

Daśavatāra

Ten Avatars of Viṣṇu

Contents

1	Dashavatara	1
1.1	Etymology	1
1.2	Incarnation of the Divine	1
1.2.1	Restoration of the Divine	1
1.2.2	Yuga	1
1.3	Popular list	2
1.4	Historical development	3
1.4.1	Origins	3
1.4.2	Alternate lists	3
1.4.3	Status of Krishna	3
1.5	Evolutionary interpretation	4
1.6	References	4
1.7	Sources	5
1.8	External links	6
2	Vishnu	7
2.1	Etymology	7
2.2	Sacred texts - Shruti and Smriti	8
2.3	Shruti	8
2.3.1	Vaishnava Canon	8
2.3.2	Brahmanas	11
2.4	Smriti	12
2.4.1	Vishnu Smriti	12
2.4.2	Bhagavata Purana	12
2.4.3	Vishnu Purana	12
2.5	Sangam literature	12
2.6	Theological attributes	13
2.6.1	Five forms	14
2.7	Relations with deities	14
2.7.1	Shiva	14
2.7.2	Lakshmi	14
2.7.3	Saraswati and Ganga	15
2.7.4	Garuda	15

2.8	Iconography	15
2.9	Avatars	16
2.10	Beyond Hinduism	17
2.10.1	Sikhism	17
2.10.2	Buddhism	17
2.10.3	Others	18
2.11	Thousand names of Vishnu	18
2.12	In popular culture	20
2.13	See also	20
2.14	References	20
2.15	Further reading	21
2.16	External links	21
3	Matsya	22
3.1	Iconography	22
3.2	Legends	22
3.3	Symbolism and comparative mythology	24
3.4	Worship	25
3.5	See also	25
3.6	References	25
3.7	Further reading	26
3.8	External links	26
4	Kurma	27
4.1	Samudra manthan (The Churning of the ocean)	27
4.2	See also	27
4.3	Notes	27
4.4	External links	28
5	Varaha	29
5.1	Iconography	29
5.2	Legends	30
5.3	Evolution	31
5.4	Symbolism	32
5.5	Temples	33
5.6	See also	33
5.7	References	33
5.8	Bibliography	34
5.9	External links	34
6	Narasimha	35
6.1	Scriptural sources	35
6.1.1	References from Vedas	35

6.1.2	Narasimha and Prahlāda	35
6.1.3	Narasimha and Ādi Śaṅkara	37
6.2	Mode of worship	37
6.2.1	Prayers	37
6.3	Symbolism	38
6.4	Significance	39
6.5	Forms of Narasimha	39
6.6	Early images	40
6.7	Cultural Tradition of Procession (Śrī Nṛsimha Yātrā)	41
6.8	Temples dedicated to Narasimha	41
6.8.1	In Andhra Pradesh	41
6.8.2	In Karnataka	43
6.8.3	In Maharashtra and Goa	45
6.8.4	In Tamilnadu	45
6.8.5	In Kerala	46
6.8.6	In Rajasthan	47
6.8.7	In other places	47
6.9	See also	48
6.10	References	48
6.11	External links	49
7	Vamana	50
7.1	Origin	50
7.1.1	Hinduism	50
7.1.2	Jainism	51
7.2	Symbolism	51
7.2.1	In Sikhism	51
7.3	In the Ramayana	51
7.4	Temples	52
7.5	See also	52
7.6	References	52
7.7	External links	53
8	Parashurama	54
8.1	Lineage	54
8.2	Birth	54
8.2.1	Renuka and the clay pot	55
8.3	Getting the Divine weapon Parashu from Lord Shiva	55
8.4	Getting Vijaya bow from Lord Indra	55
8.5	Kartavirya Arjuna and the Haihaya Kingdom	55
8.6	Genocide of the Bhṛigu and the sacred calf	56
8.6.1	Vengeance against Kshatriya	57

8.7	Ramayana	57
8.7.1	Shiva's Bow	57
8.8	Mahabharata	58
8.8.1	Vow of Bhishma	58
8.8.2	Mentorship of Drona	59
8.8.3	Fate of Karna	59
8.9	Different epochs	59
8.9.1	Ekadanta	60
8.9.2	Beating back the Arabian Sea	60
8.9.3	Request to Shiva	60
8.9.4	Rambhoja	60
8.9.5	Surya	61
8.9.6	Dattatreya	61
8.10	Kalaripayattu	61
8.11	Sanyasi and end time	61
8.12	Name	61
8.13	Parashurama temples	62
8.14	Parashurama Kshetras	62
8.15	See also	62
8.16	References	63
8.17	Additional sources	63
8.18	External links	63
9	Rama	64
9.1	Etymology	64
9.2	Literary sources	65
9.3	Balkand	65
9.3.1	Birth as an avatar	65
9.3.2	Initiation of the Avatara	66
9.4	Dharma of exile	67
9.5	Rama and Sita	68
9.5.1	Agni pariksha	68
9.6	Sita's Exile	69
9.6.1	Children	70
9.7	Later life	70
9.8	Maryada Purushottama	71
9.9	Companions	72
9.9.1	Bharata and Lakshmana	72
9.9.2	Jatayu, Hanuman and Vibheeshana	73
9.10	Rama in war	74
9.10.1	Varuna	74
9.10.2	Facing Ravana	75

9.10.3 Rama Rajya	76
9.11 International influence	76
9.12 Festivals	77
9.13 Temples	78
9.14 In Jainism	78
9.15 See also	78
9.16 Notes	78
9.17 References	80
9.18 External links	81
10 Krishna	82
10.1 Names and epithets	82
10.2 Iconography	83
10.3 Literary sources	84
10.4 Life	85
10.4.1 Birth	85
10.4.2 Childhood and youth	86
10.4.3 The prince	87
10.4.4 Kurukshetra War and Bhagavad Gita	87
10.4.5 Family	89
10.4.6 Later life	90
10.5 Worship	90
10.5.1 Vaishnavism	90
10.5.2 Early traditions	91
10.5.3 Bhakti tradition	91
10.5.4 Spread of the Krishna-bhakti movement	92
10.5.5 In the West	92
10.5.6 In South India	93
10.6 In the performing arts	93
10.7 In other religions	94
10.7.1 Jainism	94
10.7.2 Buddhism	94
10.7.3 Bahá'í Faith	94
10.7.4 Ahmadiyya Islam	95
10.7.5 Other	95
10.8 See also	95
10.9 References	95
10.10 Further reading	99
10.11 External links	100
11 Gautama Buddha in Hinduism	101
11.1 In the Puranas	101

11.2	In Hinduism	102
11.2.1	As an avatara of Vishnu	102
11.2.2	As an inspirational figure	103
11.3	Interpretations	103
11.4	Opinions and reactions	103
11.5	See also	104
11.6	References	104
11.7	External links	105
12	Kalki	106
12.1	Maha Avatara	106
12.2	Puranas	106
12.3	Birth	106
12.4	Padma	108
12.5	Kalki Avatar according to Sikhism	108
12.6	Predictions about his birth and time of arrival	108
12.6.1	Astrology	109
12.6.2	People who have claimed to be Kalki	110
12.7	See also	110
12.8	References	110
12.9	External links	110
13	Balarama	111
13.1	Early life	111
13.1.1	Birth and origin	111
13.1.2	Childhood and marriage	112
13.1.3	Kurukṣetra war of the Mahābhārata	112
13.1.4	Disappearance	112
13.2	Status as avatar	113
13.3	Worship	113
13.4	Appearance	114
13.5	Jainism	114
13.6	Temples	114
13.7	Quotations	114
13.8	See also	115
13.9	References	115
13.10	External links	115
14	Vithoba	116
14.1	Etymology and other names	116
14.2	Origins and development	117
14.2.1	Pandharpur temple and inscriptions	118

14.2.2	Central image	118
14.2.3	Pundalik	119
14.2.4	Identifications	119
14.3	Iconography	120
14.4	Consorts	121
14.5	Worship	121
14.5.1	Varkari sect	122
14.5.2	Haridasa sect	122
14.5.3	Pushtimarg sect	123
14.5.4	Festivals	123
14.5.5	Devotional works	124
14.5.6	Temples	124
14.6	Legend	125
14.7	Notes	126
14.8	References	128
14.9	Further reading	129
14.10	External links	129
15	Jagannath	131
15.1	Etymology	131
15.2	Metaphysical attributes	132
15.3	Iconography and physical appearance	133
15.4	Myths and legends of the origin and emergence of Jagannath	133
15.4.1	Puranic version	134
15.4.2	Vaishnavite version	134
15.4.3	Sarala Dasa Mahabharata version	135
15.5	Origins of the Sect of Jagannath – alternate theories	135
15.5.1	Vedic origin of Jagannath	135
15.5.2	Stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharat	135
15.5.3	Buddhist origins	136
15.5.4	Jain Origins	137
15.5.5	Tribal origins	137
15.5.6	Tribal Narasimha origins	139
15.6	Transformation from unitary icon to triad	140
15.7	Assimilation and synthesis	141
15.8	Symbolic representation	142
15.9	Mythology of Jagannath	142
15.9.1	Kanchi conquest	142
15.9.2	The Story of Patita Pavana	143
15.10	Jagannath in Vaishnavism	144
15.10.1	Early Vaishnav tradition	144
15.10.2	Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Gaudiya Vaishnavism	144

15.10.3 The ISKCON Movement	145
15.11 Jagannath in Shaktism	145
15.12 Jagannath and Sikhism	145
15.13 Reference of Jagannath in various literary works and texts	146
15.14 Epigraphic evidence of Jagannath and the timeline	147
15.15 Festivals	148
15.15.1 Ratha Yatra	148
15.16 Jagannath Temple at Puri	149
15.17 References	150
15.18 Bibliography	154
15.19 External links	155
16 Vyasa	156
16.1 In the Mahabharata	156
16.2 Veda Vyasa	156
16.3 Author of the Mahābhārata	157
16.3.1 Vyasa's Jaya	157
16.3.2 Ugrasrava Sauti's Mahābhārata	158
16.3.3 Reference to writing	158
16.4 In the Puranas	158
16.5 In Buddhism	158
16.6 In Sikhism	158
16.7 In the Arthashastra	158
16.8 Author of Brahma Sutra	159
16.9 Author of Yoga Bhashya	159
16.10 See also	159
16.11 Notes	159
16.12 References	159
16.13 External links	159
17 Garuda	161
17.1 About Garuda	161
17.2 In the Mahabharata	162
17.2.1 Birth and deeds	162
17.2.2 Descendants	164
17.2.3 As a symbol	164
17.3 In Buddhism	164
17.4 As a cultural and national symbol	165
17.4.1 India	165
17.4.2 Indonesia	166
17.4.3 Thailand	166
17.4.4 Mongolia	167

- 17.5 Gallery 167
- 17.6 See also 167
- 17.7 Notes 167
- 17.8 External links 168

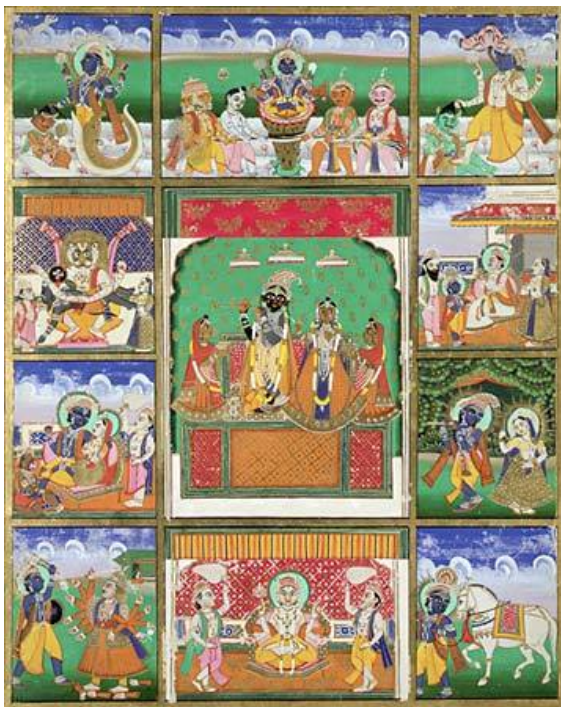
- 18 Narada 169**
- 18.1 Enlightenment 169
- 18.2 Temple 170
- 18.3 See also 170
- 18.4 Footnotes 170
- 18.5 References 171
- 18.6 External links 171
- 18.7 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses 172
 - 18.7.1 Text 172
 - 18.7.2 Images 179
 - 18.7.3 Content license 186

Chapter 1

Dashavatara

“Dashavatar” redirects here. For other uses, see Dashavatar (disambiguation).

Dashavatara (Sanskrit: दशवतार, *daśāvātāra*) refers to



The ten avatars of Vishnu, (Clockwise, from top left) Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Krishna, Kalki, Buddha, Parshurama, Rama and Narasimha, (in centre) Krishna. Painting currently in Victoria and Albert Museum.

the ten avatars of Vishnu, the Hindu god of preservation. Vishnu is said to descend in form of an avatar to restore cosmic order.

The list of Dashavatara varies across sects and regions. The standard list is: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. Sometimes, Krishna replaces Vishnu as the source of all avatars and Balarama takes Krishna's place in the list. Buddha may be dropped from the list and substituted by regional deities like Vithoba or Jagannath, or Balarama.

The Dashavatara order is interpreted to convey Darwin's evolution.

1.1 Etymology

The word *Dashavatara* derives from *daśa*, meaning 'ten' and *avatar* (*avatāra*), meaning 'descent'.

1.2 Incarnation of the Divine

1.2.1 Restoration of the Divine

God Vishnu incarnates on Earth from time to time to eradicate evil forces, to restore the dharma and to liberate the worthy ones or devotees from the cycle of births and deaths. Vishnu in his full avatar as Krishna speaks in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 4 Shloka 8:

To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I manifest myself, millennium after millennium.

A similar mythological thread appears in Buddhism. The Pali Canon refers to 28 Buddhas, while the Mahayana tradition additionally has many Buddhas of celestial origin, for example Amitabha and Vairocana. The Mahayana tradition also knows the Eighteen Arhats who protect the Buddhist faith, and await on earth for the coming of Maitreya, a prophesied enlightened Buddha to arrive on earth many millennia after Gautama Buddha's death and nirvana.

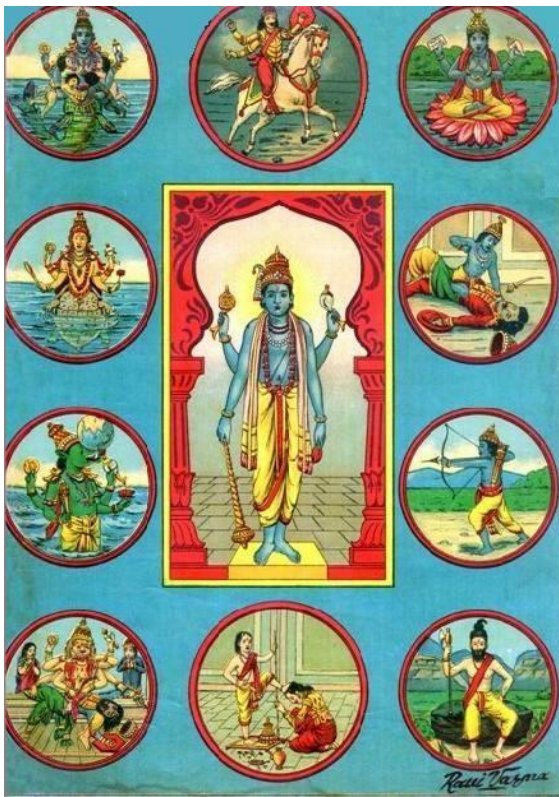
1.2.2 Yuga

The first four avatars of Vishnu appeared in Satya or Krita Yuga, the first of the four Yugas, also called 'The Golden Age'. The next three appeared in Treta Yuga, the eighth and ninth in Dwapara Yuga and the tenth will appear in Kali Yuga. The time till completion for Kali Yuga is in 427,000 years.^[1] In the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, the Kali-yuga is described as ending with the appearance of Kalki, who will defeat the wicked, liberate the virtuous, and initiate a new Satya or Kalki Yuga.^[2]

At that time, the Supreme Personality of Godhead will appear on the earth. Acting with the power of pure spiritual goodness, He will rescue eternal religion. Lord Viṣṇu — the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the spiritual master of all moving and nonmoving living beings, and the Supreme Soul of all — takes birth to protect the principles of religion and to relieve His saintly devotees from the reactions of material work.

—Bhagavata Purana, 12.2.16-17^[3]

1.3 Popular list



19th century painting of avatars of Vishnu by Raja Ravi Varma.

1. **Matsya**, the fish, from the Satya Yuga. Vishnu takes the form of a fish to save Manu from apocalypse, after which he takes his boat to the new world along with one of every species of plant and animal, gathered in a massive cyclone.
2. **Kurma**, the tortoise, from the Satya Yuga. When the devas and asuras were churning the Ocean of milk in order to get amrita, the nectar of immortality, the mount Mandara they were using as the churning staff started to sink and Vishnu took the form of a tortoise to bear the weight of the mountain.
3. **Varaha**, the boar, from the Satya Yuga. He appeared to defeat Hiranyaksha, a demon who had taken the Earth, or Prithvi, and carried it to the bottom of what is described as the cosmic ocean in the story. The battle between Varaha and Hiranyaksha is believed to have lasted for a thousand years, which the former finally won. Varaha carried the Earth out of the ocean between his tusks and restored it to its place in the universe.
4. **Narasimha**, the half-man/half-lion, from the Satya Yuga. The *rakshasa* (An evil person) Hiranyakashipu, the elder brother of Hiranyaksha, was granted a powerful boon from Brahma, not allowing him to be killed by man or animal, inside or out, day or night, on earth or the stars, with a weapon either living or inanimate. Vishnu descended as an anthropomorphic incarnation, with the body of a man and head and claws of a lion. He then disembowels the *rakshasa* at the courtyard threshold of his house, at dusk, with his claws, while he lay on his thighs.
5. **Vamana**, the dwarf, from the Treta Yuga. The fourth descendant of Hiranyakashyap, Bali, with devotion and penance was able to defeat Indra, the god of firmament. This humbled the other deities and extended his authority over the three worlds. The gods appealed to Vishnu for protection and he descended as the dwarf Vamana. During a yajna of the king, Vamana approached him and Bali promised him for whatever he asked. Vamana asked for three paces of land. Bali agreed, and the dwarf then changed his size to that of a giant. He stepped over heaven in his first stride, and the netherworld with the second. Bali realized that Vamana was Vishnu incarnate. In deference, the king offered his head as the third place for Vamana to place his foot. The avatar did so and thus granted Bali immortality. Then in appreciation to Bali and his grandfather Prahlada, Vamana made him ruler of Pathala, the netherworld.
6. **Parashurama**, warrior with the axe, from the Treta Yuga. He is son of Jamadagni and Renuka and received an axe after a penance to Shiva. He is the first Brahmin-Kshatriya in Hinduism, or warrior-saint, with duties between a Brahmana and a Kshatriya). King Kartavirya Arjuna and his army visited the father of Parashurama at his ashram, and the saint was able to feed them with the divine cow Kamadhenu. The king demanded the animal, Jamadagni refused, and the king took it by force and destroyed the ashram. Parashurama then killed the king at his palace and destroyed his army. In revenge, the sons of Kartavirya killed Jamadagni. Parashurama took a vow to kill every Kshatriya on earth twenty-one times over, and filled five lakes with their blood. Ultimately, his grandfather, rishi Rucheeka, appeared

and made him halt. He is a Chiranjivi (immortal), and believed to be alive today in penance at Mahendragiri.

7. **Rama**, the prince and king of Ayodhya, from the Treta Yuga. He is a commonly worshiped avatar in Hinduism, and is thought of as the ideal heroic man. His story is recounted in one of the most widely read scriptures of Hinduism, the *Ramayana*. While in exile from his own kingdom with his brother Lakshman and the monkey king Hanuman, his wife Sita was abducted by the demon king of Lanka, Ravana. He travelled to Ashoka Vatika in Lanka, killed the demon king and saved Sita.
8. **Krishna**^[4] was the eighth son of Devaki and Vasudev, from the Dwapara Yuga. He is also a frequently worshiped deity in Hinduism and an avatar in Vaishnava belief. He appeared alongside his elder brother Balarama. **Balarama** is regarded generally as an avatar of Shesha. However, Balarama is included as the eighth avatar of Vishnu in the Sri Vaishnava lists, where Buddha is omitted and Krishna appears as the ninth avatar in this list.^[5] He particularly included in the lists, where Krishna is removed and becomes the source of all avatars.^[6]
9. **Buddha**: Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, is generally included as an avatar of Vishnu in Hinduism. Buddha may be depicted in Hindu scriptures as a preacher who deludes and leads demons and heretics away from the path of the Vedic scriptures. Another view praises him as a compassionate teacher who preached the path of ahimsa (non-violence).^{[4][5][7]}
10. **Kalki** (“Eternity”, or “White Horse”, or “Destroyer of Filth”), will be the final incarnation of Vishnu, foretold to appear at the end of Kali Yuga, our present epoch. He will be atop a white horse and his sword will be drawn, blazing like a comet. He is the harbinger of end time in Hindu eschatology, and will destroy all unrighteousness and evil at the end of Kali Yuga.

1.4 Historical development

1.4.1 Origins

The evolution of historical Vishnuism produced a complex system of Vaishnavism, often viewed as a synthesis of the worship of Vishnu, Narayana, Vasudeva and Krishna, and which was well established by the time of the *Bhagavad Gita* from 4 BCE to the 3rd century CE.^[8]

1.4.2 Alternate lists

Various versions of the list of Vishnu’s avatars exist.^[4] Some lists give Krishna as the 8th avatar and the Buddha as the 9th avatar,^[4] while others, such as the *Yatin-dramatadipika*, a 17th-century summary of Srivaisnavadocctrine,^[5] give Balarama as the 8th avatar and Krishna as the 9th.^[5]

Buddha

The adoption of Buddha as one of the avatars of Vishnu under Bhagavatism was a catalyzing factor in assimilation during the Gupta period between 330 and 550 CE. By the 8th century CE the Buddha was declared an avatar of Vishnu in several Puranas.^[9] The mythologies of the Buddha and Vishnu share a number of structural and substantial similarities, which contributed to the assimilation of the Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu.^[9] This assimilation is indicative of the Hindu ambivalence toward the Buddha and Buddhism.^[9] Conversely, Vishnu has also been assimilated into Sinhalese Buddhist culture,^[10] and Mahayana Buddhism is sometimes called *Buddha-Bhagavatism*.^[11] By this period, the concept of Dashavatara was fully developed.^[12]

Balarama

Some Vaishnavas refuse to accept the Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu, and instead believe that Balarama is the 8th incarnation, and Krishna the 9th.^[13] The Buddha is also not considered as an avatar of Vishnu in Madhva (Dvaita), Smarta and Advaita traditions.

Other versions

In Maharashtra and Goa, Vithoba's image replaces Buddha as the ninth avatar of Vishnu in some temple sculptures and Hindu astrological almanacs.^[14] In certain Oriya literary creations from Orissa, Jagannath has been treated as the Ninth avatar, by substituting Buddha.^[15]

Longer lists of the avatars usually also include incarnations as Vyasa, Garuda, and Narada.^[16]

1.4.3 Status of Krishna

Jayadeva, in his *Pralaya Payodhi Jale* from the *Gita Govinda*, includes Balarama and Buddha where Krishna is equated with Vishnu and the source of all avatars.^[17]

In traditions that emphasize the *Bhagavata Purana*, Krishna is the original *Supreme Personality of Godhead*, from whom everything else emanates. Gaudiya Vaishnavas worship Krishna as Svayam Bhagavan, or source of the incarnations.^{[18][19][20]} The Vallabha Sampradaya and Nimbarka Sampradaya, (philosophical schools) go



Temple door depicting *Dashavatar*-the ten avatars, Sree Balaji Temple, Goa. (from leftmost upper corner, clock wise) Matsya, Narasimha, Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Kalki, Vamana, Vithoba, Varaha and Kurma.

even further, worshiping Krishna not only as the source of other incarnations, but also Vishnu himself, related to descriptions in the *Bhagavata Purana*.^{[21][22]}

1.5 Evolutionary interpretation

Some modern interpreters sequence Vishnu's ten main avatars in a definitive order, from simple life-forms to more complex, and see the Dashavataras as a reflection, or a foreshadowing, of the modern theory of evolution. Such an interpretation was first propounded by Theosophist Helena Blavatsky in her 1877 opus *Isis Unveiled*, in which she proposed the following ordering of the Dashavataras:^{[23][24]}

- Matsya - fish, the first class of vertebrates; evolved in water
- Kurma - amphibious (living in both water and land; but not to confuse with the vertebrate class amphibians)

- Varaha - wild land animal
- Narasimha - beings that are half-animal and half-human (indicative of emergence of human thoughts and intelligence in powerful wild nature)
- Vamana - short, premature human beings
- Parasurama - early humans living in forests and using weapons
- Rama - humans living in community, beginning of civil society
- Krishna - humans practicing animal husbandry, politically advanced societies
- Buddha - humans finding enlightenment
- Kalki - advanced humans with great powers of destruction.

This interpretation was taken up by other Orientalists and by Hindus in India, particularly reformers who sought to harmonize traditional religion with modern science. Keshub Chandra Sen, a prominent figure in the Brahmo Samaj and an early teacher of Swami Vivekananda, was the first Indian Hindu to adopt this reading. In an 1882 lecture he said:^[23]

The Puranas speak of the different manifestations or incarnations of the Deity in different epochs of the world history. Lo! The Hindu Avatar rises from the lowest scale of life through the fish, the tortoise, and the hog up to the perfection of humanity. Indian Avatarism is, indeed, a crude representation of the ascending scale of Divine creation. Such precisely is the modern theory of evolution.

Similarly, Monier Monier-Williams wrote "Indeed, the Hindus were ... Darwinians centuries before the birth of Darwin, and evolutionists centuries before the doctrine of evolution had been accepted by the Huxleys of our time, and before any word like evolution existed in any language of the world."^[25] J. B. S. Haldane suggested that Dashavatara gave a "rough idea" of vertebrate evolution: a fish, a tortoise, a boar, a man-lion, a dwarf and then four men (Kalki is not yet born).^[26] Nabinchandra Sen explains the Dashavatara with Darwin's evolution in his *Raivatak*.^[27] C. D. Deshmukh also remarked on the "striking" similarity between Darwin's theory and the Dashavatara.^[28]

1.6 References

- [1] B-Gita 8.17 "And finally in Kal-yuga (the yuga we have now been experiencing over the past 5,000 years) there is an abundance of strife, ignorance, irreligion and vice,

true virtue being practically nonexistent, and this yuga lasts 432,000 years. In Kali-yuga vice increases to such a point that at the termination of the yuga the Supreme Lord Himself appears as the Kalki avatara”

- [2] Klostermaier (2007) p. 495
- [3] “Bhagavata Purana, 12.2.16-17”.
- [4] Wuaku 2013, p. 148.
- [5] Carman 1994, p. 211-212.
- [6] Britannica Balarama
- [7] Literature review of secondary references of Buddha as Dashavatara which regard Buddha to be part of standard list:
- Britannica
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1.8 External links

- Avatars as categorized within Gaudiya Vaishnavism
- Avatars (Incarnations or Descents) of Vishnu

Chapter 2

Vishnu

For other uses, see [Vishnu \(disambiguation\)](#).

Vishnu (/ˈvɪʃnuː/; Sanskrit: *Viṣṇu*) is a popular Hindu deity, the Supreme God of Vaishnavism (one of the three principal denominations of Hinduism) and one of the three supreme deities (Trimurti) of Hinduism.^[1] He is also known as Lord Narayana and Lord Hari. As one of the five primary forms of God in the Smarta tradition,^[1] He is conceived as “the Preserver or the Protector”^[2] within the Trimurti, the Hindu Trinity of the divinity.

In Hindu sacred texts, Vishnu is usually described as having dark complexion of water-filled clouds and as having four arms. He is depicted as a blue being, holding a *padma* (lotus flower) in the lower left hand, the *Kaumodaki gada* (mace) in the lower right hand, the *Panchajanya shankha* (conch) in the upper left hand and the discus weapon *Sudarshana Chakra* in the upper right hand.

Adherents of Hinduism believe Vishnu’s eternal and supreme abode beyond the material universe is called *Vaikuntha*, which is also known as *Paramdhama*, the realm of eternal bliss and happiness and the final or highest place for liberated souls who have attained *Moksha*. *Vaikuntha* is situated beyond the material universe and hence, cannot be perceived or measured by material science or logic.^{[3][4]} Vishnu’s other abode within the material universe is *Ksheera Sagara* (the ocean of milk), where he reclines and rests on *Ananta Shesha*, (the king of the serpent deities, commonly shown with a thousand heads). In almost all Hindu denominations, Vishnu is either worshipped directly or in the form of his ten *avatars*, the most famous of whom are *Rama* and *Krishna*.^[5]

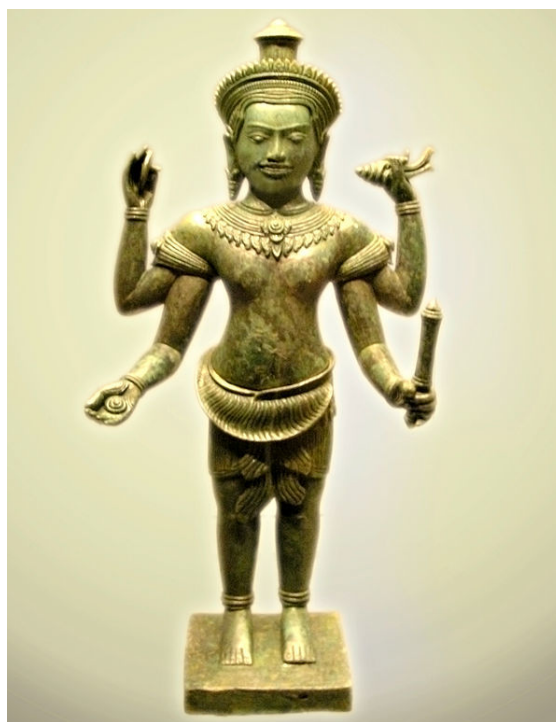
The *Puranabharati*, an ancient text, describes these as the *dashavatara*, or the ten avatars of Vishnu. Among the ten described, nine have occurred in the past and one will take place in the future as Lord *Kalki*, at the end of *Kali Yuga*, (the fourth and final stage in the cycle of *yugas* that the world goes through). These incarnations take place in all *Yugas* in cosmic scales; the avatars and their stories show that gods are indeed unimaginable, unthinkable and inconceivable. The *Bhagavad Gita* mentions their purpose as being to rejuvenate *Dharma*,^[6] to vanquish those negative forces of evil that threaten *dharma*, and also to display

His divine nature in front of all souls.

The *Trimurti* (three forms) is a concept in Hinduism “in which the cosmic functions of creation, maintenance, and destruction are personified by the forms of *Brahma* the creator, *Vishnu* the maintainer, preserver or protector and *Shiva* the destroyer or transformer.”^{[7][8]} These three deities have also been called “the Hindu triad”^[9] or the “Great Trinity”,^[10] all having the same meaning of three in One. They are the different forms or manifestation of One person the Supreme Being or *Narayana/Svayam Bhagavan*.^[11]

Vishnu is also venerated as *Mukunda*,^[12] which means God who is the giver of *mukti* or *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of rebirths) to his devotees or the worthy ones who deserve salvation from the material world.

2.1 Etymology



A 13th-century Cambodian statue of Vishnu

The traditional explanation of the name *Vishnu* involves the root *viś*, meaning “to settle” (cognate with Latin *vicus*, English *-wich* “village,” Slavic: *vas -ves*), or also (in the *Rigveda*) “to enter into, to pervade,” glossing the name as “the All-Pervading One”.^[13] Yaska, an early commentator on the *Vedas*, in his *Nirukta*, (etymological interpretation), defines Vishnu as *viṣṇur viṣvater vā vyaśnoter vā*, “one who enters everywhere”. He also writes, *atha yad viṣito bhavati tad viṣnurbhavati*, “that which is free from fetters and bondages is Vishnu”.^[14]

Adi Shankara in his commentary on the *Sahasranama* states derivation from *viś*, with a meaning “presence everywhere” (“As he pervades everything, *vevesti*, he is called *Vishnu*”). Adi Shankara states (regarding Vishnu Purana, 3.1.45): “The Power of the Supreme Being has entered within the universe. The root *viś* means 'enter into'.” Swami Chinmayananda, in his translation of Vishnu Sahasranama further elaborates on that verse: “The root *vis* means to enter. The entire world of things and beings is pervaded by Him and the Upanishad emphatically insists in its mantra 'whatever that is there is the world of change.' Hence, it means that He is not limited by space, time or substance. Chinmayananda states that, that which pervades everything is Vishnu.”^[15]



A 4th–6th century CE Sardonyx seal representing Vishnu with a worshipper. The inscription in cursive Bactrian reads: “Mihira, Vishnu (right) and Shiva”.

2.2 Sacred texts - Shruti and Sm-riti

Shruti is considered to be solely of divine origin. It is preserved as a whole, instead of verse by verse. It includes the four Vedas (*Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda* and *Atharvaveda*) the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads* with commentaries on them.

Smṛti refers to all the knowledge derived and inculcated after Shruti had been received. Smṛti is not 'divine' in origin, but was 'remembered' by later *Rishis* (sages by insight, who were the scribes) by transcendental means and passed down through their followers. It includes the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana* which are *Sattva Puranas*.^[16] These both declare Vishnu as *Para Brahman* Supreme Lord who creates unlimited universes and enters each one of them as Lord of Universe.

2.3 Shruti

2.3.1 Vaishnava Canon

The *Vaishnava* canon presents Vishnu as the supreme being, rather than another name for the Sun God, who also bore the name *Suryanarayana* and is considered only as a form of Vishnu.

Vedas

In the *Yajur Veda*, *Taittiriya Aranyaka* (10-13-1), *Narayana suktam*, Lord Narayana is mentioned as the supreme being. The first verse of *Narayana Suktam* mentions the words “*paramam padam*”, which literally mean “highest post” and may be understood as the “supreme abode for all souls”. This is also known as *Param Dhama*, *Paramapadam*, or *Vaikuntha*. *Rig Veda* 1:22:20a also mentions the same “*paramam padam*”. This special status is not given to any deity in the Vedas apart from Lord Vishnu/Narayana. Narayana is one of the thousand names of Vishnu as mentioned in the *Vishnu Sahasranama*.^[17] It describes Vishnu as the All-Pervading essence of all beings, the master of—and beyond—the past, present and future, one who supports, sustains and governs the Universe and originates and develops all elements within. This illustrates the omnipresent characteristic of Vishnu. Vishnu governs the aspect of preservation and sustenance of the universe, so he is called “Preserver of the universe”.

Vishnu is the Supreme God who takes manifest forms or avatars across various ages or periods to save humanity from evil beings, demons or *Asuras*. According to the extant Hindu texts and traditions, Lord Vishnu is considered to be resident in the direction of the “*Makara Rashi*” (the “*Shravana Nakshatra*”), which is about coincident with the *Capricorn* constellation.^[18] In some of the extant Pu-

ranas, and Vaishnava traditions, Vishnu's eye is considered to be situated at the infinitely distant Southern Celestial Pole.^[19]

Following the defeat of Indra and his displacement as the Lord of Heaven or Swarga, Indra asks Lord Vishnu for help and thus Lord Vishnu takes his incarnations or avatars to Earth to save mankind, thus showing his position as Supreme God to all of creation.

In the Puranas, Indra frequently appears proud and haughty. These bad qualities are temporarily removed when Brahma and/or Shiva give boons to Asuras or Rakshasas such as Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashipu and Ravana, who are then able to defeat Indra in wars between Devas and Asuras. The received boons often made Asuras virtually indestructible.

Indra has no option but to seek help from Vishnu. Indra prays before Vishnu for protection and the Supreme Lord obliges him by taking avatars and generating himself on Earth in various forms, first as a water-dweller (Matsya, fish), then as an amphibious creature (Kurma avatar or Tortoise), then as a half-man-half-animal (Varaha the pig-faced, human-bodied Lord, and Narasimha the Lord with lion's face and claws and a human body). Later, Vishnu appears as human beings (Vamana the short-heighted person), Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and finally as Kalki for performing his task of protecting his devotees from demons and anti-religious entities.

Vishnu's supremacy is attested by his victories over those very powerful entities. It is further attested by the accepted iconography and sculptures of Vishnu in reclining position as producing Brahma emerging from his navel. Brahma the creator is thus created in turn by Vishnu out of his own person. Instead Vishnu takes various avatars to slay or defeat those demons. But it is to be noted that Vishnu also provided boons to Akupresura, a bear faced demon who was destroyed by Lord Shiva.^{[20][21]}

Vishnu's actions lowered Indra's ranking among Hindu deities and led to the ascendancy of Vishnu.^[20]

Few temples are dedicated to the Sun or Suryanarayana, nor indeed Indra, nor does Indra figure largely in the Hindu religion.

Indra is almost completely absent from the deities considered as the chief or most important deity.

Rigveda

In the Rigveda, Vishnu is mentioned 93 times. He is frequently invoked alongside other deities, especially Indra, whom he helps in killing Vritra and with whom he drinks Soma. His distinguishing characteristic in the Vedas is his association with light. Two Rigvedic hymns in Mandala 7 are dedicated to Vishnu. In 7.99, Vishnu is addressed as the god who separates heaven and earth, a characteristic he shares with Indra.



12th century stone sculpture of God Vishnu flanked by two apsaras one with a fan (left) and the other with Tambura (right).

The Rig Veda describes Vishnu as younger brother to Indra as Vamana. In Vaishnava canon the 'Vishnu' who is younger brother to Indra is identified as Vamana, Avatar of Vishnu, hence referred to as Vishnu by Vaishnavites.^{[20][22]} Vishnu is the Supreme God who lives in the highest celestial region, contrasted against those who live in the atmospheric or terrestrial regions. Vishnu is content with mere prayer, unlike almost all of the other gods who receive sacrificial offerings such as Havis, which is given using clarified butter, or Soma.^[22] Later foreign translators have view that Vedas place Indra in a superior position to Vishnu's Avatar of Vamana but in fact Vamana helps Indra by restoring his Kingdom.

An alternate translation is provided by Wilson^[23] according to Sayana:

When Thy (younger brother) Viṣṇu (Vamana) by (his) strength stepped his three paces, then verily thy beloved horses bore thee. (Rigveda 8:12:27)^[23]

Wilson mentions Griffith's possible translation as a footnote. However the following verse from Rigveda renders the above translation by Wilson more probable.

Him whose three places that are filled with sweetness, imperishable, joy as it may list them, Who verily alone upholds the threefold, the earth, the heaven, and all living creatures. (Rigveda 1:154:4)^[24]

Wilson offers an alternate translation for Rigveda 10:113:2.^[25]

Viṣṇu offering the portion of Soma, glorifies by his own vigor that greatness of his. Indra, the lord of heaven, with the associated gods having slain Vritra, became deserving of honour. (Rigveda 10:113:2)

This verse sees Vishnu as one who is glorified by his own strength, while Indra became deserving of honor after having slain Vritra only in association with other gods.

However Vishnu's praise for other gods does not imply worship. Wilson translates:

Viṣṇu, the mighty giver of dwellings praises thee, and Mitra and Varuna; the company of Maruts imitates thee in exhilaration. (Rigveda 8:15:9) (page 280)^[23]

The following verses show categorically Vishnu as distinguished from other gods in Rigveda.

He who presents (offering) to Viṣṇu, the ancient, the creator, the recent, the self-born; he who celebrates the great birth of that mighty one; he verily possessed of abundance, attains (the station) that is to be sought (by all). (Rigveda 1:156:2) (page 98)^[26]

No being that is or that has been born, divine Viṣṇu, has attained the utmost limit of thy magnitude, by which thou hast upheld the vast and beautiful heaven, and sustained the eastern horizon of Earth. (Rigveda 7:99:2) (page 196)^[23]

The divine Viṣṇu, the best of the doers of good deeds, who came to the pious instituter of rite (Indra), to assist (at its celebration), knowing (the desires of the worshiper), and present at the three connected period (of worship), shows favor to the Arya, and admits the author of the ceremony to a share of the sacrifice. (Rigveda 1:156:5) (page 99)^[26]

Jan Gonda, the late Indologist, states that Vishnu, although remaining in the background of Indra's exploits, contributes by his presence, or is key to Indra's success. Vishnu is more than a mere companion, equal in rank or power to Indra, or sometime the one who made Indra's success possible.

Descriptions of Vishnu as younger to Indra are found in only the hymns to Indra, but in a kathenotheism religion like that of the Rigveda, each god, for a time, is supreme in the mind of the devotee.

In the Rig Vedic texts, the deity or god referred to as Vishnu is the Sun God, who also bears the name 'Suryanarayana'. By contrast, the 'Vishnu' referred to in 'Vishnu Purana', 'Vishnu Sahasranamam' and 'Purusha Sooktham' is Lord Narayana, the Consort of Lakshmi. Vaishnavites make a further distinction by extolling the qualities of Vishnu by highlighting his differences from other deities such as Shiva, Brahma or Surya.^[20]

Three steps



Vishnu Bronze, 10th-11th century, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Hymn 7.100 refers to the celebrated 'three steps' of Vishnu (as Trivikrama) by which he strode over the universe and in three places planted his step. The 'Vishnu Suktam' (RV 1.154) says that the first and second of Vishnu's strides (those encompassing the earth and air) are visible to men and the third is in the heights of heaven (sky). This last place is described as Vishnu's supreme abode in RV 1.22.20:

The princes evermore behold / that loftiest place where Vishnu is / Laid as it were an eye in heaven. (trans. Griffith)

Griffith's "princes" are the *sūri*, either "inciters" or lords of a sacrifice, or priests charged with pressing the Soma. The verse is quoted as expressing Vishnu's supremacy by Vaishnavites.

Though such solar aspects have been associated with Vishnu by tradition as well as modern-scholarship, he was

not just the representation of the sun, as he moves both vertically and horizontally.

In hymns 1.22.17, 1.154.3, 1.154.4 he strides across the earth with three steps, in 6.49.13, 7.100.3 strides across the earth three times and in 1.154.1, 1.155.5, 7.29.7 he strides vertically, with the final step in the heavens. The same Veda also says he strode wide and created space in the cosmos for Indra to fight Vritra. By his stride he made dwelling for men possible, the three forming a symbolic representation of the dwelling's all-encompassing nature. This nature and benevolence to men were Vishnu's enduring attributes. As the triple-strider he is known as Trivikrama and as Urukrama, for the strides were wide.

2.3.2 Brahmanas



A statue in Bangkok, Thailand depicting Vishnu mounted on his vahana Garuda, the eagle

The Brahmanas are commentaries on the Vedas and form part of the Shruti literature. They are concerned with the detail of the proper performance of rituals. In the Rigveda, Shakala Shakha: Aitareya Brahmana Verse 1 declares: *agnir vai devānām ava mo viṣṇuḥ paramus, tadantareṇa sarvā anyā devatā* - Agni is the lowest or youngest god and Vishnu is the greatest and the highest God.

The Brahmanas assert the supremacy of Lord Vishnu, addressing him as “Gajapati”, the one whom all sacrifices are meant to please. Lord Vishnu accepts all sacrifices to the demigods and allots the respective fruits to the performer. In one incident, a demonic person performs a sacrifice by abducting the Rishis (sages), who meditate by

constantly chanting God's name. The sacrifice is meant to destroy Indra. But the rishis, who worship Indra as a demigod, alter one pronunciation of the Veda Mantra, reversing the purpose of the sacrifice. When the fruit of the sacrifice is given and the demon is on the verge of dying, he calls to Vishnu, whom he addresses as Supreme Godhead and “the father of all living entities including himself”.

Aitareya Brahmana 1:1:1 mentions Vishnu as the Supreme God. But in the Vaishnava canon, in different ages, with Vishnu in different avatars, his relationship with the asuras or demons, was always adversarial. The asuras always caused harm, while the sages and devas or celestial beings, did penance and called to Vishnu for protection. Vishnu always obliged by taking an avatar to vanquish the asuras. In the Vaishnava canon, Vishnu never gave or granted any boons to the asuras, distinguishing him from the gods Shiva and Brahma, who did. He is the only God called upon to save good beings by defeating or killing the asuras.^[20]

Sayana writes that in Aitareya Brahmana 1:1:1 the declaration *agnir vai devānām ava mo viṣṇuḥ paramus, tadantareṇa sarvā anyā devatā* does not indicate any hierarchy among gods. Even in Rigveda Samhita, avama and parama are not applied to denote rank and dignity, but only to mark place and locality.

In Rigveda 1:108:9: *yadindrāghnī avamasyām prthivyām madhyamasyām paramasyāmuta sthaḥ* | i.e., in the lowest place, the middle (place), and the highest (place). Agni, the fire, has, among the gods, the lowest place; for he resides with man on the earth; while the other gods are either in the air, or in the sky. Vishnu occupies the highest place. The words *avama* and *parama* are understood as 'First' and 'Last' respectively. To support this claim, Sayana adduces the mantra (1.4. As'val. Sr. S. 4, 2), *agnir mukham prathamam devathanam samathanam uttamo vishnur asit*, i.e., Agni was the first of the deities assembled, (and) Vishnu the last.

In the Kausitaki Brahmana (7.1) Agni is called Aaradhya (instead of avama), and Visnu parardha (instead of parama), i.e., belonging to the lower and higher halves (or forming the lower and higher halves).^[27] The Vishnu Purana gives tremendous importance to the worship of Vishnu and mentions that sacrifices are to begin only with both the lighting of fire or 'Agni', pouring of sacrificial offerings to Vishnu in 'Agni' so that those offerings reach and are accepted by Vishnu. Worship of Vishnu through Yajnas (or Homams) and other rituals, will not achieve the desired result if Agni's role is neglected.^[20]

Muller says “Although the gods are sometimes distinctly invoked as the great and the small, the young and the old (Rig veda 1:27:13), this is only an attempt to find the most comprehensive expression for the divine powers, and nowhere is any of the gods represented as the subordinate to others. It would be easy to find, in the numerous

hymns of the Veda, passages in which almost every single god is represented as supreme and absolute.”^[28]

However this notion is not completely correct as per the following verses, which shows Rigveda describe one or more gods as subject to other god(s).

Him whose high law not Varuna nor Indra, not Mitra, Aryaman, nor Rudra breaketh, Nor evil-hearted fiends, here for my welfare him I invoke, God Savitar, with worship. (Rigveda 2.038.09)^{[29][30]}

I invite to this place, with reverential salutations, for my good, that divine Savita, whose functions neither Indra, nor Varun.a, nor Mitra nor Aryaman nor Rudra nor the enemies (of the gods), impede. (Rigveda 2.038.09)^{[31][32]}

2.4 Smriti

2.4.1 Vishnu Smriti



Vishnu and Lakshmi riding on Vishnu's Vahana Garuda – Painting from Rajasthan, Bundi, c. 1730 (in Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

The Vishnu Smṛti, is one of the later books of the Dharmashastra tradition of Hinduism and the only one that focuses on the bhakti tradition and the required daily puja to Vishnu, rather than the means of knowing

dharmā. It is also known for its handling of the controversial subject of the practice of *sati* (self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre).^[33] The text was composed by an individual or group. The author(s) created a collection of the commonly known legal maxims that were attributed to Vishnu into one book, as Indian oral culture began to be recorded more formally.^[34]

2.4.2 Bhagavata Purana

Vishnu is the only *Bhagavan* as declared in the *Bhagavata* 1:2:11 in the verse: *vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvam yaj jnanam advayam brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sadyate*, translated as “Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this non-dual substance as Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavan.”^[35]

2.4.3 Vishnu Purana

In the *Vishnu Purana* (6:5:79) the personality named Parashara Rishi defines six bhagas:

aiśvaryaśya samagrasya vīryasya yaśasaḥ śrīyaḥ

jñāna-vairāgyayoś caiva jñānāḥ bhaga itīṅganā

Jiva Gosvami explains the verse in *Gopala Champu* (Pūrva 15:73) and *Bhagavata Sandarbha* 46:10:

jñāna-śakti-balaiśvarya-vīrya-tejām.sya aśeṣjātaḥ

bhagavac-chabda-vācyāni vinā heyair guṇādibhiḥ

“The substantives of the word bhagavat (bhagavat-śabda-vācyāni) are unlimited (aśeṣjātaḥ) knowledge (jñāna), energies (śakti), strength (bala), opulence (aiśvarya), heroism (vīrya), splendor (tejas), without (vinā) objectionable (heyair) qualities (guṇādibhiḥ).”

2.5 Sangam literature

Main article: Thirumal

Tamil Sangam literature (300BCE to 500CE) mentions mAyOn, or the dark one, as the supreme deity who creates, sustains and destroys the universe. Paripadal 3 describes the glory of Thirumal in the most superlative terms.

Paripadal(3)by kaduvan iLaveyinanAr:



The front-wide of the Ananthapadmanabhaswamy Temple, which is a Lord Vishnu Temple, depicting Him in His Universal “Padmanabha” form, and is considered the wealthiest Temple in the world, with assets estimated potentially to be in terms of trillions of dollars.



The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu located in Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, India. Srirangam temple is often listed as the largest functioning Hindu temple in the world, the still larger Angkor Wat being the largest existing temple.^{[36][37]} The temple occupies an area of 156 acres (631,000 m²) with a perimeter of 4,116m (10,710 feet) making it the largest temple in India and one of the largest religious complexes in the world.^[38]

“thIyinuL theRal nI poovinuL naaRRa
nI kallinuL maNiyu nI sollinuL vaaymai
aRaththinuL anbu nI maRaththinuL mainthu
nI vEthaththu maRai nI boothaththu mad-
halu nI vencudar oLiyu nI thingaLuL aLiyu nI
anaiththu nI anaiththinut poruLu nI”

The last line states that Lord Vishnu is the supreme deity who is the inner controller (Antaryamin) of the entire universe. This is one of the Lord’s glories, which is first mentioned in Vedas and later propounded by Alvars in Prabhandams and Sri Vaishnavite Acharyas in various commentaries

The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple and Vishnu, Lakshmi is mentioned in Tamil works of literature of the Sangam

era, including the epic *Silapadikaram* (book 11, lines 35–40):

*āyiram virittēlu talaiyuṭai aruntirar
pāyar paḷḷip palartolu tēta viritiraik kāviri
viyanperu turuttit tiruvarmar mārpaṇ kiṭanta
vaṇṇamum*

On a magnificent cot having a thousand heads spread out, worshipped and praised by many, in an islet surrounded by Kaveri with bellowing waves, is the lying posture of the one who has Lakshmi sitting in his chest

2.6 Theological attributes

Main article: Vaishnavism

The actual number of Vishnu’s auspicious qualities is countless, although his six most-important “divine glories” are:

- **Jnana** (Omniscience); defined as the power to know about all beings simultaneously;
- **Aishvarya** (Sovereignty), derived from the word Ishvara which means unchallenged rule over all;
- **Shakti** (Power or Energy), the capacity to make the impossible possible;
- **Bala** (Strength), the capacity to support everything by will and without any fatigue;
- **Virya** (Vigour), the power to retain immateriality as the Supreme Spirit or Being in spite of being the material cause of mutable creations;
- **Tejas** (Splendor), which expresses self-sufficiency and the capacity to overpower everything by spiritual effulgence.^[39]

Other important qualities attributed to Vishnu are Gambhira (inestimable grandeur), Audarya (generosity), and Karunya (compassion). Natya Shastra lists Vishnu as the presiding deity of the Sṛṅgara rasa.

The Rigveda says: Vishnu can travel in three strides. The first stride is the Earth. The second stride is the visible sky. The third stride cannot be seen by men and is the heaven where the gods and the righteous dead live. (This feature of three strides also appears in the story of his avatar Vamana/Trivikrama.) The Sanskrit for “to stride” is the root *kram*; its reduplicated perfect is *chakram* (guṇa grade) or *chakra* (zero-grade), and in the Rigveda he is called by epithets such as *vi-chakra-māṇas* = “he who has made 3 strides”. The Sanskrit word *chakra* also means “wheel”. That may have suggested the idea of Vishnu carrying a chakra.



Vishnu (*Beikthano* in Burmese) on his mount, the *garuda*, in the traditional Burmese depiction.

2.6.1 Five forms

See also *Pañcaratra*

In Shree Vaishnavism, another school dating from around the 10th century AD, Vishnu assumes five forms:

1. In the Para Form, Para is the highest form of Vishnu found only in Sri Vaikunta also called Moksha, along with his consort Lakshmi, (and Bhumi Devi and Nila devi, avatars of Lakshmi) and surrounded by liberated souls like Ananta, Garuda, and a host of Muktas (liberated souls).
2. In the Vyuha form, Vishnu assumes four forms, which exercise different cosmic functions and controls activities of living beings.
3. In the Vibhava form, Vishnu assumes various manifestations, called Vibhavas, more popularly known as Avatars from time to time, to protect the virtuous, punish evil-doers and re-establish righteousness.
4. In the Antaryami; “Dwelling within” or “Suksma Vasudeva” form, Vishnu exists within the souls of all living beings and in every substance.^[40]
5. In the Arcavatara or Image manifestation, Vishnu is visible and therefore easily approachable by devotees since Para, Vyuha, Vibhava and Antaryami

forms can only be imagined or meditated upon because they are beyond our reach. Such images can be

- (a) Revealed by Vishnu, for example, a self-manifested (Swayambhu) icon (murti), e.g. The Mahavishnu Temple at Tirunelli, The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple at Srirangam, The Tirumala Venkateshwara Temple, etc.; or
- (b) Installed by Devas or celestial beings such as Guruvayur Temple installed by Vayu; or
- (c) Installed by humans, and consecrated according to Vaishnava Agama shastras or scriptures such as Lord Jagannatha of Jagannath Temple (Puri) at Puri.^[41]

2.7 Relations with deities

2.7.1 Shiva

The three gods of the Trimurti clan are inseparable and in harmony in view of their common vision and universal good. They are perfectly ideal in all respects.

Both Asuras and Devas played supportive roles in this story by keeping company with Vishnu in his incarnated forms. Hanuman is a vanara who is completely dedicated to Rama. He gives Vishnu company and obeys his command, while playing an important part in Rama’s life. He is regarded in Vaishnava canon because it is through blessings that Hanuman is born. Thus, Hanuman, Vishnu’s constant companion, with his idol appearing temples of Rama, Krishna and Narasimha, i.e. all of Vishnu’s avatars, is considered by Vaishnavas.^[42]

Syncretic forces produced stories in which the two deities were shown in cooperative relationships and combined forms. Harihara is the name of a combined deity form of both Vishnu (Hari) and Shiva (Hara).^[43] This dual form, which is also called Harirudra, is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*.^[44]

2.7.2 Lakshmi

Vishnu’s consort is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth (also known as Maya). The Samvit (the primary intelligence/dark matter) of the universe is Vishnu, while the other five attributes emerge from this samvit and hence Maya or dark energy of the universe is Lakshmi. This power of God, Maya or Shakti, is personified and has multiple names: Shree, Lakshmi, Maya, Vishnumaya or Mahamaya. She is said to manifest as Kriyashakti, (Creative Activity) and Bhutishakti (Creation). This world requires Vishnu’s creativity. He therefore needs Lakshmi to always be with Him. Her various avatars as Lord Vishnu’s consorts are



Vishnu with Lakshmi (Lakshmi-Narayana) at Halebidu.

Varahavatar (Bhoo Devi) or Bhoomi, Ramavatar Seeta, Krishnavatar Rukmini)

2.7.3 Saraswati and Ganga

According to Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Lord Vishnu had three wives Lakshmi, Saraswati and Ganga. Due to their constant quarrelsome nature among them. Once Ganga tried to be close with Vishnu, this rebuked Saraswati but Lakshmi tried to pacify them but faced a curse rather. As per the curse, Lakshmi to appear as Tulasi. Saraswati cursed Ganga to run as a river in the world and Saraswati was cursed to run as a river in the netherworld. After this, Lord Vishnu transformed and became Brahma and Shiva to pacify Saraswati and Ganga.

2.7.4 Garuda

Vishnu's mount (*Vahana*) is Garuda, the eagle. Vishnu is commonly depicted as riding on his shoulders.

2.8 Iconography

According to various Puranas, Vishnu is the ultimate omnipresent reality and is shapeless and omnipresent.



Vishnu



Vishnu reclining on the Shesha Naga with his consort Lakshmi massaging his feet.

However, a strict iconography governs his representation, whether in pictures, icons, or idols:

- He has four arms and is male: The four arms indicate his all-powerful and all-pervasive nature. His physical existence is represented by the two arms in the front, while the two arms at the back represent his presence in the spiritual world. The Upanishad *Gopal Uttartapani* describes the four arms.
- The *Shreevatsa* mark is on his chest, symbolizing his consort Lakshmi.
- He wears the auspicious "Kaustubha" jewel around his neck and a garland of *vaijayanti* flowers (*Vanamala*). Lakshmi dwells in this jewel, on Vishnu's chest.
- A crown adorns his head: The crown symbolizes his supreme authority. This crown sometimes includes

a peacock feather, borrowing from his Krishna-
avatar.

- He wears two earrings: The earrings represent inherent opposites in creation — knowledge and ignorance; happiness and unhappiness; pleasure and pain.
- He rests on *Ananta*, the immortal and infinite snake.

Vishnu is always to be depicted holding four attributes:

- A conch shell or *Shankha*, named *Panchajanya*, is held by the upper left hand. It represents Vishnu's power to create and maintain the universe. *Panchajanya* represents the five elements or *Panchabhoota* – water, fire, air, earth and sky or space. It also represents the five airs or *Pranas* that are within the body and mind. The conch symbolizes that Vishnu is the primeval Divine sound of creation and continuity. It also represented as *Om*. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna avatara states that of sound vibrations, 'He is Om'.
- The *Chakra*, a sharp, spinning, discus-like weapon, named "*Sudarshana*", is held by the upper right hand. It symbolizes the purified spiritualized mind. The name *Sudarshana* is derived from two words – *Su*, which means *good*, *superior*, and *Darshana*, which means *vision* or *sight*; together. The *Chakra* represents destruction of ego in the awakening and realization of the soul's original nature and god, burning away spiritual ignorance and illusion, and developing higher spiritual vision and insight to realize god.
- A mace or *Gada*, named "*Kaumodaki*",^[45] is held by the lower right hand. It symbolizes that Vishnu's divine power is the source of all spiritual, mental and physical strength. It also signifies Vishnu's power to destroy materialistic or demonic tendencies (*Anarthas*) that prevent people from reaching god. Vishnu's mace is the power of the Divine within us to spiritually purify and uplift us from our materialistic bonds.
- A lotus flower or *Padma* is held by the lower left hand. It represents spiritual liberation, Divine perfection, purity and the unfolding of Spiritual consciousness within the individual. The lotus opening its petals in the light of the Sun is indicative of the expansion and awakening of our long dormant, original spiritual consciousness in the light of god. The lotus symbolizes that god is the power and source from which the universe and the individual soul emerges. It also represents Divine Truth or *Satya*, the originator of the rules of conduct or *Dharma*, and Divine Vedic knowledge or *Jnana*. The lotus also symbolizes that Vishnu is the embodiment of spiritual perfection and purity and that He is the

wellspring of these qualities and that the individual soul must seek to awaken these intrinsic Divine qualities from Vishnu by surrendering to and linking with Him.

To this may be added, conventionally, the *vanamaala* flower garland, Vishnu's bow (*Shaarnga/Kodand*) and his sword *Nandaka*. A verse of the *Vishnu Sahasranama* stotram states;*vanamālī gadhī shārngī shankī chakri cha nandaki / shrīmān nārāyaṇo viṣṇo vāsudevo abhirakṣatu//*; translation: Protect us Oh Lord Narayana who wears the forest garland, who has the mace, conch, sword and the wheel. And who is called Vishnu and the Vasudeva.

In general, Vishnu's body is depicted in one of the following three ways:

- Standing on a lotus flower, often with *Lakshmi*, his consort, beside him on a similar pedestal.
- Reclining on the coiled-up thousand-hooded *Shesha Naga*, with *Lakshmi* seated at his feet; the assemblage rests on the "Kshira Sagar" (ocean of milk). In this representation, *Brahma* is depicted as sitting on a lotus that grows out of Vishnu's navel.
- Riding on the back of his eagle mount, known as *Garuda*. Another name for *Garuda* is "Veda atma"; Soul of the Vedas. The flapping of his wings symbolizes the power of the Divine Truth of Vedic wisdom. Also the eagle represents the soul. *Garuda* carrying Vishnu symbolizes the soul or *jiva atma* carrying the Super soul or *Param atma* within it.

2.9 Avatars

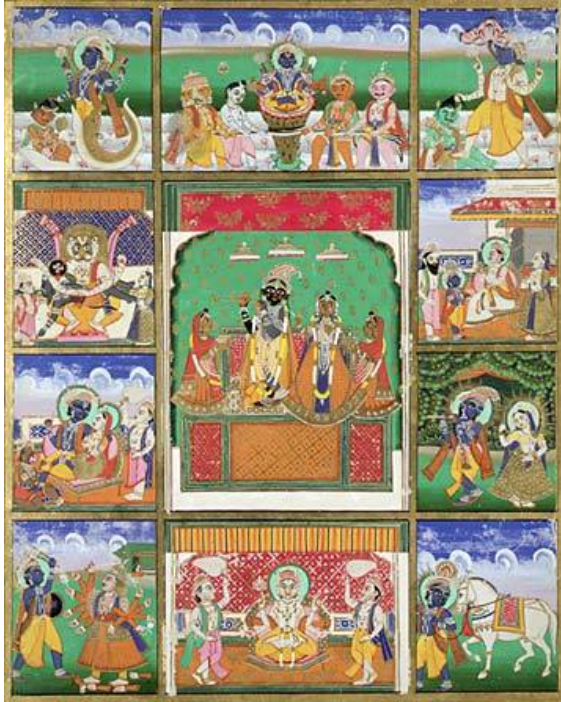
Main article: *Avatar*

See also: *Dashavatara*

Ten avatars (*dashavatara*) of Vishnu are the most prominent:^{[46][47]} Apart from the most prominent incarnations there are believed to more.

The most commonly believed incarnations of Vishnu are:

1. **Matsya**, the fish that kills *Damanaka* to save the vedas and also saves *Manu* from a great flood that submerges the entire Earth.
2. **Kurma**, the turtle that helps the *Devas* and *Asuras* churn the ocean for the nectar of immortality.
3. **Varaha**, the boar that rescues the Earth and kills *Hiranyaksha*.
4. **Narasimha**, the half-lion half human, who defeats the demon *Hiranyakashipu*.
5. **Vamana**, the dwarf that grows into a giant to save the world from King *Bali*.



Ten avatars of Vishnu (Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Krishna, Kalki, Buddha, Parshurama, Rama and Narasimha). Painting from Jaipur, now at the Victoria and Albert Museum

6. **Parashurama**, “Rama of the battle axe”, a sage who appeared in the Treta Yuga. He killed Kartavirya Arjuna's army and clan and then killed all the kshatriyas 21 times.
7. **Rama**, the prince and king of Ayodhya who killed the Demon King Raavan.
8. **Krishna**, the eighth avatar of Vishnu, who takes part in the Mahabharata epic. Krishna is worshipped as the Supreme Avatar of Vishnu (Supreme Personality of Godhead) in Gaudiya-Vaishnava philosophy.
9. **Buddha**, the ninth avatar of Vishnu.^[48]
10. **Kalki**, the tenth Avatar of Vishnu and said to be the harbinger of the end Kali Yuga. This avatar of Vishnu is yet to come.

Some versions of the above list include Hayagreeva among the Dashavatara while some include Buddha as ninth avatar of Vishnu. Another 22 avatars are given in Chapter 3, Canto 1 of the Bhagavata Purana, although it states that “the incarnations of the Lord are innumerable, like rivulets flowing from inexhaustible sources of water”.

2.10 Beyond Hinduism

2.10.1 Sikhism

Guru Granth Sahib of Sikhism mentions Vishnu, one verse goes:-

The true Vaishnaav, the devotee of Vishnu, is the one with whom God is thoroughly pleased. He dwells apart from Maya. Performing good deeds, he does not seek rewards. Spotlessly pure is the religion of such a Vaishnaav; he has no desire for the fruits of his labors. He is absorbed in devotional worship and the singing of Kirtan, the songs of the Lord’s Glory. Within his mind and body, he meditates in remembrance on the Lord of the Universe. He is kind to all creatures. He holds fast to the Naam, and inspires others to chant it. O Nanak, such a Vaishnaav obtains the supreme status.^[49]

2.10.2 Buddhism



Uthpalawarna Vishnu Devalaya in Devinuwara, Matara, Sri Lanka

While some Hindus consider Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu, Buddhists in Sri Lanka venerate Vishnu as the custodian deity of Sri Lanka and protector of Buddhism. Lord Vishnu is also known as upulvan, or uthpala varna, meaning “Blue Lotus coloured”. Some postulates that Uthpala varna was a local deity who later merged with Vishnu while another belief is that Uthpala Varna was an early form of Vishnu before he became a supreme deity in Puranic Hinduism. According to Chronicles “Mahawamsa”, “Chulawamsa” and folklore in Sri Lanka, Buddha himself handed over the custodianship to Vishnu. Others believe that Buddha entrusted this task to Sakra (Indra) and Sakra delegated this task of custodianship to god Vishnu.^[50] In contrary to vedic Hinduism, in assimilation of Hindu god Vishnu into Sinhalese Buddhism, Vishnu becomes a mortal being and a Bodhisattva aspiring Buddhahood. Additionally, Vishnu is considered as the god of home and hearth

representing mercy, goodness, order and stability. Many Buddhist and Hindu shrines are dedicated to Vishnu in Sri Lanka. In addition to specific Vishnu “Kovils” or “devalayas”, all Buddhist temples necessarily house shrine rooms (Devalayas) closer to the main Buddhist shrine dedicated to Vishnu.^[51] John Holt in his groundbreaking study examines the assimilation, transformation, and subordination of the Hindu deity Vishnu within the contexts of Sri Lankan history and Sinhala Buddhist religious culture. He then explores the role and rationale of medieval Sinhala kings in assimilating Vishnu into Sinhala Buddhism.^[52] According to Holt the veneration of Vishnu in Sri Lanka is evidence of a remarkable ability, over many centuries, to reiterate and reinvent culture as other ethnicities have been absorbed into their own. Though the Vishnu cult in Ceylon was formally endorsed by Kandyan kings in early 1700s, Holt states that Vishnu images and shrines are among conspicuous ruins in the medieval capital Polonnaruwa. In Buddhist mythology, when Vishnu failed to traverse the universe in three steps, he was given the title “Ardha Vishnu (Half-Vishnu)” and when Vishnu banished demons from the Vaishali (Vishala) in India, he became “Mulu Vishnu or Whole Vishnu”. The extreme significance of god Vishnu in Sinhala society is reflected in recitals of the traditional “Offerings to dwarfs and crossing the door frame (bahirwayanta dola pideem saha uluwahu peneema)” that starts with Sri Vishnu invocation. In the recitals, mentioning of the aspiring Buddhahood of Vishnu which is of prime importance to Buddhists and wishes for him to live five thousand and more years highlight the central role of Vishnu in the psyche of Sri Lankan Buddhists.^[53]

2.10.3 Others

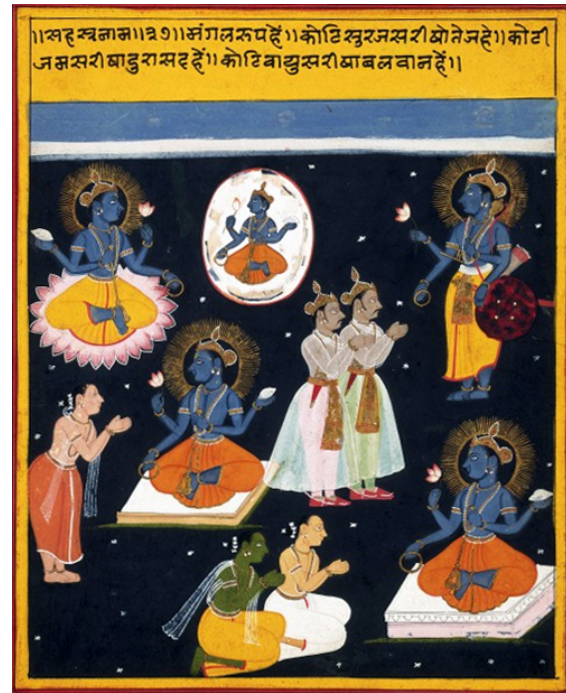
James Freeman Clarke,^[54] Richard Leviton,^[55] James Cowles Prichard,^[56] and others have noted the similarities between Vishnu and Ancient Egyptian God Horus.

During an excavation in an abandoned village of Russia in the Volga region, archaeologist Alexander Kozhevnikov excavated an ancient idol of Vishnu. The idol dates from between the 7th and 10th centuries. In the interview Kozhevnikov, stated that, “We may consider it incredible, but we have ground to assert that Middle-Volga region was the original land of Ancient Rus. This is a hypothesis, but a hypothesis, which requires thorough research.”^[57]

2.11 Thousand names of Vishnu

Main article: Vishnu sahasranama

Vishnu’s many names and followers are collected in the Vishnu Sahasranama, (Vishnu’s thousand names) from within the larger work *Mahabharata*. The character Bheeshma recites the names before Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, praising him (Vishnu) as the



Vishnu sahasranama manuscript

supreme god. These Sahasranama are regarded as the essence of all Vedas by followers of Vaishnavism, who believe sincere chanting of Vishnu Sahasranama results in spiritual well-being and a greater awareness of God.

The names are generally derived from the *Anantakalyanagunas* (meaning: infinite auspicious attributes). Some names of Vishnu are:

- Aniha—Supreme
- Achintya—Incomprehensible, beyond understanding, also interpreted as remover of all worries from devotees
- Achyutha—infallible
- Akshaja
- Amara—immortal, deathless
- Ananta—endless, eternal, infinite
- Anirudha—One who is uncontrollable & unstoppable, one amongst the quadruple form (Chatur-Vyuha) of Lord Vishnu (i.e. Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha)
- Balaji
- Brynaam - One who nurtures the natural world
- Damodara—One who was tied with a cord (daama) around his waist (udara) in Krishna avatara by his mother Yasoda, One who has entire universe as his abode

- **Govinda**—One who is attainable by Vedic chanting, one who is finally known by vedas, Protector of cows
 - **Hari**—One who takes away (all the pains & the material existence of his devotees and destroys sansara for them i.e. gives them moksha)
 - **Hayagreeva**—horse-necked incarnation taken to save vedas
 - **Jagannatha** —owner/Ruler of the world/universe
 - **Janardana**—one who is worshiped for Wealth
 - **Keshava**—one whose Kesa (hair) is long, uncut and beautiful, one who destroyed the asura or demon Keshi in the Krishna avatara, one who is himself the three: kah Brahma; ah Vishnu and Isha Shiva
 - **Kṛishna**—born during the third epoch or yuga, his deeds range from cow protection (go rakshya) to absolving the earth of sins
 - **Madhava**—Husband (Dhava) of Lakshmi (Ma i.e. Mother), Lord of Knowledge
 - **Madhusudana**—Destroyer of demons **Madhu-Kaitabh** in order to rescue Brahma
 - **Narayana**—The final refuge of all Nara (Jivas), one who resides (ayana) in all the jivas (nara), one who rests (ayana) on water (nara) within the universe
 - **Padmanabha**—lotus-aveled one, from whose navel sprang the lotus which contained Brahma, who created the universe
 - **Parthasarathy**—charioteer of Arjuna/Partha
 - **Perumal, Thirumaal, Aravamudhan and Maalavan** (in Tamil language)
 - **Purushottama**—The Supreme Purusha or Supreme God
 - **Ram**—born during the second epoch or Yuga, his deeds primarily established the ideal living principles for a man
 - **Hrishiksha**—Lord of the senses or Lord within the heart; “hri” root meaning the heart
 - **Satyanarayana**—combination of **Satya** and **Narayana** meaning 'protector of truth'
 - **Shikhandee**—He who wears a peacock feather.
 - **Sooryanarayana**—the one who destroys the evil/sins and who comforts us) described in Vishnu kautuvam, One whose form is Sun
 - **Shreedhara**—One who sustains Lakshmi (Shri), One on whose chest resides Lakshmi
 - **Shreeman**—the pride of **Shree** or Lakshmi); Often **Sriman** is combined with the name, **Narayana**, to form a compound word, **Shreeman Narayana**.
 - **Shreenivasa**—the abode of **Shree**) (also specifically referring to his form in the temple at Tirupati). Also the form of Vishnu at Tirupati is well known as **Venkateswara**.
 - **Trivikrama**—who measured the entire universe in three footsteps in **Vamana** avatara
 - **Vishala**—immense, The Unstoppable One
 - **Vamana**—who took **Vamana** avatara to help Indra
 - **Vāsudeva**—One who resides in all living beings and in turn all living beings reside in him, one amongst the quadruple form (**Chatur-Vyuha**) of Lord Vishnu (i.e. Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, Anirudha); it also means “the son of **Vasudeva**”, i.e. **Krishna**
 - **Shree-eesha**—one who has **Shree** or **Lakshmi** as his consort / Husband of Goddess **Lakshmi**
 - **Guruvayurappan**—Lord of **Guruvayur** (Temple made by **Guru Bṛhaspati** & **Vayu**), in Malayalam language.
 - **Jagannatha**—Lord of **Jagat** or the **World**.
 - **Sohama**—the most intelligent: the strongest form of Vishnu with a thousand brains
- According to the **Siddhartha-samhita** there are twenty-four forms of Lord Vishnu. The twenty-four forms are
- **Vasudeva**
 - **Sankarshana**
 - **Pradyumna**
 - **Anirudha**
 - **Keshava**
 - **Narayana**
 - **Madhava**
 - **Govinda**
 - **Vishnu**
 - **Madhusudana**
 - **Trivikrama**
 - **Vamana**
 - **Sridhara**
 - **Hrishiksha**

- Padmanabha
- Damodara
- Purushottama
- Achyuta
- Narasimha
- Janardana
- Hari
- Krishna
- Adhokshaja

Upulvan, Uthpala Varna - In Sri Lanka, Vishnu is also referred to as Upulvan (Blue Lotus Coloured)

2.12 In popular culture

4034 Vishnu is an asteroid discovered by Eleanor F. Helin^[58]

Vishnu rocks are volcanic sediments in Grand canyon. Consequently, the mass formation is also being proclaimed as Vishnu temple.^[59]

2.13 See also

Media related to Vishnu at Wikimedia Commons

- Jagannath
- Narayana
- Keshava
- Krishna
- Keshava Namas
- Dashavatara
- Great Architect of the Universe
- List of names of Vishnu
- Mahavishnu

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- [7] For quotation defining the trimurti see Matchett, Freda. “The Purāṇas”, in: Flood (2003), p. 139.
- [8] For the Trimurti system having Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the maintainer or preserver, and Shiva as the transformer or destroyer see: Zimmer (1972) p. 124.
- [9] For definition of trimurti as “the unified form” of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva and use of the phrase “the Hindu triad” see: Apte, p. 485.
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2.15 Further reading

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2.16 External links

- Vishnu, the god of Preservation, by Dr. C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar
- BBC Religion & Ethics – Who is Vishnu (bbc.co.uk)

Chapter 3

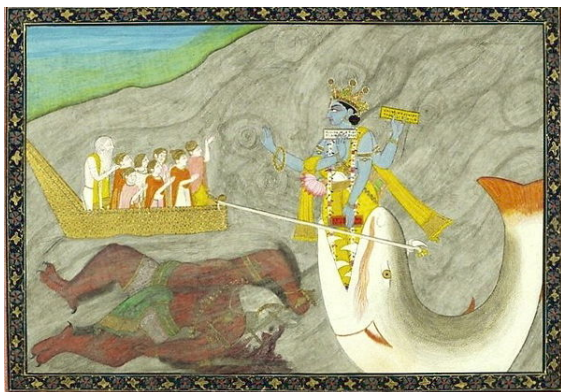
Matsya

For other uses, see *Matsya* (disambiguation).

Matsya (Sanskrit: मत्स्य, literally “Fish”) is the avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu in the form of a fish, preceding Kurma. Often listed as the first avatar in the lists of the ten primary avatars of Vishnu, Matsya is described to have rescued the first man, **Manu**, from a great deluge. Matsya may be depicted as a giant fish, or anthropomorphically with a human torso connected to the rear half of a fish.

The earliest accounts of the legend associate Matsya with the creator god **Prajapati** (identified with **Brahma**). However, Puranic scriptures incorporate Matsya as an avatar of Vishnu. Matsya forewarns Manu about an impending catastrophic flood and orders him to collect all the grains of the world in a boat; in some forms of the story, all living creatures are also to be preserved in the boat. When the flood destroys the world, Manu - in some versions accompanied by the seven great sages - survives by boarding the ark, which Matsya pulls to safety. In later versions of this story, the sacred texts **Vedas** are hidden by a demon, whom Matsya slays: Manu is rescued and the scriptures are recovered. The tale is in the tradition of the family of flood myths, common across cultures.

3.1 Iconography



Matsya pulls Manu's boat after having defeated the demon.

Matsya is depicted in two forms: as a zoomorphic fish or in an anthropomorphic form. In the latter form, the upper half is that of the four-armed man and the lower half is a fish (an exception is a sculpture in the Chennakesava Temple, Somanathapura, which is Matsya as a fish-headed human.^[1]) The upper half resembles Vishnu and wears the traditional ornaments and the *kirita-makuta* (tall conical crown) as worn by Vishnu. He holds in two of his hands the *Sudarshana chakra* (discus) and a *shankha* (conch), the usual weapons of Vishnu. The other two hands make the gestures of *varadamudra*, which grants boons to the devotee, and *abhayamudra*, which reassures the devotee of protection.^[2] In another configuration, he might have all four attributes of Vishnu, namely the *Sudarshana chakra*, a *shankha*, a *gada* (mace) and a lotus.^[3] The human torso generally wears a shawl and a garland. The shawl, worn over his elbows, may be wrapped such that the switch between the human torso and fish half is hidden. Matsya may be depicted alone or in a scene depicting his combat with a demon. A demon called *Shankhasura* emerging from a conch is sometimes depicted attacking Matsya with a sword as Matsya combats or kills him. Both of them may be depicted in the ocean, while the god **Brahma** and/or manuscripts or four men, symbolizing the **Vedas** may be depicted in the background.^[4] In some scenes, Matsya is depicted as a fish pulling the boat with Manu and the seven great sages (*Saptarishi*) on it.

3.2 Legends

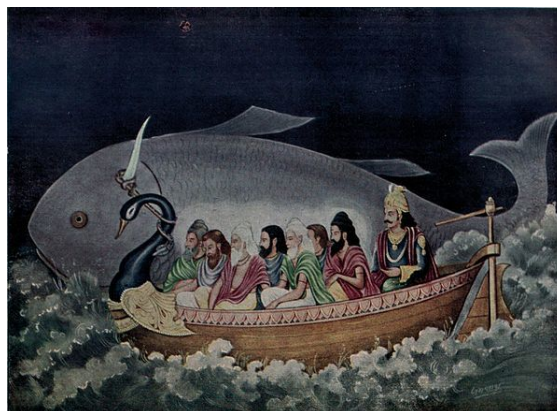
Early accounts of the Deluge equate Matsya with the Vedic deity **Prajapati** (who was identified with the creator god **Brahma** in post-Vedic era).^{[5][6]} The *Shatapatha Brahmana* is the earliest extant text to mention Matsya and the flood myth in Hinduism. It identifies the fish with **Prajapati-Brahma**.^[7] The central characters are the fish (**Matsya**) and **Vaivasvata Manu** or **Satyavrata** who becomes the progenitor of mankind. In this version, **Vaivasvata Manu** or **Satyavrata** accidentally catches a small fish in his hands, while bathing. The fish is **Matsya**, who asks **Vaivasvata Manu** for life and protection; in return he promises to save **Vaivasvata Manu** from an impending



Matsya, Central India, 9th - 10th century. British Museum.

flood; and Matsya knows exactly when this is to happen. Vaivasvata Manu agrees to help; so Matsya tells him to place him in a jar of water, and keep him safe. When Matsya has outgrown the jar, Vaivasvata Manu must dig a pit, fill it with water and place him in it. When Matsya outgrows the pit, Vaivasvata Manu should transfer him to the ocean. By then, he will be big enough to survive; he will be indestructible, and will help Vaivasvata Manu survive the flood. Meanwhile, Vaivasvata Manu should build himself a boat. Vaivasvata Manu does exactly as the fish has instructed and eventually releases Matsya, now fully grown, into the ocean. At the appointed time, the deluge comes; Vaivasvata Manu boards his boat and the waters rise to cover the earth. Vaivasvata Manu calls on Matsya for help. Matsya swims to the ship and Vaivasvata Manu ropes his vessel to the horn that has grown on Matsya's head. Then Matsya tows the ship to the safety of the highest and driest ground, at the northern mountains (interpreted as the Himalayas). Vaivasvata Manu ties the ship to a tree, disembarks, and then slowly descends the mountain along with the now subsiding water. Vaivasvata Manu finds himself the sole survivor on earth; all others have been washed away by the floods. Vaivasvata Manu then takes on the task of creating the new human race. Seeking procreation, he practices austerities and worships the gods by performing sacrifices, offering butter, milk, curds and ghee (clarified butter) to the sacrificial fire. Within a year, his prayers are answered; a beautiful woman called Shradha appears. He marries her, and together they initiate the race of Manu, as Aryans called themselves.^{[8][9]}

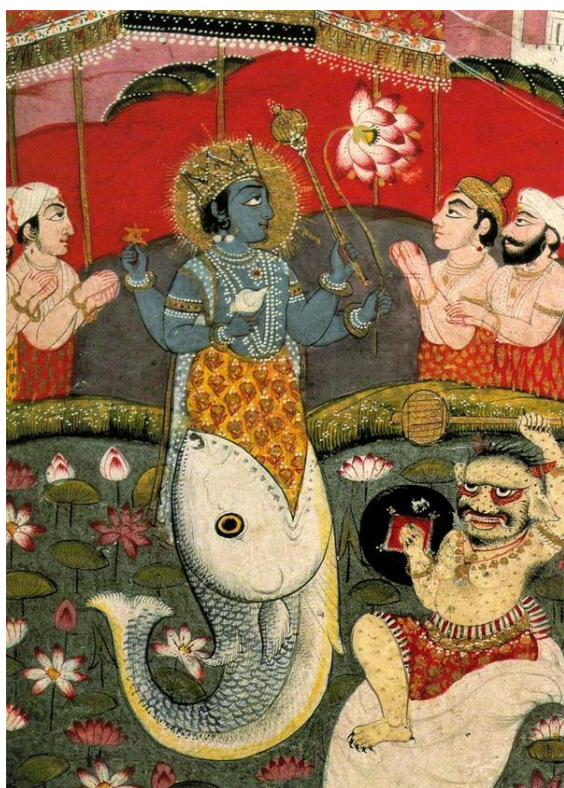
The tale of Matsya in the *Vana Parva* Book of the epic *Mahabharata* is similar to the *Shatapatha Brahmana* version but also differs in some ways. Manu is introduced as **Vaivasvata Manu** - Vaivasvata being a patronymic - the son of the sun god **Vivasvan** (Surya) and a powerful *rishi* (sage) equal to Brahma in glory. While Manu is performing religious rituals on the banks of the Chervi, he finds the fish. The legend moves in the same vein with minor modifications in that the fish grows in size, gets transferred from an earthen pot to a tank or lake and then to the mighty **Ganges River** (called the spouse of the Ocean) and finally to the sea. When Manu left the fish in the sea, it warned of impending danger of a catastrophic flood event, which would submerge the whole universe. The fish advised Manu to be prepared to face the catastrophe by building a massive boat to save himself and the **Saptarishi** (the seven great sages) and collect all seeds of the world and promised to appear when called by him as a huge horned fish to save them. As in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, the horned fish appeared and the boat was tied to his horn. The fish navigated it with great force through the turbulent and salty waters of the ocean and reached the safe heights of the Himalayas. As directed by the fish, the vessel was tied to the peak of the Himalayas, which became known as the *Naubandhana* (the harbour). Matsya tells the sages that he is Prajapati Brahma, the lord of all beings and their saviour who rescued them from danger in the form of a fish. The fish informed that Manu would create all beings - gods, demons and men and other movable and immovable things - by the power of his austerities. The fish vanished and Manu acted on the advice of Brahma, creating all beings.^{[5][7][10]}



Matsya pulling Manu's boat

The *Matsya Purana* initiates the Purana scripture tradition of identifying the fish (Matsya) with Vishnu instead of Brahma. The Purana derives its name from Matsya. It starts with the legend of Manu. King Manu renounced the world, handing his throne to his son and set off to the **Malaya Mountains** to perform *tapas* (austerities). Pleased with the austerities, Brahma granted his wish to rescue the world at the time of *pralaya* (dissolution of the universe). Like in the other accounts, Manu meets the tiny fish. The fish is placed in a jar, in a reservoir that is two yojanas in

height, and eventually ends up in the ocean. Astonished by the fish's growth, Manu realizes that the fish is the god Vishnu. Vishnu as Matsya reveals his real identity and informs Manu that a pralaya would soon come as a *yuga* (epoch) and a *kalpa* (aeon equal to Brahma's day) would soon end. Brahma sleeps in his night and his creation dissolves, submerging the earth and all the other worlds in the cosmos in the primeval ocean. Vishnu promises to return to rescue Manu at the time of pralaya and orders him to bring all living creatures and seeds of all trees on a boat, which the gods would gift him. As pralaya came, Matsya came and pulled the boat with the serpent Shesha as the rope, fastened to his horn. In the journey towards the top of the Malaya mountains, Manu asks Matsya questions and their ensuing dialogue constitutes the rest of the text.^{[3][11]}



Matsya preparing to slay the demon.

The *Bhagavata Purana* adds another reason for Vishnu to appear as Matsya. At the end of a *kalpa*, a *danava* (demon) called Hayagriva (“horse-faced”) steals the sacred Veda texts when they come out of Brahma's mouth when he yawns at the start of his night, fatigued by the creation of the universe. Meanwhile, Satyavrata (also known as Vaivasvata Manu), who was the current Manu (there are multiple Manus in Puranic texts), and the king of Dravida country (South India), was performing severe austerities, sustaining only on water. Once when he was offering water oblation in the Kritamala River, a tiny *shaphari* fish was caught in his folded hands. As the king was about to throw away the fish, the fish pleaded to be not thrown in the water, where larger fishes would devour it. Assur-

ing the fish protection, the king put it in a small jar and took it with him. But the fish grew larger and requested for more space, the king moved it in a small pond, but the fish soon outgrew it. As the fish outgrew water reservoirs, Satyavrata transferred it to a lake, then to larger reservoirs and subsequently to the ocean. But the fish requested Satyavrata that it was afraid of the dangerous marine predators of the ocean. Bewildered by these words, the king asked the fish to reveal his true identity, but soon deduced that this supernatural fish was none other than Vishnu and surrendered to him. Matsya-Vishnu declared that a great flood would come seven days from then and engulf the universe. He ordered Satyavrata to assemble the seven great sages and with their counsel, gather all kinds of seeds, herbs and various beings to load them on a boat, that would be sent by Vishnu on the fateful day. He instructed that the serpent *Vasuki* should be used as a rope to tie the boat to his fish-horn. Promising that he would sail the boat through the waters throughout the night of Brahma, Matsya disappeared after his revelation and reappeared as a horned fish on the day of the Deluge, when torrential rains drenched the earth. Satyavrata did as Vishnu instructed and fastened the boat to the horned fish (Matsya). As Matsya swam through the flood waters, he discoursed the king on various topics and revealed to him knowledge of the Vedas, Puranas, Samhitas as well as the Supreme Truth. After last wave of the flood ended, Matsya slew Hayagriva and rescued the Vedas and handed them over to Brahma, who woke after his night. The narrative ends with the narrator Sage Shuka praying to Matsya and declaring that whoever listens to this tale is absolved of sin and remembering Matsya daily grants success to the devotee.^{[12][13][14][15]}

The *Agni Purana* version is similar to the *Bhagavata Purana* version, but mentions Vaivasvata Manu only collecting all seeds (not living beings) and assembling the seven great sages similar to the *Mahabharata* version. It also adds the basis of the *Matsya Purana*, being the discourse of Matsya to Manu, to the *Bhagavata Purana* version.^[16]

3.3 Symbolism and comparative mythology

Main article: [Flood myth](#)

The story of a great Deluge is found in many civilizations across the earth. It is often related to the *Genesis* narrative of the flood and Noah's Ark.^[3] The fish motif and saving of the scriptures from a demon being additions in the Hindu tale.^[17] Similar flood myths also exist in tales from ancient Sumer and Babylonia, Greece, the Maya of Americas and the Yoruba of Africa.^[3]

Matsya is believed to symbolise the first stage of evolution, as aquatic life was the first beings on earth.^{[3][18]} The tale of Matsya may be interpreted as a



Matsya with the Vedas as infants.

creation myth where Manu creates beings of the world and men after they destroyed in the flood, though the creation is never the focus of the legend. Some authors consider the tale not a flood myth, but symbolic in nature. Manu's boat is representative of moksha (salvation), which helps one to cross over. Himalayas is treated as a boundary between the earthly existence and land of salvation beyond. God as the fish guides one to salvation. The horn of the fish is symbolic of "sacrificial values". The presence of fish seems to be an allusion to the Indian "law of the fishes", an equivalent to the "law of the jungle", when the fish seeks protection from being eaten by a larger fish. Treated as a parable, the tale advises a good king should protect the weak from the mighty, reversing the "law of fishes" and uphold dharma, like Manu, the progenitor of mankind and in particular two royal dynasties, thus an ideal king. In the tales where the demon hides the Vedas, dharma is threatened and Vishnu as the divine Saviour, rescues dharma, aided by his earthly counterpart, Manu - the king.^[11]

3.4 Worship

There are very few temples dedicated to Matsya. Prominent ones include the Shankhodara temple in Bet Dwarka and Vedanarayana Temple in Nagalapuram.^[18] The Koneswaram Matsyakeswaram temple in Trincomalee is now destroyed.

Matsya is generally enlisted as the first avatar of Vishnu, especially in Dashavatara (ten major avatars of Vishnu) lists. However, that was not always the case. Some lists do not list Matsya as first, only later texts start the trend of Matsya as the first avatar.^[3]

Matsya is the patron deity of the Meenas, who claim descent from the deity. The Meenas call Matsya Meenesh, the Lord of the Meenas or the fish (Meena) Lord. Meenas celebrates Meenesh Jayanti as birthday of Meenesh. In Rajasthan there are many temples of Meenesh, but the first Meenesh temple was in Pushkar, Rajasthan.^[19] A Meenesh temple is also situated in Malarana chour vilage of Sawai Madhopur district of Rajasthan.^[20]

3.5 See also

- Dashavatara
- Flood myth

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3.7 Further reading

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3.8 External links

- The Matsya Purana

Chapter 4

Kurma

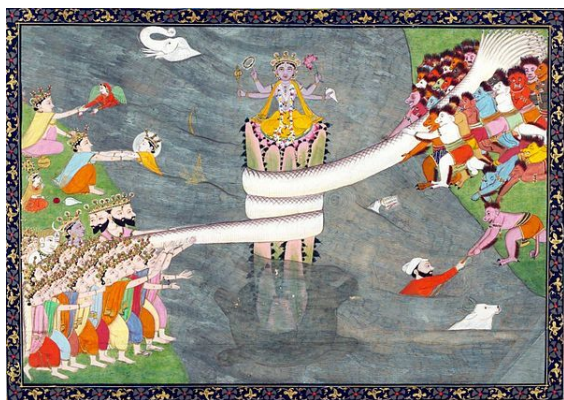
This article is about the Hindu deity. For the dish, see [Korma](#).

In Hinduism, **Kurma** (Sanskrit: कूर्म; Kūrma) was the second Avatar of Vishnu, succeeding Matsya and preceding Varaha. Like Matsya this incarnation also occurred in Satya yuga. The temples dedicated to Kurma are located in Kurmai, of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh and Srikurmam, Andhra Pradesh.

4.1 Samudra manthan (The Churning of the ocean)

Main article: [Samudra manthan](#)

Purana scripture indicates that the sage Durvasa had



Kurma Avatar of Vishnu, below Mount Mandara, with Vasuki wrapped around it, churning the ocean of milk during Samudra manthan. ca 1870.

given a garland to Indra, the king of Gods. Indra placed the garland around his elephant, but the animal trampled it, insulting the sage. Durvasa then cursed the gods to lose their immortality, strength, and divine powers. After losing the kingdom of heaven, they approached Vishnu for help.

He advised that they had to drink the nectar of immortality to regain their glory. To obtain it, they needed to churn the ocean of milk, a body of water so large they needed Mount Mandara as the churning staff, and the ser-

pent [Vasuki](#) as the churning rope. The Devas were not strong enough to churn on their own, and declared peace with their foes, the [Asuras](#), to enlist their help.

Finally, Mount Mandara churned, but the force was so great the mountain began to sink into the ocean of milk. Taking the form of the turtle Kurma, Vishnu bore the mountain on his back as they churned the waters.^[1] Fourteen precious things arose from the turbulent ocean, culminating with Dhanvantari, the physician of the gods, who brought with him the nectar of immortality.

The Asuras immediately took the nectar, and quarreled amongst themselves. Vishnu then manifested himself as the beautiful [Mohini](#) and tricked the Asuras to retrieve the potion, which he then distributed to the Devas. Though the Asuras realized the trick, it was too late—the Devas had regained their powers, and were then able to defeat their foes.

There are three temples dedicated to this incarnation of Vishnu in India, Kurmai of Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh, Sri Kurmam in Andhra Pradesh, and Gavi-rangapur in the Chitradurg District of Karnataka. The name of the village Kurmai mentioned above originated as there is historical temple of Kurma Varadara-jaswamy (Kurmavatar of Lord Vishnu) god in this village.^[2]

4.2 See also

- [Vishnu](#)

4.3 Notes

[1] <https://www.msu.edu/~{ }muneran2/hinduism.htm>

[2] http://books.google.com/books?id=dobtZ61vCp0C&pg=PA774&lpg=PA774&dq=kurma+etymology&source=web&ots=2FQ-OIZwjm&sig=ISJA6kqyrwRO4ZjncIcTfgg1C8&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=10&ct=result#PPA775,M1

4.4 External links

- [Hindu Gods, Kurma](#)
- [Indian Divinity, Kurma Avatar](#)
- [Kurma Avatara Homa\(Fire Ritual\)](#)

Chapter 5

Varaha

Varaha (Sanskrit: वराह, “boar”) is the avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu in the form of a boar. Varaha is listed as third in the Dashavatara, the ten principal avatars of Vishnu. When the demon Hiranyaksha stole the earth (personified as the goddess Bhudevi) and hid her in the primordial waters, Vishnu appeared as Varaha to rescue her. Varaha slew the demon and retrieved the Earth from the ocean, lifting it on his tusks, and restored Bhudevi to her place in the universe.

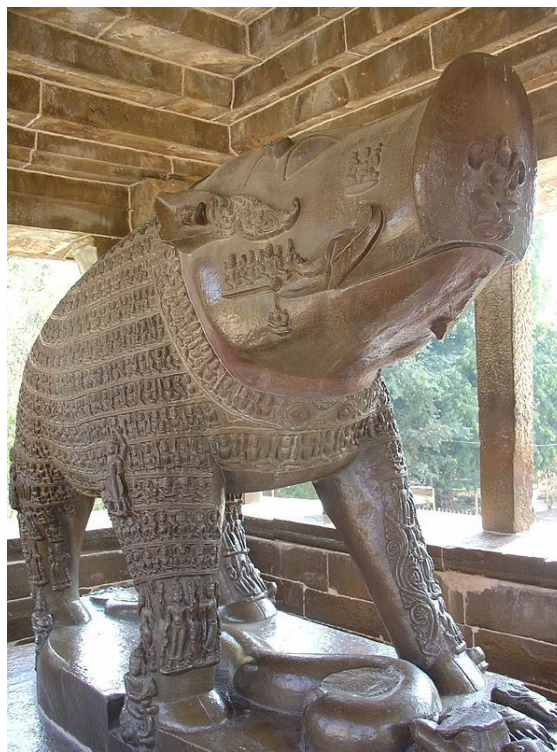
Varaha may be depicted completely as a boar or in an anthropomorphic form, with a boar’s head and human body. His consort, Bhudevi, the earth, is often depicted as a young woman, lifted by Varaha. The earth may be depicted as a mass of land too.

5.1 Iconography

Like Vishnu’s first two avatars - **Matsya** (fish) and **Kurma** (turtle), the third avatar Varaha is depicted either in zoomorphic form as an animal (a wild boar), or anthropomorphically. The main difference in the anthropomorphic form portrayal is that the first two avatars are depicted with a torso of a man and the bottom half as animal, while Varaha has an animal (boar) head and a human body.^{[1][2]} The portrayal of the anthropomorphic Varaha is similar to the fourth avatar **Narasimha** (portrayed as a lion-headed man), who is the first avatar of Vishnu that is not completely animal.

In the zoomorphic form, Varaha is often depicted as a free-standing boar colossus, for example, the monolithic sculpture of Varaha in **Khajuraho** (c. 900-925) made in sandstone, is 2.6 metres (8 ft 6 in) long and 1.7 metres (5 ft 7 in) high.^[3] The sculpture may not resemble a boar realistically, and may have his features altered for stylistic purposes. The earth, personified as the goddess Bhudevi, clings to one of Varaha’s tusks. Often the colossus is decorated by miniature figurines of gods and goddesses and other world creatures appearing all over his body, which signify the whole of creation. Such sculptures are found in Eran,^[3] Muradpur, Badoh, Gwalior, Jhansi and Apasadh.^{[4][5]}

In the anthropomorphic form, Varaha often has a styl-



Zoomorphic Varaha, Khajuraho.

ized boar face, like the zoomorphic models. The snout may be shorter. The position and size of the tusks may also be altered. The ears, cheeks and eyes are generally based on human ones. Early sculptors in Udayagiri and Eran faced the issue of how to attach the boar head to the human body and did not show a human neck. However, in **Badami**, the problem was resolved by including a human neck. While some sculptures show a mane, it is dropped and replaced by a high conical crown - typical of Vishnu iconography - in others. Varaha sculptures generally look up to the right; there are very rare instances of left-facing Varaha depictions.^[4]

Varaha has four arms, two of which hold the **Sudarshana chakra** (discus) and **shankha** (conch), while the other two hold a **gada** (mace), a sword, or a lotus or one of them makes the *varadamudra* (gesture of blessing). Varaha may be depicted with all of Vishnu’s attributes in his four hands: the **Sudarshana chakra**, the **shankha**, the **gada**

and the lotus. Sometimes, Varaha may carry only two of Vishnu's attributes: a shankha and the gada personified as a female called *Gadadevi*. Varaha is often shown with a muscular physique and in a heroic pose. He is often depicted triumphantly emerging from the ocean as he rescues the earth.^{[1][4][6][7][8]}



A rare left-facing Varaha holding Bhudevi, 7th century CE, Mahabalipuram.

The earth may be personified as the goddess Bhudevi in Indian sculpture. Bhudevi is often shown as a small figure in the icon. She may be seated on or dangling from one of Varaha's tusks, or is seated on the corner of his folded elbow or his shoulder and supports herself against the tusk or the snout, as being lifted from the waters. In later Indian paintings, the whole earth or a part of it is depicted lifted up by Varaha's tusks. In Mahabalipuram, a rare portrayal shows an affectionate Varaha looking down to Bhudevi, who he carries in his arms. The earth may be portrayed as a globe, a flat stretch of mountainous land or an elaborate forest landscape with buildings, temples, humans, birds and animals. The defeated demon may be depicted trampled under Varaha's feet or being killed in combat by Varaha's gada. Nagas (snake gods) and their consorts Naginis (snake goddesses), residents of the underworld, may be depicted as swimming in the ocean with hands folded as a mark of devotion. Varaha may be also depicted standing on a snake or other minor creatures, denoting the cosmic waters.^{[1][4][6][7][8]}

Two iconographical forms of Varaha are popular. Yajna Varaha - denoting Yajna (sacrifice) - is seated on a lion-throne and flanked by his consorts Bhudevi and Lakshmi. As Pralaya Varaha - indicative of lifting the earth from the stage of the pralaya (the dissolution of the universe), he is dedicated only with Bhudevi.^[1] Varaha may be depicted with Lakshmi alone too. In such sculptures, he may be depicted identical to Vishnu in terms of iconography with Vishnu's attributes; the boar head identifying the icon as Varaha. Lakshmi may be seated on his thigh in such portrayals.^[9]

Varaha often features in the *Dashavatara* stele - where the ten major avatars of Vishnu are portrayed - sometimes surrounding Vishnu. In the *Vaikuntha Vishnu* (four headed Vishnu) images, the boar is shown as the left head. Varaha's *shakti* (energy or consort) is the *Matrika* (mother goddess) *Varahi*, who is depicted with a boar head like the god.^[4]

5.2 Legends



Varaha stands on Nagas, rises from the waters with the earth (Bhudevi) on his elbow, National Museum, New Delhi.

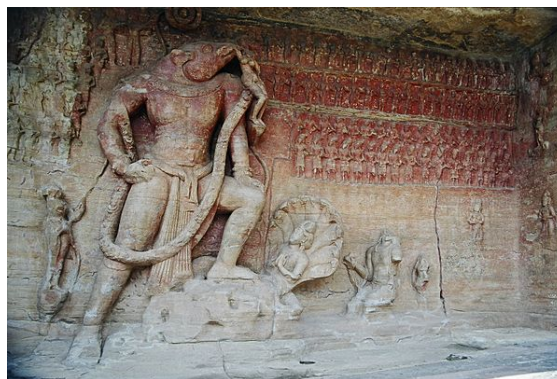
The earliest versions of the Varaha legend are found in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* and the *Shatapatha Brahmana*. They narrate that the universe was filled with the primordial waters. The earth was the size of a hand and was trapped in it. The god Prajapati (the creator-god Brahma) in the form of a boar (*varaha*) plunges into the waters and brings the earth out. He also marries the earth thereafter. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* calls the boar as Emusha. The epic *Ramayana* and the *Vishnu Purana* - considered sometimes as the oldest of the Puranic scriptures - are the first to associate Varaha with Vishnu.^{[1][10]}

Various Puranic scriptures including the *Agni Purana*, the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Devi Bhagavata Purana*, the *Padma Purana*, the *Varaha Purana*, the *Vayu Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana* narrate the legend of Varaha with some variations.^{[1][11][12]}

The gate-keepers of Vishnu's abode Vaikuntha, Jaya and Vijaya are cursed by the four Kumaras, sages who roam the world in the form of children, to be born as asuras (demons). They are born on earth as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu to the sage Kashyapa and his wife Diti and were one of the Daityas, a race of demons originating from Diti. The demon brothers are manifestations of pure evil and create havoc in the universe. The elder brother Hiranyaksha practises *tapas* (austerities) and is blessed by Brahma with a boon that makes him indestructible by any animal or human. He and his brother torment the inhabitants of earth as well as the gods and engage in war with the latter. Hiranyaksha takes the earth (personified as the goddess Bhudevi) and hides her in the primordial waters. In some versions of the tale, the earth gives a loud cry of distress as she is kidnapped by the demon; in others, she assumes the form of a cow and appeals to Vishnu to rescue her from the clutches of the demon. In some variants, the distressed gods led by Brahma along with the sages go to Vishnu for help.^{[1][11][12]} In some versions, the kidnapping of the earth by Hiranyaksha is dropped. Instead, the earth sinks on her own to Rasatala (underworld) due to the weight of the mountains or due to the torture of the demons.^[1]

Since Hiranyaksha had not included the boar in the list of animals that would not be able to kill him, Vishnu assumes this form with huge tusks and goes down to the primordial ocean. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, Varaha emerges as a tiny beast (a size of a thumb) from the nostrils of Brahma, but soon starts to grow. Varaha's size increases to that of an elephant and then to that of an enormous mountain. The scriptures emphasize his gigantic size. The *Vayu Purana* describes Varaha as 10 *yojanas* (The range of a *yojana* is disputed and ranges between 6–15 kilometres (3.7–9.3 mi)) in width and a 1000 *yojanas* in height. He is large as a mountain and blazing like the sun. Dark like a rain cloud in complexion, his tusks are white, sharp and fearsome. His body is the size of the space between the earth and the sky. His thunderous roar is frightening. In one instance, his mane is so fiery and fearsome that Varuna, the god of the waters, requests Varaha to save him from it. Varaha complies and folds his mane.^{[1][11][12]}

In the ocean, Varaha encounters Hiranyaksha, who obstructs his path and challenges him for a duel. In some versions, the demon also mocks Varaha as the beast and warns him not to touch earth. Ignoring the demon's threats, Varaha lifts the earth on his tusks. Hiranyaksha charges towards the boar in rage with a mace. The two fiercely fight with maces. Finally, Varaha slays the demon after a thousand-year duel. Varaha rises from the ocean with the earth in his tusks and places her gently above



Rock-cut sculpture of Varaha at the Udayagiri Caves, near Vidisha, carved when the city was a provincial capital of the Gupta Empire. One of the earliest anthropomorphic sculptures shows Bhudevi clinging to Varaha's tusk as Varaha emerges from the ocean.

it in her original position, as the gods and the sages sing Varaha's praises.^{[1][11][12][13]}

Further, the earth goddess Bhudevi falls in love with her rescuer Varaha. Vishnu - in his Varaha form - marries Bhudevi, making her one of the consorts of Vishnu. In one narrative, Vishnu and Bhudevi indulge in vigorous embraces and as a result, Bhudevi becomes fatigued and faints, sinking a little in the primordial ocean. Vishnu again acquires the form of Varaha and rescues her, reinstating her in her original position above the waters.^[11] Some scriptures state that Bhudevi gives birth to Varaha's son, an asura called Narakasura.^[14]

The scripture *Varaha Purana* is believed to be narrated by Vishnu to Bhudevi, as Varaha. The Purana is devoted more to the "myths and genealogies" connected to the worship of Vishnu.^[1]

Some Shaiva Puranas narrate a tale in which the god Shiva defeats Varaha, a clear indication of the conflict between Vaishnavism (who consider Vishnu as the Supreme Being) and Shaivism (who venerate Shiva as the Supreme One); both of which are sects of Hindu religion. In the *Kalika Purana*, Varaha had amorous dalliance with Bhudevi. He and his three boar sons then create mayhem in the world, which necessitates Shiva to take the form of Sharabha, to kill Varaha.^[1]

5.3 Evolution

Varaha was originally described as a form of Brahma, but later on was crystallized as the avatar of Vishnu.^[1] The earliest Varaha images are found in Mathura, dating to the 1st and 2nd century CE.^[1] The cult of Varaha seems to have been popular in the Gupta era (4th-6th century) in Central India, considering the large number of Varaha sculptures and inscriptions found.^{[8][15]} A red sandstone sculpture of Varaha in boar form with an inscription is traced to the reign of Toramana (late 5th to



Coin with Varaha (Vishnu Avatar) on a Gurjara-Pratihara coin 850-900 CE, British Museum.

early 6th century). Early sculptures of Varaha generally depict him in his boar form. Anthropomorphic depictions of Varaha with human body and boar's head become popular in the later period.^[1] Other early sculptures exist in the cave temples in Badami in Karnataka (6th century) and Varaha Cave Temple in Mahabalipuram (7th century); both in South India and Ellora Caves (7th century) in Western India.^{[1][4]} In the Udayagiri Caves (Cave 5) in Madhya Pradesh, an image of Varaha rescuing the earth sculpted in sandstone (dated to 401-450 AD) is seen; and a zoomorphic image from 8th century from Bago-Pathari is now with the Archeological Museum at Gwalior.^[4] By 7th century, images of Varaha were found in all regions of India.^{[1][8]} By the tenth century, temples dedicated to Varaha were established in Khajuraho (existent, but worship has ceased), Udaipur, Jhansi (now in ruins) etc.^{[1][15]}

In the first millennium, the boar was worshipped as a symbol of virility.^[8] The Chalukya dynasty (543-753) was the first dynasty to adopt Varaha in their crest and minted coins with Varaha on it.^[16] The Gurjara-Pratihara king Mihira Bhoja I (836-885 CE) assumed the title of *Adi-varaha* and also minted coins depicting the Varaha image.^[1] Varaha was also adopted as a part of royal insignia by the Chola (300s BCE-1279) and Vijayanagara Empires (1336-1646) of South India.^[8] In Karnataka, a zoomorphic image of Varaha is found in a carving on a pillar in Aihole, which is interpreted as the Vijayanagara emblem, as it is seen along with signs of a cross marked Sun, a disc and a conch.^[4]

However, the boar and its relative the pig started being seen as polluting since the 12th century, due to Muslim influence on India. Muslims consider the pig and its meat unclean. This led to a decline in Varaha worship to a certain extent.^[8]

5.4 Symbolism



Varaha tramples the fallen demon with Bhudevi on his shoulder, Hoysaleswara Temple.

In the *Vishnu Purana*, Varaha represents *yajna* (sacrifice), as the eternal upholder of the earth. His feet represent the *Vedas* (scriptures). His tusks represent sacrificial stakes. His teeth are offerings. His mouth is the altar with tongue of sacrificial fire. The hair on his head denotes the sacrificial grass. The eyes represent the day and the night. His coarse hair represents sexual prowess. The head represents the seat of the Brahmin (priest). The mane represents the hymns of the Vedas. His nostrils are for oblation. His joints represent the various ceremonies. The ears are said to indicate rites (voluntary and obligatory). Thus, Varaha is the embodiment of the Supreme Being who brings order amidst chaos in the world by his sacrifice.^[1]

Varaha symbolizes the resurrection of the earth from a *pralaya* (dissolution of the universe) and the establishment of a new *kalpa* (aeon).^[1] Symbolism also attributes that evolution from water could relate to the geological phenomenon of the tectonic age. It could also represent the rescue of earth from "false cults".^[1]

5.5 Temples

The most prominent temples of Varaha is the Sri Varahaswami Temple in Tirumala, Andhra Pradesh. It is located on the shores of a temple pond, called the Swami Pushkarini, in Tirumala, near Tirupati; to the north of the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple (another temple of Vishnu in the form of Venkateswara). The region is called *Adi-Varaha Kshetra*, the abode of Varaha. The legend of the place is as follows: at the end of Satya Yuga (the first in the cycle of four aeons; the present one is the fourth aeon), devotees of Varaha requested him to stay on earth, so Varaha ordered his mount Garuda to bring his divine garden Kridachala from his abode Vaikuntha to Venkata hills, Tirumala. Venkateswara is described as having taken the permission of Varaha to reside in these hills, where his chief temple, Tirumala Venkateswara Temple, stands. Hence, pilgrims are prescribed to worship Varaha first and then Venkateswara. In the *Atri Samhita* (*Samurtarchanadhikara*), Varaha is described to be worshipped in three forms here: Adi Varaha, Pralaya Varaha and Yajna Varaha. The image in the sanctum is of Adi Varaha.^{[17][18]}

Another important temple is the Bhuvarahaswami Temple in Srimushnam town, to the northeast of Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu. It was built in the late 16th century by Krishnappa II, a Thanjavur Nayak ruler.^[19] The image of Varaha is considered a *swayambhu* (self manifested) image, one of the eight self-manifested Swayamvyakta Vaishnava kshetras. An inscription in the *prakaram* (circumambulating passage around the main shrine) quoting from the legend of the *Srimushna Mahatmaya* (a local legend) mentions the piety one derives in observing festivals during the 12 months of the year when the sun enters a particular zodiacal sign.^[20] This temple is venerated by Hindus and Muslims alike. Both communities take the utsava murti (festival image) in procession in the annual temple festival in the Tamil month of Masi (February–March). The deity is credited with many miracles and called *Varaha saheb* by Muslims.^[2]

Varaha shrines are also included in Divya Desams (a list of 108 abodes of Vishnu). They include Adi Varaha Perumal shrine Tirukkalvanoor, located in the Kamakshi Amman Temple complex, Kanchipuram and Thiruvidadai, 15 km from Mahabalipuram.^{[21][22]}

In Muradpur in West Bengal, worship is offered to an in-situ 2.5 metres (8 ft 2 in) zoomorphic image of Varaha (8th century), one of the earliest known images of Varaha.^[4] A 7th century anthropomorphic Varaha image of Apasadh is still worshipped in a relatively modern temple.^[1] Other temples dedicated to Varaha are located across India in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Haryana Pradesh at Baraha Kalan,^[23] Karnataka at Maravanthe and Kallahalli, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha at Yajna Varaha Temple,^[23] and Lakhmi Varaha Temple, Rajasthan at Pushkar, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

5.6 See also

- Narasimha
- Varahi

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5.9 External links

Chapter 6

Narasimha

For other uses, see Narasimha (disambiguation).

Narasimha (Sanskrit: नरसिंह; IAST: Narasiṃha), (Telugu:నరసింహ), (Tamil: நரசிம்மர்), (Kannada:ನರಸಿಂಹ) **Narasingh**, **Narsingh** and **Narasimha**-in derivative languages is an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu and one of Hinduism's most popular deities, as evidenced in early epics, iconography, and temple and festival worship for over a millennium.^[1]

Narasimha is often visualised as half-man/half-lion, having a human-like torso and lower body, with a lion-like face and claws.^[2] This image is widely worshipped in deity form by a significant number of Vaiṣṇava groups. He is known primarily as the 'Great Protector' who specifically defends and protects his devotees in times of need.^[3]

6.1 Scriptural sources

There are references to Narasimha in a variety of Purāṇas, with 17 different versions of the main narrative.^[4] The Bhagavata Purāṇa (Canto 7), Agni Purāṇa (4.2-3), Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa(2.5.3-29), Vayu Purāṇa (67.61-66), Harivaṃśa (41 & 3.41-47), Brahma-Purāṇa (213.44-79), Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa(1.54), Kūrma Purāṇa (1.15.18-72), Matsya Purāṇa(161-163), Padma Purāṇa(Uttara-khaṇḍa 5.42), Śiva Purāṇa (2.5.43 & 3.10-12), Liṅga Purāṇa (1.95-96), Skanda Purāṇa 7 (2.18.60-130) and Viṣṇu Purāṇa (1.16-20) all contain depictions of the Narasimha Avatāra. There is also a short reference in the Mahābhārata (3.272.56-60) and a Gopāla Tapani Upaniṣad (Narasimha tapani Upaniṣad), earliest of Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads named in reference to him.

6.1.1 References from Vedas

The Ṛg Veda contains an epithet that has been attributed to Narasimha. The half-man, half-lion avatāra is described as:

*like some wild beast, dread, prowling,
mountain-roaming.*



Narasimha, Chola period, 12th –13th century, Tamil Nadu, from Museum Guimet, Paris.

Source:(RV.I 154.2a).

There is an allusion to a Namuci story in RV.VIII 14.13:

*With waters' foam you tore off, Indra, the
head of Namuci, subduing all contending hosts.*

This short reference is believed to have culminated in the full puranic story of Narasimha.^[1]

6.1.2 Narasimha and Prahlāda

Bhagavata Purāṇa describes that in his previous avatar as Varāha, Viṣṇu killed the asura Hiraṇyākṣa. The younger brother of Hirṇyākṣa, Hiranyakaśipu wanted revenge on Viṣṇu and his followers. He undertook many years of



Viṣṇu as Narasimha kills Hiranyakaśipu, stone sculpture from the Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebidu, Karnataka

austere penance to take revenge on Viṣṇu:^[5] Brahma thus offers the demon a boon and Hiranyakaśipu asks for immortality. Brahma tells him this is not possible, but that he could bind the death of Hiranyakaśipu with conditions. Hiranyakaśipu agreed:

O my lord, O best of the givers of benediction, if you will kindly grant me the benediction I desire, please let me not meet death from any of the living entities created by you.

Grant me that I not die within any residence or outside any residence, during the daytime or at night, nor on the ground or in the sky. Grant me that my death not be brought about by any weapon, nor by any human being or animal.

Grant me that I not meet death from any entity, living or nonliving created by you. Grant me, further, that I not be killed by any demigod or demon or by any great snake from the lower planets. Since no one can kill you in the battlefield, you have no competitor. Therefore, grant me the benediction that I too may have no rival. Give me sole lordship over all the living entities and presiding deities, and give me all the glories obtained by that position. Furthermore, give me all the mystic powers attained by long austerities and the practice of yoga, for these cannot be lost at any time.

Brahma said,

Tathāstu (so be it)

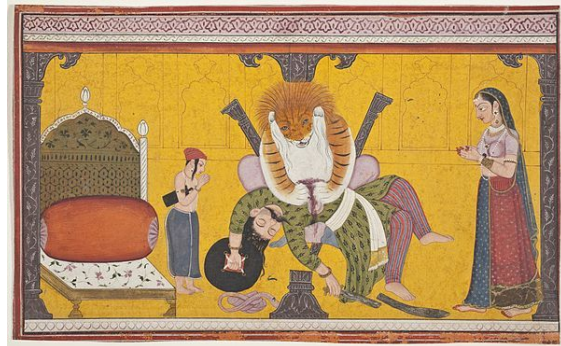
and vanished. Hiranyakaśipu was happy thinking that he had won over death.^[6]

One day while Hiranyakaśipu performed austerities at Mandarācala Mountain, his home was attacked by Indra and the other devatās.^[7] At this point the Devarṣi (divine sage) Nārada intervenes to protect Kayādu, whom he describes as **sinless**.^[8] Following this event, Nārada takes Kayādu into his care and while under the guidance of Nārada, her unborn child (Hiranyakaśipu's son) Prahlāda, becomes affected by the transcendental instructions of the sage even at such a young stage of development. Thus, Prahlāda later begins to show symptoms of this earlier training by Nārada, gradually becoming recognised as a devoted follower of Viṣṇu, much to his father's disappointment.^[9]

Hiranyakaśipu furious at the devotion of his son to Viṣṇu, as the god had killed his brother. Finally, he decides to commit filicide.^[10] but each time he attempts to kill the boy, Prahlāda is protected by Viṣṇu's mystical power. When asked, Prahlāda refuses to acknowledge his father as the supreme lord of the universe and claims that Viṣṇu is all-pervading and omnipresent.

Hiranyakaśipu points to a nearby pillar and asks if 'his Viṣṇu' is in it and says to his son Prahlāda:

O most unfortunate Prahlāda, you have always described a supreme being other than me, a supreme being who is above everything, who is the controller of everyone, and who is all-pervading. But where is He? If He is everywhere, then why is He not present before me in this pillar?!^[11]



Narasimha kills Hiranyakaśipu, as Prahlāda and his mother bow before Lord Narasimha

Prahlāda then answers,

He was, He is and He will be.

In an alternate version of the story, Prahlāda answers,

He is in pillars, and he is in the smallest twig.

Hiraṇyakaśipu, unable to control his anger, smashes the pillar with his mace, and following a tumultuous sound, Viṣṇu in the form of Narasiṃha appears from it and moves to attack Hiraṇyakaśipu. In defence of Prahlāda. In order to kill Hiraṇyakaśipu and not upset the boon given by Brahma, the form of Narasiṃha is chosen. Hiraṇyakaśipu can not be killed by human, deva or animal. Narasiṃha is neither one of these as he is a form of Viṣṇu incarnate as a part-human, part-animal. He comes upon Hiraṇyakaśipu at twilight (when it is neither day nor night) on the threshold of a courtyard (neither indoors nor out), and puts the demon on his thighs (neither earth nor space). Using his sharp fingernails (neither animate nor inanimate) as weapons, he disembowels and kills the demon.^[12]

Kūrma Purāṇa describes the preceding battle between the Puruṣa and demonic forces in which he escapes a powerful weapon called *Paśupāta* and it describes how Prahlāda's brothers headed by Anuhrāda and thousands of other demons

*were led to the valley of death (yamalayam)
by the lion produced from the body of man-lion*

avatar.^[1] The same episode occurs in the *Matsya Purāṇa* 179, several chapters after its version of the Narasiṃha advent.^[1]

The Bhagavata Purāṇa further narrates: even after killing Hiraṇyakaśipu, none of the present demigods are able to calm Narasiṃha's fury, not even Śiva. So all the gods and goddesses call his consort, Lakṣmī, but she is also unable to do so. Then, at the request of Brahma, Prahlāda is presented to Narasiṃha, and finally he is calmed by the prayers of his devotee.^[13] Before parting, Narasiṃha rewards the wise Prahlāda by crowning him as the king.

6.1.3 Narasiṃha and Ādi Śaṅkara

Narasiṃha is also a protector of his devotees in times of danger. Near Śrī Śailaṃ, there is a forest called Hatakeśvanam, that no man enters. Śaṅkarācārya entered this place and did penance for many days. During this time, a Kāpālika, by name Kirakashan appeared before him.

He told Śrī Śaṅkara that he should give his body as a human-sacrifice to Kālī. Śaṅkara happily agreed. His disciples were shocked to hear this and pleaded with Śaṅkara to change his mind, but he refused to do so saying that it was an honor to give up his body as a sacrifice for Kālī and one must not lament such things. The Kāpālika arranged a fire for the sacrifice and Śaṅkara sat beside it. Just as he lifted his axe to sever the head of Śaṅkara, Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha entered the body of the disciple of Śaṅkarācārya and Narasiṃha devotee, Padmapada. He

then fought the Kāpālika, slayed him and freed the forest of Kapalikas. Ādi Śaṅkara composed the very powerful **Lakṣmī-Narasiṃha Karāvalamban Stotram**^[14] at the very spot in front of Lord Narasiṃha.

6.2 Mode of worship

Due to the nature of Narasiṃha's form (divine anger), it is essential that worship be given with a very high level of attention compared to other deities. In many temples only lifelong celibates (Brahmācārya) will be able to have the chance to serve as priests to perform the daily puja. Forms where Narasiṃha appears sitting in a yogic posture, or with the goddess Lakṣmī are the exception to this rule, as Narasiṃha is taken as being more relaxed in both of these instances compared to his form when first emerging from the pillar to protect Prahlāda.

6.2.1 Prayers



Narasiṃha deity in Bhaktapur Darbar, Nepal

A number of prayers have been written in dedication to Narasiṃha avatāra. These include:

1. The Narasiṃha Mahā-Mantra

2. Narasimha Praṇāma Prayer
3. Daśavatāra Stotra by Jayadeva
4. Kāmaśikhā Aṣṭakam by Vedānta Deśika
5. Divya Prabandham 2954

The Narasimha Mahā-Mantra

*om hrīm kṣaum
ugraṁ viraṁ mahāviṣṇuṁ
jvalantaṁ sarvatomukham ।
nṛsimhaṁ bhīṣaṇaṁ bhadraṁ
mṛtyormṛtyuṁ namāmyaham ॥*

O' Angry and brave Mahā-Viṣṇu, your heat and fire permeate everywhere. O Lord Narasimha, you are everywhere. You are the death of death and I surrender to You.

Narasimha Praṇāma Prayer

*namaste narasimhāya,
prahlādahlāda-dāyine,
hiraṇyakaśipuṣ vakṣaḥ,
śilā-ṭaṅka nakhālaye*

I offer my obeisances to Lord Narasimha, who gives joy to Prahlāda Mahārāja and whose nails are like chisels on the stone like chest of the demon Hiranyakaśipu.

*ito nṛsimhaḥ parato nṛsimho,
yato yato yāmi tato nṛsimhaḥ,
bahir nṛsimho hṛdaye nṛsimho,
nṛsimhaṁ ādim śaraṇaṁ prapadye*

Lord Nṛsimha is here and also there. Wherever I go Lord Narasimha is there. He is in the heart and is outside as well. I surrender to Lord Narasimha, the origin of all things and the supreme refuge.^[15]

Daśavatāra Stotra by Jayadeva

*tava kara-kamala-vare nakham
adbhuta-śrṅgaṁ,
dalita-hiraṇyakaśipu-tanu-
bhrṅgaṁ,
keśava dhr̥ta-narahari-rūpa jaya
jagadīśa hare*

O Keśava! O Lord of the universe. O Hari, who have assumed the form of half-man, half-lion! All glories to You! Just as one can easily crush a wasp between one's fingernails, so in the same way the body of the wasp-like demon Hiranyakaśipu has been ripped apart by the wonderful pointed nails on your beautiful lotus hands.(from the Daśavatāra-stotra composed by Jayadeva)^[15]

Kāmaśikhā Aṣṭakam by Vedānta Deśika

*tvayi rakṣati rakṣakaiḥ kimanyaiḥ,
tvayi cārakṣāti rakṣākaiḥ ki-
manyaiḥ ।
iti niścita dhīḥ śrayāmi nityaṁ,
nṛhare vegavatī taṭāśrayaṁ tvam
॥8॥*

O Kāmaśikhā Narasimha! you are *sarva śakthan*. When you are resolved to protect some one, where is the need to seek the protection of anyone else? When you are resolved not to protect some one, which other person is capable of protecting us?. There is no one. Knowing this fundamental truth, I have resolved to offer my *śaraṇāgatī* at your lotus feet alone that rest at the banks of Vegavatī river.

Divya Prabandham 2954

*āḍi āḍi agam karaindhu isai
pāḍip pāḍik kaṇṇīr malgi engum
nāḍi nāḍi narasingā endru,
vāḍi vāḍum ivvāl nuthale!*

I will dance and melt for you, within my heart, to see you, I will sing in praise of you with tears in joy, I will search for Narasimha and I am a householder who still searches to reach you (to attain Salvation).

6.3 Symbolism



Narasimha claws Hiranyakaśipu at Banteay Srei in Cambodia.

- Narasimha indicates God's omnipresence and the lesson is that God is everywhere. For more information, see Vaishnav Theology.

- Narasimha demonstrates God's willingness and ability to come to the aid of His devotees, no matter how difficult or impossible the circumstances may appear to be.
- Prahlāda's devotion indicates that pure devotion is not one of birthright but of character. Prahlāda, although born an asura, demonstrated the greatest bhakti to God, and endured much, without losing faith.
- Narasimha is known by the epithet Mṛga-Śarīra in Sanskrit which translates to Animal-Man. From a philosophical perspective. Narasimha is the very icon of Vaiṣṇavism, where jñāna (knowledge) and Bhakti are important as opposed to Advaita, which has no room for Bhakti, as the object to be worshipped and the worshipper do not exist. As according to Advaita or Māyāvāda, the jīva is Paramātma.

6.4 Significance

In South Indian art – sculptures, bronzes and paintings – Viṣṇu's incarnation as Narasimha is one of the most chosen themes and amongst [[Avatar]|Avatāra]s perhaps next only to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in popularity.

Lord Narasimha also appears as one of Hanuman's 5 faces, who is a significant character in the Rāmāyaṇa as Lord (Rāma's) devotee.

6.5 Forms of Narasimha

There are several forms of Narasimha, but 9 main ones collectively known as Nava-narasimha:

1. Ugra-narasimha
2. Kroddha-narasimha
3. Vīra-narasimha
4. Vilamba-narasimha
5. Kopa-narasimha
6. Yoga-narasimha
7. Aghora-narasimha
8. Sudarśana-narasimha
9. Lakṣmī-narasimha

In Ahobila, Andhra Pradesh, the nine forms are as follows:



Yoga Narasimha form at a temple in Vijayanagara, Hampi, India

1. Chātra-vata-narasimha (seated under a banyan tree)
2. Yogānanda-narasimha (who blessed Lord Brahma)
3. Karañja-narasimha
4. Uha-narasimha
5. Ugra-narasimha
6. Krodha-narasimha
7. Malola-narasimha (With Lakṣmī on His lap)
8. Jvālā-narasimha (an eight armed form rushing out of the pillar)
9. Pavana-narasimha (who blessed the sage Bharadvāja)

Forms from Prahlad story:

- Stambha-narasimha (coming out of the pillar)
- Svayam-narasimha (manifesting on His own)
- Grahāṇa-narasimha (catching hold of the demon)
- Vidāraṇa-narasimha (ripping open of the belly of the demon)
- Saṁhāra-narasimha (killing the demon)

The following three refer to His ferocious aspect:

- Ghora-narasimha
- Ugra-narasimha
- Candā-narasimha

Others:

- Pañcamukha-Hanumān-narasimha, (appears as one of Śrī Hanuman's five faces.)
- Pṛthvī-narasimha, Vayu-narasimha, Ākāśa-narasimha, Jvalana-narasimha, and
- Amṛta-narasimha, (representing the five elements)
- Jvālā-narasimha (with a flame-like mane)
- Lakṣmī-narasimha (where Lakṣmī pacifies Him)
- Prasāda/Prahlāda-varadā-narasimha (His benign aspect of protecting Prahlad)
- Chatrā-narasimha (seated under a parasol of a five-hooded serpent)
- Yoga-narasimha or Yogeśvara-narasimha (in meditation)
- Āveśa-narasimha (a frenzied form)
- Aṭṭahasa-narasimha (a form that roars horribly and majestically strides across to destroy evil)
- Cakra-narasimha, (with only a discus in hand)
- Viṣṇu-narasimha, Brahma-narasimha and Rudra-narasimha
- Puṣṭi narasimha, (worshipped for overcoming evil influences)

6.6 Early images

In Andhra Pradesh, a panel dating to third-fourth century AD shows a full theriomorphic squatting lion with two extra human arms behind his shoulders holding Vaiṣṇava emblems. This lion, flanked by five heroes (*vīra*), often has been identified as an early depiction of Narasimha.^[16] Standing cult images of Narasimha from the early Gupta period, survive from temples at Tigowa and Eran.^[17] These sculptures are two-armed, long maned, frontal, wearing only a lower garment, and with no demon-figure of Hiranyakaśipu. Images representing the narrative of Narasimha slaying the demon Hiranyakaśipu survive from slightly later Gupta-period temples: one at Madhia and one from a temple-doorway now set into the Kūrmamaṭha at Nachna, both dated to the late fifth or early sixth century A.D.^[18]

An image of Narasimha supposedly dating to second-third century AD sculpted at Mathura was acquired by the



Narasimha statue

Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1987. It was described by Stella Kramrisch, the former Philadelphia Museum of Art's Indian curator, as "*perhaps the earliest image of Narasimha as yet known*".^[18] This figure depicts a furled brow, fangs, and lolling tongue similar to later images of Narasimha, but the idol's robe, simplicity, and stance set it apart. On Narasimha's chest under his upper garment appears the suggestion of an amulet, which Stella Kramrisch associated with Visnu's cognizance, the Kauṣṭubha jewel. This upper garment flows over both shoulders; but below Hiranyakaśipu, the demon-figure placed horizontally across Narasimha's body, a twisted waist-band suggests a separate garment covering the legs. The demon's hair streams behind him, cushioning his head against the man-lion's right knee. He wears a simple single strand of beads. His body seems relaxed, even pliant. His face is calm, with a slight suggestion of a smile. His eyes stare adoringly up at the face of Viṣṇu. There is little tension in this figure's legs or feet, even as Narasimha gently disembowels him. His innards spill along his right side. As the *Matsya purana* describes it, Narasimha ripped "apart the mighty Daitya chief as a plaiter of straw mats shreds his reeds".^[18] Based on the Gandhara-style of robe worn by the idol, Michael Meiste altered the date of the image to fourth century AD.^[18]

Deborah Soifer, a scholar who worked on texts in relation to Narasimha, believes that "*the traits basic to Viṣṇu in the Veda remain central to Viṣṇu in his avataras*" and points out, however, that:

we have virtually no precursors in the Vedic

material for the figure of a man-lion, and only one phrase that simply does not rule out the possibility of a violent side to the benign Viṣṇu.

Soifer speaks of *the enigma* of Viṣṇu's Narasimha avatāra and comments that *how the myth arrived at its rudimentary form [first recorded in the Mahābhārata], and where the figure of the man-lion came from remain unsolved mysteries.*^[19]

An image of Narasimha, dating to the 9th century, was found on the northern slope of Mount Ijo, at Prambanan, Indonesia.^[20] Images of Trivikrama and Varāha avatāras were also found at Prambanan, Indonesia. Viṣṇu and His avatāra images follow iconographic peculiarities characteristic of the art of central Java. This includes physiognomy of central Java, an exaggerated volume of garment, and some elaboration of the jewelry. This decorative scheme once formulated became, with very little modification, an accepted norm for sculptures throughout the Central Javanese period (circa 730–930 A.D.). Despite the iconographic peculiarities, the stylistic antecedents of the Java sculptures can be traced back to Indian carvings as the Chalukya and Pallava images of the 6th–7th centuries AD.^[21]

6.7 Cultural Tradition of Procession (Śrī Nṛsimha Yātrā)



The Nṛsimha Yatra of Lalitpur, Nepal

In Rājopadhyāya Brahmins of Nepal, there is a tradition of celebrating the procession ceremony of the deity Narasimha avatar, in Lalitpur district of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. The Lunar fifth day of the waning phase of the moon, in the holy Soli-lunar Śrāvaṇa month i.e. on Śrāvaṇa Kṛṣṇa Pañcamī of the Hindu Lunar Calendar is marked as auspicious day for the religious procession, Nṛsimha Yātrā. This tradition of the holy procession has been held for more than a hundred years. This is one of the typical traditions of the Rājopadhyāya Brahmins, the Hindu Bramhans of the locality.^[22]

In this Nṛsimha Yātrā, each year one male member of the Rājopadhyāya^[22] community gets the chance to be

the organizer each year in that particular day. He gets his turn according to the sequence in their record, where the names of Rājopadhyāya bramhins are registered when a brahmāṇa^[23] lad is eligible to be called as a Bramhan.^[24]

6.8 Temples dedicated to Narasimha

Temples indicated with * and in italics are actually Places of Pilgrimage (Tīrtha Yātrā).

6.8.1 In Andhra Pradesh



A representation of Śrī Narasimha in Kadiri. Andhra Pradesh.

1. **Ahobilam or Ahobalam is a major center of pilgrimage in South India, located in the Nandyal Taluka of Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh, India. According to local legend, this is where Lord Narasimha blessed Prahlāda and killed the demon Hiranyakashipa. It is an important place of worship for Vaiṣṇavas and is one of the 108 Divya Desams.*
2. **Penna Ahobilam Lakṣmī Narasimha temple*
3. **Yoga Narasimha Swamy, in Dharmapuri, Karimnagar District, Telangana state. It is said that at Dharmapuri, Narasimha Deva meditated in Yoga mudra, after his Ugrarūpa.*
4. *Kotla-Narasimhulapalle, Karimnagar, Telangana state*
5. **Kadiri Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy temple in Kadiri, Anantapur Dist, Andhra Pradesh.*



Lord Narasimha statue on walls of Simhacalam Temple

6. *Śrī Yogānanda Narasimha Swamy, Vedadri, near Vijayawada
7. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, Nacharamgutta, Medak district, Telangana state.
8. *Śrī Panakala Narasimha Swamy, Mangalagiri, near Vijayawada
9. Śrī Śobhanācala Vyāghra Narasimha Swamy, Aagiripalli, near Vijayawada
10. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy, Antarvedi, Sakhinetipalle, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh
11. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy, Peruru Village, Amalapuram, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh
12. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy, Yadagiri Gutta,^[25] near Bhongir, Nalgonda District, Telangana state. See Yadagirigutta (Temple)
13. Śrī Matsyagiri Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Devalayam, Vemula Konda, Valigonda mandal, Nalgonda district, Telangana state. The temple of Lakṣmī Narasimha swamy is on the rock hill (konda) in Mastya avataram.
14. Śrī Varāha Narasimha Swamy, is the combination of Varaha avatar and Narasimha avatar. When Prahlada was thrown into the sea, Śrī Varaha Narasimha swamy protected prahlada and raised a mountain. This mountain is the Simhachalam *Simhachalam, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh
15. Yoga Narasimha temple also known as Dakshina Simhachalam Singarayakonda, Ongole, Andhra Pradesh
16. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy, Mallooru, Warangal District (~70KM from Bhadrachalam), Telangana state.
17. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy, Matapalli (at the confluence of Krishna and Musi rivers), about 15 km from Huzurnagar taluq, Nalgonda District, Telangana state (Bus available from Miryalaguda/Kodada).
18. Vadapally, Near Miryalaguda, Nalgonda District, Telangana state
19. *Śrī Lord Lakṣmī-Narasimha Swamy temple, Korukonda, near Rajahmundry, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh.
20. *Śrī Malayadri Lakṣmī Narasimha temple, Malakonda, near Kundakur, Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh.
21. Śrī Prasanna Narasimha Swamy temple, Singarakonda, Prakasham district, Andhra Pradesh
22. Śrī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Khammam, Khammam District, Telangana state.
23. Śrī Penusila Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy, Penchalakona, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh
24. Śrī Limbadri Narasimha Swamy, Bheemgal taluk, Nizamabad district, Telangana state
25. Cheeryala Sree Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Devasthanam, Cheeryala, Keesara Mandal, Rangareddy district, Telangana state
26. Phani Giri gutta, Near Kottapet, Hyderabad, Rangareddy District, Telangana state # Vedagiri Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimhaswamy, Narasimha Konda, Near Nellore, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh.
27. Śrī Jvālā Narasimha Temple, Parvathapuram, Feerjadiguda, Uppal, HYD, Telangana state
28. Śrī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Sigotam(singapatnam), Kollapur, Mahabubnagar district, Telangana state.
29. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, Road No.12 Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, Telangana state.
30. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple of Penchala Kona, Nellore(dt), Andhra Pradesh
31. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple garlavoddu, enkoor mandal, Khammam district, Telangana state

32. *Guttameeda Narasimha swamy Temple Inugurti vil- lage, K Samudram Mandalam, Khammam District ,Telangana state
33. *Tarigonda Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Tarigonda, Gurramkonda mandal, Chittoor Dist. A.P
34. Narasimha Swamy Temple Kalwa Village, Adilabad Dist . Telangana state.
35. Śrī Nallakunta Lakṣmī Narsimha swamy Tem- ple, Nallagutta,RR Dist, Near Jeedimetla bus stand;Hyderabad;Telangana
36. **Narasimhaswamy Temple, Marripudi''''Bold text',Prakasam Dist.Andhrapradesh.**

6.8.2 In Karnataka



Lord Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy at ŚRĪ HARI VAIKUṆṬHA KṢETRA Bangalore

1. *Śrī Guru Narasimha Swamy Devasthanam^[26] at Śāligrama, Udupi district, Karnataka. Narasimha Idol here is in Yogānanda Narasimha posture and is from the 8th century as per historians.^[27]
2. Balele Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, Narasimha Gudda, Rajarajeshwari Nagar, Bangalore, Kar- nataka
3. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple at Roopena Agrahara, Hosur Main Road, Bangalore, Kar- nataka. This is the only temple in India which has



NARASIMHA MERU at ŚRĪ HARI VAIKUṆṬHA KṢETRA Bangalore

“Narasimha Meru” belonging to ancient period. “Narasimha Meru” is a hill shaped cakra made specifically for Narasimha Swamy. Pradakshana to this Chakra and Narasimha Swamy will clear **kuja doṣa**.^[28]

4. Śrī Yoga Narasimha, on a hilltop fortress at Melkote, Nagamangala, Mysore District, Karnataka. In Kan- nada, the term means, top (mele) fort (kote). The fort, situated on a near-vertical hill is a strategic area, overlooking the plains. Melkote is also the site of the famous Cheluvanarayana Temple and the annual Vairamudi festival, where the deity is adorned with a crown of dazzling uncut diamonds.
5. Śrī Narasimha Swami Zarni Cave Temple, Bidar District, Karnataka - It is said that Lord Narasimha after killing Hiranyakashpu, proceeded to kill a demon named Jalasura. Jalasura was a staunch devotee of Lord Śiva. After he was killed by Lord Narasimha, Jalāsura turns into water starts flowing from Lord’s feet. And to this day water keeps flow- ing from lord’s feet and fills the cave.

6. Śrī Yoga Mudre Lakṣmī Narasimha Swami, Mudugere, near Hassan, Karnataka. Considered one of the most powerful forms of the Deity.
7. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha, Marehalli, Malavalli taluk Mandya district Karnataka.
8. Śrī Śoḍaśa Bahu Narasimha Swamy, Karpara Kshetra, Koppara village, Raichur District, Karnataka. Koppa Śrī Narasimha Devaru (Also known as Vruksharopi Narasimha Swamy Temple) located in Raichur District, Devadurga Taluk, this Śrī Kṣetra is about 6 km from Devadurga.
9. Śrī Yoganarasimha Devālaya, Mysore, Karnataka.
10. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy, Malleswaram, Bangalore^[29]
11. Śrī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Hatyal, C N Halli, Tumkur, Karnataka
12. Śrī Ugra Narasimha Swamy Devasthana at Maddur, Karnataka
13. Śrī Kambada Narasimha Swamy Devasthana at Sugganahalli, near Kudur, Tumkur district, Karnataka
14. Śrī Kambada Narasimha Swamy Devasthana at Sondalagere, Kunigal taluq, Tumkur district, Karnataka
15. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Devasthana at Śrīrangapatna, Mandya district, Karnataka^[30] this temple is situated near Śrī Raṅganātha Swamy Temple, ŚrīRangapatana Town, Mysore.
16. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Devasthana at Kammasandra, Nelamangala Taluk, Bangalore Rural District, Karnataka
17. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Devasthana at Balepet, Balepet Circle, Near upperpet Police Station, Bangalore.
18. Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, Bhadravathi, Karnataka, (built by Hoysalas) located in old town area of Bhadravathi.
19. Śrībi Narasimha Swamy Temple, Sheebi, Tumkur Dist, Karnataka.
20. *Yoga Narasimha Swamy, Boga Narasimha Swamy temple, Devarayanadurga, Karnataka
21. *Śrī Ugra Narasimha, Śrī Vijayendra Tirtha Prathistapitha, Moolky, Karnataka^[31]
22. Śrī Lakṣmī-Narasimha swamy temple, Dodadalavatta, Madhugi taluq, Tumkur district, Karnataka
23. Śrī Lakṣmī-Narasimha Swamy Temple, Holenarsipura, Hassan district, Karnataka
24. *Sāvandurga Narasimha Swamy Temple, Savana Durga, Magadi taluk, Ramanagar District
25. *Holay Narasipura, Hassan district, Karnataka.
26. *Hatyaalu Betta, Tiptur Taluk, Tumkur District, Karnataka
27. *Śrī Yoga Narasimha Swamy Devasthana at Gorur, Hassan District, Karnataka
28. *Lakṣmī narasimhaswamy Temple at Nagamangala, Hassan District.
29. *Gunja Narasimhaswamy Temple at T. Narasipura, Chamarajanagar District.
30. *Śrī Narasimhaswamy Temple at Jekkenahalli, Tumkur District.
31. *Śrī Lakṣmī narasimha swamy Temple at B. R. Koppulu, Śrīrangapattana.
32. *Thoravi Narasimhaswamy Temple at Bijapur.
33. *Śrī Narasimhaswamy Temple, Śrī Kṣetra Shurpali on the banks of river Kṛṣṇa Tq. Jamkhandi Dist :Bagalkot
34. *Narasimha Temples run by GSB community in Karnataka are located at Mulki (Śrī Ugra Narasimha of S. V. Temple),^[32] Mogarnad (Panemangalore) and Kambada Narasimha at Nagar (Shimoga District)
35. *Kambada Narasimha Swamy Temple at Alisandra, Nagamangala, Mandya District. (Behind Nagathihalli on Bangalore - Mangalore road close to bellur cross)
36. *Śrī Gunjam Narasimha Swamy, Baburayana Koppalu, Śrīrangapatna, Mysore.
37. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, On O.P.H Road, Shivajinagara, Bangalore, behind Bowring Hospital.
38. *Śrī Yoga Narasimha Devaru Temple, (Angaara Narasimha) Narasimha Teertha, Sree Padaraja Mutt at Mulbagilu Kolar District.
39. *Śrī Nadi Narasimha Temple, on the banks of Kanva river, Dodda Mallur, Channapatna, this place is about 2 km from the famous Aprameya Swamy Temple on the way to Bangalore-Mysore Highway.
40. *Śrī Yoga Narasimha Swamy Temple, with Narasimha Dandam, at KereThonnur/Thondanur, built on small hillock situated at Śrīrangapatna Taluk, Mandya District, this place is about 8 km from Pandvapura, and 20 km from Melekote, on Melekote-Śrīrangapatna Highway.
41. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, No.224, 7th Cross, Teachers Colony, Kaderenahalli, Banashankari 2nd Stage, Bangalore - 560070.

42. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Bhuvaneshwari Nagar, Near Jayanthi Tiles Factory, R. T. Nagar Post, Bangalore - 560032.
43. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple (Sudarshana Narasimha) Ahoabilla Mutt, on 3rd Main Road, Prakashnagar, Bangalore - 21. (next to Mudhaliar Choultry)
44. *Śrī Kambada Narasimha Swamy Temple, (also known as Ranganatha Swami temple) in Tattakere Village, Solur Hobli, this place is also called as Dhurvasamuni Kṣetra, about 4 km from Solur Bus stand on the way to Kunigal.
45. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Sripathihalli, Kalya post, Magadi Talq, Ramanagar District
46. *Śrī Champakarnya Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy, Champakaranya Beta a small hillock just behind the famous Champakadhamaswamy Temple, Temple Road, Bannerghatha Village, Bangalore.
12. Śrī Lakṣmī Narsimha Temple, Dhom, Tal. Wai, District Satara, Maharashtra
13. At Post - Nittur, Taluka - Chandgad, Dist- Kolhapur (around 40 km inside maharashtra from Belgaum. It is said that this temple was built by Pandvas when they were in exile. This is ancient temple in a big rock, it is engraved in a big solid rock.
14. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Mandir, Partur, Dist Jalna, Maharashtra.
15. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Mandir, Mandavgan, dist ahmednagar
16. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Mandir, Mayani tal khatav Dist Satara old peth mayani, behind the postoffice, Dashputre wada
17. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Mandir, Raheer, Tal Naigaon(Kh), Dist Nanded, Maharashtra - Hemadpanthi Mandir on banks of Godavari river
18. Shri Laxmi narsinha temple , pusad , chowbara chowk in old pusad
19. Shri Laxmi Nrusinha Mandir , Kasaba Sangameshwar , Tal Sangameshwar, Dist Ratnagiri

Narahari

6.8.3 In Maharashtra and Goa

1. Śrī Narsimha Temple- Madgi, Center in Wainganaga River, Tah. Tumsar, Dist. Bhandara, 441913 Maharashtra. Religious Fair every year at the end of month December.
2. *Śrī Lakṣmī Narsimha Temple in Ranjani, Tal Ambegaon, near Manchar, District Pune-410504, Maharashtra.
3. Śrī Jvālā Narasimha Temple in Kole Narasimhapur, Walva, Sangli District, Maharashtra.
4. Śrī Ugra Narasimha Temple, Holi, Nanded, Maharashtra
5. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, 1420 Sadashiv Peth, Pune, Maharashtra.
6. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple in Ranjani, Tal Ambegaon, near Manchar, District Pune, Maharashtra.
7. *Tathavade, Near Chinchwad, Pune district, Maharashtra
8. *Nira Narsingpur, Indapur taluq, Pune district, Maharashtra
9. Śrī Lakṣmī Narsimha Temple in Veling (Mhardol), Tal Ponda, Goa
10. Pokharni, Parbhani district, Maharashtra.
11. *Sangawade, Taluka Karveer, District Kolhapur, Maharashtra (uniqueness here is that, Goddess Laxmi is sitting on right lap of the deity whereas else where she is on the other side)

6.8.4 In Tamilnadu

1. Śrī Malola Narasimha Swamy peetam velachery chennai 600042
2. Singaperumal Koil Sri Ugra Narasimhar, at Tambaram, 25 kms from Tambaram and the temple is just 100 meters off the GST Road.
3. Śrī Azhagaiya Nrsinga Perumal Temple, at Ennayiram, Ponducherry area, 123 km outskirts by the Cholan dynasty.
4. Ramapuram Narasimhar, also known as Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimhar, at Ramapuram, Chennai.
5. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Kovil, Nangavalli (Near Mettur) Salem district, Tamil Nadu.
6. *Śrī Azhagaiya Singar at Parthasarathy Kovil in Tiruvellikeni, Chennai.
7. Śrī Narasimha temple, Parikkal, Tamil Nadu
8. *Śrī Yoga Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy temple, Ghatikachala, Sholinghur, Tamil Nadu.^[33]
9. Śrī Yoga Narasimha Kovil at Chintalavadi, Tamil Nadu
10. Śrī Kāṭṭtu Azhagaiya Singar, Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli
11. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, Ukkadam, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

12. *Śrī Ukkara Narasimha Temple, Namakkal, Tamil Nadu
 13. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Thirukoil, Pollachi, Tamil Nadu
 14. Śrī Yoga Narasimha Temple, Aanaimalai, Othakkadaai, Madurai, Tamil Nadu
 15. Śrī Ugra Narasimha Temple, Singaperumalkoil, near Chengalpattu
 16. *Ugra Narasimha at Śrī Prasanna Venkatachopathy Temple, Keelapavoor, near Tenkasi also known as South Ahobhila
 17. Śrī Yoga Narasimha Swamy Temple at Velachery, Chennai, Tamil Nadu
 18. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swami Temple, (Lakṣmī Narasimha with 4 hands, in Śānta rūpa with His consort(Lakṣmī) on His right lap (usually He will have His consort(Lakṣmī) on His left lap).], vellore District.
 19. Padalathri Narasimha Swamy, Singa Perumal Koil, near Chennai, Tamil Nadu
 20. Nava Narasimhar Temple, Avaniyapuram, Tamil Nadu
 21. Śrī Yoga Narasimha Swamy Temple, Keelavasal, near thanjore palace, Thanjavur.
 22. Śrī Yoga Narasimha Swamy Temple, Vallam, Thanjavur Dist.
 23. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple, injeemedu, near Vandavasi, Tamil Nadu.
 24. Śrī Amirthavaiilli Nayaga Samadha Śrī Yogānanda Narasimha Swamy Temple Sogathur 6 km from Vandavasi, Tiruvannamail DT. and 46 km from Kancheepuram
 25. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimhar Temple, Polur, near Thiruvannamalai
 26. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimhar Temple, PV Kalathur, near Chengalpet
 27. Śrī Yoga Narasimhar Temple, Kanchipuram - (Tiruvelukkai one of the 108 divya desams)
 28. Śrī Bhārgavī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Narasapuram (Sandar Setty Palli), Hosur Taluk, Krishnagiri District
 29. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Krishnagiri, Krishnagiri District. 1500 years old temple
 30. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimhar temple, Ammapettai, Thanjavur (Moolavar - wooden daity is carved in Vellerukku) (20 km east of Thanjavur, towards Nagapatnam)
 31. Śrī Vīra Narasimhar (Thiru Thanjai Yali temple) Palli Agraharam, Thanjavur = One of the 108 Diya sthalams
 32. Śrī Yoga Narasimhar, East Gate, Thanjavur
 33. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimhaswamy, Poovarasamkuppam, Villupuram
 34. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimhaswamy temple, Singirikoil, Cuddalore.
 35. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimhaswamy temple, halepuram, near pennagaram, Dharmapuri district
- ### 6.8.5 In Kerala
1. Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple: Lord Narasimha Murthy is one of the main deities in the temple.
 2. Śrī Narasimhaswamy Mahakshetram(Thuravoor Mahakshethram), Thuravoor, Cherthala, Alappuzha
 3. Chathankulangara temple in Chengannur, Alappuzha District, Kerala
 4. Śrī Narasimha Swamy temple, Yeroor, kollam, kerala
 5. Śrī Narasimhaswami Temple, Aymanam, Kottayam, Kerala
 6. Anayadi Pazhayidam Śrī Narasimha Swami Temple, Sooranad, Kollam, Kerala
 7. Sri Edappurathu Lakshmi Narasimha Moorthi Temple, Puthuruthy, Kerala
 8. *Kulasserry Temple Thrissur, Kerala
 9. Śrī Narasimhaswami Temple, Kadungalloor, Aluva
 10. Śrī Narasimha Parthasarathy Temple, Thiruvangore, Kozhikode
 11. West Pattissery Śrī VISHNU Temple CHALISSERY PALAKKAD
 12. Narasimha Temples run by GSB community in Kerala are located at Manjeshwar,^[34] Ullal, Thuravoor and Alappuzha
 13. Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Swamy Temple. Thalassery, 670101. Kerala. This is an important pilgrim centre for GS Brahmins in the Northern parts of Kerala, and is located in the heart of Tellicherry town, in the Kannur district of Kerala. The Temple is less than half a kilometre from both the Railway station and the Bus stand. The temple and prathista faces North which is a unique feature. The temple established in 1831 A.D.
 14. Srinivasa Kovil, thekkumbhagom, Tripunithura - Here the god is Ugranarasimha. Ernakulam District

15. Śrī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Kadungalloor, Alwaye, 683 108, Kerala,
16. Pandavath Śrī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Aymanam, Near Kottayam Town, Kerala.
17. Nechiyil Sree Narasimha kshetram, Rg:No 203/93, Cherapadum.(po) k.v.kavu, malappuram, kerala,673637
18. Śrī Narasimha Swamy Temple, Peruva, Kottayam District, Keralam
19. Muriyamangalam Narasimha swamy Temple, Mamala, Thrivankulam, Ernakulam Dist (near Chottanikkara Devi temple) Kerala.
20. Śrī Ramamangalam Bala Narasimha Temple, Muvattupuzha to piravom route (via) pampakkuda. 15 km, Ernakulam, Kerala. Sree Shadkala Govinda Marar sung here. Both the highest koddī Maram of Kerala for Narasimha and shortest Koddī Maram for Ovu (Pranala) Thangi Unni Bhootham is here in this Temple.30 km from Ernakulam Railway station.
21. Narasimha Moorthy Temple - Thiruvazhiyadu - Nemmara - Palakkad Dist.
22. Sri Narasimha Moorthy Temple - Rishinaradaman-galam - Palakkad Dt.

6.8.6 In Rajasthan

1. Śrī Narsinghji temple, Amer, Rajasthan
2. *Śrī Narsinghji Temple at Gudha, Rajasthan
3. Śrī Narsinghji Temple at Garhi, Hindon-Karoli Road, Karoli, Rajasthan
4. Śrī Narsingh Mandir, Hasampur, Between Kotputli and neem ka thana, Rajasthan
5. Narsinghji Ka Mandir, Holidada, Ajmer, Rajasthan
6. Narsinghji Ka Mandir, Lokhotiyon Chowk, Bikaner, Rajasthan
7. Narsingh Mandir, Daaga Chowk, Bikaner, Rajasthan
8. Narasimha Mandir, Khandela, Sikar, Rajasthan
9. Śrī khakhee jee ki bagichi, Bidasar, Churu, Rajasthan

Sri Lakshmi nursigh temple.(Lalit) Azad chowk. kotputli. Jaipur



Lord Narasimha kills demon hiraṇyakaśipu.(At left)The prahalāda bows before lord

6.8.7 In other places

1. Talala Gir Near River Junagadh Dist Gujarat. (Patel)
2. *Megdi, Garuḍa Taluk (Tehsil), Bageshwar District, Uttaranchal
3. Narsinghji + Navgrahvatika + NrisinghKund, Goverdhan, Mathura District, Uttar Pradesh
4. Narasimha mandir, Indore.
5. Narsinghji temple, Ghadiyali Pole, Vadodara, Gujarat.
6. *Narsinghpur, Madhya Pradesh
7. *Śrī Marjāra Nṛsimha Temple, in his mighty cat-lion form near Nṛsimhanātha, Baragarh district, Oḍiṣā
8. Narasimha Temple, near Gundicha Temple, Puri, Oḍiṣā
9. Nṛsimha mandira, Nalabanta, Aska, Ganjam, Oḍiṣā
10. Nṛsimha mandira, Sunamba Street, Aska, Ganjam, Oḍiṣā
11. Nṛsimha mandira, Bada Bazar, Bramhapur, Oḍiṣā
12. Śrī Bhakti Lakṣmī Narasimha Temple, London, United Kingdom^[35]

13. Vāra-Lakṣmī Narasimhanātha Temple, Warsaw, Poland
14. Simhachalam (ISKCON), Jandelsbrunn, Bavaria, Germany.^[36]

6.9 See also

- Lion man of the Hohlenstein Stadel
- Narasimha Purāṇa
- Narasimha Śatkam

6.10 References

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- [2] “Bhag-P 7.8.19-22”. Srimadbhagavatam.com. Retrieved 2013-06-17.
- [3] Steven J. Rosen, *Narasimha Avatar, The Half-Man/Half-Lion Incarnation*, p5
- [4] Steven J. Rosen, *Narasimha Avatāra, The Half-Man/Half-Lion Incarnation*, p1
- [5] Bhag-P 7.4.1
 Lord Brahma was very much satisfied by Hiranyakaśipu’s austerities, which were difficult to perform.
- [6] Bhag-P, Canto 7 7.3.35-38
- [7] Bhag-P 7.7.6 “The victorious demigods plundered the palace of Hiranyakaśipu, the king of the demons, and destroyed everything within it. Then Indra, King of heaven, arrested Prahalāda’s mother, Hiranyakaśipu’s wife Kayādu, the Queen”
- [8] Bhag-P 7.7.8 “Nārada Muni said: *O Indra, King of the demigods, this woman is certainly sinless. You should not drag her off in this merciless way. This chaste woman is the wife of another. You must immediately release her.*”
- [9] “Bhag-P 7.8.6”. Srimadbhagavatam.com. Retrieved 2013-06-17.
- [10] Bhag-P 7.8.3-4 “Thus he finally decided to kill his son Prahlad. Hiranyakaśipu was by nature very cruel
- [11] “Bhag-P 7.8.12”. Srimadbhagavatam.com. Retrieved 2013-06-17.
- [12] Bhag-P 7.8.29
 Lord Narasimha-deva placed the demon on his lap, supporting him with his thighs, and in the doorway of the assembly hall the lord very easily tore the demon to pieces with the nails of his hand.
- [13] “Bhag-P 7.9”. Srimadbhagavatam.com. Retrieved 2013-06-17.
- [14] “Śrī Lakṣmī Narasimha Karāvalamban Stotram Lyrics - Lakṣmī Nṛsimha Devotional Video”. Hindu Devotional Blog. Retrieved 2013-06-17.
- [15] Steven J. Rosen, *Narasimha Avatar, The Half-Man/Half-Lion Incarnation*
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6.11 External links

Chapter 7

Vamana

For the medieval grammarian, see *Kāśikāvṛttī*. For Ayurveda procedure, see *Vamana (Panchakarma)*.

Vamana (Devanagari: वामन, IAST: *Vāmana*) is described in the Puranas as the fifth avatar of Vishnu, and the first incarnation of the Second Age or Treta yuga.^[1] He is the first avatar to appear with anthropomorphic features, although he does appear as a dwarf Namboothiri Brahmin. He is also known as Upendra and Trivikrama.

7.1 Origin

Vamana was born to Aditi and Kashyapa.^[2] He is the twelfth of the Adityas. Vamana is also the younger brother of Indra.

7.1.1 Hinduism



Vamana as Trivikrama, depicted having three legs, one on the earth, a second raised in the heavens and a third on Bali's head.

The *Bhagavata Purana* describes that Vishnu descended as the Vamana avatar to restore the authority of Indra over the heavens, as it had been taken by Mahabali, a benevolent Asura King. Bali was the great grandson of Hiranyakshipu, the grand son of Prahlada.

King Mahabali was a generous man who engaged in severe austerities and penance and won the praise of the world. This praise, from his courtiers and others, led him to think of himself as the greatest person in the world. He believed that he can help any one and can donate whatever they ask. Even though he became benevolent, he became pompous of his activities and forgot that the almighty is above him. Dharma says that one should do his duty and helping others is the duty of a king. Mahabali was a devoted worshiper of the Lord. The story is an ample example that the almighty, the Parabrahma is neutral and unbiased; he only tries to balance nature. He showers his divine light to all, irrespective of what they do.

Vamana, in the guise of a short Brahmin carrying a wooden umbrella, went to the king to request three paces of land. Mahabali consented, against the warning of his guru, Sukracharya. Vamana then revealed his identity and enlarged to gigantic proportions to stride over the three worlds. He stepped from heaven to earth with the first step, from earth to the netherworld with the second. King Mahabali, unable to fulfill his promise, offered his head for the third. Vamana then placed his foot and gave the king immortality for his humility.

In worshipping Mahabali and his ancestor Prahlada, he conceded sovereignty of Patala, the netherworld. Some texts also report that Vamana did not step into the netherworld, and instead gave its rule to Bali. In giant form, Vamana is known as Trivikrama.^[3]

Just before King Mahabali was pushed out of this earth, he was given permission by Vamana to visit his people once a year. The Onam festival is a celebration of welcoming Mahabali home to his lost kingdom. During this festival, beautiful floral decorations are made in every house and boat races are held throughout Kerala. A twenty-one-course feast is the most important part of the Onam festival.

Mahabali symbolizes ahankar, the three feet symbolizes the three planes of existence (Jagrat, Swapna and

Sushupthi) and final step is on his head which elevates from all three states and he attains moksha. This is the moral of the story.

[3]

7.1.2 Jainism

Jainism also describes Vamana. In its scripture, an ill-natured man has contention with Jain Munis, which results in the king banishing him from the kingdom. He traveled to a rival kingdom and managed to gain the favor and trust of its king, and is granted a wish. He asked to be made King for 4 months during Chaturmas, a holy time for the Jains. The evil man orders that he must be allowed a bite of every meal in Jain Muni, thus not allowing them not eat for the rest of the day as the food would be considered contaminated. The Jain Shravaks and Shravikas, recognizing his intent, consulted Vishnukumar Muni who had the capability to change his size. As Vishnukumar Muni changed his size to the height of a dwarf he is called a Vamana.

Dressed up as a tiny Brahman, he went to the house of the evil Raja while he performed a pooja. Near its end, the practitioner must give something to those present. He asked the dwarf what he wished, and Vamana replied that he wanted three feet of land. The King consented. Vamana then grew so large that one foot covered the planet, another the heavens, and so there was no where to place the third. The evil king then realized his mistake, and in shame bowed his head to Vamana and took Jain Shravak Vratas from the Vamana.

7.2 Symbolism

Vamana taught King Mahabali that pride should be abandoned for advancement in life, and that wealth should be appreciated as it can easily disappear. Vamana then took the form of Mahavishnu and was pleased by King Mahabali's determination to keep his promise, despite the curse of his spiritual master and losing his wealth. Vishnu named the King Mahabali since he was a Mahatma (great soul). He allowed Mahabali to return to the spiritual sky to join Prahlada, the demoniac Hiranyakashipu's pious son, and other divine beings. Mahavishnu also declared that Mahabali would be able to rule the universe in the following yuga. Mahabali was the grandson of Prahlada, with his father being Virochana, who was killed in a battle with the Devas.

Mahabali is supposed to return every year to the land of his people, to ensure that they are prosperous.



Vamana avatar with King bali

7.2.1 In Sikhism

Vamana is discussed in the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred text of Sikhism.^[4]

Satjugi tai manio Chhalio bali bavan bhaio

In Satyayuga, you sported as the dwarf incarnation, and fooled Bali.

On page 1390 of the Guru Granth Sahib, Vamana is mentioned as the "enticer" of Baliraja.^[5]

7.3 In the Ramayana

According to the *Adhyatma Ramayana* It is also said that Vamana is the guard of the gate of Bali's underworld realm Satala^{[6][7]} and will remain so forever.^[8] Tulsidas' Ramayana too declares that Vamana became the "dwarpal" (*gate-defender*) of Bali.^[9]

It is said that Mahabali attained Moksha by atmanivedanam.^[10] Krishna in the Sri Rupa Goswami's Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu^[11] says that Mahabali came to Him or attained Him. Some traditions also hold that Vamana was an avatar of Ganesha.^[12]



Dwarf Vamana avatar at Rani ki vav, Patan, Gujarat

7.4 Temples



Vishnu as Trivikrama, Mahabalipuram relief

The Vamana temples are located in

- Mithranandapuram Vamanamoorthy Temple, Cherpu, Thrissur, Kerala
- Thrikkakara Temple, Thrikkakara, Cochin, Kerala.
- Ulagalantha Perumal Temple, Kanchipuram in Kanchipuram.
- Vamana Temple, Eastern Group of Temples, Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh.
- Ulagalantha Perumal Temple, Tirukoyilur in Tirukoilur, Viluppuram district, Tamil Nadu.
- Ulagalantha Perumal Temple, Singanallur, Coimbatore
- Keevelloor Sri Vamanaswami Temple, Mevelloor post, Vaikkom Taluk, Kottayam District, Kerala
- Kodilil Sri Vamanamoorthy Temple, Kumbidi, Pattambi Taluk, Palakkad District, Kerala

7.5 See also

Media related to Vamana at Wikimedia Commons

- Dashavatara
- Vishnu Purana
- Onam
- Bhagavata Purana
- Vishnu
- Varaha
- Parashurama
- Rama
- Krishna
- Buddha
- Kalki

7.6 References

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- [4] P. 1390 *Guru Granth Sahib*
- [5] P. 1330, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 4
- [6] P. 281 *The Adhyatma Ramayana: Concise English Version* By Chandan Lal Dhody
- [7] P. 134 *Sri Rūpa Gosvāmī’s Bhakti-rasāmṛta-Sindhuh* By Rūpagosvāmī, Bhakti Hridaya Bon
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[11] *Sri Rūpa Gosvāmī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhuh last= Gosvāmī.* pp. P. 379. lfirst1= missing llast1= in Authors list (help)

[12] P. 22 *Bhavan's Journal* By Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan

7.7 External links

- [Vamana Temples in Kerala](#)
- [Complete Story of Bali](#)
- [Srimad Bhagavatam 8.18: Lord Vamanadeva, the Dwarf Incarnation](#)
- [Vamana Avatar](#)
- [Story of Vamana Avataram](#)
- [Vamana homam - Getting Blessings From Lord Vishnu](#)

Chapter 8

Parashurama

Parshuram (Parashurama, Parashuraman) is the sixth avatar of Vishnu, He is son of Renuka and the saptarishi Jamadagni. He lived during the last Treta Yuga, and is one of the seven immortals or Chiranjivi, of Hinduism. He received an axe after undertaking terrible penance to please Shiva, who in turn taught him the martial arts.

Parashurama is most known for ridding the world of kshatriyas twenty-one times over after the mighty king Kartavirya killed his father. He played important roles in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, serving as mentor to Bhishma, Karna and Drona. Parashurama also fought back the advancing seas to save the lands of Konkan, Malabar and Kerala.

Parashurama is worshipped as *mool purush*, or founder, of the Bhumihaar Brahmin, Chitpavan, Daivadnya, Mohyal, Tyagi, Shukla, Awasthi, saryupareen, Kothiyal, Anavil, Nambudiri bhardwaj and gaud Brahmin communities.

8.1 Lineage

The exact birthplace of Bhargava Parashurama is contested, although the history of his lineage took place in the Haihaya Kingdom located in modern day Maheshwar.^[1]

The grandfather of Bhargava Parashurama was a great rishi named Rucheeka, and was a direct descendant of Brahma. Parshuram is also the kul guru of Brahmins of bhardwaj gotra. Parshuram belongs to a gaud brahmin of bhargav gotra. One day, the rishi was traveling through the countryside seeking a bride. At the time, there were two dominant clans, the *Bharat-Suryavamsha*, or Solar Dynasty and the *Chandra-vamsha*, or Lunar Dynasty. The ruling King Gadhi belonged to the Lunar Dynasty and had a beautiful daughter, Satyavati, who was unwed. Rucheeka visited the king, who entertained him at his court. The rishi was besot with the beauty of Satyavati, and at the end of the evening he asked the king to have her as his bride.

The king was taken aback, but could not deny the request of a Brahmin. As such, he agreed to give his daughter away to the rishi, but on condition that Rucheeka give

him one-thousand horses, all with one ear black and the body entirely white.

The rishi agreed to the demand of the king. He then did penance to Varuna, and was blessed with the horses that the king had requested. Rucheeka gave them as dowry, and in turn received Satyavati for marriage.

Satyavati adjusted well to an ascetic life as she was blessed with a good countenance, but she did not have any children. Meanwhile, at the kingdom, her father had no heir to the throne as well, and this also worried Satyavati. One day, Rucheeka asked her what was wrong, and she told him of her concerns for the kingdom.^[1]

The rishi agreed to help both Satyavati and her mother. He gave Satyavati two potions, one for her mother so that she would have a mighty Kshatriya son, and one for Satyavati so that she would have a son that would become a great sage. Satyavati gave the potions to her mother. However, not trusting the sage, her mother switched the containers.^[2]

In time, both mother and daughter found they were expecting children. However, the sage noticed that when he looked at his wife he saw a Kshatriya aura, and he asked what had happened. Satyavati told Rucheeka, to which he responded, 'Now our son will be a great warrior instead of a sage.' Satyavati begged the rishi to instead make her grandson become the great warrior and her son a rishi. Seeing her distress, Rucheeka acquiesced. Satyavati gave birth to a son, Jamadagni, who became a great saptarishi, while her grandson Bhargav was sixth incarnation of Vishnu, and the greatest warriors of his age.^[1]

8.2 Birth

The exact location of his birth is contested, although puranas claim that he was born at Renuka Tirth as the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu.^[3] His father, Jamadagni, was a direct descendant of Brahma. Renuka gave birth to four sons before Parashurama: Vasu, Viswa Vasu, Brihudyanu, and Brutwakanwa. Before the birth of their fifth son, Jamadagni meditated with his wife Renuka at *Tape Ka Tiba* near Renuka lake for divine providence. With the blessing of Shiva, Vishnu answered their wishes

and was born from the womb of Renuka as their fifth and youngest son, whom they named Rambhadra, or Rama.^[4]

8.2.1 Renuka and the clay pot

Renuka was known for her chastity and devotion to her husband. Such was her faith, that she was able to fetch water from the river in a pot of unbaked clay, with the pot held together only by the strength of her devotion.

One day while at the river, a group of Gandharvas in a chariot passed by in the sky above. Filled with desire for only a moment, the unbaked pot she held dissolved in the river. Afraid to return to her husband, she waited at the river bank, uncertain of what to do next.^[5] Meanwhile, Jamadagni noticed his wife had not returned. Through his yogic powers, he divined all that had taken place and was enraged. The rishi called his eldest son, handed him an axe and asked the boy to kill his mother. Horrified, the boy refused, and so Jamadagni turned him to stone. He then asked each of his sons, and as they refused, one by one, he turned them to stone. Finally only his youngest son, Parashurama, was left. Ever obedient, the boy beheaded his mother.^[4]

Pleased, Jamadagni then offered two boons to Parashurama. The boy asked that his mother be brought back to life, and his brothers to be returned from stone to flesh. Impressed by the affection and devotion of his son, Jamadagni granted his request.^[5]

8.3 Getting the Divine weapon Parashu from Lord Shiva

Shri Parashuram left home to do devout austerities to please Lord Shiva. Considering his extreme devotion, intense desire and unmoved and perpetual meditation, Lord Shiva was pleased with Shri Parashuram. He presented Shri Parashuram with Divine weapons. Included was His unconquerable and indestructible axe shaped weapon, Parashu. Lord Shiva advised him to go and liberate the Mother Earth from felons, ill-behaved people, extremists, demons and those blind with pride.

Once, Lord Shiva challenged Shri Parashuram to a battle to test his skills in warfare. The spiritual master Lord Shiva and the disciple Shri Parashuram were locked in a fierce battle. This dreadful duel lasted for twenty one days. While ducking to avoid being hit by the Trident (Trishūl) of Lord Shiva, Shri Parashuram vigorously attacked Him with his Parashu. It struck Lord Shiva on the forehead creating a wound. Lord Shiva was very pleased to see the amazing warfare skills of His disciple. He passionately embraced Shri Parashuram. Lord Shiva preserved this wound as an ornament so that the reputation of his disciple remained imperishable and insurmountable. 'Khanda-parshu' (wounded by Parashu) is one of

the thousand names (for the salutation) of Lord Shiva.

8.4 Getting Vijaya bow from Lord Indra

Shri Parashuram, clipped the thousand arms of Sahasrarjun, one by one, with his Parashu and killed him. He repelled his army by showering arrows on them. The whole country greatly welcomed the destruction of Sahasrarjun. The king of Deities, Indra was so pleased that he presented His most beloved bow named Vijaya to Shri Parashuram. Lord Indra had destroyed demon dynasties with this bow. By the fatal arrows shot with the help of this Vijaya bow, Shri Parashuram destroyed the miscreant Kshatriyas twenty one times. Later Shri Parashuram presented this bow to his disciple Karna when he was pleased with his intense devotion to the Guru. Karna became unconquerable with help of this bow Vijaya presented to him by Shri Parashuram.^[6]

8.5 Kartavirya Arjuna and the Haihaya Kingdom

Main articles: [Kartavirya Arjuna](#) and [Haihayas](#)

The time of Parashurama was a tumultuous one for the Indian subcontinent, with puranas indicating frequent battles between several rival Kshatriya clans and kingdoms. Parashurama lived within the Haihaya kingdom, located in modern day Maheshwar on the banks of the Narmada River. The generations of enmity between the Kshatriya Haihaya and the Brahmin Bhargavas, from whom Parashurama hailed, were mentioned in the Mahabharata numerous times.^[5]

The Haihaya were ruled by a powerful and cruel king named Kartavirya Arjuna.^[7] He was the incarnation of Sudarshana, Lord Vishnu's Celestial weapon, Chakra that had taken birth in human form.^[1] In addition, Kartavirya worshipped a divine being known as Dattatreya, embodiment of Trimurti and descendant of the saptarishi Atri. For his obeisance, Dattatreya had granted the king a flying golden chariot that would travel wherever he wished, and one-thousand arms.^[4]

With these boons, Kartavirya became immeasurably powerful, conducting many military conquests after which he made Mahishmati in present day Maheshwar capital of his kingdom.^[7] Kartavirya became so powerful that he was even able to defeat and imprison the demon king Ravana at the river Godavari. Ravana, in turn, would later be the nemesis of the Ramayana.



Dattatreya, embodiment of the holy trinity Trimurti, whom Kartaviryā worshiped and who would later deliver the Tripura Rāhasya to Parashurama

8.6 Genocide of the Bhrigu and the sacred calf

The violent persecution of Brahmins by Kshatriya had at the time spanned generations. Aurva, great-grandfather of Parashurama, recalled a vivid childhood experience:

While lying unborn, I heard the doleful cries of my mother and other women of the Bhrigu race who were then being exterminated by the Kshatriyas. When those Kshatriyas began to exterminate the Bhrigus together with unborn children of their race, it was then that wrath filled my soul. My mother and the other women of our race, each in an advanced state of pregnancy, and my father, while terribly alarmed, found not in all the worlds a single protector. Then when the Bhrigu women found not a single protector, my mother held me in one of her thighs.

—*Mahabharata 1:182*

As the third book of the Mahabharata begins, Akritavirana, a disciple of the avatar speaks:

With pleasure shall I recite that excellent

history of the godlike deeds of Rama, the son of Jamadagni who traced his origin to the race of Brighu.

—*Mahabharata 3:117*^[7]



Parashurāma fighting the thousand-armed king Kartaviryā

As Rama grew older, he was sincere in his piety, and pleased Lord Shiva with the performance of excruciating tapas. As blessing, he was granted the Parashu of Shiva, after which he was known as *Parashurama*, or 'Rama with axe'.

Soon after Parashurama received his blessing, King Kartaviryā of the Haihaya came upon the hermitage of Jamadagni. The visit happened at a time Parusharama was away in the forest gathering yagna, and although the king had a massive entourage, the saptarishi was able to serve the king a grand feast. When Kartaviryā asked how he was able to do so, Jamadagni showed him a blessed Kamadhenu calf, given to Jamadagni by Indra, which was able to grant wishes. Kartaviryā was covetous and wanted the calf as his own. The rishi refused, and Kartaviryā stole the sacred animal.

Returning home, Parashurama was infuriated and traveled to the royal palace. Brandishing his axe, he decimated its guards and killed the mighty King Kartaviryā, retrieving the calf. When he returned home, his father was pleased, but seeing the blood stained axe of Parashurama, also concerned. He cautioned his son he must be aware of wrath and pride. Parashurama accepted the reprimand of his father, in penance, and went on a pilgrimage to holy places for one year in purification.

Meanwhile, the sons of Kartavirya discovered their father at the palace and knew that only Parashurama could have killed him. In revenge, they traveled to the hermitage and murdered Jamadagni, surrounding the rishi and shooting him to death with arrows like a stag. Afterwards, they decapitated his body and took his head with them.^[1]

When Parashurama returned home, he found his mother next to the body of his father, crying hysterically as she beat her chest twenty-one times in a row. Furious, he hunted down the sons of Kartavirya at the palace. He killed them all and returned with the head of his father to conduct the cremation. Parashurama then vowed to enact a genocide on the war-mongering Kshatriyas twenty-one times over, once for each time the hand of his mother hit her chest.^[5]



Parashurama returning with the sacred calf with Jamadagni cautioning him to not be controlled by anger

8.6.1 Vengeance against Kshatriya

Parashurama then travelled the whole of Earth, killing all men of the Kshatriya caste, guilty or innocent.^[4] The first book of the Mahabharata writes:

In the interval between the Treta and Dwapara Yugas, Parashurama, great among all who have borne arms, urged by impatience of wrongs, repeatedly smote the noble race of Kshatriyas. And when that fiery meteor, by his own valour, annihilated the entire tribe of the Kshatriyas, he formed at Samanta-panchaka

five lakes of blood.

—*Mahabharata 1:2*^[7]

One legend describes Parashurama returning to a village after battle in what is now the Badami Taluka, Bagalkot district of Karnataka. While the warrior-sage washed his axe beyond a sharp turn in the river Malaprabha, unknown to him, village women were cleaning their clothes downstream. His mighty axe stained the entire river red, and the women exclaimed “Ai hole!” translating to ‘Oh, what a river!’. This is said to be the etymology of the present-day village Aihole.^[5]

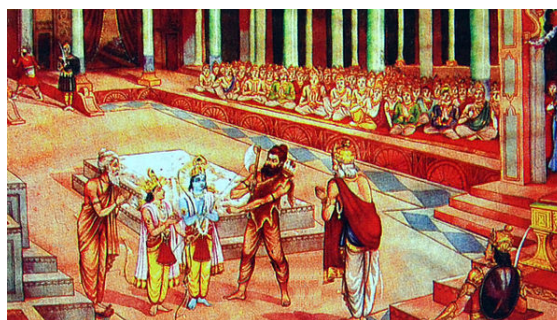
There is another legend that some of the the fisherman community of kerala who were settled in the coastal areas, receiving word as Parashurama approached, took the fisherman thread split it into two sacred threads that marked them twice-born, hid them in the forest and traveled south. Parashurama then gave their land to them.

After he had finally rid the world of Kshatriyas, Parashurama conducted the Ashvamedha sacrifice, done only by sovereign kings, and gave the land he had conquered to the Brahmin head-priests, who performed the *yagya* Kashyapa. After seeing the bad condition of some brahmins in northern india involved in priestly services Parshuram gave him the land that he had conquered. The Ashvamedha demanded that the remaining Kshatriya kings either submit to Parashurama, or stop the sacrifice by defeating him in battle. They were unable to do either, and so perished.^[1]

8.7 Ramayana

Parashurama is unique in that although he is the sixth avatar of Vishnu, as an immortal, he has also lived to see the subsequent incarnations of Vishnu in Rama and Krishna. Parashurama played an important role in both the Ramayana^[8] and Mahabharata.^[7]

8.7.1 Shiva’s Bow



Meeting of Rama and Parashurama

In the Ramayana, Parashurama had given the bow of

Shiva to the father of princess Sita for her swayamvar. As a test of worthiness, suitors were asked to lift and string the mystic weapon. None were successful until Rama, but in the process of being strung, the bow snapped in half. This produced a tremendous noise that reached the ears of Parashurama as he meditated atop the Mahendra Mountains.

In Valmiki Ramayana, Parashurama stops the journey of Sri Rama and his family after his marriage to Sita. He threatens to kill Sri Rama and his father, King Dasharatha, begs him to forgive his son and punish him instead. Parashurama neglects Dasharatha and invokes Sri Rama for a challenge. Sri Rama meets his challenge and tells him that he does not want to kill him because he is a Brahmin and related to his guru, Vishwamitra maharshi. But, he destroys his merit earned through penances. Thus, Parashurama's arrogance gets diminished and he returns to his normal mind.^[9]

In one version played in Ramlilas across India, Parashurama arrived to the scene deeply angry. The Kshatriyas were advised by Brahmarishi Vasistha not to confront the sage, but Sita still approached. Parashurama blessed her, saying "Dheergha Sumangali bhavah," or "You will have your husband alive for your lifetime."

When he then turned to confront Rama, Parashurama was unable to lift his axe. He was held back by his own word and pacified by the brilliance of Rama. When the warrior-sage realized he was looking at his own subsequent reincarnation, his own bow flew to Rama along with the essence of Vishnu, and thus the seventh avatar was fully realized.^[8]

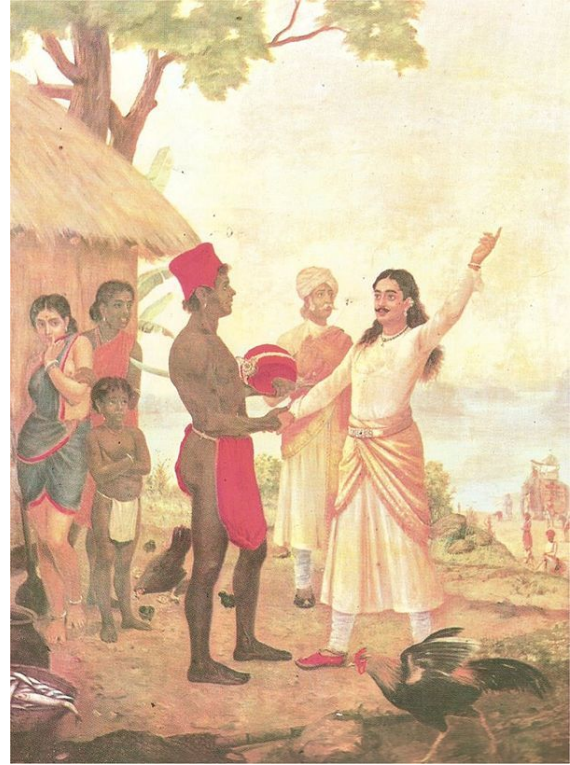
8.8 Mahabharata

8.8.1 Vow of Bhishma

For more see Vow of Bhishma.

Parashurama and Bhishma, two of the greatest warriors of the epics, shared an interesting history together as guru and student. Bhishma was a Kuru prince, and Parashurama instructed him in the martial arts as a boy. Their conflict began years later, with the beautiful princess Amba. Along with her sisters Ambika and Ambalika, princess Amba had been abducted by Bhishma in a misunderstanding between two kingdoms. Now, with her honor tainted, no man would take her for bride, and she was condemned to remain destitute. Bhishma himself was unable to marry due to his *bhishana pratigya*, or vow of celibacy, and allegiance to Hastinapur.^[10] Amba then sought the help of Parashurama to kill Bhishma.

Taking pity on her plight, the avatar agreed to fight his former student on her behalf. The battle lasted twenty-three days, by the end of which, both warriors were bloodied and filled with arrows. Bhishma had knowledge of the



Bhishma taking the bhishana pratigya

divine deadly weapon pashupatastra, which is considered the most powerful weapon of Shiva and of which Parashurama was unaware. When he was about to use the celestial weaponry, all Gods rushed to Bhishma and asked him to hold his hand, as it would humiliate his guru. Out of respect, Bhishma acquiesced.

Pitrs then appeared and obstructed the chariot of Parashurama, forbidding him from fighting any longer. The spirit of Parashurama's father, Jamadagni and his grandfather, Rucheeka, spoke to him:

O son, never again engage in battle with Bhishma or any other Kshatriya. Heroism and courage in battle are the qualities of a Kshatriya, and study of the Vedas and the practice of austerities are the wealth of the Brahmans. Previously, you took up weapons to protect the Brahmans, but this is not the case now. Let this battle with Bhishma be your last. O son of the Bhrigu race, it is not possible to defeat Bhishma.

—Mahabharata 188:5^[7]

In the end, the Gods showered praise on Bhishma, and he sought the blessing of Parashurama as his guru. The avatar then acknowledged that his former student was truly invincible, telling Amba:

Using even the very best of weapons I have not been able to obtain any advantage

over Bhishma, that foremost of all wielders of weapons! I have exerted now to the best of my power and might. Seek the protection of Bhishma himself, thou hast no other refuge now.

—*Mahabharata* 189:1^[7]

8.8.2 Mentorship of Drona

At the end of his time in the Vedic period, Parashurama was renouncing his possessions to take *sanyasi*. As the day progressed, Drona, then a poor Brahmin, approached Parashurama asking for alms. By that time, the warrior-sage had already given the Brahmins his gold and Kasyapa his land, so all that was left were his body and weapons. Parashurama asked which Drona would have, to which the clever Brahmin responded:

O son of Bhrigu, it behoveth thee to give me all thy weapons together with the mysteries of hurling and recalling them.

—*Mahabharata* 7:131

Thus, Parashurama gave all his weapons unto Drona, making him supreme in the science of arms. This becomes crucial as Drona later became the guru to both the Pandavas and the Kauravas who fought against each other in the Kurukshetra War.^[7] It is said that Lord Parashurama carried Lord Vishnu's "Sudharshana Chakra" and "Bow" and Lord Balram's "Gadha" while they fulfill their education with Guru Sandeepani

8.8.3 Fate of Karna

Karna was half brother to the Pandavas and the son of Surya, but was raised by a Suta charioteer. Karna went to Parashurama after being rejected by Drona who wished to imparted knowledge only to Kshatriyas and rejected Karna as the son of a Suta. Karna lies to Parashurama that he is a Brahmin and a descendant of Nrigu Maharish. Parashurama then accepts him as his student and teaches him of all the powerful **Brahmastra** weapons. Parashurama trains Karna to such a point that he declares Karna to be equal to himself in the art of warfare and archery.

One day, as Parashurama slept, resting his head on the lap of Karna, a scorpion crawled up the leg of the student and bit Karna's thigh. In spite of the pain, Karna neither flinched nor cried to avoid disturbing his guru's rest. Warm blood, however, trickled down his leg and woke Parashurama. Convinced that only a Kshatriya could have borne such pain in silence, Parashurama realized that Karna had lied and cursed his student that his knowledge would fail him when it was most crucial. Upon Karna's pleading, Parashurama gifted him the celestial weapon



Arjuna killing Karna while his back is turned

called Bhargavastra, along with his personal bow called Vijaya, for being such a diligent student.^[11]

Years later, during the Kurukshetra war, Karna had a dream in which he envisioned his guru and asked him to take back the curse he had placed years back. Parashurama revealed that he had known all along Karna was a Kshatriya, but because he was a worthy student Parashurama had instructed him regardless. The avatar explained to Karna that the Brahmastra had to fail him when he needed it most. If he killed Arjuna, Duryodhana would be king instead of Yudhishtira, and chaos would ensue. Parashurama asked Karna to accept his curse and asked him to die at the hands of Arjuna, so that the world might live in peace.^[7] Karna accepted his guru's words and in return the grateful guru, Parashurama blessed Karna with immortal glory and everlasting fame.^[11] Later during the war Lord Krishna also asks Karna to die and Karna agrees to accept death at the hands of Arjuna (his younger brother).

All 3 students of Parashurama - Bhishma, Drona and Karna fought on the Kaurava side (for different reasons) and were killed by unfair tricks.

8.9 Different epochs

There are a number of stories of Parashurama in different Puranas, detailing his interactions with different gods of

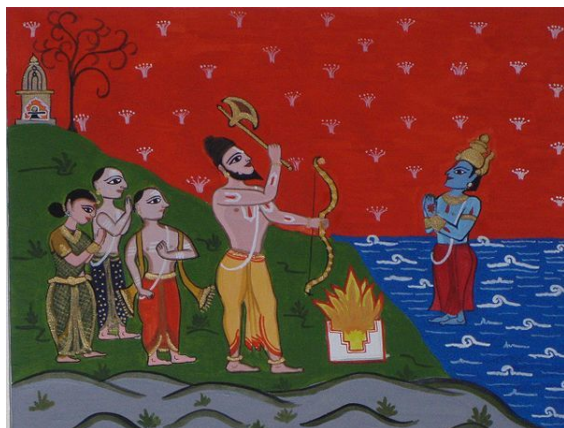
the Hindu pantheon, and even occurring during different Yuga due to his being Chiranjivi.

8.9.1 Ekadanta

According to Puranas, Parashurama travelled to the Himalayas to pay respect to his teacher, Shiva. While travelling, his path was blocked by Ganesha, son of Shiva and Parvati. Parashurama threw his axe at the elephant-god. Ganesha, knowing the weapon had been given to Parashurama by his father, allowed it to sever his left tusk.

His mother Parvati was infuriated, and declared she would cut off the arms of Parashurama. She took the form of Durgama, becoming omnipotent, but at the last moment, Shiva was able to pacify her by making her see the avatar as her own son. Parashurama also asked her forgiveness, and she finally relented when Ganesha himself spoke on behalf of the warrior-saint. Parashurama then gave his divine axe to Ganesha and blessed him. Another name for Ganesha because of this encounter is *Ekadanta*, or 'One Tooth'.^[5]

8.9.2 Beating back the Arabian Sea



Lord Parashurama with Saraswat Brahmin settlers demanding Varuna make the seas recede to save the lands of Konkan and Kerala

Puranas write that the western coast of India was threatened by tumultuous waves and tempests, causing the land to be overcome by the sea. Parashurama fought back the advancing waters, demanding Varuna release the land of Konkan and Malabar. During their fight, Parashurama threw his axe into the sea. A mass of land rose up, but Varuna told him that because it was filled with salt, the land would be barren.^[12]

Parashurama then did a tapasya for Nagaraja, the King of Snakes. Parashurama asked him to spread serpents throughout the land so their venom would neutralize the salt filled earth. Nagaraja agreed, and a lush and fertile land grew. Thus, Parashurama pushed back the coastline

between the foothills of the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, creating modern day Kerala.^[12]

The coastal area of Kerala, Konkan, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra, are today also known as *Parashurama Kshetra* or *Land of Parashurama* in homage.^[13] Puranas record that Parashurama placed statues of Shiva at 108 different locations throughout the reclaimed land, which still exist today.^{[14][15]} Shiva, is the source of kundalini, and it around his neck that Nagaraja is coiled, and so the statues were in gratitude for their baneful cleansing of the land.^[16]

Then he took a winnowing basket, or Surpa, and threw it at the sea. The water retreated, and from the place the basket fell at Gokarna, land rose again. This land is called Kerala, or 'Siirparaka' (*Brahmanda Purana*, Chapters 98 and 99). It is also said that while beating back the sea, Parashurama fired an arrow from his mystical bow that landed in Goa at Benaulim, creating *Salkache Tollem*, or 'Lotus Lake'.^[5]

8.9.3 Request to Shiva

According to Hindu tradition, Parshurama reclaimed the land of Konkan^[17] after donating the earth to Maharshi Kashyap. Then he requested different Gods and Goddesses to settle in the newly created land and to take responsibility of various clans. Parshuram, being a devotee of Shiva, requested Shiva to give him audience everyday, while he is living in the newly created land. Lord Shiva accepted his request. Lord Parshuram also brought 60 'Vipras' to settle in Kokan. One such Vipra named 'Vyad' installed a Shivalinga at Guhagar. In this era, since evil thoughts are supposed to prevail, Gods are to remain in their invisible forms. Accordingly Lord Shiva decided to remain in invisible form in the Shivalinga installed by Vyad Muni. The same Shivalinga is this well known Vyadeshwar. Thus, Lord Shiva stays at Guhagar in the 'Vyadeshwar' Shivalinga from years together. According to another history, in the era of King Sakuran, the Vyadeshwar Shivalinga was re-invented and the Temple, which we see today, was constructed.

8.9.4 Rambhoja

Kshetra scripture has a legend in which a king named Ramabhoja worshipped Parashurama. He was the ruler of the lands between Gokarna and Kanyakumari and was proclaimed king of the entire Parashurama Kshetra. While performing aswamedha yajna, he was plowing the land, but mistakenly killed a snake that was a raksha in disguise. In repentance, Rambhoja was directed by Parashurama to build a *rajathatpeetha*, or large silver pedestal, with the image of a serpent at its four corners in obeisance. Parashurama also ordered that he distribute gold to the needy equal to his own weight as *Tulabhara*.

Rambhoja performed the ashwamedha yajna successfully and Parashurama appeared before him again, declaring that he was pleased. To this day, the silver pedestal remains a center of pilgrimage. The surrounding land is known as Thoulava, in remembrance of the Tulabhara of Rambhoja.^{[18][19]}

8.9.5 Surya



Surya, the sun god, riding across the sky in his chariot

Parashurama once became annoyed with the sun god Surya for making too much heat. The warrior-sage shot several arrows into the sky, terrifying Surya. When Parashurama ran out of arrows and sent his wife Dharini to bring more, the sun god then focused his rays on her, causing her to collapse. Surya then appeared before Parashurama and gave him two inventions that have since been attributed to the avatar, sandals and an umbrella.^[5]

8.9.6 Dattatreya

Nath tradition holds that Parashurama, after enacting his vengeance, sought out Dattatreya atop Mount Gandhamadana for spiritual guidance. Their conversations gave rise to Tripura-rahasya, a treatise on Advaita Vedanta. It was here the deity instructed the warrior-sage on knowledge of scripture, renunciation of worldly activities, and non-duality, thus freeing him from the karmic cycle of death and rebirth.^[5]

8.10 Kalaripayattu

Parashurama and the saptarishi Agastya are regarded as the founders of kalaripayattu, the oldest martial art in the world. Parashurama was a master of *shastravidya*, or the art of weaponry, as taught to him by Shiva. As such, he developed northern kalaripayattu, or *vadakkan kalari*, with more emphasis on weapons than striking and grappling. Southern kalaripayattu was developed by Agastya, and focuses more on weaponless combat. Kalaripayattu is known as the 'mother of all martial arts'.^[20]

Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism, also practiced kalaripayattu. When he traveled to China to spread Buddhism, he brought the martial art with him, which in turn was adapted to become the basis of Shaolin Kung Fu.^[21]

8.11 Sanyasi and end time

Main article: End time

By the end of the Vedic period, Parashurama had grown weary of bloodshed and became a *sanyasi*, giving up his possessions to practice penance. The first book of the Mahabharata writes:

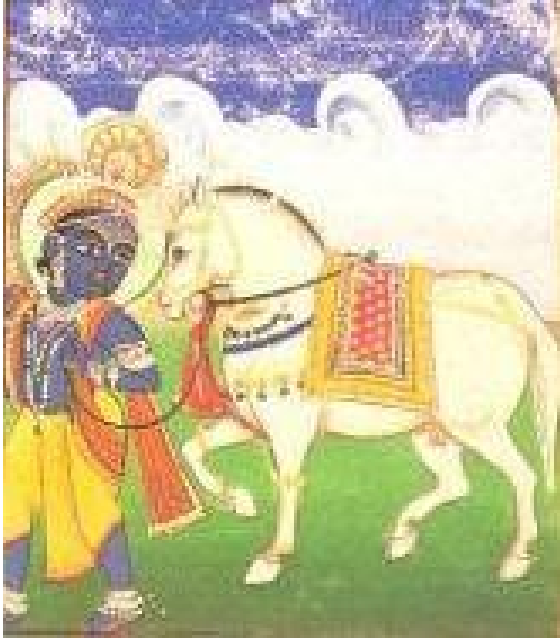
The son of Jamadagni, after twenty-one times making the Earth bereft of Kshatriyas, wended to that best of Mountains Mahendra and there began his ascetic penance.
—*Mahabharata 1:14*^[7]

He traveled to central India at the northern end of the Eastern Ghats and western Odisha, and ascended the Mahendra Mountains. Before he left, Parashurama distributed the territories he conquered among a clan of Brahmins called the Bhumihar, who ruled for many centuries. Kingdoms included the Cheras, Pandyas, Dravida, Mushika, Karnata and Konkana.^{[4][5]}

Unlike other incarnations of Vishnu, Parashurama is a Chiranjivi, and is said to still be doing penance today in Mahendragiri. The Kalki Purana writes that he will reemerge at the end of Kali Yuga to be the martial and spiritual guru of Kalki, the tenth and final avatar of Vishnu. It is foretold that he will instruct Kalki to perform a difficult penance to Shiva, and receive the celestial weaponry needed to bring about end time.

8.12 Name

Parashu means 'axe' in Sanskrit; hence, Parashurama literally translates as 'Rama with axe'. He is also known



Kalki, tenth and final avatar of Vishnu

as Bhrgupati, Bhargava, and Bhargava Rāma. Regional variations include:

- Indonesian: *Ramaparasu*
- Javanese: Ramabargawa
- Khmer: Reamsor (from Rāmasūra) or Reameyso (from Rāmīśvara)
- Thai: Ramasun (Thai: रामसुन)
- Malay: *Pusparama*

8.13 Parashurama temples

There are numerous temples and statues of Parashurama throughout the Indian subcontinent, some of which include:

- Parashurama temple, Attirala, a vernacular name for Hatyarala. Cuddapah district, Andhra Pradesh.
- Parshurama temple, Sohmag, Salempur, Deoria District, Uttar Pradesh
- Parashurama Kunda, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh, where Parashuram washed his sins after committing matricide
- Akhnoor, Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir
- Fort Songadh, Gujarat
- Gudimallam, Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh
- Harpur, Zamania, Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh

- Jalalabad, Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh
- Kumbhalgarh, Rajasthan
- Khatti, near Phagwara, Punjab, India
- Maniyar, Ballia, Uttar Pradesh
- Mahurgarh, Maharashtra
- Parashurama Mandir, Chiplun Maharashtra
- Painguinim, Canacona, Goa
- Rajkot, Gujarat
- Shivpuri, Akkalkot, Khopoli, Maharashtra
- Shivsar Talao Pond Statue, Phalodi, Jodhpur, Rajasthan
- Sri Parasurama Swamy Temple, Thiruvallam, 6 km south of Thiruvananthapuram Kerala
- Tosh, Manikaran, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh
- Padubelle, Udipi, Karnataka, India
- Kojra, Sirohi, Rajasthan, India
- Parashurama Mandir, Mokama, Bihar, India
- Parshuram Kutiya, Nirmand, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

8.14 Parashurama Kshetras

Seven Kshetras are popularly known as Parashurama Kshetras or Parashurama Srishti:^[5]

1. Udupi
2. kukke Subramanya
3. Kumbasi
4. Koteswara
5. Shankaranarayana
6. Kollur
7. Gokarna

8.15 See also

- Bhagavad Gita
- Chiranjivi
- End time
- Haihayas

- Heheya Kingdom
- Kalachuri Kingdom
- Parasuram Express
- Ramayana

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8.18 External links

- Media related to Parashuram at Wikimedia Commons
- 108 Parashurama Kshetras published by Shaivam and Google Maps

Chapter 9

Rama

For other uses, see [Rama \(disambiguation\)](#).

“Râm” redirects here. It is not to be confused with [Ram \(disambiguation\)](#).

Rama (राम *Rāma*) is the seventh avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu,^[1] and a king of Ayodhya in Hindu scriptures. Rama is also the protagonist of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, which narrates his supremacy. Commonly it is proposed that Rama was born about 1.2 million years ago, during the Treta Yuga, age that lasted 1,296,000 years. Rama is one of the many popular figures and deities in Hinduism, specifically Vaishnavism and Vaishnava religious scriptures in South and Southeast Asia.^[2] Along with Krishna, Rama is considered to be one of the most important avatars of Vishnu. In a few Rama-centric sects, he is considered the Supreme Being, rather than an avatar.

Born as the eldest son of Kausalya and Dasharatha, king of Ayodhya, Rama is referred to within Hinduism as *Maryada Purushottama*,^[3] literally *the Perfect Man* or *Lord of Self-Control* or *Lord of Virtue*. His wife Sita is considered by Hindus to be an avatar of Lakshmi and the embodiment of perfect womanhood.^{[3][4]}

Rama's life and journey is one of adherence to dharma despite harsh tests and obstacles and many pains of life and time. He is pictured as the ideal man and the perfect human. For the sake of his father's honour, Ram abandons his claim to Ayodhya's throne to serve an exile of fourteen years in the forest.^[5] His wife Sita and brother Lakshmana decide to join him, and all three spend the fourteen years in exile together. While in exile, Sita is kidnapped by Ravana, the Rakshasa monarch of Lanka. After a long and arduous search, Rama fights a colossal war against Ravana's armies. In a war of powerful and magical beings, greatly destructive weaponry and battles, Rama slays Ravana in battle and liberates his wife. Having completed his exile, Rama returns to be crowned king in Ayodhya and eventually becomes emperor,^[5] rules with happiness, peace, duty, prosperity and justice—a period known as *Ram Rajya*.

The legend of Rama is deeply influential and popular in the societies of the Indian subcontinent and across South East Asia. Rama is revered for his unending

compassion,^[6] courage and devotion to religious values and duty.

9.1 Etymology



Sita (far right), Rama (center), Lakshmana (far left) and Hanuman (below seated) at Bhaktivedanta Manor, a temple in Watford (England)

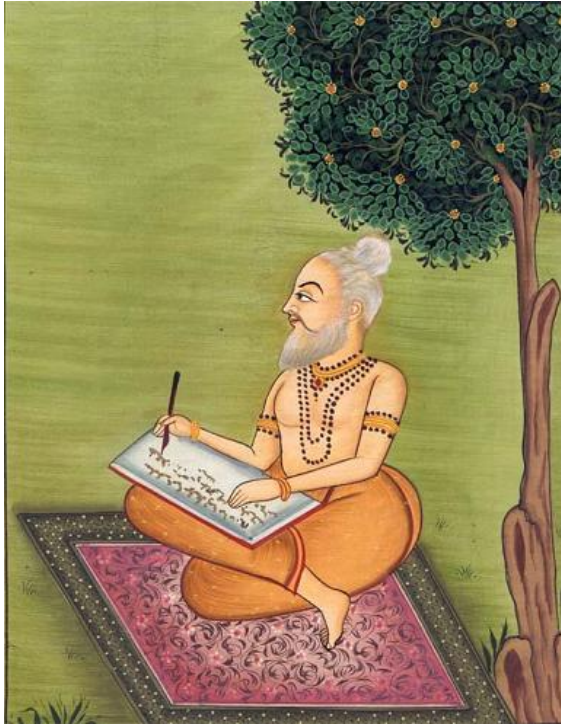
The name Rama appears repeatedly in Hindu scriptures. Besides the name of the protagonist of the *Ramayana* (subject of the current article), the name is also given to other heroes including Parashu-Rama (Bhargava Rama) and Balarama (Bala-Rama).

In the Vishnu sahasranama, Rama is the 394th name of Vishnu. In the interpretation of Adi Shankara's commentary, translated by Swami Tapasyananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, Rama has two meanings: the supreme Brahman who is the eternally blissful spiritual Self in whom yogis delight, or the One (i.e., Vishnu) who out of His own will assumed the (the universe) enchanting form of Rama, the son of Dasaratha.^[7]

Other names of Rama include Ramavijaya (Javanese), Phreah Ream (Khmer), Phra Ram (Lao and Thai), Megat Seri Rama (Malay), Raja Bantugan (Maranao) and Ramar (Tamil).

The greatness of chanting of Rama's name is mentioned in the *Ramacharitamansa*.^{[8][9][10][11][12][13][14]}

9.2 Literary sources



Valmiki composing the Ramayana.

The primary source of the life and journey of Rama is the epic Ramayana as composed by the Rishi Valmiki. The Vishnu Purana also recounts Rama as Vishnu's seventh avatar, and in the Bhagavata Purana, ninth skandha, adhyayas 10 & 11, the story of the Ramayana is again recounted in brief up to and including the slaying of Ravana and Prince Rama's return to Ayodhya. Additionally, the tales of Rama are reverently spoken of in the Mahabharata. The earliest documentation of Ram is in the Buddhist text of Dasharatha Jataka.^[15]

The epic had many versions across India's regions. However, other scriptures in Sanskrit also reflect the life of Ramayana. The followers of Madhvacharya believe that an older version of the Ramayana, the mula-Ramayana, previously existed. They consider it to have been more authoritative than the version by Valmiki. Another important shortened version of the epic in Sanskrit is the Adhyatma Ramayana. The seventh century CE Sanskrit "Bhatti's Poem" Bhaṭṭikāvya of Bhatti who lived in Gujarat, is a retelling of the epic that simultaneously illustrates the grammatical examples for Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī as well as the major figures of speech and the Prakrit language.^[16] Versions of the Ramayana exist in most major Indian languages; examples that elaborate on the life, deeds and divine philosophies of Rama include the epic poem Ramavataram by the 12th-century poet Kambar in Tamil, and Ramcharitmanas, a Hindi version of the Ramayana by the 16th-century saint, Tulsidas. Contemporary versions of the Ramayana include Sri Ramayana Darshanam by Kuvempu in Kannada and Ra-

mayana Kalpavruksham by Viswanatha Satyanarayana in Telugu, both of which have been awarded the Jnanpith Award. The epic has transformed across the diverse regions of India, which boast their own unique languages and cultural traditions.^[17]

The essential tale of Rama has also spread across Southeast Asia, and evolved into unique renditions of the epic – incorporating local history, folktales, religious values as well as unique features from the languages and literary discourse. The Kakawin Ramayana of Java, Indonesia, the Ramakavaca of Bali, Hikayat Seri Rama of Malaysia, Maradia Lawana of the Philippines, Ramakien of Thailand (which calls him Phra Ram) are great works with many unique characteristics and differences in accounts and portrayals of the legend of Rama. The legends of Rama are witnessed in elaborate illustration at the Wat Phra Kaew temple in Bangkok. The national epic of Myanmar, Yama Zatdaw is essentially the Burmese Ramayana, where Rama is named Yama. In the Reamker of Cambodia, Rama is known as Preah Ream. In the Phra Lak Phra Lam of Laos, Gautama Buddha is regarded as an incarnation of Rama.

to the Valmiki Ramayana,^[18] Rama was born in Ayodhya, India, on 9th day (now celebrated across India as Ram Navami) of Chaitra lunar month (March–April), when Moon and Jupiter were rising in the east in Cancer sign and four other planets (Sun, Mars, Saturn, Venus) were exalted in their exaltation signs. Jupiter in the sign Cancer is exalted.

Commonly it is proposed that Rama was born about 1.2 million years ago, during the Treta Yuga, age that lasted 1,296,000 years.^{[19][20][21]}

Composition of Ramayana in its current form is usually dated to 7th - 4th Century BCE.^{[22][23][24]}

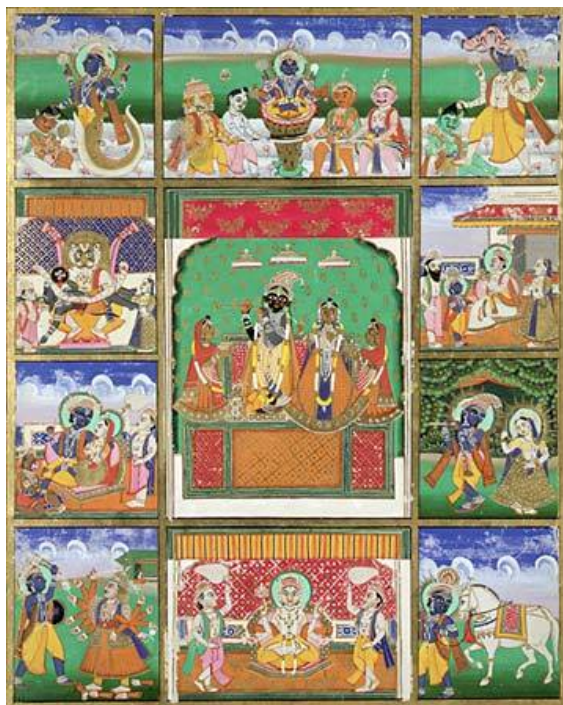
9.3 Balkand

9.3.1 Birth as an avatar

See also: Reasons for Ram avatar and Genealogy of Rama

The Ramayana speaks of how the earth goddess Bhumidevi, came to the creator-god Brahma begging to be rescued from evil kings who were plundering her resources and destroying life through bloody wars and evil conduct. The deva (gods) also came to Brahma fearful of the rule of Ravana, the ten-headed rakshasa emperor of Lanka. Ravana had overpowered the devas and now ruled the heavens, the earth and the netherworlds. Although a powerful and noble monarch, he was also arrogant, destructive and a patron of evil doers. He had boons that gave him immense strength and was invulnerable to all living and celestial beings, except man and animals.^[25]

Brahma, Bhumidevi and the gods worshipped Vishnu, the



Rama (left third from top) depicted in the Dashavatara (ten avatars) of Vishnu. Painting from Jaipur, now at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Preserver, for deliverance from Ravana's tyrannical rule. Vishnu promised to kill Ravana by incarnating as a man – the eldest son of Kosala's king Dasharatha.^[25] Goddess Lakshmi took birth as Sita in order to accompany her consort Vishnu and was found by king Janaka of Mithila while he was ploughing a field. Vishnu's eternal companion, the Shesha is said to have incarnated as Lakshmana to stay at his Lord's side on earth. Throughout his life, no one, except himself and a few select sages (among which are included Vasishtha, Sharabhanga, Agastya and Vishwamitra) know of his destiny. Rama is continually revered by the many sages he encounters through his life, but only the most learned and exalted know of his true identity. At the end of the war between Rama and Ravana, just as Sita passes her *Agni pariskha*, Brahma, Indra and the gods, the celestial sages and Shiva appear out of the sky. They affirm Sita's purity and ask him to end this terrible test. Thanking the avatar for delivering the universe from the grips of evil, they reveal Rama's divine identity upon the culmination of his mission.^[26]

Other scriptures provide other reasons for the avatar. The chastity of Vrinda, wife of the demon Jalandhara, that protects the life of her husband is destroyed by Vishnu by deceit so that Shiva can slay the demon. She curses Vishnu be born on earth; while Jalandara is born as Ravana.^{[27][28]}

Another legend narrates that Jaya and Vijaya, the gatekeepers of Vishnu, were cursed by the Four Kumaras to be born on earth three lives; Vishnu took avatars each time to free them of their earthy existence. They as

born as Ravana and his brother Kumbhakarna, who are both killed by Rama. Also, due to a boon, Kashyapa and Aditi are born as the parents of Rama, Dasharatha and Kausalya.^[29] In another version, Svayambhuva Manu and his wife Satarupa are blessed to be born as Rama's parents.^{[30][31]}

Another tale says that the sage Narada cursed Vishnu to be born on earth as a king, to be helped by monkeys and suffer separation from his wife. Narada also curses Jaya and Vijaya to be born as the demon brothers.^{[32][33]}

9.3.2 Initiation of the Avatara

Sage Vishwamitra takes the two princes, Rama and Lakshmana, to his ashram, as he needs Rama's help in slaying several Rakshasas that have been harassing him and several other sages living in the area. Rama's first encounter is with a Rakshasi named Taataka, who is a celestial nymph cursed to take the form of a demoness. Vishwamitra explains that she has polluted much of the habitat where the sages reside and there will not be any contentment until she is destroyed. Rama has some reservations about killing a woman, but since Taataka poses such a big threat to the Rishis and he is expected to follow their word, he fights with Taataka and kills her with an arrow. After her death, the surrounding forest becomes greener and cleaner.

Vishwamitra presents Rama with several astras and sas-tras (divine weapons) that will be of use to him in the future, and Rama masters the knowledge of all the weapons and their uses. Vishwamitra then tells Rama and Lakshmana that soon, he along with some of his disciples, will perform a yagna for seven days and nights that will be of great benefit to the world, and the two princes must keep close watch for the two sons of Taadaka, Mareecha and Subahu, who will try to defile the yagna at all costs. The princes therefore keep a strong vigil for all of the days, and on the seventh day they spot Maricha and Subahu coming with a whole host of Raakshasas ready to pour bones and blood into the fire. Rama points his bow at the two, and with one arrow kills Subahu, and with the other arrow flings Mareecha thousands of miles away into the ocean. Rama deals with the rest of the demons. The yagna is completed successfully

Rama also frees Ahalya, the wife of Gautama Maharishi, from a curse. She was cursed to turn into stone by her husband after a displeasing incident. However, the dust on Rama's feet touched the stone and turned it back into a woman again. Gautama Maharishi was gratified that everything was back to normal again.

Sage Vishwamitra then takes the two princes to the *Swayamvara* a wedding ceremony for Sita. The challenge is to string the bow of Shiva and shoot an arrow from it. This task is considered impossible for any ordinary king or living being, as this is the personal weapon of Shiva, more powerful, holy and of divine creation than conceiv-



Ahalya offering fruits and flowers to Rama - her saviour, a 5th-century AD Stone sculpture from Deogah, currently in the National Museum, New Delhi.

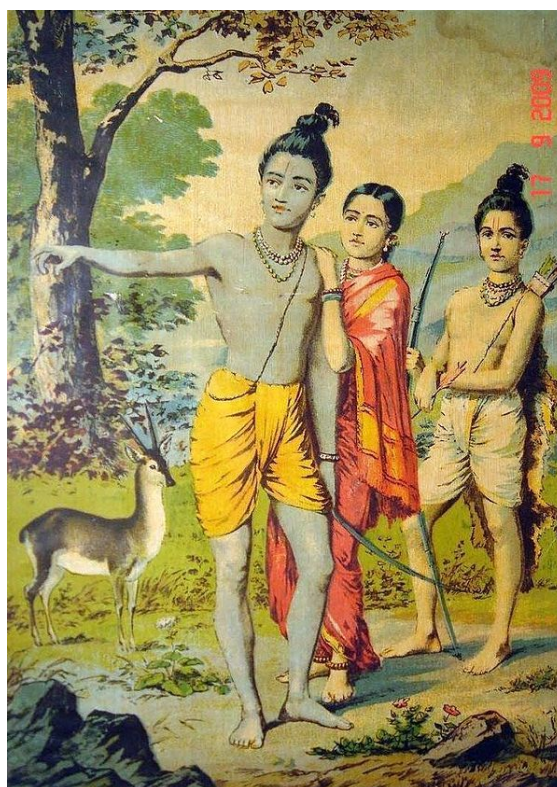
able. While attempting to string the bow, Rama breaks it in two. This feat of strength spreads his fame across the worlds and seals his marriage to Sita, celebrated as *Vivaha Panchami*.^[34]

After Rama weds Sita and the entire royal family and the Ayodhya army begin their journey back, the great rishi Parashurama (Bhargava Rama) appears before them, having descended from his mountainous hermitage. Parashurama is an extremely powerful rishi, responsible for killing all of the world's tyrannical and oppressive emperors and kings 21 times. He is the sixth Avatara of Vishnu, and finds it unbelievable that anybody could break the bow of Shiva. Considering himself to still be the most powerful warrior-rishi on earth, he brings with them the bow of Vishnu, and intends to challenge Rama to prove his strength by stringing it, and then fighting a battle with him to prove superiority.^[35] Although the entire Ayodhya army is forestalled by his mystical power, Rama is himself angered. He respectfully bows to Parashurama, and within a twinkling of an eyelid snatches the bow of Vishnu, strings it, places an arrow and points it straight at the challenger's heart. Rama asks Parashurama what he will give as a target to the arrow. At this point, Parashurama feels himself devoid of the tremendous mystical energy he possessed for so long. He realizes that Rama is Vishnu incarnate, his successor and definitely his superior. He accepts Rama's superiority, devotes his tapasya to him, pays homage to Rama and promises to return to his hermitage and leave the world of men.^[36]

Rama then shoots the arrow up into the sky with Vishnu's

bow, performing a feat true to his supreme, divine nature with his natural weapon. His overpowering of Parashurama and using the supreme weapon with incredible ease and perfection dazzle the spectators and his relatives, but no one save Parashurama and Vasishtha associate this with his true identity. It is said that the Rama's arrow is still flying across space, across time and across all of the universe. The day it will return to earth, it is said, it will bring the end of the world. Others say that the flying arrow destroys all evil on earth to uphold dharma and righteousness.^[36]

9.4 Dharma of exile



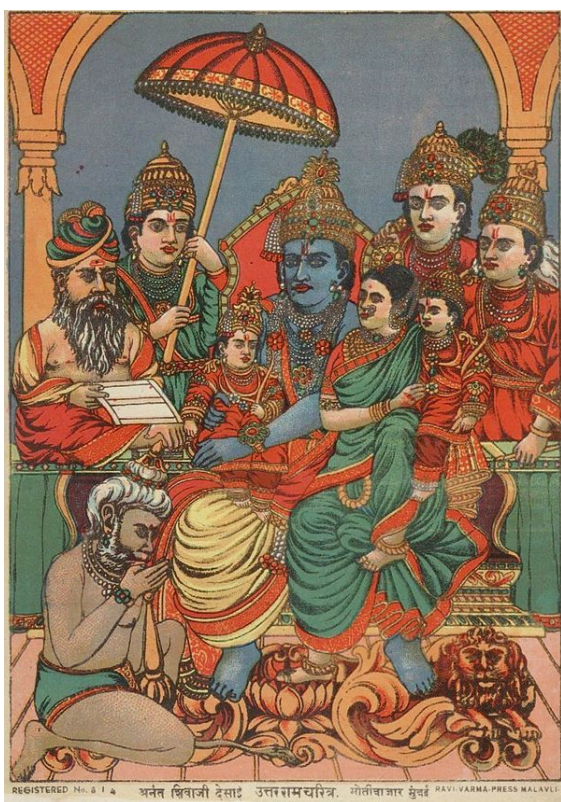
Rama portrayed as exile in the forest, accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana

King Dasaratha announces to Ayodhya that he plans to crown Rama, his eldest child the *Yuvaraja* (crown prince). While the news is welcomed by everyone in the kingdom, the mind of queen Kaikeyi is poisoned by her wicked maid-servant, Manthara. Kaikeyi, who is initially pleased for Rama, is made to fear for the safety and future of her son Bharata. Fearing that Rama would ignore or possibly victimize his younger brother for the sake of power, Kaikeyi demands that Dasaratha banish Rama to a forest exile for fourteen years, and that Bharata be crowned in Rama's place. She had been granted two boons by the king when she had saved his life a long time ago in battle, and the queen now used them to serve her purpose.^[37] The king's court and the people are outraged at this turn

of events. Dasaratha loved and cherished Rama dearly, and is in personal turmoil. Completely estranged now from his younger wife, he abhors the prospect of separation from Rama. But Rama realizes that the king must not break a solemn promise at any time, and neither should a son disobey his father's command. Sita joins her husband in exile despite his discouraging her, as it is her duty and out of love for Rama that she must be at his side at all times. His younger brother Lakshmana also immediately decides to join Rama rather than remain in the city.^[38]

As he leaves for exile, the people of Ayodhya are deeply saddened and angered at Dasaratha and Kaikeyi. Dasaratha's heart is broken and he collapses and dies during the night of the sixth day, unable to bear the agony of separation from Rama. Despite the reasoning of Vashistha and the pleas of his brothers, Rama refuses to return. Although horrified at the news of his father's death, Rama finds it impossible that he should break his dead father's word. Rama does not bear any anger towards Kaikeyi, believing firmly in the power of destiny.^[39] According to the explanation of the classic, this exile actually presents Rama the opportunity to confront Ravana and his evil empire.

9.5 Rama and Sita



Rama with Sita on the throne, their children Lava and Kusha on their laps. Behind the throne, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna stand. Hanuman bows to Rama before the throne. Valmiki to the left

Rama and Sita are the protagonists in one of the most famous love stories of all time. Described as being deeply in love, Sita and Rama are theologically understood as Incarnations of Lakshmi and Vishnu respectively. When Rama is banished from the kingdom, he attempts to convince Sita not to join him in a potentially dangerous and certainly arduous existence in the jungle, but Sita rejects this. When Rama orders her in his capacity as husband, Sita rejects it, asserting that it was an essential duty of a wife to be at her husband's side come good or ill.^[38] Rama in turn is assiduously protective and caring for Sita throughout the exile.

When Sita is kidnapped by Ravana, both Sita and Rama undergo great personal hardships during their separation. Sita protects her chastity assiduously, and survives over a year in captivity on the strength of her love and attention to religious values and duty. She is completely unfettered in her resolve despite Ravana's courting, cajoling and threats. Meanwhile Rama, not knowing who had kidnapped Sita or where was she taken, often succumbs to despair and tears, denouncing himself for failing to defend her and agonizing over her safety and pain. Sita knows that it is in Rama's destiny to fight to rescue her (she refuses to be rescued thus by Hanuman, who discovers her), but is deeply anxious for his safety and fearful of Ravana's power.

The 'Wedding of Rama and Sita' concerns two entities coming together to form a whole. An Indian marriage forges an alliance not only between two people, but also two families. The marriage of Sita and Rama creates an alliance between two people, two families, and two kingdoms: Mithila, home of Sita, and Kosala, home of Rama. Furthermore, Rama's marriage to Sita on earth parallels the celestial union of Vishnu and Lakshmi; each deity took birth on earth, and so when Rama marries Sita, he is actually reuniting with his divine consort Lakshmi, Goddess of Good Fortune, who brings prosperity to Kosala. At an allegorical level, the union of Rama and Sita represents the relationship between God and the devotee, with Rama as the beloved divine king and Sita as his devotee. Finally, at a societal level, the dance drama brings together north and south Indian dance traditions.^[40]

9.5.1 Agni pariksha

Lord Rama sent a messenger to Ravana that said, "Come to me and I will forgive you," before he slays Ravana. After Rama slays Ravana and wins the war, Sita wants to come before him in the state which over a year's imprisonment had reduced her to, but Rama arranges for Sita to be bathed and given beautiful garments before they are re-united. But even as Sita comes before him in great excitement and happiness, the society starts doubting Sita's purity so Rama decided to prove that his Sita is still pure and chaste in front of the society, so he tells her that she has to give Agni pariksha. At this sudden turn of events, all the vanaras, rakshasas, Sugriva, Hanuman and Laksh-

mana are deeply shocked.^[41]



The Agni pariksha

Sita begs Lakshmana to build her a pyre upon which she could end her life, as she could not live without Rama. At this point, Lakshmana is angered at Rama for the first time in his life, but following Rama's nod, he builds a pyre for Sita. At the great shock and sorrow of the watchers, Sita sits into the flames. But to their astonishment and wonder, she is completely unharmed. Instead, she glows radiantly from the centre of the pyre. But the gods headed by Brahma and Shiva appear, reveal Rama's and Sita's true identity and requests that Rama take Sita back as she is truly pure. Rama replies that he had never doubted her purity for a second, but, the people of the world would not have accepted or honoured her as a queen or a woman if she had not passed this *Agni pariksha* before the eyes of hundreds. Agni would destroy the impure and sinful, but not touch the pure and innocent.^[42] There is a version of Tulsidas's *Ramacharitmanasa*, which is popular, which states that Rama had Sita under the protection of Agni God. After Sita was released it was necessary to bring her out of security of Agni god.^[43] This finds echo in the *sthalapurana* of Tirupathi. Another version of this, used in Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan*, was that Rama had known Sita was going to be abducted by Ravana ahead of time. So he entrusted her to Agni, the god of fire. Rama did this so that he, who in reality was Vishnu, could kill Ravana. Sita, in turn, left behind a "shadow", or twin-like version of herself behind. The "shadow" Sita had been abducted by Ravana. Therefore, the *lila* of Agni Pariksha was to retrieve the genuine Sita from the temporary care of Agni Deva. Rama explains this to Lakshmana before the "Pariksha" is done. This version has also been written in the *Ram Charit Manas*.

9.6 Sita's Exile

In the *Uttara Kanda*, Rama banishes his wife Sita, even as she is pregnant, asking Lakshmana to deliver her safely to the forest. He does so after receiving word that some of his subjects in Ayodhya believed that Sita was unfit due



Rama fighting his sons Lava and Kusha

to her long captivity in Ravana's city. As a king is expected to uphold moral principles, Rama reluctantly banished Sita in order to uphold his duty. Sita took refuge under the noble sage Valmiki.

A legend by Rishi Agastya in the epic states that Vishnu in a previous age had been cursed by Rishi Bhrigu, whose wife had been killed by Vishnu for sheltering his enemies escaping from battle. The Rishi condemns Vishnu to be denied for a long age the companionship of his soul mate, just as Vishnu, had deprived the rishi of his loving wife. Thus Rama, Vishnu's incarnation, must live the rest of his life without Sita.^[44]

Many Hindus, such as the followers of Sri Vaishnavism, consider this entire section of the Ramayana to be interpolated, and thus they do not accept the authenticity of this story claiming that Sita was banished. An alternate narration of Ramayana does not state it so. It says that Sita later lived in her father's kingdom of Mithila with her sons Lava and Kusha as per the North Indian (especially in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) custom that children be brought up in their *nanihal*, or maternal grandmother's place. Sita and her sons later live in Valmiki's ashram for the boys' education and military training. As per Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*, both the princes grew extremely intelligent and strong under Rishi Valmiki's tutelage. .

9.6.1 Children

Main articles: [Kusha \(Ramayana\)](#) and [Lava \(Ramayana\)](#)
According to legend, Kusha and Lava are the twin sons



Lava and Kusha, the sons of Rāma.

of Lord Rama and Sita. Born in the forest after the banishment of Sita from Ayodhya, the twins were educated and trained in military skills as their mother took refuge in Sage Valmiki's ashram, located in a forest on the banks of the River Tamsa.

As Rama performed the [Ashvamedha Yajna](#), a horse strayed into their forest, Rama sent Hanuman to retrieve the horses. Rama's sons Luv and Kush captured the horses. Hanuman, seeing Luv and Kush recognised that they were the son's of Rama. He let them capture him and tie him up. There Hanuman started meditating on the name Rama. Worried Rama sent his brothers to look for the horses. As they saw Hanuman tied up and two boys guarding him, they thought that the two boy had stolen the horses. So Ramas brothers started attacking Luv and Kush. Although Rama's brothers should have won, but Luv and Kush defeated them all, knocking them unconscious. Luv and Kush were protected by Hanuman. Then Rama himself went looking for the horses fearing that Hanuman and his brothers had been attacked. On his way there, Rama intuitively knew that Luv and Kush were his sons and purposely slept on his chariot to delay tension and confrontation with his sons as he knew it would be inappropriate for a father to fight his sons. Upon reaching the battlefield, the sage Valmiki interrupted the potential battle between father and sons by explaining to Rama that Luv and Kush were his sons. A familial reunion took place.

When Devi Sita found out that Lava and Kusha had defeated Ayodhya's forces, she proudly revealed their/her identity. Rama desired Sita and his sons to live with him in his kingdom but as this took place, the general population of the kingdom resented Sita from returning. In response, Sita forsaked her like and sought final refuge in the arms of her mother Bhumidevi, the Goddess Mother Earth and ultimately returned to Rama in the form of

Vishnu in Vishnu's abode - indicating that forced separation from her beloved husband is only limited in life on earth compared to her eternal union with her beloved in life after death.

9.7 Later life



Rishi Agastya (Father of Tamil literature) -Rama acquired a rare gem from him which entombed the powers of the gods Indra, Varuna, Yama and Kubera

Rama's reign is known as the *Rama Rajya* which lasted for 11,000 years. During this period, people were healthy, holy, satisfied and lived with complete peace and harmony.^[45] There was no evil, no wars, no natural calamity and no diseases. Rama ruled the whole earth without using military force as all kings submitted themselves to him. Once a [Brahmana](#) came to him, lamenting over his dead son. According to the [Uttara Kand](#), a later edition and possible non-canon part of the [Ramayana](#), Sage [Narada](#) told Rama that a [Sudra](#) was doing a penance somewhere in his kingdom, which was a sin because in the [Treta Yuga](#) only [Brahmanas](#) and [Kshatriyas](#) were expected to do penances. [Vaishyas](#) and [Sudras](#) could attain salvation by doing their duty only. Rama set out in the [Pushpaka Vimana](#) (which [Kubera](#) had given it in gratitude for killing [Ravana](#)) and travelled in North, East and Western directions but Rama did not see any sinful activities. Rama then went out in the southern direction where he found a [Sudra](#), [Sambuka](#), on top of a hill in [sirsana](#) position, who was . Rama asked him his caste and on receiving the reply that he was a [Shudra](#),

beheaded him, establishing Dharma of the Yuga once again. His brothers Bharata and Shatrughna settled in their later lives. Bharata, with the help of his uncle Yudhajita, conquered the eastern land of the Gandharvas and ruled it. Shatrughna slew the Asura Lavana and founded the city of Mathura. Rama acquired a rare gem from Rishi Agastya which entombed the powers of the gods Indra, Varuna, Yama and Kubera, which helped the king rule efficiently. After his reign, Rama and his brothers and his allies peacefully left the earth on the river Sarayu abandoning their mortal bodies. Lava and Kusha ruled Kosala and continued the solar race.

9.8 Maryada Purushottama

As a person, Rama personifies the characteristics of an ideal person (purushottama)^{[31][46]} who is to be emulated. He had within him all the desirable virtues that any individual would seek to aspire, and he fulfils all his moral obligations (maryada). Rama's purity and piety in his intentions and actions inspires affection and devotion for him from a variety of characters from different backgrounds. For example, he gave up his rightful claim to the throne, and agreed to go into exile for fourteen years, to fulfill the vow that his father had given to Kaikeyi, one of King Dashratha's wives. This is in spite of the fact that Kaikeyi's son, Bharat, begged him to return to Ayodhya and said that he did not want to rule in place of Rama. But Rama considered his dharma as a son above that of his own birthright and his life's ambition. For such supreme sacrifices, and many other qualities, Rama is considered a *maryada purushottam* the best of upholders of Dharma, a basically human but exemplary figure^[47] Some of his ideals are as follows:

1. At the time when it was normal for kings to have more than one wife, Rama gave the ideal of having a single wife. After Sita was banished, he was doing penance with a gold statue of Sita. In Balakanda of Valmiki Ramayana it is written that Rama and Sita resided in each other's heart.
2. Rama always followed his promise at any cost. In fact, he went to forest to make his father's promise to Kaikeyi true. Another instance was when, he had promised the Spirit of Time that during their conversation, if anyone was to intrude, Rama would have pronounce an instant death sentence upon the individual. They were intruded upon by his beloved younger brother Lakshmana, and to keep his part of the promise, pronounced the death sentence. There are many examples of Rama's promises which he kept. Most important are the promise to sages to save their lives from Rakshasas, getting back Sugreeva's kingdom, making Vibhishana the king of Lanka.
3. Excellent friend: Rama had very touching relations with his friends irrespective of their status. Some of his friends are Nishada-raj Guha, King of Nishaadas (a caste

അദ്ധ്യാത്മരാമായണം (കിളിപ്പാട്ട്)



തൃഞ്ചൈതൈശ്ചൈതൃപുരീ

Rama, Sita and Lakshman from the Ramayana

whose profession was hunting the birds), Sugreeva (the Vanara king) and Vibhishana a Rakshasa.

4. Even towards his enemies, Rama showed great nobility and virtue. To gather information about the enemy army's strengths and weaknesses, Ravana sent two of his spies, Suka and Sarana, to the Vanara camps. Disguised as Vanaras they blended into the enemy camp, but Vibhishana saw through their deceit. The duo sought Rama's protection when the monkey warriors thrashed them. Rama gave them refuge. He then asked them what their mission was and whether they fulfilled it. After listening to them, he sent for a Vanara to give them a proper tour of all the Vanara camps and give them all the information they desired about the major soldiers and their strengths. He then told the spies to give this message to Ravana. "Tomorrow morning, I will destroy all of Lanka. Keep all sides of your palace well defended and be ready with all of your men by sunrise." The spies were greatly astonished with Rama's charisma, courage, and adherence to the codes of war. After Rama gave them leave, they knew that their king was bound to lose against this virtuous and courageous man. When Ravana first fought with Rama, Rama defeated him to such an extent that Ravana lost his charioteer, horses, chariot, flag, weapons and armor. Though the situation was at his advantage, Rama instead praised Ravana for a great fight that day, and asked him to retire and take rest, as he must be quite

tired. Ravana was greatly embarrassed at this, but he was also gratified that Rama saved his life, and this led him to consider for a moment whether to retreat and give Sita back...

9.9 Companions

Even as Rama is the ideal conception of manhood, he is often aided and complemented in different situations by the characteristics by those who accompany him. They serve Rama devotedly, at great personal risk and sacrifice.

9.9.1 Bharata and Lakshmana

Main articles: Bharata (Ramayana) and Lakshmana

See also: Shatrughna

Absent when Rama is exiled, upon his return Bharata



Rama and Sita worship the Shiva Lingam at Rameswaram, as his companions Vibhishana (right) looks on with Lakshmana, Tumburu and Narada along with the Vanar Sena.

is appalled to learn of the events. And even though Kaikeyi had done all this for his benefit, Bharata is angered at the suggestion that he should take Ayodhya's throne. Denouncing his mother, Bharata proclaims to the city that he would go to the forest to fetch Rama back, and would serve out his term of exile himself. Although initially resentful and suspicious, the people of Ayodhya hail Bharata's selfless nature and courageous act. Despite his fervent pleas to return, Rama asserts that he must stay in the forest to keep his father's word. He orders Bharata



Ramanathaswamy Temple, Rameswaram

to perform his duty as king of Ayodhya, especially important after Dasaratha's death, and orders Shatrughna to support and serve him. Returning saddened to the city, Bharata refuses to wear the crown or sit on the throne. Instead, he places the slippers of Rama that he had taken back with him on the throne, and rules Ayodhya assiduously keeping Rama's beliefs and values in mind. When Rama finally returns, Bharata runs personally to welcome him back.

Bharata is hailed for his devotion to his elder brother and dharma, distinguished from Lakshmana as he is left on his own for fourteen years. But he unfailingly denies self-interest throughout this time, ruling the kingdom only in Rama's name.^[48] Vasishtha proclaims that no one had better learnt dharma than Bharata,^[49] and for this piety he forms an essential part of the conception of perfect manhood, of the Seventh Avatara of Vishnu. Shatrughna's role to Bharata is akin to that of Lakshmana to Rama. Believed to be one-quarter of Vishnu incarnated, or as the incarnation of his eternal companion, Ananta Sesha, Lakshmana is always at Rama's side.^[50] Although unconstrained by Dasaratha's promise to Kaikeyi, Lakshmana resists Rama's arguments and accompanies him and Sita into the forest. During the years of exile, Lakshmana constantly serves Rama and Sita – building huts, standing guard and finding new routes. When Sita is kidnapped, Rama blazes with his divine power and in his immense rage, expresses the desire to destroy all creation. Lakshmana prays and pleads for Rama to calm himself, and despite the shock of the moment and the promise of travails to come, begin an arduous but systematic search for Sita. During times when the search is proving fruitless and Rama fears for Sita, and expresses despair in his grief and loneliness, Lakshmana encourages him, providing hope and solace.

When Rama in his despair fears that Sugriva has forgotten his promise to help him trace Sita, Lakshmana goes to Kishkindha to remind the complacent monarch of his promise to help. Lakshmana twangs the bow inside the hall quaking the entire building and threatens to destroy Sugriva and the monkey kingdom with his own divine power. Lakshmana is unable to tolerate Sugriva breaking his vow to Rama while enjoying material and sensual pleasures while Rama suffers alone. It is only through the diplomatic intervention of Queen Tara, Sugriva's wife, that Lakshmana is pacified. Tara then scolds and galvanises Sugriva into honoring his promise to Rama. Sugriva and Rama are then reconciled with the help of Lakshmana and Tara. Sugriva sends the monkey hoards to find the location of Sita and lead the monkey army into battle against the demonic forces of Ravana.^[51]

Lakshmana is uniquely responsible for slaying Indrajit, the invincible son of Ravana who had humiliated Indra and the devas, and outwitted the brothers and the Vanaras on several occasions. Rishi Agastya later points out that this victory was the turning point of the conflict. Rama is often overcome with emotion and deep affection for Lakshmana, acknowledging how important and crucial Lakshmana's love and support was for him. He also trusts Lakshmana to carry out difficult orders – Lakshmana was asked to take Sita to the ashrama of Valmiki, where she was to spend her exile. Lakshmana's deep love for Rama, his unconditional service and sacrifice, as well as qualities of practical judgment and clear-headedness make him Rama's superior in certain situations and perspectives. Lakshmana symbolizes a man's duty to his family, brothers and friends, and forms an essential part of the conception of ideal manhood, that Rama primarily embodies.

9.9.2 Jatayu, Hanuman and Vibheeshana

Main articles: [Jatayu \(Ramayana\)](#), [Hanuman](#) and [Vibheeshana](#)

When Rama and Lakshmana begin the desperate search



Ravana kidnapping Sita while Jatayu on the left tried to help her. 9th century Prambanan bas-relief, Java, Indonesia

to discover where Sita had been taken, after traversing a distance in many directions, they come across the magical eagle *Jatayu*, who is dying. They discover from *Jatayu* that a rakshasa was flying away with a crying, struggling Sita towards the south. *Jatayu* had flown to the rescue of Sita, but owing to his age and the rakshasa's power, had been defeated. With this, *Jatayu* dies in Rama's arms. Rama is overcome with love and affection for the bird which sacrificed its own life for Sita, and the rage of his death returns to him in the climactic battle with Ravana.

Rama's only allies in the struggle to find Sita are the *Vanaras* of Kishkindha. Finding a terrified *Sugriva* being hunted by his own brother, king *Vali*, Rama promises to kill *Vali* and free *Sugriva* of the terror and the unjust charge of plotting to murder *Vali*. The two swear everlasting friendship over sacred fire. Rama's natural piety and compassion, his sense of justice and duty, as well as his courage despite great personal suffering after Sita's kidnapping inspire devotion from the *Vanaras* and *Sugriva*, but especially *Hanuman*, *Sugriva's* minister. Devoted to Rama, *Hanuman* exerts himself greatly over the search for Sita. He is the first to discover that Sita was taken to Lanka, and volunteers to use his divine gifts in a dangerous reconnaissance of Lanka, where he is to verify Sita's presence. *Hanuman* hands Rama's ring to Sita, as a mark of Rama's love and his imminent intention of rescuing her. Though captured, he candidly delivers Rama's message to Ravana to immediately release Sita, and when his tail is burned, he flies and sets Lanka on fire. When Lakshmana is struck down and near death and Rama overcome with love and concern for his brother, *Hanuman* flies to the *Himalayas* on the urgent mission to fetch the *sanjeevani* medicinal herbs, bringing the entire mountain to Lanka so that no time is lost in saving Lakshmana.^[52] The *Vanaras* fight the rakshasas, completely devoted to Rama's cause. They angrily dismiss Ravana's efforts to create international divisions within their army when he suggested that Rama considered them, monkeys, as mere animals. At the end of the war, Indra restores life to the millions of fallen *Vanaras*.^[53]

Before the onset of war, rakshasa prince *Vibheeshana*, Ravana's youngest brother comes to join Rama. Although he loves his brother and Lanka, he fails in repeated efforts to make Ravana follow religious values and return Sita. *Vibheeshana* believes that Ravana's arrogance and callousness will cause the destruction of Lanka, which is a gross violation of a king's duty, and that Ravana's actions have only propagated evil. *Vibheeshana* refuses to defend the evil of Ravana's ways and inspired by Rama's compassion and piety, leaves Lanka to join the *Vanara Army*.^[54] His knowledge of rakshasa ways and Ravana's mind help Rama and the *Vanaras* overcome black magic and mystical weapons. At the end of the war, Rama crowns *Vibheeshana* as the king of Lanka. *Vibheeshana*, and to a greater extent *Hanuman*, embody the perfect devotee in the wider conception of perfect manhood.

9.10 Rama in war

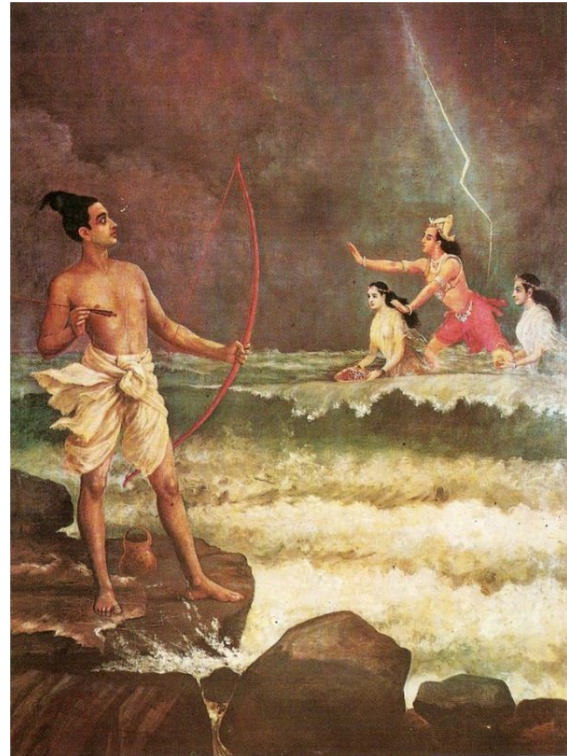


The epic story of Ramayana was adopted by several cultures across Asia. Shown here is a Thai historic artwork depicting the battle which took place between Rama and Ravana.

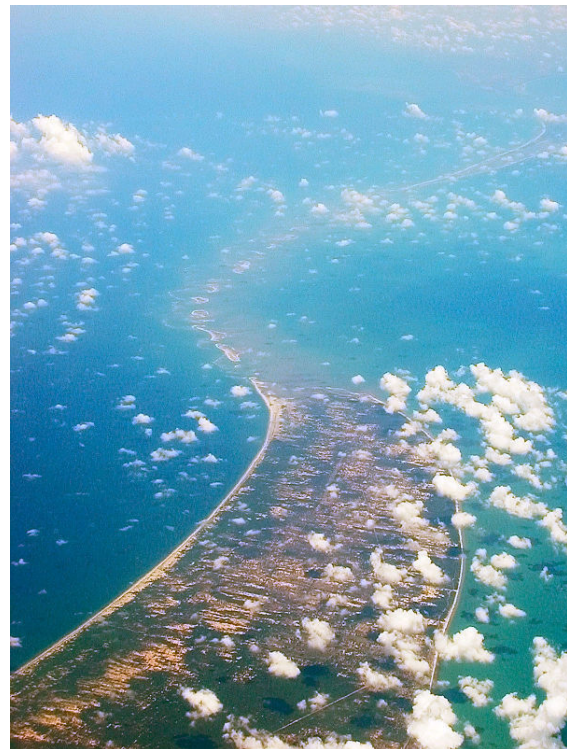
When Rama is thirteen years old, he and his brother Lakshmana are taken by Vishwamitra to the forests, with the purpose of killing rakshasas who are wrecking the tapasya and sacrifices of brahmins. When asked to slay the demoness, Rama demurs, considering it sinful to kill a woman. But Vishwamitra explains that evil has no gender. Rama replies that “My father asked me to follow your orders, I will obey them even if it is a sin”. Rama proceeds to slay Tadaka, a cursed yaksha demoness. The killing of Tadaka liberates the yaksha soul who was cursed for a sin, and had to adopt a rakshasi’s body. It restores the purity of the sacrifices of the brahmins who live nearby, and protects the animals who live in the forest, and travelers. Rama and Lakshmana are taught the advanced military arts and given the knowledge of all celestial weapons by Vishwamitra. The main purpose of Vishwamitra’s excursion is to conduct his yagna without interruption from two evil demons, Maricha and Subahu sons of Tadaka. Rama and Lakshmana guard the sacrifice, and when the two demons appear, Rama shoots an arrow named Manava Astra that carries Maricha across the lands and into the ocean, but does not kill him. Rama and his brother then proceed to kill Subahu and accompanying demons. Rama explains to Lakshmana that leaving Maricha alive was an act of compassion, but the others did not heed the point and chose to attack.^[55] During the forest exile, sages plead for protection and help against evil rakshasas who spoil their sacrifices and religious activities and terrorize them. Many rakshasas had even killed and eaten sages and innocent people. At Janasthana, Rama uses his exceptional prowess to single-handedly kill over fourteen thousand demon hordes led by the powerful Khara, who is a cousin of Ravana and Dushana.

9.10.1 Varuna

Faced with the dilemma of how to cross the ocean, Rama performs a penance tapasya, fasting and meditat-



Raja Ravi Varma Painting – ‘Rama Conquers Varuna’



Rama Setu (Adam’s) bridge as seen from the air, Rameshwaram, Tamilnadu, India

ing in perfect dhyana for three days and three nights to Samudra, the Lord of Oceans. The ocean god does not respond, and Rama on the fourth morning, pointed the Brahmastra towards the ocean. The Vanaras are daz-

zled and fearful at witnessing the enraged Rama demolish the oceans, and Lakshmana prays to calm Rama's mind. Just as Rama invokes the Brahmastra, considered the most powerful weapon capable of destroying all creation, Varuna arises out of the oceans. He bows to Rama, and begs for pardon. Since Rama had to use the weapon, he suggests Rama re-direct the weapon at a demonic race that lives in the heart of the ocean. Rama's arrows destroys the demons, and establishes a purer, liberated environment there. Varuna promises that he would keep the oceans still for all of Rama's army to pass, and Nala constructs a bridge (Rama's Bridge) across to Lanka. Rama justifies his angry assault on the oceans as he followed the correct process of petitioning and worshipping Varuna, but obtaining the result by force for the greater good.^[56]

The bridge today is known as Rama Setu, which supposedly has its existence between India and Sri Lanka, originates from Rameshwaram, Tamilnadu, India.

9.10.2 Facing Ravana

Main article: [Ravana](#)

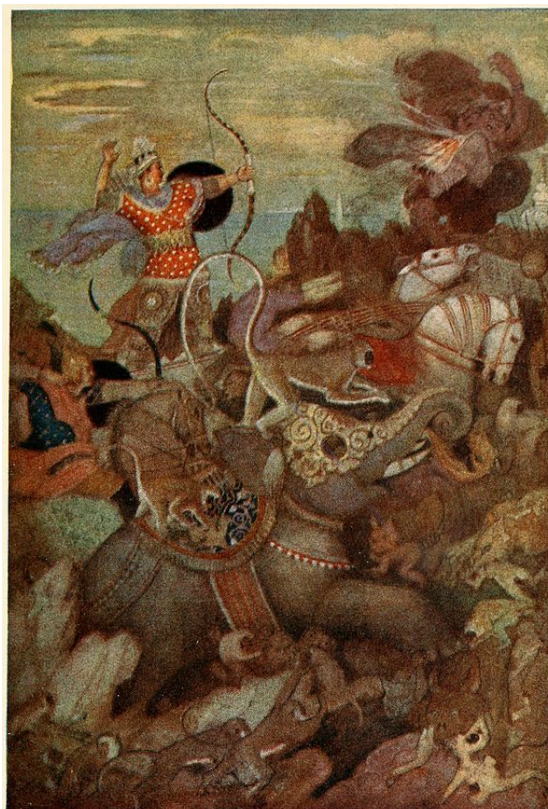
Rama asserted his dedication to dharma when he offered



Ravana, Demon King of Lanka

Ravana a final chance to make peace, by immediately returning Sita and apologizing, despite his heinous actions and patronage of evil, but Ravana refused. In the war, Rama slayed the most powerful rakshasa commanders, including Atikaya, Ravana's brother, Kumbhakarna along

with hundreds of thousands of rakshasa soldiers. He defeated Ravana in their first battle, destroying his chariot and weapons, and severely injuring him, but he allowed Ravana to live and return to fight another day. But since he was playing the part of a human being, Rama also proved "vulnerable" on occasion to his enemies. He was put to a deep sleep along with Lakshmana by the *nagapash* of Indrajit (though this is attributed by Vaishnavas to his Rama-lila or divine play, as he is to purposefully lose consciousness from the nagapash so that his devotees could engage in the divine task of serving him), but they recovered when Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu and enemy of serpents appear.

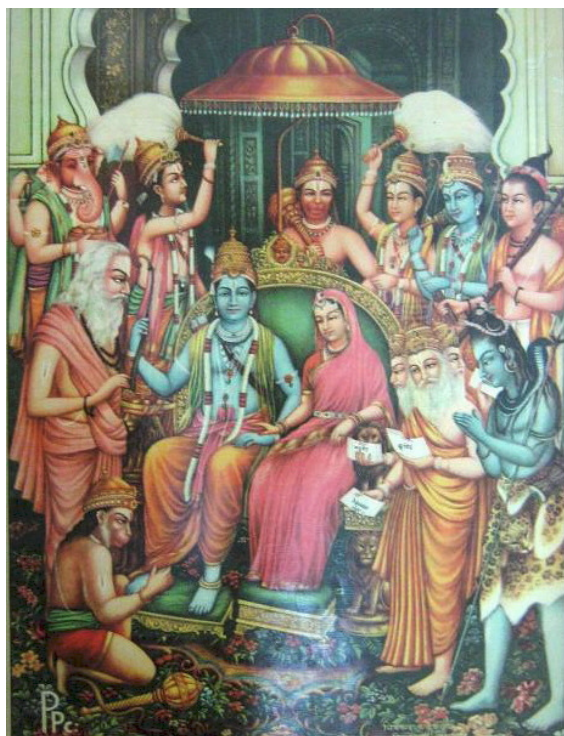


Rama launched at his foe a fearsome a bolt

In the grand finale of the battle, Rama engaged Ravana, who through the devastation of losing his sons, his brothers and friends and millions of his warriors, aroused his magical powers and made full use of the boons of Siva and Brahma, and the magical knowledge of warfare possessed by the greatest of rakshasas. Rama and Ravana competed fiercely, inflicting severe injuries on one another with powerful weapons capable of destroying the universe. After a long and arduous battle, Rama successfully decapitated Ravana's central head, but an ugly head, symbolic of all of Ravana's evil powers arose in its place. After another long battle, Rama decapitated it again, only to find another growing in its place. This cycle continues, and as darkness approached, Ravana's magical powers increased in force. Mathali, Indra's charioteer who had been sent by Indra after being counselled by the wit-

nessing Rishis, Danavas and Devas; seeing this then told Rama that Ravana had obtained amrita, the nectar of immortality, from the gods. Though he could not consume it, he nevertheless stored a vessel of it in his stomach. This amrit was causing his heads to regenerate as soon as they were cut off. Upon the advice of Agastya, Rama worshiped Lord Aditya, the Sun, with the famous *Aditya Hridayam* prayer and then invoked Brahmastra. Rama fired an arrow into Ravana's chest/stomach and evaporated the store of amrit, finally killing him. However it is stated in the Ramayana that Ravana called for Rama as he was shot and as a result, was immediately dispatched to Heaven.^[57] Following Ravana's death, Rama expressed deep compassion. After investing Vibheeshana as the next king of Lanka, he asked the new king and the surviving rakshasas to properly cremate their dead king, despite his patronage of evil.^[58]

9.10.3 Rama Rajya



Coronation of Rama with Sita (center on the throne), surrounded by his brothers and other deities including Hanuman (bottom left)

The end of the war coincides with the end of Rama's tenure of exile. Flying home on the *Pushpaka Vimana*, Rama returns to a joyous Ayodhya. His mothers, brothers and the people joyously welcome him. The next day, Rama is invested as the King of Ayodhya, and Emperor of the World. Although he first asks Lakshmana to become the *yuvaraja*, upon the rejection of Lakshmana he invests the position to Bharata, who has had fourteen years of experience as the ruler of Ayodhya. Rama performs the holy *Ashwamedha* sacrifice, puri-

fying and establishing dharma across earth.^[59] Rama's birthday is celebrated as Rama Navami (On Chaitra Shukla Navami, *Punarvasu* Nakshatra fourth Pada) as Rama Born On that Day. **Rama Navami** is also the Same Day as the Day Of Killing Demon **Ravana** and Successfully Returning Victorious Rama to Ayodhya With **Sita**, Lakshmana, Hanuma, Sugriva, Jambavantha, Angadha etc., from Completing his Exile Period and then Rama's **Coronation**(Saamraajya Pattabhisekham) Ceremony took Place on the Following Day or very Next Day when returned from Exile On Chaitra Shukla Dasami, *Pushya* Constellation (Chaitra Shukla Dasami, *Pushyami* Constellation, the same Muhurtha kept for Rama's Coronation which is given by Dasaratha and Vasista before Rama's **14 years of Exile, Padhuka Pattabhisekham** [happened before Rama completing his exile time] done by Rama's brother Bharatha, when then *Ayodhya* is ruled by his Padhuka or Rama shoes till the end of 14 years exile time period of Rama returning Ayodhya) which is on Darmaraja Dasami day after Rama Navami day, Lord Rama and his virtues besides, his popular regime '**Rama Raajyam**' to mark **DharmaRaja Dashami** as part of Sri RamaNavami as 'Ramo Vighrahan Dharmah' Which Means Rama is The Embodiment Of Dharma Or Dharma has taken a form of Ramachandrah, It is the Happiest and Unforgettable Day to Every Hindu.

Beyond the *Ramayana*, the eleven thousand years of Rama's rule over the earth represent to millions of modern Indians a time and age when God as a man ruled the world. There was perfect justice and freedom, peace and prosperity. There were no natural disasters, diseases, ailments or ill-fortune of any nature on any living being. There were no sins committed in the world by any of his people. Always attentive and accessible to his people, Rama is worshipped and hailed by all – the very symbol of moksha, the ultimate goal and destination of all life, and the best example of perfect character and human conduct, inspiring human beings for countless succeeding ages.

Rama like other Indian kings went undercover every night to hear the pleas of his subjects and have a common man's perspective of his rule. During Rama's tenure as King, the people apparently had no locks on their doors as they feared no burglaries or other such misfortunes.

9.11 International influence

Rama remains immensely revered and inspirational figure to people across the Indian subcontinent and South East Asia, as well as increasingly across Western civilization, where the Hindu epics and values are gaining recognition and popularity. In Jainism, Rama is enumerated among the nine "Baladeva". Hundreds of towns and villages are named after Rama.^{[60][61]}

Rama is a great hero to the adherents of Agama Hindu Dharma and to the Muslims who practice Abangan, a syn-



Rama (Yama) and Sita (Thida) in *Yama Zatdaw*, the Burmese version of the *Ramayana*

cretic form of Islam and Hinduism, in Indonesia. He is revered by the people throughout Indochina who otherwise adhere to different forms of Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. His regal bearing and fighting prowess is emulated in various Indian martial arts which in turn influenced various Southeast Asian fighting systems such as silat. The *Rama Leela* is performed across South East Asia in numerous local languages and the story has been the subject of art, architecture, music, folk dance and sculpture. The ancient city of Ayutthaya stands in Thailand, as the tribute of an ancient Thai kingdom to the great legend. Many ancient and medieval era kings of India and South East Asia have adopted *Rama* as their name.

Reviewers linked the imagery of the blue-skinned Na'vi in James Cameron's film *Avatar* to Rama as one of their possible conceptual prototypes.^{[62][63][64]}

9.12 Festivals

Main article: Rama Navami

See also: List of Hindu festivals

Rama's day and time of birth,^[65] as well as marriage to Sita are celebrated by Hindus across the world as *Rama*

Navami. It falls on the ninth day of a Hindu lunar year, or *Chaitra Masa Suklapaksha Navami*. This day is observed as the marriage day of Rama and Sita as well as the birthday of Rama. People normally perform *Kalyanotsavam* (*marriage celebration*) for small statues of Rama and Sita in their houses and at the end of the day the idols are taken in a procession on the streets. This day also marks the end of nine-day utsavam called *Vasanthotsavam* (*Festival of Spring*), that starts with *Ugadi*. Some highlights of this day are:



A Home shrine with images of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman, on Sri Rama Navami

1. *Kalyanam* (Ceremonial wedding performed by temple priests) at Bhadrachalam on the banks of the river Godavari in Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh.
2. *Panakam*, a sweet drink prepared on this day with jaggery and pepper.
3. Procession of idols in the evening that is accompanied with play of water and colours.
4. For the occasion, Hindus are supposed to fast (or restrict themselves to a specific diet).
5. Temples are decorated and readings of the *Ramayana* take place. Along with Rama, people also pray to Sita, Lakshmana and Hanumana.

The occasion of victory over Ravana and the rakshasas is celebrated as the 10-day *Vijayadashami*, also known as *Dussehra*. The *Rama Leela* is publicly performed in many villages, towns and cities in India. Rama's return to Ayodhya and his coronation are celebrated as *Diwali*, also known as the *Festival of Lights*. The latter two are the most important and popular festivals in India and for Hindus across the world. In Malaysia, *Diwali* is known as *Hari Deepavali*, and is celebrated during the seventh month of the Hindu solar calendar. It is a federal public holiday. In many respects it resembles the traditions followed in the Indian subcontinent. In Nepal, *Diwali* is known as *Tihar* and celebrated during the October/November period. Here, though the festival is celebrated for five days, the traditions vary from those followed in India. On the first day, cows are worshipped and



Vijayadashami celebrations

given offerings. On the second day, dogs are revered and offered special food. On the third day, celebrations follow the same pattern as in India, with lights and lamps and much social activity. On the fourth day Yama, the Lord of Death, is worshipped and appeased. On the fifth and final day, brothers sisters meet and exchange pleasantries. In Guyana, Diwali is marked as a special occasion and celebrated with a lot of fanfare. It is observed as a national holiday in this part of the world and some ministers of the Government also take part in the celebrations publicly.

9.13 Temples



Ram, Sita, Lakshman, Hanuman, at Vallipuram Temple, Sri Lanka

- Ram Janmabhoomi , Ayodhya
- Kalaram Temple, Nashik
- Raghunath Temple, Jammu

- Ram Mandir, Bhubaneswar
- Kodandarama Temple, Chikmagalur
- Kothandarama Temple, Thillaivilagam
- Kothandaramaswamy Temple, Rameswaram
- Odogeon Raghunath Temple, Odisha
- Ramchaura Mandir, Bihar
- Sri Rama Temple, Ramapuram
- Bhadrachalam Temple, Telangana

9.14 In Jainism

Main article: Rama in Jainism

Rama, Lakshmana and Ravana forms one of the nine set of Baladeva, Vasudeva and Prativasudeva whose stories forms a basis of Jain universal history.^{[66][67]} Rama is described as a pious layman in Jain scriptures. Jain scriptures tells different version of Ramayana than Valmiki's version. According to this version, Lakshmana (Vasudeva) is the one who kills Ravana (Prativasudeva). Rama (Baladeva) is described as a non-violent person who attains moksha. Lakshmana and Ravana, on the other hand, goes to hell on account of their violence & will attain moksha in their next birth. Ravan will take birth as tirthankara of next era.

9.15 See also

- Genealogy of Rama
- Nama sankeerthanam
- Ram Nam
- Ramayana

9.16 Notes

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9.18 External links

- Rama at DMOZ

Chapter 10

Krishna

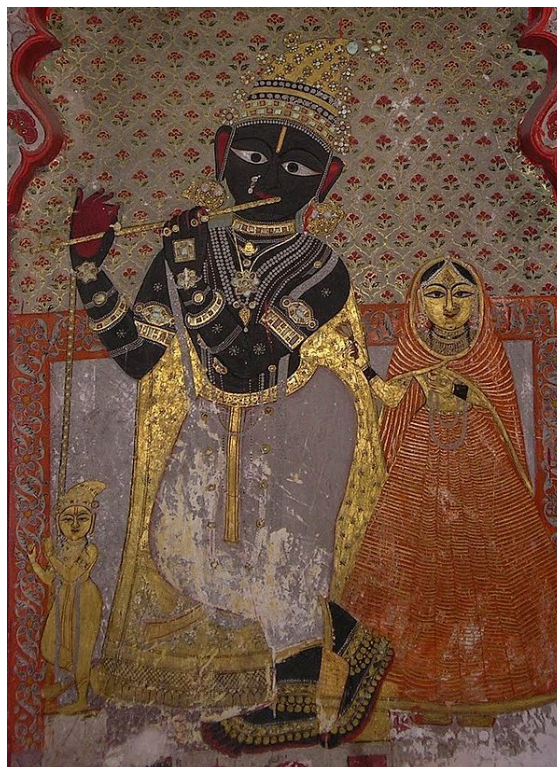
“Vāsudeva” redirects here. For the father of Lord Krishna, see Vasudeva. For Vaishnavism, see Krishna Vasudeva.

This article is about the Hindu deity. For other uses, see Krishna (disambiguation).

Krishna (Sanskrit: कृष्ण, *Kṛṣṇa* in IAST, pronounced [ˈkr̩ʂɳə] [ⓘ]), meaning “black” or “dark”) is a deity, worshipped across many traditions of Hinduism in a variety of different perspectives. While many Vaishnava groups recognize him as an avatar of the god, Vishnu; some traditions within Krishnaism, consider Krishna to be *svayam bhagavan*, or the Supreme Being.

Krishna is often described and portrayed as an infant or young boy playing a flute as in the *Bhagavata Purana*,^[1] or as a youthful prince giving direction and guidance as in the *Bhagavad Gita*.^[2] The stories of Krishna appear across a broad spectrum of Hindu philosophical and theological traditions.^[3] They portray him in various perspectives: a god-child, a prankster, a model lover, a divine hero, and the Supreme Being.^[4] The principal scriptures discussing Krishna’s story are the *Mahabharata*, the *Harivamsa*, the *Bhagavata Purana*, and the *Vishnu Purana*. He is also called as Govinda & Gopala.

Krishna’s disappearance marks the end of Dvapara Yuga and the start of Kali Yuga (present age), which is dated to February 17/18, 3102 BCE.^[5] Worship of the deity Krishna, either in the form of deity Krishna, either in the form of Vasudeva, Bala Krishna or Gopala can be traced to as early as 4th century BC.^{[6][7]} Worship of Krishna as *svayam bhagavan*, or the supreme being, known as Krishnaism, arose in the Middle Ages in the context of the Bhakti movement. From the 10th century AD, Krishna became a favourite subject in performing arts and regional traditions of devotion developed for forms of Krishna such as Jagannatha in Odisha, Vithoba in Maharashtra and Shrinathji in Rajasthan. Since the 1960s the worship of Krishna has also spread in the West, largely due to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.^[8]



14th-century Fresco of Krishna on interior wall City Palace, Udaipur

10.1 Names and epithets

Main article: List of titles and names of Krishna

The Sanskrit word in its origin language *Kṛṣṇa* is primarily an adjective meaning “black” or “dark”,^[9] sometimes it is also translated as “all attractive”, according to members of the Hare Krishna movement.^[10]

As a name of Vishnu, Krishna listed as the 57th Name in the *Vishnu Sahasranama*. Based on His Name, Krishna is often depicted in murtis as black or blue-skinned. Krishna is also known by various other names, epithets and titles, which reflect His many associations and attributes. Among the most common Names are *Mohan* “enchanter”, *Govinda*, “Finder of the cows”, or *Gopala*, “Protector of the cows”, which refer to Krishna’s Child-

hood in Braj (in present day Uttar Pradesh).^{[11][12]} Some of the distinct names may be regionally important; for instance, *Jagannatha*, a popular Incarnation of Puri, Odisha in eastern India.^[13]

10.2 Iconography



Krishna with cows, herdsmen and Gopis, Pahari painting [Himalayan] from Smithsonian Institution

Krishna is easily recognized by his representations. Though his skin colour may be depicted as black or dark in some representations, particularly in murtis, in other images such as modern pictorial representations, Krishna is usually shown with blue skin. He is often shown wearing a yellow silk dhoti and a peacock feather crown. Common depictions show him as a little boy, or as a young man in a characteristically relaxed pose, playing the flute.^{[14][15]} In this form, he usually stands with one leg bent in front of the other with a flute raised to his lips, in the *Tribhanga* posture, accompanied by cows, emphasizing his position as the divine herdsman, *Govinda*, or with the *gopis* (milkmaids) i.e. *Gopikrishna*, stealing butter from neighbouring houses i.e. *Navneet Chora* or *Gokulakrishna*, defeating the vicious serpent i.e. *Kaliya Damana Krishna*, lifting the hill i.e. *Giridhara Krishna* ..so on and so forth from his childhood / youth events.

A steatite (soapstone) tablet unearthed from Mohenjodaro, Larkana district, Sindh depicting a young boy uprooting two trees from which are emerging two human figures is an interesting archaeological find for fixing dates associated with Krishna. This image recalls the Yamalarjuna episode of *Bhagavata* and *Harivamsa Purana*. In this image, the young boy is undoubtedly Krishna, and the two human beings emerging from the trees are the two cursed *gandharvas*, identified as *Nalakubara* and *Manigriva*. Dr. E.J.H. Mackay, who did the excavation at Mohenjodaro, compares this image with the Yamalarjuna episode. Prof. V.S. Agrawal has also accepted this

identification. Thus, it seems that the Indus valley people knew stories related to Krishna. This lone find may not establish Krishna as contemporary with Pre-Indus or Indus times, but, likewise, it cannot be ignored.^{[16][17]}



Bala Krishna dancing, 8th CE Chola sculpture, Tamil Nadu, from National Museum, New Delhi.

The scene on the battlefield of the epic *Mahabharata*, notably where he addresses Pandava prince Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, is another common subject for representation. In these depictions, he is shown as a man, often with supreme God characteristics of Hindu religious art, such as multiple arms or heads, denoting power, and with attributes of Vishnu, such as the *chakra* or in his two-armed form as a charioteer. Cave paintings dated to 800 BCE in Mirzapur, Mirzapur district, Uttar Pradesh, show raiding horse-charioteers, one of whom is about to hurl a wheel, and who could potentially be identified as Krishna.^[18]

Representations in temples often show Krishna as a man standing in an upright, formal pose. He may be alone, or with associated figures:^[19] his brother *Balarama* and sister *Subhadra*, or his main queens *Rukmini* and *Satyabhama*.

Often, Krishna is pictured with his *gopi*-consort *Radha*. Manipuri Vaishnavas do not worship Krishna alone, but as *Radha Krishna*,^[20] a combined image of Krishna and *Radha*. This is also a characteristic of the schools *Rudra*^[21] and *Nimbarka sampradaya*,^[22] as well as that of *Swaminarayan* sect. The traditions celebrate *Radha Ramana murti*, who is viewed by *Gaudiyas* as a form of *Radha Krishna*.^[23]

Krishna is also depicted and worshipped as a small child (*Bala Krishna*, *Bāla Kṛṣṇa* the child Krishna), crawling on his hands and knees or dancing, often with butter or *Laddu* in his hand being *Laddu Gopal*.^{[24][25]} Regional variations in the iconography of Krishna are seen in his different forms, such as *Jaganatha* of Odisha, *Vithoba* of

Maharashtra,^[26] Venkateswara (also Srinivasa or Balaji) in Andhra Pradesh, and Shrinathji in Rajasthan.

10.3 Literary sources

See also: Krishna in the Mahabharata

The earliest text to explicitly provide detailed descrip-



Yashoda bathing the child Krishna

tions of Krishna as a personality is the epic Mahabharata which depicts Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu.^[27] Krishna is central to many of the main stories of the epic. The eighteen chapters of the sixth book (*Bhishma Parva*) of the epic that constitute the *Bhagavad Gita* contain the advice of Krishna to the warrior-hero Arjuna, on the battlefield. Krishna is already an adult in the epic, although there are allusions to his earlier exploits. The *Harivamsa*, a later appendix to this epic, contains the earliest detailed version of Krishna's childhood and youth.

The *Rig Veda* 1.22.164 sukta 31 mentions a herdsman "who never stumbles".^[28] Some Vaishnavite scholars, such as Bhaktivinoda Thakura, claim that this herdsman refers to Krishna.^[29] Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar also attempted to show that "the very same Krishna" made an appearance, e.g. as the *drapsa ... krishna* "black drop" of RV 8.96.13.^[30] Some authors have also likened prehistoric depictions of deities to Krishna.

Chandogya Upanishad (3.17.6) composed around 900 BCE^[31] mentions Vasudeva Krishna

as the son of Devaki and the disciple of Ghora Angirasa, the seer who preached his disciple the philosophy of 'Chhandogya.' Having been influenced by the philosophy of 'Chhandogya' Krishna in the Bhagavadgita while delivering the discourse to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra discussed about sacrifice, which can be compared to purusha or the individual.

[32][33][34][35]

Yaska's *Nirukta*, an etymological dictionary around 6th century BC, contains a reference to the Shyamantaka jewel in the possession of Akrua, a motif from well

known Puranic story about Krishna.^[36] Shatapatha Brahmana and *Aitareya-Aranyaka*, associate Krishna with his Vrishni origins.^[37]

Pāṇini, the ancient grammarian and author of *Asthadhyayi* (probably belonged to 5th century or 6th century BC) mentions a character called Vāsudeva, son of Vasudeva, and also mentions Kaurava and Arjuna which testifies to Vasudeva Krishna, Arjuna and Kauravas being contemporaries.^{[32][38][39]}

Megasthenes (350 – 290 BC) a Greek ethnographer and an ambassador of Seleucus I to the court of Chandragupta Maurya made reference to Herakles in his famous work *Indica*. Many scholars have suggested that the deity identified as Herakles was Krishna. According to Arrian, Diodorus, and Strabo, Megasthenes described an Indian tribe called Sourasenoi, who especially worshipped Herakles in their land, and this land had two cities, Methora and Kleisobora, and a navigable river, the Jobares. As was common in the ancient period, the Greeks sometimes described foreign gods in terms of their own divinities, and there is a little doubt that the Sourasenoi refers to the Shurasenas, a branch of the Yadu dynasty to which Krishna belonged; Herakles to Krishna, or Hari-Krishna: Methora to Mathura, where Krishna was born; Kleisobora to Krishnapura, meaning "the city of Krishna"; and the Jobares to the Yamuna, the famous river in the Krishna story. Quintus Curtius also mentions that when Alexander the Great confronted Porus, Porus's soldiers were carrying an image of Herakles in their vanguard.^[40]

The name Krishna occurs in Buddhist writings in the form Kāṇha, phonetically equivalent to Krishna.^[41]

The Ghata-Jātaka (No. 454) gives an account of Krishna's childhood and subsequent exploits which in many points corresponds with the Brahmanic legends of his life and contains several familiar incidents and names, such as Vāsudeva, Baladeva, Kaṃsa. Yet it presents many peculiarities and is either an independent version or a misrepresentation of a popular story that had wandered far from its home. Jain tradition also shows that these tales were popular and were worked up into different forms, for the Jains have an elaborate system of ancient patriarchs which includes Vāsudevas and Baladevas. Krishna is the ninth of the Black Vāsudevas and is connected with Dvāravatī or Dvārakā. He will become the twelfth tīrthankara of the next world-period and a similar position will be attained by Devakī, Rohinī, Baladeva and Javakumāra, all members of his family. This is a striking proof of the popularity of the Krishna legend outside the Brahmanic religion.^[42]

According to *Arthashastra* of Kautilya (4th century BCE) *Vāsudeva* was worshiped as supreme Deity in a strongly monotheistic format.^[38]

Around 150 BC, Patanjali in his *Mahabhashya* quotes a verse: "May the might of Krishna accompanied by Samkarshana increase!" Other verses are mentioned. One verse speaks of "Janardhana with himself as fourth"

(Krishna with three companions, the three possibly being Samkarshana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha). Another verse mentions musical instruments being played at meetings in the temples of Rama (Balarama) and Keshava (Krishna). Patanjali also describes dramatic and mimetic performances (Krishna-Kamsopacharam) representing the killing of Kamsa by Vasudeva.^[43]

In the 1st century BC, there seems to be evidence for a worship of five Vrishni heroes (Balarama, Krishna, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Samba) for an inscription has been found at Mora near Mathura, which apparently mentions a son of the great *satrap* Rajuvula, probably the *satrap* Sodasa, and an image of Vrishni, “probably Vasudeva, and of the “Five Warriors”.^[44] Brahmi inscription on the Mora stone slab, now in the Mathura Museum.^{[45][46]}

Many Puranas tell Krishna’s life-story or some highlights from it. Two Puranas, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana*, that contain the most elaborate telling of Krishna’s story and teachings are the most theologically venerated by the Vaishnava schools.^[47] Roughly one quarter of the *Bhagavata Purana* is spent extolling his life and philosophy.

Bhagavad gita and many other puranas considers that Krishna is source of all the vedas. In Bhagvad Gita 15.15, Lord Krishna tells follows

I am seated in everyone’s heart, and from Me come remembrance, knowledge and forgetfulness. By all the Vedas, I am to be known. Indeed, I am the compiler of Vedānta, and I am the knower of the Vedas.

Also in Srimad bhagvatam 11.21.43, Krishna tells:

I am the ritualistic sacrifice enjoined by the Vedas, and I am the worshipable Deity. It is I who am presented as various philosophical hypotheses, and it is I alone who am then refuted by philosophical analysis. The transcendental sound vibration thus establishes Me as the essential meaning of all Vedic knowledge. The Vedas, elaborately analyzing all material duality as nothing but My illusory potency, ultimately completely negate this duality and achieve their own satisfaction.

[48]

10.4 Life

This summary is based on details from the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivamsa*, the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana*. The scenes from the narrative are set in north India, mostly in the present states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat.

10.4.1 Birth



Krishna Carried Across the River Yamuna



Krishna Foster Mother Yashoda with the Infant Krishna. Chola period Early 12th century, Tamil Nadu, India.

Krishna was born to Devaki and her husband, Vasudeva,^{[49][50]} When Mother Earth became upset about all the sin been going on Earth, she thought of seeking help from Lord Vishnu. She went in the form of a cow to visit Lord Vishnu and ask for help. Lord Vishnu agreed to help her and promised her that he would be born on Earth. On Earth in the Yadava clan, a prince named Kansa sent his father Ugrasena (King of Mathura) to prison and became the King himself. One day a loud voice from the sky (Akash Vani in Hindi) prophesied that the 8th son of Kansa’s sister (Devaki) would kill Kansa. Thus, Kansa sent his sister and her husband (Vasudeva) to prison. Lord Vishnu himself later appeared to Devaki and Vasudeva and told them that he himself would be their eighth son and kill Kansa and destroy sin in the world. In the story of Krishna the deity is the agent of conception and also the offspring. Because of his sympathy for the earth, the divine Vishnu himself descended into the womb of Devaki and was born as her son, Vasudeva (i.e., Krishna). This is occasionally brought up as evidence for the hypothesis that “virgin birth” tales are fairly common in non-Christian religions

around the world.^{[51][52][53]} However, there is nothing in Hindu scriptures to suggest that it was a “virgin” birth. By the time of conception and birth of Krishna, Devaki was married to Vasudeva and had already borne 7 children.^[54] Virgin birth in this case should be more accurately understood as divine conception. Kunti the mother of the Pandavas referenced contemporaneously with the story of Krishna in the Mahabharata also has divine conception and virgin birth of Prince Karna.

The Hindu Vishnu Purana relates: “Devaki bore in her womb the lotus-eyed deity...before the birth of Krishna, no one could bear to gaze upon Devaki, from the light that invested her, and those who contemplated her radiance felt their minds disturbed.” This reference to light is reminiscent of the Vedic hymn “To an Unknown Divine,” which refers to a Golden Child. According to F. M. Müller, this term means “the golden gem of child” and is an attempt at naming the sun. According to the Vishnu Purana Krishna is the total incarnation of Lord Vishnu. It clearly describes in the Vishnu Purana that Krishna was born on earth to destroy sin, especially Kansa.

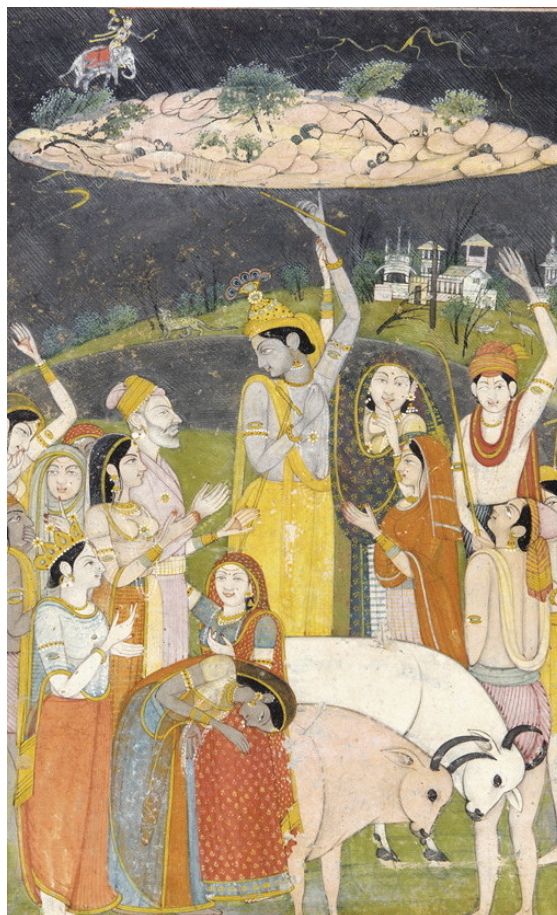
Krishna belonged to the Vrishni clan of Yadavas from Mathura,^[55] and was the eighth son born to the princess Devaki, and her husband Vasudeva.

Mathura (in present day Mathura district, Uttar Pradesh) was the capital of the Yadavas, to which Krishna’s parents Vasudeva and Devaki belonged. King Kansa, Devaki’s brother,^[56] had ascended the throne by imprisoning his father, King Ugrasena. Afraid of a prophecy from a divine voice from the heavens that predicted his death at the hands of Devaki’s eighth “garbha”, Kansa had the couple locked in a prison cell. After Kansa killed the first six children, Devaki apparently had a miscarriage of the seventh. However, in reality, the womb was actually transferred to Rohini secretly. This was how Balarama, Krishna’s elder brother, was born. Once again Devaki became pregnant. Now due to the miscarriage, Kansa was in a puzzle regarding ‘The Eighth One’, but his ministers advised that the divine voice from the heavens emphasised “the eight garbha” and so this is the one. That night Krishna was born in the Rohini nakshatra and simultaneously the goddess Durga was born as Yogamaya in Gokulam to Nanda and Yashoda.

Since Vasudeva knew Krishna’s life was in danger, Krishna was secretly taken out of the prison cell to be raised by his foster parents, Yasoda^[57] and Nanda, in Gokula (in present day Mathura district). Two of his other siblings also survived, Balarama (Devaki’s seventh child, transferred to the womb of Rohini, Vasudeva’s first wife) and Subhadra (daughter of Vasudeva and Rohini, born much later than Balarama and Krishna).^[58]

10.4.2 Childhood and youth

Nanda was the head of a community of cow-herders, and he settled in Vrindavana. The stories of Krishna’s child-



Krishna holding Govardhan hill as depicted in Pahari painting

hood and youth tell how he became a cow herder,^[59] his mischievous pranks as *Makhan Chor* (butter thief), his foiling of attempts to take his life, and his role as a protector of the people of Vrindavana.

Krishna killed the demoness Putana, disguised as a wet nurse, and the tornado demon Trinavarta both sent by Kansa for Krishna’s life. He tamed the serpent Kāliyā, who previously poisoned the waters of Yamuna river, thus leading to the death of the cowherds. In Hindu art, Krishna is often depicted dancing on the multi-hooded Kāliyā.

Krishna lifted the Govardhana hill and taught Indra, the king of the devas, a lesson to protect native people of Brindavana from persecution by Indra and prevent the devastation of the pasture land of Govardhan. Indra had too much pride and was angry when Krishna advised the people of Brindavana to take care of their animals and their environment that provide them with all their necessities, instead of worshipping Indra annually by spending their resources.^{[60][61]} In the view of some, the spiritual movement started by Krishna had something in it which went against the orthodox forms of worship of the Vedic gods such as Indra.^[62] In Bhagavat Purana, Krishna says that the rain came from the nearby hill Govardhana, and advised that the people worshiped the hill instead of In-

dra. This made Indra furious, so he punished them by sending out a great storm. Krishna then lifted Govardhan and held it over the people like an umbrella.

The stories of his play with the *gopis* (milkmaids) of Brindavana, especially *Radha* (daughter of Vrishbhanu, one of the original residents of Brindavan) became known as the *Rasa lila* and were romanticised in the poetry of Jayadeva, author of the *Gita Govinda*. These became important as part of the development of the Krishna *bhakti* traditions worshipping *Radha Krishna*.^[63]

Krishna's childhood reinforces the Hindu concept of *lila*, playing for fun and enjoyment and not for sport or gain. His interaction with the *gopis* at the *rasa* dance or *Rasa-lila* is a great example of this. Krishna played his flute and the *gopis* came immediately from whatever they were doing, to the banks of the *Yamuna River*, and joined him in singing and dancing. Even those who could not physically be there joined him through meditation.^[64] The story of Krishna's battle with *Kāliyā* also supports this idea in the sense of him dancing on *Kāliyā*'s many hoods. Even though he is doing battle with the serpent, he is in no real danger and treats it like a game. He is a protector, but he only appears to be a young boy having fun.^[65] This idea of having a playful god is very important in Hinduism. The playfulness of Krishna has inspired many celebrations like the *Rasa-lila* and the *Janmashtami*: where they make human pyramids to break open *handis* (clay pots) hung high in the air that spill buttermilk all over the group after being broken by the person at the top. This is meant to be a fun celebration and it gives the participants a sense of unity. Many believe that *lila* being connected with Krishna gives Hindus a deeper connection to him and thus a deeper connection to Vishnu also; seeing as Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu. Theologians, like Kristin Johnston Lergen, believe that Krishna's childhood can even inspire other religions to look for *lila* in deities so that they have a chance to experience a part of their faith that they may not have previously seen.^[66]

10.4.3 The prince

On his return to Mathura as a young man, Krishna overthrew and killed his maternal uncle, *Kansa*, after quelling several assassination attempts from *Kansa*'s followers. He reinstated *Kansa*'s father, *Ugrasena*, as the king of the *Yadavas* and became a leading prince at the court.^[68] During this period, he became a friend of *Arjuna* and the other *Pandava* princes of the *Kuru* kingdom, who were his cousins. Later, he took his *Yadava* subjects to the city of *Dwaraka* (in modern *Gujarat*) and established his own kingdom there.^[69]

Krishna married *Rukmini*, the *Vidarbha* princess, by abducting her, at her request, from her proposed wedding with *Shishupala*. He married eight queens—collectively called the *Ashthabharya*—including *Rukmini*, *Satyabhama*, *Jambavati*, *Kalindi*, *Mitravinda*, *Nagnajiti*,



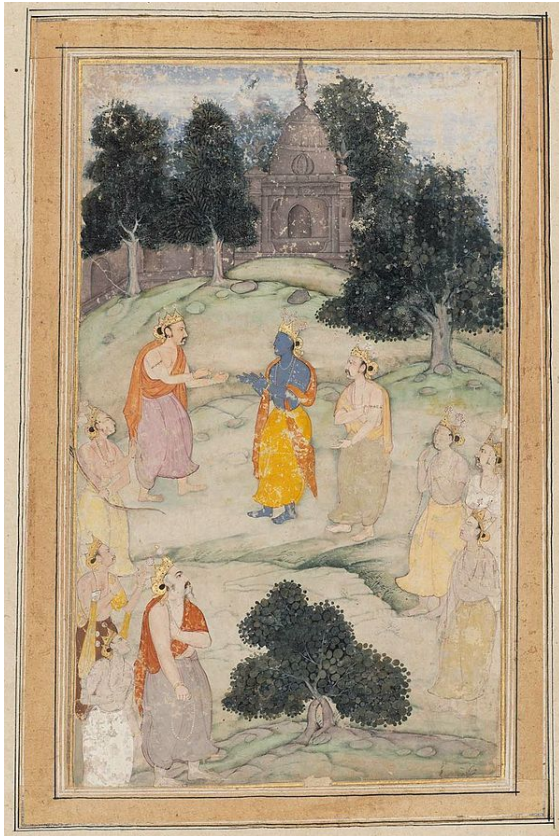
Krishna with his two principal queens. (From left) Rukmini, Krishna, Satyabhama and his vahana Garuda. Tamil Nadu, India, late 12th-13th century Sculpture.^[67]

Bhadra and *Lakshmana*.^{[70][71]} Krishna subsequently married 16,000 or 16,100 maidens who were held captive by the demon *Narakasura*, to save their honour.^{[72][73]} Krishna killed the demon and released them all. According to social custom of the time, all of the captive women were degraded, and would be unable to marry, as they had been under the *Narakasura*'s control. However Krishna married them to reinstate their status in the society. This symbolic wedding with 16,100 abandoned daughters was more of a mass women rehabilitation.^[74] In *Vaishnava* traditions, Krishna's wives are forms of the goddess *Lakshmi*—consort of *Vishnu*, or special souls who attained this qualification after many lifetimes of austerity, while his two queens, *Rukmani* and *Satyabhama*, are expansions of *Lakshmi*.^[75]

When *Yudhisthira* was assuming the title of emperor, he had invited all the great kings to the ceremony and while paying his respects to them, he started with Krishna because he considered Krishna to be the greatest of them all. While it was a unanimous feeling amongst most present at the ceremony that Krishna should get the first honours, his cousin *Shishupala* felt otherwise and started berating Krishna. Due to a vow given to *Shishupala*'s mother, Krishna forgave a hundred verbal abuses by *Shishupala*, and upon the one hundred and first, he assumed his *Virat* (universal) form and killed *Shishupala* with his *Chakra*. The blind king *Dhritarashtra* also obtained divine vision during this time to be able to see this form of Krishna. Essentially, *Shishupala* and *Dantavakra* were both re-incarnations of *Vishnu*'s gate-keepers *Jaya* and *Vijaya*, who were cursed to be born on Earth, to be delivered by the *Vishnu* back to *Vaikuntha*.^[76]

10.4.4 Kurukshetra War and Bhagavad Gita

Main articles: *Kurukshetra War* and *Bhagavad Gita*
Once battle seemed inevitable, Krishna offered both sides



Krishna Mediating between the Pandavas and Kauravas

the opportunity to choose between having either his army called *narayani sena* or himself alone, but on the condition that he personally would not raise any weapon. Arjuna, on behalf of the Pandavas, chose to have Krishna on their side, and Duryodhana, Kaurava prince, chose Krishna's army. At the time of the great battle, Krishna acted as Arjuna's charioteer, since this position did not require the wielding of weapons.

Upon arrival at the battlefield, and seeing that the enemies are his family, his grandfather, his cousins and loved ones, Arjuna is moved and says his heart does not allow him to fight and he would rather prefer to renounce the kingdom and put down his *Gandiv* (Arjuna's bow). Krishna then advises him about the battle, with the conversation soon extending into a discourse which was later compiled as the *Bhagavad Gita*.^[77]

Krishna asked Arjuna, "Have you within no time, forgotten the Kauravas' evil deeds such as not accepting the eldest brother Yudhishtira as King, usurping the entire Kingdom without yielding any portion to the Pandavas, meting out insults and difficulties to Pandavas, attempt to murder the Pandavas in the Barnava lac guest house, publicly disrobing and disgracing Draupadi. Krishna further exhorted in his famous Bhagavad Gita, "Arjuna, do not engage in philosophical analyses at this point of time like a Pundit. You are aware that Duryodhana and Karna particularly have long harboured jealousy and hatred for you



Krishna displays his Vishvarupa (Universal Form) to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Pandavas and badly want to prove their hegemony. You are aware that Bhishmacharya and your Teachers are tied down to their dharma of protecting the unitarian power of the Kuru throne. Moreover, you Arjuna, are only a mortal appointee to carry out my divine will, since the Kauravas are destined to die either way, due to their heap of sins. Open your eyes O Bhaarata and know that I encompass the Karta, Karma and Kriya, all in myself. There is no scope for contemplation now or remorse later, it is indeed time for war and the world will remember your might and immense powers for time to come. So rise O Arjuna!, tighten up your Gandiva and let all directions shiver till their farthest horizons, by the reverberation of its string."



Krishna in Balinese Wayang form

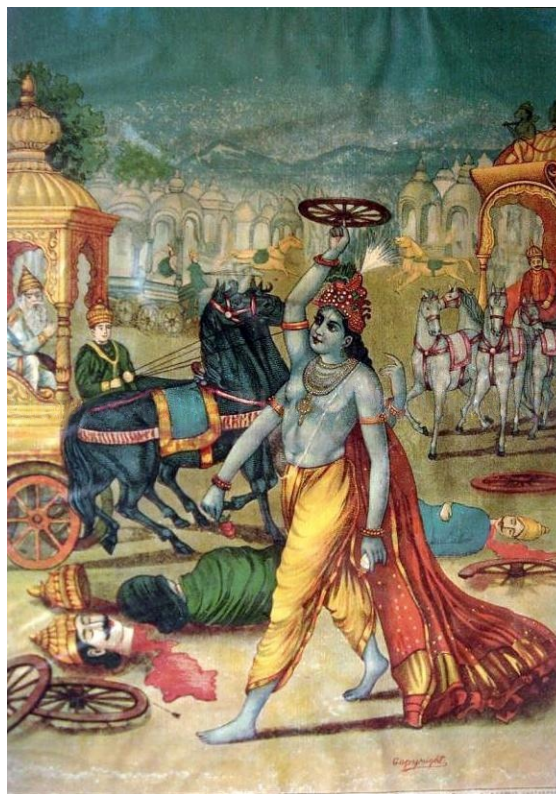
Krishna had a profound effect on the Mahabharata war and its consequences. He had considered the Kurukshetra war to be a last resort after voluntarily acting as a messenger in order to establish peace between the Pandavas

and Kauravas. But, once these peace negotiations failed and was embarked into the war, then he became a clever strategist. During the war, upon becoming angry with Arjuna for not fighting in true spirit against his ancestors, Krishna once picked up a carriage wheel in order to use it as a weapon to challenge Bhishma. Upon seeing this, Bhishma dropped his weapons and asked Krishna to kill him. However, Arjuna apologized to Krishna, promising that he would fight with full dedication here/after, and the battle continued. Krishna had directed Yudhishthira and Arjuna to return to Bhishma the boon of “victory” which he had given to Yudhishthira before the war commenced, since he himself was standing in their way to victory. Bhishma understood the message and told them the means through which he would drop his weapons—which was if a woman entered the battlefield. Next day, upon Krishna’s directions, Shikhandi (Amba reborn) accompanied Arjuna to the battlefield and thus, Bhishma laid down his arms. This was a decisive moment in the war because Bhishma was the chief commander of the Kaurava army and the most formidable warrior on the battlefield. Krishna aided Arjuna in killing Jayadratha, who had held the other four Pandava brothers at bay while Arjuna’s son Abhimanyu entered Drona’s Chakravyuha formation—an effort in which he was killed by the simultaneous attack of eight Kaurava warriors. Krishna also caused the downfall of Drona, when he signalled Bhima to kill an elephant called Ashwatthama, the namesake of Drona’s son. Pandavas started shouting that Ashwatthama was dead but Drona refused to believe them saying he would believe it only if he heard it from Yudhishthira. Krishna knew that Yudhishthira would never tell a lie, so he devised a clever ploy so that Yudhishthira wouldn’t lie and at the same time Drona would be convinced of his son’s death. On asked by Drona, Yudhishthira proclaimed

*Ashwathama Hatahath, naro va Kunjaro
va*

i.e. Ashwathama had died but he was nor sure whether it was a Drona’s son or an elephant. But as soon as Yudhishthira had uttered the first line, Pandava army on Krishna’s direction broke into celebration with drums and conchs, in the din of which Drona could not hear the second part of the Yudhishthira’s declaration and assumed that his son indeed was dead. Overcome with grief he laid down his arms, and on Krishna’s instruction Dhrishtadyumna beheaded Drona.

When Arjuna was fighting Karna, the latter’s chariot’s wheels sank into the ground. While Karna was trying to take out the chariot from the grip of the Earth, Krishna reminded Arjuna how Karna and the other Kauravas had broken all rules of battle while simultaneously attacking and killing Abhimanyu, and he convinced Arjuna to do the same in revenge in order to kill Karna. During the final stage of the war, when Duryodhana was going to meet his mother Gandhari for taking her blessings which would convert all parts of his body on which



Krishna breaks his vow

her sight falls to diamond, Krishna tricks him to wearing banana leaves to hide his groin. When Duryodhana meets Gandhari, her vision and blessings fall on his entire body except his groin and thighs, and she becomes unhappy about it because she was not able to convert his entire body to diamond. When Duryodhana was in a mace-fight with Bhima, Bhima’s blows had no effect on Duryodhana. Upon this, Krishna reminded Bhima of his vow to kill Duryodhana by hitting him on the thigh, and Bhima did the same to win the war despite it being against the rules of mace-fight (since Duryodhana had himself broken Dharma in all his past acts). Thus, Krishna’s unparalleled strategy helped the Pandavas win the Mahabharata war by bringing the downfall of all the chief Kaurava warriors, without lifting any weapon. He also brought back to life Arjuna’s grandson Parikshit, who had been attacked by a Brahmastra weapon from Ashwatthama while he was in his mother’s womb. Parikshit became the Pandavas’ successor.

10.4.5 Family

Main articles: Ashtabharya and Junior wives of Krishna
Krishna had eight princely wives, also known as Ashtabharya: Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati, Nagnajiti, Kalindi, Mitravinda, Bhadra, Lakshmana) and the other 16,100 or 16,000 (number varies in scriptures) were rescued from Narakasura. They had been forcibly kept in his palace and after Krishna had killed Narakasura he



Krishna with his two principal queens. (From left) Rukmini, Krishna, Satyawama and his mount Garuda.

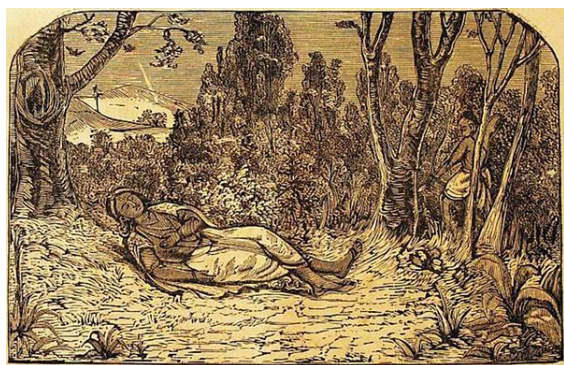
rescued these women and freed them. Krishna married them all to save them from destruction and infamy. He gave them shelter in his new palace and a respectful place in society. The chief amongst them is sometimes called Rohini.

The *Bhagavata Purana*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Harivamsa* list the children of Krishna from the Ashtabharya with some variation; while Rohini's sons are interpreted to represent the unnumbered children of his junior wives. Most well-known among his sons are Pradyumna, the eldest son of Krishna (and Rukmini) and Samba, the son of Jambavati, whose actions led to the destruction of Krishna's clan.

10.4.6 Later life

Main article: [Mausala Parva](#)

According to Mahabharata, the Kurukshetra war resulted



The hunter Jara about to shoot arrow towards Krishna.

in the death of all 100 sons of Gandhari. On the night before Duryodhana's death, Lord Krishna visited Gandhari to offer his condolences. Gandhari felt that Krishna knowingly did not put an end to the war, and in a fit of rage and sorrow, Gandhari cursed that Krishna, along with everyone else from Yadu dynasty, would perish after 36 years. Krishna himself knew and wanted this to happen as he felt that the Yadavas had become very haughty

and arrogant (*adharmi*), so he ended Gandhari's speech by saying "*tathastu*" (so be it).^{[78][79][80]}

After 36 years passed, a fight broke out between the Yadavas, at a festival, who killed each other. His elder brother, Balarama, then gave up his body using Yoga. Krishna retired into the forest and started meditating under a tree. The Mahabharata also narrates the story of a hunter who kills Krishna. The hunter Jara, mistook Krishna's partly visible left foot for that of a deer, and shot an arrow, wounding and killing him mortally. After he realised the mistake, Krishna told Jara, "O Jara, you were **Vali** in your previous birth, killed by myself as **Rama** in **Tretayuga**. Here you had a chance to even it and since all acts in this world are done as desired by me, you need not worry for this". Then Krishna, with his physical body^[81] ascended back to his eternal abode, Goloka vrindavan.^{[82][83][84]} The news was conveyed to Hastinapur and Dwaraka by eyewitnesses to this event.^[85]

According to Puranic sources,^[86] Krishna's disappearance marks the end of Dvapara Yuga and the start of Kali Yuga, which is dated to February 17/18, 3102 BCE.^[87] Vaishnava teachers such as Ramanujacharya and Gaudiya Vaishnavas held the view that the body of Krishna is completely spiritual and never decays (Achyuta) as this appears to be the perspective of the *Bhagavata Purana*. Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (an incarnation of Lord Sri Krishna according to the *Bhavisya Purana*) exhorted, "Krishna Naama Sankirtan" i.e. the constant chanting of the Krishna's name is the supreme healer in Kali Yuga. It destroys sins and purifies the hearts through Bhakti ensures universal peace.

Krishna never appears to grow old or age at all in the historical depictions of the *Puranas* despite passing of several decades, but there are grounds for a debate whether this indicates that he has no material body, since battles and other descriptions of the Mahabharata epic show clear indications that he seems to be subject to the limitations of nature.^[88] While battles apparently seem to indicate limitations, Mahabharata also shows in many places where Krishna is not subject to any limitations as through episodes Duryodhana trying to arrest Krishna where his body burst into fire showing all creation within him.^[89] Krishna is also explicitly described as without deterioration elsewhere.^[90]

10.5 Worship

10.5.1 Vaishnavism

Main article: [Vaishnavism](#)

The worship of Krishna is part of *Vaishnavism*, which regards Vishnu as the Supreme God and venerates His associated avatars, their consorts, and related saints and teachers. Krishna is especially looked upon as a full manifestation of Vishnu, and as one with Vishnu himself.^[91] How-



Rasa Lila in Manipuri dance style.

ever the exact relationship between Krishna and Vishnu is complex and diverse,^[92] where Krishna is sometimes considered an independent deity, supreme in his own right.^[93] Out of many deities, Krishna is particularly important, and traditions of Vaishnava lines are generally centered either on Vishnu or on Krishna, as supreme. The term Krishnaism has been used to describe the sects of Krishna, reserving the term “Vaishnavism” for sects focusing on Vishnu in which Krishna is an avatar, rather than as a transcendent Supreme Being.^[94]

All Vaishnava traditions recognise Krishna as an avatar of Vishnu; others identify Krishna with Vishnu; while traditions, such as Gaudiya Vaishnavism,^{[95][96]} Vallabha Sampradaya and the Nimbarka Sampradaya, regard Krishna as the *svayam bhagavan*, original form of God.^{[97][98][99][100][101]} Swaminarayan, the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya also worshipped Krishna as God himself. “Greater Krishnaism” corresponds to the second and dominant phase of Vaishnavism, revolving around the cults of the Vasudeva, Krishna, and Gopala of late Vedic period.^[102] Today the faith has a significant following outside of India as well.^[103]

10.5.2 Early traditions



An image of Bala Krishna displayed during Janmashtami celebrations at a Swaminarayan Temple in London

The deity Krishna-Vasudeva (*kr̥ṣṇa vāsudeva* “Krishna,

the son of Vasudeva”) is historically one of the earliest forms of worship in Krishnaism and Vaishnavism.^{[6][36]} It is believed to be a significant tradition of the early history of the worship of Krishna in antiquity.^{[7][104]} This tradition is considered as earliest to other traditions that led to amalgamation at a later stage of the historical development. Other traditions are Bhagavatism and the cult of Gopala, that along with the cult of Bala Krishna form the basis of current tradition of monotheistic religion of Krishna.^{[105][106]} Some early scholars would equate it with Bhagavatism,^[7] and the founder of this religious tradition is believed to be Krishna, who is the son of Vasudeva, thus his name is *Vāsudeva*; he is said to be historically part of the Satvata tribe, and according to them his followers called themselves Bhagavatas and this religion had formed by the 2nd century BC (the time of Patanjali), or as early as the 4th century BC according to evidence in Megasthenes and in the Arthashastra of Kautilya, when *Vāsudeva* was worshiped as supreme deity in a strongly monotheistic format, where the supreme being was perfect, eternal and full of grace.^[7] In many sources outside of the cult, the devotee or *bhakta* is defined as *Vāsudevaka*.^[107] The *Harivamsa* describes intricate relationships between Krishna Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha that would later form a Vaishnava concept of primary quadrupled expansion, or *avatar*.^[108]

10.5.3 Bhakti tradition

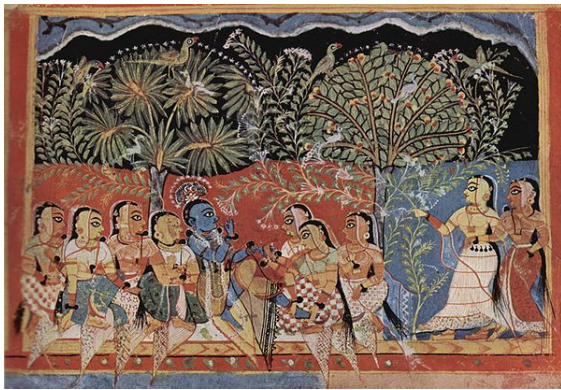
Main article: Bhakti yoga

Bhakti, meaning devotion, is not confined to any one deity. However Krishna is an important and popular focus of the devotional and ecstatic aspects of Hindu religion, particularly among the Vaishnava sects.^{[95][109]} Devotees of Krishna subscribe to the concept of *lila*, meaning 'divine play', as the central principle of the Universe. The *lilas* of Krishna, with their expressions of personal love that transcend the boundaries of formal reverence, serve as a counterpoint to the actions of another avatar of Vishnu: Rama, “He of the straight and narrow path of *maryada*, or rules and regulations.”^[96]

The bhakti movements devoted to Krishna became prominent in southern India in the 7th to 9th centuries AD. The earliest works included those of the Alvar saints of the Tamil country.^[110] A major collection of their works is the *Divya Prabandham*. The Alvar Andal's popular collection of songs Tiruppavai, in which she conceives of herself as a *gopi*, is the most famous of the oldest works in this genre.^{[111][112][113]} Kulasekaraazhvaar's Mukundamala was another notable work of this early stage.

10.5.4 Spread of the Krishna-bhakti movement

The movement, which started in the 6th-7th century A.D. in the Tamil-speaking region of South India, with twelve Alvar (one immersed in God) saint-poets, who wrote devotional songs. The religion of Alvar poets, which included a woman poet, Andal, was devotion to God through love (bhakti), and in the ecstasy of such devotions they sang hundreds of songs which embodied both depth of feeling and felicity of expressions. The movement originated in South India during the seventh-century CE, spreading northwards from Tamil Nadu through Karnataka and Maharashtra; by the fifteenth century, it was established in Bengal and northern India^[114]



Gita Govinda by Jayadeva.

While the learned sections of the society well versed in Sanskrit could enjoy works like *Gita Govinda* or Bilvamangala's *Krishna-Karnamritam*, the masses sang the songs of the devotee-poets, who composed in the regional languages of India. These songs expressing intense personal devotion were written by devotees from all walks of life. The songs of Meera and Surdas became epitomes of Krishna-devotion in north India.

These devotee-poets, like the Alvars before them, were aligned to specific theological schools only loosely, if at all. But by the 11th century AD, Vaishnava Bhakti schools with elaborate theological frameworks around the worship of Krishna were established in north India. Nimbarka (11th century AD), Vallabhacharya (15th century AD) and (Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu an incarnation of Lord Sri Krishna according to the Bhavishya Purana) (16th century AD) all inspired by the teachings of Madhvacharya (11th century AD) were the founders of the most influential schools. These schools, namely Nimbarka Sampradaya, Vallabha Sampradaya and Gaudiya Vaishnavism respectively, see Krishna as the supreme God, rather than an avatar, as generally seen.

In the Deccan, particularly in Maharashtra, saint poets of the Varkari sect such as Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, Janabai, Eknath and Tukaram promoted the worship of Vithoba,^[26] a local form of Krishna, from the begin-



Krishna (left) with the flute with gopi-consort Radha, Bhaktivedanta Manor, Watford, England

ning of the 13th century until the late 18th century.^[4] In southern India, Purandara Dasa and Kanakadasa of Karnataka composed songs devoted to the Krishna image of Udupi. Rupa Goswami of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, has compiled a comprehensive summary of bhakti named *Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu*.^[109]

10.5.5 In the West

In 1965, the Krishna-bhakti movement had spread outside India when its founder, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, (who was instructed by his guru, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura) traveled from his homeland in West Bengal to New York City. A year later in 1966, after gaining many followers, he was able to form the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement. The purpose of this movement was to write about Krishna in English and to share the Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy with people in the Western world by spreading the teachings of the saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In an effort to gain attention, followers chanted the names of God in public locations. This chanting was known as hari-nama sankirtana and helped spread the teaching. Additionally, the practice of distributing prasad or "sanctified food" worked as a catalyst in the dissemination of his works. In the Hare Krishna movement, Prasada was a vegetarian dish that would be first offered to Krishna. The food's proximity to Krishna added a "spiritual effect," and



Butter eating Krishna, Tanjore painting



A Kathakali performer as Krishna

was seen to “counteract material contamination affecting the soul.” Sharing this sanctified food with the public, in turn, enabled the movement to gain new recruits and further spread these teachings.^{[8][115][116]}

10.5.6 In South India

In South India, Vaishnavas usually belong to the Sri Sampradaya. The acharyas of the Sri Sampradaya have written reverentially about Krishna in most of their works like the *Thiruppavai* by Andal^[117] and *Gopala Vimshati* by Vedanta Desika.^[118] In South India, devotion to Krishna, as an avatar of Vishnu, spread in the face of opposition to Buddhism, Shaktism, and Shaivism and ritualistic Vedic sacrifices. The acharyas of the Sri Sampradaya like Manavala Mamunigal, Vedanta Desika strongly advocated surrender to Vishnu as the aim of the Vedas. Out of 108 Divya Desams there are 97 Divya Desams in South India.

10.6 In the performing arts

While discussing the origin of Indian theatre, Horwitz talks about the mention of the Krishna story in Patanjali's *Mahabhashya* (c. 150 BC), where the episodes of slaying of Kamsa (Kamsa Vadha) and “Binding of the heaven storming titan” (Bali Bandha) are described.^[119] Bhasa's *Balacharitam* and *Dutavakyam* (c. 400 BC) are the only Sanskrit plays centered on Krishna written by a major

classical dramatist. The former dwells only on his childhood exploits and the latter is a one-act play based on a single episode from the *Mahābhārata* when Krishna tries to make peace between the warring cousins.^[120]

From the 10th century AD, with the growing bhakti movement, Krishna became a favorite subject of the arts. The songs of the *Gita Govinda* became popular across India, and had many imitations. The songs composed by the Bhakti poets added to the repository of both folk and classical singing.

The classical Indian dances, especially Odissi and Manipuri, draw heavily on the story. The 'Rasa lila' dances performed in Vrindavan shares elements with Kathak, and the *Krisnattam*, with some cycles, such as *Krisnattam*, traditionally restricted to the Guruvayur temple, the precursor of Kathakali.^[121]

The Sattriya dance, founded by the Assamese Vaishnava saint Sankardeva, extols the virtues of Krishna. Medieval Maharashtra gave birth to a form of storytelling known as the *Hari-Katha*, that told Vaishnava tales and teachings through music, dance, and narrative sequences, and the story of Krishna one of them. This tradition spread to Tamil Nadu and other southern states, and is now popular in many places throughout India.

Narayana Tirtha's (17th century AD) *Krishna-Lila-Tarangini* provided material for the musical plays of the *Bhagavata-Mela* by telling the tale of Krishna from birth

until his marriage to Rukmini. Tyagaraja (18th century AD) wrote a similar piece about Krishna called *Nauka-Charitam*. The narratives of Krishna from the Puranas are performed in *Yakshagana*, a performance style native to Karnataka's coastal districts. Many movies in all Indian languages have been made based on these stories. These are of varying quality and usually add various songs, melodrama, and special effects.

10.7 In other religions

10.7.1 Jainism

Further information: [Salakapurusa](#)

The most exalted figures in Jainism are the twenty-four Tirthankaras. Krishna, when he was incorporated into the Jain list of heroic figures, presented a problem with his activities which are not pacifist. The concept of Baladeva, Vasudeva and Prati-Vasudeva was used to solve it. The Jain list of sixty-three Shalakupurshas or notable figures includes, amongst others, the twenty-four Tirthankaras and nine sets of this triad. One of these triads is Krishna as the Vasudeva, Balarama as the Baladeva and Jarasandha as the Prati-Vasudeva. He was a cousin of the twenty-second Tirthankara, Nemina. The stories of these triads can be found in the *Harivamsha* of Jinasena (not to be confused with its namesake, the addendum to *Mahābhārata*) and the *Trishashthi-shalakapurusha-charita* of Hemachandra.^[122]

In each age of the Jain cyclic time is born a Vasudeva with an elder brother termed the Baladeva. The villain is the Prati-vasudeva. Baladeva is the upholder of the Jain principle of non-violence. However, Vasudeva has to forsake this principle to kill the Prati-Vasudeva and save the world.^{[123][124]}

10.7.2 Buddhism

The story of Krishna occurs in the *Jataka* tales in Buddhism,^[125] in the Vaibhav *Jataka* as a prince and legendary conqueror and king of India.^[126] In the Buddhist version, Krishna is called *Vasudeva*, *Kanha* and *Keshava*, and Balarama is his older brother, Baladeva. These details resemble that of the story given in the *Bhagavata Purana*. Vasudeva, along with his nine other brothers (each son a powerful wrestler) and one elder sister (Anjana) capture all of Jambudvipa (many consider this to be India) after beheading their evil uncle, King Kansa, and later all other kings of Jambudvipa with his Sudarshana Chakra. Much of the story involving the defeat of Kansa follows the story given in the *Bhagavata Purana*.^[127]

As depicted in the *Mahābhārata*, all of the sons are eventually killed due to a curse of sage Kanhadipayana (Veda



Depiction of Krishna playing flute in the temple constructed in AD 752 on the order of Emperor Shomu; Todai-ji Temple, Great Buddha Hall in Nara, Japan

Vyasa, also known as Krishna Dwaipayana). Krishna himself is eventually speared by a hunter in the foot by mistake, leaving the sole survivor of their family being their sister, Anjanadevi of whom no further mention is made.^[128]

Since *Jataka* tales are given from the perspective of Buddha's previous lives (as well as the previous lives of many of Buddha's followers), Krishna appears as the "Dhammasenapati" or "Chief General of the Dharma" and is usually shown being Buddha's "right hand man" in Buddhist art and iconography.^[129] The *Bodhisattva*, is born in this tale as one of his youngest brothers named Ghatapandita, and saves Krishna from the grief of losing his son.^[126] The 'divine boy' Krishna as an embodiment of wisdom and endearing prankster forms a part of the pantheon of gods in Japanese Buddhism.^[130]

10.7.3 Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'ís believe that Krishna was a "Manifestation of God", or one in a line of prophets who have revealed the Word of God progressively for a gradually maturing humanity. In this way, Krishna shares an exalted station with Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Muhammad, Jesus, the Báb, and the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh.^{[131][132]}

10.7.4 Ahmadiyya Islam

Members of the Ahmadiyya Community believe Krishna to be a great prophet of God as described by their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. This belief is maintained by the Qur'anic Principle that God has sent prophets and messengers to every nation of the world leaving no region without divine guidance (see for instance Quran 10:47 and Quran 16:36). There is also a saying reportedly of the Islamic prophet Muhammad which says^[133]

There was a prophet of God in India who was dark in colour and his name was *Kanha*.

Ghulam Ahmad also claimed to be the likeness of Krishna as a latter day reviver of religion and morality whose mission was to reconcile man with God.^[134] Ahmadis maintain that the Sanskrit term *Avatar* is synonymous with the term 'prophet' of the Middle Eastern religious tradition as God's intervention with man; as God appoints a man as his vicegerent upon earth. In *Lecture Sialkot*, Ghulam Ahmed wrote:

Let it be clear that Raja Krishna, according to what has been revealed to me, was such a truly great man that it is hard to find his like among the Rishis and Avatars of the Hindus. He was an Avatar—i.e., Prophet—of his time upon whom the Holy Spirit would descend from God. He was from God, victorious and prosperous. He cleansed the land of the Aryas from sin and was in fact the Prophet of his age whose teaching was later corrupted in numerous ways. He was full of love for God, a friend of virtue and an enemy of evil.^[134]

Krishna is also called Murli Dhar. The flute of Krishna means the flute of revelation and not the physical flute. Krishna lived like humans and he was a prophet.^{[135][136]}

10.7.5 Other

Krishna worship or reverence has been adopted by several new religious movements since the 19th century, and he is sometimes a member of an eclectic pantheon in occult texts, along with Greek, Buddhist, biblical and even historical figures.^[137] For instance, Édouard Schuré, an influential figure in perennial philosophy and occult movements, considered Krishna a *Great Initiate*; while Theosophists regard Krishna as an incarnation of Maitreya (one of the Masters of the Ancient Wisdom), the most important spiritual teacher for humanity along with Buddha.^{[138][139]}

Krishna was canonized by Aleister Crowley and is recognized as a saint in the Gnostic Mass of Ordo Templi Orientis.^{[140][141]}

10.8 See also

- Pradyumna
- Aniruddha
- Vajra (King Aniruddha's Son)
- Dashavatara
- Chaubis Avtar

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10.11 External links

- Vedic Archeology (A Vaishnava Perspective) (gosai.com)
- Article on the chronology of Krishna (time-sofindia.indiatimes.com)

Chapter 11

Gautama Buddha in Hinduism



Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu.

The Buddha is viewed as an avatar of the god Vishnu in Vaishnava Hinduism although the Buddha himself denied that he was a god or an incarnation of a god.^[1] Buddha's teachings deny the authority of the Vedas^[2] and consequently Buddhism is generally viewed as a *nāstika* (heterodox school)^[3] from the perspective of orthodox Hinduism.

11.1 In the Puranas

The Buddha is described in important Hindu scriptures, including almost all the major Puranas. It is considered that 'not all of them refer to the same person: some of them refer to other persons, and some occurrences of "buddha" simply mean "a person possessing *buddhi*"; most of them, however, refer specifically to the founder of Buddhism.^[4] They portray him with two roles: preach-

ing Atheistic Vedic views in order to restore Dharma, and criticizing animal sacrifice.^[5] A partial list of major Puranic references of the Buddha is as follows:

- Harivamsha (1.41)
- Vishnu Purana (3.18)
- Bhagavata Purana (1.3.24, 2.7.37, 11.4.23)^[2]
- Garuda Purana (1.1, 2.30.37, 3.15.26)^[6]
- Agni Purana (16)
- Narada Purana (2.72)
- Linga Purana (2.71)
- Padma Purana (3.252) etc. (Dhere Ramchandra Chintaman)^[7]

In the Puranic texts, he is mentioned as one of the ten Avatars of Vishnu, usually as the ninth one.

Another important scriptures that mentions him as an Avatar is Rishi Parashara's *Brihat Parashara Hora Shashtra* (2:1-5/7).

He is often described as a *yogi* or *yogācārya*, and as a *sannyāsi*. His father is usually called Śuddhodhana, which is consistent with the Buddhist tradition, while in a few places the Buddha's father is named Añjana or Jina. He is described as beautiful (*devasundara-rūpa*), of yellow skin, and wearing brown-red or red robes.^[8]

Only a few statements mention the worship of Buddha, e.g. the Varahapurana states that one desirous of beauty should worship him.^[9]

In some of the Puranas, he is described as having taken birth to "mislead the demons":

mohanārthaṃ dānavānāṃ bālarūpī pathi-
sthitaḥ | putraṃ taṃ kalpayām āsa mūḍha-
buddhir jinaḥ svayam ||

tataḥ saṃmohayām āsa jinādyaṅ
asurāṃśakān | bhagavān vāgbhir ugrābhir
ahiṃsā-vācibhir hariḥ ||

—Brahmanda Purana, Bhāgavatatātparyā
by Madhva, 1.3.28

Translation: *To delude the demons, he [Lord Buddha] stood on the path in the form of a child. The foolish Jina (a demon), imagined him to be his son. Thus the lord Sri Hari [as avatara-buddha] expertly deluded Jina and other demons by his strong words of non-violence.*

In the Bhagavata Purana, Buddha is said to have taken birth to restore the *devas* to power:

tataḥ kalau sampravṛtte sammohāya sura-
dviṣām ।

buddho nāmnāñjana-sutaḥ kīkaṭeṣu
bhaviṣyati ॥

—srimad-bhagavatam , 1.3.24

Translation: *Then, in the beginning of Kali-yuga, for the purpose of confusing the enemies of the devas, [he] will become the son of Anjana, Buddha by name, in the Kīkaṭas.*^[2]

In many Puranas, the Buddha is described as an incarnation of Vishnu who incarnated in order to bring either demons or mankind close to the Vedic dharma. The Bhavishya Purana contains the following:

At this time, reminded of the Kali Age, the god Vishnu became born as Gautama, the Shakyamuni, and taught the Buddhist dharma for ten years. Then Shuddodana ruled for twenty years, and Shakyasimha for twenty. At the first stage of the Kali Age, the path of the Vedas was destroyed and all men became Buddhists. Those who sought refuge with Vishnu were deluded.^[10]

11.2 In Hinduism

11.2.1 As an avatara of Vishnu

In 8th-century royal circles, the Buddha started to be replaced by Hindu gods in pujas.^[11] This also was the same period of time the Buddha was made into an avatar of Vishnu.^[12]

In the Dasavatara stotra section of his Gita Govinda, the influential Vaishnava poet Jayadeva (13th century) includes the Buddha amongst the ten principal avatars of Vishnu and writes a prayer regarding him as follows:

O Keshava! O Lord of the universe! O Lord Hari, who have assumed the form of Buddha! All glories to You! O Buddha of



Buddha as an Avatara at Dwaraka Tirumala Temple Walls (A painted cement Relief)



Buddha as an Avatara at Tharasuram Airavatesvara Temple

compassionate heart, you decry the slaughtering of poor animals performed according to the rules of Vedic sacrifice.
—^[13]

This viewpoint of the Buddha as the avatar who primarily promoted non-violence (ahimsa) remains a popular belief amongst a number of modern Vaishnava organisations, including ISKCON.^[14]

Additionally, there is the Vaishnava sect of Maharashtra, known as Varkari, who worship Lord Vithoba (also

known as Vitthal, Panduranga). Though Vithoba is mostly considered to be a form of the little Krishna, there has been a deep belief for many centuries that Vithoba is a form of Buddha. Many poets of the Maharashtra (including Eknath, Namdev, Tukaram etc.) have explicitly mentioned him as Buddha., though many neo-Buddhists (Ambedkaries) and some western scholars often tend to reject this opinion.

11.2.2 As an inspirational figure

Other prominent modern proponents of Hinduism, such as Radhakrishnan, Vivekananda, consider the Buddha as an example of the same universal truth that underlies religions:

Vivekananda: May he who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura Mazda of Zoroastrians, the Buddha of Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heavens of Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble ideas!^[15]

Radhakrishnan: If a Hindu chants the Vedas on the banks of the Ganges... if the Japanese worship the image of Buddha, if the European is convinced of Christ's mediatorship, if the Arab reads the Koran in the mosque... It is their deepest apprehension of God and God's fullest revelation to them.^[16]

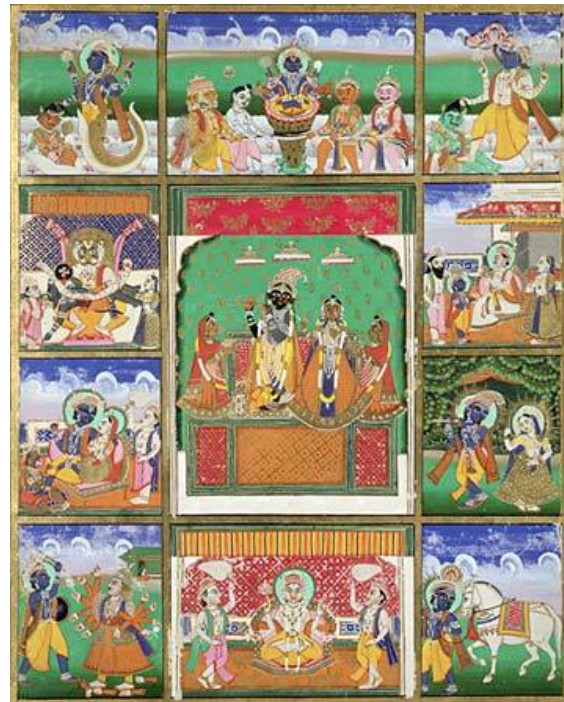
A number of revolutionary figures in modern Hinduism, including Gandhi, have been inspired by the life and teachings of the Buddha and many of his attempted reforms.^[17]

Steven Collins sees such Hindu claims regarding Buddhism as part of an effort - itself a reaction to Christian proselytizing efforts in India - to show that "all religions are one", and that Hinduism is uniquely valuable because it alone recognizes this fact.^[18]

11.3 Interpretations

According to Wendy Doniger, the Buddha avatar which occurs in different versions in various Puranas may represent an attempt by orthodox Brahminism to slander the Buddhists by identifying them with the demons.^[19] Helmut von Glasenapp attributed these developments to a Hindu desire to absorb Buddhism in a peaceful manner, both to win Buddhists to Vaishnavism and also to account for the fact that such a significant heresy could exist in India.^[20]

The times ascribed to one "Buddha" figure are contradictory and some put him in approximately 500 CE, with a lifetime of 64 years, describe him as having killed some



Hinduism regards Buddha (bottom centre with multiple arms) as one of the 10 avatars of Vishnu

persons, as following the Vedic religion, and having a father named Jina, which suggest that this particular figure might be a different person from Siddhārtha Gautama.^[21]

11.4 Opinions and reactions

Kumārila Bhaṭṭa disregarded the connection of Buddha with Hinduism, he regarded Buddha as the one who "transgressed dharma laid down for ksatriyas and he took himself to the profession of a religious teacher, one who 'deceives himself' and acts contrary to the Vedas".^[22]

B. R. Ambedkar, denied that Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu. Among the 22 vows he gave to the neo-Buddhists, the 5th vow is "I do not and shall not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu. I believe this to be sheer madness and false propaganda."^[23]

In 1999, at the Maha Bodhi Society in Sarnath, Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati of Kanchi matha and Vipassana Acharya, S. N. Goenka after having a mutual discussion, gave a joint communiqué agreeing on the following three points.^[24]

1. Due to whatever reason some literature was written in India in the past in which the Buddha was declared to be a re-incarnation of Vishnu and other various things were written about him, this was very unpleasant to the neighbouring countries. In order to foster friendlier ties between Hindus and Buddhists we decide that whatever has happened in the past

- should be forgotten and such belief should not be propagated.
2. A misconception has spread in the neighbouring countries that the Hindu society of India is organising such conferences to prove its dominance over the followers of the Buddha. To forever remove this misconception we declare that both Vedic and Samana are ancient traditions of India (Vishnu belongs to the Vedic tradition and Buddha belongs to the Samana tradition). Any attempt by one tradition to show it higher than the other will only generate hatred and ill will between the two. Hence such a thing should not be done in future and both traditions should be accorded equal respect and esteem.
 3. Any body can attain high position in the society by doing good deeds. One becomes a low person in society if one does evil deeds. Hence anybody by doing good deeds and removing the defilement's such as passion, anger, arrogance, ignorance, greed, jealousy and ego can attain a high position in society and enjoy peace and happiness.
 4. We agree on all the three things mentioned above and wish that all the people of India from all the traditions should have cordial relations and the neighbouring countries should also have friendly relations with India.

11.5 See also

- Adibuddha
- Avatar
- Brahman
- Brahmavihara
- Buddhism and Hinduism
- God in Buddhism
- Indian religions
- Moksha
- Yoga

11.6 References

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- [5] Singh, page 264.
- [6] Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1982.
- [7] Dhare Ramchandra Chintaman, Shri Vitthal: ek maha samanvaya, Shri Vidya Prakashan, Pune, 1984 (Marathi)
- [8] Singh, pp. 262–264
- [9] Singh, p.267
- [10] Wendy O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*. University of California Press, 1976, page 203.
- [11] Inden, Ronald. "Ritual, Authority, And Cycle Time in Hindu Kingship." In JF Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.67, 55 "before the eighth century, the Buddha was accorded the position of universal deity and ceremonies by which a king attained to imperial status were elaborate donative ceremonies entailing gifts to Buddhist monks and the installation of a symbolic Buddha in a stupa....This pattern changed in the eighth century. The Buddha was replaced as the supreme, imperial deity by one of the Hindu gods (except under the Palas of eastern India, the Buddha's homeland)...Previously the Buddha had been accorded imperial-style worship (puja). Now as one of the Hindu gods replaced the Buddha at the imperial centre and pinnacle of the cosmo-political system, the image or symbol of the Hindu god comes to be housed in a monumental temple and given increasingly elaborate imperial-style puja worship."
- [12] Holt, John. *The Buddhist Visnu*. Columbia University Press, 2004, p.12,15 "The replacement of the Buddha as the "cosmic person" within the mythic ideology of Indian kingship, as we shall see shortly, occurred at about the same time the Buddha was incorporated and subordinated within the Brahmanical cult of Visnu."
- [13] John Marshall / Jaya Tirtha Charan Dasa (1970-02-18). "Dasavatara stotra". Salagram.net. Retrieved 2012-08-14.
- [14] Lecture 1974 by founder of ISKCON - A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada "Because people were addicted so much in violence, in killing the animals, therefore Buddha philosophy was needed"
- [15] Hinduism, in *The World's Parliament of Religions*, J. H. Barrows (Ed.), Vol. II, Chicago 1893, p. 978.
- [16] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, New York 1969, pp. 326–7.

- [17] “Mahatma Gandhi and Buddhism” (PDF). Retrieved 2012-08-14.
- [18] Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons*. Cambridge University Press, 1990, page 9.
- [19] O’Flaherty, page 200.
- [20] von Glasenapp 1962 page 113, cited in O’Flaherty, page 206.
- [21] Singh, p.266.
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- [23] Ucko, Hans (2002). *The people and the people of God*. LIT Verlag Münster. p. 101. ISBN 978-3-8258-5564-2.
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11.7 External links

- Buddhism, the Fulfilment of Hinduism, by Swami Vivekananda

Chapter 12

Kalki

For other meanings, see [Kalki \(disambiguation\)](#).

In **Hinduism**, **Kalki** (Devanagari: कल्कि; meaning 'Eternity,' 'White Horse,' or 'Destroyer of Filth') is the final incarnation of Vishnu in the current Mahayuga, foretold to appear at the end of Kali Yuga, the current epoch. Religious texts called the *Puranas* foretell that Kalki will be atop a white horse with a drawn blazing sword. He is the harbinger of the end time in Hindu eschatology, after which he will usher in Satya Yuga.

The name Kalki is a metaphor for eternity or time. Its origins may lie in the Sanskrit word *kalka* which means foulness or filth. Hence, the name translates to the 'destroyer of foulness,' 'destroyer of darkness,' or 'destroyer of ignorance.'^[1] Another etymology from Sanskrit is 'white horse.'^[2]

In **Buddhist Kalachakra** tradition, 25 rulers of the **Shambhala Kingdom** held the title of Kalki, **Kulika** or **Kalki-king**.^[3] During Vaishakha, the first fortnight in Shukla Paksha is dedicated to fifteen deities, with each day for a different god. In this tradition, the twelfth day is Vaishakha Dwadashi and is dedicated to Madhava, another name for Kalki.

12.1 Maha Avatara

There are numerous interpretations of Vedic tradition. Avatara means "descent" and refers to a descent of the divine into mundane form. The *Garuda Purana* lists ten avatars, with Kalki being the tenth. The *Bhagavata Purana* initially lists twenty-two avatars, but mentions an additional three for a total of **twenty-five**. He is presented as the twenty-second avatar on that list. Popular images depict him riding a white horse with wings, known as 'Devadatta' or *God given*. In these images, Kalki is brandishing a brilliant sword in his left hand, eradicating the decadence of Kali Yuga. Lord Kalki will remove the darkness of kali yuga and establish a new yuga (age) called Satya yuga (Age of Truth) on the earth. Satya yuga is also known as Krita yuga. Similarly, as per the characteristics of the next cycle of four yugas, the next satya yuga will be known as Panchorath Yuga.

12.2 Puranas

One of the earliest mentions of Kalki is in the *Vishnu Purana*, dated to after the **Gupta Empire**.^[4] The *Agni Purana*, one of the earliest Puranas to describe Buddha as an avatar, also describes Kalki and the **end time**. It draws heavily upon the *Vishnu Purana* in content. The *Kalki Purana*, a minor scripture by comparison, has the most detailed descriptions of Kalki.

12.3 Birth

As written in the Kalki Purana:

Literal translation:

शम्भल ग्राम मुख्यस्य ब्राह्मणस्य महात्मनः ।
भवने वषिणुयशसः कल्किः प्रादुर्भवष्यति ॥
Srimad Bhagavata Maha Purana – 12:2:18

शम्भल ग्राम मुख्यस्य ब्राह्मणस्य
महात्मनः ।

शम्भु Shambhu (Shiv Shambhu Bhola) + ल or
ले (of) + ग्राम Grama (Community/Village)
+ मुख्यस्य Mukhyasya (Principally) +
ब्राह्मणस्य Brahmanasya (of the Brahmins)
+ महात्मनः Maha Atman (Great Souls) **The
Chief Holy Brahmin (Priest) of the Village
- 'Shambhal'**.

भवने वषिणुयशसः कल्किः
प्रादुर्भवष्यति ॥

भवने Bhavanê (At the home of) + वषिणु
Vishnu + यशसः Yáśas (Worthy) + कल्क Kalk
(Mud or Sediment) + इ i (to arise from, come
from) + प्रादुर् Prādúr (Arise/Born) भवष्यति
Bhavishyati (In the future)

In the future at the home of the aforementioned - Vishnuyashasa, 'Destroyer of Evil' will arise/be born.

This points to a name equivalent to mud or sediment born.

द्वादश्यां शुक्ल-पक्षस्य माघवे मासि
माधवम् ।

जातं ददृशतुः पुत्रं पतिरौ हृष्ट-मानसौ ॥
(1:2:15 Kalki Purana)

द्वादश्यां - द्वा dvA (two) + दश्यां dashya (tens/10's) meaning 12 शुक्ल-पक्षस्य - शुक्ल Shukla (bright) + पक्षस्य (pakshaya) parts (the first part of the moon cycle) + माधवे madhva is hindu month of Chaitra (First day of Chaitra is when Lord Brahma created the universe, Hindu new year starts) March/April + मासि masi (month of) + माधवम् Lord Krishna (as Kalki) arrived. जातं ददृशतुः पुत्रं पतिरौ हृष्ट-मानसौ ।।

जातं jatam (born - brought into existence) + ददृशतुः dadastu (then) + पुत्रं putram (a son) + पतिरौ pitarau (parents [were]) + हृष्ट hrshta (thrilling with rapture, rejoiced, pleased, glad, merry) + मानसौ manasau (mental feeling). or **12th of the first part of the moon cycle in the month of Chaitra (March/April, Hindu new year) Lord Krishna (as Kalki) arrived then the father was overwhelmed by the son being born** This also points to the sun sign of Aries. In Chaitra month, the fifteen days in Shukla paksha (first fortnight / first half of the month) are dedicated to fifteen gods or deities. Each day of the Chaitra month is dedicated to a different god. The 12th day (Chaitra Dwadashi) is dedicated to Lord Sri Maha Vishnu.

There is a description of his background in other sources of scripture. The Kalachakra tantra, first taught by Buddha to Dharmaraja Suchandra of Shambhala, also describes his background:

Lord Kalki will appear in the home of the most eminent brahmana of Shambhala village, the great souls Vishnuyasha and his wife, the pure of thought Sumati.

—Srimad-Bhagavatam Bhag.12.2.18

Vishnuyasha refers to the father of Kalki as a devotee of Vishnu while Sumati refers to His mother in Shambhala, or the temple of Shiva.

The Agni Purana predicts that at the time of his birth, evil kings will feed on the pious. Kalki will be born son of Vishnuyasha in the mythic Shambhala. He will have Yajnavalkya as his spiritual guru.

Parashurama, the sixth avatar of Vishnu is a Chiranjivi (immortal) and in scripture is believed to be alive, waiting for the return of Kalki. He will be a martial guru to the avatar, instructing him in the performance of a severe penance in order to receive celestial weaponry.

Kalki will establish moral law in the form of the fourfold varnas, and organize society into four classes, after which there will be a return to the path of righteousness.^[5] The purana also relates that Hari, will then give up the form of

Kalki, return to heaven and the Krita or Satya Yuga will return as before.^[6]

The Vishnu Purana also explains:

When the practices taught in the Vedas and institutes of law have nearly ceased, and the close of the Kali age shall be nigh, a portion of that divine being who exists of His own spiritual nature, and who is the beginning and end, and who comprehends all things, shall descend upon earth. He will be born in the family of Vishnuyasha, an eminent brahmana of Shambhala village, as Kalki, endowed with eight superhuman faculties, when the eight suns (represented by 8 solar deities or Vasu who lord over Dhanishta Nakshatra) will together shine over the sky. By His irresistible might he will destroy all the mlecchas (Barbarians) and thieves, and all whose minds are devoted to iniquity. He will reestablish righteousness upon earth, and the minds of those who live at the end of the Kali age shall be awakened, and shall be as clear as crystal. The men who are thus changed by virtue of that peculiar time shall be as the seeds of human beings, and shall give birth to a race who will follow the laws of the Krita age or Satya Yuga, the age of purity. As it is said, 'When the sun and moon, and the lunar asterism Tishya, and the planet Jupiter, are in one mansion, the Krita age shall return.

—Vishnu Purana, Book Four, Chapter 24

The Padma Purana describes that Kalki will end the age of Kali and kill all mlecchas. He will gather all brahmanas and propound the highest truth, bringing back the ways of dharma that have been lost, and removing the prolonged hunger of the Brahmin. Kalki will defy oppression and be a banner of victory for the world.^[7]

The Bhagavata Purana states

At the end of Kali Yuga, when there exist no topics on the subject of God, even at the residences of so-called saints and respectable gentlemen, and when the power of government is transferred to the hands of ministers elected from the evil men, and when nothing is known of the techniques of sacrifice, even by word, at that time the Lord will appear as the supreme chastiser.

—Bhagavata Purana, 2.7.38

It goes on to foretell his arrival:

The ascetic prince, Lord Kalki, the Lord of the Universe, will mount His swift white

horse Devadatta and, sword in hand, travel over the earth exhibiting His eight mystic opulences and eight special qualities of God-head. Displaying His unequaled effulgence and riding with great speed, He will kill by the millions those thieves who have dared dress as kings.

—Bhagavata Purana, 12.2.19-20

The Kalki Purana combines elements of earlier scriptures to describe Kalki. He will have the power to change the course of the stream of time and restore the path of the righteous. The evil demon Kali will spring from the back of Brahma and descend to earth and cause dharma to be forgotten and society to decay. When man stops offering yagna, Vishnu will then descend a final time to save the steadfast. He will be reborn as Kalki to a Brahmin family in the city of Shambhala.

Followers of Tibetan Buddhism have preserved the *Kalachakra Tantra* in which “Kalkin” is a title of 25 rulers in the mystical realm of Shambhala. This tantra mirrors a number of prophecies of the Puranas.

12.4 Padma

Padma will be the consort of the avatar, as written in the Kalki Purana:

Kalki Purana:

मत्तो वदियां शवाद् अस्त्रं लब्ध्वा
वेद-मयं शुकम् ।
सहिले च प्रयां पद्मां धर्मान्
संस्थापयषियसि ॥ 1:3:9 ततो दग्-वज्रिये
भूपान् धर्म-हीनान् कलि-प्रयान् ।
नगिहय बौद्धान् देवार्पि मरुञ्च च
स्थापयषियसि ॥ 1:3:10 श्रुत्वेतौ वचनं
कल्किः शुकैः सहितो मुदा ।
जगाम त्वरति ऽश्वेन शवि-दत्तेन तन्मनाः ॥
2:1:39 समुद्र-पारम् अमलं सहिलं जलसंकुलम् ।
(«सहिलद्वीप»)
नाना-वमिान-बहुलं भास्वरं मणि-काञ्चनैः ॥
2:1:40 प्रासादसदनाग्रेषु पताका-
तोरणाकुलम् ।
श्रेणी-सभा-पणाटताल-पुर-गोपुर-मण्डतिम् ॥
2:1:41

The beloved of Kalki who is incarnation of Lakshmi lives at द्वीप dweep (island) सहिले Sinha (सहि shiha (Lion) + ले(of))= “the island of the lion”(1:3:9).

The spotless/clean land of the one which is surrounded by an excellent/supreme ocean at the other side of this ocean. Brilliant in wealth, education, powerful and prosperity island of the lion. The Lion City island country guard by heavenly lion from Paradise.

12.5 Kalki Avatar according to Sikhism



Kalki Avatar Punjab Hills, Guler, c. 1765.

Kalki was described by Guru Gobind Singh in *Sri Dasam Granth*. Kalki is also mentioned the oral traditions of Guru Gobind Singh known as the sau sakhis, and possibly the Sarbloh Granth. He is foretold to return on horseback with sword, manifesting himself at the village Sambhal and sounding his trumpet before fighting the wicked.

Gobind Singh writes in the *Sri Dasam Granth*:

When there is incest, adultery, atheism, hatred of religion, no more dharma, and sin everywhere, the impossible Iron Age has come; in what way the world will be saved? For the helpless, the Lord Himself will manifest as the Supreme Purusha. He will be called the Kalki incarnation and will be glorious like a lion coming down from heaven.

The return of Kalki in Sikhism is also predicted to be the end of the “Iron Age” and beginning of end time.

12.6 Predictions about his birth and time of arrival

Main article: End time

Modern scholars have attempted to link recent history to Kalki. Given the traditional account of the Kali Yuga, which will last 432,000 years, and began in 3102 BCE,^{[8][9]} scholar such as Sri Yukteswar Giri have claimed there are smaller cycles within the larger 432,000 year revolution.^{[10][11]}

12.6.1 Astrology

Kalki can only be the one whose Birthday/Tithi falls on Dvadasi of Sukla Paksha. This amounts to just 12 days per any given year furthermore as it can only be the day of the Lord Sri Maha Vishnu (Chaitra Dwadashi) this amounts to **just 1 day** in each year or **100 days in the last century**.

Chaitra Dwadashi Shukla Paksha dates 1900 - 1999

April 11, 1900, March 31, 1901, April 19, 1902, April 9, 1903, March 29, 1904, April 17, 1905, April 6, 1906, April 25, 1907, April 13, 1908, April 2, 1909, April 21, 1910, April 10, 1911, March 30, 1912, April 18, 1913, April 8, 1914, March 28, 1915, April 15, 1916, April 4, 1917, April 22, 1918, April 12, 1919, March 31, 1920, April 19, 1921, April 9, 1922, March 30, 1923, April 17, 1924, April 5, 1925, April 24, 1926, April 13, 1927, April 1, 1928, April 20, 1929, April 10, 1930, March 31, 1931, April 18, 1932, April 7, 1933, March 27, 1934, April 15, 1935, April 3, 1936, April 22, 1937, April 12, 1938, April 1, 1939, April 19, 1940, April 9, 1941, March 29, 1942, April 17, 1943, April 5, 1944, April 23, 1945, April 13, 1946, April 3, 1947, April 21, 1948, April 10, 1949, March 31, 1950, April 19, 1951, April 6, 1952, March 26, 1953, April 14, 1954, April 4, 1955, April 22, 1956, April 12, 1957, April 1, 1958, April 20, 1959, April 8, 1960, March 28, 1961, April 16, 1962, April 5, 1963, April 23, 1964, April 13, 1965, April 3, 1966, April 22, 1967, April 10, 1968, March 30, 1969, April 18, 1970, April 7, 1971, March 26, 1972, April 14, 1973, April 4, 1974, April 23, 1975, April 12, 1976, April 1, 1977, April 20, 1978, April 9, 1979, March 28, 1980, April 15, 1981, April 5, 1982, April 24, 1983, April 13, 1984, April 3, 1985, April 21, 1986, April 10, 1987, March 29, 1988, April 17, 1989, April 6, 1990, March 27, 1991, April 14, 1992, April 4, 1993, April 23, 1994, April 12, 1995, March 31, 1996, April 19, 1997, April 8, 1998, March 28, 1999

South Indian astrologers have analyzed Puranas extensively to try and foretell the time of birth of Kalki. The signs described in the Kalki Purana are as follows:

1. The moon will be in Dhanishtha nakshatra, Aquarius, suggesting he will be wealthy, acclaimed and swift in action and thought.
2. The sun will be in Swati, the nakshatra of the sword.
3. Jupiter will be in Purva Ashadha nakshatra, Sagittarius.
4. The Ascendant Lord will be in Purva Ashadha nakshatra, also Sagittarius, suggesting invincibility and early victory.
5. Saturn will be exalted in Libra, predicting a balance between justice and the sword.

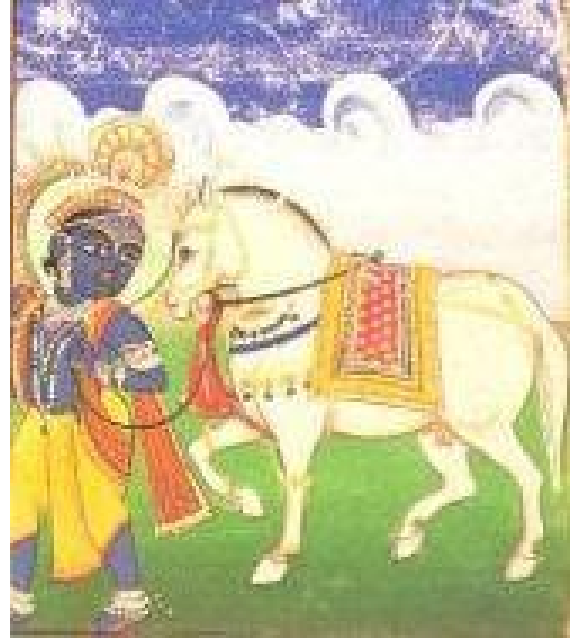
6. Ketu, lord of horse-headed Ashwini, will be exalted in Scorpio, suggesting he will descend atop a great white steed.

Astrologers have asserted that his birth year can be derived from Jupiter, Saturn and Ketu, the sun can be used to calculate the birth month, the moon the birth day. The ascendant lord can be used to even calculate the birth hour.

The Kalki Purana describes the time of his birth:

शम्भल ग्राम मुख्यस्य ब्राह्मणस्य
महात्मानः

भवने वषिण्युशसः कल्किः
प्रादुर्भवष्यति
भवने वषिण्युशसः कल्किः प्रादुर्भवष्यति
द्वादश्यां शुक्ल-पक्षस्य माधवे मासि
माधवम्
जातं ददृशतुः पुत्रं पतिरौ हृष्ट-मानसौ
—Kalki Purana, 1.2.15



Kalki with his white horse Devadatta

The Puranas describe the date as twenty-one fortnights from the birth of Krishna, which itself falls on Janmash-tami in August. This would put his descent at Vaishakha, between April and May. At this time, the father of Kalki is foretold to be overwhelmed by the incarnation of God-head that he sees as his son. This places Kalki under the sun sign of Aries.

The Bhavishya Purana foretells:

The Savior of the entire universe, Maha
Vishnu

will be born on Margashirsha Month, Krishna Ashtami
8th day after the full-moon day.
—Bhavishya Purana, Canto IV, Chapter
23, Text 15

There have been a range of dates predicted, purportedly from different methods of calculation.^[12] Sri Potuluri Virabrahmendra Swami, for example, wrote 400 years ago in his *Divya Maha Kala Gnana*, or 'Divine Knowledge of the Time,' that Kalki would arrive when the moon, sun, Venus and Jupiter entered the same sign. This is not a rare occurrence and last happened in early 2012, passing without event.^[13] The time of arrival of Kalki has not been consistently asserted by astrologers.^[12]

12.6.2 People who have claimed to be Kalki

- Members of the Bahá'í Faith have interpreted the prophecies of end time as references to the arrival of their founder Bahá'u'lláh, which has helped growth of the Bahá'í faith in India.^{[14][15][16]}
- Members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community believe their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, to be the Kalki Avatar.^[17]
- Jean-Charles Bourquin, French pianist and self-proclaimed foreseer who claims to prevent the world from an extraterrestrial invasion.^[18]



Dashavatara: (from left) Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Kalki.

12.7 See also

- Dashavatara
- End time
- Kalki Avtar aur Muhammad sahib (book)
- Kali
- Koka and Vikoka
- Mahabharata
- Maitreya
- Ramayana
- Suchandra

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12.9 External links

- Kalki in Indian Mythology / 2
- Hindu Prophecies: Translations from the Kalki Purana
- Commentaries on the Kalki Purana
- Sri Dasam Granth Sahib

Chapter 13

Balarama

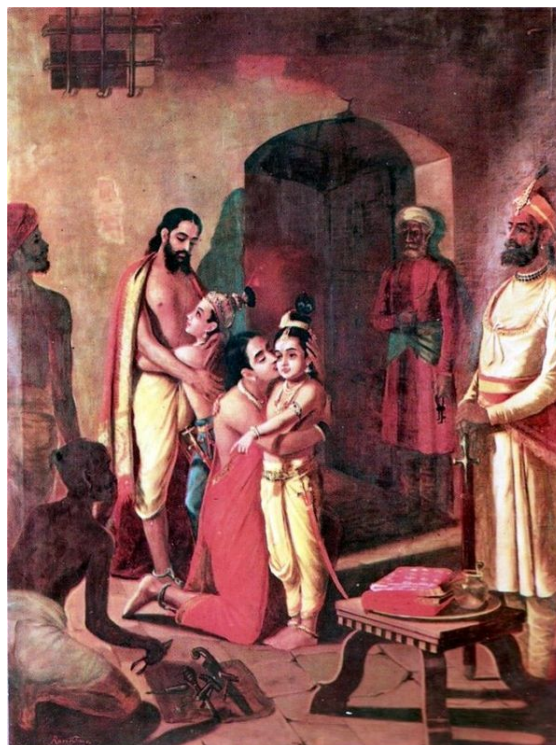
This article is about the elder brother of the divine being Krishna. For other uses, see Balarama (disambiguation).

Balarama (बलराम, *Balarāma*), also known as **Baladeva**, **Balabhadra** and **Halayudha**, is the elder brother of Krishna (an avatar of the god Vishnu) and is regarded generally as an avatar of Shesha. He is also sometimes considered as the Sankarshana form of Vishnu and the eighth avatar of Vishnu.

He may have originated in Vedic times as a deity of agriculture and fertility. In scripture, Vishnu impregnated the belly of the goddess Devaki with two strands of hair, one black, one white. To ensure their safety, they were transferred before birth to Rohini. Krishna was born with darker complexion, while Balarama was fair. In Jainism he is known as Baladeva. He is often depicted with a drinking cup, pitcher, shield and sword.^[1]

13.1 Early life

From left to right is **Balarama**, Subhadra, and Jagannatha.



Krishna and Balarama meet their parents. Painting by Raja Ravi Varma

13.1.1 Birth and origin

Balarama was a son of Yadava king Vasudev. The evil king Kamsa, the brother of Devaki, was intent upon killing the children of his sister because of a prediction that he would die at the hands of her eighth son.

Vishnu then impregnated the belly of the goddess Devaki with two strands of hair, one black, one white. To ensure their safety, their essence was transferred before birth to Rohini, who also desired a child. At birth, Krishna had a darker complexion, while Balarama was born fair. The other name of Balarama is also **Sankarshana**, meaning a spirit transferred between two wombs.

He was named Rama, but because of his great strength he was called Balarama, Baladeva or Balabhadra, meaning “Strong Rama”. He was born under Shravana nakshatra



Krishna-Balarama deities at the Krishna-Balarama Temple in Vrindavan

on Shraavana Purnima, or Raksha Bandhan.

He is often depicted with a drinking cup, pitcher, axe, shield and sword. Balarama may have originated in Vedic times as a deity of agriculture and fertility. In Jainism he is known as Baladeva.

13.1.2 Childhood and marriage



Balarama Kills Dhenukasura, Folio from a Harivamsha (Lineage of Hari, Vishnu), ca 1585-1590

One day, Nanda Maharaja requested the presence of Gargamuni, his priest, to name the newborn Krishna and Balarama. When the Gargamuni arrived, Nanda Maharaja, received him well and requested the naming ceremony. Gargamuni then reminded Nanda Maharaja that Kamsa was looking for the son of Devaki, and if he performed the ceremony in opulence, it would come to his attention. Nanda Maharaja therefore asked Gargamuni to perform the ceremony in secret, and Gargamuni did so:

Because Balarama, the son of Rohini, increases the transcendental bliss of others, His name is Rama, and because of His extraordinary strength, He is called Baladeva. He attracts the Yadus to follow His instructions, and therefore His name is Sankarshana.
—Bhagavata Purana, 10.8.12^[2]

Balarama spent his childhood as a cow herder with his brother Krishna. He killed **Dhenukasura**, an asura

sent by Kansa, as well as *Pralambasura* and **Mushtika** wrestlers sent by the king. After the evil king died, Balarama and Krishna went to the *ashrama* of sage Sandipani's at Ujjayini for study. He later married Revati, the daughter of King Kakudmi, ruler of Kushasthali or Anarta^[3]

13.1.3 Kurukṣetra war of the Mahābhārata



Duryodana was defeated by Bhima - A scene from Razmanama

Balarama taught both Duryodhana of the Kauravas and Bhima of the Pandavas the art of fighting with a mace. When war broke between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Balarama cared for both sides, and so remained neutral. When Bhima defeated Duryodhana by striking him in the groin with his mace, Balarama threatened to kill Bhima. This was prevented when Krishna reminded Balarama of the vow of Bhima—to kill Duryodhana by crushing the thigh he had exposed to Bhima's wife Draupadi.^[4]

13.1.4 Disappearance

In the Bhagavata Purana, it is described that after Balarama took part in the battle causing the destruction of the remainder of the Yadu dynasty, and witnessing the



Death of Balarama

disappearance of Krishna, he sat down in a meditative state and departed from this world.^[5]

Some scriptures describe a great white snake that left the mouth of Balarama, in reference to his identity as Ananta-Sesha. The place where he departed is situated near Somnath Temple in Gujarat.

The local people of Veraval believe that the in cave near the temple place, the white snake who came out of Balarama's mouth got into that cave and went back to *Paatal Lok*.

13.2 Status as avatar

Main article: *Dashavathara*

Narratives of Balarama are found in the *Mahabharata*, *Harivamsha*, *Bhagavata Purana* and other Puranas. The *Bhagavata Purana* suggests Balarama as incarnation of Vishnu. He is classified in the *vyuha* avathar Sankarshana, of Vishnu where in *Adishesha* and *Lakshmana* is part of.^[6]

13.3 Worship

An earlier reference to Balarama is in *Kautilya's Arthashastra* (13.3)^[7] Early individual Balarama worship



Balabhadra in golden attire on his Chariot in Puri

was followed by obeisance to Balarama alongside Krishna in various Vaishnava sects. The most revered temple of Balarama is in Kendrapada and in Puri in Odisha.



Maues coin depicting Balarama, 1st century BCE

Sage Atri's *Samurtachanadhikara* of *Vaikhyanasas*, the most ancient school of Vaishnava theology, has described protocols for building temples and idols for Balarama and his consort. The *Pancharatras*, one of the earliest Vaishnava sects, worshiped *Samkarshana* as the second *vyuha* of Godhead. Krishna is usually depicted darker than Balarama. In *Rama-lila*, Balarama serves *Ramachandra* as his younger Brother, *Lakshmana* and in the current age (*Kali yuga*), Balarama spreads the 'Sankirtan movement' of *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* as his close friend *Nityananda*.

Gaudiya Vaishnavas believe Balarama to be the supreme divinity, and worship him in the same level of Krishna as *Balaram* is considered to be the source of all Vishnu forms. In their belief system, when Krishna is depicted, *Baladeva* is also always shown as his brother—sometimes elder, sometimes younger. They depict Balarama serving Krishna in all of his incarnations. Krishna has been described as creator, and Balarama his creative potency, with them being worshiped together as embodiment of



Balarama at the lower right of a Maurya coin, holding a mace and conch; 3rd-2nd century BCE, from the British Museum

Godhead.

13.4 Appearance

Balarama is depicted as fair skinned, in contrast to his brother, Krishna, who is dark skinned, Krishna in Sanskrit means dark. His *āyudhas*, or weapons, are the plough *hala* and the *gadā*. He often wears blue garments and a garland of forest flowers. His hair is tied in a top-knot, and he has earrings, bracelets and armlets, and he is known for his strength.^[8]

13.5 Jainism

The Jain Puranas, notably, the *Triṣaṣṭīśalākāpuruṣacarita* of Acharya Hemachandra, narrate hagiographical accounts of nine Baladevas or Balabhadras, who are believed to be the *śalākāpuruṣas* (literally “torch-bearers, great personalities”). These nine Baladevas are: Achala, Vijaya, Bhadra, Suprabha, Sudarśana, Ānanda, Nandana, Padma (Rama in Hinduism) and Rāma (Balarama in Hinduism).^[9]

13.6 Temples

Baliyana Mandir, Bainsa (dist Nawanshahr) Punjab

- Puri
- Kendrapara, Baladev Jew Temple



17th century mural of Balarama in a south Indian temple

- Ananta Vasudeva Temple
- Buguda, Baladev Temple Dist: Ganjam

13.7 Quotations

- “Lord Balarama is the original Vishnu; therefore anyone remembering these pastimes of Lord Balarama in the morning and the evening will certainly become a great devotee of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and thus his life will become successful in all respects.” - A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada^[10]
- “The splendor of Lord Balarama’s transcendental form eclipses many millions of glistening rising moons, and the slightest scent of His boundless strength is sufficient to destroy many armies of demons.” - From Appreciating Sri Vrindavana Dhama, pg. 111



Balarāma in Javanese Wayang

13.8 See also

- Jagannatha
- Lakshmana
- Nityananda
- Shesha
- Subhadra
- Vishnu

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13.10 External links

- Who is Lord Balarama (Overview)
- 1000 names of Lord Balarama
- Lord Balarama Homa – Attaining success In All Areas Of Life

Chapter 14

Vithoba

“Panduranga” redirects here. For other uses, see Panduranga (disambiguation).

Vithoba (Marathi: विठोबा, Viṭhobā), also known as **Vitthala** (Marathi: विठ्ठल, Viṭṭhala; Kannada: ವಿಠ್ಠಲ and Telugu: విఠల; Viṭhala) and **Panduranga** (Marathi: पांडुरंग, Kannada: ಪಾಂಡುರಂಗ, Telugu: పాండురంగ; all Paṇḍuraṅga), is a Hindu god, worshipped predominantly in the Indian states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. He is generally considered a manifestation of the god Vishnu or his avatar (incarnation) Krishna. Vithoba is often depicted as a dark young boy, standing arms-akimbo on a brick, sometimes accompanied by his main consort Rakhumai (Rukmini).

Vithoba is the focus of the monotheistic, non-Brahmanical^{[1][2]} Varkari sect of Maharashtra and the Haridasa sect of Karnataka. Vithoba's main temple stands at Pandharpur in Maharashtra, close to the Karnataka border. Vithoba legends revolve around his devotee Pundalik, who is credited with bringing the deity to Pandharpur, and around Vithoba's role as a saviour to the poet-saints of the Varkari faith. The Varkari poet-saints are known for their unique genre of devotional lyric, the *abhanga*, dedicated to Vithoba and composed in Marathi. Other devotional literature dedicated to Vithoba includes the Kannada hymns of the Haridasa, and Marathi versions of the generic Hindu *arati* songs, associated with rituals of offering light to the deity. The most important festivals of Vithoba are held on the eleventh (*ekadashi*) day of Hindu lunar months: Shayani Ekadashi in the month of Ashadha, and Prabodhini Ekadashi in the month of Kartik.

The historiography of Vithoba and his cult is an area of continuing debate, even regarding his name. Various indologists have proposed a prehistory for Vithoba worship where he was previously: a hero stone, a pastoral deity, a manifestation of Shiva, a Jain saint, or even all of these at various times for various devotees. Though the origins of both his cult and his main temple are likewise debated, there is clear evidence that they already existed by the 13th century.

14.1 Etymology and other names



A 1922 photograph of the Vithoba icon in Pandharpur adorned with jewellery and clothes.

Vithoba is known by many names, including: Vitthala, Panduranga, Pandharinath, Hari and Narayan. There are several theories about the origins and meanings of these names. Varkari tradition suggests that the name Vitthala (also spelled as Vitthal, Viththal, Vittala and Vithal) is composed of two Sanskrit-Marathi words: *viṭ*, which means 'brick'; and *thal*, which may have originated from the Sanskrit *sthala*, meaning 'standing'. Thus, Vitthala would mean 'one standing on a brick'.^[3] William Crooke, orientalist, supported this explanation.^[4] The prescribed iconography of Vithoba stipulates that he be shown standing arms-akimbo upon a brick, which is associated with the legend of the devotee Pundalik.

However, the Varkari poet-saint **Tukaram** proposed a different etymology—that Vitthala is composed of the words *vittha* (ignorance) and *la* (one who accepts), thus meaning 'one who accepts innocent people who are devoid of knowledge'.^[5] Historian **Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar** offers yet another possibility—that Vitthu (Viṭhu) is a Kannada corruption of the name Vishnu adopted in Marathi. The suffixes *-la* and *-ba* (meaning 'father' in Marathi) were appended for reverence, producing the names Vitthala and Vithoba.^[6] This corruption of Vishnu to Vitthu could have been due to the tendency of Marathi and Kannada people to pronounce the Sanskrit *ṣṇ* (/ʃn/) as *ṭh* (/tʰ/), attested since the 8th century.^[7]

According to research scholar M. S. Mate of the **Deccan College**, Pundalik—who is assumed to be a historical figure—was instrumental in persuading the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana alias Bittidev to build the Pandharpur temple dedicated to Vishnu. The deity was subsequently named as Vitthala, a derivative of Bittidev, by the builder-king.^[8] Other variants of the name include Viṭhurāyā (King Vitthala), and Viṭhāī (Mother Vitthala). The people of Gujarat add the suffix *-nath* (Lord) to Vitthala, which yields the name Vitthal-nath.^[9] The additional honorific suffix *-ji* may be added, giving the name Vitthalnathji. This name is generally used in the Pushtimarg sect.

Panduranga, also spelt as Pandurang and Pandaranga, is another popular epithet for Vithoba, which means 'the white god' in Sanskrit. The Jain author-saint Hemachandra (1089–1172 AD) notes it is also used as an epithet for the god Rudra-Shiva. Even though Vithoba is depicted with dark complexion, he is called a “white god”. Bhandarkar explains this paradox, proposing that Panduranga may be an epithet for the form of Shiva worshipped in Pandharpur, and whose temple still stands. Later, with the increasing popularity of Vithoba’s cult, this was also transferred to Vithoba.^[10] Another theory suggests that Vithoba may initially have been a Shaiva god (related to Shiva), only later identified with Vishnu, thus explaining the usage of Panduranga for Vithoba.^[11] Crooke, however, proposed that Panduranga is a Sanskritised form of Pandaraga (belonging to Pandarga), referring to the old name of Pandharpur.^[4] Another name, Pandharinath, also refers to Vithoba as the lord of Pandhari (yet another variant for Pandharpur). Finally, Vithoba is also addressed by generic Vaishnava names like Hari and Narayana, which are typical of the cult of the god Vishnu.^[12]

14.2 Origins and development

Reconstruction of the historical development of Vithoba worship has been much debated. In particular, several alternative theories have been proposed regarding the earliest stages, as well as the point at which he came to be recognised as a distinct deity. The *Pandurangashtakam*

stotra, a hymn attributed to **Adi Shankaracharya** of the 8th century, indicates that Vithoba worship might have already existed at an early date.^[13]

According to **Richard Maxwell Eaton**, author of *A Social History of the Deccan*,^[11] Vithoba was first worshipped as a pastoral god as early as the 6th century. Vithoba’s arms-akimbo iconography is similar to **Bir Kuar**, the cattle-god of the **Ahirs** of Bihar, who is now also associated with Krishna.^[14] Vithoba was probably later assimilated into the Shaiva pantheon and identified with the god Shiva, like most other pastoral gods. This is backed by the facts that the temple at Pandharpur is surrounded by Shaiva temples (most notably of the devotee Pundalik himself), and that Vithoba is crowned with the **Linga**, symbol of Shiva. However, since the 13th century, the poet-saints like **Namdev**, **Eknath** and **Tukaram** identified Vithoba with Vishnu.^[11]

Christian Lee Novetzke of the University of Washington suggests that Vithoba’s worship migrated from Karnataka to the formerly Shaiva city of Pandharpur some time before 1000 CE; but under the possible influence of a Krishna-worshipping Mahanubhava sect, the town was transformed into a Vaishnava center of pilgrimage. This proposal is consistent with contemporary remnants of Shaiva worship in the town.^[15]



Pundalik’s temple at Pandharpur

The religious historian **R.C. Dhare**, winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book *Sri Vitthal: Ek Mahasamanvaya*, opines that Vithoba worship may be even older—

"Vedic or pre-Vedic", hence pre-dating the worship of Krishna.^[16] According to this theory, Vithoba is an amalgam of various local heroes, who gave their lives to save their cattle. He was first worshipped by the *Dhangar*, the cattle-owning caste of Maharashtra. The rise of the *Yadava* dynasty, which had cowherd ancestry, could have led to the glorification of Vithoba as Krishna, who is often depicted as a cowherd. This Vaishnavization of Vithoba also led to conversion of the Shaiva Pundarika shrine to the Vaishnava shrine of the devotee Pundalik, who—according to legend—brought Vithoba to Pandharpur.^[17] There may have been an attempt to assimilate Vithoba into Buddhism; today, both are viewed as a form of Vishnu in Hinduism.^[18]

Despite assimilation in Vaishnavism as Krishna-Vishnu, Vithoba does not inherit the erotic overtones of Krishna, such as his dalliance with the *gopis* (milkmaids). Vithoba is associated more with "compassion, an infinite love and tenderness for his *bhaktas* (devotees) that can be compared to the love of the mother for her children .. pining for the presence of his devotees the way a cow pines for her far-away calf."^[19]

G. A. Deleury, author of *The cult of Vithoba*, proposes that the image of Vithoba is a *viragal* (hero stone), which was later identified with Vishnu in his form as Krishna, and that Pundalik transformed the Puranic, ritualistic *puja* worship into more idealised *bhakti* worship—"interiorized adoration transcending caste distinction and institutional priesthood .."^[20] Indologist Dr. Tilak suggests that Vithoba emerged as "an alternative to the existing pantheon" of brahminical deities (related to classical, ritualistic Hinduism). The emergence of Vithoba was concurrent with the rise of a "new type of lay devotee", the Varkari. While Vishnu and Shiva were bound in rigid ritualistic worship and Brahmin (priestly) control, Vithoba, "the God of the subaltern, became increasingly human." Vithoba is often praised as the protector of the poor and needy.^[21] Stevenson (1843) suggests that Vithoba could have been a Jain saint, as the Vithoba images were similar to Jain images.^[22]

14.2.1 Pandharpur temple and inscriptions

Scholastic investigation of Vithoba's history often begins with consideration of the dating of the chief temple at Pandharpur, which is believed to be the earliest Vithoba temple.^[23] The oldest part of the temple dates to the Yadava period of the 12th and 13th centuries. Most of the temple is believed to have been built in the 17th century, though addition to the temple has never ceased.^[24] The date the temple was first established is unclear to Bhandarkar, but he insists there is clear evidence to suggest it existed by the 13th century.^[6] According to S. G. Tulpule, the temple stood as early as 1189.^[24] In fact, a monument dated 1189 records establishment of a small Vithoba



The shikhara of the Vithoba's chief temple at Pandharpur

shrine at the present location of the temple; thus, Tulpule concludes, the worship of Vithoba predates 1189.^[25]

A stone inscription dated 1237, found on an overhead beam of the present Vithoba temple, mentions that the Hoysala king Someshvara donated a village for the expense of the *bhoga* (food offering) for "Vitthala".^{[9][26]} An inscription on a copper plate, dated 1249, records the Yadava king Krishna granting to one of his generals the village Paundrikakshetra (*kshetra* of Pundarik), on the river Bhimarathi, in the presence of the god Vishnu.^[6] Another stone inscription in Pandharpur narrates a sacrifice at Pandurangapura due to which "people and Vitthal along with the gods were gratified".^[10] Thus from the 13th century, the city is known as the city of Panduranga. Inside the temple, a stone inscription records gifts to the temple between 1272–77 from various donors, notably the Yadava king Ramachandra's minister Hemadri.^[9]

Ranade believes that an inscription, found in Alandi and referring to Vitthala and Rakhumai, is the oldest related to Vithoba, and dates it to 1209.^[27] However, the name Pandaranga is found on a Rashtrakuta copper plate inscription, dated 516. Citing this, Pande infers that Vithoba's cult was well established by the 6th century.^[28]

14.2.2 Central image

The physical characteristics of the central *murti* (image) of Vithoba at Pandharpur, and various textual references to it, have inspired theories relating to Vithoba worship.



An arms-akimbo Vishnu (early 5th century, Madhya Pradesh) similar to Udayagiri caves Vishnu.

Sand concludes, from a version of Pundalik's legend in the *Skanda Purana* (see **Legend** below), that two distinct *murtis* must have existed at Pandharpur—one each of *tirtha* and *kshetra* type. The earlier one was a *tirtha murti*, an image purposely sited near a holy body of water (*tirtha*), in this case facing west, on the Bhima riverbed, near the Pundalik shrine. The later *murti*, according to Sand, was a *kshetra murti*, located at a place of holy power (*kshetra*), in this case facing east, on the hill where the current temple has stood since about 1189. Thus, Sand proposes that the worship of Vithoba may predate the temple itself.^[29]

Deleury suggests that although the temple may have been built in the 13th century, given the Hemadpanthi style architecture, the statue of Vithoba is of an earlier style so may have been carved for an earlier, smaller shrine that existed in Pandharpur. The workmanship of the image is earlier than the style of the Yadava (1175–1318), the Anhivad Chalukya (943–1210) and even the Ajmer Chohans (685–1193) eras. Although no other existing Vishnu tem-

ple has iconography like Pandharpur's Vithoba, Deleury finds similarities between the Pandharpur image and the third-century, arms-akimbo Vishnu images at Udayagiri Caves, Madhya Pradesh but declares that they are from different schools of sculpture.^[9]

14.2.3 Pundalik

The devotee Pundalik, thrower of the brick (see **Legend** below), is a major character in the legends of Vithoba. He is commonly perceived to be a historical figure, connected with the establishment and propagation of the Vithoba-centric Varkari sect.^[30] Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar considers Pundalik to be the founder of the Varkari sect and the one who promulgated the sect in Maratha country.^[31] Stevenson (1843) goes further, suggesting he might have been a Jain or a Buddhist, since Varkari tradition is a combination of Jain and Buddhist morals, and Vithoba is viewed as Vishnu in his form as Buddha.^[32] Frazer, Edwards and P.R. Bhandarkar (1922) all suggest that Pundalik tried to unify Shiva and Vishnu, and that this sect originated in Karnataka.^[33] Ranade (1933) thinks that Pundalik, a Kannada saint, was not only the founder of the Varkari sect but also the first great devotee or first high priest of the Pandharpur temple.^[34] Upadhyaya supports the priest theory but declines the Kannada origin theory.^[33] According to M. S. Mate, Pundalik was instrumental in coaxing the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana to build the Pandharpur temple to Vishnu, placing him in the early 12th century.^[8] Other scholars like Raeside (1965), Dhanpalvar (1972), and Vaudeville (1974) have questioned the historicity of Pundalik altogether, and dismissed him as a mythical figure.^[35]

14.2.4 Identifications

Primarily, there are three Hindu deities associated with Vithoba: Vishnu, Krishna and Shiva. Gautama Buddha is also associated with Vithoba, consistent with Hindu deification of the Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. However, Varkari consider Vithoba to be the *svarup* (original)^[36] Vishnu himself, not an *Avatar* (manifestation) of Vishnu like Krishna,^[37] despite legends and consorts linking Vithoba to Krishna. However, even the Mahanubhavas, who rose in the 13th century as a Krishna-worshipping sect, not only dismissed the notion that Vithoba is Krishna but also frequently vilified Vithoba.^[38]

In some traditions though, Vithoba is also worshipped as a form of Shiva. The Dhangars still consider Vithoba to be a brother of the god Viroba, and view Vithoba as a Shaiva god rather than a Vaishnava one.^[39] Underhill proposes that the shrine of Pandharpur is a combined form of Vishnu-Shiva established by the Bhagavata sect that worships Vishnu-Shiva—the Lord, which is what *bhagavata* means.^[40] However, for the chief priests of the



Vithoba (left, 4th from top) replaces Buddha in a depiction of the Dashavatara—ten avatars (of Vishnu)—on the door of Sree Balaji Temple, Goa.

Pandharpur temple—Brahmins of the Badva family — "Viṭhobā is neither Viṣṇu nor Śiva. Viṭhobā is Viṭhobā" (IAST original).^[41] Despite this, some priests of the temple point to marks on the Vithoba image's chest as proof of Vithoba being Vishnu, in his form as Krishna.^[9]

Vithoba's image replaces the traditional representation of Buddha, when depicted as the ninth avatar of Vishnu, in some temple sculptures and Hindu astrological almanacs in Maharashtra. In the 17th century, Maratha artists sculpted an image of Pandharpur's Vithoba in the Buddha's place on a panel showing Vishnu's avatars. This can be found in the Shivner caves of Junnar.^[42] Stevenson goes so far as to call devotees of Vithoba (*Vithal-bhaktas*) Buddhist Vaishnavas (*Bauddho-Vaishnavas*), since they consider Vithoba to be the ninth—namely Buddha—avatar of Vishnu.^[43] Some of the poet-saints praised Vithoba as a form of Buddha.^[44] B. R. Ambedkar, an Indian political leader and Buddhist convert, suggested that the image of Vithoba at Pandharpur was in reality the image of the Buddha.^[45]

14.3 Iconography



This bronze image from a home shrine inherits the traditional attributes of Vithoba's Pandharpur image like the conical headgear, the fish shaped earrings, the gem stubbed necklace, and the brick. This image shows Vithoba's right hand making a blessing gesture and his left hand holding a shankha.

All Vithoba images are generally modelled on his central image in Pandharpur. The Pandharpur image is a black basalt sculpture that is 3 feet 9 inches (1.14 m) tall. Vithoba is depicted as dark young boy. The poet-saints have called him "Para-brahman with a dark complexion".^[46] He wears high, conical headgear or a crown, interpreted as Shiva's symbol—the Linga. Thus, according to Zelliott, Vithoba represents Shiva as well as Vishnu.^[47] The first Varkari poet-saint, Dnyaneshwar (13th century), states that Vithoba (Vishnu) carries Shiva, who according to Vaishnavism is Vishnu's first and fore-

most devotee, on his own head.^[48]

Vithoba is shown standing arms-akimbo on the brick thrown by the devotee Pundalik. He wears a necklace of tulsi-beads, embedded with the legendary *kaustubha* gem, and *makara-kundala* (fish-shaped earrings) that the poet-saint Tukaram relates to the iconography of Vishnu. Pandharpur's Vithoba holds a *shankha* (conch) in his left hand and a *chakra* (discus) or lotus flower in his right, all of which are symbols traditionally associated with Vishnu. Some images depict Vithoba's right hand making a gesture that has been traditionally misunderstood as a blessing; no gesture of blessing is present in the Pandharpur image.^{[41][9]} Though usually depicted two-armed, four-armed representations of the deity also exist.^[49]

The Pandharpur image, when not clothed by its attendant priest to receive devotees, provides Vithoba with the detailed features distinctive of a male body, visible in full relief. However, close inspection of the stonework reveals the outline of a loincloth, supported by a *kambarband* (waist belt), traced by thin, light carvings.^{[41][9]} Other images and pictures depict Vithoba clothed, usually with *pitambara* – a yellow dhoti and various gold ornaments—the manner in which he is attired by the priests in the daily rites.

The Pandharpur image also bears, on the left breast, the mark known as the *srivatsalanchhana*—said to be a curl of white hair, usually found on the breast of Vishnu and Krishna images.^[50] The image is also dignified with a ring-shaped mark called *shriniketana* on the right breast, *mekhala* (a three-stringed waist-belt), a long stick (*kathi*) embedded in the ground between the legs, and double ring and pearl bracelets on the elbows.^[9]

14.4 Consorts

Vithoba is usually depicted with his main consort, Rakhumai, on his left side. Rakhumai (or Rakhamai) literally means 'mother Rukmini'. Rukmini is traditionally viewed as the wife of Krishna. Hindus generally consider Krishna to be a form of Vishnu, hence his consort as a form of Lakshmi. Rakhumai is depicted in the arms-akimbo posture, standing on a brick. She has an independent cella in the Pandharpur temple complex. According to Ghurye, Rukmini—a princess of the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra—was elevated to the status of the main consort instead of Radha, because of her affiliation with the region.^[51] According to Dhangar tradition, Rakhumai is worshipped by the community as Padmavati or Padubai, a protector of the community and cattle in particular.^[11] Dhangar folklore explains the reason behind separate shrines for Vithoba and Padubai as the outcome of Vithoba invoking a curse on his consort, and his non-attachment to *samsara* (the householder's life).^[52] Apart from Rakhumai, two other consorts Satyabhama and Rahi (derived from Radha) are worshipped too.



Vithoba (left) with his consort Rakhumai at the Sion Vitthal temple, Mumbai, decorated with jewellery during the Hindu festival of Diwali

All three consorts are regarded as Krishna's in Hindu mythology.^[51]

14.5 Worship

Vithoba is a popular deity in Maharashtra and Karnataka; devotees also exist in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Gujarat, but not in the same numbers.^[18] Vithoba is worshipped and revered by most Marathis, but he is not popular as a *kuldevta* (family deity).^[53] The main temple of Vithoba, which includes a distinct, additional shrine for his consort Rakhumai, is located at Pandharpur. In this context, Pandharpur is affectionately called "Bhu-Vaikuntha" (the place of residence of Vishnu on earth) by devotees.^[54] Devotees from across Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana, visit Vithoba's central temple at Pandharpur, since the times of Dnyaneshwar (13th century).^[13]

Two distinct traditions revolve around the worship of Vithoba in Maharashtra: ritual worship inside the temple by the Brahmin priests of the Badva family; and spiritual worship by the Varkaris.^[55] The ritual worship includes five daily rites. First, at about 3 am, is an *arati* to awaken the god, called *kākaḍarātī*. Next comes the *pañcāmṛtapūjā*, a *pūjā* that includes a bath with five (*pancha*) sweet substances called *panchamrita*. The image is then dressed to receive morning devotions. The third rite

is another *puja* involving re-dressing and lunch at noon. This is known as *madhyāhṇapūjā*. Afternoon devotions are followed by a fourth rite for dinner at sunset—the *aparāhṇapūjā*. The final rite is *śērāratī*, an *arati* for putting the god to sleep.^[56] In addition to the rites at the main temple in Pandharpur, Haridasa traditions dedicated to Vitthala flourish in Karnataka.

14.5.1 Varkari sect

The Varkari Panth (Pilgrim Path) or Varkari Sampradaya (Pilgrim Tradition) is one of the most important Vaishnava sects in India.^[57] It is a monotheistic, *bhakti* sect, focused on the worship of Vithoba and based on traditional Bhagavata *dharmā*.^[41] The sect is a “Shaiva-Vaishnava synthesis” and “nominal Vaishnavism, containing a free mix of other religions”.^[15] It is believed to have originated in Karnataka and migrated to Maharashtra. This last theory is based on a reference to Vithoba as “Kannada” (belonging to Karnataka) in the work of the first of the poet-saints, Dnyaneshwar. However, this word can also be interpreted as “difficult to understand”.^[46] Varkaris and scholars who believe Pundalik to have been a historical figure also consider him to be founder of the cult of Vithoba. This is evidenced by the liturgical call—*Pundalikavarada Hari Vitthala!*—which means “O Hari Vitthala (Vithoba), who has given a boon to Pundalik!”^[58] However, according to Zelliott, the sect was founded by Dnyaneshwar (also spelled Jnaneshwar), who was a Brahmin poet and philosopher and flourished during the period 1275–1296.^[59] Varkaris also give him credit with the saying—*Dnyanadev rachila paya*—which means “Dnyaneshwar laid the foundation stone”.^[60]

Namdev (c. 1270–1350), a Shudra tailor, wrote short Marathi devotional poems in praise of Vithoba called *abhangas* (literally 'unbroken'), and used the call-and-response *kirtan* (literally 'repeating') form of singing to praise the glory of his Lord. Public performance of this musical devotion led to the spread of the Vithoba faith, which accepted women, Shudras and outcaste “untouchables”, something forbidden in classical brahminical Hinduism. In the times of Muslim rulers, the faith faced stagnation. However, after the decline of the Vijayanagara empire, when wars erupted in the Deccan region, the Muslim rulers had to accept the faiths of Maharashtra in order to gather the support of its people. In this period, Eknath (c. 1533–99) revived the Varkari tradition. With the foundation of the Maratha empire under Shivaji, Tukaram (c. 1568–1650), a Shudra grocer, further propagated the Vithoba-centric tradition throughout the Maharashtra region.^[61]

All these poet-saints, and others like Janabai, the maid-servant of Namdev, wrote poetry dedicated to Vithoba. This Marathi poetry advocates pure devotion, referring to Vithoba mostly as a father, or in the case of the female saint Janabai’s poetry, as a mother (Vithabai).^[62] Not only women, like Janabai, but also a wide vari-



A Varkari journeys from Alandi to Pandharpur. He carries a veena (lute) with saffron flag attached, and cymbals tied to strings in his hands.

ety of people from different castes and backgrounds wrote *abhangas* in praise of Vithoba: Visoba Khechra (who was an orthodox Shaiva and teacher of Namdev), Sena the barber, Narhari the goldsmith, Savata the gardener, Gora the potter, Kanhopatra the dancing girl, Chokhamela the “untouchable” Mahar, and even the Muslim Sheikh Muhammad (1560–1650).^{[63][64]} Anyone born Shaiva or Vaishnava who considers Vithoba his *maya-baap* (mother-father) and Pandharpur his *maher* (maternal house of a bride) is accepted as a Varkari by the sect irrespective of the barriers of caste.^[58] Varkaris often practice Vithoba *japa* (meditative repetition of a divine name), and observe a fast on the *ekadashi* of each month.^[65]

14.5.2 Haridasa sect

Haridasa means servant (*dasa*) of Vishnu (Hari). According to Haridasa tradition, their *sampradaya*, also known as Haridasa-kuta, was founded by Achalananda Vitthala (c. 888). It is a distinct branch within Vaishnavism, centered on Vitthala (the Haridasa–Kannada name for Vithoba).^[66] Where Varkari are normally associated with Maharashtra, Haridasa are normally associated with Karnataka. The scholar Sharma considers Vithoba worship first emerged in Karnataka, only later moving to Maharashtra. He argues this on the basis of the reference by Dnyaneshwar, mentioned in section “Varkari sect” above.^[67] Lutgendorf credits the move-



The Vitthala temple in Hampi, Karnataka, was built by Krishnadevaraya, whose guru Vyasatirtha was a key Haridasa figure.

ment to Vyasatirtha (1478–1539), the royal guru (*rajguru*) to king Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagara empire. Vitthala enjoyed royal patronage in this era. Krishnadevaraya is also credited with building Vitthala's temple at the then capital city Vijayanagara (modern Hampi).^[68]

Haridasas consider the temple of Pandharpur to be sacred, as well that of Hampi, and worship Vitthala along with forms of Krishna.^[69] Haridasa literature generally deals with praise dedicated to Vitthala and Krishna. Haridasa poets like Vijaya Vitthala, Gopala Vitthala, Jagannatha Vitthala, Venugopala Vitthala and Mohana Vitthala assumed pen-names ending with "Vitthala", as an act of devotion.^[70] The Haridasa poet Purandara Dasa or Purandara Vitthala (1484–1564), "father of Carnatic music", often ended his Kannada language compositions with a salutation to Vitthala.^{[71][72]}

14.5.3 Pushtimarg sect

The founder of the Hindu sect Pushtimarg – Vallabhacharya (1479–1531) is believed to have visited Pandharpur at least twice and was ordered to marry by Vithoba (called Vitthalnath or Vitthalnathji in the sect) and have children so that he could be born as Vallabhacharya's son. Later, Vallabhacharya married. His second son and successor was recognized as a manifestation of Vithoba and named Vitthalnath, also known as Gusainji.^{[73][74][75]}

14.5.4 Festivals

The festivals associated with Vithoba primarily correspond to the bi-annual *yatras* (pilgrimages) of the Varkaris. The pilgrims travel to the Pandharpur temple from Alandi and Dehu, towns closely associated with poet-saints Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram respectively. Along the way, they sing *abhangas* (devotional songs) dedicated to Vithoba and repeat his name, carrying the



Dnyaneshwar's palkhi (palanquin), holding the footwear of the saint, is carried with honour in a silver bullock cart from Alandi to Pandharpur.

palkhis (palanquins) of the poet-saints. Varkaris do not engage in ritual worship but only practice *darshan* (visual adoration) of the deity. The ritual worship by the priests is restricted to five days each around the Ashadha (June–July) and Kartik (October–November) Ekadashis, when a large number of Varkaris participate in the *yatras*. In smaller numbers, the Varkaris also visit the temple on two other Ekadashis—in the Hindu months of Magha and Chaitra.^[55]

More than 800,000^[76] Varkaris travel to Pandharpur for the *yatra* on Shayani Ekadashi, the 11th day of the waxing moon in the lunar month of Ashadha.^{[77][78]} Both Shayani Ekadashi and Prabodhini Ekadashi (in the waxing half of Kartik), are associated with the mythology of Vishnu. Hindus believe that Vishnu falls asleep in Ksheersagar (a cosmic ocean of milk), while lying on the back of Shesha-nāga (the cosmic serpent). His sleep begins on Shayani Ekadashi (literally the 'sleeping 11th') and he finally awakens from his slumber, four months later, on Prabodhini Ekadashi. The celebrations in Ashadha and Kartik continue until the full-moon in those months, concluding with torchlight processions.^{[9][56]} Inscriptions dating to the 11th century mention the Ekadashi pilgrimages to Pandharpur.^[23] On Shayani Ekadashi and Prabodhini Ekadashi, the chief minister or a minister of Maharashtra state performs ritual components of worship on behalf of the Government of Maharashtra. This form of worship is known as *sarkari-mahapuja*.^[9]

Apart from the four Ekadashis, a fair is held on Dussera night at Pandharpur, when devotees dance on a large slab (*ranga-shila*) before Vithoba, accompanied with torchlight processions.^[40] Other observances at the Pandharpur temple include: Ranga-Panchami, when *gula* (red powder) is sprinkled on the god's feet; and Krishna Janmashtami, Krishna's birthday, when devotees dance and sing in front of Vithoba for nine days.^[79] Other sacred days include Wednesdays, Saturdays and all other Ekadashis, all of which are considered holy in Vaishnavism.^[4]

14.5.5 Devotional works



A four-armed Vithoba, a 19th-century painting from Tiruchchirappalli, Tamil Nadu. Here, Vithoba is depicted as an arms-akimbo Vishnu.

Devotional works dedicated to Vithoba can be categorised into the Varkari tradition, the Brahmin tradition and what Raeside calls a “third tradition”, that includes both Varkari and Brahmin elements. The Varkari texts are written in Marathi, the Brahmin texts in Sanskrit, and the “third tradition” are Marathi texts written by Brahmins.

The Varkari texts are: *Bhaktalilamrita* and *Bhaktavijaya* by Mahipati, *Pundalika-Mahatmya* by Bahinabai, and a long *abhang*a by Namdev. All these texts describe the legend of Pundalik. The Brahmin texts include: two versions of *Panduranga-Mahatmya* from the Skanda Purana (consisting of 900 verses); *Panduranga-Mahatmya* from the Padma Purana (consisting of 1,200 verses); *Bhima-Mahatmya*, also from the Padma Purana; and a third devotional work, yet again called *Panduranga-Mahatmya*, which is found in the Vishnu Purana.^{[80][81][82]} The “third tradition” is found in two works: *Panduranga-Mahatmya* by the Brahmin Sridhara (consisting of 750 verses), and another work of the same name written by Prahlada Maharaj (consisting of 181 verses).^{[83][84]}

In addition to the above, there are many *abhangas*, the short Marathi devotional poems of the Varkaris, and many *stutis* (songs of praise) and *stotras* (hymns), some of them originating from the Haridasa tradition. The best known of these is “Pandurangastaka” or “Pan-

durangastrotra”, attributed to Adi Shankaracharya, although this attribution is questioned.^[80] A text called “Tirthavali-Gatha”, attributed to Namdev or Dnyaneshwar but possibly a collection of writings of many poet-saints, also centers on the propagation of Varkari faith and Vithoba worship.^{[19][85]} Other devotional works include *aratis* like “Yuge athavisa vitevari ubha” by Namdev and “Yei O Vitthala maje mauli re”. These *aratis* sing of Vithoba, who wears yellow garments (a characteristic of Vishnu) and is served by Garuda (mount of Vishnu) and Hanuman (the monkey god, devotee of Rama—an avatar of Vishnu). Finally, the Telugu poet Tenali Ramakrishna (16th century) refers to Vithoba, as Panduranga, in his poem *Panduranga-Mahatmyamu*: “(O Parvati), accepting the services of Pundarika and Kshetrapala (Kalabhairava), becoming the wish fulfilling tree by assuming a subtle body for the sake of devotees, fulfilling their wishes, the deity Panduranga resides in that temple.”^[46]

14.5.6 Temples



The chief gate of Vithoba’s Pandharpur temple. The first step of the temple is regarded as saint Namdev’s memorial and the small blue temple in front of the gate is saint Chokhamela’s memorial.

There are many Vithoba temples in Maharashtra,^[86] and some in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. However, the main centre of worship is Vithoba’s temple in Pandharpur. The temple’s date of establishment is disputed, though it is clear that it was standing at the time of Dnyaneshwar in the 13th century. Along with Vithoba and his consorts—Rukmini, Satyabhama and Radha—other Vaishnava deities are worshipped. These include: Venkateshwara, a form of Vishnu; Mahalakshmi, a form of Vishnu’s consort Lakshmi; Garuda and Hanuman (see previous section). Shaiva deities are also worshipped, such as: Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of wisdom and beginnings; Khandoba, a form of Shiva; and Annapurna, a form of Shiva’s consort Parvati. The *samadhis* (memorials) of saints like Namdev, Chokhamela and Janabai, and of devotees such as Pundalik and Kanhopatra, are in and around the temple.^{[87][88]} Other significant temples in Maharashtra

are located: at Dehu, the birthplace of Tukaram, which attracts visitors at all *ekadashis* of the year; at Kole (Satara district), in memory of Ghadge Bova, which has a fair on the fifth day of the bright fortnight (waxing moon) in *Magha* month; at Kolhapur and Rajapur, which host fairs on *Shayani Ekadashi* and *Prabodini Ekadashi*;^{[89][90]} *Madhe* — a refuge of the *Pandharpur* image when it was moved to protect from Muslim invaders^[49] and finally at the *Birla Mandir* in *Shahad*.

Several temples are found in Goa, the well-known ones being the temples at *Sanquelim*, *Sanguem* and *Gokarna Math*. Similarly temple festivals celebrated in *Vitthala* temples in *Margao*,^[91] *Ponda* attract a lot of pilgrims. *Vitthal* is also worshipped as *Vitthalnath* at the *Nathdwara* in *Rajasthan*.^[73]



Thennangur temple, Tamil Nadu

Vithoba was introduced to South India during the *Vijayanagara* and *Maratha* rule.^[92] In South India he is generally known as *Vitthala*. The *Hampi* temple (mentioned above) is a *World Heritage* site and the most important of *Vitthala's* temples outside *Maharashtra*. Constructed in the 15th century, the temple is believed to have housed the central image from *Pandharpur*, which the *Vijayanagara* king *Krishnadevaraya* took “to enhance his own status”^[93] or to save the image from plunder by *Muslim* invaders.^[94] It was later returned to *Pandharpur* by *Bhanudas* (1448–1513), the great-grandfather of poet-saint *Ek Nath*. Today, the temple stands without a central image,^{[93][94]} though between 1516 to 1565, most important transactions, which would have been carried out previously in the presence of the original state deity *Virupaksha* (a form of *Shiva*), were issued in presence of the central image of *Vitthala*.^[95] Three of *Madhvacharya's* eight *mathas* (monasteries) in *Karnataka*—*Shirur*, *Pejavara* and *Puttige*—have *Vitthala* as their presiding deity.^{[96][97]} A *Vitthaleshwara temple* stands at *Mulbagal*, *Karnataka*. In *Tamil Nadu*, *Vitthala* shrines are found in *Srirangam*, *Vittalapuram* near *thiruporur* and in *Tirunelveli* district, and *Thennangur*, *Govindapuram* near *Kumbakonam* and sculptures are also found in *Kanchi*.^{[92][98]}

14.6 Legend

Legends regarding *Vithoba* usually focus on his devotee *Pundalik* or on *Vithoba's* role as a savior to the poet-saints

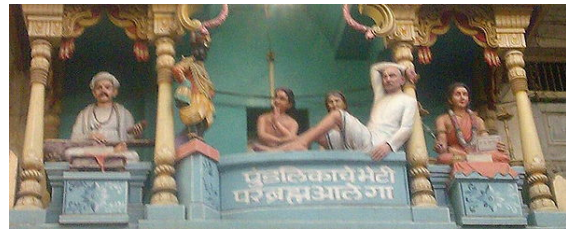


Image of a gopuram of a Pandharpur temple near Vithoba's central temple. The leftmost panel depicts Tukaram, the central panel depicts Vithoba (standing dark figure, left) waiting on the brick as Pundalik (centre) serves his parents, the right panel depicts Dnyaneshwar.

of the *Varkari* faith. As discussed in the devotional works section above, the *Pundalik* legend appears in the *Sanskrit* scriptures *Skanda Purana* and *Padma Purana*. It is also documented in *Marathi* texts: *Panduranga-Mahatmya* by a *Brahmin* called *Sridhara*; another work of the same name written by *Prahlada Maharaj*; and also in the *abhangas* of various poet-saints.

There are three versions of the *Pundalik* legend, two of which are attested as textual variants of the *Skanda Purana* (1.34–67). According to the first, the ascetic *Pundarika* (*Pundalik*) is described as a devotee of god *Vishnu* and dedicated to the service of his parents. The god *Gopala-Krishna*, a form of *Vishnu*, comes from *Govardhana* as a cowherd, accompanied by his grazing cows, to meet *Pundarika*. *Krishna* is described as in *digambar* form, wearing *makara-kundala*, the *sri-vatsa* mark (described above),^[50] a head-dress of peacock feathers, resting his hands on his hips and keeping his cow-stick between his thighs. *Pundarika* asks *Krishna* to remain in this form on the banks of the river *Bhima*. He believes that *Krishna's* presence will make the site a *tirtha* and a *kshetra*.^[99] The location is identified with modern-day *Pandharpur*, which is situated on the banks of the *Bhima*. The description of *Krishna* resembles the characteristics of the *Pandharpur* image of *Vithoba*.^[100]

The second version of the legend depicts *Vithoba* appearing before *Pundalik* as the five-year-old *Bala Krishna* (infant *Krishna*). This version is found in manuscripts of both *Puranas*, *Prahlada Maharaj*, and the poet-saints, notably *Tukaram*.^[101] The remaining version of the *Pundalik* legend appears in *Sridhara* and as a variant in the *Padma Purana*. *Pundalik*, a *Brahmin* madly in love with his wife, neglected his aged parents as a result. Later, on meeting sage *Kukkuta*, *Pundalik* underwent a transformation and devoted his life to the service of his aged parents. Meanwhile, *Radha*, the milkmaid-lover of *Krishna*, came to *Dwarka*, the kingdom of *Krishna*, and sat on his lap. *Radha* did not honour *Rukmini*, the chief queen of *Krishna*, nor did *Krishna* hold *Radha* accountable for the offence. Offended, *Rukmini* left *Krishna* and went to the forest of *Dandivana* near *Pandharpur*. Saddened by *Rukmini's* departure, *Krishna* searched for his queen and finally found her resting in *Dandivana*, near

Pundalik's house. After some coaxing, Rukmini was pacified. Then Krishna visited Pundalik and found him serving his parents. Pundalik threw a brick outside for Krishna to rest on. Krishna stood on the brick and waited for Pundalik. After completing his services, Pundalik asked that his Lord, in Vithoba form, remain on the brick with Rukmini, in Rakhumai form, and bless His devotees forever.^{[13][31][84][99]}

Other legends describe Vithoba coming to the rescue of his devotees in the form of a commoner, an outcast **Mahar** "untouchable" or a Brahmin beggar.^[102] **Mahipati**, in his work *Pandurangastrotra*, narrates how Vithoba helped female saints like Janabai in their daily chores, such as sweeping the house and pounding the rice.^[103] He narrates how Vithoba came to the aid of Sena the barber. The king of Bidar had ordered Sena to be arrested for not coming to the palace despite royal orders. As Sena was engrossed in his prayers with Vithoba, Vithoba went to the palace in the form of Sena to serve the king, and Sena was saved.^[104] Another tale deals with a saint, **Damaji**, the keeper of the royal grain store, who distributed grain to the people in famine. Vithoba came as an outcast with a bag of gold to pay for the grain.^[105] Yet another story narrates how Vithoba resurrected the child of Gora Kumbhara (potter), who had been trampled into the clay by Gora while singing the name of Vithoba.^[106]

14.7 Notes

- [1] Zelliott (1988) p. xviii "Varkari cult is rural and non-Brahman in character"
- [2] Sand (1990) p. 34 "the more or less anti-ritualistic and anti-brahmanical attitudes of Varkari sampradaya."
- [3] Novetzke (2005) pp. 115–16
- [4] Crooke (2003) pp. 607–08
- [5] Pande (2008) p. 449
- [6] Bhandarkar (1995) p. 124
- [7] Tagare in Mahipati: Abbott, Godbole (1988) p. xxxvi
- [8] Sand (1990) p. 38
- [9] Pathak, Dr. Arunchandra S. (2006). "Pandharpur". The Gazetteers Dept, Government of Maharashtra (first published: 1977). Retrieved 2008-07-14.
- [10] Bhandarkar (1995) p. 125
- [11] Eaton (2005) pp. 139–40
- [12] Zelliott (1988) p. 170
- [13] Pande (2008) p. 508
- [14] For Bir Kuar, Tagare in Mahipati: Abbott, Godbole (1988) p. xxxiv
- [15] Novetzke (2005) p. 116
- [16] Dhare p. 62
- [17] Sand (1990) p. 40
- [18] Kelkar (2001) p. 4179
- [19] Vaudeville (1987) pp. 223–24
- [20] Deleury as quoted in Sand (1990) p. 38
- [21] Tilak (2006) pp. 243–46
- [22] Stevenson (1843) pp. 5–6 "The want of suitable costume in the images (of Vithoba and Rakhumai) as originally carved, in this agreeing exactly with images the Jains at present worship."
- [23] Karve (1968) pp. 188–89
- [24] Zelliott, Eleanor in Mokashi (1987) p. 35
- [25] Shima (1988) p. 184
- [26] Gokhale (1985) pp. 42–52
- [27] Ranade (1933) p. 183
- [28] Pande (2008) pp. 449, 508
- [29] Sand (1990) pp. 43, 58
- [30] Sand (1990) p. 35
- [31] Bhandarkar (1995) pp. 125–26
- [32] Stevenson (1843) p. 66
- [33] Sand (1990) p. 37
- [34] Ranade (1933) pp. 183–84
- [35] Sand (1990) pp. 39–40
- [36] Williams, Monier. *mw1276-svadharman. sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de* (2008 ed.). p. 1276.
- [37] Zelliott, Eleanor in Mokashi (1987) p. 37
- [38] Novetzke p. 117
- [39] Zelliott (1988) p. 114
- [40] Underhill (1991) p. 171
- [41] Raeside, I. M. P. (1965) p. 82. Cited in Sand (1990) p. 33
- [42] Pathak, Dr. Arunchandra S. (2006). "Junnar". The Gazetteers Dept, Government of Maharashtra (first published: 1885). Archived from the original on 16 October 2009. Retrieved 2008-11-03.
- [43] Stevenson (1843) p. 64
- [44] Tagare in Mahipati: Abbott, Godbole (1988) p. xxxiv
- [45] Keer (2005) p. 482
- [46] Pande (2008) p. 448
- [47] Zelliott, Eleanor in Mokashi (1987) pp. 35–36
- [48] Ranade (1933) p. 41

- [49] Dhere, R C (2009). “Chapter 6: In search of the original idol of Viththal.”. *Shri Viththal ek mahasamanvaya (official site of author)*. Retrieved 20 July 2010.
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- [51] Pillai (1997) pp. 366–67
- [52] Pande (2008) p. 447
- [53] Karve (1968) p. 183
- [54] Tagare in Mahipati: Abbott, Godbole (1987) p. xxxv
- [55] Engblom, Philip C. in Mokashi (1987) pp. 7–10, 15
- [56] Shima (1988) p. 188
- [57] Flood (1996) p. 135
- [58] anon. (1987) pp. 966–68
- [59] Zelliott, Eleanor in Mokashi (1990) p. 38
- [60] Pawar p. 350
- [61] Shima (1988) pp. 184–86
- [62] Flood (1996) pp. 142–44
- [63] Zelliott, Eleanor in Mokashi (1987) p. 40
- [64] see Pawar pp. 350–62 for a review of Varkari literature
- [65] Tagare in Mahipati: Abbott, Godbole (1988) p. xxxvii
- [66] Flood (2003) pp. 252–53
- [67] Sharma (2000) pp. 514–16
- [68] Lutgendorf (2007) pp. 69, 70, 72
- [69] Rao (1966) pp. 7–8
- [70] Rao (1966) p. 28
- [71] Iyer (2006) p. 93
- [72] Kiehnle (1997) p. 39
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- [78] Engblom, Philip C. in Mokashi (1987) p. 2
- [79] Shima (1988) p. 189
- [80] Sand (1990) p. 56
- [81] Sand (1990) p. 33
- [82] For the complete English translation of *Bhaktavijaya*, which narrates the legend of Pundalik and also tells stories of reported interactions between the saints and Vithoba, see *Stories of Indian Saints* (1988) by Mahīpati, Justin Edwards Abbott, and Narhar R. Godbole.
- [83] Sand (1990) p. 34
- [84] For a complete Marathi text and English translation of *Panduranga-Mahatmya* by Sridhara see Raeside (1965) pp. 81–100
- [85] Novetzke (2005) p. 120
- [86] Singh (2004) p. 13
- [87] Shima (1988) pp. 189–96
- [88] Pande (2008) pp. 445–48
- [89] Underhill (1991) pp. 165–66, 172
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- [92] T. Padmaja (2002) pp. 92, 108, 121–22, fig 87
- [93] Eleanor Zelliott in Mokashi (1987) p. 42
- [94] Ranade (1933) p. 213
- [95] Eaton (2005) p. 83
- [96] Sharma (2000) p. 612
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- [105] For complete story, see Mahipati pp. 85–99
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- ## 14.10 External links
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 - Images of the central image of Vithoba and Rukmini
 - Video of the Pandharpur Vithoba’s “Maha-puja” (worship), Maharashtra Times
 - Article on the Pandharpur temple
 - The Haridasa movement
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- A summary of *Viththal ek mahasamanvaya* by R C Dhere on author's website

Chapter 15

Jagannath

For the short story collection so entitled, see Karin Tidbeck.

Jagannath (or **Jagannatha**) meaning “Lord of the Universe”, is a deity worshipped by Hindus, mainly in the Indian states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam, Manipur and Tripura^[1] and by Hindus in Bangladesh. Jagannath is considered a form of Vishnu^[2] or his avatar Krishna by the Hindus. Jagannath is worshipped as part of a triad on the “Ratnavedi” (jewelled platform) along with his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra.

The icon of Jagannath is a carved and decorated wooden stump with large round eyes and with stumps as hands, with the conspicuous absence of legs. The worship procedures, practices, sacraments and rituals of Jagannath do not conform with those of classical Hinduism.^[3] It is made of wood, which is an exception to common Hindu iconographic deities of metal or stone.^[4] The origin and evolution of Jagannath worship, as well as iconography, is unclear and has been subject to intense academic debate.

Jagannath lacks a clear vedic reference and is also not a member of the traditional Dashavatara concept or the classical Hindu pantheon,^[5] though in certain Oriya literary creations, Jagannath has been treated as the Ninth avatar, by substituting Buddha.^[6]

Jagannath considered as a form of the Hindu God Vishnu, is non-sectarian^{[7][8][9]} and has not been associated with any particular denomination of Hinduism in entirety, though there are several common aspects with Vaishnavism, Saivism, Shaktism, Smartism, as well as with Buddhism and Jainism.

The oldest and most famous Jagannath deity is established in Puri. The temple of Jagannath in Puri is regarded as one of the Char Dham (sacred Hindu pilgrimage places) in India.^[10]

The most famous festival related to Jagannath is the Rathayatra, where Jagannath, along with the other two associated deities, comes out of the Garbhagriha of the chief temple (Bada Deula). They are transported to the Gundicha Temple (located at a distance of nearly 3 kilometres (1.9 mi)), in three massive wooden chariots drawn

by devotees. Coinciding with the Rath Yatra festival at Puri, similar processions are organized at Jagannath temples throughout the world.

15.1 Etymology

Etymologically, "*Jagannath*" means “Master, Lord” (*nātha*) of the “World, Universe” (*Jagata*).^[12] The word has Sanskrit origin, being a tatsama in Oriya. It is a relational-case Tatpuruṣa compound word.

“Jagannātha” is a genitive tat-puruṣa-samāsa, derived from “Jagat (*a reduplicated nominal form of the verbal root √gam [to go], meaning “[whatsoever] is moving” and nātha (Oriya: ନାଥ), meaning “lord, refuge, shelter”, (Oriya: ଜଗତି). Jagannatha can thus also mean “He the shelter of the Revolving World”^{[13][14]}*

In the Oriya language, “Jagannath” refers to multiple names, as "*Jagā*" (ଜଗ) or "*Jagabandhu*" (ଜଗବନ୍ଧୁ) (“Friend of the Universe”). Both names derive from “Jagannath”. Further, on the basis of the physical appearance of the deity, names like "*Kālyā*" (କାଳିଆ) (“The Black-coloured Lord”, but which can also mean “the Timely One”), "*Darubrahman*" (ଦାରୁବ୍ରହ୍ମଣ) (“The Sacred Wood-Riddle”), "*Dāruēdabatā*" (ଦାରୁଈଦବତା) (“The wooden god”), Chakāākhi (ଚକାଆଖି) or "*Chakānayan*" (ଚକା ନୟନ “With round eyes”), "*Cakāḍōlā*" (ଚକା ଢୋଳା “with round pupils”) are also in vogue.^{[15][16][17]}

Some scholars have suggested that the word is a Sanskritization of a tribal word. They have presented arguments concerning the Jagannath’s tribal origins. Savaras the early tribal inhabitants of Odisha were tree worshippers who called their god *Jaganata* from whom the word Jagannath may have been derived.^[18] However, the verity of these statements depends upon a prior knowledge of the verbal origins of the source languages, and so remains to some extent speculative and possibly represent political agendas. Still, to this day, a class of non brahmin priests known as “Daitapati” claiming origin from original Savara devotee of Jagannath named Viśvabāsu perform some of the most important rituals in the main temple at Pūri and are considered the God’s family.^[19]

15.2 Metaphysical attributes



The image of *Jagannath* in the Puri Temple.

While some schools of thought consider Jagannath as an Avatar or incarnation of Vishnu, others consider him as Vishnu incarnate^[20] or the Avataree i.e. the cause of the Avatars, and not merely an Avatar of Vishnu.^{[21][22]} The incarnations emanate from Jagannath, who is the cause of all material creation. Therefore, Jagannath does not have any life stories and lila, in contrast to Avatars like Parshurama, Rama, Krishna etc. According to author Dipti Ray in *Prataparudra Deva*, the last great Suryavamsi King of Odisha:

“In Prataparudradeva’s time Oriya poets accepted Sarala Dasa’s idea and expressed in their literary works as all the Avatars of Vishnu (Jagannath) manifest from him and after their cosmic play dissolute (bilaya) in him (Jagannath). According to them Jagannath is Sunnya Purusa, Nirakar and Niranjan who is ever present in Nilachala to do cosmic play ... The five Vaishnavite Sakhas [“Comrades”] of Orissa during Prataparudradeva’s time expounded in their works the idea that Jagannath (Purushottama) is Purna Brahman (i.e. god *in toto*) from whom other Avatars like Rama, Krishna, etc., took their birth for lilas in this universe and at the end would merge in the self of Purna Brahman^[23]

Jagannath has been endowed with attributes of all the Avatars of Vishnu. He is adorned and worshipped as different Avatars on special occasions.^[24] Various traditions identify Jagannath with different Avatars of Vishnu. However he is most frequently identified with Krishna the 8th Avatar of Vishnu.^[25] The Puranas relate that the Narasimha Avatar of Vishnu appeared from a wooden pillar. It is therefore believed that Jagannath is worshipped as a wooden idol or Daru Brahma with the Sri Narasimha hymn dedicated to the Narasimha Avatar.^[26] Jagannath when worshipped alone is called **Dadhi Va-**

man^[27] Sanskrit for the Dwarf who likes curds. Every year in the month of Bhadra, Jagannath is dressed and decorated in the form of the Vamana avatar of Vishnu.^[28] Jagannath assumes the Vamana Avatar during the annual Rath Yatra.^[22] Jagannath appeared in the form of Rama another avatar of Vishnu to Tulsidas, whom he worshipped as Raghunath when visiting Puri in the 16th century.^[29] From the times of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu Jagannath has been strongly associated with Krishna. Jagannath is identified with Buddha considered the ninth avatar of Vishnu by Hindus.^[30] Attempts to label Jagannath as the ninth Avatar of Vishnu instead of Buddha is controversial.^[31] Jagannath as the dutiful son offers oblations in memory of parents of all the Human Avatars of Vishnu annually.



Jagannath in his Hathi Beshha or elephant attire

Caste barriers never existed among the devotees in Jagannath’s temple.^[32] Jagannath is venerated by all Hindu sects,^[24] not just Vaishnavas and has a Pan-Indian influence.^{[33][34]} Jagannath is considered the epitome of Tantric worship.^[30] Jagannath is venerated as Bhairava or the Hindu God Shiva the consort of Goddess Vimala by Shaivites and Shakta sects.^[33] Even the priests of Jagannath Temple at Puri belong to the Shakta sect, although the Vaishnava sect’s influence predominates.^[35] As part of the triad Balabhadra is also considered to be Shiva and Subhadra a manifestation of Durga.^[36] Jagannath is said to assume the form of any God to satisfy his devotee’s desire.^[29] In the Bhagavata Purana the Sage Markandeya established that Purushottama Jagannath and Shiva are one.^[37] Jagannath in his Hathi Beshha (elephant form) has been venerated by devotees like Ganapati Bhatta of

Maharashtra as the God Ganesh.^[29]

15.3 Iconography and physical appearance



Raja Ravi Varma lithography of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Sudarshana.

The most significant of Jagannath's many shrines is the temple at Puri, Odisha. In this temple, Jagannath is part of a triad of deities that includes Balabhadra and goddess Subhadra. Apart from the principal companion deities Jagannath is worshipped along with Sudarshana Chakra, Madhava, Sridevi and Bhudevi on the principal platform; Ratnavedi (Ratna: Bejewelled, Vedi: Platform/Pedestal - The bejewelled platform) in the inner sanctum sanctorum of the temple.^[38]

Unlike other deities of the Hindu gods, there is no anthropomorphic or artistic aspect to the idol of Jagannath. The idol has not been designed to represent the image of a human being. The image has a massive square head, merging with the chest into one piece of wooden stump without any demarcation of the neck. The arms have been inserted in a line with the upper lip. The eyes are very large and round. The waist is the limit of the body.

It has been hypothesized in the myths and legends that the idols of Jagannath, along with those of Balabhadra and Subhadra, are unfinished, as there are no identifiable hands or legs.^[39] Such a state of affairs mixed with the hearsay led William Bruton, the first English traveller to

Puri in 1633, to mention that the idol of Jagannatha "is in a shape like a serpent, with seven heads".^[40] The top upper portions of the deities' heads are triangular in shape, evoking the Trimundi (Triangular head).

The deity of Jagannath is about 6 feet tall (1.83 m).^[41] The colour is predominantly black and the eyes are round and large. The eyes have three concentric circles - Red on the outer border, white in the middle, and black in the centre. The image of Balabhadra in the temple is also approximately 6 feet (1.8 m) tall.^[41] Balabhadra's face is white, his eyes are oval-shaped, and his stump-like arms are at eye level. The Devi Subhadra statue is yellow in hue and stands about 5 feet tall (1.52 m).^[41] The goddess's eyes are also oval. The Sudarshana Chakra is approximately the same height as the two male deities and is red in colour and is worshipped as the fourth deity in the Ratnabedi. The Sudarshana Chakra is represented by a wooden pillar on which a Chakra is carved and clothed, unlike the traditional representation as a metal discus. The Sudarshana Chakra is placed to the left of Jagannath contrary to the traditional placement to the right of Vishnu signifying its benign and protective aspect.^[42]

The idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana Chakra are made of neem wood.^[43] Neem wood is chosen because as per the Bhavishya Purana it is the most auspicious wood to make idols of Vishnu. The Brihat Samhita and the Vishnu Samhita mention that if God is worshipped in the form of a Daru (idol of wood) the worshipper obtains all four aspirations of man, namely Ayu (longevity), Sri (wealth), Bala (strength), and Vijaya (victory).^[41]

15.4 Myths and legends of the origin and emergence of Jagannath

The legends regarding the origin of Jagannath, which have been recorded in various sources such as Mahabharat of Sarala Dasa, Deula Tola of Nilambar Das, Skanda Purana, Brahma Purana, Narada Purana, Padma Purana, Kapila Samhita etc., suggest the tribal as well as Brahmanical links of the deity in the initial stages.

It should be noted that, despite repeated references to King Indradyumna in the Jagannath lore below, Indradyumna remains a legendary figure and his historicity cannot be established on any safe ground.^[44] Some have identified him with the Indradyumna of the Mahabharat and considered him to be quite an ancient figure of the early Vedic era. Drawing from poet Sarala Dasa's *Mahabharat*, Indradyumna can be identified with Indraratha, the Somavamsi king of the 10th century AD. But identification of Indradyumna with Indraratha is at variance with the long-accepted tradition that Yayati I, the remote

predecessor of Indraratha, built the Jagannath Temple at Puri.

The following principal Puranic legends are associated with the emergence of Jagannath:

15.4.1 Puranic version

The Puranic text Purusottama Mahatmya ^[45] of the Skanda Purana ^[46] contains the Indradyumna legend and the origin of Jagannath's wooden idol at Puri.

According to the legends, in the *Satya yuga*, Indradyumna was a *Lunar Dynasty* king of Somavamsa lineage. A traveling pilgrim came before Indradyumna and described the great God *Nila Madhava* (Blue Vishnu) being worshipped at Nilachal (Blue Mountain) in Odra (*Odisha*). The pilgrim disappeared after telling the story. At the king's request, his priest and his younger brother Vidyapati went in search of the legendary divinity. Vidyapati reached the forest in Savardvipa on the banks of the river *Mahanadi*. The *Savara* king, *Visvvasu*, received Vidyapati and promised to show him *Nila Madhava* the next morning. Vidyapati did not touch food or water before seeing the Lord. Seeing the eagerness of Vidyapati, the *Savara* king had him bathed in *Rohini-kunda* and seated him under the *kalpa* tree. There Vidyapati saw *Nila Madhava* being worshipped by the *Devas*. Then Vidyapati returned to *Avanti*, the capital of King Indradyumna.



Nilamadhav Temple, Kantilo

After listening to Vidyapati's account, Indradyumna set out for *Nila Madhava*, along with the priest, Vidyapati, and his followers. But as it turned out, *Nila Madhava* had disappeared on the very day that Vidyapati had returned to *Malava*. Upon reaching the spot, they found the god missing and the entire area covered with the golden sand of the coast. The shocked king Indradyumna was apprised of the message of *Brahma* by *Narada*: that the King must worship the deity with one thousand *Asvamedha yajnas*.

The divination of *Nila Madhava* went on:

“In this world I will not give you darshana in the

form of *Nila Madhava*, but I will manifest in four forms: *Jagannath*, *Balabhadra*, *Subhadra*, and *Sudarshana chakra*. Wait near *Chakra tirtha*, and a *daru* would come afloat. I will manifest in the form of a very large, fragrant, reddish log, and the signs of *shankha*, *chakra*, *gada*, and *padma* will be seen everywhere on that form. Go there. Take Me out and make four deities from that log. Then you will be able to worship Me.”

Upon receiving the devotion of the King, the Purusottama himself took the form of *Visvakarma* and secretly made the idols of *daru* (wood). *Vishwakarma* agrees to carve four idols for Indradyumna, on the condition that the door of the temple should be shut and nobody should try to enter the temple or disturb the carpenter until the idols were ready. Indradyumna promised to follow these conditions and *Vishwakarma* began his work. However, out of curiosity, the King (or in some versions, Queen *Gundicha*) could not help stealing a glance at *Vishwakarma*'s work. *Vishwakarma*, upset at the breach of promise, vanished without completing the idols. Thus, *Jagannath*, *Balabhadra*, and *Subhadra* are still represented with incomplete limbs. Thereafter, *Brahma* himself established the holy idols on *Vaishakha Sukla*, on *Pushya* star.

The traditional version lacks historical support, as the identity of *Nila Madhava* remains unclear. For this reason, this traditional account of the emergence and origin of *Jagannath* worship remains a myth only. However, in the town of *Kantilo* in *Odisha*, there is a temple dedicated to a deity named *Nila Madhava*, of uncertain genealogy.

15.4.2 Vaishnavite version



Carpenters constructing Jagannath's chariot for the Rath Yatra at Puri

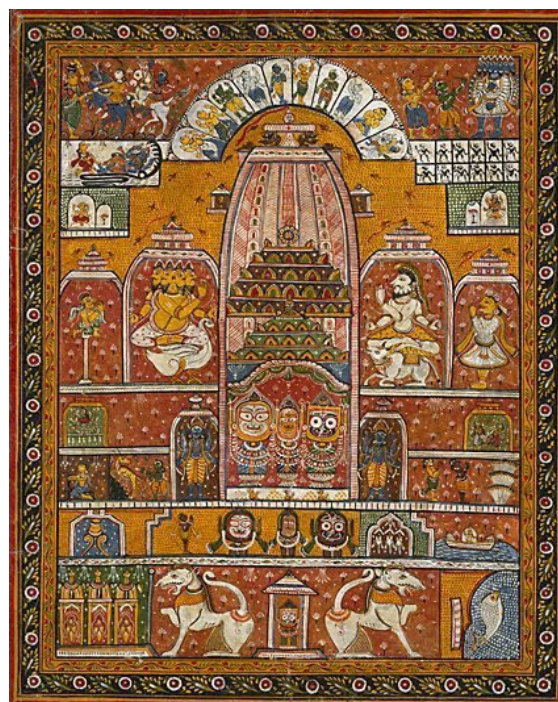
The *Skanda Purana* and *Brahma Purana* have attributed the creation of the *Jagannathpuri* during the reign of

Indradyumna, a pious king and an ascetic who ruled from Ujjain. According to the second legend, associated with the Vaishnavas, when Lord Krishna ended the purpose of his Avatar with the illusionary death by Jara and his “mortal” remains were left to decay, some pious people saw the body, collected the bones and preserved them in a box. They remained in the box till it was brought to the attention of Indradyumna by Lord Vishnu himself who directed him to create the image or a murti of Jagannath from a log and consecrate the bones of Krishna in its belly. Then King Indradyumna, appointed Vishwakarma, the architect of gods, a Brahmin carpenter to carve a the murti of the deity from a log which would eventually wash up on the shore at Puri. Indradyumna commissioned Vishwakarma (also said to be the divine god himself in disguise) who accepted the commission on the condition that he would not be disturbed till the carving of the image of the deity was completed, and the king to this condition. He then began his work in complete isolation behind closed doors.^[47]

Everyone was anxious about the divine work, including the King Indradyumna. After a fortnight of waiting, the King who was anxious to see the deity, could not control his eagerness, and he visited the site where Vishwakarma was working. Soon enough Vishwakarma was very upset and he left the carving of the idol unfinished; the images were without hands and feet. The king was very perturbed by this development and appealed to Brahma to help him. Brahma promised the King that the images which were carved would be deified as carved and would become famous. Following this promise, Indradyumna organized a function to formally deify the images, and invited all gods to be present for the occasion. Brahma presided over the religious function as the chief priest and brought life (soul) to the image and fixed (opened) its eyes. This resulted in the images becoming famous and worshipped at Jagannath Puri in the well known Jagannath Temple as a Kshetra (pilgrimage centre). It is, however, believed that the original images are in a pond near the temple.^[47]

15.4.3 Sarala Dasa Mahabharata version

Sarala Dasa, the great Oriya poet of the 15th century while praising Jagannath as the saviour of mankind considered him both as a form of Buddha as well as a manifestation of Krishna.^[48] According to Sarala Dasa’s Mahabharata, the mortal remains of Krishna transformed into a wooden form and floated up to the Puri sea shore. Jara Savara, an aborigine, picked it and worshipped it. Subsequently, Indradyumna, the king of Somavamsa, had three wooden images made out of the log and established a grand temple for the images.



Jagannath Theme in Pattachitra painting

15.5 Origins of the Sect of Jagannath – alternate theories

15.5.1 Vedic origin of Jagannath

In the Rig veda,^[49] there is mention of a Daru (log of wood) floating in the ocean. Vedic prayers have indicated taking shelter in the Daru.

In spite of the fact that Acharya Sayana, the noted commentator on the Vedas, has categorically interpreted the hymn with Jagannath as the daru floating at the sea shores,^[50] some scholars have refuted this interpretation under the argument that the hymn deals with “Alaxmi Stava” of Arayi.

15.5.2 Stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharat

It has been claimed that the land by the sea shore where King Janak performed a yagna and tilled land to obtain Sita is the same as the area in which the Gundicha temple is situated in Puri.^[51] In the Valmiki Ramayan it has been said^[52] that Ram advised Hanuman and Vibhishan to worship Jagannath after the Treta Yuga.

The Mahabharat amply describes King Indradyumna’s Ashvamedh Yagna and the advent of the four deities of the Jagannath cult.^[51] It describes how the holy Indradyumna tank was formed by the trodding of ground by thousands of cows donated by Indradyumna to Brahmins. To this day the Indradyumna tank is considered

holy by pilgrims.

15.5.3 Buddhist origins

William Bruton, the first English traveler to visit Puri and to see the Jagannath temple, made a certain counterfactual observation in 1633 that the image of Jagannatha “is in shape like a serpent, with seven heads” and the holy pagoda is “the mirror of all wickedness and idolatry”. Thus, Jagannath became known to Europeans as a pagan divinity of monstrous form. To the Europeans, the iconography of Jagannatha remained a mystery from the time of Bruton’s visit until the 19th century. Bernier visited Puri in 1667 and left the first reliable description of the Car Festival, but failed to give any account of the image.^[53] Jean-Baptiste Tavernier later described in detail the priceless jewellery of Jagannatha, which however, he never saw.^[53]

With the more enlightened views of the 19th century, the problem of the iconography of Jagannath became a fascinating field for speculation. After the British occupation of Odisha in 1803, the temple and its priests received special treatment from the East India Company, which decided to protect the institution for economic and political reasons. Europeans were still excluded from the great sanctuary and even General Alexander Cunningham, one of the doyens of Indian archaeology, had a rather vague knowledge of the appearance of the Puri images, chiefly based, it seems, on secondary sources. The restrictions imposed on non-Hindus did not prevent a number of scholars from observing the strange rites at Puri, which included the suspension of caste-rules during the Car Festival, nor from drawing conclusions concerning the origins of the cult of Jagannath.^[6]

As noted by Jagannath cult researcher, O. M. Starza,^[54] since the complex rites of the Brahmins had given Christian scholars a low opinion of Hinduism, they endeavored to explain the enlightened features of the Jagannath cult by suggesting that it originated in the noble religion of the Buddha. It was thought, for instance, that the temple of Puri occupied almost certainly the site of an earlier Buddhist shrine, without any real evidence to support this view; while General Alexander Cunningham’s suggestions that the figure of Jagannath was derived from the Buddhist symbol of the triratna (or taurine) was accepted even by such authorities as the Sri Lankan Buddhist scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy.

In the Bhilsa Topes monuments, Alexander Cunningham has identified the Jagannath triad as the Buddhist triad. Cunningham argues that the following two points are sufficient to conclude in favour of the Buddhist triad: “the suspension of caste during the festival and the belief that the image contains the relics or bones of Krishna”. In support of second point he says that “(it) is also not at all Brahmanical, it is eminently characteristic of Buddhism.”^[55] Cunningham also asserts that the

Brahma Padartha/Mani (Divine Life material) is nothing but a Buddhist relic (Buddha’s Tooth).^[55]

Along the same lines, noted writers like W. W. Hunter,^[56] A. Stirling, John Beames, N. K. Sahu in the book *A History of Orissa*, Harekrushna Mahatab in his *History of Orissa*,^[57] and Mayadhar Mansingh in his *The Saga of the Land of Jagannatha*^[58] opine that it is a Buddhist triad.

In fact, there is no historical evidence of worship of Jagannath at Puri prior to the 10th century, when Yayati Kesari was the ruler. The Buddhist King Indrabhuti’s Jnanasiddhi mentions^[6] about the place of Jagannath. Nilakantha Das has mentioned that the Savaras were worshipping the image of Jagannath made of neem wood in a place called Sambal (Samal, now in Talcher of Angul District) in Oddiyana, the kingdom of Indrabhuti, which was even prior to the rule of Yayati Kesari -I. Indrabhuti^[59] has described Jagannath as Buddhist deity in Jnanasiddhi.

In the narrative by Indrabhuti, Jagannath was worshipped by the Savaras in one of the Budha Viharas. During the rule of King Sasanka and feudatory chief Madhav Raj-II, many anti-Buddhist campaigns were undertaken. Therefore, the Buddhist Jagannath was shifted before the arrival of Hieun-Tsang and destruction of the Puspagiri Vihar. In this period, Indrabhuti emerged as a worshipper of Jagannath in 717. There are various opinions about the place where the image of Jagannath was lying buried. The *Madala panji* (The Temple Chronicles) identifies this place with the village Gopali of Sonepur district of Odisha. The *Madala panji* records a legend of King Yayati recovering the wooden images of Jagannath from the Sonepur region, where they lay buried for over 144 years. Thereafter, King Yayati reconstructed the wooden images from Sonepur forest tribes.

The book *Gyanasidhi* written by Indrabhuti, as published from Baroda, has descriptions about Jagannath worshipped as Buddha.

Pranipatyā jagannatham sarvajin-
abarcitam |
Sarvabuddhamayam siddhi – byap-
inam gaganopamam |
Sarvadam sarvasattwebhyah sarva-
jna vara vajrinam |
Bhaktyaham sarvabhaven kakshye
tatsadhanam vajrinam |
“Jagannath is worshipped by the
greatest Jainas, he is in the form
of the almighty Buddha, full of wis-
dom and compared to the sky. He
offers everything to all the living
beings. He is omniscient and best
among the Bajjanis. I offer my
solemn prayer to that Jagannatha
with devotion and tell the way of his
Sadhana”.^[60]

Many of the ancient poets of Odisha have also explained Jagannath as the form of Buddha and worshipped as Baudhabatara (incarnation of The Buddha). Sarala Mahabharata:

ସଂସାର ଜନଠକୁ ସହେ ତାରିବା ନିମନ୍ତେ
ବଦଧ୍ୟ ରୁପରେ ବିଜେ ଛନ୍ତି ଜଗନ୍ନାଥେ ॥
ବଦଧ୍ୟ ରୁପରେ କଳି କଳାନ୍ତକ ସାଧି
କୁଟାନ୍ତକ ଦରପଗଞ୍ଜ ଅଟ କୃପାନିଧି ॥

Roman transliteration:

samsāra janañku sēhu tāribā nimantē
bauddha ruparē bijē chanti jagannāthē
bauddha ruparē kalī kaḷāntaka sādhi
kuṭāntaka darpagañja aṭa kṛpānidhi

[61]

English translation: (unknown)

Darubrahma gita:

Sastha di sa antarena, pada je pani hela khina |
Baudharupa heba pain, padapani chadile tahi
॥^[62]

Oriya bhagabata:

ଠାକୁରଣେ ବଢ଼େ ଇଲ୍ଲେ ରାଜା ହଢ଼େ ଇଲ୍ଲେ କି ବାଇ,
କଳିଠୁଗଣେ ବସିବୁ ବଦଧ୍ୟ ରୁପ ହଢ଼େ ଇଲ୍ଲେ ॥^[1] (*Deula toḷā*, Oriya
Bhagabata)
ସମୁଦ୍ରରେ ମେଲିଣା ପରଭୁ ଦିଅ ଦବେରାଜା,
କଳିଠୁଗଣେ ପାଇବେ ସବେ ଦାରୁରୁପେ ପୁଜା ॥

1. ^ Cite error: The named reference prabhat was invoked but never defined (see the help page).

ṭhākūrē bōilē rājā hōilu ki bāi
kaḷijugē basibu bauddha rupa hōi
samudrē mēliṇa prabhu dia dēbarājā
kaḷijugē pāibē sē dārupurē puja

[63]

Sunya sanhita: Nija bansa gheni baudharupare nilachale
achi rahi^[64]

Ananta guptagita:

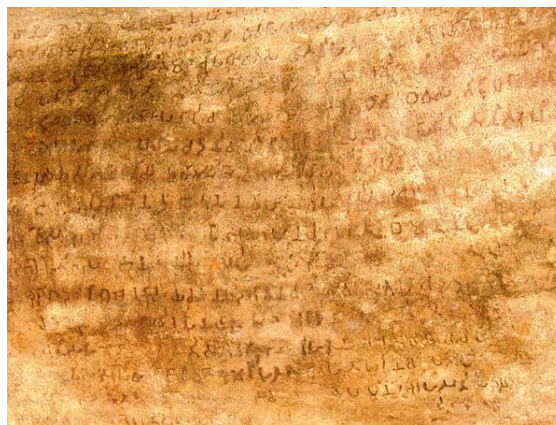
Tahun baudharupe bhagabana, rahile puruso-
tama bhubana |
Baudharupe nilagiri mohi ॥^[65]

The texts of the above prove that Jagannath was worshipped in Puri by the Oriyas as a form of Buddha from a long time. Jayadeva, in Gita Govinda also has described Buddha as one among the Dasavatara. Indrabhuti, the ancient king of Sambalaka (present Sambalpur district) of Oddiyana used to worship Jagannath as Buddha. This culture also influenced Buddhism in Nepal and Tibet. That is how Buddha is also worshipped as Jagannath in Nepal.^[66]

Anangavajja, the guru of Indrabhuti (Also described as Acharjya, Jogi, Jogiswara and Mahacharjya in the Tengur cannons). Pragyonpayabiniscayasidhi, written by Indrabhuti and published from Baroda also has description of Jagannath by Siddha Anangavajja.

Sada parahitascaiva car-
jayahkamyacetasa |
parjyupasyo jagannatho guruh sar-
varthasidhida dah ॥^[67]

15.5.4 Jain Origins



Hathigumpha inscription of King Khāvela at Udayagiri Hills

Pandit Nilakantha Das suggested that Jagannath was a deity of Jain origin because of the appending of *Nath* to many Jain Tirthankars.^[68] He felt Jagannath meant the 'World personified' in the Jain context and was derived from *Jinanath*. Evidence of the Jain philosophy like the concept of Kaivalya which means salvation are present in the Jagannath cult.^[69] O.M Starza^[70] discussed Anirudh Das's theory that the original Jagannath deity as influenced by Jainism and is none other than the *Jina* of Kalinga taken to Magadh by Mahapadma Nanda.^[71] This theory identifies the *Jina* of Kalinga recorded to have been restored to Odisha by Kharvela in his Hathigumpha inscription with Jagannath.

15.5.5 Tribal origins

Polish Indologist Olgierd M. Starza has reviewed various theories on the tribal, Buddhist, Jain, or Vaishnav origins of Jagannath in *The Jagannatha Temple at Puri: Its Architecture, Art And Cult*,^[72] and has arrived at the conclusion that "... several early theories regarding the origin of Jagannatha have been refuted; only the tribal theory remains a possibility ..." ^[73]

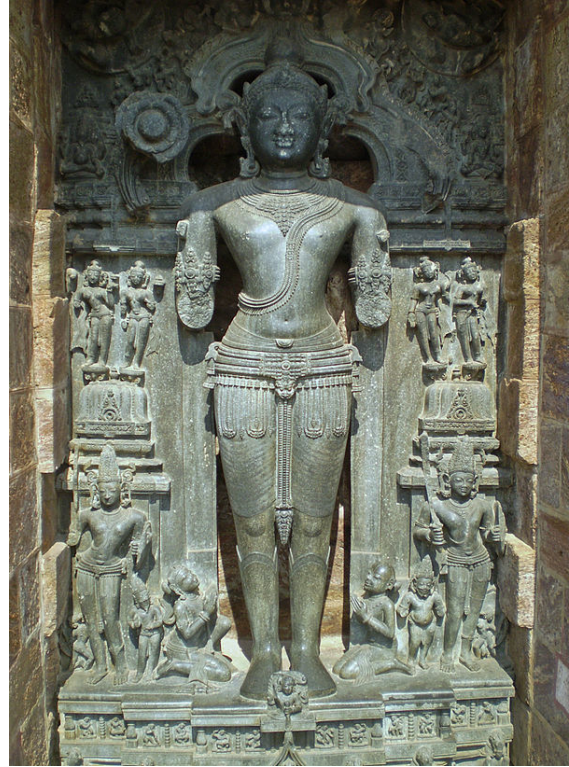
The factors responsible for the acceptance of tribal origin theories are as under:

1. The structure and shape of Jagannath deity is commensurate to a pillar. The Savaras, the earliest tribal inhabitants of Odisha, were tree worshipers, and their rituals involved dancing and singing before the *Kitung* or *Jaganata* or God.^[18] It has been argued that when the *Vedic Aryans* migrated to Odisha, they adopted the local tribal tradition of *Jaganata* worship, and effected the transformation of the tribal wooden pillar *Jaganata* to *aryanized Jagannath*. In fact, among tribals of *Vindhya* region, tree or *khamba* (pillar or post) worship is prevalent.
2. A deep association of a class of non-Brahmin, tribal origin servitors, called *Daitas*, exists with the worship of the Jagannath deities. These *Daitas* are the hereditary servitors of Jagannath.^[19] They are inextricably and exclusively connected with the funeral rites of Jagannath during the *Nabakalevara* (New embodiment/renewal) ritual and bear the sole responsibilities of *Snana Yatra* and *Ratha-Yatra*. The instances of worship of Jagannath by Savaras is also mentioned in *Darubrahma Gita* written by Jagannath Dasa in the 16th century and in *Deula Tola* written by Nilambara Das in the 17th century.
3. The images of the Jagannath triad are built out of neem wood, as opposed to universal use of stone for construction of images of all brahminical Hindu deities.^[41]
4. There is no caste distinction in the cult of Jagannath which is akin to the practices of tribals and significantly different from classical Vaishnavism.^[74]

These assumptions state Jagannath with a class of aborigines, called *Savaras*, the peculiar shape as a pillar and typical nature of the wooden icon of the deity and his associates, *Balabhadra* and *Subhadra*; many scholars have held that Jagannath has originally been a tribal deity of *Savara* origin.

Anncharlott Eschmann has pointed out that the *Nabakalevara* ritual is the ceremony of periodical renewal of the body of the deity, is a tribal custom.^[75] Such practices of renewal of wooden deity are found among the primitive tribes like *Savaras* and *Konds*.

British historian *William Wilson Hunter* in the first volume on the British province of Odisha and the temple of Jagannath has remarked that the aboriginal people worshipped a Blue Stone inside dense forests as *Nila Madhava*. Hunter ascribed the blue (*Nila*) colour to the use of the common *chlorite schist* stone of the Hills of Odisha in which all the ancient images of Odisha were being made.^[76] As per *Hunter*, the *dravidian God*, who was offered raw, uncooked food by the primitive tribes. *Hunter* hypothesized that with the passage of time, the *Aryan elements* assimilated *Jagannath* into fold of Hinduism where as per more sophisticated customs, *Jagannath* is being offered cooked food. The synthesis is clear even at present



A statue of Surya in Chlorite Schist from Konarak

since worship methods of both these two folds (Tribal and Brahminical) coexist side by side at Jagannath Temples.



Three pillars found in an old temple said to date back to the 8th century in Bilaspur district, Chhattisgarh

Nilakantha Das opines that *Savari Narayana* of *Madhya Pradesh* (*Dakshina Kosala*), was brought to *Puri* from *Phuljheer* of *Madhya Pradesh* where a wooden deity was worshipped.^[77] This *Narayana* of the *Savaras* and became *Jagannath*.

Prof. B. C. Mazumder (ed), in the *Typical Selections from Oriya Literature*,^[78] maintains that *Seori-Narayana* has been located in the *Bilaspur district* of present *Chhattisgarh* state, which was then in the kingdom of

Dakshin Kosala, where in the 7th century a line of rulers of Hinduized Savara origin, established its rule with Sivpur, in the north of Raipur, for its capital.

Verrier Elwin, anthropologist, ethnologist and tribal activist, in his book *Religion of an Indian Tribe* has narrated that:^[79]

“The god Jagannatha had appeared in Seori-Narayana and an old Savar used to worship him. The king of Odisha had built the great temple at Puri and wished to install Jagannatha in it, and he found a Brahmin to fetch it from Seori-Narayan, but nobody knew where it was except the old hermit, Savar. The Brahmin besought him in vain to be allowed to see the god and even went so far as to marry his daughter, and finally the old man consented to take him blindfolded to the place. The Brahmin, however, tied some mustard seeds on a corner of his cloth and made a hole in it so that they dropped out one by one on the way. After sometime they grew up and served to guide him to the spot. The Brahmin then went to the Seori-Narayana alone and begged the god to go to Puri. Jagannatha consented and assuming the form of a log of wood, floated down the Mahanadi to Puri, where he was taken out and placed in the temple.”

As per Elwin there is an alternative Savara legend, according to which there are three most important and prominent Kittungs (Gods) - two brothers and a sister, Ramma, Bimma and Sitaboi. Ramma is always coupled with the brother Bimma. The legend maintains that it was from them that the Savara tribe was born. Such a set up has significant resemblance to the Jagannath triad.

The argument, that because there is no caste distinction inside the Jagannath temples, the images are of Buddhist descent, cannot be accepted on merit. Verrier Elwin has argued that:

“They (The Savars) have no caste feeling, and they do not excommunicate one of their members if he changes his religion. Most of them have no idea of untouchability and accept food even from the Douss (Douss are treated as inferiors).” (The Religion of an Indian Tribe)

Although Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh thought it (*Jagannath triad*) to be a Buddhist triad,^[80] in his other book *History of Oriya Literature*, he writes:^[81]

“Originally a god of the tribal Savaras, and adopted later successively by the Aryan faiths of Jainism, Buddhism, Tantricism and Vaishnavism, Jagannatha bears the indelible impress

of each of these cults even today. The traditions and practices which centre in an around this famous temple are also still South Indian or Dravidian to a large extent.”

The theory that the Jagannath triad is a Vaishnava cult has been ruled out as there is no semblance of *Nila Madhaba* in the present triad images, nor are the three images on the same platform being worshipped by the Vaishnavites. Further, the *Brahma Padartha* (life substance) has been argued not to be Lord Krishna's mortal remains, since puritanism in the Vaishnavism does not permit mortal remains to be inserted in a sacred image.

Further, the Buddhist relic, the tooth relic, cannot be the *Brahma Padartha* (life material), as the relic has been kept at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka.

In connection to the possible tribal origins of the Jagannath cult, a pertinent point has been raised by Pandit Nilakantha Das in *The Orissa Historical Review Journal*, April 1958, whereby it has been argued that:^[77]

“Before Choraganga actually came to Orissa it appears from tradition that, Nilmadhava so much made of the Nihilists and perhaps accepted by the local Savaras, with whom also perhaps mixed up Uddas, has just been replaced by the image of the neem-wood, called Sawrinarayana. Chodaganga deba instead of disapproving the attempt seemed to take ready advantage of the incident, specially as his Hindu patriotism as well as the imperialistic outlook dictated him to make the powerful Savara element of his newly annexed land completely his own and consequently, the new god more liberal and universally popular among these Savara people as well as the Hindu public. Jaina or Buddhist worship and practice were also retained there in making the offering acceptable by all clans and castes with equal reverence.”

All the above facts and arguments point to a possible tribal origin of the Jagannath worship.

15.5.6 Tribal Narasimha origins

As per current predominant thought, Jagannath, embodies the metamorphosis of tribal god into a pre-eminent deity of the classical Hindu pantheon. The icon is carved out of wood (not stone or metal), and the tribes whose rituals and traditions were woven into his worship are still living as tribal and semi-tribal communities in the region. This tribal god may have taken a fairly circuitous route to his present pinnacle, via absorption of local shakti traditions and merger with the growing popularity of the Narasimha and Purushottam forms of Vishnu in the region in the medieval era.



Jagannath in the Narasingha or Nrusimha Beshha in Koraput

As regards to archeological findings, Queen Vasata in the 8th century built the famous Narsinghnath temple built in brick at Sripur or Shreepur on the banks of river Mahanadi in present Mahasamund district. Sripur or Shreepur was then the capital of Dakshin Kosala (Chhattisgarh region) kingdom. The temple is believed to have been built in the 8th century by Vasata, the daughter of King Suryavarma of Magadh. The temple plaque opens with a salutation to Purushottam, also titled Narasimha, suggesting a trend in Vaishnav tradition to stress the ugra (violent) aspect of Vishnu.^[82] This possibly culminates with Jagannath, widely revered as Purushottam until the end of the 13th century, which had close connections with Narasimha who became popular in Odisha in the post-Gupta period.

After Anantavarman Chodaganga, who commissioned the temple at Puri, his chief queen, Kasturikamodini, built a temple in his homeland in Tekkali (present Andhra Pradesh), east of his first capital Kalinganagar, in 1150. The temple was dedicated to the god Dadhivaman, and the inscription reveals that the image installed was of the wooden God, and not the famous Puri Trinity of Jagannath-Balabhadra-Subhadra.^[21] Scholars maintain that such fact means that Chodaganga was a devotee of this god, and as the god's name is preserved in Tekkali in this early period, it seems likely that "Dadhivaman" (or the tribal form of this Sanskritised name) was the original name of the wooden god.

As the original wooden god was a unitary figure, temples for the single deity continued to be built even after a

Trinitarian image emerged at Puri. Even today there are many Dadhivaman temples in Odisha,^[83] which perpetuate the original state of the god. The Kond continue to practice a ritual renewal of wooden posts.

There is also something striking about the figures constituting the Jagannath triad. Subhadra's image consists of only a trunk and a head, but Jagannath and Balabhadra are larger, with a trunk, over-dimensional head, and arm stumps. But while the heads of Subhadra and Balabhadra are oval with almond-shaped eyes, Jagannath's head is curiously flat on top and is dominated by enormous round eyes.

Scholars explain this in terms of Narasimha's association with wooden posts representing tribal deities. In the Andhra village Jambulapadu in (Anantapur), Narasimha Svami is worshipped as a pillar to which a sheet shaped in the form of a lion's head is attached. This lion-head explains Jagannath's large round eyes, typical of Narasimha on account of his fury (krodh).^[21] The head of the Jagannath image makes sense when perceived as a lion's head, where the emphasis is on the jaws, rather than as a human head.

15.6 Transformation from unitary icon to triad



Jagannath on the right with Subhadra in the center and Balabhadra on the left

The Madala Panji observes that Neela Madhav transformed into Jagannath and was worshipped alone as a unitary figure, not as the part of a triad. It is significant to note that the early epigraphic and literary sources refer only to a unitary deity Purushottama Jagannath.^[84] The Sanskrit play "Anargharaghava" composed by Murari mentioned only Purushottama Jagannath and his consort Lakshmi with no references to Balabhadra and Subhadra.^[84] The Dasgoba copper plated inscription dating to 1198 also mentions only Purushottama Jagannath in the context that the Puri temple had been originally built by Ganga king Anantavarman Codaganga (1078–

1147) for Vishnu and Lakshmi.^[84] These sources are silent on the existence of Balabhadra and Subhadra. Such state of affairs has led to arguments that Purushottama was the original deity and Balabhadra and Subhadra were subsequently drawn in as additions to a unitary figure and formed a triad.

The situation changed during the rule of Anangabhim III [1211–1239] when Balabhadra and Subhadra are mentioned for the first time in the Pataleshwara inscription dating back to 1237.^[84] The German Indologist Kulke termed Anangabhim III the originator of the triad of Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra^[85] suggesting that Balabhadra was added after Lakshmi's transformation into Subhadra. This is because there is an Oriya convention, according to which the younger brother's wife (i.e. Krishna's wife Lakshmi) could not have lived in the same house with her husband's older brother i.e. Balarama.

As per scholars, Devi Subhadra could be subsequent addition upon the resurgence of Shaktism as the consort ("Not sister") of Jagannath.^[86] At some point of time the figure of Lord Balabhadra may have been added to satisfy the Saivas to the existing couple Jagannath and Devi Subhadra. At this juncture, a major change had to be introduced into the relationship between the deities since as per traditional Oriya culture, the elder brother is not permitted even to see the face of younger brother's spouse. Therefore, as a solution, the erstwhile consort (Shri) of Jagannath was relieved from dual images of Jagannath-Shri and Subhadra, the sister to both to deities was introduced.

The discus Sudarshana chakra.^[42] was also a subsequent addition to satisfy the Ganapatyas and Sauras. This could only have taken place over the process of Krishna consciousness was well advanced and given the political importance of the cult after Chodaganga, only under a special royal impact.

Unique and enigmatic are the images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsan without any parallel in any Hindu shrine. They are not built according to the injunctions in traditional Shilpa Sastras (Iconography). In fact there is no foundation in traditional sculpture for the construction of image of Gods and Goddesses in wood.^[41] And thus the four-fold images of Daru-Brahma stand apart from all the other icons in the temples situated even in the precincts of the great temple.

All the hundred odd sub-ordinate deities all compare to traditional icons by and large, being anthropomorphic in form and built according to scriptural descriptions in stone so as to be eternal and immortal.

Yet the strange descriptions of Chaturdha Murti or four-fold deities is the centre of the Jagannath cult and has dominated Oriya life, art and culture and in the sense it synthesises all the major cults of India.

15.7 Assimilation and synthesis



Jagannath

Seemingly, the origin of Jagannath cult is aboriginal, tribal Savara. However, in course of time, the cult has taken an Aryanised form and various major faiths like Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism, Jainism, and Buddhism have been synthesised into this cult.^{[81][9]}

Jagannath is worshipped as Purushottama form of Vishnu,^[87] Gaudiya Vaishnavs have identified him strongly with Krishna.^[88] Balabhadra considered the elder brother of Jagannath is worshipped as Shiva.^[88] Subhadra considered Jagannath's sister is considered as Brahma^[88] in some versions and worshipped as Adyasakti Durga in the form of Bhuvaneshwari in other versions.^[89] Finally the fourth deity, Sudarsana Chakra symbolizes the wheel of Sun's Chariot, which attracts the Sauras. The conglomerate of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan Chakra worshipped together on a common platform are called the Chaturdha Murty or the "Four-fold Form".^[90]

Certain scholars like Pandit Nilakantha Das have opined that the three main images of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra represent the Jain Trinity of Samyak Jnana, Samyak Charita and Samyak Drusti. It is also believed that the soul of Jagannath, most secretly hidden within the image of Jagannath, is nothing but a Tooth Relic of Lord Buddha. The philosophy of Tantra, which in course of time became an integral part of Buddhism, has also significantly influenced the rites and rituals of Jagannath cult.

Jagannath is also worshipped as “Purushottama” (“The Best of All”). Jagannath is worshipped along with Lord Balabhadra or Balarama who is alternatively considered to be an incarnation of Seshanaga. According to some scholars, Subhadra, who is worshipped along with Jagannath, is the Goddess Bhuvaneshwari. But some other Vaishnavite scholars regard her as the younger sister of Lord Krishna, because of the similar name.

To the right of Jagannath is the Sudarshana chakra, a post-like structure that may have originated in processional Siva lingas, but that also has some parallels in pillars seen in orthodox Vaishnava contexts, in folk settings, and in tribal areas. Author O.M. Starza (1993) provides information about the processional Siva lingas,^[91] Vaishnava pillars,^[92] modern folk parallels to the Sudarshana chakra,^[93] and stakes or pillar-like icons in the tribal settings.^[94] On the other hand, the importance or role of Sudarshana chakra, the fourth deity remains unexplained. Such a combination of deities is unique in India iconography.

The Saiva element in the cult of Jagannath are co-related with the doctrine of Tantricism and Shakta Dharma. According to the Saivas, Jagannath is Bhairav.^[95] The tantric literary texts identify Jagannath with Mahabhairav.^[96] It will not be out of place to mention here that Jagannath sits on the Sri Yantra (“holy instrument”) or Sri Chakra (“holy wheel”) and is worshipped in the Vijamantra 'Klim', which is also the Vijamantra of Kali or Shakti. The representation of Balaram as Sesanaga or Sankarsana bears testimony to the influence of Shaivism on the cult of Jagannath. The third deity, Devi Subhadra, who represents the Sakti element is still worshipped with the Bhuvaneshwari Mantra.^[95]

The Tantric texts also point out the name of Jagannath and his worshippers. According to these texts, Jagannath is Bhairav, and Goddess Vimala is the Shakti. The offerings of Jagannath becomes *Mahaprasad* only after it is re-offered to Goddess Vimala. Similarly, different tantric features of Yantras have been engraved on the Ratna vedi, where Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra are set up. The *Kalika Purana* depicts Jagannath as a Tantric deity.^[95]

In Gaudiya Vaishnav tradition, Balabhadra is the elder brother Balaram, Jagannath is the younger brother Krishna, and Subhadra is the youngest sister.^[96]

According to the Jain version, the image of Jagannath (Black colour) represents sunya, Subhadra symbolizes the creative energy and Balabhadra (White colour) represents the phenomenal universe. All these images have evolved from the Nila Madhava, the ancient Kalinga Jina. “Sudarshana Chakra” is contended to be the Hindu name of the Dharma Chakra of Jaina symbol. The term “Kaivalya” (“liberation”), exclusively common in the cult of Jagannath, is derived from Jaina tradition.

To conclude, in the words of the historian Jadunath Sarkar:^[97]

“The diverse religions of Orissa in all ages have tended to gravitate towards and finally merged into the Jagannath worship, at least in theory.”

15.8 Symbolic representation

Jagannath has been depicted as the symbol of godhead in certain other belief systems and faiths as, under:

In Vaishnavism, the Jagannath form is worshipped as the abstract form of Krishna.^[88]

The follower of Shaivism maintain that the original shape of Jagannath was in shape of a Linga. Deity Balabhadra is also named as “Shiva” and “Ananta Vasudev”.^[98]

The Shaktas claim that in tantra systems, Jagannath has been accepted as Bhairava^[89] and associate deity Bimala represents 'Bhairavi'. Such a belief is reinforced by the ritual whereby only after offering of the 'Jagannath Bhog' at Goddess Vimala, it is considered as 'Mahaprasad'.

Some followers of Buddhism pray to Jagannath in mantra "*Namoh Jagannath Buddhaya*". In their opinion, Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra represent the Buddha-Sangha-Dhamma triad.^[69] A section of Buddhists believes that the tooth relic of Buddha is kept inside the Jagannath idol in the navel circle.^[99] Buddhists draw parallel in claiming that the Jagannath Rath-Yatra is like the of Rath Yatra for Buddha. The Buddhists also do not follow casteism in society, which is also followed in the Ananda Bazar of Jagannath.

Jains believe that the word “Jagannath” has been derived from the word "*Jinanath*".^[69] The Jagannath idol resembles with the ancient Jain Idol. The 'Baisi Pahacha' (22 steps) leading to the Jagannath Temple at Puri has been constructed in the memory of 22 tirthankaras or *Kevalins*. Similarly, the offerings made to Jagannath is called 'Kaivalya'.

15.9 Mythology of Jagannath

15.9.1 Kanchi conquest

One of the most popular legends associated with Jagannath is that of *Kanchi Avijana* (or “Conquest of Kanchi”), also termed as “Kanchi-Kaveri”. According to the legends,^[100] the daughter of the King of Kanchi was betrothed to the Gajapati of Puri. When the Kanchi King witnessed the Gajapati King sweeping the area in front of where the chariots of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra were kept during Ratha yatra, he was aghast. Considering the act of sweeping unworthy of a King, the King of Kanchi declined the marriage proposal, refusing to marry his daughter to a 'Sweeper'. Gajapati Purushottam Deva, felt deeply insulted at this and attacked the



The conquest of Kanchi

Kingdom of Kanchin to avenge his honour. His attack was unsuccessful and his army defeated by the Kanchi Army.

Upon defeat, the Gajapati King Purushottam Deva returned and prayed to Jagannath, the God of land of Kalinga before planning a second campaign to Kanchi. Moved by his prayers, Jagannath and Balabhadra, left their temple in Puri and started an expedition to Kanchi on horseback. It is said that Jagannath rode on a white horse and Balabhadra on a black horse. The legend has such a powerful impact on the Oriya culture that the simple mention of white horse-black horse evokes the imagery of Kanchi conquest of the God in devotees minds.

On the road, Jagannath and Balabhadra grew thirsty and chanced upon a milkmaid Manika, who gave them butter-milk/yogurt to quench their thirst. Instead of paying her dues, Balabhadra gave her a ring telling her to claim her dues from King Purushottam. Later, Purushottam Deva himself passed by with his army. At Adipur near Chilika lake, the milkmaid Manika halted the King pleading for the unpaid cost of yogurt consumed by His army's two leading soldiers riding on black and white horses. She produced the gold ring as evidence. King Purushottam Deva identified the ring as that of Jagannath. Considering this a sign of divine support for his campaign, the king enthusiastically led the expedition.

In the war between the army, of Kalinga inspired by the Divine support of Jagannath and the of army of Kanchi, Purushottam Deva led his army to victory. King Purushottam brought back the Princess Padmavati of Kanchi to Puri. To avenge his humiliation, he ordered his minister to get the princess married to a sweeper.^[101] The minister waited for the annual Rath Yatra when the King ceremonially sweeps Jagannath's chariot. He offered the princess in marriage to King Purushottam, calling the King a Royal sweeper of God. The King then married the Princess. The Gajapati King also brought back images of Uchista Ganesh (Bhanda Ganesh or Kamada Ganesh) and enshrined them in the Kanchi Ganesh shrine at the Jagannath Temple in Puri.

This myth has been recounted by Mohanty.^[102] J.P Das^[103] notes that this story is mentioned in a Madala panji

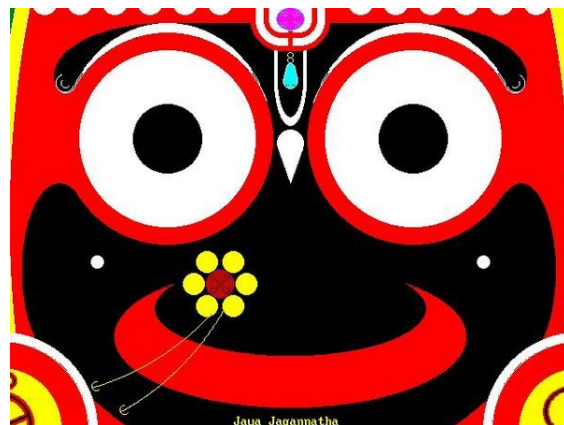
chronicle of the Jagannath Temple of Puri, in relation to Gajapati Purushottama. At any rate, the story was popular soon after Purushottama's reign, as a text of the first half of the 16th century mentions a Kanchi Avijana scene in the Jagannath temple. There is currently a prominent relief in the *jaga mohan* (prayer hall) of the Jagannath temple of Puri that depicts this scene.

In modern culture, Kanchi Vijaya is a major motif in Odissi dance.^[104]

In Oriya literature, the Kanchi conquest (Kanchi Kaveri) has significant bearing, in medieval literature romanticized as the epic **Kanchi Kaveri** by Purushottama Dasa in the 17th century and a work by the same name by Maguni Dasa.^[105] The first Oriya drama written by Ramashankar Ray, the father of Oriya drama in 1880 is *Kanchi Kaveri*.^[106]

It has been asserted by researcher J. P. Das^[107] that the historicity of this event is not certain. However, the legendary Kanchi Kingdom has been identified as the historical Vijayanagar Kingdom. As per historical records, Gajapati Purushottam Deva's expedition towards Virupaksha Raya II's Kanchi (Vijayanagar) Kingdom started during 1476 with Govinda Bhanjha as Commander-in-chief.^[108] Gajapati Purushottam Deva invaded Thiruvannaamalai of Tiruvannamalai district after crossing river Kaveri.^[109]

15.9.2 The Story of Patita Pavana



Patita Pavana

Patita Pavana in Sanskrit means "Saviour of the fallen souls". When Jagannath is worshipped alone with only his face depicted devoid of his arms and torso, he is called Patita Pavana considered the all merciful aspect of the God.^[110] Various legends have mentioned the origin of Patita Pavana. Local tradition mentions Jagannath manifested as Patita Pavana to bless Haridas Thakur, a Vaishnav Saint born a Muslim. Because of his non-Hindu origin he was forbidden entry to the Temple in Puri. Moved by his intense desire to have darshan of God, Jagannath

assumed the form of Patita Pavana to bless and offer salvation to Haridas Thakur.^[110]

The story of Patita Pavana has been associated with Salabega a Muslim devotee of Jagannath.^[110] Salabega was the son of a Muslim Subedar in the 17th century Mughal army. It is believed that Salabega suffered from some incurable ailment and through prayer to Lord Jagannath, as advised by his mother, he was miraculously cured.^[111] The grateful Salabega was eager to have darshan of Jagannath in the temple in Puri. However because he was a non-Hindu, he was forcibly removed from the temple. In great sorrow Salabega fell prostrate in front of the Lion Gate of the temple, crying for a chance to see Jagannath. Jagannath unable to bear his devotee's sorrow, came to the gate of the temple assuming the form of Patita Pavana to bless him.^[112] It is said on gaining vision of Jagannath, Salabega is said to have composed a poem in his honour known as Patitapavana Astakam. To quote Salabega:

"O unlimited one! All those who have witnessed my sins

Are so terrorized that they stop seeing their own flaws, And fearlessly praise each other's virtue. So if you are truly a purifier of the fallen, Then, dear master, save this worst of all miscreants!"

(Stanza 5 from Jan Brzezinski's translation of *Patitapavana Astakam* ^[113])

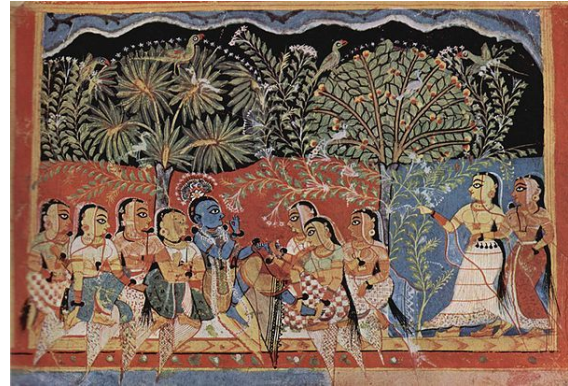
Another legend associates the emergence of Patita Pavana with Ramachandra Deva II. Ramachandra Deva II was the King of Khurda in the 18th century. He was imprisoned by the Mughal General Taqi Khan for 13 months in Khurda.^[114] To protect the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra from desecration, he had his faithful servants shift the idols to Banpur, near Chilika Lake.^[115] Ramchandra Deva to escape imprisonment and ensure safety of Jagannath and the temple in Puri converted to Islam and married a Muslim lady.^[110] Due to his apostasy he was denied entry into the Jagannath temple or take part in any religious rites associated with Jagannath.^[116] Tradition maintains Ramachandra Deva pined for darshan of Jagannath. He is said to have gone every day at midnight and cried about his plight in front of Jagannath's temple. Jagannath unable to bear his devotee's plight used to come to the Gate of the temple everynight to console Ramachandra. When people came to know of this occurrence the statue of Patita Pavana was consecrated at the main gate of the Puri temple for Ramchandra Deva to pay his obeisance.

15.10 Jagannath in Vaishnavism

Although Jagannath has been identified with other traditions in the past, He is now identified more with Vaishnav

tradition.

15.10.1 Early Vaishnav tradition



Gita Govinda manuscript c. 1500.

Vaishnavism is considered a more recent tradition in Odisha, being historically traceable to the early Middle Ages.^[117] Ramanujacharya the great Vaishnav reformer visited Puri between 1107 and 1111 converting the King Ananatavarman Chodaganga from Shaivism to Vaishnavism.^[118] At Puri he founded the Ramanuja Math for propagating Vaishnavism in Odisha. The Alarnatha Temple stands testimony to his stay in Odisha. Since the 12th century under the influence of Ramanujacharya, Jagannath was increasingly identified with Vishnu.^[6] Under the rule of the Eastern Gangas, Vaishnavism became the predominant faith in Odisha by assimilating ideas from Shaivism, Shaktism and Buddhism.^[119] Oriya Vaishnavism gradually centred on Jagannath as the principal deity. Sectarian differences were eliminated by assimilating deities of Shaivism, Shaktism and Buddhism in the Jagannath Pantheon.^[117] The Ganga Kings respected all the ten avatars of Vishnu, considering Jagannath as the cause of all the Avatars. The Vaishnav saint Nimbaraka visited Puri, establishing the Radhavallav Matha in 1268.^[118] The famous poet Jayadev was a follower of Nimbaraka and his focus on Radha and Krishna. Jayadev's composition Gita Govinda put a new emphasis on the concept of Radha and Krishna in East Indian Vaishnavism.^[120] This idea soon became popular. Sarala Dasa in his Mahabharat thought of Jagannath as the universal being equating him with Buddha and Krishna. He considered Krishna as one of the Avatars of Jagannath^[6]

15.10.2 Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Gaudiya Vaishnavism

Gaudiya Vaishnavism (also known as **Chaitanya Vaishnavism**^[121] and **Hare Krishna**) is a Vaishnava religious movement founded by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534) in India in the 16th century. "Gaudiya" refers to the *Gauḍa region* (present day Bengal/Bangladesh) with

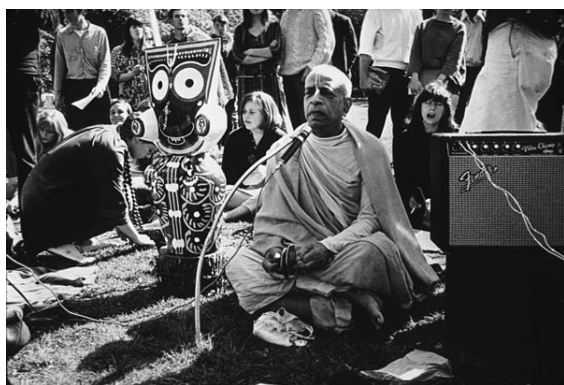
Vaishnavism meaning “the worship of the monotheistic Deity or Supreme Personality of Godhead, often addressed as Krishna, Narayana or Vishnu”.

The focus of Gaudiya Vaishnavism is the devotional worship (*bhakti*) of Krishna, as *Svayam Bhagavan* or the Original Supreme Personality of Godhead.^[122]

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu spent the last 20 years of his life in Puri dedicating it to the ecstatic worship of Jagannath whom he considered the highest form of Krishna.^[123] Mahaprabhu propagated the *Sankirtan* movement which laid great emphasis on chanting God’s name in Puri. He converted noted scholars like Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya to his philosophy. He left a great influence on the then king of Odisha, Prataprudra Deva, and the people of Odisha.^[124] According to one version Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is said to have merged with the idol of Jagannath in Puri after his death^[123]

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu changed the course of Oriya Vaishnav tradition emphasising *Bhakti* and strongly identifying Jagannath with Krishna.^[88] His Gaudiya Vaishnav school of thought strongly discouraged Jagannath’s identification with other cults and religions, thus shaping Jagannath’s identity as the Krishna Avatar of Vishnu.

15.10.3 The ISKCON Movement



Srila Prabhupada in Golden Gate Park with Jagannath deity to his right: February, 1967

Prior to the advent of ISKCON movement Jagannath, and his most important festival the annual Rath Yatra were relatively unknown in the West.^[125] Soon after its founding, ISKCON started founding temples in the West. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada popularly called Srila Prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON selected Jagannath as one of the chosen forms of Krishna installing an idol of Jagannath in ISKCON temples around the world.^[126] ISKCON has promoted Jagannath throughout the world. Annual Rath Yatra festival is now celebrated by ISKCON in many cities in the West where they are popular attractions.^[125] ISKCON devotees worship Jagannath and take part in the Rath Yatra in memory of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu spending 18 years in Puri wor-

shipping Jagannath and taking an active part in the Rath Yatra^[127]

15.11 Jagannath in Shaktism

Vimala (Bimala) is worshipped as the presiding goddess of the Purushottama (Puri) Shakti Pitha by Shaktas. In a departure from tradition Jagannath, is worshipped as the Bhairava, traditionally always a form of Shiva. Jagannath-Vishnu equated with Shiva, is interpreted to convey the oneness of God. Also, in this regard, Vimala is also considered as *Annapurna*, the consort of Shiva.^[128] Conversely, Tantrics consider Jagannath as Shiva-Bhairava, rather than a form of Vishnu.^[129] While Lakshmi is the traditional (orthodox tradition) consort of Jagannath, Vimala is the Tantric (heterodox) consort.^[130] Vimala is also considered the guardian goddess of the temple complex, with Jagannath as the presiding god.^[131]

Jagannath is considered the combination of 5 Gods Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, Ganesh and Durga by Shaktas.^[132] When Jagannath has his divine slumber (Sayana Yatra) he is believed to assume the aspect of Durga. According to the “Niladri Mahodaya”^[132] Idol of Jagannath is placed on the Chakra Yantra, the idol of Balabhadra on the Shankha Yantra and the idol of Subhadra on the Padma Yantra.

In the *Skanda Purana*, Subhadra is identified with Katyayini manifestation of Shakti.^[133] The 16th-century poet Balarama Dasa described Jagannath being attended by 64 Yoginis, Katyayini, Saptamatrikas, Vimala, and Viraja^[133]

15.12 Jagannath and Sikhism

In 1506 Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism made a pilgrimage to Puri to visit to Jagannath.^[134] As per tradition it is said that because of his clothes, Guru Nanak was mistaken as a Muslim and not allowed into Jagannath’s Temple.^[135] Nanak instead recited devotional hymns in the sea shore of Puri. Jagannath appeared in the dreams of the Gajapati King of Puri forbidding him to perform any rituals in the temple, when he went to hear the Bhajans of Guru Nanak. The King was surprised to find Jagannath present when Nanak recited his hymns. Because of his devotion, Guru Nanak was reverentially escorted to the temple to have darshan of Jagannath.

While in the Jagannath temple, Guru Nanak was said to be in deep thought when *Arti* service of Jagannath was being performed. On being asked why he did not take part in *Arti*, Guru Nanak composed a hymn in Rag dhansri explaining that the whole nature was doing a great *Arti* of God and questioned empty rituals.^[136] The Mangu, Punjabi and Bauli mathas of Puri are associated with Guru Nanak.^[134] According to B.B Majumadar Guru Nanak

spent time with Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Puri taking part in Kirtan which both of them found pleasure in.^[137] Under the banner of the assimilative and all embracing Jagannath, Guru Nanak and Tulsidas met.^[138] Thus in medieval India Jagannath Puri became a meeting ground of philosophers propounding various faiths and beliefs. To this day a Gururdwara in Puri commemorates Guru Nanak's visit to Puri.



Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of Punjab revered Jagannath

Later Sikh gurus like Guru Teg Bahadur also visited Jagannath Puri.^[139] Maharaja Ranjit Singh the famous 19th-century Sikh ruler of Punjab held great respect in Jagannath, willed his most prized possession the Koh-i-Noor diamond to Jagannath in Puri, while on his deathbed in 1839.^[140]

15.13 Reference of Jagannath in various literary works and texts

References and mention of Jagannath have been found in numerous religious texts and semi-religious literary works.

The most ancient reference is found in the 3rd rca of the 155th sukta in the 10th Mandala of the Rig veda.^[49] In a

sukta there is reference to sacred log (Daru) which runs as thus:

“Ado yad daru plavate sindhoh pare apurusam,
Tada rabhasva durhano, tena gaccha parastaram.”
(10.155.3 R.V.)

Vedic Commentator Sayanacharya has ascribed this sukta to Jagannath in the following manner:^[50] “The exists on sea-shore in a far off place, the wooden image of a deity with name Purusottama;

O ye, by worshipping that wood so indestructible, attain the supreme place.

However, the acceptance of this rca as referring to Jagannath is not universal. Alternately, it has been argued by scholars that the rca is Alaxmi Stava only.

In the Uttara Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, mention of Jagannath has been found^[52] where Rama has advised Vibhisana to devote himself to the worship of the deity, who has been described as the presiding deity of the Ikshvaku Kula (Clan) or Surya Vamsa. As a matter of fact, even today, the ritual Vibhisana Bandapana is observed in the temples of Jagannath. Further, in the Kiskinda Kanda of the Ramayana, there are references to the names of Jagannath among other deities.

In the Mahabharata, the tale of King Indradyumna and the tank named after him is a direct reference to the Jagannath lore.^[51] In this epic, there is description of Vedi, which is identified by the scholars as Antarvedi or the seat of Sri Jagannath in the Samkha Kshetra. In the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, a reference has been made to the Jagannath Dharma.

Mention of Jagannath and the Purusottama Kshetra abound in Puranic literature^[141] of Matsya Purana, Vishnu Purana, Agni Purana, Padma Purana, Narada Purana, Brahma Purana and Skanda Purana.

References to Jagannath have also been made in some Sanskrit texts such as Kapila samhita, Tirtha Chintamani, Niladri Mahodaya, Rudrayamala, Tantrayamala and Purusottama Tatwa. The Jagannath Astakam of Adi Shankaracharya composed in Sanskrit is another important historical literary piece on Jagannath which provides information about the temple and appearance of the deity in the 8th century.^[142]

Apart from the above Puranic and other ancient texts, the mention of Jagannath in medieval Oriya literature is enormous.^[143] Almost every Oriya literateure like Sarala Dasa, Jagannath Dasa, Jayadeva, Balaram Dasa, Achyutaand Dasa, Jasobanta Dasa, Ananta, Upendra Bhanja, Baladeva, Dinakrush Dasa, Kavi Jadumani Mahapatra have composed invocations, prayers pertaining to Jagannath.

In modern Oriya literature, Jagannath has been a common reference point on both historical and mythical paradigms. The most acknowledged literary pieces on Jagannath are the novels *Nila Shaila* and *Niladri Vijaya*

by renowned Oriya writer **Surendra Mohanty**, who was a recipient of Orissa Sahitya Akademi awards in 1957-8, 1969 (for *Nila Shaila*)^[144] and 1987.^[145]

15.14 Epigraphic evidence of Jagannath and the timeline



Original palm leaf manuscript of Gita Govinda written by Jayadeva, at the Odisha state museum, Bhubaneswar

The antiquity of Jagannath is supported by several historical, literary and epigraphic evidences.

318 AD: According to **William Hunter**, first appearance of Jagannath in history occurs during 318 ^[146] when the priest fled with his image to escape the wrath of **Raktabahu** and his band of plunderers.

464: The holy idol hidden in 318 was recovered by a king about 150 years later from the jungles of western kingdoms.^[146]

475: The second reconstruction [First being the reconstruction from **Nila Madhav** shrine by King **Indradyumna**) of the Jagannath temple by **Yayati Kesari** and the renewal of the cult after **Yavana** invasion of Odisha in the 5th century, as per Puri's late 16th-century **Madala Panji** temple chronicles.^[147]

Historian **K. C. Panigrahi** suggested ^[148] that Puri's legendary account of the claimed invasion of Odisha under the **Yavana** general **Raktabahu** in the 4th/5th century during the reign of the legendary King **Sovanadeva** (Legendary) may contain a historical reminiscence of the conquest of Odisha by the **Rastrakuta** King **Govinda III** during the reign of the **Bhaumakara** king **Subhakara deva** who ruled in coastal Odisha around 800. And moreover, he pointed out that Jagannath's legendary absence of 146 years in western Odisha (between **Raktabahu's** invasion and **Yayati's** 'rediscovery' of Jagannath and reinstallation at Puri) corresponds more or less exactly with the space of time between the historical reigns of **Subhakara deva** and **Yayati-I**, the **Somavamsi** ruler **Yayati Kesari** established the first regional kingdom of Odisha. The installation of Jagannath at Puri temple took place several years after **Yayati Kesari** had come to throne, viz., in **Yayati's** 9th

regnal years. Moreover in both cases the images were renewed outside Puri. **Yayati Kesari** performed the great 'Vanayaga' ritual in the vicinity of his former capital near **Sonepur** and Jagannath was finally reinstalled on at Puri only two years after the renewal of the idol. However, In Puri, too, no pre-16th-century sources of the **Yayati Kesari** account are known. Contemporary facts are fully silent about any activities of the **Somavamsi** at Puri, particularly of **Yayati Kesari** as builder of the first Jagannath temple at Puri. The silence of early medieval sources would be surprising in view of the many available **Somavamsi** inscriptions and other literary sources which could have mentioned or even praised **Yayati Kesari** and his great deeds at Puri. In **Purusottama Mahatmya** which has contained the **Indradyumna** legend and the origin of Jagannath's **Daru Devata** at Puri there is no mention of **Yayati Kesari**.

That there was an earlier temple of Jagannath at **Purushottama Kshetra** prior to the present one built by **Chodaganga Deva** in the 12th century, is established by **Sanskrit** playwright **Murari Mishra's Anargharaghava Natakam** (c. 9th century), which refers to **Purushottama** being worshipped on the seashore.^[149] In the drama **Anargharaghava Natakam**, the name **Purushottama** is used to denote the place. In the **Ganga** rule the Jagannath temple was rebuilt by **Gangeswar** or **Chodaganga Deva** (1078–1147).

8th century: In many copper plates dating 8th century, mention of individuals bearing the name of **Purushottama** also substantiates the wide popularity of **Purushottama Jagannath**.

810: **Sankarcharya** visits shrine at Puri^[142] in course of spiritual conquest over **Buddhism** and other denominations, and establishes **Govardhana Matha** at Puri upon **mahavakya Prajñānam brahma** (Brahman is Knowledge). **Sankarcharya** must have come across the image of **Nila Madhava** as described in **Skanda Purana** as above, during his visit to Puri.

1078: **Devayatana** of **Purushottama** finds special mention in **Krishna Mishra's Prabodha Chandrodya Natakam** (c. 1078).^[150]

1135: **Anantavarman Codaganga Deva** began the construction of the present temple c. 1135. In the **Dasgoba Copper Plate Inscription** of the late 12th century, **Codaganga's** grandson **Rajaraja III** praised his grandfather for having built the Jagannath temple which had been "neglected" by previous kings,^{[151][152]} which indicates epigraphical evidence of the existence of a Jagannath temple at Puri before the construction of the present temple.

12th century: The **Vaishnava** preachers of the 12th century such as **Sri Ramanujacharya**, **Acharya Nimbarka**, **Acharya Vishnuswami** and **Sri Madhavacharya** established monasteries at Jagannath Puri to spread their religious theories.^[153]

12th century: The *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva mentions of the glory of Jagannath.^[120]

1211: Emperor Anangabhimha deva (1211–1238) donated his vast empire to Sri Purushottama Jagannath calling it Purshottama Samrajya or empire of Jagannath^[154] and declared himself as his servant (Rauta). Due to his efforts several Jagannath temples were set up at different places in Odisha. During the Suryavamsi period (1435–1533) the same trend continued.

13th century: A sculptural piece of Konark temple of the 13th century depicts its builder, King Narasimha-I, offering worship to Siva Linga, Purushottama Jagannath and Durga.^[155]

1328: Epigraphic sources reveal that the inscriptions of Bhanudeva II (1306–1328) of Eastern Ganga dynasty make the first mention of the name, 'Jagannath'.^[156] Thus, the name Jagannath has been used for the first time in the inscriptions of Bhanudeva-II.^[157] During the reign of Bhanudeva-II, a feudatory chief had made gifts at Sikurmam in the 3rd Anka of Jagannath Deva when Sri Bhanudeva was ruling. According to the Puri Grant of 1313,^[158] Bhanudeva granted villages in the 7th Anka of Purushottama Jagannath deva. Thus in a private record Purushottama comes to be called Jagannath. It appears to be the earliest epigraphical reference to the name, Shri 'Jagannath'.

1568: The destruction of the 'Darumurti' of Puri's Holy Trinity by Muslim iconoclast Kalapahar, the General of the Bengal Sultan.^[159] Kalapahar looted and destroyed the Jagannath temple in Puri. He desecrated and burnt the idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra. A devotee Visara Mahanty was able to retrieve the sacred essence (Brahma Padartha) from the burnt idol of Jagannath. He spirited away the relic to a remote village in Odisha known as Khandait Kalua, where he preserved and worshipped the relic.

1590–1592: The rise of Ramachandra Deva I of Khurda. He captured the town of Puri. He restored the temple of Jagannath. Ramachandra Deva recovered the sacred essence of Jagannath and restored it to new Idols which he consecrated first in Khurda in 1587 and then in Puri in 1590. For the restoration of Jagannath worship he was considered the second Indradyumna^[159]

It has been argued that the most important message of the Visara Mahanty and Yayati Kesari legends to Jagannath's devotees is proclaimed in the very beginning of the Madala Panji temple chronicle which commences with the words^[160]

"Jagannath, the Lord of deities, never abandons Sri Purushottama (Puri) even though crores of Brahma (Brahmanda) are destroyed."

15.15 Festivals

Main article: List of festivals observed at Jagannatha Temple, Puri

A large number of traditional festivals are observed by



The Ratha Yatra at Puri

the devotees of Jagannath. Out of those numerous festivals, thirteen are important.^[161]

1. Niladri Mahodaya
2. Snana Yatra
3. Ratha Yatra or Sri Gundicha Yatra
4. Sri Hari Sayan
5. Utthapan Yatra
6. Parswa Paribartan
7. Dakhinayan Yatra
8. Prarbana Yatra
9. Pusyavishek
10. Uttarayan
11. Dola Yatra
12. Damanak Chaturdasi ^[162]
13. Chandan Yatra

Ratha Yatra is most significant of all festivals of Jagannath.

15.15.1 Ratha Yatra

Main article: Ratha-Yatra (Puri)

The Jagannath triad are usually worshipped in the sanctum of the temple, but once during the month of Asadha (Rainy Season of Odisha, usually falling in month of June or July), they are brought out onto the Bada Danda

(The main high street of Puri) and travel (3 km) to the Shri Gundicha Temple, in huge chariots (Rath), allowing the public to have Darshan (Holy view). This festival is known as Rath Yatra, meaning the festival (Yatra) of the chariots (Ratha). The Rathas (Chariots) are huge wheeled wooden structures, which are built anew every year and are pulled by the devotees. The chariot for Jagannath is approximately 45 feet high and 35 feet square and takes about 2 months to construct.^[163] The artists and painters of Puri decorate the cars and paint flower petals etc. on the wheels, the wood-carved charioteer and horses, and the inverted lotuses on the wall behind the throne.^[164] The huge chariots of Jagannath pulled during Rath Yatra is the etymological origin of the English word Juggernaut.^[165] The Ratha-Yatra is also termed as the Shri Gundicha yatra.



Pahandi bije during Ratha Yatra at Puri

The most significant ritual associated with the Ratha-Yatra is the *chhera pahara*. During the festival, the Gajapati King wears the outfit of a sweeper and sweeps all around the deities and chariots in the *Chera Pahara* (Sweeping with water) ritual. The Gajapati King cleanses the road before the chariots with a gold-handled broom and sprinkles sandalwood water and powder with utmost devotion. As per the custom, although the Gajapati King has been considered the most exalted person in the Kalingan kingdom, still he renders the menial service to Jagannath. This ritual signified that under the lordship of Jagannath, there is no distinction between the powerful sovereign Gajapati King and the most humble devotee.^[166]

Chera pahara is held on two days, on the first day of the

Ratha Yatra, when the deities are taken to garden house at **Mausi Maa Temple** and again on the last day of the festival, when the deities are ceremoniously brought back to the Shri Mandir.

As per another ritual, when the deities are taken out from the Shri Mandir to the Chariots in *Pahandi vijay*, disgruntled devotees hold a right to offer kicks, slaps and the derogatory remarks to the images, and Jagannath behaves like a commoner.

In the Ratha Yatra, the three deities are taken from the Jagannath Temple in the chariots to the **Gundicha Temple**, where they stay for seven days. Thereafter, the deities again ride the chariots back to Shri Mandir in *bahuda yatra*. On the way back, the three chariots halt at the **Mausi Maa Temple** and the deities are offered *Poda Pitha*, a kind of baked cake which are generally consumed by the poor sections only.

The observance of the Rath Yatra of Jagannath dates back to the period of the Puranas. Vivid descriptions of this festival are found in Brahma Purana, Padma Purana and Skanda Purana. Kapila Samhita also refers to Rath Yatra. In Moghul period also, King Ramsingh of Jaipur, Rajasthan has been described as organizing the Rath Yatra in the 18th century. In Odisha, Kings of **Mayurbhanj** and **Parlakhemundi** were organizing the Rath Yatra, though the most grand festival in terms of scale and popularity takes place at Puri.

In fact, Starza^[167] notes that the ruling Ganga dynasty instituted the Rath Yatra at the completion of the great temple around 1150. This festival was one of those Hindu festivals that was reported to the Western world very early. Friar Odoric of Pordenone visited India in 1316–1318, some 20 years after Marco Polo had dictated the account of his travels while in a Genovese prison.^[168] In his own account of 1321, Odoric reported how the people put the “idols” on chariots, and the King and Queen and all the people drew them from the “church” with song and music.^{[169] [170]}

15.16 Jagannath Temple at Puri

Main article: [Jagannath Temple \(Puri\)](#)

The Temple of Jagannath at Puri is one of the major Hindu temples in India. The temple is built in the Kalinga style of architecture, with the **Pancharatha** (Five chariots) type consisting of two anurathas, two konakas and one ratha. Jagannath temple is a pancharatha with well-developed pagas. 'Gajasimhas' (elephant lions) carved in recesses of the pagas, the 'Jhampasimhas' (Jumping lions) are also placed properly. The perfect pancharatha temple developed into a Nagara-rekha temple with unique Oriya style of subdivisions like the Pada, Kumbha, Pata, Kani and Vasanta. The Vimana or the apsidal structure consists of several sections superimposed one over other, tapering to the top where the Amalakashila and Kalasa are



Jagannath temple at Puri

placed.^[171]

Temple of Jagannath at Puri has four distinct sectional structures, namely -

1. Deula or Vimana (Sanctum sanctorum) where the triad deities are lodged on the ratnavedi (Throne of Pearls);
2. Mukhashala (Frontal porch);
3. Nata mandir/Natamandapa, which is also known as the Jaga mohan, (Audience Hall/Dancing Hall), and
4. Bhoga Mandapa (Offerings Hall).^[172]

The temple is built on an elevated platform, as compared to Lingaraja temple and other temples belonging to this type. This is the first temple in the history of Kalingan temple architecture where all the chambers like Jagamohana, Bhogamandapa and Natyaman-dapa were built along with the main temple. There are miniature shrines on the three outer sides of the main temple. The Deula consists of a tall shikhara (dome) housing the sanctum sanctorum (garbhagriha). A pillar made of fossilized wood is used for placing lamps as offering. The Lion Gate (Singhadwara) is the main gate to the temple, guarded by two guardian deities Jaya and Vijaya. A 16-sided, 11 meter high granite monolithic columnar pillar known as the Aruna Stambha (Solar Pillar) bearing Aruna, the charioteer of Surya, faces the Lion Gate. This column was brought here from the Sun temple of Konark.^[173]

The temple's historical records Madala panji maintains that the temple was originally built by King Yayati of

the Somavamsi dynasty on the site of the present shrine. However, the historians question the veracity and historicity of the Madala Panji. As per historians, the Deula and the Mukhashala were built in the 12th century by Ganga King Anangabheemadeva, the grandson of Anantavarman Codaganga and the Natamandapa and Bhogamandapa were constructed subsequently during the reign of Gajapati Purushottama Deva (1461–1491) and Prataprudra Deva (1495–1532) respectively. According to Madala Panji, the outer prakara was built by Gajapati Kapilendradeva (1435–1497). The inner prakara called the Kurma bedha (Tortoise encompassment) was built by Purushottama Deva.

The temple is known as the *Shri Mandira* to the devotees.

As a matter of tradition, it is strictly forbidden for non-Hindus to enter the Jagannath temple.

There are many more Jagannath Temples all over India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. In the Besakih temple of eastern Bali province of Indonesia, an ancient idol of Jagannath has been found.^[174]

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15.19 External links

- [Shri Jaganath, Official website](#)
- [Shri Jaganath Temple at Puri](#)
- [Detailed description of Ratha Yatra festival of Jagannath](#)
- [Ratha Yatra](#)
- [136th Jagannath Temple Ratha Yatra in Ahmedabad, Gujarat](#)

Chapter 16

Vyasa

For the author of Brahma Sutras, see Badarayana. For the crater on Mercury, see Vyasa (crater). For the Brahmin community often pronounced as Vyas, see Bias Brahmin.

Vyasa (Devanagari: व्यास, *vyāsa*) is a central and revered figure in most Hindu traditions. He is also sometimes called **Veda Vyāsa** (वेदव्यास, *veda-vyāsa*), (the one who classified the Vedas into four parts) or **Krishna Dvaipāyana** (referring to his complexion and birthplace). There are two different views regarding his birthplace. One of the views suggests that he was born in the island of Yamunā River. He is the author of the Mahabharata, as well as a character in it. He is considered to be the scribe of both the Vedas and Puranas. According to Hindu beliefs, Vyasa is an incarnation of God Vishnu.^{[1][2]} Vyāsa is also considered to be one of the seven Chiranjivins (long lived, or immortals), who are still in existence according to general Hindu belief.

Vyasa lived around 3rd millennium BCE.^{[3][4]} The festival of *Guru Purnima* is dedicated to him. It is also known as *Vyasa Purnima* for it is the day believed to be both his birthday and the day he divided the Vedas.^{[5][6]}

16.1 In the Mahabharata

Vyasa appears for the first time as the compiler of, and an important character, in the Mahābhārata. It is said that, he was the expansion of Lord Vishnu Himself who came in Dwaparyuga to make all the Vedic knowledge available in written form which was available in Sound form at that time. He was the son of Satyavati, daughter of the fisherman Dusharaj,^[7] and the wandering sage Parashara (who is accredited for being the author of the first Purana: Vishnu Purana). He was born on an island in the river Yamuna.^[8] He was dark-complexioned and hence may be called by the name *Krishna* (black), and also the name *Dwaipayana*, meaning 'island-born'.

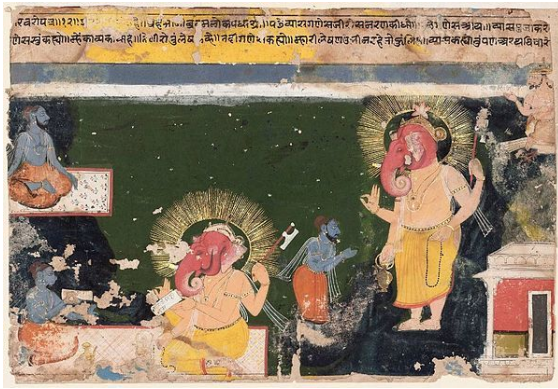
Vyasa was grandfather to the Kauravas and Pandavas. Their fathers, Dhritrashtra and Pandu, the sons of Vichitravirya by the royal family, were fathered by him. He had a third son, Vidura, by a serving maid Parishrami.

16.2 Veda Vyasa

Hindus traditionally hold that Vyasa categorised the primordial single Veda into three i.e. known as "vedaktra(3 vedas) and the fourth one known as atharva veda got recognized as veda very latter. Hence he was called Veda Vyasa, or "Splitter of the Vedas," the splitting being a feat that allowed people to understand the divine knowledge of the Veda. The word vyasa means split, differentiate, or describe.

The Vishnu Purana has a theory about Vyasa.^[9] The Hindu view of the universe is that of a cyclic phenomenon that comes into existence and dissolves repeatedly. Each cycle is presided over by a number of Manus, one for each Manvantara, that has four ages, Yugas of declining virtues. The Dvapara Yuga is the third Yuga. The Vishnu Purana (Book 3, Ch 3) says:

In every third world age (Dvapara), Vishnu, in the person of Vyasa, in order to promote the good of mankind, divides the Veda, which is properly but one, into many portions. Observing the limited perseverance, energy, and application of mortals, he makes the Veda fourfold, to adapt it to their capacities; and the bodily form which he assumes, in order to effect that classification, is known by the name of Veda-vyasa. Of the different Vyasas in the present Manvantara and the branches which they have taught, you shall have an account. *Twenty-eight times have the Vedas been arranged by the great Rishis in the Vaivasvata Manvantara... and consequently eight and twenty Vyasas have passed away; by whom, in the respective periods, the Veda has been divided into four. The first... distribution was made by Svayambhu (Brahma) himself; in the second, the arranger of the Veda (Vyasa) was Prajapati... (and so on up to twenty-eight).*^[10]



Ganesha writing the Mahabharat



Vyasa narrating the Mahabharata to Ganesha, his scribe, Angkor Wat.

16.3 Author of the Mahābhārata

Vyasa is traditionally known as author of this epic and likewise features as an important character in it. His mother Satyawati later married the King Shantanu of Hastinapura, and had two sons Chitrāngada and Vichitravirya. Chitrangada died unmarried and Vichitravirya died without issue and hence their mother asked Vyasa to father the child through “niyoga” method. Niyoga method is fathering the child through transmission of energy to the female without physical touch. (This is not correct – read “Niyoga” method.)

Vyasa fathers the princes Dhritarashtra and Pandu by Ambika and Ambalika. Vyasa told them that they should come alone near him. First did Ambika, but because of shyness and fear she closed her eyes. Vyasa told Satyawati that this child would be blind. Later this child was named Dhritarashtra. Thus Satyawati sent Ambālika and

warned her that she should remain calm. But Ambālika’s face became pale because of fear. Vyasa told her that child would suffer from anaemia, and he would not be fit enough to rule the kingdom. Later this child was known as Pāndu. Then Vyasa told Satyawati to send one of them again so that a healthy child can be born. This time Ambika and Ambālika sent a maid in the place of themselves. The maid was quite calm and composed, and she got a healthy child later named as Vidura. While these are his sons, another son Śuka, born of his wife, sage Jābālī’s daughter Pinjalā (Vatikā),^[11] is considered his true spiritual heir. He makes occasional appearances in the story as a spiritual guide to the young princes.



Vyasa with his mother

In the first book of the Mahābhārata, it is described that Vyasa asked Ganesha to aid him in writing the text, however Ganesha imposed a condition that he would do so only if Vyasa narrated the story without pause. To which Vyasa then made a counter-condition that Ganesha must understand the verse before he transcribed it. Thus Vyasa narrated the entire Mahābhārata and all the Upanishads and the 18 Puranas, while Lord Ganesha wrote.

Vyasa is supposed to have meditated and authored the epic by the foothills of the river Beas (Vipasa) in the Punjab region.

16.3.1 Vyasa’s Jaya

Vyasa’s Jaya, the core of Mahābhārata is structured in the form of a dialogue between Dhritarashtra (the Kuru king and the father of the Kauravas, who opposed the Pāndavas in the Kurukshetra War) and Sanjaya, his adviser and chariot driver. Sanjaya narrates the particulars

of Kurukshetra War, fought in eighteen days, chronologically. Dhritarāshtra at times asks a question and doubts, sometimes lamenting, knowing of the destruction caused by the war to his sons, friends and kinsmen.

Sanjaya, in the beginning, gives a description of the various continents of the Earth, numerous planets, and focuses on the Indian subcontinent. Large and elaborate lists are given, describing hundreds of kingdoms, tribes, provinces, cities, towns, villages, rivers, mountains, forests etc. of the (ancient) Indian subcontinent (Bhārata Varsha). Additionally, he gives descriptions of the military formations adopted by each side on each day, the death of individual heroes and the details of the war-races. Eighteen chapters of Vyasa's Jaya constitutes the **Bhagavad Gita**, a sacred text of the Hindus. Thus, Jaya deals with diverse subjects like geography, history, warfare, religion and morality.

16.3.2 Ugrasrava Sauti's Mahābhārata

The final version of Vyasa's work is the **Mahābhārata**. It is structured as a narration by **Ugrasrava Sauti**, a professional story teller, to an assembly of rishis who, in the forest of Naimisha, had just attended the 12 year sacrifice known as Saunaka, also known as "Kulapati".

16.3.3 Reference to writing

Within the *Mahābhārata*, there is a tradition in which Vyasa wishes to write down or inscribe his work:

The Grandsire Brahma (creator of the universe) comes and tells Vyasa to get the help of Ganapati for his task. Ganapati writes down the stanzas recited by Vyasa from memory and thus the Mahābhārata is inscribed or written.

There is some evidence however that writing may have been known earlier based on archeological findings of styli in the Painted Grey Ware culture, dated between 1100 BC and 700 BC.^{[12][13][14]} and archeological evidence of the Brahmi script being used from at least 600 BC.^[15]

16.4 In the Puranas

Vyasa is also credited with the writing of the eighteen major Purāṇas. His son Shuka is the narrator of the major Purāṇa Bhagavat-Purāṇa.

16.5 In Buddhism

Within Buddhism Vyasa appears as Kanha-dipayana (the Pali version of his name) in two Jataka tales: the Kanha-

dipayana Jataka and Ghata Jataka. Whilst the former in which he appears as the **Bodhisattva** has no relation to his tales from the Hindu works, his role in the latter one has parallels in an important event in the Mahabharata.

In the 16th book of the epic, **Mausala Parva**, the end of the **Vrishnis**, clansmen of Vyasa's namesake and **Krishna** is narrated. The epic says: *One day, the Vrishni heroes .. saw Vishvamitra, Kanwa and Narada arrived at Dwaraka. Afflicted by the rod of chastisement wielded by the deities, those heroes, causing Samba to be disguised like a woman, approached those ascetics and said, 'This one is the wife of Vabhru of immeasurable energy who is desirous of having a son. Ye Rishis, do you know for certain what this one will bring forth? Those ascetics, attempted to be thus deceived, said: 'This heir of Vasudeva, by name Samba, will bring forth a fierce iron bolt for the destruction of the Vrishnis and the Andhakas.*

The **Bhagavata Purana** (book 11) too narrates the incident in a similar manner and names the sages as *Visvāmītra, Asita, Kanva, Durvāsa, Bhṛigu, Angirā, Kashyapa, Vāmadeva, Atri, Vasishthha, along with Nārada and others* - it does not explicitly include Vyasa in the list.

The Ghata Jataka has a different version: *The Vrishnis, wishing to test Kanha-dipayana's powers of clairvoyance, played a practical joke on him. They tied a pillow to the belly of a young lad, and dressing him up as a woman, took him to the ascetic and asked when the baby would be born. The ascetic replied that on the seventh day the person before him would give birth to a knot of acacia wood which would destroy the race of Vāsudeva. The youths thereupon fell on him and killed him, but his prophecy came true .*

16.6 In Sikhism

In Brahm Avtar composition present in Dasam Granth, Second Scripture of Sikhs, **Guru Gobind Singh** mentioned Rishi Vyasa as avtar of Brahma.^[16] He is considered as fifth incarnation of Brahma. **Guru Gobind Singh** had written brief account of compositions of Rishi Vyasa, which he wrote about great kings like King manu, King Prithu, king Bharath, KingJujat, King Ben, King mandata, King Dilip, King RaghuRaj and King Aj.^{[16][17]}

Guru Gobind Singh attributed him the store of vedic learning.^[18]

16.7 In the Arthashastra

Arthashastra of Chanakya (Kautilya), Vyasa has an interesting entry. In chapter 6 of the first Department, it says;- *Whosoever is of reverse character, whoever has not his organs of sense under his control, will soon perish, though possessed of the whole earth bounded by the four quar-*

ters. For example: Bhoja, known also by the name, Dándakya, making a lascivious attempt on a Bráhma maiden, perished along with his kingdom and relations; so also Karála, the Vaideha... Vátápi in his attempt under the influence of overjoy to attack Agastya, as well as the corporation of the Vrishnis in their attempt against Dwaipáyan.

This reference matches the Jataka version in including Vyasa as the sage attacked by the Vrishnis, though Vyasa does not die here.

16.8 Author of Brahma Sutra

The *Brahma Sutra* is attributed to Badarayana — which makes him the proponent of the crest-jewel school of Hindu philosophy, i.e., *Vedanta*. Vyasa was conflated with Badarayana by Vaishnavas with the reason that the island on which Vyasa was born is said to have been covered by Badara (Indian jujube/Ber/Ziziphus mauritiana) trees. Although some modern historians suggest that these were two different personalities.

16.9 Author of Yoga Bhashya

This text is a commentary on the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. Vyasa is credited with this work also.^[19]

16.10 See also

- [Guru Gita](#)
- [Parashara](#)

16.11 Notes

- [1] Bhagavata Purana 1.4.14: (dvāpare samanuprāpte tṛtīye yuga-paryaye jātaḥ parāśarād yogī vāsavyām kalayā hareḥ)
- [2] Mahābhārata 12.350.4-5, K.M. Ganguly full edition
- [3] “Legacy of the Elder Gods” by M. Don Schorn, p.256
- [4] William R. LeVacy. *Vedic Astrology Simply Put: An Illustrated Guide to the Astrology of Ancient India*. Hay House. p. 18.
- [5] *Awakening Indians to India*. Chinmaya Mission. 2008. p. 167. ISBN 81-7597-434-6.
- [6] Editors of Hinduism. *What Is Hinduism?: Modern Adventures Into a Profound Global Faith*. Himalayan Academy Publications. p. 230. ISBN 1-934145-00-9.

- [7] According to legend, Vyasa was the son of the ascetic Parashara and the dasyu) Satyavati and grew up in forests, living with hermits who taught him the Vedas ,from the Encyclopædia Britannica
- [8] *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, Arvind Sharma, Motilal Barnarsidass Publisher, p. 205
- [9] Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Puranas - Volume 1 - Page 1408
- [10] “Vishnu Purana”. Retrieved 2014-03-15.
- [11] Skanda Purāṇa, Nāgara Khanda, ch. 147
- [12] S. U. Deraniyagala. Early Man and the Rise of Civilisation in Sri Lanka: the Archaeological Evidence.
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- [15] T. S. Subramanian. Skeletons, script found at ancient burial site in Tamil Nadu. Institute for Oriental Study, Thane.
- [16] Dasam Granth, Dr. SS Kapoor
- [17] Line 8, Brahma Avtar, Dasam Granth
- [18] Line 107, Vyas Avtar, Dasam Granth
- [19] Ian Whicher. *The Integrity of the Yoga Darsana: A Re-consideration of Classical Yoga*. SUNY Press. p. 320.

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16.13 External links

- Quotations related to [Vyasa](#) at Wikiquote
- Media related to [Vyasa](#) at Wikimedia Commons

- Srîmad Bhagavatam (Bhagavata Purana), The Story of the Fortunate One (complete)
- The Mahābhārata – Ganguli translation, full text at sacred-texts.com
- Vedanta Sutras of Vyasa with Shankara Bhashya

Chapter 17

Garuda

For other uses, see [Garuda \(disambiguation\)](#).

The **Garuda** (Sanskrit: गरुड *garuḍa*) is a large mythical bird, bird-like creature, or humanoid bird that appears in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology. Garuda is the mount (*vahana*) of the Lord Vishnu. Garuda is the Hindu name for the constellation Aquila. The Brahminy kite and Phoenix are considered to be the contemporary representations of Garuda.^[1] Indonesia adopts a more stylistic approach to the Garuda's depiction as its national symbol, where it depicts a Javanese eagle (being much larger than a kite).^[2]

17.1 About Garuda



The Brahminy Kite (left) is considered as the contemporary representation of Garuda. Garuda may be also identified with an eagle. Vishnu riding Garuda, depicted as a complete bird in this painting by Raja Ravi Varma.

In Hindu religion, Garuda is a Hindu divinity, usually the mount (*vahana*) of the Lord Vishnu. Garuda is depicted as having the golden body of a strong man with a white face, red wings, and an eagle's beak and with a crown on his head. This ancient deity was said to be massive, large

enough to block out the sun.

Garuda is known as the eternal sworn enemy of the Nāga serpent race and known for feeding exclusively on snakes, such behavior may have referred to the actual Short-toed Eagle of India. The image of Garuda is often used as the charm or amulet to protect the bearer from snake attack and its poison, since the king of birds is an implacable enemy and “devourer of serpent”. Garudi Vidya is the mantra against snake poison to remove all kinds of evil.^[3]

His stature in Hindu religion can be gauged by the fact that a dependent Upanishad, the Garudopanishad, and a Purana, the Garuda Purana, is devoted to him. Various names have been attributed to Garuda - Chirada, Gaganeshvara, Kamayusha, Kashyapi, Khageshvara, Nagantaka, Sitanana, Sudhahara, Suparna, Tarkshya, Vainateya, Vishnuratha and others. The Vedas provide the earliest reference of Garuda, though by the name of Śyena, where this mighty bird is said to have brought nectar to earth from heaven. The Puranas, which came into existence much later, mention Garuda as doing the same thing, which indicates that Śyena (Sanskrit for Eagle) and Garuda are the same. One of the faces of Śrī Pañcamukha Hanuman is Mahavira Garuda. This face points towards the west. Worship of Garuda is believed to remove the effects of poisons from one’s body. In Tamil Vaishnavism Garuda and Hanuman are known as “Periya Thiruvadi” and “Siriya Thiruvadi” respectively.

In the Bhagavad-Gita (Ch.10, Verse 30), in the middle of the battlefield "Kurukshetra", Krishna explaining his omnipresence, says - " as son of Vinata, I am in the form of Garuda, the king of the bird community (Garuda)" indicating the importance of Garuda.

Garuda wears the serpent Adishesha on his left small toenail and the serpent Gulika on his right cerebral cortex. The serpent Vasuki forms his sacred thread. The cobra Takshaka forms his belt on his hip. The snake Karkotaka is worn as his necklace. The snakes Padma and Mahapadma are his ear rings. The snake Shankachuda adorns his divine hair. He is flanked by his two wives 'Rudra' and 'Sukeerthi' or (Sukirthi). These are all invoked in Vedanta Desika’s Garuda Panchashath and Garuda Dandaka compositions. Garuda flanked with his consorts 'Rudra' and 'Sukirthi' can be seen worshipped in an ancient Soumya Keshava temple in Bindiganavile (or Mayura puri in Sanskrit) in Karnataka state of India.

Garuda Vyuha is worshiped in Tantra for Abhichara and to protect against Abhichara. However, the interesting thing is that Garuda is the Sankarshna form of the lord who during creation primarily possesses the knowledge aspect of the lord (among Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha forms). The important point is that Garuda represents the five vayus within us : prana, apana, vyana, udana, samana through his five forms Satya, Suparna, Garuda, Tarkshya, Vihageshwara. These five vayus through yoga can be controlled through Pranayama which can lead to Kundalini awakening leading to higher



Vishnu and Lakshmi riding on the Garuda - Painting in LACMA from Rajasthan, Bundi, c.1730

levels of consciousness.

Garuda plays an important role in Krishna Avatar in which Krishna and Satyabhama ride on Garuda to kill Narakasura. On another occasion, Lord Hari rides on Garuda to save the devotee Elephant Gajendra. It is also said that Garuda’s wings when flying will chant the Vedas.

With the position of Garuda’s hands and palms, he is also called 'Kai Yendhi Perumal', in Tamil.

17.2 In the Mahabharata

17.2.1 Birth and deeds

The story of Garuda’s birth and deeds is told in the first book of the great epic Mahabharata.^[4] According to the epic, when Garuda first burst forth from his egg, he appeared as a raging inferno equal to the cosmic conflagration that consumes the world at the end of every age. Frightened, the gods begged him for mercy. Garuda, hearing their plea, reduced himself in size and energy.

Garuda’s father was the creator-rishi Kasyapa. He had two wives, Vinata and Kadru, who were daughters of Prajapathi Daksha. Kasyapa, on the pleadings of his wives, granted them their wishes; Vinata wished for two sons and Kadru wished for thousand snakes as her sons. Both laid eggs, while the thousand eggs of Kadru hatched



Balinese wooden statue of Vishnu riding Garuda, Purna Bhakti Pertiwi Museum, Jakarta



Vishnu swoops down from heaven on an eagle named Garuda, who has four arms in this image, two of which hold vessels that probably contain the nectar of immortality.

early (after steaming the eggs to hatch) into snakes, the hatching of two eggs of Vinata did not take place for a long time. Impatient, Vinata broke open one egg, which was half formed with the upper half only as a human and was thus deformed. Her half formed son cursed her that she would be slave for her sister (she was her rival) for a long time by which time her second son would be born who would save her from his curse; her first son who flew away and came to prominence as Aruna, the red spectacle seen as the Sun rises in the morning, and as also charioteer of the Sun. The second egg hatched after a long time during which period Vinata was the servant of her sister as she had lost a bet with her. When the second egg hatched, a fully grown, shining and of mighty sized bird form emerged as Garuda, the king of birds. Garuda was thus born.^[5]

One day, Vinata entered into and lost a foolish bet, as a result of which she became enslaved to her sister. Resolving to release his mother from this state of bondage, Garuda approached the serpents and asked them what it would take to purchase her freedom. Their reply was that Garuda would have to bring them the elixir of immortality, also called amrita. It was a tall order. The amrita at that time found itself in the possession of the gods, who guarded it zealously, since it was the source of their immortality. They had ringed the elixir with a massive fire that covered the sky. They had blocked the way to the elixir with a fierce mechanical contraption of sharp rotat-

ing blades. And finally, they had stationed two gigantic poisonous snakes next to the elixir as deadly guardians.

Undaunted, Garuda hastened toward the abode of the gods intent on robbing them of their treasure. Knowing of his design, the gods met him in full battle-array. Garuda, however, defeated the entire host and scattered them in all directions. Taking the water of many rivers into his mouth, he extinguished the protective fire the gods had thrown up. Reducing his size, he crept past the rotating blades of their murderous machine. And finally, he mangled the two gigantic serpents they had posted as guards. Taking the elixir into his mouth without swallowing it, he launched again into the air and headed toward the eagerly waiting serpents. En route, he encountered Vishnu. Rather than fight, the two exchanged promises. Vishnu promised Garuda the gift of immortality even without drinking from the elixir, and Garuda promised to become Vishnu's mount. Flying onward, he met Indra the god of the sky. Another exchange of promises occurred. Garuda promised that once he had delivered the elixir, thus fulfilling the request of the serpents, he would make it possible for Indra to regain possession of the elixir and to take it back to the gods. Indra in turn promised Garuda the serpents as food.

At long last, Garuda alighted in front of the waiting serpents. Placing the elixir on the grass, and thereby liber-



Garuda, Belur, India

ating his mother Vinata from her servitude, he urged the serpents to perform their religious ablutions before consuming it. As they hurried off to do so, Indra swooped in to make off with the elixir. The serpents came back from their ablutions and saw the elixir gone but with small droplets of it on the grass. They tried to lick the droplets and thereby split their tongues in two. From then onwards, serpents have split tongues and shed their skin as a kind of immortality. From that day onward, Garuda was the ally of the gods and the trusty mount of Vishnu, as well as the implacable enemy of snakes, upon whom he preyed at every opportunity.

17.2.2 Descendants

According to the *Mahabharata*, Garuda had six sons (Sumukha, Suvarna, Subala, Sunaama, Sunethra and Suvarchas) from whom were descended the race of birds. The members of this race were of great might and without compassion, subsisting as they did on their relatives the snakes. Vishnu was their protector.^[6]

17.2.3 As a symbol

Throughout the *Mahabharata*, Garuda is invoked as a symbol of impetuous violent force, of speed, and of martial prowess. Powerful warriors advancing rapidly on

doomed foes are likened to Garuda swooping down on a serpent.^[7] Defeated warriors are like snakes beaten down by Garuda.^[8] The field marshal Drona uses a military formation named after Garuda.^[9] Krishna even carries the image of Garuda on his banner.^[10]

17.3 In Buddhism



The statues of Krut battling naga serpent, a Thai Buddhist adaptation of Garuda in Wat Phra Kaeo temple, Bangkok

In Buddhist mythology, the Garuda (Pāli: **garuḷā**) are enormous predatory birds with intelligence and social organization. Another name for the Garuda is **suparṇa** (Pāli: **suparṇa**), meaning “well-winged, having good wings”. Like the Naga, they combine the characteristics of animals and divine beings, and may be considered to be among the lowest devas.

The exact size of the Garuda is uncertain, but its wings are said to have a span of many miles. This may be a poetic exaggeration, but it is also said that when a Garuda’s wings flap, they create hurricane-like winds that darken the sky and blow down houses. A human being is so small compared to a Garuda that a man can hide in the plumage of one without being noticed (Kākātī Jātaka, J.327). They are also capable of tearing up entire banyan trees from their roots and carrying them off.

Garudas are the great golden-winged Peng birds. They also have the ability to grow large or small, and to appear and disappear at will. Their wingspan is 330 yojanas (one yojana being 8 miles long). With one flap of its wings, a Peng bird dries up the waters of the sea so that it can gobble up all the exposed dragons. With another flap of its wings, it can level the mountains by moving them into the ocean.

There were also the four garuda-kings : Great-Power-Virtue Garuda-King, Great-Body Garuda-King, Great-Fulfillment Garuda-King, and Free-At-Will Garuda-King, each accompanied by hundreds of thousands of attendants.

The Garudas have kings and cities, and at least some of them have the magical power of changing into human

form when they wish to have dealings with people. On some occasions Garuda kings have had romances with human women in this form. Their dwellings are in groves of the *simbalī*, or silk-cotton tree.

The Garuda are enemies to the *nāga*, a race of intelligent serpent- or dragon-like beings, whom they hunt. The Garudas at one time caught the *nāgas* by seizing them by their heads; but the *nāgas* learned that by swallowing large stones, they could make themselves too heavy to be carried by the Garudas, wearing them out and killing them from exhaustion. This secret was divulged to one of the Garudas by the ascetic Karambiya, who taught him how to seize a *nāga* by the tail and force him to vomit up his stone (Pandara Jātaka, J.518).

The Garudas were among the beings appointed by Śakra to guard Mount Sumeru and the Trāyastriṃśa heaven from the attacks of the asuras.

In the Maha-samaya Sutta (Digha Nikaya 20), the Buddha is shown making temporary peace between the Nagas and the Garudas.

The Thai rendering of Garuda (ครุฑ *Krut*) as Vishnu vehicle and Garuda's quest for elixir was based on Indian legend of Garuda. It was told that Garuda overcame many heavenly beings in order to gain the ambrosia (amrita) elixir. No one was able to get the better of him, not even Narai (Vishnu). At last, a truce was called and an agreement was made to settle the rancor and smooth all the ruffled feathers. It was agreed that when Narai is in his heavenly palace, Garuda will be positioned in a superior status, atop the pillar above Narai's residence. However, whenever Narai wants to travel anywhere, Garuda must serve as his transport.

The Sanskrit word Garuda has been borrowed and modified in the languages of several countries. In Burmese, Garudas are called *galone* (ဂဏ်း). In Burmese astrology, the vehicle of the Sunday planet is the *galone*.^[11] In the Kapampangan language of the Philippines, the native word for eagle is *galura*. In Japanese a Garuda is called *karura* (however, the form *Garuda* (ガルーダ) is used in recent Japanese fiction - see below).

For the Mongols, the Garuda is called *Khan Garuda* or *Khangarid* (Mongolian: Хангарьд). Before and after each round of Mongolian wrestling, wrestlers perform the Garuda ritual, a stylised imitation of the *Khangarid* and a hawk.

In the Qing Dynasty fiction *The Story of Yue Fei* (1684), Garuda sits at the head of the Buddha's throne. But when a celestial bat (an embodiment of the Aquarius constellation) flatulates during the Buddha's expounding of the Lotus Sutra, Garuda kills her and is exiled from paradise. He is later reborn as Song Dynasty General Yue Fei. The bat is reborn as Lady Wang, wife of the traitor Prime Minister Qin Hui, and is instrumental in formulating the "Eastern Window" plot that leads to Yue's eventual political execution.^[12] It is interesting to note *The Story of*

Yue Fei plays on the legendary animosity between Garuda and the Nagas when the celestial bird-born Yue Fei defeats a magic serpent who transforms into the unearthly spear he uses throughout his military career.^[13] Literary critic C.T. Hsia explains the reason why Qian Cai, the book's author, linked Yue with Garuda is because of the homology in their Chinese names. Yue Fei's courtesy name is Pengju (鹏举).^[14] A Peng (鹏) is a giant mythological bird likened to the Middle Eastern Roc.^[15] Garuda's Chinese name is Great Peng, the Golden-Winged Illumination King (大鹏金翅鸟).^[14]

17.4 As a cultural and national symbol



Lamp in the Form of the Mythical Garuda Bird, 19th century. Brooklyn Museum

In India, Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia the eagle symbolism is represented by Garuda, a large mythical bird with eagle-like features that appears in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology as the *vahana* (vehicle) of the god Vishnu. Garuda became the national emblem of Thailand and Indonesia; Thailand's Garuda is rendered in a more traditional anthropomorphic mythical style, while that of Indonesia is rendered in heraldic style with traits similar to the real Javan Hawk-eagle.

17.4.1 India

India primarily uses Garuda as a martial motif:

- Garud Commando Force is a Special Forces unit of the Indian Air Force, specializing in operations deep behind enemy lines
- Brigade of the Guards of the Indian Army uses Garuda as their symbol
- Elite bodyguards of the medieval Hoysala kings were called Garudas



Garuda according to Ida Made Tlaga, a 19th-century Balinese artist

- Kerala and Andhra Pradesh state road transport corporations use Garuda as the name for a/c motorbuses
- Garuda rock, a rocky cliff in Tirumala in Andhra Pradesh
- 13th century Aragalur chief, Magadesan's, insignia was Rishabha the sacred Bull and the Garuda

17.4.2 Indonesia

Indonesia uses the Garuda, called the Garuda Pancasila, as its national symbol, it is somewhat intertwined with the concept of the phoenix.

- *Garuda Pancasila* is coloured or gilt gold, symbolizes the greatness of the nation and is a representation of the *elang Jawa* or Javan Hawk-eagle *Nisaetus bartelsi*. The black color represents nature. There are 17 feathers on each wing, 8 on the lower tail, 19 on the upper tail and 45 on the neck, which represent the date Indonesia proclaimed its independence: 17 August 1945. The shield it carries with the Indonesian *Panca Sila* heraldry symbolizes self-defense and protection in struggle.^[2]
- Indonesian national airline is Garuda Indonesia.
- Indonesian Armed Forces United Nations peace-keeping missions is known as *Pasukan Garuda* or Garuda Contingent

- Airlangga University, one of the oldest and leading university in Indonesia uses Garuda on its emblem. The emblem, containing a Garuda in a blue and yellow circle, is called "Garudamukha", and depicts Garuda as the bearer of knowledge, carrying a jug of Amrita, the water of eternity, symbolizing eternal knowledge.
- In Bali and Java Garuda has become a cultural symbol, the wooden statue and mask of Garuda is a popular artworks and souvenirs.
- In Bali, we can find the tallest Garuda statue of 18 metres tall made from tons of copper and brass. The statue is located in Garuda Wisnu Kencana complex.
- Garuda has identified as Indonesian national football team in international games, namely "The Garuda Team".^[16]



Garuda 18m tall statue in Garuda Wisnu Kencana, Bali.

- The stylized brush stroke that resemble Garuda is appear in the logo of 2011 Southeast Asian Games, held in Palembang and Jakarta, Indonesia.
- The stylized curves that took form of Garuda Pancasila is appear in the logo of Wonderful Indonesia tourism campaign.

17.4.3 Thailand

Thailand uses the Garuda (Thai: ครุฑ, khрут) as its national symbol.

- One form of the Garuda used in Thailand as a sign of the royal family is called Khrut Pha, meaning "Garuda, the vehicle (of Vishnu)."
- The statue and images of Garuda adorned many Buddhist temples in Thailand, it also has become the cultural symbol of Thailand.

17.4.4 Mongolia

- The Garuda, known as Khangarid, is the symbol of the capital city of Mongolia, Ulan Bator.^[17] According to popular Mongolian belief, Khangarid is the mountain spirit of the Bogd Khan Uul range who became a follower of Buddhist faith. Today he is considered the guardian of that mountain range and a symbol of courage and honesty.
- The bird also gives its name to Hangard Aviation
- Khangarid (Хангарьд), a football (soccer) team in the Mongolia Premier League also named after Garuda.
- Garuda Ord (Гаруда Орд), a private construction and trading company based in Ulaanbaatar, also named after Garuda.
- State Garuda (Улсын Гарьд) is a title given to the debut runner up in wrestling tournament during Mongolian National Festival Naadam.

17.5 Gallery

- **Garuda** as national symbol of Indonesia
- **Garuda** as national symbol of Thailand
- **Garuda** (*Khangardi*) as the symbol of Ulan Bator, Mongolia
- **Garuda** mūrti in West Bengal, India
- **Garuda**, Durbar Square, Kathmandu
- King Airlangga depicted as Vishnu mounting **Garuda**, 11th century East Java
- 13th century Cham sculpture depicts **Garuda** devouring a serpent
- 12th century Cham sculpture in the Thap Mam style depicts **Garuda** serving as an atlas
- **Garuda** figure, gilt bronze, Khmer Empire, 12th-13th century, John Young Museum, University of Hawaii at Manoa
- 12th century bas relief at Angkor Wat in Cambodia showing Vishnu in battle mounted on **Garuda**
- Wingless statue of **Garuda** or Karura in Kofukuji Temple, Nara, Japan, 8th century
- Head of a **Garuda** during the 14th century, Honolulu Museum of Art
- Chakri Maha Prasat Hall **Garuda**
- **Garuda** returning with the vase of Amrita
- Garuda at Srivilliputur Temple, Tamil Nadu, India

17.6 See also

- Fenghuang
- Garid
- Garuda in the architecture of Cambodia
- Garuda Purana
- Harpy
- Kalaviṅka
- Karura
- List of avian humanoid
- Peng (mythology)
- Phoenix (mythology)
- Roc (mythology)
- Sirin
- Thunderbird (mythology)
- Vishnu

17.7 Notes

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- [2] Archived August 27, 2013 at the Wayback Machine
- [3] “Shakti Sadhana”. Retrieved 30 September 2014.
- [4] Mahabharata, Book I: Adi Parva, Sections 23 ff.
- [5] Ashok, Banker K (2012). *Forest of Stories*. Westland. pp. 173–175. ISBN 978-93-81626-37-5. Retrieved 6 March 2013.
- [6] Mahabharata, Book V: Udyoga Parva, Section 101.
- [7] “Loud was the noise with which Arjuna faced his foes, like that made by Garuda in days of yore when swooping down for snakes.” (Mahabharata, Book VIII: Karna Parva, Section 77.) “The impetuosity of Ashvatthama, as he rushed towards his foe, resembled that of Garuda swooping down for seizing a large snake.” (Mahabharata, Book VIII: Karna Parva, Section 59.) Arjuna “seized Drupada as Garuda seizeth a huge snake after agitating the waters of the ocean.” (Book I: Adi Parva, Section 140.)
- [8] Mahabharata, Book VIII: Karna Parva, Section 85.
- [9] Mahabharata, Book VII: Drona Parva, Section 20.
- [10] Mahabharata, Book VIII: Karna Parva, Section 94.

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- [15] Chau, Ju-Kua, Friedrich Hirth, and W.W. Rockhill. *Chau Ju-Kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, entitled Chu-Fan-Chi*. St. Petersburg: Printing Office of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1911, p. 149, n. 1
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- [17] Michael Kohn. *Mongolia*. Lonely Planet, 2005. p. 52.

17.8 External links

- The Garuḍa Purana (Sâroddhâra), by Ernest Wood and S.V.Subramanyam, 1918 (Online, downloadable PDF) archive.org
- The Garuda Purana (Wood and Subrahmanyam translation, 1911) at sacred-texts.com
- Garuda Purana

Chapter 18

Narada

For other uses, see [Narada](#) (disambiguation).



Narada

Narad redirects here; for the village in Slovakia, see Ārād.

Narada (Sanskrit: नारद, *Nārada*, possibly derived from “nāra”, meaning man) ^[1] is a Vedic sage who plays a prominent role in a number of Hindu texts, notably the Ramayana and the Bhagavata Purana. Narada is arguably ancient India’s most travelled sage with the ability to visit distant worlds and realms (Sanskrit *lokas*). He is depicted carrying a Veena, with the name Mahathi and is generally regarded as one of the great masters of the ancient musical instrument. This instrument is known by the name “mahathi”^{[2][3]} which he uses to accompany his singing of hymns, prayers and mantras as an act of devotion to Lord Vishnu. Narada is described as both wise and mis-

chievous, creating some of Vedic literature’s more humorous tales. Vaishnav enthusiasts depict him as a pure, elevated soul who glorifies Vishnu through his devotional songs, singing the names *Hari* and *Narayana*, and therein demonstrating bhakti yoga. The Narada Bhakti Sutra is attributed to him.

Narada is also said to have orated the maxims of the *Nāradaśmṛti* (100 BC – 400 CE), which has been called the “juridical text par excellence” and represents the only Dharmaśāstra text which deals solely with juridical matters and ignoring those of righteous conduct and penance.^[4]

Tamil cultural proponents insist that sage Narada was invoked by legendary Carnatic musician, Thyagaraja, to produce his various compositions.

18.1 Enlightenment

The Bhagavata Purana describes the story of Narada’s spiritual enlightenment: He was the primary source of information among Gods, and is believed to be the first journalist on Earth. He claimed to have 60 wives. In his previous birth Narada was a Gandharva (angelic being) who had been cursed to be born on an earthly planet as a sudra for singing glories to the demigods instead of the Supreme Lord.^[5] He was born as the son of a maid-servant of some particularly saintly priests (Brahmins). The priests, being pleased with both his and his mother’s service, blessed him by allowing him to eat some of their food (prasada), previously offered to their lord, Vishnu.

Gradually Narada received further blessings from these sages and heard them discussing many spiritual topics. After his mother died, he decided to roam the forest in search of enlightenment in understanding the 'Supreme Absolute Truth'.

Reaching a tranquil forest location, after quenching his thirst from a nearby stream, he sat under a tree in meditation (yoga), concentrating on the paramatma form of Vishnu within his heart as he had been taught by the priests he had served. After some time Narada experienced a vision wherein Narayan (Vishnu) appeared before him, smiling, and spoke “that despite having the



Narada found Vishnu in viraat swarupa

blessing of seeing him at that very moment, Narada would not be able to see his (Vishnu's) divine form again until he died". Narayan further explained that the reason he had been given a chance to see his form was because his beauty and love would be a source of inspiration and would fuel his dormant desire to be with the lord again. After instructing Narada in this manner, Vishnu then disappeared from his sight. The boy awoke from his meditation both thrilled and disappointed.

For the rest of his life Narada focused on his devotion, meditation upon and worship to Vishnu. After his death Vishnu then blessed him with the spiritual form of "Narada" as he eventually became known. In many Hindu scriptures Narada is considered a saktavesha-avatara or partial-manifestation (avatar) of God, empowered to perform miraculous tasks on Vishnu's behalf.

18.2 Temple

Narada Temple is dedicated to the Divine Sage Narada. These temples are located in **Chigateri**, which is 50 km away from Davanagere, Karnataka, India and the temple is famous in neighbouring districts of Davanagere, and in **Korva** which is 29 km north-east of Raichur in Karnataka, India. Korva is a beautiful island surrounded by the Krishna River. Korva is looked upon as a holy place and is popularly known as Naradagadde - one of the most scenic islands on the Krishna River. Due to its exquisite location the temple is not only visited by devotees but also

by tourists.

Sri Narada Muni



Sri Narada Muni

Narada Munisri Narada Muni Temple



Sri Narada Muni Temple

18.3 See also

- Narad Bhakti Sutra
- Bhagavata Purana
- Four Kumaras
- Nāradasmṛti
- Vishnu

18.4 Footnotes

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18.5 References

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18.6 External links

- Complete Narada-Bhakti-Sutradēad links on site
- Narada's Instructions on Srimad-Bhagavatam for Vyasadeva
- Translation from Sanskrit of Narada Bhakti Sutras at www.urday.com/narad.htm
- References to Narada in Gaudiya Vaishnava texts
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18.7 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

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