

# trīmurti

..... in the vedic vision



*'namo viśvasṛje pūroaṃ viśvaṃ tadanu bibhrate |  
atha viśvasya saṃhartre tubhyaṃ tredhāsthītātmane ||'*

"Salutations to you the Divine Trinity who creates the universe first,  
Preserves the universe thereafter and resolves the universe finally."



*With the blessings of*  
Brahmaleena Pujyasri Swami Dayananda Saraswati  
&  
Pujyasri Swami Paramarthananda Saraswati



## KALAVARDHINI

*Presents*

## त्रिमूर्ति

*A Thematic Presentation through Dance, Depiction and Narration*

## PROGRAMME

Padma Bhushan Alarmel Valli, Chennai – Guest of Honour

### BRAHMĀ – SRṢṬIKARTĀ

Padma Vibhushan Pt. Birju Maharaj, Saswati Sen & Students of Kalashram, Delhi – Kathak

### VIṢṆU – DHARMĀYAṆAM

Vyjayanthi Kashi & Shambhavi Dance Ensemble, Bengaluru – Kuchipudi

### ŚIVA – ŚIVA NAVARASA

Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh and  
Centre for Indian Classical Dances Repertory Group, Delhi – Kathak

### TRIMŪRTI

Shashadhar Acharya and Group, Acharya Chhau Nrutya Bichitra, Delhi – Chhau

### FOLK MUSIC

Bhutte Khan Manganiar & Group, Rajasthan

### SŪTRADHĀR

Smt. Revathy Sankaran, Chennai

VENUE : Music Academy • DATE : Wednesday, 11th January 2017 • TIME : 6.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Doors open at 5.15 p.m. • Please be seated by 5.45 p.m.

## Artistes



### Alarmel Valli

**Padma Bhushan Alarmel Valli** is a renowned classical dancer, who is credited with introducing Bharatanatyam into mainstream venues all over the world. She infuses her dance with bubbling energy and joy, which is at once infectious and elevating. She is also an articulate orator and an original thinker.



### Pandit Birju Maharaj and Saswati Sen

**Padma Vibhushan Pt Birju Maharaj** is one of India's living legends. He is a direct descendant of Ishwari Prasad, the first known Kathak teacher, and of Maharaj Bindadin and Maharaj Kalka Prasad, the founders of modern-day Kathak. He is a torchbearer of the Lucknow Gharana that is known for its grace, elegance and mime. He is a mesmerising storyteller and extends his artistry to see drama in numbers.

**Saswati Sen** is the prime disciple of Guru Birju Maharaj who has imbibed the artistic nuances of her guru embellishing them with her own virtuosity and skill. She is best known for her abhinay, expressions.

### Dr. Sonal Mansingh

**Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh** is a famed Odissi dancer, guru and choreographer, but has contributed much beyond the performing space and is referred to as, 'The Iconic Personality of India.' She is a research-scholar with interests in reviving traditional music of Odissi, besides studying philosophy, literature and mythology, among others. She is also well-versed in multiple dance styles and languages. She combines her scholarship and oratorical skills to create a new style of performance, the Natya Katha.





## Vyjayanthi Kashi

Vyjayanthi Kashi is a well-known and respected Kuchipudi dancer, guru and choreographer, who was one of the pioneers of dance therapy. She teaches Kuchipudi to aspirants from all over the world in a residential school in Bangalore, the Shambhavi School of Dance, and believes in each creating their individual style. The first ever international dance fair in India, Dancejathre, in Bangalore in 2015, was her brainchild.

## Shashadhar Acharya

Shashadhar Acharya is a brilliant Seraikella Chhau artist and teacher with long years of training and dedication behind him. He is the fifth generation of a family of traditional performers. The Seraikella Chhau art form is a masked dance tradition with a strong ritualistic content; it is said that males from the royal family perform the ritualistic dances. Body kinetics forms the basic vocabulary of the art form which is highly influenced by the martial arts.



## Bhutte Khan Manganiar

Bhutte Khan is a Rajasthan folk promoter who collaborates with various folk groups in the state, both music and dance, to help them sustain their art forms and to take their artistry to cultural venues across the country and beyond. He launched the project 'Dharohar,' for this purpose.

## Revathy Sankaran

Revathy Sankaran is a multi-faceted artist - an actor, singer, orator, script writer, linguist amongst others. She is a celebrated television personality and a Harikatha exponent as well. She is a storehouse of knowledge concerning Tamil scriptures, mythology and songs of different genres and in different languages. She is also our in-house resource person.





## Trimūrti

### Three Forms of The Lord



*'namastrimūrtaye tubhyaṁ prāk sṛṣṭeḥ kevalātmane |  
guṇatraya vibhāgāya paścād bhedamupeyuse ||'*

“Salutations to you the Divine Trinity, who was one before creation and who assumed a threefold division presiding over the threefold *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*).”

In the *Vedic* vision, the Lord is both the intelligent and the material cause of the creation. He is appreciated in the form of various laws and functions as the *Trimūrti*. Masculine and feminine aspects of the creation are represented in this vision by denoting the intelligent cause as masculine and material cause as feminine.

Creation and resolution (commonly known as destruction) go together, like two sides of a coin. One cannot exist without the other. The creation of one object necessarily involves the ‘destruction’ of another. In fact, it is not destruction, it is transformation. For example, the creation of a pot-form from a lump of clay involves the transformation of the lump-form. Between creation and resolution, sustenance of the created

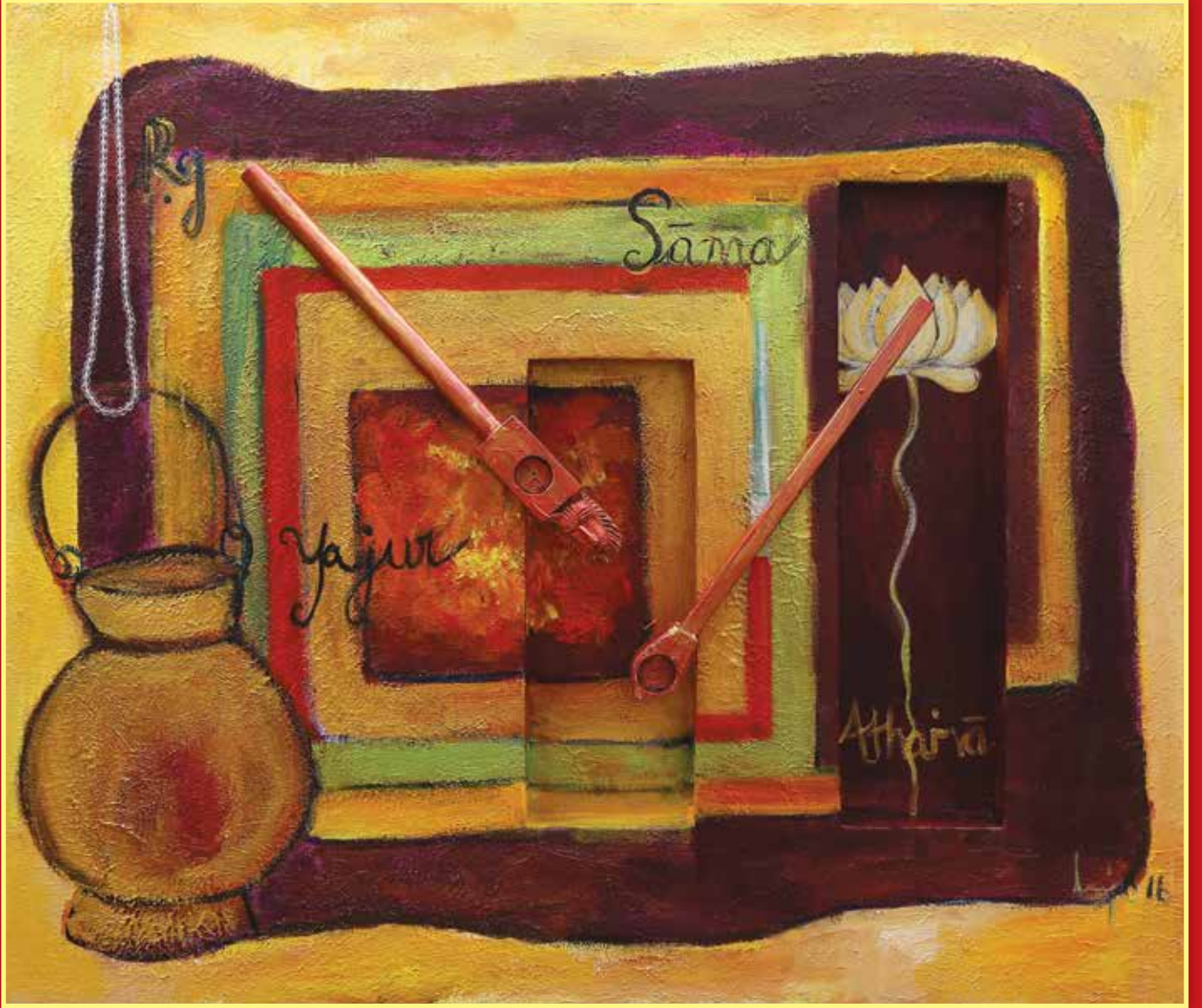
object is inevitable. Even though these functions are interdependent, for the sake of worship the Lord is invoked through each function independently.

From the standpoint of the created universe, the Lord is conceived as having a threefold form, corresponding to three simultaneous functions: creation, sustenance and resolution. He is looked upon as the deities *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva* respectively, with each Lord representing the intelligent aspect of different functions.

The consorts for these deities are *Sarasvatī*, *Lakṣmī* and *Pārvatī*, respectively. These consorts represent the material aspect of each function.



## Symbolic representation of Lord *Brahmā*



'brahmā devānān prathamah saṁbhabhūva  
viśvasya kartā bhuvanasya goptā |  
sa brahmavidyān sarvavidyā-pratiṣṭhām  
atharvāya jyeṣṭhaputrāya prāha ||'

*Muṇḍakopaniṣad 1.1.1*

"Among the Gods, *Brahmāji* came into being first, He is the creator of the entire universe and its protector. He taught the knowledge of *Brahman*, which is the most exalted among all forms of knowledge, to *Atharvā*, his first son."

# Lord Brahmā

## Lord Brahmā, creator

*Īśvara*, in the form of creator of the universe, *ṣṛṣṭikartā*, is called Lord *Brahmā*. He is the first among the *devas*, is the revealer of the *Vedas* and source of all knowledge. The word 'Brahma' derives from the verbal root 'bṛh' meaning 'to grow'. The derivation of the word is 'bṛñhati vardhayati yaḥ saḥ brahma' – Lord *Brahmā* is the one who causes growth.

## Nāmas, names

Lord *Brahmā* is addressed as *Caturmukha*, *Pitāmaha*, *Hiraṇyagarbha* and so on. He is also known as *Prajāpati*, Lord of all beings, as *Svayambhu*, self-born and *Vāgīśa*, Lord of speech.

He is referred to as *Brahmāji* so that he is not mistaken as *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the all pervading consciousness, the Truth.

## Rūpa varṇanam, form and symbolism

Lord *Brahmā* is traditionally depicted as having four heads, *Caturmukha Brahmā*, sitting in a meditative posture contemplating on creation. The four heads are said to represent the four directions or the four *Vedas*.

His four arms hold different objects, all symbolising knowledge and creation. An *akṣamālā* or *japamālā* symbolizing time can be seen in the upper right hand. The *Vedas* that stand for all knowledge are held in the upper left hand. A *kamaṇḍalu* or water pot is held by the lower left hand symbolizing water where creation emanates. He can also be seen holding a *sruk* and *sruva* in the fourth hand. The *sruk* has a slightly pointed wooden bowl and is the ghee offering-spoon while *sruva* is a dipping-spoon. Lord *Brahmā* uses this to make the oblations of ghee which is an important part of the *homam* or *yajña*, the sacred fire ritual that is required to sustain creation.

Lord *Brahmā* is always depicted with a white beard that denotes wisdom and hence he is known as *Pitāmaha*, the grand sire. His golden face symbolizes

activity performed with all knowledge indicating that the Lord is active when involved in the process of creation, taking recourse to *rajoguṇa*.

## Lord Brahmā's Śakti, consort



Creation is possible only when one has knowledge of that which is to be created. Lord *Brahmā* being the creator is wedded to knowledge.

His consort *Sarasvatī* represents all forms of knowledge and resides permanently on his tongue.

## Kriyā, function – creation

When the unmanifest becomes manifest, it is called creation. In other words, when what is in an unmanifest, undifferentiated form takes space, shape and form, it is called creation. Creation is cyclic, from unmanifest to manifest and again to unmanifest. Every creation was preceded by a



previous creation. In between two creations, *Īśvara* brings about dissolution, *pralaya*. Just as the sprout is within the seed in an unmanifest form, so too before creation, this world is in the unmanifest form in *Īśvara*, as knowledge.

When the time has come for the *jagat* to come out of its unmanifest condition, then the *karmas* of the *jīvas* in unmanifest condition clamour to be born. The individual *jīva* carries his or her own *karma* and the total *virāt* carries the *karma* of the total creation.

In *Sanskrit*, the universe is known as *viśva* which means 'voidha pratyaya gainyam', that which can be experienced in many and varied forms. The *Vedas* reduce all these forms to five constituent elements called the *pañca mahā bhūtas*, the five great elements – *ākāśa*, space; *vāyu*, air; *agni*, fire; *āpah*, water; and *pṛthivī*, earth.



In this elemental model of creation, these five great elements have undergone a process of grossification called 'pañcīkaraṇam'. These elements are thus present in every object both in animate beings and inanimate objects in varying degrees, permutations and combinations.

Lord *Brahmā* creates this elemental universe consisting of animate and inanimate objects. The different *lokas* (fields of experience), the fourteen worlds-seven up and seven down are created where human beings, *devas* and other beings come into existence.

### **Karma and karma-phala**

Exalted *puṇya* will result in taking birth in higher *lokas* where one becomes a *deva*, celestial. Only *pāpa karmas* fructifying will result in births as various lower bodies. A combination of *puṇya* and *pāpa* gives one the human body and every human being is a *miśra*, a mixture of both types of *karmas*.

When a *jīva* is to be connected with a particular set of *karma-phala*, he/she cannot go through them unless they get a particular body, parentage and set-up. In accordance to one's *karma*, a person is born at a particular place and time, parentage and culture. Lord *Brahmā* appropriately connects the *jīvas* with a particular set of *karma-phalas*. All the *karma-phala* standing in one's account cannot be fulfilled in one given birth. As a human birth is a mixture of both *puṇya* and *pāpa*, and every experience is a result of these, one keeps exhausting the *puṇya* and *pāpa* on one hand while accruing more *puṇya* and *pāpa* in the current life.

A human being is endowed with free will and can use it to earn *puṇya* by doing what is right, *dharma*. He earns *pāpa* by doing what is against *dharma*. The results of actions are according to the law of *karma*, which is a manifestation of *Īśvara*. Hence it is not a random creation. Everything is in order. There is knowledge in the creation. It is not chaotic. Lord *Brahmā* creates according to the law of *karma*.

### **Yajña, sacred fire ritual**



Lord *Brahmā* created human beings with the *yajña*. So, *yajña* became an integral part of the *Vedic* life. *Yajña* refers to a *Vedic* ritual in which one offers specific materials such as ghee and pieces of

wood to various deities through the medium of fire. Worship through the *yajña* is a unique form of prayer in the *Vedic* tradition. The *Vedas* perceived fire as the medium of worship and enjoined varieties of *yajñas* for the fulfilment of human pursuits. Since fire carries brilliance and heat, it is the life-sustaining principle in creation and lends itself for worship through the *Vedic yajña*.

### **Teacher of the Vedas**

Lord *Brahmā* taught the *Vedas*, *Brahma Vidyā* to his first son *Atharvā*, born of his *saṅkalpa*, thought. *Atharvā* imparted the same *Brahma Vidyā* to *Aṅgīras*. The *saṁpradāya* or tradition of passing on the *Brahma Vidyā* unadulterated was initiated by *Atharvā*.

*Brahma Vidyā* is the basis for all forms of knowledge. It is the most exalted, important and significant learning among all forms of knowledge as it destroys the cause of *saṁsāra*, the ignorance of the self.

### **Brahma Vidyā**

Insecurity and unhappiness are not mere psychological traits. They are much more basic and are centred on the core person. Neither the physical body nor the mind has any sense of insecurity or unhappiness. It is the self-conscious, judgemental person, manifesting in the sense of 'I', who feels insecure and unhappy. Therefore, the basic problem of a human being is the sense that 'I am insecure, I am unhappy'. There is no solution to this problem of insecurity and unhappiness through mere fulfilment of desires.



No matter how long or how often one creates conducive situations, replete with desirable objects and persons, the basic problem will never be addressed. The insecure or unhappy person continues to be the same, no matter the number of times he or she tries to be otherwise. This process of becoming is called 'saṁsāra' in the Vedic language. Essentially everyone is struggling to gain mokṣa, freedom from this struggle to acquire and 'become', though he or she may not have recognized this pursuit that backs all pursuits in life. The solution to this basic problem can only be in the form of self-knowledge wherein one recognizes that "I am already free from insecurity and unhappiness". This is the knowledge of the completely adequate self as being free from any form of limitation.

With vairāgya, dispassion, objectivity can be gained by understanding the limitations of all other pursuits. When one exposes oneself to this teaching and understands, 'ahaṁ brahmāsmi', "I am Brahman, the limitless", it is called Brahma Vidyā.

### Vāhana, vehicle – Haṁsa

Lord Brahma's vāhana is the haṁsa, the white swan which is a mythological bird. It is a symbol of grace and stands for discrimination and wisdom. Haṁsa is an intelligent bird blessed with the 'nīra-kṣīra viveka', an amazing power to separate water from milk. This symbolizes the power of discrimination of the wise, between dharma and adharma, appropriate and inappropriate. It ultimately leads to discrimination between nitya and anitya, permanent and temporary,

and eventually to discard all that is an obstacle for spiritual growth.

### Āditya

Āditya, the Sun with golden rays also represents Lord Brahmā as Hiranyagarbha. Hiranya means gold. Knowledge is likened to gold which is ever shining. Lord Brahmā is the source of all knowledge. The one in whom this hiranya, world in the form of knowledge is there, is called Hiranyagarbha.

### Lord Brahmā's temples

The Jagatpita Brahma temple in Pushkar, Rajasthan and Pattur Brahma Purishwarar temple and Uttamar Koil near Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu are the popular temples for the worship of Lord Brahmā.

As creation is the work of the mind and the intellect, Lord Brahmā represents the universal mind at the total level - the sūkṣma prapañca, subtle universe. From the standpoint of an individual, Lord Brahmā symbolizes one's own mind and intellect, the sūkṣma śarīra, subtle body. This cannot be objectified by the sense organs because they are sūkṣma, subtle. (Perhaps, this could be one of the reasons why Lord Brahmā does not have many altars of worship like the other mūrtis).

### Prārthanā, prayer

Seekers of knowledge pray to Lord Brahmā as he is the revealer of the Vedas. He blesses us with the knowledge of Brahman, Brahma Vidyā - gaining which there is nothing more to gain.

### Brahma Gāyatrī

'Om vedātmanāya vidmahe hiraṇya garbhāya dhīmahi tanno brahma pracodayāt ॥'

"Om, we meditate on Lord Brahmā, the embodiment of Vedas and who holds the world within himself. May Lord Brahmā bless us with intelligence and knowledge!"



## Symbolic representation of Lord Viṣṇu



*'śāntākāraṁ bhujaga śayanam padmanābham sureśam  
viśvādhāraṁ gaganasadrśam megha varṇam śubhāṅgam |*

*lakṣmī kāntam kamala nayanam yogihṛddhyānagamyam  
vande viṣṇuṁ bhavabhayaharam sarva lokaikanātham ||'*

"I salute that *Viṣṇu*, who has a form that is calm, who has a lotus in his navel, with *Ananta* as his bed, who is the Lord of the *devas* and the support of the whole universe, who is all-pervasive like space and dark like the clouds, whose limbs are auspicious, who is the consort of *Lakṣmī*, whose eyes are like the lotus petals, who is recognised through meditation in the heart of the *yogis*, who removes the fear of *saiṁsāra* and who is the only Lord of all the *lokas*, the worlds."

# Lord Viṣṇu

## Lord Viṣṇu, sustainer

Īśvara as Lord Viṣṇu sustains creation, the manifest universe. The word Viṣṇu means, 'vyāpnoti viśvaṁ yaḥ' the one who pervades the world. In the process of sustaining creation, Lord Viṣṇu preserves and pervades creation. He is the preserver of *dharma* that sustains harmony in creation.

## Nāmas, names

The *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma*, the 1000 *nāmas* in praise of Lord Viṣṇu, is one of the most popular forms of prayer. It was recited by the *Kuru* patriarch *Bhīṣma* to *Yudhiṣṭhira* in the *Mahābhārata*. Some of the popular *nāmas* among them are *Ananta*, *Govinda*, *Keśava*, *Padmanābha*, *Śrīdhara*, *Śrīnivāsa*, *Śrīmān*, *Vāsudeva*, *Nārāyaṇa* and so on.

The *nāma*, *Nārāyaṇa* is considered very sacred and the *aṣṭākṣara mantra* 'Om namo nārāyaṇāya' is mentioned in the *Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*. The word 'Nārāyaṇa' means 'narāṇām ayanam'. A human being is called *nara* and *ayanam* means abode. Being the ultimate abode for human beings, the Lord is called *Nārāyaṇa*.

## Rūpa varṇanam, form and symbolism



Lord Viṣṇu is depicted in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* and other *purāṇas* as having four hands. In one hand he holds a *śaṅkha*, a conch which represents the *Vedas* and beckons people to come to him. In another hand he holds a *cakra*, the disc for destroying all the *kāmas* and *krodhas*, our internal enemies that stands in our way, not allowing us to attain the Lord. Therefore, we pray to the Lord and earn the grace to destroy *kāma* and *krodha* by using his *cakra*. The third hand holds a *gada*, the mace that destroys *ahaṅkāra*. The fourth hand points to the Lord's feet while showing the *abhaya mudrā*, offering protection and implying, "All these you can accomplish when you surrender unto Me". This is the most popular form in which the Lord is invoked for worshipping and for *dhyānam* (meditation).

The colour of Lord Viṣṇu is the colour of dark blue cloud that denotes his cosmic dimensions and his connection with the *Vedic* Gods of rain, thunder and earth. He is usually depicted with a smiling tranquil face. He is draped in *pitāmbaram*, the yellow coloured silken *vastram*. He wears the famous *kaustubha* gem that rests on his left chest and the *vaijayantīmālā*, a garland of flowers and gems. He can be presented in a sitting, standing or reclining posture.

According to the *purāṇas*, Lord Viṣṇu is seen reclining on *Ādiśeṣa*. The universe is borne by the thousand-headed serpent called *Ananta* or *Ādiśeṣa*, who is a symbol of power. This popular reclining posture is called *Ananta śayanam*.

## Lord Viṣṇu's Śakti, consort

Goddess *Lakṣmī*, the consort of Lord Viṣṇu called *Śrī* or *Tirumagal* represents all forms of wealth and prosperity in abundance that is required for sustenance. She resides permanently on Lord Viṣṇu's chest. Hence he is also known as *Śrīdhara*, *Śrīnivāsa*.



## Kriyā, function – sustenance

### Lord Viṣṇu, bestower of wealth

To his devotees, Lord Viṣṇu bestows *Śrī*, all kinds of wealth that is required to live a prosperous and successful life in keeping with their *karma-phala*. Anything that gives us happiness is wealth. He gives us *Śrī* in the form of marital happiness, *gṛha*, home; *santāna*, children; *dhana*, wealth; *dhānya*, foodgrains; *rājya*, kingdom; *dhairya*, courage; *vidyā*, knowledge; *jaya*, victory / success; *aiśvarya*, the capacity to rule and *ārogya*, health.

'*Yoga kṣemam vahāmyaham*' – taking recourse to *sattva-guṇa*, Lord Viṣṇu protects, supports, nourishes the world and preserves *dharma*.



## Lord Viṣṇu, preserver of dharma

*Dharma* is a manifestation of *Īśvara*, the cosmic law and order which sustains the harmony in creation. It is necessary for a human being to conform to the order of *dharma* while relating to the world. Everyone has enough knowledge and common sense to sense *sāmānya dharma*, the universal values, to sense what is right and wrong without being taught. We have the innate knowledge that says, "I do not want to get hurt"; "I do not want to be cheated". Other human beings too do not want to get hurt, do not want to get cheated. This is the basic structure for our interaction in society and it is called *dharma* which is meant to hold society within its framework. Every human being is endowed with a free will which can be abused. Since we have a faculty of choice, we must have certain norms controlling various actions to gain what we desire. Not being pre-programmed, the end cannot justify the means. We have a choice over both ends and means. Not only must the end chosen conform to values, but the means to gain the end must also be in keeping with what is right. These norms guide us to have consideration for the others welfare and needs. We cannot selfishly fulfill our *rāga* and *dveṣas*, likes and dislikes, unmindful of others welfare.



*Īśvara* is manifest in the *buddhi* in the form of *dharma*. By being a human being we are given the knowledge of *dharma*. We may go against this knowledge due to the pressures born of desires, background and the unconscious, *kaṣāya* and so on. All the pain of the past, from our childhood to the present

caused by insecurity, forms the unconscious, called *kaṣāya* in *Sanskrit*. Nature has made a provision for us to bury this pain deep into the subconscious. It is the flip side of the ego, the shadow part of oneself that really controls our life. The mechanical behaviour and subjectivity comes from this unconscious part of our mind and being.

Subjectivity in one's value structure is the reason why we take certain things to be more real or important than they are. Pursuits become very obsessive as we look upon an object as more valuable than it is as though it is going to solve all our problems. To be objective is to be intelligent and discriminative between *dharma* and *adharmā*. Objectivity towards all our pursuits will ensure that we do not transgress *dharma* while pursuing the same.

## Managing desires

Desire is *ichā sakti*. Lord Viṣṇu is in the form of desire. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā*, '*dharma aviruddha kāmāḥ asmi*', "I am in the form of desires which are not against *dharma*". One can have more ambitions and desires but while fulfilling desires, you cannot rub against *dharma*. Going against *dharma* is the tendency. We must curb this tendency while fulfilling any desire. When we fulfil a desire in keeping with *dharma*, we are free from conflict and guilt.

A mature person is a discriminating person who always thinks whether what we want is good for oneself. I want money for happiness and peace. However, in the process, if I also buy conflicts, sorrow and sleepless nights, then the money is worthless. If conflicts accompany any gain, the bargain is a bad one. A mature person is one who sees the immensity of loss in terms of one's happiness and peace of mind, *sānti*. We have to deliberately make an attempt to conform to *dharma*. We should be able to see Lord Viṣṇu's laws of *dharma* and *karma* at work and refrain from *adhārmic* actions to fulfil desires. Let us pray to Lord Viṣṇu in the form of *dharma*, "Help me to conform to *dharma*".

## Law of *dharma* and law of *karma*



*Dharma* and *karma* are like the two sides of the same coin. One cannot rub against *dharma* without getting rubbed in the process. Nobody can rub against a law without getting rubbed. In the law of *karma*, one is answerable for our own actions. As we have a choice, we cannot get away with it if we make a wrong choice. One may get away from the hands of local laws, but not from the universal laws of *dharma*.

*Dharma* is not a belief. According to law of *dharma*, human action has an unseen result (which will fructify

at a later time), *adr̥ṣṭa phala* and a visible immediate result, *dr̥ṣṭa phala*. When one follows *dharma* and does appropriate/good actions, it gives *dr̥ṣṭa phala*, *karma ānanda*, satisfaction and also earns what is called *puṇya* that will manifest as pleasant experiences. When one goes against *dharma* and gets into inappropriate activity not sanctioned by *śāstra* or society, we pick up not only guilt but also earn what is called *pāpa* which would manifest as unpleasant, painful experiences. *Puṇya* and *pāpa* are realities for us. The law of *karma* is also *Īśvara*. Where there is the order of *dharma*, there is the order of *karma*.

Lord *Viṣṇu* gives us the *karma-phala*, results of our actions in this *sr̥ṣṭi*, creation. He protects *dharma* through the laws of *karma*. He represents the intelligence, reason and purpose in the individual. He blesses us with the vision to see a purpose in everything in the world and to do actions that are appropriate and subservient to *dharma*. *Karma yoga* is to be in harmony with the world, performing actions in accordance with the law of *dharma* that govern *karma* – ‘*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*’. Therefore, we have to choose our actions recognising *Īśvara* as *dharma*. Then our actions become a form of *arcana* to the Lord. This attitude results in *antaḥ karaṇa śuddhi*, purification of the mind. Once this happens it takes no time for self-knowledge to take place.

## *Avatāra*, incarnation

Lord *Viṣṇu* sustains *dharma* in the order that exists of what is right and wrong. Since human beings enjoy freewill, they can abuse their will and act against *dharma*. When majority of the people in power and positions take to a life of *adharmā*, when *dharma* is suppressed by false beliefs, practices, wrong thinking brought on by misguided leadership, there is a breakdown of *dharma*, law and order. A person in such a society can no longer follow legitimate means for achieving ends. For a person to legitimately pursue prosperity there must be an infrastructure, a structure of law and order that majority of the people follow. It is true that there will always be some degree of dishonesty in any society. However, when the majority of the people refuse to follow *dharma*, the problem becomes enormous and cannot be ignored.

When people abuse their free will at every turn, something drastic needs to be done. To put things in order requires the divine intervention of the Lord, as an incarnation. Like all actions, this drastic action is a result, a *karma-phala* of another action, namely everyone’s prayers. When people who want to follow *dharma* find it impossible to do so, they pray to the Lord for help. In the *purāṇas*, it is said that before every incarnation there is a collective petition to the Lord in the form of prayers on the part of all *dhārmic* people including the *devas*. The very prayers become the material cause for Lord *Viṣṇu*, the sustainer of *dharma*, to assume a body to protect the *dhārmic* people by re-establishing *dharma*.

‘*yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata |  
abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmyaham ||*’

(B *Gītā* Ch. 4, Verse 7)

“O *Bharata* (*Arjuna*)! Whenever there is a decline in right living, and an increase in wrong living (everywhere), I bring Myself into being (assume a physical body)”.

‘*paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām |  
dharma sainsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ||*’

(B *Gītā*, Ch. 4, Verse 8)

“For the protection of those who are committed to *dharma* and the destruction (conversion) of those who follow *adharmā*; and for the establishment of *dharma*, I come into being in every *yuga*”.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *purāṇas* describe how Lord *Viṣṇu* incarnates in the world, to preserve *dharma*, when *adharmā* becomes rampant. The main ten incarnations, *Daśāvatāras* that Lord *Viṣṇu* assumed are - *Matsya*, fish; *Kūrma*, tortoise; *Varāha*, boar; *Narasimha*, lion-man; *Vāmana*, dwarf; and *Paraśurāma*, *Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Buddha* and *Kalki*, the last *avatāra* that is yet to manifest.

### **Vāhana, vehicle – Garuḍa**

The *Garuḍa* is a mythological bird like an eagle. It is the chosen *vāhana* or vehicle of Lord *Viṣṇu*. The divine bird is also represented in his flag. According to the *purāṇas*, *Garuḍa* the king of birds is huge in size and denotes speed, power and swiftness in movement. These are qualities required by Lord *Viṣṇu* for sustenance.



### **Śāligrāma**

Lord *Viṣṇu* is invoked in the *Śāligrāma*, a type of stone obtained from the river *Gandaki*. This stone

contains marks of the *cakra*, the disc or weapon that Lord *Viṣṇu* holds in his hand. The *Śāligrāma* gains importance from its association with Lord *Viṣṇu* as told in the *purāṇic* stories.

### **Lord Viṣṇu's temples**

*Divya deśams* are the 108 *Viṣṇu* temples. These abodes of the Lord have become famous due to the devotional hymns called 4000 *Divya Prabandham* sung by the *Āzhvārs*, the twelve devotee saints of Lord *Viṣṇu*. These beautiful hymns are in praise of the Lord in different temples that include Sri Ranganatha Swami temple in Srirangam, Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirupati, Sri Devarajaswami temple in Naimisaranya and Sri Parthasarathy temple in Chennai, and more.

### **Prārthanā, prayer**

We seek Lord *Viṣṇu*'s blessings for abundance of material prosperity, to gain all that is good, for harmony and order in the universe. We invoke his grace to neutralize our *rāga dveṣas*, likes and dislikes which are an obstacle for following *dharma* and to gain *antaḥ karaṇa śuddhi*, purification of the mind.

### **Viṣṇu Gāyatrī**

‘Om nārāyaṇāya vidmahe vāsudevāya dhīmahi tanno viṣṇuḥ pracodayāt ||’

“Om, we meditate on Lord *Nārāyaṇa*, the lord of the universe; May Lord *Viṣṇu* illumine our intellect!”



## Symbolic representation of Lord Śiva



*'namaste astu bhagavan viśveśvarāya mahādevāya tryambakāya  
tripurāntakāya trikālāgni kālāya kālāgni rudrāya nilakaṇṭhāya  
mṛtyuñjayāya sarveśvarāya sadāśivoāya śrīman mahādevāya namaḥ ॥'*

“Salutations to the Lord, who is the Lord of the universe, who is the greatest among *devas*, who has three eyes, who destroyed three cities, who is the master of the three fires, who is *Rudra* who burns the world, who has a blue neck, who won over the God of death, (*Yama*), who is the Lord of everything, who is ever peaceful and who bestows auspiciousness to all, salutations again.”

# Lord Śiva

## Lord Śiva, one who resolves everything

Lord Śiva is 'sarva-saṁhārakaḥ', the one who resolves everything and brings about the transformation of the universe. Śiva means auspicious. Not only is he auspicious, he makes us auspicious and purifies us. He is the embodiment of blessing to heal all afflictions, at all times and he is the physician to cure the disease of *samsāra*.

## Nāmas, names

Some of the names and forms of worship of Lord Śiva that are mentioned in the 'Śiva aṣṭottara śata nāmāvalī' and Śrī Rudram are Rudra, Nīlakaṇṭha, Mr̥tyuñjaya, Sadāśiva, Śaṅkara, Ardhanārīśvara, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Naṭarāja and many more.

## Rūpa varṇanam, form and symbolism

In the śāstras, he is given a particular form for the purpose of worship and contemplation. There are many features in this form and a special meaning is associated with each of them.

In the upper right hand he holds a *ḍamaru*, a small drum. In the upper left hand we see him holding fire. We also see in his matted locks a maiden figure representing *Gaṅgā*.



The entire form of Lord Śiva represents the Lord as the universe made up of *pañca bhūta*, the five elements: *ākāśa*, space; *vāyu*, air; *agni*, fire; *jalam*, water and *pṛthivī*, earth.

The drum that produces sound represents the element space. His matted locks represent air. Space and air being invisible to the eye, their presence is inferred by these symbols. Fire is shown in one hand and water is represented by the *Gaṅgā* flowing from his head. Earth is represented by the whole form and by *vibhūti*, the ashes smeared on the body of the Lord.

*Vibhūti* means riches and glories.

It also means sacred ash. When everything is burnt down, destroyed, what remains is the ash. So we say, "Everything is reduced to ashes". That is why symbolically Lord Śiva smears ashes on his body constantly reminding us that ashes alone remain when anything is destroyed.



At the individual level, Lord Śiva represents the body, feeling and emotions.

Lord Śiva is called *Trinetra*, because he has three eyes. The two eyes represent the sun and the moon and the third eye is the fire of knowledge, *jñāna cakṣu*. Indra, the king of *devas*, instigates *Manmatha*, *Kāmadeva* to break Lord Śiva's penance. Lord Śiva with his third eye burns *Kāma* (desire) to ashes.

Lord Śiva also wears the snake as a *yajñopavīta*, the sacred thread which indicates that the Lord protects us from all fears.

*Trīśula*, trident that Lord Śiva carries is for the restoration of peace and divinity in the universe and the destruction of evil. According to the *purāṇas*, Lord Śiva kills the *asuras*, demons and wrong doers with it. What is relevant to us is that it has the capacity to remove the *āsuri saṁpat*, negative qualities like *kāma*, desire; *krodha*, anger; *lobha*, greed; *moha*, delusion; *mada*, arrogance and *mātsarya*, jealousy which inhibit one's spiritual journey.



Lord Śiva manifested as Lord *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*, the first teacher who revealed the Truth that is the identity between the individual and *Brahman* to the *ṛṣis*, in silent exposition.

Lord *Naṭarāja*, the *Tāṇḍava* or dancing *Śiva* is a form that depicts the joy of creation. The cosmic dance of Lord *Śiva*, '*ānanda tāṇḍavam*' symbolizes the cosmic cycle of creation and resolution as well as the joyous appreciation of the rhythm and harmony in the universe.

### Lord *Śiva*'s *Śakti*, consort

Lord *Śiva*'s consort *Pārvatī*, also called *Śakti*, represents strength. For destruction, one needs power and strength. We see this in the form of *Ardhanārīśvara*, where *Śiva* has *Śakti* as the other half of his body.



### *Kriyā*, function – resolution

Lord *Śiva* is the one who withdraws/resolves everything unto himself at the time of *pralaya*, resolution. Taking recourse to *tamo guṇa*, he disintegrates and destroys the universe. It is not a total destruction; it is withdrawal from the manifest to an unmanifest condition, only to become manifest once again. Each form regularly undergoes a change – transformation.

### *Kālabhakṣaka*, devourer of time

In the universe, every form created has a measured time. Nothing remains eternal. Time consumes everything. It is time that makes one change, grow, decline and die – to be reduced to ashes. Every form that is there in this world, is resolved unto Lord *Śiva*, as *Trikālāgni-kāla*, who is fire, devouring the three periods of time (past, present and future). Lord *Śiva* resolves the mortal body according to the *prārabdha karma* of *jīvas*.

*Kālah*, time is the devourer of all *jīvas*; Lord *Śiva* consumes even that 'time', *kālabhakṣaka*. The story of *Mārkaṇḍeya* portrayed in the *purāṇas* is an illustration of this fact. The Lord is known as *Mṛtyuñjaya*, victor of time.

### *Maṅgala rūpa*

Lord *Śiva* is the destroyer of our *ajñāna*, ignorance. It is by knowledge alone that one can cross *saiṃsāra* which is born of self-ignorance. Lord *Śiva* is called *Śivaḥ*, meaning *maṅgala rūpa*, who helps us overcome all the obstacles and guides us to *mokṣa*.

### Divine and demonic dispositions

All our *purāṇas* talk about wars between *devas* and *asuras*. This represents one's internal conflicts. Everyone is endowed with *daiṃvī saṃpat*, divine qualities of a *deva* to an extent and also the *āsurī saṃpat*, qualities of an *asura*. All conflicts first happen within; every war is first waged in the mind. If it cannot be resolved there, it expresses itself externally. With proper enquiry, these conflicts get resolved as they arise. If that resolving capacity is not there, or the people around do not help with the resolution but inflame the conflict, a war erupts. One has to pray to Lord *Śiva*, to destroy the *āsurī* thinking and resolve conflicts. Blessed with *daiṃvī saṃpat* one gains maturity. In the avoidance of the negative, the positive is also cultivated.

### *Daivi saṃpat*, divine disposition

*Daivi saṃpat*, divine disposition is the basis for *jñāna*, knowledge meant to help one gain *mokṣa*, freedom from *saiṃsāra*. In order to cultivate the values that constitute the mind of a person with divine disposition, certain values are presented.

Virtues like purity of mind, commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and *yoga*, charitableness, self-restraint, straightforwardness, practice of non-injury, absence of longing for objects, not reacting internally to accusations, modesty, fortitude, compassion are some of the qualities which belong to one whose nature is divine.

One need not be a saint to have these virtues; anyone can cultivate them. Examine each value and assimilate it so that by following these values, we are not obliging anyone else, but only oneself. One becomes divine, a complete human being. Only a person who has assimilated these *daiṃvī saṃpat*, divine values, will have



the mental poise and dispassion needed to acquire knowledge of the self, for *mokṣa*, liberation.

## Lord Śiva, destroyer of *āsurī saṁpat*, demonic disposition



*Āsurī saṁpat*, the wealth of an *asura* on the other hand, will lead to bondage. The notion of bondage already exists in everyone and it expresses itself as “I am wanting. I am limited. I am other than *Īśvara*”. There is a sense of fear and insecurity because of seeing oneself as different from *Īśvara*. With the *āsurī* qualities, the bondage is perpetuated.

Those of an *āsurī* disposition have no discrimination between *dharma* and *adharma*, proper and improper behaviour leading to *punya* and *pāpa*, desirable and undesirable results. Since *punya* and *pāpa* are not visible, *adrṣṭa*, the people with *āsurī* disposition do not believe in their existence. Their minds are committed to nothing beyond sense perception and gratification of their bloated ego. What they see is the only truth and anything more than what the senses can enjoy, has no reality. They are not people with low IQ, but people of meagre thinking, *alpa-buddhayaḥ*.

Further, they are people whose actions are cruel, *ugra-karmāṇaḥ*. When the end justifies the means, one becomes cruel. This is because the end is so important that one does not worry about others needs and wants. The end alone becomes so important that when there is a choice of means, the only consideration is how beneficial it is to achieving the end. By fair means or foul, one will achieve it. All their pursuits are backed by the philosophy that there is nothing more in life. Their false conclusion is that this alone is the human end and there is nothing beyond it.

Wealth is gathered by these people, not for sharing, but only for their own enjoyment. Once they have achieved a buying power, they indulge in amassing

of wealth to please their ego. They want to have more and more so that they can compare themselves favourably with others.

These people are self-glorifying, vain and arrogant because of their wealth. They do not respect anyone else but think that everyone should respect them. They are filled with pride because of their wealth, '*dhana-māna-madānvitāḥ*'. *Māna* is the attitude that “I am to be worshipped”; *mada* is arrogance and conceitedness born of one's wealth. They have *bala*, a brute strength backed by their *rāga-dveṣas* that is used to overpower others.

Even if a person is wealthy and born in a good family with lineage and yet he is an *asura* in terms of his behaviour, his family background becomes meaningless. He may also follow rituals only for self-glorification and self-promotion. The purpose is not for anything noble, but to destroy some enemy, or at least to gain some fame. *Rāvāṇa* did great *tapas* only for the destruction of others. He was very learned in the *Sāma Veda*, a very religious person in some respects. Sadly, he did everything only to gain power to destroy, for basically he was an *asura*.

People of *āsurī* disposition not only live a life void of goodness, but are also vociferous in making their opinions known to others. They cannot tolerate the qualities, lifestyle, disciplines and values of people who are spiritual seekers and followers of *dharma*. Seeing the merits of others makes them feel small and to counteract that, they will point out defects in them. By this attitude, they contribute to the degradation of society.

A person, who has the attributes of an *asura*, is someone from whom we have to protect one's belongings, self-respect, children, one's very life, even one's *punya* (not allowing one to perform good actions). An *asura* is not one with terrifying appearance. Behind a pleasing form he can be undesirable, motivated by false values.

All the attributes of *asuras* stem from *kāma*, binding desire; *krodha*, anger and *lobha*, greed. These three are the doorway to *naraka* (any painful experience). They

disturb and destroy one's mind in such a way that we are no longer fit for any *puruṣārtha*, human pursuits leave alone *mokṣa*.

Once *kāma* is there, *krodha*, anger and *lobha*, passion and greed necessarily follow. If we can manage *kāma*, then anger and greed are taken care of. A desire is binding if its non-fulfilment makes one angry. It is also important to discern where greed begins and the binding desire ends. In fulfilling a desire, if we go against *dharma*, that desire becomes greed.

They are committed to desires that cannot be fulfilled at all, for their desires have no limit. It is like the fire, *anala*, the one who never says 'enough'. Similarly binding, insatiable desire is never quenched. Due to lack of discrimination, they attribute to something a value that it does not have. So, they are bound, *baddhāḥ* with the bonds of hope and greed – bound by hundreds of aspirations, *āśā-pāśā-śataiḥ baddhāḥ*.

All three of these - desire, anger and greed - are portals to painful experiences and therefore the cause for self-destruction, '*ātmanaḥ nāśanam*'. No intelligent person wants to get destroyed. So, naturally we should give up these three.

*Āsurī saṁpat* hampers our emotional growth and maturity. To overcome these enemies, we first need to recognize their presence in our minds. We must examine what gives rise to these qualities and sustains them and whether they are legitimate. When we begin to appreciate the illegitimacy of these enemies, we will not be bound by them.

Devotion to the Lord through prayer, certain disciplines and also *vicāra*, inquiry are necessary in order to give these up. We can train our minds to change our priorities so that what seems big, assumes an appropriate proportion. Once a true devotee recognizes that he is not bound by *kāma*, *krodha* and *lobha* and that what he is seeking is *mokṣa*, he can certainly accomplish it.

Lord *Śiva* blesses the devotee by destroying the *āsuri* dispositions and guides them to follow the path of *dharma* and attain *mokṣa*.

## Vāhana, vehicle – Nandi

*Nandi* the white bull is the favoured *vāhana*, vehicle of Lord *Śiva*. The bull stands for *dharma*, justice and virtue. *Nandi*, reverentially called *Nandikeśvara*, is the first devotee of Lord *Śiva*. According to the *purāṇas*, he is said to have performed a great penance and Lord *Śiva* appeared before him in the form of *Dakṣiṇāmūrti* and taught him to recognize the eternal truth. *Nandikeśvara* is considered as one of the *Ācāryas* of *Saivism*.

## Śivaliṅgam

*Īśvara* as Lord *Śiva* is generally worshipped in a particular form known as *liṅga* meaning a symbol. The derivation of the word is '*liṅgyate grhyate anena iti liṅgam*' – that by which (something) is represented or known is *liṅga*.



If all forms in creation are put together, it would form an indefinable form which is symbolized by the *liṅga*. Since all forms in the creation are *Īśvara* and *Īśvara* is not any one form, the *liṅga* represents the formless form of *Īśvara*.

## Lord Śiva's temples

There are five temples in India dedicated to the worship of Lord *Śiva* in the form of the five elements, *pañca bhūtas*. Lord *Śiva* is worshipped as *ākāśa*, space in Chidambaram; *vāyu*, air in Kalahasti; *agni*, fire in Thiruvannamalai; *jalam*, water in Thiruvanaikaval; *ṛthivī*, earth in Kanchipuram.

There are also twelve *Śiva* temples known as the *jyotirlinga-kṣetras*, where the Lord is believed to have manifested in the form of light. Some of these temples are Sri Ramanathar temple at Rameswaram, Sri Triambakeswara temple near Nasik, Sri Somanatha temple at Somnath, Sri Mahakaleswar temple at Ujjain and Sri Kasi Viswanatha temple at Varanasi and so on.

## Prārthanā, prayer

'Śrī Rudram' a hymn from the *Vedas*, is in praise of Lord Śiva. The famous five syllable 'pañcākṣara mantra' 'namaḥ śivāya' occurs in the middle of the Śrī Rudram. As a prayer when Śrī Rudram is chanted by a seeker, it becomes a *prāyascitta* for *pāpas*. We pray to Lord

Śiva to purify and make us free from conflicts and inadequacies that are centred on the ego.

Lord Śiva being *mokṣa-svarūpa*, prayers to him become a *sādhānā*, a means in the discovery of oneself as non-separate from the Lord.

## Śiva Gāyatrī

'Om̐ tat puruṣāya vidhmahe mahādevāya dhīmahi tanno rudraḥ pracodayāt ॥'

"Om̐, we meditate on the great Puruṣa, Lord Mahādeva; May Lord Rudra illumine our mind!"



## Conclusion

The *Vedic* vision of the *Trimūrti* – *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva* – is that they are all different manifestations of ONE *ĪŚVARA*. As they represent the three functions of creation, sustenance and resolution, they are invoked as different deities at the functional level. This understanding helps us worship each of the *Trimūrtis* with equal reverence.





Lord Brahmā with Goddess Sarasvatī  
on the hamsa vāhana



Lord Viṣṇu with Goddess Lakṣmī  
on the garuḍa vāhana



Lord Śiva with Goddess Pārvatī  
on the ṛṣabha vāhana

## Forms in the Vedic Vision

*Vedic* culture has survived thousands of centuries of change as it has an inherent, self-sustaining strength. *Vedic* culture has its basis in realities fundamental to a human being. We need to understand what is fundamental about any culture and what is flexible and adaptable. Through all scientific and medical discoveries, human nature has remained the same. We continue to feel the same emotions and feelings that our forefathers felt despite the belief that we know more than them in terms of science and technology. The fact that a human being can experience joy, sorrow, guilt, anger and so on has not changed. While we can improve the quality of life, the fact that one day life comes to an end has not changed. While the objects of desire have changed, the need for fulfilling human desires has not changed. Thus, while human beings have changed the world around them in many ways, fundamental characteristics of a human being remain unchanged.

The essence of *Vedic* culture is its teaching based on the *Vedas*, which addresses the issues relevant to the life of every human being. It addresses problems that are common to all such as one's non-acceptance of one's limitations and one's need to be free from being a wanting person. The teaching enables the individual to discover his/her essential nature as free from all limitations. This knowledge enables us to live in

harmony with all beings and our environment. This is the inner strength of our *Vedic* culture.

The various cultural forms that pervade the lifestyle of an Indian are rooted in this tradition of knowledge and self-discovery. The role of culture and society has constantly been to promote emotional growth and maturity in an individual that will lead to the discovery of the self as a free and complete person. While some of these cultural forms may undergo modifications and respond to changes in the immediate environment, its basis cannot change as it is essential and true to human nature. While the fundamental quest for freedom continues in all of us, it is incumbent upon us to understand whether the cultural modifications are conducive to our inner search and fulfilment of life.

The vision of our *Vedic* culture is, "All that is here is *Īśvara*". It is this understanding of a universal, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient *Īśvara* that influences our art forms, languages, attitudes and our ways of worship. Most of the socio – cultural customs that are followed in our society have their basis in the spiritual wisdom of the *Vedas*. *Vedic* culture is a religious culture for everything is sacred. The spiritual life is lived on a daily basis. *Vedic* customs and traditions are an expression of our understanding of oneness among all seeming differences in the universe. They reflect our sensitivity to all beings and

our broad acceptance of the sanctity of all forms of life and the creation itself. When the meaning behind various forms are understood, then the forms are not mere habitual behaviours born of convention. They become expressions of a profound vision and deep understanding of oneself and the world. The universe in the *Vedic* way of life is understood as being non-separate from *Īśvara*.

Culture is the route to our roots. Self-esteem is built by understanding, appreciating and living in the culture in which one is born and brought up. Life is lived through cultural forms.

We have a rich and varied legacy of forms by which an individual is initiated into the *Vedic* culture. Cultural forms have great significance for they provide a link between the generations and are the basis for the individual's inner growth.

However, without understanding the spirit of tradition behind the form, a form is meaningless. We need these forms to be imbued with meaning in order to be transformed into meaningful elements of our culture.

## Symbol worship of *Īśvara*

When the whole creation is *Īśvara*, every form in the creation is a manifestation of *Īśvara*. When we are unable to see this fact, it becomes necessary to have the *bhāvāna*, the attitude of *bhagavad-buddhi* in a given form. For this purpose, one invokes the Lord in a *vigraha*. This tradition has been handed down to consecutive generations as specific forms. The *bhagavad-buddhi* – seeing any form as the Lord – is associated with those forms in one's mind.

When we see Lord *Gaṇeśa*, we recognize the form as the Lord and not as a strange creature with an odd head and a big belly. This is what is known as tradition, *sampradāya*. We should understand this as a blessing and an inheritance of an enriching cultural legacy of forms. The form invokes the devotee in everyone and that is a great heritage.

When a person worships, he is not worshipping an idol. Everybody worships the Lord. The sculptors

do not look upon the *vigraha* as a piece of stone or marble once the Lord is invoked in it. Only until the installation ceremony is the form merely a stone. During the installation process, the *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*, imparting life to the *vigraha* is done through *mantras* and *sanskāras*. The last act of the sculptor is to open the eyes of the *vigraha*. The sculptor is the first person to fall at the feet of the *mūrti* which is no more just a stone for him. Now it is the Lord and he worships the Lord.

We do not even need a stone for worship. Even in a lump of turmeric powder, we can invoke Lord *Gaṇapati*. In a bucket of water, we can invoke all the deities by chanting *mantras* of the holy rivers every day and bathe in *Gaṅgā*, *Yamunā* and so on. We need not actually go to the rivers. All that is required is a specific attitude and perspective.

The depth of attitude behind a symbol is experienced deeply in our day to day life. For instance, when we stand before the picture of our departed grandparents, what is in front of us is just a photograph. When we place a flower on the photo, this offering is not to the piece of paper but it is a mark of respect to our departed grandparents. Without such forms of expressions of respect and love, life will be void.

One may ask, "Why do people worship the Lord?" One cannot ask, "Why do people worship *vigrahas*?" One never worships *vigrahas* themselves, but instead we worship them as symbols of the Lord. We worship the Lord to bring about *antaḥ karaṇa śuddhi*, the purity of mind that is needed to understand that *Īśvara* is everywhere.

When we have not understood that the Lord is everywhere, we have to worship physical manifestations of the Lord to keep the ego under check. Since we think that we are separate from the Lord, a flower is placed at the feet of the Lord and the ego is kept under check. Thus symbols such as *vigrahas* play an important role in this worship by cultivating humility, until we are able to conceive of the all-pervasive *Īśvara*.



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