

trouble. He could refuse neither Śukra nor the Gods. At last he told hermit Śukra that to come by such a spell he had to stand head downwards, inhaling smoke for a thousand years. Śiva said so thinking that when the dreadful nature of the feat was considered, Śukra might desist from the attempt. But Śukra began that penance instantly.

The Gods understood everything. The deceit of the Asuras, the crookedness of Śukra all were now clear to them. They trembled with fear and began to consult how to get over the difficult situation. Finally they decided to go to war with the Asuras. The gods did accordingly. The Asuras were in trouble. They were not strong enough to face the Gods. So they all went to Kāvya-mātā, the mother of Śukra. The devas (gods) with Mahāviṣṇu at their head chased the Asuras. Kāvya-mātā, by the merits of her devotional meditation petrified Mahāviṣṇu and Indra. Mahāviṣṇu thought of his Sudarśana (wheel-weapon of Viṣṇu) which instantly made its appearance and cut off the head of Kāvya-mātā. The great hermit Bhṛgu got angry because Mahāviṣṇu committed woman-slaughter, and cursed him thus: "You are a crooked being, a viper, a deceit. The hermits who adore you as the seat of all that is good are mere fools; you are wicked, of a black character, and I curse you to take countless incarnations in the world, and painful confinement by and by because of your sins." (Śrī Mahādevī Bhāgavata, 4th Skandha).

Thus having cursed Viṣṇu, the hermit Bhṛgu took some water from his water-pot and sprinkled it on the face of Kāvya-mātā, who woke up as if from sleep. (For the remaining portion of the story see Śukra).

2) *Daśāvatāras*. (*The ten Incarnations*). Owing to the curse of Bhṛgu, mentioned above, Mahāviṣṇu had to undertake so many incarnations, complete as well as partial. Complete incarnations are ten in number. They are called *Daśāvatāras* (*The Ten Incarnations*).

Matsyaḥ Kūrmo Varāhaśca

Narasimhaśca Vāmanaḥ /

Rāmo Rāmaśca Rāmaśca

Kṛṣṇaḥ Kalkir janārdanaḥ //

Matsya (Fish), Kūrma (Turtle), Varāha (Pig), Narasimha (Lion-man), Vāmana (Dwarf), Rāma (Paraśurāma), Rāma (Śrī Rāma), Rāma (Balabhadrarāma), Kṛṣṇa (Śrī Kṛṣṇa), Kalki (Yet to come). These are the ten incarnations of Janārdana.

The *daśāvatāras* are described one by one below.

1) *Matsyāvatāra*. (*Fish Incarnation*). To Kaśyapa, the son of Marīci, and the grandson of Brahmā a son was born, by his wife Aditi. He was called Vivasvān and the Manu who was the son of Vivasvān is known as Vaivasvata Manu or Satyavrata Manu. It was during the time of this Manu that Viṣṇu incarnated as a Matsya (fish).

Once, while Brahmā was reciting the Vedas (the Scriptures) Hayagrīva, an asura, stole the Vedas from the side of Brahmā and with them he went under water to the bottom of the ocean and hid himself there. So Mahāviṣṇu decided to take the form of a fish to recover the stolen Vedas.

Vaivasvata Manu, the first and foremost of the godfearing, was once doing penance in a place known as Badarī. He got down into the river Kṛtamālā to take a bath. Then a small fish said to the Manu: "Oh King, I am afraid of large fishes. So please don't forsake me". Hear-

ing this the Kind Manu took the fish in his hand and put it in an earthenware pot and brought it up. In a few days the fish began to grow. When the pot became insufficient the King put it in a larger pot. When that also became too small, the King put the fish in a pond. When the pond could not hold the fish any longer the King put it in the Ganges at its request. After a few days the Ganges also became too small for the fish. Finally the fish told the King: "Oh, King, within seven days there will be a great flood in the world. You should make a boat and take the seven hermit-sages with you in the boat and escape. I will help you."

Hearing this he got an immensely large boat ready and obeyed the instructions of the fish. Within seven days rain started in torrents. Everything in the world, the moving and the not moving, were under the flood. A horn began to sprout from the head of the fish. Manu tied his boat on that horn. The fish reached the summit of the Himālayas with the boat, which was tied to the highest peak. Since the peak came to be called 'Nau-bandhana Śṛṅga' (The peak to which boat is tied). The rain ceased to pour. It was seen that everything in the world had been destroyed except the Manu and the seven hermit-sages and some of the germs, saved in the boat. (This story occurs in the great Hindi work 'Kāmāyani' of Jayaśankar Prasād). (M.B., Aranya Parva, Chapter 187; Agni Purāna, Chapter 2; Bhāgavata 8th Skandha, Chapter 24).

This story of the incarnation of Viṣṇu as fish is seen in the Bible figuratively. "In the order of the generations of Adam, the first creation of God, Seth, Enos; Kainān, Mahalil, Jared, Enoch, Methūselah, Lamech and Noah were born. When Noah was five hundred years old he begot Shem, Ham and Japheth.

There was a great flood during the time of Noah. God said to him: "The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them, and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark and shalt paint it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of. The length of the ark should be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof, with lower, second and third stories shalt thou make it. And behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of water up on the earth. to destroy all flesh wherein is the breadth of life from under heaven and everything that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish my covenant, and thou shalt come into the ark, thou and thy sons and thy wife and thy sons' wives with thee, and of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort, shalt thou bring into the ark to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after their kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee to keep them alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten and thou shalt gather it to thee, and it shall be for food for thee and for them." Thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him, so did he. And the Lord said unto Noah, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark, for thee Have I seen righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean beast thou