

Varāha in Early Art - With Emphasis on a Recently Discovered Yajña Varāha Temple in Central India

Dr Vinay Kumar Gupta,
Deputy Superintending Archaeologist,
Archaeological Survey of India

Varāha is popular as an incarnation of Viṣṇu from the early centuries of the Common Era but the oldest Brāhmaṇical literature does not actually talk of Varāha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In certain instances, he is related to *asuras* as a keeper of their wealth. Viṣṇu being a *deva* comes in the context of Varāha but as his opponent and this mention may either be just coincidental or a deliberate one. The earliest reference to Varāha in ancient literature is found in the *Ṛgveda* (1,61,7; 8, 77,10) which says that a boar called Emuṣa was keeping a hundred buffaloes and rice cooked in milk which were carried away by Viṣṇu. Indra by shooting across the cloud mountain slew the boar Emuṣa (Gonda 1954: 137). The myth of Varāha was further developed in the *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas* and *Āraṇyakas*. In the *Taittirīya Samhitā* (6,2,4,2f.), Viṣṇu (the sacrifice) carried the Boar as a sacrifice for the gods and this way the gods won the wealth of the *asuras* as Boar was the keeper of their wealth. A similar legend is found in the *Kapiṣṭhala Kaṭha Samhitā* (XXXVIII, 10) which says that there was a Varāha called Emuṣa behind the twenty forts of the *asuras*, who had all the wealth of the demons and Indra was asked to destroy him (Rangarajan: 23). In the *Maitrāyaṇīya Samhitā* (3,8,3) also a somewhat similar legend is found about the role of boar (Gonda 1954: 138).

The myth of Varāha as the 'Uplifter of Goddess Earth' is developed in two stages - as cosmogonical creator and then as an incarnation.

The earliest reference to Varāha as the uplifter of the Earth is found in the *Bhūmi Sūkta* of the *Atharvaveda* (XII,1,48). The *Taittirīya Samhitā* (7,1,5) refers to the legend that Prajāpati in the form of a boar brought up the Earth from the primeval waters and assuming the form of Viśvakarmā planned her. The *Kapiṣṭhala Kaṭha Samhitā* identifies the boar itself as the great deity Prajāpati (6,7). The *Kaṭhaka Samhitā* calls the Earth as Varāhavihita - creation of Varāha (Prasad 1990: 6). During the period of Brāhmaṇas the relationship of Prajāpati-Varāha with Pṛthvī was fully established. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XIV, 1,2,11) mentions that a boar called Emuṣa raised the Earth up and Emuṣa was her Lord Prajāpati. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (1,1,3-5) informs that Prajāpati after taking the form of a boar plunged into the waters and after bringing the Earth up,

he extended it on a lotus leaf. In the Purāṇas, the Varāha myth is found to have been developed in two stages. In the earlier Purāṇas, like the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (47,1-13) , *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (1,4), *Matsya Purāṇa* (248,62-69), *Vāyu Purāṇa* (6,1-11), *Kūrma Purāṇa* (1,6,1-25) and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (1,5,1-11) Nārāyaṇa in the form of Prajāpati or Brahmā uplifts the Earth from the deepened waters (Rangarajan: 25-28). The *Varāha Purāṇa* (1,15,12), *Padma Purāṇa* (*Sṛṣṭi khaṇḍa*, 3, 30) and *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (1,1,18) describe the Varāha form but not in much detail. In the next stage, Varāha myth is developed as an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. The *Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa* (3,13,13-30), *Liṅga Purāṇa* (1,94), *Padma Purāṇa* (*Uttara khaṇḍa*, 237,10-29) mention that Lord Viṣṇu took incarnation in the form of a Varāha and killed the demon Hiraṇyākṣa and brought the Earth on the surface by carrying it on his tusk. The *Rāmāyaṇa Yuddhakāṇḍa* (117.13) and the *Mahābhārata Śāntiparva* (339,106) also mention the Varāha incarnation.

The Śilpa text, *Aparājitapṛchchā* of Bhuvanadeva (*adhyāya* 25, *śloka*s 1-17) describes Varāha as the creator of the universe. It mentions that when Pṛthvī due to the burden of the universe sank deep down in the waters, the Devas praised Viṣṇu and requested him to redeem her from Rasātala. Then Viṣṇu took the form of Varāha and brought Pṛthvī from Rasātala by holding her on his tusk. Along with her all Devas came and worshipped Varāha. Vāyu rested on the tip of his nose, Sarasvatī on his tongue and crores of Devas took shelter in his upper palate. On the neck of Varāha, the Devas and on the lip the Asuras stayed. On the *kapāla* of Varāha, a Deva with bow and on the eyes Sūrya and Chandra appeared. In the ears three crores of Gandharvas and above the back of the body Meru came in the form of Liṅga. The five-headed Sadāśiva does *pradakṣiṇā* of Varāha, the fourteen worlds existed on its body. There are Ekādaśa Rudras, Dvādaśa Sūryas, Chaturdaśa Manus and many Devas who rest on his body. On the shoulder of Varāha, Śailajā, Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya rest and in the *karṇābhūsaṇa* this world is rotating. Indra rests in the broad wrist of Varāha and Gandharvas in the hoof. Aśvinīdevas are at the tip of the hoof. On his chest, Lakṣmī stays and in his stomach the whole universe. Seven oceans are in the armpits and in the tail creator Brahmā dwells.

Varāha in Early Indian Art

The boar incarnation is represented in several ways, the principal modes being, theriomorphic and hybrid. The textual name of purely animal form is Varāha, while hybrid form is Nṛ-Varāha (Banerjea 1956: 413-414). Gopinath Rao (1968: 132-133) on the authority of *Vaikhānasāgama*

informs that in the Yajña Varāha form the God (as hybrid form) is shown seated in *lalitāsana* on a lion throne and is accompanied by his two consorts Lakṣmī and Bhūdevī on either side. In the Pralaya Varāha form the God is shown seated in the same pose as Yajña Varāha but is attended by only one consort Bhūdevī (Banerjea 1956: 415). As per Rangarajan (1997: 39) the image of Yajña Varāha described by the Āgamas and Tantras is different from that described in the Purāṇas. The Purāṇas visualize Yajña Varāha in the context of Vedic cosmogony and treat Varāha in animal form comparing its different limbs to the various elements of Yajña. On the other hand, the Āgamas and the Tantras visualize Yajña Varāha in the anthropomorphic form with the face of a Boar and the body of a man. The concept of Varāha as provided by the Purāṇas seems more acceptable and on the basis, the theriomorphic or zoomorphic Varāha images can be identified as Yajña Varāha while the animal-human hybrid images as Nṛ-Varāha.

The earliest representations of Varāha in Indian art are in the form of Nṛ-Varāha. The earliest one is in Mathura Museum (Acc.No. 16.1254, Fig. 1 a&b) considered by Agrawala (1951: 84) a Yakṣa and mentioned by Srinivasan (2011: 32) a Varāha. The small piece (about 7” high) represents a boar faced human body with two distinct objects held in the two hands. In his left hand, he is holding a round shaped object (Pṛthvī?) or possibly a fruit whereas in the right hand, the object looks like a money bag. The figure is broken below the waist. On the back side, there are traces of a tree as are observed on the back of famous Viṣṇu chaturvyūha image (Mathura Museum No. 392-395) as well as on other images from Mathura where multiplicity convention is used. This indicates towards its identification as a Vaiṣṇava image of Varāha. In case the represented figure is not identified as Varāha, it should for sure be considered as a prototype of later Varāha images. The well accepted earliest Varāha images are also known from Mathura and date from the Kushan period. The one slab in Mathura Museum (No. 65.15, Fig. 2) with an inscription on the base represents Nṛ-Varāha and is part of a larger representation, possibly representing avatāras of Viṣṇu, but unfortunately the major part of this slab is lost. The four handed Varāha has two of his natural hands in *katyāvalambita* pose whereas his two upper hands hold two discs embossed with a motif depicting Sun-god with his two horses (Joshi 1965: 114). Pṛthvī in female form is shown hanging from the Varāha’s tusk (now broken) to his left. Varāha is wearing a collar like garland which is an earlier form of *vanamālā* in Vaiṣṇava images of Mathura and also having a *śrīvatsa* on his chest which is the earliest such use in Brāhmaṇical context. A human figure with folded hands to the left of Varāha may be identified as a devotee. Above the head of

this devotee is shown a rock. The figures shown to the right of Varāha may be related to the other theme. A very important Varāha image was acquired by the Government Museum, Mathura in the year 1979 (M.M. No. 79.125). The god is represented in therianthrope form with the body of a man and the head of a boar. Not much survives in the image but still one can figure out the presence of a *vanamālā* and from the silhouette of mutilated part near the neck the possibility of Bhūdevī who was clinging from his snout. The neck is very narrowed and based on it and other attributes one can surely consider it as a precursor to the famous Eran Varāha image presently housed in the Archaeological Museum, Sagar University. This Mathura image could be dated to the late third century CE. Another Varāha image from Mathura of *circa* 3rd century CE was auctioned by Christies (Lot 208, 18th September 2013, Fig. 3a) which represents Varāha in anthropomorphic form striding to his left with his hand at his chest, wearing a *dhotī*, *vanamālā* and beaded necklace and three kneeling devotees at his feet. The head portion along with the uplifted Bhūdevī figure is missing due to damage. Another contemporary Varāha image from Mathura is housed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Fig. 3b) which represents Varāha in anthropomorphic form uplifting the Earth. Bhūdevī is clinging to his tusk and shown standing on a stool which is kept over a lotus. The left hand of Varāha is resting on his left knee. He is wearing a *vanamālā* and a double stringed *mālā* round his neck. This image clearly appears to be a precursor of Eran and Udayagiri Varāha images from the shape of snout of the boar. Another image (Fig. 3c) from Mathura is presently housed at Norton Simon Museum and represents a complete Varāha in anthropomorphic form. Its overall features are quite different from usual Varāha images of the period (5th century as per Norton Simon description) and from the study of photograph, I doubt its authenticity. In the art of Mathura, at about the same time (during 3rd and 4th century CE), Varāha also emerges as part of images following *vyūha* doctrine which are popularly identified as Vaikuṇṭha Viṣṇu. In such images, only three faces are visible. The central one is of Viṣṇu or Vāsudeva and the side faces are of Varāha and Nṛ-siṃha (Gupta 2013: 211). There is also a broken relief in Mathura Museum (Acc. No. 1344, Fig. 4) which was identified by D.R. Sahni and V.S. Agrawala as Vāsudeva carrying child Kṛṣṇa across Yamunā to Gokula and the author had doubted this identification (2013: 213). In the relief the depiction of serpent king (Pātālarāja) and the nether world quite resembles the later but famous relief of Varāha avatāra from Udayagiri. On that basis, this broken sculptural relief in Mathura Museum should be considered part of a huge sculptural panel depicting Varāha.

During the Gupta period, Central India observed an unprecedented popularity of the Varāha cult. The important Varāha sculptures of this period are: the Yajña Varāha sculpture at Ramtek (the Vākāṭaka capital); the famous Nṛ-Varāha panel at Udayagiri; Nṛ-Varāha sculpture from Eran (presently housed at Sagar University Museum); the largest Yajña Varāha sculpture at Eran; the Yajña Varāha sculpture from Khoh; the free standing Nṛ-Varāha in the Daśāvatāra temple, Badoh; Nṛ-Varāha from the Varāha temple, Deogarh; two Nṛ-Varāha reliefs at Nachna (one larger one at compound of Nachna and the smaller at the doorjamb of Telia Marh).

The New Discovery

It all started when my M.A. (final) student at University of Sagar Shri Ashish Vanshkar on inquiry about ancient remains in his village informed that near Pawai in Panna district, there is possibly some old image which is under worship. When on map I searched the location, I found it very interesting as it was located near Nachna as well as Maihar, Bharhut, Unchahara and I thought that possibly some great archaeological discovery was in the offing. At that time, I was passing through a difficult medical stage and the probable potential of this site provided a new energy into my life and I along with my M.A. (previous) student Shri Shilendra Thakur (from Bahraich in U.P.) started a long journey on his motorbike from Sagar to Nachna region to explore the area on the first weekend of November 2014.

The newly reported Varāha image and the temple lie on the outskirts of village Baraho in district Panna of Madhya Pradesh (Map 1). The site lies about 7 km to the east of Pawai town and about 11 km south-west of the famous site Nachna Kuthar (Nachne). This temple shrine is situated just near the base of a hill towards north (Fig. 5) and adjoining the site are two big ponds, one to the east is a part of this temple site itself (Fig. 6). There is a natural cave adjacent to this temple site which is at present occupied by some *baba* (Fig. 7). As the cave was locked from outside and appeared to be whitewashed inside, it is difficult to ascertain its antiquity and the presence of rock paintings, if any. But it is quite possible that the cave pre-existed the temple site and being the only such cave in a larger landscape might have been sacred for the locals and in some way may have played a role in the selection of the spot for the Varāha temple. Ken river is flowing about 1km to the east of this temple site.

The Varāha sculpture is theriomorphic and made of pinkish red sandstone, but has been painted black by the locals in recent years considering it to be the usual colour of boar's body (Fig.

8a & b). The serpent Śeṣa under his legs is still in its original colour. The idol is about 7.5 feet in length and slightly different from all other Yajña Varāha images in the proportions of body. The body of the Varāha is plain which is quite rare in such representations. The boar has well defined hoofs, tusks, eyes and ears. Near his mouth to the left side is shown a projection in sky blue colour which is marked as Pṛthvī. The locals may have indicated the Earth based on the existing practice prior to paint as Pṛthvī is not observed in such other Yajña Varāha sculptures. The whole Varāha image is put on a stone base which is also observed in other Yajña Varāha images. On that base, between the legs of the Varāha is carved the figure of a long serpent with thick coils and tail; its hood is facing towards Varāha. A human bust is shown coming out of the broad serpent hood. The earliest representation of theriomorphic boar is the Yajña Varāha from Ramtek (Fig. 9) of about 4th -5th century CE (Vākāṭaka dynasty). The Ramtek Varāha is bigger in size in comparison and has a small temple enclosure surrounding it. The serpent king Śeṣa with head of a human and body of a snake is represented under the legs of the Varāha with its head raised near Varāha's head facing Varāha, but now missing. The other plain Yajña Varāha image is the one from Khoh (Satna district), presently kept at the Municipal Office, Unchahara town (Fig. 10). This Yajña Varāha is adorned with a beautiful beaded necklace round the neck as well as anklets at the legs. Between the legs of Varāha, remnant of the figure of Śeṣanāga with a human body and the tail of a snake is visible. The size of Khoh Varāha image is about 5.5 feet in length and 3 feet 9 inches in height (Cunningham 1879: 6) but its appearance is more bulky in comparison to elongated body of our Varāha. The Khoh Varāha should also belong to *circa* 5th century CE and is possibly part of either Gupta or Vākāṭaka legacy as this area formed part of either of these major dynasties. The distance of Khoh/ Unchahara at the eastern end of the hill from our temple site is just about 30 km as a crow flies. Both the Yajña Varāha images of Khoh and Unchahara are quite naturalistic in execution and proportionate whereas our Yajña Varāha image is slightly elongated and hence can be considered 150-200 years later.

Either during the time of installation of our Yajña Varāha image or possibly sometime afterwards, the deity was enclosed within a temple structure (Fig. 11). This consisted of the square *garbha-gr̥ha* and a rectangular *antarāla*. The base of this shrine still exists whereas the superstructure is completely lost. Two pilasters on either side of the *garbha-gr̥ha*'s entrance are standing but may not be there in their original position as symmetry is missing. For the major portion (about 2/3rd length), the pilasters are square in shape and plain, then in the remaining

portion there are flutings topped by an *āmalaka* decoration. There are two projections visible on either side of the temple base. These projections may have consisted of niches with sculptures in them.

The temple complex was developed in several phases. Remains of base of structural walls still visible (Fig. 12). In the center of the wall of latest extension a *chandraśilā* is still present which may be in its original position. The temple at the site must have been dedicated to Viṣṇu as various sculptural remains indicate. Varāha was one of the important shrines and probably the earliest at the site. In the whole complex except the Varāha shrine, only one other shrine (may be called *maṇḍapikā*) is existing but without an idol (Fig. 13). This shrine consisted of four round pillars supporting a flat roof. The pillars at the base have flutings and from above the mid portion are circular and plain. At the top, the pillars are surmounted by brackets which have four bhāravāhaka yakṣas in four cardinal directions and in between the two yakṣas, a nāgakanyā is represented (Fig. 14).

Architectural and sculptural fragments:

A temple lintel (Fig. 15) represents a Garuḍāsīna Viṣṇu in the center. Viṣṇu is shown four handed, though the implements in his hands are obliterated. At both the ends of the lintel are shown two deities, possibly Brahmā and Śiva, but too damaged. In between these deities and the Viṣṇu figure in the center are shown three vidyādhara on either side. These six vidyādhara are identical in shape and three to the natural right possibly carry a *nāga* or a curved lotus bud in their right hand and either a staff or a flower with long stem in their left hand whereas three to the left hold a small pot in their right hands and a snake in the left. This lintel may be datable to post- Gupta period on the basis of stylistic features. In another temple lintel (Fig. 16), again the central figure is of Garuḍāsīna Viṣṇu. The four handed Viṣṇu is holding *gadā* and *chakra* in his upper right and left hands respectively whereas his natural left hand is holding a *śaṅkha* and the natural right hand is shown in *varadamudrā*. On the right and left ends of the lintel seated figures (in *lalitāsana*) of four handed Śiva and Brahmā are shown. Brahmā is wearing a *jaṭāmukuta*. Brahmā's upper right and left hands are holding a lotus and a book respectively whereas his natural left hand is holding a *kamaṇḍalu* and the right hand is in *varadamudrā*. The natural left hand of Śiva is also holding a *kamaṇḍalu* and the right hand is in *varadamudrā*. All three deities are shown wearing *yajñopavīta* in a similar fashion. In between Śiva and Viṣṇu, a female devotee and two male garland bearers are shown, all facing towards Viṣṇu, the central figure but in between Brahmā and Viṣṇu figures,

only one garland bearer is facing towards Viṣṇu, the remaining two figures are facing towards Brahmā, a very uncommon representation as Brahmā is not the central figure.

In one temple frieze (Fig. 17), ten seated figures are shown, four towards proper left seem to be female divinities carrying a child in their lap. They all seem to be animal headed. In case, this frieze is a part of lengthier panel, the four female divinities may be part of Saptamātṛkās whereas the six male figures may be identified as six Vasus out of Aṣṭavasus. In a fragmentary doorjamb, *triratha* in composition (Fig. 18), in the lower register, three prominent figures are represented (Fig. 18a). The one towards the opening is less prominent and is a female deity carrying a pot in her hands. Above her head a torso of a Nāginī is represented. The two prominent figures facing to front are a female and male deity standing in *tribhaṅga*. The deity in the center is a female and carries a long object (now broken) in her right hand whereas the object in her left hand is indistinct. She is having a beautiful hairdo speaking the effect of style of post-Gupta period. She also had a canopy over her head but now much damaged. From the position of the figure on the doorjamb, she may be identified as a river goddess, possibly Yamunā, in spite of the absence of a representation of Kūrma, her *vāhana*. The male deity standing by her side is full of youth and charm and on the basis of the object held in his right hand, if it is a cock, may be identified as Kārttikeya. Two small attendant figures are also shown near the feet of these three deities. In similar representations in early Pratihāra art, the pot carrying lady is generally identified as either Gaṅgā or Yamunā as besides her, there is representation of only the attendants and a Śaiva dvārapāla like at Teli ka Mandir, Gwalior, temples at Batesar and Śiva Mandira, Pathari (Trivedi 1990). But here, three figures occupy the prominent position and the central figure is definitely the most prominent, so most qualified to be identified as a riverine deity. Above the central figure, a *bhāravāhaka* figure is represented to show a break in the registers. Above the *bhāravāhaka* in the central register (Fig. 18b), two human figures seated on a cot, one male and a female are represented involved in *maithuna*. On either side of them, one musician is represented, one playing a *bīṇa* and the other playing a *mṛdaṅga*. In the register above it (Fig. 18c), in the center a *paśu-maithuna* scene is represented. One couple is also shown above them. On either side of the central *ratha*, a musician is represented. One is playing a *bīṇa* and the other playing a *majīrā* but the more important and significant aspect is that they are doing so in a pose of *tapasa* by standing on one leg only, the right side figure on his right leg and the left side figure on his left leg respectively. This confirms that the representation of *mithuna* scenes is for a sacred purpose only. In the upper

register, a divine couple is shown in the center but due to damage, it is not identifiable. On either side of this divine couple musicians standing on one leg just like the lower register are shown but this portion is too damaged for a proper interpretation.

In another fragmentary doorjamb (Fig. 19) which would have once stood in front of the above doorjamb at the entrance of a shrine, figures are represented in almost similar manner. The *dvāraśākhā* is *triratha* in plan and has similar registers as the above. In the lower register three figures, possibly deities are represented, the central figure of a lady is more prominent than the other two. She is possibly shown carrying a lotus bud with a long stalk in her left hand, the object in her right hand is not visible. This lady figure might be identified as Gaṅgā based on its position on the doorjamb. The figure to her left and facing the entrance is a lady figure which possibly would have carried a water pot in her now broken hands. On top of this lady figure, a bust of a Nāginī is represented. To the proper right side of the central female figure, a youthful male is shown, possibly carrying a bird and may be identified as a form of Skanda-Kārttikeya. In the three registers above the lower register, three couples are shown on the central *ratha*. On the side *rathas*, human figures in various yogic postures are shown. In another temple frieze (Fig. 20), five registers survive carved on the *mithuna śākhā*. On it, human couples are shown in love and sex making poses. On another architectural piece, a beautiful image of a standing devotee is represented (Fig. 21).

In an architectural member (*gavākṣa*), a beautiful bust of a deity is shown (Fig. 22). The eyes are half closed with *nāsāgradr̥ṣṭi*. The hairdo and the overall appearance reminds of imagery of Pārvatī Temple at Nachna. In the border decoration, a stylized *svastika* is represented. A decorated *chaitya* window with a human head shown in the center (Fig. 23) would have once increased the glory of the site.

There is a loose image of a deity, possibly Agni, which would have formed part of a temple frieze (Fig. 24). The bearded deity is four handed, wearing a *yajñopavīta*. The attributes in his upper two hands are lost or mutilated whereas the natural right hand is in *varadamudrā* and the left hand broken. One of the architectural members (Fig. 25) depicts some important object being held between two deities. The figures are quite mutilated for identification. To the left of this fragment in Fig. 25, there is a standing life size image of a deity, possibly of late medieval period. Somehow, it was missed during investigations at the site. One of the representations available at the site is of Vāmana (Fig. 26) in which the deity is shown four handed and adorned with *śrīvatsa*

on his chest in between two small pilasters indicating a niche. The stout bodied god seems to have held usual attributes of Viṣṇu but the sculpture is too mutilated for their proper identification. On the back wall of the Varāha shrine, an image of Viṣṇu seated in *lalitāsana* on a lotus is fixed (Fig. 27). The deity is shown in between two small pilasters forming a niche. In his upper two hands, the deity is holding a *gadā* and a *chakra* whereas the attributes held in his natural hands are missing.

Another image of a goddess seated in *lalitāsana* on a lion throne is quite mutilated for identification (Fig. 28). Beautiful *ihāmṛgas* are shown on either side of the seated deity. An architectural member (Fig. 29) represents two devotees, one male and a female in *tribhaṅga* pose with beautiful hairdo. The lady is possibly carrying a plate full of sweets and the male devotee is holding some other offering object. On another architectural fragment forming part of a niche, a four handed standing Viṣṇu is represented (Fig. 30). In his upper hands the deity is holding a *gadā* and a *padma* whereas his natural hands are placed on two male figures, possibly representing chakrapuruṣa and śaṅkhapuruṣa. Viṣṇu is wearing a long *vanamālā* and is shown in between two pilasters. A broken *makara praṇāla* (Fig. 31) is also present at the site. Another architectural fragment (Fig. 32) represents a *siṃha-śārdūla*, possibly trampling a human figure shown at the lower end. On the protruding part of the same fragment a beautiful figure of a standing lady is represented. On another similar architectural fragment (Fig. 33) the *siṃha-śārdūla* is depicted trampling upon an elephant headed anthropomorphic figure. This representation is quite unique and poses a possibility whether the elephant headed figure could be identified as Gaṇeśa and if so, what esoteric meaning does it convey in a Vaiṣṇava temple. Another architectural frieze (Fig. 34) represents three human figures in a dancing and singing attitude. The figure to the right in frieze is a lady and the remaining two are male figures. The figure towards the left is playing a *ḍholaka*. An architectural fragment (Fig. 35) in the central niche depicts a seated devotee with folded hands. There are many architectural members lying at the site like pillar erected at the entrance of Varāha shrine, probably part of early shrine and two contemporary pillars lying horizontally (Fig. 36). These pillars are having floral decoration on the middle part and an *āmalaka* on top. There are a number of unfinished stones at the site; one of these is a pillar with *kalaśa* motif (Fig. 37), and many other fragments (Figs. 38-42). Many mason marks are observed at the site, some of these are of Gupta period with reading *nī e* (Figs. 43 a - f), whereas some are of later periods (Figs. 44 a - d). The latest important find from the site is of a Satī stone (Fig. 45) showing the couple entering

the heaven holding hands; sun and moon motifs are shown above them and in the center on top an oath taking symbol. The inscription on it mentions samvat 1415 (1494 CE). An excavated pit at the site shows a deep foundation of stones (Fig. 46).

Conclusions:

The majority of the available temple remains from our site on stylistic grounds are datable to Pratihāra times of *circa* 10th century CE. Still, few fragments are even later and belong to late Pratihāra times. One Sati stone at the site is much later in date. There is also a strong possibility that the temple at the site was never completed in a single phase and the construction work continued there during succeeding periods but was never completed as a number of incomplete architectural fragments indicate. At some point of time, the sacred site would have been ransacked as various sculptures appear defaced due to human vandalism. But, the most important aspect about this site is the continuity of the sacredness and worship of the Varāha. The nearby village still acquires its name as Baraho from this Varāha image.

This Varāha temple again highlights the popularity of Varāha cult in central India, particularly during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods as some evidence from the site indicates its existence during the Gupta period. Nachna (Dt. Panna) situated about 11 km distant from our site and Khoh (Dt. Satna) situated about 30 km distant from our site were important religious art centers during the Gupta period. These three sites form part of an important archaeological landscape. Out of these three, two have provided important evidence of the presence of Yajña Varāha cult and incidentally both the figures are plain. Here it is important to consider the chronology of the two extant plain Yajña Varāha images. Both the Ramtek and Khoh Varāha are dated to late 4th - 5th century CE. In every possibility, our Varāha image is datable to seventh or eighth century, though the earliest shrine at the site may date back to the Gupta period. Two more plain Yajña Varāha images have been found from central India. One is from Pathari (Fig. 47) which is quite large (12 feet) but incomplete and the other one is from Ataria Khera, Nagod (Fig. 48). Ataria Khera is quite close to Khoh and Nachna, about 11 km and 20 km distant respectively. The Yajña Varāha is standing on a platform and in between the legs is shown Ādiśeṣa. Ādiśeṣa holding *amṛtaghaṭa* is having the long body and tail as a snake and the bust portion in human form. There is no certain base of dating these two images but the Ataria Khera Varāha on stylistic and iconographic grounds may belong to the same chronological framework as the Varāha from Khoh and Baraho.

Michael Willis (2009) furthering the earlier views of K.P. Jayaswal, V.S. Agrawala and others has laid too much emphasis on the Udayagiri Nṛ-Varāha panel in particular and Eran Nṛ-Varāha image to an extent, as being representative of Gupta imperial power and hegemony and associated presumptive rituals rather than the usual religious connotation, but the presence of two important Yajña Varāha images from the important art activity centers conveys a meaning of their religious importance. It is difficult to associate notions of Gupta or other imperial powers and related rituals to the representation of these theriomorphic Varāha images. In this context, Becker (2010: 142) also suggests that the all-boar form of the Eran Varāha resembles a sacrificial animal more directly than the much more regal-looking Udayagiri Nṛ-Varāha. In my view, popularity of Varāha cult at Mathura during the Kushan period and the subsequent popularity of this cult in central India during the Gupta and onwards periods has to be considered on religious parameters.

Dedication and acknowledgement: I dedicate this discovery and the article to the sacred memory of Dr. (Mrs.) Haripriya Rangarajan, a highly dedicated scholar and great human being who brought forth before the scholarly world a brilliant survey of Varāha images in Central India along with her other scholarly works. I am very grateful to my student Shri Shailendra Thakur for accompanying me in that exploratory visit and to Shri Ashish Vanshkar for providing the first information leading to this discovery.

References:

- Agrawala, V.S. 1951. *A Catalogue of Brāhmaṇical Images in Mathura Art*. Lucknow: UPHS.
-1963. *Solar Symbolism of Boar*. Varanasi.
- Aparājita prchhā of Bhuvanadeva*. 1950. Baroda: Oriental Institute.
- Atharvaveda Samhitā*. 1905. Tr. W.D. Whitney. Cambridge.
- Banerjea, J.N. 1956. *Development of Hindu Iconography*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Becker, Catherine. 2010. “Not Your Average Boar: The Colossal Varāha at Erāṇ. An Iconographic Innovation”. *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 70 (I). Zurich: 123-141.
- Cunningham, Alexander. 1879. *Report of a Tour in the Central Provinces 1873-74 and 1874-75*. ASI: 5-7.
- Gonda, J. 1969. *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas.

- Gopinath Rao, T.A. 1968. *Elements of Hindu Iconography*. Vol. I (Pt. I). New York: Paragon Books.
- Gupta, Vinay Kumar. 2013. *Mathura: An Art and Archaeological Study*. Delhi: Kaveri Books.
- Joshi, N.P. 1965. “Kuṣāṇa Varāha Sculpture” *Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. 12. Paris: 113-119.
- Kaṭiṣṭhala Kāṭha Saṃhitā*. 1932. Ed. Raghu Vir. Lahore.
- Mahābhārata*. Gorakhpur: Gita Press.
- Prasad, Maheshwari. 1989. *Some Aspects of Varāha Kathā in Epis and Purāṇas*. New Delhi. *Rāmāyaṇa*. Gorakhpur: Gita Press.
- Rangarajan, Haripriya. 1997. *Varāha Images in Madhya Pradesh: An Iconographic Study*. Mumbai: Somaiya Publications.
- Śrīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa*. Gorakhpur: Gita Press.
- Srinivasan, D.M. 2011. “Becoming Vishnu” *Vishnu – Hinduism’s Blue-Skinned Saviour*. Ed. Joan Cummins. Ahmedabad (Mapin): 24-33.
- Taittirīya Saṃhitā*. 1967. Tr. A.B. Keith. Varanasi.
- Trivedi, R.D. 1990. *Temples of Pratihāra Period in Central India*. N. Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India.
- Varāha Purāṇa*. Varanasi: Kashiraj Trust.
- Willis, Michael. 2009. *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual: Temples and the Establishment of the Gods*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

List of Figures (All photographs are taken by the author unless otherwise specified):

Map 1. Map showing Varāha Temple site, Village Baraho, District Panna along with important nearby ancient sites.

Fig. 1a. Nṛ-Varāha, Government Museum, Mathura.

Fig. 1 b. Back view of Fig. 1a.

Fig. 2. Varāha image in Government Museum, Mathura.

Fig. 3a. Varāha image from Mathura auctioned by Christies. Photo from Christies Catalogue.

Fig. 3b. Varāha image from Mathura in LACMA. Photo from Internet.

Fig. 3c. Varāha image from Mathura in Norton Simon Museum. Photo from internet.

Fig. Fig. New addition (M.M. No. 79.125) Photo credit: Sh. Vijay Kumar in IJA 9(1)

Fig. 4. Varāha relief in Government Museum, Mathura.

Fig. 5. General view of Varāha Temple site, Village Baraho, District Panna.

Fig. 6. General view of ancient pond situated adjacent to Varāha Temple site.

Fig. 7. A view of the cave as observed from a hole in the wooden door.

Fig. 8a. Varāha image.

Fig. 8b. Another view of the Varāha image.

Fig. 9. Varāha image, Ramtek.

Fig. 10. Varāha image from Khoh, now at Unchahara.

Fig. 11. Varāha image inside a temple enclosure.

Fig. 12. General view of enlarged temple structure.

Fig. 13. Maṇḍapikā shrine.

Fig. 14. Pillar bracket.

Fig. 15. A temple lintel.

Fig. 16. Another temple lintel.

Fig. 17. A temple frieze.

Fig. 18. A doorjamb.

Figs. 18a-c. Enlarged view of doorjamb in Fig. 18.

Fig. 19. Another doorjamb.

Fig. 20. Another temple frieze.

Fig. 21. Architectural frieze with a standing devotee.

Fig. 22. A *gavākṣa*.

Fig. 23. A *chaitya* window.

Fig. 24. Temple frieze with Agni.

Fig. 25. An architectural member.

Fig. 26. Temple fragment with image of Vāmana.

Fig. 27. Viṣṇu seated in *lalitāsana*.

Fig. 28. A mutilated image of a goddess.

Fig. 29. An architectural fragment with two devotees.

Fig. 30. An architectural fragment with Viṣṇu image.

Fig. 31. A broken *makara praṇāla*.

Fig. 32. An architectural fragment.

Fig. 33. An architectural fragment.

Fig. 34. An architectural frieze.

Fig. 35. An architectural fragment.

Fig. 36. Pillars at the Varāha shrine.

Fig. 37. Unfinished stone pillar.

Figs. 38-42. Architectural fragments.

Fig. 43a-e. Stones with mason marks of Gupta period.

Fig. 44a-d. Stones with mason marks of medieval period.

Fig. 45. Satī stone.

Fig. 46. An excavated pit at the site.

Fig. 47. Varāha near Bawri Khurd, Pathari.

Fig. 48. Varāha from Ataria Khera, Nagod. Photo is courtesy ASI.



Map 1



Fig. 1a & b



Fig. 2



Fig. 3a



Fig. 3b



Fig. 3c



Fig. New addition (M.M. No. 79.125) Photo credit: Sh. Vijay Kumar in IJA 9(1)



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8a



Fig. 8b



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

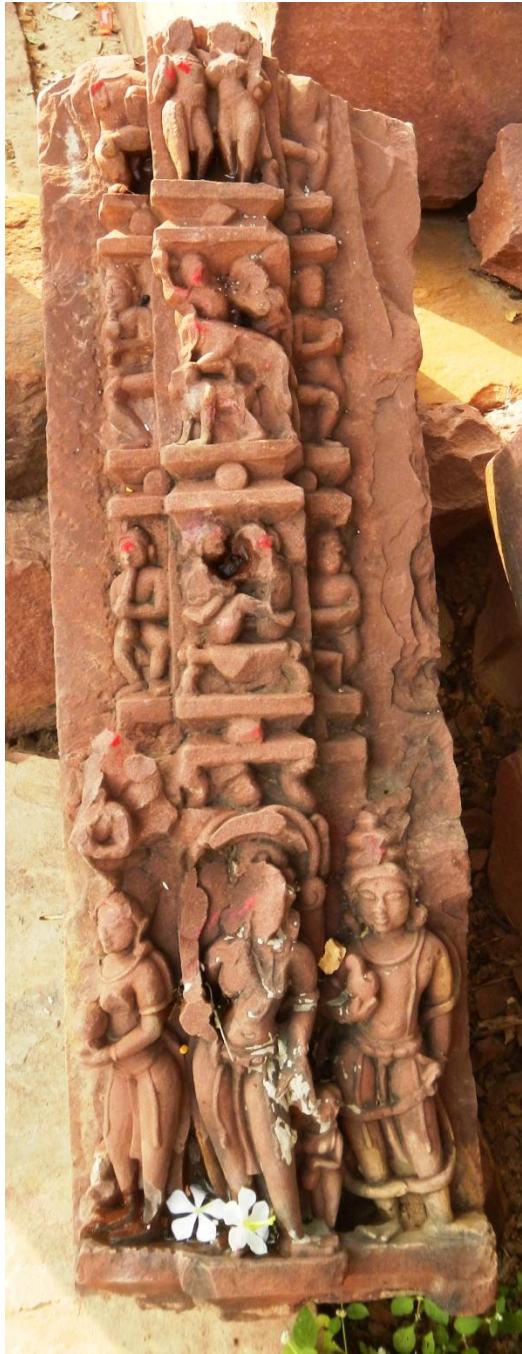


Fig. 18



Figs. 18 a & b



Fig. 18c



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27

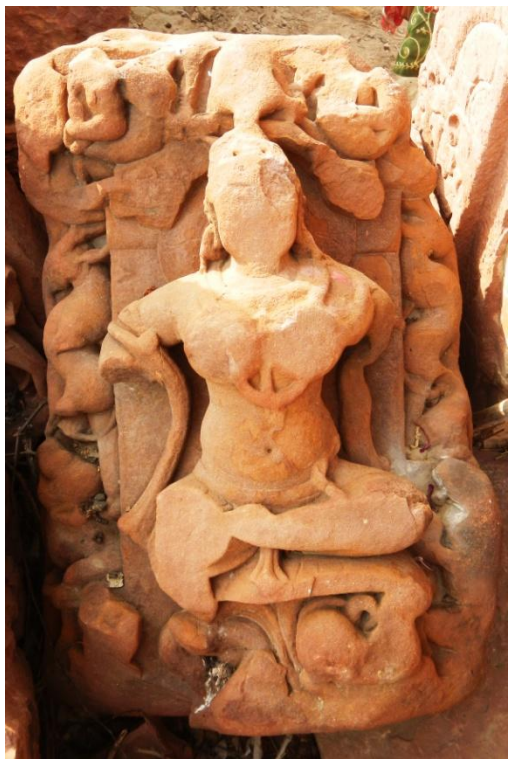


Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 40



Fig. 41



Fig. 42



Fig. 43a

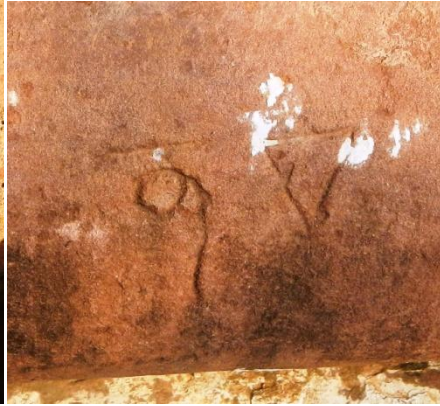


Fig. 43b



Fig. 43c



Fig. 43d



Fig. 43e



Fig. 43f



Fig. 44a



Fig. 44b



Fig. 44c

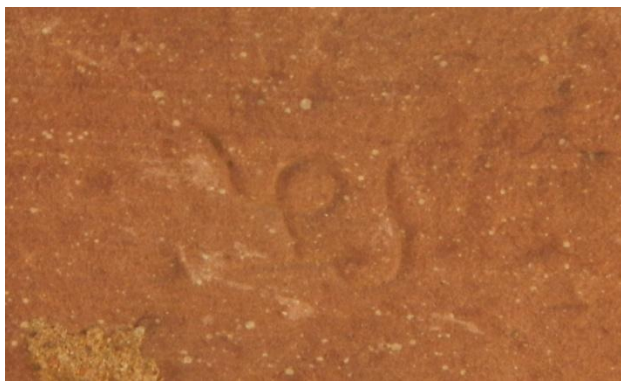


Fig. 44d



Fig. 45



Fig. 46



Fig. 47



Fig. 48