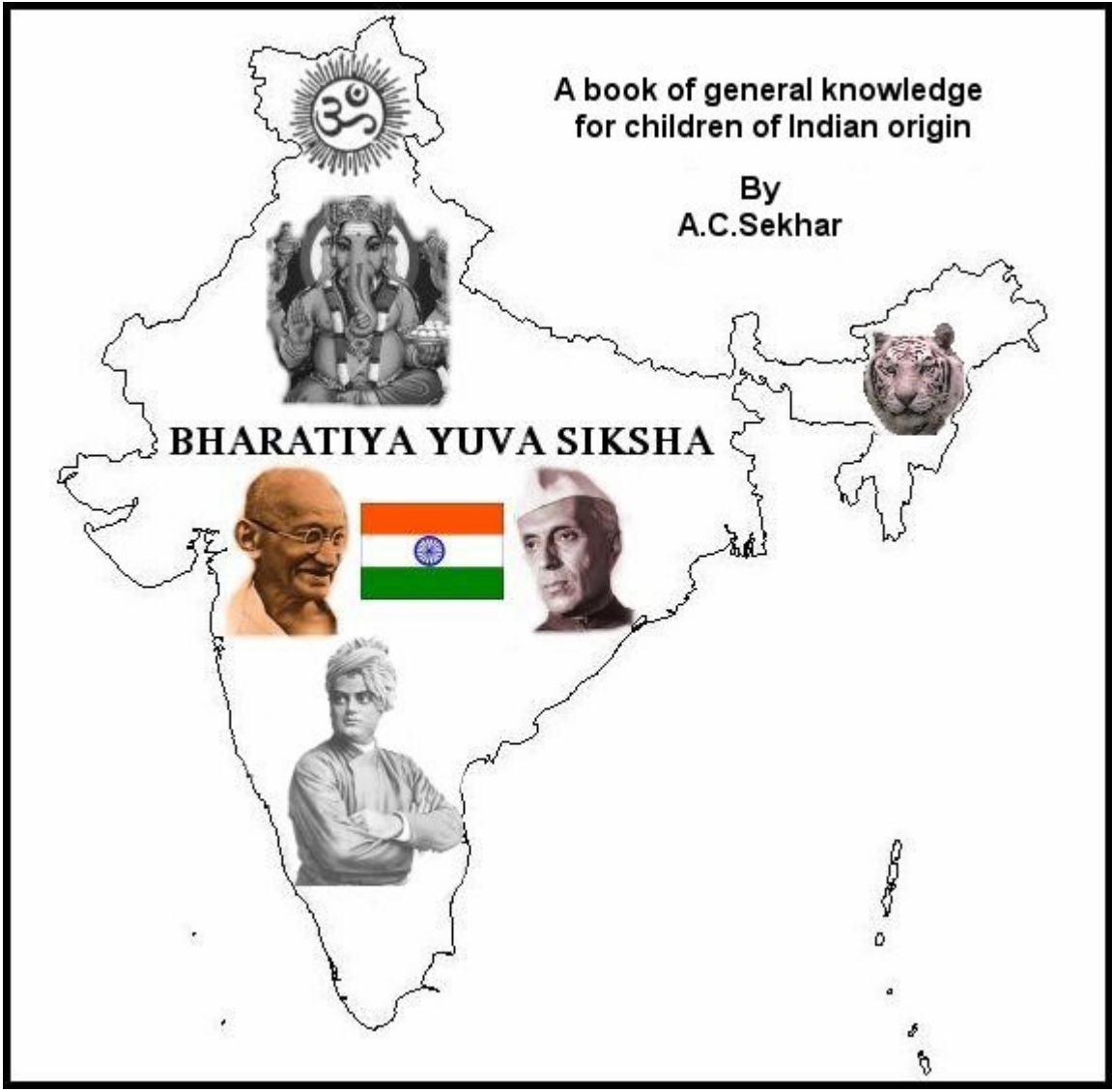


A book of general knowledge  
for children of Indian origin

By  
A.C.Sekhar

**BHARATIYA YUVA SIKSHA**





## **BHARATIYA YUVA SIKSHA**

*(A book of General Knowledge for children of Indian origin)*

**A.C. Sekhar**

**Dedicated to my granddaughter  
MAYA  
and children of Indian origin**

## Preface

When people from India leave their mother country to seek their fortunes in other countries they are sometimes confronted with lack of direction for their own children. Some want their children to mix freely with kids of their own age in the new environment and adjust themselves fully with the new culture and habits. Others want their children to retain the values of the culture of their mother country and be proud of their origin. They desire their children to share with their fellow kids the values of their own heritage. There are some instances when some send their children back to India to live with relatives and grand parents so that they would grow up in an Indian culture and tradition only. The kids of such parents, being from a stock of high intelligence and ambitions, are also highly adaptable to their new environment but cannot escape from the knowledge and curiosity of their ancestral culture back in India.

For this reason, it was considered that children of Indian origin growing up in other countries should have a handy book which can be of interest to them, and get a good insight of their ancestral country. It is with this object in mind that a modest attempt has been made in this book for kids and youth of Indian origin to acquaint themselves with some fables, facts and figures relating to India. India is a land of diverse cultures, ethnic groups, and a variety of festivals. Hinduism is predominantly the main religion and way of life in India; this has permeated to some extent into other groups and vice versa also. For this reason emphasis has been given mostly to Hinduism with occasional references to other groups, so that the readers can decide for themselves as to what may be of interest to them.

Children are generally interested in stories. Hence it is felt that much of the information may be conveyed in the form of stories. It is also a well known fact that the ancient sages of India used to convey the philosophy of the Vedas and the practical significance of it to the common folks, mostly in the form of fables and lyrical poems which served as guidance in the daily life of Hindus through several generations, hence some chapters like "Vedic commandments" "Hindu festivals" have been padded with appropriate stories

In addition to the above, a separate chapter on some typical stories has also been added. Stories interest all sections of people, the young and old, men and women, rich and poor, educated or not, story telling is an art form that attracts people of all ages. Some grand-parents and traditional story tellers seem to have mastered this art. Whether the stories are true or just made up, they generally start with some ordinary facts of life and then end in surprises and admiration which cause some sort of entertainment in the minds of listeners. Hence stories require patient hearing with an element of curiosity. There are many types of stories and parables found in the literatures of the world. The stories of the West generally send messages of adventure, travel, bravery and facing dangers with some sort of weaponry and scientific tools.

The stories of Europe and the Middle East generally touch upon social events, kings and queens, legendary events travelers etc. Stories of the East on the other hand talk about miracles of life, supernatural powers, spirituality, morality, wisdom and divinity. While all such stories and styles of their narration may have conveniently suited people of the world of past generations, it does not impress most of the current generation of children, as they do not consider them to be realistic, they require different types of stories and different types of narration in view of their interaction with the present day world of a melting pot of cultures, multi-polar societies, diverse religious beliefs and rapid technological advances etc. Present day children with all their interactions with the latest computer technologies have a tendency to question the validity of events in a story and try verify the values of

such stories. They need to understand and appreciate the integral whole of human existence involving both the material and spiritual aspects of life, covering the various events in the story told to them. They should be able to see not only some sort of unity in the diversity of life but also see a balance of the real and the abstract, a balance between materialism and spiritualism of the present day world. With this view, it appears that the narration of stories whether old or new, whether of the East or West, should take a pattern different from the conventional grandparents style. The stories in this book are told with the above in mind.

Every story narrated to a child has three aspects in mind, the aspect of a mother, the aspect of a father, and the aspect of a teacher. The mother after giving birth nourishes the child carefully and gives the child access to tools for development. So the narration of a story to a child also creates the requisite interest and desire in the child to get more and more interested and to develop an inquiring mind to proceed further with the story. The intensive desire to keenly follow the trends in the story should be born in the child's mind. The father helps the child to grow up and develop a continuous and well connected pattern for the progress of the child. So any story must develop a sustaining interest so the child may feel to be an active partner in the world of the story, and move along with the heroes and heroines with an attentive mind. The teacher imparts knowledge to the child to with a view to think independently and gain some life skills. So the story should have a moral that the child could follow and help the child to deal with various situations independently, hence we should begin each story with a prayer,

***Mathru Devo Bhava, Pithru Devo Bhava, Guru Devo Bhava.***

Meaning that I worship the godliness in my mother, and in my father, and in my teacher; and end each story with acknowledgement of a moral to follow in life.

**Acknowledgements:** I am thankful to Gouri Smitha for the cover design, Koti Shreekrishna for some valuable suggestions on Hinduism and some *stotrams* with meanings, and to Bharat Vala Patel (SA) for compiling and editing this book.

A. C. Sekhar.

**Biography of the author:** Born in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh in India in 1919, he was educated at Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam and with a brilliant academic career got his Masters Degree in 1938. With some training and experience for a few years in a sawmill at Madras (Chennai), he was sent to the UK and USA during 1945-47 for advanced training in the Wood Sciences and Technology and wood based industries. On returning to India in 1948, he was posted as a research officer at the Forest Research Institute at Dehra Dun, and gradually rose to the position of Director Forest Products Research. He retired in 1977 and served as a consultant to various wood based industries in India. He was elected Fellow of the International Academy of Wood Science and he was founder and general Secretary and President of the Indian Academy of Wood Science. He became a citizen of USA in 2003 and has now settled down in Cincinnati and actively participates in the activities of Hindu Temple of Greater Cincinnati.

Bharat Vala Patel (Lenasia, SA).

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## Facts about India

**Geography:** The Indian sub-continent (Bharat Khand) is generally considered to comprise of the present day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh. Sri Lanka, Maldives and India including the Andaman Islands. But the present day India, also known as Bharat, is bound by Nepal, Bhutan and Himalayas in the north, and by Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean in the south. On the east there is the Bay of Bengal and on the west, the Arabian Sea and Pakistan. The coastal line is 7517 kilometers long and the land boundary is 14103 Km in length, the climate is mostly tropical.

**Brief History of India:** The Indus valley civilization goes back to 5000 years, beginning in the Vedic period. The Aryans of Central Europe invaded the Indus valley about 1500 BC through its Northwest mountain areas, their merger with the local population at that time is the foundation of the present day Indian Culture, Arabs invaded in the eighth century, Turks (Moghuls) invaded in the twelfth century, and Europeans in the fifteen century. Finally the British took control of the entire region in the nineteenth century by creating part of the land as British India and the rest as many princely Indian States under their own control, Later the non-violent and non-cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi helped India to attain full freedom and political power as of the present day and all princely states ultimately merged with free India.

**Government:** The Constitution of India provides for a Federal Republic, with an elected President, Council of Ministers headed by a Prime Minister, Independent Judiciary (with one Supreme Court and 22 High Courts) and a parliament consisting of the Lok Sabha (545 seats) and Rajya Sabha (250 seats) with the Capital in New Delhi.

**National official language** is Hindi but the Constitution of India recognizes 17 other state languages. There are many more spoken but not written dialects. The 17 languages are: Telugu, Tamil, Urdu, Oria, Kannada, Kashmiri, Gujarati, Assamese, Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi, Malayalam, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Nepali, Manipuri, and Konkani. English is widely used in government and in the business world and is fast becoming an essential language.

**Population** of India is more than one billion (1,049,700,118 as at July 2003).

**Area** is 3,287,590 Square kilometers (Land = 2 973 190 Sq. Kilometers and water 314 400 square kilometers).

**States (28) and centrally administered areas (7)** also called union territories marked with \* as below

Andaman and Nicobar Islands\*, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chandigarh\*, Chhattisgarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli\*, Daman and Diu\*, Delhi\*, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Lakshadweep\*, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa, Pondicherry\*, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

**National flag** is Tri-color of equal bands of saffron on top, white in the middle and green at the bottom with wheel in the centered white area called Ashok Chakra (also called Dharma Chakra with 24 –spiked wheel).

**National holidays:** Independence Day, 15 August, Republic Day, 26 January and Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, 2nd October.

**National Anthem:** "Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka Jayahe, composed by Rabindranath Tagore

**Other National Song:** "Vande Mataram" composed by Bankim Chandra Chatterji



## **Basics of Hinduism**

- 1). Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both the Creator and the Unmanifest Reality.
- 2). Hindus believe in the divinity of the four Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Agamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion.
- 3). Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
- 4). Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
- 5). Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas has been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny.
- 6). Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments and personal devotionals create a communion with these Devas and Gods.
- 7). Hindus believe that an enlightened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry, meditation and surrender in God.
- 8). Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, non-injury, in thought, word and deed.
- 9). Hindus believe that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding

## **Some important facets on Hinduism**

### **Karma**

Karma is what the soul undergoes in one of two ways, according to whether its actions are virtuous or not; but both kinds subsist until the end of enjoyment in this world.  
-Svayambu Agama

God's cosmic law of karma governs our life experiences through cause and effect. As God's force of gravity shapes cosmic order, karma shapes experiential order. Through karma, your thoughts, emotions and deeds, whether good, bad or mixed; return to you. Thus, karma is your teacher. It imparts the lessons you need and are able to meet.

For it is a divine law that no karmic situation will arise that exceeds your ability to resolve it. Karma is not fate. You have free will. No God or external force is controlling your life. It is your own karmic creation. To be responsible for your karma is strength. To blame another is weakness. Therefore, remember God's great law of karma and act wisely.

### **Reincarnation**

Through his past works he shall return once more to birth, entering whatever form his heart is set on. This mighty soul unborn grows not old, nor dies, for the soul is immortal and fearless.  
-Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

Your soul is an immortal body of light. It's Absolute and super conscious essence is identical with God. Yet, this identity needs to be realized and unfolded within the soul. Toward this goal your soul undertakes many, many lifetimes in a physical body. You are now the sum total of all your past lives. You undergo every conceivable human experience as the forces of the body, ego and desire manifest.

In the latter lives the forces are transmuted toward spirituality. Finally, your soul realizes God. After resolving all residual karmas, your soul no longer incarnates into human form. As the Agamas and Vedas teach, the soul continues its evolution in the inner worlds. Therefore, you live joyously, strive for spiritual unfoldment and do not fear death.

### **Dharma**

May noble wisdom come to us from all sides, undeceived, unhindered, overflowing, so that the Devas may always help us onward, unceasing is their care, our Guardians day by day.  
-Rig Veda

Dharma is God's Divine Law, the law of being. Dharma is to the individual what its normal development is to a seed, the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature and destiny. When following dharma, you are in harmony with the cosmic order; you abide close to God.

The moral dimension of Hindu dharma is embodied in the eight yamas (restrains) and eight niyamas (observances). The yamas are: non-violence, not stealing; disciplining desire; abjuring lust and greed; curbing arrogance and anger; not lying; avoiding injustice; shunning wrongdoing and evil company. The niyamas: be pure in body, mind and speech; love mankind; seek contentment; cultivate devotion; develop forbearance; give charitably; study the scriptures; preform penance and sacrifice. Every person has his or her path; worship God, and your dharma will become clear.

## **Worship**

Offering of perfumed substances, flowers, incense, lamps and fresh fruit, these are the five elements of the traditional puja which culminates with offering of the lamp.

-Kamika Agama

Worship expresses our profound love for God. Puja, bhajan, prayer and meditation are all worshipful means of direct, personal communion with God and Gods. God, Gods and devas are all real beings dwelling in the inner worlds. They can and want to help you in every aspect of your life. They do this in accord with your own patterns of karma and dharma.

Daily, personal puja at home keeps you God-conscious and your home holy. God has established many temples to allow us to intimately communicate with Him. Temple puja opens a channel to God. Through His personal presence and Shakti, prayers are answered, karma softened, spiritual unfoldment guided. Surrender, worship with intense love, and God hears.

These four facts; karma, reincarnation, dharma, worship are the essence of the Vedas and Agamas and the fabric of every Hindu's life. 'Speak of them to all who will listen; they are the heritage of all souls'.

## Chapter 1: Facts Relating to Hinduism (*Sanathana Dharma*)

### Introduction

The first thing one should know about Hinduism is that it is not only a religion, but also a way of life.

The word 'Hinduism' has its origin from the river 'Indus' then known as 'Sindhu' and pronounced as 'Hindu' around which the religion of *Sanathana Dharma* was thriving. The Hindu way of life has evolved from several interpretations, commentaries and discourses ancient literature, known as the *Vedas* and other religious scriptures like the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Puranas* which are all fables and stories built around the activities attributed to various historic and non-historic personalities who are sometimes depicted as Hindu Gods. Hence in the course of time, the Hindu way of life has become adaptable and adjusted to various geographic, climatic, socio-economic conditions that existed with people at different places and times.

#### 1.1. Sanathana Dharma.

*Sanathana Dharma* means 'Eternal Religion', unlike many other religions based on a single person's teachings on God, on the creation of the Universe and on righteous living, Hinduism is an outcome of the enlightenment and collective wisdom of many wise sages of the past, it is emphasized in the *Upanishads*; the last phases of *Vedas*, that each person should aim to realize the 'truth of nature' based on his own knowledge and experiences. While such a philosophy could have evolved from the time man started wondering and discussing about Nature even when no writing existed, the literary aspect of the religion must have started only when Sanskrit became a popular and common language for normal exchange of views and thoughts. Also most of the literature of the past is in poetic and lyric form to foster easy communication.

In the philosophy that evolved, it is strongly emphasized that there is only one 'God' who is all pervading both in animate and inanimate objects, who is formless, called *Brahman*, or Universal Self, but 'He' can be conceived as existing in many forms, both in animate and inanimate shapes, and even in an absolute abstract form. Hence to convince common people, the great sages of ancient India conceived that the Infinite should be explained in Finite forms. They conceived that the best such forms are human figures endowed with such qualities and powers as may be needed for achievement of specific activities in this world. Accordingly, even though God is one Infinity, He is shown as deities in human forms each with the highest of power and qualities expected of human beings for specific activities.

Hence the often criticized belief that Hinduism consists of several Gods is a misconception, by whichever name 'God' is known, realized, and prayed, 'He' is considered as the source of Supreme Power responsible for all the activities in nature, and in all parts of creation including those of human beings. Also several stories have been built around such forms of Deities to explain to common man how such powers have been used for the benefit of mankind. Several poems and hymns have been written to describe the powers of those Deities which have become symbols of Hinduism's thoughts on God.

Various types of rituals and religious ceremonies were also developed to propitiate such powers for the required benefits and boons to mankind. These were continuously altered according to the times and changing circumstances in the Hindu way of life. Also some modern scholars are discovering that various discoveries in Science regarding the Universe have been found in the *Vedas*, if only they can be interpreted correctly. A modern version of Creator and Creation and their inter-convertibility is given later in this chapter. Hence Hinduism is considered neither static nor dogmatic but dynamic and flexible that goes on changing with the times, with socio-economic conditions of the society and geographical conditions where communities live, but preserving the traditional values and basic focal issues, thus it has withstood the pressures of time and has been preserved even against all odds faced by humanity over many thousands of years.

All religions virtually teach the same for moral and righteous living but some features of the *Sanathana Dharma* distinguishes itself from other religions, some of which is briefly mentioned here:

- the belief in reincarnation of the soul after death
- practicing the creed of non-violence to achieve desired goals (*Ahimsa Paramo Dharmaha*)
- recognizing godliness in everything and in all human beings, particularly in teachers and parents
- developing a balance of mind and body at various stages of life (*Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaraprashtha, and Sanyasa*) for integral growth, by material and spiritual exercises, to achieve *Moksha (liberation from the cycle of birth and death)*
- A distinct philosophy that emerged is the *Advita* philosophy which theorizes that the Creator and Creation are one the same and are interconnected like matter and energy
- The rituals in Hinduism end generally with a phrase "*Sarva Jano Sukhino Bhavanthu, Om Shanti, Om Shanti, Om Shanti*" which means that all people, irrespective of their faith or origin, should live in complete peace and harmony.

## **1.2. Symbolic Aspects of the Hindu Religion:**

As it is the aim of any religion to guide human beings to lead a moral life, similar to the quests of modern science and technology, the methodology adopted in Hinduism by the ancient sages of India is to present the knowledge of the Universe and guidelines to life, symbolically in several objects, events and rituals of that have convenient access to ordinary human beings. These in fact have undergone small variations in the course of time depending on the socio-economic conditions of the communities and the geographic conditions where they live.

The very concept of reincarnation of the soul after death is symbolic of the scientific Laws of Conservation of Energy (life force) and Matter (the human body), thus the human power of creating anything new, which requires some knowledge, is symbolized in the form of 'Brahma' with Knowledge personified in his consort, as Saraswathi, the human power of preservation of wealth is personified as Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi, the power of destruction or constructive change is personified in Shiva with the required energy in his consort Parvathi.

The seven horses of the Sun God suggest symbolically the seven colors of the rainbow in the sky, or those of the spectrum from the white light. Whether Rama of Ramayana and Krishna of Mahabharata existed as we were told or not, they ultimately symbolize the best qualities in human beings, namely; love, honesty, truthfulness, morality, wisdom and divinity. It is a common saying "live like Rama and learn from Krishna" though these two 'gods' had somewhat diametrically opposite situations in their life stories. The ten *Avatharas* or incarnations of God in the Hindu mythology seem to be symbolic of the theory of evolution, from 'Matsyavatar' to 'Kalikavatar' the gradual evolution of life as it first started in water, then gradually onto land, and finally to the present day state of Man. They also symbolize the developing stages of the spiritual path to perfection. The stories associated with each incarnation seem to suggest symbolically that the energy levels in the life form of the particular incarnation or time period.

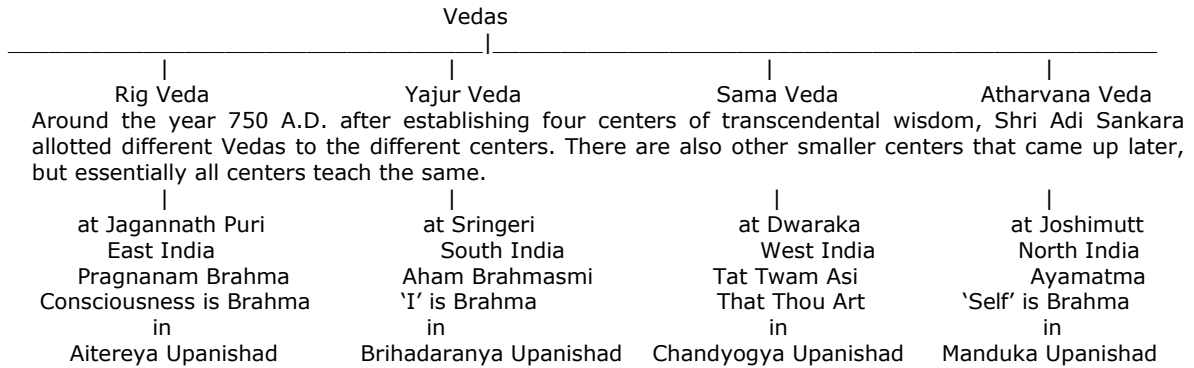
There are several other deities symbolic of the highest in human beings themselves. Lord Ganesha, with the head of an elephant symbolizes the power of removing obstacles in one's progress, Hanuman, with the monkey figure, is the symbol of extreme loyalty and extraordinary energy, Mother Durga with ten hands and multiple weapons has been created to symbolize the superiority of woman power, to destroy evil (personified as Mahishasura) which could not be conquered by any other male 'god'. Similarly there are several auspicious events such as Makara Sankranti, Shivratri, Diwali and several objects and logo like idols, the swastika, OM, etc. symbolic of disciplines and concentration required for proper orientation of the human mind which has been recognized as the center of all activities in the Universe. Thus Hinduism seems to suggest a symbolic character of all that modern Science has revealed and is still discovering about our Universe.

Other religions also have symbols of their own; for example, the 'Dharma Chakra' or 'Wheel of Laws' in Buddhism is symbolic of duties in life; the five 'Kakas' together with a dagger and a shield in Sikhism are symbolic of valour and defense of faith; the Cross in Christianity is a symbol of sacrifice and love; the Menorah of Judaism with seven lights is a symbol of God's creation of this world in seven days; the Cauldron of Fire is a symbol of purity in

Zoroastrianism etc. A deeper study of these aspects particularly in relation with modern science and technology will greatly help to follow an appropriate direction in our study of the *Sanathana Dharma* and in the progress of human beings.

### 1.3. Primary Scriptures - The VEDAS

The Vedas are considered as the oldest source of religious knowledge with a history of more than 5000 years. The exact period when they were written and the authors are not clearly known but their study is said to have revealed the Truth of the Creator and Creation in philosophical discourses, some of which modern Science is now discovering both theoretically and experimentally. The classification, distribution and the main contents of the Vedas are indicated below:



Each Veda consists of four parts as follows:

1. Mantras: Lyrical poems on nature and power of the forces for Man to first see, observe and enjoy in the world mainly during boyhood
2. Brahmanas: Rituals of various ceremonies which a Man should perform particularly during his married life which is his mid-life
3. Aranyakas: Methods of Meditation; Upasanas to be performed by Man during their last stages of life
4. Upanishads: Also known as Vedanta, i.e. the end of the Vedas. These are essentially discourses between a teacher (supposed to be the Lord himself) and a mature Student (who is supposed to have knowledge of the world and worldly experiences). The discussions mainly surround the purpose of Creation and the goals of human existence. So far about 280 Upanishads are said to have been unearthed of which about 180 have been commented upon by great sages. Of these there are eleven called Major Upanishads and commented upon by saints like Sankara, Ramanuja, Madvacharya and written as Bhashyas. Some people consider the Upanishads themselves as a separate primary scripture.

#### 1.4. Elements of Creation and Creator Universal Theory - a new modern concept

Great thinkers, philosophers and scientists have all advanced various theories about the creation of the Universe, its origin, its content, its purpose, its beginning and end and also its creator, but there remain many unanswered questions today. In fact there is a strong debate today as to whether or not children should be taught all these theories or only scientific facts, and not the **intelligent design** which emanated mostly from religion. However it appears that an amalgamation of all these theories and facts presented to children in a way that they understand may be interesting. This is what has been attempted below.

##### Elements of Creation: (Three categories)

- |   |        |  |
|---|--------|--|
| 1. Matter: (Solids, Liquids, Gas)   | -----> | Physical category measurable from a fixed zero to a finite value!                    |
| 2. Energy: (Potential, Kinetic)   | -----> |  |
| 3. Time: (Past, Present and Future)   | -----> | Transcendental category no fixed origin, varies from minus infinity to plus infinity |
| 4. Space: (Limited within measurable boundaries and unlimited without boundaries) | -----> |  |
| 5. Cosmos: (Maya) All pervading medium through which transformations take place   | -----> | Spiritual Category   |

**Elements of Creator:** (The powers or energy relating to creation, preservation, destruction; all personified and expressed in abstract or finite forms)

Brahma: Activates Creation by the help of knowledge personified in Mother Saraswati

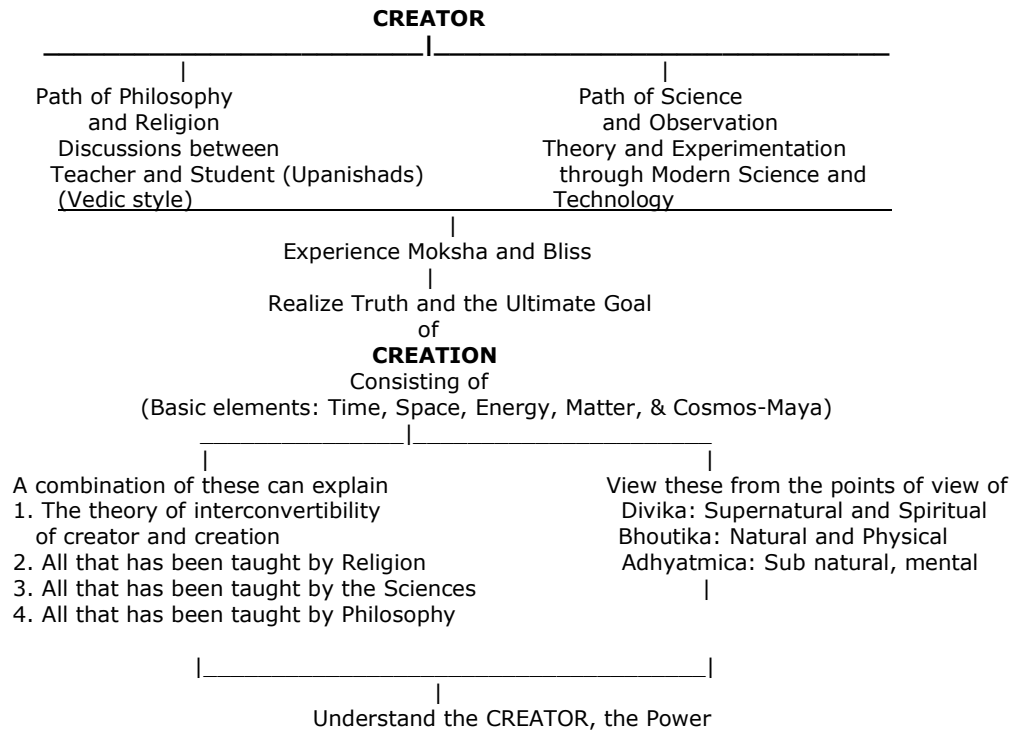
Vishnu: Preserves the Creation by the help of wealth personified in Mother Lakshmi

Shiva/Ishwar: Modifies the Creation by the help of super powers personified in Mother Parvathi

Self: The inherent sustaining unit which keeps up the dynamic activity of any creation (Jeevatma, Paramatma)

Destiny: The pre-determined end of a particular creation, before it is altered. Unknown until it is actually altered

## 1.5. Creator-Creation Inter-Convertibility Process.



Thus what has been created once cannot remain permanent or eternal in nature. It has to end at sometime or other and go back to the Creator. The power of preserving creation as symbolized by Vishnu is however indicated in Hindu mythology as existing in ten different stages, popularly known as Dasavataras or ten incarnations of Vishnu. One aspect of these Avatars is that they represent physical evolution of life forms and spiritual stages of development to reach the Supreme Creator. Given below is the physical part:

1. Matsya - first life started under water
2. Kurma - this is the stage when life existed both under water and land
3. Varaha - life existed freely on land itself
4. Narasimha - half man and half beast stage of existence
5. Vamana - entirely man with developing powers
6. Parashurama - man with uncontrolled emotions
7. Shree Rama - ideal Man (ideal son, ideal husband, ideal king)
8. Shree Krishna - Supreme source of knowledge and perfect joy
9. Buddha - enlightenment
10. Kalki- ruthless striker of developing evil (Yet to come).



## 1.6. Secondary Scriptures - some popular Hindu Religious Literature

There are many epics, *itihisas* and *puranas* etc. in Hindu religious literature which is mostly narrations of the lives of god incarnations, spiritual men, and religious leaders and important incidents depicting Divine power. These formed the main guiding forces of the Hindu way of life as it developed through the ages. Some of the more popular ones are mentioned below:

1. **Ramayana:** This is an epic poem in which the life of Rama is described by the Saint Valmiki, Rama is considered as an ideal human being and his life story is the role model for all human beings. More details of Rama's life are described in Chapter 10 in the story of "Royals of Ayodhya". The original epic poem in Sanskrit has been reshaped with additional stories and removal of some stories by many subsequent writers like Kamban of Tamil Nadu, Tulsidas of Central India., etc In many eastern countries like Indonesia and Jakarta there are different versions of the Ramayana with new names of characters, but the basic theme remains the same.
2. **The Mahabharata:** This is an epic story of the Kauravas and Pandavas, rulers of Hastinapur where the great Indian Battle took place. The ups and downs, the prides and prejudices of communities are exposed in this story dictated by the great Saint Vyasa and written by Lord Ganesha.
3. **The Bhagavat Gita:** In the battle of Mahabharata, Lord Krishna acting as the charioteer for Arjuna teaches him the standards and morals of living. This has served as the guiding light for Indians for many generations. Some people regard the Bhagavat Gita as the primary Hindu Scripture, just as the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras.
4. **Sahasranamas:** the Vishnu Sahasranama and Lalitha Sahsrnama are the most popular. They describe the powers of Lord Vishnu and Adi Sakti Lalithambika in lyrical forms.
5. **The Suktas:** The Prusha Sukta, Narayana Sukta, Sri Sukta and Narada Sukta etc. are parts of Vedic literature in which the Origin, Composition and Powers of Creation are well described and in which morals and ways of life are implied.
6. **Patanjali's Yoga Sastra** in which body-mind coordination methods and practices are indicated

### **1.7. Some misconceptions about Hinduism**

1. In Hinduism there are many Gods--- FALSE – Hindus believe in only one GOD who has Infinite Supernatural Power manifested in several finite forms of specific powers like the power of education, creativity, wealth etc.
2. Hindus practice the caste system in their society-- FALSE -- Hindus believed in the excellence of professionalism through heredity in specific communities.
3. In Hinduism women are subordinate to men – FALSE—Hinduism is the only religion which believes in Feminine Power and has many women deities like Laksmi, Durga, Saraswathi etc. Historically and also mythologically some women have played a greater role than men in human history.
4. Hindus are intolerant of other religions –FALSE – India is the only country where all religions co-exist with Hinduism, peacefully and tolerant of each other believing in the Unity in Diversity of Religions
5. Hindu religious rituals are expensive and not understood by common people –FALSE – The Hindu religion the only religion that has adopted its rituals easily to suit on going socio-economic changes and also to suit geographic and climatic conditions.

## Chapter 2: Some Popular Slokas (Prayer hymns) with meanings

### Introduction

The Indian culture was sustained through centuries mostly by protecting traditions through oral communications rather than by any written laws. One method of maintaining constancy in oral communications is through musical lyrics and songs, they are easy to remember and recite if repeated several times. Typically almost every Hindu child in India is made to memorize some prayer *slokas* to inculcate the spirit of devotion to the God. They repeat these *slokas* to invoke the Gods to help them to achieve successes and happiness in their lives, whether it be at school, at work or in a new venture. Following are some popular *slokas* together with their meanings so that children may understand their significance and practice them.

#### 1. Vighneswara prayer

*Shuklambara Dharam Vishnum Shashi Varnam Chaturbhujam  
Prasanna Vadanam Dhyayeth Sarva Vighnopa Santhaye*

Meaning: Salutations to the Lord, clad in white, Lord of the universe, shining like the moon, with four hands, pleasant face and remover of all obstacles peacefully

*Vakratundamahakaya Suryakotisamaprabha  
Nirvihnamkurumedeva Sarvakreshusarvada*

Meaning: Salutations to the Lord who has a large body with a curved trunk and who has the power of a million suns. Please make my work always free from all obstacles

*Agajaanana Padmaarkam Gajaanana Maharnism  
Aneka Dantham Bhakthanaam Eka Dantham Upasmahe*

#### 2. Maha Mrityunjaya Mahamantra:

*Om Trayambakam Yajamah Sugandhim Pushti Vardhanam  
Urvarukamivaa Bandhanan Mrityo Mukshiya Mamretat*

Meaning: We worship the all pervading three-eyed Lord Shiva, who is fragrant who nourishes and liberates us from bondage of Death (Samsara) but not from immortality.

#### 3. Gayathri Mantra:

*Om Bhur BhuvahSuvaha That SaviturVarenyam  
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahee Dhiyoyonah Prachodayat*

Meaning: Om (resounds in our bodies) representing both the worlds Bhuvaha (Earth) and Suvaha (Cosmos) which are the most excellent of the Creator, by the gift of the Lord's light we meditate for proper inspiration and intellect (so that we may be enlightened).

#### 4. Venkateswara Stotram

*Vina Venkat esam Nanatho Nanatha Sada Venkatesam Smarami Smarami  
Hare Venkatesah Prasida Prasida Priyam Venkatesah Prayacha Prayacha*

Meaning: O! Lord Venkateswara, I worship thee always, Glory be with you and bless me with your kindness.

## 5. Shri MahaLakshmi Stotram

*Namastestu Mahamaye Sreepeethe Surapujithe  
Sankha Chakra Gadha hasthe Mahalakshmir Namosthutte*

Meaning: Salutations to Mahamaya, the abode of Fortune and worshipped by all Devas I offer my prayers to thee, O! Mahalakshmi who holds a conch, a disc, and a mace

## 6. Shri Saraswathi Stotram

*Saraswathi Namasthubhyam Varade kamarupinee  
Vidyarambham karishyami Siddhirbhavatu mesada*

Meaning: O Mother Saraswati I worship thee as I am going to start my Education bless me to have perpetual knowledge and intelligence

## 7. Shri Durga Stotram

*Sarva Maangala Mangalye Shive Sarvada Sadhake  
Sharanye Trayambake Devi Naarayani Namostuthe*

Meaning: O! Auspicious one, O! Beautiful form You are the auspicious of all auspiciousness, the fulfiller of all desires and protector of all those who surrender to you, You are the consort of Shiva and sister of Narayana I offer my salutations to you

## 8. Shanti Mantra

*Om Sahanavavatu Sahanau Bhunaktu Saha Veeryam  
Karavavahai Tejasvinavadhitaqmastu Ma vidvissavahai  
Om Shanti Om Shanti Om Shanti*

Meaning: All of us live together; eat together, fight together, study together May God protect us and bless us in our joint efforts. Peace be with us

## 9. Guru Puja Stotram

*Gururbrahma Gururvishnu Gururdevo Maheswara  
Gurusakshat Parabrahma tasmai Sri Gurave Namaha*

Meaning: Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara are my Gurus. Salutation to my Guru who is Parabrahman

## 10. Awareness Mantra

*Om Asatoma Sadgamaya Tamasoma Jyothirgamaya  
Mrityorma Amritagamaya  
Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti*

Meaning: Redeem me from ignorance and take me to Wisdom  
Redeem me from darkness and take me to Light  
Blissful end will take me to Eternity  
Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

## 11. Eka Slokatmaka Ramayanam

*Adau Rama Tapovanadi Gamanam Hatvamrigam Kanchanam  
Videhi Haranam Jatayu Maranam Sugriva Sambhashanam  
Vali Nigrahanaqm Samudratharanam Lankapuridahanam  
Paschat[Ravana Kumbhakarna Haranam Ethadhi RAMAYANAM*

Meaning: Rama goes to forest, killed a golden deer, Sita kidnapped Jatayu bird died, counseled with Sugriva, Eliminated Vali, Crossed the seas, burnt Lankapuri, Killed Ravana and Kumbhakarna. This is the entire RAMAYANA

## 12. Eka Slokatmaka Bhagavatham

*Adau Devaki Deva Garbhajananam Gopigrihe Vardhanam  
Mayaputhana Jeevithapaharanam Govardhanodaranam  
Kamsachedana Kauravadihanam Kunthi Sutha Palanam  
Etat Bhagavatham Puranakaditham Srikrishna Leelamritham*

Meaning: Born to Devaki and Vasudeva; Grew up among Gopis  
took the life out of disguised female demon Puthana  
lifted the Govardhan mountain, killed Kamsa and all Kauravas  
protected sons of Kunthi, This is the entire BHAGAVATHAM,  
the greatest of all *Puranas*, the Nectar of Sri Krishna Leela

## 13 Eka Slokatmaka Mahabharatam

*Adau Pandava Drtharashtra Jananam Lakha Grihe Dhanam  
Dyute Shree Haranam Vana Viharanam Matsyalaya Vardhanam  
Leela Go Grahanam Rane Vitharanam Sandhikriya Jrihmbinam  
Bhishma, Drona, Duryodhnadi Mathanam, Etat MAHABHARATAM*

Meaning: (With) the birth of sons of Pandu and Drtharashtra and (failed attempt)  
of burning alive (Pandavas) in a wax house, Wealth grabbed illegally,  
exile in forests (of Pandavas), retreat in the house of Matsya  
(Kingdom) cows stolen and rescued, in battle, Attempts for  
compromise (between the Pandavas and Karavas by Lord Krishna)  
failed, Bhishma, Drona Duryodhana and others killed, is  
MAHABHARATA

## 14. Shiva Panchakshari Stotrams

### Stotram 1:

*Nagendra Haaraaya Thrilochanaaya Bhasmaanga Raaya Maheshvaraaya  
Nityaaya Suddhaaya Digambaraaya Tasmai Nakaaraaya Namah*

*Shivaaya*

Meaning: I offer my salutations to the Lord who is embodied in the first letter "Na" who has a serpent as his garland, who has three eyes and is covered with ash Thou art pure and the entire sky is your entire dress.

### Stotram 2:

*Mandaakini Salila Chandana Chaacthitaaya Nandeesvara Pramathanaatha  
Mahesvaraaya Mandaara Pushpa Bahu Pushpa Supoojitaaya Tasmai*

*Makaaraaya*

*Namah Shivaaya*

Meaning: I adore the Lord who is embodied in the letter "Ma" , who is bathed in the holy waters of Ganges, anointed with sandal paste, who is the king of Parama Ganas and worshiped with divine flowers like Mandara.

### Stotram 3:

*Shivaaya Gauri Vadanaaravinda Sooryaaya Dakshaadhvara Naashakaaya  
Shree Neelakantaaya Vrisha Dhvaajaaya Tasmai Shikaaraaya Namah*

*Shivaaya*

Meaning: I offer my salutation to the Lord in the letter "Shi" who destroyed Daksha Yagna, who gives a dazzling effect to Gauri's face, who has a blue neck because of a poison, and who has the emblem of Bull on his banner

### Stotram 4:

*Vasishtha Kumbhodbhava Gautamadi Muneendra Devaarchita Sekharaaya  
Chandraarka Vaishvaanara Lochanaaya Tasmai Vakaaraaya Namah*

*Shivaaya*

Meaning: I salute the Lord embodied in the letter "Va" who is worshipped by the great sages like Vasishtha, Agasthya, Gautama, and whose eyes represent the sun, moon, and fire.

### Stotram 5:

*Yajna Swaroopaaya Jataadharaaya Pinaaka Hasthaaya Sanaatanaya  
Divyaaya Devaaya Digambaraaya Tasmai Yakaraaya Na*

Meaning: I worship the Lord in the letter "Ya" who is the incarnation of Yaksha with long hairs, and who holds a trident in the hand with the entire sky as his dress

### Stotram 6:

*Panchaaksharam Idam Punyam Yah Pateth Shiva Sannidhau  
Shivaloka Mavaapnothee Shivena Saha Modithe*

Meaning: Whoever repeats these slokas with the holy letters, will enjoy an eternal bliss and reach the abode of the supreme Lord

## 15. General Sloka

<i>Twameva Mata, Pitha Twameva,</i>	Meaning: Thou art my mother and my father
<i>Twameva bandhuscha, Sakha Twameva</i>	Thou art my relative and my friend
<i>Twameva Vidya, Dravinam Twameva,</i>	Thou art the Knowledge and the Wealth
<i>Twameva Sarvam, Twameva Deva Deva</i>	Thou art the Universe and the Lord of Lords

## Chapter 3 Some Vedic Commandments and Related Stories

### Introduction

The following are some of the more important Vedic commandments which served as guidelines for the Hindu way of life based on *Sanathana Dharma*. The references where such commandment exists are also given. There are many incidents and stories in Indian history and mythology to illustrate the validity of the commandments but only a few have been described hereunder.

#### Veda/Book, chapter, verse

#### 1. Let not wicked impulses destroy your character

Rig. 1.38.6

Kamsa was a wicked son of a great King called Ugrasena who once ruled the kingdom of Mathura. Kamsa dethroned his own father and imprisoned him. He imprisoned his own sister Devaki and her husband Vasudeva. Kamsa was always afraid that a son of his sister would one day kill him and had several wicked impulses to kill all children born to his sister. But when he came to know that the eighth child of his sister was quietly whisked out of the jail and was being raised elsewhere, he decided to kill all children in his kingdom.

He sent out several demons and devised several wicked ways not only to kill all children but to locate the child of his sister and kill him. But that child was the Lord himself, known to the world as Krishna and by his divine power; He at last got into the Palace auditorium of Kamsa and killed him in public before a large audience. Thus the wicked impulses of Kamsa destroyed his character as a ruler and he became infamous in his own kingdom. There are many other such stories like the one about Ravana, the great king of Lanka who had wicked impulses to somehow marry Sita, the devoted wife of Rama and finally got killed by Rama himself in the great battle of Ramayana.

#### 2. Do not retaliate against any man even if he harms you

Rig.1.141.8

It is said in the bible that Christ once said "If somebody slaps you on your cheek show him the other one". This commandment is similar. By such teachings and practices Christ became the founder of one of the great religions of the world, Christianity.

#### 3. The Process of self-realization automatically destroys evil desires Rig. 2.30.5

Once upon a time there was a king by name Dharmendra. He had two sons, the elder Gnyanendra was the heir to the throne and the younger Karmendra was getting trained in various types of Royal Arts; however the younger was always jealous of his brother as he was not to get the throne. He was proud of his skills and made many friends with whom he was always making merry and enjoying himself. He used to gamble and squander away his money. He even used up royal jewels to enjoy pleasures with his friends. When the old king had come to know of his activities he had placed several restrictions on the activities of Karmendra and refused access to any further money from the palace. There upon Karmendra even threatened to kill his brother so that he may himself succeed to the throne.

Further restrictions were placed on his movement also. In desperate conditions Karmendra went to his mother for restoration of his privileges. There upon, out of sympathy to her son, she agreed to help Karmendra on some conditions. She asked if his friends were truly loyal to him and if so whether they would consent to do a few things for him. She asked if his friends would join the army to defeat a threatening enemy from the neighboring country if he were made the commander-in-chief.

His friends were not prepared to do so, and then she asked him if his friends would join him for a hunt of a dangerously menacing lion living in the neighboring forest. His friends were too afraid to undertake any such job. Then she asked if they were prepared to go to jail if found in possession of stolen royal jewelry. The friends returned even what they previously got as gifts from Karmendra and ran away. Karmendra was astonished and disgusted at the cowardly and unfaithful behavior of his trusted friends.

He realized his own follies and desired no more of any royal patronage for him. He finally retired into a life of an ascetic and composed many spiritual poems for guidance of humanity. Thus the process of self realization automatically destroyed all evil thoughts in Karmendra

#### **4. Will power can conquer passionate urges of sense organs**

**Rig. 5.31.3**

Viswamitra was a great saint but was very ambitious, so he started meditation to obtain the powers equal to those possessed by the Devathas. So they were naturally scared of his intentions and feared they may be ousted from their positions if Viswamitra got such powers. They knew that he was highly sensitive to the urges of his sensual organs. He could be easily attracted and disturbed if he sees or hears or smells, or touches attractive things. So they created some natural forces and calamities like high winds, heavy rains, fragrant atmosphere etc. to disturb him but nothing could shake his will.

They then sent a beautiful lady Menaka to seduce him. His concentration was then disturbed but he soon realized and turned away the lady after spending some time with her. He again resumed his meditation and finally he succeeded to get many powers by mere will power that he developed. He could conquer many kings. He is reported to have developed the capacity to create artificial substitutes for anything found in nature and created by the Devathas. He could thus create whatever he wanted by his own will power, which conquered all his passionate urges of sense organs

#### **5. Be humble and not boastful; avoid egoism**

**Rig 6.52.1**

In this connection there is an interesting story in Hindu mythology. Kubera is the richest amongst Devathas and in fact he is known as the treasurer and banker of Devathas. He was proud of his wealth and was always boasting that he can feed any number of people for any number of days. To prove his worth, he once invited young Ganesha with the elephant head for a feast in his house and told him he could eat whatever he wanted and however much he wanted, just to show off his wealth. Ganesha delightedly accepted the invitation and went on eating non-stop all the delicacies and insisted on getting more and more. There were no signs of ending his eating at all.

At this point Kubera got exasperated as he was losing all his wealth in feeding a single young Ganesha only. In utter desperation he went to Lord Shiva, father of Ganesha and begged him to save his wealth. Shiva laughed at Kubera's predicament and followed him to the place where Ganesha was enjoying his feast, on seeing his father, Ganesha joyfully expressed how he felt hungrier at every morsel of food he had been eating in Kubera's house. Then Shiva gave him a handful of roasted rice flakes to eat. Ganesha ate the flakes also but started burping and exclaimed with satisfaction that his stomach was full and he could not eat anymore. Kubera heaved a sigh of relief and profusely apologized to Shiva and Ganesha for his boastful attitude by which he almost lost all his wealth. This demonstrated that small offerings with love yield better results than boastful acts and thinking

#### **6. An idle mind is an easy pray to evil thoughts**

**Rig. 10.22.8**

There once lived in a town an old woman with a decent ancestry. But as ill luck would have it, she had exhausted almost all her wealth in looking after a grandson who was not well educated nor was he interested in any hard work. He would always waste his valuable time in eating, sleeping, gossiping and playing with other mates or sometimes in idle seclusion. His grand mother was always chastising him for being idle and not making any money for a living. As days passed by, some evil thoughts were entering his brain. He started stealing money and valuables from various houses in the town. He picked up quarrels on petty matters and used to get beaten up sometimes for his odd behavior. Finally he landed up in the jail for various offences.

Even in jail he was not attending to any assigned labor and used to get punishments frequently. One day the town preacher and local spiritual guide had an opportunity to approach him in jail and advised him not to be bothered in any way for his past or present deeds but to try to think about how to escape from jail and join his aging grandmother again.

This idea kept him busy thinking of various plans and discussing them with other inmates. Although he was not successful in finalizing any plan for the escape, his brain got sharpened and helped him to be cooperative with the jail officials with the hope of getting an early release. In due course the authorities recognized the sharpness of his brain and took advantage for some developmental activities in the jail itself. With some good results he was ultimately released. Once outside, his brain continued to be active and worked on useful projects to make a decent living. Thus the value of an active brain over an idle brain was recognized.



## **7. Do not think or act maliciously but tread on righteous path**

**Rig. 10.57.1**

In the Indian classic Panchathantra there is an interesting story to illustrate the above.

Panchathantra means five paths to safe living; they are to know:

- (1) your true friends,
- (2) your enemies,
- (3) your duties
- (4) your limitations and
- (5) your resources.

There are several stories under each group but the one related to the above commandment is in the third group. There once lived two very close and intimate friends, Shyam and Ram in a town in India. Ram was extremely rich and Shyam was a poor man. On the occasion of Shyam's daughter's marriage Shyam borrowed some money from his friend Ram and promised to pay in small installments. Ram gave him the money with conditions, but he had some malicious intentions of snatching away Shyam's house sooner or later.

Ram waited for a few days and then insisted that Shyam should clear his entire debt immediately or mortgage his house to him in the presence of the chief judge of the court in his town, Shyam realized Ram's intentions and pleaded that he had no proper dresses, proper foot and head wear, to come in the presence of a chief judge. Ram gave Shyam all that was required for his temporary use to appear before the judge. Shyam also got a bicycle from Ram to go to the court. When both of them reached court separately, Shyam complained to the judge that Ram was a rich neighbor who always claimed that anything belonging to Shyam, as his own.

On being asked to prove his statement, Shyam, with the permission of the judge asked Ram publicly to whom his dress, his head and foot wear, and his bicycle belonged to. To this, Ram replied that they all belonged to him only. On this everybody in the court laughed and finally the judge ruled that Ram being rich was really malicious to grab everything of his neighbor and so not only dismissed the request of Ram to get Shyam's house mortgaged to him but also ruled that Shyam does not owe anything to Ram. Thus Ram lost all that was due to him because of his malicious intentions and acts.

## **8. Dispel ignorance through patience and perseverance (Sadana)**

**Yajur. 3.61**

Patience and perseverance requires control of mind. Many of us do not know that most of our time we may live in a dreamland without visualizing the truth. One should control his actions through one's control of one's mind. The following story will give a clue how we may avoid ignorance. Once a gentleman was found moving in a street with a box containing perforations on its sides. This indicated that inside the box there may be an animal. A friend stopped him and asked what he had in the box. He replied that it contained a mongoose.

The friend was surprised as to why he was carrying a mongoose. The gentleman replied that soon he may get drunk and in that state he sees lot of snakes and so he carries a mongoose to kill them. The friend laughed at the answer and pointed out that they are all imaginary snakes and why should he be afraid of them. The gentleman replied that his box also contains an imaginary mongoose and it was really empty. Thus one imagination counters the other and dispels ignorance through patience and perseverance

## **9. Do not forget earthly duties while in spiritual moods**

**Yajur 5.43**

There is an enlightening tale narrated by Swami Satchidanada as an example for the above commandment. A spiritual seeker named Kausika was once meditating in a forest under a tree. A bird's excrement had fallen on him. He looked angrily at the bird and the bird caught fire, fell down and died. Kausika was happy that he attained some special powers through his meditation. As was his habit at noon time he went to a house in the neighboring village and asked the lady for the usual alms. But the lady asked him to wait as she was very busy. He became angry but the lady came out after some time and told him that she was not the bird to die at his angry looks.

He was surprised and shocked as to how she ever came to know what happened in the forest and entreated her to let him know the *mantras* by which she attained the powers to know what happened in the forest. She replied that she was only an ordinary housewife attending dutifully on her sick husband as ordained by God, and if likes to know of any *mantras* he should visit the butcher in the next village. Wondering how a butcher will ever know the sacred *mantras*, Kausika traveled to the next village. There the butcher himself welcomed him saying he was glad the spiritual seeker had followed the advice of the lady in the previous village. Once again Kausika was shocked how these simple folk knew what was on his mind

The butcher made him wait for several hours attending first to his own business, then to his old parents and completing all other household duties. Kausika was becoming impatient and even refused further hospitality overtures by the butcher. He wanted the *mantras* immediately. Thereupon the butcher explained that he believed in God, and that he is only performing the duties assigned to him by God, not for his own sake but for others. Thus there is always peace and enlightenment in his mind as in true *Karma Yoga*, Kausik understood the Truth that selfless service on earth is the right path for salvation

## **10. Rise high and maintain your magnanimity**

**Yajur. 13.1**

There is another enlightening tale narrated by the same Swami as above. Once a king wanted to test his ministers and ordered that some important articles of his palace, including his throne be placed in a closed compound. He sat on the throne and asked his ministers and the people to select whatever they wanted from his compound and take it home fearlessly, but there was one condition that no one should leave without his permission, every one was astonished at this strange behavior of the king and started to pick up whatever they could grab.

However, there was one young peasant lady who did not touch anything but simply stood watching everybody. When most of the articles had been taken away by his ministers and other people, she quietly went to the king and asked if the king was sure that anything in the compound would be available to be taken away. When the king confirmed his order, she said magnanimously that she wanted nothing but only the king himself as he was also in the same compound. Every one was shocked but the king understood the magnanimity and courage of the young lady and gave himself up to her. Thus she got the king and automatically the whole kingdom and everything that belonged to the king.

## **11. With virtue and vitality establish yourself on earth (Yoga)**

**Yajur. 17.72**

The story of Vibhishana, brother of Ravana, of the great epic Ramayana indicates how a man of great virtues can survive and be a good king purely by his qualities. During the great war between the armies of Rama and Ravana, Vibhishana with his own personal army approached Rama's camp with a white flag indicating he wanted peace and would like to save people of Lanka from total destruction. He confessed that his brother Ravana had done great harm and is entitled to suitable punishment. Initially Rama's aids doubted Vibhishana, but as Rama declared that anybody approaching with a white flag was to be treated as an honored guest, Vibhishana was shown all due courtesy and was presented before Rama.

On hearing Vibhishana's story Rama immediately declared that on the defeat of Ravana and his army, Vibhishana would be made the king of Lanka, Vibhishana revealed many secrets under which Ravana had been ruling and many weaknesses of Ravana's army. During the battle it was found that even though Rama was chopping off the heads of Ravana they were shooting up again in their respective places, This was indeed a great puzzle to Rama, Vibhishana then revealed that the epic-center of Ravana's life was not in his heart or heads but in his stomach.

Rama then aimed his arrow at Ravana's stomach and killed him. Finally when the battle was over and all soldiers, aids, demonic relatives of Ravana including his son, were killed, the gates of Lanka royal palace were opened for Vibhishana and he was declared the successor king of Lanka and there after all Lankan people were completely changed to more righteous living. Vibhishana was also given a special seat in the flower decked air-borne vehicle (Pushpak Vimana) in which Rama flew back to the capital of his own kingdom Ayodhya. During the coronation ceremony of Rama, Vibhishana received several praises and honors for his virtues and vitality and he was given a given a royal farewell to go back to Lanka with great dignity to establish himself as the true and just ruler of Lanka.

### **12. Behave with others as you would with yourself**

**Yajur. 40.6**

Everyman defends himself and protects himself against all the odds he meets in life. He wishes that no harm should ever come to him and he should live in comfort and happiness. He even prays to God for help for all his needs and particularly when he is in a distressful situation, but he often forgets that the other person also deserves the same which he has been desiring, As you expect others to address you and respect you properly when talking to you, so also you should show the same respect when talking to others. As you expect consideration from others to any shortcomings you have, the same consideration must be shown towards other's shortcomings, if any. The above commandment is to remind people of their responsibilities towards others also even if they are not your own kith and kin. Only such people who sincerely follow the above command receive the Divine Grace for their own well being.

### **13. Forgiveness, Compassion and Service are qualities that make you lovable by all**

**Yajur. 40.6**

In the city of Amalapuram there was a boy named Raghu, he was about 12 years old. He was the only child to his parents, He was always helping his mother in various household chores and he cleaned his father's bicycle every day before he went to work. In school he was found to be helping other students in many ways sometimes even helping them with their home work. He used to keep his classroom clean and tidy before the teachers arrived. He used to help his teachers in many other ways. One day a mischievous boy had picked a quarrel with Raghu and beaten him badly.

When the matter was reported to the teacher he wanted to punish the mischievous boy but Raghu intervened and requested the teacher to pardon him because he had acted out of ignorance. There were many such incidents when he always forgave his adversaries. When Raghu grew of age and became a responsible member of his society, he was elected mayor of his town because he was loved by one and all. Then the almost neglected town of Amalapuram once again became a prosperous town and people lived in happiness. Thus one single person's nature of forgiveness, compassion and service had made him not only lovable by the entire town leading to happiness and prosperity.

### **14. Be always brave. The brave are invincible**

**Atharva.20.47.3**

Shivaji was one of the very brave chieftains of Marathas. He faced several battles with Muslim rulers of his days and always won with only a meager army on his side. For his valour and cunning ways he was nick named mountain rat, he used to worship Goddess Bhavani.

Rani of Jhansi was another brave princess from Rajashtan, she single handedly led armies to fight against Muslim rulers. In recent times Subhas Chandra Bose was considered a very brave man. He renounced his career in the government service and joined the freedom movement in India; He escaped from an Indian jail during British rule and raised a large army outside India under the name of the Indian National Army to fight back against British oppression. His bravery contributed to the freedom of India.

**15. Be non-violent and persistent to get rid of all evil and evil impulses. Sama 308**

There are many instances in Indian history and mythology indicating the noble values of non-violence for achieving success in life. In fact the entire creed of Buddhism is based on "Ahimsa Paramo Dharmaha" meaning that non-violence is the highest principle of life. India got its independence and freedom from British rule only by observing the principle of non-violence. Indians demonstrated non-violently to oppose British and taxation system.

The British forces had beaten, shot and tortured the protestors several times but under the advice of their leader Mahatma Gandhi they remained tolerant and remained non-violent. In the end the British yielded and gave India complete freedom to rule themselves. The politics of non-violence had thus become recognized by the entire world and Mahatma Gandhi was declared father of the Indian Nation.

In mythology there is the story of Prahlada (See Chapter 5) who was tortured by his demon father in many ways but Prahlada remained non-violent by constant prayer to Lord Vishnu, He thus escaped all harmful effects and finally became the ruler of the kingdom.

## Chapter 4 Popular Hindu Festivals

### Introduction

Festivals are joyous occasions and also auspicious occasions celebrated seasonally every year. They are of great significance for enhancement of culture by intermixing traditional values with present day living conditions. They help towards the healthy growth of an individual's spirit and mind which is so essential in the stress filled and ever changing world we live in today. There are three main aspects of any festival, the first is the social aspect, the second religious, and the third the story aspect.

The social aspect consists of people exchanging greetings among family members and friends, decorating houses and places of celebration, putting on smart dresses, spending time and money on gaiety, revelry, and merry making, participating in entertainment, preparing special foods for the occasion, etc. This naturally depends on climatic, geographic, and socio-economic conditions of people and places where they are celebrated.

The second aspect consists of participating in individual or group religious rituals based on Vedic and religious scriptures, organized in individual houses or in community centers and temples, etc. This depends mostly on the available priests and religious leaders of the community.

The third aspect is the one which mainly guides people to righteous living and is of particular interest to children. For all the above reasons, there may be slight variations in the type of celebrations and methodologies from place to place while the basic cultural significance is maintained. In India, there are many festivals performed with variations, at different parts of the country but only a few important ones are mentioned below.

### 1. Maha Shivratri

**Rituals:** Shivratri is celebrated in *Phalguna* (February-March) starting at about 5 P.M. and ending at 4 A.M. the next day Shiva is invoked by the chanting of 'Om Namah Shivaya' and recitation of 'Shiva Ashtottara Namavali' and other sacred hymns. The Linga is worshipped throughout the night by bathing it every three hours successively in milk, yogurt, clarified butter, honey and finally in sacred water. After bathing, the Linga is decked with *Alankaras* (decorations) like *Vastra* (dress), *Abharana*, (Jewelry), *Pushpa* (Flowers) *Vibhuti* (Sacred Ash) and *Phala* (fruits). *Puja* (rituals of worship) are then performed with flowers and leaves (*Bilva Patra*) and finally other offerings are made and sacred hymns are recited to bless the devotees

**Legend & Stories:** Lord Shiva, one of the most worshiped Gods for boons is manifested in different forms like Nataraja, Ardhanareeswara, Neelakantha, Gangadhara etc to symbolize the various powers of Nature controlling the activities on earth. One such manifestation is LINGA, which is considered as formless in the ordinary sense to make mankind aware of the birth of the Universe in Eternal Time. Maha Shivratri is the day when such a form was created by the great sages of India. It is also considered as the wedding anniversary of Shiva and his consort Parvati. The unmarried girls pray for handsome husbands and the married pray for sharing happiness with their husbands. This is also considered a day when Shiva swallowed poison and retained it in his throat to save the world from destruction. Hence people fast, pray, and practice *Jagaran* (all-night vigil) on this occasion

**Sloka:**

*Brahma Murari Surajita Lingam, Nirmala Bhasita Sobhita Lingam  
Janmaja Dukha Vinasaka Lingam, Thatpranamami Sadasiva Lingam*

## 2. Holi

**Rituals:** Holi is a spring festival celebrated on the full moon day in Phalguna (February-March) each year representing the end of winter. It is a festival more of social activities and practical jokes than any religious rituals though some *pujas* are performed associated with many legendary stories indicating the origin and significance of the festival. It is celebrated on two days. On the first day a bonfire is lit, known as *Holika Dahan*, and on the second day, people playfully smear each other with colored powders, particularly

*Gulal* (red powder), followed by distribution of sweets and delicacies followed cultural programs, singing and dancing. The smearing of colors and burning of fires are said to be reminders to change the colors of one's own personality and ego, by burning away the instincts of hatred and impatience, by driving away evil intentions and by developing love and understanding.

**Legend & Stories:** Among the many legendary stories one important story relates to the Demon Hiranyakashipu who obtained a boon from Lord Shiva to rule the whole Universe. He wanted to set fire to his own son Prahlada who was a staunch devotee of Lord Vishnu. So he gave fire-proof garments to his sister Holika and asked her to carry Prahlada into the burning fire. Instead of Prahlada dying, Holika was consumed in the fire by the grace of Lord Vishnu. Hence it began to be called *Holika Dahan*.

A second story relates to Krishna as a boy visiting the Gopikas when they were taking a bath in a river. As the Gopikas were feeling shy and embarrassed by the presence of a young boy, and Krishna had also hidden their dresses, he appeared in His true self as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu himself and admonished them saying that Divine Love can destroy any type of pleasures amidst worldly surroundings. Another event in Krishna's life is Rasa Leela when he and other Gopikas threw colored waters at each other. The life story of Krishna is more elaborately described in chapter 5 under "Krishna"

A third story relates to Lord Shiva burning off Manmatha, the personification of Kama (Cupid) by opening his third eye. Hence in some parts of India, setting up of the bonfire is also known as *Kama Dahan*. There are other stories also in which wars between rival groups have led to change of hearts for happier living. Thus all stories and all activities during the festival lead to the same central themes of triumph of good over evil, and supremacy of Divine love over material pleasures

**Sloka:** *Bolo Sada Tere Nam, Radheshyam Radheshyam*

## 3. Ram Navami

**Rituals:** Ram Navami is a festival mainly dedicated to Lord Rama. His birthday falls on the ninth day (Navmi) of the bright fortnight of Chaitra (March-April) each year. The day also coincides with the wedding anniversary of Shree Rama with Sita. The celebration of festivities actually starts on the first day of Chaitra and end on the ninth day and so it is sometimes referred as Vasantha (spring). Navaratri is also celebrated in Sharat (Fall), Navaratri falling in the month of Ashwani (September-October) when Dashera is celebrated and Durga is worshipped. Rama's descendancy is from the Sun God and so he is also known as Raghukula and on Ram Navami day the Sun God is also worshipped.

Ram Navami is celebrated all over India and in many places abroad. In some places the deities (idols) of Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman are taken out in procession with great fervor and devotion. Offerings are made by people and blessings received from the accompanying priests. In some places instead of deity idols, persons dressed up like Rama and Sita take part in processions. By and large the celebration usually starts with *Akhand Path* (complete recital) of the Ramayana and ends with reciting the Hanuman Chalisa and finally the Aarti.

**Legend & Story:** The essence of the great epic poem Ramayana is supreme importance of righteousness. Lord Rama has been depicted as a highly devoted son, a faithful husband, an affectionate brother, a trustworthy friend, a noble enemy and most important of all as an ideal king. Hence Ram Rajya has come to mean a model for ideal governance of a country. The full story of Rama is related in chapter 5 under "Royals of Ayodhya".

**Sloka:** *Ramaya Ramabhadraya Ramachandraya Vedhase  
Raghunathaya Nathaye Seethayampathaye Namaha  
Mangalam Kosalendraya Mahaniya Gunatmane  
Chakravarti Tanujaya Sarvabhaumaya Mmangalam*

#### 4. Rakshabandhan (Rakhi)

**Rituals:** Although this is primarily a festival of siblings, it has wider ramifications to emphasize a harmonious social life of a community where all members are expected to live like brothers and sisters of one motherland and meet all the challenges from within and without. Some people worship the Lord of rain Varuna on this day. Rakshabandhan is also known as Rakhi or Rakhri. This is celebrated each year on the full moon day of the month of Sravana of the Hindu calendar (July-August) Usually after an early bath, a sister wears her best clothes, prepares a *Puja Thali* containing *Arathi* light, *kumkum*, rice grains, sweets and a colorful thread known as Rakhi.

The sister applies *Tilak*, a dot of *kumkum* and rice on the forehead of her brother, ties the Rakhi on his right wrist in three knots, performs *Arathi*, and playfully stuffs some sweets into her brother's mouth to wish him happiness and prosperity, The three knots signify the expected protection in thought, word, and deed and reminds the brother of his responsibility towards his sister financially and emotionally. After the sister performs her rituals, the brother in return offers gifts and makes promises of protection against all adversity.

**Legend & Stories:** There are many legendary and historical stories related to this festival. Lord Krishna is said to have advised Yudhistara to tie the Rakhi on his hand to win wars against the Kauravas; Brihaspati the Guru of devathas advised Indira to tie the knot to win the menacing acts of demons; King Bali got all his power by rakshabandhan and won the wars against his enemies.

Historically, the sister of Alexander the Great tied the rakhi on the hands of his Hindu enemy King Puru and saved her brother's life; one Rajput princess sent Rakhi to the Moghul emperor Humayun for protection against the local muslim chieftains; there are many other stories of women or even men seeking protection from unacquainted heroes of different communities. Thus the Rakshabandhan festival affords the most auspicious occasion to dedicate oneself to the spirit of service, sacrifice, and welfare of the society and to the protection of righteousness from forces of evil

**Sloka:**

*Yenabadho Baliraja Danvendro Mahabali  
Tenatwam Anubandhanami Rakshema Chala maa Chala*

#### 5. Krishna Janmashtami

**Rituals:** Janmashtami, also known as Krishnashtami or Gokulashtami is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Lord Krishna. There are many different festivals that are observed to recall the events of Krishna's life and to symbolize his acts and teachings. Some observe whole day fasts until midnight, the hour of his birth, and recite the Bhagavatam (Story of Krishna). At midnight they place an idol of baby Krishna in a swinging cradle and sing popular songs in praise of him and his deeds. Later they partake in foods made from milk, butter and other favorites of Krishna.

In some places they hang a pot high above the reach of a single person containing butter, sweets and money. The boys then construct human pyramids to claim the pot and have fun at distributing the contents. In other places processions of deities are done to pay their homage and receive blessings of the Lord

**Legend & Stories:** Krishna was born in a prison to his parents Vasudeva and Devaki on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Sravana (July-August). He was then transported secretly to Gokul where he was raised by his foster parents, Nanda and Yasoda. When he was transported down the river Yamuna, the crossing was difficult, but the waters parted giving a relatively easy access..

His boyhood is full of stories of great significance to the supremacy of His Divine powers for subduing several types of evils prevalent in his times. The entire story of his birth and life is more an allegory than a conventional story. The full story of his life is given in chapter five under the title "Krishna". He is blue in color and wears yellow clothes symbolizing the infinite in the blue sky and the finite, in yellow (earth).

The seven holes in his flute represent the mind, intellect and the five physical senses of human beings which produce the sweet music of life. His symbolic stealing of the Gopis clothes while they were bathing in a river and his stealing butter and yogurt symbolize his admonition to the world to shed their ego and greed. Finally in his later life He preaches in the Bhagavat Gita the essence of Creation and the Creator and the greatness in realizing the Reality of Nature and worldly life.

**Sloka:** *Sarvepi Sukhinasanthu Sarvesanthu Niramaya  
Sarvebhadrani Pasyanthu Makhaschit Duhkhabag Bhavet*

## 6. Ganesh Chaturdhi

**Rituals:** The festival of Ganesh Chaturdhi is celebrated largely in Central and South India by people of all classes, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, men and women of all occupations primarily for favor of removing all obstacles in their progress and for granting of various boons. It is celebrated on the fourth day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada (August-September) to commemorate the birthday of Lord Ganesh, born to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati through Cosmic power. The birthday celebration is marked with decorations of all sorts and continues for ten days until the fourteenth day in most of the community centers and even in private houses with great zeal, enthusiasm and devotion.

Several types of *Pujas, Bhajans, and Arathis* are performed and many songs both vocal and instrumental are sung in His praise by young and old. In some places a variety of dance and musical entertainment by renowned artists is organized. He is identified in different forms and colors, the most popular form of worship as a God is the one shown as an adult in the sitting position, in crimson color, with an elephant head with large ears, human body, large belly with a serpent around, and four or more hands holding sweets, a rosary, a conch, a *trishul*, some flowers, and many other articles, mounted on a rat.

A variety of sweets are prepared and served as Prasad. At the end of the celebration, the idols are taken in processions by devotees, and immersed in water, be it a stream, a lake, the river or the sea. The strong central belief in all these activities is in the progress and welfare of individuals and communities, the old obstacles are removed and new one prevented.

**Legend & Stories:** The elephant head is considered as symbolic of power of strength, wisdom, memory, keen hearing and less talking. The rat is a symbol of greedy desires that can be controlled by wisdom. He has two consorts *Siddhi* (Achievement) and *Buddhi* (Intelligence). Legend says that on one of his birthdays, Lord Ganesh was enjoying himself in a garden, the Moon looked at him and his figure and laughed ridiculously. On that Ganesh cursed the Moon that who ever sees him on the fourth day of the month would face several obstacles in his life.

The Moon then apologized for his behavior and prayed to Lord Ganesh to excuse him for his conduct and redeem the curse. Ganesh then pronounced that who ever performs pujas and celebrations in his honor on that date would be saved from the curse, this is the reason that Ganesh celebrations are done on Chaturdhi, the fourth day of Lunar month, Bhadrapad. Ganesh is said to have written, non-stop, the great Mahabharata with his broken trunk as dictated by the sage Vyasa. He did it on condition that Vyasa would dictate non-stop the entire Mahabharata. Thus he became the first stenographer known in legends. Once his parents asked him and his brother Kumaraswami, to go around the world and whoever did the task first would be rewarded well.

While Kumaraswami went around the world with his own vehicle, the peacock, Ganesh chose just to go around his parents only and demanded the reward. Asked why he had done so, he replied that his parents are his world and so he completed the task in all reverence to his parents. Shiva and Parvati were pleased with his answer and he was duly rewarded. There are many other mythological stories that exist for people to understand and live the Hindu way of life.

**Sloka:** *Agajanana padmarkam Gajanana Maharnisam  
Anek dantham Bhaktanam Ekadantam Mupasmahe*



## 7. Diwali

**Rituals:** Diwali is considered as a festival of lights signifying victory of Divine forces over wicked elements, and ushering in new prosperity and wealth. It is celebrated in a row of five days commencing from the last three days of the dark fortnight of Ashwin and ending on the first two days of the bright fortnight of Kartik (October-November).

The first day is known as Dhanteras, the second day is known as Narak Chaturdi or Roop Chaturdhi or Choti Diwali. The next day is the proper Diwali, also known as Deepavali. On this day people put on new dresses after an early bath; houses, community centers, and temples are decorated with Rangolis and colored lights, divas and candle lights; Pujas are performed for Lakshmi, Vishnu, Ganesh and other gods. On the fourth day sweets and a variety of food items are prepared and distributed. Employers present gifts to their employees.

The fifth day is known as Bhayya Dhuj when brothers visit married sister's houses and offer gifts and receive sweets in exchange for their continued love and attachment. This is a major festival celebrated throughout India with great zeal and enthusiasm, even with slight variations in concepts and methodologies in different parts, but the central theme of the Divine Light removing darkness on earth and increasing socio-religious bonds between people.

**Legend & Stories:** The origin and celebration of the Deepavali festival seems to date back to many *yugas*, during the period of the Vamana Avatar, Lord Vishnu, as Vamana, pushed down the head of the demon king Bali with his cosmic foot, to remain in Patala Lok, and helped the Devathas to remain safe in Indra Lok. Later when the ocean was churned for Amrit (nectar), Goddess Lakshmi was manifested during the process and married Lord Vishnu; the event symbolized the advent of prosperity and wealth.

During the Ram Avatar period, Rama returned victoriously to Ayodya from an exile of 14 years after killing the ten-headed Ravana, (the full story of Rama is described in Chapter 5 under "Royals of Ayodhya") during the Krishna Avatar period, Lord Krishna is said to have killed the most menacing demon Narkasura, the wicked son of Bhumi, and restored all the stolen property of the Devathas.

In modern history King Vikramaditya is reported to have started a new era on this day and so the tradition of opening new account books seems to have originated. On this day, seasons also change and new harvest ushers in wealth and prosperity. For Jains this day is auspicious because Lord Mahavir had attained Eternal Bliss.

More recently some observe this day as sacred because Swami Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the great Hindu renaissance movement Arya Samaj passed into Eternity. Thus in all events the challenge of some liberating powers (Lights) is manifested to erase the darkness of ignorance and evil bringing joy, prosperity and wealth to all.

**Sloka:** *Namastestu Mahamaye Shree Pithe Surapujite  
Sankhachakra Gadahasthe Maha Lakshmi Namostute*

## 8. Dussehra (Vijaya Dasami - also known as Navratri)

**Rituals:** There are several ways of celebration of this festival in different parts of India. The celebration lasts ten days, (or nine nights) each day the goddess Durga is decorated in different forms as Bhavani, Kali, Amba etc. On a few days the goddess is decorated as Lakshmi and Saraswati to indicate the flow of wealth and knowledge after a successful victory over evil.

Lalitha Sahasranama is recited in south Indian temples by groups of ladies. Unlike other festivals during which both gods and goddesses are worshipped together, in Durga Puja only the goddess is worshipped because of the concept that all powers of all gods and goddesses were given to Durga to fight single handedly.

In Mysore the annual procession of Goddess Chamundeswari along with other entertainers and elephants, is done with zeal, enthusiasm and devotion. In Rajasthan and Gujarat, Garbha dances are performed around a burning lamp to symbolize that there is life in the womb which has to be respected. There are many types of folk dances in other parts of India to symbolize victory over evil forces. In Bengal, Kali is worshiped in specially erected platforms at different places and on the tenth day the deity is taken in a procession and finally immersed in the river Ganga.

In Andhra Pradesh "Bommala Koluvas" are arranged in private houses exhibiting all the dolls which children have collected over the years. In some places teachers take out children in groups to the houses of the parents to symbolize harmony through the Power of Knowledge, Saraswati. In some villages, cattle, carts, and agricultural implements are well decorated and held in competition to symbolize harmony through the Power of Wealth, Lakshmi.

In most parts of Northern India the festival is performed as Victory of Rama over the demon Ravana. Processions of people dressed as heroes of Ramayana are displayed. Ram Leelas are enacted at various places by burning effigies of Ravana, Meghdooth and Kumbhakarna. About 100 years ago, the Raja of Benares (Kasi) started putting on plays in public stages, some of the mind boggling stories of Ramayana with verses recited from Tulsidas's Ramayana, and this practice is still continued in several cities of Northern India. In the Kulu valley, various gods are brought down from villages on different peaks to attend the Durbar of Raghunath in the flatter portion of the valley.

**Legend & Stories:** As all other festivals of India this is also an important festival of great tradition to remind Man of his ultimate goal and ideal, which is conquering evil forces not only external to him but also within him like desires, passion, lust, greed, jealousy etc. and gain not only material benefits but also gain divine wealth of love, kindness, devotion, patience, endurance, charity and Ahimsa etc.

The celebration of the festival is symbolic of the liquidation of sins committed through the ten senses (five senses of perception 'Gnanendriyas' and five sense organs of action 'Karmendriyas') of human beings, and the entering into the transcendental experience for ultimate Bliss.

Historically, Shivaji had always prayed to Durga Bhavani for his successes in various wars against invading armies. He maintained special temples and united different warring groups of the Marthwadars. In the south and some parts of western India it is celebrated as a great Victory of Goddess Durga over a powerful demon.

Once there existed a very powerful Buffalo Demon called Mahisasura. He was a great menace to all gods and Devas. Several attempts were made by the gods to kill him but they were unsuccessful, so the legend goes that Goddess Durga was created out of Parvati, She was given ten hands, divine weapons and a lion to ride on, to fight and kill the demon. After a fierce battle for ten days she finally killed him, incidentally this story reveals the supremacy of the female deity over male deities, thus symbolizing that when full power is released, women can do better than men.

**Sloka:**

*Om Rakthaksha Raktajihwadi Sikshamaye Namonamaha  
Om Mahisasura Dorvirya Nigrahayei Namonamaha*

## Chapter 5 Popular Hindu Deities and their Symbolism

### Introduction:

According to the basic principles of Hindu Philosophy God is Infinite, all powerful, and exists everywhere. Hence to convince the common people, the great sages of ancient India, conceived the Infinite should be explained in Finite forms. They conceived the best such forms are human figures endowed with such qualities and powers as may be needed for achievement of specific activities in this world. All the different deities are therefore symbolic of supreme powers in various fields personified in poetic forms by the great sages and described in pictorial forms by the artists.

Accordingly, even though God is one Infinity, He is shown in the form of several deities in human forms each with the highest of power and qualities expected of human beings for specific activities. In the following some of the Deities are described explaining their status in Hindu Society and also the symbolic aspects they represent. Under the title of each Deity a frequently uttered sloka is also mentioned, for the purpose of invoking the deity.

### 1. OM/AUM

#### ***OM Ityekaksharam Brahma Omittedam Sarvam***

OM has been considered by great sages of India as the center of Spiritualism from which all paths lead to the Ultimate Reality. It is considered as the origin of the Universe itself. Some theories of Western Science also corroborate this view in a way. It is also called 'Pranava' and universally accepted as a symbol or logo of *Sanathana Dharma*.

It is highly extolled in the Vedas, Upanishads, Geeta and various Hindu Scriptures. All religious rites and hymns invoking various deities are started with the utterance and repetition of OM as it helps to concentrate on the ongoing spiritual procedures and practices and also in meditation. Actually OM consists of three independent syllables A U M each having a significant meaning. 'A' stands for Adima meaning the beginning, 'U' stands for *Utkarsha* meaning progress, and 'M' represents the end, *Miti*.

Thus the sound OM is the power responsible for creation, preservation and dissolution (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) of the Universe. There are also several other interpretations on the symbolism of 'OM' available in Hindu literature such as it represents the three states of human conscience. The lips and vocal muscles also move in the same order of A, U, M, as the sound of OM is uttered signifying the opening, continuation and closing of the power of prayers. Hence the Wisdom of Vedic Masters gave 'OM' as an ideal logo, deity, and idol for the worship of all the gods. Incidentally the attributes of Omnipotent, Omnipresent and, Omniscience to God begins with OM. It is also interesting to note that in the English concept of God as 'OMnipotent' 'OMniscient' and 'OMnipresent' all contain the two letters 'OM' as also similar in the phonetics of the Christian 'Amen' and Arabic 'Amin'.

### 2. Shree Venkateswara

#### ***Vina Venkatesam Nanatho Nanatha Sada Venkatesam Smarami Smarami***

Lord Venkateswara is the presiding deity of a very ancient and famous temple at the seven hills of Tirupati in Southern India. He is supposed to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the present *Yuga* and has two consorts Sri Devi and Bhudevi. He is also known by the names Sreenivasa, Balaji and other names in various parts of India. The shrine at Tirupati is visited by thousands of pilgrims every day and it is among the richest temples in India with a daily total income of nearly ten lakh rupees. His glory has been sung by many saints and poets, chief among them is Annamacharya. The management of the temple at Tirupati patronizes and sponsors several undertakings of religious, cultural, charitable, social and educational activities. It has also established a huge complex at Pittsburgh (PA) which is visited by many Americans and visitors from different parts of the world including India. Fridays and Saturdays are the most important days of the week for the deity and so special *Pujas* (rituals of worship) are performed on these days.

### 3. Shree Saraswathi

***Saraswathi Namstubhyam Varade Kamarupini  
Vidyarambham Karishyami Siddhirbhavatu-me-sada***

Goddess Saraswathi symbolizes the Power of Knowledge and is worshipped in all parts of India, particularly during the Navaratri period. She is shown riding on a swan or sometimes sitting on a lotus flower. The Swan is a bird with the power of separating water from milk and so represents the power of discrimination. Lotus represents Purity and Truth. The four hands of the Goddess represent mind, intellect, consciousness, and ego which are the requisite attributes of Knowledge. She is shown playing the Indian musical instrument Veena, symbolizing that Knowledge tunes up the mind and intellect of Man to draw out the music and melody of life. As the entire Creation and all activities there in, require to be supported by true knowledge, the Goddess Saraswathi is given the status of a consort to Lord Brahma, the Creator of the Universe, as conceived in Hindu mythology

### 4. Shree Lakshmi

***Namastestu Mahamaya Shree Peethe Surapujite  
Sankhachakra Gadahaste Maha Lakshmi Namostute***

Goddess Lakshmi is a symbolic representation of Wealth, Peace and Happiness. As wealth, both material and spiritual is essentially required for protection and maintenance of worldly objects; Goddess Lakshmi is shown as the consort of Lord Vishnu who symbolizes the power of maintenance and protection of the Universe. Her four hands indicate that she provides 'artha' 'dharma' 'kama' and 'moksha' popularly known as 'Purushartha Chatushtaya', She sits on a Lotus flower, a symbol of Purity and Truth. She is supposed to have emerged during the churning of the oceans, symbolizing development of values of life when one's mind is churned by the process of reflection and contemplation upon one's Higher Self. She is worshipped all over the world particularly during Diwali.

### 5. Shree Durga

***Om Rakthaksh Raktajihwadi Sikshnaya Namonamaha  
Om Mahishasura Dorvirya Nigrahayai Namonamaha***

Goddess Durga riding on the most powerful and brave animal, the lion, is the symbol of strength and courage to conquer even the most powerful demons (evils) of the world. She has eight hands each holding the most powerful weapon given to her by various gods to destroy their greatest enemy Mahishasura, and who could not be destroyed by themselves. Incidentally this is also symbolic of superior power of women over man in certain events as envisaged by the great sages of India. She is worshipped by all communities particularly during Navaratri and has several names as Mahakalika, Brahmani, Bhavani, etc. mentioned in the famous Durga Sapta Shati (Durgashtakam). Bhavani was Ishta Deva of Shivaji and several warriors of Indian mythology. Kali is the form mostly worshipped in Bengal and She was the Ishta Deva of Ramakrishna Paramahansa

### 6. Shree RadhaKrishna

***Bolo Sada Tere Nam, Radheshyam Radheshyam***

Lord Krishna is supposed to be the incarnation of Vishnu depicting transformation of the Infinite to the Finite ways of the material world. Radha is supposed to be the most beautiful and most beloved of all the Gopis with whom Krishna played. Her constant companionship by his side represents the selfless and ideal love and devotion needed by humanity towards Divinity. All prayers to RadhaKrishna and several stories associated with Radha and Krishna explain the science of self-realization and devotion in life through interaction of Gyan (knowledge), Karma (action), and Bhakti (worship) yoga (Physico-spiritual exercises). The combination of Radha and Krishna is a constant reminder to the devotee about the ultimate merging of one's Self with the Lord. Several temples of Radhakrishna have been built particularly in Northern India.

## 7. Shree Rama and Sita

***Ramaya Ramabhadraya Ramachandraya Vedhase  
Raghunathaya Nathaye Seethayampathaye Namaha***

Rama and Sita are supposed to be the incarnations of Lord Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi respectively representing the most ideal Man and Woman on earth as conceived by the great sage Valmiki in Ramayana. The entire life of Rama and several stories in Ramayana depict Rama as an ideal embodiment of Dharma (duties) in everyday life, as a perfect son obeying the orders and fulfilling the wishes of his parents, as a just and democratic monarch satisfying the wishes of every individual in the country, as an ideal husband caring for the welfare and reputation of his wife, as a loving and caring eldest brother, as a noble enemy of those who did evil acts in the world, and above all as the most perfect human being in all aspects. As Truth, Nobility and Perfection are personified in him, he is often referred as "Maryada Purushottam" and his governance is referred as "Ram Rajya" the ideal statecraft for peace, prosperity and joy to everybody

## 8. Shree Hanuman

***Manojanam Marutatulya Vegam, Jitendriyam Buddhimatam Varishtam  
Vaatatmajam Vanarayudha Mukhyam, Sriramadutam Sirasanamami***

In Ramayana, the great epic poem of India, Hanuman is depicted as chief of the army, with enormous strength and strategy, as an extreme loyalist to his master, and as highly devoted to the Supreme. He is also shown as an able diplomatic ambassador of a king and could conquer all difficult situations with swiftness. In the perception of the great sage Valmiki who created Ramayana, Hanuman is given the shape of a leader of monkeys to indicate the manipulative strength of Spiritualistic tendencies of the human mind to achieve material objectives. Hanuman is considered as the heart and soul of the Ramayana. He is said to be the son of Anjani with the blessings of Vayu the god of Wind power, hence he is known as Vayu Putra, Anjani Suta. He is has the powers of Rudra, so he is known as Shankar Suvan, because of his selfless service, Bhagwan Rama himself remained permanently indebted to him throughout his life. Temples of Hanuman are found all over India even in remote villages and small towns.

## 9. Shree Shrinath

***Sasanka Chakram Sakirita Kundalam Sapeeta Vastram Sarasiruheshanam  
Sahara Vakshsthala Kuasthabhasriyam Namami Vishnum Sirasa Chaturbhujam***

The famous temple of Lord Shrinath, an image of Lord Krishna is located in Nathdwara near Udaipur, Rajasthan, constructed in 1783 A.D. Lord Shrinath is the Ishta Deva of Pushtimarg or Vallabha Sampradaya of Vaishnavism. He is also known as Govardhan or Shriji Bava. Shrinathji represents Krishna lifting the Govardhan Hill to subdue Indra who was sending heavy rain causing considerable hardship to the cowherds of Gokul. As most Hindu idols symbolically represent the various aspects of Hindu philosophy, the icon of Shrinathji is indicative of the need to shed the ego in the human mind and surrendering to him completely, to get out of worldly miseries, to hold on tightly to God and to unite with Satchitananda to reach the Ultimate Truth. This is the fundamental principle of Vishnava Sampradaya.

## 10. Shree Lakshmi Narayana

### ***Akashatpathitham Toyam Yadhagachati Sagaram Sarvadeva namaskaraha Kesavam Prathigachathi***

Narayana or Vishnu is God, the Supreme Power, for the preservation of the Universe and *Dharma*. As wealth is needed for self preservation, the same is personified in the Goddess Lakshmi as his consort. Vishnu is supposed to have already taken ten *Avatars* (incarnations) to preserve the Dharma on earth, whenever it was on the decline. These ten incarnations (*Dasavataras*) symbolically represent the state of gradual and orderly physical evolution of human beings on earth from Matsyavatara (Fish) to *Kalikavatara*, the modern worldly Man.

Some believe that they also represent the gradual spiritual evolution in Man from his birth to his end. The four hands represent the four aspects that function in human beings, the Mind, Ego, Intellect and Conscience. The articles in his hands are the symbols of the essential types of energy required for the preservation of the Universe; Sankha (Conch) for sound energy, Chakra (Discus) for heat energy, Padma (Lotus) for light energy and Gada (Mace) for Electro-magnetic energy. As all water in the form of rain from the sky eventually merges into the ocean, so also the worshipping of gods leads only to one Supreme God who is known by the name of Vishnu or Narayana

## 11. Shree Ganesh

### ***Agajanana Padmarkam Gajanana Maharnisam Anekadantham Bhaktanam Ekadantam Upasmahe***

Sri Ganesh is the first son of Lord Shiva and is depicted in several forms and poses including feminine forms and worshipped in several places of the world. He is also known as Vighneswara, Vinayaka, Ganapathi and many more names suggestive of various powers attributed to him. Primarily, He is the lord to remove all obstacles and bestows wisdom. Hence He is invariably worshipped before the commencement of any auspicious ceremony by all communities in India. His two spouses are *Buddhi* (intelligence) and *Siddhi* (achievement) The various parts of the icon of elephant head, human body with several hands, riding on a mouse etc., symbolically represents the need of several spiritual and material tools required for perfecting oneself to the highest levels of wisdom.

## 12. Shree Kartikeya

### ***Om Ttatpuroshaya Vidmahe, Maha Senaya Dhimahi Tanno Shanmukha Prachodayat***

Lord Kartikeya also known as Shanmukha or Subrahmanyam is the second son of Lord Shiva and goddess Uma (Parvati). He is worshipped throughout India and even abroad but more particularly in South India where He is more popularly known as Murugan or Kumaran. His consorts are Valli and Devayani. He is shown as commander-in-chief of the army which destroyed many demons, symbolically the negative tendencies (*Vasanas*) which overshadow the Divine Self in human beings He is shown as riding on a peacock which symbolizes vanity in human perceptions as manifested in the lengthy ecstatic dancing of the bird with colorful feathers spread out in a delightful form.

### **13. Shree Shiva**

***Brahmamurari Surarjita Lingam Nirmala Bhashita Sobhita Lingam  
Janmaja Dukha Vinsaka Lingam Tatpranamami Sadasiva Lingam***

Lord Shiva also known as Shankar is invoked as Master of Life and Death and worshipped in several forms and ways. He is also known as Mahadeva, greatest of all gods, because He sipped poison to save the lives of all the Devas, hence He is also called Neelakantha - the blue throated Deva. The icon in the form of Linga and Yoni is interpreted as a phallic emblem, a symbol of generative power in Nature understood in its full purity by ancient sages. There are twelve sacred Lingas known as "Jyothir Lingas" in India. Another conception of Shiva is that of 'Ardhanareeswara', to highlight the scientific principle of Animus and Anima and that of silent Dakshinamurthi symbolizing that silence is the language of Realization. Shiva is the God with three eyes-Triyambaka Deva- symbolizing the sun, moon and fire which constitute the threefold vital powers for human survival and death, which are invoked during sacrifices and *Yagnas*.- sacred fire rituals as per Vedas.

### **14. Shree Mahavir**

***Om Mangalam Gurudevaya Mahaneeya Gunatmane  
Sarvalokaya Saranyaya Sadhurupaya Mangalam***

Bhagawan Mahavir was born in the Kundanpur Royal family; having denounced the pleasures of royalty he led the life of 'Shraman'- a life of a great self-realized Spiritual Master. He is considered as the twenty fourth *Thirthankar* (incarnation) of the Jain religion. He was against any sort of violence, be it in thought or deed. He propagated non-violence and spread the nectar of love for mankind. His concept of Ahimsa (non-violence) was much more widely broad-based than normal, and he desired his followers to lead a highly disciplined and pure life. He preached *Kewalya Gyan* (knowledge of seclusiveness and detachment) as the ultimate aim of human life and advocated purity, self-discipline and *Tapasya* (deep yogic meditation)) to achieve the Ultimate.

### **15. Shree Lord Jagannath of Puri**

***Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare  
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare***

Puri is an ancient town on the east coast of India most famous for the ancient temple of Lord Jagannath, (another name for Lord Krishna) his brother Balbhadra and sister Subhadra. There are many anecdotes relating to the shape of the deities, once there was a king by name Indradyumna who had lost his cherished deity while carrying it from one place to another, but later he had a dream that his Lord would come to him again sailing in the sea. After a few days they found a huge log coming to the shore and the king desired that the log be carved into the original forms of his deities. Two craftsmen named Vishnu and Vishvakarma started the job in a closed and hidden area, they made a condition that no one will look at he figures before it was completed.

At one point the craftsmen wished to relax for a while and temporarily stopped the task, as no noise was forthcoming from the area of their work the king and his wife thought the work was completed and so peeped into the area. At this point the craftsmen suddenly vanished without finishing the work. Thus as we see today the faces of the deities are well formed but not have no hands or feet. Religious literature have indicated several symbolic aspects of the shapes and colors of the deities, and several anecdotes exist, all leading to the one concept of Eternal Truth (Sanathana Dharma) and the existence of one Supreme God. There are many annual rituals performed in the temple with great religious fervor from many generations and from devotees from many parts of the world, amongst them the Rath Yatra is the most important. All the deities are dressed and decorated with leaves roots, pulp and twigs for the occasion and carried in special chariots for a distance of three kilometers in about twelve hours. Part of the path is cleaned with a golden broomstick by the descendents of the old rulers of Puri. There are many other popular ceremonies which according to legend signify the great attachment of Lord Krishna to his devotees, some of whom claim to be blood relations of Krishna. The ISCON movement has established various centers and spread the activities world wide with great religious fervor.

## **16. Shree Lord Chitragupta**

### ***Om Chitravaso Swasti Te Paramshiya***

Lord Chitragupta is supposed to have originated from the body of Lord Brahma, the Creator of the Universe (Manas Putra born out of cosmic influences) and so he is named "Kayashtha" hence all his descendents on earth are known as Kayashthas. They are a community, mostly spread out in the northern parts of India.

Chitraguptaji is endowed with powers to control the activities of all beings in the Universe, He is supposed to maintain a complete record of all good and bad deeds of all beings, He administers rewards and punishments to people as they deserve and grants boons to his devotees. He is supposed to have blessed Bhishma Pitamaha of Mahabharat to have a control on the time of his death. He is supposed to be guided by the principles of life enunciated by Dharamraj and also served as his principle advisor on matters of Dharma; His followers adopt the principles of Vaishnavism and also worship Bhawani- Durgaji.

## **17. Navgrahas**

### ***BRAHMA MURARI STRIPURANTAKARI BHANU, SHASHI, BHOOMI SUTO BUDHASCHJA GURUSCHA, SHUKRAH, SHANI RAHU, KETAVAH KURVANTU SARVE MAM SU PRABHATAM***

Navgrahas refer to the nine celestial bodies in Cosmos which are said to have influence on the lives of people, the are Ravi (Sun), Chandra (Moon), Kuja (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Guru (Jupiter), Sukra (Venus), Sani (Saturn), Rahu and Ketu which are respectively the invisible North and South Nodes of the moon . Some interpret these bodies as Neptune and Pluto.

The Sun is the central figure around which all the other bodies revolve with the moon revolving around the earth along with the earth's motion. The science of Astrology, predicts the life progress of individuals on earth, depending on the position of the celestial bodies in the Cosmos at the time of birth of an individual These celestial bodies, particularly the Sun and Moon have profound influence on the climate of different geographical regions of the world. It is for all these reasons they are worshiped by Hindus during various religious rituals, at times special offerings are made to the Navgrahas to ward off any adverse effects on the life of an individual.



## **Chapter 6: Biographical sketches of some world famous Indians**

### **1. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)**

He became to be known as the Father of the Nation when India got independence from British rule as he was primarily responsible for the change; he employed the unusual techniques of non-violence and non-cooperation against the rulers.

He was born in Porubunder in Gujarat and was married to Kasturbai when both were 13 years of age. He studied law in London and was admitted to the Inner Temple in 1891. He then moved to South Africa where he worked for the rights of Indian immigrants by non-violent methods (Satyagraha, meaning the force of truth), after many successful achievements in South Africa, he moved back to India in 1915 and took up leadership of the struggle for independence of India from British rule. He continued his theory of non-violence, non-cooperation and religious tolerance; His most trustworthy associates were Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhai Patel. His famous Dundee Yatra and Salt Satyagraha earned world-wide recognition and sympathy for his struggles. He fasted several times he fasted for achieving Hindu-Muslim unity or for getting his point accepted by the British and was successful in his attempts.

He finally won independence for India in 1947 without much bloodshed but could not help the division of India into India (Bharat) and Pakistan. This division had caused tremendous upheaval in both the communities of Hindus and Muslims and many tragedies followed. He was assassinated in January 1948 by a fanatical Hindu during his regular evening prayers. His birthday, October 2, is a National Holiday in India and the day of his death anniversary, 30<sup>th</sup> January is celebrated as *Sarvodaya* day in India.

### **2. Jawaharlal Nehru**

Born in a rich family in 1889, he was educated at Cambridge, England and practiced law before entering politics, following in the footsteps of his famous father Motilal Nehru. He was married to Kamala Kaul at the age of 26; he became a leader of the Socialistic wing of the Indian National Congress and became the first Prime Minister of India in 1947. He remained so until his death in 1964. Although born in an aristocratic family he mixed with common people and developed a charisma of his own. He was imprisoned several times by the British for his fiery speeches and political activities.

He utilized his time in prison for writing letters to his only daughter Indira Priyadarshini. Those writings, subsequently printed as a book became a standard reference for Indian history and culture. He created a Planning Commission for preparing 5-year plans for India but he followed much of British legacy in Indian administration and judicial systems. He always recognized and encouraged intellectuals to actively participate in India's development. He created a Non-aligned Movement in the world to strike a balance between powerful nations like the US and the Soviet Union. He was also honored with "Bharat Ratna" the highest civilian award in India. He developed Scientific institutions and infrastructure like dams, factories etc. which he once referred to as modern "Temples", he became popular as Chacha Nehru amongst children and his birthday, 14 November is celebrated in India as Children's Day.

### **3. Vallabhai Patel (1875-1950)**

He was the right hand man to Mahatma Gandhi in the leadership of the Indian National Congress which was responsible for obtaining freedom for India. He was closely attached to him personally and spiritually. Because of his organizational ability, he was known as *Sardar* Patel, he was Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister in the first National Government in India.

He was the middle of five children and was much neglected in his early days. He matriculated at the age of twenty two and worked by himself to pass the Pleaders examination, and then went to England to become a barrister at the age of thirty. On his return he had a hard life supporting his ailing wife, two children and elder brother. He was worked in several municipal jobs and made civic improvements to Ahmedabad. His reputation for ruthlessness and fierceness, earned him a name as the "Ironman of India". As Home Minister his most important assignment was to integrate nearly five hundred and sixty five princely states of India and amalgamate them into an Indian Union and introduce democracies in those states. Along with other leaders he went to jail several times for his roles in the freedom movement in India.

### **4. Subhash Chandra Bose (1897-1945)**

He was a prominent leader of the Indian Freedom movement but differed from the views of Mahatma Gandhi and others in the Indian National Congress. He was born in Cuttack in an affluent Bengali family in 1897. As a youth he participated in voluntary community services, under the influence of the writings of Swami Vivekananda. After his education in India and England he was offered a prestigious job in the Indian Civil Service, but he refused and joined the Indian National Congress instead. He was leader of the radical left wing of the party and was twice elected President of the Congress. He came to be addressed as *Netaji*, because of differing views from Gandhiji; he had to resign his second term and join the Swarajya Party under Chittaranjan Das and later formed his own party called the Indian Forward Bloc.

He was elected Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation but the British arrested and exiled him to Mandalay as a suspected terrorist, after his release, he was put under house arrest, but he secretly escaped disguised as a Pathan, he went to many foreign countries and contacted many leaders who were against the British and were fighting a war against them. He strongly believed that Indian freedom will be achieved only if there was political, diplomatic and military support on the international level and that India must raise its own national army.

With support from countries like Italy, Germany and Japan, he created Azad Hind Radio, the Indian Legion, and Indian National Army; he formed the Provisional Government of Free India and established its headquarters in the Andamans when the British lost the war with Japan during World War II. However with the defeat of the Axis Powers, and the winning of the war by the Allies, all efforts of *Netaji* Subhash Chandra Bose came to an end. He was supposed to have died in a plane crash in Taiwan while proceeding to Japan but the body was never found and his death still remains a mystery, and in controversy, in spite of several investigations. He was posthumously awarded the highest Civil Award of India in 1992 but it was withdrawn on the ruling of the Supreme Court

## **5. Mother Teresa (1910-1997)**

Mother Teresa was born to parents of Albanian descent in Scopeje, Macedonia on 27 August 1910, she was known as Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, at the age of twelve she was attracted to God and wanted to spread the love of Jesus Christ. At the age of eighteen she left home and joined an Irish community of nuns who had missionary activities in India. She came to India in 1931 and started at the St. Mary's High School in Calcutta. She worked there until 1948, after seeing the suffering of many poor people, she left school and started an open-air school for children living in slums.

She soon received financial support from many different sources and many volunteers joined her. In 1950 she received permission from the Holy See to start her own order, "The Missionaries of Charity" who were taking care of all those who were not otherwise cared for in India. In 1965 her Missionary Society became an International Religious Family under the order of Pope Paul VI.

The Society had spread all over the world providing help to the poorest and organizing relief work in the wake of natural catastrophes, by 1990 there were more than one million workers of the Order spread in over forty countries. They followed Mother Teresa's spirit in all their activities. She received a number of awards and distinctions such as the Pope John XIII Peace Prize (1971), the Nehru Prize for Peace and Understanding (1972), the Baizan Prize and the Templeton and Magsay awards and finally the Nobel prize in 1979. She was recommended for Sainthood.

## **6. S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975)**

He was born in Tiruttani, Chennai South India on September 5, 1888 he achieved a Masters degree and was appointed in the department of Philosophy. Since then he worked in the field of philosophy in several institutions and wrote several books. He participated in several international congresses on Philosophy in the UK and the USA and won great fame.

In 1929 he taught philosophy at the Manchester College in Oxford and later from 1936-39 he was the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the Oxford University. Earlier he worked as the Vice-chancellor of the Andhra University, from 1939-48 he was the Vice-chancellor of Banaras Hindu University. He was the leader of the Indian delegation to UNESCO during 1946 to 1952 and later became the president of its General Conference.

He was ambassador of India to the USSR during 1949 to 1952 and he was the Vice-President of India during 1952-1962 and later became President of India from May 1962 to May 1967. During his time he was acclaimed throughout the world as the greatest philosopher of the East, in modern times, and the greatest exponent of Eastern religions and thought. His main point was that religion must express itself in reasonable thought, fruitful action and in the right social institutions. He passed away on 17 April 1975. In his honor, India celebrates his birthday, 5th September, as Teachers Day.

## **7. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)**

He was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, leader of the *Brahmo Samaj* movement, a Hindu sect for open society, based on interpretations of the Upanishads. He was born in a talented family of in dancing, music and writings etc. After completing his schooling in India, he was sent to England for further studies but he did not complete it there, he was more interested in social reforms in India. He took great interest in the Indian National movement and became a great friend of Mahatma Gandhi.

He rose to literary fame by his articles and poems written in Bengali. Some of his works were translated into English and he thus became well known in the West. Several literary luminaries of the west were his good friends. He was awarded a Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, he was the first Asian to receive the honor.

He was knighted by the British but he refused the honor in protest against the British policies in India. Besides writing poems, he wrote numerous musical dance dramas, which were in a class by themselves and which became famous as Rabinra Sangeet. His composition "Jana Gana Mana" is the National Anthem of India. He also made several paintings and created many objects of art and culture. He used to look after his own estate in Shelaidaha, now in Bangladesh and came into contact with many common people over there. He later moved to Shantiniketan, in the present day West Bengal where he established a university for development of arts and culture in traditional Indian styles. He was known as Gurudev in the entire country for his commanding influence in India arts and culture. He died at his Jorasanko house on 7 August 1941, a day still mourned by the Bengali speaking community throughout the world.

## **8. C.V.Raman (1888-1970)**

India has produced many great scientists in the past and also in the current generation but Sir C.V.Raman is considered the greatest among them. Chandrasekhar Venkata Raman was born in Tiruchinapalli, India on November 7, 1888 and died in Bangalore on 21 November 1970. His earlier education was at the Visakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh where his father was working as a mathematics teacher. He later got his M.A. degree in Physics with honours, because of a lack of opportunities in India for scientists in those days, he accepted a position as Assistant Accountant General in the Civil Service in Calcutta. Because of his immense interest in Science, he worked at the Indian Association for Cultivation of Science in his spare time, he later was offered the Palit Professorship of Calcutta University where he stayed for the next fifteen years.

He received worldwide recognition for his contributions in optics and was elected a Fellow of Royal Society of London in 1924, he obtained the Knighthood of the British Empire in 1929, and received many scientific honors. Finally in 1930, he received the world's highest honour, the Nobel Prize. For the first time in the history of India, a student educated entirely in India and working with meager facilities and encouragement earned the highest award in Science. In 1934, he became the Director of the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore, and became the first National Professor when India got independence. After he retired, he established his own institute, the Raman Institute, which received world wide recognition. The Government of India conferred on him the highest Civil Award of 'Bharat Ratna' (Jewel of India).

## **9. S. Ramanujan (1887-1920)**

Srinivasa Aiyangar Ramanujan was one of the greatest mathematical geniuses that India ever produced. He was born in Erode, Madras in 1887 to a middle class orthodox family, at the age of five, it was learnt that he was brilliant in mathematics. Due to poverty and poor health he was moving from place to place for further education and suitable jobs. Because of his excellence in complicated mathematical problems, he was encouraged by some well known Indian mathematicians and even some foreign professors in India but he could not get any higher degree because he neglected all other subjects other than mathematics. He failed to get any university degree in India. He had his own methods of solving many complex problems and leading mathematics professors were unable to follow his methods but they were astonished at the solutions obtained by him. At last when his works were brought to the notice of leading mathematics professors in England they brought him over for collaborative work and further studies.

Prof. Hardy was the person who helped him to get admitted to the Trinity College in Cambridge in 1914, in spite of the lack of any formal education. Ramanujan graduated with a Bachelor's degree in the year 1916 (which in 1920 was called a PhD). In 1917 he was seriously spending most of his time in nursing homes but he was alert still in mathematical problems. In 1918 he was elected a Fellow of the Cambridge Philosophical Society, and also a Fellow of the Royal Society of London, the highest honor for any scientist in the British Empire, he was later elected to become a Fellow of the Trinity College in Cambridge. He returned to India in 1919 and because of poor health, he died the next year in Kumbakonam, Madras. Ramanujan left a number of unpublished notebooks filled with theorems etc. and they formed a base for continued research in the field of mathematics by several other mathematicians.

## **10. J.C. Bose (1858- 1937)**

Jagdish Chandra Bose was one of India's greatest scientists of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, who was unfortunately not recognized in his own times but became famous only in later years. He was born in Decca in 1858, he first studied medicine in 1880 at the University of London, England and later studied Natural Science at Cambridge under Professor Raleigh and obtained a B.Sc degree.

On returning to India, he was made assistant professor of Physics at the Calcutta University, his discoveries were mainly in the fields of optics and solid-state physics, he made all his experiments with very crude material and equipment in a make shift laboratory. He was in fact the first to predict the existence of microwaves etc.

In 1895 he gave a public demonstration of electro-magnetic waves to ring a bell and also to explode gunpowder by remote control. But unfortunately the discovery of radio waves was attributed to Marconi of Italy who shared a Nobel Prize in Physics in 1909. In some quarters this was considered as the greatest blunder in the history of scientific inventions. J.C.Bose also proved practically that plants also respond to some type of waves, a belief held only in some quarters of Hindu religious philosophy.

One of his students in Calcutta, S.N.Bose became world famous for the Bose-Einstein statistics. He established his own institute in Calcutta for various types of scientific research, particularly on plants and proved they too have feelings and measured their rate of growth. He traveled and lectured widely in Europe and in India and made friends with many famous contemporary people in the fields of science, literature and politics.

## **Chapter 7 Popular Hindu Religious Leaders**

### **Introduction**

India is a land of great spirituality with a variety of religious scriptures. The oldest of them are the Vedas which form the main foundation of religious life and the philosophical outlook of Hindus. Several sages, saints and seers have written commentaries on these and other religious scriptures like the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, Bhagavad-Gita, Vishnu Sahasranama, Srimad Bhagvatam, Smritis, Puranas, Ramayana, Agamas etc.

Some of them have also participated in serious religious discourses and established convincing faiths in their own philosophies. Some have translated the original Sanskrit scripts into local languages adding their own commentaries and lyrical poems. All these have become the main guidelines for the Hindu way of life throughout the years and fulfilled the social needs of the time.

Indian history reveals hundreds and thousands of such highly religious luminaries also known as Mahatmas but in the following paragraphs only a few of the great religious leaders, like Acharyas, Saints, Sages, Mystics, and Godmen who have made a long standing impact on Indian culture and way of life have been mentioned.

#### **1. Shree Adi Sankaracharya**

Adi Sankaracharya (which means the first Sankaracharya) was born at a time when religious life in India was in a state of flux and great confusion. Scholars estimate his birth to be sometime between the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to 788 A.D. He was born in the Kalhadi village on the banks of the river Alwaye (Purna) in Kerala, to pious parents as a gift of Lord Shiva. Hence he had high spiritual powers right from his birth, he was an infant prodigy who mastered all scriptures before his eighth year. His father died when he was quite young and with the permission of his mother he took to Sanyasa (ascetic order) with the promise that he will always be by her side whenever she desired. He went all the way to the Narbada River and chose his own Guru, Govinda who not only foresaw the greatness of Sankara but blessed him to write commentaries on the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita etc. He advocated the Advaita philosophy (non-dualism) which in means that the Creator and Creation are one and the same.

He saw God Power in everything and everywhere. With the help of four disciples, he established four Mathas (religious centres) in four corners of India, at Jyothirmath (north), Puri (east), Dwaraka (west) and Sringeri (south). The successive heads of these Mathas are also known as Sankaracharyas. Adi Sankaracharya traveled all over India on foot twice or thrice, consecrating many shrines, participating in religious discourses and defeating many misinterpreters of the Vedas, he thus revived Hinduism. He wrote several poems songs and religious treatises which created spiritual awakenings and guided the welfare of the people of India.

Many miracles happened in his dealings with various situations which confirmed to his followers and other people about his spiritual greatness and the existence of God. He was spent some time in the Himalayas, when he heard that his mother was on her death bed in South India. He suddenly presented himself before her in her last moments which in itself was a great miracle and performed the last rites even though Sanyasis were not supposed to do so. He became to be recognized as a Jagat-Guru (world teacher) and was so recognized by many westerners. He died at a young age, before he reached forty.

There is a very interesting episode in his life, once, after his usual bath in the Ganges River at Varanasi, he met with a Chandala (Untouchable caste of those days in India) and four dogs. As people of those days considered them impure and untouchable, Sankara asked the Chandala to move away from his path. The Chandala in his reply pointed out that his present action is contradictory to his philosophy of non-dualism by which the Souls in all creatures are identical with the Universal Soul, the Atman. Sankara was stunned at his reply and realized his folly. He realized that the Chandala was Lord Siva himself with the four Vedas accompanying him as dogs. He then composed his famous poems known as "Manisha Panchaka" each of which ends with a motto "Who looks at Creation with a non-dualistic point of view, is my true Guru whether a Brahmin or a Chandala"

## **2 Shree Ramanujacharya (1017-1137)**

Although born in the Brahmin community, he was initially initiated by a non-brahmin guru, Goshti Purna by a special mantra for human salvation.

Ramanuja against the wishes of his guru, proclaimed the Mantra in a temple so that all people can be benefited by it, irrespective of caste and creed. He was against all orthodoxy of his family. He sent his wife away to her parents, and took Sanyasa. He then wanted to become a disciple of Yamuna (also known as Alvander) the great Bhakti Acharya of Srirangam in South India, but before he reached the place the master's body was laid for cremation, however, Ramanuja noticed three fingers of the Guru clenched and wanted to know the reason for it, he was told that it was the wish of the master before his death, that Ramanuja should write commentaries of Bhagavad-Gita, Brahma Sutra and the Vishnu Sahasranamam and extol the glory of Vishnu and the path of Bhakti.

Accordingly, Ramanuja expounded the great philosophy which later came to be known as Visishtadwita and succeeded the Guru, he postulated that the Soul, Matter (Body) and God are distinct but the former two are inseparable from God and may be referred as his attributes. Many poet saints known as Alvars in South India created a new wave of devotional life with miracles and Divine grace, they worshiped only Vishnu thus creating a distinction between Saivites (devotees of Siva also called Nayanmars) and Vaishnavites (devotees of Vishnu).

Vaishnavites strongly believe in rituals as the religious paths for ultimate Bliss and thus Ramanuja can be said to have bridged the gulf between philosophy and religion by his great devotion to God and deep love for mankind. He is reported to have lived the full span of human life, one hundred and twenty years, and just before his end he had summoned all his disciples and reported to have given them several injunctions for propagating amongst his followers.

## **3. Shree Madhvacharya (1199-1278)**

Born to religious parents in Konkan and initially known as a Vasudeva, he studied the Vedas under an ascetic Guru called Achyuta Preksh, but he differed from his master in interpretation of the scriptures and succeeded him as an Acharya and came to be known as Madhvacharya.

His philosophy came to be known as "Purna Pragna Darsana" later defined as the Dwita philosophy or Dualism as contrary to the philosophy of Adi Sankaracharya. His philosophy is also referred as a pluralistic theism, thus making a clear distinction between God, Soul and Body (Matter). He toured various parts of India and gathered many adherents to his faith. He enshrined Bhagawan Krishna at Udipi. He prescribed many rituals for daily life and for worship for disciplining one self and seeking the blessings of God. He composed and sang many stotras to emphasise his philosophy and which are sung by many of his followers today.

## **4. Shree Vallabhacharya (1479-1531)**

Born and abandoned one day as dead in 1479, in the forests of Champaranya in Chattisgarh in India, he was found alive the next day, surrounded by a ring of flames, so he is generally considered as an incarnation of the Fire God. By the age of twelve he completed the study of the scriptures like the Vedas, Puranas etc. at Varanasi and was acclaimed by many as a great scholar. At the age of twenty-five he was invited by Krishna Deva Raya of South India to participate in discourses relating to several systems of Hindu philosophies then in vogue. He differed from the views of others declaring that God, Man and Nature are identical but remained separate like sparks of an Eternal Flame.

He was finally declared a winner by the king himself, he initiated a path of devotion (Bhakti) which came to be known as Pushtimarg (complete and sincere) or Nirguna Bhakti. His philosophy came to be known as Suddha Advita (pure non-dualism or monoism) to emphasis that God is both immanent and transcendent without the concept of Maya he personified his God as Krishna with several Leelas (acts of wisdom and action).

As a contemporary of Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, they complimented each others role, one by complete immersion in Love of God Krishna and the other as Acharya the preacher of a new philosophy.

Sri Vallabhacharya gave a new message, a new hope and a new pattern of devotional life when India was passing through separate tendencies due to diverse sects, foreign creeds, social upheavals, and political domination by rulers belonging to alien faiths, he earned a permanent place in the evolutionary history of Spiritualism in India. In 1531 he gave his final advice to his two sons to have complete faith in Lord Krishna and then at the sacred river Ganga, he is reported to have taken holy water into his hands when a flame like Divine glow appeared around his body and he disappeared.

### **5. Bhagawan Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886)**

Ramakrishna was considered as a Divine Messenger who preached the ideals of Hindu religion through wit and wisdom. Born in a poor family at Kamarpukar in Bengal and known by the name of Gadadhar Sambhuchandra, he was called to be a priest at the age of seventeen in a newly erected temple of Kali at Dakshineswar. His extreme devotion to Goddess Kali developed to consider her as Mother.

When he was twenty four he was compelled to marry a young girl of six years old, but he used to consider her as Goddess Mother Kali and she also recognized that Ramakrishna had no physical ailments but suffered from spiritual ecstasy in the worship of Kali. Around the year 1864, a monk named Thotapuri initiated him into the order of Sanyasis and named him Ramakrishna. Under the blessings of Kali he remained a Sanyasi (a state of what is called Nirvikalpa Samadhi) for many years. He preached universal brotherhood without distinguishing between caste and creed of individuals, he believed in unity of all religions.

Of all his devotees and disciples, Swami Vivekananda became the mouth piece of his philosophy and a world-wide organization called the Ramakrishna Mission came into existence. The Mission has published many books in English on various topics related to the Hindu religion and Advaita philosophy

### **6. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)**

Swami Vivekananda was the foremost disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He was earlier known as Narendra Babu, a graduate of Calcutta University. When he came in contact with Ramakrishna, there were several incidents to test each other's spiritual powers and finally through Divine grace they became attached to each other.

He was the first monk from India to have visited the United States of America and started bridging the gulf between Western Science and Eastern religions and amalgamating them into one perception for righteous living. He was also a great patriot and worked hard for uplifting the poor in India. His message to the youth of India was to always be brave and fearless.

He started the Ramakrishna Mission and established several centers both in the USA and the UK. He expounded the philosophy of Vedas to Western audiences in such a convincing and lucid manner that several people became his ardent followers, foremost among them was Margaret Noble (1867-1911) who was later called sister Nivedita.



## **7. Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi (1878-1950)**

At the foot of a hill known as Arunachal in Tamil Nadu, there is an old Siva temple with an idol known as Tejo Linga (Radiant Linga). Every year during the annual festival in the month of Karthik (November-December) a beacon of light is lit to remind people to pursue the light of Knowledge. Once a teenager by the name of Venkatraman, the second son of his parents, and normally very fond of sports and studies, was overwhelmingly attracted towards the beacon. He left his home without any belongings and spent the rest of his life at the site of the hill for about fifty five years, spreading the concept of "self-knowledge". He was later to be known as Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

People always observed a radiance around him and enjoyed peace and enlightenment in his presence, he preached that one should know oneself thoroughly to remove all ignorance and reach the Goal of Life. This is based on the famous Vedic statement 'Tatvamasī' meaning "That thou art" which engulfs the entire Truth of the nature of the Creator and Creation.

There were many miracles in his life but no special significance was attached to any of them. He had a soft and distinct voice but a somewhat frail body. In his last years he developed a painful tumor with shooting pain but it was a miracle to attending doctors how he calmly bore the pain and how he cheerfully gave audience to his devotees as if the body did not belong to him. One evening in April 1950, people saw a bright light emanating away from his body and he was found dead. Later a shrine was erected over his Samadhi and many of his devotees visit it every year.

## **8. Swami Dayanand Saraswathi: (1824-1883)**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati was born in 1824 in Tankara, Gujarat, India to a rich family devoted to Lord Siva. He was named Moolashankar and had a pet name Dayaram. From very early age he was religious but he was not happy with superficial rituals. He traveled wide through forests and mountains all by himself in search of the true meaning of the Vedas and in search of a suitable Guru and faced several ordeals, causing harm to his body. He met Sanyasis in various places, and one Swami Poornanada initiated him into the order of Sanyasis and he was named Swami Dayananda Saraswathi. He was offered positions for managing Mutts where he lived but he refused saying he wanted Spiritual wealth and not Material wealth. So he wandered further to find a true Guru, at last he found a blind Guru Virajananda Dandeesha in 1860 at the age of thirty six.

In spite of harsh treatment, he found great inspiration in his Guru's teachings and knowledge even though he was blind. The Guru was impressed by the earnestness and enthusiasm of Swami Dayananda and ordered him to go and preach true Vedic knowledge to people. With the help of some princes he founded the Arya Samaj in 1876 with the main object of eradicating evils and dogmas of the Hindu Society and slowly established several centres, schools, gurukulas etc.

He worked for the emancipation of women, he joined the Indian Freedom Movement and several leaders became his followers in Punjab and Gujarat. He was poisoned by the British but he got rid of it through his yogic powers. There are many stories of his miraculous strength and will power, he had a command of the Gujarati language but wrote many books in Hindi. He refused to go abroad and hoped the Light of India will automatically spread to other places. He was a great reformer, who for the first time introduced conversion into Hinduism to those who wanted to embrace it, and prevented many Hindus to embrace other religions out of ignorance and material greediness. He believed in the fundamentals of the Vedas and not in superficial rituals of religion. He died in 1883 with the words OM on his lips during the last moments with many of his disciples by his side.

## **9. Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993)**

Swami Chinmayananda was more a missionary than a saint. He was born in Ernakulam Kerala in 1916, to an aristocratic conservative family, and was named Balakrishna Menon. Even at an early age he was attracted by many saintly persons who were visiting his house. He studied Malayalam and English in school and showed excellence in all activities.

He was very humorous and dynamic, it was the tradition of the house that all members of family should join in making Puja daily. He became an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. He joined the Lucknow University to study Law and English, he used to partake in many extra-curricular activities and was found to be excellent speaker and writer, he later joined the Indian Freedom Movement where he was jailed and fell ill, he was released and a Christian lady took care of him, during his jail term he had pondered over the mysteries of Life and Death.

When he completed his university career he took up journalism with the National Herald and became famous as a dynamic and controversial reporter on current topics and social life, his mind was restless with the thoughts on Creation and the Creator and he looked to Swami Sivananda for further understanding. He joined the Sivanada Ashram in 1949, although he was sometimes deluged by material activities, he was attracted to spiritual disciplines. He was then given the name of Chinmayananda Saraswathi, and following the advice of Swami Sivananda, he went to Swami Tapovan at Uttarkashi to study the scriptures, he spent nearly eight year over there and attained considerable spiritual experiences and disciplines.

With the blessings of his Guru, Swami Tapovan, he toured many places in India and preached Vedantic philosophy. He started Gyana Yagnas, Yuva Kendras, Bal Viharas, schools, study circles etc. He may be called a pioneer of renaissance of spiritual culture in modern times. He wrote commentaries on some Vedantic texts, and established mission centres not only in India but in U S A and other countries. He gave an address to United Nations on "planet in crisis". He was elected President of the Hindu Religion for the Centennial Conference of the Parliament of World Religions which was addressed by Swami Vivekananda nearly a hundred years ago.

## **10. Swami Sivananda (1887-1963)**

He was born in September 1887 in the Pattamadai village in South India in a family highly devoted to Lord Siva and was named Kuppuswami. In school, at Yettayapuram and in college at Tiruchirapalli he showed many signs of brilliance, compassion and *Tyaga* (renunciation and sacrifice) in many activities, he later studied medicine in Tanjore. He practiced in Tiruchi for sometime and started a journal 'Ambrosia'. After his father's death he went to Malaya and worked for about ten years at the Estate Hospital which in later years was managed by himself, he treated patients for free, especially the poor, sadhus and sanyasis and gave comfort to many. But he was highly spiritual minded and so renounced the world in 1923 and entered the holy order of Sanyasa in 1924 at Rishikesh.

He was so initiated by Swami Viswananda Saraswati and after twelve years of intense austerities, he established the Divine Life Society in 1936, and organized the All-World "Religions" Federation in 1945, Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy in 1948, he wrote over three hundred books on Yoga, Health and Healing. He toured India and Ceylon/Sri Lanka in 1950 and created Spiritual awakening in many people. He established centres of his organization in some foreign countries also. He tried to reach the "Message of India" to all parts of the world. He died in Rishkesh in July 1963 leaving behind many followers to "Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate and Realize" as their main motto.

## **11. Tulsidas (1532-1624)**

Although born in a family of great Vedic scholars he became virtually an orphan in his young age and lived in a temple of Hanumanji and became a disciple of Pandit Naraharidas from whom he learnt much of the Vedas and mythology. He was greatly interested in Bhajans and discourses and traveled widely with his Guru at Chitrakut, he is supposed to have the vision of Ram and Lakshman. He wrote in Avadhi (a Hindi dialect) his famous Ram Charit Manas which is also known as the Tulsi Ramayan, which teaches the principles of right living is valid even today. He also wrote several devotional lyrics of which Hanuman Chalisa is the most famous and sung by devotees all over the world.

## **12. Thyagaraja (1767-1847)**

He was a great devotee of Bhagawan Rama and composed many songs in praise of Him. He was a great scholar in Sanskrit, astrology and Telugu. All his songs were in Telugu set in the Karnatak style and sung by people with great fervour. His ancestors were of Andhra origin but he settled in Tiruvayur in Tamil Nadu to commemorate his works and his famous songs and Kirtans. Music festivals are organized every year in Tiruvayur and well known musicians and celebrities from all over India participate. Similar festivals are also organized in many cities of Andhra and Tamil Nadu in India.

## **13. Chaitanya Maha Prabhu (1486-1534)**

He was born In Bengal and became a great proponent of devotion to Radha and Krishna. He was also known as Gaurang due to his light, radiant golden complexion. At a very early age he became an expert in Sanskrit grammar and Hindu philosophy. Throughout his life he defied the caste system and preached Love and Devotion to Radha and Krishna.

He composed the most popular bhajan mantra 'Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare' He lived his latter part of life in Puri and is said to have disappeared in 1534 at the temple of Tota Gopinath. Many of his followers believe he was the incarnation of Radha-Krishna combined. A big movement is currently spreading in many parts of the world under the name of ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), with groups of people singing, dancing, and chanting the above bhajan mantra and spreading Love and Devotion through Krishna.

## **14. Saint Tukaram (1608-1649)**

He was born in a village called Dehu on the banks of a river Indrayani in Maharashtra, he inherited the family rights of collecting money from traders but he and his family suffered a lot due to famine in his area and by cheating others. He then wrote poetic compositions called Abhangs in praise of his family deity Vothoba, which had greatly influenced the Marathi literature, Tukaram realized that singing and chanting of God's glory was the ultimate source of human liberation.

His followers believe that at the age of about forty eight, he was taken away bodily to heaven as only his cymbals, rug and tambura (musical instrument he was playing) were found floating in the river without the body. Even today he is the most popular saint of Maharashtra.

## **15. Meerabai (1498-1550)**

India gave birth to not only male saints but to many female saints also. Among them Meerabai is one born in the royal dynasty of Mewad in 1498. Her father spent most of his time in fighting wars with Moguls and so she was brought up in her grandfather's house. From a very early age she loved the idol of Lord Krishna and she used to dance, and sing ecstatically in praise of Krishna. She called Krishna as Giridhar Gopal and was so much attached to him that she used to consider him virtually as her husband, even though she was actually married to Bhojraj, the crown prince of Chittore.

The royal family of Chittore was very angry and disgusted with her because of her intense devotion to Krishna, neglecting all other household duties as a princess. They tried to poison her but her devotion and love was so great that the poison did not affect her at all. She had wandered to many sacred places related to Krishna, composed many songs which came to be known popularly as Meera's bhajans. It is said that while dancing in the temple of Giridhar Gopal in Dwaraka she collapsed and vanished, her songs have become so famous both for literary value and the devotional aspect that they have become a tradition of Indian Music.

## **Chapter 8: Mythological Stories from Hindu literature**

### **1. The Royals of Ayodhya**

Ayodhya was the capital city of an ancient kingdom Khosala in India. Once a great king named Dasaratha ruled the place. He was not only very generous and kind but most noted as a man of his words for he never failed to fulfill his promises made to anybody. He had four sons. The eldest son was Rama, born to his first wife Kaushalya. His other sons were Lakshmana and Sathrugan born to his second wife Sumitra, and Bharata born to his third wife Kaikeyi.

All the sons were highly trained in all types of royal crafts and sports, because of their extraordinary proficiency some sages who were engaged in spiritual practices in their own hermitages, sought help of Rama and Lakshmana to exterminate the notorious demons who were constantly menacing and disturbing them. The news of their victories and successes reached far and wide with great appreciation of their valour and skills. On hearing about their courage and victorious deeds, Janaka, the king of Mithila, gave his daughters in a ceremonious marriage to the sons of Dasaratha. Rama and his wife Sita together with the other princes and princesses were then living very happily with King Dasaratha and his three wives, performing their assigned royal duties. They were greatly admired and loved intensely by all people of Ayodhya.

In view of the great esteem earned by Rama from the people of Ayodhya, Dasaratha one day decided to make Rama the crown prince and soon abdicate the throne in his favour. This was welcomed by all the courtiers and also by the people of Ayodhya. In consultation with the royal priests necessary preparations were started in full gala and splendor. At this stage, on the advice of a wicked maid servant, Kaikeyi the third and youngest queen of Dasaratha desired that the king fulfill his promises made to her some years earlier. The king readily consented without anticipating any impossible requests from the queen.

She demanded that Rama be immediately banished to the forest for fourteen years and that her own son Bharata be crowned as the king. This naturally saddened the king and due to shock he died soon thereafter. Rama with his wife and brother Lakshmana went to forest to fulfill their father's promises to Kaikeyi, and live as ascetics. But Bharata being a faithful and devoted brother to Rama did not accept to be crowned as the successor king to Dasaratha. Instead, he kept the wooden sandals of Rama on the throne and looked after the kingdom as proxy ruler not from Ayodhya but from a neighboring town called Nandigram, declaring that Rama alone was the true monarch of Khosala kingdom.

In the meanwhile Rama, his wife and brother Lakshmana had cheerfully adopted themselves to the forest life enjoying the beauties of Nature, they were also helping other sages in several ways and destroyed many evil spirits who were disturbing the peace and tranquility of their spiritual practices. As it happened one day Sita saw a golden deer roaming in the forest and desired it be caught and brought to her to keep as a pet but the golden deer was none other than a malicious demon called Maricha who had some evil designs. He lured Rama to chase him to a distant place and cried aloud for help imitating the voice of Rama himself. When the cry was heard by Sita and Lakshmana they sensed foul play somewhere but did not want to take any chances. So Lakshmana set out to find out the truth, leaving Sita alone in the hermitage. At that point the ten headed Ravana in the disguise of a mendicant arrived at the hermitage and kidnapped Sita.

On the way he met several obstructions from various elements of Nature to protest against his unethical act. He had to also fight with a huge bird by name Jatayu, but Ravana cut off his wings, overcame other obstacles, and finally carried away Sita to his own kingdom Lanka, situated beyond the seas. He kept her in a park of Ashoka trees attended by his demonic maids. While she was imprisoned there, she was in great distress, remained always in meditation over Rama, and did not even drink water and ate any food by a power she sought from Lord Indira. Several times Ravana pleaded with Sita to marry him and be the queen of Lanka, but being the devoted and faithful wife to Rama she warned him of death at the hands of Rama for his words and deeds, and remained always in grief hoping she will one day be saved by Rama from the evil clutches of Ravana. During her escort to Lanka, Sita dropped a trail of her ornaments on the way so that Rama may find them and follow the clue to track her.

Depressed and anguished by the disappearance of Sita, the royal brothers in their ascetic garments were wandering through the forest in search of her. At last they met the dying Jatayu who narrated to them how he lost his wings in a fight with Ravana to save Sita. However Jatayu died peacefully under the blessing of the divine power of Rama. During their onward quest, they followed the trail left by Sita and met Sugriva, the king of Vanaras, the monkey-headed tribe. Rama helped Sugriva by killing his powerful brother Vali, because Vali had eloped with Sugriva's wife.

The chief of the Vanara army, Hanuman, was then entrusted with the task of finding Sita. He was given the royal ring of Rama to identify himself before Sita when he found her. He flew to Lanka and after a search of several places he finally located Sita. He was not sure if the lady he found was really Sita and so he started praying and praising Rama loudly. On hearing this, the otherwise depressed Sita was herself alerted and attentive to Hanuman's approach. He also identified himself by the royal ring given to him by Rama before his quest of Sita. When Sita was satisfied that Hanuman was the real emissary of Rama, he wanted to carry Sita back to Rama but Sita refused as she desired that Rama alone should defeat Ravana and take her back. He pleaded with Ravana to release Sita honorably as otherwise he may be killed by Rama in a battle. Ravana not only refused but ill-treated Hanuman and set his tail on fire. In retaliation, Hanuman set fire to most of Lanka's palaces with the fire on his tail before he extinguished it.

He flew back to Rama who was staying with Sugreeva and gave the good news about safety of the Sita. The news was received joyfully by Rama, his brother, Laxmana and Sugriva and they all planned to invade Lanka to free Sita from the clutches of Ravana. With the help of Vanara and his army and also assisted by birds and animals, they built a bridge to cross to Lanka and the great battle between Rama and Ravana took place.

Several heroes and relatives of Ravana perished in the battle. Even Lakshmana was said to have fainted once but the strong Hanuman brought herbal medicines from a far off mountain, Meru, and brought him back to life. One kind-hearted and wise brother of Ravana, named Vibhishna crossed sides, and joined Rama and revealed to him all the secrets of Ravana's powers. With Vibhishna's help and with Hanuman's devoted service, Rama finally killed Ravana but did not try to reach Sita immediately.

After winning the battle and successfully conquering Lanka, he first installed Vibhishana as the rightful ruler of Lanka and wanted Sita to be brought to him with full royal honours. Even when this was ceremoniously arranged Rama desired that Sita should publicly prove her truthfulness and fidelity to Rama as she lived in a foreign land for a long time. Everyone, including Lakshmana were shocked and angry at Rama's demands but Sita insisted on proving her fidelity as desired by Rama. So she entered a burning pyre with full devotion to Rama and prayed to the Gods to witness her act as a proof of her innocence. But the Lord of Fire (Agni) saved her and handed her over to Rama personally with his Divine authority extolling the great virtues of Sita.

Rama accepted her gladly and thereafter all of them including Vibhishana and Hanuman were said to have flown back directly to Ayodhya in a divine vehicle called "Pushpak Viman" a flower-bedecked flying chariot. Rama was then crowned as king of Kosala and he ruled for a long time in a democratic way to complete satisfaction of even the most common people of his kingdom. Hanuman remained with Rama as the most loyal and devoted subject and worshipped Rama as an incarnation of God. There are many other miscellaneous anecdotes and stories in the history of the royal members of Ayodhya which go to prove the sincerity of the Royal members and the divinity of Rama who even today is considered as one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu himself.

**This is the essence of the great epic Ramayana which was described in greater detail by the famous sage Valmiki for the benefit of generations that followed. In this story we learn how all the members of the Royal family of Ayodhya remained steadfast in their attitudes and how they were greatly admired by people of all generations, we also we learn how Nature co-operated with a noble minded person like Rama. He was considered as an ideal son, an ideal husband, an ideal brother, and ideal man and above all an ideal prince and a king, as an example for people of future generations.**

## 2. Bhisma

The story of Bhisma is one of the heroes of the Mahabharata who had great self-discipline, high determination and a strong will-power, he was known as 'Grand Sire' and highly respected and adored by one and all of his time. He was the eldest son of a great king Shanthanu who ruled Hastinapura, in India, a long time ago. His mother was Ganga a divine lady who had to leave him and his father in the early years, after some years, his father fell in love with a fisherman's daughter, named Sathyavathi, but her father would not give her in marriage to the king for the fear that Sathyavathi's son would not ascend the throne of Hasthinapura, as Bhisma, being the eldest son, would be the rightful heir to the throne.

However to make his father happy, Bhisma vowed not only to renounce the throne but also to remain unmarried so that he may not have any children of his own to claim the throne. He then got Sathyavathi married to his father for which the king blessed him that Death will never come to Bhisma until he himself desires it. Bhisma served Sathyavathi as his own mother, looked after her well even after his father's death and safeguarded all the royal honors due to her and her children.

Sathyavathi had two children and one of them died quite young, Bhisma got the other son married to a princess of a neighboring kingdom, by sheer exhibition of his valor and might, and himself remaining unmarried as he vowed before. After the death of his father, Bhisma had placed his cousin, Sathyavathi's son on the throne of Hasthinapura as per his vow and served the new king as the Supreme Royal Advisor.

The new king had three sons Pandu, Dhritharashtra and Vidur, but died after ruling for about seven years. Pandu had two wives and five sons collectively known as the Pandavas but he also died early due to some cursed physical ailment. Dhritharashtra was born blind and had 100 sons and one daughter collectively known as Kauravas (or Kurus) through a wife who voluntarily blind-folded herself not to see any light which her husband was unable to see. Vidur was a well knowledgeable and just person. Under all these circumstances, Bhisma was once again left with a heavy responsibility of looking after the widows, young princes, and the kingdom of Hastinapur.

Bhisma installed Dhritharashtra as the logical interim king of Hastinapur until the eldest son of Pandu, Yudhishtara, would come of age to ascend the throne of Hastinapur and he himself once again worked in the role of Supreme Royal Advisor. However, when the appropriate time had come, Duryodhana, the eldest son of Dhritharashtra would not allow Pandu's son to ascend the throne of Hastinapura and carved out a separate kingdom of Indraprastha for the Pandavas to rule. As the Pandavas were flourishing rapidly, Duryodhana became envious and desired to occupy Indraprastha also by defeating Yudhishtara.

He therefore invited Yudhishtara for a game of dice and in connivance with a wicked uncle defeated him by foul means. Consequently, the Pandavas had to abandon all the rights on their kingdom and went into an exile for a period of thirteen years. During this period of turmoil there were several episodes when Bhisma had strongly opposed several acts of Duryodhana and his father Dhritharashtra, but it was all in vain. However he remained loyal to the throne of Hastinapura and continued as its Chief of Armed Forces and strategic advisor, though personally he was very sympathetic to the Pandavas and always admired them and wished them success and prosperity.

During this period, the king of Mathura, Krishna, who was considered a divine incarnation became friend and relative of the Pandavas. On several occasions he protected them from their troubles and tribulations. He even acted as an ambassador for peace with the Kauravas but could not succeed. Hence in the end a battle ensued with Krishna leading the forces on the Pandava's side and Bhisma leading on the Kaurava's side. It was during this war that Lord Krishna revealed himself as the entire COSMOS and gave to the world the eternal song of Bhagavad-Gita which was the guiding light for all of humanity.

During this war several famous heroes had fallen and at last it was felt that the war could not be won by the Pandavas as long as Bhishma was in command on the other side. So at one time the Pandavas approached the 'Grand Sire' and begged him to guide them for victory. Bhishma pointed out that if he were to face anybody born a woman and comes to the battle field, he would lay down his arms. On hearing this, the Pandavas brought Shikandi who obtained knighthood even though born a woman, to fight alongside of Arjuna. When Bhishma laid down his arms, Arjuna wounded him with his arrows. But as per the blessings of his father death did not come to Bhishma until he desired it, so he waited until an auspicious day, and on a bed of arrows, and by the side of a spring of water created by Arjuna, he finally reached the heavenly abode at his own will. This is the story of the Mahabharata in nutshell.

**From this story we learn that a person of steadfast mind, and highly self disciplined will not only be in command, and earn reverence from one and all , but he will also be able to conquer death and will end his life peacefully at his own will.**

### 3. Dhruv

All of us are aware of the Pole Star, it is just above the North Pole, it is a bright star that is always in the same position when viewed from any position on earth. It has served as a guide for many sailors and mariners for generations, it is even used now as a point of reference for astronomers for various types of calculations. In Indian legends there is a story about this star known as Dhruv Nakshatra or Dhruv Tara.

Dhruv was the son of a king who had two wives, in those days it was an honour for a woman to be wife of a king and it was a privilege and prestige for a king to have more than one wife. Sunita was the first wife and so was entitled to be called the queen and share the throne and participate in the governance of their subject, her son would eventually become the heir to the throne. But Sunita did not bear children for a long time. In the meantime, a son was born to Sumati, the second wife, and she became jealous of the queen. She was afraid that if a son were to be born to Sunita her son would not be the heir to the throne.

So she pleaded with the king and managed to send away Sunita to a separate dwelling in the forest. But after some time Sunita gave birth to a beautiful male child whom she named Dhruv. Dhruv grew up in the midst of Nature experiencing all its wonders and beauties. Many sages and travelers who passed by, visited Sunita and her son to exchange ideas on religion, philosophy and worldly life. Sunita and Dhruv lived happily, as years rolled by though Sunita was always afraid that one day something unexpected may happen which would upset their happiness.

Seven years after his birth, Dhruv expressed a desire to see his father. Although Sunita was fearful that he may not be received well in his father's palace, she readily consented. After dressing him up appropriately and feeding him, she gave the necessary directions to him to go and see his father. When he reached the palace, the king was overwhelmed with joy to see his own son after so many years and made him sit on his lap. Sumati could not tolerate this sight and pulled him out of his lap and made her own son sit there instead. Although Dhruv was disappointed he touched the feet of his father and also of Sumati and quietly returned to his own house in the forest, but he appeared distressed.

When his mother pressed him to say what happened, he narrated in full detail all that happened at the palace and asked a question as to who was more powerful than a king. Sunita was sorry to hear about what happened and wondered why he was asking such a question, she replied that the Lotus eyed Vishnu is all merciful and more powerful than any king and he lives far away. After hearing that he desired to seek Lord Vishnu, so one night when his mother was asleep he went close to her, and prayed that Lord Vishnu may look after her and quietly went out all alone in the forest, which was previously forbidden to him. In the forest he encountered with thorny bushes, shady trees and even wild animals. He went on asking fearlessly everything and everybody he met, about who was the Lotus eyed Vishnu.

They were all ashamed for not knowing and quietly went aside without harming him in any way. Then suddenly the sage Narada appeared before him and explained to him that the way to seek Vishnu is not to go on wandering aimlessly but to sit in a place with crossed legs (*Padmasana*) and chant the mantra

'*Om Namo Narayana Naya*'. The young Dhruva followed the instruction of Narada accordingly, and one day, Lord Vishnu appeared before him and asked him what he wanted, because he was pleased with his steadfast devotion and aim. Dhruv simply replied that he wanted nothing more than to remain with Him only, on hearing this Vishnu was pleased to grant him the boon and created the Dhruva Star, a place where he and his mother lived happily and he remained as a shining guide to all others.

**In this story we learn that even a child can achieve the highest and most powerful by a steadfast mind and devotion to God and thus become a bright shining and guiding star to others, in Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu is supposed to be the Preserver of the entire Universe, the symbolic personification of the most powerful force in Nature that has sustained the Universe.**



#### 4. Drona (hero of the epic Mahabharata)

After Bhishma withdrew himself from the position of leading the Kaurava army in the great Mahabharata war, Drona assumed his responsibilities; he was a great teacher and trainer in archery and other skills of warfare. In fact he was reverentially called Dronacharya and served as the royal Guru for both the Pandavas and Kauravas.

Before he taught anybody he used to test the student if he was worthy of receiving the warfare skills and if he belonged to the proper class and community. He used to teach only certain classes of people like the Kshatriyas who were traditionally skilled in such arts and who in those days were meant to follow such professions.

He once refused to teach a low caste student by name of Ekalavya, Ekalavya however disguised himself as a Kshatriya eligible for being taught by him. Drona was unaware of the true background of his new student and believed he was of the right caste and society, taught him all the skills successfully. After learning archery from his Guru Drona, Ekalavya passed all the examinations and proved he was excellent in the skills he had learnt.

One day when the teacher wanted to rest for a while, Ekalavya offered his thigh to be used as a pillow, but during the period of his sleep, Ekalavya was being bitten by a wasp, but he did not move lest he should disturb his master's sleep. However when Drona woke up he saw a pool of blood under the thigh of Ekalavya and suspected that his student could not be of the caste he professed as he did not fight back the wasp which was sucking his blood. He then demanded to know the truth and Ekalavya had to confess about his caste and how he disguised himself for leaning under the great master. Drona was very angry and wanted to give him such a punishment that he would not be able to use his skills again. So, Drona demanded his normal *guru Dakshina (offering)* as was the practice in those days to honor the teacher with a present after successful completion of any course.

He demanded that Ekalavya give him the thumb of his right hand by which Ekalavya would become incapacitated from any further archery. Ekalavya was extremely sorry for this situation but because of his integrity he immediately cut off his thumb and presented it to his master. However Ekalavya remained a legendary figure and some communities in India, the Bhils, worship him, in some villages there are some sort of temples erected in his honour.

When Drona assumed charge of the Kaurava army, it was very difficult for his own student Pandavas to face him in war, he and his son Aswathama destroyed much of the Pandava army, like wild fire. There was panic in the Pandava's army. Krishna, the eternal protector of the Pandavas and was fighting on the side of the Pandavas as the charioteer of Arjuna, advised the Pandavas that Drona was really invincible unless a ruse is found to trap him. Krishna explained that if he hears and believes this to be true, on any sorrowful news he would throw away his arms and cease fighting. In order that he may believe this news to be true, Krishna planned that Yudhishthira, the eldest of the Pandavas should convey the message, as he was known to never utter a lie. Bhishma was then asked to kill an elephant by the name of Aswathama, the same name as Drona's son. Immediately Yudhishthira announced to Drona that Aswathama had died, whereupon upon Drona thought that it was his own son who died, so he immediately dropped his arms and retired for meditation.

**In this story we learn that teachers are sometimes selective to choose proper students as they have criteria for teaching. However successful students may become they can never surpass the teacher in real spirit. Also there is a point that all information must be truly verified and checked for its truth, from whatever source it may come.**

## 5. Krishna

Mathura was an ancient kingdom in India, once ruled by a king named Kamsa. He was a very cruel man having ascended the throne by imprisoning his own father. He also imprisoned his own sister Devaki and brother-in-law Vasudeva as it was prophesied that their eighth child would be a son, who would kill him, so he ordered that every male baby be killed in prison itself as soon they were born. But when the eighth child was born the parents recognized some Divine Power in their new born son because the gates of the prison were suddenly found opened at the time of his birth. The father of the child, Vasudeva, took the opportunity to sneak out the new born baby, his son, to a neighboring village, Gokul and exchanged his son with a newly born baby girl y born to a friend, named Nanda, he brought the girl back to the prison.

On hearing the news of the birth of the eighth child to his sister, Kamsa himself arrived at the prison, and even though Devaki pleaded that it was not a boy but a girl, he lifted the child up and tried to kill the child. But the girl, also having the Divine Power Maya, flew away with a warning to Kamsa that his real enemy was still alive and would one day surely kill him. This infuriated Kamsa very much and he set himself on a trail to kill all new born children in his kingdom.

In the meanwhile, Vasudeva's son was being raised in Gokul by the cowherd chieftain Nanda and his wife Yashoda, as their own son, they named him Krishna, he grew up to be a very lovable child, and admired by all the fellow cowherds in the village. As a child many miracles are attributed to him, he sucked the life out of a vampire nurse that was sent by Kamsa to kill the child by poisonous milk from her breast. He liberated two bright spirits who remained as unfortunate trees for a long time under a bad spell. Once when Yashoda rested him in an abandoned cart, a demon Shakata was sent by Kamsa to destroy the cart and thus kill Krishna, but by his magic power Krishna toppled the cart in the opposite direction and killed the demon, to the astonishment of all the villagers.

Once a big hurricane engulfed the entire village and all were scared of their lives and for their properties. The baby Krishna was tossed to a great height and dropped so that he may die but, by his divine powers, Krishna soon realized that the hurricane is nothing but another demon sent by Kamsa and subdued the hurricane demon and killed it. Once when he was playing in the mud and his mouth was covered with it, his mother chastised him and asked him to open his mouth, to her amazement and awe, she is said to have seen the entire Universe and Creation in his mouth. This is popularly known as Viswarupa Darshan, and she realized the Divine Power of her son and that he is none other than the Lord Himself.

After about seven years, Krishna moved from Gokul to the Brindavan forest area where he joined his elder brother Balram, son of Rohini, the second wife of Nanda, they tended to their father's herds. The two brothers became good playmates to several young boys and girls of other cowherd families. When Krishna used to play his flute the herd-boys and herd-girls, also known as Gopis and Gopikas, used to gather around in merriment and sing and dance along. Even the cows and sheep used to enjoy the music from his flute. It is said that even the trees and flowers blossomed, the lotus buds in the river opened up, the air became cool and fragrant whenever he played his flute.

Among the gopikas there was a girl called Radha, whose devotion and love to Krishna was so great that many legendary songs and poems came into popular vogue to perpetuate the memory of their Divine association. In Hindu literature unlike other male deities who are generally depicted along with their consorts, Krishna is shown with Radha as Radha-Krishna to symbolize the affinity of finite human activities (as Radha) with the infinite God power (as Krishna). Even today, during the annual Holi festival, Rasleela dances and celebrations are held, in memory of the great devotion and pure love of Radha to Krishna.

During this period there were several incidents when the cruel king Kamsa had sent several demons to destroy Krishna, like Medhurasura the sheep-demon, Bakasura the crane-demon. Krishna also destroyed the serpent king Kaliya who poisoned the waters of the river Yamuna, and thus liberated him from a curse. Even Gods tried to test whether the wonder boy Krishna was the Lord himself, so it happened once that Brahma created a dragon which devoured all the gopis and gopikas, together with their cattle. But Krishna having learnt of this, created a copy of the boys, girls and cattle from his own body, Brahma then realized the Truth about the Lord.

On another occasion when the herd-boys and girls were playing and enjoying the flute of Krishna along with their cattle, Indira, the lord of the Devas, produced a rain storm causing confusion and panic amongst them. Krishna soon saw the game of Indira and lifted a heavy mountain with his little finger to provide an umbrella protection to all. This story is popularly known as the Govardhanagiri story and the gods also had seen that the wonder boy was none other than the Lord Vishnu himself.

Kamsa having failed to kill Krishna by any of his messenger demons finally decided to invite him to his own court and arrange a fight with him and other strong people so that he can personally witness the killing of Krishna. On their arrival at Mathura, Krishna and Balram were greeted by all people very warmly. They praised them for their activities, offered them fruits and flowers, and prayed to God that they may successfully dethrone and kill Kamsa so that they may be free from his tyranny and cruelty. Kamsa arranged a number of gladiators to fight with Krishna and Balram, he also arranged for two great wrestlers, Chanura and Mushtica to fight with the boys.

All the guests and spectators, which included royalty and ordinary citizens of Mathura were first horrified, and became apprehensive as to how the young boys would ever be able to face such strong and wicked opponents, but, Krishna and Balram by virtue of their divine powers defeated and killed all of them easily to the astonishment of everybody. Finally they pulled down Kamsa from his throne and Krishna killed him, true to the prophecy. There was great rejoicing not only in the court, in the royal palace, but throughout Mathura. Krishna liberated his parents Vasudeva and Devaki who once again had the pleasure of a long lost parenthood of a divine child. Ugrasena, the imprisoned father of Kamsa was once again seated on the throne and Krishna remained only as the most important royal counselor and virtually the chief guide for the kingdom of Vrishni (also known as Yadava) with Dwaraka as the capital.

In later years Krishna sided with the army of the Pandavas who fought the great Mahabharata war with the Kauravas and delivered in the battle field, the famous 'Bhagavad-Gita' which even today serves as the most accepted guiding authority for the Hindu way of life.

**In this story we learn that the Supreme Power of God can never be defeated and will be duly associated with all human activities. Also wicked people with evil minds will ultimately succumb to their own plans, and that there is a world of illusion which has to be recognized by one and all.**

## 6. Parikshit

At some time or other many of us have felt that something has happened to us because of our fate or destiny, to illustrate the possibility of this there is an interesting episode in Indian mythology.

Parikshit Maharaj was a descendant of the Pandavas of the Mahabharata epic, he came to be known as a very noble and great king loved by everyone in his kingdom. He was very fond of hunting and killing deer, one day while hunting, a deer got wounded and ran away in the forest. The king ran after the deer but he could not find it, but he came across an Ashram belonging to a sage called Shamika who was then in a deep meditation. The king asked him several times if he had seen any wounded deer, but the sage would not answer him as he was observing silence.

The king was upset as he thought he was being ignored by an ordinary hermit, and in a frivolous mood he picked up a dead snake and put it around the neck of Shamika, he then returned to his palace. In the meanwhile Shamika's son, Shringi arrived and saw a dead snake around the neck of his father, he was furious, he uttered a powerful curse that whoever had placed such a dead snake around the neck of his father would die within seven days due to a deadly bite by a poisonous snake, the king of snakes, Takshika. But Shamika felt sorry at his son's curse because he felt that the King Parikshit was a kind and noble person and acted innocently, he immediately sent information about his son's curse to the king so that he may take the necessary precautions to avert it.

On hearing this, the king repented very much but it was too late, after consulting his ministers, the royal doctor, and other officials in his palace, he decided to live the next seven days in complete seclusion in a special building entirely surrounded by a pond full of water so that no snake could come close to him, he however was being supplied with regular food and water after careful inspection that no snake ever slipped into it. He had occasional visits from his advisors and relatives.

Thus, at the end of the seven days, the king thought he had escaped the danger of being bitten by any snake. However during the last minutes of his secluded position, with a feeling of absolute safety, he desired to eat some of the fruit brought to him by his admirers. Inside one of these fruits was a small worm with bright eyes which was nothing but the snake king Takshika in disguise, on opening the fruit the worm jumped on the king and killed him instantly. All present immediately realized what has happened because of the powerful curse of Shringi and prayed to God for the soul of the king to rest in peace.

**This story emphasizes that however much one wishes to change the destiny of oneself, by worldly and material measures, it cannot be done as the power of karma and destiny are much stronger. There is a lesson that one should not do any wrong even in a frivolous mood as some negative aspects will result.**

## 7. Prahlada

We have been told by wise men that God is every where and anywhere. This means that in every object we see and in every act we do, we are connected with God, there is 'Godliness', some unknown power beyond our own control, to illustrate this concept there is an interesting episode in Indian mythological legends.

Once upon a time there was a demon king by the name of Hiranyakashipu, he became so powerful that he conquered the entire Universe and obtained much powers and boons by which he could not be killed by any human or beast, inside or outside his palace, neither on earth nor in heaven. His rule was a terror not only to human beings but also to some of the Devas who ruled various kingdoms in heaven. He did not like it that

anybody could worship any other as God except himself, as time passed, a son was born to him. He was very beautiful, chubby, always smiling, even in his cradle he was able to say "*Narayana*", "*Narayana*" the name of the God whom he had realized as the true savior of the Universe. This was not liked by his father Hiranyakashipu, so when the boy became of age the demon king handed him to a Guru and gave strict instructions that the boy should never think of any God except himself as the true God.

The Guru tried his best to follow the instructions of the demon king, but he failed and on the other hand found that the boy was slowly converting others also to believe that Vishnu was the true Lord who preserves and saves the world. To prevent this trend, the Guru, overcome with fear of punishment by the king, handed over the young Prahlad back to his father and begged him to be excused for his failure. The king tried through his wife, his ministers and other court officials to convert his son, but Prahlada was very adamant and continued to pray openly "*Narayana-Narayana*".

Finally one day he told his son that if he does not change his attitude he would have him killed, to which Prahlada replied that he had no powers to do anything against the wishes of Lord Vishnu and continued to pray "*Narayana-Narayana*". The King then decided to have his son killed and arranged to put Prahlada to several types of tortures like throwing him from the top of a hill, throwing him into the sea with heavy weights, setting him on fire etc. but young Prahalada was always saved from all these tortures by Vishnu himself and Prahlada remained safe and became more devoted to the Lord. Every one was surprised at the miraculous escapes which Prahalda had and wondered what would happen next.

One day the king called his son to the court and asked him where Lord Vishnu was, Prahlada replied that He exists at all times, everywhere and anywhere. In a fit of anger the king asked him if he existed in a pillar nearby. Prahlada replied humbly and with great devotion to the Lord 'Yes, He exists everywhere and even in this pillar' thereupon, Hiranyakashipu lifted his mace and struck the pillar, out of the broken pillar then emerged a figure,

'half lion, half man' which, legends have called "*Narasimha*" an incarnation of the Lord Vishnu.

He took the demon king in his hands, dragged him to the boundaries of the palace, kept him on his lap and tore him to pieces by which the earlier boons and powers gained by the demon king were negated because he was killed by neither a full beast, nor a full man, neither inside nor outside the palace, neither on earth nor in heaven.

All the palace staff including the queen were amazed and horrified at the sight, but they were also pleased to have been relieved from the tyranny of the demon king, and witnessed the Lord Himself. Prahlada stood in great devotion praying "*Narayana Narayana*", he thereafter became known as 'Bhakta Prahlada' meaning the great Prahlada endowed with devotion and love of God

**In this story we learn two important things; (1) God, or Godliness. the great Power of Lord Vishnu the preserver of the Universe, is present at all times, every where, in all objects in any form that may not be easily noticeable and (2) A steady mind, and a devoted faith in one's objective, as Prahlada had in Vishnu, will remove even deadly types of obstacles in one's own progress.**

## 8. Sudama

Sudama was a poor man belonging to the Brahmin caste and living in a remote village of Dwaraka then ruled by Krishna, the hero of the Mahabharata, he made a living by teaching young children, and after he got married he had a daughter whom he loved very much. But he was always feeling very sad because he could not afford a good dress for her. The family also suffered very much for not having enough food for everybody. One day unable to see misery in the eyes of her husband, his wife suggested that he should go and see Krishna about whom Sudama spoke many times.

But Sudama was hesitant as he was not sure whether the King would recognize a childhood friend in torn clothes etc. he also felt he had nothing to offer as a present for the King Krishna. His wife suggested that she has some puffed rice to spare and Krishna may love to eat it as was his childhood favorite. Though Sudama did not relish this idea, he finally consented and started on his journey to the royal palace of Krishna.

On reaching the palace Sudama was so exhausted that he virtually collapsed in front of the palace. Some of the servants of Krishna helped him up. Sudama told them that he had come from a remote village for meeting his old friend Krishna and that he wished to be taken to him. The servants wondered how such a poor man in virtual rags could be a friend of the King. However on his repeating the request the servants went up to Krishna who was then socializing with his favorite wife Rukmini and who would not normally liked to be disturbed at that time, but on hearing the name of Sudama, Krishna rushed out of the palace and recognized his old friend, received him in his arms gave him first a comfortable place for resting a while, he then gave him food for recovering from his exhaustion.

After some time after Sudama recovered, Krishna spoke to him for many hours, and enjoyed recalling their old happy days. Krishna then noticed a small bag of something by the side of Sudama and realized that he would have brought a gift for him but was perhaps hesitating to give it to him, so Krishna grabbed the bag and found the puffed rice sent by Sudama's wife and started eating it with great pleasure. Both were very happy and Krishna wanted Sudama to stay in the palace permanently, but Sudama expressed his desire to go back to his family and village. Krishna then dispatched some of his men to Sudama's village in advance, and had a house built for Sudama and filled it with grains and supplies, on return to his village, Sudama was greatly surprised with what Krishna had done for him.

**Moral: Some childhood friendships or childhood bondage and attachments will last long throughout one's life, irrespective of any adverse developments.**

## 9. Prahlada

From the great epic Ramayan we learnt that Lanka consisted of demonic people once ruled by the demon Ravana with ten heads, these ten heads symbolically represent evils that can possess a person. His kingdom consisted of people with all sorts evil habits like drinking, killings etc. When Ravana abducted Sita, the wife of Rama he had hidden her in his royal garden guarded by women folk from his kingdom. Later Hanuman, the monkey soldier of Rama's friend Sugriva, of the Kishkinda kingdom, visited Lanka to save Sita, and was surprised to see that the woman guards of Sita were in a drunken state.

In fact Hanuman observed that nobody did any serious work in Lanka and people drank all day and made merry. Ravana also had two other brothers Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana, while Kumbhakarna was noted for his enormous eating habits and slept for extended periods, Vibhishana was the only virtuous man in the entire kingdom with noble ideas and deeds to his credit. It was indeed a mystery how in such an environment, there could be a man with such high virtuous qualities.

During the great war between the armies of Rama and Ravana, Vibhishana with his own personal army approached Rama's camp with a white flag indicating he wanted peace and wanted to save the people of Lanka from total destruction. He confessed that his brother Ravana had done great harm and should be punished. Initially Rama's aids doubted Vibhishana words, but as Rama declared that anybody approaching him with a white flag was to be treated as an honored guest, Vibhishana was shown all due courtesy and was presented before Rama.

On hearing Vibhishana's story Rama immediately declared that on the defeat of Ravana and his army, Vibhishana would be made the king of Lanka, Vibhishana revealed many secrets under which Ravana had been ruling and exposed many weaknesses of Ravana's army. During that battle that ensued, it was found that even though Rama was chopping off the heads of Ravana they were coming up again in their respective places, this was indeed a puzzle to Rama.

Vibhishana then revealed that the epic-center of Ravana's life was not in his heart or heads but in his stomach, Rama then aimed his arrow at Ravana's stomach and killed him. Finally, when the battle was over and all the soldiers, aids and demonic relatives of Ravana including his son, were killed, the gates of Lanka royal palace were opened for Vibhishana and he was declared the successor king of Lanka, and the Lankan people returned to righteous living.

Vibhishana was also given a special seat in the flower decked air-borne vehicle (Pushpak Vimana) in which Rama flew back to the capital of his kingdom, Ayodhya. During the coronation ceremony of Rama, Vibhishana received several praises and honors for his virtues and vitality and he was given a given a royal farewell to go back to Lanka with great dignity to establish himself as the true and just ruler of Lanka

**This story emphasizes how with true virtue and vitality one can establish oneself on earth and convert many other evil persons to righteous living**