



THE INCARNATIONS OF LORD VISHNU IN BHAGAVAT PURANA

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ABSTRACT

Indian devotion believes in the incarnations of the Supreme Being. Lord Vishnu, the protector among the Trinity in Hinduism, is believed to have taken many incarnations whenever the righteousness or dharma is in danger. In Bhagavat Gita, Lord Krishna stated that he will incarnate to uproot the evil and to establish dharma in each of the Yuga. Bhagavata Purana described the incarnations or avatars of Lord Vishnu.

KEYWORDS : Lord Vishnu , Bhagavat Gita , Indian devotion , Bhagavata Purana.

INTRODUCTION

Bhagavata Purana is stretched in 12 skandas, 365 Adhyayas and 14615 verses. This purana is in form of a narrative narrated by Sage Suka to King Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna. During this conversation Sage Suka explained about the divine incarnations of Lord Vishnu to King Parikshit along with many dharmas and incidents. This Purana is much revered by one and all in general and Vaishnavite in particular. For the Visistadavita and Dwaita doctrines, this Purana is the pillar of faith.

According to Bhagavata Purana, the Supreme Being or Paramatman has three forms. One is pervaded in and out of the universe. The second is the Triguna (Satva, Tama and Rajas). These three gunas or virtues called termed as Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesa by scholars and devotees. These Tripurusha or Trimurthi, generally called by all, perform the creation, nourishment and the destruction of the universe respectively in timely manner. The third form of the Supreme Being is the human form he takes to nourish and protect the world. This taking human form by the Supreme Being is called avatara or incarnation. The concept of taking avatara is called as Avataravada.

The number of avatars of Lord Vishnu, according to Bhagavata Purana differs from place to place in the book. It gives different figures at different places. Once it was nine, at another place it was fourteen. Twenty and Twenty-two were the other figures mention in Bhagavata Purana. At a place, it even stated that there are innumerable incarnations of Lord Vishnu.

The very first Adhyaya of Bhagavata Purana (1-3- 6 to 25) 22 incarnations of Lord Vishnu were mentioned. They are Sanakadi sages (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Santkumara), Varaha, Narada, Nara-Narayana, Kapila, Dattatreya, Yagna, rushabha, Pruthu, Matsya, Kurma, Dhanvantari, Mohini, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Vyas, Rama, Balrama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. At another place (2-7- 1 to 35) the description of twenty-four incarnations was mentioned. These Twenty-four incarnations are Varaha, KSuyagna, Kapila, Datta, Sanakadi, Nara-Narayana, Sri Hari (Boon giver to Dhruva), Pruthu, Rushabha, Hayagriva, Mastya, Kachchapa (Kurma), Nrusimha, Hari (Savior of Gajendra), Vamana, Hamsa, Manuvansadhara, Dhanvantari, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Kalki.

In the fourth Adhyaya of eleventh skanda Nara-Naarayana, Hamsa, Datta, Sanatkumara, Rushabha, Hayagriva, Mastya, Varaha, Kurma, Hari (savior of Valakhilya sages), Srihari (Saviour of Indra from sins),

Srihari (savour of Apsaras), Nrusimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki were mentioned as incarnations or avatars of Lord Vishnu.

Summing up the different lists we can sketch out the incarnations of Vishnu as Balrama, Buddha, Dattatreya, Dhanvantari, Hamsa, Hari (Savior of Gajendra), Hari (savior of Valakhilya sages), Hayagriva, Kachchapa (Kurma), Kalki, Kapila, Krishna, Manuvansadhara, Mastya, Mohini, Narada, Nara-Naarayana, Narasimha, Parasurama, Pruthu, Rama, Rushabha, Sanakadi sages (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Santkumara), Sri Hari (Boon giver to Dhruva), Srihari (Saviour of Indra from sins), Srihari (savour of Apsaras), Suyagna, Vamana, Varaha, Vyasa and Yagna. This list of incarnations is in alphabetical order, but not in the order of the incarnation. If Sanakadi sages (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, Sanatkumara) and Nara-Narayana were taken group as single units, though comprises of more than one, the number of incarnations is thirty-one. If individuals in the groups are counted independently the number of incarnations becomes thirty-five.

These incarnations or avatars can be classified into four categories viz., Animals, Man-animals, Humans and Divine. Out of these avatars or incarnations Dhanvantari, Hamsa, Hari (Savior of Gajendra), Hari (savior of Valakhilya sages), Mohini, Narada, Nara-Naarayana, Sanakadi sages (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Santkumara), Sri Hari (Boon giver to Dhruva), Srihari (Saviour of Indra from sins), Srihari (savour of Apsaras), Yagna are divine incarnations. Mastya, Kachchapa (Kurma) and Varaha are incarnations in animal form. Hayagriva, Narasimha are Man-Animal incarnations or half-human half-animal incarnations. Balrama, Buddha, Dattatreya, Kalki, Kapila, Krishna, Manuvansadhara, Parasurama, Pruthu, Rama, Rushabha, Suyagna, Vamana and Vyasa are incarnations in human form.

While the highest number of incarnations of Lord Vishnu according to Bhagavata Purana comes to twenty-four, the Ahirbudhnya Samhita of Pancharatra mentions thirty nine incarnations of Lord Vishnu. Viz., Padmanabha, Dhruva, Ananta, Sakrutyatma, Madhusudana, Vidyadhideva, Kapila, Visvarupa, Vihanga, Krodatma, Vadvavaktra, Dharma, Vagiswara, Ekavarnasayi, Kamthesvara, Varaha, Nrusimha, Piyusaharana, Sri Pati, Kantatma, Rahujit, Kalanemigraha, Parijatahara, Loknatha, Santatma, Dattatreya, Nyagrodhayasayi, Ekarunatanu, Vamana, Trivikrama, Nara, Narayana, Hari, Krishna, Parasurama, Rama, Vedvid, Kalki and Patalasayi. This list appears to have included the virtues of Lord Vishnu as independent incarnations or avatars.

Lord Brahma narrated the story of Varaha avatara in the second skanda of Bhagavata Purana. To save the world from devil Hiranyaksha, Lord incarnated as Varaha and this Varaha is described as 'Yanga-Varah'. In Suyanga incarnation Lord took birth in the house of Prajapati Ruci and his great grandfather King Manu named him as Hari. Rigveda also mentions about this incarnation. In Kapila incarnation, Lord created the Sankhya Darshana and preached Brahma Vidya. In the incarnation of Dattatreya, Lord Vishnu took birth in the house of Sage Atri. In this avatara Lord preached Atma vidya to king Alarka and others. Sanakadi sages are divine sages. They are four in number. These are spiritual knowledge personified. Nara-Narayana is an incarnation in duo. These two are the considered as ancient incarnation and the everlasting treasure of infinite incarnations. When prince Dhruva did a great penance, Lord appeared before him as Sri Hari and gave an immovable place to him in the skies.

In the incarnation of King Pruthu, the son of King Vena, Lord reestablished the Yagna Dharma and propagated farming. In the avatar of Rushabha, the Lord showed the way of ascetic life. In the incarnation of Hayagriva, he saved Vedas from Madhu and Kaitabha, the demons. He taught the Sri Vidya to the world. In Mastyavatara, he protected Vaivaswat Manu and righteous at the time of deluge. At the time of Samudra manthan, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu i.e., Kachchap (Kurma) bore the weight of Mantharachala while Gods and Rakshasas churned the milky ocean for the nectar Amrutha. In Nrusimha avatara, he protected Pahlada and gods from the atrocities of HiranyaKasipu. In Ramavatara he killed Ravana, the symbol of passionate temperament. For saving the Gajendra, the elephant king, Lord appeared as Srihari with disc and killed the crocodile. In Vamanavatara he saved Indra and other gods from the wrath of King Bali.

In Hamsavatara, the divine swan, Lord preached the Bhagavata Dharma and importance of knowledge and devotion. In Manuvanshadhara avatara, Lord cleared all the obstacles by protecting the

progeny of Manu and killed the evil kings. As Dhanvantari he propagated self-realization. He is considered as the father of medicine, Ayurveda. As Parasurama, he killed all the evil kings on the earth with his incomparable powerful axe. As Sri Rama, he killed the demon king Ravana and taught the humane values by his righteous behaviour. Sri Krishna, the avatara described in detail in Bhagavata Purana, killed evil kings and lessened the burden of the mother earth. He taught the divine knowledge through several Gitas to different people. The incarnation of Balarama is considered to be one and same with Krishna by few philosophes. According to them, these two are the two sides of a same coin. In the incarnation of Sage Vyasa or Vedavyasa, Lord has organized the vedic knowledge by dividing in into different parts. In this incarnation, he taught the divine knowledge through divine Samhitas of Vedas the by creating Puranas. In the avatara of Buddha, sounding similar to historical Buddha, Lord defeated the evil plans of Maya Danav and resurrected the belief in Vedas in the people. The incarnation Kalki will be in future. This is considered to be last of the ten major avataras of Lord Vishnu. At the end of Kaliyuga, he will kill all the thieves disguising in the kings clothes cheating the innocent, righteous people.

Being the Supreme Being, omni present, omni potent God, he is eternal and present everywhere. Bhagavata Purana narrated about few of His incarnations in detail and became the most honoured, revered Purana in India and abroad.

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