CHAPTER IV

NARASIMHA IN ICONOGRAPHY AND SCULPTURE UP TO THE VIJAYANAGAR PERIOD

Historical Background

The political condition of post Vedic India can be reconstructed with the help of references in Vedic, early Buddhist and Jain writings and other sources. They mention that there were sixteen major states (mahajanapadas) dominating the northern part of the subcontinent during the pre-Mauryan period. A few of these, such as Gandhara, Kamboja, Kuru-Pancala, Matsya, Kashi, and Kosala continued from the earlier period and are mentioned in Vedic literature. The rest were new states, either newly created from declining older ones or new areas coming into importance, such as Avanti, Ashvaka, Shurasena, Vatsa, Cedi, Malla, Vrjji, Magadha, and Anga. The mention of so many new states in the eastern Ganges valley is attributable in part to the eastern focus of the sources and the increasing pre-eminence of the eastern regions.

The changing features of social and economic life were linked to religious and intellectual changes. Orthodox traditions maintained in certain sections of Vedic literature were questioned by teachers referred to in the “Upanishads” and “Aranyakas” and by others whose speculations and philosophy are recorded in other texts. There was a sizable heterodox tradition current in the sixth century BCE, and speculation ranged from idealism to materialism. The Ajivikas and the Sarvakas, among the smaller religious sects, were popular for a time, as were the materialist theories of the Buddha’s contemporary, Ajita Keshakambalin. Even though such
sects did not sustain an independent religious tradition, the undercurrent of their teachings cropped up time and again in the later religious trends that emerged in India.

Of all these sects, only two, Jainism and Buddhism, acquired the status of major religions. The former remained within the Indian subcontinent; the latter spread to Central Asia, China, Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Both religions were founded in the sixth to fifth century BCE; Mahavira gave shape to earlier ideas of the Nirgranthas (an earlier name for the Jains) and formulated Jainism (the teachings of the Jina, or Conqueror, Mahavira), while the Buddha (the Enlightened One) preached a new moral order. According to Mahajan, “Brahmanical religion got a setback at least for the time being. In order to meet the challenge from other religions, an attempt was made to purify and reform the Brahmanical religion. It was in these circumstances that the Bhakti cult became popular. The Greek writers tell us that people in North-Western India worshipped Indra and Parjanya. The worship of images also became popular. Curtius tells us that the army of Paurava which faced Alexander, carried an image of Herakles. Panini also refers to the sale of the images of Siva, Skanda and Visakha” (Mahajan, 1983: 206).

The Persian and Greek invasions had an important affect on Indian Civilization. The political systems of the Persians were to influence future forms of governance on the sub-continent, including administration in the Mauryan Empire. In addition, the region of Gandhara, or present-day eastern Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan, became a melting pot of Indian, Persian, Central Asian, and Greek cultures and gave rise to a mixed culture in art and religion.
The northwestern cultures of the subcontinent included the Indo-Greeks, the Indo-Scythians, the Indo-Parthians, and the Indo-Sassinids. The first of these, the Indo-Greek kingdom, was founded when the Greco-Bactrian king Demetrius invaded the region in c.180 BCE, extending his rule over various parts of present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan. Lasting for almost two centuries, the kingdom was ruled by a succession of more than thirty Greek kings, who were often in conflict with each other. The Indo-Scythians were a branch of the Indo-European Sakas (Scythians) who migrated from southern Siberia, first into Bactria, subsequently into Sogdiana, Kashmir, Arachosia, and Gandhara, and finally into India. Their kingdom lasted from the middle of the second to first century BCE (Majumdar, 1982: 189).

The Indo-Parthians (also known as the Pahlavas), came to control most of present-day Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, after fighting many local rulers such as the Kushan ruler Kujula Kadphises, in the Gandhara region. The Sassanid Empire of Persia, which was contemporaneous with the Gupta Empire, expanded into the region of present-day Balochistan in Pakistan, where the mingling of Indian culture and the culture of Iran gave birth to a hybrid culture under the Indo-Sassanids.

Political activity in the sixth to fifth century BCE centered on the control of the Ganges valley. The states of Kashi, Koshala, and Magadha and the Vrijjis battled for control of this region for a century until Magadha emerged victorious.

The accession of Chandragupta Maurya (c. 321–297 BCE) is significant in Indian history because it inaugurated what was to become the first pan-Indian empire. The Mauryan dynasty was to rule almost the entire subcontinent except the area south of present-day Karnataka, as well as substantial parts of
morden Afghanistan. During the reign of Ashoka, due to the consequences of the Kalinga war, he propagated Buddhism and established many Buddhist stupas, viharas and chaityas. Mauryan monolithic rock pillars are famous for their gigantic shafts, abacus and crowning sculptures. Particularly, the Ashokan pillars at Sanchi and Saranath with four lions set back to back as the crowning member now serves as the official emblem of India.

The Satavahana dynasty, also known as the Andhras, ruled in southern and central India from circa 235 BCE to 225 CE ((Mahajan, 1983: 308). The Satavahanas contributed much to the art and architecture of central and southern India. Both Hinduism and Buddhism flourished during their period. Numerous sites like Goli, Jaggayapata, Bhattiprolou, Ghantasala, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda have revealed the remains of stupas and sculptures of this period. They issued silver coins with the lion symbol.

The Kushana Empire expanded out of what is now Afghanistan into the northwest of the subcontinent under the leadership of their first emperor, Kujula Kadphises, about the middle of the first century CE. By the time of his grandson, Kanishka (circa 78 – 101 CE), they had conquered most of northern India, at least as far as Saketa and Pataliputra, in the middle Ganges Valley, and probably up to the Bay of Bengal. They played an important role in the establishment of Buddhism in India and its spread to Central Asia and China. The fall of the Kushana Empire seems to have been completed during the reign of the successors of Vasudeva II in the early third century CE (Simth,1993: 275). The Kushanas followed a policy of religious tolerance. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism flourished side by side. The deities found on the coins of the Kushana rulers are not only Hindu and Buddhist but also Greek, Sumerian, Zoroastrian, Elamite and Mithraic gods. According to Puri,
“the inscriptions, coins, literature and art suggest that Brahmanism was a living force during the Kushana period. There are references to many Hindu gods, e.g. Vishnu, Narayana, Varuna, Brahma, Kuvera, Chandra, Surya, Dhanada and Ganga” (Puri, 1965: 156). The Gandhara and Mathura schools of art flourished during this period.

The classical age refers to the period when much of the Indian sub-continent was united under the Gupta Empire (circa 320–550 CE). This period has been called the golden age of India and was marked by extensive achievements in various fields such as science, art, architecture, literature, mathematics, astronomy, religion, and philosophy that crystallized the elements of what is generally known as Hindu culture. The decimal numeral system, including the concept of zero, was invented in India during this period. The peace and prosperity created under the leadership of the imperial Guptas enabled the pursuit of scientific and artistic endeavors in India. The high points of this cultural creativity are magnificent architecture, sculpture, and painting.

From the available sources like literary, epigraphical and art materials lead us to conclude that the Gupta kings were followers of Hinduism and tolerant towards other religions also. We can say that they revived Hinduism or brought it to the forefront. From the time of Ashoka, Buddhism had become the state religion and consequently Hinduism had been thrown into the background. During the Gupta age, other religions also survived and religious tolerance was maintained in the state. From the coins issued by the Gupta kings we can understand that there was no sectarianism in the Hindu religion. Siva, Vishnu, Devi and Karttikeya were all worshiped without any difference. The Gupta kings are known as “ParamaBhāgavatas” a term that refers to the followers of Vishnu (Mahajan,
They issued coins with the figure of Lakshmi; she is the consort of Vishnu. They built many temples to Vishnu. The “avatara” concept was popular during this time. Many temples were built all over the Gupta Empire for the different incarnations of Vishnu. As far as the Narasimha incarnation is concerned we find many sculptures of him in the Gupta period. It reveals the importance that was given to the worship of the “avatars” or incarnations of Vishnu during the Gupta dynasty.

In the Deccan, the cultural and religious conditions faced rapid changes due to continuous change of political powers. After the Satavahana rule the Abhiras (north-west), the Chutus (south) and the Ikshvakus (in Andhradesa) rose to power. Little is known about the political, social and cultural activities of the Abhiras and Chutu kingdoms. The Ikshvakus ruled over the Krishna – Guntur region, and most of them were followers of Buddhism. After the Ikshvakus, the region between the Western and Eastern Ghats, up to the Vindhyas, was ruled by many smaller kingdoms. Samudragupta of the Gupta dynasty invaded this region and brought them under his suzerainty. In the post Gupta period three prominent dynasties rose in southern India: they were the Chalukyas of Badami, the Pallavas of Kanchi and the Pandyas of Madurai. Each of their contributions to Indian art is remarkable. This period saw the revival of Hinduism and excellent advances were registered in the fields of architecture, sculpture and painting.

Under the patronage of the Chalukyas of Badami, the Vedic religion attained pre-eminence. Temples were built in large numbers to Puranic deities at Badami, Aihole and Pattadakal, in honour of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. After the Chalukyas of Badami, the whole region south of the river Tungabhadra was occupied by dynasties like the Rashtrakutas, the Chalukyas of Kalyani, the Hoysalas of
Dorasamudra, the Kakatiyas of Warangal and the Yadavas of Devagiri till the thirteenth century CE, up to the rise of the Vijayanagar dynasty.

The Eastern Ganga dynasty reigned from Kalinga and their rule consisted of the whole of the modern day Indian state of Orissa as well as parts of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh from the eleventh century to the early fifteenth century. Their capital was known by the name Kalinga nagar, which is the modern Srimukhalingam in Srikakulam District of Andhra Pradesh bordering Orissa. The dynasty was founded by King Anantavarman Codaganga, descendents of the Western Ganga Dynasty that ruled southern parts of modern Karnataka state from the fourth century to the end of the tenth century. Anantavarman was a religious person as well as a patron of art and literature. He is credited for having built the famous Jagannath Temple of Puri in Orissa. King Anantavarman Chodagangadeva was succeeded by a long line of illustrious rulers such as Narasimha Deva I (*circa* 1238–1264 CE). With the death of Narasimha in 1264CE, the Eastern Gangas began to decline; the sultan of Delhi invaded Orissa in 1324 CE, and Vijayanagar defeated the Narasimha Deva III in 1356 CE. Narasimha Deva IV, the last known king of the Eastern Ganga dynasty, ruled until 1425 CE. The names of the rulers attest to the popularity of Narasimha worship in the Eastern Ganga period.

Further south, in Tamilnadu, the Pallava and the Pandya dynasties played a major role in cultural and religious development from the sixth to ninth century CE. During this time Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism were all practiced in Tamilnadu. The Pallava rulers built many cave and structural temples for Siva, Vishnu and other gods in different styles. These styles were identified as excavated rock temples (caves), monolithic rock-cut temples (rathas) and structural temples. Apart from this, sculptural panels and monolithic sculptures are found in many numbers
throughout the empire. The Bhakti movement had its origin in this part of the country. According to V.D. Mahajan, “the great religious reform which swept India in the eighth century first originated in the Pallava kingdom. The Pallavas were orthodox Hindus. They were generally followers of Vishnu but sometimes they were devotees of Siva.” That they gave importance to the incarnations of Vishnu is reflected in the temples and sculptural panels they made at Mahabalipuram.

The Chola dynasty re-emerged from the ashes of the Pallava kingdom in the middle of the ninth century CE and ruled major parts of Tamilnadu till the thirteenth century CE. During their time Hinduism was the prominent religion and the Cholas were devotees of Siva. Saivism enjoyed royal patronage and this is the reason why a large number of Siva temples were constructed by them. But Vaishnavism was also strong and various saints upheld it with lesser patronage from the kings. It was the period when the art, architecture and culture of Tamilnadu attained its zenith.

In the thirteenth century the Vijayanagara Empire came to power in Southern India. The Vijayanagara kings were tolerant of all religions and sects as writings by foreign visitors attest. The Vijayanagara kings followed Hinduism and the early rulers were Saivaites; the later rulers of the Saluva and Tuluva dynasties followed Vaishnavism. They made immense contributions to the development of temple architecture. Nilakanta Sastri says, “The Vijayanagar type of temples exhibits beauty in its rich and intricate structure of a large pillared hall, a kalyanamandapa and pavilion to the old type of temple” (Nilakanta Sastri, 1982). The Vijayanagara kings renovated and made additions to many temples in Southern India, especially in Tamilnadu. The Narasimha form of Vishnu attains fulfillment during the Vijayanagara period. A gigantic sculpture of Narasimha in the round, seated, at
Hampi (Vijayanagaram) and the Ahobilam Nine Narasikha temples are examples of their faith in Narasimha.

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<th><strong>Place</strong></th>
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<td>Kushana - Narasimha in theriomorphically as seated lion</td>
<td>Kaushambi. Uttar Pradesh.</td>
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<td>Kushana - Narasimha in theriomorphically as seated lion (Fig. 40)</td>
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<td>Gupta - Narasimha with four hands (Fig. 48)</td>
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<td>Gupta – Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig.52)</td>
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There are a variety of representations of Narasimha found in Northern and Central India which reveal that the Narasimha avatāra of Vishnu was worshiped in both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms. The zoomorphic representations of Vishnu’s avatāra are less in number when compared to anthropomorphic forms. Fish, Tortoise, Boar and Lion (Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, and Narasimha) are the four major incarnations of Vishnu associated with animals depicted on the walls of the temple and in sculptures. Among these four forms we find huge sculptures of the zoomorphic Varaha in many parts of Madhya Pradesh, starting from the fifth century CE to twelfth century CE. Eran, Knoh, Badoh, Khajuraho, Karitalai, Majhoouli, and Lucknow Museum are a few places that have the zoomorphic Varaha images (Haripriya Rangarajan, 1997: 48).

Narasimha representations in zoomorphic form are also found. But they are very less in number and they are also small in size. An early tradition of representing Narasimha in theriomorphically is clearly demonstrated by a seated lion of Kushna period was found in the ancient city of Kausambi dated to the first century CE (Kala, 1950: 74). Another specimen of the seated form of lion was found from Kausambi dated to second century CE, and was identified as the Narasimha form of Vishnu. It is now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Fig. 40). This buff terracotta lion is shown seated frontally on his haunches on a trough like base with his hind legs bent at the knees and front legs fully extended. His tongue hangs
out, and his phallus (especially regarded as a symbol of the reproductive force of life) is erect. An interesting feature of the animal is his erect phallus, which suggests that the lion probably is divine rather than mortal and may represent Narasimha, the man-lion (Pratapaditya Pal; 1986:192, s 69). A similar representation of a seated lion on a stone plaque is found at Kondamodu, Andhra Pradesh, dated to the late Satavahana period, i.e., third century CE (Ratan Parimoo, 2000: 145). The images on the plaque represent the Vrsni heroes flanking Narasimha on either side. Narasimha is in the fully theriomorphic form with the addition of two human hands holding the cakra and gada. The erect phallus of this animal also supports the above theory. This lion, flanked by five heroes (viras), has been identified as an early depiction of Narasimha in South India (Fig. 41).

One of the interesting early representations of the man-lion incarnation is executed on a seal found at Basarh, Bihar, datable to the early Gupta period, i.e., about third century CE (Fig. 42). In this image, Narasimha is shown with a lion’s head and a human body with two hands and is seated on a high pedestal in the lalitasana pose, with the left leg folded and the right leg hanging down. His right hand is in the abhaya (protection) mudrā and his left hand is kept on his waist in katyavalambita hasta. The demon Hiranyakasipu is conspicuous by his absence, and so also are the typical emblems of Vishnu. The vanamala (long garland) hanging up to his knees, however, indicates him to be a Vaishnava deity. This is the earliest representation of Narasimha with a human body and lion head found thus far (ASIAR, 1913).

An early narrative sculpture of Narasimha story is to be seen at the Philadelphia Museum of Art a small (13.25" x 8.75" x 4") stone sculpture made of
Mathura mottled red sandstone (Fig.43) it has been dated to fourth century CE, Gupta, according to its sculptural features. The stone sculpture describes the story of Narasimha killing the Hiraṇyakaśipu. Stella Kramrisch, then the museum's Indian curator, described the image at that time as, “The sculptor, full of his own realization, achieved an image conveying his religious experience of Visnu as man-lion. The god is shown seated in a unique way. The legs are almost as if running, the left leg is thrown upward. Although, the human body carries the head of a lion there is no ferocity in that lion's mien, it is a calm face. The demon stands for ignorance. Narasimha as an embodiment of wisdom is rendered by the sculptor with grace and power. In no other image is the robe of the deity shown with such detail and care. Iconographically inventive also is the mane of the lion's head with two long strands of hair on either side of his face connecting the head of the lion with the body of the man.”

Meister examined this sculpture in detail and says that, “This figure deserves close attention. Its furled brow, fangs, and lolling tongue conform to later images of Narasimha but its robe, simplicity, and stance set it apart. Under the robe on his chest appears the suggestion of an amulet, which Kramrisch chose to associate with Vishnu’s cognizance, the Kaustubha jewel. The upper garment flows over both shoulders; but below Hiranyakaśipu, the demon figure placed horizontally across Narasimha's body, a twisted waist-band suggests a separate garment covering the legs. The demon's hair streams behind him, cushioning his head against the man-lion's right knee. He wears a simple single strand of beads. His body seems relaxed, even pliant. His face is calm, with a slight suggestion of a smile. His eyes stare adoringly up at the face of Vishnu. There is little tension in his legs or feet, even as
Narasimha gently disembowels him. His innards spill along his right side. As the *Matsya Purāṇa* describes it, Narasimha ripped "apart the mighty daitya chief as a plaiter of straw mats shreds his reeds." Narasimha, is shown two-armed, carrying no emblems, his right leg bent at the knee. His right foot is firmly placed on the ground above a pattern suggesting a pillared platform (*vedika*). His left knee also rests on this platform, the lower part of his leg turned up, his left foot tautly touching his elbow, as if to reflect an Indian dancer's earth-bound means of portraying flying. The image, stable and symmetrical above, active below, is centered on Narasimha's hands, which plunge their limpid fangs into the demon's belly directly in front of Narasimha's centering navel. The significant male figure lying across Narasimha's lap thus divides the composition in half.” (Meister, 1996:291-301) The above mentioned sculpture of Narasimha is the earliest example in this narrative style found so far. It also serves as a tool to study the important iconographical developments that occurred during the Gupta age.

Another example of the two handed Narasimha comes from the Udayagiri cave at Vidisha (Besnagar) in Madhya Pradesh. These caves were established by Chandragupta Vikramaditya, after defeating the Sakas in the fourth to fifth century CE. The primary motive behind the construction of these caves and establishment of sculptures of different deities clearly seems to be promotion of Hinduism among the common people. In cave no. 12, a niche contains a standing figure of Narasimha in low relief, Vishnu in his 'lion-man' incarnation. Below on either side are two small standing attendant figures, holding long spear or sword on their right hand and left hand kept on the waist. Their other features are not so clear (Fig.44).
The Gwalior museum houses a Narasimha sculpture of the Gupta period from Besnagar which looks similar to the above. It is also a two-handed image with a lion head that has a thick mane (Fig.45). Both of the hands being broken, but the vanamala is seen hanging down up to his knees (Coomaraswamy, 1965: Pl.170). An important thing is that though the scholars believe that the vanamala is hanging down up to his knees but it is like a serpent coiled around his legs. These features are similar to the lion headed Mitraic deity Ahriman as mentioned earlier (Fig.28). Another important aspect found in this sculpture is that a small pillar is shown behind his legs indicating his emergence from it. This sort of narrative panel is a development of the Narasimha sculpture during the Gupta period.

At Eran, Sagar district, Madhya Pradesh, a Gupta temple of Narasimha belonging to the fifth century CE, has been found in a dilapidated condition. A seven feet tall stone sculpture lies on the plinth of the temple (Fig.46). Even though the image is in a much-mutilated condition, some of the iconographic details are notable. He has only two hands, and both the hands are broken and the attributes are missing. The knotted mane flows down to his shoulders; the broad mouth and bulging eyes are beautifully carved. This image, enshrined in a Gupta temple dedicated to Narasimha, testifies to the high position occupied by Narasimha in that period (Alexander Cunningham, 1873-75: 47). The face of the figure is clearly leonine.

The Udayagiri and Besnagar figures of Narasimha belong to the same period as the Eran image (fifth century CE), all are tall and magnificent. We can therefore surmise that the faceless visages of the Udayagiri and Besnagar Narasimha figures were similar.
A unique representation of Narasimha with four hands and seated in *ardhaparyankasana* on a lotus is found at the *chaitya* window of the Dasavatāra temple, Deogarh, belonging to the Gupta period, fifth century CE (Fig.47). The fierce lion-face is surrounded by the thick locks of the mane spreading on the shoulders. A small ornamental *makuta* is an uncommon feature for the Narasimha images of the Gupta period (Desai, 1973: 87). His upper right hand holds the mace, and lower right, supported by his folded right knee, holds the disc. The upper left hand holds the conch and the lower left are placed on the thigh. The identification with Vishnu is complete in this image. To show the terrifying nature of Narasimha, the sculptor creates an impression of flames around his head in the form of a halo. A small human figure in *anjali-hasta* is found to the left of the deity, obviously Prahlāda, his devotee.

Another Gupta period representation of Narasimha found at the Dasavatāra temple, Deogarh, fifth century CE, is important to note for its iconographic development. The image on a panel projecting in the centre of the doorway is of Vishnu shown seated on a coiled serpent. To his right stands a small human figure with a lion’s head, evidently Narasimha (Fig.48). In this image Vishnu is shown as Vaikuntha Narayana, seated in *sukhasana* on the coil of the seven headed AdiŚesha or Ananta (snake). He has four arms: the upper right and left carries the *cakra* and *śankha* respectively, while his lower right hand is in *abhaya* and the lower left is kept on the left knee. He is adorned with the *kiritamakuta*, *kundalas*, neckles, armlets, bracelets, and all the other attributes of Vishnu.

The just born Narasimha incarnation, standing on the right side of Vaikuntha Narayana, is a small figure. He has four arms, of which three are visible, that depicts his divine nature. The upper right hand is visible without any weapon. The
bare hands of Narasimha indicate that he is going to kill the demon without any weapon but with his claws. His lower hands are in *anjalihasta* (salutation). He is obtaining the blessings of Vishnu before exerting himself. In other words, Vishnu demonstrates his Narasimha incarnation to the world and tells them how he is going to destroy the demon, Hiranyakaśipu. A small *gana* is standing to the left of Vishnu and witnessing this event. He holds a sword in his left hand and his right hand is in *vismaya* (astonishment).

The four-handed Narasimha sculpture found inside the sanctum of Kankalidevi temple at Tigawa, Madhya Pradesh, is a unique example (Fig.49). This temple is an early structural temple of the Gupta dynasty that survives, dating to the fifth century CE. The image of Narasimha stands inside the sanctum with four hands, his front left hand holding the śankha and right in *varadamudrā*. The two back hands of Narasimha are placed on the personified weapons on his left and right. On his left *gadadevi* (club) standing in *tribhanga* with two hands, her left hand resting on her thigh and in her right a flower. To the right of Narasimha stands the *chakrapurusha* (wheel) with two hands, holding a flower in his right hand and his left resting on his thigh. Narasimha’s lion face is very prominent, with bulging eyes, ears, big moustache, and wide open mouth giving him a terrific look. His head does not have any crown except the curly mane which flows up to his shoulder. No upper garment is seen, but a *dhoti* serves as the lower garment. A necklace adorns his chest, and a *vanamala* runs from his shoulder to his knee. This sculpture is an early example of Narasimha with two personified Vaishnava attributes of Vishnu. Since it is inside the sanctum and worshiped as the central figure in the temple, we can understand easily the importance given to this form of Vishnu in the early Gupta period.
A similar representation of Narasimha with personified attributes is found in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, USA. This statue of man-lion form of Vishnu made of mottled red sandstone belongs to the Mathura area of Utter Pradesh and has been dated to *circa* 550 CE (Fig.50). Although its lower legs are broken, its workmanship is appreciable. The ornamentation of the object and other features show a refined state of craftsmanship. This must have been either the principal figure in a sub shrine or in the sanctum of a temple. Pratapaditya Pal says, “As with Narasimha images from the Gupta period onward, the god is basically human, except for his additional arms and lion head. Wearing a *dhoti* and adorned with various ornaments and the *vanamala* garland, the god rigidly stands flanked by two of his personified attributes. All three originally would have stood on a rectangular base. Parts of a circular nimbus are still attached to his shoulders, and his head is crowned by a lotus that seems to grow out of his rich mane. The broken right hand of Narasimha probably would have been extended and held a *myrobalan*; the corresponding left hand holds a conch. The two lower hands rest on the personified attributes, the club on the right and wheel on the left. Because the Sanskrit word for club (*gada*) is feminine in gender, the attribute is personified as a female. She holds a flower of dalliance (*lilakamala*) with her right hand and one end of her scarf with her left hand. The personified wheel is a male stands with his arms crossed against his chest. Narasimha is a powerfully modeled figure with broad shoulders, strong limbs, and somewhat disproportionately elongated thighs and legs. His grimacing lion face with rolling eyes, arched, scowling eyebrows, and prominent moustache is almost a caricature in its expressive exaggeration. The rigidity of the columnar stance is relieved by the graceful dihanchement of his two elegantly coiffed attributes” (Pratapaditya Pal, 1986:252-253.Figs 129).
While analyzing both the sculptures we can identify some regional variations as well as the development of sculptural style. Though each of the images were made in a time gap of fifty to hundred years there ornamentation and style shows a considerable development. Major iconographical elements are followed in both images as the same but few additions in the later is not found in the earlier one.

The concept of Narasimha *avatāra* is well executed in the narrative sculptures of the Gupta period. A sculpture in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benaras and dated to sixth century CE, is in the form of Narasimha killing the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu (Fig. 51). Narasimha has two hands and his face has a big moustache and bulging eyes which make the sculpture look like a ferocious lion. The demon is lying on his right thigh and Narasimha’s hands are engaged in the act of tearing open the stomach of the demon. We can see the same type of late Gupta sculpture of Narasimha killing the demon king with two arms at the Madhia temple (Fig.52). In this image Narasimha has two arms without any weapons in them, his right leg bent to support the back of Hiraṇyakaśipu. He leans over, his arms stiff, to thrust his "neither wet nor dry" nails into the demon king's belly.

Another relief sculpture telling the early part of the climax - that is Narasimha catching hold of the Hiraṇyakaśipu - is depicted on the doorway of the Gupta temple at Nachna, dated to sixth century CE (Fig.53). The image is a fourarmed man-lion, holding the *śankha* in his left upper arm, but his upper right is an open palm, as if he is going to slap using that hand. The lower right hand is in the *mushtimudrā* and the left catches the shoulder of the sword-bearing demon who is attempting to flee.

Two square pillars belonging to the Gupta period, now in the Bharat Kala Bhavan and dated to the sixth century CE, have different forms of Vishnu on four
sides of each. A standing Narasimha figure was found on one of the four sides of each pillar. He is standing in *samabhanga* pose and holds the usual emblems of Vishnu in his four hands. The lower right hand is placed on the mace; the left lower hand is placed on the disc which is mounted on a pedestal. The upper right hand holds the lotus and the upper left hand holds the conch. But both are not raised, and are adorned with the *vanamala* (Fig.54).

The number of Narasimha images found in the Gupta period is itself testimony to the prevalence of the worship of Narasimha in that period. It is likely that the Gupta kings patronized Narasimha worship, since the last Gupta king was named after the God. A temple dedicated to Narasimha in Sagar testifies to Narasimha being a prominent deity of the period.

### Table - 3

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<tr>
<th>Dynasty - Description</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Post Gupta - Narasimha fighting with Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Manora, a village in the Kaimur range in Central India</td>
<td>Eighth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Gupta - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Devangana near Mount Abu.</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Gupta - Narasimha with six hands with Scythian influence</td>
<td>Chamba in Himachal Pradesh.</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pala - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig. 55)</td>
<td>National Museum, New Delhi.</td>
<td>Eighth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pala - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Indian Museum, Kolkata.</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pala - Narasimha flanked on either side by Lakshmi and Saraswathi (Fig. 56)</td>
<td>West Dinajpur district – now in Government Museum, Kolkatta.</td>
<td>Eleventh century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pala - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig. 57)</td>
<td>Bihar – now in Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California</td>
<td>Eleventh century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sena - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig. 58)</td>
<td>National Museum, New Delhi.</td>
<td>Twelfth century CE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Post-Gupta images of Narasimha are found in many parts of the country, witnessing the continuation of the worship of this deity and its development. A sculptural panel found at Manora, a village in the Kaimur range in Central India and dated to the eighth century CE, depicts in a vivid manner the fight between the god and the demon (Banerji, 1921-22: 70). The fight between Narasimha and the demon Hiranyakashipu is well executed in stone. The left leg of Narasimha is interlocked with the right leg of Hiranyakashipu who stands to the left of the god. The right foot of the god is placed on the head of a prostrate demon holding a mace in his hand. The lower left hand is engaged in the act of tearing the abdomen of the demon, whereas the right hand palm is open and shown in the act of striking. Both his upper hands hold a disc and conch respectively.

An eighth century CE, Narasimha sculpture of Pala dynasty in National Museum, New Delhi, represents the final stage of the story - the death of Hiranyakashipu in the hands of Narasimha (Fig. 55). The muscular Narasimha stands with four arms: his upper left hand holds the conch and right hand in *tarjani mudrā* or warning symbol. Two of his lower arms are like lion’s claws which are open and his nails are tearing the stomach of the demon. His right leg is stretched and placed firmly on the ground, while his left knee is bent, with Hiranyakashipu on it. The toe of the left leg is placed on a keeling figure, probably that of a warrior of Hiranyakashipu’s army. A *vanamala* or flower garland is running from his shoulder to his knee. His face has a big moustache and a curly mane adorns the back of his
head. Narasimha’s mouth is wide open with a projecting tongue, bulgy eyes and sharp ears which give him a terrible look. An inverted lotus adorns his head, a thick ornament hangs on his neck and a lower garment covers up to his knees. The Hiranyakasipu on the lap of Narasimha hangs helplessly, but he has a sword and shield in his two hands.

Another image of Narasimha belonging to the Pala dynasty, ninth century CE, from Eastern India, is in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. This mutilated image has four hands, the front two tearing out the entrails of the demon king Hiranyakasipu who is lying on his folded left knee. In his upper two hands he holds the mace and the conch. The image seems to have been flanked by Śrīdevi and Bhudevi (Banerji, 1998, PI.XLVI c). An image similar to this was found at Suhaniya, near Morena, Madhya Pradesh, now in the collection of the Gwalior Museum. Narasimha’s two lower hands are tearing the abdomen of the demon lying on his folded right knee. Uniquely, the folded right leg of the god is supported by a serpent-hood of a naga who may represent the nether world.

A four armed image of Narasimha from West Dinajpur district, preserved in the Government Museum, West Bengal and dated to eleventh century CE, depicts Narasimha standing in samabhanga with four arms with all the attributes of Vishnu. His face is that of a lion with his mane falling on his shoulders in two tufts. He holds in his hands a conch, disc, mace and lotus. An important feature in this sculpture is that he is flanked on either side by Lakshmi and Saraswathi as in the Pala Vishnu images (Fig.56).
An eleventh century CE representation of Narasimha killing the demon king Hiranyakasipu is in the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California, collection (Fig. 57). This sculpture was found at Bihar and belongs to the Pala dynasty. In this sculpture Narasimha has four arms, the upper right arm holding an ornamental mace and carrying the wheel in the left. At the base of the sculpture we see the conch laid down, probably to keep his lower hands free to tear the abdomen of the demon king. The mane around the leonine face of the god resembles the flames of the fire and his mouth is wide open and his tongue visible. A lion’s head surmounts a pillar placed to the right of the sculpture, an early part of the story. A small female figure near the left leg of the god is an attendant holding a fly whisk and bowl.

A sculpture of Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu belonging to the Sena dynasty, twelfth century CE, is in the National museum, New Delhi (Fig. 58). This image is carved artistically with all the attributes of early sculptures of this type. The ferocity of the god is missing on his face. He looks very calm but the mane around his head is decorated like the flames of the fire to show the raudra (angry) aspect of the god. Other regular attributes found in Bengal sculptures include celestials flying on top of the sculpture with garlands in their hands and kirtitorana.

Another interesting sculpture of the four-handed Narasimha is in the Khajuraho Museum collection. His two upper hands are in the abaya mudrā, probably blessing Prahlāda, while his lower hands are engaged in destroying the demon Hiranyakasipu (Desai, 1973: 89). A large number of four-handed images of Narasimha are found in different parts of Northern India. The above-mentioned images are all good examples of the Narasimha sculptures found so far and they are
important for the study of iconographical development of the icon. There are also several six-handed and eight-handed Narasimha sculptures found in Northern India.

The Rajivalocana temple at Rajim in Madhya Pradesh contains a six-handed image of Narasimha and dated to the seventh century CE. In this sculpture Narasimha is shown standing on the prostrate demon holding a sword. The right leg of the god is placed on the hip and left leg is on the tilted head of the demon. He is strangling Hīrāṇyakaśipu who is lying on his folded leg (Dikshit, 1960. Pl. 74-75).

An image found at Vikrampur, West Bengal, is another narrative sculpture of Narasimha with six hands and dated to twelfth century CE. He is standing on a recumbent demon on the lotus pedestal. He holds the demon Hīrāṇyakaśipu by the hair and the leg with two of his lower hands; the two hands in the middle are tearing out the entrails of the demon. The upper right hand palm is open as if to hit the demon, and the upper left one in the ārjani mudrā. Below the lotus seat is carved the figure of Hīrāṇyakaśipu kicking the pillar out of which emerges the small figure of Narasimha. To the right of the pillar stands Prahlāda in worshipful attitude. At the end, on the right side of the pedestal, appears Garuda with folded hands (Banerji, 1998. Pl.XLVI a).

It is interesting to note that a Narasimha image from the Dhaka Museum, Bangladesh, has six hands and is sculpted depicting the killing of the demon Hīrāṇyakaśipu (Fig.59). A remarkable feature of this image is that the sculptor has tried to add some more part of the myth in this piece of stone. The central figure is Narasimha with six hands, killing the demon Hīrāṇyakaśipu lying on his lap. To the left of the god is a figure in anjali mudrā facing an enthroned person, presumably
Hiranyakasipu and his son Prahlāda. To the right of the god is Hiranyakasipu kicking the pillar where a miniature man-lion emerges from the top of the pillar with his left hand raised in *tarjanimudrā* to warn the demon king. Bhattachariya mentions this event as, “We could find to the right of the main figure a small pillar surmounted by a lion head, symbolically representing the sudden appearance of the god from the pillar” (Bhattachariya, 2001: Pl.XXXVII b). Another interesting feature in this sculpture is that of the presence of the Trinity, namely Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu on the top of the panel, seated on a lotus pedestal with their attributes. Narasimha holds a personified cakra and śankhain two of his upper hands and the rest are busy holding and killing the demon king. In the bottom of the panel we could see two couples worshiping the deity in *anjali mudrā* on either corners and in the centre kneeling Garuda appears with *anjali mudrā*.

A similar image, with a very detailed representation of the myth, has been found in Birbhum, West Bengal (Dikshit, 1921-22: 80, PL. XXVIII b). This sculptural panel is well executed with the important mythical scenes of the Narasimha incarnation. The central figure is Narasimha with six hands, killing the demon Hiranyakasipu lying on his lap. To the right of the god is a figure in *anjalimudrā* facing an enthroned person, presumably Prahlāda and Hiranyakasipu. To the left of the central figure is Hiranyakasipu kicking the pillar, thus challenging Prahlāda to prove the presence of his god there. The miniature man-lion emerging from the pillar has his hands raised in *abhayamudrā* to offer protection to Prahlāda. Although the sequence of the panel is incorrect, the artist has tried to showcase the events that occur in that particular scene.
A Narasimha image from Devangana near Mount Abu is a fine specimen of ninth century sculpture. Hiranyakasipu is lying on the folded right leg of the god who tears his entrails with his two hands. One of his left hands is in the tarjanimudrā (warning sign) and the rest are broken. To the right of the main figure appear two demons; near his left leg appear other two defeated demons. The hanging right leg of the god is placed on the shoulder of a figure wearing a crown, with a benign expression on his face. He may be identified as Prahlāda worshipping the god (Desai, 1973: 91).

A unique and important sculpture of Narasimha has been found at Chamba in Himachal Pradesh. It has been dated to the ninth century CE and identified as a Narasimha image with Scythian influence (Goetz, 1955: 83, Pl.IV). The figure is seated on a throne with both of his legs hanging down. The god wears only a dhoti as under garment. Two of his middle hands support his chin and the other two upper hands are in tripatakamudrā, the significance of which is not yet known. It is a very forceful representation of the man-lion with rolling eyes, open mouth, and expanded nostrils. His thick mane is spread over his shoulders. He does not hold any of the Vaishnava emblems in his hands (Desai, 1973: 91).

Table - 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty - Description</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Gupta - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig.60)</td>
<td>Lakshmana Temple, Sirpur, Chattisgarh</td>
<td>Seventh century CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Gupta - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Amb in Punjab</td>
<td>Eighth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Gupta - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig.61)</td>
<td>Lucknow Museum, Utter Pradesh.</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The eight-handed images of Narasimha are not as numerous as the four and the six handed variety. But there are good examples of eight-handed Narasimha images in northern India. A seventh century CE image of Narasimha found in the passage of the Lakshmana Temple at Sirpur in Chattisgarh, is sculpted beautifully with eight-hands. In this image, the upper two pairs of his hands are in the abhaya mudrā and the two front hands are engaged in the act of destroying the demon who is hanging upside down on the lap of the uplifted left leg of the god. The lower right hand of the god is seizing the hand of the demon which is thrown around his leg, while the lower left hand is broken (Fig.60).

Another example is from excavations at Amb in Punjab (ASIR, 1913-21: Pl.VII. 2837). A much mutilated image of Narasimha with eight hands was found. On the right side all the four hands are preserved, but on the left only two survived. The upper right hand of the god is in the abhaya mudrā, the second right is in the tarjani mudrā, the third is holding the hair knot of the demon recumbent on his right leg and the fourth one is tearing open his entrails. On the left, two preserved hands are engaged in holding and attacking the demon.

The Lucknow Museum has a beautiful image of an eight handed Narasimha which is interesting from the iconographical point of view. The execution of the elaborate iconographical details and its superb artistic quality class it among one of the most beautiful images of Narasimha, datable to the ninth century CE. The two upper hands hold the nagapasa. Together with the end of the nagapasa the upper
left hand also holds a shield. The second pair of hands holds the mace and the disc; the third pair is broken and fourth pair is engaged in tearing out the entrails of the demon lying on the folded right leg of the god. The goddess, with a lotus in her right hand, to the right of the main figure is Lakshmi. To the left of Narasimha at the bottom of the panel is a kneeling figure with *anjali mudrā*, which is probably Prahlāda (Fig.61).

The Lakshmana temple, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, was built in the early tenth century CE during the reign of King Yasovarman of the Chandella kingdom, and houses a beautiful Narasimha with eight arms (Fig.62). This sculpture is found in one of the niches of the outer *prakhara* wall of the temple. On the right side only two hands survived and on the left three hands are preserved. Two lower hands are engaged in the act of tearing the abdomen of the demon that is lying on the right lap of the lord. The right leg is shown uplifted and kept on a demon holding a sword. The left leg is kept on the ground and a *vanamala* hangs below the left knee. Prahlāda is shown seated on the right side of the god in *anjalimudrā*. The bulging eyes and the open mouth of the lion headed god illustrate his ferociousness.

The Narasimha image is sometimes even endowed with many more hands. The ceiling of the Jain temple of Vimala Vasaha near Mount Abu, Rajasthan, contains a twelve-armed Narasimha with his legs intertwined tightly with the legs of the defeated Hiranyakasipu. The palm of the upper right hand of the god is stretched out near his forehead as if in the *abhaya mudrā*. The second right hand is also in the *abhaya mudrā*. The third hand is in the act of tearing open the bosom of the demon, the fourth is holding a mace, the fifth is piercing the abdomen of the demon, and the sixth is holding his leg. On the left side, the first two of the hands are broken, the
third is proceeding to attack the demon, the fourth and the fifth hold the disc and an indistinct object and the sixth is tearing open the entrails of the demon. The god’s rolling eyes and lolling tongue give him a fierce look (Desai, 1973: 93).

Table – 5

Narasimha Sculptures in Southern India

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<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Satavahana - Narasimha in theriomorphically as seated lion</td>
<td>Kondamodu, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Third century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satavahana - Narasimha in theriomorphically as seated lion</td>
<td>Peddamudiyan, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Third century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalukya - standing form of Narasimha (Fig.63)</td>
<td>Cave no.3, Badami, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Sixth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalukya - <em>yoga</em> Narasimha</td>
<td>Cave no.3, Badami, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Sixth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalukya - standing form of Narasimha (Fig.64)</td>
<td>Aihole, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Sixth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalukya - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Konti-gudi, Aihole, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Sixth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalukya - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Huchchappayya-gudi, Aihole, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Sixth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalukya - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig.65)</td>
<td>Durga temple, Aihole, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Sixth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalukya - Narasimha fighting with Hiranyakasipu (Fig.66)</td>
<td>Mallikarjuna temple, Bagalkot, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Seventh century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalukya - Narasimha fighting with Hiranyakasipu (Fig.67)</td>
<td>Pattadakal, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Eighth century CE.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Rashtrakuta - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig.67)</td>
<td>Lankeshvara cave XVI in Ellora, Maharashtra.</td>
<td>Eighth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashtrakuta - Narasimha fighting with Hiranyakasipu (Fig.68)</td>
<td>Kailasa temple at Ellora, Maharashtra.</td>
<td>Eighth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashtrakuta - Narasimha fighting with Hiranyakasipu (Fig.69)</td>
<td>Dasavatāra cave temple at Ellora, Maharashtra.</td>
<td>Eighth century CE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Narasimha Icons in Southern India

After the decline of the Mauryan Empire, the Satavahanas held sway in the whole of the Deccan and spread far into northern India, perhaps even as far as Magadha. Their rule lasted nearly four and half centuries from about 230 BCE. Buddhism was considered the religion of the state. Most of the Satavahana rulers followed Buddhism and constructed stūpas and viharas at Amaravathi, Alluru, Goli, Nasik, Karle, Kanheri etc. However, the Satavahana rulers also worshipped the Hindu deities (Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., 1976: 99).

As mentioned earlier, the Narasimha form of Vishnu is represented as a seated lion on a stone plaque found at Kondamodu, Andhra Pradesh, dated to the late Satavahana period around third century CE (Fig.41) (Abdul Wahid Khan, 1964). The Narasimha figure is in fully theriomorphic form with the addition of two human hands at the level of the neck, holding the cakra and gada. The Srivatsa appears prominently in the centre of his chest and is an exclusive identification of the representation of the goddess Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu (Champakalakshmi, 1981: 103). This is early evidence of association of the goddess with Narasimha and here it also helps us to identify the Narasimha as an incarnation of Vishnu. He is shown seated with taut legs, and his phallus is erect it shows the symbol of fertility cult. Another such plaque is found at Peddamudiyan, with is the same representation of deities with the seated Narasimha with Lakshmi is represented as Srivatsa (Sivaramamurthi, C. 1979: 3. pic.11).
Kalpana Desai (1973: 88) describes the Kondamotu panel as, “The main figure of Narasimha is flanked on the right side by two and on the left side by three figures. To his right, the figure in abhayamudrā and holding a conch in his hand may be identified with Vishnu. A figure holding the sugarcane bow in his right hand and a makara standard in his left hand stands to the right of Vishnu; he is probably Kama. To the left of Narasimha a figure in tribhanga pose in swastika stanaka holding a flute and the bow is that of Krishna. Next to him is Balarama holding a wine goblet in his right hand, while the left arm isakimbo (ktyavalambita hasta). The last figure carrying a sword and the shield in his hands may be that of Aniruddha. This panel perhaps represents Narasimha and the pancavira worship. Another noteworthy feature is the execution of Narasimha, which is completely zoomorphic except the two human hands attached to the neck. Though no such image has been found from northern India, it is probable that this cult also existed there in or before the Gupta period.”

After the Satavahana period we find many sculptural representations of Narasimha in the Chalukyan period around circa 500 CE. The cave and structural temple architecture of the Chalukyan dynasty found at Badami, Ellora, Aihole and Pattadakal are fine examples of Brahmanical temple art.

A fine example of the standing form of Narasimha is found at Badami cave no.3. This is a huge sculpture of Narasimha about fifteen feet high (Fig.63). In this panel the face of the lion is realistically treated. It is a calm posture with a slight flexion at the hip; Soundara Rajan describes this standing pose as abhanga, almost in virastanaka form. He wears a small unusual head gear on the top of his mane. He has four hands in which the śankha and cakra are personified as ayudhapurusas and are held just above his two upper hands. His lower left hand rests upon a large gada, whose upper extremity alone is preserved; his right hand holds a pādma.
In the same sculpture there are two couples shown witnessing the presence of Narasimha over his head: Brahma and Siva with their consorts. Soundara Rajan, Champakalakshmi and Banerjea identify them as *vidyadhara* couples (Champakalakshmi, 1981:95) but Gopinatha Rao rightly identifies them as Bramha and Siva (Gopinatha Rao, 1985: Vol-1, Part.1: 156). Out of the four heads of Brahma three are clearly visible. There are two more figures standing on either side of Narasimha below his waist level. The figure standing on the right of Narasimha is Prahlāda and the figure on the left is Garuda, since his right wing is visible and he is also shown in *tribhanga*. Another notable feature in this sculptural panel is the goddess Lakshmi standing on the left of the god on a high pedestal accompanied by an attendant. This type of representation of Lakshmi in her symbolic form (*Srivatsa*) seated high on a pedestal can be seen in the Narasimha figure in the cult plaques from Nagarjunakonda, Yellesvaram, etc., in a group with other deities. This sculpture of Narasimha stands as a proof of the continuation of the earlier practices of worship.

Another seated Narasimha image (*yoga* Narasimha) is found at cave no.1, Badami. A *yogapatta* is tied around his waist and the right leg which is flexed high. He has four arms, the upper arms carry *cakra* and *śankha* and with two attendants on either side, the one to the right in *anjali* probably represents Prahlāda. It is interesting to note that the face of Narasimha has a similarity to the Narasimha found in cave no.3 (Soundara Rajan, 1981: 61).

Besides, the Narasimha sculpture at Aihole is similar to that of Badami cave no.3. Here, he is standing alone with simple decoration (Fig.64). He has four hands and the attributes in the right upper and lower hands are broken. On the left upper
hand he holds a śankha and left lower hand is in katiyavalambitahasta, that is, on the hip. The hip has a small flexion and his right leg is also shown stretched out a little to his right. He is standing in virastanaka by resting his right lower on a long gada, only its upper part is visible. The lion face is beautifully carved and the bulging eyes and wide opened mouth are realistic. The knotted mane that falls on the shoulder of the god is a notable feature.

A fine image is noticed on one of the pillars in the Konti-gudi group of temples at Aihole. In this sculpture Narasimha is standing with the demon Hiranyakasipu on his thighs. He is shown piercing his leonine claws into the abdomen of the demon. Another relief is found on the exterior shrine wall of the Huchchappayya-gudi. In this case, the god is seated and tearing the bosom of the demon who is lying flat on the thighs of the god. The upper right and left hands hold a cakra and a śankha. Another sculpture representing the same theme in the same style is carved on a pillar in the Durga temple at Aihole (Gupte, 1967, image. 87 & 105). The Mallikarjuna temple at Bagalkot in Karnataka has a similar Narasimha icon and although it is in a mutilated condition, the ferocity of the lion god can be seen (Fig.65).

At Pattadakkal, the Virupaksha temple and Sangameswara temple house sculptures of Narasimha incarnation of Vishnu. The sculpture found at Pattadakal explains the puranic legend of Narasimha, how he captured the demon king and killed him (Fig.66). Narasimha has four hands, but no weapons are found in his hands. All the four hands are engaged in the act of holding the demon. The demon Hiranyakasipu is showing his back to the Lord, as though he is going to run away, and Narasimha firmly captures the demon’s right hand, which holds the khadga.
This narrative panel beautifully depicts the fight between Narasimha and the demon. In all these sculptures, the early Chalukyan artists paid more attention to and laid more emphasis on portraying the *raudra* (anger) and *samhara* (destructive) aspects of the god. The popularity of the Narasimha *avatāra* of Vishnu and its importance in early Chalukyan art has been revealed by the above examples.

The Rashtrakuta representations of Narasimha are found at Ellora. The Rashtrakuta specimen of a four-handed Narasimha in the act of killing Hiranyakaśipu is found at Lankeshvara cave XVI in Ellora (Fig.67). In this sculpture, Narasimha is shown seated on a *padmapita in sukhasana*. Hiranyakaśipu is shown lying on the lap, on the folded left leg, while the hanging right leg rests on the defeated demon, carrying a naga in his left hand. The god has four arms, the two upper arms carrying the śankha and cakra and the two lower arms are in the action of tearing the abdomen of the demon. The god is adorned with karanda makuta on his head and his bulging eyes and open mouth make him look ferocious (Soundara Rajan, 1981: 189).

Another remarkable panel of Narasimha and Hiranyakaśipu fighting each other is found in the Kailasa temple at Ellora. This sculpture is delicately ornamented in low relief and is of great iconographic interest. The figures of Narasimha and Hiranyakaśipu are found in positions different from the usual representations (Fig.68). Narasimha has six arms, but the attributes cannot identified because of their highly mutilated condition. The drama of the whole tableau in the Ellora panel, with the stretched out left leg crossed by the right leg, the crushed head of a prostrate figure (probably a retainer of Hiranyakaśipu) is full of expressive movement. The sculpture is executed with dramatic effect (Gangoly, 1958: Pl.13).
The above Narasimha image is beautifully executed and he is shown holding the śankha and cakra in two hands. The other hands are free of weapons and, as described in the puranic legend, fighting the demon with bare hands. One of the right hands holds the makuta of the demon and the other lifts him high by drag his lower garment. On the other side, one of the left hands has strongly caught hold of the left hand of the demon which holds a shield and the other hand is lifted high in the air in the act of giving a blow to the demon. The small figure lying on the left foot of the god is probably Prahlāda.

Another magnificent panel like the one at the Kailasanatha temple depicting the duel between the god and the demon is realistically sculpted and found in the verandah of the Dasavatāra cave temple at Ellora (Fig.69). The panel shows Narasimha engaged in battle with Hiranyakaśipu, the knees of both interlocked. The half-gyrating defensive posture of Hiranyakaśipu and the offensive stance of the god are shown in no uncertain terms. It has been a special ability of Rashtrakuta craftsmen to add vigorous emotion to their stone sculptures and here the face of Narasimha, with the leonine jaw in wide grin with the right upper arm of the god ready to give the lethal stroke, is well set off by the terror-stricken and frantic expression of the demon. The fact that a full-blown padmapita is placed below the right leg of the god would show his divinity as already well conventionalized (Soundara Rajan, 1981: 181).

Other notable features of this panel are Narasimha has eight hands, the śankha, cakra, khadga, in three of them, while the other hands are empty. Although the god has weapons, he is shown attacking the demon with his bare hands. His front right hand is lifted to administer a blow to the demon. One of the left hands of
the god holds the *makuta* of the demon king. Another left hand holds firmly the right hand of the demon that holds a sword. The natural left hand is shown holding the right shoulder of the demon and makes him immovable. The haughty smile and defiant attitude of Hiranyakaśipu suggest his utter ignorance of the power of his enemy. E.B. Havell remarks about this sculpture is that, “the sculptor has chosen the moment when the terrific apparition of the man-lion rushes forth to seize Hiranya who, taken unaware, and with a mocking taunt still on his lips, makes a desperate effort to defend himself” (Havell, E.B. 1964: 25).

A similar sculpture is found at the Kailasanatha temple, Kanchipuram built during the Rajasimha Pallava period *circa* 695-728 CE. Champakalskhmi says that, “We may well wonder whether the artist who was responsible for this fine panel (Ellora) derived the conception from a representation of the same theme in the earlier temple of Kailasanatha at Kanchi. This is the earliest known representation of the theme in the Tamil country and precedes the Ellora panel by at least more than half a century.” There is no wonder that this could be possible because the matrimonial relationships between these two dynasties are well known; the artistic idea may also have migrated from one another.

We get some fine examples of Narasimha images belonging to the later Chalukyan period from the Kattesvara temple at Huvinahadagalli, Kallesvara temple at Bagali (Rea, 1995. Pl. VII. pic. 6) and the Ramalingesvara temple at Nandikhandi (Rama Rao, 1970: 67). The sculptures are all well executed in narrative style and express the legend of Narasimha.
### Table – 6

**Narasimha sculptures in Eastern Chalukya and other dynasties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty - Description</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Chalukya - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Bhimesvara temple at Drakasharama</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Chalukya - Narasimha fighting with Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Mallesvara temple at Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Chalukya - Yoga Narasimha</td>
<td>Mandavya Narayana temple at Samalkot, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chola Ganga - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Nilakanthesvara temple at Narayanapuram, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Chalukya - Varaha Narasimha (Fig.70)</td>
<td>Simhachalam, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Ganga - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig.71)</td>
<td>Simhachalam, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Thirteenth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Chalukya – Nava Narasimha (Fig.73)</td>
<td>Ahobilam, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Ninth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijayanagara – Narasimha with Chenchulakshmi (Fig.73).</td>
<td>Ahobilam, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Fifteenth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoysala - Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu (Fig.76)</td>
<td>Chenna Kesava temple, Belur, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Twelfth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoysala - Lakshmi Narasimha (Fig.77)</td>
<td>Chenna Kesava temple at Somnathapura, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Thirteenth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijayanagara – Yoga Lakshmi Narasimha (Fig.78)</td>
<td>Hampi, Karnataka.</td>
<td>Sixteenth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijayanagara – Narasimha with a human face (Fig.79)</td>
<td>Mallikarjuna temple at Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>Sixteenth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijayanagara – Narasimha fighting with Hiranyakasipu</td>
<td>Venkataramana temple at Tadpatri, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Sixteenth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijayanagara – Yoga Narasimha</td>
<td>Tirumala Tirupathi temple, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Sixteenth century CE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijayanagara – Narasimha as seated lion (Fig.80)</td>
<td>Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.</td>
<td>Sixteenth century CE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Eastern Chalukyan representations of the Narasimha image are also found in great numbers. In the Bhimesvara temple at Drakasharama (Rama Rao,
1964: 23), the god is shown seated in *sukhasana*. He has four arms; two of his upper arms carry the *śankha* and *cakra*. The lower two arms are busy tearing the abdomen of the demon who is lying on his lap. The Narasimha sculpture in the Mallesvara temple at Vijayawada depicts the fight between the god and the demon (Sivaramamurthi, 1962: Pl. XIII, d). To show the pre-eminence of the god, an umbrella is placed over his head. The whole relief is packed with vigour and dynamism.

Another interesting Yoga Narasimha representation of Eastern Chalukyan sculpture is found at the Mandavya Narayana temple at Samalkot, northern Andhra Pradesh (Krishna Kumari, 1990:119). The god sits on a pedestal in *utkudikasana* and has four arms. A *yogapatta* binds his knees with the waist. His front two arms rest on the knees while the upper two arms carry the *śankha* and *cakra*. The *kiritamakuta* adorns his head, he has a lion face with bulging eyes and ears which are standing straight.

The Nilakanthesvara temple at Narayanapuram in northern Andhra Pradesh contains a Chola Ganga style of the Narasimha image in one of its niches in the outer *prakharā* wall of the sanctum. This image of Narasimha is in standing posture and he is in the act of killing the demon Hiranyaśakaśipu. The god has ten hands, two of his lower hands are tearing the stomach of the demon and the other hands carry the usual weapons. The uniqueness of the sculpture is that its narrative images on the bottom of the sculpture depict Prahlāda and his father Hiranyaśakaśipu looking towards the pillar between them from which emerges the man-lion that is Narasimha (Krishna Kumari, 1990:124).
The Varaha Narasimha shrine at Simhachalam is a famous pilgrimage centre in the Vishakapatnam district on the east coast of Andhra Pradesh. The main deity of this temple is Varaha Narasimha, a combined form of the third and fourth incarnation of Vishnu (Fig.70a). The sanctum houses a natural rock, the top portion of which resembles the head of a boar and lion, and the rest of the boulder suggests a human torso with two arms. The image of the deity in the sanctum is covered with a thick coating of sandal paste, which is said to have appeased the anger of the Lord after the destruction of Hiraṇyakaśipu. The sandal paste is removed only for one day on akṣayatrītiya that is on the third day of the bright half (new moon to full moon) of the month Visakha, when the original form of the deity becomes visible (Fig.70b). The consecration of this image of the Lord in this form is said to be to destroy enemies, secure success in battles, cure all ailments and procure every good. One of the pillars in the mukhamantapa of the temple is named kappamstambham or the pillar of tribute. This pillar is worshiped, since the popular belief is that the pillar has the power of curing cattle diseases and barrenness among women.

The dating of this temple is uncertain because renovation was carried out periodically by many dynasties through the ages. There are nearly five hundred and twenty five inscriptions found on the walls of this temple. The earliest inscriptions belong to the Chola king Kulotunga I, dating to 1087 CE, mentioning about his victory over the Kalinga king and the endowments he granted to this temple. Another of the Velnati chief Gonka III, 1137 CE says that he covered the image of the lord with gold. There are a number of inscriptions of the Eastern Ganga kings of Kalinga. King Narasimha I of this dynasty is said to have reconstructed the central shrine, the mukhamandapa, and then Nātyamantapa, in 1267 CE. Since Simhachalam was for sometime under the Vijayanagar Empire, its influence is also
felt on this temple. In fact Krishna Devaraya of Vijayanagar captured Kondavidu in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh in 1515 CE from Prataparudra Gajapathi of Orissa. In the following year he advanced as far as Simhachalam and erected a pillar of victory there (Jagadisa Ayyar, 1993: 575).

The Narasimha image on the eastern wall of the central shrine of the Simachalam temple depicts the story of the god killing the demon Hiranyakaśipu (Fig. 71). This Eastern Ganga representation of the Narasimha image was probably made during the period of Narasimha I in the thirteenth century CE, who reconstructed this temple during his reign. Narasimha is in standing posture with four arms, upper arms carrying the śankha and cakra, while the lower two arms are tearing the entrails of the demon. The demon is resting on the lap of the uplifted left leg. The mane on the head, bulging eyes and open mouth gives him a terrible appearance. Another important temple of Narasimha in coastal Andhra Pradesh is situated at Ahobilam (Fig. 72). This place is also known as Singavel kundram in Tamil. As seen in the earlier chapter, this temple was praised by the Alwars in their pasurams. The ten verses of Thiruvaymoli by Tirumangai Alwar explain the geographical features of the hill on which the temples are located. This temple is one of the 108 Divyadesams of Vaishnavism.

According to legend it is believed that when the Devas saw the manifestation of Lord Vishnu as half-lion, half-man, they shouted either "Aho bala" (great strength) or "Aho bila" (great cave). Hence, this place could be called either "Aho balam" or "Ahobilam". The place where lord Narasimha appeared from the stone pillar to kill Hiranyakashipu can be seen in this place. The name of this pillar is Ugrasthambha, which is now referred as “ukku sthambha” in Telugu.
It is common practice to worship the Prahlāda Varada Narasimha (the Narasimha who gave boons to Prahlāda) in lower Ahobilam before worshipping Eguvva (Upper) Ahobila Narasimha, who is present eight kilometers away on a hilltop inside a cave. After worshipping him, it is a practice to visit the nava Narasimhas (nine Narasimhas). The legend says Lord Narasimha, after slaying Hiranyakasipa was roaming around the forest hills of Ahobilam making fearsome noises or laughing and settling at nine places to bless the devotees. Another legend describes how Garuda did penance to see lord Vishnu in the Narasimha form. Thereafter, Narasimha took nine different forms on this hill (Fig.73). The nine forms of Narasimha present at Ahobila are, 1. Prahlāda varada Narasimha, or Lakshmi Narasimha, 2. Chatravata Narasimha, 3. Karanda Narasimha, 4. Yoga or Yogananda Narasimha, 5. Guha Narasimha, 6. Kroda Narasimha, 7. Malola Narasimha, 8. Jwala Narasimha and 9. Pavana Narasimha (Fig.74) (Ramesan, 1988:26).

The origin of the god in this temple goes back to an unknown age, but the present structure belongs to the ninth to fifteenth century CE. The songs of the Alwars mentioned earlier are also one of the sources which help us to date this temple. The earliest inscriptions found in this temple belong to Vikramaditya VI (1076 – 1126 CE) of Western Chalukya of Kalyan. It says that the king worshiped Narasimha after attaining victory over the Cholas at Vengi (Nilakanta Sastri,1976: 206). The golden image of the utsavamurthi of Narasimha was donated by the Kakatiya king Pradaparudradeva. It is still worshipped by the jeeyars of Ahobilam. Legend says that Prataparudradeva wanted to fashion a golden image of Siva in the linga form and give it to the Srisailam temple. But when he tried to fashion a linga, it turned out to be a Narasimha. The king was much agitated and perturbed. In the
night, Lord Narasimha appeared in his dreams, and pointed out to his that in reality there was no difference between him and Siva, and they were one and the same. He instructed the king to install his idol in the Ahobila temple, and to worship him there. The temple received grants during the Vijayanagar dynasty and enjoyed the patronage of king Krishnadevaraya.

There is a folk story about Ahobila Narasimha among the tribal people. The god, after killing Hiranyakasipu, wandered in this mountain jungle in an angry mood. While doing so he saw the tribal girl Vasantika or Chenchulakshmi, daughter of the Chenchu tribal king Saurasena. Her beauty pacified the anger of the god and he fell in love with her. Vasantika Parinayam, a play in Sanskrit and Prakrit was composed by Sri Sadagopa Yatindra Maha Desikan, seventh Pattam Srimad Azhagiya Singar of Sri Ahobila Matam. It is a love story of Lord Narasimha, who is believed to have ruled over Ahobilam for a while as king Ahobilesa, and a Chenchu tribal girl, known variously as Vasantika or Chenchulakshmi. The story of Narasimha and Chenchulakshmi became popular not only among the Chenchus, but also among the rural folk (Fig.75). Even now, the Chenchus believe that Chenchulakshmi is their woman and God Narasimha is their tutelary deity. Prior to the beginning of Brahmothsavam, even today, it is the custom for the utsava Narasimha to tour several tribal villages around Ahobilam and accept their hospitality. It is significant that there is a sub shrine for Chenchulakshmi Thayar in the Ahobilam shrine and that even today, the Chenchu tribal people have participatory functions and duties in the annual Brahmothsava.
The Hoysala representation of Narasimha sculpture is well executed at the Chenna Kesava temple, Belur, Karnataka (Fig. 76) built during the reign of king Vishnuvardhana (1110 – 1152 CE). It is a highly baroque sculpture which depicts the scene of Narasimha killing the demon, Hiranyakasipu. The god has sixteen arms the two upper hands carry the entrails of the demon which looks like a garland on the neck of the god. The two lower arms are tearing the stomach of the demon and other two arms catch hold of the demon. This sculpture differs from the other in one aspect in that the god locked the left hand of the demon with his left leg. On the lower right of Narasimha, Garuda and Prahlāda are in anjalihasta. A similar representation of Narasimha is found at the Hoysaleshwara temple at Halebid, Karnataka.

The Chenna Kesava temple at Somnathapura was build during the reign of the Hoysala king Narasimha III (1254 – 91 CE) by one of his general Somanatha dandanayaka in 1268 CE. A highly carved Lakshmi Narasimha is found in this temple (Fig.77). The Lord is shown with four arms, the lower two hands carrying the cakra and śankha and the upper two arms partly broken. He is shown seated in lalitasana and goddess Lakshmi is sitting on the folded left leg. Goddess Lakshmi holding a pādmaon her left hand and her right hand is shown embracing the hip of the god. On the right side of the god Garuda is standing and admire the form of Lakshmi Narasimha withanjalimudra.

The Lakshmi Narasimha Temple at Harnahalli, built in 1234 CE and the Lakshmi Narasimha Temple at Nuggehalli, anciently known as Vijaya Somanathapura and built in 1246 CE are the best examples of shrines dedicated to the Narasimha form of Vishnu and of Hoysala architecture. Apart from these there
are many sculptures of Narasimha found in the Hoysala temples which indicates the popularity of this form of Vishnu. That many of the rulers of the Hoysala dynasty are named after this god is evidence of their high devotion and the status of Narasimha worship during this period.

The Vijayanagar kings were ardent devotees of Vaishnavism. They worshiped and gave importance to the worship of Narasimha. Hampi, the capital of the Vijayanagar dynasty, has an excellent depiction of the Yoga Lakshmi Narasimha form of Vishnu. This huge monolithic rock-cut sculpture, around 6.7 meters’ high, represents Vishnu in his man-lion incarnation, seated beneath a serpent's hood. The original sculpture that was recovered by the Archaeological Survey of India was in a highly mutilated condition (Fig. 78a). The god has four arms, but all the arms are broken and attributes are unidentifiable. He is seated in utkudikasana, which was understood by seeing the remains of his crossed legs, of which only the lap and the foot in cross position remained. It was recognized as a Yoga Narasimhamurti. A feminine hand that remained at shoulder level near the chest of the god and embracing him at his hip suggests that the statue of Lakshmi was once a part of this sculpture and it now is missing. Probably, Lakshmi was seated on the left lap of the god and embracing him with her right hand.

The present statue has been reconstructed without the Lakshmi image and remade as the original probably didn’t appear (Fig. 78b). Narasimha is sitting on the coils of a giant seven-headed cobra called Śesha. The hood of the snake acts as an umbrella above his head. The god is seated in a cross-legged yoga position with the yoga patta (a belt) supporting his knees. This is one of the unique forms of Narasimha because we do not get this kind of representation earlier to the sixteenth
century CE. In earlier sculptures he has been shown either alone as Yoga Narasimha or with his consort as Lakshmi Narasimha, seated in laitasana. In this particular form, he is shown seated in yogasana with the yogapatta (knee band) and seated Lakshmi on his left lap. That is how he got the name Yoga Lakshmi Narasimha.

The sculptures carved on the eastern prakara wall of the Mallikarjuna temple at Srisailam depict the theme in two sections (Fig. 79). In the upper section the god and asura are shown fighting with each other. The interesting aspect in this is that Narasimha with a human face instead of his lion face. In the lower section, Narasimha is seated in virasana and Hiranyakāśipu is shown lying on the thighs of the god. The god has eight hands. He is ripping open the stomach of the demon with his two lower hands.

Another interesting relief is found on the western exterior wall of the Venkataramana temple at Tadpatri. Here, the sculptor has emphasized the fighting aspect rather than tearing the entrails of the asura. The god has six hands. He holds the hair, neck, and hand which carry the sword of the asura with four of his hands, while the remaining hands are holding the śankha and cakra. It appears that the god is trying to overpower the asura before going on to tear his entrails. Another sculpture depicting the theme in similar style is sculpted on a pillar in the sabhamandapa of the same temple (Sathyanarayana Rao, 1993: 56).

The sub shrine of Yoga Narasimha, facing west, is located in a mandapam in the north-eastern corner of the first prakaram at the Tirumala Tirupathi temple. Yoga Narasimha is also known as Girija Narasimha. The idol of Yoga Narasimha has four hands and he is seated with two hands on his knees, supported by the yogapatta.
Apart from the above images, there are many sculptures of Narasimha found in the various temples of the Vijayanagar period. Simhachalam, Ahobilam, Gethavaram, Mangalagiri, Mattapalli, Vēdadhrī, Vadapalli, Yadagirigutta, Kadhiri, Singaraya konda, and Narasmiha konda were all important centers of Narasimha worship during the Vijayanagar period. Yoga Narasimha, Lakshmi Narasimha, \textit{Ugra} Narasimha, and Prahlādavarada Narasimha were all the famous subjects in the Vijayanagar period. We can see many of these sculptures in the \textit{gopura}, \textit{vimana}, \textit{mandapa}, pillars, and sanctum of the temples built during the Vijayanagar period.

The crouching or seated lion is a popular symbol of the later Vijayanagar period, found in almost all the temples renovated and build by them throughout southern India (Fig.80). If we closely examine the icon we can found the feet and hands are human, sometimes decorated with armlets, bracelets, anklets, with a sacred thread running across his shoulder. These features help us to identify the symbol of the seated lion as Narasimha. The Narasimha temples and sculptural representations all over India had their echo in Tamilnadu, andhave been discussed in detail in the next chapter.

\textbf{Vaikuntha (Caturmūrti Form)}

According to the literary evidences (Chapter two), the early Vaishnava cult is the syncretisation of Vedic solar deity the Vishnu, the human Vasudeva – Krishna and the syncretised Vishnu Narayana. These are transcendent, emanatory, incantatory, immanent and iconographical forms of worship. The \textit{Vyūha} concept must have been extant in the second century BCE, because Patanjali mentions the \textit{caturmūrti} form that includes Vasudeva, Samkarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha
in his *Mahabhashya* (Raychudhuri, 1936: 23-24). During the Gupta period, the *vyuhas* enlarged into twenty-four, when much of the Puranic literature was compiled, with the influence of *Pāñcarātra* theology. *Śilpaśāstra* and a few other texts which mention Narasimha as one of the secondary *vyuhas* of Vishnu.

### Table – 7

**Sculptures of Vaikuntha (Caturmūrti Form)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynasty - Description</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunga – Four sided – four faced image (Fig.81)</td>
<td>Bhita, Uttar Pradesh and is now in the State Museum, Lucknow.</td>
<td>Second century BCE.</td>
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The *Jayākhya Sarṇhitā*, describes the images of Vaikuntha with human, Narasimha, Varaha and Kapila heads and its worship (Bhattacharya, 1967: 46). We
find more information about the form of Vaikuntha with the Narasimha face in the
image of Vishnu in the following literatures: *Pārameśvara Saṃhitā* (19,541-43),
Īśvara Saṃhitā (21, 579-581). *Paushkara Saṃhitā* (38, 300-302), and *Padma Saṃhitā*(quoted in the *Pāñcarātra Rakṣā*) (10 – 11). The *Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa*, refers to Vaikuntha with eight hands and four faces in four cardinal
directions. Each of these faces is endowed with two hands holding the wheel and
the mace for Vasudeva, the pestle and plough for Samkarshana, the bow and the
arrow for Pradyumna, and the shield and the sword for Aniruddha. The eastern face
is placid, the southern is that of a lion, the western is fierce (Kapila) and the northern
is that of a boar (Shah, 1961: I, ch.44 & 85).

The Vaikuntha form of Vishnu is described in the *Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa*
as, “Vishnu, the god of gods, should be represented as seated on Garuda, wearing a
celestial yellow garment, with *Kaustubha* brightening his bosom and with all sorts
of ornaments. His complexion would be like that of a cloud, laden with water. The
eastern face is called *Saumya*, the southern Narasimha, the western Kapila, and the
northern Varaha” (Shah, 1961: II, 141). The *Bhagavata Purāṇa*(VIII. 5, 4.) and the
*Vishnu Purāṇa* (III, 2-4) record that Vaikuntha was born of Vikuntha, the wife of
Sage Subhra; the *Mahabharata* (*Vishnusahasranama*, verse.57) enumerates
Vaikuntha as one of the epithets of Vishnu.

The earliest *Caturmūrti* or Vaikuntha image found so far belongs to the
second century BCE, Sunga period (Srinivasan, 1979: 41). This sculpture was
found at Bhita, Uttar Pradesh and is now in the State Museum, Lucknow (Fig.81).
The important feature in this image is that it has been sculpted in the round on all four sides: one can see the four faces by circumambulation. Although the image has four heads, one side of the head has a crown and heavy ornaments, which make it prominent. This figure must be Vasudeva, his right hand is in *abhaya mudra* and the left hand holds a decorative jar. He wears both upper (*uttarīya*) and lower garment (*dhoti*). To the right, we find a damaged human head and below that the theriopomorphic form of Narasimha as a seated lion. On his right appears another full standing figure without a crown and his hair is parted in the middle and falls in strands on either side of his shoulders. Both the hands are broken, the attributes are not clear. Adjacent to the left side of the crowned figure, there is a defaced human head and below that a theriophomorphomorphic form of Varaha in standing posture. He is in the attitude of worshipping Vasudeva with two of his hands in *anjali mudra*. Iconographically, this image is an important find because there are several Vaikuntha images found in relief in the Gupta period, but we do not come across anything similar to this.

Another image of Vaikuntha belonging to the third century CE, Kushana period is from Sapta – Samudri well at Mathura (Fig.82). Although the image is in a highly damaged condition, enough remains of this statue to ascertain the Vaikuntha iconography. The bust of Vasudeva has four arms, the natural right hand is in *abhaya mudra* and the left holds a conch. The upper right hand rests on an ornamented mace and the left is missing. One emanating form is seen projecting from Vasudeva’s right shoulder which is identified as Samkarshana according to attributes like a single ear-ring, serpent-hood canopy above his head and holding a wine cup in his left hand (Srinivasan, 1979: 40). In this sculpture, Samkarshana is directly represented instead of his theriomorphic form of a lion that explains the
concept of *caturvyūhamūrti* form practiced in the Kushana period. Two other forms originally projected from Vasudeva. One emanated from his crown; the head and right arm of the form are broken. The fragment of a shawl remains draped over the left shoulder. A fourth figure, completely lost, should have emanated from Vasudeva’s left shoulder.

During the Gupta period, Vaikuntha images are available in plenty, according to Puranic descriptions. An early bust of Vaikuntha datable to the fifth century is in the National Museum, New Delhi (Fig.83). Two small images from the Mathura Museum, no. 771 (Fig.84), and No.D.28, depict the lion’s head to the right and the boar’s head to the left, thus reversing the position of the animal heads. It appears from some of the Gupta images from Mathura that there was no rigidity about the position of animal heads of Vaikuntha in this period (Agarwala, 1972: 13). The popularity of *Vṛūha* worship at Mathura is further evidenced by the discovery of a Gupta terracotta plaque preserved in the Mathura Museum (Agarwala, 1936: 35-36).

The popularity of this particular sect of the *Pāñcarātra* cult was confined to Mathura and its vicinity during the Gupta period. During the early medieval period, the centre of the cult appears to have shifted to Kashmir and Punjab Hills. No Gupta bronze depicting Vaikuntha Vishnu has been discovered in the Mathura region. However, it was popular among the Gandhara artists in a later period (Agarwala, 1972: 13).

The *Chaturmukha* form of Vishnu is described as *Chaturātman* in the *Rajatarangini* (IV, 500, V, 25) of Kalhana. A Vaikuntha image from Avantipur is a good example of the Kashmiri style, housed at Srinagar Museum (Fig.85). A dagger is tucked at the waist belt of the God and the third eye on the forehead of the fourth
face at the back is noteworthy. A ninth century CE fragmentary Vaikuntha Caturmārti in the Prince of Wales Museum, Mumbai, illustrates the classic Kashmiri type (Chadra, 1974: 29) (Fig.86). The central figure has a human face wearing an elaborate triple crested crown. The body is ornamented with earrings, a necklace, the yajnopavita, and the Srivatsa mark on the chest. On the right of the central face of Vasudeva is projected the head of a lion; to the left that of a boar. On the reverse appears the fierce-looking face of Kapila. Clearly each of the four murtis of this image displays iconographic traits that correlate with those of the Sunga image from Bhita.

A standing Vaikuntha at the National art Gallery, New Delhi is a good specimen of a bronze icon of this god from Kashmir (Fig.87). The Vaikuntha bronze from the Hari Rai temple at Chamba is a masterpiece and it is under worship (Fig.88).

A stone image of Vaikuntha from the Srinagar Museum is interesting for some of its iconographic features. The animal heads are shown in the traditional manner but there is a serpent-hood canopy above the central human head. Besides, a miniature figure of Lakshmi is carved in the centre of a lotus flower held in the right hand of Vaikuntha. The chauri-bearer below also has a serpent-hood above the head (Agarwala, 1972: 16). A Lakshmi-Vaikuntha from Kashmir is seated figure on Garuda (Fig.89). Vaikuntha has four arms, with lion and boar faces projecting on either side of his neck. Lakshmi is seated to the left of Vaikuntha who is lifted by a four armed Garuda.

The Western Indian images of Vaikuntha are also more in number. A stone image from the Chamba Hills is preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum (Fig.90). The three-headed Garudārūda deity rests his upper hands on the heads of standing
personified attributes of the mace and wheel. The deity rests his legs on the uplifted hands of Garuda while his personified cognizances, the *Cakra Purusha* and *Gada* Devi, are supported on the wings of the bird. A few early Vaikuntha images of this kind have been found from the Kangra region of the Punjab. An eighth century temple at Masruru and a medieval temple of Siva at Baijanath preserve Vaikuntha images (Agarwala, 1972: 18).

The *Visvarūpa* Vaikuntha images are also available in good numbers in the northern, western, and eastern parts of India. A fragmentary stone relief of *Visvarūpa* Vaikuntha from Utter Pradesh is now in the National Museum (Fig.91). The head of the statue is well preserved but the hands and lower parts of the statue are missing. Only a part of a preserved right hand is raised up to the shoulder and is in *abhaya mudra*. The vestiges of the rope-like *vanamala* are seen on the left shoulder. To the right of the human head are the fish and the boar faces and on the left are the tortoise and the lion faces. It appears that the image was provided with an elaborate halo which is mutilated now. A few miniature human heads near Vishnu’s right shoulder complete the *Visvarūpa* form in this medieval relief. This type of *Visvarūpa* Vaikuntha image is also found at Kannauj, Abaneri, Moriyama in Rajasthan, Mariyama in Bihar, Sabdera and Taibpur in Gujarat, Sadadi and Nagada in Udaipur, Deogarh in Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir.

A *Viśvarūpa* statue from Bajaura in Kulu is unique because of the depiction of *Cakra Purusua* on its back (Fig. 92 & 93). The *Cakra Prurusua* appears against a spoke wheel in halo with folded hands. This is an important sculpture, which stands
as a forerunner of the Suddarsana Narasimha icons found in plenty in southern India in the later period.

We get many varieties of the Vaikuntha *Caturmūrti* form of Vishnu in the northern, central, eastern, and western parts of India. These icons display the concept of *Caturmūrti* and *Vyūha* as mentioned in literatures. Although the *Viśvarūpa* Vaikuntha form depicts the *daśāvatāra* of Vishnu and especially the four animal incarnations, the Vaikuntha Caturmūrti form purely depicts the *Pāńcarātra* concept of *Vyūha*.

The Narasimha head found on the Vaikuntha *Caturmūrti* form is transference of the incarnation aspect to the more philosophical that is a *Vyūha* aspect. Banerjea points out that the lion and the boar faces are primarily associated with *PāńcarātraVyūha* and not with the Narasimha and Varaha incarnations (Banerjea, 1956: 410). However, the growing importance of these two incarnations resulted in their being the preferred forms of the *Caturvyūhamūrti*. 
References


