

31. Eulogised thus by Indra' and others and by the repetition of Japas by Viṣṇu, the delighted lord came there seated on his bull.

32. Getting down from Nandiśa and embracing Viṣṇu, lord Śiva delighted in his mind cast his benign look on all with his hand resting on Nandin.

33. Casting a sympathetic glance on the gods, the delighted Śiva, lord of Pārvatī, spoke to Viṣṇu in a majestic tone.

*Śiva said:—*

34. "O lord of gods, all the intentions of the gods have been understood by me now. The power of Viṣṇu's magic and that of the intelligent Nārada has been known.

35. O most excellent of the gods, there is no doubt in this that I will destroy the three cities of the Asuras if they persist in indulging in evil activities.

36. But the great Asuras are my firm devotees. They shall be killed only by me, for they have been forced to abandon their excellent virtue under false persuasion.

37. Let Viṣṇu or any one else slay them now that they have been made to abandon their Dharma. The Asuras of the three cities have become devoid of devotion to me."

38. O great sage, on hearing these words of Śiva, all the heaven-dwellers and Viṣṇu became dispirited.

39. On seeing the gods and Viṣṇu sitting cheerless, Brahmā, the creator of the worlds spoke to Śiva with palms joined in reverence.

*Brahmā said:—*

40. There is no sin in this, since you are the foremost among those who know the Yogic theory; you are the great lord, the great Brahman and the saviour of gods and sages always.

41. It is at your own bidding that they have been deluded. You induced them to be deluded. Although the Asuras have forsaken their duties and your worship, they cannot be killed by others.

42. Hence, O great lord, the saviour of the lives of