



## **DASHAVATARA SHRINE**

National Museum, Delhi

Dashavatara Shrine

Late 18<sup>th</sup> century

South India

Material used- Ivory and Sandal Wood carved and Painted

Size- Length :22cm

Width: 17.8 cm

Height: 15 cm

Collection- Decorative Arts 1 Gallery, Ground floor

**National Museum, New Delhi**

A magnificent example of ivory carving and painting pursuing typical art of South India, this tiny shrine is both exceptional and rarest, both as the art material and the quality of art.

It depicts Lord Vishnu's ten incarnations, each on a circular double lotus seat. For properly accommodating all images the artist has manipulated the sanctum's space into four steps, the foremost accommodating four images: Rama, Balarama, Krishna and Kalki,

In the next step another three: Narsimha, man-lion incarnation, Vamana, dwarf incarnation, and Parasurama,

And further next, two: Kurma, tortoise incarnation and Varaha, boar incarnation,

Finally, in the last, just one, Matsya, fish incarnation. This arrangement affords to them proper height perspective and full visibility.

The sandal wood base of the shrine is mounted with an ivory sheet and in the background is a perforated ivory screen divided into three parts using European style pillars. Such ivory images as has this shrine were the specialty of ivory carvers of Trivandrum, Kerala, while screen, especially its painted form, that of Mysore artists. Maybe, the artefact is an assimilation of both.

#### Did You Know?

Vishnu Purana mentions the stories related to each Incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

The four-armed Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, and Narsimha hold in two of them sankha - conch, and chakra - disc, while the other two are held in abhaya mudra - the gesture of granting freedom from fear, and varada - the gesture of accomplishment. Kalki is also four-armed, though while in two of them he carries the same conch and disc in other two he is carrying sword and shield. Of other four incarnations Vamana holds an umbrella and 'kamandala' - water-pot with handle, Rama, bow and arrow, Balarama, mace and one hand held in abhaya, and Krishna, stick/ flute and conch. Except Vamana who is even without a crown figures of all them have been richly adorned.

This tradition of depicting Vishnu and it's ten incarnations in various art forms like-Sculptures, paintings, texts etc. has been practices since 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE when first cave temples began to be constructed in South India. The Gupta Rulers in 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE constructed the Famous Dashavatara temple in Uttar Pradesh, which is believed to be the earliest example of temple building in North India.

Vishnu Purana, Matsya Purana and Bhagwat MahaPurana and Other Brahminical Texts tells us about the origin of Lord Vishnu in different bodily forms on this earth.

It's believed that when sin and negative energies will rise to appoint that humanity cannot resist it anymore then Lord Vishnu takes birth on this earth to save the righteous and punish the wrong doers and to establish the universal faith "Aadi Sanatan Dharma".

However, history uses these textual tradition as a medium to draw the picture of society, religion and family values of the Past era specially on the Ancient Period. These texts were written to explain the brahminical laws written in dharma sutras, shastras and Vedas to the common masses in a form of story. Even the women and the lower Castes were allowed to listen and study Purana.

#### Activity

**Collect more information about the Dashavatara Temple in UP built by Gupta rulers.**

#### Did You Know?

According to Vishnu Purana, the 10<sup>th</sup> Incarnation of Lord Vishnu is supposed to be born soon in this epoch or yuga only.

#### Lets' Do It Together-

**Q1. Find Out the Total Number of Puranas in Hinduism and make a list of them. Also mention about the subject or which particular deity which they deal with.**

**Q2. Which is your favourite god, find out the sacred text related to him or her?**

**Q3. Visit National Museum, New Delhi with your Parents/Teachers/Guardians and go to manuscripts gallery to see the ancient palm leaves pages of Puranas and other sacred texts. Prepare a short summary of your observation.**

**Q4. Write down any one story related to Lord Vishnu's incarnation and narrate in your class.**

**References-**

<http://www.nationalmuseumindia.gov.in/index.asp>

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