

# God



God is one with many names, shapes or forms. God can be with form or can be formless. All great Men and Saints from time immemorial have been saying that 'God is one'.

*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*

A simple example is given here.

There are clouds in the sky. The clouds are formed out of moisture or very fine particles of water. The clouds gather and move with wind and rain over cool places like forests, hills, villages and cities. The moisture in the clouds precipitates and become water drops and when these drops fall down from the clouds in the sky, we call it as rain. When the temperature below is very cool or suddenly gets cool, then water drops become bigger, solidify and fall down to earth. These two are examples of God with Form (*Saakaara*) and God without Form (*Niraakaara*).

This example or analogy holds good for God. When God is formless, he is in a state similar to the one before cloud formation as moisture. As time passes, clouds are formed and God gradually takes shape. Then it rains when these clouds pass over cool places. Similarly, God's form becomes clear in the form of human beings, animals, birds, fish, plants, minerals, mountains etc. God can take all these forms and live in them or live as they are living. This is 'Created Form of God'.

God is present in all beings and is present everywhere. He thus becomes Omni-present. He is all powerful and is the Supreme or the Greatest. So He is called Omni-potent.

# God and Living Beings



The Link between *Paramaatma* and *Jeevaatma*

*Paramaatma* means God. He is Supreme. He is Omnipresent (present everywhere). He is Omnipotent (all powerful). He is Omniscient. He is Eternal. He is Permanent. He is Universal.

The whole creation consisting of plant life, animal kingdom, birds, reptiles, human beings, *Devatas*, *Gandharvas*, *Kinneras*, *Kimpurushas* etc. all come under *Jeevaatmas* or Living beings.

All the *Jeevaatmas*, the small sparks of Creation, the rivers, the mountains, the trees, plants and all other species including several celestial bodies such as planets, star constellations all put together is called **Nature**. The Sanskrit word for Nature is '*Prakriti*'. *Paramaatma* expresses through the Nature as several living beings or *Jeevaatmas*.

*Paramaatma* is a whole and *Jeevaatma* is its part. *Paramaatma* has boundless freedom. But *Jeevaatma* may experience certain bounds and limitations which are results of its own actions.

From the *Paramaatma*, several sparks (*jeevas*) that come out are called Individual souls or *Jeevaatmas*. In several aspects, both have similarities in nature.

# Tri Murthis: The Three Gods

The Indian culture consisting of Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Epics and the classical books explain that there are three Gods:

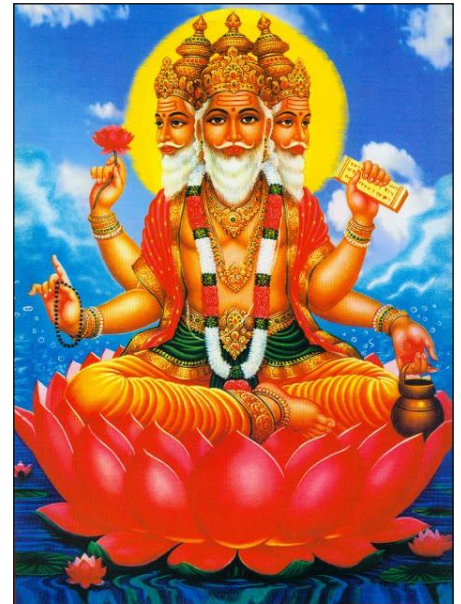
- Brahma
- Vishnu
- Maheswara

Each of them has been identified with specific functions in the Universe.

## Brahma, the Creator

Four-faced God Brahma is called *Chaturmukha* Brahma. He has taken birth from the Lotus flower which came out of the navel of Bhagavan Vishnu. He has four faces and four hands. He holds the four Vedas in one of His hands. He is seated on Lotus.

The story of Brahma is the story of Creation. Brahma is the beginning. He is the Origin of all the Creation. This is sum and substance of the story of Creation as available in all the sacred books of India (Vedas and Shastras). Hamsa (Swan) is his vehicle.



## Goddess Saraswati

Goddess Saraswati is Brahma's consort. She is Goddess for *Vidya* or education and learning. She also grants *Jnaana* (Knowledge and Wisdom).

Brahma granted boons to many *asuras* (demons) in the past because they did penance or *tapasya* for Brahma's appearance. He gave them what ever boons they wanted. Some asuras

like *Hiranya Kashipa*, became violent and cruel. Lord Vishnu had to incarnate on earth and kill these asuras who troubled the devataas, lokas and even the ordinary human beings.

## Vishnu, the Protector

Vishnu is the God who protects the Universe. He took ten avatars (births or incarnations) to save the earth, to protect the good people and to punish the persons doing wrong deeds. Vishnu is also called Shesha Sayana.

In Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna (8<sup>th</sup> avatara of Vishnu) gave reassurance that he would descend to earth and take birth whenever dharma (good) declines and adharma flourishes, whenever good people are troubled or tormented.

Vishnu has four hands. He has *Sudharshana Chakra* and *Pancha Janya Shankha* (conch) on two of his hands. He wears a garland named *Vyjayanti Mala*. *Kaustuba* is the precious gem which Lord Vishnu wears. Garuda, the Divine bird is his vehicle.

Lord Vishnu is the protector of entire Nature and Nature's kingdoms. Vishnu pervades in all beings. The meaning of 'Vishnu' means *Vyapti* or the one who spreads. He is everywhere. He feeds all the beings and in this manner, he sustains every part of blood stream in our body. Vishnu is all expanding. He is the Life Force or Prana itself. This is the primary duty of Vishnu. *Akasha* or Space Ether is ruled by Lord Vishnu and therefore *Akasha* is expansive. It has no boundary. It extends everywhere.



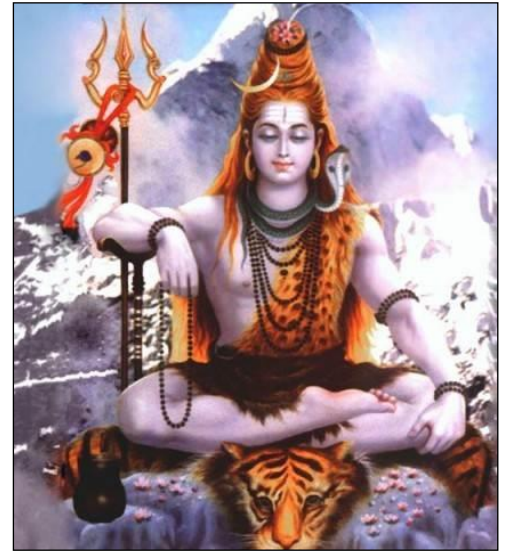
## Goddess Lakshmi

Goddess Lakshmi is Vishnu's consort. She is the embodiment of grace. She is giver of wealth and all material benefits and even spiritual blessings.

## Shiva or Maheshwara, the Destructor

Shiva is the lord of destruction, also called 'Laya Karaka'. In Sanskrit, Laya means dissolving. He is in-charge of the direction of North-East (Eeshanya). Shiva's first wife was Sati (the daughter of Daksha Prajapati). When King Daksha didn't honor him for the Yagna, Lord Shiva was annoyed. This led to the destruction of Daksha's Yagna.

Sati, wife of Shiva, felt humiliated by her father. Through Yoga, she invited *Yogaagni*, the Fire God, and burnt herself to ashes. She was born again as Parvati, the daughter of Parvata Raja Himavan (Himalayas).



Lord Shiva was engaged in *tapasya* and meditation for many long years and then Manmadha, the lord of Love, shot an arrow on Shiva. Then, Lord Shiva was disturbed from his *tapasya*. He opened his third eye and burnt Manmadha.

Shiva has granted half of his body to Parvati, his wife and this form is called '*Ardha Naarishawara*'.

The abode of Shiva is Mount Kailash. Shiva is fond of dancing. He dances in happiness. *Tandava* means dancing. Shiva Tandava is very famous. Shiva is the presiding deity for all dance forms and is therefore called *Nataraja*.

He is worshipped in the form of Linga. He is pleased by offerings of water as abhisheka, so he is also called '*Abhisheka Priya*'. There are 12 *Kshetras* or holy places associated with Lord Shiva called '*Dwadasa Jyothir Lingas*'. Nandi, the Divine bull is his vehicle.

## Goddess Parvathi

Goddess Parvati is the Consort of Lord Shiva. She has many forms and many names such as Lalitha Tripura Sundari, Bramarambika, Durga, Meenakshi, Kamakshi, Annapurna, Raja Rajeswari, Vishalakshi, Jnana Prasunamba and many other interesting names. Kaali or Kalika is her terrible form.

# Pancha Bhootas

In the Indian culture, Rishis have identified that the creator has used five basic elements for making a whole range of living and also non-living entities. The basic elements are:

- |                  |       |
|------------------|-------|
| 1. Prithvi       | Earth |
| 2. Jala          | Water |
| 3. Vaayu         | Air   |
| 4. Akaasha       | Space |
| 5. Tejas or Agni | Fire  |

These elements are invariably referred to the themes or subjects connected with creation. These five elements should not be confused with 106 elements that are identified and taught in modern chemistry today. These five elements are called Pancha Bhootas.

In Bhagavad Gita, these five elements prominently figure in the descriptions of human behavior.

Also in Astrology, the rasis are associated with four of the five elements with an exception of Ether or *Akasa*. As there are twelve rasi's, three rasi's are connected with each of these four elements.

An important concept in Indian culture is that when the five basic elements are used in the creation, each one has a common item called an atom. There are no separate atoms for any particular elements. Different elements result from changes in atomic structure. It is proved that, if the atomic structure is changed, then the elements can be transformed from one element to another. H.P. Blavatsky, a Russian Yogini demonstrated this.

## Advance Concepts

### Five Pancha Bootha Places

There are five pancha bootha places or designated sacred spaces, where Shiva is worshipped as the five elements of nature: agni or fire (nerupu) at Arunachaleswarar Temple here at Tiruvannamalai, bhumi or earth at Ekambareswarar Temple in Kanchipuram; neer or water at

Jambukeswara Temple in Thiruvanaikaval, vaayu or wind (kaatru) at Srikalahasti and as akasam or the sky at Chidambaram.

Arunachaleswarar Temple has a wealth of mythology attached to it which tells of its association with fire, heat, light and the sun. Primarily of which is the story of Shiva manifesting himself in the form of a massive column of fire, whose crown and feet could not be found by the Gods Brahma and Vishnu. A celebration of this manifestation is observed in particular during the festivals of Shivaratri and Karthigai Deepam. The lingam inside the Mulasthanam of Arunachaleswarar Temple itself generates such intense heat radiation, that it is uncomfortable for pilgrims to spend more than a few minutes in the Siva Sannidhi.



Arunachaleswarar Temple,  
Tiruvannamalai (fire)

At one time the authorities at the Temple planned to install an air-conditioner in the sanctum because of the reports of devotees fainting due to the extreme heat. But the plan was abandoned as a result of public opposition – as people felt that cooling the sannidhi would be interfering with the divine presence.

In Kancheepuram, the lingam is made of sand as Ekambareswarar is perceived to be in the form of earth. It is said that Parvati made the lingam from the sand on the river bank and did penance to unite with Shiva. Local devotees say both that the present lingam is made of sand and that the sand inside the temple is of a different colour to sand found elsewhere in the area.





Ekambareswarar Temple,  
Kanchipuram (earth)

At Thiruvanaikaval, Jalagandeeswarar is in the form of water. The lingam is in the midst of water and a spring is present inside the shrine. It is linked to the River Cauvery which runs close to the Temple. Even when the river runs dry, water is present inside the shrine all through the year. Goddess Akhilandeswari is said to have been pacified by Adi Sankara. Devotees consider the Goddess to be more powerful in this place than Shiva.



Thiruvanaikaval Temple, Trichy (water)



At Kalahasthi, there is no window in the sanctum and just one solitary lamp flickers. No one knows where the wind comes from to make the lamp flicker. Sri Kalahastheeswara is in the form of air in this temple.



Kalahasti Temple (Air)

At Chidambaram, Shiva is present as Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, in the form of ether. Though there is an idol of Nataraja, he is Arupa or formless. There is a separate enclosure covered by a screen in the sanctum decorated with bilva leaves made of gold. Shiva is Arupa here and this is also called the Chidambara Rahasiyam - the secret of Chidambaram.



Chidambaram Natarajar Temple (Sky)

# Ganesha and Shanmukha

## The Two Brothers

### Ganesha

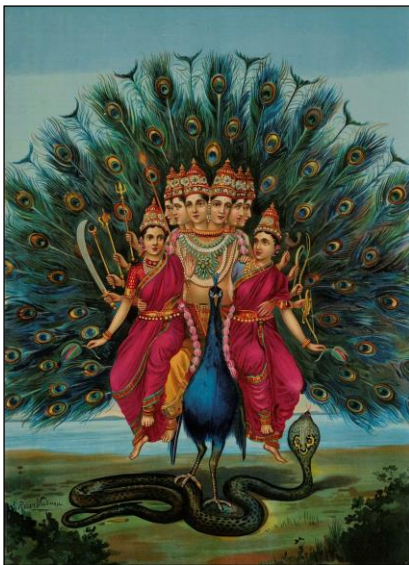
Ganesha is the child made by Parvati using her sweat and clay. She then gave life to Him. When he obstructed Shiva from entering the house to see Parvati, Shiva was angry with Ganesha and killed him. At the request of Parvati, Shiva attached the head of an elephant to Ganesh and gave him life. Since then Ganesha became elephant-headed.

Ganesha is the first one to be worshipped all over the world. He grants good education to children. He removes obstacles. So, He is also called Vighneswara meaning 'Remover of Obstacles'.



### Shanmukha

Shanmukha is the second son of Shiva and Parvati. He has six faces and hence the name Shan-



Mukha or six faced God. He is also called Kumara, Skanda, Subramanya, Karthikeya as he was born under the star Krittika. He has been raised by six mothers. One of them is Ganga. He has been elected as the commander-in-chief of the Devataas. He also presides over the assembly of Devataas. Therefore, he is called *Sabhapati*. This is similar to a speaker in the Lok Sabha (called Lower House) in India. Veda mantras address to him, call him as *Sabhapati*.

He destroyed a powerful demon called Tarakasura. There are six famous pilgrim centres associated with Lord Subramanya.

# Surya – The Sun God



Sun is called Aditya. He is the center of a family of many celestial bodies which orbit around him. He is a spark who has come off from Super Nova or a big bang. He is one among several millions of Suns. Over a long period of time, many celestial bodies are attracted by Him and kept in a defined orbit and they are controlled by the Sun. They are called Planets. Each planet has similar objects or huge bodies going around them. All these constitute the family of the Sun or Solar family.

Sun is like a star. He is self illuminant. He is the source of great energy and light. He is life force, the giver of prana. Sun's one white Ray contains Seven Colors.



In Ramayana, Maharshi Agastya gave a mantra to Lord Rama which enabled him to kill his enemy Ravana. This mantra is called ***Aditya Hrudayam***. Many children (even elders) in India, recite this mantra every day to receive the blessing of Sun God.



**Sun God**

# Lakshmi



Goddess Lakshmi was born from the ocean of Milky Way (*Kshera Saagara*). When the Deva's and Asuras (Demons) churned Milky Ocean for getting the Nectar (*Amrutha*), several entities came out of it. Moon (Chandra) is one of them. He is followed by Lakshmi. Lord Vishnu chose her as his Consort. Whenever, Lord Vishnu takes an avatar, Lakshmi was also born on earth. During Ramayana, she was born as Sita and married Sri Rama. When Vishnu was born as Sri Krishna, she was born as Rukmini and married Sri Krishna.

In Indian culture, Goddess Lakshmi stands for grace, prosperity, riches, wealth, courage and strength. Goddess Lakshmi has been worshipped with great devotion during the festival of Lights, Diwali or Deepawali. Also, in the Lunar month of Sharavana, She is worshipped in eight forms which covers *Adi Lakshmi* (the Primordial Lakshmi), *Dhana Lakshmi* (Riches, Gold), *Dhanya Lakshmi* (Grains), *Gaja Lakshmi* (Wealth), *Santhana Lakshmi* (Children), *Dhairya Lakshmi* (The Courageous one), *Vidya Lakshmi* (Education), *Vijaya Lakshmi* (Success).

There are Asta Lakshmi temples dedicated to Goddess Lakshmi all over the world in the ancient times and also new shrines are being constructed even today.

# Nava Vidha Bhakti



Bhakti means devotion. It also means dedication. Bhakti is the foundation of all spiritual practices. Devarshi Narada gave a book called 'Bhakti Sutras'. The book contains the ways and means of cultivating devotion to God. It also tells that a great quality of Bhakti is to have supreme love towards God. This love to God can take many forms.



Srimad Bhagavatam has given a list of nine ways (Navavidha Bhakti) in which the devotee can lovingly connect oneself with God:

*"Sravanam Keerthanam Vishnoho:*

*Smaranam Padasevanam,*

*Archanam Vandanam Dasyam,*

*Sakhyam Aatma Nivedanam"*

**Sravana** means hearing the stories of God's glories and stories connected with his Divine Name, Form and his acts. When we hear the stories of God, our mind merges in the divine love of God and we remember God even in our sleep. King Parikshit attained salvation through *sravana* of sacred purana, Srimad Bhagavatam from Suka Maharshi.

**Keertana** is singing the glories of God. The bhakta is filled with divine emotion and love. He loses himself in the love of God. Meerabai (a devotee of Lord Krishna) did *keertana* or sang about God at all times. In the recent decades, Hare Krishna devotees have adopted keertana or Sankeertana as an important form of Devotion. There Guru Sri Prabhu Pada preached Keertanas as a very powerful tool to connect to God and encouraged his disciples to move through the streets chanting the name of God, both in urban centers and rural areas all over the world in as many countries as possible. In the medieval times of India, Chaitanya Prabhu and his brother Nityananda preached Keertanas as a mode of devotion and sadhana.

**Smarana** is remembering God at all times. The mind of the bhakta is always engrossed in the memory of God and meditates all times about the glories of God alone. God is to be remembered at all times. Prahalada and Dhruva did *smarana* of God at all times.

**Padaseva** is serving the feet of the Lord or Guru. It is done by Lakshmi Devi to Lord Vishnu and Parvati Devi to Lord Shiva. Understanding that the Universe is the body of God, we can serve the sick and needy as service to God.

**Archana** is worship of God. It can be done through an image or picture or even the mental form of God within yourself. Flowers, fruits, incense etc are used in *archana*. The advanced bhakta leaves the external form and worships the form of God within himself. The purpose of worship is to please God and to purify self through surrender of ego and love of God.

**Vandana** is prayer and prostration to God. Prostration to God helps overcome ego. Vandana grants humility or humbleness. It endears the devotee to God.

**Dasya Bhakti** is service to God. It means the bhakta sees himself as servant of God and loves and serves God. He carries out the wishes of God seeing God as the Supreme Master. Hanuman is the example of *Dasya Bhakti*. Serving the saints, sages and other bhaktas, serving poor and sick as forms of God is also reckoned as *Dasya bhakti*.

**Sakhya bhava** is seeing God as one's best friend. Arjuna had this love for Sri Krishna. Love at human level is full of expectations and give and take. When God is loved this way, it is transformation of mundane love to the Divine.

**Atma Nivedana** is self surrender. The bhakta offers everything to God – body, mind and soul. He has no personal existence. He is a part and parcel of God and God takes care of him. He becomes the perfect instrument in the hands of God.

Bhakti is supreme love for God. A bhakta loves God in different ways. Bhakti helps a bhakta to attain the Supreme State of Self Realisation. The nine modes of bhakti are ways in which a bhakta attains the supreme state of life. We can take up any of these modes and reach the highest state. The path of bhakti is easiest and follows the natural inclination of human nature to love God in familiar ways. Bhakti takes us slowly and gradually to God without demanding any extreme behaviour or drastic changes in way of life. It is a progressive realisation of God.

## Part II – The Navagraha's

Sun is the center of our solar family. He is called Graha Raja, the King of the planets or the planetary worlds. Budha, Sukra, Earth, Kuja, Guru, Sani all orbit around him. But in the Nava graha's, Ravi is not a graha or a planet in a true sense. He is like a star which is self illuminant. Further, Chandra or Moon is not a planet, but he is a satellite to earth.

Because we are living on earth and apparently seeing the movement of all the members of the Solar system, with Earth as the center, the planetary status is not indicated to earth in the below list of nine planets. Also, Rahu and Ketu are the nodes or shadows are called Chaya Grahas or Shadow Planets.

Ravi or Surya	: Sun
Chandra	: Moon
Mangala or Kuja	: Mars
(Also called Angaraka)	
Budha	: Mercury
Guru	: Jupiter
Sukra	: Venus
Sani	: Saturn
Rahu (Chaya Graha)	: Node
Ketu (Chaya Graha)	: Node

The order of planets given above is as given sounded in below sloka. But, the order is not the same as is astronomically found in the sky:

*Namah suryaya chandraya mangalaya budhayacha  
Guru Sukra Sanibhyacha Rahave Ketave Namaha*

In the Indian culture, the Rishis provided a means of offering prayers to the nine planets through Vedic mantras. This shiksha comes under the theme of Pariharam or Remedies as given in the book of Karma Vipaka.

# Dasa Avataras - The Ten Avataras

There are ten major Avataras or Incarnations of Lord Vishnu. He is the protector of human beings and all living beings or entities. He being the protector takes birth at different times of need. The ten avataras of Lord Vishnu are: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Sri Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki.

Each of this avataras is explained in simple words.

## 1. Matsya

Matsya avatara is the first avatara in which Lord Vishnu takes the incarnation of Fish. This



happens after Pralaya and before Satya Yuga. At that time, King Manu was doing tapasya (Penance) for many thousand years. One day, King Manu took some water into his hands for offering it to God. Suddenly, he saw a small fish in his hands. The fish spoke to the King and requested him to save its life. The king placed the fish in a jug of water. The fish soon grew bigger. The king left the fish in the river. Even there, the fish quickly grew much bigger than what the river can hold. Then the king had taken the fish to Ganges. Here again the fish

grew bigger. Then the king left the big fish in the ocean. At that time, Manu understood the fish was none other than Lord Vishnu. The fish requested the King to prepare a boat. The fish also told him that in coming seven days a great flood would come and deluge the earth. The fish advised to get into the boat and take the Saptarishis (Seven Rishis) into it, also the seeds of all species, animals of each type into the boat to save them. The fish then promised to the king that it would take the boat to the Himalayas (Mount Meru) for surviving the flood till the next Yuga (Satya Yuga). Exactly after seven days the flood appeared. And the king tied the boat which Manu built to the tail of the Great Fish. The great serpent Vasuki was used as a rope. The Great Fish took all of them to safety and protected till the flood was over. Then new Yuga or Era commenced.

Thus the Matsya avatara which is the fish form of Vishnu saved the world and helped the creation to prosper in the Satya Yuga.

Lord Matsya is the presiding Deity of Veda Narayana Temple in Nagalapuram (70 km from Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India).

## 2. Kurma



The second avatara is called Kurma Avatar. This is a turtle or Tortoise. In this avatar, devataas also called as Suras are cousin brothers of Daanavas (also called as Asuras or Rakshasas). These two cousin brothers wished to churn the great milky ocean (Milky Way) and obtain amrutha (ambrosia). Anyone who consumed this would become immortal which means death less. A great mountain Mandara was selected to churn the ocean. And the great serpent Vasuki was requested to take up the role of a rope for churning. As the devataas and danavaas started churning the milky ocean, king Indra of the devataas suggested that they would move to the head side of the Vasuki and suggested the Asuras to go to the tail side. But the Asuras suspecting some foul play chose to hold the Vasuki from the head side. Naturally the Devataas moved to the other side. As they started churning, the Mandara Mountain started slipping into the ocean. Devatas and Danavaas prayed to Lord Vishnu to help them. Then Lord took the form of Turtle (Kurma Avatar) and protected the mountain from sinking by providing support from the bottom. He kept the mountain floating. A kalasha of Amruta called the Nectar of Immortality appeared and Asuras carried it away. Then Lord Vishnu took the form of beautiful lady called Jagan Mohini (Charming to all the worlds) and offered to distribute the Nectar by taking it back from the Asuras. She distributed the Amruta to the Devatas and disappeared from the scene with the Amruta Kalasha. The Asuras were thus denied their part.

A temple in Srikurman dedicated to Kurmadeva, is located 100 km northeast of Visakhapatnam and 15 km east of Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, India.

### 3. Varaha



Lord Vishnu incarnated as a great boar. A daemon by name Hiranyaksha performed Tapasya for Lord Brahma. In return he got boons from Brahma that no beast or no god could kill him. The Asura or Demon forgot to include the name of Boar in the list of animals that could kill him. He attacked the earth and pushed it to the Patala loka or under the sea. He took away the Vedas and the holy books from the creator Lord Brahma when he was a sleep.

Lord Vishnu incarnated as Varaha and recovered the Vedas from him by killing him. He lifted the earth from below and brought it to its previous location. He handed over the Vedas to Lord Brahma for his safe custody.

A beautiful white deity of Lord Varaha can be seen in **Sweta Varaha Temple, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India**. This is the place where Lord Varaha appeared as a giant boar to save the earth and to kill the demon Hiranyaksha.

### 4. Narasimha



The fourth incarnation of Lord Vishnu is called Narasimha, Half lion and half man. The Head portion is Lion and the rest is human. Hiranya kashipa, the brother of Slain (killed) Asura Hiranyaksha developed vengeance against Lord Vishnu. He again performed Tapasya for Lord Bramha and brought boons from him. He received a boon that he would not die by a human being or a beast, either in daylight or at night, either inside or outside a building. He became strong and behaved himself as God asking all people his subjects



not to worship Lord Vishnu. Instead, he advised them that all should worship him as God. He had a son by name, Prahalad, who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu by birth. Hiranya kashipa was very unhappy with his son. He ordered his soldiers to kill young prahalada as he was worshipping Vishnu. He threw him into fire but prahalada didn't die. Hiranya kashipa was angry and ordered the soldiers to throw him from cliffs into the oceans; he made elephants to trample him. But Prahalada was unhurt due to grace of Lord Vishnu. Prahalada was saved by Lord Vishnu every moment, at all places. Towards the end, Hiranya kashipa was very angry with his son and asked him to show where Vishnu was? Prahalada told his father that Lord Vishnu was present everywhere. Hiranya kashipa shouted at him to show his Lord Vishnu in the pillar of his palace. Saying so he broke the pillar. Then suddenly, Lord Vishnu appeared from the broken pillar as Narasimha (half loin and half human) during the Sandhya time (neither morning nor night), neither inside nor outside the house. He tore open the body of Hiranya kashipa. He saved his devotee Prahalada. Among the many avataras, Acharyas indicated that Lord Narasimha can be pleased with simple prayers and Lord grants boons in abundance that too quickly (Sadyo Phalam).

There are many famous temples of Lord Narasimha. Mangalagiri is situated about 12km south of Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh, India). The Deity is called Pana Narasimha (Panakala Narasimha), because he is believed to drink half the quantity of panaka, offered by worshipers. It is said that Lord Narasimha rested here after killing Hiranyakashipu, and Lakshmi Devi then gave him a drink to quench his thirst.

Another famous temple, **Yadagiri-gutta** (60 km north of Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India) was named after a sage named Yadava, who performed intense tapasya (Penance) to see Lord Vishnu in His form as Lord Narasimha.

Simhachalam is an ancient temple situated near the city of Visakhapatnam, about 11 km from the city, at a height of 244m on Simhagiri Hill. It is one of the most important Vaishnavite shrines in Southern India. It has Sri Varahalakshmi Narasimha Swamy as the presiding Deity. The Deity gives "nijaroopa darshan" (holy appearance in true form) for only 12 hours in a year, the rest of the time the Deity is covered with sandalwood paste. The darshan described as chandana yatra or chandanotsavam falls every year in Vaishakha masa (May).

The famous Lord Lakshmi Narasimha Swami is located in **Kadiri, Anantpur, (A.P.)** and large numbers of pilgrims visit the temple throughout the year.

Ahobilam is one of the most venerated Vishnu temples of Lord Narasimha. It is located near Nandyal in Andhra Pradesh. It is also known as the Nava Narasimha Kshetram (Shrine). This is the place where Lord Narasimha appeared from the pillar and killed Hiranya kashipa to save his devotee Prahalada.

## 5. Vamana



In Vamana Avatar, Lord Vishnu incarnated as a short young Brahmin boy (Vatuvu). He is the fifth avatara. Prahalada's grandson, king Bali conquered all over the world. Then Indra, the king of the Suras or Devataas, and other gods were afraid of Asuras, who were associates of Bali. They went to Lord Vishnu and prayed to him to save them from the dominance of the Asuras. Lord Vishnu agreed to be born as a dwarf boy by name 'Vamana'. He went to King Bali after growing up and asked for dhana or gifts. King Bali was over pleased with the charmingly young and bright Vatuvu. He promised Vamana that he would give anything that he would ask. Then Vamana asked only three small pieces of land each measuring his foot length. King Bali was expecting that Vamana would ask for many great things but Vamana didn't do so, even when king Bali persuaded to ask more. Vamana was contented with three foot space. King Bali asked him to take the land. Suddenly, Vamana took the form of Trivikrama (a man to the size of three lokas). With one foot, he occupied the entire earth, with second foot, he occupied the whole sky. Vamana asked King Bali as to where he should put the third foot? King Bali understood that this tiny boy could be none other than Lord Vishnu. He bowed down to Him and offered his head space to keep the feet of Vamana. Then Vamana pushed him to the world called Paataala Loka (the loka below the earth). In this manner, he checked the growth and dominance of King Bali. The Asuras were also kept in control with act of Lord Vishnu.

Interestingly, Vamana gave a boon to King Bali that he would stand by the gate of Bali's palace in Paataala and guard his palace. As Vamana was born in family of Indra as a youngster he acquired the name of Upendra (Upa + Indra), the person standing watch at the gates of King Bali.

Vamana (Adinatha) Temple in Khajuraho, (M.P.) is dedicated to Lord Vishnu in His form as Vamana (the dwarf). The Vamanamurthy temple in Thrivikramangalam (Thamalam) near Thiruvananthapuram on the banks of Karamana River is called 'Thrivikramangalam Maha Vishnu Temple'.

## 6. Parasurama



Parasurama avatar of Lord Vishnu appeared when the earth was dominated by arrogant and tyrannical rulers who need to be taught a lesson. Parasurama was born in a Brahmin family to Maharshi Jamadagni and mother Renuka. Maharshi Bhrigu was among his forefathers. It is known that 'Parasu' or axe was the Ayudha (Weapon) given to him as boon by Lord Shiva and so he was called Parasurama.

Kartaveerya was a great powerful king. He visited Jamadagni's Ashram and requested the divine cow Kamadhenu (which fulfills all desires, and shall provide unlimited quantities of food and milk). Rishi Jamadagni didn't agree. King Kartaveerya carried away the Kamadhenu without permission. Rishi Jamadagni was angry and killed the king Kartaveerya and brought back Kamadhenu to his ashram. On hearing this, Kartaveerya's son came to the Ashram and killed Jamadagni. Parasurama, son of Jamadagni was wild with anger with these developments. As a result, he went and killed the kshatriyas or rulers one by one all over the earth on 21 occasions.

A cave housing deities including Maharshi Jamadagni, Parashurama, Rama, and Sita, a Shivalinga with a Nandi is located at Parasgad Fort in Belgaum district of Karnataka, dating back to 1674 built by the Maratha ruler Shivaji.

Another temple of Lord Parasurama is present at Nirmand, known as the 'Kashi of the Himalayas', situated in Kulu District, Himachal Pradesh, India.

## 7. Rama



Lord Vishnu was born as the son to King Dasaratha. He is known as Sri Rama. His life is described in Valmiki Ramayana. This is the holiest books of Indian culture Rama came to earth when two asuras Ravana and Kumbhakarna were troubling the people of earth. They were very arrogant and very powerful. When he grew up, he married Sita, the daughter of King Janaka. He was a Rajarshi (a king and a rishi). Sita was the incarnation of Mahalakshmi, wife of Lord Vishnu. Sri Rama married

Sita and was about to be coronated as King of Ayodhya. At that time his step mother, Kaikeyi, asked a boon from Dasaratha to send Sri Rama to forest for 14 years. During that time, Lord Rama and Sita met many holy people and rishis in forest. Lord Rama killed many asuras as they were moving in the forest. Sita was carried away by Ravana to Lanka. Aanjaneya, a great warrior among the Vanaras located Sita in Lanka. He met her and brought the news of her safety back to Rama. Lord Rama with the help of monkeys (Vaananaras) built a bridge across the sea to Lanka and attacked Ravana. In the Great War that took place, Ravana and all the other asuras were also killed by Lord Rama. Sita was recovered, they came back to Ayodhya and ascended the throne and lived for a long time.

Lord Rama is the great symbol of an ideal person, ideal king, ideal husband, obedient son to the father. He was a great king for all times for excellent governance. So in India, the constitution writers took the kingdom of Rama as ideal and kept it as a model, so that generations of people in India can live in Happiness as did the people during reign of Rama.

Ayodhya is the birth place (*Janma Bhoomi*) of Lord Rama and is situated 6 kms from Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh, India.

A very famous temple of Lord Rama called *Chaturbhuja Rama* is located in Bhadrachalam on the bank of River Godavari, 180 kms West of Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. This is the place where Rama and Sita lived before Sita was taken away by Ravana. This temple is named Bhadrachalam after a sage named Bhadra.

## 8. Sri Krishna



Sri Krishna is eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He was born when Dwapara Yuga was coming to an end and the Kaliyuga was to start. His maternal uncle (Mother's brother) was King Kamsa who ruled from city of Madhura now in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Akasha Vaani (Voice from the skies) predicted that the eighth child born to his sister Devaki would kill him. King Kamsa was frightened by this voice and imprisoned his sister Devaki and her husband Vasudeva. He started killing all his sister's children as soon as they were born. The eighth child was born when the parents (Father Vasudeva, Mother Devaki) were in jail. The child granted a vision with four hands as Lord Vishnu and advised his father Vasudeva to take him across the river Yamuna to Gokula and leave him in the house of the local ruler Nanda. Nanda and his wife Yashoda raised the child for a few years. King Kamsa could not kill the eighth child. He was frightened that one day the eighth child after growing up would come to the palace and kill him. He made several attempts to kill the child Krishna with the help of many demons or Rakshasas (Shakatasura in form of a cart, Putana – a lady, Bakasura in form of Crane, Trunavatta in form of air etc). But the divine child Sri Krishna escaped all these attempts and killed the Rakshasas. Along with his elder brother Balarama, they lived in Gokula happily grazing the cows in the fields on the banks of River Yamuna. In his childhood days, Krishna was famous as a cowherd boy (*Gopala*). He had many friends while he lived in Gokula. He has a famous flute which he used to play music that fascinated and attracted many people, friends, devotees, Gopi's (the ladies of the town) and even cows and animals. He played merrily with all the children in Brindavan, a place very near to Madhura and spent very happy times.

Brindavan is a very holy place for many devotees in India and abroad as Sri Krishna lived there about 5000 years back, showed many miracles and walked around those fields and places. The place is considered very holy and pious. Very large number of people or devotees, holy men

and saints, sages and swamis live there even to this day. When children grow up, they should visit this place and spend some time in Brindavan as it is truly one of the holiest places on earth. When Sri Krishna and Balarama were at a very tender age, King Kamsa invited both the brothers to Mathura. They were attacked by powerful notorious boxers. The young boys miraculously killed the two boxers Chanura and Mustika. Then Sri Krishna entered Kamsa's palace and killed him thus ending all the cruel deeds and tyrannical rule of Kamsa. Then Sri Krishna brought freedom for his parents Devaki and Vasudeva from the jail. The people of Mathura were very happy to see this divine child. In this avatara, Lord Vishnu incarnated as Sri Krishna to kill Kamsa and another person Shishupala.

He also established correct rule (righteous) by defeating all tyrannical and arrogant kings in the great war of Mahabharata.

Sri Krishna lived for 36 years after Mahabharata war and left his body after living for 125 years (18 Feb 3102 B.C.).

Puri Jagannatha temple is approximately 60kms from Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India is one of the famous temples in India. It is considered to be one of the four holiest places (dhamas) of Krishna in his form of Jagannatha, Lord of the Universe. This place is also the site of many of the pastimes of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

## 9. Buddha



With the departure of Lord Krishna (Krishna Avatar), the Kali Yuga set in. In this age, the true devotion to Vedas was replaced by empty rituals. To enlighten the world, Lord Vishnu descended the earth as Buddha, the enlightened one.

He was born as the crown prince of the Kapilavastu (Close to Bihar-Nepal Border) to King Suddhodana and Maya. He was named Siddhartha, meaning "All things fulfilled". But his mother died soon after his birth and he was brought up by Prajapati, the sister of Maya. Buddha was saddened by death of living creatures, and vices like poverty. He wasn't happy with any answers that were provided to him and he decided to find out the



meaning and the absolute truth and he left his wife and child to a hermit's life in the forest and became the **enlightened** one in Buddha Gaya in Bihar.

His preaching's spawned off the religion of Buddhism now popular across the whole world.

Buddha advocated the Middle Path, in which he offered a balanced, harmonious way of life, steering between two extremes of self-indulgence and total abstinence. Buddhism rests upon four Noble Truths:

- Suffering is universal,
- It is caused by desire and yearning
- Suffering can be prevented and overcome and
- Eradication of desires can lead to removal of suffering.

To prevent suffering one has to conquer craving and desire and this conquest leads to the attainment of *nirvana* or complete enlightenment.

Buddhist temples are built all over the world. Missionaries travelled to many countries Ceylon (Srilanka), Thailand, Burma (or Bramhadesha) present day Mynammar, Japan, China on the east, Afghanistan, Gandhara Desa (Kandahar) and till Arabia on the west. The Buddhist thought spread an influence on many Mediterranean and European countries. Many scholars in the past found that Buddhism had great influence on Christianity. Major teachings are in common for both of them.

## 10. Kalki



Kalki is the Tenth Avatar of Vishnu. He will appear, riding his white horse and drawing a flaming sword, at the end of the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age through which we are now passing. His task will be to exterminate the evil and restore the Dharma. Thus a new cycle will begin, starting with the new Satya Yuga. The whole world will be ruled by him with unquestioned authority.

Some scholars identified that he was born on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1962 C.E. when eight planets assembled in Kumbha Rasi (Aquarius) to Vishnu Yashas in a pious Brahmin family. He was born in a village named Shambhala in the Himalayas.

This place is mysteriously guarded by divine people barring access to the common folk. Great Maharshi's have been teaching many holy scriptures and astra vidyas (i.e. use of military equipment) just as Lord Sri Rama was taught the astra vidyas by Maharshi Viswamitra, Lord Kalki is being taught all such education by Bhagawan Parasurama, the greatest warrior of all times on earth. Parasurama was a sixth avatara of Lord Vishnu who was a chiranjeevi.

Lord Kalki is the presiding deity of temple located at Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. King Raja Sawai Jai built the Kalki temple right opposite the eastern entrance to the City Palace in 1727 AD.