CHAPTER SIX

COMPOSITE ICONS

There are two types of composite icons in Nepal, those of Hari-Hara and of Vāsudeva-Kamalajā. The images of Hari-Hara may be said to reflect a syncretic intention, but it is doubtful if the same idea inspired those of Vāsudeva-Kamalajā. On the other hand, they were probably created to emphasize the non-duality of the two divinities. We may thus begin with an explanation of what is precisely implied by the term ‘syncretism’.

The principal sects in India emerged with their distinctive forms by the beginning of the Christian Era, and before the Gupta period the theologians were already busy in attempting to achieve some sort of syncretism between them. The purāṇas and the āgamas are curious admixtures of blatant sectarianism as well as lofty synthesis¹. There are also specific purāṇas such as the Bhaviṣyottara and the Brhadādharma which are decidedly of a non-sectarian character². Ultimately, in the doctrine of the smārta Pañcopāsakas, a total syncretic ideology combines the five principal sects, Gānapatya, Saura, Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava³. Even more than literature the plastic arts afford us with the most tangible evidence for understanding both the sectarian bias and the spirit of fusion that simultaneously prevailed in India throughout her history. While there was constant borrowing and assimilation from one pantheon into another and frequent, if not futile, attempts were made to dislodge the gods of one and replace them with those of another, certain iconographic types were especially created that manifestly display a syncretic intention.

Strictly speaking, by ‘syncretism’ is meant the urge or inclination to combine the ideologies and concepts of the different sects.
Thus, the concept of Hari-Hara is an example of syncretism since Hari and Hara are the principal divinities of two important sects. Further, the concepts of Dattātreya or of Pañcopāsanā are illustrative of multiple syncretism, and were embodied in specific image types. Such images can be said to reflect a conscious effort on the part of some liberal theologians to gloss over the underlying sectarian differences and animosity. In iconographic texts these images, where two or more deities of different sects are portrayed conjointly or with equal emphasis, are classified under such heads as saṅghāta or miśra-mūrtis⁴.

The miśramūrti section of the Śilparatna describes among others forms of both Arddhanāriśvara and Lakṣmī-Nārāyāṇa. In stating that a syncretic spirit is reflected by the concept of Arddhanāriśvara, J. N. Banerjea no doubt assumed that the female half represents the principal goddess of the Śākta sect⁵. It may be pointed out, however, that in the Brāhmaṇical pantheon almost every god is given a female partner, and, Pārvatī or Umā, with whom Śiva is combined to form the image type of Arddhanāriśvara, is really the śakti of Śiva. A parallel example is the composite image of Vāsudeva-Kamalajā, where Kamalajā or Lakṣmī is the consort of Vāsudeva. No doubt, Lakṣmī in her quintessence, as we have discussed in the preceeding chapter, is an important aspect of the Devī or Śakti, although it must be stressed that no exclusive sect evolved around her despite the universal popularity of her cult. If one accepts that the concept of Arddhanāriśvara indicates syncretism between Śaiva and Śākta sects, then the concept of Vāsudeva-Kamalajā should also be illustrative of syncretism between Vaiṣṇava and Śākta sects. But it is doubtful whether such was the intention behind the creation of these composite images. Rather they probably suggest the idea of arddhāṅginī, of an ideal conjugal relationship, or, metaphysically, they may illustrate the belief that the male and the female are but two aspects of the One Principle⁶.

In Nepal, particularly, the spirit of rapprochement and tolerance among the principal sects has been a major factor contributing towards the religious integrity of the people. We have already
mentioned how one of the faces of the liṅga in the temple of Paśupathinātha is considered to be of the Buddha. The Buddhists are permitted to worship the liṅga once a year, and by placing the crown of Akṣobhya at the top of the liṅga, they consider the four faces to belong to the four Tathāgatas. Moreover, the Buddhists worship the Jalaśayana form of Viṣṇu at Budhā Nilkanṭha ās Lokeśvara. Mahākāla is venerated by both Hindus and Buddhists, while Hārīti is considered to be Śitalā by the Hindus. In such instances we are not witnessing ‘syncretism’ in the strictest sense of the term, but a spirit of expansive catholicism illustrative of the Ṛgvedic aphorism that the sages call the One Principle by many names (ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti).

There can be little doubt, however, that to a Hindu in Nepal, when all is said and done, Śiva remains on the loftiest pedestal as the supreme divinity. Thus, in a kalāpustaka that has nothing to do with Śiva but, on the contrary, illustrates Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist myths, the deity painted on the first folio, as an invocation, is Śiva. Or in a painting representing a Vaiṣṇava maṇḍala the top is decorated with a Śiva-liṅga (Fig. 109), or again a liṅga is seen at the apex of the aureole in an image of Viṣṇu (Fig. 102). This same Śaiva inclination probably influenced the form of the curious sculpture in Patan (Fig. 36), where on the four sides of an obelisk, reminiscent vaguely of a liṅga, four identical images of Viṣṇu with Śri-Lakṣmī and his mount Garuḍa are portrayed. Such instances can be multiplied and they must not be misconstrued as necessarily demonstrating a conscious attempt to belittle Viṣṇuism. On the other hand, one also finds that Śiva is portrayed as an accessory figure in a Viṣṇu maṇḍala (Fig. 16), or the covers of a Śivadharma manuscript show on one side Śaiva themes and Vaiṣṇava on the other (Figs. 27-28).

This curious alternation between bias and fusion also characterizes the Nepālamāhātmya section of the Skandapurāṇa, which at times glorifies Śiva and at others Viṣṇu. Many stories in it reveal a definite bias for one or the other divinity while others clearly reflect a syncretic intention. The māhātmya is replete with legends relating the consecration of liṅgas by Viṣṇu, but, curiously, it also declares
that those who see the liṅga established by Kṛṣṇa will attain Viṣṇu's heaven⁹. The same spirit is behind the following declaration by Nemi. ‘Who sees Hari without the form of Hara, and Hara without the form of Hari? He is Vaiṣṇava and He is Śaiva. He who distinguishes between Hari and Hara is a miserable miscreant and a heretic; hell is his destination’. These words of Nemi were heartily approved by Paśupati himself¹⁰. A similar idea was expressed much earlier in the Skandopanisad, where Śiva and Viṣṇu are considered to be each other's soul¹¹. And so a fifteenth century Nepali inscription begins with the following joint invocation: deva devaṁ Maheśānaṁ Viśveśvaram... deva Govindaṁ namāmi Mađhamādhavaṁ...¹².

I ŚAÑKARA-NĀRĀYANA

The cult of Hari-Hara appears to have been quite popular in Nepal judging both from extant images and epigraphs. The earliest instance of the dedication of a Hari-Hara icon is recorded in an inscription of the Licchavi period as we have already mentioned. The inscription states that the image was consecrated by one Svāmīvārtta and the principal name of the composite divinity is given as Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇasvāmi¹³. The image was donated in the year 489 corresponding to 567 A.D., and is as early an instance of the consecration of such an icon as we know in India. Some of the passages in the inscription throw considerable new light on the iconic concept and the underlying symbology.

The fifth line of the inscription states that Svāmīvārtta establishes this image of Bhagavān Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇasvāmi, who is responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of all this world and who is without beginning and indestructible (Śvāmīvārttaḥ sakalabhuvna-sambhavasthitī-pralaya-kāraṇam anādinidhanam bhagavantam Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇasvāminam pratiṣṭhāpitavān/). In the Brāhmaṇical conception the responsibility of creation, preservation and destruction rests on the three godheads of the Trinity, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, respectively. This division of labour is made very definite in the purāṇic literature, while in the epics there seems to have been
some confusion regarding the distribution. Moreover, in the purāṇas, depending upon the bias of the particular purāṇa, often one of the three is said to perform all three functions. A new interpretation evident in this Nepali inscription is that the composite god Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇasvāmī is said to be responsible for the three functions. The same idea is also explicitly stated in another inscription of the sixteenth century. The relevant portion is as follows: om namo Hariharābhyaṁ...devouyoukarunākarau Hari-Harau dharmārtha-kāma-pradāu viśvesou pralayodhava sthitikarau...¹⁴. Not only is Hari-Hara being regarded as responsible for destruction (pralaya), creation (udbhava) and preservation (sthiti), but the divinity is also invoked for dharma, artha and kāma, the three basic pre-requisites for a full life. Here then is a clear enunciation of the monotheistic philosophy of one supreme godhead who performs all the functions of the phenomenal world. The Licchavi inscription continues to describe this composite divinity as the Guru of all the worlds (api ca yo sau sarvātṛihuvanaguruḥ...), as one who upholds the endless universe of many forms (nānārūpaṁ bhuvanam akhilāṁ dhārayate yena), and declares that if he is worshipped with a pure mind that veneration cannot be in vain (cedam tasmin bhaktir na bhavati vrthā suddhacittāśanāṁ).

The actual iconographic form of the composite god is also vividly described in the inscription. It begins with an invocation to Ardhasaurīśvara whose image is styled as being conjoint (ekatra prktau) like that of Madanaripu (a name of Śiva) and Bhvānī, and states that the representation should include both their consorts (Śrīyyugalam) but not in physical union (amithunam). The invocation runs as follows: om patyor nnau paśya he śrīr yyugalam amithunam śulahreccchāṅgupānyor ekaikasyātra kin tan na su-karam anayos tau yad ekatra prktu|mūrtti (m) tya (ktveva) nūnāṁ sakhi Madanaripor evam uktvā bhavāṇyā yo ḍṛṣṭo jātu tasmai satatam iha namo stv arddhasaurīśvarāya|). We will presently discuss whether this description agrees with the image now standing above this inscribed block of stone.

A further iconographic description of the composite form is given
in another passage in the inscription. It is stated that the two halves of Murāriśvara should be distinctly shown, that of Murāri as dark as the autumn clouds and that of Īśvara as white (ity arddhābyāṁ samuparacitam yan Murāriśvarabhyaṁ ekam rūpaṁ šaradijaghana-śyāmagauram tad avyāt). In regular iconographic description Śiva is of course described as fair-complexioned, but it is interesting that in the Viśṇudharmottarapurāṇa Viśṇu's complexion is compared, as in the epigraph, with clouds bearing water: (sajalāmbudasacchāyāṁ pītadivyāmbaraṁ tathā).

In the invocatory passage the composite form of Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇasvāmī is likened to that of Śiva and Bhavānī. It follows obviously that the Arddhanāriśvara images were already well-known in Nepal by the sixth century, although there is no early icon depicting the theme. We have already stated that in the appellation Arddhaśaurīśvara the composer of the passage was probably referring to the vedic Āditya-Viśṇu, as is evident from the explicit use of the term śaura (or saura). The other designation employed in the passage is Śūlabhrccāńgapaṇī, where Śiva is being addressed as Śūlabhr̥ and Viśṇu as Śāṅgapaṇī. It has also been pointed out that ārṅga is the name of the bow with which Viśṇu destroyed the demon Mura, as it is recounted in the Mahābhārata, which incident no doubt led to the usage of the name Śāṅgapaṇī. The name Śūlabhr̥ for Śiva is of epic origin as well; and in the Viśṇudharmaottarapurāṇa he is referred to as Śūlin. Thus, the composer of the inscription has employed a wide variety of synonyms to designate the composite god. Mention has already been made of four such names, viz. Śūlabhrccāńgapaṇī, Arddhaśaurīśvara, Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇasvāmī, and Murāriśvara. Finally, in the last line of the inscription the name employed is Keśava-Śaṅkara (...mūrttim Keśava-Śaṅkarārddharacitāṁ asthāpeyaṁ bhaktītah).

Another epigraphic record standing next to the image, probably of the sixteenth century, describes it as follows: om namo bhagavate śrīŚaṅkara-Nārāyaṇāya|| YatAüşaṃkho-kapāla bhūṣaṇa karau mālāksimālādharaου devvou-dvāravati śmaśānanilayaou någa (gā) rigauvāhanou | dvitryakṣau vali dakṣau yajñā mathanaou śrīŚailajāvalla-
bhau pāparn meharatāṁ sadā Hari-Harau Śrīvatsa-Gaṅgādharau ||
svasti ||

The attributes held by Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa are kapāla, aksamālā, and śaṅkha. The scull-cup (kapāla) and the rosary (aksamālā) no doubt belong to Śiva, while only the conch (śaṅkha) is mentioned as Viṣṇu's attribute. Perhaps, the first mātā of the expression mālāksimālādharau has been used in a synonymous sense to denote cakra. The two vāhanas are here curiously referred to as nāga (gā) rī, the enemy of the serpents (nāga + arī), who is no other than Garuḍa and the other as go. Śiva's vāhana is the bull Nandi, and the term go normally signifies a cow, but here it has apparently been used as a generic term implying the species 'cattle'. The same word has again been used in another inscription. Śiva is described as the destroyer of the sacrifice of Dakṣa and is called Śailajāvallabha, the beloved of the daughter of Śaila. The composer has used. apart from Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa, two other appellations for the composite god, the common Hari-Hara and the less usual Śrīvatsa-Gaṅgādharā.

The image that now stands on the inscribed pedestal in the courtyard of a house in Deo Patan (Fig. 103) can by no means be the same as that consecrated in the sixth century by Svāmīvārtta. We know, however, that the shrine must still have been in situ, probably with the original image, in the sixteenth century. Stylistically as well the present image cannot be placed earlier than the sixteenth, and hence this is possibly a replacement, when the original was destroyed, perhaps due to some natural calamity, in more recent times. This also becomes evident if we compare the extant image with the descriptions of the original given in the two inscriptions.

In the sculpture now seen (Fig. 103) the composite god stands in samapadasthānaka on a pedestal decorated with an ornate floral scroll. The only means of distinguishing the two halves are the attributes in the hands and the head-dress. That the right half represents Śiva is evident from the trident and the rosary, held by the two right hands, and the jaṭāmukuta on the right side of the head. There also appears to be a sarpakuṇḍala in the right ear, while the left ear is adorned with the śaṅkhapatra and the ratnakuṇḍala. The
left half of the head wears an elaborate kūṭamukūṭa, as befitting Viṣṇu, and the two left arms hold the discus and the conch. Otherwise the figure is clad and ornamented exactly as any other conventional icon of Viṣṇu, such as that now in Deo Patan (Fig. 30). The entire figure is carved fully in the round except for the prabhā behind the head. A larger aureole, as ornately decorated as the smaller prabhā with flamboyant arabesques and flame designs, imbues the sculpture with a decidedly ‘rococo’ flavour. The composite god is flanked on either side by their respective consorts, as it is described in the text of the dedicatory inscription. The female on the right, the half that belongs to Śiva, is naturally Pārvatī. She holds in her left hand a mirror and the right displays the varada-mudrā while holding a vijapuraka. She stands on a pedestal which is decorated with geometric shapes, no doubt a stylization of the rock forms of earlier sculptures indicating her association with the mountains. The female on the left, the half that represents Viṣṇu, bears in her left hand a lotus, while the right displays the abhayamudrā as it holds the śrīphala. She is naturally Śri-Lakṣmī and appropriately she stands on a double lotus pedestal.

According to Svāmīvārtta’s inscription the image should be conjoint and should also show the two consorts separately. A more detailed description occurs in the sixteenth century epigraph, presuming, of course, that the reference is to Svāmīvārtta’s image. Here we are told that the two halves should carry in the hands the scull-cup, the rosary, the conch and the discus (?). In the present image, however, instead of the scull-cup we see a trident as is found in another icon in Patan (Fig. 105). The inscription further implies that the two mounts were present but these do not occur in the sculpture now standing at the site. Nevertheless, true to the sixth century inscription, the two consorts have been included. It would thus appear that the present icon is a fairly close imitation of the original; at the same time, the copyist has changed not only a few iconographic features, but has also added certain stylistic elements that must have been prevalent during the period. Even so the sculpture remains a good example for demonstrating how an iconic type can persist in Nepal for centuries and carry with it stylistic traits in a
copy that may be removed from the original by at least a millennium. This tenacity often creates almost insoluble art-historical problems, particularly in any attempt to establish a firm chronology of Nepali sculpture.

A somewhat different and an earlier icon of Hari-Hara may be seen outside the temple of Kumbheśvara at Patan (Fig. 104). Despite its effaced and white-washed condition, it remains a fine example of medieval Nepali sculpture and has more figures than the Deo-Patan image. In the centre is the composite figure of Hari-Hara, the right half being of Hara and the left of Hari. As in the other image the two right hands hold the *trisula* and the *akṣamālā*, while the two left hands bear the *cakra* and the *śaṅkha*. It is noteworthy that the design of the *trisula* is identical in both stele. Because of the unfortunate lime-wash the difference in the crown is not noticeable, but the rest of the body appears to have been treated in a similar fashion in both halves. The two females immediately flanking Hari-Hara are Pārvatī to his right, the attributes in her hands not being clearly discernible (that on the right appearing to be in *varadamudrā*), and Lakṣmī beside the Viṣṇu-half, her left hand carrying a lotus and the right displaying the *varadamudrā*. The male figure showing the *namaskāramudrā* and with his wings falling from his shoulders like a cape is no doubt Garuḍa. On Pārvatī’s left, however, is a female figure holding a bowl in her left hand behind whom is the faint outline of the bull. She is probably a companion of the goddess, while the bull obviously is Śiva’s mount, Nandi.

A cursory comparison between these two steles and that of Viṣṇu from Deo-Patan (Fig. 30) reveals emphatically how a stock iconographic and compositional arrangement was applied with equal facility for the portrayal of divinities belonging to different sects. The same artist was often called upon to delineate an icon of Śiva or of Viṣṇu or of a Buddhist divinity, and it was inevitable that the same stylistic elements and similar canons of proportions would be employed without any reservation. In SvāmiVārta’s inscription the artist is explicitly instructed that the composite form of Hari-Hara should be like that of Arddhanārīśvara images. We will see in the
following section how the artist also utilized this type of image to portray the composite form of Vāsudeva and Lakṣmi. This fluid character of the style as well as of iconic types was in itself an important factor in achieving a semblance of uniformity in the diverse manifestation of the divinities and was conducive to fostering a spirit of tolerance among the devotees. It is indeed very likely, as Herbert Read has boldly asserted, that the idea does not always precede the icon, but often the icon contributes significantly towards the formulation of an idea.¹⁰

Another image (Fig. 106), now in a private collection in New York, shows the composite god standing without the consorts or the mounts. Its ornateness, with its richly carved aureole, is comparable with the Deo Patan icon (Fig. 103). The attributes are the same as those in the two images already discussed. The two halves, however, are more clearly distinguished; the chignon, the sarpakūṇḍala and the animal skin adorning Śiva, while Viṣṇu is given the kīrtīta, the ratnakūṇḍala and a printed dhoti. Curiously, the sarpahāra and the vanamālā are common to both halves. It seems clear that the same prototype, probably Svāmivārtta’s original image, continued to be employed at different periods with minor modifications.

A substantially different form of Hari-Hara may be seen in another sculpture fixed in a niche on a temple wall in Kathmandu (Fig. 105). The principal divinity stands in samapadasthānaka on a lotus and is eight-armed. The left half, that of Hari, is distinguished by half a kīrtamukuta, and a circular kuṇḍala in the ear. While the vanamālā on this half is composed of overlapping flowers, on the other half it consists of a broad pearl string interspersed with pear-lined discs. The right half, that of Hara, is distinguished by the jaṭāmukuta and sarpakūṇḍala. Otherwise the garment and ornamentation are same in both halves. The four left hands carry the four usual Vaiṣṇava attributes: mace, conch, discus and lotus. The four right hands display the trident, the rosary, the rattle-drum (damaru) and, curiously, the bow and arrow in the lowest hand. Although the bow and arrow are not commonly found in Śiva’s hand, in certain forms such as that of Śrīkanṭha, Trambayaka or
Bahurūpa-Sadāsiva he is said to carry them. Two females, representing no doubt the two consorts, Pārvatī and Śrī-Lakṣmī, stand at a lower level on either side. They bear no ostensible symbols, but their hands display the varada and the abhaya gestures. What really reflects the ingenuity of the artist is the manner of depicting the mount on whose back the composite god stands. Once more the artist has emphasized the ‘syncretic’ character by combining the bull and Garuḍa in one hybrid form. The left half is of Garuḍa, who is crowned and whose human arm stretches in alignment with the sweeping wing. The right half is of the bull, indicated by his horns and the foreleg with the hoof outstretched along the other wing of Garuḍa. It is this composite animal that flies through the air as it bears on its back the conjoint divinity Hari-Hara. Here again is a feature that is not only peculiar to Nepal, since we know of no similar examples in India, but which also reflects the individual idiosyncrasy of the artist. Nor are we informed of any representation in India, where Hari-Hara is accompanied by Pārvatī and Śrī-Lakṣmī, although the form is described in the Agnipurāṇa. This is yet another instance of an iconic type that is no longer known in India and the idea of combining the forms of the mounts to emphasize further the syncretic spirit may have been due entirely to the ingenuity of the Nepali artist.

II VĀSUDEVA - KAMALAJĀ

( i )

We have seen that from the very beginning of Vaiṣṇava art in Nepal, viz. the two inscribed images of Viṣṇu vikrānta consecrated by Mānadeva, Śrī Lakṣmī is almost an invariable and inseparable companion of Viṣṇu. It has also been mentioned that in Mānadeva’s Chaṅgu Nārāyaṇā pillar inscription his mother Rājyavatī is once compared with Lakṣmī and again she is described as an ardent devotee of Śrī. Of course, by this time, i.e. the fifth century of the Christian Era, the concepts of Śrī and Lakṣmī had already merged, and Śrī-Lakṣmī was generally personified as a beautiful female holding a lotus. This is how she is portrayed in the two fifth century reliefs of Viṣṇu vikrānta (Figs. 7–8).
Both the concepts of Śrī and Lakṣmī are embedded in the śrīsukta of the Ṛgveda, but generally they remain separate entities in vedic literature. Although in the upaniṣads the two concepts appear to merge together, a vagueness is still apparent in the Mahābhārata where the fortunes of Śrī-Lakṣmī seem to vacillate. While in the story of the Churning of the Ocean, which is also recounted at greater length in the purāṇas, she emerges from the ocean and is taken by Viṣṇu, in other passages, not inappropriately, Lakṣmī is associated with Kubera, the god of riches. Yet, in another section of the great epic, we are informed that Lakṣmī came to the gods and Alakṣmī fell to the share of the asuras. In the Rāmāyana as well the two concepts are not quite completely fused, for Śrī is styled as aśvānirvarṣadhānā and Lakṣmī as saubhāgyapradhānā. It is, however, not difficult to see that at some stage the distinction should disappear inevitably, for ‘wealth and prosperity’ (śrī) cannot be achieved without ‘fortune’ (lakṣmī).

No commentary is necessary to explain why this goddess should enjoy universal popularity or for the pervasiveness of her cult. At the same time, no major sect, in the same sense that Viṣṇuism and Śivaism are sects, evolved around Śrī-Lakṣmī. No temple was essential for her worship for she was primarily a domestic deity, her function assuring her of a permanent place in the home. This is why, among all the major cult divinities, the concept of Śrī-Lakṣmī accumulated maximum appendages from various folk lores and beliefs and from rites and rituals that are essentially of a bucolic and agrarian character. In Nepal also she is worshipped as a household deity and, as we have seen, as a constant companion of Viṣṇu. It is not insignificant that, on assuming power, the first temple to which Amśuvarman made a donation was to that of Śrīdevi. There must therefore have been a separate temple of Śrīdevi as early as the seventh century. It may be pointed out here that there is a large number of images, both in stone and in metal, of a female bearing a lotus in her left hand and the right hand displaying the varadamudrā as well as holding a round object. This is also the iconography of the simplest form of Tārā, the consort of Avalokiteśvara, which makes it difficult to distinguish the two in such icons, unless they are
portrayed in specific contexts.

Notwithstanding the fact that she is always seen accompanying Viśṇu, a type of image is found where the two divinities are delineated in a composite manner. A large number of such images, both in sculpture and in painting, are known, and here we shall illustrate and discuss only three of them. This proliferation of such icons attests the popularity of the concept, and, although the type is described in Indian liturgical texts, no plastic representation there has yet come to light. Once again this demonstrates how the study of Nepali iconography helps to illuminate many religious ideas that are no longer familiar in India.

(ii)

The earliest known example, where the conjoint form is depicted, is a thirteenth century sculpture in Kathmandu. The form of the principal image in that stele is identical to the metal icon, illustrated here (Fig. 107), and now in the Museum fur Volkerkunde in Basel, or to another stone sculpture standing in a niche in the Darbar square at Kathmandu (Fig. 108). The thirteenth century sculpture, in addition to the figure of Vāsudeva-Kamalajā, shows on its aureole twelve of the twenty-four emanatory forms of Viśṇu. The following description of the metal icon will apply generally to the two lithic representations.

On a double lotus pedestal the deity stands in samapada posture. The right half of the figure is male and the left female as found in the images of Arddhanārīśvara. Except for the prominent breast on the left of the naked torso, there is no other significant difference in the modelling of either half. In contrast to the plain diaphanous garment clinging to the right leg, the left is draped in one with a floral design. Parts of the garment overhang in stylized folds on either side and between the legs. Of the ornaments, the diadem, the necklace and the waist-band are common to both halves, and both feet bear anklelets of similar design. The right ear is adorned with a kunḍala and each of the arms bears an āṅgada; the left ear has a large ring, and the arms display ornaments different from those on
the right. The ornaments must once have been set with semi-
precious stones which no longer exist.

Of the eight hands, three on the right carry a cakra (discus), gada (mace) and śanikha (conch), while the palm of the fourth bears a lotusmark. One of the four left hands is broken, but the remaining three bear a pustaka (manuscript), a darpana (mirror) and a kalaśa (pot). The damaged hand obviously held a lotus as we see in the examples in stone or in the painted version (Fig. 109). The attributes in the four right hands of the male half of the figure make his identity with Viṣṇu quite certain. Naturally, the left half represents his consort Lakṣmī.

An admirable representation of such a composite conception of Lakṣmī-Vāsudeva occurs also in a paṭa (Fig. 109), now in the collection of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. The painting has an inscription which reveals the date 383 (?), presumably of the Newari era, corresponding to A.D. 1263. Here the composite deity presides over an elaborate maṇḍala of several divinities.

The central figure of the maṇḍala is white and stands in sama-
pada posture on a double lotus pedestal within an elaborate shrine. The arch or torana of the shrine presents a beautiful design of stylized makaras, ornate floral and scroll motif, geese and a gaping kirttimukha dominating the apex. As in the metal image, the right half is male and the left female, the feminine breast being indicated by a large circle. Likewise only ornaments decorate the otherwise naked upper portion of the body. The right leg is draped only to the knee, while the left is covered down to the ankle. The garment is brightly painted in vivid red, blue and green, and the folds overhang on either side and between the legs, as in the metal image. Near the right foot is Garuḍa and next to the left a kūrmā or a tortoise. The attributes in the eight hands are quite clearly discernible. Those in the four right hands are the discus, the conch, the mace and the lotus; and in the left hands are the manuscript, the lotus, the mirror and the water-pot.
Apart from the two attendant figures on either side of the principal divinity, forty-eight others constitute the maṇḍala. Among these are the dvādaśarāsis or the twelve signs of the zodiac, the aṣṭadikpālas or the guardians of the eight quarters, the navagrahas or the nine planets, twelve different emanations of the vyūha aspect of Viṣṇu and seven other miscellaneous Brāhmaṇical divinities. Of these seven, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya are easily recognized. Besides, there are representations of a liṅga, of Umā-Maheśvara and of Bhairava.

At the bottom of the painting, just above the inscription, is a panel divided into five sections. In the section on the extreme left, a priest with his assistant is seen offering libations in the fire, and in the next a man is being anointed with water. In the centre a woman dances with what appears to be a sword in her right hand, and in the next section two seated women are engaged in conversation. To the far right are two couples with enjoined palms, evidently representing the donors. Similar scenes of homa are also commonly depicted in Buddhist paintings; the person who is being anointed in the ritual of initiation (dikṣā) is no doubt the donor himself.

A slightly different form of this composite divinity is described in a dedicatory inscription of a mutilated image in Bhatgaon. It invokes the deity as follows: Om namo Vāsudevāya // cakra-śaikha-gadā-mañiṁ ... (a)bjavara-da-rapanomṛtaghaṭa ... kara (?) ... Lakṣmi-Keśava sarvvaloka namitā dhārmābhakāmaprad bhaṅtopnāṁ vaṛada-yakāḥ muṟāri...ntakaḥ pātuvaḥ // svasti // Regmi identifies the image as Vāsudeva, but it is clear from the invocation that the deity is composite in character, not only because it is stated that Lakṣmi-Keśava is worshipped by all the world or people (sarvvaloka namitā), but also because of the eight arms, four of which display the attributes of Lakṣmi, viz. the lotus, the mirror, the pot of nectar and the varadamudrā. The mirror is essentially a feminine attribute, and the only deviation from the other images discussed, as far as Lakṣmi is concerned, appears to be in the substitution of the varadamudrā for the manuscript. Vāsudeva has the three usual
attributes, the conch, the discus and the mace, while the round object, usually signifying the seed of the lotus (padmavāja), is probably described here as a jewel (maṇī). Both the jewel and the varadamudrā are quite in keeping with the invocation, where Lākṣmī-Keśava is said to grant (varadayakaḥ) to the devotee (bhaktānāṁ) dharma, artha and kāma.

Although no such image has yet come to light in India, there are many literary descriptions of the form attesting the popularity of the concept. Descriptions of this form occur in the Sāradātilaka, the Tantrasāra, and in the Śilparatna of Śrī Kumāra. As these descriptions are more of less all alike only the dhyāna in the Tantrasāra** will be given here as a typical example. The mantra is devoted to Lākṣmī-Vāsudeva, and it begins: māyādvayāṁ ramaṇāvayāṁ Lākṣmī-Vāsudevāya namaḥ. The dhyāna is as follows:

vidyuccandranibham vapuḥ Kamalajāvaikuṇṭhayor-ekatāṁ
prāptam sneharasena ratnavulisadbhūṣābhharālāṅkṛtam /
vidyāpankajadarpanān maṇimayaṁ kumbham sarojaṁ gadāṁ,
śaṅkhāṁ cakramamūṁ vibhrad-āmitāṁ diśyācchi yan vah sadā //

The body of Kamalajā, bright as the lightning, and that of Vaikuṇṭha, bright as the moon, have been united in love; it is ornamented with various jewels. The goddess carries vidyā (knowledge), paṇkaja (lotus), darpana (mirror) and kumbha (vase) filled with jewels, while the god has saroja (lotus), gadā (mace), śaṅkha (conch) and cakra (discus) in his hands. Let this deity grant you infinite wealth and well-being’.

It is obvious from the first line of the dhyāna that in this particular conception the two bodies of Vāsudeva and Lākṣmī become one in their mutual love for each other. In transforming this concept into tangible form, the artist had little difficulty in devising the composite image, the well-known icons of Arddhanārīśvara providing ready models. It may be recalled that in the inscription describing the form of Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇasvāmī it is explicitly stated that the image should be visualized as that seen in Śiva-Bhavānī icons of a composite character. The same injunction
is given to the artist by the commentator of the Sāradātilaka:
vidyād iti | ekatām iti dehārdhavibhāgena |

A similar dhyāna is also included in the inscription below the painting: Oṁ namo bhagavate Vāsudevāya // himakaŋḍendusadṛṣṭam
padmakau modakipunah śaṅkhaacakradharanān daṇḍa (dakṣe) vāmeca
kalasam tathā // darpaṇān utpalam vidyā Vaiṣṇavam Kamalānvitam //
pātu daiya nirākāra trāhinām Puruṣottomamaḥ //

This dhyāna is substantially the same as that quoted from the
Tantrasāra. The expression Vaiṣṇavam Kamalānvitam clearly indicates
the composite form of Viṣṇu and Kamalā, which is another name of
Lakṣmī. We also learn that in this particular form Lakṣmī is known
as Kamalajā or Kamalā.

(iii)

The concept of dualism (Puruṣa and Prakṛti) originated in the
Śāmkhya system and profoundly influenced the later Buddhist notion
of Upāya and Prajñā. This led to the universal belief that each
divinity has a female companion, known as Śakti in the Brāhmaṇical
and as Prajñā in the Buddhist traditions. Then, as a monistic gloss,
these dual principles were expressed in such composite forms as
Ardhāraṃśvara, or in those images in Buddhism, where we find
divine couples in sexual embrace. In Viṣṇuism the basic idea is
already elaborated in the Pāñcarātra samhitās. In describing
the higher or 'pure' creation the Ahirbudhnyasanāhitā states that in the
eighth part of the cosmic night (pauruṣī rātri), the Śakti of Viṣṇu,
awakened by His command, 'opens her eyes' (unmesa). The
samāhitā further explains this phenomenon: Śakti, which was so far
indistinguishable from the "windless atmosphere", or "motionless
ocean" of the Absolute, existing only as it were in a form of
"darkness" or "emptiness", suddenly, "by some independent resolve"
(kasmaccit svatantrayat), flashes up, with an infinitely small part of
herself, in her dual aspect of kriyā (acting) and bhūti (becoming), that
is Force and Matter.

As Schrader has averred the dualism implied in the Ahirbudhnya-
*Samhita* is merely a temporary arrangement to emphasize the transcendent character of Viṣṇu⁷⁸. Although Lakṣmī acts alone, all her actions are according to her Lord’s desire. As a matter of fact, despite the assertions of the identity of Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu, ‘they do not completely coalesce but become only “as it were” a single principle⁷⁹’. What is of even greater interest to us is that, in the *Lakṣmītantra*, the mutual relation of the two is said to be one of ‘inseparable connection or inherence’ (*avinābhāva, samanvaya*), and, as an analogy, is suggested the relation between moonshine and moon or sunshine and sun or *dharma* and *dharman*⁸⁰. The concept of *samanvaya*, inherence or synthesis, is also implicit in the expression *vaiṣṇava kamalānvitam* of the inscription on the paṭa. It is further stated in the *Ahirbudhnyasaṁhitā* that the six Guṇas in their totality constitute the body of Vāsudeva (*ṣaḍguṇa-vigraham devam*) and also that of Lakṣmī, ‘in the same way that these two are constantly seen by the free souls inhabiting the Highest Space⁸¹.

Thus, there can be little doubt that the ideological basis for the composite divinity Lakṣmī-Vāsudeva is already inherent in the Pāṇcarātra literature, of which the *Ahirbudhnyasaṁhitā* almost certainly goes back to the ninth century. That the conception had an esoteric flavour is evident from the *dhyānas* included in tāntric texts, and the Pāṇcarātra saṁhitās are themselves permeated with tāntric elements. Of particular interest are the expressions *vidyuccandranibham vapuh Kamalajā-Vaikuṇṭhayorekatārin prāptam sneharasena* of the *Tantrasāra*. The allusion to lightning (*vidyut*) reminds us of the passage in the *Ahirbudhnyasaṁhitā* where the opening of the eyes of Viṣṇu’s Śakti is compared with the flash of lightning⁴⁰. But of greater significance is the use of the term *sneharasena*, which seems to reflect the basic tenet of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā cult. Affection (*sneha*) or love is the fundamental factor that has brought about the unity of the two bodies of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. This appears to be quite different from the cosmic unity or non-duality of Puruṣa and Śakti as declared by the Pāṇcarātrins. It is not known when exactly the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā cult originated, but we do know that it was consi-
derably influenced by the Buddhist Sahajiyā ideology and was already familiar by the twelfth century\textsuperscript{41}. The central figures of the Vaishnava Sahajiyā cult are Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, and the Bhāgavata-
purāṇa, a work of the ninth or tenth century, makes no mention of Rādhā\textsuperscript{42}. The earliest text to emphasize the amorous nature of the relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, who are only the manifestations of Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu, is the Gītāgovinda of Jayadeva, who flourished in the twelfth century. It is, perhaps, not fortuitous that all composite icons of Vāsudeva-Kamalajā in Nepal seem to be posterior to this date.

As we have already suggested the iconic type may have been influenced by the better-known and older representations of Arddhanāriśvara. As a matter of fact, in the Sāradātilaka the form is labelled ‘Arddhalakṣmīhari’, and it is further stated that the image should be made like that of Arddhanāriśvara\textsuperscript{43}. Thus, like the Arddhanāriśvara images, those of Lakṣmī-Vāsudeva or Vāsudeva-Kamalajā may also be said to reflect the idea of non-duality. At the same time, it must be remembered that in the two inscriptions quoted above only Vāsudeva has been invoked at the very beginning, thus emphasizing the Pāñcarātra standpoint that Lakṣmī is only a part of Vāsudeva, although the active part. While she comes forth following his wishes, ultimately she is dissolved in him\textsuperscript{44}.

(iv)

Certain other traits appear to be peculiar to this conception of Lakṣmī. Of her attributes the lotus is of course well-known. The kalaśa or the pot is also a familiar symbol, and once, very appropriately, it has been described as the pot containing jewels, and again, in the Bhatgaon inscription, as the pot containing nectar (amṛta-ghata). She is of course the dispenser of both wealth and health. The mirror and the manuscript are apparently uncommon, although the mirror is not an altogether unusual or inapposite attribute. We have already seen that in a fifteenth century painting (Fig. 50) she carries the mirror on a lotus. It is frequently associated with many a form of Devī, and, in her quintessence, Lakṣmī is after
all a manifestation of Devī. This is already suggested by the use of the same appellation śrī to denote the consorts of both Śiva and Viṣṇu in the sixth century dedicatory inscription of Svāmīvārtta⁴⁵; and in the image itself we notice that Pārvatī holds the mirror with her left hand (Fig. 103).

The manuscript no doubt symbolizes her jñāna aspect and signifies the expansion of her conception as gnosis. Although in an image of Lakṣmī, now in the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, we find the manuscript as one of her attributes it is not a commonly seen emblem of the goddess. In the Brāhmapical pantheon Sarasvatī is the specific goddess of knowledge, but, in course of time, all the major divinities, including Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī⁴⁷ and others, came to be associated with knowledge or intellect. A parallel development was taking place in the Mahāyāna pantheon as well. Similarly, in the case of Lakṣmī over the basic concepts of fertility, abundance and wealth, that of gnosia was finally superimposed.

In the Ahirbudhyasamhitā we are told that at the command of Viṣṇu his Śakti or Lakṣmī manifests herself in dual aspects, kriyā and bhūti. The first phase of these manifestational aspects is known as sūddhāspṛṣṭi or pure creation, and in it ‘through the three pairs of what are called the Six Gunas (śādgunya), to wit : knowledge, Lordship, Power, etc. does the Pure Creation of (His) becoming take place⁴⁸. The principal guṇa or quality is jñāna or knowledge, and the remaining guṇas flow out of jñāna (jñānasyasyaṅtayah). Moreover, in the Lakṣmī-tantra, this jñāna is considered to be the very essence of Lakṣmī⁴⁹.

Again, in a passage in the Viṣṇupurāṇa, Lakṣmī is characterized as ‘intellect’⁵⁰, and the Tantrasāra⁵¹, once more, sheds further light on this aspect. In connection with a charm—Lakṣmī-kavaca—it is quite explicitly stated that those who use this kavaca or charm, after observing proper rites, will attain proficiency in all branches of knowledge (sarasvastātra). We are further told that students always worship the beloved of Viṣṇu, who is none other than Lakṣmī, and
the charm is particularly recommended to those who desire to be good poets (sukavītā) and pundits (sūpāṇḍitya).

At any rate, by the thirteenth century Lakṣmī had come to be associated with knowledge. Curiously, in the Buddhist pantheon, Vasudhārā, who is primarily the goddess of wealth and prosperity like her Brahmanical counterpart, also came to be connected with vidyā or jñāna in medieval times, and, in most six-armed images of the goddess, especially from Nepal, the manuscript is an invariable attribute. While one cannot definitely assert that this concept of Vasudhārā had anything to do with that of Lakṣmī’s association with knowledge, tāntrism once again appears to have been the common ground where such intermingling was possible.

One other iconographic peculiarity in the painting (Fig. 109) is the presence of the kūrma or a tortoise indicating that it is a vāhana or mount of Lakṣmī. Generally, in Indian iconography, the tortoise is the mount of either Yamunā or Dharma and its association with Lakṣmī is not known either textually or in actual representations. The common mount of Lakṣmī is an owl (pecaka). The tortoise is, of course, associated with Viṣṇu and Vaiṣṇava mythology in more ways than one. In the Agnipurāṇa it is prescribed that the pedestal in the images of Puruṣottama should be composed, among other things, of a tortoise and this is what the artist has attempted in the multi-armed image of Viṣṇu in the Ashmolean (Fig. 25). In describing the form of Hayagrīva, a form of Viṣṇu, the same purāṇa enjoins that the left foot of the god should be placed on a tortoise. It is not impossible that there were other images where the god was accompanied by Śrī-Lakṣmī on a pedestal composed of a tortoise and a later artist mistakenly associated it with the goddess. Perhaps, this is why the magnificent image of Yamunā, standing on a tortoise below the temple of Paśupatinātha, is identified by the common people as Lakṣmī. Of course, it is always possible that Nepal has a separate tradition which associates the tortoise with Lakṣmī.

On the other hand there is a particular āsana that is described in literature as kūrmāsana. An āsana in Indian iconographic
terminology may have two implications. It may denote the posture in which a divinity is seated or it may refer to the seat itself, as, for example, *padmāsana*, *makarāsana*, etc. In the *Ahirbudhnyasamhitā* kūrmāsana is described as a particular posture. In a Tamil work called *Śaivasamaya-neri* we are given a description of kūrmāsana as a seat. It is said that it should be of an oval shape like a mirror and should be provided with the face and feet of a tortoise. Gopinath Rao illustrates such a seat from Ellora. It is thus possible that there are textual descriptions of Lakṣmī seated or standing on such a kūrmāsana and such images were known in Nepal. In course of time the āsana became the vāhana of the goddess.