

## CHAPTER-V

### THE POSSIBILITY OF TRACING OUT A CULT OF GARUDA

In case of *Hanumāna* myth it may be noticed that *Hanumāna* himself got elevated to the status of a god and subsequently a cult of *Hanumāna* worshipping also came into existence. It deserves to be examined if the Garuda myth also could lead to the prevalence of Garuda worship. It is however, obvious that whenever certain deity is worshipped the 'vāhana' of the deity is also worshipped at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

In the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, though Rāma is depicted as a human being, yet he is worshipped as *avatāra* of God by the people till date. Rāma is one among the twenty four *avatāras*.<sup>2</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has given three separate lists of the incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu. One of such list names – ten incarnations of the Lord, while another names twenty-four of them. In both the lists Rāmāvatāra has been mentioned. It is found that the monkeys were the actual helper to acquire Sītā, his wife from

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<sup>1</sup> *Nirukta* – 7.4

<sup>2</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 1<sup>st</sup> Canto – 3<sup>rd</sup> Ch - 1.3.6, 1.3.25, 2.7.1, 2.7.26

Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā. Among the monkeys, *Hanumāna* was a supreme devotee of Rāma. In every work he performed his duties with full devotion to Rāma. Now it is seen that *Hanumāna* was a supreme devotee of Rāma, who has also been placed among the gods as a form of Śiva. Temples to this god are to be seen, and in some places his image is worshipped daily as the remover of obstacles. He is even chosen by many as their guardian deity. In the performance of work he is swift as air or Pavana. It is found that one of the faces of *Srī Pañcamukha Hanumāna* is *Mahāvīra Garuḍa*.<sup>3</sup> This face points towards the west. Worship of *Garuḍa* is believed to remove the effects of poisons from one's body. *Hanumāna* is also one of the *avatāra*'s of *Garuḍa*. In Tamil Vaiṣṇavism *Garuḍa* and *Hanumāna* are known as 'Periya Thiruvadi' and 'Siriya Thiruvadi' respectively.<sup>4</sup> In Hindu Religion an independent Upaniṣad the *Garuḍopaniṣad* and a Purāṇa, the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, are devoted to him. Various names have been attributed to *Garuḍa* – Gaganeśvara, Kāmāyuṣa, Kāśyapī, Khageśvara, Nāgāntaka, Sitānana, Suparṇa, Tārksya, Vainateya, Viṣṇuratha and others. As stated above in chapter-III, in the Vedas, *Garuḍa* is described by the name of

<sup>3</sup> Website of the *srī viśvarūpa pañcamukha ānjaneya swamī* foundation, which also includes *garuḍa* as one of the faces.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

*Śyena*, where the mighty bird is said to have brought nectar to earth from heaven. The Purāṇas which came into existence much later, mention Garuḍa as doing the same thing, which indicates that *Śyena* (Sanskrit for Eagle) and Garuḍa are the same.

Cf: *bhuvā harervāhanastu sargādīnāñca kāraṇam |*  
*devān vijitya garuḍa amṛtāharaṇam tathā ||*<sup>5</sup>

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* in the middle of the battlefield ‘*Kurukṣetra*’, Kṛṣṇa explaining his omnipresence, says – “of birds, I am the son of Vinatā (Garuḍa) indicating the importance of Garuḍa.

Cf: *mṛgāṇām ca mṛgendro ’ham vinateyaśca pakṣiṇām*<sup>6</sup>

As *Hanumāna* is one of the *avatāras* of Garuḍa and *Hanumāna* is worshipped as god and it can therefore be said that Garuḍa is also worshipped in disguise. The word Garuḍa is related to Viṣṇu, so *Garuḍadhvaja* is also Viṣṇu.

There is a *mantra* named as *Garuḍa-mantra* which is related to *Garuḍa-daivata*. The word *Garuḍa-daivata* means Garuḍa as god and this *mantra* is believed to remove the effects of poisons from one’s body

<sup>5</sup> *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, Śloka No.6

<sup>6</sup> *Śrīmadbhagavad Gītā*, Ch-10, Verse-30

and removes the fear of snakes who are the enemies of Garuḍa. We have found this *Garuḍa mantra* in *Tantrasāra* – as –

Cf: “*kṣīp om̐ svāhā*”<sup>7</sup>

In *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, Garuḍa worshipped and pleased Lord Viṣṇu. So, highly pleased with the devotion of Garuḍa, Viṣṇu asked him to have a boon from him. Garuḍa also aimed to be a *vāhana* of Lord Viṣṇu. There also, it is found that Lord Viṣṇu said to Garuḍa that you will be famous in the world by the name of Garuḍa as I am the wealth of the gods. You will be adored like me in the world.

Cf: *gāruḍaṁ tava nāmnā talloke khyātim̐ gamiṣyati*

*yathāhaṁ devadevānām̐ śrī khyātā vinatāsuta*

*yathō'haṁ kīrtanyo'tha tathā tvam̐ garuḍātmanā*<sup>8</sup>

From this saying of the Lord it may be understood that Garuḍa will also be adored in the world like his master Lord Viṣṇu.

In *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* there is a mention of Garuḍa temple. In the *Garuḍa temple*, *Garuḍa* should be placed in centre, *Kaśyapa* and *Vinatā* should be placed in the side temples. Or otherwise *Vāsudeva*

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<sup>7</sup> *Tantrasāra*, Page-617

<sup>8</sup> *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, II<sup>nd</sup> Chapter, Verse.53-54, Page-5

should be placed in the centre and either Rudra and Pitāmaha or Candra and Arka or Varuṇa and Anila or Laxmi and Kālaratri or Anala (fire) and Anila (wind) or Tārksya and Ananta or Garuḍa and Aruṇa should be placed in the side temples, or otherwise Dharma should be placed in the centre, in the principal and Artha and Kāma in the side temples.

Cf: *pārśvaprāsādayastasya kartavyau vanamālinau |*

*prāsāde gārūḍe vāpi kartavyaśca tathā yamaḥ ||*

*pārśva prāsādayastasya mṛtyukālau niveśayet |*

*prāsāde gārūḍe vāpi kartavyo varuṇo bhavet ||*

*pārśva prāsādayaḥ kāryau kaśyapo vinatā hyubhau |*

*prāsāde gārūḍe vāpi vāsudevaṃ niveśayet ||<sup>9</sup>*

In the book “*Hindu Architecture in India and Abroad*” the form of Garuḍa is described, “the Garuḍa is figured partly as a human creature and partly as a bird. He is provided with feathers, with wings painted in five colours, and with a beak (*tuṇḍa*) ; but, on the other hand, the description refers to his arms (*prakoṣṭha*), his ears, and hair (*Keśa*). He wears various ornaments (*Sarvālaṅkāra-Saṃyukta*), including a diadem of the kind called *Karaṇḍa* (Lit. a basket), and is gorgeously painted in a

<sup>9</sup> *Viṣṇudharmottara purāna*, Chapter-86, Verse-67, 68, 74, Page-235-236

great variety of colours. He is described as being of a terrific appearance (*Ugradriś*). His worship is stated to be conducing to the destruction of the enemy (*Śatru-nāśa*).<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the possibility of tracing out a cult it is also found that the “*Garuḍa stambha* in front of a Viṣṇu temple appears as a lineal descendant of these most ancient *vāhanas*.”<sup>11</sup>

It is also noted that “a specific shape of the temple, as closely connected with the shape and name of its deity as are the *Liṅga* temples, is the temple *Garuḍa*. It resembles the bird *Garuḍa* having two wings ; these have the shape of attached shrines ; the main building of the temple forms the body of *Garuḍa*, the Sun-Bird, who carries *Sūrya*, the Sun. The temple here has the shape of the *vāhana* and thus is similar to those temples which were built in the likeness of the chariots of the gods.

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<sup>10</sup> The *Garuḍa* is a mythical bird, the sovereign of the feathered tribes and the enemy of Serpent (*Nāga*) race. There is the tradition that *Garuḍa* is the son of *Kaśyapa* and *Vinatā*. Hence the metronymic *Vainateya*, by which he is often designated. The myth of the birth of *Garuḍa* is told in the *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi-parva*, Chapter-XVI.

<sup>11</sup> *The Hindu Temple*, Vol-II, Page-317

“Garuḍa himself, the bird form and *vāhana* of the Sun, has also his image enshrined to the main divinity ; he is flanked by Kaśyapa and Vinatā.<sup>12</sup>

To whichever god the temple Garuḍa is dedicated, it is a temple of *Sūrya* who shines in all images. *Dharma* in the main temple and *Artha* and *Kāma* in its wings may also be worshipped in this temple and purpose of whose construction like that of any temple is to attain *Mokṣa* (*Viśvaprakāśa*, Vol.10).

As it is found in the *Hindu Temple*, Garuḍa temple is a rectangular building. The fourth group of temples (Verses-47-77, *Viṣṇudharmottara*) is more complex. These temples have a tapering superstructure in two stories. Two temples of this family moreover embody in their plan their iconographic function. These are temples Kamalā and Garuḍa.<sup>13</sup>

In Buddhist mythology, the Garuḍas (Pali : Garula) are enormous predatory birds with intelligence and social organization. Another name for Garuḍa is Suparṇa (Pali : Supanna), meaning “wel-winged, having good wings.” Like the Nāgas, they combine the characteristics of

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, Page-421-22

<sup>13</sup> *The Hindu Temple*, Vol-II (Ch : The iconography of the temples of the viṣṇudharmottara) page-414.

animals and divine beings, and may be considered to be among the lowest devas. From the Buddhist mythology it is clearly drawn that Garuḍas are worshipped as devas. According to this Garuḍas have kings and cities, and at least some of them have the magical power of changing into human form when they wish to have dealings with people. On some occasions *Garuḍa kings have had romances with human women in this form. Their dwellings are in groves of the Simbali, or Silk-cotton tree.*

*The role of Garuḍas in Buddhism is that the Garuḍas were among the being appointed by śakra (i.e. Indra) to guard mount Sumeru and the thirty three gods of heaven from the attacks of the Asuras.*<sup>14</sup>

Cha-Khyung (Bird Garuḍa) was a mountain deity of Rebkong, Tibet, an area on the west side of the river in Amdo province. When he was defeated by Padmasambhava he became a worldly protector, Shang Shang.

It is found that in Thai mythology, Garuḍa is known as king of birds. *Garuḍa symbolizes the Thai Monarch an enduring symbol. It serves as the royal insignia. Besides this, Garuḍa appears in all forms of art, architecture and even modern sculpture. By Hindu mythology the*

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<sup>14</sup> *Images of Garuḍa* (<http://altreligion.about.com/library/graphic/bl-garuḍa-htm>)

symbol of sovereignty was inspired. Hinduism portrays Garuḍa as a powerful deity in the lower domains of heaven, who sometimes comes among human beings. In the story of Kāki, Garuḍa came down from his celestial residence to gamble with the king in a dice game. In this well known story Garuḍa saw the beautiful kākī and stole her away.<sup>15</sup>

According to Hindu mythologies, Garuḍa was a powerful celestial being. At his birth, there appeared a radiance so brilliant that all heaven was troubled and thought that the new arrival was *Agni*, the Fire God, the heavenly hosts came to pay homage.

Cf : *jātaḥ paramatejasvī vinatānandavardhanaḥ |*

*tejorāsīmidam̐ dr̥ṣṭvā yuṣmān moha samāviśat ||*<sup>16</sup>

It is also seen that in royal Buddhist temples Garuḍa is there. The influence of ancient Brahmanism is still felt in royal ceremonies which pay homage to Garuḍa. The supreme deities in the Hindu Pantheon are Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā. There are a host of lesser spiritual divinities of which Garuḍa is one. Garuḍa is depicted in the sculpture, architecture

<sup>15</sup> *Garuḍa, arch-enemy of the nāga.*

([http://www.thailex.info/THAILEX/ENG/lexicon/garoeda % 20in % 20gevechi % 20met % Nāga htm](http://www.thailex.info/THAILEX/ENG/lexicon/garoeda%20in%20gevechi%20met%20Nāga.htm))

<sup>16</sup> *Mahābhārata, Ādiparva, 23<sup>rd</sup> Ch. Śloka-11-12, Page-139*

and painting adorning Hindu and Brāhman temples. In such cases, it may be thought that as a lesser divinity Garuḍa is worshipped among the Hindus, when one prays to god Viṣṇu who is riding on Garuḍa, it is indicated that with the deity, the *vāhana* is also worshipped. In this matter, it can be suggested that there should not be any conflict regarding the worship of Garuḍa. Garuḍa is typically shown with the bill and wings of a bird, but the body and limbs of a man as well. He wears a crown on his head like his master, Viṣṇu. He is ancient and huge and can block out the sun. The whole concept of Garuḍa can be traced back to *Rgveda*, 1.164.46, (as discussed in Ch-II of this dissertation) where the sun god is referred to as *Garutmān*.<sup>17</sup> As found in *Amarakoṣa*, *Garutmān* is also just another name of Garuḍa.<sup>18</sup> Thus sun (*sūrya*) and Garuḍa are identical. This identity is not disturbed even when Garuḍa is described as the vehicle (*vāhana*) of Viṣṇu, because Viṣṇu is identical with *Sūrya*, the sun god. So it is supposed to be that worship of sun god or Viṣṇu is related to Garuḍa also. The worship of Garuḍa is believed to remove the effects of poison from one's body. Sometimes Garuḍas deal with the

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<sup>17</sup> *Rgveda* – 1.164.46

<sup>18</sup> *Amarakoṣa* 1/20, page-23

people also. There is a Garuḍa valley, Kyunglung to the South-west of Mount Kailāś.

There is also a story relating Garuḍa with reference to *Kumbhamelā*, the great Hindu Festival. The *Kumbhamelā* is held at a different spot on the shores of the Gaṅges every 12 years. At the beginning of 2001, Allahabad was the focus for this largest of the world's gatherings. It is one of the four spots where Garuḍa is believed to have rested during a battle with demons over the pot of divine nectar of immortality. Garuḍa flight lasted 12 divine days or 12 years of mortal time, so the *Kumbhamelā* is celebrated at each city of 3 towns, alternating among them every three years.<sup>19</sup>

It is believed that the Hindu people worship Viṣṇu as supreme God, whose vehicle is Garuḍa. Garuḍa, the mount of Viṣṇu was born with a great hatred for the evil and he is supposed to roam about the universe devouring the bad.

It is also found in the Śaiva tradition of Hinduism, Garuḍa is a guardian of Lord Śiva. In the *Agni Purāṇa*, Rudra, is said to be manifest in the shape of the mighty celestial bird Garuḍa.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.khandno.net/mysterious.garuḍa.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> *Agni Purāṇa* II, page-1101

Regarding tracing out of the cult of Garuḍa it is seen in the Hindu mythology that Garuḍa is one of the three principal deities that has evolved after the Vedic period in Indian history. The other two are Gaṇeśa, elephant-headed son of the goddess Durgā, and Hanumāna, the monkey god. The Indonesian National Airline is named as Garuḍa. Garuḍa is much revered by the religious Hindus for his ethics and his strength in applying his ethics to correct evil-doers.

Garuḍa as a lesser Hindu divinity is invoked as a symbol of impetuous violent force of speed, and of martial prowess throughout the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>21</sup> Powerful warriors were compared with Garuḍa. As Garuḍa seizing down on a serpent likewise the powerful warriors too, destroy their enemies.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “Loud was the noise with which Arjuna faced his foes, like that made by Garuḍa in days of yore when swooping down for snakes.” (Mahābhārata, Book-VIII : Karna parva, section 77). “The impetuosity of Ashvatthāmā, as he rushed towards his foe, resembled that of Garuḍa swooping down for seizing a large snake.” (Book-VIII : Karna parva, section 59) Arjuna “Seized Drupada as Garuḍa seizeth a huge snake after agitating the waters of the ocean.” (Book-I : Ādiparva, section-140).

<sup>22</sup> *Mahābhārata*, Book-VIII : Karna parva, Section-85

The field Marshall Droṇa uses a military formation named after Garuḍa.<sup>23</sup>

It seems to be a symbol that the defeated warriors are like snakes beaten down by Garuḍa.

Kṛṣṇa even carries the image of Garuḍa on his banner.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Mahābhārata*, Book-VI : Droṇa parva, Section-20

<sup>24</sup> *Mahābhārata*, Book-VIII : Karṇa parva, Section-94