

the task of the gods. All of you go immediately to the three cities.

33. Go there, strike at, break and burn the three cities of the Asuras. O Bhūtas, thereafter you can go away as you please for prosperity.

*Sanatkumāra said:—*

34. On hearing the words of the lord, the hosts of Bhūtas bowed to the lord of the gods and went to the three cities of the Asuras.

35. Immediately after their entry into the cities they were reduced to ashes like moths in the fire.

36. Those who escaped fled out of the cities and came grief-stricken to Viṣṇu.

37. On seeing them and hearing the incidents in detail, lord Viṣṇu pondered over this.

38. On realising that all the gods were distressed and dejected in the mind, he too was extremely grieved.

39. He became much worried at the thought "How can I destroy the three cities of the Asuras, with force and carry out the task of the gods?"

40. The lord who had authoritatively laid down the rules of conduct according to the Vedas, said "There is no doubt in this that the virtuous ones cannot be destroyed by black magic.

41. O good gods, these Asuras and the other residents of the three cities are virtuous. Hence they have become invincible. Not in any other manner.

42. After perpetrating great sins they worship Śiva and so they are freed of all sins even as the leaves of the lotus from water.

43. O gods, thanks to the worship of Śiva, their cherished desires are realised. Different means of enjoyment in the world are brought under their control.

44. Hence these Asuras who are devoted to the phallic worship enjoy different kinds of pleasures and prosperity and salvation hereafter.

45. Then putting obstacles in their activities of virtuous rites, by means of magic art I shall destroy the three cities