



Vāmana/Trivikrama Incarnation Sculptures From Himachal Pradesh; Earliest Till 1200 CE.

Dr. Amit Sharma

Assistant Professor

College Of Art, Chandigarh

Vāmana incarnation is the fifth incarnation among the ten incarnation of Vishṇu and it comes after the Nṛsimha incarnation. Vāmana literally means dwarf and this is the first incarnation in which lord Vishṇu assumes a human form. Vāmana incarnation is unique amongst the other incarnation of Vishnu as it has two aspects of the lord in the first aspect the lord assumes the form of Vāmana and in the other aspect the lord assumes gigantic form of Trivikrama to take the entire universe into his three steps. The second aspect has its roots in the Vedic mythology where he is referred to as *Urugāya* or *Urukrama* and traverses the universe with his three steps. The Trivikrama has its roots in the solar cult as Vishṇu as *Urugāya* in the *Ṛig Veda* has its roots in the solar philosophy. Various texts refer to this story with some variation. In the *Varāha Purāṇa* it is explained that after Aditi, wife of sage Kaśyapa performed severe penances, lord Vishṇu became pleased and granted her boon that he will take birth from her womb and annihilate all your enemiesⁱ. In the tenth month of her pregnancy Aditi gave birth to lord Govinda in the form of Vāmanaⁱⁱ. The god of all gods, lord Vāmana arrived at the Bali's *Yajña*, assuming umbrella, matted hair, staff and *kamaṇḍalu*ⁱⁱⁱ. Then lord Vāmana asked for land which will be covered by his three steps^{iv}. Bali promised to give land covered by lord Vāmana's three steps and as water was poured on the hands of lord Vāmana as it is customary before receiving land donation, Vāmana became non Vāmana that is seamless^v. After annihilating the demons, *Urukrama* (the one with the long strides) Vishṇu, after the conquest of the entire three universes, restored them to Indra^{vi}. The lord gave the nether world named *sutala* to Bali^{vii}. Similarly this story of Vāmana incarnation is explained in various other texts such as the *Harivaṁśa Purāṇa*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* etc. According to the *Agni Purāṇa* form of Vāmana is adorned with parasol and staff otherwise he should be shown four handed^{viii}. In the *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa* it is mentioned that the god Vāmana should be shown with diminutive body limbs. He should be flabby and shown with a stick and as he is ready to read. His complexion should be green like *dūrva* and he should wear the skin of the antelope^{ix}. In the next verse of the same chapter of the *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa* form of Trivikrama is explained. It is stated that Trivikrama should be represented as having the complexion of the clouds laden with water. He should be shown holding a rod and a lasso and he is blowing the conch. Beautiful forms of

conch, disc, mace and lotus should be shown without human forms. He should be depicted with single raised head and wide open eyes^x. Vāmana is listed as a *tīrtha* in the *Nīlamata-Purāṇa* suggesting its association with Vishṇu^{xi}. In the *Rūpamaṇḍana* Vāmana is mentioned as having *śikhā* (tuft of unshaven hair atop the head), he is dark complexioned and he holds *daṇḍa*, *chhatra* and *kamaṇḍalu*^{xii}.

There is an unpublished image of Vāmana incarnation in a niche on the proper left side of the entrance of Vaidyanath temple, Baijnatha (plate 1). This image flanks the proper right side of composite form of Vishṇu Lakshmī. The Varāha is depicted two handed, in his proper left hand he is holding staff and in his proper right hand however the object is worn-out and indistinct but possibly it is *kamaṇḍalu* as it is so mentioned in the *Varāha-Purāṇa*. The deity is wearing dhoti having double incised line pattern, necklace, sacred thread, earrings *etc.* There is a gentle smile on the face of the deity and his eyes are large and open. The stylistic characteristics of this sculpture are same as the other Daśāvātāra sculptures of Vishṇu in the same Temple. Therefore the time period of early 13th century CE can be given to it.

On one of the panel of the window of the Markula devi Temple located in Udaipur, district Lahaul Spiti, there is depiction of Trivikrama incarnation. The deity is depicted four handed, he is holding ribbed mace in his proper back left hand, raised upward to the level of his shoulder and conch in the proper front left hand, raised up to the level of his chest. In the proper back right hand the deity is holding disc and lotus in the proper front right hand. Vishṇu-Vaikuṇṭha aspect is fused here with Trivikrama as there is boar and Nṛṣimha faces on the sides of the central face of the Trivikrama. The crown of the deity has crescent moon pattern in the centre. These two characteristics clearly bring this sculpture in to the Kashmir idiom as we know very well that crown with crescent moon pattern was popular in Kashmir and also the Vishṇu-Vaikuṇṭha form of Vishṇu was created and popular in this region. However there is no image of Trivikrama form of Vishṇu, discovered from Kashmir. In Himachal also there is only this image which represents Trivikrama Vishṇu otherwise Vāmana has been given preference by the artists of this region. The manner in which the deity has held attributes and also the way they are fashioned is commonly seen in the sculptures of Vishṇu from Kashmir. The deity is wearing *vanamālā* whose flow is constricted around the waist and it further resumes below waist resembling the shape of numeric eight. The deity is wearing necklace, armlets, anklets and a scarf which billows at the back. The panel in which this sculpture is represented is vertically rectangle showing all the three planes of the universe *i.e.* the nether world at the base, in the middle earthly plane and on the top heavenly realm. Trivikrama's legs are completely stretched and covers all the three realms, his left feet touches the nether world which is depicted in horizontal rectangle and divided by a frieze. Two figures are depicted in the nether world the one on the proper right side is holding plough in his proper left hand and his proper right hand is aloft touching the proper right feet of Trivikrama. At the back figure's head is covered by multi hooded snake. Similarly the figure on the proper left side is holding plough in his proper left hand and some indistinct object in his proper right hand also the figure's head at the back is covered by multi hooded snake. These figures as it is evident from the multi hooded snake at the back of the figure's head and their placement at the bottom that they belong to the realm of the nether world but plough in their hands bring them close to Ananta form of shesha who resides in the nether world and also Balarāma is manifestation of Ananta. In the centre where the actual scene is depicted

lord Trivikrama is shown measuring the entire universe with his stride and towards his proper left Vāmana is depicted in standing position and in front of Vāmana king Bali is shown seated on a throne while he is granting the land which will be measured by the three steps of the Vāmana. Here Vāmana is shown with parasol. The deity's proper left leg which is stretched upward and reaches up to the heaven is held by Lord Brahmā who is washing his feet on the extreme right corner of the relief sculpture. Brahmā is shown three headed and in terms of size artist has tried to show the hierarchy as Brahmā is bigger in size as compared to the other deities of the heaven. On the basis of the stylistic characteristics the date of c. 8th century CE can be given to his sculpture.

Fountain slab from mohalla Kashmiri, Chamba has depiction of Vāmana incarnation third from the top register (plate 2). He is fourth from proper right and shown in standing position. The deity is two handed, right hand is akimbo and in left hand he is holding parasol. He is wearing dhoti with horizontal striations on it, *vanamālā* and necklace.

Vāmana is depicted atop in a frieze of a Vishṇu image bearing pratihara idiom, from village Jayali, District Shimla. To his proper right a figure probably king Balī is depicted, standing in *tribhaṅga* posture. Hands of the Vāmana are being washed by the King Bali as it is customary to do so before receiving the gift.

The third register from below on the proper right of the wooden facade of the Markula devi temple, represents two handed Vāmana. He is holding parasol in his proper left hand and staff in the proper right hand. The deity is standing on a pedestal in *tribhaṅga* posture. The image is depicted inside a niche with pilasters on the sides and exquisite pattern above.

Himachal Pradesh is dotted with ancient temples throughout the its length and breadth. There are numerous beautiful sculptures of Vishnu that one can see in these temples and the museums of Himachal. Though sculptures of Vamana incarnation, that are known to the scholars so far are invariably depicted as Dashavatara incarnation of Vishnu or part of the *Parikara* or door jambs of the temple. However, these images are beautifully depicted and provide a peep into the virtuosity of the artist as a skilled craftsman. Why there is no independent image of the deity has been found from Himachal is difficult to answer. Probably it is because the Vamana deity was not depicted quite often by the artists in Kashmir whose significant impact can be seen in wider area of Himachal.

ⁱ *Kritaha prasadau hi maya tava devi yathepsitama
Svanshen chaiva te garbhe sambhavishyami kashayapata
Tava garbhe samudabhutasatataste ye tvaratyaha
Tanahama cha hanishyami nivrita bhava nandini
Vamana Purana., chapter 28, verse 10-11*

ⁱⁱ *Tato maseatha dashme kale prasava agate
Ajayata sa govindo bhagavana vamanakrithi
ibid, chapter 30, verse 13*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Sa vamano jati dandi chatri dhritakamandaluha
Sarvadevamayo devo baleradhvaramabhayaghata
ibid, chapter 30, verse 39*

^{iv} *Ityukto daityapatina pritigarbhanvitama vachaha
Praha sasmitagambhirama bhagavana vamanakritiha
Mamagnisharanarthaya dehi rajana padatrayama
Suvarnagramaratnadi tadarthibhyaha pradiyatama
ibid, chapter 31, verse 43-44*

^v *aitachrutva tu gaditama vamanasya mahatmanaha
Vachyamasa vai tasmai vamanaya mahatmane
Panao tu patite toye vamanoabhudavamanha
Sarvadevamayama roopama darshayamasa tatakshanata
ibid, chapter 31, verse 47-48*

^{vi} *jitva lokatrayama tanshcha hatva chasurapanguvana
Purandaraya trailokyama dadau vishnurookramha
ibid, chapter 31, verse 65*

^{vii} *sutalama nama patalamadhasatada vasudhatalata
Baleradattama bhagavata vishnuna prabhavishnuna
ibid, chapter 31, verse 66*

^{viii} *Agni. Purana., chapter 49, verse 5.*

^{ix} *Vishnudharmottara Purana, III, 85, 54-55.*

^x *Vishnudharmottara Purana, III, 85, 55-57.*

^{xi} *Kumari, Veda, The Nilmata Purana, Vol. 1, Srinagar-Jammu 1968, p. 148.*

^{xii} *Rupamandana, chapter 3, verse 26*





Plate 1. Vamana, Vaidyanath temple, Baijnath



Plate 2. Vamana, (1st from left) Fountain stone, Mohalla Kashmiri, Bhuri Singh Museum
Chamba.