CHAPTER V

MATSYA...KURMA...AND...VARAHA

The earliest indication of the evolution of the avatāra theory occurs in the famous passage of the Bhagavad Gītā quoted in a previous chapter. However, though there is no definite idea of the avatāra in the Vedic literature, there is a prefiguration of several later stories, as, for instance, the story of the Vāmanāvatāra. Viṣṇu is here described as a youth of vast body and as striding over this universe, planting his step in three places. He is also said to have assumed a different form in battles. This idea is later developed by the Brāhmaṇa and Epic literature.

While the legend of the Vāmana, even in its nucleus is connected with Viṣṇu, the earlier accounts regarding the Matsya, Kūrma and Varāha avatāras considered them as three manifestations of Brahmā (Prajāpati), as is seen in the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa and Taṇṭirīya Sambhitā and even in the Mahābhārata, in which the "fish incarnation" is a form of the Creator God rather than of Viṣṇu.

With the tremendous growth of the Viṣṇuva religion, these

1. Chapter II, p. 67
2. Rg Veda, I, 154, 1-2.
3. Ibid., I, 100, 6.
three incarnations were bodily transferred to Viṣṇu, but it is not possible to trace the process by which these legends were assimilated into the scheme of the avatāras of Viṣṇu. Chronologically, therefore, the first three among the traditional avatāras numbering ten, were perhaps the last to be incorporated into the scheme. Even among the three, the Varāha form gained greater popularity than the Matsya and Kūrma.

In the period before the rise of the Pallavas, the avatāra concept was well known in the Tamil country but the traditional list of ten avatāras does not appear to have been finally evolved. For, we have seen that the early Tamil works clearly refer to Kūrma, Varāha, Narasimha, Śaiva-Śiva, Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa as avatāras. Kama, however, seems to be included in the fold only towards the end of the period i.e. 6th-7th century A.D. On the other hand, Paraśurāma, though he is known as the ascetic with the axe and the one who 'extirpated' the Kṣatriyas, is nowhere found to be associated with this concept in the Bānāga age. Matsya and Kalkī, the first and the last were definitely not known.

By about the close of the 7th century A.D., however, Paraśurāma appears to have been accepted as an avatāra of Viṣṇu.

8. It is noteworthy that Brahmā never attained the popularity of the other two Gods of the Trinity as an object of worship.

6. Ādiya, p. 71
7. Chapter III.
The Matsya and Kalki are also now definitely included. The earliest epigraphic reference to the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu occurs in a Pallava-Granatha inscription found in the Mivarāha cave temple in Mahābalipuram. This inscription, which establishes the termima ad guṇa for the traditional purāṇa is assignable to about the 7th-8th century A.D. and consists of the oft-quoted verses:

Matsyaḥ Kīrṣṇavāraḥḥava (īcī) Narasimhaḥ (īcī) Varanāḥ
Kalki Hamsava (īcī) Hamsava (īcī) Buddhah Kalki on tā dāttā

Here the inclusion of the Buddha as the nth avatāra is noteworthy. It may be attributed to the influence of the development of Vaishnava concepts under the Guptas of the 4th-6th centuries A.D., a period in which there was a great revival of Vedic Brāhmaṇism and when a new orientation was being effected, leading to the development of the Vaishnava and Saiva pantheons. The one important factor of the development of the Vaishnava pantheon under the Guptas was the inclusion of Buddha into the avatāra fold, which cut at the very root of the Buddhist religion. The spread of these ideas into the south must have taken place shortly after the end of the fourth century A.D., and became popularised in the Tamil country by about the seventh century. It must, however, be noted that the Alvars of this period do not mention the Buddha as an avatāra of Viṣṇu. On the basis of the accepted chronology

of the Ṛṣis it may be said that the first three of them Poygai, Poy and Fudam of the 8th-9th centuries A.D. appear to have known only the following avatars - Kūrma, Varāha, Narasimha, Vāmana, Hāna, Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, the last one being the most popular.

But Tirumāḷai, Tirumangai and Nammāḷvār, who came slightly later know all the ten avatars besides various other forms of Viṣṇu.

The complete list of the avatars known in this period may be obtained from the references of Tirumangai who sings in praise of the ten avatars besides various other forms of Viṣṇu. The complete list of the avatars known in this period may be obtained from the references of Tirumangai who sings in praise of the ten avatars in which Kṛṣṇa is the ninth and no place is given to the Buddha. Elsewhere he mentions Hamsa as an avatar and seems to include it in the traditional list. The earliest mention of Hamsa as an avatar occurs in the Narāyanīya section of the Mahābhārata where the name Hamsa occurs first. The Narāyanīya list is as follows - Hamsa, Kūrma, Matsya, Varāha, Narasimha, Vāmana, Hāna, (Bhūravā), Hāna (Dāsarathi), Sañvata (Vasūdeva) and Kalkin. The list given by Tirumangai is the same but he mentions Hamsa in the place of Balarāma before Kṛṣṇa, who is the ninth. In the Pāñcarātra text called the Abhirudhavā sanhitā which gives a list of thirty-nine vibhavas, the ninth one is

9. Parīya Tirumallī, VIII - 8 - vv.1 to 10.

"Mrīṇaṁ kāral ardha naṅgār bhūmam itīsaṁśūt-tarpay

nippana itīsamśūt-tamaśdaraṁśu-kārtiyā iti nām hamsai . . . "

v.10.

10. Ibid., II-7-10; VIII-6-8; XI-4-1 to 10.

11. ch.XII, v.104.
of the Avāra it may be said that the first three of them Poygai, Pay and Pādam of the 5th-6th centuries A.D. appear to have known only the following Avatāras: Kūrma, Varāha, Narasiṁha, Vāmana, Kāma, Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, the last one being the most popular. But Tirumangai, Tirumangai and Namālvār, who come slightly later know all the ten Avatāras besides various other forms of Viṣṇu. The complete list of the Avatāras known in this period may be obtained from the references of Tirumangai who sings in praise of the ten Avatāras besides various other forms of Viṣṇu. The complete list of the Avatāras known in this period may be obtained from the references of Tirumangai who sings in praise of the ten Avatāras in which Kṛṣṇa is the ninth and no place is given to the Buddha. Elsewhere he mentions Hanum as an Avatāra and seems to include it in the traditional list. The earliest mention of Hanum as an Avatāra occurs in the Narāyanīya section of the Mahābhārata where the name Hanum occurs first. The Narāyanīya list is as follows: Hanum, Kūrma, Nāstyap, Varāha, Narasiṁha, Vāmana, Kāma, (Bhārgava), Kāma (Pāsārathi), Satvata (Vasūdēva) and Kalkin. The list given by Tirumangai is the same but he mentions Hanum in the place of Balarāma before Kṛṣṇa, who is the ninth. In the Pānḍarāstra text called the Aṅkhudhumya samhita which gives a list of thirty-nine vibhayas, the ninth one is

9. Parīva Tirumalī, VIII - 8 - vv.1 to 10.
10. Ibid., II-7-10; VIII-6-8; XI-4-1 to 10.
11. ch.XII, v.104.
Vīhāṇgama, same as Hamsa of the Nārāyāṇīya section. Evidently the list in the Pañcarātra text is derived from the Nārāyāṇīya for obvious reasons. The same may be said of the hymns of Tirumangai, who, among the early Vaiṣṇava śāhāvs, was the most well versed in the Bhāgavata or Pañcarātra doctrines and must have been influenced by the same section in the Mahābhārata.

It is also significant that Buddha is not found included in the Nārāyanīya list as also in the Vāyu Purāṇa list. The Vāyu Purāṇa list gives the following ten names - Yajña, Narasimha, Vāmana (celestial), Dattātreya, one (5th) unnamed in the Tretāyuga, (Jāmadagnya) Kāma, (Bāhrathī) Kāma, Vedavyāsa, Vāsudēvā- Kyāpa and Kalkin.

The legend behind the concept of the Hamsāvatāra is known to Tirumangai who says that in this form, Viṣṇu taught the Vedas to illumine the whole Universe which had become submerged in a gloom on account of the Great Deluge. There are, however, no representations of this form of Viṣṇu anywhere.

The Hamsāvatāra is not one of the traditional ten avatāras, but it is discussed here mainly on account of its inclusion in

12. F.O. Schrader, Introduction to the Pañcarātra and the Atitpudhyam Saṁhitā, p.43.
13. The antiquity of this section of the Great Epic as said earlier, is discussed by S.Krishnaswami Iyengar, who rightly believes that in the Tamil country it was popular even from the beginning of the Christian era - See The Antiquity of the Pañcarātra, PIHE, III Session, 1939, Calcutta, pp.53-56.
15. Pariyatimuni, V-1-9; V-3-8; Tirumallai also refers to this form - "Pallatai Vedam nimamuś utair" - Tiruaccanda-19.
the hymns of Tirumangai. In one sense, it is also of the same category of descent as the Matsya and Kūrma, which various things from the waters after the Great Deluge. The Hamba taught the Vedas to illumine the world just as the Fish and the Tortoise saved Manu, the Vedas and other things lost during the Great Deluge.

The concept of the fish-incarnation has originated from the Indian flood legends, the earliest account of which is found in the Satapatha Brähmana. According to this account, the fish, which sought protection under Manu, saved the latter from a flood of which it forewarned Manu. In the Mahābhārata the fish form is said to be assumed by Prajāpati. Manu, Vaivasvata, gave protection to the fish and later the fish saved him from the flood. The Purānic accounts transfer this myth to Viṣṇu and add other details to the story. While the Matsya Purāṇa locates the story in the Malaya mountain (Malabar?) to which king Manu is said to have retreated after abdicating the throne, the Bhāgavata says that it was Satyavātana, the pious king of Dravidā (South), a faithful worshipper of Viṣṇu, who was saved by the fish. The story is that Manu was performing yajna (Satyavātana was performing rites for his ancestors on the river Krithanagā) when a fish got into the hallow of his hands. The fish sought his protection. The king, therefore, put it in a jar. Soon the fish outgrew the jar and asked for a bigger place. So it went on till the fish was finally carried to the ocean. The fish was recognised to be none other than a form of Viṣṇu. The

16. I-3-1.
fish forewarned the king of the deluge to come, because of the demon Hayagriva stealing and destroying the Vedas. The king was instructed by the fish to take with him the seeds of creation and the seven प्रसिद्धिः and board a ship which would appear for him. When the deluge came, Mānu did all this and tied the ship to a horn of the immense fish which steered his ship to a mountain. He was thus saved from being submerged by the flood. Hayagriva, the demon was killed and the Vedas were recovered. Vaivasvata Mānu became the progenitor of the human species for the next cycle. The story in the main is the same in all the Purāṇas except for variations in details.

The Kūrma form is also said to have been assumed by Prajāpati to create living beings.17 The Purāṇas turned the tortoise into an incarnatory form of Viśnu, assumed in order to recover various objects lost during the deluge or to support the Mandara mountain during the churning of the ocean of milk.18

The age-old struggle between gods and demons reached a crisis, when, one of the asuras obtained as a boon the ability to restore life to the dead. The gods found themselves at a disadvantage for, in the war that ensued, the asura brought back to life those that were killed among them. Viśnu, at the request of the gods, came to the succour of the devas and

17. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, VII, 5-1-8.
18. Bhāgavata Purāṇa, 1-3-16.
proclaimed that only amṛta, the nectar which would confer
imortality, could restore the Gods to their former strength
and glory. Then followed a truce with the asuras for the
churning of the ocean of milk to bring back many objects that
had been lost in it. With Mount Mandara as the churning staff
and the serpent Vāsuki as the rope, the process of the churning
began. But as the Mount Mandara was found to be sinking, Viṣṇu
took the form of the Kūrma and supported the mountain. Among
the fourteen precious things that came from the churning was the
amṛta, which Viṣṇu distributed only among the devas in the form
of the enchantress Mohini, deceiving the asuras. This legend
has formed the basis of several concepts, Viṣṇu as Kūrma, as
Vāvanavantari arising from the ocean with the nectar and as the
deceptive Mohini.

While Tirumalaiśal, Tirumangai and Nammarīvar mention all
the ten avatāras, Tirumangai gives the stories behind these
concepts in one of his hymns. About the Matsya, he says
that this form was taken by Viṣṇu in order to redeem the
Universe from the great deluge. The same saint describes the
Kūrma form as taken by Viṣṇu in order to support the Mountain

19. "Vandanaiye suśrīraśtri-valambā kālam valiṇuṇvin śrīnāvay
Yandu vividyanuvaṅkanda ten tāmaraikkapan" — Pariya
Tirumali, VIII-8-1.
used as stick to churn the ocean for obtaining amrta for the devas. 20

The Matsya and Kārma forms are absent in early sculptures. This feature may be explained as due to the greater popularity of the other forms of Viṣṇu or to the lack of skill among the early artists in representing the complete zoomorphic forms of these concepts, whereas the hybrid forms such as Nyūrāha and Narasimha could be represented by them with greater ease. The fish and tortoise forms are later represented in the late medieval sculptures found in the Viṣṇu temples in Ariyalūr, Kauṇumiyāmalai and Teṭikombu where a hybrid variety of these forms is evolved for facilitating sculptural representations (Figs. 36 & 36). The upper half of the figure is in human form, while the lower half takes the form of the fish or tortoise. There are also a few late representations of these aspects, entirely in the zoomorphic forms. 21 Similarly, in North India also, the earliest representations of the Matsya and Kārma forms belong to the late medieval period. Here the same variety of the hybrid forms was evolved in sculptures.

20. “malanum vilanum naṇavāḷaḥam mapuṣa saṃti ṛṣy varināṭṭha
    ilanmisītyāramadam avumalas vṛkṣāṇiṁyā
    vilanul tiriyat-teṇasaḥ-ul amandukṣaṇḍa vittasaṅgaḥ”

Ibid., VII-3-2.

21. In the Putāṅkrāṇa Paruśāl temple in Tiruvelḷal in the Tiruchhrāpalli district, there are late medieval representations of the Matsya and Kārma in the zoomorphic forms.
The Vaikhānasāramāya texts say that the God in the Matsyāvatāra should be represented in the form of the Matsya or fish and in the KūrmaVatāra, in the form of the Kūrma or tortoise. The Silparatna gives a similar description of both the forms.

Next in the traditional order of the avatāras comes the Varāha form of Viṣṇu. The boar is first mentioned in the Rg Veda in two passages. One of them refers to the piercing of the boar (clouds?) by Indra and Viṣṇu and the other states that Viṣṇu was sent by Indra to carry off the buffaloes and rice cooked with milk, which belonged to the boar Mahīśa. These references may represent a version of the slaying of Viṣṇa and piercing of the cloud mountain. But this earlier mythology is transformed in the Satapatha Brahmana, according to which, the boar Mahīśa raised the earth whose lord was Prajāpati. The boar is identified in the Taittirīya Samhitā with Prajāpati himself. The Epics and Purāṇas represent the final stage in the evolution of the myth and make the boar an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

All the Purāṇas mention the Varāha avatāra, but there is considerable variation in the accounts given by them. The

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22. Dhrubakeran tu matsya ca kūrma rūpaṃ ca kārayat / Vīṣṇu kūrma vadhānaṃ sthitam vā'ñi vidhānatāp //

Matsyāvatāraṇa dvarā matsyākāraṇa prakalpayat /
KūrṇaVatāraṇa dvarā kanthākṛtipraśāh


24. XIV, 1, 2-11.
story, in brief, is that Hiranyaksha, one of the two sons of Diti, obtained by his sage, a boon from Brahma that he could not be hurt by noxious animals, which he enumerated. Unable to bear the burden of the excessive evil wrought by this asura, the earth sank beneath the waters of the ocean. At this critical stage, Visnu assuming the form of a boar, lifted the earth from the depths on his task. Then he slew Hiranyaksha, for in his blind pride and desire, the asura had forgotten to include the boar in the list of animals when he obtained the boon from Brahma.

As mentioned earlier, the Varaha avatara is known only to the Purana among the Sanskrit works. On the other hand, it is mentioned by all the Avatars of this period.

The legend of Visnu assuming the form of the Varaha to retrieve the earth from the waters is referred to by them frequently. In fact, the feats of Visnu connected with the earth, its creation and rescue from waters, and also Visnu swallowing the earth, are together mentioned in the following manner - "Idu El Padaittidiandumudumilpera nār". The most remarkable description of this form is found in the hymns of Tirumangai who states that the earth Goddess was lifted and held by the task of

25. Supra, p. 102.
the Varaha. 27 The name Adivaraha is also mentioned by him. 28

Sculptural panels representing the Varaha (or Nyavaraha - hybrid) form of Viṣṇu are found in Mahabalipuram in the Varaha mandapam and the Adivaraha cave temple (7th century). The later seems to have been subjected to later renovation and painting, whereas the relief in the Varaha mandapam deserves particular attention as the earliest known representation. This elaborate sculpture depicts Varaha, the central figure in Īṭīva jām, facing proper right, carrying the figure of Bhūdevi by the lower right arm and holding her right leg by the left-hand. The Devi herself is found seated on the right thigh of the God which is lifted up, the right foot of the God resting on the hoods of Adiseva shown in aśīlai. 29 The face of the Goddess is expressive

27. Pariva Tirumoli, IV - 4-8.

"In the act of lifting up the earth the boar caused the mountains to tremble with blows of his hard snout" — this idea is expressed in the above lines of Tirumangai's hymn.

Parāralavam mukumugkl paranda külaa vaalai maranall īṟuvaṭṭamāṉāy jutta īṟvamāṉāṉāy" — Ibid., VIII-8-3.

28. Pariva Tirumoli, VII - 7-4; Also Poyagi, Forn köḻiṟaraṇamāv- mukkiñchancavku eṇu un ou kōṭṭa māl kīkkanda, Tiruvandādi, 9; 12 & 91; Tirumāḻiṣai, Tirumanda, 48; Kulaśekhara, Pariva Tirumoli, 2-3. Namālvar, Tiruvāyoli, 1-8-7; II-8-7. Ṛṣṭhi, Ṛṣṭhi Tirumoli, II-7.

29. Vasuki, according to O.C. Gangoli, The Art of the Pallavas, (contd.).
of both shyness and joy. Her two hands are seen closed up in shyness below the navel of the Varāha. The central figure is flanked by Brahmā on the left (three faces seen) and Śiva (more probably a ṛṣi) on the right. In height these two figures reach up to the shoulders of Varāha, a feature generally prescribed by Sanskrit works on Iconography for the principal figures res among the attendant deities. To the left of Brahmā is the figure of Mārāda with yīpā, the head of which is seen in the sculpture. To the right of the figure of the ṛṣi is a female figure in dhīlī, identified by T.K. Gopinatha Rao as Bhūdevī just rescued from the ocean. It is more probable that the figure represents the consort of Adiśeṣa. The worshipful attitude of both this figure and of Adiśeṣa may be noted. Water below is depicted in the conventional manner with lotuses and waves, though lacking in realism, as lotuses are out of place in the ocean. Conventional treatment, however, hardly troubled itself to portray realistically the details of a story. Above,

29 (contd.)

Pl.M and description. O.C. Gangoli says that the treatment here is summary but still correspondent to the description in the Brāhmaṇa: "Adorned by Brahmā, the Boar dived into cosmic waters, and pulled out Mother-earth by one of his teeth, and placing her firmly by his prowess disappeared. (Sa sa tama avasthit pralayaṁvā-īla-madhyē pravīṣya dantācchāna Prithvīuddhārtya niyādharma-Saktva samathāna antarvēta-Yāhāya).

30. This figure, which is identified as Šiva by Gopinatha Rao, seems to be a ṛṣi and not Śiva - See K.R. Srinivasan, Āvasa I, pp.146-7.
to the left and right of the central figure, are the figures of Gendra and Gīrya represented above the heads of Brahma and the Śrī respectively. This panel follows closely the Vaikhāna-
ākṣara. (Fig. 37).

The main shrine of the Adiśvara cave temple in Mahābalipuram contains a painted stucco relief of Varāha more or less of the same iconographic type as the one described above.

Varāha rescuing the Earth forms the theme of another Pallava sculpture found in one of the panels on the walls of the main shrine in the Vaikupṭha Perumāl temple in Kāṇṭh. The figure of the god faces proper left and here the left leg is in śrīvālī pose. The goddess is held by the two lower arms. The attributes held in the upper hands are the śankha and cakra, but the other details cannot be made out due to the damaged condition of the sculpture. Below to the left of Varāha are two figures of a man in añjali with nāga hoods and a woman slinging to the man Antar in fear, probably representing the people of the nether lands (Fig. 38). Another panel in the same temple represents Varāha standing, with śankha and cakra in the two upper arms and the lower left on the hip and the right (broken) in abhaya (?). In front of Varāha stands a male figure in añjali. It appears to be Brahma. Above are four figures also in añjali (Fig. 39).

Later representations of Varāha differ from this manner of treatment, and in many cases the subsidiary details are
relegated to an insignificant size and position, the central figure of the god dominating the entire scheme of the composition. This may be described as a gradual transition from the narrative to the iconic representation corresponding to a change in the nature of popular interest in the themes. In the first instance the narrative reliefs reflect, in all probability, the earliest attempts to depict the concepts in any medium with the idea of edifying the faithful and the later representations which also contain the details in a secondary position reflect the fact of their having become so well known that a mere sign or a symbol or an attribute suggests the whole story. Another interesting feature is the method of personifying the _śvālaka_ and later reverting to the older method of representing them in their inanimate forms. This appears to be a peculiar development from original symbolism to detailed representation of the forms and a reversion to the symbolic method while retaining the main form without much change. It is not clear whether this manner of treatment is due to the restricted space that was assigned later to the carving of the varieties of divine forms which are found on pillars, in niches on walls or between pilasters or even inside the _kāṭu_ arches and other architectural background. The Pallava cave temples were more the work of sculptors than of architects but for the fact that the design of the temple was probably derived from existing structural examples. The large scale panels or "frescoes in stone", gave the Pallava artists the
greatest scope for exhibiting their technical skill as also their knowledge of the iconographic details with which they filled up large spaces. However, in the case of metal images, details were omitted obviously due to the fact that metal images are in the round and hence only the main figure received the attention of the artists. The narrative wealth of the small scale relief (sometimes the width of panels is not more than six inches) of the Cōla and Vijayanagar periods must not, however, be lost sight of. In this case, on the other hand, the intention of the artist was to tell a story rather than set up an iconic group for purposes of worship. Nonetheless their importance for the study of Iconography cannot be minimised. To the Indian mind anything that is associated with deities becomes sacred and hence even the tiny figures are worthy of attention and worship, irrespective of the medium in which they are made. To a student of iconography and art, particularly, even the minutest details carry a great significance, for a close study of these details offers fruitful results in the understanding of the nature of changes which come over the attitude of the people to legends and other Puranic stories forming the basis of all artistic representations. In this context, the localisation of particular legends and the differences in regional representations are very important, wherein geographical factors operate a great deal.

The fully theriomorphic representation of the Varūṇa avatāra comes from Eran in Central India. It belongs to the Gupta period and is an inscribed red sandstone statue of the Boar. The
inscription is of Torana and is found on the chest of the boar. "The Boar is covered all over with elaborate sculptures, chiefly of Nāgīs or saints clinging to its mane and bristles. It has the earth represented as a woman hanging on, in accordance with the legend to its right tusk; and over its shoulders there is a small four-sided shrine, with a sitting figure in each face of it. This sculpture is of great iconographic interest due to two important features, one of them being represented by the various miniature figures on its body illustrating that section of the story about this incarnation, which refers to the gods, sages and various others beings taking shelter on the body of the Boar, when it was about to rescue the earth from the nether regions. The other feature is the small four-sided shrine on the shoulders of the boar, the four seated figures on the four sides of which probably represent the four principal forms of Viṣṇu.

Thus the Varāha images are found represented in several ways, theriomorphic and hybrid forms being the principal ones. The colossal open relief of this form in Udayagiri (Gupta), five miles from Sāncī, depicts Nyūvarāha or a man with a boar’s head. The left foot of the standing Nyūvarāha is placed on the head of a nāga with thirteenhoods, in two rows of seven and six each.

31. Fleet, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, p.159.
The right hand is on the hip and the left on the knee. The right hand raises Pitthvi, a female figure, from the depths of the Ocean. A small figure behind the nīga probably represents Samudraśāla. To the left are found heavenly musicians. To the right and left of the main figure are four lines of smaller figures filling the whole background of the composition. Among them Brahmā, Śiva on Nandi and other Gods with haloes around their heads can be spotted. Another line of figures representing Asuras and yet another line representing bearded rajas are also found. The Varāha form here has only two hands and no attributes. The ornaments are also few. In the Pallava panel the God is shown with four hands, the upper two carrying the jankha and gākra on the left and right respectively.

There are two representations of Varāha in Bādāmi a century and a half later than Udayagiri, but a century earlier than the Mahābalipuram panel. The difference in the treatment between the former two is obvious. There is a greater finesse in the delineation of the theme in Bādāmi, though there is a loss of the energetic vigour of the earlier one. One of the Varāha figures in Bādāmi cave II faces proper left and the Goddess Bhūdevi is found standing on a lotus held in the left hand of the God. The pose is described as that of the archer-pratyālīka.

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33. ARASL, X, p.48, Pl.XVIII.
34. A.D. Banerji, Bas Reliefs of Bādāmi, p.16, Pl.IX, 6.
The other Varāha figure in Cave IV (678 A.D. - period of
Mangalōsa) is represented in much the same manner, the figure of
the God facing proper left and holding the Earth Goddess in his
left hand Bhūdēvi supporting herself by placing her right hand
on the left shoulder of the Boar. ³⁵ The figure has four hands,
the upper two carrying the śankha and cakra on the left and right
respectively, just like the figure in cave II. A similar
representation of about the same period is found in the Kavapapāḍi
cave in Ahole, also in the Bijapur district (Fig. 40).

Another remarkable representation of the Varāha incarnation
comes from the 8th century cave temple of Lakṣmi Narasimha in
Kāmakkaḷ (Fig. 41). In the third cell of this temple there is
a panel depicting this avatāra with the Goddess Bhūdēvi in anīali
uplifted on the right arm, her feet resting on the palm of the
other hand. In this feature it is almost similar to the Varāha
panel from Mahābalipuram. But there are very important differences
as in the Kāmakkaḷ panel there are four hands shown above the
hand of the Varāha, supposed to represent the four Vedas carried
away by a demon. ³⁶ But it is more probable that they represent
the four sages Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra. ³⁷ The
left tusk on the face of the boar is also shown more prominently.

³⁵. Ibid., p.36, Pl.XVIII,b.
³⁷. Editor's remarks, Artīκ Maṭh, XXIV, No.2, p.115 - on the
article by P.R. Srinivāsa, pp.107 ff. in the same number.
Nakarakundalas are also worn by this figure, besides a conical kirita. Below the Varāha, are found the figures of Māsāga to the left and Bhāmidēvī (?) to the right, waiting to see the feet of the Varāha ayatāra, which, it is believed will appear at the end of the kaliyuga. The right leg of the Varāha which is bent, is seen down to the ankle, while the left, which is straight, appears as far down as the knee. Though this figure represents the usual hybrid form of the god, it is unique in that the details represented here are reduced to the minimum. The treatment is also simple. The sculptures in the two caves temples of Nāmakkal are distinguished by their slender shaped, smooth modelling and restrained decoration. They are altogether more evolved and in some respects more refined and beautiful than the sculptures of Mahābalipuram, Singavaram, Tirumayyam and of Kāalēmi in the Deccan. This is quite in keeping with the slightly later date to which they have been assigned.

Almost contemporaneous is the Bhūvarāha panel in the famous Kailāsa temple at Ellora assignable to the latter half of the 8th century A.D. This panel is interesting both from the iconographic point of view and for its artistic merit. The central figure of Varāhā faces left and holds the figure of Pṛthvī by his lover left hand. The goddess, herself, is a beautiful little figure in tribhanga posture, with her right arm placed on the snout of the Varāha for support. The prominent right tusk of the Varāha may also be noticed. The left leg of the god is raised.
and rests on the twisted tail of the näga. There are figures of näga big and small all around the central figure, indicating that it is the nether region (Pañcal) of which they are the dwellers, that the meant here by the sculptor. 38

In the Pādīya country the Varāha avatāra is represented in one of the niches on the rock to the left of the Tirupparankulam cave temple (Fig. 42). This relief depicts Varāha with Bhūdevi seated on his right thigh with näga worshippers below. 39 The cave here is assigned to the period of one of the early Pādīya rulers called Mārān Saḍāyana, whose inscription is found here. 40 He is the same as the king mentioned in the Ayaimalai inscription 41 and ruled in the latter half of the 8th century A.D. His minister Mārangārī has been identified with Madhurakavi, one of the twelve āvārī. 42 The composition and treatment in this panel are considerably different from the two panels from Mahābalipuram, and Nāmakkal.

Of great interest is a small panel depicting the Varāha avatāra in the Pupdiarikāśa Perumāl temple in Tiruvellāgai in the Villuppuram district (Fig. 43). The temple dates from the Pallava period as it has been glorified by the songs of

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38. O.C. Gangoli, The art of the Rashtrakutas, Pl. 19 and description.
40. 37 of 1908.
42. E.I., VIII, pp. 217 ff.
of Tirumangai. In this panel the method of representation is unique. Varāha is shown uplifting the earth Goddess and apparently placing her on the hoods of the nāga figure below. The figure of Varāha occupies the major part of this vertical panel. He is shown in the śvīḍha pose facing left and carrying by his two lower hands the figure of the earth Goddess holding her at the arms. The two upper hands are in the posture of carrying the śankha and cakra by the index and middle fingers, but the weapons themselves are absent. The figure of Bhūdevi is a charming piece of work, shown in anjali, bending slightly forward. The nāga shown below probably represents Adiśeṣa on whose five hoods the left foot of the Varāha is placed. It may be mentioned here that Adiśeṣa bore the burden of the earth on his hoods, according the Purānic accounts, and hence the feet of Bhūdevi appear to be placed resting on his hoods. The treatment of the dress and ornaments of both the Varāha and Bhūdevi figures is more delicate. The well modelled forms and the deeper cutting into the stone around the figures indicate a date later than that of both the Mahābalipuram and Namakkal panels. Further the size of the panel is about sixteen inches by nine. Hence, the sculpture appears to be closer to the early Cōla relief narrating the Rāma and Kṛṣṇa stories. Yet, it is highly probable that the panels in the Pundarikākṣa Perumāl temple were executed in the late Pallava period, about the middle of the 9th century A.D.
Thus the Varāha avatāra seems to have been a favourite subject with the artists of the Pallava, Pāṇḍya and Kongu countries as much as it was with the Gupta, Cālukya and Rāṣṭrakūṭa of the north and the Deccan. In the Pallava and Cālukya panels, the figures of Varāha are seen wearing the high crown usually associated with Viṣṇu, whereas in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa sculpture no crown is seen. In the Tamil country separate temples enshrining the Varāha form of Viṣṇu are known from this period onwards. Besides the Adi Varāha cave temple of Mahābalipuram dating from about the 7th century A.D. there is a structural temple at Tiruvaṅkundōai not far from Mahābalipuram, enshrining the image of Varāha. The latter has been sung by the Vaiṣṇava śiśvara and therefore dates from the same period, though the earliest inscriptions of the temple belong to the early Cōla and Rāṣṭrakūṭa kings.

It is curious that in the contemporary Pallava and Pāṇḍya inscriptions no direct reference to the Varāha form of Viṣṇu is found to occur. On the other hand, the Cālukyas of Badami, who

43. The concept, however, seems to be alluded to in the Kāśakkuḍi plates of Nandivarman II - Śr.I., II, p.347, 11,34-36 - The idea embodied in these lines is that the Pallava race resembled 'an inscription of Viṣṇu in the conquest of the world', thus indicating the Varāha avatāra. One of the panels depicting historical events in the Valkapūṭha Perumpal temple in Kanchipuram, gives shape to this idea as it contains a relief of the Varāha form lifting the earth, similar to the one found at the Mahābalipuram Varāha maṇḍapa - C. Minakshi, op.cit., p.7 and pl.iv, fig.1.
adopted the Boar as their emblem (boar crest) invariably invoke Viṣṇu in the form of the Boar in all their copper plate records. The Nāsārī plates of Śṛgārāya Śīlāditya dated in the Čaṇḍi year 421 = 671 A.D. open with an invocation to the boar incarnation and gives the following description of the form.44 “Hail! Victorious is the body of Viṣṇu manifested in the form of a boar, on whose uplifted right tusk rests the world, and who has agitated the ocean.”

The Varāha form of Viṣṇu is often mentioned in the inscriptions of the Cōla and medieval Pāṇḍya periods. This avatāra is described in an inscription of Rājaḷa II dated in his 3rd regnal year 7, from the Saṃdeśarāja Perunāl temple in Sāmanagalam in the Chingleput district. The God is here stated to have assumed the Varāha form and rescued the earth goddess.45

The story of the Varāha avatāra is found among the small-scale narrative panels of the early Cōla temples, such as those at Pāṇḍi and Kumbakonam. Here the narration takes a form different from the earlier one found in the Pallava panels (Figs. 44 & 45). On the right half of the rectangular panels the


45. 182 of 1901; S.I. VIII, 392.

“saṃtana udayatāśāni ylliṇ diseñasal kamaṇe rasaṇaṇa nilasalad / saṃgam jāmpan-tānti śrīnāl tikalin kalalā ṛguttāmam āṇaṃsaṇaḥ ṛgaliḥ lalī ṛgali lalī lalī niṃura jīvatī”. 
figure of Varāha carrying the earth Goddess is shown fleeing being pursued by the asura followers of Hirapūraka. This method of representation is uncommon, for in the large-scale sculptures of the Pallava cave temples of Mahābalipuram and those of the Cālukyas in Hāṃgal and Aihole and of the Adigimānas in Nāmakkal, the particular moment in the story chosen for representation is that immediately following Varāha's fight with Hirapūraka and the rescue of the earth. The actual fight between Varāha and Hirapūraka forms the theme of a few sculptures, as for example, the one in the Hyderabad Museum. The scene depicted in the Cōla panels shows the Varāha being chased by the asuras, and not the moment of victory depicted in the earlier panels. Even in the Purānic stories of the Varāha avatāra this detail does not find a place. It is therefore, interesting that it should have been chosen by the Cōla sculptors for representation. However, the panels showing this scene are of great artistic merit, as they are dynamic in contrast to the static but beautiful representations of the theme in the Pallava and Kongu panels.

Individual icons of Varāha were also set up in this period in several important Vaiṣṇava centres. Epigraphic references to them occur in the Pāṇḍya inscriptions of Śrīrangam and Tiru-\[\text{ā}vandīpuram. One of these dated in the 8th ye. of Jaṭāvarman Sundara Pāṇḍya I (1289 A.D.) records the provisions made for festivals to God Varāha Nāyagar and the Goddess in the Perumāl Tirumanāndapālam of the Śrīrangam temple. Another inscription from 46. Another inscription from 43 of 1948–49.
In the North and East Indian sculptures of Varāha, the Goddess is generally placed on the left elbow of the deity, one of whose feet rests on the ādiṣeṣa. This feature corresponds partially to the Agni Purāṇa description of the Varāha āvatāra. On the basis of the Varāha Purāṇa verses the Goddess seated on the left elbow is to be identified as Śrī and the earth Goddess and Anantā are to be found near the feet of the God. But according to the Satya Purāṇa, Mahāvarāha with a gadā and a lotus in his hands, after rescuing the earth with his sharp tusk, placed her on his left elbow, one of his feet is to be placed on the head of a tortoise and the other on the hand of a nāga king.

In T.A. Gopinatha Rao’s monumental work an Indian Museum specimen is illustrated in which the theme corresponds to the descriptions given above.

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47. 99 of 1943-44.
48. “Catur bāhum-Varāhastu-āṣega sapitale dīrthatā dhāravat hāmunā
prthivī vēmanā kanalādhaḥ - chap.49, v.18. But in verses 2 and 3 of the same chapter it is said "Varāngo vātha
Karttavyo Bhūvarāho gadābhṛt!
dakaṇḍe vēnaḥ āṃkham lakṣaṇārām padamanva vi śrī vāsa-kūra-
vraṭabh ētu keśānantau varāhaṃgaua".
49. Chap.280, vv.28-30.
50. KSI, Vol.I, Pt.1, fig.3.
Two versions of the story of the Varāha incarnation are known. One is found in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, according to which, Brahmā was thinking of the Universe created by him that had been submerged by the water after the deluge and had sunk to the nether regions. At that time a small boar issued from his nostrils measuring one finger. Immediately afterwards, this little boar became as big as an elephant (19). After the God had prayed to this boar, it entered into the waters of the deluge (28). Before entering, the boar threw up its tail upwards to and reached the nether regions (nātala) and found the earth (nīlahādī) (28-29). It then held the earth in its tusks and raised it within a moment (30). Afterwards it destroyed the Daitya Hirapa-yākṣa, inside the water. The Daitya was trying to prevent it from lifting the earth, by raising his mace, but God killed him with as much ease as a lion kills an elephant. When Brahmā and the munis were praising him, the boar placed the earth on the water, which was partly covered by his hoofs and having done so disappeared (46).

In the Matsya Purāṇa it is stated that on account of the weight of various hills, the Earth being unable to support the heavy weight, sank into the waters (ccxvii-6-9). Then Viṣṇu decided to lift it up and after being praised by the Earth Goddess 2 (2588) decided to assume the form of a boar (62-66). He raised the Earth, which had sunk as far as the nether regions, with his tusks (74).

--- III-XIII: 18-18. ---
It is in the *Vispudharmottara* that we come across a description of Hiranyaka, which fits in with several types of this hybrid form. Here the express mention is made that the goddess should be shown on his left elbow - *kavyasatmikata kavya varadhi varundhara*. In this form the Varaha is more or less similar to the one mentioned in the other texts noted above. There is yet another manner of representation described in the *Vispudharmottara* wherein he is shown as about to decapitate Hiranyaka with his akra, the demon standing with a raised fūla in front of him, or shown seated like Kapila in the aṭhyāna pose or his hands so placed as if offering pāttas.

The actual fight or killing of Hiranyaka is found in some North Indian representations whereas it is hardly met with in the sculptures of the Tamil country in this or in later periods. One such representation is found in the Hyderabad Museum (Fig.46). In spite of the general tendency to follow the textual prescrip-
tions in the ways of representation, the individual skill of the artists and differences due to regional variations, have been responsible for the introduction of novel features, resulting sometimes in works of great artistic merit. The theriomorphic

52. Book III, Ch.79, vv.7-9 - *Hiranyaka śīvagachchāsaśakran-
dyatākaṃṭhayā / hōlayata Hiranyaka samayikho bhagavān bhavat / kārtiṃatanamaniśvaryam Hiranyakośaṃ vidurkhudbāh / śīvavaya Varahasa sa śīvagachchāsaśakraya hīranyakothayā kārvān dvīyana kālīvaśatihāp // dhūratastavathaya kārayat pāttasaniṣyaphaḥ dhūyata

form is also totally absent in the Tamil country, though, as a symbol of royalty it was introduced in the banners of the Cālukyas of Hādāmi, Vēngi, Kalyāṇi and later in those of the Kākatiyas and Vijayanagare rulers.

Some iconographic texts like the Aṇuś Purāṇa (Ch.49) pose diverse problems relating to the details of the representation of the Varāha form. The difficulties arise out of the different attributes assigned to the God in one and the same text or in different texts. It is in the particular Goddess whom the Varāha is said to be holding in his hands that divergences occur. In verses 2-3 in the above text, it is said to be Śrī or Lākṣmī and in the Kātaka Purāṇa, it is said to be Sṛṅdōvi who is to be shown as carried by the God. 54 These difficulties cannot be easily solved as in the sculptural representations we sometimes find two female figures one carried on the tusk or by the hands of the God and another in mālī or at the feet of the God, as for example, in the Mahābalipuram panel. The latter may be taken to be the consort of Śrīdeśa.

The Vaikhānasāgama texts give descriptions of three types of Varāha, viz., Ṛṣivaraṇa, Pralayarāha and Yajñavaraṇa, of which the Ṛṣivaraṇa form seems to be more commonly represented in the sculptures of the Tamil country. The other two descriptions are those of the seated forms of Varāha. In the Pralayarāha

form, he is accompanied by Bhādevi and in the Yajñavarāha form, he is accompanied by both Śrīdevi and Bhādevi.

The Ādīvarāha is described thus: The figure of Varāha should be of dark colour, should have four arms, must hold the śankha and ukṣraya, presumably in the two upper arms while the lower left should hold the Earth Goddess by the shoulder and the lower right should hold her feet. The right foot of Varāha should rest on the hoods of the nāga (Śeṣa) (and the left is probably to be raised in the ādićchā pose).55 The Earth Goddess should be in aśūla hasa and should have a shy but happy expression. The figure of the devil should be well ornamented.56

55. In most of the sculptures in the Tamil country with the exception of the one in the Vaikuntha perumāl temple (Fig.38) the right is seen facing proper right, his left foot placed either on the nāga hoods or firmly on the ground while the right leg is lifted and the Goddess is shown therefore to the right.

56. Ādīvarāha satvarbhimān śankhasakraddharaṃ asayāvāmanibhaṃ

T.A. Gopinatha Rao, pp.gik., Vol.I, Pt.II, App.C., pp.29-
In the *Sāmkhyakārikā* of the Atri *Sambhita* all the three varieties are described. But in the case of the seated images of Pralaya Varāha and Yajñavarāha, this text adds a number of attendants, including Nārada with the *yūpa* in his hands, Markapārya, Bhyag, Rupya and other Pājakarmis. It may be mentioned here that in the Varāha panel in Mahābalipuram representing the Ādiveśa form, some of these attendant figures such as Nārada and also perhaps Markapārya are present to the left and right of the God respectively (Fig.37). The description of Ādiveśa given in this text is almost identical with the prose passage mentioned above, but there are additional details in it like the ornaments *kīvā* etc., to be worn by the God, who should have the face of the Varāha.

57. Ādiveśa:

Paṭālauṣa mūneva dāvan tatkarotāvīpas /
mañc̣hān varāhādham tu kīvāpañcāṇavītes //
sarvābharanaparvaktaṁ naktarūpanaśāntaṁ /
āṅkha pakradharaṁ devaṁ nilakundadhanaeśhastam //

yeva pūraṁ saṃkṣuṇaṁ nāhīnudāvya vacataḥ /
dakṣinān ca atitaṁ kyūṁ-mahīmaṁ aṣaṇāgaret //
ḥareṇa dā [{'\u092f'}]-ānanta tu devānām dhīṭam vabhā /
tevāh kaṭakaḥ habhip pārśeva sarvaśabdāḥsarvasvagaret //
mañc̣hena rūdhaka śīhantaṁ varūhαm tatra kāravat /
mahīṁ ca āvāmāvāṁ pānāh samatālavidhānataḥ //
mañc̣hena asaśāntaṁ sarvābharanabhāṣitaṁ /
āṅkhaṅkaṅkaḥ paśातbhāgīḥ pṛyāṁ kyūrantaṁ vandanaṁ hariḥ //
asaṃśāntaṁ pānāh maḥāṁ tatra aṣaṇāgaret /
svaśādiveśaṁ tu kāravāl-lakṣaṇāvītes //

chap.36, vv.30-36. (cont'd)
Pralayavarāhā:

vadanti tannāt pralaya varāha tu nīkā pinākā / 
Kārayat nītavaram tu toyam yathāparoṣitaṁ //
Sanskāra-dharam saṁyak gajurāmūlindharan harim /
daksīpan gābhayan haatam vāmaṁ kvaṭavalamhitam //
naṁ ra na daksīna kurvat vednāhaṁ ca daksīna /
vaṁkavaţavalamham ca saya śaśmenibham tathā //
pālambaradharan devah nispānābaradharan naṁha /
sukhāsacakramacapayānānuṇaṁ tu ca kārayat //
vāmabhāsa sthitam kurvat nāradan navatālaṁtap /
naṁra naktavarābham vināhaṁ tu kārayat //
markandeyam bhram naiva rūjakas te saśoḥarāta /
napram nītanibham kurvādbhṛṣṇamāmānibham sarat //
vv.38-43.

Yājañavarāha,

ēvaṁ yājañavarāham tu daśatālaṁ mānātaṁ /
ēkhandāsanān kvaṭ-śaṅkaraṁ nātāpayam naṁ /
sukhāsam suṇāśīnā yājañavarāha māyayan /
yājañtīṛthaṁ kṝyaṁ ca tatra rūjakas //
yājañamānibham kvaṭ-kīrtanāḥ ēvaṁ abhāvaṁ tathā /
śat-śaṅkaraṁ prakvaṭita kṣutakam laksanāvitaṁ //
vv.47-49.
Fig. 35  --  Matsyaśati -- Kuśāmiyāmalai -- 6th c. A.D.

36  --  Kūrmaśati -- Ariyalūr -- 16th c. A.D.

37  --  Varāhavatāra -- Mahābalipuram -- Pallava -- 7th c. A.D.
Fig. 38 — Varaha-vatara — Kanchi — Pallava — 8th c. A.D.

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40. " Aihole — Cañukya — 7th c. A.D.
Fig. 43 -- Varāha (and Govardhana) - Tiruvellārapal
Pallava -- 9th c. A.D.

Fig. 44 -- Varāha -- Pūṇjai -- Early Cōla -- 10th c. A.D.
Fig. 45 -- Varāha -- Kumbakonam -- Early Cōla
10th C. A.D.

46 -- Varāha - Hyderabad Museum