

= Vaikuntha Chaturmurti =

Vaikuntha Chaturmurti or Vaikuntha Vishnu is a four @-@ headed aspect of the Hindu god Vishnu , mostly found in Kashmir ( northern part of the Indian subcontinent ) . The icon represents Vishnu as the Supreme Being . He has a human head , a lion head , a boar head and a demonic head . Sometimes , even three @-@ headed aspects of Vishnu where the demonic rear head is dropped are considered to represent Vaikuntha Chaturmurti . Though iconographical treatises describe him to eight @-@ armed , he is often depicted with four . Generally , Vaikuntha Chaturmurti is shown standing but sometimes he is depicted seated on his vahana ( mount ) Garuda .

The concept of a four @-@ headed Vishnu first appears in the Hindu epic Mahabharata , but the complete iconography was first found in a 5th @-@ century Pancharatra text . The icon reflects influences from the Gupta period and the Gandhara architectural tradition . While as per one interpretation , the animal heads represent Vishnu 's avatar Narasimha ( lion @-@ headed man ) and Varaha ( boar ) , another theory based on Pancharatra texts relates the four heads to Chaturvyuha - Vasudeva ( Krishna ) , Samkarshana ( Balarama ) , Pradyumna and Aniruddha - four vyuhas ( manifestations ) of Vishnu . A cult centered on Vaikuntha Chaturmurti developed in Kashmir in the 8 @-@ 12th century , when the deity also enjoyed royal patronage in the region . The Lakshmana Temple of Khajuraho suggests his worship in the Chandela kingdom ( Central India ) in the 10th century .

= = Names = =

The icon is known by various names : Vaikuntha , Vaikunthanatha ( " Lord of Vaikuntha " ) , Chaturmurti ( " four @-@ fold representation " ) , Chaturanana ( " four @-@ faced " ) , Para Vasudeva Narayana , Vishnu Chaturmurti , Vishnu Chaturanana and Vaikuntha Chaturmukhi ( " four @-@ faced Vaikuntha " ) . The Vishnudharmottara Purana calls him Vishnu @-@ Vaikuntha . The icon may be called Chaturvyuha ( " having four vyuhas " ) , when identified with the four manifestations or vyuhas of Vishnu .

Vaikuntha generally refers to Vishnu 's abode , but in the Mahabharata and the Puranas , this term is also used as an epithet of Vishnu . Though no clear etymology of vaikuntha exists , the term is believed to be derived from vi @-@ kuntha , literally meaning " not blunt " . The earliest scriptures like the Vedas , Upanishads and Brahmanas connect the epithet to Indra , the king of the gods and the Supreme god of the era . By the time of the Mahabharata , Vishnu gained the role of Indra and the epithet vaikuntha was transferred to him . The use of vaikuntha in the name also suggests that the form represents the Para ( Ultimate Reality ) form of Vishnu .

The name Chaturmurti also appears in the Vishnu sahasranama ( thousand names of Vishnu ) .

= = Iconography = =

The Pancharatra text Jayakhya @-@ Samhita mentions that Vaikuntha Chaturmurti has four faces : Vaikuntha , Narasimha , Varaha and Kapila and four arms holding the usual attributes of Vishnu : shankha ( conch ) , chakra , gada ( mace ) and padma ( lotus ) . In the Vishnudharmottara Purana , Vaikuntha Chaturmurti is described as having eight arms and four faces , human ( nara - human or saumya - mild or purusha - man ) facing the East ( front ) , lion ( Narasimha - the lion @-@ headed avatar of Vishnu ) on the South ( his right head , left ) , boar ( Varaha - the boar avatar of Vishnu ) on the North ( his left head , right ) and demonic ( kapila or raudra - fierce / wrathful or rakshasa - demon ) facing the west ( rear ) .

In one of earliest Vaikuntha Chaturmurti images dating from the Gupta era - c . 6th century ( now housed in Mathura Museum ) , the positions of the boar and lion heads are reversed , though this is a rare aberration . The central front face may be smiling . Sometimes , the back face may be omitted . The fourth head may be replaced by a horse ( Hayagriva , another avatar of Vishnu ) or a Chakrapurusha ( the personified Sudarshana Chakra - the discus weapon of Vishnu ) . The kapila head may have a moustache , bulging large eyes , a third eye , grinning teeth , fangs , a short chin ,

broad eyebrows and a ferocious , grim or sad expression . His hair are generally tied up in a large knot - a jata ( matted hair ) like a sage ; rarely he may wear a crown .

The name of the fourth head as Kapila is interpreted in two ways . Taking the literal meaning of kapila as red , it is interpreted as meaning fierce or angry . The epithet kapila is associated with the fire god Agni and the solar deity Surya in early canonical texts . Another theory relates to Vishnu 's sage avatar and founder of Samkhya philosophy , Kapila , who is described as having a wrathful nature and cursing the sons of Sagara to turn into ashes for insulting him . The head @-@ dress jatajuta is typical of Brahmin sages like Kapila . The Agni Purana also describes the icon having four heads , without describing the nature of each . The iconographical treatises Aparajitapriccha and the Rupamandana mention that the fourth head is Shri ( Lakshmi - the wife of Vishnu ) and Stri ( female ) respectively , however no sculptures with a fourth female head have been discovered . The back face may be carved on the halo behind the central three heads in low relief or in a space between the halo .

In the iconography of Kashmir , during the 8th and 9th centuries , the gods of Hindu Trimurti - Brahma , Vishnu and Shiva - each are depicted with three heads . In a sculpture displayed in the Metropolitan Art Museum of New York , the four @-@ headed Brahma as well as Shiva are shown with three visible heads . Vishnu is depicted as Vaikuntha Chaturmurti in this configuration , with three visible heads .

Vaikuntha Chaturmurti is generally depicted standing . He wears rich clothes ( generally in sculpture , only a dhoti ) as well as various ornaments like a crown , armbands , necklaces etc . , symbolic of royalty and the yagnopavita ( sacred thread ) . In his eight arms , he is prescribed in the texts to carry gada ( mace ) , sword , arrow and the Sudarshana Chakra in his left hands and shankha ( conch ) , shield , bow and lotus in his right hands . However , in sculpture , he is often four @-@ armed and in two of his hands , he holds a lotus and a conch , while his other hands rest on the heads of his personified weapons ( ayudhapurusha ) - Gadadevi or Gadanari ( gada as a female ) on his right and Chakrapurusha on his left , who stand as small figures besides his legs . They both look upwards towards him and hold fly whisks . A tiny figurine of the earth goddess Prithvi ( who associated with Varaha and Vishnu as his consort ) rises from the pedestal in between his feet , as though supporting the deity . A short dagger or sword may be tucked up in the waist belt of the god near the right hip , a peculiar feature of Kashmir icons . Attendants or devotees may be also shown besides or below Vishnu . Sometimes , Brahma and Shiva and the ten avatars of Vishnu may be depicted in the background .

As prescribed in the Jayakhya @-@ Samhita , Vaikuntha Chaturmurti may be depicted as riding his vehicle ( vahana ) Garuda too , though these images are rarer . In this configuration , the god holds a sword , a lotus , a mace or a conch and the chakra . Generally , on four feathers of Garuda sit four female figures , two on either side of Vaikuntha Chaturmurti . The identity of the female figures is uncertain . They are interpreted as two goddesses ( possibly consorts of Vishnu - Lakshmi and Bhumi ) and two female attendants . The Jayakhya @-@ Samhita mentions that four goddesses Lakshmi , Kirti , Jaya and Maya as the female counterparts of Vaikuntha Chaturmurti . Rarely , Vaikuntha Chaturmurti is accompanied with his consort Lakshmi , who sits on his left thigh . This form is called Lakshmi Vaikuntha in the Jayakhya @-@ Samhita .

In rare instances , true to the textual descriptions , Vaikuntha Chaturmurti is depicted as eight @-@ armed . Examples of these exist in Kandariya Mahadeva Temple , Khajuraho ; Siddhanatha Mahadeva Temple , Sandera , Gujarat and Jhalawar Museum . A ten @-@ armed Vaikuntha Chaturmurti is found at Sasbahu temple , Nagda . A twelve armed Vaikuntha image is categorized as a different form called Ananta by iconographical treatises ; an illustration of the same is found at Lakshana Devi temple , Brahmaur , Chamba . This form is also identified with the Vishvarupa form of Vishnu . Another variant of Vaikuntha image is sixteen @-@ armed and is called Trailokyamohana .

There are some sculptures that synthesize Vaikuntha form with other forms of Vishnu . A 1170 CE sculpture at Chamba depicts Seshasayi Vishnu ( Vishnu reclining on the serpent Shesha ) with the three heads of Vaikuntha form . Another sculpture in Markula Devi Temple , Udaipur combines Trivikrama ( another avatar of Vishnu ) with Vaikuntha 's three heads .

= = Development and symbolism = =

Vaikuntha Chaturmurti first appears in the Mahabharata , where he is known as Murtichatushtaya . Besides the four faces , no details of his iconography are found though . The Jayakhya @-@ Samhita , generally dated to the Gupta period ( c . 5th century CE ) , is the first iconographical reference to Vaikuntha Chaturmurti .

Though three @-@ faced Vishnu images from the Mathura school exist from the Gupta period , not a single four @-@ faced Vaikuntha Chaturmurti from this era is found till day . It is suggested by scholars that the three @-@ faced Vishnu images should be considered as Vaikuntha Chaturmurti too , where the fourth head was dropped by sculptors just for sake of convenience . An alternate theory dates Jayakhya @-@ Samhita to c . 600 @-@ 850 CE and suggests that the three @-@ faced Vishnu images of Gupta era as well as Gupta icons of Vishvarupa ( another form of Vishnu ) inspired the iconography of the Vaikuntha Chaturmurti , which developed in Kashmir in the 8th century and attached the fourth head on the back of the older icon of a three @-@ faced Vishnu . Though popular in Kashmir , the four @-@ headed icon is rarely seen outside of it .

The iconography of Vaikuntha Chaturmurti was influenced by Gandhara architectural tradition , which impacted the iconographic depictions of sculptures of Northwest India , particularly those made in Kashmir . Keeping with the Gandhara style , the body and legs are depicted as strong and sturdy . The muscular body is considered to be inflated with prana ( life @-@ breath ) , an Indian concept . The bow arched eyebrows and lotus shaped eyes are also characteristic of the Indian school of sculpture . The presence of the earth goddess at the feet also reflects Central Asian influence . The ayudhapurushas in the icon may be inspired by those in the Vishnu iconography of Gupta art . They and the earth goddess are also part of traditional Vishnu iconography , even when he is depicted as one @-@ headed .

The central Vishnu head and side heads of Varaha and Narasimha may be influenced by other configurations in architecture . For example , Vishnu , Varaha and Narasimha may be depicted on back ( western ) and side ( northern / southern ) walls of temples . Varaha ( rescues the earth from the cosmic waters at the beginning of an eon ) , Vishnu ( as a human ) and Narasimha ( destroying a demon ) may represent creation , preservation and destruction - the three functions in the Hindu universe . Vaikuntha Chaturmurti represents Vishnu as the Supreme Being , Creator of the Universe . Also , Varaha and Narasimha are oldest in antiquity ( avatars Matsya and Kurma which are described in sacred texts to be appearing before Varaha and Narasimha were associated with Vishnu at a later date ) . Their presence in the iconography of Vaikuntha Chaturmurti suggests that this form originated in the Gupta era , where their cults were at their peak .

Many writers associate the boar and lion heads to the avatars Varaha and Narasimha , others associate with the Chaturvyuhas , however the latter is heavily disputed . The Vishnudharmottara Purana describes the Chaturvyuhas - Vasudeva ( Krishna ) , Samkarshana ( Balarama ) , Pradyumna , Aniruddha - four manifestations of Vishnu . Though the text does not explicitly equate the two forms . Many modern indologists as well as Pancharatra followers associate both of them based on the association of Chaturvyuhas with gunas ( qualities ) in the Vishnudharmottara Purana and the Pancharatra texts . The gunas are in turn associated with Vaikuntha Chaturmurti . The human face is Vasudeva , who symbolizes strength / power ( bala ) ; the lion is Samkarshana , who is knowledge / wisdom ( jnana ) personified ; the demonic form is Pradyumna , who is prosperity / sovereignty ( aishvarya ) and the boar is Aniruddha , the Lord of energy ( shakti ) .

= = Worship = =

The presence of Vaikuntha Chaturmurti found in Kashmir and north West India predating 10th century suggests the worship of Vishnu in this form in the era . The form developed a cult between 8th to 10th century CE . The 12th century chronicle Rajatarangini also mentions about the installation of this form of Vishnu . The icon received royal patronage from King Avantivarman , the founder of Utpala dynasty ( reign : 855 @-@ 883 CE ) ; temples built in his reign often depict

Vaikuntha Chaturmurti . Vaikuntha Chaturmurti became the tutelary deity of the Karkotas and Utpala dynasties of Kashmir . It was also popular in the regions adjoining Kashmir .

The Lakshmana Temple of Khajuraho is dedicated to Vaikuntha Chaturmurti . Though three @-@ faced , an inscription in the temple suggests that it should be considered four @-@ faced . It also records a legend where Kapila and other demons conjoined together in a single form and were blessed by Brahma that only someone in the same form could slay them so Vishnu took the form of Vaikuntha Chaturmurti . The presence of the Lakshmana Temple in Khajuraho suggests worship in the Chandela kingdom in the 10th century .

The Trailokyamohana form of Vishnu was worshipped in Gujarat between 12th to 15th century CE .