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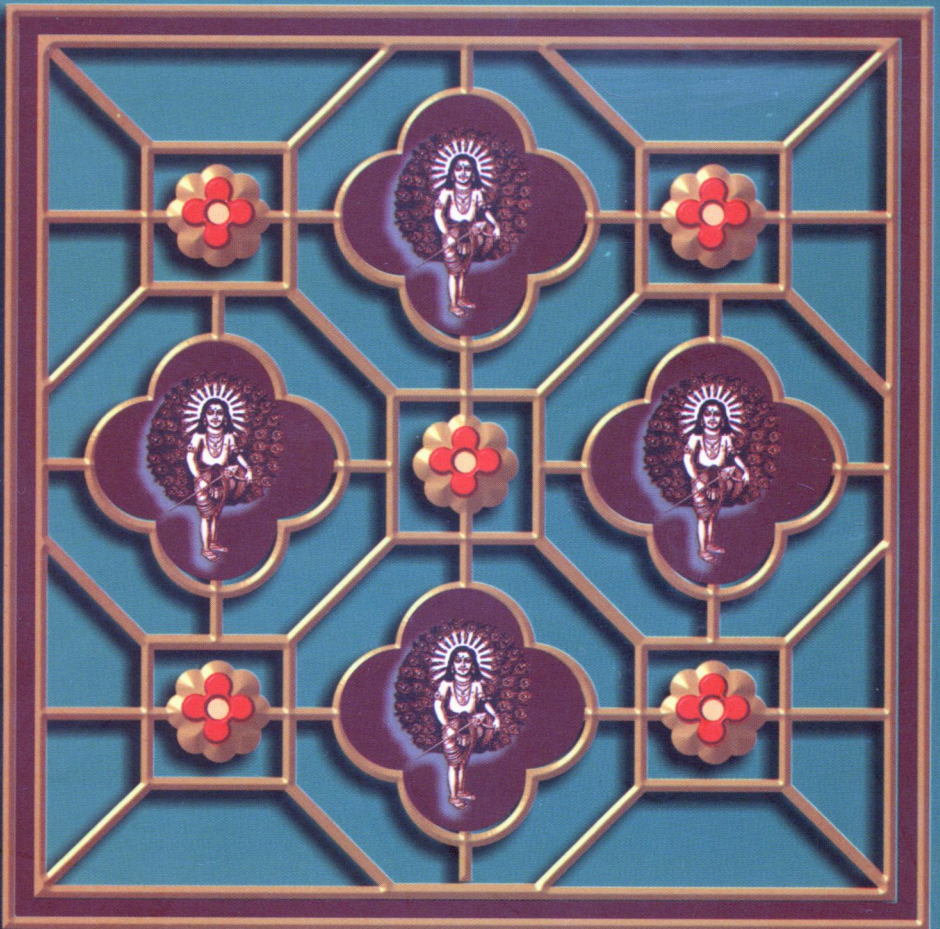
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# SKANDA PURANA

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# STORIES FROM THE SKANDA PURANA

Śrīla Kṛṣṇa Dvaipayāna Vyāsadeva

Told by Pūrṇaprajña Dāsa





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## INTRODUCTION

The Skanda Purana is one of the eighteen major Puranas, as stated in the Shrimad-Bhagavatam (12.7.23-24): “The eighteen major Purāṇas are the Brahmā, Padma, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Liṅga, Garuḍa, Nārada, Bhāgavata, Agni, Skanda, Bhaviṣya, Brahma-vaivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Vāmana, Varāha, Matsya, Kūrma and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas.”

Of all the Puranas, the Skanda Purana is by far the largest, as explained in the Shrimad-Bhagavatam (12.13.4-9): “The Brahmā Purāṇa consists of ten thousand verses, the Padma Purāṇa of fifty-five thousand, Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa of twenty-three thousand, the Śiva Purāṇa of twenty-four thousand and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam of eighteen thousand. The Nārada Purāṇa has twenty-five thousand verses, the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa nine thousand, the Agni Purāṇa fifteen thousand four hundred, the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa fourteen thousand five hundred, the Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa eighteen thousand and the Liṅga Purāṇa eleven thousand. The Varāha Purāṇa contains twenty-four thousand verses, the Skanda Purāṇa eighty-one thousand one hundred, the Vāmana Purāṇa ten thousand, the Kūrma Purāṇa seventeen thousand, the Matsya Purāṇa fourteen thousand, the Garuḍa Purāṇa nineteen thousand and the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa twelve thousand. Thus the total number of verses in all the Purāṇas is four hundred thousand. Eighteen thousand of these, once again, belong to the beautiful Bhāgavatam.”

Shrila Prabhupada frequently explained that, of the eighteen Puranas, six are meant for those in the mode of ignorance, six are meant for those in the mode of passion, and six are meant for those in the mode of ignorance.

In a Bhagavad-gita lecture, Shrila Prabhupada once said, “There are eighteen Purāṇas. Men are conducted by three qualities: the modes of goodness, modes of passion and modes of ignorance. To reclaim all these conditioned souls in different varieties of



life, there are presentation of the Purāṇas. Six Purāṇas are meant for those who are in the modes of goodness. And six Purāṇas are meant for the persons who are in the modes of passion. And six Purāṇas are for those who are in the modes of ignorance. This Padma Purāṇa is meant for the persons who are in the modes of goodness. In Vedic rituals, you find so many differences of ritualistic performances. It is due to different kinds of men. Just like you have heard that in the Vedic literature there is a ritualistic ceremony of offering goat sacrifice in the presence of goddess Kālī. But this Purāṇa, the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, is meant for persons in the modes of ignorance.”

As far as I know, Shrila Prabhupada never mentioned for which people the Skanda Purana was written. In the Garuda Purana, which is meant for those in the mode of goodness, it is said that those Puranas compiled for persons in passion and ignorance contain some sections beneficial for those in the mode of goodness. These sections can be enjoyed by persons cultivating the mode of goodness, while leaving aside the rest.

The Skanda Purana principally deals with glorification of Lord Shiva and holy places of pilgrimage associated with him. For this reason, I tend to think that this Purana is principally meant for those in the mode of ignorance.

In the Krishna Book, in the chapter entitled, The Deliverance of Lord Shiva, Shrila Prabhupada wrote: Vṛkāsura was searching after a benediction and trying to decide which of the three presiding deities to worship in order to get it. In the meantime he happened to meet the great sage Nārada and consulted with him as to whom he should approach to achieve quick results from his austerity.

He inquired, “Of the three deities, namely Lord Brahmā, Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva, who is most quickly satisfied?”

Nārada could understand the plan of the demon, and he advised him, “You had better worship Lord Śiva; then you will quickly get the desired result. Lord Śiva is very quickly satisfied and very quickly dissatisfied also. So you try to satisfy Lord Śiva.”

Nārada also cited instances wherein demons like Rāvaṇa and Bāṇāsura were enriched with great opulences simply by satisfying Lord Śiva with prayers. Because the great sage Nārada was aware of the nature of the demon Vṛkāśura, he did not advise him to approach Viṣṇu or Lord Brahmā. Persons such as Vṛkāśura, who are situated in the material mode of ignorance, cannot stick to the worship of Viṣṇu.

Still, there are very interesting sections of the Skanda Purana, such as those that describe the glories of Jagannatha Puri and Vyenkata Hill. And, as in all the Puranas, there are numerous stories that clearly illustrate that piety is the root of happiness and sin is the root of misery. Also, as in all the Puranas, there are innumerable short statements that are veritable gems of wisdom.

The great acharyas, including Shrila Prabhupada, frequently quoted important verses from the Skanda Purana. In a purport to Shrimad-Bhagavatam (2.9.36), Shrila Prabhupada wrote: Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī also quotes another common passage, which is found in three Purāṇas, namely the Padma Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa and Liṅga Purāṇa. It runs as follows:

*āloḍya sarva-śāstrāṇi  
vicārya ca punaḥ punaḥ  
idam ekaṁ suniṣpannam  
dhyeyo nārāyaṇaḥ sadā*

“By scrutinizingly reviewing all the revealed scriptures and judging them again and again, it is now concluded that Lord Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Absolute Truth, and thus He alone should be worshiped.”

Every day, in all ISKCON temples, a verse is chanted that is described by Shrila Prabhupada in a purport to Shri Chaitanya-charitamrita (Antya 16.96):

The remnants of Kṛṣṇa’s food are mixed with His saliva. In the Mahābhārata and the Skanda Purāṇa it is stated:



*mahā-prasāde govinde nāma-brahmaṇi vaiṣṇave  
sv-alpa-ṇyavatām rājan viśvāso naiva jāyate*

“Persons who are not very highly elevated in pious activities cannot believe in the remnants of food [prasādam] of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, nor in Govinda, the holy name of the Lord, nor in the Vaiṣṇavas.”

As with my summaries of three other Puranas, the Padma Purnana, Narada Purana, and Garuda Purana, it is my hope that you, the reader, will find many hours of entertainment and enlightenment provided by the interesting stories and words of wisdom found therein.

Pūrṇaprajña Dāsa

## SKANDA PURANA

**B**efore reciting this Skanda Purana, which is the very means of conquest, one should offer respectful obeisances unto the Personality of Godhead, Vasudeva, unto Nara-narayana Rishi, the supermost human being, and unto mother Sarasvati, the goddess of learning.

Shrila Vyasadeva said, "At the forest of Naimisha, great sages, headed by Shaunaka Rishi, were engaged in a prolonged series of sacrificial performances. One day, my disciple, Suta Gosvami, came there with a desire to have the sages' association."

The sages welcomed Suta Gosvami and worshiped him with offerings of auspicious articles. Thereafter, as Suta Gosvami was seated at the head of the assembly, the sages said, "Please narrate to us the greatness of Lord Shiva, who carries a trident in his hand. We would like to hear about the merit achieved by worshiping him and meditating upon his pastimes."

Suta Gosvami said, "In the eighteen Puranas, Lord Shiva is glorified as the supreme lord within this world. Indeed, he is considered to be practically on a level with the Personality of Godhead, Lord Vishnu. Of course, nowhere in the Puranas is Lord Shiva glorified as being superior to Lord Vishnu in any way. Still, his glorification is very prominent in the Puranas because materialistic men are advised to worship him for the fulfillment of their desires."

"There is no doubt that one who hates Lord Shiva, or is envious of him, is a great sinner. It was Lord Shiva who swallowed the deadly poison and who destroyed the sacrifice of Daksha."

The sages were eager to hear these pastimes of Lord Shiva and so Suta Gosvami began by narrating the following story. Formerly, at the instance of Lord Brahma, Dakṣa gave his daughter, Dakṣayani, in marriage to Lord Shiva. Once, it so happened that Dakṣa came to Naimisharanya and he was honored by all the sages

performing sacrifice there. Mahadeva (Lord Shiva) was present at that time but he did not even stand up to show his father-in-law respect, nor did he speak any words of greeting.

Upon seeing this, Daksha furiously said, "Everywhere the demigods and sages bow down to me with great respect. How is it that this vicious fellow does not offer obeisances upon seeing me? This shameless person lives in a crematorium, surrounded by ghosts and evil spirits!"

"Only wicked people who are habituated to sinful acts behave arrogantly in the presence of a brahmana. Such persons should be killed or driven out by pious people. I will therefore curse him!"

"All of you brahmanas assembled here—heed my words! This Rudra should be banned from all sacrificial performances because he has transgressed the rules of etiquette as prescribed by the varnashrama system."

Nandi, the son of Shilada, angrily replied, "Why should my lord, Mahesha, be excluded from sacrificial performances? It is by remembrance of him alone that a sacrifice bears fruit! You have cursed Lord Shiva unjustly because of your brahminical pride. Evil-minded Daksha, it is Shambhu alone who protects the universe!"

While hearing this, Daksha became more enraged and he cursed Nandi, saying, "All of you who are devoted to Lord Shiva have made yourselves beyond the purview of the Vedas by clinging to heretical doctrines! You are beyond the boundary of good conduct and are thus are not fit to be seen by true gentlemen!"

In this way, Lord Shiva and his servants were cursed by Daksha. Nandi retorted, "Although we, the servants of Mahadeva, are faultless, you have unnecessarily cursed us. Now, I shall counter-curse you for your rash behavior!"

"O Daksha, you brahmanas claim to be followers of the Vedas but actually, you are very lusty, greedy, and deluded. In the future, brahmanas will perform sacrifices on behalf of shudras. They will always remain impoverished and greedy for gifts of money."

Upon hearing this, Lord Shiva smilingly said to Nandi, "You



should not be angry at the brahmanas because they are always to be considered as our elders and superiors. Who are you? Who am I? Who are these brahmanas? We are all parts and parcels of the Supreme Soul.

Rise above the concept of duality and become enlightened. View everything through the eye of transcendental knowledge. Be situated in your eternal self and avoid the base material qualities, such as anger.”

Nandi took this advice to heart and thereafter, he closely associated with Lord Shiva and attained the state of transcendental ecstasy. Daksha returned home in a very angry mood, however, accompanied by many sages, and he continued to criticize Lord Shiva. Indeed, he never regained his composure after that incident.

Some time later on, Daksha commenced a great sacrifice and all of the great sages and demigods were invited. Kuvera arrived, riding on the Pushpaka chariot. Vayu rode on his deer, Agni on his goat, and Nirriti on a ghost. All were honored by Daksha. Residences of great beauty had been constructed by Tvastri for the accommodation of the guests.

Here, it is mentioned that this sacrifice took place at Kanakhala. Some commentators say that this is a village two miles east of Haridvara, at a place where the Ganga and Niladhara rivers unite. After Daksha was initiated into the performance of the sacrifice, the sage, Dadhichi, said to him, “This sacrifice does not seem pleasing without the presence of Lord Shiva. Even an inauspicious occasion, when presided over by him, becomes auspicious. Therefore, you should urge Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu, and Indra to invite him without delay. Have him brought here, along with your daughter.”

The cruel Daksha derisively replied, “It is Lord Vishnu who is the root of all auspiciousness and He is present here. Lord Brahma has come along with the personified Vedas and the king of heaven, Indra, is also present, along with the other demigods. Of what need is there of Shiva? Of course, I admit that I gave my daughter to him in marriage but that was done under the instruction of Lord Brahma.”

“Lord Shiva is degraded and he is loved by those who are

similarly inclined. Indeed, he is the lord of the ghosts, witches and goblins! He is too proud of himself! He is deluded and stubborn! Therefore, he is totally unworthy of taking part in this glorious sacrifice. O brahmana, you should not speak like this to me again."

Dadhichi said, "It is a great injustice to the brahmanas and demigods that Lord Shiva has been excluded from their association. I am sure that a great destruction awaits all those who are present here."

After saying this, Dadhichi walked out in protest and returned to his hermitage. Daksha laughed and then said, "Well, there goes a staunch follower of Shiva. All those slow-witted rogues who are possessed by evil spirits, who are enamored by heretical doctrines, and who are therefore excluded from Vedic rituals, should also leave at once."

Then, addressing the brahmanas, Daksha said, "You are all devoted to Lord Vishnu and so make my sacrifice a grand success."

Meanwhile, Daksha's daughter, Sati, as she was playing with her girlfriends, happened to see Chanda, along with Rohini, as they were on their way to attend Daksha's sacrifice. She told her friend, Vijaya, "Go and ask Chandra where he is going."

Vijaya approached Chandra and made this inquiry and then reported back to Dakshayani. When she heard that Chandra was going to attend her father's sacrifice, Sati wondered, "Why didn't my father invite me and my husband? Has my mother forgotten me? I shall ask Shankara the reason for this."

She saw Lord Shiva in the midst of an assembly of his associates. Some were hideous and terrifying to behold. Some were headless trunks, others had no chest, and some had no eyes. All were dressed in elephant hides, had matted hair, and were adorned with rudraksha beads. They were all devoid of attachment, they were conquerors of their senses, and they were antagonistic toward the objects of sensual pleasure.

Bewildered in mind, Dakshayani suddenly presented herself before Lord Shiva. Pleased to see her, Mahadeva placed her upon his lap and asked, "O lady of slender waist, what is the purpose of your coming here?"

Sati replied, “O lord, how is it that we are not going to the sacrifice of my father? Tell me everything clearly. It is the duty of friends to regularly associate with one another. By doing so, they enjoy great pleasure and increase their mutual love. Therefore, we should go to my father’s sacrifice, even if we have not been invited.”

Lord Shiva said, “O gentle lady, you must not go to your father’s sacrifice. Those who go to others’ houses without being invited are often insulted in a way that is worse than death. It is for this reason that I advise you not to go.”

Becoming somewhat angry, Sati replied, “You are truly the lord of sacrifice. How is it that my wicked-minded father has not invited you? I wish to understand clearly the attitude of my father and so grant me permission to go to his sacrifice today.”

Finally, Lord Shiva gave his assent, telling Sati to ride on Nandi in the company of many of his other associates. In fact, at Lord Shiva’s bidding, sixty thousand of his ganas (followers) accompanied Sati. After Sati’s departure, Lord Shiva exclaimed to himself, “After being insulted by her father, Sati will never go to his house again!”

Upon Sati’s arrival, the demigods and others were very happy to see her. Sati went and offered her obeisances to her parents and then asked her father, “Why was Shambhu not invited by you? He is the lord of sacrifice and its successful completion depends upon him alone. Are the other invited guests, headed by Vishnu and Brahma, ignorant of his true position?”

Addressing Lord Brahma, Sati said, “Formerly, you had five heads, When you spoke rudely to Maheshvara, he made you four-headed. Have you forgotten this?”

While listening to his daughter speak, Daksha became angry. He said, “Your talk has no relevance to the present occasion. Why did you come here? Of course, you are free to stay or leave—that is up to you. The fact is, however, that your husband, Shiva, is an inauspicious fellow. Being the lord of ghosts and spirits, he is excluded from Vedic rituals. That is why I did not invite him.”



“It was my mistake to give you in marriage to that dull-witted sinner and so it would be better if you would abandon your body.”

Upon witnessing how her father was full of contempt for Lord Shiva, Sati became furious. She thought, “How can I go back to my husband? Both the one who criticizes Lord Shiva and the one who hears it must enter hell and remain there for as long as the sun and moon shine. It would be better for me to enter fire and give up my life!”

Sati made up her mind in this way and then entered fire, thus relinquishing her body. At this, the associates of Lord Shiva became terribly aggrieved. After jumping onto the sacrificial platform, they cut the limbs from their own bodies, thus giving up their lives.

In this way, the sacrifice of Daksha was disrupted. The devas and brahmanas silently remained in their places, in a fearful state of mind. Meanwhile, news of what had happened was relayed to Lord Shiva by Narada Muni. In terrible anger, Lord Shiva jumped up from his seat, pulled out some of his matted hair, and dashed it onto the ground. Immediately, a great demon, Virabhadra, rose up from the earth, accompanied by many varieties of fevers in personified forms.

Virabhadra inquired, “My lord, what task is to be accomplished by me?”

Lord Shiva succinctly said, “Go and destroy the sacrifice of Daksha!”

As Virabhadra and his hordes of ghosts and spirits approached, those in the sacrificial arena of Daksha experienced very fearful omens. A strong wind blew carrying dirt and sand. It began to shower blood as all quarters were enveloped in darkness. Thousands of meteors fell upon the earth.

Being frightened, the demigods took shelter of Lord Vishnu and in response, the Lord gave them assurances. At the same time, however, He informed Daksha, “This fearful condition has beset you because of your disregard for Lord Shiva. None of us are powerful

enough to counteract this calamity, which was brought about by your wicked behavior. There is no need to say more.”

Upon hearing this, Dakṣha became pale and sat silently on the ground, absorbed in thought. At this time, Virabhadra arrived upon the scene, accompanied by the nine Durgas (nava-durga). The nine Durgas were Kālī, Kātyāyānī, Iṣhānā, Cāmunda, Mundamardīnī, Bhadrā-kālī, Bhadrā, Tvaritā, and Vaiṣṇavī. A great horde of ghosts and spirits also entered the sacrificial arena. All of the attendants of Lord Śhiva who accompanied Virabhadra had forms resembling that of Mahadeva. They had five heads, blue throats, ten arms, and three eyes. They wore matted hair that bore the emblem of the crescent moon. Virabhadra had three eyes and one thousand arms and he was entwined with many serpents. His chariot was drawn by two thousand horses and one million lions. Defending his two sides were many lions, elephants and sharks.

As music played, the associates of Lord Śhiva went in front of Virabhadra, indulging in various kinds of dances. The great sound of their shouts reverberated throughout the three worlds. The devas, Daityas, and Rakṣaṣhas who had attended Dakṣha’s sacrifice, while observing the portents indicating the destruction of the world, stood up simultaneously to watch the approach of Lord Śhiva’s hordes—some through the sky and some on the ground.

The demigods, demons, and Rakṣaṣhas said, “Let us pick up our weapons and confront them.” Upon seeing how his side was preparing for war and mounting their vehicles, Dakṣha petitioned Lord Viṣṇu to give them all protection.

In response, Lord Viṣṇu told him, “You say that I should protect you and this sacrifice but you seem to forget how you insulted Lord Śhiva at Naimiṣarāṇya. O wicked one, this was a great fault of yours. Now, I do not see anyone competent to protect you from Rudra’s wrath. The performance of a sacrifice, in and of itself, is not sufficient to award one benefit. One who insults Lord Śhiva should never expect to benefit by performing religious rituals. Those who disrespect Lord Śhiva go to hell, even though they may



have performed millions of sacrifices. It is not karma (acts) alone that produces good results—it is the good will of the controller of material nature, Lord Shiva, that insures auspiciousness and prosperity.”

Daksha replied, “O slayer of Madhu, it appears that You are discrediting the authority of the Vedas. How can one renounce the Vedas and accept the authority of Shiva?”

Lord Vishnu said, in a conciliatory manner, “The Vedas mainly deal with the three modes of material nature and the lord of material nature is Shiva. Therefore, for success in the performance of sacrifice, one must take shelter of Lord Shiva.”

As they were conversing in this way, the army of demigods arrived on the scene, being desirous of fighting. At the urging of Bhrigu Muni, the demigods, lead by Indra, were eager to destroy the army of Lord Shiva, led by Virabhadra. Thereafter, in the fierce battle that took place, the demigods routed the army of Lord Shiva’s associates, being strengthened by the mantras chanted by Bhrigu.

Upon seeing the defeat of his army, Virabhadra became enraged. Advancing to the front ranks, he proceeded to create a slaughter among the ranks of the demigods so that they all fled the battlefield, leaving only Indra and the loka-palas, who were still eager to fight.

Indra went and asked Brihaspati, “How can we attain victory?”

Brihaspati unhesitatingly replied, “What was spoken by Lord Vishnu previously has been proven true today. It is not merely the performance of sacrifice or any other Vedic ritual that awards one auspiciousness and prosperity. It is Lord Shiva who imbued material nature with its characteristics that award one happiness and misery. It is the favor of Mahadeva and not the mere performance of sacrifice that should be sought after.”

“Indra, you and the other directors of universal affairs have taken a foolish course of action in trying to oppose Lord Shiva.”



Upon hearing this, Indra and the other demigods became anxious. Virabhadra said to the demigods, "You have come here for the purpose of attaining avadana (glorious achievement). For your satisfaction, I shall now give you avadanas (cutting into pieces).

After saying this, Virabhadra released an onslaught of arrows that made the demigods panic and flee in all directions. Virabhadra and the associates of Lord Shiva then entered the deserted sacrificial arena. At that time, the sages said to Lord Vishnu, "Please protect Daksha's sacrifice. After all, You are the yajna-purusha (personification of sacrifice)."

After hearing this, Lord Janardana became desirous of fighting, for the sake of the brahmanas. Virabhadra then addressed Lord Vishnu, saying, "Why have You come here? You know of my incomparable strength. How can You expect to come out victorious by taking the side of Daksha? Please tell me that."

Coming closer to Lord Vishnu, Virabhadra continued, "To me, You are just like Lord Shiva. If you desire to fight then remain in front of me."

Upon hearing this, Lord Vishnu laughingly replied, "O intelligent one, you were born from the splendor of Rudra. Having been frequently requested by Daksha, I attended his sacrifice because I am subservient to My devotees. It is for this reason that I am subservient to Shiva, as well. Either you will conquer Me, or I will conquer you."

Virabhadra laughed as he humbly bowed down before Lord Vishnu and said, "We are all servants of both You and Shankara."

Lord Vishnu also laughed as He replied, "Fight with Me unhesitatingly. I shall return to My own abode after being satisfied by your onslaught of weapons."

Saying, "So be it," Virabhadra picked up his foremost weapon and roared loudly while Lord Vishnu made a tumultuous sound by blowing His conch shell. Upon hearing that sound, the demigods who had fled the battlefield took heart and returned so that soon, a great battle commenced.

In that terrible conflict, when Virabhadra attempted to swallow Indra and Airavata, Lord Vishnu intervened, pushing the king of heaven behind Him. As they fought, Virabhadra could see that his army was weakening and so he said to the Lord, "You are certainly a heroic warrior and the protector of the devas. If this is actually true then fight with me now, as best You can."

After saying this, Virabhadra released a shower of arrows upon Lord Vishnu. In reply, the Lord released His chakra but it was swallowed by Virabhadra. When He saw this turn of events, the Lord stroked His mouth, causing the chakra to come out of Virabhadra's mouth and return to His hand. After accomplishing this, Lord Vishnu ascended into the sky and returned to His eternal abode, satisfied that He had fulfilled His duty."

After the departure of Lord Vishnu, the demigods and others that had taken part in Daksha's sacrifice were totally vanquished by the devotees of Lord Shiva. Virabhadra cut off Bhrigu's beard and moustache and then knocked out Pusha's teeth. Indeed, the associates of Lord Shiva, being infuriated, created havoc as Daksha fearfully hid himself under the sacrificial altar.

When he understood this, Virabhadra went and caught hold of Daksha. After cutting off his head, he threw it as an offering into the sacrificial fire. While all this was going on, the demigods and others fled the scene.

After returning to his abode, Lord Brahma, who was sorry for what had happened to his son (Daksha), began to think, "What can be done now?" After carefully thinking over the wicked behavior of Daksha, Lord Brahma finally decided to go to Kailasa. Riding upon his swan carrier and accompanied by the chiefs of the demigods, Lord Brahma arrived at Mount Kailasa and saw Lord Shiva sitting with only Nandi as his companion.

After falling flat onto the ground to offer obeisances, Lord Brahma begged for pardon and offered prayers glorifying Lord Shiva in which he expressed how he was aggrieved because of his son, Daksha.

Lord Shiva replied, “The destruction of Dakṣha’s sacrifice was not carried out by me. There is no doubt that he was killed as a result of his own actions. One should never do something that will give pain to others. The pain that one afflicts upon others will no doubt be experienced by oneself, later on.”

Thereafter, Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva went to Kanakhala, where the sacrificial arena was situated. When he saw Lord Shiva come, Virabhadra bowed down to offer obeisances, as did the other *ganas* (associates of Mahadeva). They then stood before Shambhu with folded hands.

Lord Shiva laughingly said, “O hero, what has been done by you? Bring Dakṣha here at once.”

Virabhadra went and brought Dakṣha’s headless trunk, placing it in front of Lord Shiva. Mahadeva asked, “Who removed Dakṣha’s head? Although he was a foolish fellow, I shall now give him back his life.”

Virabhadra explained, “I threw Dakṣha’s head into the sacrificial fire. All that remains here is the deformed head of a bearded goat.”

Lord Shiva then placed the goat’s head upon Dakṣha’s headless trunk so that he came back to life. Upon seeing Rudra in front of him, Dakṣha felt terribly ashamed. He bowed down to Mahadeva and after standing up, he glorified him with many prayers.

Thereafter, Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma returned to their respective abodes.

When the sages at Naimisharanya desired to hear about the origin of the worship of the *shiva-linga*, Suta Gosvami narrated the following story. Some time, long ago, Lord Shiva assumed the form of a mendicant and wandered about, naked, in the forest known as Daruvana, begging alms. At noon, the sages in the forest would bathe in the river, so that their wives were left at home.



At such a time, the wives of the sages happened to see Lord Shiva pass by. They said amongst themselves, "Who is this strange-looking person, appearing as a mendicant? Let's give him alms."

The wives of the sages went to their cottages, brought various kinds of food, and gave it to the mendicant. One of the ladies, who was enamored by Lord Shiva, inquired, "Who are you, O intelligent one? Why have you come to the hermitages of the sages in the guise of a mendicant? Come, sit down here for some time."

Lord Shiva laughingly replied, "I am Ishvara, Lord Shiva."

The lady said, "You say that you are the lord of Mount Kailasa but how is it that you are begging alms without any companion?"

Lord Shiva replied, "I am bereaved because of the loss of my wife, Dakshayani. It is for this reason that I wander about naked, begging alms, O lady of excellent hips. Actually, I do not have any expectation of gaining anything from anyone. Without Sati, none of the women in the world appeal to me. I am telling you the truth, O lady of large eyes."

That lotus-eyed lady said, "There is no doubt that women give great pleasure to a man when they touch him. I am surprised that such women have been renounced by you!"

Lord Shiva, whose begging bowl was now filled with nice food, was surrounded by many beautiful, young women. Thereafter, when Mahadeva began to return to Mount Kailasa, all of these women followed him, forsaking their household duties. With their minds attached to him, they followed Lord Shiva.

For this reason, when the sages returned home after bathing, they found their cottages empty. They said to one another, "Where have our wives gone? By which rascal have they been kidnapped?"

While thinking in this way, the sages searched, here and there, until they came upon their wives, following Lord Shiva. In a rush, they went and stood before Mahadeva, saying with great agitation, "What are you doing, Shambhu? You claim to be detached and self-realized but here you are, kidnapping our wives!"

Although rebuked in this way, Lord Shiva simply continued walking. Being neglected in this way, the sages angrily cursed him, saying, “Because you have abducted our wives—let you immediately become a eunuch.”

As soon as this was said, Lord Shiva’s penis fell to the ground and upon touching the earth, it enormously increased in size. In fact, it pervaded the seven lower planets within an instant. After that, it pervaded the earth and thereafter, the higher planetary systems. Indeed, the entire cosmic manifestation ceased to exist as a separate entity, being merged in that shiva-linga.

As the penis of Lord Shiva was covering all directions, Lord Brahma, the great sages, and the loka-palas became astonished, saying to one another, “What is the actual size of this linga? Upon what does it rest?”

The demigods said to Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma, “You must tell us clearly about the nature of this linga. Then You can rightly be called the protectors of the universe.”

After hearing this, Lord Vishnu departed for the bottom of the universe and Lord Brahma went to the top. Upon reaching the limit of his capabilities, Lord Brahma eagerly looked here and there but could not see the top of the linga. From there, Lord Brahma went to the summit of Mount Meru, where he was greeted by Surabhi, who was standing with Ketaki (a flowering tree).

Lord Brahma told her, “An extraordinary linga has pervaded the entire universe. I was deputed by the demigods to find its top but I failed to do so. Because of this, I wonder what I shall tell them. I request you—go with me to the demigods and lie to them. Tell them that I spotted the top of the linga. If they ask you, ‘Did you see the top of the linga,’ you should reply, ‘Do not doubt—there were witnesses.’ Kindly do me this favor.”

Surabhi and Ketaki accompanied Lord Brahma and went to where the demigods were waiting. Lord Brahma said, “I have seen the top of this wonderful linga. I worshiped it with offerings of ketaki flowers. The top of this linga is soft and wonderfully lustrous.”

As the demigods were thus listening to Lord Brahma's speech, Lord Vishnu returned from the bottom of the universe. He reported to the demigods, "I was eager to see the bottom of the linga but I was unable to do so. This linga is an expansion of Lord Shiva, who is unlimited. It is for this reason that I could not find its limit."

After hearing this, the demigods glorified Lord Vishnu, who then laughed and said to Brahma, "If you have actually seen the top of the linga, do you have any witnesses to back up your story?"

Lord Brahma hurriedly said, "Ketaki and Surabhi. These two were with me and they are my witnesses."

When questioned by Indra, Surabhi replied, "It is true. The top of the linga was seen by Lord Brahma and it was worshiped with an offering of ketaki flowers."

Just at that moment, a voice was heard in the sky, saying, "O splendid one, today you have told a lie! From now on, let your mouth become unholy and thus excluded from religious rites. O Ketaki, even though you are fragrant, from now on, you will be considered unsuitable for the worship of Lord Shiva."

The voice in the sky next cursed Lord Brahma, saying, "O foolish one, why have you childishly lied? Because of this fault, you will never be considered worthy of being worshiped. Besides this, future brahmanas will become deluded and jealous of one another and thus pass their time in useless arguments. Although proud, they will become no better than beggars in the street!"

After being cursed in this way, the demigods and sages took shelter of the shiva-linga, offering prayers in glorification. Finally, the voice of Lord Shiva could be heard. He said, "Do as I say without delay. Offer prayers to Lord Vishnu, begging Him to rectify this awkward situation."

When the demigods offered Him prayers, begging for His protection, Lord Vishnu laughed and replied, "Formerly, when you were oppressed by the demons, I protected you. Today, however, the danger is very severe and so I cannot protect you."

Upon hearing this, the demigods became worried. A voice

from the sky then spoke to them, saying, “O Janardana, worship this linga and in this way, give protection to all moving and non-moving beings.”

Saying, “So be it,” Lord Vishnu worshiped the shiva-linga, while the demigods worshiped Virabhadra, who is non-different from Lord Shiva. Thereafter, the great shiva-linga expanded into the innumerable shiva-lingas that are still worshiped throughout the three worlds.

Suta Gosvami said, “What is the use of so much talk? Every living being is born with the characteristics of the shiva-linga. The shiva-linga represents the penis of Lord Shiva while the base represents the vagina of Goddess Durga, Lord Shiva’s consort. The living entities within the material world are modeled after the union of Lord Shiva and Shakti (Durga). Only those who are extremely foolish fail to worship Mahadeva.”

“Ravana had performed very severe austerities at Gokarna while worshiping Lord Shiva. After one thousand years, he cut off his head and offered it to the shiva-linga. After some time, another head appeared in its place and so he cut it off and offered it once again. Indeed, again and again, Ravana repeated this method of worship.”

“When Mahadeva became pleased with him, Ravana obtained, as a benediction, twice the number of heads as that of his five-headed lord. He was also awarded the rule of Trikuta. Thereafter, Ravana conquered the three worlds and even Lord Shiva was defeated when the king of the Rakshashas lifted up Mount Kailasa.”

“Finally, the demigods assembled atop Mount Meru to discuss what could be done to curb the menace of Ravana. Due to their various weaknesses, none of the demigods were capable of countering Ravana. Being overpowered by lust, Brahma had tried to have sexual intercourse with his daughter. Indra had sex with another’s wife. Chandra had sex with the wife of his preceptor. Yama had been very miserly. Agni, the fire-god, ate everything, indiscriminately, and the others had similar defects.”



“Nandishvara, the associate of Lord Shiva, informed the demigods of how he had previously cursed Ravana to be killed by an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, with the assistance of an army of monkeys. After hearing this, the demigods approached Lord Vishnu and requested Him to incarnate upon the earth for the destruction of Ravana. Lord Vishnu then instructed the demigods to incarnate on the earth as monkeys while He would appear at Ayodhya as the son of King Dasharatha. After saying this, Lord Vishnu disappeared from the demigods’ vision.”

“Thereafter, Nandi, the son of Shilada, appeared as Hanuman and the other demigods expanded to appear as other great monkey heroes. Rama appeared as the son of Kaushalya, Shesha appeared as Lakshman, and Brahmavidya appeared as Sita from a furrow while King Janaka was ploughing the earth. Brahmavidya had formerly appeared as Vedavati.”

“After being killed by Lord Rama in battle, Ravana attained the position of being one of Lord Shiva’s eternal associates.”

Once, Narada Muni desired to see Lord Shiva and so he journeyed to Mount Kailasa. There, the sage saw how the Ganga was descending from the sky, falling onto the top of the mountain. The surrounding area was most lovely, with all types of flowering trees being seen in abundance.

When Narada came to the entrance of Lord Shiva’s abode, he saw two gatekeepers. Actually, they had been made by Vishvakarma and were not actually persons. Narada was fooled by this illusion, however, and so said, “I wish to enter because I would like to see Lord Shiva. Kindly give me permission.”

When the gatekeepers failed to utter a response, Narada Muni was surprised. Then, by means of his introspection, the sage came to know the truth of the matter and so he entered. Inside, Narada Muni saw many other people who were actually mechanical creations of Vishvakarma and so he joyfully bowed down to each of them. Indeed, he saw many wonderful things in the abode of Lord Shiva.

Narada Muni soon came upon Lord Shiva, who was seated with Parvati by his side. Indeed, they appeared to be two halves of the same body. They were being served by both demigods and demons. Lord Shiva had a complexion like molten gold. He was being served by the best of serpents. Vasuki had become a great necklace for Mahadeva. Other serpents formed his earrings. Some serpents had one hood. Others had four, six, or eleven, on up to a hundred billion hoods.

Lord Shiva's matted hair was adorned with the crescent moon and a third eye decorated his forehead. Mahadeva had five heads, ten arms, and a dark, bluish neck. In this way, he was seen by Narada Muni. After bowing down to offer his obeisances, Narada Muni stood up and offered prayers to Lord Shiva and Parvati, glorifying them as the mother and father of the material world.

Being very pleased, Lord Shiva inquired, "O brahmana, are you quite happy and satisfied? What shall I do for you?"

Narada Muni replied, "Of course, I am happy just to have the chance of seeing you here, today! Actually, I have come here with a desire to see you engaged in some type of sport or game."

Parvati asked, "What kind of play would you like to see? Just tell me."

Narada laughingly replied, "I enjoy playing the game of dice in its many varieties. O Mahadevi, two can have much fun playing with dice."

Being a little annoyed with Narada, Parvati asked, "How is it that you are familiar with the game of dice, which is liked by learned men? You are the son of Brahma and a sage of great repute. You instruct others to conform to the rules of various disciplines. You always wander about within the three worlds. There is no other noble-minded person like you."

Narada again laughed and said, "I do not know how to gamble, nor do I wish to play such a game of risk. I am an ascetic, and a devotee of Lord Shiva. O princess, why do you inquire from me in this way?"

Parvati laughed while replying, "You are the knower of everything. You can watch as I play dice with Mahesha."

Thereafter, the daughter of the Himalayas played dice with her husband while Narada Muni stood to the side and watched. Parvati was surrounded by her friends and attendants. Once, Parvati cheated and won and so Lord Shiva wagered a larger bet and then won. Together with Lord Shiva, Narada Muni laughed at Parvati, displaying their great pleasure that she had lost. Indeed, Narada also made some derogatory remarks and this made Parvati furious. Taking Narada by the neck, the goddess wanted to throw him out while offering him a suitable reply.

In that angry mood, Parvati appeared extremely beautiful and so, Lord Shiva delighted in looking at her. At his behest, the game resumed.

Parvati asked her husband, "I lost but now, what are you willing to stake?"

Lord Shiva replied, "For your sake, I will offer my famous crest-jewel, the crescent moon, as well as my necklace and earrings. O lady of slender waist, may you win the throw of the dice and take these ornaments."

Both were experts at gambling with dice. In the next round, Bhavani defeated Mahadeva. She laughed and said, "O Shankara, you have lost and so give me the wager."

At this, Mahadeva replied with a laugh, "I have not actually been defeated by you. Let us ponder over my truthful statement. I am invincible in all respects. Gamble as much as you like—let us continue. I will win—watch and see!"

Ambika said to her husband, "You have been defeated by me just now. What is astonishing about this?"

Taking him by the hand, Parvati continued, "You have been defeated but you do not realize it."

Girija laughed gracefully and looked at her husband in a most fascinating manner while saying, "Give me now what you had promised."



Lord Shiva replied, “You have spoken arrogantly. Actually, I am invincible. You should carefully consider this.”

Parvati argued, “It is true that you are invincible for everyone but by me alone you have been defeated at the game of dice. Actually, you don’t know what you are saying.”

In this way, as the couple continued arguing, Narada Muni said, “O lady with large eyes, kindly listen to a statement that is conducive to the welfare of the universe. Was Lord Shiva actually defeated by you? Why do you tell this lie! Mahadeva, the lord of the demigods, is unconquerable. He is the lord of the three worlds and the soul of the universe.”

“O goddess, how could he be defeated by you? Truthfully, he cannot be defeated by anyone. You do not actually know the truth about Lord Shiva because of your womanly nature.”

While hearing this, Parvati became extremely angry and jealous. Being highly incited by these base qualities, she replied, “O son of Brahma, you should not speak so foolishly! Of course, I have great respect for you but now, you should just be quiet! Why do you speak so highly of Lord Shiva alone? It was by my grace that he was born!”

Upon hearing this, Narada Muni remained silent. An associate of Lord Shiva, named Bhṛīṅgi, then said, “O beautiful lady, you should not talk too much! My master is invincible. Due to your feminine nature, you do not realize that your husband is greater than the greatest. Remember how, previously, you had approached your lord, keeping Kamadeva in front of you. Don’t you remember how Cupid had been burned to ashes by Mahadeva? Remember how the great lord of the devas had thereafter become gratified by your penance.”

While listening to Bhṛīṅgi’s talk, Parvati became even more enraged. She replied, “You have spoken due to partiality, being a favorite of Lord Shiva, O stupid one. There is actually no difference between Mahadeva and me. Only due to ignorance do you differentiate between us!”

Bhringi retorted, "You have love for your husband but devotion and love together is what pleases the lord. It is your position to render service to Lord Shiva and so you should not argue with him."

Parvati retorted, "O Bhringi, shut up or else go away! You do not know what you are talking about! Why do you babble like a ghost? You talk too much! Be careful or I will curse you!"

In fact, after saying this, Parvati cursed Bhringi as follows: "O stupid one, favorite of Shankara, become devoid of flesh!"

After uttering this curse, Parvati took Lord Shiva by the hand and removed Vasuki from his neck. She then took away many other ornaments from her husband, including his crescent moon and elephant hide. She even took away his loincloth while speaking in a clever way. At that time, the associates of Lord Shiva felt very embarrassed and so turned their faces away.

Seeing how his associates had become miserable, Lord Shiva became angry and said to Parvati, "All of the sages, and even Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu, are laughing at me! What are you doing? You were born in a good family—why are you behaving like this? If you are convinced that you have won then take everything but at least, leave me my loincloth!"

Parvati laughed and replied, "Why do you need a loincloth? After all, you are a great renunciate! Previously, you wandered through Daruvana, naked. When you approached them on the pretext of begging alms, the wives of the sages became enchanted. In fact, as a result of this, your penis fell to the ground! Considering all this, you should willingly give me what has been lost by you while gambling with me today."

While hearing this, Lord Shiva became more and more angry, staring at Parvati with his third eye. Upon witnessing Lord Shiva's rage, everyone became terrified. They said to one another, "Formerly, Kamadeva was burnt to ashes by Lord Shiva's anger and now, Parvati may face a similar fate."

Parvati said to Lord Shiva, "What is the use of your staring at me with your dreadful eye? I am not Kamadeva or the sacrifice of Daksha! What do you think will happen to me?"

After hearing such words, Lord Shiva became inclined toward going away and living in seclusion. He thought, "A forest is the best place of residence. One who lives alone, whose mind and senses are under control, and who has renounced all possessions is truly happy. Such a person is actually a learned man. He is the knower of the highest truth! The person who has given up lust and attachment becomes liberated and self-satisfied."

Thus it came to be that Lord Shiva left Parvati and went to reside within a forest called Siddhavata, where many paramahamsas (yogis of the highest realization) had their ashrams. As Lord Shiva departed from Kailasa, all of his associates, headed by Virabhadra, followed him. Parvati went to her room in a dejected mood. Surrounded by her friends and servants, she sat down in a contemplative mood.

After some time, Lord Shiva bid his associates farewell and continued deeper into the forest, alone. When Mahadeva reached Siddhavata, the earth provided him a nice seat. He sat down in the padmasana, closed his eyes, and began meditation upon the Supreme Soul, Lord Vishnu.

Without her husband, Parvati became dejected and so she could not take pleasure in anything around her. Seeing her like this, her friend, Vijaya, said, "O splendid lady, it was by means of great patience and austerity that you attained Lord Shiva. It was foolish for you to play dice with him. There are many faults with gambling. Don't you know this? You should just try to attain your lord's forgiveness. Let us go to the forest and seek his pardon. If you do not take my advice, your misery will continue."

With a laugh, Parvati replied, "Without me, Mahadeva will never find happiness. Actually, this world has been created by me simply for his pleasure. It is he that is dependent upon me. Come now and witness the nature of my pastimes."

After saying this, Parvati assumed the form of a female shabara huntress, desiring to go to the forest to see her husband. The tribal woman had a dark complexion, rosy-red lips and heavy



breasts, although her waist was slender. She had very nice buttocks and shapely thighs. She decorated herself with peacock feathers. In her hand, she held a bow and a quiver hung on her back.

As she entered the forest, the shabara woman was accompanied by many attendants. In this way, she approached the place where Lord Shiva was absorbed in the trance of meditation. Upon her arrival, Mahadeva came out of his trance and upon seeing the sabari, he immediately became afflicted with love. Indeed, he got up and approached Parvati, intending to seize her hand, but she suddenly disappeared.

At this, Shambhu could understand that it was his wife who had approached him. He wandered around but could not find her and so he experienced the pangs of separation. In fact, he became greatly oppressed by feelings of longing for love and in this way, he came under the sway of delusion.

In this condition, Lord Shiva saw Parvati once again. He said to the huntress, "O lady of slender waist, who are you? To whom do you belong?"

Parvati replied, "I am searching for my husband, who is omniscient, independent, free from illusion, and the lord of all these worlds."

Lord Shiva said, "O gentle lady, I am the most suitable husband for you. and no one else. O beautiful lady, think about what I have said."

Parvati smilingly replied, "You say that you are the one I am searching for but the beautiful lady that had sought you by means of severe austerities has been abandoned by you. It appears that you are very difficult to please. Anyway, whatever you said to me should not be spoken of again."

Lord Shiva said, "O lady with large eyes, do not speak like this. That woman has not been abandoned by me. By seeing my wretched condition, you should be inclined to carry out my wishes."

Girisha laughed and replied, "You are an ascetic, free from attachment. You take pleasure in the self alone. You are the

vanquisher of Madana (Cupid). Therefore, it is impossible for me to attain you. In fact, no one can conquer you. Still, what was said to me before should not be repeated.”

Lord Shiva said, “Be my wife. Nothing else should be said by you.”

After saying this, Lord Shiva seized the huntress by the hand. With a smile, she respectfully said, “Let me go. This is not proper, especially for an ascetic. Do not force me. Instead, go and make your desire known to my father.”

Mahadeva asked, “Where is your father residing? I shall go and see him.”

Thereafter, the shabari brought Lord Shiva to see her father, the lord of the Himalayas. The huntress pointed him out to Shankara and said, “Give up all shyness. Go and ask him for my hand in marriage. Do not delay.”

Lord Shiva bowed down to Himavan and said, “O best of mountains, please give me your magnificent daughter, for I am exceedingly distressed.”

Upon hearing this, Himavan stood up, took Lord Shiva by the hand, and said, “What are you saying? This is most improper! Why are you asking for something when you yourself are the creator of the three worlds?”

At that moment, Narada Muni arrived there. Laughing, he said to Lord Shiva, “O bearer of the trident, listen to my words because they convey the essence of truth. Associating with young women only adds to one’s distress. You are the master, the lord of the worlds, and greater than the greatest. Ponder over this and then tell me what you truthfully feel.”

Lord Shiva laughed and replied, “O Narada, you have certainly spoken the truth. The downfall of men is surely caused by the association of young women. There is no doubt about this. I was fascinated with this lady and brought here. This is all the mysterious effect of the illusory energy of the Lord. Now, I shall return to the forest.”

After the departure of Lord Shiva, Narada Muni said to Parvati, "Lord Shiva should be approached for the purpose of begging for his forgiveness. Only this course of action will bestow happiness upon you."

After hearing this, everyone present bowed down to offer obeisances to Lord Shiva. They then stood up to offer him prayers in glorification. In response, Mahadeva returned to receive the worship of his associates and admirers, beginning with Brahma. He then sat on a divine throne, along with Parvati and in this way, everything was reconciled.

Being questioned by the sages, Suta Gosvami next narrates how Arjuna had traveled to holy places in South India. In the course of his travels, Arjuna came to a region where there were five holy places that were shunned by the ascetics. All were highly meritorious but were avoided by the sages and so Arjuna inquired from them about the cause of this.

The sages replied, "Five great crocodiles live in these five holy places and they have devoured many holy ascetics. It is for this reason that we do not visit them."

Even after hearing this, Arjuna made up his mind to visit these five holy places, called Kumaresha, Stambesha, Barkareshvara, Mahakala, and Siddhesha.

The sages told him, "O Phalguna, you should not go to these places. Many kings and sages have been killed by the crocodiles. During the last twelve years, while living in exile, you have visited many wonderful holy places. What is the need of you to visit these five? Don't follow the vow called patanga-vrata (moths falling into a fire)."

Arjuna replied, "A person desirous of achieving piety should never be discouraged, even by saintly people. Life is momentary, like a flash of lightning, and so, if it is passed in performing pious work, that is commendable. Only those men are worthy of respect whose lives, wealth, time, and dependents are utilized (or even sacrificed) for the sake of spiritual advancement."

Upon hearing of Arjuna's determination, the sages gave him their heartfelt blessings. After bowing his head to offer them respect, Arjuna set out. He first went to Stambhesha and dove into the lake. While he was bathing, a large crocodile suddenly caught hold of Arjuna. Without fear, Arjuna grabbed the crocodile and rose out of the water. Immediately upon being brought onto the shore, the crocodile assumed the divine form of a woman.

Being delighted, Arjuna addressed her: "O lady of auspicious features, who are you? How is it that you became a crocodile? What was the great sin that you had committed?"

The woman replied, "I was an Apsara and I used to roam about in the forests of the demigods. I was a favorite of Kuvera named Varcha. Once, along with four of my friends, as I was wandering about, I came upon a brahmana. He was in the renounced order of life but very handsome. While sitting in a solitary place, he was reciting the Vedas. Indeed, the luster of his penance illuminated the surrounding forest."

"After seeing the handsome sage, a desire to hinder his austerities entered my heart. Along with my four friends—Saurabheyi, Sameyi, Budbuda, and Lata—I approached him. We laughed and played in a most feminine and enticing manner in the hopes of attracting the sage."

"However, in spite of our best efforts, that sage hardly seemed to notice us. Instead of being enticed, he became angry and cursed us, saying, 'You will become crocodiles and stay within the water for one hundred years.' Upon hearing this, we became disheartened and full of remorse. We humbly approached the brahmana and pleaded for mercy."

The five Apsaras said, "We had become proud of our beauty and youthful age. As a result, we have committed a great offense. O brahmana, it behooves you to forgive us. Good men protect those who seek refuge in them and besides, it is prescribed that women should not be harshly punished. Kindly forgive us."



After hearing their appeal, the brahmana replied, "When I think about your conduct—your audacity and your inclination towards sin and malice—I become bewildered. If people were aware of how death is perched over their heads, they would not even be able to enjoy their meals and their inclination toward sinful activity would certainly diminish."

"Alas! A birth as a human being is very rarely attained! And yet, many misuse this golden opportunity. Being deluded by women, they act selfishly in the bodily concept of life. I would put this question to such persons: For what purpose have you appeared in the human form and what benefit will you gain from this fortunate birth? Think over this seriously and then give me your reply."

"I do not blame women, for it is from them that the living beings receive the opportunity of a human birth. It is the reckless persons who associate with women without restraint that I blame. Men and women were created by Lord Brahma and so their combination is the natural condition of life. In and of itself, the combination of a man with a woman is not sinful. The union of man and woman enabled the universe to become filled with living entities."

"When a girl is given to a man in marriage by her family, in the presence of the fire-god and brahmanas—such a combination is beneficial. The union of a man and woman should be accepted for the purpose of facilitating their advancement on the path of spiritual advancement—otherwise, such a combination of man and woman is misused. Those who regulate their lives and senses are respectable. Others, who are uncontrolled, are contemptible. Those who are under the influence of the mode of ignorance take a crow-like man to be a swan!"

"My dear girls, what anger should I feel towards you? Everyone acts according to the influence of the three modes of material nature. As crocodiles, you will catch hold of those who enter the water. If an excellent man can take you out of the water and throw you on the land, you will regain your forms as Apsaras. I have never uttered a lie, even in jest."

The Apsara, Varcha, continued speaking to Arjuna, “We offered our obeisances to the brahmana and departed in an extremely dejected mood. We thought, ‘Who is that man who will deliver us from our curse.’ While thinking in this way, we happened to meet Narada Muni. He could clearly see the misery written on our faces and so he inquired about the cause of our misfortune.”

After hearing everything from the girls, Narada Muni told them, “Near the southern ocean are five holy places in a marshy land. Go there without delay. Dhananjaya (Arjuna), the son of Pandu, a great warrior of pure mind, will liberate all of you from your misery.”

The Apsara, Varcha, continued, “After hearing Narada’s words, we came here. Now, kindly free my four friends from their curses as well.”

Obliging, Arjuna plunged into the four other lakes, one by one, and delivered the Apsaras who had become crocodiles, so that they regained their original forms. They all bowed down to Arjuna and gave him their heartfelt wishes for success.

As they were about to depart, Arjuna asked, “I have a doubt. How could Narada Muni allow you to stay in these holy places, which are worthy of his respect? Two of the Nava-durgas (nine powerful expansions of Goddess Durga) reside here—Siddhesha and Siddhaganapa. They are competent to ward off even chiefs of the demigods. How is it that they did not prevent you from obstructing the activities of these holy places? I am very curious to know about this and so it behooves you to tell me everything truthfully.”

The Apsaras replied, “Your questions are certainly relevant. Look to the North! Here comes Narada Muni, surrounded by many brahmanas. I am sure that he will be happy to answer your questions.”

After saying this, the five Apsaras ascended into the sky. Thereafter, Arjuna approached Narada Muni. He offered his obeisances to Narada and the brahmanas, grasping their feet.

Narada Muni said, “O Dhananjaya, may you always be victorious over your enemies. May your mind always be inclined toward piety and devotion for the Lord and the brahmanas. While engaged in your twelve-year pilgrimage journey, I hope that you have not become exhausted, or unnecessarily angry. Even the minds of sages become tired of traveling on long tours of pilgrimage. Becoming irritable, they often yield to uncontrolled anger, which is a great impediment on the path of spiritual advancement.”

Narada Muni proceeded to speak to Arjuna at great length, telling him about his experiences as he wandered over the universe. In the course of his narration, Narada said, “When I arrived at Raivataka Mountain (in present-day Gujarat), I remembered how my father, Lord Brahma, had instructed me to find a place that was ideal for the residence of brahmanas. Just as a boat without a rudder cannot reach its destination, a brahmana without good conduct is incapable of benefiting others. A brahmana who does not study the Vedic texts ceases to be a brahmana.”

“If a deserving person is ignored and gifts are given to an undeserving person, it is like giving a cow’s allotted food to a donkey. The charitable gift given to a fool is futile, like a seed sown on barren ground, milking a cow while holding a cracked pot, or offering oblations into ashes. Gifts to the following persons prove fruitful—those with the power of austerity, those who hear and recite the Vedic literature, those who are faithful to their wives, and those who are self-satisfied and at peace with themselves and the world. Still, it must be understood that Vedic study and austerity alone are insufficient to make one a worthy recipient of charity. When there is good conduct along with these two, a person is truly considered to be deserving charity.”

“Among learning, conduct, and austerity—learning is considered the most important because without developed understanding, a man of good conduct can be easily diverted. A man without proper education is like a blind man.”

After considering things in this way, Narada Muni came to this conclusion, “I will go to various lands and test all the learned brahmanas. I will give gifts to those whom I find worthy.”

Narada Muni thus started on a tour of ashrams of great sages. While going, he sang the following verses that contain twelve questions: “Who knows the matrika (Sanskrit alphabet)? How many kinds are there? What are the syllables? What brahmana knows the twenty-five wonderful houses? Who knows how to make a multi-formed woman into a single-formed one? What man knows the chitrakathabandha? Who that is devoted to chanting mantras and learning knows the great crocodile residing in the ocean? What excellent brahmana knows the eight types of brahmanas? What are the days that begin the four yugas? Who knows the days that begin the reign of the fourteen Manus? On what day did the sun-god formally receive his chariot? What causes affliction to all living beings, like a black serpent? Who is the most clever of clever persons in this cruel and terrible world? Which brahmana expounds the two paths?”

Narada Muni said, “These are my twelve questions. The brahmana who knows the answers is the foremost of those worthy of being praised. I will be his worshiper, not only now but in the future.”

While singing in this way, Narada Muni wandered over the earth. Wherever he went, the brahmanas told him, “Your questions give us pain. We offer our obeisances to you.”

Narada Muni continued speaking to Arjuna, “Even after roaming over the entire earth, I did not find a single brahmana willing to (or capable of) answering my twelve questions. Finally, while sitting atop a Himalayan mountain, I pondered, ‘All of the brahmanas on earth have been seen by me. What should I do now?’ At that time, a thought entered my mind: ‘I have not yet visited the excellent village of Kalapa.’ (Kalapagrama is the place where Maru and Devapi, the last kings of the dynasties of the sun and the moon, await the beginning of the next Satya-yuga. At that time, they will re-establish their dynasties.)”

Narada Muni thought, "Eighty-four thousand brahmanas who are devoted to the study of the Vedic literature reside there like embodied forms of penance."

Narada crossed the snow-clad Himalayas, traversing the path through the sky, until he came to that great jewel of a village, Kalapa, on the other side of the mountains. Kalapa extended for one hundred yojanas and it was seen to be full of all varieties of trees. The village was surrounded by hundreds of hermitages of the sages and all of the animals in the forests were devoid of animosity toward one another. All the residents of the village were engaged in rendering service to the sages as they performed sacrifices. The sound of "svaha" never ceased in Kalapagrama.

After arriving at Kalapa, Narada Muni entered an ashram of brahmanas who were engaged in lively debate, the more intelligent ones refuting the statements of the others. Narada interrupted them, saying, "O brahmanas, of what use are your shouts, which seem like the cawing of crows? If you are actually men of knowledge, kindly answer my questions."

The brahmanas said, "Honorable sage, put forward your questions and we shall answer them."

Indeed, the brahmanas vied with one another, saying, "I will be first! I will answer the questions first!" just like brave warriors. Narada Muni then posed his twelve questions. Upon hearing them, the leaders of the sages playfully said, "O brahmana, what use are these childish questions? The least learned among us will answer them."

Considering one of the sages to be the least educated, Narada Muni said, "Let this one reply."

That person, a boy named Sutanu, addressed Narada, saying, "I shall reply to your silly questions because you consider me to be the least learned."

Thereafter, Sutanu answered the questions, one after another. First, he gave a thorough explanation of the Sanskrit alphabet. Then, he described the twenty-five elements that comprise the house of the material body.



Sutanu said, “Teachers of Vedānta call the intellect a multi-formed woman because it considers different subjects in various ways. However, when the intelligence considers matters in light of the understanding given by a mahājana appearing in disciplic succession, she becomes of a single form.”

“That which is not mentioned in the śāstra, which does not show honor to God, and which is full of lust—learned men call such statements *bandham chitrakatham* (bondage caused by foolish talk).”

“Now, listen to the answer to the fifth question. Greed is the great crocodile swimming in the ocean of material existence. It is due to greed that one commits sinful activities. From greed, anger is aroused, and lust also has its origin in greed. Delusion, deception, false prestige, the desire to take another’s wealth, ignorance, and foolishness—all these proceed from greed. When one robs another’s wealth, molests another man’s wife, or performs any other risky act or atrocity—it has resulted from greed. Hypocrisy, hatred, back-biting, and malice—all occur in greedy people who have not learned to control their senses. A person may be a very learned knower of the śāstra who is able to dispel all doubts but if he is a victim of greed, he will face a great fall. Such a person may speak very sweetly but actually, he is like a dry well covered with grass. There are pretenders of piety who adorn themselves with all the external symbols of righteousness but internally—they are ready to rob the universe if able to do so.”

“Therefore, one who desires his own welfare should carefully avoid greed if he truly desires to cross over the ocean of material existence. Others will be eaten by the crocodile.”

“There are eight classes of brahmanas—matra, brahmana, śrotriya, anuchana, bhrūṇa, rishikalpa, rishi, and muni. These eight classes are mentioned in the Vedas. The latter ones are comparatively superior to the former ones in terms of learning and behavior. One who was born in a brahmana family but did not approach a bona-fide spiritual master is referred to as matra.”

“One who is straightforward, without ulterior motives, who practices the precepts of the Vedas, and is quiet, truthful and merciful is called a brahmana.”

“One who has mastered at least one branch of the Vedas, and is engaged in executing the six duties of a brahmana is called shrotriya.”

“A brahmana who is well-versed in the Vedas and Vedangas, who is pure and sinless, and who has many disciples engaged in Vedic study, is called anuchana.”

“A brahmana endowed with all the good qualities of anuchana, who restrains his senses by regular performance of sacrifice and study of the Vedas, and who only partakes of food that was offered in sacrifice, is called bhruna.”

“A brahmana who has attained perfect knowledge and control of his senses and who always remains in his ashram is called rishikalpa (almost a rishi).”

“A brahmana who has completely controlled his sexual impulses, who eats very simply, who is free from malice, who is truthful, and who is competent to bless and curse, is called a rishi.”

“A brahmana who completely refrains from worldly activities, who is devoid of lust and anger, who is engaged in meditation upon the Supreme Lord, and who considers a lump of dirt and gold as being equal, is called a muni.”

“The ninth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Karttika is glorified as the first day of Satya-yuga. The third day of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaishakha is said to be the first day of Treta-yuga. The new moon day of the month of Magha is known as the first day of Dvapara-yuga. The thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of Bhadra is known as the first day of Kali-yuga.”

Similarly, Sutanu listed the first days of the Manvantaras. He then said, “The seventh day in the month of Magha, called rathasaptami, is the day on which the sun-god obtained his chariot.”

“This man is called nityodvejaka (one who always causes affliction to others): He who begs every day cannot attain heaven. Like a thief, he gives misery to all others. As a result of troubling others, he goes to hell.”

“The person who ponders, ‘By what act have I been born here? Where shall I go from here?’ and adopts suitable measures is called dakṣa-dakṣa (the most clever of all clever people).”

“The expounders of the Vedas have mentioned two paths—that of light and that of darkness (or smoke). One who traverses the path of light attains liberation and one who traverses the path of darkness is again born in this world.”

Sutanu concluded, “O brahmana, I have thus answered your questions to the best of my capacity. Tell me whether my answers are correct or not. Also, kindly reveal your identity.”

Being very pleased, Narada introduced himself and expressed his gratitude at meeting such nice brahmanas. In return, the brahmanas, headed by Shatātapa, honored Narada Muni and presented him offerings of arghya, pādya, and other auspicious articles.

When the sages inquired about the purpose of his visit, Narada Muni explained, “Being so instructed by my father, Lord Brahma, I wish to give as a gift to qualified brahmanas the holy place known as Mahi-sagara-sangama. I had been wandering over the earth, testing the brahmanas of various places, until I arrived here. I have been pleased by your answers to my questions and so I will settle you in a colony at this holy place, if you are agreeable.”

Shatātapa replied, “It is true that Bharata-varṣa is inaccessible, even to the demigods, and so what to speak of Mahi-sagara-sangama tirtha? However, there are many merciless thieves residing there and so we are frightened at the prospect of residing at that holy place. They will steal our wealth, as denoted by the sixteenth and twenty-first letters of the sparṣa alphabet (ta and pa, indicating tapas, or penance). Without that wealth, how could we continue living?”

While listening to Narada Muni's narration, Arjuna interrupted at this point, asking, "This is a very strange story. Who are the thieves that the brahmana referred to? What is the wealth that the sages fear losing? Who are these people that cause fear to the brahmanas?"

Narada Muni replied, "Lust, anger, and greed are the thieves and penance is the wealth."

Narada said to Shatatapa, "O excellent brahmana, what can roguish thieves do to those who are alert? If a person is fearful, idle and unclean—what can he accomplish? The earth will swallow up such a person!"

The sage, Harita, then said, "Narada, I have with me twenty-six thousand brahmana disciples and we will all go with you to Mahi-sagara-sangama. Your proposal appears to me to be an excellent one."

Thereafter, accompanied by all these brahmanas, Narada travelled through the sky and reached Mahi-sagara-sangama.

Arjuna inquired, "Where is the village, Kalapa?"

Narada Muni explained, "The snowy Himalayas extend for one hundred yojanas and beyond them is Kalapagrama. Kalapagrama also extends for one hundred yojanas and beyond that is a vast desert."

By his power of austerity, Narada Muni placed the twenty-six thousand brahmanas from Kalapa on the tip of his staff, in minute forms. After arriving at Mahi-sagara-sangama, Narada Muni placed the brahmanas on the shore, where the river Mahi meets the ocean. They then bathed in the sangam and performed their religious duties. At that time, the sage, Kapila, arrived there and it is he who established an ashram for the brahmanas of Kalapa.

When Arjuna wanted to hear more from Narada Muni, the sage among the demigods related the following history: Long ago, there was a king named Indradyumna, who was worthy of honor and was always respectful to others. It may be possible to count the grains of sand in the Ganga, the drops of rain in a storm, or the stars in the sky but not King Indradyumna's meritorious deeds. In

fact, as a result of his pious acts, Maharaja Indradyumna attained the abode of Brahma without relinquishing his mortal body.

One day, at the end of one hundred kalpas, when Indradyumna approached Lord Brahma at the time of rendering service, the grandsire of the universe said, "O excellent king, you must return to earth immediately. Do not remain here for even a moment."

Being very surprised, King Indradyumna inquired, "Why are you dispatching me to earth now, when so much of my merit still remains?"

Lord Brahma replied, "Pious credit alone is not the cause of enjoying life in the higher planetary systems. It must be accompanied by continuing fame within the three worlds. It seems that you have been completely forgotten on the earth. You must go and revive the memory of your spotless character within the minds of the people if you at all desire to continue living here."

King Indradyumna asked, "By what means can I accomplish this?"

Lord Brahma said, "Kala (time) is indeed very powerful. Ultimately, it will devour even me and this very universe and so then what to speak of you? Still, you must somehow revive your reputation on the earth before returning to my abode. The means will have to be devised by you."

After hearing these words, King Indradyumna found himself situated in the city of Kampilya (which was formerly Indradyumna's capital and later on, the capital of King Drupada, the ruler of the southern Panchalas), on the earth. Being astonished, the king inquired from the local people about himself, his city, and his kingdom.

The people replied, "We do not know of a King Indradyumna or his city. Better you ask someone who has lived for a very long time."

Indradyumna asked, "In this kingdom, who is the oldest person?"

The people said, "We have heard that in the forest of Naimisha



there is a sage named Markandeya who can remember events from the last seven kalpas. Go to him without delay.”

King Indradyumna went to Naimisharanya and when he saw the sage, Markandeya, he bowed down to offer his obeisances. He then inquired, “Your holiness is reputed to be the oldest living person on this earth. Do you know of a King Indradyumna, who ruled long ago?”

Markandeya Rishi replied, “Within the last seven kalpas, there were no kings named Indradyumna. Ask me some other question if you like.”

Upon hearing this, the king became so disappointed that he began to gather wood for the purpose of building a large fire. When he saw this, Markandeya said, “My dear sir, do not commit this rash act! Even if it takes a hundred years, happiness may come to a person who is patient and remains alive.”

“Listen. I will tell you something that will relieve you of your grief. I have a very old friend, a crane known as Nadijangha. I am sure that he will have heard of you. Come with me and let’s pay him a visit. The lives of noble souls have mutual help as their sole purpose and so, if he has heard of Indradyumna, he will certainly say so.”

Thus, the king and the brahmana started out for the abode of Nadijangha in the Himalayas. Upon their arrival, the crane was delighted to see his good friend after such a long time. After the customary welcome and inquiry into his well-being, Nadijangha asked about the purpose of Markandeya’s visit.

In reply, Markandeya asked, “Have you heard of a King Indradyumna, who had ruled the earth long ago?”

Nadijangha replied, “I can remember the events of the last fourteen kalpas but I have no remembrance of a king named Indradyumna. In fact, I am quite sure that during that time, there was no king of that name that ruled the earth.”

The king was very surprised to learn the age of the crane and so he asked, “What pious acts had you performed to achieve such a long duration of life?”

Nadijangha explained, “In my previous birth, I was the son of the brahmana sage, Vishvarupa. As a child, my father was very fond of me and was in the habit of calling me Baka (crane). I was a very naughty child, however.”

“Once, on Makara-sankranti, I took my father’s emerald shiva-linga and hid it in a pot of ghee. The next morning, when my father woke up, he found his altar empty and upon seeing this, he became frightened. In a sweet voice, he asked me, ‘My dear boy, please tell me where you kept my shiva-linga. If you tell me, I shall give you something nice to eat.’ Being eager to get the reward, I took the shiva-linga out of the ghee pot and handed it to my father.”

“After some time, I died and was reborn in a palace as the son of the ruler of the kingdom of Anarta. I could recollect the events of my previous birth. Although my act had been very childish, the covering of the shiva-linga with ghee on Makara-sankranti was the cause of my fortunate next birth. I installed a shiva-linga and regularly smeared it with ghee while thinking of my previous birth.”

“When I grew up, I inherited the kingdom of my forefathers. I continued my worship of the shiva-linga and one day, Lord Shiva appeared before me and said, ‘I was pleased by your offering of ghee in your last life and for that reason, I awarded you this kingdom. Now, choose whatever benediction you desire.’ My desire was to become the lord of the ganas (associates of Lord Shiva) on Mount Kailasa and so Lord Shiva awarded me that post. Thus, I became the lord of ten million ganas by the name of Pratipa Palaka.”

“Still, as destiny would have it, I was not competent to retain such a position for long. I became haughty and proud, wandering around like a maddened elephant, devoid of an understanding of what should be done and what should not. It is because of this mentality that calamity was waiting for me, just around the corner.”

“Once, as I was wandering about, I came to a mountain where a block of ice was covering the entrance to a cave. The sage, Galava, was staying there, along with his wife, practicing penance. He was so emaciated due to his severe austerities that his veins were clearly

visible all over his body. He was not fond of worldly enjoyment—instead, he performed austerities so that he could enjoy unlimited happiness after death.”

“His wife was very beautiful with protruding breasts, ample buttocks and a slender waist. While walking, she resembled an elephant in rut. Indeed, it appeared as if Lord Brahma had created her with the desire of seeing the beauty of all kinds of objects assembled in one place.”

“I became enamored upon seeing Galava’s beautiful wife, being pierced by a volley of arrows from Cupid’s bow. Even sages who are supposed to be masters of the senses are so, only as long as they are not looked at with the coy glances of a doe-eyed woman. Within my mind, I made a plan to abduct that beautiful woman. I thought, ‘I will become this sage’s disciple, ever devoted to his service. When I get the opportunity, I’ll kidnap his wife. If he curses me, that will be my bad luck. Either she will become my wife or I will meet death. This beautiful woman is not suited to this emaciated ascetic.’ ”

“Having made up my mind in this way, I approached the sage, bowed down at his feet, and begged him to accept me as his disciple and instruct me so that I might cross over the ocean of material existence.”

“I told him, ‘You are Lord Vishnu in the form of a brahmana. I have been bitten by the black snake of avidya (ignorance) and am affected by its poison. Kindly revive me by means of a great mantra and relevant instructions. A great tree of delusion is growing within the lake of my heart. Let that tree be cut down with the axe of your wisdom. I am taking shelter of you. I will bring you wood, darbha grass, fruit, water, and roots. Kindly accept me as your disciple.’ ”

“In a previous birth, I had received the nickname, Baka (crane), and now, I resorted to the devious tactics of that bird. The sage, Galava, accepted me as his disciple and I began to act in a most humble manner that was pleasing to him and his wife. Indeed, I tried very hard to please them, just to win their confidence.”

“The sage was intelligent and so he did not have full faith in his wife, who could easily be the target of lusty men. He knew very well the nature of women. Thus, even while sleeping, he would keep his wife next to him.”

“One night, however, because she was in her period, the sage’s wife slept in a separate place, having trust in me. Thinking this to be a good opportunity, I was delighted. At midnight, I assumed the guise of a robber and abducted her.”

“As she was being carried away, the lady cried out in distress. I tried to comfort her but then she recognized my voice and shouted to her husband, ‘This wicked so-called disciple, using deceptive tactics like a crane, covering himself with a cloak of piety, is carrying me away by force. Please save me! He posed as your disciple but is now kidnapping me! You are my refuge and so it behooves you to rescue me.’ ”

“Immediately, Galava woke up. He quickly paralyzed me while shouting, ‘Stop! Stop!’ Being paralyzed, I stood like a figure painted on a wall, feeling great shame. Galava approached me and said, ‘Since I have been deceived by you, wicked man, who has adopted the fraudulent tactics of a crane, you will become a crane for a long time.’ In this way, I was cursed by the sage. Because of trying to enjoy another man’s wife, I have met with this fate.”

“There is nothing that shortens one’s life-span more than enjoying another man’s wife. Galava’s wife, having been defiled by my touch, bathed and then cursed me in the same manner as her husband. After being cursed, I trembled just like leaves on a tree in a storm.”

“I bowed down to the holy couple and said, ‘I am an associate of Lord Shiva but have acted in an abominable manner. Just as you have rectified me by your curse, kindly bless me as well. Sometimes, the speech of a brahmana is as sharp as a razor but still, his heart is soft like butter. A brahmana may become angry but when entreated, he can become pleased in a moment. Because I offended you, you are now my only refuge. For those who falter while walking on the ground, the ground itself is their only support.’ ”

“ ‘Intelligent men can understand what calamity can come from others as a result of one’s own actions. Cruel and selfish people cannot see the consequences of their actions unless they directly experience them. After attaining wealth, position, and learning, a selfish person like me becomes proud and haughty, and thus cannot retain his position for long.’ ”

“ ‘For those who are blinded with pride—learning, wealth, and nobility are the causes of arrogance. Such persons don’t care to think of the consequences of their actions. It is they who have given Goddess Lakshmi the reputation of being fickle (because prosperity does not stay long with such people).’ ”

“ ‘O sage, I beg you to withdraw your curse. Good men always possess a forgiving nature, even when dealing with those of bad conduct.’ ”

“The sage, Galava, said, ‘When you assist King Indradyumna in reviving his lost reputation, you will be freed from my curse.’ Thus, due to the sage’s curse, I became a crane in the family of Kashyapa and have been staying here in the Himalayas. My dear sir, whatever you have asked has been told by me.”

(Narada Muni continued his narration as Arjuna eagerly listened) As he listened to Nadijangha tell his story, King Indradyumna became very dejected. Upon seeing how the miserable king had tears in his eyes, the compassionate Markandeya spoke to the crane on his behalf: “After creating hope in this king, I came here to see you but our purpose has remained unfulfilled and so he will give up his life by entering fire. Since he took shelter of me, I will also have to give up my life. A good person cannot tolerate to see the dejection of one who he gave hope and so death for him is preferable to living. I will now gather wood for making a fire. O Nadijangha, this is my last meeting with you.”

After hearing these unpalatable words, the crane thought deeply for a moment and then said, “There is no need for your friend to enter the fire now because I know someone who is



much older than I am. He is an owl named Prakarakarna who lives on Mount Kailasa. I am sure that he will have heard of King Indradyumna. I shall accompany you two and do my best to fulfill your mission.”

The three wended their way to Mount Kailasa and met the owl, who was sitting in his nest. After being welcomed, the crane was asked about his two companions and so he narrated all that had happened. Nadijāṅgha said, “You are long-lived. If you have heard of King Indradyumna, please tell us. If you do so then the three of us will be able to continue living.”

Upon hearing this, the owl became sad because he had been asked to accomplish something that he could not do. He replied, “I do not know of a King Indradyumna. Twenty-eight kalpas have passed since I was born and a King Indradyumna was never seen nor heard of by me.”

The king was certainly surprised that the owl had such a long duration of life. He asked, “How did you obtain such a long life-span? How did you receive this abominable form of an owl?”

Prakarakarna replied by narrating his story: “Formerly, I was a brahmana, born in the dynasty of Vasiṣṭha. My name was Ghanta and I was engaged in the worship of Lord Shiva at Varanasi. I was accustomed to listening to discourses on religious principles conducted by learned men. During one such discussion, I learned that if one offers Lord Shiva bilva leaves, he can reside in heaven for one hundred thousand years.”

“After I had worshiped him for one hundred years, Lord Shiva became satisfied and appeared before me and spoke in a thundering voice: ‘O brahmana, I have become very pleased by your worship of me with bilva leaves. Tell me whatever you desire and I shall fulfill it.’ ”

“I said, ‘O lord, kindly make me immortal, so that I will never experience old age.’ ”

“Lord Shiva said, ‘So be it,’ and then vanished from view.”

“As you can well imagine, I was highly delighted, feeling myself

to be the most fortunate person on earth. At that time, there was a brahmana in the line of Bhrigu who was very learned. His wife was a chaste woman named Sudarshana. She was the daughter of Devala and unrivaled on earth in terms of beauty. She would always feel great happiness, just by seeing the face of her husband. The brahmana and his wife had a daughter who was considered to be no less than her mother. She was no longer a child and had reached the stage of adolescence."

"For some reason, the father had not found a suitable husband for his daughter. One day, I saw this girl and she was exceedingly charming, having just entered the stage of life where youthfulness awakens. In fact, she was just on the border line separating childhood from maturity and the two mingled in her in a most charming manner, like peanut butter and honey (actually, it says rice and gingelly seeds but I don't know what these seeds are, and I am not very impressed by such a mixture)."

"I saw the girl playing with her friends and she appeared to be fascinatingly beautiful. I thought, 'This girl must have been made by another creator.' In this way, Cupid sportingly struck me with his arrows."

"I approached one of the girl's friends and asked in a faltering voice, 'Whose daughter is she?' The girl replied, 'She is the daughter of a brahmana in the line of Bhrigu. She has not yet been given in marriage.' I then went to the girl's father. After bowing down, I requested him to give me his daughter in charity."

"Considering how I was equal to his family in terms of status and behavior, the girl's father immediately gave his consent. However, when the girl came to hear from someone how she had been given in marriage to an ugly brahmana, she went to her mother and said, with great indignation, 'Just see what has been done! It was a terrible injustice for my father to give me in marriage to such an ugly man. I will never marry such an ugly person. Instead, I will give up my life by taking poison or entering fire.' "

“The girl’s mother approached her husband and said, ‘Our daughter should not be given to an ugly man.’ After hearing these words from his beloved wife and after consulting the dharma-shastra, the brahmana decided to give his daughter in marriage to someone else. Another man was found and the day before the marriage, I learned of what had happened. I was with my friends at that time and so I felt very ashamed. I was so humiliated and also overwhelmed by lust that late that night, I kidnapped the girl as she was sleeping.”

“I took her to a secluded place and performed the marriage rites in accordance with the Gandharva style of marriage, even though the girl was unwilling. Then, against her will, I forcibly had sexual intercourse with my ‘wife.’ The next morning, the girl’s father arrived where I was staying, accompanied by many other brahmanas. Seeing how his daughter was married against her will, the father became infuriated and cursed me.”

“The girl’s father said, ‘Because my daughter was married by you with the rites of a nishachara (night wanderer), you shall soon become a creature of the night.’ I bowed down and clasped the feet of the girl’s father, my eyes filled with tears. I said, ‘Why do you curse a blameless person like me? It is a fact that you verbally gave me your daughter when I came and asked for her hand in marriage. A girl can be married only once and so you have wrongly cursed me. A person who verbally gives his daughter in charity and then goes back on his word goes to hell. This is the decision of shastra.’ ”

“After hearing my words, the girl’s father considered them to be true. Although he regretted having cursed me, he said, ‘My words cannot prove false and so, you will be born as an owl, for an owl is a wanderer at night. When you help King Indradyumna, you will regain your original form.’ ”

“As soon as this was said, I immediately became an owl on the banks of the Mandakini river. Since that time, twenty-eight days of Brahma (kalpas) have passed.”

The owl concluded by saying, “Thus I have told you everything connected with my previous births.”

The crane, Nadijangha, said, "The purpose for which we came here has not been achieved. Thus, it appears that all three of us will have to give up our lives. My friend, I bid you farewell. What heartless person could stand by and watch his friend die because his task was not accomplished? I shall certainly enter fire, along with these two."

After hearing this, the owl steadied his mind and then replied with a faltering voice, as tears filled his eyes: "There is still a way to fulfill your aspiration. I have a friend who lives on the Gandhamadana Mountain. He is as dear to me as my own life. He is a vulture that is much older than I am. He will surely have heard of King Indradyumna."

The owl, the crane, the sage (Markandeya) and the king (Indradyumna) set out for Gandhamadana Mountain. When he saw his friend (the owl) approaching, the vulture came out of his nest to welcome him. Indeed, he was delighted to see his dear friend. After duly honoring and welcoming his guests, offering them seats and providing them with food, the king of vultures asked the owl about the purpose of his visit.

In reply, the owl narrated all that had happened and explained how, if the king were not recognized, he would give up his life, causing the other three to also relinquish their lives.

The vulture said, "Since my birth, fifty-six kalpas have passed but I have never heard of a King Indradyumna."

When he heard this, King Indradyuma was astonished and dismayed. He then asked the vulture the cause of his degraded condition.

The vulture narrated his story as follows: "I was formerly born as a monkey and so I was very fickle. Once, during the spring, the Damanaka festival was celebrated at a temple of Lord Shiva in the middle of the forest. The people placed the shiva-linga on a golden swing and then left. That night, I jumped onto the swing and rocked it back and forth for a long time. Indeed, when the people returned the next morning, they were surprised to find a monkey on the swing,

along with the shiva-linga. Being enraged, they beat me with sticks and rods so that I died, even as I was sitting on the swing.”

“As a result of the merit achieved by swinging the shiva-linga, I was next born as the son of the King of Kashi, and I could remember the events of my previous birth. In due course of time, I inherited the throne and I celebrated the Damanaka festival with great pomp. I took initiation into the worship of Lord Shiva. I worshiped Mahadeva in a mood of detachment and after some time, he became pleased and appeared before me.”

Lord Shiva said, “O Kushadvaja, you can take from me whatever benediction you desire. No one on earth worships me with such steadfast devotion as you.”

The vulture continued, “When I heard this, I replied, ‘Without changing my body, I would like to be one of your personal associates.’ Lord Shiva said, ‘So be it,’ and then brought me to Kailasa and gave me an aerial chariot inlaid with valuable jewels.”

“From that time onward, I wandered here and there in my celestial chariot, being very pleased with myself. One day, while seated on my chariot, I saw the beautiful daughter of the sage, Agnivesha, standing in the water without any clothes on. She was on the threshold of youth, her waist was thin, her thighs shapely, and her breasts close together. Beauty was gradually sprouting in her body. Her lovely face resembled a lotus in full bloom. Indeed, it is very difficult to adequately describe her. It appeared that the god of love had taken up residence within her body and he struck me with a constant stream of arrows. She was playing while surrounded by her friends.”

“Becoming maddened with lust, I descended to the earth and abducted the girl. Being seized by me and placed upon my celestial chariot, she cried out for her father. The girl’s friends ran to her father and informed him of what had happened. The gentle sage, Agnivesha, a storehouse of austerity, quickly ascended to the sky and approached my chariot. While ordering me to stop, he halted my movement by the power of his austerity.”



"The infuriated sage said to me, 'You have forcefully carried away my daughter as a vulture carries away a piece of flesh. Therefore, become a vulture without delay! You carried her away against her will and so now, receive the fruit of your action!'"

"Upon hearing this, I became filled with shame. With my head bent downward, I clasped the sage's feet and pleaded for mercy. When I sought the shelter of the sage, he became pacified and said, 'My words cannot prove false. However, when you assist King Indradyumna in regaining his fame, you will be freed from my curse.'"

The vulture concluded his narration by saying, "Thus, everything has been told by me to you."

Narada Muni continued his narration: When he heard the vulture's story, King Indradyumna felt wonder and dismay. He bid farewell to his companions and prepared to meet his death. Considering himself to be involved in the king's plight, the vulture spoke out, "Do not do this! There is someone older than I am. He will certainly have heard of you. In the Manasa-sarovara there is a tortoise named Mantharaka. He knows everything. Come, we shall all go to see him."

The king, the sage, the vulture, the crane, and the owl started their journey. The tortoise was resting by the side of the lake and when he saw a group approaching in the distance, he became afraid and went into the water.

The owl laughingly said to him, "Why have you vanished within the water? Are you fleeing from your guests? How have you become averse to proper etiquette?"

The tortoise said, "I know very well how to perform the rites of hospitality. I know my duty to honor respected guests. In all the years of my long life, I have never been unhappy to see a guest. I have welcomed everyone. However, I am afraid of this King Indradyumna, although he is an honest and straight-forward person."

"Formerly, in the city of Rauchaka, this king performed a sacrifice and my shell was burnt in the sacrificial fire. Indeed, the wound never healed. It is for this reason that I did not welcome you."

As soon as this statement was made, a shower of flowers fell from heaven, sent by the five Apsaras who were released from their curses. Because King Indradyumna's reputation had been revived, a celestial chariot appeared before him. Shouts of praise were heard in the sky.

A messenger of the demigods, who was driving the chariot, loudly declared, "O King, your spotless reputation has been revived. Enter this chariot and I will take you back to the abode of Brahma, where you can stay for the duration of a kalpa. Even if one has limitless merit, he can remain in heaven only for as long as his fame is spread over the earth. It is for this reason that the construction of memorial wells, parks, lakes, and temples is recommended in shastra."

King Indradyumna said, "These are my friends—Markandeya Rishi, the crane, the owl, the vulture, and the tortoise. It is by their mercy that I have been invited back to Brahmaloka. Therefore, only if they accompany me to Brahmaloka will I be willing to go there. Those who act favorably without being influenced by the behavior of others can be called a true friend. The greatest acquisition one can obtain is the friendship of others. These five were prepared to lay down their lives for my sake. If they go to Brahmaloka with me then I will go—not otherwise."

The messenger from heaven said, "All of these persons were associates of Lord Shiva. Due to being cursed, they fell from their positions and were born on earth. When their curses are nullified, they will go back to the association of Lord Shiva. Therefore, you should come with me now and forget about your friends."

Indradyumna Maharaja replied, "If what you say is true, you can return to Brahmaloka alone. I do not wish to go. I shall remain here and attempt to also become an associate of Lord Shiva. I do not desire to enjoy heavenly pleasure because such happiness has a beginning and an end. While enjoying in heaven, one knows that eventually, he will have to fall back to earth. Because Lord Brahma had evicted me from his abode, I feel ashamed to once again come before him."

Turning to the tortoise, King Indradyumna inquired, "How did you achieve such a long duration of life?"

In response, the tortoise narrated his life story as follows: "Formerly, I was a brahmana named Shandilya. Even as a child, I playfully made a nice temple of Lord Shiva from sand and dirt. In it, there were five separate altars for the deities. In this way, I worshiped Ganesha, Lord Shiva and Parvati, the sun-god, and Lord Vishnu. I used yellow clay to make the kalash at the top of the temple. The gate was made of wood and leading up to it were steps. In my childish way, I put a stone in the temple to represent the shiva-linga."

"Every day, I would go to the fields and collect varieties of flowers and durva grass and then perform very nice worship. I sang and danced in my childish way, in front of the deities, surrounded by my friends. Due to the merit of that worship, in my next life, I was born as the son of a brahmana and I had the power of recollecting the events of my past life. I took initiation into the worship of Lord Shiva and I read in the Puranas that one who constructs a temple of Lord Shiva will reside in his abode for as many years as there are atoms in the building materials used for construction."

"In that birth as a brahmana, I lay down in ashes, I kept matted hair, I maintained myself by begging alms, and I performed many austerities—all in the hopes of satisfying Lord Shiva. As I continued this practice, I met with death and next, I was born as an emperor of the earth, in the dynasty of the sun-god, and once again, I could remember my previous lives. My capital was at Pratishtana and my name was Jayadatta. In that birth also, I eagerly engaged myself in trying to satisfy Lord Shiva."

"Finally, Lord Shiva became pleased and awarded me the benediction of immortality and freedom from old age, without a change of body. Having received this favor, I began proudly wandering over the earth like an elephant blinded by intoxication. I abandoned my devotion for Lord Shiva and, being greatly afflicted by lust, I molested the wives of others."

“The molestation of other men’s wives is the primary cause of the destruction of one’s duration of life, penance, fame, splendor, and reputation. Although such a person has ears, he behaves as if he is unable to hear the good advice of others. Although he has eyes, he cannot see the destruction that awaits him. Although endowed with human consciousness, he behaves worse than an animal. Although apparently learned, he acts like a fool.”

“In fact, a man becomes bereft of all intelligence as soon as he is gazed upon by a doe-eyed, attractive woman. If he dies, he goes to hell and while alive, he has to live in constant fear of the husbands of the women he mistreats. Thus, a man who molests the wives of others spoils his life in both this world and the next.”

“Being freed from old age and death, I had no fear of this world or the next and as a result, I engaged in outraging the wives of others. Understanding that I was transgressing all bounds of propriety, Yamaraja went to Lord Shiva and said, ‘O lord, I cannot restrain this sinful man because of the benedictions that you awarded him. Therefore, select someone else to perform my duties.’ ”

“ ‘My lord, the following have been mentioned by you as being the support of the universe—chaste women, cows, brahmanas who are learned in the Vedas, liberal-minded people who are not greedy, and those who adhere to the truth. The most important among them are chaste women. Chaste women have been outraged by your devotee, Jayadatta, the ruler of Pratiṣṭhāna, due to excessive pride.’ ”

“Upon hearing this, Lord Shiva became enraged and had me brought into his presence. As I stood before him, trembling and with folded hands, Lord Shiva cursed me, saying, ‘O fellow of wicked conduct, being mad with lust, you have outraged chaste women and so I curse you to immediately become a tortoise.’ ”

“I bowed down to Lord Shiva and begged him to forgive me. Finally, he said, ‘In the sixtieth kalpa of your existence as a tortoise, you shall be freed from this curse and come to me to live as my associate.’ After saying this, Lord Shiva vanished from sight while I became a gigantic tortoise, ten yojanas long.”

Addressing King Indradyumna, the tortoise said, "Once, you took me to the sea for the performance of sacrifices. You performed many sacrifices on my back and because of this, my back was burnt by the sacrificial fire. Being scorched by your sacrifices, the earth exuded the essence of all her tirthas and that became the river Mahi. At the time of partial annihilation, I came here to Manasa-sarovara. Fifty-six kalpas of my life have elapsed and four more remain. After that, I will be freed from my curse."

"O King, why did you reject the chance to return to heaven in the chariot that had come here to summon you? You should enjoy the pleasures that you have earned!"

King Indradyumna said, "I no longer desire temporary material enjoyment. Now, I will endeavor to attain liberation from material bondage. Just as you kindly received me as a guest, please direct me to a preceptor who can carry me across the ocean of material existence."

The tortoise replied, "There is a great sage named Lomasa who has lived longer than I have. Some time ago, I saw him in the village of Kalapa."

Indradyumna Maharaja said, "Come. Let us all go and see him. Learned men say that association with a great soul is more beneficial than going to holy places of pilgrimage."

All six were happy with this proposal and so they immediately set out to meet the great sage. When they arrived at Kalapagrama, they saw Lomasa Rishi, who seemed to be the embodiment of austerity. He was so effulgent that he appeared like a fire that had been fed with ghee. He held chanting beads in his hand. He was following the path of maitra. When one vows not to harm any living being, not even with harsh words, and engages himself in chanting japa, he is called a maitra sage.

The crane, the king, the brahmana, the owl, the vulture, and the tortoise bowed down to the great sage, Lomasa Rishi. The sage warmly received his guests and being delighted, they disclosed to him what was in their hearts. The tortoise explained how King

Indradyumna no longer desired the opulence and enjoyment of heaven but rather, wanted to cross over the great ocean of material existence and it was for that purpose that he came to Kalapagrama.

The tortoise concluded by saying, “O sage, kindly instruct this king so that he can achieve his desired goal of life. Helping others is the vow that is accepted by all good men. This is especially applicable for those who are worthy of being enlightened. When good advice is given to sinful people who are not worthy of being enlightened, it certainly harms both persons (the instructor and the hearer).”

Lomasa Rishi said, “O tortoise, what you have said is very true.”

Turning to Maharaja Indradyumna, he said, “Tell me what is exactly on your mind and I will certainly give you relevant instructions.”

King Indradyumna said, “O sage, here is my first question. Even in the heat of summer, why don’t you construct a cottage to give you shelter? I see that you have no residence. You simply hold a bunch of straw over your head for shade. Why is this?”

Lomasa Rishi said, “It is certain that the material body will fall down at the time of death. What is the use of constructing a home in this transient world? If one is a personal friend of the lord of death (Yamaraja) or has drunk the nectar of immortality then it may be suitable for him to build a nice house. After understanding the worthless and unsteady nature of material existence—why should one go to the trouble of constructing a residence?”

King Indradyuma said, “You are reputed to be the oldest person in the three worlds. It was for that reason I approached you. Considering your longevity, why are you speaking in this way?”

Lomasa Rishi said, “Once in a day of Brahma (kalpa), a hair falls from my body. When all of my hair has fallen, my death will occur. Just look at my knee. See the patch that has become devoid of hair? For this reason, I am afraid. Of what use is there of a house when death is certain?”



When he heard this, King Indradyumna was somewhat amused. He smilingly asked about the cause of the sage's longevity. In reply, Lomasa Rishi described how, in his previous birth, he had worshiped Lord Shiva with unwavering devotion.

Lomasa Rishi said, "Formerly, I was an exceedingly poor shudra. I wandered over the earth, afflicted by hunger. One day, I came to a small lake and entered the water to bathe. Afterwards, I cast my net in the hopes of catching some fish but instead, I pulled up a shiva-linga from the water. Thereafter, I performed very nice worship with an offering of lotus flowers that grew there in abundance. After some time, I departed and while wandering, I met with death."

"In my next life, I was born in the house of a brahmana and I could remember the events of my past life. This was the result of worshiping the shiva-linga with an offering of splendid lotus flowers. Because my father had received me as a son in his old age after worshiping Lord Shiva, he named me Ishana."

"Understanding the illusory nature of this world, I adopted a vow of silence. My father didn't understand my intention and so he bought some medicine in the hopes of curing my dumbness. Thereafter, he tried many magical formulas and brought many physicians. Seeing how my parents were so foolish, I laughed inside my mind."

"When I became a youth, I would secretly leave my house every night and worship Lord Shiva with offerings of lotus flowers. After doing so, I would return home and go to bed. Later on, when my father died, I was forsaken by my relatives because they considered me to be an idiot. Actually, I was happy that I was rejected by my family. I roamed about freely, eating only fruit, and I worshiped Lord Shiva to my heart's content with offerings of lotus flowers."

"After one hundred years, Lord Shiva appeared before me and so I begged him to make me immortal. Lord Shiva said, 'There can be neither immortality nor freedom for one who inhabits a material body. Therefore, fix a limit for your duration of life.' I asked, 'Let

one hair from my body fall at the end of each kalpa. Only when all the hair on my body has fallen will I die. After that, let me become one of your associates.' Saying, 'So be it,' Lord Shiva vanished."

"Ever since then, I have been wholly devoted to penance. There is no doubt that one can achieve great merit by worshipping Lord Shiva with offerings of lotus flowers and so I would advise you to take up this practice, my dear King. By worshipping Lord Shiva and chanting the sacred syllable, om, one will surely attain liberation from material bondage. Only when all of your sins are completely destroyed will you feel genuine attachment for the Lord."

After hearing this, King Indradyumna said, "My dear sage, I shall never abandon you and resort to another person."

After hearing these words, the crane, the owl, the vulture and the tortoise bowed down to Lomasa Rishi and told him the same. In return, the sage accepted all of us as his disciples. Thereafter, all six of us engaged in the performance of austerities.

Narada continued his narration to Arjuna, saying, "Once, I journeyed to Kalapagrama, being eager to see Lomasa Rishi. After I had been welcomed and had rested, the crane, owl, vulture and tortoise approached me and said, 'We four have been cursed because of our indiscretions. Please direct us to some holy place that will free us from our curses. This place does not yield such a fruit. Tell us about the place where the benefit of visiting all holy places can be attained.' "

Narada Muni replied, "You should go and ask Samvarta. He will tell you about such a place."

The four inquired, "Where can we find this great sage? Previously, we had not heard of him."

Narada Muni said, "Samvarta is staying at Varanasi. He secretly worships a shiva-linga, smears his body with dirt, goes naked, and eats what he acquires by begging. He eats out of his hands without using any utensils. I will tell you how you can recognize the sage. A dead body should be placed on the main road without the knowledge of the public. Stay nearby. The person who arrives there and then

suddenly turns back is Samvarta. You should then approach him and ask him what he desires. If he asks, 'Who sent you?' inform him that it was I who did so. Then, say that after mentioning him, I had entered fire."

"The four did as I had told them. They went to Varanasi, placed a corpse on the road and then, when Samvarna was leaving, they followed him. They said, 'O brahmana, please stop for a moment.' Samvarna rebuked them, saying, 'Go away, do not come near me. It will not be good for you.' As he was fleeing, he asked, 'Who has sent you? Tell me quickly so that I can reduce him to ashes with my curse. Or, I shall burn you if you do not tell me the truth.' Being very afraid, we replied, 'We were sent by Narada.' He asked, 'Where has that gossip-monger gone? I shall reduce that fool to ashes!' Being frightened, they replied, 'After telling us about you, Narada immediately entered fire. We don't know why.' "

Samvarta said, "I would have done to him what he has done to himself. Tell me now, what do you want. I will not stay here long."

At this point in the narration, Arjuna asked, "If you entered fire, how are you living now? Please explain this mystery to me."

Narada Muni said, "Fire, the ocean, the wind, a mountain, or a weapon—none has the power to destroy my body. Even after entering fire, I came out unscathed. Just as someone might enter a house made of flowers, I went into the fire and came out unharmed."

Samvarta said, "Clear the road of the corpse because I am hungry. I want to enter the city to beg for alms. Ask me what you want."

The four said, "We have fallen down due to being cursed. By your blessings, we hope to become delivered from our misfortune. Please tell us—what holy place awards the benefit of all holy places. We would like to reside at that place."

Samvarta replied, "I shall tell you about the holy place called Mahi-sagara-sangama, where the Mahi river meets the sea. By the power of King Indradyumna's sacrifices, the earth exuded a stream of water that became known as the river, Mahi. It's water consists of all the holy places on the surface of the earth."

Diti, one of Kashyapa's wives, was the mother of Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. After they were killed, Diti performed austerities for the purpose of receiving a son who could kill Indra. Knowing of this, Indra entered Diti's womb and cut her embryo into forty-nine parts. These became the forty-nine Maruts.

Thereafter, Diti begged her husband to give her another son who would be capable of slaying Indra. Again, Kashyapa instructed Diti to engage in performing austerities, this time for a period of ten thousand years, and he assured her that in this way, she would receive a son named Vajranga. Thus, Diti came to have a son who was invincible, even to Indra's thunderbolt.

After his birth, Vajranga asked his mother, "What shall I do?"

Diti ordered him to kill Indra and so Vajranga assembled his army and proceeded to heaven. With his arms alone as his weapon, he conquered Indra, the king of heaven. Just as a lion drags an insignificant animal, Vajranga dragged Indra by the leg into the presence of his mother.

As Indra was fearfully begging for his release, Lord Brahma and Kashyapa arrived there. Lord Brahma said, "Release him. It is said that insulting an honorable man is almost the same as killing him. Just as you captured Indra on the order of your mother, now you should release him on the order of your father."

Vajranga obeyed his great-grandfather (Brahma) and released Indra. He said, "I do not want to enjoy the rule of the three worlds that is already enjoyed by Indra, for that would be like enjoying a woman who already has a husband."

Lord Brahma then created a large-eyed woman and gave her to Vajranga as his wife. Her name was Varangi, meaning, "one having beautiful limbs." Vajranga went with her to the forest for the purpose of performing austerities.

While Vajranga performed austerities for one thousand years, his wife sat patiently, meditating upon him all the while. As she was performing penance in this way, Indra took the form of a monkey and came near her. He poked her eyes, passed stool and urine, tugged

at her clothes, shook her head, and messed up her hair. Then, taking the form of a ram, he caused her great pain. As a serpent, Indra coiled around her feet. He dragged her far away but due to the prowess of her penance, the king of heaven could not kill her.

Because of her forbearance, Varangi did not become even slightly angry. Next, in the form of a jackal, Indra created havoc at her hermitage. Then, in the form of fire, Indra burned down her cottage. As a raging wind, Indra pulled that lady forcibly. As Indra continued to harass her in the form of a lion, wolf, and other animals, Varangi thought that it was the nearby mountain that was teasing her and so she prepared to curse him.

Understanding this, the mountain assumed a human form, approached Varangi and said, "O lady, I am not the one who is harassing you. It is the slayer of Vritra (Indra) who is angry and thus tormenting you."

Finally, after a thousand years had passed, Lord Brahma became pleased and appeared before Vajranga. He said, "I shall grant you whatever you desire. Desist now from your austerities."

Getting up, the Daitya joined his palms in reverence and replied, "Let there be no evil feelings in me. Let there be no desire for Indra's kingdom. Let there be love for virtue, penance, and piety in me."

Lord Brahma said, "Let it be so." Being surprised in his mind at Vajranga's indifference toward Indra, Lord Brahma suddenly vanished from view. His austerities completed, Vajranga wanted to eat something but he could not see his wife in the hermitage. Thinking, "One who is without a wife lives in vain," he looked for her, here and there. Finally, he saw her sitting behind a tree, crying.

Vajranga said, "O timid lady, who has harmed you, even as you were performing penance in your own way? Why do you cry when your husband is alive? What desire do you have that I shall fulfill?"

"If a man does not show affection for the goddess of his

house, the auspicious lady who has come to share his life, just as a lame man and a blind man cooperate, and if he does not fulfill her desires—is he really a man?”

Varangi replied, “I have been repeatedly tormented by the lord of the devas, as though I were without a protector. Being unable to see the far shore of the ocean of misery, I sometimes prepared to give up my life. If you have any mercy for me then give me a son who can be my savior from misery.”

After hearing this appeal, Vajrangi thought to himself, “Although I have no feelings of enmity, I must satisfy my wife because that is my sacred duty, as ordained by shastra. It is only with the help of one’s wife that a man is able to conquer the urges of his senses. I am capable of conquering Indra and so first, let me gain revenge, and then I will give her the son she desires.”

While thinking in this way, Vajrangi became enraged and he resumed his austerities for the purpose of gaining revenge. Upon learning of his terrible decision, Lord Brahma quickly returned to where the son of Diti (Vajrangi) was staying.”

Lord Brahma said, “Why are you performing austerities with a view to harm another? You had not eaten for one thousand years and then you ate for only a few moments. The renunciation of desires for that which has not been obtained is not as troublesome as the giving up of that which one has abundantly enjoyed.”

The Daitya said, “O grandfather, I am performing severe austerities for the sake of my wife. I wish to obtain a son who will subdue the pride of the demigods.”

Upon hearing this, Lord Brahma became pleased and said, “Enough of your penance. Do not become involved in an endeavor that will cause pain. A son of great strength, named Taraka (the word taraka means savior), will be born to you. He will make the wives of the demigods untie their braided and decorated hair (when they become widows).”

Vajrangi bowed down to Lord Brahma and then approached his wife. In due course of time, Varangi became pregnant and after



one thousand years, she gave birth to a son. At that time, the entire earth shook, the oceans became agitated, the mountains trembled, strong winds blew, the sun lost its splendor, and mist enveloped the land. The great sages became frightened and so they chanted the holy names of the Lord for relief.

Being delighted, all of the asuras came there, along with their wives. As a great festival of celebration was being held, the demigods in heaven, headed by Indra, became dejected. Immediately after his birth, Taraka was crowned king of the demons.

Taraka addressed the demons, saying, "We have an undying enmity toward the demigods and so we should endeavor to obtain victory over them. However, I think that this can be accomplished only through the power of penance. Therefore, before starting my conquest, I will engage myself in performing austerities."

The demons applauded Taraka's determination and thereafter, he went to the mountains and began to reside within a cave. Flowers of all seasons were scattered about. Medicinal herbs illuminated the surrounding area. Various types of minerals were being exuded from the mountain. There were birds of many species and springs and lakes added to the beauty of that mountainous region.

Taraka was initiated into the worship of Lord Shiva. He repeated mantras, abstained from food, and sat in the middle of five fires. In this way, ten thousand years passed. Thereafter, he began cutting flesh from his body and offering it into the sacred fire. When his body became devoid of flesh, he appeared to be simply a mass of penance.

Meanwhile, the demigods in heaven became very anxious because of Taraka's severe austerities. Lord Brahma was very pleased, however, and so he went to the peak of that mountain for the purpose of granting Taraka benedictions.

Lord Brahma said, "My dear son, get up from your penance for there is now nothing impossible for you to achieve. I will award you the benediction that you desire."

With the palms of his hands joined in reverence, Taraka replied, “O lord, I have a hereditary enmity toward the demigods. Award me the benediction that I cannot be killed by any living being and any weapon. This is what I desire. I do not wish for anything else.”

Lord Brahma said, “It has never been seen that an embodied soul who possesses a physical body has not died. For one who has been born, death is certain. Therefore, choose something else.”

Thinking that death could not be possible at the hands of a seven-day-old baby, Taraka requested, “Except a boy of seven days, let me not be killed by anyone, not even a demigod.”

Lord Brahma said, “So be it,” and departed. Taraka returned to enjoy his kingdom of demons. Thereafter, the haughty Taraka assembled his army and yoked his chariot with one thousand sons of Garuda, whom he had conquered as they stayed in their caves of Mount Meru. All of the leading demons were as huge as mountains and they were masters of the use of all kinds of weapons.

Taraka’s chariot had sixty-four wheels and extended for four *yojanas*. The flag was terrifying because it would change shape without notice. Sometimes, it appeared like a *Rakshasha* and sometimes, like a ghost, or vulture.

The wind-god, the messenger of the demigods, went to report the matter to Indra, who was seated in his royal assembly. Indra then questioned Brihaspati about what should be done. In reply, Brihaspati described the science of diplomacy as having four parts—*saman* (peaceful negotiations), *dana* (gifts, or bribes, for reconciliation), *bheda* (sowing seeds of dissension in the enemy’s ranks), and *danda* (punishment or attack).

Brihaspati said, “*Saman* should be employed when dealing with good people, *dana* when dealing with greedy people, *bheda* when dealing with those who are frightened and hesitant, and *danda* when dealing with those who are vicious. *Saman* is of no use when dealing with the vicious demons because they are devoid of all good qualities. There is no use of employing *dana* because they are already

wealthy, and due to their strong sense of family ties, there is no hope of sowing seeds of dissension. Therefore, the only remaining option is the use of force. You should prepare for war.”

Thereafter, the two great armies clashed, like two great oceans at the end of the kalpa (when there is a partial devastation).

The terrible battle between the demigods and demons is described here in great detail. I am not very fond of blow-by-blow battle descriptions and so I will just give a few highlights. The demons were formidable and so appeared to be heading for victory on the battlefield.

While the demon, Kalanemi, was creating a great massacre, the sun-god ordered his charioteer, Aruna, the elder brother of Garuda, to confront him. When the sun-god released a Shambara weapon, it made the demigods look like demons and the demons look like demigods. Kalanemi went on a rampage and killed millions of his own soldiers, mistaking them to be demigods. When he caught the demon, Nimi, by the hair and was about to kill him, the demon informed him of Shambara’s illusion and the disaster it had created.

Kalanemi released a brahmastra that immediately counterated the Shambara’s illusion and at this, the sun-god became enraged. Indeed, he blazed up like the sun (this is a joke), covering the three worlds by utilizing the Indrajala weapon. Thus, the army of demons became scorched. Being tormented by thirst, the demons and their animals searched here and there for water as blazing forest fires raged.

Suddenly, the demons saw waves of water right in front of them, although they could not touch them. Soon, millions of demons and their animals died of thirst and exhaustion. Becoming exceedingly enraged, Kalanemi assumed the form of a black cloud so that his shiny hair appeared like hundreds of streaks of lightning. The tumultuous sound produced by the striking of his arms seemed like thunder. Covering the entire sky, he reduced the luster of the sun to nil. He then showered rain upon the scorched army of demons so that they quickly felt relieved of their distress.

Thereafter, Kalanemi in the form of a cloud showered weapons upon the demigods. Panicked, they sought shelter under their chariots and elephants. Still, more than a million demigods perished in the course of Kalanemi's onslaught.

The Asvini-kumaras fought furiously with Kalanemi but when the demon discharged a Narayana weapon, they fled from the battlefield. The Asvini-kumaras went to where Indra was stationed but Kalanemi, along with his army, followed in hot pursuit. Upon seeing Kalanemi rushing toward him, Indra and all of the demigods became afraid and so began to take shelter of Lord Vishnu.

They prayed: *namo brahmanya devaya, go brahmana hitaya ca, jagat-hitaya krishnaya, govindaya namo namah*. "I offer my respectful obeisances to the Supreme Absolute Truth, Krishna, who is the well-wisher of the cows and the brahmanas as well as the living entities in general. I offer my repeated obeisances to Govinda, who is the pleasure reservoir for all the senses."

The demigods concluded their prayers, saying, "May Govinda come and save us."

The Lord was absorbed in yoga-nidra (mystic slumber) but knowing that He was being thought of, He woke up. After pondering over the situation, Lord Vishnu summoned Garuda. After arming Himself, the Lord mounted Garuda and set out for the battlefield. There, He saw the frightened Indra under attack from the army of demons.

The demigods saw a greatly effulgent being appear in the sky. The demons were also curious to ascertain the nature of that glaring effulgence and as they looked on, gradually, they could see Lord Vishnu, mounted upon Garuda. The chiefs of the demons felt great delight, thinking, "This is Lord Keshava, the refuge of the demigods. If we can defeat Him, the demigods will automatically perish."

While thinking in this way, ten great demon warriors, headed by Kalanemi, surrounded Lord Vishnu and began showering their weapons upon Him. When Kalanemi pierced Him in the chest

with three arrows, Lord Vishnu picked up a mallet and threw it. Kalanemi shattered that weapon into splinters with his arrows, however, before it reached him.

Having become infuriated, Lord Vishnu next hurled a barbed missile that struck Kalanemi in the chest, causing him to lose consciousness. Kalanemi regained his senses after a moment and picked up a shakti weapon that was decorated with bells and made a sound like boisterous laughter. That shakti weapon pierced Lord Vishnu's left arm.

The Lord picked up a huge bow and seventeen wonderful arrows. With nine, He pierced Kalanemi's heart, with four He wounded the charioteer, and with one He knocked down the flagstaff. With two arrows He cut the demon's bowstring and with one more He broke his arrow.

Being deeply hurt, Kalanemi trembled violently. Seeing His adversary's weakened condition, Lord Vishnu picked up a mace and hurled it with the intention of killing his enemy. That club landed on Kalanemi's head, shattering his crown and smashing his head. Blood oozed from every pore of his body as he, devoid of consciousness, fell to the floor of his chariot.

Lord Vishnu said, "O Daitya, I will let you be for the moment. Soon, I shall kill you."

Upon hearing these words, the charioteer fearfully took Kalanemi from the battlefield. The remaining leaders of the demons surrounded Lord Vishnu, showering their arrows upon him. Enraged, the Lord responded with a stream of arrows that drove the demons off, just as talk of earning money drives away religious sentiments.

When the infuriated leaders of the demons exerted themselves more vigorously, Lord Vishnu picked up His mace. The demon, Nimi, struck the mace with thousands of arrows, making it fall to the ground. Lord Vishnu next hurled a shakti weapon but the demon, Jambha, caught it and threw it back, striking Garuda on the head, causing him to fall unconscious. With a stroke of His hand, the Lord brought Garuda back to his senses and then consoled him with gentle words.

Just as everything planned by a man with a wicked wife is futile, so was the shakti thrown by the Lord. After employing more weapons, without achieving ultimate victory, Lord Vishnu assumed a form resembling the all-encompassing fire of devastation and picked up His Sudarshana chakra. When the chakra was released, it cut off the head of Grasana, the demons' commander-in-chief.

When the demons fought furiously, in the hopes of gaining revenge, Lord Vishnu killed millions of them with His perfectly-aimed arrows. All of the demons then rushed at Lord Vishnu at the same time. Some seized Garuda by the feet, hundred hung from his wings, while others grabbed his beak. Some clung to Lord Vishnu's head and arms while others grabbed His bow. Upon seeing this, the demigods became terribly dismayed.

The Lord violently shook off the demons, like an enlightened man shaking off the impurities of material existence, so that they fell to the ground. The Lord then unsheathed His terrible sword, Nandaka, and picked up His shield. Getting down from His chariot, the Lord wandered over the battlefield and within one muhurta (forty-eight minutes), He slashed to pieces trillions of demons.

While some of the commanders of the demons were mounting a final attack, Garuda came and the Lord mounted him once again. In the battle that ensued, Lord Vishnu killed Mahisha and then revived him, saying, "O Danava, you do not deserve to be killed by Me. You will be killed by a woman (Goddess Durga), as predicted by Brahma. Get up and go away from this great battle."

Similarly, when the demon, Shumbha, was severely injured in the battle, Lord Vishnu told him, "You are destined to be easily killed by a woman in a few days. You do not deserve to be killed by Me and so you should leave the battlefield."

The great demon, Jambha, then challenged the Lord. Lord Vishnu hurled a mace and spear. The demon jumped from his chariot and seized both weapons. With the former he hit Garuda and with the latter, he struck a severe blow on the Lord's head. Because of this, both Garuda and Govinda lost consciousness so



that it appeared as if they were almost dead. The demons roared with delight, twanged their bows in ecstasy, and joyfully waved their cloths.

Soon, Lord Vishnu and Garuda regained consciousness. The Lord embraced Jambha and then began fleeing from the battlefield, His bow and flag smashed. The demons were overjoyed but Indra was perplexed about what to do next and so he quickly approached Lord Vishnu and said, “O Lord, why do You play with these vicious demons? Formerly, You easily killed Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashipu, Madhu and Kaitabha. Indeed, in every yuga, you effortlessly kill many demons. You are the support of the demigods, who are now terrified.”

Lord Vishnu laughed and replied, “What you say is true. I could kill all of the demons in a moment, if I so desired. However, the demon, Taraka, can only be killed by a seven-day-old child. Mahisha and Shumbha are destined to be killed by a woman and Jambha was cursed by Durvasa that he would be killed by you.”

“Go now and fight with Jambha. Being protected by Me, you will come out victorious.”

Thereafter, Indra mounted upon Airavata, who has four tusks and can assume any form at will, and the army of the demigods were assembled. To the left of Indra was Vayu, the wind-god, and to his right was Agni, the fire-god.

As the fierce battle raged, Jambha approached Indra to fight. In the duel that ensued, when Indra discharged a fire weapon, Jambha released a weapon that created clouds and then dense showers. These clouds were then dispersed when Indra employed a wind weapon. Jambha assumed the form of a great mountain, ten yojanas high, that stopped the force of the wind. Indra next released his thunderbolt to shatter the mountain created by Jambha to pieces. In response, Jambha assumed the form of a huge elephant and began crushing the soldiers of the demigods. Indra discharged a Narasimha weapon that created thousands of lions that began to claw the great elephant. Being tormented, Jambha gave up that form and took the

form of a terrible serpent with many hoods. As the demigods were being burned by that serpent's poisonous breath, Indra discharged a Garuda missile that created thousands of Garudas. This dispelled the illusion created by Jambha and so he next assumed a huge form that extended up to the sun and moon, desiring to swallow the leading demigods.

As the demigod warriors were being swallowed by Jambha, Indra became depressed, not knowing what to do next. When solicited by Indra for advice, the Lord said, "Do not grieve and give up the fight. Now, employ the Narayana weapon."

Meanwhile, Jambha was swallowing thousands of demigod warriors as the Narayana weapon struck him in the chest. This forced Jambha to give up his gigantic form and next, while stationed invisibly in the sky, he began to shower weapons on the demigods. Indeed, the demigods became exceedingly oppressed because they were unable to counter Jambha's onslaught of weapons.

Seeing their plight, Lord Vishnu told Indra, "Remember the Aghora mantra that was awarded by Lord Shiva. It has the power of the Pashupata weapon. That weapon has never been counteracted."

Being thus advised, Indra bowed down to Lord Shiva, fixed the arrow on his bowstring, empowered it by chanting the appropriate mantra, and then discharged it. That wonderful weapon severed the head of that worst of demons, Jambha. At this, all of the demons fled to the shelter of Taraka. Taraka then urged his charioteer to take him to Indra. When he saw Taraka coming, Indra left Airavata and mounted his chariot, which was driven by Matali.

In the fierce battle that took place, Taraka hurled a mallet that reduced Indra's chariot to a pile of rubble, although both the king of heaven and his driver escaped unharmed. Thereafter, Taraka oppressed all of the leading demigods, and even made Lord Vishnu fall unconscious for some time. When Lord Vishnu responded by releasing His Sudarshana chakra, it shattered into

fragments as it fell on the demon's chest. Indra then discharged his thunderbolt, upon which he had pinned all of his hopes, but it also became shattered upon hitting the heroic demon.

Indeed, all of the best weapons of the chief demigods were foiled by Jambha as if they were mere toys. When the demon proceeded to kill millions of demons with his fists and kicks, Lord Vishnu advised the demigods to flee and then suddenly vanished from view.

The demigods feverishly fled the field of battle but many were impeded by their impetuous enemies and tormented. At this time, a tumultuous roar was heard in the ranks of the demons as they highly lauded Taraka for his wonderful victory.

Taraka then went to his capital, which was situated near the confluence of the river Mahi and the sea. After entering the city, Taraka entered his palace amid great festivity and celebration, and sat down on his throne in the royal assembly while being honored by his wives and sons. In that great city of the demons, music was always to be heard and the motto appeared to be, "Let the worldly pleasures be enjoyed as much as possible."

At that time, a divine woman appeared in that city, and her marvelous beauty was unparalleled. Upon seeing her, King Taraka was very pleased and surprised. He smilingly said, "Who are you, gentle lady? O woman with a fascinating form, for what purpose have you approached me? I have never seen anyone so lovely before."

The woman replied, "I am a goddess who has been acquired by you as a result of your performance of austerities and your heroism. I adhere to that man who is heroic and never idle, who is endowed with the splendor of austerity, and who is never cowardly, a reasonable enjoyer, and always charitable."

"I immediately abandon a man who is cowardly, who is extremely morose and dejected, who harasses chaste ladies, and who is suspicious of everyone. Indra was abandoned by me when he insulted your mother."

In this way, the expansion of Lakshmi-devi secured the

confidence of Tarakasura. After that, the women performed arati for the victorious Taraka. Many of the demigods had been captured and bound by the demons and they were very dejected. Being kept near the gate, they were ridiculed by the women and others.

Meanwhile, Lord Vishnu assumed the form of a Daitya and while standing in the midst of those who were deriding the demigods, He recited these two verses: "What is there a king will not do, recollecting the anger of his mother? There is no one who will not bow down after approaching a very powerful person. O demigods, remain here in the form of monkeys."

Upon hearing this, the demigods transformed themselves into monkeys. The people teased them and fed them in a happy mood. Lord Vishnu then told the gatekeeper, "Go and inform the king that many monkeys are here for his entertainment."

When he was informed of how there were many monkeys at the gate, Taraka went, along with Kalanemi, to see them. Meanwhile, Lord Vishnu had transformed Himself from a Daitya into a monkey. When Taraka arrived, all of the monkeys danced very nicely for his entertainment. Being delighted, the Daityas cheered and applauded. Being very pleased, the king invited the monkeys to remain in his city without any fear, wandering about at will.

While still dancing, Lord Vishnu in the form of a monkey inquired, "O King, we would like to know the extent of your abode."

The king laughed and replied, "My abode is three-stories because I rule the three worlds."

Lord Vishnu said, "If this is so then remember your words and let these monkeys roam about the three worlds as they please. O King, adherence to truth is superior to the performance of one hundred horse sacrifices. Keeping this in mind, stay true to your word."

The king said, "O monkey, you are highly enlightened. Tell me the truth—who are you really?"

The Lord replied, "My name is Narayana and I have assumed the form of a monkey to protect the demigods. Since I am telling the truth, you should keep your word and allow the devas to roam freely within the three worlds."

"One should not let haughtiness enter his heart, especially if he can appreciate the prowess of Kala (time). Because everyone dies, there is no one who can consider himself to be a killer. It is time alone who destroys us all."

"Long ago, many Daityas more powerful than you suffered miserable plights while being tossed about by Kala, as if they were mere cotton swabs. After receiving your position, you think too much of yourself, considering yourself to be eternal. Even this position is not stable, although you childishly consider yourself to be the lord of the three worlds. Just consider how, after passing from one hand to another innumerable times, this kingdom is now yours. How can you imagine that it will remain yours forever?"

"Who is there competent to stand before Me on the battlefield? Kala (fate) has intervened, however, and so I stand waiting, O Taraka. It is I who create the universe, along with Brahma. As long as I wish, I keep it and if I were to desire, I could destroy it in a moment. It is not that I do not dare to kill you in the presence of all these Daityas but I never violate the rules of dharma, even to the slightest extent. After considering all this, you should keep your promise intact."

Taraka replied, "All that you have said is true. After seeing how the universe is leading toward destruction, which embodied being would be eager to continue believing in the permanent existence of his body or wealth? I also have realized the temporary nature of material existence. Even as a man thinks, 'I shall do this today and I shall do that tomorrow,' Kala sweeps him away in a moment, as when a river floods its banks."

"I know that you are the eternal Supreme Personality of Godhead but due to my acquired nature, I do not meditate upon You. I agree to let the demigods roam freely within the three

worlds but only on these conditions—they must remain in the form of monkeys and they cannot accept their shares of sacrificial offerings.”

The demigods were delighted to hear this. Lord Vishnu replied, “Enjoy the three worlds as long as the power of your austerity lasts while these devas roam throughout the universe in this condition.”

After saying this, Lord Vishnu departed for Mount Meru in the company of the demigods. Upon their arrival, the Lord told the demigods to go and see Brahma, assuring them that he would act for their welfare, and He warned them not to violate the conditions laid down by Taraka.

Meanwhile, Taraka assumed the post of Indra and he posted Kalanemi as Yamaraja. When the demigods came before Lord Brahma, he was surprised to see them in the forms of monkeys. He told them to resume their celestial forms because there could be no fear of Taraka in his presence. Brahma told the demigods that they are considered to be his arms and therefore, their misfortune was also his. Although he knew everything, Brahma asked the demigods to describe exactly how their glory had been snatched away by Taraka, the son of Vajranga.

After hearing of the demigods' plight, Lord Brahma explained to them that Taraka could not be killed by any deva or asura but would be slain by one who had not yet been born. He said, “It is a child of seven days who will be born to Shankara (Lord Shiva) that will kill Tarakasura. The auspicious Sati, who burned herself in the fire of mystic yoga after being insulted by her father, Daksha, will be reborn as the daughter of the Himalayas. You should endeavor to unite her with Lord Shiva. I will also do my best to accomplish this.”

The demigods bowed down to Lord Brahma and then again took the forms of monkeys and departed.

After the departure of the demigods, Lord Brahma called for Nisha-devi, the goddess of night. He explained to her how, at the time of his birth, he had seen a personality called Ardhanarishvara

before him. That person then separated into a male part and a female part and these were the origin of all future males and females. The female part was Sati. Brahma told his son, Daksha, to adopt her as his daughter, which he did. Later on, Daksha gave his adopted daughter, Sati, to Lord Shiva.

Lord Brahma told Nisha, "Enter the body of Himalaya's wife, Mena, and make her embryo have a black complexion so that she will be known as Kali. When Rudra laughs at her because of this, she will perform great austerities to regain her fair complexion. Lord Shiva will then also perform austerities and later on, when their son is born, he will become the slayer of Taraka."

"O Devi, without penance, there can be no achievement. Indeed, penance is the root cause of all perfection."

Goddess Nisha gave her assent and departed for the Himalayas. There, she saw the beautiful Mena (Menaka) resting. Upon receiving the opportunity, Nisha entered Mena's body through her slightly opened mouth. Thereafter, during the brahma-muhurta, Mena gave birth to a baby girl. Being very pleased, the demigods released showers of flowers.

As a child, the daughter of Mena, Parvati, played with many girls of her own age. Once, Indra, who was staying at Mount Meru, thought of Narada Muni, who then went to see him. Indra wanted Narada to ensure that Parvati was united with Lord Shiva and so the great sage went to visit her father, Himavan.

In this way, Narada went to the abode of medicinal herbs (the Himalayas) and met the king. It must be remembered that Narada was relating this story to Arjuna.

Narada continued, "As I was seated, along with the lord of the Himalayas, his wife and daughter came to see me. I told the girl, 'come near me,' Being shy, the girl went and sat on her father's lap."

Himavan said, "My dear daughter, go and offer your obeisances to the sage. By his blessings, you will get a good husband."



The girl simply covered her face and remained silent and so Narada told her, "Come, I will give you a jeweled toy that I have kept for a long time."

The child Parvati then quickly got down from her father's lap and went and offered obeisances to Narada Muni. Narada took her on his lap and, considering how she would become worshiped throughout the universe, he said, "O girl, I cannot think of anything good enough to offer you as a blessing. What do you think is suitable for you?"

When she heard this, the girl's mother implored, "O sage, you know everything past, present, and future. I would like to know what kind of husband my daughter will obtain."

Narada Muni replied, "Her husband will be one who was not born, has evil characteristics, goes naked, is furious by nature, is always surrounded by cruel persons, and who has absolutely no possessions."

Upon hearing this, Himavan became very upset and bewildered. With a choked voice, he said, "Oh! This world is extremely mysterious. Even great souls cannot understand it. O Narada, your statement has caused me great grief! How could my daughter's husband be one who was not born? How could he possess evil characteristics? How could he be totally devoid of wealth? Your statement has bewildered my mind."

Narada Muni replied, "Do not be sad on this occasion of delight. Your daughter, in her former birth, was the wife of Lord Shiva, named Sati. Her husband is one who was not born because he is eternal. Although his activities may not appear auspicious, he is an abode of auspiciousness. Although thoroughly renounced, he bestows wealth upon his worshipers. It is he that will become your daughter's husband. Therefore, there is no reason for your sorrow."

After hearing this, Himavan felt relieved and enlivened. Narada then advised him to quickly arrange for the marriage of his daughter with Lord Shiva, saying that a great task had to be performed on behalf of the demigods.



Narada went and informed Indra of the success of his mission and told him that Kamadeva (Cupid) should be employed to complete the task.

Narada Muni continued speaking to Arjuna, "After that, I went to see Taraka. Being fond of quarrels, I wanted to apprise him of the situation. Meanwhile, at the urging of her father, Parvati and her friends went to Lord Shiva and engaged in his service. Appreciating her good behavior, Lord Shiva engaged Parvati in collecting flowers and fruit, and bringing water."

"Indra summoned Kamadeva and asked him to bring about the union of Lord Shiva and Parvati. At first, Kamadeva declined, saying that Lord Shiva was engaged in performing austerities and that such persons view lust as a great enemy. At last, Indra convinced Kamadeva of the importance of the task and so the god of love went to where Lord Shiva was staying, accompanied by Rati and Vasanta (spring)."

"Smara (Cupid) saw Lord Shiva sitting underneath a tree, engaged in meditation with his eyes fixed on the tip of his nose. Employing the humming of a bumblebee, Kama entered the mind of Lord Shiva. At that time, Lord Shiva opened his eyes, his mind being affected by love as he remembered the daughter of Himavan. Just at that time, Parvati came there and Lord Shiva realized that he was enamored by her. While curbing this feeling, Lord Shiva glanced behind him and saw Kamadeva with his arrow fully drawn on his bow."

"Thereafter, by his power of yoga, Lord Shiva wandered over the three worlds and yet, whenever he looked behind him, he saw Kamadeva. After returning to his ashram, he glanced behind him once again and found that Kama was still there. Fire then emanated from Lord Shiva's third eye, reducing the god of love to ashes. That fire then increased as if to burn the entire universe, and so, for the welfare of all, Lord Shiva divided it among proud people, the moon, flowers, songs, bees, the beaks of cuckoos, and lovely parks. Indeed, when a lover is near one of these, his heart



becomes filled with affection. When one is burning with that fire, it is very difficult to curb and it leads to unhappiness.”

“Rati lamented greatly at the loss of her husband and so the compassionate Lord Shiva told her, ‘Gentle lady, although your husband has no body, at the time of amorous dalliance, he will accomplish everything required. Later on, when Lord Vishnu incarnates as Vasudeva, you will become the wife of His son.’ Upon hearing this, Rati became pacified. After bowing to Lord Shiva, she departed, along with Vasanta.”

Arjuna wondered why Lord Shiva had burnt Kama to ashes since it was due to feelings of separation from Sati that he had engaged himself in performing austerities. Also, Mahadeva had chosen to reside in the Himalayas so that he could be near his wife, who had appeared again as the daughter of Himavan.

Narada Muni explained, “What you say is true but from the very beginning, Lord Shiva considered that he should not be united with his wife before performing austerities. He thought, ‘Without penance, one does not become pure in body. Bodily contact with one having an impure body is improper. Penance is the root of all greatness. The achievements of those who have not performed penance do not reach the level of a great man’s actions.’ It is for this reason that Lord Shiva burned Kamadeva to ashes.”

Himavan happened to meet Rati as she was wandering about in the Himalayas. She informed him of all that had happened and so Himavan went and took his daughter back home. Through the mouth of a friend, she said to her father, “Of what use is this wretched body? If I don’t obtain the husband of my desire, I will relinquish it. Let me perform austerities for the sake of achieving my desired goal.”

When they heard this, the parents replied, “U ma! (meaning, “don’t do this”). Your frail body will not endure the pain of penance. Besides, whatever is destined will come to be. Even if someone doesn’t want something, if it is destined, he will get it.”



Parvati replied, "My opinion is that your statement is not correct. It is not through destiny alone that things are achieved. A person acquires something partly because of destiny, partly by means of effort, and partly as a natural sequence of events."

Parvati bid farewell to her parents and, accompanied by her friends, went to a mountain peak to perform austerities after installing Lord Shiva in her heart. As a result of her severe austerities, the living entities of the universe became scorched. In the guise of a brahmachari, Lord Shiva then came to see her. Parvati's friends informed him that her period of penance would come to an end in just five hours and so they requested him to sit and wait. Just before the expiry of that time, the intelligent Mahadeva, on the excuse of surveying the area, went to a nearby lake and dove in. In a loud voice, he cried out, "I am drowning. Please come and lift me up from the water."

When they heard him crying out, Parvati's friends came running. Even though they offered their hands, the brahmachari sank deeper into the water while saying, "I would rather die than touch a girl who has not made spiritual advancement."

Thus, Parvati came there after concluding her period of austerities. When she offered her left hand to him, the brahmachari said, "I shall not accept a hand that is not clean. The left hand is considered unclean and so I will not hold it."

Parvati replied, "I will not offer my right hand to anyone because it has already been dedicated to the lord of the demigods (Shiva). Only Mahadeva will hold my right hand."

The brahmachari said, "The brahmanas are respected by everyone, even Lord Shiva. What kind of austerity are you performing whereby you neglect a brahmana that is on the verge of death? If you actually consider the brahmanas worshipable then lift me out of the water."

Parvati carefully considered the matter and then lifted the so-called brahmachari out of the water. After doing this, Parvati bathed and then sat down firmly in a yogic posture.



The brahmachari laughed and inquired, “For what purpose are you sitting like a yogi, O woman of slender waist?”

Parvati replied, “With the fire produced of yoga, I will burn my body to ashes since it is now considered by me to be defiled, even though my mind was fixed on Lord Shiva.”

The brahmachari said, “How could you accept someone as your husband who goes naked, has an unknown family background, coils snakes around his body, smears his body with ashes, associates with ghosts and spirits, rides upon a bull, and lives in a cemetery? How can such a person be suitable for you? My advice to you is that you should give up thinking of this person.”

When she heard this, Parvati became furious and said, “O brahmana, do not speak like this! One enters the darkest region of ignorance by blaspheming Mahadeva! Listen carefully to me so that you can be absolved of your sins. Lord Shiva is the primeval cause of this world and so nobody can trace out his origin (or family). The entire universe is encompassed in his form and so he cannot be considered naked. The cemetery is symbolic of this world of birth and death. He resides there out of compassion for the living entities. Dharma has the form of a bull and so the fact that Lord Shiva rides a bull means that he is the master of religious principles. Serpents are compared with the defects of material existence. Lord Shiva keeps them under his control. Various religious rituals are his matted hair and his three eyes are the three Vedas. It is for these reasons that I worship Lord Shiva and you should also do so.”

As the brahmana was about to say something, Parvati told her friends that they should block their ears and depart. Lord Shiva then assumed his actual form and caught hold of Parvati’s garments as she was leaving.

Immediately, Parvati bowed down to her lord and began eulogizing him. Lord Shiva said, “O glorious girl, I am your slave. Command me as you please.”

Parvati replied, “O Shambhu, you are the lord of my mind but my parents are the lords of my body. It behooves you to approach them.”



Mahadeva said, "You father had vowed that he would give you in marriage only with a svayamvara and not otherwise. Let his words not prove false. Go to your father now and urge him to hold a svayamvara. In this way, I will accept you."

Thereafter, Parvati returned home, much to the delight of her parents. Her father then arranged for her svayamvara. It was announced throughout the three worlds and the thirty-three crore, thirty-three thousand, thirty-three hundred and thirty-three demigods attended, as did the leaders of the demons.

At the time of the svayamvara, when all the demigods were in attendance, Lord Shiva playfully assumed the form of a small child on the lap of a man named Jaya. Upon seeing this, the demigods became furious. Indra lifted his thunderbolt to strike him but suddenly became paralyzed. In the same way, the other demigods could not discharge their weapons. They were all frozen like statues by Lord Shiva.

Lord Brahma then went deep into meditation and understood that the child was indeed Shambhu. He went and glorified Lord Shiva by offering him select prayers. The demigods followed suit and so Lord Shiva took away their paralysis. The demons, headed by Taraka, became infuriated, however, saying, "Who is this Mahadeva? We do not worship or honor him!"

At this, the child (Lord Shiva) laughed and uttered "hum," flinging all the demons back to their abodes. Indeed, by the power of the lord, everything about the svayamvara was forgotten by them.

Thereafter, Lord Shiva assumed a wonderful form and Parvati accepted him as her husband. After the marriage ceremony was completed, Lord Shiva departed for his abode at Mount Mandara, along with his wife, Parvati. After their departure, Himavan began to cry. Who is that father of a girl that was just married whose mind is not agitated and aggrieved?

Lord Shiva felt highly delighted as he sported with Parvati in the abode he had personally constructed on Mount Mandara.



Narada Muni said (as he was relating all this to Arjuna), “Meanwhile, the devas were being harassed by Taraka, who had been urged by me because I am fond of quarrels.”

At this time, the demigods approached Lord Shiva while Parvati was bathing and dressing. From the dirt of her body, she created a human child having the head of an elephant (the origin of Ganesha is described differently in other Puranas) and, out of compassion, addressed him as her son. Lord Shiva then came there and told her, “Your son will be just like me. Those who are opposed to the Vedas will be harassed by him in the form of obstacles. On the other hand, he will remove the obstacles from the path of those who are devoted to me or Lord Vishnu. Without his worship, all religious performances will be hindered.”

Upon hearing this, Uma said, “Let it be so.”

Lord Shiva presented Ganesha to the demigods, saying, “This is your lord until the advent of the slayer of Taraka.”

Later on, as Lord Shiva was pointing out his associates to Parvati, she inquired about a particular one, the gatekeeper, Viraka. Lord Shiva called for him and then gave him to Parvati as an adopted son.

One day thereafter, as they were enjoying together in a cave, Lord Shiva said, “On my white body, O slender lady, you of black color shine like a black serpent maiden coiling around a sandalwood tree.”

Parvati became insulted by being referred to as black and so she angrily spoke sharp words in reply. Lord Shiva tried to pacify her with flattering words but she held on to her anger. Indeed, she released her feet from Shankara’s clasp, desiring to leave her husband. As she rushed off, Lord Shiva said, “It is true that the daughter is like the father. Your mind is like a peak of the Himalayas, encircled by dense clouds. Your mind is very hard to fathom. You have acquired hardness from the rocks of the mountains, crookedness from the rivers, and impossibility of being resorted to by the snow.”



Shaking with anger, Parvati replied, "By your association with wicked beings, you have acquired their qualities. Who could enumerate all of your faults?"

Parvati left her husband's abode and proceeded to a mountainous region where she could perform austerities for transforming her dark complexion into a fair one. She told the gatekeeper, "While I am gone, do not let any other woman approach my lord. If any woman comes here, inform me."

When Ganesha approached his mother and begged her to let him accompany her, she agreed, saying, "My dear boy, since you have the face of an elephant, Mahadeva will laugh at you, just as he laughed at me for having a dark complexion. Let your fate and mine be the same."

Thereafter, Parvati performed severe austerities on the peak of a mountain while her son, Ganesha, protected her. In the summer, she surrounded herself with fires. In the rainy season, she remained submerged within water. In the winter, she lay on the bare ground and all the while, she did not eat anything.

Meanwhile, a Daitya named Adi, who was the son of Andhaka and the brother of Baka, was performing austerities meant for the destruction of Lord Shiva because Mahadeva had defeated his father in battle. Adi knew that Parvati had left Lord Shiva alone. When he pleased Lord Brahma by his penance, the Daitya was offered a benediction and so he chose to become exempt from death.

Lord Brahma replied, "O Asura, there is no living being in this material world who doesn't experience death. Everyone has to meet with death due to one cause or another."

After hearing this, the demon requested that he would only die when his form would radically change. Lord Brahma consented and then departed. Considering himself to be unconquerable, Adi went to the abode of Lord Shiva and there, he saw the gatekeeper, Viraka. Taking the form of a serpent, Adi deceived the gatekeeper and entered Lord Shiva's palace. There, the deluded asura wanted

to trick Lord Shiva and so he assumed the guise of Parvati, giving up his form as a snake.

Adi appeared exquisitely beautiful. Desiring to kill Lord Shiva, he kept a sharp weapon hidden within his vagina. When Adi approached Lord Shiva, in the form of Uma, Mahadeva was delighted and embraced him (her) tightly.

Lord Shiva said, “Your feelings of love are genuine and not at all faked. O lady of excellent complexion, you have understood my desire and then come here. Without you, I felt as if the entire world were void. You have returned to me in a happy mood. I am so glad to see you!”

Adi (as Uma) replied, “I went away to perform austerities when you called me Kali (black). I did not enjoy performing penance and so I have come back to you.”

Lord Shiva had a doubt, thinking, “My wife is steadfast in her determination. How could she return without finishing her vows of austerity?”

Then, when he looked for a familiar scar and did not see it, Lord Shiva could understand that it was a demon impersonating his wife who was standing next to him in a most alluring manner. He then fixed a terrible Rudra weapon on his penis and proceeded to do just as the Daitya desired. When, at the peak of passion, Lord Shiva invoked the Rudra weapon, the demon fell dead on the spot while shrieking hideously.”

Parvati came to know of how a woman had visited her husband and so she became even more aggrieved and angry. From her rage, a lion emerged from her mouth and departed. She cursed her adopted son, Viraka, the gatekeeper, because he had allowed a woman to see her husband. Actually, Parvati was so unhappy that she was about to give up her life and so Lord Brahma came to pacify her. When asked what she desired, Parvati explained to Brahma that she wished to have a fair complexion.

Lord Brahma granted this benediction. At that time, a lady of blue complexion came out from Parvati's body. Lord Brahma said,

“Let this lady be your powerful vehicle, in the form of a lion that she had previously assumed.”

This is how Goddess Durga received her lion carrier. Feeling ashamed of herself, Parvati returned to her husband. At the gate, she learned that the so-called woman who had visited her husband was actually a Daitya, who was then killed.

The gatekeeper, Viraka, could not recognize Parvati because her complexion had changed from black to almost white and so he refused to grant her entry into Lord Shiva's palace. When she described all that had happened to Viraka, he finally understood. Parvati then apologized to Viraka, saying that although her curse could not be cancelled, she would arrange for him to become Lord Shiva's personal carrier, Nandi, the bull.

Thereafter, when Lord Shiva saw Parvati enter, he exclaimed, “To hell with women!”

Parvati bowed down to her husband and said, “This is true. Women certainly deserve criticism. It is only by the favor of a man that a woman can be liberated from the ocean of material existence.”

Lord Shiva exclaimed, “You are now most worthy! I will bestow upon you a son who will greatly enhance your fame.”

Thereafter, Lord Shiva and Parvati enjoyed each other in heavenly surroundings for thousands of years. Being impatient, the demigods asked Agni to find out what Mahadeva was up to. Taking the form of a pigeon, Agni, the fire-god, deceived the gatekeeper and entered Lord Shiva's palace.

Lord Shiva had been engaged with Parvati in conjugal affairs. As she bent down to tenderly show her affection, Lord Shiva's semen was ejaculated. At that time, Mahadeva could understand that the pigeon in the room was Agni. He said, “What you have done is highly improper. I have ejected my semen without intercourse. Consume it or else I will burn you to ashes.”

Being terribly frightened, Agni drank Lord Shiva's semen and because he is the mouth of the demigods, all of them became disturbed. Coming out from the bellies of the demigods, the semen formed a lake that extended a hundred yojanas. The fire-god spat Lord Shiva's semen into the Ganga. Being unable to bear it, Ganga-devi cast it aside and it became the Shveta Mountain.

One day thereafter, Agni was invoked by the seven sages and so he appeared at their arena of sacrifice. Later on, when Agni saw the beautiful wives of the seven sages, he became infatuated with lust. He very well understood that such desires were very sinful and would destroy his pious position and so he went to the forest. Although he tried his best to drive the thoughts of sexually enjoying the sapta-rishi's wives out of his mind—he failed to do so.

Understanding the condition of her husband, Svaha became delighted, thinking, "Because I have lived with him for such a long time, my husband treats me neglectfully and wants to enjoy sexual intercourse with the wives of prominent rishis. Therefore, I shall assume their forms and enjoy with him as when we first met."

The wife of the rishi, Angira, was named Shiva. Svaha took her form and approached the fire-god, saying, "I am being scorched by the god of love and so you should love me in return. If you don't reciprocate my love, I will consider myself to be no better than dead. I am the wife of Angira, named Shiva. I have come here with the wives of the other rishis and they will also meet you, one after another. You are our eternal lover and our minds are fixed on you."

Being greatly agitated by strong desires, Agni enjoyed sex with his wife, thinking that she was another woman. Agni was delighted with his experience and Svaha was also delighted. While going, she thought, "If people see me in this form, they will blame the innocent wives of the rishis."

Svaha took the form of a female Garuda bird and flew to the Shveta (white) mountain. Soaring to the peak of the mountain, she deposited Agni's semen in a golden pot because she was not able to tolerate it. Thereafter, she assumed the forms of the other wives

of the sapta-rishis and continued to enjoy sexual intercourse with her husband. However, she could not assume the form of the chaste Arundhati. In this way, Agni deposited his semen (which was mixed with the semen of Lord Shiva) in Svaha six times, and each time she put it in the golden pot.

Agni felt terribly guilty, however, thinking that he had committed very grave sins, and so he decided to give up his body. Just then, however, he heard a voice from the sky, saying, "Do not kill yourself because what has happened was inevitable, having been caused by destiny. There was a great purpose to all this. Besides, these were not actually the wives of the rishis. All of them were your wife, Svaha, who had assumed their forms. Still, at the sacrifice of Shvetaketu, you will suffer indigestion due to the profuse offerings of ghee. Go now and see your son in a golden pot atop Mount Shveta."

Agni went to Mount Shveta and saw his son, Karttikeya (also called Skanda), having six heads. On the first day, Agni saw his son as a lump of flesh. On the second day, he had form. On the third day, he became an infant, and on the fourth day, he matured. At that time, Agni embraced his son and gave him the shakti weapon. Skanda went to the top of the mountain and surveyed all directions. He shouted so ferociously that all within the universe became terrified. Then, with his shakti weapon, he smashed the mountain to dust.

The demigods, with Indra at their head, went to try and subdue Karttikeya. Upon seeing the army of the demigods, Skanda discharged flames from his six mouths that burned his assailants. Being engulfed in flames, the demigods took shelter of Agni. At last, when Indra's thunderbolt proved ineffective, the demigods took shelter of Skanda and in return, he assured them that there was no cause for fear. The demigods requested Skanda to become their commander-in-chief and kill Taraka.

Skanda accepted this position and in response, the demigods roared with delight. Upon hearing this sound, Parvati inquired from



her husband about the cause. Lord Shiva explained, "The demigods are delighted because a son has been born to you."

Parvati became very anxious to see Karttikeya. Lord Shiva was also very eager and so he took Parvati upon his bull carrier and departed. Lord Shiva and Parvati fondly embraced their son and at that time, the six wives of the sages came there, after having been abandoned by their husbands. These six women addressed Skanda as their son and so Parvati said to them, "This is my son and not yours!"

Svaha said, "The child is mine!"

Agni said, "He is my child!"

Rudra exclaimed, "This child is mine!"

Ganga-devi insisted, "This boy is mine!"

In this way, a terrible argument ensued. Narada Muni commented to Arjuna, "The love one has for a son is very strong. What is there that it does not cause one to do?"

Karttikeya then laughingly said, "It is not good to argue like this. I am all of yours son. Let each of you receive a benediction from me."

The six wives of the sages requested, "Let us eternally reside in heaven."

Skanda consented (the seven stars of the Pleiades are considered to be the seven sages) and the wives of the six sages departed. Svaha said, "I am not much loved by Agni and so grant that I will be his beloved wife and always stay with him."

Skanda replied, "Whatever the brahmanas offer in the sacrificial fire will be done in your name and thus, you will reside with Agni forever."

The others prayed that Skanda would always be known as their son, and this was also accepted. Thereafter, a great celebration took place as Karttikeya was installed as the commander-in-chief of the demigods' army. At the end of the ceremonies, when Karttikeya requested the demigods to accept benedictions, they replied, "Our only desire is that you kill the terrible demon, Taraka."

Thereafter, Skanda mounted his peacock carrier and departed, along with his army, vowing to kill his enemy that very day. Lord Shiva and Parvati closely followed their son, riding on a chariot. That wonderful chariot had been made by Lord Shiva himself. One thousands lions were yoked to the chariot and Lord Brahma held the reins. Kuvera rode upon the Pushpaka chariot and Indra was seated upon Airavata. Yamaraja, in the company of Mrityu (Death), was surrounded by hundreds of fearful ailments.

When he came to Taraka's city, Skanda praised its beauty. Indra then requested that, as is customary, a messenger be sent to inform Taraka of Karttikeya's arrival.

Narada Muni told Arjuna, "Skanda sent me to the leader of the demons, considering me to be a worthy messenger. I was pleased because this was also my desire."

Narada Muni went into the palace, which was inhabited by thousands of women, and relayed Indra's message to Taraka: "You have committed countless sins while tormenting the inhabitants of the universe. Those sinful reactions will be destroyed by me today (by your death). Come out of your city and fight. Otherwise, I shall cast it into the sea."

Narada said, "Upon hearing these insulting words, Tarakasura, who was surrounded by many women, became infuriated. Indeed, he clenched his fists and rushed at me. I was terrified and so I quickly ran away and reported everything to Skanda (who is repeatedly referred to as Kumara).

Taraka then considered within his mind, "Without having some support, Indra would not dare speak like this. I see omens that produce fear in me."

Taraka went to the top of his palace of one thousand stories and surveyed the army of the demigods. He wondered, "They were already soundly defeated by me. Why have they come again?"

Then, in the distance, Taraka could hear the bards glorifying Karttikeya, referring to him as a seven-day-old boy. When he heard this, Taraka remembered how Lord Brahma had predicted that he

would be killed by a seven-day-old child. Becoming overwhelmed by fear, Taraka summoned his ministers, headed by Kalanemi. Taraka chastised them for not informing him of the activities of his enemies but in reply, Kalanemi assured him of their victory. The army of demons was then hastily assembled as the infuriated demigods proceeded to destroy the outskirts of the city.

Thereafter, the army of demons, with Kalanemi at the front, rushed at the demigods and the universe became plunged in darkness. In the fighting that ensued, Kalanemi suddenly jumped onto Airavata's head, kicked him with great force and gave Indra a blow with his fist so that both fell to the ground. Kalanemi then picked up the unconscious Indra, put him on his chariot and proceeded towards Tarka's city.

Lord Shiva, after killing numerous demons, approached Kalanemi and said, "Of what use is Indra? Fight with me and then you will learn what heroism is."

Kalanemi replied, "Who will fight with a naked man? Even if he were to be killed, when this feat would be recited in the assembly of Daityas, it would solicit derisive laughter."

Upon hearing these words of contempt, Lord Shiva was surprised. At that time, Skanda arrived on his peacock, along with Lord Vishnu. After requesting Skanda to step aside, Lord Hari, who was seated upon Garuda, began showering arrows from His Sharṅga bow. Kalanemi put down Indra and concentrated on counteracting Lord Hari's onslaught of arrows.

As Kalanemi playfully foiled His arrows, Lord Vishnu picked up His Kaumodaki club and hurled it. That club smashed Kalanemi's driver and so the demon jumped down from his chariot. After opening his mouth widely, Kalanemi seized Garuda by the beak and put both he and Lord Vishnu into his gaping mouth. Upon seeing this, the demigods fainted and the earth trembled. Then, as Kalanemi danced in ecstasy, Lord Vishnu utilized His chakra to cut open his stomach. While coming out from the demon's body, Lord Janardana shone like the rising sun.

By means of his deluding potency, maya, Lord Vishnu took Kalanemi away from the battlefield and placed his dead body, which was like a log of wood, upon the ground in the lower regions of the universe. Being delighted, the demigods instantly regained their composure. Lord Shiva embraced Lord Vishnu and congratulated Him with great feeling.

Lord Shiva said, "You have done what no one else could do. Again, in the form of Kamsa, he should be killed by You in Your eighth incarnation as Lord Krishna."

Thereafter, as the army of demons was being routed by the demigods, Taraka ordered his charioteer to enter the battlefield. Lord Vishnu pointed him out to Skanda, saying, "This is Taraka, who terrorized the demigods for so long. Do not disregard him. This is your seventh day and it is already noon. You must kill him before sunset otherwise, he cannot be killed."

Lord Vishnu then ordered Indra, "Make the king of the Daityas exhausted so that he can easily be slain."

Thereafter, when the demigods surrounded Taraka, showering their weapons upon him, he easily routed them, like a sinful atheist who drives away the instructions of shastra. Skanda then proceeded toward Taraka with Lord Shiva guarding his left side and Lord Vishnu protecting his right. Billions of soldiers protected him from the rear.

As the two clashed, like dharma and adharma struggling for supremacy, Taraka said to Karttikeya, "Why do you, a mere boy, at the urging of the demigods, come to fight with me, like a moth falling into a flame? I now release you, so that you can go and drink your mother's milk. Here, take this ball and play with it."

Skanda laughed and replied, "Do not disregard the state of being an infant. Even an infant snake can cause great distress. Even the rising sun is difficult to look at. Even a small fire burns when touched. A mantra consisting of just a few letters can be most effective."

After saying this, Skanda caught the ball that was thrown by Taraka, charged it with the shakti weapon, and threw it. The ball reduced Taraka's chariot to a pile of ashes. That chariot was four yojanas long and when it was smashed, the sons of Garuda that had been pulling it were freed and flew away.

As the fighting continued, Taraka began to consider the six-faced lord to be invincible. He also remembered once again the words of Brahma. Then, as Skanda proceeded to slaughter the Daityas in great numbers, Taraka picked up his effulgent iron club that was decorated with a hundred thousand bells. With it, he came and struck Skanda's peacock, making him turn his face.

Upon seeing this, Lord Vasudeva urged Skanda, "Discharge your shakti weapon against the great asura and thus keep your promise. Look, the sun is about to set!"

Skanda replied, "It was You, O Lord, who told me that Taraka is a devotee of my father, Lord Shiva. I cannot employ my shakti weapon to kill a devotee of Lord Shiva! If he were to kill me in battle, I would not mind but I am not willing to slay a devotee of Rudra."

Shri Bhagavan (Lord Vishnu) said, "O Skanda, this is not befitting you. Listen as I describe to you a genuine devotee of Lord Shiva. One who harasses others is not a real devotee of Mahadeva. A bona-fide devotee of Rudra must exhibit kindness toward all living beings. Therefore, you should slay this impostor devotee who is envious of others."

Even after hearing this, however, Skanda was not inclined to kill Taraka. Taraka then rushed at Lord Vishnu, saying, "Just see my prowess! I shall destroy the root of the devas, piety, and intelligence. After killing You, I will easily destroy the demigods."

Lord Vishnu responded, "Why should we fight? Here is Lord Shiva. If he were to be killed then everything would be accomplished by you."

After hearing this, the infuriated Taraka rushed toward Rudra, who was seated upon his chariot. Coming close, Taraka grabbed the chariot's flagpole. Understanding the mind of his adversary, Lord



Shiva, along with Parvati, left the chariot and mounted upon his bull. Lord Brahma (the driver) chanted om and ascended into the sky. Taraka lifted up the chariot that had been constructed by Rudra and which was drawn by one hundred lions and dashed it upon the ground, reducing it to a pile of rubble.

Lord Shiva's trident and Pashupata weapon approached their master but he told them, "I can handle this demon."

Taraka rushed at Mahadeva as he was riding upon his bull. Seeing this, Lord Vishnu, Indra, and others came to confront the Daitya. Upon seeing this assault, Taraka turned to face the demigods. With a blow from his fist, he made Indra fall to the ground. He grabbed Yama's staff and hit him over the head with it, making him also fall down. He took Varuna's noose, tied him up, and then toppled him. After performing similar feats, again and again, thus rendering the army of the demigods almost unconscious, Taraka rushed at the disc-wielding Lord Vishnu.

The Lord simply laughed and then made Himself invisible. Being unable to see Lord Vishnu, Taraka rushed at Lord Shiva, his fist clenched in anger. Lord Vishnu, becoming sometimes visible and sometime not, like lightning in the sky, said, "O devas, run away fast, if you are able. All of us who have come here for the sake of a mere infant have been deluded. It has been stated, 'Whatever is given for safe-keeping into the hands of infants, women, bad scholars, and fools is no better than lost.' The truth of this statement has been verified by our direct experience. If we had known that Skanda is unwilling to kill a devotee of Lord Shiva, we never would have engaged in this horrible war. Anyway, if Karttikeya does not kill Taraka, rest assured that I will."

"Witness now the prowess of My arms! With a single blow, I shall destroy all of these mean-minded demons. My right arm is eternally offered to you for your protection. I shall keep My promise by killing all of your enemies."

After saying this, Lord Vishnu raised His clenched fist and, without any other weapon, jumped down from the back of Garuda

and rushed at Taraka. As the Lord of the universe ran, the entire world seemed to be losing consciousness. As He ran, flames came out from His mouth. Millions of demons were killed by Him simply because they were in His way.

From the sky, the Siddhas implored, “O Vasudeva, please calm Your anger. If You remain furious, what will happen to the cosmic manifestation?”

Without paying heed to this, the Lord challenged Taraka, saying, “Let Me acquire the merit given to those who protect good men. Let Me acquire the merit given to those who kill vicious men.”

At this time, Skanda could see Taraka rushing toward Rudra with Lord Viṣṇu in pursuit. He saw how the universe had been thrown into confusion and he remembered his promise to the demigods. While gazing at the setting sun, Skanda heard a voice in the sky declare: “O Karttikeya, why are you dispirited? If, after killing a brahmana, one repents and installs a shiva-linga, the reaction for his sin will be deleted.”

After hearing this, Skanda assumed a very fearful form. Getting down from his peacock, he went and laughingly embraced Lord Keshava, saying, “I now realize Your supreme position. You alone are the slayer of the demons and the protector of the demigods. It is you alone who establishes dharma within this world. I offer my obeisances unto You. Within a moment, You will witness my prowess.”

The Lord was very pleased to see Skanda in this mood. Being freed from His anger, Lord Viṣṇu embraced him and said, “Now, dharma has acquired a real patron in you. Remember the purpose for which you were born as the son of Maheshvara. The birth and entire life of a noble person is dedicated to protecting religious principles and the people who uphold them—the brahmanas. You are born as the combined splendor of Lord Shiva, Parvati, Agni, Svaha, Ganga, and the Kṛttikas (six wives of the rishis). Make this glory fruitful. When one’s wealth, energy, and

intelligence are used for the benefit of the good—these things are actually fruitful, not otherwise. Today, exhibit your prowess for the pleasure of the demigods, sages, and cows.”

In reply, Skanda assured Lord Vishnu that he would kill Taraka without delay. When they heard this, the demigods praised Karttikeya highly. Thereafter, Lord Vishnu on Garuda and Skanda on his peacock rushed at Tarakasura. Karttikeya was dressed in red garments and his ornaments were also red. His eyes were red with anger and he was clad in golden armor.

When Skanda challenged Taraka, a woman came out of the demon’s head. Skanda asked, “Who are you?” and the woman replied, “I am Shakti. I reside with brahmanas who study the shastra, as well as with chaste women. I never reside with those who are devoid of good qualities.”

“O Guha (Skanda), Taraka’s pious credit has become exhausted and so I am forsaking him. Kill him now, for the welfare of the universe.”

With the departure of Shakti, Taraka’s entire body trembled. Within a moment, it lost all of its incredible prowess. Skanda released His shakti weapon while imploring, “If dharma (righteousness) is actually victorious in this world, let this demon be destroyed by virtue of this truth.”

The shakti weapon pierced Taraka’s heart, entered the earth, and then returned to the hand of Skanda. With Tarakasura dead, all pious entities within the universe became delighted, exclaiming, “Well done! Well done!”

Previously, Narada Muni had established the holy place of pilgrimage, Mahi-sagara-sangama, for the welfare of the brahmanas at Kalapagrama. Some time later on, Narada once again thought about benefiting the brahmanas. He considered as follows: “A holy place does not shine without Lord Vishnu, just as the universe is not illuminated without the sun. If Lord Hari is not the principal Deity worshiped at a holy place, in a house, within the mind, or in

a religious text—these must be considered repugnant. Therefore, I should gratify Lord Vishnu so that He will be pleased to come to this holy place—Mahi-sagara-sangama.”

Thereafter, for a period of one hundred years, Narada Muni engaged in meditation upon the Lord while chanting the eight-syllable mantra, om namo narayanaya. At the end of that period, Lord Narayana appeared before Narada, seated upon Garuda and surrounded by millions of attendants.

Narada Muni bowed down before the Lord and then said, “O Lord, formerly, at Svetadvipa, I had seen Your form as Nara and Narayana Rishis. My dear Lord, kindly establish Yourself here in one of Your expansions. If you are pleased with Me then kindly oblige me in this manner.”

Lord Vishnu gave His consent. He expanded His form so that He could reside at Mahi-sagara-sangama and then departed.

Narada Muni continued speaking to Arjuna: “On the Ekadashi of the bright fortnight in the month of Kārttika, a devotee should bathe in the river and then worship Lord Krishna very devotedly with offerings of five things—sandalwood paste, flowers, a ghee lamp, incense, and food. He should fast throughout the day and then remain awake all night, singing and dancing before the Deity, and reading about the Lord from Vedic literature, such as Shrimad-Bhagavatam.”

“If one observes jagara (staying awake all night for the purpose of worshipping the Lord) while displaying the following twenty-five qualities, on Ekadashi, he will not again experience birth in this material world. The devotee must have full faith in the Lord and the process of devotional service. He must be enthusiastic, joyful, and he must aspire for spiritual advancement. He should be free from false egoism.”

“The devotee must bathe regularly, offer incense and perfume, flowers, food, and arghya. At the end of each three hours, arati should be offered to the Deities. Chamara should be joyfully waved

by the sides of the Lord and drums should be sounded. There must be readings from the Puranas. Devotional dances should be performed and no one in the audience should sleep during the performances. The devotee should not desire to eat or drink anything at all to quench his thirst and appease his hunger.”

“The devotee should smell the sweet fragrance emanating from the Lord’s lotus feet. Bhajans that are pleasing to the Lord should be sung and the worship of the Lord should be regularly performed. Plans should be made to go on pilgrimage to the places that are related to the pastimes of the Lord. There should be no evacuation by the devotee that night. Perfect celibacy should be observed. Prayers should be recited and water for washing the Lord’s lotus feet must be offered. A vow of truthfulness must be observed and the time can be passed in discussions about devotional practices. This practice was previously performed by the sage, Aitareya. By the grace of the Lord, he attained perfection in this way.”

Arjuna inquired, “Who was Aitareya’s father? Where did he reside? How did he attain perfection.”

Narada Muni replied, “In the holy place that was established by me, there lived a brahmana named Manduki. His wife was a very chaste woman named Itara and their son was Aitareya. Beginning from his childhood, he chanted the twelve-syllable mantra, *om namo bhagavate vasudevaya*, which he had learned and chanted in his previous birth. In fact, he never heard anything else, he never said anything else, and he never thought about anything else.”

“Because the boy was not inclined to speak, his father thought that he was retarded. Later on, the father acquired a second wife, named Pinga, and they had four sons. These boys were very clever in performing their religious duties as brahmanas. When they grew up, they became teachers of the Vedas and Vedangas.”

“These young men were greatly respected in the brahmana community whereas Aitareya simply went to the temple of Lord Hari, three times every day, and chanted his mantra. He did not exert himself in any way to do anything else.”



One day, upon seeing the sons of her co-wife, Itara became very aggrieved and so she said to her son, "It was only to give me distress that you were born! To hell with my birth and my life! If a wife is insulted by her husband and if her son does not possess good qualities—it would have been better if she had not been born! Pinga is a fortunate woman because her sons possess good qualities and are thus honored everywhere."

"My son, unfortunate as I am, I have decided to drown myself where the river Mahi meets the sea. Of what use is life to me? You are a great observer of silence and a devotee of Lord Hari and so be happy."

After hearing his mother talk like this, Aitareya meditated for a while. Then, being conversant with morality, he bowed down to his mother and laughingly replied, "O mother, you have become overwhelmed by that which is actually false. Although you have learned much, you are still entangled in the web of ignorance. You are aggrieved about that which is not worthy of grief and you do not lament for that which is truly lamentable."

"Why are you infatuated with this temporary material body? Indeed, this is foolishness and unsuitable for the mother of a person like me (who is enlightened). What is actually important is quite different. Foolish people accept inconsequential things as being important."

"Human birth is such that it gives pain, beginning from conception. The householder named Jiva (soul) lives in a house having a skeleton as its beams that are fitted with muscles. The walls are plastered with blood, flesh, and fat. It is a receptacle of stool and urine and it is covered with hair, which is like grass. It is also covered with a layer of skin. The mouth is the front door, having two panels (the two lips). Perspiration flows out through every pore of the body."

"Just as streams continually flow from the mountains—mucus, urine and other secretions flow out of the body. Still, foolish people are fascinated with their bodies. There is not a single clean place in

the body, which is a storehouse for all kinds of dirty things. After touching the anus after passing stool, one must wash his hands. Why does not a man become disgusted with this pot of dirt? Even if it is carefully purified by bathing, the body does not cast off its intrinsic filthy nature, just as so much twisting and turning cannot make a dog's tail straight."

"If a person is not disgusted with the dirt and odor of his body then what else can bring about a spirit of detachment in him? Purification of the mind is more important than so-called cleansing of the body. The daughter is embraced with one emotion and the wife with another. The son views the breasts of his mother in one way and his father in another way. What is the use of external formalities without purification of the mind?"

"One who is extremely pure in mind attains heavenly enjoyment and ultimately, liberation from material existence. Purification of the bad odor and sliminess caused by the stool and urine of avidya (ignorance) and raga (passionate attachment) is accomplished by means of the water of transcendental knowledge and the soap of detachment."

"One who knows that the body is impure by nature and devoid of actual substance, like a hollow bamboo rod, is a man of real knowledge. Understanding the impermanent nature of the body (and the permanent nature of the self), an intelligent person becomes detached from it. Such a person achieves liberation, while the man who clings to the material body is born again in this temporary world."

"Just as something is placed in an iron pot and cooked over a fire, the fetus is placed within the mother's womb and cooked by the gastric fire. Pain is felt when one is pricked by red-hot pins. Within the womb, one experiences eight times that misery. At the time of birth, the pain is millions of times more than that experienced within the womb. While in the womb, the living entity remembers his past lives and repents, vowing to act in a way that will enable him to achieve liberation after being born. As soon as one is born,

however, one forgets all that he had experienced within the womb. Because there is no recollection of one's experiences within the womb, Vedic texts recount these miseries for our benefit."

"As a baby, one experiences great misery due to a lack of development of the sense organs. Even if he wishes, he cannot say something to his mother, nor do something to relieve his suffering. The small child suffers when his teeth come in, and when he contracts one of the innumerable diseases that children get. At night, evil spirits harass him while he sleeps."

"When the child is a little older, he suffers due to punishment from his parents. He struggles to learn what he is forcibly taught in school and he suffers the chastisement of his teachers."

"In youth, the senses become strong and uncontrollable. Lust pressures and torments one. How can one be happy when, during youth, he is constantly overwhelmed by passionate desires? On the path of material enjoyment, one experiences misery due to the malice and jealousy of others. Passion is instrumental in producing all of the defects of a person. Indeed, a materialistic person does not get proper sleep at night due to being burnt by the fire of lust. What happiness can he experience in the day when his time is spent worrying about how to earn money? The pleasure he receives while having sexual intercourse with women who are receptacles of defects is considered to be little better than the pleasure one feels while excreting stool."

"A man receives some honor and respect but these are overshadowed by the dishonor and disrespect he also receives. Where does a person experience happiness without affliction or harassment? Gradually, the skin becomes wrinkled, the hair becomes grey, and the limbs of the body become feeble and thus incapable of performing activities as previously. The youth and beauty of men and women, which formerly made them mutually attractive, are no longer pleasing as old age engulfs them. Indeed, as he grows old, a man is repeatedly insulted by his wife and children, and even by his servants. Because an old, feeble man

cannot obtain wealth and love, he should absorb himself in activities meant for his spiritual advancement, which he should have begun cultivating in his youth."

"A disturbance in the equilibrium of the air, bile and mucus of the physical body is the cause of diseases. Therefore, the body should be known as being full of ailments. Indeed, many miseries are experienced because of various problems in the body. If a person doesn't know this as a result of his own experience, what can another person say?"

"There is no agony like death. There is nothing as fearful as death. There is no terror like death for the conditioned, embodied souls. Death severs one's association with a good wife, friends, wealth, and pleasures, which are all bound together by bonds of friendship and love. What is death? Death is the separation of the living being from his temporary, material body."

"One is swallowed by death like a frog by a serpent. Lying on his death-bed, one is naked and shameless, being smeared over by his stool and urine. He thinks about his assets: 'to whom will these go when I die?' Even as other watch, he dies while producing a gurgling sound in his throat. Like a caterpillar, the soul enters a new body after gradually abandoning the old one. He partially grasps the new body and then leaves the old one."

"For an intelligent person, begging from others gives more distress than even death. The pain at the time of death is momentary but that caused by solicitation never ends. For this reason, one should not depend upon others. Greed is the cause of one's being disrespected and despised. Begging from others is miserable in the beginning, miserable in the middle, and miserable at the end. Actually, materialistic life is simply a series of miserable conditions."

"Hunger is considered to be the chief of all ailments. Like other diseases, one dies of hunger. Hunger robs one of all strength. Eating nicely only appeases hunger for a short while and so, hunger appears to be the permanent condition of the material body."

“What happiness does a king enjoy? His only happiness is the conceit he has because of his position and possessions. All his ornaments are actually a burden. All the songs sung for him are mere prattling. All the dances are the activities of intoxicated fools. What happiness does a king enjoy, his mind always absorbed in the fear of being conquered?”

“Besides these miseries experienced by human beings, there are miseries in heaven, miseries in hell, and terrible miseries experienced by animals. Listen to the miseries experienced by herds of animals, even elephants. Hunger, thirst, and cold torment them. They are killed, bound, and beaten by men, and their nostrils are pierced. They are struck with hooks, whips, and goads and they are beaten with bamboo sticks. They are fettered in chains. They suffer from having to carry heavy loads. They are tormented when they are tamed or trained for warfare. They are taken away from their herds and separated from their family members.”

“The world of moving and non-moving entities is pervaded by all kinds of miseries, such as famine, bad luck, foolishness, poverty, the condition of superiority and inferiority, death, political crises, revolutions, natural disasters, and the back-biting of others. Considering all this, one should give up all attachment for this material world.”

“A man may shift a burden from one shoulder to the other and consider that to be some respite. The miseries of this world are like that. One miserable condition is gotten rid of by replacing it with another miserable condition. How can there be peace in this world where every person is trying to excel all others in some way or another? Detachment from this world of birth and death is attained through indifference. When there is an absence of attachment, there is the possibility of the dawning of true knowledge, which culminates in realization of the Supreme Lord and the attainment of liberation.”

After describing the miserable conditions of the material world, Aitareya told his mother about another realm that is free



from the terrible conditions of material existence. This realm is the practice of devotional service to the Lord in the association of like-minded devotees.

He said, "I worship the Lord of sacrifice. One who does not strive to satisfy his desires will find that all of his desires are fulfilled. As soon as one endeavors to fulfill his material desires, all sorts of problems arise. This is the nature of the material world, which was created to frustrate the fallen, conditioned souls."

"O mother, do not be aggrieved. I will take you to that place beyond the influence of material miseries. That is the supreme abode of the Supreme Lord."

Itara was certainly surprised to hear the lengthy talk of her son, whom she had considered to be a moron. She thought, "Such an intelligent son will certainly achieve great fame in this world and that will enhance my reputation as well."

That night, Lord Vishnu appeared from the Deity that Itara's son had been worshiping, and appeared before him. With his voice choked and tears streaming from his eyes due to ecstasy, Aitareya fell down flat before the Lord to offer Him obeisances.

He then stood up and glorified Him with very nice prayers, some of which are repeated here: "O my Lord, in my innumerable births, there is no place on earth where I have not been born and have not died. Even in thousands of years, the clouds do not shower as much water as the tears that have fallen from my eyes in the course of my countless births, as I was tormented by grief."

"I think that the number of my previous births exceeds the number of atoms that comprise the earth. Who could calculate the number of friends, enemies, dependents, and relatives in all of these lifetimes?"

"By the strength of my glorification of You, My Lord, kindly grant that every person will have the same feelings toward people in general as he has of himself, his brother, or his son."

"O Lord, I am foolish and deluded. I am less intelligent and capable of doing very little. Still, I am unattached to the so-called

pleasures of this world. Kindly be merciful to me, who bows down at Your lotus feet. Take pity on me, the helpless soul that I am. You are extremely merciful and compassionate. Please lift me up, for I have sunk deep into the ocean of material existence."

Being delighted, the Lord replied, "O Aitareya, I am very pleased with your pure devotion for Me. Now, accept from Me any benediction of your choice—even though it may be very difficult to obtain."

Aitareya said, "O Lord, there is only one thing that I desire. Become the captain of my ship because I am sinking down in this terrible ocean of birth and death."

The Supreme Lord said, "As a result of your pure devotion for Me, you are already liberated from material entanglement. Whoever chants the prayers composed by you will be freed from the reactions to all kinds of sins. Now, you should marry and perform sacrifices. In this way, satisfy your mother. There is no doubt that you will ultimately attain My supreme abode in the spiritual sky because of your constant meditation upon Me."

After saying this, the Lord re-entered the body of the Deity as the mother and son looked on with unblinking eyes. Aitareya bowed down to the Deity and then said, "My dear mother, formerly, I was a shudra. Being very afraid of material existence, I took shelter of an elevated brahmana. That kindhearted soul imparted to me the twelve-syllable mantra, om namo bhagavate vasudevaya, telling me to chant it without cessation."

"Thereafter, I constantly chanted japa and as a result, I was placed within your womb, given the power to remember my last life, and endowed with an everlasting inclination toward the devotional service of Lord Vishnu. Now, I am going to the sacrificial arena of Harimedha."

Aitareya went to the sacrifice officiated by Harimedha, who was surrounded by thousands of brahmanas. There, Aitraya gave lectures on the Vedic texts. Being delighted with Aitareya, the brahmanas gave him much wealth and the leader of the brahmanas, Harimedha, gave him his daughter in marriage.

Aitareya returned home with wealth and wife, much to the delight of his mother. He begot very pious sons and by the merit of his devotional service, at the end of his life, he was liberated from material entanglement.

Narada Muni concluded his narration, saying, "My dear Arjuna, the Deity of Aitareya is the Lord who expanded Himself, at my request, to reside here at Mahi-sagara-sangama."

Arjuna was very pleased to hear everything from Narada Muni. Finally, the sage bid him farewell and Arjuna departed for Dvaraka.

Suta Gosvami next narrated this story: After obtaining the daughter of King Drupada, the sons of Pandu established their capital at Indraprastha, as suggested by Dhritarashtra. One day, as the Pandavas were seated in their royal assembly, discussing various topics, Bhima's son, Ghatotkacha, came there. The five brothers and Lord Krishna got up from their seats and joyfully embraced him. Ghatotkacha bowed down to them in return.

With great affection, Maharaja Yudhishthira had Bhima's son sit on his lap. He inquired, "Where are you coming from? What have you been doing this long time? I hope that you are happily ruling the kingdom that you inherited from your maternal uncle."

"O son of Hidimbi, I hope that you never mistreat the brahmanas, good men, cows, and the demigods. I hope that your mother is well and happy. She has done many things for our benefit."

Ghatotkacha replied, "When my wicked uncle was killed, I was appointed to rule the kingdom. Ever since that time, I have administered the kingdom righteously, suppressing all wicked men. My mother is quite well. She always tells me, 'My dear son, be devoted to your father and uncles.' I have come here in the hopes that you will engage me in some noble service."

Maharaja Yudhishthira once again embraced Bhima's son and said, "You alone are our devoted assistant. It is for this purpose that

good people wish to have sons. Certainly, a son is like his mother. Your mother is also very devoted to us.”

Turning to Lord Krishna, Yudhisthira said, “O lotus-eyed Lord, You know how Ghatotkacha became a mighty youth just after his birth. I always worry about providing a suitable wife for him. My Lord, where can I find a like-minded girl for Ghatotkacha? O Krishna, You know everything that is happening within the three worlds and so it behooves You to suggest a wife for the son of Hidimbi.”

Lord Janardana thought for a moment and then said, “O King, there is one! I shall tell you of a girl who is just suitable for your nephew. She is the daughter of the asura, Mura, and she lives at Pragjyotisha. Mura was a dear friend of Narakasura and He was killed by Me. After I killed Mura, his daughter, Kamakatankata came to challenge me. She was very powerful and energetic and she held a sword and shield in her hands.”

“I fought with her, releasing arrows from My Sharṅga bow, but she deftly cut them to pieces with her sword. Then, after approaching Me, she hit Garuda with her sword so that he fell unconscious. At that, I invoked My Sudarshana chakra with the intention of killing her.”

“When she saw this, the goddess, Kamakhya, came and stood before Me, saying, ‘O Puruṣhottama, it is not proper for you to kill this girl. Invincibility was granted to her by me, along with this sword and shield. That is why, even after fighting for three days, she has not been subdued by You.’ ”

“I agreed to stop fighting and requested the goddess to make the daughter of Mura stop as well. Upon hearing this, the goddess went and embraced her devotee, Kamakatankata, and ordered her to stop fighting, assuring her that Lord Krishna could never be defeated by anyone.”

“The goddess said, ‘Even the three-eyed Lord Shiva cannot defeat Him and so, what to speak of anyone else? I have decided that you will become the daughter-in-law of Bhima, His cousin. The death of your father at the hands of Lord Krishna is glorious because

he has been liberated and now resides in the spiritual world.' After hearing this, Mura's daughter gave up her anger and, coming before Me, she bowed down to offer her obeisances."

"I told her, 'Stay here in this city which is now ruled by Naraka's son, Bhagadatta. He will honor you like a sister. While residing here, you will marry the son of Bhima and Hidimbi.' After bidding her farewell, I went to the abode of Indra and then came here to see you. The daughter of Mura is the right wife for Ghatotkacha. She has made this stipulation, saying, 'I will marry the man who conquers me by silencing me with questions as well as subduing me in battle.' After hearing of this, many Daityas and Rakshashas went to try and gain her hand in marriage but they were all defeated by her. Indeed, no one who has approached her in this manner has returned alive. If Ghatotkacha goes and conquers her, she will certainly become his devoted wife."

Maharaja Yudhisthira said, "This girl may have many good qualities but she has one defect. What is the use of milk that is mixed with even a little poison? How can I give the son of Bhima, who is as dear to me as my life, to such a girl when there are so many nice girls available? My dear Lord, You should suggest someone else."

Bhima said, "What Krishna has said is approved by me, not the sentimental talk of Yudhisthira. The prowess of a kshatriya should be tested by a difficult task for it is in this way that he will establish his reputation. Let the son of Hidimbi bring Mura's daughter without delay!"

Arjuna said, "Bhima has spoken simply being guided by the spirit of heroism. The words of the goddess, Kamakhya, will never prove false and she had predicted that Ghatotkacha would marry Mura's daughter. It is for this reason that he should leave for Pragjyotisha at once. My dear Krishna, this is my opinion."

Lord Krishna said, "Your words and the words of Bhima appeal to me. No one is equal to Ghatotkacha in terms of prowess and intellect. My feeling is that the daughter of Mura is already obtained by him and so let him depart without delay. My dear son, what do you think?"

Ghatotkacha replied, "It is not proper to speak highly of oneself in front of venerable persons. Good qualities and the sun shine of their own accord. I am happy to do that which You have ordained."

After saying this, Ghatotkacha bowed down before Lord Krishna and the Pandavas. After receiving their blessings, as he was about to depart, Lord Krishna advised him, "At the time of debate, remember Me, and I will enhance your intellectual prowess."

Lord Krishna embraced Ghatotkacha, who then rose up into the sky and departed for Pragjyotisha. Bhima's son saw the wonderful thousand-storied palace of Naraka situated within a vast park. The sound of music was heard everywhere and thousands of servants hurried about performing their duties.

Ghatotkacha came upon a girl named Karnapravarana and asked her, "Where is the daughter of Mura. I am an admirer of hers from a far-off land and I wish to see her."

The girl replied, "What is the use of your coming here? Millions of suitors have already come here and been killed by her. O hero, I bow down to your feet and am ready to carry out your orders. Rejoice in my company and enjoy all kinds of pleasure. I will provide three girls to your three companions."

Ghatotkacha said, "Your words befit you but they do not enter my heart. One of two things will happen today—either I will win your mistress and sport with her, or I will be defeated like all of the others and dispatched to the abode of death. Please go and inform her of my arrival without delay."

Karnapravarana went to the top of the palace and informed the daughter of Mura, "O gentle lady, a glorious young man is standing at the gate, announcing himself as your lover. Tell me what should be done."

Kamatankata said, "Show him in at once. Perhaps, by good fortune, my conditions will be met by him."

The maidservant returned and told Ghatotkacha, "Go immediately into her presence, the presence of death."



Bhima's son laughed and then entered the palace like a lion entering a cave of Mount Meru. When Ghatotkacha saw Mura's daughter, seated upon a swing, he considered her to be superior to Rati (the wife of Kamadeva) in giving pleasure by her beauty and youth.

After a brief pause, Ghatotkacha said, "O ruthless one with a heart of stone, I have come here as your guest and so please offer me the hospitality I deserve."

Kamakantaka was astonished to see the handsome man standing before her. She condemned her childishness, thinking, "To hell with the condition I had stipulated! If I had not done so, this man could have been my husband."

She said, "My dear sir, you have come here in vain. Return home alive and be grateful for that. However, if you truly seek my love then narrate a story. If you tell a tale that throws my mind into confusion, I will come under your control. Otherwise, you will be killed by me."

Ghatotkacha remembered Lord Krishna and then began his story: A certain young man freely indulged in sensual enjoyment with his wife and in due course of time, a daughter was born. Soon thereafter, the wife died and so the man dutifully raised his daughter. That girl grew up to be a beautiful girl with a lotus-like face, slender waist, and exquisite figure.

However, being overwhelmed by lust, the vicious fellow broke all bounds of propriety and passionately embraced his daughter and said, "You are my neighbor's daughter. You were given to me to raise so that you could become my wife. Now, fulfill your duties in that role."

The girl accepted her father's words as true and so she behaved toward him like a wife. Thereafter, a daughter was born to her and that lecherous donkey. Tell me whether that child was his daughter or grand-daughter.

Ghatotkacha said, "If you are able to answer my question then do so quickly."

Mura's daughter thought over the matter deeply for some time, considering every angle of vision, but she could not come to any conclusion. Being defeated in that way, she struck the golden chains holding the swing with her fist, causing millions of terrible Rakshashas to become manifested, along with countless ferocious animals.

When he saw these animals rushing to devour him, Ghatotkacha laughed and snapped his fingers, making twice the number of Rakshashas appear. They swallowed the animals created by Kamakatankata in a moment. When her mystic power was thus thwarted, the daughter of Mura resorted to brute physical strength. She got up suddenly from her swing, desiring to pick up a sword. However, Ghatotkacha chased her and grabbed her hair with his left hand, making her fall to the floor. He placed his left foot on her neck and took out a knife to cut off her nose.

Trembling, Kamakatankata said, "I have been defeated by you in three ways—by means of words, mystic power, and physical strength. I offer my obeisances to you. Please let me go—I am your servant. Command me and I shall carry out your order."

Bhima's son said, "If it is so, I will let you go."

Mura's daughter then told Ghatotkacha how the goddess, Kamakhya, had predicted his arrival. She said, "This palace of mine, along with all of my wealth and followers, are yours. I await your command."

Ghatotkacha said, "If parents are there, it is not proper to marry secretly. Therefore, carry me to Indraprastha. It is our family tradition that the wife should carry the husband. After receiving permission, I shall marry you there."

Mura's daughter went and told Bhagadatta all that had happened and then bid him farewell. She then took Ghatotkacha on her back and carried him to Indraprastha. After being congratulated by Lord Krishna and the Pandavas, at an auspicious moment, Ghatotkacha married Mura's daughter. Thereafter, with Maharaja

Yudhisthira's permission, Ghatotkacha took his wife and returned to his kingdom, where he was warmly received by the Rakshashas.

As he enjoyed conjugal relations with his wife in the surrounding forests, Ghatotkacha received a son of great luster. As soon as he was born, he began to noticeably increase in size so that, after a moment, he became a young man. His complexion was the color of a dark cloud and his head was shaped like a pot. The hair on his head naturally stood up.

The boy bowed down to his parents, pledged his service, and asked to be given a name. Ghatotkacha embraced his son and said, "Because you have hair like those of the Barbara tribe, you will be named Barbarika. We shall go to Dvaraka and see Krishna, the Lord of the universe."

Leaving his wife at home, Ghatotkacha went with his son to Dvaraka, traveling through the sky. Upon seeing two Rakshashas coursing through the sky, the soldiers at Dvaraka sounded the alarm. When he saw how the soldiers of the Yadu dynasty were ready to fight, Ghatotkacha raised his right arm and said, "Know me to be the son of Bhima, named Ghatotkacha. I am very dear to Lord Krishna. Inform the Lord that I have come here, along with my son."

When He heard of Ghatotkacha's arrival, Lord Krishna, who was seated in the royal assembly, ordered that he be brought immediately. The son of Hidimbi was then escorted into the city, along with his son. Upon entering the assembly hall, Ghatotkacha offered his obeisances to Ugrasena, Vasudeva, Satyaki, and other Yadavas, headed by Akrura and Balarama. He then offered his obeisances to Lord Krishna. The Lord embraced Bhima's son and had him sit close by. He said, "O best of Rakshashas, born in the line of Kuru, I hope that all is well. What brings you here?"

Ghatotkacha replied, "By Your mercy, I am happy in all respects. This is my son, born from the womb of the wife You had allotted me. He wants to ask You a question and that is why I have come here."

Shri Krishna said, "My dear boy, grandson of Mura, ask Me whatever you like. Just as your father is very dear to Me, so are you."

Barbarika said, “After bowing down to You, the primeval Lord, I ask You this: O Madhava, how is it that one who was born can attain his ultimate welfare? There are many opinions in this regard. Different people say that one’s welfare can be achieved by means of pious acts, good fortune, expertise in some field of endeavor, repressing the senses, performing austerities, worshiping the demigods, enjoying sensual pleasures, and liberation. Please tell me conclusively what is conducive to the welfare of myself and my family.”

Lord Krishna said, “My dear boy, various means of welfare are prescribed for different classes of people. For highly intelligent men (brahmanas), austerity and study of the Vedic literature are the root causes for all kinds of benefit.”

“For kṣatriyas, prowess and heroism are the root causes of their welfare. Chastisement of the wicked and protection of the good are prescribed for kṣatriyas. For vaiśhyas, cow protection, farming, and mastery of the arts and crafts constitute the root causes for their welfare. For śudras, it is service to the higher classes of men.”

“My dear boy, you are born in a kṣatriya family and so first, you should acquire incomparable prowess. With that prowess you should protect the pious and curb those who are evil. Prowess is obtained by achieving the favor of the goddesses. Therefore, you should engage in the worship of the goddesses.”

Barbarika asked, “Which goddess should I worship, and at what place? Please tell me after making Your mind favorably disposed toward me.”

Lord Damodara thought for awhile and then said, “You should go to Mahi-sagara-sangama and perform austerities while worshiping the goddesses of the four directions and the nine forms of Goddess Durga. Worship them every day until they become satisfied with you because when they are gratified, nothing remains unattainable—whether it be power, wealth, wives, sons, heaven, or great happiness.”

Addressing Ghatotkacha, the Lord said, “Your son is a noble-hearted boy. For this reason, let him have a second name—Suhridaya.”

After embracing the boy, the Lord directed him to go to Guptakshetra in Mahi-sagara-sangama. Barbarika bowed down to the Lord and departed, while his father returned home.

Thereafter, Barbarika constructed a cottage and began worship of Goddess Durga three times a day. After three years, the goddess became pleased with him. Appearing before Barbarika, she offered him benedictions and told him to remain at Mahi-sagara-sangama for some time, predicting that a man named Vijaya would help him greatly.

After some time, a brahmana from the Magadha province named Vijaya came to Mahi-sagara-sangama in the course of his wandering over the earth. Indeed, in a dream, he had been directed by Goddess Durga to come there. She had said, "My devotee, Suhridaya, will assist you."

Vijaya performed many austerities and Barbarika stood by, guarding, so that there may not be any obstacles placed before him. There were attacks from evil spirits and Rakshashas but Bhima's grandson annihilated them all. Then, one day, a mysterious Digambara Jain mendicant came there. He had a shaved head, he was naked, and he held a peacock fan in his hand. He said, "Alas! This is painful indeed! Non-violence is the greatest virtue. Why then does this fire burn brightly? When a fire is ignited, many tiny living entities are burnt to death."

Upon hearing this, Barbarika smiled and said, "This fire is the mouth of the demigods. O sinful man, while we are performing sacrifice, why do you speak lies? O wicked one, you deserve to be punished and taught a lesson."

Saying this, Barbarika jumped up and held the man by the armpit. Then, with a punch, he made the man's teeth fall onto the ground. Indeed, the man fell down unconscious, his face covered with blood, and Barbarika left him laying there. Soon, however, the man regained consciousness and assumed the form of a terrible Daitya. Afraid of Bhima's grandson, he fled and entered a cave.

Inside the cave was a city named Bahuprabha and the demon entered it with Barbarika close behind. When they saw Barbarika, a hoard of ninety million demons rushed at him with upraised weapons. Barbarika simply closed his eyes and rushed in their midst, killing them with kicks and punches. Just as an infuriated elephant enters a garden and utterly destroys it, Barbarika dispatched the demons to the abode of Yamaraja.

The Nagas, headed by Vasuki, approached Barbarika, glorifying his heroic feat, saying that they had been harassed by the demon, Palashi (who had appeared as a Jain mendicant) for a long time. When the Nagas offered him a benediction, Barbarika said, "Let the brahmana, Vijaya, be freed of all obstacles and attain perfection."

The Nagas consented and thereafter, Barbarika returned to where Vijaya was performing austerities. Soon thereafter, he finished his penance and attained his perfection as benedicted by the Nagas. As Barbarika remained at that place, engaged in worshiping the goddesses, the Pandavas, along with Draupadi, who had been defeated at dice and were thus exiled, came there in the course of their travels.

As he saw the Pandavas arrive, Barbarika did not recognize them, nor did they recognize him because since his birth, they had never met. The Pandavas entered the temple and offered respect to the deity of the goddess and then began to search for water, being very tired and thirsty. There was a pond close by and as Bhima was about to enter the water and drink it, Yudhisthira told him, "First take some water and wash your feet and then enter the pond and drink. Otherwise, you will incur sin."

Being very agitated due to thirst, Bhima did not hear his brother as he entered the pond. Before drinking, he washed his hands, face, and feet. If anyone drinks water without cleansing himself first—a ghost may enter him, along with the water.

As Bhima washed his feet, Suhridaya said, being nearby, "O vicious one, what are you doing? You are washing your feet, hands,



and face in the pond belonging to the goddess! I use this water to bathe the deity. Are you not afraid of the sin of making this water dirty? Dirty water is not fit for human use and so, what to speak of the residents of heaven? Come out of the water and then drink. O sinner, if you are such a fool, why do you wander about, visiting holy places of pilgrimage?"

Bhima replied, "Ruthless Rakshasha, what are you talking about? Water is meant to be used by all kinds of living beings. Everyone says that after going to a place of pilgrimage, one should bathe in the river or lake there. Why then do you rebuke me?"

Suhridaya said, "You have spoken well but you have made one mistake. When visiting a place of pilgrimage, one should certainly bathe. However, the injunction is that one can bathe in a moving body of water, such as a river or a stream, but one should bathe outside a body of water that does not flow, such as this pond. Sometimes, bathing in such a pond or lake is allowed but only if the water is not taken for bathing the Deities, or if it is very big. Don't you know this verse spoken by Lord Brahma? 'Those who discharge stool, urine, garbage, mucus, tears, or gargled water into a body of water at a holy place are on a level with those who killed a brahmana.' Therefore, come out at once! Only one whose mind and senses are fully under control and whose activities are free from abominations will actually benefit by visiting a holy place of pilgrimage."

Bhima replied, "I will not come out of the water because I have never been able to control hunger or thirst."

Suhridaya said, "Why do you commit a sin for the sake of the material body? Have you not heard this verse spoken by Shibi? 'If a man lives, even for a short while, performing only pious and beneficial activities it is far superior to living a long life engaged in sinful and harmful acts.' "

Bhima replied, "My ears have become deaf because of your tumultuous cawing. I am going to drink water here and you can lament as much as you like."

Suhridaya said, "I was born in the family of kshatriyas who

protect virtue. For this reason, I will not allow you to commit any sin in my presence. Pitiable wretch, come out of the water immediately! Otherwise, I will smash your head with stones.”

After saying this, Suhrīdaya picked up a stone and hurled it at Bhīma’s head. Bhīma dodged the rock and then came out of the water. Both heroes began to abuse one another. Both possessed immense strength and both were masters of warfare. With their long, mighty arms, they wrestled. Then they struck each other with fists, knees, and feet.

After some time, Bhīma became exhausted while Barbarika grew in strength. Indeed, Bhīma was so tired that he could hardly lift himself off the ground. Barbarika lifted Bhīma up and furiously dashed him to the ground, much to everyone’s surprise. He then picked up Bhīma with the intention of throwing him into the ocean. Because their eyes were covered by the goddesses, the Pāṇḍavas did not see this.

The demigods, who were watching from the sky, were astonished to witness the prowess of Bhīma’s grandson. When Barbarika reached the seashore, Rudra spoke to him from the sky, “O Barbarika, tiger among Rākṣaṣas, let Bhīma, your grandfather, go. He is traveling on a pilgrimage tour along with his brothers and Draupadī. These descendants of Kuru deserve your respect in all regards. One’s grandfather should always be respected, whether he be pious or sinful.”

Barbarika immediately released Bhīma and fell at his feet, saying, “Alas! To hell with me! Please forgive me!”

While beating his head, Barbarika cried. Quickly, Bhīma came and embraced his grandson, saying, “We had heard from Ghatotkacha and Kṛṣṇa that you were staying here but because of our miseries, we had forgotten about this. Not the slightest fault can be attributed to you.”

“Everyone who has gone astray deserves to be punished by the kṣatriyas. Good people should punish even their own selves if they tread the path of evil. I feel myself fortunate to have a grandson who

is the protector of dharma. You deserve honor from all good people. Give up your moroseness and compose your mind."

Barbarika said, "Dear grandfather, I am worse than the killer of a brahmana and so I am not worthy of being praised. There is atonement prescribed for all kinds of sinners but not for one who lacks devotion for his parents. For this reason, I shall give up my body here at Mahi-sagara-sangama—the body that afflicted pain upon my grandfather. In this way, I will not have to suffer the sinful reactions in my next birth."

After saying this, Barbarika jumped into the ocean. While he was within the water, the goddess he had been worshiping appeared there and kept him afloat. Accompanied by Rudra, the goddesses embraced the son of Hidimbi and said, "O foremost of heroes, there is no sin incurred for an act such as this performed out of ignorance. This is the statement of shastra and so you should not disregard it. Just see how your grandfather is close behind you, crying out, 'O, my son! O, my son!' He is prepared to give up his life, along with you. If Bhima were to give up his life—that would be a great sin on your part."

"Still, if you are determined to give up your life, listen to what has been destined. Soon, your death will take place at the hands of Lord Krishna, the son of Devaki. Just wait for that time to arrive because death at the hands of the Lord awards one liberation."

After hearing this, Barbarika returned to the shore, although greatly dejected. At that place, Bhima established a shiva-linga known as Bhimeshvara. Bhima related all that had happened to his brothers, and they were very surprised to hear it.

After remaining at that holy place for seven days, Yudhisthira began to make preparations for his departure. Before leaving, Maharaja Yudhisthira bathed and then offered nice prayers to Goddess Durga (Yogamaya). Standing nearby, Bhima disdainfully said, "People say that you are a great reservoir of knowledge but they are foolish because you are truly an ignorant man. What true knower of the Vedic literature will seek refuge in a woman? Why

are you worshipping these goddesses, who are superintendents of the Lord's deluding potency? Why are you worshipping the inferior prakṛiti instead of the puruṣha, the Lord of material nature? You yourself are supposed to be a representative of the Supreme Puruṣha because you accept the role as king. Why then are you bowing down to prakṛiti? When I see you bow down to a woman, it makes me laugh! Who would take his shoes and place them on his head, like a person who worships prakṛiti? Why do you not worship Lord Shiva, or Lord Kṛṣṇa?"

"It was only by the grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa that Draupadī was obtained as our wife, that Indraprastha was established, and that the Rājāsuya sacrifice was performed. It was only by Kṛṣṇa's mercy that I was able to kill Jarasandha and it will only be by His mercy if we regain our kingdom. Still, you are leaving aside Kṛṣṇa and worshipping someone else. Those who are haunted by ghosts speak and act in a senseless manner. If you continue this worship of the goddess, I shall assume that you are haunted by a ghost!"

Yudhiṣṭhira replied, "The goddess must be angry with you and that is why you have lost your sense. Worship her now so that if she becomes pleased, your good intelligence may be revived."

Bhīma said, "It is just to test your faith in the goddesses that I spoke in this manner. Of course, I know that Goddess Durgā must be offered respect by us."

Thereafter, as Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira continued to worship Goddess Durgā, she mercifully appeared before them. After they had bowed down and greeted her like a mother, the goddess took Bhīma upon her lap and spoke as follows: "Listen now, as I tell you the truth about myself and about my eternal master. Whenever there is a decline in religious practice, Lord Hari incarnates and I come to assist Him."

"At present, the Lord has appeared as the son of Vasudeva and I am the daughter of the cowherd man, Nanda, named Yogamāyā, or Durgā. Lord Kṛṣṇa is my brother and so all of you are considered to be my cousin-brothers. In the future, when you fight a great war

against the Kauravas, I will assist you by residing in your arms. After that, you will rule the earth for thirty-six years and then take a final journey to the north as a pastime of disappearance.”

When the goddess finished speaking, Yudhishthira and Bhima again bowed down to offer obeisances and while doing so, she vanished from view. Thereafter, they advised Barbarika to remain at Mahi-sagara-sangama as they continued their tour of pilgrimage.

When their period of exile expired, the Pandavas assembled their allies and went to Kurukshetra to fight with the Kauravas. After hearing from Bhishma about the strength of the warriors on the Kaurava side, Yudhishthira said, “O Krishna, I have heard that when Duryodhana inquired, ‘Who, within what period of time, can kill the Pandavas and their allies?’ Bhishma promised to do so within a month. Kripa promised the same and Drona said that he could vanquish the Pandavas in a fortnight. Ashvattama, the son of Drona, claimed that he could vanquish the enemy in just ten days. Karna, who always made me afraid, said that he could accomplish the task in just six days.”

“Now, I wish to ask our men the same question, ‘Who, within what time limit, can vanquish the enemy?’ ”

Arjuna replied, “What Bhishma and the others have promised is highly improper! Any prediction of victory or defeat is absolutely useless. Besides, just see the great heroes that are aligned on your side! Still, to tell you the truth—I think that I can exterminate the Kauravas single-handedly. Why should you be afraid of an old man like Bhishma? What is the fear of elderly brahmanas, like Drona and Kripa? Why should we fear a foolish child like Ashvattama, or the son of a chariot driver (Karna)? I hereby declare within the hearing of the enemy that single-handedly, I can kill all of the Kauravas and their soldiers.”

Upon hearing this, Lord Krishna smilingly said, “What Arjuna has said is true. His words never prove false.”

Thereafter, hundreds of thousands of conch shells were sounded. Barbarika, who was sitting amongst the Pandava warriors,

ordered them to stop and then said, “Listen now to my words that are spoken due to my great prowess, and not arrogance. I place no faith in what was boasted by Arjuna. Let Arjuna and Krishna stand by and watch while I vanquish the entire Kaurava army in about one and a half hours.”

“As long as I am standing, none of you should pick up your weapons. If I die, you can enter the battlefield and continue the fight. This is my vow and my desire. Witness the prowess of my arms that was attained by the grace of Goddess Durga, whom I worshiped at Guptakshetra (in Mahi-sagara-sangama). This sword was personally given to me by her.”

When they heard this, all of the great kshatriyas on the Pandava side were astonished. Feeling ashamed, Arjuna glanced at Krishna out of the corner of his eye. Krishna then whispered to Arjuna, “This is certainly good news. I had heard that, formerly, Barbarika had killed ninety million Rakshasas in just a few moments.”

Arjuna said, “Let us ask him, ‘By what means do you think that you will be able to kill the Kauravas in just a few minutes?’ ”

Krishna asked the son of Ghatotkacha, “How can you vanquish, in just a few minutes, an army that is protected by Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Ashvattama, Karna, Duryodhana, and many other great heroes—an army that could not be defeated by Lord Shiva? We are very surprised to hear your words. After hearing of the means whereby you will accomplish this task, we will consider it more carefully.”

Barbarika, who was as huge as a mountain, who could travel as fast as the wind, whose head resembled a pot, and whose laughter resembled the sound produced by a pot when it is struck, and whose prowess was sufficient to destroy the universe if he so desire, replied, “Just watch as I demonstrate the means whereby I will vanquish the enemy!”

After saying this, Bhima’s grandson strung his powerful bow and fitted an arrow upon the string. That arrow was completely covered by ash that had been received from Goddess Durga. When



the arrow was shot, the dust fell upon all the soldiers of both sides, landing upon each warrior's most vulnerable spot (the place on their bodies that, when struck by an arrow, would cause them to immediately die). The ash fell on Bhishma's white hair, the necks of Karna and Drona, Duryodhana's thighs, Shalya's chest, the sole of Krishna's lotus foot, and Shikandin's hip. In fact, the ash fell on everyone, except the five Pandavas, Kripa, and Ashvattama.

Barbarika said, "Did you all see how the vulnerable spots of the warriors were ascertained by me? Now, I will discharge arrows at all of these vulnerable spots—arrows that never fail to miss their mark because they were given to me by Goddess Durga. All of these warriors will die in a moment. None of you pick up your weapons because I will vanquish the enemy in a few minutes."

Upon hearing this, there arose a cry of, "Well done! Well done!" However, as these words were being spoken, the infuriated Lord Krishna invoked His Sudarshana cakra and cut off Barbarika's head, making it fall to the ground. Everyone was shocked and looked at Lord Krishna, saying, "What is this? Why did you kill Barbarika?"

Indeed, the Pandavas and others shed tears at that time. Crying, "O my son!" Ghatotkach fainted and fell onto his son's body. Goddess Durga, in her various forms, came there and consoled Ghatotkacha, saying, "Listen to the reason why your son was killed by Lord Krishna. Formerly, the demigods had assembled atop Mount Meru. At that time, the over-burdened earth begged them for relief. After that, the demigods prayed to Lord Vishnu for the removal of the earth's burden and He agreed to incarnate for that purpose."

"A Yaksha leader named Suryavarchas raised his hand and said, 'O Lord, why should You have to go to a world that is so full of defects? All of you stay here and enjoy life in heaven while I go to earth and destroy all of those wicked persons who are creating a terrible burden.'"

"After hearing this, the enraged Lord Brahma replied, 'O evil-minded one, you claim that you can remove the great burden that is unbearable for all of the demigods. You say this only because of your

delusions of grandeur. Without considering the time and place and without properly estimating one's own strength, and that of the enemy, if he boasts in the assembly of leading personalities, he should be punished. I hereby predict that at the beginning of the great battle to remove the burden of the earth, you will be killed by Lord Krishna.' ”

“Upon being cursed by Brahma, the Yaksha requested Lord Vishnu, ‘If my death must occur in this manner then grant me the intelligence to accomplish a great task.’ Lord Vishnu gave His assent, saying, ‘So be it. People will worship your head and even goddesses will be fond of you.’ Thereafter, the Lord incarnated on the earth and Suryavarchas, the Yaksha leader, appeared as your son. Indeed, Krishna killed him in consideration of Brahma's curse and so, you should not blame Him.”

In this way, the goddess spoke to Ghatotkacha. Lord Krishna told Yudhisthira, “What the goddess has said is true. If I had not killed your grandson, the words of Lord Brahma would have proven false. Indeed, because of remembering the curse of Brahma, I had inspired him, at Guptakshetra, to worship Goddess Durga and receive unparalleled prowess.”

Goddess Durga then sprinkled nectar on Barbarika's head, making it immortal, like the head of Rahu. That head bowed down to the Lord and said, “I would like to witness the battle and so, please grant me this favor.”

Lord Krishna announced in a booming voice, “As long as the sun, moon, and stars exist, you will be worshiped by people in general. Upon being worshiped, you will remove diseases in children. Climb onto this mountain peak and watch the battle.”

Barbarika's head ascended to the top of a mountain and then the great battle between the Pandavas and Kauravas began. Within eighteen days, Bhishma, Drona and Karna were killed, and then the cruel Duryodhana was slain. Yudhisthira then said to Lord Krishna, “O Purushottama, we were only able to survive this terrible battle because You acted as our protector. Our obeisances unto You!”

When he heard this, Bhima said with disdain, "O King, it was I who killed the evil sons of Dhritarashtra and yet, you are ignoring me. Why do you speak, like one who is deluded, of Krishna as being the greatest hero? You speak highly of a charioteer while ignoring Dhrishtadyumna, Arjuna, Satyaki, and me. To hell with you, Yudhisthira!"

Arjuna countered, "Don't talk like that Bhima! You do not understand Krishna! Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else killed our enemies. I always saw someone subtly situated in front of me, killing those who opposed me. I couldn't understand who that person was."

Bhima said, "That was just a hallucination. If there really was someone then let's ask my grandson, who viewed everything from the top of a hill."

The Pandavas and Lord Krishna approached Barbarika. Bhima asked, "Tell me—who killed all of the sons of Dhritarashtra?"

Barbarika replied, "I saw someone fighting with the enemies. On the left side of his body he had five faces and on the right side, only one. On the left side, he had ten arms holding various weapons and on the right side, four arms holding a disc and other weapons. On his left side was matted hair and on his right side was a crown. His left side was smeared with ashes and his right side was smeared with sandalwood paste. On the left side, he was adorned with the moon and on the right side, the Kaustubha gem. His appearance frightened me. It is he who killed all of the enemies and no one else."

As soon as this was said, flowers showered from the sky and musical instruments were heard. Bhima felt ashamed and heaved heavy sighs. Lord Krishna grabbed him firmly by the hands and said, "Come with me."

The Lord thought of Garuda, who instantly appeared. Lord Krishna took Bhima and together, they mounted Garuda. Soon, they crossed the ocean and sighted Lanka. Krishna pointed to a lake twelve yojanas long and told Bhima, "If you are actually a bold

warrior then fetch some water from the bottom of this lake.”

Bhima immediately dove into the water. After going down one yojana, however, Bhima could not sight the bottom. Disappointed, he came out of the lake and said, “This lake is fathomless. Some powerful beings almost ate me but I managed to come out.”

Krishna then laughingly lifted up the lake with His thumb so that it became one-fourth its size. In response to Bhima’s astonishment, Lord Krishna explained, “Long ago, Lord Rama killed the terrible Rakshasha, Kumbhakarna—cutting off his head. This is the place where Kumbhakarna’s tongue landed. Now, we should return to your brothers because Ashvattama is up to something.”

Bhima bowed down and begged for forgiveness and Lord Krishna happily replied, “It is forgiven.”

The sages at Naimisharanya wanted to hear about Arunachala mountain and in response, Suta Gosvami related this story, which had formerly been narrated to Sanaka Kumara by Lord Brahma.

Once, as Lord Shiva and Parvati were roaming about Arunachala, enjoying themselves in great happiness, the goddess began to think that her lord was entirely under her control. Acting like a simple young girl, Parvati quietly approached Lord Shiva from behind and playfully covered his three eyes with her lotus-like hands.

When Lord Shiva’s three eyes (in the form of the sun, moon, and fire) were thus covered, the universe became enveloped in terrible darkness. Although it was just half a minute for Shiva and Parvati, that period consisted of millions of earth years. Indeed, the manifested creation appeared to be on the brink of destruction as all kinds of religious performances ground to a halt.

By dint of the power of their introspection, some great souls could understand that Parvati had playfully covered the eyes of Lord Shiva with her hands. They bowed down to Mahadeva and offered him prayers, requesting him to allow the creation to return to its normal condition. They prayed, “O lord, please stop this destruction of the worlds that has been initiated as a result of your loving pastimes.”

Upon hearing these prayers, Lord Shiva told Gauri, "Kindly take away your hands from my eyes."

As soon as Parvati took her hands from Mahadeva's eyes, the universe regained its bright, normal condition. Lord Shiva asked some nearby Siddhas, "How much time passed in this way?"

They replied, "It was only half a moment for you but it was millions of years for the people on earth."

Lord Shiva said to Gauri, "O pretty girl of youthful simplicity, you have acted thoughtlessly, almost causing the destruction of the world. Because you are the mother of the universe, this was a great fault on your part. I take part in the destruction of the world but only at the prescribed times. What person other than you would indulge in such an irresponsible act, just for fun? A person who is endowed with compassion for others never causes them unnecessary distress!"

Being afraid that her spiritual status would be diminished because of her childish act, Parvati asked, "What should I do as atonement for my foolishness?"

Being pleased by her repentance, Lord Shiva replied, "You are non-different from me and so, what can I suggest? Still, you are the maintainer of religious principles. If dharma is not upheld by the master then subordinates will certainly abandon it. I cannot live for a moment without you and so, I shall perform the penance myself, in a subtle form. Go to Kanchi (Shiva-kanchi and Vishnu-kanchi are near present-day Madras, or Chennai) and perform austerities there. I will remain present within your mind and so you should not feel separation."

Parvati thus went to Kanchi, accompanied by her friends, for the purpose of performing penance. There, by the side of the river, she saw the single mango tree that was indicated by Lord Shiva. Sitting down beneath that tree, Parvati performed severe austerities so that soon, she became emaciated.

Feeling great agitation because of separation from her lord, Parvati said to her friend, Vijaya, who was seated by her side, "I have

come here to perform austerities but this mango tree, who is a friend of the god of love, reminds me of my husband. Indeed, my mind has been greatly agitated by Kamadeva. How can I bear separation from my husband? My sole remedy seems to be the remembrance of his lotus feet.”

Vijaya replied, “O goddess, you are inseparable from Lord Shiva. You are the goddess of his life and his only shakti. It was at his request that you came here and so, you should carry out his order. If you absorb your mind in meditation upon him, you will not feel the pangs of separation.”

Becoming pacified, Parvati resumed her life of austerity. Once, just to test Parvati, Lord Shiva caused the river to flood. Upon seeing how the water would soon engulf them, Parvati's friends urged her to get up and go to higher ground. Parvati declined to move, however, saying that she could not forsake her austerities.

Gauri said, “I have made this linga out of sand and if it is swept away by the water then I had better give up my life. I know that this flood has been caused by Lord Shiva, just to test my devotion and dedication. I will embrace the shiva-linga and in this way, remain unaffected. All of you can go wherever you like.”

Thereafter, as Parvati embraced the shiva-linga, the flood completely engulfed her. She did not let go of the shiva-linga and in fact, she pressed it to her breasts so hard that the nipples left an impression there, like a scar. Indeed, as Parvati clung to the shiva-linga in this way, she felt a thrill of ecstasy course through her entire body as her hair stood on end. In this way, she remained motionless with her mind absorbed in meditation upon Lord Shiva.

Parvati then heard a voice from the sky telling her, “My dear girl, let go of the linga, the flood has receded. The linga worshiped by you will become famous within the three worlds as the bestower of benedictions. In that form, I shall remain at Arunachala, which is nearby, for the welfare of the world. Runa means, “collection



of sins,” and so aruna indicates that at this place, Arunachala, men will become freed from all sins. Go there, to the ashram of Gautama, and continue your performance of penance.”

After hearing these words of her husband, Parvati came out of her trance of meditation and proceeded toward Arunachala, for the purpose of continuing her austerities. There, she saw the linga of Lord Shiva, as well as the abodes of many great sages. At the bidding of the sages, Parvati went to the hermitage of Gautama. As soon as she entered the ashram, jeweled palaces miraculously appeared, along with excellent furnishings. When Gautama returned from the forest, he was astonished to see such a change.

Thereafter, with Gautama’s permission, Parvati continued her performance of austerities near his ashram. Meanwhile, the demigods were being greatly oppressed by the terrible demon, Mahisha, and so they came and sought refuge of Parvati. The demigods informed her, “This demon comes to our residences and makes use of whatever he likes. He has taken Yamaraja’s buffalo and yoked it to his chariot! He wants to take Agni’s ram for his son to ride! He has captured the Siddhas and engaged them in his domestic chores! He has taken the Apsaras and is employing them in his personal service! Indeed, we have all become his servants and are tormented with fear.”

“Having received benedictions from Lord Shiva, this demon cannot be conquered by any deva or asura. Even the ocean has to bow down to him and relinquish all of his jewels. He playfully picks up mountains with his horns, smashes them to the ground, and then covers himself with their minerals.”

“O Devi, this demon must be killed by you. O mother of the universe, we seek your shelter and so, kindly give up protection.”

While hearing these words of the demigods, Gauri became compassionate upon them. She assured them that she would vanquish the demon, even as she was engaged in performing austerities. She said, “I will wait until he offends me and then I shall vanquish him—do not fear.”

Parvati established four of her associates as protectors of the four directions, instructing them, “Only admit one who is overwhelmed by hunger and thirst, and no one else.”

Thereafter, Parvati continued performing austerities near Gautama’s ashram. Because of her presence, all of the sages in the surrounding area were freed from all kinds of fear. Meanwhile, Mahisha engaged in hunting and while traversing the forests, he killed many herds of deer. It so happened, while chasing deer, Mahisha and his army of demons approached the forest where Parvati was engaged in performing austerities.

The guardians of the directions forbade Mahisha from entering the area around Gautama’s ashram. When questioned by the demons, the guardians explained how a goddess was nearby, performing austerities in the association of great sages.

Mahisha and the other demons retreated some distance while thinking about what should be done by them. Thereafter, the demons assumed the forms of birds and entered the forest surrounding Gautama’s ashram. They perched high in the trees so that they could get a clear view of the surrounding area. In this way, the demons saw Parvati engaged in performing austerities. Upon seeing her great beauty, the demons were very surprised and pleased and they went and informed Mahisha of the situation.

Thereafter, Mahisha, being oppressed by the god of love, assumed the form of an old man and entered the hermitage. After being welcomed by Parvati’s friends, the old man asked, “For what purpose is this woman performing penance?”

The girls replied, “She is performing austerities in the hopes of pleasing her husband. However, it appears that he is never pleased!”

Upon hearing this, Mahisha said, “It is certain that, as a result of her austerities, this beautiful lady will attain me. I am Mahisha, the powerful lord of the Daityas. Even the demigods bow down to me and offer their obeisances. In fact, I have conquered the entire three worlds. I can assume any form that I wish and I am the bestower of all kinds of pleasure.”

Mahisha was speaking within the hearing of Parvati. Turning to her, the demon said, "Accept me as your husband and I shall fulfill all of your desires. I can supply you innumerable desire trees and wish-fulfilling cows. With the wealth of Kuvera, I will provide you with whatever you desire."

Upon hearing this, Parvati remembered Lord Shiva and slowly replied, with a mild laugh, "Kindly demonstrate the strength that you boast of."

This made Mahisha angry. As he quickly approached her with the intention of taking her by force, Parvati assumed a terrifying form of Goddess Durga. Upon seeing the effulgent goddess before him, Mahisha assumed the form of a buffalo and expanded in size until he became as big as a mountain. In fact, with his horns, he violently struck the peaks of the nearby mountains.

While Mahisha summoned his army, the demigods, with Lord Brahma at the front, came and bowed down to Goddess Durga, whose form resembled the fire at the time of universal dissolution. While remaining invisible, the demigods presented the goddess their best weapons.

Goddess Durga rode upon her vehicle, a lion. Being unable to bear the effulgence of her form, Mahishasura fled. At this, Goddess Durga thought, "This demon must be killed by means of deceit. Employing a messenger, I shall bring him back here so that we can fight."

Gauri sent a sage as a messenger, telling him assume the face of a monkey. That messenger presented himself before Mahisha and delivered the message of Goddess Durga, which was filled with various taunts. Upon hearing it, Mahisha became enraged and rushed at the messenger, desiring to swallow him. By utilizing his mystic power, however, the sage managed to get away.

Thereafter, Mahisha gathered together his army and attacked. When she saw the demons approaching, Goddess Durga created an army of ghosts and spirits to counter them. Some of these hideous soldiers had one arm, one leg, or one eye. Some had their face in

their hand, or foot, or stomach. They spoke to one another, saying, “I will swallow everyone. There is not enough for me and so stand aside and watch while I fight.”

When the army of Daityas approached, Goddess Durga blew her mighty conch shell. In the frantic battle that ensued, the witches and ghosts ground the demons into powder, swallowed them, and then spit them out, causing a great massacre. Mahisha then entered the battlefield, the tips of his horns tossing the clouds this way and that—his eyes rolling menacingly. As he tore up the ground with his hooves, clouds of dust were created, covering all directions. His loud roaring resounded in all directions, making the demigods fear that the shell of the universe might crack. His tail stood up straight, like a rod. In this way, Mahisha rushed at Goddess Durga, who was seated upon her lion carrier.

After a fierce duel, Mahisha disappeared. He soon returned, in the form of a lion. However, when Durga’s lion carrier clawed him severely, the demon vanished once again and next, returned in the form of a massive tiger with gaping jaws. When the goddess pierced his mouth with a fiery arrow, the demon again vanished and next, appeared as an elephant. When this attempt proved futile, Mahisha again took the form of a buffalo.

Gautama and the other sages offered prayers to Goddess Durga, questioning why such a long, drawn-out battle should take place, since the demon was insignificant in comparison to her. After hearing these prayers, the goddess, carrying a trident in her hand, caught the demon and sat on him. Mahisha found her weight to be unbearable as she pounded him with her fists. He tried to escape her grasp but could not do so, being pinned down by the sharp points of her trident. Finally, Goddess Durga took a sword and cut off the demon’s head. After doing so, she held it in her hand and danced ecstatically as the demigods showered flowers upon her while praising her heroic feat.

Parvati felt herself to be guilty of a great sin by killing a devotee of Lord Shiva, Mahisha. Gautama assured her that there was no fault in her action and later on, she learned from her husband that, after being killed by her, the demon had attained the status of being one of his eternal associates. Having thus concluded her penance for having brought the three worlds to the brink of destruction, Parvati happily returned to Lord Shiva.

The next section of the Skanda Purana is called Vyengkatachalamahatmya. The sages at Naimisharanya asked, "O Suta Gosvami, son of Romaharshana, you are well-versed in the Puranas. Please describe the greatness of the prominent mountains on the earth."

Suta Gosvami replied, "Formerly, as we were seated on the banks of the Ganga, I made this same request of Shrila Vyasadeva, the best of my preceptors. He related to me the following."

Long ago, in Satya-yuga, Narada Muni went to the peak of Mount Sumeru, which is resplendent with numerous jewels. In the middle, he saw the abode of Lord Brahma. To the north, he saw the great banyan tree that is one thousand yojanas high and twice that in breadth. At the foot of that tree, Narada saw a divine hall made of jewels. The columns were made of rubies. The gopura (lofty towering gateway) was seven stories tall and the doors were made of diamonds.

After entering, Narada saw a platform set with pearls. He climbed onto that stage and in the middle was a throne having eight legs and inlaid with pearls. On that throne rested a splendid white lotus flower having one thousand petals, the splendor of which rivaled that of one thousand moons. Seated on that lotus, Narada saw a beautiful person as big as Mount Kailasa. He had the effulgence of ten thousand full moons. He had four magnificent arms and the head of a boar. In two hands, that most excellent Purusha held a conch and a chakra, while the other two hands displayed gestures granting benediction and immunity from fear. He wore yellow garments, He had lotus-like eyes, and His moon-like face had a

fragrance like incense. The sound of hymns from the Sama-veda emanated from Him. The mark of Shrivatsa adorned His chest and He wore a white sacred thread. His left foot was placed on a footstool and He was constantly attended to by Lord Brahma and foremost sages, such as Vasishtha, Atri, Markandeya, and Bhrigu, as well as Indra and other chiefs of the demigods.

Narada bowed down before the Lord and then, while standing near Him, glorified Him with excellent passages from the Upanishads. At that time, drums were suddenly sounded and in walked Goddess Earth, accompanied by her friends, Ila and Pingala. She appeared very brilliant and her clothing, in the form of the oceans, abounded with gems. She bent down due to the weight of her breasts, in the form of the two mountains, Sumeru and Mandara. She had a dark complexion like the color of durva grass.

The goddess offered, at the lotus feet of the Lord, a big basket of flowers that her friends had brought. She bowed down and then stood up, standing before the Lord with folded hands. Lord Varaha embraced mother Earth and took her upon His lap. Being very pleased in mind, He inquired from her about her welfare.

Lord Varaha said, “O Goddess, I established you, along with your assistants, the mountains, on the head of Shesha and filled you with inhabitants. After accomplishing this, I came here. O gentle lady, what is the purpose of your visit?”

Bhumi (the earth) replied, “You lifted me up from the lower regions and placed me on the head of Shesha, who has one thousand hoods, as if on a jeweled pedestal. The mountains You placed upon me, as my assistants, are holy and nondifferent from You. Please tell me about the chief mountains for they are my support.”

Lord Varaha said, “O Vasundhara, these mountains are your support—Sumēru, Himavan, Vindhya, Mandara, Gandhamadana, Shalagram (the source of the Gadaki river), Chitrakuta, Malyavan, Pariyatraka, Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Simhadri, Raivata, and the great golden mountain named Anjana, the son of Meru. These mountains have been resorted to by Me, the demigods, and the sages.”



In His description of mountains, Lord Varaha described Vyenkatachala, the abode of Lord Vasudeava. After hearing the Lord's descriptions of her various mountains, Goddess Earth offered prayers, being highly delighted at heart. At the finish of her prayers, the goddess fell down upon the lotus feet of the Lord, to offer obeisances.

Beaming with delight, Lord Varaha lifted the goddess up and embraced her, and then placed her on His lap. After some time, Lord Varaha took Dharani (the earth) with Him and departed for Sheshachala, riding on the back of Garuda, while being praised by the best of sages.

Thereafter, as they were seated at ease, Goddess Earth asked Lord Varaha, "O Lord of the devas, by which mantra are You to be worshiped and satisfied? Please tell me which mantra is Your favorite, and which gives You great delight. This mantra should be the cause of all prosperity for those who chant it. It should bestow sons and grandsons, and the power to rule society. It should yield all desirable things for those who want them. It should grant the attainment of Your personal abode at the end. O Lord Varaha, kindly reveal that mantra to me."

Being pleased, the Lord smiled and said, "Listen, gentle lady, to that exceedingly confidential mantra that grants immediate prosperity. It should not be revealed to anyone except a devotee with a controlled mind who is always willing to render devotional service unto Me. Om namah shri varahaya dharan-yuddharanaya ca svaha. 'Om. I offer obeisances to Lord Varaha, who lifted up the earth. Svaha.' This mantra should be continuously chanted by one who desires liberation from the entanglement of material existence."

"O Goddess, this mantra is the bestower of all perfections. Sankarshana is the presiding sage of this mantra, I Myself am the objective, the meter is pankti, and the bija is Shri. One who receives this mantra from a bona-fide spiritual master should chant it four hundred thousand times while performing a fire sacrifice."

“The devotee should meditate upon Me with you seated upon My left thigh. I should be thought of as having the luster of a crystal mountain, eyes resembling the petals of a pink lotus flower, the head of a boar, a gentle nature, four arms, and adorned with a crown.”

“After meditating upon Me in this way, the devotee should chant the mantra one hundred and eight times. By doing so, he will attain all desired objects, as well as liberation at the end of life.”

The Lord asked Bhūmī to tell Him what else was on her mind and so she requested Him to narrate more about Vyenkata Hill. In reply, Lord Varaha narrated the following story.

There was a king named Mitravarman, in the dynasty of the moon-god, who ruled his kingdom from Narayanapura. He was a righteous king and so the earth produced food without being cultivated. The people of his kingdom were also virtuous and they didn't have to suffer from any kind of natural calamity. The charming daughter of the ruler of the Pandyas was his wife and he was very attached to her. They had a son named Viyāt, who was also called Akasha, and his wife, who was from a family of Shakas, was named Dharani.

After entrusting the rule of the kingdom to his son, Mitravarman retired to Vyenkata Hill so that he could lead a life of penance in a forest there.

Once, as King Akasha was ploughing the earth to make it suitable for performing a sacrifice, a girl emerged from the furrow, lying on a bed of lotuses. She was very beautiful and endowed with all attractive characteristics. Indeed, she shone like a doll made of gold.

Upon seeing her, the king was astonished. Taking the child in his arms, his eyes sparkling with glee, he told his ministers, “This is my daughter.”

A voice from the sky announced, “This is true. This girl is your daughter and so you should raise her carefully.”

Being delighted, Akasha went to his queen and said, “Look at this girl, who has been granted to me by the Lord. She emerged from

the earth as I was ploughing. Because we are childless, we will raise her as our daughter."

Saying this, Akasha handed the girl to his wife. Soon thereafter, Dharani became pregnant and Akasha was very happy that his family would continue. Queen Dharani gave birth to a son at a very auspicious moment, according to the arrangement of the stars and planets. Indeed, on the day the boy was born, drums were heard resounding in the heavens and flowers showered from the sky onto the king's palace. To those who came to see the newly-born child, the king gave lavishly in charity. The boy was named Vasudana.

When Vasudana grew up, the sacred thread ceremony was performed and he was educated by preceptors who had mastered the Vedic literature. From his father, he learned how to wield weapons and chant their mantras. Indeed, because of the prowess of his son, the king became immune from fear of his enemies.

The girl that Akasha had found while ploughing the field was named Padmini, or Padmavati. One day, after Padmini had grown up, as she was playing within a palace garden, along with her friends, Narada Muni happened to come there.

Being surprised to see how the girl looked like a celestial goddess, Narada asked, "Who are you, timid one? Whose daughter are you? Please show me your hand."

The fascinating girl replied, "O brahmana, I am the daughter of King Viyat. Please tell me about my bodily characteristics (physiognomy). Do they indicate good or bad fortune?"

Narada Muni said, "I shall tell you about your distinctive features. Your feet are very good. They are like pink lotuses with soft petals. Your toes are reddish and even and your toenails are elevated. Your ankles are not protruding and your wonderful calves are devoid of hair. Your knees are smooth and shiny and they are identical. Your thighs are tapering, your buttocks are stout, and your thighs are thought-provoking. Your navel is circular and deep. Your breasts are plump, your hands are reddish, and there is a lotus-line on your palm. Your hands are tender with straight and even fingers

that allow no space between them. Your fingernails shine and your arms are long and delicate, like the stalk of a flower. Your neck is reddish and long and your shoulders slope downward. Your face is always pleasant, like a full moon devoid of spots. Your cheeks shine like a golden mirror. Your forehead looks splendid with its curls of black hair. Your face is circular and your lips are red, like a bimba fruit. Your white teeth sparkle when you smile.”

“Considering all this, you are fit for Lord Vishnu. You look like Lakshmi, who was born from the ocean of milk.”

After saying this, and after being worshiped by the girls, Narada Muni suddenly vanished from view. The friends told Padmini, “Now it is spring. Let us pick some lovely flowers in the garden. The garden of flowers is very charming.”

Thereafter, the girls wandered here and there, picking flowers. After some time, they spotted a lordly elephant, accompanied by many female elephants. Being, afraid, the girls took shelter in a grove of trees. Soon thereafter, they spotted an excellent horse that was white, like a spotless moon. Riding on the splendid horse was a man of dark complexion who looked as handsome as Madan, the god of love. His lotus-petal eyes practically extended to His ears. In His hand was the Sharṅga bow, covered with gold and bedecked with jewels.

He had been chasing a wolf in the forest and upon seeing Him, all the girls stood speechless. When the lordly elephant saw Him, he bowed his head and then went back into the forest, trumpeting. The rider on horseback asked, “Did you see a wolf come this way?”

The girls replied, “No, we haven’t seen a wolf. Why have you come to our garden, wielding this excellent bow? O hunter, none of the animals living here should be killed. Go away from this garden, which is protected by King Akasha.”

After hearing this, the man dismounted and said, “Who are you? Who is this lotus-like girl? All of the parts of her body are fascinating to behold. She has very nice, plump breasts. Tell me who you are and then I will return to My home in the mountain.”

At the urging of Padmavati, her attendant replied, "This is the daughter of King Akasha. She was born from the womb of the earth. She is our master and her name is Padmini. Tell us, O youth of handsome features, what is Your name? What is Your varna, where do You live, and why did You come here?"

With a smile on His lotus-like face, the man said, "Our family is that descending from the sun-god. I have innumerable names and they purify learned men. According to My color and characteristics, great sages call Me Krishna. My chakra instills fear in the hearts of those who are enemies of the demigods and the brahmanas. Upon hearing the sound of My conch shell, everyone's mind becomes bewildered. There is no bow, even among the residents of heaven, that is equal to Mine. I reside at Vyenkata Mountain. I have come here, along with my Nishada followers, to hunt. I was chasing a very fast animal and thus came here. Now that I have seen this maiden, I am afflicted by love. Can this girl be obtained by Me?"

Upon hearing this, the girls became infuriated and said, "If King Akasha sees you, he will throw You in his dungeon. Before that happens, You had better return home."

Being warned in this way, the man mounted His swift horse and, accompanied by His followers, rode off swiftly toward the mountain. Upon returning home, He dismissed the demigods, who had assumed the forms of hunters, and then entered His palace. There, Lord Hari lay down on a swinging couch, feeling exhausted. As He rested, the Lord thought about the maiden with plump breasts and smiling face. He considered her to be Lakshmi herself. While thinking of her, the Lord went into a deep trance of meditation.

At noon, a maidservant named Bakula-malika prepared a nice meal for the Lord and then went to see Him. She was accompanied by three other maidservants, named Padmavati, Padmapatra, and Chitrarekha. Telling them to wait at the door, Bakula-malika entered the Lord's room. After offering obeisances, when she saw that the Lord appeared to be sleeping, she began to massage His lotus feet.

When she understood that the Lord had closed His eyes so that He could absorb His mind in thinking about something, Bakula-malika said, "Please get up. I have prepared excellent food for You. Come and eat. Why do You lay down like one who is distressed, even though You relieve the distress of all those who worship You within the three worlds? What did You see in the forest while You were hunting? Truthfully, You seem to be suffering the plight of a love-lorn man. Who did You see—a celestial maiden, a human girl, or the daughter of a Naga? Please tell me about the girl who has captivated Your mind."

Upon hearing this, the Lord heaved a deep sigh and then said, "Alright, I shall tell you everything. Formerly, in the Treta-yuga, I killed Ravana. Lakshmi had appeared as the daughter of King Janaka (Sita). While living in the Panchvati forest, when I went to kill the demon, Maricha, My younger brother followed Me, at Sita's urging. The fire-god, Agni, had anticipated this and so he took the real Sita to Patala and entrusted her into the care of his wife, Svaha."

"There was a splendid lady named Vedavati. Formerly, she had been touched by Ravana but not sexually molested. Still, she gave up her life by entering fire. For the purpose of killing Ravana, she was born again with a form very similar to that of Sita. It was she who was abducted by Ravana and kept prisoner at Lanka. When Ravana was killed, she again entered fire. At that time, Agni handed over the original Sita who had been kept in his custody. He said, 'O Lord, this is Vedavati, who acted for the pleasure of Sita. For Sita's sake, she remained at Lanka. Now, You should award her a benediction.' Sita then said to Me, 'Vedavati always did that which was pleasing to me. Therefore, I consider her to be Your great devotee. You should accept her as Your wife.' I told Sita, 'I will do that in the twenty-eighth Kali-yuga. Until that time, let her remain in the abode of Brahma. Then, at the proper time, she will become the daughter of the earth, adopted by King Viyāt.'"

"Vedavati has now appeared at Narayanapura and I saw her today. Even in one hundred years, it would be impossible for Me to



describe her beauty. If I am able to obtain her as My wife, I will be most satisfied. Know this to be the truth.”

“O Bakula-malika, go there, and after seeing the girl, tell me whether you find her suitable for Me.”

After saying this, the Lord once again closed His eyes, almost as if fainting. Bakula-malika said, “I shall do as You say.”

Bakula-malika mounted a red horse and departed. At the temple of Agastyeshvara, a shiva-linga worshiped by Agastya Muni, she stopped for awhile and rested. At that time, some of Padmavati’s friends came there to worship the shiva-linga. After seeing the girls, Bakula-malika went and spoke to them.

In answer to her inquiries, one of the girls explained, “We are friends and attendants of King Akasha’s daughter, Padmalaya (a nickname). Some time back, while we were picking flowers in a garden, we happened to see a man of dark complexion, whose chest seemed to be a temple of the goddess of fortune. A gentle smile spread across His face. Our friend talked to Him and then, when He suddenly left, she fainted.”

“We brought her back to the palace and upon seeing her condition, the king called for a prominent brahmana, who was also an astrologer. After carefully considering the time and positions of the planets, the astrologer said, ‘An excellent man had approached your daughter and she fainted when He departed. She will be united with Him. A woman acting as His representative will come here and her purpose will be conducive to your welfare and prosperity. You should do as she says. Have the brahmanas go to Agastyeshvara and perform an abhisheka.’ ”

“The king summoned the brahmanas and asked them to perform a grand bathing ceremony for Lord Shiva, in the form of Agastyeshvara. After their departure, the king called for us and asked us to collect all the required paraphernalia for the abhisheka. That is why we are here.”

“Now, tell us about yourself and why you have come here. What is your mission? You appear to have come from the heavenly planets, riding on this celestial horse.”

Bakula-malika replied, "I have come from Vyenkata Hill and my name is Bakula-malika. I have come here to see Queen Dharani. Is she there in the palace?"

The girls told Bakula-malika to accompany them when they would return to the palace. Meanwhile, as the girls were returning home, Dharani saw a Pulinda (a forest tribe) woman walking in the street. She wore jewelry made of dried berries and shells and a small baby was tied to her back by means of a cloth. She called out, "Listen to me, for I tell the truth. I can tell you everything you want to know about the past, present and the future."

Dharani summoned the Pulinda woman and made three piles of pearls. Placing them before the Pulinda woman, Dharani asked her to point to the pile she was intently thinking about. The Pulinda woman pointed to the middle pile of pearls and Dharani confirmed that this was correct and asked her to speak more, promising to give her a lot of money. The Pulinda woman requested that first some food be given to her child. After feeding her child, the young Pulinda woman said, "It is due to the arrival of a man that the body of your daughter has become emaciated. Being unable to see that man, she is afflicted by Cupid's arrows. It was the primeval Lord Himself, who came from Vaikuntha to reside on the peak of Vyenkata Hill. Sometimes, He assumes a form more alluring than that of the god of love. He is the Lord of Lakshmi and the master of maya. One day, He came to your garden, riding upon a horse. Upon seeing your daughter, He came under the control of the god of love. He is sending a messenger to see you very soon. Upon being united with the Lord, your daughter will experience great transcendental love."

"O Queen, my words are true and you will experience their truth this very day. Now, please give some more food for my son." After giving some food, Dharani dismissed the Pulinda woman. She then went to see her daughter, Padmavati, who was seated, surrounded by her many friends. She said, "What shall I do for you, my dear daughter? Tell me—what is the object that is most pleasing to you?"

The love-sick girl slowly replied, "O mother, my mind is attracted to that object which is pleasing to all of the good people of this world—that object whom even Lord Brahma desires to see—that object which is only attained by the devotees and never by the non-devotees. O mother, let that be sought after."

Dharani said, "Describe the characteristics of the devotees who are able to achieve this supreme objective."

Padmavati replied, "The devotees of the Lord decorate their arms with tilaka drawings of a conch shell and chakra. They decorate their foreheads with tilaka consisting of two parallel lines, called urdhva-pundra. Indeed, the devotees mark twelve places on their bodies with tilaka. While applying tilaka, they recite twelve holy names, beginning with Keshava."

"The devotees regularly recite the Vedic literature. They always speak the truth and are never jealous or malicious to others. Indeed, they do not insult other people and never covet their possessions. Devotees never look at, think about, or touch the beautiful wives of others. They are kind and merciful toward all living entities and they always engage themselves in a way that is for others' welfare. They remain satisfied with whatever they have by means of honest endeavor and they are faithful to their wives. They are freed from attachment, fear, and anger. They like to sing the glories of the Lord. Know these to be the faithful followers of Lord Vishnu."

(Padmavati also described how devotees obtain symbols of the Lord's chakra, lotus, conch, club, and bow—heat them on a fire and then brand their bodies with these weapons of Lord Vishnu. This is still practiced by some devotees in the Madhva sampradaya. When the holy name is branded (or tattooed) on one's body, it is called nama-mudra.)

Padmavati concluded by saying, "My love is for Him alone. My mind yearns to obtain Him. O mother, besides Lord Vishnu, I do not desire anyone else. I simply remember the dark-complexioned Lord Vishnu and thus sustain my life. Now, let the means of attaining Him be thought of."

After hearing this, Queen Dharani thought, "How can Lord Vishnu become pleased with us?"

Soon thereafter, Padmavati's friends, along with Bakula-malika, came to see Dharani. The queen honored the brahmanas, fed them nicely, and then gave them gifts in charity. In return, she received their blessings for the fulfillment of her desires.

After the departure of the brahmanas, Dharani asked the maidservants, "Who is that excellent woman accompanying you? How did you meet her? Why has she come here? She seems to be worthy of great respect."

The girls replied, "O Queen, this is a divine lady. She has come here to see you. We met her at the temple of Lord Shiva. Because she wants to see you, we had her accompany us."

Dharani approached Bakula-malika and said, "O gentle lady, where have you come from? Tell me the truth. What can I do for you? I want to help you achieve the purpose of your visit."

Bakula-malika replied, "I have come from Vyenkata Hill and my name is Bakula-malika. My Lord, Narayana, dwells on the mountain, Shri Vyenkatachala. One day, my Lord went hunting and while chasing many animals, He happened to see these girls, picking flowers. In the midst of the girls, He saw your daughter. Considering her to be on a par with Lakshmi, He became attached to her. In the hope of achieving her hand in marriage, the Lord asked the girls about your daughter and they explained how she was the king's child. After hearing this, My Lord mounted His horse and departed. Upon His return home, the Lord requested me to come and meet you. After attaining the king's consent, He wished me to return at once. Now, please consult you daughter and husband and then do what is required."

The queen was delighted to hear this. She called for her husband and together, they went to Kamalalaya (Padmalaya). In the midst of the assembled ministers, the queen repeated all that Bakula-malika had said. When he heard this, the king was very happy and spoke to his ministers and priests, saying, "My daughter

was not born from a womb. She is certainly a divine being. Now, she is being sought by the Lord of the demigods, who is residing at Vyenkata Hill. Today, my desire is being fulfilled. Tell me whether this proposal is acceptable to you or not.”

The ministers were also delighted. They replied, “O great king, we are all satisfied. Your matchless daughter will have the association of Lakshmi. Let her be given to the Sharnga-wielding Lord of the devas. Let the auspicious marriage be performed soon. Brihaspati should be called and an auspicious hour fixed for the wedding.”

Saying, “so be it,” the king called for Brihaspati to descend from the world of the demigods. When Brihaspati arrived, at the king’s request, he determined the ideal day for the marriage after carefully considering the horoscope of the bride.

Honoring Brihaspati’s decision, King Akasha bid him farewell and then said to Bakula-malika, “O splendid lady, return to the abode of the Lord and inform Him that the wedding will be in the month of Vaishaka. Let Him come here after making all arrangements for the marriage.”

Thereafter, just prior to the marriage, Vishvakarma was called for and he decorated the city gorgeously. Indeed, he did this in a moment’s time (Ripley’s Believe it or Not). Indra sent showers of flowers, Apsaras sang and danced, and Kuvera filled the city with all kinds of wealth. Yamaraja made the people of the earth free from disease.

When Bakula-malika came before the Lord, she informed Him, “The mission has been accomplished. The queen says that she is Your devotee and that she simply wishes to engage in Your devotional service. She begs that You kindly accept her.”

The Lord was very pleased and He had a messenger sent, assuring the king and queen that He would come to marry their daughter at the prescribed time. Carrying a garland of flowers for Padmavati that was given to him by the Lord, the messenger hastened to the city of King Akasha.

When the time for the marriage approached, at the Lord's request, Lakshmi made all the necessary arrangements. Being commanded by Lakshmi, Pṛiti (affection) brought scented oil and Shruti (the Vedas) brought silk cloth. Smṛiti (Vedic literature) brought the ornaments, Dhṛiti (patience) held the mirror, and Shānti (peacefulness) held a container of musk.

At that time, Indrani held an umbrella, Sarasvatī held a chamara, and Gaurī held another chamara. Jayā and Vijayā held fans. Upon seeing their arrival, Lakshmi got up quickly. She took the scented oil and applied it to the Lord's body. Then, she performed the bathing ceremony of the Lord with water from the Gāṅgā and other holy rivers, filling one hundred gold pots. Thereafter, Lakshmi dressed the Lord and decorated His body with numerous ornaments.

Dhṛiti then placed a mirror in front of the Lord. While looking into the mirror, the Lord applied urdhva-pundra (tilaka) on His forehead. Thereafter, along with Lakshmi, He mounted upon Garuda and departed for the city of King Akasha, accompanied by Brahma, Shiva, Varuna, Yama, Vasishtha, and other prominent sages. The Gandharvas sang while the Apsaras danced.

When he saw that the Lord had arrived, the king made his daughter sit on the elephant, Airavata. The bride and bridegroom were then brought together. As the king and his family faced Him, the Lord took off His garland and smilingly placed it over the shoulders of Padmavati. She then took a garland of jasmine flowers and placed it around the Lord's neck. This exchange of garlands was performed three times and then the couple entered the marriage arena, accompanied by the demigods, headed by Brahma.

Lord Brahma then performed the marriage ceremony, beginning with the tying of the mangalya-sutra (the auspicious thread of conjugal felicity) and ending with the fire sacrifice. On the fourth day, Lord Brahma concluded all of the sacred rituals. A huge quantity of valuable gifts were given by the king to the Lord and His bride. Being highly pleased with the king, Lord Vyenkateshvara requested him to ask for a benediction of his choice.



King Viyat replied, “My dear Lord, please grant me unswerving loyalty and devotion unto You. Let my mind rest peacefully at Your lotus feet.”

In reply, the Lord assured the king that his desire would be fulfilled. Thereafter, the demigods returned to their abodes and the Lord mounted Garuda, along with Padmavati, and returned home. There, the Lord enjoyed life along with Lakshmi and His new bride, Padmavati.

Dharani (the earth goddess) very happily listened to this story. Next, she inquired, “O lifter of the earth, in Kali-yuga, by whom are You seen? Due to love for You, I am very eager to hear more.”

Lord Varaha responded by narrating the following story. Long ago, there lived a hunter named Vasu, who was a devotee of the Supreme Lord, Purushottama, residing at Vyenkata Hill. He used to cook rice, pour honey over it, and then offer it to the Lord. Vasu’s wife was the chaste Chitravati. They had an excellent son named Vira. Vasu lived happily with his wife and son. His job was to protect the surrounding forest, called Shyamaka.

One day, Vasu entrusted the protection of the Shyamaka forest to his son and then went deep into the forest, along with his wife, to collect honey. Vira cooked rice, offered it to the Lord at the base of a tree (as was the custom of these forest people) and then happily honored prasada. After some time, Vasu returned home with some honey. Seeing that his son had eaten all the rice (called Shyamaka rice), he became angry. Indeed, the enraged father held up his sword, intending to kill his son.

Lord Vishnu, who resided within the tree, grabbed the sword. Vasu looked back to see who had caught hold of his sword and he saw Lord Vishnu, holding a conch, disc, club, and lotus in His hands. After throwing aside the sword, Vasu bowed down to offer obeisances to the Lord.

When Vasu asked why He had grabbed his sword, the Lord replied, “Your son is My devotee and he is more dear to me than you. I reside on this hill and so I have appeared before your son in reciprocation for his pure devotion.”

Soon thereafter, a devotee name Rangadasa, a twelve-year-old boy, came there to worship Lord Vishnu. Although a shudra, Rangadasa had great devotion for the Lord since his infancy. Upon his arrival at Narayanapura, he had worshiped Lord Varaha. There, he had heard that Lord Shrinivasa was residing at Vyenkata Hill and so he quickly went there.

After climbing the Vyenkata mountain, Rangadasa saw Lord Hari, along with Lakshmi and Bhumi, staying at the root of a tree in the middle of the forest, on the banks of the lake, Svamipushkarini. He saw Garuda overhead, stationed in the sky with his wings spread over the Lord's head, like a canopy. He was attended by the conch, disc, club, and sword, who were standing nearby in their personified forms.

Rangadasa was very pleased to see the Lord and he made up his mind to construct a nice garden for His worship. With that in mind, he began residing at the base of the tree. Every day, he would clear a bit of the forest but on the order of the Lord, he left two trees standing. These trees served as abodes of the Lord—one was a tamarind tree where Lord Krishna resided and the other was a champaka tree that served as the residence of Lord Balarama. After clearing a sufficient area, Rangadasa enclosed it by building a stone wall and then he planted many nice flower gardens. By digging a well, he was able to make the gardens flourish.

Each day, Rangadasa would pick the best flowers and string beautiful garlands of various colors. He would give these to the brahmana who was engaged in worshiping the Lord. The pujari would then offer the garlands to Lord Shrinivasa, Lakshmi and Bhumi. In this way, Rangadasa remained in the service of the Lord for seventy years.

One day, a Gandharva came to that area, along with many young female consorts, to bathe in the lake. After entering the water, the Gandharva passed his time engaging in loving affairs with his women. While intently watching these amorous affairs of the Gandharva, Rangadasa forgot to string garlands that day.

Although he had carefully controlled his senses, as he looked at the girls' attractive bodies, his semen was involuntarily ejaculated. Even as Rangadasa was watching, the Gandharva got out of the lake, put on his clothes, boarded his celestial chariot, along with the maidens, and departed through the sky.

After the departure of the Gandharva, Rangadasa felt ashamed of having been deluded in that way. He threw away the garlands that he had started to string, bathed in the lake, and then picked some more flowers. When the garlands were made, Rangadasa slowly made his way to the temple. Upon seeing him come after the worship had been concluded, the brahmana pujari asked, "My dear friend, you are late. What were you doing?"

Being ashamed, Rangadasa remained silent and so the Lord asked him, "Why are you ashamed, Rangadasa? You have been deluded by Me! Indeed, you are a man who has conquered lust! Take courage! You will become a king of the earth, just like the Gandarva you saw, and you will remain devoted to Me. After enjoying all kinds of worldly pleasures, you will construct outer walls and pavilions for Me. I will be delighted with your service and grant you liberation from the entanglement of material existence. Stay here and render service unto Me until you have to leave your body."

After saying this, Lord Vishnu remained silent. Thereafter, Rangadasa engaged himself in making his gardens more and more splendid. Finally, after a life of more than a hundred years, Rangadasa met with death and then was reborn in the dynasty of the moon-god. His name was Tondaman, the son of Suvira and Nandini. Even as a five-year-old child, Tondaman manifested devotion for the Lord. When he grew up, he became a heroic young man of good behavior. First, he married Padma, the daughter of the Pandya king, and thereafter, he married a hundred girls from various lands after attending their svayamvaras.

Tondaman enjoyed life in Narayanapura, like the king of the devas. One day, after receiving permission from his father, Tondaman went hunting near Vyenkata Hill. While wandering on

foot, along with his attendants, Tondaman happened to see a leader of elephants. Desiring to capture the elephant, Tondaman went a great distance through the forest. Then, when he saw a parrot of five colors, Tondaman tried to catch it. However, the parrot flew away toward the mountain, chirping, “Shrinivasa! Shrinivasa!”

While following the parrot, the prince climbed the mountain and came to the field of Shyamaka rice. He lost sight of the parrot but he saw the keeper of the forest. Upon seeing the prince approach, the forester bowed down and then stood with folded hands.

Tondaman greeted the forester and inquired, “Did you see a parrot of five colors here? It was chirping, ‘Shrinivasa! Shrinivasa!’ ”

The forester replied, “That parrot is a favorite of Lord Shrinivasa and always remains by His side. Indeed, the bird was brought up by Lakshmi and Bhumi. It would not be possible for anyone to capture that parrot! After wandering about the mountain during the day, the parrot comes back to the Lord in the evening and remains near Him.”

“O prince, I am now going to worship the Lord. Rest awhile at the base of this tree until I return. My son will keep you company.”

Tondaman said, “I shall come with you to have darshana of Lord Janardana. I want to see the Lord, who resides at Vyankata Hill.”

The forester took some rice mixed with honey in a cup made of mango leaves and went with the prince to see Lord Hari. When they reached the Svamipushkara river, they bathed. There, the forester pointed out the tree on the bank of the river that served as the Lord’s abode. After coming out of the water, when the prince and forester approached the tree, they saw the four-armed Lord standing there, His feet and legs, up to His knees, covered by an anthill.

The two joyfully bowed down before the Lord. Getting up, the prince was in a state of ecstasy as he stood silently with folded hands. Being absorbed in transcendental bliss, he could not think of or feel anything else. The forester offered the rice mixed with honey and then handed half to the prince, keeping half for himself.

The prince spent the night with the forester. After getting up early the next morning, he returned to his city. After some time, Tondaman's father installed him upon the throne and then retired to the forest, along with his wife, to perform austerities for gaining liberation from material existence. In this way, Tondaman inherited the kingdom of his father.

Meanwhile, at the Shyamaka forest, the Lord assumed the form of a boar and ate rice from the fields every night. Each day, the forester would see footprints of a boar in the fields. He would follow the footprints but failed to see the Lord.

One night, the forester hid, bow in hand, waiting for the arrival of the boar. That night, he saw a magnificent boar, having a luster like that of millions of moons, grazing in the middle of the rice field. The forester picked up his bow and roared like a lion. Upon hearing that sound, the boar hurriedly fled that field and so the forester followed. The rest of the night was spent with the forester chasing the boar in the moonlight. At last, the forester saw the boar enter an anthill.

When the boar vanished within the anthill, it appeared as if the full moon had set behind a mountain. Being amazed as well as angry, the forester furiously dug up the anthill. Inside, he saw the boar but as soon as he did, he fainted. Upon seeing how his father had lost consciousness, the son, who was very devoted to the Lord, offered prayers to Lord Varaha (the Boar Incarnation).

Being very pleased, Lord Varaha said, "I reside here and so tell the king to install a Deity and worship Me. This anthill should be washed with the milk of a black cow. The Deity of Varaha should be excavated and then installed on the slab of stone found within the anthill. The king, Tondaman, should worship me with offerings of food and other articles."

When his father regained consciousness, the son told him of the Lord's instructions. When the forester, Vasu, heard about the Lord's desire, he rushed to the capital of King Tondaman. The hunter, Vasu, was escorted into the royal court, along with his son

and followers, and was welcomed by the king. Tondaman asked, "O forester, what is the purpose of your visit?"

In reply, Vasu informed the king of all that had happened and related the Lord's message: "The king should come here and wash this anthill with the milk of a black cow. A nice slab of rock will be found within the anthill. The king should have a sculptor prepare a Deity of Me that has the head of a boar, in a sitting posture. The Goddess Earth should be seated upon My left thigh. The Deity should be installed by the best of brahmanas. After installing the Deity, the king should build a sturdy temple."

That night, in his dream, Lord Shrinivasa showed the king how he had strewn flowers, making a path from his city to a cave in the mountain. The next morning, at an auspicious hour, the king mounted his horse and followed the path of flowers that was clearly visible, starting from the entrance to his city. When he came to the cave in the mountain, the king began preparation for establishing a city there. When this was well underway, Tondaman washed the anthill with milk, as instructed by the Lord.

At that time, the Lord commanded him, "Carefully guard these two trees. The tamarind tree is my residence and the champaka tree is the abode of Lakshmi. Cut the other trees down and build a protective wall and decorative gate. A descendent of yours named Narayana, who will be My great devotee, will construct a grand temple and cover the domes with gold."

In due course of time, King Tondaman became old and so he installed his son, Shrinivasa, as ruler of his kingdom and then retired to the forest to live a life of austerity. After some time, being pleased with Tondaman, Lord Vishnu appeared before him, sitting on the back of Garuda, accompanied by Lakshmi and Bhumi.

The Supreme Lord said, "O King, what shall I do for you? I am very pleased by your performance of penance."

Being extremely delighted, the king replied in a faltering voice, "I would like to reside in Your transcendental abode that is



devoid of old age and death. O Madhava, please grant me this wish for that is all I desire.”

After saying this, King Tondaman fell prostrate onto the ground to offer his obeisances. Indeed, he immediately cast off his material body and boarded a celestial chariot, having attained sarupya-mukti, the liberation of having a form similar to that of the Supreme Lord.

Suta Gosvami said, “I shall now narrate to you an excellent story that broadcasts the glories of the lake, Svamipushkarini. Long ago, a brahmana named Kashyapa bathed in that holy river (it appears that the lake is connected to a river of the same name) and thus gained relief from a great sin that would have caused him to fall into hell.”

The sages inquired, “What sin did the brahmana, Kasyapa, commit? O Suta, tell us this story for we are very eager to hear it. No thirst can remain in the person who is satisfied by the nectar of your words.”

Suta Gosvami replied, “I shall recount this story because it illustrates the greatness of the lake, Svamipushkarini. It destroys the sins of those who listen to it.”

Formerly, there was a king named Parikshit. He was the son of Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna. He ruled his kingdom righteously from his capital, Hastinapura. Once, when he was sixty years old, as he wandered about the forest, hunting, Maharaja Parikshit became very hungry and thirsty. In this condition, he came upon a sage who was deeply absorbed in meditation.

The king asked the sage, “I hit a certain deer with my arrow and so it became frightened and fled. Have you seen it?”

Not only was the sage absorbed in meditation, he was observing a vow of silence. For these two reasons, he did not give a reply. Feeling slighted, Maharaja Parikshit picked up a dead snake that was lying nearby with the end of his bow and placed it around the sage’s neck. After doing this, the king returned to Hastinapura.

The sage had a son named Shringi, whose friend was the brahmana, Krisha. Krisha advised his companion, Shringi, "You should not be proud and thus exhibit your anger for what has occurred."

Still, Shringi was furious and he cursed the king, saying, "The foolish and ignorant person who placed a dead snake around the neck of my father will die within seven days, being bitten by the serpent, Takshaka."

When he heard that the king had been cursed by his son, the sage, Shamika, said to the boy, "Why have you cursed the king, the protector of the people? How could we live peacefully in a world without law and order? Anger gives rise to sin. Happiness is achieved through kindness and mercy. He who, by means of patience and forbearance, defuses surging anger, will attain the state of supreme happiness in this world and the next. Indeed, only those who are forgiving obtain the highest good."

Shamika Rishi told his disciple, Gauramukha, "Go to Maharaja Parikshit and tell him about the curse uttered by my son. After doing so, report back to me."

Gauramukha went and told Maharaja Parikshit that he was cursed to die on the seventh day from that day, being burnt by the fire of Takshaka's poison. After Gauramukha left, Maharaja Parikshit became depressed and had a mansion built in the middle of the Ganga. It was so high that it touched the clouds (truly a skyscraper). The building was supported by a single pillar.

Maharaja Parikshit stayed within that palace and he kept in attendance many good physicians conversant with medicinal herbs and the maha-garuda mantra. At that time, the brahmana, Kashyapa, who was expert in the chanting of all kinds of mantras, proceeded toward where Maharaja Parikshit was staying, thinking that he would save the king from the effects of the virulent poison.

Desiring to be rewarded with great wealth, Kashyapa arrived at the Ganga on the seventh day after the uttering of

Shringi's curse. Just then, Takshaka, in the guise of a brahmana, approached Kashyapa and asked, "O brahmana, where are you going? Please tell me."

Kashyapa replied, "Today, Takshaka will burn the emperor, Parikshit, with the fire of his poison. I am going to him because I am able to counteract the poison and thus save the king's life."

The so-called brahmana said, "Actually, I am Takshaka. One who is bitten by me could never be cured, even by uttering ten thousand maha-mantras! If you think that you are competent to subdue my poison then lets make an experiment. I will bite a great tree, several yojanas tall. If you can revive the life of the tree, I will regard you as being competent to save the king."

After saying this, Takshaka bit the tree so that it became reduced to a hill of ashes in a moment. Before this, a man had climbed the tree and he was also burnt in the fire of Takshaka's poison. Neither Kashyapa nor Takshaka were aware of his presence.

Kashyapa then vowed, "Let everyone witness the power of my mantras!"

After saying this, Kashyapa actually revived the tree that had been reduced to ashes by Takshaka. He did so by the power of his mantras. Indeed, the man who had climbed the tree was also brought back to life. Takshaka said, "O brahmana, you should see that the words of the brahmana boy, Shringi, do not prove false. I will give you twice the amount of wealth that the king is likely to reward you with. Go home at once."

After saying this, Takshaka gave Kashyapa incredibly valuable gems and made him return to the place from where he had come. Actually, Kashyapa knew that Maharaja Parikshit was destined to die and so, with his stash of jewels, he returned to his hermitage.

Takshaka called together many leading serpents and told them, "You should all assume the guise of sages and go to Maharaja Parikshit at once. Give him fruit as an offering of respect."

Takshaka then assumed the form of a worm and hid himself within a jujube fruit, ready to bite the king. Maharaja Parikshit

accepted the fruit offered by the serpents disguised as brahmanas and distributed them to his ministers. Out of curiosity, however, he picked up a certain fruit. This was just as the sun was about to set on the western horizon.

At that time, the many brahmanas and kings who were present with Maharaja Parikṣhit wondered, "Perhaps the words of the brahmana boy will prove false."

Just as this was being said, a big, red, evil-looking worm was seen by the king and all others present. The king said, "O brahmanas, will this worm bite me?"

Saying this, Maharaja Parikṣhit placed the worm on his neck. Takshaka, appearing as a worm, suddenly resumed his natural form and coiled around the body of the king. When this happened, all those present fled out of fear. Within a moment, Maharaja Parikṣhit was burned to ashes, along with his palace.

After the funeral ceremonies for Maharaja Parikṣhit had been performed, the brahmanas and ministers crowned his son, Janamejaya, as king. The people of the land greatly criticized the brahmana, Kashyapa, however. Wherever he wandered, he was rebuked by all good people. Indeed, wherever he went, he was driven out by the people so that he had nowhere to stay.

Finally, Kashyapa came to the ashram of the sage, Shakalya. Bowing down to him, Kashyapa said, "Everyone, even sages and brahmanas, despise me. I do not know why. I am not a drunkard, woman-hunter, murderer, or thief. If you know my fault, kindly inform me of it."

Shakalya meditated for a short while and then said, "You went to try and save Maharaja Parikṣhit but you were prevented from doing so by Takshaka. One who can treat a person who is afflicted by poison or sickness but does not do so is considered to be on a level with those who murder a brahmana. Whether it is due to lust, anger, fear, greed, jealousy, or delusion—if one does not try to help one who is afflicted due to poison or an ailment, he has no means of atonement. Indeed, merely by talking with such a person, one incurs sin."

“Maharaja Parikshit was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu and he had a spotless reputation. Still, you did not try to protect him. Being swayed by Takshaka, you turned back. It is for this reason that you are blamed, even by leading brahmanas. There is a verse quoted by masters of the science of medicine: ‘As long as the vital air of life clings to a man—even if he is about to die—treatment must be continued. After all, the ways of death are very hard to understand.’ ”

Kashyapa said, “O sage, by what means can I atone for this sin, so that people will once again accept me?”

Shakalya replied, “There is a mountain known as Vyenkata where the Lord of Lakshmi resides. On that mountain is a lake known as Svamipushkarini, which is the destroyer of all sins. Go there immediately and bathe in that lake and then see Lord Shrinivasa in the temple nearby. If you do this, you will become freed of your sin.”

Kashyapa did as the sage, Shakalya, advised and in this way, he regained his normal condition. Once again, his family, the brahmanas, and people in general honored him.

Listening to the Puranas and chanting the holy names of the Lord—these two alone are the two great fruit on the tree of auspiciousness for human society. Whether he be a boy, a young man, or an old man—whether he be rich or poor—a man conversant with the Puranas should always be respected by virtuous persons. One should never consider a person conversant with the Puranas to be lowly because the words that come from his mouth are like a wish-fulfilling cow (*kama-dhenu*). It is he who grants one the chance of never being born again in this material world.

One should not recite the Puranas in a place where wicked men are found. The Puranas should be recited in villages inhabited by good men, or at a holy place or a temple. Those who listen to (or read) the Puranas with faith and devotion, who do not hanker for any other activity (while listening or reading), and who restrain their speech shall earn merit. Those vile persons who listen to the Puranas without devotion will never gain any merit. They will be miserable in every birth.

Those who go elsewhere while the Puranas are being recited will come to lose their wives and wealth, even as they imagine themselves to be enjoying life nicely. Those who listen to the Puranas while chewing pan will have to eat the stool of dogs in hell. Those hypocrites who listen to the Puranas while occupying a seat that is higher than the speaker will suffer torments in hell and then be born as crows. Those who listen without first offering obeisances will be born as poisonous trees. Those who listen lying down will become pythons.

Those who criticize a person who is conversant with the Puranas will be born as dogs for one hundred births. Those who make impertinent remarks while the Puranas are being recited (or described) will be born as donkeys. Those who refuse to listen to the Puranas will be born as wild pigs. Those who create disturbances while discussion of the Puranas are going on will be born as village pigs.

Those who encourage the recitation of the Puranas, even if they do not listen, will attain an exalted destination after death. Those who recite the Puranas for others to hear will live in the abode of Brahma for millions of kalpas. Those who give in charity to propagators of the Puranas will dwell in Brahmaloṇa and then achieve ultimate liberation.

After hearing the glories of Vyṅkata Hill, the sages worshiped Suta Gosvami, who was richly endowed with the favor of his spiritual master, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, and who was the best among those who were conversant with the Puranas.

After marrying Draupadi, the Pandavas returned to Hastinapura, at the urging of Dhṛitarashtṛa, the son of Ambika. The Pandavas remained at Hastinapura for five years, along with the Kauravas. Then, as advised by Bhishma and others, Dhṛitarashtṛa, who was very pleased with the Pandavas because of their services, granted them rule of one-half of the kingdom and the establishment of a new capital, Khandaṇaprastha (also called Indraprastha).

Thereafter, the Pandavas left Hastinapura, accompanied by Lord Krishna.

As Maharaja Yudhisthira continued to rule the kingdom in the company of his brothers, Lord Krishna returned to Dvaraka. Then, at Narada's behest, the Pandavas made an agreement that Draupadi would stay with each of her husbands for one year, one after the other, on the condition that if any of the Pandavas happened to see her present with another brother in their apartment, he would have to go on a tour of pilgrimage for one year.

One day, a brahmana from the countryside came and stood in the palace courtyard, loudly lamenting, "My cow has been taken away by thieves!"

After consoling the brahmana and giving him assurances, Arjuna went to get his bow from the room where the Pandavas stored their weapons. Before entering the room, Arjuna saw that Yudhisthira was seated, along with Draupadi. Although fully aware of his vow, Arjuna rushed into the room, took his bow and quiver and left. Arjuna hastily pursued the thieves, and after killing them, he returned the cow to the brahmana.

When he returned to the palace, Arjuna told his elder brother (Yudhisthira), "I must now leave on a tour of pilgrimage for one year because I have broken my vow."

Yudhisthira, the foremost of those conversant with righteousness, replied, "If, for the sake of a brahmana, one lies—that is actually truth. It was for the sake of a brahmana, as well as for the sake of a cow, that you entered the room while Draupadi and I were seated there. How can this be considered wrong? It is the foremost duty of a kshatriya to give protection to the citizens. If he fails to punish thieves, he will incur great sin. Arjuna, you have acted for the best welfare of all and so there can be no fault in your action."

Arjuna folded his hands and said, "O King, do not speak in a way that justifies the breaking of my vow. A vow that one has proclaimed should never be broken. Out of compassion, you may try to dissuade me from undergoing penance but how will you prevent



people from criticizing me? Only weaklings forsake their duties, being prompted by the words of their relations. Actually, I am eager to go on a pilgrim's journey. Therefore, kindly give me your approval."

Maharaja Yudhisthira gave his consent and at his behest, many persons followed Arjuna as he left. There were brahmanas, astrologers, physicians, artisans, and story-tellers. Officers of the treasury also went with Arjuna, taking sufficient wealth to insure his comfort and provide his gifts of charity.

Arjuna first went to the Ganga, visiting Haridvara, Prayaga, and Kashi. After coming near the sea, Arjuna went south to what is present-day Orissa and saw the temple of Lord Jagannatha at Puri. Going further south, Arjuna came to Vyenkata Hill, the abode of Lord Narayana. With great devotion, he worshiped the Lord in the temple situated at the top of the mountain. After descending the mountain, Arjuna came to the river, Suvarnamukhari, that had been brought by the sage, Agastya.

There were many ashrams of rishis situated on the banks of this river. After bathing in the river, Arjuna visited many hermitages of the sages and at last, came to Bharadvaja's ashram. It was a very beautiful place, adorned with many flowering trees of various kinds. Animals and birds of all varieties roamed in the vicinity of the hermitage and none were inimical to the others. In fact, when the lions became tired after continuously playing in the forest, the elephants would approach them of their own accord and shower water on them from their trunks, to give them relief.

Upon seeing this wonderful ashram, Arjuna was highly astonished and he praised the prowess of the ascetics living there. Before him, Arjuna saw the sage, Bharadvaja, appearing as effulgent as fire. He had smeared ashes all over his body and a deerskin served as his upper garment. His matted hair appeared brilliant. Indeed, he appeared to be the personification of the Vedic literature. He was attended by virtues, such as fortitude, forbearance, kindness, and contentment, as if they were his devoted wives. In summary, he had an incomparable splendor of Brahman.

Arjuna approached the sage slowly and then fell flat onto the ground in front of his feet. The sage lifted up Arjuna and blessed him with great pleasure. Bharadvaja welcomed his guest with offerings of arghya and other pleasing things and then had him seated. When the sage inquired about his welfare, Arjuna entertained him with very pleasing words. Thereafter, by means of his kamadhenu (wish-fulfilling cow), Bharadvaja Muni fed Arjuna sumptuously.

In the evening, as the two were seated together, enjoying the pleasant breeze, Arjuna inquired about the origin of the river, Suvarnamukhari, which was visible at a short distance from where they were seated. Bharadvaja, an excellent speaker, first said, "O mighty-armed Arjuna, many kings have been seen by me but none have been endowed with grace, liberal-mindedness, courage, and kindness like you. Nobility of birth, learning, and wealth invariably cause arrogance in powerful men. However, in the case of excellent people like you, they are the cause of greater modesty and courteousness. What is there that should not be disclosed to you? Listen now to the divine story that is capable of freeing one from all afflictions."

After Sati, the wife of Lord Shiva, was insulted by her father, she gave up her life and was reborn as the daughter of the Himalayas. Her marriage was then again arranged with Lord Shiva and so all living entities assembled to take part in the marriage ceremony. As a result, the northern part of the earth became over-burdened and sank down to the nether world. The southern part of the earth became very light, however and so it rose up, causing everyone to become frightened.

Upon seeing this change in the earth's position, Lord Shiva said to Agastya Muni, "Because all living beings have come here, the earth has become dislodged from its normal position. You should make the earth level once again because no one except you is capable of doing so. Indeed, you were born of my splendor. I will always remain visible to you as I appear now at the time of my marriage."

Saying, “So be it,” Agastya Rishi departed for the south. After he crossed the Vindhya mountains, the earth again became level. Deciding to remain in the south, Agastya continued his travels and then saw a huge mountain in front of him. It appeared to be a mine of medicinal herbs and valuable gems. Its lofty peaks with streams of water cascading down appeared to hold up the sky, preventing it from falling to the earth.

Agastya slowly climbed the mountain, having decided to reside at the summit. He then constructed an excellent hermitage on the northern bank of a lake that was surrounded by many flowering trees and filled with lilies and lotuses. Along with many other sages, Agastya Rishi remained there for a long time.

One day, as he entered the temple of Lord Shiva, the goddess of speech spoke to him while remaining invisible. She said, “This land does not look good due to being without a nice river—like a night without moonlight or a brahmana who is averse to acquiring wisdom.”

“O foremost brahmana, I therefore request you to make a river flow here. It should have the power to release people from the fear of their sins.”

After hearing this, Agastya Rishi became engrossed in thought for some time. Then, after worshiping the deity, he sat down in the temple courtyard, along with all the other sages residing there. He told them of the divine instruction he had received and the sages were delighted to hear of this. They glorified him saying, “Merely by your uttering ‘hum,’ Nahusha was thrown down from his position as the king of heaven and forced to become a worm. What could be more wonderful than this? You dried up the ocean, making it a mere mouthful. The Vindhya mountain that tried to obstruct the sun was subdued by you.”

“It is said that not being born is superior to living in a land that has no river. We are therefore most fortunate that you have been directed to make a great river flow here. Of what use are mere words. Let the endeavor be made to cause a great river to descend here!”

Agastya Muni assured the sages, saying, "I will bring a river to our land."

Thereafter, Agastya Muni performed very severe austerities, surrounding himself with four fires in the summer, allowing himself to be lashed by driving rain in the monsoon, and standing in water up to his neck in winter while continuing his meditation and japa. However, when he felt that there was a delay in achieving his goal, Agastya Muni adopted measures even more severe. Without being conscious of the external world, he stood like a stone statue. At this time, a fire blazed from his body, touching the sky. Terrified, the people of the world cried out in alarm.

The demigods went and informed Lord Brahma of the precarious condition of the universe. After reassuring the devas, Lord Brahma appeared before Agastya Muni as he was engaged in his austerities. The sage bowed down to Lord Brahma and offered nice prayers for his satisfaction.

Lord Brahma said, "I am highly pleased with your penance, which was very difficult to perform. Choose a benediction and I will be happy to grant it."

Agastya Muni replied, "If you desire to grant me the fulfillment of my desire then this is what I would like—let a great river capable of freeing one of all sins grace this region. This is my only desire."

Lord Brahma said, "It will happen as you desire," and then thought of the celestial Ganga. Immediately, Gangadevi came and stood before him. Lord Brahma said, "O Ganga, you must carry out my order for the benefit of the three worlds. To fulfill Agastya's desire, descend to this place as an expansion of yourself. O gentle one, do what is pleasing to the sage."

After saying this, Lord Brahma vanished from view. Gangadevi told Agastya, "A portion of myself will appear on the earth to fulfill your desire."

Gangadevi departed and thereafter, a river appeared before Agastya Muni, asking, "Which way should I go?"

Agastya Muni replied, "I shall lead the way and you follow me."

After following a long course, Agastya Muni united the river with the sea. Thus, the river, Suvarnamukhari, came to flow near Tirupati and Vyenkata Hill, which is also known as Varahakshetra because the Boar incarnation had once resided there.

Having heard that Lord Varaha had lifted the earth from the bottom of the ocean, Arjuna inquired from Bharadvaja Muni, "O great sage, what is the support of the earth when it is sunk within the water at the end of the kalpa, beneath the seven lower planets? Kindly explain this to me in detail."

In response, Bharadvaja Muni described the creation and dissolution of the universe as follows. In the course of Brahma's day, there are fourteen Manus and this period is called a kalpa. Towards the end of Brahma's day, a terrible drought lasting one hundred years afflicts the earth. As the earth become dried up, all kinds of living beings perish. At this time, the sun becomes brighter and vomits fire. With all of its towns, villages, cities, mountains, trees, and oceans gone, the earth resembles the back of a tortoise, or a red-hot ball of fiery iron.

Then, from Lord Brahma, great clouds issue forth, covering the entire sky and roaring with thunder. These clouds are of various colors and they have the forms of elephants, mountains, palaces, trees, etc. Thereafter, a great shower of rain falls for one hundred years, extinguishing the fiery condition caused by the sun. Thus, a great flood occurs, covering not only the earth but the entire three worlds.

Being sunk into water, the earth goes down to the lower planetary regions. It does not perish, however, being somehow supported by the energy of Lord Brahma. Then, from the breath of Brahma comes great gusts of wind that will drive away all the clouds. That violent wind blows unceasingly for one hundred years.

Thereafter, Lord Brahma becomes absorbed in mystic slumber (yoga-nidra) and goes within the lotus that sprouted from the navel of Lord Vishnu. This is the night of Brahma and it lasts as long as his day. When the night is over, Lord Brahma awakens and re-creates the universe as it was before, under the direction of Lord Hari.

To protect the universe, Lord Hari assumes various forms of incarnation. In this kalpa, he assumed the form of the White Boar incarnation (Sveta-Varaha) and lifted up the earth.

The next section of the Skanda Purana is called Purushottama-mahatmya. Jagannatha Puri is also referred to as Nilachala or Niladra—names that describe it as a mountain. Actually, there are only sand dunes at present. The origin of this most holy place is described as follows by the sage, Jaimini.

Long ago, after creating the universe under the direction of Lord Vishnu, Lord Brahma thought to himself, “How can I avoid the great task of creation once again? How can the conditioned souls afflicted with the three-fold miseries (tapa-traya) be liberated? For this purpose, I will glorify Lord Vishnu without cessation.”

After a long time, Lord Vishnu appeared before Lord Brahma and said, “The purpose for which you have glorified Me cannot be achieved. Avidya (ignorance) is eternal and firmly rooted! How can birth and death in this world discontinue while avidya predominates? Still, I will tell you the means whereby ignorance can be gradually destroyed.”

“From the Ekamra forest (present-day Bhuvaneshwar) to the Nila mountain is a glorious place that is covered by Yogamaya so that even you would have a difficult time seeing it. It is there, at Purushottama-kshetra, that I reside by the side of a lake called Rauhina. My temple there is not affected by the creation or dissolution of the universe. Go there, and after seeing Me, further understanding of Nilachala’s greatness will become manifest to you.”

After directing Brahma in this way, Lord Vishnu disappeared from view. Lord Brahma hastened to Nilachala and there he saw the Deity known as Nila-madhava, made of black stone. (This Deity was worshiped by the shabaras before the installation of the present wooden Deities.) As Lord Brahma stood gazing at the Lord, a magnificent crow suddenly came and plunged into the water of the lake.

After casting off its body of a crow in that way, the liberated soul rolled on the ground in ecstasy, the Lord standing by his side. (A deity of this crow is installed in the temple of Lord Jagannatha and he appears with four arms, indicating that he achieved sarupya-mukti.)

When Lord Brahma saw how a mere crow had achieved liberation, which is very difficult for even great yogis to attain, he thought that the material creation would gradually become deserted. Indeed, he began to doubt the statement of the Upanisads that only the human form of life affords one the opportunity for liberation. At last, Brahma concluded, “Since anyone who leaves his body while thinking of the Lord is liberated—why then shouldn’t a lower creature achieve liberation in the Lord’s presence?”

At that time, Yamaraja, fearing the loss of his position, came there. After falling down to offer obiesances, Yamaraja stood up and glorified the Lord with excellent prayers. The Lord then indicated to Lakshmi (with a glance), who was standing by His side, that she should respond to the lord of death.

Lakshmi said, “The purpose for which you have gloried the Lord cannot be achieved because at this holy place, even lower forms of life achieve the liberation of having a form similar to that of the Lord. Your authority is restricted to the places where karma takes effect but not here, where there are no reactions to activities—whether sinful or pious. Just try to understand the glories of Nilachala!”

At Yamaraja’s request, Lakshmi continued to speak about the glories of Purushottama-kshetra.

At the time of dissolution, only Lakshmi, Purushottama-kshetra, and Markandeya Rishi (whose duration of life is seven kalpas) remained. While wandering through the waters of devastation, Markandeya Rishi came to a banyan tree at Nilachala. While at the base of the tree, the sage heard the voice of a small boy, saying, “Markandeya, come near Me. Enter into Me and thus cast of your woes. See Me lying on a leaf of this banyan tree in



the form of a baby. I am eternal time and the Supreme Soul of everyone. Enter My mouth."

Markandeya Rishi climbed the banyan tree and there, he saw the baby and entered His mouth. In the belly of the child, the sage saw the fourteen worlds, including the demigods, headed by Lord Brahma. After wandering in the Lord's belly, which was without limit, Markandeya Rishi came out and saw the Lord standing with Lakshmi.

When the Lord informed Markandeya that Niladri existed eternally, the sage made up his mind to reside there, forgoing all other holy places. The Lord gave His assent and informed Markandeya that he would be granted a place in that eternal abode. (Markandeya-tirtha is one of the pancatirthi [five important holy places] in Jagannatha Puri. Lord Shiva is known as Yameshvara because he supersedes the rule of Yamaraja at Nilachala.)

Turning to Lord Brahma, Lakshmi said, "In the Satya-yuga, there will be a king named Indradyumna. Being a great devotee of Lord Vishnu, King Indradyumna will come here to worship Him. As a reward for his devotion, a great tree will split into four parts and Vishvakarma will make Deities from the wood. Being worshiped by Indradyumna Maharaja, you will install the Deities."

Thereafter, Brahma and Yamaraja returned to their respective abodes. Jaimini said, "O sages, the Lord still resides at Nilachala, along with Baladeva and Subhadra. He is the same Lord that was worshiped by Indradyumna, the dark-complexioned Lord Nilamadhava, who resided within a cave of Mount Nila."

The sages asked, "In which yuga did Indradyumna live. Where was his kingdom? How did he come to Purushottama-kshetra? O omniscient one, we are very eager to hear about the king."

In reply, Jaimini narrated the story of King Indradyumna as follows. Maharaja Indradyumna lived during the Satya-yuga. He was in the fifth generation from Lord Brahma in the dynasty of the sun-god. He had a spotless character and he ruled the subjects as if they were his own children. He was a very advanced devotee of the

Supreme Personality of Godhead. In terms of learning, he was like a second Brihaspati. He was the beloved of the people, like the moon on a full-moon night. He ruled his kingdom from his capital, Avanti.

One day, as he was worshiping Lord Narayana within a temple, King Indradyumna asked the pujari and some other brahmanas who were seated there, "Tell me at which holy place the Lord of the universe, Jagannatha, can be seen with these mortal eyes."

Upon hearing this, the humble priest faced the assembled pilgrims and said, "O people who are conversant with holy places of pilgrimage, can you answer the king's inquiry?"

A certain eloquent person who was standing nearby, and who had visited innumerable holy places, joined his palms in reverence and said, "O king, I have been traveling over the earth ever since my childhood. There is a place in the south called Odhra (Utkala, or modern-day Orissa) on the shore of the Southern Ocean. Within that district is the holy place known as Purushottama and at Purushottama, there is a mountain known as Nilagiri. On Nilagiri is a fantastic banyan tree that is almost ten thousand feet tall. Simply by resting in the shade of that tree, one is freed from countless sinful reactions."

"To the west of that tree is a pool known as Rauhina. Simply by touching the water of that lake one is liberated from his entanglement in fruitive activities. At that place live hunters known as shabaras. Near to the banyan tree is a footpath that leads to the temple of Lord Jagannatha, who holds a club, disc, lotus and conch in His four hands. The Lord grants liberation to all who visit Him in His temple."

The pilgrim explained how he had resided at Purushottama-kshetra for one year, associating with the devotees in a mood of Krishna consciousness. He concluded by saying, "Formerly, I was a completely ignorant person. Now, due to the grace of Lord Madhava, I am second to no one in terms of learning. My mind has become freed of all impurities. I do not see any other Lord than Vishnu."

“O king, because you are a devotee of the Lord, steadfast in your vows, I have come here to instruct you. I do not want anything in return—not wealth nor a plot of land. All these are understood by me to be useless. You should go and worship the Lord of Lakshmi as He resides at Purushottama-kshetra.”

After speaking, the pilgrim with matted hair suddenly vanished from view, much to the astonishment of the people who had heard him. King Indradyumna was also awe-struck and he was excited, thinking, “How can I do this (go to Jagannatha Puri)?

He said to the purjari, “This was a paranormal experience. After listening to that celestial person, my intelligence prompts me to go Purushottama at once. O brahmana, my life is under your control. By your grace, I have achieved the first three objectives of life (dharma, artha, and kama). Now, if you help me, I can also attain the fourth (liberation). Please go to Purushottama and then come back here and tell me about it.”

The pujari replied, “Yes, I shall do this so that you may receive the opportunity of seeing Lord Keshava with your present, material eyes. Let my younger brother, Vidyapati, go there, along with your spies. He will make all arrangements for your stay while he is there.”

King Indradyumna said, “Good. Let your brother go without delay. Even before the onset of this mission, I feel that I will go to reside at Purushottama, without a doubt.”

After saying this, the king returned to his palace. At an auspicious hour, Vidyapati started his journey. After passing through the Ekamraka forest (modern-day Bhuvaneshwar), when Vidyapati approached Niladri, he saw the people as four-armed, holding a conch, disc, club and lotus in their hands. Thinking that he must have achieved a new, divine birth, he got down from his chariot and offered obeisances by falling flat onto the ground.

After climbing to the top of Niladri, Vidyapati could not find the path to the temple, although he searched for it a great deal. That night, as he lay down to sleep, Vidyapati heard divine voices that

seemed to be speaking about devotional service to the Lord from somewhere on the mountain. He got up and went in the direction of the voices and thus came to the village of shabaras.

After cautiously entering the village, Vidyapati saw the inhabitants as four-armed, holding a conch, disc, club, and lotus in their hands. He bowed his head and then stood motionlessly with joined palms. At that time, an elderly shabara named Vishvvasu came out of a cave, having completed his worship of the Lord.

Vidyapati thought, "From him I will learn about the abode of the Supreme Lord that is situated here."

As he was thinking in this way, Vishvvasu came to him and said, "From where have come to this impassable region? You look very tired, hungry, and thirsty. Please sit here for some time."

The shabara, Vishvvasu, offered Vidyapati *padya* and *arghya*. He said, "O brahmana, how do you sustain your life—by eating fruit or cooked food? I will provide you with whatever you like to eat. It is my great fortune that you have come here."

Vidyapati replied, "I have nothing to do with fruit or cooked food. Kindly see that the purpose for which I have come here is fulfilled. I am a priest of King Indradyumna, from Avanti. I have come here desiring to see Lord Nila-madhava."

Upon hearing this, Vishvvasu became worried, thinking, "Nila-madhava, whose presence has been kept a secret, is the sustainer of our lives. It would be our misfortune if He becomes known to all people (so that the intimacy of relationship would be lost). And yet, if I do not show the Lord to this brahmana, he will surely curse me. A brahmana must be honored by everyone, especially when he is a guest. If he is not gratified by me, my life will prove useless."

"It has already been predicted that King Indradyumna will come here and perform one hundred horse sacrifices after the disappearance of Lord Nila-madhava into the earth. After that, he will install Deities made of wood. What has been ordained by destiny should not be counteracted by my endeavors."

Thinking in this way, the shabara said, "The news that King Indradyumna will come here has been heard by us. You are more fortunate, however, because you will see Lord Nila-madhava before him. Come, let us go."

Vishvavasu took Vidyapati by the hand and led him along a forest path. They had to climb up to a very high place along the rocky path, which was only wide enough for one man to pass at a time. After about two hours, they reached the pond called Rauhina. The shabara told the brahmana, "By bathing here, one is assured of going back home, back to Godhead."

Vidyapati bathed in the kunda and while doing so, he offered very nice prayers to the Lord. The prayers concluded: "Please rescue me from the myriad miseries of material existence. I suffer greatly by transmigrating from one body to another in this worthless world. I am constantly harassed by grief and disease. My dear Lord, I take shelter at Your lotus feet."

He then went to see the Deity of Nila-madhava, which was situated nearby. After some time, the shabara said, "The day is ending and so we should return home while it is still light. I know that you are hungry and tired. Residence in the forest suits wild animals but it is not good for us to stay here after dark."

Vishvavasu caught hold of Vidyapati's hand and led him to the path. Before dark, they reached home. Because of his absorption in meditation upon the Lord and his mission, the brahmana was not aware of the pains pertaining to his physical body. He was unaware of how exhausted, hungry and thirsty he was, nor of how the stones and thorns had pricked his feet.

The shabara fed Vidyapati a royal feast and provided first-class hospitality in all respects. The brahmana wondered, "This shabara lives in the forest, which is a life full of difficulties and inconveniences. He maintains himself on what is found in the jungle. How could he prepare food like this, which is fit for a king? This is very mysterious."

As he was wondering in this way, Viśhvavāsu said, “O brahmana, are you comfortable now? The life-style of a city-dweller is much different than ours. You reside in the king’s palace as his highly respected priest. I hope that you are satisfied.”

Vidyapati replied, “You have served me with things that I have not even seen in the king’s palace. I am surprised that you are able to provide such hospitality. I am very curious to know how you accomplished this.”

Viśhvavāsu said, “My mind is not very enthusiastic to reveal this to you but because you are my guest, I must speak. Every day, hosts of demigods, headed by Indra, come here to worship the Lord. They perform sankīrtana and dance in ecstasy before returning to heaven. Whatever I have given you are the remnants left by the demigods after their worship of the Lord. Indeed, it is because we subsist on the prasāda of the Lord that we are free from disease and old age. Here, we live up to ten thousand years.”

While hearing this, the brahmana felt a thrill of transcendental ecstasy course through his body as his eyes filled with tears. He considered himself to be most fortunate, thinking, “Who can be equal to this śhābara in this world for he subsists upon the remnants of the Lord? What is the use of going back home to face the tribulations of family life? I shall become this man’s intimate friend and remain here for the rest of my life.”

Vidyapati said, “If you wish to favor me then my hope is to form a close friendship with you. What is the use of returning to Avantī and engaging in the service of the king? I would like to remain here and worship Lord Nīla-madhava. In this way, I hope to free myself from the vicious cycle of repeated birth and death. I feel very fortunate to have met you.”

“Friendship with devotees is praised as being essential for crossing over the ocean of material existence. When I return here with the king, he will worship the Lord and build Him a gorgeous temple. Grant the king permission to do this.”

Vishvavasu said, "It is a well-known story that King Indradyumna will come here but he will not be able to see Nila-madhava. The Deity is going to be covered with sand. This was revealed by the Lord to Yama. It was your great fortune that you were able to see the Lord. Even if the king were to come here soon, the Deity would vanish before his arrival. Do not tell this to the king, however."

"After coming here, when the king fails to see the Deity, he will sit down to fast until death. Then, in a dream, the Lord will instruct him to install four Deities made of wood. As long as these Deities remain here, our clan of shabaras will continue."

"My dear friend, do not feel aggrieved because of what I told you. Go to sleep now and in the morning we shall see the Deity after bathing in the sea. We can also find a suitable place for the king to stay near the beach."

After talking for some time, the two friends slept on a bed made of tender leaves. The next morning, they bathed and then went to offer obeisances to the Deity. After that, they found a nice place for Maharaja Indradyumna to stay when he would come. Finally, after bidding farewell to the shabara, Vidyapati mounted his chariot and departed.

That evening, while Vidyapati arrived at Avanti, in Purushottama-kshetra, as the area around the Deity of Nila-madhava was crowded with demigods, a violent wind began to blow, causing a sandstorm. Being blinded, no one could see the Deity and so they meditated upon Him for a long time. When the dust storm subsided, all that the demigods could see was a big pile of sand but no Deity. Rauhina-kunda was also no longer visible.

The demigods lamented piteously, being very aggrieved at the loss of their beloved Deity of Nila-madhava. As they begged the Lord to save them from sinking into the ocean of grief, an unembodied voice announced, "From now on, the vision of the Lord on the earth will be very difficult to achieve. Do not lament, however. Go at once and hear from Lord Brahma about the cause of Nila-madhava's disappearance."



When the demigods went to see Lord Brahma, he told them how the Lord would soon incarnate as wooden Deities. By hearing this, the devas became pacified. Meanwhile, Maharaja Indradyumna was very pleased to see Vidyapati return home. The brahmana gave the king a prasada garland from Nila-madhava. The king offered obeisances to the garland, along with many nice prayers.

Vidyapati said, “I have become freed from all sins by eating the prasada of Nila-madhava. Can’t you see the divine splendor of my spiritualized body? That prasada—even if taken once, causes hunger, thirst, and weakness to never again harass one. The unseen can be inferred by means of that which is seen.”

At King Indradyumna’s urging, Vidyapati described his experience at Purushottama-kshetra, saying, “It was in the evening that we approached the Deity of Nila-madhava. At that time, a cool breeze bearing a divine fragrance began to blow. Then, a confused sound was heard coming from the sky and gradually, voices could be distinguished as the demigods arrived to worship the Lord. Soon, I could distinctly hear the sounds of flutes, mridangas and other instruments, as well as the clapping of hands and the singing of heavenly songs in glorification of the Lord. I could only see the hands of the demigods as they presented thousands of offerings to the Deity, none of which I had seen before.”

“After the devas had departed, my friend, Vishvavasu, gave me some remnants of what had been offered. There was some prasada and this flower garland, which will never fade nor lose its divine fragrance.”

“The holy place of Purushottama has the Nila mountain as its center. On top of the mountain is a great banyan tree that is destined to remain for one kalpa. To the west of the banyan tree is Rauhina-kunda, whose waters dispel all sinful reactions. The Deity is situated on the eastern side of the pond, in the shade of the banyan tree. He is about six feet tall and stands on a golden lotus flower. His eyes defeat the beauty of a pair of smiling, blue lotuses. His forehead is more charming than the crescent moon.

His moon-like face dispels the three-fold miseries of whoever casts his glance upon it. His lips display a captivating smile. His cheeks are adorned with dimples because of His laughter. His shoulders are broad and His four arms extend to His knees.”

“By bowing down to Lord Nila-madhava and seeing Him with love and devotion, one is liberated from the bondage to the material body. Lakshmi, holding a lotus in her hand, stands to the left of the Lord, being embraced by Him. Her eyes are fixed on the lotus face of the Lord. I saw these two on that mountain. They were silent but with Their smiling eyes, They bless all who see Them. Indeed, as I gazed at the Deities, I thought that they were truly alive! Shesha, with His one thousand hoods, is stationed behind the Deities, forming an umbrella over Their heads. In front I saw the Sudarshana cakra in his embodied form. Behind him was Garuda with his palms joined in reverence.”

“O King, after directly seeing the Lord, my mind races back to that place, as though dragged with ropes! What more can I say? Whatever a person covets within his mind will be attained and even more if he simply bows down before Lord Nila-madhava. I went to Purushottama-kshetra at your request and now, you can do whatever you like.”

King Indradyumna said, “I am very satisfied that you have accomplished your mission. After hearing your words and wearing the garland you gave me, I only desire to go and see Lord Nila-madhava myself. I shall go there and build a new kingdom with cities and forts. Every day, I will worship the Deity with hundreds of presentations. If I do so, certainly the Lord will become merciful upon me.”

Narada Muni, who is ever curious to know what is happening throughout the universe, arrived there at that moment. Indradyumna Maharaja promptly got up to receive him with the formalities of offering padya (water to wash the feet) and arghya (articles of worship).

With palms joined in reverence, the king said, "Today, my performance of sacrifices and giving of charity has proved successful because you have come to my abode. What can I do to please you? For what purpose have you come here?"

Upon hearing the king's words, which were uttered with great affection, Narada Muni smilingly replied, "My dear Indradyumna, most excellent among kings, Lord Brahma and the other devas have become pleased by your flawless character. I had come to the earth to see Nara at Badarikashrama and there, I heard about your endeavors."

"Your devotion for Nila-madhava, whose abode is a cave in Mount Nila, is the result of devotional cultivation during your last one thousand births. Devotion to Lord Vishnu is the only happiness for those who are wandering in the forest of worldly existence, which is full of thorns at every step, in the form of the three-fold miseries. For those who are sinking without any support in the ocean of material existence, where duality rises up like a violent storm, making it very difficult to cross, devotion for Lord Vishnu is proclaimed in the shastra as the boat."

King Indradyumna wanted to hear more about bhakti-yoga (devotional service to the Lord) and so he requested Narada Muni to speak about it in detail. Here are some of the most interesting things that Narada said: "Lord Vishnu alone is the bestower of absolute happiness and the destroyer of material miseries. Taking shelter of the Lord while thinking in this way is called bhakti. Bhakti can be divided into four categories. The devotion of those who are overpowered by lust and greed and do not see any other means to fulfill their desires is of the tamasic (in the category of the mode of ignorance) variety. Such devotion is conducive to the fulfillment of such desires and the attainment of mystic powers."

"The devotion that is resorted to for achieving great fame, overpowering a rival, or enjoying life in heaven is bhakti of the rajasa (passionate) variety. Sattvika (in goodness) devotion is pursued by one who understands the transitory nature of material

objects and pleasures and thus takes shelter of the Lord for attaining self-realization. One who understands that there is nothing separate from the Lord and knows himself to be the part and parcel eternal servant of the Lord, and thus wants to develop love for Him, possesses transcendental bhakti, which is pure, being without any tinge of the three modes of material nature. This last variety of bhakti is very rarely seen.”

“Those whose bhakti is of the sattvika variety can attain the realm of Lord Brahma. Those whose bhakti is rajasic can attain the abode of Indra. After enjoying worldly pleasures, devotees possessing bhakti of the tamasic variety can attain the realm of the Pitris (forefathers). Later on, they may return to earth to cultivate devotional service of a superior quality. Generally, a tamasic devotee will practice rajasic bhakti and a rajasic devotee will practice sattvika bhakti in a future birth.”

“In any case, devotional service leads one on the path of liberation from material bondage. For those who are devoid of devotion to Lord Vishnu, their performance of religious rituals and austerities, and their tours of pilgrimage are simply worldly ornaments. Even if born in a low family, a devotee of Lord Vishnu should be respected by all whereas a brahmana who is expert in all departments of knowledge but who is lacking in devotion to Lord Vishnu need not be respected.”

“O King, listen as I describe to you the characteristics of Lord Vishnu’s devotees. A devotee has a peaceful mind and he behaves gently towards all. He controls his senses, using them only as he desires. Mentally, physically, or verbally—a devotee never desires to harass anyone. His heart is full of compassion for others. He is by nature averse to violence and theft.”

“Devotees appreciate the good qualities of others and they are happy to see activities being performed for others’ welfare. They are refined in behavior, being very polite and respectful toward others. Without jealousy or rivalry, they see how Lord Vasudeva resides within everyone’s heart. They are always sympathetic towards the

wretched because they desire everyone's welfare. Devotees shun objects of sense enjoyment. Their love for the Lord far exceeds the love for sensual objects of those who lack discrimination."

"The devotees think, 'O Lord of the universe, I am Your eternal servant and You are my master. In this way, we are never separate. Because I am Your part and parcel, it is only You who have become manifested as the served and servant.' With this attitude, the devotees always glorify the Lord. They consider materialistic people to be no more significant than blades of grass."

"Vaishnavas have the same attitude toward other's wealth and a lump of dirt—others' wives and shalmali trees with thorns all over them—and friends, enemies, and kinsmen. Vaishnavas have very pleasant faces because of their good qualities. They do not consider the weaknesses of others and speak in a very pleasing manner."

"Vaishnavas constantly chant the holy names of the Lord with clear and loving voices. They neglect the acquisition of material wealth as being useless. They mark their bodies with tilaka and the symbols of Lord Vishnu's ornaments, such as the conch and lotus. They wear as armor the dust from the lotus feet of the Lord after bowing down to Him."

"Devotees are always victorious and beautiful, having discarded pride and false prestige from their minds. My dear King, I have thus described to you the auspicious characteristics of the devotees of Lord Vishnu."

King Indradyumna was very pleased to hear Narada Muni's descriptions of devotees and devotional service. He said, "Great sage, by your presence, my darkness of ignorance has been dispelled. I now simply have the desire to go to Purushottama-kshetra and worship Lord Nila-madhava. Wandering all over the three worlds, you know the universe in its entirety. Let us get into my chariot and go see Lord Nila-madhava together."

Narada Muni agreed to accompany the king to Niladri and they fixed an auspicious time to begin their journey. King Indradyumna proclaimed to all in his kingdom that everyone was to

move to Purushottama-kshetra. He ordered everyone to pack up their belongings and told them that while there, they would continue to perform their occupational duties as they had been doing.

Thus, everyone in the kingdom packed their possessions and made other preparations for departing. It was as if the entire kingdom was packed up and made ready to move to Nilachala. The brahmanas performed innumerable auspicious rituals as were required for such an occasion. Finally, at Narada Muni's urging, King Indradyumna mounted his chariot and departed, followed by everyone else.

They halted after reaching modern-day Orissa. Then, after performing his religious duties, as Maharaja Indradyumna was seated at leisure, along with Narada, enjoying the dances of the courtesans, the playing of the musicians, and the recitations of the bards, it was announced that the king of Odhra (Orissa) was outside, desiring to see him.

King Indradyumna immediately had the Orissan king ushered in and he welcomed him and honored him as a great Vaishnava. Then, as they were conversing, the King of Orissa said, "I have heard that a great storm has scattered sand, completely covering the Deity of Nilamadhava. Because of this, there is now famine and disease spreading throughout the kingdom. I am glad that you have come here because your presence will certainly be for everyone's welfare."

King Indradyumna arranged for the Orissan king to rest and then, with great dejection, he said to Narada, "O sage, what has happened? Maybe all my endeavors will prove futile!"

Narada Muni, the knower of everything, replied, "You should not be disappointed. Rest assured that the desire of a great Vaishnava like you never goes unfulfilled. For your sake, the Lord will incarnate on the earth. Lord Vishnu is fully independent. He does not depend upon anyone whereas the other deities, such as Lord Shiva and Goddess Durga, are dependent upon Lord Vishnu. Rest assured that you will see the Lord in the holy place of Purushottama-kshetra. Indeed, Lord Brahma has dispatched me to you for this purpose. I will tell you more when we arrive there."

King Indradyumna became encouraged by Narada's words. "After all," he thought, "if the grandfather of the universe has deputed his son to help me then my mission must surely become a success."

The king and the sage spent the night conversing and the next morning, they departed, the way being led by the King of Orissa. That day, they reached Ekamravana (Bhuvaneshvara). There, Narada Muni related the pastime of how this became the residence of Lord Shiva and a very holy place for his followers.

Thereafter, as they approached Purushottama-kshetra, there appeared an inauspicious omen—the king's left eye and left arm throbbed, again and again. Upon seeing this, Maharaja Indradyumna became depressed and he asked Narada Muni to explain the cause of his misfortune.

Narada Muni replied, indicating the task that awaited the king, "You should not be dejected. Generally, all auspicious things are impeded by obstacles. When these obstacles are removed, everything will be alright in the case of fortunate persons. It is true that the Deity for whose sake you have undertaken this journey has vanished, being covered by sand the day after the brahmana, Vidyapati, visited Him. The Deity has descended to the lower planets."

Upon hearing this, Maharaja Indradyumna fell to the ground, unconscious, as if hit by a bolt of lightning. His attendants sprinkled water over his body and fanned him. Narada became momentarily confused but then, by means of his mystic power, he revived him in consideration of his future good fortune.

After regaining consciousness, Maharaja Indradyumna got up and then fell at the feet of Narada Muni, saying, "What sin did I commit in my previous birth? What meritorious act was performed by Vidyapati that he was able to see Nila-madhava? How could you make me give up my kingdom when you knew this would happen? Why didn't you tell me this before we set out on our journey? How could you allow all of these people to leave their homes and kingdom for nothing? Now, how will they maintain themselves? If I cannot



see Lord Hari, I will end my life. This is my vow. Return with my son, along with all the subjects, to my kingdom and install him as the ruler. I will remain here, meditating on Nila-madhava. I will fast unto death and thus make my life fruitful.”

As the king lamented in this way, Narada Muni lifted him up and said, with a kind and gentle voice, “You are a courageous Vaishnava. How is it that you do not understand how the path of spiritual advancement is strewn with obstacles? It is impossible to understand the intentions of the Lord, even by me, a liberated soul. The workings of the Lord’s energies are inconceivable.”

“Now, I will tell you the good news. Lord Brahma had told me, ‘Go quickly to Indradyumna. He will go to the Nila mountain, desiring to see Nila-madhava. At the request of Yamaraja, the Deity will vanish, however. The king should not grieve over this because it cannot be otherwise. Tell the king that I will petition Lord Vishnu to come from Shvetadvipa and appear at Purushottama in a form of wood. Until that time, the king should perform one thousand horse sacrifices. At the conclusion of those sacrifices, he will see the Lord of the universe in that form. These Deities will be installed by me.’ ”

Narada Muni concluded by saying, “My dear King, there is flat land at the tip of Purushottama-kshetra that is suitable for the performance of horse sacrifices. We shall go there and also see the Deity of Lord Nrisimhadeva that is located on the Nila mountain. We shall perform the sacrifices at once because delay is not conducive to one’s welfare.”

After climbing Nila mountain, the king and his entourage reached the place where Lord Nrisimhadeva was present beneath a black aloe tree. The Lord’s mouth was open, displaying His terrible teeth, and the hair of His mane was disheveled. He looked fierce, with three eyes, and the body of the demon, Hiranyakashipu, placed upon His thigh. With His claws, the Lord was tearing apart the abdomen of the demon. Sparks of fire were seen coming from His eyes. His lotus feet had gone deep into the earth as He stamped them in anger.

Being in the presence of Narada Muni, the king and the members of his entourage looked at the Lord without fear and bowed down to Him at a distance. When he saw this wonderful Deity, King Indradyumna's faith in Narada's words became firm so that he was confident that his future task would be accomplished.

Thereafter, the king requested Narada Muni to show him the place where Nila-madhava had stood. Narada pointed out the place, which was now covered with golden sand. Narada said, "O King, see the banyan tree! It will stand until the end of the kalpa. One is liberated from material entanglement simply by coming under the shade of this tree. Anyone who dies at the foot of this tree also attains liberation. It was to the west of this tree and to the north of the Nṛsiṃhadeva Deity that Nila-madhava stood. He will manifest here once again just to favor you. Just as Shvetadvīpa is the abode of the Lord in the Milk Ocean, this is the abode of the Lord in Jambudvīpa."

After saying this, Narada Muni pointed to the exact place where Lord Nila-madhava was situated. Indradyumna Maharaja went and fell down at that spot to offer obeisances. Then, he offered very nice prayers, which concluded, "O Lord, bless me, for I am wretched and seek refuge in You alone. Even as I was within the womb, all my future activities were decided by You. Let my life pass in this way—I only beg You for this. Formerly, Your Deity was situated here on this spot, bestowing liberation on even lower forms of life. Let me see that form of Yours with my present eyes. I have no other desire than this."

After offering his prayers, Maharaja Indradyumna fell down flat onto the ground to once again offer obeisances. As he lay there, tears filled his eyes. A voice from the sky then spoke in a clear yet gentle tone: "Give up your anxiety. I shall come within the purview of your vision. Just carry out the directions of Brahma, as conveyed by Narada."

After hearing this, the king became convinced that he must perform the horse sacrifices without delay. Narada told the

king, "The demigods help those who are engaged in meritorious enterprises. The proof of this is you yourself because you have the assistance of Lord Brahma. Let us go to Nilakantha (a place of Lord Shiva), on the edge of Purushottama-kshetra and install a Deity of Lord Nrisimhadeva. The sacrifices performed in His presence will surely prove fruitful. Construct a temple there. By my remembering him, the son of Vishvakarma will come and build it very quickly. You go on ahead while I remain here for five days, worshipping Lord Nrisimhadeva. I shall cause Him to descend as a Deity."

King Indradyumna went to Nilakantha and there, he saw the son of Vishvakarma, who had appeared in a human form, bringing with him all the implements necessary for construction. He said, "I am conversant with the science of architecture and I will build an excellent temple for Lord Nrisimhadeva."

The temple was built in four days. Thereafter, as King Indradyumna and his entourage were waiting for the arrival of Narada and the Deity of Lord Nrisimhadeva, a tumult of indistinct sounds of conch shells, drums and voices were heard in the sky. As the king looked on in wonder, a wind began to blow from the south, bringing showers of flowers and a mist of Ganga water. Just then, Narada Muni appeared with the Deity of Lord Nrisimhadeva, which had been made by Vishvakarma. The prana-pratistha (instilling life into the Deity) had already been performed and the Deity was kept on a carrier made from Narada's penance."

Everyone was ecstatic and praised Narada highly. Thereafter, the Deity was installed, along with Deities of Lakshmi and Bhumi, at an auspicious hour. After offering many eloquent prayers, Maharaja Indradyumna fell to the ground to offer his obeisances to Lord Nrisimhadeva, again and again.

Thereafter, the demigods, sages, brahmanas and Vaishnavas were invited to attend the sacrifices. Indeed, innumerable people of all varnas were invited and a huge hall was constructed. Everyone was seated according to their status. Indra was seated on a throne inlaid with diamonds. Maharaja Indradyumna honored

all his guests by means of garlands, perfume, gifts of clothes, and the offering of a nice seat.

Approaching Indra, the king prayed, "I wish to perform horse sacrifices for the pleasure of the yajna-purusha, Lord Vishnu. Kindly give me your permission. Until the thousand sacrifices are completed, please remain here. Rest assured that I am not performing these sacrifices with a desire to occupy your throne! I simply desire that Lord Madhava appear here once again so that I can see Him."

The demigods assured Maharaja Indradyumna that they would assist him in every way possible. They informed the king, "While Lord Nila-madhava was entering the bowels of the earth here, He had told us, 'I shall appear here once again in a wooden body.'"

The king was initiated into the performance of the sacrifices, along with his wife. The sacred fire was brought to the altar and then the first sacrificial horse was released. Everyone was fed sumptuously and there were musical, dance, and dramatic performances for the entertainment of the assembled guests. The king personally ran, here and there, seeing that all the details of the sacrifices were carried out properly. The demigods never feel hunger or thirst—their diet is nectar—and so their food was not prepared by ordinary cooks—it was prepared by those expert in chanting mantras.

As the performance of the last of one thousand sacrifices was underway, King Indradyumna sat down to meditate upon Lord Vishnu. As he became deeply absorbed in thought of the Lord, the king suddenly saw within himself the island of Shvetadvipa within the ocean of milk, as if he were seeing it with his eyes. All around were desire trees that rendered the atmosphere fragrant because of their flowers. He could see how the Lord was present, internally and externally, in His all-pervading four-armed form, within every tree, fruit, twig and branch of those trees.

In the middle of the island the king saw a wonderful pavilion made of jewels and in the center he saw Lord Vishnu, holding a conch, disc, club and lotus in His hands. To His right was Lord Ananta, who supports the earth. He appeared to have the splendor

of millions of moons. Lakshmi was standing next to Lord Narayana, holding a lotus flower in one hand and with her other hand, she offered benediction and freedom from fear. Her wonderful body was a model for all the young women of the three worlds. In front was Lord Brahma, his palms joined in reverence. The Sudarshana chakra in its personified form stood to the left of the Lord.

Being overwhelmed by ecstatic feelings, King Indradyumna offered many prayers to the Lord. Finally, the king's trance of meditation broke and upon remembering his vision of the Lord, he considered his performance of sacrifices to be successful.

At the conclusion of the sacrifices, as the king was taking his ceremonial bath, some servants excitedly came to him and said, "O lord, a great tree was seen by us on the shore of the ocean. It's top is sunk into the water but its roots are above the waves. It is marked with symbols of a conch and chakra. It is exceedingly wonderful to behold! It is a tree like one never seen before. It is effulgent, like the sun, and it has rendered the atmosphere fragrant with its scent. It must be a celestial tree or else some god in the form of a tree."

The king asked Narada, "What does this indicate?"

Narada Muni laughingly replied, "Let the final offering of oblations of ghee (called purnahuti) be made into the sacrificial fire so that the sacrifice will be fruitful. Don't worry—your good fortune is imminent. This tree is a partial incarnation of Lord Vishnu and it shall remain forever on the earth."

Thereafter, Narada Muni and King Indradyumna went to see the tree. When the king looked at the tree, which had four branches, it looked just like the four-armed Lord that he had seen in his trance of meditation. His lamentation due to the disappearance of Lord Nila-madhava was now dispelled. The king bowed down again and again on the shore. He then had the brahmanas bring the tree, which was being tossed by the waves, onto the beach.

Conch shells were blown, drums were beaten, and thousands of people shouted, "Jaya! Jaya!" The tree was fanned

with chamaras by courtesans of great beauty in the prime of their youth. It was decorated with flags and fine cloth and it was glorified by great sages.

The tree was taken and placed on a great altar that had been prepared and covered by a canopy. Being instructed by Narada, King Indradyumna performed the arati. At the end of arati, the king asked Narada, "What kind of Deities will be made from this tree? Who will carve Them?"

Narada Muni replied, "The size of the Deities will be awesome. As for other details, even the creator cannot say exactly what will happen."

As the two were thus discussing, an unembodied voice was heard coming from the sky: "The Lord is not under the control of anyone. He is beyond the understanding of the speculative mind. This altar should be covered for fifteen days, during which time the Lord will incarnate as He pleases. There is an old carpenter present here, along with his tools. Let him work undisturbed behind closed doors. No one should open the doors and see him at work. Anyone who hears the sounds of chiseling or carving will become blind and deaf. Indeed, he will go to hell and his family will become extinct. No one should even take a peep. When the work is completed, the Lord Himself will announce it."

When the unembodied female voice stopped speaking, the old carpenter presented himself to the king, saying, "With this wood I shall fashion that which you had seen in the trance of meditation."

After saying this, Vishvakarma, who had been empowered by Lord Narayana and who had assumed the form of a carpenter, went into the altar room and closed the doors. After fifteen days, the work was completed and four Deities had been manifested—Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balarama, Subhadra, and Sudharshana (chakra).

The divine voice then said, "These Deities must be painted. Lord Jagannatha must be black and Lord Balarama must be white. The Sudarshana chakra must be red. Subhadra must have a golden complexion. They should be dressed very nicely. O King, these Deities

should never be seen by you without their garments. The Lord has manifested in this way just to bless you because He is pleased with your devotion.”

“You should build a large temple on Nila Mountain, to the northwest of the banyan tree and just north of the Nrisimhadeva temple. The grand temple should be four hundred and fifty meters tall.”

“Formerly, a shabara resident of Nilachala named Vishvavasu worshiped Lord Nila-madhava. Your priest, Vidyapati, became his intimate friend. Only the descendents of these two should be engaged as pujaris in the Jagannatha temple.”

After the divine voice finished speaking, Maharaja Indradyumna unveiled the altar so that everyone could see the Deities. Lord Krishna had a kind and beaming face. His broad chest was projected forward. His long arms were capable of uplifting the poor, conditioned souls. His eyes resembled full-blown lotuses. His glance could dispel the stock of sinful reactions of those who viewed Him.

Baladeva appeared to be laughing boisterously. His eyes appeared to be rolling due to an excess intake of honey. His chest was broad and muscular. He held a plough, disc, lotus and club in His hands. Between the two Lords was Subhadra, who appeared like a second Lakshmi. The Sudarshana chakra was very sharp and as effulgent as the rising sun.

Upon seeing the Deities, the king was merged in an ocean of ecstasy and became confused as to what should be done next. Indeed, he was stunned and so stood like the stump of a tree, his hands joined in reverence.

Narada Muni smiled and said, “My dear king, that for which you exerted yourself so ardently had been accomplished. You are the most fortunate person in the world! Worship this Lord and He will bestow upon you the fulfillment of all your desires.”

Maharaja Indradyumna offered prayers to the Lord, surrendering his life and possessions for His service. Thereafter, the



king gave gifts to the guests who had attended his sacrifices. Indeed, he gave many millions of cows in charity and a great pit was dug up by their hooves. That pit was filled with water and it became a holy lake, named after Maharaja Indradyumna.

Thereafter, the king began to contemplate the construction of a palatial temple for Lord Jagannataha, Lord Balarama, and Subhadra. Narada Muni said, "O King, all this has been made possible by the grace of Lord Brahma. You stay here and worship Lord Jagannatha—I am going to Brahmaloka to inform my father of all that has transpired."

Maharaja Indradyumna said, 'Great sage, I would like to accompany you to Brahmaloka. It is only by the grace of Brahma that I have received the Deities of the Lord. I would like to tell him about the temple that I wish to build and I would like to invite him to the grand opening celebration and the installation of the Deities. Therefore, kindly wait some time and take me with you. First, I would like to construct the temple and then invite Lord Brahma to the opening.'

Thereafter, the king engaged countless workers in cutting stone and other tasks. The building grew, day by day, at an astonishing rate so that it was very tall within a very short time. Indeed, it was impossible to count the number of stones used in the construction. It was impossible to estimate the cost of building that temple because all of the people who owed allegiance to the king were engaged in its construction. In fact, the workers became so ecstatic while building the temple that their loud clamor filled the four directions.

In some places, the temple was plated with gold and inlaid with valuable gems. Even the demigods were amazed upon seeing the magnificent temple built by King Indradyumna. They said, "A building like this has never before been constructed anywhere on heaven or on earth. This king performed one thousand horse sacrifices. Such a feat has not been heard of or seen. The Vedas were present in their personified forms. Demigods who can realize their desires simply by thinking of them have become astonished by seeing this temple."

Narada Muni informed the king that he was now *jivan-mukta*, a liberated soul even within this material world. Narada said, "If you go to see Lord Brahma, he will instruct you of the festivals that should be performed in honor of Lord Jagannatha. When Lord Brahma inaugurates the temple and installs the Deities, I shall also come here, along with the seven sages. Then we can all go together to Brahmaloka."

After saying this, Narada rose up into the sky. Maharaja Indradyumna pleaded, "Here, there is a flower chariot capable of traveling at the speed of mind. Kindly wait for some time and then we can go to Brahmaloka in this chariot. I just want to circumambulate the Deities and instruct my officers how to act in my absence."

Narada Muni and the king went to where the Deities were being worshiped, hand in hand. They repeatedly bowed down to Lord Jagannatha, Lord Baladeva, and Subhadra. Both of them begged for permission to depart for Brahmaloka.

King Indradyumna and Narada Muni then boarded the celestial chariot. After circumambulating the sun and passing the pole star, they were gazed upon with upturned faces by the residents of Janaloka. After that, they were honored by the residents of Maharloka. While traveling in this way, King Indradyumna forgot everything about his earthly existence, except the temple of Lord Jagannatha.

Indeed, the king worried as follows: "Will the final details of the temple be completed properly or not? Maybe my enemies will attack! Perhaps the workers have lost interest due to greed for wealth. Perhaps the artisans will work slowly because I have already given them their full wages. Many persons had previously ascended to Brahmaloka, never to return again to earth. Perhaps the subordinate kings are thinking in this way and hope to usurp my kingdom."

Narada Muni, the knower of past, present, and future, said, "What are you thinking? Brahmaloka is not a place where one should worry. Agonies, death, old age, and diseases are not to be found there. Those who come to Brahmaloka do not worry about worldly affairs."

King Indradyumna replied, “My dear brahmana, I am not worried about my family, I am only concerned that the temple construction will be completed properly. Thinking of the obstacles that could raise their heads in my absence, I am worried.”

Narada laughed and said, “You are not an ordinary king. You are on the same platform as Brahma. You were never previously offended by anyone and now, Lord Brahma personally looks after your affairs. Why should you be suspicious of obstacles? Who would think of harming your temple? Look! That effulgence is the abode of Brahma that we are approaching.”

In this way, the king and the sage among the demigods reached Brahmaloka. Even from a distance, recitation of the Vedic literature could be heard coming from the sages who residing there. When they arrived at the entrance gate, they saw that even Manu was turned away, as if he were a common man. Upon seeing Narada Muni and Indradyumna Maharaja, the gatekeeper, Manikodara, bowed his head and said, “Because you take pleasure in wandering over the fourteen worlds, your father’s assembly does not look good without you. Of course, there are many great sages present here but after all, even though the night sky may have innumerable stars, it is only when the moon is present that it looks delightful.”

In this way, the gatekeeper granted Narada permission to enter. Narada then said, “This is the saintly King Indradyumna. He is foremost among the devotees of Lord Vishnu and he has come to see Lord Brahma. Let him accompany me.”

The gatekeeper replied, “This king does not seem like an ordinary human being. Let him wait over there with the dik-palas, Pitris, and Manu. You go and inform Lord Brahma of his arrival and then, when he is called for, I will admit him. Lord Brahma is now engaged in listening to a singing recital with rapt attention. As the gatekeeper, it is necessary for me to wait for the opportune time. I am only a slave to you and your father. Please do not be angry with me.”

Narada went in and bowed down to Lord Brahma and informed him of the king’s arrival. With a mere glance, Lord

Brahma indicated that Narada should show the king in. He did not say anything because he was attentively listening to the music. As Narada led him in, Maharaja Indradyumna walked falteringly, due to fright. He bowed down to offer his obeisances and then stood at a distance with folded hands.

As Lord Brahma listened to the glorification of Lord Vishnu, Savitri and Sharada stood on either side, fanning him. When the song ended, Lord Brahma welcomed King Indradyumna. Although he knew everything, he inquired, "Why have you come here? What is on your mind? When I am seen there is nothing that cannot be obtained."

In reply, King Indradyumna explained how the temple of Lord Jagannatha was being built and he asked Lord Brahma to come for the opening ceremony. After hearing this request, Lord Brahma informed the king, "You came here during the first manvantara but neither your kingdom nor your successors exist now. While I was listening to the singing, much time has passed in terms of earthly years. Indeed, your dynasty has become extinct. Millions of kings have been born and passed away. Only your temple and Lord Jagannatha remain. Now, it is the first yuga of the second Manu, Svarochana. Because you were in my abode, you did not age. Return to earth and make the Lord and His temple your own. When you have accomplished this, I shall come there."

Maharaja Indradyumna returned to Purushottama-kshetra and offered his obeisances to Lord Jagannatha, Lord Baladeva, and Subhadra. Many demigods had accompanied the king and they also bowed down and offered many prayers. After leaving the place where the Deities were being worshiped, King Indradyumna and the devas went to the temple of Lord Nrisimhadeva. From there, they went to see the grand temple on top of Nilachala. The temple was so tall that it appeared to be another Vindhaya mountain, trying to obstruct the path of the sun.

As the king and the devas were making the necessary arrangements for Lord Brahma's arrival, Narada arrived there.

He instructed Indradyumna that three grand chariots must be constructed for the Deities. He said, "The three chariots must be very big and strong. Lord Jagannatha's chariot should have sixteen wheels, Baladeva's should have fourteen, and that of Subhadra should have twelve. I have come here on the order of my father and so, I will supervise the construction of the chariots."

Three grand chariots were then constructed—they were built by Vishvakarma in a single day. The Deities were then brought and placed on Their chariots. At that time, the ruler of the earth was a king named Gala. He had made a stone Deity of Lord Madhava and installed Him in the temple that Maharaja Indradyumna had built. Worship of that Deity had been going on for a long time.

Maharaja Indradyumna built a smaller temple nearby and very respectfully placed the stone Madhava Deity there. When King Gala heard of this through spies, he became furious and came to Niladri with his army. However, when he saw the arrangements that Indradyumna and the demigods had made for the temple opening and installation, he became wonderstruck. Through inquiries, King Gala finally understood how Indradyumna had built the temple long ago and then had gone to the abode of Brahma. After visiting Lord Brahma, he had returned with the demigods and Narada.

After understanding everything, King Gala considered himself fortunate to witness such an auspicious occasion. Thus, he agreed to work under King Indradyumna's direction. Like an obedient servant, Gala stood by Maharaja Indradyumna's side, awaiting his order.

After all arrangements were made, a tumultuous sound was heard in the heavens. Gradually, the distinct sounds of conch shells, drums, and shouts of "Jaya! Jaya!" could be heard as fragrant breezes blew and droplets of Ganga water fell from the sky. Soon, the chariots of the demigods could be seen overhead and a great effulgence was observed. The divine chariot of Lord Brahma then came into view, being drawn by hundreds of golden swans.

Upon the appearance of Lord Brahma, everyone offered their obeisances and prayers. Lord Brahma descended from his chariot and

first went and circumambulated the three chariots. In great ecstasy, he offered prayers to the Lord of the universe. Thereafter, along with Indradyumna and Narada, Lord Brahma ascended the mountain to see the glorious temple. He then inaugurated the temple and a great flag was placed on the flagstaff.

Thereafter, the Deities were taken down from Their chariots and brought to the temple amidst great celebration. After the Deities were placed on Their altar, Lord Brahma personally performed the installation. The installation of the Deities was performed on the eighth day of the waxing moon in the month of Vaishakha. For this reason, that day is very auspicious.

After the installation, Lord Brahma spoke at great length about the glories of Purushottama-kshetra and the Deities of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Baladeva, and Subhadra. At the conclusion of his speech, Lord Brahma said, "I will tell you the simple truth, O king. Listen to me attentively. By seeing the Supreme Personality of Godhead situated on Nila mountain in the guise of a wooden statue, at the root of the banyan tree, near the shore of the ocean, one will certainly be liberated from material existence."

Thereafter, Lord Brahma returned to his abode and Maharaja Indradyumna continued to worship the Lord and perform all of the festivals for His pleasure.

Skanda Purana next describes how twelve great festivals of Lord Jagannatha are to be performed. While describing the Ratha-yatra, it is said that Gundicha is the place where Maharaja Indradyumna had performed his one thousand horse sacrifices. It is also the place where the original Deities were carved. Indradyumna lake is near the Gundicha temple.

Finally, after a lifetime of executing pure devotional service to the Lord, Maharaja Indradyumna attained Brahmaloaka. This Purushottama-kshetra-mahatmya should only be recited to devotees and never to non-devotees. The following are non-devotees—those who unnecessarily indulge in useless arguments, those who have improperly learned the scriptures, atheists,

hypocrites, and those who only see the defects in others. Such persons' lives are fruitless.

The next section of Skanda Purana is called Bhagavat-mahatmya (the glories of Shrimad-Bhagavatam) Suta Gosvami said, "Once, after bowing down to his progenitor, who was comfortably seated at Shvetadvipa, Lord Brahma made numerous inquiries. In the lengthy discussion that followed, Lord Vishnu described the glories of chanting His holy name.

The Supreme Lord said, "Listen to this most confidential understanding. The holy name, Krishna, should be uttered continuously for it is exceedingly pleasing to Me. If a person remembers Me every day, chanting, 'Krishna, Krishna,' I will save him from all misfortune."

"One who worships Me just for fun, or out of hypocrisy, or due to foolishness, greediness, or even fraudulently, is My devotee. There is no need for him to repent. When death is imminent, if a person chants, 'Krishna, Krishna,' he will not have to see Yamaraja or his servants, even if he was sinful. Earlier in his life, a man might have committed so many sins but at the time of death, if he remembers or utters the name, Krishna, he will attain My eternal abode."

"If a helpless, miserable person says, 'Obeisances to Shri Krishna, the Supreme Lord,' he attains My eternal abode. When death has arrived, if a person chants, 'Krishna, Krishna,' and dies, the Yamadutas stand at a distance and watch as he ascends to an exalted destination."

"Whether it be in a crematorium or in the street, if someone chants, 'Krishna, Krishna,' and dies, he comes back to My eternal abode. There is no doubt of this. In fact, if a person dies anywhere within the sight of My devotees, he shall attain liberation even if he failed to remember Me."

"My son (Brahma), there is no need to be afraid of the blazing fire of sin. It will be extinguished with the water coming from the cloud of Shri Krishna. Why should anyone be afraid of the serpent



of Kali, who has sharp fangs? He will be burnt in the fire coming from the wood of the holy name of Shri Krishna.”

“Except for the remembrance of Shri Krishna, there is no other remedy for those who are burning in the great fire of material existence. If anyone’s tongue continually speaks, ‘Krishna, Krishna,’ his life is fruitful, even if he does nothing else. One will not be touched by sin or affliction if he glorifies the Lord by chanting, ‘Krishna, Krishna.’ In the Kali-yuga, there is no torment for the person who never forsakes the holy name of Krishna.”

“I never take much pleasure in hearing millions of names but when the name, Krishna, is uttered, it gives Me great delight. The merit that is obtained by performing millions of ritualistic ceremonies is achieved simply by chanting, ‘Krishna, Krishna.’ If a person is contaminated by great sins, such as enjoying forbidden women, he is liberated from the sinful reactions if he chants the name of Krishna at the time of death.”

“A person who chants the holy name of Shri Krishna is always to be respected. Let that tongue that does not chant, ‘Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna,’ be shattered into a hundred pieces! If a person rises in the morning and chants, ‘Krishna, Krishna,’ I shall bestow all welfare upon him. There is no doubt of this.”

“Listen, My dear Brahma, for I shall describe to you the proper method of meditation. One should meditate upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead as He is seated on a lotus-shaped seat within a pavilion paved with valuable gems, surrounded by countless desire trees within a beautiful garden. He appears as a child with a dark blue complexion, like a sapphire. His glossy black hair is scattered over His face, making it appear like a lotus surrounded by a swarm of bumblebees. His eyes resemble blue lotuses. His nose is shapely and beautiful and His lips are red.”

“The Lord’s face is decorated with a smile and the many ornaments around His neck glisten. His chest is covered with the dust raised by the hooves of the cows. His limbs appear strong and well-nourished and they shine like gold. A string of bells is tied around His hips.”

“The Lord holds some milk sweet in His right hand and fresh butter in His left. He is the fire that burns down the demons who burden the earth. He is engaged in killing these demons, such as Putana. He is surrounded by His cowherd boyfriends. The cowherd girls view Him in this way from a distance.”

“A spiritual master should not accept as a disciple one who is idle, dirty, distressed, a hypocrite, or delusional. Nor should he accept one who is poor like a beggar, diseased, infuriated, lecherous and full of lust. The guru should not accept a person who is jealous and malicious, a rogue, or one who is harsh in speech. He should not accept someone who earns money dishonestly or who is devoted to the wives of others. One who is inimical to learned scholars or who has no interest in study of the śāstra should not be accepted as a disciple. The guru should not accept one who does not engage in his occupational duty, who is a back-biter or wicked minded, who is a voracious eater, who is cruel in his activities, or who associates with wicked-minded people. One who terrorizes those who take shelter of him, who is very miserly, or who is very sinful should not be accepted as a disciple. If a spiritual master accepts any of the above-mentioned people, their bad qualities will affect him, just as the defects of the ministers affect the king, or as the defects of a wife affect her husband.”

“For this reason, a spiritual master should always test a prospective disciple. A disciple should be one who causes delight within the mind of a preceptor. He should be devoted to helping others.”

“My son (Brahma), these are the characteristics of a bona-fide spiritual master. He is impartial, peaceful, devoid of anger, friendly to all, and magnanimous. He treats everyone equally. One who possesses these qualities is qualified to give initiation to others. But foremost, he must be a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu and he must be respected in the society of advanced Vaiṣṇavas. In short, he must be a perfect gentleman who is learned in the Vedic literature. He must be capable of removing all the doubts of his disciples.”

“A devotee should regularly study Shrimad-Bhagavatam, which is My favorite literature. One who studies Shriimad-Bhagavatam every day, with faith and devotion, receives the merit of giving a brown cow in charity with every syllable he pronounces (or reads). Even the reading of only one-fourth of a verse each day is as meritorious as giving one thousand cows in charity. I am delighted with a person who, in this age of Kali, honors the Shrimad-Bhagavatam in his house, claps his hands in praise of the Bhagavatam, and sometimes shouts with joy while reading it. When one possesses the Shrimad-Bhagavatam, what is the use of collecting hundreds and thousands of other texts?”

“One who does not read the Shrimad-Bhagavatam cannot be called a Vaishnava. All of the holy places and holy rivers are present in the Shrimad-Bhagavatam. Wherever there is Shrimad-Bhagavatam, I go there like a cow who is fond of her calf. I never abandon the person who is attached to studying Shrimad-Bhagavatam. If a person honors the Shrimad-Bhagavatam upon seeing it by standing up and then bowing down to offer obeisances, I derive matchless pleasure by seeing him. Upon seeing the Shrimad-Bhagavatam in the distance, if a person hastens towards it, he will undoubtedly receive the merit of performing a horse sacrifice with each step he takes. For one who very respectfully listens to the Shrimad-Bhagavatam, I am easily won over.”

The sages at Naimisharanya asked, “Maharaja Yudhisthira renounced his throne after crowing Vajra at Mathura and Parikshit at Hastinapura. What did those two kings do?”

Suta Gosvami replied by narrating the following. After the departure of Maharaja Yudhisthira, Parikshit (Subhadra's grandson) went to Mathura to see Vajranabha (Aniruddha's son and therefore, Krishna's great-grandson). Vajra very happily received his uncle, who went inside the palace and bowed down to Krishna's wives, Rohini, and others.

After resting, when they were seated at ease, Maharaja Parikshit said to Vajranabha, who was quite young, “You should not worry about finances or enemies while I am here. Don’t worry about anything and leave everything to me.”

Vajra replied, “What you say is quite proper. I feel secure because your father (Abhimanyu) had imparted the science of the use of the bow to me. As far as fighting is concerned, I have no worries. There is one thing that concerns me, though. My kingdom is practically devoid of subjects. Where have all the people gone? I would like to rule a kingdom that is full of people!”

After hearing this, Vishnurata (Parikshit) invited Shandilya, the priest of Nanda Maharaja, and others to come to Mathura and dispel Vajra’s despondency. Shandilya soon arrived and was honored by Vajra and offered an excellent seat. After some polite conversation, Shandilya said, “Listen as I disclose to you the confidential understanding of the land of Vraja (Vrindavana). ‘Vraj’ means ‘to spread’ and so Vraja is an extensive place.”

“The inhabitants of Vraja, the abode of Lord Krishna, whose life and soul is Radha, are immersed in love of God. When the Lord incarnated, along with His associates, the demigods also appeared to assist Him. Those who were perfected devotees also appeared in Vrindavana and at the end, attained the Lord’s supreme abode in the spiritual sky.”

“There were thus three kinds of associates of the Lord—eternal associates that descended with the Lord, demigods who came to assist Him, and devotees who had attained the qualification to associate with the Lord and then return to His eternal abode. The demigods were kept at Dvaraka and by means of a fratricidal war, they regained their positions in the heavenly planets. The devotees who had attained perfection achieved the status of nitya-siddha devotees and returned back to Godhead. With the departure of these associates of the Lord, Vrindavana was rendered desolate.”

“My dear Vajra, do not worry. By assimilating all the surrounding villages, you can repopulate Mathura as you desire. Later on, Uddhava will come to see you and you will learn much from him.”

After instructing Vajra in this way, Shandilya departed. Thereafter, thousands of artisans and craftsmen were brought to Mathura from Indraprastha by Maharaja Parikshit. Knowing that the brahmanas of Mathura were formerly monkeys that served in the army of Lord Ramachandra, Maharaja Parikshit honored them greatly.

With the help of Maharaja Parikshit, Vajra came to know about the places where Lord Krishna had exhibited His transcendental pastimes in Vraja-mandala. Vajra named these places and established them as recognized places of pilgrimage. Ponds, wells and other public amenities were constructed by him. He propagated exclusive devotion for Lord Krishna within his kingdom and rejoiced while doing so. Indeed, his subjects were naturally inclined to glorify Lord Krishna.

Once, some of Krishna’s wives who were distressed due to separation from Him saw Kalindi in a joyful mood. They said, “O Kalindi, we were Krishna’s wives and so were you. We are miserable due to separation from our Lord but you are not. Please tell us the reason for this.”

Upon hearing their words and noticing their jealousy, Kalindi felt pity for these women. She smilingly said, “Krishna is atmarama (self-satisfied) and Radha is His atma. Because we are Her servants, the pangs of separation will not affect us. All of Krishna’s beloved gopis and wives are expansions of Radha and thus, there is no question of separation. Radha and Krishna are non-different from one another and Krishna’s flute is the form of Their love. Rukmini and other principal queens were expansions of Radha. Desiring to serve Radha and Krishna, they assumed other forms and merged within Radha’s existence. I witnessed this.”

“In your cases also, there is no question of separation from Krishna but you do not realize this. It is for this reason that you feel distress. Formerly, when Akrura came to Vrindavana, the gopis

also experienced apparent separation but that feeling was dispelled when they were pacified by Uddhava. After meeting Uddhava, you will again be able to enjoy with your husband.”

After hearing this, the wives of Krishna became eager to meet Uddhava. They replied to Kalindi, “You are certainly fortunate because you have no separation from your lover. We hope that, by seeing Uddhava, our purposes will be served. Tell us how we can meet him.”

Kalindi said, “Before returning to His eternal abode, Krishna instructed Uddhava to go to Badarikashrama, as it is the best place to perform austerities for achieving one’s objectives. Uddhava still stays there in a visible form, imparting knowledge of Krishna.”

“In another form, Uddhava remains near Govardhana Hill as a clump of grass, desiring to receive the dust from the lotus feet of the gopis. All of you, along with Vajra, should reside in the vicinity of Kusuma-sarovara. Assemble all of the devotees of Lord Krishna and hold a grand festival in His honor. While the festival is going on, you will definitely meet Uddhava. By meeting him, you will certainly experience the fruition of all your desires.”

Krishna’s wives were delighted to hear this from Kalindi. After bidding her farewell and showing their gratitude, they went to tell Vajra and Parikshit about Kalindi’s advice. Being very pleased, Maharaja Parikshit immediately began making preparations for the festival. That festival was held at Kusuma-sarovara, near Govardhana Hill. As the chanting and dancing in glorification of Lord Krishna was going on, the pastimes of Radha and Krishna became visible to all the devotees. Indeed, their eyes were fixed upon the vision of the Lord and could not be moved to any other object.

At that time, Uddhava emerged from a clump of grass. He had a dark complexion and he wore yellow garments. He was constantly singing the glories of Lord Krishna, the lover of the gopis. Uddhava’s appearance was like the rising of the moon so that the festival became even more enchanting. Indeed, everyone was merged in the ocean of transcendental ecstasy, forgetting everything else. Just by

seeing Uddhava, whose form exactly resembled that of Lord Krishna, the queens attained perfect enlightenment. Having realized their desires, they worshiped Uddhava very devotedly.

Uddhava embraced Maharaja Parikshit and said, "O King, you are an unalloyed devotee of Lord Krishna! You are constantly engaged in the glorification of the Lord! This is befitting because you were brought back to life by Krishna as you were within the womb of your mother, Uttara."

"Among all the residents of Dvaraka, the most fortunate were those who went to live at Vrindavana, by Krishna's instruction to Arjuna. Indeed, Krishna always remains in Vrindavana."

"The conditioned souls are always covered by the external energy and thus they remain in ignorance. Lord Krishna appeared in this world, thus removing that covering of ignorance, but that time has now passed. Still, the same effect (of removing the covering of maya) can be had by the recitation of Shrimad-Bhagavatam. Certainly, Lord Krishna is present wherever Shrimad-Bhagavatam is being recited in the assembly of devotees."

"If, after being born as a human being in Bharata-varsha, one does not hear Shrimad-Bhagavatam, his life must be considered wasted. From Shrimad-Bhagavatam, brahmanas will receive transcendental knowledge, kshatriyas will attain victory over their enemies, vaishyas will earn great wealth, shudras will enjoy good health, and women will attain the fulfillment of their desires. Who then would not take shelter of Shrimad-Bhagavatam?"

"It is only after the fruition of pious acts performed in many previous births that one receives the chance to hear Shrimad-Bhagavatam. Formerly, Brihaspati heard Shrimad-Bhagavatam from Sankhyayana Muni. Later on, Brihaspati imparted it to me."

"Brihaspati had told me, 'Formerly, when Lord Brahma was engaged in the work of creation, he prayed to Lord Vishnu that the mode of passion would not obstruct his remembrance of Him. Lord Vishnu then imparted Shrimad-Bhagavatam to Brahma, telling him that by taking shelter of that great literature, he would remain in



the transcendental position. Thereafter, Brahma recited Shrimad-Bhagavatam for seven days, and that was the origin of the Bhagavata-saptaha.’ ”

“ ‘Rudra also petitioned the Lord, saying that he could easily enact the other kinds of annihilation but he didn’t have the power for causing the ultimate destruction of the cosmic manifestation. Lord Narayana then imparted Shrimad-Bhagavatam to Rudra so that he could perfectly control the mode of ignorance.’ ”

Uddhava continued, “Having received the Shrimad-Bhagavatam from Brihaspati, I absorbed myself in its study. It is only for that reason that I became very dear to Lord Krishna and He chose me to come to Vrindavana and deliver His message to the gopis. That message was nothing more than the essence of Shrimad-Bhagavatam! It was because of hearing Shrimad-Bhagavatam that the residents of Vrindavana gained relief from their pangs of separation from Krishna.”

“Later on, at the root of the banyan tree (at the time of His disappearance), Lord Krishna made the understanding of Shrimad-Bhagavatam more firmly fixed in my mind. I then went to Badari while simultaneously remaining in a clump of grass here in Vrindavana.”

After hearing this, Maharaja Parikshit bowed down to offer his obeisances to Uddhava. When Maharaja Parikshit expressed his willingness to assist him in any way possible, Uddhava told him, “Now that Lord Krishna has departed for His own abode, the powerful Kali will create obstacles in the execution of good work. Therefore, you should conquer all directions and subdue the wicked Kali. You can also assist me in my propagation of Shrimad-Bhagavatam.”

Maharaja Parikshit said, “I will certainly subdue Kali but how will I obtain the understanding of Shrimad-Bhagavatam?”

Uddhava replied, “Up to this time, very few men have heard Shrimad-Bhagavatam. It will be by your mercy that the people of Bharata-varsha will become acquainted with the great text. The great sage, Shukadeva Gosvami, whose form resembles that of Shri Krishna, will undoubtedly recite Shrimad-Bhagavatam to you. As a

result, you will attain the eternal abode of the Lord and Shrimad-Bhagavatam will spread over the earth (by the mercy of Shrila Prabhupada)."

Thereafter, Maharaja Parikshit went on a tour to subdue the wicked Kali while Vajra installed Pratibahu upon the throne so that he could remain with Krishna's wives to study Shrimad-Bhagavatam. In Vrindavana, near Govardhana Hill, Uddhava recited Shrimad-Bhagavatam for one month and Krishna's presence could be clearly felt by everyone present. Indeed, everyone realized themselves as parts and parcels of Lord Krishna.

The queens of Krishna could see themselves shining with great effulgence as expansions of His internal energy. Liberated from their pangs of separation from the Lord, they at last attained the supreme destination. Others also entered the eternal pastimes of Lord Krishna and thus became invisible to ordinary vision. Indeed, even today, they sport along with Krishna in the groves around Govardhana Hill. This can be seen by those devotees who are immersed in love for Krishna.

The sages at Naimisharanya said, "O Suta, you have glorified Shrimad-Bhagavatam most wonderfully! Continue to do so for a long time! Please tell us more about Shrimad-Bhagavatam for we are very eager to hear you."

Suta Gosvami said, "Shrimad-Bhagavatam is non-different from Lord Krishna. It's nature is sac-chit-ananda and it ever expands, manifesting to the devotees the sweetness of devotion to Lord Krishna."

"Shrimad-Bhagavatam was first imparted to Lord Brahma by Lord Vishnu in four verses. Only someone as intelligent as Lord Brahma can realize the Absolute Truth by studying only these four verses. For the benefit of human society, whose intelligence is very limited, the conversation of Shukadeva Gosvami and Maharaja Parikshit, as recorded by Shrila Vyasadeva, has been presented. This literature of eighteen thousand verses is the greatest support for those who are drowning in the ocean of Kali-yuga."

“Those who hear *Shrimad-Bhagavatam* are divided into two categories, the *pravaras* (superior ones) and the *avaras* (inferior ones). The *pravaras* are sub-divided into *chataka* birds, swans, parrots, and fish. The *avaras* are sub-divided into wolves, *bhurunda* birds, bulls and camels.”

“If a person discards all other sacred texts and only hears those that are about Lord Krishna—he is like the *chataka* bird that only drinks water from the clouds. The *hamsa* (swan) is one who takes the essence from various *shastra*, just as a swan takes milk from a mixture of milk and water. A trained parrot delights people by his speech. Similarly, the *shuka* (parrot) listener pleases his audience by simply repeating what he has heard from authorities. The *mina* (fish) listener never utters a word. He doesn’t even blink his eyes while absorbed in listening to the *Bhagavatam*.”

“The hearer who shouts, giving pain to the speaker and sincere listeners, and who is very ignorant, is like a wolf who inflicts pain upon the deer in the forest. The *bhurunda* bird is found on the peaks of the Himalayas. The *bhurunda* type of listener may try to teach others but he does not act according to his own advice. The *vriṣha* (bull) kind of listener cannot discriminate between what is essential and what is not. He accepts everything he hears blindly, like a bull that may indiscriminately eat nice grapes and wretched oil cakes. The *uśtra* (camel) listener leaves aside the sweet things and delights in just the opposite, like a camel who grazes on bitter *margosa* fruit, leaving aside mangoes. There are many other types in these two divisions of listeners to *Shrimad-Bhagavatam* and they are known by their behavior, caused by their inborn natures.”

“A genuine student of *Shrimad-Bhagavatam* is one who bows down to the book incarnation of the Lord, discards discussions of other things, desires to hear the pastimes of the Lord more and more, is humble, keeps his palms joined in reverence, is a trustworthy disciple, is interested in reflecting upon the question under discussion, and is clean in body and mind. He is always respected by Krishna’s devotees.”

“A genuine propounder of the Bhagavatam is one whose mind dwells in the Lord, who does not expect any reward for his preaching, who has a good heart, who is compassionate toward the unfortunate souls that are rotting in this material world, and who is very clever in making people understand things from various angles of vision.”

“Four types of people take shelter of listening to Shrimad-Bhagavatam—sattvika, rajasa, tamasa, and nirguna. The rajasa type of listening is the bhagavata-saptaha, the recitation of the Bhagavatam for seven days. Elaborate and strenuous preparations are made, it is a gala social occasion, and there is much adoration and worship involved.”

“The sattvika type of listening to Shrimad-Bhagavatam is a lengthy study, involving a month or a season. It is not ostentatiously presented as a social event and therefore, does not require much effort.”

“The tamasa type of listening to Shrimad-Bhagavatam is a study characterized by procrastination. It is done without much faith or enthusiasm. (It is something like the Shrimad-Bhagavatam classes conducted in many of the temples where devotees are reluctant to attend but are forced to do so.) Still, even this type of listening awards benefit.”

“When a devotee continuously studies or hears Shrimad-Bhagavatam in a mood of loving devotion, with no thought of there being a beginning or an end to his engagement in this way, it is considered to be nirguna, or transcendental. Of course, the recitation of Shrimad-Bhagavatam by Shukadeva Gosvami to Maharaja Parikshit is gloried as nirguna. That it lasted for seven days was only because seven days was the remaining duration of Maharaja Parikshit’s life.”

“Anyway, somehow or other, one should take an interest in hearing Shrimad-Bhagavatam. It is the only asset for those who relish the worship of Lord Krishna without even a desire for liberation. Shrimad-Bhagavatam is the remedy for all those who are disgusted with the suffering of material existence.”

“There are many persons who take delight in sensual pleasure. They desire worldly happiness but in Kali-yuga, they become frustrated. It is very difficult for people in Kali-yuga to fulfill their desires for material happiness because of a lack of ability, wealth, and expertise. Even if a person has learned how to live happily in this material world, how can he do so with the help of those who are bereft of that understanding? Being frustrated, such persons should take shelter of Shrimad-Bhagavatam. Besides bestowing love of God and liberation, the Shrimad-Bhagavatam awards the devotee wealth, sons, wives, fame, and freedom from enemies. After enjoying such benefits, materialistic devotees will ultimately attain the abode of the Lord due to their contact with Shrimad-Bhagavatam.”

“Everything other than Krishna is termed *dhana* (wealth). The speakers and listeners of Shrimad-Bhagavatam can be divided into two categories—those who are *krishnarthi* (desiring Krishna), and those who are *dhanarthi* (desiring material benefit). If the speaker and hearer are of the same kind, they enjoy the recitation of Bhagavatam. If they are of different kinds, there is *rasabhāsa*, or displeasure. Of course, if a *krishnarthi* devotee hears Bhagavatam from a *dhanarthi* speaker, he will benefit but it may take some time. Actually, expecting the fulfillment of material desires from the hearing of Shrimad-Bhagavatam is not good. In fact, it is a ridiculous and vexing condition.”

The next section of the Skanda Purana, Vaishakhama-hatmya, glorifies the month of Vaishakha (April-May).

As Suta Gosvami continued to speak to the sages at Naimisharanya, headed by Shaunaka Rishi, he referred to a conversation that took place, long ago, between Narada Muni and King Ambarisha.

Narada Muni said, “O King, in the month of Vaishakha, which is very hot, if one does not offer water to those who are very thirsty and tired while traveling on a long journey, he will next be born in one of the lower species of life. In this connection an interesting story is often cited.”

Formerly, in the line of Ikshvaku, there was a king named Hemanga, who was a great admirer of the brahmanas. It is said that he gave as many cows in charity as there are particles of dust on the earth, or drops of water in the sea, or stars in the sky! In fact, there was no charitable gift that was not made by this king, except water. The king never gave water because he considered it to be easily available for everyone.

One day, the great sage Vasishtha, the son of Brahma, advised Hemanga to give water in charity but the king argued, "What benefit can one achieve by giving something of no value, that is available everywhere for everyone? There is only merit to be gained by giving that which is not easily attained."

In this way, King Hemanga used sound reasoning but unfortunately, logic and argument are not always adequate to ascertain the truth of a situation. Similarly, the king liked to worship brahmanas with physical handicaps, such as having only one arm or one leg, as well as those who were poor and without a proper means of livelihood. He neglected to worship brahmanas that were well-versed in the shastra, who were knowers of the truth, and who preached Krishna consciousness.

King Hemanga reasoned, "Everyone worships learned brahmanas who are prominent in society and who act as the spiritual masters of the people. Who will help the brahmanas that are suffering—who are without much education, who are disabled, and who are poor? They deserve sympathy!"

Thinking in this way, the king offered much wealth to undeserving persons, without consulting his spiritual master. Because of this sin, in his next lives, Hemanga had to accept the body of a chataka bird for three births, a vulture for one birth, and a dog for seven births.

Finally, the former king was born as a house lizard in the palace of King Shrutakirti, the ruler of Mithila. In that form, the foolish Hemanga remained in the rafters of the king's inner apartment, eating insects for eighty-seven years. One day, a learned sage named

Shrutadeva came to see the king at noon. King Shrutakīrti was very pleased to see the brahmana and he immediately stood up and offered him a very nice reception.

Indeed, the king sprinkled the water over his head that had washed the brahmana's feet and by good fortune, a few drops fell upon the lizard that was formerly King Hemanga. Immediately, the lizard could remember his previous lives. Feeling great distress upon realizing all that had happened to him, the lizard cried out to the brahmana, "Please save me! Save me!"

Shrutadeva was certainly surprised to hear the lizard talking in this way! He asked, "Lizard, what did you do to attain this degraded condition of life? Were you a demigod, a king, a brahmana, or an ordinary man? Tell me all about yourself and today, I will redeem you."

King Hemanga in the form of a lizard replied, "I was born in the dynasty of Ikṣhāvaku and I was an avid student of the Vedic literature. I performed all kinds of sacrifice, I gave innumerable gifts in charity, and I performed great public service, such as digging wells and ponds. Still, instead of being rewarded for my pious acts, I was thrown into this miserable state. It is because a few drops of water that washed your feet fell upon me as the king sprinkled it on his head I remember my previous births. I am still destined to be born twenty-eight more times as a house lizard. I am very afraid of undergoing such an existence and I do not know why I am made to suffer in this way. Kindly enlighten me about my fault."

The sage, Shrutadeva, could understand everything with his vision of perfect knowledge. He said, "I shall tell you the reason for your births in lower species of life. The simple truth of the matter is that you did not offer water during the month of Vaiśākha. Because water is generally easily available to anyone, you considered it to be a worthless gift. The fact is, however, especially in summer, a gift of water is very much appreciated by those who are traveling. Besides this omission, you often gave charity to undeserving persons, while ignoring deserving ones."



“Oblations are never offered to the ashes, leaving aside the sacrificial fire. A tree may be very colorful and have nice flowers but if it is full of thorns, no one likes it. Should egg-plant be worshiped, setting aside the tulasi plant? Poverty and helplessness are not the qualifications for receiving worship. Disabled people and poor people should be pitied but they should not be worshiped. Those who strictly adhere to religious principles and who are expert scholars of the Vedic literature are always deserving of worship. A truly wise man should be worshiped (and not politicians, movie stars, and pop singers) for he is very dear the Lord and the Lord is very dear to him.”

“Contempt for learned persons of excellent conduct always leads to misery, both in this life and in the next. Service to great souls is the cause of good fortune. Even if millions of blind people join together, they will never be able to see reality. What good can the association of thousands of dull-headed people afford one?”

“O descendent of Ikshvaku, water was never given by you, nor were good men served. It is for these reasons that misfortune has befallen you. Now, to deliver you from your misfortune, I will donate to you all of the merit I had achieved by performing pious acts during the month of Vaishakha. This will free you from all your past sinful reactions.”

After saying this, the brahmana, Shrutadeva, sipped water and then ceremoniously donated this piety to the lizard. Immediately, King Hemanga cast of his lizard body and appeared in a celestial form. Hemanga bowed down to the brahmana and the king and then circumambulated them. Finally, with their permission, he boarded the celestial chariot that had come for him and ascended to the heavenly planets. There, he enjoyed life for ten thousand years and was thereafter born in the dynasty of Ikshvaku as the son of King Kakutstha. Under the direction of Vasishtha Muni, he diligently performed all the rites pertaining to the month of Vaishakha. At the end of his life, he attained the liberation known as sayujya, or merging into the existence of the Supreme Lord.

King Shrutakīrti was very pleased to have heard this story and so he encouraged the brahmana, Shrutadeva, to continue speaking about the glories of the Lord.

Shrutadeva said, “O King, without pious credit acquired in the course of many previous births, no one is inclined to hear the glories of the Lord. Even though you are a young man and the ruler of the earth, your mind is inclined toward hearing about the Lord. Therefore, I consider you to be a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu and so I will happily continue my narrations.”

King Shrutakīrti said, “The holy rites to be performed in the month of Vaiśākha are easily accomplished and award one great merit. Why are they not well-known, although many rituals of a rājasic or tamasic nature are very well-known? These are very difficult to perform and require great expenditure.”

The brahmana, Shrutadeva replied, “The world is full of people with rājasic and tamasic natures. They are very lusty and simply live to enjoy material pleasures. Their interest is wealth, women, and their children. Among such people, if you look hard for a long time, you may find a few who are properly endeavoring for heavenly elevation by performing sacrifices and following various religious vows. You will not find anyone at all who is actually aspiring to be liberated from material bondage. Whatever religious performances are seen within human society are performed in the hopes of improving one’s present situation. It is for this reason that rājasic and tamasic religious practices are predominant in human society and sattvic practices, which are pleasing to Lord Hari, are hardly seen. The rites prescribed during the month of Vaiśākha are all sattvic.”

To illustrate this point, Shrutadeva narrated this story. Formerly, there was a king of Kāśī named Kīrtiman, who was born in the dynasty of Ikṣvaku. He was a self-controlled man who patronized the brahmanas.

Once, during the month of Vaiśākha, when it was extremely hot, Kīrtiman came to the ashram of Vāśiṣṭha while hunting in

the forest. While approaching the ashram, he saw the sage's disciples engaged in various ways. Some were building shady pavilions and arranging for the distribution of water. Some were repairing the embankments of ponds. Some were seen fanning people who sat comfortably in the shade of a tree. At noon, some of Vasishtha's disciples gave umbrellas and cool drinks in charity. Some were setting up swings by tying ropes to the branches of trees.

Kirtiman asked, "Who are all of you?"

They replied, "We are disciples of Vasishtha."

The king asked, "What are you doing?"

The disciples said, "We are performing all the holy duties prescribed for the month of Vaishakha. Our spiritual master has instructed us to do so."

King Kirtiman asked, "What benefit is obtained by doing these things?"

The students replied, "We are too busy carrying out the orders of our spiritual master. It would be better if you were to inquire from Vaishtha directly."

King Kirtiman entered the ashram and was warmly greeted by the sage. After being comfortably seated, he asked, "While coming here, I saw the wonderful work being done by your disciples. I asked them about the merit that would be obtained as a result of their work but they couldn't give me a proper reply. For that reason, they told me to come and see you."

"While hunting, I became tired and so I came here for some respite. Now, I am very eager to hear from you about these religious performances. I am your humble disciple. I have faith in your words."

Vasishtha Muni replied, "Because you have inquired about activities that are in relation to Lord Vishnu, I can understand that your past pious acts have born fruit."

The sage then spoke in glorification of the rites prescribed for the month of Vaishakha and he advised the king to also practice them. Indeed, he urged him, saying, "O King, you should engage all

your subjects in performing these rites and anyone who refuses to do so should be punished.”

After learning everything about the rites to be performed during the month of Vaishakha, the king returned home. King Kirtiman was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu and he did not like to see anyone worshiping the demigods and goddesses. He placed a great drum on an elephant and had it announced throughout his kingdom: “If anyone over eight and below eighty does not bathe early in the morning in the month of Vaishakha—he will be punished, or banished from the kingdom! Even if my son, father, or wife are seen neglecting the rites that are to be performed during Vaishakha, they should be bound and handed over to me, just like thieves! After bathing, gifts should be given to eminent brahmanas and the other prescribed devotional activities should also be carried out by all.”

The king appointed a preceptor for each village who would explain to the people the holy rites to be performed, and he appointed an officer to oversee the activities of five villages. This officer was entrusted with the duty of punishing all those who neglected their religious performances. Ten horse soldiers were at the disposal of each officer.

Thus, the tree of pious activity that was planted everywhere by the order of the king flourished throughout the kingdom. Indeed, everyone who died attained the abode of Lord Vishnu. Because King Kirtiman ruled the entire earth, and all of the people engaged in activities that freed them from all sinful reactions, Yamaraja, the lord of death, and his scribe, Chitragupta, were relieved of all work (the accounting of sinful activities and punishing sinners). Indeed, the record of people’s previous sins had to be erased and hell became empty. Not only hell—even heaven became devoid of residents.

At that time, Narada Muni went to Yamaraja and said, “O king, I do not hear any cries of lamentation coming from your abode. Chitragupta appears to be observing a vow of silence, like a great sage! What is the reason for this? Why are not sinful rogues and cheaters coming to your abode?”

Yamaraja, the son of Vivasvan, helplessly replied, "The ruler of the earth is a great devotee of Lord Hrishikesha, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Along with the beating of a great drum, he has ordered that all within his kingdom perform devotional service to the Lord during the month of Vaishakha. Being afraid of the king, no one dares transgress his order. As a result, everyone on earth is going back to Godhead, the abode of Lord Vishnu. Indeed, the path to hell has become overgrown with tall grass and the hells are vacant. I have heard that the same is true of heaven. My accountant, Chitrugupta, is resting. After erasing all the old accounts, he has nothing more to do. Devotional service to Lord Vishnu performed in the month of Vaishakha has such great efficacy!"

"O Narada, I have become useless, like a piece of wood. I plan to fight with the king and kill him, even though his prowess is unparalleled. The servant who remains inactive while still receiving his wages certainly deserves to be punished. If I am unable to defeat the king, I will present my case before Lord Brahma!"

Thereafter, Yamaraja bid farewell to Narada Muni, picked up his staff, and mounted his buffalo carrier. Along with his followers, including Mrityu (death), Roga (disease), and Jara (old age), and the five hundred million Yamadutas, the lord of death proceeded to earth.

While besieging Kashi, Yamaraja blew his terrible conch shell, which instills fear within the hearts of all the inhabitants of the three worlds. Upon hearing that sound, King Kirtiman could understand that Yamaraja had approached his kingdom. After quickly preparing his army, he came out of his city to fight. Thereafter, the battle between those two rulers, Yamaraja and Kirtiman, was so fierce that the spectators' hair stood on end. Within a short while, however, Yamaraja's army was routed and so the lord of death personally entered the battlefield.

While roaring like a lion, Yamaraja broke Kirtiman's bow with three arrows. Then, picking up his sword and shield, the lord of death approached the king with a desire to kill him.

With his arrows, Kirtiman broke Yama's sword and shield to pieces and then pierced his forehead. Infuriated, Yamaraja picked up his staff, charged it with the power of the brahmastra by chanting the proper mantras, and released it. As the onlookers cried out, "Alas!" Lord Vishnu invoked His Sudarshana chakra for the protection of His devotee.

When the Sudarshana chakra entered the battlefield, it neutralized Yamaraja's staff empowered with the brahmastra. Being awe-struck and fearful, King Kirtiman offered prayers to the Lord's chakra, asking it not harm Yamaraja. Being thus implored by the king, the Sudarshana chakra spared Yamaraja.

Being very dejected, the lord of death quickly went to the abode of Brahma. There, he saw the grandfather of the universe seated, surrounded by the personified Puranas and other sacred texts, as well as the chiefs of demigods, the sacred rivers in personified form, and the personified units of time, such as years, months, seasons, and yugas.

In such a surrounding, Yamaraja, who appeared pale, entered like a bashful bride, glancing at the floor. Everyone was surprised to see Yamaraja. They said to one another, "What is he doing here? This son of the sun-god is busy every moment, punishing the innumerable sinful men and women of the earth. How is it that Chandragupta is with him? They look exceedingly dejected."

While people were speaking in this way, Yamaraja came and fell down like a stick before Lord Brahma. He cried, "Save me, O lord! I have been humiliated and my account books are now empty. Previously, I had never met with such a defeat!"

This caused an uproar in the assembly as people said, "Yamaraja, who makes others miserable, is now unhappy himself and crying. It is true—those who give trouble to others will meet with miseries himself, later on.

Vayu asked the assembled persons to remain quiet as he went and lifted Yamaraja up and placed him in his seat. He asked Yamaraja, "Who attacked you? Who has prevented you from carrying out your duties? Please tell me everything."

In response, Yamaraja related to Vayu and Lord Brahma all that had taken place. He said, "I have been deprived of my job and I find this to be worse than death. One who does not perform his duty and misappropriates the money of his master becomes a worm in a log of wood in his next life. If a person does not carry out his duty, due to a lack of interest, he is born as a crow after suffering in hell. He who spoils the work of his master, due to fulfilling his own selfish ends, is reborn as a mouse. One who is capable of doing his job but stays at home and neglects it is reborn as a cat."

"O lord, as instructed by you, I keep the people of the earth disciplined and meet out justice according to how they act—whether piously or sinfully. At the beginning of the kalpa, the great sages had discussed this matter amongst themselves and then decided upon the tortures of hell that should be meted out by me as punishment for the various sinful activities."

"King Kirtiman of the earth has instilled a great fear in me. He has ordered his subjects to simply perform activities in relation to Lord Vishnu in the month of Vaishakha and so they have given up all kinds of religious rites, the performance of the shraddha ceremony, and traveling to holy places of pilgrimage. They have completely given up the paths of karma, jnana and yoga. Even though they commit many sins, all of the people are attaining the abode of Lord Vishnu in the spiritual sky. Because of this, I am sitting idle with nothing to do. The supreme abode of the Lord is certainly without limit because countless people have gone there and still, it is not overcrowded."

"My lord, you should curb the king of the earth, Kirtiman. I am placing my staff and account book at your feet. King Kirtiman is now in control of the universal order and your authority is being neglected."

After listening patiently to Yamaraja, Lord Brahma replied, "Why are you so disappointed? Merely by chanting the holy name of Lord Vishnu, one is delivered from material existence. Simply by offering obeisances to Lord Govinda, even once, one receives the



merit of performing one hundred horse sacrifices. In fact, performers of sacrifices are undoubtedly born in this world again whereas those who offer obeisances to Lord Krishna never experience birth in the material world again. Of what use is traveling to holy places of pilgrimage for one whose tongue is always decorated with the two syllables—ha and ri? The Supreme Lord, Purushottama, is the master of everyone, including me.”

“O Yamaraja, you are not competent to punish the devotees of Lord Krishna. When the task of a worker is beyond his capacity, he should inform the master of this. You have informed me of your plight and so you have fulfilled your duty. You should now give up your grief and lamentation.”

By hearing this, Yamaraja became even more dejected, however. His eyes brimming with tears, the lord of death said, “O lotus-born lord, I am your devotee. Whatever I had obtained was by your mercy. I cannot return to my abode as long as this king continues to rule the earth.”

“O lord, enable me to dispose of this king so that I can resume my duties in a happy mood.”

Upon hearing this, Lord Brahma became worried. He informed Yamaraja, “This king who is devoted to the worship of Lord Vishnu cannot be restrained by you. Still, if that is your desire then we will approach Lord Hari and inform Him of the situation. Then, whatever He orders, we will carry out without further argument. He alone is the supreme authority. He alone is our supreme spiritual master.”

Lord Brahma and Yamaraja went to the ocean of milk. Sitting on the shore, Brahma glorified the Lord with selected prayers. Finally, being pleased with Brahma, Lord Vishnu personally appeared before him. As Brahma and Yama got up after hurriedly offering obeisances, Lord Vishnu spoke in a booming voice: “Why have you both come here? Is there any disturbance caused by the demons? Why is Yama’s face so pale?”

Being so addressed, Lord Brahma said, “The ruler of the earth, Kirtiman, has convinced all within his kingdom to follow the holy

rites of Vaishakha and engage in Your devotional service. For this reason, everyone on the earth is attaining Your transcendental abode so that hell has become vacant. It is for this reason that Yamaraja has become depressed. He fought with the king but when he employed his staff, the Sudarshana chakra neutralized it. After failing in this way, he came to see me.”

Upon hearing this, Lord Vishnu laughingly said, “I may forsake Lakshmi, My body, Shrivatsa, Kaustubha, My Vaijayanti garland, Shvetadvipa, Vaikuntha, the Milk Ocean, Shesha, or even Garuda but I will never forsake my pure devotees. How could I ever abandon My devotees who leave aside everything, even their lives, for My sake? For this reason, I shall find some other means to dispel your misery.”

“I have given King Kirtiman a life-span of ten thousand years and eight thousand have passed. When his life as a king is over, he will return to My eternal abode. Soon thereafter, a vicious man named Vena will become the king and he will destroy the pious practices of the people. This king will be vanquished as a result of his sins and at that time, I will incarnate as King Prithu to re-establish the principles of religion. I will preach pure devotional service to Myself but only one in a thousand men will become My true devotee, renouncing the desire to hoard more and more material possessions.”

“Yamaraja, rest assured that you will soon be able to resume punishing sinful men. Give up your anger toward the king. I will send my messenger to inform the king that your worship must also go on in the month of Vaishakha.”

After reassuring Yamaraja in this way, Lord Vishnu suddenly disappeared from view. Thereafter, Yamaraja returned to his abode, along with his followers, in a somewhat cheerful mood. In due course of time, King Kirtiman ascended to the abode of the Lord and later on, Vena became king. Due to his vicious rule, the performance of rites prescribed for the month of Vaishakha were practically forgotten in human society.

After hearing this story, the king of Mithila said, “King Vena had appeared in a previous manvantara. I had heard this from authorities. How then could he appear in the present Vaivasvata manvantara? Kindly clear up my doubt in this regard.”

The brahmana, Shrutadeva, explained, “There are apparent contradictions in the Puranas because the events described occurred in different yugas and kalpas. At different times, these pastimes are enacted with variations and so there are actually no contradictions in the Puranas.”

“One who sits down to listen to the pastimes of Lord Vishnu and then leaves in the middle so that he can do something else will be tormented in the hell known as Raurava and after that, he will appear as an evil spirit (pishacha). In this context, I will tell you an interesting story.”

Formerly, in the holy place, Brahmeshvara, which is situated beside the Godavari River, there lived two preceptors. They were disciples of Durvasa Muni and their names were Satyanishtha and Taponishtha. Both were very pious, devoted to the study of the Upanishads, and detached from material sense enjoyment. They lived in a cave and maintained themselves by eating whatever they received by begging. Of the two, Satyanishtha was very fond of listening to narrations of Lord Vishnu’s pastimes. Indeed, as soon as there was someone willing to listen, Satyanishtha would simply go on describing the names, forms, qualities, and pastimes of the Lord. If someone else was engaged in telling stories about Lord Vishnu, Satyanishtha would leave whatever he was doing and go listen.

Satyanishtha never traveled far to visit holy places of pilgrimage because, while walking for many days, he would have no opportunity to hear about the Lord. His whole life was absorption in shravanam kirtanam vishnu, and he didn’t know anything else (because he was not interested in anything else).

Taponishtha, on the other hand, foolishly and obstinately adhered to the performance of Vedic rituals, which mostly involve worship of the demigods. He never liked to listen to people who

narrated the pastimes of Lord Vishnu. He never talked about the glories of the Lord because he simply wasn't interested. Even if narrations of Lord Vishnu's pastimes were going on, he would get up and go to some nearby holy place. While at such a place, even if the pastimes of Lord Vishnu were being narrated, he would carefully avoid listening to them and go about conducting the myriad rituals that he felt were required of a pilgrim.

(This reminds me of the following very nice verse from Shrimad-Bhagavatam [10.84.13] that Shrila Prabhupada often quoted:

*yasyātmā-buddhiḥ kuṇape tri-dhātuke  
sva-dhiḥ kalatrādiṣu bhauma iḥya-dhiḥ  
yat-tīrtha-buddhiḥ salile na karhicij  
janeṣv abhijñeṣu sa eva go-kharaḥ*

“A human being who identifies this body made of three elements with his self, who considers the by-products of the body to be his kinsmen, who considers the land of birth worshipable, and who goes to the place of pilgrimage simply to take a bath rather than meet men of transcendental knowledge there, is to be considered like an ass or a cow.”

Because Taponishtha carefully avoided shravana kirtanam vishnu, after death he attained the state of being an evil spirit (pishacha), dwelling in a shami tree. His name was Chinnakarna (meaning ‘one whose ears were cut off’, or in other words, deaf). Having nothing to eat, his throat, lips, and palate became parched and he became very weak.

In this way, Taponishtha suffered for ten thousand celestial years and he saw no one capable of rescuing him from his wretched condition. He wandered about aimlessly, like a madman or a drunkard. He felt that the wind was scorching his body and water seemed to him like fire. Fruit and flowers appeared to him like

poison. He resided in an uninhabited forest.

Meanwhile, as Satyanishtha was walking to the city of Paithinasi, he came upon Chinnakarna, who appeared to be extremely miserable. Seeing how he was hungry and ill, Satyanishtha felt compassion and so asked, "Who are you? How did you receive this horrible form? Don't worry, I will help you."

Chinnakarna replied, "I was formerly Taponishtha, the disciple of Durvasa Muni. Due to foolishness, I meticulously performed all kinds of rituals but purposely ignored the narrations of Lord Vishnu's pastimes. As a result, after death, I became a pishacha. O sage, it is my great fortune that I have met you today, for the very sight of you has freed me from countless sinful reactions."

After saying this, Chinnakarna fell at the feet of Satyanishtha, pleading, "Save me! Save me!"

Feeling great pity, Satyanishtha raised him up. He then sipped water and donated to the pishacha the merit that he had earned by listening to the pastimes of Lord Vishnu for one muhurta (about an hour and a half) during the month of Vaishakha. As a result of this gift, Taponishtha was immediately released from the state of being a pishacha and assumed a celestial form. He then boarded a celestial chariot that had been sent for him, after bowing down to Satyanishtha and circumambulating him, and ascended to the abode of Lord Vishnu.

Satyanishtha departed for Paithinasi, contemplating the wonderful efficacy of devotional service to Lord Vishnu performed in the month of Vaishakha.

Shrutadeva said, "I will now tell you another story that nicely illustrates how devotional service to Lord Vishnu performed in the month of Vaishakha is the destroyer of unlimited sins."

Formerly, there lived a king of Panchala named Puruyashas, the son of Bhuriyashas. When his pious and intelligent father died, Puruyashas was installed as the ruler of Panchala-desha. Thereafter, he ruled his kingdom in a very righteous manner. However, in his previous birth, Puruyashas had never given water

to those who needed it and when the fruit of this great fault fructified, it caused him terrible misfortune.

King Puruyashas suffered a great loss of wealth, and many of his horses and elephants died after becoming diseased. A great famine plagued his kingdom so that countless people died—so much so that the population appeared to be on the verge of extinction. In this way, both the treasury and the kingdom became practically empty.

When they understood the weak condition of King Puruyashas, many rival kings throughout the land decided to attack him. After being defeated in battle, King Puruyashas went and lived in a mountain cave, along with his wife, Shikhini, and some attendants. No one else knew of the king's whereabouts. In this way, the king spent fifty-three years in hiding.

From time to time, the king would contemplate in this way: "I was born in a noble family and I always acted for the welfare of my parents and subjects. I was a sincere disciple of my spiritual master and I was a great benefactor of the brahmanas. I observed all the practices that are prescribed for kshatriyas and I worshiped the demigods."

"And yet, I have no son or brother and friends do not show me respect. What did I do in a former life so that now I am suffering in this way? What brought about my defeat and sent me into the forest?"

Always anxious because such thoughts filled his mind, the king began to feel the need for spiritual guidance. He then invited two highly intelligent sages, named Yaja and Upayajaka, to come and advise him. When the two sages arrived, King Puruyashas stood up to greet them and then fell at their feet, seeking shelter. The kind-hearted sages lifted up the king and wiped the tears from his cheeks.

After they were comfortably seated, the king said, "O brahmanas, please reveal to me the cause of my suffering. I was born in a noble family and I ruled the earth in a righteous manner. Still,

I lost my wealth and was humiliated by my enemies. Why did this happen? Why was there famine in the kingdom protected by me?"

The two sages meditated for a short while and then replied to King Puruṣaśaṣṭha, "We shall tell you the cause of your misery. In your previous ten births, you were a sinful hunter. You were very cruel by nature so that you inflicted pain on others without hesitation. You made no effort to control your mind and senses and you didn't take the slightest interest in religion or spirituality. Your tongue never once uttered the holy name of Lord Viṣṇu. Your mind didn't even once think of the lotus feet of Govinda. Not even once did you bow down before the Deity of the Lord."

"In your tenth birth as a hunter, you and your wife engaged yourselves in plundering travelers. You lived by means of your weapons and you were attracted to violence and harmful activities. Because you mercilessly killed infants, children, animals and birds, no son has been born to you in this life. Because you had such a vicious nature, you now have no brothers. Because you harassed travelers, you have no friends. Because you disrespected those who were good, you were defeated by your enemies. You are impoverished because, in your previous life, you never gave anything in charity. Because you inflicted suffering upon others, you are now miserable in exile. Because you were displeasing to others, unbearable misery oppresses you."

"Now, I shall tell you the reason why you were born in such a noble family. In your last life as a hunter, you stood on the forest path like a merciless annihilator of all living beings. One day, two rich vaiśyaś came your way and they were very distressed because of the great heat. They were accompanied by a sage named Karṣṇa, whose sole possession was a water pot."

"When you saw the three coming, you picked up your bow and obstructed their path. You then shot and killed one of the vaiśyaś and took all his possessions. As you tried to shoot the other vaiśyaś, he managed to escape after hiding his possessions in a bush. The sage, Karṣṇa, thinking that he would also be killed, ran away with



the vaishya. After some time, the sage collapsed onto the ground, being exhausted due to the great heat. Being eager to save his own life, the vaishya left the sage and kept on running.”

“You ran after the sage and the vaishya. When you came upon the sage, lying unconscious on the ground, you wanted to ask him what the vaishya had done with his possessions. You blew into his ears and shook him in the hopes that he would regain his senses. You wiped his face with water from a muddy puddle that was full of worms and fanned his face with leaves.”

“When the sage finally regained consciousness, you said to him, ‘Don’t be afraid of me. One who is without possessions is happy in this world. What would I gain from an old, broken water pot? Just tell me this—where has that merchant gone? Where did he hide his possessions? I will kill you if you lie to me!’ ”

“The sage replied by showing you the bush in which the vaishya had hidden his wealth. You thanked the brahmana and told him that if he took a certain path, he would come to a nice lake and then a village. After giving the brahmana a fan made of a palasha leaf, you left him and went deeper into the forest.”

The two sages, Yaja and Upayajaka, concluded their story by telling King Puruyasha, “This was the meritorious act that you performed in the month of Vaishakha, which is oppressively hot. Even though that pious act was motivated by selfishness, it saved the life of the sage. It is on the strength of that action that you were next born in a family of kings. Therefore, if you want to once again make your life auspicious, you should perform acts of devotion in this current month of Vaishakha, of which today is the third day.”

“If you give a cow with a calf in charity to a needy brahmana, your treasury will once again become filled. If you give an umbrella in charity, you will regain your kingdom. If you bathe early in the morning and then give a Deity of Lord Krishna in charity to a worthy person, you will come out victorious. Set up a free water distribution booth and you will receive highly qualified sons. If you perform all

of these pious acts during this month, there is no doubt that the earth will once again come under your control.”

After advising King Puruṣyaśa in this way, the two brahmanas, Vaja and Upayajaka, bid farewell to him and departed. Thereafter, the king performed all of these acts, as advised by the sages, and he worshiped Lord Kṛṣṇa, the killer of the Madhu demon. Gradually, he regained his incomparable prowess and good fortune. With his family and the remnants of his army, he returned his capital in the kingdom of Panchala.

When his enemies, the kings of the neighboring realms, heard of King Puruṣyaśa’s return, they gathered their armies and attacked him. In the battle that took place, the Panchala king managed to defeat all of his enemies, single-handedly. When those kings fled in all directions, Puruṣyaśa collected all their horses, elephants and wealth.

As the Panchala kingdom continued to prosper, the king begot five sons and he became more and more absorbed in worship of Lord Viṣṇu. One day, the Lord appeared before King Puruṣyaśa in His four-armed form, seated upon Garuda and accompanied by Lakṣmi and numerous associates.

King Puruṣyaśa closed his eyes due to the Lord’s brilliant effulgence. With great delight, he began to dance, moving about and whirling like a drunkard. The hair on his body stood on end and tears came to his eyes. He then fell flat onto the ground to offer obeisances. After standing up, the king stood with joined palms and praised the Lord with beautiful prayers.

One prayer of the king gives a very nice example: “My yearning for sense gratification increases like the desire of a mouse for the cheese that is meant for trapping it.”

King Puruṣyaśa concluded his prayers, saying that his only desire was to be engaged in the Lord’s pure devotional service, in any condition of life.

In response, the Lord told the king that he would live prosperously for ten thousand years and then attain His eternal

abode in the spiritual sky. After saying this, the Lord vanished from view. Thereafter, due to his contact with the Lord, King Puruyasha became very pleasing to his wives, ministers, and people in general. After death, he went back home, back to Godhead.

King Shrutakirti said, “O brahmana, I desire to hear the glories of the Lord, more and more. I never tire of hearing the sacred texts, which are full of descriptions of the Lord’s pastimes and wonderful instructions that lead one on the path to enlightenment.”

The brahmana, Shrutadeva, replied, “O King, I shall narrate another story to you that nicely illustrates the efficacy of devotional service to Lord Vishnu performed in the month of Vaishakha.”

Once, long ago, on the banks of the river Pampa there lived a brahmana named Shankha. One day, as he was traveling to the Godavari river to bathe at an auspicious time during the month of Vaishakha, Shankha passed through a desolate forest. Being very hot, he sat down to rest beneath a tree at mid-day. At that time, a ruthless hunter came there, bow in hand. Upon seeing the brahmana, the hunter caught hold of him and took his gold earrings, umbrella, chanting beads, water pot, and shoes. After taking these things, the cruel hunter let the brahmana go and told him, “Go away!” Such was his mentality.

Shankha walked along the path without any shoes so that his feet were pierced by the stones and sharp pieces of wood. Without his water pot, he became terribly thirsty and with no umbrella, he was scorched by the sun. Shanka continued on, as best he could, and rested wherever he found a patch of grass.

Meanwhile, the hunter thought to himself, “That brahmana must be suffering without any shoes. I now have his nice shoes and so I don’t need my old, worn-out sandals. I should give them to the brahmana and if any merit comes to me for lessening his suffering—all for the good!”

The hunter went and gave his old shoes to Shankha. The brahmana was very pleased because his feet had been burnt by the hot pebbles on the forest path. He blessed the hunter, saying, “Be happy.

Your past pious acts must now be bearing fruit because you have given me these shoes in charity in the month of Vaishakha, which is pleasing to Lord Hari.”

The hunter was surprised to hear the brahmana speak like this. He said, “What is yours has been given to you and so what merit could there be for me? What is Vaishakha and who is Hari? Please explain this to me.”

Upon hearing this, Shankha felt delighted and so he continued to praise the hunter’s good fortune, the glories of Vaishakha, and devotional service to Lord Hari. After listening for some time, the hunter said, “Do not hesitate in the matter of enlightening me. You are compassionate toward those who approach you with submission. I bow down to you as your disciple—please instruct me.”

Shankha was very pleased to hear these words of the hunter. He said, “It is very hot here. Let’s go to a place where there is shade and a pond. After drinking some water, I would like to rest underneath a shady tree. There, I shall describe to you all the practices prescribed for the month of Vaishakha.”

The hunter said, “Close by is an excellent lake and on the shore there are trees fully laden with fruit. Let us go there.”

When the brahmana and the hunter came to the lake, they saw that it was full of blue, pink, and white lotus flowers, as well as ducks, swans, and geese. Indeed, the lake gave one pleasure, as if it were a festival for the eyes. There were many fruit and flowering trees by the side of the lake.

Shankha had his noon bath and then worshiped the Lord, offering Him the fruit that the hunter picked from the trees. After offering the fruit, the brahmana eagerly ate the prasada. Thereafter, Shankha and the hunter sat down beneath a tree. The brahmana began the conversation by asking the hunter to inquire about whatever was on his mind.

The hunter asked, “What did I do in my past life so that I was born as a cruel hunter? What did I do that awarded me the good fortune of meeting you?”

Shankha replied, "Formerly, you were a brahmana named Stamba, in the city of Shakala. You were a brilliant student of the Vedic literature. Your fault was that you loved a prostitute and by her association, you gave up performing your brahminical duties. You became devoid of good behavior, like a shudra. Although abused by the prostitute, your brahmana wife, Kantimati, continued to serve you in a most humble manner. She washed the feet of both of you, and she obeyed the orders given by both you and the prostitute. She slept on the floor while you and your beloved prostitute slept on the bed. Indeed, a long time passed in this way."

"One day, you ate some unwholesome food and as a result, you suffered from vomiting and diarrhea. As long as there was enough money, the prostitute continued to stay with you. When she had spent all of your money, however, and there was nothing left, she went to live with someone else."

"At this time, you felt terrible distress and so you cried to you wife in a most pitiful tone of voice, 'O gentle lady, protect me! I know that I treated you badly due to my attachment for the prostitute. I know that a man who neglects his chaste wife will be born as a eunuch in his next fifteen births. I know that I am the subject of ridicule for respectable gentlemen. I know that my future is very dark due to disrespecting a chaste lady like you.' "

"With palms joined in reverence, your wife, Kantimati, replied, 'You need not feel ashamed, my dear husband. I have no feeling of anger toward you. Sins committed previously are the cause of present misery. I must have been very sinful in my last life. I know that I am simply receiving the results of my previous activities and so I do not feel disappointed.' "

"After speaking in this way, your chaste wife continued to serve you very nicely. She even brought money from her father and other relatives so that you could continue to maintain the household. You were very ill and she cared for you, day and night, cleaning your stool and urine and picking the worms from the sores on your body, so that she hardly got any sleep. Feeling very sad due

to your miserable condition, she prayed to the demigods that you might become cured and return to a healthy condition of life.”

“One day, in the month of Vaiśākha, the sage, Devala arrived at your house, being very oppressed by the great heat. Knowing you to be averse to pious people and pious activities, your wife tricked you by saying, ‘A physician has come to our house and so your illness can be cured. Let us give him all hospitality.’ ”

“She washed the feet of the sage and sprinkled the water on your head. Then, being encouraged by you, she gave a sweet drink that gave the sage some relief from the heat. The next morning, the sage departed and soon thereafter, your diseased condition worsened. As your wife was giving you some medicine, you bit off her finger as your mouth suddenly shut tight. Indeed, you died in your bed with the tip of your wife’s finger in your mouth. At the time of death, you were thinking about the beautiful prostitute that you had loved so much.”

“Your wife sold her bangles so that she could buy wood for your funeral. She then made the funeral pyre, placed your dead body upon it, and embraced it tightly. Her feet were entwined in your feet, her breasts pressed against your chest, and her face touched your face. Thus placing her body on yours, she burned them both in the fire.”

“Your wife attained the eternal abode of the Lord due to the merit of washing the sage, Devala’s feet and offering him a cool drink in the month of Vaiśākha. You had also become freed of all sins by receiving the water that had washed the sage’s feet but because you thought of the prostitute at the time of death, you were awarded this terrible birth as a hunter wherein you always caused pain to others. Still, because of your service to the sage, Devala, you have the inclination to inquire about the merit of performing devotional activities in the month of Vaiśākha, and you gained my association.”

In this way, the brahmana, Shankha, described to the hunter his previous birth. The hunter said, “You said that the holy rites

prescribed for the month of Vaishakha are performed for the satisfaction of Lord Vishnu. What kind of personality is Lord Vishnu and what is the proof of His existence? How can He be known? Please explain this to me, your surrendered servant.”

Shankha replied, “I shall describe Lord Vishnu to the extent that I am able. The Lord is omnipotent and a reservoir of all good qualities. His transcendental form is sac-cit-ananda, and not material. Indeed, the form of the Lord is unlimited.”

“The material nature that has manifested this universe is fully under the control of Lord Vishnu. The Supreme Lord can only be known through hearing of the revealed scriptures, such as the Vedas, Puranas, and histories. He is beyond the range of our blunt, material senses, and the speculative power of our mind. For someone who has not received information from the Vedic literature, it is impossible to imagine the form and existence of the Lord.”

The hunter asked, “Why has the Lord created countless millions of eternal jiva souls. They are all engaged in different activities and have various natures. Why is this so?”

Shankha replied, “There are three classes of jiva-bhuta (conditioned souls) in this world—sattvika, rajasa, and tamasa. It is their situation under the control of these three modes of material nature (and the limitless combination of these modes) that causes the jivas to act variously. Happiness, distress, and a mixture of the two are obtained according to the influence of these three gunas. The results of activities that are enjoyed by the jivas are determined by guna and karma.”

“Those in the mode of ignorance mostly experience pain and misery. Such people are merciless because their world is one that is colored by hatred. Those in the mode of passion have a mixed temperament—they perform both sinful and pious activities. When piety predominates, they ascend to heaven and when sin predominates, they descend to hell. In this way, such unfortunate jivas repeatedly come and go in this world. Those in the mode of goodness perform pious acts, and they are merciful and without jealousy.”



“It is not that God is partial. One may think this while observing how some people prosper while others suffer terribly. God is impartially awarding everyone the fruit of their respective actions.”

As the brahmana, Shankha, was thus instructing the hunter, a huge banyan tree having five main branches suddenly fell down within their sight. A huge cruel serpent had been living in that tree and when it fell, he gave up that form and stood before Shankha with palms joined in reverence.

The brahmana and hunter were certainly astonished at this turn of events. Shankha asked the former serpent, “Who are you? How did you attain such a degraded form? How is it that you were suddenly liberated from that dreadful condition of life?”

Upon being spoken to, that person fell to the ground like a staff, to offer obeisances. After getting up, he replied, “Formerly, I was a very talkative brahmana living in Prayaga. I was very handsome when I was in the prime of youth. I was also very proud of my learning. I had abundant wealth and many sons but my defect was that I always behaved arrogantly. I was the son of the sage, Kusida, named Rochana. These were my activities—sitting quietly studying, lying down, sleeping, having sexual intercourse, gambling, gossiping, and lending money.”

“Being afraid of public condemnation, I made a big show of performing religious rituals with great pomp but I was a hypocrite because I had no faith in them. Once, during Vaishakha, a brahmana named Jayanta gave lectures describing the holy rites that are prescribed for that month. In that holy place (Prayaga), thousands of men and women from all the four varnas would bathe early in the morning and then worship Lord Madhusudana. After that, they would sit down to hear the discourses of Jayanta. All of them were pure-hearted and they sat in silence while eagerly hearing the narrations of Lord Vishnu’s pastimes. None of them were lazy or hypocritical.”

“One day, I entered that assembly, being curious to see what was going on. I was wearing a turban and I didn’t bow my head as a show of respect. I was chewing betel leaves. I started gossiping with some people I knew and this disturbed the concentration of the listeners. While talking, I sometimes criticized others and sometimes, I laughed loudly. I carried on in that way until the end of the lecture.”

“As a result of this fault, my duration of life became reduced so that I died the very next day. I was dragged to hell and tortured for a period of fourteen manvantaras. Thereafter, I was born in all eight million four hundred thousand species of life. In the form of a serpent, I have lived within a hollow of this great tree for the last ten thousand years. By good fortune, I heard the necatrean narrations emanating from your mouth and this resulted in the destruction of all my misfortune. My serpent body has been relinquished and I have received this celestial form.”

“O sage, I do not know in which birth you were my relative. No one else has helped me in any way. Devotees of the Lord are impartial and compassionate—they are always ready to help others. Bless me so that my mind will remain inclined to follow religious principles. Let me have the association of devotees so that I will never forget Lord Vishnu. I would like to be poverty-stricken because that will act like a medicine to dispel the blindness due to arrogance.”

While saying this, the former serpent bowed down, again and again. Feeling great emotion, Shankha lifted him up while affectionately patting his body. Shankha said, “Later, you will be born on the earth as an excellent brahmana in the land of Dasharna, and you will be known as Vedasharma. You will become a master of the Vedic literature and you will be able to remember your previous births. By remembering your past miseries, you will renounce material pleasures and engage wholeheartedly in the devotional service of Lord Vishnu. As a result of your devotion, you will attain perfection in that very lifetime.”

Thereafter, the former serpent circumambulated Shankha and proceeded to heaven. The next morning, the brahmana and the hunter bathed before sunrise. Shankha then called for the hunter and sprinkled some water on his head while imparting to him the two-syllable mantra, Rama. He told the hunter, "The name of Lord Rama is equal to the one thousand names of Lord Vishnu. Therefore, you should continuously chant the holy name of Lord Rama. In your next birth, you will be born as the son of a pious brahmana."

Thereafter, the brahmana, Shanka, departed. The hunter followed him some distance and then watched as he went out of sight. Feeling separation from his preceptor, he began to cry. Thereafter, the hunter engaged himself in the pious acts that his guru had instructed him to perform. He bathed early every morning and then chanted, "Rama, Rama, Rama," throughout the day and night.

At this time, there was a great sage named Krinu who performed severe austerities by the side of a lake without moving. After much time, an anthill covered his body and so people began to call him Valmika (anthill). When he gave up his austerities, Krinu began to think about materialistic life and soon the thought of women overwhelmed his mind, causing an involuntary seminal discharge. A female dancer took that semen and as a result, the hunter attained his next birth. He became known as Valmiki and it was he who popularized the pastimes of Lord Rama by means of his literary composition, Ramayana.

(This story differs from the one that is commonly accepted. Narada Muni once asked a plunderer of forest travelers if his relatives would be willing to share the results of his sinful acts and thus share his destiny. When the robber asked this of his family members, they refused. After understanding this truth, the robber begged Narada to redeem his fallen soul. Narada Muni then initiated the plunderer into the chanting of the holy name of Lord Rama. As the former robber became engrossed in meditation upon Lord Rama, an anthill manifested around him. For this reason, he became known as Valmiki and later on, he composed the Ramayana.)

As the brahmana, Shrutadeva, continued speaking to King Shrutakirti, the following story was narrated by him. There was once, in a previous Kali-yuga, a brahmana named Dharmavarna. Once, he went to Pushkara, where an assembly of sages were engaged in a prolonged sacrificial performance. There were regular discussions of shastra and many times, the speaker would praise Kali-yuga, saying that simply by chanting the holy name of the Lord, one could be freed from material entanglement.

Once, while such a discussion was going on, Narada Muni came there. He then caught hold of his penis with one hand and his tongue with the other and began to laugh and dance like a madman. Those who were assembled there asked him, “Narada, what are you doing?”

While continuing to dance, the celestial sage replied, “You are all realized souls and what you say is true. The meritorious age of Kali has arrived. In this age, there is no doubt that much can be achieved by even a little devotional service to the Lord. Still, I must inform you that two things cannot be easily accomplished in this age—control of the genitals and control of the tongue. It is for this reason that I advise you to leave Bharata-varsha and go somewhere else.”

Most of the sages took Narada’s advice. After completing their sacrifice, they departed for other realms. Dharmavarna, who wore tree bark and had matted hair, also felt inclined to go somewhere else and so he picked up his staff and water pot and started walking.

While going along the road, Dharmavarna was astonished to see how people were engaged in vulgar behavior and sinful acts. He saw how brahmanas discredited the Vedas while shudras took to the performance of austerities. He saw that wives despised their husbands and disciples had no respect for their gurus. Brahmanas resembled shudras and cows looked almost like goats. The Vedic literature was taken to be mythology and religious performances were done casually. Indeed, many people worshiped ghosts and spirits. Everyone eagerly engaged in sexual intercourse, being willing to risk their lives for that purpose.

The people in the age of Kali had one thing in their mind, another in their speech, and still another in their actions. Those brahmanas who were actually learned in the Vedic literature were poverty-stricken. Devotion to Lord Vishnu was conspicuous by its absence. Shudras became ascetics with matted hair. Most of the people were rogues who took pleasure in plundering others.

In Kali-yuga, everyone wants to be worshiped by others. A brother may approach a sister for sex, or a father may approach a daughter. All men become enamored by shudra women, fascinated by their sexy ways. People ignore good and honorable men and respect those who are very sinful. Such foolish people are happy to point out even a single defect found in a good man. And yet, the defects of sinful men are spoken of as good qualities.

In Kali-yuga medicinal herbs lose their potency. People take great pleasure and interest in actors and dancers. Stupid people view superior men with knowledge of the Vedic literature as their servants. Only the romantic sentiment of sensual love gives people happiness in Kali-yuga and so they continually sing songs of an erotic nature.

Upon seeing how everyone was headed for destruction, Dharmavarṇa became astonished and frightened and proceeded on to another varṣa.

To illustrate the glories of Dvādāśī, the brahmana, Śrutadeva, narrated the following story. Formerly, in Kashmir, there lived a brahmana named Devavrata, who had a very beautiful daughter named Malini. When she grew up, Devavrata gave his daughter in marriage to an intelligent brahmana named Satyashila.

Although Malini was very young and beautiful, Satyashila wasn't enamored with her. In fact, he hated her and treated her cruelly. Somehow, Satyashila did not hate anyone else but he hated his wife. Malini was very unhappy because of this and she wanted to somehow or other attract her husband. She went and took advice from some women who had been abandoned by their husbands.

The abandoned women told Malini, "Your husband can definitely come under your control. We have heard that many husbands have been brought under control by means of mantras and potions. There is a yogini you should go and see right away. She will give you a drug to give to your husband. After taking it, he will begin acting like a slave."

After hearing this, that wicked woman went to the hermitage of the yogini. The yogini had very long matted hair, she was effulgent, and many persons attended her. With chanting beads in her hands, she was engaged in chanting japa. When requested by Malini, the yogini gave her a magic spell that could bring anyone under one's control. In return, Malini bowed down and gave her a very valuable gold ring having diamonds and rubies.

Upon seeing the ring placed at her feet, the yogini became delighted. She told Malini, "This powder and amulet are powerful enough to captivate anyone. Give the powder to your husband and wear the amulet around your neck. Your husband will never look at another woman and he will never dare to say anything displeasing to you, even if you misbehave."

Malini returned home and that evening, she gave the powder to her husband, mixed with milk, and tied the amulet around her neck. After drinking the milk, however, Satyashila came down with a terrible disease so that, day by day, he became weaker and weaker. Worms grew in his putrefying wounds. Within just a few days, his condition became critical. Upon seeing this, Malini established intimate relationships with other men.

One day, Satyashila said to Malini, "O splendid woman, I am your slave. I take shelter of you and so, please save me. I will never love any woman but you."

Malini wanted her husband to live, not because she loved him, but because a husband is a nice ornament for a woman. She went to the yogini and informed her of her husband's condition. A second drug was then handed over to her, to cure her husband's illness. As soon as he drank the milk mixed with that powder, Satyashila

instantly regained his normal health.

Malini's lovers stayed in her house on the pretext of doing some work. Actually, she had lovers belonging to all castes and creeds and all of them stayed in her house. Due to the influence of the yoginī's spell, however, Satyashila never complained. Finally, as a result of her misdeeds, Malini came down with a terrible disease something like leprosy so that her body became deformed. Ultimately, she became invalid and then died.

After suffering in hell for a long time, Malini was born as a female dog in her next one hundred births. In each of these lives, there was some defect—her tail was cut, her foot was deformed, or her ears were split. In her final birth as a female dog, she lived in the house of a brahmana's maidservant. Her eyes were damaged, her tail was cut off, her head was infested with worms, and her vagina was infected and putrefied.

And yet, due to good fortune resulting from some unknown past pious act, on the Dvādāshi in the fortnight of the waxing moon in the month of Vaiśākha, the following happened. The brahmana's (Padmabandhu's) son bathed in the river and then returned home wearing clothes that were soaking wet. Going near the tulasi plant that was placed on a raised platform, the boy washed his feet. Just beneath the tulasi plant, the female dog that was formerly Malini slept. Being touched by the water that had washed the brahmana boy's feet, the dog's inauspiciousness immediately vanished so that she could remember her past lives.

While remembering her past sinful behavior, that female dog howled pitifully, saying, "O sage, please save me."

She then informed the brahmana's son of how she had poisoned her husband and had illicit connections with many men. She begged him to be merciful to her and donate some of the merit he had obtained by performing prescribed rituals on Dvādāshi.

After hearing her appeal, the brahmana boy replied, "Mrs. Dog, happiness and distress are the results of one's previous actions. A sin committed against those who are good will only cause misery."



Upon hearing this, the female dog felt very sad. She again howled pitifully in front of the boy, saying, "Please save me, who stays at your door and eats the remnants of your food every day."

The son was unmoved by these words but the father came out of the house in a hurry. When asked, the son told him all that the dog has said about her former life. Padmabandhu then chastised his son for his callousness, saying, "One should work for the welfare of others. The moon, sun, wind, night, fire, water, sandalwood trees, and good people—all these help others. A brahmana must always be merciful. Does Indra not shower rain on sinful people? Does the moon not shine on the houses of chandalas? I will rescue this female dog who is begging for mercy by donating a portion of my merit to her."

The brahmana, Padmabandhu, donated to the female dog the merit that he had earned by following the vow of Dvadashi. As soon as this was spoken by the brahmana, the dog cast off her old, worn-out body and assumed a celestial form. She bade farewell to the brahmana and ascended to the heavenly planets. After enjoying in heaven, she was born from Nara-Narayana Rishi, as Urvashi, and thus became a favorite of the devas as one of the chief Apsaras.

The next section of the Skanda Purana is called Ayodhya-mahatmya. Here, the numerous holy places in and around Ayodhya are described, along with the merit attained by performing pious acts there.

Once, Agastya Muni came to Ayodhya while on a tour of pilgrimage and bathed in the River Sarayu. Here it is stated that the Ganga emanated from the big toe of Lord Vishnu's right foot and the Sarayu emanated from the big toe of His left foot. After visiting numerous holy places in Ayodhya, Agastya Muni felt very blissful. Indeed, the hair of his body stood on end. After staying in Ayodhya for three nights, the sage departed and while on the road, he happened to meet Shrila Vyasadeva.

Shrila Vyasadeva said, "O brahmana, where are you coming

from? You seem very blissful—what is the cause for this? Just by seeing you, I also feel delighted.”

Agastya Muni replied, “I have experienced the wonder of Ayodhya and that is the cause of my ecstasy.”

After hearing this, Shrila Vyasadeva requested the sage, Agastya, to speak about the holy places in Ayodhya and the benefit derived from visiting them. Thus, the narrations included here are spoken by Agastya Muni to Shrila Vyasadeva.

After describing a lake called Papamochana (deliverer from all sins), Agastya mentioned that to the east of it, at a distance of one hundred dhanus (Bow lengths. One dhanu equals three-and-a-half hastas, a measurement of one’s arm.), the tirtha known as Sahasradhara is situated. Being curious, Shrila Vyasadeva wanted to hear about Sahasradhara and so Agastya Muni related this incident, from the pastimes of Lord Rama, which describes the origin of that holy place.

Long ago, Rama, of the Raghu dynasty, completed His mission on behalf of the demigods by removing the burden of the earth (in the form of Ravana). At that time, Kala (eternal time personified) came to see Lord Rama at Ayodhya. Because their talks were very confidential, Lord Rama ordered, “If anyone enters the room and disturbs our conversation, I will punish him by banishing him from My kingdom!”

As Rama and Kala were meeting, Lakshmana guarded the closed door. It so happened that Durvasa Muni came there at that time. Being famished and agitated, he affectionately said, “O son of Sumitra, quickly go and tell Rama that I am here on a mission. Be careful! It would not be in your interest to disobey my request!”

Being afraid of the sage’s curse, Lakshmana opened the door and came before Rama, informing Him that Durvasa Muni, the son of Atri, had come to see Him. Upon hearing this, Rama dismissed Kala and then came out of the room where they had been talking. Rama bowed down to Durvasa Muni with great respect and provided him with an excellent feast, serving him personally.

Thereafter, Lord Rama bade farewell to Durvasa Muni. After the sage's departure, being afraid of violating His vow, Rama abandoned Lakshmana. Lakshmana also wanted His brother's words to remain true and so He left the palace and went to the shore of the Sarayu. After bathing, Lakshmana sat in meditation, fixing His mind on His master, Lord Rama.

After some time, Lord Shesha, who has one thousand hoods, suddenly pierced through the ground in a thousand places and appeared before Lakshmana. He was accompanied by Indra, the king of heaven. As the other chiefs of the demigods watched, Indra sweetly spoke these words to Lakshmana: "Get up! Now, You should return to Your original position. The mission of the demigods has been accomplished by You. Return to the eternal abode of Lord Vishnu. Shesha, Your original form, has appeared before You. He pierced through the earth in one thousand places with His one thousand hoods."

"Because the thousand hoods of Shesha have made one thousand holes in the earth and because they were burnt by the effulgence of the jewels on His hoods, this place will become a holy tirtha known as Sahasradhara. By bathing here, one will become freed from all sins."

In this way, Lakshmana amalgamated Himself with Lord Shesha and returned to His abode in the spiritual sky.

After hearing this, Shrila Vyasadeva inquired, "How did the citizens of Ayodhya attain liberation? How did Lord Rama perform His disappearance, thus returning to His eternal abode in the spiritual sky?"

In reply, Agastya Muni narrated the story as follows. After the completion of His mission and after the disappearance of Lakshmana, Lord Rama desired to return to His supreme abode, along with Bharata and Shatrughna. By means of spies, the monkeys, who could assume any form at will, heard of this. These monkeys were the offspring of the devas, Gandharvas, and sages. Upon understanding that Lord Rama was about to enact His pastime of disappearance, they quickly came to Ayodhya, as did Vibhishana.

After approaching Lord Rama, the leaders of the monkeys said, “O King, we have come here to follow You. If You leave without us, it will be as if we were struck by a huge stick!”

Addressing Vibhishana, Lord Rama said, “I want you to remain here and protect Lanka, ruling your subjects righteously.”

Turning to Hanuman, the Lord said, “O son of the wind-god, may you live a long time! Remember your vow. As long as the people narrate My pastimes, you should sustain your life. Mainda and Dvidida have partaken of heavenly nectar and so, they will live for as long as the earth exists.”

Rama said to all the assembled monkeys, “All of you may come with Me.”

The next morning, at dawn, Lord Rama said to His priest, Vasishtha Muni, “Let the sacred fire proceed Me, along with the brahmanas.”

After some introspection, the sage, Vasishtha, arranged for the performance of all the rites pertaining to the Lord’s departure. Lord Rama then dressed in silk robes and took a clump of darba grass in His hand in preparation for His disappearance from this world. While remaining silent, Lord Rama came out of Ayodhya like the moon rising from the ocean. Various weapons followed the Lord in human forms, as did Bharata and Shatrughna. All the palace residents, including the servants and maidservants, followed Lord Rama. The ministers, along with their families and servants, followed Lord Rama. Indeed, all the citizens of Ayodhya came out to follow their Lord and master, Rama. All were pure souls and all were clad in white.

No one was distressed or dejected, frightened, or miserable. All were delighted and astonished. All living beings who witnessed the departure of Lord Rama from Ayodhya became desirous of attaining liberation from material existence.

Lord Rama arrived at Svargadvara, and there was no living entity that did not follow Him. Turning west, He came to the River Sarayu. At that time, Lord Brahma arrived there, accompanied by all

the demigods and celestial sages. Thus, millions of celestial chariots shone brightly in the sky. Auspicious, fragrant breezes began to blow. There was a shower of flowers carried by a gust of wind.

Lord Rama touched the water of the Sarayu with His feet. Then, along with His two brothers, Rama returned to His eternal abode in the spiritual sky. Lord Brahma then announced, "All those who give up their lives here at Svargadvara will return to the eternal abode of Lord Rama, which is far above my realm."

Just at that moment, the water of the Sarayu rose dramatically, flooding the surrounding area. Everyone, including the monkeys and Rakshashas, joyfully plunged into the water and in this way, cast off their material bodies and then boarded celestial chariots. Even animals and insects cast off their bodies in this way so that all of the inhabitants of Ayodhya went back home, back to Godhead, leaving the city deserted.

There is a description of Urvashi-kunda near Ayodhya. It is said that one who bathes there will attain Urvashi in the heavenly planets.

Formerly, there was a sage named Raibhya who performed austerities in the Himalayas. Upon seeing his how severe the sage's performance of austerities were, the demigods became frightened, thinking that he might soon occupy one of their posts. For this reason, they dispatched Urvashi to disrupt his quest for perfection.

Urvashi began to reside on the slopes of the Himilayas and during the day, she would wander about in a playful manner. She appeared to be a receptacle of all that the god of love possessed. Her waist was slender, her hips broad, her breasts fully developed, and her complexion fair. She was like a spear in the hands of the god of love. She appeared to be a wonderful creation of Cupid for gaining revenge against Lord Shiva, who had burnt him to ashes.

When the sage, Raibhya, happened to see Urvashi pass by, his senses became agitated, and this displeased him. Blazing with anger, the sage cursed the Apsara, saying, "May you become exceedingly

ugly because you are too proud of your beauty. I know that you came near me just to try and obstruct my austerities.”

Urvashi joined her palms in reverence and pleaded, “O holy one, be merciful to me. After all, I am only a tool in the hands of others. How can I become freed from your curse?”

Raibhya replied, “At Ayodhya, there is a very sacred pond. If you bathe there, you will regain your beauty.”

Urvashi did as the sage instructed and after bathing in the kunda, her loveliness was instantly restored. Thereafter, that holy place became famous as Urvashi-kunda.

The next section of the Skanda Purana is called Vasudeva-mahatmya. Once, the sage Savarni approached Skanda and said, “Many religious duties have been recommended in the Vedic literature and many of them are very difficult to perform. I would like to know what religious performance will easily cause one to progress on the path to liberation. There is so much worship of the demigods and goddesses but what kind of benefit can that afford when the deities themselves are destroyed in due course of time? What is the use of working hard to attain temporary benefit? Only He who is eternal and free from the fear of death is the bestower of actual benediction. Kindly tell me about this Supreme Person.”

Skanda replied, “I shall narrate to you a history that will shed light on this subject. After the great war at Kurukshetra was over, Maharaja Yudhisthira had inquired from Bhishma in much the same manner as you.

Maharaja Yudhisthira asked, “Which deity should be worshiped for the attainment of life’s ultimate goal? How can perfection be obtained the most easily? O grandfather, you are omniscient and so please enlighten me in this regard.”

Bhishma, who was lying on a bed of arrows, looked at the lotus face of Lord Krishna, who was seated nearby. By His glance, the Lord indicated that Bhishma should answer Maharaja Yudhisthira’s questions.

Bhishma said, “Lord Krishna, Vasudeva, should be worshiped by all classes of men, whether they are full of material desire, desireless, or even liberated. Whatever act is devoid of a relationship to Lord Krishna should be known as limited and perishable. The only act that is truly righteous is one that aims at pleasing Shri Krishna.”

“In the Krita-yuga, Lord Krishna appeared as the twin forms, Nara and Narayana. From the hermitage of their father, Dharma, they went to perform austerities at Badari. Only those who are blessed by Them are able to see Them there. Once, being inspired from within by Nara and Narayana, who desired to see him, Narada Muni went to Badari.”

Narada Muni was astonished to see how the Lord of all living entities, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, was engaged in apparently worshiping someone else. When Narada Muni inquired about this, Narayana Rishi replied, “This understanding is most confidential and should not be divulged to anyone. We are worshiping Lord Krishna, who is the original form of Godhead.”

Narayana Rishi continued to speak at great length about worship of the Supreme Lord. Narada Muni then said, “Although I am fully satisfied just to see You, I still have a desire to see the form from whom You have expanded.”

Narayana Rishi replied, “That form of mine is only perceivable by means of unalloyed devotional service (bhakti). O Narada, I know that you have undivided devotion for Me and so you will soon have the vision of the Lord at Shvetadvipa. Go there and your desire will be fulfilled.”

After worshiping Nara-Narayana Rishis, Narada ascended to the sky and went to the peak of Mount Meru. From there, in the northern direction, he could see the effulgent White Island, Shvetadvipa, in the ocean of milk. Shvetadvipa was seen by Narada to be filled with all varieties of fruit and flower-bearing trees that were actually desire trees. There were innumerable parks with nice lakes full of blooming lotus flowers. All of the living beings there, both moving and non-moving, were ever-liberated souls.



There, Narada also saw many devotees of the Lord. Some were two-armed and some were four-armed. Some were very fair-complexioned and some had dark complexions. All were devoid of sins and bodily discharges and the six defects of material life (hunger, thirst, decay, death, grief, and illusion). They were dressed in white.

At this point in the narration, Savarni inquired, "O Skanda, Shvetadeva is located in the ocean of milk, which is a part of Bhumandala. How can the inhabitants of Shvetadvipa be ever-liberated souls? This is my doubt."

Skanda replied, "The residents of Shvetadvipa attained perfection by the practice of devotional service to the Lord in many previous births. At the time of annihilation, they will be transferred to the eternal abode of the Lord in the spiritual sky. Even now, they are similar to the eternally liberated souls who reside in Vaikuntha."

With his divine vision, Narada Muni saw Shvetadvipa and its liberated residents from the summit of Mount Meru. Within an instant, he ascended into the sky and arrived at Shvetadvipa.

Narada Muni worshiped the residents of Shvetadvipa and they also honored him. They said, "O sage, you are a devotee of Lord Krishna and so you can see what is difficult for even the demigods to behold. What desire torments you?"

Narada replied, "I am very eager to see Lord Krishna, the Supreme Brahman and the Lord of the universe. O exalted souls, kindly show Him to me!"

Being directed by Lord Krishna within his heart, one of the residents of Shvetadvipa said, "Come, I will take you to Lord Krishna."

The two ascended into the sky, passing over the residences of the demigods. They next passed by the abodes of the sapta-rishis and the pole star. After that, Narada saw Maharloka, Janaloka, and Tapaloka. Finally, after crossing the region of Lord Brahma, Narada and his guide came to the coverings of the universe. Beyond these coverings, they arrived at Goloka, after crossing the river, Viraja, which surrounded the Lord's abode, like a moat.

The River Viraja had the fragrance of sandalwood because of the bathing of innumerable cowherd boys and girls. It appeared very beautiful due to being adorned with white, pink, and blue lotuses. On the shore were many desire trees. There were beautiful jeweled steps leading down to the water, which abounded with swans and other aquatic birds. The absolutely clear water was being drunk by multitudes of wish-fulfilling cows, elephants, and horses.

After crossing the Viraja River, Narada Muni arrived at the golden Mount Shatashringa, which was very pleasing to the mind. In the palaces on the peaks of the mountain, Narada saw mandapas constructed for the rasa-dance, surrounded by very beautiful gardens.

Narada Muni heard the sounds of musical instruments and he saw an unlimited number of gopis. They were all endowed with youth, loveliness of form and features, and incomparably sweet voices. They were engaged in singing the glories of Lord Krishna.

At the foot of the mountain, Narada Muni saw the forest of Vrindavana, which is the playground of Radha and Krishna, and which was beautified by rows of desire trees and lakes filled with lotus flowers. The abode of Goloka appeared splendid with millions of palaces that served as residences of the devotees. Narada saw Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva with articles of worship in their hands.

When Narada Muni came to Lord Krishna's palace, which was surrounded by the palaces of the cowherds, such as Nanda and Vrishabhanu, he saw doorkeepers at the four gates. Narada bowed to the gatekeeper, Shridama, and entered with his permission.

There, Narada saw a wonderful splendor before him that defied description. It was all-pervading and eternal, full of knowledge, and full of bliss. It was by His brilliance that the sun, moon, fire and stars are illuminated. Some (impersonalists) only see the effulgent splendor while others (devotees) see the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Supreme Brahman.

Narada Muni saw within that brilliant effulgence a beautiful palace having thousands of pillars. It was surrounded by innumerable

other palaces that served as residences of the devotees. Within that palace, Narada Muni saw a throne that astonished the mind of the beholder for it was made of the essence of all the most valuable jewels. Seated upon that throne was Lord Krishna, the omniscient Lord of the universe, who is realized as Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagavan, according to one's capacity.

Lord Krishna's ever-youthful form appeared more beautiful than thousands of Cupids. Narada Muni saw the Lord, whose mere glance causes the creation, maintenance, and destruction of countless manifested universes. Lord Krishna was sweetly playing His flute as He was being worshiped by Radha and Her gopi friends. The goddess of fortune was also present, as were Kalindi, Satyabhama, Jambavati, and other wives.

Lord Krishna was waited upon by His attendants, of whom Nanda and Sunanada were prominent, as well as by the personified Vedas and personified weapons, such as Sudarshana. The cowherd boys were also present, headed by Shridama, as were Garuda and the eight mystic powers in personified forms.

Upon seeing Lord Krishna, whose vision awards one complete satisfaction, Narada's hair stood on end and his eyes filled with tears. Overwhelmed by feelings of love, Narada fell to the floor like a stick to offer obeisances. Then, as Narada stood up, Lord Krishna welcomed him with great respect.

After hearing the Lord's nectarean words of welcome, Narada glorified Him with nice prayers. He concluded by praying, "O Lord of the demigods, please confer upon me that favor whereby my devotion for Your lotus feet will always remain unshakable."

Lord Krishna said, "O sage, you have been able to see Me because of your unalloyed devotion for Me, your absence of hypocrisy, and My desire to see you. In you there will always reside non-violence, celibacy, detachment from the objects of worldly enjoyment, and self-realization."

"As four-armed Vishnu, I reside in Vaikuntha, along with Lakshmi and My servants, of whom Garuda and Nanda are the

chief. In Shvetadvipa, I give darshana five times daily to the ever-liberated souls that reside there. As Aniruddha, Pradyumna, and Sankarshana, I carry out the creation, maintenance, and destruction of the innumerable crores of brahmandas (universes)."

Lord Krishna continued speaking to Narada, describing His various incarnations within human society for annihilating the demons, protecting the devotees, and re-establishing the principles of religion. The Lord concluded by saying, "O sage, ask for any benediction that may be desired by you. I am very pleased with you and so, My darshana should not be fruitless."

In reply, Narada requested, "May I always be eager to sing about Your glories, as well as those of Your exalted devotees. May I have ever-increasing love and devotion for You."

While giving His consent, Lord Krishna handed Narada Muni a wonderful vina and instructed him, "You should go to Badarikashrama and worship the son of Dharma, Narayana Rishi. My devotees, such as you, who are exclusively attached to Me, know everything about My form, qualities, and pastimes. I reside within their hearts and they reside within Mine. Just as chaste, devoted wives bring their good husbands under their control by their good qualities, my devotees conquer Me. Know for certain that for those who desire liberation from material existence, the only means is association with devotees like yourself."

Narada Muni bowed down before Lord Krishna and departed, following his guide, the resident of Shvetadvipa, as before. After leaving his guide at Shvetadvipa, Narada quickly went to Mount Meru. From there, he went to Gandamadana, and then arrived at Badarikashrama. There, Narada Muni saw the two divine sages, Nara and Narayana, performing great austerities. Their effulgence superseded the light of the sun. They had a circular mass of matted hair. Their arms were long and they wore white garments. Their bodies were adorned with all auspicious markings and they were most attractive.

After approaching Nara and Narayana Rishis, Narada Muni circumambulated them and then fell to the ground to offer obeisances.

Thereafter, as Narada stood before them with folded hands, Nara and Narayana Rishis welcomed him with offerings of arghya and padya.

Thereafter, as they were comfortably seated, Narayana Rishi asked, “O brahmana, was the Supreme Soul, the origin of us both, seen by you in His abode?”

Narada replied, “I saw Lord Krishna in His eternal abode and it was He who sent me here to see You.”

Narayana Rishi advised Narada to remain at Badarikashrama for some time and perform austerities. He said, “O sage, the Lord is never satisfied by a person who has not performed penance.”

Thereafter, at Narada Muni’s request, Narayana Rishi spoke at great length about pure devotional service to Lord Krishna. Here are a few of His interesting instructions.

Moral conduct is different for the four varnas and four ashramas. This is called svadharma. There are some duties that are common to all men, however, and ahimsa (non-violence) is the foremost. Other common duties are the following of Ekadashi and fasting on Janmastami; satisfaction with that which one receives by destiny; gladly donating wealth to a suitable person; restraint of lust, anger and greed; avoidance of meat and liquor, abstinence from adultery, straightforwardness of behavior, and the performance of devotional service to the Lord.

Austerity is characterized by a reduction in the enjoyment of objects permitted in the shastra. The means of livelihood for a brahmana are teaching, the performance of sacrifice on behalf of others, and accepting gifts from pure persons. The last is only to be adopted in an emergency. The means of livelihood for a kshatriya is to collect taxes from those he protects, except brahmanas.

After hearing from Narayana Rishi, Narada Muni said, “Whatever you have said has been understood by me. For some time, I will remain here and perform austerities and hear Your talks on Krishna consciousness. In this way, I am sure that I will become more mature in spiritual life.”

Narada Muni remained at Badarikashrama for one thousand celestial years. Every day, at a scheduled time, he listened to Narayana Rishi's discussions based on shastra. One day, Narayana Rishi said to him, "O great sage, you have reached the stage of perfection. Go now and preach Krishna consciousness for the welfare of the people of the world. It is your duty to spread the teachings of pure devotional service everywhere."

After offering many nice prayers to Narayana Rishi, Narada Muni departed, going first to the ashram of Shrila Vyasadeva at Shamyaprasa. After being welcomed by all the sages present there, Narada Muni repeated to Shrila Vyasadeva all that he had heard from Narayana Rishi.

Narada Muni next went to Brahmaloaka. There, he spoke in an assembly of demigods and Pitris as Lord Brahma also listened. The sun-god was present in that assembly and later on, he taught whatever he had heard to the Valakhilyas, who precede him on his chariot. These sages passed on the understanding of pure devotional service to Indra and other demigods as they were seated atop Mount Meru. These demigods imparted that knowledge to the sage, Asita, who then spoke it to the Pitris when he happened to visit their planet. The Pirti, Aryama, spoke this understanding of devotional service to King Shantanu, who later on imparted it to his son, Bhishma. At the end of the Kurukshetra war, as he was lying on a bed of arrows, Bhishma spoke this science to Maharaja Yudhishthira. Narada was present in that assembly and later on, he repeated all that he had heard to Lord Shiva at Kailasa.

Skanda had been narrating this story to the sage, Savarni. Skanda said, "My father, in turn, narrated the teachings of Narayana Rishi to me. At your request, I have imparted all that I had learned to you. When Maharaja Yudhishthira heard from Bhishma that his maternal uncle's son (Krishna) is the original cause of all causes, he felt great delight. Indeed, everyone present on that occasion became solely devoted to the son of Devaki. After bowing down to Him with great reverence, everyone dedicated their lives to His devotional service."

“Those who listen to this glorification of Lord Vasudeva will have all of their desires fulfilled. Those who are unalloyed devotees will return to the eternal abode of the Lord. Those who aspire to become righteous will become very pious men. One who desires wealth will attain it and one who desires liberation will be released from the cycle of repeated birth and death. A student will attain knowledge and a sick person will be cured.”

“A brahmana will attain brahminical luster, a kshatriya the rule of a kingdom, a vaishya wealth, and a shudra happiness. A king going into battle will achieve victory, a woman will attain the favor of her husband, and a girl will attain her desired groom.”

Wife, sons, wealth, servants, relatives, dear ones, brothers, father, other family members, learning, beauty, house, youth, and multitudes of beautiful women—all of these are of no use at the time of death. Adherence to Krishna consciousness is the only true friend of the living entity.

Once, Narada Muni came to see Maharaja Yudhisthira. Narada had placed his vina, named Mahati, under his arm and in his hands, he carried a staff and a water pot. He had a huge mass of matted hair, he wore gold ornaments, and the hide of a black antelope served as his upper garment. He wore cloth that was as white as moon rays.

Narada Muni is a master of the Vedic literature, as well as the art of playfully provoking people’s enmity. He is the one who exposes the secrets of the world, thus causing quarrels.

Narada Muni explained to Maharaja Yudhisthira that he had just come from the abode of Lord Brahma, where he had heard many wonderful stories. When the king asked Narada to recount them, the sage said that he could not stay very long. Narada Muni told Maharaja Yudhisthira that he should go bathe in the Ganga and very soon, Shrila Vyasadeva would meet him and tell him whatever he desired. After saying this, Narada Muni disappeared from view.

Later that day, Shrila Vyasadeva entered the assembly of Maharaja Yudhisthira. After being worshiped by the king and his



brothers, when Shrila Vyasadeva was comfortably seated, he began his narrations.

Once, during Treta-yuga, Yamaraja performed terrible austerities in a forest for thirty thousand years, while seated at the base of an ashoka tree. While Yamaraja remained motionless, his bones became bereft of flesh as ants and worms ate his body. Indeed, his life was sustained merely by his inherent vitality. It was as though he remained alive simply because it was his destiny. The fact that he was still alive was indicated by the movement of breath within his nostrils.

Becoming fearful, the demigods approached Lord Brahma and informed him of Yamaraja's austerities. Lord Brahma then took the demigods to Mount Kailasa to see Lord Shiva, who was engaged in meditation while seated in the shade of a parijata tree, along with Uma.

Lord Brahma offered prayers to Lord Shiva and then fell to the ground to offer obeisances. When Lord Shiva inquired about the purpose of his visit, Brahma explained how Yamaraja was engaged in performing very severe austerities. Brahma said, "We do not know for what purpose he is performing penance but maybe he desires one of our posts. While thinking in that way, the demigods fearfully approached me. We request you to go and make Yamaraja desist from his practice. Ask him what he wants."

In reply, Lord Shiva assured the demigods that they need not fear Yamaraja and so they returned to their respective abodes. Indra, however, could not find any peace, sleep, or happiness. Being convinced that Yamaraja desired his post, the king of heaven summoned the chief demigods and said, "Listen to the cause of my grief. I believe that Yama craves all that I have acquired with great difficulty."

Brihaspati said, "O residents of heaven, don't you have the means to obstruct Yama's penance? Why don't you send Urvashi and other Apsaras to bewilder him?"

Thereafter, many principal Apsaras were summoned. When they arrived at his assembly, Indra said, "I have a very important task for you. Go to the forest where Yamaraja is performing austerities

that are very difficult for anyone to execute. By means of your seductive charm, smiles, and glances, as well as sensual songs and dances, tempt him so that he will have a great fall from his pedestal of penance.”

After hearing this, the Apsaras consulted one another. Finally, Urvashi departed for the forest known as Dharmaranya, along with many of her friends, as the demigods and brahmanas encouraged them by offering lavish praise. Urvashi reached the dense and dark forest in a happy mood because she naturally enjoyed flirting with excellent men. In that wonderful forest, there were no trees without flowers or fruit. None had thorns and none were without swarms of bees. Upon seeing the delightful forest, Urvashi became even more pleased.

There, she saw the River Yamuna, the daughter of the sun-god, and within the forest, an ashram of sages. The wild animals in that region were as gentle as pets. A mongoose was seen playing with a snake, a cat with a mouse, and a lion with baby deer.

From afar, Indra viewed the forest and spoke to Urvashi: “This Yamaraja is performing severe penance in the hopes of attaining my post as king of heaven. All of you must do your best to obstruct his austerities. This is my command.”

Upon hearing this, Urvashi, Tilottama, Sukeshi, Manjughosha, Ghritachi, Menaka, Visvachi, Rambha, Pramlocha, Charubhashini, Purvachitti, Surupa and the many other Apsaras glanced at one another with fear and suspicion, thinking, “Yama and Indra are both very powerful and both are our shelter.”

The lovely Vardhani then said to Urvashi, “Why do you worry? By the strength of my beauty and mystic power, I shall bring Yamaraja under my control.”

Indra said, “Excellent. Accomplish your task without delay. You are certainly capable of seducing anyone!”

Saying, “So be it,” Vardhani went to where Yamaraja was standing, holding a vina in her hand. When the sound of her singing, accompanied by her vina, entered Yama’s ears, it agitated his mind.

At this point, Maharaja Yudhisthira interrupted Shrila Vyasadeva by saying, “O brahmana, I am very surprised to learn that there can be a disruption in the penance of one who is self-realized, like Dharmaraja (Yama). The entire world is under the rule of Dharma. How then could he become disturbed and agitated?”

Shrila Vyasadeva said, “Degradation is the cause of falling into hell after death. A woman’s vagina is like the hell, Kumbhipaka, on earth. With strong rope, in the form of loving glances, women bind even elevated personalities. Men are beaten senseless by the stout sticks of women’s breasts. After rendering him senseless, a woman sends a man to hell. Indeed, women have been created to entice and stupefy men. As long as a woman is not present, like a net to trap a poor animal, so long there can be steadiness of mind, learning, and truthfulness—even for advanced souls.”

“As long as one does not see the face of a fickle-minded, doe-eyed woman, so long there can be progress in penance, control of the senses, adherence to learning, purity, righteous behavior, and an attitude of sympathy toward all living beings. As long as one has not been toppled, and bound by the noose in the form of an amorous woman, so long there can be respect for one’s parents, a sense of shame and fear, and adherence to good conduct.”

After saying this, Shrila Vyasadeva continued his narration: When Yamaraja opened his eyes and saw Vardhani before him, he thought, “Who is this beautiful woman? What is she doing here in this uninhabited forest?”

Dharmaraja said, “O respectable lady, why do you walk alone in this dreadful forest? Where have you come from? O beautiful one, whose wife are you? Whose daughter are you? Are you a human being, a Gandharva woman, a goddess, a Kinnari, an Apsara, or a demoness? Tell me the truth. What do you want? Whatever you desire, I shall give you.”

Vardhani replied by asking, “It is very difficult to attain perfection in this life. What are you trying to accomplish?”

Dharmaraja said, “O beautiful lady, I wish to see the actual form of Lord Shiva. I know that if I see Lord Shiva, my fame will last for many kalpas. It is for this reason that I am performing such difficult austerities. Now, tell me—why have you come here? What do you want?”

Vardhani replied, “The king of heaven is afraid of your penance and so he asked me to come here and disturb you. He is afraid of losing his throne. I am telling you the truth.”

Yamaraja was very pleased to hear these truthful words. He said, “I am very satisfied with you. Tell me your desire and I will award you a benediction. I am Yamaraja (the restrainer) for those who are sinful, and I am Dharmaraja (the righteous one) for those who have controlled their senses and act piously.”

Vardhani said, “Please award me eternal residence in the abode of Indra, which is such a delightful place.”

Yama replied, “Let it be so. Now, ask me for another benediction because I am delighted with you.”

Vardhani said, “Let there be established in this forest a holy place bearing my name that will be the destroyer of all sins. Let there be a lake called Vardhamana.”

Yamaraja said, “So be it,” and remained silent. Vardhani circumambulated Dharmaraja three times and then returned to heaven. She informed Indra, “Do not be afraid. Yamaraja has no desire to occupy your post. He only wants to establish his eternal fame.”

Indra was very pleased to hear this and he heartily thanked Vardhani. After Vardhani’s departure, Yamaraja resumed his austerities. In summer, he stood motionless, surrounded by five fires (the panchagni vrata). After one hundred years, Yamaraja took a vow of silence and remained motionless like a statue. Because of this, after some time, he became covered by anthills. Still, because of his severe penance, the residents of heaven became disturbed and so they went to Mount Kailasa to take shelter of Lord Shiva.

After hearing the demigods’ appeal for protection, Lord Shiva

asked, "Who has offended you? What happened and where? Tell me quickly. Rest assured that I will destroy your enemy."

In response, the demigods explained how they were being tormented by Yamaraja's severe austerities. After hearing everything from the demigods, Lord Shiva mounted his bull carrier after picking up his weapons and went to where Yamaraja was standing.

Lord Shiva said, "O Yama, my mind is delighted by your austerities. Tell me the benediction you seek. Rest assured that I shall grant you the fulfillment of your desire."

After hearing Lord Shiva's speech, Yamaraja emerged from the anthills and joined his palms in reverence, while offering nice prayers. After being praised by Dharmaraja, Lord Shiva repeated his request that he accept a benediction.

Yamaraja asked that the forest where he performed austerities become a renowned holy place bearing his name. When Lord Shiva granted this wish and requested Yama to accept another boon, the lord of death asked that his fame would be prominent in every age. Lord Shiva granted this wish as well. At this time, the demigods, being very pleased, showered flowers. The Gandharvas sang while the Apsaras danced ecstatically. Lord Shiva bade farewell and then returned to Mount Kailasa.

Thereafter, while instructing Maharaja Yudhisthira, Shrila Vyasadeva said, "One should acquire piety slowly and steadily, like an ant building an anthill. One should abstain from inflicting injury upon others because this will act adversely in his next birth. Everyone considers himself to be more important than his father, mother, son, brother, or wife. Actually, a person is alone when he is born and he is alone when he dies. He suffers or enjoys the results of his activities alone."

"When the body begins to disintegrate after the departure of the soul, it resembles a clod of earth or piece of wood. After cremating the body, the relatives turn their faces and return home. It is the results of actions alone that follow a person after death and so one should be careful to accumulate piety, as far as possible."

“The lord of death harasses a brahmana who habitually neglects the study of the Vedic literature, who transgresses the codes of good conduct, who partakes of food offered by wicked-minded people, and who is lazy.”

“The following six classes of people are worthy of receiving charity—a traveler, one who has lost his job, a student, one who maintains his preceptor, a recluse, and a person who has taken the vow of celibacy.”

Next, many restrictions are listed as being beneficial for one’s welfare. One should not look at the sun when it rises or sets, or during an eclipse. One should not look at one’s reflection in water. One should not stare at a naked woman and one should not bathe naked.

One should not have sexual intercourse with a woman in her period. One should not eat with one’s wife. One should not urinate on an anthill or on ashes. One should not urinate in a hole where there are many insects. One should not urinate while standing or while walking. One should not evacuate while facing a brahmana, the sun, a fire, the moon, or elders. One should not blow on fire. One should not place his feet near a fire to warm them in winter. One should not throw impure things into a fire. One should never purposely harm any living being. One should not eat at dusk or at dawn.

One should not look at a calf drinking her mother’s milk and one should not point out a rainbow in the sky. No one should sleep alone in an isolated place. No one should wake up a sleeping man. No one should proceed on a journey alone. No one should drink water from the palms of his hands. One should not eat yogurt at night. One should not speak directly to a woman who is in her monthly period. One should not eat to one’s full satisfaction at night.

No one should be overly fond of song and dance routines. One should not wear shoes or clothes that were worn by someone else. One should not eat food from a broken vessel. One should not sit on a chair that was partially burnt. One should not ride on a bull if he

desires to live a long life, and one should avoid the rays of the early morning sun. One should not cut his fingernails with his teeth. One should never start a task that he cannot finish.

One should not lie down or sleep naked. One who eats with wet feet will not live long. One should not lie down with wet feet. One should not eat or drink while lying in bed. One who desires good health should not sit with his shoes on or drink water while standing up. One should never look at stool or urine. One should not scratch his head with both hands. One should never impart a Vedic mantra to a shudra. A brahmana who does so will find that his brahminical prowess diminishes.

Shaunaka Rishi requested, "I would like you to talk about the characteristics of chaste women."

Suta Gosvami said, "Fruitful indeed is the life of a man in whose house there lives a chaste woman. Even talk about such a woman awards one pious merit."

"A chaste woman eats after her husband has finished eating and when he stands up, she stands up with him. She goes to bed after he has slept and in the morning, she wakes up before him. When her husband is out of town, a chaste wife dresses very simply, without any jewelry or cosmetics. A chaste woman never calls her husband by his name and she never mentions the name of another man."

"When her husband says, 'Do this,' she replies, 'My lord, rest assured that it is already as good as done.' When her husband calls her, a chaste wife will put down whatever she is doing and immediately come to him, saying, 'Please tell me for what purpose I have been called.'"

"A chaste woman will eat the remnants of her husband's food. She never attends a marriage or other social function without her husband. When her husband is asleep or absorbed in doing something, she will never disturb him. When she has her monthly period, a chaste woman will not even come before her husband or have her voice heard by him."

“A chaste woman will never speak to a woman who is critical of her husband. She never bathes naked. She never exhibits boldness except during sexual dalliance. She always shows interest in whatever is of interest to her husband. The vow of a chaste woman and her highest virtue is that she never disobeys the order of her husband.”

“A chaste woman never gives up her husband, even if he is impotent, miserly, ill, senile, or invalid. A hot-tempered woman who replies to her husband rudely is reborn as a female village dog. Indeed, a chaste woman never speaks harshly to her husband. Even if struck by her husband, a chaste wife will not lift her hand to strike him back. A wife who casts loving glances at others will be reborn with squinting eyes.”

“Upon seeing the return of her husband, a chaste woman will hurriedly receive him with offerings of water, a nice seat, massaging his feet, sweet words, and other such services. A father give one little, a brother gives one little, and a son gives one little but a husband gives a woman much. What woman would fail to worship her husband?”

“Just as a body without a soul immediately becomes impure so a woman without her husband is to be considered impure, even if she has bathed very nicely. A widow is the most inauspicious of all inauspicious things. If one sees a widow while engaged in some task, that work will never be accomplished. A woman who burns her body along with the body of her deceased husband achieves the merit of performing a horse sacrifice with each step she takes to the crematorium.”

“Are there no women in every house who pride themselves on their beauty and charm? It is only by devotion to the Lord that one is able to obtain a chaste wife. For a householder, the wife is the source of his happiness and the fruit of his virtue. Just as the body becomes purified by contact with the water of the Ganga, the home becomes auspicious by the presence of a chaste woman.”



In the course of describing the glories of Dharmaranya, the forest where Yamaraja had performed severe austerities, the origin of Ganesha is narrated by Shrila Vyasadeva as follows.

Once, Parvati applied a kind of liniment all over her body in preparation for bathing. She then scraped that liniment off and held it in her hand. In a playful mood, Parvati molded the form of a boy with that liniment and she found it to be very attractive and so, she infused it with life.

The boy stood in front of his mother and said, "What shall I do at your command?"

Parvati replied, "While I bathe, stand here at the door and guard it. Make sure that no one comes and disturbs me."

As the boy stood in the doorway with weapons in hand, Lord Shiva came there and started to enter the room where Parvati was bathing. However, the boy blocked his way and this infuriated Mahadeva. Soon, a great duel was fought. The boy struck Lord Shiva in the forehead with his axe. In response, Mahadeva raised his trident and brought it down on the boy's head so that he fell to the ground, dead.

When Parvati came and saw what had happened, she began to cry most pitifully. Upon seeing his wife's agitation, Lord Shiva wondered, "What wrong was done by me?"

At that time, Mahadeva saw a great demon, named Gajasura, pass by. He beheaded the demon, who had the form of an elephant, and placed the head on the dead body of the boy that had been created by Parvati. Immediately, the boy regained his life and stood up.

That boy became known as Gajanana (elephant faced), as well as Ganapati and Ganesha.

Samjna, the daughter of Vishvakarma, was given in marriage to the sun-god. However, she could not bear her husband's great effulgence and so, whenever she saw him, she would close her eyes. This made Ravi (the sun-god) very angry and so he told her,

“Because you close your eyes every time you see me, O deluded woman, Yamaraja will be born as your son.”

After hearing this, Samjna fearfully glanced at her husband. Seeing her fear, the sun-god said, “Samjna, when you see me, you turn your head away. For this reason, you will have a daughter of unsteady character.”

Due to this curse of her husband, Samjna received a son, Yamaraja, and a daughter, the River Yamuna. Still, being unable to bear her husband’s effulgence, she thought, “What can I do? Where shall I go? Where can I get relief? How will my husband’s anger subside?”

Finally, Samjna decided to go to her father’s house. First, she created a reflection of herself and told her, “Stay here with the sun-god just as I do. Make sure that you treat my husband and children nicely. You should never speak any disagreeable words to the sun-god. If asked, say that you are indeed Samjna. Don’t give anyone reason to doubt your real identity.”

The shadow Samjna replied, “I will carry out your order but only so long as no one grabs hold of my hair or curses me.”

With this understanding, Samjna went to Vishvakarma’s house. She was welcomed by her father and remained at his house for some time. Finally, however, Vishvakarma said to her, “My dear daughter, you have been here for many days although for me, it has seemed like a few moments. Still, staying at her father’s house for a long time is not conducive to the good reputation of a woman. You are married to the sun-god and so, now you should return to his abode. Come and see me again after some time.”

Samjna departed and went to the realm of the Northern Kurus, where she performed austerities in the guise of a mare. She didn’t return to her husband because she was still unable to bear his terrible effulgence.

Meanwhile, the sun-god considered the shadow Samjna to be his beloved wife and he begot in her two sons and a charming daughter. However, the shadow Samjna did not treat the children

of Samjna as affectionately as she did her own. Thus, she exhibited partiality in her manner of fondling them and feeding them. Manu was willing to forgive this behavior but not Yama. Indeed, once he raised his leg to kick his so-called mother. At that time, he controlled his anger and so did not actually touch her with his foot.

However, the shadow Samjna became furious. As her lips trembled with rage, she raised her fist and cursed Yama by saying, "Because you raised your foot to kick me, it will fall off this very day!"

After hearing this, Yama became suspicious of the shadow Samjna's true identity. He approached his father and said, "I have never heard of this before—that a mother curses her son. This mother does not speak to me with the same affection as my real mother."

After hearing this, the sun-god called for the shadow Samjna and asked her, "Where has my wife gone?"

The shadow Samjna replied, "I am the daughter of Vishvakarma, your wife, and these are all my children."

Although the sun-god asked her this many times, the shadow Samjna didn't reveal the truth to him. Because of this, the sun-god prepared to curse her and so, the shadow Samjna told him all that had actually happened. After learning the truth of the matter, the sun-god went to Vishvakarma's house. After being honored by him, the sun-god inquired about Samjna. When informed that she had already left, the sun-god went into a trance of meditation and saw his wife, in the guise of a mare, performing austerities in the province of the Northern Kurus.

In this way, the sun-god came to understand that his wife could not bear his effulgence and so was performing austerities in the hopes of reducing his glare. The sun-god then went to where his wife was performing penance, after assuming the form of a horse. In this form, the sun-god had sexual relations with his wife and as a result, the twin Asvini-kumaras were born upon the earth, from their mother's nostrils.

Formerly, a great sacrifice was performed by the demigods upon the surface of the earth. Desiring the presence of Lord Vishnu, the demigods went to the ocean of milk but could not find Him there. Being deluded, the demigods searched all over the universe and when they failed to find Lord Vishnu, they approached Brihaspati and said, “Kindly tell us the whereabouts of Lord Vishnu, our master.”

In response, Brihaspati went into a trance of meditation and soon, Lord Vishnu revealed Himself. Brihaspati then took the demigods and hurried to where Lord Vishnu was staying. They saw Him engaged in meditation, holding a bow in His hand.

Brihaspati thought, “How can I make the Lord come out of His trance of meditation?” He then told the demigods, “If termites were to cut the Lord’s bowstring, He would certainly come to His external senses upon hearing the sound.”

The demigods said to the ants, “Kindly cut the Lord’s bowstring because we have some important matter to discuss.”

The ants replied, “Those who disturb someone’s sleep, interrupt a story from the Puranas, cause enmity between husband and wife, and separate a child from his mother go to hell. The Lord of the universe is absorbed in meditation and so, we don’t want to disturb him.”

Lord Brahma said, “It is your nature to nibble at anything. So that our sacrifice can be successfully completed, you should do as we ask.”

The queen of the ants replied, “We have nothing to do with you or your sacrifice and so, why should we disturb the Lord? Let me have a share of the sacrificial offerings and then I will see what can be done.”

The demigods said, “We will give you a share of the sacrificial offerings, as you desire. Now, do as we have requested.”

Lord Brahma gave his consent and thereafter, the ants began to nibble at Lord Vishnu’s bowstring.

At this point in the story, Maharaja Yudhisthira commented,

“O son of Satyavati, waking up the Lord by means of cutting His bowstring is certainly something wonderful.”

Shrila Vyasadeva replied, “The minds of the demigods were deluded by maya. The bow of Lord Vishnu had been strung, for what purpose we do not know. Thereafter, the ants built an anthill until it reached the bow of Lord Vishnu. The moment the bowstring was eaten through by the ants, Lord Vishnu’s head was cut off by the force of the tip of the bow as it sprang back to its normal condition.”

Being unable to see Lord Vishnu’s head (because it went to a destination not perceivable by mundane eyes), the demigods became very anxious while searching for it, here and there. When even Lord Brahma failed to find Lord Vishnu’s head, he said to Vishvakarma, “You alone are capable of accomplishing anything imaginable. Do something to restore Lord Vishnu’s head.”

Vishvakarma replied, “The demigods had previously deprived me of my share of sacrificial offerings. First, command the demigods to award me my proper share in the sacrifice that is to be completed.”

Lord Brahma assured Vishvakarma that he would receive shares in all subsequent sacrificial performances. He then said, “Now, join the head of Lord Vishnu to His body.”

Vishvakarma told the demigods, “Bring me the head.”

The demigods replied, “That is what we do not have!”

It was mid-day and at that time, the demigods could see Surya seated upon his chariot, which was pulled by a horse. They quickly went and detached the horse from the chariot. After the demigods cut off the horse’s head, Vishvakarma joined it to the body of Lord Vishnu. Having accomplished this, the demigods began to glorify Lord Hayagriva with many nice prayers.

Being pleased by the demigods’ prayers, Lord Hayagriva said, “Why have you all assembled on the earth? Are you being harassed by the demons?”

The demigods replied, “We have no fear of the demons right now. We are very eager to perform a sacrifice. To invite You, we looked in all directions but, being deluded by maya, we failed to find You.

We were then brought here by Brihaspati. Seeing You absorbed in meditation, we engaged the ants in cutting Your bowstring. When this was done, however, Your head was somehow severed and so, Vishvakarma joined the head of the sun-god's horse to Your torso. It is for this reason that You now have the head of a horse."

Lord Hayagriva said, "I find this form very attractive and so I am not at all displeased. Rest assured that I will grant you your desired benedictions."

Śrīla Vyāsadeva said, "Thereafter, the sacrifice of the demigods was brought to a successful conclusion. The ants and Vishvakarma received their due shares of the offerings. Finally, the demigods returned to their respective abodes."

Maharaja Yudhisthira said, "Lord Vishnu previously covered the entire universe with just two steps (as Lord Vamanadeva). At the root of each of His hair there are thousands of brahmandas (universes in seed form). How then could His head have been severed?"

Śrīla Vyāsadeva explained, "No conditioned soul can possibly understand the transcendental pastimes of the Lord. Listen as I relate the explanation that is given in the Puranas."

Once, the demigods, headed by Indra, arrived at the assembly of Lord Brahma. At that time, Lord Vishnu also came there because He had been invited to take part in some discussion. Being deluded by arrogance, Lord Brahma asked the demigods, "Who among the three (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) is actually supreme? Tell the truth."

The demigods were quite surprised that Lord Brahma would ask such a question. They replied, "We do not know." Lord Brahma's wife then asked Lord Vishnu, "Tell me—who is the greatest of these three lords?"

Lord Vishnu simply replied, "Everyone within the three worlds is deluded by the illusory energy of the Lord."

Lord Brahma said, "This is not true. No one is deluded by Your *māyā*! The actual protector of the universe cannot be arrogant or violent."

When Lord Vishnu continued to disagree with him, Lord Brahma became furious. With his lips trembling due to anger, he cursed Lord Vishnu, saying, "Before long, Your head will fall from Your body!"

As soon as this curse was uttered, there was an uproar in the assembly of demigods. King Indra and some other chiefs of the demigods then made Brahma apologize to Lord Vishnu. Still, Lord Vishnu said, "Whatever was predicted by Brahma will certainly come to pass."

Thereafter, Lord Vishnu went and performed austerities at the forest known as Dharmaranya. After receiving the head of a horse, Lord Hayagriva continued His austerities and Lord Brahma accompanied Him. At the end of His period of penance, Lord Vishnu regained His original form.

The next section of the Skanda Purana is called the Brahmottara Khanda. Suta Gosvami narrated the following story. There was a king in the family of Dasharha who ruled his kingdom from his capital, Mathura. He was intelligent and brave, youthful and handsome. He married the daughter of the King of Kashi, named Kalavati, who was a very attractive and qualified girl.

After the marriage ceremony, the king returned to his palace, along with his newly-wedded wife. That night, when she lay down on her bed, the king called for her so that they could engage in sexual indulgence. Indeed, he called her many times but because she was not inclined to enjoy sex, she did not come near him. Finally, the king got up from his bed, thinking to take her by force.

The queen said, "Don't touch me! You should know what is dharma and what is adharma. Don't do anything rash! Learned authorities approve of sexual indulgence on certain occasions—that is true. Sexual intercourse is certainly very pleasurable if both husband and wife equally desire it. You will be able to enjoy me when the desire for sex is aroused in me. What happiness could a man derive by forcibly raping a young woman? No man should approach

with lust a woman who is not interested in having sex with him, or a sickly woman, a pregnant woman, or one who is in her monthly period.”

“A loving husband should lustily approach his young wife after fondling her and pleasing her in various ways, after a great deal of coaxing, and after sympathetically seeing that all of her requirements have been met. A man who desires to receive pleasure from a woman should act in this way.”

Although instructed by his chaste wife in this way, the king, who was overwhelmed by lust, went to drag her forcibly to his bed. And yet, as soon as he embraced her, he felt her to be as hot as iron placed in a fire. Being scorched and terrified, he pushed her aside.

The king said, “What a miracle! How did your body, which is tender like the sprout of a plant, become red-hot like fire?”

Kalavati smiled modestly and replied, “In my childhood, the great sage, Durvasa, had kindly imparted to me the five-syllable mantra of Lord Shiva (shivaya namah). By regularly chanting this mantra, my body has become free from all sin and impurities. Sinful persons bereft of good fortune are unable to even touch me.”

“O King, you regularly take pleasure in the company of prostitutes and other women who indulge in drinking liquor. You do not bathe every day, nor do you worship Lord Shiva or Lord Vishnu. How can you consider yourself to be fit to touch my body?”

The King said, “O lady with excellent buttocks, initiate me into the chanting of the five-syllable mantra of Lord Shiva. I wish to enjoy you after becoming freed of all sins by chanting that mantra.”

Kalavati said, “I cannot instruct you because you are senior to me. You should approach the sage, Garga, the foremost of those who are conversant with mantras.”

Thereafter, the queen and king went to see Gargamuni. After worshipping the sage, the king requested him to impart unto him the five-syllable mantra of Lord Shiva. In response, the sage took the royal couple to the shore of the River Yamuna. The preceptor seated



himself at the base of a sacred tree and asked the king to bathe and observe fasting for the day.

Later that day, after offering obeisances to Lord Shiva, Gargamuni placed his hand on the king's head and imparted to him the five-syllable mantra of Mahadeva. Due to the potency of this mantra and the touch of the great sage, flocks of crows immediately flew out from the king's body. The wings of these crows were burnt and while screaming, they fell to the ground, reduced to ashes.

Upon seeing this, both the queen and king were astonished. The king asked Garga Rishi, "A flock of crows came out from my body! How did this miracle happen? What is the meaning of this?"

Gargamuni said, "O King, you had accumulated innumerable heinous sins in the course of thousands of previous births. There were also meritorious acts performed by you that resulted in your birth in a royal family. When the five-syllable mantra of Lord Shiva entered deep within your heart, millions of sins came out in the form of crows. In other words, all of your sins were burnt to ashes by your chanting of the five-syllable mantra of Lord Shiva. Now that you are freed from all previous sins, you can enjoy with your wife to your heart's content."

Once, while returning from Gokarna, the sage, Gautama, bathed in a river and then sat down beneath a banyan tree to rest. Not far from him, the sage saw an old, blind chandala woman who was about to die. She was emaciated, her mouth was dry, and she was obviously tormented by various ailments. There were leprosy wounds on her body that were infested with worms. Around her waist hung a cloth that was stained with pus and blood. All of her teeth had fallen out. She coughed repeatedly due to some lung disease. She rolled on the ground, groaning in pain, so that her entire body was covered with dust. Her body was also covered with her urine and stool, so that she emitted a very foul odor.

By looking at this chandala woman, a feeling of great pity welled up in Gautama's heart. He sat there watching, expecting

her to die at any moment. Suddenly, the sage saw the arrival of a celestial chariot and inside, four assistants of Lord Shiva, who were as splendid as the sun. He quickly approached the celestial chariot, even as it remained in the air, and asked the servants of Lord Shiva, "Have you come here for the protection of the three worlds or is this just one of your pleasure pastimes. Kindly tell me your reason for coming here." The messengers of Lord Shiva replied, "Being directed by Lord Shiva, we have come to take this chandala woman to him when she dies."

Astonished, Gautama Rishi said, "How can this fierce, sinful chandala woman deserve to ride on a celestial chariot? That would be like a female dog entering a sacrificial arena. Why are you taking this bag of evil conduct to the abode of Lord Shiva? She has no knowledge of Lord Shiva, she has not performed any austerities, and she possesses no truth or compassion. She regularly ate meat and drank liquor, and she was always engaged in harming others. Even the very sight of her should be shunned by good men and so, what to speak of conversation? If she had performed some meritorious act in a previous life then why is she being tormented like this now? Wonderful indeed is the plan of the lord because even a most sinful soul is being taken to an exalted destination!"

The servants of Lord Shiva affectionately replied, "Listen as we tell you the truth about this chandala woman. In her last life, she was the daughter of a brahmana in the land of Kekaya. Everyone was astonished by her great beauty, considering her to be a second Rati (the wife of Kamadeva). Indeed, she grew up to be a most captivating young woman. She was given in marriage to a brahmana boy and lived a very respectable life for some time."

"Although he was young and handsome, her husband got some terrible disease and passed away. Being terribly aggrieved, the wife spent some months carefully controlling her mind and senses but ultimately, her youthful nature gained the upper hand. She had been married at a very young age and when she became mature, her heart throbbed with lust."

“Women come to ruin due to lust, brahmanas by service to low-class men, kings due to being punished by a brahmana, ascetics by accumulation of material comforts, cooked rice by being licked by a dog, milk by being mixed with even a drop of liquor, beautiful bodily features by leprosy, and a noble family by a wanton woman.”

“Although guarded by her relatives and admonished by persons with pious dispositions, she became overwhelmed by lusty desires. That youthful beautiful woman, even though a widow, became attracted by a paramour. Shrewd as she was, the adulteress kept this a secret for some time. After some time, however, the symptoms of pregnancy became clearly visible so that everyone came to know that she had been defiled by some lusty fellow.”

“The woman’s uncles then threw her out of the house, grabbing her by her braided hair. As a symbol of their rejection, they broke a clay pot in the street. She went out of the village and was soon seen by a shudra who greatly appreciated her youth and beauty. Upon seeing the beautiful woman with protruding breasts, the leader of the shudra clan took her to his house and consoled her with gentle words.”

“Thereafter, the shudra and that woman passed their time engaged in sexual dalliance, throughout the day and night. Indeed, she became like his wife and regularly ate meat and drank wine. After much sexual indulgence, the shudra begot in her a son.”

“One day, when the shudra had gone somewhere, after drinking a lot of wine, the woman craved for some meat. Outside, some cows and sheep had been tied with rope. In the darkness of night, she went out, holding a large knife in her hand. Being intoxicated, her sense of discrimination was dulled. Being very eager for meat, she thought a calf to be a sheep and killed it, even as it was crying piteously.”

“The wretched woman brought the dead calf inside, and upon realizing what she had done, she cried out, ‘O Shiva! O Shiva!’ She lamented for a few moments but that feeling was transient and so, the desire for meat and wine prevailed. She cut up the dead calf, cook the meat, and ate as she desired. After eating half of the carcass, she

threw the other half outside, crying out, 'Alas! A tiger has pounced on my calf and mauled it!' "

"Upon hearing her cries, all the shudras came running. Believing the woman's story, they lamented that a tiger had killed her calf. The next morning, the shudra chief returned home and also accepted as truth whatever his wife said."

"In due course of time, the woman died and was taken to the abode of Yamaraja. After carefully considering her record of sinful and pious activities, Yama gave her a next birth from the womb of a chandala woman. The girl was blind and had a complexion as black as coal but she was sympathetically raised by her father. In her childhood, the child became afflicted by leprosy and so no chandala boy wanted to marry her. Before she grew up, her parents died so her brothers and other relatives abandoned her, thinking her to be useless."

"Famished, the girl moved about with the help of a stick, begging for alms from town to town. Somehow, she managed to get enough to eat to avoid starvation. After passing her life in this way, she met with old age."

"One day, as she was famished and without even a cloth to cover her body, she came to know that a caravan of people were proceeding to Gokarna while on a tour of pilgrimage, to attend a festival of Lord Shiva. There were numerous people in the caravan, of all varnas, and they were accompanied by their wives and children. Thus, there was a great deal of noise as the caravan passed with people laughing, singing, and playing as they chose."

"Hoping to get some food and cloth to cover her wretched body, the chandala woman entered within their midst. While clutching the hand of another beggar woman, the chandala woman reached Gokarna, along with the caravan of pilgrims. This was due to some pious act that she had performed in the past. There, she sat down by the roadside with outstretched palms, begging alms. She cried out, 'O people, take pity on me and give me something to eat. I have suffered a long time the results of the activities performed in my previous lives.' "

“As she was speaking like this, a kind-hearted person thrust a bunch of bilva leaves into her outstretched hands. However, when she understood that what had been given to her was not fit to eat, she threw the leaves away in disgust. Being cast off in that manner, the bilva leaves miraculously landed on a nearby shiva-linga.”

“The next morning, being famished and hopeless, the chandala woman started the journey back to her homeland. She was so weak that she faltered with each step and while going, she continuously lamented her great misfortune. Her naked body was scorched by the sun. After traveling some distance, she fell unconscious onto the ground.”

The servants of Lord Shiva concluded their narration, saying, “At this time, Shambhu commanded us to go and fetch this chandala woman. O sage, thus we have concluded our story which clearly illustrates Lord Shiva’s compassion toward the distressed people of this world.”

“Those who are seen to be afflicted by countless miseries and diseases; who are penniless and without children; who are shameless beggars; who lack even the basic amenities of clothes, food, drink, and accommodation; who are ugly or deformed; who are illiterate wretches; who are physically handicapped; and who are forced to work as slaves—all of these were great sinners in their previous lives.”

“After seeing all these terrible conditions brought about as the results of sins, a sensible person refrains from performing sinful acts. One who understands this and yet performs sinful acts must be considered the killer of his own soul. One who seeks happiness should perform meritorious work and one who seeks misery should indulge in sinful activities.”

After speaking to Gautama Rishi in this way, the servants of Lord Shiva pulled the atomic soul from the body of the chandala woman, endowed it with a celestial form, and placed her on their chariot. While remembering her previous births, she was certainly astonished and wondered if she had woken up from a dream. She wondered, “Who am I? Who are these people? Where is my tormented

chandala woman's body?" Thereafter, she was transported into the presence of Lord Shiva, where she continued to reside as one of his associates.

Long ago, in the kingdom of Vidarbha, there was a king named Satyaratha, who was courageous, truthful, and a strict adherent to religious principles. The Shalva king, Durmarshana, was Satyaratha's avowed enemy and once, he attacked Vidarbha in the hopes of conquering it. A terrible battle was fought and ultimately, King Satyaratha was killed. That night, as the enemy soldiers celebrated their victory throughout the city, the slain king's chaste wife came out of her palace with great difficulty, utterly shattered by grief. She was pregnant and in the darkness, she left the city, proceeding toward the West.

The queen traveled a great distance throughout the night and in the morning, she continued along the forest path. Finally, she came to a lake of crystal-clear water. It was a very hot day and so she sat down in the shade of a large tree by the side of the lake. As destiny would have it, as she sat on the raised platform surrounding that tree, the queen gave birth to a son at an auspicious moment.

Being tormented by thirst, the queen entered the water of the lake and immediately, she was seized by a powerful crocodile and killed. The orphan baby, by the side of the lake, cried piteously, being hungry and thirsty. At that time, a brahmana lady happened to come there, carrying her one-year-old son in her arms. Widowed, without any relations, and penniless, she had been begging from door to door in a nearby village.

Upon seeing the orphaned prince, the brahmana lady, named Uma, thought to herself, "What is this? This baby's umbilical cord has not even been cut and yet, the mother is no where to be found. Has he no father? Alas! The poor baby is lying upon the bare ground."

"Is he the child of a chandala, a shudra, a vaishya, or a brahmana? Is he the son of a king? How can I find out? I would like to pick up this child and nurse him as my own but I dare not touch him without knowing about his parents."

As the brahmana woman was pondering over the situation, Lord Shiva in the guise of a mendicant came there. He said to the brahmana lady, "Don't be upset. Take this child and nurse him without the least hesitation. Before long, you will attain great fortune because of this child."

After saying this, the mendicant hurriedly departed. The brahmana lady then took the abandoned baby to her house, at a village called Ekachakra. Thereafter, she raised the young prince as if he were her own child. Indeed, she was able to raise the two children (the abandoned baby and her own) by the alms she received by begging. At the proper time, the two boys were awarded the sacred thread by brahmanas. They observed all the duties of brahmanas and walked with their mother when she would go out to beg alms.

Once, in the course of her begging, the brahmana woman happened to enter a temple full of elderly sages. Upon seeing the two boys, the wise sage, Sandilya, exclaimed, "Wonderful is the working of fate! The power of karma is irresistible! This boy is dependent upon another boy's mother. Considering this brahmana lady to be his mother, he has adopted the brahminical way of life."

Upon hearing these words, the brahmana lady bowed down to the sage and asked him, "O brahmana, this boy was brought home by me at the urging of a mendicant. Until this day, I cannot understand who are his parents. I have raised him as my own son. Tell me—in which family was he born? Who is his mother and who is his father? You are endowed with the eye of knowledge and so, please tell me everything."

In response, the sage, Sandilya, related to the brahmana lady all about the boy's parents and birth—how his father had been killed in battle and how his mother had been carried away by a crocodile.

After hearing this, the brahmana lady asked the sage to disclose the means whereby her adopted son might regain his father's kingdom. In response, the sage described her adopted son's previous birth and that of his parents. There had been discrepancies in their worship of Lord Shiva that had resulted in their misfortune

in this life. The sage then instructed the brahmana woman in the procedures for worshiping Lord Shiva properly.

Thereafter, the brahmana lady, her son, and the prince, engaged themselves in worshiping Lord Shiva as directed by the sage, Sandilya. Some months passed happily in this way. Then, one day, in the spring, as the two boys were playing in a forest, they came upon some Gandharva girls playing nearby.

While looking at the lovely girls from a distance, the brahmana boy said to the prince, “Don’t go any further because some girls are playing over there. Those who are learned men with hearts free of impurities avoid close association with women. These girls are proud of their youthfulness and beauty. They take pleasure in bewildering the men they see. They are experts in the art of enticing speech and behavior. For this reason, scholars engaged in their work, and especially brahmacharis, should avoid looking at women and talking to them. Knowing this very well, I don’t want to proceed further into the forest.”

After saying this, the brahmana boy turned and walked away. The prince was very curious, however, and so he advanced toward where the Gandharva girls were playing. Among the girls, one was especially cute and alluring. When she saw the prince approach, she thought, “Oh, how nice! Such a handsome youth is coming toward us, walking in a most majestic manner. His large eyes are so attractive and his sweet smile adds to his beauty. His body is so young and tender.”

Turning to her friends, she said, “Nearby is a forest with many champaka and other flowering trees. Go there and gather flowers. I will wait for you here.”

After the departure of her friends, the girl stood waiting for the handsome prince to arrive, her gaze fixed upon him. As he approached, the prince also stared at the lovely girl with great curiosity. Indeed, he began to feel the ache that is caused by being pierced by Cupid’s arrows.

When the boy arrived, the Gandharva girl offered him a nice



seat on the ground. Her patience had already fled upon seeing the prince and her senses experienced sweet agitation. Still, she offered him all the formalities of a nice reception. That girl with a slender waist then asked, "Who are you, O lotus-eyed one? From where have you come? Whose son are you?"

After being spoken to in a very affectionate way, the prince related everything about his life. He told the Gandharva girl how he was actually the son of the King of Vidarbha, who had been defeated by his enemies and killed, and thus had to be raised by a poor brahmana woman. He asked her, "O beautiful one, who are you? Why have you come here? Who is your father? What are you thinking about? What would you really like to tell me?"

The girl replied, "I am the daughter of the eminent Gandharva, Dravika. My name is Amshumati. When I saw you coming, I became very eager to talk with you and so I sent my friends on an errand. I am now alone here. I am an expert musician and I am liked by all the celestial girls. I can understand the inner workings of everyone's mind and so, I know your desire. I know that you feel love for me and I also feel love for you. This has certainly been ordained by destiny. From this day on, there should be no separation between us."

After saying this, the girl presented the prince with the pearl necklace that had adorned her breasts. As he accepted the gift, he said, "O timid girl, what you have said is true. Still, I must tell you that I am a poor boy, deprived of my rightful inheritance. How can I expect you to be my beloved? You are under the care of your father. How could you transgress his wishes? You should not do as you like, like a deluded girl."

While smiling in a most captivating manner, the girl replied, "Don't worry. I will arrange everything. Return home now and the day after tomorrow, in the morning, come back here. This is a most serious matter and so, do not betray me."

After saying this, the girl rejoined her friends, who were returning after picking many beautiful flowers. When the prince met his friend, the brahmana boy, he excitedly told him about all

that had happened. After returning home, the prince delighted the pious brahmana lady by telling her the story as well.

On the morning of the second day, the two boys returned to the forest. When they came to where the prince had met his beloved, he saw the king of the Gandharvas, along with his daughter. After welcoming the boys and seating them comfortably, the Gandharva king said, “Yesterday, I went to Kailasa, where I saw Lord Shiva, along with Parvati. Mahadeva told me, ‘There is a prince named Dharmagupta. He is poor, having been deprived of his rightful kingdom by his enemies. Under the direction of his guru, this boy is worshipping me and by the prowess of his worship, all of his forefathers have attained my abode. O Gandharva, you should help him by killing his enemies and reinstating him as the king of Vidarbha.’ After receiving this command, I returned home, where my daughter informed me of her interest in you, as well. Understanding all this to be the will of Lord Shiva, I have brought my daughter to this forest today.”

“I am now giving you my daughter, Amshumati. After killing your enemies, I will establish you as the ruler of your kingdom. At the end of ten thousand years, you will attain Lord Shiva’s association in his abode. There, my daughter will rejoin you in a celestial form.”

After saying this, the Gandharva king placed the hand of his daughter in the prince’s hand and gave him many valuable presents, including one hundred thousand blue horses. He gave him a celestial chariot and a bow that was comparable to Indra’s. For the comfort of his daughter, the Gandharva king gave her five thousand slave girls and immense wealth. So that he could conquer his enemies, the prince’s father-in-law gave him an army of Gandharva soldiers.

Thereafter, the Gandharva king, Dravika, returned to heaven. Dharmagupta took his wife and, with the help of the Gandharva army, went and killed his enemies in battle. When he entered his father’s capital, the boy was crowned king by his ministers. The brahmana lady who had raised him continued to act as the prince’s mother and her son was accepted by him as his brother. As he continued to rule

his kingdom without difficulty, King Dharmagupta worshiped Lord Shiva with unerring devotion.

Much of the Skanda Purana is filled with glorification of Lord Shiva and the holy places associated with him. Next, Suta Gosvami narrated another story that vividly illustrates the efficacy of worshiping Lord Shiva.

Long ago, in Aryavarta, there lived a king named Chitravarma. He was very pious in behavior and for miscreants, he was like the lord of death. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. He had many sons but only after a long time was he blessed with a daughter.

After the birth of his daughter, Chitravarma summoned many learned brahmanas for the purpose of learning about her future from astrological calculations. One of the brahmanas said, "Your daughter, named Simantini, is endowed with all auspicious characteristics. She will live happily with her husband for ten thousand years and beget eight sons."

Being very pleased, the king gave this brahmana many valuable gifts. Another brahmana then spoke up: "In her fourteenth year, this girl will become a widow."

Upon hearing these cruel words, which were like a stroke of lightning, the king's mind became very agitated. He then dismissed all the brahmanas. Considering whatever might happen to be the work of destiny, the king gave up his anxieties.

When the girl reached the age of adolescence, she heard from one of her friends about how a brahmana had predicted that she would soon become a widow. Becoming very fearful and anxious, Simantini approached Maitreyi, the wife of the sage, Yajnavalkya, and asked, "O mother, being very fearful, I seek refuge at your feet. Please give me the means whereby I will have a happy married life."

The chaste wife of the sage replied, "You should take shelter of Parvati, the wife of Lord Shiva."

As Simantini continued to worship Lord Shiva and Parvati,

her father, one day, on the advice of his preceptor, invited prince Chandrangada to his palace and gave him his daughter in marriage. Nala and Damayanti had a son, named Indrasena, whose son was Chandrangada. (The history of Nala and Damayanti is narrated in the Mahabharata and is certainly a most interesting story. Make sure you read a version of the Mahabharata that contains the story of Nala and Damayanti.)

There was great celebration at the time of the marriage and many neighboring kings came to attend. After the marriage, Chandrangada spent a few days in the palace of his father-in-law. One day, Chandrangada wanted to cross the River Yamuna and so he boarded a boat, along with some of his friends. In mid-stream, however, the boat was swallowed by a whirlpool and sank, killing the boatmen and the prince.

There was a great tumult of lamentation on the shore as the prince's soldiers helplessly watched the boat sink. Upon hearing about what had happened, King Chitravarma became bewildered and stunned. He rushed to the Yamuna in a practically unconscious state. When she learned what had happened, Simantini fainted onto the ground. Indeed, everyone in the palace wailed piteously.

Far away, in his kingdom, when King Indrasena heard about the death of his son, he also fainted. After some time, being consoled by his elders, King Chitravarma regained his composure and began to pacify his daughter. The king then performed the funeral ceremonies for his dead son-in-law.

Simantini at first thought of entering the funeral pyre so that she could accompany her husband to his destination. Her father dissuaded her, however, and so she resigned herself to being a widow. At that time, she was fourteen years old and she continued to perform her worship of Lord Shiva and Parvati, as before.

The grief-stricken King Indrasena was overthrown by his relatives and confined, along with his wives, in prison.

When the boat sank, the newly-married Chandrangada went deep into the water of the Yamuna, where he saw some serpent

damsels engaged in playing. They were surprised to see the prince and they took him to Nagaloka, the abode of serpents. Being led by the serpent girls, Chandrangada entered the beautiful city of Takshaka, which rivaled Amaravati, the abode of Indra, the king of heaven.

There, in the midst of a great assembly, Chandrangada saw the serpent, Takshaka, seated upon a jeweled throne. He had hundreds of hoods, each bedecked with a jeweled crown. Innumerable serpents waited upon him with palms joined in reverence. He was also surrounded by one thousand Naga maidens of incomparable beauty.

The prince went and bowed down to Takshaka and then stood up with joined palms. The brilliance of Takshaka dazzled his eyes. The king asked the serpent girls, "Who is this? Where did he come from?"

They replied, "We happened to see him in the water of the Yamuna. We don't know his name or his family."

Takshaka asked the prince, "Who are you? Whose son are you? Where do you come from?"

In response, Chandrangada explained how he was the grandson of the famous Nala, the king of the Nishadas, and how he was drowned while trying to cross the Yamuna. Takshaka asked, "Which deva is worshiped by you?"

The prince explained how he was a devotee of Lord Shiva and Parvati and Takshaka was pleased to hear this. He told Chandrangada, "This world is full of jewels. All of these girls are very charming to behold. The trees are all desire trees and there are wells filled with nectar. Here, there is no fear of old age, disease, or death. Stay here and enjoy life as you please."

The prince replied, "I was married according to religious principles. I am an only son and my wife is very pious. Certainly, my father and wife are overwhelmed by grief, considering me to be dead. Maybe they have died out of grief. I hope that they have managed to cope with the situation and somehow maintain their lives. For this

reason, I would not like to remain here for long. Kindly arrange that I can return to earth.”

Takshaka offered the prince food that was provided by the desire trees. Before Chandrangada’s departure, the serpent king told him, “Whenever you remember me, I will appear before you.”

Takshaka provided the prince with a horse that could travel anywhere at will, as well as other presents and a boy to assist him, and bid him farewell. In a short while, Chandrangada rose out of the water, seated upon his celestial horse. Just at that time, his chaste wife, Simantini, came to the river to bathe, surrounded by her female attendants.

Because her husband’s form had been enhanced by contact with the Nagas, and because she was without fine clothes or jewelry, and her hair was disheveled, the two could not recognize one another.

Chandrangada approached the lady and asked, “Who are you? Whose wife are you? Why are you so distressed at such a young age?”

Simantini stood bashfully before her husband, shedding tears. Because she was unable to speak, one of her attendants revealed everything to the prince, including how her father-in-law had been overthrown and imprisoned.

Gaining some courage, Simantini asked the prince, “Who are you, a demigod, Kinnara, Gandharva, Siddha, or a king? You seem like a second god of love, Kandarpa. Why do you inquire about me with such concern? Did you see me before? You seem somewhat familiar to me. Kindly tell me everything about yourself.”

After saying this, the princess cried for a long time and then fainted onto the ground. As her attendants crowded around the princess, Chandrangada remained silent for some time, himself overwhelmed by grief. Then, he began to console his wife with pleasing words. He caught hold of her hand to bring her close to him, and at this, the hair on her body stood on end. He whispered into her ear, “Somewhere in the world, I saw your husband. He is

delighted by your chaste and pious behavior. He will come here soon, within two or three days, and remove your grief. I am a friend of your husband's and I came here to tell you this. Keep this a secret for now and don't tell anyone."

While listening to these words that appeared sweeter than nectar, the princess glanced at the prince, again and again, with excitement and dismay. She carefully noted how the hair on his body stood on end due to the touch of her hand. She observed his complexion, tone of voice, age, and other characteristics and thought, "Surely this is my husband. I feel wonderful attachment for him. How could he assume such a form and come here from another world? Am I dreaming? Is it my destiny to see my lost husband again? Is this the fruit of my worshipping Lord Shiva, as advised by the wife of a sage? One brahmana had predicted that I would be happily married for ten thousand years. Is this now coming true? Every day, I experience auspicious omens. What is impossible for one who has pleased Lord Shiva and his wife, Parvati?"

In this way, Simantini became convinced that her husband was standing before her. He then whispered to her, "I will go to my aggrieved parents and tell them the news."

Chandrangada mounted the celestial horse and arrived at the kingdom of the Nishadas in a moment. While remaining in a garden on the outskirts of the city, the prince sent the Naga boy with a message for his relatives who had usurped the throne.

The Naga boy told them, "Release Indrasena at once. His son, Chandrangada, has come here from the world of the serpents. If you do not renounce the throne peacefully, Chandrangada's arrows will deprive you of your lives."

The inimical relatives peacefully relinquished power over the kingdom and Indrasena was released from prison and informed of how his son had returned from Nagaloka. Thereafter, all of the citizens, ministers, and brahmanas came and welcomed Candrangada and then took him to see his father. With great pomp, the prince entered the royal palace and bowed down before his parents.

At first, the king could not recognize his son, who had fallen at his feet, but when encouraged by his ministers, he picked him up and embraced him.

Thereafter, while seated in the assembly, Chandrangada told everything of how he had met Takshaka and then returned home. While listening to his son, King Indrasena felt thrilled. The Nishada king then sent messengers to inform King Chitravarma of the good news. When he received this message, the king stood up and danced in ecstasy. He called for his daughter and had her remove all the signs of widowhood and once again dress as a princess.

There were great celebrations throughout the land and everyone praised the piety of Simantini. King Chitravarma invited Indrasena's son to his kingdom and once again had the marriage ceremony performed. With the jewels brought from Nagaloka, Chandrangada happily decorated his wife so that she appeared celestially beautiful.

Thereafter, Candrangada returned home with his wife and King Indrasena installed him upon the throne. He ruled the kingdom for ten thousand years while enjoying incomparable conjugal happiness with his wife. In due course of time, they received eight sons and a daughter.

The sages at Naimisharanya said, "That was a very good story! What you have spoken was excellent! Now, you should relate another story that is equally wonderful."

In response, Suta Gosvami narrated this ancient history. In the kingdom of Vidarbha, there lived a qualified brahmana named Vedamitra. He was intelligent and well-versed in Vedic knowledge. He had a brahmana friend named Sarasvata. Both were from the same place and they were great friends. Vedamitra had a virtuous son name Sumedha and Sarasvata had a son named Somavan. The two boys were the same age, they dressed alike, and their education was similar. Indeed, they became great scholars in their childhood and so, their parents were very satisfied with them.

One day, after the completion of the boys' sixteenth year and



they had grown up to become handsome youths, the fathers called them and said with great pleasure, "My dear sons, you have finished your education and so, I would like to arrange for your marriage. Go to the King of Vidarbha and please him with your scholarship. When he rewards you with ample wealth, we can arrange for your marriage."

The boys did as they were told and when the king became very pleased by their discourses, they disclosed to him that they needed money for getting married. Upon hearing this, the king laughed. Desiring to learn something, he told them, "The Queen of the Nishadas is a very chaste lady, named Simantini. She worships Lord Shiva every Monday and after doing so, she rewards the learned brahmanas and their wives with gifts of wealth. One of you should disguise yourself as a woman and the other will be her husband. In this way, present yourselves to the queen as a brahmana couple. After receiving money from her, come back her and tell me about all that happened."

Upon hearing this, the boys became frightened and replied, "We are afraid to do this. One who acts fraudulently towards the Supreme Lord, the demigods, elders, parents, or the king will perish, along with his family. Even well-concealed deception is exposed, sooner or later. How could a man dare to deceitfully enter the king's inner apartments? When one treads the path of deceit, immediately all of his good qualities perish. Indeed, sin, censure, fear, and enmity—these four always harass a deceitful person. We were born in pious families and have adopted good conduct. We will never resort to the behavior of rogues!."

The king said, "The orders of God, elders, parents, and the king should never be disobeyed. Whatever is commanded by these superiors, whether it be for the good or for the bad, should be carried out without hesitation. Therefore, do as I have told you without delay!"

After hearing this, the two brahmana boys reluctantly agreed to carry out the king's order. The king had Somavan, the son of

Sarasvata, disguise himself as a woman, with the appropriate clothes and make-up. Indeed, he looked like a very charming girl to anyone who might see him. As they proceeded to the kingdom of the Nishadas, the two boys thought, “Whatever happens—let it be.”

When Monday arrived, they entered the king’s palace, along with many other brahmana couples. The queen welcomed all of the brahmanas and their wives, and respectfully washed their feet, after seeing that they were comfortably seated. Indeed, she tended to the brahmanas individually and while doing so, she could recognize that one of the so-called wives was actually a man in disguise. She smiled at discovering this deception but continued serving all of the brahmanas and their wives an excellent feast.

After everyone had finished eating and had washed their hands and mouths, the queen gave them cows, jewels, garments, and gold. Finally, after bowing down to the brahmanas and their wives, Simantini dismissed them.

Actually, Queen Simantini had worshiped each brahmana and his wife, considering them to be representatives of Lord Shiva and Parvati. It so happened that, after leaving the palace, the brahmana boy, Somavan, who had dressed as a woman, forgot his real nature as a man and became enamored by his friend, Sumedha. Being pierced by Cupid’s arrows and thus overcome by passion and tormented by love, ‘she’ said, “My handsome lord, stop! Where are you going? Don’t you see me—your beloved? Here we are in a lovely forest and so, I would like to stay here with your for some time, absorbed in pastimes of love.”

Upon hearing this, Sumedha thought that his friend must be joking and so he continued walking through the forest. Again, the ‘girl’ said, “Stop! Embrace me and enjoy me. I am tormented by Smara’s arrows! Let me kiss your lips and drink their nectar. I cannot walk any further.”

When he heard this kind of talk, which he had never heard before, Sumedha became suspicious. Looking behind him, he became astonished, wondering, “Who is this beautiful woman with lotus-

petal eyes, protruding breasts, slender waist, and shapely hips? Is it possible that my friend has been transformed into a woman? I had better ask her.”

Sumedha said, “O friend, you appear quite different to me now and you are talking like a lusty woman. You are a brahmachari, the son of Sarasvata, with senses under control. Why are you talking to me like this?”

Somavan in the form of a woman replied, “I am not a man. I am a girl named Samavati. I have come here to give you sexual pleasure. If you doubt me, just look more closely at my body.”

Sumedha did just that and after seeing her breasts, he became somewhat aroused. He controlled his wandering mind with great effort and simply stood there, speechless. Samavati said, “I hope that you don’t continue to doubt me. Come, this forest is ideal for sexual dalliance with a beautiful girl like me.”

Sumedha replied, “Don’t speak like this! Do not violate the bounds of decency! You have carefully studied shastra. Why do you speak in this way? You are not a woman—you are a learned brahmana! Perhaps this is the result of our having deceived the queen! At the bidding of a roguish king, we have deceived our parents. Because of this fault, we are now reaping the results. Let us go home. Perhaps your female nature will disappear as suddenly as it came. Or, if it remains, you can enjoy sex with me after being given to me in marriage by your father. What a disastrous effect of sinful behavior!”

Although admonished in this way, the woman, being agitated by lust, embraced Sumedha by force and kissed his lips. Somehow, Sumedha managed to bring Somavan home and report everything to their fathers.

The brahmanas were very upset and angry. Taking their two boys with them, they went to see the King of Vidarbha. Sarasvata said to the king, “Just see what happened to my son by obeying your command. Because he is my only son, my family will perish. Heaven is now beyond my grasp. My forefathers are disgusted. He has attained the despicable form of a woman!”

Upon seeing what happened to the brahmana boy, Somavan, the king was astonished by the power of Simantini. He summoned many great sages and requested them to enable the boy to regain his manhood. The sages replied, "Who can change what was willed by Lord Shiva and Parvati?"

Finally, at the advice of the sage, Bharadvaja, the king took the two boys to a temple of Goddess Ambika, where they performed elaborate worship. For three nights, the king fasted while meditating upon Parvati and offering her prayers. Parvati became pleased with the king and appeared before him, saying, "Tell me, what is your desire?"

The king replied, "I would like this boy's manhood to be restored."

The goddess said, "What has been done by my devotees cannot be altered, even by thousands of years of endeavor."

The king said, "This boy is the only son of a brahmana. How will his father attain happiness?"

Goddess Ambika said, "By my favor, he will have another excellent son who will enjoy a long life. Let this girl, Samavati, be united in wedlock with Sumedha so that she can enjoy the pleasures of love."

After saying this, the goddess vanished from view. Later on, the brahmana, Sarasvata, received another son. His daughter, Samavati, was given in marriage to Sumedha.

In the kingdom of Avanti, there lived a brahmana named Mandra. He had an easy-going temperament, he was eager to amass wealth, and he was ruled by women. (This reminds me of a joke that Shridhar Swami once told me. A man died and went to heaven. There, he saw two gates. Above one gate, a sign was posted: "For those who are controlled by women." There was a very long line of men waiting to get into heaven through that gate. Above the second gate, a sign was posted: "For those who are not controlled by women." There was just one man standing before that gate, awaiting his turn

to be admitted to heaven. The man who had just died approached the man standing at the second gate and asked, "How is it that only you are standing here?" The man replied, "My wife told me.")

The brahmana, Mandra, had abandoned the performance of most of his duties and didn't even bathe regularly. He was very fond of nice clothes, perfume, garlands, and loose women. He became attached to a prostitute named Pingala and so constantly hovered around her. Indeed, with unrestrained passion, he remained at her house. In this way, Mandra resembled Ajamila of times long past.

One day, a yogi name Rishabha, who was a devotee of Lord Shiva, came to the prostitute's house. Considering his arrival to be the result of their past pious activities, both the prostitute and brahmana worshiped the yogi. They had him sit on an elevated platform and then washed his feet, after which they sprinkled the water on their heads. After honoring the yogi, Rishaha, in various ways, the brahmana and prostitute fed him very nicely. After he had finished eating and had rinsed his mouth, they had him sit on a bed covered with a clean sheet. The brahmana and the prostitute then massaged his feet and entertained him for some time.

The Shiva yogi spent the night there and the next morning, departed. Thereafter, in due course of time, both the brahmana and the prostitute passed away. Carried by his karma, the brahmana entered the womb of Sumati, the wife of Vajrabahu, the king of Dasharna. When they saw that the senior queen was pregnant, her envious co-wives secretly gave her poison. Even after consuming the poison, however, Sumati did not die because fate ordained that she must undergo suffering worse than death.

That chaste lady endured terrible pain and then delivered her child, a son. Being affected by the poison, the new-born child suffered terribly and so cried throughout the day and night. The mother also continued to suffer as a result of the poison. Mother and child were treated by the best physicians, but to no avail. Being tormented by pain, the queen hardly slept at night, and she became emaciated.

A few months passed in this way. When the king saw how his wife and child were little better than dead, he thought, "They must have come here from hell! Their crying doesn't allow anyone to get a good night's sleep. I will have to get rid of these sinful persons. Let them suffer alone the results of their past misdeeds."

The king was very fond of his other wives and their sons. After making up his mind in this way, he called for his charioteer and instructed him to abandon them at a distant place. Thus, the mother and child were left in a dense forest. Due to hunger, thirst, and pain, they suffered terribly. While carrying her baby, the queen faltered with each step while gasping for breath and cursing her fate.

Her body was bruised and pricked by thorns and her hair was disheveled. When a lion would roar, the queen became frightened and sometimes she saw a terrible snake. Ghosts tormented her at night.

While wandering through the forest, Sumati came to a path used by merchants to travel from one place to another on business. After following the path some distance, she arrived at a city of vaishyas that bustled with activity. The leader of those vaishyas was named Padmakara. One of his maidservants saw Sumati approach the city and so she talked to her and heard her story. Feeling compassion, she took Sumati and her son to meet her master.

Upon seeing how the woman was very ill and burdened with a child, the vaishya talked to her for some time. Then, treating her like his own mother, the vaisya provided Sumati with a room near his house and gave her food, clothing, and bedding. Still, while being looked after in this way, the poor woman felt no relief from her diseases. After a few days, Sumati's son died, despite the treatment provided by excellent doctors. Upon the death of her son, the aggrieved queen fainted like a banana tree dashed to the ground by an elephant.

After regaining consciousness, Sumati cried for some time as the vaishya ladies tried to console her. Indeed, who could pacify such a miserable lady whose child had just died?

It so happened that Rishabha, the devotee of Lord Shiva, happened to visit the vaishya, Padmakara, at this time. The vaishya sent Rishabha to try and help Sumati, whose lamentations seemed to be without end.

Rishabha said to her, “My dear lady, why do you needlessly lament like this? The material body appears for some time and then disappears, like a bubble on the surface of the ocean. What then is the need to lament?”

“Whatever happiness or distress one experiences is simply the result of one’s previous activities, which were performed under the influence of the three modes of material nature. The embodied soul, however, is eternal and so, those who are learned do not rejoice when one is born, nor lament upon his death.”

“The moment of death for an embodied soul is already decided as soon as he enters his mother’s womb. The results of karma and death cannot be avoided. Nothing in this world is permanent and so, one should tolerate temporary material conditions and not lament.”

“Some die within the womb, some just after birth, some in childhood, and some in old age. Death is ever present and so, what is the question of happiness in this world? When a tiger stands before him, does a deer enjoy the grass in his mouth?”

“You should seek the shelter of Lord Vishnu, or, if you are so inclined, Lord Shiva. As long as you remain in ignorance, you will suffer great fear of disease and death. Take your mind away from your material miseries and place it in meditation at the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu, or Lord Shiva.”

In this way, Sumati was consoled by the devotee of Lord Shiva, Rishabha. The yogi then took some sacred ash that had been empowered by a mantra of Shiva and placed in the mouth of Sumati’s dead son. Immediately, the boy’s life was restored and he cried for breast milk. Rishabha then applied sacred ash to the body of Sumati and instantly, her diseased condition fled to a distant place.

Sumati fell at the yogi’s feet. He lifted her up and told her,

“You will live a long life. Your son, who is named Bhadrāyu, will attain his rightful kingdom. Stay here with the vaiśhya until your son finishes his studies.”

After saying this, the Shiva yogi, Rishabha, departed. In his last life, Sumati’s son had been the brahmana, Mandra, who was attached to the prostitute, Pingala. After death, Pingala, due to her service to the sage, Rishabha, was born as the daughter of Simantini, the wife of Chandrangada. She was a very beautiful girl named Kirtimalini.

In the rooms provided by the vaiśhya, Padmakara, Prince Bhadrāyu grew up. He and the vaiśhya’s son, Sunaya, became inseparable friends. They studied together at the ashram of their preceptor and were awarded the sacred thread together.

When Bhadrāyu completed his sixteenth year, the yogi, Rishabha, came to see him. He and his mother worshiped him with great respect. Rishabha instructed Bhadrāyu at great length and empowered him with the strength to defeat his enemies. After doing so, he departed.

Hemaratha, the ruler of Magadha, was a powerful enemy of Bhadrāyu’s father, Vajrabahu, the King of Dasharna. One day, along with his army, Hemaratha came and besieged Vajrabahu’s capital. King Vajrabahu came out to fight, along with his army, but after a fierce battle, he was defeated and tied up with ropes. The victorious Magada soldiers then ransacked the city, taking whatever they liked—wealth, cows, girls, and women.

When Prince Bhadrāyu heard the news that his father had been defeated and his queens abducted, he roared like a lion. Taking Sunaya as his assistant and picking up the sword and conch given to him by Rishabha, Bhadrāyu mounted a horse and set out with an ardent desire for victory.

Upon arriving at the city of the Dasharnas, Bhadrāyu saw desolation everywhere. The women and children held prisoner were crying piteously. This further enraged the prince. In his fury, he penetrated the enemy army, showering upon them streams of arrows.



In the battle that ensued, Bhadrayu was hit by many weapons but was unaffected, due to the shiva-kavacha that had been given to him by Rishabha.

After killing a warrior and his driver, Bhadrayu mounted the chariot and made Sunaya the charioteer. Like a lion roaming amongst a herd of deer, the prince moved about on the battlefield.

Although he was a single person facing the onslaught of thousands, Bhadrayu took out the blazing sword given to him by the yogi, Rishabha, and simply by seeing it, all the opposing warriors fell down dead, like worms struck by lightning. Then, when Bhadrayu blew the mighty conch shell that was given to him by Rishabha, all the enemy soldiers fell to the ground, unconscious.

Without killing these enemy soldiers, Bhadrayu went and released his father and his wives. He then freed all of the others who had been captured by the enemy. Thereafter, the prince, while moving at the speed of the wind, took away all of the enemy's horses, chariots, elephants, wealth, and slave girls. He tied up King Hemaratha, the ruler of Magadha, and imprisoned his ministers.

After witnessing the incomparable prowess of Prince Bhadrayu, the ministers of King Vajrabahu considered him to be a demigod who had descended to rescue them. However, when questioned by these ministers, Bhadrayu revealed his identity as Vajrabahu's abandoned son.

When the king came and embraced Bhadrayu, he asked, "Who are you—a demigod, Gandharva, or a human being? Who are your parents? What is your name? Where have you come from? You appear to be capable of conquering the three worlds! My dear boy, tell me everything. Why did you come here to rescue me?"

Bhadrayu replied by assuring the king that he would soon explain everything to him. He said, "Enter your city and enjoy life as you please, without fear. Don't release the enemies until I return."

Bhadrayu returned home and related everything to his mother. The next morning, Rishabha went to see Chandrangada, the husband of Simantini. He confidentially told him all about

Bhadrāya and his previous life. He advised, “Give your daughter, Kīrtimalinī, in marriage to Bhadrāya.”

Thus, Bhadrāya was invited by the king and the marriage was settled. Vajrabāhu was invited to the wedding and in confidence, the king of the Nishadas, Chandrangada, informed him that Bhadrāya was actually his son. He then brought Vajrabāhu’s eldest queen (Bhadrāyu’s mother) and presented her to the king. Upon seeing her beauty restored, Vajrabāhu felt terribly ashamed of his sinful act of abandoning her. He warmly embraced both mother and son and after some time, returned home with them.

In due course of time, Vajrabāhu passed away and Bhadrāyu became the ruler of his kingdom. Bhadrāyu released Hemaratha after the king pledged his friendship.

One day thereafter, as Bhadrāyu and Kīrtimalinī were roaming about in a delightful forest, they came upon a brahmana couple that was being chased by a ferocious tiger. Upon seeing the king, the brahmana pleaded for protection and so Bhadrāyu quickly strung his bow and released numerous arrows. Miraculously, these arrows had no effect on the tiger, who then carried away the brahmana’s wife, to devour her.

Being bereft of his wife, the aggrieved brahmana lamented, “O, my beloved chaste wife! How could you go away, leaving me alone? What is the use of my living now that I am bereft of my wife, who was dearer to me than my life?”

“O King, what happened to your weapons? Where is your famous bow and sword? What is the use of your prowess, which was reputed to be equal to ten thousand elephants? A king should enter fire or consume poison rather than maintaining his life if he is unable to protect those who take shelter of him.”

King Bhadrāyu thought, “Alas! My manliness has been lost. Fate has reversed its course and gone against me. My reputation is finished. I must try to console this poor brahmana at any cost.”

Having made up his mind in this way, the king fell at the brahmana’s feet and said, “Have pity on me, a degraded kshatriya

deprived of his energy. Give up your grief. I will give you whatever you desire. My kingdom, my wife, and my body—all are meant for your pleasure. Tell me what you want.”

The brahmana replied, “Of what use is a mirror to one who is blind? Of what use is a house for one who subsists by begging? Of what use is a book to an illiterate fool? Of what use is money for one who is without a wife? My wife is gone and I did not sufficiently enjoy with her. Therefore, give me your queen for my pleasure.”

The shocked king said, “O brahmana, is your proposal in line with virtue? Is this the command of elders? Engaging in sex with other men’s wives leads one to hell. There were many people who donated their wealth, kingdom, horses, and elephants. Even the donor of one’s body can be found but never has it been heard that one donated his wife!”

The brahmana replied, “By the power of my austerities, I can burn to ashes the sins of killing a brahmana and drinking liquor. Why not then the sin of enjoying another man’s wife? Give me your wife. Otherwise, you will surely be punished in hell for being unable to give protection to one who sought it.”

King Bhadrayu became fearful after hearing these words. He thought, “It is true. A king who is unable to protect his subjects incurs great sin. Better I give this brahmana my wife. After doing this, I will give up my life by entering fire, thus preserving my reputation.”

Having made up his mind in this way, the king started a great fire. He then formally gave his wife in charity to the brahmana, bathed, and circumambulated the fire twice while meditating upon Lord Shiva. Then, just as he was about to enter the fire, Lord Shiva appeared before him. As Bhadrayu gazed upon Mahadeva, who had five faces and was seated upon his bull carrier, flowers showered from the sky. After bowing down, the king offered many prayers in glorification of Lord Shiva.

Lord Shiva then said, “I am very pleased by your devotion for me. With an unwavering mind, you have always worshiped me very nicely.

It was just to test you that I assumed the form of this brahmana and approached you. The woman that seemed to be seized by a tiger was actually Parvati. The tiger was a special creation of maya and so could not be wounded by your arrows. Now, I will gladly offer you any benediction you like.”

The king replied, “Kindly accept my wife and myself, my mother and father, and the vaishya, Padmakara and his son, Sunaya, as your eternal associates.”

Queen Kirtimalini requested, “Let my father, Chandrangada and my mother, Simantini, always reside in your presence.”

Lord Shiva said, “It shall be so,” and then vanished as suddenly as he had appeared.

Once, as Skanda was talking to the sage, Agastya, the son of Mitra and Varuna, he narrated this story which he said would take place in the future.

Shrila Vyasadeva divided the Vedas into many branches. He taught the eighteen Puranas to Suta Gosvami and others. He compiled the most fascinating Mahabharata. Once, while wandering over the earth, Shrila Vyasadeva came to Naimisharanya, where eighty-eight thousand sages were engaged in hearing the glories of Lord Shiva. They had three-lined tilaka on their foreheads and rudraksha beads in their hands. They were of the opinion that Lord Shiva alone is the giver of liberation from material existence.

Upon hearing the sages discussing in this manner, Shrila Vyasadeva raised his index finger and said, “After churning the vast ocean of words, again and again, this alone has been my conclusion—Lord Hari is the Supreme Personality of Godhead and it is His shelter alone that should be sought after. In the Vedas, Puranas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata, Lord Vishnu is described as the beginning, middle, and end of everything. This is the truth, this is the truth, this is the truth! The Lord of Lakshmi is the bestower of salvation and therefore, it is upon Him alone that one should meditate. Those of little intelligence take shelter of someone else,

leaving aside Lord Janardana, and thus remain within the cycle of repeated birth and death.”

Upon hearing this speech, the sages at Naimisharanya felt agitation within their hearts. They replied, “O son of Parashara, you are worthy of our worship because you are the compiler of the Puranas. You are the author of the great work, Mahabharata, which awards one a definite understanding of virtue, prosperity, enjoyment, and liberation.”

“O son of Satyavati, who could be more conversant with the truth than you? Still, we do not have faith in what was said by you just now after raising your index finger for emphasis. Go to Varanasi, where Vishveshvara (Lord Shiva) is present. When you make your statements in his presence, we will gain faith in their validity.”

After hearing this, Shrila Vyasadeva felt some agitation within his mind. Accompanied by about ten thousand disciples, he started for Varanasi. Upon his arrival, Shrila Vyasadeva bathed in the Ganga and then entered the Vishveshvara temple, where he chanted and danced along with the devotees of Lord Shiva.

After the kirtana ended, Shrila Vyasadeva stood amongst his disciples, raised the index finger of his left hand and said, “After churning the great ocean of words, I have come to the conclusion that Lord Hari, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is the actual shelter of all living beings.”

As Shrila Vyasadeva recited many verses from the Vedic literature to support his conclusion, Nandi playfully paralyzed his left arm. Indeed, even his power of speech became bewildered. At this, Lord Vishnu invisibly came there and whispered to Shrila Vyasadeva, “A great offence has been committed by you. Because of this, even I feel afraid. I advise you to glorify Lord Shambhu if you at all desire your welfare.”

After saying this, Lord Vishnu touched Shrila Vyasadeva’s throat, so that his power of speech returned to normal, and then disappeared. Thereafter, Shrila Vyasadeva offered many nice prayers in glorification of Lord Shiva. At the end of his glorification, Lord

Shiva glanced at Nandi, who then removed the paralysis of Shrīla Vyasadeva's arm.

To relieve the burden of the earth, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Balarama incarnated in the Yadu dynasty. After killing Kamsa and establishing Ugrasena upon the throne at Mathura, Lord Kṛṣṇa asked, "Now, what remains for Me to do?"

King Ugrasena replied, "Everything will be accomplished by You. Go now to Avantī (modern day Ujjain, in Madhya Pradesh) and study under the guidance of Sandipani Muni."

Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa and Balarama spent sixty-four days at the ashram of Sandipani Muni, mastering the Vedic teachings. When he saw how quickly Kṛṣṇa and Balarama learned whatever he taught, Sandipani Muni thought, "Chandra and Surya must have come here, in the guise of students."

At the conclusion of their studies, Kṛṣṇa and Balarama asked their spiritual master, "O brahmana, what shall we give as guru-dakṣhina?"

The delighted preceptor replied, "I would like you to bring back my son. He went into the sea and was swallowed by a whale while we were on pilgrimage at Prabhāsa."

Lord Kṛṣṇa gave His consent and then departed, along with His elder brother, Balarama. Lord Kṛṣṇa approached Varuna and in answer to His inquiry, the lord of the water said, "Panchajana, a great demon in the form of a whale, has swallowed the boy."

Lord Kṛṣṇa killed the demon, Panchajana, and took a wonderful conch shell from him that he had stolen from the abode of Varuna. He couldn't find the boy within the demon's stomach, however, and so He considered that he must have gone to the abode of Yamarāja.

Lord Kṛṣṇa told Varuna, "I want to use the divine chariot that was formerly possessed by the Daityas and Danavas. After killing the demons, that chariot was kept in your care. With it, I will be able to subdue the lord of death in battle, if need be."

Varuna gave Lord Krishna the chariot, which was pulled by the horses, Shaibya, Sugriva, Pushpadanta, and Balahaka, and was more brilliant than the sun. Garuda sat on its flag pole. When Lord Krishna approached the abode of Yamaraja, He blew His mighty conch shell, to announce His arrival . Simply by hearing that sound, the residents of Yamaloka became terrified. On the other hand, those who were devoted to sinful activities and thus confined within hell felt delight upon hearing that transcendental sound. Indeed, all the instruments of torture were blunted or crushed upon the appearance of Lord Krishna. The impassible Vaitarani river became easy to cross by men. All the sins of all the residents of hell were instantly destroyed so that they were released from bondage. In fact, thousands of celestial chariots arrived to take them away.

At this, the Yamadutas came and confronted Lord Krishna, saying, "Do not proceed any further with Your chariot."

Lord Krishna replied, "Go quickly and inform Yamaraja of My arrival at his abode."

The Yamadutas hastened to their master. Upon hearing about how all the residents of hell had been released, the lord of death became enraged. He ordered his servants, "Go with your leader, Narantaka, and restrain anyone who comes here against my authority. Seize him and bring him here!"

Narantaka tried to restrain Krishna with strong words and when the Lord ignored him, he became furious. In the fight that ensued, Narantaka struck Krishna and Balarama with many arrows. In retaliation, when Lord Balarama hit Narantaka on the head with His mace, he fell to the ground, unconscious. At this, the other Yamadutas fled to the shelter of Yamaraja and informed him of their defeat.

At this, Yamaraja personally entered the battlefield, surrounded by his supporters. He declared, "Never before have I been subdued by my enemies!"

Chitragupta followed his master and by his command, the entire army of Yamadutas surrounded the chariot of Krishna and

Balarama, showering upon them volleys of arrows. Soon, however, Chitragupta lay wounded upon the floor of his chariot, having been pierced by the arrows of Lord Krishna.

Yamaraja fought furiously and hurled his terrible staff at Lord Krishna. As the kaladanda approached, however, Balarama in the form of Ananta sportingly caught it. However, when He was about to hurl it back at Yamaraja, Lord Brahma hastily intervened and restrained the two Lords from further fighting.

Lord Brahma urged Krishna to forgive Yamaraja, saying that, due to ignorance, the lord of death could not understand Him to be the same Lord Vishnu whom he worshiped.

Lord Krishna told Brahma, "The son of my guru, Sandipani Muni, was brought here. It is to return him to his father that We came here. That was the remuneration requested Us by Our spiritual master and so I promised to return his son to him."

Lord Brahma ordered Yamaraja, "Do what Lord Krishna says."

Yamaraja replied, "But this is not the procedure laid down by you at the beginning of creation. An unembodied being comes here for punishment. How can he leave here after regaining the material body he had relinquished?"

Lord Brahma said, "Krishna is the soul of the universe and the original creator of the material elements. Therefore, what He desires must be carried out by you. Give Him the son of Sandipani Muni."

Being so ordered, Yamaraja recreated the external body of Sandipani Muni's son and handed him over to Lord Krishna.

Delighted, Lord Krishna said to Brahma, "From now on, those who visit the place where I had been instructed by Sandipani Muni, at Avanti, should not have to see the abode of Yamaraja after death. Instead, let them be freed of all sins and attain the heavenly planets after death."

Lord Brahma gave his consent. Thereafter, Lord Krishna and Lord Balarama departed, along with Sandipani Muni's son. Upon



returning the boy to Sandipani Muni, Lord Krishna and Lord Balarama became freed of Their debt to Their spiritual master.

There is a section of the Skanda Purana that describes the characteristics of a girl a brahmana who has concluded his studies at the ashram of his spiritual master may accept as a wife. After studying the Vedas under the guidance of his spiritual master, a brahmachari can enter the grihastha ashram.

A harmonious relationship between husband and wife is conducive to the accomplishment of the three purusharthas (dharma, artha, and kama).

Some foolish people compare young women with leeches. If we think over the matter, we will find that there is a great difference between lovely-eyed ladies and leeches. A leech only takes one's blood but a young woman takes one's mind, wealth, strength, and happiness.

This woman is considered to be an expansion of Goddess Lakshmi—she is clever and efficient, she is chaste, she speaks pleasing words, and she is under the control of her husband.

A sensible man should not marry a girl having the name of a mountain, star, tree, river, serpent, or bird. Her name should have a gentle sound. She should have a gentle face and she should be gentle in speech. She should not be too tall or too thin. Her hair should not be too coarse.

After carefully examining the characteristics of a girl, she can be taken as a bride. A girl with auspicious characteristics and good conduct enhances the longevity of her husband. A man with a suitably qualified wife enjoys happiness. Therefore, for the sake of happiness and prosperity, one should select a properly qualified girl.

These eight are the groups of qualities of a girl that should be ascertained before marriage—vapus (limbs), avarta (curls), gandha (odor), chaya (splendor), sattva (mental stability), svara (voice), gati (walking), and varna (complexion).

Beginning with the soles of the feet and ending with the hair, the auspicious and inauspicious characteristics of girls are herein described. There are sixty-six parts of a girl's body that are to be analyzed—the soles of the feet, lines on the feet, big toe, other toes, nails, instep, heels, ankles, calves, hair on the legs, knees, thighs, navel, stomach, two sides, buttocks, vagina, area beneath the navel, navel, sides of the belly, hair around the navel, heart, chest, two breasts, nipples, joints at the shoulders, shoulders, hands, palms, wrists, back of the hands, nape of the neck, chin, lower lip, upper lip, teeth, tongue, lower part of the tongue, palate, laughter, nose, sneeze, eyes, eyelashes, eyebrows, ears, forehead, head, and hair.

A girl's soles should be fleshy, soft, and glossy. They should not perspire, and they should be warm and pink. These characteristics indicate that she will experience much enjoyment. If the soles of a girl's feet are rough and dry—this indicates misfortune.

If a girl's soles have lines of a wheel, svastika, conch shell, banner, fish, or umbrella—she will become the wife of a prominent man. If a line on the sole of her foot joins the middle toe, it indicates unbroken enjoyment. A line resembling a mouse, crow, or serpent indicates misery.

If the big toe is raised, fleshy, and round, this indicates incomparable enjoyment. If it is crooked, short, or flattened, this indicates misery and misfortune. Soft, close-set, and raised toes are a good sign. If a girl has long toes, she will become a wanton woman. If she has lean toes, she will be poor. If the toes are very short, she will not live long and if the toes are curved, her behavior will be crooked. If a girl's toes are flat, she will be a slave and if the toes have spaces between them, she will be impoverished. If the toes appear to be riding upon one another, the girl will be the killer of her husband and she will depend upon others. If the little toe does not touch the ground when a woman walks, she will kill her husband and then go to live with another man. If the two toes next to the little toe are defective, a woman will be a widow, or will never have a husband.

Toenails are considered to be auspicious if they are glossy,

raised, and copper-colored. Otherwise, they are inauspicious. If the instep of a girl is raised, soft, and fleshy—she will receive a rich and powerful husband. A flatfooted woman will be poor. If the instep is sinewy, she will be a constant traveler.

Ankles that are not prominent are conducive to a girl's welfare. Prominent ankles indicate misfortune. A woman with broad heels meets with misfortune.

If a girl's calves are devoid of hair, glossy, and pleasing to see, she will get a good husband. Knees that are fleshy and round are praiseworthy. A girl with scrawny knees will be unchaste.

Shapely thighs that are glossy, without hair, and fleshy are considered excellent. Hairy thighs indicate widowhood. Flat thighs indicate misfortune and if the skin is rough or hard, this indicates poverty.

Rounded, ample hips are considered praiseworthy. Scrawny hips, hips that are too large, hairy hips, and poorly shaped hips indicate misery. If the small of the back of a woman is fleshy and curved, it is conducive to pleasure. Round buttocks that are soft, fleshy, and firm increase the pleasure of sexual indulgence.

If the lips of a girl's vagina are raised—this is considered auspicious. If they are tilted to the left, it indicates that a woman will give birth to daughters. If it is tilted to the right, she will have sons. If the lips of the vagina are surrounded by hair like that of a mouse, if the clitoris is hidden, and if they are dense, firm, and large—this is considered auspicious. When the lips of the vagina remain open, like an open mouth, and are full of hair—this indicates misery. The lips of a vagina that are curved, like a conch shell, indicate that a girl is barren.

If the area between the navel and the vagina is fleshy, soft, and has soft hair curling to the right, it is auspicious. If the skin of this area is rough and of uneven elevation—this indicates misery.

A deep navel is considered auspicious. A woman with a large belly will experience happiness. But, if the belly has folds of loose skin, she will become a maidservant. If the sides of a girl are soft and fleshy, this is a good sign. Bony or sinewy sides are not good.

A woman of slender waist is considered to be fortunate. A woman with wide breasts will be lusty, unchaste, and merciless. A woman with hair growing on her breasts will certainly be the killer of her husband. High and firm breasts are the best and are conducive to happiness. Uneven, large, and unshapely breasts indicate misery. Breasts that leave little space between them are good, and not those with much space between them. If the right breast is higher than the left, a woman will beget sons. A woman with a left breast that is higher than the right breast will beget daughters. Stout breasts with pointed tips are considered to indicate pleasure in the beginning but misery at the end.

Dark, circular, and firm nipples are praiseworthy. Depressed or lean nipples indicate distress.

Fleshy armpits with fine hair that don't perspire much are nice. Deep, sinewy armpits that perspire much indicate trouble. A girl's arms that are fleshy and without much hair are considered good. Hairy arms indicate widowhood. Scrawny arms indicate distress.

When the thumb and fingers face one another, a girl's hand is considered auspicious. If the palms are reddish and soft, this is considered praiseworthy. Very few lines on the palms is a good sign. A woman with many lines on her palm will become a widow. If the palms are devoid of lines, this indicates poverty. A woman with sinewy palms will become a female mendicant. If a woman has a line on her palm that starts at the base of her thumb and extends to her little finger, she will become the killer of her husband.

If the back of the hands are without hair and are fleshy—that is considered to be very good. The backs of the hands of a girl that are bony, sinewy, and hairy indicate that she should be rejected. A thumb that is straight, rounded and having a circular nail indicates auspiciousness. Long fingers that are gradually tapering are auspicious. Rough fingers with hair on the back are inauspicious.

Short, lean, crooked fingers with spaces between them indicate illness. Fingers of women having large joints indicate misery. Raised, pink fingernails are auspicious. Depressed, discolored fingernails

indicate poverty. White dots are seen on the nails of women having loose morals. Even men become miserable if they have dotted fingernails. The backs of the hands of a woman that are hairy indicate that she will certainly become a widow.

If the back of the neck is fleshy and straight, it is an excellent sign. If the back of the neck is sinewy, hairy, wide, or crooked—this is inauspicious. A woman with a stout neck becomes a widow. A woman with a crooked neck become a maidservant. A woman with a flat neck is barren. A woman with a short neck will not receive a son.

A woman whose chin is divided into two parts, or is hairy, should not be accepted. If there is hair below the lower lip of a woman—this is not good. Cheeks that are plump and fleshy are considered good. One should avoid a woman with rough, depressed, fleshless cheeks. A fleshy, glossy, round face is considered to be very nice. Lean lips indicate misfortune. Very stout and dark lips indicate a quarrelsome nature. If the center of the upper lip is raised and if there is no hair above it—this indicates a life of enjoyment.

All thirty-two teeth should be glossy and white, like cow's milk. They should be placed in even rows. If the teeth are yellow or dark, big, long, and having spaces between them—this indicates misery and misfortune.

If the tongue is red and soft, a woman will enjoy all that is pleasing. If it is dark, narrow in the middle, and wide in front—this indicates misery. A woman with a blackish tongue is fond of quarrels. A woman with a fleshy tongue will be poor. A woman with a wide tongue habitually commits mistakes.

A palate that is reddish, glossy, and tender is praiseworthy. If a woman's palate is blackish, she will be separated from her children. A yellowish palate indicates that a woman will renounce the world and become a recluse. If the palate is rough and hard, a woman will have a large family.

A woman's smile is praiseworthy when the teeth show slightly, the cheeks become puffed, and the eyes do not close. A raised nose

is considered auspicious. If the tip of the nose is bent, it indicates widowhood or distress. If the end of her nose is flat, a woman will become a slave. A woman whose nose is very short or very long is certainly fond of quarrels.

If a woman has bulging eyes, she will not live long. A woman with round eyes will be unchaste. Squinting eyes are not a good sign. A red-eyed woman will be the killer of her husband. Eyebrows in the shape of a bow and having soft hair are praiseworthy. If the hair of the eyebrows are rough, large, or scattered—this is not a good sign.

Crooked, thin, or sinewy ears are inauspicious. The forehead should be devoid of hair. A woman with a prominent forehead will certainly be the death of her husband. A woman with a big head will be a widow. A woman with a long, narrow head will be a prostitute.

Curly, fine hair is very nice. Rough hair, split hair, and sparse hair indicates misery and poverty. A mole on the breast of a woman indicates conjugal bliss. A mole to the right of the vagina indicates that she will be the wife of a leader of men. A mole or freckle beneath the navel is auspicious.

If, while sleeping, a girl gnashes her teeth noisily, she is not praiseworthy, even if she has other good characteristics. This is also true of a girl who babbles in her sleep.

Despite all that has been said about bodily characteristics, the following statement must be considered above all: A woman of bad character is the worst of persons, even though she may possess seemingly auspicious bodily features. A chaste woman is the most auspicious person, even if she possesses none of the above-mentioned praiseworthy bodily features. It is only by the grace of God that one gets a wife of good conduct, who is under her husband's control, and who considers her husband as worthy of respect.

Those who relinquish their bodies in holy places of pilgrimage will be born again with auspicious bodily characteristics. A wife having a good character and noble behavior causes her husband to have a long life, even if he was destined to die young. Therefore, one who is wise will marry a girl of excellent character after carefully examining all of her qualities.

Every day, a householder performs five kinds of activities that are called *sunakarma* (acts involving violence). These are—pounding spices with a mortar and pestle, use of a grinding stone, use of a stove, use of a water pot, and sweeping the floor or courtyard with a broom. There are five sacrifices to be performed by a householder to free him from the sinful reactions incurred as a result of these activities. These are—*brahmayajna* (teaching or studying the Vedas), *pitriyajna* (offering oblations to the forefathers), *daivayajna* (fire sacrifice), *bhutayajna* (offering oblations to spirits), and *nriyajna* (worship of guests).

When a householder regularly eats another man's cooked food, he will become that man's pet animal in his next life. When a person offers cooked food to someone, he takes away that person's pious merit. When a guest is not honored and goes away, that person's sinful reactions are transferred to the negligent householder. When one partakes of food only after guests have been fed enjoys longevity and prosperity. A householder who eats without feeding a guest is a sinner. Children, married women of the household, pregnant women, and sick people are to be fed even before guests.

Formerly, there was a very heroic and arrogant *Danava* named *Andhaka*, who was a grandson of Lord *Brahma*. Once, he thought to himself, "I will satisfy *Mahadeva* so that I can receive his blessings. When he is pleased with me, I will choose the benediction of my choice."

For performing austerities, *Andhaka* went to the banks of the *Reva* River. He abstained from food for one thousand celestial years. During the next thousand years, he only drank water. During the third thousand years, he simply inhaled smoke. During the fourth thousand years, he practiced yoga. Due to the severity of *Andhaka's* austerities, only his skin and bones remained. A column of smoke emanated from his head and ascended beyond *Svargaloka*, all the way to *Kailasa*.

*Uma*, who was seated near Lord *Shiva*, said, "Who is engaged in such severe austerities in the world of human beings? Already, four

thousand years have passed! A penance such as this has never before been seen nor heard of. O lord, why are you indifferent toward this devotee? I have seen you grant benedictions to those who performed much less severe penance. Until you reward this Danava, I will not play dice with you."

Lord Shiva replied, "I did not know that this Danava is performing austerities. Come with me to where he is staying."

Standing before Andhaka, Lord Shiva said, "Such a great feat has been accomplished by you! Why are you performing such terrible penance? I will grant you whatever is within your mind."

Andhaka replied, "O lord, if you are pleased with me then grant me the benediction that I may vanquish all the demigods."

Lord Shiva said, "You should never fight with the demigods, not even in your dreams! Your request is not pleasing to my mind. Ask for something else. You can enjoy pleasure on the level of the residents of heaven. Rule your kingdom without impediment!"

Andhaka was disappointed and so he appeared to be quite gloomy. He said, "All my painful austerities have proven futile! For all that effort, I have achieved nothing!"

After saying this, Andhaka heaved a heavy sigh and then fell to the ground, as if unconscious.

Parvati said, "O Shankara, grant this Danava whatever he wants. If you neglect your devotees, your reputation will be spoiled."

Lord Shiva said, "O Goddess, if I give this Danava what he wants, he will lose all respect for Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu, and even for me, and so what to speak of the other demigods. After attaining such power, he will disregard everyone."

Parvati said, "O Maheshvara, give him this benediction: 'Conquer all of the demigods except Lord Vishnu.'"

Lord Shiva responded, "This is an excellent idea! I will do as you say."

Lord Shiva sprinkled nectar over the emaciated body of Andhaka so that it instantly returned to its normal condition.



Mahadeva then said, "I shall fulfill your desire but you shall not be able to conquer Lord Vishnu."

Andhaka said, "Let it be so! By my prowess, I will conquer all of the demigods, except Lord Vishnu. You can now return to Kailasa, along with your consort."

Lord Shiva and Parvati departed, riding upon his bull carrier, while the Danava, Andhaka, also returned home, where he was greeted with great celebration. For some time, he remained in his capital, happy to be back with his family, ruling his prosperous kingdom.

Meanwhile, knowing that the Danava had obtained a benediction from Lord Shiva, the demigods became anxious. They assembled and went to Indra, their king, asking him what should be done about the powerful demon. While the demigods were consulting one another in this way, this news was conveyed to Andhaka, by means of spies. After considering the matter, the Danava left his city without any assistants, riding upon his chariot and equipped with numerous weapons.

Effortlessly, Andhaka ascended to the peak of Mount Meru, where the demigods were assembled. Being fearful, Indra got up and offered the Danava his seat. Andhaka sat down on the throne of Indra and surveyed the scene with great satisfaction.

Indra said, "My dear sir, for what purpose have you come here? Whatever wealth we possess, we will gladly hand over to you."

Andhaka replied, "I have not come here for wealth! Show me Airavata. Show me Ucchaishrava. Show me the best of Apsaras. Show me the parijata tree."

Upon hearing this, Indra thought to himself, "I don't see anyone who can kill this sinful rogue. In our miserable condition, I do not find anyone who can protect us."

Thereafter, the frightened king of heaven had the Apsaras perform a dance for the Danava. Indeed, one by one, the Apsaras, headed by Urvashi, came before Andhaka, dancing to the accompaniment of tantalizing music. However, the demon's mind

didn't feel satisfaction, even after seeing all of the beautiful Apsaras. Suddenly, he caught hold of Indra's consort, Sachi, having become enamored by her.

After seizing Sachi, Andhaka hurriedly left the assembly of demigods atop Mount Meru and returned home. The demigods had tried to stop the demon but they were easily defeated..

After being vanquished, all the demigods went to the abode of Brahma, riding upon elephants as huge as mountains, horses as big as elephants, and chariots the size of a city, as well as on crocodiles, tortoises, and buffaloes. After falling flat to the ground to offer obiesances, the demigods stood up and recited prayers.

Lord Brahma addressed Indra with a voice as grave as the rumbling of clouds: "Why have you come here? Why do you all looked so distressed? By whom have you been insulted? Tell me everything without delay."

In reply, the demigods informed Lord Brahma of how the Danava, Antaka, had kidnapped Indra's wife. After hearing the whole story, Lord Brahma began to ponder over the means of killing the great demon. Finally, he told the demigods, "This Danava cannot be killed by any of you. Lord Vishnu is the actual protector of the three worlds. There is no one else who can save you."

Thereafter, keeping Brahma in front, the demigods went to where Lord Vishnu was residing. After being offered very nice prayers, the Lord said to them, "For what purpose have you come here? Who is tormenting you? Tell me everything clearly. May the person who is harassing you go to the abode of Yamaraja this very day!"

The demigods replied, "We have been deprived of our kingdom by Andhaka. Kindly protect us, as a father protects his sons. Kill this enemy of Indra, along with his sons and grandsons."

Getting up from His bed of Ananta, Lord Vishnu came and stood before the demigods and said, "Rest assured that I will kill this sinful demon, wherever he may be. Return to your abodes now."

The demigods, headed by Brahma, bowed down to Lord Vishnu

and then returned home, confident that their enemy would be soon slain. Thereafter, for the purpose of killing Andhaka, Lord Vishnu discharged an Agni weapon toward the region of Patala, knowing that the demon was residing there. As he was being scorched by that missile, Andhaka discharged a Varuna weapon to counteract it.

The demon wondered, "Who is this powerful adversary that is harassing me? Who is it that I will soon dispatch to the abode of Yamaraja?"

The infuriated demon traversed the path from where the Agni weapon had come and soon, he came upon Lord Janardana, holding His bow in His hand.

Andhaka challenged, "Your happiness is finished! After seeing me, there will be no escape for You, like a mouse caught by a cat. I will send you on the terrible path leading to the abode of Yamaraja. The Danavas killed by you earlier were not even men—they were like women. I will not even pick up any weapon to fight with You."

Lord Vishnu did not become the least bit disturbed or angry while listening to these boasting words. Understanding that the demon wished to wrestle, Lord Krishna suddenly kicked him, making him fall to the ground. After a short while, Andhaka composed himself and got off the ground. Realizing that he was not capable of fighting with Lord Vishnu, the Danava began to employ the first means of diplomacy, *saman* (reconciliation). With his palms joined in supplication, Andhaka bowed down to offer his obeisances, saying, "All victory to You, My Lord," as well as many prayers of glorification.

When the demon finished speaking, Lord Vishnu said, "O Danava, I am pleased with you and so I will grant you a benediction."

Andhaka said, "O Lord, if You are really pleased with me then I would like to fight with You in a most splendid fashion. Being purified by Your touch, I will attain the spiritual world."

The Lord replied, "How can I fight with you, now that you have gratified Me with your prayers? Being satisfied with you, how will My anger be aroused? If you are so eager to fight then go to Lord Shiva."

Andhaka said, "My Lord, I know that Shiva is not inclined to fight with me."

Lord Vishnu responded, "Go and shake Mount Kailasa with all your strength. By doing this, Mahadeva will surely become infuriated and grant you the favor of combat with him."

Thereafter, Antaka went to Mount Kailasa and began to violently shake it. When Mount Kailasa shook, the entire three worlds trembled with it. Many peaks from the mountain fell, as did innumerable meteors and trees. While sitting with Uma, Lord Shiva became surprised.

Goddess Girija tightly embraced her husband and said, "O lord, why is the mountain shaking? Is this the annihilation that occurs at the end of Lord Brahma's day? Please tell me what is happening."

Lord Shiva replied, "Who has become so wicked? Who has placed his head in the mouth of a serpent? That person will go to the abode of Yama this very day! I had been sleeping. I will kill anyone who wakes me up and comes face to face with me."

Lord Shiva thought to himself, "There is no doubt about it—this is the work of Andhaka."

As Mahadeva was considering the means for vanquishing the demon, all of the demigods arrived there. He then made a chariot out of the demigods' diverse energies. After constructing this incomparable chariot, Lord Shiva mounted it and angrily set out to combat the Danava.

As he approached Andhaka, Lord Shiva challenged him to stand and fight. Thereafter, a fierce battle took place. Many weapons were employed by Shambhu but each and every one was counteracted by Andhaka. Finally, abandoning the use of weapons, Lord Shiva and Andhaka engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

As the two pounded each other with their fists, Lord Shiva began to think about the means of killing his adversary. Then when Lord Shiva violently struck Andhaka, making him fall to the ground, the Danava became enraged. After getting up, he pressed Lord Shiva's head in his armpit, squeezing it until he fainted.

When he saw Mahadeva lying unconscious, Andhaka thought, "Alas! What a sinful act I have performed! What shall I do? How can I rid myself of the terrible consequences that are sure to befall me?"

The Danava carried Lord Shiva to his abode atop Mount Kailasa. After placing him on a bed, he departed. Upon regaining consciousness, Lord Shiva saw that he was at home. Feeling hurt, Shambhu angrily said to himself, "How was that evil wretch able to do this to me?"

Lord Shiva picked up an iron rod and rushed at the Danava. Coming close, he hurled it at the demon's head. Andhaka laughingly cut that iron bar to pieces with his sword, however. Mahadeva then remembered his blazing trident, known as *kaucchera*. After being invoked by the lord, it struck Andhaka's chest, making him vomit blood as he fell facedown onto the ground.

Lord Shiva took the demon, who was stuck to the tip of his trident, and whirled him around like a wheel. However, every drop of blood that fell to the ground transformed into a Danava with weapons in his hands. Within a short while, Lord Shiva became oppressed by that army of demons.

At this time, Lord Shiva remembered Goddess Durga. Within an instant, she arrived at the battlefield, striking terror into the hearts of all those who saw her, simply by her gruesome appearance. She had curved fangs, a huge body, and loosely hanging earlobes. She said, "O lord, what is your command? Who is to go to the abode of Yamaraja today?"

Lord Shiva replied, "O Goddess, drink as much of this Danava's blood as you please. Be sure to quickly lick up the blood that falls to the ground. Help me kill this wicked demon!"

As soon as this was said, Goddess Durga began killing thousands of Danavas. While witnessing this slaughter, Andhaka joined his palms and praised Lord Shiva. When he finished his prayers, he bowed down to Mahadeva and simply waited.

Lord Shiva said, "Alright. Ask for a benediction. I will grant you whatever you desire."

Andhaka said, “O lord of the devas, if you are actually pleased with me then make me equal to you. I will smear my body with ashes, wear matted hair, display three eyes, wield a trident, and wear a tiger skin like you. This is all I desire.”

Lord Shiva replied, “I shall grant you this boon. You will become one of my associates, named Bhṛṅgiṣha.”

Thereafter, Lord Shiva returned to Mount Kailasa, along with Uma. The demigods came there and worshiped Mahadeva, being very thankful that he had subdued their enemy, Andhaka.

Formerly, there was a formidable demon named Kalapriṣṭha, who was a grandson of Lord Brahma. Once, he went to the banks of the Ganga to perform severe austerities. While remaining upside-down, the arrogant demon constantly inhaled smoke. It so happened that Lord Shiva and Uma were sitting nearby. When she happened to see the demon engaged in penance, Parvati said, “Just see, Mahadeva, there is a man inhaling smoke. Go and grant him the fulfillment of his desire.”

Lord Shiva replied, “What you request does not appeal to me. One should look after his own affairs and not meddle with other people’s concerns. He who carries out the whims of fools, women, children, and enemies invariably falls into terrible difficulty. What I have said is the simple truth.”

Parvati countered, “In the śāstra it is said that when a husband gives excuses after being requested for something by his wife, she feels humiliated. My lord, if you do not honor my request, I will give up my life.”

Being thus urged by Parvati, Lord Shiva approached the Danava and asked, “Why are you inhaling smoke? Why do you perform these austerities? What is your distress? Tell me what you want. You seem to be a youth, only about twenty years old. There must be some great purpose behind your penance.”

The Danava replied, “Please grant me steadfast devotion to you. That is all I desire. I have already completed two thousand days of penance.”

Lord Shiva said, "Kindly express your real desire. Rest assured that I am pleased with you."

Upon hearing this, the Danava thought, "What shall I ask for—residence in heaven, or lordship of the earth?"

Finally, the Danava said, "Kindly grant me this benediction. I am not the kind of demon who likes to fight wars. This is what I want—if I touch anyone on the head, be he a deva, Danava, or Gandharva, let him instantly be reduced to ashes."

Lord Shiva gave his consent and requested the Danava to return home. However, the demon said, "O lord of the demigods, stay here a moment so that I can test your benediction by placing my hand on your head."

Upon hearing this, Mahadeva became worried, thinking, "Neither Skanda, Lord Vishnu, nor Brahma could handle this situation!"

Finally, Lord Shiva asked his bull carrier, Nandi, to fight with the demon. This was after the Danava had extended his hand and was about to touch his head. Suddenly, being lashed by the bull's tail, the demon stumbled and fell. Taking Uma with him, Lord Shiva hurriedly departed toward the South. Being very frightened, Mahadeva frequently turned his head and glanced behind him to see if the demon was chasing him.

With Lord Shiva gone, the Danava fought with the bull. Both were very powerful and although he tried his best, the demon couldn't touch his adversary's head with his hand. After lashing the demon with his tail, the bull started to run away. The Danava followed him and soon Nandi came to where Lord Shiva was standing. The bull told him, "Get onto my back and let's get out of here!"

Lord Shiva and Parvati mounted the bull and soon they reached the palace of King Indra. The demon was in hot pursuit, however, and so Lord Shiva left Amaravati and went to the abode of Brahma. Still, wherever he went, Lord Shiva saw the Danava pursuing him. Indeed, while wandering all over the universe, Lord Shiva was dismayed to find that he could not find anywhere to rest—not even for a moment.

When Narada Muni heard about this incident, he joyfully began to dance, saying, “Today is my lucky day!” Narada went to where Lord Shiva was fleeing from the Danava. Lord Shiva asked the sage, “Do you know where Lord Keshava is staying? I want to go and inform him of my perilous condition.”

Narada Muni replied, “Lord Vishnu is certainly the protector of the surrendered souls. I was not aware that you were in such difficulty.”

Lord Shiva said, “I know that you are well aware of everything! Go quickly to Lord Narayana and inform him of my plight. This demon cannot be killed by me, or by any demigod.”

Narada Muni said, “I am going. The Lord is asleep in the ocean of milk. However, as you well know—a sleeping king, master, or preceptor should never be awoken.”

Lord Shiva argued, “If a house is on fire and one does not wake up the people sleeping inside—they will perish.”

Narada Muni said, “Go quickly and save yourself! I will go to where Lord Janardana is sleeping.”

When Narada Muni arrived at the Ocean of Milk, he saw Lord Vishnu lying upon the serpent, Shesha. His lotus feet were kept by Lakshmi upon her thigh. The Apsaras surrounded the Lord, singing His glories. After bowing down, Narada Muni requested Lakshmi to arouse the Lord from His sleep. Lakshmi pressed the Lord’s big toe and said, “Narada Muni has come to see You. Do wake up, O slayer of the Madhu demon.”

Upon seeing Narada Muni before Him, the Lord was very pleased. He said, “Welcome, O foremost sage.”

Narada Muni informed the Lord of Mahadeva’s mischievous pursuer and how Shambhu had requested him to solicit His assistance. Thereafter, Lord Vishnu went with Narada Muni and came upon Lord Shiva, who was fleeing toward the North. When he saw Lord Vishnu, Shiva came and embraced Him, again and again.

Lord Vishnu could see perspiration on Lord Shiva’s forehead as He inquired about his difficulty. Lord Shiva replied, “Fools have



no happiness! A henpecked husband has no happiness! Being urged by my wife, I gave a wicked Danava this benediction: 'If you place your hand on anyone's head, that person will be instantly reduced to ashes.' Now, the sinful demon wants to kill me."

Lord Vishnu said, "Shankara, I will find some means to kill this demon. Go to the banks of the Reva and remain there."

After the departure of Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu utilized His illusory energy, maya, to create a very heavenly atmosphere. It appeared to be spring and innumerable flowering trees could be seen wherever one's glance turned. That delightful atmosphere was pervaded by the lovely sound of cuckoos and other melodious birds. The Lord created a girl whose beauty was beyond compare, as well as seven female companions. All of them were desirous of a man.

A swing was created and decorated with garlands of flowers and jewels. The girl who was created by the Lord's illusory energy sat on the swing and began to sing in a most sweet and pleasing manner. A cool breeze began to blow, carrying a sweet fragrance to the nostrils of the Danava, Kalasprishta (a name meaning, "one who is touched by kala, or death). While smelling this fragrance, the demon thought, "Such a nice flower has never been seen by me before."

Even as he was thinking in this way, the sound of enchanting music reached the Danava's ears. Just by hearing that sound, the demon came fully under the control of maya. Just as a deer falls into the snare of a hunter, Kalasprishta fell into the trap laid by Lord Vishnu. Then, when he actually saw the young girl playing on a swing, he briefly swooned and fell to the ground.

After getting up, when the demon glanced at the faces of the girls, he became afflicted by the god of love. When he approached the principal girl, she said, "No. No, don't touch me. I am a virgin girl from a noble family and I must return home at once."

The Danava said, "Splendid girl, I wish to marry you. With me as your husband, you will become the queen of the entire earth."

The girl replied, "In childhood, a father protects a girl. In

youth, her husband protects her and in old age, her sons. Thus, at no stage in her life is a woman independent. I am not free to do as I like. I was born in a noble family. You must approach my father with your proposal.”

The Danava pleaded, “O lady with beautiful eyes, if you do not accept me as your husband right now, this foolish act of yours will be the cause of my death.”

The girl said, “Trust cannot be indiscriminately placed upon all men. Men behave with women in a very peculiar manner. They easily become infatuated and lusty. If you enjoy me and then leave me, my life will be ruined. No one else will accept me. Whether a brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya, or shudra—no woman can have a second husband.”

The Danava conceded, “What you say is true. Ask anything of me that will convince you of the genuineness of my love.”

The girl said, “I am a cowherd girl and I am playing here with my companions. Our family tradition is not like others with regards to giving away a girl in marriage. In our family, the man who comes to propose marriage must simply place his hand upon his head, as a sign of sincerity.”

After hearing this, the Danava placed his hand upon his head. Obviously, he had been blinded by passionate desire and as a result, he was immediately reduced to a pile of ashes. Upon witnessing this, the demigods ecstatically showered flowers and then returned to their abodes, while Lord Vishnu went back to the ocean of milk.

Once, Parashara Muni engaged in austerities within the water of the Ganga. While restraining his breath, he remained within the water for twelve years. When twelve years was completed in this way, the sage emerged from the water. Thereafter, as he begged for alms from village to village, Parashara Muni came to another river. There, he saw a boat and within the boat, a very beautiful woman.

Becoming enamored by the woman, he approached her and said, “O sweetly-smiling lady, please take me to the other shore.”

The woman bowed her head with respect for the great sage. She could see that he was infatuated with her and so she said, "I am the daughter of a fisherman and I am a virgin girl. Being directed by my father, I ply this boat on the river. I wanted you to understand this about me before you step into the boat."

Parashara meditated for a short while and then said, "O fair lady, by my introspection I have understood the truth about you. You are not the daughter of a fisherman—you are the offspring of a king!"

Becoming very curious, the girl inquired, "Who is my real father? Who is my mother? How is it that I was raised by a fisherman?"

Parashara explained, "I will tell you everything about yourself. There was a king named Vasu, born on the Soma dynasty. He was the emperor of Jambhudvipa. He had seven hundred wives and one thousand sons. He was a very righteous ruler but the residents of Kshiradvipa, who were mlecchas, did not recognize his authority. Accompanied by his army, King Vasu crossed the ocean to subdue the mlecchas and after a fight, he came out victorious."

"My dear girl, that king's chief wife was your mother. While her husband was away, her time for conception arrived and she became tormented by the arrows of Kamadeva. She called for a messenger and asked him to inform her husband of her plight. The messenger replied, 'The king has crossed the ocean and he has taken all the boats with him. I will not be able to reach him at this time.'"

"Upon hearing this, the lusty queen became more upset. A friend then told her, 'Why worry? Send your letter by means of a courier pigeon. Birds can cross the sea.'"

"A scribe was then instructed to write this note: 'O King Vasu, your queen, Satyabhama, cannot remain without you. Her time for conception has arrived and she is very eager to receive your embraces.'"

"This letter was written on a bhurja leaf and a carrier pigeon was brought. When the queen instructed it to carry the letter to her

husband, the bird bowed down, picked up the paper, and flew off. Soon, it reached the king. After reading the letter, the king squeezed out his never-failing semen and put it in some kind of container. Along with a note, he gave it to the pigeon and asked it to return to his queen.”

“The bird bowed down to the king, took the semen and letter, and flew away. However, as it was flying over the sea, it was spotted by a hungry hawk. Thinking that the pigeon was carrying some meat, the hawk attacked it and in the scuffle, the semen fell into the water. The king’s semen was swallowed by a fish and as a result, a female child grew within its womb. That fish was caught by fishermen and when it was cut open, you were discovered, dazzling like the full moon. The fishermen were delighted and the chief fisherman adopted you because he had no children.”

In this way, Parashara Muni told the girl in the boat all about her origin. After thinking over the matter for a moment, the girl said, “O brahmana, I have a fishy odor,” indicating that she would gratify his desire if this could be rectified by him in return. By means of his yogic power, Parashara made the girl wonderfully fragrant. He also lit a sacred fire and circumambulated it, thus marrying the girl he hungered for.

After doing this, the sage began to touch the girl in a most intimate way. Understanding that he wanted to embrace her right there within the boat, the girl became fearful and told him, “O wise one, how can you do this in public? Aren’t you ashamed that people are watching?”

At this, the sage meditated and soon, the entire area was enveloped in darkness. As he enjoyed the happiness of the beautiful girl’s intimate association, she became pregnant and delivered her child—all within a matter of moments. That child held a staff and a water pot in his hands, and on his head was matted hair. Upon seeing her son, the girl felt great alarm. While trembling, she took shelter of the sage, saying, “Please save me! What will people think?”

Parashara Muni replied, “Don’t worry. Even though you have delivered a son, you will remain a virgin. Indeed, you will become

famous as Yojanagandha (one whose fragrance can be perceived for eight miles), as well as Satyavati. A king named Shantanu will be your husband. Just resume rowing this boat and rest assured that things will happen as I have predicted.”

After saying this, Parashara Muni departed. The boy bowed down to his mother and said, “Please forgive me for what I am about to say. I wish to leave home so that I can perform austerities to satisfy the Lord of all beings.”

Becoming upset, Satyavati said, “My son, please do not abandon me, your poor mother. Due to separation from you, I will surely die. No one is more affectionate than a son, there is no greater relative than a brother, no greater piety than truthfulness, and no greater sin than deceit. I have no husband and so you must be my support.”

Vedavyasa replied, “Do not become bewildered. At the time of any danger, simply remember me, and I will rescue you. Please accept my words as truth.”

After saying this, Vyasadeva went away and Satyavati returned home. Later on, as he remained within a forest, the demigods, headed by Brahma, visited him, at the advice of Narada Muni. Lord Brahma performed the birth ceremonies and the child was given various names. Because he had been born on an island, he was named Dvaipayana. Because he was an incarnation of Lord Krishna, he was called Krishna and because he would compile the Vedic literature, he was named Vyasa.

Once, Maharaja Yudhisthira conversed with the great sage, Markandeya Rishi. In the course of their elaborate discussions, the king asked, “Men in this world experience pleasure and sorrows as the results of their former pious and sinful activities. When the individual soul leaves the material body at the time of death, it cannot be seen. Again, when the soul attains another body, constituted of the five elements, at the time of conception, it cannot be seen. The body is made up of bones, skin, tissue, flesh, hair, nerves, stool, and

urine. By what characteristics of the body can the past activities of a man be known?"

Shri Markandeya Rishi said, "O son of Kunti, this is a very complex science. I shall repeat to you what I had previously heard from the mouth of Lord Brahma as he was discussing this very subject in an assembly of great sages. A spiritual master is the chastiser of his self-controlled disciples. The king is the chastiser of the wicked people within his kingdom. The chastiser of those who conceal their sins is Yamaraja, the son of Vivasvan."

"Those who did not atone for their sins are punished in hell by the servants of Yama. After being tormented in hell, sinful persons are born in various lower species until they once again attain the human form of life. At that time, they display distinct characteristics that are the indicators of their previous sins. It's as if sinful people are branded so that others may be warned of what kind of person they are dealing with. I shall now describe to you these tell-tale signs."

A habitual liar becomes one who stammers. One who lied, putting cows in danger, bereft of the power to speak (dumb). The killer of a brahmana becomes a leper. A drunkard has blackened teeth. One who stole gold will have deformed nails. One who had intimate relations with his preceptor's wife will have a skin disease. One who enjoyed the association of sinful people will have a disorder of the genitals. One who never gave in charity will be impoverished.

A brahmana who performed sacrifices for unworthy persons will become a village pig. One who had a habit of arriving as an uninvited guest will become a dog. One who ate indiscriminately will be born as a monkey in a desolate forest. One who enjoyed threatening others will be born as a cat. One who set fire to a dry forest will become a lightning bug.

By imparting false knowledge, one becomes a bullock. One who gives stale food to a brahmana may become impotent. One who thrived on rivalry will be born blind, as will one who had stolen

books. The child of one who stole fruit will die and in his next life, he will be a monkey. One who ate fruit without giving any to others will be childless. One who stole cloth will become an alligator. One who administered poison will become a serpent. One who stole grains will become a mouse.

One who rapes a girl who has not reached puberty will become a serpent. One who covets the wife of his spiritual master will become a chameleon. One who sells illegal items will be born as a person with defective vision. One who enjoyed sex by placing his penis into places other than the vagina will become a wolf. One who practiced deception while buying things will be born as an owl.

One who promises to give a brahmana money and then doesn't do so will become a madhuka tree. A habitual thief will become a pig. One who likes to spread rumors about distinguished persons will become a tortoise. One who maintains himself on the offerings made to a deity will become a chandala. The higher caste lover of a shudra woman will become a scorpion.

One who regularly eats meat belonging to others will become chronically diseased. One who enjoyed sex with his sister will be impotent. A street astrologer will become a donkey. One who falsely professes to be a very learned man will become a cat. One who professionally recites the shastra will be born as a dog.

In the Treta-yuga, there was an intelligent king named Devapanna. He delighted in performing sacrifices and giving charity to worthy persons. Like a doting father, he carefully protected his subjects.

Datyayani was the beloved wife of King Devapanna. Their love for each other seemed to increase with each passing day. The king was a reservoir of all good qualities but somehow, he had no children. Because the perpetuation of his family was threatened in this way, the king was in a state of constant anxiety. He fervently worshiped Goddess Durga in the hopes that she would relieve him of his misery by awarding him a son.

After worshipping the goddess for twelve years, the king was blessed with her darshana. The goddess said, “I have become pleased by your worship. Choose any benediction—whatever desire you cherish, I will fulfill.”

King Devapanna said, “O goddess, if you think that I am worthy then relieve me of the distress caused by having no male child. Please save my family from extinction. Although I perform the shraddha ceremony every day, it is said that the forefathers do not accept the offerings made by a childless man. Indeed, my ancestors appear to me in my dreams as though afflicted by hunger.”

Upon hearing this, the goddess began to meditate so that she could perceive the entire universe, crowded with moving and non-moving entities. Finally, her face beaming with delight, she replied to the king, “Within the entire creation, there is no one destined to become your child. Perform a sacrifice for the satisfaction of Lord Vishnu, who is the yajnapurusha (the actual enjoyer of sacrifice). Otherwise, there is no hope of you receiving a child.”

After saying this, the goddess disappeared from view. The king performed a sacrifice, as directed by his worshipable goddess and as a result, a daughter was born. She was radiant and beautiful. Indeed, such a lovely girl could not be found anywhere else—be it in heaven or on earth. Being delighted, King Devapanna named her Kamapramodini.

When she grew up, Kamapramodini stunned the world with her beauty. She had curly black hair and the weight of her breasts caused her to lean slightly forward. Her smile was beautified by her red lips and her lotus-petal ears extended almost to her ears. Her thin waist and shapely thighs added to her charm.

One day, in the company of her many girlfriends, Kamapramodini went to a temple of Goddess Durga, taking with her all the paraphernalia of worship. The temple was situated by the side of a nice lake. Taking off their clothes and jewelry and leaving them on the bank, the girls enjoyed playing within the water, after completing their worship of the goddess.



At that time, a demon named Shambara came there in the form of a hawk. Upon seeing the girls within the water, the demon suddenly swooped down from the sky. Taking Kamapramodini in his claws, along with some of her jewelry, he ascended into the sky.

As the demon flew away, some of the jewelry fell from his claws and landed in the Narmada River, where the great sage, Mandavya Muni, was meditating.

Upon seeing how the princess had been carried away by the demon, all of the girls came out of the water, lamenting loudly. They rushed back to the palace and informed the king of how his daughter had been kidnapped by a huge hawk. Getting up from his throne, the king hurriedly went to the lake, along with his ministers. When no clue of his daughter's whereabouts were found, the king fainted onto the ground.

After some time, when he regained consciousness, the king asked his ministers, "Now, what should be done?" It was decided that the king's soldiers would be sent out in all directions to search for the missing girl. The king also equipped himself with various types of weapons and was about to set out. No one could guess what the king would do to vent his terrible anger.

At that time, one of the soldiers came and presented some of his daughter's jewelry, saying, "These were found at the ashram of Mandavya Muni."

While examining the jewelry, the king's eyes became red with rage. He declared, "Such a brahmana is living within my kingdom, who indulges in stealing! In the guise of a holy man, he is engaged in plundering the people! He must be the one who abducted my daughter after assuming the form of a bird!"

"No sin is incurred if one kills a hypocrite, rogue, flatterer, thief, or man of evil conduct. There is no need for further inquiry. Impale with a stake this sinful imposter who has abducted my daughter! He is a demon in the guise of a sadhu!"

Thus it came to be that Mandavya Muni was impaled by the king's men. The citizens were shocked and they openly criticized the

king, saying, “Our ruler has acted like a chandala! A brahmana is never to be killed! If a brahmana commits an abominable act, he can be banished from the kingdom but not physically harmed.”

In fact, the citizens became so gloomy that hardly anyone ate or performed their prescribed duties. At this time, many great sages, headed by Narada Muni, came to see Mandavya Muni, who had been impaled by a stake. When they saw him, their grief knew no bounds. They came close to the rishi, wondering whether he was dead, or still alive. They talked among themselves: “Let him be asked. If he consents, we can reduce the king to ashes by the power of our penance.”

Mandavya Muni’s brother, Narayana, who had attended him while he performed austerities, then said, “Even as I live, such a plight has befallen my brother. To hell with my life! I will now reduce the entire kingdom to ashes!”

After saying this, Narayana put some water in the palm of his hand and empowered it with the potency of a mantra. Before he could utter a curse, however, the sages approached Mandavya Muni and asked him, “Do you wish that the king who has brought you near to death should be cursed?”

While tolerating great pain, Mandavya Muni replied, “I offer my respects to all of you. The terrible misery that I am undergoing is the fruit of an activity performed by me in my last life. For this reason, you should not feel aggrieved.”

“Those who always act piously and who have conquered arrogance and anger live happily in this world. Those who are educated and polite, who never harass others, who never think about other men’s wives and remain content with their own wives, need not be afraid of anything in this world. They are innately pure and devoid of sins.”

The sages asked, “What sin was performed by you in a previous birth that caused this terrible suffering? Shouldn’t you be taken off the stake?”

Mandavya Muni replied, “Just as a calf will find its mother in a herd of thousands of cows, one’s sinful reactions will certainly

visit one. In my youth, as I combed my hair, the lice that fell out were killed by me, by means of a thorn. It is because of this sin that I have been impaled with a stake. Knowing this, I do not wish to curse anyone. By remaining on this stake for a few days, I will completely cleanse myself of that sin. The king should be excused because he was simply an instrument in the hands of destiny. Let all anger toward him be dispelled.”

(This brings to mind a very nice verse from the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam [10.14.8]:

*tat te 'nukampām susamīkṣamāṇo  
bhuñjāna evātma-kṛtaṁ vipākam  
hṛd-vāg-vapurbhir vidadhan namas te  
jīveta yo mukti-pade sa dāya-bhāk*

“My dear Lord, one who constantly waits for Your causeless mercy to be bestowed upon him and who goes on suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds, offering You respectful obeisances from the core of his heart, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim.”)

The assembled sages were delighted to hear Mandavya Muni’s speech and they responded by heartily congratulating him. Mandavya Muni’s brother, Narayana, asked, “Where shall I deposit this mantra-charged water?”

Mandavya Muni replied, “Keep it for now. I will throw it in the ocean at the proper time.”

As the sages were about to return to their ashrams, Mandavya Muni requested, “Please promise me that you will return here on the fifth day from today.”

The sages, headed by Narada Muni, gave their consent. The sages departed and the next day, a female ascetic named Sandili happened to come there. She wandered about at night, carrying her husband on her back, in a sack. Due to the weight, Sandili staggered as she walked and she did not even see the impaled rishi, Mandavya.

As she came close by, that lady stumbled on Mandavya Muni's knees so that she fell to the ground.

This caused the muni more pain and so he chastised the woman, saying, "I have received further pain from you for no reason! You must be a shameless woman, wandering about as you please. Are you a thief or a female Rakshasha?"

After saying this, Mandavya Muni lost consciousness. Some sages that were still present said to the woman, "Why do you wander about at night? What are you carrying in that sack? Why have you come here and inflicted pain upon this poor sage?"

Sandili replied, "I am not a female Rakshasha or demon. I am a chaste woman who is loyal to her husband and steadfast in the practice of her vows. I am not lusty or angry. I have no enmity toward anyone, nor am I jealous of anyone. I tripped over this rishi's knees because I could not see properly. Therefore, you should pardon me. For the convenience of my husband, who is invalid, I carry him in this sack on my back. Not only that, I dress him and feed him. You should not be angry with a chaste woman who serves her husband. Instead, you should treat us as your honored guests."

The sages said, "You seem to wander about, unaware of others' distress. Tomorrow morning, when the sun rises, your husband will die. O low-born woman, you only know your own troubles and not those of others."

Sandili became depressed upon hearing this, so that she appeared to be lost in deep thought. Gradually, however, her eyes became red with anger. While staring at the sages, she said, "When a good person comes to one's house, he should be welcomed with gentle words. What kind of hospitality have I received from you? It appears that you do not at all observe the righteous behavior that leads one to heaven."

"Just witness today the prowess of a chaste woman! My husband will not die and the sun will not rise tomorrow morning! This night will never end and the universe will be covered with darkness!"

Immediately, the sun became paralyzed. All kinds of religious performances were suspended. Because of this, all the demigods and great sages hurried to the ashram of Mandavya Muni, which was situated on the banks of the Narmada River. King Devapanna also came there.

Lord Brahma then requested Mandavya Muni to accept a benediction and also reward the lady, Sandili. In reply, Mandavya Muni asked that his pain subside. Then, just as he was speaking, the demon, Shambara, arrived upon the scene, along with the king's daughter, Kamapramodini.

Shambara said, "Formerly, I was cursed by Urvashi. At that time, she told me, 'When you abduct a young girl, the effect of your curse will end.' Now, you can understand the motive behind my apparently despicable act. Kindly excuse me."

After saying this, Shambara disappeared. The demigods carefully studied the girl, Kamapramodini, consulted one another, and finally decided to give her in marriage to Mandavya Muni. They poured water over the stake that had impaled the rishi and pulled it out of his body. Mandavya Muni married Kamapramodini and then offered his obeisances to the demigods.

The citizens, who had previously scolded him, were now delighted with their ruler. After being given a great amount of wealth in charity, the brahmanas were requested to forgive the king.

After the marriage was concluded, Mandavya Muni called for Sandili and told her, "Kindly allow the sun to rise, now that everything has been peacefully settled."

Sandili replied with agitation, "If the sun rises, my husband will die! It is therefore not in my interest to release the sun from my curse. Let this darkness remain or else, somehow enable my husband to live."

After mutual consultation, the sages washed Sandili's husband with water from the Narmada River and then restored his body to a healthy condition. Being delighted, Sandili bowed down to the sages and just then, the sun began to rise.

Gradually, the crowd dispersed. Sandili and her husband remained at Mandavya Muni's ashram for one month. She then bowed down to the sage and returned to her hermitage.

Formerly, in the city of Vardhamana, there lived a brahmana named Virasharman. He had a daughter, named Dirghika, who was very plain and much too tall, so that people used to make fun of her. While considering the injunction of shastra: "A man who, being deluded by lust, marries a girl that is too tall, too short, or with very short hair, will certainly die within six months," no one approached her father with a proposal of marriage.

Indeed, no man would even look at the girl because of her excessive height. Feeling despondent, Dirghika performed many rites of atonement. In fact, whatever vow shastra recommended—she performed it without fail. Still, as fortune would have it, she attained the state of old age while remaining a virgin. Still, because of her performance of austerities, she could be seen to possess great prowess.

She liked to attend the court of King Indra and listen to the discourses given by the great sages. As soon as she would leave, however, Indra's servant would come and sprinkle water on her seat. One day, she waited and witnessed how this was being done.

The aged virgin, Dirghika, became furious. Knitting her brows, she said, "O king of heaven, what fault of mine did you notice? Why do you have my seat sprinkled with water? Tell me—what is my sin? If you don't have a good answer, I will curse you!"

Indra replied, "O splendid lady, you have only one fault. It is for this reason that I have water sprinkled on your seat when you leave. You are a girl who has her monthly period and yet, you are not married. It is for this reason that I have your seat sprinkled with water."

"If there is any sage prepared to marry you and if you accept him as your husband then you will be considered pure."

Upon hearing this, Dirghika felt ashamed as returned to her home on earth. From that time onward, while wandering about the city, she would raise her right arm and loudly proclaim, "If anyone

who is a brahmana by birth will come and accept my hand in marriage, I will give him a portion of my accumulated piety."

When the people heard her loudly making this declaration, throughout the day and night, they considered her to be mad and so joked among themselves. This went on for some days until once, a brahmana afflicted with leprosy happened to hear her. He approached Dirghika and said, "If you are willing to execute all of my orders, I will accept you as my wife."

Dirghika accepted the leper and the marriage rituals were properly performed. When the marriage ceremony was completed, Dirghika said, "My lord, command me and I shall carry it out without fail."

The husband said, "O beautiful lady, I would like to bathe in sixty-four holy places of pilgrimage, with your help."

Dirghika gave her consent and then made a carrier out of bamboo for her husband. She placed soft cotton inside and then told her him, "This is for you. Get inside and I will carry you on my back to all the holy places you want to visit."

The leper was very pleased with this arrangement. Thereafter, as she carried him on her back to various holy places, the leper would sometimes sleep. One evening, after walking all day, that chaste lady became exhausted. Burdened with the weight of her husband on her back and drowsy with sleep, she falteringly came to where Mandavya Muni was pinned down by a stake. Not even seeing him, she tripped over his knees and fell to the ground.

Experiencing great pain, the sage asked, "Who is the sinful person who shook me? I was already suffering and now it is worse!"

Dirghika said, "I was blinded by sleep and didn't even notice you. You should not hate a chaste lady like me!"

Mandavya Muni replied, "Your sinful husband has almost killed me. He will not live to see the next morning! As soon as he is touched by the rays of the sun, he will die!"

Dirghika declared, "If that be the case, the sun will never rise again!" After saying this, the lady took the bamboo structure from her back, placed it on the ground, and sat down.

Her husband, the leper, said, "I am thirsty. Kindly fetch me some cool water."

She looked here and there but couldn't find any water. She didn't want to venture far and leave her helpless husband alone. She again sat down and said, "If I am perfect in my observance of chastity and faithfulness to my husband, let water come from the earth as a result of this piety!"

After saying this, Dirghika stamped the ground with her foot. Then, as Mandavya Muni watched, pure and tasty water sprang from the place where she had stamped the earth. After having her husband bathe and drink the water, she herself bathed and drank.

The next morning, the sun did not rise, being afraid of the power of Dirghika's chastity. At this, all kinds of immoral men and lusty women were delighted. Owls, Rakshashas, paramours and thieves embraced one another and joyfully said, "Today, destiny is pleased with us for the night is prolonged and the day has vanished."

On the other hand, brahmanas and other pious people became morose because their auspicious religious performances were curtailed. Being disturbed, the demigods, headed by Indra, went to the sun-god and asked, "Why don't you rise?"

Surya replied, "I have postponed my rising at the behest of a chaste woman. Why don't you all go to her and plead on my behalf? I am afraid that she will curse me if I rise without her consent."

The demigods went to Dirghika and said, "O chaste lady, by forbidding the sun to rise, you have created an inauspicious condition. All kinds of religious rituals are being neglected. Therefore, kindly give the sun permission to rise, as usual."

Dirghika replied, "If the sun rises, my husband will immediately die due to being unjustly cursed by this rishi. I don't care for all your religious performances because it is my husband who is dearer to me than my own life."

After considering the matter for some time, the demigods suggested, "Let your husband die and then we will bring him back to life. Indeed, when we revive your husband, he will have the form



of a lusty youth. We will also give you the form of a beautiful young woman, just fifteen years old. In this way, you can both enjoy godly delights!"

Dirghika agreed and immediately, the sun was seen rising on the eastern horizon. Being touched by the sun's rays, the leper died but then, being touched by the hands of the demigods, he rose up as a young man, twenty-five years old, appearing like another Kamadeva. After being touched by Lord Shiva, Dirghika became endowed with youth and beauty. She was fair and slender and her breasts were large and protruding.

The demigods freed Mandavya Muni from the stake that impaled him and requested him to accept a benediction. Mandavya Muni said, "I will surely accept a benediction from you but first, I would like to hear Yamaraja's statement. I want him to tell me about the sin I committed that caused me to be impaled by a stake."

Dharmaraja said, "When you were a boy, you once pierced some insect with a thorn. It is the reaction to this sin that you have experienced."

When he heard this, Mandavya Muni became enraged. As Yamaraja stood before him, he said, "For this slight offense, you have meted out a disproportionately severe punishment. Because of this, I will now curse you: You will be born in human society from the womb of a shudra woman. In that birth, you will experience great pain due to the loss of your relatives. Furthermore, I make this declaration: From this day onward, one will be adversely affected by a sinful deed only if it is committed after the eighth year of his life."

After saying this, Mandavya Muni was freed from his anger. As he prepared to depart, the demigods were worried about Yamaraja's fate and so said, "O sage, although Yama is certainly guilty, you should not force him to be born as a shudra."

Mandavya Muni replied, "My speech cannot be altered. Certainly Yamaraja will be born from the womb of a shudra woman." Later on, Yamaraja appeared as the son of Shrila Vyasadeva, named Vidura.

When the Kuru dynasty faced extinction upon the death of Vichitravirya, who had no children, Shrila Vyasadeva begot three children, at the urging of his mother, Satyavati. Two were begotten within the wombs of Vichitravirya's two widows, and the third, Vidura, was begotten in a maidservant.

Thereafter, Shrila Vyasadeva thought about accepting a wife and so he asked the sage, Jabali, for his daughter, named Vatika. The sage happily gave his daughter to Vyasadeva and in due course of time, she became pregnant. And yet, even after twelve years had passed, the child was not delivered from his mother's womb. That intelligent boy, even while within his mother's womb, memorized whatever he happened to hear. Thus, even before his birth, the child became a master of the Vedas and Puranas. Actually, he was satisfied to remain within the womb, reciting the Vedic texts, and never thought of coming out into the world.

However, as the child continued to grow, this condition became painful for his mother. Vyasadeva then asked, "Who are you that has entered the womb of my wife? Why don't you come out? Do you want to kill your mother?"

The fetus replied, "I am a Rakshasha, I am a Pishacha, I am a demigod, I am a human being, I am an elephant, I am a horse, I am a chicken, and I am a goat. There are eight million four hundred thousand species of life and I have appeared in all of these forms. Now, I am settled in this womb as a human embryo. I don't want to come out and face the terrible condition of material existence. Staying within the womb, I will practice yoga and meditation to free myself from material bondage.

Within the womb, I have knowledge, detachment, and remembrance of my previous births. If I come out of the womb, however, I will become a victim of Lord Vishnu's external energy, maya."

Shrila Vyasadeva replied, "Don't worry, maya will not affect you. Come out of the hell in the form of the mother's womb."

The fetus said, "You must solicit the assurance of Lord Krishna Himself. Only then will I be willing to come out of the womb."

Upon hearing this, Shrila Vyasadeva hastened to Dvaraka, where he told everything to Lord Krishna. The Lord then accompanied Shrila Vyasadeva as he returned home. Lord Krishna told the fetus, “I guarantee that when you emerge from your mother’s womb, you will not be affected by My external energy, maya. It is My desire that you come out now.”

The boy came out of the womb, appearing as a twelve-year-old youth. He bowed down to Lord Krishna, his mother, and his father and then began to depart for the forest.

Shrila Vyasadeva said, “Wait, my dear son, I must perform the birth ceremonies for you.”

The child replied, “Thousands of birth ceremonies have been performed for me in thousands of births. They have only served to bind me to material existence.”

Lord Krishna said to Vyasa, “Your son is a very expert speaker, like a parrot. Let him be named Shuka. Give him permission to go to the forest. He will not stay at your ashram. There is no need for you to exhibit so much parental affection.”

After saying this, Lord Krishna returned to Dvaraka, riding upon the back of Garuda. Vyasadeva said to Shukadeva, “A son who does not obey the behest of his father will surely fall into hell. Therefore, stay here for some time.”

Shukadeva Gosvami replied, “Just as today, I was born as your son so, in another birth, you were born as my son. Therefore, I am your father and so you should carry out my order. Don’t deny me permission to go to the forest.”

Vyasadeva argued, “First, one must practice brahmacharya. Then, he should enter householder life. After enjoying family life, he can attain salvation as a vanaprastha and then sannyasi.”

Shukadeva countered, “If, through celibacy, liberation could be attained, impotent eunuchs would be liberated without separate endeavor. If householders can attain liberation then everyone would be liberated. If residents of the forest attain liberation then animals would easily be liberated.”

After arguing with his father in this way for some time, Shukadeva proceeded to the forest.

Long ago, in the city of Vaidisha, which was ruled by King Chitravarma, there lived a kshatriya named Manibhadra. He had a huge amount of inherited wealth and whenever the necessity arose, the king would borrow money from him on interest. Manibhadra was an old man with grey hair and his appearance was exceedingly ugly. He was so miserly that he never gave anything to anyone and he often remained hungry because he didn't like to spend his money on food.

Once, that wicked man happened to see a beautiful kshatriya girl and so he wanted to marry her. She had lovely red lips, a slender waist, and large lotus-petal eyes. Her body was beautiful and her personality was fascinating.

Manibhadra placed the proposal before the girl's father, who was very poor. The father of the girl then informed his wife and when she heard that a miserly old man wanted to marry her daughter, she fainted.

When his wife regained consciousness, the poor kshatriya said, "There is no knowledge, no art or craft, and no object that is not given to a rich person by someone seeking wealth. In this world, even a stranger becomes one's relative if he is rich. From wealth, no matter how it is collected, all kinds of activities spring up, like rivers flowing from the mountains. If he is wealthy, even an unworthy person is approached and an undeserving person is bowed down to."

In this way, the poor kshatriya convinced his wife to give their daughter to Manibhadra. The preliminary rituals were then performed by the poor kshatriya in the presence of Manibhadra, who afterwards, insisted that the marriage take place that very day. The poor kshatriya objected, however, saying that the day was not auspicious. He humbly requested Manibhadra to wait a few months.

Manibhadra didn't want to wait, however, and so he said, "The fire of love has been kindled in my heart and it torments me.

If you perform the marriage immediately, I will give you a great deal of wealth.”

Due to greed for money, the marriage was celebrated that very day. The poor kshatriya gave his daughter to the old man, even though her eyes were filled with tears. Later in the day, Manibhadra took the girl to his house and began to fondle her to his heart's desire. Although she did not want to have sexual relations with him, he indulged his lust with great satisfaction.

After his lust subsided, Manibhadra began to abuse his newly-wedded wife. He used many threatening words, making the girl depressed. Being jealous, Manibhadra dismissed all of his servants except one, a eunuch, who acted as the doorman. He instructed him, “Don't admit any man into this house, even if he is an elderly sage.”

Thereafter, that miserly man gave nothing to his wife except simple, white clothes. After returning home at noon from his place of business, he would give some measured quantity of food for his wife to cook. Manibhadra's habit was to invite a brahmana for lunch every day. Before feeding the brahmana, however, he made this condition: “You must always keep your face down while eating. If you dare look at my wife, you will be punished!”

After eating lunch, the miserly Manibhadra would return to his office and then come home at dusk. His poor wife had to remain at home all day and because of this, she was invariably in a dejected state of mind.

One day, a brhamana named Pushpa arrived at Vaidisha while on a tour of places of pilgrimage. He was a very handsome young man. It was noon and Pushpa was very hungry. As he begged from door to door, someone told him that Manibhadra would give him a nice lunch.

When Pushpa approached him in his office, Manibhadra said, “You must eat with your face turned downward. You must not stare at my beloved wife. If you do so, there will be trouble. Keep this in mind and then decide whether you want to eat with me or not.”

Pushpa replied, "I am very hungry. What will I gain by staring at another man's wife? I am a student of the Vedas on a tour of pilgrimage."

Manibhadra said, "Well then, come to my house. I will give you very nice food and a gift of money."

After walking to Manibhadra's house, they first came to where the eunuch was standing guard. After asking the brahmana to wait there, Manibhadra went inside. He measured out some ingredients and asked his wife to begin cooking. Pushpa was then ushered inside and Manibhadra gave him water to wash his feet. After being seated, the brahmana was served his lunch. While looking down, he saw the lotus-like feet of a young woman. The more he gazed at her feet, the more curious he became to look at her face.

Manibhadra could sense the brahmana's eagerness and so he summoned the eunuch and ordered, "Punish this adulterer!"

Without notice, the eunuch hit Pushpa over the head with a stout stick, making him fall to the floor unconscious, his body smeared with blood. The servant then grabbed him by the feet, dragged him outside, and dumped him on the road. At this, a crowd gathered, making a lot of noise. Someone came and compassionately sprinkled water over Pushpa's body.

Finally, when he regained consciousness, Pushpa said to the crowd, "No theft or adultery was committed by me. I am a brahmana on a tour of pilgrimage and I was invited by this man for lunch. Just see what he has done! Is there no king in this land? Can an innocent brahmana be beaten like this without fear of punishment?"

The people replied, "Many brahmanas have been punished by this man. He is favored by the king and so nothing happens to him. Get up now. We will give you some food."

Pushpa said, "I will not eat anything until I gain revenge. Is there any temple where the deity will provide help to his sincere worshiper?"

The people guided the brahmana to a temple of the sun-god. While fasting, Pushpa continually worshiped Surya for many days

but apparently, to no avail. He then lit a sacrificial fire outside and chanted the mantras of the sun-god as found in the Vedas. While doing so, he invoked Ravi's presence by saying, "O lord, be visible to me."

When the sacrificial fire responded by blazing up brightly, Pushpa cut flesh from his body and offered it as an oblation. Finally, when he was about to offer his very self into the fire, the sun-god intervened and stopped him with his own hand.

Surya said, "O brahmana, don't act rashly! Tell me what you want and I shall gratify you."

Pushpa said, "If you are actually pleased with me, kindly award me two pills. In the city of Vaidisha there is a rich kshatriya named Manibhadra. He is short, old, and wrinkled. He is a very mean and miserly man. He takes pleasure in punishing brahmanas and for this, he is rebuked by the people."

"When I place the first pill in my mouth, let my form become just like his. When I place the second pill in my mouth, let my original form be restored. Besides this, let me understand about everything in his house. Also, give me knowledge of his business, friends, and relatives. When I assume his form, no one should be able to detect even the slightest difference between us."

The sun-god gave Pushpa two pills—one black and one white. He said, "By placing the white pill in your mouth, you will be transformed into a duplicate Manibhadra. When you place the black pill in your mouth, you will regain your youthful appearance."

After saying this, Surya touched Pushpa's body, so that all of his wounds were at once healed, and then vanished from view. After receiving these two pills, Pushpa broke his fast and proceeded toward Vaidisha.

Pushpa was very pleased and excited when he reached the outskirts of Vaidisha and he put the white pill in his mouth. Immediately, he was transformed into a duplicate Manibhadra. When he came to the miser's house, he told the eunuch gatekeeper, "Someone very cleverly disguised as me is moving about the city.

I am sure that he will come here and try to steal something. Make sure that you don't let him in."

After nodding his assent, the eunuch stood at attention by the door. Pushpa went inside and told Manibhadra's wife, Mahika, "Today, I saw my father standing before me dressed in dirty rags. He harshly rebuked me, saying, 'To hell with you! By deceiving her father, you have married a young, beautiful girl! And, you have provided her with nothing, keeping her like a widow dressed in white. You should now give ten thousand gold coins to her father and provide your wife with beautiful dresses and jewelry.' My dear wife, go put on some nice clothes and cook some excellent food so that we can have our lunch together."

Manibhadra's wife was delighted as she busily began to cook while Pushpa impatiently waited for the chance to embrace her. Meanwhile, the real Manibhadra returned home. However, as he tried to enter his house, he was stopped by the eunuch doorman. When, by force, he managed to get inside, the eunuch struck him over the head with his heavy stick.

When Manibhadra fell to the floor, a crowd gathered to see the commotion. Some people chastised the eunuch, saying that the king would surely hang him for beating his master. Others thought that he had surely gone mad.

The doorman explained that the person lying upon the floor was not actually Manibhadra but an imposter who tried to force his entry into the house. He said, "The real Manibhadra is inside. After having his lunch, he is now resting in bed."

Upon hearing the commotion, Pushpa came to the door in the guise of Manibhadra. He said, "Some low fellow comes here every day disguised as me, begging for money."

Meanwhile, the real Manibhadra regained his composure. After studying the situation, he said, "A thief has entered my house after disguising himself as me. He bribed my doorman with new clothes so that he would betray me. I will now go to the king and have these two cheaters executed!"



At this point, the two Manibhadras began to strike one another and so they were restrained by the bystanders. Some of Manibhadra's relatives then came but they could not establish the identity of the real Manibhadra. Everyone then proceeded to the king's palace as the two Manibhadra continued to shout at one another.

Soon, both Manibhadras stood before the king. There was no difference of form to distinguish the two. Both were asked questions about confidential matters that only the real Manibhadra would know but both gave all the correct answers.

King Brihatsena then ordered, "Let Mahika, the wife of Manibhadra, be brought here. She is the actual authority with regards to identifying her husband."

After some time, Mahika bashfully stood facing the king, who then said, "Identify your husband. Even his relatives are confused about these two."

That excellent lady thought to herself, "I was always treated terribly by Manibhadra. He had promised my father a lot of money but he never gave it. This second man, however, gave me very nice clothes and jewelry. And, after eating, he loved me in a very nice way. I believe that he will give my father the gold that he promised. Therefore, I will choose the second Manibhadra."

She then said, while pointing to her chosen lover, "In the presence of the sacred fire, I was given in marriage to this man. The other one is a wicked imposter."

At this, the king angrily ordered that Manibhadra be hanged.

Thereafter, as he was being led to the tree from which he would be hung, Manibhadra recited these verses: "These are the innate faults of women—lack of mercy, anger, lack of cleanliness, and ruthlessness. Women resemble the red and black gunjaphala berry that is poisonous within but very charming to look at. The understanding possessed by Brihaspati is nothing compared to the cleverness of women. Nectar resides in the lips of women but poison fills their hearts. The root of the poisonous tree of material existence, which has sinful acts as its flowers and residence in hell

as its fruit, is a woman with shapely buttocks. Lord Brahma created women to overturn virtue and piety, just as a violent wind uproots a tree. Finding no other means of binding men, Lord Brahma created a strong noose in the form of women.”

Manibhadra also cursed himself, saying, “I have been wicked and unwise. No benefit has been attained by me from my materialistic life. Being greedy, I never once gave a gift of charity. Although possessing sufficient wealth, I didn’t perform one pious act.”

Even as he continued to lament in this way, Manibhadra was hanged by the king’s men. Pushpa returned to Manibhadra’s house, along with Mahika and all the relatives. Everyone believed him to be the real Manibhadra.

After coming home, Pushpa sat down, surrounded by all Manibhadra’s relatives, and said, “For a long time, I was overpowered by miserliness but today, this good woman has saved me. From now on, I will happily share my wealth with my relatives, brahmanas, and deities.”

After saying this, Pushpa called Manibhadra’s relatives, one by one, and gave them nice clothes and other gifts. He then invited the brahmanas and amply rewarded them, and he distributed food to the needy. At the end of the day, he sat down to eat, along with his wife. Thus, Pushpa enjoyed the wealth of another man for a long time in a way that was pleasing to himself and his wife.

One night thereafter, as Pushpa lay in bed while Mahika massaged his feet, she confided, “Undoubtedly, you are my husband for as long as I live. I had forsaken that other man for your sake. How was this achieved by you—did you master the chanting of some mantra or did you receive the mercy of some deity?”

Pushpa replied, “I am the brahmana that Manibhadra beat with a stick when I dared to look at your moon-like face. After being beaten, I worshiped the sun-god and it was he who granted me this form.”

Mahika said, “I remember you. After seeing you, I thought about you constantly. Now, I will also worship the sun-god so that

he may restore your original form. Of what use are my youth and beauty? Actually, I simply think of you as you were, throughout the day and night.”

Upon hearing this, Pushpa took out the black pill and placed it in his mouth. Immediately, his original, youthful form was restored. Mahika ecstatically embraced Pushpa and said, “Today, all of my desires have been fulfilled! Before this, I served you as an old man so that only a token pleasure was enjoyed by me. Now, enjoy me to your heart’s content. I am your obedient servant.”

That night, the two merged their bodies as if one. The next morning, Pushpa put the white pill in his mouth and once again took the form of Manibhadra. In this way, many years passed as they begot sons and daughters, who in turn gave Pushpa and his wife grandchildren.

Finally, when he became old and invalid, Pushpa thought, “A great sin has been committed by me. By deceit, I made Manibhadra meet his death. His wife was forcibly taken away by me and enjoyed for a long time. I had better go to a holy place and perform atonement.”

Having made up his mind in this way, Pushpa went to a place of pilgrimage and built a temple of the sun-god. He remained there until the end of his life, engaged in a life of penance.

Once, there was a hunter in the forest surrounding Prayāga who was fortunate enough to meet Nārada Muni when the great sage was returning from Vaikuṇṭha after visiting Lord Nārāyaṇa. Nārada came to Prayāga to bathe in the confluence of the rivers, Ganges and Yamunā.

While passing through the forest, Nārada saw a bird lying on the ground. The bird was half-killed, being pierced by an arrow, and it was chirping pitifully. Further on, Nārada saw a deer flopping about in agony. Further, he saw that a boar was also suffering, and, in another place, he saw a rabbit twitching in pain. All this filled him with compassion.

He began to think, “Who is the foolish man who has committed such sins?” Devotees of the Lord are generally compassionate upon the miseries of living entities, and what to speak of the great sage Nārada? He became terribly aggrieved by this scene and after proceeding a few steps, he saw a man engaged in hunting with his bow and arrows. The hunter’s complexion was very dark, and his eyes were red. It appeared to be dangerous just to see him standing there with his bow and arrows, looking just like an associate of Yamarāja, the lord of death.

Upon seeing him, Nārada Muni entered deeper into the forest to approach him. As Nārada Muni passed through the forest, all the animals that were caught in the hunter’s traps fled away. The hunter became very angry at this, and he was just about to call Nārada vile names. However, due to the influence of saintly Nārada, the hunter could not utter even one word in condemnation. Rather, with gentle behavior, he asked Nārada: “My dear sir, why have you come here while I am hunting? Have you strayed from the general path? Because you have come here, all the animals in my traps have fled.”

“Yes, I am sorry,” Nārada replied. “I have come to you in the hopes of receiving directions. I have seen that there are many boars, deer and rabbits on the path. They are lying on the forest floor half-dead and flopping about. Who has committed these sinful acts?”

“What you have seen is all right,” the hunter replied. “It was done by me.”

“If you are hunting all these poor animals, why don’t you kill them at once?” Nārada asked. “You half-kill them, and they are suffering death pangs. This is a great sin. If you want to kill an animal, why don’t you kill it completely? Why do you leave it half-killed and allow it to die flopping around?”

“My dear sir,” the hunter replied. “My name is Mṛgāri, the enemy of animals. I am simply following the teachings of my father who taught me to half-kill animals and leave them flopping about. When a half-dead animals suffers, I take great pleasure in it.”

“I beg one thing from you,” Nārada implored. “Please accept it.”

“Oh, yes sir, I shall give you whatever you like,” the hunter said. “If you want some animal skins, come to my house. I have many skins of animals, including tigers and deer. I shall give you whatever you like.”

“I do not want such things,” Nārada replied. “However, I do want something else. If you kindly grant it to me, I shall tell you. Please, henceforth from tomorrow, whenever you kill an animal, please kill it completely. Don’t leave it half-dead.”

“My dear sir, what are you asking of me? What is the difference between half-killing an animal and killing it completely?”

“If you half-kill the animals, they suffer great pain,” Nārada explained. “And if you give too much pain to other living entities, you commit great sin. There is a great offense committed when you kill an animal completely, but the offense is much greater when you half-kill it. Indeed, the pain which you give half-dead animals will have to be accepted by you in a future birth.”

Although the hunter was very sinful, his heart became softened, and he became afraid of his sins by virtue of his association with a great devotee like Nārada. Those who are grossly sinful are not at all afraid of committing sins, but here we can see that because his purification began in the association of a great devotee like Nārada, the hunter became afraid of his sinful activities.

The hunter replied, “My dear sir, from my very childhood I have been taught to kill animals in this way. Please tell me how I can get rid of all the offenses and sinful activities which I have accumulated. I am surrendering unto your feet. Please save me from all the reactions of my sinful activities which I have committed in the past, and please direct me to the proper path so that I can be free.”

“If you actually want to follow my directions, I can tell you the real path by which you can be freed from sinful reactions.”

“I shall follow whatever you say without hesitation,” the hunter agreed.

Nārada then told him to first break his bow—only then would

he disclose the path of liberation.

“You are asking me to break my bow,” the hunter protested, “but if I break it, what will be the means of my livelihood?”

“Don’t worry about your livelihood,” Nārada said. “I shall send you sufficient grains in order to live.”

The hunter then broke his bow and fell down at the feet of Nārada. Nārada got him to stand up, and he instructed him: “Just go to your home and distribute whatever money and valuables you have to the devotees and the brāhmaṇas. Then just come out and follow me wearing only one cloth. Construct a small thatched house on the river bank and sow a tulasī plant by that house. Just circumambulate the tulasī tree, and every day taste one fallen leaf. Above all, always chant the holy name of Lord Krishna. As far as your livelihood is concerned, I shall send you grains, but you will only accept as much grain as you require for yourself and your wife.”

Nārada then relieved the half-dead animals, and, getting freed from their dreadful condition, they fled away. Upon seeing Nārada execute this miracle, the dark hunter was struck with wonder. After taking Nārada to his home, he bowed down again at his feet.

After some time, Nārada departed and the hunter, after returning home, began to execute the instructions Nārada had given him. In the meantime, news spread amongst all the villages that the hunter had become a devotee. Consequently the residents of the villages came to see the new Vaiṣṇava. It is the Vedic custom to bring grains and fruits whenever one goes to see a saintly person, and since all the villagers saw that the hunter had turned into a great devotee, they brought eatables with them. Thus every day he was offered grains and fruit, so much so that no less than ten to twenty people could have eaten there. According to Nārada’s instructions, he did not accept anything more than what he and his wife required for sustenance.

After some days had passed, Nārada told his friend, Parvata Muni, “I have a disciple. Let us go to see him and see if he is doing well.”

When the two sages, Nārada and Parvata, went to the hunter’s

home, the hunter saw his spiritual master coming from the distance, and he began to approach him with great respect. On his way to greet the great sages, the hunter saw that there were ants on the ground before him and that they were hindering his passage. When he reached the sages, he tried to bow down before them, but he saw that there were so many ants that he could not bow down without crushing them. Thus he slowly cleared away the ants with his cloth. When Nārada saw that the hunter was trying to save the lives of the ants in this way, he was reminded of a verse from the Purāṇas: “Is it not wonderful that a devotee of the Lord is not inclined to give any sort of pain to anyone, not even to an ant?”

Although the hunter formerly took great pleasure in half-killing animals, since he became a great devotee of the Lord, he was not prepared to give pain even to an ant. The hunter received the two great sages at his home and offered them a sitting place, brought water, washed their feet, took water to them to drink, and finally both he and his wife touched the water with their heads. After this, they began to feel ecstasy and began to dance and sing the holy names of the Lord. They raised their hands and danced with their clothes flying. When the two great sages saw this ecstasy of love of Godhead manifest in the body of the hunter, Parvata Muni told Nārada: “My dear Devarshi, you are glorious, and by your mercy, even the lowest creature, a hunter of animals, also became elevated to the path of devotion and attained transcendental attachment for Lord Krishna.”

At length, Nārada inquired of the hunter-devotee: “Are you getting your foodstuff regularly?”

“You send so many people,” the hunter replied, “and they bring so many eatables that we cannot begin to eat them.”

“That’s all right,” Nārada replied. “Whatever you are getting is all right. Now just continue your devotional service in that way.”

After Nārada had spoken this, both Nārada and Parvata Muni disappeared from the hunter’s home.



The Skanda Purana is one of the eighteen major Puranas, as stated in the Shrimad-Bhagavatam (12.7.23-24): "The eighteen major Purāṇas are the Brahmā, Padma, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Liṅga, Garuḍa, Nārada, Bhāgavata, Agni, Skanda, Bhaviṣya, Brahma-vaivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Vāmana, Varāha, Matsya, Kūrma and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas." Of all the Puranas, the Skanda Purana is by far the largest, as explained in the Shrimad-Bhagavatam (12.13.4-9), containing eighty-one thousand one hundred verses.

The great acharyas, frequently quoted important verses from the Skanda Purana. In a purport to Shrimad-Bhagavatam (2.9.36), Śrīla Prabhupada wrote: "Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī also quotes another common passage, which is found in three Purāṇas, namely the Padma Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa and Liṅga Purāṇa. It runs as follows :"

*āloḍya sarva-śāstrāṇi  
vicārya ca punaḥ punaḥ  
idam ekaṁ suniṣpannam  
dhyeyo nārāyaṇaḥ sadā*

"By scrutinizingly reviewing all the revealed scriptures and judging them again and again, it is now concluded that Lord Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Absolute Truth, and thus He alone should be worshiped."



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