Rama the 7th Incarnation of Vishnu



Marble figure depicting Rama used in temple worship

"*Rama is the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Rama is conceived as a model of reason, right action, and desirable virtues*"

Rama (or Ram) is one of the most widely worshipped Hindu deities, and is considered the embodiment of chivalry and virtue. Although there are three Ramas mentioned in Indian tradition (Parashurama, Balarama, and Ramacandra), the name is specifically associated with Ramacandra, the seventh incarnation, or avatar, of Lord Vishnu, the “preserver and protector” of humankind. It is possible that Rama was an actual historical figure, a tribal hero of ancient India who was later deified. His story is told in two famous Indian epic poems, briefly in the *Mahabharata* and at great length in the *Ramayana* (the “Romance of Rama”).



Example of figural toy depicting Rama used to teach children

In sculpture, Rama is represented as a standing figure, holding an arrow in his right hand and a bow in his left. His image in a shrine or temple is almost invariably attended by figures of his wife, Sita, his favorite half-brother, Lakshmana, and his monkey devotee, Hanuman. Sculptural representations included figures used to teach children as in one example shown, and devotional intended for temple use, as in the other example shown. In paintings, he is depicted dark in colour – indicating his affinity with Lord Vishnu – with princely adornments and the *kirita-makuta* (tall conical cap) on his head indicating his royal status. Rama's exploits were depicted with great sympathy by the Rajasthani and Pahari schools of painting in the 17th and 18th centuries.

References to Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu appear in the early centuries CE (Common Era); however, there was probably no special worship of him before the 11th century. It was not until the 14th and 15th centuries that distinct sects appeared venerating him as a supreme god. Rama and Krishna, the God of Love – also an incarnation of Vishnu – were the two most popular recipients of adoration from the *bhakti* devotional cults that swept the country during that time. Whereas Krishna is adored for his mischievous pranks and amorous dalliances, Rama is conceived as a model of reason, right action, and desirable virtues. Temples to Rama faced by shrines to his monkey devotee Hanuman are widespread throughout India. Rama's name is a popular form of greeting among friends (*"Ram! Ram!"*), and Rama is the deity most invoked at death.