

ART & HERITAGE: AN ANCIENT IMAGE AT OUR DOORSTEP

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For those interested in art, architectures, ancient temples and monumental remains, Nepal is an open museum. At every nook and corner there are temples with unique art/ artistic creations to make outsiders wonder as to how they were crafted?

This Chaturmurti image is at the Rastriya Nach Ghar, Jamal, which lies in the heart of the city. Chatur is four, and 'murti' means image or icon. It means four images in one sculpture. Since many centuries, the sculptors of Nepal have been making



Fig 1. The Chaturmurti Image, Rastriya Nach Ghar, 3rd Century A.D.

Chaturmurtis and it continues to this day. This image belongs to the 3rd century AD. It has been sculptured from a single piece of rock that has been withstanding sun, wind, rain, hail, fog, frost. Most of its features have been fragmented and withered with time. Yet its grandeur and uniqueness can be identified despite erosion and fragmentation. This unique piece of Chaturmurti image, does not exist anywhere else, but in Nepal.

The first image is of Brahma (the creator), standing on the lotus Pedestal who is regarded as the source of knowledge and his consort Saraswati is 'knowledge' itself. On its right is the image of Shiva (Fig 2), and towards its right is the image of Vishnu (Fig 3). In between Brahma and Vishnu is the image of Shakti (Fig 4). This Chaturmurti image rests on a single 'Jalahari' water-vessel shaped as pedestal. Some important characteristic feature of this image is that it is made of single sandy rock.

Among the Hindus the 'THREE TRINITY' or 'TRIMURTI' holds an important position, however, in this image; Brahma is given more importance than the others. Vasudeva Saran Agrawal views that Brahma worship existed in India during Mathura and Kushan period. The icon of Brahma was depicted with four heads therefore known as (Chatur-anana), four face, (chatur-mukha),



Fig 2. Siva image of Chaturmurti

eight eared (asta-karna). In his hands he holds four Vedas, or he may hold the Veda in one hand and in other various accessories such as 'jap mala' or prayer beads, 'kamandalu or water pot. He is usually bearded, which symbolizes maturity; and his vehicle is a swan or goose that signifies knowledge. He is always depicted on the lotus springing from Lord Vishnu's navel.

This image at the Rastriya Nachghar is depicted in 'samabhanga mudra' with legs slightly apart, placed upon a lotus flower. Lord Brahma is depicted with four heads that signifies 4 directions. This image depicts only three heads with 'jata' or raised headdress, some portion of this images is eroded. Brahma is shown wearing a dhoti or a simple

cloth tied around his waist. On his neck he wears a single beaded 'mala' or necklace. He is shown with a keyura or armband, bala or wristlet, karana kundala or earring; and is shown holding 'akshayamala' or prayer beads on his right hand, and left hand he is shown with 'kamandalu' or water pot. This is the oldest Brahma image of Nepal. It has a broad shoulder and chest and the shape of the lotus petal are similar to the Mathura style of India. Like any other ancient images of Nepal this image also does not depict 'upavita' or the sacred thread. This is one of the features that distinguish ancient images with the new images.

On the right side of Brahma image is the icon of Shiva shown standing on a small 'padapitha' or the pedestal. He is depicted with four hands, on his ears he wears a kundala (earring), kanthahara (necklace), bala (wristlet). He is also shown with a dhoti or antariya or a cloth tied around his



Fig 3. Vishnu image Chaturmurti



Fig 4. Shakti Image

waist that comes up to his knee. He is depicted with four hands holding 'jal-patra' water-pot or kamandalu, trisul or trident and one hand in varadha mudra or symbol of blessing. This is also one of the oldest image of Shiva in Nepalese art.

On the right side of Siva is the image of Lord Vishnu the 'saviour'. This image is in 'samabhanga mudra with legs slightly apart. It is highly eroded. The face, hand and other frontal portions are highly eroded. He is depicted wearing kundala, (earring), necklace, antariya or dhoti or cloth tied around the waist, it is similar to that of Lord Brahma's image. He is depicted with four hands holding samkha (conch shell), charka (discus), gadha (mace) and one hand in varadha mudra (symbol of blessing).



Chaturmurti, Epatol, Sakhu, 8th-9th century A.D.

On the right side of Siva is the image of Shakti, This image is one of the most artistic creation of its time. This image shows that the sculptors had surpassed excellence. The image depicts a lovely female figure with smiling face. She stands on a small pedestal in a samabhanga posture. She is shown wearing kundal (earring), necklace, 'kalli' or anklet and dhoti a cloth tied around the waist that reaches up to the feet. Like other ancient images of her period her hair-style is similar to Chyasalhiti Gajalaxmi. .

Another Chaturmurti image was made 500 years later in the town of Epatol Sankhu, some 12 miles away from Kathmandu. This image belongs to 8th 9th century AD. This image has Brahma with a single head and

Vishnu with Samkha (conch), Chakra (discus), Gadha (mace), and Padma (lotus). In between them is the image of Ardhanareswara (Hermaphrodite) showing union of Siva & Shakti, prior to this century image of Ardhanareswara had not been made. This image is constructed around a huge 'Shiva linga' placed on a square shaped 'jalahari' (water-vessel shaped pedestal).

Both these Chaturmurti differ in style. The Chaturmurti at Epatol, has the look of ChanguNarayana Viswaroopā' image. This image is more refined. All this shows that as time passed, art, artistic creations also underwent refinement. Despite what maybe, the "Chaturmurti" image at Rastriya Nach Ghar near Jamal is a unique piece of ancient art which has its own grandeur and style.



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