THE DANCING DEITIES OF BHORAMDEV
(AVTARS OF VISHNU AND NATYASHASTRA)

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Bhoramdev is a famous ancient temple which is located in Kabirdham district of Chhattisgarh. This temple is situated in Chauragaon, 18 km from Kabirdham district and 125 km from capital Raipur. This famous temple was built around the eleventh century during the reign of Phani Nagvanshi ruler Gopaldev. Built in Nagara style, this temple is dedicated to Shiva. It is believed that the Gond rulers who ruled in this region were worshipers of Lord Shiva, they worshiped him in the form of Bhoramdev which is a name of Shiva. Probably due to this, the name of this temple was named Bhoramdev. The artistic feature of this temple establishes its similarity with the temple of Khajuraho. Hence it is also known as Khajuraho of Chhattisgarh.

Although this is a Shiva temple, but idols related to Vaishnavism are also seen in the outer walls of this temple. The expressions and postures of these idols are similar to Bharatanatyam dance, an attempt has been made to discuss them in this research paper.

The idols related to Lord Vishnu are found in various forms in the temples of Bhoramdev. These can be described as follows. -

i. Paad-Sthanaka (standing statues)
ii. Asana-Upvishta (Sitting Upwardly Idols)
iii. Mounted on a vehicle-Vahana (Garuda Vahana)

I. LAKSHMI NARAYAN

Vishnu is depicted with Lakshmi at many places in Vaishnava Puranas. The idol of Laxminarayan is placed near the north entrance in the left side of the hall of Bhoramdev temple. In this his vehicle-Vahana is inscribed on Garuda. Narayan is sitting in Lalitasana, his right leg is facing down. Lakshmi ji is also in Lalitasana on the left thigh of the bent leg of Vishnu. His right leg is bent and the left is facing down. Garuda is depicted in flight.

Both Lakshmi Narayan are four-armed, wearing a kirit crown. Vishnu holds a mace and a conch in the right hands respectively and the upper left hand is on the withers touching the back of Goddess Lakshmi, but the other hand is not visible and his eyes are towards Lakshmi. The idol of Laxminarayan is considered to have the characteristics of iconography. Although this statue bears resemblance to the statue of Uma-Maheshwar, but their vehicle-Vahanas are different.

II. AVATAR STATUES OF VISHNU

Various forms of Lord Vishnu are depicted in the temple of Bhoramdev. As the maintainer of the universe, Vishnu has incarnated in the earth in both god and human form. The number of incarnations of Vishnu is mentioned in different Puranas and texts. There are 22 incarnations of Vishnu in Garuda Purana and 10 incarnations in Mahabharata. The images of some of these incarnations are seen in the outer wall of the Bhoramdev temple. These avatars are prominently performed in Bharatanatyam performances.
Narasimha Avatar
The statue of Narasimha is installed on the top of the most niche located on the outer wall of the north side of the temple. It is mentioned in the Vishnudharmottara Purana that Shrihari took the form of Narasimha from the part of Sankarsana – “Harir Sankarsanāṣen Narasimhā Vapuradharah”. This statue is different from the statues of other places - they are inscribed from the cave of the mountain, they are quadrilateral. The conch shell, the chakra are in the back hands and the other two hands are spread ājana (arm length to thigh). He is in Lalitasana (i.e. left leg bent and right hanging down), tongue protruding. This statue can be equated with Narasimha mentioned in Agni Purana.

Vāmana Avatar
This statue is situated in the topmost niche on the outer wall of the west direction. Vāmana form of Vishnu has been conceived on the basis of Vedic texts. To defeat Bali, he took the form of Vāmana to increase the opulence of Indra. This statue of Vāmana is inscribed two-faced. Vāmana’s statue is marked with a gross body, a alms-pot (Begging bowl) in the left hand and a letter in the right. Munjmekhala in the waist and having a huge abdomen. The Yagyopaveet can be clearly seen on the left shoulder.

Ramchandra Avatar
Lord Rama is engraved in a very simple manner in the wall outside the temple. It is situated in the left side of the west direction. The crown on the head (Jatāmukut) is described as a bow on the left shoulder and an arrow in the right hand. The statue appears to be in a moving state because the left leg is in the position of foot deflection. This is the double hand form (Dwibhuji) of Rama. Its marking is similar to the form described in the Agni Purana – “Ramshchāpi Sharikhangii Shankhi Cha Dwibhujasmritah.”
Balarama Avatar

He is the eldest brother of Krishna. Both were sons of Devaki and Vasudeva. When Balarama entered the seventh-order womb of Devaki, Vishnu ordered Yogmaya to pull the womb from Devaki's abdomen and place her in Rohini's abdomen. Due to being dragged, Balarama's name was also Sankarshan. The idol of Balarama in the Bhoramdev temple resembles the form described in the *Vaishnava Puranas*. It is inscribed on the lateral wall of the south direction.

Kundal in the left ear, wearing a Vanmala on neck and a plough in the right hand is adorned. Left hand hanging down.

Krishna (Venugopal Avatar)

The wonderful pastimes of Krishna incarnation of Vishnu have been described in Vishnu Purana. Venugopal is inscribed on the outer wall in the south part of the temple. In his right side Radhaji is depicted listening to Vanshi. ShriKrishna is in tribhangi posture, eyes are blinking. He has a peacock feather on his head and a Vaijayanti garland around his neck. His form matches in the form described in Shrimad Bhagawat.

The marking of specific forms of Vishnu is visible in the temple of Bhoramdev. In the Bharatanatyam dance form, the avatars of Vishnu are presented through various phrases. In the temple, along with the Lakshmi Narayan form of Lord Vishnu, the marking of his avatar statues is seen. In which Narasimha Avatar, Vamana Avatar, Ramchandra Avatar, Balarama Avatar, Krishna Avatar etc. are prominent.
The postures mentioned in the Abhinaya Darpan composed by Acharya Nandikeshwar to represent these incarnations are similar to the postures of these incarnations in the temple. Students of Bharatnatyam style study these verses of Abhinayadarpan and show them by using them. Therefore, it can be clearly said that the idols of Vishnu inscribed in the temple are in the use of Bharatanatyam at that time, performing ‘Dashavatar’ prominently in Bharatanatyam dance.

Apart from this, various pastimes of Lord Shri Ram and Krishna are also performed. The story of Lord Rama's marriage, Shabari episode, Kenwat episode, war with Ravana, deer hunt etc. has been done by accomplished artists of Bharatnatyam style. Similarly, Shri Krishna has got the title of 'Natvar'. His Makhan Chori, Kaliya Daman, Rasleela, Radhakrishna's splendid composition, Ashtapadis are as beautiful as they are in Bharatnatyam in any other dance form.

In ancient times, devadasis used to please them by dancing in front of their favorite deity through these stories. This performance is performed by Bharatanatyam with the same devotion today.

Hand postures have an important place in Bharatanatyam style. Hand gestures are mainly used to express expressions. In the idols inscribed in the temple, both combined and uncombined postures are used in abundance.

Although the size of the idols is small, yet the expressions of the hands are being displayed. The position of the hands in the Dashavatara idols is the same as that of the Dashavatara hands described in the acting mirror. The shlokas and hand gestures spoken in Bharatnatyam dance form follow the tradition of Abhinaya Darpan, so whether Dashavatara idols or other hand gestures inscribed in the temple can be considered as the influence of Bharatanatyam style.

The relation of hand mudras (hastmudra) has been believed from the beginning with spirituality and religion. Bharatanatyam is a dance originating from temples, so there is no doubt that purity and subtlety are seen in its postures.

**III. FORM OF PERFORMANCE OF 'DASHAVATAR' IN BHARATANATYAM DANCE**

![Matsyaavataar](image1.jpg)  
![Koormaavataar](image2.jpg)
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