



## Purusottama Jagannath is Purusottama Narasimha

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The Supreme Lord of the Universe Jagannath is invariably called *Purusottama*, and his abode *Sriksetra* is known as *Purastama* or *Purusottama Ksetra*. The deep reverence to Lord Purusottama is found in the very beginning of the invocatory verses of the Sirpur Stone Inscription of the Panduvamsi queen Regent Vasata, who ruled Kosala as dowager queen in the first half of the 8th century A.D.

on behalf of her minor son Balarjuna (later on known as Mahasivagupta Balarjuna). In 1904, Henry Cousens discovered this inscription engraved on a thick red-coloured stone-block of the size of around four feet in length and two feet and a half in breadth. This inscription was edited by Hiralal. (*Epigraphia Indica, Volume- XI, PP- 184-202 ff*).

In the first line itself the queen paid her deep reverence to god Purusottama. (Om !

Narasimha Purusottamaya //) The three verses immediately follow, narrated the greatness of the Lord in his Narasimha *avantara*. In translation by late Dr. Satya Narayan Rajaguru it runs like this : "(Vr.1) Let the discuss-holder's foot protect you-the foot whose sharp claws emitted a sound like that of *gunji* berries (shaken) by the gust of strong winds passing

through the long spaces between each other, and (looked) terrific (more so) with the jaws shining with the flame of rays (emanating) from the nails, when they being lifted up, tore through the mass of dark clouds in the sky and revealed the star with pearly

brilliance, like a lion who, having overcome that storehouse of darkness; - the elephant, jumps about scattering brilliant pearls (torn from his temples). (Vr.z) Let that Narasimha protect you, who looking with eagerness at (his own) nails, for the enemy ( Hiranayakanasipu)



Laksmi Narasimha, Sonapur



Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu,  
Sarsara, Sundargarh District.

who had not been secured for being torn with these (claws), happened to see him hiding through fear in the cavern-like cavity in the interior of the deep hollow of those (nails), with a laugh (at his foolishness in taking shelter in the place where he could be easily crushed out) joy ( at finding him out) and contempt ( at the miserable creature) he split the demon at once with the print of the other claw and threw him away with wrath like dirt that had collected there. (Vr.3) As if bearing the jaws like a beautiful conch and the tongue like a sword, with the face burning like the discus (and) with the eyebrows (as it carrying) the mace, this form of Vishnu born for devouring, like sins, the demons, presented the appearance of the god of death..."

In the *Vayu Purana* and *Padma Purana* we get the account of *Narasimha avatara* (one among ten *avataras* of Visnu) killing the demon *Hiranyakasipu*. In the *Kurma Purana* also we find the brief account about the *Narasimha avatara* or the man-lion incarnation of Visnu. The *Saura Purana* also follows the *Kurma Purana* in stating a short account. Noted iconologist T. Gopinatha Rao has found from the texts *Silparatna*, *Vaikhyanasagama* and *Visnudharmottara*, that the *Narasimha* images are of two types; *Girija Narasimha* and the *Sthauna - Narasimha*. *Girija Narasimha* is also

called *Kevala Narasimha* or *Yoga Narasimha*. A third category of *Narasimha* image is called *Yanaka Narasimha*, in which aspect *Narasimha* is depicted as seated upon the shoulders of *Garuda* or upon the folds of *Adisesa*. There are some images depicting the seated figure of *Yoga Narasimha* and goddess *Laksmi*. Those are called the images of *Laksmi Narasimha*.

Although *Purusottama Narasimha* has been mentioned in the 8th century *Sirpur Stone Inscription* of the *Panduvamsi* queen-regent *Vasata*, the worship of *Kevala Narasimha* in the upper *Mahandi* valley was prevalent also in the *Nala* kingdom in the 5th-6th century A.D. due to the influence of the *Vakatakas* of *Nagavardhana*, whose titular deity (*Istadevata*) was *Kevala Narasimha*. Therefore we get three *Kavala Narasimha* images, one at *podagad* in the *Umerkot Tahsil* of *Nawarangpur* district and another two at *Sarguli-Deulpada* and *Parua-Simdapada*. In the foot of a hill situated to the north of *Podagad* hill a modern temple has been constructed where the image of *Kevala Narasimha* called the "*Bhairava Narasimha*" is worshipped as the central deity. Two-handed *Narasimha* in the pacified form is sitting in a graceful *Maharajalila* posture, holding a *Cakra* in his right hand by placing it on the ground and putting his left palm on His right thigh. A *Hara* is round



Parsvadevata Narasimha,  
Narsinghnath Temple, Paikmal,  
Bargarh district.



Parsvadevata Narsimha, Jagannath Temple, Sonepur

his neck and another on His chest, while a *Yajnyopabita* is on his body. Four front-faced seated Yaksa figures are carved in a row on the pedestal of this image, measuring eighteen inches in length and four inches in

breadth. In the Narasimha images at Sarguli and Parua the Yaksa figures are absent. The Sarguli Kevala Narasimha sculpture is made of black granite. All the three Kevala Narasimha images of Podagad, Sarguli and Parua are two-handed and seated in the megestic *Maharajalila* posture. *Srivatsa* symbol is carved on the chest of the Kevala Narasimha image at Parua-Simdapada, which symbol is usually found on the chest-portion of the Visnu image. The lion-mane of the Lord is flowing from the head-portion on His back as well as both shoulders. His lion face is completely calm and serene.

A huge Kevala Narasimha image of the around five feet height is worshipped in the *Garbhagrha* of a flat-roofed temple at Ramtek near Nagpur city of Maharashtra State, which is strikingly similar to all three Kevala Narasimha images found at Podagad, Sarguli and Parua in the Nawarangpur district of Orissa State. As the temple at Ramtek is dated to the 5th-6th century A.D. i.e. the Vakataka rule from Nagavardhana (present Nagardhan near Nagpur), the worship of Kevala Narasimha might have been instituted by the Vakatakas, when they attacked the Nala kingdom,

occupied the capital city Pushkari (present Podagad) and burnt down and devastated their capital city some time in around the 5th-6th century A.D. The association of Yaksa with Narasimha is found in another Nrsimha image at Sarsara (Banei) in Sundargarh district also. A huge stone-block, measuring around 48" in height and 30" in breadth is found at Sarsara, having the image of a fourhanded standing Narasimha, killing the demon Hiranyakasipu by placing his body on His right thigh, which is slightly raised. The lion-faced god is depicted as cat-faced, which seems to be a peculiar phenomenon in western Orissa. Such cat-faced four-handed Narasimha image seated in Maharajalila on a high pedestal has been discovered from Maraguda in Nuapada district, which is dated to the 6th century A.D. Even cat-faced and lion-bodied feline form of Lord Narasimha is worshipped as the central deity of the Narsinghnath temple in Bargarh district as Lord Narsinghnath. The earliest temple at Narsinghnath is believed to have been built by Queen Vasata, the mother of the Panduvamsi king Mahasivagupta Balarjuna sometime in the second half of the 8th century A.D. The top portion of this Sarsara stone slab bearing the Narasimha image is designed like a Caitya window with a squatting Yaksa figure carved inside it. This design is flanked by two lotus-rosette motifs in both sides.



Narasimha sitting in Maharajalila, Khariar Museum





A pacified form of Narasimha figure, seated in the *Lalitasana* is found at Khariar Museum in Nawapada district of Orissa which is four-handed. It is dated to the Sarabhapuriya period, the 6th century A.D. as it has been collected from the historic Maraguda valley and belongs to the Sarabhapuriya period.

Another place, where we get four depictions of Narasimha is in the Narsinghnath temple at Paikmal in the Bargarh district of Orissa. The Yoga Narasimha images, one diminutive images seated in *Utkutikasana* worshipped by a profiled male figure in the *gelaba* scroll of the eastern doorjamb of the *Jagamohana* and another one in a small niche in the *baranda* portion of the southeast side of the *vimana*. In both the cases, the Lord is seated in the *Utkutikasana*, the legs being maintained is required position by the *Yogapatta* belt going round them and the back of the body.

Another very interesting standing image of Yoga Nrsimha is found at Narsinghnath. To the north of the temple, there is a small room, where one four-handed figure of Narasimha is enshrined. It is a pacified form of the Lord known as Yoga Narasimha," He is standing in *Samabhanga* and holding a *Sankha* and a *Cakra* in his upper left and right hands respectively. A *Gada* is in the lower left hand of the Lord, which is firmly placed on the pedestal. His lower right hand is in *Varada*. In both sides of his legs, there are standing figures

of two lady attendants. The lady near the *Gada*, wearing a *Mukuta* seems to be Laksmi. The eyes of the Lord are half-closed and *Jata* forming many stripes is hanging on both shoulders. The strange characteristics of this figure is that, there are long boots covering both legs of the Lord up to knee portion. The Lord's body is heavily ornamented with all ornaments like *Hara*, *Keyura* and *Katisutra* etc. The figure is of the height of about four feet.

The fourth one is the usual image of Lord Narasimha killing the demon king Hiranyakasipu, which is fitted to the western Parsvadevata niche of the Narsinghnath temple.



Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu, Indralath Temple, Ranipur Jhari

The lotus-petalled design of the pedestal and the trefoil torana with the *Kirtimukha* motif in the centre of its apex occur in this sculpture also. In both sides of the top portion, there are two round lotus-rosette motifs. The Lord is seen to be standing in *dvibhanga* posture and killing the demon by putting his body on his slightly raised right thigh and tearing the entrails of the demon in the claws of his lower hands. A *gada* is in his raised upper left hand, while the upper right hand is broken. A male figure with *Mukuta* on his head and both his hands folded in abeissance, probably Prahallad the son of Hiranyakasipu is standing in the right side of the pedestal, to the proper left of the Lord.

Another exquisitely carved Narasimha image is found in the Jagannath temple at Sonepur, situated near the completely



destroyed place of the erstwhile Maharaja (foundetary ruling chief) of Sonepur. The image of Narasimha fitted to the western *parsvadevata* niche exhibits the scene of lord Narasimha killing the demon king Hiranyakasipu, tearing apart his belly by piercing claws, while both his hands in obeisance, his body is upheld by the Lord on his right thigh which is slightly raised, the leg resting on the toe. The anthropomorphic form of Garuda in profile and Prahallad, the son of Hiranyakasipu, also in profile are to the proper right and left of the Lord respectively. They both are seen standing in both sides of the pedestal praying the Lord with both hands folded in obeisance. Although in this pose, Lord Narasimha has usually a fearful appearance; in case of this figure, there prevails a serene calmness on his face and both his

eyes are closed. In the upper left and right hands, which are raised up, the Lord is seen holding a *sankha* and a *cakra* respectively. There is an oval-shaped halo forming the *prabhamandala* behind his head. The *mukuta* is conical in shape resembling the top portion of the *pidhamundi* design. Just above the forehead a thin band of beaded strings with a flower-pendant in the centre is tied on the *mukuta*. A long *vanamala* is hanging upto the

knee-level from the neck of the Lord. A long scarf is put round the shoulders of Narasimha, and hanging in both sides of his body (*OHRJ Vol. XLIV, No.1-4*).

Two images, one of four-handed Mahisamardini Durga and the other of Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu are worshipped on one pedestal inside a *triratha* temple, built in the laterite stone at Belsaragad in Sundargarh district.

Narasimha cult was so popular in the upper Mahanadi valley that in another small *triratha* style stone temple at Gandharla on the right bank of river Under in the opposite side of Sindhekela in the Titilagarh sub-division of Balangir district also till to-day Narasimha is enshrined and worshipped since the 8th century A.D. The *Avatara* concept

developed in the 7th-8th A.D. and we find diminutive figures of *Dasavatara* (ten incarnations) of Lord Visnu carved in both edges and beneath the feet of two Visnu images found at Saintala. Such depiction of the *Avataras* including Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu is found carved in both side-edges of Visnu images found at Dadpur in Kalahandi district and Kapilapur (Pujaripali) in Jharsuguda district also. The Kapilapur and



Yoga Narasimha, Narsinghnath,  
Bargarh District



Dadpur images belong to the 11th-12th century A.D. The *Dasavatara* concept became extremely popular all over Orissa by the beautiful composition of *Gitagovinda* by Mahakavi Jayadev in the 12th century A.D. Even during the reign of the Chauhans at Sambalpur, they have carved out the *Dasavatara* of Visnu in both side of the doorjamb of the *Garbhagrha* of the Radhakrisna temple inside the Gopalji Math precinct belonging to the 17th century A.D. The images of Nrsimha killing Hiranyakasipu are also found in the Samlei, Bad Jagannath and Radhakrisna temple Parsvadevata niches.

The Narasimha image, depicting the god as killing the demon Hiranyakasipu is found carved in the south *Raha* niche of the upper *Jangha* portion on the north side of the brick-built exquisitely sculptured Indralath temple at Ranipur Jharial in Titilagarh subdivision of Balangir district, belonging to the 10th century A.D.

Images of Narasimha killing the demon king Hiranyakasipu are found in the Suvarnameru, Gokarnesvar and Ramesvar temples at Sonepur town, all belonging to the Chauhan period, i.e. 17th -18th century A.D. The Gundicha temple of Sonepur, rising to a height of around sixty feet is dedicated to Lord Narasimha. An image of Yoga Narasimha is also fitted in its western *Parsvadevata* niche of this temple. A very interesting image of Yoga Narasimha with his consort Laksmi sitting on his lap is found in the Kunjaghar complex, just in front of the devastated royal palace at Sonepur. There is one independent image of Narasimha under a tree near the Suresvari temple at Sonepur, which might have been enshrined inside a temple in the remote past as the central deity. Even broken images

of Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu are found at Daspur Surda in Balangir district, Topigaon in Kalahandi district and Godhanesvar in Sonepur district which testifies to the popularity it was enjoying in the upper Mahanadi valley.

This cult of Narasimha has affinity with Saivism from the iconographic aspect as suggested by the learned scholar late Anncharlotte Eschmann. "The representation of *Lingodbhava* where Siva appears within or from the endless flaming *lingam*, usually represented as a huge column, resembles the scene of Narasimha bursting out of a pillar." It was probably such an association which stands behind an image used in the *Visnudharmottara Purana*, where a devotee worships the *Sivalingam* until he has a vision of Narasimha appearing from it. (*Visnudharmottarapurana*, III, 354), Eschmann further writes : "The fact that the imagery of Narasimha has been applied to Bhairava is very interesting in the connection of Hinduization. Bhairava being a popular god, he could have had to 'lend' the imagery. It is certainly an advantage of the Narasimha concept, that it is simulataneously important in both realms : popular religion and sophisticated theology." It is important to point out that the Kevala Narasimha image of Podagad in Nawarangpur district is worshipped as "Bhairava" by the local tribal populace. In this context it is very interesting that Lord Jagannath is also worshipped both as Bhairava and Narasimha. In the tantric tradition He is even taken as Daksina Kalika (*Niladrou tu Jagannatha Saksat Daksina Kalika Mahanirvana Tantra*). The discovery of the uniconic anthropoid stone images of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra at Tentelkhunti (Balangir district) from underneath a mound (temple ruins) in 2004





testifies to the fact that the Holy Triad were worshipped during the early Somavamsi period (probably by king Yayati).

As about the identification of Lord Jagannath as Narasimha it has been stated by the noted German scholar H.V. Stietencron that "Even to-day, Narasimha plays an important role in the periodical renewal of the wooden image of Jagannath." Jagannath is also worshipped in the *Nrsimha Mantra*. He further writes. "The worship of Purusottama Narasimha can be traced back to Sirpur in the upper Mahanadi valley, the ancient capital of Daksina Kosala. It is here that during the late Panduvamsi period we find one of the germs which later developed into the composite Jagannath cult of Orissa ..... Here it may be noticed only that this development is closely linked with the political fate of the Panduvamsi dynasty which, being driven away from the political center by the Kalachuris, was forced to retreat into largely tribal areas of Bolangir and Sambalpur districts of western Orissa."

"Tantricism and Saktism were powerful rising movements at this period. These popular trends could to some extent be incorporated into the Vaisnava creed by means of the Narasimha cult. On the whole, however Visnuism was slow and reluctant to adjust itself to tantric requirements. Therefore, from the 8th to the 12th century, the general trend was in favour of Saivism, which was unrestrictedly free to accept or to promote, Tantric and Sakta developments and which even absorbed Tantric Buddhism to a large extent". (*Stietencron : 12-13*)

We find mention of the terminology "Jagannath" for the first time in the *Jnanasiddhi*, composed by the tantrik Buddhist (Vajrayana) king Indrabhuti of Samalaka. Scholars are yet to identify exactly who

Indrabhuti was and what was the extent of his kingdom, as we lack historical or inscriptional or textual evidences. But this much we know that Indrabhuti's kingdom was situated on the bank of river Mahanadi. While going through the Oriya history book, titled '*Anugola Itihas*' this scholar has come across seven tribal chiefs (*dalapati*) ruling over Angul area in the 8th - 10th century A.D., the first and last *Dalapatis* being Indra and Anu. As in the Samal area of Angul district there is a place called Vajrakot or Vajrakotta this place might have some connection with Vajrayana or the Tantrik Buddhism, as we get a large number images of gods and goddesses of Vajrayana in the Talcher, Angul, Rengali, Vajrakot, Riamal and Barkot (Deogarh) area, which were probably under the rule of Indra *dalapati* in the 8th century A.D. A few years back also explorers have come across a huge brick mound called *Baisipahacha* in the Angul area near Odsingia village (*Odrasinga* of the historical fame), on the left bank of river Mahanadi. Therefore this scholar believes that the kingdom of Indra was situated in between the right bank of Brahmani river and left bank of Mahanadi upto Sambalpur town.

This Indra was Indrabhuti, whose daughter Laksmikara was married to the son of the king of Sonepur. Laksmikara propagated Sahajayane another form of Tantrik Buddhism and is treated as one among the *Chaurasi Siddhas* of Tantrik Buddhism. This Sahajayana of Laksmikara might have influenced the *Sahajia* sect in the later period.

Most probably it is during the 8th century, Purusottama Narasimha got amalgamated with Lord Jagannath, the Supreme God of the Samala or Sambala kingdom of Indrabhuti and popularly came to be known as Purusottama Jagannath.



The Indradyumna episode is so significant that some time Indradyumna, Indrabhuti and Indra Dalapati seem to be the same personality. But the fact that Indradyumna was a king of Malava and belonged to the dynasty of the Pandava although Indrabhuti, the king of Samala were of all together different origins. While attempting to identify Indradyumna of Malava, name of one celebrated king comes to mind of this writer, i.e. Shri Maharaja Indra, or Bharatavala of the Pandava dynasty, son of Nagavala and grandson of Vatsaraja, grand-son of Jayavala of Mekala. He was ruling some time in the 5th century A.D., who might be identified with Indradyumna who sent his Brahmin Minister Vidyapati to look for Lord Jagannath. As this king Indrabala was married to Lokaprakasa, the daughter (princess) of the Amaryakula of South Kosala kings of which dynasty were great Bhagavata (Parama Bhagavata), he might had been allured to look for the great Lord Jagannath in Odra.

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