Lord Vishnu or Narayana, the Supreme God has been worshipped in various forms, from time to time with different modes of doctrines and rituals. The literary and epigraphic sources throw considerable light on the revival of Narayana cult.

The earliest epigraphic evidence regarding the worship of Lord Narayana is found from the Ghosundi Stone Inscription of Maharaja Sarvatta of 1st Century B.C. Ghosundi is a village in the Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan. The inscription records the erection of enclosing wall around the stone object of worship called Narayana Vatika for the divinities Sankarshan and Vasudeva by one Sarvatta who was a devotee of Bhagavat and had performed an Asvamedha Sacrifice.¹

The next important inscription is found from Nagarjuni Konda in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, which is 3rd century A.D.² The inscription written as:

1. Namo Bhagavatodeva Paramadevasya
2. Purana-Purushasya Narayanasya

Salutation to god Narayana who is the Supreme God among the gods and the Primordial Male. This inscription found in a stone slab dated in the 9th regnal year of Vasishtiputra Vasusena. The inscription records the construction of a wooden image of AshtabhujaSvamin. There is no doubt this AshtabhujaSvamin is no other than god Narayana. The eight armed images seems to be the earliest conception of Narayana as found in the Brhat Samhita of Varaha Mihira.

In Orissa, the earliest epigraphic evidence on Narayana is traced from the Ningondi copper plate grants³ of Prabhanjana Varman of Mathara dynasty. It records that the king's grandfather Sankara Varman as who meditates on the feet of Lord Narayana (Bhagavat-Svami-Narayana-Pad-anudhyathoh). Again the Andhavaram Plates⁴ of Anantasakti Varman refers to him as a devout worshipper of the lotus feet of the god Narayana whose chest is embraced by Kamalanilaya.
The Narasimhapali grants of Hastivarman describes that god Narayana, who lies in the seven hymns of Vedas and who is the sole lord of seven worlds. All these epithets of Narayana are mentioned in the Raghuvamsa by the Mahakavi Kalidasa.

The Plate records the grant of a piece of land for defraying the expenses of the worship of god Narayana and repairing of his temple. The granted land is regarded as a devagrahara, a freehold created not for the benefit of an individual person, but for the regular worship of god Narayana and the repair of his temple. The inscription has recorded that a village was granted for Vali and Charu of god Narayana.

The Juruda grant of Nettabhanja commences with an invocation to god Narayana, who is stated to be the family deity (Kula-devata) of the Bhanja kings.

Besides these one important stone inscription on god Narayana is found from Khalari near Raipur, Chattisgarh. It is a Prasati composed by Mishra Damodara. It records the foundation of a temple of Narayana by the shoe maker (Mochi) Devapala, son of Sivadasa and grand son of Jashu, at the town of Khalavatika, the modern Khalari.

The Narayana Deva temple inscription of Srikakulum district of Andhra Pradesh records the gift of 50 cows by one Peddalura Gokana Nayaka on the day of Uttarayana Samkranti, in order to burn the lamp before the god Narayanadeva in the month of Dhanu. This grant was recorded in the 7th regnal year of Devendravarman.

References:
8. Invocatery from inscription edited by S.N. Rajguru.

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