

Virajas. Śāstā is another son of Mahāviṣṇu. Śiva became amorous with Mohinī (fascinating woman)—the form which Mahāviṣṇu took at the time of the churning of the Sea of Milk. They led a short family life as a result of which the son Śāstā was born. (See under Śāstā).

5) *Curses*. Mahāviṣṇu had cursed and had been cursed on many an occasion. The most important of them are given below:

(i) *The curse of Mahālakṣmī*. Once Mahāviṣṇu looked into the face of Mahālakṣmī and laughed for no reason. Thinking that Mahāviṣṇu had been making fun of her, she cursed him saying "Let your head be severed from the body."

At this period an Asura named Hayagrīva had done penance for a thousand years and obtained several boons. One boon was that he should be killed only by a man with the head of a horse. Hayagrīva attacked the devas (gods). Though the gods fought with Hayagrīva for many thousands of years they could not kill him. Even Viṣṇu, admitted defeat. Using the bow as a prop to his chin he stood thinking, for years. In the meanwhile white ants began to eat the string of the bow. When the string was broken, the bow straightened with a sudden jerk and the head of Mahāviṣṇu was severed from the trunk and was thrown away. Viśvakarmā cut off the head of a horse and joined it to the trunk of Viṣṇu, who instantly rose up and killed Hayagrīva. Thus satisfying the need of the gods and making the curse of Lakṣmī come true, Viṣṇu regained his original form and returned to Vaikuṇṭha. (Devī Bhāgavata, Skandha 1).

(ii) *The curse of Bhṛgu*. The Asuras who were defeated in the war with Devas, approached Pulomā, the mother of their teacher-priest Śukra, and sought protection. Pulomā, was the wife of hermit Bhṛgu. She began to do penance for the destruction of devas. Knowing this Viṣṇu aimed his weapon, the Discus, at her and killed her. Bhṛgu got angry and cursed Viṣṇu to take birth as a man and suffer the grief of separation from his wife for many years. This curse was the first cause of the incarnation of Śrī Rāma. (For details see under Bhṛgu, Para 4).

(iii) *The curse of Viṣṇu*. Once the handsome King Revanta, mounted on the horse Uccaiśravas and came to Vaikuṇṭha. Looking at the handsome youth, Lakṣmī stood for a while enchanted by Revanta and his horse. Mahāviṣṇu was displeased at this, and cursed her to take birth on the earth as a mare. Accordingly she was born as a mare and when the duration of the curse was over returned to Vaikuṇṭha. (For details see under Ekavira).

(iv) *The curse of Vṛndā*. See under Māyāśiva.

6) *Contests and wars*. Wars are very few in the Purāṇas in which Viṣṇu had not participated directly or indirectly. As almost all of them have been dealt with in various places in this book, they are not given here. Only a few of the prominent among them are mentioned here.

(i) *Madhukaiṭabhas*. Madhu and Kaiṭabha are two asuras born from the ear-wax of Mahāviṣṇu. They tried to attack Brahmā and Viṣṇu killed them. (See under Kaiṭabha).

(ii) *Killing of Andhaka*. Andhaka was a notorious asura. He was the minister of Mahiṣāsura. When war broke out between asuras and Devas, Andhaka caused havoc

among the devas. At last in the fight with Viṣṇu Andhaka was killed. (Devī Bhāgavata, Skandha 5).

(iii) *Killing of Vṛtrāsura*. See under Vṛtra.

(iv) *Rāhu*. For the story of how Viṣṇu cut into two the asura Rāhu, see under Amṛtam.

(v) *Contest with Brahmā*. The story of Viṣṇu and Brahmā making a competitive journey to find out the crest and foot of Śiva, is given with slight variations in most of the Purāṇas. (For detailed story see under Brahmā, Para 5).

(vi) *For the story of how Viṣṇu confronted the asuras Nemi, Sumālī and Mālyavān* see under each of those words.

7) *The weapons and ornaments of Viṣṇu*. The following are the prominent ornaments and weapons of Viṣṇu.

(i) *Śrīvatsa*. This is a mark on the chest. It is said that this is the mark imprinted by the angry Bhṛgu who kicked on the chest of Mahāviṣṇu. (See under Bhṛgu).

(ii) *Pāñcajanya*. This is a white conch. Even by the touch of this conch man becomes wise. (For further details see under Pañcaja I).

(iii) *The Discus Sudarśana*. Vajranābha is another name of this weapon. Viṣṇu uses this weapon to deal with fierce enemies. This is a wheel with a hole in the centre and thousand arms going out from the centre. The outer edge is sharp. This Sudarśana Cakra is operated by putting it on the first finger and turning it round, and releasing it at the enemy. Though it is terrible for the wicked and unjust, it forebodes good to good people and so it is Sudarśana (good to look at).

(iv) *Kaumodakī*. This is the club. The syllable "Ku" means the earth. Kumodaka means he who delights the earth. He who makes the earth delightful is Viṣṇu. As the club is the property of Kumodaka (Viṣṇu) it is called Kaumodakī.

(v) *Kaustubha*. This is the jewel of Mahāviṣṇu. (Ku= the Earth. Stubhnāti=Pervades (spreads). Kustubha= ocean. Kaustubha-obtained from the sea. This jewel obtained from the sea of milk at the time of its churning, is worn by Mahāviṣṇu on his neck. This is a red Jacinth.

(vi) *Nandaka*. This is the sword of Viṣṇu. It is stated in Mahābhārata, Śānti Parva, Chapter 166, that this sword was obtained from Indra.

(vii) *Śārṅga*. This is the name of the bow of Viṣṇu. This is called Vaiṣṇavacāpa (the bow of Viṣṇu) also. A description is given in Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa, Sarga 25, as to how this bow was obtained. It is as follows :

Once the Devas made Viṣṇu and Śiva quarrel with each other, to test their might. The fight between the two began. Viśvakarmā gave each of them a bow. The bow of Viṣṇu was called Vaiṣṇavacāpa; the bow of Śiva was called Śaivacāpa. This Vaiṣṇavacāpa is Śārṅga. Due to the power of Śārṅga, Śiva was defeated in the fight. Getting angry Śiva gave his bow to the King Devarāta of Videha. It was this bow that Śrī Rāma broke at the time of the Svayamvara marriage of Sītā. After the fight, Viṣṇu gave his bow to Ṛcika. That bow changed hands from Ṛcika to Jamadagni and from him to Paraśurāma, who presented this bow to Śrī Rāma on his return after the marriage with Sītā.

(viii) *Vaijayantī*. This is the necklace of Viṣṇu. This necklace, made of five jewels stuck together, is known by the name Vanamālā, also. Viṣṇu has a charioteer named Dāruka and four horses named Śaibya, Sugriva,