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VARAHA IMAGES FROM THE VAISNAVITE TEMPLES OF PRACHI VALLEY IN ODISHA: A RECENT STUDY

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Introduction

The study of extant Varaha images of the Vaisnavite temples of Prachi Valley is one of the fascinating aspects of the Odishan temple art in Eastern India. The region of Prachi Valley is an important historical place, which is located in the border areas of the undivided Cuttack and Puri districts of Odisha. The worship of Varaha has been prevailing in the Prachi Valley since the medieval period. Varaha, is the *avatar* of the Hindu god Vishnu who takes the form of a boar to rescue goddess earth.¹ The word Varaha is found in *Rigveda*, for example, in its verses such as 1.88.5, 8.77.10 and 10.28.4 where it means "wild boar".² The Hindus believe in the ten incarnations (*avataras*) of Lord Vishnu such as Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parsurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna, Buddha and in modern period study on another *avatar* i.e. Kalki (Jagannatha).³ In the Hindu religion, Varaha is the third *avatar* of Lord Vishnu. In this *avatar* Lord Vishnu incarnated as a Boar to protect the mother earth (*Prithvi*). According to Hindu mythology, Hiranyaksha was a great devotee of Lord Brahma. He worshipped him for years and in return Lord Brahma gave him a boon. According to the boon no God, human, *Asura*, *devata*, animal or beast would kill him. Hiranyaksha started torturing the people on earth as he was assured of his immortality. His powers grew by the day. He started harassing *devatas* and invaded Indra's palace. Fearing for their lives, *devata* stook shelter in the caves of mountain ranges of earth. To harass *devatas*, Hiranyaksha seized earth and submerged it in *patallok*. Mother Earth sank to the bottom of the ocean. Emanating a terrifying roar, he (Lord Vishnu in the form of Boar) took one mighty leap into the air and tore the clouds with its hoofs and dived in to the bed of ocean in search of Mother Earth. He reached the other end of the ocean and discovered in its depths 'Bhoomidevi (Mother Earth).

On the basis of above Hindu mythology, Varaha worship was started in India during the ancient period and it also continued in the medieval and modern periods. After the visit of various Vaisnava preachers to Odisha and establishment of different *mathas*, worship of Lord Vishnu in the form of Madhava (Madhavananda), Rama, Narasimha, Krishna, Narayana, Varaha, etc. in the Prachi Valley has been widespread. Vaisnavism had deeply influenced the religious life of the people of Prachi Valley during the Ganga period of Odishan history. The Varaha images of different periods noticed in the Prachi Valley are very interesting study for scholars, antiquarians, archaeologists and art historians. As a good number of fine Varaha images

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are available in the Prachi valley and these need proper study by scholars as well as art historians. Hence, the present article attempts to highlight the detailed iconographic features of Varaha images as surveyed by the present author from the Vaisnavite temple sites of Prachi valley along with their religious significance. Before describing the Varaha images of the Prachi valley of Odisha, here we have to discuss about the general iconographic features of Lord Varaha at first.

Iconography of Lord Varaha

Like Lord Vishnu's first two *avatars*-*Matsya*(fish) and *Kurma* (turtle), the third *avata* Varaha is depicted either in zoomorphic form as an animal (a wild boar), or anthropologically. The main difference in the anthropomorphic form portrayal is that the first two *avatars* are depicted with a torso of a man and the bottom half as animal, while Varaha has an animal (boar) head and a human body.⁴Varaha has four arms, two of which hold the *Sudarsanacakra*(discus) and sankha (conch), while the other two hold a *gada* (mace), a sword, or a lotus or one of them makes the *varadamudra*(gesture of blessing). Varaha may be depicted with all of Vishnu's attributes in his four hands: the *Sudarsanacakra*, the sankha, the *gada* and the lotus. Sometimes, Varaha may carry only two of Vishnu's attributes: a sankha and the *gada* embodied as a female deity called Gadadevi. Varaha is often shown with a muscular physique and in a heroic pose. He is often depicted triumphantly emerging from the ocean as he rescues the Earth, the mother goddess.⁵ The earth may be personified as the goddess Bhudevi in Indian sculpture. Bhudevi is often shown as a small figure in the icon. She may be seated on or dangling from one of Varaha's tusks, or is seated on the corner of his folded elbow or his shoulder and supports herself against the tusk or the snout, as being lifted from the waters. The defeated demon may be depicted trampled under Varaha's feet or being killed in combat by Varaha's *gada*. Nagas (snake gods) and their consorts Naginis (snake goddesses), residents of the underworld, may be depicted as swimming in the ocean with hands folded as a mark of devotion. Varaha may be also depicted standing on a snake or other minor creatures, denoting the cosmic waters.⁶By the end of the 11th century, the iconography of Varaha changed, Varahaadopts the *alidha* pose with the left knee only slightly bent, and the snakes are removed or are replaced by a single one placed between the feet of the deity.⁷ The left elbow of Varaha supports the image of Prithvi, the major right hand is now lowered and holds the uplifted left hand of a small image of Prithvi (Bhudevi) in the lower right corner and a second female figure, most likely representing Laksmi is added in the left corner.⁸

Two iconographical forms of Varaha are popular in India as well as Odisha. They are 'Yajna- Varaha' and 'PralayaVaraha'.Yajna-Varahadenoting *Yajna* (sacrifice) is seated on a lion-throne and flanked by Bhudevi and Laksmi whereas 'PralayaVaraha' indicative of lifting the earth from the stage of the *Pralaya*(the dissolution of the universe) - he is depicted only with Bhudevi.⁹Varaha may be depicted with Laksmi alone too. In such sculptures, he may be depicted identically to Vishnu in terms of iconography with Vishnu's attributes; the boar head identifying the icon as Varaha. Laksmi may be seated on his thigh in such portrayals.¹⁰**T.A. Gopinath Rao** has mentioned in his book "Elements of Hindu Iconography" that there are three different types of Varaha images namely 1. Bhuvaraha, Adivarâha or NriVaraha, 2. Yajnavaraha and 3. Pralayavaraha, which are noticed in India.¹¹

Varaha Images of the Vaisnavite temples of Prachi Valley

In Prâchi valley, a good number of **Varaha** images are noticed as *parsvadevatâs* in most of the Vaisnavite temples and in only one place as presiding deity. The surveyed **Varaha** images from the different Vaisnavite temple sites of Prachi valley are 1. Madhavananda temple at Madhava, 2. Mudgala-Madhava (Nila-Madhava) temple at Mudgala, 3. Varaha-Narasimha temple at Adaspur, 4. Laksmi-Narasimha temple at Nuapatna, 5. Dadhivamana temple at Kuanrpur, 6. Narasimhanatha temple at Paribasudeipur, 7. Gopinatha temple at Varahipur, 8. Madhavananda temple at Pahaiga, 9. PatitaPavana temple at Ottarasasana and 10. Madhavananda temple at Balara. The detailed iconographic features of the **Varaha** images noticed in the above Vaisnavite temples/ shrines of the Prâchi valley are clearly described below.

1. Three Varahas of Mādhava

Three Varaha images are noticed in the temple of Lord Madhavananda, which is located at the village of Madhava in the Niali Block of the Cuttack district. The temple Lord Madhavananda is situated about 8 kms from the Niali Bazar on the eastern bank of the river Prāchi.¹² The central niches of the three sides of the *bada* of *vimana* of the Madhavananda temple are housed with the *parśvadevatā* images of Varaha, Narasimha and Trivikrama. Varaha is the *parśvadevatā* of the southern side. The original/ earlier image of Varaha is not found in the central niche. The present four handed image of Varaha is depicted in dancing posture. The upper right hand displays *cakra*, the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi, the upraised left arm bears the figure of goddess Prithvi and the lower left hand holds *gada* respectively. There is no Garuda figure near the Varaha (image). Most probably, the original Varaha image has been replaced by the present Varaha image belonging to the Odishan art of the twentieth century considering its iconographic features. As regards to the *parśvadevatā* images of the main *deula*, G.S. Das has mentioned that these images appear to be of recent workmanship and very likely older images of these deities which were originally placed there are missing at present.¹³

The southern side *bada* wall niches of the *Bhogamandapa* of the Madhavananda temple contain two Varaha images; one is larger and another is small in size respectively. The larger size four handed image of Varaha is carved in dancing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The upper right hand is broken from the elbow portion, the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi, the upraised left arm bears the figure of goddess Prithvi and the lower left hand displays *sankha*. Above the head of deity is decorated with full blown lotus flower. A thin stem of lotus flower is found raised from the pedestal and it continues to the top of the slab. Flying *apsara* figures holding garlands are depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image of Varaha is made of chlorite stone and it measures 3 feet 11 inches in height and 2 feet 5 inches in width respectively. The image of Varaha is housed in the *pidhamundi* niche of the southern side *bada* wall. Another small image of Varaha is also found housed in one of the *pidhamundi* niches of the *bada* wall of southern side. The four handed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The upper right hand holds *cakra*, the lower right hand possesses the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi, the upraised left arm bears the figure of goddess Prithvi and the lower left hand displays *Sankha* respectively. Here the deity wears *vanamala* in his body. The slab of deity measures 1 foot 7 inches in height and 1 foot 1 inch in width. The image of Varaha is made of sand stone. The iconographic features of these two Varaha images indicate the Odishan classical art of the Ganga period.

2. Varaha of Mudgala

The temple of Mudgala-Mādhava (Nila-Madhava) is situated at the village Mudgala in the Astharanga Block of the Puri district. This temple is located at a distance of about 5 kms from Jiunti, on a bifurcation away from the Kakatpur-Astharanga road.¹⁴ The central niches of the three sides of the *bada* of *vimana* are housed with the *parśvadevatā* images of Varaha, Narasimha and Trivikrama. Varaha is the *parśvadevatā* of the southern side. The four armed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal (PLATE-I). The bottom part of the pedestal is decorated with scroll work. The right part of the pedestal is partially broken. He holds *cakra* in upper right hand, the lower right hand of deity holds the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi, the upraised left arm bears the image of goddess Prithvi and the lower left hand displays *Sankha*. A lotus meanders up from between his feet to flower above his head while another lotus-rosette is at each upper corner of the back slab.¹⁵ The upper part of the slab of deity is decorated with three full blown lotus flowers. Garuda figure is not found to be installed on the pedestal of the slab. The image of Varaha is made of chlorite stone. It measures 2 feet 9 inches in height and 1 foot 5 inches in width respectively. The iconographic features of the Varaha image of Mudgala indicate the Odishan classical art of the Ganga period.

3. Varaha of Adaspur

The temple of Varaha-Narasimha is one of the ancient Vaisnava shrines of the Prachi Valley in the coastal belt of Odisha. It is situated about 37 kms from Bhubaneswar on the eastern bank of the Prāchi river.¹⁶ The temple is located at the village Adaspur in the Kantapara Block of the Cuttack district. This temple is built on the ruins of the earlier Vishnu temple, which was destroyed by nature. At present this temple is a monumental evidence of Varaha-Narasimha worship in the Prāchi Valley. The sanctum of the temple preserves the images of Varaha and Narasimha as the presiding deities. Here both the images of Varaha-Narasimha are jointly worshipped by local people. The four handed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal (PLATE-II). Garuda, the conventional mount of deity is carved on the front side of the pedestal. The upper right hand of deity displays *cakra*, the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi, the upraised left arm bears the figure of goddess Prithvi and the lower left hand possesses conch.¹⁷ There is a female figure holding *cauri* depicted on the left of the pedestal. The back side of the head of deity is carved with trefoil arch; *makara* heads at the base and the *kirtimukha* motif at the apex. Flying *apsara* figure holding garland is depicted on both side top corners of the slab. The image Varaha measures 4 feet 1 inch in height and 1 foot 11 inches in width respectively. It is made of chlorite stone. In connection with the Varaha image of Adaspur, Hansanatha Sahu opines that the present Varaha of the sanctum was initially housed as *parśvadevata* of the earlier Vishnu temple of that site.¹⁸ Most probably, after the dilapidation of the earlier Vishnu temple of that site, the image Varaha was preserved in the sanctum as presiding deity. The earlier presiding deity of the site might have been collected by local people and carefully preserved in the sculptured shed of the Sovanesvara temple of Nuagaon, near Niali. Observing the presiding deities, T.E. Donaldson remarks that these Varaha-Narasimha images are the standard iconography of the 13th century A.D.¹⁹ Iconographical features of the Varaha image of Adaspur indicate the Odishan classical art of the Ganga period.

4. Varaha of Nuapatna

The temple of Laksmi-Narasimha is located, about 54 kms from Bhubaneswar on the Nakhara-Madhava road near the southern bank of the river Prāchi, at the village Nuapatna in the Nimapara Block of the Puri district.²⁰ The central niches of the three sides of the *badā* of *vimāna* of the Laksmi-Narasimha temple are housed with the *parśvadevata* images of Trivikrama, Varaha and Vishnu. Varaha is the *parśvadevata* of the western side (PLATE-III). The four armed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The upper right hand of deity displays *cakra*, the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi, the upraised left arm bears the image of goddess Prithvi and the lower left hand displays *Sankha*. A diminutive female figure is carved on the left of the slab. The background of the slab is decorated with full blown lotus flower with stalk. Flying *apsara* figure is carved on both side top corners of the slab. The image of Varaha measures 1 foot 10 inches in height and 1 foot 2½ inches in width respectively. It is made of chlorite stone. Iconographic features of the Varaha image of Nuapatna possess the artistic features of the Odishan classical art of the modern period.

5. Varaha of Kuanrpur

The temple of Dadhivamana of Kuanrpuris situated at a distance of 32 kms from Bhubaneswar on the northern bank of the river Prachi.²¹ The eastern side outer *badā* wall of the *natamandapa* of the Dadhivamana temple contains the image of Varaha. The image Varaha is housed in a niche of the right side wall. The four armed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal (PLATE-IV). The upper right hand of deity displays *cakra*, the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi, the left upraised arm bears the figure of goddess Prithvi and the lower left hand possesses conch respectively. There is no figure of Garuda on the pedestal of the slab. A diminutive *nagini* figure is depicted on the centre of the pedestal. Female attendant figure is carved on both sides of the slab. The backside of the head of deity is decorated with trefoil arch crowned by the *kirtimukha* motif. Flying *apsara* figure is carved on

both side top corners of the slab. The image Varaha is made of sand stone. The slab of deity measures 2 feet 10 inches in height and 1 foot 6 inches in width respectively.²² Iconographic features of the Varahaimage of Kuanrpur indicate the artistic features of the Odishan classical art of the Gajapati period.

6. Varaha of Paribasudeipur

The temple of Narasimhanātha is located at the village Paribasudeipur in the Baliantha Block of the Khurdha district. This temple is situated about 12 kms from the Hansapalachhak of the National Highway No. 5 and 1 km from the Prāchiriver. The temple is a renovated shrine of that locality. The sanctum of the temple preserves the image of Narasimha (Narasimhanatha) as the presiding deity. Besides, an image of Varaha is being worshipped on the right side of the presiding deity. So both the images of Narasimha and Varaha are found to be worshipped in that sanctum (PLATE-V). The four armed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. Garuda, the conventional mount of deity is noticed on the left of the pedestal. The deity Varaha holds *cakra* in upper right hand, *Sankha* in lower left hand, the upraised left arm bears the figure of goddess Prithvi and the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure, possibly Bhudevi. The deity wears a *vanamala* in his body. The backside of the head of deity is decorated with trefoil arch crowned by the full blown lotus flower. *Apsara* figure holding garland is carved on both side top corners of the slab. The image Varaha is made of chlorite stone. The slab of deity measures 2 feet 10 inches in height and 1 foot 3 inches in width. Iconographic features of the Varaha image convey the artistic tradition of the Post-Ganga period.

7. Varaha of Varahipur

The temple of Gopinath is located at the village Varahipur in the Kantapara Block of the Cuttack district. This temple is situated about 20 Miles from Bhubaneswar and 2 miles from Kantapara on the left bank of the sacred Prāchi river.²³ The temple is exactly found erected inside a *matha* of that village. The central niches of the three sides of the *bada* of the Gopināth temple are housed with the *parsvadevata* images of Trivikrama, Narasimha and Varaha. Varaha is the *parsvadevatā* of the southern side. The four armed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. He displays *Sankha* in upper right hand, *padma* in lower left hand, the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi and the upraised left arm bears the figure of goddess Prithvi. The image of Varaha is made of sand stone. The slab of deity measures 1 foot 5 inches in height and 1 foot 3 inches in width respectively. Iconographical features of the Varaha image contain the features of Odishan classical art of the late medieval period.

8. Varaha of Pahanga

The temple of Madhavananda is located at the village Pahanga in the Niali Block of the Cuttack district. This temple is situated about 10 KMs from Niali and 8 kms from the Prachiriver. The temple is a modern shrine of that locality. The central niches of the three sides of the *bada* of *vimāna* of the Mādhavānanda temple are housed with the *parsvadevata* images of Narasimha, Vamana and Varaha. Varaha is the *pārsvadevatā* of the northern side. The four armed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the pedestal. He holds *cakra* in upper right hand, *gada* in lower right hand, *padma* in lower left hand and the left upraised arm bears the image of goddess Prithvi. The image Varaha is made of sand stone. It measures 8 inches in width and 1 foot 1½ inches in height. The Varaha image of the temple site has been built in the 1st decade of the twenty-first century. The local people say that the old *parsva devata* images were broken and eroded by nature. So the original side deities have been replaced by the present side deities including Varaha image. Iconographic style of the Varaha image contains the features of the Odishan art of the recent period. There is a broken image of Varaha noticed on the northern side of the *vimāna* of the site and it is completely broken. This Varaha image may be the original side deity of the temple.

9. Varaha of Ottarasasana

The temple of Patita Pavana is located at the village Ottarasasana in the Gop Block of the Puri district. This temple is situated about 5 kms from Nuahat and 6 kms from the Prachiriver. The central niches of the

three sides of the *bada* of *vimana* are housed with the *parsvadevata* images of Narasimha, Vamana and Varaha. Varaha is the *parsvadevata* of the southern side (PLATE-VI). The four armed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. He holds *cakra* in upper right hand, *Sankha* in lower left hand, the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure possibly Bhudevi(Prithvi) and the left upraised arm bears the image of goddess Prithvi. Bhudevi is carved on the left side of the deity. There is a *naga* figure depicted at the centre of the pedestal. The deity Varaha wears a garland of beads in his body. The backside of the head of deity is decorated with trefoil arch; *makara* head at the base and the *kirtimukha* motif at the apex. *Apsara* figures holding garlands are carved on both side top corners of the slab. The image of Varaha is made of granite stone. It measures 1 foot 2½ inches in width and 2 feet 2 inches in height respectively. Iconographic features of the Varaha image contain the features of the Odishan art of the modern period.

10. Varaha of Balara

The temple of Mādhavānanda is located at the village Balara in the Kakatpur Block of the Puri district. The central niches of the three sides of the *bada* of *vimana* are housed with the *parsvadevata* images of Trivikrama, Narasimha and Varaha. Varaha is the *parsvadevata* of the southern side. The four armed image of Varaha is carved in standing posture on the double petalled lotus pedestal. The upper right hand displays *cakra*, the lower right hand holds the hand of a female figure, possibly Bhudevi, the left upraised arm bears the figure of goddess Prithvi and the lower left hand possesses *Sankha* respectively. The upper part of the slab of deity is decorated with lotus bud having stalk. The image Varaha is made of sand stone. It measures 1 foot 6½ inches in height and 9½ inches in width respectively. Garuda figure is not found depicted on the pedestal of the slab. Iconographic features of this Varahaimage indicate the Odishan classical art of modern period.

Conclusion

Thus, it is known from the above discussion that the Varaha worship has been prevailing in the Prāchi valley since the Ganga period of Odishan history as indicated by the available images. Really, the Prāchi Valley preserves fine specimens of Varaha images as *parsvadevatas* in most of the Vaisnavite temples and in a few shrines as presiding deity like the sites of Varaha-Narasimha temple of Adaspur and Narasimhanatha temple of Pāribasudeipur as discussed in the fact. The original Varaha image of the Madhavananda temple of Mādhava village has been replaced by the present Varaha image belonging to the Odishan art of the twentieth century considering its iconographic features and stylistic ground. At present the Varaha-Narasimha temple of Adaspur is a monumental evidence of Varaha worship in the Prachi Valley. Here in, the sanctum of the temple preserves the images of both Varaha and Narasimha as the presiding deities. The iconographic features of the Varaha image of the site (Adaspur) indicate the Odishan classical art of the Ganga period. The Varaha image of Mudgala clearly indicates the iconographic features of the Ganga art of Odisha. The iconography of the Varahaimage of Nuapatna shows the artistic features of the modern period. On the other hand the iconography of the Varaha image of Varahipur suggests the Odishan classical art of the late medieval period. Most probably, the Varahaimage of Kuanrpur was initially used as the *parsvadevata* of the main *deula* (*vimana*) of the site, but due to some reasons it has been haphazardly inserted in the *natamandapa* wall of the Dadhivamana temple. Iconographic features of the Varahaimage of Kuanrpur indicate the Odishan classical art of the Gajapati period. The sanctum of the Narasimhanātha temple of Paribasudeipur preserves the image of Varaha alongside of Narasimha (Narasimhanatha) as the presiding deity. Herein, both the images of Narasimha and Varaha are found to be worshipped in that sanctum. Iconographic features of the Varaha image of Paribasudeipur convey the artistic tradition of the Post-Ganga period. Style and iconography of the Varaha image of the Madhavananda temple of Pahanga displays the artistic features of the Odishan art of the recent period. The Varaha image noticed on the northern side of the *vimana* of the Madhavananda temple of Pahanga is possibly the original side deity of the temple. Iconography of the Varaha image of Madhavananda temple of Balara shows the Odishan classical art of modern period. Considering the style and iconography, some of the Varaha images of the Vaisnavite temples of Prāchi valley can be considered as masterpiece

sculptures of Odisha. Really, the extant Varaha images of the above sites of Prachi valley symbolize the excellent workmanship of the Odishan artists, who have been able to represent here the combination of beauty with plastic art. On the whole, the iconographic features of all the Varaha images of the Vaisnavite temples of Prachi valley possess a unique place in the history of Vaisnava art in Odisha.

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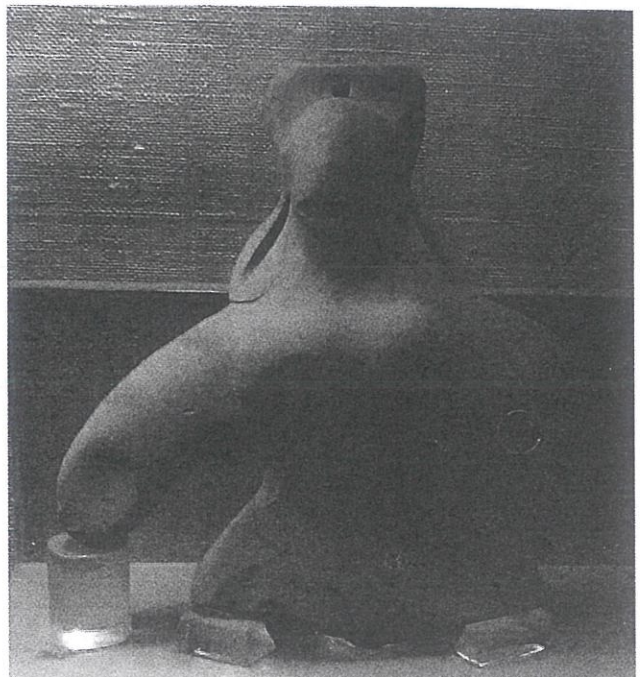
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Article 10
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Naigamesa, Mathura



Naigamesa, Vaishali

Article 11
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PLATE-I : The image Varaha, the southern side
parsvadevata of the Madhava
temple of Mudgala, Puri district, Odisha.



PLATE-II : The image Varaha, the presiding deity
of the Varaha-Narasimhatemple of Adaspur,
Cuttack district, Odisha.

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PLATE-III : The image Varaha , the western side
parsvadevata of the Laksmi-Narasimha temple of
Nuapatna, Puri district, Odisha.



PLATE-IV : The image Varaha is found to be
inserted in the eastern side outer bada wall of the
natamandapa of the Dadhivamana temple of
Kuanrpur, Cuttack district, Odisha.

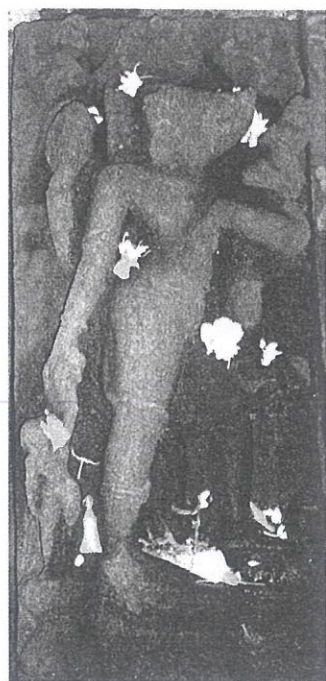


PLATE-V :The image Varaha is being worshipped on the
right side of the presiding deity of the Narasimhanatha
temple of Paribasudeipur, Khurdha district, Odisha.



PLATE-VI : The image Varaha, the southern side
parsvadevata of the Patita Pavana temple of
Ottarasasana, Puri district, Odisha.