CHAPTER II

THE...VAKRATUNA...PARENTHESES
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THE VAISSEYA PANTHEON

The evolution of the Vaishya pantheon is the result of the merging of three currents of theistic development, the first being the cult of the Vedic Vīṣṇu, the second, the one connected with Nakayana, mentioned in the Aranyakas and Brāhmaṇas and the third that of Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the Vīṣṇu hero. It began with the identification of Vīṣṇu, Nakayana and Vasudeva. The Vedic Vīṣṇu was in one sense a personification of the Sun (Mitra) who traverses the Universe. Nakayana was the cosmic Purusa of the great sacrifice of the Brāhmaṇa literature, around whom evolved the Pasharātra religion. Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the last of the three, was a historical personage associated with the Bṛāhmana war. He was the Great Teacher of the Bṛāhmana Gita.

The prevalence of the independent worship of these deities in the pre-Christian era is indicated by the evidence of Vasudeva worship in Pāṇini's Śastra, commented upon by Patanjali in his Mahabhashya. Evidence of the worship of Kṛṣṇa (Vasudeva) by the tribe called Scouraseni identified with the Satvatas or Vīṣṇis is found in the account of Megasthenes, who

1. Patañjala Brāhmaṇa, XIII, 6, 1 - Purusa Nakayana is mentioned as having conceived the idea of a Pasharātra Sattra or continuous sacrifice for five days (nights) as a means of obtaining superiority over all beings and becoming all beings.

2. Skt., IV, 3, 98; K.G. Subramaniam, A Note on the evidence of Vasudeva worship, IHR, Vol.3, pp.188-88; J.N. Banerjia, B.H.I,

mentions that Herakles (identified with Kṛṣṇa) was the special object of worship of this tribe, who lived in Mathura. This statement indirectly confirms the prevalence of Kṛṣṇa worship in the 4th century B.C. in the region of the Yamunā.

The process of the merging of the above different currents seems to have been completed by the second century B.C. In this evolution, various other elements such as the associated divinities were incorporated into the pantheon as merely various forms of the chief god. In this respect, the Vṛṣṇi Vīras, of whom five were the most important ones and who were deified and worshipped by the people of the Mathurā region, may be taken as the earliest to be assimilated. Of them, Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa was the chief one and his identification with Viṣṇu-Nārāyana, inevitably led to important changes in the development of the cult. The Pāñcavīra cult receded into the background, and with the exception of the fifth hero Śamba, the other three Sankayaṇa (Baladeva), Pradyumna and Aniruddha were accepted as the yaśas or emanatory forms of Vasudeva. This development may be placed in the beginning of the Christian era.

The pantheon then became more complex due to the development of the theory of incarnation which brought with it many new forms of the divine being, believed to be innumerable. The germ of the Avatāra theory is seen for the first time in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and it was later developed by the Bhārata Purāṇa. The traditional list of ten avatāras came to be established by about
the 4th or 5th century A.D., but the avatāras constantly varied in number and swelled to include more than ten in some Purāṇas and as many as thirty-nine in the Pāṇcarātra texts. Later by about the 8th century A.D. the Caturvīrāha forms of the god gave place to a group of twenty-four other emanatory forms according to the Pāṇcarātra theory of creation in a chain.

The process of identification and assimilation did not, however, wipe out the older associations of the three main elements of the composite cult picture – Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. They continued to figure with their own associates in daily worship. The Vedic element is clearly retained in the worship of Viṣṇu according to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, which enjoins that Viṣṇu in the sanātana sanctorum must be worshipped with the Viṣṇu śayāna, and in association with four other forms called the Puruṣa, Satya, Asyatā and Amṛtuddha. Similarly, Nārāyaṇa is to be worshipped with Kṛṣṇa, Varāha and Kapila and Vāsudeva with three other members of the vyūha.

The amalgam of Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva necessitated the identification of their consorts also and hence Śrī, Lakṣmī,

Rukmini and others were regarded either as identical with or as the different manifestations of the same Goddess. Yet, the primary associations of these goddesses with the principal deities could not be completely obliterated. Thus Viṣṇu of the Vaikhanāsas is invariably found in association with Śrī and Bhāmag. In keeping with the Vaikhanāsas practice of performing the actual marriage rite of the divine couple before installation of the images, the vaikhanā is enjoined to think of himself successively as Bhāmag and Kāśyapa and to give his daughters Śrī and Bhāmag respectively in marriage to the god. It is of particular interest to note that in the sanctum sanctorum of a Viṣṇu temple in South India, the images of one or both of the pāris may be found in the sanctum according to the number of consorts enshrined with the deity.

The Pancharatra Samhitās associate Laksma, Kṛttti, Jayā and Māyā, with Kāśyapa worship. Vasudeva, in his divine form is worshipped with Śrī and Pāppī or with Śrī and Bhāmag (also Sarasvati) but in his human aspect with Rukmini alone or both Rukmini and Satyabhāmag.

To this ever expanding pantheon, the Tamil country contributed a few more by the addition of a cowherdess called Pippal as the wife of Kṛṣṇa, Ḫppā, a lady saint of about the 8th–9th centuries A.D. as the consort of Ranganita, the Jávāna aspect

7. Ibid., p.126. 216
of Viṣṇu and a third one called Mālādevī, who is frequently mentioned in the texts of the Vaikūṇṭhas.

Another distinct development in the South was the worship of the Ālāvaṇa and Acāryaṇa, who were instrumental in promoting the Bhakti cult of the Bhāgavata religion, and in establishing the greatness of the Śrī Vaṣṇava religion during the period under study.

A survey of the available archaeological data in North India on the existence of early Bhāgavata temples and images enshrined in them would provide the necessary background for an understanding of the development of this large pantheon and the well-evolved form in which it appears in the Tamil country from the early centuries of the Christian era.

It is clear from the occurrence of various terms in early texts denoting image, that image worship came to be regarded even at an early age as one of the necessary concomitants of the various religious systems that developed. However, on the antiquity of image worship in India, divergent views have been put forth by scholars. Some of them believe that image worship was known and practised even in the Vedic religion. 8

Scholars like Max Müller, H. H. Wilson, A. A. Macdonell, Grünwedel and J. N. Banerjee hold that there is no evidence in the Vedas, 8 S. S. V. Venkateswara, Vedic Iconography, Hāraṇa, 1930, pp. 81-87.
of the prevalence of image worship, though some of them like Maedonelli and J.N. Banerjea are prepared to concede the probable anthropomorphism of the Vedic deities, though only in a shadow way. J.N. Banerjea further points out that in the character of the early Vedic religion, there was no place for image worship but this character gradually changed. In the later phases of the Vedic literature distinct changes were introduced and a re-orientation of the religious practices was made due to various factors which had been in operation from the very beginning of the advent of the Indo-Aryans. One of these factors is definitely by related to the practice of image worship, which in all probability was known to and practised by the indigenous people of India who must have possessed a highly advanced material culture, though there is unfortunately no literary or other data throwing light on their culture. The Vedic literature expresses the beliefs and practices of only a smaller section of the people,


10. But the remains unearthed in the Indus Valley excavations have brought to light enough remains which supply ample evidence regarding the high and developed state of material civilisation of the Chalcolithic period. R.P. Chanda traces the origin of image worship to this period i.e. the age of the Indus Valley Culture, Medieval Indian Sculptures in the British Museum, p.9; See J.N. Banerjea, DHI, pp.66, 68, 71.
i.e. the higher intellectuals. The larger section of the people
during the Vedic times may have practised image worship.

While it is thus difficult to fix the exact origins and
antiquity of image worship in India, it may be accepted that
some of the iconographic concepts which evolved in later times
may be traced to Vedic period. The earliest reference to
image worship appears in the work of Panini (6th century B.C.),
who uses the term pratikrtya in the sense of 'likeness' or
'Image'.

The next important reference to the use of icons is found
in the Mahabharata of Patanjali, who gives the word arka for
image. While this word is frequently used in later Pashcharatra
and Brha Vaishnav literature in preference to other terms, there
are a number of terms such as shti, viraha, beka, tana and
guna used in early texts and inscriptions to refer to icon.
Words like pratina and bimba which are also used may be under-
stood as referring to any image other than icon, though these
terms are often used indiscriminately. The Tamil inscriptions
of the Pallava and Cbja periods seem to make a distinction be

11. J.N. Banerjea argues convincingly that the origin of image
worship principally depends on the origin and growth of
the idea of bhakti, as the primary purpose for which an
image or icon is intended, is to serve as the visible sym-
bol of a deity, the handy medium, through which the bhakta
or devotee could transfer his one-sided devotion (ekatana bhakti)
to his god - See DHL, p.78. The Vaishavata or
Maharastra view point of the importance of images discussed
in the previous chapter may well be compared with this idea.
12. V, 3-60.
were images of deities and other ordinary beings by referring to the former as Timūṟi (sacred body or form) and the latter as nadiṇim (pratīkā). Early Tamil literature, as will be seen in the next chapter, contains words such as nadiṇim and nāval.

Other early texts like the Arthasastra and Mahābālī furnish evidence regarding the prevalence of image-worship in India in the centuries immediately preceding and after the beginning of the Christian era. Henceforth we have not only an increasing number of literary evidences in the Epics and Purāṇas, of image worship and temples, but also evidences of an archaeological character dating from the same period i.e. roughly from the 1st century B.C. In this connection the archaeological data relating to the worship of the Vaippava pantheon are of immediate importance to us.

The earliest among the epigraphic records are those from Bemporāg and Ghosundū. The latter discovered on the wall of a well in the village of Ghosunda, originally hailed from Nāgarī, in the old Udaipur State in Rājasthān. Nāgarī has been identified with ancient Madhyamikā. The inscription, of which three copies were discovered, records the construction in stone of a Ṛṣya-paṇṭikā or compound for the divinities Sākṛṣṭapa-Varadāva by a king called Satkāta, a devotee of Bhagavat (Vīṣṇu). The

14. II., IV, 1913 II, 6 & 36.
15.同比下降, XXII, p.204.
inscription is assigned to the second half of the 1st century B.C. There was evidently a shrine which probably contained as the objects of worship the two images of the Gods Samkarṣaṇa and Viṣṇu. Earlier in the close of the 2nd century B.C. a Garuḍa-dhvaja in honour of God Viṣṇu was erected in Vidisha (modern Bannagar) by Heliodorus, a Greek ambassador from Antialkidas of Takṣasāla (Taxila) to the court of Kaśyiputra Bhāgabhadra of Vidisha. This Greek ambassador was a Bhāgavata or votary of Bhagavat (Viṣṇu). The Garuḍa figure which surmounted the pillar in Bannagar is missing but the inscription is important as the earliest recorded evidence of the association of the sectarian God Viṣṇu with the Vedic Viṣṇu. There were other Bhāgavata shrines in Bannagar as evidenced by the fragmentary inscription on the shaft of another Garuḍa column in Bhilsa, erected in the temple (prakāśa) of Bhagavat by Gantamiputra, a Bhāgavata, in the 12th year of Mahārāja Bhāgavata. Besides establishing the fact that temples were built in honour of Viṣṇu as Viṣṇu even in the pre-Christian era, these records also

16. D.C. Sircar, Select Inscriptions, No.3.
17. J.N. Banerjea, DHI, pp.91-92.
19. Garuḍa was originally the Sun conceived as the bird Garuḍa (Sukrāsa) and Viṣṇu was one of the Adityas.
testify to the custom of erecting abhayastambhas or votive columns. Remains of the capitals of other votive columns found in the same place show that the custom was a well established one as early as the period before the beginning of the Christian era. Two capitals which were found here, are shaped as a kuśa (fan-palm) and as a makara (crocodile) and evidently served as the votive columns dedicated to the two Ṛṣiṣeṣ or two of the Pañcavīras, viz., Sankarpāpa and Pradyūnasa, who had the kuśa and makara as their respective emblems or banners. The three deities, Vasudevā, Sankarpāpa and Pradyūnasa were three of the five Vyppi heroes, whose worship was prevalent in the region of Mathurā and to whom shrines were dedicated in the 1st century A.D. Another Pañcaśtrīla of about the 1st century B.C. was also found in Pavāyā in the former Gwalior State (Madhya Pradesh).

The worship of the Pañcavīras in the 1st century A.D. as mentioned above, is attested by the Hora well inscription of the period of Mahārṣiśatrapa Rājuvula's son Śvāmi (Mahārṣiśatrapa) Śoṭha. The inscription, which belongs to the first half of the 1st century A.D., records the setting up of the stone images of the worshipful Pañcavīras of the Vyppis in a stone shrine. The words pratima and astā are used in this record to denote the

21. ASIAR, 1913-14, pp.188-98, Pls.LIII & LIV.
images. An early inscribed Vaippava image has been found in Durkakhar near Malhar in the Bilaspur district of Madhya Pradesh. It probably represents one of the Vypi heroes or Vishvakarna as the figure is in a residential pose and also bears the Vaippava emblem and weapons besides the trappings of a warrior. It is dated in the close of the 1st century B.C. Stone images of the Vypi heroes have also been recognized in some of the stray sculptures from Mathura. Another inscription on a doorjamb preserved in the Museum at Mathura also belonging to the time of Maheshatrapa Sōṇasa, is the only early record referring to 'Kṣapa under the name Bhāgavān Vāsudeva. It seems to relate to the building of a shrine with a gateway (torana) and a railing (vadikā) probably for Vāsudeva.' The further progress of the Bhāgavata cult and the worship of the Vaippava deities in North India are revealed by the subsequent epigraphic references and

23. B.I., XXIV, pp.194 ff.; R.P. Chanda interpreted the second line "Bhāgavatāśa Kṣapānāṁ naṁśvārinīṁ aratiṇāḥ" as referring to the images of the five Pāṇḍavas and also to Kṣapa, the divine Vypi of the Yadava tribe - Archaeology and Vaippava Tradition, MASI, No.5, pp.166-67; D.C. Sirsar, SB. XII, No.26 A. The identity of the five heroes as those of the Vypi race - Sankarṣapa, Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, Śamba and Aniruddha - has been established beyond doubt by J.H. Banerjee, JISSA, I, pp.65-8.


actual representations in the Kaśāpa and Gupta periods, as found in their coins, seals and sculptures.

In the Deccan, the earliest epigraphic reference to the worship of the Vaishāva deities occurs in the Nāmāghāṭ record of Nāgaṇikā, the queen of the Śatavāhanā ruler, Śrī Śatakarnī. The inscription begins with an invocation to various deities such as Dharma, Saṃkaraṇa, Viśṇudeva, Indra and Śīrya and the guardians of the four quarters etc. There is, however, no definite mention of temples built for them. Further, the sectarian basis of their worship, seems to be as yet absent.

Literary evidence from the Sāntanāti of Kāla, one of the early Śatavāhanā rulers (1st century B.C.) also proves the widespread popularity of the Kṛṣṇa legends contained in this work and of Viṣṇu as Trivikrama. The names Kṛṣṇa, Viśnupaṇita, Veṣṇu and Laciṇikā (Lakṣmī) borne by the rulers and other individuals also point to the worship of Viṣṇu in the Deccan in the commencement of the early centuries before and after the Christian era.

In the eastern part of the Deccan, evidence of the worship of Viṣṇu and the setting up of his images comes from Nāgarjuna-kopaṇa in an inscription of the Abhirā king Vaiśṇaviputra Vemugopa.

26. K. Gopalačhāri, Early History of the Andhra Country, pp. 87 & 189. This inscription which was at first assigned to the 2nd century B.C. is now dated in the second half of the 1st century B.C. - D.C. Sirrū, on Sūr., No. 82.

recording the consecration of a wooden image of Aṣṭabhujaśvāmin (Vippu with eight arms). Among the structural remains in this area are those of three shrine chambers with a dvāraṭastambha opposite to one of them. Besides, two inscribed conches, one bearing in addition, an incised ankra on the pedestal flanked by an ankuśa and a ghāṭra, were also found. This Ābhīra king is assigned to the end of the 3rd century A.D.

The above record seems to contain the earliest epigraphic evidence found in South India for the consecration of a Vippu image. It is also important as the first inscription of the Ābhīrās in the Deccan containing 'positive information' about the religious activities of the dynasty which centered round Vaippavism. In addition to these inscriptions and literary evidences, a rare sculptured panel of an early date, i.e., of the 3rd or the beginning of the 4th century A.D., comes from a place called Kanṭamūṭu in the outskirts of the village of Pidigurallu in the Gurusala Taluk of the Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh. The panel shows a row of images, the most prominent among them being a figure of the Narasimha aspect of Vippu, shown entirely in the animal form with the addition of

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two human hands holding a sakra and a gadā and the en. 
the ākṣara symbol. Flanking the Narasimha figure are a. 
more, three to the left and two to the right. Probably there 
was one more to the right of this group; but the panel is 
broken at this end. The five other figures of this panel re-
present, in all probability, the Vijāpī vīras of whom Pradyumna 
may be recognised in the first big figure from the left holding a 
sugarcane bow and a mākaraśāla, kṣṇa in the second, with a 
snake in the left hand, (the third, the main figure of Narasimha), 
fourth holding a bow and arrow (?), the fifth probably Baladeva 
as it is seen with a cup of wine (?) and the last representing 
Amravṛddha with the sword and shield. All the figures are two 
armed. The style of the sculptures indicate the age of the 
panel as between the earlier Amarāvati and Nāgarjunakonda art 
of the 1st-2nd centuries A.D. and the early Pallava art of the 
7th century A.D. In fact, the sculptures resemble more closely 
the Andhrade sculptures of the previous centuries, while the 
Pallava art of a later period was evolved out of the style of 
Amarāvati. This panel is thus an additional and more tangible 
proof of the early spread of Vaippavism especially of the 
Pañcavīra cult in the Eastern part of the Deccan.

Further south, in the Tamil country, the early centuries 
of the Christian era witnessed a great literary activity which 
produced a large number of works in Tamil, collectively called
the Śān̄gama works. These works, brought down to us in several anthologies, contain valuable information on the Vaiṣṇava religion and the prevalence of image worship and temples dedicated to a number of Vaiṣṇava deities. A detailed discussion of the beginnings of Vaiṣṇava iconographic concepts based on the Śān̄gama classics, follows in the next chapter.

An understanding of the terms such as Parā, vyūha, avatāra etc., denoting the various forms of Viṣṇu, may be useful for a study of these forms as found in the Tamil country. Chronologically the earliest of these forms are the vyūhas, which replaced the much earlier Pānea-vīra worship i.e. the worship of the deified Viṣṇu heroes.

According to the Kāmarātra ideology, the one God Vaiṣṇava-Viṣṇu-Māraṇḍa could be conceived in his five fold aspects or forms: Parā, the highest aspect of the God, i.e. God as the Supreme cause and the final resting place of everything. All creation proceeds from this aspect, though God himself acts through his Ischā (will) which is projected towards his consort, Śrī or Lakaṇḍā, who acts in her dual aspect Krīvā and Bhāti. These three powers Ischā, Krīvā and Bhāti together bring into being the six ideal gunas jñāna, sīlaya, ākāti, dala, vīra and saña. In their totality they represent Vaiṣṇava and in three pairs they make the other three vyūhas Sānakarāṇa, Pradyumna
and a Aniruddha. In his Para aspect God Narayana Vishnu-Vasudeva is often represented in the Sayana forms, especially in South India, where it is perhaps the earliest form of representation.

Vishva is the emanatory form or a divine fulguration. It is the Divine "splitting into many" for the sake of "impelling from behind sustaining within and beckoning forward."

The concept of the Caturvyāahas or the Caturmārtis appears

30. Intra, pt 4.14-6, for a detailed account of the chain of emanations.

31. Vishva has several meanings such as dispersal or removal, an organisation for defence in military science etc. But in Vaisnavism par excellence it means 'a sundering apart for the purposes of "creative, redemptive, dedicative providential and destructive activities, the definite personalities of God's infinite being", apparently a kind of 'split-personality' - not in the sense of modern psycho-analysis - of which five are postulated by the Pañcarātra and four came to be established. It is the result of a process of creation prior to the general creation, the germ of which is to be found in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa in connection with Prajāpati and his primary function or activity of Creation. But the process does not mean the birth or origination of the souls such as Sankarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha for they are not souls at all, but Personalities of the Divine charged with creative, sustentative and destructive activities — See K.C. Varadachari, The Philosophy of the Vaiśeṣika, New Indian Antiquary, Vol.6, pp.113-118.
to have been first formulated in the second century B.C., for Patanjali seems to refer to it. The number of  was later increased to twentyfour perhaps after the Gupta period and came to be definitely represented in sculptures from about the 9th or 10th centuries A.D.

Yabhaya or Avatāra is different from transmigration, or emanation. The term Avatāra combines the verb-root āvā, which means "to cross over (a river), to pass across or over", with the prefix ava signifying "off, away, down". It is from the famous passage in the Bhagavad Gītā that the fundamental basis of the concept can be understood.

This passage is in the direction of the unconditioned to the conditioned, from infinite to finite, from eternity to temporal sphere. The opposite direction was sought by the Buddhists by means of the Mahā-vīna or hīna-vīna, the Great or Lesser Vehicle. In the Vaishnavism concept of Avatāra both the directions are implied, though the two fold aspect is not

apparent. The divine descent into earthly form and nature leads to the restoration of the balance of Shakti, producing a corresponding ascent of the manifest Universe towards the divine nature and consciousness. Thus avatāra is to be distinguished from all other manifestations in the world of names and forms, nāmarūpa.

Vipūna is unique as the only one among the Hindu deities, to be credited with avatāras. He is said to have assumed several forms in his role as protector. The probable explanation, as put forth by M. Huntington, is the recurrent Purānic motif of the daityāram, the unceasing conflict between gods and demons. Vipūna (the Pervader) in the central role of sustainer, accomplishes the task of exerting the divine wisdom and strength to restore conditions fruitful for further evolution. The direct intervention by the divine powers restores the cosmic balance, but, the very activity of restoration generates a counter force which leads inexorably toward another crisis. So the cyclic pattern goes on and critical events occurring in it again and again, brings into being yet another avatāra of the divine.

The avatāra theory seems to have assumed an evolutionary pattern. The avatāras are classified by the Purāṇas according to the pūrṇa in which they are said to have appeared for their

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saving work. The first four Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha and Narasimha are assigned to the Kyūta vriṣa. The next three - Vāmana, Parasurāma and Hīma - belong to the second or Tretā vriṣa. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma (or Buddha) are associated with the Dwāpara vriṣa. Lastly, Kalkī, the future avatāra is expected to restore the dharma balance in the Kali vriṣa. Curiously enough, the pattern of frequency of the avatāras is just the opposite of what might be expected from the well known characteristics of the four ages, i.e. in each successive vriṣa, dharma is believed to decline progressively. But the diminishing number of the avatāras of each vriṣa is indirect relationship to the diminishing lengths of these vriṣas.

The first three avatāras are concerned with resuscitating something from the waters (man, Vedas-knowledge, and earth). In other words they symbolise the emergence of life (or consciousness) onto dry land from the all-encompassing waters (state of the unconscious). The fish, strictly an aquatic creature, is succeeded by the amphibious tortoise. The boar is particularly a land animal, but still has an affinity for water.

Narasimha, the half-man and half beast, symbolises the emergence of nascent humanity. This avatāra came mainly for the purpose of killing Hiranyakāśipu, the asura, who personified ahimsā, but the significance of it was that Hiranyakāśipu's death was necessary, in order to assuage the spiritual longing represented by his son Prahlāda. The next avatāra, Vāmana, is physically
undeveloped, a dwarf. But he contained within himself the consciousness of divine power and he takes possession of the world. Parāśurāma continues this evolutionary pattern by representing the full potential of human physical strength directed for a single purpose by the power of will. The Kṛṣṇa-vatāra symbolises moral strength and represents the human ideal (Purāṇottara), judged by every human canon of ethical conduct. The superiority of moral strength over physical prowess is exemplified by the episode of Kṛṣṇa meeting Parāśurāma which resulted in the retirement of the latter.

The advent of Kṛṣṇa (along with Balarāma) does not make Kṛṣṇa's position less important, for morality is always presupposed in the teachings of Kṛṣṇa. It is difficult to fix the position of Kṛṣṇa in this scheme, as he is yet to appear. It may be said that the colour white, which is associated with him, is a symbol of purity and also of fullness or plenitude.

The above pattern of evolution is purely interpretational and not chronological in their association with Viṣṇu. For, before the traditional list of the ten avatāras came to be established, the names of the avatāras given in some early Purāṇas like Yāju, Ṛgveṇa etc. omit the first three Nārāyaṇa, Kṛṣṇa and Narāha but give three other names to make the number ten, for

38. Buddha's function according to the Purāṇas is purely negative.
the number seems to have been fixed at ten even before their identity was agreed upon. Only seven descents of Viṣṇu among men are said to be necessitated due to the curse of Ḫaŋgu, according to both these Avatāras. It is quite probable that a tradition prior to the ten Avatāras may have included only seven and later it was raised to ten. A further expansion of the number of Avatāras beyond ten was made in order to give a place to the presumptive manifestations of the divine. 40 But Avatāras other than the traditional ten (Gaṇavatāra) are usually looked upon as minor manifestations.

All Avatāras, however, are not of the same category. While the actual descents of the divine are called Avatāras, a temporary possession of one individual by divinity is a case of Āvāna, which manifested itself in the story of the Paraśu-Rāmāvatāra, partial descents are called amīna-Avatāras or Ṛṣīvatāras as in the case of the Ḫyās and their messengers called the Āryas or great teachers. Viḥavas also belong to pure creation according to Pāṇcarātra theology, just as the Viḥas and these incarnations may not only be of Viṣṇu himself, but can also be of his Viḥas, sub-Viḥas, Pariṇāmas (companions) or even of his attendants or emblems. The Ḫyās and Āryas represent the descents of the companions, attendants or emblems of Viṣṇu.

The last two of the five forms of Vişnu according to the Brahmāraṇītra ideology are the antaryāma and the arāha aspects. The former means "the inner controller of all beings or one who resides in the heart of all and regulates their actions." The arāha is the image or vīrāha (the very body of God), in which he comes to dwell and to receive offerings and to be meditated upon.

To the Vaippava saints (Ālvārs) of the Tamil country all the five forms of the God are of equal importance and hence not one hymn of these saints is devoted to any one exclusive form, since almost all the five forms are believed to coalesce into one vision. Thus the icon (Arāha) is not a mere device for the realisation of the Supreme by the "ignorant", for whom it is not possible to understand the conception of Godhead without the help of a concrete object. To the yogi as well as the common man the icon is more than a symbol, it is a presence embodying the divine. With such a conception pervading the entire thought of the hymnists, it is no wonder that their songs are devoted to the glorification of the Arāvātatāra of Viṣṇu.

41. For example, Śri Rāmāyana, 99; Pāy, Śrīvaṃśi, 40 & 83; Śrīvaṃśi, Śrī Ramaśan Śrīvaṃśi, 99; Śrīvaṃśi, Pariva Śrīvaṃśi, II-6-7-"Śrīvaṃśi Śrīvaṃśi" etc.

42. Śrīvaiśnav, Śrīvaṃśi, III - 6-1 to 10 - in which the saint glorifies the Arāvātatāra as the easiest means of attaining the Supreme. (Contd.)
Roughly corresponding to the above five forms of the
Śrāvetra ideology, the Vaikhānaṣṭaṇa evolves the five fold
conception of God Viṣṇu as Viṣṇu, Puruṣa, Satya, Acyuta and
Aniruddha. These five forms are equated with the five bānas
in a Viṣṇu temple. Viṣṇu is all pervading and is said to
reside in the Dhruvabera (fountain), Puruṣa is embodied in the
Kanuka (spirit), Satya in the Utsava (lava of God), Acyuta
in the Saṇapana (matter) and Aniruddha in the Bali (energy).
All the five are the requisites for a true Ārṇā form of God.
Thus there are five bānas in a Viṣṇu temple following the
Vaikhānaṣṭaṇa form in of worship. All the five are meditated upon
as residing in the one principal bāna, deriving their powers
from it. The Vaikhānaṣṭaṇa is thus said to have given gross
iconographic forms to the five manifestations and such images
are used in the temples for purposes of abhiseka, arāṇā, food
offerings and processions and festivals. It is doubtful whether
this explanation is correct for, according to the Vaikhānaṣṭaṇa
texts, the five forms are to be enshrined in the following order:
Puruṣa in a shrine on the east, Satya in a shrine on the south,

48 (contd.)

īṣya parāśivamāny śīvāśivahāny
śrīvarāhavāny śoṣiyavāny
 śrībhāvanāny-tenāvāyān
imdhilāl arṇābhāvanān alidegu
raṇām tāmul bāraṇ ragijnā.


T.N. Srinivasan, South Indian Bronzes, Their Seal Significance,
Modern Review, LXX, 1946, p.47.
Aṣṭauṣṭa in a shrine on the west and Aniruddha on the north.

Vīṣṇu is evidently the main deity enshrined in the garbhagṛha.
The four other shrines may not be four independent shrines but
may be niches on the four sides of the main vimāna. This is

clear by the directions which the four images are said to
face i.e., Puruṣa to face the east, Satya, the south, Aṣṭauṣṭa,
the west and Aniruddha, the north. 45

45. Śaṁścārasaṃścārabhikarana, ch.37, vv.11-47. This arrangement of
the shrine and the niches containing various forms of Vīṣṇu
and other Parivāradēvatas placed at different parts of the
temple may be seen from the plan contained in T. A. Gopinatha
most of the Vīṣṇu temples are found today to contain few
images in their niches, especially of the main shrine, there
are a few figures of Vīṣṇu in the niches on the outer walls
of the Vīṣṇu temple in Maṇimala in the Chingleput
district, which go by the names Puruṣa, Satya etc. in accor-
dance with the Vaikhyānasāgara.