

CHAPTER FOUR



Matsya



Kurma



Varaha



Narasimha



Vamana



Parasurama



Rama



Balarama



Krishna



Kalki

DASHA AVATAR

DASHA AVATAR (TEN INCARNATIONS OF LORD VISHNU)

INTRODUCTION

Whenever Dharma (righteousness) declines and Adharma (evil) prospers, Lord Vishnu whose duty it is to preserve this world often bodies himself forth to restore the balance in the world. Vishnu took nine avatars, tenth one is yet to come. They are: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Balarama and Krishna. The tenth one will be Kalki. *Srimad Bhagavatam*, a very sacred scripture deals with these avatars of Lord Vishnu. It was written by Sage Veda Vyasa.

The Avatar concept is closely related to the measurement of time in Hindu theology, which has its basis on one working day of Lord Brahma.

According to the *Bhagwat Purana*, Brahma, the creator, is the causal effect of the predetermined periodic creation and dissolution of the universe.

Each creation or *Kalpa* is equal to one day and each dissolution or *Pralaya* is equal to one night in the life of Brahma. A *Kalpa* and a *Pralaya* last for 4,320 million human years each.

Every *Kalpa* has 1000 cycles of 4 *Yugas* (ages). The 4 *Yugas* are called *Krita* or *Satya*, *Treta*, *Dwapara* and *Kali*. Each cycle of 4 *Yugas* is completed in 4,320,000 human years.

Dasha Avatar starts with the form of a lowly fish and work up to a noble man, cast in the image of God. The fanciful find a parallel to Darwin's theory of evolution in the progression of these avatars.

The Avatars enable the common folk to speak of or listen to stories of divine doings, which are a simple way of proceeding towards Godhead, particularly in this *Kali Yuga*.

1. MATSYA AVATARA (FISH-INCARNATION)

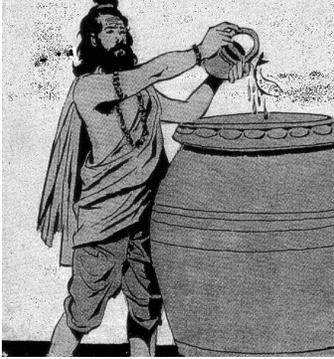
Matsya, the Fish, is the first incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the course of the Deluge; He saved humanity's forebears from the flood and also the Vedas.

At the end of the previous *kalpa* (creation) Lord Brahma went to sleep. When Brahma was sleeping an asura by name *Hayagriva* (a horse-faced demon who resided at the bottom of the ocean) stole the Vedas from him. Lord Vishnu decided to retrieve the Vedas from the asura and



took the form of a fish.

There was, then, a king by name Satyavrata who ruled the world at that time. He was a saint among men: a great devotee of Lord Narayana (another name of Vishnu).



One day Satyavrata was performing his morning ablutions on the banks of the river Kritamala. When he had taken up the water in his cupped palms he found a tiny fish in the water held in his hands. When he was about to drop it back into the river, the fish spoke in a human voice and said, "O kind King, do not throw me back into the water. I am afraid that other creatures of the river will soon eat me up." The king was touched by the appeal in the voice of the fish. He dropped the fish into his kamandalu and took it to his hermitage.

That night, however, the fish grew and grew till it filled the whole kamandalu. In the morning when Satyavrata went to see if it was all right, the fish said, "O king, this kamandalu is too small; please find a more spacious vessel for me." The king placed it in a large pot filled with water. Within an hour the fish had outgrown the pot. Satyavrata then placed it in a pond and the same thing happened. The king kept on placing it in larger and larger areas filled with water and yet the fish had not enough space to move about. It grew so big; the king finally took it to the sea and dropped it there. The fish said, "O valiant king, do not leave me here and go. The gigantic creatures of the sea may eat me."



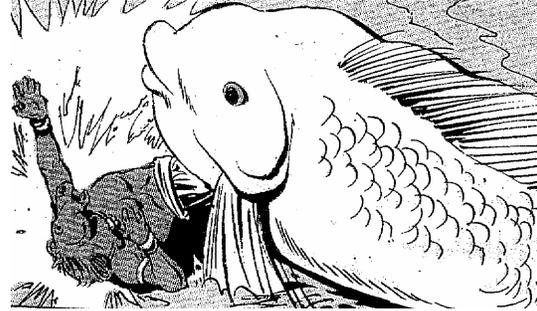
Satyavrata smiled slightly and said, "You are a very strange fish. I have neither seen nor heard of a wonderful creature like you. In one day you have grown big enough to cover the largest of lakes. You are no ordinary fish. I know who you are. You are Lord Narayana."

Satyavrata prostrated himself before the fish and said, "I know you assume different forms and come to earth for the good of all. Since you have revealed yourself to me please tell me why you have taken this form."

The Lord in the form of fish said, "You are right. I have taken this form with a purpose. Seven days from today the three worlds will be submerged under the waters. Mahapralaya (Dissolution of creation) is coming. When the

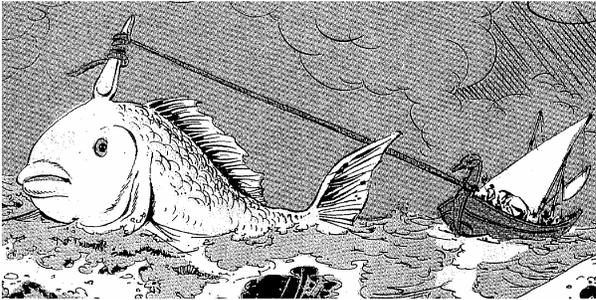
world goes completely under, a spacious boat sent by me will approach you. Be on the look out for it. When you see it you will have to enter it. Meanwhile, you must collect all the herbs and seeds and animals you want for the next kalpa. Then, along with the sapta rihis (seven sages), get into the boat and await me. Don't forget to bring Vasuki, king of the serpents with you." Then the fish set off on its other mission.

The fish approached the asura Hyagriva who stole the Vedas from Brahma; the asura was filled with terror on seeing the gigantic fish coming towards him. He did not want to lose the Vedas. But Lord Narayana in the form of fish soon put an end to him and retrieved the Vedas from him.



On the seventh day Satyavrata saw dark clouds enveloping the heavens and the rains came. The earth was fast disappearing and, at a distance he saw the promised boat coming fast towards him. As soon as the boat touched the shores, Satyavrata, along with the sapta rishis and the select living creatures, entered it.

Satyavrata and sapta rishis were meditating on the Lord. As their boat was tossed about by the turbulent ocean, they suddenly saw the fish approach them. It had a



horn now and was golden in color. It lit up the darkening skies, reassuring the inmates of the boat. As instructed by the Lord, Satyavrata tied the boat to the horn of the fish using Vasuki as a rope.

When they sailed on that vast expanse of water, throughout that night of Brahma, Vishnu taught Satyavrata and sapta rishis the Atma Vidya (Self-knowledge).

Lord Vishnu restored the Vedas to Brahma at the end of the Pralaya. When the world was re-created, king Satyavrata was born as Swayambhuva Manu, the progenitor of mankind. ■

Activity 28
(Matsya-avatara)

Fill in the blanks.

Complete the following story with the appropriate words given below.

Vedas Hyagriva safety danger fish Satyavrata

1. The asura _____ once stole the Vedas and hid them under the waters.
2. The Lord took the incarnation of a _____ .
3. One day, while praying, King _____ found a small fish in the palm of his hands.
4. The king and the seven sages were led to _____ during the dissolution of the world.
5. The Lord killed the asura and restored the _____ .

2. KURMA AVATARA (TORTOISE-INCARNATION)

Kurma, the tortoise, is the second incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the course of the churning of the milky ocean (*Samudramathana*); He supported the Mount Mandara, which started sinking when the gods and the demons churned the ocean to get Amrita (ambrosia).

Rishi Durvasa was once insulted by the proud Indra, the king of devas (gods). So the rishi cursed Indra that he and the three worlds ruled by him should lose all his glory and prosperity. As a result, the gods became very weak and the asuras (demons) became very strong and powerful. Indra, pale, drawn, and lustreless went to Brahma on Mount Meru. Brahma did not know what to do. So Brahma, Indra and other devas went to Sri Vishnu, and asked Him to help them.



To the distressed devas, Lord Vishnu said, "The asuras are now powerful. So make peace with them. Ask their help in churning the Milky Ocean. Make Mount Mandara as a churning-rod and Vasuki, the king of the serpents, as the rope for turning it. As a result of this, Amrita shall come out; drinking which you shall all become immortal and regain your lost sovereignty."

"Be kind and courteous to the asuras. They will help you to churn the ocean. You will see many things coming out of it. But do not express any anger, greed or desire for them. Your aim is only the Amrita and I shall help you to get it," said Lord Vishnu to the devas.

Brahma returned to his own abode while Indra and the devas set out for the court of Bali, the king of asuras and the grandson of Prahlada. Indra explained to him Sri Vishnu's plan for churning the ocean. Bali was a wise and clever commander and he knew this was not the time to fight but to make peace. So he agreed to the plans of the devas. The devas and their cousins, asuras then went to the Mount Mandara and uprooted the golden mountain. They carried it to the seashore. The mountain however was too heavy for them and they dropped it on the way and a number of devas and asuras were crushed under it. Indra prayed to Lord Vishnu for help. Soon Lord Vishnu came on his Garuda vahana. With the



mere glance He revived the devas and then, placing Mount Mandara on Garuda's back, He flew to the seashore, followed by the devas and the asuras. After the mountain was safely deposited on the ocean Sri Vishnu summoned Vasuki, the serpent king to be the churning rope and said that Vasuki would receive his share of nectar and the jagged surface of Mandara would not hurt the serpent king at all. Reassured, Vasuki allowed himself to be wound round Mandara.

The asuras wanted to hold the mouth end of the snake so the devas headed by Sri Vishnu went to the tail end. Thus holding the two ends of the snake the devas and the asuras began to churn the ocean.



In spite of the many powerful arms that were engaged in the task the mountain Mandara sank into the ocean because of its great weight. Sri Vishnu assumed the form of a Giant Tortoise - Kurma. He dived to the bottom of the ocean and lifted the mountain up on His back.

The churning went on. Pulled powerfully in both the directions Vasuki could not bear it. Fire and smoke came out of the thousand mouths of Vasuki. The devas and the asuras started suffocating. The Lord took pity on everyone and commanded the rain clouds to collect and cool the air. The rains came and a soft cool breeze blew from the ocean. The devas and the asuras continued their churning.

The first thing that came out of the ocean was the most deadly poison Halahala! Its poisonous fumes choked the devas and the asuras. In sheer terror they went to Kailasa and took refuge at the feet of Lord Shiva. Shiva gathered all the poison in the palm of his hand and swallowed it up. But his consort, Mother Parvati, fearing for her Lord, quickly caught his throat with her hands. So the dread Kalakuta stayed there forever staining the white neck of the Lord with blue. So Lord Shiva is also known as Neelakanta.



As soon as the poison was removed, the devas and the asuras were able to churn the ocean once again. As they continued churning, many precious things rose to the surface. They are:

- A sacred sacrificial vessel called Surabhi, and
- A beautiful wish-yielding cow, Kamadhenu, claimed by the Rishis.

- The famous white horse, Uchchaishravas, taken by Bali.
- A magnificent white elephant, Airavata, given to Indra.
- The Kaustubha gem, lotus-colored and beautiful, adorned the chest of Sri Vishnu.
- The Parijata tree or Kalpavriksha, which fulfills all wishes, and
- Beautiful women called apsaras, given to Indra.
- Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, chose Vishnu as her husband and the Lord placed her on his chest. Brahma, Shiva and all the gods worshipped Her; the rishis chanted Vedic hymns and sprinkled on Her holy water from golden pots.



- A lotus-eyed beauty called Sura or Varuni, the goddess of all intoxicating drinks, taken by the asuras.
- At last came a magnificent youth, Dhanvantari, an amsa (part) of Lord Vishnu, with the jar of Amrita (ambrosia) in his hands.

When the asuras saw this, they were filled with greed. They snatched the jar from the hands of the divine youth, and even started fighting among themselves for the Amrita. Taking this opportunity Lord Vishnu took the form of Mohini, the enchantress. She was so lovely that at once all the asuras fell in love with her. They gave her the pot of Amrita and asked her to distribute it to whomsoever she pleased. Mohini said, "I will do so if you promise not to question my actions." Not knowing who she really was, the asuras readily agreed in a frenzy of passion.

Mohini (Lord Vishnu) knew that it was not right to give Amrita, the nectar of immortality to the asuras who are aggressive by nature. She therefore asked the devas and the asuras to assemble in two different rows and began distributing the Amrita to the devas.



Rahu, one of the daityas (asuras), had disguised himself as a deva and had sat with them. He also got Amrita and swallowed it. Surya and Chandra (the Sun and the Moon) soon spotted him, and Sri Vishnu cut off his head with His chakra. Since he had already tasted Amrita he was immortal. His body that had not absorbed Amrita fell down senseless,

lifeless; but his head was alive. Brahma made Rahu one of the planets, which causes the eclipses of the Sun and the Moon, showing his (Rahu's) eternal enmity to them.

By the time Mohini reached the end of the row of devas, she made sure that the nectar was exhausted. Then Lord Vishnu assumed His own form and left the place on the back of Garuda. The daityas suddenly woke up from their infatuation and were furious when they learnt how they had been cheated. They launched a terrible war against the devas. But the devas were immortal with Sri Vishnu on their side. So the asuras suffered a miserable defeat.

Thus the devas who were gentle in nature sought refuge in Lord and regained their lost sovereignty. ■



Activity 29 (Kurma-avatara)

Fill in the blanks

Complete the story with the appropriate words.

Rama	mountain	devas	Mohini	asuras
kurma	snake	Ravana	Dhanvantari	pole

1. The _____ and _____ fought many wars in the heavens.
2. To churn the ocean the devas used the _____ Mandara as a churning staff.
3. The _____ Vasuki was the churning rope.
4. The Lord incarnated as a _____ to hold the mountain on his back.
5. The Lord also incarnated as _____ to distract the asuras.
6. The Lord came as _____ with the nectar of immortality.

Activity 30 (Kurma-avatara)

Identify the items that emerged during the churning of the ocean.

1. Her milk was used for Vedic rituals. _____
2. It was swallowed by Lord Shiva. _____
3. She married Lord Narayana. _____
4. The tusker that was given to Indra. _____
5. Bali took this white animal. _____
6. The Lord wore it as an ornament. _____
7. It was known as the Parijata. _____

3. VARAHA AVATARA (BOAR-INCARNATION)

Varaha, the boar, is the third incarnation of Lord Vishnu; He killed the demon Hiranyaksha and lifted the earth out of the floodwaters in which it had been submerged.

After Pralaya, and at the beginning of the present kalpa, while Brahma was busy in the work of creation, Bhudevi (Mother Earth) being tossed about on the waves sank to the bed of the ocean and Swayambhuva Manu, the first man and Shatarupa, the first woman came into being.



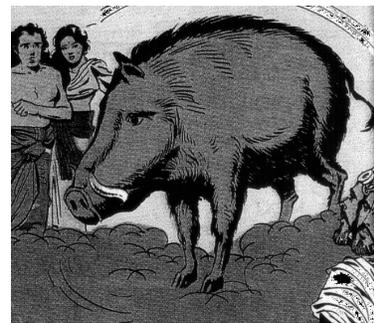
Manu and Shatarupa approached Lord Brahma and bowed to Him. Manu asked his father how he might serve Him in the process of creation. Brahma said to him, "Beget many virtuous children and rule over the earth, for you shall be the ruler of men."

Manu said, "I shall obey your wishes. But please let me know where my progeny and I should live. Bhudevi lies submerged."

Brahma was troubled. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I will have to bring the earth up to proceed with the work of creation." He prayed to Lord Narayana, "O Lord Vishnu, it's you who commanded me to create the entire universe; please help me to solve this problem."

As Brahma meditated on the Lord, a tiny boar, hardly as big as his thumb, emerged from one of his nostrils. Brahma wondered what weird creature it was, coming out of his nostril. As Brahma gazed at it amazed, it grew and grew till it was the size of a large elephant. Brahma was full of wonder and thought if that could be Lord Vishnu Himself.

While Brahma pondered thus, the boar, which was now as large as a huge mountain, roared. Then, emitting another terrifying roar, it took one mighty leap into the air, tore the clouds with its hoofs and dived into the ocean. Brahma was now sure that it was none other than Lord Vishnu.



The boar nosed its way about the ocean-bed, in search of the earth. It reached the other end of that fathomless ocean and discovered Bhudevi.

Meanwhile, the mighty asura, Hiranyaksha, one of the twin sons of Sage Kashyapa and Diti, entered Indraloka

(Heaven) and roared out a challenge. But he found no one there. Everyone one, including Indra was in hiding. So he went into the ocean and challenged its ruler, Varuna. Varuna was old, wise and shrewd. He said to Hiranyaksha, "I am too old now. I have given up fighting since long ago. The desire to fight has left me. Lord Vishnu is the one you should approach. He alone would be an equal opponent to you. Go seek him out."



Hiranyaksha, thirsting for a good fight, went in search of Sri Vishnu. Sage Narada told him that Vishnu had taken the form of a boar to lift the earth up from the oceanic waters. So Hiranyaksha charged towards the ocean-bed. The boar had just dug his tusk into the ocean-bed and lifting Bhudevi onto it begun rising towards the surface.

Hiranyaksha challenged the beast with a roar, "Come on, you beast! I know you are Narayana. Leave Bhudevi alone. Brahma has entrusted her to us. You cannot take her away. Till now you have been defeating the asuras by your Yogamaya (power of illusory creation). Not anymore. Now I have found you. I shall fight you and avenge all the asuras you have killed."

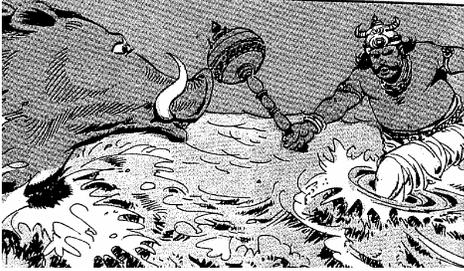
The boar ignored him and continued lifting the earth up. Hiranyaksha pursued Him, all the while jeering that He was a coward, fleeing from a worthy challenge. But the boar did not even look back. Lord's aim was first to take Bhudevi to safety.

After coming to the surface of the ocean, Sri Vishnu firmly placed Bhudevi on it and blessed her so that the earth may continue functioning on its own. He then turned towards Hiranyaksha and said, "O wretch, scared away by your mace, we who have stolen the earth must take our stand in the battlefield. For, having incurred the wrath of a powerful enemy, where can we go?"

Hiranyaksha became furious; He lifted his mace and sprang towards the animal. But the boar stepped aside and raised his own. They fought for a long while, each striking out with his mace. Everyone came to watch this magnificent fight.



As the hour of twilight drew near, Brahma reminded the boar that the asuras become stonger as night draws nearer and so to rid the world from that sinner right away.



Hearing Brahma's words, Hiranyaksha hurled his mace at the animal. Varaha caught the mace as if it were a toy. They then began to wrestle with each other. Finally with his strong and very powerful fist the Lord in the form of Varaha killed Hiranyaksha.

The beings of the three worlds wept in joyous relief, and rejoicingly burst into praise of Mahavishnu. ■

Activity 31

(Varaha-avatara)

Fill in the blanks

Complete the story with the appropriate words.

creation	tusk	sword
boar	lion	Earth
		Hiranyaksha

1. Mother _____ was submerged in the oceanic waters.
2. Lord Vishnu, as a _____, jumped into the deep waters.
3. There he fought the rakshasa named _____.
4. He lifted Mother Earth on his _____ and saved her.
5. Thus the process of _____ continued uninterrupted.

4. NARASIMHA AVATARA (MAN-LION INCARNATION)

Narasimha, the Man-lion, is the fourth incarnation of Lord Vishnu; He killed the demon Hiranyakasipu who was a non-believer in the existence of an omnipresent and omnipotent God and who tortured his own son Prahlada, a great devotee of Lord Vishnu, by emerging out of a pillar shown by the demon.



Hiranyakasipu was an asura (demon) King. He was a mighty ruler but evil minded. He hated God. He hated God because his brother Hiranyaksha was killed by the incarnation of Lord Vishnu - Varaha Avatara. Hiranyaksha challenged Lord Vishnu while He was lifting the earth from the bottom of the ocean of Pralaya and was killed during the fight. Hiranyakasipu vowed to avenge the death of his brother. He went to Mount Mandara and performed the most rigorous "meditation" - tapas. Anthills and grass grew on him but he did not move. The force of his tapas was so great that the earth rocked, the waters of the oceans raised high, the mountains toppled over and the stars and planets darted about in panic. And many places just caught fire! Unable to tolerate the destruction caused by his tapas, the devas went to Brahma the creator and pleaded with him to save them from the disaster. Brahma went to Hiranyakasipu's ashram and was amazed at his tapas. He took some water from his Kamandalu, and sprinkling it on Hiranyakasipu, asked him what boon he wanted.

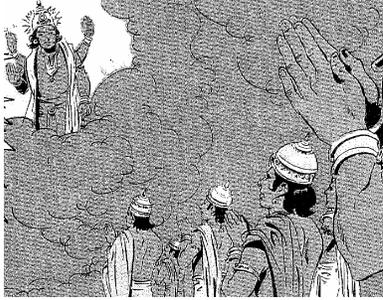


The holy water rejuvenated the asura. He emerged handsome and radiant. Immediately Hiranyakasipu prostrated before Brahma and said, "Lord, grant me this boon. Let me not die in the hands of any being created by you, nor at the hands of any being not created by you, be it god, man, demon, animal or even an inanimate thing. Let it not be by day or by night, indoors or outdoors, in the sky or on the earth; let it not be by any weapon whatsoever." Hiranyakasipu also wanted complete sovereignty in the worlds of men, demons and gods.

"So be it - Tathaastu" granted Brahma, the creator of the Universe.

On the strength of his boon, Hiranyakasipu became arrogant. He conquered the three worlds and became their

supreme overlord. He hated God so much that he wanted the people in his kingdom to disregard all the scriptures and offer prayers to him only. People were fed up with his rule of terror. They secretly prayed to Lord Vishnu.



The devas in desperation approached Lord Narayana and asked for his help. Lord Vishnu consoled them and said, "Have patience, O devas. I know the evil that is the asura. He will be a father of a good son who will be devoted to me. When the asura seeks to kill my devotee, I shall slay him in spite of his boon from Brahma." Comforted by his words devas went away from his presence and patiently waited for the good times to come.

Hiranyakasipu became the father of four sons and the youngest of them was Prahlada. From birth itself, he was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu (*Hari Bhakta*). When Prahlada was five years old he started learning the daitya lessons from his teachers Chanda and Amarka, the sons of Sukracharya (the guru of the asuras). He repeated the lessons to please the gurus (teachers) but he did not approve of them in his heart.

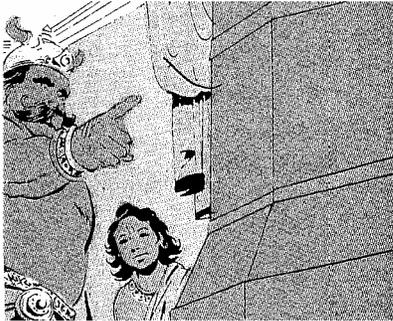
Some time passed. The gurus thought they could now present him to his father. And so they took young Prahlada to the presence of Hiranyakasipu. Prahlada did his salutations to his father. With tears of joy Hiranyakasipu took his child and placed him on his lap. He then asked his child to tell him of something what he had learnt.

Prahlada replied, "Father, I have learnt NINE important lessons which will help me." "And what are they?" asked the father. "They are", the child replied, "Shravana, listening: Kirtana, Singing: Smarana, Meditation: Padasevana, serving: Archana, Praising: Vandana, Worshipping: Dasya, slaving: Sakhyam, Friendship and Atmanivedana, Surrender of the self." Hiranya was very happy that Prahlada had learnt his lessons well. He thought he would be immensely pleased if Prahlada follows any one of these methods to serve him. But Prahlada said, "Father, these are the methods of worshipping Narayana. The Lord, who is all pervading, can be approached by any one of these nine methods and that is the lesson I have been fortunate enough to learn."



Hiranyakasipu was really furious that his son praises his dread enemy, Narayana, who killed his beloved brother. He ordered the asuras to kill the child. The asuras pierced the little boy with their pointed and poison-tipped spears and tridents. But nothing happened to Prahlada, for his mind was concentrated upon the Lord, and the brave boy did not even feel the spear and trident thrusts!

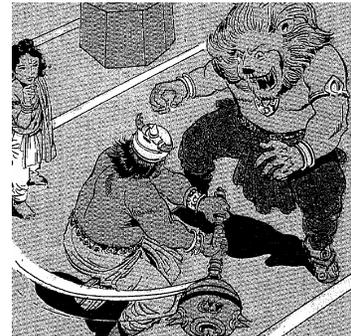
The asura king tried various means of putting Prahlada to death. He ordered him to be trampled upon by a mad elephant. The enraged animal came rushing towards Prahlada, but stopped just a few yards away, bowed its head and turned away! Prahlada was then rolled down a mountain. His food was poisoned. He was bitten by poisonous snakes. He was locked up in a solitary cell for days without food. He was thrown into the sea. He was burnt by fire. But he always came out of them safe and sound! This is the grace of the Lord - *Narayana Kripa*.



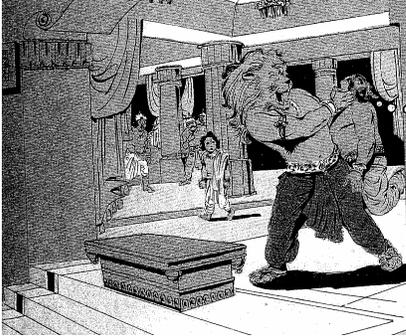
Hiranyakasipu was now thoroughly frustrated. It was a challenge to his authority and a tremendous blow to his pride. Due to his boon from Brahma, he had never known failure. The teachers of Prahlada tried to calm Hiranyakasipu by saying that Prahlada was still too small to know what he was saying and that in time he would learn to behave like true daitya.

But Prahlada did not change. He continued to repeat Lord Vishnu's name. He also taught young kids of his age to chant the names of Lord Vishnu. This news reached Hiranyakasipu. He was very angry and ordered the young Prahlada to be brought before him. He told Prahlada that time and again he has disobeyed him by praying to Lord Vishnu. He asked Prahlada where Lord Vishnu is. Prahlada folded his palms before his father and humbly said, "He is everywhere."

"Everywhere?" asked Hiranyakasipu. His red eyes came to rest on a huge pillar in the council hall. He asked Prahlada "Is he then, inside this pillar?" "Yes, He is," replied Prahlada. "I am going to kill you. If he is in this pillar let him come out and protect you," said Hiranyakasipu. He jumped down from his seat and hit the pillar with his strong and powerful fist.



Suddenly the pillar split into two and out of the pillar came a mighty being - half man - half lion (Narasimha). He was the man-lion avatara of Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakasipu lifted his iron mace to strike him. But the Narasimha roared a tremendous roar, which was like a man's laughter and a lion's roar put together. With a great ease, He picked Hiranyakasipu, carried him to the door of the hall, sat on the threshold and placed him on his lap across his thighs.



Hiranyakasipu looked helplessly around. It was neither day nor night but twilight hour. He was on the threshold of the hall that was neither inside the house nor outside it. He was caught by a strange creature that was neither a man nor a beast. He was placed on the lap that was neither in the sky nor on the earth. With a great roar Narasimha

tore open his belly with his claws and killed Hiranyakasipu without using any weapons. Thus Lord Vishnu took the Narasimha form and killed him satisfying all the conditions in the boon the asura got. He also killed all his wicked supporters. There was a great rejoicing in the three worlds.

Flowers showered on Him from above. Prahlada prostrated in front of Lord Vishnu and praised Him. Lord Vishnu placed His hand on the head of His little devotee and asked him whatever wish he wants. Prahlada did not want any boon except the everlasting devotion - *Bhakti* - and love for Lord Vishnu.

And the Lord blessed him; "You have asked me for no reward. Yet it is my wish that you should rule as a King and enjoy". Prahlada bowed his head in obedience to the wish of Lord Vishnu.

Thus did Vishnu, by the faith of his devotee, prevent the triumph of evil and establish virtue. ■

* It was Jaya and Vijaya, the two gatekeepers of Vaikunta (the abode of Sri Vishnu), who were born as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu, the twin sons of Diti and Sage Kashyapa. Jaya and Vijaya were cursed by the four mind-born sons (Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana and Sanatkumara) of Brahma because they did not allow the four rishis to see Lord Vishnu and worship Him. Their position by the side of the Lord made them proud. So they were cursed to be away from Narayana. They were born as the above said asuras in their first janma (birth) in Satya Yuga. KRODHA (anger) was predominant in them and it was accompanied by MADA (arrogance). They were finally killed by Lord Himself in Varaha avatara and Narasimha avatara and went back to Him.

Activity 32**(Narasimha-avatara)****Matching:**

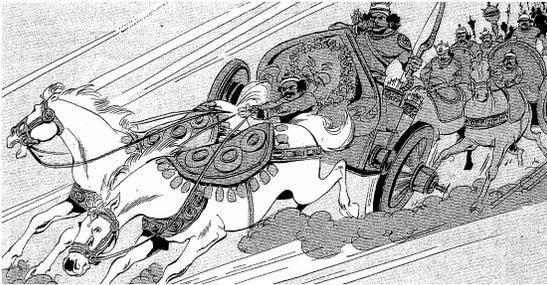
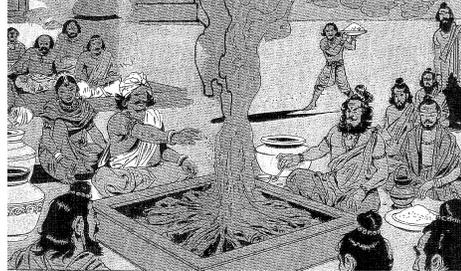
Show the relationships by drawing lines between the columns.

<u>WHO</u>	<u>RELATED TO WHOM</u>	<u>HOW</u>
Hiranyakasipu	Vishnu	brother
Jaya & Vijaya	Hiranyaksha	servants
Diti	Vishnu	wife
Prahlada	Kashyapa	son
Hiranyakasipu	Diti & Kashyapa	devotee

5. VAMANA AVATARA (DWARF-INCARNATION)

Vamana, the dwarf, is the fifth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. When Bali the asura king conquered the three worlds, Indra was deprived of his heavenly kingdom. At the request of Aditi, the mother of Indra, Lord Vishnu incarnated as Vamana, to help Indra get back his kingdom.

Bali, the son of Virochana, and the grandson of Prahlada was the king of the asuras. He had many times been defeated by Indra in battle. Now he wanted to take revenge. Guided by his guru Sukra, he performed the Vishvajit sacrifice to gain mastery over the three worlds. From the sacrificial fire he received a golden chariot, some horses, a golden bow, and two quivers with an inexhaustible supply of arrows, and a divine kavacha or protective armor.



Donning the armor, Bali mounted the chariot with the bow in his hand and the quiver fastened to his shoulder. And with an immense army he proceeded towards Indra's city by name Amaravati (built by the divine architect Vishvakarma). As Bali

laid siege to the city, Indra went to his guru Brihaspati and said, "My Lord, what should we do? Bali is now riding some strange power. We may fail in beating him back."

Brihaspati said, "You are right. Bali at the moment is invincible. No one will be able to stand up to Bali except Narayana. I would advise you to retreat from heaven till the tide turns in your favor." "And when will that be?" asked Indra. "When his guru curses him for ignoring his counsel," said Brihaspati.



So Indra and the other devas abandoned heaven. Bali promptly occupied it with his asura hordes, and became lord of the three worlds. Sukracharya (acharya=guru) told him that he could now perform Ashvamedha yagna. Bali performed a hundred Ashvamedhas. His fame spread all over the world. He was well known for his generosity and his goodness.

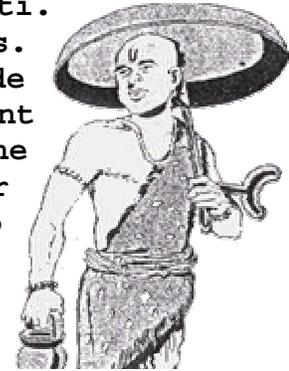


Meanwhile, Aditi, the mother of Indra and the other devas was very unhappy since her sons had been defeated. When her husband Sage Kashayapa returned after a long spell of meditation in the forest, she told him of her sorrows. Kashayapa said to her, "Worship Lord Narayana, who dwells in the hearts of all. He and he alone can help you. Pray to him." "Tell me the quickest means of doing it," asked Aditi.

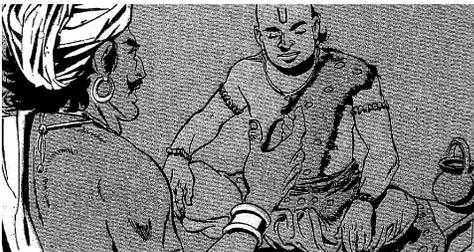
Kashyapa said, "There is a vrata by name PAYOVRATA (vow of milk). During the bright half of the month of Phalguna (lunar month corresponding to latter half of February and former half of March), you should worship Narayana day and night with only milk as your food. Recite the mantra: OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VASUDEVAYA. If you observe this vrata with intense devotion and concentration the Lord will grant your wishes."

Focusing her mind on Lord Vishnu, Aditi observed the vrata for twelve long days. On the thirteenth day the Lord appeared before her and said: "Mother of Gods, I am pleased with your vrata and I will grant you your wish. I will be born as your son to protect your progeny."

Soon the Lord was born as a son to Aditi. There was great rejoicing in the three worlds. The child grew up to a boy. He was small made and he was indeed a VAMANA, which meant 'dwarf'. When the time came Upanayana (the sacred thread ceremony) was performed for him, and Vamana was initiated into brahmacharya ashrama. The gods and goddesses presented him with all the necessary things which a brahmachari (celibate) needs. Annapurna (Goddess Parvati) gave Vamana his first Bhiksha (alms).



At this time Bali was performing an Ashvamedha yaga on the banks of the river Narmada. He had invited all the Brahmins of the land. Vamana also went there. Bali and all other priests rose to receive him. Bali gave Vamana a special seat, washed his feet with water, and sprinkled his own head with the washings. Then he prostrated before him and said, "What is it that you wish, O Brahmin? I shall give you anything you ask for, be it land, gold, houses, cows or horses."

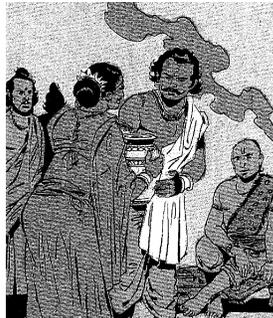


Vamana was greatly pleased by this. He said, "ALL I SEEK IS THREE PACES OF GROUND MEASURED BY MY FOOT." Bali was amazed with Vamana's humble demand. He said, "Ask a greater boon. Perhaps an island and a large comfortable house with all needs provided!" But Vamana said, "Three paces of land are all I need and three paces of land are all that I will have". Bali laughed and said, "So be it. I will grant you three paces of land measured with your Tiny Foot"; and he looked at the tiny lotus feet of the Lord in the form of a Vamana.

At that moment Sukracharya realized the truth that the dwarf is none other than Lord Vishnu himself. As Bali took the consecrating water in his palm, Sukracharya stopped him. He said, "Wait! This



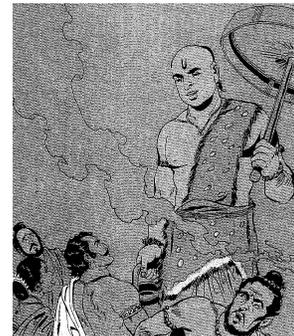
youngster is Lord Vishnu. He is here to help our enemies, the devas. He will cover the three worlds with just two steps of his and how will you give him the third? Retract from your promise. The Vedas allow it when one's life and the lives of one's dependants are at stake."

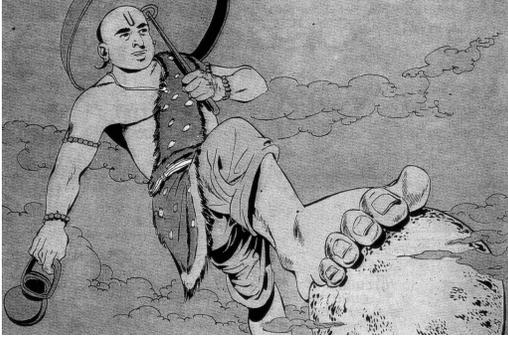


Bali was quiet for a moment. Then he said to his guru, "A word once given how I, the grandson of virtuous Prahlada, can take it back? I do not fear either hell or death for myself. But I must keep a promise given to a holy Brahmin, be he, Lord Vishnu, whom I worship daily, or be he, my worst enemy"; and Bali poured the water in front of Vamana to say: 'I have given you what you asked for.'

Sukracharya was angry because his word of advice had been disregarded. He cursed Bali: "Have you grown so arrogant as to ignore my command? You will soon lose all your wealth and glory and fall from your high position."

The curse of the Brahmin did not affect Bali. He called for his wife Vindhyavali. She brought the golden pitcher full of water. Bali and his wife sat at the feet of Vamana, washed his dear feet and took the water on their heads. Then Bali looked up and amazed to see that the form of Vamana was increasing in size. As he looked, Vamana grew bigger and bigger. With his first step he covered the entire earth.





With his second, he covered the heavens and the rest of the universe. His body filled the sky and his arms embraced the four directions. Bali and his priests were stunned to see the entire creation in him.

The enraged asuras took up arms and ran towards him. The attendants of Sri Vishnu who

were there already prepared themselves to fight with the asuras. Bali saw all this and stopped the asuras: "Pray do not make war; Retreat."

As the asuras retreated, Garuda who was standing by the side of the Lord bound Bali with ropes (Varuna Pasha).

With the intention of testing Bali further Vishnu spoke harsh words to him: "You promised me three paces of land and I have covered all that was yours in two. Where then shall I place my foot for the third pace? You will have to suffer if you do not fulfill your promise."



Bali was neither frightened nor hurt by the words of Vamana. He bowed his head in all humility and said, "Lord, please place your third step on my head, which is more valuable to me than all my possessions put together. In the eyes of the world you are supposed to have punished me for my pride and arrogance. But in reality, you have opened my inner eye-the eye of wisdom."



With all the majesty of his divine glory, Vamana placed his foot on the head of Bali for his third pace of ground and said, "Son, I take away all from him whom I love and make him realize his real nature."

Mahabali was released from the Varuna Pasha. His head was purified by the touch of the Lord's feet and he became one of the seven immortals of the world.

At the command of the Lord, Sukracharya completed the yaga that had begun by Bali.

Thus did Vishnu in his Vamana avatar beg the earth and the heavens for the devas from their enemy, the king of the asuras. ■

Activity 33
(Vamana-avatara)

Fill in the blanks

Complete the story with the appropriate words:

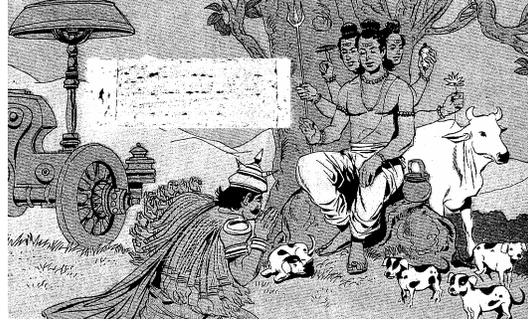
Heavens	water-pot	three	earth	brahmin
agreed	umbrella	ego	fire	huge

1. The Lord incarnated as a young _____ .
2. In one hand, Vamana carried an _____ .
3. In the other hand, Vamana carried a _____ .
4. He asked the powerful King Bali for _____ paces of land.
5. The proud king _____ .
6. Vamana suddenly grew to be _____ .
7. Taking one step, the Lord covered the _____ .
8. Taking another step, the Lord covered the _____ .
9. With the third step, the Lord destroyed the king's _____ .

6. PARASURAMA AVATARA

Parasurama (Rama with the battle-axe) is the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu born to rid the world of sinful kings like the Hehayas.

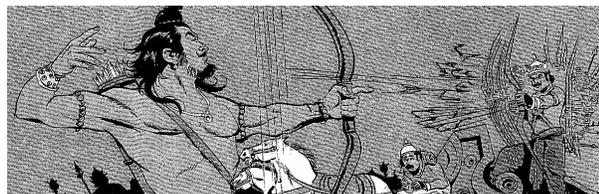
King Kartaviryarjuna, the ruler of the Hehayas, had propitiated Lord Dattatreya (incarnation of the Trinity born to sage-couple Atri and Anasuya) and secured from him boons that made him invincible. But Arjuna misused his powers and became a merciless tyrant. The devas and the rishis appealed to Lord Vishnu to protect them from his tyranny. To vanquish him and all such evil Kshatriyas (warriors), Lord Vishnu, in response to the prayers of the devas and the rishis, came to earth as Rama, the youngest son of Sage Jamadagni, and his wife, Renuka.



Though Rama was the son of a Brahman, he was kshatriya by nature. He had an inordinate love for weapons and his favorite was the axe. So he came to be known as Parasurama.

One day, while Parasurama and his brothers were away, Arjuna entered Jamadagni's ashram. The rishi entertained the king and his entire host with the help of Kamadhenu, the divine cow. Kartavirya was greatly impressed by the powers of Kamadhenu: so much so, he became jealous of Jamadagni. He instructed his men to seize the cow and her calf and bring them to his city. His orders were obeyed and the cow and calf were carried by force to Mahishmati, the capital of Hehaya. When Parasurama returned to the ashram he came to know that the king took the cow and the calf away.

Brandishing his axe, an enraged Parasurama stormed into Mahishmati. Kartavirya was alarmed and dispatched a part of his army to meet him. But the terrible Parasurama destroyed them in no time. Not a single man escaped alive. Enraged at the destruction of the core of his army, Arjuna himself rushed forward. But as



Arjuna rushed towards him, Parasurama lopped off all his thousand arms and then brought his axe down on the tyrant's neck. Parasurama then led Kamadhenu and her calf to his father.



But not for long, the sons of Arjuna were bent on avenging the death of their father. One day, while Parasurama and his brothers were away in the woods, the sons of Kartavirya came to the ashrama of Jamadagni. The rishi was seated in front of the fire and Renuka was attending on him. The sons of the king rushed towards the rishi with their swords raised. Renuka knew what they were planning to do.

She implored them not to kill her husband but they would not listen. They cut off the head of the rishi who was meditating on the Lord and ran away from the spot.

Renuka shouted, "Rama! Rama!" and hearing her voice at a distance Parasurama rushed to the ashram to see what had happened. He saw his dead father and was horrified. He asked his mother who



were the foul murderers. But Renuka's agony was so deep that she could only beat her chest and cry. Full of anger and grief, Parasurama made a vow: "Twenty-one times have you beaten your chest, mother. I shall wipe out the vile race of the kshatriyas as many times."



Parasurama decided to destroy the evil kshatriyas. He went with the speed of lightning to Mahishmati and killed the sons of Kartavirya. Then one by one he massacred twenty-one generations of kshatriyas on earth. Finally, he went to the mountains to do severe penances.

Thus did Lord Vishnu, as Parasurama, exterminate those evil kshatriyas like Hehayas who had become a great burden to Bhoomidevi (earth) and her children. ■

Activity 34 (Parasurama-avatara)

Fill in the blanks

Complete the story by filling in the appropriate words:

Parasurama	Jamadagni	Renuka
unrighteous	Kamadhenu	all

1. Parasurama was the son of sage _____ and _____
2. King Kartavirya Arjuna stole the cow named _____
3. The king's sons killed _____'s father.
4. Parasurama destroyed _____ the _____ kshatriyas.

7. RAMA AVATARA

Rama (one who charms everyone with his excellent qualities), one of the two most popular incarnations of Lord Vishnu, comes next in series. His story is too well-known to need repetition. His story, the *Ramayana* has now become an immortal epic. His name is known as the 'Taraka-mantra,' the Mantra that takes one across the ocean of transmigration. ■

* It was Jaya and Vijaya, the two gatekeepers of Vaikunta, who were born as Ravana and Kumbhakarna, the sons of Kaikesi (daughter of a rakshasa king, Sumali of netherworld) and Sage Vishrava (father of Kubera, the God of wealth/treasurer who ruled Lanka for sometime before Ravana). They were born as the above said asuras in their second janma (birth) in Treta Yuga. KAMA (desire) was predominant in Ravana and it was accompanied by MADA (arrogance). The brothers were finally killed by Lord Himself in Rama avatara and went back to Him.

Activity 35
(Rama-avatara)

Fill in the blanks

Complete the story by filling in the appropriate words:

Lanka	fourteen	Janaka	bow
rakshasas	Dasaratha	Ayodhya	holy

1. King _____ had four sons, the eldest being Rama.
2. Rama successfully broke the _____ and married Sita.
3. Rama was sent to the forest for _____ years.
4. In the forest, Rama destroyed the _____ who were disturbing the sages.
5. Ravana came in the disguise of a _____ man and carried Sita away.
6. Rama killed Ravana and returned to _____ with Sita.

8. and 9. BALARAMA AVATARA and KRISHNA AVATARA

Balarama (Rama the strong), the elder brother of Sri Krishna is the eighth incarnation and Krishna (one who is dark in complexion), who is very popular, is the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. They were born towards the end of Dwapara yuga to rid the world from the arrogant and unrighteous kings and asuras. (Krishna is the great expounder of the 'Song Celestial,' the *Bhagavad Gita*.)

Mother Earth burdened with sinners took refuge in Brahma in the form of a cow. Brahma in turn prayed to Lord Vishnu. In response to the prayers, Vishnu and Adishesha (another aspect of Vishnu; the serpent on which Vishnu rests) incarnated as Krishna and Balarama in the Yadu house, as the sons of Vasudeva & Devaki and all the devas incarnated as their kith and kin to aid them in their mission.

KRISHNA and BALARAMA'S BIRTH

Vasudeva was a Yadava prince and son of Shura who ruled Shurasena; and Devaki was the niece of King Ugrasena who ruled Mathura. They got married. Later, Vasudeva and Devaki were imprisoned by Devaki's brother Kamsa who imprisoned his own father Ugrasena and became the ruler of Mathura. He did this because he was told by a heavenly voice that the eighth child of his sister would kill him. Kamsa killed all of her six children.

When the seventh child was due, it was miraculously transferred to the womb of Rohini, the second wife of Vasudeva, in Gokul. Kamsa thought that Devaki lost her seventh child. Later, a son (Balarama) was born to Rohini.



It was midnight when the eighth child (Krishna) was born to Devaki. He too was miraculously carried to Gokul and left with Nanda, the head of cowherds at Gokul and baby girl born to Yashoda (Nanda's wife) was brought back to Mathura by Vasudeva. Kamsa tried to kill the baby girl. But it rose into the sky, and a voice said that the person who will kill him was still alive. Regretting his actions, Kamsa released Vasudeva and Devaki from prison. But his repentance was short lived.

Kamsa sent his wicked asura friends-POOTANA, SHAKATA, TRINAVARTA to destroy all newborn babies. But they were all killed by baby Krishna. People who could not bear Kamsa's rule of tyranny left Mathura and fled to neighboring kingdoms.

AT GOKULA...

Meanwhile, Krishna and Balarama were growing up in Gokul. Krishna, who was very mischievous, used to steal butter in other houses and gopis (wives of cowherds) would complain to Yashoda. But looking at his innocent face the gopis would soon forget their anger.

Krishna ate mud one day. Yashoda asked him to open his mouth. When he did, Yashoda saw the entire universe inside his mouth.



One day, Yashoda wanted to punish him for his mischief and tied him to a mortar. Trying to untie himself he uprooted two huge trees in the courtyard from which two heavenly beings rose. They were sons of Kubera relieved from the curse of Narada. They praised the Lord and left the earth. Later, Yashoda came and untied Krishna.

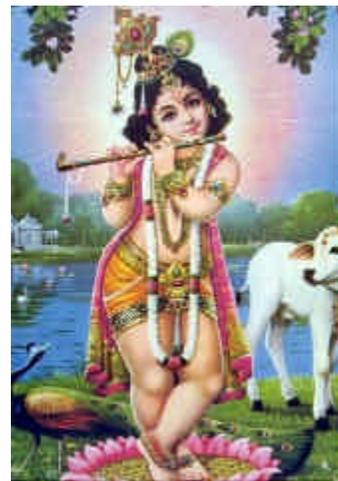
One day, a fruit-selling lady who passed by Nanda's house gave some fruits for Krishna who in turn filled her basket with precious gems without her knowledge.

Nanda and all the Gopas (cowherds) now decided to abandon Gokula and go to Brindavan for the safety of their darling Krishna and all the children. When Krishna was about three years old, they all left Gokul and slowly settled down in Brindavan.

ADVENTURES IN BRINDAVAN

Brindavan is located at the foot of a small mountain Govardhana which is surrounded by the forest full of grass and river Yamuna is flowing close by.

Balarama and Krishna liked the new place. They wished to explore the forest and took the calves to graze. While the calves graze the grass, they would play games with their friends. They played flutes and danced, adorned themselves with wild flowers and peacock feathers. One day, they saw a calf that was not one of theirs. Krishna approaching the calf from behind held its hind legs firmly twirled him around and threw it on top of a tree. It was a demon VATSA in disguise and fell down dead in his true form, crushing a number of trees under his weight.



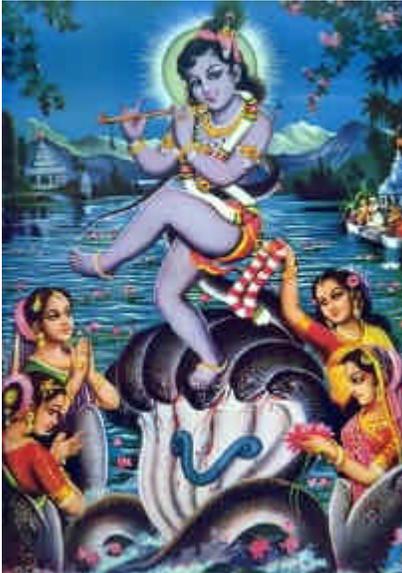
When they were a little older, Krishna and Balarama were allowed to take the older cattle to the forest to

graze. They would carry their morning meal with them, and roam all day with their friends, from forest to forest, with their herd. One day, when they took the cows to the banks of Yamuna to quench their thirst, they saw a huge crane. It was BAKASURA, a friend of Kamsa who came in disguise to kill Krishna. But Krishna put an end to him.

Another day, when the boys were playing, AGHASURA, the brother of Pootana and Bakasura assumed the form of an enormous serpent and tried to kill them. But he was killed by Krishna and everyone was safe.

When Krishna and Balarama were six years old, they were allowed to go further deep into the forest with their cows. There was a palmgrove in which a wicked asura named DHENUKA lived in the guise of a donkey. So no one dared to go there and eat the fruit. But Balarama killed Dhenuka and helped the cowherd boys to venture fearlessly into the forest to eat the palm fruit and graze the cattle.

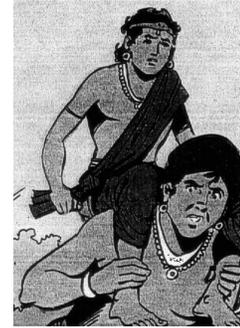
Balarama and Krishna were usually inseparable. One day, however, Krishna went with his other friends to graze the cows, leaving Balarama behind. Close by the bank of Yamuna, there was a lake called Madu and its water was poisoned by Kaliya, the dread snake who lived there. The cattle and the boys who quenched their thirst in the lake collapsed. Unable to bear this, Krishna dived into the lake and began to splash on the water playfully. Disturbed by the sound, the angry Kaliya with his five heads came out and caught Krishna in his coils. Some boys rushed to tell Nanda and everyone from Gokula hurried to the spot and was horrified. Krishna grew bigger and bigger until he got free from Kaliya's hold. The serpent then hissed and spat out venom on Krishna through his tongues. But Krishna playfully avoided his attack. Suddenly he leaped into the sky, landed right on Kaliya's heads and danced in a rhythm, stepping from one head to another. Kaliya would raise one head to sting him but quickly Krishna would jump on it. Kaliya got tired and blood oozed out from his mouths. Just then his wives and children came, worshipped Krishna and pleaded with him to spare Kaliya's life. Krishna let him go but asked him to leave the lake. Kaliya begged his pardon and left the Madu Lake with his family. The water of the lake became



children came, worshipped Krishna and pleaded with him to spare Kaliya's life. Krishna let him go but asked him to leave the lake. Kaliya begged his pardon and left the Madu Lake with his family. The water of the lake became

miraculously pure and clear. The cows and the boys had got up as though from a long sleep. Everyone rejoiced.

Another day, when Krishna, Balarama and their friends were grazing their cattle by the riverside, PRALAMBHA, the asura, came there in the guise of a cowherd. Krishna allowed him to play with them. At the end of a game, Pralambha hurried and carried away Balarama on his back with the intention of killing him. When he went far away from the other boys he assumed his asura form. Balarama with his fist, hit Pralambha on his head. The blow was so strong the asura fell down dead. The boys had now reached the spot and were relieved to see Balarama safe and sound.



Later, when they were playing games, all on a sudden a forest fire broke out on that hot summer day. The flames spread rapidly and surrounded them. The children were panic-stricken and cried out: "Krishna! Balarama! Help us!" Krishna said: "Please do not be afraid. Just close your eyes." The boys obeyed him. Krishna sucked all the fire towards him and swallowed it. When the boys opened their eyes, they found themselves safe in the shade of a tree.

They went home and talked about the achievements of Balarama and Krishna. People of Brindavan thought that two divine beings had been born in the midst of their children. And the gopas and the gopikas (gopis) would wait every evening to see the beautiful vision of Krishna.

One day, when Krishna and his friends were grazing their cows on the slopes of the Govardhana hill, he said that people who give generously like trees, which live only for the good of others and not for themselves, are blessed.

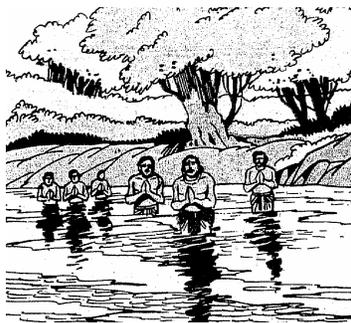
The rainy season was drawing near and in Vraja, people were preparing for a Yagna to worship Indra, the god of rain that gives life to all beings. But Krishna suggested in worshipping their cows that give them wealth, and the Govardhana Mountain that gives grass to their cows. People agreed and instead of worshipping Indra they worshipped the cows and the Mountain. Indra took it as an insult and decided to take revenge on the people of Vraja by creating a very heavy rain to wash away the whole village. People ran to Krishna for help. He came to the rescue by lifting the Govardhana Mountain and holding it in his hand as an umbrella, under which people with their cattle and belongings took shelter for seven days and seven nights, until the rain stopped. Then the



people of Vraja came out and went back to their homes. Krishna replaced the hill. The people of Brindavan thanked him and once again marveled at the achievements of Krishna. Meanwhile, when Krishna was alone, Indra with all his pride vanished- approached Krishna and begged his pardon.

One morning, Nanda entered the waters of Yamuna to take bath. The sun had not yet risen and the time was said to belong to the asuras. An asura grabbed him and took him to the presence of Varuna, the lord of the waters. When the gopals (gopas) saw him disappear underwater, they cried out for Krishna who rushed to the spot, dived into the water, went to the netherworld and entered the palace of Varuna. Varuna fell at Krishna's feet; worshipped him and begged his pardon for the ignorant act of his servant who seized his father. Krishna then went back to the earth and to Brindavan with Nanda.

Nanda was amazed at the Bhakti (devotion) which Varuna showed to his son and related the events to his friends. They believed that Krishna is the lord of Lords and wondered if he will reveal to them his true self. Krishna learnt what was in their minds, and revealed to them his infinite form but soon came back to normal.



On a Shivaratri day, Krishna, Nanda and other cowherds visited Ambikavana, a forest nearby. After a holy dip in the river Sarasvati (that has joined Yamuna and Ganga near Prayag-present day Allahabad) they worshipped Lord Shiva. They fasted and slept in the riverbank that night. Suddenly a huge python pounced on the sleeping Nanda. He woke up in panic and shouted, "Krishna! Help me." Krishna went near and touched the snake with his feet. The python vanished. In its place stood a Vidhyadhara, a divine being called Sudarshana who was cursed to be a python by the rishis called Angirasas for his ill-thought about them out of his pride. Sudarshana worshipped Krishna and went back to his home Gandharvaloka.

Once, there came a servant of Kubera (the god of wealth) by name Shankhachuda and carried away the gopis. They cried for help. The two brothers approached him with huge trees. Shankhachuda got frightened and ran for his life releasing the gopis. Leaving Balarama behind, Krishna chased him and with one blow from his hand, he hit the wicked one on the

head. He died on the spot. Krishna took his crest-jewel and presented it to Balarama.



An asura by name ARISHTA in the form of bull came to Brindavan to kill Krishna. But Krishna with all his might pulled out its sharp horns; attacked the bull with the horns and killed him.

Meanwhile, Sage Narada visited Kamsa and revealed him the truth that the eighth son of Devaki is still alive in Brindavan in the house of Nanda and all the asuras sent by him were killed by Krishna and his brother Balarama. Kamsa got furious. He put Vasudeva and Devaki in prison. He then sent the last of his asura friends KESHI and VYOMA to Vraja to kill the brothers but the asuras were killed by Krishna.

Kamsa now carefully planned to invite the brothers to Mathura and kill them in a wrestling match. He sent Akrura, a Yadava chief to Vraja to bring Krishna and Balarama to Mathura in the pretext of celebrating Dhanur-yagna (the bow-sacrifice). Akrura was a devotee of Krishna; he reached Brindavan and conveyed Kamsa's message as well as his intention of killing them; the brothers laughed. The next day, early morning, Krishna and Balarama left for Mathura with Akrura in the royal chariot. The gopis bid them farewell with heavy hearts. Nanda and the cowherds followed Akrura in their carts loaded with gifts for Kamsa.

They took a break at the banks of Yamuna. The brothers did their morning rites in the river and went back to the chariot and seated themselves. Akrura then went to do his rites when he was blessed by Krishna with the vision of Narayana reclining on Adishesha. Akrura saluted Krishna, the lord of Lords and drove the chariot ahead. They all reached Mathura. (Krishna was about fifteen years old then.)



AT MATHURA..

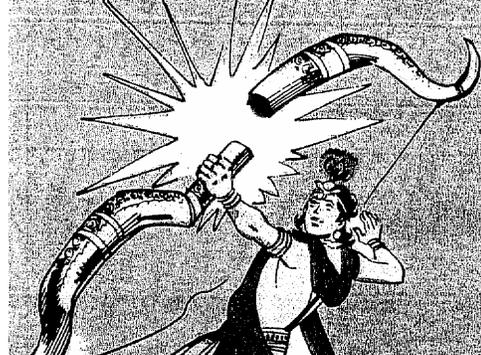
Akrura informed Kamsa that his mission was successful. Balarama and Krishna went to see the sights of the city with the cowherds. While they admired the city, people of Mathura admired them. Some women stopped the brothers and offered worship. Just then Krishna saw a washer man pass by. He took some silk clothes from him for all of them and got dressed. Then they came upon a weaver who gave them

good-looking shawls. Krishna was pleased and blessed him with health and prosperity. Then, a flower man welcomed



them and presented them a garland of finest flowers. Krishna blessed him too. Later, they saw a beautiful woman called Trivakra with a hunchback. She was a maidservant of Kamsa who makes special sandal paste and ointments for him. She offered them to the brothers. Krishna was pleased and straightened her body.

Krishna and his companions then reached the site of the sacrifice. They saw the large and mighty bow studded with expensive jewels and guarded by soldiers. Ignoring their protests, Krishna reached for the bow, lifted it, strung it and split it into two. The soldiers surrounded him. Krishna and Balarama using the pieces of bow as weapons killed all the soldiers. Then they left the hall and roamed about. At sunset, they returned to their camp, had their meal and slept peacefully. Meanwhile, Kamsa heard about everything that had happened at the sacrificial site; he was worried.



Next day, Kamsa inaugurated the festival of wrestling matches. The champions like Chanura and Mushtika arrived on the scene. When Krishna and Balarama arrived at the site, an elephant by name Kunalayapeeda blocked the entrance. Krishna called out the Mahout (elephant keeper) to allow them to pass. But, as already told by Kamsa, the Mahout provoked the elephant to attack Krishna. Krishna pulled out the tusks of the elephant and with them finished off both



the elephant and its keeper. Then Krishna and Balarama entered the arena. Chanura and Mushtika challenged the boys. The fight began. Krishna soon put an end to Chanura and Balarama that of Mushtika. Then Krishna reached Kamsa, threw him down and killed him. Enraged by this, Kamsa's eight younger brothers rushed at Krishna

and Balarama. They were all killed by Balarama. Thereafter,

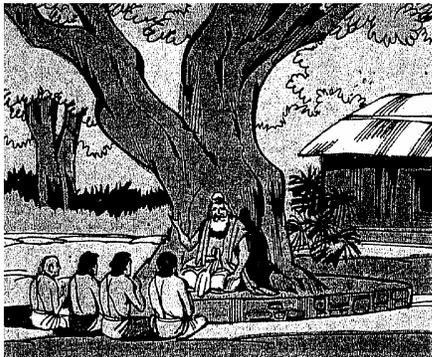
Krishna and Balarama hurried to the prison to free Vasudeva and Devaki.

Balarama and Krishna bowed respectfully before their parents and comforted them for their long separation from their own sons. Vasudeva clasped Krishna in a fond embrace.

The brothers also released their grandfather Ugrasena from prison and they placed him back on the throne. Krishna welcomed back all the subjects who had fled from Mathura in terror of Kamsa and restored to them their rightful properties and homes. People lived happily thereafter.

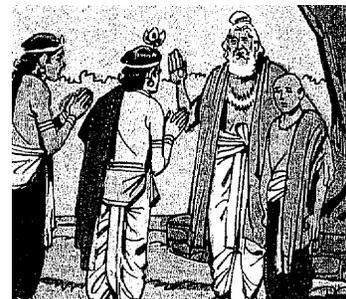
Some days passed. Krishna and Balarama requested Nanda to return to Vraja and comfort all their dear ones there. They said they would be coming there as soon as their work in Mathura was over. Nanda and the gopas bade them good-bye and returned to Vraja with heavy hearts.

Soon, at the request of Vasudeva, Gargacharya, the family priest of the Yadavas performed the Upanayana of Balarama and Krishna.



Then the boys set out for Sage Sandipani's ashram in Avanti (modern Ujjaini) to go through their formal education in gurukula with the sage as their guru. They learnt the Vedas, Shastras, how to wield weapons and all the sixty-four arts and crafts in just sixty-four days. At the end of their training, they humbly addressed their guru and asked him what he would like from

them as gurudakshina. Sandipani being aware of their extraordinary powers consulted his wife and asked them to restore their lost son in the sea at Prabhasa (in Gujarat). The brothers immediately left for Prabhasa in their chariot. They sat on the seashore for a while, when the lord of the oceans appeared before them and said, Panchajana, an asura who dwells under the sea took the boy away. Krishna promptly dived into the ocean and killed the asura. But he could not find the boy. Then they went to Yama, the lord of death and asked him to restore their guru's son. Yama's servants brought the son of Sandipani. Krishna took him with them and came back to the earth to their guru's ashram. Sandipani and his wife overjoyed to see their son back. The sage blessed Krishna and Balarama. They took leave of the couple and their new companions in the gurukula and came back to Mathura.

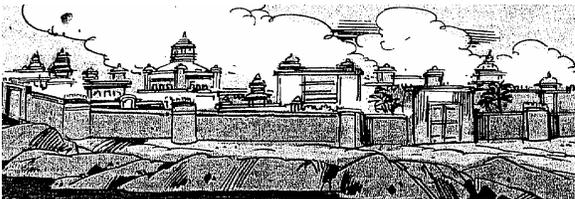


Krishna then sent his message of love to the people of Vraja through his dear friend and a respectful minister Uddhava.

Krishna and Balarama learnt about all their relations from their parents. Vasudeva had heard that his sister Kunti and her sons Pandavas were not treated well by the Kauravas in Hastinapur after she lost her husband. According to his father's wish, Krishna sent Akrura to Hastina to find out the state of affairs there. Akrura stayed there for sometime and saw that the Pandavas were being ill treated in many ways by their cousins. He gathered all the information he wanted, came back to Mathura and reported to Vasudeva, Krishna and Balarama.

RISE OF DWARAKA

Meanwhile, Kamsa's two queens Asti and Prapti went back to their father's house after the death of their husband and related to their father Jarasandha, the ruler of Magadha, how Kamsa had been killed by Krishna. Enraged Jarasandha collected a huge army and surrounded the city of Mathura on all sides to avenge the death of his son-in-law. That very moment, two chariots equipped with weapons and driven by able charioteers appeared from heavens. Krishna and Balarama ascended the chariots and with their small army destroyed the whole army of Jarasandha but let him go free. Jarasandha gathered another army and attacked Mathura again and again for seventeen times and seventeen times his army was destroyed. On the eighteenth occasion, just before Jarasandha reached Mathura, his ally and another king Kalayavana surrounded the city with his own army. Krishna wanted his subjects to be safe. He, after consulting Balarama had a strong and invincible fortress city called



Dwaraka built by the divine architect Vishvakarma in the sea in Gujarat. The devas sent many gifts for this new city. With the divine power, Krishna transferred his

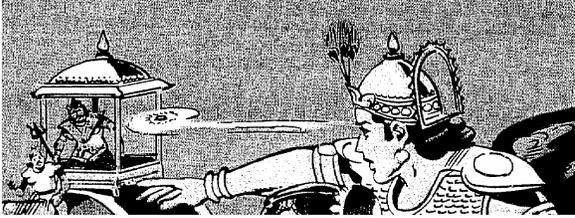
beloved subjects to the new city. (Krishna was about thirty years old when he established a kingdom in Dwaraka.)

Now Krishna and Balarama went to fight with Kalayavana. Soon, Kalayavana and his army were destroyed. On Krishna's bidding, the Yadava soldiers took all the precious objects from the defeated army to Dwaraka. Just then, Jarasandha approached Mathura for the eighteenth time. Krishna thought of a different plan. Krishna and Balarama pretended to flee and reached the top of a hill. Furious Jarasandha set fire to the mountain on all sides.

The brothers jumped down the hill: from there, without being noticed by the enemy went safely to Dwaraka. Thinking that the brothers were destroyed Jarasandha returned to his kingdom in peace.

NARAKASURA

The devas were once harassed by Narakasura. They were so desperate that Indra came to Krishna and asked for his help. Krishna agreed to do so. He reached Pragjyotishapura, the capital city of Narakasura on his vehicle-Garuda.



Krishna easily broke into all the barriers that surrounded the city. Then he blew his conch-Panchajanya that woke up the demon Mura who slept under the water. The five-headed Mura with

his trident rushed at Krishna who destroyed it and finally killed Mura with his chakra. He also killed all the seven sons of Mura who attacked him and finally, Narakasura himself. Mother Earth approached Krishna with the earrings of Aditi (mother of devas) and the umbrella of Varuna that were stolen by Narakasura. Then Krishna went to Amaravati (in heaven) and returned the earrings of Aditi to Indra.

BANASURA

Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna was held captive by Banasura, the son of Bali, who ruled Shonitapura guarded by Lord Shiva himself. Krishna and Balarama with their Yadava army marched towards Shonitapura and attacked the city on all sides. Lord Shiva came to fight for his devotee (Banasura) and his son Subrahmanya had come with him. Krishna fought with Shiva and Pradyumna (Krishna's son) fought with Subrahmanya. Balarama took care of the rest of the army of Banasura. Krishna's Saranga bow was busy and so was Shiva's Pinaka. During the fight Shiva was made to sleep by the arrow, Jumbhana-astra.

Then Krishna attacked the asura and finally he took up his Sudarshana chakra and cut off Banasura's arms leaving only four out of one thousand. Humbled Banasura bowed Krishna and released



Aniruddha. With his grandson, Krishna returned to Dwaraka where they received a joyous welcome.

YAMUNA

Once, Balarama visited Brindavan, prostrated before Nanda and Yashoda and spent two full months with them and with all his old friends. One day, he went to the banks of Yamuna and wished the river Yamuna to come to the spot where he was; but she did not. Furious Balarama lifted his weapon, the plough and tried to drag the river out of its course. Yamuna being shocked begged his pardon and prayed to him to spare her. The greathearted Balarama dropped his weapon and let her free. It is said, even now, there can be seen the groove which was caused by Balarama when he tried to change the course of Yamuna.

PAUNDRAKA

When Balarama was in Vraja, Krishna received a message from Paundraka, the king of Karusha and a friend of Narakasura that he was the true Vaasudeva and Krishna was an imposter who carries his insignia, so he wanted Krishna to give up or fight with him. Krishna told the messenger that he will not give up his disc and other insignia and in fact, he would use his disc to destroy the king and his foolish friends who mislead him into this self-deception. After the messenger left Krishna prepared to attack that fool Paundraka who was staying with his friend, the king of Kashi. Krishna led his army to Kashi. Paundraka who was dressed exactly like Krishna with a conch-shell, a disc, a mace and yellow garments came out to meet his challenge along with the king of Kashi. In a matter of moments, Krishna with his chakra cut off Paundraka's head as well as the king of Kashi's head. The king of Kashi's head flew off and landed at the gates of his palace. Sudakshina, the prince of Kashi, was shocked at the sight. He wanted to avenge his father's death. He performed a yagna from which a fiend emerged and it rushed to Dwaraka. The people of Dwaraka were terrified. Krishna ordered his chakra to attack the fiend. The disc chased the fire fiend that entered Kashi and since Sudakshina had sent it, the fiend turned against him and burned him up. The chakra then went back to Lord Krishna.

DVIDVIDHA

Once, Balarama spent some time wandering in the forests on the hill Raivataka. It was near their country Anarta (modern Saurashtra in Gujarat). He met an ape Dvidvidha in the forest. Dvidvidha who was enraged by the

slaying of Narakasura created a great havoc in the region of Anarta where Krishna lived. The same Dvididha caused trouble to Balarama there in the hill. Furious Balarama took his weapons, the plough and the pestle. When Dvididha tried to hit Balarama with an uprooted tree he hit him with his pestle. Then with immense fists Dvididha hit Balarama on his chest. Balarama dropped his weapons and hit him on the chin that put an end to Dvididha. People of Anarta rejoiced.



HASTINAPURA

Samba, the son of Krishna was held captive by the Kauravas in Hastinapura. Narada conveyed the news to Yadavas who were ready to attack the Kauravas with their army. But Balarama intervened and said he will go to Hastinapura and persuade them to free Samba so the fight in the family could be avoided. Balarama with some wise old men went to Hastinapur and gently requested the Kauravas to



release Samba. But the Kauravas insulted Balarama and arrogantly walked away without even waiting for Balarama's reply. Balarama got furious. With his plough, he started to drag the whole city Hastinapura towards the river Ganga. The earth was shaking and Kauravas were panic-stricken. They

hurriedly released Samba. With folded hands they approached Balarama, begged his pardon and pleaded with him to spare their city and people. Balarama spared their life and returned to Dwaraka with Samba. It is said that till today, the city of Hastinapura on its southern side is leaned towards the Ganga, evidence of Balarama's prowess.

JARASANDHA

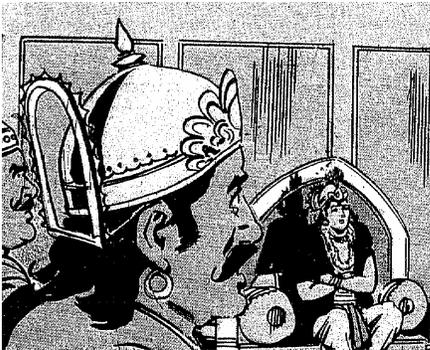
One day, Krishna received a message from the many kings, who were defeated and held captive by Jarasandha (Kamsa's father-in-law who attacked Mathura 18 times) in his capital city Girivraja, requesting Krishna to come and release them. At the same time, Narada arrived on the scene and said that Pandavas would like Krishna to be present at the Rajasuya Yagna they plan to perform. Krishna asked Uddhava what he should do now. To perform the yagna, the Pandavas had to gain supremacy over the entire land also defeating Jarasandha. So Uddhava suggested that Bhima (the Pandava)

could defeat Jarasandha, when all the captive kings can be released and then the yagna can also be performed in the presence of Krishna. Krishna agreed to Uddhava's wise counsel. He sent the messenger back to the captive kings with the promise that they would soon be released. Then Krishna went to Indraprasta. The Pandavas, in consultation with Krishna, decided to perform Rajasuya Yajna. All the kings except Jarasandha had surrendered to their supremacy. So Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna (the Pandava) went to Girivraja in the guise of Brahmins and asked Jarasandha a duel with one of them as alms. Jarasandha agreed to fight with Bhima. After a long fight, Bhima, with the help of Krishna who knew that Jarasandha was given life by putting two halves of his body together, tore his body into two and won the fight. The captive kings were all released by Krishna. They praised him in gratitude and went back to their kingdoms.



RAJASUYA YAGNA and SHISHUPALA

Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna returned victorious to Indraprasta. With Krishna's permission, Yudhishtira (the eldest of the Pandavas) began the preparations for the Yagna. All the sages, kings and people were invited to attend the yagna. Guided by learned priests, Yudhishtira performed all the requisite rituals of the Rajasuya Yagna. Then with his younger brother Sahadeva's proposal

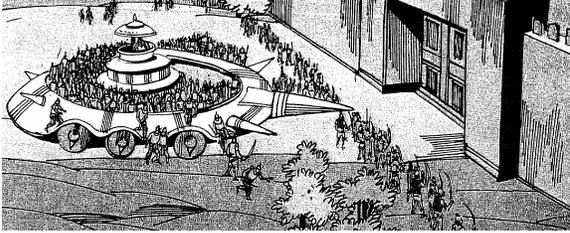


Yudhishtira offered his first worship to Lord Krishna. Everyone was happy except Shishupala, the prince of Chedi. He hated Krishna and he was jealous of him. He insulted Krishna saying ill of him in front of everyone. Krishna was very calm but when Shishupala lunged at him Krishna released his chakra and cut off his head.

DWARAKA UNDER SIEGE

While Krishna and Balarama were staying at Indraprasta after the Rajasuya, Dwaraka was attacked by Salva, the friend of Shishupala and Jarasandha. He attacked Dwaraka to avenge the death of his friends. In the absence of Krishna, his brave son Pradyumna led the Yadava army and met Salva's army in a fierce battle. Salva had a vehicle, as a boon from Lord Shiva to attack Yadavas that was able to travel

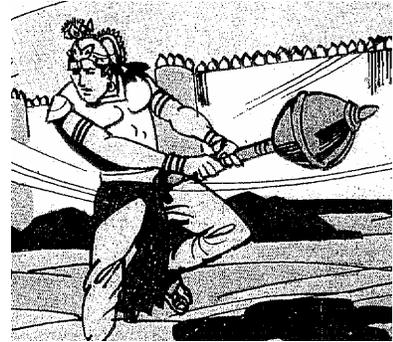
anywhere-in air, water or on land. It could carry thousands of soldiers and Salva attacked Dwaraka seated on that vehicle. For twenty-seven long days, the battle continued. When Krishna and Balarama returned from Indraprasta, they



found their beloved city Dwaraka under siege. Leaving Balarama behind to guard the city and the citizens, Krishna hurried to the battlefield and fought with Salva. Krishna with his mace first shattered the Salva's

vehicle to bits that fell into the ocean and finally released his chakra that killed Salva.

Dantavakra, now came to fight with Krishna to avenge the death of his cousin-brother Shishupala and his friends. He was also a cousin of Krishna as Shishupala was. He hit Krishna with his gada (mace). Unruffled by this sudden attack Krishna took up his own gada-Kaumodaki and with it, hit Dantavakra on his chest, killing him that very moment.



Now Viduratha, the brother of Dantavakra, came to the field but he too was soon killed by Krishna.

The long, long battle was at an end and the Yadavas entered the city in triumph.

SUDAMA

It was after this incident that Sudama, a poor Brahmin who became a close friend of Krishna in gurukula of Sandipani, visited Krishna on the insistence of his wife.



He took with him Krishna's favorite dish, Poha as a gift for Krishna. Krishna received Sudama with great affection and honored him. They recalled the many happy days they had spent together at childhood. Later, Krishna noticed the bundle that Sudama had brought for him; he snatched it from Sudama, opened it and ate a handful of rice dish with great enjoyment. The next morning Sudama took leave of Krishna and reached his village. He saw a palace standing in place of his old home. He

could hardly recognize his wife who came out of the palace in fine clothes and ornaments to receive him. Sudama

praised Lord Krishna for his benevolence and lived a happy and devout life.

KURUKSHETRA WAR



Krishna's cousins, the virtuous Pandavas were unlawfully deprived of their kingdom by their cousins, the arrogant Kauravas, and war broke out between them at Kurukshetra (in Haryana). With Krishna by their side, the Pandavas won the war in which all the Kauravas were exterminated. Krishna was about ninety years old at the time of this war. It was on this battlefield Krishna taught 'Bhagavad Gita' to Arjuna.

When the Kurukshetra war was going on, Balarama went on a thirtha yatra (pilgrimage to holy rivers) and visited many rishis during which he killed an asura called Palvala who was disrupting the yagna performed by the rishis.

Thus did Balarama and Krishna fulfill their purpose of incarnation ridding the world from the arrogant kings and the asuras. Krishna is said to have lived for one-hundred and twenty-five years and left the earth on February 18, 3102 BC when the present Kali Yuga (Iron Age) started. ■

*It was Vijaya, the gatekeeper of Vaikunta, who was born as Shishupala (the son of Damaghosha and Shrutashravas, siater of Vasudeva), in his third and last janma in Dwapara Yuga. MATSARA (jealousy) was predominant in him and it was accompanied by MADA (arrogance). He was finally killed by Lord Himself in Krishna avatara and went back to Him.

**It was Jaya, the gatekeeper of Vaikunta, who was born as Dantavakra (the son of Shrutadevi-sister of Vasudeva and Vriddhasarma-the Lord of Karusha), in his third and last janma in Dwapara Yuga. He was finally killed by Lord Himself in Krishna avatara and went back to Him.

EKASLOKAM BHAGAVATAM



आदौ देवकिदेविगर्भजननं गोपीगृहे वर्धनं
 मायापूतनजीवितापहरणं गोवर्धनोद्धारणम् ।
 कंसच्छेदनकौरवादिहननं कुन्तीसुतापालनं
 ह्येतद्भागवतं पुराणकथितं श्रीकृष्णलीलामृतम् ॥

*Aadau Devakidevi-garbha-jananam Gopee-grihe vardhanam
 Maayaa-pootana-jeevi-taapa-haranam Govardhano-dhaaranam
 Kamsachchedana-kauravaadi-hananam Kunteesutaa-paalanam
 Hyetad-Bhaagavatam Purana-kadhitam Shreekrishna-leelamritam.*

Meaning:

In the beginning, Krishna was born from Devaki's womb; he grew up in the house of Gopi-Yashoda. Then he slayed wicked Pootana, sanctified Govardhana Mountain. He slayed Kamsa, ended the Kauravas, took care of Kunti's sons. This is Bhagavatam; this is the nectar of the wonderful and pleasing acts of Krishna that is narrated in the Purana.

Activity 36**(Balarama-avatara & Krishna-avatara)**

I. Choose the fifteen names of the wicked asuras who were killed by Krishna and Balarama. Mark them with an X.

_____ Hiranyaksha _____ Putana _____ Shakata _____ Trinavarta
 _____ Vatsa _____ Baka _____ Aghasura _____ Ravana
 _____ Dhenuka _____ Hiranyakasipu _____ Pralambha _____ Arishta
 _____ Keshi _____ Vyoma _____ Panchajana _____ Mura
 _____ Narakasura _____ Palvala _____ Kumbhakarna _____ Banasura

II. Choose the six names of the arrogant kings and princes who were killed by Krishna. Mark them with an X.

_____ Kamsa _____ Kartavirya-arjuna _____ Kalayavana _____ Salva
 _____ Paundraka _____ Shishupala _____ Dantavakra _____ Viduratha

III. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate words given below.

Kauravas Govardhana Kaliya Jarasandha gopis Dvididha

1. Krishna danced on _____, the snake and subdued it.
2. Krishna lifted the _____ mountain to protect the people of Brindavan from Indra's anger.
3. Balarama killed an ape by name _____.
4. Krishna aided Bhima, the Pandava to kill _____.
5. The arrogant _____ were all killed in Kurukshetra war.

10. KALKI AVATARA

Kalki, the tenth incarnation of Lord Vishnu is yet to come. It is said, he will descend upon the earth by the end of the present age (Kali Yuga). Riding on the back of a white horse, with a drawn sword, he will destroy the enemies of Dharma and re-establish it in all its glory and the new cycle of four yugas will again begin with the Golden Age called Satya Yuga. ■

EKASLOKAM DASHAVATARAM

वेदानुद्धरते जगन्निवहते भूगोलमुद्विभ्रते
 दैत्यं दारयते बलिं छलयते क्षत्रक्षयं कुर्वते ।
 पौलस्त्यं जयते हलं कलयते कारुण्यमातन्वते
 म्लेच्छान् सूच्छयते दशाकृतिकृते कृष्णाय तुभ्यं नमः ॥

*Vedaanuddharate jagannivahate Bhoogolam-Udbibhrate
 Daityam-Daarayate Balim-Chhalayate Kshatrakshayam-Kurvate
 Paulastyam-Jayate Halam-Kalayate Kaarunyamaatnavate
 Mlechchhaan-Moorchchhayate Dashaakrutikrute Krishnaaya Tubhyam Namaha*

Meaning:

Salutations to Sri Krishna (Vishnu) who restored the Vedas (Matsya), who retained the world on his back (Kurma), who saved the Mother Earth (Varaha), who tore open the asura (Narasimha), who took everything from Bali (Vamana), who destroyed the evil kshatriyas (Parasurama), who won Ravana (Rama), who had the plough in his hand (Balarama), who was calm, gentle, kind and joyful (Krishna) and who will destroy all the enemies of Dharma (Kalki). These are the ten forms of Krishna (Hari or Vishnu).

In this list of Dasha avatar, considering Sri Krishna as Vishnu Himself (as Poornavatara-the incarnation in Toto), his place, or Balarama's place is sometimes taken over by Buddha. In 560 B.C., as history says, Gautama Buddha was born as the son of Sakya King Suddhodana of Kapilavastu and Queen Mayadevi. Raised as a prince, he was unaware of the pain and afflictions of human life. One day, he happened to see an old man, a sick man, and a dead man, for the first time; that made him introspective and question how human suffering could be removed. One night, Prince Siddhartha, silently leaving his wife Yashodhara and his baby son behind, went in search of truth. He got enlightened under a Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya (Bihar) and later came to be known as the Buddha. The Buddha taught ahimsa (non-injury), as the basis of righteousness and nirvana or moksha (liberation), as the ultimate end of this life through the eight-fold path. He held his first sermon in the deer park at Sarnath, near Varanasi. ■



Below is the map of India showing some of the important places in Ancient India.

