

***Vaikuntha* – A MASTERPIECE FROM KASHMIR**

R.N.KAW

The best preserved image is actually from Avantipur (Kashmir). As per Kalhana Avantipur town enjoyed sanctity as a holy *tirtha* resorted to by people at the approach of death with the hope of obtaining a heavenly life. The image was photographed by me in 1974 on the verandah of the Gadadhara Temple at Srinagar-Kashmir. The image was retouched thus the photograph is a refashioned. Gadadhar Temple, Srinagar. is situated on the bank of the Jehlum and is one of the most beautiful temples in the country.



Vishnu at Gadadhar Temple, Srinagar- Kashmir

Vaikuntha carved in the round, this image of fine workmanship has four faces: the principal face, with a mark between the eye-brows, is benign and represents Vasudeva-face; the right face is leonine and stands for Sankarshana; the left face is that of a boar and

symbolizes Aniruddha; and the fierce looking Kāpila face with *jatābhāra* on the rear signifies Pradyumna. Of his four hands, the upper right and left carry respectively the stalk of a full blown lotus and a conch-shell, while the corresponding lower hands rest above the heads of Gada-devi and Chakra-purusha, both holding a *chāmara* with their right hand. Between the stretched legs of the image is the upper portion of Prithvi, the Earth-goddess, emerging from the pedestal, with her palms touching the feet of the god. The main image is draped in a *dhotī* held by a belt to which is attached a small sword. A folded scarf encircles the thigh. With the *kaustubha* jewel on the bosom and an *upavīla*, the image is bedecked in a long *vana-mālā*, a beaded *hāra*, *valayas*, armlets, finger rings, flower shaped *kundalas* and a richly-embellished elaborate crown.

Four headed images of this type are called Vaikuntha, Chaturvyūha and Chaturmūrti.

R.N.Kaw

E-Mail : rnkaw@rediffmail.com