

41. Between the two, namely, protection of the good people and punishing the wicked, which is the more important purpose of the avatara?

Certainly, protection of the good people is the more important purpose. Good people like rahlada, Vidura, Akrura and others desired to see the Lord, to worship Him in person. It is to bless such good people that the avataras are made. If it is only for punishing the wicked, this can be done even from Paramapada or Sri Vaikunta, by His simply desiring to that effect. The Sudarsana chakra is there to carry out His orders and for punishing the wicked.

42. When the Lord took avatara in this world, like Rama or Krishna, did He also have bodies like us, ordinary human beings, of flesh and blood?

No, Here Gita says that the bodies the Lord takes during these avataras are of Suddha Sattva. I have explained to you already, what is Suddha Sattva. So there is no question of the Lord having bodies like us, ordinary human beings.

43. What are the forms of Bhagavan Narayana?

We can say that, for the purposes of meditation, He has two forms. One is the divine and auspicious form. The second is, with the body consisting of Jivatmas and matter (chetana and achetana). This is what we saw earlier that Iswara or Narayana is the soul and Jivatma and matter are His body.

44. Please describe in a little more detail the divine and auspicious form, which you mentioned.

His form has four arms. His body shines like gold, He has eyes like lotus; feet like lotus; hands like lotus. This form is in Paramapada or Sri Vaikunta. Besides divine ornaments, He also has weapons, like the sankha and chakra, gada, sword and bow.

45. Lord Narayana has five kinds of forms. What are these?

The five forms are called:

1. Para.
2. Vyuha.
3. Vibhava.
4. Antaryami.
5. Archa.

46. Please describe the essential features of each of these forms. What is Para form?

The Para form is that of Sri Narayana in Paramapada or Sri Vaikunta. There, He is also called Para Vasudeva. The description of Sri Vaikunta is given in Kaushitaki Upanishad and also in the

Sri Vaikunta Gadya of Ramanuja. The throne (simhasana) has eight legs, like dharma. The adishesha (serpent) is the seat. There Narayana shines along with Lakshmi, Bhudevi and Niladevi. He has four arms and has sankha, Chakra and gada. He has a number of ornaments.

47. What is the second form, i.e., Vyuha form?

This is a bit difficult and you have to listen carefully. The Lord Narayana assumes four forms by name, Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The first vyuha is Vasudeva. From the first vyuha Vasudeva, arises the second vyuha Sankarshana. From the second vyuha Sankarshana, arises the third vyuha Pradyumna. From the third vyuha Pradyumna, arises the fourth vyuha Aniruddha. As I told you earlier, the Lord is called Bhagavan, because He has six qualities. The six qualities are: 1) knowledge, 2) strength, 3) lordship, 4) valour, 5) energy and 6) splendour.

48. You are saying that because He has the six qualities, He is called Bhagavan and these qualities are not found in others. But we hear many people being called as Bhagavan, like Vyasa Bhagavan and Narada Bhagavan, How do you explain this?

We apply the word Bhagavan to others, only out of respect. When we say that Rama is a lion, it only shows that Rama is as majestic and strong as a lion. Similarly, when we say Vyasa Bhagavan, it is only a term of respect for Vyasa.

49. How do you differentiate between the four Vyuhas, Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha?

Although these are all forms of the Lord, in Vasudeva, we have all the six qualities, which I have just mentioned, in full. Of course, in the other three vyuhas also, all the six qualities are present; but some qualities are found predominantly in some of the vyuhas. The qualities 1) Knowledge and 2) strength, are in plenty in Sankarshana. Similarly, the qualities, 3) lordship and 4) valour are in plenty in Pradyumna. The qualities, 5) energy and 6) splendour, are in plenty in Aniruddha.

50. What is the function of Vasudeva?

Vasudeva is the object of worship and enjoyment by the Jivatmas, who have attained salvation or moksha.

51. What is the function of Sankarshana?

We saw that Sankarshana has knowledge and strength in plenty. Because of the knowledge, as Sankarshana, the Lord promulgates the sastras. Because of the strength, as Sankarshana, He destroys the universe.

52. What about Pradyumna?

As Pradyumna, having in plenty lordship and valour, the Lord creates the universe, and makes dharma prevail.

53. What is the function of Aniruddha?

Aniruddha has in plenty energy and splendour. So, as Aniruddha, the Lord protects the world, and also teaches the truth

54. Is there any further sub-division of these vyuhas?

Yes. As we have been doing sandhyavandana, you know the 12 names of the Lord Narayana. The 12 names are: Kesava, Narayana, Madhava, Govinda, Vishnu, Madhusudana,, Trivikrama, Vamana, Sridhara, Hrishikesa, Padmanabha and Damodara. So, from each of the four Vyuhas mentioned above, the forms of three sub-Vyuhas appear. For example, from the first Vyuha of Vasudeva, we have the three sub-Vyuhas, Kesava, Narayana and Madhava. Similarly, from the second Vyuha Sankarshana, we have Govinda, Vishnu and Madhusudana. From the third Vyuha Pradyumna, we have, Trivikrama, Vamana and Sridhara. Finally, from the fourth Vyuha Aniruddha, we have Hrishikesa, Padmanabha and Damodara

55. What is the significance of these 12 sub-Vyuhas?

We state that symbolically they are called the Lords of the 12 months, beginning from the Tamil month of Margazhi. Kesava is the lord for the month of Margazhi. Narayana is the Lord for the month of Thai. Madhava is the Lord for the month of Masi and so on. For the 12 months, these 12 sub-Vyuhas are the Lords. We also wear the 12 urdhvapundras (Tirumann) in our body. These 12 Lords are respectively masters of each one of these.

56. Earlier you mentioned about para Vasudeva in the first form of para. Again you mentioned as the first Vyuha Vasudeva. What is the difference between the Para Vasudeva and Vyuha Vasudeva?

There is no difference at all. Both are differentiated only for the purposes of meditation. There is no other difference.

57. What is the third form of the Lord?

The third form of the Lord is called Vibhava. That is, when He takes avataras and comes down to this world. He takes the form of men like Rama or Krishna; or animals like fish, tortoise and boar. These avataras are called as the third form, or Vibhava, of the Lord

58. How many avataras are there?

There are ten avataras which are considered as the main and important ones.

59. What are they?

1. The first is called the avatara of fish. This was taken, because a demon took away the Vedas from Brahma and hid himself in the sea. So Lord Narayana took the form of a fish, to get back the Vedas from the demon and give them back to Brahma.
2. The second avatara is that of the tortoise. The Devas wanted to have the nectar or amrita, for immortality. So the Lord advised them to churn the milky ocean. Naturally, for churning the ocean, they required a support. The mountain of Mandara was used as the support.
3. But, when they started churning the ocean the mountain itself started sinking into the ocean. So the form of tortoise was taken to support the mountain itself, from the bottom and thus prevent it from sinking into the ocean.
4. The third avatara was that of the boar. The demon Hiranyaksha took away the mother earth. He rolled the earth and went down into the sea, with it. So the Lord took the form of a boar, went into the sea, slayed the demon Hiranyaksha and brought back the mother earth. This was the purpose of the avatara as a boar.
5. The fourth avatara was that of Narasimha. You must be well aware of the story of Hiranya and his son Prahlada. Prahlada told Hiranya that the Lord is present everywhere. He is there even in a small vessel, even in a pillar. So Hiranya wanted to break a pillar and see whether the Lord was there. When Hiranya kicked the pillar, Lord appeared as Narasimha, came out of the pillar and killed him.
6. The fifth avatara was that of Vamana. He went to the demon Mahabali, as a small boy;- and requested only for that much land which he would measure in three steps. When Mahabali granted his boon, He grew into Trivikrama and measured the whole earth and above. So this avatara is called as Vamana avatara. Vamana in Sanskrit means a dwarf. 6) The next one, i.e., the sixth avatara was that of Parasurama. In this avatara. He slayed the wicked kings, all over the world, to protect dharma.
7. The seventh avatara was that of Rama The Ramayana is too well known, and I need not repeat here the purpose of this avatara.
8. The eighth avatara was that of Balarama, who was the elder brother of Krishna.
9. The ninth avatara was that of Krishna – too well known
10. The tenth avatara is yet to materialise. This is called the avatara of Kalki, when the Lord will come on a horse, at the end of the Kali” yuga.

60. You have briefly told me about the ten avataras. Where can one get more details?

One can read about them in Vishnu Purana, Bhagavata, Ramayana and Mahabharata.

61. What are the four yugas

1. The first yuga is called Krita yuga. In that yuga, people would be highly religious, follow the principles of dharma, vedas and sastras.
2. The second yuga is Treta yuga. In this yuga, practice of dharma gets diminished.
3. The third yuga is Dvapara yuga. The practice of dharma in this yuga gets further -diminished.
4. The fourth and the last yuga is Kaliyuga. Here the practice of dharma is at its worst; adharma flourishes unabated. So, these are the four yugas. After every cycle of four yugas, there will be a great deluge (pralaya). After the deluge, again the cycle of the four yugas starts. The cycle of four yugas is unending

62. What are the characteristics of the four yugas?

There is a simile about the practice of dharma in the four yugas. Dharma is compared to a holy cow. This cow has four legs, i.e., it is perfect in Krita yuga. In the second yuga, namely, Treta yuga, the cow has only three legs, i.e., dharma starts diminishing. In the third yuga, which is Dvapara yuga, the cow of dharma has only two legs. And lastly in Kali yuga the holy cow is left with only one leg. This is a simile, to illustrate how dharma goes on diminishing, yuga after yuga.

63. Are these ten avatars only, called Vibhava?

No. These are the more important or principal avatars.

64. What are the Other avatars then, apart from these?

Apart from these ten principal avatars there are innumerable avatars like Padmanabha, Hayagriva, Hamsa (Swan) and even a small mango tree

65. Are there any further classifications of these avatars?

Yes, in a way, we can divide them as primary or important and secondary avatars.

66. What are the primary avatars?

The primary avatars are those ten described earlier. Out of these, even Parasurama avatara and Balarama avatara are considered secondary.

67. What do you mean by secondary avatara?

The secondary avatars are of two kinds:

- where the Lord, enters a Jivatma, with His form;
- where the Lord, without entering a Jivatma, in His own form, gives him extraordinary divine powers

68. What are the examples of secondary avatars, where the Lord enters Jivatmas, in His own form?

Such avatars are like Parasurama and Balarama. These avatars were taken for specific purposes. The Parasurama avatars was for the purpose of destroying the kings who were practising adharma. Balarama avatars was to be of service and assistance to Krishna.

69. What are the types of secondary avatars, where the Lord, without entering Jivatmas in His own form, gives them extraordinary powers?

We have avatars like Vyasa, Brahma and Siva, where the Lord gives them extraordinary powers, without entering in His own form.

70. So, how many types of Vibhava avatars are there?

To sum up, among the Vibhava avatars, there are two types.

- The first set is called primary or important avatars.
- The second set is called subsidiary or secondary avatars.

These secondary avatars are further subdivided into two kinds:-

- Where the Lord enters into Jivatmas, in His own form.
- Where the Lord does not enter Jivatmas, in His own form; but gives them extraordinary powers.

71. What is the fourth form of the Lord?

The fourth form of the Lord is called Antaryami. The Paramatma or the Lord lives within the heart of the chetana. The Lord takes the minute form and resides in the heart of the human being or animal, along with the Jivatma himself. So, this form of the Lord is called Antaryami or “One who controls from inside”.

72. What is the fifth form of the Lord?

The fifth form is called Archa avatars. That is, where the Lord is worshipped in Srirangam, Tirupati, Kanchipuram and other temples

73. What are the Divya Desas?

As explained earlier, we have ten Alvars, besides Andal and Madhurakavi. The verses they have sung in praise of the Lord, are called Divya Prabandha. Now, the places having temples, which have been sung by the Alvars, are called Divya Desas.

74. How many Divya Desas are there?

We have 108 Divya Desas. Out of these, now we cannot worship in two places. These are Sri Vaikunta (Paramapada) and Milky Ocean.

75. Are there other temples, which are considered equally holy and sacred?

Yes, we have 1) Tirunarayanapuram (Melkote) 2) Mannargudi 3) Sriperumpudur, and other places which are considered equally holy and sacred.

76. What about the temples in other places, villages or towns, which have not been sung by Alwars?

There also, the Lord does exist and is of the same sanctity, divinity and importance. So far as the Lord's presence is concerned, there is no difference absolutely, between any temples, whether they are Divya Desas or not. In any temple, in any village or town, where Lord Narayana is installed and worshipped, He is of the same form and He manifests Himself in full. So, this form of manifestation in temples is called archa avatara.

77. How many kinds of such temples are there?

There are four such kinds of temples.

78. What are these?

1. The first category consists of temples, where the Lord has manifested Himself of His own accord. This is called Svayam Vyakta Sthala.
2. The second category is of temples established by devas.
3. The third category of temples are those installed by siddhas and
4. The fourth category is the temples constructed and consecrated by human beings.

79. Is there any difference between these five forms of the Lord, which you have explained. (Para, Vyuha, etc.)?

There is absolutely no difference. The Lord is fully present in all these five forms; and everyone can worship the Lord, in whichever form he likes, and in whichever temple he likes.

80. Who is Niladevi?

Lord Narayana has three consorts. They are: Sri Devi or Mahalakshmi, Bhu Devi and Nila Devi.

81. Are they also mentioned in the Vedas?

Yes. We have separate suktas (hymns) for each one of them. The suktas are called Sri Sukta, Bhu Sukta and Nila Sukta, respectively. It is this Nila Devi, whom we have as Nappinnai in Krishna Avatara. It is to win the hand of Nappinnai, that Krishna fought and subdued the 7 bulls.

Chapter 7: Advaita, Visishtadvaita and Dvaita

1. How did the three systems of Vedanta philosophy, namely Advaita, Visishtadvaita and Dvaita come about?

The question can be answered with a little bit of background on the Upanishads. The Upanishads are of three types namely bheda sruti, abheda sruti and ghataka sruti.

2. What is the Bheda sruti?

There are many passages in the Vedas, which clearly and categorically state that Brahman or Paramatma is different from Jivatma. These are called bheda sruti, because they show the difference between Paramatma and Jivatma.

Bheda in Sanskrit means difference.

3. What are the passages in the Vedas which come under the category of bheda sruti?

The following are some of the quotations.

- 1) "Two birds with similar qualities and attached to each other, reside in the same tree. One of them (Jivatma) eats the fruit (the results of his karma), whereas the other (Iswara or Brahman) shines, without eating the fruit."
- 2) "The Jivatma realises that the supreme self or Brahman directs him and he is the object of direction".
- 3) "He, the Jivatma, is different from Brahman. By winning the grace of Brahman, the Jivatma attains salvation".
- 4) "The three-fold nature, can be simply put as follows (1) who experiences pleasure and pain; (2) the object of such experiences and (3) He, the Brahman who directs all". 79
- 5) "He is the lord of Matter and Jivatma and the possessor of qualities".
- 6) "Brahman is the ruler whose knowledge has no limits. The Jivatma has his knowledge limited".
- 7) "The Brahman is different from Matter or Achetana and is greater than the Jivatma."
- 8) "He is different and He rules over the Jivatma and the Matter."
- 9) "The knower of Brahman attains the supreme."
- 10) "He reaches the other side of samsara and reaches the Paramapada of Vishnu".
- 11) "I belong to the Brahman and I will not leave Him".
- 12) "All these are born out of Him and because of Him they live and they go back to Him."
- 13) "The brahmins understand Him, by learning the Vedas, by doing penance, by giving donation and by doing yagas."
- 14) "The Brahman cannot be attained by reading the scriptures, by intelligence,..."
- 15) "He is the lord of all. He is the ruler of all".
- 16) "There are two eternal, permanent things. One is Brahman, knowing everything and all