



SGS International Vedic Association Inc



100 STORIES

of Indian Heritage Explained by

HH Sri Ganapathy
Sahchidananda Swamiji

Vedanidhi Grantha Mala ... 201

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of Indian Heritage

Explained by His Holiness

Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji

SGS Vedanidhi Academy & Masters' Institute

Avadhoota Datta Peetham

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Fore Word

Dr Vamshi Krishna Ghanapathi

Director, SVAMI & Advisor - SIVA

एतद्देश प्रसूतस्य सकाशादग्रदन्मनः।

स्वं स्वं चरित्रं शिक्षेरन् पृथिव्यां सर्वमानवाः। - मनुस्मृतिः

Learn the precedent from the wise elders of the community, to better your life - stated Manu, the first law maker of the known history. He further insisted that this rule should be universally applicable. Little thought and analysis will be required to understand the rationale of this rule. At the outset, the benefits outweigh the cons.

Benefits from the knowledge about History

1. Information about past events, will lead to the affirmation that Benevolent Acts with Bonafide intentions will lead to benefit of the community.
2. Vice versa, Cruel and Greedy Acts or Good Acts with Malafide intentions will be detrimental to the society.

Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

3. Every event is interpreted to suit one's own convictions, conveniences and whims. If the mind is let loose to make its conclusions, then the macro effect on the general psyche, especially that of young minds might lead to downfall at large.

4. From this point of dire need, the sanity, equilibrium and discretion of the mind are pre-requisite for a presenter.
5. This regulation, is more needed for the text book drafting committee, Policy makers, community leaders.
6. Rabble-Rousing and Rhetoric would certainly excite the listeners and gullible public to believe whatever they are spoon fed. This could create mass hysteria, mania and phobia.
7. Many wars, riots are the result of the Malafide intentions of One or few leaders, with a vested personal interest. Often the top echelons escape the wrath of the events, they unleashed, while the cadre down the rank bear the brunt.
8. Either Greedy or Foolish leaders with concocted or eccentric or misplaced intentions will lead nations and communities towards catastrophe.
9. Similarly, benevolent leaders will inspire people to become reasonable. Such elders will encourage their followers to universally apply the principle of "Live and Let Live".

World Wars of the previous century, Contemporary Strife scattered worldwide, resultant crisis of mass migrations, suicide attacks and the local reactions contextually explain the above mentioned points. Similarly the maturity of reconciliation exhibited by nations in the aftermath of the World War testify the advantages of pragmatism.

Improve the Self Esteem

Presentation by the Community Elders and local Authors, is bound to have the minimum set of benefits, in contrast to the external presenters.

1. Present the community heroes or heroines in favorable light.

Communities need some focal points, either as inspiring personalities or to lead from front. Film Actors, Sports Persons, Artists, Business Leaders, Community elders fit this slot as per the interim moods of the population. Political leaders occasionally occupy the slot, naturally to further their agenda of obtaining power both in democracies and autocracies.

If the leader is extolled for the leadership qualities and deeds of courage, Self Esteem of the population is enhanced to harness the collective power of the nation. This would automatically result in the development and prosperity at large by inspiring second rung leadership across the spectrum.

2. Focus the positive aspects and achievements

If the leaders are focused for their positive facets, the followers both on the social/ electronic/ print media and traditional mouth to mouth to spread, will try to emulate the model.

3. Minimize the attention on negative aspects

It is the natural instinct of any person, not to present or focus on the negative shades or characteristics of their personality.

Similarly, people would strive hard to avoid attention on the negative aspects of their leaders or community in order to avert unwanted attention. Thus the self esteem is preserved to the most extent.

Negativity based media trends, promoted religiously by the barons of the contemporary societies; stand as a testimony to the conflagration of violence, Erosion of Ethics and morality. Needless to state, this trend often leads to the loss basic rights of fellow humans and other creatures.

4. Motivated Distortion

History is replete with instances of distortion and partial presentation of facts, to prove the superiority of civilization of the presenter. In fact, it is not difficult to observe from a neutral perspective, whether a Historian or Chronicler of Events, is motivated to present a civilization in poor light.

Purpose of History

In light of the facts discussed, it is to restate the purpose of history is to help the society orient itself, in picking up the right strands from past events and progress. Correlation of past events and stories with the contemporary understanding based on the scientific advancement, is the most wanted trait for a presenter.

His Holiness Sri **Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji**, Pontiff of Avadhoota Datta Peetham of Mysore, South India; gifted with the above mentioned traits, has coupled the flair for simple and lucid language in his presentations about Indian Heritage. He has been propagating the fundamentals of righteousness effectively through his discourses and writings.

100 Stories

This collection actually 111 Stories, which were earlier published on the monthly series in the magazine **Bhakti Mala** published by Avadhoota Datta Peetham. These wonderful stories from Indian scriptures, were effectively explained by Sri Swamiji in his discourses to enhance the understanding the Indian Heritage.

The book is translated into English, by Sri Nagesh Cavatur of Hyderabad in simple language to suit the International readers, for the publication of **SVAMI** (SGS VedaNidhi Academy & Masters' Institute) of Avadhoota Datta Peetham. **SGS International Vedic Association Inc**, the non-profit organization founded by the inspiration of Sri Swamiji and licensed to publish and distribute the content developed by SVAMI, is pleased to present this book. May the Almighty bless all the readers and volunteers who made this possible. Our Reverential Obeisances to Pujya Sri Swamiji!

September 10, 2016

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2. PRITHU THE EMPEROR

In the lineage of Dhruva, there was a king named Anga to whom a child was born. This child named Vena was cruel and used to trample other children while playing. His father was very much distressed by his son's cruel tendencies and took great pains to reform him. However, Anga's efforts only served to worsen his son's behaviour. This situation caused terrible anguish to Anga and one day, being unable to withstand the sorrow caused by his son's behaviour, he left home forever.

Since, there was no ruler in the kingdom after Anga had left; the *Maharshis*¹ were compelled to make Vena the king. After being made the king, Vena's arrogance increased tremendously. He declared that he was God and directed his people to pray solely to him. Vena was a tyrannical ruler and the living conditions of the people in his kingdom became unbearable over a period of time. In order to reduce the sufferings of the people, the *Maharshis* made several attempts to convince Vena to follow the path of *Dharma*². Their efforts proved to be futile and the king not only insulted them, but he also tried to punish them. This compelled the *Maharshis* to fatally curse the king.

¹ Great Sage.

² Righteousness.

Although the people celebrated the death of the king, the *Maharshis* were worried because the kingdom was left without a ruler. Consequently, these holy men contemplated upon Sri Hari, the ruler of the *Prajapatis*³, and started to churn the right hand of Venu's corpse. These efforts bore fruit and Lord Vishnu manifested himself as a divine couple. The sages named the youth, who had been born as an embodiment of their divine powers, as Prithu and his wife as Archi.

Prithu was made the king, and while surveying the kingdom he realized that the crops were not growing properly in his kingdom. On employing his divine insight he discovered that his father's atrocities had so angered *Bhudevi*⁴ that she had withdrawn the life force that made plants grow.

The king was infuriated at *Bhudevi* for continuing to prevent the growth of plants and approached her with a drawn bow aimed at her. A terrified *Bhudevi* assumed the form of a cow and fled, knowing that the king would not harm cows. However, the extremely agile king recognized *Bhudevi* in the garb of a cow and captured her. *Bhudevi* told the king that she had withdrawn her powers, in order to prevent their misuse by evil persons. She entreated the king

³ Prajapati is the presiding deity of procreation.

⁴ Deity of the earth.

to utilize his powers and milk her, so that his subjects could use it for their benefit.

The king acceded to her request and this restored the fertility of the land. One day he noticed that the unevenness of the land prevented the optimal distribution of rainwater. Hence, he used his divine power and levelled the ground with his arrows; with this his subjects obtained an adequate amount of rain water.

After that he established towns and villages in his kingdom and introduced the practice of founding them on the banks of rivers. He also established the concept of using river water, in addition to rain water, for irrigation. Consequently, there was sufficient food for all the people in his kingdom. Afterwards, he conducted a number of religious acts to establish righteousness. In this endeavour he successfully completed ninety – nine *Asvamedha Yajnas*⁵. The king of the deities, Indra stole the horse in the hundredth *Asvamedha Yajna*, out of jealousy. However, Prithu's son defeated Indra and restored the horse to his father. All the same, Prithu was least interested in usurping the position of Indra; and a much pleased Lord Sri Hari

⁵ Horse sacrifice. A religious rite that was conducted by a king to declare his supremacy, by allowing a stallion, accompanied by a royal escort to wander, in an unfettered manner. A king who captures such a horse, declares his unwillingness to accept the paramouncy of the king who conducts this sacrifice.

manifested himself and imparted the knowledge of the absolute to Prithu.

Out of compassion for Indra, the king discontinued the hundredth *Asvamedha Yajna* and commenced penance on Lord Sri Hari. After making considerable progress on the path of yoga, Prithu gave up his mortal body. Thus the Lord Maha Vishnu assumed the form of an earthly ruler and imparted knowledge regarding exemplary governance. Therefore, Prithu is also recognized as the first king.

3. RAGHU MAHARAJA

In the lineage of Lord Rama, there was a king named Dilip. He obtained a boon from *Kamadhenu*⁶, which resulted in the birth of a son who was named Raghu. He had reached manhood, when his father was performing his hundredth *Asvamedha Yajna*⁷. The crown prince Raghu accompanied the sacrificial horse, in order to afford it protection. After they had proceeded for some distance, the deity Devendra assumed an invisible form and abducted the horse. The disappearance of the horse placed Raghu in a dilemma, however at that juncture; *Kamadhenu* arrived and sprinkled

⁶ The sacred cow, which grants all wishes and desires.

⁷ Horse sacrifice. A religious rite that was conducted by a king to declare his supremacy, by allowing a stallion, accompanied by a royal escort to wander, in an unfettered manner. A king who captures such a horse, declares his unwillingness to accept the paramourcy of the king who conducts this sacrifice.

holy water on him. As a result, Raghu beheld Devendra fleeing with the captive horse. On seeing this Raghu showered Devendra with his arrows and a fierce battle ensued. Devendra used his thunderbolt against Raghu, but this proved to be ineffective and he was defeated and the sacrificial horse was claimed by Raghu.

At this critical juncture, an incident that revealed the greatness of Raghu took place. Indra told Raghu that if he restored the horse to his father, he would be replaced by Dilip as the king of heaven. On the other hand if he was allowed to decamp with the horse, he would ensure that Dilip would receive all the benefits of the *Asvamedha Yajna*, and in addition he would bestow *Moksha*⁸ upon his father. Raghu understood Indra's desire, and he also realized that the status of Indra was vastly inferior to the obtention of *Moksha*. This knowledge had been obtained by Raghu from his father; therefore, he took pity on Indra and allowed him to retain the sacrificial horse. In this manner he acquired the eternal realm of *Moksha* for his father. *This incident reveals the presence of generosity, from a young age, in ideal persons.*

Subsequently, Raghu ascended the throne and conquered the whole world. He became immensely wealthy

⁸ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.

and performed the *VisvajitYajna*⁹. The performer of this *Yajna*¹⁰ has to give away as all his material possessions as *Yajna Dakshina*¹¹. Therefore, this *Yajna* was performed very rarely. Consequent to the performance of this *Yajna*, Raghu was reduced to a state of abject poverty. He was so impoverished that he was compelled to cook his food in earthen vessels. In this manner he demonstrated that the purpose of earning was to distribute it among the needy.

Despite these adverse financial conditions, Raghu continued to rule his kingdom. During this period, Kautsa had to offer a *Gurudakshina*¹² of fourteen crore gold coins to his Guru the sage Varatantu. Accordingly, he approached the emperor Raghu for this amount. He saw the earthenware of the emperor and came to know about the reasons for his dismal poverty. He experienced conflicting emotions, on one hand he was elated at the greatness of the emperor and on the other he was depressed, because he could not ask the emperor for the *Gurudakshina* amount. Consequently, he left that place without seeking any financial assistance from the emperor.

⁹ A sacrifice, in which the person performing the sacrifice has to donate all his possessions.

¹⁰ Vedic sacrifice.

¹¹ The fees offered to the Brahmin Priests who conduct the Vedic sacrifice.

¹² Offering to the guru by a disciple, for the conferment of knowledge.

However, the emperor did not let go of Kautsa and wormed out the truth about his visit. He requested him for a day's time to fulfil his wish. Kautsa was astonished by this turn of events. Moreover, the neighbouring kings were terrified, as they feared a military attack from the emperor; however, Raghu spared them. He decided to attack Kubera, the deity of wealth. This information scared Kubera witless; hence, he caused the royal coffers to be filled with gold.

Raghu told Kautsa that he had obtained all that wealth in order to give it to him. Accordingly, he asked Kautsa to take it away, but Kautsa stated that his requirement was only fourteen crore gold coins. He further declared that he would not accept even a cowrie shell¹³, over and above that. This resulted in a verbal altercation between them and ultimately, Kautsa had to accept defeat.

Since, the emperor Raghu was such a great person, Lord Rama selected his dynasty to be born in. Kalidas was a great poet, who named one of his greatest poems, the Raghuvamsa, in honour of this dynasty.

4. KAVERA

In ancient times there lived a king named Kavera. After ruling his Kingdom for several years, he developed a

¹³ A paltry or insignificant amount.

strong desire to obtain *Moksha*¹⁴. To attain this goal he performed penance to Lord Shiva in the *Himalayas*¹⁵. After Kavera had prayed to Lord Shiva for quite some time, the Lord appeared before him. *Rajarshi*¹⁶ Kavera asked Him for *Moksha*, but Lord Shiva expressed his inability to grant him that wish.

Rajarshi Kavera was greatly astonished at this reply and Lord Shiva explained that the granting of *Moksha* was the sole prerogative of Lord Brahma. Hence, he asked Kavera to pray to Lord Brahma. Kavera followed these instructions of Lord Shiva and after the passage of some time; Lord Brahma manifested Himself before him. Kavera asked Lord Brahma to grant him *Moksha*, but Lord Brahma replied, “I cannot do that” and told the amazed King, “My daughter Vishnu Maya will be born to you and you will get *Moksha* through her.”

Kavera was satisfied with the assurance given to him by Lord Brahma and returned to his palace. After some time a daughter was born to him, and when she grew up, he prayed to her and asked her to obtain *Moksha* for him. She did not express any surprise at this entreaty and replied, “Father;

¹⁴ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.

¹⁵ Abode of snow. A mountain range in the northern part of India. It is the highest mountain range on the surface of the earth.

¹⁶ Royal sage.

please allow me to conduct *Tapas*¹⁷, so that I can become a river and ensure that you attain *Moksha*.”

She transformed herself into two girls, and one of them, named Lopamudra, remained with her father. The other girl conducted severe penance to Lord Shiva. In the meanwhile, Lord Brahma approached *Maharshi* Agastya and told him that His daughter Vishnu Maya had assumed the form of two girls, and asked the *Maharshi* to marry them.

Accordingly, Agastya *Maharshi* married Lopamudra and initiated her into *Sri Vidya*¹⁸. Afterwards, he approached the second girl and asked her to marry him. To this she replied, “I will become a river very soon, therefore, I will be unable to render any service to you, hence, it is of no avail to marry me.” However, *Maharshi* Agastya persisted in his demand and after their marriage he changed her into water, and he kept her in his *Kamandal*¹⁹.

At the same time, *Maharshi* Agastya had to travel towards the south, in order to subdue the pride of the Vindhya Mountain. The *Maharshi* gave his *Kamandal* to his disciples and asked them to carry it safely. After crossing the Vindhya Mountain they reached the Sahyadri Mountain, where Lord Dattatreya used to reside. At that juncture, the daughter of Kavera, who was confined to the *Kamandal*,

¹⁷ Deep meditation or ascetism.

¹⁸ Worship of the Divine Mother.

¹⁹ Water pot used by ascetics.

recollected her resolve to obtain *Moksha* for Kavera and increased her weight tremendously. The disciples of *Maharshi* Agastya, who were carrying the *Kamandal*, were compelled to let it go, and it fell to the ground. The contents of the *Kamandal* spilled onto the ground and changed into a river that was named Kaveri, the daughter of Kavera.

The followers of *Maharshi* Agastya were alarmed at this development; however, Kaveri allayed their fears and reassured them, “*Maharshi* Agastya will not be angry with you because I have already explained all these things to him. I am Vishnu Maya the daughter of Lord Brahma; therefore, I have an element of Lord Brahma in me and since I had prayed to Lord Shiva, I also have an element of Him in me. These qualities blossomed forth due to my close association with *Maharshi* Agastya. Consequently, those who immerse themselves in my waters will obtain *Moksha*. The prayers offered for my father’s liberation will benefit the world. This is the purpose for which *Maharshi* Agastya had married me.”

Subsequently, *Rajarshi* Kavera took a bath in the holy waters of the Kaveri and obtained self realisation. The *Maharshis* named the river Kaveri as the *Dakshin Ganga*²⁰, since it flowed into the waters of the southern ocean.

As such, the prayers of *Rajarshi* Kavera moved Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva to commingle their

²⁰ Southern Ganges

powers, which led to the genesis of this great river. Therefore, the contribution of Kavera should never be forgotten.

5. UPAMANYU

Upamanyu was a saintly boy, whose parents had repaired to the forest after having relinquished all earthly desires. As a sage, Upamanyu's father used to meditate the whole day; and Upamanyu's nourishment was restricted to the fruits of the forest and his mother's love. One day, Upamanyu met a traveller, who gave him some cow's milk to drink. The next day, Upamanyu asked his mother to provide him with cow's milk. She was unable to procure cow's milk, and all her efforts at diverting his attention proved unsuccessful. Therefore, she mixed some powered grains with water and offered it as milk to him. This deception did not help and Upamanyu started to cry loudly. His vexed mother told him that he would have to perform *Tapas*²¹ on Lord Shiva, if he wanted milk. This advice awakened the latent tendencies of his previous births, and he undertook severe penance on Lord Shiva.

Lord Shiva wished to test this child further; therefore, he appeared before him as the deity Indra and offered him a wish. To this the boy replied, "I am performing *Tapas* on Lord Shiva, and you do not resemble Him; hence, I do not

²¹ Deep meditation or ascetism.

want any boon from you.” To this Lord Shiva told the boy that he was too young to perform penance till such time as Lord Shiva would appear before him. He told the boy that he had the power to grant him any boon that he desired, and once again asked him to seek a boon.

Upamanyu was greatly incensed by this persistence by the deity Indra and sprinkled some holy ash on him. The effect of sprinkling this ash was that it dispelled Lord Shiva’s Maya, Who was revealed in his true and resplendent form. Thereupon, Upamanyu asked Him to give him some milk. Lord Shiva was ecstatic with this uncompromising determination of Upamanyu and created oceans of milk and curd, and placed them under his control. This story is a telling example of the results yielded by unflinching determination.

6. NAABHAAGA

As children grow older, disputes regarding the distribution of the family property will arise. The manner in which virtuous persons deal with this problem is illustrated in the story of Prince Naabhaaga.

Naabhaaga was the youngest of *Manu*²²’s four sons. Naabhaaga developed renunciation towards the world, at a very young age, and started to do penance. Later on, his

²² Ancestor of humanity

father distributed his kingdom among Naabhaaga’s brothers; and went to the forest to perform penance. After some years had passed by, Naabhaaga felt nostalgic and returned home. To his astonishment, he could not find his parents, moreover, he discovered that he had not been apportioned any share in the property. He asked his brothers about his share of the property, but they merely replied that their father had bestowed upon them that property and that it would be appropriate to approach him in this context. Naabhaaga searched in the forest and finally located his father. Afterwards, he placed his newly arisen problems before his aging father.

Manu pondered for a long time and concluded that if he attempted to redistribute the property, the fraternal relationship amongst his sons would be lost forever. At the same time, he realized that it was unfair to deprive Naabhaaga of a share in the property. So he taught him the esoteric *Sooktha*²³ of *Vaiswadeva*²⁴ and said, “Naabhaaga, do not quarrel with your brothers over the property. I will tell you a way to get more property than they have obtained. Some sages called Angirasas are at present performing the *Satrayaga*²⁵. They are ignorant about these

²³ Vedic hymn

²⁴ The deities collectively

²⁵ Yaga conducted for very long period, requiring a greater number of qualified people, who participate just for the sake of Punya and nothing else

Vaiswadeva Sookthas; hence that *Yajna* will remain incomplete. If you make haste, you can reach that place and bring about the proper conclusion of that *Yajna*. This will fetch you the undistributed wealth of that *Yajna*, and you will also become famous.” Naabhaaga proffered his obeisance to his father and replied, “I am not particular about the wealth that I will gain, and whatever I receive from you will be sufficient.”

Subsequently, Naabhaaga reached the place where the *Yajna* was being conducted and ensured its successful completion. Thereupon, he was offered the remaining wealth; however, while he was collecting that wealth, a ferocious person with a trident materialized and spoke in great anger, “This money belongs to me, do not touch it.” Naabhaaga retorted, “My father gave this property to me, so do not make such false claims.” Immediately, a great argument commenced between them and finally the trident bearer stated that Naabhaaga should consult his father in this regard. Naabhaaga approached his father with this problem, and after thinking about it Manu replied, “The trident bearer is *Rudra*²⁶ and the Angirasas had offered all the wealth in the *Yajnasala*²⁷ to him; hence, all the wealth of the *Yajna* belongs to him.” Naabhaaga was not disheartened by his father’s pronouncement, and after returning to the

²⁶ Deity of the tempests, closely related to the deity of fire; it is also, another name for Lord Shiva

²⁷ Place where a *Yajna* is performed

Yajnasala, he craved pardon of *Rudra* and did not lay any claim on that wealth.

Rudra was immensely pleased with Naabhaaga's adherence to virtue, and his devotion and obedience towards his father. Consequently, he revealed his true form and said, "Naabhaaga, you requested the property as an offering from your father, but you did not forsake truthfulness and virtue. Moreover, you did not envy your brothers, and this has pleased me very much; hence, I will present you with *Bramhajana*²⁸ in addition to this wealth." Subsequently, a son, named, Ambareesha was born to Naabhaaga. Ambareesha was a great devotee of the Lord, in addition to being a renowned emperor.

7. BHANGASWANA

Once upon a time a mighty king, named Bhangaswana conducted a great *Yajna*²⁹ to obtain children. As a result, he was blessed with a hundred sons. However, the king of the deities Indra had not been made the main dignitary for this ritual, and this caused him to nurse a grudge against Bhangaswana. One day, while this king was hunting animals in the forest, he lost his way. He wandered in the forest for a long time and finally found a lake, into which he dived and drank deeply to quench his

²⁸ Knowledge of Brahman or the ultimate reality

²⁹ Vedic sacrifice.

overpowering thirst. But Lo Behold! When he came out of the lake he found himself transformed into a woman, which was due to the mischief played upon him by the deity Indra.

His long absence, prompted his troops to conduct a search for him, and they finally located him near this lake. However, the king was unable to face his subjects in the form of a woman. Accordingly, he handed over the reins of the kingdom to his sons and stayed back in the forest. The ways of God are incomprehensible; and this king befriended a young tribal man in the forest, and after some time had elapsed, they were blessed with sons. The king sent these sons to his kingdom and he asked them to live with their brothers. Due to the commingling of these siblings, the might of the kingdom increased tremendously.

The deity Indra was very much vexed, because his malevolent deed had proved to be a blessing. Hence, he disguised himself as a *Brahmin*³⁰ and created enmity between these two groups of brothers, which resulted in their killing each other. On hearing this news, Bhangaswana approached this Brahmin and fell at his feet. Then the deity Indra revealed his true self and told him that he had been responsible for all that had taken place. He felt pity for the king and asked him to make a wish. At this, the king begged him to bring his sons to life. To this the deity Indra asked, "Do you want me to revive the sons you had as father or the

³⁰ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

sons you had as a mother? I can give life to only one group.” The king asked him to resurrect the sons that he had begat as a mother.

The surprised deity Indra, questioned him, “Your older sons are suitable to be kings. Do you not want to bring them back to life?” To this the king replied that a mother’s love for her sons was greater than that of a father’s, and that the children born to him when he was a mother, were dearer to him than the sons who would become the rulers of the kingdom. The deity Indra was pleased with this reply and restored all his sons to life. After restoring all of them to life, he said, “My anger caused you all these bitter travails. However, you showed great devotion to me, therefore, I will restore your masculinity.” The king was greatly alarmed on hearing this and said, “I have lived as a mother as well as a father and I have become convinced that nothing can surpass the state of motherhood in the world. The sacrifice that a mother makes for her children is verily the greatest thing in this world; and the happiness that a mother obtains on seeing her children is the greatest joy in this life. Moreover, every woman is a mother, not only to her children, but also to all the children in the world. Therefore, please let me remain as a mother forever.” Accordingly, the king remained a woman.

8. MARUTA

Racial discrimination has always been decried in our mythology and the *Rakshasa Yajna*³¹ performed by Parasara and the *Sarpa Yajna*³² performed by Janamejaya, fall under the category of racial discrimination. The story of emperor Maruta's belongs to the very same category.

The pious and royal couple of Avikshita and Visaala were blessed with a son after a very long time. *Maharshi*³³ Thumburu paid a visit to them at that time, and told them that the boy had been born due to the grace of a divine tribe named the Maruta. Accordingly, the parents named the boy as Maruta. This boy grew up into a redoubtable warrior and he vanquished all the kings. His reputation increased to such an extent that even the deity Devendra became jealous of him.

Gradually, he developed an interest in sacrificial rituals, and even in this activity, his reputation was formidable. He performed *Yajnas*, wherein the *Devarshis*³⁴ were the *Ritviks*³⁵. Once, he went to Brihaspati and requested him to be the *Ritvik*. Brihaspati refused to do so, because of the deity Indra's ill will towards Maruta.

³¹ A rite performed by Parasara, in order to destroy all demons

³² A rite performed by Janamejaya, in order to destroy all serpents

³³ Great Sage.

³⁴ Divine Sage

³⁵ Priest who supervises the fire sacrifice

Therefore, Maruta appointed Brihaspati's elder brother the *Maharshi* Samvartha as the *Ritvik* and started the *Yajna*.

At that time Raavanasura was establishing his might and he attacked the *Yajnasala*, with the intention of destroying the *Yajna*. Before, commencing hostilities, he enquired arrogantly of Maruta, "What is your motive in making these offerings to the deities? Offer a share in the *Yajna* to me, or else, feel my wrath." Maruta immediately commenced hostilities with him, however, some *Maharshis*, who were the friends of Pulastya Brahma, convinced Raavanasura about the danger involved in confronting the redoubtable Maruta. Accordingly, Raavanasura decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and made a silent and swift exit.

Subsequently, the deity Indra decided to behead Maruta with his *Vajrayudha*³⁶. Maruta, who was unruffled by this development, approached the deity Indra and bound him. After that he brought the deity Indra to his *yagnasala* and compelled him to receive a share in the *Yajna*. This effectively ended the enmity between them.

On one occasion, the residents of *Nagaloka*³⁷ posed a major problem for Maruta. A few of these snakes, for no apparent reason, started to fatally bite the saints. These

³⁶ The adamantine weapon of the deity Indra

³⁷ The world in which Nagas reside

saints pleaded with Maruta to protect them. This caused Maruta to use a weapon named Samvartham on *Patala*³⁸. The creatures residing in that place were petrified with fear due to the influence of that *Astra*³⁹. They pleaded with Visaala, Maruta's mother, and sought her protection. She implored her husband, Avikshita, to intervene; who despite being proud at his son's valour, considered it unjust to punish the entire *Naga*⁴⁰ tribe for the mischief committed by a few vicious Nagas. Hence, he asked his son to cease his deadly assaults on the Nagas. However, the stubborn Maruta was disinclined to heed his father's words. Avikshita Since, his father abhorred racial discrimination in his domain; he declared war against his son, despite being aware of the fact that his son surpassed him in valour.

The *Maharshis* had implemented proper governance and *Dharma*⁴¹ in the country, and kings were required to adhere to the principles set out by them. Hence, this unseemly war between father and son was proving to be extremely distressing. Consequently, they dissuaded them from fighting and convinced Maruta, by arguing that the Nagas had sought his protection, through his mother; and that it was improper for a *Kshatriya*⁴² to kill such people. In

³⁸ The infernal regions

³⁹ Weapon

⁴⁰ A semi – divine being with a human face and the tail of a snake

⁴¹ Righteousness.

⁴² A person belonging to the warrior caste

this manner, Avikshita and the *Maharshis* combined forces to eradicate racial discrimination.

9. MAANDHAATA

Maandhaata, the son of Yuvanaswa, was a very ancient king of the *Kruta Yuga*⁴³. The lack of progeny made Yuvanaswa conduct a *Putra Kama Yajna*⁴⁴ to obtain a son. This *Yajna*⁴⁵ was presided over by Bhṛugu *Maharshi*⁴⁶. The king stayed at the *Yajnasala*⁴⁷ for the duration of this *Yajna*, and one night he awoke with great thirst. Upon searching in the dark, he found a vessel with water, and drank its contents. The next day Bhṛugu *Maharshi* asked him about the vessel of water that he had placed in that place, and the king replied that he had consumed all the water in that vessel. Bhṛugu *Maharshi* was very much concerned at this development and exclaimed, “Oh no! I put all my power of *Tapas*⁴⁸ in that water; whoever drinks it, will become pregnant, I wanted your wife to drink it, after I had completed some more rituals.”

The power of a *Maharshi* is inexorable. Therefore, Yuvanaswa became pregnant and a male infant burst out of

⁴³ Righteous age

⁴⁴ A Vedic rite performed for obtaining children

⁴⁵ Vedic ritual

⁴⁶ Great Sage

⁴⁷ Place where the Vedic rite is performed

⁴⁸ Deep meditation or ascetism.

his stomach. This boy was named Maandhaata and the deity Indra, recognizing the power of this boy, came down from heaven and fed him.

Maandhaata was made the king at the age of twelve. He started his conquests from that very age itself. This was intolerable to Raavanasura, who engaged in battle with him; however, Maandhaata effortlessly caught the twenty armed Raavanasura and imprisoned him. Later on, at the behest of Pulastyabrahma, he set him free.

This incident made Maandhaata, slightly proud. Consequently, he declared war on the deity Indra, who put on a brave face and said, “Have you conquered the entire Earth? Why did you come this far? There is a demon named Lavana in your world. First defeat him and then come to me.”

Indra adopted this tactic, as he knew that Lavanasura was a redoubtable foe, who had been blessed with special powers. Maandhaata attacked Lavana and suffered a major defeat at the latter’s hands. Failures constitute the best lessons, and after this defeat Maandhaata discontinued his conquests. He ruled his kingdom exemplarily, and emerged as a great and righteous emperor.

10. RANTHI DEVA

In spiritual life situations often arise, wherein taking the right decision, without violating *Dharma*⁴⁹, seems to be very difficult. The renowned ruler, Ranthi Deva was once compelled to countenance such a situation.

During a particular phase of his life, Ranthi Deva had been fully immersed in performing *Yajnas*⁵⁰. However, the sacrifice of animals was repugnant to him. One day, some cows approached him and asked him to conduct a *Yajna*, whereby they were all to be sacrificed. The king was dumbfounded at this horrendous command of these cows. He turned a deaf ear to their talk and invoked the name of the Lord. At this the cows explained to the king that they were adopting this measure at the behest of the scholars and the sages.

Ranthi Deva was beyond his wits and replied that even the mere thought of killing cows was extremely repugnant to him; and that those cows were asking him to sacrifice them in their entirety. Despite his great reluctance and trepidation to do so, the cows did not budge from their stance. Finally, Ranthi Deva found his tongue, and addressed the cows with great humility, "O! Most venerable mothers! It is unpardonable for me to disobey your command; but my

⁴⁹ Righteousness.

⁵⁰ Vedic sacrifice.

condition for compliance is that each and every cow has to come forward voluntarily and happily, and participate in the *Yajna* that I am going to conduct. If even a single cow displays hesitation, I will stop the *Yajna* forthwith. Moreover, I do not want the benefit of this terrible *Yajna*.”

With these words he started the *Yajna*. The cows were ecstatic on being sacrificed as they reached *Goloka*⁵¹. The blood of the sacrificed cows became the source of the River Charmanvathi. These sacrifices were proceeding without any hindrance, when one day, upon being called by the king to be sacrificed, a cow started to weep as it did not want to desert its calf. Ranthi Deva discontinued the *Yajna*, and developed great dispassion towards all things earthly. He distributed his wealth among the needy. As a result, he became a pauper and had to go without food for forty days. On the forty – first day he managed to procure some food, but as he was about to eat it a guest arrived. Hence, he provided his guest with half of the food he had obtained. Once again, when he was just on the verge of eating the remaining food, a *Sudra*⁵² came to see him, and immediately Ranthi Deva gave some of his food to him with. Then a *Chandala*⁵³ arrived and to him also Ranthi Deva offered a portion of the remaining food. After that a dog came to him

⁵¹ The first and highest realm in the cosmos, where the Divine Mother resides as Sri Radha with Lord Sri Krishna

⁵² Person belonging to the fourth or lowest caste

⁵³ Pariah

and Ranthi Deva gave the last of his food to it. With this, he had nothing left to eat.

Impressed by his magnanimity, Lord Brahma and other deities materialized before him, and acclaimed his unselfishness. They told him that they had visited him, disguised as the guests. These deities expressed their pleasure at his generosity and offered to grant him whatever he desired. To this Ranthi Deva replied, “Please give me everlasting devotion, devoid of selfishness; I desire nothing more than that.”

The beneficial results of dharma are obtained by following the customs prescribed in the Vedas. The Vedas exhort people to be kind towards other creatures, and such kindness leads to the equality of all the creatures. To attain such an advanced spiritual stage, one has to become free of all desire. The final outcome of such an exalted spiritual state is becoming one with the almighty. Ranthi Deva’s life teaches us to lead a life of purity and to reach God.

11. NRIGA

People, who do good deeds in haste, often commit mistakes. During Lord Sri Krishna’s rule, a chameleon entered a well in a village, whose water was used as the chief source of potable water. On observing it, the people thought that it would spoil the well water. In order to chase the chameleon from the well, the people began to throw

stones at it. Despite this barrage with stones, the chameleon neither left the well nor did it die. Upon hearing this amazing news, Lord Krishna arrived at that village to see this strange chameleon. On seeing Him, the chameleon changed into a human being, and narrated its past.

“Oh Lord, there was a king named Nriga who used to give cows as a gift to people who approached him. He derived great pleasure from this activity and over a period of time he became very arrogant. Once, he unknowingly donated his favourite cow to a *Brahmin*⁵⁴. Subsequently, this cow escaped from the *Brahmin* and joined the king’s herds. Nriga, without noticing this, donated this cow to another person. The *Brahmin*, to whom the cow had been donated in the first instance, asked the owner of that herd to return the cow to him, but that person refused to part with the cow.

After a long but indecisive argument, they approached Nriga. The latter thoroughly examined the issue and found that he had erroneously donated the cow twice. Accepting his error, King Nriga offered them a thousand cows, instead of the disputed. However, they refused to accept his offer and stated that accepting cows was in itself a sin. Consequently, they did not want to repeat it and demanded of the king to provide them both with the disputed cow.

⁵⁴ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

Nriga was unable to resolve the dispute and departed from this world without finding a solution to the problem. He arrived in hell where it was decided that he had to born as a chameleon, in order to atone for his transgression. Thus Nriga was punished for his failure to notice the presence of the donated cow in his cattle and for having donated the same cow twice.

Nriga deposed before *Yama*⁵⁵ that he had donated the cow twice and had behaved arrogantly. He contended that the punishment inflicted on him was disproportionate to the mistake committed by him, and that his numerous acts of charity had been disregarded.

After listening to the pleadings of Nriga, Yama replied, “Your very name, Nriga means one with humans, but your ignorance and arrogance made you behave like a beast. You interchanged the cows like a chameleon changes its colours. As such you deserve this punishment. However, you will be rewarded for your benefactions to *Brahmins*. Accordingly, you will remember your earlier life, while you are a chameleon. Moreover, you will see Lord Sri Krishna, which will restore your human form.” With these words, Nriga concluded his story and told Lord Krishna that His vision had once again made him human and that all his sins had been washed away. The moral of this story is that it is essential to be very careful while performing good deeds.

⁵⁵ Deity of death and ruler of the infernal regions

12. Trishanku

The state of being unconnected or indifferent to any situation or circumstance is generally referred to as being in Trishanku *Swarga*⁵⁶. In ancient times there was a prince in the *Suryavamshi*⁵⁷ clan, named Satyavrata. He exhibited aberrant behaviour, and on one occasion he abducted a married woman and kept her with him. His father, the Emperor Tridhanva, was much annoyed at this act of his son and exiled him from the country. Subsequently, there was a severe drought in the country and the people underwent untold sufferings. They found it very difficult to obtain food.

During that period, the *Maharshi*⁵⁸ Vishwaamitra was leading the life of a householder, and the famine made it very difficult to provide food for his family. His desperation was so great that he was prepared to sell one of his sons in order to feed the other members of his family. At this juncture, Satyavrata happened to meet him and promised to provide him with food.

One day Satyavrata stole a cow belonging to *Maharshi* Vasishtha, and slaughtered it in order to feed himself and Vishwaamitra. However, his hunger was so great that he consumed the entire cow on his own. *Maharshi* Vasishtha was very angry on coming to know of this incident.

⁵⁶ Heaven

⁵⁷ Solar dynasty

⁵⁸ Great Sage.

He strongly rebuked Satyavrata in the following words, “You have betrayed your father with your disgraceful conduct, you have stolen your *Guru’s*⁵⁹ cow and eaten it. Thus you have committed three sins, which have pierced your heart with three nails. Therefore, you are Trishanka, or the one with three nails embedded in him.” In this manner, Satyavrata came to be known as Trishanku.

After the passage of some time, Trishanku became the King and wished to go to heaven with his mortal body. He requested his Guru *Maharshi* Vasishtha to perform the *Yajna*⁶⁰ required for this purpose. *Maharshi* Vasishtha refused to do so; because, in his opinion, such a desire was wrong. Trishanku approached *Maharshi* Vasishtha’s sons with the same request, but they refused to do so, as his request entailed the performance of an act, which had been forbidden by the *Guru*⁶¹. They were sorely vexed with him and cursed him to become a *Chandala*⁶².

Trishanku was desperate to ascend to heaven in his physical body; hence, he approached *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra with this request. *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra had an age old feud with *Maharshi* Vasishtha; moreover, Trishanku had provided food to Vishwaamitra and his family, during the terrible famine. Hence, *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra

⁵⁹ Religious or spiritual teacher

⁶⁰ Vedic sacrifice

⁶¹ Religious or spiritual teacher

⁶² Pariah

agreed to perform the necessary *Yajna*. He invited other *Maharshis* to be present at the *Yajnasala*⁶³ and perform the duty of *Ritviks*⁶⁴, but not a single one of them accepted his invitation.

Maharshi Vishwaamitra completed the *Yajna* on his own and expended some of his power of *Tapas*⁶⁵, in order to send Trishanku to heaven. However, while Trishanku was entering heaven, the deity Indra stopped him and threw him back to the earth. Trishanku was falling down to the earth, head foremost, and he was desperately calling upon *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra. The latter, on hearing Trishanku's voice, immediately stopped his fall and suspended him between heaven and earth. After that Vishwaamitra created a new heaven in that place. These efforts cost Vishwaamitra a considerable amount of his *Tapas shakti*⁶⁶. Subsequently, he took up the creation of a new heaven; but he was dissuaded from doing so by the deity Indra and some other saints. In return, they agreed to allow Trishanku to permanently stay in between heaven and earth.

Trishanku remained on this intermediate plane, which was neither heaven nor earth. He had led an aimless and vagrant life and the term Trishanku Swarga originates from him. *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra lost his entire *Tapas*

⁶³ Place where the Vedic rite is performed

⁶⁴ Priest who supervises the fire sacrifice

⁶⁵ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁶⁶ Sacred power

shakti in replicating the original heaven for Trishanku. Therefore, one should never forsake righteousness and one should never disobey one's Guru. People who commit such transgressions, are certain to end up like Trishanku.

13. ASAMANJASA

Some people indulge in iniquity, despite being born in a great family. Such people do not deserve to be condemned summarily. The following narrative bears this out. Long ago, a king of the *Suryavamshi*⁶⁷ clan, named, Sagara, was blessed with a son named, Asamanja. This Asamanja was perfect in all the arts and had a family. However, he was in the habit of going to the river bank, in the evenings, and attracting all the children by giving them delicacies. Afterwards, he would play with them for a while, and then suddenly throw them into the river. The people were much annoyed at this and complained to the king, who banished him from the kingdom.

For this reason, Asamanja came to be known as Asamanjasa. Although, a number of people had condemned him, *Maharshi* Vasishtha did not blame him, as he was aware of Asamanja's previous birth. In his previous birth Asamanja had been a saint, who had lost his intellectual and supernatural powers, on account of befriending unrighteous persons. One day he had found a great treasure in the

⁶⁷ Solar dynasty

forest. As he was greedily about to grab it, a huge demon prevented him from doing so and said, "All of this treasure belongs to me. I have been guarding it despite suffering from unbearable hunger. You can take this treasure, if you provide me with a cow, so that I can eat it."

On hearing these words, he replied, "First, give me the treasure; and I shall bring the cow to you as soon as possible." After convincing the demon in this fashion, he appropriated the treasure, but he forgot about the providing the demon with the cow. Soon, afterwards, he died, and was reborn as a son of the emperor Sagara. That demon had not obtained its revenge, so it commenced to harass him. Asamanja had acquired all the intellectual and supernatural powers of his previous birth. He used to throw children and old people into the river when he was under the spell of that demon. Afterwards, when the demon had departed, he used to pull them out of the river. Unfortunately, the people had failed to see this. They had thought that the children had emerged from the river, without suffering any harm, merely due to their good luck. Asamanja never told them about this; and even if he had done so, nobody would have believed his words.

In this manner that corrupted saint, who had been possessed by the demon, was exiled from the kingdom and finally died due to the agony caused by the demon. His son, Ansumantha was anointed the ruler of that kingdom.

14. HARISHCHANDRA

King Harishchandra was renowned for his truthfulness. He also had the sobriquet of Satyaharishchandra, for reasons that were not so well known.

Harishchandra did not have children, hence, he prayed to the deity *Varuna*⁶⁸, in order to obtain offspring. After the passage of some time, the deity *Varuna* appeared before him and said, "I will bless you with progeny, if you promise to sacrifice your new born child in a *Yajna*." Harishchandra agreed to this and a son was born to him.

The deity *Varuna* manifested himself before him and asked him to fulfil his promise. To this Harishchandra replied, "Let the ceremonial cleansing, after the birth of a child, be completed, then I will complete my part of the bargain." After this ceremony had been completed, the deity *Varuna* returned with his original demand. However, Harishchandra pleaded with him, "Please wait till the boy starts teething." When this change took place in the boy, Harishchandra again asked for time, by saying, "Let the child start talking." When the boy was able to talk, Harishchandra stated, "This boy will be impure till such time as the ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread is not completed; therefore, please wait awhile."

⁶⁸ Deity of the Ocean

That boy was named Lohithasya and when he was ten years old his *Upanayana*⁶⁹ was performed. Subsequently, the deity Devendra, in the garb of a *Brahmin*⁷⁰, met this boy, when he was all alone in a secluded place and warned him, “Your father intends to sacrifice you to the deity *Varuna*.” On hearing these words, that boy immediately, fled into the forest.

When the deity *Varuna* came to claim the boy, Harishchandra asked, “What am I to do? The boy ran away.” This reply made the deity *Varuna* furious and he cursed him, “Your entire body will become bloated and you will be infected with the *bhagandara*⁷¹ disease.” The king was terrified at this curse and pleaded with the deity *Varuna*, who told him, “I will ward off the curse if you arrange for a surrogate and sacrifice him to me. However, the surrogate’s parents should voluntarily agree to his being sacrificed.” Thereupon, Harishchandra made a proclamation to this effect.

At that time, Ajeegartha, a forest dwelling *Brahmin* devotee, had three sons. They were very poor and often went hungry. On hearing this proclamation, Ajeegartha said, “I do not want to offer my elder son.” His wife added, “I do not want to sacrifice my youngest son.” At this, Sunassepha,

⁶⁹ Ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread

⁷⁰ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

⁷¹ Internal abscess

the middle son, spoke angrily, “Since, you consider me to be dispensable, I shall be the sacrifice. I will be happy if all of you emerge from your abject poverty.” With these words, that ten year old boy approached the king’s soldiers and offered himself as a sacrifice; and his parents agreed to this.

The king’s soldiers took Sunassepha and stopped at *Maharshi Vishwaamitra’s* ashram, on their way back to the king’s palace. The boy started to weep bitterly as soon as he saw *Maharshi Vishwaamitra* and said, “Oh great sage! I want to perform *Tapas*⁷²; but, my father’s word should not prove to be false. In addition, the king’s *Yajna*⁷³ should continue and I should live. Please tell me some method by which all these things can be accomplished.”

Maharshi Vishwaamitra was extremely pleased with that boy’s virtuousness. He summoned his sons and asked any one of them to go to the king instead of Sunassepha, but none of them agreed to do so. *Maharshi Vishwaamitra* got enraged and burned them to ashes. After that he taught two *mantras*⁷⁴ to Sunassepha and instructed him to chant them just before he was to be sacrificed. Sunassepha followed his advice and the deity *Varuna*, who was pleased with Sunassepha’s virtuous mind, appeared at once, and ordered the *Yajna* to be stopped. Afterwards, he revoked the curse

⁷² Deep meditation or ascetism

⁷³ Vedic sacrifice

⁷⁴ Aphorisms

he that he had placed on Harishchandra. Then, the deity Indra and all the other deities granted Sunassepha a wish. To this he replied, "Please include me in the family of *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra, who lost his children for my sake. That will be a true blessing for me." Subsequently, the absconding Lohithasya, returned home; and Harishchandra vowed to follow only *satya*⁷⁵. From that time onwards, he was known as Satyaharishchandra.

15. UTTAMA

In ancient times there was a king named Uttaana Paada. One day, his son Dhruva attempted to sit on his lap; but he was dissuaded from doing so by his step mother Suruchi. She had a son named Uttama, who inherited the kingdom. He married the incredibly beauty Bahula and developed extreme fondness towards her. However, she did not reciprocate his love and was aloof towards him. One day, she insulted her husband in the presence of others. The deeply humiliated Uttama, instructed his soldiers to abandon her in the forest. Surprisingly, Bahula accepted this banishment without any remonstrance.

After sometime, a *Brahmin*⁷⁶ named Susharma arrived at Uttama's court and asked him to rescue his wife who had been abducted. Uttama asked the *Brahmin* to

⁷⁵ Truth

⁷⁶ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

describe his wife, and he told the king that his wife was black, short, old and ugly.

The king was flabbergasted and thought that he had forsaken his beautiful wife, whereas, this *Brahmin* was searching high and low for his ugly wife. He advised Susharma to forget his ugly wife; and told him that he would arrange Susharma's marriage with a young and beautiful girl. Susharma did not accept this and replied, "O! King! We have to protect our wife irrespective of her appearance and lead a happy married life, in accordance with *Dharma*⁷⁷. I do not want to hear your words, which are unrighteous."

Susharma's determination and his adherence to righteousness moved the king. So he conducted a search for the *Brahmin's* wife. In the course of his search, he arrived at the ashram of *Maharshi*⁷⁸ Trikalagna. On seeing Uttama, *Maharshi* Trikalagna instructed one of his disciples to give the king *arghyam* or water to wash his hands and feet. The disciple asked him to reconsider his order. Consequently, the saint did not offer water to the king and enquired of him as to why he had come to the forest. Moreover, he informed the king that Susharma's wife had been abducted by a demon named Balaaka. The king asked the saint as to why he had not offered him water, to which the saint replied,

⁷⁷ Righteousness.

⁷⁸ Great Sage

“Do not mistake me, but a man without a wife is not eligible to receive water.”

Afterwards, the king located Balaaka, who handed over Susharma’s wife to him. Subsequently, the demon told the king that he had kidnapped her, because her husband had been performing a *Yajna*⁷⁹ to eradicate all the demons; in which it was imperative for his wife to be by his side. He told that king that he would permanently place himself at his disposal and render any service to him, if he ensured that the *Yajna* was discontinued.

This compelled Uttama to realize the importance of a wife; and he clearly comprehended the relationship between dharma, *Yajna* and a wife. He handed over that ugly woman to Susharma and urged him to stop the *Yajna*. Afterwards, he approached *Maharshi* Trikalagna and asked him to locate the whereabouts of his wife through his supernatural powers. The saint replied that his wife had been abducted by a king of the serpents, named Salapothaka. Nevertheless, Salapothaka’s daughter has been protecting her.

Uttama asked Balaaka to fetch his wife, subsequently; Susharma arrived at that place and made the king and his wife conduct the *Mithra Vindeshti Yajna*, which instilled friendly and affectionate feelings in Bahula, so that she stopped being indifferent towards Uttama. After some

⁷⁹ Vedic sacrifice

time, she gave birth to a son, who was named Uttama. This Uttama was elevated to the position of Manu. The moral of this narrative is that those who realize the purity of the marital relationship are blessed with children, who rise to positions of eminence.

16. SATYATAPA

Mythology is replete with instances, in which even the morally depraved obtained a good nature by associating with virtuous persons. The story of Satyatapa belongs to this genre.

Satyatapa was given this name as an honorific, and as such no one knew his original name. Initially, his profession had been that of a highway robber on the forest highways; during the course of which, he had murdered a large number of people.

One day, while wandering in the forest he saw a saint named Aaruni. He pounced on the saint with the hope that he might get some treasure if he beat him. That saint opened his eyes once, looked at him and again closed his eyes to resume his meditation. That cruel man was surprised at this and his intentions underwent a sea change. He bowed low before that saint and prayed, "Venerable one! I have beaten many people to death. You are the first person, I have encountered, who does not fear death. I will abstain

from evil in the future. Please show me the way to self - realization.”

Aaruni ignored him and left that place. The bandit started to follow the saint wherever he went, all the while beseeching him with great humility.

One day, while the saint was walking through the forest, a tiger suddenly tried to attack him. The bandit, who had been following the saint, interposed himself between the saint and the tiger; and killed the latter. Aaruni was very pleased, and instructed him, “Always speak the truth and never eat anything from the tree called Sakata. This is the way to *Moksha*⁸⁰.”

This seemingly trivial teaching left the bandit in the seventh heaven of bliss. He took the sage’s permission and started *Tapas*⁸¹ in the forest. To his surprise, he could not find any tree other than the Sakata tree, in that forest. Therefore, in accordance with his preceptor’s command, he commenced *Tapas*, while simultaneously abstaining from food.

One day, *Maharshi*⁸² Durvasa visited that erstwhile bandit’s *ashram*⁸³. He wished to see the hospitality that he

⁸⁰ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.

⁸¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁸² Great Sage

⁸³ Hermitage

would show towards him. The bandit had worshipped *Ishwara*⁸⁴ and obtained a divine bowl, which produced whatever was desired, and *Maharshi* Durvasa partook of a wonderful meal due to that bowl. Afterwards, he expressed wonder at the bandit's power of *Tapas* and appreciated him wholeheartedly, "O *tapasvi*⁸⁵! Your devotion towards your master is exemplary. You shall be called Satyatapa, as you meditate only on the truth. From that time onwards, that bandit turned saint was known as Satyatapa.

One day, while Satyatapa was cutting wood for a sacrifice, the knife fell on his finger and chopped it off; but his power of *Tapas*, made that amputated finger to return to his hand and fix itself in its previous place. A few *kinnaras*⁸⁶, who witnessed this miracle, described it in the assembly of the deity Indra. Consequently, Lord Vishnu and the deity Indra disguised themselves as a pig and a *boya*⁸⁷, respectively, and came to the forest to test him. The wild pig entered Satyatapa's ashram pretending to be terrified of the *boya* who was chasing it. The *boya* also entered the ashram behind it and shouted, "O! Saint! Where did the wild pig I was chasing, go?" Satyatapa was faced with a dilemma, if he told the truth; he would be responsible for the wild pig's death; whereas, if he told a lie, he would be disregarding his

⁸⁴ God

⁸⁵ Ascetic

⁸⁶ Celestial musicians

⁸⁷ Tribal huntsman

preceptor's words. Accordingly, Satyatapa gave a perplexing answer, "The eye beheld the pig, but the eye, which saw it, could not talk. The mouth that can talk, did not see the pig, therefore, how can the mouth say that it had seen the pig?"

Pleased with his virtuous mind and compassionate nature, Lord Vishnu and the deity Indra revealed their true form to him. In this manner a ruthless bandit had been transformed into a *Maharshi* with the blessings of saint Aaruni. This incident shows that it is very beneficial to associate with virtuous people; and the grace of a good master, allows one to adhere to the truth even under the most difficult circumstances.

17. ASVASIRA

People who follow the spiritual path always think about how to reach God. This desire is possessed by not only the common people, but also those who have reached positions of eminence. Moreover, the hard earned victories of life; in no way diminish this desire to find an easy way to reach God. Long ago, there lived a king named Asvasira, who had such a desire.

Asvasira was not only a great warrior, but also a virtuous man. He conquered all the great kings of his time and amassed great wealth, with which he commenced a

great *yaga*⁸⁸. One day, the *Maharshis*⁸⁹ Kapila and Jaigeeshavya came to attend that yaga. Asvasira was very pleased and treated them with great honour. During his conversation with them, he asked them if they knew of any easy method to attain Lord Vishnu. Asvasira was anticipating some *Yajna*, *Tapas*, benefaction, mantra or a secret. However, those *Maharshis* merely laughed and stated that the easiest method was to worship them, as they themselves were Lord Vishnu.

The king was angered at this reply and said, “Please refrain from mocking at me. It is not that I am ignorant about Lord Vishnu, even though I have not been blessed with His vision. His mount is the *Garuda*⁹⁰ and He bears the conch and discus in his hands. Why do you take my request so lightly?”

Thereupon, *Maharshi* Kapila appeared as Lord Vishnu and *Maharshi* Jaigeeshavya as Garuda; but Asvasira laughed loudly and said, “Revered ones! Why do you show these magic tricks to me? If you are really Lord Vishnu, where is the lotus flower in your navel; and where is Lord Brahma in the lotus flower?”

Immediately, a lotus flower formed in *Maharshi* Kapila’s navel, and *Maharshi* Jaigeeshavya changed into Lord

⁸⁸ Vedic sacrifice

⁸⁹ Great Sages

⁹⁰ Eagle

Brahma in that lotus flower. The king replied that this was also a magic trick. At this both the *Maharshis* disappeared at once; and within a very short while, a number of wild beasts fell on the *Yajnasala*⁹¹ and filled it completely. This caused the officiating priests to flee from that place. Asvasira lost all his pride and realized that this was due to the influence of the *Maharshis*. He prayed to them fervently, which caused them to reappear. At the same time all the wild animals in the *yagnasala* disappeared. Then the *Maharshis* addressed him in the following manner, “You wanted to know an easy way to attain God. Be aware that God exists in each and everything in this world. Such realization constitutes the easy path. We changed our appearance to make this clear to you and not to show you any magic tricks. From now onwards, view God in all the creatures and you will obtain Him very easily.”

18. AVEEKSHITA

Stubbornness and resoluteness are not the same. Resoluteness is to be bound by a decision made in accordance with the law, after having deeply contemplated as to what is right and what is wrong. Stubbornness, on the other hand, is to obstinately hold on to whatever feelings or views one thinks to be correct. Stubbornness can be seen in many young people, and it generally leads to failure.

⁹¹ Place where the Vedic rite is performed

In times of yore, a son was born to king Karamdhama. The eminent astrologers of that kingdom were summoned by the king and asked to examine the boy's horoscope. After scrutinizing the horoscope, they declared, "It is good, because the bad planets are not watching", which was a very strange statement. That boy was named Aveekshita, because the bad planets were not observing him.

Aveekshita grew older and became a great warrior and scholar. One day, the king of Visaladesa proclaimed a *Swayamvaraa*⁹² for his daughter Visaala, and Aveekshita attended it. However, the word spread that Visaala would choose Aveekshita as her husband. The princes attending the *Swayamvaraa* became envious, encircled Aveekshita and imprisoned him; which resulted in the cancellation of the *Swayamvaraa*.

On hearing about this, Karamdhama arrived there with his army and set Aveekshita free. Visaala had declared that she would marry none other than Aveekshita, and everybody was happy at this development. All the same, Aveekshita refused to marry Visaala, because he had been defeated, while she had been watching. The wise men present in that place tried to convince him by saying, "None of those princes could defeat you on his own, so they waged

⁹² Ceremony, in which a prospective bride selects her husband, from amongst a number of suitors

an unfair battle with you and won over you in an unjust war. Thus, whatever transpired cannot be termed as defeat.” Aveekshita refused to listen to them and Visaala vowed, “I want you as my husband in every birth and I will not marry anyone else.” Unfortunately, Aveekshita was unmoved by her words.

His parents kept quiet, as they could not do anything about his stubbornness. What was to happen to their kingdom? This question troubled them, but Aveekshita was uncaring and it did not occur to him that as the crown prince, it was wrong on his part to ignore his people.

A long time elapsed and one day, Aveekshita’s mother Veeradevi, started a *Vrata*⁹³ called Kimichchaka. She beckoned her son and said, “When we take up this *Vrata*, we have to give away whatever anyone asks us. You take this vow on my behalf.” Aveekshita agreed to this and started to distribute benefactions.

Meanwhile, his father Karamdhama approached his son, and asked him to present him with a grandson. Aveekshita was on the horns of a dilemma, but those were the days, when truth could not be forsaken at any cost. He was frightened of committing a falsehood and yielded to his father’s word. His stubbornness received a mortal blow in this manner. Aveekshita now took another vow that he

⁹³ Religious practice

would only marry Visaala, but her whereabouts were unknown, as she had left to some secluded place, in order to perform *Tapas*⁹⁴.

In this manner, quite some time went by. One day Aveekshita was hunting in the forest, when he heard a female voice crying, “Please save me! I am Aveekshita’s wife.” When he went there, he saw that a demon was about to carry away a female recluse by force. Immediately, Aveekshita fought with that demon and killed him. As he had performed a very difficult task, the deities materialized before him and showered flowers on him. Then they stated, “Marry this woman, a great son will be born to you.” To this the adamant Aveekshita replied, “I will not marry anyone except Visaala.” The deities smiled and said, “She is the same Visaala and she had been performing *Tapas* to obtain you as her husband.”

In this manner, Visaala and Aveekshita were finally married and a son, Maruta was born to them. Karamdhama had become very old, therefore he asked Aveekshita to take over the reins of the kingdom, as he wanted to retreat to the forest. Once, again Aveekshita raised a new condition. He stated that since he had been defeated once, he was not suitable to rule the kingdom. Nobody could convince him, and a helpless Karamdhama made his grandson Marutta the ruler of the kingdom.

⁹⁴ Deep meditation or ascetism

Marutta became a great warrior. One day, during his rule, some *Nagas*⁹⁵ started to harm the saints. These saints requested Marutta to resolve their problem, and he released a formidable weapon, known as the Samvarthastram and burned down the entire *Nagaloka*⁹⁶. At this some old *Nagas* approached Visaala and beseeched her put an end to their slaughter by her son. She informed her husband Aveekshita, about this, as she did not want to tell this to her son. Aveekshita did not want to involve himself in the affairs of the kingdom; however, he met his son and asked him to stop fighting with the *Nagas*.

Surprisingly, Marutta did not pay heed to his father's words. Moreover, Aveekshita did not give up and the result was a mighty battle between father and son. On seeing this unfortunate spectacle, the *Maharshis* themselves came forward to stop the war between them. Later on, Aveekshita blessed his son and left for the forest, as he was unable to live in the kingdom. In this manner, Aveekshita was compelled to forsake his resolve on many occasions. Therefore, lawful firmness and not stubbornness is to be adopted.

⁹⁵ Semi – divine beings with a human face and the tail of a snake

⁹⁶ The world in which Nagas reside

19. SUKANYA

People with intense self realization obtain protection from their unintentional sins and mistakes; the narrative of Sukanya Devi illustrates this fact.

Once upon a time, there was a king Saryathi, who was the son of Vivaswatha. Saryathi had a very beautiful daughter named Sukanya. Once, the King went on an excursion to a nearby forest, accompanied by his family and servants. Sukanya, while roaming in the forest with her companions, found a strange ant hill, which had two holes. She saw an object that was shining and emitting light through the holes on the ant hill. Out of curiosity she prodded these holes with a sharp object, whereupon, a piercing scream of extreme pain, emanated from the ant hill. Soon, blood started to flow from these holes, and a terrified Sukanya fled from that place.

An ant hill had formed around *Maharshi*⁹⁷ Chyavana, who was in deep meditation, and the shining objects, pierced by Sukanya, had been his eyes. The extreme pain and suffering caused great anger to Chyavana *Maharshi*, which resulted in the immediate cessation of all excretory functions in the King, his soldiers, family members and escorts. Their stomachs started to distend and King Saryathi made enquires to determine the reason for this sudden

⁹⁷ Great Sage

development. Sukanya told him that she had pierced two holes on an ant hill, which had then started to bleed. King Saryathi went to that place and carefully cleared the ant hill. Inside they found the blinded Chyavana *Maharshi*. King Saryathi tendered his apologies to the *Maharshi* and begged for mercy.

Chyavana *Maharshi* told the king “I am already old and now I have become blind. How can I lead my life in this condition? Your daughter made me blind. As such, you have to make her my wife and leave her with me, only then you will be relieved of your suffering.”

The king was hesitant to marry his daughter to the *Maharshi*, but Sukanya told her father that as she had committed the sin, she would marry the *Maharshi*. Having no other choice, the King was forced to perform their marriage. Only then were the king and his entourage relieved of their peculiar affliction. Sukanya became busy with serving her husband and immersed herself in meditating on the Goddess Lalita Devi. Her devotion to her husband was so great that she was considered to be a *Pativrata*⁹⁸.

One day, the deities *Aswini*⁹⁹ came to that place for recreation, and on espying Sukanya, were enraptured by her

⁹⁸ A woman who is chaste and staunchly loyal towards her husband

⁹⁹ Divine physicians

great beauty. They asked her about her identity, and she replied that she was the wife of Chyavana *Maharshi*. These deities praised her beauty and told her that the old *Maharshi* was unsuitable for her, and that she should select one of them to be her husband. Sukanya was enraged at these words and threatened to curse them for their misbehaviour. The Aswini deities expressed sympathy for her and told her that they were physicians, who could transform her husband into a young man. However, they imposed the condition that he would resemble them after the change. Sukanya was perplexed at their words and approached her husband. She told him about what had transpired. The *Maharshi* encouraged her to accept the offer of the deities.

The Aswini deities asked Chyavana *Maharshi* to dip himself in a lake along with them. Subsequently, three similar looking youngsters emerged from the lake. They were identical in physique, gestures and speech. Sukanya pondered as to the course of action to be adopted by her. Finally, she prayed to the Goddess *Parameshwari*¹⁰⁰ with great devotion and sought her help in this matter. The Goddess answered her prayers and Her blessings enabled Sukanya to identify her husband. The Aswini deities were astonished at her chasteness and devotion to her husband,

¹⁰⁰ The Divine Mother

which had made it possible for her to pass the difficult test, put to her. They expressed their happiness with Sukanya.

The young Chyavana thanked the Aswini deities and asked them to seek a boon from him; and the deities asked him to provide them with the Soma portion in his *Yajnas*. Chyavana accepted their wish.

Afterwards, King Saryathi came to visit his daughter and found Sukanya in the company of a young person. He was very angry with his daughter; but soon came to know that the young person was none other than his son – in – law. The King was overjoyed at this turn of events; and Chyavana encouraged him to perform a great and important yaga, with his assistance.

King Saryathi started the *Yajna* and the deity Indra accompanied by the other deities attended the *Yajna* to receive their portion of the offerings such as the *Havirbhagas*¹⁰¹. At that time, Chyavana started to chant the mantras for inviting the Aswini deities to receive the Soma portion of the offerings. The deity Indra objected on the grounds that the Aswini deities were divine doctors and hence ineligible to receive the *Yajna's Soma*¹⁰². Chyavana did not listen to Indra's argument, which infuriated him and made him aim his *Vajrayudha*¹⁰³ at Chyavana to assault him.

¹⁰¹ Offerings made at the time of the Vedic sacrifice

¹⁰² A divine drink

¹⁰³ The adamantine weapon of the deity Indra

At the same time, Chyavana uttered some mantras, due to which the hand in which the deity Indra was holding that weapon became motion less. A demon emerged through the mantra and came forward to swallow the deity Indra. The deity Indra was frightened and craved the pardon of Chyavana. Then Chyavana withdrew the demon and the mantra that he had used against the deity Indra. Afterwards, the Soma portion of the offerings in the *Yajna* was made over to the Aswini deities.

In this manner, the power of Sukanya's chastity and staunch loyalty towards her husband, and her devotion to the Goddess Parameshwari, resulted in great fame and honour to not only the Aswini deities, but also her husband.

20. PURURAVA

The practice of separating Agni into a triad and worshipping it as *Tretagni*¹⁰⁴ started in the *Tretayuga*¹⁰⁵. This manner of worshipping Agni was introduced by the Emperor Pururava, who had been born in the intermediate period of the *yugas*¹⁰⁶, in order to introduce a new method of worship on earth. He led a life that was full of ups and downs.

¹⁰⁴ The sacrificial, southern and household fires

¹⁰⁵ Second of the four epochs that constitute a great epoch

¹⁰⁶ Epochs

Once upon a time in the distant past, Vaivaswata Manu performed a *Yajna*¹⁰⁷, in order to acquire male offspring. The chief priest for this *Yajna* was *Maharshi*¹⁰⁸ Vasishtha. However, Vaivaswata's wife wanted a female child, hence, she approached the priest who was performing the *Yajna* and secretly requested him to conduct the *Yajna* in such a manner that her wish would be fulfilled. After the completion of the *Yajna*, she gave birth to a female child, who was named Ila. Vaivaswata Manu asked Vasishtha to tell him the reason as to why a female child had been born, when the purpose of the *Yajna* had been to obtain a male child. Vasishtha *Maharshi* had come to know through his divine vision that the priest, who had performed the *Yajna*, was responsible for this outcome. Since, he was the chief priest for that *Yajna*; he felt responsible for the acts of the other priests. Accordingly, Vasishtha transformed that female child into a male child, and named it as Sudyumna.

On ascending the throne, Sudyumna ruled for a very long period of time. One day he went to the Kumara garden, whilst Lord Shiva and the Goddess Paarvati were present in that place. The Goddess Paarvati had placed a curse upon the Kumara garden, whereby any male, who entered that garden, when the Gods were present there, would be changed into a female. Due to this curse, Sudyumna changed

¹⁰⁷ Vedic sacrifice

¹⁰⁸ Great Sage

back into Ila and forgot all about who he was and from whence he had come.

The deity Buddha on seeing Ila, fell in love with her and married her. They had a son named Pururava. He was an intrepid warrior, who visited heaven with his physical body; where he assisted the deities in the war with the demons.

One day, a demon abducted Urvasi and carried her away. Pururava on seeing this intervened and killed the demon. Urvasi was saved and Pururava fell in love with her. She was unable to reject his love and at the same time she was unwilling to stay back on earth. In order to find a way out of this dilemma, she imposed a condition that she would fetch some goats, which would have to be protected by him. If he failed to do so, she would go back to heaven. Pururava gladly agreed to this condition.

Urvasi and Pururava had many sons, and after the passage of quite some time, the Gandharvas stole the goats, so that Urvasi could return to heaven. Accordingly, Urvasi returned to heaven and the grief stricken Pururava took leave of his senses.

Holy people do not fall victim to short lived emotions like lust and anger, because their divine power protects and directs them onto the sacred path. Pururava was in agony due to separation from Urvasi. Subsequently, the Gandharvas gave him a vessel containing fire; and it was at

the juncture, where the Kruta Yuga was coming to an end and the Tretayuga was commencing. The effect of time is not only inconceivable but also important. Due to the effect of the Tretayuga, and on seeing the vessel of *Agni*¹⁰⁹, Pururava came to understand the Vedic Mantras from a new perspective. With this newly acquired knowledge, he cut a branch from a Ravi tree that had emerged from a Jammi tree. Afterwards, he broke the branch into two pieces and churned them, thereby creating Agni. After that he separated this *Agni* into three parts and named them *Avahaneeyama*¹¹⁰, *Dakshinagni*¹¹¹ and *Garhapathya*¹¹². He worshipped these three fires and this practice was later termed as worshipping the *Tretagni*, which rendered worship much easier.

The three fires worship developed by Pururava is followed in the Vedic rites, even today and it constitutes an important ritual.

Pururava experienced many ups and downs in his life. He utilized his spiritual and divine power to develop new methods of worship, which constituted a permanent

¹⁰⁹ Fire

¹¹⁰ Sacrificial fire

¹¹¹ Southern fire

¹¹² Household fire

solution to the numerous problems faced by the *Sadhakas*¹¹³. Therefore, he will never be forgotten.

21. PULASTYA

In order to achieve an objective, one has to work hard with dedication, after overcoming lust and wrath. That which creates interest in some other activity is lust; and indulging in quarrels, due to the thinking that they are hindering one's religious practices is termed as wrath. These two vices hinder, even the *Maharshis*¹¹⁴ in their practice of *Tapas*¹¹⁵. Some of the *mahatmas*¹¹⁶, who had conquered lust, could not achieve their goal, because they had failed to win over wrath. Pulastya-Abrahma was one such unfortunate soul.

Maharshi Pulastya was a mind born son of Lord Brahma. He practiced *Tapas* in the vicinity of the Meru Mountain, near the *Ashram*¹¹⁷ of *Maharshi* Trinabindu. This *Maharshi* had a daughter, who, along with some celestial maidens, used to cause a lot of disturbance with her music and dance. Gradually they started conducting their dance and music near Pulastya's ashram, which caused considerable disturbance to his *Tapas*.

¹¹³ Spiritual seeker

¹¹⁴ Great Sages

¹¹⁵ Deep meditation or ascetism

¹¹⁶ Noble minded

¹¹⁷ Hermitage

He tolerated this for a long time, but one day he admonished and cursed them, “Leave this place immediately, whomsoever that I see again will lose their virginity and become pregnant.” When the girls heard this curse, they ran away out of fright. *Maharshi* Trinabindu’s daughter, who was not present there, was unaware of the curse. Hence, as was her usual practice, she started wandering near Pulastya’s ashram and he happened to see her, which resulted in her instant pregnancy.

She was shocked at this unexpected occurrence. She was terrified as to the action that her father would take against her. After some time had elapsed, she reached her father’s *ashram*. Her father noticed the despondency, which had replaced her usual exuberance and with his supernatural vision he came to know the reason behind the change in his daughter. He understood how much punishment his daughter would have to undergo despite having done no wrong. He consoled her.

Later, *Maharshi* Trinabindu invited *Maharshi* Pulastya to his ashram, and explained to him the disaster caused by his curse. *Maharshi* Pulastya had never imagined that such a tragedy would take place. He had conquered lust, but his anger had resulted in this catastrophe. An increase in tapasic power should increase the benefit to other people, and they should not have to face calamities. These thoughts caused *Maharshi* Pulastya to repent.

In order to redress the harm done to his innocent daughter, *Maharshi* Trinabindu asked *Maharshi* Pulastya, to marry her. He agreed to this and the result of this sacred pregnancy, which was free of lust, was the birth of the saint Visrava who became famous as Aparabrahma.

Maharshi Pulastya had already been married before his marriage to *Maharshi* Trinabindu's daughter; and Havirbhoo, the daughter of Kradama Prajapathi was his previous wife. After marrying Trinabindu's daughter, his family became twice as large, and all this resulted from his anger. Therefore, it behoves us to be highly circumspect and not to allow anger to take the upper hand, because even great people had to countenance a number of difficulties due to their rage.

22. HAYAGREEVA

All of us worship some deity of our choice. Nevertheless, it is essential that we worship amiable deities with sincerity. Taamasic passions always try to submerge us under the influence of powerful illusions. We should always be very careful and drive away these illusions. The demons, being powerless to discard their *Tamas*¹¹⁸, headed towards destruction, despite the fact that they had performed a lot

¹¹⁸ Darkness

of *Tapas*¹¹⁹. Even the deities, under the influence of *Tamas*, behave in a cruel manner.

Long ago, Lord Sri Mahavishnu became very tired after fighting with the demons for ten thousand years. Hence, he repaired to a secluded place and assumed the lotus posture. After some time, He leaned his chin on His bow, which He used as a brace, and rested in *yoganidra*¹²⁰. Some time elapsed in this manner, and the deities decided to perform a Devi Maha Yaga, and Lord Brahma decided that Lord Vishnu should lead the *yaga*¹²¹.

However, Lord Vishnu was not to be found and a prolonged search revealed Him in the state of *yoganidra*. In order to awaken Him, Lord Brahma created a termite and ordered it to snap the bowstring by biting it; as the resulting movement of the bow would awaken Lord Vishnu. Unfortunately, as soon the bowstring was bitten the bow sprang outwards and decapitated Lord Vishnu. The separated head fell in the sea.

At this all the deities grieved deeply, and Lord Brahma advised them to pray with great sincerity to the Goddess Paraa Shakti. As they kept up their prayers for a

¹¹⁹ Deep meditation or ascetism

¹²⁰ Conscious deep sleep

¹²¹ Vedic sacrifice

long time, the Goddess appeared before them and stated that a demon named Hayagreeva, who had a horse's head, has performed severe penance, in order to obtain her grace. She also told the deities that she had granted him a wish and that he had asked for immortality. She had stated that it impossible to become immortal. Accordingly, the horse headed demon had sought the boon that none other than a deity with a horse's head should be able to kill him. She had granted that wish. In addition, she told the deities that the demon had made such a wish, because he had always worshipped Her Taamasic powers.

Finally, She told them, "On one occasion, Lord Srihari had laughed at the Goddess Lakshmi. At that moment, I had entered Goddess Lakshmi Devi in my Taamasic form. Consequently, she was much annoyed with Lord Srihari, because she felt that He was ridiculing her, and She cursed Him that His head would be cut off. Due to the result of that curse, Lord Srihari's has been beheaded. Fetch a horse's head and fuse it to Lord Srihari's body, and this task can be accomplished by the deity Thvashta. This will revive Lord Srihari, who will destroy the evil Hayagreevasura."

The deities followed the Goddess Bhagavati's advice and revived Lord Srihari. Later on, He killed Hayagreevasura. Subsequently, he asked *Maharshi* Agastya to spread the knowledge of the Goddess Sridevi throughout the world; and

He also taught the Lalita *Sahasranamavali*¹²² for the benefit of all. This narrative, illustrates the power of illusion. The demon Hayagreevasura, despite his tremendous *Tapas*, compelled the Divine Mother to plan his demise, due to the illusion that he was placed under. Moreover, the Goddess Lakshmi Devi was unaware of the Taamasic forces, penetrating her body and cursed Her Husband. Therefore, the power of illusion should never be underestimated, and one should always be on one's guard, in this regard.

23. HAIHAYA

Some people are blessed with beauty, wealth, power and knowledge from their very birth. Such good fortune can generally be attributed to the immense amount of worship performed by them in their previous birth. Albeit, they might have forgotten the details of the worship they had performed in the previous birth, they would, nevertheless, be attracted towards God. There are numerous people who forget all about worship after being visited by good fortune. Due to this, they have to face considerable adversity at some stage or the other in life. In fact, even the Goddess *Lakshmi Devi*¹²³ had to countenance such a situation.

In ancient times, there lived a person named Revantha, who was the son of the deity Surya. One day he

¹²² Thousand and eight names

¹²³ Divine consort of Lord Vishnu

proceeded to *Vaikunta*¹²⁴, mounted on a divine steed named Vuchaisrava, which had been born from the sea. This effectively made it the brother of Goddess Lakshmi Devi, who was entranced upon seeing its beauty. Lord Srihari called her several times, in order to tell her something; but the all absorbed Goddess did not respond. This infuriated Lord Srihari who cursed her, “As you ignored me whilst looking at that horse, change into a mare.”

Goddess Lakshmi Devi came to her senses and pleaded with Her Husband, while weeping heavily, to relieve her from the curse. At this, Lord Vishnu calmed down and told her that when she bore a son who resembled Him, she would be absolved from the curse.

Goddess Lakshmi Devi took leave of the Lord and arrived at the confluence of the rivers, Thamasa and Kalindi. She was transformed into a mare, and meditated on Lord Shiva. After a thousand years had passed by in this manner, Lord Shiva appeared and said, “O! *Jaganmaata*¹²⁵! A woman should meditate only on her husband. That is *dharma*¹²⁶. Why are you meditating on me?” Then the Goddess Lakshmi Devi said, “O! Shankara! There is no difference between you and Lord Srihari and this was revealed to me by Lord Srihari. He Himself meditates on You and You meditate on Him.

¹²⁴ Lord Vishnu’s Abode

¹²⁵ Mother of the world

¹²⁶ Righteousness

That is why I meditated on You. O! God of the gods! My husband cursed me and distanced me. He told me that I would be relieved from the curse when I give birth to a child. How is it possible if he is not near me? Therefore, please devise a stratagem, by which He will come to me.” Lord Shiva was pleased with her and granted her that wish. He also consoled her and told her, “O! Mother! Do not cry. A great son will be born to you.” After that He revealed a great secret to her.

“Mother! Your tribulations are the consequence of having forgotten the Goddess *Srimaata*¹²⁷, who has been residing in your heart. You became proud after having obtained your Husband’s love and this pride begat that forgetfulness. From now onwards pray with all your heart and mind to the Goddess Srimaata and all your problems will be resolved.”

Goddess Lakshmi realizing her mistake started *Tapas*¹²⁸ on the Goddess Srimaata and eagerly awaited her husband. Meanwhile, Lord Shiva sent a messenger to Lord Vishnu with a message to forgo his anger with the Goddess Lakshmi Devi and to approach her. Lord Srihari acceded to Lord Shiva’s words and approached Goddess Lakshmi as a horse, which she recognized as the Lord Srihari. A handsome boy was born to them and then Lord Srihari asked Goddess

¹²⁷ Divine Mother

¹²⁸ Deep meditation or ascetism

Lakshmi to leave the boy there and come with him to Vaikuntha. When she felt sad to leave her son, the Lord Srihari spoke to her saying, “O! Lakshmi! A great miracle is going to happen on earth because of this boy. That is why I am asking you to leave him here.” The Goddess Lakshmi was convinced by her husband’s words and left the boy in that place.

After their departure, a *Vidyadhara*¹²⁹ named Champaka and his wife Madaalasa, who were enjoying a pleasant stroll, saw this handsome boy. They took him to Indraloka and the deity Indra stated on seeing the boy, “O! Champaka! Turvasu, the son of Yayaati meditated for long on Lord Srihari, in order to obtain children. This boy is to be given to Turvasu, in accordance with Lord Srihari’s wishes. Turvasu will be going to that sacred place, from where you brought this boy, in a while. So you go there as soon as possible and leave this boy there, otherwise, Lord Srihari will get furious.” On hearing these words the Vidyadhara left the boy, from where he had brought him, and returned to Indraloka.

At the same time, Lord Srihari appeared before Turvasu who was meditating and asked him to make a wish. Turvasu wished for a son. Whereupon, Lord Srihari stated, “I created a boy for you and left him at the confluence of the

¹²⁹ A celestial being

Kalindi and the Thamasa rivers. He is Goddess Lakshmi Devi's son. Go and take possession of that boy."

Turvasu took that boy and named him Ekavira. Since, this boy had been born to Lord Srihari, when he was in the form of a *haya*¹³⁰, he was also known as Haihaya. His son's name was Krutaveerya, and his grandson's name was Kaartaveeryaarjuna.

This incident reveals, how even the Goddess Lakshmi Devi was unable to escape punishment for her mistake. However, as she was a great person, she obtained help from Lord Shiva and regained her original status. The son born to her due to the curse also attained great fame. Ordinary people, who stop worshipping on becoming fortunate, would find it to be very difficult to retain their fortune in their next birth; therefore, one should be never forget one's worship.

24. SHASHTI DEVI

In some Vedic contexts, the term hero denotes a son. As such the *Vedamaata*¹³¹ wanted each and every child to be a hero. However, it is incorrect to assume that only those who wield a sword are heroes; and any person who engages in selfless sacrifice, while performing acts of charity,

¹³⁰ Horse

¹³¹ The Mother of the Vedas

*Dharma*¹³² and compassion is also a hero. Consequently, the mythological tales that reflect the Vedic principles have depicted a single deity, the Goddess Shastidevi, as the presiding deity for both children and heroes. She was called, Shastidevi as she was born from the sixth component of Nature. As the presiding deity for children, she bestows children upon barren couples. She is also known as Devasena, and is the consort of Lord Kumara Swamy. Moreover, she is always proximate to infants, to whom she accords her protection.

In ancient times, Swayambhu Manu had a son called Priyavrata, who was deeply engrossed in the practise of yoga. Priyavrata did not marry and practiced yoga for a number of years. Later on, at the behest of Lord Brahma, he married a damsel named Malini. However, even after a number of years had elapsed, he was not blessed with children. *Maharshi* Kashyapa helped him to perform the *Putrakameshtiyajna*¹³³ and Malini became pregnant after partaking of the *Yajna's prasada*¹³⁴. However, to everyone's amazement, she remained pregnant for twelve years and delivered a stillborn child. Everyone felt sad at this unfortunate turn of events and Malini lost consciousness. The king took this dead child to the graveyard and lamented

¹³² Righteousness

¹³³ A Vedic sacrifice that bestows progeny

¹³⁴ Offering of food or fruits to the deity

loudly. He was unable to leave that child there and decided to kill himself.

Suddenly, he espied a divine vehicle in the sky, in which there was a brightly shining deity. The king asked, “O! Mother! Who are you?” She replied, “I am Lord Brahma’s mind – born daughter. I am known as Devasena, because a long time ago, I had led the deities to victory against the demons. After creating me, Lord Brahma entrusted me to Lord Kumara Swamy, thus I am the consort of Lord Skanda. I am the sixth element of Nature, hence I am also known as Shastidevi. I provide children to barren couples and money to the needy. Since, happiness and misery are the result of one’s deeds, I promote the practice of good deeds.” With these words, she touched the dead boy. Immediately, that golden hued boy got up and smiled. Then the Goddess Shastidevi told the king that she would take the boy with her. The king, though nonplussed, praised her with great fervour. This pleased the Goddess and she handed over the boy to the king. Then she said, “O! King! When you return to your kingdom, you and your subjects should worship me. This will make your son a famous and virtuous person.” The king obeyed her, and conducted prayers and held grand feasts for the Goddess Shastidevi on every *SuddhaShasti*¹³⁵.

Therefore, the Goddesses Shastidevi and Devasenadevi are one and the same. As the Goddess

¹³⁵ Sixth day of the Bright Lunar Fortnight

Shastidevi she protects children and as the Goddess Devasena she brings about the destruction of the demons, which connotes the destruction of our shortcomings. Let each and every one of us destroy the bad and strengthen the good, with the grace of that Goddess.

25. DAKSHINADEVI

Most of us spend a lot of money on the celebration of feasts and festivals. A priest is appointed to perform the required worship and rites. However, after the various ceremonies have been completed and it is time to offer the *Dakshina*¹³⁶ to the priest, both the hand and the mind will commence to vacillate. The Devi Bhaagavatam narrates a very relevant incident in this regard.

In ancient times, there lived a *Gopika*¹³⁷ named Susheela in *Goloka*¹³⁸. She was a close friend of SriRadha the beloved of Srihari. Once in SriRadha's presence, she stood to the left of Lord Sri Krishna, as she was unable to control her ardour. When the Lord Sri Krishna noticed that SriRadha was standing just opposite to Him, He lowered his head in fear. SriRadha was infuriated and left that place at once, and Lord Sri Krishna also departed in a trice from that place.

¹³⁶ Fees for the Brahmin priests

¹³⁷ Eternal companion of Lord Sri Krishna

¹³⁸ The first and highest realm in the cosmos, where the Divine Mother resides as Sri Radha with Lord Sri Krishna

As Lord Sri Krishna disappeared in that manner, several Gopikas, who were present there, raised their hands in homage. Upon hearing about the disappearance of Lord Sri Krishna, SriRadha thought that whatever had transpired was due to Susheela. Consequently, SriRadha cursed her, "In future, if you enter Goloka you will be reduced to ashes." Then she requested Lord Sri Krishna to return to His palace, but He did not do so.

Susheela left Goloka and performed severe penance for many years. As a result, she entered into Goddess Lakshmi Devi's body.

Meanwhile, the deities who had been performing a number of *Yajnas* were unable to obtain any benefit from them. They approached Lord Brahma with their dilemma and He meditated on Lord Srihari and obtained the solution. At his request Lord Narayana manifested a goddess from the right side of Goddess Mahalakshmi's body and entrusted it to Him. As that goddess had emerged from the Dakshina or right side of Goddess Lakshmi, she was named as Dakshinadevi. Lord Brahma gave Goddess Dakshinadevi to Lord Yagnadeva, who began to worship her. After she had become pleased with his prayers to her, he married her. A son, named Phala, was born to them.

Thereafter, Lord Yagnadeva, along with his wife and son, bestowed the results of the *Yajnas*¹³⁹ on the people who were performing them. Due to this incident, Lord Brahma imposed the rule that the *Dakshina*¹⁴⁰ should be given to the *Ritviks*¹⁴¹ as soon as the *Yajna* was completed. If the *Yajnakarta*¹⁴² failed to obey this rule, he would be denied the fruit of the *Yajna*. Even a moment's delay in giving the *Dakshina*, would bring about a loss that would be twice of what would have been gained as the result. If a night's delay occurred, then the loss would be a hundred times. A week's delay would make the loss two hundred times. Further, a month's delay would cause a one hundred thousand times loss and a one-year delay would cause a loss that was thirty million times. If the *Dakshina* was not given at all, the *Yajna* would be fruitless. Moreover, Goddess Lakshmi would impose a terrible curse on such a *Yajnakarta* and depart from his house forever. However, those who performed the *Yajna*, while meditating on Goddess Dakshinadevi, would obtain all its benefits.

It is incorrect to consider *Yajnas* as just elaborate sacrifices. In addition to worship and rites, a person's good deeds are also classified as *Yajnas*. In addition to the persons who chant sacred texts and hymns, all those who help us in

¹³⁹ Vedic sacrifice

¹⁴⁰ Fees for the Brahmin priests

¹⁴¹ Priest who supervises the fire sacrifice

¹⁴² Person who gets the *Yajna* conducted

performing good deeds are priests. It is our duty to pay them *Dakshina* as money, effects or gratitude, because it will increase our prosperity. This story, which describes the incarnation of Goddess Dakshinadevi from Goddess Lakshmi Devi, serves to explain this reality.

26. SUDARSHANA

Long ago, the kingdom of Kosala was ruled by a virtuous king named Dhruvasandhi. A son named Shatrujit was born to his second wife Leelavathy. Thereafter, a son was born to his queen Manorama, and that boy was named Sudarshana. Shatrujit was not only handsome, but also a skilled orator; and Dhruvasandhi displayed greater affection towards him.

One day, while his sons were still young, Dhruvasandhi went on a hunt. A lion, which he was hunting, attacked him and in the ensuing combat, both of them lost their life.

Maharshi Vasishtha decided to enthrone the queen's son, Sudarshana. Meanwhile, Yudhajit, the maternal grandfather of Shatrujit, hearing the news of his son-in-law's death; immediately, arrived at Ayodhya with his army, in order to install his grandson on the throne. At the same time, Sudarshana's maternal grandfather Veerasena, also arrived with his troops, because he wanted his grandson to be the king.

A heated argument commenced between Yudhajit and Veerasena. Yudhajit argued that Shatrujit should get the kingdom, as he was older than Sudarshan. To this Veerasena retorted that Sudarshana was to be made the king as he was the queen's son. This argument ended in war between them, in which Veerasena was killed.

On receiving this information, his daughter, the queen Manorama, along with her son and a maid servant, fled to the forest with the help of a minister named Vidalla. While she was fleeing to the forest, she was divested of her ornaments and chariot by robbers. Despite these afflictions, she managed to cross the river Ganga and reached *Maharshi*¹⁴³ Bharadwaja's ashram. He provided her with shelter, after listening to her story. Manorama was very happy, and she became an ascetic among the saints present there, and started to bring up her son.

Meanwhile, the victorious Yudhajit started searching for Sudarshana in order to kill him. As he could not find Sudarshana, he proceeded towards his own kingdom. On the way, he met some forest dwellers, who told him that Sudarshana was living in *Maharshi* Bharadwaja's ashram. Accordingly, Yudhajit went there with his army. *Maharshi* Bharadwaj warned him very sternly, "Recollect what happened to *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra who tried to take *Maharshi* Vasishtha's cow by force. I have extended my

¹⁴³ Great Sage

protection to Manorama and Sudarshana. You are not even permitted to look at them.” Yudhajit, who feared Maharshi Bharadwaja, left that place, immediately.

Sudarshana was five years old, when he heard his companions teasing Vidalla by calling him a Kleeba¹⁴⁴. On hearing this word, the *Kamaraja bijakshara Mantra*¹⁴⁵ *Kleem* became embedded in Sudarshana’s heart, and it became second nature for him to chant it.

When he was eleven years old, *Maharshi* Bharadwaj performed his *Upanayana*¹⁴⁶ and started his education. Sudarshana became proficient in all branches of education, due to the power of the mantra that he used to repeat continuously. One day, the Goddess Paraa Shakti, who was adorned in a red *sari*¹⁴⁷ and who was shining brightly, with a red radiance; materialized before him seated on *Garuda*¹⁴⁸. She bestowed upon him a bow, armour, quiver and arrows.

During that time the king of Kasi, Subaahu had a very beautiful daughter named Sasikala. She was a staunch devotee of the Goddess Paraa Shakti, who commanded her in a dream, to marry her devotee, the impoverished

¹⁴⁴ Eunuch

¹⁴⁵ Vedic hymn

¹⁴⁶ Rite of passage ritual

¹⁴⁷ A garment, whose one end forms a skirt and the other a covering for the torso

¹⁴⁸ Eagle

Sudarshana. From then onwards Sudarshana occupied centre stage in Sasikala's mind.

One day Sudarshana was presented with a chariot, by his friends, the kings of the forest tribes. Subsequently, the king of Kasi, announced his daughter's *Swayamvaraa*¹⁴⁹, which caused Sasikala to be greatly distracted. She told her parents that the *Swayamvaraa* would end in a fiasco, as she had already been directed by the Goddess to marry Sudarshana. Nevertheless, her parents attempted to convince her that she should marry some suitable king instead of Sudarshana, who had been exiled from his kingdom. Sasikala refused to listen to them and did not grace the venue of the *Swayamvaraa*.

This news spread among the kings, who had arrived for the *Swayamvaraa*. Yudhajit who arrived there in the company of Shatrujit was greatly enraged, on coming to know about Sasikala's predilection. In this potentially explosive situation, Sudarshana arrived, all alone in his chariot. Some of the princes present there asked him, "Why have you come alone? Do you think Yudhajit would refrain from killing you?" To this Sudarshana replied calmly and fearlessly, "I have come here at the bidding of the Goddess Srimaata; as such I have enmity towards none. Even then, if some person bears me ill will towards me, the Goddess will

¹⁴⁹ Ceremony, in which a prospective bride selects her husband, from amongst a number of suitors

certainly inflict terrible punishment on such a person. My trust in the Goddess leaves no room for fear.” To this they asked, “Does not Yudhajit bear enmity towards you?” In reply Sudarshana said, “A person’s death does not take place due to another person. If the Goddess is so inclined, anything becomes possible. I have no enmity towards Yudhajit, and even if he bears ill will towards me, the Divine Mother will protect me.”

At the same time a heated discussion was taking place between Subaahu and Sasikala, who was unwilling to attend the *Swayamvaraa*, as she had made up her mind to marry none other than Sudarshana. Subaahu left the outcome to destiny, and entered the hall where the suitors were assembled. He declared before them, “My daughter does not wish to attend the *Swayamvaraa*, hence, this ceremony will not be held today. I request all of you to come tomorrow.” Afterwards, he clandestinely performed the marriage of Sasikala with Sudarshana in the inner chambers of his palace. The kings were infuriated upon hearing this news. Yudhajit and Shatrujit insisted, more than the other kings, that Sudarshana should be put to death.

Sudarshana and his wife started on their return journey to *Maharshi* Bharadwaja’s ashram. On the way they were besieged by a large army. This caused Subaahu to become anxious, but the bridegroom was unperturbed.

Sudarshana silently prayed to the Goddess *Jaganmaata*¹⁵⁰, seeking Her protection.

Yudhajit and Shatrujit commenced hostile tactics and a fierce war ensued. Suddenly, the Goddess manifested Herself in the sky, and She was riding a lion and was armed with a number of weapons. On seeing Her, some of the assembled people wondered as to who She was, while some others were terrified. Sudarshana prostrated himself before Her, and the lion that the Goddess was sitting upon started to roar. At this, several of the kings and their troops fled from that place in abject terror. However, Yudhajit remarked arrogantly, “There is no cause to fear a lady who is mounted on a lion” and engaged in hostilities with Her.

The Goddess transformed Herself into different forms and fought with a variety of weapons; finally, both Yudhajit and Shatrujit were killed by Her. This glorious victory was greeted by loud acclamations of *Jaya*¹⁵¹ *Jaya Durgaa Devi*¹⁵². Sudarshana and his wife praised the Goddess in diverse ways. Then the compassionate Goddess departed from thence and the remaining kings saluted Sudarshana and said, “We were all blessed with the sight of the Goddess because of you. Hence, we accept you as our king.”

¹⁵⁰ Mother of the world

¹⁵¹ Victory

¹⁵² Invincible One

Sudarshana ascended the throne of Ayodhya and consecrated the Goddess Durga's temple in that place. Afterwards, he conducted grand festivals for the Goddess on a regular basis, and ruled in a highly exemplary manner, which made his subjects very happy.

27. GOWRI AND LAKSHMI

It is often perceived that some children are good at studies, whilst others excel in dance, music or other cultural activities. Everyone acquires intelligence solely due to God's grace, but some people forget this due to their arrogance. Such people cannot escape the wrath of God, even if they become great. Moreover, even Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva could not escape the consequences of their arrogance.

Once upon a time, the Goddess Parambika bestowed three *Shaktis*¹⁵³, namely, the Goddesses Lakshmi, Goddess Paarvati and Goddess Saraswathi upon Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma, respectively. Consequently, these three Gods became very efficient in performing their duties. At that time, the demons Haalahala started to torment heaven, earth and hell. They were very powerful due to the blessings of Lord Brahma and even invaded *Vaikunta*¹⁵⁴. Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva engaged in a fierce war with these demons for about six thousand years and killed them in large

¹⁵³ Sacred powers

¹⁵⁴ Lord Vishnu's Abode

numbers. Then they returned to their homes and started boasting to their wives that they had destroyed these demons on their own. The Goddesses Lakshmi and Paarvati laughed at their boasting, which made them furious, and they scolded their wives very harshly.

At this the Goddesses Lakshmi and Paarvati left their homes; and their husbands, immediately lost their powers and competence. Lord Brahma was perplexed by this strange occurrence and on using His divine insight; He came to know about the disrespect shown to the Goddesses by Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. Left with no other alternative, Lord Brahma had to assume the duties of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. He produced the Manus and the sages Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Sanatkumara from his mind and told them, “Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva, angered the Goddess Paraa Shakti, and lost their powers. I have been performing their duties. So I have no time to please that Goddess by practicing *Tapas*. I want you to perform a lot of *Tapas* on Goddess Paraa Shakti for the welfare of the world. This will restore the power of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva and you will acquire a lot of fame in the process. Moreover, the family residing in the house that the Goddess Paraa Shakti enters, will obtain salvation.”

Accordingly, the sons of Lord Brahma practiced austere penance in the Himalayas, for a hundred years. As a result, the Goddess Paraa Shakti appeared before them and granted them a boon. They asked the Goddess to restore the

power and prosperity of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. Daksha, who was a *Prajapati*,¹⁵⁵ beseeched the Divine Mother to be born as his daughter. To this Goddess Paraa Shakti replied, “Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva were ruined, because they scorned my powers. Let this be a warning to everybody and let no one repeat such a sin. I will restore Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva to their previous pristine state. O! Daksha! One of the two Shaktis will be born in your home and the other one shall be born in the ocean of milk. Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva shall obtain these Shaktis due to my influence.” With these words the Goddess evanesced.

Thereafter, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva resumed their duties. On one auspicious day, the Goddess Paraa Shakti was born as Sati in Daksha’s house and became Lord Shiva’s consort. The Goddess Lakshmi was born due the churning of the *Kshirasagar*¹⁵⁶ by the deities and the demons. After that she once again became the consort of Lord Vishnu. In this manner, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva acquired Goddess Lakshmi and Goddess Paarvati, due to the unbounded grace of the Divine Mother.

This story clearly depicts the manner in which the Goddess Paraa Shakti punishes the conceited. As such She is the power that has spread throughout this world. A tiny portion of that power has entered into us, and this makes us

¹⁵⁵ Prajapati is the presiding deity of procreation.

¹⁵⁶ Ocean of milk

attain success in different fields of endeavour. Therefore, on achieving success, we should express our gratitude towards Goddess Paraa Shakti with great modesty.

28. DADHEECHI

History is replete with instances of individuals who made tremendous sacrifices for the sake of others. Nevertheless, *Maharshi*¹⁵⁷ Dadheechi remains unsurpassed in this respect. There had been numerous benefactors who had parted with all their wealth and there had even been persons who had donated their very flesh. However, *Maharshi* Dadheechi was greater, as he had knowingly sacrificed his life for the sake of others.

In times of yore, during a war between the demons and the deities; the demons resorted to stealing the weapons of the deities by using their supernatural powers. This was a novel development, which the deities were unable to oppose. Moreover, if the demons were to acquire all their weapons, then the destruction of the entire world was inevitable. They pondered deeply to arrive at a solution. Finally they deposited all their weapons with *Maharshi* Dadheechi and asked him to conceal these weapons, and then they fled from that place.

¹⁵⁷ Great Sage

The guarding of these weapons posed a major problem for *Maharshi* Dadheechi, who was always in deep meditation. All the same, the demons were afraid to come near him, but it was obvious that any negligence on his part would embolden them to steal these weapons. Dadheechi waited a long time for the deities to claim their weapons. Finally, he felt that it was futile to wait any longer, so he dissolved those weapons in the water of his *Kamandal*¹⁵⁸, and drank that water to the very last drop. After that he was free of all anxiety, regarding the safety of those weapons, and entered a state of deep mediation.

Quite some time had elapsed, when the deities visited the *Maharshi* and asked him for their weapons. *Maharshi* Dadheechi said, "I thought that you would never come for those weapons. Hence, I dissolved them in water and imbued the resulting solution. Their essence has already been absorbed by my bones; therefore, it is almost impossible for me to restore them." To this the deities replied, "O! *Maharshi*! The time has come for us to fight with the demons. How are we to protect the world and establish righteousness, without weapons?"

Maharshi Dadheechi calmly cogitated about this. It was true that the deities could not harm him if he failed to return their weapons, but the good people of the world would be deprived of protection. However, if they took his

¹⁵⁸ Water pot used by ascetics

bones, the power of the weapons would increase ten million fold and the deities would become very strong. Thus, *Maharshi* Dadheechi said, “O! Deities! I permit you to take my bones.” To this the deities replied, “Sire! We cannot withstand the sin of slaying a *Brahmin*¹⁵⁹.”

Maharshi Dadheechi did not indulge in arguments. He asked his wife, Suvarchala, who had been listening to this conversation from a distance, to go into the house on some trivial errand. The moment that she had done so, he materialized a sacred fire that rapidly immolated him. As the astonished deities were watching, the fire went out and only his bones remained.

Even before the deities recovered from their astonishment, Lord Brahma manifested himself and fashioned a variety of weapons from the *Maharshi*'s bones, which he presented to the deities. The deity Indra's weapon, the *Vajrayudha*¹⁶⁰ was the *Maharshi*'s backbone and it destroyed a number of dreadful demons like Vritrasura.

Maharshi Dadheechi not only enhanced the power of the deities, but also sacrificed his own body in order to prevent them from sinning by slaying him. This great tradition, which has been established by the sages is worthy of emulation.

¹⁵⁹ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

¹⁶⁰ The adamantite weapon of the deity Indra

29. Trishanku

The term Trishanku *Swarga*¹⁶¹, denotes a place that is not located anywhere. Trishanku was a king, who not only failed to reach heaven with his physical body, but also caused the spiritual power of *Maharshi*¹⁶² Vishwaamitra to be frittered away. The principal cause for this catastrophe was Trishanku's contempt towards his Guru. A number of incidents transpired when this king was young, which resulted in his contempt towards his Guru, father and *Dharma*¹⁶³. Moreover, these incidents caused him to forswear righteousness.

Once upon a time, the king of Ayodhya was a virtuous king of the solar dynasty, named Arun. Unfortunately, his son, Satyavrata, was evil incarnate. On one occasion he abducted a *Brahmin*¹⁶⁴ lady from a wedding ceremony. All the *Brahmins* approached the king and complained about this evil act. The king felt ashamed at this and asked his son to leave the palace at once and to live with the tribal people in the forest. Satyavrata, without indulging in further parleys, left home at once.

All the same, Satyavrata did possess a few good qualities and had compassion for others. He was critical of

¹⁶¹ Heaven

¹⁶² Great Sage

¹⁶³ Righteousness

¹⁶⁴ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

his father's actions, and felt that his punishment was disproportionate to his transgression. He was also angry with *Maharshi* Vasishtha, who had not prevented his father from expelling him from the palace. His anger towards *Maharshi* Vasishtha was transformed into affection towards *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra, who was *Maharshi* Vasishtha's arch rival.

At that point of time, *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra had repaired to the forest for *Tapas* and his wife, who was unable to bring up their children, attempted to sell one of the sons, in order to defray the household expenses. Satyavrata noticed her plight and prevented her from doing so. He told her, "Everyday I will tie a sack of food to the tree near your ashram. You and your children can eat it. Do not sell your children."

From that day onwards, he used to kill wild animals, pack the meat and hand it over to *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra's wife. One day he was unable to hunt down any animal. While he was pondering about what to do he espied *Maharshi* Vasishtha's cow. As he was angry with *Maharshi* Vasishtha, he killed that cow, ate its meat and gave the remaining portion to *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra's family. *Maharshi* Vasishtha, on coming to know about this incident, was infuriated and cursed him, saying, "You evil man! You abducted a married woman and faced your father's wrath. Now you have killed a cow and eaten its flesh. These three sins are three scars in your life. So you will be known as

Trishanku and from now onwards you will assume the form of a visible ghost.”

Nevertheless, only Satyavrata was able to learn the Goddess Srimaata’s *Navakshara*¹⁶⁵ mantra on account of a saint’s son. Subsequently, he started to live in an ashram and performed japa on that mantra with great intensity. He prayed a lot and invited the *Brahmins* to perform a homa to achieve tranquillity. They refused to accept his invitation and told him, “You turned into a ghost due to *Maharshi* Vasishtha’s curse. So you do not have authority over Vedas. We cannot be the priests for your sacrificial rite.” Satyavrata felt greatly humiliated and wanted to immolate himself by jumping into the fire.

He prayed to Goddess Lalitaa Parameswari before doing so, and the goddess, who was riding a lion, appeared to him in the sky saying, “Do not commit suicide. Your father has become old and he will call you on the day after tomorrow, so as to make you the king.” Then out of her infinite kindness, she liberated him from his ghost form.

Maharshi Naarada, who had witnessed this incident, informed King Arun about it. The latter underwent a change of heart and instructed his ministers to bring Trishanku home. Subsequently, he installed him on the throne and Trishanku ruled the kingdom virtuously for a long time. He

¹⁶⁵ Nine syllable

performed innumerable rituals to please the Goddess. In the later years, he was instrumental in creating the Trishanku Swarga, and he also tried to enter heaven with his physical body. This incident unequivocally establishes the fact that he who disobeys his Guru, as also he who does not have his Guru's blessings will certainly be ruined.

30. VEERUDHA

Stories abound about the *Rakshasas*¹⁶⁶, but who are they? And where do they live? A story narrated by *Bhagavan*¹⁶⁷ Vyasa relates to these questions.

Once, while Dhruva, the child devotee, was performing penance; the deity Indra called on Veerudha, a gandharva, and instructed him to assume the garb of a *Rakshasa* and then test the seriousness of Dhruva's resolve.

Accordingly, Veerudha approached Dhruva in the guise of *Rakshasa* and completed the task allotted to him by Indra. However, the gandharva continued as a *Rakshasa*, as he had developed a great liking for that form. He used to derive great pleasure from frightening the saints. One of the saints discovered that he was a gandharva masquerading as a *Rakshasa* and cursed him to remain in that form and to acquire the *persona* of a *Rakshasa*.

¹⁶⁶ Demons

¹⁶⁷ Lord

Subsequently, Veerudha became very cruel and lived for a long time. Even though he had become a *Rakshasa*, his supernatural knowledge and divine sight remained intact. Sometime later, he went to a new forest, where the children of saints, were gathering wood for cooking and conducting *Yajnas*¹⁶⁸. Most of them were frightened on seeing the *Rakshasa* and fled from that place. However, one of the lads, named, Bharata, was not frightened of this *Rakshasa* and merely looked at him.

Initially, the *Rakshasa* was surprised and pleased with this boy's courage. After that he became angry and thought that if such a small boy was so brave, then his father would be even more courageous. The *Rakshasa* wished to meet that boy's father; hence he encompassed him in his massive hands. Even then the boy did not display any fear.

The other children, while running away, saw what had happened to Bharat, and were frightened to a still greater extent. They rushed to Bharata's father and told him about what had befallen his son. On hearing this terrible news, he ran to the place where the demon was located and prostrated himself before him. After that he pleaded with the demon, to let go of his son, as he had no other children.

Veerudha observed that the saint was unafraid and that he was pleading with him very skilfully, which led him to

¹⁶⁸ Vedic sacrifices

reflect on this issue. “This man is not frightened of me. So he must have acquired a considerable amount of power by performing penance. Moreover, instead of laying a curse on me, he is pleading with me, in a very skilful fashion to release his son. I will test his mettle.”

After having thought in this manner, the demon told the saint, “Although this boy is my food, I will set him free under one condition. I will come to your house tomorrow morning, and you have to so hide your son that I should be unable to locate him. If you fail to do so I will devour him.”

The saint accepted this and took the boy home, where he thought deeply about a suitable hiding place for his son. Finally, he prayed to Lord Brahma for His assistance, and the merciful Lord Brahma transported that boy to his world and transformed him into a petal of the lotus, on which He used to sit.

The next morning, Veerudha visited the saint’s house and shouted angrily, “You are insane to have underestimated my ability. I know that the boy has become a petal in Lord Brahma’s lotus seat.”

The dejected saint asked Veerudha to give him one more opportunity and Veerudha agreed. Thereupon, the saint prayed to Lord Shiva who changed the boy into flower

in the *chignon*¹⁶⁹ of the Goddess Paarvati Devi. However, that demon was once again able to locate the saint's son. The saint beseeched the demon for yet another chance; and prayed to Lord Vishnu. The Lord took the boy with Him, but what He did to that boy was not known.

On the following day the demon once again came to the saint's house. He could not locate the boy, despite searching everywhere with his supernatural sight. At last he shouted, "O! Bharata where are you?" He heard the reply "here" but he was unable to locate Bharata. Veerudha again shouted, "O! Child of a saint! Come here in front of me, I will not harm you, do not be afraid." Immediately, Bharata emerged from the heart of Veerudha, after tearing it apart. With this Veerudha died and was relieved of his curse; and he once again became a Gandharva.

This story tells us that demons live in our thoughts and promote cruelty in our behaviour. Our wrong doings and bad deeds are the result of such influence. Even if we possess divine powers and divine vision, we will be unable to identify the evil that resides in our hearts and in our thoughts. If we could sense this evil, even faintly, and get rid of it, our sufferings would end and we would attain *Moksha*¹⁷⁰.

¹⁶⁹ A knot or coil of hair, at the back of a woman's head.

¹⁷⁰ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth

31. GAYA

In the *Puranas*¹⁷¹, there are several occasions on which the Lords Brahma and Shiva had bestowed boons on demons, which had made them behave outrageously and cause hardship to the people. It is left to Lord Vishnu to destroy these demons by employing suitable strategies. However, a departure from this usual practice occurred, when Lord Vishnu blessed a demon and bestowed boons upon him. This is an extraordinarily rare incident.

In ancient times, there was a mediocre demon named Gaya. After an extensive analysis he concluded that Lord Vishnu posed a potential threat to their dynasty and to the entire race of demons. Accordingly, he meditated on Lord Vishnu and obtained blessings and boons from the Lord.

Afterwards, he enlarged his body tremendously and became a hundred and twenty – five *yojanas*¹⁷² in height. Since, a yojana is approximately ten miles; he became one thousand two hundred and fifty miles tall with corresponding weight. The deities and *munis*¹⁷³ were in serious trouble, because the Lord Vishnu himself had sanctioned these boons to that giant demon. In desperation,

¹⁷¹ Mythological narratives

¹⁷² Vedic measure of distance

¹⁷³ Ascetics

they approached Lord Brahma and narrated what had transpired.

Lord Brahma heard them out and thought deeply about this problem, then he called the demon Gaya, and praised him to the skies, which pleased him tremendously. Consequently, Gaya promised Lord Brahma that he would do whatever He desired.

To this Lord Brahma replied, “I want to perform a great *Yajna*¹⁷⁴, but I could not get consecrated land, to the extent required, on earth. Your body is best suited for this purpose, as it has been rendered holy, due to having been saturated with your devotion towards Lord Vishnu. Hence, I want to conduct the *Yajna* on your enormous body.” The demon acceded to this request and Lord Brahma specified that he would have to remain immobile, while the *Yajna* was in progress. To this the demon replied haughtily, “If you place sufficient weight on my body I will remain still.” Then, Lord Brahma asked Gayasura to lie down; after that He placed a huge rock, called Devarupini, which had been transported from the *Brahma Loka*¹⁷⁵ over the *Rakshasa*. Although, it was difficult to bear the rock’s weight, Gayasura bore it patiently.

¹⁷⁴ Vedic sacrifice

¹⁷⁵ Highest material plane, in which Lord Brahma, the creator, resides

Lord Brahma invited Lord Vishnu to his yaga and provided a seat to him in the middle of the place where the *Yajna* was to be performed. Gayasura was exhausted and could not bear the weight of the rock any longer. He sensed that Lord Vishnu had arrived to witness the *Yajna*. So he concentrated his will power and prayed to the Lords Brahma and Vishnu in the following manner:

“Lord! Why is Lord Vishnu standing on me? As instructed, I am stationery and unmoving. The Lord Brahma himself had told me that my body is sacred. The words of Lord Brahma cannot be false. Moreover, Lord Vishnu has placed his feet on me, which has sanctified me. Hence, I request you to name this place after me, make the holy rites performed in this place fruitful and to grant *Moksha*, immediately to people who perform sacrifices for their ancestors at this place. I will remain in this place without moving, until Lord Brahma orders me to get up.”

Accordingly, Lord Vishnu granted this wish to Gayasura. Lord Brahma also agreed to the granting of this boon. The proposed *Yajna* by Lord Brahma was never completed. This place has become famous as Gaya. Beneath this sacred place, Gaya still meditates on Lord Vishnu. Due to these divine incidents, Gaya is considered to be a sacred place.

The Lords Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are one and the same. They have emerged from a single Satya matter and

are called the *Trimurthis*¹⁷⁶. They cooperate with each other in all their works, and always protect us. In order to favour us, they often subject themselves to blame. They are one and there is no difference between them; furthermore, They are equals and none of Them is either superior or inferior. We attain *Moksha* if we worship any one of Them. Sometimes Their boons are seen as being perilous to the world, but in the end They ensure that these boons prove beneficial to the world.

32. PIPPALAADA

At times it becomes essential to indulge in cruelty, in order to achieve good. Subsequently, one may have to suffer the consequences of such sin. The story of *Maharshi*¹⁷⁷ Pippalaada, describes the manner in which the virtuous deal with such difficult situations.

Once upon a time, the deities approached *Maharshi* Dadheechi, and requested him for his bones, in order to fashion their weapons from those bones. Dadheechi sent his wife Suvarchala, inside their house on some pretext. Afterwards, he immolated himself so that the deities could take his bones. All this was over before Suvarchala returned from inside the house. She wept bitterly and tried to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre. However,

¹⁷⁶ Holy Trinity

¹⁷⁷ Great Sage

an *Aakaasha Vaani (Celestial Voice)*¹⁷⁸ told her, “You are with child; you are not permitted to take your life, before giving birth to it.” Suvarchala, who was in a deep sorrow, went under a *Pippala*¹⁷⁹ tree, delivered her child and performed *Sahagamana*¹⁸⁰.

The fate of the infant under the *Pippala* tree was such that he had lost both his parents, ere he could even open his eyes. Nevertheless, the power of *Tapas*¹⁸¹ possessed by great people is unimaginable. Due to that power, even the *Pippala* grove took pity on the child. They prayed to the deity *Chandra*¹⁸², ate the rays of honey sent by him, and conveyed those honey drops into the child’s mouth as dewdrops, through their leaves. The boy was called Pippalada, as he had remained alive, due to having been nurtured by the *Pippala* trees.

Just as a tiger cub remains a tiger, the child of Saint Dadheechi and Suvarchala could not remain a normal person. Accordingly, even when he was young, he made his foster father, the deity *Chandra* appear in person and developed deep friendship with him.

¹⁷⁸ Voice from heaven

¹⁷⁹ Ficus Religiosa

¹⁸⁰ Practice, wherein a widow committed suicide on the death of her husband

¹⁸¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

¹⁸² Deity of the Moon

While growing up, he came to know that he had lost his parents due to the selfishness of the deities. This made him bear a grudge against the deities, and he requested the deity *Chandra* to suggest a plan, by which he could take revenge on the deities. The deity *Chandra*, observed the boy's fury, thought deeply and said, "Son! Meditate on Lord Shiva." Thus, *Maharshi* Dadheechi's son, instead of becoming extremely unselfish and highly spiritual, involved himself in such *Tapas*. Lord Shiva was compelled to materialize before him and grant him his wish; and Pippalaada asked for the power to destroy all the deities.

Lord Shiva's problem was regarding what would happen to the world, if all the deities were destroyed. The deities' problem was that, what would be their fate; if the good work they had done for the sake of the world, proved to be their end.

The young saint was unaware of these problems, and his sole objective was revenge. Lord Shiva, who was forced to grant his wish, created a huge ghost and gave it to the boy, and said, "Use this ghost against anyone that you wish to destroy." The boy commanded the ghost, "Go and kill all the deities." When Lord Shiva reached Kailas, after granting the wish, the deities arrived in hordes, fell at His feet and asked, "Why have you done this?" Lord Shiva was perplexed, because the ghost that He had created would destroy Him also, because He was also a deity. Lord Shiva thought for a while and ordered the ghost to wait in the river Ganges as a

boat, for some time. Then he went to Pippalada and asked him, “Son! You want to kill the deities, as they were the cause of your parents’ death; but will this heinous act resurrect your parents?”

Questions posed by the great constitute the best teaching, as they awaken true knowledge in the deserving disciple’s heart. Since, his *Tapas* had been done in order to seek Lord Shiva; he obtained this insight by His divine grace. Thereupon, he replied, “What you state is the truth. My parents will not come back to life, and their sacrifice will be in vain if I do this. If you still have mercy on me, please show my parents to me once, which would suffice for me.”

Lord Shiva was very pleased with the acquisition of knowledge by his devotee; and the deities were also elated, as their plan had met with success. Moreover, the world was happy as the deities had come out of their adversity. However, the ghost continued to reside in the river Ganga; and the Goddess Ganga stated, “I cannot withstand the horrible power of death.” Hence, Lord Shiva distributed that burden between the Goddesses Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi. After that He made them throw it into the sea. Pippalaada became a scholar – saint and devotee of Lord Shiva, and lead a peaceful life.

This incident indicates the manner in which the deities ensured that Pippalaada attained salvation, even though he wanted to harm them. They even helped the boy

to attain a matured mind and cleverly protected themselves in the bargain. Such is the nature of good people.

33. BHANANDA

The renowned Naabhaaga, after pleasing Lord Parameswar, due to his devotion towards his father, obtained wealth and divine knowledge. That great person, who was a *Kshatriya*¹⁸³, married Suprabha, a girl belonging to the *Vaishya*¹⁸⁴ caste. He did this in order to avoid enmity with his brothers, while apportioning the kingdom. From then onwards he lived as a *Vaishya*. Later on a son, Bhananda was born to Suprabha and Naabhaaga.

Whilst growing up, Bhananda developed the qualities of a *Kshatriya* and his nature differed from those born as *Vaishyas*. When he was old enough to take up a profession, he was unable to decide as to which profession was good for him. So he went to his mother and asked her about it. She said, “Keep on tending the cattle for some time, then we will decide.” Tending the cattle was one of the main duties of the *Vaishyas*.

Bhananda’s memory power was such that he recollected the Goddess *Bhudevi*¹⁸⁵, who had the form of a

¹⁸³ A person belonging to the warrior caste

¹⁸⁴ A person belonging to the caste of merchants, artisans and landowners

¹⁸⁵ Deity of the earth

cow, when he heard the word *Gopala*¹⁸⁶. As he thought that he lacked the power to protect her, he went to the Himalayas and performed penance. At that time he developed friendship with an old king named, Neepa, who was also meditating in that place and learned warfare from him.

After the completion of his penance, he returned home. At that point of time, his cousin Vasuratha was ruling the kingdom. Bhananda asked Vasuratha to give him his share of the kingdom, but Vasuratha refused to do so, stating, “You will never get the kingdom as your father took up the profession of the *Vaishyas* by uniting with them.” Bhananda declared war on him and won easily due to his superior knowledge of warfare.

Bhananda, who won the kingdom with his own power, went to his old father and implored him to rule over the kingdom, which was rightfully his; but, Naabhaaga, who was a man of divine knowledge, refused to accept that kingdom. Thus, Bhananda became the king.

Since, Naabhaaga’s devotion towards his father had been devoid of selfishness, Lord Shiva had taught him the divine science. Even though Bhananda had devotion towards his father, it was mitigated due to a desire to obtain a kingdom. Accordingly, he could only acquire the science of

¹⁸⁶ Protector of cows, Lord Sri Krishna

warfare and the kingdom, but he could not obtain knowledge of the divine science, with his penance.

34. BHADRAYUVA

It is a matter of great astonishment, if great people show kindness towards the notorious. Sometimes, their greatness is also questioned. However, they do so, in order to redeem the wicked and make them attain maturity. They do this by observing not only their present behaviour, but also their behaviour in their previous births, with their divine insight. This is revealed in the narrative concerning the emperor Bhadrayuva.

In a place called Avanthipuram, there lived a morally corrupt *Brahmin*¹⁸⁷ who had abandoned his wife and was squandering all his wealth on a woman of ill repute. He was detested by all the people in his city. One day a great saint named Rishabha visited the house in which this *Brahmin* and his paramour were residing, and accepted their hospitality. Everyone, in that village was amazed at this and soon thereafter, that *Brahmin* left his mortal coil.

In his next birth, he was born to Sumatidevi, the eldest wife of King Vajrabahu, of Dasarnades. He had married several women as he had no offspring. However, after a very long time, Sumatidevi became pregnant, which

¹⁸⁷ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

made his other wives very angry and resulted in their poisoning her. The queen did not die, but her son was born with a lot of sores all over his body. Soon, she also developed sores all over her body. The unbearable torment, due to these sores made them cry all the time and the deeply dejected and disgusted king had them banished to the forest.

The mother and son reached a city called Vaishyapura, where they lived with the support of a *Vaishya*¹⁸⁸. However, in a short period, the boy's disease proved fatal. While Sumathidevi was grieving over her son's corpse in the street, Saint Rishabha, who happened to be passing by, consoled her. Since, she was inconsolable, the saint, took pity on her and sprinkled some ashes on the boy's corpse. In a trice her son was revived and moreover, he had no sores on his body. The saint named him Bhadrayuva.

When Bhadrayuva grew up into a young man, Saint Rishabh came to that place unexpectedly, and taught him a great *Mantra*¹⁸⁹ called the *Shivakavacha*¹⁹⁰. He also gave him a conch shell and a sword named Chandrahaas.

Later on Bhadrayuva obtained information that the king of Magadha had defeated Vajrabahu and had occupied

¹⁸⁸ A person belonging to the caste of merchants, artisans and landowners

¹⁸⁹ Vedic hymn

¹⁹⁰ Divine Armour

his kingdom. He immediately repaired to the kingdom of Dasarna and defeated the king of Magadha, due to the power of the *Shivakavacha*, and reinstated Vajrabahu on the throne.

After this Saint Rishabh went to a king named Chandrangada and asked him to give the hand of his daughter Keerthimalini to Bhadrayuva in marriage. King Vajrabaahu, who also attended that marriage, recognized the groom as the same young man who had restored his kingdom to him without any ostensible reason. He enquired of King Chandrangada about that young man and came to know that he was none other than his own son. Vajrabahu repented his banishment of his wife and son, and invited them back to his palace, where he made Bhadrayuva the king.

A number of years passed by and Bhadrayuva garnered fame as a good king. One day, when he was walking in the royal garden with his wife, he saw a tiger carrying away a *Brahmin* lady in its mouth. Her husband fell on Bhadrayuva's feet and asked him to rescue his wife. Bhadrayuva struck the tiger with his arrows. Even then the tiger did not relinquish its hold on that woman and fled from that place with that woman.

The *Brahmin* became infuriated with the king for failing to rescue his wife and berated Bhadrayuva very severely. The Emperor Bhadrayuva, who was a redoubtable

warrior accepted his failure and requested the *Brahmin* to take his body, his kingdom or his wife as expiation.

The *Brahmin*, who had been fuming with anger, laughed benignly and told him, “O! King! I only created this scene to test your valour and devotion to virtue. The tiger was death and my wife was the duration of life. I showed all this to you, in order to teach you the truth.” At that instant, the inner veils covering his true Self were destroyed and he became aware of new splendours, and transformed into a saint.

He, who had been a morally depraved *Brahmin*, became a great emperor and saint in his succeeding birth. Saint Rishabha entered the house of ill repute, only to enlighten him in this manner. The people suspected even Saint Rishabha, because of that morally depraved *Brahmin*. Nevertheless, it never crossed their minds to contemplate the greatness achieved by that *Brahmin* on account of Saint Rishabha. The significance behind great people’s deeds cannot be grasped, unless we overcome such base thoughts.

35. KHANINETRA

Ikshvaku was the originator of Lord SriRama’s lineage. However, there was another Ikshvaku in this lineage, whose grandson was Khaninetra or Khanitra. A strange incident occurred in his life. He did not have children for a long time, and some priests advised him to offer venison to

the deities. Consequently, he went to the forest to hunt for deer, because he thought it would be better if he himself brought the venison for the *Yajna*¹⁹¹. He was unable to find any deer, even after hunting for a very long time. As he was unwilling to cause without a reason, he did not hunt the other animals.

After a long time, a deer approached him and said, “Please do me a favour by killing me, as I am unable to withstand the sorrow of having no children.” The king had a doubt, as to whether that deer was mocking him. Meanwhile, another deer came in great haste and said, “Please kill me first. I have a large number of fawns, who could be devoured by a tiger, any moment. I find it very difficult to procure food for them; and I am unable to bear this mental and physical agony.”

Those two deer taught the king very valuable lessons. He realized that there was dissatisfaction, whether there were children or not. Consequently, Khaninetra decided that it was better to worship God by non-violent means and without any desire, rather than satisfy the Deities by killing a living creature. Hence, he meditated on God and a son named, Karanthama was born to him.

¹⁹¹ Vedic sacrifice

This incident reveals that the wisest course is to pray to God, in an unselfish manner, and He will bestow upon us whatever we need.

36. DITI, THE WIFE OF BHRUGU

Diti was one of the wives of the Prajapathi Kashyapa, from whom the race of demons originated. Hiranya Kashipu was also one of her progeny. He named his daughter after his mother and performed her marriage to the *Maharshi*¹⁹² Bhrugu, who had been born from the mind of Lord Brahma.

Saint Bhrugu took very good care of her as she was Kashyapa's granddaughter. Although, she was a loving wife, she did not lose her affection towards the demons. On one occasion, the demons were forced to flee, as Lord Vishnu directly helped the deities, in the war between the deities and the demons.

The demons, after much cogitation, slowly began to live in Bhrugupatni's or Diti's house. She used to stand in the doorway to protect them and the deities had to leave that place in fear, on seeing her. The demons became quite strong due to her intervention.

Once, the Lord Srihari himself came to Saint Bhrugu's ashram, while chasing the demons. Saint Bhrugu was not at home and Bhrugupatni was unafraid even on seeing Lord

¹⁹² Great Sage

Srihari and told him haughtily that she had given the demons an assurance of safety. Lord Srihari decapitated her with his *Sudarshana Chakra*¹⁹³ and killed the demons hiding in that place.

Saint Bhrgu returned home and saw his wife's dead body. He lost his power to reason, due to his deep sorrow and cursed Lord Srihari, "May you also suffer separation from your wife." He recovered his senses afterwards and started to grieve, "I did not realize that my wife had given shelter to the demons. I only saw my wife's dead body, without noticing the dead bodies of the demons and cursed Lord Srihari." Lord Srihari just smiled and said, "Your curse will help in the destruction of several more demons." Accordingly, He underwent the effects of that curse in His incarnation as Lord Sri Rama.

Even a person of the stature of Saint Bhrgu, was beset with such a problem because he had married a woman of bad lineage. This makes it very clear that we have to observe the lineage on the peers as well as the distaff side, while considering a matrimonial proposal.

¹⁹³ Lord Vishnu's Discus

37. NIMI

Any virtue less devotee is possessed by anger and desires. However, even a great personage like *Maharshi*¹⁹⁴ Vasishtha, was affected by these undesirable traits.

Long ago, there lived a king named Nimi in the lineage of Ikshvaku. Since, he wanted to perform a great *Yajna*¹⁹⁵; he approached *Maharshi* Vasishtha and requested him, “O! *Maharshi*! I want to perform a *Yajna* for five thousand years. Please be its chief priest and make it a grand success.” To this *Maharshi* Vasishtha replied, “The Deity Indra has already called me for a *Yajna* that will last for five hundred years. After the completion of that *Yajna*, I will attend to your *Yajna*, be patient till then.”

King Nimi said, “I have already prepared everything and invited all the people. It is not fair on your part to conduct the Deity Indra’s *Yajna* first. Moreover, as our *kula Guru*¹⁹⁶ you should complete my *Yajna* first. You are going there only with a desire for the wealth that will be offered at that place.” However, these words failed to change *Maharshi* Vasishtha’s resolve, and he went to Deity Indra’s *Yajna*. Hence, Nimi appointed *Maharshi* Gautama as his principal priest and commenced the *Yajna*.

¹⁹⁴ Great Sage

¹⁹⁵ Vedic sacrifice

¹⁹⁶ Preceptor of the clan

Maharshi Vasishtha visited King Nimi after completing the Deity Indra's yaga. The servants did not allow him to enter, stating that the King Nimi was sound asleep. *Maharshi* Vasishtha, who was already quite angry, became infuriated with this turn of events, and cursed Nimi, "I am your Guru. I had asked you to wait till my arrival, but you made somebody else the chief priest and started the *Yaga*¹⁹⁷. As you have insulted me in this manner, may you no longer have a body."

The king, who came to know about this, was much annoyed and cursed *Maharshi* Vasishtha, in the following fashion, "I am the host for this *Yajna*, but you went to some other *Yajna*, by rejecting me. Moreover, you have cursed me even though the fault lies with you. Therefore, let your body fall off."

After they had cursed each other in this manner, *Maharshi* Vasishtha straightaway went to Brahmaloak and pleaded with Lord Brahma. He requested Lord Brahma, "I want to get back the same body, with the same knowledge. Please tell me how to accomplish this." Lord Brahma told him, "Enter into the body of *Mitra-varuna*¹⁹⁸. At an opportune time, you will be born as an Ayonija or one not born from any womb." *Maharshi* Vasishtha obeyed these instructions and after some time had elapsed, *Mitra-*

¹⁹⁷ Vedic sacrifice

¹⁹⁸ Solar deities

varuna's divine power changed into drops of sweat, from which two *Maharshis* were born. The first born was Agastya and the second was Vasishtha. In this manner, *Maharshi* Vasishtha regained his body.

The story of King Nimi, who was under the vow of the *yaga*¹⁹⁹, took an altogether different course. The priests, who were making him conduct the *yaga*, were saddened by *Maharshi* Vasishtha's curse. They took a minute part of the bodiless King Nimi, and protected it with various chants so that the king's vow would not be ruined. The *yaga* was completed after some time. Then all the deities came forward and said, "O! Nimi! As you have lost this body, you can now wish for some other body."

King Nimi, who had matured due to the *yaga*, replied, "A body is always perishable, and therefore, I do not want a body. I want to dwell in the eyes of living creatures as wind."

Then the deities encouraged King Nimi's soul in this manner, "O! King! The Goddess Paarvati is delighted with your *yaga*. Praise her once again and She will definitely grant your wish." King Nimi followed their instructions, and the Goddess Bhagavati manifested Herself and blessed him in the following manner, "The living creatures on earth will experience the blinking of their eyes due to you. Thus, you

¹⁹⁹ Vedic sacrifice

will live on in the eyes of the living creatures. In addition, you will obtain pure knowledge.”

Later on, the saints churned King Nimi’s body, and a boy was born from that churning. He was named Mithi, as he had been born from that churning. He was also named Janaka, because he was born from his father’s body. Moreover, he also had the name Videha as he was the son of the bodiless Nimi. Janaka acquired all the knowledge of his father and became a great scholar.

This story has many twists; and there were technical and philosophical concepts at several places. Facts about the virtuous, promote the welfare of the future generations.

38. RAIVATA

During the course of religious practices the phrase, Vaivaswata Manvantare is recited, regularly. The term Manvantara connotes the ruling period of a *Manu*²⁰⁰. Each Manu’s rule lasts for thirty crores, sixty – seven lakhs and twenty thousand years, and there have been fourteen such Manus till now. RAIVATA Manu was one amongst them. Due to the unification of one’s parents’ exemplary contemplative power and one’s own considerable contemplative power one can attain the position of Manu. The story of Raivata is a telling example of this fact.

²⁰⁰ Ancestor of humanity

Long ago, there lived a king named, Durdama, who was not only virtuous; but also a great devotee. He had a good friend in the renowned saint Pramukha. Quite surprisingly, a girl was born to that saint when he was very old. She was named Revati, and as the king used to visit that saint's house often, he was familiar with her.

One day, when King Durdama went to Pramukha's ashram, Revati was present, all alone at that place. The king had no evil intent, and solely due to God's inducement, he asked, "Dear, where is your father?" He was surprised at his own words and thought, "why did I address her in this manner?"

Meanwhile, Saint Pramukha emerged with great haste from the house and declared, "O! King! Since, you have addressed my daughter as beloved, you are my son-in-law."

The king was alarmed and said, "It was not my intention to address her in that manner" and asked to be pardoned. The saint laughed and said, "Your word and my word have emerged only due to the will of God." This statement of the saint made the king to desist from raising any further objections.

Their marriage was duly conducted and the saint was very pleased, however, the king remained deep in thought. After the wedding was over, the saint addressed his son-in-

law and said, “Son! I wish to grant you any desire that you have as dowry. Wish for anything that is not available anywhere.”

When the king heard the words, “not available anywhere” he felt that he had understood the supreme purpose of the wedding. Immediately he stated, “O! Great saint! Bless us with a son who has the qualities required to become a *Manu*.”

The Saint was very pleased, because his son-in-law had understood the supreme meaning inherent in the marriage vow and granted the wish in the following manner, “This Revati was born as my daughter, with the express purpose of giving birth to *Manu*. Your birth was also for that purpose. Therefore, your penance and your son’s penance, in conjunction with my penance will enable your son to achieve the status of *Manu*.”

The RAIVATA *Manu* was none other than this Revati’s son. This narrative illustrates the fact that good people are bestowed upon the world due to the penance of the great souled Maharshis.

39. THE KING VASU

There are innumerable inhabitants of this world, who get into unexpected troubles and undergo untold sufferings, despite performing good deeds. This tends to make us sceptical on occasion and harbour thoughts like, “Why is it that they are beset with these problems even after doing good? What is the benefit in performing good deeds?”

Similarly, we are placed in a quandary, when prosperous people encounter strange problems and this makes us entertain thoughts like, “Their wealth and status could be attributed to their good deeds, why do they have to countenance such setbacks?” In the *Varaaha Purana*²⁰¹, *Maharshi*²⁰² Vyasabhadgawan narrated the story of Vasuraju, in order to clarify doubts regarding these uncertainties.

In times of yore, during the Manvantara of Chakshusha, a son named, Vasu was born to Sumanasa, the king of Kashmir.

He ruled the kingdom with his amazing supernatural powers. All the same, he used to occasionally suffer a great deal, due to several unexpected diseases, which would subsequently, get cured.

²⁰¹ A religious text of the Sanatana Dharma

²⁰² Great Sage

On one particular occasion, while visiting the Brahmaloak, he participated in a Satsang at *Maharshi* Brihaspati's residence. A discussion was taking place as to whether the path of *Karma*²⁰³ or the path of *Jnana*²⁰⁴ was greater. Finally, *Maharshi* Brihaspati expressed his opinion, "Since, all the living beings perform actions due to the power of the Supreme Being, they would obtain liberation, if they offered the fruit of their actions to the Supreme Being."

King Vasu on returning to his kingdom abdicated the throne in favour of his sons and absorbed himself in *Tapas*²⁰⁵ on the Supreme Being. He meditated as if the Supreme Being were residing within him and as if he himself was that Supreme Being.

While the king was meditating in that manner, smoke emerged from the pores of his skin and a brutal savage was born from that smoke. The savage offered his respects to the king and said, "O! King! Command me!" The king was nonplussed and asked, "Who are you? How did you come here?"

At this the savage related the story of Vasu's previous birth.

²⁰³ Action or deed

²⁰⁴ Knowledge

²⁰⁵ Deep meditation or ascetism

Vasu was a king in Dakshinadesa, during the previous Kaliyug. Although he was a good man, he had a great passion for hunting. One day while hunting, he saw a deer at a distance and struck it with his arrows. He approached the deer with elation at his aim being true, but he witnessed a saint fall out of that deer's body, writhe in agony and then die. King Vasu performed many *Yajnas* as expiation for the sin of slaying a *Brahmin*²⁰⁶. Finally, death claimed him due to his fasting. He had been performing the *Deviyaga*²⁰⁷ on the eve of *Vijayadasami*²⁰⁸. As he had been calling upon his wife, *Narayanidevi*²⁰⁹ at the time of his death, he went to *Vaikunta*²¹⁰.

He revelled in the splendours of Lord Vishnu's heaven for the duration of a *Kalpa*²¹¹. All the same, he was not absolved of the sin of slaying a *Brahmin*. The spectre of *Brahmin* slaughter used to leave the king when he was in the presence of Lord Vishnu and possess him the moment that he left the Lord's presence. Even after a *Kalpa's* sojourn in Heaven, the spectre of *Brahmin* slaughter, continued to haunt him. Subsequently, he was born as King Vasu, but the bewitchment did not cease. As a result he was beset with numerous troubles, despite performing a number of *Yajnas*.

²⁰⁶ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

²⁰⁷ Ceremonial rite to the Divine Mother

²⁰⁸ The tenth day on which the Divine Mother achieved victory over evil

²⁰⁹ Consort of Lord Vishnu

²¹⁰ Lord Vishnu's Abode

²¹¹ Eon or very long period of time

However, due to his *Tapas* on the Supreme Being as his own self, the spectre of *Brahmin* slaughter, being unable to withstand that power, emerged as a brutal savage.

With this the king remembered all his previous births, and he realized that he was able to practice *Tapas* and worship the Supreme Being, only as a result of all the religious practices performed by him in the past. The king praised the Supreme Being and continued his worship with unparalleled devotion. When the Supreme Being manifested Himself before him, he prayed, "Please bestow an unrivalled birth upon this savage." He told the Supreme Being that he did not have any other desire and merged with Him.

Thus, the result of sin does not depart even after several ages or births have elapsed. It persists even in the presence of Lord Vishnu and produces bad results whenever provided with an opportunity to do so. Hence, if we are facing difficulties, it means that we might have previously committed some sins. All the same, we should not cease to perform good deeds even if we have to face problems. As far as possible, we should not indulge in wrongdoings. That is the moral to be learned from the story of King Vasu.

40. JAAJILI

We feel happy about our unselfishness and our spirit of sacrifice, while rendering help to others. Moreover, we try to ridicule those who pray and conduct rituals, without helping others. *Maharshi* Ved Vyas narrated the story of the Saint Jaajili in the context of such people.

Once upon a time there was a great Saint named Jaajili. He was doing penance, when some birds built a nest on his head. By the time that he regained awareness of the external world, the eggs on his head had hatched and the fledglings were moving about.

The Saint realized that any movement on his part would cause inconvenience to those small birds. Accordingly, due to his extreme compassion and even though he was not in *Samadhi*²¹², he remained motionless.

The saint was elated with himself and thought, “Even though I was not in Samadhi I could remain motionless, which implies that I have acquired *Tapas*²¹³ *Siddhi*²¹⁴.” Those fledglings sang his praises and as he could understand their tongue, he was elated. At that time an *Aakaasha Vaani* (*Celestial Voice*)²¹⁵ was heard, which stated that in Kasi,

²¹² A supernatural state in which the consciousness of the experiencer and the experienced become one

²¹³ Deep meditation or ascetism

²¹⁴ Perfection or mastery

²¹⁵ Voice from heaven

there was an even greater person named Tuladhara, who was a trader. That celestial message shamed Jaajili.

Several questions arose in his mind, namely, how could a businessman be greater than him? And what were his mistakes? Even after thinking a lot along these lines, he was unable to arrive at an answer. Consequently, he went to Kasi and asked Tuladhara about this. Tuladhara replied, “O! Saint! I do not know about *Tapas* and *Samadhi* like you do. Nevertheless, I am satisfied, and gold and earth have the same value for me. Even then I conduct business, because of my *Vamsa*²¹⁶ dharma. I neither crave anything nor do I refuse anything. This is true greatness and the birds on your head will confirm my statement.”

The astonished saint questioned the birds on his head, and they replied, “O! Saint, we are the messengers of the deity *Dharma*²¹⁷. We built the nest on you head, in order to benefit you. By remaining motionless you helped yourself and not us. You performed penance for your own benefit, but felt proud that you had helped others; whereas, that businessmen, did not aspire for any profit, while conducting his business. Your actions were due to pride, but his actions were devoid of desire. Now, you yourself tell us as to who is greater.” Upon hearing this Jaajili rectified his faults.

²¹⁶ Lineage

²¹⁷ Righteousness

Therefore, one should live like Tuladhara, and perform one's duties without pride and without any desire for the fruits of the good deeds performed.

41. VAITRASURA

The demons are the brothers of the deities; however, demons possess a greater quantity of *Tamas*²¹⁸, in comparison to the deities. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to assume that all demons are bad. Despite the fact that quite a few stories about evil demons exist in mythology, there were several good demons. They are very persistent, but this is not due to anything good in their nature. On the other hand, the determination of the deities is due to their *Saatvik*²¹⁹ nature. Owing to this, the deities ultimately emerge victorious, in spite of suffering a number of initial setbacks.

The Lord always strives hard to transform those with a petty mind into noble souls, and to convert the *tamas* in a person to *satva*. This transformational process is spread over a number of births. The story of Vaitrasura is a very illustration of this fact.

The mighty demon Vrutra Asura met his end at the hands of the deity Indra. Vrutra Asura was unsurpassed by

²¹⁸ Darkness

²¹⁹ Light or purity

any of the other demons. He belonged to the same lineage of demons as the king of Sindhudweepa; and his purity improved to an appreciable extent in his succeeding birth.

Although, he was good by nature, the memories of his previous birth created a desire in him to wreak vengeance on the deity Indra. The many luxuries and facilities, which he enjoyed, were unable to bring him satisfaction. Therefore, with a *taamasic* approach, which is second nature to the demons, he commenced penance on the banks of the river Vetraavati.

The methods employed by the Supreme Being to reform living creatures are astonishing; and the river Vethravathi fell in love with this demon and they married each other. This brought about a temporary interruption to his penance. However, they soon resumed penance, and a son Vaitra was born to them.

He inherited not only an appreciable amount of his mother's *saatvik* nature but also a considerable portion of his father's *taamasic* nature. At the behest of his father, he gradually developed hatred towards the deity Indra. Moreover, the aged Sindhudweepa bestowed the power that he had gained by penance, upon his son. Vaitrasura became highly impatient to revenge himself on the deity Indra. Whenever, *taamasic* persons obtain power that they cannot control, they turn into unfeeling automatons.

The Goddess Paraa Shakti was taking great pains to render King Sindhudweepa a good person. Accordingly, She was continually depriving him of his power and a consequence of this was the transmission of his power to Vaitrasura.

Due to the transmission of his father's power, Vaitrasura became very powerful and forced the deities to take flight. The deities approached Lord Brahma who was standing in the river Ganga and praying. Upon espying the deities, He started thinking, "Even I was unable to fathom the true nature of Goddess Paraa Shakti. While, improving Vrutra Asura She has created problems for the deities. Nonetheless, the deities are blaming Vaitrasura, as they have failed to realize that all that had transpired was in accordance with Goddess Paraa Shakti's plan. Therefore, it is up to the Goddess Paraa Shakti to protect them." Thinking in this manner, he prayed to the Goddess Paraa Shakti.

All of a sudden, the eight armed, eight shouldered Goddess Durgaa Devi who was riding a lion, was born from Lord Brahma. Thereupon, She attacked the demons and killed them. The turmoil in the hearts of the deities perished due to this and at the same time their devotion towards the Goddess Saktimata increased tremendously. Lord Brahma sang encomia to that Goddess and praised her for enhancing the *saatvik* nature of both the deities and the demons.

As such, the principal task of the Supreme Being is to continuously render the living creatures more *saatvik*. He destroys *tamas* in the hearts of those, who worship him either as the Trinity, the Goddess Paraa Shakti or as any other form. Hence, our objective should be to worship God in some form or the other.

42. JAMBUKUMARA

On occasion, we learn something useful even from despicable people. A telling example of this fact is the story of Jambukumara. Once upon a time, Kaikasi Devi gave birth to a girl named, Shoorpanakha, after she had produced Raavana and Kumbhakarna. Subsequently, she lost her demoniacal powers and gave birth to Vibheeshana, who was endowed with divine qualities.

In spite of being a demon, Raavana possessed a few good qualities, as he was the son of a *Brahmarshi*²²⁰. For instance, he was very fond of his brothers and sisters, and conducted Shoorpanakha's marriage with the demon Vidyujjihva. Whenever this demon put out his tongue, energy akin to lightning used to emerge and burn whoever was present there, hence, he was named Vidyujjihva or the one with lightning in his tongue.

²²⁰ A sage who has attained the highest divine knowledge

Once, during a war, Raavana mistook Vidyujihva for the enemy and killed him, in the heat of battle. At this his sister berated him very severely.

He consoled her and arranged shelter for her under the protection of his relative, Kharaasura, in a place called Janasthaana.

Shoorpanakha had already given birth to a son, named Jambukumara, by that time. As he grew up he developed hatred towards his uncles. Accordingly, he prayed to the deity Indra, who was inimical to his uncles. Jambukumara performed penance for a very long time. One day the deity Indra appeared before him, created a sword and said, "Son! You have performed penance for a very long time. Take this sword, its touch is sufficient to cause instant death."

What is the use of doing a lot of such penance? The principal motives behind his penance were his anger, desire for revenge and victory, but not devotion. On being offered the sword, Jambukumara was enraged and said, "This is what you have given me, for all the effort that I have put in?" and resumed his meditation.

The deity Indra laughed to himself, as he was aware of what would happen if he gave him more powers, just because he was the enemy of Raavana. So he laughed and

said, “Son! You deserve this. Put it to proper use.” Then he left the sword there and went away.

That sword remained hanging in the sky, and a cluster of bamboos gradually formed around the meditating Jambukumara.

After the passage of quite some time, Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshmana came to take refuge in that forest. One day, while searching for fruits, Lakshmana came near the bamboo bushes. When he saw the shining sword hanging in the air, he took it into his hands and started to hack the prickly bushes that were obstructing his path. Amazingly, even big trees were shredded into pieces by the touch of that sword.

Meanwhile, some saints who lived in that area came to him and requested him, “O! Mighty Prince! Could you please cut those bamboo bushes for us?”

When Lakshmana acceded to their request and struck the bamboo clumps with the sword, Jambukumara who was inside was sliced into pieces, along with the bamboo bushes.

This incident shows us that penance done with a bad intention proves to be harmful. We might not perform such austere penance, but we still conduct prayers. So the above rule is also applicable to us. If we lack modesty, virtue and unselfishness; no amount of worship can help us to realize beneficial results.

43. PRATAAPA BHAANU

It is stated in the Ramayana that Jaya and Vijaya were born as Raavana and Kumbhakarna. However, the Tulsi Ramayana narrates another story about Jaya and Vijaya.

A king named, Prataapa Bhaanu ruled over the kingdom of Kaikaya. His brother's name was Arimardana and his minister was named Dharmaruchi. These three were not only virtuous but also great warriors.

Once they attacked an evil king named, Durdhara and defeated him. Durdhara fled to the forest, due to the humiliation caused by the insult and assumed the garb of a saint.

After a long time had passed by, King Prataapa Bhaanu, who was on a hunting expedition, lost his way and reached a saint's ashram. He was alone and exhausted and it was nearing sundown. Prataapa Bhaanu did not realize that the lean and bearded saint, in the ashram, was none other than Durdhara. However, Durdhara recognized the king and feigned affection and respect towards him. After that he asked the king to make a wish. King Prataapa Bhaanu expressed his desire to become an absolute monarch.

The impostor replied, "O! King! The blessings of the *Brahmins*²²¹ are required for this. So make arrangements for

²²¹ Persons who possesses sacred knowledge

conducting the worship of a *lakh*²²² *Brahmins* in your kingdom, on the third day from today. I will come there and look after all the arrangements, and your wish will be fulfilled after that. Now, go to sleep, I will see that you reach your home while you are still asleep.”

After the king went to sleep, Durdhara called his friend, the demon, Kaala Ketu and discussed his plan with him. The demon agreed to Durdhara’s plan and transported the king to his home with his magic power. The king was very pleased at these turn of events.

On the third day’s morning, Durdhara and Kaala Ketu approached the king as saints. The arrangements for the worship of the *Brahmins* were in progress. These two impostors supervised the cooking.

A meal was served, in the afternoon, to all the one lakh Brahmins, at the same time. They were tantalized by the different dishes that had been prepared for the occasion. However, just as they were about to partake of the meal, a voice sounded in the sky, “Stop! All the dishes have been adulterated with beef.”

On hearing those words, the *Brahmins* blazed with fury like the flame of a fierce fire. Then all of them cursed the king in one voice, “O! King Prataapa Bhaanu! You

²²² Hundred thousand

deceived us. You will be born as a demon along with your retinue.”

King Prataapa Bhaanu understood that he had been deceived. He fell on the feet of the *Brahmins* and craved their pardon. At this they were becalmed and modified their curse, “O! King! You were cheated. We were also cheated. Even then, the curse is inevitable. You have performed several good deeds. Therefore, enjoy their result first and achieve the final and eternal happiness. May our curse enable you to achieve beatitude at the earliest.”

Due to this, they first became the residents of Vaikuntha and were later born as Raavana, Kumbhakarna and Vibheeshana.

Therefore, if persons, who naturally possess good qualities, get into trouble due to having been deceived, then their virtue comes to their rescue in one way or the other. Accordingly, the Aakaasha Vaani (Celestial Voice) issued its warning at the very beginning, so that the *Brahmins'* fury would not become uncontrollable. In addition, the power of virtue calmed the *Brahmins* and made them convert their curse into an act of kindness. This story proves that, we should never forsake virtue.

44. SHAKUNTA MAHARAJA

On occasion, we tend to denigrate the acts of people who are noble or great. If we censure their deeds, solely on the basis of our judgment, we would be committing a sin. Great sages are unmindful of their reputation being tarnished, as long as their acts benefit the world. The ultimate objective behind their acts, remains concealed till such time as the end result of their goals is not realized. Therefore, criticizing the deeds of divine personalities without knowing all the facts is to be condemned.

Once upon a time, Lord Sri Ram was performing a *Yajna*²²³ and the *Maharshis*²²⁴ Vishwaamitra and Vasisht were the chief priests. Shakunta Maharaja was a king who paid tribute to Lord Sri Ram. One day Shakunta came to the *Yajnasala*. He saw Vasisht *Maharshi* at the entrance to the *Yajnasala*. Thereupon, Shakunta offered his salutations at the feet of the *Maharshi*. At the same time some messengers approached the king and told him that an emergency had arisen in his kingdom. On hearing this, the king took leave of the *Maharshi* and rushed back to his kingdom.

²²³ Vedic sacrifice

²²⁴ Great Sages

Maharshi Vishwaamitra, who was inside the *Yajnasala*²²⁵, came to know that Shakunta had left without offering his respects to him. The *Maharshi* was rendered wrathful. Consequently, Vishwaamitra approached Lord Ram and instructed him to fetch the head of King Shakunta and place it at his feet. Commanded in this fashion by the Guru, Lord Sri Rama despatched his brother Lakshmana to capture King Shakunta.

On coming to know about these developments, through *Maharshi* Naarada, King Shakunta was petrified with fear. He asked *Maharshi* Naarada to save him. Thereupon, *Maharshi* Naarada advised him, “In the present situation, only Anjanadevi, the mother of the deity Hanuman, can save you. Therefore approach her and swear to her that you are innocent and then ask her to protect you.”

King Shakunta followed the advice of *Maharshi* Naarada. Immediately, Anjanadevi promised to protect him and to save his life. After hearing him out and coming to know all the details, she started to develop fear. She then called upon Hanuman and said to him, “Son! This man is not a criminal and he is a devotee of Lord Sri Ram. I promised him that I would safeguard his life; all the same my promise could result in enmity with Lord Sri Ram. So you decide as to the course of action to be adopted.”

²²⁵ Place where the Vedic rite is performed

Hanuman thought for a while and said, “Mother! Lord Sri Ram is the embodiment of dharma. I consider my mother as being the same as God; hence it is my principal duty to uphold my mother’s promise.” Then Hanuman formed a fortress around Shakunta with his tail and sat on the top of his tail. After that he became absorbed in devotion towards Lord Sri Ram and started to chant the latter’s name.

After sometime, Lakshmana came there and ordered Hanuman to handover Shakunta to him. Hanuman refused to do so. A battle ensued between them and Lakshmana had to return after being defeated in that battle. This information enraged Lord Sri Ram and he came to that place to wage a battle against the deity Hanuman.

When Lord Sri Ram reached that place, Hanuman was singing melodiously the name of Sri Ram. The melody and devotion of that song rendered Lord Sri Ram spellbound for a while. Soon Lord Sri Ram came out of that state and asked Hanuman to handover king Shakunta. The deity Hanuman offered his obeisance to Lord Sri Ram and said, “O! Lord! You are the yardstick for dharma. You exemplify paternal devotion; you are the sole protector of the truth. I am here to uphold my mother’s promise. Kill me and then take that king with you.”

Lord Sri Rama became very furious at this reply and launched his arrows on Hanuman. The latter closed his eyes

and kept on repeating the name of Lord Sri Rama. The arrows aimed at the deity Hanuman turned around and fell at the feet of Lord Sri Rama. The Lord became tired and did not know what to do next. At that time, *Maharshi* Naarada came there and praised Lord Sri Rama with extreme contentment.

Lord Sri Rama was dejected and addressed *Maharshi* Naarada in the following words, “Devarshi! The Rambaan was rendered worthless, from now onwards my life is a sheer waste, please advise me as to what I have to do now.” On hearing this *Maharshi* Naarada danced with ecstasy and sang the Ramagana, while accompanying himself on the Veena. He told the Lord, “Prabhu! Your magic is incomparable and extraordinary. This is not a defeat but a victory. In order to prove to the world that Ramaganam is superior to the Ramabanam, *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra enacted this entire play. That *Maharshi* instructed you to throw the head of Shakunta at his feet but not to behead him. For that matter, you along with the deity Hanuman take Shakunta and make him bow down before the *Maharshi*. Make Shakunta place his head at the feet of the *Maharshi*. This will resolve the matter.”

Maharshi Vishwaamitra had made the power of the Ramabanam or the arrow of Lord Sri Rama known to the world when the Lord was yet a child. Similarly, the same *Maharshi* revealed the power of the Ramanamam or the name of Lord Sri Rama, when the Lord was older. This

incident, once again served to reveal the greatness of the *Maharshi*.

At the beginning of this story, we might have mistakenly detested *Maharshi* Vishwaamitra. However, as the story reaches its end, the true greatness of the *Maharshi* stands revealed in all its glory. His principal objective had always been to benefit the world at large and his thinking had always been unselfish. Therefore, we should never condemn the acts of saints or noble people.

45. AURVA

The names, Badabanala and Aurvanala, might be familiar. These have been described as the equine shaped fire that burns inside the sea. Our sciences have described the power that prevents the sea from drowning the earth, by keeping the balance between the seawaters, the blowing of the wind and the earth's magnetic power, as Aurvanala. The word anala was used in the sense of power. That is why the mythologies have stated that, if Aurvanala was imperilled, the sea would produce cyclones. Further, it was also stated that at the time of calamities, the Aurvanala flourishes and dries up the seawater.

During the days of enmity between the sons of Kaarthviryarjuna and the descendants of Bhrugu, the sons of Kaarthvirya began to harass the latter, wherever they found

them. One day they attacked the house of *Maharshi*²²⁶ Chyavana. His wife fled out of fear and the princes chased her.

The pregnant wife of the saint fell down and was breathing with great difficulty; moreover, she was unable to run anymore. Her womb split and a boy emerged forth. This boy was accompanied by a bright light, which seemed to be like lightning. This light blinded the princes who were about to fall upon his mother.

People who are not great lack modesty. These princes, being distraught at their blindness, started praying to the saint's wife. People who are good natured and virtuous do not find miscreants in the world. Accordingly, that innocent woman forgot all their crimes and advised them, "A great person has been born here and you lost your sight due to his power. Pray to him and he will definitely restore your eyesight."

That young sage out of deference to the promise inherent in that advice removed their blindness as soon as they prayed to him. Great people consider their mothers to be unsurpassed, even by God.

He was like a lion cub at his birth; and his fellow saints named him as Aurva as he had slid down his mother's

²²⁶ Great Sage

Uruvu or thigh, at the time of his birth. Aurva restored the sight of the princes, as he was unable to gainsay his mother's wishes, however, his anger did not abate. While growing up, desire for revenge was on the increase and this finally led him to perform *Tapas*²²⁷. His *Tapas* was so intense that it began to burn heaven, earth and hell.

One day, while Aurva was deep in meditation, all his ancestors appeared to his mind's eye. When he opened his eyes, he saw that they were really standing there; this affected him tremendously and tears welled up in his eyes.

"Child! Why are you performing such austere *Tapas*?" they asked him.

Aurva replied belligerently, "Not a single living being in this world came to the rescue, while those bad princes were killing you. Where is goodness in these worlds? What is wrong in burning them? That's why I am performing this *Tapas*." The ancestors laughed pityingly and replied, "Son! In our lineage, every person's mind and knowledge had improved due to *Tapas*."

Aurva felt like somebody had lashed his back with a whip and pleaded with them, "O! Fathers! Please tell me where I have gone wrong!" The ancestors explained his mistake to him in these words, "Son! We obtained a very

²²⁷ Deep meditation or ascetism

long life due to our *Tapas*. Gradually, as we experienced the sordidness of this life, we did not want to continue in these bodies. Since, it is a sin to commit suicide; we surrendered our bodies to these princes and utilized the opportunity created by them. Alas! What a wise man you are, that you aim the Brahmastra at living beings that are inferior even to insects, and in this manner you make them great.”

Aurva bowed his head in shame and thought, “The princes, who are like grasshoppers, are incomparable to my ancestors. Then how could they have killed my ancestors? How is that I failed to get this thought? What an ignorant man I am!” Then he asked his ancestors, “What should I do now?”

They said, “Your fury and your penance are entirely God’s sport. The effect of this virulent *Tapas* will burn you. So change it into fire and position it as the Aurvagni, at the bottom of the sea. The fire will be calmed due to the water. The water will be controlled by the fire. Even the wind will be tranquil due to the equipoise between fire and water and the power of your *Tapas* be utilized for the benefit of the world.”

Thus, in accordance with his ancestors’ commands, the fire of Aurva’s *Tapas* was transformed into the Aurvagni and has been engendering equilibrium amongst the powers of the Earth; namely, water, wind and fire.

This is one of the most lucid mythological portrayals, regarding ecological balance. It provides an apt example of the fact that some of our mythological stories explain science, including its technical intricacies.

46. SUVARSNA SHTHEEVI

The doyens of society always give the following advice – even if a patron is to be found, the beneficiary should beware. Children are wont to inquire, as to why a person who accepts something should be more careful than the person who gives it. A convincing answer is provided in the story of Suvarsna Shtheevi.

In ancient times, there was a virtuous king named, Srunjaya who was a friend of *Maharshi*²²⁸ Naarada. This king was despondent due to being childless. On one occasion, his *Brahmin*²²⁹ courtiers requested *Maharshi* Naarada, “Please bless your friend with children.”

Maharshi Naarada asked the king, “What kind of children do you want?” The overjoyed king started to express his desire. Initially, he asked for a son, then he changed his request and asked for a handsome and virtuous son. After that, he pondered awhile, and wished for a boy whose sweat, urine and excrement would be transformed into gold.

²²⁸ Great Sage

²²⁹ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

Maharshi Naarada smiled enigmatically and said, “So be it!” A son was born, who was named, Suvarsna Shtheevi. The waste matter from his body turned into gold, in accordance with his father’s wishes. The king’s wealth and fame were on the increase and there was no end to his happiness.

One early morning, the ten-year-old Suvarsna Shtheevi disappeared from the palace. The alarmed king had the whole kingdom searched, and finally, the boy’s corpse, with its stomach rent asunder, was found in a forest.

Some thieves, who had heard that the boy’s urine and excrement were converted into gold, thought that his stomach was full of gold. So they took the boy into the forest and split his stomach open. When they found only flesh and blood, they left the dead body there and decamped.

On finding his son’s corpse, Srunjaya embraced it and began to weep bitterly. Meanwhile, *Maharshi* Naarada came there. The king’s wailings increased on seeing his friend, and he said, “O! Devarshi! The wish granted by you has gone to waste in this manner.”

Maharshi Naarada patted the king on his shoulder and said, “O! King! You are a man of great learning. Think carefully and try to determine, as to how my boon proved futile, or how it was wasted. You asked for a son, but did not stop at that; and asked for a handsome and excellent son.

You should have stopped at that, but on realizing that you were in the presence of a person who could grant any wish, you tried to acquire wealth by utilizing your son in an unnatural manner. You made a highly perverted wish that resulted in what had been non – existent in the world. There is nothing wrong in a king being ambitious, but it is wrong for anyone to be avaricious. You had taken leave of your senses due to the heady intoxication caused by greed and you have suffered the consequences.”

On being enlightened by the Devarshi, in this manner, the king realized his blunder. He felt ashamed of having unknowingly fallen victim to greed. He begged the Devarshi to pardon his evil deed. To this *Maharshi* Naarada said, “Dear friend! Irrespective of what has transpired, you are my friend and you are in trouble. Make a wish and I will grant it.” King Srunjaya made obeisance to him and said, “Swami! I do not need anything other than your kindness and the boon of knowledge.” *Maharshi* Naarada replied, “The duty of a true friend is to correct his friend’s mistake. You have corrected your own mistake, as I had anticipated. Behold! Your son has come alive.” At this the dead Suvarsna Shtheevi sat up. This shows that great care should be exercised while receiving something; and that the people who befriend good persons are always at an advantage.

47. KACHA

It is essential for those in politics to indulge in espionage. However, Kacha was an ideal young man, who was totally virtue bound, even in such situations. The present day youth, who harbour the illusion that youthful attractions are life's best achievements, should pay careful attention to the story of Kacha. The demons that had lost their life in the frequent battles with the deities were revived by *Maharshi*²³⁰ Sukracharya's art of *Mrithasanjivini*. On the other hand the number of the deities was gradually decreasing. The deities, who were trembling with fear at this adverse development, approached their Guru *Maharshi* Brihaspati and pleaded with him.

Maharshi Brihaspati deliberated for a long time and said, "O! Deities! We do not possess the spell of *Mrithasanjivini*. There can be no solution to this problem, unless we obtain that *mantra*²³¹. However, *Maharshi* Sukracharya will not give us this knowledge and he might immolate any deity who asks him for it. There is only one way out of this situation. My son Kacha is well educated and a bachelor at present. If he works up sufficient courage to become *Maharshi* Sukracharya's disciple and pleases him with his services, we might eventually obtain that *mantra*."

²³⁰ Great Sage

²³¹ Vedic hymn

Kacha, who was present there, understood his father's desire and said, "I would offer even my life for the sake of my father's determination and for the benefit of the deities" and started for Sukracharya's place at once. Kacha had stated that he was prepared to forgo even his life, but not his virtue; thereby reinforcing the principle, that not only the goal, but also the means to achieve it are very important.

Kacha straightaway went to *Maharshi* Sukracharya and requested him, "Sire! I am *Maharshi* Brihaspati's son. I have obtained my father's permission to obtain a thorough education under your tutelage. Please accept me as your disciple."

Maharshi Sukracharya contemplated for long regarding the mystery involved in, an intelligent and prominent adversary from the enemy camp, sending his son to him as a disciple. Nevertheless, adherence to the rule that, "A worthwhile person, who comes as a student, should not be dissuaded," compelled *Maharshi* Sukracharya to accept Kacha as his disciple.

Very soon Kacha stole his master's heart with his modesty and skill. Apart from this, he even acquired the affection of his daughter, Devayani. The demon warriors, who observed this, were envious of Kacha. One day, they came upon him, all by himself, in the forest and hacked him into two pieces. As Kacha did not come home even after a

long time had passed by, Devayani pleaded fearfully with her father. He used his divine sight to see what had happened and felt sad with the cruel act of the demons. Therefore, he made Kacha alive by the power of his Mrithasanjivini mantra.

The demons again killed Kacha and burnt him to ashes. Even then, *Maharshi* Sukracharya made him alive. This made the demons to think for long, and then they again burned Kacha and mixed the ashes in a drink. They gave this drink to *Maharshi* Sukracharya who drank it. *Maharshi* Sukracharya again searched for Kacha with his divine sight, at the persuasion of Devayani, but he could not find him in the three worlds. Finally, he ascertained the fact that Kacha's ashes were in his stomach.

Maharshi Sukracharya was at a loss to find a way out of this predicament. He was on the horns of a dilemma, on one hand; his daughter was inconsolable, while on the other hand, if he made Kacha alive he would meet with certain death. He thought a lot and finally brought Kacha to life within his stomach. He taught him the Mrithasanjivini *mantra* and commanded him, "Son! Come out by splitting open my stomach, and restore me to life as soon as you come out."

Kacha scrupulously followed the *Maharshi's* instructions and proved himself worthy of his Guru's grace. All the same, he encountered an unexpected problem.

Devayani accosted Kacha, who had started on his journey home and declared, "I will accompany you, marry me."

This was a crucial test of character for Kacha. He did not falter and replied, "According to the science of Dharma, a master's daughter is as good as one's sister. So I never saw you in any other light. It is unbecoming for girls to pursue bridegrooms. Think in a righteous manner." This reply infuriated Devayani, who cursed him, "May the Mrithasanjivini, you have earned with such hard work fail you."

Even then, Kacha was unshaken, and cursed her in return, "Look! May your curse come true and may those who learn it from me, have thousand fold good results. Since, you wasted your *Tapas* and cursed me, may your marriage be to someone born in the lineage of sages."

Devayani, who had expended all her *Tapas* power on that curse, realized her mistake, returned home. The race of the deities flourished due to Kacha who was endowed with virtue and the spirit of sacrifice. This incident shows the great difference between the attitudes of the present day youth and Kacha. The custom that had been handed down from generation to generation was that not only the goal but also the way to achieve it should be righteous.

48. JAANAA BAI

We listen in the main; to the stories of kings, scholars and sages and express great appreciation for them. However, we never give importance to the stories of sages who were always among us even if we had seen them with our own eyes. The main reason for this is their abject poverty. Several great people, who had reached the pinnacle of *Tapas*²³², were by design born in poverty stricken families, in their subsequent birth. Their life reveals a number of valuable messages, as was revealed by the incidents that transpired in Jaanaa Bai's life.

Once upon a time, on a festival day, a couple, along with their five year old girl arrived at the sacred Pandari, to have *Darshan*²³³ of the presiding deity. After the end of their visit, they noticed that for some reason their little girl was weeping continuously and crying out loudly, "Vittala, Vittala."

Their pilgrimage came to an end and the parents left the temple. When they reached the main gate, that little girl, declared adamantly, "I do not want to leave this temple." The parents pampered, beseeched, scolded and finally beat her. Even then they could not make her come out of the

²³² Deep meditation or ascetism

²³³ Sight of

temple. When some days had passed in this manner, the parents left the girl there and went away.

That little girl sat there and gazed at the Lord, without any interruption. She did not indulge in talk with anyone and abstained from eating anything. The next day after her parents had left, Namadeva²³⁴ saw her; and for some inexplicable reason his heart was gladdened on seeing her. He went near her and asked affectionately, “Who are you?”

That girl, who had remained silent till then, replied, “My name is Jaanaa Bai. My father is Vittala, my mother is Rukuma and you are my preceptor. Please extend thy protection to me”, and then she fell at Namadeva’s feet.

Namadeva, who was a great devotee of the Lord, took the girl to his house and asked his mother to look after her. One night, a storm broke out and Jaanaa Bai woke up due to the rain. When she opened her eyes, the leaves on the thatched house were flying away due to the wind. To her surprise, the rain had stopped falling on her. She inspected her surroundings and observed that the Lord Panduranga was sitting on the roof, using his discus that was on his index finger as an umbrella to shelter their house. He was using his right hand and legs, to repair the thatched roof with a thread and needle.

²³⁴ A renowned saint of Maharashtra in India

Jaanaa Bai's astonishment exceeded her pleasure at this sight. The next day she asked her Guru, "Baba²³⁵! Why cannot Lord Pandarinatha give us a new house instead of taking pains to stitch the leaves?" Namadeva replied, "My dear! He knows that if he gives in that manner, we would get immersed in worldly things. Thereby he was taking pains on our behalf, as he does not want us to suffer." This answer provided Jaanaa Bai with a novel enlightenment.

One day, Kabirdas, who a great devotee of the Lord, visited their home; at that time, Jaanaa Bai had been fighting with her neighbour and accusing her of having stolen fuel meant for their household fire. Kabirdas came forward and asked her, "How can you identify your fuel, as it seems to have been mixed with that of your neighbour?" Jaanaa Bai replied, "O! Great Saint! I prepared the fuel while chanting Lord Panduranga's name. My fuel can make you hear His name." When Kabirdas examined the fuel, he discovered that some of it in the neighbour's house, repeated the name of Vittala in a beautiful voice. His eyes filled with tears at the depth of Jaanaa Bai's devotion.

One night Jaanaa Bai was thinking of the Lord Hari, while grinding millet and the Lord Vittala was sitting by her side and imparting profound knowledge to her. When it was early morning, Jaanaa Bai asked, "O! Lord! The devotees are entering your temple. Is it not necessary for you to appear

²³⁵ Father

before them?” In His haste, Lord Panduranga left behind his ornaments and cloak, and covered himself with Jaanaa Bai’s torn blanket.

The next day the priest who recognized Jaanaa Bai’s blanket in the shrine of the temple came to her house. There he saw the Lord’s ornaments and was convinced that Jaanaa Bai had stolen them. The king conducted an inquiry into the incident and concluded that Jaanaa Bai was to be hanged. Jaanaa Bai was weeping bitterly, while ascending the gallows in the middle of the town. However, she was also continuously chanting the name of Lord Panduranga. The executioner pulled the rope, but wonder of wonders, both the pillar and the rope turned into flowers and vines.

From then onwards, Jaanaa Bai used to sing Lord Panduranga’s *Kirtans*²³⁶ spontaneously and she would be rendered insensate. When one day Jnanadeva visited the Lord, He Himself was writing her *Kirtans*. “What is this, oh Lord?” asked Jnanadeva. To this, Lord Vittala replied, “Jnanadeva! These Kirtans are dearer to me than the mythologies of the *Vedas*²³⁷. Spread this message in the world.”

Jaanaa Bai’s life is the best example of the fact that pure devotion is superior to perfect knowledge. We console

²³⁶ Sacred hymns

²³⁷ Primary texts of the Sanatana Dharma

ourselves with the thought that we are unable to concentrate on God, because of innumerable domestic problems. If love towards God wells up inside our heart, we never notice these problems, and God tends to be merciful towards people who are immersed in such devotion.

49. UT TAANA PAADA

Whenever an argument arises as to whether penance or a virtuous mind is greater; irrespective of our choice, we have a tendency to develop greater regard for those who perform conjuring tricks in our presence. To what extent is affection justified? This question was answered in the story of Uttaana Paada.

Uttaana Paada, the second born of Swayambhu Manu, had procured a divine air borne vehicle by means of his penance. He used to travel in this vehicle and never placed his feet on the ground, hence he was known as Uttaana Paada. He had two wives Suniti and Suruchi, each of whom had a son. Dhruva was Suniti's son and Uttama was Suruchi's son, and as Uttaana Paada had greater affection towards Suruchi, he was more affectionate towards Uttama than Dhruva. This caused the crestfallen, Dhruva to perform severe penance, which made him the ruler of Dhruvaloka.

Uttaana Paada repented a lot upon coming to know about these events. He was ashamed of himself, after he realized that he had been prejudiced by his love towards his

wife, even in taking caring of his children. Therefore, he invited Dhruva and accorded considerable respect towards him. After that he made him the ruler of the kingdom and left that place as atonement for the wrong done by him. Even though Uttaana Paada had undertaken considerable penance and even though he had ruled the Earth in a virtuous manner, nevertheless, he had succumbed to beauty and had displayed partiality towards his wives. Even in the innocent faces of his children, he only saw their mothers and accordingly showed partiality towards them. Hence, in the absence of circumspection, penance and intelligence will be rendered futile and will cause repentance as in the instance of Uttaana Paada.

Thus, Uttaana Paada's life shows that a great amount of penance, in the absence of a virtuous mind will render a human being incomplete. Therefore, the best penance lies in the practice of virtue.

50. JADA BHARATA

Everybody has to countenance unexpected challenges in life. Accepting such challenges courageously is commendable. However, it is a bad trait to think too much about that problem, the intelligence that we displayed in solving it and the people whom we met in that context. Furthermore, we should not forget that we were merely performing our duty in dealing with it. Even a good person who engages in such obsessive thinking could lose his

humanity and become a brute. This is different from indulging in cruel deeds and developing the nature of a brute. The story of a great emperor Bharata is the best illustration of how a person's downfall ensues due to thinking too much along these lines. Although he performed good deeds, he failed to perform his duties.

Bharata was the son of Rishabha, who had been born from a portion of Lord Vishnu. During King Rishabha's time, our country was known as Ajanaabha. King Rishabha divided the entire Earth into nine parts and bestowed the best part on his elder son, Bharata. Our country was called Bharatavarsha, because Bharata had ruled over it. His rule lasted for a long time and was famous all over the Earth, due his performance of several unselfish *Yajnas*²³⁸.

After a considerable time had passed by in this manner, Bharata handed over the kingdom to his sons and settled down in the forests, in order to perform penance. A wonderful incident transpired at that time. One particular evening he went to a river and commenced the *Arghyapradana*²³⁹. A pregnant antelope, which had also come to that place at that time, was drinking water. Suddenly, a tiger that was in the vicinity loudly cleared its throat. The perturbed antelope immediately jumped into the river.

²³⁸ Vedic sacrifice

²³⁹ Offering water as oblation to the Deity Sun

While it was jumping into the river, it delivered its fawn, which fell directly into *Rajarshi*²⁴⁰ Bharata's hands that were cupped together for offering the *Arghya*²⁴¹. When he opened his eyes, he saw the doe in its death throes in the river. The kind hearted Bharata pitied the fawn and brought it to the ashram, in order to raise it.

Every day after his prayers he used to play with it. Gradually, he started to make elaborate arrangements for the protection of that fawn. Every day of his was spent in fear that some carnivore might kill the fawn. Some time had elapsed in this manner, when he realized that his death was approaching. Even at the time of his death, he was unable to forget the perceived danger to the deer, which was too young to protect itself. Consequently, Bharata was born as a deer, because his last thoughts had been about the deer in his ashram.

However, his *Tapas*²⁴² came to his rescue and he remembered his previous birth and realized the reason for his being born as a deer. He prayed a lot to Lord Parameswara and became a recluse, and desisted from befriending the other deer. He lived without enmity, even towards the carnivorous beasts that would have killed him on sight. Every day he immersed himself in the river Ganga,

²⁴⁰ Royal sage

²⁴¹ Water

²⁴² Deep meditation or ascetism

which flowed nearby and ate only dry leaves. He was born as JadaBharata in his next birth and obtained liberation from the bonds of the senses.

Even a highly virtuous person like the Emperor Bharata was reborn as a dumb animal, due to a minor infraction. Kindness is not bad, even caring for a fawn is not bad. His only mistake was his obsession. Is it not better to exercise caution by realizing this fact in this very birth itself?

51. KAALA NEMI

Lord Sri Rama, when he was a boy, belaboured Maareecha and Subaahu; while protecting a *Yajna*²⁴³ that was being conducted by Vishwaamitra. Subaahu succumbed to his injuries, while, Maareecha escaped death and took to the life of a saint. Nevertheless, due to the machinations of Raavana, he was compelled to end his life as an enchanted deer at the hands of Lord Sri Rama.

His son Kalanemi, who was a friend of Raavana, had a daughter named Brinda who married Jalandhara. Kalanemi had seven sons who lived as the associates of Raavana. During the war between Lord Sri Rama and Raavanasura, the deity Hanuman went in search of the Sanjeevini herb. Raavanasura came to know about this and approached Kalanemi, who was residing in the Himalayan regions. He

²⁴³ Vedic sacrifice

asked Kalanemi, to kill the deity Hanuman when the latter would traverse that region, all alone, while searching for the Sanjeevini herb.

Kalanemi acceded to this supplication and donned the garb of a saint. He accosted the deity Hanuman, who was in search of the divine herb and said, “If you bathe in the yonder lake, your task will be accomplished very quickly.” Consequently, the deity Hanuman stepped into the lake, in order to take a bath. This lake was full of crocodiles, which caught hold of the deity Hanuman. Thereupon, the deity Hanuman realized the treachery that He had been subjected to; and killed all the crocodiles in that lake.

As such, these crocodiles were some *Gandharvas*²⁴⁴ who had been transformed due to a curse. On being killed by the deity Hanuman they regained their *Gandharva* form. They offered their heartfelt greetings to the deity Hanuman and described the misdeeds of Kalanemi to Him. The disappointed and enraged Kalanemi fought with the deity Hanuman and lost his life. Subsequently, he was reborn as the demon Kamsa, during the life of Lord Sri Krishna. He engaged in combat with Lord Sri Krishna, which proved to be fatal; nevertheless, he attained *Moksha*²⁴⁵, because he had been killed by the Lord.

²⁴⁴ Male celestial beings, who possess magnificent musical skills

²⁴⁵ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth

Although the demon Maareecha knew the power of Lord Sri Rama, he surrendered to Raavanasura and took on the guise of an enchanted deer. His son, despite knowing his father's fate, did not relinquish his association with Raavanasura. Even though he became a saint, he could not stop himself from becoming an enemy of Lord Sri Rama and tried to obstruct the Lord's mission. From this story it is clear that association with deceitful persons causes us to commit sins even in our old age.

52. RISHABHA

There are several people who deem their laziness to indicate detachment from earthly desires. In fact, detachment energizes men and increases their capacity to carry out their tasks with greater efficiency. One who functions without detachment suffers the most in the face of adversity. Lazy people are contented at the sight of unexpected profits, and they think that they have detachment. People with a false sense of detachment argue that it is impossible to carry out one's duties if one is totally detached. Such people should scrutinize the story of Rishabha, in order to know the truth about their condition.

In ancient times, there was a great ascetic, named, Priyavrata. He had seven sons, and the eldest among them was Rishabha, who was an incarnation of the Lord Maha

Vishnu. Rishabha exhibited several miracles right from his birth. He used to be in deep *Tapas*²⁴⁶ almost all the time. He possessed complete knowledge, which came to him of its own accord. Gradually, the miracles displayed by him increased, which made him very famous.

His fame spread, even to heaven. The deity Indra developed jealousy and withheld the rains. However, the powers and functions of the deity Indra proved to be inferior to the spiritual and yogic power of Rishabha. Consequently, Rishabha ensured that there was rainfall in the kingdom of Priyavrata. This incident served as a portent to king Priyavrata, who immediately handed over the entire kingdom to Rishabha and started to perform *Tapas*.

As a king, Rishabha ruled his kingdom with efficiency and compassion. He later became famous as the very embodiment of dharma. Lord Sri Rama was a king, who was renowned for His righteousness. However, prior to Lord Sri Rama, Rishabha was famous for his righteousness and morality. He ruled over his kingdom for a long time and followed the rules of a householder. He brought about several reforms to the administration of his kingdom.

He and his wife Jayanti had a hundred sons. Amongst them Bharat was the eldest and our country was named Bharatavarsha in his honour.

²⁴⁶ Deep meditation or ascetism

Rishabha divided the entire earth into nine areas and appointed nine of his sons as rulers over them. Accordingly, the kingdoms were termed as Bharatavarsha, Kushavartha, etc.

The saints and sages of that period engaged themselves in observing Rishabha in order to acquire knowledge and to learn the secrets of *dharmā*²⁴⁷, *yoga*²⁴⁸ and *Tapas*. Therefore, Rishabha abdicated the kingdom and became a saint, in order to illustrate the various rituals involved in the *Sanyasa Dharma*²⁴⁹; to the numerous aspirants treading the spiritual path. Later on, he desired to teach his disciples the practices relating to their physical bodies.

He then united his mind with the *Parabrahma*²⁵⁰ and proceeded towards the north. His mind was one with God, while his body was engaged in the act of walking. Accordingly, his body was walking of its own accord, towards the north, without his involvement.

In this fashion he traversed several villages and cities. Finally, his body entered a dense forest that was ablaze, and started to burn. Even then his mind did not disassociate

²⁴⁷ Righteousness

²⁴⁸ disciplines of asceticism that result in spiritual experiences and a deep understanding into the nature of existence.

²⁴⁹ Code of conduct to be followed by a renunciate

²⁵⁰ Supreme Being or God

itself from *Brahma*²⁵¹ and the unharmed parts of his body realized that the other parts of the body had been burned. He was unable to feel the pain caused by the burns, which was witnessed by his atman,²⁵² witnessed the pain to his body, which was moving forward. Eventually, the body was completely reduced to ashes, and his individual soul became one with the *ParamAatma*²⁵³.

In this manner, Rishabha followed the rites of a *grihastha*²⁵⁴ and an *Avadhoota*²⁵⁵. As such, he was one of the famous reincarnations of Lord Maha Vishnu.

53. SARAMAA

Once upon a time, there was a hound named Saramaa, in heaven. The deity Indra treated that dog with the same honour that he used to accord to the other gods. One day the demons commenced a war on heaven. Unable to withstand their attack, the deity Indra approached Brihaspati and requested him to suggest a method by which the power of his army would be enhanced. Brihaspati advised him to perform the *Gomedhayagam*²⁵⁶.

²⁵¹ God

²⁵² Individual soul

²⁵³ Universal soul

²⁵⁴ householder

²⁵⁵ One without any bonds

²⁵⁶ A ritual in which the cows in the Yajna are allowed to travel in whichever direction that they please

In the *Aswamedhayagam*²⁵⁷, it is the practice to let the horse travel in whichever direction that it pleases. Similarly in the Gomedhayagam, the cows are allowed to take to take to the path that they wish. Accordingly, the deity Indra set the cows free and directed Saramaa to guard them.

After these animals had travelled some distance, he sent his invisible emissaries the Maruta, to observe this hunting dog.

The cows entered the places where the demons lived, however, the demons, were rendered terror struck on seeing Saramaa; and they accordingly informed their master, Sukracharya. The latter cogitated for a while and told them, “do not fear the dog, bring the cows. Although, Saramaa is ferocious it has a lowly nature, which can be exploited.”The demons seized and confined these cows, but Saramaa located the cows by their smell. In the meanwhile, the demons milked the cows and collected the milk in a golden bowl. After that they addressed the dog, “O! Great dog! The cows are safe here; do not fear for them. Here is the divine milk from them, please partake of it.”

²⁵⁷ Horse sacrifice. A religious rite that was conducted by a king to declare his supremacy, by allowing a stallion, accompanied by a royal escort to wander, in an unfettered manner; any king who captured such a horse, declared his unwillingness to accept the paramuncy of the king who was conducting this sacrifice.

Saramaa was momentarily perplexed, but was tempted to drink the divine *Yajna* cows' milk. Finally it drank the milk and a bond of friendship developed between the demons and Saramaa. It stayed there for a period of time and drank the milk frequently, due to which it became fat and obdurate.

The demons then told the dog, "Please inform the deity Indra that the *Yajna* cows have gone astray."

Saramaa returned to heaven and informed the deity Indra that the cows were missing. At this, the deity Indra obtained information about what had transpired, from the Maruta. The deity Indra was beside himself with rage and kicked the dog in its abdomen. With that kick the milk that had been consumed by the dog came out. Saramaa lost his senses for a while and then recovered. Saramaa confessed to the wrong done and revealed the place where the cows were confined. The deity Indra found the cows with the help of this dog and completed the *Yajna*. As a result, he and his army became very powerful and won in the battle against the demons.

Due to this incident, dogs developed their significant feature of loyalty towards people who feed them. Association with conniving people changed the thinking of Saramaa. It ate the food provided by them and became dishonest; therefore, it lied to the deity Indra. When it reached the presence of noble people, it regained its piety

and attained *Moksha*²⁵⁸. From this story we learn that associating with devious people makes a person devious. However, the company of knowledgeable and great people transforms a devious person into a good person and helps in the attainment of greatness.

54. RUBHU MAHARSHI

Children learn new things while growing up, which make them complacent. This is a welcome development; unfortunately, it usually does not stop at that. Some children develop the bad habit of boasting about the new things that they have come to know about. Such behaviour, if left unrectified develops into arrogance. As arrogance increases, the ability to learn new things decreases. Therefore, it is far better to control such behaviour in the initial stages itself. Increasing arrogance deludes individuals into believing that they have much more knowledge than the others. Moreover, it does not stop at this and culminates in the thinking that other people do not know anything. Children do not realize that these tendencies arise out of innocence.

To make this comprehensible, *SadGurus*²⁵⁹ attempt to make us realize ourselves. In the course of this endeavour

²⁵⁸ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth

²⁵⁹ A liberated sage

they encounter several hurdles and dishonour on our behalf. The story of Rubhu *Maharshi*²⁶⁰ clearly brings forth this fact.

In ancient times, the saints indulged in *Tapas*²⁶¹ and stayed away from villages and cities. Whenever, they visited a city or village, the people would come forth and serve them wholeheartedly.

On one occasion Rubhu *Maharshi* visited a city where a young person named Nidhaama accosted him. Nidhaama posed several questions to the *Maharshi* in order to demonstrate his proficiency in the *Vedanta*²⁶².

In general, *Maharshis* or saints answer only those who question them with a sincere and deep desire for knowledge. They do not respond to the inquiries of people who merely wish to exhibit their erudition.

As such Rubhu *Maharshi* did not reply to Nidhaama's queries, which made the latter all the more enthusiastic, due to which he started to display his knowledge of the *Upanishads*²⁶³ and the *Vedanta*. Suddenly, they heard the shouting of soldiers in the street, at this Nidhaama became silent with fear on seeing the soldiers. However, Rubhu *Maharshi* was loudly exclaiming, "What is going on?"

²⁶⁰ Great Sage

²⁶¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

²⁶² The philosophical foundation of the Sanatana Dharma

²⁶³ The inner or mystic teaching

Nidhaama replied, “The king is parading on an elephant, do not shout.” To this Rubhu *Maharshi* asked innocently, “Where is the elephant? Who is the king?” Nidhaama replied in a low voice that “the person with the crown on his head is the king and the fat animal is the elephant.”

Then the *Maharshi* asked, “Where is the crown and on what is it placed.” The royal procession had passed by that time. Nidhaama became very angry and pushed down the head of the *Maharshi* and sat on his back. Then he told the *Maharshi*, “The elephant is like you and the king is like me, understand?”

The *Maharshi* did not resist. He only replied, “I do not see anybody above or below me, but you are saying that somebody is on top of me.

”Nidhaama was astonished. He had been discussing with the *Maharshi* the essence of the *Vedanta* and the *Upanishads*, which claim that “I fill the universe.” After the *Maharshi* had asked him about who the king was and what the elephant was, he considered the *Maharshi* to be a barbarian, who was incapable of recognizing the king. He now realized that the *Maharshi* was stating that the life force that existed in the king and the elephant was the same. Nidhaama realized that the *Maharshi* had imparted the essence of the *Upanishads* to him, but he had failed to

understand; and he had sat on the back of the *Maharshi*. He realized the sin that he had committed.

With this realization, Nidhaama dismounted from the back of the *Maharshi* and prostrated himself at the feet of Rubhu *Maharshi*. After that he pleaded with the *Maharshi* to forgive him for his ignorance. When Nidhaama touched the feet of Rubhu *Maharshi*, he obtained his benediction and immediately attained realization of the self.

True knowledge springs not from books, and knowledge about the Almighty can only be attained through *Guru Krupa*²⁶⁴.

55. DHRUVA'S Valour

In general, people believe that *Tapas*²⁶⁵ is performed in caves. This misconception regarding *Tapas* disappears if we examine the lives of the great sages and saints. The incidents in the life of the child devotee Dhruva are fitting examples of this contention.

Although Dhruva started *Tapas* in his childhood it continued for a very long time. During the period, when Dhruva was doing *Tapas*, his step brother Uttama ruled the kingdom. On one occasion, Uttama went to the Himalayas, along with his wives, on a pleasure trip. While they were

²⁶⁴ Blessings of the Guru

²⁶⁵ Deep meditation or ascetism

strolling there, they lost their way. All at once, a *Yaksha*²⁶⁶ approached Uttama and accosted him very rudely by stating, “This is my kingdom, where I am strolling with my wives. Your entrance has disturbed our privacy, why did you come to this place?”

Uttama who was young and hot blooded; was incensed at these words of the Yaksha and replied in an arrogant fashion to him. Subsequently, they exchanged hot words and finally they engaged in a battle, in which Uttama lost his life. His death caused a great deal of anguish to his father Uttaana Paada. At that very moment, Dhruva returned from his *Tapas* after having attained *siddhi*²⁶⁷. He inquired the reason for his father’s agony and came to know that a Yaksha had killed his brother.

In addition, Uttaana Paada had realized the injustice done to his son Dhruva by him, so he wanted to make him the king and retire to the forest. The anguish of his father moved Dhruva emotionally who became very angry with the Yaksha. He waged a war against Kubera but the battle proved to be very difficult. Dhruva then utilized his power achieved through *Tapas* and killed thirteen thousand *yakshas* with divine weapons.

²⁶⁶ Semi divine beings who are the followers of Kubera the deity of wealth

²⁶⁷ Perfection or mastery

Dhruva's prospects of emerging victorious in battle were improving, when all of a sudden his grandfather Swayambuva Manu arrived in that place like a bolt from the blue. Dhruva venerated his grandfather but the latter ignored them and said "O! King! How can you kill thirteen thousand *yakshas* as punishment for the wrong committed by just one *yaksha*? What is justification for your punishment?"

Dhruva noticed that his grandfather had called him a king in a sarcastic manner. Then Dhruva bowed his head before his grandfather and saluted him. By this gesture of Dhruva, his grandfather was appeased and told him, "Dhruva! Relationship is undoubtedly great but racial discrimination is reproachable. The first thing to do is to identify the offender and punish him. It is incorrect to punish the innocent in order to punish one offender, as this is unacceptable to any *shastra*²⁶⁸. To punish an entire race for an offence committed by one of them is not only *adharma*²⁶⁹ but also inhuman.

The races were created in order to establish the system of dharma. Whatever the race, its members love their life and their relatives.

²⁶⁸ Scripture

²⁶⁹ Unrighteousness

It is the duty of the king to punish offenders, and this punishment destroys the sin of the offender. The king has to impose punishment after properly assessing the gravity of the offence. If that is done by the king then he would get the benefit of eradicating the sin of the offender. If the punishment exceeds the deserved punishment then the king verily becomes a sinner. What would happen to a king who exterminates the entire race for the sake of just one offender?”

The exhortations of his grandfather had a profound effect on Dhruva, who repented his actions. Subsequently, he arrived at a rapprochement with Kubera on the advice of his grandfather. Thereafter, he ruled his kingdom peacefully and lawfully.

Those who have great powers of *Tapas* should become kings and rulers. Sometimes, even they are deluded into thinking that the power achieved through *Tapas* will correctly guide them and make them the best of rulers. The story of Dhruva reveals this fact very clearly.

56. ANGA

Even those who do not violate the law, and who are well educated court disaster due to their outlandish desires, and the best example of this is provided by the story of Anga. Dhruva who achieved the unique status of the pole star is well known. Before attaining that position, he ruled

over his kingdom; and he had eight sons, who were great devotees and adherents of *dharma*²⁷⁰.

When Dhruva wanted to hand over the reins of the kingdom, his first seven sons refused to become kings. The eighth son Anga, desired to perform the *Asvamedha Yajna*²⁷¹ without seeking the result.

In order to perform that *Yajna*²⁷² it was essential to be a king, therefore, Anga agreed to ascend the throne after his father.

After Anga was anointed the king he commenced the *Asvamedha Yajna* and appointed great saints and *Maharshis*²⁷³ as priests for this *Yajna*²⁷⁴. Although, the *Yajna* was progressing in an exemplary manner, the deities did not come to partake of the offerings made during the *homa*²⁷⁵.

During that age, the deities used to attend the *Yajna* and take the *homa* offerings in their true identity. If they did not do so then it could be construed that either the person

²⁷⁰ Righteousness

²⁷¹ Horse sacrifice. A religious rite that was conducted by a king to declare his supremacy, by allowing a stallion, accompanied by a royal escort to wander, in an unfettered manner; any king who captured such a horse, declared his unwillingness to accept the paramouncy of the king who was conducting this sacrifice.

²⁷² Vedic sacrifice

²⁷³ Great Sages

²⁷⁴ Vedic sacrifice

²⁷⁵ Vedic ritual, in which offerings are made to the consecrated fire

performing the *Yajna* or the presiding priests were at fault. As such, a debate was in progress regarding the refusal of the deities to accept the offerings in that *Yajna*. After a thorough examination, it was concluded that the fault was with Anga, as he did not have children and that as a consequence his offerings were worthless and hence the deities had failed to grace the occasion. The anguished Anga asked the officiating priests to suggest a method by which he could obtain children. They advised him to perform the *Putrakaameshti yajna*²⁷⁶. Accordingly, he postponed the *Asvamedha Yajna* and commenced the *Putrakameshtiyajna*.

Initially, Anga had wanted to perform the *Yajna* without any desires, but he was compelled to have desires. The *Putrakameshtiyajna* was completed and Anga obtained a son, whom he named Vena. This child was a conqueror by birth; unfortunately, he developed into a very cruel person, while conquering the other kingdoms and ultimately lost all of his humanity.

Anga suffered great agony due the activities of his son. Subsequently, Vena became a youth and argued that there was no God and that the Vedas were wrong. When the elders questioned him about his atheistic activities, he replied to them that “*Na Vishnu Prithvipati*, (which means he who is not Vishnu, is not a king). So I am Lord Vishnu, worship me.”

²⁷⁶ A Vedic sacrifice that bestows progeny

They accepted this and agreed to worship him. Thereupon, he said, “When the god is here intact then performing any other worship is tantamount to indulging in sin. Hence, any person who worships other gods will be beheaded.” Subsequently, he decapitated those who did not worship him.

Due to his attractive and dynamic personality, all the soldiers and generals of his army supported him. Anga attempted to rectify Vena, but his efforts were in vain. The situation worsened and there was no respect for the emperor. All the important posts were occupied by drunkards and vandals; and the populace was berating Anga for the prevailing anarchy in the country.

These incidents angered Anga. He thought of his father and brothers, and his desire to perform *Yajnas*, which had resulted in his becoming the king of the country. Furthermore, the kingdom and the desire to perform *Yajnas* compelled him to bear children. If the child had been good natured he would have fallen in love with that child.

Therefore, God had given him an evil son to keep him away from the desire for children, kingdom and *Yajnas*. He

decided to repair to the forest and perform *Tapas*²⁷⁷ ; while giving up all earthly desires.

Subsequently, Anga went to the forest and relinquished all earthly desires; and afterwards, he was united with the Almighty. Emperor Anga wanted to do good, for that he had to perform *Yajnas*, which required him to be a king. He obtained a kingdom and started the *Yajnas*. However, he had to have children to successfully perform the *Yajna*. In order, to obtain children he had to perform another *Yajna*.

He procured a son, who created yet another problem for him. Due to the succession of these distressing incidents, the original concept of doing well vanished into thin air. Thus, the drifting from one desire to another leads to great danger.

57. VENA

There are epochs of time or ages in the world. In every age, the influences of the other ages are always present. According to our epics, the people born in any age are affected by such influences. The tale of the emperor Vena is a fitting example of this fact. Vena was born in the last quarter of the *Kruta Yuga*²⁷⁸ when there was an

²⁷⁷ Deep meditation or ascetism

²⁷⁸ Righteous age

influence of the *Kaliyuga*²⁷⁹, which had ended just then. He tried to destroy the order of *Dharma*²⁸⁰.

Vena was the son of Anga and the grandson of Dhruva. Although Vena was a great warrior, he was cruel, unethical and an atheist. His father, the king Anga, tried to reform him in vain. Consequently, the despondent and dejected king retired to the forest to perform *Tapas*²⁸¹.

The absence of his father brought the worst out of the emperor Vena. He prohibited *Yajnas*²⁸² and worship in his kingdom. He banned the recital of the *Vedas*²⁸³ and executed those who gave alms to the poor. Gradually, the gamblers became the officials in the kingdom, and the people started to live capriciously. Education was on the basis of physical standards. Freedom from customs and traditions was the established way of life; and this despicable manner of existence was considered to be the acme of civilization. Bribery was widespread and indulgence in falsehood became second nature to the people. Moreover, during his rule, women were ill treated.

Those who could exploit others became the favourites of the King, while those who could commit

²⁷⁹ Age of vice

²⁸⁰ Righteousness

²⁸¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

²⁸² Vedic sacrifices

²⁸³ Primary texts of the Sanatana Dharma

robberies in the cities became his chieftains. Those who were capable of robbing the entire kingdom became kings. Moreover, the tribal militants who lived in the forests gained importance by looting the surrounding villages and were acclaimed by the king.

Those who supported this iniquity were accorded the highest positions in the king's court, and robbers were highly decorated.

The common folk, women and other weaker sections of society were unable to live in that kingdom and escaped into the forests.

The emperor was dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions and he despatched search parties to locate the *Rishis*²⁸⁴ and *Munis*²⁸⁵. These parties searched in the forests, caves and hills; and those who were found were executed by the king. As anarchy was at its worst, *Maharshis*²⁸⁶ like Atri and others convened a meeting to arrive at a plan to end the chaos, to save the earth, and to protect the future generations of mankind from being affected by this lawlessness. They also discussed, in detail, the probable calamities that could ensue due to the evil acts of the king.

²⁸⁴ Sages

²⁸⁵ Ascetics

²⁸⁶ Great Sage

The *Maharshis* also decided that in every *Yuga*²⁸⁷, the influences of the remaining three *Yugas* would be evident. In the *Kruta Yuga*, Vena was born under the influence of *Kaliyuga*; this was the reason for the anarchy in his rule and his indulgence in nefarious activities. They also opined that if he was given a free hand he would recreate the *Kaliyuga* milieu. It was, therefore, decided upon by this august body that Vena deserved very severe punishment.

They approached Vena and talked to him about humanity. The king was enraged and said, “You are talking against the king who is none other than god himself. Therefore, you deserve punishment.” He started to make arrangements to punish the *Maharshis*. The *Maharshis* were much annoyed at these acts of the king and they generated the *Humkara*²⁸⁸ vibrations. These vibrations brought about the demise of the evil Vena.

The chieftains on coming to know that Vena was no more, became independent rulers of their kingdoms. They waged war against each other and this led to utter chaos. This new development made the *Maharshis* realize that the need of the hour was to establish a virtuous and strong emperor over the kingdom, in order to maintain law and order.

²⁸⁷ Epoch

²⁸⁸ The sound of the sacred symbol OM

Vena did not have any children and if any other person were to be made the emperor, there was the possibility of the reoccurrence of anarchy. Furthermore, the courage of Vena would have been wasted.

Accordingly, the *Maharshis* rubbed the palms Vena's corpse, in order to produce *Agni*²⁸⁹. Due to this friction between the palms, a ray from Lord Vishnu emerged, which was named Prithu. This divine person was made the king and he successfully maintained law and order on the earth.

In this manner, the attempt of Vena to eradicate dharma ended in a fiasco. All the same, Lord Vishnu's essence emerged from his body. This incident reveals to us the truth that although *Adharma*²⁹⁰ appears to be ferocious, by creating chaotic conditions; *Dharma*²⁹¹ stands unshaken like a mountain, and emerges as the ultimate victor.

The kings are not the true protectors of the practice of *Dharma*, the saints who are always engaged in *Tapas*, which they perform in the caves and in the forests, are the custodians of *Dharma* and only they can protect it in its pristine and true form. Therefore, we should never forsake the path of *Dharma*, which has been taught by the *Maharshis*.

²⁸⁹ Fire

²⁹⁰ Unrighteousness

²⁹¹ Righteousness

58. MAITRA MUNI

Some people express criticism at the existence of a number of contradictory theoriesMait, regarding divinity in our country. Those who follow a particular theory, strongly support their theory and their religion. Such criticism seems very convincing, until we deeply analyze them. The story of Maitra Muni will serve as an eye opener for those who blindly believe in such criticism.

The King Vajraanga once visited Maitra Maharshi and entered into a discussion on the faults in the *Sadhana*²⁹² of the *Maharshis*²⁹³. Maitra Maharshi gently replied, “Why should we talk about them?”

The king Vajraanga again told the Maharshi that “One claims that truth is great, another claims that patronage is great, another claims that devotion is great, another says Lord Shiva is great. So there is a difference of opinions. If they had really achieved perfection then all of them should have made the same claim.”

At that moment, dinner was announced, which effectively brought a halt to this discussion. After they had finished their dinner, Maitra Muni told the king that he wished to accompany him to his city. The king, though astounded at this request, acceded to it. Accordingly, Maitra

²⁹² Spiritual practice

²⁹³ Great Sages

Muni started on the journey, accompanied by four of his disciples. The king escorted the Maharshi in his chariot and wished to continue their previous discussion, but the Maharshi did not provide him with an opportunity as he was discussing the flora and fauna.

During their journey, a hunter accosted them and proffered gifts to the king. The chariot was halted there and the hunter greeted the Maharshi and asked him, “Revered One! What is meant by *Mantras*²⁹⁴?”

The Maharshi feigned confusion, at which the king intervened and replied, “*Mantras* are the language of God. If you beseech Him with them, He pays heed.” The Maharshi accepted the interpretation of the king and the hunter was satisfied.

After some time the chariot reached a small village, where some young farmers offered gifts to the king. They questioned the Maharshi, “What are *Mantras*?” The Maharshi again failed to answer and the king interposed, “*Mantras* are words uttered by God that is why they have a great deal of power in them.” The Maharshi accepted this explanation also, and the farmers were pleased with this explanation.

²⁹⁴ Vedic hymn

When the chariot reached another town, some educated women approached them and asked the same question.

The king once again replied that *Mantras* were words that had been rendered powerful by the *Bijaksharas*²⁹⁵.”

At another place, some Vedic students approached them and posed the same question. This time the king was perplexed and replied, “The subject of your present academic study is termed as *Mantras*.” The Maharshi smiled and spoke to them, “Dear boys! Some Vedic sentences contain the procedure for performing *Yajnas*²⁹⁶ and the explanation regarding those methods is termed as a *Mantra*.” The king accepted this explanation.

After the students had departed, the Maharshi addressed the king, “O! King! It seems that you lack the knowledge of the truth. You interpreted the meaning of *Mantras* in different ways in my presence. From this it is evident that you do not understand what is meant by *Mantras*. When you are ignorant about something you should accept it. As such you lack knowledge regarding the truth.”

The king was angry at this observation. He said, “Is it necessary to tell a hunter that the application of *Yajnas* is

²⁹⁵ Seed mantras

²⁹⁶ Vedic sacrifice

Mantras? If I had given him that explanation he would not have understood its actual meaning and would have only been confused. The answer should be provided on the basis of the status of the person who asked the question.”

The *Maharshi* then laughed and said, “The ancient *Maharshis* had answered the question, as to what is the greatest, in several ways, depending on their status as truth, benefaction or devotion. It does not imply that the *Sadhana* of the *Maharshis* was wrong.” These words made the king realize his foolishness in dissociating people from their religion. From then onwards the king used to treat all as one and the same.

This narrative tells us that those who criticize others should have the capacity to analyze, without which their criticism would be like the interpretations of king Vajraanga. The lesson to be gleaned is that one should not fall prey to indulging in such illogical criticism.

59. SAKTU PRASTHA

Everyone thinks that they are liberal in their generosity towards the poor and labour under the illusion that they are faithfully adhering to the *dharma shastra*²⁹⁷. They do not find fault with the manner in which they distribute alms. The King Dharma Raja used to subscribe to

²⁹⁷ Law codes

this opinion. Once he was distributing food during the *Rajasuya Yajna*²⁹⁸, which was greatly acclaimed by all *Brahmins*²⁹⁹ in the country.

One day Dharma Raja was supervising this distribution and the people assembled there, after consuming the food, were praising him loudly. At that moment, a strange mongoose was noticed. It was as large as a fox and one side of its body was golden in colour. It rolled itself on the plates out of which the guests had eaten food. At last, it stood up and shouted angrily, “Stop! Stop your praise.

The alms distributed here were not all that much. The charity of Saktu Prastha was a thousand times greater.”

On hearing this, all the saints and Brahmins went towards it and offered their salutations to that mongoose and asked it, “Who are you? This charity is being performed on the basis of dharma, but you are criticizing it. Why? Who was Saktu Prastha? Was he greater than our king?”

The mongoose thereupon laughed and replied, “Revered Sirs! Please do not be angry. Saktu Prastha was not a king but his charity was greater than your king’s charity. Listen to his story.”

²⁹⁸ Sacrificial rite performed by a king, which signifies that the king has subjugated all the other kings

²⁹⁹ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

In the ancient Kritha Yuga, there was a man named Saktu Prastha, who lived in the forests of Kurukshetra. He led a life of *Tapas*³⁰⁰ in peace. His wife, son and daughter – in – law lived with him and they also performed *Tapas*. That great *Brahmin* never stored up food for the future nor did he discontinue his *Tapas*, in order to earn food.

Every day at noon, he visited the fields on the outskirts of the village and gathered the fallen grains there. This is termed as Unchavrithi in the *Shastras*³⁰¹, afterwards, they would cook those food grains and eat it.

Once, in the middle of summer, there was a severe drought, due to which he was unable to procure any grains. In the afternoon, Saktu Prastha found it difficult to withstand the heat of the sun; all the same, with great difficulty, he managed to obtain some food grains and returned to his hut.

These food grains were not sufficient for the family members. Hence, his wife prepared puffed rice from them and distributed it among the four family members. The four members offered the food to the deities and commenced to consume it. At that very moment, a *Maharshi*³⁰² who was very hungry visited their hut. Saktu Prastha regarded the guest as God and served him with love. He gave his share of

³⁰⁰ Deep meditation or ascetism

³⁰¹ Scripture

³⁰² Great Sage

food to the Maharshi but it failed to reduce his hunger, therefore, Saktu Prastha's wife also gave her share to the Maharshi.

Even then it did not satisfy the Maharshi's hunger. Then his son and finally, his daughter – in – law gave their share to the Maharshi. Saktu Prastha and his wife were touched when their daughter – in – law gave her share but they did not prevent her from doing so. The *Maharshi* ate the fourth portion. Subsequently, flowers from heaven fell upon the four family members. The *Maharshi* became invisible and in his place the deity of *Dharma*³⁰³ materialized before them.

He said, "Saktu Prastha! I am the deity of dharma. I came here to test your charity. Here is a divine vehicle, come with your family members to *Brahma Loka*³⁰⁴." As they had travelled to the *Brahma Loka*, a mongoose in the vicinity of their hut, tried to lick the corn powder that was scattered there. It was unable to get the powder into its mouth so it rolled on the floor. The particles of corn powder adhered to its body and that portion of its body turned to gold.

This incident had taken place in the *Kruta Yuga*³⁰⁵. From then onwards, this mongoose had been was trying to change its remaining body to gold, therefore it went to every

³⁰³ Righteousness

³⁰⁴ Highest material plane, in which Lord Brahma, the creator, resides

³⁰⁵ Righteous age

place where food was being distributed and rolled over the remains. The *Dwaparayuga*³⁰⁶ had commenced, but the mongoose's desire remained unfulfilled. Even Dharma Raja's charitable rite could not bring about the desired change.

“O! Brahmins! I am that mongoose. Saktu Prastha was a poor commoner. He did not distribute food as alms after collecting money from the people. He never set aside anything for the future. His philanthropy did not cease even when he was in danger of losing his and his family members' life. He had been contented, while giving food in charity. His charity was unrivalled and your king cannot be compared with him.” On hearing the mongoose's story, all those who were present there, including Dharma Raja, bowed down before it.

On occasion, we make donations and regret our action at a later stage.

As such, true charity was performed by Saktu Prastha. The moral of the story is that it is not the amount that is given in charity, but the quantity that one saves for oneself that is of significance to the deity of *Dharma*. Thus, it is essential to bear this fact in mind while performing charitable acts.

³⁰⁶ Third of the four yugas

60. MRIGASHRINGA MAHARSHI

Every dynasty originates from *Rishis*³⁰⁷ and *Gothras*³⁰⁸. The term *Pravara*³⁰⁹, connotes the list of great people born in that particular dynasty. In our country, every dynasty consisted of great people whose lives served as an example to others. Their power of *Tapas*³¹⁰ flows in the veins of every individual of this country. In this country, there were people of great valour, and their background reveals the influence of the doyens of their dynasty.

The history of Mrigashringa *Maharshi*³¹¹ proves this concept. Mrigashringa Maharshi was the grandfather of Markandeya, whose extraordinary devotion to Lord Shiva had enabled him to challenge the deity Yama, conquer death and attain immortality. It should be borne in mind that Markandeya's victory over death was to a certain extent, due to the penance of Mrigashringa.

Once upon a time there was a *Maharshi* Kautsa, who had a son named Vatsa. He had read all the Vedas by the time he was sixteen years old and wanted to practice *Tapas*. His father discovered his desire and said to him, "Son! If you want to perform *Tapas* then you have to select an isolated

³⁰⁷ Sages

³⁰⁸ Lineage

³⁰⁹ Best

³¹⁰ Deep meditation or ascetism

³¹¹ Great Sage

place and maintain total celibacy. Perform *Tapas* till the Lord Sri Hari appears before you. This is the method that had been adopted by the eminent people in our dynasty.”Immediately, Vatsa went in search of an isolated place. He performed *Tapas* at the place where the river Kaveri starts flowing towards the west and thereafter towards the Narayanadri hill, which is situated on the banks of the river Sahyaja.

While performing *Tapas* on the Narayanadri hill he went into a state of deep meditation. Since he immersed himself in continuous *Tapas*, his body became as lean as a wooden stick. The wandering deer thought that his body was a wooden plank and used to rub their horns against it. However, his state of deep *Tapas* continued unabated. On observing this incident, his fellow *Munis*³¹² started to refer to him to as Mrigashringa, or deer horn. Over a period of time, this name supplanted his original name.

Several years passed by and at last, Lord Sri Hari appeared before Mrigashringa *Muni*. He requested the Lord to grant him a boon by which he would become one with the Lord. The Lord Sri Hari smiled and replied, “Mrigashringa! Your wish will be granted but before unifying with me you have to perform certain duties. Every person is weighed down with debts such as the debt towards the deities,

³¹² Ascetics

*Rishis*³¹³ and the ancestors. These have to be repaid without fail. The debt towards the deities is discharged by performing *Tapas*, which you have concluded.

The debt towards the *Rishis* is settled by studying the Vedas, which you have already completed. The final debt is towards the ancestors, which is paid in full only by giving birth to children. Some very great people have to come to this world through you. Your *Tapas* should support them. You will have to fulfil this responsibility in this as well as the next birth. In your next birth, you will be born as *Muni Rubhu*. In that birth you will attain *Moksha*³¹⁴ and be united with me.”

Mrigashringa *Maharshi* returned to his parents and appraised them about what had transpired. His father was very happy to hear about these developments and formalized his son’s marriage with Samvruta, the daughter of *Maharshi Utathya*.

In the meanwhile, before the marriage took place, Samvruta went to the river to take a bath along with three of her friends. Suddenly, a wild elephant appeared from nowhere, and chased them. These four girls fled in terror before the elephant. While, escaping from the pursuing elephant, all of them fell into a well and died.

³¹³ Sages

³¹⁴ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth

This information reached Mrigashringa *Maharshi*, who had been enthusiastically preparing for the marriage and was consequently, in the seventh heaven of bliss. His dreams were shattered and he was extremely disappointed. The betrothal had already been completed, which meant that the marriage had been completed partially and that the bride had become his wife to some extent. Her *Gothra* would have changed only after the marriage and not at the time of engagement. Nevertheless, the bridegroom is to some extent responsible for protecting the bride, as per the tenets of the *Dharma shastra*³¹⁵.

Mrigashringa Maharshi was a scrupulous follower of the *Dharma shastra*. So he was shocked at this incident, however, he quickly regained his composure and loudly proclaimed, "Safeguard the bodies of those four girls, I now take a dip in the river Kaveri and with my power of *Mantras*³¹⁶ I once again make them alive." Immediately he ran to the river Kaveri and submerged himself up to his neck and performed *Tapas*.

Some *Rishis* had safeguarded the bodies of the girls; and Mrigashringa *Maharshi* meditated on the deity *Yama Dharma Raja*³¹⁷. While performing good deeds it is natural to countenance obstacles. As the *Maharshi* was in deep

³¹⁵ Law codes

³¹⁶ Vedic hymn

³¹⁷ The Deity of death

meditation, the wild elephant that had caused the death of the four girls, came there and caught the *Muni* in its trunk, raised him above its head and started running in the forest.

Mrigashringa *Maharshi* did not panic. He thought for a while, and then he remembered that he had performed *Mahaa Snaana*³¹⁸ in his childhood with utmost devotion. Accordingly, he sacrificed the virtue of a day's bathing to the elephant.

Immediately the elephant changed into a *Gandharva*³¹⁹ who declared, "Maharshi! Once I unthinkingly and out of arrogance, pestered some Maharshis that were performing *Mahaa Snaana*. They cursed me to become a wild elephant.

However, in their infinite mercy, they revealed to me the means of deliverance from their curse and specified that I would be released from the curse if any person sacrificed the result of their *Mahaa Snaanas* to me. You have absolved me of that curse, and your *Tapas* was enhanced due to your love towards animals. Continue with your *Tapas* your wish will be granted very soon." Subsequently, the *Gandharva* left that place.

In this manner, this obstacle further helped the Maharshi to intensify his *Tapas*, due to his endless love

³¹⁸ Great bath

³¹⁹ Celestial beings who are expert musicians

towards animals. The gods were flabbergasted and as he made preparations to commence *Tapas*, even death was terrified and told him, “I will restore the life of those four girls, please desist from performing *Tapas*.”

61. KARKOTAKA

Brutal and cruel behaviour is termed as *Karkotakam* in Indian languages. This word originated from a venomous snake named Karkotaka. Although, due to ignorance, he committed many sinful acts, he subsequently repented and became sanctified. Later on, he helped others to achieve similar eminence.

Once upon a time there was a king named, Kashyapa Prajapati. His second wife Kadroo gave birth to a thousand *Nagas*³²⁰. One day she went to the seaside, on a pleasure trip, accompanied by Vinataa, who was also a wife of Kashyapa. At a distance they saw a white horse, named Uchaishravas, which belonged to the deity Indra. Vinataa was flabbergasted at its whiteness and exclaimed, “This horse is completely white.”

Kadroo contested this statement and said, “There is black in its tail.” They placed a wager on this issue, with the condition that the loser would have to become the slave of the winner. Vinataa accepted this wager and was eager to

³²⁰ A semi – divine being with a human face and the tail of a snake

examine the colour of the horse. Kadroo replied, “Nightfall is going to ensue and our husband will be waiting for us, so let us go home. We will examine the horse in the morning.” Vinataa Devi agreed to this suggestion. That night, Kadroo called on her sons and addressed them, “I have hatched a plot to enslave Vinataa, and I want you to approach the horse, transform yourselves into the strands of hair in its tail and thereby render it black.”

Her sons including Anantaa, Vaasuki and Takshak tried to convince their mother to refrain from embarking on that course of action, as it was unjust. At this reply, from her sons, she was beside herself with rage and cursed them, “Those who disobey me will fall into the fire and perish.” Not one of them agreed to do what she had commanded; however, Karkotaka came forward and agreed to do as she instructed due to fear of her curse. Accordingly, his mother won the wager and Vinataa became her slave.

Karkotaka had violated *Dharma*³²¹ due to fear of her curse. Subsequently, Karkotaka could not bear the blame being heaped on him for his misdeed. He repented for what he had done and he was very anxious to be absolved of his sin.

At that time, king Nala, who a great upholder of *Dharma*, was dethroned and banished into the forests. He

³²¹ Righteousness

left his wife and was wandering alone in the forests. One day he saw Karkotaka amidst a wildfire in the forest.

Immediately, Nala rescued this snake from the fire and saved his life. Thereupon, Karkotaka bit him. The great Nala did not die, but he became very ugly and his hands shrank and became shorter. Nala was shocked with this unexpected and barbarous attack of Karkotaka.

The latter revealed his true form and told the king, “My name is Karkotaka and people consider me to be devious; but that was my childhood character. I bit you in order to favour you. It is unsafe for you to go about in your original form. However, due to this deformity, you can safely go and work as a cart driver for king Rituparna. Your sufferings will end soon. Whenever, you think of me I will come and withdraw my venom from you.”

In that manner, Karkotaka helped Nala and obtained forgiveness for his sins. Moreover, it was decided that those who took his name would be relieved from the ill effects of the *Kaliyuga*³²².

³²² Age of vice

62. NALA AND DAMAYANTI

Nala and Damayanti were a sacred couple, who could provide relieve from the deleterious effects of the *Kaliyuga*³²³. Nala was the king of Nishadha and his fame as a ruler and warrior spread throughout the world. One day, while he was promenading in his garden, he discerned a divine swan. After the king had adroitly seized it, the swan spoke to him in human language, "O! King! If you set me free I will ensure that Damayanti reciprocates your love." Nala was dumbfounded, as the swan had not only addressed him in human language, but had also discerned his innermost desire, therefore, he set it free.

Damayanti was the most comely maiden of her age. She was born of a boon that had been granted by the *Maharshi*³²⁴ Dama to her father, the potentate of the Vidharbha kingdom. Her father named her Damayanti in honour of that *Maharshi*. The divine swan proceeded to Damayanti's garden and expatiated on the good nature and other virtues of Nala to Damayanti; in such a manner that Damayanti fell in love with Nala.

The king of Vidharbha, finding it difficult to obtain a suitable bridegroom for Damayanti, arranged a

³²³ Age of vice

³²⁴ Great Sage

*Swayamvara*³²⁵ for her. Being beguiled by her beauty, the deities Indra, Yama, Varuna and Kubera wended their way towards the venue of the *Swayamvara*. These august deities accosted Nala who was on his way to the *Swayamvara* and instructed him, “Ask Damayanti to select one of us.” They granted him the divine power of Thiraskarani, by which he could become invisible.

Nala was much annoyed at this request of the deities. Nonetheless, out of respect towards them he consented to comply with their instructions. He discussed this issue with Damayanti and attempted to persuade her to marry one of the deities. Damayanti fervently refused to do so and stated categorically, that she would marry none other than the king Nala.

Therefore, Nala returned to the deities and conveyed her refusal to marry one of them.

The next day, five Nalas were present at the *Swayamvara*. Faced with this perplexing and potentially catastrophic situation, Damayanti prayed to the deities to reveal the true Nala. The deities were compassionate towards her and divulged the authentic Nala to her. After that they blessed the couple.

³²⁵ Ceremony, in which a prospective bride selects her husband, from amongst a number of suitors

While the deities were going back to the heaven, the deity Kali met them and informed them that he was going to attend the *Swayamvara* of Damayanti. The deities informed him that Damayanti had already selected king Nala as her bridegroom. The deity Kali was enraged upon hearing this and swore that he would separate them.

Subsequently, the deity Kali reached earth, but he was unable to penetrate Nala's abode. One day, Nala planned to perform a great *Yajna*³²⁶ and entered the *Yajnasala*³²⁷ without washing his feet. This transgression enabled Kali to permeate Nala. Meanwhile, king Nala was invited to participate in gambling by his relative Pushkara. King Nala accepted the invitation and started to gamble, unfortunately, due to the influence of Kali, Nala lost.

In accordance with the terms of the wager, Nala had to leave the kingdom. Hence, he retired to the forest along with Damayanti.

While suffering from hunger in the forest, he saw some birds on the ground. To catch these birds, he threw his clothes over them, but the birds flew away with his clothes. In this manner, Nala lost his clothing and had to share his wife's *Sari*³²⁸. Poverty is the mother of all evil thoughts; and

³²⁶ Vedic sacrifice

³²⁷ Place where the Vedic rite is performed

³²⁸ A garment, whose one end forms a skirt and the other a covering for the torso

due to his untold misery, Nala thought that he was the reason for his wife's sufferings and that if he left that place, she would return to her parents. With that thought in mind, he tore a portion of her sari, wrapped it around himself and disappeared into the deep forest, whilst his wife was fast asleep.

Damayanti after waking up had to countenance innumerable difficulties, before she arrived at her parents' home. King Nala was deformed due to the bite of Karkotaka and his hands had reduced in length. He changed his name to Bahaka and obtained employment as a chariot driver of king Rituparna.

Damayanti on reaching her parents home despatched spies to locate Nala. From them she obtained information that there was a deformed person who spoke in the manner of Nala. She sent a message to Rituparna that a selection of bridegrooms for the second marriage of Damayanti was going to be conducted.

Bahaka transported king Rituparna to Vidharbha in just one night, by using the power of his *Aswahridaya*³²⁹. Damayanti identified Bahaka as Nala due to the effulgence emanating from him. Then she prayed to him, and Nala recited the name of Karkotaka and regained his true form.

³²⁹ Art of horses

At the same time, the deity Kali emerged from king Nala and said, “O! King! You faced innumerable difficulties, because I had entered into you. Please forgive me. Furthermore, I solemnly swear that I will not affect those who chant the name of Nala, Damayanti, Karkotaka and Rituparna. ” As soon as Kali left him, Nala shone with his pristine radiance, and claimed the hand of Damayanti.

He conquered Pushkara, who had cheated him in gambling and regained his kingdom. He ruled his kingdom, in strict accordance with the principles of *Dharma*³³⁰.

The great couple Nala and Damayanti had another noteworthy attribute. Individuals beset with domestic problems, differences with family members, friends and relatives were able to get rid of their difficulties by studying their story.

63. UTTANKA

Birth in a rich family is providential and the result of some good deed done in the past. All the same, the misuse of such a birth is fraught with dangers, as is revealed in the story of Uttanka the son of Pandyaraja. Uttanka was stubborn since his childhood, and his father, the king used to satisfy his every whim. One fine day Uttanka ascended the throne. It became the established practice for the king to

³³⁰ Righteousness

admire valuable goods, while visiting rich people's houses. Subsequently, these hosts would gift these articles to the king, out of fear.

A number of maidens were forced to reside in the royal palace due to such compulsion. However, the sin of harassing good people does not go unpunished. One day, while hunting, Uttanka discovered two strangely coloured deer under a large tree. Uttanka desired to possess them and ordered his soldiers to capture them. However, his soldiers, despite their best effort, were unable to match the speed of these deer, which escaped into the neighbouring kingdom.

The king beheaded these soldiers, as they had failed to complete the task assigned to them. Nevertheless, beheading the soldiers did not bring the deer back and for want of anything better to do, the adamant king set off in pursuit of the deer. He found them on a hill in the neighbouring kingdom, and these deer addressed him, "O! King! You have decapitated innocent people, in order to capture us.

Since, this kingdom is ruled by Videha, it would be advisable to seek his permission before capturing us." After talking in this fashion, the deer fled from that place. They did not reappear and the place they had repaired to could not be ascertained.

The king was in a quandary as to whether they had fled or disappeared from sight. However, as he knew that the neighbouring kingdom was weak, he entered it with his small consignment of troops. Thereafter, he sent a message to the king, “Relinquish those strange deer or in the alternative I will hack you into tiny bits.”

King Videha, replied, “Those talking deer might be some metamorphosed *Maharshis*³³¹. As such they are independent and I have not restrained them in any manner. Moreover, it could prove to be harmful for you to do so.” In reply, king Uttanka declared war against Videha, who came forward to participate in a duel with the former, because he did not want any of his soldiers’ to lose their life in battle. Uttanka emerged victorious in that duel. Just as Uttanka was about to behead Videha, the strange deer appeared like lightening and jumped him. They roared like thunder at him, “Uttanka! You have offended the person who provided us with shelter. You were also riding roughshod over the defenceless forest denizens. This is a pit that has been dug by you and the day that you will fall in it and die, is in the offing.”

After making this ominous speech, the deer disappeared. The terrified Uttanka silently retraced his steps and rode away on his horse.

³³¹ Great Sages

While travelling in this manner, he fell into a pit that had been dug by his soldiers, in order to trap elephants, and died on that very spot due to a broken head. This incident, further tells us that the wealth of the forest does not belong to anyone. It is a crime to capture the creatures made by God, for our sport. Further, it is difficult to recognize in the wilderness as to which *Maharshi* is wandering in which animal form. Hence, it is our duty to protect the animals of the forest.

64. SANKHA AND LIKHITA

In all the civilized countries, the penal codes are based on the ideas of the great saints. Our eternal penal code has described the reason for punishment and it has also specified who has to inflict punishment. It has also discussed the result obtained by punishing someone, as well as the result obtained by a person who had been punished.

The story of Sankha and Likhita, who were some of the authors of the holy *Dharma shastra*³³², provides these particulars.

Sankha and Likhita were two brothers who were also saints. They built adjacent *Ashrams*³³³ on the banks of a river and used to conduct research on the *Dharma shastra*. They

³³² Law codes

³³³ Hermitages

attached great importance to the *Astheya Vrata*³³⁴. The meaning of *Astheya Vrata* is that the property belonging to others should never be coveted or possessed even mentally, in the absence of the owner's permission.

After the passage of many days, the younger brother Likhita undertook a fast for a very long time. Subsequently, he went to meet his elder brother. The mangoes in his brother's ashram had ripened and were very fragrant. Likhita, out of hunger, put his hand on a mango and fondled it imprudently. That fruit detached itself from the tree and came into his hand. Saint Likhita trembled from head to foot at this occurrence.

He realized that his hunger had turned into desire without his notice and that the theft of his brother's possessions had transpired.

Thereupon, Likhita approached his brother with the fruit in his hand, and described to him the mistake committed by him. After that he asked him to decide what penance was best for him. The elder brother told him that he had not committed any wrong. He also said that the forest trees belonged to nobody. He further stated that, even if the trees had been his, taking a falling fruit was not theft. Moreover, he said that the taking of an elder brother's property by a younger brother did not constitute stealing.

³³⁴ Vow of not coveting what belongs to others

He finally said, “Even if that was also untrue, you are all the same, innocent.”

Then Likhita replied tearfully, “O! Brother! You are talking in that manner due to your affection for me and not like a researcher of virtue. I am a saint practicing the vow of *Astheya*. I stole the mango, hence, I request you to specify the penance that will get rid of my sin. Your duty is to decide and tell me about it. Please give the judgment in the presence of the Goddess of Virtue.”

Since, Likhita was adamant in his stance, the Saint Sankha, replied, “Likhita! The king is responsible for punishing thieves. The judges in the king’s court are responsible for deciding upon the punishment to be inflicted. Therefore, let us both approach the king, in order to absolve you of the sin.”

The king’s court trembled greatly on hearing the complaint lodged by Sankha and Likhita. Nobody else lodged complaints in that place. The person, who had committed the robbery, had come by himself and was requesting that he be punished so as to get rid of his sin. These persons were very holy saints; hence the king stood up with fear and requested the wise men to pronounce judgment. The wise men assembled there, discussed this issue for a long time and finally declared, “O! King! Whatever happened was a minor robbery, but the person who was responsible for that act was himself the author of the science of virtue.

Moreover, he was a saint and under the vow of *Astheya*. Such a person violated the vow of *Astheya*. So it is not possible to impose any punishment that is less severe than the amputation of both his hands. If an ignorant person had committed such a crime, there would have been no need to inflict such punishment.

However, when an authority on this subject commits such a sin, then such punishment is inevitable.” The king turned pale, upon hearing this judgment and remained motionless without giving any orders to his soldiers. Then Likhita demanded loudly, “O! King! A person who sins is purified due to the king’s punishment and manages to escape from the punishment of Yama, the ruler of hell. I came to you only to obtain this benefit. The king, who supplants the punishment of Yama by imposing a suitable punishment on the deserving sinner, obtains the result of thousand *Yajnas*³³⁵. Please be aware that a king, who is lenient in dealing with a sinner, is himself a sinner.”

When the Saint Likhita talked in this fashion, the King Dharmadhwaaja offered his salutations to the Goddess of Virtue and then he himself severed the hands of Saint Likhita. Tears of joy fell from the eyes of Saint Likhita. Saint Sankha, who had remained silent till then, embraced his younger brother and said, “O! Brother! You have become

³³⁵ Vedic sacrifice

pure and our lineage has become pure because of you. Now, immediately, go to the river and bathe in it.”

Likhita submerged himself in the river and got up, thereafter, at his elder brother’s command, both of his hands grew back again. From that day onwards, that river was called *Baahudaanadi*³³⁶. Then Lord Brahma manifested Himself and praised both Sankha and Likhita.

This story shows the manner in which arguments can be used to bend the law to suit one’s purpose. All the same, this story also depicts the manner in which a person with true self awareness grieves for proper punishment and how a person who obtains such punishment attains a state of prominence.

65. KAASHYAPI

The Goddess Bhudevi was also known as Kaashyapi, because, the *Maharshi*³³⁷ Kashyapa had adopted her as his daughter after divesting her of her pride. It might cause wonder as to how the Goddess Bhudevi, who was renowned for her forbearance and harmony, developed pride.

This astonishing incident took place at the beginning of the *Tretayuga*³³⁸. After Parashurama had massacred the

³³⁶ The bestower of arms

³³⁷ Great Sage

³³⁸ Second of the four epochs that constitute a great epoch

*Kshatriya*³³⁹, the burden of the entire earth had to be borne by him. Parashurama was disheartened at this turn of events, but as it was his responsibility, he safeguarded virtue, to the best of his ability, by utilizing the power of his *Tapas*³⁴⁰.

In order to escape from this predicament, he decided to perform a *Yajna*. Accordingly, he approached *Maharshi* Kashyapa with the request, “Revered Sir! Please officiate as the chief priest of my *Yajna*³⁴¹.”

The normally humble *Maharshi* Kashyapa, for no accountable reason, became highly incensed at this request and replied, “Are you a Brahmin? You are an inveterate murderer and a man of bad principles. How could you imagine that I would officiate at your *Yajna*?”

Parashurama who was well known from his anger, remained unruffled and said, “It is not right for a great person like you to live in the kingdom of a base person like me. So, please leave my kingdom.”

The perplexed *Maharshi* Kashyapa started on his journey and traversed the earth from end to end. All the

³³⁹ A person belonging to the warrior caste

³⁴⁰ Deep meditation or ascetism

³⁴¹ Vedic sacrifice

same, he was unable to find any place that was not a part of Parashurama's kingdom. Being unable to think of any way out of this dilemma, he wandered in the dense forests in an invisible form. During his sojourn, he espied a pair of pigeons. The male bird was about to outrage the modesty of the female bird. At this the female pigeon warned the male pigeon, "Be warned. This is Parashurama's kingdom." The male pigeon did not pay heed to her words and advanced upon her with the words, "Is that so? Where is Parashurama in this place?"

Suddenly, while *Maharshi* Kashyapa was watching, an arrow emerged from some unknown place and decapitated the male pigeon. Parashurama's name was engraved on that arrow. *Maharshi* Kashyapa was flabbergasted at Parashurama's devotion to virtue and his power of *Tapas*.

He immediately, approached Parashurama and praised him. After that he addressed him, "O! King! I will help you in performing the *Yajna*."

After having said this he stated, "You have to give me good *Dakshina*³⁴²." Parashurama was blissful at this turn of events, and gave him his word of honour. Moreover, he promised, "O! *Maharshi*! I shall give you whatever you want. Please help me to successfully perform the *Yajna*."

³⁴² Fees for the Brahmin priests

The *Yajna* proceeded prodigiously and at the time of receiving the *Dakshina*, *Maharshi* Kashyapa said, “You have to give me your kingdom and wealth as my *Dakshina*.” Parashurama was very happy at this request and donated even the dress he was wearing and went out clad in just his loincloth. *Maharshi* Kashyapa who had been smiling with the pride of a victor said, “Parashurama! Now this is my kingdom. It is incorrect to enjoy donated property.” Parashurama lowered his head sound and proceeded to the seashore. At that place he brought forth an island from the sea and lived on it.

Meanwhile, *Maharshi* Kashyapa was contemplating the situation, “I acquired the kingdom of the earth by my perseverance, but what am I to do now?” Suddenly, his divine vision enabled him to see the Goddess Bhudevi leaving the earth and proceeding with great haste towards *Patala*³⁴³. *Maharshi* Kashyapa roared with rage, “Bhudevi! Stop!” To this Bhudevi replied, “I refuse to accept the authority of an unethical person like you.” *Maharshi* Kashyapa challenged her in turn, “Wherein lies your greatness?”

Bhudevi declared, “Who else is greater than me in this universe? The entire universe consists of the *Panchabhutha*³⁴⁴. Among them, the sky has just the quality

³⁴³ The infernal regions

³⁴⁴ The five elements, namely, earth, fire, air, water and ether

of sound. The wind has the qualities of sound and the sense of touch. Fire has shape, sound and the sense of touch. Water, however, has sound, shape, flavour and the sense of touch. Finally, I have, not only these four qualities, but also that of smell. It is due to my sole effort that crops grow and the creatures live. How can a person like me submit to the authority of a coward like you?"

Maharshi Kashyapa thought for a while and said, "Alright! Go. You can come back after your arrogance subsides." After this Bhudevi left that place; subsequently, *Maharshi* Kashyapa transformed himself into Bhudevi and used his power of *Tapas* to maintain the vitality on the earth. Several thousand years elapsed in this fashion.

Even then, that saint's power did not reduce even an iota. Bhudevi, who had been witnessing all this, was terrified and implored *Maharshi* Kashyapa to restore her erstwhile status. *Maharshi* Kashyapa laughed and said, "You thought that I had done injustice to Parashurama out of arrogance. A kingdom is unsuitable for a *Brahmin*³⁴⁵, because it benefits neither the *Brahmin* nor the kingdom. Parashurama was aware of this fact. I accepted this kingdom by pretending to be arrogant; merely to destroy the vestiges of arrogance in him.

³⁴⁵ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

As I was in the act of placing the kingdom in the hands of an apt *Kshatriya*, you exhibited arrogance. Neither Parashurama nor I became arrogant, but you developed superciliousness.

Therefore, I was compelled to display my supernatural power for all these years, to help you. Even then, I am unfazed and it is sufficient that your conceit has been obliterated. Henceforth, attain fame as my daughter Kaashyapi.”

In reality two people had exhibited arrogance in this story. One person had only pretended to be arrogant. How can we determine as to who was actually arrogant and who was only pretending to be so, in real life? The answer to this question is in this story itself. Such secrets are to be discerned, while listening to mythological stories. This story tells us that people, who are truly arrogant, like Bhudevi, lose their position of pre-eminence. On the other hand, those who pretend to be arrogant like *Maharshi* Kashyapa or persons who rectify themselves on realizing that they are arrogant like Parashurama, achieve immense equanimity.

In general, everyone easily recognizes arrogance in others, but it is seldom that they recognize their own arrogance. Moreover, they even recognize the wise people who pretend to be arrogant.

Bhudevi committed this blunder; all the same *Maharshi* Kashyapa did not develop hatred towards her and made tremendous sacrifices for her sake. The wise and the *Gurus*³⁴⁶, also sacrifice for our sake. After having heard this story, we have to learn to remember the sacrifices made by the elders.

66. SUGAADHA

Once upon a time, there lived a demon named Sugaadha, who performed *Tapas*³⁴⁷ by concentrating on Lord Shiva. After some time, the Lord gave him His *Darshan*³⁴⁸, whereupon the demon asked for a boon, whereby no one including the Trinity could cause his death. Lord Shiva granted this wish, and after this the demon asked for the post of Indra, which the Lord declined to confer upon him.

Sugaadha was enraged at this and again performed *Tapas*. This time he fixed his mind on the Lord Brahma.

When Lord Brahma materialized Himself before him, the demon stated, "I wish to supplant Indra, I have no other desire." Lord Brahma replied, "O! Cherished one! Listen to what I have to say. The position of Indra is unsuitable for you. Even if you achieved it, it would not last for long. So

³⁴⁶ Religious or spiritual teachers

³⁴⁷ Deep meditation or ascetism

³⁴⁸ Sight of

make some other wish.” In this fashion, Lord Brahma beseeched Sugaadha, who did not heed to the sayings of the Lord Brahma. At last the Lord granted his wish and disappeared.

Sugaadha became arrogant due to these boons and due to his conquest of heaven. He decreed that all the people in the world should only pray to him and should not praise anybody else. He prohibited *Yajnas*³⁴⁹. He ousted the deities and the *Rishis*³⁵⁰ from heaven. These exiled deities sought the refuge of Lord Vishnu who told them that, “The Lords Shiva and Brahma had warned the demon that it is unsuited for him, but he paid a deaf ear to their advice. Even after he replaced Indra, he failed to correct himself. Moreover, he has been bestowed with a number of boons.

However, I will take the necessary steps to destroy him.” As the Lord was telling this to the deities, a beautiful woman emerged from his body. She bore a huge sword, and she immediately approached Sugaadha and challenged him to fight with her.

The demon was spellbound by the beauty of that woman. He fought for some time with her and then stopped and addressed her, “O! Beautiful lady! Why do you want to engage in combat? Marry me.” He beseeched her to marry

³⁴⁹ Vedic sacrifice

³⁵⁰ Sages

him, while boasting about his greatness to her. That spellbinding beauty replied, “You have outraged the modesty of several women. I will see that you experience the result of all your sins.” Then she fought with him with even greater ferocity.

Sugaadha could not concentrate on the battle at hand, due to his preoccupation with her beauty, which resulted in his death. In this manner, Lord Vishnu taught the deities that, “It is essential to be very circumspect, while wishing to hold on to any post. One should refrain from demanding great positions even if there is someone to provide such positions. Having occupied a post, a person should act very cautiously.

Committing a mistake in either of these aspects could lead to disaster. This demon had erred in both these areas, and paid with his life. Hence, O! Deities! Beware of such desires and be wary all the time.”

67. TWAASHTRA

People who behave despicably and who possess a mean mentality are addressed as *traashta* (in Indian Languages). This word is derived from Twaashtra, the son of Twashtaa, whose name was initially Vrutra Asura. His story is narrated in the holy text Bhaagavata. A few minor changes were made to this story in the holy text Padma Puraana. The

Padma Puraana version is very clear in its import and provides us with a very good moral.

The demon Hiranya Kashipu had a daughter named Para, whose husband's name was Twashtaa. Paraa performed *Tapas*³⁵¹ by concentrating on Lord Shiva in order to beget children. By virtue of the boon provided by Lord Eshwar she gave birth to a son named Vrutra, who was renowned for his valour and notorious for his cruelty.

Although he was born due to the penance of his mother, he was named after his father and was called Twaashtra. The demon Vrutra Asura garnered a number of powers with the help of the *Maharshi*³⁵² Sukracharya and waged a war against the deity Indra. The latter, after fighting for five thousand years, fled to Brahma Loka.

The demon Vrutra Asura occupied heaven but he did not obtain much satisfaction. This dissatisfaction was caused due to the fact that while pursuing the fleeing deity Indra, Vrutra Asura could not proceed all the way to Brahma Loka and had therefore to turn back. The deity Indra had managed to go further and had escaped. Unable to withstand this dissatisfaction, Twaashtra approached Sukracharya and requested him to tell him some method by which he could reach Brahma Loka.

³⁵¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

³⁵² Great Sage

The Guru replied, “It is not so easy, be satisfied with what you have achieved till now.” Twaashtra retorted, “If it was possible for Indra, why not me?”

To this question, Sukracharya replied, “In order to reach Brahma Loka, you will have to do *Tapas* for a thousand years, and while doing so you will have to go into a very deep trance, at present you do not have that much time.”

The demon Vrutra Asura was unable to restrain himself and contended that there was nothing that he could not achieve. In the meanwhile, the deities sought the protection of Lord Vishnu and asked Him to tell them some means of destroying Vrutra Asura. Lord Vishnu told them that, “The demon will die if injured with a weapon made of bones. This boon has been bestowed upon him by Lord Shiva.

Therefore, approach Maharshi Dadheechi, obtain his backbone and use it as a weapon.”For the sake of the deities, Dadheechi handed over his backbone and died. His backbone was transformed as the Vajrayudha, the weapon of the deity Indra. The deity Indra launched this weapon on the demon Vrutra Asura, who was deep in meditation. Due to the impact of the weapon the demon died, however, this assassination affected the deity Indra with the sin of *Brahmahatya (Gravest sin of killing a Brahman)*.

However, Indra had committed this sin to save the world from the atrocities of the demon. Therefore, the deities and other living creatures made Indra to perform a number of rites to mitigate this sin to some extent. The remaining portion of sin was borne by them and this completely absolved the deity and purified him.

This story tells us that the harmful Vrutra Asura had committed sins even though his *Guru*³⁵³ had advised him to do good, and had therefore brought about his own death. On the other hand the deity Indra had attempted to execute the demon to protect the world from the latter's evil acts. In that attempt Lord Vishnu, *Maharshi* Dadheechi and all the creatures of the earth had helped him. Therefore, if we develop a good nature then divine help comes of its own to us.

68. CHYAWANA GODAANA

Any person, who has heard about Chayawana *Maharshi*³⁵⁴, might have heard about the complications in his marriage to Sukanya Devi. That was a truly perplexing incident, which took place in his old age. Let us consider a strange passage in his life, which occurred in his young age.

³⁵³ Religious or spiritual teacher

³⁵⁴ Great Sage

As such, complications in the life of great people occur due to the influence of some divine design, so as to benefit the world and to convey the proper message to the people. The truth depicted in the sequel, is to be evaluated, while keeping this fact in mind.

During his youth, *Maharshi* Chayawana, decided to perform intense *Tapas*³⁵⁵ by standing in the middle of water. In Prayag, at the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, he stood in the river, in the rainy season. He stood in the river, steadfast like a pillar and went into a state of deep meditation. The riverine currents of the Ganga and the Yamuna were overwhelmed by his resolve and the waters after performing a circumambulation around him, advanced forward.

The saint did not move even after dozens of years had passed by. Gradually the saint's body was covered with moss and waterweeds and he was turned into a verdant bush, and people gradually forgot about him.

After a long time had elapsed, some young fishermen went into the middle of the river and started fishing by casting large nets. On returning to the river bank, they found a human form along with a big fish. On removing the coverings of moss and weeds, they realized that it was *Maharshi* Chayawana.

³⁵⁵ Deep meditation or ascetism

They were truly terrified and when the saint slowly opened his eyes, all of them stood before him with folded hands. However, the saint's gaze was on the fish that were lying around him.

It took a long time for him to find his voice and he spoke to them softly, "O! Masters! Do not be afraid. All aquatic animals are your property and your means of livelihood is to sell them. For many years I have been living with these aquatic animals like one of them. All these fish are my brethren. I cannot live like a terrestrial animal, while these fish die. Hence, sell me as an aquatic animal." The fishermen partially recovered their wits and replied, "Revered Sir! Who is capable of buying you?"

To this the saint said, "Go and ask your king Nahusha." King Nahusha, upon being appraised of this occurrence, approached the saint in person and prostrated himself before the saint. Afterwards he requested the saint to explain the matter in detail. The saint kept his counsel and made just a single statement, "O! King! These fishermen own me. Buy the fish and me from them."

As no other solution was forthcoming, the King offered to pay a thousand gold coins to the fishermen. To this saint objected, "You are being parsimonious, offer a suitable price for me." Thereupon, the king progressively increased his offer to ten thousand, one lakh, one crore gold coins, half of his kingdom and finally his whole kingdom. The

saint however was not satisfied with the offer, and the king was unable to arrive at any solution to this quandary.

At that moment, *Maharshi* Gautama arrived at that place. He had been born with bovine grace. The king described the dilemma that he was placed in to *Maharshi* Gautama, who laughed and replied, “Even your entire kingdom cannot equal the worth of this saint.

Moreover, the entire earth would also prove to be unequal to the saint’s value. Nevertheless, a single cow can surpass the worth of all the saints.” The king, immediately, approached *Maharshi* Chayawana and declared, “O! Saint! I can offer one cow as fair exchange for your person.” The saint stood at once with great joy and hailed the king, and loudly praised cows. The King gave the cow to the fishermen, and the saint was made over to King Nahusha.

The wise amongst the fishermen thought for a while and addressed the saint, “Revered Sir! We are the benighted of society and we trapped you in the net by mistake. Please accept this cow as an offering from us and absolve us of all our sins.” *Maharshi* Chayawana was pleased with this fine speech and accepted the gift of the cow. He bestowed heaven upon the fishermen and the fish that had been caught along with him. Thereupon a divine vehicle materialized, which transported them to heaven.

Did you think that only the greatness of a cow was described in this story? That is true to a certain extent; however, something of greater significance had also been depicted in this tale.

It is to be observed keenly, that *Maharshi* Chayawana, who had performed *Tapas* without paying attention to the world, had felt that the young fish, which lived along with him, were his brothers and sisters. He had also considered the fishermen, who had trapped him in the net, to be his owners. Therefore, he wished for the prosperity and well being of both of them. He disseminated his power of *Tapas* for their welfare.

69. THE PREVIOUS BIRTH OF JAYA AND VIJAYA

It has been described in the epic Bhaagavata that Jaya and Vijaya were subsequently, born as Raavana and Kumbhakarna. There is another version of the incidents that lead to their birth as demons, which has been broached in the Tulsi Ramayana.

Prataapa Bhaanu was the ruler of the kingdom of Kekaya. His brother's name was Arimardana and his minister was Dharmaruchi. This trio were not only formidable warriors but also virtuous persons. On one occasion, they waged war against a wicked king, named, Durdhara and defeated him.

Durdhara repaired to the forest, in shame at his defeat, and seemingly adopted the life of a saint.

A long time elapsed and King Prataapa Bhaanu, who was out on a hunt, lost his way and reached a saint's *Ashram*³⁵⁶. He was alone and exhausted, and dusk was fast approaching. King Prataapa Bhaanu failed to recognize the emaciated and bearded Durdhara. However, Durdhara recognized him and pretended to be affectionate and respectful. Then he asked the king to make a wish. King Prataapa Bhaanu expressed his desire to become the absolute monarch.

Durdhara the impostor, replied, "O! King! The good will of Brahmins is essential to realize your desire. Arrange for the worship of a lakh Brahmins in your kingdom, on the third day from today. I will come and supervise all the arrangements. Your wish will be fulfilled, now rest for the night. I will transport you to your palace while you are still asleep." When the king went to sleep, Durdhara invoked his friend, the demon, Kaala Ketu and appraised him about his nefarious plan.

The demon was in agreement with him and that night itself moved the king to his palace, by means of his supernatural power. The king was very pleased with these events.

³⁵⁶ Hermitage

Durdhara and Kaala Ketu reached the king on the morning of the third day, after having donned the garb of saints. The arrangements for the worship of Brahmins were progressing along smoothly and these two evil persons took over the supervision of the cooking arrangements. The one lakh Brahmins were all served at the same time by the afternoon. They were greatly enticed by the multifarious comestibles that had been prepared for this feast. Just as they were about to partake of the meal, a voice reverberated in the sky, "Do not eat the food, it has been contaminated with beef."

On hearing this voice, these Brahmins became extremely wrathful and cursed in one voice, "O! King Prataapa Bhaanu! You have deceived us. You will be born as a demon along with your retinue." Durdhara and Kaala Ketu, were not to be seen anywhere. King Prataapa Bhaanu, who realized the deception, fell at the feet of the Brahmins and begged to be forgiven.

Thereupon, their anger abated and they changed their curse. They addressed the king, "You were deceived and we also suffered the same fate. Nevertheless, the effect of our curse is inevitable. Since, you have performed a number of good deeds, enjoy their result. May you quickly obtain beatitude, as a consequence of our curse!" Consequently, they initially resided in Vaikunta and only later were born as Raavana, Kumbhakarna and Vibheeshana.

There are two morals in this story. We should refuse to accept the wishes granted by each and every hermit we encounter, unless they are virtuous and intimate with us. King Prataapa Bhaanu was placed in jeopardy because he did not follow this maxim. Nowadays, some people approach anyone and everyone to describe their horoscope and procure amulets. This story constitutes a warning to such people. Prataapa Bhaanu, despite encountering grave danger, was saved by his humility. He did not attempt to shift the blame for what had transpired onto others. He tendered his apology, as though he was entirely to blame; even though he was not to blame.

That attitude was solely responsible for affording him protection from certain destruction. We should never forget this part of the story. When a mistake occurs, other persons might also have contributed to it. A person, who even in such a situation, admits to his share of the blame, becomes a most excellent man, worthy of receiving the grace of the wise. This is the second moral in this story.

70. RAAJA DHARMA

There is a vast difference between performing a good deed fortuitously and doing the same with dedication. Our mythology is replete with stories regarding persons who spoke the truth, worshipped their parents and led a virtuous life. In those stories it had been stated that the deities

manifested themselves to them and granted them their wishes.

We also perform good deeds. Then how is it that the deities are never seen by us? Bhagwan Vyasa narrated the story of Raaja Dharma to answer such doubts.

In ancient times, a young man who was unable to obtain either employment or wealth, ventured out to beg for alms.

As there were numerous old beggars wherever he went, the amount obtained by him as charity was very limited. Thus he forayed farther and farther afield in search of new towns. Finally, he reached a place that was bereft of beggars. He was unable to decipher the cause for this strange phenomenon. The ladies of that town, on seeing a beggar, after a very long time; were delighted and respected him. His earnings from charity increased tremendously.

After some days this beggar realized that the townspeople followed only two professions, namely, hunting and robbery. This was the reason why even the beggars were chary of taking their money. He was elated at this turn of events and stayed back in that place. The townspeople liked him very much, gifted the widow of a person who had died while performing a robbery, and gave him a house to live in.

There is danger from animals in hunting and there is danger from kings in robbery. So by avoiding these activities, he stayed in that place happily, and by helping the townspeople with minor things.

Sometime later, one of his childhood friends lost his way and reached that town. Upon coming across him unexpectedly, he felt very sad and admonished him, “O! Gautama! You are educated and you belong to a family of scholars. Why are you leading such a life? Why are you a slave to these thieves? Come to your senses at least now and serve your old parents.”

As his childhood friend rebuked him in this fashion, throughout the night, Gautama had a change of heart and decided to return home. He fled from that town without even informing his wife.

Whilst he was passing through the forest along with other travellers, a group of elephants came upon them and commenced to trample them. Luckily, Gautama escaped unhurt, but whilst escaping from the herd of elephants, he was driven even deeper into the forest. He was wandering around helpless and hungry when he saw a large crane perched on a tree.

He was wonderstruck, when that crane started to talk in human language. It invited Gautama and said, “O! Weary traveller! Welcome! Rest under this tree.”

After that it procured some delicious fruits and offered them to him. Subsequently, they became friends and exchanged their personal details.

That crane's name was, Raaja Dharma. He was a *Gandharva*³⁵⁷, who was born as a crane due to a curse. That was the reason for his proficiency in several languages. Subsequent, to the curse, he was invariably kind to everyone and vowed to abstain from harming anybody. However, Gautama did not disclose all the facts about himself.

He told Raaja Dharma that he was a scholar, who had started on a journey to some other country. He also stated that he had performed the journey, in order to earn money as he was poor and that he had come to that place, because he had lost his way while escaping from the wild elephants. Raaja Dharma pitied him and said, "O! Scholar! Tomorrow is the *Dwadasi*³⁵⁸. A demon king, who is my friend, lives nearby.

On every *Dwadasi* he heaps gifts on scholars. Therefore, you go there and tell him that I have sent you. You will get rid of your poverty by doing so." After that the crane described the way to that place.

As soon as the demon king saw Gautama, he said, "Your face is evil to look at, but you can take as much as you

³⁵⁷ Celestial beings who are expert musicians

³⁵⁸ Twelfth day of the Lunar month

want, because my friend has sent you.” Then he poured out gold coins and precious gems in heaps before him. Gautama greedily collected more than he could carry with him and started on his return journey.

Since, he was unable to walk swiftly, due to the heavy load being carried by him; Gautama reached Rajadharmā’s tree after midnight. Raaja Dharma again welcomed him respectfully and said, “As it is night, no food can be procured. Hence, go to sleep. I will fetch food for you tomorrow morning” and then he slept.

Gautama was unable to sleep due to his hunger. As he was addicted to the taste of flesh, his mouth watered when he saw the crane sleeping next to him. Gautama thought, “Of what use is he to me now? There will be no loss if I kill him, as I have such a huge amount of gold.”

Thereupon, he struck the crane’s head with a club and ate its flesh. Later on he slept peacefully and continued on his journey in the morning.

The demon king was apprehensive, as his friend the crane failed to show up even on the evening of the succeeding day. Therefore, he sent out his messengers. They came back and reported that, Rajadharmā’s head had been smashed. The demon king suspected the handiwork of the iniquitous scholar and sent out his messengers to search for him.

The messengers caught Gautama and brought him before the demon king, who decided that Gautama was the culprit and handed him over to his servants saying, “Chop him into pieces and eat him.” Even the low caste demons refused to eat him and stated, “He was an ungrateful man. He even took the life of the person who saved his life. We do not want to touch his flesh.”

Then they chopped Gautama into pieces and offered it to the crows and eagles. Even those birds did not touch it, as he had sinned against the race of birds.

The demon king grieved for his friend’s death and piled up his bones into a heap. After that he prayed to Kamadhenu and extracted her milk and poured it on those bones. Raaja Dharma was restored to life. Immediately Raaja Dharma requested the demon king to make Gautama alive.

He told the astonished demon king, “Dear friend! We should never forsake our vow to help those who seek refuge from us. Thus it is my duty to help Gautama who came to my house in search of refuge.” The deities, were immensely pleased with Raaja Dharma and showered flowers on him, after that they restored Gautama to life.

This story, does not exhort us to wait for someone to come and break our head. Every human being who helps others wishes that the person helped would be grateful to him. The reason behind this wish is the arrogant feeling of

superiority that arises in the helper, unbeknownst to that person. Due to this reason such a person seeks the gratitude of others. Any person, who has such a desire, will not get the complete benefit of the kind act. The deities appear only to those who realize that they are duty bound to help others.

In addition, there should be the realization that by helping others, a person helps himself. Moreover, such persons have to realize that helping others permitted them to uphold and practice their vow. Therefore, they should be grateful to the persons who received their help. The virtue practiced by such persons is the best among all the virtues. The hero of this story was named, Raaja Dharma only to emphasize this point. Just like the greatest *Yoga*³⁵⁹ among all the yogas was named Raja *Yoga*; the best *Dharma*³⁶⁰ amongst all the *Dharmas* was termed as Raaja Dharma. A person practising such virtue was termed as Raaja Dharma. In general, many people in the world help those who practice raja dharma, even if somewhere, sometimes, some a base person causes harm to them.

It was narrated in this story that the demon king was the friend of Raaja Dharma, only to make this point clear. Hence, it is essential to understand the mythological stories

³⁵⁹ Disciplines of asceticism that result in spiritual experiences and a deep understanding into the nature of existence.

³⁶⁰ Righteousness

from such a perspective. Moreover, we should put such Raaja Dharma into practice.

71. MANU NEETI CHOLA

We ridicule people, who are inflexible in matters relating to justice and virtue and term them as insane. Nevertheless, the sagacious believe that only such people become the favourites of God. In order to comprehend, the level of devotion towards justice and the virtue needed to satisfy God, we have to examine the story of Manu Neeti Chola.

In times of yore, there lived a king named, Manu Neeti Chola. His subjects had much respect and love for him. The king reciprocated this feeling by regarding them as his own children. He also treated the dumb creatures like humans beings. Manu Neeti Chola did not have children for a long time. Since, he performed a number of good deeds to obtain children; finally a male infant was born to him.

The boy was named, Veedhivitanka. His father pampered him a lot. However, he mastered all the arts, without developing any pride. He used to listen to the mythological stories in the temple, every evening; and he learnt the art of ruling from his father.

One day, while going to the temple in a chariot, a calf fell under the wheels of his chariot and was crushed to

death. Veedhivitanka felt that had run over something. Therefore, he stopped the chariot and discovered to his horror, the dead calf. He remained there itself and started to weep. After some time, he told his servants sadly, “Today I have committed a major sin. I took this calf’s life. How unlucky I am. My mother feels sad even if I am a little bit late. How much this calf’s mother will suffer.”

To this the servants said, “O! Prince! It is not your fault. You did not kill the calf deliberately. It was an accident. So do not worry” and took him away from that place by force. Suddenly a cow came to that place and became very sad upon seeing her dead calf. Realizing the futility of weeping, it went to the palace and rang the bell that was placed in front of the palace, by pulling the bell’s rope with its snout. When the king heard that sound, he approached the cow in the company of his minister. All the time he was fearful as to who had been endangered.

The cow moored loudly with tears streaming down its face. The minister who already knew about the matter, stood there silently.

The cow again cried and when the king looked at the minister, he told the king about the incident, as he was unable to conceal it any longer. Manu Neeti Chola eyes filled with tears.

The king felt very sad. The minister told him, “O! King! The prince is blameless, and he did not commit any mistake.” However, the king’s conscience was not allayed. He came to a decision and questioned the minister, “was the death of the calf real?” When the minister said, “Yes my lord”, the king stated severely, “then the person who killed the calf deserves punishment.” The minister was unwilling to agree to the king and stated, “It is unfair to punish the prince for what happened by accident.” Manu Neeti Chola replied, “Everybody is equal before the law. There should be no partiality between a son and others.

Justice does not reside in a place where there are thoughts like, our own people and strangers. Wherever pure humanity exists, there the grief over the loss of a son becomes trifling. Then Manu Neeti Chola went inside, after ordering his minister to execute the prince by sending the chariot over him.

The minister, who did not want to kill the prince, stabbed himself with a knife and died. The king, who heard this news felt very sad and decided, “Veedhivitanka has to die as he killed the calf. I should also die, as the minister died because of me.”

Immediately he had the chariot readied and asked Veedhivitanka to lie down on the ground. Everyone came to know about this and watched that terrible scene with tears in their eyes. Veedhivitanka was elated, as he felt that he

would receive the most appropriate punishment, and lay down on the ground. Manu Neeti Chola mounted the chariot and drove it with great speed over his son. Veedhivitanka was crushed under the wheels of the chariot. Being unable to watch this horrifying spectacle, the people present there closed their eyes.

Then the king got down from the chariot and was about to behead himself. Immediately, Lord Shiva manifested Himself and caught hold of the king's hand. Then the Lord spoke, "O! King! I am very pleased with your humanity. I have done all this only to test your morality and humanity."

Manu Neeti Chola prostrated himself before Lord Shiva and addressed Him with folded hands, "Lord! This is all your kindness. You are the one who made me deliver this judgment. You guided me. I am nothing."

Lord Shiva was pleased and evanesced after saying, "There are the dead calf, minister and your son." To the astonishment of the king, the calf, the minister and Veedhivitanka got up as if they had been sleeping. Everyone hailed Lord Shiva's loudly. The people were extremely, pleased at having a king of such great morality and humanity.

The level of Manu Neeti Chola's devotion towards justice and virtue was extraordinary. Sometimes we display a

little morality and secretly hope that we will obtain good things and God's grace immediately. There was a vast difference the virtue practiced with such desire and the virtue practiced by Manu Neeti Chola.

There was also another characteristic to this story. Finally Lord Shiva came and left after making the dead persons alive, but he did not grant any other wish. Manu Neeti Chola did not ask and Lord Shiva did not grant.

Manu Neeti Chola's opinion was that, there was nothing greater to wish for than the vision of Lord Shiva. Accordingly, he did not make any other wish. There is nothing greater for a devotee to obtain than Lord Shiva's personal appreciation. So Lord Shiva did not grant any other wish. We should also learn to reach that stage in the practice of unselfish virtue.

72. VINATAA

No one should interfere with the natural time cycles or Kaala chakra. Any attempt to ride roughshod over time either due to anxiety or audacity, should be construed as a breach of the time limitations that had been preordained by the almighty. Individuals, who commit such transgressions, have to face a number of difficulties in their later life. An apt illustration of this universal truth is provided by the story of Vinataa.

*Maharshi*³⁶¹ Kashyapa had two wives namely Kadroo and Vinataa. Kadroo gave birth to one thousand *Nagas*³⁶².

Vinataa, who was good natured and polite, was also desirous of having children; and she requested her husband, repeatedly in this regard. The *Maharshi* advised her, “Be patient and do not be anxious. The time will come for you to bear children. You will have three sons,” but she was unable to remain patient.

Since she wanted to bear children immediately, her first son was born as an owl. She was very much depressed at this consequence, and *Maharshi* Kashyapa admonished her, “You did not pay heed to my words; in reality the future king of the birds is destined to be born to you but your haste resulted in this useless bird, which is blind during the day. Therefore, do not be anxious this time, since you are going to give birth to twins.” These words pacified her to some extent.

Vinataa once again became pregnant and remained in that state for a hundred years. She gave birth to two eggs, which did not hatch for a further hundred years. Her impatience once again overpowered her and she broke open the larger of the two eggs.

³⁶¹ Great Sage

³⁶² A semi – divine being with a human face and the tail of a snake

An extremely energetic child emerged from that egg. However, his body was undeveloped below the waist. He came out of the eggshell and addressed his mother with great agitation, "Mother! The first time you ruined the child due to your impatience and the second time you made me emerge from my shell before I had developed completely. You ignored your husband's words." Then that boy cursed her, "For this sin, you will spend your entire life as a slave to Kadroo, of whom you were jealous."

Vinataa mournfully addressed her son, "Child! I have done irreparable damage to you. However, I did not commit this sin intentionally or with any evil intention. I did it only out of my impatience to see you. It was my love and not any hatred, which made me behave in this fashion. I wanted to have children but God is not cooperating with me. You seem to be extremely powerful but God has caused you damage. It is incorrect for you to get angry with your mother." She pleaded with her son in this manner.

The boy was naturally powerful and righteous. He flapped his wings and said, "Mother what you have narrated is correct. I should not get angry with you. My elder brother did not receive sufficient power, though I could obtain that power it has been wasted, therefore, ensure that you save and protect your third child properly. If you succeed in protecting him, he will bring about your emancipation from slavery."

Maharshi Kashyapa pitied the boy's condition and made him the Sun's charioteer. As he did not have thighs, he was named as Anooru and as he was red in complexion he was also named Arun.

Several years passed by after this incident. Vinataa Devi controlled her mind and settled down peacefully. One day, *Maharshi* Kashyapa started a *Yajna*³⁶³, in which the deity Indra was his assistant. The Valikhilya *Munis*³⁶⁴ were the chief priests of that *Yajna*. They were quite aged and one day they went to the forest to collect samidhas or sticks to be used in the *Yajna*. Due to their age they were extremely exhausted, while returning. At that time, the deity Indra was also coming from the forest, carrying a bundle of sticks on his head.

He laughed at the exhaustion of these old *Munis*. When the king of deities, who knew them, behaved in this insulting manner, the *Munis* were infuriated. They sat down and materialized *Agni*³⁶⁵ with their yogic power. After that they started a *Homa*³⁶⁶, in order to create a person who would be greater than the deity Indra.

Indra on coming to know about this fell at the feet of his father. The latter went to the place where the Valikhilya

³⁶³ Vedic sacrifice

³⁶⁴ Ascetics

³⁶⁵ Fire

³⁶⁶ Powerful fire ritual

Munis were performing their *homa* and asked them, “Why are you conducting this *Homa*?” The *Munis* apprised him of the facts. Then Maharshi Kashyapa requested them in the following manner, “How can I complete the *Yajna* if my son dies? You have to forgive him.” The *Munis* questioned him as to how they could discontinue their *Homa*, which was in progress. To this Kashyapa proposed an alternative solution, “Please grant me a favour and create the *Pakshindra*³⁶⁷, who can defeat Indra; and then make him a brother and friend of Indra.”

The Valikhilya *Munis* agreed to this and the power of their *Homa* made its way into the third egg of Vinataa. Later the deity Garuda was born from that egg and became the *Pakshindra*. He defeated the deity Indra, obtained *Amrita*³⁶⁸ and released his mother from her slavery. Vinataa was a great person and her husband Maharshi Kashyapa was second only to Brahma. He tried to give birth to three great beings through Vinataa, but due to her impetuosity only one was born. This story tells us that if we ignore the advice of our elders, then we have to countenance difficult situations and untold suffering.

³⁶⁷ The best or the leader amongst the birds

³⁶⁸ The drink of the deities that makes them immortal

73. SHANKARA PUNDITA

Shankara Pundita was a great *Pundit*³⁶⁹, who lived on the banks of the river Gandaki in Nepal. His daily routine was to wake up early in the morning, chant the name of Lord Rama till noon, perform worship in the temple of the Lord Shiva and then partake of his midday meal.

In the afternoon, he used to teach Sanskrit to his students. He was ignorant of anything other than this daily routine. The head of that village held Shankara Pundita in great regard and used to cater to all his needs. After some time, this head man expired. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Kushala Paala, who did not evince much interest in continuing with the village school, since he was unable to afford his own luxuries.

However, he restrained himself from closing the school, because he was apprehensive that his mother and brothers would resist its closure. Subsequently, his mother passed away. In the past, his father had dreamt of the deity Surya, who had shown him the location of a treasure hoard. His father had dug at that place and found fifteen lakh gold coins. He had decided to build a Surya temple at a cost of ten lakh gold coins, but he fell ill and death was fast approaching him.

³⁶⁹ Scholar

Therefore, he called his sons and Shankara Pundita and directed them to build the Surya temple with ten lakh gold coins. He asked his three sons to share the remaining five lakh gold coins.

However, Kushala Paala forged his father's signature and made a new will in which it was stated that he had decided not to get the Surya temple constructed and that the ten lakh gold coins allocated for that purpose were to be handed over to his eldest son. After fabricating this counterfeit will, Kushala Paala approached Shankara Pundita and asked him to affix his signature to the will as a witness. If Shankara Pundita had signed on the will, no one in the village would have suspected its credibility.

However, Shankara Pundita refused to do so. In order to obtain his signature, Kushala Paala attempted to tempt him in numerous ways. He even offered to give him half the gold coins, but to no avail. Finally, Kushala Paala threatened to kill him. The next day, when Shankara Pundita was returning from the Lord Shiva's temple, Kushala Paala stabbed him in his stomach and hacked his intestines into pieces.

Shankara Pundita fell to the ground, while loudly invoking the name of Lord Sri Rama. Surprisingly, he felt that he had fallen on a bed of flowers; and he found himself in Nandanavana.

In that place, he saw Lord Sri Ram, Goddess Sita, Lakshmana, Bharat and Shatrugna sitting under an Aswatha Tree. Shankara Pundita, fell at the feet of Lord Rama. The deity Hanuman lifted him up and embraced him. Lord Sri Rama caressed his head and said, “You have to perform several of our tasks on earth, after you complete them you will return to us.”

Shankara Pundita experienced this whole incident as a dream. On regaining consciousness of his surroundings, he found himself uninjured and in the bushes that were proximate to the temple of Lord Shiva. He was wonderstruck at this miracle. In the meanwhile, the iniquitous Kushala Paala, after having stabbed Shankara Pundita, walked away from that place.

After he had proceeded some distance, he was accosted by two brawny men who thrashed him to within an inch of his life. As he was losing consciousness, they told him, “We would have killed you, but Shankara Pundita had prayed in the temple of Lord Shiva for your welfare. Moreover, he had also blessed you. So we are sparing your life for the time being, if you do not mend your ways, we will sever your head.”

After that they vanished and Kushala Paala drifted away into unconsciousness. Shankara Pundita, while returning, saw Kushala Paala. He pitied Kushala Paala and thought, “Due to his stabbing me, I had the vision of Lord Sri

Rama, felt the Lord's hand touch my head and experienced the warm embrace of the deity Hanuman. This man has helped me to a very great extent, but what could I do for him in return?"

Subsequently, he revived Kushala Paala. Kushala Paala on regaining consciousness saw Shankara Pundita and was terrified. However, Shankara Pundita offered his salutations to him and said, "You are very great, you enabled me to see Lord Sri Rama."

Kushala Paala then realized that the persons who had belaboured him were none other than Lord Sri Rama and Lakshmana. He repented his barbarous act and craved pardon by touching the feet of Shankara Pundita, and swore to be righteous from that day onwards. Shankara Pundita was astonished at the miracles wrought by God in order to purify the hearts of the denizens of the earth. Subsequently, Kushala Paala became a disciple of Shankara Pundita and a great devotee of God.

Devotion is not just the performing of puja. It also requires us to desist from hating others, abstention from differentiating between Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu and aspiring for the welfare of others. Such is the nature of real puja and this anecdote regarding Shankara Pundita substantiates this contention.

74. SHATADYUMNA

At times righteous people, encounter unexpected problems relating to *Dharma*³⁷⁰. The solution to such problems is not to be found in any of the religious texts. Moreover, these problems prove difficult of solution even for the greatest of people. Once upon a time, King Raghu retired to the forest, after installing his son on the throne; as he had entered the *Vaanaprastha ashrama*³⁷¹ stage of life. One day, while he was in the forest, an old *Brahmin*³⁷² sought his protection and he promised to do so.

At that moment a demon arrived there in great haste. However, the demon held himself back out of fear for Raghu and pleaded with him, “Please give me back my food.” As such, the demon appeared to be very weak.

Raghu angrily commanded the demon, “Go back and stand at a distance. Realize that you are in the presence of Raghu maharaja. I promised this Brahmin that I would protect him. I have to perforce protect those to whom I have given my word of honour to do so, even if it entails the sacrifice of my own life. This is the least that can be expected of human nature.”

³⁷⁰ Righteousness

³⁷¹ The last phase of life, in which a person retires to the forest to perform austerities

³⁷² A person who possesses sacred knowledge

The demon laughed feebly and replied, "You are attempting to enforce dharma, but after relinquishing your kingdom, it ill becomes you to do so. Therefore, restore my food to me." To this Raghu said, "Neither am I waging a battle with you, nor am I challenging you. It is unnecessary to possess a kingdom, in order to save a fellow human being. The act of saving another person is unsurpassed."

By that time the demon had weakened further and was exhausted. He said, "What you have stated is the truth. Saving those who are in danger is always dharma. I had been starving from a long time and was on the verge of death, at that time God provided me with this *Brahmin*. By eating this weak *Brahmin* I can live a bit longer. However, you are taking away my food and you will cause my death by depriving me of my food without even touching me. Is it righteous on your part to do so?" These words of the demon, served to place the king on the horns of a dilemma. The king justified his action by stating, "This person is an old Brahmin and he has sought my protection. It is in accordance with dharma for a capable person to save a weak person."

The demon cogitated over the words of the king and commented ironically, "Is it dharma in your opinion to deprive a weak and dying person of his sustenance?" At this, Raghu proposed, "I will provide you with food by hunting animals and offering their flesh to you. Please, let go of the *Brahmin*."

However, the demon said, “I might not last till such time as you procure food for me. God had given me food in the form of the *Brahmin*. Why should I beg you for food? You are wasting my time. If your kindness is true and unselfish, then save me from death and give me back my food.”

Raghu was unable to judge as to what was right or what was wrong. He thought for a while and realized that only the Lord Sri Hari could resolve this dilemma. He commenced to pray to the Lord Sri Hari with total devotion and concentration. He raised his hands high and invoked Lord Sri Hari.

Upon hearing the name of the Lord Sri Hari, the demon changed into a prince and told the dumbfounded king, “My name is Shatadyumna. I became a demon due to the curse of Maharshi Vasisht. However, he also provided me with the solution to his curse and told me that upon hearing the name of the Lord Sri Hari, I would regain my original form. Thus, I have been purified and my pristine glory has been restored by seeing you.”

Raghu maharaja was very much pleased at the solution provided by the Lord Sri Hari. The moral of the tale is that the only solution to get out of difficult situations is prayer to God.

75. KALAAVATI

Girls who obtain virtuous husbands are indeed fortunate. Most families view the performance of the marriage of their daughters as a difficult task. This has constituted a primary problem for women, and has existed even in the past. The story of Kalaavati, which was narrated by *Maharshi*³⁷³ Vedavyas, reveals the steps to be taken by women facing difficulties, while getting married.

In the city of Kampilya there was a king by the name of Dharmasetu. He had a daughter named Kalaavati. When she grew became a young woman, the king arranged a *Swayamvara*³⁷⁴ for her betrothal. Unfortunately, the prospective bridegrooms, who had arrived for the *Swayamvara*, fought with each other in order to marry her. In that battle all the aspirants for her hand perished. Dharmasetu was unable to withstand this highly distressing incident and he breathed his last. To compound the misery, his wife immolated herself on his funeral pyre.

The people of the city abused Kalaavati and considered her to be the most ill fated of girls on earth, because the effect of her fate had resulted in the death of her parents and her suitors. Subsequently, no man came

³⁷³ Great Sage

³⁷⁴ Ceremony, in which a prospective bride selects her husband, from amongst a number of suitors

forward to marry her. She could not stay in her brothers' kingdom and so one day she left for the forests.

She decided, "I am very beautiful and to possess this beauty many kings and princes lost their life. Nevertheless, no man is prepared to marry me. They all are fools; hence, I will remain a spinster. If at all I am to wed in any birth, I will marry none other than the Lord Sri Hari." After coming to this decision, she was thinking about her future course of action. At that moment *Maharshi* Bharadwaj chanced upon her.

He heard her out and blessed her by teaching her an appropriate mantra. He also advised her to meditate on the banks of the river Viraja. While, she was conducting *Tapas*³⁷⁵ on the banks of the river, *Maharshi* Agastya rendered her a lot of help in her religious efforts.

Kalaavati was deeply engrossed in her *Tapas* on Lord Sri Hari, who materialized before her with his consort the Goddess Lakshmi. On being asked to specify her wish, by the Lord, she asked Him to marry her. The goddess Lakshmi was infuriated at Kalavathi's wish and retorted, "You are proposing marriage to my Husband, in my very presence – your insolence is extraordinary. In every avatar of the Lord I will be his wife and remain by His side."

³⁷⁵ Deep meditation or ascetism

The Goddess Lakshmi was reprimanding Kalaavati in this manner, when Lord Sri Hari intervened and stated, “What Lakshmi Devi has stated is a fact and irrespective of my avatar, she is always my wife. Kalaavati! In the forthcoming *Dwaparayuga*³⁷⁶ I will incarnate as Lord Sri Krishna. At that time you will be born as Sathyabhama and become my second wife. You will be the most prosperous of my wives and Lakshmi Devi will be born as Rukmini Devi and will be my queen.” At these words of the Lord, Lakshmi Devi was partially pacified. All the same, the goddess Lakshmi Devi refrained from taking part in any further conversation, due to her extreme anger.

Then the Lord addressed Her, “Devi! It is customary for all married women on the earth to see me in their husbands and love them accordingly. This constitutes their ritual and *Tapas*. Women who fail to enter holy matrimony have to visualize me as their husbands and offer their prayers to me. This has been enjoined in the *Shastra*³⁷⁷. Unmarried women should not think about anyone other than Me. After marriage it is imperative for them to see Me in their husbands.

Kalaavati performed *Tapas* for a husband, but the extent of her *Tapas* had rendered everyone on earth, ineligible to claim her hand in marriage. Thus, it has become

³⁷⁶ Third of the four yugas

³⁷⁷ Scripture

inevitable for me to become her husband. You are the very incarnation of *Shakti*³⁷⁸ and you yourself had bestowed the power of *Tapas* on her, therefore it is your boon to her.” On hearing this, the Goddess Lakshmi Devi laughed joyously along with Lord Sri Hari.

The crux of this story is that women who remained unmarried should always consider Lord Vishnu to be their husband, and this should be their *Tapas*.

76. BHAGEERATHA

There is no difference between ascending the throne and assuming higher office. The present day young generation aspires to assume higher positions and strive hard from childhood itself, to achieve this goal. This is good, but those who want to achieve higher goals in life, should develop their mettle. An incident from the life of the Emperor Bhageeratha provides encouragement to develop such inner strength.

Bhageeratha, who ruled over the kingdom of Ayodhya, was revered for having brought the river Ganga to earth. He had become the emperor of the entire earth and ruled it in an exemplary manner. His determination can be gauged from the incident, wherein, he brought down the river Ganga to earth from heaven.

³⁷⁸ Sacred power

Whilst ruling over his kingdom, Bhageeratha firmly resolved to know about the Almighty and informed his Guru about it. His Guru advised him to perform a *Yajna*³⁷⁹, in which he was to donate his entire wealth to the *Brahmins* (*Persons of highest knowledge*) and others.

However, he had to retain the emperorship, as no *Brahmin* came forward to rule the kingdom. Thereupon, he invited his neighbouring king and offered the emperorship to him. After coming to know about what had transpired, the king was terrified and tried to circumvent the situation by stating, “You are a great king and a great adherent of dharma. I am unworthy to succeed you.” Bhageeratha discussed morality with him and convinced him to rule over his kingdom.

Subsequently, Bhageeratha left his country in the night, disguised as a beggar. He used to venture out only in the darkness of the night to beg for alms. After some time had elapsed in this manner, he was convinced that his egotism had been completely destroyed. Thereafter he came out boldly even in the day time, in order to beg for food. Subsequently, he journeyed to Ayodhya and begged for alms in that place also.

The people of Ayodhya failed to recognize him. Therefore, he approached the king and begged him for food.

³⁷⁹ Vedic sacrifice

One of the palace guards, stationed at the royal gates, recognized him by his voice and other features, as the King Bhageeratha.

The guard conveyed this information to the king, who humbly saluted king Bhageeratha and implored him in the following manner, “Please accept this kingdom.” King Bhageeratha rejected this offer and said, “Revered Sir! If you want to give me alms then do so, otherwise do not give me anything.” The king, who was rendered speechless by this reply, gave alms to him. King Bhageeratha accepted the alms and left that place happily.

Sometime later, the king who was ruling over Ayodhya passed away. He did not leave behind any successor to the throne. The people searched everywhere and finally located king Bhageeratha. Then they told him “You have to accept this kingdom as our alms to you, it is inevitable.” As Bhageeratha had been blessed with the vision of the Almighty by that time, he acceded to the request of their people. When the people asked him to rule over the kingdom as their alms to him, Bhageeratha accepted, because due to his self realization, he had not been tempted by the offer.

As he had reached this pristine state, he was able to bring down the river Ganga to the earth for the welfare of the earth’s creatures.

The youth of today, who aspire to achieve very high positions, have to possess self realization, mental stability and a helping attitude towards other people, like Bhageeratha had been endowed with. This is essential for them to emerge as the pride of our nation.

77. SOUBHARI

Sometimes the behaviour of great people appears to be wonderful and incongruous at the same time. We should not misunderstand them just because of that. *Maharshi*³⁸⁰ Soubhari's story provides the best illustration of this fact. Once upon a time in the kingdom of Saptadweepa, during the rule of Maandhaata, a saint named Soubhari, performed *Tapas*³⁸¹ by staying in the middle of the water for a hundred years.

While he was meditating in that manner, he saw some fish sporting in the water along with their young. This created a desire in him to enjoy the comforts of family life and he immediately, discontinued his *Tapas*.

Soubhari thought deeply and then approached Maandhaata and addressed him in the following manner, "O! King! You are a great donor. I have a small wish. Can you fulfil it without saying no?" To this Maandhaata replied, "O!

³⁸⁰ Great Sage

³⁸¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

Great saint! It is not my habit to say no to the wishes of saints. If you ask for something worthwhile, I will definitely grant it.”

Then the sage said, “Why would I ask for something that you cannot give? It is not my habit also to ask for something that is unworthy. I have suddenly developed a desire to enjoy the comforts of a family. I have heard that you have fifty daughters. So give one of your daughters in marriage to me.”

It would have been in the interest of all concerned, if Maandhaata had immediately agreed to the saint’s request. However, he fell into a confused state of mind and cogitated for a long time. “Ah! This saint is an old man. How can I ask my daughter to marry such an old man? He would curse me if I refuse to grant his wish. Nevertheless, if I do as he says my daughter stands to become a forest dweller. What am I to do?”

He thought for a long time along these lines, and finally said, “O! Saint! You are an old man. My daughters are in the bloom of youth. Moreover they are beautiful. Thus, I fear that they might laugh at you.”

The saint understood the underlying meaning of the king’s words. All the same, he gazed at the king calmly and said, “O! King! Your words are worth thinking about, but, lead me to the inner chambers. If any of your daughters

chooses me for a husband, give her to me in marriage. Otherwise, there is no necessity for you to do so. “

Maandhaata, who was heartened by these words, summoned a servant and instructed him, “Take this saint to the inner chambers and show all my fifty daughters to him. The girl who accepts him as her husband will marry him.” *Maharshi* Soubhari used his power of *Tapas* to look extremely enchanting. In fact, the princesses were under the impression that a second deity of love had appeared before them. The result was that the princesses started to quarrel amongst themselves as to who should marry the saint. Maandhaata was unable to resolve this dispute. Therefore, he gave them all in marriage to the sage.

Maharshi Soubhari arrived at his ashram, accompanied by his fifty wives. Then he summoned Viswakarma and instructed him, “I have become a householder and my wives are the daughters of an emperor. So build some magnificent mansions for them to live in.” Accordingly, Viswakarma built fifty towns that surpassed even the renowned city of Alakapuri in grandeur. Saint Soubhari assumed fifty similar forms and lived with each of his wives.

Meanwhile, Maandhaata was worried about the manner in which his daughters were leading their life. So the emperor started out, in order to ascertain the manner in which his daughters were living. In the course of his search

for the ashram of Saint Soubhari, he came across fifty new towns in that place. He inquired of the residents of that place and was informed that those towns belonged to *Maharshi* Soubhari. As he was observing all this flabbergasted, *Maharshi* Soubhari came forward, addressed his father-in-law with great respect and invited him inside. Emperor Maandhaata went to each of his daughters and questioned them. He was astonished to learn that all of them were safe and sound.

Maandhaata prostrated himself before the *Maharshi* and addressed him in the following words, “*Maharshi!* I underestimated you. Please forgive me.” *Maharshi* Soubhari was pleased at these words and enlightened him, “O! Emperor Maandhaata! You are efficient in all respects. All the same, you were comparatively ignorant about saints. I did all this only to make you realize your shortcomings.

Tapas simplifies the process of incessant absorption in the true perfection of the Supreme Being. You were under the illusion that such work was beyond the capacity of the people of your kingdom. I have been constantly meditating with a mind that has always been devoted to true perfection of the Supreme Being. I have been living with fifty wives in fifty bodies in fifty towns only to remove your illusion. You have to learn this by observing me. Not only that, you have to learn to discern the great, who have an especial motive in displaying an external interest in family life. O! King! Please

achieve this art and live like a *Rajarshi*³⁸² at least henceforth.”

Due to this exhortation of *Maharshi* Soubhari, Maandhaata lived by devoting himself to *Atmajnana*³⁸³.

Thus, it becomes evident that the laity is incapable of comprehending the actions of the great. We should always remember this fact. Even though the behaviour of *Maharshis* appears to be ludicrous and contrary to virtue, there are several incidents in the divine stories of *Maharshis* that have to be understood by comparing them to the minute details, regarding virtue, in this story.

We should also distinguish between actions that are suitable for great persons like *Maharshi* Soubhari, but inappropriate for the common householder.

78. THE MAHARSHIS ROMASHA and ASHTAAVAKRA

It is common for growing up children to entertain thoughts such as, “I am already a grown up! Why do these elders always keep supervising my every act? Am I not aware of what is beneficial to me? Why do they pester me?”

³⁸² Royal sage

³⁸³ Knowledge of the Self

Even in schools and colleges, the senior students wish to impose their authority on their juniors. When they become older and get married, this feeling gets enhanced to a much greater extent. The story of the saints Romasha and Ashtaavakra is extremely advantageous to those who are beset with such thoughts.

Once upon a time, Lord Brahma entertained the thought, “Is there anyone older than me?” Initially, he felt that he was the oldest; however, after some time he thought that only the Lord Vishnu was older than Him. He was happy that at least He was the second oldest. As He was unable to contain that happiness, He approached Lord Vishnu and said, “Is it not correct that I am the oldest person after you?”

Lord Srihari said, “One can never know! It is not possible to know who was in existence at any particular place or time.” Lord Brahma was unhappy with this reply and replied scornfully, “What is it that you are stating? Was I not born after you? After that, did I not create the entire animal kingdom? Then how is it possible for any other living creature to be older than me?”

To this Lord Vishnu stated, “There is an old man, whom I know. Let us ask him whether he knows anything about this matter.” Thereupon, Lord Srihari accompanied Lord Brahma to the place where *Maharshi*³⁸⁴ Romasha was

³⁸⁴ Great Sage

residing. Since, that *Maharshi* had hair all over his body, he had been named Romasha.

By the time of their visit, more than half of the hair on his body had fallen off. That old saint on seeing Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma addressed them respectfully and enquired of them as to the reason for their visit.

Lord Srihari asked, “Revered Sir! How old are you?” The saint replied, “Lord! Despite my insignificance in comparison to you I will reply as desired by you. A thousand *Yugas*³⁸⁵ of the human world are a day for Lord Brahma. An equal period of time is His night. After a hundred such years His life will end. If one such Brahma passes away, a hair falls from my body. In that manner, almost half of the hairs on my body have fallen off my body.

If these also fall off then I will obtain permanent beatitude. I do not know when I will have your blessing in this regard.”

Upon hearing those words, Lord Brahma was astounded. Lord Srihari, without saying anything, clasped Lord Brahma’s hand and took him to the dwelling of *Maharshi* Ashtavakra. He was celebrated for possessing a body that was curved in eight places. However, his body revealed only four curves. Even before Lord Brahma could

³⁸⁵ Epochs

recover from amazement, that saint worshipped Him and Lord Hari, in a magnificent manner. After that he enquired of them the reason for their visit.

To this Lord Vishnu replied, “Nothing in particular! We had visited with *Maharshi* Romasha and after that we decided to pay you a visit.” Then He enquired of the Maharshi in a seemingly, casual manner, “How old are you?”

That *Maharshi* offered his salutations to Him and replied humbly, “O! Lord of Lords! You have seen so many people like me. It is my great fortune that you came to me and asked me this question. You had stated that you had already visited *Maharshi* Romasha.

If one such *Maharshi* Romasha departs from this world, I lose one of the curves in my body; till now I have lost four such curves and four more are left.” Lord Srihari gazed at Lord Brahma who bowed down his head in shame.

Then, Lord Srihari patted Him on His shoulder and said, “Lord Brahma! Age and antecedence pertain to the body and people who have experienced the happiness of the soul, find this body to be a burden. Such persons are always keen to rid themselves from it. It is futile if the body merely ages, without the attainment of complete wisdom. The question, ‘what is the age of my body?’ is devoid of meaning to a person who has attained significant spiritual progress.”

The latter half of this narrative dealt with some complicated terms like happiness of the soul, accomplishment of wisdom and a spiritual state. It should not be assumed that this is just some philosophical story. Even if someone attains a preeminent position, there would always be someone greater than that person. This fact should never be forgotten.

Moreover, even if an individual attains some powers, they are no greater than the sparks that have emerged from the Supreme Being. For that matter, even that individual is such a spark. This constitutes spiritual wisdom, which should never be forgotten.

79. MRIGASIRA

Some people, despite being devoted to God lack virtue. On being queried about this, they argue that devotion towards God absolves one of all sins. Furthermore, such people quote from apparently reasonable sources to vindicate their stance. All the same, the reality is that God and virtue are inseparable. If the manifestation of God truly transpires in a person's mind, then virtue would also manifest in him. The following is a beautiful story that proves this fact.

One day, a hunter, who used to dwell in the forest; failed to capture any animal, despite hunting all day. There was not even a morsel of food in his house and his children

were crying with hunger. Therefore, he searched till nightfall, but in vain. As he was wending his weary way home, he chanced upon a pond.

Immediately on sighting it, the following thought flashed in his mind, “Since, there is water here, some animal or the other is bound to come here during the night to quench its thirst.” Moreover, his wife would take umbrage if he went home empty handed, therefore, that huntsman decided to lie in wait, near the pond, till such time as he could capture some animal. On casting around, he found a large tree nearby.

The huntsman hid behind that tree and lopped off some of its branches. These he employed to camouflage his place of concealment. The huntsman soon perceived that he had chosen a tree, whose branches were full of thorns. A closer scrutiny revealed that it was a *Maredu*³⁸⁶ or *Bilva*³⁸⁷ tree. Finding that place convenient for his purpose, the huntsman remained standing in that place, with his bow and arrows in his hand. As the night progressed, the dew started falling and there was a steep drop in the temperature. The huntsman’s teeth were chattering due to the cold and he whiled away the time by chanting, “Shiva, Shiva.”

³⁸⁶ Aegle marmelos

³⁸⁷ Aegle marmelos

At the end of the first quarter of the night, a doe came to the pond to quench its thirst. The huntsman immediately took aim, but the doe noticed his presence. As the huntsman was thinking, “If it notices me, it will be difficult to strike it with the arrow,” the antelope uttered a loud cry and addressed him in human language, “Brother! Do not kill me.” The hunter was rendered speechless, because the doe not only stood there courageously but was also talking to him in his own language. Finally, he asked the doe, “Who are you?”

To this the doe replied, “Previously I was an Apsara named Rambha. On one *Shivaratri*³⁸⁸ I forgot to worship Lord Shiva and whiled away the time, in sporting playfully with a king. Lord Shiva was enraged and cursed us, “Be born as animals.” Now I am an expectant mother. According to the moral code of huntsmen, it is inequitable to kill pregnant animals. Hence, let me live.” The huntsman fell into a state of confusion, but after a little thought he said, “Fair or unfair I was unable to procure even water, since morning. Therefore, I am unwilling to relinquish the food that I have found.”

The doe said, “Please wait for some time, another doe, which is more robust than I am, will come here. You can satisfy your hunger by killing it. In case it does not arrive, I will return. I swear this by Lord Shiva, please believe me.”

³⁸⁸ Great Night of Lord Shiva

The huntsman, being unable to disagree with this talking doe, permitted it to leave. At the end of the second quarter of the night, another doe came to the pond. This doe also addressed the huntsman in the human tongue and said, "Son! Listen to my words before you kill me. I have become emaciated due a quarrel with my fellow wife. There is no flesh left in my body. I am of no use to you. Very soon a well fed deer will come to this place. Satisfy your hunger with that deer. In the event of its non – arrival, I will come back again. I swear to this by Lord Shiva."

The huntsman was unable to say no. By the end of third quarter of the night a buck came to that place. It addressed the huntsman, "Son! Stop for a minute. Two does had come here a little while ago. Have you killed them?"

When the huntsman replied in the negative, the buck said, "Then spare my life for some time. My wife is going to give birth. I wish to visit my dwelling and have a last glance at my wives. After that I will return to this place, please trust in me, I swear by Lord Shiva." The huntsman allowed the buck to go and repeated, "Shiva, Shiva."

The fourth quarter of the night was almost over and dawn was making its glorious presence felt. Suddenly the three deer, along with the newborn fawn, arrived and stood before the huntsman. They bowed before him and pleaded, "Kill me first." The huntsman was highly confused. The male deer said, "Son! *Shivaratri* will be over as soon as sunrise

occurs. Please be blessed by killing all four of us when the hours of the *Shivaratri* are not yet over.”

The huntsman was amazed and happy at the same time. He thought, “These deer, despite being beasts, were rushing to their death on the eve of *Shivaratri*. They came here to die being bound by truthfulness. Even though I am a human being, I kill animals every day with scant regard for whether it is *Shivaratri* or *Navaratri*³⁸⁹.” Whereupon, he broke his bow and arrows and cast them aside, then he waxed eloquent in the following manner, “O! Deer family! You are my masters. Virtue is greater than kindness. There is no greater sin than violence.

From henceforth, I will follow Lord Shiva and I will tread the path of virtue. I will never forsake virtue or harm anyone even if my family and I have to die. I swear to this by Lord Shiva.”

After the huntsman had loudly proclaimed this, he circumambulated the deer and offered his homage to them. On arising, flowers showered down upon him from the heavens. A celestial vehicle driven by the attendants of Lord Shiva materialized in the sky. These attendants invited the deer family and the huntsman to come inside their vehicle. The huntsman addressed them in the following fashion,

³⁸⁹ A festival lasting nine nights that signifies the triumph of good over evil

“Greetings! Revered Sirs! This deer family is pure and worthy of ascending your celestial vehicle. Why are you inviting a base person like me to join them?”

To this Lord Shiva’s attendants replied, “O! Virtuous minded man! You abstained even from water, since morning, even though you were unaware of the fact that today was *Shivaratri*. You circumambulated many times around the *Maredu* tree, which had an icon of Lord Shiva in its roots. You plucked the *Maredu* leaves and let them fall on that icon, unknowingly.

You stayed up all night for the animals without even blinking your eyes. You chanted “Shiva, Shiva” due to the cold. You had spent the four quarters of the night with four saints. Due to this *Vrata*, your mental blindness has been destroyed and kindness has increased in you. As a result you vowed to adhere to virtue even at the cost of your life. Accordingly, Lord Shiva has commanded that you are to reside amongst the stars, in the company of these deer. This deer family will be seen in the firmament as a constellation that is shaped like the head of a deer, accordingly, it is to be named as *Mrigasira*³⁹⁰. Exactly at the back of this star, your form bearing a bow and arrows will emit its bright light; it will be named Lubdaka after your name.

³⁹⁰ Head of a deer

As evidence to the glory of the vow of *Shivaratri*, all of you will shine in the sky till the end of creation.”

Thus, the star *Mrigasira* has been announcing not only the glory of *Shivaratri*, but also that both virtue and God are one and the same. This star *Mrigasira* appears even more clearly at the time of midnight on *Shivaratri*.

Thus the virtuous mind blossomed forth when devotion to God emerged, even in the barbarous breast of a huntsman. This proves that virtue and God are the same. Therefore, the wise have declared that devotion in the absence of a virtuous mind, or virtuous minds devoid of devotion never yield good results. One should embark upon the journey of life by constantly remembering this secret.

80. DRONA

The hallmark of an outstanding teacher is that he never displays partiality towards any of his students. Such a teacher never takes special care of a student, just because he is good at studies. At the same time, such a teacher never bestows less care on a student who is a dullard.

He teaches and cares for his students without any discrimination. It is common for children to harbour feelings like, “Our preceptor has a special interest in those who study well.” The following story constitutes a very useful parable for children who have such misgivings about their teachers.

One day the ball with which Duryodhana, Bheema and other princes of the kingdom of Kuru were playing in the garden, fell into the well. They were at a loss as to how to retrieve it from the well. At that moment Drona came there and tossed a blade of *Darbha*³⁹¹, which he had fashioned into the form of an arrow, and removed the ball from the well. The Grand Sire, Bhishma, on coming to know about this, observed Drona's archery and placed the princes under his tutelage.

Duryodhana and Bheema obtained their education from Drona, who was veritably very great. Nevertheless, Duryodhana harboured misgivings to the effect that their mentor was partial to Bheema and had consequently, imparted some additional and secret knowledge to him.

One day Bheema and Duryodhana were taken to the forest by Drona, where they were accosted by a *Yaksha*³⁹². That *Yaksha* had been pursuing a fleeing Brahmin lad, with the intention of capturing him. Duryodhana and Bheema witnessed this hot pursuit and enquired of the *Yaksha* about the cause for all that commotion.

To this the *Yaksha* replied, "My father lost his life due to the curse cast upon him by this boy's father. I vowed to kill this boy, however, he seems to be very cunning and I was

³⁹¹ *Desmostachya bipinata*

³⁹² Semi divine beings who are the followers of Kubera wealth deity

unsuccessful in catching him. If anyone of you kills him, I will reward him with complete happiness and pleasure. On the other hand I will just teach a spell to him who sets the boy free out of pity. Therefore, decide for yourself whether you want to enjoy all the pleasures by killing him or just learn a spell by sparing him.” His words appeared to be strange for a demon. Bheema was of the opinion that it was not the duty of a *Kshatriya*³⁹³ to obtain any benefit by killing a mere boy; accordingly, he refused to capture him and remained where he was.

Duryodhana cogitated for long and replied, “Spells can be learnt from anyone, but no one will grant complete happiness and pleasures.” With that he embarked upon the task of killing that boy and attempted to brain him with his mace. That boy led Duryodhana a merry chase by disappearing in one place and showing up in some other place. In this manner, he compelled the greed driven Duryodhana to wander all over the forest.

Finally, Lord Krishna, who had assumed the form of the Yaksha, manifested Himself and exhorted them in the following words, “O! Duryodhana and Bheema, both of you were taught by Drona. Alas! It was Bheema who learned, how and where to utilize his education. Whereas Duryodhana, you failed to obtain such understanding. There was nothing esoteric in what Dronacharya taught you and

³⁹³ A person belonging to the warrior caste

Bheema. The onus of grasping what the teacher imparts rests upon the disciple.”

Despite not finding a place in the Mahabharata, this story teaches a lot to a disciple. A competent teacher is always unbiased, while imparting education to his pupils. Such a preceptor teaches the foolish and the gifted student in the same manner.

He never endows a student with exclusive power and at the same time he does not impart lesser power to any student. The amount of knowledge garnered by a student depends on his effort and understanding. This story should motivate all disciples to become good students by keeping this maxim in mind.

81. DURJAYA

Some people, from their very childhood are endowed with greater intelligence and skill, which could possibly make them proud of themselves. However, the truth is that their eminence is due to good deeds performed in their previous births, which might have pleased God and made Him bless them with these outstanding attributes.

Those who understand this fact remain untainted by arrogance; whereas those who fail to do so will be compelled to countenance setbacks in life, despite their

greatness. One such instance is provided by the story of the emperor Durjaya.

In times of yore, there ruled a king named Supratheeka. He obtained a son Durjaya, due to the blessings of *Maharshi*³⁹⁴ Durvasa. Durjaya was so potent that he could even defeat the deity Indra. *Maharshi* Durvasa performed all the rites relating to the birth of the child including the *Jathaka karma* or the christening ceremony.

Durjaya was a great warrior, who had subjugated the entire earth and heaven. Wherever he went, the gods, gandharvas or rishis would render unexpected help to him. Once Durjaya went to the forest to hunt animals and there he encountered the great *Maharshi* Gouramukha. The latter wished to offer his hospitality to Durjaya.

That *Maharshi* had an invaluable jewel named Chinthamani, which had been given to him by Lord Vishnu. By the power of that Chinthamani, the *Maharshi* materialized mansions and servants, and hosted a grand party for the king. Durjaya was astonished by the grandeur of the banquet.

Although the king had won several kingdoms and worlds, he had not won over his desires. He beckoned his minister and instructed him to procure the Chinthamani

³⁹⁴ Great Sage

from the Maharshi. At this the minister approached Gouramukha and requested him to make good the jewel to him. To this the *Muni*³⁹⁵ replied, “This gem is not to be parted with and you should not take it.”

The king tried to overpower the muni in order to seize the jewel. At this several armies emerged from the Chinthamani and a heavy battle ensued between the king and those armies. The king found it very easy to destroy his opponents, as his prowess was tremendous and as he had emerged a victor over even the deity Indra. The destroyed armies were being continuously replaced and the battle continued unabated.

The Maharshi was gravely distressed at this bloodshed, so he prayed to Lord Vishnu who manifested Himself before him and asked him to make a wish. The Maharshi asked the Lord to stop the bloodshed.

At this Lord Sri Hari told him “I have given you the Chinthamani. It does not remain aloof when my devotee is facing difficulty, even if I ask it to do so. It will continue to create armies. That king, due to the blessings of Maharshi Durvasa, will continue to kill the soldiers. The only way to stop this bloodshed is to kill the king. Think it over and let me know about your decision.”

³⁹⁵ Ascetic

The Maharshi stated, “Lord! It is very difficult to understand you. You are stating that your jewel does obey your words and that I have to kill my guest. Your actions are the standard for dharma. Those who misuse the power of the blessings received by them have to be punished only by you.” At this Lord Vishnu entered the fray and killed Durjaya. This brought an end to the massacre and Durjaya attained *Moksha* by becoming one with the Lord.

Then the Maharshi said, “Lord! I longed for a guest, the king longed for the jewel and You longed for devotion. The only difference was that our desires created problems for us, whereas your desire relieved us from suffering.”

There are similar parables in the *Puranas*³⁹⁶. For example, in the *Dattadarshan*, the emperor Kartaviryarjuna fought over a cow that belonged to Maharshi Jamadagni, with more or less the same results. Although there are similar stories in the Purana, it has to be remembered that some additional facts of great importance are hidden in each story.

In the present story, Lord Vishnu had told Maharshi Gouramukha that the bloodshed would end upon putting his guest to death. Accordingly, the Lord asked the Maharshi to instruct Him as to the course of action to adopt. The question that arises is why the Lord asked the Maharshi to

³⁹⁶ Mythological narratives

contemplate about this issue and its answer has been provided in the words of the Maharshi at the end of the story.

That great Maharshi had also been desirous of according luxurious treatment to his guests. This had made him desire the jewel Chinthamani, which he obtained after performing penance. This Chinthamani had been the root cause for the bloodshed.

From the perspective of the emperor Durjaya, his egotism had brought about his downfall, while the Maharshi's desire had destroyed his *Tapas*³⁹⁷. Therefore, both the egoism and desire are dangerous; and this is the essence of this story. Therefore, the Puranic stories have to be analyzed in this fashion, if their true import is to be comprehended.

82. PRIYA VRATA

On occasion, children in orthodox families face perplexing situations. When their education reaches a certain stage, they attain detachment from the world and consider worldly education to be futile. They may also feel like abstaining from employment and marriage after the completion of their education.

³⁹⁷ Deep meditation or ascetism

In addition, they get confused with regard to their spirit of renunciation and entertain doubts as to its veracity, which causes considerable mental suffering. The son of the Manu Swayambhuva, Priya Vrata, once fell into such confusion.

Swayambhuva Manu was the *Manasa – Putra*³⁹⁸ of Lord Brahma. Satarupa was his wife and they had two sons Priya Vrata and Uttaana Paada. The elder son Priya Vrata indulged in *Tapas*³⁹⁹ all the time. As he was growing up, his father Swayambhuva Manu also decided to meditate. Hence, he summoned Priya Vrata and asked him to ascend the throne of his kingdom. Priya Vrata was alarmed at this offer and repaired to the forest, where he performed severe *Tapas* on his grandfather, Lord Brahma.

After the passage of some time, Lord Brahma revealed Himself to him and stated, “Dear boy! You want to attain *Moksha*⁴⁰⁰ directly from the state of a celibate, however, in your case I am against such a decision. You have to shoulder a major responsibility. You will be absolved of your *Karma*⁴⁰¹ only by performing all of your duties. This is essential to make the task of attaining *Moksha* easier. Therefore, you have to rule over the kingdom and if you treat it as *Tapas*, then attaining *Moksha* will become easy.”

³⁹⁸ Born from the mind

³⁹⁹ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁴⁰⁰ Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth

⁴⁰¹ Law of moral causation

On hearing this preaching, Priya Vrata replied, “Lord! You are the father of all the creatures and a grandfather to me. In a spirit of renunciation I forsook the kingdom and came to your rescue as you are the ultimate Guru. I left behind everything and you are instructing me to discontinue *Tapas*, then why should I do *Tapas*? I will obey you as your directions are of greater importance to me than my personal desires. May your will prove to be my driving force and motivation.”

Thereupon, Lord Brahma again addressed him “Without total renunciation it is impossible to attain *Moksha*. Renunciation of a thing does not imply hatred towards it and love towards *Tapas* does not connote eschewal. With true devotion to the Guru, you have overcome desire for the kingdom and developed love for *Tapas*. Maintain this state of the mind, for the rest of your life. Guard yourself from being engulfed by the royal luxuries and rule over the kingdom; this in short will constitute the *Tapas* prescribed by me for you.”

In accordance, with this command of Lord Brahma, Priya Vrata returned home and assumed charge of the kingdom. He ruled the kingdom in an exemplary manner.

He was that great person who divided the earth into seven continents. The predicament of Priya Vrata was resolved by his Grandfather, who also taught him self – restraint. This story tells us that the advice of a Guru is to be

obtained, while contemplating renunciation. Moreover, a Guru is indispensable for taking correct decisions, in this context, rather than doing so on one's own.

83. KRAUNCHA PARVATA

In the opinion of experienced persons, it is imprudent to bear evidence in disputes. The contemptible people of the present times always attempt to get into the good books of the wealthy, by giving false evidence. The parable of the Krauncha Parvata describes the punishment meted out by God to such perjurers.

One day the deity Devendra visited the Meru Mountain. There he chanced upon a young lad, whose effulgence was extraordinary. The deity Indra was elated at seeing this boy, who nevertheless, failed to offer his respects to him.

This incensed the deity Indra, who shouted at the boy, "Young lad! You seem to be very intelligent, why do you fail to accord the respect due to your elders?" After that he paused momentarily and continued his diatribe, "Are you ignorant of the fact that I am the king of the deities, Devendra?"

However, that young boy became infuriated and replied, "Why should I respect you? You rule over an impermanent kingdom, whereas I preside over the

permanent kingdom of the soul. Base beings like you are unaware of my presence, only the knowledgeable *Brahmarishis*⁴⁰² know about me.” This reply only served to fuel the anger of the deity Indra. He once again accosted the lad, “Heed my words! Only Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva are greater than me amongst the deities. You are being insolent to me. All right, why indulge in mere words! Let us circumambulate the Krauncha Parvata. Whoever does so first, will be deemed to be the winner.”

The young boy agreed to this wager made by the deity Indra. The winner in this race proved to be the young boy, who won by a small margin. However, the deity Indra proved to be a bad loser and argued that he had won the race. Since, the matter remained unsettled, they asked the Krauncha Parvata to adjudicate.

The Krauncha Parvata was the son of Mainaak and the grandson of Himavantha. He was acquainted with the deity Indra, whereas he was totally unaware of the lad. In order to please the king of the deities, he bore false witness and declared that the deity Indra had won in the race.

The young boy was greatly enraged at this act of falsehood and struck the Krauncha Parvata a mighty blow with the weapon in his hand. This blow rendered the Krauncha Parvata into powder and thereby brought about

⁴⁰² Sages who have attained *Bramhajnana*

his demise. The deity Indra was stunned by this awesome display of power.

Himavantha, upon hearing this terrible news arrived at that place and found that the deceased was none other than his grandson, and that the person who had brought about this bereavement was his daughter's son, and started weeping uncontrollably.

The deity Indra was trembling like a leaf with terror, upon coming to realize that the young boy was none other than Lord Kumara Swamy, the formidable son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Paarvati. Meanwhile, Lord Shiva, Goddess Paarvati and Mainaak also arrived at that place. The atmosphere in that place became very sad and Himavantha was grieving greatly by clasping the hands of Lord Shiva.

Finally Lord Shiva addressed his son, "Son! These are all our relatives, Himavantha is your grandfather and Mainaak is your maternal uncle. Krauncha is your cousin and the deity Indra is a friend. Even if one of the relatives does a wrong, the elders of the family hesitate to inflict punishment, whereas you have caused his very death."

To this Lord Kumara Swamy, replied, "Father! Please forgive me. I will restore Krauncha to life." Then he approached the demolished Krauncha and addressed him, "Get up! Get up!" Astonishingly, Krauncha arose in a trice.

The deity Devendra, realizing the might of Lord Kumara Swamy, fell at his feet and craved his pardon.

After that he pleaded with Lord Shiva to anoint Lord Kumara Swamy as the commander – in – chief of the deities.

It would be incorrect to assume that Krauncha was not punished, because after being killed he was resurrected. Every living being that dies will definitely be born again after some time has elapsed. In this incident the punishment inflicted by Lord Kumara Swamy on Krauncha was the agony of death.

He somehow underwent it. However, a very stringent punishment had been inflicted for a minor transgression. As compensation, Krauncha was restored to life in the same body. Ostensibly, it appears that Krauncha was revived due to Lord Shiva's words and the power of relations. In the mythologies, it is essential to discern the latent facts in such incidents, if the secrets inherent in the mythologies have to be discerned.

The reason behind the actions of the deity Indra, were that on espying the self effulgent boy, he thought that he could utilize him for his own purposes. In order to verify the capacity of that boy, he had challenged him.

The situation had gone out of control due to the impetuosity of Krauncha. Although, the test of the deity Indra had been completed with the administering of that

mighty blow, all the same he had been terrified by the unexpected turn of events.

Lord Shiva had recognized the deity Indra's good intentions, therefore He had stated, "The deity Indra is our friend." Since, the Lord Kumara Swamy had deemed it fit to make a greater display of his limitless prowess to the deity Indra, and in order to render justice towards Krauncha, who had been punished disproportionately to his sin; He restored the Krauncha Parvata to life.

In this manner, Lord Kumara Swamy revealed not only his valour and the power of *Tapas*⁴⁰³, but also his determination to uphold virtue. Therefore, one must learn to practice the essentials of virtue, which are inherent in the mythological stories. They can be discovered by analyzing the mythological stories in this fashion.

84. Saavitri

At times the stories in the Puranas resemble cinematographic trick scenes. Whenever such illusionary scenes are encountered, we have to understand that there are some hidden facts to be unearthed. In order to simplify our search, these Puranas will sometimes give us clues. The story of Savitri in the Varaaha Purana is a good example of this fact.

⁴⁰³ Deep meditation or ascetism

This story is unrelated to the story of Sati Savitri who had challenged the deity Yama. The mother goddess of the Vedas is also known as Savitri. Since, the Vedas are a compilation of sounds, what does the mother of such a compilation indicate? The sequel will enlighten us in this regard.

In the *Kruta Yuga*⁴⁰⁴, the deity Naarada visited the island of Swetha Dweepa. There he encountered a divine woman. Her eyes were very large, her mien was dignified and her smile was extremely alluring. The deity Naarada was rendered senseless by her beauty and said, “O beauteous woman! Who art thou?”

She accorded him a mysterious glance but did not reply. At that moment the Sage Naarada was suddenly deprived of his knowledge. This caused the deity Naarada much annoyance and after thinking for a while he bowed before her and pleaded with her to pardon him. She increased in size, manifold and in her enormous body a divine male, who was blazing like a fire, appeared.

While the deity Naarada was observing this, that male person also increased tremendously in size and another male was to be seen inside that person. That particular person was red in colour and well built. Again this man also enlarged in size and in his body another man

⁴⁰⁴ Righteous age

appeared, who was handsome and had ash besmeared on his body.

The deity Naarada was astounded at seeing these four people, one inside the other. He was unable to discern the underlying meaning of what he had seen. Thereupon the three men disappeared and the beautiful woman stood there smiling. The deity Naarada recognized her as the embodiment of great power and praised her. He humbly asked, “Who are you? Why have you taken away my Vedic Knowledge?”

The goddess replied, “Naarada! I am the mother of Vedas, my name is Savitri. My vision is very broad so my eyes are huge. My central attribute is not easily understood; as such my appearance is splendid. Those who had acquired mere superficial knowledge would be distracted by my beauty. Thus my appearance and my smile prove to be enchanting for such persons. Those who had been lured by the outer attractions would not obtain my real essence. That is why you had forgotten the Vedas, I have not taken them.”

After listening to this, the deity Naarada realized his fault. He begged her to forgive his mistake and addressed her, “Who are the men who appeared inside you?” The goddess Savitri said, “Naarada! The first man who resembles the fire is the Rigveda. He consumes all sins and signifies Lord Vishnu. The man inside him is Yajurveda. He is strong and well built and represents Lord Brahma. The third man

inside him is Samaveda. He is the provider of pleasure and symbolizes Lord Shiva.

From Rigveda, the basic sound Aa, from Yajurveda the basic sound Vu and from Samaveda the basic sound Ma have emerged.

Together these three fundamental sounds form the sound Om. *Omkar*⁴⁰⁵ follows the *Nada*⁴⁰⁶ and I am the *Nada.*” After hearing this, the consciousness of the deity Naarada commingled with the *Omkar* through the *Nada*. Immediately, he recollected the entire Vedas, their meaning and other associated sciences, and he also experienced the true meaning of *Omkar*.

Then the goddess addressed him, “Naarada! The name of this lake is Vedasaras, bathe in it.” After he had bathed in the lake, the deity Naarada was able to recollect his previous one thousand births. He was completely purified and praised the Goddess to the heavens.

The hidden hints in this story are disclosed by the story itself. It had established that the Vedamatha is *Nada*. However, there was one question that was left unanswered at the end of the story; a lake named Vedasaras was mentioned. What does it indicate? In order to unravel this mystery, a clue was provided, which stated that after having

⁴⁰⁵ Symbol representing Om

⁴⁰⁶ Sound

taken a bath in the lake, the deity Naarada could recollect his previous births.

There are two ways to study the Vedas. First, by learning them from a *Guru*⁴⁰⁷ and memorizing them. After having achieved this, if the soul is immersed in meditation, then the Veda sounds will reach the student from the heavens. Such a person would be termed as a *Mantra – drashta*⁴⁰⁸ or *Rishi*⁴⁰⁹.

This is the best way to learn the Vedas. Those who acquired knowledge of the Vedas in this manner would be able to see the past, present and future. This method was mentioned, although in a concealed manner, as bathing in the Veda Saras (Pond of Veda).

In this manner, we have to cultivate the habit of discovering the hidden secrets in the Puranic stories.

85. ANGAD

The word angadamu denotes a Bhujakeerthi or a specific ornament, which kings wear on their upper arms. Vaali, the king of the monkeys gave that name to his son, who was accordingly known as Angada. Even though Angada did not play a major role in the epic Ramayana, an

⁴⁰⁷ Religious or spiritual teacher

⁴⁰⁸ Seer of a Mantra

⁴⁰⁹ Sage to whom the Vedas were originally revealed

observation of his character reveals the manner in which Lord Sri Rama transformed a living being, who was in an intermediate state to an excellent state. However, this change took quite some time.

When Angada, the son of Taara and Vaali, was about to enter the phase of youth, a war took place between Vaali and Sugreeva, in which Vaali lost his life. Since, Vaali died in the war, his kingdom was handed over to the victor, Sugreeva.

Although Angada was almost as powerful as Vaali, he did not possess the power of *Tapas*⁴¹⁰ and the wealth of boons, which had been the lot of Vaali. Moreover, he was young. This caused Angada great sorrow, because he was unsure of what would happen to him.

However, Sugreeva made him the crown prince, which made him very grateful to him. Nevertheless, Angada still harboured suspicions regarding the intentions of Sugreeva.

Shortly afterwards, Sugreeva ordered the monkeys to go in all the four directions to search for Sitamaata. Among the monkeys proceeding towards the south were great beings like Hanuman and Jaambavanta. Sugreeva appointed Angada as the leader of that mighty group proceeding

⁴¹⁰ Deep meditation or ascetism

towards the south, because he was the crown prince. It was indeed a great honour; all the same Sugreeva warned all the monkeys that he would kill them if they came back without finding the whereabouts of Sitadevi.

A suspicion arose in Angad's mind, that the warning was intended only for him. The monkeys searched high and low for Sitamaata, but her whereabouts could not be ascertained. This caused immense fear in Angada, who disclosed his fear to the other members of his group and declared that he was going to end his life by performing prayopavesam or a fast unto death, as Sugreeva would anyhow kill him.

Then he began to perform that vow on the shores of the sea in the pilgrim centre of Rameswaram. At that instant Jaambavanta, who was the senior most member of that group, remonstrated with Angada very strongly and encouraged him, "The kingdom of Raavana is in the middle of the sea. Jump and cross the sea and search in that place." Angada replied that he could cross the sea and reach Lanka, but that he did not possess the courage to return from the other side.

This answer pleased Jaambavanta, who exhorted Angada to encourage Hanuman, and to use him to complete the assignment successfully. Angada realized his folly and strictly followed the advice given to him by Jaambavanta.

The mighty Hanuman discovered the place where Sitadevi had been hidden by Raavana. Subsequently, the war between Rama and Raavana started. Angada became a commander of Sri Rama's Army. Lord Rama thought that it would be better if a final ambassador of peace was sent to the court of Raavana. At that stage the question arose as to who should undertake this mission.

By that time Angada no longer had any suspicions or doubts in his mind and he had also realized the divinity of Lord Sri Rama. Accordingly, he went to Raavana's court as a messenger and talked fearlessly. He returned after striking terror in the hearts of the demons. During the course of the war, Angada killed Mahaakaaya, one of Raavana's most feared commanders. Later on Raavana, who had faced a lot of defeats, lost his courage and took a vow to perform a special demon *Yajna*⁴¹¹ to bring about the death of Lord Rama.

This information came to the knowledge of Lord Rama, and Vibheeshana warned Him that Raavana would become insuperable if he completed that sacrifice. While everyone else was pondering as to the course of action to adopt, Angada bounded into the inner chambers of Raavana with supreme courage and seized Mandodari Devi by her tresses. Then he at once repaired to the place where Raavana was performing the homa. On witnessing this

⁴¹¹ Vedic sacrifice

extremely distressing spectacle, Raavana discontinued the homa and started to fight with Angada, in order to protect his wife.

Angada broke Raavana's vow in this manner, and after giving him four blows he returned. Later on Raavanasura could not do anything special to win. He commenced the war and was defeated at the hands of Lord Sri Rama.

Sugreeva had been residing in Ayodhya, most of the time after the coronation of Lord Sri Rama. As Sugreeva had no male offspring, Angada was crowned the king of the monkeys. Gradually, Angada developed devotion towards Lord Sri Rama. Even then, the feeling that Lord Sri Rama had killed his father did not leave him. Therefore, Lord Sri Rama blessed him to be born as a huntsman during the incarnation of Lord Sri Krishna. The arrow let loose by that huntsman, pierced Lord Sri Krishna's foot and brought about the end of that incarnation.

The huntsman who came to know of that matter was overwhelmed with sorrow. He remembered his previous birth, due to the compassion of Lord Sri Krishna, and realized that his present heinous act was the result of the foulness left in his mind in the previous Yuga. This resulted in his becoming a holy man.

Thus, Angada, who belonged to the *Treta Yuga*⁴¹², was completely purified at the end of the *Dwaapara Yuga*⁴¹³.

86. ANGAARAPARNA

Sometimes, even those endowed with supernatural powers commit mistakes and suffer humiliation. All the same, there are people who attain greatness even though they do not possess such powers. The reason for this is their innate devotion to virtue. The story of Angaaraparna, in the epic Mahabharata, provides us with an exemplary explanation of this truth.

Subsequent, to escaping from the house of lac, the Pandavas resided in Ekachakrapuram for some time. From that place, they left for the city of Drupada and they had to traverse a forest path on the banks of the river Ganga. The forest was very dense, it was midnight and pitch dark. To add to the fearfulness of the scene, a dreadful voice was to be heard, which said, “Who are you? Do you not know that this forest and river belong to Angaaraparna? How dare you enter this place?”

That voice was awful and fear inspiring. The Pandavas were unaware of Angaaraparna or his power. Moreover, Arjuna was displeased at being accosted in this harsh manner, which was devoid of even a modicum of respect. In addition, he was totally devoid of fear. So, he immediately shouted back, “The River belongs to the person who bathes in it and the forest to the person who walks in it. This is the highest truth in this context. We

⁴¹² Second of the four epochs that constitute a great epoch

⁴¹³ Third of the four yugas

do not have to change our path just because some person raises an objection.”

Arjuna, while retorting in this manner, was examining his surroundings. As a result, he perceived a headstrong *Gandharva*⁴¹⁴, surrounded by women. All of them were riding in boats on the River Ganga and making merry. Arjuna understood that the *Gandharva* had shouted at them in order to prevent the invasion of their privacy. Accordingly, Arjuna decided that they should leave that place. However, at that very moment, the enraged *Gandharva*, under the influence of strong drink; let loose a multitude of arrows at the Pandavas.

All the while he was shouting, “How dare you reply back to me?” This immediately, aroused the mighty warrior within Arjuna. His bow assumed the shape of a disc and his arrows proved to be the messengers of the Deity of Death.

In a short period of time, Angaaraparna was rendered weapon less and trembling with fear. Arjuna pounced upon him, clutched his hair, gave him a couple of buffets, dragged him and threw him at the feet of his eldest brother Dharmaraja. Angaaraparna’s wife arrived at that place and fell at the feet of Dharmaraja. Then she beseeched him to restore her husband to her. Dharmaraja pacified both Arjuna and Angaaraparna and asked, “By the way Oh Angaaraparna! Who are you in reality? Why do you hate us?”

To this the *Gandharva* replied, “O! King! My name is Angaaraparna. I am a *Gandharva* and a friend of Kubera. I came

⁴¹⁴ Celestial beings who are expert musicians

here to revel on the river in the company of this bevy of maidens. I failed to recognize you and had thought that you were some *Kshatriyas*⁴¹⁵ travelling in the forest without *Agnihotra*⁴¹⁶. Since, I was certain that mediocre people, who failed to perform the *Agnihotra*, would not possess the power of weapons, and also in order to display my bravery before these women, I attacked you. There was no other cause and I did not harbour any hatred against you. Nevertheless, something good has taken place. I was able to witness the prowess and skill of this young warrior with my own eyes. I have also observed your devotion to peace and righteousness.

Consequently, I am very happy to befriend you. To demonstrate my intentions, I am desirous of giving the Chaakshushi, a *Gandharva* art, to Arjuna; let it be a token of my friendship. In addition, I would like to gift some horses from the *Gandharva* world, to you. Finally, I want to impart a piece of important advice to you. It is unsuitable for good *Kshatriyas* like you, to wander about without performing the worship of *Agni*⁴¹⁷ and without a priest. Therefore, take the renowned Dhaumya as your priest. This will make your weapons shine with much greater brilliance and also render them much more powerful.”

Thereupon, this *Gandharva* displayed a magical feat before them. In his battle with Arjuna, his chariot had been consumed by the flames from Arjuna’s arrows. The *Gandharva* transformed that heap of ash into a bejewelled chariot. After that

⁴¹⁵ Persons belonging to the warrior caste

⁴¹⁶ Ritual to purify the environment

⁴¹⁷ Fire

he declared his intention to change his name, as he had been vanquished at the hands of Arjuna.

Moreover, in recognition of his creation of the fabulous chariot, he changed his name to Chithraratha. Subsequently, Arjuna questioned Chithraratha, “What is this art of Chaakshushi?” Chithraratha replied, “This art allows its practitioner to obtain knowledge about the antecedents of anyone in the three worlds.

Furthermore, any incident can be witnessed by such a person. I will teach you this art, and you teach me how to use the *Aagneyastra*⁴¹⁸.”

Whereupon, Arjuna said, “Angaaraparna, you are aware of the fact that we cannot forsake righteousness. There is no necessity to teach me the Chaakshushi art. I will teach you the Aagneyastra and in exchange, give us brothers the horses from the *Gandharva* world. We can neither accept free gifts nor can we even request the *Gandharva* Art that helps one to perform supernatural feats.” Angaaraparna was once again taken aback by Arjuna’s adherence to virtue.

Angaaraparna denotes a person whose wings consist of fire. That extremely fierce *Gandharva* transformed into Chithraratha, due to friendship with the Pandavas. Chithraratha connotes a person who has exquisite sense organs, or in other words an excellent person. Arjuna refused to accept even the Chaakshushi art, which confers supernatural powers. As a

⁴¹⁸ Weapon of fire

Kshatriya, he was convinced that he was precluded from receiving anything gratis.

Thus, he accepted the *Gandharva* horses as fair exchange for the *Agneyastram*. Such stability is difficult to achieve, unless there is tremendous devotion towards virtue. It was this very same devotion to virtue that enabled Arjuna to become a great person and the lord of Angaaraparna.

87. AANGIRASA

The true reason behind the righteousness of *Mahaatma*⁴¹⁹ is sacrifice. The baseborn ignore this truth and try to identify *Mahaatmas* with their magical and divine powers. The biography of Aangirasa *Maharshi*⁴²⁰ included an incident, which would enable such people to identify *Mahaatmas*.

In ancient times, there was an era that had been named Chakshuva Manvantaram. The ruler of that era was Chakshuva Manu and the *Kshirasagara – Mathana*⁴²¹, transpired during that period. One of his children, Uruva who was also called Ulmukuda, had several sons and Aangirasa was one of them.

⁴¹⁹ Noble minded

⁴²⁰ Great Sage

⁴²¹ Churning of the Ocean of Milk

Aangirasa had performed tremendous *Tapas*⁴²², with the result that he was born from the mind of Lord Brahma, in his next birth. The Lord gave him the name of his previous birth and in this manner; he acquired the name Angira *Maharshi*.

From the time of his birth, he had a contented mind and he used to meditate all the time. He obtained a number of powers, but he had no desires. He was unaware of the powers that he had gained and he was wont to disregard them. Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe, knew these facts.

At that time, the deity Agni squabbled with the other deities and in a fit of rage refused to continue in his ordained position. Subsequently, he abandoned that position and repaired to the forest, in order to perform *Tapas*. It is not human nature alone, but also that of the deities, which behaves in a peculiar fashion. Such behaviour results from the mind, which is not only complex but also eccentric.

The deity Agni had deserted his station out of resentment and apathy, but his mind thought, "If I abandon this position, there is no other deity, with the requisite competence to do justice to it. This would compel the deities to approach me beseechingly; as they do not have any other option in this matter."

⁴²² Deep meditation or ascetism

The deity Agni commenced his *Tapas*, but his mind was preoccupied with grief. He was pestered by the thought that someone or the other would occupy the post abandoned by him, after proposing suitable adjustments. To compound his misery, no deity approached him and pleaded with him to resume his duties. This situation became intolerable and the deity Agni, being unable to withstand the mental stress, discontinued his *Tapas* and returned to his kingdom.

He was thunderstruck on perceiving Angira *Maharshi* on his throne. The *Maharshi* had greater effulgence than him and in addition to performing his ordained duties he was also meditating. The deity Agni's anxious enquiries revealed that Lord Brahma had appointed Angira *Maharshi* to that post.

He also came to know that after the assumption of office, the proceedings in the Agni plane were progressing in an extremely smooth fashion.

The erstwhile deity Agni was totally disappointed. He was not in a position to match the competence of Angira *Maharshi*, whose fame was tremendous and whose competence was unmatched. These new developments convinced him that he would have to give up any hopes of being reappointed to that post. Subsequently, he became highly dejected, and the news of this development reached Angira *Maharshi*.

Immediately, Angira *Maharshi* approached the deity Agni and bowed before him. This gesture served to petrify the deity Agni. After that the great Angira *Maharshi* calmly addressed him, “Agni Deva! Welcome! In order to ensure the daily routine without interruption during your absence, my father had appointed me to your post. Now that you have come, my responsibility ceases. You can resume office whenever you wish to.” The deity Agni, after hearing these words, regained normalcy and though, his mouth was closed, his eyes moved and he was lost deep in thoughts.

“This *Muni*⁴²³ has addressed me in dulcet tones, but he had enjoyed the luxuries of the post. Can he forsake the post that easily? May be, beyond his honeyed words there is some ulterior motive?” This made him to think with great agitation. Angira *Maharshi* looked deeply into his eyes and once again offered his salutation to him. Thereupon, he once again talked to him, “Agni Deva! You need not doubt me. You are venerable and a deity. I am a mere human and a child. I am like your son and if it pleases you, you can adopt me as your step son. I will serve you, with the utmost of respect, as a son.”

These words of Angira *Maharshi* made the deity Agni feel slightly embarrassed but extremely happy. “It is my great fortunate to have a son like you” declared the deity

⁴²³ Ascetic

Agni. After that the deity Agni embraced him and accepted him as his adopted son.

This regal sacrifice of Angira *Maharshi* astonished the entire *Devaloka*⁴²⁴, whose residents showered him with flowers. Subsequently, that great man became the founder of the clan named Aangirasa gothram.

It is to be observed that the great Angira *Maharshi* had never displayed his supernatural powers anywhere or at any time. When his father instructed him he did not evade his duty and he did not hide his ability. Moreover, he did not hesitate to give up his post of eminence at the opportune moment. His great sacrifice enabled him to become one of the Saptarshis. The blessings of that *Maharshi* would certainly a person's abilities and sacrifices.

88. ANDHAKA ASURA

What is blindness? The usual answer is the absence of eyes or eyesight. If that is so, then what is the meaning of blindness in the phrases blind belief and blind thoughts? When we start to think along these lines, we soon realize that the meaning is not all that simple to decipher. The exact meaning has been properly explained in a story in our Puranas, namely in the story of Andhaka Asura.

⁴²⁴ World of the deities

Once, the goddess Paarvati Devi approached Lord Shiva from behind and closed his eyes in play. At that time, Lord Shiva was deep in meditation, as the goddess Paarvati Devi closed his eyes, her hand started to sweat.

From those droplets of sweat a small child fell down to the ground and commenced to cry loudly. By that time the goddess Paarvati Devi had realized her fault. She lifted the child and found that it was blind. In the mean time Lord Shiva had opened his eyes and said “As the boy was born blind, we will name him as Andhaka. This boy was born due to your playfulness and as such you have to rear it.”

The penitent goddess Paarvati Devi took the boy and reared him without any argument. At the same time, the demon king Hiranyaksha had performed very deep *Tapas*⁴²⁵ on Lord Shiva, in order to be blessed with children. The Lord manifested Himself before him and said “You do not deserve to bear children; however, you can adopt my son, since you had meditated on me with such extraordinary fervour.”

The king Hiranyaksha agreed to this and returned to his palace with Andhaka. Gradually, the boy developed a wide range of divine powers. Despite, his blindness, he became very powerful and invincible.

⁴²⁵ Deep meditation or ascetism

At that time Lord Vishnu, in the Varaaha Avataara, executed Hiranyaaksha. Consequently, Andhaka lost his sustenance, so he meditated on Lord Brahma and asked for the boon of eternal life without death. Lord Brahma laughed and said “How can I grant you what even I do not possess?” Andhaka had anticipated Lord Brahma’s reply, accordingly, he stated, “If that is the case, then grant me the boon that my death will transpire, when I desire a woman whom I am precluded from desiring.”

At this Lord Brahma laughed and said “Let it be so! In addition, you will no longer be blind.” Andhaka was proud of his celibacy and control over his limbs, and this pride constituted his blind belief! He had asked for that boon on the basis of this blind belief. Lord Brahma knew about this therefore, he had laughed at Andhaka’s wish. Andhaka was immensely happy as he had gained vision and returned to his kingdom. Thereafter he annexed heaven and stayed there.

He used to declare that the compulsions of monarchy had compelled him to remain in heaven. However, he made it very clear that he was in no way allured by the pleasures of heaven.

Initially, he lived up to his words, but all of a sudden, due to reasons unknown, he lost his resolve. Over a period of time he made attractive women to stay with him and he achieved this by either employing force or enticement. As

things were progressing in this fashion, one day some of his attendants informed him that a beautiful girl, escorted by a *Muni*⁴²⁶, was residing in the Himalayan caves. They extolled her beauty to the king and provoked him to acquire her. The king Andhaka was aroused by their description of the girl and ordered them to abduct the girl and get rid of the *Muni*.

However, his assistants were repulsed by the chieftain who was guarding the cave. This forced Andhaka to enter the fray, and on reaching that place, he beheld the goddess Paarvati Devi in that place.

He was tremendously attracted to the Goddess and fought ferociously. Lord Shiva took up arms and prolonged the battle for five thousand years, in order to deplete the virtuousness of Andhaka.

Finally, Lord Shiva pierced Andhaka with his trident and raised him to the sky; and kept him skewered like that for a thousand years. At the end of that period, the body of Andhaka was reduced to just the skin and bones.

In that sorry state, Andhaka remembered the circumstances of his birth and repented in the following fashion, "I am the son of the goddess Paarvati Devi and I am a man of self abstinence. I forgot these two important facts and desired my own mother! Can anyone be a greater fool

⁴²⁶ Ascetic

than me! Is there any person whose is blinder than me? Now, I realize as to why Lord Brahma had laughed at me. In the present situation, death is certain; and despite having obtained eyesight I continued to remain a blind person. I require Lord Shiva's forgiveness, in order to get rid of my blindness."

In that manner he took cognizance of the truth and meditated for another thousand years, dangling from the trident. After his sins had been gradually destroyed, Lord Shiva exonerated him and bestowed true wisdom upon him.

Thereafter Lord Shiva appointed him as the leader of one of his *Pramatha*⁴²⁷ armies. In this way, Andhaka attained immortality and divinity.

This story of Andhaka Asura describes real blindness. Lack of awareness is blindness; because it promotes unbounded self confidence, which results in blind confidence. Furthermore, it leads to blind thinking; and persons lacking in discrimination and judgment would be driven by incessant lust, which would certainly bring about their demise. That is why the deity Manmadha was also termed as Andhaka Satru, which means he who kills the blind. If we get rid of such blindness we will gain the vision of eternity and wisdom; and this requires the blessings of Lord Shiva.

⁴²⁷ Principal

89. AMBA

During the times of the Mahabharata, there lived a damsel named Amba. The story of this maiden, serves as a warning to girls who fall in love before marriage. It also cautions girls who feel that their love is eternal and develop overconfidence as a consequence.

Amba denotes a mother, and this unfortunate girl Amba, remained a mother to all throughout her life; but she was unable to become the better half of any person. Her story is replete with ups and downs, and twists and turns. This story, despite the passage of time, has not lost its relevance to contemporary society. She was a vivacious girl and exhibited great administrative capability and devotion to her duties. Her father, King of Kaashi Hotravaahana, had given a free rein to his daughters.

Amba, being aided by that independence and her verve, fell head over heels in love with Saalva, the brother of king Sisupal. However, her sisters Ambica and Ambalika did not develop any such relationship.

Their father asked them to select a bridegroom and arranged a *Swayamvara*⁴²⁸. These turn of events rendered Amba extremely happy.

⁴²⁸ Ceremony, in which a prospective bride selects her husband, from amongst a number of suitors

However, fate decreed otherwise; and King Bhishma, unexpectedly, arrived at that *Swayamvara* and took his seat in the place meant for the prospective bridegrooms. Bhishma was celebrated for his valour and heroism in those days and all the other warriors were terrified of him. The news of his pledge that he would never marry had already spread throughout the land, and this Bhishma had arrived at the *Swayamvara*. Amba was a brave girl, who had never feared anyone. She gestured to her sisters to pass in front of Bhishma and stepped forward.

Suddenly, Bhishma stood up and announced that he was taking the three princesses with him, in order to perform their marriage with his brothers. Thereupon, he confined them to his chariot and proceeded towards his kingdom. The son of the king Salvaraj resisted Bhishma and commenced to fight with him.

This sudden development emboldened the other kings, who joined hands with him to fight against Bhishma. However, Bhishma defeated all of them and left that place without killing them. He took the three princesses with him. Their father Kasiraja was deeply distressed and shocked. He consoled himself with the thought that his three daughters would end up as the queens of the great Empire of India, and that they were on the verge of occupying a higher pedestal than his.

Despite this fact, he was much annoyed at the abduction of his daughters, but he was forced to keep his counsel, as there was nothing useful that he could do in the matter. At the capital Hastinaapura, these three sisters were acclaimed by the people of the city. Their prestige was at its pinnacle, and these developments assuaged the agony of Ambica and Ambalika. They were beside themselves with joy and readily accepted marriage. However, Amba was on the horns of a dilemma, due to her inability to forsake her love for Saalva. She started to think that she had loved Saalva, unswervingly and that he had reciprocated her love by confronting Bhishma, in order to release her, despite being aware of the fact that the task was beyond him.

Furthermore, he had been prepared to sacrifice his life for her sake. It would be well nigh impossible for her to marry the emperor, because such an act would be tantamount to treachery towards such a great gallant. In addition, was such an act in accordance with *Dharma*⁴²⁹? Was it justifiable? Was it love and was it in accordance with humanity? She continually tormented herself by indulging in these thoughts.

Then, in a daring move, she approached Bhishma and posed the same questions to him. Till that time Bhishma had been in a furious mood. When the princess Amba demanded these answers of him, he was unable to answer her. After

⁴²⁹ Righteousness

that he set aside his courageous stance, accepted the mistake committed by him and sent her back to her lover, in accordance with all the royal customs.

Saalva refused to accept her and said “I was vanquished and Bhishma the winner abducted you, in the presence of everyone. After confining you for ten days he has sent you back. As the king I am answerable to my subjects. It is improper and unrighteous for me to accept you as my wife.”

His contention was irrefutable, due to the fact that if he surrendered to a woman, he could no longer live like a warrior or a king. Consequently, he would be rendered unfit to rule. The princess Amba grasped the nuances inherent in the situation and decided to abstain from compelling Saalva.

The society of that age was entirely depended on *Yajnas*⁴³⁰. How was she to live in society without performing *Yajnas* and without getting married? She forswore her love and returned to Bhishma, whom she addressed with firm determination, “Due to your impulsiveness, I became unsuitable to the king Saalva, therefore, get me married to your brother, in accordance with your previous plan.”

To this Bhishma replied without any hesitation, “A girl who went in search of some other person, in order to

⁴³⁰ Vedic sacrifices

wed him, is precluded from becoming the empress of the Kingdom of Bharat.”

This reply enraged Amba, who said, “I do not want the kingdom but the *Yajna*, so you marry me.” At this Bhishma reprimanded her and attempted to cast her out of the palace.

The princess Amba was beside herself with rage due to the acts of Bhishma and decided to kill him at any cost. After contemplating for a while, she realized that her father’s kingdom was smaller than that of Bhishma’s and that Saalva could not defeat him. In addition, her desire for revenge against Bhishma was continuously increasing.

After giving the matter a great deal of thought, she decided to quench her thirst for vengeance by obtaining supernatural powers through *Tapas*⁴³¹. Thereupon, she was beset by thoughts like where she was to meditate; she had always lived regally, could she perform *Tapas* in the deep forests? Could she live in such places? After mulling over these practical problems, she proceeded to the city of Kasi, selected a place on its outskirts and commenced *Tapas*.

In this society, is it possible for a girl to perform *Tapas*? The neighbouring people made impertinent enquiries regarding her marital status and other such

⁴³¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

personal details. In addition, they expressed their doubts regarding her capacity to withstand *Tapas*.

Moreover, they were be unable to curb their curious tongues and would continually disturb her with their unnecessary and unceasing chatter. Being unable to cope up with these obstacles, she went to the distant forests and performed *Tapas* amidst the wild animals. There she realized that the wild animals were friendly towards those who indulged in sincere *Tapas*.

Her father, Kashi Raja after coming to know of her terrible plight, became highly depressed. Consequently, he forsook his kingdom and settled down in the forest, in order to perform *Tapas*. One day, due to the grace of God, he chanced upon Amba. They embraced each other tightly and bemoaned the misfortune that had befallen them. Her father shared her conviction that Bhishma was responsible for this disaster in their life and he also expressed his desire to be revenged upon him.

Subsequently, he addressed his daughter “Dear girl! This Bhishma is a disciple of *Maharshi*⁴³² Parashurama. If we could obtain his help our task of taking revenge would become easier. We will enquire about his whereabouts in the *Ashrams*⁴³³ of the *Rishis*⁴³⁴.” In the course of his

⁴³² Great Sage

⁴³³ Dwellings

⁴³⁴ Sages to whom the Vedas were originally revealed

enquiries, he came to know that *Maharshi* Parashurama was on his way to the very place where they were residing.

They approached *Maharshi* Parashurama and narrated their tale of woe to him. He asked them a number of questions, in order to understand all the facts of that unfortunate episode. Subsequently, he advised them to make an attempt to once again convince Saalva. The princess Amba said to him, “Bhishma is at fault for what all has happened and he deserves punishment.” *Maharshi* Parashurama was unable to refute her contention. In order to render assistance and to do justice to a maiden, he approached king Bhishma, in the company of princess Amba and commanded him to accept her.

Bhishma refused to obey his *Guru*⁴³⁵ and a lengthy parley ensued between them on righteousness, which deteriorated into a physical battle that lasted twenty – four days. In that battle, *Maharshi* Parashurama was defeated and escaped with life, as he was spared by Bhishma.

Afterwards, the *Maharshi* called on the princess Amba and told her, “Dharma always emerges victorious. Bhishma has won. Since, I had given you my word of honour; I fought against Bhishma, thereby staking my very life. There is nothing more that I can do in this regard. I am leaving.” With these words the *Maharshi* left that place.

⁴³⁵ Religious or spiritual teacher

The princess Amba was taken aback by this incident and was disheartened. She returned to the forest and conducted severe penance on Lord Shiva. The goddess, River Ganga was deeply impressed by her *Tapas* and appeared before her as a pious lady. She asked Amba, “Why are you performing *Tapas*?” Seeing another woman,

Amba narrated her tale of woe to her in all its details and declared vehemently that she had commenced *Tapas*, in order to kill the wicked Bhishma. The goddess Ganga Devi cursed her immediately on hearing her reply, “Your story depicts your abnormal behaviour. Your very thoughts and gait are crooked and all of your *Tapas* will prove to be futile.

At most, you might become a winding river with many curves. Even then you would not be able to reach your husband, the sea, and would only merge with a larger river. What is that you can do, other than this, to my son?” After cursing the princess Amba in this manner, that pious woman disappeared into the flowing Ganga. The princess Amba, till that moment, had not recognized her as the mother of Bhishma.

This setback further enhanced her determination; and she increased the intensity of her *Tapas*, with the result that the curse of the goddess Ganga was restricted to the *Tapas*, which Amba had performed till that time. That portion of her *Tapas* was transformed as the River Amba, which became a tributary of the Ganga.

The rest of her *Tapas* brought about the manifestation of Lord Shiva, Who blessed her and granted her a wish. She asked Lord Shiva to vouchsafe to her the power to kill Bhishma. Lord Shiva granted her wish and said, “You will be the cause of death of Bhishma. You will be born as the daughter of king Drupada and after that you will transform into a man.” With these words, Lord Shiva evanesced.

These events proved to be highly disheartening to Amba. King Saalva and King Bhishma had refused to consider her pure, and even the *Maharshi* Parashurama was unable to help her. The people had criticized her and the goddess Ganga Devi had declared that she was an unprincipled person. Even then she had not paid heed to them. Lord Shiva, out of satisfaction with her *Tapas*, had told her that she had to be reborn in order to kill Bhishma.

Amba realized the folly of her ways and her lack of virtue. She lost interest in life, but not the desire to kill Bhishma. These two contradictory emotions caused her to plunge into a lighted pyre. Subsequently, she was born as the daughter of king Drupada and after some time her gender underwent a transformation, with the result that she became a man.

This was due to the boon granted to her by Lord Shiva, in her previous birth. This was the origin of Shikhandi; nevertheless she did not kill Bhishma. She only became the

cause of his death, in accordance with what Lord Shiva had ordained.

Amba's life was replete with fluctuations, due to her falling in love at a young age. This had resulted in the perversion of her thoughts and behaviour. The princess Amba was a great person and her love was without blemish. She was fearless and possessed of strong determination. Despite, being endowed with these exemplary traits, her life was unsuitable for being emulated.

Even Lord Shiva did not praise her and there was no contentment in her life or that of her parents. The sole cause for this turmoil in her life was her animosity and impulsiveness. Her story teaches us to avoid haste in love and life.

90. SHIKHANDI

The princess Amba desired to bring about the death of the grand sire Bhishma. After immolating herself on the funeral pyre, she was born as the daughter of King Drupada, in her very next birth. Her parents gave her the masculine name of Shikhandi, as she did not have thick tresses like the other girls. Shikhandi denotes a boy with locks of hair just above and in front of the ears.

From a very tender age, when gender distinctions were beyond her comprehension, her parents made her

wear the apparel of a boy. Later on, when she was old enough to make out the difference, her parents coaxed and coerced her to behave, transport and grow up like a boy. As she grew older, her parents sent her to school. In school, during games, she used to feel timorous, whenever other boys came into physical contact with her.

Shikhandi gradually developed inner grace, and it was her fond desire to consort with other girls and to dress like them. On the one hand she was proud of growing up like a boy, but on the other she was deeply troubled in her mind.

After she had grown older, her father sent her to Dronacharya to become a toxophilite. Although, she was elated at learning the science of warfare, she was unable to develop as strong a body as the other warriors, despite exercising very hard. Her elder brother, Dhrushtadyumna was intrepid and unyielding, while her elder sister; Draupadi was an exquisite beauty, despite being jet black in colour.

Shikhandi was torn between the desire to develop as a male warrior and the desire to develop into a charming and graceful damsel; and this caused her considerable despondency.

Even though she did not emerge as a great warrior, nevertheless, she was regarded as a competent warrior. Dronacharya ignored his abhorrence for her father and taught her all the secrets of warfare. This failed to evoke any

affection in Shikhandi towards him. However, what was truly surprising was that whenever she discerned Bhishmacharya, she became wrathful.

While the other children were full of praise for the ideal life that he led, she used to feel that he was pride incarnate.

Whenever it was stated that Bhishma was a great warrior, she would get the conviction that she would defeat him. However, she realized the incongruity of her thoughts, which used to haunt her all the time. While she was being beleaguered by these emotions, her parents compounded her misery by formalising her betrothal to another princess. Shikhandi was terrified to put it mildly. However, the astonishment evoked by her mother's words was greater.

She told Shikhandi that her brother and sister had emerged from the Homakund, when her father had performed a *Yajna*⁴³⁶ to obtain children and thereby allay his wife's grief at being barren. Being pleased with the performance of the *Yajna*, Lord Shiva had manifested Himself and had granted the boon of a child to him.

Lord had informed him that the child, though a girl at birth, would later on become a boy. Thus, Shikhandi was being brought up as a boy. Now a doubt arose in Shikhandi's

⁴³⁶ Vedic sacrifice

mind, as to whether her mother's words could be trusted. If she refused to get married, then after becoming a boy she might be unable to get married.

As she was undergoing a mental turmoil in this regard, her mother once again addressed her and revealed the fact that her father, Drupada, bore a grudge against both Dronacharya and Bhishma. Accordingly, he had obtained Dhruvadyumna to kill Drona, while Shikhandi was procured for the purpose of killing Bhishma. Moreover, Lord Shiva had granted a boon to this end.

On hearing that she would bring about the death of Bhishma, on the strength of Lord Shiva's blessing, her body tingled with pleasure, from end to end. She was unable to understand the reason for her delight. All the same, Shikhandi's belief that she would change into a man, was firmly entrenched on hearing the words of her mother. In that highly excited state she married the daughter of the king of Dasaarna.

However, her joy was short lived; because the new bride realized that her husband was a girl. While Shikhandi hid her face in shame; king Dashaarna, accompanied by his large army, declared war against Drupada. The news that Shikhandi was a girl, whose marriage had been performed by deceit with the result that king Dasaarna had declared war, spread like wildfire, throughout the kingdom. Even the beggars, were having a good laugh at this news.

Sikhandi was disconsolate and dismayed at the turn of events. She was unable to fathom the reason as to why she was still alive. To add to her misery, her father was obstinately insisting that she was a man. Sikhandi was extremely apprehensive, because the fact of her being a woman and not a man would come out into the open very soon. Therefore, she lost all interest in living this life of pretence. Since, there were no opportunities for committing suicide in her regal life, she fell into deep thought and fled to the forest.

It was her desperate hope that she would be devoured by a tiger if she went deep into the forest. However, her fate was such that she did not encounter any tiger or even a snake, despite walking for long. After the passage of quite some time in this manner, Sikhandi out of despondency, sat down under a Banyan tree and loudly lamented her miserable situation.

To her wonder, this uncontrolled outburst of grief gave her quite a bit of relief, and moreover, after a long time, since her birth, she could weep without any restraint. All at once, a demon jumped down from that banyan tree with a loud noise and demanded of her, “Who are you?”

On perceiving Shikhandi, who though dressed as a prince of distinction, was all the same sobbing like a woman, the demon was perplexed. Subsequently, his demeanour softened and he addressed her tenderly, “What is the

purpose of this disguise? Why are you weeping uncontrollably?" These kind words of the demon, dispelled Sikhandi's terror and she narrated her tragic tale to him. After that she entreated with him to devour her and once again resumed her bitter lamentation.

The original intention of the demon had been to kill and eat her. However, out of compassion for her and also due to the effect of the boon granted by Lord Shiva, he changed his mind and advised her in the following words. "Why do you want to lose your life in vain? I will transfer my masculinity to you for a day, due to which you will be transformed into a complete man. Go back home and prove to everyone that you are a full – fledged man. After that, come back to this place by tomorrow afternoon and return my manhood. If you deceive me, I will swallow your entire kingdom."

Sikhandi became very optimistic and agreed to this transfer of masculinity.

Subsequently, she became a man, proved her masculinity and convinced her father-in-law to return to his kingdom with his army. The next day, was sheer agony for her. She was reluctant to lose her manhood and she was at odds to know, as to how she was to live with her wife, once again as a woman after she had lived with her as a man. Moreover, she could not cheat that fearful demon. Finally, Sikhandi returned to the demon with a heavy heart.

The *Maaya*⁴³⁷ of Lord Shiva is profound. The male demon, who had transferred his masculinity stood tearfully before Sikhandi and addressed her, “Brother Sikhandi! You kept your word. I am very much pleased; all the same a great misfortune has befallen me. Yesterday, after you had left, my king came to this place. He was infuriated at the fact that I had taken your womanhood without his permission. Consequently, he completely deprived me of my supernatural power and I can no longer effect a gender change. Your wife is lucky, now go home, and live like a man forever.” With these words, the demon left that place.

Sikhandi, despite feeling a modicum of pity for the demon, was in the seventh heaven of bliss at this unexpected change in his fortune. Gradually, the news of Sikhandi’s transformation into a man spread amongst the people. Prior to that Sikhandi’s feminine qualities had been known to the public and the other warriors used to view her with derision. The boon granted by Lord Shiva had come true and Sikhandi had become a man. It would be in the fitness of things if she could bring about the death of Bhishma.

She became euphoric by thinking along these lines. However, the very thought of confronting Bhishma in battle, had the power to render a warrior sleepless, and this fact terrified her.

⁴³⁷ Divine power of illusion

Subsequently, Draupadi entered King Pandu's household as his daughter – in – law; and Bhishmacharya was their friend and well-wisher. It was certain that Draupadi's husband Arjuna, himself would tear Sikhandi to pieces, if the latter's intention towards Bhishma was disclosed. Sikhandi bided his time in fear. Later on, Sikhandi received information that Bhishma had come to know the details regarding his birth.

Sikhandi's agitation was enhanced by the fact that Bhishma did not evince any ill will towards either Sikhandi or Drupada's family. As such, Bhishmacharya commanded tremendous respect in the world. He had neither aversion nor desire and was famous for having conquered his senses.

How was it possible to deny his greatness, when he had not displayed any repugnance towards Sikhandi, despite knowing these facts? Was it possible to justify the unjustifiable hatred that Sikhandi nurtured towards such a venerable person? Sikhandi found that this problem defied solution.

In the meantime, a number of unexpected incidents transpired and the Mahabharata war commenced. Things came to such a pass that her brother-in-law Arjuna had to meet Bhishma, face to face in combat. It is said that Bhishmacharya himself revealed the strategy by which he could be defeated. He had taken a vow that he would never fight with a person who had been born as a woman, but had

later become a man. Moreover, he would not break his vow, despite knowing about Sikhandi.

In addition, he had even informed Duryodhana that he might be placed in danger due to Sikhandi. Upon hearing this, Sikhandi hated himself thinking about his worthlessness in comparison to the matchless Bhishma.

However, like rainfall without clouds, Arjuna asked Sikhandi to be his principal charioteer, and told him that he would place himself behind him in the chariot. Sikhandi immediately understood the import of Arjuna's words. "At last! An opportunity to engage in combat with Bhishma!

I will face him as the leader of the great charioteers. Lord Krishna will be a mere coachman under my feet! The mighty Arjuna will be an armed attendant behind my back! What a sight! This is a one of its kind opportunity. Moreover, Bhishma will not shoot arrows at me. Why should I fear?" Sikhandi lost his head due to these thoughts and conveyed his consent to Arjuna.

In the battle that ensued with Bhishma, Sikhandi's arrows were as effective as twigs against the adamant frame of Bhishma, who did not respond in kind. It seemed as if these arrows were being turned to ash, due to the extraordinary penance and effulgence of Bhishma.

Suddenly, Arjuna emerged from behind and sent a volley of arrows towards Bhishma. These arrows felled the mighty Bhishma.

The Grand Sire did not die but lay on the bed of arrows and commenced to joyously sing the praise of Lord Sri Krishna. The entire battlefield, which had been in tremendous uproar, suddenly became silent like the grave and warriors from both the camps temporarily suspended hostilities to approach the Grand Sire and kneel at his feet.

Sikhandi, the vile and despicable man who had brought about the defeat of Bhishma, was treated worse than dirt or a worm. His presence was not acknowledged by those present there and no one considered him to be a human being. Subsequently, he led a life replete with self loathing. He was unable to decipher the reason for his cowardice and spent rest of his life by hating himself, as he did not know why he had committed that disgraceful act and he was unable to fathom the benefit that he had gained from it.

Everybody ignored his existence and the manner in which the life of Sikhandi progressed and ended has not been accorded any importance.

He was unable to derive any satisfaction in having caused the death of Bhishma. All these setbacks in his life were attributable to the capital blunder he had

committed as Amba. He was neither a man nor a woman and the only thing that remained at the end of the day was his futile and obdurate perseverance.

The phrase Stubborn Sikhandi has become synonymous with Sikhandi's name and connotes foolish stubbornness. Sometimes, intense desires arise in the strange sport of human life. Devastating defeats take place and the adverse effects of not comprehending our environment come to the forefront.

The story of the intransigent Sikhandi establishes the fact that misfortune never forsakes the arrogant, who disregard the advice of the virtuous and the wise. May we never succumb to such iniquity, by the grace of Sri Datta SadGuru, who is the repository of mercy!

91. AMBAREESHA

God retained the function of creating people and merely allocated the task of naming people to them. Man being incapable of competing with the prodigious creativity of God, uses the same names perpetually. Despite the fact that the authenticity of this observation cannot be ascertained, in practice, one can concur with it. There are numerous instances that illustrate this contention and the name Ambareesha is one of them.

Several thousand men could have been named Ambareesha, in the Puranas and in times of yore. Some of them could have possibly been prominent at that time. Moreover, quite a few famous persons in the Puranas had been named Ambareesha. The Srimad Bhagvath alludes to two persons with that name. This story deals with Ambareesha the son of Naabhaaga.

Naabhaaga was an eminent philosopher and a prominent saint. His son Ambareesha succeeded him to the throne. By dint of his exceptional valour and administrative competence, Ambareesha became the Emperor of Bharat.

He conducted several *Asvamedha Yajnas*⁴³⁸ with great devotion and in accordance with the rules of *Dharma*⁴³⁹. However, in addition, to consolidating his emperorship with these *Yajnas*⁴⁴⁰, he also developed spiritual thoughts in his mind. As he grew older, his kingdom became more and more stable, and he attained inner peace and maturity of the mind.

Due to purity he was able to concentrate his mind on the Almighty and he was highly praised by the people for

⁴³⁸ Horse sacrifice. A religious rite that was conducted by a king to declare his supremacy, by allowing a stallion, accompanied by a royal escort to wander, in an unfettered manner; any king who captured such a horse, declared his unwillingness to accept the paramourcy of the king who was conducting this sacrifice.

⁴³⁹ Righteousness

⁴⁴⁰ Vedic sacrifices

being an able administrator and strict follower of dharma. He was erudite and moderate and he was a warrior as well as a devotee of the Lord. Gradually, the *Ekadasi Vrata*⁴⁴¹ became very important in his religious practices. This *Ekadasi Vrata* precluded him from partaking of food on the day of the *Ekadasi*.

This ritual requires the consumption of food, offered to God; before the expiry of the remaining moments of the *Dwaadashi*⁴⁴² day and is termed as the *Dwaadashi Paarana*⁴⁴³.

Ambareesha had been performing the *Ekadasi Vrata* from a very long time. No one had any idea about his achievements due to that *Vrata*⁴⁴⁴. He himself had never contemplated the benefits that would accrue to him due to this *Vrata*, and he had never desired anything from it. As usual, on one *Ekadasi* the king commenced his fast. On the following day the *Dwaadashi* minutes left were few and he had to eat food before they ended. Accordingly, king Ambareesha hurried through his usual rites. At that very

⁴⁴¹ Observance of a total fast on the eleventh day of the bright as well as the dark fortnight of the Lunar Month

⁴⁴² Twelfth day of the Lunar Month

⁴⁴³ Breaking the fast

⁴⁴⁴ Religious practice

instance, *Maharshi*⁴⁴⁵ Durvasa and his disciples arrived unannounced.

Maharshi Durvasa was famous for his ferocity, and Ambareesha visualized Lord Vishnu in the *Maharshi*. Consequent to veneration he invited the *Maharshi* cordially and invited him to dinner. Durvasa accepted the royal invitation and went to the river to take a bath, but he failed to return even after a very long time. The *Dwaadashi* minutes were ending and the king was concerned that his *Ekadasi Vrata* would be ruined. Nevertheless, he could not eat food before his guest had done so, in addition, the guest was a renowned *Maharshi*. If he partook of the food, in the absence of his guest, he would be committing a sin. If he had failed to take the food before the *Dwaadashi* minutes had ended, then also it would be a great sin. King Ambareesha felt as much torment as standing on fire, and knew not as to the course of action the he was to adopt.

He sought the advice of the senior most *Pandits*⁴⁴⁶, who had gathered in the *Yajnasala*⁴⁴⁷. They were pleased with the king's adherence to dharma and replied, "There is no need to worry. The seers of the holy shastras have prescribed ways to deal with such situations. Offer water to

⁴⁴⁵ Great Sage

⁴⁴⁶ Scholars

⁴⁴⁷ Place where the Vedic rite is performed

Lord Sri Hari and drink it as *Prasaadam*⁴⁴⁸, this will be as good as eating a meal.

However, you would not have eaten in reality. Partaking of the consecrated water, in order to complete the *Dwaadashi Parana*, would not breach your *Ekadasi Vrata*. Moreover, drinking water would not amount to eating food. In this manner, you will not be guilty of overlooking your guest, by taking food in his absence. This *via media* has been indicted in the *Shastras*⁴⁴⁹ and this is incontrovertible.”

The upshot of this discussion was that king Ambareesha offered water to God and consumed it. At that very moment, Durvasa arrived at that place like a tempest, and berated the king “O! Wicked king! Have you taken water as a substitute for food? That implies that you had eaten the meal without waiting for me. Do I look like a fool to you? See my prowess.” In this manner, he screamed at the king in rage. Thereupon, the *Maharshi* plucked one of his hairs, from which a demon emerged.

Ambareesha had a very large arsenal of weapons with him and in addition, he was a very great warrior, who had emerged victorious in numerous wars. Therefore, he was the least perturbed on seeing this demon. Nevertheless, in order to pacify the irate *Maharshi* he acted with the

⁴⁴⁸ Sanctified on being offered to God

⁴⁴⁹ Scriptures

utmost of humility and submissiveness. In addition, the king felt that he had been the cause for the anguish of the *Maharshi*, and ignored the steadily growing demon and pleaded with the *Maharshi* to forsake his rage.

Durvasa was not pacified by the pleadings of the king, and his fury was beyond control. He ordered the demon, Ghorakrutya, whom he had created, in these words, “This king insulted me. Devour him.”

Upon hearing this command, the demon further enlarged in size and opened his huge mouth. After that the demon bent his head down, in order to swallow the king. Ambareesha was unimpressed with the huge head of the demon, with its protruding teeth. He fervently exclaimed, “Sri Hari” and once again supplicated Durvasa, “*Maharshi!* Please be pacified.”

The courtiers and others present at that place fled in terror, and while doing so they were shouting “All is over. Our king will be consumed by the demon.” Everyone present at that place was terrified at these developments. At that moment, a whirling disc of light came into view and no one had the slightest idea as to how it had come and from where it had materialized.

The disc was revolving like the wheel of the Sun deity or like a wheel of fire. Whilst everyone was watching it in

great astonishment, it decollated⁴⁵⁰ the demon and the droplets of blood from the decapitated demon were discharged by this disc into the sky above the city. The citizens were astonished and Durvasa was shocked by this event.

However, before he could regain his senses; the disc, which was covered with the blood of the dead demon, spun towards him. Durvasa was enraged by this and concentrated his entire power of *Tapas*⁴⁵¹ to destroy it.

However, his attempt met with failure, and in order to escape from it he fled from that place with great speed to save himself. This was to no avail, as the disc followed him with the same speed. Thereupon, Durvasa employed his considerable powers to ascend into the air and proceed to the world of Lord Brahma.

As he was describing his predicament to Lord Brahma, the disc appeared. On seeing it Lord Brahma was frightened and said, "That is the weapon of Lord Sri Hari! The Sudarshana Maha Chakra! I am helpless to assist you in this regard, protect yourself." With these words Lord Brahma sent away the *Maharshi* from that place.

There was no time to plead with Lord Brahma. The Sudarshana Chakra was drawing near; therefore, Durvasa

⁴⁵⁰ Beheaded

⁴⁵¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

transported himself to Kailas and sought the protection of Lord Shiva. His efforts there met with the same result and his powers were getting depleted. Consequently, he was left with no other alternative, but to seek the refuge of Lord Sri Hari. The Maharshi forsook his pride and reached *Vaikunta*⁴⁵².

In an exhausted state he pleaded, “Lord! Please restrain your Sudarshana Chakra. Accept my humble pleading.” Lord Sri Hari smiled and replied, “*Maharshi!* Do I dispatch my weapon to kill pious people like you? Believe me I did not send it.”

This confused Durvasa and he begged the Lord, “Please ask the Sudarshana Chakra to stop for a while.” Thereupon, Lord Sri Hari again laughed and said, “The Sudarshana Chakra proceeded of its own accord. I did not launch it. Would it hear my words? It is a fact that the Chakra is my weapon and stays in my hand, but when my devotees encounter danger, it disregards my words. As such, it kills those who harm my devotees ”

The desperate Durvasa pleaded with the Lord to show him a way out of his predicament. Then the merciful Lord Sri Hari asked him to seek the protection of the person he had tried to harm. To this Durvasa asked if he was to seek

⁴⁵² Lord Vishnu’s Abode

the protection of king Ambareesha, and Lord Sri Hari asked him to determine this for himself.

The *Maharshi* had nothing further to discuss and there were no options left to him.

Consequently, he returned to earth exhausted, and fell at the feet of Ambareesha, seeking his protection. Ambareesha had witnessed all that had transpired, with the aid of his divine vision, but he was unhappy, because his guest had been subjected to humiliation.

In addition, he was saddened by the thought that he was responsible for the ignominy experienced by the *Maharshi*. Ambareesha was tremendously moved and he lifted up the *Maharshi*. Thereupon, he offered his obeisance to the Sudarshana Chakra and pleaded with it to forgive Durvasa.

The Sudarshana Chakra had approached very close to the neck of the *Maharshi*, with the intention of beheading him. It paused in its deadly trajectory at the pleadings and prayers of Ambareesha. Subsequently, its anger abated and it returned to *Vaikunta*.

This incident had been witnessed by the astonished deities and *Rishi*⁴⁵³, who had been watching from the sky.

⁴⁵³ Sage to whom the Vedas were originally revealed

Then *Maharshi* Durvasa stood up and offered his veneration to the king.

He blessed the king and announced “O! Deities and *Rishis*! Pay heed to my pronouncements! Despite being a *Kshathriya*⁴⁵⁴, Ambareesha has surpassed me in *Sattvaguna*⁴⁵⁵. However, this is not of much importance, because he has exceeded even Lord Sri Hari in this aspect.”

In addition, Durvasa stated that, “Ambareesha was angry because his guest was being slighted, despite the fact that his guest had attempted to kill him. As such, this king is the only being in the three worlds who entertains such thoughts. It is a matter of supreme pride for Lord Sri Hari to declare Ambareesha as his devotee.

I am also proud of him, because even though I tried to harm him, I escaped death only due to his kind intervention and devotion. He has demonstrated what true devotion signifies and the people will recognize this great fact! They will also comprehend the importance of the *Ekadasi Vrata* and the results that it bestows. Ambareesha’s fame shall last forever!”

With these words Maharshi Durvasa left that place. The denizens of the three worlds hailed the greatness of the king and the comprehension of the *Maharshi*. Subsequently,

⁴⁵⁴ A person belonging to the warrior caste

⁴⁵⁵ The quality of goodness or purity

Ambareesha became more restrained and dispassionate, and handed over the kingdom to his sons. Later on he immersed himself in deep *Tapas* and became one with the Lord Sri Hari.

It is to be noticed that this story has numerous convolutions, which help to describe the nature of the great *Sadhakas*⁴⁵⁶ and the good deeds performed by righteous people. We have to become conscious of the greatness of such people, their status, their thinking and their practices. It is also essential to incorporate their exemplary qualities in our daily life to the extent possible. Let us try to follow in their footsteps. That will be our service to them.

92. KANDALI

In the incident relating to the king Ambareesha, the possibility exists of our regarding *Maharshi*⁴⁵⁷ Durvasa as a wretched person. However, it is incorrect to arrive at such conclusions, about *Mahatmas*⁴⁵⁸ and *Maharshis*, because of the fact that behind every incident in their life, there could be some divine reason. In the narrative regarding king Ambareesha, *Maharshi* Durvasa had been insulted. There was a hidden reason behind his humiliation, which related to the past.

⁴⁵⁶ Spiritual seekers

⁴⁵⁷ Great Sage

⁴⁵⁸ Noble minded persons

It is common for us to identify him as Durvasa *Maharshi*, but his real name was Durvaso *Maharshi* in Sanskrit. In Telugu it transforms into Durvasa, in accordance with the rules of grammar. On one occasion he had been immersed in *Tapas*⁴⁵⁹ on the Gandhamadhan Mountain, in total isolation. At that time due to divine design, an *Apsara*⁴⁶⁰ named Tilottama and an exceedingly handsome demon, named Sahasika, arrived at the place where *Maharshi* Durvasa was meditating and began to engage in romantic sport. Their romantic behaviour exceeded all limits and this disturbed the *Samadhi*⁴⁶¹ of Durvasa. This made him wrathful and caused him to curse them. Due to that curse Sahasika was born as an ass and Tilottama as a maiden named Usha, during the period in which Lord Sri Krishna incarnated.

After having cursed them, the *Maharshi* attempted to again attain *Samadhi*, but he could not do so. It is difficult for a yogi to forget a thought that has implanted itself in his mind, whilst he is in a state of deep meditation. This is the very reason for yogis to ward off all thoughts during meditation. It is not only the yogis; but also students, who have to concentrate their mind on their studies, who are vulnerable to this danger. Thus, students have to exercise

⁴⁵⁹ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁴⁶⁰ Celestial Nymph

⁴⁶¹ A supernatural state in which the consciousness of the experimenter and the experienced become one

extreme care to avoid unnecessary thoughts, while studying. Durvasa was affected by thoughts of amor and the divine force ensured that they were deeply implanted on his subconscious mind.

He tried for a long time to attain *Samadhi* but all his efforts were in vain. He could not meditate and he became obsessed with the thought of marriage, which was always uppermost in his mind. He thought of getting married and that craving generated by that desire, deprived him of his senses. This desire increased in intensity and he was unable to expel the thought of marriage from his mind. He forgot about his birth and how many epochs ago he had been born. Moreover, he was impoverished and did not possess sartorial elegance. Consequently, he had been named Durvasa or the shoddily clad person. As such, it was inconceivable for anyone to give their daughter in marriage to him.

After considerable reflection, Maharshi Durvasa, finally identified a prospective father – in – law in the *Maharshi* Ourva, who belonged to the older generation and who had a daughter. His daughter was a good looking girl and moreover, she was interested in *Tapas*. This was the reason for her remaining unmarried, nevertheless, her father; was determined to perform her nuptials with a suitable bridegroom. Durvasa had avidly gathered this information and she was foremost in his mind all the time.

It was the custom in those days of yore, for the relatives of a youth desiring marriage with a girl to approach that maiden's father with a request to perform her marriage to that young man. Durvasa had no relatives to perform this duty. Therefore, he proceeded to the house of Ourva, all by himself.

After he had travelled, some distance, Ourva came and met him. Now, Durvasa was not in the habit of talking politely and reasonably. Accordingly, he immediately offered his greeting to Ourva and demanded, "Perform your daughter's marriage with me. Together, we will meditate and this shall be our principal activity."

Maharshi Ourva was thunderstruck for a while. He could not believe his ears. After thousands of years, this was the only marriage proposal that had been made in respect of his daughter. He was ecstatic by this proposal, but he was troubled by the thought that Maharshi Durvasa was a man of extreme anger, so he thought for a while and addressed Durvasa, "Boy! You have decided to get married. This is a very happy development; all the same, I have to disclose a fact about my daughter to you. She is a short tempered person like you, though not to the extent that you are. Do you think that the two of you could get along amicably? Think it over well and let me know."

To this Maharshi Durvasa laughed out loud and replied, "Such rumours have been spread in order to

besmirch my fair name; actually I am a very mild mannered person. However, women have a penchant for a modicum of anger. Your daughter's anger would serve to enhance our love for each other to its zenith. Do not worry about such things." Thereupon, Maharshi Ourva stated, "She is not only bad tempered, but also foolish. She does not pay heed to the words of others. People are of the opinion that she desisted from marriage due to her all consuming passion for *Tapas*; however, the reality is otherwise, and the fact of the matter is that no person volunteered to marry her, because of her discourteous behaviour. I do not wish to conceal this fact from you."

Despite, coming to know about this drawback, Durvasa did not lose interest in the alliance. He thought that if he withdrew from this alliance, then he would be unable to procure a suitable bride for himself. Hence, he said, "Do not worry. I will make the necessary adjustments with her. I request you to fix the date and time of the marriage." The elated Maharshi Ourva exclaimed, "Do not think that I am restating the foolishness of my daughter. I will offer her hand in marriage to you, only if you give me your promise that you will pardon her foolhardiness." In this manner, the Maharshi made his intentions very clear.

Maharshi Durvasa repeated his promise four times to Maharshi Ourva and married that girl, whose name was Kamdali. Maharshi Durvasa enjoyed matrimonial bliss with his wife Kamdali for some time. Moreover, his mind had

been ingrained with the romance displayed by Tilottama and Sahasika towards each other, when he had been in the state of Samadhi. This memory served to increase his romantic mood. However, Kamdali had to live all alone in the forest, without the company of any other person. She became peevish with her husband's activities and this irritation resulted in conflicts between them. Those conflicts intensified gradually and led to aloofness between them.

Even then, they did not forsake each other and lived together. Kamdali was always criticizing her husband's manners and habits. She used to exhibit her disapproval and point out his faults. However, compromise and adjustment were alien to Maharshi Durvasa. Nevertheless, he had been deeply influenced by the love displayed by Tilottama. In addition, he had to abide with the promise made to his father – in – law. These two factors compelled him to tolerate the harangues of his wife for years.

One day when he was regaining consciousness, while emerging from the state of Samadhi, he heard someone shouting. This caused him to come out of the state of Samadhi instantly. He regained his senses and opened his eyes. The vociferous voice was that of his incensed wife, who was raving and ranting against his *Tapas* and his state of Samadhi. By that time the Maharshi's mind was gaining awareness of its surroundings. Due to the loud noise made by his wife's fulminations, he lost his presence of mind.

Involuntarily and without his being aware of what was happening, he lost the tranquillity of his mind.

On opening his eyes, his mental turbulence was transformed into fire, which reduced his wife to ashes. This happened within the twinkling of an eye and he was totally unaware of what had transpired. Afterwards, a flash of lightning emerged from that pile of ash, which changed into a celestial lady who ascended into the sky. This lady folded her hands and praised Durvasa, "*Maharshi!* I have been set free from a curse that had made me assume a human form. All this happened due to your power of *Tapas*. The intention behind my reprehensible behaviour was to achieve this objective. Please, pardon my transgressions." With these words she departed from thence.

Durvasa was unable to comprehend what had happened and returned to his state of Samadhi. He remained in that state for several years. When he returned to the normal state, he found his father – in – law sitting beside him on a stone. He stated that he had been waiting for him to emerge from the state of Samadhi. Durvasa kept his counsel, and his father – in – law again addressed him, "Where is my daughter?"

Maharshi Durvasa calmly indicated the pile of ash. *Maharshi* Ourva was taken aback on seeing it and with his divine vision he realized that *Maharshi* Durvasa had incinerated her. He was much annoyed and wept copiously.

Suddenly, he developed uncontrollable fury and cursed Durvasa “I had already warned you that my daughter was a fool. You had given me your word of honour, and then married her, is that not the truth? I trusted you, but you betrayed me. Did you think that I was a fool? Was that the reason for your reckless disregard for me, in burning my daughter? This sin cannot be expiated. You will be disgraced by a person who is far inferior to you and who is also an incapable person. I cast a curse upon thee to this effect!” With these terrible words, he sprinkled water from his *Kamandal*⁴⁶², on the face of Durvasa.

Durvasa was famous for his inordinate ill temper, but he did not respond to this curse. He smiled pleasantly and stated, “Let it be, O! Father-in –law! The influence of Lord Shiva had entered into me, which released a being from her curse. That is the enchantment of Lord Shiva. Who knows who will be benefitted by your curse? Let us await that great moment!” With these words, the *Maharshi* left that place. By that time, *Maharshi* Ourva regained his calm. He abstained from the influence of relations and immersed himself in meditation.

Several thousand years later, *Maharshi* Durvasa was denigrated and insulted by Ambareesha, who was inferior and younger to him. Durvasa knew the cause for this ignominy; hence, he was not disturbed unduly by that

⁴⁶² Water pot used by ascetics

incident. On the other hand, the Maharshi had been overjoyed by this incident, as it had revealed the greatness of Ambareesha to the world.

One should review the incidents that had taken place in this narrative. The manner in which Lord Shiva influences the lives of *Mahatmas* and the incidents in their lives, imparts lessons to us in a number of ways. Even a *MahAatma* like Durvasa, was diverted from meditation, due to witnessing an immoral incident. Keeping this episode in mind, one should keep away from immoral and bad incidents in life. Moreover, one should always desist from seeing obscene pictures and reading salacious books.

Even the Maharshi Durvasa fell victim to such desires and failed to keep his promise to his father – in – law. This brought upon him terrible humiliation. However, he experienced that insult after a thousand years. Ordinary people, have to countenance such insults and demeaning situations in their very next birth. Hence, one should not lose one's temper and break one's promises.

We might assume that the *Maharshi's* behaviour had been due to the influence of Lord Shiva! However, we should not conclude that our faults are the due to the influence of Lord Shiva. *Maharshis* can undergo punishment with pleasure, but we cannot withstand punishment; as such we should not commit mistakes and misdeeds.

May all, due to the blessings of the Lord Dattatreya, the brother of Maharshi Durvasa, develop moral thoughts!

93. SUDEVA

In ancient times, there was another Emperor Ambareesha, whose life has been described in the epic Mahabharata. Some people attain higher positions in life, earn well and make larger charitable contributions. There are others who spend a life of servitude to these people. The entire world praises these eminent persons as being excellent and unstinting persons. At the same time the world hates their servants, as they are insignificant and mean. Are these opinions correct? The story of Emperor Ambareesha provides a befitting answer.

This Ambareesha may not have been as great as the other Ambareesha; nevertheless, he was great in his own right. He was a virtuous ruler, who used to perform a large number of *Yajnas*⁴⁶³. He thought that these *Yajnas* would benefit the people with abundant rains. Moreover, he felt that he would attain salvation due to these sacrifices.

He used to administer the kingdom in an irregular manner. He would issue orders whenever he felt inclined to do so. This had been the cause of considerable confusion and consternation amongst his ministers and commanders.

⁴⁶³ Vedic sacrifices

Nevertheless, fortune favoured him and even his hastily issued orders bore beneficial results. Consequently, no one could ever find fault with him. Since, good luck had always been his faithful companion; his enemies could not harm him in the least.

As such, he had his share of enemies, and one day, a very powerful enemy attempted to invade his kingdom. Ambareesha simultaneously, dispatched each and every one of his ministers and commanders, to engage the enemy. These officials pleaded with him to eschew such strategy, which was fraught with danger. Ambareesha turned a deaf ear to their entreaties. In the course of that war, the demons named, Sadama, Vidama and Dama besieged the main entrance to the city, while a huge army positioned itself on the other side. Emperor Ambareesha was terrified at this news. He no longer had sufficient troops or able commanders to countenance this new danger. While he was pacing about furiously, due to his inability to find a solution to the pressing problem; he espied Sudeva, a junior officer.

Sudeva was a low-ranking officer in the army, whose duty was to guard the palace under normal conditions. He was provided with a small detail of soldiers to assist him in this task. His work was light and he used to have a significant amount of time to spare. Sudeva worshipped Lord Shiva with great devotion every day, while discharging his duties diligently. His fame as a righteous man was widespread.

The harried emperor addressed this Sudeva, angrily and loudly reproached him, “Sudeva! You have put on weight due to lack of work. What is the necessity to guard the palace? Take the soldiers under your command and repulse the demons.” The soldiers guarding the palace were petrified with fear at these words of the emperor. Their fear was heightened by the thoughts that there were not one but three terrible demons and a large army to contend with. As such they were not even a fourth of that vast army, in size. To compound their misery, Sudeva was to be the leader of this host!

Sudeva could be expected to wield the sword, but it was doubtful if he could set up battle formations, and make the optimal utilization of the various weapons. The soldiers under him were convinced that all of them would be reduced to ashes in the war with the demons, because these demons employed illusion as a weapon. Notwithstanding, the diffidence expressed by those under him, Sudeva was the least perturbed by this terrible development. He stood firm like a mountain and loudly exhorted his men, “Soldiers! We are fortunate. We have been blessed with the opportunity to participate in a righteous war. No duty of a soldier surpasses that of sacrificing his life for his king, who provides him with sustenance. As such, there is no need for you to fear for your life. I will lead you and Lord Shiva, will be graceful towards us and will precede us with his Trisul in his

hand. Go and fearlessly fall upon the enemy.” After that he entered the temple.

He prostrated himself and offered homage, “O! Mighty bearer of the Trisul! O! Saviour of the whole world! I am extremely fortunate, because I obtained the opportunity to sacrifice my life, in order to protect my king. This has been entirely due to your mercy. Please protect my king and my kingdom.” Thereupon, he accoutred himself for warfare and attacked the hostile forces. The acts of Lord Shiva are unfathomable, and every arrow from Sudeva’s bow became a mighty weapon that confused the enemy. This improved the morale of the men under his command, who started to fight valiantly. The three demon leaders noticed this and attacked Sudeva.

He was as rampant as a wild fire and destroyed most of the enemy’s army. The three demon leaders were severed into pieces. On seeing this, the enemy army fled in different directions. However, some of them turned back and released a number of weapons on Sudeva.

In the ensuing chaos, Sudeva was decapitated. No one, including the soldiers under Sudeva’s command knew about this. Afterwards, these soldiers put to flight the remaining enemy forces and attempted to locate their commander. They found his body in one place and his head in another place. At this, Sudeva’s soldiers shed copious tears. However, the flag of victory was hoisted and the feast

of victory was commenced. The people praised the emperor's bravery, his expertise in setting up a battle formation and his intelligence in a thousand voices. The commanders sent the appropriate wages to Sudeva's home. Apart from that, no one in that kingdom took cognizance of what had befallen Sudeva.

The king ruled the kingdom for a long time, performed numerous *Yajnas* and died peacefully. He reached heaven with considerable pride in himself and his achievements. However, Ambareesha lost all these feelings of confidence and pride, immediately upon entering the heavenly assembly.

There were a row of thrones for seating the highest amongst the residents of heaven, in that magnificent assembly. These thrones were located much higher than the throne that had been allotted to him. On one of these superiorly positioned thrones, Sudeva, his soldier was sitting proudly, with his legs crossed. Ambareesha offered his salutations to the deity Devendra who had made a grand entrance, but the latter did not notice him.

Ambareesha was crestfallen at this insult. His anger was increasing and he felt like spurning heaven. All the same, he controlled himself and modestly addressed the Deity Devendra who had been welcoming him, "O! Lord of the three worlds! Oh Devendra! May victory be always yours! This is the assembly of the deities. It is the abode of

virtue. I have done thousands of *Yajnas* and innumerable charitable works. In addition, I have done quite a bit of devoted *Tapas*⁴⁶⁴. I am extremely grateful to you for having provided a place for me in your court. Nevertheless, I have some misgivings; this Sudeva had been one of my minions. He was a weakling who had lived wretchedly, but you have accommodated, even such an undeserving person in your court. I assume this is due to your generosity.”

Thereupon, the Deity Devendra, who had been smiling till then, assumed a serious mien. He looked at Ambareesha with exasperation and replied, “You have entered the assembly of the gods, like the greatest among the *Rajarshis*⁴⁶⁵, due to your *Yajnas*; because those who perform them, without any desire, are truly great. Even those who perform them with desires, if such desires are virtuous, belong to the category of good people. Your efforts were of that nature.

“As such, virtue is greater than the greatest of *Yajnas*, the greatest charity and the greatest *Tapas*. However, performing one’s duty is the greatest *Tapas*. Protecting the king was the specific duty of Sudeva, who was your soldier. He even sacrificed his life, in order to discharge that duty faithfully. There was no mistake or ignorance

⁴⁶⁴ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁴⁶⁵ Royal sages

involved. Moreover, it was expected and he was fully aware of his failings.

“You gave away huge amounts in charity, because you were very wealthy. You performed *Yajnas*, while thousands of people sacrificed their life for your sake. Even in these *Yajnas*, you desired the good of your people, while praying for your salvation. This Sudeva never wished anything for himself. He considered it to be his great fortune to sacrifice his life for the king. He prayed to Lord Shiva to bless him by permitting him to sacrifice his very life for the king.

“Ambareesha, you had prayed to me, during the thousands of *Yajnas*, which you had conducted. However, did you ever declare that you would sacrifice your life for the sake of the people? Did you even consent to give away your kingdom? Leave alone the kingdom, did you even contemplate the giving away of your property? Did you at least agree to give away a share of what you had acquired due to your *Tapas*? Set aside all of these considerations. Did you ever state that no one should lose his life for your sake?

“The soldiers of your kingdom guard the borders, day and night. They are prepared for any sacrifice that might be required, in order to protect the king and the kingdom. They work in the most hostile of climatic conditions. This enables you and your subjects to live amidst comforts. Even under such difficult circumstances, they do not forsake their

worship or meditation. Ambareesha, do you think that these soldiers do not deserve anything more than their wages?

“If such people do not get any merit, then the kings, who perform *Yajnas* with the money of the people, will fail to get any merit whatsoever. Moreover, citizens, who live comfortably in the cities and the villages would not earn any merit. If nobody gets merit, then what is the use of these donations? What for these prayers and these *Yajnas*? If these were of no value whatsoever, how could you come to heaven?

“O! King! The reward I have given to Sudeva is very small. It is beyond our comprehension as to what great rewards Lord Shiva would have bestowed upon him. All the *Devarshis*⁴⁶⁶ assembled here are of the opinion that the greatest among your various rewards was the opportunity given to you to sit in the same assembly with Sudeva. In their opinion, this happened due to Sudeva’s merit and virtue and not due to my magnanimity. You had been an analytical person; do you concur with their thinking?”

Emperor Ambareesha was trembling by the time that the deity Devendra had ended his admonition. He prostrated himself at the feet of the deity Devendra, offered his obeisance to the assembled gods and Sudeva, and took his seat.

⁴⁶⁶ Divine Sages

In this story, the *Maharshis*⁴⁶⁷ have taught us the difference between *Tapas* and virtue. It is not possible for each and every person to obtain a great position. Only a few persons can make donations to the entire town. There is always a specific duty, which will be suitable for the status of the life that God has provided us with. This story establishes the fact that practice of that specific duty with devotion, will enable us to obtain a reward that is of greater value than *Tapas*. Therefore, we should work diligently, by realizing the importance of devotion to our duty, in the manner of Sudeva, without paying heed to our status in life.

94. SAGARA

Some of the stories in the Purana hint at the secrets of the universe, creation and *Dharma*⁴⁶⁸. One such story is that of the Emperor Sagara.

In the early days and for a long time after man had been created, the northern hemisphere of the earth was comprised totally of land, whereas the southern hemisphere consisted of water. Later on, meteors from outer space collided with the earth. The force of these collisions broke up the northern land mass into smaller parts, which are the present day continents. This is what science tells us. Furthermore, scientists have been trying to accurately

⁴⁶⁷ Great Sages

⁴⁶⁸ Righteousness

estimate when these collisions had taken place. In this endeavour they are wont to announce a particular period of time for these incidents and later on they change their opinion. Even today, uncertainty prevails among scientists in this regard. Despite the uncertainty regarding these calculations, these impacts had transpired some millions of years ago, and not in the recent past. Our *Maharshis*⁴⁶⁹ had documented the events and the causes that had brought about the formation of continents, in the history of the emperor Sagara.

In ancient times, a king named Aasitha, who belonged to the Solar dynasty, had ruled from Ayodhya, which was the capital of his kingdom. He married several women, in order to have children. However, as he was sterile he did not have any children. After the passage of quite some time, his aged first queen became pregnant. The king had been ill –treating her as she had not borne any children. All this changed with the announcement of her pregnancy and the king became very affectionate towards her. Her status in the kingdom improved overnight, her prestige increased and she became very powerful. The king was ecstatic, but his other wives were incensed at this pregnancy. They thought that if they allowed this pregnancy to culminate, their very existence would be jeopardized. Consequently, they poisoned the elder queen’s foetus.

⁴⁶⁹ Great Sages

The emperor was beset with difficulties in his family and in the kingdom. He encountered disturbances in the family as well political disagreements. Taking advantage of this turmoil, the forces of the Haihaya kings besieged the capital city, with the intention of capturing it. This led to a war and Aasitha could not effectively repulse these enemies. Moreover, there was nobody to assist him in the war. Finally, the pregnant elder queen entered the fray and fought fiercely with the enemy forces. After that she lifted her wounded husband on her shoulders and fled to some remote forests through secret tunnels.

The king was deeply moved at the services rendered by the elder queen, whom he had despised for a long time. Due to the effect of the poison, the chances of development of the queen's pregnancy were meagre. Moreover, the stress of the recent circumstances at home and on the battlefield had further worsened the condition of her pregnancy. The king brooded about all the ills that had befallen him, which made him very sad and resulted in his demise.

The queen was overwhelmed by the sudden death of the king in that deep forest. She decided to immolate herself on his funeral pyre. Despite the fact that pregnant women were prohibited from committing self - immolation, she went ahead with her preparations. She made the final funeral arrangements placed her dead husband on the pyre and lit it. Just as she was about to leap into the flames,

Maharshi Chayawana arrived there. He immediately realized that a pregnant *Kshatriya*⁴⁷⁰ woman was attempting self-immolation on the funeral pyre of her husband. He was beside himself with rage and prevented her from committing that terrible deed. He admonished her by stating, “Your actions violate *Dharma*⁴⁷¹! So please desist!”

The queen paused at these words from the effulgent *Maharshi* with radiance ordered her to stop jumping into the flames. He told her, “I know who you are. You are very unfortunate, but your unborn child is physically very powerful. The poison surrounded him and a portion of it found its way into him. Even then he is alive. He will become the emperor and perform a deed that will significantly influence creation. It is wrong to go against the will of God; moreover, this contemplated act of yours would be detrimental to motherhood. Therefore, ponder deeply on my words. You might wonder as to why I am interfering in your affairs, I am Chayawana *Maharshi* and my ashram is nearby. That is why your husband had constructed the secret tunnel up to this place. The king was a good friend of mine; hence I gave you that advice. Please adhere to it.”

On coming to know the identity of the *Maharshi*, the queen, reconciled herself to her fate and accompanied him

⁴⁷⁰ A person belonging to the warrior caste

⁴⁷¹ Righteousness

to his *Ashram*⁴⁷². After some time had passed by, she gave birth to a boy. This child had layers of poison in its body, hence the Maharshi named him as Sagara or the one with poison. This boy grew up in the *Ashram* and developed both cruelty as well as gentleness. He also, obtained some supernatural powers due to residing in the ashram.

All the same, neither his mother nor Chayawana *Maharshi*, informed him about the events leading to his birth. However, due to the intervention of the Divine Force, *Maharshi* Vasishtha accosted that boy and told him about what had transpired. The boy was greatly incensed on learning about these events. This event brought about a sea change in his behaviour. Within a very short period of time he conscripted an army, consisting of millions of tribal people. He conquered Ayodhya city and took it under his control. Subsequently, he became the emperor of the country.

King Sagara ruled the kingdom in a virtuous manner. His behaviour was cruel due to the poison inside him. He was totally opposed to enemies and dissenters, consequently, there were no enemies during his reign. The *Asvamedha Yajna*⁴⁷³ was performed by him daily. During this

⁴⁷² Hermitage

⁴⁷³ Horse sacrifice. A religious rite that was conducted by a king to declare his supremacy, by allowing a stallion, accompanied by a royal escort to wander, in an unfettered manner; any king who captured such

Yajna, the horse would be let loose and it would traverse other kingdoms. None of the kings had the capability to stop the horse. If any king obstructed the horse then his kingdom would be subjugated. Therefore, no king attempted to obstruct this horse.

God imposes barriers, irrespective of a person's eminence. Accordingly, Sagara did not have any offspring. This constituted an insurmountable problem and all his prayers and *Tapas* proved unequal to the task of resolving it. Moreover, with advancing age there was a corresponding decrease in his hauteur. During that period of transition, he visited *Maharshi* Chayawana's ashram and narrated his tale of woe to him.

The Maharshi Chayawana smiled encouragingly and said, "*Tapas* performed in the kingdom will not be fruitful. If you truly desire offspring go with your wives to Mount Kailas. The three of you should perform *Tapas* in that place. You were born out of the solar radiation, but there is some poison inside your body, which is not the poison that had been utilized by your step mothers. The poison in question had been accumulating from your previous births. It has one of the characteristics of solar radiation and comprises of the nature of execution. As such, there are two different natures intermingled in you; consequently, you have two wives. By

a horse, declared his unwillingness to accept the paramourcy of the king who was conducting this sacrifice.

the grace of Lord Shiva, your wife Vaidarbhi will bear sixty thousand sons, who will be born from the essence of the sixty segment cycles in the solar power. They will be warriors, but they will be short lived. Your second wife Saibhya will give birth to only one son. He will be neither a good person nor a warrior. He will not fetch you fame and honour, but he will live for a long time and prolong your dynasty. This son will contribute to the welfare of the world, and will be born out of the life – promoting essence of the solar power. Your life is full of turbulences and you have a penchant to engage in conflicts and disputes. Even then, by the grace of Lord Shiva, transform your disadvantages and convert them into the stepping stones to attain *Moksha*. Now go and perform *Tapas* at the top of Mount Kailas.”

Sagara was deeply impressed by these words of *Maharshi* Chayawana and left for Mount Kailas. In that place he immersed himself in deep meditation. After a very long time had elapsed, Lord Shiva manifested Himself before him and repeated what had been stated by *Maharshi* Chayawana. Thereupon, the Lord blessed Sagara and gave him some boons.

After that, Sagara returned to his kingdom and became busy with the matters of the state. Subsequently, he had children. Surprisingly, his wives gave birth to a boy each. The male child of queen Vaidarbhi had an oddly shaped body, which resembled a tree trunk. The king was frantic and thought that the words of the *Maharshi* and Lord Shiva had

failed to come true. At that moment, *Maharshi* Chayawana came there and stated, “O! King! This tree trunk shaped body has sixty thousand human bodies conjoined in it. This is an uncommon issue. These people have born as an omen for a natural calamity. However, nature needs them. I will operate upon this conjoined body, separate the individual infants and ensure their independent growth.” With these words, the *Maharshi* materialized a sword, with his supernatural powers. He applied some herbal oils on his hands and obtained sixty thousand aya ghatams or pot like vessels. Subsequently, the *Maharshi* employed the utmost care and severed the body that had been born to Vaidarbhi into sixty thousand pieces. He put each piece in one of the pots and applied some medical processes to them. After some days, a fully grown boy emerged from each pot. The entire nation was flabbergasted at this incredible incident.

At this point, close attention has to be paid to certain facts. Aya ghatam are not clarified butter pots. In ayurveda, aya denotes herbal oil and ghatam a vessel used in scientific experiments. As such, aya ghatam can be construed to denote the modern day test tubes, which are employed for in vitro fertilization. Ayurvedic physicians do not wear gloves on their hands; instead they apply certain herbal oils on their hands. In the Mahabharata, Maharshi Vyas had conducted a similar procedure to bring the Kauravas into this world. The Mahabharata describes this procedure in detail. However, the epic Mahabharata is

considered to be a literary work and not a medical book. During that period the medical books were maintained separately and they contained several technical details regarding the human body and surgical operations. With the passage of time, several invasions by foreigners and neighbouring kings took place and our forefathers were able to safeguard, only the religious literature. The remaining scientific books were either lost or destroyed. We might doubt the credibility of these operations, due to lack of particulars. However, an investigation based on the scientific approach, would permit us to obtain the technical details of such operations.

Returning to our narrative after this interesting digression, it is found that Sagara named Saibhya Devi's son as Asamanja or one without peer. His father had fondly hoped that he would be incomparable, but the people of that kingdom named him as Asamanjasa or a wastrel. His behaviour was loathsome to the citizens of the kingdom.

He had sixty thousand brothers and they were collectively referred to as Sagara putras or the sons of Sagara, because it was not possible to remember such a vast number of names. They were extremely mischievous like their brother Asamanja. However, a certain amount of valour was involved in their naughtiness. Their powers increased as they grew up and they commenced to harass their tributary kings. Gradually their powers increased some

more and they started to create difficulties for the divine residents in heaven.

The deity Devendra discussed their misdeeds with Lord Brahma. He pondered for a while and said, “Why do you want to undertake activities that would create conflicts between earth and heaven? His father is performing *Asvamedha Yajnas*⁴⁷⁴ frequently and his sons are acting as protectors of the *Yaga*⁴⁷⁵ horse. At the moment, *Maharshi* Kapil is meditating in solitude in the nether world. He is intolerant of any disturbance. Therefore, arrange to have this horde to come into contact with that *Maharshi*. The rest will be taken care of by the *Maharshi*, Who is the very incarnation of the Lord Vishnu.” The deity Devendra agreed to this proposal and bided his time for such an opportunity.

In the meanwhile, all the Sagara putras entered holy matrimony and begat children. Subsequently, these children became young men. Nevertheless, the Sagara putras did not mend their ways. Over a period of time, the citizens found the behaviour of Asamanjasa to be intolerable. Finally, they gathered sufficient courage to complain to the king about his son’s appalling activities. They were very fortunate, because

⁴⁷⁴ Horse sacrifice. A religious rite that was conducted by a king to declare his supremacy, by allowing a stallion, accompanied by a royal escort to wander, in an unfettered manner; any king who captured such a horse, declared his unwillingness to accept the paramourcy of the king who was conducting this sacrifice.

⁴⁷⁵ Vedic sacrifice

the king banished him from the kingdom. Asamanjasa did not resist this punishment and happily repaired to the forest, subsequently, his whereabouts were unknown. Some people used to state that a great secret was associated with his life, but much importance was not attached to their words.

The sixty thousand brothers were in the habit of pillaging other kingdoms; and Sagara considered their activities to be valorous acts, and as a consequence, his love for them waxed tremendously. In accordance with what had become a long established practice, Sagara commenced another *Asvamedha Yajna* and sent his sixty thousand sons to escort and protect the *Yaga* horse. By that time several *Yajnas* had been performed and none of the kings, on earth, had the temerity to even touch the *Yaga* horse. Accordingly, everyone ignored that horse and attended to their work.

However, this horse, which had been galloping along the sea shore in the west, was suddenly untraceable. The sixty thousand strong escort formed several groups and searched for the horse, without success. After a year of searching for the horse in vain, they returned to their kingdom and reported to their father that they had lost sight of the horse. Further, they suggested to him that he could complete the *Yajna* by resorting to the alternative prescribed in such eventualities. These words, from his sons, infuriated Sagara, who bellowed at them in rage and threatened to reduce them to ashes if they failed to return with the horse.

The Sagara putras had formed the opinion that they were heroes, but on seeing the anger of their father they were terrified and left in search of the horse. They left no stone unturned, in their quest for the horse, but all their efforts were in vain. The only information that they could glean was that the deity Vayu, in accordance with the orders of the deity Devendra, had abducted the horse and left it in the nether world.

The Netherworld refers to that piece of land, which is situated in the Antarctic region near the South Pole. There was an ocean that separated this huge single plate of land and the rest of the Antarctic region in those days. It was not possible for humans to reach that place. What was to be done?

The Sagara putras discussed their predicament threadbare and whilst doing so they suddenly, experienced some new powers, which were entering their body. They were greatly energized by this and resolved, "We will split up this land into pieces, so that we can create a path to the nether world." Thereupon, they solemnly swore to achieve their objective at any cost.

Subsequently, they concentrated their entire strength and brought about the flow of powerful electrical currents from the sky to the land. The place, where this event occurred is located near the continent of Africa.

The very earth was set into vibrations due to the transfer of this high voltage electricity and the single landmass disintegrated into seven pieces, which are the present day continents. These continents drifted apart and positioned themselves all over the earth. This event resulted in the extinction of millions of species and a number of unexpected changes took place in the ecosystem of the earth. Even Sagara had to countenance a number of difficulties, in order to maintain normalcy in his kingdom.

After sometime, the *status quo ante* was restored and the Sagara putras were satisfied with the outcome of their efforts. The passage created to the nether world lay over the land; however, it was a circuitous route from India, and involved the crossing of several seas. The Sagara putras traversed this path, crossed a number of gulfs and finally reached the nether world.

The land near the South Pole was covered with thick sheets of ice and this led them to think, whether their horse could have survived in such a hostile place. This thought caused them, quite some anxiety. Another question that was troubling them was regarding the chances of survival of their horse and whether they had been justified in causing such havoc. This doubt was more troublesome than the biting cold. Whilst wandering about in that place, they happened upon a most astonishing scene. They came across a verdant place, with a solitary tree, amidst the desolate landscape. A black bearded man, who was in deep meditation, was sitting

underneath it. Their horse had been tethered to the tree with a long rope.

Upon seeing their horse, they were relieved of their anxiety. They thought that the man underneath the tree had stolen their horse and was pretending to be a *Maharshi*. They forsook their reason at this thought and none of them paused to consider, as to how any normal person could have reached that place. They also, failed to consider, how he could have brought the horse to that place or how a tree was flourishing in that snowy wilderness. They disregarded these facts and became extremely furious with the *Maharshi*.

The sixty thousand strong, Sagara putras, rushed at the *Maharshi*. They had been rendered blind with rage and they were loudly rebuking the *Maharshi*. At that moment *Maharshi* Kapil was in deep meditation, and His state of poise was disturbed by this commotion. He had withdrawn his senses from their area of operation, by means of meditation. If such a state of deep *Tapas* were to be disturbed then it would pose great difficulty to restore the senses back to their area of influence. This constitutes a very difficult task for yogis and such restoration has to be a gradual process. Any haste in doing so could prove harmful to the yogi's life. Accordingly, no person who knows this will disturb yogis who are in deep meditation.

Kapil *Maharshi* had been established in the state of Samadhi for millennia and this state had been suddenly disrupted by the Sagara putras. His Samadhi state was destroyed. With great effort he managed to regain the normal state and opened his eyes. He developed uncontrollable rage and then he saw the sixty thousand Sagara putras. Spontaneously, despite comprehending as to what has transpired his inner powers emerged as fire from his eyes and instantly reduced the Sagara putras to ashes.

The *Maharshi* felt despondent and closed his eyes. With his divine vision, he saw the creation of the Sagara putras, the objective of Lord Brahma, the strategy of the deity Devendra and the formation of the continents. Then the *Maharshi* concluded that those Sagara putras were the poisonous components of the solar power. They had come for a specific purpose; nevertheless, instead of fulfilling their duty peacefully, they had committed a number of atrocities. The result of their misdeeds had led to their being reduced to ashes. He was convinced that he was in no way responsible for what had happened and that all that had transpired was as per the wishes of the Almighty. Subsequently, he regained the state of Samadhi. Meanwhile, Sagara who had been proud of his sons' prowess, became melancholic with the passage of time. The years turned into centuries, but there was no news regarding the whereabouts of his sons. He had come across some news, which had

stated that his sons had left for the nether world. He refused to accept this information.

The law and order situation in his kingdom had deteriorated and there were a number of disturbances. The division of the land into pieces and the subsequent formation of continents had affected communications between the people. A number of atmospheric changes had happened and this had made it very difficult to conduct the religious rituals. The kings of the tributary kingdoms were refusing to accept his suzerainty over them. Centuries had gone by, but his *Yajna* remained incomplete, and he was relieved from the *Yaga* rituals.

Meanwhile, some of the *Maharshis* started to predict bad news. He himself had witnessed several ill omens. To add to his misery, he was unable to find a suitable successor. Many of his courtiers and ministers advised him to install the impish Asamanjasa on the throne. Despite his indifference towards Anshumana – the son of Asamanjasa – he had no other choice, but to call him and ask him, “The fate of the Sagara putras is unknown; I am in the midst of conducting a *Yajna*, hence, I have to remain in this very place. Could you make an attempt to locate them?”

Anshumana was temperate by nature and it was universally believed that a mild mannered person like him would refuse to undertake such a hazardous task. Nevertheless, to the great wonder of all, Anshumana agreed

to locate the whereabouts of the Sagara putras. Moreover, he was very much insistent that he should not be accompanied by anyone. As such, Anshumana had received a number of supernatural powers from his father; therefore he did not travel like his paternal uncles. He undertook supernatural travel and reached the nether world by merely visualizing the route to it.

He saw the solitary tree and the horse that was tied to it. He also saw the *Maharshi* and the sixty thousand mounds of ash. He immediately, understood what had happened and was moved to tears. Anshumana was able to evaluate the divine powers of the *Maharshi*. He sat before the *Maharshi* and started meditating, in silence. The *Maharshi* Kapil came to know that someone was praying to him. Slowly he emerged from his exalted state and became aware of his surroundings. His mind was pleased and calm, as the *Maharshi* opened his eyes; at this Anshumana offered his obeisance to him with devotion and prostrated himself before the *Maharshi*. The mercy of the *Maharshi* was showered on Anshumana.

Anon, the *Maharshi* addressed him tenderly, “Anshumana! You are the son of a yogi and you yourself are a yogi, who can obstruct the will of God? I have not brought this horse here; nor have I seen the person who has brought it here. I only saw these heaps of ash, but I did not play any active role. You are welcome to take your thing from here.”

Anshumana once again demonstrated his reverence, with folded hands, to the *Maharshi* and said “*Maharshi!* Upon seeing these piles of ashes it could be ascertained that these people had reached the nether world. Although they were cruel, they were my uncles on the patrilineal side. Please teach me a method, whereby I can effect their salvation.” The *Maharshi* thought, “It is not he who is talking. It is his virtuous conduct. He has to perform a beneficial act towards nature. The divine wish of Lord Parameswara would be realized by this.”

Then the *Maharshi* replied, “Ansumantha! You thinking is extremely virtuous. However, the iniquity or your uncles was very great. They had tormented not only the earth, but also the heavens, and they had harmed nature out of conceit. As such, every person has to entertain virtuous thoughts and perform virtuous deeds, irrespective of their status. It is futile to attach undue importance to results; what is required is the proper performance of one’s duty. At present the goddess Ganga is in an incipient form at the boundaries of the Universe. Make her to come down to this nether world. Her mere touch is sufficient to get rid of the harmful effect of any sin. There can be no second thoughts about this. Perform sufficient *Tapas* to ensure her mercy. First take the *Yajna* horse to your grandfather and release him from the duty of the *Asvamedha Yajna*, then protect the people from natural disasters. After that develop

your dynasty, and these tasks will serve as a means of self realization, now proceed with my heartfelt blessings.”

In this manner, Anshumana obtained the invaluable blessings of *Maharshi* Kapil and the *Yajna* horse. Subsequently, he reached home after some time. The meaning of Anshumana is a person composed of shafts of light. He possessed all the desired qualities and was self sufficient, which had rendered him calm and gentle. He informed the essence of his conversation with *Maharshi* Kapil to Sagara.

Although, he spoke like a reader of news, each and every word of his contained many secrets regarding creation and *Yoga*⁴⁷⁶. Then the king Sagara expressed the opinion that he and his sixty thousand sons did not possess even a single quality possessed by Anshumana. After that he recollected that his Guru *Maharshi* Chayawana and Lord Shiva had told him that this Anshumana would continue his lineage. He had forgotten that piece of information and had believed himself to be undeserving of knowledge, which would be a waste of effort. Eventually, the *Asvamedha Yajna* was completed and Sagara repented his mean mentality and the misdeeds of his sons. At that time, he also realized that his subjects detested him. This information caused him a great deal of unhappiness.

⁴⁷⁶ Disciplines of asceticism that result in spiritual experiences and a deep understanding into the nature of existence.

On one full moon day, when Sagara was taking bath in the sea, a deity emerged from the water and addressed him as father. This left him dumbstruck and he merely stared at that deity. The deity smiled reassuringly and said “Father! I am the in – charge of this sea. In the past I could not reach you, but now due to the divine wish, I can communicate with you. I am fortunate to meet you and this is due to my brothers. Those sixty thousand sons of yours are my brothers. They had committed some misdeeds and the people had detested them, nevertheless, they had done a good turn to the earth; by creating the continents, subsequent to breaking up the unified landmass. This enables me to penetrate into the interior parts. The underground water level is increasing due to my expansion and this will increase the production of creatures in the future. Moreover, agriculture will flourish and the land will become fertile.

“The extant balance of the earth had been affected, but some other equilibrium will be established. The land that had been submerged in me was elevated and some infertile lands were submerged. Gradually they will regain their fertility. Due to the activity of my brothers, changes occurred in my kingdom under the water. In the past, the demons had enjoyed the resources of my kingdom. Now the situation has changed. Adventurous people can explore the vast deposits of valuables in my kingdom.

“The deity Devendra had expended a great deal of effort to create water and supply it uniformly throughout the land. He had achieved this by utilizing the heat of the sun to evaporate the water contained in me. Now the task of forming clouds has become easier, due to the fact that I surround the continents. In this manner my brothers had rendered yeoman service to this planet. It was not a simple task to create the continents.

“The Lord Sri Maha Vishnu resides in my kingdom. I am offering my services to him by helping the people to live on earth. That is why I am named as *Jeevana*⁴⁷⁷. My area of influence had been expanded by my brothers. I feel as if my body had expanded and I am very happy on that account. Hence, father! Please see the good in your sons. It is difficult for anyone to withstand the grief of losing sixty thousand sons at one stroke. Please accept me as your adopted son in their place. I will get the name of Saagara by becoming the son of Sagara. From now on, please relinquish all your desires and drawbacks; and submit yourself to the will of God. This will bring about your purification.”

The deity of the sea had approached him of his own volition and proclaimed him as his father. After that he renamed himself as Saagara and propounded novel theories regarding the ecological system. This made Sagara very happy and he regained his erstwhile vigour and enthusiasm.

⁴⁷⁷ Giver of life

Subsequently, Sagara settled the affairs of the kingdom, installed Anshumana on the throne and retired with great joy to the forest. Eventually, he reached the *Ashram*⁴⁷⁸ of *Maharshi* Chayawana and started self realization practices in the presence of his Guru. He never returned from that place. After becoming the king, Anshumana behaved in a highly decorous manner. He did not scold anyone and he ruled the kingdom, within the limits imposed by the geographic changes. He waged wars and performed *Yajnas*, but he never forgot even a single word of what *Maharshi* Kapil had taught him. He had a son named, Bhageeratha, which connotes a person whose chariot is the sun. Anshumana taught his son to follow the principles that were dear to him. After Bhageeratha attained the suitable age, he crowned him the king and left for the forests.

In the forests, Anshumana did not perform *Tapas*. He followed the teachings of *Maharshi* Kapil and began to meditate, in order to obtain the goddess Ganga. It is uncertain as to how many thousand years he meditated or when he died. His mission was later on taken over by his son. Ultimately, this great enterprise was successful and the goddess Ganga descended to the earth. The living creatures of both the earth and the nether world were benefitted by the river Ganga and the goddess, later on, became famous as Bhagirathi.

⁴⁷⁸ Hermitage

This is a long narrative and it contains a number of hidden indications. Numerous goals of life had been narrated in this story. These indications describe the behaviour to be indulged in by young, middle – aged and old people in their lives. This story, in addition, establishes the correct way to lead life.

95. BHAGEERATHA

The phrase Bhageeratha Prayatna or Bhagirath's great effort denotes prolonged and inexorable effort. Bhageeratha was the son of Ansumantha. However, in some mythologies, it had been stated that Ansumantha's son was Dilip and that Dilip's son was Bhageeratha. According to these stories, Dilip meditated for a long time, in order to bring down the River Ganga, but death overtook him, before he could accomplish that task.

Bhageeratha ascended that throne, when he was quite young. He thought deeply about the hard work put in by his forefathers from three generations and resolved to establish the Divine Ganga on earth, so that not only his forefathers but all the living beings would obtain a permanent passage to heaven. Although he used to discharge his royal duties diligently, he was always

preoccupied with thoughts relating to the *Tapas*⁴⁷⁹ of his father, grandfather and great – grandfather.

What had they attained? What was the reason for their failure? These questions used to haunt him all the time.

In the meanwhile, Naabhaaga and Srutha were born to him. As soon as the elder son reached the suitable age, Bhageeratha made him the king and set off to commence *Tapas*, after invoking the Holy Ganga. Bhageeratha did not perform *Tapas* to seek the river Ganga. His *Tapas* was directed at seeking Lord Brahma. After thousands of years of *Tapas*, Lord Brahma manifested Himself and enquired of Bhageeratha as to what he wanted. Bhageeratha offered his homage with folded hands and replied, “O! Lord Brahma! My forefathers had meditated without pause for three generations, so as to effect the liberation of their ancestors. These ancestors are stranded in the netherworld as mounds of ash. I wish to continue in their footsteps. O! Lord of Lords! My *Tapas* should not be in vain and the Goddess Ganga should flow into the netherworld. Moreover, my longevity should remain undiminished to the extent of the period for which I perform *Tapas* in this endeavour. Kindly grant this wish. I vow to use the extra period of life granted by You, exclusively for this purpose.”

⁴⁷⁹ Deep meditation or ascetism

Lord Brahma was delighted at these words and granted that wish, after that he asked Bhageeratha to continue his *Tapas* without any fear and evanesced. Thereupon, Bhageeratha meditated on the Goddess Ganga. After ten thousand years, the Goddess Ganga appeared in her divine form and asked him to make a wish. Bhageeratha was very much contented and paid his homage to her, after that he spoke to her, “O! Mother! Please come down to the earth. Then come to the netherworld, this is all that I require of you.”

The Goddess Gangadevi remained silent and fell to thinking. As a goddess she was a manifestation of spiritual splendour. Even the five elements, namely, earth, fire, water, air and ether, would be in the form of spiritual essences in the world of the deities. On earth these elements would be in their corporeal form. The living creatures of the earth would fail to recognize the spiritual forms of the five elements even if these elements were to exist right before them. Only Lord Shiva had the power to change the present form of the spiritual bodied goddess Gangadevi into a corporeal form. Hence, Bhagirath’s task would remain incomplete, unless Lord Shiva bestowed His mercy upon him.

The Goddess Gangadevi contemplated these issues, and addressed him in the following manner, “Bhageeratha! I will come! All the same, if I descend directly from heaven to earth, the entire earth will be blown away. A powerful being

is required, who can keep pace with me and slowly, bring me down to earth. As far as my knowledge goes, there is no one in the three worlds who has such power. If at all anyone can perform this task, it has to be Lord Shiva, who dwells in Kailas. Make an attempt to convince him, if he is willing, I will descend on to his head.”

With these words the Goddess Gangadevi departed from that place. Bhageeratha was saddened for a moment, but he recovered immediately and started to meditate on Lord Shiva with redoubled energy. Another ten thousand years elapsed and Lord Shiva revealed Himself and granted him a wish. Bhageeratha addressed Him with great circumspection, “O! Mahadev! Parameswar! My forefathers, the Sagara Putras, lie as ashen mounds in the Pathalaloka. I prayed to the Goddess Gangadevi to flow to that place and effect their liberation. She consented to do so only if You would render Your kind assistance. Please bestow Thy mercy upon me, so that I can attain the object of my *Tapas*.”

Lord Shiva, who had been in the midst of the *Ugratandava*⁴⁸⁰, did not display much enthusiasm at this proposal. He paused in his dance, just once and said “What? That Ganga wants to jump on my head? Does she need a powerful man? Al right, ask her to come. Let her display her might,” after that He once again lost Himself in the *Ugratandava*. These words posed a great peril to

⁴⁸⁰ The virulent form of Lord Shiva’s dance

Bhageeratha. His fear was that these Deities could ruin his efforts with their adamance. Nevertheless, he took courage from the fact that Lord Shiva had not refused to accept his proposal. Hence, he worshipped the Goddess Gangadevi and invited her.

Afterwards, while gazing at the sky, he saw her; and it seemed as if she was descending from the Heavens with tremendous speed, and accompanied by a loud noise that was far in excess of the sound produced by even a thunderbolt. Bhageeratha was petrified with fear, due to this vision; and he shifted his gaze towards Lord Shiva. The Lord was dancing with great vigour and His plaited hair had come undone due to the virulence of His dancing. This vast mass of hair had spread to a great distance across the skies, and it looked as if a huge container had been constructed around Lord Shiva's head. Bhageeratha, who was standing below, could not make out as to what was happening up there.

Suddenly, Lord Shiva, who had been gyrating with tremendous ferocity, rested on his knees. His plaited hair, which had been whirling in the sky, parallel to the earth; turned upwards and intertwined itself into a double knot. The bemused Bhageeratha was unable to locate the Goddess Gangadevi. Therefore, he used his supernatural vision and saw that the Goddess Gangadevi had been completely enclosed by the matted locks of Lord Shiva. She had been terrified by Lord Shiva's dance and had spared no effort to escape from the confines of His hair, but all her

efforts were in vain, since, even a microscopic aperture was not to be found.

Subsequently, Bhageeratha, pleaded with Lord Shiva, who was dancing ecstatically, to protect him. This pleased Lord Shiva, who thereupon spoke, “O! Bhageeratha! Forsake thy fear. In heaven, Goddess Ganga’s form had been in the spiritual form of water. She could not achieve a corporeal form without my intervention. On attaining the corporeal form, she would have to fulfil the duties of rivers on earth. This would make her emerge in abundance from the centre of the earth and flow with a riverine form. In the absence of this transformation, she would have been unable to descend from the heavens. Now, she will purify the earth and protect the living creatures. Nevertheless, she cannot enter the netherworld in this form. She has to assume some other spiritual form and I am going to bestow those two forms on her, out of my love for you.

“Behold! Over there a new spring gushes forth, after splitting the mountain side, from the summit of these *Himagiris*⁴⁸¹, where I wander. In this form she is the Divine Ganga. At the present moment she is in the corporeal riverine form and she will flow towards the sea. Go forward and offer your homage to her, then welcome her and show her the path and lead her to the confluence of the rivers Yamuna and Saraswathi. This confluence will be known as

⁴⁸¹ Snow capped mountains

the Triveni Sangam, due to union with the River Ganga. There is a door to *Patala*⁴⁸² in that place and Ganga will assume two forms there. She will reach the corporeal sea in her corporeal form and she will reach *Patala* in her spiritual form. Guide her to that place and bring the *Tapas* of generations to fruition.”

At these benevolent words of Lord Shiva, Bhageeratha prostrated himself before Him. After that he approached the new born Goddess Ganga and requested her, “O! Mother Ganga! I am indebted to you. I will create a divine chariot with my power of *Tapas*. Then I will mount it and proceed along these mountain paths. Please follow me without getting diverted.”

The Goddess Ganga acceded to his request and Bhageeratha preceded her. The local water deities were elated on seeing the newborn Goddess Ganga. As the Goddess Gangadevi was following Bhageeratha, with dazzling speed, bouncing from rock to rock; divers aquatic deities rushed towards the resplendent Goddess Ganga, through crossways in the form of waterfalls and embraced her. They were very happy at being united with her. Gradually, Mother Ganga’s form underwent a number of transformations. She changed into a welling spring, a waterfall, a hill stream and a mighty river. Numerous rocks were thrust aside by the force of her passage, a number of

⁴⁸² The infernal regions

gigantic trees were uprooted and quite a few ponds were subsumed in her.

The birds flying in the sky were gladdened by the new cold winds produced by her mighty flow, and flew alongside her. They welcomed her with their melodious chirping. The wild animals, not to be outdone, were prancing with joy after having tasted her waters. The news of the Goddess Ganga's arrival reached the *Ashrams*⁴⁸³ of the *Maharshis*. The saints, living far away, rushed to that place, in order to welcome her; and on reaching her, they took a holy dip in her and became very blissful.

Bhageeratha, who was leading the way in his chariot, gently cautioned the *Ashram* dwellers, who were obstructing Goddess Ganga's path, to make way by moving to a side. Upon hearing these words, they desisted from blocking her path and welcomed her with considerable reverence. Further on, Bhageeratha chanced upon the ashram of *Maharshi* Jahnu, which was as large as a town. This ashram was exactly in the way of Goddess Ganga. Moreover, an important *Yajna* was in progress at that place and it was being conducted by not just hundreds, but by thousands of *Maharshis*. Bhageeratha espied this flurry of activity from his chariot in the sky and warned the *Maharshis*, in a strident voice, "The Goddess Ganga is on her way, move out of the way!"

⁴⁸³ Hermitages

After having issued this strident warning, he moved ahead, in order to warn the families of the saints. However, to his great astonishment, the roaring sound of the flowing River Ganga was no longer to be heard. He turned around and saw that she was flowing into *Maharshi Jahnu's* ashram, with ten times her normal force. At this the *Maharshi* had placed himself in her path and had commenced to receive her entire flow into his mouth. Even a single drop of water did not escape and the *Ritviks*⁴⁸⁴, who had gathered around him, were loud in their praise.

Bhageeratha was thunderstruck at this incredible incident; but soon he regained his poise. After that he turned his chariot back and approached *Maharshi Jahnu's* ashram. That Jahnu was not an ordinary *Maharshi*. He had been an exemplary *Kshatriya*⁴⁸⁵ and an emperor, in days of yore. He had been performing *Tapas* for thousands of years and was quite prominent, even though he had not been seen before. Bhageeratha had not expected such greatness in him.

A *Kshatriya* remains a *Kshatriya*, even after becoming a great saint. Thus, he remained unmoving, even after everybody else had moved out of the way on being warned by Bhageeratha. He remained in that place, because he was unwilling to discontinue his *Yajna*. The *Ritviks* were petrified

⁴⁸⁴ Priest who supervises the fire sacrifice

⁴⁸⁵ A person belonging to the warrior caste

with fear, but *Maharshi* Jahnu was unmoved and asked the Goddess Ganga to divert her flow. He prayed to her in these words, “Mother Ganga! In one of your various aspects, you are the *Yajna*, a *Yajna* is being conducted in this place, please extend your protection to it. In the coming epochs, men will not be able to perform *Yajnas*. The Lords Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma have sent you to earth, in order to make you the conferrer of the result of *Yajnas*. You will bestow the fruit of a multitude of *Yajnas*, merely if human beings visit you with devotion and take a bath with concentration. All the same, it would be unseemly for to ruin the *Yajna* that is being conducted at this place. Please change your course.”

*Rajarshi*⁴⁸⁶ Jahnu’s mental prayers seemed to have remained unheard due to the mighty roar of the flowing river, because the Goddess Gangadevi did not change her course. Consequently, Jahnu went to the *Ashram’s* main entrance and drew the entire river into his mouth. These incidents were seen in all their clarity by Bhageeratha, who had employed his divine sight. Thinking that it would serve no purpose to confront this *Maharshi*, he prostrated himself at his feet, and addressed him by interposing a familial relationship with him, “O! Grandfather! My family’s *Tapas*, which had been going on from three generations, will receive its befitting reward today, due to the blessings of wise people like you. Even though there is an element of

⁴⁸⁶ Royal sage

personal selfishness, a noble cause is also inherent in it. As you have said, the people would become worthy of only the inundated *Yajnas* in the future epochs. Even if they immersed themselves in the River Ganga as crows, they would emerge as swans. Moreover, an offering or sacrifice to her would ensure the salvation of several generations of ancestors, even if the prescribed funeral ceremonies had not been conducted. In addition, worship of Mother Ganga would provide relief from disease and the harassment of demons. Stated succinctly, O! Grandfather! The waves of this River Ganga will be beneficial for the people, living on earth. Furthermore; they will also constitute the steps leading to Heaven, for the denizens of Hell.”

Even before, Bhageeratha had completed his supplication; a mighty roaring sound was heard. Upon turning his head towards the source of that sound, Bhageeratha saw an enormous fountain of water, coming out of *Maharshi* Jahnu’s right ear. This great body of water landed on some gigantic rocks in the distance and began to frolic around. The tinkling sounds and placid laughter of Mother Ganga were spreading throughout that place.

Even though *Maharshi* Jahnu’s mouth remained closed, numerous pleasant sounds reached Bhagirath’s ears – “My son Bhageeratha! You have not been selfish and have merely fulfilled your duty. We have also been furthering

your cause. This River Ganga had sprouted up in Lord Brahma's *Kamandal*⁴⁸⁷, prospered at the feet of Lord Vishnu and produced flowers on Lord Shiva's head. Then she flowed as a stream of nectar on the *Himagiri* peaks. Despite, having assumed a corporeal form, she was unable to descend to the human level. The lustre of her divinity could not be countenanced by human beings, even though it had been mitigated to a great extent. In order, to benefit you and the future generations, I have been swallowing her with my mouth and releasing her from my right ear.

“Bhageeratha, you are aware of the fact that there is *Saptapata*⁴⁸⁸ at the centre of the human skull. It is the junction of seven roads – one nerve of the mouth; and two nerves each of the nose, the eyes and the ears. Their junction is the *Ajnachakra*⁴⁸⁹ and it is the place of confluence of divinity and humanity. Mother Ganga entered my *Saptapata* through my mouth, took possession of a streak of humanity in that place, and came out from my right ear. The right ear is important because disciples obtain their teaching, only through this ear. This place is the seat of purity and *Maharshis* touch it when they are unable to obtain pure water. Since, the Goddess Ganga had emerged by the path of the right ear; our *Tapas* will enter into the

⁴⁸⁷ Water pot used by ascetics

⁴⁸⁸ Seven paths

⁴⁸⁹ Third eye or the plexus located between the eyebrows

flow of River Ganga and reach every one of the future generations.

“The *Yajna* in this place had been conducted, solely for this purpose. Thousands of *Maharshis* had assembled at this place, in order to become the sacrificial fuel for this great *Yajna*. Mother Ganga arrived at this ashram, only to accept the essence of the *Tapas* of these *Maharshis*. O! Bhageeratha! Forsake fear. All of us will assume our spiritual bodies and ensure that the River Ganga continues to flows in this fashion. You proceed with your journey.”

Even before the dumbfounded Bhageeratha could regain his composure, the Goddess Gangadevi resumed her swift flow. Bhageeratha, quickly paid his homage to the evanescent forms of those *Maharshis*, whilst moving rapidly forward in an attempt to catch up with the swiftly coursing River Ganga.

The Goddess Gangadevi was led by Bhageeratha, towards the River Yamuna. The path traversed hill and dale, a few sundry ponds, and finally Hrishikesh and Haridwar. The Rivers Yamuna and Saraswathi had already united with each other in the renowned pilgrimage centre of Prayag. The mighty River Ganga reached that place. Hitherto fore, the River Saraswathi had been a small river and the River Yamuna had been a large river. It was termed as the River Yamuna, after the River Saraswathi had merged with it. Similarly, this tremendous body of water, despite

commingling with the extant confluence, was termed as the River Ganga. This river proceeded to hallowed Kasi, and finally entered the sea, and this is the journey of the corporeal River Ganga.

One more journey had to be undertaken by the River Ganga in her spiritual form; and Bhageeratha divided his natural form into two parts, on reaching the confluence of the Yamuna and the Saraswathi. With one of these forms he ventured into *Patala*, and invited the spiritual form of Mother Ganga. Thus, the venerated flow of the River Ganga entered the netherworld and completely submerged the erstwhile *Ashram*⁴⁹⁰ of *Maharshi* Kapil. As soon as the sixty thousand ashy mounds merged in the River Ganga, the spirits that had been taking refuge there and suffering from hunger became pure. Afterwards, they departed to Heaven in celestial vehicles, and all the while they were loudly singing the praise of Mother Ganga and Bhageeratha.

The River Ganga did not cease her journey and continued till she reached the door, termed Samyamanipura, which belonged to the Deity Yama; and finally merged, into the sea at that place. The Deity Yama welcomed this new incarnation of Goddess Ganga and took a ceremonial bath, along with his family, friends and retinue, in this river. On coming to know of the arrival of the Holy Mother Ganga, the denizens of Hell, rushed headlong and took a bath in the

⁴⁹⁰ Hermitage

river. This served to wash away their sins and they were released from Hell, which rendered that place bereft of sinners.

Subsequently, the dead who were being transported by the soldiers of the Deity Yama, to Samyamaniपुरi started to bathe in the River Ganga, as it was en route. Instantly, on immersion in the Holy Ganga, their sins were washed away, and they ascended to heaven from that very place. This caused considerable consternation to the deity Yama, who on the advice of the deity Indra, prayed in the company of all the deities to the Goddess Gangadevi, in the following manner. "O! Mother Ganga! Every sinner who bathes in you escapes punishment due to your touch. The statute of virtue, in the human world, is facing ruination due to this. Therefore, we pray you to grant us a boon, by accepting our prayer. May you acquire the name Vaitharini in this world, because you have been rescuing all the creatures of the Hell! May you appear as a pure river only to the virtuous people who come to our world! Due to this, may they be bestowed with good fortune after taking a bath in you! May you appear as a filthy river, consisting of pus and blood to sinners! Due to this, may they abstain from bathing in you. This will make them suffer proper punishment for their sins! You have to grant this wish, in order to protect virtue." The Goddess Ganga acceded to this supplication of the deities.

Thus, Mother Ganga was given several new names like, Triptagamini or the one who moves along the paths of

Heaven, Earth and Patala; Bhagirathi, as she had descended to earth due to the tremendous efforts of Bhageeratha; and Jahnuputhri – Jahnvi, due to the fact that *Maharshi* Jahnvi had swallowed and then released her. Bhageeratha attained eternal fame, due to his great effort. In this manner Bhageeratha, who had rendered permanent help, not only to the people of his lineage and people of the human world, but also to the people of Patala; achieved salvation, by properly utilizing the boon of long life, which he had obtained from Lord Brahma.

This story had commenced as the story of Emperor Sagara; and the details regarding the manner in which young people, middle-aged people and old people were to conduct themselves, after understanding the secrets of nature; the virtue depicted in mythological stories and what constitutes the virtuous path; were described to some extent.

Apparently, all of the incidents in this story of Bhageeratha relate to the supernatural. Even though, these incidents were patently supernatural, the *Maharshis* would not have narrated them if they had been incomprehensible or of no use to us. This precept has to be always uppermost in our mind, whilst scrutinizing mythological stories.

Despite, being an ordinary human, Bhageeratha had possessed attentiveness and a method or plan. In addition, he was desirous of performing the same kind of *Tapas*, as his forefathers had done before him. However, he did not do so

immediately. At first, he meditated on Lord Brahma and obtained the boon of long life, so that he could live till the fulfilment of his objective. This plan of action helped him to emerge victorious. Bhagirath's plans remained in force and he displayed, remarkable astuteness, while praying to Lord Shiva and also while beseeching *Maharshi Jahnu*.

Moreover, the feeling of revulsion plays an important part in causing disappointment, and even the strong minded are not spared. We come across a number of people who discard their work at the very last moment, even after having expended much effort and time, due to fatigue. He who does not possess such aversion is a true leader and an able person. Bhageeratha was the greatest example of this concept. He did not develop aversion, even though Goddess Gangadevi imposed new conditions. She had manifested herself after he had performed *Tapas* for ten millennia. He did not exclaim, "O! Once again I have to perform *Tapas*" He patiently undertook *Tapas* for another ten thousand years, in order to seek Lord Shiva.

Bhageeratha did not lose heart, when Lord Shiva appeared before him and it seemed as if he would have to continue with *Tapas* for another ten thousand years. He did not feel disgust and was on the verge of commencing penance for ten more millennia; but Lord Shiva dissuaded him from doing so. This represents conquest over repugnance.

The question arises as to what was the advantage of possessing all these great qualities. Was his objective limited to achieving the liberation of his ancestors? Had Lord Brahma, Goddess Gangadevi, Lord Shiva and *Maharshi* Jahnu aided Bhageeratha in realizing his selfish designs? This question has great significance and the *Maharshi* Jahnu had provided an answer in the story. Let us analyze it more thoroughly now.

First and foremost, the undertaking of painstaking efforts to achieve the salvation of one's parents and ancestors does not constitute selfishness. A person's development is due to the fact that his parents had lived purely, provided unwavering rules to be followed and had performed the task of rearing the children with great devotion and love. Therefore, despite the presence of personal faults, indebtedness to the parents and ancestors is mandatory. Accordingly, the services rendered towards one's ancestors constitute acts of altruism.

As such, *Maharshi* Kapil, who was peerless in the world, chose Ansumantha, the grandson of Sagara, to commence *Tapas*, in order to realize the birth of Goddess Ganga. Once again, examine the golden words spoken by him. He had noticed the imperfect state of nature at that time. He recognized the nobility in the lineage of Ansumantha who was in his presence. Therefore, he asked Ansumantha to perform *Tapas*, by merging a large amount of benevolence with a small amount of selfishness.

Bhageeratha performed *Tapas*, keeping this precept in view. Numerous spiritual souls, who had been bestowed with the sight of divinity, had recognized this secret and even *Maharshi* Jahnu had been aware of this fact. Bhagavan Vyasa recounted this story, solely to have this realization dawn upon us.

What is the realization that is to be obtained? It is not essential to realize the greatness of Bhageeratha. The lesson to be learned is that we have to combine a large amount of benevolence to a small amount of selfishness. That is the essence of this story.

Now, let us consider what modern science has to say about the waters of the River Ganga. Every Indian who follows the Veda Dharma is very fond of the River Ganga and rejoices in its sacredness. Such people have been narrating various stories about it with considerable inventiveness. What is the scientific value of such stories? This question will certainly assume importance among the present day youngsters.

The River Ganga was born in the pure snow covered mountains, at a great distance from the pollution of modern civilization. Its path mainly traversed snow covered rocks. The inhabitants of that area believe that there were a lot of natural medicinal plants in the delta region of the River Ganga. Even if all these beliefs were to be accepted, the River Ganga could be construed to be nothing more than

very pure water. What is the significance of worshipping the River Ganga's water as a deity?

Scientists in western countries have done some research in this regard, and their conclusions are truly astonishing. Ships have been plying between Calcutta and London, since a very long time. The ships that started from Calcutta were filled with the waters of the River Hubli, which is a branch of the River Ganga. This water was observed to retain its purity, even after the ship had reached London.

Similarly, the ships that set sail from London were filled with the water of the Thames. That water lost its purity even before half the journey to Calcutta had been completed. Consequently, these ships had to be replenished with fresh water on approaching the Red Sea of the Suez Canal. Dr. C. E. Nelson, F.R.C.S., a British medical scientist after coming to know about this, conducted some research and stated, "It has to be accepted that there is some mysterious power in the water of the River Ganga." He made this statement, because he was unable to find any physical cause for this extraordinary phenomenon.

This incident rendered several western scientists wonderstruck. In order, to investigate this unique occurrence, several research studies were conducted. In one such study, Dr. F. C. Harrison, of the McGill University, concluded that, "The germs that cause Cholera had been exterminated in the water of the River Ganga, within a

period of three to five hours. We were unable to find the cause for this. People, who live on the banks of the River Ganga, have been throwing a large number of corpses, including the rotted dead bodies of those who had died of Cholera, from quite some time, into the river. Nevertheless, these people had been bathing and drinking the very same water. It is their firm belief that the water of the River Ganga is sacred and beyond decay. They do not fall ill, and further research, employing modern microbiology has to be conducted.”

The internationally renowned French doctor, Dr. D. Harley, conducted research in this area. He suspended the cadavers of those who had succumbed to diseases like Dysentery and Cholera, in the River Ganga and collected the water underneath them. On examining these samples, he was unable to find any microorganisms that had been responsible for that disease. At the time of conducting this research, he had plunged several feet beneath these dead bodies. He had expected to find lakhs of microbes, but his expectations were belied and he could not find even a single one. He was amazed at this, but he did not discontinue his studies; he collected the bacteria from people infected with Cholera and Dysentery, prepared a culture, nourished them and finally, poured the water of the River Ganga on them. He examined these cultures after some time and found that the bacteria had been completely destroyed.

There was no end to his surprise and he himself announced these details to the world. According to these research studies, it has been proved that it is unacceptable to consider the water of the River Ganga to be merely, distilled water or medicinal water; it has to be conceded that this water contains some mysterious divine power.

96. SVAPHALKA

In our Puranas, we often come across marriages between people with a vast age difference between them. The reason for such marriages could be due to the hidden secrets of their previous births or they could represent preparations for the birth of great people. Such an incident took place in the story of Svaphalka.

Ugrasena was the king of Madhuranagar, when Lord Sri Krishna was born. Svaphalka was one of his distant relatives. Although, Svaphalka was born in the *Kshatriya* caste, he led the life of a *Brahmin*. He was more interested in performing sacrificial and religious rites, and chanting mantras than in discharging his duty. The people of the city were of the impression that he possessed divine powers from birth. However they did not attach much importance to it.

As things were progressing in this manner, the king Kasiraja had to countenance a major problem. His wife had become pregnant and had borne it for twelve years, but she

did not deliver the baby. She did not have any illness and the symptoms of pregnancy were prominent. All the eminent doctors of that period had diagnosed her but could not arrive at a decision. The queen was unable to withstand the pregnancy any longer. The king was distraught at his queen's condition. He could not rely on doctors anymore and resorted to the help of sorcerers. They were unanimous in their advice and told the king, "If you bring Svaphalka from Madhura, your problem will be solved."

The king thought that Madhura and Kasi were far apart and that the sorcerers had asked him to fetch a *Kshatriya*⁴⁹¹. The king was not pleased with their advice, but as a last resort he sent his men to bring Svaphalka to Kasi. After a long time, Svaphalka arrived in Kasi, and immediately on seeing the queen, he spoke, "O! Girl! Why are you harassing your mother? Come out immediately." He did not chant any mantra, perform any puja or japa. He did not give any holy water to the queen. He just uttered those words and went away. All the inmates of the royal palace wore long faces and were deeply disgraced.

The following morning, to the astonishment of everyone, the queen easily delivered a charming baby girl. The *Mages*⁴⁹² of Kasi were dumbstruck and conducted a number of discussions, regarding the boy's powers. Their

⁴⁹¹ A person belonging to the warrior caste

⁴⁹² Sorcerers or learned persons

discussions concerned the manner in which the youngster from Madhura had already known that there was a female in womb of the queen. They also debated over whether he had conversed with that girl and if she had emerged from the womb at his behest; however, these questions remained unanswered.

Subsequently, that child was named Gandhini. Svaphalka was greatly felicitated and honoured. He remained in Kasi, not for days but years. Later on, he returned to his native village. After his departure, the citizens of Kasi and their king realized that during Svaphalka's stay in their city, there had been adequate rains and that after his departure, draught and famine began to rear their ugly head in the kingdom. The sorcerers and scholars of Kasi predicted that rains would fall if Svaphalka returned to Kasi. It took twenty years for the king and his subjects to be convinced of these words.

The king of Kasi made incessant efforts to bring back Svaphalka to Kasi. The latter returned to Kasi and had resided there for two or three years. During that time the rainfall was great and the kingdom enjoyed great prosperity. Svaphalka was eager to return to his native place, as he could not stay there forever. It had been a herculean task for the king to retain Svaphalka in his kingdom. One day the king noticed that his daughter had become eligible for marriage. Moreover, he realized that Svaphalka was a *Kshathriya*; he thought that if he could persuade Svaphalka to marry his

daughter, then the latter would remain in his kingdom forever. However, the king was beset with a nagging doubt; Svaphalka was nearly sixty years of age and was always immersed in meditation, would he accept this marriage?

The king, despite these misgivings, suggested marriage to Svaphalka. Surprisingly, Svaphalka agreed to the marriage proposal. Even more surprisingly, Gandhini was elated on hearing this news.

At this juncture, today's readers have to understand the effect of the age factor in those days. At the time of the marriage, there was a huge gap between the age of Gandhini and Svaphalka. Gandhini was in her twenties, whereas Svaphalka was in his sixties. Can we accept such a marriage? Undoubtedly we cannot.

It was different in those days because the average life span of people was three hundred years. In that long life, the duration of youth lasted for nearly two hundred and fifty years. In the Mahabharata, people like Satyavathi Devi, Bhishma, Drona, Vasudeva and others had lived for a very long period of time. Since the men and women of that era remained youthful for long, an age gap of fifty years between a husband and his wife was considered to be insignificant. The story of this couple is extraordinary. Gandhini had confined herself to her mother's womb and did not come out until her husband had been proximate.

Svaphalka had recognized that the girl in the womb was his wife and had affectionately invited her to come out.

The marriage was performed and although Svaphalka did not settle in Kasi, he used to visit the kingdom regularly. Gandhini and Svaphalka had thirteen children and the eldest of them was the great devotee Akroora.

The important facts to observe are the secrets of the previous births of Gandhini and Svaphalka that lead to their marriage; and the manner in which the Almighty had crafted incidents to bring about the birth of the great devotee Akroora. As such, Svaphalka denotes a man who gives tomorrow's fruits today! This meaning has been practically established in the story.

97. AKROORA

In this world, there are a number of people who fail to overcome the effect of desires and passions, even after they attain a great position in the spiritual field. Even if a person's divine knowledge tells him that God Himself is talking to him, he cannot escape from the whirlpool of uncertainty and agitation that are natural to him. Such persons continue on their spiritual journey, by arising after clinging to the support of the Supreme Being's gracious hand: despite slipping and falling on the stones of blunders. They continue their journey by alternately falling down and

getting up. Such lives serve as a good lesson to the ordinary people like us.

Svaphalka, the distant relation of Lord Sri Krishna had thirteen children. The eldest among them was Akroora, and the wise people of the village used to declare that all the supernatural powers of his father had devolved upon him. On growing up, Akroora was successful in gradually attaining higher positions in King Ugrasena's court and was finally made a judge in that place. His house was always aglow as it was an abode of devotion, a school of virtue and a temple of meditation.

Ugrasena's son, the king of Mathura, the evil Kamsa's powers were nearing their zenith and that of King Ugrasena were nearing their nadir, hence, Akroora's likelihood of obtaining any higher position had dwindled. Akroora, who had already crossed middle age, did not feel depressed by this turn of events. Later on, Kamsa deposed his father and ascended the throne. Under these circumstances, it was very difficult for Akroora, who was famous for his sincerity and virtue to serve under Kamsa, but he was unable to give up his employment.

Akroora was like a speck of dust in the eye, for Kamsa, who had been appointing his own people to important positions. Kamsa was hesitant to dismiss Akroora from his service, because the latter had a very good name in the city. Therefore, Kamsa reduced the powers of Akroora,

without removing him from the job and accorded the barest minimum of respect towards him. Akroora had cordial relations, right from the beginning, with good people like Vasudeva. Moreover, as his worship of Lord Vishnu had been reaching the stage of perfection, it was evident that Lord Srihari would be born in that place. This gladdened the heart of Akroora and he whiled away the time, as an honourable man by attending to his professional duties. All the while he was contemplating the eagerly awaited God-man, by meditating on that image.

Even Kamsa entertained doubts that Lord Srihari had either been born or was going to be born. Due to these apprehensions, he had been encouraging his demon friends to attack Repalle and Brindavan. Akroora knew about this. Gradually, the conviction dawned upon Kamsa that the boy named Sri Krishna, who had been growing up in Brindavan, could be the incarnation of Lord Srihari. The spread of this news enabled Akroora to reach a state of pure bliss and to cross over the state of doubt. Akroora saw Him in his dreams and during meditation. Nevertheless, Akroora could not see that little boy in person, who was residing in the neighbouring village that was just two miles away. He held a position of importance and could neither afford to lose it nor could he take the risk of attracting the attention of the vicious Kamsa.

While Akroora was undergoing this agitation, he came to know that Kamsa was going to perform a *Yaga*⁴⁹³, known as the Dhanuryaga; to which he was going to invite Balarama and Sri Krishna. Even though Akroora did not have permission to attend the ministerial meetings conducted by Kamsa, he had friends who informed him about the important events that transpired in those meetings. Therefore, he came to know the actual reasons behind the *Yaga* and the invitation to Balarama and Sri Krishna. He was deeply agitated on coming to know of these plans.

Subsequently, Akroora was summoned by Kamsa and approached with trepidation. However, Kamsa was very respectful to him and shared all his concocted sorrows and joys with him. Finally, he said, “Go in person, invite Balarama and Krishna to my *Yaga* and accompany them back to this place.” Akroora felt as if a thunderbolt had fallen on his head.

He spent a sleepless night and a number of thoughts raced through his mind, “Has my desire for an official post, resulted in all this trouble? Will the great sin of bringing about the end of the incarnation of Lord Srihari, with my own hands, fall upon me? How would it be if I resigned from the job? If I tender my resignation at this moment, Kamsa will first take my life, there is no doubt about that. I will lose my life if I oppose Kamsa; but I will be deprived of virtue if I

⁴⁹³ Vedic sacrifice

follow his orders! It is as if there were a deep well in front and a pit at the back.” After some time, he entertained a new train of thoughts, “It is ridiculous of me to think along these pessimistic lines; can Kamsa and his evil minions do any harm to Lord Srihari, who incarnated, in order to kill the demons? I had been thinking of visiting that God-man, but could not get an opportunity. Now, due to God’s grace, Kamsa himself has asked me to visit them. Somehow, that Lord Sri Krishna will come here and kill Kamsa and his followers in their entirety. If I had gone to meet Lord Sri Krishna after his task had been accomplished, it would have resembled the visit of an employee in Kamsa’s court. This is not desirable; however, if I visit Him right now, I could warn Him to be on his guard, by disclosing Kamsa’s evil ploy to Him. It would be the height of foolishness, if I did not avail myself of this golden opportunity, which has been bestowed upon me due to the result of some previous act of great virtue.”

Finally, Akroora left for Brindavan. When he saw Balarama and Krishna for the first time, he was bewitched by their divine lustre and without his knowledge offered his homage to them, by falling at their feet. Those two children realized that Akroora was their uncle; and they embraced him joyously, and offered their respects to him. After some time, Nanda enquired, because he could not restrain himself any further, “Are you all safe under Kamsa? Anyway, how

can you or we be safe when that Kamsa, who has killed my sister's sons, is alive?"

Akroora was a great diplomat, hence, he kept his counsel, on hearing these words. Lord Sri Krishna, who had noticed all that had transpired, smiled enchantingly, and enquired about the well being of each and every person in Mathura. He also enquired, "Is my uncle doing well?" After all those enquiries, he finally asked, "Are Devaki and Vasudeva, who have been living in prison for the sin of having borne me, alive?"

Akroora jerked his head up and looked at Lord Krishna, as if struck by a whip. He was unable to frame a suitable reply, because that boy had started to directly discuss the secret. Akroora had been under the impression that nobody knew about it. Suddenly, Lord Sri Krishna resumed his questions, "Have my mother and father asked you to convey any message to me?" Akroora, who considered himself, to be a diplomat and a genius to boot, was unable to offer any reply whatsoever. He had planned to disclose Kamsa's plan in secret, but this boy was compelling him to reveal everything in public.

While Akroora struggled with such thoughts, Lord Sri Krishna smiled and asked, "Anyway, what is the reason for your visit, Uncle?" Then, Akroora came to his senses, and described in brief, all the incidents that had taken place, commencing with the visit of Deity Naarada to Kamsa, the

imprisonment of Devaki and Vasudeva and the killing of Kamsa's nephews. After describing these events, Akroora told them that Kamsa had asked him to bring Balarama and Sri Krishna to Mathura, under the pretext of the Dhanuryagam, and that he had come for that purpose.

All the wise people present there, understood Kamsa's plot, on hearing this news. They were thinking of some way to refuse this invitation. However, Lord Sri Krishna immediately leapt with joy and hastened everyone, by saying, "The king himself has invited us. Therefore, we should go and give gifts to him." The journey started the next morning itself and all the wise people of the herdsman caste started out to Mathura in their respective vehicles. Balarama and Krishna travelled in Akroora's chariot.

Akroora, who had been overwhelmed by the excitement of devotion, brought upon by his very first visit, slowly got rid of that sensation to some extent, as he was immersed in thoughts regarding this affair. His emotions were surfacing and he was thinking that he represented the king, that he was related to Lord Sri Krishna as an uncle and that he was a man of business. Since, he was a pious man by nature; he sat with exterior calm, whilst reciting the charms of Lord Srihari internally. Moreover, he was aware of the fact that the person sitting opposite him was Lord Srihari. Even then, he had been meditating on Lord Srihari, in far away

*Vaikunta*⁴⁹⁴, by means of *Mantras*⁴⁹⁵. He felt more at peace with the vision created in his mind, than with the reality that was seated opposite to him.

Gradually, it became the afternoon, and it was very hot. The journey was alongside the banks of the River Yamuna and Balarama and Krishna stopped the chariot and advanced to the river, in order to quench their thirst. As they were young, they went and came back as swiftly as dragonflies and resumed their seat in the chariot. Akroora noticed the approaching twilight, slowly waded into the water to take a bath and perform the evening prayer. He immersed himself in the water all the while contemplating the Lord Srihari, who resides in *Vaikunta*.

To his great surprise, he saw Balarama and Sri Krishna sitting steadily under the water with their eyes closed. Akroora got up, looked at the chariot and thought, “What is this? Do they know how to continue along, while remaining under water?” astonishingly, he also saw them in the chariot, waving their hands towards him. Akroora felt that he was losing his mind. He immersed himself in the water one more time. Balarama and Krishna were still under the water! When he emerged from the water, he saw that the boys were still there on the chariot!

⁴⁹⁴ Lord Vishnu’s Abode

⁴⁹⁵ Vedic hymn

Suddenly, he noticed that Balarama was not there. Only Lord Sri Krishna was there and he was sitting on a gigantic snake. It was not an ordinary snake, it was a thousand –hooded snake and Sri Krishna was sitting on it. Akroora arose with amazement and beheld that the boys were seated in the chariot. Once again Akroora immersed himself in the water. This time the snake had become even larger and he understood that the snake was none other than the thousand hooded Adisesha, and that the young boy reclining on it was none other than the Lord SriMahaVishnu! He had four hands and a lotus emerged from his navel, on which Lord Brahma was seated. The Goddess Lakshmi Devi was seated at His feet and He was surrounded by *Maharshis* like Naarada.

Akroora became ecstatic and recited several *Stotras*⁴⁹⁶ and chanted numerous *Mantras*⁴⁹⁷ from the Vedas. He commenced to immerse himself and emerge from the river, and this process was not only in the water but also, metaphorically speaking, in heavenly bliss! He did not know for how long this continued, and finally that vision stopped. Later on his ecstasy diminished in intensity and he regained normalcy. Finally, Akroora controlled himself, somehow completed his evening prayers, reached the shore, donned dry clothes and came to the chariot.

⁴⁹⁶ Hymns of praise

⁴⁹⁷ Vedic hymn

Both the brothers were indulging in pleasantries in the chariot. It looked as if they had not bothered about this old man. They were in the midst of their mirth and moreover, Lord Sri Krishna looked at him mockingly and asked, “What Uncle! You have immersed and got up so many times. Did you see some amazing things in the water?” Akroora had been immersed in a peculiar state of happiness. He had been in that happy state because the person who appeared as Lord Srihari was none other than this boy. Nevertheless, he felt bad that the youngster who did not even display a moustache was playing tricks on him. He was an old man, and above all he represented the king. It was not fair that he had to forsake his personal dignity. This was one chain of thought in his mind.

However, another stream of thoughts accosted Akroora from another direction. Is he a young boy? No! He is the king of the three worlds! Lord SriMahaVishnu! My king is nothing before him and I am nothing before him. He talked to me because of the kindness of his heart. It was my great fortune that he deigned to play tricks on me. These two streams of thought struggled within Akroora for a while and then slowly reduced in their intensity and became quiescent.

When the impact of those waves had reduced, the worldly person in Akroora came to the fore. Consequently, Akroora addressed the Lord in the following words, “O! Lord! Which are the details that could exist without your knowing about them? Which interesting details could exist in

the water, without being present in you?” After these words, he seated himself silently in the chariot and immersed himself in his own chanting, all the while, thinking about the Lord who had manifested Himself to him.

The chariot proceeded on its way and Lord Sri Krishna looked at Akroora pityingly. He thought to Himself “Alas! He obtained the vision of the divine form. He even realized who had bestowed that vision upon him. Nevertheless, he entertained the thought that he was an elderly person and an officer of the king. How powerful was my world bewitching magic!”

When it was evening and the heat had reduced, the chariot reached the boundary wall of Mathura. A few officers from the villages, who had come from various places, had been resting in the tents that surrounded the city. Nanda and the others had already reached there by the time Akroora’s chariot reached that place. They had awaited Akroora after setting up their tents. Even though they had come in carriages, they reached that place earlier than Akroora, because they had not tarried anywhere along the way. Lord Sri Krishna recognized his waiting kinsmen from a distance and navigated the chariot in their direction. He dismounted near them and addressed Akroora, “Uncle! Go and tell the king that we have come. Tell him that I will come

to the place of the *Yaga*⁴⁹⁸, leisurely, and in the company of my people.”

Akroora got agitated and said in a humble tone, “Oh Lord! I have a house in this city. Please purify it by visiting it. We can go to the king’s court after resting there for some time. Please be compassionate to me!” Lord Sri Krishna laughed and replied in a normal voice, “Uncle! It would be better if I come to your home after I put an end to that Kamsa.”

Akroora felt that a thunderbolt had fallen by the side of his house. Could this boy, who resembled a tender spinach stem, kill Kamsa? That Kamsa had displayed his strength by restraining thousands of elephants, which were in rut. After that he had tossed them around as they were a ball. How could this boy kill such a strong man?”

This thought had not arisen in Akroora’s mind till that moment; and he had only thought that he had to somehow, protect these children from Kamsa. Whereas, this young boy, was casually stating that he would kill Kamsa. Moreover, he was asking him to inform Kamsa that he had arrived. Akroora started to tremble, on contemplating the future course of events and their consequences. However, Lord Sri Krishna ignored Akroora’s apprehensions and commanded him to start for the king’s palace. Akroora

⁴⁹⁸ Vedic sacrifice

acknowledged this directive, with unintended deference, and made his way into the city.

While going forward, Akroora was besieged by a new thought, “Yes, this boy is the incarnation of Lord Srihari and he has killed gigantic demons with his finger. He even created the hills and created the sphere of spheres, the colossal sphere. Moreover, He is the one who rules and kills; hence, this Kamsa of a thousand elephants and his innumerable troops are insignificant in His presence. It is foolishness on my part to become anxious about his safety!

“I am so austere, diligent in prayers, an unparalleled devotee and was willing to sacrifice my life, in order to assist Him. Even then, He did not accept my invitation. Why? He did not even say no. What is the link between his visit to my home and the killing of Kamsa? Perhaps, my ignorance is the cause; I had been thinking that I am the king’s representative. The Lord was almost in the position of the defendant; and I had felt that I was a superior officer and that He was an ordinary person. Moreover, after the death of Kamsa he would become the king of this country. Then I would be a minor official under Him. May be He was planning to visit my house after my official status had reduced in that manner. Nevertheless, the reality was otherwise, because He was already the king of the three worlds. I am like unto a dog in his presence; and it is proper to teach humility to arrogant people like me. May my wisdom get purified due to the Lords’ grace!”

With these thoughts in his mind, he approached Kamsa and told him about the arrival of Balarama and Sri Krishna. He also informed Kamsa that they would come and meet him the next day. Kamsa was about to praise Akroora for fulfilling the task allotted to him. However, Akroora stopped Kamsa and said, "I am very tired from the journey and due to my age. I will see you tomorrow after taking some rest." With these words he went home.

The next day when he had completed the observance of the various essential religious ceremonies, he heard the news that Lord Sri Krishna had crushed Kamsa like a rooster crushes the earthworm. Akroora, unlike the rest of the people in the city, was least surprised at this turn of events. However, he was surprised only by one of the acts of Lord Krishna. After vanquishing Kamsa, he had made neither Himself nor His father the king. He had installed Ugrasena, the father of Kamsa, on the throne. Akroora used to believe that he was a great and virtuous man; but this act of the young boy, who had not yet undergone the *Upanayana*⁴⁹⁹, caused him unceasing wonder.

After annihilating Kamsa, the Lord was to pay a visit to Akroora's home. He had agreed to the visit, but nothing had materialized, in this context. Akroora was nonplussed, because he did not know the manner in which to remind Him now. Akroora waited for the arrival of Lord Sri Krishna

⁴⁹⁹ Ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread

and his mind desperately swung between hope and despair. Some time passed by in this manner. The *Upanayana* ceremony was performed for Lord Krishna. He completed his education and His activities increased tremendously and it seemed as if he had forgotten all about Akroora.

Akroora was deep in despair due to this; however, one day, like rainfall without clouds, Lord Sri Krishna suddenly arrived at his home, in the company of Uddhava and Balarama. Akroora felt that his life had been restored. He had become considerably older by that time; nevertheless, he prostrated himself to Balarama and Sri Krishna, and washed their feet. Then he sat down and placed their feet in his lap. After that he tenderly attended to those feet and praised the Lord, “O! Lord! Please make me get rid of affection towards worldly affairs.”

However, Lord Sri Krishna laughed playfully and said, “Uncle! You are an efficient relative. Why do you indulge in philosophy when we need your help? Moreover, human beings worship rocks thinking them to be deities and immerse themselves in the water. We should not stop them from doing so. Hence, I do not criticize them; but, the reality is that a real blessing would have been obtained if a devotee and virtuous person like you had been worshipped. There would be nothing worthwhile in other forms of worship. I am seeking your help with great hope.”

On hearing these words of Lord Sri Krishna, Akroora forgot all the philosophy that he had been talking till then and said, “Lord! Tell me about the work that has to be done.” The arrows of appreciation released by Lord Krishna had penetrated his bosom without his knowledge. However, Lord Sri Krishna pretended to ignore these developments and addressed Akroora, “Do you remember my aunt Prithadevi? She is a sister to you. I heard that she was close to you in your childhood. Have you ever thought about the troubles she is facing now? Previously, our situation was not all that good. Hence, we ignored her problems; but it would be unfair if we did not take care of her now. Hence, I have been thinking that it would be good if one of us were to go there, take stock of the situation and provide at least mental courage to our aunt.

“However, those Kuru emperors pay scant regard to anyone from this place. In the entire Mathura city, they have respect only for you. Our aunt would lose her diffidence if you were to go there. You possess the power to tell beneficial and ennobling words to that blind king at that place. Moreover, nobody could surpass you in the art of talking and the question of failure would never arise if a job were to be entrusted to you. Hence, I request you to go there and complete this job.” Akroora was aglow, due to the praises heaped on him by the Lord and was very pleased with himself, that even the Lord had recognized his diplomatic acumen. Thereupon, he started for Hastinaapura.

That period in the political history of India was beset with a number of crises. Panduraju, the virtuous emperor of India, had died. The blind Dhritharashtra, who was given temporary charge of the kingdom, was disporting⁵⁰⁰ himself as the real king and was making plans to ensure that his son, the evil Duryodhana would inherit the kingdom. Externally, he kept up charade of affection towards his brother's sons. In addition, some powerful kings like Jarasandha, had been attempting to usurp the throne, by availing themselves of this opportunity. Panduraju's wife Kunthidevi, and her sons the Panchapandavas, had been surviving due to the affection of the people, amidst this web of deceit and enmity. They were anxious to obtain the kingdom and were facing mortal perils at every turn; nevertheless, they lived with courage and resoluteness.

The sightless king raised his eyebrows on hearing that Akroora had arrived from Mathura. Kunthidevi felt rejuvenated and told her brother, in detail, about all the wrongs of Dhritharashtra and this was corroborated by Vidura. Akroora consoled Kunthidevi and accosted the blind king. He employed the tactics of the worldly wise and attempted to make him desist from iniquity. He addressed Dhritharashtra in the following manner, "Your younger brother made an unworthy man like you the king. You are duty bound to at least look after your younger brother's

⁵⁰⁰ Frolicking

sons as the equals to your own sons. If you do not do so, you will definitely go to Hell.”

Dhrutharashtra was an extremely materialistic person. Akroora would not transgress virtue, but Dhrutharashtra had no such scruples. While Akroora was quoting verses on righteousness, Dhrutharashtra repeated philosophical verses. He said that Lord Sri Krishna was the incarnation of Lord Srihari. He also said that humans were dependent on the Lord; and that whatever took place in the world was solely due to Lord Sri Krishna’s resolve.

Akroora understood the duplicity of the blind king, and after expressing his dissatisfaction, left that place. His confidence in himself, that he could convince anyone and that he could achieve any work, suffered to a great extent. Nevertheless, he explained the situation to Lord Krishna and asserted that the position of Pandavas could be improved, only if Lord Sri Krishna Himself intervened.

After that Lord Sri Krishna did not employ Akroora in the affairs of Hastinaapura. Even the Lord was unable to resolve this issue amicably. Finding the political turmoil to be distracting, He shifted his kingdom from Mathura, on the banks of the Yamuna; to the island of Dwaraka, which was in the middle of the sea, off the coast of the present day Gujarat. He had to face many wars and his first marriage was due to the influence of politics and the power of love. Later

on, regional political influences compelled him to marry for the second time.

In that very same city, in the same lineage of *Kshatriyas*, there lived an ordinary householder Sathrajith. He was a worshipper of the Deity Surya. His daughter Sathyabhama was famous as the most beautiful girl in the world. Some of the wise people among Sathrajith's relatives, advised him to give his daughter in marriage to Lord Sri Krishna. This advice was not palatable to Sathrajith, who used to state in public, "What does that Krishna possess? He is not worthy of becoming a king in this birth. Sathadhanva is better than him. He is a wealthy man and a warrior and it would be better to give my daughter to him, in marriage."

The families of Lord Sri Krishna and Sathadhanva heard these words of Sathrajith. Although Sathadhanva was much younger to Akroora, they were good friends. Another respectable man, named Krithavarma also belonged to the same group. They were all gladdened to hear that Sathadhanva would wed the most beautiful woman in the world. Secret consultations transpired among the wise people, in which Akroora was also a participant. Sathrajith did not commit himself; however, he agreed informally to give his daughter to Sathadhanva. Akroora was apprehensive with this state of affairs.

One day, Sathrajith undertook the vow of the deity *Surya*⁵⁰¹, and remained in deep *Tapas* for some days. The result of his efforts was that he procured a precious gem, the Syamantakamani, due to the grace of the deity Surya. It was said that the gem gave approximately two hundred and eighty kilograms of gold every day to those who worshipped it with determination and devotion! Lord Sri Krishna, who came to know about this, developed a desire for it. Sathrajith did not consent to handing it over to him. This gem was subsequently, lost and Sathrajith's suspicions immediately fell on Lord Sri Krishna. This infuriated Lord Sri Krishna and He engaged in a number of courageous deeds, and finally restored that gem to Sathrajith.

Sathrajith was terrified that he had antagonized Lord Sri Krishna, due to this incident. To rectify his mistake and also to assuage the anger of Lord Krishna, he changed his mind and gave the beautiful Sathyabhama in marriage to Lord Sri Krishna. Akroora, Sathadhanva and Kritha, were infuriated at this unexpected change. Moreover, Sathadhanva had desired not only Sathyabhama but also the Syamantakamani. He was beside himself with rage and approached his friends and sought their advice in the matter.

Akroora disliked Sathrajith due to their political differences. Moreover, his friend's sorrow prompted him to

⁵⁰¹ Sun

He speak without thinking, “Sathrajith had always been like this. He promised to give his daughter to you, but went back on his word and gave her to Lord Sri Krishna. I do not contest the fact that Lord Sri Krishna is a great person. All the same is it proper for Sathrajith to do such a thing? Since, you were unable to get married to that girl who had been promised to you; at the very least, obtain that Syamantakamani. Lord Sri Krishna did not take that gem even though Sathrajith had pressed him to take it. Therefore, it should be with Sathrajith. Somehow procure it.”

On being motivated in this manner by Akroora, Sathadhanva left that place, after having resolved to procure the Syamantakamani at any cost and by any stratagem. A few days later, he came to know that both Balarama and Lord Sri Krishna had left for Hastinaapura, on some work. That night in an intoxicated state, he attacked Sathrajith’s house and demolished it. Subsequently, he beheaded Sathrajith and proceeded to the prayer room, where the gem was kept and after taking possession of the gem, fled from that place.

The news of this event had spread all over the city by the morning; and the entire city was amazed at the courage of Sathadhanva, for having killed the father-in-law of Lord Sri Krishna. The whereabouts of Sathadhanva were unknown; and Akroora and his friends were hoping that as Lord Sri Krishna was not present in the city, the public outrage against the killer would abate to some extent, after the

funeral ceremony was over. They were also hoping that Lord Sri Krishna would not be that furious, as Sathrajith was not His true friend. However, Sathyabhama dashed all their hopes.

She was greatly incensed and loudly clamoured that her father's cremation would have to be postponed, until such time as his murderer had not been executed. Subsequently, she had the cadaver embalmed with herbal oils, to prevent its decay. After that this fearless lady, mounted a chariot and travelled all the way, on her own to Hastinaapura. There she informed Lord Sri Krishna and Balarama about what had transpired, with the result that they immediately swore to apprehend the killer. Subsequently, they set out for Dwaraka along with her.

When Sathadhanva came to know that Lord Sri Krishna was much annoyed with him and that he was coming to the city to capture him, he was greatly agitated. Since, he was unable to find any solution to his predicament; he went to Krithavarma and asked him for assistance. However, the latter expressed his inability to help him. Thereupon, Sathadhanva ran to Akroora, thinking that only Akroora had been credited with the power to appease Lord Sri Krishna. However, Akroora was extremely astute and had anticipated such an eventuality; accordingly, he berated him severely as soon as he saw him.

Akroora told Sathadhanva that he had not advised him to kill Sathrajith, while purloining the gem. He continued his diatribe and stated, “My advice to you was not to perform assassinations under the influence of string drink. Does not homicide entail a certain amount of skill? Why have you underestimated Lord Sri Krishna? You did not believe me when I said that he was the incarnation of Lord Srihari. Even if you ignore this fact, how could you forget that he had smashed Kamsa into smithereens with just one hand? Do you expect me to help you against such an adversary? Do I have to forgo my life along with you? My final advice to you is to go and fall on his feet.”

Sathadhanva head spun and his fury was unstoppable, “Uncle! I have known from the beginning that you are a practical person. Even then, I did not anticipate such treachery from you. You asked me to somehow obtain the Syamantakamani and I did so by believing in your words. That Krishna had coveted it from the very beginning and now, He is approaching this place in great fury, because of that gem, and not out of love for his wife, anger with his father-in-law’s death, nor hatred towards me. He is coming only for this gem! So if this gem were not with me, I would survive even if he were to capture me. Although, He would be vexed considerably, He would spare my life. So you need not conceal me in your house, just keep this gem with you for a few days.” With these words, he tossed that gem onto Akroora’s lap and mounted his steed, in great haste. As he

could not think of any solution, Akroora shouted, “If that is what you want, promise me that you will never tell anyone, about having given this gem to me even if you were to lose your life.” Sathadhanva rode away and shouted back, “All right! I promise!”

Meanwhile, Balarama and Sri Krishna had reached the outskirts of Dwaraka, and they heard the news that Sathadhanva had been last seen galloping away on his horse. They quickly swerved their chariot back and lent furious chase to the fleeing felon. Presently, they espied Sathadhanva, who was dashing away for all he was worth, and resembled a speck in the distance. The fugitive was speeding along on his horse, while the chariot was in hot pursuit. The chase was over sand, due to proximity to the sea shore, and through a dense forest. Therefore, Sathadhanva was able to elude his pursuers. This continued for some time and Lord Sri Krishna out of vexation, struck him with an arrow, which pierced his spine.

Balarama and Sri Krishna approached the prostrated Sathadhanva, but he had already departed from this world. Lord Sri Krishna searched his clothes with great anxiety, but the Syamantakamani was not on his person. He sadly related this to his elder brother. Unexpectedly and for no apparent reason whatsoever, Balarama suddenly became very angry and shouted, “Bravo Sri Krishna! Bravo! On one hand you acquired that bundle of beauty and on the other you obtained a pile of gold! How can you find the gem inside the

garments of a dead man, when all the time it has been in your possession? You have always possessed such qualities. You might have desired that gem, which is natural for human beings. However, you have killed a relative, who had been accused of murder. Is it appropriate for kings to execute an accused, without conducting a proper investigation? Nobody is allowed to kill, but you do so! It is better to go on pilgrimages rather than live with such a brother. I am leaving here and now, go ahead and devour the entire kingdom.” With these words, Balarama made preparations to leave that place.

Lord Sri Krishna was flabbergasted, and his limbs felt weightless. He beseeched his brother in several ways and with tears in his eyes, but his brother did not change his resolve. Finally, Lord Sri Krishna was compelled to enter the city, without his elder brother. This incident served to provide grist for the gossip’s mill. Some rumours stated that Sathadhanva had killed Sathrajith; while others contended that Lord Sri Krishna himself had secretly brought about the demise of Sathrajith, and had subsequently, hidden the Syamantakamani.

In this manner the entire city became a hot bed of rumours and Akroora felt great agitation. The Syamantakamani had been producing about two hundred and eighty kilograms of gold per day, where was he to hide it? This secret was bound to be revealed any day and he would certainly be hanged. This was a constantly recurring

thought in his mind. Moreover, Akroora's qualities of being highly principled, sincere, opposed to revelry, under the vow of celibacy and diligent in observing the religious ceremonies; were greatly enhanced after the arrival of the Syamantakamani and his mind had become very peaceful.

At last, Akroora decided to flee from that city. He also thought of approaching Lord Sri Krishna and surrendering the gem to him. However, he decided against this course of action, because even if Lord Krishna remained silent, Sathyabhama was sure to interfere and make Him take some action or the other against him. Moreover, the performance of the religious ceremonies had been going on very well, after obtaining the gem and Akroora was chary of being deprived of these benefits.

In addition, he was besieged with thoughts like, whether the gold being produced every day, was his property and how could he enjoy it. These thoughts pestered him ceaselessly, and finally compelled him to leave Dwaraka and settle in Kasi, which was his grandfather's city. In Kasi he was made welcome by the populace, and he was supported in his activities. Accordingly, Akroora remained in that place and was very happy.

In Kasi, no one could make out as to how he obtained money for making donations continuously. He used to perform lavish *Yajnas*, one after the other. Finally, the people named him as Daanapathi or the personification of

generosity. As the people of Kasi city believed that he and his father had acquired supernatural powers, they believed that the gold was being produced by supernatural means. Twelve years elapsed in this manner and in those twelve years, Akroora never used even a single piece of the gold, acquired through the Syamantakamani, for his personal requirements. He did not increase his pleasures and this had the effect of taking his *Tapas*, gradually to an exalted state.

In the meantime, rainfall was gradually decreasing in Dwaraka and finally conditions of drought emerged. Some of the citizens began to speak ill and said, “How it that there are no rains, when Lord Sri Krishna himself is present in this place?” Some other older people stated publicly that Svaphalka and Akroora both possessed the power of fetching rains, from their very birth, and that Akroora had not been accorded proper respect, after Lord Sri Krishna had come to power. These people further held that Akroora had left for Kasi due to this lack of appreciation, which had resulted in the drought.

These words of criticism reached the ears of Lord Sri Krishna. There were hot winds blowing not only in the city, but also on the domestic front. His elder brother who had left in anger had not returned home. This caused His sister-in-law and her sons to reproach him and His parents were not talking to him properly. Sathyabhama was deeply dissatisfied and moreover, he was getting a bad name in the city.

The talk in the city regarding Akroora, caused Him to investigate about him, and on receiving the relevant information, He understood that the Syamantakamani could be with Akroora, because he was making such great donations and conducting such a large number of *Yajnas*. He smiled to himself and sent a message to Akroora, “We are very proud of the fact that one of the persons in our lineage has been given the title of Daanapathi. We wish to honour you on behalf of our entire Vrishni lineage. You should attend this ceremony without fail.”

Akroora was startled upon hearing the final part of the message. He understood that Lord Sri Krishna had come to know of his secret and was afraid to meet Him. On the other hand, his mind was longing to see Him, hence, Akroora started out to Dwaraka without paying much attention to his wildly conflicting thoughts.

The court at Dwaraka was very large and somehow Lord Sri Krishna managed to bring Balarama into that assembly. All the speakers in that assembly were full of praise for Akroora. Finally Lord Sri Krishna’s turn to talk arrived and he arose amidst applause and cries of victory. After silence had been restored, Lord Sri Krishna described all the troubles that He had faced for the past twelve years, because of His inability to trace out the Syamantakamani. He addressed Akroora directly and said, “Daanapathi! If you have that Syamantakamani, retain it with yourself, however,

show it just once to my elder brother. Then he will believe in my words. I require nothing else from you.”

When Lord Sri Krishna talked in this guileless manner, the entire court was speechless. All the same, Akroora’s mind was racing furiously. He had anticipated the strategy that Lord Sri Krishna was going to adopt in his speech. Akroora realized that the Supreme Being knew that the gem was on his person. He also understood that He would make him bring it forth, even by disrobing him, if he pretended to be insane. Meanwhile, he was happy that he could finally rid himself of the responsibility of taking care of that gem. Moreover, his involvement with political affairs convinced him that he was in no danger. Therefore, he stood up at once and touched the feet of the Lord and replied, “O! Lord Sri Krishna! You have absolved me of my responsibility. I had been waiting all these days, to receive your command. This gem reached me through Sathadhanva; and God only knows how he had acquired it. I thought of handing it over to you; but, I kept quiet all these days out of fear that you would say, “No work ever takes place without my order. Await my instructions and till such time keep it with you.” Now you have issued your instructions and moreover it shines truly well only if it is with you.”

While saying this Akroora took out a small box, which had been concealed in his navel, and revealed a sparkling gem that had been placed in it. He showed it to all the members of the royal court, and Sathyabhama recognized it

as the Syamantakamani. The expressions on Balarama's face underwent several changes, while looking at that gem. He even forgot to be apologetic towards his brother, who had borne the blame for the missing gem. Presently, he made the following observation, "It would be in the best interests of all concerned, if this gem were to be enjoyed jointly, by my younger brother and me. Since, I am the elder brother; it would be in the fitness of things if this gem was to be placed in my house of worship."

Sathyabhama displayed petulance on hearing these words. She became rubicund of visage and clearly stated her opinion, "This gem is my father's self acquired property. Why does it have to be with someone else, when its proper place is with me?"

Lord Sri Krishna felt that he had been pinioned between the interlocked horns of two combating bulls. Nevertheless, he did not pay much attention to this argument. He was contemplating something else; and he was truly pleased with the spiritual development of Akroora. As such He wished to teach them all a lesson, through this incident. Accordingly, He gave that assembly an enchanting smile and said, "It would be excellent if this gem were to be placed in my brother's house of worship. However, it is a divine gem and if we wish to obtain the best results from it, we have to adhere to certain principles. If the mind is drawn towards enjoyments like drinking wine, when this gem is in

the house, then the goddess of this gem would destroy that person, rather than bestow her benevolence.”

When Balarama heard about having to forsake wine, he was startled and said, “I made that statement just for fun, why would I covet my sister-in-law’s property? I will not even touch it even if you asked me to do so.” Lord Sri Krishna smiled once again and stated, “Sathyabhama practices *Yoga*⁵⁰² daily. It is essential to be a celibate for retaining this gem. That is not a problem in her case; however, if she wants to worship this gem I will have to sit beside her. Due to certain unavoidable circumstances, I had been compelled to marry sixteen thousand girls. Hence, I have been thinking whether I can adhere to these principles.”

The entire court reverberated with laughter and Sathyabhama, felt very shy with what had happened and left that place, by stating, “You look after this matter.” Lord Sri Krishna warned everyone who was assembled there, “Dear members of the court! This gem will not give that much gold to everyone. It gives such results only to those who possess good principles, sincerity, and pure celibacy, true non-violence and the vow of *Astheya*⁵⁰³. Only Akroora possess such good qualities, hence, I request him to keep this gem

⁵⁰² Disciplines of asceticism that result in spiritual experiences and a deep understanding into the nature of existence.

⁵⁰³ Non - covetousness

with him. However, I have a request; the benefits of this gem should be made available to our Dwaraka. Even the results of Akroora's meditations should be made available only for us. As such all our people have been insisting, most humbly that he should reside in his own house here and retain this gem with him. He should perform all his charitable actions in this place itself. This will be as per his wishes and we will consider ourselves to be extremely fortunate."

These words brought out the effulgence of Akroora's noble personality, which took on the aspect of the unfurled flag on the Palace. In addition, Akroora obtained constant nearness to Lord Sri Krishna as an additional benefit. Akroora offered his humble prostrations to Lord Sri Krishna and spent the rest of his life in the proximity of Lord Sri Krishna.

What transpired after this with regard to Akroora has not been described, and there is no need to specifically narrate it. Akroora was pure and his mind was clear. All the same, purity and clarity do not result in efficiency. He had conducted his worldly affairs with efficiency. Even though his mind got slightly polluted due to arrogance, the Supreme Being corrected it, without getting enraged. That is why Akroora never thought of buying armies or building cities, despite possessing enormous wealth. He had totally put into practice the rule that, if he obtained more money than was required by him, he would merely manage such excess money and not spend it on himself. He offered his wealth to

society and remained an ideal man. All this could be construed to be his hard work. As a result, the Supreme Being decided that the gem should remain with Akroora; although this had brought about the disgrace of his elder brother, wife and even Himself, before the entire court. In addition, He provided His constant nearness to Akroora and led him by the hand towards liberation.

On the basis of the foregoing, it is crystal clear that if ordinary people like us, maintain our heart in a peaceful, unselfish and constantly devoted manner; then the crests and troughs of the waves of the sea of family life and the ups and downs of worldly life, would be unable to prevent us from acquiring a good life with the grace of the Supreme Being. Moreover, this story establishes the fact that we should not necessarily think that the good people, who live in the world, are low minded, just because they exhibit a modicum of narrow mindedness, at some place or time.

98. AGASTYA

There are four yugas, namely Kruta Yuga, Threthayuga, Dwaparayuga and Kaliyuga, which constitute a Mahayuga. The union of a thousand such Mahayugas constitutes a day in the life of Lord Brahma. This is also known as a Kalpa and He does the work of creation throughout His day. During His night the entire creation is destroyed and He takes rest.

Some beings are born in one Kalpa and practice a lot of *Tapas*⁵⁰⁴. However, just as they are about to attain a state of oneness with God, and just when their sadhana is about to be completed, that particular Kalpa is completed and the entire creation is destroyed. Subsequently, a new Kalpa begins. The result is a new creation and several million living creatures are born.

Some of these living beings would have reached the final stage of religious practice during the previous Kalpa, and such beings are reborn in the new Kalpa. The manner of their birth and their parents would be extraordinary. Even the advantages enjoyed by them and their biography would not be commonplace. *Maharshi*⁵⁰⁵ Agastya's birth is the best example of this fact. Long ago, during the beginning of creation a demon called, Tarakasura had been tormenting the deities with his army of demons. The Deity Devendra assigned the responsibility of killing those demons to the Deities Agni and Vayu. The battle formation was so designed that the Deity Agni and his army would be in the front and the Deity Vayu would be at the back to render assistance to the former.

The army of the demons was scattered and most of them lost their life due to the effectiveness of that battle formation. The remaining demons concealed themselves at

⁵⁰⁴ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁵⁰⁵ Great Sage

the bottom of the sea where the Deity Agni's powers were of no avail. The Deities Agni and Vayu were elated at this victory and they told the Deity Devendra, "The agony caused by the demons has come to an end!" After that they attended to their regular duties.

When some time had elapsed, the demons that had been hiding in the sea came out in the night time, as they had observed the negligent attitude of the deities, and attacked the heavenly cities. In the daytime they would return to their underwater hideouts. In the heavenly cities small wars were taking place everywhere, due to this guerrilla warfare, and the army of the deities was suffering heavy losses.

Twelve thousand years passed by in this manner and finally, this problem came to the notice of the Deity Devendra. He was much annoyed and summoned the deities Agni and Vayu before him. After that he scolded them, "What is this? Had I not assigned this duty to you both? Then why have you kept quiet, while the demons have continued their depredations for the past twelve thousand years? Perhaps, you do not know what to do as they are hiding in the sea? If required, you should have killed them by drying the sea and by dragging them out, but why have you abandoned the task and why are sitting as if you have adorned your hands with bangles?"

On being berated by their king, in the royal assembly, the deities Agni and Vayu were fulminating internally; however, they replied deferentially, "O! Lord! It's not that difficult to dry the sea; nevertheless, if we did such a thing, many living creatures would have died. As this was an improper course of action to follow, we refrained from doing it. You are virtuous and intelligent, it would be far better if you could arrive at some other plan, which would spare the creatures living in the sea."

The Deity Devendra was incensed with this impertinent reply and cursed them, "Is it not enough to resemble the useless inanimate things? Why are you spouting verses on virtue? You do not deserve this manly divine birth. Go to the Earth and be born from inanimate things. Moreover, be born as Brahmins who recite verses." When the king of the deities displayed his anger in this manner, everyone present at that place left hastily, in order to attend to their respective duties. The deities Agni and Vayu worked very hard to the best of their ability and managed to control the demons to some extent. Nevertheless, the curse of the Deity Devendra had been waiting for an opportune moment. Surprisingly, that opportunity was caused by the Deity Devendra himself.

During that time, the Maharshis Nara and Narayana, who were born from a part of Lord Narayana, commenced to meditate in the Himalayas. The Deity Devendra, who came to know of this, sent some Apsaras from heaven to

test them. He sent the deities Manmadha and Vasantha as their leaders. All of them started to dance and there was considerable disturbance. Maharshi Narayana, who saw all this, did not get angry. He just smiled and slapped his thigh or uruvu and a beautiful celestial maiden was born from that act. As she had been born from the Maharshi's uruvu or thigh, she was known as Urvasi.

It was not just Manmadha and Vasantha, but even the heavenly damsels that were dumbstruck by her gorgeousness. Moreover, the deity Surya who had been watching from the sky lost the presence of his mind and invited her to his abode.

The name of the deity Surya that had called her was, Mithra. Dikpalaka and Surya are the names of the ranks. There were numerous officers in each rank, and they were collectively known by the name of their rank. However, they also had individual names. There were twelve principal officers in the rank of Surya. Amongst them, Mithra, the leader of the day, had invited Urvasi. Similarly, there were many officers in the rank of Varuna and one of them was known as Varuna. He was the leader of the night, and Mithra and Varuna were good friends. The deities had given them the sobriquet of Mithraavaruna, and they used to traverse all the divine courts, in each other's company, like twin deities.

Mithra, who had invited Urvasi, halted at his friend Varuna's house, while taking her to his home. Having lost his wits due to the beauty of Urvasi, he failed to recognize the changes that were taking place in the facial expressions of Varuna, who seized the opportunity when Mithra was temporarily absent and accosted Urvasi, and asked her to accompany him. Even women of ill repute adhere to some principles, and Urvasi replied, "Your friend Mithra has already invited me. I agreed to that, therefore I cannot accompany you."

Varuna was dispirited at this reply and after thinking for a while he said, "It is all right! You have been abiding by your principles. What you state is very good, but please grant me a small favour. Despite, living with my friend, keep me in your thoughts forever. That is all that I desire of you." Urvasi thought for a while, pretended to hesitate and finally agreed to his wish.

Urvasi and Mithra reached the latter's house, where he saw Varuna in Urvasi's heart. With that, his lust turned into anger and he cursed Urvasi, "O! Urvasi! Do you want one person for fantasizing about and another for pleasure? This is unpardonable. Be born as a normal human being in the world of humans." In the ensuing commotion, Urvasi left without having made herself available to either Mithra or Varuna. The two friends repented at what had transpired, nevertheless, they were unable to get rid of the lust in their minds.

They were not only deities, but also, the leaders of their rank! More than that they were the controllers of emendation; lust and anger could not overwhelm them that easily. As the feeling of lust had not left them, they concentrated their divine vision and looked inside. Then they understood the reason for their lust. The deities Agni and Vayu, who had been cursed by the Deity Indra, had entered into the bodies of Mithra and Varuna, in order to obtain human birth. Now they were in a hurry to obtain human birth and for that reason the fire of lust had been burning in Mithra and Varuna.

Immediately, Mithra and Varuna studied all the events leading up to the Deity Indra's curse and understood that the deities Agni and Vayu had to be born as Brahmin saints from inanimate matter. Mithra and Varuna felt that it was their duty to co-operate with the laws of Nature and the Deity Indra's command. Thereupon, they fetched a pot, filled it with sacred water and poured drops of their power inside them, by taking the vow, "May the protection of the world take place."

The pot and the water in it were in an inanimate form and the Deities Agni and Vayu assumed the form of seeds. Gradually, these seeds attained a mature state; and acquired a human body that developed into two Brahmin boys, who emerged from that pot. The first to emerge was Agastya and he was followed by Vasisht.

As they were the combined sons of Mithra and Varuna, they were also known as the Maitravarunas. As Urvasi had been the unintentional cause of their birth, some people also named them as Aurvaseyas. Both of them had been born from the same pot. Therefore, they could also be described as Kumbhasambhavas. Nevertheless, that name had been universally reserved for Agastya, who had emerged first from the pot. Those two mysterious beings, who had been born from the pot, became Maharshis and performed many deeds for the prosperity of mankind.

Maharshi Vasisht and Maharshi Agastya were not ordinary people like us. Two living beings had performed eternal Tapas in one of the Kalpas and had become the deities Agni and Vayu in the succeeding Kalpa. Certain of their components had been born as Maharshi Vasisht and Maharshi Agastya in another Kalpa. All this is a part of the sport of the powerful people who can control their arrival and departure from one body to another. Their acts bring about the welfare of the common people like us.

99. THE MARRIAGE OF MAHARSHI AGASTYA

*Maharshi*⁵⁰⁶ Agastya had entered into this world in a strange manner, and as a lonely creature, without parents. Even then, he did not develop fear or sadness; and the deeds of his previous births provided some help. That boy, who had spent his early days in the houses of Mithra and Varuna, gradually reached some villages, where a number of saints were in residence; and grew up there in comfort. In that environment, the memories of his previous birth were restored and he continued his *Tapas*⁵⁰⁷ from where he had discontinued it. He was meditating, even though he had not undergone the *Upanayana*⁵⁰⁸ ceremony.

Some of the deities, who noticed this fact, manifested before the *Maharshis* and told them the story of that boy's birth. After that they made them perform the boy's *Upanayana*. The young Agastya acquired divine knowledge from these *Brahmarishis*⁵⁰⁹ and the *Vedamantras*⁵¹⁰ of the Vedas appeared before him. He performed intense *Tapas* and a number of centuries passed by.

⁵⁰⁶ Great Sage

⁵⁰⁷ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁵⁰⁸ Ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread

⁵⁰⁹ Sages who have attained *Bramhajnana*

⁵¹⁰ Vedic hymns

Some of the saint families had come forward to give their daughters in marriage to Agastya, and some wise people had even encouraged it. Nevertheless, Agastya could not decide about forsaking his celibate state. Moreover, as he had undertaken the vow of prolonged *Tapas* and had spent a lot of time in deep meditation, he became very thin and resembled a skeleton. All the same, he used to glow very brightly with divine lustre and he was in the habit of sauntering about the forests. One day while wandering about like that, he saw a strange phenomenon.

It was a very large forest, but there was only a single tree in the entire forest. This tree's branches appeared to be several miles in height and length. Its trunk had ripened and could clearly be seen to be very old. Its roots had emerged from the earth by piercing the ground and were spreading in all the directions like twisted snakes. The soil under those roots might have been carried away by floods, because the entire ground had become hollow and that tree resembled an old bear standing on tiptoe. What was even stranger was the fact that some venerable *Maharshis* were suspended from the roots of that tree and were weeping, while chanting some mantras in between.

This entire scene left *Maharshi* Agastya spellbound. It resembled some secret scene of deep meditation; but he was not in deep meditation. Thereupon, he approached a little nearer and peered into that pit and saw that deep down below in that pit, the flames of Hell were visible. The

people who were suspended from the roots of that tree were eminent persons, who had been blessed with divine knowledge! They were suspended in an inverted position above the flames of Hell!

As *Maharshi Agastya's* supernatural sight had lost its keenness, he could not understand anything. Hence, he prostrated himself before them and enquired of them, "Venerable ones! Who are you? Why are you in this state?" Then those *Maharshis*, pause in their lamentations and replied, "Son! We had spent hundreds of years in *Tapas* and had produced sons. After that we reached Heaven. Our sons were unable to produce a sufficient number of children as they also had spent their lives in *Tapas*, with the result that our lineage suffered gradual decay. Finally, there was no one left, even to perform the final obsequies for us. As we were contemplating our certain downfall, one great person named Agastya was born on earth. We had spent not hundreds but thousands of years, with the fond hope that we were blessed. We had felt that this Agastya was virtuous and therefore we would be able to settle down in Heaven, because our lineage would flourish due to him.

Unfortunately, his stubbornness proved to be our undoing. His own opinions were of greater importance to him than the science of Virtue, and he disregarded the words of the wise. The fame attained by him as a saint assumed greater importance for him and he had declared that he would remain unmarried and immerse himself in

Tapas. As such, he entertained such thoughts, due to our misfortune. Moreover, we had permeated some of the *Maharshis* by bestowing them with our power of *Tapas*; and supplied him with milk through their agency, because he had been born without a mother and had consequently, been leading the life of an orphan. After that we impelled them to feed him and teach the Vedas to him. Of course, we cannot expect that infant to know all this. He might have been complaining against us and enquiring as to what his ancestors had done for him. Therefore, we have been whiling away the time by blaming ourselves. Some day our feet will lose their grasp and this tree would fall down, which would result in our burning in the fires of Hell. This in brief, is our tale of woe!”

Maharshi Agastya head spun on hearing these words. He was able to comprehend that situation, those *Maharshis*, the extent of their *Tapas* and their message. He immediately prostrated himself and declared loudly, “O! Venerated ancestors! Please forgive me. You have undertaken much trouble to correct my fault. I will obey you and continue our lineage. I will ensure that your *Tapas* continues in Heaven, please give me some time.” The moment that he had spoken those words, that scene disappeared. Subsequently, *Maharshi* Agastya remained there for a long time in deep meditation and proceeded to the kingdom of Vidharbha from that place. The king of that place recognized *Maharshi* Agastya and offered his respects to him. After that he

implored him, “O! Venerable sage! I am not being blessed with children. Please bestow thy mercy on me.” *Maharshi* Agastya blessed him and declared, “A girl will be born to you very soon,” and departed from that place.

Previously, that king had approached several distinguished persons; and each and every one of them had categorically stated that he would not have children. Hence, he did not attach much importance to the words of *Maharshi* Agastya. Nevertheless, his queen conceived within the month and gave birth to a healthy girl within one year. They gave the name Lopamudra to that girl. The king was overjoyed and was thinking of honouring that *Maharshi* on a grand scale, if he happened to see him again.

Meanwhile, nine years passed by and one day, *Maharshi* Agastya arrived unexpectedly, like thunder without clouds. He resembled a nest of bones, his hair was akin to a nest of sparrows and he was wearing torn clothes that resembled a crow’s nest, this was the extent of his handsomeness! Notwithstanding all this, his eyes were sparkling with a divine lustre.

The king welcomed and thanked him, afterwards he enquired, “Revered one! What can I do for you?” To this *Maharshi* Agastya smiled and replied, “O! King! Your child was born for my sake! Do not tarry; give her in marriage to me.” The king was deeply agitated and a number of thoughts were rising in his mind, “How shabby his appearance is! I

would pay homage to him as he has the power of *Tapas* and I would even give him gifts if he were to ask for them. However, is it possible for me to cut off my own daughter's head?"

Maharshi Agastya again stated, "She was born solely for my sake. You can confirm this with your daughter." The king trembled at these words, because he was afraid that the *Maharshi* would burn him to ashes if he created any trouble for him. At that moment his daughter arrived there, without having been summoned. Then she caressed her father and stated with grim determination, "O! Father! He looks so handsome, I want to marry him." She was not even ten years old at that time. Subsequently, the king acceded to the *Maharshi's* wish and the wedding took place. The newlywed couple set out the very next day and this dashed the hopes of the king, who had desired to keep his son-in-law with him. He was unable to do anything due to his daughter's behaviour.

Maharshi Agastya and Lopamudra travelled on foot and reached Gangotri, the birthplace of the River Ganga, built an ashram there and began to meditate. *Maharshi* Agastya bestowed the vow of *Srividya*⁵¹¹ upon Lopamudra and gradually, taught her the deeper techniques, with regard to *Tapas*. One day, he placed his palm on her head and brought about the descent of divine energy. As a

⁵¹¹ Worship of the Divine Mother

consequence, she remained in the deep meditation, continuously for ten thousand years. It was the result of practice in the previous births, which brought about such deep *Tapas* in a ten year old. Such people have that kind of perfection. That is why *Maharshi* Agastya had helped in the birth of this being, and assisted her to attain deep devotion and finally deep meditation.

Her body did not undergo any change, because of the fact that all the movements connected with life, had ceased in her body; during those ten thousand years of deep meditation. Normalcy was restored finally, after she emerged from that unfathomable state of meditation, and in just a few years she was aglow with adequate divine beauty to be crowned a queen.

One day, *Maharshi* Agastya explained to Lopamudra about the scene shown to him by his ancestors and told her that they have to continue their lineage. She replied calmly and without any coyness, “I was in a royal household during my childhood. I have come to the forest after that, but the entire time in this place was spent in deep meditation. So, I have not become accustomed to the habits of the people living in the communities of the saints. According to the custom in my house, wedlock is possible only if things like, ornaments all over the body and beds all over the house are present. The rest is up to you.”

Maharshi Agastya understood that his wife was testing him. He also realized that some benefit would accrue to mankind due to her conditions. He thought for a while and said, “Kalyani! You have your own customs and I have my own customs. I would never ask you to change your habits. I do not want to face defeat in your test by wasting my power of *Tapas* on them. As already stated by me, I have my own customs and I am a Brahmin. My tradition is to beg, I will acquire what all you have demanded by begging others for them. Tend to the fire till then.” With these words, *Maharshi* Agastya set out at once and approached a king named Sutarva.

He was a king only for namesake; as such, he used to meditate quite a bit, and merely by looking at him it was possible to estimate his wealth. *Maharshi* Agastya was at a loss for words and was unable to ask him anything. Even then, he thought that it would be incorrect to hide the facts. Accordingly, *Maharshi* Agastya requested the king in this fashion, “Please give me the money that remains with you after you have met all your expenses.”

That king was embarrassed and fell at the *Maharshi*'s feet. He narrated all his troubles and pleaded with him to forgive him. Afterwards, he stated, “Please do not mistake me! I will accompany you, let us descend from these mountains, there is another king, named Bradhnasva. His village is larger than mine; let us ask him for alms.” However, Bradhnasva's plight was no better. Therefore, the three of

them descended still further, and called upon a king, named Thrasadasya, with the same outcome. However, Thrasadasya provided them with some information.

He told them that if they descended still further, they would reach the small town of Manimatipura, which was situated a few feet above Haridwar. Its king was very powerful, despite the small size of that town. His name was Ilvala and it was rumoured that enormous quantities of gold and money had been accumulated by him.

Everyone was surprised as to how he had acquired such wealth amidst the snow laden mountains. The people of that area contended that this Ilvala had supernatural powers. It was also said that his younger brother Vaathaapi had the power of Kamrupa or the ability to assume various forms, in accordance with one's own will. It was said that one day they met a sorcerer and requested him to teach them some secret mantras. That sorcerer refused to teach them and these brothers were angry with that reply; nevertheless, they requested him with a smile, "That is all right; however, please come and have a meal in our home." That sorcerer, unwittingly, accepted their invitation.

Later on, Vaathaapi changed into a goat and Ilvala killed it, cooked that meat, mixed it with the regular curries and offered it to that sorcerer. After he had completed his meal, Ilvala smiled and called out, "Brother! Vaathaapi! Come out!" Immediately Vaathaapi, who was inside the

sorcerer's stomach, regained his life and burst out of the sorcerer's stomach, causing his immediate death. From that day onwards, Ilvala and Vaathaapi resorted to this stratagem for entertainment and profit and acquired enormous wealth.

Maharshi Agastya was delighted on hearing this story. He said, "That's fine! Why should we worry about the way in which they had earned it? They have the money, so I will go and ask them." Those three *Rajarshis*⁵¹² accompanied the *Maharshi* and all of them arrived at Ilvala's palace, where the latter welcomed them and said, "I will provide you with whatever you desire if you partake of food at my home." *Maharshi* Agastya agreed, despite the reservations of his companions. He consumed the entire goat's meat curry, which had been served by Ilvala, without leaving anything for the others.

After he had finished eating, he chanted loudly, while rubbing his stomach with his hand, "Jeernam Jeernam Vaathaapi Jeernam." This brought about the immediate digestion and absorption of the entire food in the *Maharshi's* stomach. Subsequently, Ilvala arrived there and called out, "Vaathaapi! Come out!" Nothing happened, and Vaathaapi, did not emerge, even after being beckoned several times. Ilvala continued to call upon his brother with mounting anxiety, and finally, *Maharshi* Agastya laughed

⁵¹² Royal sages

loudly and told him, “Vaathaapi is not here. He has been completely digested by me.”

Ilvala was infuriated at these words and assumed the form of a gigantic demon and tried to swallow *Maharshi* Agastya without a second thought. Thereupon, *Maharshi* Agastya uttered a menacing sound in anger. This menacing sound transformed itself into lightning and converted Ilvala into a mound of ash. The *Maharshis*, who lived nearby, rushed to that place on hearing that sound. After coming to know about what had happened there, they loudly praised *Maharshi* Agastya, who had destroyed these two evil brothers, in order to bring about the welfare of mankind; in the following words, “Oh destroyer of Vaathapilva! Victory to you!”

All the people assembled there requested him, “O! *Maharshi*! These brothers were not human. They were demons and you have rendered a great favour to us by killing them. The entire wealth of the kingdom belongs to he who kills the king. Consequently, the entire money and gold accumulated by him belongs to you, please take possession of it.”

The phrase, “Jeernam Jeernam Vaathaapi Jeernam”, had turned into a mantra that was available to everyone after that incident. This constitutes a boon from *Maharshi* Agastya. If a mother feeds her baby with milk and then massages her baby’s stomach, while chanting this mantra,

then that baby will not be afflicted with any disorders of the stomach. This practice is followed in the villages to this day.

After having given this boon to the people of the world, *Maharshi* Agastya distributed some of the *Ilvala's* wealth among the three persons who had accompanied him. Subsequently, he transferred the rest of the wealth onto vehicles and reached his own house. Later on a king's palace was constructed in the village of the saints, and the bearded *Maharshi* donned the apparel of a king. The queen in that palace, Lopamudra was really a queen and she paid homage to him with considerable gratitude. The *Maharshi* laughingly posed a riddle to her, "Do you want one hundred people who resemble ten people; ten people who resemble a hundred people or will one person who equals a thousand suffice?"

Devi Lopamudra, without wasting even a minute, replied, "One son equal to one thousand people will suffice." Later on, a son named, Dhruhasya was born to that couple. In some places he was also known as Bruhadrvatha. He grew up immediately, after he was born, turned into a young man in minutes, obtained the vow of *Upanayana*⁵¹³, and immediately undertook *Tapas*. Immediately after this son had been born, *Maharshi* Agastya and Lopamudra took a bath in the river and vowed to lead a life of celibacy from that very moment.

⁵¹³ Ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread

Afterwards, a son named, Thejasvi was born to Dhruhasya. That family tree showed gradual growth and developed over a period of time. In that manner, *Maharshi* Agastya accomplished the journey of life by upholding his promise to his ancestors. In addition, he rendered considerable help to a number of virtuous people and performed several deeds for the welfare of mankind.

100. AGASTYA’S SECOND MARRIAGE

Maharshi Agastya had entered into this world as a lonely creature that did not know its parents. Afterwards, he lived as if only *Tapas* constituted his entire world. He was unaware of the phrase, the turmoil of the sense organs.

Maharshi Agastya married Lopamudra and after the birth of a child, they took the vow of lifelong celibacy. A long time after that incident, Lord Brahma arrived, uninvited, at *Maharshi* Agastya’s house to attend a feast. This unexpected arrival of Lord Brahma perplexed *Maharshi* Agastya. The latter offered his homage to him and enquired, “What is Your command?”

Lord Brahma gracefully eluded the real issue on hand and replied, “You have promised your ancestors that you would marry, but your marriage is not yet over!” *Maharshi* Agastya was stunned and asked, “What do You wish to convey?” Lord Brahma smiled and narrated a curious tale, “*Maharshi* Agastya! Long ago there lived a king by the name

of Kavera. He retired to the forests after becoming old, and started to meditate. He attained control on *Tapas* within a short span of time. He also attained the status of a *Rajarshi*⁵¹⁴, with negligible difficulty. In that state, he developed devotion towards Lord Shiva and performed severe penance to seek Him.

“Subsequently, Lord Shiva manifested Himself and asked him as to what he wanted. That *Rajarshi*, without thinking, requested for liberation. Lord Shiva is not all that *naive* as assumed by everyone. He burst into peals of laughter and replied, “Liberation connotes the art possessed by Lord Brahma! It remains with Him. Seek Him out and your task will be fulfilled.”

“Kavera did not lose heart and he started to meditate on me immediately. All the while he was repeating, “Lord! I will do whatever you say.” I have delayed to the extent possible.

“Kavera wants liberation, but never makes an effort to acquire knowledge, nor does he make an effort to cross over illusion. How can I bestow liberation upon him? Not just him, but there are a number of human beings in the world who are going to perform *Tapas* in the future. How to handover liberation to all of them? After thinking about this matter for a long time, I prayed to Lord Srihari, “Lord! It is

⁵¹⁴ Royal sage

difficult for anyone to cross over your illusion. Your illusion fascinates everyone. Only he, who crosses over that fascination and considers even your illusion as his daughter, would attain liberation. Hence, please be merciful towards me and make your illusion to be born as a daughter to me. Please empower me to permit others to adopt her.”

“As a result of my prayer, the illusion of Lord Srihari descended to our world. Nevertheless, as she was the illusion of Lord Srihari, she would not conform to anyone’s imagination. When I requested for one daughter, she became two daughters. While I had been deciding as to what to do with those two daughters, you started your efforts to get married. At this I sent one of my daughters to the King of Vidharbha as his daughter, after obtaining the permission of Lord Srihari. According to my intention, you married her and were blessed with a child.

“Sometime after this had happened, Kavera’s *Tapas* came to fruition. I appeared before him and he asked for liberation. I laughed and replied, “Go into the city and marry again! If a daughter is born to you, she will ensure your liberation.”

“Strangely, that Rajarshi was not frightened even an iota. He merely replied, “Lord! The Lord Shiva had asked me to do whatever you say. So I will obey and He will look after the matter of the liberation.” My second daughter was born as his daughter. From the time of her birth, she started to

meditate and kept repeating, “Not only my father, but even other people like him should get liberation.” She has been wandering in the forest, due to the madness induced by her meditation. However, as she was unmarried, her *Tapas* was not bearing fruit.

“Even though she is presently, not my daughter, I am very much worried about her marriage. Who can ask her to get married? Who has the courage to marry her? Who can withstand the fire of her meditation? I thought long about this and finally came to you. I know what you will say. You will plead that you are already married and in addition state that your wife is still alive. That is why I have been telling you that your present wife is not a complete wife. You might state that you had taken the vow of celibacy. That is all right, who can tamper with that? How can any event, aimed at destroying your endless state of great absorption, occur? Therefore, even your vow would not be capable of hindering my wish.

“The principal objective of your life is the welfare of mankind. Your great knowledge and your state of great absorption should not end with you, and they should reach the future generations like a mighty flow. Therefore, *Maharshi* Agastya! Do not hesitate anymore, take the illusion of Lord Srihari, entirely into your possession. Complete the marriage that you had promised your ancestors and this is the best duty for you to follow at present.” When Lord Brahma Himself had instructed him in

such a detailed manner, *Maharshi Agastya's* inner eye was completely opened. He immediately offered his homage to Lord Brahma and said, "Lord! I do not have any duty other than your command. May your plan be successful!"

After Lord Brahma had evanesced, *Maharshi Agastya* donned his sandals, seized his *Kamandal*⁵¹⁵ and started out in search of the daughter of Kavera in the forests. He penetrated deep into the forest, and was guided by the strongly emanating waves of mental resolution. Finally, he located the daughter of Kavera. Despite having meditated for millennia, she shone like a brilliant flash of lightning. Perhaps the illusion of Lord Srihari connotes only that! However, *Maharshi Agastya's* presence caused her to open her eyes, because she could not continue with her meditation.

She saw an unknown *Maharshi* standing in front of her, who was quite short, and the *Kamandal* in his hand appeared to be larger than him. In addition, it was difficult to withstand his great brilliance. The daughter of Kavera got up at once and prostrated herself at his feet. After that she said, "O! Great man! Please accept my hospitality." *Maharshi Agastya* paused for a moment, looked her straight in the eye and said, "You are an unmarried woman. If I come as your guest, you will have to marry me."

⁵¹⁵ Water pot used by ascetics

Kavera's daughter shook from head to foot on hearing those words. She fumbled and felt a bit angry, however shyness overcame her and she forgot her anger. She recovered slowly and said, "Brother-in-law! I realized who you are. My sister has already occupied your left part. Where am I to reside?" *Maharshi* Agastya laughed and replied, "Your sister is only half human. My left part will remain incomplete, until and unless the remaining half also takes up residence." On hearing this, Kavera's daughter became very active. She laughed with a tinkling sound and said, "I will become a river very soon. What comforts will you get by marrying me?" *Maharshi* Agastya replied, "I have brought my *Kamandal* for that very reason." Kavera's daughter did not argue after that.

In the very same jungle, in the presence of the saints, their marriage was conducted. Even as Lord Brahma was chanting the last mantras of the marital vows, Kavera's daughter changed into a river. Everyone screamed in terror at this transformation. The *Maharshi* Agastya, who had been very circumspect, drew the entire stream of water into his *Kamandal*, by using his power of meditation. From then onwards, he never left that *Kamandal* even for a moment. He used to meditate by holding it in his hand all the time. Thousands of years passed by in that manner and through all those years the power of the goddess inside the *Kamandal* had been increasing.

One day, *Maharshi* Agastya had to come to south India by pushing down the Vindhya Mountains, in accordance with the prayers of the deities. In his great hurry he handed over that invaluable *Kamandal* to his disciples and instructed them to sit on the Vindhya Mountain. Before leaving, he said, “Sit here till I come back, and hold this *Kamandal* very carefully.” After his departure, the river goddess realized that the time was opportune and started to dance inside the *Kamandal*. She did not want to delay the liberation of her father any further.

Maharshi Agastya’s disciples abandoned the *Kamandal*, as they were unable to withstand the force being generated by the goddess. Immediately, the *Kamandal* turned on its side and the riverine goddess flowed away and was born as a new river goddess from the edges of the Vindhya Mountains. As she was the daughter of Kavera, the *Maharshis* gave her the name of Kaveri. *Rajarshi* Kavera, who came to know of this news, rushed to that place and immersed himself in that river, which made him achieve instant liberation. Thousands of saints followed suit and obtained liberation.

Subsequently, *Maharshi* Agastya came to know of this incident. He was immensely pleased and gave his blessings, “May this River Kaveri bestow liberation upon good people, as long as this Earth exists!” From that day onwards, the River Kaveri has become famous as the best

amongst the rivers of India. Even today, that Mother river flows in the same manner in South India.

101. HUMILIATION OF THE VINDHYA MOUNTAIN

The lives of the noble *Maharshis*⁵¹⁶ continues for thousands of years and it is not necessary for just one physical body to live throughout that time. Sometimes, *Maharshis*, continue to meditate with their spiritual body and in this manner, do not die even after abandoning the physical body. While they are living like that, if a need arises to appear to some person, in order to accomplish some beneficial work, these *Maharshis* acquire a body, which resembles their previous physical body. They accomplish this with the power of their *Tapas*⁵¹⁷ and return to the spiritual body after the completion of that work. They live in this way, till their allotted task comes to an end, and after that they get absorbed into the Supreme Being. This is the usual way of life for the noble *Maharshis* who live till the end of time. It is for this reason that the incidents in their life take place in different epochs.

⁵¹⁶ Great Sages

⁵¹⁷ Deep meditation or ascetism

Apart from this, there have been occasions where some of the *Maharshis* had been vested with authority over some other world, while simultaneously functioning as a *Maharshi* on earth. This happens, while they are living in their spiritual body and even their behaviour can be related to those two types of life. For instance, *Maharshi* Agastya had authority over one of the stars in the sky; and his name had become permanently associated with that star, which the deities had termed as the Agastya Star. The function of that star was to help the living beings of the earth to expand their knowledge, by attaching great importance to the real nature of Fire; and *Maharshi* Agastya supervised that work.

While performing that task, *Maharshi* Agastya decided to perform a Dwadasa Varshika *Satrayaga* or a *Satrayaga* that was to be performed, uninterruptedly, for twelve years. The term Yaga means, a *Yajna*⁵¹⁸ performed by the *Yajamana*⁵¹⁹, by retaining some chief priests for his benefit. In such yagas, these main priests or *Ritviks* get only the *Dakshina*⁵²⁰. Only the *Yajamana* of the yaga obtains its fruit. However, the *Yajna*, in which all the *Ritviks* are also the *Yajamanas* and consequently, partners in receiving the results of the *Yajna* without taking any *Dakshina*, is termed as a *Satrayaga*. The yaga to be performed by the *Maharshi* Agastya was such a *Satrayaga*.

⁵¹⁸ Vedic sacrifice

⁵¹⁹ Sacrificer

⁵²⁰ Fees for the Brahmin priests

He had undertaken this task to bring about some esoteric welfare of mankind. Accordingly, he formed a group of thousands of *Maharshis*, assumed responsibility for its management and inaugurated the Dwadasa Varshika Satrayaga; and began the continuous distribution of food, which was one of its requirements, on a large scale.

This yaga had been progressing satisfactorily. However, even the deities were at a loss to discern the purpose of this yaga and the suspicious deity Devendra halted the rains, in order to test these *Maharshis*. This yaga had to take place for twelve years, and the distribution of food had been seriously affected due to the lack of rainfall. Over a period of time, even the roots that were inside the soil got destroyed. Those roots had constituted the food of the *Ritviks*. As they could not get even those roots they approached *Maharshi* Agastya and said, “The deity Devendra has moved against to you and you are finding it very difficult to provide us with food. Why not stop this yaga?”

Maharshi Agastya smiled gently and replied, “O! *Maharshis*! Please do not be hasty, there is no reason for the deity Devendra be angry with us. He is merely testing us. What is the harm if there is no rain? Do I not have the power of *Tapas*? I will continue to distribute food and at the same time I will make the necessary arrangements for your sustenance, by utilizing my power of *Tapas*. Please do not discontinue the yaga, and bestow your mercy upon the world.”

Those *Maharshis* were eminent and the near equals of *Maharshi Agastya*. They observed his tranquillity and replied, “We had spoken out of turn, do we need your power to procure our food? We can obtain it on our own and you manage the rest of the affairs. May your resolve emerge triumphant!” Subsequently, the yaga and the food distribution proceeded at a much faster pace than what had been obtaining previously. The deity Devendra, who noticed this, was alarmed at this development and immediately approached *Maharshi Agastya* and attempted to speak. However, *Maharshi Agastya* forestalled him, by singing his praises. Afterwards, *Maharshi Agastya* prayed to him in a humble manner, “Lord! Please be merciful to us!” The deity Devendra left quietly and provided all possible help to the yaga. The *Maharshis* who were the *Ritviks* were surprised at the generosity and humility of *Maharshi Agastya*.

The yaga was completed and its fruit was dedicated to Lord *Parameswara*⁵²¹, for the welfare of mankind. All the *Maharshis*, who had served as *Ritviks*, left for their respective destinations. However, no one knew about the whereabouts of *Maharshi Agastya* and Lopamudra, who had attained great fame due to this yaga. As such, they used to lead a lonely and secret life. It was not known as to why *Maharshi Agastya* had conducted such a major yaga with such great effort and no one bothered to ascertain the

⁵²¹ Supreme God

whereabouts of Lopamudra and *Maharshi* Agastya after that yaga's completion.

There are countless spheres in the sky and each one of them has two poles, which are designated as the North and South Poles. The straight line that connects these poles is termed as a Meru. This holds good, even for our planet and if a sufficiently long nail were to be pierced from the South Pole to the North Pole it would constitute our Meru. On being lengthened at its extremities, this elongated line would constitute what is known as the Meru Mountain. The term Mountain connotes an immovable thing. Even when the Earth revolves around its axis; this line, which connects the earth's poles would not display any movement. Since, this is similar to the property of immobility of a mountain, our ancient wise ones, had referred to this line, technically as a mountain, namely the Meru Mountain.

Due to the fact that it had been termed as a mountain, various stories were narrated about it in our mythologies and poems. Some of them described it as a golden mountain or a diamond mountain. Those were changes that had been made to embellish the story. The incontrovertible fact, in this regard was that the Meru Mountain was a very long straight line that passed through the north and south poles of the earth. The *Maharshis* had never failed to remember this fact. Another distinguishing trait of this Meru Mountain is that it intersects the axis of the pole star through our north pole. Due to this, all the

stars in our universe revolve around this polar axis. This is the physical truth that one sees in nature, with one's eyes and through telescopes.

Moreover, there is the involvement of divine forces behind this phenomenon. Our investigation would be incomplete if we ignore the effect of divine forces. In fact, each aspect of nature is controlled by some divine force. The presiding deity of the earth is a female deity, whereas that of the Meru Mountain is a male deity.

While *Maharshi* Agastya had been conducting his Satrayaga, a subordinate deity, who had been officiating on behalf of the principal deity of the Vindhya Mountain, performed a little bit of *Tapas*. After that he wrongly assumed that he had become as powerful as the presiding deity of the Meru Mountain. After the passage of a few days, he enquired of himself, "Am I inferior to the presiding deity of the Meru Mountain?" Later on, after some more days had elapsed, he declared loudly, "O! Deities of the stars, I am more powerful than even the presiding deity of the Meru Mountain. From now onwards, you have to revolve around me."

His raucous ranting was ignored by everybody in this eternal universe. This enraged him and he lost his sense of proportion. He commenced to expand his mountain body, while stating, "I shall see how this Sun, these planets and these stars revolve." Due to this, the journey of the Sun, the

Moon and the stars was hindered. In other words, the distribution and weight of the mountains on earth was disturbed by this growth in the Vindhya Mountain. Consequently, the axis of the earth suffered a change of direction and this in turn affected the rotation of all the other celestial bodies. The duration of day and night was affected due to this, which resulted in a number of problems for the living beings of the earth.

The deities noticed this chaos and beseeched the deity of the Vindhya Mountain, “What have you done? Everyone has to work for a specified period of time at a job. How is it possible to allot the job being performed by the deity of the Meru Mountain to you, just because you have the capability; before his tenure is over? If you are truly better suited for that job, approach Lord Brahma, He might appoint you to the post of the presiding deity of the Meru Mountain in the next Kalpa. Desist from this obduracy; there is no other viable alternative.”The deity Vindhya did not forsake his stubbornness. Since, they could not find a solution to this problem, they approached Lord Brahma. He heard their tale of woe and replied, “We are unsuited for this job. *Maharshi* Agastya has to do it.”

These words, stirred the memory of all the deities, who remembered *Maharshi* Agastya in a trice. They employed their divine vision to scour the three worlds.

Finally, they located the *Maharshi* couple in the great pilgrimage centre of Kasi. They were in the *Anandavana*⁵²², in the presence of God Viswesvara, in a deep state of meditation. They had bowed down in devotion, while receiving the great teaching of Taraka. After obtaining the permission of Lord Brahma, all the deities assembled before the *Maharshi* couple, and then Brihaspathi, the preceptor of the Gods narrated the story of the Vindhya Mountain, in all its finer details, to *Maharshi* Agastya. After that Brihaspathi, on behalf of all the deities and the three worlds, requested *Maharshi* Agastya to protect them. All the deities supported him in this entreaty and informed him that Lord Brahma had asked them to approach him as he was their protector.

Maharshi Agastya bowed before them with great humility and offered his homage to all the wise people and sent them away by stating, “O! Deities who deserve respect from all the three worlds! I had performed that protracted Satrayaga only for the prevention of such dangers. Albeit, some of you had doubted my motives, your wish will definitely be fulfilled; because that yaga had been completed without any obstruction, due to the grace of Lord Parameswara. I will do whatever is essential for resolving this impasse.”

The very next moment the *Maharshi* couple journeyed towards the Vindhya Mountain. They were

⁵²² Grove of bliss

shedding tears, as they had to leave the great pilgrimage centre of Kasi, which was highly esteemed in the three worlds. They approached the deities in Kasi and beseeched them to accord them their permission to leave that place. They prayed to each and every deity, "Please do not forget us. We do not know, whether we will be able to return to Kasi, we do not know the will of Lord Shiva." After grieving in that manner, they finally left Kasi and travelled towards the south, and reached the vicinity of the Vindhya Mountain.

The presiding deity of the Vindhya Mountain was startled on seeing *Maharshi* Agastya and his wife, who had renounced the world, in order to meditate in the *Anandavana*. Despite being vainglorious about his *Tapas*, he knew its true value. *Maharshi* Agastya resembled an image that was filled with the essence of the *Tapas* of the fourteen worlds. The deity Vindhya trembled and exhibited great humility. He sank to the ground and fell on his knees, after that he prostrated himself, offered his homage with folded hands and said, "O! Matchless one! Please save me!"

Simultaneously, his mountainly form diminished and the summit almost reached the level of the ground. The deity Vindhya was unable to fathom if his humility had been to the liking of the venerable *Maharshi* Agastya. Since, there was no trace of anger in the latter; the deity Vindhya was gladdened and stated politely, "O! *Maharshi*! I am your servant. What is your command?"

Maharshi Agastya, who had been displaying a serious mien, smiled gently and replied, “Nothing of importance, Son! The two of us have become old and we had started on a pilgrimage of southern India. We cannot enter the southern part of the country, without passing over you. If you do not reduce your great height, we will be unable to negotiate the path into southern India. Therefore, retain this diminished height till we return. This is my only command.”

The king of the Vindhya Mountain was momentarily nonplussed. After that he appraised the situation and realized the ploy of the deities. However, he was in the presence of *Maharshi* Agastya, who was deemed to be great even by Lord Brahma. Moreover, he had mirthfully engulfed the demons Vaathaa and Pilva at the same time. Accordingly, he kept his counsel and bowed his head and replied, “*Maharshi*, Your wish is my command!”

After that *Maharshi* Agastya and his consort, crossed the Vindhya Mountain and traversed the dense forests of the Dandakarnya. After that they paid their homage in turn, to the rivers Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri and established a number of Agastya Pilgrimage centres in that area. Subsequently, they disseminated the Vedic culture and language throughout southern India.

In their travels, they chanced upon the goddess Kolhapura MahaLakshmi Devi. She was pleased with them and said, “*Maharshi* Agastya! You will be born as Vedavyas

in the twenty – seventh *Dwaparayuga*⁵²³, which is drawing near. You will live in Kasi and impart knowledge regarding the Vedas and virtue. Therefore, abandon the sorrow that you had to leave Kasi. At present, Lord Kumara Swami is residing on the banks of the Tungabhadra River, near the Malaya Mountain. Approach him and listen to the Skanda Purana, which he will narrate to you.”

Maharshi Agastya obeyed her command and remained in the southern part of the country. He worked for the welfare of mankind and did not return to the northern part of the country. Thus, due to these series of magnificent sacrifices of *Maharshi* Agastya, the axis of the Meru Mountain was safeguarded. It was able to remain undamaged, despite the bad intentions of the presiding deity of the Vindhya Mountain; and the various activities in Nature continued without any hindrance.

102. ENGULFING THE SEA

The attempt by the Vindhya Mountain to tamper with the Meru axis was thwarted by *Maharshi* Agastya. In order to preserve this Meru axis, he permanently settled down in the southern part of the country. The importance of the Meru axis lies in the fact that any change to it would interfere with the time cycles in Nature.

⁵²³ Third of the four yugas

The earth is tilted to a side and rotates on its axis, while revolving around the Sun. However, the Moon does not rotate on any axis, while revolving around the earth. Similarly, the other planets also revolve around the Sun and all these heavenly bodies are restricted to their specific orbits. A system of calculating time based on this arrangement had been established. The progress of the yugas and the life span of the living beings had been determined by this arrangement, and the laws of nature were being enforced without any obstruction, due to this arrangement.

There were some living beings that were predisposed towards evil conduct. They were opposed to this harmonious state of affairs. There was no specific reason for their dislike and first, their dislike would come to the fore and only later they would search for a cause for their aversion. The conduct of the malevolent is always of this nature and such living beings are usually born amongst the demons. However, in the instance of the deity of the Vindhya Mountain, there was an exception, because he had been born among the deities. Despite his great iniquity, he was of the deities; accordingly he had obeyed *Maharshi Agastya* without causing any further destruction. Moreover, he had abstained from executing the evil that he had intended to do. Some of the demons, who had noticed this,

were greatly distressed. They performed *Tapas*⁵²⁴ in order to destroy time. As a result, a demon called, Kaalaka was born.

This word kalakamu denotes a black birthmark, and a deeper investigation reveals its meaning as Kalaha Kaayathi Asmin Yithi Kaalakaha (Kai Sabdae), or that the time itself cries with respect to him. In accordance with the meaning of his name, he had made some efforts to destroy the circle of time. However, death overtook him, before he could achieve anything substantial. He had a thousand sons, who were named the Kalakeya. They worked diligently, in order to complete the work that had been started by their father.

The term sixty thousand reminds us of sixty hours. In our Indian system of reckoning time, the entire calculation is based on multiples of six. Sixty minutes comprise an hour and twenty-four hours form a day. Three hundred and sixty days constitute a year and sixty years make up a circle. Our calculations progress in this fashion. The Kalakeyas, who were born to destroy these time cycles, were sixty thousand in number, but despite their large number, they could not complete their destructive work, and this compelled them to depend upon Vrutra Asura.

Vritha means one who covers, or one who performs wrong calculations everywhere and causes the correct calculations to go wrong. Vrutra Asura's courage was

⁵²⁴ Deep meditation or ascetism

extraordinary. It had become difficult for the deities to withstand him. Finally, the deity Devendra acquired the Vajrayudham, on the advice of Lord Brahma, and killed him due to the grace of *Maharshi* Dadheechi. However, the Kalakeyas escaped and continued with their efforts at destroying the circle of time by affecting the Meru axis.

They adopted a new strategy to accomplish their task. Whenever the deities were inattentive, they jumped on the various planets and attempted to destroy the Meru axis by damaging their similarities. They had realized the dangers in this endeavour and whenever the deities came in hot pursuit, they had escaped by hiding at the very bottom of the sea.

The deities took some time to comprehend the guerrilla warfare strategy of the Kalakeyas. Further, it took some more time to find out the location of these demons. The deity Devendra could have employed the thunderbolt in the middle of the sea. If he had done so, then the thunderbolt would have exploded with a force that would have exceeded hundreds of nuclear fission devices and it would have reduced all those demons to ashes inside the water itself. However, this would have destroyed a large number of creatures living in the sea, which would have been most unjust. The deities had to restrain themselves out of fear of causing harm to those creatures. The humaneness of the deities became the armour of the demons.

Gradually, the Kalakeyas discovered a new plan for destroying the time cycles. They had concluded that if all the righteous people on earth were to be killed, then the balance of the earth would be ruined. This would result in a variation of the Meru axis, which would result in the destruction of the time cycles. With this understanding, the Kalakeyas searched out the ashrams of the *Maharshis* and devoured them.

At the time of warfare, places like the ashrams of *Maharshis* and the houses of the righteous are circumvented. Even before the deities had come to know about the new strategy being adopted by these demons, and had afforded adequate protection for these places; several residents of the ashrams of the more famous *Maharshis* had been swallowed and digested by the Kalakeyas. When the deities attacked these demons, they did not retaliate; instead they beat a hasty retreat and hid in the depths of the sea.

If the thunderbolt was to be used against the demons, the sea creatures would also be destroyed; and if the deities attacked the demons in the ashrams, the *Maharshis* would be destroyed. Being unable to do anything concrete in this situation, the deities approached Lord Brahma. After hearing them out, He replied, "O! Deities! The objective of the Kalakeyas is to destroy the cycle of time by affecting the Meru axis. The very same fine diamond should attack a fine diamond and as this problem is related to time.

The deity Devendra's diamond will not be of much use here. The star of *Maharshi* Agastya, which had been continuously spreading its supernatural stateliness on the earth, despite being very far from the earth, is the ideal weapon in this regard. That star is composed of brilliant fire and it is bestowed with the eternal glory of radiance. *Maharshi* Agastya, the pure minded, who has been leading a secret life like a common man, is the controller of that supernatural sphere.

“Long age, when the Meru axis had been placed in jeopardy, due to the deity of the Vindhya Mountain, I had involved *Maharshi* Agastya in this job, only because of this reason. At that time I had compelled that *Maharshi*, to reach the shores of the southern sea. The land between the Himalayas and the Vindhya Mountain is known as Aryavarta. Even though it was very sacred, it does not come into contact with seawater. In that country, if the fiery star were to thrive, the snow covered mountains would melt and cause the lower lands to sink; which is very dangerous. Accordingly I shrewdly but gently, made the deity of the sphere of *Maharshi* Agastya to reach the shores of the sea. I made him reach the triangular junction, where the seas from the three directions meet, and it was his grace that he had agreed to this.

“Now, all of you go there and pray to him. If he is merciful, he will bring the Agastya Star to within a hair's breadth of the Earth. Thereupon, he will cause the rays of

fire from this sphere to impinge on the sea. The spreading of the radiant fire by Star Agastya will dry up the entire water of the sea. The Kalakeyas will become senseless due to this unexpected incident and you can destroy them before they regain their senses and escape. This will remove the danger to the circle of time. The success or failure of this plan is entirely dependent on *Maharshi Agastya's* compassion. Your devotion and skill will have to be used to their maximum extent to obtain his help."

The astonished deities thought in the following manner, "This *Maharshi* is the owner of the Agastya Star's sphere. He has been wandering around the southern part of this country like a demented person, all the while concealing this secret even from the deities! Ah! How inconceivable is the state of modesty of the great! Then they approached *Maharshi Agastya* and prayed to him, "O! *Maharshi*! There has been no end to the harm being done by the Kalakeyas. They have stayed away from your ashram, as they are terrified of you. However, they have damaged even *Maharshi Vasisthta's* ashram. If you do not show compassion, the worlds will cease to exist. All the help that we require of you is that you drink the waters of these three seas at once. This would make the Kalakeyas to emerge from their hiding places and we will deal with them appropriately."

Maharshi Agastya reached the shores of the sea at Kanyakumari. All the while he was repeating, "Why should I

bother about all this?” Finally, he paid heed to the words of the deities and folded his fingers as if he was about to perform *Achamana*⁵²⁵ and spread out his hand. Before anyone could make out as to what was taking place, the entire water in the sea, flowed into the hollow of the *Maharshi*'s palm. The very next moment, he sipped the seawater in his palm and it reached his stomach, within a very short time.

The deities had been extremely vigilant all that time. The Kalakeyas were dumbfounded by this occurrence, and before they could recover their composure, the weapons of the deities and their king, beheaded them. All this transpired within a very short interval of time. Everything went according to plan, and the deities commenced to loudly proclaim their victory. Just then they heard pitiable wailing. On investigation the deities discovered that these were the anguished cries of the various aquatic beings; which were struggling at the bottom of the sea, due to the sudden absence of water.

The deities became very sad. They had refrained to use the thunderbolt, in order to protect these aquatic creatures, and now those very creatures were gravely imperilled. Their hearts were over laden with grief and they fell at the feet of *Maharshi* Agastya. They beseeched him, “*Maharshi*! Please forgive us. We should have discussed this

⁵²⁵ Sipping water three times, while repeating the names of the Lord

situation with you, this is entirely our fault. Nevertheless, please have mercy on the numerous aquatic animals and release the water consumed by you, because these creatures will not live any longer without water.”

However, *Maharshi* Agastya smiled and replied, “What is this wailing? You have pestered me till I drank the seawater. Now you are asking me to regurgitate it. How can the water remain in my stomach? It has already been absorbed by my body and egested. Now what can I do?” The deities pleaded with him with still greater fervour and *Maharshi* Agastya replied,

“O! Deities! What has happened will result in some good. The unification of the fourteen worlds will constitute the corporeal form of Lord Parameswara. In that corporeal body, the Salt Sea will be the place where his bladder is located. At present I have acquired oneness with that corporeal form. Therefore, the sea in its entirety has reached the bladder in my stomach. It has not undergone, even the slightest of change, and remains just like it was previously. Now that water in that bladder will once again reach the sea, according to your wish, and this will ensure the life of the aquatic animals; moreover, the purity of the sea will increase.

“It will increase to such an extent that even if the people bathe daily in the sea, they will be unable to withstand its majesty. The sea obtained this special purity,

during the time of protection of the cycle of time. Hence, the Sun and the Moon, who manage time, are also involved in this. Therefore, from now onwards, enact rules that the people have to bathe in the sea only on the new moon and full moon day, which are holidays for the Sun and Moon. During the rest of the days, let the people practice *Tapas* on the waves of the Sea and the sound of Omkara that come from those waves.

“Since, I was present on the shores of this southern Sea, at this particular time, the entire endeavour of protecting the Meru axis transpired satisfactorily. There is no danger to that axis, for the time being, and there is danger only due to the deity of the Vindhya Mountain. However, he is a deity and he has been meditating, therefore, let us not disturb him. I shall pass my time on this side of the Vindhya Mountain. You may take your leave now.” After having spoken these words, that *Maharshi* filled the sea with water. Thus, he provided protection for not only the aquatic creatures, but also the equilibrium in Nature. Subsequently, all the deities offered their gratitude to *Maharshi* Agastya and left for their respective abodes.

Our *Maharshis* had described the mutual interaction between the different powers of Nature, by describing the wars between the deities and the demons, and this was lucidly explained in the story of *Maharshi* Agastya. The *Maharshis* did not restrict their narratives to just a description of Nature’s Powers, they also interposed moral

issues and the spiritual practices to be followed by the living beings in these descriptions. As such they had commingled mythological stories into the pictures depicting existence.

103. MEETING LORD SRI RAMA

*Maharshi*⁵²⁶ Agastya had to remain in the southern part of the country, due to his promise to protect the Meru axis. He spent his time by going on pilgrimages, travelling around the rivers Kaveri, Godavari and Krishna; and occasionally by undertaking special vows regarding *Tapas*⁵²⁷. He had unshakeable trust that the bearer of the corporeal form, Lord Srihari would someday appear to him.

Circumambulation of rivers implies that one has to reach the place where the river meets the sea, by walking along one shore, from the source of that river. After that one has to cross the river and return to its source by walking along the opposite shore. *Maharshi* Agastya transformed the entire south India into a sacred place. He built temples to Lord Shiva whenever he came to suitable places, while performing the circumambulation of the rivers. It is for this reason that we find the temples of Agastyaeswara in several places in south India.

⁵²⁶ Great Sage

⁵²⁷ Deep meditation or ascetism

The custom in those days was to consider a riverbank to extend for a distance of twenty to thirty kilometres from the edge of the river. During those days, while moving around south India, he used to spread the regional languages and regional cultures of different places, by making them have greater consonance with the Vedas. The Tamil people still consider *Maharshi* Agastya as the creator of their science of Grammar.

During those days, a *Brahmarshi*⁵²⁸'s son became a demon and a king. He was known as Raavanasura and he had been endangering virtue in the whole world. His courage like a stormy wind dissipated several minor *Maharshis*. Some of them left south India, in order to escape his depredations. Only a few wise people like *Maharshi* Agastya had been carrying on their *Tapas* calmly and fearlessly in the dandaka forests.

Even then, the danger due to Raavanasura was increasing from day to day. The Vedic culture had been assuming cruel forms even in the villages and cities of south India and even the wise people like *Maharshi* Agastya, were only able to protect their *Ashram*⁵²⁹ and their disciples. They were unable to find a solution for the spread of unrighteousness.

⁵²⁸ Sage who has attained *Bramhajnana*

⁵²⁹ Hermitage

In those days, the dandaka forest was a very wide forest, located between the northern and southern parts of the country. For Raavanasura, who had been ruling Lanka, this deep forest became the central point. He appointed three of his distant cousins, Khar, Dushan and Thrisira as his representatives in the dandaka forest. He was very careful in ensuring that no aid could reach the south from the north or *vice versa*.

In those days, many wise people, like the famous *Maharshis* and authors of the science of *Dharma*⁵³⁰ and virtue, used to live mainly in northern India. As the demons were residing in the dandaka forest, the messages from these wise people were not reaching south India. So, the Vedic culture had reduced to a great extent in south India, and this was the precise objective of Raavanasura. The venerated ones like *Maharshi Agastya*, *Maharshi Athri* and *Maharshi Dattatreya* had been living in the dandaka forest. However, in the main, they avoided the villages. Only *Maharshi Agastya* had been moving around the villages to some extent. Even then, he used to think and say that he was unsuited to withstand a tempest like Raavanasura and that Lord Srihari would have to come in person for that purpose.

In the meanwhile, a wise man named Suthikshnu approached *Maharshi Agastya* and asked him to tell him

⁵³⁰ Righteousness

some means to attain heaven easily. *Maharshi* Agastya taught him the mantra of Lord Sri Rama and asked him to repeat it. Thereupon, *Maharshi* Suthikshnu enquired, “Who is this Lord Rama? What does he look like?” *Maharshi* Agastya laughed and replied, “This Lord Rama is not yet born, and Lord Srihari will be born as Lord SriRama. Keep on repeating his name. After He is born, He will appear to you in person and you will be able to recognize the person who comes to you as Lord Rama. Set aside your doubts and start repeating the name of Lord Rama.”

Subsequently, Lord Srihari was born as Lord SriRama, the son of King Dasaratha. Then some time later, he had started to live in the forest, along with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana. During the period of his stay in the forest, Lord SriRama entered the dandaka forest by crossing north India, and visited the *Maharshis* living there. Whilst visiting the holy people in the forest, he did not visit *Maharshi* Agastya, in the beginning. Prior to that, he visited *Maharshi* Suthikshnu and blessed him and only afterwards he came to *Maharshi* Agastya.

The couple *Maharshi* Agastya and Lopamudra quivered from head to toe, on seeing Lord SriRamachandra accompanied by Sita Mata and Lakshmana. That old couple, who were like ripe mangoes, due to the fullness of their age, embraced Lord SriRama and Sita very tightly and kissed them on their forehead. They felt very happy to touch the bodies of those three from top to bottom, with their shaking

hands. Afterwards they blessed them and told them many things, and made them partake of the fruits that were nearby. Later on, they made them sit near them and told them numerous stories.

When some time had passed by, the excitement caused by the devotion of the *Maharshi* subsided to a certain extent. They were at peace with themselves, due to the ecstasy being experienced by them. Afterwards, *Maharshi* Agastya stood up and brought some heavy objects from the place of worship, and placed them in front of Lord Rama and Lakshmana. Those objects were two large swords and they were sparkling with super natural brilliance, moreover, there was one large bow and a quiver filled with arrows.

After he had brought out all these weapons, *Maharshi* Agastya addressed the Lord, with great humility, “O! Sri Ramachandraprabhu! The deity Devendra had once given these two swords to me. They possess great efficiency and enemies would die, the moment these swords touch their bodies. You might require them, accordingly, both of you take a sword.

“O! Lord! This wonderful bow had been used once by Lord Srihari and this was the quiver used by Him on that particular day. It is indestructible and the arrows released by it are never lost. Lord Srihari once gave this to me as a favour, all the same Lord! This is your bow and only you can

bear it and use it. You will be able to kill the evil people of the world with this mighty bow. As such, I have been worshipping these weapons by placing them in my place of worship. All this was solely for your sake. Now accept them and show mercy on all the worlds.”

Lord SriRama was happy with these words and accepted the weapons. After that he said, “O! *Maharshi*! We have to lead our life in the forest for fourteen years. Please suggest a suitable place for our residence. I hope it will benefit us and also the world.” This was an unexpected question for *Maharshi* Agastya. Nevertheless, his brain worked with lightning speed, and he closed his eyes and thought for a while, before replying, “Lord! You have brought the Mother with you. So it will be difficult for you to change dwelling places frequently. Therefore, it will be better, if you live in the place where there is plenty of water. If you go a little further along this river Godavari, there is sacred place named Panchavati and there is also a small hill there. If you make your house at that place, it would be pure, comfortable and safe.”

Lord SriRama was amazed at the foresight of *Maharshi* Agastya, who had thought just like a military commander about the requirements of protection. The place suggested by the *Maharshi* was bounded on one side by the river and the hill on the other. An enemy could approach only from one direction. The *Maharshi* had asked Him to construct

their house on high ground so that He could clearly observe that single line of approach.

The place suggested by the *Maharshi* was on the banks of the River Godavari and was between five Banyan trees. It was very famous for performing *Tapas* and in addition, it was proximate to a place called Janasthaanam in the dandaka forest. This Janasthaanam was one of the military centres of Raavanasura. This *Maharshi* had asked the Lord to live close to that place by donning bows, arrows and swords. This was nothing short of predicting the incidents of the future.

Lord SriRama realized the various implications of living in that place and built a house in the Panchavati, according to the recommendations of *Maharshi* Agastya. Twelve years passed by peacefully. At the end of the thirteenth year, Shoorpanakha, the sister of Raavanasura saw Lord SriRama and was deeply infatuated. That incident ignited the fire between Lord SriRama and the Janasthaana military centre of the demons. The Janasthaana military centre was reduced to ashes in that fire and the smoke entered Srilanka. Raavanasura abducted Sita Mata; and Lord SriRama attacked Lanka along with an army of the monkeys. All these incidents transpired due to those quarrels.

Maharshi Agastya never encountered Lord SriRama again in these thirteen years even though they were near. All the same, he had been observing Lord SriRama's actions

every minute, with great adoration. Lord SriRama, who had come to the jungle all alone, readied Himself to fight with the great ruler Raavanasura. While he was still wondering at these events, Lord SriRama formed an army of numerous monkeys and crossed the mighty sea, reached Lanka and attacked the palace in that place.

Everything had proceeded well till that stage, but when the war started and that Raavanasura started to shower arrows by flourishing his ten heads and twenty arms; alas, the young Lord SriRama began to look around with embarrassment. *Maharshi* Agastya's felt great pity, on seeing this sight and he immediately started out by the path of the sky and descended before Lord SriRama and addressed him encouragingly, "O! Lord! What is this despondency? Do you have to be alarmed by such a small shower of arrows? How many wars between the deities and demons you have seen? Who do You think that you are? You are that invincible Lord Srihari who was responsible for the destruction of the entire lineage of the demons! Leave aside that matter, who are You in this incarnation? You are the great warrior born in the lineage of Surya and the son of King Dasaratha. Lord Suryanarayana was the founder of your lineage, and the splendour of Lord Surya has been flowing endlessly in your lineage. Can there be any misfortune if we have his benediction? Or can there be any empty victory?"

"O! Ramachandra! Lord Aditya, the founder of your lineage has been shining gloriously in the sky. Worship him. I

will teach you a secret mantra to the Lord Surya, which is known as the Aditya Hridayam. Accept it and chant it three times, that is sufficient and all your enemies will be destroyed and you will achieve victory, kindly accept this mantra.”

After *Maharshi* Agastya had encouraged him in this way, enthusiasm bubbled up in Lord SriRama, and he performed the *Achamana*⁵³¹ with great joy and accepted the teaching of the Aditya Hridayam from *Maharshi* Agastya. As soon as he had chanted that spell for the third time, Lord Surya appeared in the sky in the middle of the entire multitude of the deities and asked him to become energetic. Accordingly, Lord SriRama became very active and with exemplary zeal beheaded the ten headed Raavanasura. Later on, when Lord SriRama’s coronation had been completed, and some of the affairs had been settled and He had been relaxing to some extent, *Maharshi* Agastya came to visit him, along with some other great *Maharshis*. They all praised Lord SriRama in a number of ways. Thereupon, Lord SriRama displayed his reverence to them with great humility and said “Venerable ones! In general, kings indulge in warfare and some of them emerge victorious. What is so praiseworthy in this?”

To this the *Maharshis* replied, “O! Sri Ramachandra! There is a vast difference between killing an ordinary enemy

⁵³¹ Sipping water three times, while repeating the names of the Lord

and killing Raavanasura and his army. They were definitely out of the ordinary; and there is no one, other than *Maharshi* Agastya, who has the capacity to narrate the details of their birth. Later on, at the request of Lord SriRama and the persuasion of the other *Maharshis*, the particulars regarding the birth and *Tapas* of Raavana and his associates were narrated by *Maharshi* Agastya. Subsequently, incidents like the abandonment of Sita Devi by Lord SriRama and her giving birth to the sons Lava and Kusa in *Maharshi* Vaalmiki's Ashram in the jungle transpired.

During that period, Lord SriRama had to conduct an inspection, by travelling in an airborne divine vehicle. He was passing through the Dandaka forest and at that point of time, *Maharshi* Agastya had just completed a great yaga and was about to make the final offering. On seeing Lord SriRama in his divine vehicle, the *Maharshi* was beside himself with joy and worshipped Him in numerous ways. After that he completed the yaga in His presence and offered a huge diamond necklace to the Lord as a gift.

When Lord SriRama displayed some hesitation in accepting that gift, *Maharshi* Agastya beseeched him, "A *Rajarshi*⁵³², named, Swetha had given this to me. What am I to do with it? We are unable to even carry it and the person who had given this to me had been a great man. It will be of

⁵³² Royal sage

great benefit to you, if it remains with you. It will also be good for your entourage, so, please retain it.”

At these humble yet profound words of *Maharshi* Agastya, Lord SriRama was dumbfounded. Then he addressed *Maharshi* Agastya, “O! *Maharshi*! You are the best among the *Brahmins*⁵³³. We are *Kshatriyas*⁵³⁴. How can we accept gifts from you? I am unable to resolve this doubt and there is no one to consult in this jungle, in this context. Therefore, you have to judge in this matter.

Maharshi Agastya was momentarily alarmed, however, the very next moment he laughed very loudly and replied, “O! Lord! Who is so great that he can give you anything? You are the creator of the three worlds and you rule over them as their king. What is there that does not belong to you? It is your predilection to develop pride in us. Otherwise, why do you entertain doubts regarding righteousness? Nevertheless, I will explain, in accordance to your query. You are the monarch and a great one to wit. Moreover, you are the ruler of the three worlds. We are your subjects and the king can accept gifts from the ordinary people. This is not considered to be a donation. The sciences term this as an honour donation and it does not entail any sin. O! Pious king! You are the embodiment of virtue. You are that divine incarnation, whose aim was to demonstrate

⁵³³ Persons who possesses sacred knowledge

⁵³⁴ Persons belonging to the warrior caste

the meaning of virtue to the common people by practicing it yourself. That is why you have raised these doubts regarding virtuous conduct. May victory be yours! May virtue be rendered victorious by your accepting this ornament.”

Lord SriRama was satisfied with *Maharshi* Agastya’s explanation. Afterwards, he accepted that necklace and left that place. In this manner, at the request of *Maharshi* Agastya, Lord Srihari blessed *Maharshi* Agastya by coming to him on numerous occasions.

It is to be observed that the compassion of the Supreme Being, always accompanies good people, who use their infinite power of *Tapas* to further the welfare of mankind, with unselfish devotion. The great people in whom, the three elements of meditation, unselfishness and God’s grace, have merged become worthy of official positions and prove to be suitable for assuming positions, in which they would have to correct and punish those who commit mistakes in their official capacity.

104. NAHUSHA’S PUNISHMENT

The great ones on being appointed to positions of eminence acquire the power to punish even the deities who commit mistakes in their official capacity. As such punishment connotes the transformation of a person into a purer person by washing away the impurity in the mind, which is termed as sin. On one occasion, *Maharshi* Agastya

reformed no less a person than the deity Devendra himself, by resorting to punishment.

In order to become a deity, a person born in this world has to perform the necessary *Tapas*⁵³⁵. Subsequently, such a person attains the position of a deity in the next birth, and there are exact rules that determine the amount of *Tapas* required for obtaining each position. The king of the deities is known as Devendra, and to achieve this position, a human being has to perform one hundred *Asvamedha Yajnas*⁵³⁶, within one's lifetime and by following all the specified conditions.

An emperor named Aayu was born to the emperor Pururava through Urvasi the celebrated celestial maiden. Aayu and his supremely virtuous wife, Swarbhanavi had a son named Nahusha. The latter had five sons through his wife Priyamvada. Nahusha was a great warrior, who was always busy with the affairs of his kingdom. However, he had also conducted more than a hundred *Asvamedha Yajnas*. The deity Devendra of that period was unable to prevent even a single one of these *Yajnas*, and he was

⁵³⁵ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁵³⁶ Horse sacrifice. A religious rite that was conducted by a king to declare his supremacy, by allowing a stallion, accompanied by a royal escort to wander, in an unfettered manner; any king who captured such a horse, declared his unwillingness to accept the paramourcy of the king who was conducting this sacrifice.

unable to develop even the slightest hatred in the heart of Nahusha towards him.

In this manner, Nahusha obtained divine powers, unintentionally, while he was still on the Earth. However, Nahusha had no interest in Heaven and he had never paid any attention to it. Meanwhile, the incumbent deity Devendra, who had created several obstacles to Nahusha's *Yagas*⁵³⁷; unexpectedly developed enmity towards *Maharshi*⁵³⁸ Brihaspathi. As a result, the latter repaired to the forests to perform *Tapas*. The deity Devendra did not bother much about this adverse development and appointed a wise man named Viswarupa, as his *Guru*⁵³⁹. Subsequently, the deity Devendra came to know that Viswarupa had clandestine relations with the demons, so he decollated⁵⁴⁰ him. With this act the deity Devendra was weighed down with the cardinal sin of having slain a Brahmin⁵⁴¹. Subsequently, he lost his wits and his power, and was not to be found anywhere.

Heaven was rendered ruler less, and swiftly degenerated into anarchy. The demons took advantage of this opportunity and increased their vicious attacks. Consequently, all the deities, the wise people and the

⁵³⁷ Vedic sacrifices

⁵³⁸ Great Sage

⁵³⁹ Religious or spiritual teacher

⁵⁴⁰ Beheaded

⁵⁴¹ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

Maharshis of that time undertook several rounds of discussions and surmised that there was no other option than to temporarily install some worthy living being on the throne of Heaven. Then the question arose, as to where they could find such a person. It was not a run of the mill position; it was the throne of the king of the deities! Who could possibly withstand the power of that throne?

Finally, that assembled host decided that Nahusha was the best choice. However, the fact remained that Nahusha was an ordinary king of the earth and that he had performed the *Yajnas* only as his duty. Nahusha had never desired to rule over heaven, hence, it could prove very difficult to make him accept that position. Then it was decided that this responsibility was to be given to the *Saptamaharshis*⁵⁴². *Maharshi* Agastya was appointed as the leader of that delegation and under his leadership, that council of *Maharshis* approached Nahusha and explained the situation to him. They requested him to save the three worlds by occupying the position of Devendra. Nahusha proved quite difficult to convince, but the *Maharshis* coaxed, cajoled and beseeched him, and made him ascend the throne of heaven.

The demons increased their iniquitous acts and Nahusha Devendra was greatly vexed by this. Everyone thought that the new Devendra was an indulgent person. However, he took on a fierce and terrible aspect and

⁵⁴² Seven sages

controlled the demoniac army on one side and the internal politics of the deities on the other. Consequently, he ushered in a stable rule, which made everyone happy.

In addition, to these victories, some peculiar changes started to take place in Nahusha Devendra's mind. He had been emerging victorious regularly, and he felt that there was no need to be humble. Previously, while residing on earth, he had worshipped the deities Agni and Vayu, by employing *Mantras*⁵⁴³. He had already seen their benevolent forms, which were endowed with a divine and glowing brilliance; when they had come to accept the sacrifice. However, after living in heaven, he noticed that they were not as pure as he had thought. The individuals in that place had their own thoughts and political leanings, and these deities were now required to serve under him. Even though they were obeying him, they had found it difficult to accept their situation; and they continued to treat him like a human.

Nahusha's difficulty was that if he neglected the manner in which they were treating him, his authority over them would be undermined. He had been entrusted with the responsibility of achieving stability in Heaven. Therefore, he could no longer consider them to be deities worthy of worship; accordingly, he had to display a certain amount of obduracy.

⁵⁴³ Vedic hymn

During that period, Nahusha Devendra was surrounded by some sycophants, who encouraged him to display his authority over the deities. As their suggestions and his inner thoughts were in agreement, those words were like nectar to his ears, with the result that those flatterers appeared to be his friends. Gradually, they became his unofficial ministers and his victories increased due to their scheming. He was becoming more and more self – opinionated due to these victories. A certain amount of disagreement was expressed by the deities who were in the other ruling positions. However, Nahusha felt that they were doing so because they considered him to be a mere human. His unofficial ministers aggravated the situation, by encouraging his pomposity.

Gradually, this situation developed into a major storm. The urge to prove that he was not a mere human and that he was a deity, and a more powerful one at that, was completely overwhelming him. Then the question emerged, as to how this was to be achieved. His advisors proffered their advice, but initially, Nahusha was reluctant to follow their advice. This resulted in several arguments between him and his advisors. They asked him as to what was wrong with their advice, to this he replied that his sense organs no longer desired material comforts. To this they replied that their question was whether the post of Indra or ruler of heaven depended on birth or position. Nahusha stated that this post came with position, thereupon his advisors posed

another query, namely if the post of Indra depended on position, then how was the post of the wife of Indra to be obtained. These iniquitous advisors, further told Nahusha that while arriving at a reply, he should not draw a parallel with his experiences on earth; in which context, Indraani would connote Indra's wife, in the same manner that a king's wife is termed a queen.

The perplexed Nahusha asked as to why he should not think in that manner, and to this his advisers posed a further question, as to whether, presently, he was a human or a deity; and the former had to admit that he was a deity. After he had accepted that he was a deity, the advisors waxed eloquent and told him that in accordance with the traditions of Heaven, similar to Indra, Indraani was also a position. There was no old age in heaven and her position would remain like that as long as she lived and that her youth would also remain intact.

After this they told him that Indraani was the wife of the deity who occupied the position of Indra. Since, he was the present incumbent, and as he was impervious to sense attractions, no one would prevent her from being his wife. In addition, they told him that it was unacceptable for him to state that he was not her husband. Then they told him that he was unaware of this, because he was new to heaven; but Indraani knew this very well. Then they poisoned his mind further by telling him that she had been disregarding him because she considered him to be a mere human being.

Hence, it was up to him to establish that he was no longer a human being, but a deity. Nahusha was very pleased with this advice and asked his advisors to do whatever was required in that regard.

The next day, a message was sent to the inner chambers of Indraani Devi, asking her to come to the bedroom of Devendra. This message caused her considerable astonishment. She could not imagine, even in her dreams that such a message could come from Nahusha, who was famous as a man of great virtue. She sent the messengers away without saying anything. Then she approached the Guru of the deities, *Maharshi* Brihaspathi and sought his advice.

In the meanwhile, the furious Nahusha sent his messengers to her, once again the next day. This time they addressed her somewhat harshly, but she replied smilingly, “Nahusha is a man of great virtue. Everyone has to submit to his command. In the beginning, the previous Devendra had come to my house in a manner that had befitted his grandeur and taken me to his palace. This is the tradition of Heaven. If Nahusha is really a Devendra, let him come to my palace on a *Brahmaratha*⁵⁴⁴, borne by the *Saptamaharshis*; and invite me to his palace!”

⁵⁴⁴ A palanquin carried by the best among the Brahmins

On hearing this reply Nahusha was further enraged; because, if the palanquin bearers came voluntarily, on being beseeched, then a person, who was their equal in *Tapas*, could mount that *Brahmaratha*. Other than that, nobody could request anyone else to bear the *Brahmaratha*. Moreover, he would have to request the great *Sapthamaharshis* to carry the *Brahmaratha*. If he failed to do so, it would be construed that he himself had accepted that he was not Devendra, and his carefully nurtured dignity would be destroyed in a moment. On the other hand if he made such a request, he would be committing a sin.

Nevertheless, his vile advisors told him that it was his right to make such requests, and if they failed to come, then it would be tantamount to disregarding him. The king's command, that the palanquin was ready and that all seven of them had to come and bear it reached the *Sapthamaharshis*. They *Sapthamaharshis* were taken aback at this effrontery and thought, "Why should we destroy heaven with our hands?" Hence, they went and stood beside the palanquin. Nahusha arrived with great pomp and sat down in the palanquin. The *Sapthamaharshis*, who were like long stiff dry grass, lifted up the palanquin with great difficulty and the journey started.

The *Sapthamaharshis* were not ordinary people, and they were unmindful about the past and the future, and concentrated only on the present. They had to work as palanquin bearers for the time being; but they were the

least perturbed by this. They started their daily Vedic discussion and cheerfully bore their burden. Nahusha was an expert on the Veda and he also took part in this discussion. The discussion slowly turned towards the *Yajnas*, and the Gomedha yaga came up for discussion, it is conducted by performing *Homa*⁵⁴⁵ with the flesh of a cow; however it is essential to ensure that the cow does not lose its life. That yaga used to be conducted in the *Kruta Yuga*⁵⁴⁶.

Nahusha liked cows very much. So he said, “Do not conduct that yaga.” The *Maharshis* replied, “It was stated in the Vedas that it could be performed in the Kruta Yuga.” Nahusha was incensed at this reply and threatened them, “Why are you referring to the Vedas, when I am telling you? It is a useless yaga even if the Vedas say otherwise. I am ordering this, therefore, adhere to it!”

This statement marked the downfall of Nahusha. Till that time he had indulged in a number of cruel acts. Even then his power of virtue had not diminished. Despite asking Indraani to come and live with him, his power of virtue had remained unaffected. After that he had commanded the *Sapthamaharshis* to carry the *Brahmaratha*, even then there was no diminution in the power of his virtue. However, when he had declared himself to be greater than the Vedas by rejecting them, the entire virtue acquired through the

⁵⁴⁵ Powerful fire ritual

⁵⁴⁶ Righteous age

innumerable *Asvamedha Yajnas* was reduced to ashes, in a moment.

Nahusha failed to notice this, but the *Sapthamaharshis* recognized this and became very sad. Their thoughts were weighing them down and this slowed down their pace of walking, they thought, “What is this? Devendra, who was being borne by us, has become such a worthless and virtue less person.” Nahusha who was in a hurry to visit Indraani Devi, stretched out one of his legs from the palanquin and struck the head of *Maharshi Agastya*, while saying, “Sarpa or go.”

Maharshi Agastya was the shortest person of them all. He had already been feeling great inconvenient in carrying the palanquin, because he had to lift up his hands, in order to bear the palanquin. In that state, when Nahusha’s leg struck his head, his eyes became red with anger. He understood that if he cursed Nahusha it would not be in vain, because the latter had lost his power of virtue. Accordingly, a curse, spontaneously, emerged from his mouth like a thunderbolt, “Nahusha! You have been saying Sarpa-Sarpa. Who is that Sarpam? You have been hissing like a serpent, by disrespecting virtue, the Vedas and the elderly. Turn into a real snake and fall onto the earth.” When Nahusha heard those sharp words, he shivered from top to bottom. He saw with his own eyes that some changes were taking place in his body and that he was changing into a python.

His previous good deeds had not completely gone to waste, even though all of his virtue had turned to ashes. He realized his mistakes within minutes, due to the power of his previous good deeds. While Nahusha was obtaining this knowledge, the floor of Heaven developed a fissure and his python's body started slipping down towards Earth. Immediately, he came to his senses and lamented loudly, "*MahAatma*⁵⁴⁷! *MahAatma*! Please forgive me. I have committed not one but several mistakes. You had made me sit on this divine throne, thinking that I was worthy to do so. Now, I have become a mean person and I am facing your punishment. I am not asking you to extricate me from this punishment. Please show mercy on me and grant me a wish, as I have accepted my mistakes and have been grieving with repentance. Let me fall to the earth as a snake, but I should fall amidst good people and I should not forget my past."

The deities, who had been frightened that Nahusha would act rashly, out of anger at the *Maharshi*'s curse, were surprised to hear his words. They even thought that *Maharshi* Agastya, who had been burning like the fiery sphere of the Sun, would not calm down even if Nahusha lamented very much. Nevertheless, *Maharshi* Agastya, who was like a fire ball, became calm like the moon within minutes. After that he smiled like the soft moonbeams and said "Nahusha! Do not weep. I am not angry with you. We

⁵⁴⁷ Noble minded

made you sit on the throne of Heaven, thinking that you were well suited to that task. You did not possess the required mental brightness for that position. That is why you have committed mistakes. You might not have done so if we had let you stay at home. I am the one who brought you and made you sit in heaven, and I am the one who created an opportunity for you to become iniquitous. So, it is my responsibility to wash away your entire sins and send you home in the same state you were before you came to Heaven. Hence, I have cursed you and it will wash all your sins away.

“Your mind functioned properly, by God’s grace, at the very last moment. It made the wishes that were required for washing away your sins. There is no better best option, in the world, for the cleansing of sins than associating with good people. You had asked for such an association with the good people. We usually say that the living beings die and are born again. This connotes that the living beings forget about their previous body completely, enter into a new body and think that the new body is the I. Forgetting about the previous body is known as death and assuming that the new body is I is called birth.

“Since, you will retain your previous memory; you will not die and will remain the same, although you will be in the body of a snake. You will wash away all your sins in the company of the good people and will come to realize that there is no permanent existence for Nahusha’s body,

Devendra's body, the snake's body or for the numerous bodies of the previous births. Moreover, you will realize that they are unreal and that you are the essence of the eternal reality. I was also wishing for the same thing through my curse. So Nahusha! May everything happen according to your wish!

There is great depth of thought and mercy, behind the curses of the great people. After *Maharshi* Agastya had blessed him in that manner, the snake Nahusha began to swing in the sky due to the wind and finally fell down by the side of the altar, where a great yaga was in progress. The person performing that yaga was from Nahusha's illustrious lineage. On the persons sitting there, getting affrighted that this was some bad omen; that snake addressed them in the human language, and narrated his antecedents. He also told them that he belonged to the same lineage as they did. Then he stayed in their company for some time, got rid of his curse due to the beneficial power of their company and once again obtained the body of Nahusha. After that he performed intense *Tapas* and achieved salvation.

This narrative shows that *Maharshi* Agastya had reached a very powerful position, whereby he could correct the mistakes of even those who were in great positions.

105. INDRADYUMNA

There are two kinds of thoughts in our minds, and it is our tendency to magnify the good thoughts and feel happy by looking at them. It is only the Almighty, who can see both types of thoughts, and that is why; he creates some small wonders now and then.

One day *Maharshi*⁵⁴⁸ Agastya visited a certain place and all the *Maharshis* in that place felt very happy at his visit. They welcomed him and due to his grace, learnt new secrets in the practice of meditation. During that conversation, those *Maharshis* told him that, Emperor Indradyumna had been meditating on a particular hill with great devotion. On hearing this *Maharshi* Agastya felt like bestowing his mercy on that *Rajarshi*⁵⁴⁹.

Accordingly, *Maharshi* Agastya ascended the hill very quickly, and entered the hermitage of Emperor Indradyumna. When *Maharshi* Agastya reached there that king had his eyes closed. He was quite advanced and could make out that the person who had arrived was *Maharshi* Agastya. He just sat there immobile and thought, “Why should I bother? Of what benefit is he to me? Moreover, I am under the vow of silence.” Thus, he kept his eyes closed and remained silent.

⁵⁴⁸ Great Sage

⁵⁴⁹ Royal sage

Maharshi Agastya stood there for some time and observed the king who was entering into a state of deep *Tapas* and then emerging from the same. *Maharshi* Agastya understood that this king had failed to get rid of his old habits, including his impetuosity. That king also had the misconception that those who came to see him, had to wait for him. Moreover, he was unused to the duty of a *Maharshi*. Agastya *Maharshi* realized that even though that king had performed a great deal of meditation, his passion for sensual desires, would prevent him from attaining the final beatitude. Finally, *Maharshi* Agastya's eyes reddened, his body straightened itself and his face puffed up with rage; and he shouted, "O! King! You have failed to get rid of your pride. You have been drowsing like an elephant in rut, without opening your eyes, even though *Maharshi* Agastya has come. Be born as an elephant." After that he poured water on the floor.

With that blow, the king's vow of silence flew away. His pride was crushed and he opened his eyes. He stood up and he fell at the feet of *Maharshi* Agastya. At this, *Maharshi* Agastya decided to remain silent and the king commenced to weep bitterly.

He prayed to *Maharshi* Agastya in numerous ways and said, "O! *Maharshi* Agastya! Please be merciful towards me. I had behaved in that manner, in order to preserve the vow of silence and not to disregard you. Please forgive me and be compassionate towards me by recalling your curse."

Finally, *Maharshi* Agastya lost his anger and replied, “O! King! You left your kingdom, came to the forest and ascended the hill. Even then you remained a king and were unable to become a saint. However long you meditate in this fashion, the result will remain unchanged. The pride, which has established itself in you, requires punishment. That is why this curse has come out of my mouth. Let it happen like that, but do not be afraid. You will not turn into an elephant immediately. Meditate the rest of your life with this newly acquired knowledge and purification. Forsake the duty of a king and uphold the duty of a saint. You will be born as an elephant in your next birth.

“If the seed of pride starts to sprout in the heart, one birth and one punishment are insufficient. You have faced a punishment in this birth but it is not very severe. You will undergo punishment in your next birth also, perhaps, by then; the seed of pride may burn away completely. May you receive the benefit of the *Tapas* done by you in this birth, may your devotion towards Lord Srihari be complete and may you reach the state of satiety!”

Luckily for Indradyumna these final words emerged from the voice of such a great man, like *Maharshi* Agastya. If there had been no pride left in him, this benediction might have been available to him then and there. When that king understood that *Maharshi* Agastya’s grace would be available to him after some delay, he was very happy. He

mentally prepared himself to undergo any number of punishments, in order to obtain the final bliss.

Maharshi Agastya blessed him once again and went on his way; and Indradyumna remained on the hill and continued his *Tapas*. In his next birth, he was born as a great king of the elephants and did not remember his previous birth. Bull elephants have a great deal of lust for their females, and this king of the elephants was more lustful than the other elephants. Under the influence of the intoxication caused by that lust, he stepped inside a pond in the company of some cow elephants. There a crocodile caught him by his leg, while the other elephants escaped.

The king elephant tried his best to escape from the clutches of that crocodile and thought, “How long will this crocodile’s strength prevail before my strength? I have fought a hundred elephants on my own.” However, even that huge elephant was like unto a blade of grass in that crocodile’s grip.

When this battle had continued for a thousand years, the elephant started to weaken, and with the increase in weakness, some of the old memories started to occur to its mind in a confusing manner. By the time it had lost all hope of remaining alive. At that desperate stage, the elephant felt surrounded by the *Tapas* done by it. There was sudden brightness in his mind, as if the window of a dark room had been opened all at once; and a new perception emerged.

What is the principal difference between a human being and an animal? Is it not perception? If the consciousness blossoms completely, even the mind in an animal body becomes a human mind. In reality, it is the mind that is the human being. So, if the wisdom expands, an animal would turn into a human being. The only difference would be that the animal limbs would not be able to perform all the tasks that the human limbs can do. If there had been no need for any work, then there would have been no need for limbs. The mind alone would have performed the work. Now, *Gajendra*⁵⁵⁰ was facing a similar situation. All his limbs had become paralyzed, but his mind was working with great clarity and complete perception. Hence, this king of the elephants turned into the previous king of the humans, and started praying to Lord Srihari.

As the deadly peril predicted by *Maharshi Agastya* had occurred, the seed of pride hiding inside that living being burnt away completely, and Lord Srihari's essence of bliss and satiety was visible much more clearly than before. As a result, Lord Srihari appeared in person and killed the crocodile with his discus. Thereafter, He fondled that stout elephant's body and wiped off its tears with his tasselled cloak. Then He helped the elephant to reach dry land, and disappeared.

⁵⁵⁰ King of the elephants

This very same passage has been described in a highly captivatingly manner as the *Gajendra Moksha* in the Bhaagavata.

There was a great deal of sport behind *Maharshi* Agastya's submission to anger. As we have told the story from the king's perspective, we do not find much of a tempo in this story. In the Bhaagavata this story was narrated from the elephant's point of view. Hence, its tempo is very much evident. What is tempo? Does it not connote knowing some secrets? If we had been unaware of the secret behind *Maharshi* Agastya's curse, then the tempo would have been good. However, we would have thought, "When the other person did not offer his homage to him, even a person like *Maharshi* Agastya could not control his anger. He himself was unable to lose his pride." The sport indulged in by *Maharshi* Agastya proves that the secrets behind the actions of the great are just like this in many instances.

106. AGNI DEVA

*Maharshis*⁵⁵¹ and deities are equivalent terms that denote similar beings. Those people who even after attaining divine powers, do not leave the human body, the earth and humanity are the *Maharshis*. They live with self restraint and do not have any sort of passion towards earthly desires and are free of attachments. If any of these

⁵⁵¹ Great Sages

Maharshis decide to reach divine worlds with their power of *Tapas*⁵⁵², they will have to forsake their human bodies and the earth completely. Then they have to take up a divine body and after that they would become deities.

The deities in heaven are primarily of two types, namely the Ajanaja deities and the Aganthaka deities. At the beginning of every age and at the time of creation of heaven, some of the *Maharshis* of the previous age will be awaiting a suitable accommodation in the new heaven. Such *Mahatmas*⁵⁵³ are born as deities, at the time of creation of the new heaven; and remain in heaven. Generally, these *Mahatmas* remain as deities as long as that particular heaven lasts, in that age. Such *Mahatmas* are known as the Ajanaja deities, for instance the deities Indra and Varuna.

People who perform *Yajnas*⁵⁵⁴ reach heaven and live there after attaining divine bodies. They enjoy the comforts of heaven, and on the completion of their virtue they return to the earth. These people are termed as the Aganthuka Deities and an example of this category is Nahushu who discharged the duties of the deity Devendra for some time. The majority of the deities in the Puranic stories belong to the category of Ajanaja deities. In those stories we often hear the names of the deities like Indra, Varuna, Vayu, Agni,

⁵⁵² Deep meditation or ascetism

⁵⁵³ Noble minded

⁵⁵⁴ Vedic sacrifices

Vasu, Rudra and Aditya. In fact, these names denote celestial positions and not the name of any particular deity.

Indeed, each of the Ajanaja Deities is allotted a position that entails some responsibility, in the process of creation and organization. One of the principles of creation is that luxury without responsibility is unwelcome. An irresponsibly luxurious lifestyle is to be condemned; and any person approaching divinity has to be duty bound and responsible. That is why people who have become eligible to attain divinity, are aware of their responsibility even if they are inclined towards luxuries. As such, the Almighty requires such persons to act on his behalf, in the process of creation and organization. God encourages competent and eligible persons and employs them in important positions.

The twin events of taking birth as an Ajanaja deity and holding office occur simultaneously. This is in direct contrast to the process of birth and growth on earth. For instance, the position of Vayu comprises of forty – nine deities. Each of them gets the generic name of Vayu; however, they have individual names, like Vayuvu, Maruta and Mathariswa.

Similarly, Agni is also a heavenly position, which comprises of thirty – two deities. Some of them are Vaiswanara, Vithiothra and Jathavedasa. Each one of them has his own individual history, but collectively they are known as Agni. This is the reason for the existence of various

stories in the Puranas, with regard to the birth and activities of the deity Agni. In the Puranic period, people were able to understand these stories; and explanation and introductions were not required for stories, relating to the deities in the post of Agni. Due to this, we may find several contradictions regarding the nature of the deity Agni. Hence, we should not consider the stories in the Puranas to be fabrications or irrelevant. We have to analyze these stories and come to know about the facts in them. Moreover, each story has to be examined in the context of the deity described in the story. In this manner we have to correlate the stories with the deities in those positions, and this will be done in respect of the story of Vaiswanara who was the deity of Agni.

The practice of promoting to a post in heaven is not in vogue. Let us assume that a new age had commenced at the present moment. The assumption by a person, of the office of the deity Indra, implies that he was the holder of the position of Indra. We may enquire as to who this person is; and such information is obtained from the name of that person; because he will be called in a manner that will indicate his name in the previous age, despite the fact that he performs the duties of the deity Indra. For example, in some age, a person named Sanathkumar *Maharshi*⁵⁵⁵ had existed. In the succeeding age he was born as Kumara

⁵⁵⁵ Great Sage

Swami. This being is usually referred to as Sanathkumar who had become the deity Shanmukh.

When Sanathkumar *Maharshi* was born as the Ajanaja Deity Shanmukh, he was addressed by his new name Shanmukh. Whenever the situation demanded, he was described as Sanathkumar *Maharshi* who had become Shanmukh. In general, deities were addressed by the post that they occupied. Some posts are group posts in which a number of virtuous people collectively perform the duties of that post. In such situations, although each individual has his own name, they will be named according to the name of their post.

107. THE AGNI DEVA VAISWANARA

Once upon a time, in the city of Kasi there was a couple who were engaged in *Tapas*⁵⁵⁶. The name of the husband was Viswanara, and that of the wife was Suchishmati. Viswanara was a very great person who considered all creatures to be equal, and he saw himself in them. His wife considered purity of thought to be the ultimate requirement and meditated with that objective. Their names themselves are indicative of the mode of *Tapas* adopted by them.

⁵⁵⁶ Deep meditation or ascetism

However, it is difficult to be rid of human tendencies. Accordingly, as they became older, they developed a strong desire to have children. In order to fulfil this desire, they concentrated on the God Kasi Visveswara and started *Tapas*. Alas! They were unable to perform *Tapas* in order to fulfil a desire. It was alien to their nature, and they would fail to remember about their desire to obtain a son, as they would get fully immersed in the *Tapas*.

At last, Lord Shiva appeared before them and told them that He was Kasi Visveswara. They saw Him as the embodiment of the life force, which was present in all the living creatures. They did not feel that they were seeing a new person; all the same they experienced tremendous happiness. As a result of this, they remained deeply immersed in that divine pleasure and were staring awestruck at that divine personality. Lord Visveswarudu smiled gently and caressed them, after that he addressed them with great affection and love, “Dear ones! A great son will be born to you,” and then He evanesced.

After some days had elapsed, a son was born to this couple; and they were awestruck by the brilliance of the new born child. They decided to celebrate the child’s birth on the eleventh day, and invited their friends and relatives. Although they had invited only a few of their relatives, hundreds of people, including kings and emperors attended that celebration. Upon enquiry, the parents of that child

came to know that the attendees were the deities from heaven.

That child was no ordinary child, and the attendant deities were very happy on seeing that child and decided to give it a suitable name. They gave him the name Vaiswanara or the son of Viswanara. This name also denotes the life force that exists in all the living creatures. After having named the boy, the deities returned to their abode. As the boy grew up, he acquired all the skills and education, even before he could talk. When he was five years old, the *Maharshi* Naarada visited their dwelling and stated without any hesitation that, “This boy has to countenance an evil and dangerous event in his twelfth year.” After imparting this unpleasant news, the *Maharshi* left on his interminable travels.

With this, both Viswanarudu and his wife Suchishmathi were deeply saddened. They tried their level best to conceal this information from their son. All the same, he came to know about it, but he was the least perturbed by this unfavourable news. He comforted his parents and asked them to be hopeful. After that he told them, “What is the need to fear when Lord Visveswara is protecting us!” In this manner, he instilled courage in them. Afterwards, he entered the hallowed precincts of the Kasi Visveswara temple and commenced *Tapas*.

Astonishingly, that child Vaiswanara became immersed in deep *Tapas*, like Dhruva, within a few months time. His intense *Tapas* resulted in the state of Samadhi, and subsequently, the deity Devendra admired his dedication and appeared before him and asked him to make a wish. Vaiswanara enquired of him “Venerable one! Who are you?” To this that deity replied, “Dear boy! I am Devendra the king of the deities. There is nothing that I am incapable of granting, ask whatever you want.” That child replied fractiously, “I am performing *Tapas* on the Lord Kasi Visveswara. Why are you interfering with my endeavour? I want neither you nor your boon; please do not disturb my *Tapas*.”

After having rejected the offer of the deity Devendra, the child Vaiswanara again immersed himself in *Tapas* on Lord Shiva. The deity Devendra became irate at this refusal of Vaiswanara. He shouted furiously at the child, but the latter ignored him, as he was deep in his *Tapas* and oblivious to what was happening around him.

The king of the deities, Devendra could not withstand this insult, so he angrily drew his Vajrayudha and struck him on his head. Vaiswanara had attained his twelfth year and received the Vajrayudha’s blow, simultaneously. He was consequently, rendered unconscious. At that moment, Lord Kasi Visveswara appeared at that place and he was in a great rage; however, he placed his hand on the head of that boy and said “Get up dear boy and live for a very long time!”

The deity Devendra was terrified at these developments and Vaiswanara arose with pleasure. The Lord Parameswar laughed cheerfully and said “What can these Vajrayudhas do to you? Nothing can stop you and you will enjoy a long life, with great affluence. The plane of Agni will be managed by you. Although this Devendra is the king of deities, he will have to seek your help.” Subsequently, Lord Shiva once again blessed that boy and returned to his sanctum.

After these events had taken place, the deity Devendra informed Vaiswanara that there was no one in charge of the Agneya or south easterly direction, which was the province of the deity Agni. Thereafter, Devendra asked him to assume that vacant position at the earliest, and returned to heaven. Vaiswanara went home and recounted all these events to his parents and made them very happy.

The taste of *Tapas* is greater than that of Amrita, and Vaiswanara evinced great interest in conducting *Tapas*. Until that point of time, he had been doing *Tapas*, in order to fulfil his desire. After this incident, he decided to do *Tapas* without desiring anything. He commenced *Tapas* on Lord Shiva, Who immediately materialized before him and said, “Boy, at present there is a vacancy in the position of the eight Vasus, hence, I am offering it to you.”

Vaiswanara was taken aback and tried to reply, “O! Lord! I did not perform *Tapas* to get any post,” but before he

could say anything, the Lord asked him to take over the posts of Agni as well as Vasu, for His sake and left for his divine abode. From that time onwards many changes took place in the physical body of Vaiswanara. It became a lustrous body, and he was able to change his body, at will, from a macroscopic to a microscopic form and *vice versa*. Soon after this change, owing to the wishes of the Deities, he assumed charge of the posts in the worlds of Agni and Vasu.

Vaiswanara discharged the duties of both these posts with remarkable ease. Moreover, as the Agni in the stomachs of the living creatures that helps digest food; as the Agni that transfers the *Havis*⁵⁵⁷ to the deities and as Vasudeva who provides food to the pitru devas, he was discharging multiple duties with astonishing efficiency. Simultaneously, he was continually conducting internal *Tapas*. Due to this, the power of his *Tapas* reached astounding proportions.

While things were going along in this manner, Sreemata, the reincarnation of *Adisakthi*⁵⁵⁸, blessed Vaiswanara. This resulted in the concentration of the yoga sakthi on his left side. Subsequently, this concentrated energy assumed the form of a damsel and the Sreemata named her Swaha.

⁵⁵⁷ Sacrificial offerings

⁵⁵⁸ The Divine Mother

The literal meaning of Swaha is that she is a part of the self, and another meaning is that her speech is invaluable and beautiful. Vaiswanara accepted Swahadevi as his wife, at the behest of Sreemata. From that day onwards, discharging his multiple duties became very easy. This was due to the fact that whenever people wanted to offer *Havis* to the deities, they used to invoke the word Swaha at the end of all the mantras and then place those offerings in the *Agnihotra*⁵⁵⁹. This had been ordained by the Vedamatha and Swaha was his wife's name, Agni used to complete the task of offering the *Havis* to the deities very quickly. This resulted in a faster distribution of the offerings made to the deities, and proved to be very convenient to the humans.

Sometimes even the deities have to face difficulties, while discharging their duties. Once, Lord Brahma created a man named, Pulomudu and a woman named Puloma. Pulomudu was born with the demoniac element in him, whereas Puloma was born with a divine element in her. Since they had been created at the same time, Pulomudu wanted to marry Puloma, but Lord Brahma did not say anything to his wish. Pulomudu thought that as the Lord had not said anything, he could marry Puloma. However, the Lord had decided otherwise and He performed her marriage to *Maharshi* Bhrugu. Pulomudu was very angry at this

⁵⁵⁹ Ritual to purify the environment

development, but he was unable to do anything, as *Bhrugu Maharshi* was a very powerful practitioner of *Tapas*.

With the passage of time, Pulomudu forgot all about this and eventually married another woman and became a leader of his men. One day, *Bhrugu Maharshi*, while going to the river for a bath, asked his wife to take care of the consecrated fire. At the same time Pulomudu, who was going that way, saw the radiant Puloma. He stopped there, and had a faint recollection that he had seen her somewhere, but was unable to remember where he had seen her. Pulomudu utilized his power of *Tapas*, called forth the deity of Agni, and asked him the identity of that woman. The deity of Agni realized what was going to happen, but he had to answer Pulomudu, hence, he replied that she was the wife of *Bhrugu Maharshi*. However, he did not reveal her name to him and he also advised him to leave that place and forget about her, because her husband was a very powerful *Rishi*. All the same, the deity Agni's efforts were in vain, as Pulomudu remembered his love for Puloma. The latter, immediately took on the shape of a wild boar and seized Puloma in his mouth, and fled into the forest.

At that time, Puloma was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. Due to this sudden exertion, she delivered a glorious baby boy. That boy, immediately after touching the ground became a twenty year old youth. His rage was tremendous and he reduced Pulomudu to ashes, merely with his fierce gaze. In this manner he saved his mother from

the clutches of that demon. Presently, Puloma Devi reached home with her son and recounted her harrowing experience in the forest to her husband, Bhrugu *Maharshi*. The *Maharshi* was very angry with the deity Agni, for telling the demon about Puloma. In a fit of rage, he cursed the deity Agni, “You will become omnivorous and consume everything without showing any discrimination.”

Upon hearing this curse the Deity Agni became distraught and said to *Maharshi* Bhrugu, “Why did you curse me? What is my fault? Is speaking the truth a crime? Just because some demon, due to past karma had harmed your wife, are you justified in cursing me?”, but all his entreaties were in vain. The deity Agni, in a fit of anger resolved to discontinue eating, and withdrew all his flames. The outcome was that all the deities were deprived of *Havis*, resulting in pandemonium in the realm of the deities. The deities were utterly shocked at these incidents. Subsequently, they approached Lord Vishnu and beseeched Him to resolve the crisis. At this the Lord approached the deity Agni, in the company of all the other deities and attempted to pacify him by stating, “O! Deity Agni! Let bygones be bygones. This sort of behaviour is unbecoming for ascetics like you; moreover, nobody, including me, can undo the curse. Even Bhrugu *Maharshi* cannot retract that curse. The deities can assist you by making any edible thing pious, so that you can eat something only after it has been sanctified by them. In this way the curse of the *Maharshi* will

be carried out and you will be able to perform your duties without any hindrance. In addition, anything that you touch will become extremely pious, so be calm and do discharge your duties in a just manner.” After listening to this advice of Lord Srihari, the deity Agni was pacified and decided to honour the wishes of the deities. He restored his flames and commenced to hand over the *Havis* to the deities. From that time onwards, the deity Agni obtained the titles *Sarvabhakshaka*⁵⁶⁰ and *Suchi*⁵⁶¹.

108. AGNI DEVA AND SHATKRITHIKA

On several occasions, people encounter difficult situations. This happens as long as the mind continues to think. It also results from previous iniquitous behaviour and even the *Mahatmas*⁵⁶² had to undergo such difficult situations. As a matter of fact, even the deity Agni, who was a great adherent of the dharmic way and who had been honoured with the title of *Suchi*⁵⁶³, had to encounter such difficulties.

Long ago, on a new moon day, the *Saptamaharshis*⁵⁶⁴ were performing special homas for their ancestors; and their wives were helping them in this task. The deity Agni was

⁵⁶⁰ The consumer of everything

⁵⁶¹ Pure

⁵⁶² Noble minded

⁵⁶³ Absolutely clean

⁵⁶⁴ Seven sages

satisfied with the chanting of the *Mantras*⁵⁶⁵ by the *Saptamaharshis*, and their devotion. Accordingly, he was receiving their sacred offerings by rotating his flames in a symmetrical manner. However, all seven wives of the *Saptamaharshis* were not helping their husbands with the same level of devotion and dedication. There were variations in their devotion and this was recognized by the deity Agni. After having detected this, the deity Agni started to observe them with keen interest.

It is always inadvisable to stare at other women with interest, as it results in considerable danger; and the deity Agni became prone to this danger. The *Homas*⁵⁶⁶ were completed and everyone present there left for their abodes. All the same, the wives of these *Saptamaharshis* were foremost in the thoughts of the deity Agni. He realized this and was frightened of his own thoughts. He cursed himself for thinking in that manner and was astonished at his unacceptable behaviour. Consequently, he was terrified at what would transpire if the *Saptamaharshis* came to know about his evil thoughts, which caused him considerable cheerlessness.

The mind is treacherous and a scoundrel and it acts as if it were bound by *Dharma*⁵⁶⁷, but in reality it is more

⁵⁶⁵ Vedic hymn

⁵⁶⁶ Powerful fire rituals

⁵⁶⁷ Righteousness

attached to desires than to *Dharma*. Although the mind of the deity Agni chanted the principles of *Dharma*, it did not drive away the thoughts pertaining to the wives of the *Saptamaharshis*. Gradually, these thoughts intensified. The deity Agni hated himself; and he was unable to go home and face his wife. Hence, he sat in a forest and commenced to fantasize about the wives of the *Saptamaharshis*.

His wife, Swaha Devi was awaiting his return, at home. She constituted the sinistral part of his power; and as such she was the left portion of his mind. Therefore, she could understand the thoughts going on in the dextral side of his mind. She was surprised and thought at length.

“How strange this is. I am his left side, but he is thinking lustfully about some other woman! There is only one way to save him from falling down to the nether world. He had recognized the differences in the level of devotion of the wives of the *Saptamaharshis* and he committed a sin by concentrating on their sin. I will cleanse him of those sins.”

Swaha Devi thought like this and by concentrating her power she changed into Shivadevi, the wife of Angiro *Maharshi*, who was the first of the *Saptamaharshis*, and approached the deity Agni who was sitting all alone in the forest. The deity Agni, on seeing the approaching Shivadevi, faltered. He tried to discourage her but was unsuccessful; so he surrendered to her and with that his lust for her Shivadevi was completely destroyed.

On the next day, Swaha Devi came to him in the disguise of another *Saptamaharshi's* wife, and the deity Agni fulfilled his desire for her. In that manner, six days went by; and the deity Agni's lust was reducing. The deity Agni started to repent his unbecoming behaviour. On the seventh day, Swaha Devi could not assume the form of the remaining Saptarshi's wife, because that last one was *Maharshi* Vasisht's wife, Arundhathidevi. The latter was supremely devoted and dedicated towards her husband, Swaha Devi was unable to assume her visage and don her garb.

Swaha Devi had donned the faces of the wives of six of the *Saptamaharshis*, who were subsequently, known as the Shatkritihika. Swaha Devi did not reveal the secret of her having obtained the masks of these *Saptamaharshis'* wives; all the same it managed to spread, and the people assumed that some of the wives of the *Saptamaharshis* had carried on an amorous relation with the deity Agni. This issue reached the ears of the *Saptamaharshis*. As a result, six of those Saptarishis left their wives.

That is why, in the constellation of the *Saptamaharshis*, which is located in the northern sky, there are seven stars that represent the seven sages; but there is only one star, which represents Arundhathi, and this star is located by the side of the star that represents her husband, *Maharshi* Vasisht. The Shatkritihikaluv were deprived of a place in that constellation.

However, the deity Agni was pious, hence, even though the right side of his mind indulged in sinful thoughts; the left side of his mind prevented their materialization. This saved him from the nether world. After the sixth day, the deity Agni was completely purified and there were no evil thoughts left in him. However, this episode had destroyed the lives of the Shatkritika. As such, their lack of dedication towards their husbands was the sole reason for their ruin. Once having reached the status of stars, the utmost care has to be taken in life, and even sinful thoughts can result in severe punishment.

However, if virtuous *Mahatmas* commit sins, it could be a secret wish of Lord Shiva. The episode of the deity Agni and Shatkritika resulted in the subsequent birth of Kumara Swami. The deity Agni had to bear the divine force of Lord Shiva for some time and later on that of the Shatkritika for some time. This was possible due to the desertion of the Shatkritika by their husbands.

However, life after realizing the wish of the Lord Shiva is different from the deviant thinking, engendered by His divine will. Therefore, one should avoid deviant thoughts, by taking recourse to discrimination. If a person fails to do so, then such a person becomes liable to undergo punishment. This applies to the *Mahatmas* also. In the case of the deity Agni, he had committed a sin, but it had not materialized. As such he did not deserve full punishment. He had to withstand the unbearable force of Lord Shiva for

some time, which caused him to suffer tremendously. Subsequently, he beseeched the Shatkritika, whom he had defamed, to bear the brilliance of Lord Shiva. On their according their consent, he distributed it among them. The Shatkritika, due to their disobedience towards their husbands, had to bear the brilliance of Lord Shiva. They were also unable to withstand the intensity of that radiance and had to get rid of it in the *SaRaavana*⁵⁶⁸. In this manner, by virtue of the touch of Lord Shiva's radiance, the deity Agni as well as the Shatkritika were purified and once again became virtuous.

A person of the status of the deity Agni received punishment for his interest in and observation of women, other than his wife. What would happen in the case of ordinary humans? Due to his divine powers and due to the help of his wife, the deity Agni could escape from plummeting into the nether world, and he was purified by the radiance of Lord Shiva. If ordinary people commit such sins, then what would be their fate and how difficult it would be for them to extricate themselves from such sin? This has to be understood and even after attaining virtuousness and divinity, men should not think of other women and women should not think of other men.

⁵⁶⁸ A small bush found bordering marshes and lakes

109. ARUNI MAHARSHI

The *Maharshi*⁵⁶⁹ Aruni was not very well known, however, his disciple Satyatapa was renowned. The latter was a great saint who had won the acclaim of several sages and he had received more accolades than what had been received by the deity Indra and the other deities. Although, he had been moulded by *Maharshi* Aruni to such a high status, his *Guru*⁵⁷⁰ retained his simplicity. It has been mentioned in the Puranas that while the great *Maharshis* are performing *Tapas*⁵⁷¹, the nearby wild animals behave very gently.

The reason behind this strange behaviour of these wild animals is the universal love and affection of those *Maharshis*, who do not consider any animal or creature to be their enemy. They witness the Almighty and his brilliance in all the creatures. That is why they do not hate or distrust any creature. The *Maharshi* Aruni used to perform *Tapas* in the dense forests and attained the zenith of such universal love. It is very difficult to reach that stage and one has to undergo several difficult tests in order to attain that ultimate position of universal love. One day *Maharshi* Aruni had to undergo such a difficult test.

⁵⁶⁹ Great Sage

⁵⁷⁰ Religious or spiritual teacher

⁵⁷¹ Deep meditation or ascetism

Whilst, deeply immersed in the bliss of Samadhi, he heard someone shouting in his vicinity, that person was shouting, “The thief has been captured.” His state of Samadhi ended abruptly, and he was in light trance. His eyes opened partially and again closed themselves. All of a sudden, a tribal person emerged from the bushes, and he was carrying a large sword, which he was swinging in the air, all the while shouting, “You impostor! Tell me where you have hidden the gold! If you fail to do so, I will behead you.”

Although the situation was chaotic and there was quite some external commotion, the *Maharshi* was enjoying great internal happiness. He felt that the goddess of time was dancing before him. He was surprised at the fact that it had taken that particular form before him. His mind was calm and his body was fixed and motionless. The tribal hunter was trampling the ground and shouting loudly. Moreover, he was brandishing his sword in the air, but to his surprise, he was unable to kill the *Maharshi*. He could not even attempt to kill the *Maharshi*. He fell to thinking at this strange occurrence and started to think, “What is this? I have killed numerous *Maharshis* till now. Those *Munis*⁵⁷² had run away on seeing me, lost their senses, and had cried and pleaded with me to spare them. This man is not at all afraid of me and sits immobile like a stone. Moreover, he seems to be very happy. Does he have no fear of death? Has

⁵⁷² Ascetics

he overcome death? At any cost and in any manner possible, I will obtain the required training for doing such *Tapas* from him.”

After thinking in this fashion for some time, he threw away his sword and pleaded with the *Maharshi*, “Please accept me as your disciple.” Thereupon, he fell at the feet of the *Maharshi*. Till that time the *Maharshi* had been calm and his face had been pleasant to look at. Subsequent to the pleadings of the hunter, the *Maharshi* regained his senses and his face lost its calmness. He compressed his lips and opened his eyes. The *Maharshi* neither accepted nor rejected the request of the tribal hunter. He looked at the hunter with exasperation and started to leave the place immediately. The hunter followed the *Maharshi* like a domesticated cat. All the while, he was pleading with the *Maharshi*, who continued to ignore him. They walked for miles in this manner, and during their long journey, they were compelled to rest at many places.

They continued on their journey and entered a forest of Sakata trees that bear fruits and have medicinal properties. As they were walking in that forest, suddenly a tiger emerged from a cave and attacked the *Maharshi*. He managed to escape its attack, but his heart was palpitating with fear. He was very sad at what had happened and was thinking, “What is this? What has happened to my *Tapas*? How could any creature become violent in my presence? How could the tiger attack me?” At that time, the tribal

hunter who was following the *Maharshi* killed the tiger by crushing its head with rocks. He was seriously injured in this endeavour, but very happy at having saved the *Maharshi*.

To their surprise, a handsome *Kshatriya*⁵⁷³ emerged from the body of the dying tiger and paid homage to the *Maharshi* and said, “Your *Tapas* is extraordinary, your righteousness is great and your love is universal! I had attacked you after ascertaining these characteristics; because I had surmised that by merely touching you I could end my curse. However, I was unable to touch you. All the same I have been absolved of the curse, due to the touch of your disciple. I have regained my earlier body, and my name is Dheergabahu. I had been subjected to this curse, because of my arrogant behaviour, and changed into a tiger. By virtue of your great presence, I am relieved of the curse. Thank you and good bye.”

The hunter was gasping due to his fight with the tiger; even then he paid his homage to the *Maharshi*. His entire body was covered with injuries, and it was unascertainable as to how many of his bones were broken. The *Maharshi* thought, “This hunter has killed hundreds of *Maharshis*. He is a sinner but he has some virtue in him, which has attracted him towards *Tapas*. He is determined to do *Tapas* and that determination has made him virtuous. He

⁵⁷³ A person belonging to the warrior caste

wanted me to be his *Guru*⁵⁷⁴ but he does not know how to ask. I refused to teach him and did not favour him in the least; even then he risked his life to save me as he believed me to be his *Guru*. Who will do such a task for the sake of a *Guru*? He is truly a great man.

“His sins have been absolved, but he does not have any virtue. Which *Mantra*⁵⁷⁵ can I teach him? I cannot make him do *Pranayama*⁵⁷⁶, nor can I teach him *Tatva*⁵⁷⁷. Nevertheless, I will teach him something invaluable.” In this manner the *Maharshi* cogitated for a long time and prayed to the Almighty. Thereupon, the *Maharshi* said, “O! Hunter! You have been following me to learn about *Tapas*. Have faith, today is an auspicious day for you. From now onwards, do not tell lies and always speak the truth. This is your *Tapas* and your teaching. Do not eat the fruits of these Sakata trees and stay back in this place and perform *Tapas*.” The hunter accepted these instructions and remained silent about his wounds and broken bones. He was ecstatic at the teaching of his *Guru*. While, he was immersed in that tranquil state, his *Guru* left that place.

The hunter was unable to walk far, due to his broken bones. To the extent that he could walk there were only Sakata trees. What was he to eat? However, he did not get

⁵⁷⁴ Religious or spiritual teacher

⁵⁷⁵ Vedic hymn

⁵⁷⁶ Art of breath control

⁵⁷⁷ Truth

dejected and he did not bother about food. His mind concentrated on the teachings of his *Guru*, namely the truth. Therefore, he settled there, concentrating on truth; and his concentration was so great that it made him reach the state of *Samadhi*⁵⁷⁸. Later on, he became popular as Satyatapa.

110. SATYATAPA

By the grace of his *Guru*⁵⁷⁹ *Aruni Maharshi*⁵⁸⁰ a tribal hunter became a great saint and had come very close to the ultimate stage in *Samadhi*⁵⁸¹. He performed *Tapas*⁵⁸² by abstaining from food. Consequently, he had become shrunken and no one in his surroundings cared whether he was dead or alive. Several years passed by in that manner.

After a long time, this erstwhile hunter perceived a person. That person's clothes were besmeared with mud and his behaviour was verging on lunacy. Nevertheless, the hunter identified an aura that was emerging from that person, and identified that person as the *Maharshi* Durvasa. The hunter prostrated himself at the feet of the *Maharshi* and beseeched him several times to be his guest.

⁵⁷⁸ A supernatural state in which the consciousness of the experiencer and the experienced become one

⁵⁷⁹ Religious or spiritual teacher

⁵⁸⁰ Great Sage

⁵⁸¹ A supernatural state in which the consciousness of the experiencer and the experienced become one

⁵⁸² Deep meditation or ascetism

The *Maharshi* stared at the hunter, whose body resembled a tree trunk. There were scars on his body due to wounds, and he was not wearing the sacred thread. However, to his great surprise that hunter was displaying not only an aura, but also a halo. The *Maharshi* Durvasa pondered awhile and asked, “What do you eat?”

The hunter was taken aback at this query and thought that the *Maharshi* had identified him as carnivorous. Then, he answered, “Now a days, I do not eating anything.”

“From when?” the *Maharshi* asked sarcastically and the hunter replied humbly, “I do not remember, venerable one, but probably from some decades.” To this the *Maharshi* addressed him, “You seem to be an uncouth person, if you do not have anything for yourself, what is that you can give me?” To this the hunter replied meekly, “Please do not talk like that. Whatever you want I will give you, visit my *Ashram*⁵⁸³.” The *Maharshi* asked sceptically, “Which *Ashram* are you referring to? I do see even a single hut in this place.” To this the hunter replied, “The hole in that tree is my ashram.”

This seemingly, audacious reply enraged the *Maharshi* who shouted, “Is the hole in the tree your *Ashram*? Do I have to come into the hole? There may be

⁵⁸³ Hermitage

snakes or scorpions. It seems to me that you are underestimating me.” Immediately, the hunter beseeched the *Maharshi*, to remain calm and asked him to sit in the shade of that tree and tell him as to what he would like to eat. Then the *Maharshi* asked the hunter to initially, procure a dozen bunches of bananas, fifty jack fruits and one hundred dry coconuts.

On hearing the *Maharshi’s* demands, the hunter entered the hole in the tree, with serpentine grace. All the while the *Maharshi* Durvasa was observing him carefully. Once inside, the hunter entered into deep meditation and concentrated on Lord Eshwar. Very soon a precious-stone studded utensil materialized in his hands. After this the hunter emerged from the hole, and with the leaves of the nearby trees, prepared a plate for offering food. Then, he fashioned tumblers with these leaves and fetched water from the river. Next, he seated the *Maharshi* and placed this plate before him and from the stone studded utensil he served, one by one, what all the *Maharshi* had asked for.

The *Maharshi* seeing all this became greatly excited and wanted many more things, which the hunter served out of the divine utensil. Finally, after partaking of these innumerable dishes, he felt satiated and placed his hand on the hunter’s shoulder and said, “I am very happy with you. Your *Tapas* consists of speaking the truth, hence you are Satyatapa.” He repeated this three times, loudly and with great excitement, then he entered deeper into the forest.

The other *Mahatmas*⁵⁸⁴ in the forest recognized the visitor as *Maharshi* Durvasa, but they did not approach him, because they knew of his great anger, which could be provoked on the slightest pretext. When the hunter invited the angry Durvasa, all of them had thought that the hunter had courted disaster, but when the *Maharshi* praised the hunter and proclaimed him as Satyatapa, they were truly astonished. From then onwards that hunter was known as Satyatapa.

Thus the grace of the *SadGuru*⁵⁸⁵ had transformed the hunter into a *Rishi*⁵⁸⁶ and had bestowed him with the title Satyatapa, which was a great honour. Satyatapa performed *Tapas* by concentrating on the truth and he experienced the contents of the Vedas. He came to know various *Mantras*⁵⁸⁷ and the procedures for performing *Homas*⁵⁸⁸. He conducted *Homas* by collecting herbs and *Samidhas*⁵⁸⁹ from the forest and the deities appeared before him and blessed him with several boons. His only desire was to intensify his adoption of the truth.

One day he wished to perform *Homa* with suitable *Samidhas*. For that purpose he required sticks of that

⁵⁸⁴ Noble minded

⁵⁸⁵ Liberated sage

⁵⁸⁶ Sage to whom the Vedas were originally revealed

⁵⁸⁷ Vedic hymn

⁵⁸⁸ Powerful fire ritual

⁵⁸⁹ Sticks used in Homa

jammi⁵⁹⁰ tree, which was growing in the trunk of a fig tree. A tree growing in another tree is a rare event in forests, and it is difficult to identify. Even after having recognized such a rare specimen, it is difficult to climb the tree and collect its sticks. Moreover, in such rare trees, *Yakshas*⁵⁹¹ and *Gandharvas*⁵⁹² could be residing, and they would not allow humans to climb such trees. Moreover, in order to deter humans from making such efforts, they were likely to perform various magic tricks.

These efforts of the *Yakshas* and *Gandharvas* did not deter *Maharshi Satyatapa*, who was good at climbing trees. One day he located such a divine tree and climbed it, and then he started cutting sticks from the branches with a knife, while chanting some *Mantras*. Suddenly he cut off a portion of one of his fingers with the knife and this portion fell to the ground. Nevertheless, he was unmindful of the wound and the amputated finger; of its own accord attached itself to his hand. The bleeding stopped of its own accord, and he glanced just once at his finger and resumed his task of cutting sticks.

The *Kinnera*⁵⁹³ couple atop the tree witnessed this strange incident and were dumbfounded. They presented themselves in the court of the deity Devendra and narrated

⁵⁹⁰ Mimosa Suma

⁵⁹¹ Benevolent nature spirits

⁵⁹² Celestial beings who are expert musicians

⁵⁹³ Celestial musician

what had transpired in the forest. The deity Devendra and the Lord Sri Maha Vishnu listened with rapt attention to this incident, and then they discussed the power of *Maharshi Satyatapa*. After that they queried, “Who is this Satyatapa? How did he obtain such great powers? What is the nature of his *Tapas*? For how long has he been contemplating the truth and what did he learn about the truth?”

Satyatapa was unaware of these developments. One day, while he was meditating in front of his *Ashrama*; he got the whiff of a wild boar and heard its roaring. He knew how dangerous it was and accordingly opened his eyes and looked all around. He saw a wild boar that had been wounded by a hunter’s arrow, rushing towards him. It is rare for a wild boar to get wounded, however, such creatures; takes leave of their senses and rush about wildly, on being injured. All the same, as he used to witness the embodiment of truth in every creature, he was not frightened by the wild boar, which ran into his *Ashrama* from his side.

A hunter, who looked more brutal than even the wild boar, came after it. Satyatapa remembered his own history on seeing the hunter and recollected the passion involved in hunting. The hunter approached him and asked him, “The wild pig, which was wounded by me, came here. Have you seen it? Where is it?” Satyatapa was placed on the horns of a dilemma, due to these questions of the hunter. His mind raced and he thought, “I am Satyatapa and truth is my *Tapas*. Truth is second nature to me and I only contemplate

the truth, but my telling the truth will result in the death of the pig. Can such violence be the truth? No, violence cannot be the truth. Violent activity is not the truth. What is to be done in this situation?”

The *Maharshi* thought like that for a while and he was unable to arrive at a decision. Suddenly, he had a bright idea and he spoke, “Friend! You are asking me about the pig. My eyes saw the pig but they cannot talk. My mouth can talk but it did not see the pig. What can I do now? One sense organ had seen, whereas only the other one can talk. How are we to accept the words of the sense organ that cannot see?”

On hearing this, the hunter was rendered speechless. Later he started to laugh so loudly, that his sides started to heave from side to side. During this process, the bird feathers that were adorning his head transformed into a crown and the beads, which he was wearing, changed into a *Kaustubha*⁵⁹⁴ garland. His clothes became divine garments and the hunter transformed into the Lord Sri Maha Vishnu. Satyatapa was astonished and offered his homage to the Lord. In the meanwhile, another Maha Vishnu emerged from his *Ashrama* and this second Vishnu was bearing a strange weapon in his hands. Both these Vishnus were almost alike and Satyatapa was unable to distinguish between them.

⁵⁹⁴ A gem that adorns Lord Maha Vishnu

The first Lord Sri Maha Vishnu placed his hand on the shoulder of Satyatapa and said, “You are a great person, Satyatapa. I am the Lord Sri Maha Vishnu and that person is my brother the deity Devendra and he entered your *Ashrama* in the guise of pig. We wanted to test your adherence to the truth and your determination in upholding the truth. We have witnessed it and we are thrilled, moreover, the Kinnera who had described you were unable to do so properly. Now, we are also unable to evaluate your greatness; as such, there are no boons left to grant you, because the ultimate essence of boons is truth, and you already possess it. Live long in this manner and always be victorious!” Thereafter, both the deity Devendra and Lord Sri Maha Vishnu left that place. Satyatapa remained there without any feelings of joy.

This story illustrates the greatness of the benevolence of the *SadGuru* and the power of truth, which can raise any person to any height. Even the Lords Brahma and Vishnu are incapable of giving anything to a person who adheres to the truth.

111. KHANDAVA VANA

Some of the stories in our Puranas narrate incidents that combine the earth, the heaven and the nether world. A few of these stories indicate deep secrets and are purely technical in nature. The deity Devendra shoulders the responsibility of organizing the three planes. Those who are in power always attempt to remain in that position and try to retain it permanently. Although this amounts to a misdeed, they are compelled to adhere to it, because they do not want to lose their position. As such, some of the activities of the deity Devendra fall under this category.

On one occasion, the deity Devendra had identified a piece of land located between the Himalayas and Haridwar. It was fertile and there was a dense forest on it. Subsequently, he invited the demon Takshaka and his associates to this place and said “You can stay here without any interference.” After that, the deity Devendra donated that piece of land to them. By this bestowal, the demon Takshaka, who lived in the nether world, was benefitted as he obtained land on earth. At the same time the deity Devendra made a new friend and gained some control over the earth as well as the nether world.

In order to know who Takshaka is some knowledge about the creatures that live in the nether world is essential. The plane of the earth is between that of the nether world and heaven. Heaven exists above the earth and the nether

world exists below the earth. There are a number of creatures that live in these two planes, besides the earth. These creatures resemble humans both in appearance and thoughts; however, they have some extraordinary powers. The people who live in the nether world have human as well as serpentine forms. Moreover, if they wish to acquire a human form they can obtain it. Surprisingly, though the beings that live in heaven and the nether world have greater powers than humans, they are desirous of living on earth. There are two reasons for their interest. The first reason is that the humans who live on the earth can reach either the heaven or the nether world by performing yogic practices. However, their mother land is the earth. That is why they favour the earth. The second reason is that although they are more powerful, they have to depend on the virtuous activities of the humans on the earth, in order to survive. They obtain their daily needs for their life through the *Yajnas*⁵⁹⁵ performed by the humans, and this motivates them to gain control over the earth.

All the deities in heaven have this tendency, except for the *Trimurthis*⁵⁹⁶ and the *Trimathas*⁵⁹⁷. Similarly, all the demons and creatures that live in the nether world are also dependent on the offerings made on earth, with the exception of the pious creatures, such as Anantaha, Vaasuki

⁵⁹⁵ Vedic sacrifices

⁵⁹⁶ The Lords Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

⁵⁹⁷ The Goddesses Saraswathi, Maha Lakshmi and Parvati

and Adishesha. In heaven, the deity Devendra and the *Astadikpala*⁵⁹⁸ are endowed with the power to rule; and Takshaka, Karkotaka and Sankha are empowered to ruler in the nether world.

The deity Devendra of heaven and the demon Takshaka of the nether world had become friends. As a result of their friendship, the region near the Himalayas had become the kingdom of the people of the nether world; and the deity Devendra named it as the Khandavavana. Kha denotes the sky and Anda a sphere. Therefore, Khandava connotes the sphere that pleases the skies. Nevertheless, the people proceeding towards the Himalayas were facing a great amount of difficulty; because the Khandavavana forest was coming in the way of these people. This forest had become the home of wild animals and venomous serpents.

Human behaviour is always eccentric; and even though the forest housed wild animals, some sages and saints were fascinated by the isolation of the place, and started to do *Tapas*⁵⁹⁹ in that place. The tigers, snakes and other wild animals were entranced by the peace of those *Maharshis*⁶⁰⁰ and became their pets and centuries elapsed in this manner.

⁵⁹⁸ Guardians of the eight quarters

⁵⁹⁹ Deep meditation or ascetism

⁶⁰⁰ Great Sages

One day, in the *Kruta Yuga*⁶⁰¹, the king Sudarshana, a great warrior, who had won several kingdoms and become the emperor, desired to capture the Khandavavana. He lived between Varanasi and Haridwar, in North India. Accordingly, he sent his troops to Khandavavana to cut down the trees and to kill the wild animals there. The troops dispersed the *Maharshis* living there and built a large city in that place. The emperor named it as Khandava Nagara and interpreted this term in the following manner; Khandava denotes a piece of sugar cane, and Khandava connotes the molasses made from the sugar cane. In a manner akin to that of the flies that are attracted to molasses, all the renowned persons of the world would come there. That was the reason behind his selection of the name Khandava Nagara.

He invited the great and famous people, belonging to different trades from all over the world, to Khandava Nagara; and built houses for them in the city and made it his capital. Moreover, he made it a very opulent place by filling it with gold and diamonds. The people living in that city were very happy. However, the deity Devendra and the demon Takshaka were deeply agitated and several years passed by. As the glory of the emperor Sudarshana was at its peak, a new warrior was born in the city of Kasi. His name was Vijaya and he wanted to fight with the emperor Sudarshana to prove his valour.

⁶⁰¹ Righteous age

The deity Devendra and the demon Takshaka rejoiced at this development. They wanted Vijaya to win in the war. Accordingly, they transferred some of their powers to Vijaya. In that great battle between emperor Sudarshana and king Vijaya the latter emerged victorious and the former died. King Vijaya celebrated his victory, in a manner that no had done before him. He entered the city of Khandava Nagara and found heaps of diamonds in every house there.

King Vijaya was stunned on seeing the wealth of the city. At the same time the deity Devendra descended from heaven and spoke to king Vijaya, “Vijaya! Be victorious! You are the king of Kasi and another form of the Lord Kasi Visveswara. The Lord Visveswara’s vehicle is the *Vrishabha*⁶⁰² who is none other than the deity of law and righteousness. Lord Kasi Visveswara is the organizer of *Dharma*⁶⁰³ and His blessings will be upon you. That is why you have not been tempted by wealth. Do you know how Sudarshana obtained this wealth? He had cruelly and brutally killed the people of other nations and confiscated their wealth. I had created a dense forest beside the Himalayas, as it would generate greater rainfall all over India, but Sudarshana destroyed my plans. Now you have won the battle and become the new emperor, and you are a staunch follower of dharma, it is entirely at your discretion, as to what you have to do.”

⁶⁰² Bull

⁶⁰³ Righteousness

The deity Devendra left after addressing him in this fashion, and the king realized the hidden intent in the deity's speech. He thought, "I am the king of Kasi. Why should I come to this place for wealth? However, a king has to examine both sides of the matter. It is not correct to take a decision on the basis of a one sided version." As he was thinking in this manner, some feudatory kings of Sudarshana arrived at that place and informed king Vijaya that the diamonds and other precious materials belonged to them and thereupon narrated their stories.

The upshot of all this was that Vijaya understood the words of the deity Devendra; and saw to it that everyone got back his money. After that he directed them to leave for their homes. In this manner, Vijaya emptied the entire city within three days and offered his homage to the sky by saying, "Devendra! I have fulfilled your command. You yourself have to protect the people of the earth," and returned to Kasi, the abode of Lord Kasi Viswesvara.

The deity Devendra was very happy, and with the passage of time all those houses were destroyed and new trees sprouted up. Takshaka and his entourage once again occupied that place and the city of Khandava was once again, transformed into the Khandavavana. However, a difference was there, the *Maharshis*, who had left, never returned to that place again.

Several epochs passed by and the *Dwaparayuga*⁶⁰⁴ was nearing its end. Lord Srihari had incarnated as Lord Sri Krishna and he had undertaken the task of punishing the wicked. In that task, his attention extended towards heaven and the nether world.

One day, the deity Agni approached to Lord Brahma and addressed Him, “Lord! Recently, I have developed severe indigestion, principally, due to a *Rajarshi*⁶⁰⁵ named Swethaki who keeps performing many *Yajnas*⁶⁰⁶ and *Homas*⁶⁰⁷ continuously. This has increased my indigestion tremendously. As such, the deities do not become sick, that being the case, how is it that I have been afflicted with this disease? It is only You who can suggest proper medicine for my ailment.”

Lord Brahma realized Lord Srihari’s sport in this incident and replied, “O! Deity Agni! Diseases should not affect the deities; otherwise, there would be no difference between the deities and the human beings. However, those who are sick have to take medicines. How do the medicines work when the human beings take them? When a person is afflicted with pain in the foot, he swallows medicine, which reaches his stomach. As you are stationed there as the

⁶⁰⁴ Third of the four yugas

⁶⁰⁵ Royal sage

⁶⁰⁶ Vedic sacrifice

⁶⁰⁷ Powerful fire ritual

*Jataraagni*⁶⁰⁸ , you will force the medicine to perform pachanam, take it to the location of the disease, through the blood vessels and finally provide relief from the pain. As the Jataraagni in the common people, is in a small quantity, only a small amount of medicine would suffice for them. However, you are the combined form of the different fires that that are in existence! How can the usual medicines suffice in your case? Therefore, locate a place like the Khandavavana and swallow it entirely. Your disease should be cured with that and the world would also benefit due to this.” To this the deity Agni, replied with great fear, “I do not want to venture near the Khandavavana, because there are several extremely poisonous snakes living there.”

Lord Brahma replied, “That is why I am asking you to consume it; moreover, in some diseases poison proves to be the best medicine. As such, if the herbs in that place and those deadly poisons mix together, it would become the best medicine for you. Therefore, cast aside your fear and consume the forest.” On hearing this, the deity Agni, replied, “I had already got this idea and I had gone there on, one or two occasions, and seen it. Takshaka Rajendra who has been ruling there is a great Karkotaka. He saw me from a distance, made out my intentions, and attacked me with fire that was fiercer than me. I had to beat a hasty and ignominious retreat. You have been referring to that place, and I will not

⁶⁰⁸ Digestive fire

disregard your word. However, I need you to stand by me and help me.”

Lord Brahma laughed loudly and replied, “Only the Lord SrimanNarayana can help both of us. Why do you want the help of others? Take the help of Lord Narayana.” The deity Agni understood that Lord Brahma was evading the issue. Therefore, he asked Him, “Lord! Can people like us reach him?” Lord Brahma replied, “He has been born on earth as Lord Sri Krishna, so that he can be reached by everyone. The erstwhile Nara and Narayana are the present Arjuna and Sri Krishna. Observe keenly and you will notice that they visit the surroundings of the Khandavavana, on pleasure trips, frequently. Have you ever seen them there?” To this the deity Agni replied in the affirmative. Next, Lord Brahma asked him if he knew the reason for their visiting that place, and as he was unable to provide the reason, the Former replied, “The Lord of the three worlds, Lord SrimanNarayana’s attention has turned towards that Khandavavana. Moreover, Lord Sri Krishna and Arjuna are good friends, good people and donors. They will definitely be merciful to you, go and take refuge at their feet.”

Since, Lord Brahma advised him forcefully in this manner, the deity Agni agreed to this proposal and took his leave of Lord Brahma. Subsequently, he approached the surroundings of the Khandavavanam. On arriving at that place, he was Lord Krishna and Arjuna wandering about in pleasure. The deity Agni immediately disguised himself as an

old *Brahmin*⁶⁰⁹ , approached Lord Krishna and Arjuna, and prostrated himself before them. Afterwards, he beseeched them to bestow their mercy upon him, and fell down.

Arjuna looked at him with suspicion and enquired, “Who are you?” However, Lord Sri Krishna was very happy and said, “O! Good *Brahmin*! Do not be afraid of anyone. My brother-in-law is a great warrior, and even the deity Devendra cannot surpass him. Hence, no one can harm you if you are under his protection; now, tell me as to what you want.” Then He lifted up that *Brahmin*, and seated him in the chariot.

Arjuna whispered in Lord Krishna’s ears, “Do you have to become elated, merely due to his homage?” Lord Krishna, ignored his words and said, “He looks so weak. Let him specify as to what he wants.” The deity Agni was emboldened by these words and replied, “Lord! I am hungry, but I cannot digest what I eat. This seems to be a strange disease and some wise people have told me that the herbs suitable for my disease are available in this Khandavavanam. Unfortunately, as soon as I step into this place, for those herbs, some strange creatures attack me by casting poisonous and terrifying flames at me. What am I to do?”

This melted Lord Sri Krishna’s heart and He replied, in an excited voice, “These are not the days for the righteous;

⁶⁰⁹ A person who possesses sacred knowledge

the wicked make fun of the meek. Nevertheless, since, the two of us are present in this place, cast aside your fear and go inside the forest. You can eat whatever you want and if you so desire, you can consume the entire forest. We will accost anyone who dares to interrupt you.”

The deity Agni thought for a while and replied slowly, “Lord! I can no longer hide the truth from you. I am not a common Brahmin, but the deity Agni; nevertheless, my sickness is real. It is also true that the herbs required for its cure are present here. All the same, my disease and hunger render it essential to burn down this entire Khandava forest and eat it. It is up to you, to help me or not.” To this the Lord replied, “O! Agnideva! Despite my seeming loquacity, I never tell lies. I have agreed and I am bound by my word, irrespective of whether the outcome will be good or bad; and my brother-in-law will assist me.”

The redoubtable Arjuna found this dialogue to be vexatious, and he called Lord Sri Krishna aside and admonished him *sotto voce*⁶¹⁰, “Methinks that you are being hasty. Takshaka resides in that forest and he is protected by the deity Devendra. We came here to enjoy ourselves and we lack suitable weapons.” The deity Agni heard these words, despite the muted tone employed by Arjuna. He immediately, interrupted Arjuna and said, “Do not hesitate for the lack of weapons, because I possess some divine

⁶¹⁰ In an undertone

weapons, which had been inherited by me. They are endowed with great power.” Thereupon, he deity Agni summoned those weapons and a brightly caparisoned divine chariot arrived on the ground from the sky. There was a huge bow, two quivers, a large mace and a divine discus in it.

Any warrior of renown would have been beside himself with joy at the sight of those celestial weapons; and Lord Sri Krishna and Arjuna were no exceptions. They mounted that chariot with great excitement and commenced to examine those weapons. Arjuna placed the quivers on his shoulders with great haste, lifted up the bow, and aimed it and then he tested it by releasing arrows from it. Lord Sri Krishna lifted up the discus with the index finger of his right hand and twirled the mace with his left hand.

The deity Agni was extremely happy at witnessing this extraordinary display of valour. He said, “O! Lords! Those weapons have come solely for your sake. They are yours and will yield to your commands like tame parrots. Such great brilliance is possible only for you. That bow is the Gandeeva, please accept these weapons.” Then he paid his homage to them with upraised and folded hands. Lord Sri Krishna smiled graciously and said, “Brother-in-law! The weapons that I am holding are mine and the weapons you are holding are yours. Then to whom does this chariot belong to?”

Arjuna paid his homage to Him and replied with great humility, “Lord This world itself belongs to You; hence, this chariot is also Yours.” Lord Sri Krishna replied, “You have spoken well! Even though this chariot is mine, keep it with you. You will be invincible as long as it remains with you.” After that he said, “Agnideva! My brother-in-law has agreed, and he has the weapons in his hands. So his hands are itching for a fight, enter the Khandava forest and consume whatever you want.” The news regarding this conversation, somehow reached Takshaka. Now, the behaviour of some kings is quite strange and that of Takshaka was stranger. On hearing that Lord Krishna and Arjuna had jointly sent the deity Agni to his forest, he was terrified. Nevertheless, he did not warn anyone in his army and he himself approached deity Devendra, surreptitiously.

The serpent warriors in the Kandava forest noticed the deity Agni’s intrusion, and they were very much annoyed at this and attacked him. However, their heads were smashed to smithereens by the volley of arrows from the Gandeeva, which was being wielded by Arjuna. Both the Khandava forest and the serpent warriors were being reduced to ashes. In the midst of this uproar, a demon, who was also an architect, named Maya and his sons, Aswapala and Mandapala, separated themselves from the other serpents and somehow escaped from the flames. Afterwards, they reached Lord Sri Krishna and Arjuna, and requested protection. In this manner, they saved their lives.

However, the remaining serpent warriors kept on fighting with stubborn courage, and were thereby risking their lives.

Meanwhile, Takshaka, who had reached heaven, started to fight with the deity Agni from above and he was accompanied in this endeavour by the deity Devendra. The deity Devendra attempted to douse the flames with his divine weapons, but all his weapons were powerless before Arjuna's arrows. Takshaka fled from that place as he could not withstand the power of those arrows. These events caused the enraged deity Devendra to make an attempt at casting his thunderbolt on Lord Sri Krishna and Arjuna. Fortunately, he beheld Lord Sri Krishna, whose crown was adorned with a peacock's feather; bearing the Kaumodaki mace in his left hand and the Sudarshan Chakra in his right hand, standing gracefully on the chariot. When he saw that supernatural form, he realized that he was seeing none other than the Incarnation of Lord SrimanNarayana.

This brought him to his senses, and he understood that Lord Sri Krishna was not in favour of his brand of politics. As he was very intelligent, he immediately made his peace with Lord Sri Krishna and Arjuna, and beseeched them to spare Takshaka, who was his bosom friend. After acquiring that wish he beat a hasty retreat from that place. Meanwhile, the deity Agni completely burned down the Khandava forest and the venomous creatures living in that place. After that he established a safe and comfortable path for the inhabitants of the country, who were journeying to

the Kailas Mountain, and offered his homage to Lord Sri Krishna and Arjuna.

Subsequently, Lord Sri Krishna stated with satisfaction, “Arjuna! Do not feel sad that the forest was burnt down. The entire area of the earth from Simhalam in the south to Mount Himalayas and to the end of China in the North is the sacred land of India. This is the Karma Bhoomi and the land where Vedic culture has to flourish. However, the great forests of Khandava in the north and Dandaka in the south have been flourishing due to the sins of the people, and this has greatly hindered the flow of virtue. Among these, the Khandava forest’s end had approached. Thus, the flow of Vedic duty will continue peacefully in this direction.

“This place was not only a forest, but also the home of the *Maharshis*. Later due to the grace of Emperor Sudarshan, those *Maharshis* left this place. Then due to the combined compassion of Vijaya and the deity Devendra, this place was transformed into the deep forest of the serpents. Finally, the troubles created by this forest were solved by burning it down. As such, only the Dandaka forest poses a problem. The procedure adopted by us in this place will fail in that place; because, even though it is a forest, still it is the abode of some people. There are numerous villages and fields, deep within that forest. So we have to devise some other plan to resolve the issue of the Dandaka forest. The time for that will arrive in due course. Let us travel together,

along the southern part of the country for pleasure and encourage the benevolent kings there. We can consider the question of the Dandaka forest later; first, let us resolve the affairs of the kingdom.” With these words, Lord Sri Krishna sent the deity Agni on his way, and travelled to Hastinaapura with Arjuna.

Lord Sri Krishna had revealed to Arjuna, only the duty relating to the earth, by lending his support to the burning of the Khandava forest. Great people never talk even a single word more than is required. Arjuna as a human being, needed to know, only about the affairs of the earth. It is to be understood that for the Supreme Being, the political balance between heaven, hell and the necessities of the earth are all equally important.

112. ARJUNIKI

It is common for people to feel that the customs adopted in their house are the best. Moreover, if the children of the house attempt to change their habits, then the elders try their best to convince them that their customs are the best. At times, such teaching degenerates into casteism and racism, and what is truly astonishing, is that even the people who hail from families that lead good spiritual lives; become slaves to casteism and lose their virtue. To illustrate this curious phenomenon, Bhagavan Vyasa narrated a highly illuminating story in the Varaaha Purana.

Long ago, there lived a person named Dharmavyaadha. He belonged to the caste of huntsmen who sell raw meat. All the same, he was a very great saint, who could teach virtue to even the likes of *Maharshi*⁶¹¹ Vishwaamitra. An unexpected problem took place in that great person's life, after he had crossed his middle age. Dharmavyaadha had a daughter, named Arjuniki, who preferred the domestic way of life. Her father was anxious on her behalf, because she had reached the marriageable age and he possessed very little wealth to perform her marriage.

As such, the problem being faced by Dharmavyaadha was far more intricate. He belonged to the caste of huntsmen who sell raw meat; and even though he, his wife and their children used to perform *Tapas*⁶¹², they had continued to eat meat. If he performed his daughter's marriage, among his relatives, she might be unable to adjust to their materialistic way of life. Whereas, the families that principally led a spiritual life were unlikely to accept a butcher's daughter as their daughter – in - law. While searching for a suitable alliance for his daughter, Dharmavyaadha came into contact with *Maharshi* Matanga, who belonged to his caste. He was a great saint, whose family had been treading the spiritual path and had totally eschewed non-vegetarian food.

⁶¹¹ Great Sage

⁶¹² Deep meditation or ascetism

Maharshi Matanga recognized the *Tapas* power of Dharmavyaadha, and accepted the latter's daughter as his daughter-in-law. This solved his problem, but started considerable trouble for his daughter Arjuniki. Each and every member in her in-law's household was a vegetarian; and some one or the other in that household would discuss her non – vegetarian tastes and tease her, which made her quite angry.

However, she encountered a much greater problem, because she was in the habit of sitting in *Tapas* and forgetting everything; whereas, in her in – laws' place prayer was accorded greater importance than *Tapas*. Arjuniki felt that their religious practices were inferior, whilst, the other members of that family held the opinion that performing *Tapas* was merely an excuse for indolence.

Added to the confusion, Arjuniki's mother-in-law was a cantankerous lady, who would be deeply affected, if her daughter-in-law failed to answer her on being called by her. Arjuniki was unable to hear if anybody called her, while she was immersed in *Tapas*. One day Arjuniki remained in *Tapas*, though her mother-in-law was calling her with sufficient loudness to be heard by anyone in their street. Her mother-in-law became very angry with this and started to scold her in a loud voice.

In an office, if the officers get angry with their subordinates, the berating is restricted to the person who has

committed the mistake. However, in a family, if anyone gets angry with the daughter-in-law, the reprehensible practice of passing uncharitable comments about her family is in vogue in India. Saint Matanga's wife also became a slave to this bad practice and passed uncharitable comments about the family of her daughter-in-law; finally she said, "Moreover, how can a girl from a family of butchers who eat the unsold parts of slaughtered animals, behave any better?"

This final verbal whiplash was the proverbial last straw on the camel's back, and Arjuniki, who used to always remain silent, in the face of such verbal assaults, became very excited. She started to hiss like a snake whose tail had been trampled, and their argument became more and more heated, with the result that Arjuniki immediately went to her parents' house. Dharmavyaadha, who was selling meat, eagerly saw his daughter's arrival. As soon as he came into the house, after closing his shop, she told about all that had happened and started to weep loudly.

Dharmavyaadha kept quiet and returned to his shop. She attempted to give further details to her father when he was at home. However, he was inattentive and neither scolded her nor praised her. This indifference proved to be unbearable, and she found it more difficult to withstand than the insults in her in-laws' house. In that house, they would ask her to her face, whatever they had in their mind; and the matter would end with that. No one discussed

anything and she was unable to make out if her parents had liked or disliked what she had done.

Arjuniki thought for a long time, and one day questioned her father in this regard. To this he gave her a long winded sermon and told her that *Tapas* is of no use, unless it is tempered with patience. Usually, whenever he talked about such things, her mother would intervene and make some caustic comment. However, she sat there and supported whatever her father was saying. Moreover, she was giving the issue wider ramifications by asking, “Will you argue if your sister-in-law says these words?”

Arjuniki argued a lot with them, but while doing so she understood that her argument was baseless. This softened her stance; but what was to be done? She wished that her husband would come and take her back to his home. She thought that it would be better to send a mediator. The next afternoon after lunch, her father said, “I am going to your village on some work and I will be staying at your home. You can accompany me.”

While he was saying that, her mother came and applied an auspicious mark on her forehead and placed a new sari with *Chalimidi*⁶¹³ in her hands. This made her mother’s intentions very clear, and Arjuniki surmised that her mother wanted her to return to her in – laws house.

⁶¹³ A concoction of rice, flour and jaggery

Hence, Arjuniki wore that new sari, and silently started out with her father. Arjuniki reached her in-laws' house before evening and her father and her father-in-law were very happy to see each other. Their interests were different and they became immersed in philosophical discussions.

Arjuniki entered the house with considerable consternation. Her mother-in-law laughed loudly and said, "You have come just in time, now, light the lamps as you are the Goddess Lakshmi." Nevertheless, Arjuniki could make out that she had not lost her anger with her completely. Arjuniki was frightened at what trouble she would have to face that night. When the evening had passed, her mother-in-law went near Arjuniki's father and addressed her husband, "Find out what he will eat in the night." Saint Matanga asked "Sir! What will you eat for the night? What are your rules?" Dharmavyaadha replied that he would eat whatever they would have for dinner.

This caused considerable surprise to his wife who asked Dharmavyaadha, "Do you not have any rules, regarding the food that you consume?" To this Dharmavyaadha replied, "It is just that, we were used to non-vegetarian food, since our childhood and we were unable to get rid of that habit. Even then, I have kept to a rule that I would not harm more than one animal a day for my food. I have already eaten a goat today, so it will suffice."

Maharshi Mathanga was displeased with this conversation, and he told his wife, “Complete the cooking! He will eat with us.” Arjuniki, who had been overhearing this conversation, was terrified and she was convinced that trouble was inevitable. Her, mother-in-law finished the cooking and called everyone for dinner. She had especially sent for some rice, on the arrival of Arjuniki’s father, and she had cooked that rice and served it.

Mathanga and Dharmavyaadha sat adjacent to each other on wooden planks and rice, on a leafy platter, was placed before them. After having made the necessary offerings to the deities; *Maharshi* Matanga looked casually at Dharmavyaadha, before placing the food in his mouth and saw that Dharmavyaadha was sitting with folded hands. He was surprised and asked him, “Why are sitting like that? Why do you not mix the rice?” Dharmavyaadha replied hesitantly, “You carry on with the meal.” To this Matanga enquired if there was any difficulty in partaking of the meal. To this Dharmavyaadha replied, “I had already told you about my rule. I kill only one animal a day for my food. I thought it would be all right to kill one more animal today. However, on looking here ...,” and Dharmavyaadha stopped with this incomplete sentence. Matanga’s wife was quite angry, but kept smiling externally, and said in a humble voice, “I do not know how to cook meat, brother!”

“What is the need for such serious talk? I already know that you do not eat meat! It is generally contended

that people who kill other living creatures cannot perform *Tapas*. I have been thinking as to how Matanga could continue his *Tapas* even if he had been harming so many living beings!" With these words, Dharmavyaadhya looked askance at his brother-in-law. Matanga's wife contested this by stating, "He does not kill even the mosquitoes that bite him."

Maharshi Matanga immediately understood what was happening, and called his wife to one side and asked, "Where did you get these grains of rice from?" His wife showed him the paddy from the bowl beside her by taking them in her hand and said, "What do you mean where? It is from here, I had sent for this paddy." At this reply, Matanga asked her as to what happened if one were to plant one of those seeds, and she replied, that the rice plant would sprout, ears of rice would emerge and some more seeds would be born. To this Matanga stated, that this meant that the grains of rice had life and his wife agreed to his contention.

After that he asked her if a plant would emerge from a cooked grain of rice, and she replied that half of its life had been lost on being de husked and that the remainder had been lost on its being boiled, hence, no plant would emerge from it. Then he asked her if by implication they had killed the living being inside the rice with their own hands and she was forced to accept that without boiling the rice they could not consume it and that their very existence would be

endangered if they desisted from eating. Thereupon, Matanga asked her as to how many such living beings they had killed for that particular meal and his wife was unable to reckon that very large number.

Finally, Dharmavyaadha, intervened and said, that he had made it a reason to kill just one living being per day, due to this reason. To this Matanga's wife enquired if they were also to become meat eaters and he replied that he had only told them as to what he did for food. Next, she asked her husband to clarify what was being discussed. Matanga passed on this question to Dharmavyaadha, who stated, "I am not asserting that non-vegetarian food is the best. Whenever you search in the science of virtue, you will find that vegetarian food is the best. In nature, it is obvious that every living being has to kill another living being for its survival. Nevertheless, God has given the faculty of thinking to human beings. So it is the duty of a human being to ensure that such violence is at its lowest possible level.

"Even Mother Nature has designed the human body to be fit only for vegetarian food. She has arranged the stomach and gastric juices of carnivorous animals to properly ingest meat and absorb it. The human stomach had not been designed in that fashion and it is suitable only for vegetarian food. Moreover, if humans survive by eating only the dry leaves that have fallen to the ground, the killing of living things will be inconsequential. That is why the great *Maharshis* live on such food. If that is not possible, then

there is another method of eating, wherein the fruits that have dropped on the ground are to be eaten, after rejecting the seeds. *Maharshis* of the intermediate level follow this practice. If even this is impossible, there is a method of eating, in which the top portion of a plant or tree is to be plucked, without killing it, thereby making it convenient for the tree to sprout again. The saints, who survive by eating the leaves of spinach and other such plants, follow this method.

“In addition, there is one more method of accepting the seeds of certain trees that on being born grow and fall to the ground by themselves. *Maharshis* like you, who live amidst a family, practice and follow this path. Rice, wheat, etc., are small plants, which fall to the side, within a year after being born. You have been surviving by collecting such fallen rice plants and eating the grains. If that was also impossible, then the people grow plants like rice and wheat by using fertilizers, and they forcibly, make the grains to fall, at the time of harvesting, and then eat them.

“If even that were impossible, and such grains were not available; some of the people have consumed animals like hens and goats, after killing them. The *Maharshis* had decided that such violence would result in greater evil, as these animals possess the capacity to express their agony at the time of their death. Even then, in some places, and in some families, the necessity of eating meat occurs due to several reasons. The gracious *Maharshis* realized such

occasions also. That is why, they formed a system, in which it was specified as to which animals could be killed and which animals could not be killed, for their meat. A person, who submits to that system and leads life by consuming non-vegetarian food and harming animals, is also a righteous person.

“Due to my fortune or misfortune, I was born in such a family. I was unable to forsake non-vegetarian food; mainly due to the power of regular practice, since childhood; due to the profession God had allotted to me and due to my financial status. That agony had been bothering me; hence I thought of sending, my daughter to a better place and sent her to your house. However, I am getting a new doubt, *Maharshis* had encouraged vegetarian food, but was it to decrease or increase pride? I was unable to decide either way and only my brother-in-law, Matanga can clarify this issue.”

To this Matanga, replied, “Dharmavyaadha! I am very happy with your words. No one should possess pride, and this is all the more so, in the case of elderly people.” Then his wife said that she should be taken to task if she had committed any mistake. Matanga told her that she had not done anything wrong. To this she stated that she had been continually grumbling about her daughter – in – law hailing from a house of non – vegetarians. Then Matanga told her that she had fallen victim to pride; and that Dharmavyaadha was actually asking them as to whether it was proper to eat

at the house of proud people. To this she asked Dharmavyaadha to disregard her words.

To this Dharmavyaadha replied that what he wished to convey was that every house had its own customs and that it was the duty of the daughter – in – law to adapt to these customs. However, this process entailed quite some time and that it was the task of the mother – in – law to patiently teach them, without criticising the daughter – in – law.

As she was listening to this conversation, Arjuniki's face was getting brighter. However, when that conversation had continued a little further, she was feeling bad because her father had been criticizing her mother-in-law, quite harshly. So she stepped forward at once and said angrily, "Father! It is not good that you are talking like that to my mother-in-law." Matanga and Dharmavyaadha looked at that mother-in-law and daughter-in-law with surprise. Dharmavyaadha was the first to recover from astonishment and said "Are my words bad? However, this rice is good enough for me," and started to mix the rice very quickly. Everyone laughed out loud, and Dharmavyaadha's heart became lighter. He returned to his village the next day.

When we listen to the story of Dharmavyaadha in the Mahabharata, we are apt to regard him as a *Maharshi* living somewhere far away. We also regard him as someone who did not resemble the people who live in our society, in our

vicinity or in our houses. However, on listening to this story, do we not feel that he is akin to someone like our uncle who lives in our house?

In reality, all the *Maharshis*, whose stories we learn about, were like the people who live in our houses! They were not robots with fixed backs like the *Maharshis* depicted in the movies. They also had families and children, and these children sometimes obeyed them and at other times disobeyed them. The only difference was that they had the power of *Tapas*, in far greater abundance than anything else. To those who possess the power of *Tapas*, all the human faults, appear to be trivial. It is for this reason that they never harboured hatred towards anyone. Those who possess little *Tapas* would have greater hatred and pride. In this story, the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law were the examples of that. In any society, the family structure is its backbone and if this structure is to remain, the girls have to go to their mother-in-law's house or else the boys would have to go to their in – laws' house. Due to several reasons, our *Maharshis* had decided that it would be better if the girls went to the mother-in-law's house.

It is natural that, it takes some time for a person who was brought up in one house, to respect and get used to the habits of some other house. However, no household is prepared to accept this fundamental truth. Each and every family believes that its habits are the best. A girl goes out from a family, and her in – laws will dislike her habits. From a

similar family some other girl would come to their house, but they would dislike her habits; and this is due to human nature.

Nothing is greater for real *Maharshis* and this was illustrated by Matanga and Dharmavyaadha, in this story. If we apply this truth to every aspect of our life, then there will be no turmoil in any family. Every girl would worship her mother-in-law's house as a place of happiness. Does not this story warn you, that it is the responsibility of you all to work hard to achieve such an ideal family with the power of the divine blessings of *Maharshis* like Matanga and Dharmavyaadha?