

ASHVINI AGRAWAL

### An Inscribed Viṣṇu Image from Fatehpur (Kangra)

A brass image of Viṣṇu standing on a pedestal was recovered from the village Fatehpur in the Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh, about 20 miles due west from Kangra town. The village is located on the bank of a small stream called Gaj Khaḍ, a tributary of the Beas. The image (pl. I) was first noticed by Pandit Hiranand Sastri, along with another image of the Buddha, both of which were acquired by the Lahore Museum. The image was published by Vogel (1904-5: 109), who gave a detailed description of the image and read the inscription on its pedestal. At the time of India's partition in 1947, when the antiquities of the Lahore Museum were divided between Pakistan and India, this Viṣṇu image came to India's share but remained unknown for a long time. It was published by Douglas Barrett in 1962 along with a photograph supplied to him by Vogel, but without knowing its whereabouts at that time.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately it came in the possession of the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, where it lies in the reserve collection of the Museum. Bhattacharyya (1981: 54-56, fig. 20) included it in his catalogue of sculptures. Though he has mentioned its find-spot as 'Fathpur', there is no reference to either Vogel or Barrett. In the light of Barrett's remark it is possible that Bhattacharyya could not connect it with the previous publications of the image which shall also account for the unsatisfactory and incomplete reading of the inscription on its pedestal by him. Recently Ohri (1991: 67-68) has discussed the image and has drawn his own conclusions about its date and inscription. We recently examined the image and its inscription in the Chandigarh Museum.<sup>2</sup> Since we find ourselves at variance with the views of the earlier scholars on the subject, we feel it appropriate to dwell upon it afresh.

The brass image is 21.6 cm high including the pedestal.<sup>3</sup> The latter has a

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<sup>1</sup> He clearly remarked that 'It seems to be held neither by the Pakistan nor by the Indian authorities, a photograph given to me by Vogel may therefore be of importance' (Barrett 1962: 43).

<sup>2</sup> We express our thanks to the Director, Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, for permitting us to examine and photograph the image.

<sup>3</sup> Bhattacharyya has given its height as 29.5 cm whereas Vogel correctly measured it as 21.6

sprout on the top left for draining out the water used for bathing the image during the worship. The image depicts four-armed Viṣṇu, standing, facing in *sambhaṅga* posture with a slight graceful bend in legs having a well-formed body of fine appearance. He wears a single necklace around his graceful conch-like neck and *vanamālā* reaching below knees. The *yajñopavīta* over his left shoulder reaches below his navel. He is shown wearing a loincloth, whose folds hang in ornamental style. Flower shaped ear-rings adorn his long ears and on his arms he wears bracelets and armlets. The *kaustubha* jewel is shown on his chest with a silver studding. The eyes too are made of silver. A beautiful *kirīṭa* adorns his head, which has a plain halo behind it. Above the *kirīṭa* on halo is shown the *śiraścakra* in the form of a full-blown lotus. Of his four hands, he holds a lotus in the upper right hand and a conch in the upper left hand. On his right is a female figure in *dvibhaṅga* posture wearing a sari and ornaments and holding a fly-whisk in her up-raised right hand. She is looking upwards towards Viṣṇu, whose right hand rests on the halo above her head. She may be identified as *Gadādevī* the personification of Viṣṇu's mace. On the left of Viṣṇu is *Cakrapuruṣa*, the personification of Viṣṇu's discus, wearing a loin-cloth, the sacred thread and usual ornaments. He too is holding a fly-whisk in his right hand and gazing upwards. His left hand is *kaṭiavalambita*. Between the feet of Viṣṇu is depicted a seated female figure of Bhūdevī.<sup>4</sup>

In the twenty-four forms of Viṣṇu described in the *Rūpamaṅdana*, on the basis of the arrangement of *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gadā* and *padma* in the hands of the god, the present image should be that of Viṣṇu (Rao 1914-16: I/1, 229; Srivastava 2021: 50, 136). The *Padmapurāṇa* also assigns this arrangement to the images of Viṣṇu (cf. Rao 1914-16: I/1, 231). But both of these are very late works and do not conform to the iconography of the image under discussion. However, *Pratimālakṣaṇa* section of the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, which is generally considered a work of the late-Gupta period,<sup>5</sup> gives a detailed description of the iconography of Vāsudeva, which is in complete conformity with the iconography of the present image down to minor details (Rao 1914-16: I/1, 241-43; Bhattacharyya 1991: 240-44). We are, therefore, inclined to identify the image as that of Vāsudeva form of Viṣṇu. This similarity of iconography in the textual description and that of the image may have a strong bearing on the date of the latter.

The *Agnipurāṇa* lays down that the images of Vāsudeva should be flanked by Śrīdevī and Puṣṭidevī carrying a *padma* and a *viṅā* respectively. In the *prabhāmaṅdala* ornamented with the figures of elephants and other ani-

cm. The pedestal measures 4.5 cm.

<sup>4</sup> Vogel (1904-5) identified it as Lakṣmī.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion on the date of the *Pratimālakṣaṇa* see Bhattacharyya (1991: lxvii-lviii) who has assigned it to ca. AD 650.



Standing Viṣṇu image from Fatehpur.  
(Courtesy Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh).



mals, two flying figures of Vidyādhara, each carrying a flower garland, should be sculptured (Rao 1914-16: I/1, 241). However, the present image has none of these features. Both Śrī and Puṣṭi are conspicuous by their absence and in their place we have the figures of Gadādevī and Cakrapuruṣa. By itself, the comparison with textual description may not be very safe to reach a conclusion on the date of this image, but other considerations also lead us to the same conclusion. The lingering traits of the Gupta idiom can still be seen in the serene features of the deity and the *āyudhapuruṣas* besides their well-proportioned bodies. The plain halo of the deity, lack of heavy ornamentation etc., all point to a date which cannot be far removed from the post-Gupta period of the seventh-eighth century.<sup>6</sup> The inscription on the pedestal of the image corroborates this. The palaeography of the characters of this inscription clearly indicates a period close to the eighth century of the Christian era. The inscription bears the date *Samvat 23, Jyestha bati 5*, i.e. the year 23, month of *Jyestha*, the fifth Lunar day of the dark fortnight.<sup>7</sup> Vogel suggested a date later than the sixth century but also remarked that 'The inscription is dated according to the *Saptarishi samvat*, so that we can only say that it corresponds to the year 47 of some century of the Christian era' (Vogel 1904-5: 109). Considering the palaeography of the inscription and the iconography of the image we may assign it to the year 47 of the eighth century, i.e., AD 747, which appears to be the most appropriate date for it.<sup>8</sup>

The most important and equally enigmatic is the two line inscription on the mid-register of the frontal part of the pedestal. It reads:

1. *Sam 23 J[y]eṣṭha bati 5 pra[ti]ṣṭhāpita<sup>9</sup> praśasta Devī m[ā]*

2. *tā<sup>10</sup> bhāryā<sup>11</sup> tathā<sup>12</sup> Śrī<sup>13</sup> Mahādeva.*

Since the wording of the inscription is difficult to comprehend, Ohri has proposed emendations in the second line besides translating it in his own way. He has read *bhāryā* or *bhāriyā* in place of *bhāryā* read by Vogel and has taken it to denote 'a workman who casts images in metal'. He further tries to associate it with the famous artist of Chamba, the maker of great bronzes of Brahmaur and Chhatrarhi in the eighth century, namely Gugga, through a tradition

<sup>6</sup> Barrett (1962: 43) as well as Bhattacharyya (1991: 54) assigned it to the ninth century AD.

<sup>7</sup> Ohri (1991: 67) has translated *bati 5* as 'the 5th lunar day of the bright fortnight'. However, *bati* means dark fortnight. The expression used for bright half of the month is *sudi* or *Śukla*.

<sup>8</sup> Ohri (1991: 68) has also suggested the same date but he does not refer to Vogel's calculations.

<sup>9</sup> Vogel (1904-5: 109), *pra[ti]ṣṭhāpita*.

<sup>10</sup> Vogel (*ibid.*), *ta*.

<sup>11</sup> Ohri (1991: 67), *bhāriyā* or *bhāryā*.

<sup>12</sup> Ohri (*ibid.*), *ṭhaṭhar*.

<sup>13</sup> Vogel (1904-5: 109), *Śrī*.

(Ohri 1991: 68). However, it is not possible to agree with Ohri's suggestion, as we need three letters for the word *bhaṛiyā* whereas there are only two letters in this word. They too are clearly *bha* with a medial vowel *ā* followed by *ryā*. It cannot be read as *bhaṛiyā* by any stretch of imagination.

The next word has been read as *ṭhaṭhara* by Ohri, a reading which is absolutely untenable. For *ṭhaṭhara* we need two exactly similar syllables in the beginning of the word followed by a third one to be read as *ra*. However, the word has only two syllables, the first of which is clearly *ta*. It does not have even the remotest resemblance with *ṭha*, which should be round in shape like a small circle. Further, the second letter again is not round like *ṭha*. Instead it has a line in the centre and a medial vowel *ā* in the end to make it a perfect *thā* of the *Śāradā* script of eighth century AD. The word cannot be read anything but *tathā*.

Not only the reading of the inscription but also the conclusions drawn on its basis by Ohri do not stand a minute's scrutiny. Neither *bhaṛiyā* nor *ṭhaṭhara* occur anywhere in the Sanskrit lexicons or amongst the classes or castes prevalent in ancient India. The learned scholar has not been able to cite even a single instance of their use prior to the seventeenth century AD. None of these terms has ever been used for Gugga in the Chamba inscriptions. The expression used in these inscriptions is invariably *Kṛitam Karmmina Guggena* i.e. 'Made by the artisan Gugga' (Vogel 1911: 142, 144-45). This specific use of the Sanskrit term *Karmmin* for craftsman or artisan completely demolishes the theory based on a tradition of unknown origin, if any, that Gugga was called *bhaṛiyā*. Moreover, the use of two synonyms *bhaṛiyā* and *ṭhaṭhara* for the same person would make the expression meaningless.

With the correction of the reading given by Ohri, its translation suggested by him also becomes redundant.<sup>14</sup> Besides giving the date, the inscription refers to the installation of an image of Devī Mātā, which is rather confusing keeping in view that the image is not of the goddess but of Viṣṇu. Further, what do *bhāryā* and *Mahādeva* mean? Does *Mahādeva* stand for god Śiva and *bhāryā* for his consort Umā or *Mahādeva* is the name of an individual, who was the donor of the image along with his wife? Jagannath Agrawal has taken it in the former sense and has translated the record as 'The year 23, Dark (fortnight) Lunar day 5. The mother-goddess has been consecrated, the wife (of Mahādeva) as also the illustrious god Mahādeva' (Agrawal in press: 295).<sup>15</sup> Though literally correct, this rendering of the inscription does not give a satisfactory meaning. In what context the name of god Mahādeva and his

<sup>14</sup> He has translated it as follows: 'On the fifth lunar day of the bright half, in the month of saṃvat 23. Praśasta Devī Mātā established this image. Ṭhaṭhyār Śrī Mahādeva cast the image' (Ohri 1991: 67).

<sup>15</sup> It may however be noted that Jagannath Agrawal was not able to examine the original image as pointed out by him.

consort is mentioned on an image of Viṣṇu? Secondly it does not refer to the consecration of Viṣṇu but of the mother-goddess, and thirdly the prefix *Śrī* is generally not used before the name of a god. Keeping this in view, we prefer to take Mahādeva and his wife (*bhāryā*) as two individuals who were donors of the image. The reference to the installation of Mother-Goddess in place of Viṣṇu remains unexplained except for a tentative suggestion. It is possible that two images were simultaneously installed, one of Mother-Goddess and the other of Viṣṇu. The engraver of the inscriptions on the two images, either due to mistake or being an illiterate,<sup>16</sup> swapped the script of two inscriptions, hence giving the present one on the image of Viṣṇu. The present inscription, however, may be translated as follows:

‘The year 23, (the month of) Jyeṣṭha, fifth lunar day of the dark fortnight. The (image of) Mother-Goddess has been installed by Śrī Mahādeva and his wife’.

<sup>16</sup>This is also evident from the fact that the inscription is carelessly engraved and has errors. For example, *ya* is missing from *jyeṣṭha* and *ti* is missing from *pratiṣṭhāpita*.

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