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LING PURAN

ENGLISH

PART ONE SUTA NARRATES THE DIVINE TALES OF LINGA PURANA

Once, sage, Narada arrived at Naimisharanya where he found many sages engaged in austerities. All the sages were delighted to see him. They eulogized him in reverence and offered him seat. Sage Narada narrated some amazing tales describing about the greatness of Linga Purana. This made the sages even more curious about Linga Purana. Right then, Suta also arrived there and the sages requested him to narrate the tales of Linga Purana.

After making salutations to lord Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh and Sage Krishna Dwaipayana, Suta said--- Sound is the medium through which the almighty Brahma manifests himself. Brahma manifests himself in the sacrosanct OMKAR mantra. Rigveda is his mouth, Samaveda his tongue, Yajurveda his neck and Atharvaveda is his heart. He is the Supreme Being and is beyond the reach of creation or deluge. He is one but manifests himself as three distinct deities--- Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. These three deities are the expression of the three natural qualities respectively-Rajas, Satva and Tamas. He manifests himself as Mahesh in his formless (Nirguna) identity. He manifests himself in all the living creatures as well as imperceptible things in the form of seven natural elements-Mahattatva (5 basic elements) Ahankara (ego), Shabda (Sound) Sparsh (touch), Roop (appearance), Rasa (taste) and Gandha (smell).

Lord Brahma compiled the divine tales of Linga Purana. It covers wide range of subjects like the beginning of creation, the origin of universe, description of the time, tales of different Kalpas, the greatness of Linga and its worship, tales related with Lord Shiva, characteristics of Shiva temple etc. It specially elaborates upon the greatness of Shivalinga and its worship.

FIRST CANTO PRATHAM SARG

Shiva is both invisible as well as the root cause of all the delusions of the world. This is why Shiva is also known as Alinga (unknowable). Linga is nothing but the non-manifested (Auyakta) form of Shiva. This implies that the visible world is the medium through which Shiva manifests himself. Nature (Prakriti) in itself is devoid of qualities like smell, taste, touch etc. But, all these

qualities become apparent in it only because of Shiva, who is imperishable and whose characteristics are the natural qualities like taste, smell, touch and sound.

The whole world along with the gross and subtle has originated from Alinga Shiva. The whole world comes into being with the help of eleven components-10 sense organs and mind. It is pervaded by the delusions of 'Alinga Shiva'. The three prominent deities---Brahma Vishnu and Mahesh are the manifestations of Shiva. He is the creator in the form of Brahma, the nurturer in the form of Vishnu and the annihilator in the form of Mahesh.

Nature is pervaded by the delusion of Shiva, which is also known as Aja (unborn). The three basic colors -red, white and black are the symbolic expressions of the three qualities Raja, Sat and Tamo respectively. Majorities of people fall prey to the delusions of this world and get entangled in its illusionary appearances, but there are few that understand the futility of this illusionary world.

With the desire of beginning creation, the supreme Almighty manifest himself in the imperceptible which results into the creation of the Mahattatva (five basic elements). From Mahattatva manifests the ego or 'ahankara which comprises of three gunas. From Ego manifests the Tanmantras or subtle forms of matter-sound, form, taste smell and touch. Among these subtle forms of matter, Sound came into being first of all and space originated from it. The second tanmantra, touch originated from the space. Air manifested from touch or sparsh. The third tanmantra, form or roopa originated from air or Yayu. Fire or Agni manifested from roopa. The fourth tanmantra, taste or rasa manifested from Agni.

Similarly, water or Jal manifested from Rasa, smell or Gandha from Jal and Earth manifested from Gandha respectively.

All the five organs of action (Karmendriya) sense organs and mind originated from pure Ego (Satva ahankara). In course of time all these elements got transformed into a mammoth egg (Anda), inside which Lord Brahma manifested himself. The whole universe is said to be established inside the above mentioned egg.

The egg is covered by seven layers and Lord Brahma dwells inside it, seated on a lotus flower. The mammoth egg contains crores of universes inside its fold.

THE BEGINNING OF CREATION

The whole creation lasts for the total period equivalent to Brahma's day. The almighty God created during daytime and annihilated during night. One day of Lord Brahma is equivalent to one Kalpa of this world. The cycle of four yugas occur periodically for 1000 times, during which period altogether fourteen Manus take incarnation, one after another. Satya Yuga consists of 4000 years.

Fifteen Nimesha make one Kashtha (unit of time measurement) Thirty Kalas make a Muhurta, fifteen Muhurta a day and night each. The dark lunar phase is said to be the day, while bright lunar phase is said to be the night of the manes. One year of this world consists of 360 days. The

deities' day lasts for the full period, when the sun is positioned towards the north of equator. Similarly, the deities' night lasts for the total period when the sun is positioned towards the south of equator. One year of the deities is equivalent to thirty years of this world. Similarly three months of the deities are equivalent to one hundred months of this world.

Each of the four yugas is measured on the basis of divine years. Satya Yuga is equivalent to 40,000 divine years, while Treta Yuga is equivalent to 80,000 divine years. Dwarpar Yuga is equivalent to 20,000 years of the deities, while Kali Yuga is equivalent to 60,000 years of the deities. The period of each yuga given here is exclusive of the periods of Sandhya (evening) and Sandhyansh (part of evening.)

Lord Brahma commences creation at the fag end of night and all his creations exist for the whole day. When the night descends, everything is annihilated. This is the time when Kalpa ends.

THE ORIGIN OF CREATION

In the initial phase of his creation, Lord Brahma created immovable natural things like ~~est~~ mountains etc-then birds and animals. In the process of creation, he created various things and human being was his seventh creation.

First of all Lord Brahma created his Manasputras- Sanak, Sanandan etc, who had no worldly desires. He then created the nine supreme sages---Marichi, Bhrigu, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Daksha, Atri and Vashishtha by the help of his yogic powers. After that, it was the turn of the twelve Prajapatis-Ribhu, Sanatkumar, Sanatan etc. All of them were divine, extremely virtuous and had realized the supreme - self, Brahma. Shatarupa had begotten four children from Swayambhuva Manu-Priyavrata, Uttanpad, Akuti and Prasuti.

Akuti was married to a Prajapati named Ruchi, while Prasuti married Daksha. Akuti gave birth to two children- Dakshaina and Yagya. Dakshaina had twelve sons. Prasuti, the youngest daughter of Shatarupa had begotten twenty four daughters from Yaksha-Shradha, Lakshmi, Dhriti, Tushti, Pushti, Megha, Kriya, Buddhi, Lajja, Vapu, Siddhi, Keerti, Khyati, Sambhuti, Smriti, Preeti, Kshama, Sannati, Anusuya, Urja, Swaha, Sura Arani and Swadha. Thirteen of them were married to Dharma, a Prajapati. Khyati was married to sage Bhrigu while Arani married sage Bhargava. Similarly various sages like Marichi, Angira, Pulastya, Pulaha, Ritu, Atri and Vashishtha got married with Sambhuti, Smriti, Preeti, Kshama, Sannati Anusuya and Urja respectively. Swaha was married to Vibhvasu while Swadha married the Pitrishwaras.

Dharma had begotten all together 15 sons from his thirteen wives- Kam, Darp, Niyam, Santosh, Alobha, Shrut, Dand, Samay, Bodi, Mahadyuti, Apramadd, Vinay, Vyavasay, Kshem, Sukh and Yash. Khyati, wife of sage Bhrigu gave birth to Sri who later became the consort of lord Vishnu. She also had two sons named Dhata and Vidhata.

Prabhuti, wife of sage Marichi gave birth to two sons- Puranama and Marich. She also had four daughters- Tushti, Drishti, Krishi and Apachi. Kshama, wife of Sage Pulaha had many offspring among whom Kardam and Sahishnu were prominent. Preeti, wife of Sage Pulastya had two sons

named Dattarnavr and Dahvahu. She also had a daughter named Dwashdwati. Kratu's wife, Sannati had six thousand offspring who became famous as Balkhilyas.

Smriti, wife of Sage Angiras had given birth to five daughters--- Sini, Vali, Kuhu, Raka and Anumati. Anusuya, wife of Sage Atri had six children-five sons and one daughter. The names of the sons were - Satyanetra, Bhavyamuni, Murtiray, Shanaishchar and Somatha. Urja, wife of sage Vashishtha gave birth to seven sons- Jyayji, Pundarikaksh, Raj, Suhotra, Bahu, Nishpap, Shravana, Tapasvi and Shukra. Agni's consort Swaha gave birth to three sons- Pavaman, Pavak and Shuchi.

LORD SHIVA - THE SUPREME LIBERATOR

Sati, daughter of Daksha had married lord Shiva much against the wish of her father. Once, Daksha organized a grand yagya in which he did not invite his son-in-law. Sati went to attend the yagya ceremony inspite of Shiva's forbiddance. After seeing her, Daksha calumniated Lord Shiva and made fun of him. This infuriated her to such an extent that she gave up her life by jumping into the sacrificial fire. She was born as Parvati in her next birth and once again got Shiva as her husband.

Once, Lord Brahma requested Shiva to create a world, which was free from death. Lord Shiva refused apprehending its disastrous consequences. Lord Brahma was left with no other option than to commence creation on his own. Meanwhile, Shiva became immovable just like the trunk of a tree (sthanu). Lord Shiva, who is capable of attaining any form. He showers benediction on mankind. He is engrossed in the supreme state of Yoga with effortless ease. Nobody can attain liberation without his grace. He is the bestower of religiousness (Dharma), knowledge (Jnana), asceticism (Vairagya) and splendour (Aishwarya). Sinners who do not take refuge in Shiva have to experiences the unbearable tortures of countless hells.

INCARNATIONS OF MANU AND VYASA

On being asked about the incarnation of Sage Vyasa during various eras and Manvantars, Suta replied- O Brahmin! Now I am going to mention the names of all the incarnations of Vyasa who existed during Vaivasvat manvantar of Varaha kalpa. The names are as follows- Ritu, Satya, Bhargava, Angira, Savita, Mrityu, Shatakratu, Vashishtha, Saraswat, Tridhatma, Trivrit, Swayam, Dharm, Narayan, Tarakshu, Aruni, Kritanjay, Trina, Bindu, Ruksha, Muni, Shakti, Parashar, Jatukarnya and Sri Krishna Dwaipayana.

The names of Manu's belonging to different manvantars of Varaha kalpa are- Swayambhu, Swarochi's, Uttam, Tamas, Raivat, Chakchhus, Vaivaswat, Savarni, Dharmasavarni, Vishang, Avishang, Shabal and Varnak. All of these Manu's were named according to their appearances and complexions. For example vaivaswat Manu was of dark complexion.

THE ESSENCE OF YOGA

Yoga means union with God. The state of yoga is impossible to attain without the blessings of Lord Shiva. It needs a concentrated and focussed mind. There are some specific spots in the human body concentrating upon which, enables a man to attain the state of yoga-spot between the eyebrows, lower part of the throat, navel and six inches above it etc.

The state of yoga can never be attained until and unless a person has fully controlled the tendencies of sense organs. It can be achieved with the help of eight means- Yama (penance), Niyam (discipline), Asan (posture), Pranayama (breath-control), Pratyahar (restraint of passion), Dharan (retention), Dhyan (concentration) and Samadhi (deep meditation). Each of them holds an important position in the path of yoga.

Describing about the methods of performing yoga, Suta says--- A person should sit with his legs crossed in Padmasan and try to concentrate his mind by fixing his gaze between his eyebrows. He should keep his spine erect. He should meditate either on the form of Omkar or on the form of lord Shiva. Breath control is an important aspect of yogic exercise. A man should exhale deeply for 32 times and then breathe in deeply. He should then retain his breath as long as possible and visualize lord Shiva within his body. By constant practice he will achieve mastery over this art and a time will come when he will experience divine bliss. This divine bliss can not be experienced unless one has attained a deep state of meditation (Samadhi).

OBSTACLES IN THE PATH OF YOGA

A man experiences numerous obstacles in the path of Yoga-laziness, restlessness confusion, a diseased body etc. The main reason for being lazy is a bulky physique and one's inability to concentrate his mind. Lack of concentration results in restlessness, which is a major obstacle in the path of yoga. If a person is unsure about the results he becomes confused. It is impossible for a person suffering from any disease to concentrate his mind.

All the above mentioned hurdles can be overcome by firm resolution. A man who has successfully overcome all these obstacles might experience other obstacles in the form of siddhis (divine powers). There is a real danger of getting lured by these divine powers. As a result his mind may get distracted from his original goal and he may deviate from his path. The names of these siddhis or divine powers are-Pratibha (having knowledge of past present and future incident), Shravana (being capable of listening to abnormal sounds), Varta (whatever is said becomes true), Darshana (capable of seeing things which can not be seen by the mortal eyes), Aswada (being capable of experiencing divine (tastes), Vedana (being capable of relieving other's pain by a mere touch). If a person successfully overcomes all these allurements then he becomes a siddha- or man of accomplishment and divine powers.

REALISATION OF SHIVA

Lord Shiva showers his blessing on one and all without any discrimination, but virtuous people have special privilege in the sense that it is easier for them to realize Lord Shiva. Once, Parvati asked Lord Shiva as to how a devotee could realize him. Lord Shiva recalled an incident when Lord Brahma had asked the same question. Lord Shiva had told lord Brahma-"Anybody can

realize me by having deep devotion towards me. A devotee can meditate upon me in the form of Linga with total devotion. It is only by deep devotion that a man can achieve true knowledge as well as salvation."

VENERABLENESS OF SADYOJAT

The sages asked Suta as to how was lord Brahma able to have a divine glimpse of Sadyojat. Suta replied- During the Kalpa named Shwetalohit, once lord Brahma witnessed the manifestation of a divine child who was of mixed (red and white) complexion. The child had a Shikha (topknot) on his head. Considering him to be an embodiment of almighty God, Lord Brahma eulogized that child. Suddenly four children appeared and formed a protective ring around Sadyojat. The names of these children were- Sunand, Nandan, Vishwanand, and Upanand. All of them were of fair complexion and very handsome. Anybody who is desirous of attaining to Rudraloka must take refuge in Sadyojat.

LORD VAMDEV

Once, during thirtieth kalpa named Rakta, Lord Brahma was meditating on Paramaeshthi Shiva. Suddenly a divine child appeared before him who was of red complexion and who had put on red apparels. He was none other than Lord Vamdev. Lord Brahma immediately realized the divinity of that child and was convinced that he was the embodiment of Almighty God.

Lord Brahma eulogized Vamdev who was pleased by his devotions. Four divine entities- Virija, Vivahu, Vishoka and Vishwabhavana manifested from the body of Vamdev. All of them had great resemblance to Lord Vamdev. Vamdev preached them on the finer points of religiousness so that mankind could be benefited by this knowledge.

LORD TAT PURUSHA

The thirty-first kalpa was known as Peet Kalpa. The term 'Peet' means yellow and this Kalpa was named Peet because Lord Brahma had put on yellow apparels during this Kalpa. Once, while he was meditating on the form of Lord Shiva, a divine child manifested before him. The child had a halo of light all around him and had put on yellow coloured clothes. Even his turban, sacred-thread and garland were yellow in colour. His arms were abnormally long.

Lord Brahma immediately realized that the child was none other than Lord Maheshwar himself. Suddenly a divine cow appeared from the mouth of Maheshwar, who had four faces and possessed all the thirty-two qualities. The divine cow was none other than Goddess Gayatri herself. Lord Brahma eulogized her and Maheshwar was very pleased by his deep devotion. Maheshwar also blessed him with divine knowledge and unrevealed the secret of yoga to him. Right then, many divine children appeared from the body of lord Maheshwar. Each of them had put on yellow apparels and had great resemblance to lord Maheshwar. They were extremely virtuous and served the mankind by giving sermons. After having completed their mission of spreading the message of virtuosity to the mankind, all of them got united with Lord Maheshwar ultimately.

A person, who is desirous of getting liberated from all his sin, must seek the blessings of Lord Maheshwar who is also known as Tat Purusha.

LORD AGHORESH

Peet kalpa was followed by Pradhritta kalpa. Black was the predominant colour of this kalpa. Initially, the whole earth was submerged in the water and Lord Brahma desirous of commencing his creations wished for a son. As a result, a divine child manifested whose complexion was dark. Not only that he had put on black apparels and a black crown on his head. A black sacred thread was hanging across his shoulder.

Lord Brahma immediately recognized Aghoresh and eulogized him. Lord Aghoresh became pleased by his devotion and blessed him. Just like the preceding Kalpas, four divine children manifested from lord Aghoresh's body. All of them had great resemblance with Aghoresh in every respect. In course of time, they did tremendous penance and preached the virtue of religiousness to the mankind. A person who worships Lord Aghoresh and has deep devotion in him becomes liberated from gravest of sins like Brahmhatya (sin acquired due to killing a Brahmin) etc.

LORD ISHAN

In the beginning of Vishwaroopa kalpa, lord Brahma, desirous of commencing creation was engrossed in deep meditation. This resulted into the manifestation of a divine cow, which puzzled lord Brahma very much. Actually, this divine cow was none other then Vishwaroopa Saraswati, but lord Brahma failed to recognize her. Lord Brahma decided to take the help of Lord Ishan and started meditating on him.

When Lord Ishan appeared before him, he was requested by Lord Brahma to shed light on the identity of that divine cow. Lord Ishan replied by saying-"The present kalpa is called Vishwaroopa kalpa. It has originated from the left side of my body and is the thirty-third kalpa. This divine cow has also originated from me. She is goddess Gauri-the source of all creation. After saying like this, Lord Ishan created four divine entities from the body of the cow-Jati, Mundi, Shikhandi and Ardhamund. All of them were very luminous and virtuous. After preaching the world for thousands of divine year. They got reunited with lord Rudra.

THE ORIGIN OF SHIVALINGA

The sages asked Suta--- Lord Shiva is formless then how come Shivalinga is worshipped? What is the significance of Shivalinga? What is the proper method of worshipping a Shivalinga?

Suta replied--- Once, Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu developed serious different on the matter of superiority. A tremendous duel broke out between them. As they were fighting a mammoth Linga appeared on the scence, the effulgence of which made efforts both of them amazed. Both of them decided to find out the origin of that divine Linga. Lord Brahma transformed his appearance into that of a swan and flew up in the sky to determine the height of that Linga. Lord

Vishnu transformed himself into a roar and entered the depth of earth to find the source of that Shivalinga. But both of them failed in their objectives and returned to the same place exhausted.

Suddenly, they heard a loud sound of AUM emanating from the Shivalinga. Very soon, the whole form of OM, consisting of all the three letters A, U and M became visible. (The letters A, U and M symbolize Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh respectively).

At last, both of them realized their mistake and stopped quarrelling. This way, Lord Shiva was successful in subduing their arrogance. Lord Rudra is beyond sensual perception. He is the supreme Almighty and the bestowers of divine bliss. The mystical form of Shivalinga is a symbolical expression of sacred mantra-AUM. The letter A symbolizes Beeja (Seed), M the creator himself and U is the symbolical expression of Yoni (Vagina).

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PART TWO LORD SHIVA BLESSES BRAHMA and VISHNU

At the time, when this incident of mystical Shivalinga had occurred and after which Lord Brahmend Vishnu had stopped quarelling, Lord Shiva appeared before them and said---

"I am very pleased with both of you, Both of -

"O Vishnu! You are the creator, Lord Shiva. This made Lord Shiva extremely pleased and he the preserver as well as the destroyer of this world. I am the supreme you, though having distinct identities have actually manifested from my body- Brahma from my left side and Vishnu from my right." almighty and distinct from all three of you- Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Lord Vishnu expressed his undiluted devotion towards Lord Shiva. This made Lord Shiva extremely pleased and he said.

"O Vishnu! You are the creator, the preserver as well as the destroyer of this world. I am the supreme almighty and distinct from all three of you- Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh."

Linga is the personification of the Almighty God. The term Linga means fusion and the Shivalinga are said to be the symbolical expression of all the deities.

THE MANIFESTATION OF LORD BRAHMA

The Sages requested Suta to elucidate how Lord Brahma emerged from the navel of Vishnu seated on a lotus flower.

Suta replied--- At the time of deluge Lord Vishnu went in his yoganidra lying on the back of Sheshnag. As the result of his divine play, a huge lotus flower along with a long tubular stalk emerged from his navel. Lord Brahma was seated on the Lotus flower. When Lord Brahma saw Lord Vishnu, he asked-"Who are you sleeping in this ocean?" Lord Vishnu also asked the same question as to whom was he and from where had he manifested. Very soon, a quarrel ensues between them. Desirous of knowing the identity of the stranger, Lord Vishnu entered Brahma's abdomen through his mouth. He was amazed to find the existence of whole universe inside Brahma's abdomen. He remained there for thousands of year but could not find the end. Being exhausted, he came out and told Lord Brahma that even his abdomen had the same unlimited expanse.

Lord Brahma decided to check the authenticity of Vishnu's statement and entered into his abdomen through the mouth. Lord Brahma wandered inside the abdomen for thousands of year but could not find the end. Mean while, Lord Vishnu has shut each and every opening of his body which made it impossible for Lord Brahma to come out. Ultimately he was successful in coming out through the tubular stalk of the lotus. As Lord Brahma was not amused by Vishnu's behaviour, he started fighting with him. Right at that moment, Lord Mahadeva arrived there. His moments created high tide and strong mind, which vigorously shook the lotus flower.

Lord Vishnu immediately realized that these signs forebode the arrival of Mahadeva. He revealed this fact to Brahma and about Manadev's greatness. But Lord Brahma was not impressed. Lord Vishnu then said ---

"Shiva is the almighty God. He is the one, whom, enlightened people are always in search for. He manifests himself in the form of an egg on account of the union of his formless and with form appearances. In course of time the egg gets divided into two halves, from which are created the different Lokas (world). The egg is the very place from where originates the whole creation. Even you (Brahma) own your existence to that egg. Your arrogance might invite the wrath of Shiva. So, come let both of us eulogize and praise the holy name of Mahadeva.

LORD BRAHMA BECOMES THE CREATOR

At last, Lord Vishnu was successful in convincing Brahma of Shiva's supreme status. Both of them eulogized and sang hymns in the praise of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva became very pleased by their devotion. He requested Lord Vishnu wanted nothing else but undiluted devotion in him. Lord Shiva agreed and said "So be it".

Lord Shiva then blessed Brahma and made him the creator. Lord Brahma did a tremendous penance, which continued for a very long period. The severe penance strained his eyes as a result of which tears started rolling down his cheeks. Poisonous snakes manifested from those teardrops. Lord Brahma became disillusioned by his maiden creation and gave up his life. Eleven Rudras emerged from his body and started wailing. They then brought Lord Brahma back to life. After becoming alive, Lord Brahma eulogized Vishveshwar and goddess Gayatri. He was amazed to see the existence of whole universe inside the body of Lord Vishveshwar all the kalpas including the different incarnations of lord Shiva about origin of these kalpas and various incarnations like sadya, etc.

DESCRIPTION OF DIFFERENT KALPAS

Lord Shiva revealed to Brahma that the Shwet-kalpa derived its name from his complexion. "I took incarnation attired in white apparels. My complexion was fair. You being self-begotten were able to recognize me. Goddess Gayatri had also manifested from my body and later on became famous as 'Shwet-Lohit-Brahm'."

"The next kalpa was known as Lohit kalpa because of my red complexion, Goddess Gayatri had also incarnated in the form of divine cow. I became famous as Vamdev during this kalpa."

Lord Shiva then went on to describe about the rest of the kalpas which had been named after his complexion. He also gave in-depth description of various subjects like, the different worlds, the vedas the four major castes etc.

INCARNATIONS OF SHIVA DURING VARIOUS DWAPAR YUGAS

On being enquired by Lord Brahma about his various incarnations, Lord Shiva said ---

"I shall incarnate as Shwet-Mahamuni during first Dwapar Yuga of Vaivaswat manvantar. My abode shall be at Chhogal peak of Himalaya mountain. I shall have four disciples who will be proficient in the Vedas."

"I will incarnate as Sutar during second dwapar. At that time, Saddyojat Prajapati will be holding the post of Vyasa. I will have four sons- Dundubhi, Shataroopa, Richika and Keluma."

"During third dwapar and at the time when Sage Bhargav will be acting as a Vyasa, I will take incarnation as Daman. I will have four sons- Vikrosh, Vikesh, Vipash and Papnashak."

"During fourth dwapar and at the time when Sage Angira will be acting as a Vyasa, I will take incarnation as Suhotra. I will have four sons- Sumukh, Durmukh, Durdhar and Duratikram."

"I will take incarnation as Kank during fifth dwapar and at the time when Sage Savita will be fulfilling the obligations of Vyasa; I will have four sons- Sanak, Sanandan, Sanatan and Sanatkumar."

"During Sixth dwapar, I will take incarnation as Laugakshi. At that time Sage Mrityu will be holding the post of Vyasa. My sons will be Sudhama, Viraja, Shankh and Padraj."

"Sage Shataritu will act as Vyasa during Seventh dwapar. I will have four sons- Saraswat, Megh, Meghvah and Suvahan."

"Sage Vashishtha will be the Vyasa during eighth dwapar. I will take incarnation as Dadhivahan. My sons will be- Kapila, Asuri, Panch, Shikhomuni and Vashkal."

"Sage Saraswat will act as Vyasa during ninth dwapar. I will take incarnation as Rishabh. I will have four sons- Parashar, Garg, Bhargav and Angiras."

"The tenth dwapar will see Tripad fulfilling the duties of Vyasa. I will incarnate as Bhavit Muni. I will have four sons- Bala, Bandhu, Niramitra and Ketu."

"Sage Trivat will be the Vyasa during eleventh dwapar. I will take incarnation as Ugra. My sons will be- Lambodar, Lambaksha and Lambakesh."

"Sage Shatateja will perform the duties of Vyasa during twelfth dwapar. I will have four sons- Sarvagya, Sambuddhi, Sadhya and Sarva."

"Dharma will be the Vyasa during thirteenth dwapar. I will take incarnation as Bali and live at the hermitage of the Balkhilya. I will have four sons- Sudhama, Kashyapa, Vashishtha and Viraja."

This way, Lord Shiva elaborated upon his various incarnations till the period of twenty-eight dwapar, which went as follows.

DWAPAR	VYASA	SHIVA	SHIVA'S SONS
14th	Tarakshu	Gautam	Atri, Devarudra, Shravana & Srivishthak
15th	Traiyaruni	Vedshira	Kuni, Kunibahu, Kusharir & Kunetrak
16th	Deva	Gokarn	Kashyao, Shukracharya, Chyavn & Brihaspati
17th	Kritanjay	Guhavasi	Utathya, Vamadev, Mahayoga & Mahabal
18th	Ritanjay	Shikhani	Vachashrava, Richik, Shyavasva & Yatishwar
19th	Bhardwaj	Jatamali	Hiranyabh, Kaushal, Laungaksi & Kuthumi
20th	Gautam	Attahas	Sumantu, Varvari, Kavand & Kushi Kandar
21st	Vachashrava	Daruko	Ramapksoda, Bhayani, Ketuman & Gautam.
22nd	Shushmayan	Langli Bheem	Dharmik, Mahayotri, Bhallavi, Madhupinga, Shwetu, Ketu & Kush
23rd	Trinabindu	Kalanjar	Ushik, Vrihadashva, Deval & Kavirevach
24th	Riksha	Shooli	Salihotra, Agnivesh, Unasva & Sharadvasu.
25th	Shakti	Dandi-Mundishvar	Chhagal, Kundak, Kumbhand & Prawahaj
26th	Parashar	Sahishnu	Ulook, Viddyut, Shambuk & Ashwalayan.
27th	Jatuk Karnya	Somsharma	Akshapad, Kumar, Ulook & Vatsa.
28th	Dwaipayana	Lakuli	Kushik, Garg, Mitra & Kaurushya

RITUALS OF SHIVA-LINGA WORSHIP (PURITY)

Once, Goddess Parvati asked Lord Shiva about the proper methods of worshipping Shivalinga. While Shiva was elucidating upon the rituals, Nandi who was present there too got enlightened on this sacred topic. In course of time, this knowledge was passed on to Sanatkumar, who in turn revealed it to Sage Vyasa. Suta came to know about it from Shailadi. Lord Shiva had described the following three methods, by the help of which a devotee should become pure before

commencing his worship. 1. Varuna Snan (taking bath in open) 2. Bhashma Snan (smearing ashes) 3. Mantra Snan (chanting of mantra)

Lord Shiva had stressed upon the importance of taking bath in a river or a pond. According to him a man's mind, which is like a lotus, could never blossom unless it received the radiance of the sun. Describing about the methods of taking Bhasmasnan, he said-After washing his hands and feet, a devotee should smear any of the following things on his body to make it pure-mud, cowdung ashes etc. While smearing mud on his body, he should chant the mantra - UddhatashiVarahaen. After becoming pure according to the methods mentioned above, he should then worship Lord Varuna. Having done, this, he should take a dip in the river after purifying the water by chanting the sacred 'Adhamarshan' mantra. He should then worship all the deities by sprinkling water from the Shankh (Conch) and amidst the chanting of mantras like 'Rudren Pavamanaen' etc. He should then concentrate upon the form of a Shivalinga. He should drink some water holding some Kusha grass in his right hand simultaneously.

A devotee should commence his worship only after becoming pure. In the beginning he should perform Pranayama for three times so that his lungs are filled up with fresh air. After this, he should concentrate his mind on the form of Lord Trayambak in all his glory. He should purify all the articles required for the worship by performing ablution and by chanting OM NAMA SHIVAY. He should also make offerings of flowers, rice grains, barley etc. to the deity. Worship of Lord Shiva is believed to be incomplete without the worship of his family-Nandi, Kartikeya, Vinayak and Goddess Parvati. So, the devotee must not forget to worship them.

LORD SHIVA TESTS THE PATIENCE OF SAGES

Once upon a time, the sages were busy doing their penance to please Lord Mahadeva. Lord Shiva decided to test patience and visited daruk forest in naked position. By the virtue of his divine power, he was successful in corrupting the conduct of the sage's wives. Those women became so infatuated by his divine appearance that they lost control over themselves. They were desirous of satiating their lust but Shiva maintained silence and did not oblige them.

When the sages saw the womenfolk in such a pitiable condition, they started abusing Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva did not respond and disappeared from the scene. Now, the sages became very frightened. All of them went to Lord Brahma and narrated the whole incident. Lord Brahma reprimanded them by saying that how unfortunate they had been in not recognizing Lord Shiva-the Almighty. Lord Brahma said- "You have committed a grave sin by showing disrespect to your guest. Your conduct was unlike Sudarshan, a Brahmin who by his hospitality was able to win the lord of death."

Lord Brahma narrated the following tale to them ---

"Once there lived a kind hearted Brahmin named Sudarshan. He was very hospitable and considered his guests, as Lord Shiva himself. He had given strict instructions to his wife that under no circumstance should a guest return unsatisfied from his home."

"Dharmaraj wanted to test Sudarshan firmness in his belief. One day he arrived at Sudarshan's hermitage disguised as a Brahmin. At that time he was not present in his hermitage. Dharmaraj refused to accept anything in donation except Sudarshan's wife herself.

"Sudarshan's wife offered herself without any hesitation. When he returned, not finding her wife started calling her name. At that time he heard a voice saying that his wife was satisfying the lust of a guest. Sudarshan remained unperturbed and requested his guest to carry on till he is satisfied."

"Dharmaraj became pleased. He appeared before Sudarshan and gave blessings. He appreciated his hospitable nature by saying that by the virtue of his undiluted hospitality he had even vanquished him (Dharmaraj)."

The sages were very ashamed of their conduct and returned Lord Brahma to explain as to how they could have devotion in Lord Shiva. Lord Brahma elucidated on the virtue of devotion and narrated the tale of sage Shwet who had subjugated even death by his devotion.

SAGE SHWET

The sages were very curious to know about sage Shwet. Lord Brahma narrated the following tale ---

"Once, there lived a sage named Shwet. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He lived in a cave and engaged himself in severe penance, continuously chanting the holy name of Shiva. When the time of his death approached, 'Kal' arrived there to take his life. Sage Shwet started eulogizing Lord Shiva. He challenged 'Kal' that being a devotee of Shiva he was beyond the reach of death. But, Kal made fun of him and told him that nobody could escape death. Sage Shwet had unshakable faith in Lord Shiva. Pointing towards the Shivalinga, he told Kal that he would remain unharmed because of Lord Shiva who was present in that Shivalinga. Suddenly, Kal tied him with his noose and said---See, Now you are absolutely under my control and even your deity seems to be helpless. To protect his devotee, Lord Shiva arrived on the scene accomplished by Goddess Amba, Ganapati and Nandi. 'Kal' got scared to such an extent that he fainted and died."

The sages curiously asked Lord Brahma about the means with which Shiva could be pleased. Lord Brahma told them that only deep devotion and nothing else could please Lord Shiva.

SAGES EULOGIZE LORD SHIVA

Having realized their mistake, the sages returned to Daruk forest and engaged themselves in austere penance to please Shiva. They did a tremendous penance, which lasted for a year. Ultimately their wished were fulfilled as Lord Shiva appeared with ashes smeared all over his body. He had a begging-bowl in his hands and exhibited strange mannerism. But this time the sages did not fail in recognizing him. They begged for his forgiveness and sought his blessings.

Lord Shiva became pleased and blessed them divine sight, which made them enable to see his form of Trayambak. The illumined appearance of Lord Trayambak cast a spellbound over them. They eulogized Lord Shiva by singing praise in his name. This way, their deep devotion in Lord Shiva had exploited them from their sin.

LORD SHIVA PREACHES THE SAGES

Lord Shiva revealed to the sages that a female sex organ was nothing but a symbolic expression of goddess Parvati where as a male sex organ symbolized his own self. He also cautioned them against making fun of hermits appearance. He said- "These hermits who appear absurd by their looks are my great devotees. They don't care about their physical appearance because I predominantly occupy their thoughts. Anybody making fun of these 'naked' hermits, whose bodies are smeared with ashes is in fact making fun of me."

Lord Shiva then went on to describe the purity of ash and said---Ash is extremely pure, as it is the residual element of matter, which is left after burning. It is sacred and indestructible. This is why I smear it on my body. A person who smears ash on his body becomes liberated from all his sins. It is the destroyer of sin. It is the symbolic expression of my veerya (semen). This way Lord Shiva enlightened them on various spiritual topics.

DADHICHI SUBJUGATES KSHOOPA

There ruled a king named Kshoopa whose friend was Sage Dadhichi. Once they got into argument over the superiority of their respective castes. King Kshoopa was of the opinion that a Kshetriya was superior to Brahmin. Very soon, the dispute took an ugly turn and a duel broke out between them.

Dadhich punched Kshoopa on his head. Kshoopa retaliated by attacking Dadhichi with his weapon named Vajra. The assault proved to be fatal for Dadhichi and he fell down. Before his death he prayed to his guru-Shukracharya and sought his help. Realizing that his disciple was in danger, Shukracharya rushed to the spot, but Dadhichi had already died before he could arrive there.

Shukracharya knew the secret learning, Mritasanjivani Vidya. He brought back Dadhichi alive and advised him to please Lord Shiva to attain invincibility. He also taught Dadhichi the proper methods of worshipping Shiva. Dadhichi did an austere penance and pleased Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva appeared and blessed him with invincibility and also made his bones as hard as Indra's thunderbolt (Vajra).

Dadhichi then went to fight Kshoopa. He kicked Kshoopa on his chest. Kshoopa retaliated by attacking Dadhichi with his Vajra. But this time Dadhichi remained unharmed. Kshoopa was surprised to see his assault going in vain. He decided to take the help of Lord Vishnu and engaged himself in austere penance.

KSHOOPA ACCEPTS DEFEAT

When Lord Vishnu appeared before Kshoopa, he sought his help in defeating Dadhichi. Lord Vishnu expressed his inability by saying--- I don't punish a Brahmin, especially if he is a devotee of Rudra. Dadhichi is both, so forget about defeating him. Anyhow, I will try me best to make Dadhichi devoid of his power.

Lord Vishnu then went to Dadhichi's hermitage disguised as a Brahmin. Dadhichi recognized him and came to know about his intentions. He requested Lord Vishnu to go ahead with his demand. "I have conquered fear on account of my total devotion in Lord Shiva" said Dadhichi.

Lord Vishnu did not like his arrogant behaviour. He said-"I know you have conquered fear. But, just for once, say that you are fearful of me, as I am Vishnu."

But, Dadhichi refused to obey his commands. This infuriated Lord Vishnu and he tried to kill Dadhichi with his Chakra. Dadhichi remained unharmed and said- How can this Chakra harm me? Lord Shiva has given whose devotee I am it to you whose devotee I am.

Lord Vishnu tried to use his other weapons but failed to cause any harm to Dadhichi. All the deities came to his help but still their efforts of defeating Dadhichi went futile. Lord Vishnu then tried to impress Dadhichi by his divine powers and showed his divine appearance in which the whole world was visible. Dadhichi gave a befitting reply by showing the whole universe including Lord Vishnu within his body. Lord Vishnu was amazed by his divine powers. Ultimately, Lord Brahma persuaded Lord Vishnu to discontinue the fight. Seeing his lord in such a helpless condition, Kshoopa had no other option but to accept defeat. He tried to pacify Dadhichi anger by asking cursed him as well as all the deities by saying--- All of you including the deities and Vishnu will be destroyed in Daksha's yagya as the consequence of Rudra's wrath.

The place where Dadhichi's hermitage was situated later on became famously known as Sthaneshwar. It is considered to be the most sacred place of pilgrimage.

SHILAD'S IMPOSSIBLE DEMAND

Once, Shilad did an austere penance to please Indra. He was desirous of begetting a son. When Indra appeared he requested him to bless him with a son who was self-born as well as deathless. Indra expressed his helplessness in fulfilling impossible demand. Even Lord Brahma meets his end after the passage of crores of Kalpas"-said Indra. Shilad tried to convince the validity of his demand by citing the example of Daksha's son who according to his best of knowledge were self-born as well as deathless. Indra told him that it was not true. To prove his point Indra said-"Even Vishnu and Brahma are not self born. Lord Vishnu created Brahma during Meghavahan Kalpa. Some are of the view that Vishnu and Brahma manifested from the left and right sides of Shiva respectively. So, your demand is unsubstantial and without any base."

According to a mythological tale Lord Vishnu manifested from in between the eyebrow of Lord Brahma. At that time Lord Shiva had arrived there to bless both of them. After the departure of Lord Shiva, Vishnu took the incarnation of Varaha (Boar) and reestablished the earth in its original position. Lord Brahma then commenced his creation and in course of time the earth came to be inhabited by all kind of living creatures.

PART THREE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FOUR ERAS

Shilad requested Indra to shed light on the special characteristics of each of the four eras.

Indra replied---Lord Brahma created the four eras (yugas)--Satya, Treta, Dwapar and Kali. These eras keep on occurring in a cyclic order where the former is followed by the latter. Satva guna (Pure) prevails during Satya Yuga. Rajas guna is the dominant quality prevailing during Treta Yuga. During Dwapar Yuga both Rajas guna and tamas guna are present. Tamas guna (Dark) is the dominant quality prevailing during Kali Yuga. During Satya Yuga, meditation was the means by the help of which a man could achieve salvation while oblation, devotion and donation were said to be the means capable of giving salvation during Treta Yuga, Dwapar Yuga and Kali Yuga respectively.

The inhabitants of Satya Yuga were virtuous and free from sorrow. But the vice of desire started to raise its head during Treta Yuga and people started being troubled by it. Lord Brahma created the warrior caste Kshatriya for the protection of virtuosity. Brahma propagated the rituals of oblation during Treta Yuga. Everything was fine till Treta Yuga but there was a drastic change in the human behaviour during Dwapar Yuga. All the vices surfaced and people were troubled by them. Some extraordinary literary feats were accomplished during dwapar--Sage Vyasa categorized the veda into four sections, all the major Puranas were compiled and smritis were written. Kali Yuga saw the decline of virtuosity and religiousness. Ignorance and false knowledge prevailed everywhere during this era.

KALI YUGA

Describing about the decline in moral values during Kali Yuga, Indra told Shilad-- In Kali Yuga, people will be under the total influence of the worldly illusions. Ignorance diseases, fear and hunger will be prevalent everywhere. Famine and drought would occur quite frequently as the fall out of inadequate rain. Sinners would outnumber the virtuous people would deviate from the path of religiousness. Brahmins would lose their superiority and Shudras would become the rulers. Brahmins will not be respected and will be forced to serve the lowlye people. Majority of women would be immoral and progenies would not obey the commands of their parents.

Predicting a grim scenario, Indra stressed great importance of religiousness during Kali Yuga and said-- A virtuous deed accomplished in Kali Yuga gives fruits in a day as compared to Treta and Dwapar Yugas, which take one year and one month respectively.

MANIFESTATION OF BRAHMA

Once, Lord Brahma did an austere penance to please Lord Shiva. Shiva manifested as Ardhnarishwar (partly male partly female) from his forehead and said--'I am your son'. But, the unberabale heat emanating from the effulgence of Ardhanarishwar burnt the whole world including Lord Brahma.

Lord Shiva then separated the feminine part of his body (Goddess Parmeshwari) and instructed her to begin creation. Both Brahma and Vishnu manifested from the body of goddess Parmeshwari. Lord Vishnu divided his body into two halves and created the world. Lord Brahma once again did a tremendous penance which lasted for ten thousand years. Once again Shiva manifested from his forehead, but this time as Neelalohit. Lord Neela Lohit became pleased by Brahma's eulogy and blessed him.

MANIFESTATION OF NANDISHWAR

Shilad did a tremendous penance to please Lord Shiva. His penance continued for thousands of year. At last, Lord Shiva appeared before him and said--"I am extremely pleased by your devotion. I shall bless you with a son who will become famous for his knowledge and learning." But, Shilad was desirous of a self-born and immortal son. Lord Shiva said--"Your desire will be fulfilled. Even Lord Brahma had requested me to take an incarnation. I will take birth as your son and my name will be Nandi."

In course of time, Shiva manifested from the oblation site. The deities became pleased after seeing Nandi, who possessed three eyes, four arms and a crown on his head.

THE NETHER WORLD

Lord Shiva is the source from where all the different worlds originate. People in their ignorance are unaware of the fact that the whole universe is nothing but a medium through which Shiva manifests himself. The various worlds like Maha, Jana, Tapa, Satya etc. and all the natural elements like earth, Sky ocean etc, owe their origin to Shiva. Underneath the earth lies the netherworlds which are all together seven in number-- Tala, Vitala, Sutala etc. The netherworld named Mahatala is the dwelling place of Lord Muchkand and king Bali. Sutala is yellow in colour while Vitalo shines brightly like a coral. Atala is of white colour and Tala has a shade of white.

All these netherworld have the same expanse as the earth. Rasatal is the place where Vasuki resides. Talatal is the dwelling place of mighty demons like Virochan and Hiranyaksha. It is also the place where hell is situated. The netherworld named Satal is the dwelling place where Tarka, Agnimukh and Prahlada live. Tala is the dwelling place of mighty warriors like Mahakumbh, Hayagreeva etc.

THE SEVEN ISLANDS

The earth consists of seven islands, many rivers, mountains and seven oceans. The Plaksha, Shalmali, Kush, Kraunch, Shak and Pushkar. Lord Shiva alongwith goddess Ambika and his ganas dwell in all these seven islands in one form or the other.

The name of the seven oceans are Ksharod, Rasod, Surod, Ghatodakshai, Dadhyarnav, Kshirod and Swadood. Lord Shiva manifests himself in all of them. Lord Shiva dwells in the ocean named Kshirarnav. King Priyavrata was the grandson of Manu, who ruled during Swayambhuva

manvantar. He had ten sons-- Agnighra, Agnibahu, Meghatithi, Vasu, Vayushman, Jyotishman, Dyutiman, Havya, Savan etc. Priyavrata had made Agnighra the king of Jambudweepa. Similarly the islands of Plakshadweepa, Shalmali, Kushadweepa, Kraunchdweepa, Shalvadweepa and Pushkar were given to Medhatithi, Vayushman, Jyotishman, Dyutiman Havya and Savan respectively. Havya had seven sons who became rulers and the different territories they ruled desired their names from them.

BHARATA VARSH

Agnighra--the ruler of Jambudweepa was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He had nine sons-- Nabhi, Kimpurusha, Harivarsha, Ilavrata, Ramaya, Hiranyaman, Kuru, Bhadrashva and Ketumal. Agnighra appointed Nabhi the king of Hemakhya. Similarly, Kimpurusha, Harivarsha, Ilavrata, Ramaya, Hiranyaman, Kuru, Bhadrashva and Ketumal were given the kingdoms of Hemakoot, Naishadh, Meru, Neelachal, Shwet, Sringavarsh, Malvan and Gandhamoodan respectively. After this, Agnighra renounced everything and went to do penance.

Merudevi was Nabhi's wife and the mother of Rishabh. After growing up Rishabh got married and became the father of no less than one hundred sons. Among them Bharata was the eldest. When Bharata grow up, Rishabh appointed him as his successor and after renouncing everything went to the forest.

Bharata went on to become a great king and ruled over the whole territory southwards of Himalaya. Our country derives its name from him. Bharata had a son named Sumati who succeeded his father as a king.

THE MERU MOUNTAIN

Meru mountain is situated in the heart of Jambudweepa. The Meru range is spread in the area of 16 thousand yojan. Its towering peak is 84 thousand in height from the ground level and had even penetrated the depth of earth to the measurement of 16 thousand yojan. Meru mountain is considered to be very sacred and is believed to be the dwelling place of the deities.

Yamraj's abode--Vaivaswatipuri is situated in the souther part of Meru mountain. Some other holy places like Shuddhavati, Gandhavati and Yashomati are also situated on this mountain where Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva are believed to have their respective abodes. The sun continuously shines over Meru mountain. A river named Jambu flows down this mountain. There is also a tree by the same name which is eternally ladden with fruits. The Meru mountain is surrounded on all its sides by a country Ilavrita. The residents of Ilavrita relish the fruits of Jambu tree.

THE PROMINENT MOUNTAINS

Describing about the physical characteristics os all tje seven islands, Suta says ---

"Seven mountains are situated in Plaksha dweepa- Gobhedak, Chandra, Narada, Dundubhi, Soyak, Sumana and Vaibhraj. Similarly, the prominent mountain ranges situated in Shalmali dweepa are Kumud, Uttam, Balahak, Drona, Karkamahish Kumudman etc. Kushadweepa also has seven mountains among which Vidhrabh and Hem are the prominent ones. All these seven islands are surrounded by seven oceans. The mountain named Lokalok is so gigantic in size that half of its part is always covered in darkness.

The omnipresent Lord Shiva pervades the whole universe. Once, being confronted by the effulgence of Lord Shiva, who had disguised himself as a Yaksha, all the deities became devoid of their power. Indra was amazed and asked the Yaksha as to who he was. Lord Shiva disappeared without giving any answer and goddess Ambika appeared before the deities. Indra asked her the same question to which goddess Ambika replied--- He was none other than the almighty Shiva. I being the Prakriti (nature) do creation following his instructions. He is the embodiment of Purusha (Supreme almighty).

THE SUN

The movement of Sun is rapid when it is positioned south of equator (Dakshainayan), on the other hand its movement is slow when positioned north of equator (Uttarayan). The time is indicated by the various positions of Sun while it is on its course of movement in the horizon. While the sun is situated in the South-East direction it is believed to be the morning time. Similarly, when the Sun has positioned itself in the south-west, North-west or South-East direction, it is said to be the 'before-noon', 'after-noon' and Night respectively.

The Sun is believed to be mounted on a chariot while on its course of movement in the Horizon. All the deities, apsaras and Gandharvas are believed to follow its movement. The periods of day and night consist of 30 ghadi each. The Sun causes rainfall due to the process of evaporation. Water is the source of life and is the manifestation of Lord Shiva himself.

LORD BRAHMA ASSIGNS LORDSHIPS TO THE DEITIES

The Sages requested Suta to describe how Lord Brahma assigned Lordships to all the deities and the demons.

Suta replied--- The Sun was made the lord of all the planets. Soma was made the lord of all the constellations and medicinal herbs. Similarly, Vaun was made the Lord of water, while Kubera was assigned the Lordship of wealth. Lord Vishnu attained the Lordship of Adityas, Pawak of Vasus, Daksha of Prajapatis, Indra of deities, and Prahlada attained the Lordship of all the demons. Some other prominent species and the assigned Lordships are as follows---

SPECIES
SPECIES

LORD
LORD

Animals	Rudra	Women	Uma
Rudras	Neelalohit	Obstacles	Gajanan
Power of Speech	Saraswati	Mountains	Himalaya
Rivers	Ganga	Oceans	Ksheersagar
Trees	Peepal (Fig)	Gandharvas	Chitrarathi
Serpents	Takshak	Birds	Garuda

Prithu was made the lord of Earth and Lord Shiva the lord of whole universe.

THE CHARIOTS OF SUN MOON AND OTHER PLANETS

The chariot of Surya is believed to have been created by Lord Brahma. It is made up of gold and its wheels have five spokes each. The chariot is very huge in size and its expanse covers the area of nine thousand yojan. It is pulled by seven horses which are of green complexion. The movement of Sun results into the occurrence of day and night. The moon's chariot consists of three wheels and is pulled by ten white horses. Each wheel is supported by one hundred spokes. The chariots of Mercury, Mars and Jupiter are believed to be pulled by eight horses and the chariot of Saturn is believed to be pulled by ten black horses.

THE RADIANCE OF SURYA

The Surya is the source to which all the living beings owe their existence. All the deities derive their effulgence from Surya, who in turn derives its own radiance from Lord Mahadeva. Time is determined with the help of Surya's movement. One can not even imagine the various units of time, like Kshana, muhurta, day, night, fortnight, month, season etc. without the existence of Surya. The Sun, which illuminates the whole world is nothing but the medium through which the almighty Rudra manifests himself. The Sun sheds thousands of rays among which seven are prominent- Sushumna, Rishikesh, Vishwakarma, Vishwatyacha, Annadh, Sarvavasu and Swarah.

PART FOUR DHRUVA -- THE SUPREME DEVOTEE

The Sages asked Suta as to how Dhruva became successful in attaining immortality and supreme status among all the stars. Suta narrated the following tale---

There lived a king named Uttanpad, who had two queens--Suniti and Suruchi. The eldest queen Suniti had a son named Dhruva. One day while Dhruva was sitting in his father's lap, Suruchi--his step mother, contemptuously pulled him from Uttanpad's lap and made her own son sit in his place. Dhruva went to Suniti and complained about his step mother's behaviour. Suniti advised

Dhruva that he should seek for the supreme status, which is permanent. Following his mother's advice, Dhruva went to the forest in search of that supreme status. In the forest, he met Sage Vishwamitra who advised him to seek the blessings of Lord Keshav by chanting the sacred mantra Om Namoh Vasudevay. Dhruva did an austere penance for thousands of years. At last, Lord Vishnu became pleased and appeared before him mounted on Garuda. Vishnu touched Dhruva's face with his conch as a result of which he attained Self knowledge. Vishnu blessed Dhruva by saying ---I give you the supreme place, which even the deities and the sages long for. This way Dhruva attained a supreme status among all the stars with the blessings of Vishnu.

THE ORIGIN OF DEITIES

On being enquired by the sages about the origin of deities, demons and other celestial entities, Suta said-- Daksha being desirous of enhancing the population, created ten-thousand sons merely by his wish and instructed them to contribute in the propagation of population. His objective remained unfulfilled as Narada was successful in preaching them towards the path of devotion. As a result all of them went to do meditation after renouncing the world.

Seeing his efforts go in vain, Daksha created ten thousand more sons who were convinced by Narada to the path of renunciation once again. Daksha then begot sixty daughters from his wife named Vairini. When these girls grew up, Daksha married to different sages--ten of them were married to Dharma, thirteen to Kashyapa, twenty-seven to Soma, four to Arishtanemi, two to Bhṛigu's son, two to Krishashwa and the remaining two were married to Angira.

The names of Dharma's wives were Marutivati, Vasu, Aryama, Lamba, Bhanu, Arundhati, Sankalpa, Muhurta, Sadhya and Vishwabhamini. Vishwabhamini was the mother of Vishvedeva, while Sadhya gave birth to Sadhva. Similarly, Marutvati, Bhanu, Muhurta, Lamba and Sankalpa gave birth to Varutwan, Bhanav, Mahurtik Ghosh and Sankalpa respectively. Vasu became the mother of eight Vasus.

Among the twenty seven wives of Kashyapa the names of some prominent ones were--Aditi, Diti, Arishta, Surasa, Muni, Surabhi, Vinata, Tamra, Krodha, Vasha, Ila, Kadru, Twishad, Anga etc. Kashyapa had two sons from Diti, Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Danu gave birth to one hundred sons among whom Viprachit was very prominent. Tamra gave birth to six daughters--- Shuki, Sweni, Sugreevi, Gridhika, Bhasi and Shuni.

Kashyapa did an austere penance and was blessed with two sons--Vatsar and Asit, Vatsar had two sons--Naibudh and Raimbh. Asit married Ekparna and had one son from her--Brahmanishth. Vashishtha was married to Arundhati and had one hundred sons from her among whom Shakti was the eldest. Shakti was married to Adrishyanti and Parashar was his son. Dwaipayana was the son of Parashar and Shukra was Dwaipayana's son.

SAGE PARASHAR

The Sages asked Suta how Shakti had been devoured by a demon named Rudhir.

Sutiji replied--- Once, Sage Vashishtha was presiding over a grand Yagya being organized by a king named Kalmashpad. Vashishtha had a rivalry with Vishwamitra. On seeing Vashishtha busy in that Yagya, Vishwamitra instigated Rudhir-- a demon, to kill his sons. Rudhir followed the instructions and devoured Vashishtha's sons including Shakti.

When Vashishtha learnt about his sons death his heart was filled with grief. He desired to give up his life but was prevented from doing so by his daughter-in-law. She informed him about her pregnancy and said-- Very soon you will see your grandson. So, quit the idea of giving up your life. Vashishtha, though still mournful of his son's death, postponed the idea of giving up his life for the time being. One day while he was engrossed in the thoughts of his departed son, he was amazed to listen the recital of a vedic hymn. He looked all around but found nobody. Suddenly he heard a heavenly voice that revealed by his grandson who was still inside the womb of his mother. In course of time, Arundhati gave birth to a son who was named Parashar. One day young Parashar curiously enquired from his mother as to why she did not put on ornaments like other women of her age do. Arundhati kept quite but when Parashar kept on insisting she revealed to him that it was not proper for a mournful women to adorn herself. She also told him how his father--Shakti had been killed by Rudhir, the demon.

Parashar consoled Arundhati by saying that he would avenge his father's lord Shiva. He then made an earthen Shivalinga and started worshipping it by chanting the scared mantras of Shiva-Sukta and trayambak Sukta. Lord Shiva became pleased by his devotion and blessed him with a divine vision which enabled him to see his dead father. Parashar then commenced a yagya with the purpose of annihilating the demons. All the demons started being tormented by the extreme heat generated by that oblation. Vashishtha prevented by that oblation. Vashishtha prevented Parashar from contiuing with that Yagya as many innocent demons had suffered. Parashar stopped performing the rituals at his father's request.

Sage Pulastya had also been invited in that yagya. He was very pleased by his devotion toward his father and blessed him with the knowledge of all the scriptures. In course of time, Parashar became famous for his treatise--Vishnu Purana.

THE LINEAGE OF ADITYA

On being enquired by the Sages about the respective lineage of Aditya (Sun) and Soma (moon) Suta replied---

Sage Kashyapa had a son--Aditya, from Aditi. Aditya had four wives--Sangya, Rajyi, Prabha and Chhaya. Sangya gave birth to Manu whereas Ragyi was the mother of Yama, Yamuna and Raivat. Prabha gave birth to Prabhat while chhaya was the mother of three children--Savarni, Shani, Tapti and Vrishti.

Chhaya was extremely affectionate towards her step son-- Yama. One day Yama kicked her in anger as a result of which his leg became inflicted with incurable disease. He became cured of his disease only after doing penance for thousands of years at as place called Gokarna.

Manu had nine sons--- Ikshavaku, Nabhag, Dhrishnu, Sharyati, Narishyant, Nabhag, Arisht, Karush and Prishaghna. He also had three daughters--Ila, Jyeshtha and Varishtha who coincidentally attained male physique later on in their life. Ila became famous as Sudyumna and had three sons-- Utkal, Gopa and Vinitashva. Harishwa was the descendant of Ikshavaku and had a son named Vasumana. Tridhanva was Vasumana's son. He had attained the designation of 'Ganapatya' by virtue of accomplishing one thousand Ashwamedha Yaga. Tridhanva had a son named Trayyarun and the name of his son was Satyavrata. The same Satyavrata became famous as Trishanku, who was the only person to attain to heaven with his mortal body.

The most truthful king Harish Chandra was the son of Trishanku. Harish chandra had a son named Rohit. Sagar belonged to the lineage of Harishchandra. He had two wives-- Prabhada given birth to sixty thousand sons but Bhanumati had only one son named Asamanjas. Anshuman was the son of Asamanjas. Anshuman's son was Dilip. Sage Bhagirath was the son of Dilip.

Some prominent personality who belonged to the lineage of Ikshavaku were Shrut, Nabhag, Ambarish, Dirghabahu, Dilip (Dirghabahu's son), Raghu, Aja, Dasharath, Rama, Lakshman, Bharata, Shatrughna, Lav and Kush. The famous king Pururava also came from the same lineage. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. His son was Nahush. Nahush had six sons among whom Yayati was the eldest. Yayati had two wives--- Devayani and Sharmishtha. Yayati ruled over the whole earth. He had conquered the whole earth with the help of divine weapons and chariot which he had received from his father in law--Shukracharya (Devayani's father).

Yayati had two sons from Devayani-- Yadu and Turvasu. He also had three sons from his second wife--Sharmishtha whose names were Drushya, Anu and Puru. Yayati appointed his youngest son Puru as his successor because of his total devotion towards his parent. Yadu was made the ruler of Southern province.

YADU DYNASTY

Yadu had five sons among whom Sahastrajeet was the eldest. Shatarjay was the son of Sahastrajeet and himself had three sons--Haihya, Haya and Venu. Dharma was Haihya's son. Dharmanetra was the son of Dharma and himself had two sons--Kirti and Sanjay. Sanjay's son was Mahishman and Bhadrashrenya was Mahishman's son. Durdam was the son of Bhadrashrenya and Durdam's son was Dhanak.

Dhanak had four sons among whom the youngest --Kartaveerya Arjuna was very mighty. He was killed by Parashuran. Kartaveerya Arjuna had many sons among whom Shoor, Shoorsen, Dhrishta, Krishna and Jayadhuraja were prominent. Jayadhuraja had a very mighty son named Talajangha. Talajangha too had many mighty and brave sons like Veetihotra, Vrisha etc. Vrisha had a son-- Madhu. Madhu's son was Vrishni.

Some other prominent kings of Yadu dynasty were--Praghrjit, Jyamagh, Shrut, Vidarbha, Subhag, Vayu, Kratha, Kaushik, Romapad, Vabhru, Sughrity, Kunta, Ranadhrista, Bhimarath, Navarath, Dhridharath, Karambha, Devaratha, Devakshatrak and Madhu. The famous Kaurava dynasty came from the lineage of Madhu.

SRI KRISHNA

Ahuka came from the lineage of Yadu. He had two sons-- Devak and Ugrasen. The eldest son, Devak had eleven children--four sons and seven daughters. The names of his sons were-- Devavan, Upadeva, Sudeva and Devarakshit. All his seven daughters, which also included Devaki were married to Vasudeva. Ahuk's youngest son, Ugrasen had nice sons among Kansa was the eldest.

Vasudeva had a son named Balarama from Rohini. Devaki, one of his wives gave birth of lord Sri Krishna. Vasudeva had exchanged Sri Krishna with the daughter of Yashoda as Sri Krishna's life was under threat from Kansa. When Kansa tried to kill her, She slipped away from her hand and ascended towards the sky. She then thundered. "There is no use killing me. The person who is supposed to kill you has already taken birth". Her prophesy came to be truth and Kansa was ultimately killed by Sri Krishna.

Sri Krishna had 16108 Queens among whom Rukmini was dearest. He did an austere penance to please Lord Shiva as the result of which He was blessed with many sons like Charudeshna, Sucharu, Pradyumna etc. He also had a son named Samb from Jambawati. Lord Krishna left for heavenly abode after enjoying a long life of 120 years. He had destroyed His whole ~~l~~an before leaving His mortal body. A hunter named Jara who mistook him to be a deer killed him. Due to the curse of Ashtavakra, Sri Krishna's wives had been abducted by the dacoits.

LORD BRAHMA BLESSES THE DEMONS

The Sages asked Suta as to how did Maya--The demon acquire three well fortified forts from Lord Brahma and how was lord Shiva finally successful in destroying them.

Suta replied-- After Tarakasur's death his three sons, Vidyunmali, Kamalaksha and Tarakaksha did tremendous penance to please Lord Brahma. When Lord Brahma appeared. They expressed their desire of attaining immortality. Lord Brahma refused to oblige them. The demons after consulting each other demanded three invincible forts from him and said 'Only such a person should be able to kill us, who is capable of destroying all the three forts with a single shot of an arrow.'

Lord Brahma blessed them and disappeared. Maya, then did an austere penance and with the help of divine powers attained from it, constructed three forts at three different places. The fort made of gold was situated in the heaven, while the silver-fort was situated in the space. The third fort, which was made of iron, was situated on the earth. The gold-fort was given to Tarakaksha, the silver-fort to Kamalaksha and the iron-fort was given to Vidyunmali. After acquiring these invincible forts all the demons had become extremely arrogant. They started tormenting the deities.

The deities went to Lord Vishnu and requested help. Lord Vishnu created thousands of spirits (Bhootganas) and instructed them to destroy those three forts. But, the Bhootganas were unsuccessful in their attempt and were charred to death. Lamenting their death the deities went to

Lord Vishnu and sought help once again. Lord Vishnu was aware that the demons derived their power from Lord Shiva. So, He decided to deviate them from the path of Shiva's devotion. He then created an illusionary entity. The illusionary entity went to the place where demons lived and was successful in influencing them by his illusionary tactics.

All the demons became so impressed by him that they stopped worshipping Lord Shiva and became His disciples. This resulted into a total degradation of moral values among the demons. Finding the time opportune, Lord Vishnu eulogized Shiva who appeared and agreed to destroy those three forts. Vishwakarma made a divine chariot for Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma became the charioteer. Mounted on that chariot, Lord Shiva proceeded towards the demon. All the deities followed him.

Lord Brahma said---'Right now it is Pushya yoga and it is very auspicious for launching and it is very auspicious for launching an attack on the demon's forts.' Lord Shiva then released his arrow, which after destroying all the three forts returned to his quiver. The deities became pleased and eulogized lord Shiva.

APPOINTMENT OF ANDHAK AS THE LORD OF GANAS

On being asked by the Sages how Andhak--the demon was appointed as the lord of Ganas by Lord Shiva, Suta narrated the following tale to them.--The mighty demon, Andhak was Hiranyaksh's son. By the virtue of his austere penance he had received a boon of immortality from Lord Brahma. In course of time he conquered all the three worlds. He started tormenting the deities and as a result of which they had to take refuge in the causes of Mandarachal mountain.

The deities went to Lord Shiva and narrated their woeful tale to him. They also requested him to kill Andhak so that they could live in peace. Lord Shiva went to the place where Andhak lived accompanied by all the deities. When Andhak saw them coming, he attacked menacingly with his various weapons. The deities became scared and started running helter-skelter. Lord Shiva then killed Andhak with his trident. He then lifted the corpse with the help of his trident and kept in that position for a very long period.

The divine sight of Lord Shiva had liberated Andhak from all his sins. Finding himself in a helpless position, Andhak eulogized Shiva and begged for forgiveness. At last, Lord Shiva became pleased and brought Andhak down after lowering his trident. He gave him the designation of a Ganapati and made him the lord of his ganas.

THE LIBERATION OF EARTH

The Sages were curious to know how Lord Vishnu in his incarnation of Varaha (Boar), had liberated the earth from the captivity of Hiranyaksha. They also wanted to know why Lord Shiva adorned himself with the horn of that boar.

Suta narrated the following tale--- Hiranyaksha--Andhak's father was a tyrant. After Vanquishing the deities, he had taken the earth to 'Rasatala'. The deities sought the help of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu then took the incarnation of Varaha (boar) and killed Hiranyaksha with his sharp horns. He then brought the earth from Rasatala and kept it in its original position. The deities eulogized both Lord Vishnu and mother earth. Lord Shiva adorned and himself with the ornament carved out from the horn of that boar. This is the reason why he is also called 'Dandhtri' (wild boar).

KILLING OF JALANDHAR

The Sages requested Suta to reveal how Lord Shiva had killed the notorious demon-- Jalandhar. Suta narrated the following tale---

There was a demon named Jalandhar. He had manifested from the ocean. He had acquired divine power by the virtue of his austere penance. Jalandhar had defeated the deities and conquered the heaven. He even defeated Lord Vishnu and boasted---'I have conquered everybody. Now! Only Shiva is left to be conquered.'

Jalandhar went to fight a battle with Lord Shiva accompanied by a huge army. Lord Shiva was aware of the boon, which Lord Brahma had given to Andhak and which had made him invincible. Jalandhar derived his power from his wife- Vrinda who was an extremely chaste woman. As per the plans of the deities, Lord Vishnu disguised as Jalandhar and went to breach the modesty of Vrinda. Vrinda could not recognize Lord Vishnu and mistook him to be her husband--Jalandhar. Ultimately, Lord Vishnu was successful in his motives.

Meanwhile, the battle had commenced between Jalandhar and Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva destroyed the whole army of Jalandhar by the sight of his third eye. Jalandhar became furious and tried to kill Lord Shiva with the Sudarshan Chakra, which he had snatched from Vishnu. But as soon as he lifted the Sudarshan chakra, his body got cut into two parts. The death of Jalandhar brought immense joy to the deities.

THE ORIGIN OF LORD GANESH

Once, the deities requested Lord Shiva to devise some means so that they no longer had to live under the threat of the demons. The most merciful Lord Pinaki Shiva then took the incarnation of Ganeshwar. He had a human body but his head resembled like an elephant. He held a trident in his hand. All the deities eulogized Lord Ganesh--the Lord of wisdom and the remover of all obstacles. Lord Ganesh is the first deity to be worshipped in any ritual as he is believed to remove all the obstacles. A devotee of Lord Ganesh is free from the fear of failures and achieves success in any endeavour he undertakes.

SHIV TANDAV

The deities were curious to know the story behind 'Tandav'- the famous dance of Lord Shiva. So, they asked Suta how it started and what made Shiva to perform Tandav.

Suta replied--- There lived a demon named Daruk. He had acquired divine powers by the virtue of his austere penance. He started tormenting the deities, sages and all the virtuous people. All the deities went to Lord Shiva and requested him to give protection from the tyranny of Daruk. Lord Shiva then requested Parvati to help the deities. One part of Parvati's consciousness entered into the body of Lord Shiva. But, the deities were not aware of this happening. Goddess Parvati then attained her physical form with the help of poison stored in the throat of Lord Shiva. The effect of poison had made her complexion dark. Lord Shiva then brought her out from within his body through his third eye.

The deities became frightened after seeing her terrific appearance. She was none other than Goddess Kali. Goddess Kali then killed Daruk with the permission of Parvati. But, even after the death of Daruk, her anger did not subside and the whole world was ablaze due to her anger. Lord Shiva then incarnated as a small child and started crying as if he was hungry. Goddess Kali could not decipher the illusions of Shiva and thought that the child was crying because of hunger. She started feeding the child her breast-milk. In the process of sucking milk, Shiva also sucked out her anger.

The extreme anger of Kali had resulted into the manifestation of eight divine entities who became famous as 'Kshetrapal'. After her anger had subsided Goddess Kali became unconscious. Lord Shiva then performed his famous dance--Tandav for the first time to bring Kali back to consciousness. He was accompanied by all the ghosts and spirits in his terrific dance. When Kali regained her consciousness she found Shiva dancing. She too started dancing and this is the reason why she is also called Yogini.

PART FIVE UPAMANYU

The sages were curious to know how Lord Shiva had bestowed the designation of Ganpatya and an ocean of milk to Upamanyu. They requested Suta to shed light on the two incidents.

Suta narrated the following tale ---

Upamanyu was a brilliant child. There is an interesting story how he became the supreme devotee of Lord Shiva. Once, during his childhood he had gone to his maternal-uncle's place. One day, while he was hungry he tried to drink some milk. But his cousin did not allow him to drink milk and after snatching the bowl of milk drank himself.

Upamanyu started crying. He went to his mother who tried to console him by giving a solution of powdered grains. But, Upamanyu did not want anything less than milk. His mother said--'You should be satisfied with whatever you get. Perhaps we did not worship Lord Shiva in our past lives. Our hardships are the fallouts of those unpardonable sins. Only a devotee of Shiva is entitled to all kinds of comfort and pleasure.'

Upamanyu decided then and there to please Shiva by his penance and attain an ocean of milk from him. He went to Himalaya mountain and started doing an austere penance. His penance had resulted into the generation of unbearable heat. The deities became terrified and went to seek the help of Lord Vishnu.

Lord Vishnu along with the deities went to Lord Shiva and sought his help. Lord Shiva decided to test the devotion of Upamanyu. He disguised himself as Indra and went to the place where Upamanyu was doing penance. He started abusing Shiva which made Upamanyu so angry that he tried to kill him. When Upamanyu failed in his attempt to kill Shiva, he tried to kill himself by chanting 'Agnaya mantra'.

Lord Shiva was very pleased by his total devotion and revealed his identity. He blessed Upamanyu and after accepting him as his son granted the designation of Ganpatya. He also provided oceans of milk and curd to Upamanyu.

THE GREATNESS OF DWADASHAKSHAR MANTRA

On being asked by the sages about the sacred mantra-- the chanting of which enabled a man to attain salvation Suta replied ---

Lord Vishnu gives salvation to those people who endeavour to seek Brahm-- the Almighty God. A man whose mind is preoccupied with the thought of Lord Vishnu and nothing else is entitled to attain Salvation. Such a man is also blessed by goddess Lakshmi."

Describing about the greatness of Dwadashakshar mantra, Suta said --"The sacred mantra consists of twelve letters 'OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VASUDE VAY'.

This powerful mantra helps a man to achieve proximity with Lord Vishnu.

'Once there lived a brahmin who used to stammer while talking. All his efforts of making him speak distinctly went in vain as the child continued to lisp. When the brahmin tried to teach his son. the dwadashakshar mantra, he incorrectly pronounced 'Vasudev as 'Etareva'. So the child was given the name 'Etareva'. The brahmin became disgusted and married a second time. He had many sons from his second wife, all of whom were very studious.

Etareva's mother used to curse her fate because of his habit of stammering. One day she said-- 'Look! I am no more able to tolerate the humiliation of being a mother of a dull child at your step-brothers, who have achieved fame and respect on account of their learning. I have decided to give up my life.' Etareva became very sad. He started chanting the dwadashakshar mantra regularly and as a result a day came, when he could pronounce it correctly and without stammering.

One day Etareva happened to pass by a place where a yagya was being performed. As soon as he reached that place, the priests found to their surprise that they had become dumb. All the priests became restless, as the rituals were still incomplete. Looking at their pitiable condition, Etareva chanted the dwadashakshar mantra-- OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VASUDEVAY. The priest regained their power of speech by the virtue of the flawless pronunciation of the mantra. Such is the greatness of dwadashakshar mantra. Later on, Etareva went on to become a renowned scholar. A person who chants this sacred mantra regularly become liberated from all his sins and attains Vishnu Lok.

SHADAKSHAR MANTRA

Describing about the greatness of Shadakshar mantra that consists of six letters, Suta said--

The sacred mantra -- OM NAMAH SHIVAY holds a supreme place among all the mantras. During the Meghavahan kalpa of the first Treta Yuga, there lived a brahmin named Dhoondhmook. He became a licentious person due to the curse of a sage. As a result he became a man of loose moral conduct. His wife gave birth to a child on the inauspicious day of Amavasya. The astrologers predicted a very bleak future for that new born child.

When the child grew up he became notorious for his sinful conduct. Dhoondhmook married his son in a respectable family but his son being a man of loose character, developed intimacy with a woman belonging to a low caste. One day, Dhoondhmook that son developed sharp differences with that woman on some matter and in a fit of rage killed her. When the family members of that woman came to know about her death, they retaliated by killing Dhoondhmook his wife and his daughter-in-law. Since Dhoondhmook's son was not present in the house at that time he survived. He avenged the death of his family members by killing the assassins. Now Dhoondhmook's son had become disillusioned with life. He started wandering aimlessly and reached a hermitage. The sage who lived in that hermitage was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and taught him the rituals of Pashupat Vrata as well as the sacred Shodakshar mantra. Dhoondhmook's son performed the rituals of Pashupat Vrat for twelve months. All the while he kept on chanting the Shadakshar mantra. As the result of his devotion towards Lord Shiva and by the virtue of chanting Sadakshar mantra he as well as all his ancestors attained salvation.

LORD PASHUPATI

The sages were curious to know why Lord Shiva was also known as Pashupati (lord of animals). Suta retold the same tale which sage Shiladi had once narrated to Sanatkumar --

Once, Sanatkumar went to the hermitage of Sage Shiladi and asked him as to why was Lord Shankar also known as Pashupati. He also inquired about the reason of man's bondage and how could he be liberated from them.

Sage Shiladi replied---All the living beings including Lord Brahma have been referred to animals because of their attachment to worldly desires and ignorance. Lord Shiva being the lord of them is also known as Pashupati. It is none other than Lord Vishnu whose illusionary and divine powers keep them in bondages. It is also only lord Vishnu who liberates them by bestowing the knowledge of Jnana Yoga.

Nobody can attain salvation without the blessings of Lord Shiva. The nothing but the 24 elements--10 sense organs, 4 type of consciousness, 5 basic elements from which matter is made and 5 subtle forms of matter. A person who worships Lord Shiva with total devotion becomes liberated because devotion is capable of destroying all types of sins.

THE MAJESTIC LORD MAHESHWAR

Lord Maheshwar is beyond the reach of any kind of bondage. He is a totally liberated entity. It is only by his blessings that the Nature-Prakriti creates intelligence--buddhi. Similarly, intelligence creates ego-ahamkara and subtle forms of matter--tanmatra creates the gross forms of matter by the blessings of Lord Shiva. No word can describe the greatness of Lord Shiva. It is only with the permission of Lord Maheshwar that our sense organs function, the fire burns and all the living beings fulfill their respective duties. Lord Shiva is the Almighty God and goddess Parvati is also called Shiva. He is the Purusha and she is the nature or Prakriti. The matter derives its power from goddess Gauri. Everything that is capable of creating is nothing but the form of Uma. The whole universe is established in the form of Shivalinga and hence everybody must worship Lord Shiva.

THE SUN - MANIFESTATION OF SHIVA'S POWER

Lord Shiva manifests himself in the form of Sun. The Sun radiates twelve different types of rays which have specific impacts and influences on the world.

The first ray is called Amrit and the deities derive their power from it. The second ray is called Chandra and it helps in the preservation of medicinal herbs. The third ray is called Shukla and it helps in the propagation of religiousness in the world. It also helps the food crops to become ripe. The fourth ray is Harikeshha and all the constellations get their nourishment from it. The fifth ray is called Vishwakarma and it gives the planet mercury.

The sixth ray is called Sanyadwasu and it nurtures the planet--Mars. The seventh ray is called Arvvasu and it nurtures the planet Jupiter. The eighth ray is called Surat and it nurtures the planet --Saturn. The ninth ray is called Susumana and it nurtures the moon.

SHIVA TATVA

The learned and sages call Shiva by many names ---Kshetragya, Prakriti Vyakta, ~~Kama~~ etc. The synonyms of Kshetragya and Prakriti are Purusha and Pradhan respectively. The delusionary net of the Prakriti is known as Vyakta (apparent). Kala (time) is the resultant by product of Pradhan and Vyakta. Some sages call Hiranyagarbha (Brahma) as the Purusha and Shiva as Pradhan. They consider Hiranyagarbha to be the creator and Purusha to be the enjoyer. Even these sages are of the opinion that Hiranyagarbha, Pradhan, Purusha and enjoyer are the manifestations of Shiva.

THE GREATNESS OF SHIVA

The almighty Shiva manifested in the form of Sthanu (Pillar) from his imperceptible form and looked at Lord Brahma. Lord Brahma then commenced his creation and established the norms of Varna ashrama. He also created 'Soma' which is required for the performance of 'Yagy'. This world, including all the deities are the embodiments of Soma. The deities eulogize Lord Shiva by chanting the mantras of 'Rudrashtadyay'.

Once, Lord Shiva was sitting surrounded by all the deities. On being requested by the deities to shed light on his mysterious self, Lord Shiva said---

"I was present before the beginning of time and I will be present forever. Everything originates from me and get submerged in me ultimately. I am the Lord of Brahma. I am the truth itself. I manifest myself in the forms of Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. I am the light as well as the darkness. I am Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. One who is aware of my omnipresence is the only person who is worthy of being called an enlightened one."

This way, after enlightening the deities on his mysterious self Lord Shiva disappeared.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GURU

A devotee should commence the worship of Lord Shiva only after taking permission from his Guru, Only such a person is worthy of being called a Guru who is virtuous and well versed in the scripture.

A disciple should unwaveringly be in the service of his Guru and should try to please him by his devotion because only he (Guru) is capable of liberating him from the miseries of world. A guru should try to test the worthiness of his disciple by employing different means for three years. Once, the Guru has accepted a person as his disciple, he should try to impart all the knowledge to him. He should never discriminate on the basis of caste or creed of a disciple. It is the duty of a Guru to make his disciple destitute of flaws and shortcomings.

THE RITUALS OF INITIATION

Before commencing the rituals of initiation, the Guru should purify the place where the rites are supposed to be performed. He should make an attar and draw an eight-petalled lotus at its center. He should then establish the various embodiments of Shiva like Aghor, Pranav, Vamadeva, on each of the eight petals. The Guru should then purify all the directions by chanting different mantras. He should then meditate on the form of Lord Shiva. After that he should make offerings in the sacrificial fire and purify himself by doing achaman. He should then have Panchagavya as prasadam and smear ashes on his body.

The Guru should instruct his old disciples to sit towards the south of altar. He should make offerings of ghee into the sacrificial fire for 108 times amidst the chanting of Aghor mantra. The new disciple then arrive blindfolded and circumambulate the sacrificial altar for three times. While circumambulating everybody should chant either the mantras of Rudrashtadyai or Omkar mantra. The new disciple then smear ashes on their bodies amidst the chanting of Aghor mantra. The Guru then sprinkles holy water on the new disciples. In the end the disciple takes a religious vow. "I shall never have food without worshipping Shiva". This way the ritual of initiation comes to an end.

INSTALLATION OF SHIVALINGA

Describing about the methods of installing a Shivalinga Suta says-- A devotee should install a Shivalinga made of either gold, silver or copper. The shivalinga should be installed along with the altar. The altar of the Shivalinga symbolizes goddess Uma. Lord Brahma is said to manifest at the base of Shivalinga while Lord Vishnu at its center. After the installment of Shivalinga it should be worshipped with appropriate rituals. The Shivalinga should be adorned with clothes and its ablution should be performed.

A devotee should chant the Brahma vigyan mantras for the consecration of Lord Brahma who is supported to manifest at the base of Shivalinga. Similarly, for the consecration of Lord Vishnu dwelling at the center of Shivalinga, Gayatri at the center of Lord Shiva is consecrated by the chanting of any of the following mantras---

OM NAMA SHIVAY; NAMO HANSA SHIVAY CHA

A devotee should then worship the Shivalinga and make offerings in the sacrificial fire.

VAJRESHWARI VIDYA

The sages requested Suta to elaborate upon the rituals of Vajravahanika Vidya or Vajreshwari Vidya. Suta replied--- Anybody who is desirous of vanquishing his enemy must perform the rituals of Vajreshwari Vidya. The devotee should worship Vajra (a spear) and make offerings in the sacrificial fire holding it (Vajra) in his hand. The following mantra should be chanted while making offerings.

OM BHURBHUVAH SWAH TATSAVITUR VARENYAM BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHI
DHIYO YONAH PRACHODAYAT;

OM PHAT JAHI HOOM PHAT CHHINDHI MINDHIJAH I HAN HAN SWAHA.

In the past Lord Brahma had taught this secret Vidya to Indra with the help of which he had killed the ferocious demon Vritrasur. A man can acquire all the types of supernatural powers with the help of Vajreshwari Vidya. Describing about the rituals of Mrityunjay Japa, Suta said-- A person who chants Mrityunjay mantra with appropriate rituals becomes free from the fear of death. A devotee is required to make offerings of ghee in the sacrificial fire for one lakh times. Instead of ghee he can also make offerings of ghee and sesame seeds or dhoob grass, ghee, milk and honey.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF YOGA

The sages asked Suta as to how should a devotee meditate on Lord Triyambak following the path of Yoga. Suta then retold the tale which Mandishwar had once narrated to Sanatkumar--

1. The first type of Yoga is called Mantra Yoga. In this type of yoga a devotee tries to attain deep state of meditation by chanting mantras. The chanting of mantras helps a man to concentrate his mind.

2. The second type of Yoga is known as Sparsh Yoga. In this type of yoga, a man acquires perfection in breath-control by constantly practicing various exercises like Rechak (exhalation), Kumbhak (retention), etc. These exercises help to purify the nerves and blood vessels.

3. The third type of yoga is known as Bhava Yoga. This is the state in which a person's mind is totally engrossed in the thoughts of Lord Mahadeva. This state of mind can not be attained unless the two former types of yoga have been mastered.

4. The fourth type of Yoga is called Abhava-yoga. When a man has mastered this particular yoga his ego is subdued in totality.

5. The fifth type of yoga is called Maha yoga. It helps a man to understand his real self and get united with the supreme Almighty. The secret of Yoga should be revealed to worthy disciples-- who are virtuous and religious."

This way, Suta described the divine tales of Linga Purana and blessed the sages. The Linga Purana contains eleven thousand shlokas in it. The study of Linga Purana fulfills all the four worldly aspirations of a man- Dharma, Artha, Kam and Moksha. It also helps a man to attain salvation.

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12. NARADA PURANA

CHAPTER ONE TALK BETWEEN SUTA AND SAGES IN NAIMISHARANYA

Once upon a time, about twenty-six thousand sages assembled in the holy ambience of Naimisharanya. All of them had renounced their desires and homely comforts and were worshipping Lord Vishnu for the benefit of the entire humanity.

During their stay in Naimisharanya, those sages called a huge assembly to discuss about the means of attaining all the four goals of life like Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. The great sage Shaunak was presiding over the assembly. He said: "O sages! We have assembled here to discuss the most cryptic disciplines of life. But it is beyond my powers to answer the questions you have put before me. Only a great sage like Suta, who is the most learned disciple of Veda Vyasa, is able to answer these questions. Presently, he lives in a hermitage in Siddhipeeth. Let us all go there and request him to preach us about the cryptic disciplines of life." Hearing these words, all the sages thanked Shaunak with joy. Then, led by Shaunak himself, all of them reached the hermitage of the sage Suta. At the hermitage, sage Suta welcomed them all and satisfied their queries. He said:

" O great sages! I narrate to you, the great Purana, which was once narrated by the great saint Sanatkumar to Devarshi Narada and now known as Narada Purana."

CHAPTER - 2 NARADA PRAYS TO LORD VISHNU

Shaunak says: "Suta, how did Sanatkumar unfold the mystic character of the religion to Narada? When and where they had the meeting to hold this pious discussion? Kindly tell us in detail."

Suta says: "The great sage Sanatkumar, who was free from illusions, was the creation of Brahma's imagination. He always remained engrossed in the worship of Brahma. Once, he was going towards the peaks of the mighty Meru Mountains (Himalayas) when on the way, he happened to sight the sacred Ganges. He was about to take a dip in the waters when Devarshi Narada also arrived there. Devarshi Narada greeted his elder brother and took bath in the river.

After carrying out usual rituals, they seated there and started a discussion about the virtues of Lord Vishnu." Devarshi Narada asked- "O brother! How can one realize the Lord Vishnu? Who is the cause of this whole creation? What is the appearance of devotion, knowledge and penance? Kindly elaborate the mystery of treating the guests also. Also tell me, how did Lord Vishnu effected the origin of Brahma and other gods?"

Sanatkumar says: In the beginning of creation, the self-illuminating Lord Vishnu created Brahma from His right hand side, Rudra from His central part and Vishnu, his own replica from His left hand side. As Lord Vishnu is omnipresent, similarly his illusions are also omnipresent and known with different names like Lakshmi, Uma, Shakti and Chandi. These are the powers of Lord Vishnu. Some people identify these powers with the illusions created by the Lord whereas the sages regard them as nature."

The gods, who protect the world, are Purusha, and the Supreme Being, who is above these levels, is Lord. Nobody else is greater than He is. From His navel even Brahma has originated on a divine lotus. He is the Supreme Being the eternal joy incorporating all the three virtues.

O Narada! Five senses- sights, sound, scent, touch and taste have originated from the ego. Ego is the origin of other eleven senses also. These five senses in turn gave rise to five physical elements- ether, air, fire, water and earth. It was after the creation of these five physical elements that Brahma created the lower living beings. Then he created human beings followed by the creation of all the seven worlds and seven guards of these seven worlds. For the inhabitation of the living beings, Brahma also created great mountains, plains and seven seas.

Towards the north of the great saline sea and towards the south of the great Himalayas is situated the Holy Land of India. People who worship Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu inhabit this land. Because of their virtues, even the gods worship the people who populate the Indian landmass. Those ignorant people, who do not seek salvation despite having been born in India, have to suffer the tortures of hell as long as the Sun and the Moon shine in the sky. The whole world from Brahma to a seemingly unimportant blade of grass is the manifestation of Vasudev (Lord Vishnu).

CHAPTER - 3 PROFILE OF THE SAGE MARKANDEYA

Sanatkumar says: O sage! Faith has the greatest significance. Achievement of everything and appeasement of Lord Vishnu depend upon the faith. Nothing is attainable without faith. Such as a human being faces inertia in the absence of life and is rendered motionless. Similarly, faith is like a spiritual light without which, religious actions of a man come to cease. Similarly, devotion is also known as the life of all the achievements. It is also the giver of four supreme goals of life like Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. No action succeeds without the input of devotion and faith. Even the menial jobs done with faith gives everlasting results. On the contrary, even the pious actions of envious people go futile. Attainment of God by envious people is impossible.

Envy is the greatest enemy of the human being. It creates a gap as big as the one that separates the sky from the nether world. O Brahmanandan! Only those people, who remain engrossed in faithful devotion of God, attain to the abode of Vishnu. Fallen are those who, despite having the knowledge of Vedas, do not comply with the moral code of conduct of their clan. Neither Vedas nor even devotion can save such people. In other words, moral conduct is everything. O great sage! Devotion is like mother who is the base of life for every living being.

O Narada! Company of the pious people and the saints is the best means to cherish devotion. Saints are the teachers of the entire world. When the sins that have been accumulating all throughout the previous births decay only when one gets pious company and those who once get pious company experiences eternal joy.

Narada says: "O great devotee of Lord Vishnu! Kindly relate the actions and appearance of the Lord's devotees to me."

Sanatkumar says: "During the period of Pralaya, when all the world was inundated, Lord Vishnu was sleeping on a Banyan leaf. That scene had amazed Markandeya, the supreme devotee of the Lord."

The sages asked: "When all the world was inundated, how did Markandeya escape? Suta kindly remove our doubt."

Suta says: "O great sages! Now, I am going to narrate the tale of Markandeya. Listen to it carefully."

Once upon a time, there lived a fortunate sage in the pious land of India. The sage was famous as Mrikandu. He had observed a very severe penance at the holy pilgrimage center of Shaligram. His penance began to cause worry for Indra. So, accompanied by other gods, Indra reached to Lord Vishnu who was resting on Sheshnag in Ksheersagar, the ocean of milk. The gods prayed the Lord to protect them from the radiance of Mrikandu. Listening to the prayers offered by the gods, Lord Vishnu appeared in His four-armed form holding conch, wheel, mace and lotus in each of those arms. His radiance was enough to beat the shine of crore Suns. His radiance caused tremendous joy for the gods who fell flat at the feet of the Lord.

Lord says: "O gods! Get up. I am fully aware about your miseries. But your worries are meaningless because Maharshi Mrikandu is really a gentleman. He is not going to harm you in any way. Even if the situation arises, I am always ready to protect you." Saying these words, the

Lord disappeared. Thus, assured by the Lord's words, the gods also returned to their abode. On the other hand, pleased by Mrikandu's penance, Lord appeared before him. As soon as Mrikandu opened his eyes, he saw Lord Vishnu standing before him. Lord's four-armed, blue and radiant appearance caused great exhilaration for Mrikandu. He fell flat at His feet and prayed Him with tearful eyes. Pleased with his prayers, Lord asked Mrikandu to seek a boon. But Mrikandu refused saying that he had attained salvation just by having His sight. Still, Lord said, "This appearance never goes in vain," So, I will be your son who will live a long life." Grangithis boon, the Lord disappeared."

CHAPTER - 4 TALE OF THE SAGE MARKANDEYA

Narada says: "O great sage! Why did Lord Vishnu appear as the son of Mrikandu? What did He do as his son? The Puranas say that during the Pralaya, Markandeya had witnessed the direct appearance of Lord Vishnu's illusion. Kindly narrate these things in detail."

Sanatkumar says: "Listen O Devarshi! After observing severe penance, the sage Mrikandu got married and received an equally virtuous and chaste wife. In the tenth month after their marriage, his wife gave birth to an extremely beautiful baby. The baby in fact had incorporated the radiance of the Lord. Mrikandu carried out all the necessary rituals and consecrations of the baby happily. In his fifth year, he carried out the thread ceremony of his son and started to educate him in Vedas. His education developed all the pious virtues in his son whom he had named Markandeya. After finishing his education, sage Markandeya also started a severe penance to please Lord Vishnu.

Pleased by his penance, Lord Vishnu blessed him with a boon of creating Purana Samhita. This is the reason why the sage Markandeya is also known as Narayan. O Brahmins! Lord Vishnu did not annihilate Markandeya during the Pralaya only to show him His illusions. It was due to this grace that Markandeya survived the Pralaya and passed that time floating on a Banyan leaf. As long as the Lord slept, Markandeya kept floating on that leaf. As long as the night of the Lord lasted, Markandeya stayed on that flimsy leaf. At the end of the night, when the inundating Pralaya receded and the Lord awakened from His prolonged sleep, He began the work of creation again. It was even more amazing for Markandeya to see the inundating water recede and new creation taking place. He began to pray the Lord with folded hands. Pleased by his prayers, the Lord said that He always protected His devotees even during the most severe crises. Markandeya then asked about the appearance of the true devotees of the Lord. He also expressed his curiosity to know the reasons of their birth.

Lord Vishnu says: "O great among the sages! The greatest devotees are those who do not harm others with their mind, words and actions and who are free from envy. Those who have impartial view are best among the devotees. Those who protect the human beings, cows, Brahmins, vegetation and remain engrossed in discussion of Lord's virtues. Those who salute the garden of basil and put the earth from basil's roots on their heads, those who are beloved to Lord Shiva, put Tripund on their forehead and worship Him performing Yagyas facing south. Those who always donate water and cereals, cows and daughters are the excellent among all the devotees. O great sage! These are some of the characteristics of a true devotee. Cherish these characteristics and you will also attain salvation in the last." Thus, preaching, Lord Vishnu disappeared.

Markandeya thereafter led a pious life and observed penance and in the last he too attained to the supreme abode of the Lord.

CHAPTER - 5 THE GREATNESS OF THE GANGES

Suta says- "The glorious description of devotion for Lord Vishnu caused extreme joy for Narada."

Narada says: "O great sage Sanat! Now kindly tell me about such a place of pilgrimage which is even holier than the holiest places of pilgrimage."

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! Confluence of Ganga and Yamuna is the holier than any other place of pilgrimage. The extremely sacred and pious Ganga rises from the feet of none other than Lord Vishnu. Yamuna on the other hand is the daughter of Surya. Even the remembrance of Ganga is enough to do away with all the sins and making one peaceful.

This place where Ganga and Yamuna merge is famous as Prayag in the world. It is the same place where Brahma had once invoked Lord Vishnu in a Yagya. Since then, innumerable sages have followed Brahma and performed different kinds of Yagyas there. Even a person who recites the name of Ganga hundred miles from Prayag attains salvation. Smear the sand of Ganga's bank on the forehead is like, in a way, bearing the crescent shaped Moon on the head. Those who remember Ganga receive the benefit of performing pilgrimage to all the holy places. Among other places of pilgrimage, Varanasi has almost equal significance to that of Prayag. O Brahmin! Ganga is the mother of the entire world. Mere touch of her sacred waters saved the sixty thousand sons of Sagar. No one can describe the greatness of Ganga.

CHAPTER - 6 FATE OF KING BAHU

Narada says: "O great sage who in the dynasty of Sagar received salvation from ~~met~~ Bhava. Who was Sagar? Kindly narrate his whole story to me."

Sanatkumar says: "Long ago, there occurred a king named Bahu in the dynasty of Surya He was very religious in nature and looked after his subjects like his own offspring. Everyone was happy in his kingdom, which he ruled with polity and justice".

But destiny was playing another game for the king. With time, evils like envy and ego ~~egan~~ began to rise in the mind of Bahu. He began to think that nobody else was as religious as he was. These evils in turn caused the king to incline towards sensual pleasures. O Narada! An unconscious mind is the greatest cause of destruction. Everyone, even the better half begins to nurture hostility against such a person. So, the same thing happened with the king Bahu. Many neighbouring kings together launched a massive attack on the kingdom of Bahu and defeated him after a month-long fierce battle.

After his defeat, the king Bahu left his kingdom and began to wander along with his queens. At last, he came to stay beside a big lake. Even the local inhabitants and lower creatures hid seeing the king approach. His subjects too had lost their sympathies for him.

Now the life of the king was not more than the death. So, repenting his condition, king Bahu met his death in the presence of the sage Aurv. At that time, his youngest queen was expecting an issue. After her husband's death, she decided to commit Sati. But, the sage Aurv prevented her convincing that her would be son would enjoy more popularity than his father had. Besides, nothing is more wretched than killing an unborn baby. Thus, convincing the queen with all means, sage Aurv guided the queens to perform cremation of her husband and other rituals. Since then, both the queens began to live in the hermitage of sage Aurv.

CHAPTER - 7 THE BIRTH OF SAGAR

Sanatkumar says: - "O Narada! Both the queens were passing their time in the hermitage of sage Aurv. When half of the rainy season had passed, the elder queen began to cultivate evil feelings for the younger. She, therefore, made deceitfully the younger queen to consume poison. But the poison could not affect the queen and her unborn baby because of the virtues she had acquired serving the sage Aurv. After three months, the younger queen gave birth to a son. Sage Aurv carried out necessary rituals and consecrations of the child and named him Sagar because he was born with the effect of poison."

Sagar began to grow in Aurv's hermitage. The sage had started to train the boy in weaponry. One day, out of curiosity, Sagar asked his mother about his father. His mother related to him all the events that took place with his father king Bahu, her husband. Listening to the fate of his father, Sagar took an oath to destroy all those who had caused misery to his father. Circumambulating his teacher Aurv and taking his mother's permission, Sagar at once set out on his mission. His first halt was at the hermitage of sage Vashishta.

Sagar narrated the whole thing to the sage Vashishta. Sage Vashishta presented him with a number of divine weapons and saw him off blessing him with a boon for victory. Armed with many divine weapons and the blessings of his mother and teachers, Sagar defeated even the most powerful enemies of his father in no time and established his rule over the entire earth. The defeated kings took asylum in the hermitage of sage Vashishta who assured them to be fearless. Spies on the other hand informed Sagar about this development. Sagar at once set out to the hermitage of Vashishta with an intention of exterminating those kings but meanwhile, sage Vashishta had got all the kings shaven. So, assuming that his enemies were dead, Sagar mockingly said to sage Vashishta: "O sage! Why are you guarding these characterless creatures? I will not spare their lives."

Vashishta says: "O son! You are great. Now listen to me carefully for your benefit. I have already killed your enemies, so you will not gain anything killing them again. O king! This physical body is the root of all the sins. You will not receive popularity killing the physical body. So, give this matter a little thought before killing them." The words of sage Vashishta soothed Sagar's anger. Thereafter, sage Vashishta carried out the coronation of Sagar.

The king Sagar had two wives, Keshini and Sumati. They both were the daughters of Vidharba's king Kashyapa. When sage Aurv heard about Sagar's coronation, he visited his palace and returned after preaching him. Some months later, with a desire of having sons, both the queens secretly summoned sage Aurv once again and received the talisman for having sons. Meditating for a while, the sage Aurv said: "O fortunate ones! One of you will receive a son who will continue his progeny in future and the other will have sixty thousand powerful sons."

The sage also advised them to seek the boon of their respective choices. With time, Keshini gave birth to one son Asmanjas who grew in a whimsical person. Sumati gave birth to sixty thousand sons who were very obedient initially but following Asmanjas, they too began to behave whimsically. Asmanjas had one son, Anshuman who was very obedient to his grandfather. Sixty thousand sons of Sagar soon began to torment all the three worlds. Perplexed by their atrocities, Indra appealed to the sage Kapila to get them rid of their woes. With the inspiration of Sage Kapila, Sagar organized an Ashwamedha Yagya. Indra kidnapped the horse of the Yagya and tethered at the hermitage of sage Kapila. When all the sixty thousand princes reached Kapila's hermitage, they began to abuse him seeing the horse there. Infuriated Kapila at once incinerated them with his curse. King Sagar then sent Anshuman in search of his sixty thousand sons and recovered the horse. Sage Kapila assured Anshuman that his grandson Bhagirath would please Ganga to descend and save his ancestors.

CHAPTER - 8 SALVATION OF SAUDAS

Narada says: "O great brother! Why did sage Vashishta curse Saudas and how did he recover from this curse by the virtue of the Ganges waters?" Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! Saudas was a virtuous king. He ruled over his subjects religiously. He was very fond of hunting. So, one day, he went on hunting in the forest. He continued his excursion all day long. Towards evening he reached at the bank of Godavari and decided to pass the night there. In the next morning also, he began his hunting excursion one again. During the hunting, he spotted a deer and began to chase it. Chasing the deer, he reached the core of the forest.

There, the king saw a pair of tigers copulating. Saudas was an expert archer. He trained an arrow and killed the tigress in just one shot. As soon as the tigress died, she assumed the form of an enormous ogress. Death of his partner infuriated the tiger, which was in fact a monster in disguise. He decided to avenge the death of his mate. On the other hand, the whole event frightened the king. He held a hasty parley with his ministers. They unanimously took a decision to give up the hunting forever.

Long afterwards, king Saudas organized an Ashwamedha Yagya in the auspices of sage Vashishta. At the completion of Yagya, sage Vashishta went to take a bath before taking his meal. Meanwhile, the monster appeared there in the guise of Vashishta and expressed his desire to eat meat. Then, in the guise of the cook, the monster cooked human flesh and served it in golden bowls. When sage Vashishta arrived, Saudas offered him the dishes made of human flesh. For a while, Vashishta thought in amazement but soon he realized the whole thing. Indignantly, he cursed the king to become a man-eating demon.

The king tried to assert his ignorance and said- "You yourself had expressed your desire to eat the meat." With his divine sight, sage Vashishta learnt that the king had been tricked with. By then, the king himself got ready to curse the sage in retaliation. But his prudent wife Madayanti stopped him. Thus, convinced by the queen, the anger of Saudas subsided. But he had taken water in his palm, so the problem arose where to dispose it off for it was sure to burn anything it fell upon. After a little consideration, the king dropped that water right on his feet that burnt immediately. Since then, the king Saudas came to be known as Kalmashpad. Sage Vashishta then consoled him. Vashishta says: "O king! Imprudence is the root of all the obstacles and crises. But O king! You have no reason to be sorry. Your miseries will end soon and you will regain your original radiance by the virtue of the Ganges' waters." Saying this, Vashishta returned to his hermitage.

The whole body of the king had turned black. Since then, he began to roam in the forests like a wild animal. There he ate whatever he found-animals, birds and even human beings. Within six months, he devoured all the animals in one hundred Yojan expanses of the forests. Then he migrated to another area in the forest. One day, in the guise of a monster, Saudas was wandering in a forest on the bank of Narmada. There he spotted a sage couple engaged in carnal conjugation. Saudas at once got hold of the sage and began to devour him.

The sage's wife pleaded him to release her husband but Saudas did not pay heed to her pleas and devoured the sage. In anguish and anger, the Brahmini cursed Saudas that he would die if he tried to copulate with a woman and that he would always remain a monster. Infuriated, Saudas cursed her in retaliation: "O evil one! Just one curse was sufficient. Why did you pour down two curses on me? Go and become a devil." The Brahmini at once turned into a devil. Afterwards, both of them began to wander in the forest. One day, they reached to such part of the forest where another monster was living. That monster too had acquired the formidable appearance because of not obeying his teacher. Seeing them, the monster enquired about the reasons of their coming to that forest. They narrated the whole thing to him.

Saudas says: "O friend! Who are you? Tell me, what sins did you committed. Do not conceal anything from your friends."

The monster says: "Before acquiring this appearance, I was a Brahmin and well versed in all the Vedas. I lived in Magadh. One day, blinded by my knowledge and youth, I insulted my teacher. That is the reason of my acquiring this monster's appearance. Since then, I have been eating flesh only and I do not know how many Brahmins I have devoured so far. Still, my hunger is insatiated. O fortunate one! Hence I advise each and everyone never to insult their teachers."

Saudas says: "What is a teacher? Who was your teacher?"

The monster says: O brother! There are many kinds of teachers but I am telling about the most revered ones. All the teachers of Vedas, preachers of scriptures and mantras, remover of doubts, protectors, wife's father, elder brother, mother's brother, family priest and own mother and father fall in the category of teachers. I had received preaching about all the religions from sage Gautam while staying on the enchanting banks of the Ganges. Once, when I went to worship

Shiva, I did not greet him. Sage Gautam did not mind my behavior but Lord Shiva turned me into a monster out of anger."

That sort of pious discussion among the monsters attenuated their sins. In the meantime, a Brahmin, who had hailed from Kalinga (Orissa), arrived there carrying the holy water of Ganges. The monsters requested the Brahmin to sprinkle some of the waters over them. They also narrated the greatness of Ganges before the Brahmin. Pleased with their willingness, and appraisal of Ganges, the Brahmin sprinkled some Ganges water on them. The monster and the ogress resumed their divine appearance but Saudas remained unchanged. His worries began to mount but the invisible Saraswati consoled and advised him to recite the Lord's name. Saudas then migrated to Varanasi where he continuously recited the Lord's name and took bath in the holy Ganges. Thus, he overcame the curse of Brahmini and returned to his kingdom. There, sage Vashishta once again carried out his coronation. Since then, Saudas ruled his kingdom through religious means and attained the supreme abode of Lord Vishnu.

CHAPTER - 9 KING BALI DEFEATS THE GODS

Narada says: "O brother! Kindly narrate the tale of the Ganges' origin from the feet of lord Vishnu."

Sanatkumar says: Long ago, in the beginning of creation, one sage Kashyapa had two wives Diti and Aditi. They both were the daughters of Daksha. Aditi was the mother of the gods while Diti had given birth to demons. Thus, the demons and the gods were stepbrothers and fought accordingly for the power and prestige. Demons were elder. HiranyaKashyapa, the demon king was the son of Diti. His son Prahlada was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. In the lineage of Prahlada, occurred the great king Bali who was the son of Virochan.

Bali had conquered entire earth and was now eyeing the heaven. Bali had two ministers, Kubhand and Koopkarna and an equally prowessive son Ban. With a huge army, Bali launched a massive attack on heaven and soon a fierce battle broke out. The battle lasted for one thousand years. At last, the gods lost the heaven to the demons and began to wander here and there in search of solace. Defeating the gods, the king Bali organized many Ashwamedha Yagyas. Feeling sorry for the plight of her sons, Aditi began a severe penance on the Himalayas.

CHAPTER - 10 ORIGIN OF THE GANGES

Narada says: "O brother! You narrated a wonderful tale. Now, kindly relate to me, how did the Ganges originate?"

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! Pleased with the severe penance of Aditi, Lord Vishnu appeared before her and asked her to seek a boon. Feeling elated with exhilaration, Aditi fell flat at the Lord's feet. She intimated the Lord about the plight of her sons and sought that He should help them to regain the heaven without killing the demons for they were also her sons though step. Pleased by her indiscrimination for her stepsons, Lord Vishnu assured Aditi that soon He would arrive as her son and save the gods from their miseries. Then, the Lord presented Aditi with His

garland and disappeared. In due course of time, Aditi gave birth to a son who was holding a conch, a wheel, a mace and a lotus in each of his four hands. The child was named as Vamana. Even his father, sage Kashyapa greeted him with respect.

By the time, when the thread ceremony was about to be carried out for Vamana, king Bali organized a grand Ashwamedha Yagya in the auspices of his teacher Shukracharya. Lord Vishnu Himself had been invoked in the Yagya along with Lakshmi. Taking his parent's permission, Vamana too arrived at the sight of the Yagya. With their divine sight, all the sages who were present there recognized Lord Vishnu and felt extreme joy and greeted Him with respect. Even Shukracharya understood the motive of Vamana's coming there. He cautioned Bali in isolation not to grant any demand of Vamana. He also advised Bali to abide by his dictate or he would have to face severe consequences.

But illumined by the destiny, king Bali did not pay heed to Shukracharya's advice and welcomed Vamana warmly and asked him to seek anything he wished. Vamana said: "O king! If you want to give me something, kindly grant me three steps of land so that I may carry out my Yagyas smoothly. King Bali tried to dissuade Vamana with temptations of heavenly comforts and other luxuries. But Vamana stayed to his demand that he needed nothing else but three steps of land for carrying out Yagyas. At last Bali agreed to grant his demand. He requested Vamana to pour some water from the Kamandalu on his palm so that he could take a vow. As the last attempt to prevent Bali from making a vow, Shukracharya assumed a miniature appearance and clogged the snout of the kamandalu. The omniscient Lord pricked the snout with a sharp stem and pricked Shukracharya's one eye.

Thereafter, taking some water on his palm, king Bali proceeded to grant Vamana three steps of land. As soon as Bali granted the demand, Vamana assumed a gigantic appearance and measured the entire earth and heaven in his two steps. While Lord Vishnu was measuring the universe, it broke into two pieces with the impact of His toe. With the tearing of the universe, millions of streams sprang out. In the course of their flow, these streams merged into a single mightier stream and, sanctifying Brahma and other deities, fell on the mighty Sumeru Mountain (Himalayas). As there was no other room left for the Lord to put His third step, Bali presented his own head for the purpose. Vamana put his third step on Bali's head and pressed him down into the hades.

Narada says: "O great sage! How did the Lord arrange for Bali's food in the nether world?"

Sanatkumar says: "Oblations offered without hymns and alms given to undeserving person constitute the food for Bali. Thus, the Lord snatched the kingdom of heaven from Bali without any bloodshed and returned it to the gods."

CHAPTER - 11 DEFINITION OF DHARMA

Narada says: "O great sage! I have just heard the tale of sacred Ganges. Now kindly describe about the people who deserve to take donations."

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! Brahmin is considered as the excellent among all the four castes. Hence, to make the donation fruitful, one should donate to the Brahmins only. A Brahmin can accept donation candidly but not a Vaishya or a Kshatriya. Even among Brahmins, there are many categories who do not deserve to accept donation.

These are- Brahmins who practice astrology, act against the religion, who are greedy, who sell scriptures and other religious materials, who have relations with other women than their wives, who are envious, ungrateful, singer, who have characterless wife, who are soldiers, priests, harbinger, cook, poet, doctor, who eat meat and cereals given by a Shudra, who carry out cremation and the Brahmins who consume the food given by prostitutes. Donation given to all these types of Brahmins go futile. Besides these, Brahmins who habitually enjoy sensual pleasures during siesta, who dine during the dusk, who have been boycotted by their brothers and society, who have taken birth illegitimately or after the death of their real father because of dubious relations of their mother, whose younger brother have married earlier and those who are always controlled by lusty women, who act as pimps or remain indulged in mean activities also do not deserve donation.

Donation, spending to meet necessities and wasting in useless activities are the three fates of wealth. A donation made selflessly to a deserving person on a request is excellent among all kinds of donations. A donation made with some desire is mediocre while donation given as sacrifice is of the lowest category.

Sanatkumar then narrated the tale of Bhagirath and Dharmaraj.

Once, Dharmaraj visited the kingdom of king Sagar. Dharmaraj praised Sagar overtly. With folded hands, king Sagar requested Dharmaraj to preach him about religion and non-religion and tell him something about divine worlds and hell. Dharmaraj says: "O king! Providing a Brahmin family or a Vedapathi Brahmin with a means of sustenance is the most virtuous donation. Inspiring others to make donation to such a Brahmin is also equally fruitful. Apart from these, digging out reservoirs and maintaining them and inspiring others to do the same thing also bears unending fruits." To corroborate his point, Dharmaraj narrated the tale of king Veerbhadrak and his minister Buddhiraj.

CHAPTER - 12 DESCRIPTION OF RELIGIOUS ACTION

Dharmaraj says: "O king! Those who build temples with earth stay in the abode of Vishnu for three kalpas. Then they attain Brahmaloaka. One receives double virtues if he builds a temple with wood. Building a temple with bricks and stones gives four-fold virtue while with the precious stones one gets ten-fold virtues. Building of temple with copper and gold gives hundred fold and crore fold virtues. Those who preserve temples and reservoirs receive hundred times more virtues than the builders do. Virtues of a rich man donating whole estate and a poor person donating a yard of land are equal."

"O virtuous one! Those who develop gardens and parks also receive same virtues. Those who preserve them receive more virtues than the developers. One who plants a basil sapling saves his crores of ancestors. Similarly, those who bathe the Lord's idol with milk on Dwadashi and

Poornamasi save millions of their ancestors. Those who bathe Lord's idol with Panchamrit on Ekadashi receive everlasting joy and salvation. Similarly, those who bathe Lord's idol with coconut milk, sugarcane juice, and water containing flowers or filtered water get free from all their sins. Similarly, those who bathe Lord Vishnu's idol during eclipses or on auspicious dates and conjugations receive the virtue of all the Yagyas. Those who bathe Lord Vishnu's and Shiva's idols with coconut milk, ghee, honey and sesame oil on auspicious dates assume respective appearances of these gods."

"Those who worship Lord Vishnu and Shiva offering them flowers of lotus, Pandanus, and particularly offer Dhatura to Lord Shiva attain their respective abodes. Similarly, donation of Guggul (scented raisin), lamp, water and cereal bears inexhaustible fruits. Virtues of donating land and milch cow to a Brahmin cannot be described in words. It is the case with the donation of knowledge, Shaligram, Shivalinga, horse, buffalo, elephant or any other vehicle. Those who arrange for the cremation of an orphaned Brahmin receive virtues equal to thousands of Ashwamedha Yagyas. Those who serve the Brahmin deities or cow, those who play instruments, bell, and blow conch or clap in the temple enjoy intimacy with divine beauties in the heaven for five Kalpas. Blowing of conch helps one attain the abode of Vishnu. Even the remembrance of Lord Vishnu's name does away with the imminent crises."

CHAPTER - 13 EXPIATION FOR THE SINS

Dharmaraj says: "O king! I am now going to narrate about the religion. Listen to it faithfully. If a person touches or gets touched by an impure or irreligious thing, he should observe fast for three days and six nights for expiation. He should take bath thrice a day. If a Brahmin defecates during dining, he must give up his food at once and take water only. Then he should observe a fast for a day and night and close it taking Panchgavya only to get pure again. If a person dines immediately after urination, or urinates during dining, he must observe a day and night long fast and close it with Havan. Those women who do not serve their husbands should be expelled from the home for a period of twelve years and should not be helped in any way during the exile. Impurity resulted because of touching a woman in menses takes fast for three nights to get purified."

Dead body of a person who had committed suicide should be smeared with sandalwood paste or any other holy material. If a person escapes an attempt to suicide, a fine of two hundred rupees should be imposed on him.

Those who deliberately eat cereals of washers, skimmers and other downtrodden classes and tribes or have illicit contacts with their women are required to observe Chandrayan fast in order to get pure. For those who establish abhorrent connection with their mother, sister or daughter, self-immolation is the only way to expiate. Those who mate with their teacher's wife formal observance of fast is required. If someone has killed a pregnant cow, he must expiate for it observing Chandrayan fast separately for each of the animals.

One should not use the soil collected from pond's bottom, termite's mound, mouse burrow, barren land, road, cremation ground and ground used for defecation purpose. Use of Panchgavya washes even the most severe sin. If a second death occurs in the family while the purification

period of first death is still on; separate purification is not required. Ill effect of an abortion lasts for three days. After marriage, a woman adopts her husband's name. Hence, oblation for a married woman must be offered by her son or someone belonging to her husband's clan. Ashes must be collected on the first, second, third or fourth day after the cremation. One must offer watery oblations to his dead ancestors standing in navel-deep water facing south.

CHAPTER - 14 TORTURE IN THE HELL

Dharmaraj says: "O king! Those who commit severe sin on earth are bound to suffer equally severe torturing in hell. I am now describing about such sins and the tortures vouchsafed for them in the hells. Tapan, Balukakumbh, Maharaurav, Raurav, Kumbhipak, Pramardan, Lalabhaksha, Vasakup and Vaitarni are some of the prominent hells. Drinking of urine in a ditch full of feces, eating of canine flesh, eating of worms, drinking of semen, sleeping on cinders, stinging by snakes, boring through bones, drinking of bile, biting by ants, breaking of teeth, tethering to hot iron etc. are some of the tortures one has to face for his sins in the hell. Those who criticize Brahmins and dictate them or kill them, drinker, those who steal gold, have illicit contact with the wife of their teacher and even those who accompany such people are condemned as great sinners. All of them deserve a place in the hell."

Stealing of items like copper, iron, water, musk, betelnut, sandalwood etc. is also like the crime of stealing gold. Illicit contact with sister and daughter-in-law and forceful copulation with a woman in menses are also like having illicit contact with the wife of the teacher. Our great sages have given dictates for the expiation of such sins. Those who live in Buddhist monasteries or frequently visit there live in the hells for crores of years. Sinners pass initial phase of their expiation in the hells. For the seven births then, they take incarnation as asses. Then for the next six births, they appear as snake, diseased people, dog, deer, tree and monitor. O king! Those who long for and have illicit contacts with women other than wife are forced to copulate with a pretty but extremely hot copper mannequin and then thrown into the hells. Those women who prefer to sleep with men other than husband are forced to embrace hot iron statue on a blazing bed. Then they are forced to embrace a hot iron pillar, take bath in saline water, and drink it. They have to suffer these tortures for thousand years.

Those who listen to other's criticism with interest have to bear lot of suffering. Hot nails are hammered into their ears. The pores thus formed are filled with boiling oil. They are then thrown into Kumbhipak hell.

Those who abuse Lord Vishnu and Shiva are fed with salt only for crores of years then they are thrown into Raurav hell, which is full of hot scorching sand. Traitors and greedy of other's cereals have to eat their own flesh. Those who eat astrologer's and priest's cereals are kept in different hells for crores of years followed by their keeping in the wells of boiling oil and saline water where they are fed with feces only. At the completion of their punishment, such people appear as Malechchha on earth. Those who torment others are thrown into Vaitarni. Those who do not perform Panchmaha Yagya or worship deities are kept in Lalabhaksha and Raurav hells respectively.

Those who do not act as per the scriptures are thrown into the hells for thousand crores of Kalpas. Those who throw excretion from their bodies or leave parts like hair, tooth, bone, nails etc. in the temple commit sins equal to killing an unborn baby. They are subjected to severe tortures in the hells before being sent into abhorrent incarnations. Those who give false witness undergo sufferings in the hells till the rules of fourteen Indras. Those who do not curb immoral traffic despite being capable go to hell. Those who falsely blame gentlepeople have to live in the hell for crores of years. Those who give up a fast before stipulated period go to the hell named Asipatra. There is no penance for the ones who adopt partial view during justice or religious education. Those who consume cow's flesh live in Vingbhoyja hell for thousands of years. Those who torture Brahmins through their thoughts, actions and words always fall in the hell. Those who destroy gardens have to suffer all the above mentioned hells.

O king!" One must repent for his sins before Lord Vishnu. Sight of the Ganges and basil, singing of devotional songs, magnanimity and non-violence attenuate the effect of the sin. No action bears fruit if not offered to Lord Vishnu. Devotion to Lord Vishnu is the excellent way to repent for the sins. Abidance to morality is the best way to train the religion. Religion without morality is equally painful. O king! Now I have related all about religion. Since now onwards, cultivate devotion for Lord Vishnu and invoke the Ganges to descend on earth in order to save your sinister ancestors. Only the Ganges is capable of saving one and all."

Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! Thus preaching the king Sagar, Dharmaraj disappeared from the sight. It was due to the severe penance of king Bhagirath that the Ganges descended on the earth and saved the sixty thousand deceased sons of Sagar."

CHAPTER - 15 DESCENT OF GANGES AND SALVATION OF SAGAR'S SONS

Narada says:"O Muni! What did king Bhagirath do on Himalayas? How did he please Ganges to descend on the earth?"

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! Renouncing all his royal comforts, Bhagirath went to the snow-capped, lofty peaks of the Himalayas. There he saw dense forest and herds of deer and elephants playing. Even his hermitage was full of sweet chattering of the birds. Reciting of Vedas and other scriptures was reverberating all around. Bhagirath came face to face with the sage Bhrigu who was surrounded by his disciples. Bhagirath approached and respectfully greeted the sage Bhrigu.

Bhagirath says: "O omniscient sage! Kindly grace me with the knowledge of the path that leads even the most mournful souls to salvation."

Bhrigu says: "O king! I know that you have arrived here with a beautiful motive of saving your ancestors. Hence, you are like Sri Hari yourself. Now, I describe about the actions, which please Sri Hari. O king, be non-violent, altruistic, virtuous, speak truth and seek pious company to be a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Recite the following mantras- AUM NAMO BHAGVATE VASUDEVAY NAMAHA |AUM NAMO VASUDEVAY

You will definitely attain peace of mind."

Bhagirath says: "O sage! What is truth? What is in the interest of all the living beings? Who are evil ones? Who are ascetics? What are virtuous actions? How should one remember and worship Lord Vishnu? What is peace? O great sage! Kindly describe about these things."

Bhrigu says: "O knowledgeable one! All such actions, which do not harm any living being, are non-violence. Actions, which aid in moral conduct and pacify the people, are in the interest of the public. All the people who are envious and oppose the religion and the scriptures are evil ones. Those who tread the path shown by religion and scriptures and always engage in the benefit of people are ascetics in the true sense. All the actions, which lead to devotion for Lord Vishnu and cause extreme joy for all are virtuous. Lord Vishnu incorporates all the other deities. Having such thoughts like 'I will worship Him with correct methods' is devotion. Seeing Lord Vishnu in each living and non-living things is impartial view. To be in peace and harmony in all circumstances with each and everyone is peace. O king! I have described now all the things to you. Go now and begin your penance. May it all be well for you."

Thus, with the permission and blessing of sage Bhrigu, king Bhagirath started his penance. He continued his penance for sixty thousand years at length in an enchanting place Nandeshwar in Himalayas. Seeing his severe penance, and perplexed by its radiance, all the gods appeared before Lord Vishnu in Ksheersagar.

The gods say: "O remover of sorrows! O controller of all the three worlds! We all greet you."

Pleased by the prayers, Lord Vishnu instinctively learnt about the motive of the gods. He assured them to be fearless and Himself appeared before Bhagirath. Bhagirath felt hilarious and greeted Sri Hari.

Lord Vishnu says: "Your desires shall be fulfilled. Your ancestors shall attain to my abode. But now go and pray Lord Shiva with your full capacity. He will definitely benefit you." Saying this, Lord Vishnu disappeared. The king stood there for some time wondering whether it was all a dream when an invisible voice announced, 'it was not a dream O king! It is reality. Do as Lord Vishnu has said.'

King Bhagirath began even more severe penance to please Lord Shiva. After a prolonged penance, Lord Shiva appeared there. Bhagirath fell flat at His feet. Pleased by his devotion and prayers, Lord Shiva blessed Bhagirath that He would hand over the Ganges to him for the salvation of his ancestors. As soon as Lord Shiva uttered these words, the Ganges emerged from His tussocks and followed Bhagirath wherever he walked.

Thus, following Bhagirath, the Ganges reached Gangasagar at the hermitage of sage Kapila where the ashes of Bhagirath's ancestors were lying unattended. As soon as the holy waters of the Ganges touched the ashes, Bhagirath's ancestors got freed from the noose of Yama and ascended to their heavenly abode. Since then, the Ganges is also known as Bhagirathi.

CHAPTER - 16 DESCRIPTION OF DWADASHI FAST

The sages say: "O fortunate one! You have obliged us narrating the tale of sacred Ganges. Now we desire to hear what Narada asked Sanatkumar."

Suta says: "O great sages! Now I narrate what Narada asked Sanatkumar, listen to it carefully."

Narada says: "I am blessed hearing the pious tale of the Ganges. Now kindly tell me about the fast and rituals performing which, Sri Hari could be pleased."

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! May God bless you! You are the supreme devotee of Lord Vishnu. That's why, you are asking about these rituals. Now I am telling you about these rituals and fasts, which make a man fearless. O Narada! There is a special provision for worshipping Lord Vishnu on the twelfth day of Shukla Paksha (brighter phase) in the month of Margashirsh. This worship could be performed wearing white or yellow clothes. During the worship, one should recite the mantra - KESHAVAYA NAMASTUBHYAM.

One should then offer oblations of ghee and sesame seeds in sacred fire. During the night, one should sing devotional songs before Shaligram and remain awakened. Then the idol of Vishnu should be bathed with five liters of milk. Similarly, Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu should be worshipped with Naivedya and edible items three times. Next morning, similar worship should be repeated.

At the end of the worship, one should donate sweetmeats made of milk, ghee and coconut to Brahmin while reciting-'May the Lord materialize all my wishes.' Seeing off the Brahmin, one should break his fast at the end.

On the same day, in the month of Pausha, one should observe a fast and worship Lord Vishnu's idol bathing it with milk while reciting NAMO NARAYANA.

In this worship also, there is provision of nightlong prayers and vigilance. Donating the Brahmins with rice, pulses, ghee etc., one should respectfully feed them and break his fast in the last. Donation of Dakshaina is a must. Similarly, on the same day in the month of Magh, there is a provision of daylong fast and worship. This time, five kilos of sesame seeds are donated to the Brahmins.

On the twelfth day of Shukla Paksha in Phagun, one should bathe Sri Hari's idol with five liters of milk. Then one hundred and eight oblations of sesame seeds and ghee are made to the sacred fire. Nightlong prayers, feeding of Brahmins etc. are as usual. In this worship, unhusked rice is donated. The required mantra is GOVINDAY NAMASTUBHYAM

On the same day in the month of Chaitra, there is a provision of bathing Vishnu's idol with five liters of ghee and making oblations of honey, ghee and sesame seeds one hundred and eight times while reciting -NAMOSTU VISHNAVE TUBHYAM

Then four kilos of rice are donated to a Brahmin.

On the twelfth day in the brighter phase of Vaishakh, there is a provision of bathing Vishnu's idol with milk and making one hundred and eight oblations of ghee reciting -NAMASTE MADHUHANTE

On the twelfth day in the brighter phase of Jyeshtha, there is a provision of offering one hundred and eight oblations of kheer (rice cooked in four liters of milk) while reciting NAMA TRIVIKRAMAY.

Twenty Malpuas (wheat flour kneaded in milk and sugar and fried in ghee) are donated to a Brahmin.

On the same day in the month of Ashadh, Lord Vishnu's idol is bathed with four liters of milk. Then oblations of ghee are made and cereal mixed with coconut and curd are donated to the Brahmins. This worship is directed to Vamana incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Hence, mantra NAMASTE VAMANAY is recited all along the rituals.

In the month of Shravan, there is a provision of bathing Lord's idol with milk and honey on the twelfth day of the brighter phase. Then one hundred and eight oblations are made reciting - SRIDHARAY NAMOSTUTE.

Then four liters of milk, clothes and two golden earrings are donated to the Brahmin.

Lord's idol should be bathed with milk while reciting - HRISHIKESH NAMOSTUBHYAM on the twelfth day in the month of Bhadrapad.

Then one hundred and eight oblations are made with cooked cereals mixed with honey. Wheat donated along with gold to the Brahmins besides feeding them with respect.

In the month of Ashwin also, Lord's idol is bathed with five liters of milk. Then, one hundred and eight oblations are offered with ghee, sesame seeds and rice reciting - NAMASTE PADMANABHAY.

Two hundred and fifty grams of honey are donated to a Brahmin. In the month of Kartik, on the same day, Lord's idol is bathed with four liters of milk, curd or ghee while reciting- NAMO DAMODARAY.

Then, one hundred and eight oblations are offered with sesame seeds mixed with honey and ghee. This worship is closed with donating five types of edible items to a deserving Brahmin, feeding him and seeing him off with Dakshina.

O Munivar! Those who observe this virtuous fast for the twelve months of a year attains to the supreme abode. Observance of this fast for one or two months only is also equally benefiting. If this fast is observed for a year, there is a provision of special closing ritual at the end so that one shouldn't have to observe it again in his life. This closing ritual is performed on the twelfth day of the darker phase in the month of Margsheersh.

One should get up early in the morning that day and after attending routine tasks; he should take bath, wear white clothes, smear sandalwood paste on the forehead and make a square-shaped altar on the ground. This altar should be decorated with jingling bells, whiskers, flags and white cloth. On the four corners of the altar, four lamps should be lighted.

At the center of the altar, a Sarvatobhadra wheel is drawn and twelve urns filled with water are kept on it. Putting five kinds of gems in these urns, they should be covered with white cloth. The worshipper must procure silver or gold idols of Lakshmi and Lord Vishnu and place them on the lids of the urns. Frugality is not expected in this ritual. These idols should be bathed with milk containing ghee, honey, curd and five types of dry fruits. It should be followed with proper worship of Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi. These rituals last nightlong.

Next morning, oblations are offered with sesame seeds reciting all the twelve mantras described above. Donation of ten Malpuas, curd, kheer, ghee etc. are made to twelve Brahmins. At last, all the idols and other materials are handed over to the priest who had guided the worship. Devotee must dine after all and he should not speak during dining. All the desires of the one who observes all these twelve fasts and closes them properly are fulfilled and he attains abode of Vishnu along with his twenty-one generations.

CHAPTER - 17 DESCRIPTION OF FAST FOR LAKSHMINARAYAN

Sanatkumar says: " O great among the sages! Now I am narrating about an excellenfast, which destroys all the sins. Observing fast on full Moon day is considered excellent among all the fasts. It leads to fulfillment of all the desires and protects the devotee from influence of harsh planets. Like the fast of Dwadashi, this fast is also begun from the month of Margsheersh and observed continuously on every full Moon day of succeeding months till Kartik when it is closed with proper rituals".

To begin with, one should start worshipping Lord Vishnu since the morning of full Moon day in the month of Margsheersh wearing white clothes and reciting NAMO NARAYANA.

After the worship, the devotee must perform a Havan on a square-shaped altar offering oblations with cooked cereals, sesame seeds, ghee etc. White flowers, unbroken rice grains and water are offered to the Lord. In the evening, the same things are offered to the rising full Moon also. A devotee must pass the night engaged in religious discussion, singing of devotional songs etc. Next day, donations are made to the Brahmins after performing usual worship. The same rituals are performed every month to observe the fast.

Rituals for closing this fast in the month of Kartik on full Moon day are also elaborate.

Fist of all, the devotee should build a rectangular canopy and decorate it with floral garlands, arches, lamps, cinnabar, mirrors, whiskers etc. At the center of the canopy, on the ground, Sarvatobhadra wheel should be drawn with five pillars. Then one to twelve urns are kept on this wheel and on these urns, silver or golden idols of Lord Vishnu are placed. These idols are bathed

with milk containing curd, ghee, honey and five types of dry fruits. Then a proper elaborate worship is carried out for these idols. Night is passed singing devotional songs. Next morning, after proper worship, these idols are donated to the presiding priest. It is followed by feeding of Brahmins. All these rituals are closed with performing a Havan offering sesame seeds as oblation. Those who perform these worships with proper rituals enjoy worldly comforts lifelong and attain abode of Lord Vishnu.

CHAPTER - 18 FLAGGING IN THE TEMPLE OF LORD VISHNU

Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! Now I am narrating about the flagging fast in order to please Lord Vishnu. He who performs this fast is even worshipped by Brahma and other deities. This fast accords virtues equal to those of donating one thousand carats of gold to a Brahmin or those attained taking bath in the Ganges and worshipping Shivalinga and basil sapling. " The devotee should observe this fast on the tenth day of the brighter phase in the month of Kartik. He should worship Sri Hari since morning after taking bath and wearing fresh clothes. He is expected to sleep before the idol that day. Next day, he should again perform worship, recite Nandishraddh along with four Brahmins and bathe masts of the two flags. He should then worship the Sun, the Moon and Garuda.

Then turmeric, sandalwood paste are smeared on the masts and white flowers are offered on them. Thereafter, the devotee must smear just enough ground with cow dung and produce a fire in an altar. One hundred and eight oblations are made with kheer in this fire. Havan thus performed is directed to Lord Vishnu, Brahma and Lakshmi then eight oblations are offered reciting -VENTEYAY SWAHA.

It is followed by oblations offered to the Sun, the Moon and Kamadhenu.

The night is passed in worship and performing Havans. Next morning, the same rituals are performed to worship Lord Vishnu. At last, the flags are carried to a temple of Lord Vishnu and installed at the pinnacle or on top of a column. Lord Vishnu is worshipped with proper rituals. Circumambulating the temple, one should then present Brahmins with clothes and Dakshaina, feed them and should take food after all. It is said that as long as the flag flutters in air, as much sins of the devotee are destroyed and he attains the abode of Lord Vishnu.

CHAPTER - 19 TALE OF THE KING SUMITS PREVIOUS BIRTH

Narada says: "O Sanatkumar! A king Sumit had performed this flagging fast for the first time. Kindly narrate to me the tale of his life."

Sanatkumar says: During Satya Yuga, a Somavanshi king Sumit was ruling the entire earth. He was very religious in nature and a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. He served the other devotees with respect and was a down to earth person.

His queen Satyamati was also a chaste woman. Both of them were the great worshippers of Sri Hari and knew everything about their previous birth. They regularly donated cereals and water. Satyamati used to dance in the temple of Lord Vishnu with pure feelings. The king also would install a big and beautiful flag in the temple on the twelfth day of brighter phase of every month. Their reputation had reached all the three worlds. One day, a sage Vibhandak came to visit the king along with his disciples. The king and the queen treated the sage with respect and the king himself seated on a lower seat before the sage.

The king says: "I am saved O sage! Now order me how can I serve you?"

The sage says: "O king! I am very much pleased with you. Now I will ask you a few questions. Answer them honestly. You regularly install a big and beautiful flag in the temple of Lord Vishnu whereas there are many more rituals to please Him. Tell me the reason for your actions."

The king says: "O sage! I tell the reason for my action. Kindly listen to it. In the previous birth, I was a Shudra named Malini and always engaged in appalling activities. One day, I abandoned my family and society and migrated to the forest where I sustained myself on deer's flesh. But there too, I used to rob the passersby. One day, I had nothing to eat nor could I lay my hands on any passerby. Scorching sun of the summer was adding to my woe moreover. Thus perplexed by the thirst, hunger and intense heat, I was roaming in the forest when all of a sudden I stumbled upon a temple of Lord Vishnu. It had long been deserted and was very much in dilapidated condition. A small lake was also there beside the temple. In the lake, beautiful birds like swan and ducks were playing and delicious fruits and scented flowers also abounded in the forest. Since I was feeling tired to the point of dropping down, I ate the fruits which had fallen on the ground. Then I took rest at the bank of the lake.

Since that day, I began to live in that temple. There I repaired the walls, cleaned the premises and erected a small hut for myself. But still, I used to hunt small animals to satisfy my hunger. Twenty years passed like that. One day, a Sadhvi (a female hermit) named Avakokila, who hailed from a Nishad family in Vindhyachal, came there. Her family members had deserted her because of sinister actions she was involved in. She was thin and lean due to continuous starvation. Feeling pity on her, I gave her some fruits and flesh to eat. When she recovered, she narrated her tale that I am narrating to you as it was."

Sadhvi says: "I was born in the family of oarsman, Daruk was my father. I was a great backbiter, thief and sinner. My family therefore deserted me. For sometime, my husband fostered me but he too died. Since then, I have been wandering from this place to that and it is because of Lord's grace that I have arrived here."

The king says: "Listening to her tale, I married her and we began to live in the temple. Every day we used to eat flesh and fruit. One day, under the intoxication of wine, we enjoyed our time greatly. We even began to dance forgetting our physical condition. Suddenly, agents of Yama arrived there and began to tighten their noose around us. Simultaneously, Sri Hari too sent His agents."

Vishnu's agents say: "O imprudent Yamadoots! Release this great devotee of Lord Vishnu.

Yamadoots say: "These are abject sinners. We will definitely take them with us."

These words infuriated the agents of Vishnu.

Vishnu's agents say: "They are not sinners. They are great devotees and the servers of Lord Vishnu. This woman has performed a dance while this man has installed a flag in the temple. Thus, their sins have been destroyed and they have now a right to the supreme abode. They have served this temple for the past thirty-two years."

Saying this, the agents of Vishnu snapped the noose and carried us to the abode of Vishnu in a divine aircraft. Hearing this tale from the king Sumit, sage Vibhandak felt extreme joy and went to the forest.

CHAPTER - 20 DESCRIPTION OF HARIPANCHRATRA VRATA

Sanatkumar says: O Narada! I am now narrating about another fast. It is Haripanchak fast and is rare in all the worlds. It destroys all the sorrows of the devotee, fulfills his all desires and helps him attain the four goals of life. It is observed for five days in the month of Margsheersha starting from the tenth day of the brighter phase till the full Moon day. On the first day, a day long fast is observed after worshipping Lord Vishnu in the morning. It is broken with a plain meal in the evening.

Next day, Lord's idol is bathed with milk containing ghee, curd, honey and five types of dry fruits followed by usual worship. Vows of the fast are recited and prayers are made for their successful completion. That whole night and also the subsequent nights till full Moon night are passed reciting Lord's name and singing devotional songs. Bathing of Lord's idol with milk containing ghee, curd, honey and dry fruits continues in the morning everyday till full Moon day.

On the full Moon day, Havan is performed with oblations of sesame seeds and donations. On the sixth day, the devotee must drink Panchgavya and worship Sri Hari, feed Brahmins and only then should take meal silently. This fast is observed every month till Kartik and closing rituals are taken up in the month of Margsheersha next year. During the closing rituals, the devotee should observe day long fast on the eleventh day and take only Panchgavya on the twelfth day. Thereafter he should worship Lord Vishnu, donate honey, ghee, fruits, kheer and an urn filled with water and containing five jewels to the Brahmin. He should then feed the Brahmins before himself taking any meal.

O Narada! Those who observe this Haripanchak fast never return from Brahmaloaka. Those who desire for salvation should essentially observe this fast. It destroys all the sins like a fire destroys a forest. Its virtues are equal to those of donating millions of cows.

CHAPTER - 21 DESCRIPTION OF THE FRUITS OF FAST

Sanatkumar says:"Now I am narrating about an excellent fast for the benefit of the world. Listen to it carefully O Narada! This fast must be observed in the months of Ashadh, Shravan, Bhadrapad or Ashwin. On any day during the brighter phase of these months, the devotees must drink Panchgavya and pass his time in the vicinity of Lord Vishnu's idol. Then, reciting scriptures in the guidance of learned Brahmins, he should take a vow to observe a month long fast praying Lord Vishnu to protect him from any unforeseen crises. The devotee should since then pass his time in a temple for one month. Everyday, he should bathe the idol with milk containing ghee, curd, honey and dry fruits and light the lamps before the idol. He is also expected to pass his life in a natural way without using any artificial thing like toothpaste or soap. Then he should feed a Brahmin and give them Dakshaina. According to the provision of fast, the devotee should feed at least twelve Brahmins and donate jewelry. Virtues of this fast are enormous. A widow woman who has no son, ascetic, bachelor and Vanaprasthi should essentially observe this fast.

CHAPTER - 22 TALE OF BHADRASHEEL BRAHMIN

Sanatkumar says: "O Narada! A fast on Ekadashi (eleventh day) in both the phases of a month pleases Sri Hari and fulfills all the desires. On the eleventh day of each phase, one should not dine. Those who dine on the eleventh day commit severe sins. Salvation from sins like killing a Brahmin is possible but there is no method to eliminate the sins incurred because of dining on the eleventh day. Brahmins should essentially observe fast on the eleventh day of each phase. The preparations for Ekadashi Vrata start on the tenth day. The devotee should worship Sri Hari in the morning with proper rituals and pass the night in the vicinity of the idol."

On the eleventh day, the devotee should worship Sri Hari in the morning and take an oath to observe fast during the day and pray the Lord to protect him from calamities. The devotee must pass the night singing devotional songs, reciting scriptures and if possible dancing. In the morning of the twelfth day, he should worship Lord Vishnu as usual. Then he should feed Brahmins and make donations as per his powers. Performing five kinds of Yagyas, the devotee should break his fast in the last. During the period of fast, the devotee must not see wretched ones and desist from talking to such people who oppose Brahmins.

As there is no pilgrimage place holier than the Ganges; no teacher greater than the Mother and no deity more virtuous than Lord Vishnu. Similarly there is no fast greater than Ekadashi Vrata is. O Narada! I am now narrating an old tale. Listen to it carefully.

In the ancient times, a great sage Galav lived in the dense forest on the bank of the river Narmada. He was very peace loving and truth abiding in nature. The forest surrounding his hermitage was the playground for beautiful fauna, Yakshas, Gandharvas and Vidhyadhars. Sage Galav passed his time engaged in penance. Thus, he lived there for a long time. He had an equally virtuous son named Bhadrasheel who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu and who knew everything about his previous birth. In his childhood, Bhadrasheel used to play with his friends but his plays reflected his religious sentiments. He would make an earthen idol of Lord Vishnu and worship it. He also would tell his friends to always worship Lord Vishnu and observe fast on the eleventh day of every phase in every month. His friends too followed him. During the

worship, Bhadrasheel used to wish well for the entire world. His activities pleased the sage Galav very much.

Galav says: "O fortunate one! You are really Bhadrasheel because even the Yogis rarely have a nature like yours. You always indulge in worship of Hari, benefit of all and observe fast on Ekadashi. You always abstain from forbidden work. How come, you acquired such a peaceful and unconflicting mind. I am very much pleased with you. Kindly tell me, about your achievements."

Bhadrasheel says: "O father! I have some remembrance of my previous birth. During my previous birth, Yama had preached me about religion." These words surprised Galav. He says: "O fortunate one! Who were you in your previous birth? What did Yamaraj said to you and why?"

Bhadrasheel says: "O great sage! I was a king in Soma dynasty. I had received knowledge from Dharmakeerti and Dattatreya. I ruled continuously for thousand years. During this period, I committed various religious as well as irreligious tasks. In the company of imposters, I too became an imposter. Working diplomatically, I destroyed Yagyas. My subjects also followed me and began to behave irreligiously. I received sixth part of their evil deeds. One day, I went to the forest hunting. There, I killed many animals.

After a while, perplexed by thirst and hunger, I reached the bank of Narmada. I had strayed in deeper forests all alone. The intense sun was scorching my body. I was about to drop down because of hunger when I saw that people on the bank of Narmada were observing Ekadashi Vrata. I joined them and stayed awake all along the night without taking any food. But I could not bear the starvation and exertion and died as a result. Fierce looking Yamadoots took me to Yamaraj. Yamaraj asked Chitragupt to open the account of my life. Chitragupt thought for a moment and said: "Its true O Yamaraj that this person is a sinner. But now he is free from his sins due to observing fast on Ekadashi and passing his night in the company of pious devotees." Hearing these words, Yamaraj greeted me and worshipped me with devotion. Then, he called his servers."

Yamaraj says: "Listen to me, O agents! I am narrating something to your interest. Never bring to me in future anybody who is engaged in religious task. Stay away from those who always recite the name of Sri Hari. Greet them from a distance. This is my order as well as teaching to all of you. Spare all those who serve their teachers, love their religion, are helpless, serve the pious one and are truly deserving. Bring all such people who abuse their mother, hate the world, steal the wealth of temples and Brahmins, who are killers, who do not observe fast on Ekadashi, who are short tempered, criticize me and nurture hostility with others."

Hearing such words from Yamaraj, fire of penance began to burn within me. More intense this fire grew, more of my sins were destroyed. I acquired an appearance of Sri Hari. Even, Yamaraj greeted me with respect. His action even surprised the Yamadoots. Worshipping me, Yamaraj sent me on a divine aircraft to the abode of Vishnu.

O father! I was passing my time happily. I did not know how and when crores of years passed. Then I arrived in Indraloka. There I stayed with the gods for many Kalpas. It was after such a great experience that I have arrived on the earth. Having the knowledge of my previous birth, I always engaged in the worship of Hari and inspire others to follow suit. Earlier, I didn't know the virtues of Ekadashi Vrata. But now, because of the knowledge of my previous births, I have come to know about it. I observed it without any desire and without knowing that I was actually observing a fast and received so much in return. Hence, I cannot tell how much will one receive if he observes Ekadashi Vrata with some desire. Those who devotedly worship Sri Hari and observe Ekadashi Vrata attain even the supreme abode of Lord Vishnu."

The words of his son gladdened sage Galav. He says- "My birth has been successful because I got such a devotee son like you who told me the complete method of worshipping Lord Vishnu."