

The Saugal-ṭol Temple of Patan

--Mary Shepherd Slusser

Recently appeared a brief paper entitled "A Medieval Nepalese Temple of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa"¹. Since the temple is neither of proven medieval date nor dedicated to Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa the following discussion may be useful. Its purpose is to rectify the date assigned to the temple and to identify and date the remarkable image within².

The temple in question is a small, two-roofed structure of square plan, a typical Nepalese, or Newar, style temple of brick and wood standing at Saugal-ṭol, Patan in the Kathmandu Valley. Although there are inscriptions on stone stelae and on images within the temple precincts, neither these nor any other documents permit us to date the temple to the "early middle age"³, nor certainly to the "Malla Dynasty...from the 11th or 12th century"⁴. The truth is that -- as for most of the more prestigious Nepalese temples -- we simply do not know when this minor shrine was built. Lacking evidence to the contrary -- stylistic or documentary -- one would certainly assign the Saugal-ṭol temple at the earliest to the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the period embracing the large majority of extant architectural monuments in the Kathmandu Valley. It may well be a replacement of a number of preceding shrines which have risen and decayed in the same place, ephemeral and successive shelters of the ancient divinity enshrined within. From documentary evidence we know this to be true for such important sites as Paśupatinātha and Cāṅgu Nārāyaṇa, two of the most venerable foundations in the Kathmandu Valley, each now occupied by a seventeenth century building. This is a well established characteristic of the history of Nepalese architectural monuments and no scholar attributes to the existing temples dates from "the 4th to 10th centuries"⁵.

If the Saugal-ṭol shrine were of eleventh or twelfth century date it would be a treasure indeed. For with the exception of Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa, a sattal, or rest house and temple, to be dated anterior to A.D. 1143⁶, there is no known extant architectural monument in Nepalese style that predates the Malla period⁷.

If the post-Licchavi ("Ṭhakurī") (ca. A.D. 850-1200) architectural monuments are rare, those of the Licchavi period (ca. A.D. 300-850) are even more so. Although it is true that there is a host of inscriptional references to Licchavi architecture -- of which, however, the cited Mānadeva victory inscription is not one⁸ -- we have yet to establish the exact nature of Licchavi buildings. That the Licchavis, even as their descendants, favored more than one temple style is evident. Surface remains, decorative and architectural, point to the popularity of the North Indian stone

śikhara, and inscriptions affirm the existence of temples of brick and wood. This is explicit in a charming reference in the Mātiṅgrāma inscription to a temple whose "bricks had been disturbed and holes formed so that the mongoose chase the mice ... and the timbers ... had become old"⁹. But whether the Licchavi style temple of brick and wood conforms to the latter day Nepalese style temple has yet to be established. Certainly it is unwarranted to say of Licchavi temples that "most of them [were] constructed of brick and wood in the multi-roofed Nepalese style" and that the Saugal-ṭol temple "closely follows the earlier Licchavi type of construction". While it is true that given the remarkable continuum of culture in the Kathmandu Valley the Nepalese style temple may well mirror Licchavi antecedents, this is mere conjecture. It is abundantly clear that the archeologist's spade must be activated and that patient research must preface any generalizations about the exact nature of Licchavi architecture¹⁰.

II

Of far greater interest than the modest Saugal-ṭol shrine of undetermined date is the remarkable image enshrined within (Figs. 1-3)¹¹. Rather than "Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa" or Hari-Hara, a composite image half Śiva, half Viṣṇu. It will be recalled that such syncretic representations which sought to reconcile diverse cults in a single image are common in Indian art from early times. Indeed, it is perhaps on a coin of the Kuṣāṇa king, Huiṣka, that we find the first representation of the Hari-Hara theme¹². It is sculptured in stone at Kutari and still later at Bādāmī where it becomes the fully developed form which was to characterize the Hari-Hara motif into later times¹³. It was also familiar to Licchavi Nepal, as attested by a sixth century inscription which records the consecration of an image of Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa¹⁴. In fully developed images Śiva, the right half, typically wears the distinctive jaṭāmukuta headdress and the serpent earring; he may exhibit the ūrdhvaliṅga; he carries two of his principal cognizances, and he is accompanied by his consort, Pārvatī, and his mount, the bull Nandi. Viṣṇu is represented on the left, the normal position of the female, dictated by his onetime role as Mohini, the beautiful maiden charged with distributing the divine nectar, or amṛta, churned from the cosmic ocean. Typically he wears the tall kirītamukuta headdress, the earring in the form of a makara, carries two of his chief attributes, and is accompanied by his consort, Lakṣmī, and his vahāna, Garuḍa.

In the temple of Saugal-ṭol, however, the Hari-Hara image is represented in a far less developed form, and the two gods are to be distinguished principally by their chief symbols. Śiva holds in his upper hand his emblem par excellence, the trident (triśūla), Viṣṇu in his upper hand the distinctive wheel (cakra). Rather than displaying a second cognizance, Śiva's lower hand is held in the boon bestowing gesture (varada mudrā) but Viṣṇu displays in his the

symbolic conch. What in the photograph appears to be a downturned club, or gadā, Viṣṇu's other distinctive weapon, is actually a sash end.

There is no doubt as to the identity of the critical cognizances, triśūla and cakra¹⁵. The triśūla is a long weapon with three short prongs and the slightly tapering handle (half hidden by Śiva's forward arm) terminates in a carved butt planted firmly on the ground beside the deity (Figs. 2, 3). Although Viṣṇu's cakra is less distinct, one may easily perceive its spokes and, more clearly, Viṣṇu's fingers thrust through them (Fig. 3).

Except for the carefully delineated cognizances, trident, wheel, and conch, the two sides of the image appear to be only slightly differentiated. The earrings, extremely worn, are apparently different and Śiva is ūrdhvaliṅga.

The image is essentially a high relief composition in which the upper portion, freed from the stele and in part summarily modelled on the rear, approaches sculpture in the round. It is a hieratic figure that stands rigidly erect, inflexibly frontal. In contrast to the relatively lean and attenuated hips and chest, the shoulders are broad and rounded, the arms uncommonly thick, and the legs sturdy. The feet are distinctively inclined down a sloping pedestal and the forward arms, awkwardly articulated at the elbow, are held stiffly away from the body. The pendant, boon-bestowing hand of Śiva is disproportionately large and weblike in the undifferentiated carving of the fingers as alternating ridges and grooves. The facial features are totally obliterated by worship and time.

The Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa image is rather simply clothed and ornamented. The most elaborate aspect is the large headdress, extremely deteriorated, from which ribbon-like appendages curve upward to disappear behind the trident and wheel (Figs. 2,3). Massive, lobe-distending earrings (apparently of two types) fall just below the shoulder line. A single strand bead, or rudrakṣa seed, bracelet (kaṅkana) is worn on the forward arms but no other jewelry may be detected on the eroded image.

The torso of the Śaṅkara-Narayaṇa is bare and without the sacred thread. The hips are draped in a short dhoti whose sharply curved, excessively thick, and bracket-shaped hem reveals the knees and falls between them to the ground in stylized folds. A sash is tied at the sides in huge, billowing knots and, like the dhoti, terminates near the ground in a carefully arranged symmetry of folds. A scarf sweeps diagonally up from the divinity's right to hang over the left arm. Like the other garments it, too, falls in stylized folds to the ground. It is this sash end, perfectly balancing the trident's butt at the opposite side, which gives the impression of a downturned club.

Elements of dress -- specifically the crescent ribbons of the headdress, the sash, and the thick dhoti hem -- are schematically carved on the back of the image which can be explored with difficulty in the narrow space between it and the cella wall. Similarly the backs of the arms are also quite carefully modelled.

The exact date of the Saugal-ṭol Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa is unknown. Examination of the roughly cut base reveals the image to be uninscribed and nearby stone inscriptions do not relate to it. Black makes no allusion to the age of the image while D.R. Regmi inexplicably considered that it "must belong to Yaksamalla's reign [A.D. 1428-1482]"¹⁶. It is clear, however, that the Saugal-ṭol Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa may be dated provisionally to the late fifth or early sixth century. Stylistically it presupposes a knowledge of Gupta sculpture although it retains a lingering attachment to Śāka and Kuṣāṇa idioms. But rather than to the Kuṣāṇo-Gupta works of Uttar Pradesh, the Saugal-ṭol image finds its closest analogies with the early sculptures of Eastern India. Two Viṣṇu images from Bengal, one from Hānkraīl¹⁷, the other, Chaitanpur (the well-known "Ābhicārika")¹⁸, are particularly pertinent.

The Saugal-ṭol Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa is one of an impressive series of related images in situ in the Kathmandu Valley. A few of these sculptures, particularly a group representing the Mother Goddesses, have been introduced elsewhere¹⁹. Subsequent field research has established a current inventory of some fifty stylistically related images, male and female, representing diverse divinities of the Hindu pantheon. Among them are more than a dozen standing stone sculptures that share in greater or lesser degree the distinctive characteristics of the Saugal-ṭol Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa. On epigraphic evidence two among them may be dated anterior to A.D. 567. The discussion of these and the related images is deferred to a forthcoming paper that will further place in proper perspective the important image of Saugal-ṭol.

From the foregoing it will be clear that the Saugal-ṭol shrine rather than medieval is merely one of a host of similar structures to be dated roughly to the sixteenth-seventeenth century. By contrast, the image within, not Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa but Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa, is of considerable importance and is to be ranged within a series of related images which provisionally may be dated to the late fifth or early sixth century A.D.

FOOTNOTES

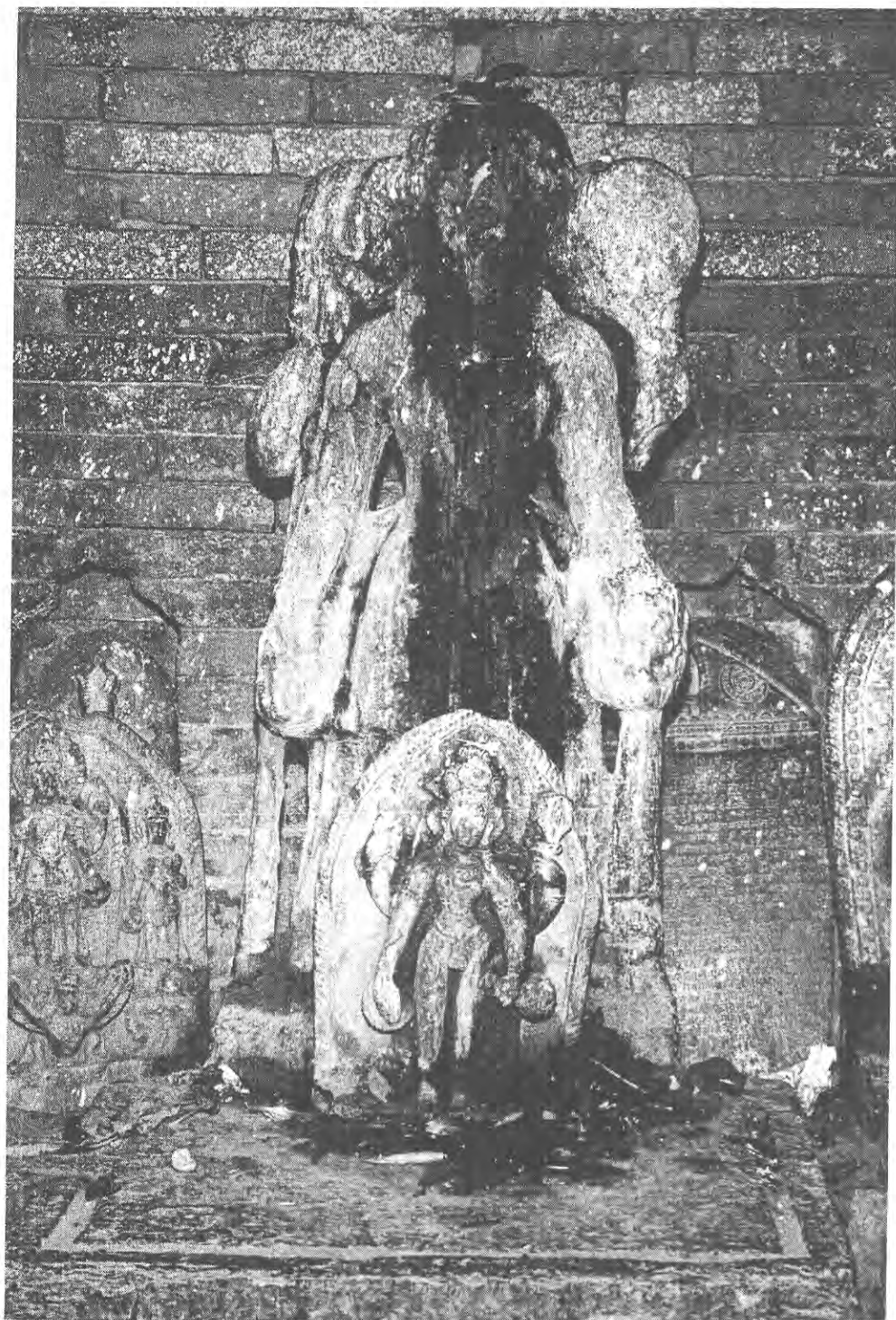
1. Shirley M. Black, Oriental Art n. s., vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer 1972), pp. 163-165. In the following text all quotes without source refer to this citation.
2. The field research which made this contribution possible was financed by a generous grant from The JDR 3rd Fund, New York, to the director and trustees of which I take pleasure in recording my gratitude. I should also like to thank Dr. Pratapaditya Pal, Curator of Indian and Islamic Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, for willingly reading through the manuscript and for his helpful criticism.
3. D. R. Regmi, Medieval Nepal, 4 pts. (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965-1966; Patnā: pt. 4 published by the author 1966), pt. 1, p. 599.
4. Black, op. cit., p. 164.
5. Ibid.
6. Mary Shepherd Slusser et al., "Two Medieval Nepalese Buildings: An Architectural and Cultural Study", Artibus Asiae, in press.
7. The Malla dynasty, of course, did not rule in "the 11th or 12th century" as Black affirms. Malla rule began in the thirteenth century with the advent of the first Malla king, Ari, enthroned sometime in the year A.D. 1200. We do not know the initial date of Arimalla's reign but the last document of his post-Licchavi predecessor, Vijayakāmadeva, is 320 Māgha (January A.D. 1200) and the first of Arimalla is 321 Kārtika, October of the same year (Regmi, Medieval Nepal, pt. 1, pp. 195-196, 207).
8. See Sylvain Lévi, Le Népal, 3 vols. (Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1905, 1908), vol. 3, pp. 10-18 for the transliteration and translation of the inscription.
9. Raniero Gnoli, Nepalese Inscriptions in Gupta Characters, Serie Orientale Roma, vol. 10, Materials for the Study of Nepalese History and Culture, no. 2, 2 pts. (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1956), inscr. 38, p. 53.
10. Apropos of the Licchavis it should be noted that there is no mystery about their system of dating. Saṃvat 386, the date of Mānadeva's Cāngu Nārāyaṇa pillar inscription referred to by Black, is not "thought to fall in the fifth century of the Christian Era". It is a firmly established date of the Śaka Era which, inscribed in the month of Jyeṣṭha, corresponds to the year A. D. 464. On the method of converting the two eras

employed by the Licchavis, Śaka and Aṃśuvarman (or Mānadeva), see R.C. Majumdar, "The Eras of Nepal", Journal of the Asiatic Society (Calcutta, 1959), vol. 1, no.1, pp. 47-49 and Luciano Petech, "The Chronology of the Early Inscriptions of Nepal", East and West n. s., vol. 12, no. 4 (Rome, December 1961), pp. 227-232. Similarly there is no confusion about the post-Licchavi dates that requires clarification by a historian as the Black article suggests. The epoch date of the Nepal Saṃvat corresponds to 20 October A.D. 879 and a simple mathematical calculation (in which the month must also be considered) provides the appropriate Christian Era conversion.

11. Regarding the Surya sculpture outside the temple and the related Surya images referred to by Black, it should be noted that, rather than two, there is only one image dated Nepal Saṃvat 185 (A.D. 1065). The illustrations Black designates as the two Suryas of this date are manifestly the same image. The A.D. 1065 sculpture, now in the collections of the Department of Archeology, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, originated in the sunken fountain of Thāpāhiṭī, not far from Saugal-ṭol where the companion image of A.D. 1083 still stands. Both images have been correctly published by Pratapaditya Pal in The Astral Divinities of Nepal (Benares, 1969), pp. 10-12, Figs. 2, 3 and in "Three Dated Nepali Bronzes and Their Stylistic Significance", Archives of Asian Art vol. 25 (1971-1972), p. 59, Fig. 3.
12. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, The Development of Hindu Iconography, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1956), pp. 123-124, 544.
13. Pramod Chandra, Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum, No. 203, Pl. LXVIIIa; Banerjea, The Development of Hindu Iconography, Pl. XLVI, Fig. 3.
14. Gnoli, inscr. 20, p. 28; Pratapaditya Pal, Vaisnava Iconology in Nepal (Calcutta, 1970), pp. 128-130.
15. Together with my colleague, Mr. Gautamavajra Vajrāchārya, I have made a very thorough study of the image in situ. It presented a formidable challenge since the deity, in worship, is covered with caked vermilion and food offerings as well as with thick deposits of dirt and mold occasioned by the leaking temple roof. Moreover, the upper half of the image is extremely deteriorated while the lower half is normally concealed by a stone image of Mahādeva. Fortunately, we chanced upon the shrine one day when the latter had been pulled from its socket, perhaps in an abortive attempt at thievery since the image lay nearby. Profiting by this circumstance we scrubbed the image with soap and water - a rite almost universally approved by the Nepalese as an appropriate if

unusual way of honoring the gods. It was only after this measure that the spokes of the cakra and other distinctive features of the sculpture became clear.

16. Medieval Nepal, pt. 1, p. 613 Dr. Regmi also incorrectly describes the image, attributing to it symbols and vahānas that are to be expected in Hari-Hara images but that are absent here.
17. S.K. Saraswati, Early Sculptures of Bengal (Calcutta: Sambodhi Publications, 1962), Pl. I, no. 4. The author assigns the image to the fourth century but most scholars prefer a fifth-sixth century date.
18. Banerjea, The Development of Hindu Iconography, Pl. XXVIII, Fig. 2. The image is usually dated to the seventh century but a revised dating to the sixth century was suggested to me by Dr. Pal.
19. Mary Slusser, "Nepali Sculpture - New Discoveries", in Aspects of Indian Art, ed. Pratapaditya Pal (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 93-104. At the time I wrote the above paper the early images were only slowly becoming manifest. While I was not then ready to assign to some of them an early date, subsequent field research leaves no doubt that they should be included within the series of early images.



1. Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa, Saugal-ṭol, Patan as seen in the normal state of worship. H: 36 inches. A late Malla Viṣṇu beside him and Śiva Mahādeva in front recapitulate his dual nature. Photograph by the author.



2. Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa after cleaning. Photograph by the author.



3. Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa, a detail. Photograph by the author.