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KAMALA SUBRAMANIAM



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SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

By

Kamala Subramaniam

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Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

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2016

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FOREWORD

This is a summarised version of the Mahapurana *Srimad Bhagavatam* written by Smt. Kamala Subramaniam. Earlier Smt. Subramaniam had brought out a condensed version of the great epic *Mahabharata* also which became very popular and was highly valued by the society at large.

While summarising the Mahapurana, Smt. Subramaniam has omitted only the ornamentations and decorations, usual in all Sanskrit literature. She has uncompromisingly kept intact the solid hard core of the Mahapurana. Not only she has taken no liberty with the essentials of this sacred book, but in fact has brought them out more prominently in a language which is as simple as it is appealing. The readers of this sacred book will thus derive great spiritual benefit not confined to the Hindu society alone but also to mankind outside the Hindu fold.

While studying the *Kathas* - the stories of the great personalities and of the *avatars* and the parables - the reader as he reads the passages should amply digest them to know the true purport of the suggestions, the lessons and the indications behind them. These are not just embellishments. They have a deep meaning under the surface. Attentive study of these shall spiritually inspire the reader more than the *Kathas* themselves.

It is not my desire nor it is desirable to make any comments on the content and object of this Mahapurana. Such an effort on my part shall deprive the reader from drinking the joyful nectar which the original text contains in an adequate measure. Let the reader read the summarised version and if attracted also the unabridged *Grantha*, digest and reflect and draw inspiration therefrom to mould his life and achieve the spiritual bliss and tranquility which is the ultimate goal of all the pilgrims of life — the Jeevan Yatra.

The story goes that even after composing the *Mahabharata* Vyasa was not completely happy. On relating his dissatisfaction to the sage Narada, Vyasa was told that his restlessness was due to the fact that while in Mahabharata

he fully propagated Karma Yoga, he neglected Bhakti Yoga and that he should write something more in the glory of Narayana, which alone shall give him the full mental tranquility. It was at this suggestion of the sage Narada that Vyasa compiled *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

The general impression that Bhagavatam is purely a Purana of Bhakti Yoga therefore is not unnatural. But on proper appreciation of the Mahapurana, we shall discover that while Bhakti does dominate, Jnana and Karma have not been neglected in *Bhagavatam*. To put it correctly the Mahapurana is the Sangam — Confluence — the Triveni of the three streams of Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga. It is thus the *Samanvya*, the *Samuchhya*, of all the three paths.

This *Samanvya* is beautifully brought out by the Lord in Gita, Chapter IV, Stanza 10, where he states:

*vita-raga-bhaya-krodha man-maya mam upasritah
bahavo jnana-tapasa puta mad-bhavam agatah*

"A Karma yogin free from attachment, fear and anger, a Bhakta absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me.' a Jnana yogin 'purified by the fire of knowledge' with these qualifications of Karma yoga, Bhakti yoga and Jnana yoga many have attained My Beings."

As described in Gita so also in *Srimad Bhagavatam* this *Samanvya* finds a prominent place.

May God bless the readers of this Mahapurana.

My congratulations and *Sadhu Vada* to Smt. Kamala Subramaniam for this *Punyakarya* - a virtuous and meritorious act.

May God bless her.

G.D. BIRLA

PREFACE

Aum Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya

Some years back, I made an attempt to narrate the story of the *Mahabharata*. I must say that I succeeded to an extent in my attempt and the book was published under the aegis of Kulapati Shri K. M. Munshi.

My thoughts were then turned towards *Sri Bhagavatam*. To many people the *Bhagavatam* signifies only Krishnavatara. In several *pravachanas* I have heard, only the tenth canto has been dealt with in great detail and the talk ends invariably with the wedding of Krishna with Rukmini and that is the end of it.

There are quite a few, however, who are familiar with the ten *avatars* of the Lord: Matsya being the first and Kalki, the last. But then, there are many more *avatars* - descents - of Lord Narayana down to the earth during the three yugas. I was eager to tackle this great Purana and try to make young minds familiar with it.

Right from the beginning one fact was clear. *Sri Bhagavatam* is entirely different from Mahabharata. There is continuity in the *Mahabharata*, in the story, which makes the narration comparatively easy. On the other hand, the *Bhagavatam* is made up of a number of isolated stories, incidents and innumerable episodes. There is no continuity here to hold the attention of the reader.

I was at a loss as to how I should begin. There are several places where one can say: "This is the beginning." The *Bhagavatam* is repeated from mouth to mouth and it is related to different people by different preceptors. It is a confusing, tantalising, labyrinth where one easily gets lost. And again, since Bhakti is the central theme, there are numerous passages where the praises of the Lord are sung. This is mostly by Brahma who, with the Devas, recites the *Purushasukta*. I was afraid that constant

repetition would be unwelcome and so I have condensed some of the prayers and omitted some others altogether. This was unavoidable.

The *Bhagavata Purana* is made up of ten sections. The first is called *sarga*. It comprises the creation of the universe, the *mahat* and *aham tattvas*, and the *tanmatras*. The manifestation of the *Virat Purusha*; the creation of living and non-living beings by Brahma, Hiranyagarbha, is called *visarga*. The establishment of each created being in its proper place by the Lord is called *utkarsha*. His Grace which is infinite towards his Bhaktas and which protects them goes by the name *poshana*. The narration of the different periods of time started by different Manus is *manvantara*. The *vasanas* following the *karmas* performed in the previous *janma* are called *oothi*. The stories about the Lord and his avatars are collectively named *ishakatha*. The merging of the *jivatma* with the *paramatma* after the *yoganidra* is called *nirodha* and the casting away of the objects of enjoyment and even the desire for them which is naturally followed by *atman* becoming one with the Brahma is called *mukti*. *Aabhasa* which is creation and *nirodha* which is the merging back at the end of Time are all caused by the ONE which is Eternal: which has no beginning and no end and which cannot be described by words: that is called *aashraya*. He is the refuge of everything in the Universe. The aim of every aspirant is to reach this *aashraya* and become one with Him. This is the purpose of all tapas, of all *yogas* and THAT is the one Truth to be realised.

I have enumerated the many sections of the *Bhagavata Purana* in such detail to make the reader understand how complex it is and I hope I will be forgiven when I say that I found it almost impossible to handle all of it.

I decided to take up one of these sections: *Ishakatha, touching on the others here and there*. The story of Creation has been related in different places and in different forms. The foremost of them is when Brahma relates it to Narada. Lord Narayana Himself had explained it to Brahma and that is the first version of *visarga*. Another is when Maitreya learns it from Parasara. Originally Adishesha or Ananta is said to have taught this to Sanatkumara. Sankhyayana learnt it from Sanatkumara and taught this to Brihaspati. Brihaspati passed it on to Parasara from whom Maitreya learnt it and, in his turn, taught this to Vidura.

Considering the complexity of the Purana, and again, considering the fact that the reader is expected to be already familiar with the many words and terminologies used in the *visarga*, it seemed to me that it may not be easy to follow it at first reading. I have, therefore, related the same in Chapters 279 to 293. It is all quite complicated and I cannot claim that I have been able to do full justice to the grandeur and sublimity of the subject.

I have tried to begin at the very beginning and find my way through the confusing, distracting and, at the same time, fascinating wilderness called *Bhagavatam*.

Barring the *Purushasukta* which occurs again and again throughout the Purana like the refrain of a song or like the hypnotic drone of the *tanpura* in a musical concert, I must draw the reader's attention to some beautiful stotras. The first of them is the adoration of Krishna by Kunti where she says: *Vipadah Santunah Shashvatah*—May misfortunate visit us continuously.

There is the worship of Narayana by the child Dhruva and later, the words spoken by the other child Prahlada in praise of the Lord in the form of Narasimha.

One of the most beautiful passages in the Purana is the long conversation between Krishna and Uddhava at almost the end of the book. Part of it I had to place in the end since it seemed likely to tire the reader at the first reading. This conversation is almost a re-casting of the *Bhagavad Gita*. However, I have taken special care not to condense the *Avadhuta Gita* which is sublime. As for the tenth canto which deals entirely with Krishna's childhood I have not omitted anything. It is not possible to be anything but emotional when one goes through this particular canto. As for the esoteric significance of several controversial incidents in the tenth canto, I have not ventured into that field. My work has been just the narration of the incidents.

Kapila Vasudeva's teachings to his mother Devahuti are in the main book. But the Sankhya on which Kapila has elaborated has been placed in the end since it is quite tough. I have tried to elucidate it but I do not know how far I have been successful in the attempt.

The glossary has been complied with great care. It has become quite voluminous but it is essential that the meanings of the words should be given or else, for those not quite familiar with the phraseology of the Purana, it will not be very easy to follow the narrative.

In spite of these many shortcomings the book may, I hope, be accepted by the discerning readers who will be tolerant enough to overlook the lapses.

It goes without saying that this is not a literal translation but an attempt to relate the story of the Lord, of Narayana, and the many forms he donned to establish Dharma on the earth. Twenty-six is the number of which Kalki is yet to happen. *Krishnavatara* is the *Poornavatara* and to lead the thoughts of the readers towards these many appearances of the Lord has been my desire and if the youngsters who read this book become interested enough in the Purana to try and read it in the original, my purpose will be served.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Shri Ghanshyamdas Birla for the interest he has taken in the book and for the Foreword he has been kind enough to write for it.

KAMALA SUBRAMANIAM

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NAIMISHARANYA

He was walking fast towards the southern slopes of the Himavan. He was alone. He scanned the distance and discerned the thin spiral of smoke snaking its way to the skies. The spot was not far away. His footsteps were now faster and soon he arrived at a cluster of thatched roofs. He had arrived at Naimisharanya. When they saw him a number of *rishis* stood up and welcomed him gladly. They offered *arghya and padya*. Making sure that he was feeling fresh after his long trek they spoke to him in humble tones. Shaunaka, the leader of the group stood with folded palms and said: "Our hermitage is honoured by the visit of the great Ugrashrava, the son of Romaharshana. Vyasa was your father's *guru* and from that great seer; Vyasa, your father has learnt all the Puranas. As for you, you are famed as the Sutapauranika and we are all eager to sit at your feet and listen to the many stories which you know so well. Please recount all of them to us." Suta smiled at them and said: "I heard that you were set on performing the *Brahma satra*, a yagnya which should last for a thousand years. *Dvapara*, the third quarter of Time has passed and Kali has set in. With the advent of Kali the earth has become the home of *Adharma*, of untruth, of injustice and all the many sins which are the attendants of Kali. This holy spot, I know, cannot be touched by Kali and I came here. Tell me what I can do for you and I will do my best to please you."

"It is the state of the earth, ridden with Kali, that has made us dread the future", said Shaunaka. "Man is no longer assured of his hundred years of life. Diseases rob him of his youth and his death is premature. His physical well-being is threatened by many ills: his mind is clouded by *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Lobha*, *Moha*, *Mada* and *Matsarya*, the six arch enemies of man. These in their turn, are attended by smaller evils. Man's intellect is clouded by ignorance. If he has to emerge out of this illusion called *Maya*, if he has to save his soul from this sinful life on earth, he will have to study the Dharma Shashtras, the Purana the Vedas. But the man of today

has neither the time nor the inclination to study what is good for him. Please, therefore, let us know about a single Kavssya, a single great work, a single poem studying which man can become pure and good and be freed from the bondage of *Karma*.

"Krishna, the incarnation of Lord Narayana, was on the earth during *Dvapara*. He left us and went away: and with him went Dharma -- righteousness. People are groping in the darkness called ignorance. It is up to you, my lord, to tell us where *Dharma* has found refuge after the disappearance of Krishna."

Ugrashraya was pleased with their question. He smiled at them and said: "I will tell you where righteousness has found refuge after Krishna left the earth. The Sun has risen: the Sun which will dispel the inner darkness in the mind of man during this sinful *Kali Yuga*. That Sun is the great *Bhagavata Purana* composed by the seer Veda Vyasa. The *Bhagavata* tells you the story of the Lord and the many *avatars* he took to establish *Dharma* on the earth. He is the infinite, the incomprehensible, not bound by anything: not by the chain of cause and effect which makes the ordinary man live through *janma* after *janma* in an endless cycle. He is beyond all this. But man is not good enough or great enough to realise Him. He can see only through human eyes, perceive only through the senses and grasp things only through the human intellect. We approach Him with the eyes of man born of woman. We ascribe to Him qualities which we *have*, and try to gauge Him by *our* standards. Knowing all this, the Lord, in His infinite kindness has, in the past, *assumed* forms of living beings so that we could see Him. Through these descents into the world of men the Lord has helped man again and again. He has established *Dharma* whenever there was threat of its being eclipsed.

"Contemplating on the Absolute will not be possible for man today, ridden as he is by besetting sins. But even the worst sinner can be saved if he listens to the stories of the Lord, his many *avatars*. The *Bhagavata* is just that. The path to the Lord is devotion, the *Bhakti marga*. It is *Bhakti* which we see as the golden thread running through all the *avatars*. The *Bhagavata* is string of beads which, like a *japamala*, helps you to realise

the Lord and reach Him. Vyasa composed this Puranas as his last contribution for the good of the world. I will tell you how it came about."

THE COMING OF NARADA

The river Saraswati was flowing placidly. On the banks of the river was the *ashrama* of Vyasa. It was evening time and he was sitting on the sands gazing at the ripples in the river with unseeing eyes. His eyes were sad and his face, troubled. Some deep pain was mirrored in his thoughtful eyes: and so he sat for a long time.

The silence around him was broken by the twanging of the strings of the *Vina*. Sweet notes fell on his ears. With the music of the *Vina* was heard a voice singing the praise of Narayana. Vyasa looked up with an eager face and found the young sage Narada coming towards him. Vyasa got up in a flurry, welcomed the divine *rishi* and made him take a seat of honour. He then sat at his feet: at the feet of the young *rishi* who was a son of Brahma.

Narada smiled at Vyasa and said: "I hope all is well with you. I hope that sickness and disease do not bother you. I am confident that your mind, clear like a pond, is without agitations. You ought to be happy since you have composed the great poem, the *Mahabharata* which is a storehouse of knowledge, of all the rules of conduct. It is indeed, a great achievement and the world of men will benefit by your work. As for you, learned as you are in the *Brahma Vidya*, you must be without any sorrow." He paused for a while and Vyasa sat silent without uttering a word. Narada spoke again. He said: "It seems to me as though you are not looking happy. You seem to me like one who has not achieved what he wanted to. You have done so much and yet to you, I think, it seems to be inadequate. What is worrying you? What makes you unhappy? "What you say is perfectly true", said Vyasa. "And you are the only person who can clear my doubts. You are wise. You are the son of Brahma. You are ever lost in praising the glories of Lord Narayana and it seems to me, there is nothing which is beyond your intellect. You are like the Sun which sees all the three worlds. With the power of your *Yoga* you can, like the air, enter into human beings and

know what is hidden in their minds. You must be knowing the reason why I am despondent.

"Long ago, I was once absorbed in meditation. In my mind's eye I saw the future of the world. I saw the deterioration of *Dharma*. I saw the nature of Man undergoing a change for the worse. I saw that advent of Kali, of the sinfulness pervading the earth. I saw the gradual withdrawal of the glory that had been her heritage all these years. And, I was filled with infinite pity for the generations of men that are to be born in the *Kali Yuga*. I therefore resolved to help them in their distress. I edited the Vedas. I divided it into four parts and these four were taught to my disciples. Paila learnt the *Riks* and Jaimini, the *Sama*. Vaishampayana was the only one who could master the *Yajur Veda*. Sumantu became proficient in *Atharva Veda*. To Romaharshana I taught the seventeen Puranas and the Itihasas. These disciples of mine have divided the Vedas further and they have taught them to their disciples and they, in their turn, to theirs.

"I found that I had not done enough. I realised that those who cannot study the Vedas, those who are not allowed to do so, should also be saved. And so I composed the poem by name *Mahabharata* wherein all the lessons of the Vedas are taught in the course of the narration of the story. I had hoped that humanity will benefit by all this.

"And yet, my friend, I feel that my work does not grant me satisfaction. Or, rather, I have not the peace, the state of tranquillity that should be mine by right if I have done the right thing. Tell me what I have left undone. What is it that will grant me peace? Please tell me. I am sorely distressed by this unrest inside me".

With a slight smile lighting up his young face Narada said: "I know the reason. You have not done enough."

"Not done enough?" echoed Vyasa with dismay. "I have tried to do all that I possibly could. I have set down all that I thought was essential for the well-being of man and for his walking in the path of *Dharma*. What else is left? Tell me."

"I still maintain that you have not done enough", continued Narada. "There is still something you have to achieve before you attain peace. You have done a great service to humanity by composing the *Mahabharata*. There is no doubt about it. But there is one drawback in that great work."

Vyasa was listening to him as a student would, to the words of his *guru*. A drawback in the *Mahabharata*? He was eager to know what it was. He did not speak a word but his eyes were questioning as if to say: "Please tell me. Go on and tell me what the drawback is and how I can rectify it. I am eager and impatient to know."

Narada said: "You were interested in the welfare of the world and by relating the story of the Pandavas you have taught the lesson that righteousness will conquer in the end: and where Krishna is, there is found *Dharma*. This is the lesson and there is no doubt that people will learn it. But you have, throughout the epic, laid stress on the duties of man: on his *Dharma*; on his performing them selflessly. The *Bhagavad Gita* and all the other discourses on *Dharma* lay stress on *Karma Yoga*, as you call it. But, my friend, you have not sung the praises of the Lord as much as you ought to have. Know you not that the easiest path to the Lord is the path of *Bhakti*? All the other *yogas* are harder paths which lead to the feet of the Lord.

"The praises of Narayana even if they are couched in wrong words, even if they are sung all out of tune, will assure man of the Grace of the Lord. Like a piece of *Arni*, which, when churned, will give forth smoke first and later fire which will consume the wood itself, even so, the mind of man, when churned by constant devotion to the Lord, will make all the evil in him come out on to the surface. The true *Satvic* nature of man will then blaze forth and, like fire, will consume the bondage of *Karma* and grant him salvation for ever and ever.

"The *Mahabharata* was, to you, a play. Your attitude was purely objective. You entered into everyone of the characters. You were, therefore, thinking good thoughts as well as evil ones while in the process of portraying them. *Incidentally* the Lord was praised. There was no single-mindedness about your devotion to Him. You must try to make up for this omission. Sing the

praises of Narayana. Relate to the world his *Vishvarupa*, His *Viratarupa*, His *Vibhutis*, His *avatars* and this, I assure you, will grant you the peace you are seeking. Unveil to the world the secret behind the *avatars*.

"Tell them why the Lord Who is beyond the opposites, Who has His abode in *Ananta*, Who is the *Purusha*, the life-giver to this entire Universe: why He should take a form and a name and a birth and become like one of us: why He should appear to be infused with one or the other of the three *gunas* and act as though He were a human being with human emotions. Praise every *avatara* of the Lord. Let nothing come from your lips except words of praise describing the glory of Narayana and you will find peace.

"Drive home to the world of men this lesson: even if a man fails in his duties, duties which are ascribed to him by the Vedas and by the elders; even if he is a sinner who has transgressed all rules of conduct; still, if, in his heart, there is a spring of love, of devotion to the Lord, that will wash his sins white and he will be dear to Him. Remember, my friend, that you are yourself an *avatara* of Narayana. You have been born into this world for the benefit of mankind. And yet, you allow emotions to delude you. Remember who you are. Wake up from this sleep which makes you forget your real nature. Relate to everyone the many *avatars* of Narayana and the purpose behind each of them. Sing the praises of Narayana again, again and yet again. You will then have reached the goal for which you have been striving: PEACE."

THE PREVIOUS BIRTH OF NARADA

They were sitting silent for a while. The only sound was the music made by the waves of Saraswati as she flowed, and the hypnotic drone of the vina strings which Narada was plucking incessantly. Suddenly he smiled at Vyasa and said: "You will be interested to know how I was saved from the bondage of *Karma* because of Narayana. You may not be aware of my previous birth."

There was a look of amazement on the face of Vyasa. He said: "Previous birth? But, my friend, you are the son of Brahma. How could you have had a previous birth? You have kindled my curiosity. Please tell me all about it."

"I am talking of the previous *Kalpa*", said Narada with a reminiscent look on his eyes. "There was a shudra woman who was working in the *ashramas* of the rishis. I was her only son. Once, during the rainy season a group of sages came to the *ashrama* where my mother was a servant. They were to spend the four months there. I was a youngster of five and to me my mother assigned the duty of attending to their wants. I served them all the time. I was a peculiar child. I was not like the others. I was not fond of childish pranks and games and I was quiet and not given to much talking. Even the words I spoke were indistinct since I was still a child. The sages who were there became quite fond of me. They took pity on me and let me stay with them all the time. They were sorry for me, I think, and they let me stay with them all the time.

"Once while washing the vessels out of which they had eaten I happened to eat what was left and that made my mind pure. I was rid of all sins: such is the power of the devotees of the Lord.

"These *Bhaktas* would spend all their time singing the praises of Narayana and I became engrossed in the stories which they recounted and I became

enamoured of Narayana. The songs which spoke the greatness of Him made me think on Him and to me nothing else seemed to matter. Day and night I was thinking only of Him. I came to realise that I was something beyond *Maya*, the illusion that the body is real. I had learnt so much all because of the *Harikirtana* which I was hearing constantly. The *Rajoguna* and the *Tamoguna* which were in my mind were all washed away and, in the meantime the four months came to an end and the sages were ready to depart.

"They looked on me who was standing there with tears flowing from my eyes. They knew that I was a fit disciple and, in their infinite kindness they taught me the secret of realising the Truth. They taught me that dedication of all one's actions to the Brahman would cure one of the *Tapatrayas*: *Adhyatmika*, *Adidaivika* and *Adibhautika*. Action which is performed in the world with a desire for returns involves man further in the coils of *Maya*. These same actions, however, when performed without any desire, with a dedicated frame of mind, will only hasten to break the bonds of *Maya*. Knowledge of the Brahman wedded to the path of devotion will help man to perform actions dedicated to the Lord. Soon, very soon, the conditioned *Atman* will find freedom from the coils and become one with the Infinite. That was the lesson they taught me.

"Strangely enough, the technique was quite simple. Men who perform action with the thought of the Lord in their minds will, naturally, think on Him all the time. If the action is performed with the words, 'Salutations to you, Lord of lords; I worship You calling You by the names, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, Sankarshana; that will be the path to *Moksha*, freedom from the bondage of *Karma*. This was the great lesson taught me by the sages. The Lord was compassionate and He instilled in my mind the thought that He was the One Truth and that all the rest was illusion."

THE SEARCH AFTER TRUTH

"The sages went away and I was left alone. I had a mother as I told you before. She was a servant, she was ignorant, and she was immensely attached to me, her only child. I knew how foolish it was to love like that but it was not possible for me to leave her and go away. I was with her in the *ashrama* where she worked, and waited for the grace of God. The world, my friend, is under the Sway of God and His ways are inscrutable. We see what is happening but we lose sight of the fact that something else is responsible for the happenings in this world.

"The actions of man are like those of a puppet. It seems to move on its own accord but it is not so. It has to move the way the strings are pulled. And the strings are pulled by an expert who is not seen by us.

"One night my mother was proceeding towards the cowshed to milk the cow belonging to the *ashrama*. It was twilight and even that little light was fading rapidly. My poor mother was bitten by a snake which was lying in her path and she died on the spot. Strangely enough, I did not feel too unhappy since I knew that this was the Lord's doing; that He had so engineered it that I would get my freedom. My mother was a *bandha* and I was now free of it. I left the ashram and proceeded towards the north. I travelled through many countries and many forests. I crossed rivers which were beautiful. The forests were full of flowering trees, trees which had their branches broken by wild elephants. I saw mountains gleaming golden and silvery because of the minerals which were hidden in the rocks. I saw lakes which were noisy with the sounds of bees which were murmuring all the while. I passed fearful bamboo forests and to my ears came the noise made by the roaring of wild animals, the howling of jackals and the mournful hooting of the night owls.

"I was exhausted and my limbs were aching. My throat was parched and I was hungry. I went towards the river, washed myself and drank my fill of

the sweet water. I then sat under an immense *pipul* tree. I assumed the posture which the sages had taught me and concentrated my mind on the form of the Lord which they had described. I sat there absorbed in meditation.

"In my mind's eye I saw the form of Narayana slowly taking shape. I saw Him and my body trembled in ecstasy. Tears flowed incessantly and my entire being was flooded with joy. A moment of this ecstasy and the form of Narayana vanished: it was there no more. I was plunged in misery and I was roused from my meditation. I tried again to sit and meditate and I could not concentrate. The form would not come back to my mind. I was like one demented.

"All on a sudden I heard a voice speak to me. He was calling me and His voice was loving, comforting, beautiful. He said: 'My child, you will not be able to see me again in this birth of yours. Unless and until you shed this form born of desires you cannot reach me. This momentary vision of my form was to assure you that you will reach me in the end. Having seen me once no one can think of anything else or have any other desire in his mind. Even at this young age you have, by your association with sages, learnt to love me and only me. Love for me will banish all other forms of love in your mind. Shed this body of yours and come to me. You will always be by my side. This love you have for me will not wane even after the *Pralaya*. You are dear to me.' The divine voice was heard no more.

"Since then, I spent all my time singing the praises of Narayana and went from place to place. I had no desires and I was content with my lot in life. I was waiting for the time when I could shed the human form which kept me in bondage, kept me prisoner.

"Days passed: years too, many of them. In course of time Death came to me. It was a streak of lightning deceptively like a garland of light. The body made up of the elements fell to the earth. And I travelled towards the ocean where Narayana was sleeping. I entered into Brahma along with his breath. After four *yugas* had passed, when Brahma began to create the world I was born as his son along with *Marichi* and the others. By the grace of the Lord I travel all over the universe singing his glories. The

devas gave me this *vina* by name Mahati and with this to accompany my songs I go about spreading the lesson of love.

"When I sing the form of Narayana comes to my mind at once as though He has been summoned by me! I see Him all the time and I am always happy.

"Let me repeat what I said before. *Karma Yoga* which you have taught in the *Mahabharata*, *Gnyana Yoga* which you have taught in the Upanishad and the *Karma Kanda* you have described in the Vedas: not one of them will grant man, so easily, the peace and tranquillity which *bhakti yoga* gives. So dear friend, let your composition be the raft which will save men floundering in the ocean of pain, frustration and despair."

Narada went away from the presence of Vyasa. Long after he had gone, the drone of his *vina* could be heard and the great poet sat for a while pondering on the words of Narada.

Vyasa closed his eyes and went into a deep trance. He saw, in his mind's eye, the great events of the past. He saw Narayana resting on *ananta*. He saw the beginnings of creation: the Viratapurusha and the great lotus out of which was born Brahma. He saw the birth of the worlds. He saw the *Vibhuti* of the Lord and the happenings during the many *kalpas*.

Vyasa then composed the great *Bhagavata Purana*. He taught this great poem to his son *Suka* and Suka propagated it in the world of man.

THE END—WHICH WAS THE BEGINNING

It was the last day of the great war on the field of Kurukshetra. The sun had set long ago. Near Samantapanchaka lay the Kaurava monarch, Duryodhana, with his thigh broken by Bhima. He was dying, and to his presence came Ashvatthama, the son of Drona. His anger knew no bounds when he saw how unjustly the king had been hit. Ashvatthama took an oath that he would avenge the killing of his king by destroying all the Pandavas.

The entire Kaurava army had been annihilated. Only three were alive, barring the dying king. They were Kripa, Kritavarma, the son of Hardika and Ashvatthama. That night when everyone was asleep Ashvatthama hurried to the Pandava camp. He did not find the Pandavas but their five sons were there, sleeping. Dhrishtadyumna and his brothers were in the camp too. The angry brahmin killed all of them: the five sons of Draupadi and all her brothers. He then set fire to the camp and went away. The king, when he was told about it was not happy. The act of his friend was too terrible.

Early in the morning the news reached the Pandavas. Draupadi was horror-stricken. In one night she had lost her sons and her brothers. She saw their dead forms and her voice was harsh with pain as she lamented their death. Seeing her tear-stained face and anguished eyes Arjuna tried to comfort her. He said: "My queen, you will not weep for long. I will avenge the death of the children. I will bring the head of that sinner and lay it at your feet. He will not be able to escape me and the arrows from my dread Gandiva. I will seek him out and kill him."

Arjuna hurried to his chariot and Krishna was once again, his charioteer. They saw Ashvatthama running fast, to escape from Arjuna. Seeing the angry cloud on Arjuna's brow the son of Drona tried to run as fast as he

could. But Arjuna was like an avenging fury and Ashvatthama could do nothing. His horses were not fast enough to carry him away from the spot.

In despair he thought of saving his life by using the great *astra* Brahmashirsha. He touched water and after invoking the *astra* he spoke the words, "Let the world be Pandava-less" and sent it towards Arjuna.

The skies were filled with the glow and heat of the *astra*. A fear came over Arjuna and he said: "Krishna, Krishna, what is happening? Why is my frame burning so? I feel that a dreadful fire is travelling towards me and I do not know what it is nor can I find a way of escaping its fury. Tell me what I should do."

With a grim look Krishna said: "Arjuna, the son of your *guru* has thought fit to hurl the great Brahmashirsha at you. Do not look horrified. I know that Drona has told you how terrible it is. And I dare say he has told the same to his son also. But Asvatthama, evidently, has no thought of the consequences of this dastardly action. Apparently he desires to destroy the entire world. Make up your mind soon, Arjuna, and invoke the same *astra*. This is the only way you can quench the fury of this approaching fire." Arjuna saluted the presiding deity of the *astra* and invoked it. When the two fires were travelling towards each other it seemed like the end of the world had come. The *rishis* from the heavens hurried towards the spot and they said: "Withdraw the *astra*, both of you or else the world will be destroyed. The two fires should not meet. Hurry and avert the calamity."

Arjuna obeyed them immediately and withdrew his *astra*. Ashvatthama could not. When he learnt the invocation from his father he had been warned about the dreadful power of the *astra*. Not bothering to remember the warning he had sent it against Arjuna. The sins he had committed had robbed him of his purity and his brahmanic *tejas*, and he was powerless against his own *astra*. Lest it should consume him he aimed it at all the unborn children of the Pandavas and thus thought of making the world Pandava-less.

After withdrawing the *astra* Arjuna rushed towards Ashvatthama. Tying him up with a rope Arjuna dragged him like a cow meant for sacrifice. Krishna's eyes were spitting fire. He said: "Arjuna, this is the man who has

committed the gravest of sins, killing of children while they were sleeping. It is not right that you should have mercy on him.

You must kill him without a qualm. I do not have to remind you of the rules of fighting. A man well-versed in them will not kill an enemy who is drunk; who is careless about his safety; who has lost his wits; who is not trying to fight back; who is sleeping; who has fallen at your feet asking for mercy; who is defeated and who is frightened. But the sinner who saves himself by killing ruthlessly thousands of other lives must be punished only by death. And again, Arjuna, have you forgotten your promise so soon? I was listening when you told Draupadi: 'I will lay at your feet the head of that man who killed your son.' You swore to do it. Why do you delay? Kill this man." Arjuna would not do so. In spite of the great provocation he remembered that Ashvatthama was his playmate of old; that he was the son of his *guru*. Drona had loved Arjuna even more than he loved Ashvatthama. Arjuna was unwilling to kill the son of his guru who was like a brother to him. He took him to the presence of Draupadi and the other Pandavas. He said: "Look, my queen. Look on this sinner who is standing before you. His eyes are bent on the ground since he dare not look you in the face. Tell me what I should do with him and I will do it."

Draupadi's grief at the loss of her children would ever be fresh in her mind; also the fact that Ashvatthama killed them. But her anger had abated. She was overcome with compassion for him and she said: "Arjuna, please release him at once from these coils. I cannot bear to see the son of your *guru* bound like this. Drona was the *guru* who taught you archery and his son is a brother to you. That pious woman Kripa has not joined her lord on the funeral pyre because her son is alive. If you kill him now she will suffer the pain of losing her only child. I do not want her to suffer like me. Let him go his way. Please release Ashvatthama."

Yudhishtira, Arjuna as well as the twins were pleased with the words of their queen. Bhima was the only one whose anger had not evaporated at the sight of Ashvatthama. He was for killing him. Krishna smiled and said: "Arjuna, you are caught on the horns of a dilemma. Either you displease Draupadi and the others killing Ashvatthama or you incur the wrath of your beloved brother Bhima by letting this sinner live. Do what you think

is fit under the circumstances. Try and see how you can please all of them."

Arjuna looked at all of them. Krishna was standing with his arms locked together across his chest and there was an inscrutable expression on his face. Yudhishtira and the others were looking sad and uncomfortable. Bhima was glowering angrily at the prisoner. After a long moment Arjuna thought that he understood what Krishna was trying to tell him. He took up his sword and cut off the jewel on the head of Ashvatthama.

Stripped of the glow of the jewel which had been part of him, stripped of his brahmanic *tejas*, impure because of *Shishuhatya*, Ashvatthama stood in their midst. Arjuna undid the ropes which bound him and said: "Now you can go."

Cutting off the hair of a brahmin; taking away the wealth that belongs to him and ordering him to leave your presence; each one of them in itself is like killing a brahmin and Arjuna had done it all. To Ashwatthama who was jealous of his honour this treatment at the hands of Arjuna was worse than death.

With his eyes bent on the ground he dragged his steps away from the presence of the Pandavas and went far away from there.

UTTARAYANA

Yudhishtira had no peace of mind. He had conquered his enemies and had got his kingdom back from Duryodhana. But he had no desire to rule the kingdom. He was greatly depressed. He hated the thought that his cousins and all the great kings of the land had to be killed because of the war. He felt that it should not have been allowed to happen. "It is because of me and my lust for power, my 'Rajyalobha' that all this happened", he said again and again. Krishna tried his best to comfort him. He spoke words of wisdom. He said: "Look, it was Fate that was responsible for all this and not you. The sons of Dhritarashtra *had to die* because of the *adharma* which was part of them. Remember all that they had done to you. Remember the one incident when my sister Draupadi was dragged to the court by her hair! Does not your blood boil at the remembrance of it? For that one sin all of them had to be killed. Grieve not, my lord. You are not to blame. They carried the germs of destruction in themselves. Please shed this sorrow and make your brothers and Draupadi happy. Let me see the five Pandavas enjoy the kingdom which is theirs by right. This was the sole purpose of my life: to establish you on the Kaurava throne. Now that I have achieved it please reward me by looking happy."

Vyasa and Narada added their words to those of Krishna. But it was of no avail. What hurt Yudhishtira most was the killing of Radheya. Day and night he would sit and brood over it; and the entire family was sunk in gloom because of the king's sorrow.

One day while they were all together, all on a sudden Krishna became lost in a reverie. Yudhishtira asked him why he had become so thoughtful all at once. Krishna said: "Bhishma, who is on the bed of arrows is thinking of me and he wants me by his side. Yudhishtira, he will soon pass away and with him will go the entire store of wisdom which he has garnered throughout the years. I suggest that you go to him and ask him to instruct

you in the art of ruling the world and in the more difficult art of preparing yourself for the life to come. *Uttarayana* is fast approaching and you must hurry."

Next morning all of them went to the field of Kurukshetra where the worthy patriarch was lying, waiting for his death. He looked like a fallen god. They went and stood by his side with folded palms. Tears were flowing incessantly from the eyes of Yudhishtira. He went near his grandfather and said: "Here I am, the sinner Yudhishtira, who is the cause of your death and that of your grandsons. I do not know what special hell is waiting to receive me." The old man stroked his grandson's head with his gnarled hands and comforted him. He convinced the grieving king about the inevitability of the war and said: "My child, do not think that you have killed me. You have granted me freedom from the bondage called life. Long long ago I promised my mother Satyawati that I would not die until the Kuru throne is established firmly on the earth. Thanks to you, I have been able to keep my promise to her and I am no end grateful to you for this. My child, if only you knew how tired I am of living! As for your sorrow, wipe it away. It is unbecoming and unworthy of you. You are a king and a king cannot afford to have feelings of his own. He belongs to his people and your worry from now on should be their welfare and nothing else."

Krishna said: "We have tried, my lord, to comfort him and I have failed; not even Narada could comfort him and Vyasa is unable to convince him that his grief is unnecessary. It is up to you to talk to him and I hope you will succeed where we have failed."

Bhishma's eyes were wet. He said: "Children, I am unhappy to hear about your despondency. Ever since you were born you have been suffering. Your mother Kunti went through so much pain and anguish after Pandu died leaving her to bring up her five sons. Like clouds tossed hither and thither by the wilful breeze you have been the playthings of Fate. Else how can one explain the fact that the son of *Dharma* with his powerful brothers to help him, could not rule his kingdom all these years? The ways of Fate are inscrutable. We do not know them. But there is ONE WHO KNOWS. It is Krishna. He knew about it long ago. This son of Vasudeva, this Yadava

whom you consider to be your cousin, your friend, your mentor, your ambassador, why, your charioteer, is none other than Narayana. Very few know the glory that is Krishna. One is sage Narada and the other is Kapila.

"And it was this Krishna who allowed all these things to happen. Can you still doubt the rightness of his actions? He is *Ishvara*. He is not ridden with desires, loves and hatreds, ego and emotions like we are. And he took it upon himself to protect you and steer you through this great war. Why did he do it? It is because he is affected by just one thing and that is *Bhakti*: and you have infinite *bhakti* for Krishna. Look at me. I am on my death-bed and my thoughts were with Krishna. He knew it and he has come to grant me my desire. He is tied to the *bhakta* with the threads of bhakti.

Krishna intervened and said: "Bhishma, let me ask a favour of you.

"Command me, my lord", said Bhishma with his palms folded. Krishna took his hands in his and said: "Bhishma, you are the son of Ganga. She wanted you to be an ideal king and so she made you learn the shashtras, state craft, *raja dharma* and all the many *dharma*s from the divine preceptors, Shukra and Brihaspati. Now you are impatient to go away. Will you teach your grandson, this Yudhishtira, the rules of governing the kingdom? Teach him all that you know. He is the only one worthy of the legacy of knowledge which is in you. It is but right that all your learning should not go back with you to the heavens where you acquired it."

"So be it," said Bhishma. And for fifty-four days he taught Yudhishtira all that he had learnt in the heavens.

Uttarayana, the day for which Bhishma had been waiting so patiently and so impatiently, came at last. Bhishma was prepared to shed his body. Bhishma, who had led the Kaurava army for ten days, who had fallen on the bed of arrows on the evening of the tenth day, who refused to reach the heavens on the same day since it was *Dakshinayana*. It is said that there will be rebirth for one who lays down his body during *Dakshinayana*. Bhishma, who was the foremost of the sons of the Paurava race, was getting ready to go back to the heavens. He looked at Krishna and said: "My Lord, it is said that one should close his eyes and contemplate on the form of the Lord in the mind just before the breath leaves the body. But I

have the good fortune of having the Lord of lords by my side. Can anything be more glorious than this?"

Bhishma called for flowers and worshipped Krishna. He became silent. His thoughts were flowing towards Krishna in an endless stream. And, like a sigh breathed by a tired traveller at the end of his journey, his breath left his body and Bhishma was one of the denizens of heaven.

THE SON OF ABHIMANYU

Yudhishtira had been crowned as monarch. Krishna said: "Now that my task is done, now that my dream has come true, I should begin to think of going back to Dvaraka. It is ages since I left my home. Satyaki and I have forgotten what the city looks like. Please let us go back for a while at least. I must see my aged parents and all the others."

When she heard about the impending departure of Krishna, Uttara, the wife of Abhimanyu came rushing to him. She fell at his feet and holding on to them sobbed out the words: "Krishna, Krishna, you are the Lord of the Universe, says grandmother. You are the only person who can help me. I am in great trouble. I am pursued by a powerful presence which is spitting fire all the time. I am not fond of this life of mine which has lost all meaning ever since that day when my lord died on the battle-field. Krishna, I am bearing the child of your Abhimanyu. The child is the only gift of the Pandavas to the throne of the Pauravas. I am afraid this fire will destroy my child. Please save it from death, Krishna."

Krishna closed his eyes and to his mind came the day when Ashvatthama sent his Brahmashirsha *astra*. When he invoked it the brahmin had said: "Let the world be Pandava-less." Since he could not withdraw the *astra* Ashvatthama had aimed it at the unborn sons of the Pandavas. Krishna lifted up Uttara and said: "Do not weep my child. I promise you, Abhimanyu will live again in you. I will stay here till your child is born. I am here to protect you. Do not worry any more about the fire which is threatening you and your son. I will take care of it." Krishna entered the womb of Uttara with the power of his *Maya*. He was there when the *astra* entered her to destroy the unborn child. With his divine form he fought the *astra* and finally subdued it.

The child, while in the mother's womb, saw a glowing form emanating from the *astra*. It enveloped him and he felt that he was being burnt. He

then saw another form. He was as big as a thumb and he was beautiful. He had a golden crown on his head. There was a blue sheen on his body like that of a cloud and his dress was the colour of lighting. He had four long arms which were decked with bracelets. His earrings were glowing like golden fire and his eyes were crimson with anger. He had a mace in his hand which he was twirling and the mace was spitting fire like a lit-up torch. He was going round and round the child and was holding at bay the *astra* and its fire. For months he stayed inside the womb of Uttara with the child and finally the power of Brahmashirsha was quelled. And, even as the full grown child was looking, he vanished from his sight.

Abhimanyu's son was born. There was great rejoicing in the city of Hastina and the child was called Vishnurata since the Lord Himself protected him and made a gift of him to the Paurava throne. And Krishna called him Parikshit because the child, even when he was in his mother's womb used to look at the form of Vishnu and ask himself: "Who is this wonderful person dressed in yellow silk, wearing this lovely garland, with the *gada* in his hand, who is protecting me all the time? Who is he?" He had begun to question about the form of the Lord even before he was born!

KRISHNA TAKES LEAVE OF KUNTI

The excitement after the birth of the child had now subsided and things were coming back to normal in the city and in the palace of Yudhishtira too. Krishna knew that he had an unpleasant task ahead of him. He had to tell them that he wanted to go back to Dvaraka. They loved him so much they would not welcome his departure. He loved them too, but he had to go.

He bade farewell to every one of them individually: to Subhadra, his sister; to Draupadi; to Dhritarashtra, the old blind king and to Gandhari, the saintly wife of the old king; and the Pandavas. They were loath to let him go and very unwillingly Yudhishtira let him go. Krishna went to the apartment of Kunti and falling at her feet he said: "Please wish me well. I am going to Dvaraka."

Kunti smiled sadly at him and said: "Still you are playing the role of Krishna, my brother's son! I am an ignorant woman, Krishna. I have not studied the Vedas nor have I been taught *Brahma Vidya*. But I know one truth and that is: You are the Ishvara, the Lord of lords. I salute you. You are the Truth that has always existed, the Creator of the universe, the *Purusha*. You are the power that brings Prakriti into action. You pervade the universe made up of the elements. The impenetrable screen which goes by the name *Maya* hides you from us and we cannot perceive Your presence in every living and non-living object. You are the five senses and You are beyond their power since You are the Truth behind them. I know very little but I know that You are the Absolute Truth. The only thing I can do is to salute You. Ignorant woman that I am, I do not even know the proper way in which to pray to You. I fall at Your feet in all humility.

"Like an actor appears on the stage whose acting is so perfect that the audience thinks that he is the character whom he is portraying, You have played the role of Krishna to perfection. Your real nature is not known to

all. To people deluded by the two cardinal faults "I" and "Mine" You are invisible. Sages who have practised the *yoga* of selflessness, who have tried to realise the Brahman, who have schooled their emotions so well that they are beyond their influence, even they are not able to see You. How then can we, women, ignorant even in the *yoga* called *Bhakti*, perceive You? To me You are the son of Vasudeva and Devaki; of Nanda and Yashoda. You are the cowherd who tended the cows in Vrindavan. But You are, I know, the Lord Narayana whose navel has the Divine Lotus in it. Long ago Your mother Devaki was freed from the prison by You after You had killed Kamsa. Even so, I have been saved again and again from miseries by You. My sons have regained their kingdom because of You. You have been our saviour. You have been there to protect us whenever troubles visited us. You are beyond the grasp of the highest intellect; and You have been with us in a human form with a name and *that* has been our great good fortune. Whenever misfortunes befell us, in its wake we found You coming to us. You have loved us so much.

"Please, Krishna, there is only one boon I want to ask of You and that is: there should be misfortune after misfortune visiting us. That and only that, will make You be with us all the time. People who are born in good families, who are wealthy, who are well—read and who have their ego thriving on the power which wealth has given them; how can such people be fit to pronounce Your name and call You to them? And yet, it is Your kindness which makes even such undeserving people fit to be graced by Your favours.

"I salute You Who is the Lord of lords, who is the uncaused cause of the universe. You are Time which rolls on and on without a beginning and without end. Why did You make up Your mind to be born in this world of men? Some say that You were born in the House of Yadu like the sandalwood tree growing on the slope of the Malaya mountain to propagate to the world the glory of Yudhishtira. Others maintain that You were born as the son of Vasudeva and Devaki to fulfil a promise of Yours to a couple: Sutapas and Prishni. Again it is said that You were entreated by Brahma to be born in the world of men to relieve Mother Earth of her burden which threatened to overwhelm her and sink her like an overladen

ship. I do not know what made the Brahman, the Infinite, take up a form and a name. I only know that You are beyond the sway of the opposites which trouble men of small minds. You have no likes and You have no dislikes. No one is dear to You and You hate no one. No one is able to gauge the depth of Your purpose; no one who is caught in the snare of likes and dislikes.

"Krishna, how can we live when You go away from us? How can the senses function if the life behind them ceases to illumine them? How can the mind think of anything else once it has been trained on You? Krishna, grant me that my mind should always be bent on You and thoughts of You, like the river Ganga who, with single-minded purpose, flows into the sea unmindful of obstructions."

With a smile of infinite sweetness Krishna wiped Kunti Devi's eyes and said: "So be it."

He then went to the court of the king and there he saw Yudhishtira and his brother plunged in woe because of their impending parting from Krishna. The chariot had been brought to the gates of the palace. Arjuna stood in the chariot holding the white silk umbrella over the head of Krishna. Uddhava and Satyaki held the *chamaras* for him. Yudhishtira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva walked on either side of the chariot. The entire city was assembled on the streets to bid farewell to Krishna, the beloved of them all. Soon they reached the outskirts of the city and with great difficulty Krishna persuaded his friends to go back to their houses. Daruka spurred the horses and soon the chariot of Krishna was but a speck in the distant horizon. The five brothers stood rooted to the spot gazing into the distance from where the chariot had disappeared long ago.

YUDHISHTHIRA PERFORMS ASHVAMEDHA

Several months passed. Yudhishthira had managed to get a semblance of peace in his mind when he devoted all his thoughts and all his time in governing the kingdom. But, at the back of his mind there was still a feeling of guilt gnawing at his vitals. He could not - would not - get over the fact that he had caused the death of his cousins and his kinsmen.

Vyasa came to him and told him that he would be cleansed of the sin if he performed the yoga by name *Ashvamedha*. This suggestion was welcomed by everyone. Krishna came at the request of Yudhishthira and he too approved of the suggestion.

Everyone was happy that Yudhishthira had something to do. This would keep him from brooding. Arjuna was particularly thrilled. It seemed ages since he had taken the Gandiva in his hand. His powerful arms were itching for fight. But Yudhishthira was against all unlawful fighting. He would not let them collect even the customary wealth, the tribute, which vassal kings had to pay the emperor. "If there is some other way in which I can acquire wealth tell me, Krishna, and we will proceed with our plans," said Yudhishthira. Krishna thought for a while and sent the brothers to the north where a king had performed a *yagnya* previously and had left all the golden vessels and other necessary utensils there. They came back with immense wealth and the *yagnya* was performed three times by the king. Vyasa presided over the function and Krishna was the honoured guest as was the custom with the Pandavas.

Krishna spent some time with them all after the *yagnya* and when he went back to Dwaraka he took Arjuna with him.

VIDURA LAYS DOWN HIS BOW

It was just after the thirteenth year of the exile of the Pandavas. Vain efforts were made by them to get back their half of the kingdom from Duryodhana. The court of Dhritarashtra was a hotbed of intrigue.

Old Bhishma tried to advise Duryodhana to make peace with the Pandavas. Drona in his own way tried to say the same thing. But it was all to no purpose. Duryodhana was bent on war; either war or the return of the Pandavas to the forest. With this end in view Dhritarashtra sent Sanjaya the charioteer to the Pandava camp in Upaplavya asking them to avert the war. He particularly requested gentle-hearted and noble Yudhishtira to go back to the forest instead of "desiring" the kingdom. Sanjaya came back to Hastina and he spoke harshly to the old king censuring his avarice.

The king could not sleep that night. Try as he might, he could not. He sent for Vidura his brother and asked him to comfort him. Vidura had nothing but contempt for the blind king and his querulous moods. But, at the same time, he was sorry for his brother. He said: "My dear brother, you say you cannot sleep. I know why you are not able to sleep. You are trying to be unjust to the sons of your dead brother. It is your sinful nature which is robbing you of your sleep. Listen to me. Let me take you back to the days when we had just lost Pandu. Do you remember the day when Kunti came to us with her five sons? You disliked the youngsters from that day. I know about it. I knew too about the dastardly plot you hatched with your son on the advice of Kanika to destroy them at Varanavata. You sent them to that city knowing full well that they would be burnt to death in the house of lac. I saved my brother's children and I know you have not forgiven me for it. You were given a second chance. Did you take it? No. Poor Yudhishtira was given the dry and barren piece of land by name Khandavaprastha.

"Because he made it beautiful, because he and his brothers were able to subdue all the kings of Bharatavarsha and perform the *Rajasuya* your son

became highly jealous of them and made up his mind to rob them. You endorsed his action in every way. You built the gambling hall and you cheated the sons of your brother. They lost their kingdom and themselves too. And when that unfortunate child, their queen Draupadi, with her hair and mantle all awry, appealed to you for justice, for succour from the assault on her, you paid no heed to her words. And you allowed them to be banished to the forest for thirteen years. Was that not wrong? And now, what has happened? Yudhishtira has just fulfilled the conditions of the exile. He stayed in the forest for twelve years and the thirteenth year has also been completed. Now, after all this, he asks you for justice. All he wants is his share of the kingdom and you, with your sons, are too avaricious to part with your ill-gotten gains. You refuse to listen to him. You send word to him asking him to go back to the forest. Is that not wrong? Even now it is not too late. In your old age you can have peace if you listen to Krishna who is coming to you with a message of peace." Vidura tried to explain *dharma* to a king who was singularly devoid of it. A few days later Krishna came to Hastina. In the council hall he spoke to the king and to Duryodhana about their unjust behaviour. Elders like Bhishma and Drona tried in vain to plead the cause of the Pandavas. Then Vidura spoke.

Vidura said: "My dear brother, evidently you do not seem to realise the grave danger that awaits you and your sons. It is obvious that you have, in your foolishness, forgotten the dreadful oath of Bhima. Bhima, with his brothers is hissing like a huge python, ready to swallow your sons. Please return the kingdom to Yudhishtira. This Krishna who is the Lord in human form has declared that the Pandavas are dear to him. The gods, therefore, will side only with the Pandavas. Can you not see that Lakshmi the goddess of wealth will favour only the side where the Lord is present? All your past sins have taken a form and that is your son Duryodhana. The wise say that one can be abandoned for the honour of the family; the family for the sake of the village; the village for the sake of the community and the earth itself should be abandoned to save one's soul. Please abandon this Duryodhana. Listen to my advice. I am saying what is good for you."

There was a moment of silence when he said this. Just a moment. Duryodhana then descended from his seat and with him walked Radheya, Dusshasana and Shakuni. Duryodhana came and stood very near his uncle. His eyes were red and his lips were throbbing with anger. He would not even talk to Vidura directly. He said: "Who allowed this lowborn man into this council hall? He is a traitor. He has been eating the salt of my father, the king, and shamelessly he is siding with our enemies. It is our wish that he should leave this city. We do not want him here. Since he is the brother of our revered father he can escape alive."

Vidura looked at everyone and at his brother. No one spoke a word. Vidura's face was bland and calm. Only, a slight sneer could be discerned on his lips. He thought of the Lord and his mind was freed of all delusion, of attachment, pain, sorrow. He took up his mighty bow and placed it on the doorstep of the great hall as if to say: "With this bow I am laying down on this doorstep the *Maya* which was clouding my vision: the affection I had for my brother and his sons; the affection which was blinding me to their real nature. It was this *Maya* which had been tying me to this place all these years and now I am able to shed it."

Vidura walked out of the assembly without once looking back.

VIDURA'S RETURN AFTER THE WAR

Vidura left Hastina and went on a pilgrimage to all the holy rivers of Bharatavarsha. He wanted to visit all the *tirthas* which had been sanctified by the Lord in his three forms: Brahma, Vishnu and Mahadeva. He went to Vrindavan first and spent some time under the shelter of the Govardhana hill. He walked all the way to the river Narmada and bathed in her waters which were always clear. He visited Pampasaras where Sri Rama once stayed while he searched for his Sita. Pushkara was one of the many *tirthas*. He went all over the surface of the country dressed in tree barks, with his body covered with dust and with his hair all matted because of negligence and the frequent baths in the several rivers. He was bent on only one thing, the feet of Narayana, and with this thought ever in his mind he managed to shed the opposites and attain a semblance of peace.

Vidura reached Prabhasa, the favourite spot of Krishna. There he heard about the annihilation of the family of Dhritarashtra, like the destruction of a bamboo forest by the fire which is born of the bamboo itself. He heard that Yudhishtira was now the sole monarch of the entire Bharatavarsha. He tried to grasp the facts.

Protected as he was by the armour of detachment, still his heart was touched with great sorrow and quietly he walked towards the banks of Sarasvati. From there he pursued his journey towards the Yamuna. On the banks of the river Yamuna he met Uddhava. Uddhava sent him to sage Maitreya to learn *Brahma Vidya*. Vidura spent some time in the *ashrama* of Maitreya and from there he travelled towards Hastina. He wanted to meet Yudhishtira and his brothers. He wanted to fall at the feet of his brother Dhritarashtra and console him and Gandhari in their sorrow. This was a mission he had to perform: after that he was free to go to Badarikashrama and shed his frame. That was his intention: to perform *tapas* and attain freedom from the bondage called life. He had no desire. Thirty-five years had passed since Yudhishtira began to rule the kingdom. He had now

learnt the art of detachment. The lesson he had learnt was the lesson of dedication. His grandfather had taught him, again and again, that a king belonged to the people and not to himself; he could not afford to have feelings and emotions of his own. His sole concern should be the welfare of his subjects. Yudhishtira had no time to look back on the events of the long ago which precipitated the terrible war. He realised that blaming himself for the events of the past was wrong and fruitless. Yudhishtira had performed the *Ashvamedha* and he had earned peace of mind. He was ruling the earth which was bounded only by the sea on all sides. He was like Indra ruling the celestial kingdom. The earth was happy under his rule. The land was fruitful; the people were contented. There was rain in plenty and the cows yielded milk which was like *Amrita*. There was no theft and goodness reigned in the hearts of all.

Suddenly Yudhishtira saw evil omens in the sky. He had seen them once before and that was before the Kurukshetra war. The same planets and assumed the same positions relatively and this spelt calamity, a great calamity, to the world. When he was worried as to what the skies prophesied Vidura arrived in Hastina.

Yudhishtira was speechless with amazement and happiness. Tears flowed from his eyes at the sight of his beloved uncle. All the members of the royal family welcomed him: Dhritarashtra, Yuyutsu, Sanjaya, Kripa, Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi, Subhadra, Uttara, Kripa, the wife of Drona, and the brothers of Yudhishtira. The meeting between Vidura and Dhritarashtra was very tender. The old king had been missing Vidura and like the body welcoming the life-breath which had left it for a while, he embraced his brother. After they had got over the first thrill, they all went into the inner chambers. The guest was made to take food and rest himself. Yudhishtira then asked him how he was and what he had been doing all these years. He said: "Did you think of us of all, uncle, during these years? We have not forgotten you and your affection for us. During the days when we were young you protected us under your wings, like a mother-bird her fledglings. We would have been burnt in the house of lac with our mother long ago if it had not been for you. How have you been all these years? Tell us about the many *tirthas* you have visited. My lord, men like you

who have the form of the Lord ever present in your minds are considered to be *tirthas*. When you visit the rivers polluted by ordinary men you purify the *tirthas*. I have been told that Ganga, when she was beseeched by Bhagiratha to come down to the earth said: 'I am heavenly and if I come to the earth the sins of those who bathe in me will contaminate me and rob me of my purity. I do not want that to happen.' Bhagiratha said: 'Pure and holy men will bathe in you. They will be the ones to purify you. They are called *Tirtha Rupas*.' Tell us about all that has been happening to you all these years. We are eager to hear your words."

Vidura related to them what he had been doing. He described the many holy spots he had visited. Time passed very quickly and very pleasantly for all of them.

Vidura spent some time with them in the palace. Most of it he spent in the company of his unfortunate brother Dhritarashtra.

THE END OF DHRITARASHTRA

Vidura, after spending a reasonable number of days in Hastina, realised that time was running short and that he should not waste any more time. He had to do what he had come there to do. He spoke to Dhritarashtra one day. He said: "My beloved brother, you have never listened to the words of advice I was wont to speak in those days. But this once you must listen to me. Leave this city and go to the forest, my lord. Please abandon all these comforts and go far away from the city, to the forest."

Dhritarashtra turned his unseeing eyes on his brother and said: "I do not understand what you are saying. Tell me why I should go to the forest at this old age, helpless as I am with this infirmity. Explain to me why I should go. I know there must be a reason behind this suggestion of yours, Vidura. Why do you ask me to go away?"

Vidura spoke in a gentle and persuasive voice. He said: "Dread *Kala*, is coming fast towards us. There is nothing that can withstand its power. No word can coax it to go back. Death is very near. When the Hand of *Kala* is touching you, you have to renounce this life which is very dear to you: what then can one say about the other things which are dear to us! Wealth? Kinsmen? Power? What can all these do when death draws near? Let me speak candidly some home-truths. You have no one whom you can call yours. Your father, your brother, your friends, your sons are all gone; buried in the depth of oblivion. As for your body, old age has swallowed almost all of it. Think of the house you live in, even that does not belong to you. Your sons were killed by Bhima and it is food given by that Bhima which you are eating. Surely life is very dear to you if you are prepared to undergo such humiliation. This life of yours, my dear brother, is allowed to you out of sufferance.

"You tried to kill the Pandavas in the house of lac; you tried to kill Bhima by mixing poison with his food; you insulted them and their queen in the

court; you stole from them their wealth and their kingdom. And yet, they have granted you this life. What is the use of living in such ignominy, my brother? Even if you are unwilling to relinquish this life and these comforts, death is not going to spare you. Whether you like it or not, this body of yours is growing old and with age like a garment which has been used constantly. Ponder on these truths for a moment. Be brave, for a change. A brave man is one who, having abandoned his wealth, his kith and kin, his sons and his family goes away in secret to the forest and sheds this human body. This *Vairagya* may come to him of its own accord or he may adopt it after being told about it. But a man who has the strength of mind to take to this course and spends the rest of his life in the forest thinking on the Lord all the while, is, indeed, a prince among men. It is easy enough to be brave when one is young. But the really brave man is one who feels the approach of death and is prepared to shed this body without any regret. Forget this city of pain, brother. Get up and go towards the North, the path to heaven."

Dhritarashtra was silent for a long time. For the first time in his life he considered the advice of Vidura without protesting.

The night had passed the second *yama*. Dhritarashtra got up from his bed and told what he had decided to do to his queen, that great lady who had tied up her eyes with a silken scarf on the day she was married since she did not want to see the world which he could not see. She spoke not a word. Quietly she came and stood by his side. Accompanied by Vidura the old couple left the palace without anyone knowing about it.

NARADA'S VISIT TO HASTINA

Early in the morning Yudhishtira woke up from sleep. He performed his morning ablutions, the worship of the household god and other daily rituals and then went to the apartments of the elders Dhritarashtra and Gandhari. This was his daily ritual too. He looked around and could not find them there. He did not find Vidura either. He searched everywhere and could not find them. At the doorway of their apartments he found Sanjaya looking as distracted and woebegone as himself. He asked him where the elders were. Sanjaya could not speak a word. Yudhishtira said: "Sanjaya, where are they? Where are my uncles and where is my aunt? Have they gone away without telling me because they were insulted by anyone here? Or, unable to bear the pain of losing their sons have they fallen into the river Ganga and killed themselves? Please say something." Sanjaya wiped his eyes which were filled with tears and said: "I really do not know what happened. They did not tell me that they were planning to do. I have been deceived by them and by Vidura too." When he was sore distracted by this calamity Yudhishtira saw that Sage Narada along with *tumburu* had come to see him. He hurried to his presence and after honouring him properly he spoke to them and said: "Please forgive me if I seem preoccupied. I am greatly upset by the disappearance of my parents. I am sunk in woe. It is up to you to comfort me and tell me what it all means." Narada said: "Grieve not, Yudhishtira, for anyone. This world is entirely in the hands of the Lord. He is the one Who brings people together; makes them live together for a while and then part for ever. Consider the bullock. The master pierces its nostrils and threads a rope through it. He then loads the back of the animal with the burden it has to carry. The bullock has to move in the direction in which the master pulls the rope and it has to carry the burden the master chooses to place on its back. It has no choice in the matter. Even so, man is tied by the ropes whose names are Rules of Conduct: *Dharma*, *Brahmacharya* and *Bhrahmanya*. Propelled by them man carries to the Home of the Lord the burdens imposed on him. No man

is free to do as he pleases. When a child plays with toys he brings a few of them together, plays with them for a while and separates them as suits his whim. Even so, human beings are brought together in this world and they are parted by the wish of the Lord. Consider the essential truth about the life of every human being. The human body is impermanent as you know. And the *atman* is imperishable. Considered either way, there is no cause to mourn the disappearance of the elders. Do not think they will be helpless because you are not there to take care of them. Forget this delusion. This body which is the conglomeration of the five elements is governed only by Time—*Kala*, *Karma*, and *Svabhava*. Nothing else is able either to protect it or to destroy it.

"Yudhishtira, listen to me carefully. The Lord has taken a name and a form and has been born on this earth to destroy evil. His work is ended. You will remain on this earth only as long as He does.

"As for your uncles: Dhritarashtra has now reached the *ashramas* of the *rishis*. The river Ganga when she descended to the earth divided herself into seven streams and that spot is named Saptasrotas. On the banks of that holy lake your uncle is now spending his time preparing himself for the life to come. Five days from today he will find release from this human bondage. His body as well as that of his queen Gandhari will be burnt to ashes in the *ashrama*.

Having witnessed this your uncle Vidura will travel towards the *tirthas* once again and when he reaches Badarikashrama he will also shed his body.

"Remember all that I have said and abandon this grief." Narada then took leave of the Pandavas and Yudhishtira consoled himself with the words of wisdom spoken by Narada.

ARJUNA COMES BACK FROM DWARAKA

Yudhishtira's mind was upset by the recent happenings. To an extent Narada's words had comforted him. But the evil portents persisted in the skies and the general uneasiness in his mind indicated to him the dread advent of some great calamity. He could not rest.

Narada had said: "The Lord has taken a human form to suppress evil and His work is ended. You will remain on the earth so long as He remains."

These words had made Yudhishtira worry day and night. And again, Arjuna who had gone with Krishna had not come back. Several months had passed since he went. Yudhishtira was telling Bhima about his misgivings. He said: "Bhima, I am greatly worried, ever since revered Narada told us that the Lord, Whose purpose has been served is ready to lay down the human form He has assumed, like an actor taking off the clothes He had donned for the role, He was playing, my mind is full of fear. Do you think it is possible for our Krishna to go? Krishna who has been everything to us; do you think he will leave us and go away? I am afraid, very much afraid, that it is to happen and that, very soon. Look at the sudden change for the worse on the face of the earth. People are getting to be more and more inclined towards *adharma*. Anger, avarice and untruth seem to be holding sway in the minds of men. People are becoming hypocrites and their natural love for father and mother and elders is fast on the wane. I am very much afraid that *Kali*, the fourth quarter, has set foot on the earth and Mother Earth has lost the glory that has been hers all these years since the sacred feet of Krishna will no longer adorn her. Bhima, I am afraid." Arjuna came back from Dwaraka. He walked with slow and weary steps towards his brother. His eyes were raining tears and his face was bent towards the ground; it had no glow on it. He went straight to the king, fell at his feet and held on to his feet without getting up. Yudhishtira was trembling all over and his heart

would not beat normally. His voice was trembling too as he raised up Arjuna and asked: "Arjuna, what has happened? Are you unwell? Or is your mind unwell because of some pain? What is the matter? Is every one well at Dwaraka? Tell me how is our beloved Krishna?" Arjuna was standing silent. His face, like his heart, was drained of all joy and wiping his eyes with both his hands he stood for a moment. His mind went to his beloved Krishna and with his voice choked with tears, he said, "We have been cheated, my lord. We have been deceived by Fate. There is no Krishna in Dwaraka. Why, there is no Dwaraka." He fell down in a dead faint.

When they brought him back to consciousness Arjuna composed himself and told them how all the Yadavas had been killed and how no trace of them was left any more on the earth; how the city itself went under the sea after the death of Krishna.

They gave him time to gather his scattered senses and they needed time too to digest this terrible news. Later, bit by bit, they got all the details of the tragedy at Prabhasa. Even as he was recounting the glories of Krishna, Arjuna found a strange sense of peace pervading his being. His mind became clear and calm and there came to him a sense of detachment. Incessant thinking on the feet of the Lord had cleared his mind of all agitations. Years back Krishna had taught him the *Brahma Vidya* and that, on the battle-field. Now, and perhaps, only now, after all these years Arjuna found that he had finally understood what Krishna was trying to tell him. He knew how that sorrow is caused by the illusion of plurality: the feeling that the *Jiva* is other than the *Paramatman*. The reason for this plurality is the human body which is made up of the elements. And the other cause is the combination of the three gunas. *Avidya*, ignorance of the Truth, is the basis of this plurality. And when *Avidya* is destroyed by Comprehension of Reality all the other things vanish of their own accord.

Yudhishtira became silent after the tragedy hit him. What had happened at Dwaraka only confirmed his worst fears and his mind had already been anticipating the news about the end of Krishna. Ever since Narada came and went Yudhishtira had lost his peace of mind and now he realised that his mind was still, without any agitations. He remembered what Narada

had told him: "You will remain on this earth only as long as Krishna does." Yudhishtira's thoughts were now bent on the other world. The moment Kunti heard about the death of Krishna she dropped down dead and her soul which was ever thinking on Him became one with him.

Calmly Yudhishtira made preparations for the final journey. He crowned Parikshit the monarch. Vajra, the son of Aniruddha, was crowned in Mathura. Yudhishtira then gave away all his wealth and his personal belongings. Dressed in barks, with his hair matted he walked out of the palace. He looked like one demented, so devoid of all expression was his face. He spoke to no one, not even to his dear brothers.

Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva followed him. With their minds bent on the feet of the Lord they travelled northwards and reached the heavens which held for them, all that had been taken away from them on earth.

THE COW AND THE LAME BULL

When Parikshit was born Dhaumya and Kripa had cast his horoscope. They told Yudhishtira that the child had a glorious future. "He will be like Ikshvaku, the son of Manu", they said. "He will honour brahmins and he will be truth-speaking, like Rama, the son of Dasharatha. Like Shibi he will be a giver and as for his glory and fame they will spread to the four quarters like that of Bharata, the son of Dushyanta. In archery he will be as great as Arjuna and Kartavirya. He will be as stately as Himavan and as patient as Mother Earth. His courage will be that of Bali and his devotion of Narayana will equal that of Prahlada. He will perform the *Ashvamedha* and he will learn *Brahma Vidya* from Shuka, the illustrious son of Vyasa. His name will be remembered on the earth so long as the sun and moon move in their orbit."

After he was crowned Parikshit justified the words of the *rishis*. He ruled his kingdom just as well as Yudhishtira had been doing. He married Iravati, the daughter of Uttarakumara, and Janamejaya was his eldest son. On the banks of the river Ganga he performed the *Ashvamedha yaga*. There was great pain in the heart of the king since he saw the influence of Kali increasing day by day. He wanted to fight with Kali, destroy him and restore to the earth her past glory and beauty when his grandfather ruled the earth.

Once, on the banks of the Sarasvati a bull was talking to a cow. The cow looked emaciated and she looked like she had lost her calf. Tears were flowing from her eyes. The bull was maimed. He was limping on just one leg. He went near her and said: "Why are you weeping? Why do you look so despondent? You look sick, my dear. It seems to me it is a malaise of the mind. I can see that some intense pain is gnawing at your vitals. Are you mourning the loss of someone very dear to you? Are you weeping because you cannot bear to see me with three of my legs broken? Are you

weeping at the thought that lowborn *shudras* instead of *kshatriyas* will rule you in the days to come? Are you sorry for the *devas* who will be denied their share of the *havis* in the *yagnyas* since *yagnyas* will not be performed anymore? O Mother Earth, are you sad because Indra will not wet you with rain hereafter? Are you sad about the decay of *dharma*? Are you dreading the future when men will no longer protect the women?; when parents will not be respected by their children? Are you sad because Goddess Saraswati will have to live in the homes of sinful brahmins?; or because high-born brahmins will do menial service to their inferiors? Or are you mourning the fate of mankind which will be so immersed in sin, the gratification of the senses, that it will never think of the Lord?

"I know why you are sad. The Lord has been with you and He removed the burden which was choking you. He destroyed *adharma* and relieved you. But when he went away *Dharma* went with him. That, I am sure, is the cause of your unhappiness. Time, the arch enemy of all, has stolen your glory and the pain in your heart is because of the thoughts of the future. Am I right?"

The Earth raised her tear-filled eyes to the bull and said: "Lord *Dharma*, you know only too well what lies behind this pain of mine. Your questions only serve to make my wounds bleed anew. The Lord has left me, and I am pining for Him. The moment he went away righteousness left me and with it all the noble qualities for which I have been the home all these years. I am mourning for you and all that you once stood for. The Lord Who was the home of all that is beautiful, good and pure, has left me and I am dreading the progress of Kali. In the form of Krishna the Lord had placed His dear feet on me and He had walked on me. I was so beautiful then because He had sanctified me. I had become proud, perhaps, of my good fortune. To punish me He has left me and I do not know what I should do. The memory of those glorious days makes me weep the more because I weep in vain."

As they were thus engaged, out of nowhere, a low-born man who was dressed in the garments of a *kshatriya* approached the couple. He began to harass them. With a stick he was trying to break the one remaining leg of the bull. King Parikshit who was coming near the place in a chariot saw

this terrible scene and hurried to the spot. He had his bow in his hand and his other hand was already in the quiver picking out an arrow. The sight of the cow brought tears to his eyes. In a terrible voice he addressed the assailant: "How can you behave like this? How is it possible for such injustice to take place in my kingdom? In the land which was once ruled by the great Yudhishtira? How could you pluck up courage enough to commit this atrocity when I am king?"

He comforted the cow and the bull and said: "Whoever you may be, you are rid of this sinner who has been harassing you. I am going to kill him. Be rid of your fears. Poor bull, tell me who cut off your other legs?"

Dharma looked at him and said: "It is but fitting that a scion of the great Kuru House should speak thus. You are the descendant of those great men for whom the Lord Himself took up the role of a messenger of peace; the role of a charioteer. As for our condition, we do not really know who is really responsible for it. When I look around me I become faint with the many forms of *dharma* which people talk about. There are the atheists who say: man himself is master of his fate. The gods have neither the power nor the right to influence the lives of men on the earth. Nothing governs man except his EGO. There are some others who ascribe everything to the nine planets: the *grahas*. They say that fate and *grahachara* are but synonyms. Some other talk about *karma* and say that *karma* is what matters: *karma* it is, which is responsible for everything. And again there are those who say that one's good or bad fortune is the consequence of one's own nature, *Svabhava*, and nothing else. There are still a few, very few, however, who maintain that there is a god who is beyond the ken of human thought and that He is responsible for everything. Consider, O king, all these views and you should yourself make up your mind as to who is responsible for this state of affairs. As for me, I really do not know!"

The king considered his words for a moment and spoke with a smile. He said: "The shastras say that the *Naraka* which is waiting for the perpetrator of adharma is meant also for him who mentions the name of the wrong-doer. A truly righteous person will never betray the name of the sinner. You speak words befitting a person who knows the nuances of *dharma*.

The more I think on it the more I am convinced that you are Dharma himself and no one else. Only you can trace so vividly the dearth of purity on the earth.

"It has been said that Penance (*Tapas*), Cleanliness (*Shaucha*), Compassion (*Daya*) and Truth (*Satya*) are the four legs of Dharma. Pride is responsible for the destruction of Tapas; Smaya, indulgence and arrogance for that of the other two. In the *Kali Yuga* man can be said to practise *dharma* only by the observance of Truth and that is the one leg on which you are standing. This Kali is trying to kill truth and replace it with his weapon, untruth. I know why Mother Earth is weeping. She is comparing the golden age when the Lord walked on her with the days to come when sinners will rule over her. But be without fear. I am going to kill Kali."

The king dropped his bow and taking up a sword in his hand he rushed towards Kali.

THE HAUNTS OF KALI

Kali shed his disguise and dropped at the feet of the king and begged for mercy. Parikshit said: "You know that I will not hurt you now that you have fallen at my feet. I have been born in the family of Arjuna and I will not hurt a suppliant. But you are a dear kinsman of Adharma and so, I command that you should no longer be here; you should not exist in the country where I rule. I cannot brook your presence. Once you are given a chance to stay, your many companions will join you: avarice, untruth, theft, unrighteousness, hypocrisy, quarrelsomeness and, in short, all that is ugly and hateful. I do not want any of you in my kingdom."

Trembling with fear Kali said: "My lord, the entire earth is ruled by you. Where can I go? God who created good has also created evil which is but the shadow of good. I have to exist somewhere since I have been created. Tell me where I should go and I will obey you."

The king thought over his words and said: "What you say is right. You can go and thrive where the name of the Lord is forgotten. You can go where there is gambling, drinking, lustfulness and the desire to kill.

Kali said: "Point out to me a single spot where all these are present and I will go there."

"Gold", said the king. "Gold will propagate avarice, untruth, arrogance, lustfulness, ruthlessness and hatred. These five will be the places and so, gold, will be the place where you will be allowed to live."

Kali went away from there to the places mentioned. This is why the wise say that *Kamini* and *Kanchana* are the two dread enemies which are lying in wait to destroy man. The words spoken by Kali are worth studying. He says that he is also created by the Lord and so there is a purpose behind his creation. Kali is made to live in places where thoughts of the Lord are absent. The Lord Himself is forgotten. True enough. But, as Kunti said,

"Give us misfortunes all the time so that we may think of You." Man is lost in the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. If he is a success in life he ascribes it all to himself and not to his good fortune. Never. However, if and when trouble comes, when man is in distress, then the mind becomes pliable. Suffering melts the hardened core of the ego. When something is achieved the ego comes forward and takes the credit. But when there is failure the ego must necessarily be pushed to the background and humility makes its appearance. The ego surrenders itself completely admitting defeat and the Lord who is present in the heart always, but has been hidden by *Avarana*, shines resplendent. It is when one is in trouble that thoughts of the Lord come to the mind and Kali meant this, perhaps, when he said that there is a purpose behind his creation. People will walk in evil paths and forget the Lord completely and Kali helps them in this. But the backsliding is really to save the soul. When they are hurt and sorely tried men will turn their minds towards the Lord and be saved. This is what Kali means when he says: "Evil is but the shadow of good."

SHRINGI'S CURSE

Once king Parikshit went out hunting. While chasing a deer he lost his way. Overcome with thirst, hunger and fatigue he wandered about. Finally he saw an *ashrama* at a distance. He hurried towards it. He went inside and shouted for someone. The king found the place empty; or so he thought. Walking around the place he found a *rishi* who was absorbed in meditation. His eyes were closed. He had brought his senses and his breath under control and he was oblivious to the world around him. His hair was matted and he was wearing the skin of a deer. The king spoke to him and asked him for water. He received no response. Again and again he asked for water and he found that the *rishi* persisted in his silence. With his mind clouded by his physical anguish and his ego hurt by the seeming indifference of the *rishi* the king lost his temper. He looked around and found a dead snake lying on the ground. In a perverse frame of mind Parikshit lifted the dead snake with the tip of his bow. Placing it on the neck of the *rishi* he walked away from there. Still, Shamika, the great *rishi*, did not wake up from his trance.

Shamika had a young son by name Shringi. Some of his playmates went to Shringi and said: "You think so highly of yourself. But you must swallow your pride hereafter since you are, after all, the son of a man who carries corpses." Shringi glared at them and laughingly they told him about the condition of his father; about the dead snake which was placed round the neck of the *rishi* by the king of the country. Young Shringi's anger was uncontrollable. He said: "This arrogant king has insulted my father. I will punish him. A week from today the dread serpent Takshaka will sting him and he will die."

He then rushed to his father's presence and wailed aloud. His voice roused the *rishi* from *samadhi*. He opened his eyes and saw the dead snake on his shoulders. Pushing it aside casually he said: "My son, why are you crying? Did anyone hurt you?"

Shringi told him what had happened and he also told him about his cursing the king. Shamika was very angry with his son for this hasty action. In his anger he had cursed a good man. He said: "You are young and you do not know how to restrain yourself. You were too rash. Why did you curse that king who is the best among men? Do you not know that he is a righteous king? Because he was hungry and thirsty, and again, because I did not answer his questions he threw the snake on my neck in sheer disgust. It was a childish gesture and should have been treated as such. This is not reason enough for you to pronounce such a dreadful curse on him.

"This Paurava king has been called Vishnurata since the Lord himself protected him when he was in his mother's womb. Because of him the world is protected from the threat of Kali. You have made the earth lose her very precious son because of your impulsiveness. I ask you to leave this place and perform *tapas* until you learn self-control. Now that you have cursed him the good king will have to die. Let me at least warn him of his impending doom and give him a chance to prepare himself for the other world."

The king, in the meantime returned to his kingdom. He was feeling unhappy about his stupid action. He knew that he had committed an unpardonable sin. When he was in this frame of mind there came to him a disciple of Shamika by name Gauramukh who told him about the curse.

ON THE BANKS OF SACRED GANGA

Trained as he was in the path of *dharma*, and being a worthy descendant of the righteous-minded Pandavas, the king was not unhappy at the turn of events. He lost interest in the things of the world and welcomed death which was, to him, a fitting punishment for his unpardonable behaviour towards Shamika. King Parikshit crowned his son Janamejaya as king and, abandoning his princely garments he made a journey to the banks of the river Ganga. There, he spread holy *Kusha* grass on the ground and sat down on it. He had decided on *Prayopavesha*: fasting unto death with the mind filled with thoughts of the Lord. He began the preparations for the end, which, to him, seemed a new kind of adventure."

Many great *rishis* came to his side when he was sitting on the banks of Ganga. Atri, Vasishtha, Chyavana, Sharadvan, Bhrigu, Angiras, Parashara, Vishvamitra, the son of Gadhi, Parashurama, the son of Jamadagni, Vyasa accompanied by Narada. Looking on this galaxy of great men Parikshit was thrilled beyond words. He received them with great excitement and joy and he spoke to them humbly after honouring them. He said: "Without a doubt mine is great good fortune. What good actions have I performed in my previous birth that you should all have deigned to visit me all together? Now that you have come please bless me who has decided on *Prayopavesha*. The brahmin boy who has cursed me has, in reality, been my benefactor since he has made me reach out for the next world in the presence of great men like you. I have renounced the world and I am ready to meet death which is imminent. I have but one request. Please let my ears drink in the praises of the Lord during the seven days which must pass before I reach Him."

The *rishis* said: "Descendant as you are of the Pandavas, princes who renounced the world when Krishna died, it is not surprising that you should follow in their footsteps. This your decision is laudable."

The king said: "I have but one question to ask of you. What is the course of action to be adopted by a man who is on the point of death so that he can be assured of becoming sinless?" The *rishis* pondered on the question. Some spoke of *yaga*, others of *yoga*. Some thought that *tapas* was the best course to adopt while others, said: *dana*, giving away all that one possessed. No one could say anything definite. All the paths seemed plausible but the king was fighting against time and what could be done in seven days was indeed a poser. Seven days was so short. As for *dana*, the king had already given away everything he had. *Tapas* was out of question since there was no time. *Yaga* also had to be abandoned for the same reason as also *Yoga*.

While they were talking this among themselves there came to them Shuka, the young son of Vyasa. Glowing like a heap of gold he appeared before them clothed in his own glory. This was indeed a great event. The *rishis* stood up as one man and honoured Shuka. Parikshit fell at his feet and with tears in his eyes, said: "I am fortunate, very fortunate. The Lord who protected me when I was in my mother's womb is still thinking of my good. Or else how could it happen that the great Shukabrahma should grace the spot where a sinful man like me stands? When great souls like you visit our sinful abodes you sanctify them so much that even we become as pure and good as *sadhus* worthy of worship. It is said that a house gets purified even by the thought of men like you. What then about a spot visited by you? You have come to me: your blessed feet have trod the same ground where a sinful *kshatriya* like me stands. You have graced the seat I have offered you by sitting on it. Great indeed is my good fortune who has the great Shukabrahma by his side when I am so near my death. I will dare to ask you to advise me as to the right path to be pursued by a man whose death is very near. Please tell me, my lord, what I should do now to reach the feet of Narayana."

Shukra blessed him. He was seated and after him, all the many *rishis*. Shukra said: "I have come to you for the sole purpose of telling you about the glory of Narayana which is the only recital worth hearing: My revered father has composed the *Bhagavata Purana* and I learnt it from him. I will tell you the story of the Lord and make these seven days the most glorious

days of your life. This story will help you, and not only you but all men who will be born hereafter.

"Consider the life of ordinary men on the earth. They are caught in the web of bondage: attachment to their homes, their children, their belongings. They are ignorant of the science of self-realisation. There are so many things to be learnt by man during his short stay in this world. Yet what does he do? Half his life is lost in sleep. As for the other half, childhood and youth steal away most of it. Man becomes involved in worldly pleasures and the pain resulting from it: from attachment. Man never pauses to think of the truth that death is awaiting him. Every day he sees death around him and yet he will never consider himself to be a mortal. He will never reckon the quick passage of time which carries him nearer and nearer death every moment. And so, for one who desires *mukti* from the world of bondage there is one easy path available and that is thinking of the Lord at the end of one's life. Even *rishis* who have realised the Brahman delight in singing the praises of the Lord. There is no need to regret the number of years wasted in thinking of things other than Him. Even a *muhurta* is enough to tide you over if you are sincere enough.

"There was a king Khatvanga by name. He came to know that he had just one *muhurta* more to live. This was when he was in the heavens with the *devas*. Khatvanga at once renounced the heavens and rushed to the earth. He sat in meditation for that one *muhurta* and reached the feet of the Lord. You, my dear Parikshit, have seven whole days to spend in this very pleasant task: thinking of the Lord. I will help you to concentrate on Him."

DHARANA

"When death draws near man should cast off his fear of death. With the sword of renunciation he should sever all ties which bind him to his wife, children and other worldly objects. He should leave his house and having bathed in the holy waters he should sit down for meditation. I will describe the technique for meditation.

"Steady the mind with the help of *Pranayama*. Repeat the mystic word A U M. When the mind is controlled by you it should then be made steadfast. The intellect should be the charioteer which should hold the reins and steer the mind towards contemplation on the Lord. The mind should not be allowed to stray towards the objects of the senses. The *Ashtanga Yoga* is the preliminary yoga for concentrating on the form of the Lord. This *yoga* is made up of eight qualities which should be part of you: *Ahimsa*, not hurting anyone or anything; *Satyam*, Truthfulness; *Astheyam*, not stealing what belongs to another; *Brahmacharya*, withdrawal of the senses; *Aparigraham*, not receiving gifts from anyone; *Shaucham*, inner and outer cleanliness; *Tapas*, penance; and *Svadhayaya*, study of the scriptures, understanding all that you have learnt. These eight are the requisites for the next step. This is called *Dharana*, which leads to *Dhyana*.

"With a steady mind you should visualise the form of the Lord. The mind should be pervaded by his form and by nothing else. Once this is achieved *tamasic* nature will no longer delude man, nor will *rajasic* nature try to ensnare him in worldly things. Once you have mastered the correct posture and correct breathing according to the rules of *Pranayama*, once you have broken away from the bondage and the snare of the senses then you will be in a position to do *Dharana*: holding the form of the Lord firmly in the mind. Think on the *Virata Purusha*.

"This form comprises the past, the present and the future. All the actions which have taken place, which are happening and which are to happen

hereafter, are all comprised by the *Virata Purusha*. This *Virata Purusha* is enveloped by the seven Avaranas: *Prithvi*, the earth; *appu*, water; *Tejas*, fire; *Vayu*, air; *Akasha*, ether; *Ahamattva* and *Mahattattva*. This *Virata Purusha* has the *Patala* as the soles of His feet; *Rasatala* as His feet; *Mahatala* as His heels; *Sutola* as His knees; *Vitala* and *sthala* as His thighs; *Bhutala* as His waist.

"The sky is His stomach. *Suvarloka* which is all light is His chest, *Maharloka* is neck and *Jana*, His face. *Tapo Loka* is His forehead and *Satya Loka* comprises His many hands. The *devas* led by Indra form His hands. The four quarters are His ears. The *Ashvins* are His nostrils, fire is His mouth and the sun, His eyes. Day and night are the eyelashes of the *Virata Purusha*. Water forms His palate and the sense of taste forms His tongue. The Vedas are His head and Yama, His teeth. *Maya* is His smile; Creation, the glance from His eyes. The sea forms His stomach and the mountains are His bones. The rivers are the veins in His body and the trees, the hair covering Him. Time is His stride, air His breath, and the world with its myriad qualities, His sport. The clouds are His looks and the evening, His clothing. The *Avyakta*, the unmanifested, is His heart and the moon is His mind while Rudra is His ego. Svayambhu Manu is His intellect. The *gandharvas*, *charanas* and the *apsaras* are the musical notes and the Smritis. These are the words from the Vedas which describe the *Virata Purusha*. Concentrate on this form of the Lord.

"Those who have mastered this should then invoke the form of the Lord and see it in their hearts. They see the form of Narayana lying on the immense snake called Ananta. When the mind is stilled and hushed by concentration man can see this form in his mind. After this is achieved life leaves the body easily and reaches the Lord. Before this last stage, Dharana, man should spend all his time in listening the stories of the Lord. Man's ears will be just holes in his head if he does not use them to drink in the praises of Narayana. As for his tongue, if it does not sing the glories of Narayana it is no different from the tongue of a frog which croaks during the rainy season. The head is but a burden if it does not bend at the feet of Narayana. The hands beautiful with many jewelled bracelets and perfumed with sandal paste will still be just the arms of a corpse if they do not

worship Narayana with flowers. The eyes which do not drink in the beauty of His image are like the eyes on the plumage of the peacock. The feet which do not travel to holy spots are like the roots of a tree.

"When he does not take the dust of the feet of holy men and wear it on his head man is in no way better than a corpse. If his body does not thrill when he hears the stories of the Lord, if his eyes do not grow dim with tears then his heart is indeed made of stone. Unfortunate is the man who is made that way. Even such a man finds salvation if, at the end of his life, he thinks of Narayana and his stories.

"And so, Parikshit, I will relate to you the entire *Bhagavata Purana* during these seven days and you can rest assured that because of you mankind will benefit in the days to come."

Shuka invoked the Lord Narayana in his mind. He then saluted Vyasa his father who was the author of the poem. He then began to recite the great Purana.

THE TRAGEDY AT PRABHASA

When Vidura left Hastina on the fateful day he made up his mind to visit all the holy rivers of Bharatavarsha. He wanted to bathe in the *tirthas* which had been sanctified by the feet of Narayana. He went to Vrindavan and rested his weary soul in the shelter of Govardhana: the hill which was dear to Krishna. Vidura found a semblance of peace in his troubled mind when he thought of Krishna and the childhood of Krishna which had been spent here. Bhishma had told him that Krishna was Narayana himself and tears flowed from the eyes of Vidura when he thought of the good fortune of the Govardhana hill and its slopes where Krishna wandered at will during those days when he had not yet been saddled with the responsibilities which burdened him now. Even though he was the Lord incarnate, Krishna had to be like one of the many whom he had come to protect and a smile of joy lit the face of Vidura at the thought of Krishna. After a few days at Vrindavan Vidura proceeded northwards. He visited many *tirthas* and several *kshetras*. At the end of his long travel he reached Prabhasa *tirtha*, the favourite spot of Krishna. There he heard about the annihilation of the family of Dhritarashtra and about Yudhishtira being lord of the world. Protected as he was by the armour of detachment, still, Vidura's heart was touched with sorrow and quietly he walked towards the banks of the river Saraswati. From there he visited several other *tirthas* again and came to the banks of the river Yamuna. There he met Uddhava, the playmate of Krishna.

Such a long time had passed since they had met. They were locked in a close embrace and tears were flowing from their eyes. Vidura composed himself and said: "What a great moment for me! I have met you after so many years! Tell me, how is Krishna and how is the valiant Balarama? How is everyone at Dwaraka? Is Satyaki still as fierce as he used to be? How is Pradyumna? Tell me about them. It is ages since I heard of them and their welfare. I have been away visiting the *tirthas*. I am eager to know

all about everything. I heard that Yudhishtira is now lord of the world. I left Hastina long ago driven away from there by the son of my brother, as you must have heard. I have been wandering all over the place and I have been far away from the cities. I know that Narayana came into the world of men in the guise of a human being to establish *Dharma* and to destroy the kings whose arrogance was unbearable. These kings were afflicted with three kinds of *madras*: *Vidyamada*, *Dhanamada* and *Kulamada*. One of them is enough to turn the head of anyone and when all three are found in one man is there any doubt as to the high degree of pride and sinfulness in him? The world was full of such kings and the Lord destroyed every one of them. Now He must be resting after performing the immense task He had undertaken to perform. Tell me how He is enjoying His leisure? How is Krishna and how are the other Yadavas?" Uddhava was silent for a moment. His mind went back to the days he had spent with Krishna ever since he was a boy. Uddhava was lost to the world of men for that one moment. His eyes were wet with joy at the thought of the remembered things of the long ago. With a start he came back to the world. Wiping his eyes he said: "My friend, your questions make me sad. How can I answer them? Krishna is dead."

Vidura stood stunned. He could not comprehend the words of Uddhava. Looking at him Uddhava smiled sadly and said: "It is true. Krishna is dead. The glory of the earth vanished when Krishna died. And it grieves me to think of the ignorance of the Yadu House which could not see Krishna as the *avatara* of Narayana. You know, Vidura when the moon is reflected in the sea, the fish living in the water do not realise that it is the moon. They think it is just another fish which has come to stay with them. Even so the Yadavas thought that Krishna was one of them. They knew that he was greater than them, wiser than they were and so they called him: 'The best among the Yadavas'. That is all. And they are all dead, every one of them: Not one lives except me."

"But how?" exclaimed Vidura. "How come, they are all dead? Please tell me everything. I can bear it."

"Once" began Uddhava. "Once the youngsters of the Yadava House had offended some of the *rishis* who had come to Dwaraka. They dressed up

Samba, Jambavati's son as a woman and asked the *rishis* if she would bear a son or a daughter. The angry *rishis* said: "She will bear an iron pestle which will be the destruction of your entire clan."

"Samba did give birth to an iron pestle; or rather, when they removed the disguise from him they found an iron pestle. The children were horrified and they went to Balarama and Krishna with the entire story. Balarama was very angry. He made them grind the pestle into powder and throw it into the sea. He forgot all about it. But not Krishna.

"At the end of the war at Kurukshetra Duryodhana's mother, the saintly Gandhari was very angry with Krishna because she felt that he was solely responsible for the war. 'Like a bamboo forest is destroyed by the fire caused by itself the Kuru family was destroyed, the fire being jealousy,' said Krishna. But the royal mother would not be convinced. She told Krishna. 'Your family will also be destroyed by itself.' Krishna bent his head, and with folded palms he received the curse. With a smile he said: 'Mother, it is a blessing and not a curse.'

"Years passed. Krishna knew the moment had come. He suggested that the entire family should go to Prabhasa and spend some time there. So they went, a happy crowd.

"One day they were all drunk; and, overcome with intoxication they did not know what they were saying or what they were doing. They began to quarrel with each other; insults were hurled at each other and in a matter of moments the quarrel became violent. They were killing each other and when they found that they did not have many weapons the fighters plucked handfuls of the reeds growing along the shore of the sea and hit each other with them.

"The reeds had all sprung up from the powdered pestle of the long ago. Each reed became as powerful as an *astra* and the entire family of the Yadava, Bhoja and Andhaka clans was gone - annihilated in a matter of moments.

"Krishna walked away from them and I found him seated at the foot of an *Ashvattha* tree (peepul tree). I told him that I would also go with him but

he asked me to go to Badarikashrama. I refused and said: 'Krishna, I will not live in this world without you. You have always been by my side. Please take me with you.' Sage Maitreya came there too.

"Krishna looked at me and said: 'You must listen to me, Uddhava. You cannot come with me. You have a mission to perform. I will teach you the TRUTH. I will teach you the *Brahma Vidya*. You must travel all over the world and teach it to those who do not know how to reach me.'

"He taught the great lesson to me and asked me to leave him. After I left Krishna was seated in a yogic trance. He had assumed the *Padmasana* and his left foot was placed on his thigh.

"A hunter at a distance saw his left foot resting on the thigh. The pink foot and the yellow silk created the illusion that it was a deer. The hunter took aim and sent an arrow. The arrow entered the foot of Krishna and he died not long after. I am on my way to Badari."

Vidura was listening with tears flowing unheededly from his eyes. He looked at Uddhava piteously and said: "Please teach me the lesson which was taught you by Krishna. You know how sorely I need it."

Uddhava said: "I am not the person to teach you, my friend. It is Maitreya. Krishna asked me to tell you that you should go to the *ashrama* of Maitreya and learn the *Brahma Vidya* from him. Please seek him out and learn from him." After a tender leave-taking Uddhava went in the direction of Badarikashrama, in the north: Badarikashrama where Nara and Narayana had performed *tapas* long ago.

IN THE BEGINNING

Vidura travelled towards the banks of the Ganga where sage Maitreya had his *ashrama*. He went there. After saluting the *rishi* Vidura told him about the meeting he had with Uddhava and said: I have come to you to learn the lesson which the Lord taught to Uddhava. I was told that you will be good enough to tell me. It is the wish of Krishna that I should learn it from you."

Maitreya said: "I am happy you have come to me. Tell me what is troubling you and I will try to clear your doubts."

Vidura said: "Wise one, I have lived in this world all these years and I have lived in the midst of different people. I have known good men and I have lived with bad men too. But, different as they are in every characteristic, they are all alike in one thing. People, I have noticed, perform actions with but one desire: happiness. Strangely enough, their sorrow. Pain, and not pleasure, is the fruit they reap out of their actions. I asked myself: Is there then, no way of avoiding this? What light can be thrown on this problem which has been teasing me since so many years?

"What should man do in order to avoid pain: the pain which results from his actions? I thought that I had finally found the answer to my question. Listening to the stories of the Lord and thinking only of Him helps man to solve this problem. People like you, my lord, who have been devotees of Narayana are in this world with only one purpose: to lead erring humanity towards God, to tell them the story of the Lord, of his glory and lead them in the path of devotion. Please teach me and through me teach the world in general the path to God. We have great pleasure in listening to the story. The great Vyasa taught us the *Mahabharata*. In relating the story to us he has taught man about the rules of conduct. Vyasa had taught us that attachment to things of the world leads but to pain and he has taught us the many nuances of *Dharma*. But we want more. We want to drink in the

praises of Narayana. Please relate to me the story of the many *avatars* of Narayana. Tell me about the many acts which He has performed, as a result of which the world has been purified again and again."

Maitreya smiled his appreciation and said: "It is but meet that you should ask these questions of me since you are the incarnation of *Dharma*. I am very pleased with you. I will be only too happy to relate to you the entire story of the Lord. I will begin from where it all began."

"It was after the great deluge. The entire earth was submerged under the waters. Narayana was absorbed in the *Yoganidra* after the *Mahapralaya*. He was reclining on the great serpent Adishesha and the entire universe had been withdrawn into Him and it lay dormant in Him like fire in a piece of wood.

"The three *gunas* were in equilibrium and therefore there was no action. And so it was for a long while. Then TIME caused a disturbance in the three *gunas* and when the balance was upset, out of the navel of Narayana emerged a thin stalk which was the manifestation of *Rajoguna*. This grew into an immense lotus and it illuminated everything around it. Into the lotus entered Narayana in another form which was Brahma. Considering himself to have been born on his own Brahma found himself to be well versed in the Vedas and he found that he was alone. He looked around him in all the four directions with eyes wide open and he found that he had four heads pointing in the four directions. He saw nothing but a large expanse of water all around him and the noise he heard was made by the immense waves of the sea. He looked down and found that he was seated on a lotus and he could not discern the beginnings of the lotus stalk. He entered the stalk and travelled downwards but found nothing at the end of it. He came back to his original place and around him the waters made noise and it seemed to him as though they said: "*Tapa! Tapa!*" "Perform *Tapas!*" "Perform *Tapas* and you will find what you seek". Brahma performed *tapas* seated in the lotus for a hundred years. For a hundred years he was absorbed in meditation.

All on a sudden he saw the form of Narayana in his mind. The Lord was reclining on Adishesha who was white like the stalk of a lotus. Brahma

realised that He was the *Purusha*. The moment he saw the Lord, Brahma obtained wisdom. He knew what he had to do. He was made to come out of the lotus to create a new world. He worshipped Narayana with the words which came to him without his being taught them. Narayana said: "I have set you the task of creating the world and the beings on it." Brahma said: "So be it."

Out of the mind of Brahma were born the four *rishis* Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana and Sanatkumara. When they were born Brahma said: "Take up the work of creation and multiply." The four *rishis* were bent on attaining salvation at the feet of the Lord and so they refused to take up the work of creation. Brahma was very angry with them. But he controlled his anger. Though his reason held it in check his anger took up a form and emerged out of his forehead. It was a child reddish blue in hue and he began to cry as soon as he was born. "Please give me a name and a place where I can stay", cried the new born and Brahma said: "Do not cry. Since you cried the moment you were born I will call you Rudra. The heart, the senses, life, the sky, air, fire, water, the earth, the sun, the moon and *tapas*: these are the places assigned to you. You can go now and produce many in your image." Brahma then created ten sons out of his body. These were Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Bhrigu, Daksha, Marichi, Vasishtha and Narada. *Dharma* and *Adharma* were also born of Brahma. Out of his heart was born desire and out of his brows was born anger. His shadow took a form and this son was named Kardama. From his mind and body was created this entire world. Out of his four faces were born the four Vedas. Brahma then divided his body into two: one was male and the other, female. They were called Svayambhu Manu and Shatarupa. These two produced five children: Three were daughters, Akuti, Prasuti and Devahuti. The sons were Priyavrata and Uttanapada.

Akuti was married to a *rishi* by name Ruchi, Devahuti to Kardama and Prasuti to Daksha. And the children of these with their descendants have populated the world.

ADI VARAHA

As soon as he was born Svayambhu Manu approached his father and said: "Please command me as to what I should do and I will obey you." Brahma was pleased with the words of his son and told him that the work of creation should be continued. "I will do it my Lord", said Manu. "But", he continued. "But please indicate to me the spot where my creations are to live. I am prepared to take up the task of creation but the earth has been submerged during the great deluge. She is now in the nether lands. If you can get her back I will then be able to do what you wish."

Brahma was nonplussed and he thought to himself: "How is the earth to be brought up out of the nether world? How is the work of creation to take place? Narayana, you commanded me to create and it is up to you to help me solve this problem." He thought of Lord Narayana. As he was absorbed in meditation all on a sudden, out of his nostrils jumped out a tiny boar the size of a finger nail. From the moment it was born it assumed immense proportions. All those who were watching it realised that it was Narayana himself who had donned the form of a boar to raise the earth from below.

The boar sent up a roar which resounded in all directions and it thrilled the hearts of the onlookers. There rose up a great cry from them and they all sang together the praises of the Lord.

Sniffing the air around him sniffing the surface of the waters the magnificent boar entered the ocean suddenly. So terrible and so sudden was the plunge that the ocean was heaving, unable to bear the burden. Swimming and running inside the water the boar reached the bottom and there he found the earth. Raising it on his tusks the boar began to rise up. His progress upwards and towards the surface of the ocean was slow. An *asura* tried to stop his progress but he was killed. The Varaha then continued his interrupted progress. Sanaka and his brothers, Brahma, Marichi and his brothers were all watching with bated breath.

Even as they were looking they saw the earth emerge from the water and the Varaha was bearing it on his tusks. He placed the earth on the dents formed by his hoofs and Brahma with the others praised him and his glory. They said: "You are the Lord of Lords who is worshipped by all men in the form of *Yagnya*. Your form is made up of the four Vedas. We salute Narayana who has assumed the form of Varaha. Your skin is made up of *Gayatri* and the other *Chhandas*. The hair on your body is named *Barhis*. Your eyes are *Ajya*. The rite by name *Chaturhotra* is made up of your legs. It is not given to everyone to see this sacred form of yours." They then compared each individual part of his body to an essential for performing the *yagnya*. And they continued. "We are grateful to you. This earth lifted by you on your tusk looks beautiful. She looks like a lotus bud lifted aloft on the trunk of an elephant. We salute you and thank you for restoring to us the earth, the foundation on which the entire creation has to rest. We salute you and your wife, mother earth. Because of the drops of water which you have scattered around you the heavens have become purified. The spots where your hair has been shed have become holy: fit places for performing *yagnyas*. We pray that your kind, benevolent eyes will ever rest on us."

The Lord paused for a while listening to their words and vanished from their sight.

Vidura intervened and said: "My lord, it is thrilling to hear about this ancient incident. But tell me, who was this *asura*? I have heard that Narayana, in the form of a boar killed an *asura* by name Hiranyaksha. This must be He. Tell me how it came about that the Lord himself appeared to kill a mere *asura*."

Maitreya said: "We have to travel a long distance back to trace the story of Hiranyaksha."

DITI, DAKSHA'S DAUGHTER

Thirteen of the daughters of Daksha had been given to the *rishi* Kashyapa, the son of Marichi. Diti was one of them.

Once, when it was evening time, Diti came and stood by the side of her husband. He had just finished the evening worship of fire by pouring milk into it. Diti was full of love and longing and she wanted him to take her. She spoke to him in a soft gentle voice and said:

"My lord, my body is burning with love for you. Please make me happy by granting me my desire. The suffering caused by the god of love is unbearable." He did not speak a word in reply and she said: "Please have mercy on me and assuage this pain." Kashyapa looked at her beautiful form and her eyes which were liquid with love and longing. He looked at her kindly and said: "Certainly I will make you happy, my beloved wife. A wife is the raft with which man crosses the ocean by name life. She is the one who stays with him during his happy days and during his days of pain. She walks in the path of dharma with him. She is his *sahadharmachari* and she is his very life. When she is married a woman is called *Jaya* because she is born again in the heart of her husband where she is given a place of honour. You are very dear to me. But please do not ask me to take you now.

"Look, it is evening time. The sun has just withdrawn his scorching rays and with a chastened look he is wheeling away towards the West. This is a hallowed time. This is the time of the day which is sacred to Mahadeva. This is when He promenades on His sacred bull with all the *Pramatha gana* attending on Him. This is the hour when He watches the world with His three eyes: the sun, moon and fire. With His body covered with the ashes from the burning ground, with His matted locks glowing with the red dust scattered by the travelling breeze, with ashes whitening His golden body, this husband of your sister Sati keeps watch on the world. This is the

wrong time to make love. It shows a lack of respect for the great Mahadeva. Wait for a while and I will satisfy you. Be patient."

But she would not listen. Angry at the thought of her desire which would be frustrated and bereft of her reasoning powers as a result of the torment of love, Diti importuned her lord repeatedly and finally he had to take her to make her happy. When her reason came back to her Diti remembered the warning of Kashyapa and said: "Overcome with love as I was, I became blind and deaf to my surroundings and to your words. I am afraid I have insulted Lord Mahadeva. Please assure me that this child of mine which is to be born will not be destroyed by His anger. I supplicate before Him and ask for His mercy. Please say that this sin of mine will be forgiven. Mahadeva is my sister's husband and He is sure to be compassionate. Please tell me what is going to happen. I am afraid." Kashyapa was silent for a long time. Finally he looked at his wife who was standing with downcast eyes and said: "You have sinned. Your mind was filled with earthly desire when you came to me. You have disobeyed me. And, you have insulted Lord Mahadeva by your disrespect towards Him. These three faults of yours cannot go unpunished. You will be the mother of two sons who will be wicked. They will harass the three worlds and the *devas* will suffer at their hands. They will try to destroy righteousness on the earth. Holy men will be tortured and your sons will spell terror for the entire world until Lord Narayana decides to rid the world of its tormentors."

Diti knew that it would all come to pass. She fell at his feet and said: "I have but one boon to ask of you my lord. Let my sons be killed by the Lord Himself. Let them not die because of the curse of a brahmin. The one will grant them *mukti* while the other is sure to damn them for ever and for ever."

Kashyapa said: "Any sin will be lessened if the sinner is penitent. You are now sorry for what happened. You have honoured Narayana by wanting him to be the death of your sons and you have requested me and Mahadeva to forgive you. I therefore assure you that your sons will be killed by Narayana and by no one else. And again, I will tell you something which will comfort you. Your grandson will be the greatest *bhakta* of Narayana.

The world will ever praise his devotion to the Lord. They will remember him as long as the name of the Lord remains on the lips of men. Like gold is cleansed by being so well burnt that all the dross is destroyed, even so men will burn all their worldly desires to be like your grandson in their devotion to Narayana.

He will be the ideal *bhakta* who will worship his beloved Lord day and night against all opposition and he will reach Narayana when he sheds this body made up of the elements. He will have no attachments. He will be good-natured. He will be the home of courage and compassion. Without malice or anger he will consider everyone to be like himself. He will have no enemies and he will be like the moon which rains radiance and coolness on the world. With his gentleness he will gladden the hearts of men. For his sake the Lord will make an appearance. Your grandson will be one of the rare few who will see the Lord with human eyes.

Diti knew that nothing could avert the fate that was to visit her sons because of her foolishness. There was no use in repenting and she found a semblance of peace at the thought that her sons would meet their deaths at the hands of Narayana and no one else. And again, the fact that her grandson would be a great good man comforted her and she walked away from the presence of her husband with her head bent and with her eyes full of tears.

THE ARROGANT DOOR-KEEPERS

In her womb the sons of Diti were growing rapidly. The poor woman was afraid for the *devas* and for the world. And so she tried to retain the children inside her and would not let them be born. So they stayed inside her for a hundred years. Then a wondrous thing happened. The glow of the unborn children was so great that the world became lustreless. The heavens themselves were losing their splendour and even the *devas* looked less like sons alight than they were wont to! Worried about the eclipse of their glory the *devas* went to Brahma the Creator and asked him to explain the mystery. He smiled at them and said: "There is nothing here for you to worry, not just now, at any rate! I will tell you the reason for this.

"Once, my sons Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana and Sanatkumara went to *Vaikuntha* the abode of Narayana with a desire to worship him. They crossed the six gates in a hurry and came to the seventh, and when they were about to enter *Vaikuntha* they were stopped. The rishis were prevented from going inside by Jaya and Vijaya. These two were the door-keepers and they stepped in front of the *rishis* and said 'You cannot enter.'" "The *rishis* looked for a moment at these two who were so handsome, so well dressed and, at the same time, so arrogant. Unmindful of their words the *rishis* walked towards the seventh gate and again tried to enter the sanctum. The keepers placed their staffs in front of them and said: 'You cannot enter.'

"The *rishis* were now definitely annoyed. In their eyes could be seen traces of anger, the younger brother of desire. They looked at Jaya and Vijaya and said: 'Indeed it is strange that you, who have been in the presence of the Lord so long, should have this undesirable quality in you. We can see that your position by the side of the Lord has made you proud. We curse you to leave the presence of Narayana. You will be born in the world of men, in the world ruled by *Kama* (lustfulness), *Krodha* (anger), *Mada* (arrogance)

and all other evils. You will be far away from Narayana whose nearness has blinded you to such an extent that you insult good men.'

"Overcome with horror at the fate awaiting them Jaya and Vijaya fell at their feet and prayed for forgiveness. The *rishis* were sorry for them but they said: 'We cursed you since we felt that you both deserved it. But we will modify the curse. Your births will be such that the Lord will dwell in your hearts all the time because of your hatred for Him.' "The two placed their hands on their ears saying: '*Shantam papam*' and exclaimed: 'Hatred of the Lord? Hatred? How can that be possible?', and tears rained from their eyes.

"Lord Narayana appeared there at the moment. The *rishis* worshipped Him. The two young men held on to His feet and would not get up. The feet of the Lord were drenched with their tears. He asked them to rise up. He looked at the young *rishis* and said: 'These servants of mine have insulted you unaware of your greatness. It is but right that you should have cursed them. I approve of your action. Any fault of a servant reflects on the master and so, on their behalf, I beg you to pardon me. No one is more dear to me than a *bhakta* and when that *bhakta* is insulted I am very angry. Let them be born in the lower world as you have ordained and they will come to Me later.'

"Slightly ashamed of themselves for their short temper and the hasty curse which they had pronounced on the young men whom the Lord obviously loved so much, the *rishis* were confused as to whether the Lord was reprimanding them for their lack of control. Knowing what was passing in their minds Narayana said: 'Please do not be upset. I really do approve of this entire incident.' "Relieved by the reassuring words of the Lord the *rishis* worshipped him and went away. Narayana turned to Jaya and Vijaya and said: 'I can retract the curse of the *rishis* but I will not do so. The curse of brahmins should not be ignored. Both of you must be born in the world of men. You will have three *janmas*. In one *Krodha* will be the cause of your downfall; in the next, *Kama* will overshadow your actions and in one *Mada* will rule your actions. But let me assure you of one thing. You will be killed by Me and only Me. You will finally come back to Me. You will hate Me with an inordinate hatred. That is also a *yoga* in which you will

think more of Me than if you had been My *bhaktas*. This *Sambhrama yoga* will be your special privilege and you will be granted release from the three *janmas* which will last the end of *Dvapara*, the third quarter of Time.'

"The Lord vanished from their sight and they descended to the earth. These servants of Narayana", concluded Brahma, "are lodged in the womb of Diti and it is their glow which is eclipsing the glory of the earth and the heavens. There is no other reason for it."

After a hundred years two sons were born to Diti: twins. Their father called them Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. Their birth was attended by several evil omens which indicated great calamity for the world.

THE KILLING OF HIRANYAKSHA

The brothers grew in strength and power. They worshipped Brahma. They performed severe *tapas* and pleased the Creator. Hiranyakashipu wanted immortality as a boon. Brahma said that he could not grant it since he himself was not free from the sting of death. The *asura* then modified his words. He said: "Then, grant me this my Lord. No god should kill me and no man should kill me. Nothing that has been created by you should be the cause of my death. No weapon should be capable of hunting me. No living being or a non-living thing should be able to destroy me. I should not die in the day-time nor during the night. I should not die on the earth nor in the sky: not inside my house nor outside it." Hiranyakashipu thought up all the possibilities and asked for immunity from them all. "So be it," said Brahma and vanished from there.

The brothers then set out on a conquest of the worlds. The *devas* were easily vanquished and Hiranyaksha, ever desirous of pleasing his brother set out all by himself in search of new glory. They had been told that Narayana was the Lord of lords and they hated him with an inordinate hatred. They felt that the world would be all theirs if only they could destroy this Narayana.

Hiranyaksha entered *Vibhavari*, the city of Varuna, who is the lord of the nether worlds. Hiranyaksha bowed arrogantly in front of Varuna and with mock humility said: "My lord, please grant me the privilege of fighting with me. You are famed for your prowess. In days of yore you defeated all the *daityas* and performed the *Rajasuya*: thus you became the ruler of the nether world. I will be honoured by a fight with you." The *asura* then laughed boisterously Varuna controlled his anger and also with mock humility said: "My dear Hiranyaksha, I am old and I have given up fighting since long ago. The desire to fight has left me. There is only one person who will fight with you willingly and who is capable of giving you

a good fight. That is the One, the Lord, the Ancient, the great Narayana. Fight with him and you can reach him." Varuna was silent for a while. He added after a pause: "He takes different forms for the sole purpose of destroying evil beings like you. He will rid you of your arrogance and because of him you will lie on the field of battle, fit only to be the food for dogs and jackals."

Hiranyaksha was highly elated at the thought that Narayana would be willing to give him fight. He ignored the parting words of Varuna. The *asura* went round the place and kept on searching for his arch enemy. While he was thus wandering around Narada came to him as though he were in a hurry and coming very near Hiranya spoke excitedly: "Hiranya, I was told that you are in search of Narayana: that you want to fight with him and destroy him. Is this true?"

"True!" exclaimed Hiranyaksha. "Of course it is true. The entire world knows that I have spent years, many of them, looking for this 'Lord of lords' as you call him. If only someone will show me where he is hiding I will be no end grateful to him."

"Then you can be grateful to me", said Narada. "I know where he is. That is why I came rushing to you to tell you about it. You remember how the earth has been buried in the *Rasatala* since the great deluge? the *mahapralaya*? The Lord wants to re-establish her and he has now taken the form of a boar to lift her up from the *Rasatala*. He is even now returning to the surface of the sea with the earth in his arms. If you hurry you can catch him and fight with him." Thanking Narada profusely Hiranya rushed to where the sacred Varaha was. He shouted at him and said: 'Listen to me, you beast. You are stupid to think that you can steal this earth and run away while I am looking on. Remember she was given by Brahma to us: to those who live in *Rasatala*. You cannot take her away. You have no right over her. You are a thief. Though you have assumed the form of a boar I know that you are Narayana, the enemy whom I have been seeking. I have heard of your achievements. You have managed to cheat us all these years. You kill us with the help of your *Maya*. Never once have you fought a straightforward battle with any of us. It is for this purpose that the *devas*, our dear enemies, call you the Lord of lords and make much of you. Not

anymore. Those days have gone. I am here and that means that the days of your glory have come to an end. I have found you and I will not let you go without fighting with me. I will today despatch you to the abode of death and rid the *asuras* of the one and only thorn in their path."

Ignoring the words of Hiranyaksha the Lord tried to rise out of ocean. But Hiranya pursued him and said: "You are shameless. That is why you are trying to run away from me and my valour. I have been looking for you since ever so long. I will not let you go easily. Do not run away from me. I want that fight which my arms have been itching for ever since I heard about you."

Varaha placed the earth on the surface of the sea and he established her firmly. He then turned towards Hiranyaksha and said: "It is because I am a beast that I am listening to your words. Only animals are obliged to listen to the barkings of a dog. Really brave men do not and are not obliged to listen to your ravings. You are already caught in the clutches of death or else you will not talk like this to those more powerful than you. As you mentioned earlier, I am a thief who was trying to steal the earth from this *Rasatala* when no one was looking. But you have found me out. You say you have sworn to rid the path of the *asuras* of the one thorn which is hurting their feet. I am ever compassionate and I cannot bear to see the bleeding feet of your friends: nor can I bear to see a great hero like you break his promise. That is why I am staying. Or else I would have run away long ago."

The sneer and contempt in the voice of the boar, a mere animal, made Hiranyaksha wild with rage. He raised his mace and rushed towards the Lord.

He was hissing like a serpent and his head was reeling because of his extreme anger. He came near the Varaha and hit him hard with his *gada*. The Lord averted the blow by moving away from its path: like a *yogi* would, the coming of Yama. He then raised his own *gada* and hit Hiranya on the brow. Hiranya moved away, and hit back with his *gada*. They fought for a long while with their *gadas* and it was a fight watched by everyone with bated breath. Hiranya was no mean warrior and his opponent was the

Lord himself. Brahma and the rishis had come to *Rasatala* to watch this magnificent fight.

With his mind Brahma spoke to Narayana and said: "Lord, in a moment of weakness, flattered by their penances, I granted boons to this sinner and to his brother. They are bent on harassing all those who love you. The world is suffering because of them. He is very powerful. Please do not trifle with him any longer. Evening time is drawing near. I do not have to tell you that the *asuras* become stronger as night draws nearer. It is now the sacred hour by name *Abhijit*. Please rid the world of this sinner now."

The Lord smiled as if to say: "I am Time and this son of mine teaches me about the purity of the *Abhijit muhurta* and about the power of the *asuras* increasing as though I may be vanquished!"

He rushed towards Hiranya and hit him on the chin with his *gada*. However, Hiranya warded off the blow with his *gada*. It was indeed a very clever fight he was fighting. The *gada* of the Lord was crushed and the asura waited for a while as though he honoured the rules of fighting which forbids an opponent to hit the other if he is weaponless.

Varaha called for the *chakra* and it came to his hand. Hiranya was still fighting only with the *gada*. He threw it at the Lord who caught it with his left hand. When he tried to return it, Hiranya would not take it back.

After fighting with several weapons they finally began to wrestle with each other. Finally with his strong and very beautiful fist the Lord in the form of Varaha killed Hiranyaksha.

KARDAMA'S PENANCE

Brahma had told his sons Manu, Kardama and Daksha that they should create progenies and they agreed to do so. Kardama proceeded to the banks of the river Saraswati and there he spent several years performing *tapas*. Pleased with his devotion Narayana appeared before him and asked him what he wanted. Kardama fell at his feet and praised him. He said: "I am a fortunate man. You have appeared before me. You are the *Parabrahman* and it is to realise You that *tapas* is performed by the great. Having seen You man has no other desire in his mind.

"And yet, commanded as I am by my father to take up the task of creation, I am forced to ask a boon of You. I want a woman to be given to me. I want her to be the perfect woman. I will then perform my duties and make a sacrifice of my everything to You.

"You are the other form of Time. The Kingpin of that Wheel of Times is You: The *Brahman*. This Wheel is made up of many parts. The spokes which are thirteen in number are the months. The wheel has three hundred and sixty *parvas*, days, and its rim is made up of the six seasons. Its edge is decorated with millions of teeth which are the moments: the rim itself is made up of four pieces, each representing three months.

"The speed of this Wheel is terrific and no one can withstand its power. The entire world is tied to it and rolls with it helplessly. In this mad rush men think only of themselves and the gratification of their desires. They have no thought of You. Life ends only too soon: and it is wasted because it has achieved nothing.

"I am, alas, one of the many who want something worldly out of You. But then, please grant me non-attachment to the objects of the world. Please make me efficient enough to perform dispassionately the duties imposed on me by father and also by Your words, the Vedas. Make it possible for

me to abandon the world for Your sake whenever I want to. Grant me this boon."

"Narayana smiled on his devotee and said: "I know what is in your mind. I know that you will live in this world in *Karma* like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. I have already chosen a wife for you. I am well pleased with you and your devotion.

"In two days' time Manu, the emperor of the world, will come to you with his wife Shatarupa. They will come here with the intention of giving their daughter Devahuti to you. She will be the ideal wife for you. She will be the mother of nine daughters and these daughters will marry the *rishis* Marichi and others. Thus will your father's commands be obeyed by you. And, in the end, since I am pleased with you, I will be born to you as your son. I will then establish SANKHYA philosophy on the earth."

The Lord vanished from the spot and Kardama waited for the coming of Manu.

Kardama's *ashrama* was so situated that the river Saraswati flowed on either side of it. There was a small lake by the side of the *ashrama* which was filled with sweet clear water. Flowering trees and trees which bore fruit were growing on all the sides of the *ashrama* and the air around was always scented. It was a holy spot and made all the more so because the Lord had visited it. It became known as Bindusaras because tears from the eyes Narayana had fallen there: tears of joy which He shed when He saw the devotion of His *Bhakta*.

THE COMING OF DEVAHUTI

Svayambhu Manu, in the meantime, was travelling fast towards the Bindusaras. With him was his wife Shatarupa and his daughter Devahuti. He had brought costly silks and jewels with him and he travelled towards the *ashrama*. Soon he reached the holy spot. Followed by his servants who were carrying his gifts Manu entered the *ashrama* of Kardama and walked towards him. Kardama had just completed the worship of the fire. He was himself glowing like fire because of the spiritual awakening in him following the sight of the Lord. Manu was pleased to see that he was very handsome and that he had eyes which were gentle and full of compassion. Manu went and prostrated at the feet of Kardama.

Kardama blessed him and offered him *Arghya*, *Padya* and other customary things offered to a guest. He honoured Manu since he was a monarch. Manu received them all with humility and sat at the feet of the *rishi*.

Kardama spoke sweetly to him about the welfare of his kingdom and the happiness of the people under his rule. He said: "I am honoured by the visit of such an illustrious person like you; you are the monarch of the world and you have come to my humble cottage. I honour you because you are the image of Narayana. A king is said to be the Lord himself. He is said to be the sun, the moon, fire, Indra, Vayu, Yama, Dharma, Varuna and Narayana. By his prowess he becomes like the sun. He pleases by the sweetness on his face and thus he resembles the moon. His power is so great that ordinary mortals cannot approach him and that is where he resembles Agni, the fire. He rains riches and prosperity on the kingdom he rules and so a king is said to be like Indra. He should know the innermost thoughts of those who are around him, like the air-Vayu—which can enter everywhere. Destruction of evil is his role like that of Yama, and protecting the good, like Dharma. His dignity and innate greatness are like

those of Varuna and he is the representative of Narayana on the earth. This is the reason why a king should be honoured like he is a divine being.

As for the reason which prompted you to come to this hermitage, I will, I assure you, try my best to please you."

Embarrassed by the words of praise which Kardama had spoken, Manu spoke humbly. He said: "You have been born from the face of the Lord to propagate *tapas*, knowledge, selflessness, detachment. We, kshatriyas, have been born of the arms of the Lord to protect great souls like you and to help you propagate the lessons you have learnt. We protect each other and when you say that you are pleased with my rule I consider it my great good fortune that I have been able to please you. Compassionate as you are, you are sure to listen to my words and grant me what I ask for.

"I have five children. Uttanapada and Priyavrata are my sons and my daughters are Akuti, Prasuti and Devahuti. Being the father of daughters is a difficult state. I am worried as to who will be fit persons to marry my daughters. This is my daughters, Devahuti has heard about you and your glory from Narada and ever since then she has set her heart on you. She has chosen you as her lord. Lord Narayana has also instructed me to approach you with this request. I am therefore asking you to grant me my wish. Please accept this child of mine and honour me."

Kardama said: "I have been thinking of marriage since some time, now. Your daughter, you say, has chosen me as her husband. I am happy to accept her as my wife. She is beautiful and she does but eclipse the glow of the jewels she is wearing. But I must tell you something before I accept her. I will live with her in the *grihashthashrama*—married state—until she becomes the mother of my children. After that I will leave her in order to perform *tapas* and reach the Lord. A man who has followed the three *ashramas*—*Brahmacharya*, *Grihashtha* and *Vanaprastha*—must needs become a *sanyasi* and renounce his wife, his home and his children. This is my intention."

Manu and Shatarupa then gave their daughter Devahuti in marriage to Kardama. Leaving her behind with her husband in the picturesque spot, Bindusaras, the emperor returned to his city which was called

Barhishmati. The city was a holy spot. It was here that the sacred Varaha, while sniffing around for the earth, had shed some of the hair from his body. Out of the hair grew grass by name Kusha and Kasha. The official name for this grass is *Barhis* and the city was thus named Barhishmati.

Manu had performed a *yagnya* on this spot with this *Barhis* spread on the *yagnya vedi* and this was in the name of Adi Varaha. The land which was sanctified thus was named Brahmavarta.

THE IDEAL WIFE

Devahuti the wife of Kardama served with him even as Parvati served Mahadeva when he was performing penance. Days passed; months passed and years too. Still she was the same cheerful happy woman whose only pleasure seemed to be serving her husband. One day Kardama looked at her. She had grown thin because of the austerities she had been observing. Her face had lost the glow it had when she first came to him. Her blue eyes were still beautiful but they had lost their lustre because of sleepless nights. Her jewels she had discarded long ago and her dress was simple and coarse. Her silks she had given away so many years back.

Kardama called her to his side and said: "My beloved wife. I am pleased with you and your devotion to me. Though you are a princess by birth used to luxury and comfort, you have never once looked unhappy at the poverty and the difficulty you have been made to undergo all these years. Because of the *vratas* you have been observing constantly and again, because of your constant serving me while I have been in meditation you have also obtained the grace of the Lord. I will give you the power to see with the inner eye. You can see the glory of Narayana. Listen to me, dear woman. With a lift of his eyebrows the Lord is able to destroy all the many desires in the mind of man. When he has looked on us with love where is the need for worldly pleasures? We are heirs to heavenly enjoyments. Why then should we think of the pleasures of the senses? You and I have risen above them."

Devahuti's eyes were downcast when she spoke to her husband. She said: "I know. All that you have told me is true. I know the power of your *yoga* and about the grace of Narayana which is always yours. But, my lord, I am just a woman. The wish to be a mother is the natural instinct of a woman. You would have known this desire lodged in my mind already and yet you

want me to express it." She stood before him with her face suffused with a blush.

Kardama smiled softly at her and said: "So be it." With his yogic power Kardama created a *Vimana*, a floating palace with lovely gardens and lakes and flowers and jewelled pillars and seats covered with silk and brocade. It stood at the doorway of the *ashrama*. Devahuti stood looking at it. Kardama saw her eyes filled with longing and said: "My dear wife, enter the Bindusaras. After bathing in it you will go with me in the Vimana wherever you wish", and added: "This saras has been formed because of the kindness of Lord Narayana and it will grant the desire of everyone."

Devahuti whose eyes were blue, whose raiments were soiled, and whose hair was all unkempt because of neglect, whose body was thin, emaciated because of her vratas, entered the Bindusaras because her husband had asked her to. Even as she was looking, an amazing thing happened. Hundreds of young and beautiful maidens were there to welcome her. They bathed her with oil and perfumed water and dressed her in costly silks. They decked her with jewels and, when she came out of the Saras she could not recognise herself. All her charm and her maiden beauty had come back to her and she thought shyly of Kardama. He was quicker than thought and came and stood by her side. She looked at him and he had also become so different. He looked like he used to when they were married. He was as handsome as a *gandharva*.

With a smile he took her hand and placed her in the *Vimana*. It rose up in the air and was soon travelling with the speed of *Vayu*. The young couple spent several years in the Vimana. They lost count of time and they spent all their nights and days in happiness, oblivious to the world. Hundred years had passed and they knew it not. Devahuti became the mother of nine daughters and Kardama realised that it was time to go back to the earth.

The dream was over and Devahuti came back to reality. She knew that her husband would leave her and go away to perform *tapas*. He had spoken about it long ago when they were to be married. She went to his presence and spoke to him in soft and gentle terms. She said: "My lord you had told

my father long ago that you would abandon the *grihashthashrama* as soon as I became the mother of children. I know now that the time has come when you will leave me. But, my lord, how can I bear this separation? I am an ignorant woman. Please teach me how to be rid of the fear of *samsara*. I am frightened. I will have to live all by myself. The children, when they grow up will find suitable husbands for themselves. I will get no solace from them. Please stay back for a while. Who knows! I may get a son who will help me; who may teach me how to be rid of this bondage called worldliness.

"When I was with you all these days before the children were born my desire for you was earthly. Attachment of a worldly person to one who is also worldly, like her, leads to bondage. But when this same attachment is to one who is beyond the ties of worldliness they say that it leads to salvation. You are detached. Will my love for you, then, lead me to salvation? Consider me. I have been your wife. I am the wife of one who is the greatest of the *tapasvis* and yet, this heart of mine is still grieving over worldly things which I am to lose. I am, indeed, the most unfortunate of women since I have been deceived by the *Maya* of the Lord."

Kardama wiped the tears in her eyes and said: "Do not think of yourself so badly. You are not unfortunate. On the contrary you are the most fortunate among all women. Lord Narayana has told me that He will be born as your son. You are going to bear the Lord Himself in your womb. Can any woman be more fortunate than you? Do not weep, my dear woman. From today you must observe the severest of *vratas* to prepare yourself: to make yourself worthy to receive the Lord. Pray to him day and night. Pleased with your devotion He will be born as your son. He will glorify your name and mine in the days to come. He will teach you *Brahma Vidya* which will break asunder all the knots which have been tying you down to this world. He will help you to find a way out of this wilderness called *Maya*. Through you, the world of men will learn the lesson."

KAPILA VAASUDEVA

Devahuti did as she was told. She worshipped Narayana day and night. A long long time passed. In course of time the Lord entered her womb and stayed there like fire which is hidden in the *arani*. There was great rejoicing in the heavens when this happened. Sweet music could be heard from the skies. The clouds rambled as though in joy. *Gandharvas* sang and the *apsaras* danced in ecstasy. There was a rain of flowers from the heavens on the fortunate Devahuti who would be the mother of Narayana.

To the ashrama which was beautiful with Saraswati flowing on either side came Brahma, the creator: Brahma the father of Kardama. And with him came Marichi and the other *rishis*. Brahma who knew that Narayana would be born and the purpose of his birth, came to his son Kardama and his wife and said: "My child, you have been the ideal son to me. You obeyed my commands and now you have nine daughters who will propagate the race. Give them to the *rishis* who are with me. The Lord Narayana has, I know, promised to you that He will be born as your son and even now, your wife is bearing Him in her womb. My dear daughter, he will explain to you, and through you, to the world, *Brahma Vidya* which will rid you of *Avidya*, ignorance, which is the cause of pain in this world. He will establish the great SANKHYA YOGA and he will be famed as KAPILA the world over. The world will be the richer for the presence. Your names will be remembered by the world of men because you will be the parents of Kapila." Brahma took leave of the couple and went back to *Satyaloka*.

Kardama married his daughters to the *rishis*. Kala was given to Marichi; Anasuya to Atri; Shraddha to Angiras and Havirbhu to Pulastya. Gati was given to Pulaha, Kriya to Kratu while Khyati was given to Bhrigu. Arundhati became the wife of Vasishtha and the youngest daughter Shanti was given to Atharva. The daughters left the home of the good Kardama and Devahuti and went with their husbands. Loneliness visited the aged

couple who were all by themselves now. The thoughts of the great event to come kept them happy. Kardama, alone with his wife now that the daughters had gone away to their new homes, prostrated before the Lord Who was in her and said: "How can I, with my poor and inadequate intelligence describe the greatness that is You? How can I express in words Your infinite kindness? The gods are indeed benevolent towards men who have spent all their time in this pain filled *samsara*. We are born into this world of bondage because of the accumulated sins in our many previous *janmas*. And yet, You heed them not. Great *rishis* spend years and years on end training their minds to follow the path of devotion. With single-minded *Bhakti* they try to sit in solitary spots and concentrate on Your form, trying to visualise You in their hearts. And what have you done? Unmindful of the fact that I am an ignorant, stupid, low man who is caught in the web of the senses; not minding all this You have deigned to be born in this humble *ashrama* of mine as my son! What shall I say? What can I say? Once you told me that You would be born as my son. And to keep that promise You have come to me. Great is the love You have for our *Bhaktas*.

"I know no words, my lord, to praise You and Your form. You are the womb of all this universe and You are now a child in the womb of Devahuti. We ascribe to You four arms. These four stand for the four pathways of approach to You, the four *yogas*. The seers know You by realising You with their penance. I can only fall at Your feet and worship You. How can I describe the Ishvara? You are the *Purusha*, You are the *Mahat* and *Aham tattvas*, You are Time. You are the three *gunas*, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. You are the world and the protector of the world too. You hold the entire universe inside You. I salute You, Kapila Vaasudeva, the Lord of lords. Having known You I am completely rid of this *Maya*; this attachment to my *samsara*. I am bent on adopting *sanyasa*. I want to spend the rest of my life in contemplation of You and the sole purpose of my life hereafter will be to reach You."

Narayana who was inside Devahuti said: "Kardama, I had once promised you that I would be born as your son. How could I stay without fulfilling it? This, my *avatara* is solely for the benefit of those who want release from this bondage called "the human body". I want to help man by telling

him the Truth about myself. This *Brahma Vidya* has been forgotten by many. I want to retrieve it and save mankind. You have made a wise decision. You have my permission to go as a *Sanyasi*. But then, you are ripe for salvation. Surrender all your desires to me and you will find release from this bondage. You will see me in your heart and soon you will come to me. As for my mother, she is so frightened of this world and she is terrified of her impending loneliness after you go. I will teach her *Atma Vidya* and help her to realise me."

Kardama made *pradakshina* to Kapila and went away to the forest. In the forest Kardama spent his days in silence. He thought of nothing else but the Brahman. He had no more feelings of attachment. He was now beyond the plane of cause and effect. He reached the stage where the three *gunas* are so perfectly balanced that man becomes *nirguna*: without any of the three *gunas*. The feelings of "I" and "Mine" had left him long ago. The opposites ceased to trouble him. The pains of the body, the agitations of the mind and the restlessness of the intellect had all vanished. His vision had turned inwards and inside himself he saw none other than the Lord Narayana.

Kardama found his mind tranquil and still like the sea whose waves have been hushed. And in such a frame of mind Kardama, the son of Brahma, the father of Kapila Vaasudeva reached the feet of the Lord.

KAPILA AND HIS TEACHINGS

After Kardama went away to the forest bent on *Sanyasa*, the young son Kapila stayed in the *ashrama* on the banks of the picturesque lake Bindusaras with his mother. Days passed. Devahuti remembered the words of Brahma: "My dear daughter, Lord Narayana desires to teach the world *Brahma Vidya* and hence He has decided to be born as your son. He will teach you the *Brahma Vidya* which will rid you of *Avidya*, ignorance, which is the cause of pain in this world." Devahuti saw her son sitting all by himself and went to him. She said: "You are my son. And I know you are Lord Narayana. I am asking you to help me. I am tired, tired of his life which I have spent in gratifying the senses. You are the sun which has risen to dispel the darkness from the minds of ordinary people like me. I have the great good fortune to be the mother of the Lord. Tell me what I want to know. In the body made up of the five elements you have instilled the feelings of "I" and "Mine": You have it susceptible to the several emotions like love and hatred: and this evil of ignorance has been drawn across the *Atman* by you and you alone. It is up to you to remove it and save us. Teach me the path to peace. Teach me the path of *Mukti*: salvation. Tell me about your nature. *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are both you and if I learn about them, they say, I will find freedom from the bondage of births and deaths."

Kapila's face was lit up by a smile of pure affection and he looked at his mother. He said: "I will tell you. In my opinion there is only one *yoga* which will entirely destroy the pains and pleasures which are the resultants of *samsara*. I taught this *yoga* to the *rishis* of yore when they were eager to learn it. I will teach you the same *yoga* now. I will, however, make the lesson easier for you. Anyone can understand this path to salvation.

"Mother, it is the mind, which is the cause of bondage as well as freedom. Consider the mind. When it gets involved in the three *gunas*: when there is

an upset in the balance of the three *gunas*, then, one of the *gunas* becomes predominant and the *Atman* gets involved in the play of the emotions. The mind turns away from the inner self and begins to be interested in the objects of the senses: it seeks gratification from them and it wanders farther and farther away from the *Atman*. This same mind, if it is turned INWARDS, if it attaches itself to the *Purusha*, the Lord, Ishvara, Narayana, then this same mind will be the cause of freedom of man from the coils of the senses. This path is called by the name CHITTASANYAMANA and it is the first step towards the goal. When the feelings of "I" and "Mine" disappear the mind at once becomes free of *Kama*, *Krodha* and other qualities. It becomes pure and is fit enough to lead you to me. The pleasures of the world and the pains will not affect it any more. When it is equipped with *Vairagya*, detachment, or rather, non-attachment: with *Bhakti*, which is devotion to me: and with *Gnyana* which is knowledge of the truth about me then the mind is able to perceive the BRAHMAN.

"Of all the paths to me, mother, *Bhakti* is the easiest and surest. There is no other path which grants you freedom as quickly as the path of devotion. The wise say the SANGA, attachment, is the one imperishable quality which is inherent in man. When it is imperishable, when it is evergreen, without any possibility of getting destroyed, obviously it cannot be ignored. Mother, attachment is always there. The way to salvation is to use this same *Sanga* as an instrument. Let the attachment be there by all means. Only do not feed it with the usual sense objects. Change the object of desire: of attachment. You have been attached to the things of the world. Let the attachment remain but make the object different. In place of the worldly objects, substitute Narayana. Attachment to Narayana makes the ties to other things snap. And the way is easy.

"This process of transferring the attachment from the lower to the higher will, naturally, be a gradual process. It is not possible to abandon the one and adopt the other all on a sudden. The mind will refuse to co-operate. The ultimate aim should be to be called a MUKTA-SANGA. The best method of schooling the mind to follow this path is to have the company of *Sadhus*. When the mind becomes attached to the company of *Sadhus* it

would have abandoned the earlier attractions and the next step is made easy.

"How can the mind be led towards thoughts of the Lord? It is easier than it seems. As I said before, *Kama*, *Lobha*, the feelings of "I" and "Mine" are the impurities which cloud the mind, turn it away from its goal and make it cling to the objects of the senses. A mind free of the impurities *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Lobha*, *Moha*, *Mada* and *Matsarya* will, naturally turn towards the Lord.

"Once this is achieved, once you are a *Mukta-Sanga* you should now spend your time in SAT-SANGA: the company of *Sadhus*. Attachment, the evergreen body which ties you down should be for *Sadhus*. Who are the *Sadhus*? What are their characteristics? How can they be recognised? I will tell you. The sufferings, the ills and pains that the physical body is heir to, do not affect the *Sadhus*. They are full of compassion for all men. All living beings are, to them, their kinsmen. They love all beings. Naturally they have no enemies. They are at peace with themselves. Their minds are clear and tranquil, without agitations. And they never swerve from the path of righteousness. Their conduct is ever flawless and their thoughts flow towards me and only towards me. They have no other duties, obligations, relations, no other claims on their affections or thoughts. They are interested only in stories about me and they are happy when they relate these stories to others. The troubles of the world are no troubles for them because they refuse to be affected by them. They are FREE from attachment and such people are called "*Sadhus*". Mother, pray that your mind becomes attached to these people. They are capable of helping you to break away from other attachments.

"Constant company of *Sadhus* makes you familiar with the stories about me, stories which please the ear and which gladden the heart. Pleasure in these stories leads to a constant interest in me and this interest becomes finally, enjoyment: meaning, you will enjoy thinking on me and only on me. This enjoyment will then become BHAKTI, devotion to me. *Satsanga* leads to *Shraddha*, this to *Rathi* and *Rathi* leads to *Bhakti*. Because of the *Bhakti* you develop for me the mind becomes slowly, gradually, but surely disgusted with the sense objects. The things of the world which were once

attractive are no longer so. The pleasures which you once enjoyed cease to please you. The mind becomes keen on discovering methods by which it can be focused steadily on the Lord. The emancipated man tries very earnestly for salvation. He has no taste for the snare which nature casts about him and his intellect becomes sharp and keen. This is because of the non-attachment to the senses and the objects of the senses. Surrendering himself entirely to me he becomes one with me even in this bondage-ridden birth."

Devahuti was listening intently. She now intervened and said: "Tell me how an ignorant woman like me, one who has not studied the Vedas or learnt the many truths which the wise have learnt: how can I reach you. Which is the easiest path which leads to you?"

"*Bhakti*", said Kapila. It is *Bhakti yoga* which will help you. Whether it be the senses which are involved in the world of objects: whether it be the mind which is involved in the daily duties and actions dictated by the Vedas: the only path which will free both of these from the particular fields in which they are engaged is a sincere and spontaneous desire for the attainment of salvation. This desire will be granted by an effortless devotion to Narayana. This devotion will burn away the bondage of *Karma* and the bondage created by the senses like the fire in the body burns up the food which is eaten. *Bhakti* will not only grant you one-ness with the Lord, but it will also free you from the world of objects. *Mukti*, release, will follow as a matter of course when you become a pilgrim in the path of *Bhakti*.

"Sadhus who think only of serving me, who are attached only to me, who perform actions to please only me, who talk nothing but my stories, such people do not desire even to get salvation. They are so happy with the thoughts of me. In their minds' eye they see my form always. And so, whether they ask for it or not, I grant them *Mukti*. Lost as they are in thoughts of me, they are not attracted by the glories of the heavenly worlds. But still, I grant them all that since they are entitled to them.

"My *Bhaktas* will never be destroyed. The Wheel of Time which is my formidable weapon is powerless as far as they are concerned since they

become one with me. I am everything to a *Bhakta*. I am dear to him as a son is: his confidant like a friend is: his instructor: his well-wisher: his beloved. My *Bhaktas* have no fear of anything since everything in this universe is under my sway. It is in fear of me that the wind blows. Fear of me makes the sun shine. Parjanya rains from the heavens because he stands in fear of me. The fire burns and Yama keeps a watchful eye on everything: all because I have appointed them to do so. But *yogis* who have conquered the world of the senses are afraid of nothing and they reach me without any doubt."

KAPILA'S TEACHINGS II

"I will now tell the secret about the *Purusha* and about how He has pervaded the universe. This *yoga* is again *Atma Vidya* by mastering which you will reach salvation. All one's doubts will vanish on their own accord once this *yoga* is understood. The *Atman* in you is the PURUSHA. He has no beginning and no end. He is self-luminent, and there is nothing which is not the *Purusha*: which is different from the *Purusha*. He pervades everything. He is eternal.

"*Prakriti*, however is the cause of the conditioning of the *Atman*. *Purusha* is eternal, as I said before, and He is that which pervades the world of plurality. He is beyond the three *gunas*. How then can one reconcile the two aspects of *Purusha*? One is pure and the other is a world of plurality. How did the *Purusha* who is beyond the reach of the *gunas* and beyond *Prakriti*: how did He become involved in this apparent process of births and deaths? It is not a puzzle to the wise.

"*Prakriti* is made up of two powerful ingredients: *Avarana Shakti* and *Vikshepa shakti*. When the three *gunas* are so well balanced that there is perfect equilibrium then we have what is called the *Nirguna* state: *guna*-less-ness. Time is again another form of the *Purusha*. When Time moves on, the *gunas* are suddenly found to have lost their equilibrium. It gets upset and one of the three *gunas*, the *Rajas*, manifests itself. After that, the other two.

"When the *gunas* thus come into action the *Avarana* and *Vikshepa* also come into their own. *Purusha* now assumes two forms: *Jiva* and *Ishvara*. *Jiva* is that aspect of the *Purusha* which becomes involved in the play of the *gunas*. *Avarana* makes the *Jivatma* forget himself: forget his true nature and this state of the *Purusha* is called AVIDYA: not knowing: ignorance of the Truth about himself Along with *Avidya*, *Vikshepa* also comes into force. *Vikshepa* causes the agitation: it is considered to be

Maya, the illusion which makes one think that the unreal is the real. These two, *Avarana* and *Vikshepa* together cause *Avidya* and *Maya*. When the *Jivatma* gets involved in this, it forgets its true nature. It identifies itself with the world of plurality and gets involved more and more deeply. The other aspect of the *Purusha* which goes by the name *Ishvara* is the one who does not get deluded by the two powerful forces of *Prakriti*.

"For one to be free of this *Maya* and reach the state where the forces of *Prakriti* do not capture the *Jiva*, one path is enough. *Bhakti yoga*. Mother, think on the Lord all the time. *Bhakti* will, of its own accord grant you *Gnyana* and *Vairagya*. You do not have to seek them. Love for the Lord Narayana will make you indifferent to other loves and so non-attachment is achieved. *Bhakti* will show you the way to the feet of Narayana. When a *Bhakta* realises that the only aim in his life is to reach Narayana and strives for it that means that he has learnt the truth and his *Avidya* has vanished. He knows that Narayana is the only Truth and nothing else.

"It is the Brahman or the Purusha or the *Ishvara* or the *Bhagavan* according to the different *yogas* which seek Him. It is this which is revealed in all the manifestations in the world of plurality. The one who realises this is the *Brahman* himself. Realising the *Brahman* is not a knowing but a becoming. You will KNOW that you are the *Brahman*. The *Jiva* will know that he is the *Ishvara*, the *Purusha*. The *gnyana yoga* taught by me and the *bhakti yoga* on which I elaborated earlier are, in reality, the same. One is not different from the other.

"Mother, I have taught you the different pathways of approach. You can rest assured that any one of the paths when followed earnestly, will help attain salvation."

THE END OF DEVAHUTI

Kapila's mission was over. He had been born to propagate the *Sankhya* to the world through his mother. He had done it and now he was free to go. He took leave of his mother and went away. Devahuti spent the rest of her life in the manner taught by her son. She stayed in the *ashrama*. Her black curly locks became brown, matted and lifeless because of her frequent bathing in the Bindusaras. Her body became emaciated because of the severity of her *vratas*. Dressed in tree barks she began to perform the yoga taught her by Kapila, the Lord Himself. She gave away all that she once thought was hers. She missed her husband and she missed her son. She had been taught the science of detachment and yet it was not easy for her to adopt it at once. She thought of her son day and night. He had told her that she should let her thoughts flow towards Narayana night and day like a perennial stream and she was doing just that. She thought of the beautiful face of Kapila. Her mind became still and steady gradually. She could then think on the form of Narayana. She practised the *Ashtanga yoga* and her mind was bent on the *Brahman*. Her *Avidya* had been burnt up by her *tapas* and with *Avidya* vanished all her pain and misery. She forgot all about her body and its many functions like a man forgets his dream state the moment he wakes up. Devahuti reached the *Brahmi* state in no time.

The spot where she attained the *Brahmin* is a holy spot: a *tirtha*. The body which shed then became a river which even the *devas* use, to purify themselves. The holy spot is called Siddhapada. Thus Devahuti, the daughter of Manu, became greater than all the great *jivanmuktas* because of the great lesson she learnt from her son Kapila Vaasudeva.

Kapila, after he left his mother, travelled towards the north-west. *Siddhas*, *charanas* and *gandharvas* worshipped him wherever he went. The lord of the oceans worshipped him with *arghya* and *padya* and offered Kapila a quiet spot inside his region where he could continue his *tapas*.

YAGNYA, THE SON OF AKUTI

Svayambhu Manu had three daughters and two sons. The sons were Priyavrata and Uttanapada. The daughters were Akuti, Devahuti and Prasuti. Akuti was given by Manu to a *rishi* by name Ruchi. This marriage was performed in accordance with the rule called "Putrikadharmā". When a man has only daughters and no sons, he gives away his daughter to a worthy man and says: "I am giving you this maiden who has no brother. The son who is born to her must be your son as well as mine." Manu had two sons and yet, with a desire for another son he performed Akuti's marriage in this manner.

Ruchi was great *rishi* and an ardent devotee of Narayana. To him and Akuti were born two children: a son and a daughter. The son was Narayana himself and he was named Yagnya since he was said to be the personification of *yagnya*. The daughter was named Dakshina and she was the goddess Lakshmi.

Manu was immensely pleased that the Lord himself had been born as his son and took him to his house. Dakshina stayed with Ruchi and Akuti. Yagnya then married Dakshina according to religious rites. Twelve sons were born to them. Every Manvantara, that is, every epoch of a Manu, has to have a Manu, *devas*, Manuputras, Sureshvaras, Rishis, and an *avatara* of Narayana. In Svayambhu Manvantara, that is, during the time of Svayambhu Manu, twelve sons of Yagnya were the *sureshvaras* and the *rishis* led by the *Marichi* were the seven *rishis*. Yagnya was the *avatara* of Narayana and also Indra. Priyavrata and Uttanapada were the Manuputras. The Svayambhu Manvantara was peopled by these.

Devahuti was married to Kardama Prajapati and her son was Kapila. Her daughters were nine. Kala, the eldest of them was the wife of Marichi and one of the sons was the great Kashyapa. Purnima was a daughter and her daughter was Devakulya who was later to be called Ganga.

The next daughter Shraddha who was married to Angiras was the mother of Brihaspati. Havirbhu was the wife of Pulastya and her son was Agastya. Vishravas was another son. The son of Vishravas was Kubera. The other wife of Vishravas was Kaikasi and she was the mother of Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana. Kratu's wife Kriya was the mother of the *rishis* by name "Valakhilyas".

Khyati, the wife of Bhrigu had two sons one of whom was the father of Mrikandu. Ushanas, who is better known as Kavi was the son of Bhrigu. He was Shukra, the *acharya* of the *asuras*. Daksha Prajapati married Prasuti, the other daughter of Manu. They had sixteen daughters. Thirteen of them were given to Dharma: one was given to Agni, one to the Pitris and one to Lord Mahadeva.

DATTATRAYA

Anasuya, the grand daughter of Manu was given to Atri. On the slopes of the mountain Ruksha, Atri performed intense *tapas*. It was a peaceful spot. The river Nirvindya flowed in gentle waves on all sides of the mountain. The music of the flowing river, the hum of the bees, which haunted the flower bushes in the *ashrama* were all conducive to the peace which pervaded the atmosphere. There, with his senses under control, with his breath controlled by *Pranayama* and with his mind bent on *tapas* Atri spent many years.

Atri prayed for a son to be born to him. His prayer was: "May He, who is the Lord of lords grant me a son who will be like him." His *tapas* was intense and even after a hundred years the *rishi* was intent on his *tapas*. The denizens of the heavens were afraid to see the fire which was emanating from his head as a result of the intensity of his *tapas*. The three murtis, Vishnu, Mahadeva and Brahma went to the *ashrama* of Atri. The *rishi* saw their arrival and realising what a great privilege it was to see all three of them together at his doorstep, Atri got up in a flurry and received them with all the honour due to them. He found that words would not come easily to his lips, so overcome was he with emotion. He composed himself and looked at them. They stood with smiles lighting their faces. With flowers he worshipped them and he said: "The creation of the universe, the support of it and the destruction of the same in the end are in the hands of the three of you. I worship you with words which are poor vehicles for my thoughts. Tell me why all three of you have come to grace me. I prayed for the best among you to grant me a son in his image. It is up to you to tell me who is the greatest: which of you will give me a son. Which of you is the greatest?"

Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara were amused by the words of Atri. They laughed at him and said: "You wanted a son in the image of the greatest of

all. We did not want to disappoint you: and that is why we have come. The three of us comprise the Lord of lords. Vishnu, Brahma and Mahadeva are all three aspects of the *Brahman*. It is this same *Brahman* which creates, preserves and destroys. We are the *Brahman* and there is nothing to differentiate between any two of us. We wanted you to realise the truth about us and that is why we have come all three of us. You will be the father of three sons, each one, an *amsha* of one of us. They will be famed the world over and bring you a great name. You will be happy." The son born to Atri with the *amsha* to *Brahma* was the Moon: Datta was the son with the *amsha* of Vishnu and the son in the image of Mahadeva was Durvasa.

DAKSHA'S ANGER

Sati, one of the daughters of Daksha was given to Mahadeva. Once the great *yagnya* by name Brahma Satra was being performed by Marichi and other great *rishis*. All the great sages, *devas* and other denizens of the heavens were present. While the *yagnya* was in progress Dakshaprajapati entered the *yagashala*. He was glowing like the sun and the *yagashala* was lit up by his magnificent presence. Such was his glory that all the *rishis* stood up as one man and honoured him. Only two did not stand up and pay him the respect which had been paid by the others: one was Brahma and the other was Mahadeva. Daksha went to the presence of his father Brahma, fell at his feet and took the dust of them on his head. With the permission of Brahma Daksha sat down.

He was very angry with Mahadeva since he did not join the others in honouring him. He could not brook this insult. With his eyes copper-red with anger Daksha said: "*Brahmarshis* are all assembled here and in the presence of all of you, this man has insulted me. He took the hand of my beloved daughter in marriage and I gave her to him. And so, it follows that he has to pay me respect. I am in the position of a *guru* to him. But he does not seem to know even the rudiments of decorum. He is puffed up with ego. He did not even talk to me with respect when I entered. I am sorry I gave my daughter to this boor. I made a mistake in giving her away to an unworthy person. He is not well behaved: he is unclean: he is ignorant of the rules of conduct: he is proud. To such a man have I given my child. It is like teaching the Vedas to the unfit to pronounce it.

"He lives in the burning ground surrounded by *pretas*, *bhutas* and *pishachas*. With his hair all matted and wild he wanders naked in the burning ground. He laughs awhile and weeps awhile like one demented. He smears himself with the ashes from the funeral pyre and wears a garland made of human skulls. His ornaments are human bones. He is ASHIVA and he calls himself SHIVA. He is full of *tamas*, the worst of the three

gunas and he is swollen with ego. As for his attendants they are also afflicted with the same qualities. My father Brahma asked me to give my Sati to him and so I gave her to him. I regret it now".

Daksha took water in his hand and began to curse Mahadeva. He said: "This Mahadeva, the worst of all gods, will not receive any more a share of the *Yagnyas* like Indra, Upendra and the other gods do."

Having cursed Mahadeva Daksha did not tarry there even for a moment more. He went back to his home. Nandikeshwara, the ardent *Bhakta* of Mahadeva was very angry with Daksha who had treated the Lord so badly. The slight to his master was too much. He got up and said: "This Daksha is a fool. He thinks so highly of himself that he has forgotten who Mahadeva is. A man who can be so ignorant of the true nature of Mahadeva is really unfortunate. He will, from now, stray away from the grace of the Lord. He is no better than an animal which lives only for the gratification of its hunger and thirst. Daksha is, therefore, like a goat which has no intelligence. He will hereafter, have the head of a goat.

"As for the *rishis* who were silent when Daksha pronounced the curse on Mahadeva, they will all suffer for this. These many followers of Daksha will hereafter go through the cycle of births and deaths. They will forget their real selves and their minds will be turned away from the *Brahman*. They will become engaged in tasks associated with worldly desires and the gratification of them. They will get so much involved in the rituals that they will lose their love for discipline, *tapas*. They will become susceptible to flattery and, with their minds clouded by ignorance they will get involved in worldly things. They will have to beg for their food. This is the curse I pronounce on the supporters of Daksha." Bhrigu, the chief of the *rishis* assembled there was beside himself with anger at the words of Nandikeshwara. He said: "I curse the followers of Mahadeva. Those who worship him, those who consider him to be great will, hereafter be called Pashandis: hypocrites. They will not be initiated into the rites prescribed by the Vedas and they will oppose the Vedas. They will be unclean and foolish. They will wear their hair matted like Mahadeva: they will wear ornaments made of bones and they will smear ashes on their bodies like their master. They will drink SURA. Since they have

condemned the Vedas which form the basis of the four *ashramas* and that of society they will move in a world indifferent to the rules of society. They will earn the contempt of the world of men because of the nefarious methods with which they perform worship.

"They will form a religion which has, for its goal, the slighting of the Vedas. These worshippers of Mahadeva will be beyond the pale of men who have, all these many years worshipped the Vedas: who have followed the path laid out by the *Sadhus*: who have realised that Narayana is the soul of the Vedas and therefore the Vedas have to be worshipped. These Pashandis will all be afflicted with the lowest of the three gunas, the *Tamoguna*."

Mahadeva, who was sitting silently all this while, got up and with a sad look on his face walked out of the *yagnyashala* followed by his adherents.

The *satra yaga* came to a conclusion after the thousand years set apart for the performance. The performers then went to the spot where the sacred Ganga and Yamuna come together and, with pure and contented minds, went back to their *ashramas*.

CONFLICT IN KAILAS

A long time had passed after the incident in the *Brahma Satra*. Brahma had now crowned Daksha as the foremost among the Prajapatis and, as a result of this Daksha had become more swollen with pride and arrogance, than he had been before. To show his contempt for Mahadeva he began to perform a *yagnya* by name "Brihaspati Sava." All the *brahmarshis*, *devarshis*, *pitris*, *devas* attended the *yagnya*.

Sati, the wife of Mahadeva, heard about the *yagnya* which was being performed by her father. She saw an endless stream of men and women dressed beautifully, going towards the spot where the *yagnya* was being performed. She went to her lord and said: "Your father-in-law, my father, has begun to perform a great *yagnya*. We should also go there. All the *devas* and *rishis* are there with their wives. People are still going in the direction of the *yagashala* and so it is evident that it is not over. I want to go there, my lord. I want to meet my mother and my sisters whom I have not seen for a long time. I am very eager to go and see the *Yagnya*."

"You are the Lord of the Universe and you seem to consider this *yagnya* as very ordinary. But I am a woman and I cannot help being excited at the thought of going to a *yagnya* which my father is performing. From the look on your face I can see what you want to say: 'We are not invited.' What if we are not invited? Good men do not wait to be invited to the houses of their masters, *gurus*, fathers, friends. Please take pity on me and my longing to go there should, be gratified by you. Will you not take me there and make me happy?"

Mahadeva smiled sadly at his wife. He looked at her eager face and was sorry he could not grant her what she was asking of him. He remembered the cruel words of Daksha spoken long ago. He said: "My dearest wife, my Sati, the thought of going to your father's house in spite of the fact that we have not been invited, would not have mattered if he had been a different

person. But your father, Daksha Prajapati is puffed up with pride. Drunk as he is with power, he is not likely to pay us the respect that is due to us. Your father is possessed of great qualities: learning, *tapas*, wealth, a beautiful body, age, noble birth. All these, if they are found in a good man are indeed ornaments to the man. However, your father has become proud because he possesses these. 'I am learned: I am a *Tapasvi*': thoughts like these have made him insufferably proud and he will not brook the greatness that is me. There are different types of pride. But the pride born of learning and *tapas* is the worst and your father suffers from that malady.

"The hurt caused by a cruel relative pains much more than arrows sent by an enemy. The enemy's arrows make you faint and you are not conscious, for long, of the pain caused by them. Do you not know it? Your father loves you. In fact, he loves you most among his children. But then, he does not like me. He thinks that I insulted him and he hates me. And so, he will not treat you with the affection which you expect of him. Perhaps you do not remember the reason for his anger. There was once a *yagnyashala* which he entered. Everyone stood up and greeted him. I did not stand up and do likewise. Do you know why? When a person gets up and makes *Namaskara* to another, the greetings are known as *Pratyudgamanam* and *Abhivadanam*. These have some meaning. The wise have said: "The inherent *Purusha* in the one greets the *Purusha* in the other." The respect is not paid to the man, to the body which holds the *Purusha* but to the *Purusha* himself who lodges in everyone. But this father of yours claimed that respect should be paid to him. I could not do it. When a good man meets one who is full of ego: so much so that his *atman* is not seen by him because of his clouded intellect, then respect will not be paid him by the good.

"Long ago your father spoke disparagingly of me. He spoke cruel words and insulted me in the presence of everyone. He has cursed me. I am denied my share of the *havis* in the *yagas* performed to the *devas*. He is your father, no doubt. But he happens to be my enemy and all his followers are my enemies. I do not wish him and his followers to set their eyes on you: you happen to be my wife."

Silently Sati was listening to his words. He looked at her and he sensed her rebellion. He could see all the thoughts that were passing in her mind. But he had to be firm. He said: "If, however, you choose to ignore my words and decide to go, I can assure you that no good will come of it. To the proud and sensitive mind an insult from one's own people will mean only one thing: DEATH. I am warning you. You will not be welcomed by anyone there since you are no longer Daksha's daughter but Mahadeva's spouse."

Sati was very unhappy. Her husband had asked her not to go: he had said that she should not go: that it would end in disaster if she went against his wishes. But her heart was in the *yagnyashala* where her dear ones were present. She would walk in and out of her little home trying to decide on the course of action. And Mahadeva was watching her all the while without speaking a word. Prevented as she was by her husband from going to her people her eyes filled with tears. And, at the same time, womanlike, she looked angrily at her husband since he would not accede to her wish. She asked for so little and he would not grant her that. Finally her womanliness won.

Leaving her husband whose half she was, with long sighs escaping her, she made up her mind to go to the *yagnyashala*. She walked swift and straight as an arrow without looking back. The servants of Mahadeva followed her. They placed her on a glorious bull and they went towards the *yagnyashala*. And Mahadeva was sitting all alone; his mind was filled with sadness.

SATI KILLS HERSELF

From a distance Sati could hear the sonorous music made by the incessant chanting of the Vedas. As she approached the spot she could see the *yagnyashala* filled with all the great *rishis* and all the *devas*, *Gandharas*, *Siddhas*, and *Charanas*. She reached her destination. The *yagnyashala* was glowing like heaven. She looked at everyone: she looked at her father. Daksha looked quite through her as though she did not exist. No one had the courage to defy Daksha and greet Sati. No one dared to welcome her. Only her mother and her sisters embraced her and expressed their joy at seeing her. They tried to make a fuss of her. But she would have none of it. Ignored as she was by her father she would not look at anyone else.

The realisation came upon her that this was a *yagnya* which would not give a share to Mahadeva: that it was performed with the sole purpose of insulting her lord. Mahadeva had told her so clearly the course the events would take: the indifference which would greet her when she entered because she was the wife of Mahadeva. But she, in her foolishness, would not pay heed to his words. She remembered the sad and resigned look on his face when she had last seen him and anger flashed from her eyes. She was so furious that words would not flow easily and distinctly from her lips. Her lips were throbbing with anger and her eyes were red with anger. Her entire frame seemed to be like a flame without smoke. Sati looked at her father and said: "What a foolish person you are! You call yourself the enemy of the Lord: of one who has no equal in the universe. Only a fool like you will do such a thing. People can be classified into different categories. The first is the lowest type: he is called an *Asadhu*. He will see only the faults in another man. He will have no eyes for the good in him. The second is the mediocre type. This man sees the good as well as the bad in another. There is again a third type: they are those who can find the difference between good and bad qualities but who will treat them in a sensible manner, look at them in the proper way and proper perspective.

They are called the good people. The better class of men are those who ignore the faults and take into account only what is good. But the really great souls are those who will not even look at the faults: who will not admit that there are faults. They will try to enhance even the smallest of the good quality in the other man and applaud him for it. They will ignore the faults even if they are innumerable.

"You, however, are lower than the lowest. You see a fault which does not exist. This is not surprising in one who does not realise the greatness of a really great person. My Lord treats you with indifference. Your behaviour does not affect him. But it hurts me and I cannot brook it. My husband is called "Siva": all that is holy and good and pure. You hate him because you are *Ashiva*.

"I have heard that when his God is insulted His *bhakta* should try to punish the wrong doer. If it is not possible for him to do so, if he is too weak to oppose the offender, he should at least run away from the spot so that the words may not reach his ears. A real devotee should not have a desire to live after hearing the words of insult spoken by the hater of the Lord. I am ashamed of this body of mine which owes its existence to you, a hater of Siva. I hate myself for being the daughter of a sinner like you. I do not want to be known as Dakshayani hereafter. This body has lived long enough. I will shed it."

Sati said nothing more. She sat down dressed in her gold coloured silk and closing her eyes went into a yogic trance. They were all watching her. Mentally she controlled her thoughts and invoked the god of fire to enter her. No one spoke a word. Suddenly her body began to bum with the fire which she had summoned and Sati was just a heap of ashes.

THE ANGER OF A GOD

When they saw Sati destroying herself the attendants of Sati rushed towards Daksha with the intention of killing him and thus avenge the death of their queen. Bhrigu saw them rushing and, invoking a *mantra* which destroys those who try to disturb a *yagnya*, he poured libations into the fire. Out of the fire was born a crowd of beings by name 'Ribhus'; they were more than a thousand in number. They fought with the servants of Mahadeva and drove them back.

In the meantime Sage Narada went to Mahadeva and related to him about the happenings at the *yagnyashala* and the tragic end of Sati; and also about the routing of the *Pramathaganas* by the power of Bhrigu.

Mahadeva was not surprised. He knew all along that something like this would happen. All his sorrow turned into anger. In his fury he pulled out a strand from his matted locks and fling it on the ground. Out of it was born Virabhadra, a fire-like form. He was fierce to look at. He was so big he seemed to measure the distance between the heavens and the earth. He had a thousand arms and he glowed like fire. He was dark like the rain cloud and his eyes were spitting fire. He was also wearing a garland of skulls like Mahadeva. He fell at the feet of his Lord and said: "What do you command me to do?" "Go", said Mahadeva. "Go to the *yagnyashala* of Daksha. Kill him and destroy everything there."

Followed by the attendants of Mahadeva Virabhadra hastened towards the *yagnyashala*. A fierce cry escaped him and he rushed toward the holy spot with an uplifted trident in his hand. The dust rising from the rush of the *Pramathaganas* was so great that those in the *yagnyashala* began to wonder what was happening. "What is happening in the north?" they asked themselves. "It cannot be night drawing near. It is a cloud of dust. Where does the dust come from? There is no breeze blowing. Perhaps it is *Pralaya*, the great deluge," they thought.

Daksha's wife Prasuti was afraid something dreadful was about to happen. She knew that this was imminent when she saw how her daughter had been insulted: when she burnt herself under their eyes. She knew the greatness of Mahadeva. How could one who defied him be safe from his wrath? Within a few moments the *yagnyashala* was surrounded by the angry *Pramathaganas* led by Virabhadra. Panic set in. Everyone was rushing everywhere. Maniman rushed towards Bhigu and captured him. Virabhadra caught hold of Daksha in his immense arms. Chandikeshvara pinned Pushan in his arms while Nandi got Bhaga as his share. Virabhadra pulled out the moustaches on the lips of Bhrigu. Bhaga, who had incited Daksa in his indifference towards Sati by just moving his eyebrows, suffered for what he had done. Both his eyes were destroyed. When Mahadeva was insulted long ago by Daksha in the other Yaga, Pushan had the indiscretion to laugh and now all his teeth were lost by the blow from the fist of this terrible henchman of Mahadeva.

Virabhadra then sat on the chest of Daksha and tried to cut off his head. But he was not able to do so. For a while he was non-plussed since no weapon could kill Daksha. He then realised that because of the fact that he was performing the *yagnya* Daksha was immune from weapons. Virabhadra now knew what he should do. He strangled Daksha with his bare hands. He then severed the head from the body and threw it into the fire as an offering. The *yagnyashala* was destroyed completely and the attendants led by Virabhadra returned to Kailasa.

A GOD'S FORGIVENESS

All those who had survived the massacre went to Brahma and related to him the great calamity that had befallen them. Brahma and Vishnu had not been present at the *yagnya* since they did not want to take part in a ritual which did not include Mahadeva: which, as a matter of fact, was being performed with the sole intention of insulting Mahadeva. When they told Brahma about the happenings at the *yagnyashala*, he said: "When a powerful man does something wrong his being powerful does not, in any way, justify his followers to behave in the same manner towards the victim of the injustice. It is not good. You sided with Daksha. When he performed the *yagnya* you attended it knowing fully well that it was a gesture of insult to Mahadeva. Since you have wronged him, there is nothing else for you to do except fall at the feet of Mahadeva and seek his pardon. He has been greatly wronged. His mind is still seething with pain because of the treatment of Daksha towards his beloved Sati. Sati is dead because of Daksha. If Mahadeva continues to be angry the world will come to an end. Go to him at once and pacify him.

Brahma then went to Kailasa the abode of Mahadeva. It was a picturesque spot. The river Nanda was flowing there. Facing the mountain was the city Alaka ruled by Kubera. The *devas* who were with Brahma stood rooted to the ground looking at the lake where the heavenly lotuses by name Saugandhika were floating. Nanda and her sister Alakananda were both flowing out of the city Alaka.

There was an immense banyan tree and under the tree they found Mahadeva immersed in *tapas*. His right hand was holding a string of beads. Brahma went near him and, accompanied by the *devas* who stood with folded palms, began to speak softly. He spoke words in praise of Mahadeva and there was a note of pleading underlying the chanting of the words. Mahadeva was roused out of his *yoga*. He knew that Brahma was there. He stood up from his seat and greeted Brahma by bending his head

with reverence. The others around also bowed before Brahma. Brahma accepted it all with a smile and spoke to Mahadeva: "Lord as you are, of the world, of the mind and the senses, it is but right that you should abandon this anger against humanity. You must forgive the faults of the ignorant. Please make it possible for the interrupted *yagnya* of Daksha to be completed. Forgive the *yajamanas* who denied you a share of the *havis*. Make the maimed whole again. Forgive all of them."

Mahadeva smiled at all of them and said: "I am not angry with all those who took part in the *yagnya*. But I had to punish Daksha. He had to be cured of his pride and his arrogance. Incidentally the others were also punished. Daksha can come back to life with the head of a goat. *Nandikeshwara's* words cannot become false! Daksha's mind is now cleansed. As for the maimed they will all be whole again."

Brahma asked him to go to the *yagnyashala* with them and he agreed. All that the Lord said came true. Daksha rose up as out of a deep sleep and he found that he was in the presence of the *devas*, Brahma and Mahadeva. His mind which had been clouded because of his hatred for the Lord had now become clear like an autumn lake. He tried to speak but he could not. Tears choked him: tears at the thought of his daughter, his beloved child Sati who had to die because he, her father was blind to the glory of her lord. He composed himself and spoke words speaking of the greatness of Mahadeva. He said: "I insulted you and the world thinks that you have punished me for it. But in reality, what you did is an act of grace. Vishnu and you have so much affection for mankind. Even when ignorant brahmins behave as though they know so much you smile indulgently at them and unmindful of their stupidity you are kind to them. When such is the case, how can anyone imagine that you have punished me, who has ever been doing all that my father had asked me to do. It is unfortunate that I, who should have known so much, knew nothing. The reality escaped me while I was caught in a web of illusion. That made me behave foolishly. In the midst of everyone I hurled insult after insult at you. And yet, you have so much affection for me. Unmindful of what I have done you have made me clean. You have given me a new birth so that I will use it better. All that I can do is to fall at your feet and ask for your pardon."

The *yagnya* was resumed. Lord Narayana appeared and the three gods presided over the *yagnya*. When it was ended Daksha honoured the gods, the *devas* and all the guests properly. The *devas* returned to their abode after the conclusion of the great eventful *Yagnya*. Daksha was now freed of his proud and arrogant nature and he was a highly chastened person.

Only, Sati was dead.

A CHILD'S RESOLVE

Uttanapada, the son of Manu, had two wives: Suniti and Suruchi. Suniti had a son named Dhruva and Suruchi's son was called Uttama. Suniti, however, was not dear to the king. Suruchi was his favourite queen.

Once the king was in the garden playing with Uttama. He had taken him on his lap and he was petting the child. To him came Dhruva and he wanted to sit on his father's lap too. He was trying to do so. Suruchi saw it and rushing near, she dragged him away from his father saying: "You are the son of the king, no doubt. But you are not my son and so you will not have the privilege of sitting on your father's lap. You are striving for the impossible. You do not seem to be able to realise that you are unfortunate. Your misfortune is just this: you are the son of another woman. If you want to sit on your father's lap like Uttama then you will have to perform a long penance. Pray to the Lord to make you the son of Suruchi in your next birth."

The king was listening to her. He did not speak a word in protest since he was infatuated with his wife. Hurt by the cruel words of his stepmother. Dhruva, hissing like a wounded serpent, looked accusingly at his father who was sitting silent. Dhruva rushed from there and went to his mother. Without speaking a word he began to cry loudly. The mother placed him on her lap and, after comforting him she got the story out of the others who were present when the child was pushed so rudely by Suruchi. Suniti could do nothing but weep. Drowned as she was in sorrow, still, she did not lose her gentle nature.

She said: "My child remember one fact and that is, when one wishes someone ill, that ill is visited on the wisher. So never, at any time, think ill of others. The king does not like me. He does not want me to serve him even as a hand-maid. Such an unfortunate woman happens to be your mother. What Suruchi said is true. Because you are my son you do not

have the privilege of sitting on the king's lap. Do not be angry with your stepmother because she has spoken words which have wounded you. On the contrary do what she asked you to do. Pray to Lord Narayana who is the greatest among the great: who is the refuge of all those who are sufferers. Take refuge in the feet of the Lord who is the refuge of all the gods, of Brahma, and of your grandfather Manu and all the denizens of the heavens. Become attached to Him and only to Him. Speak His name and see His form. Pray to Him. He is sure to rid you of all unhappiness. I can see no other way of comforting you."

Dhruva was bent on doing what his mother said would be good for him. He left his father's city and wandered about without knowing how to set about his penance. Narada, with his *yogic* powers knew about Dhruva. Perhaps he was reminded of his earlier *janma* when he was just such a child, wandering in quest of God. He told himself: "I must help this child. He is a *kshatriya* and he has been hurt by the words of his stepmother." Narada hurried to where Dhruva was and, placing his hand on the child's head blessed him. He said: "You are still a child. You are just five years old. Your place is by the side of your toys and such things. You are still too young to let insult or approbation have so much influence on your mind. In this world good and bad, praise and censure, are all the result of one's own actions and nothing else.

It is man's delusion which causes these. If God's Grace is with you then unhappiness will never come near you. His Grace: is the only thing needed. If it is not there no amount of energy or attempt will bear any fruit. It is up to you to be satisfied with what the Lord metes out to you as your share of pleasure or pain.

"Your mother has told to you that you should take refuge in Narayana. And I know you are bent on performing *tapas* and finding him. My child, do you not know that it is not easy to please Him? *Rishis* and *yogis* have performed penance for years on end and still they have not been able to see him. It needs concentration: it needs sacrifice: it needs a sense of detachment and patience: *tapas* spread over *janma* after *janma*. And still, in spite of all these, He is very hard to find. Please give up this quest. Abandon this childish obstinacy. You can come back to it later. Penance is

a course to be adopted by you when you are in your old age. God has ordained that man should enjoy a certain share of happiness and a certain share of sorrow. It is not right to rebel against the law of nature. The wise say that a man's *punya* decreases when he enjoys the good things of life and that his *papa* decreases when sorrow visits him. And so, he reaches the very boon of release from both if he learns to be even-tempered: unaffected by either. When you see one more fortunate than you, it is not right that you should be jealous of him. You should show him affection. And if you see a man lacking in good qualities you should be sorry for him and not hate him or sneer at him. If you meet one who is your equal you should then be friendly with him. Such a man will never be unhappy."

Dhruva said: "It is my good fortune that I have met you. It is fortunate that I should have found you who can tell me clearly the secret, the real secret, about pleasure and pain and how to be unaffected by either. And yet, because of my being an undisciplined *kshatriya*, perhaps, the words of Suruchi have hurt me abominably and your words do not reach my very inside. They ought to impress me but they do not. Please have pity on me and my ignorance. Teach me the method by which I can reach the Lord. I want to attain a state higher than the highest and I want to pray to the Lord to grant me that. Please teach me. You are, I have heard, born as the son of Brahma: and you wander all over the universe plucking the strings of your *vina* with but one aim: to do good to mankind. Please have compassion on me."

Narada was charmed by the naivety and sweetness of the words spoken by Dhruva and he made up his mind to help him. He said: "The path suggested by your mother is the correct path. I will grant you what you desire. The ultimate refuge of all is Narayana. Pray to Him. Set your mind steadfastly on him. It is known to all that any desire will be granted by Him when He is asked.

"Set your mind on Narayana. He will hear your prayers. May you be successful in your endeavour.

"My child, go to the banks of the river Yamuna where the Lord is always present. Go to the holy spot which is called Madhuvana. Bathe in the pure

waters of the river Yamuna three times a day and, doing *pranayama*, set your mind on the Lord and His form. He is easily pleased. I will teach you the *mantra*—the incantation—reciting which you will be able to summon the Lord to your presence. The *mantra* is: "AUM NAMO BHAGAVATE VASUDEVAYA". When this *mantra* is constantly repeated the Lord will grant you all your desires. This is called *Bhakti yoga* and it is the easiest of the yogas. It is also very dear to Lord Narayana.

Narada then described in detail the form of the Lord and Dhruva fixed the image in his mind even as he heard it being described. His mind was filled with Narayana lying on Ananta the great snake. The child could already see the lotus rising from the navel of the lord. He could visualise the yellow silk which draped the form of the Lord and the tender smile on his lips and the compassion in his lotus eyes.

Dhruva made *pradakshina* to Narada and fell at his feet. Taking leave of his *guru* the young child walked towards Madhuvana on the banks of the Yamuna.

DHURVA'S TAPAS

On the banks of the river Yamuna, at the holy spot by name Madhuvana Dhruva began to perform the penance as taught by Narada. For the first month he lived on the fruits which were found in the forest. The second month he sustained himself by eating grass and dried leaves. The third month, only water held his life in the body. During the fourth month he denied himself even that. The air he breathed was the only food he was taking. He was bent on only one thing: the *mantra* which he had learnt from Narada. Mentally he repeated the *mantra*: "Aum Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya" and this was all that mattered to the child who was hardly five years old.

The *devas* found his *tapas* too terrible. They tried to bring obstacles to his concentration. Wild animals and serpents and even evil spirits were sent to frighten the young child. But he heeded them not. So intense was his absorption that he did not even know that they were there. He was intent only on his *tapas*. The three worlds began to tremble in fear because of it and the *devas* at last went to Narayana. They said: "Lord, never has this happened before. All living beings are finding that they cannot breathe because Dhruva is intent on his *tapas*. Please have mercy on us and stop this penance." Narayana said: "I will now go to him and make him desist from this *tapas*. It has lasted five months. I must bless the child who is my *bhakta*."

Narayana came to the banks of the Yamuna. Dhruva found his heart suddenly bereft of the image of the Lord which he had been seeing all these days. He was roused from his *Samadhi* and when he opened his eyes Dhruva found the Lord in front of him. The child was overcome by the suddenness of it all. He looked at the form of the Lord as though he would drink him with his eyes. He held out his arms as if to embrace the Lord. His eyes were raining tears and his face was wreathed in smiles. He fell at the feet of the Lord and stood up looking at him and still he kept on

looking. His lips moved but he could not speak a word. So he stood for a while.

Lord Narayana knew what the child wanted. Dhruva wanted to praise him but he could not, since he did not know how. He knew not the words. And so Narayana gently touched the young boy's cheek with his conch which was snow-white and which is said to personify the *Vedas*. The moment the conch touched his face Dhruva became enlightened. He became articulate. His words were those of *rishis* when they talk of the glories of the Lord.

Dhruva said: "I salute you, who entered into me and gave me the power to speak. My lord, my power of speech was asleep and you gave it an awakening. You pervade the *indriyas*, the sense organs and with your power you give them life. You are the One Truth. You create the illusion, *Maya* and you the creator of the *Mahat* and *Aham tattvas*: you have created the three *gunas* and the presiding deities of the *indriyas*. And you enter these, all of these and remain in them like fire residing inside the *arani*. People who do not know the truth about you think this *Maya* to be other than you. Brahma was granted the vision which made him see the world like a sleeper viewing the dream from which he is awakened. How can anyone forget you, who is everything? You will rid man of births and deaths if he worships you. If ignorant men worship you and ask favours of you, favours like the gratification of small desires, then that man is really unfortunate since he has been well and truly deceived by *Maya*. Having seen you who is the *Kalpavriksha* granting immortality, if a man asks for pleasures enjoyed by the mortal body, is he not the most unfortunate amongst men?

"The ecstasy which one experiences by thinking on you and by listening to stories about you: stories related by your *bhaktas*, is even greater than the Brahmi state which is nothing but bliss.

"As for ordinary mortal man who exists for pleasure only, he is like one sailing in a chariot which has been hurled suddenly to the earth by a sweep of the sword named Death: he will never know the ecstasy of knowing you. When even the *Brahmi* state cannot equal the joy achieved by the thoughts of you do I have to mention the unfortunate condition of men who live in

the world of pleasure thinking it is great joy and who die when their time comes, like dry leaves falling from a tree? Please grant me only this: that I will think on you night and day. And grant me the company of noble souls who are your *bhaktas*. In the company of such people, listening to your glories all the time I can become drunk with joy. And so I can cross this fearful, pain-filled ocean called "Birth and Death" without any trouble.

"When a man becomes happy in the company of your *bhaktas* he will not think of this perishable body of his nor about those who are dear to him. His wife and his children and his house, wealth and belongings mean nothing to him. As for me, I have been granted a sight of this your form. But I am not able to comprehend your form as the *Ishvara*, the cause of the cosmos. It is therefore evident that my mind is not completely free of desires. I am not seeing the form of you which is sleeping in *yoga* trance after the great deluge. The entire universe is withdrawn into you and your bed is Ananta, the other form of Time. Out of your navel is born Brahma. I imagine that form of yours and prostrate before it.

"I am still the *Jivatma* and you are the *Paramatma*. You are pure and the *Jiva* is not. It is tainted with desires. You are knowledge and the *Jiva* is ignorance: Avidya. You are life and *Jiva* is inert. You are imperishable while the *Jiva* suffers under the delusion that it is ever undergoing change. You are the ancient and the *Jiva* is fated to have births. You control the *gunas* but the *Jiva* is their slave.

"I salute you who are the *Brahman*, the *Purusha*, the cause of this Universe."

Narayana was pleased with his young worshipper. He said:

"I know what made you take upon yourself this difficult task. I will grant you what you wanted then. I am assigning for you a place which is eternal.

"I have decided to place you so that the sun and moon will revolve round it: which will be circumambulated by the seven *rishis*: the stars will wheel round you.

"Your father will crown you king after he renounces the kingdom and goes in search of peace. You will ever be devoted to me and to my *bhaktas*. In

their company will be spent all your time. You will rule the world for thirty thousand years. You will perform many *yagnyas* and finally you will see me again. You will reach me ultimately."

The Lord vanished from his sight and Dhruva was left alone, living the moment over and over, again and again in his mind. The young child thought of returning to the city ruled by his father. He was glad in a way, but his heart was not quite elated at the turn of events. He told himself: "I have seen the Lord, Narayana and his presence blessed me. I attained the joy which even *rishis* like Sanaka and Sanatkumara have not attained. Fool that I was, I did not ask for *moksha*. It is just my misfortune that my mind was clouded. Sage Narada spoke rightly when he said: "This is not the age to take insults and applause to heart." I was foolish to have disregarded his words. The Lord has granted me a boon far inferior to *Moksha*. I should have asked for release from the bondage called life on earth. But I did not do so. My ego, evidently, is not completely destroyed and so my mind became clouded. I became a beggar and I am ashamed of myself."

THE CONSTANT STAR

After he had spoken to Dhruva the sage Narada went to the palace of Uttanapada. When he had been welcomed properly and given a seat of honour Narada addressed the king: "Why do you look depressed? Has any calamity befallen you or your kingdom?" The king sighed deeply and said: "I have been heartless. Obsessed as I have been with my love for a woman I allowed my young son of five to be driven away from me. He is wandering about in the forest. Will he not be hungry and thirsty? How can his tender form bear the difficulties of living in the forest? He will surely be eaten up the wolves and other wild animals in the dreadful forest. He wanted to sit on my lap and my blindness was so much that it prevented me from letting him do so. Hurt by my indifference and by the cruel words of my wife the poor child has left me and gone away. Are you surprised then, that I am depressed?"

Narada smiled at him and said: "Please stop mourning for your son who is protected by Narayana Himself. Your son will be the greatest among men. You do not know greatness of Dhruva. Nor are you aware of the future of this 'Child' as you call him. Your son will achieve what the *devas* have not been able to: and, because of him, your name will live in the world for ever. You will be known as Uttanapada, the father of the great Dhruvaswami. Do not worry. Dhruva will come to you very soon."

Five months passed and the king was impatiently marking time. News reached him that his son was returning from the forest. With the entire city following him the king went out to receive the young boy. Suniti and Suruchi were with him and Uttama, the younger son of the king. Dhruva reached the outskirts of the city and the king spied him from a distance. Jumping out of his chariot Uttanapada ran to his son and embraced him with tears in his eyes. Dhruva fell at the feet of his father and of his

mothers. Suruchi embraced him and with her voice faltering because of emotion she said: "May you live long."

Years passed. The king installed Dhruva as the king and abandoned the kingdom for a life of penance in the forest. Years later, after ruling the kingdom wisely and well, and after performing several *yagnyas* and *ashvamedha yagas*, Dhruva realised that he had ruled the earth for thirty thousand years. The words of the Lord had always remained in his mind: that after thirty thousand years of doing his duty as a king he would be free to seek comfort at the feet of Narayana.

Dhruva, with a smile of happiness at the thought of his imminent freedom, installed his son on the throne and went to Badarikashrama to perform *tapas*. He was impatient to shed the earthly body which was confining his *atman*. He was immersed in *yoga* as he was, years ago. He was blind and deaf to everything around him.

A glowing chariot reached his presence and out of it came divine beings who were the servants of Narayana. He honoured them and they said: "Years ago when you were a child of five you prayed to the Lord and he granted you a place in the heavens: a place higher than that of anyone except Himself. Even the sun and the moon and the stars and the seven *rishis* will make *pradakshina* to you and they will never reach your eminence. All the other stars and planets will alter their course in the heavens but you will be constant, never swerving from your place. Please enter the chariot and reach your appointed place."

As he was about to enter the chariot Death came near Dhruva and bowing to him said: "My lord, please accept me." Dhruva said: "I welcome you" and placing his foot on the bowed head of Death. Dhruva entered the chariot.

THE BIRTH OF VENA

Utkala was the son of Dhruva. He was a great philosopher. Even when he was young he had reached the *Brahmi* state. He did not care for the throne and the pomp and splendour of the royal court. In fact he took so little interest in the ruling of the kingdom that people mistook him to be ignorant and dull. He did not bother about his appearance and those who looked at him would not pay him any respect. Finally the elders of the city thought that he was not in the least efficient. They crowned his younger brother Vatsara as king.

One of the descendants of Vatsara was a king by name Anga. He was a *Rajarshi* and once he performed the *Ashvamedha*. At the end of the *yaga* the *devas* are supposed to come to receive their share of the *havis*. But when they were summoned by incantations the *devas* would not come and receive their dues. Everyone was surprised and they asked the *yajamana*, the king. They said: "O king, the *devas* have not appeared to accept your oblations into the fire. We can assure you that we have performed the *yaga* without any mistake being committed. There is no fault on our part. We do not know why the *devas* have not come."

The king was sorely distressed. He addressed those who had assembled there: "You are all wise men and you all wish me well. The *devas*, as you have seen, have not responded to our summons. Can anyone tell me what my fault is? What has been committed that should not have, in a situation like this? I do not know why it has happened. Can no one find out the reason why?"

The wise men spoke. They said: "O king of kings, you are not to blame in the performance of the *yaga*. We know the reason for this. You are a man of great virtue, no doubt. But you have not been sinless in your previous birth. As a result of that you are childless. We will try to help you. You can perform another *yagnya* with the purpose of getting a son. Lord Narayana

who will be worshipped will be so pleased that he will himself gratify your desire. When they see that Narayana himself is pleased to bless you with a son the *devas* who will be with him will come to you and receive their share of the *havis*."

They took it upon themselves to perform a *yagnya* which was to honour Narayana. When the *yaga* was coming to an end out of the fire rose up a form wearing golden ornaments and in his hand he held a vessel made of gold. He held it out to the king who found divine *payasa* inside it. With the blessings of the elders who had assembled there the king smelt the *payasa* and gave it to his wife Sunita.

In course of time a son was born to the king. This son born of the sacrifice was, however the abode of *adharma*. Even when he was a child, he enjoyed hurting living beings. As he grew older he would go into the forest to hunt. But he was bent on hunting at will and on killing gentle and harmless animals. He was so cruel that people would avoid him. When he appeared in sight men would say: "Here comes Vena, the cruel prince" and run away from the spot. While playing with his companions he would kill them without any compunction.

The king tried his best to bring him round to the right path. He tried all the four methods: *Sama*, *Dana*, *Bedha* and *Danda*. But it was of no avail. He was unable to change the nature of his son. The king was very unhappy. He told himself: "God is kind towards those who have no children: because they are not unhappy as the result of the atrocities committed by a bad son. Because of being the father of a bad son a man inherits infamy, hatred of all man and endless mental pain. The really wise man will never desire to have a son when the entire house and the family and the country is unhappy because of this one bad son.

"But when I think of myself I feel that God has been really good to me in giving me a bad son instead of a good and well behaved one. Because of the unhappiness caused by this son I have become disgusted with my home and my very life. I dare not move about in the presence of good men, burdened with the sin of having produced this son. A good son would not have let his father adopt the path of renunciation so soon. I would have

been bound to my family and this bondage has been severed because of the behaviour of my son."

The king was very unhappy. No one could talk to him since he was drowned in his own misery.

One night he was tossing to and fro sleeplessly on his bed. Suddenly he made up his mind. The poor unfortunate king Anga abandoned his bed and with it, his home, his wife and all the things of this world. He walked away quietly from the city never to return.

The subjects were grief-stricken at the departure of the king. They knew that the son's sinfulness had made the father adopt this course. King Anga had gone in search of peace. The ministers and other wise men of the city went on a deputation to the *rishis* and asked them for advice. They said that a kingdom had to have a king and so, much as they disapproved of him, the ministers had to crown the wicked Vena as king.

THE RULE OF VENA

There followed a reign of terror. Bad as he was already, Vena's behaviour became incorrigible after he became king. He was drunk with power and the immense wealth of the kingdom served only to enhance his arrogance. He had no respect for the elders and he made it a point to insult them whenever he could. He won the reputation as the most arrogant, cruel and heartless king that ever sat on a throne. He gave orders that there should be no sacrifices, no *homas*, no *yagas* to be performed anywhere.

The wise conferred again and considered ways and means to stop this anarchy. It was daily getting worse. They were caught on the horns of a dilemma. If the king were to rule the country as he was doing now the subjects would not be able to bear it much longer. On the other hand, if there were no king, robbers and highwaymen would raid the country and again the subjects would suffer. Vena had been made king since it was imperative that there should be a king. It was known to all that he was unfit for the task but they never bargained for this state of affairs. He was the cause of fear for everyone. They thought they would try and see if it would be possible for someone to instil some sense of duty in him by talking to him seriously about it. They were responsible for his becoming king and so they felt that it was again their responsibility to try and rectify the fault.

The ministers went to the *rishis* and they agreed to do their best. They went to the presence of the king and suppressing with difficulty the anger which was uppermost in their minds they spoke to him in soft and gentle words. They said: "Dear son, please listen to our words carefully. Your life, your wealth and your good name are all involved in danger. *Dharma* when practised with purity of mind, thought, word and deed will lead to greatness. This *adharma* which you are practising is not good either for you or for your country. You should protect your subjects and not harass

them. The king who does not worship righteousness or god is doomed to hell. You should perform *yagnyas* and please the gods. On the contrary you have stopped them from being performed. You are acting wrongly. Take our advice. Improve your ways. Even now it is not too late. There is hope of prosperity for the subjects and salvation for you if you listen to us. Abandon this type of rule and be good to all." King Vena turned a deaf ear to all their pleadings. He said: "You are the ones who are following the path of *adharma* and not me. You worship another god instead of me, who is your protector. The king is the image of god and he should be worshipped as god and no one else. All the celestial beings find a home in the body of a king who has been anointed and it is but right that I am the one to be worshipped. I am Narayana in person, worthy of the highest honour. People who do not know this truth will go to hell and not myself. You are like women who are unfaithful to their lords. Who is this *yagnya purusha* whom are talking about? He is the king. Hereafter you must perform *yagnyas* in my honour: *homas* for me and sacrifices in my name. No one else is worthy of worship except me, your king."

The *rishis* were horrified by his words. They looked at him for a while and they thought of the future of the country with this tyrant on the throne. The anger which they had been keeping inside their hearts flared up at the words of Vena and they could not brook the insults hurled at them. They thought to themselves: "This man deserves to die. He equals himself to Yagyeshvara Narayana and he has thus sealed his own fate. He has already been killed by the Lord for his arrogance. We will have to destroy him for the sake of protecting his subjects."

With their minds they invoked the god of Death and Vena was dead. The *rishis* went back to their ashramas without looking back.

PRITHU, THE GREAT

Some time passed. Since there was no king to rule the country robbers and thieves found it a good opportunity to loot the city. Once, when the *rishis* were sitting on the banks of the river Sarasvati they found a cloud dust at a distance. Curious as to what it was caused by, they investigated and found that the dust was raised by a band of robbers who were riding back after looting the city which was without a lord. The *rishis* knew how wrong it was for a country to be without a ruler. They realised that they had, to an extent, been responsible for the present state of affairs and they felt that they should do something to save the people from this series of misfortunes: the rule of a bad king and on top of that, the fear of robbers.

The *rishis* knew that Sunita, the wife of Anga had been so fond of her son that she would not let his body be cremated. She had preserved it with medicinal herbs and by some magical powers which she possessed. They went to her and asked for the body of Vena. The *rishis* now churned the thigh of the body and out of it came a dark and ugly person who was the personification of the evil that was in Vena. This newly born person was called Nishada and his descendants were also called Nishadas later on.

The *rishis* then proceeded to churn the right arm of the body and the left arm also. Out of them were born a man and a woman. They were the incarnations of Narayana and Lakshmi. The *rishis* adored them and said: "This man will be named PRITHU and she will be ARCHIS. They will be man and wife and the world will be glorious because of the rule of this king Prithu."

Brahma and the other *devas* came down to the earth to honour the great event: the birth of Prithu.

When Prithu was born heavenly music was heard. The *siddhas* rained flowers on earth. All the *devarshis* and *devas* led by Brahma came down to

the earth to see the new-born child. Brahma looked at the right-hand of the child and said: "Lo! This child is born with the mark of the chakra in his hand and the sign of the lotus is found on his feet. He is the incarnation of Narayana who has taken this form to protect the world."

When he was old enough for it, Prithu was crowned as king. Everyone brought a gift for the new king. Even the rivers, oceans, mountains, trees, cows, birds, deer brought gifts. The sky, and the earth, and all living beings brought him gifts. Prithu glowed on the throne wet with the waters of the holy rivers which were poured on him when he was anointed. He had Archis by his side.

The *devas* brought him gifts: they were their personal belongings. Kubera the lord of the North, lord of the *Gandharvas*, brought for him a beautiful seat. Varuna brought an umbrella which was white like the moon. The god of wind, Vayu gave him *chamaras* while Dharma's gift was a garland. Indra gave him a Crown and Yama, a sceptre by name Sanyamanam. Brahma had brought for him an armour protected by Vedas and Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, gave him a string of pearls. Narayana gave him a chakra and his wife, wealth. Rudra gave a sword and Parvati, a shield. The moon gave horses as white as nectar and *Tvashtar*, a beautiful chariot. Agni gave a bow and the Sun, arrows like his rays. The earth gave him sandals which would carry him wherever he wanted to go. The heavens sent him flowers from their gardens, every day. The *devas'* gift was dance, music, sweet instruments, the power to become invisible at will. The *rishis* gave their blessings. The sea yielded up her conchs for the king while the rivers gave him pathways across them whenever he wanted to cross them.

The Vandhis, Sutas and Magadhis began to praise him in glorious terms. He smiled at them and raising his voice which was as beautiful, as the rumbling of a rain cloud he said: "Please forbear from praising me like this with your sweet words. I am yet a novice in the art of ruling. I have not yet proved myself to be fit enough to hear the praises which you are trying to shower on me. Please praise the Lord and not me. When I really prove to be a good king you can then praise me as much as you please. Not now. And again, when such great and celebrated people more deserving of

your words of praise, are assembled here, it is not right that I should be the subject of your eulogy.

No man who is really humble will dare to accept praises in anticipation of possessing the qualities mentioned. Even if a man is great, efficient, famed all the world over, still, a humble man will not allow praises to be sung in his presence. Please do not continue this recital of my glory which is highly embarrassing.

When he was crowned as king the *rishis* called him Prithu, the great: the protector of the world.

PRITHU'S ANGER

Prithu was crowned as the king of the land and the gods had called him "The Protector of the world". The king took the words seriously and he found that he had a difficult task ahead of him. He found that his subjects were all thin and extremely weak. They were underfed, undernourished and this was a painful state of affairs. The subjects spoke to him and they said: "My lord, please give us food. Like a tree is burnt by the fire concealed in its hollows we are slowly consumed by the fire of hunger. Our vitals are suffering and we are unable to do our work. Give us food. We have been told that the *rishis* churned the old king and you were born out of his body to protect us. Please save us from this hunger which is killing us."

Prithu pondered for a moment and he realised the cause of their hunger. He realised that the earth had swallowed up all the nourishing and health-giving seeds and would not give them up: would not let them grow. Prithu was very angry with her for this act of hers and he decided to punish her. He took up his divine bow and sent an arrow to hurt the earth. Mother earth became frightened and taking the form of a cow fled from him. With her tail raised aloft, with her legs trembling because of her panic earth rushed all over the surface of the earth. With his eyes red with anger Prithu pursued her wherever she went. She ran down the slopes of the mountains: she fled into the valleys: she ran towards the thickets and dense forests hoping to escape from him. Still he pursued her relentlessly. Wherever she went the earth looked back and found him following her with his bow bent. She could find no one to protect her. Finally she came to him and fell at his feet. She said: "Please protect me. You are a righteous king and you should not harass a woman like this. You know that it is wrong to kill a woman. Even if she is guilty a woman should not be killed. Yet you are trying to kill me and I have not done you any harm.

And again, if you destroy me how are you going to establish your kingdom?"

Prithu said: "You have been in the wrong, mother earth. That is why I am trying to punish you. In the *yagnyas* which are performed by men your share of the *havis* is given to you and in return you are not giving us food. You are not doing your duty and I have to punish you. In the form of a cow you eat grass every day and you do not give us milk. You are selfish. You have dared to ignore my rule. You are hiding within yourself the health-giving herbs which Brahma gave you long ago. My subjects are all suffering from hunger and they have to be comforted. Anyone who does not think of the good of others, be he man or woman, should be killed by a king and this killing will not be considered a sin. I know *Dharma Shashtra* and you do not have to teach me the nuances of it! I will have no qualms in killing you and I will feed my subjects with your flesh. As for you kingdom, with my *yoga* I will be able to establish it."

His angry brows and his thunderlike voice and the bow which was still drawn made the earth tremble. She said: "I know you to be the Lord of lords. You have created me so that I can be the home of living and non-living things. You have made me the mother of all these. If you then take arms against me who will help me? When I was buried deep under the sea in the nether world you were the one to lift me up and establish me firmly above the oceans. That same Varaha is you and you have taken a human form to protect me and my children. And yet, what do I see? My lord and master is threatening to kill me with the dreadful arrow in his hand. The ways of the Lord cannot be understood by ignorant persons like me. Please have compassion on me.

"Please listen to me and my plea. A bee collects honey from different flowers, drop by drop and it makes its own honey. This needs so much of effort on the part of the bee. A wise man collects truths from different people and different places. He assimilates them all and makes the wisdom his own. Even so, to get the best out of me, great effort is needed. The *rishis* had stipulated several tasks for men to get the best out of *this* world: and several rituals and *yagas* to become fit for the next world. Those who have followed this right path: those who have followed these rules set by

the ancients sincerely have been able to reap the benefits. When the men were all righteous they were doing what the *rishis* had stipulated.

"But then, as time passed, sinners like Vena began to rule me. Sinfulness became rampant on my surface. Thieves and unjust kings began to harass me and there was no one to protect me. Ignored as I was, by everyone, I realised that the herbs and the other precious plants which Brahma had given me as gifts were being used by unworthy men. I decided that the men on the earth were not fit enough to taste my seeds and my herbs and so I swallowed them. You are right when you say that I have hidden them. They do not grow on my surface any more. It is now up to you to get the best out of me. If you use the proper technique you will be able to get them all out of me.

"Provide me with a calf which will make me yield milk. Provide yourself with the proper vessel into which the milk can be drawn. Look for the man fit enough to milk me. Level the surface of me so that the rains from the heavens will stay on my surface and not flow away leaving me arid." Prithu stood listening to the words of mother earth. The arrow dropped out of his hand and the bow slipped from his shoulder unheeded. His eyes became thoughtful. He told her: "You are right, Devi. It is up to me to find a way of getting the best out of you. Man had been asked to work. He had been asked to plough you, plant seeds in you and tend the growth of plants in you. The heavens had to send the rains in the proper seasons and then man's patience would be rewarded by you gladly. And man has been forgetting your worth. He has taken you for granted. 'Like mother earth in patience', is a proverb which has been in use since ever so long. When such a mother has lost her patience then the world has become really a sinful place. Do not grieve. I will set it right."

THE MILKING OF MOTHER EARTH

After long deliberation Prithu made Manu the calf and he was himself the milker. He milked out of her all the herbs and seeds which were needed for his subjects. He then told everyone that they could all get what they wanted out of her if they were able to get the proper calf and the proper one to milk her.

The wise ones then milked knowledge out of her. The *rishis* made Brihaspati their calf and milked the Vedas. The vessel which held this milk was made up of the powers of speech and hearing and the mind. Indra was the calf whom the *devas* selected. They used a golden vessel to get nectar (Soma); mental strength (Virya); strength of the senses (Ojas); and physical strength (Bala). *Daityas* and *Danavas* brought as their calf Prahlada and the wines named Sura and Asava were milked into an iron vessel. The *gandharvas* had a vessel made of lotuses and they, with the *apsaras* made their calf to be Vishvavasu and music was the milk they got out of her; music which was sweet to the ears and which was composed with beautiful words.

In an unburnt earthen vessel the *pitris* with Aryama as their calf, milked Gavya (food for the Manes) out of her. Kapila was the calf for the Siddhas who milked out of her the *siddhis*: Anima and the Vidyadharas obtained the power to wander at will in the sky. Kimpurushas milked Maya out of her and the calf was Maya.

Yakshas, Rakshasas, Bhutas and Pishachas made Rudra their calf: the skull as their vessel and they asked for wine mixed with blood. The reptiles had Takshaka as their calf and out of the earth they milked poison; their vessel was the snake pit. The cows had the bull for their calf and they got plenty of grass for themselves.

The calf chosen by the trees was the pipal tree and the milk they obtained from the earth was the life-giving sap. The mountains milked conchs and precious things out of her and Himavan was their calf.

Each one and everyone got what he wanted out of her. The best of each group was the calf for them.

Prithu was so pleased with the earth and her bounty, her unstinting gifts, that he made her his beloved daughter. It is since then that mother earth began to be called PRITHVI.

With the tip of his bow Prithu crushed and crumpled the tops of the mountains: filled up the ravines on the surface of the earth and levelled her. He was the first king that ever won the hearts of the people and from his time kings have been called "Rajas." "Ranj" means: to charm. "Ranjayati iti Raja". Prithu was the Adiraja.

NINETY-NINE ASHVAMEDHAS

At a certain spot upon the banks of the river Sarasvati can be discerned a bend in the river. Here the river changes her course and begins to flow towards the east. It is here that the other celestial river Dhrishadvati joins her and flows along with her. The two rivers enclose a piece of land. The *devas* considered it sacred and called it Brahmavarta.

On the holy spot King Prithu decided to perform a hundred *ashvamedhas*. When they heard about the decision of the king everyone brought the necessary things as gifts. The earth took the form of a cow and poured into the *yagnyashala* all that was needed: like the sacred *havis*, milk, butter and other sacred articles. The rivers flowed into the *yagnyashala* carrying the juices of the sugar-cane and the grape. The trees gave fruits filled with honey. The seas brought precious stones, and the mountains, four different types of edibles. All the guests came with their hands laden with gifts for the king.

Narayana, Mahadeva, Brahma, the *dikpalakas*, the great *rishis* from the heavens, *gandharvas* and *apsaras* were all there in the *yagnyashala*. Ninety-nine *yagnyas* were completed.

Indra, who became Indra because he had performed a hundred *ashvamedhas*, whose other name is "Shatakratu", became worried about the security of his position. He was also jealous of the glory of Prithu whose praises were sung everywhere. He could not brook the fact that a mere mortal could be more wonderful than himself. Indra therefore decided to disturb the *yagnya* and the fulfilment of the hundredth *yagnya*.

While the *yagnya* was in progress Indra assumed the guise of a Pashandi and stole the sacrificial horse. The disguise was almost an armour since it gave everyone the impression that he was a *sadhu*, a holy man. The son of Prithu got ready to chase the thief and rescue the horse. The sage Atri

pointed out to the prince Indra with the horse. The young man rushed to give a chase to the thief. When he went near, he saw a mendicant dressed in saffron robes with his hair all matted and with his form covered with ashes. The young prince thought that he was chasing a saint by mistake and did not hurt him with his arrows. When he came back Atri said: "Child! this man who has stolen your horse is Indra who is unfit to be a *deva*. The only way to punish him is to kill him. Do not hesitate to do so." Once again the prince pursued the divine offender. Indra vanished from his sight leaving the horse behind. Triumphant the young man led the horse into the *yagnyashala* and the people were so pleased with his great achievement that he was, from then on, called "VIJITASHVA". Once again Indra tried his tricks. A sudden darkness fell on the *yagnyashala* and Indra, under cover of this, stole the horse along with the chain of gold which was used to bind it to the stake. Atri showed him to the spectators. Again he was dressed as a mendicant and again Vijitashva was deceived into believing that he was a holy man. Again, incited by Atri, and again furious because he had been so easily deceived, Vijitashva sent his scorching arrows towards Indra. Indra abandoned the horse and vanished once again.

These tactics of Indra were having an adverse effect on the people. His guise was so attractive and deceptive: they looked so charming and were apt to create the impression of holiness which was not there. People began to use them: adopt them for their use: to serve their purposes. Hypocrites and false saints began to wander on the face of the earth and no one could see the difference between the true and the false.

Prithu saw all this and was very angry with Indra. He took up his bow and arrows. When they saw his anger the Ritviks stopped him from drawing his bow. They said: "It is not done, O king. You are the performer of the sacrifice. And you are not allowed to kill unless it is sanctioned by the rites. However, with our powerful *mantras* we will summon Indra to the *yagnyashala* and we will sacrifice him in the fire." "So be it", said Prithu. They were about to begin the incantations when Brahma intervened and said: "What you propose is not right. This Indra, whom you are trying to summon in order to sacrifice him, is an *avatara* of Narayana and should not be insulted by you. Yagnya, the son of Akuti and Svayambhu Manu's

grandson is the Indra for that Manvantara and the Lord took the form of Yagnya for this purpose. Now look on the terrible consequences of Indra's disguises. He has created for the benefit of sinners this Pashandi guise which will nurture sin and deceit. Let there not be an increase in this sinfulness. Indra wanted to prevent you from performing the hundredth *yagnya* since he thought you would then become his equal. You must forget this ire against Indra. You are both *avatars* of Narayana. Should you not be friends? Forget the fact that there was an interruption to the *yagnya*. Let not your mind be troubled with anger because anger is the surest emotion to ruin the equipoise of man. Man will become deluded the moment he gives way to anger. Listen to me.

The *devas* are quite obstinate. They will keep on trying to disturb the *yagnya*. And Dharma on the face of the earth is in danger of being destroyed because of the many guises adopted by Indra and copied by men. These guises attract hypocrites and man's basic honesty may become eclipsed. Forget this anger against Indra. As for the completion of the hundredth *yagnya* we will grant you the favour: we will consider it has been completed by you."

Prithu listened to the words of Brahma. His anger against Indra vanished. Indra, ashamed of his small-mindedness, had the grace to fall at the feet of Prithu. The king of the earth embraced the king of the heavens.

Years passed. Prithu found that he was getting old. He left the kingdom with his sons and went to the forest with his wife. After spending some time in wandering about all the holy spots he finally knew that the time had come when he had to abandon his earthly frame. He settled down in a hermitage and observed the *yoga* which would grant him release.

When she found that he had abandoned his body Archis, his wife, prepared a funeral pyre and she entered it along with her lord Prithu.

The earth got her name Prithvi because he had adopted her as his daughter.

KING PRACHINABARHIS

Vijitashva, son of Prithu, ruled the kingdom after his father had gone away to the forest. He appointed his four brothers to rule the four quarters and himself ruled the entire kingdom. Vijitashva had a wife by name Nabhasvati and she bore him a son by name Havirdhana. This son, however, was not like other children. Even when he was a young man he declared that he had no interest in ruling the kingdom and he refused to be caught up in the toils of kingship. He went away to the forest in pursuit of salvation.

Havirdhana had a wife Havirdhani and she bore him six sons before he abandoned the kingdom. Barhishat was the eldest of them. He married Shatadruti, the daughter of the lord of the seas. She was so beautiful that, it is said, when the couple went round him during the wedding ceremony, the god of fire fell in love with her and desired her.

Ten sons were born to this couple and they were famed as the Prachetas brothers. They grew up to be god-fearing, well-versed in *dharma shastra* and ever devoted to Narayana. Their father asked them to take upon themselves the task of continuing the line and, as a preparation for it, they entered the sea and there, they performed intense *tapas*.

King Barhishat was a man who believed in the performance of *yagnyas*. He was fascinated by it and so absorbed was he in it that he was always performing one *yagnya* after another. In course of time this became with him, an obsession. The moment one *yaga* was completed he would begin another. At one time the entire earth was covered by the *kusha* grass which was used for the *yagnyas*. He got the name PRACHINABARHIS because of the *kusha* grass which was spread on the face of earth with the tip of each blade pointing towards the east.

When his sons were away performing *tapas* the father was still engaged in performing *yagnyas*. Sage Narada took pity on him and told himself: "This good king is wasting all his life in pursuit of the *Karma Kanda* which is not helping him to prepare himself for salvation. I will go to him and show him the easier path of *Bhakti* and save him."

Narada went to the presence of the king Barhishat. The king honoured him as was his due and having placed him in an elevated seat, the king sat at his feet. Narada enquired after the welfare of the country and then said: "O king, I see that you are engaged in the performance of innumerable *yagnyas*. But you will never realise salvation as a result of this *Karma Kanda*. The removal of sorrow and the attainment of happiness are the two things man desires in this world. But the wise are of opinion that these *karmas* - the performing of them - do not grant either of these wishes to the performer. Is there, then, a third objective which you are pursuing? Tell me what your purpose is in the incessant performing of *yagnyas*." The king said: "My lord, involved as I am in the *Karma Kanda* and its performance, I have not been able to think of a third objective. Salvation has not come to my mind till today. Please have the goodness to tell me what I should do to attain salvation. I realise that I have been foolish. I have been so absorbed in the *Karma* aspect of the *yagnyas* that I have not once thought of the other paths: the *yogas* they speak about. I have not ever once thought of *Moksha*."

"Man is caught up in the web made up of affections of different types: love for wife and children, love of the home, love of wealth, love of kingdom. He is foolish and he is ignorant of the ways of reaching the other world. In his involvement with the things of this world he has not considered that there is another life after this: that there is another world for which one has to prepare oneself. My lord, all these many years I have been like this and your words have made me pause for a while and think. Till now I had no time to think: so busy was I with action. You now tell me that all this will not lead me to the other world. What am I to do? Please teach me the method by which I can get freedom from the bondage of *Karma*. What should I do to shake off this obsession and save myself? Please help me."

Narada said: "By performing *yagnyas* which are so many that it is easier to count the grains of sand on the shore of the sea, do you know what you have gained so far? I will show you." The sage led the king to the terrace of the palace. With his *yogic* power he summoned the cows which the king had sacrificed since so long.

"Look", said Narada. "Look at the thousands and thousands of cows which you have killed thus far, in the name of *yagnya*. They are waiting for you to die so that they can wreak their vengeance on you. They are so angry with you they are just waiting to gore you with their horns which are hard and firm as rods of iron."

The king looked at them and then at Narada. He spoke not a word. Narada led him back to the interior of the palace and said: "I will relate to you the story of PURANJANA which is as old as the hills. Listen to it carefully and you will enjoy it. It is a very beautiful story about a handsome man and a lovely damsel. Sit and listen to me."

THE STORY OF PURANJANA

There was once a famous king by name PURANJANA. He had a friend whose name was AVIGNYATA. This friend had earned that name because no one knew what he did and how he acted. His presence was unknown to everyone and unless one thought of him and asked him to be with him he would not make his appearance. Puranjana and he were very great friends. In fact they were considered by everyone as "the inseparables". They would ever be together: and so it was for a long while.

As time went on Puranjana became restless. Avignyata was not. Though he was warned by his friend, Puranjana left his home and the company of his friend and went in search of a new home, a new dwelling place. He wanted a city fit enough to be ruled by him and he searched all the world over for it. For a long time he wandered in search of a city for himself. He travelled far and wide and yet, he could not find what he was looking for. He was very unhappy since many of the places he found and even tried, were not good enough for him to stay in. And so he kept on travelling.

Once on the southern slopes of the Himalaya he found a city. It was a beautiful city. Nine gateways adorned it. There were many turrets and there was a great wall around it. Lovely gardens were to be found everywhere and all around the city was dug a moat. The houses in the city were well designed. They were built out of gold, silver and iron and inlaid with precious stones: sapphires, crystal, amethyst, pearls, emeralds and rubies. There was a mansion with seven floors. The streets were wide and large. There was a market place, there were bazaars and there were gambling places in plenty. Pillars adorned with corals and silks were to be found everywhere. The city was called Bhogavati.

Adjoining the city was a heavenly garden. All the trees of heaven were found there. The birds and the bees vied with each other in making sweet music. There was a lake and across the lake blew a pleasant cool breeze.

The breeze was laden with the perfume of innumerable flowers. The trees on the edge of the lake made the place delightfully shady and inviting. The cuckoos were making sweet music in the mango grove and the king, Puranjana wandered around drinking in the beauty of the place.

All of a sudden, there came within his sight a beautiful woman. He thought that she was a heavenly damsel. Her form was captivating. Her eyes, her face, her lips, her hips, and her lovely breasts were intoxicatingly lovely. She might have been about sixteen. Her eyes looked here and there and her eyelids fluttered like the wings of a butterfly. She looked at him and away from him. The golden earrings which she wore in her small ears seemed to whisper secrets into her ear making her blush. She was dark and her form was swaying captivatingly as she moved.

Puranjana stood rooted to the spot gazing at her. He came to his senses for a moment and he saw that she was strangely attended. There seemed to be ten main attendants and these ten had each, a hundred women as companions. An immense cobra with five heads was walking ahead of her as though keeping close watch on her: guarding her.

Puranjana pulled his eyes away from the others and looked at her once again. The language of her eyes; the sights which made her breasts heave; the way she tried in vain to cover them with the silk which she had draped on her shoulders; the way she stood tracing patterns on the ground with her toe-nail: all these made him realise that she did not resent his presence: that she was also interested in him. A smile hovered on her lips and he went near her. He had to speak to her or else he would die: so he thought.

He asked her: "Tell me who you are. You are so beautiful. Your eyes, timid like those of a deer are making me mad. They are like the petals of a lotus. Whose daughter are you? Where have you come from? Where do you belong? Are you a woman of the heavens come down to the earth to see its beauty? Are you Hree, the wife of Dharma? Bhavani, the consort of Mahadeva? Are you Sarasvati looking for Brahma? Perhaps you are Lakshmi, the wife of Lord Narayana. Beauty like yours cannot be just earthly. What are you thinking about? In your preoccupation the lotus which was in your hand has fallen down unnoticed. You are not heavenly

since your feet are touching the ground. You are earthly. You have made me your slave by your beauty and by your captivating ways. Your dark eyes have made me your slave. Will you become mine? I have fallen in love with you. Please make me happy by becoming my wife. Tell me who these attendants are: these ten men and these hundreds of women. How is it possible for you to have this dreadful snake with you all the time? I am sorely puzzled. Please lift up your eyes and look at me."

With a smile and with halting words she spoke to him. She said: "I do not know who I am nor do I know who created me. All I know is that I belong to this city and that I live here. I do not know who built this city either.

"These men, my lord, are my companions and these women who are their attendants are also my friends. This five-headed snake guards this city when I am asleep and it is ever with me. It is my good fortune that you have come to me. You have come in search of pleasure and I can, with the help of these friends of mine, gratify all your desires. You can be the lord of this city. I will be by your side. You can drink the cup of joy to the fill for a hundred years. You are the ideal man to become my husband. I would never have been happy with a man who is a scorner of the pleasures of the senses: who is ever thinking of death which is imminent: who is always thinking of tomorrow and worries about it. Such a man is not dear to me. But you are different. Your thoughts are only of pleasure. You have no thought of tomorrow nor are you scared at the thought of death. You will be satisfied with the happiness that you can get in the present. There is nothing so wonderful as the love between man and woman. Nothing else can equal that happiness. You desire me and I am very much in love with you. Come with me to the city called Bhogavati and we will live happily without a thought for anything else."

THE HAPPY LIFE OF PURANJANA

Her name was Puranjani. She and Puranjana lived in that city with nine gates. He lived happily in the inner apartments of the princess and he was always with her. Not for a moment would he lose her company. He did all that she did. What she desired was what he wanted. If she wanted to sip wine his desire was to do the same. He was hungry when she was. When she sang he became the words. When she wept he shed tears with her and her smile was enough to make him smile. The words he spoke were the words she spoke and the words he heard had to be the ones which reached her ears. What she thought was sweet smelling was the same for him too and what was ugly in her sight was abhorrent to him. In short, he had no entity except through her. He was so lost in her.

Puranjana lost all count of time. Days passed him by and they seemed like moments to him. Children were born to them and they were growing up. Still Puranjani held him in thrall. He did not realise that he was growing old. His age was now fifty. His love for his wife became tenfold and the love he had for his children was also growing. He was lost in the thoughts of himself, his children, his wife and their love for each other.

He did the conventional things like performing *yagas* and *yagnyas*. But the love he had for his wife and the pleasures which she was still giving him were always in his mind and he was happy. He was unconscious of the truth that time was fast slipping by: that his youth had left him long ago. The passage of time was the one thing which he never noticed. Old age, the unwelcome guest to the body of a man in love, came to him and came to stay.

* * *

Chandavega was the name of a *gandharva* chieftain. He had three hundred and sixty powerful servants. These, in their turn, had the same number of

women to attend on them. These men were fair and the women were dark. Chandavega decided to attack the city called Bhogavati. With his three hundred and sixty henchmen and their women Chandavega went to the vicinity of the city of Bhogavati. He surrounded it on all sides and his intention was to destroy it entirely. The city had the snake to guard it: the snake Prajagara with the five heads. He tried in vain to stop the attacking forces from destroying the city. He fought valiantly with the enemy which was seven hundred and twenty strong. The fight went on for a hundred years and Prajagara could not withstand the onslaught. Puranjana was sorely distressed at the state of affairs. The attack had begun long ago: ever since he came there to live with the woman he loved. But he was so lost in his love for wife and children he refused to pay attention to the invasion of Chandavega. Now, slowly it was trying to force itself into his thoughts: the fight which was going on. But still he refused to pay any thought to what was happening.

Kala, Time, had a daughter by name Jara. Unfortunately, she was not attractive and no one wanted her. She travelled far and near in search of a husband. No one welcomed her advances and people turned their faces away if she appeared in front of them. Once she came across Narada and fell in love with the young sage. She asked him to take her for wife. Repulsed by him she became very angry and cursed him to wander the entire universe without a place to call his own. Jara then went on with her search for a husband. She went to Yavaneshvara, Death and asked him to take her. He looked at her with kindness and pity and said: "Listen to me and do not be angry with me for my frankness. You are not attractive: nor are you bent on doing good to anyone. That is the reason why no one is willing to accept you. But I feel sorry for you. I will tell you what you should do. I cannot accept you. As long as you keep on asking people to accept you willingly, they will not do so and you will only be disappointed again and again. I suggest that you creep on people without their being aware of it. The entire world will then be your slave.

"Do not be afraid. I will team up with you. This my brother Prajvara and I will be with you all the time. From today you are my sister and we will travel all over the world invisible to the eyes of men. And when they are

unmindful of us, when they are unheeding, you and Prajavara creep on them: I will do the rest."

The three travelled together bent on destruction. Their army was made up of men named Bhaya. During their wandering they came upon the city Bhogavati which was guarded by the old snake Prajagara and they thought the time to be ripe for their onslaught.

When he was unaware of it Jara entered the body of Puranjana. She gained complete control of his body and he could do nothing about it. And the Yavanas, the assistants of death attacked the city on all sides. Puranjana was suffering great agony. His body occupied by the invader, Jara, and his city invaded by Chandavega. He found that he was being treated with indifference now by everyone. His children did not care for him anymore and, even his beloved wife, Puranjani frowned when he tried to make love to her. He could not invoke the old passion in her and he found to his dismay that he was himself too weak to indulge in love as he used to.

Puranjana looked all around him. The city was falling to pieces under his eyes and he was helpless. Prajvara approached him and in his wake came Bhaya. Puranjana was sorely distressed. Prajagara, the guardian of the city could not fight any more. Like a snake which tries to escape from the tree which has caught fire, Puranjana wanted to get away from the city Bhogavati. He wept tears of despair. He had no desire to let Prajagara leave the city and go away: and, at the same time he did not know what he had to do. While he was cogitating thus Death came to him and claimed Puranjana. With his death the city of Bhogavati fell to pieces and nothing was left of it except the name.

AVIGNYATA COMES BACK

Puranjana's last thoughts were of the woman Puranjani when he died and so, in his next birth he was born as a woman. He was born as the daughter of the king of Vidarbha. The princess grew up to be a beautiful woman. Malayadhvaja, the king of Pandya married this daughter of Vidarbha. The king of Pandya was a great devotee of Narayana.

In course of time seven sons and a daughter were born to them. When he became old Malayadhvaja Pandya left the kingdom in the hands of his sons and went to seek peace in solitude. His wife followed him. She abandoned her children and the comforts of the palace and went with him like the moonlight following the moon. Pandya performed *tapas* and, strictly following the rules set down for *Ashtangayoga* he gave up his body having realised the *Brahman*.

Vaidarbhi, his wife had been serving him and attending to his wants. Dressed in tree bark, with her form emaciated because of her austerities, her hair all knotted and unkempt because of negligence, she shone with her lord like a smokeless flame emanating from pure fire.

When she found that her lord was dead she set up a wail of pain and bathed her husband's body with her tears. She then collected wood and placed his body on it. She had made up her mind to ascend the funeral pyre along with him.

While she was weeping and moaning and preparing herself for the last journey there came to her side, a Brahmin. The Brahmin was Avignyata, the companion of Puranjana in the days of the long ago. He stood by her side and said: "Consider my words for a moment. Who are you? Whose wife are you? You are now mourning the death of this man who is lying on the funeral pyre. Who is he? Try and think what there is between you and him that you should weep for him."

Vaidarbhi stopped crying and looked at him in bewilderment. The Brahmin said: "My friend, do you not recognise me at all? Do you remember that long ago, long before you became involved with the things of the world you had a friend called Avignyata?" There seemed to be a spark of recognition in the eyes of Vaidarbhi. The Brahmin went on: "We were ever together. We were inseparable in those days. We were called 'the inseparables'. You and I were like two swans floating on the surface of the Manasa lake. You were very dear to me and so was I to you. Suddenly you left my company. You were restless for the pleasures of the senses and you went away from me. You came to the city with the nine gates, Bhogavati. Then you forgot all about me. But I have had your welfare at heart and I have always thought of you. The time is now ripe for me to do what I have been longing to do since ever so long. I have been waiting to reveal myself to you and to take you back with me. I have come to tell you all about yourself. Forget this man and the misery you are going through because of his death. You do not belong here. Come with me and let us be happy once again." He paused for a moment and said: "You are neither the man who married Puranjani nor are you the princess Vaidarbhi who married Malayadhvaja the Pandya. It has all been an illusion created by yourself because of your ignorance: ignorance of your real nature."

Puranjana who was now Vaidarbhi looked at the Brahmin with faint traces of recognition and waited for more words from him. Avignyata said: "I will explain the entire phenomenon to you. *You and I are the same*. There is not an iota of difference between us. I am the Paramatma and you are the Jivatma. The Manasa lake is the heart where we lived together. We have always existed together. Your getting involved in the city Bhogavati guarded by the serpent with five heads and with the woman Puranjani is all because of *Maya*. Bhogavati is the human body with the nine openings. Puranjani is the mind which enjoys the pleasures of the senses. When you became involved in them you forgot your real nature. Avidya enveloped you and your involvement in the meshes of *Maya* and the bondage resulting from all these, became inevitable. You are really caught up in the web of *Maya* which is the resultant of your own desire to get involved with the things of the world. The more you tried the deeper you became drowned in the ocean called *Samara*.

You are really neither Puranjana the lord of Puranjani, nor are you the wife of Malayadhvaja. The Atman is without sex and it has no attachment. You are the reflection of me in the mirror. It so happens that the mirror has become clouded as a result of Avarana and so, you were under the illusion that you belonged to the body. The body was so easily destroyed by Chandavega which is another name for Time: destroyed by old age which is Jara and Prajvara which is all the diseases put together. You are now rid of all of them. You had forgotten the truth about yourself. Now you are one with me and let us go back to the lake where we used to float together, the lake Manasa."

THE TRUTH UNDERLYING THE STORY

King Prachinabarhis sat silent for a while after Narada had related the story of Puranjana. Narada said: "This is *Brahma Vidya*. Even as Narayana favours his devotees without their being aware of his presence, even so I have tried to make you realise the Truth without making the lesson obvious. The teaching of *Brahma Vidya* was in the form of a story. I have tried to make you see yourself as the imperishable: I wanted you to know the Truth about yourself."

Prachinabarhis said: "Please explain it more fully, my lord. Ordinary mortals like me cannot grasp the Truth so easily. Tell me clearly once again what the story means." Narada said: "I will certainly do so. I came to you only with the intention of teaching you *Brahma Vidya*. I am happy that you want to know more about it. Listen to me carefully. I will begin with the word Puranjana. The Purusha who pervades and illumines the body he has assumed is called Puranjana. He has created the *pura*, the city where he has decided to dwell and so he is named Puranjana.

"And so, Puranjana is the *atman* which resides in the body. The divinity in him is not seen but it is always there to guide him in the right path and that is Avignyata.

"In the beginning, after the *Pralaya* when there was nothing but the *Brahman*, the *Purusha* was all by itself. After the manifestation of universe by the *Maya* of the *Purusha* the *Purusha* became *Prakriti* also. Out of *Prakriti* came its other form: the *Mahat tattva* which became the *Ahamtattva*. Then was the *Jivatma* manifested.

"The *Jivatma* became restless and wanted to experience the world of objects. He then entered the human body which is made up of the nine openings: the two eyes, the two nostrils, the two ears, the mouth and the two excretory organs. In combination with the mind the *Jivatma* is able to

experience the worldly objects conveyed to him through the sense organs. The mind is necessary for the process of this enjoyment. Now you will be able to understand the analogy of the city by name Bhogavati. The human body is Bhogavati, the home of all enjoyment. Puranjani who helped Puranjana to enjoy the worldly pleasures is the mind, the *Buddhi* as it is called. The ten attendants who were with her are the ten *Indriyas*: the *Gnyanendriyas* and the *Karmendriyas*. And the many functions of these *Indriyas* are the hundreds of female attendants of the ten men. The snake with the five heads is *Prana*, the breath of life and the five heads are its five variations: *Prana*, *Apana*, *Vyana*, *Udana* and *Samana*. When the *Jivatma* wants to enjoy the things of the world he does so with the help of the nine instruments of perception: the eyes, the ears, etc., and that is why the nine gates are said to lead into the city or lead out of the city.

"When the mind is bent on the world of objects and in the enjoyment of them the *atman* also has to do the same since it has become attached to it. That is why I said Puranjana did all that the woman did. He had lost his identity, meaning, he had forgotten his real nature.

"The garden surrounding the city of Bhogavati where Puranjana met Puranjani is the world of objects which gratifies the senses. When the *Jivatma* gets involved with the mind, the *Buddhi*, his desire being the pursuit of the world of objects and the pleasures to be derived from it with the help of the senses then he said to have become involved. The real nature of the *Jivatma* becomes enveloped in *Maya* and he suffers the pains and pleasures of the world.

"The hundred years which he was allowed to spend with the woman in the city Bhogavati is the span of life granted to man. Chandavega is Time which moves ruthlessly on: and the three hundred and sixty *gandharvas* are the days in the year while dark counterparts, the women, are the nights. They surround the body and eat up one's life without any consideration for the man who wants to fight them: to hold them at bay. *Jara* is old age, or rather, the decay which sets in with the advent of old age. Naturally *Jara* is not welcome anywhere and it is but natural that she should team up with death. Death is called Yavaneshvara. The *Yavanas* are the diseases of the

mind and those of the body. Prajvara is fever, affliction which hastens death.

"When the *atman* becomes conditioned by the equipment made up of the body and mind, it develops the qualities "I" and "Mine". When these enter the mind along with them come the many sufferings which the body undergoes and the *Jivatma* too, since it has become involved with the body, its pleasures and its pains.

"What then, is the cure for this? Man dreams and during his dream he undergoes all the feelings, emotions, pleasures and sufferings of that dream world. He has identified himself with the man who is dreaming and, naturally, the sufferings of the one are the sufferings of the other. This state of things will continue *until the dreamer awakes*. The moment he awakes, the dreamer knows that all that he had been going through was not real: that it was all conjured up by the dream state and that he need not suffer them because he is awake. He knows the Truth about his dream. But, *unless* he wakes up and *until* he wakes up, it is not possible for anyone to convince him that it is all false: that the dream world just does not exist. A dreamer has to wake up in order to realise that he was dreaming. *Even so*, the involvement of the *Jivatma* with the body and the mind is like a dream. No amount of intellectual arguments can convince him that his sufferings are all false. He has to *wake up from this dream* to realise the Truth about himself."

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

"The only way which has helped man to learn about the Truth is devotion to Lord Narayana. He is the cause of everything and He is the refuge of all sufferers. Devotion to Narayana makes the mind detached from the world of objects and it makes you realise the true nature of the *Jivatma*: that it is not *different* from the *Paramatman*. Listening to the stories of the Lord, thinking on Him day and night are both sure remedies for the misery called the cycle of birth and death. In the story of Puranjana when he died he became the daughter of Vidarbha in his next birth. He was fortunate to have been born to a good man and he became the wife of Malayadhvaja Pandya who was a devotee of Narayana. A daughter and seven sons were born to them.

"The daughter was Asha, desire—a desire to listen to the stories of the Lord. The seven sons were: Shravana, Kirtana, Smarana, Padasevana, Archana, Vandana, and Dasya. The association with a devotee of Narayana will make you adopt the seven ways of worshipping him. When there is a desire to listen to the stories of the Lord then you get the other ways of worshipping him also. You begin with *Shravana*: listening to the stories of the Lord. After that *Kirtana*: reciting them incessantly. *Smarana* is remembering them by repeating them in your mind. *Padasevana* is devotion to the Lord, a surrender at His feet. *Archana* is worshipping Him: *Vandana* is praying to Him and *Dasya* is becoming a slave to Him and only to Him. When one is engaged in these the mind breaks away from the bondage of *Karma* and, in a short while, the *Jivatma* will realise its true nature and become one with the *Paramatma*. Puranjana became one with Avignyata.

"I will illustrate the lesson with another example. Consider a deer wandering in the garden. It has found a mate and the garden is full of green grass on which it can live for its entire lifetime. The flowers

growing there and the gentle breeze wafting across the garden make the deer so happy that he thinks there is nothing which can ever spoil his bliss and his contented life there. But all the while, the dread wolf which is bent on eating it up, is standing there, in front of it. In its preoccupation with its mate and the beauty of the garden, the heavenly taste of the grass, and the wonderful breeze which is blowing across the garden, the poor deer does not see the wolf. Nor it is aware of a hunter who is even now aiming his dread arrows at it from behind. Man's life on earth is even like that of the unfortunate, careless deer.

"The pleasures of the world are as evanescent as the scent of the flowers in the garden. Man and woman wander around in this little garden in search of the fleeting pleasure found in the company of each other. All the while, Time, in the form of a wolf is waiting there in front of him and he does not notice it. Behind him is death with a thousand diseases in the form of arrows. He sends the arrows one by one and yet man does not understand the message: does not heed the warning."

Narada paused for a while. He then said: "I told you the mythical story of Puranjana because I wanted you to realise that *Karma Kanda* leads you nowhere near the absolute Truth. You are superior to ordinary human beings who think they can reach the heavens by performing *yagnyas*. The *karmas* you have been performing will only give you the things of this world and you should try not to get involved in them. You should strive for something higher. Pleasing the Lord and trying to reach him are the only things a man should do. The company of *Sadhus* will develop in you a love for the Lord's stories. When you pursue the seven paths you will finally reach the last stage which is surrender: *Atmasamarpana*. When the Ego is completely surrendered there is liberation. One who is ever thinking on the Lord will never be troubled by the objects of the world. Pain will not hurt him nor will he be elated when pleasure comes his way. He will achieve evenness of mind and that is very near the *Brahmi* state. *Jivatma* and the *Paramatma* will merge into each other and there will be no more births and deaths. So, forget this path which you have been pursuing and devote the rest of your life to the meditation on the Lord."

For a long' moment there was silence in the royal hall. The king had tears in his eyes and he said: "Indeed, my lord, in your infinite kindness you came to me and showed me the one and only path which will lead to salvation. It is evident that my *gurus* either do not know this truth or they did not think of initiating me into this wonderful secret. I have tried to follow very carefully what you have had the grace to teach me and with your blessings I may reach the Feet of the Lord by the seven pathways of approach. Please bless me."

Narada was very pleased that the king was enlightened and, after blessing him he went back to his Siddha Loka. King Prachinabarhis renounced his *karmas*. He renounced his kingdom and his mind was dwelling night and day on the Feet of the Lord and not long afterwards he reached the lotus Feet of Narayana.

THE PRACHETASA BROTHERS

The Prachetasa brothers were ten in number and, as already mentioned, they were the sons of Barhishat. He had asked them to perform *tapas* in order to fit themselves to continue the line. They had, accordingly set out to the forest to do what their father had asked them to do.

They travelled towards the west and while they were so engaged, they found an immense lake which was almost as large as the sea. It was filled with water which was clear, pure and without any waves like the mind of a *sadhu* which is without any agitations. Fish were there inside the lake and lotuses, red, white and blue were floating on its surface. Water birds made sweet music and this was echoed by the music of the bees which were drunk with the honey from the flowers abounding there. Perfume-laden breeze was blowing across the lake and brothers stood there as if spell-bound. They heard sweet music and they were intrigued as to where it came from. All on a sudden, out of the heart of the lake rose the Lord Mahadeva with all His attendants. He was glowing golden and His beautiful neck was black with the poison, which He had swallowed for the good of the world. A smile lit up His face and the princes, after a moment of stunned wonder, fell at His feet and worshipped Him. He blessed them and said: "I know you are the sons of Barhishat and that you are great devotees of Narayana. I also know why you have come to the forest to perform *tapas*. I have come to you to help you. I will teach you the great incantation which will make you see the Lord in person."

Mahadeva taught them the *Rudra Gita* which is an invocation for Narayana and said: "If you repeat this mantra everyday with a steady mind you will attain whatever you desire." He then vanished from their sight.

The Prachetasas entered the ocean, and there they performed *tapas* for a long time. Narayana, pleased with their devotion, appeared before them and said: "I am pleased with your *tapas*. Ask me what you desire most and

I will grant you that. I know that you have been commanded by your father to perform *tapas* in order to continue the line of kings. I assure you that a son will be born to you who will be a Prajapati. His fame will spread all over the world and he will be remembered by posterity.

"There was once a *rishi* by name Kandub and he was performing intense *tapas*. Indra, with the intention of disturbing his *tapas*, sent down to the earth an apsara, called Pramlocha. The *rishi* became so enamoured of her that he spent many years with her tasting the pleasures of the senses. A daughter was born to them. Pramlocha abandoned the child in the forest and went back to the heavens. The child which was weeping was adopted by the trees of the forest. Taking pity on the child the moon came and placed his index finger into her mouth and fed her with nectar. The child is now a woman. Her beauty is heavenly. She will be the wife to all of you and she will bear a son who will be a Prajapati."

The Prachetasas were overwhelmed by the sight of the Lord. Composing themselves they fell at His feet and praised Him. Accepting their worship with a gracious smile Narayana vanished from their sight.

The brothers then rose out of the ocean and they saw the entire face of the earth covered by trees and nothing could be discerned. They became angry and tried to burn the entire forest. Brahma came to them and asked them to forbear from their rashness.

The trees that were still remaining brought out their foster daughter Marisha also known as Tarkshi and gave her to the valiant brothers. All of them married her.

A son was born to them and he was Daksha. It was the same Dakshaprajapati who had insulted Mahadeva long ago. He had been born as a human being because of his disrespect to Mahadeva once upon a time.

The son grew up and when he was old enough to be throned, the Prachetasas crowned him and left the kingdom for the forest.

On the way they met Narada. They spoke to him humbly and asked him to teach them the path to salvation. When he went away they remembered his teachings and they also remembered the words of the Lord that they would

be assured of a place at His feet when they were ready to abandon the world.

They set their minds on the Feet of Narayana and soon they reached him.

Here ends the conversation between Maitreya and Vidura. Vidura here takes leave of Maitreya and proceeds towards Hastina to see his brother and Yudhishtira. His sole aim in going there was to make his brother realise that he should get ready to abandon the world and reach the Feet of the Lord. It is interesting to note one detail. When he is questioned by Yudhishtira about his travels Vidura does not tell him about the tragedy at Prabhasa. He was very soft-hearted by nature and he could not bear the sight of suffering in others. He did not have the heart to give them the terrible news about Krishna.

PRIYAVRATA

Svayambhu Manu had, as has been said before, five children. Akuti, Devahuti and Prasuti were the daughters, while Priyavrata and Uttanapada were the sons. Devahuti was the wife of Kardama and the mother of Kapila. Akuti became the wife of Ruchi and her son was Yagnya. Prasuti was the wife of Daksha and the mother of Sati. Uttanapada was the father of Dhruva, the favourite *Bhakta* of Narayana.

Priyavrata was the elder of the two sons. But early in life he had heard the teachings of Narada and he had no desire to rule the kingdom. He asked his brother Uttanapada to take up the burden of ruling the kingdom and went off to the forest to perform *tapas*.

Uttanapada was ruling the land for many years. After him, Dhruva and his descendants ruled the land. Prachinabarhis and the Prachetasas were the descendants of Dhruva. Daksha, the son of the Prachetasas went to the forest to perform *tapas* after abandoning the kingdom. Manu saw that the land was without a ruler. He knew that it was not right. Much against his will he went to the forest and tried to coax his son Priyavrata to come back and take up the task of ruling the kingdom. His mission was fruitless. He therefore left it to Brahma, his father to try and coax Priyavrata.

In a cave in the forest Priyavrata was conversing with Narada and to him came Brahma. The cave glowed with an unearthly glow because of the presence of Brahma. Priyavrata at once stood up and so did Narada. Brahma smiled at his grandson and said: "My child, please listen to my words very carefully. The Lord whose commands we should all obey, and which are obeyed by all of us, has ordained that you should do your duty as king. This human body given to you is for a purpose. You are meant to live the life of a normal human being on the earth. Each one of us has been created for a purpose. We are helpless in the hands of the Creator.

"Look at the bullocks which plough the fields. They have ropes running through their nostrils and, as the farmer leads, so moves the bullock. The jerk of the rope is what he has to obey and he has no power to act on his own. Even so, we are led by the Lord into whatever walk of life he has chosen for us. We are not free even to act as we like, nor to enjoy the things of the world as we like. We cannot choose pleasure or pain. They are sent to us alternately, or perhaps together or singly. We should not question why; only we should bear them with equanimity. Man should live in the world performing the actions he has been created to perform: and, he has no right to refuse to do so.

"However, if he moves without any attachment to the things of the world he can be free of further births. He is then a *Jivanmukta*. He moves in the world of men as long as the Lord wishes him to and such a man will view pleasure and pain like a dreamer views the world of dreams after he has awakened, from sleep. Such a man will not acquire any *vasanas* which cause a further birth in the world: nor will he have to exhaust the *vasanas* since his actions are all performed without any desire for returns.

"The man, however, who has no control over his sense organs will move from birth to birth eternally like a man who has lost his way wanders from forest to forest. The six enemies *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Moha*, *Lobha*, *Mada* and *Matsarya* will always pursue him and to add to the downfall and to increase its speed, his mind, his *manas* and the *indriyas*, the sense organs, will obey the summons of the six enemies only too easily; only too readily. He will always be caught up in the cycle of births and deaths.

"A man who has conquered his senses and who has realised that he is none other than the *Paramatman*, is the best person to live in the world of men. Detached as he is, from the worldly objects he will be the ideal man to move among men who have so much to learn and this emancipated soul can help others who are sorely in need of help.

"The man who wants to conquer his *indriyas* should live the life of an ordinary man: marry, breed children: and, at the same time, try to conquer his arch enemies. Once he has subdued them the perfect man can walk fearlessly in the midst of men. Think of the example of a besieged city.

Enemies are attacking the city and the king defends it by taking refuge in the fort. The fort gives him succour. Even so, if a man takes refuge at the Feet of the Lord he can easily repel the six enemies and he can, at the same time, enjoy the things of the world which have been given to him by the Lord to be enjoyed. After his span of life is ended he becomes one with Him: the *Jivatma* and *Paramatma* become one.

"I am telling you all this, my child, so that you can come back to the world of men and rule the land like a good king. Yours is an emancipated soul and so you will never be in danger of losing yourself in the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. After doing your duty you can come back here and resume your search for peace. You have already achieved it and that is why I am asking you to take up this task. Perform it for my sake: this selfless action of ruling the kingdom and continuing the line. Come back to the kingdom."

With folded palms Priyavrata listened to him and said: "I will obey you, my Lord." With a happy smile lighting his face Brahma left the cave. Manu then came and taking Priyavrata back to the kingdom established him on the throne.

PRIYAVRATA'S RULE

Unattached as he was to the things of this world, Priyavrata lived among men and he was not one with them. He did his duty as king. He married Barhishmati, the daughter of Vishvakarma. Ten sons and a daughter were born to them. Agnitra was the eldest of them. Three of the younger sons became *sanyasis* early in their lives even as their father had done in his early days.

Because of his prowess and because of his righteousness there were no enemies to the kingdom ruled by Priyavrata. His rule was such that people were all happy. He was endowed with divine prowess. Once he thought to himself: "The sun illumines only half the world and the other half is in darkness. I must find out the path of the sun." He equipped himself with a chariot as fast and glorious as that of the sun and he travelled with the sun round the earth seven times. The moats formed by the quick progress of his chariot became the seven great seas and the earth was divided also into seven islands. These were named Jambu, Plaksha, Shalmali, Kusha, Krauncha, Shaka and Pushkara. The seas were named: Lavana, Ikshu, Sura, Sarpi, Dadhi, Kshira and Madhu.

Agnitra and the other six sons were made to rule these seven islands. The daughter by name Ojasvati was given in marriage to Shukra and their daughter was Devayani.

When he felt that he had performed the duties assigned to him by his elders, Priyavrata decided to renounce the kingdom. Like the life sheds the body which had been its home for long, he abandoned his kingdom, his wife and companions and went off to the forest to continue the penance which had been interrupted by his grandfather Brahma.

THE BIRTH OF RISHABHA

Priyavrata's son was Agnitra and his eldest son was Nabhi. Nabhi had no children and he therefore performed a sacrifice where he worshipped the Lord in the form of Yagnyapurusha. Pleased with his devotion Narayana appeared before him. The *ritwiks* and the *yajamana* of the sacrifice praised the Lord with suitable words. They said: "You are perfect and You are complete in every way. We have not the power nor the command over words with which you should be praised. We can only fall at Your feet and show our devotion. In a world full of sinful things which beset the path of man, who is there who can gauge Your greatness? With our thoughts turned towards earthly things and with earthly desires filling our minds how can we aspire to know You and describe You? In Your infinite love and compassion for us You are pleased with the inadequate offerings made by us. We praise You with words which are not enunciated clearly even. We worship You with water and Tulasi leaves and tender blades of grass. And yet You are pleased with our worship. All that You want is *Bhakti*. Without *Bhakti* the most elaborately performed *yaga* will not please You. It seems as though You have understood the deep *Bhakti* we have for You. Or else how could You, the Lord of Lords, bless us with Your presence?

"Worship, my Lord, should be selfless and yet, this *yaga* has been performed with an object in view. The king Nabhi wants a son and it is for this purpose that the *yagnya* has been performed by us. We feel so small and so ashamed to ask a favour of You when we have been granted the greatest reward for our *yagnya*, Your presence. Please forgive us for asking You this favour."

Narayana looked kindly on his worshippers who stood with tears flowing from their eyes and said: "Do not humiliate yourselves. Nabhi wants a son like me, and so he has asked you to perform this *yagnya*. There is no one like me and so I will myself be born as the son of Nabhi. To me, nothing is

more precious than the word of a Brahmin and, when Brahmins, great Brahmins like you, have performed this *yagnya* I will honour you by granting your wish. I will be born as the son of Nabhi."

In course of time a son was born to Nabhi and the king, knowing that it was the Lord who had taken the form of a child to bless him, felt there was no one to equal him in good fortune. The child was named Rishabha and the fame of the child spread far and wide. When his son reached manhood Nabhi crowned him as king and went to Badari where he worshipped Nara and Narayana till he reached the Feet of the Lord.

Rishabha, in course of time, married Jayanti, the daughter of Indra and became the father of a hundred sons: the eldest of them was Bharata. The country which he ruled later became known as Bharatavarsha.

The purpose of Rishabha *avatara* was to show the world of men that a man can be a king: be surrounded by wealth and luxury and all the many things which tempt man: live with the most beautiful of women and be the father of many children: live the life of a perfect *grihastha* and yet, live like a *sanyasi*. This was the lesson taught to the world of men by Rishabha. It is the peculiarity of human beings that they try to emulate whatever a man in high position does. And so, it is the responsibility of a good king to set an example to his subjects and make them walk in the path traced out by himself. This was the purpose of this *avatara*. Rishabha taught men that living a family life, the life of a *grihastha*, man could still so arrange his life that he could achieve *dharma*, *artha*, fame, children, happiness and salvation in the end by righteous living and selfless performance of all actions. Though he was himself beyond worldly things Rishabha lived according to the rules set down by the Brahmins and ruled the kingdom like an ideal king.

THE TEACHINGS OF RISHABHA

To propagate the lesson of living a life of detachment to the world, the king Rishabha once called his sons to his side and taught them the rules of living. He said: "My sons, this human body has been given to us not to enjoy worldly things like animals do, but for a higher purpose. Purity of mind is essential. There are two immense gateways. Serving people who are great is one gateway to salvation. The other is the one which leads to worldliness and this is entered by attachment to the senses and the objects of the senses. Equanimity of the mind is the one thing you should strive for. You should learn to receive gain and loss with the same calm frame of mind. Anger should be conquered and the mind should be brought under control. Devotion to the Lord should be the sole aim of life. You should not become attached to wife and children, wealth and kingdom. Man should desire only that much which is essential for the maintenance of the body. Because of some wrong actions performed in the previous *janma* this body has been given to you to live in. You have been made to be born in this world beset with many temptations. It is but logical that you should act in such a way that there will be no repetition of this cycle of births and deaths. So long as the body exists, so long as the mind does not think on the higher truth, so long will *karma* also hold its sway over man. Avidya, that is, ignorance of the true nature of the *Atman* leads man to become involved in the snare called *karma*. So long as man does not think on the Lord, his life will not find freedom. Man becomes more and more attached to woman and a home and a child and a thousand other things similar to these. Man fails to see that the world of objects is false and he does not think of the higher wisdom which tells him the truth about the world he lives in. He becomes foolish and suffers as a consequence of his attachments.

'I' and 'Mine', the two dread enemies of man cloud his vision and the knots of his heart do not get loosened. Because of his love for woman he forms

new attachments: home, land, son, relations, wealth and so it goes on, endlessly. The chain binding him to the earth has new links forged and it becomes stronger and stronger. For such a man the hopes of salvation are indeed thin. The moment he begins to see the truth about these things, the moment the knot in his heart becomes loosened by wisdom, he loses the attachment he had towards woman. His *Ahankara* and *Mamakara* leave him on their own accord. My sons, set your minds on thoughts of the Lord. Abandon attachment. Heat and cold, hunger and thirst, sorrow and delusion should have no effect on you. Your pursuit should be the pursuit of the only knowledge worthwhile: the knowledge of the *Brahman*. Surrender yourself to the Lord. Dedicate your actions to Him. Listen to stories about Him and keep the company of the devotees of the Lord. Hate no one because everyone is an image of the Lord. Share the pain of others. Control anger. Be alone with yourselves whenever you can because solitude helps you to think of the Lord. Do your duties properly. Do not neglect any of them. Speak sparingly and think more.

"It is essential that a *guru* should lead the way for a *shishya*, a disciple. And for a son there is no greater guru than his father. It is the duty of a father to lead his son in the right path and it is the duty of a king to lead his subjects in the right path. I am your *guru* and I am telling you what you should do.

"When a *guru* sees his disciples getting involved in *karma* it is his duty to teach them the path of freedom. He has passed through this difficult journey called life and he knows by experience the many pitfalls that beset the path of man. If the *guru* has not compassion enough towards his follower to warn him about them, what use then, is all the learning of the *guru*? No man will sit unconcerned when a man is drowning. A *guru* should be a guide, a father, a mother, a well-wisher. Ponder carefully on all that I have told you. Consider this Bharata as your father and obey him. He is a great man. Live in the world in the manner I have indicated. *Bhakti* is the one cure for the dread disease called *Moha*, delusion. And with the help of *Bhakti* save yourselves from the cycle of births and deaths."

Rishabha spoke these words to his sons who were already very much like him. It was more to guide the men of the world that he gave this discourse.

He then crowned Bharata as king. Renouncing his kingdom, his wife and children and all that was once his, Rishabha, who had never been deluded by *Maya*, left the country and went away. He wandered all over the world till the time his freedom came.

It is the rule of life that even when a man had no desires left: when nothing in the world moves him: when he is all ready to move away from the world, still, life persists until the appointed time comes. When a potter spins the wheel to fashion the pot of clay it spins long after the pot is removed from it. Even so, because of some chance, some *samskara* of the previous birth, life will not leave the body even if the *dehi* is ready to die. It was so with the king Rishabha.

He had become an *Avadhuta* and after a long wandering, he reached the slopes of the hills of Kutaka (Coorg). While he was there a forest fire devoured the large forest where he was wandering and he found release from the bondage called *Karma* which had never really touched him.

BHARATA, THE HERMIT

Bharata, the son of Rishabha ruled the kingdom well. He was a righteous man and his rule was perfect. So famed was the earth under his rule that, in later days she earned the name Bharatavarsha since the good king Bharata ruled her. In the wake of his ancestors Bharata followed all the rules of conduct which are prescribed for a king: and the earth was happy under his rule. He was a great devotee of Narayana. In the heart of Bharata was imprinted the form of the Lord. When he felt that he had enjoyed the kingdom and the pleasures it held long enough, Bharata divided the kingdom among his sons, crowned his eldest son as the king and renouncing everything he went away to Haridwar, to the *ashrama* of the sage Pulaha. The ashrama was located in a picturesque spot. It was surrounded by the river Chakra which is, even today, full of Shaligramas, the stones which are worshipped since the Lord Narayana is said to pervade them.

Bharata stayed alone there and with flowers and fruits collected by himself he would worship Narayana every day with a full and overflowing heart: overflowing with *Bhakti*. He had passed beyond the stage where the pleasures and the pains of the world affect man and his heart was filled with peace born of renunciation and detachment. He had reached the very ecstasy of joy which comes of intense devotion to the Lord. His heart would melt like water when he thought of Narayana and tears of joy would often flow from his eyes. His heart was like a deep lake into which he had immersed himself and his ego and his self. Everyday he would wander around clad in the skin of a deer and with his hair matted and dusty he would invoke the Lord Who is present in the rising sun: "I surrender myself to that glorious power Which created this world: Which pervades this universe and Which it has created: Which protects its beloved by the power of intelligence: Which is the cause of the intellect functioning: Which is lodged in the sun thus giving its glory to the sun."

Days passed thus for him who knew no joy other than the thoughts of the Lord. Once, when he was seated on the banks of the Mahanadi bent on his morning prayers, a piteous scene met his eyes. A deer had come to the banks of the river to drink water. All on a sudden the roar of a lion was heard. The noise seemed to come from somewhere near. Frightened by the roar which, she knew, was very near, the poor deer did not know which way to run. She had not even begun to drink the water for which she was thirsting. In despair born of extreme terror she tried to leap across the river. Because of her sudden panic the little deer which was unborn till then fell into the river out of her body. The mother deer, when she reached the opposite bank lay panting and crawled to a cave where, after a few moments, she died.

Bharata who had been watching the entire incident was overcome with pity for the poor unfortunate deer which had been born just a few moments back, and which was struggling on the surface of the water. He gathered it up in his arms and took it to the hermitage. He fed it with milk and he fondled it and comforted it as a mother would.

Days passed and the deer became older. By then it had become the very life of Bharata. He became greatly attached to this living thing. He who had renounced his kingdom: his wife and children and everything else, became inordinately fond of this animal. It became with him, an obsession. He could not bear to let it out of his sight even for a moment. If it went out to graze he would become worried and tell himself: "My poor child has no friends, no kinsmen, no mother and no father. He has no one except me. I am his only refuge. He trusts me completely. I cannot fail him since he has implicit faith in me. It is up to me protect him."

He would spend all his time with him. He would wander in the forest along with the deer and he would carry him on his shoulders when he thought that the young animal was tired. And, if he did not come back to him when evening drew near, he would be terribly worried. He would say to himself: "Will I see my beloved deer again? Perhaps a wolf, or a wild hog or some other wild animal has eaten him up. The sun is about to set and still my child has not come back. Perhaps a lion has eaten it up. Perhaps a tiger is even now pursuing it." He would walk about in agony and say: "It is

dangerous to leave it alone in the forest. I must go in search of it." So saying he would wander into the forest and, like one demented, call out to the deer in affectionate terms: and, when he found it, would bring it home in his arms.

This affection for the deer made him forget his other duties. His daily worship of the Lord, his *Samadhi* when he would sit and concentrate on the form of the Lord were all now things of the past. When he tried to worship the deer would come in and prod him gently with his horns and Bharata would offer to the deer all the young blades of grass which he had gathered. When he sat in meditation the form of the Lord would not come before his mind. The antics of the young deer would come before his eyes and he would smile indulgently at the thoughts of his pet. In short, everything was now forgotten and the deer was the only thing that mattered. He would fondle it like a mother and he would spend hours together talking to it. This was, indeed, a terrible state of affairs for one who had renounced the world.

Days passed by, and death, which is no respecter of persons finally drew near Bharata with the speed of a storm and entered into him like a snake would into the hole where the rat lives. Bharata fixed his dying eyes on the deer and his last thought was of the deer. Aching for his pet Bharata gave up his breath.

BHARATA, THE DEER

Bharata was born again. Since his thoughts were fixed on the deer: since with his last breath he was calling out to the deer silently he was born as a deer. But he was fortunate in one thing. He had the privilege of remembering his previous birth. Overcome with self-pity he told himself: "What a pitiable state is mine now. I had abandoned all kinds of attachments. I had made the forest my home and my mind was ever lost in thoughts of the Lord and in remembering the many stories about Him. There was place in my heart for Narayana and nothing else could find a place there. My mind was firmly fixed on His lotus feet. And into that calm lake came a disturbing factor: the affection I developed for the deer. So powerful was it that it made me forget everything else: even my Lord Narayana. I had strayed far away from the path I had been following. As a result of that I have been born as a deer instead of reaching the *Brahmi* state. Such is the power of affection and attachment to worldly things. I must try and exhaust this birth by associating myself with people whose thoughts dwell on Him. My mind will once again become attuned to the higher sphere. By thinking on Him, by listening to His praises, by listening to conversations and talks about His glory I will be rid of this *janma* and I will become free of this earthly bondage."

In the form of a deer Bharata travelled towards Shalagrama which was the spot where *rishis* congregated. Staying there, living on the grass growing in the *ashrama* and drinking the waters of the river flowing there Bharata spent his life painfully, waiting for death which would relieve him. Finally he died and was granted freedom from the form of a deer, a mere animal.

JADA BHARATA

There was Brahmin belonging to the Angirasa clan. He was a very good man. He had followed the rules of conduct set down for a Brahmin. He had nine sons by his first wife and his second wife bore him a son and a daughter. The son of the second wife was none other than Bharata who had to be born again.

Bharata had been the son of Rishabha, an incarnation of Lord Narayana and so Narayana had Himself taught his son all the *dharma* to be followed by a *mumukshu*: one who aches for freedom from bondage. Bharata had been initiated into the *Atma Vidya* and he had almost achieved it. But then, because of the *Prarabdha Karma* which he had to exhaust, he had to be born as a deer and after that, one more *janma* was needed to grant him freedom. Relentless is fate and the path to salvation is not easy. It has been said that *yogis* are born in the homes of good men and Bharata was born in the home of a good Brahmin.

Because of the disgust he felt with himself as a result of his fall from grace in his previous *janma*, Bharata did not want to form any new attachment with anyone. And in his family he was found to hold himself aloof from others. He was a difficult child as far as his father was concerned. The poor man tried his best to initiate his son into the mystery of the Gayatri, the music *Mantra*. And though he spent several months in his attempt he was not able to get any response from his son. Bharata would deliberately mispronounce the words and recite them out of tune. He refused to learn anything: and gradually he managed to produce the impression that he was a deaf-mute. People called him a fool, an imbecile. But he was not in the least affected by what people said.

He remembered his previous births and he was bent on only one thing: freedom from this earthly bondage: and so, like rain falling on the back of a buffalo, the comments of the men of the world did not affect him in the

least nor did it affect his general behaviour. His father was drowned in the performance of worldly duties and worldly affections: and he was very unhappy that he could not make a good Brahmin of his son. In course of time he died. His wife left her son and daughter in the care of her stepsons and their mother. She followed her husband on the funeral pyre.

Once their father was dead, the brothers of Bharata felt that they did not have to do much for Bharata. They felt that they did not have any responsibility as far as Bharata was concerned. They lost no time in ill-treating their step-brother. Bharata would never protest and that made them happy. They would make him labour in the fields like any ordinary workman and they insulted his birth as a Brahmin. But Bharata did not mind it at all. He would work till sunset and would be satisfied with whatever food the brothers gave him. Sometimes it would be old musty flour and sometimes he would get only the husk from the grains. They all tasted the same to Bharata and he spent his hours thinking on the Lord and doing menial work for his brothers.

There was a robber chieftain who did not have any children. He was told that offering a human being as a sacrifice to the goddess Kali would get him a son. He therefore sent his servants in all directions to bring a human being fit enough for the sacrifice. They searched in vain all through the day and they saw that night had set in. They were wandering around. Suddenly at a distance they saw a human being, standing on mound. Standing on a raised spot Bharata was guarding the fields to prevent their being destroyed by deer and wild hogs during the night. The servants of the robber chieftain drew near and looked at Bharata. He had always been unmindful of the comforts of the body. Rain or shine, cold or heat were all the same to him. He had not even covered his body properly. As he was used to lying on the ground or anywhere his body was covered with dust and grime. His hair was all dirty and matted. He was like a precious stone covered with clay. His sacred thread was black and dull.

Life in the open and the hardihood he had undergone all these years had made the body of Bharata strong and powerful. Looking at him the servants of the robber king thought that he was the perfect victim. His body, though dirty was without a single blemish or wound or even a

scratch. They lost no time in making up their minds. They tied him up with ropes and carried him away with them. They were rather surprised at his unresisting attitude when they tied him up. They took him to the temple. He was bathed in holy water and he was dressed in the clothes meant for a sacrificial victim.

They smeared sandal paste all over his body and his forehead bore the mark of the red Sindhura. They made him partake of a big meal and then placed him before the altar of the goddess. There was wild music and beating of drums.

All the while Bharata sat silent and unaffected. The priest then pronounced the incantations and lifted his sword to kill the Brahmin.

The goddess could not bear the glow emanating from the Brahmin sitting there ready to be killed. His *Brahmic* glory was burning her and she came out, unable to bear it. She saw that a great crime was about to be committed. A poor unresisting Brahmin was to be killed by a group of robbers, bloodthirsty villains every one of them. And the crime was ascribed to her. She was followed by a group of servants from the heavens. She stood there watching while they fell on the miscreants, killed all of them and drank their fill of their blood.

The goddess disappeared after blessing the Brahmin and he too went on his way.

BHARATA, THE PALANQUIN-BEARER

Once a king by name Rahugana was travelling along the banks of the river Ikshumati. He was lord of the countries Sindhu and Sauvira. He was being carried in a palanquin and the bearers thought that one man more would make it easier for them to carry the weight. They looked around and their eyes fell on Bharata who was standing there. He was well-built. He looked strong and tough and they felt that he was ideal for the job. Accordingly they called out to him and ordered him to help them. Bharata who presented the appearance of a stupid person did not speak a word. Though it was degrading for a Brahmin to carry the palanquin of a *kshatriya* he did not protest. He lifted it silently along with the others. On the way, at every step he would scrutinise to see if there were any helpless germs, insects or worms. Making sure that there were none he would then place his foot on the spot. Naturally, this upset the rhythm of the pace of the others and most of the time, the palanquin was lopsided. The king became quite annoyed about it and said: "Why is the palanquin leaning to one side like this? Can you not do your job in the proper manner?" The servants said: "It is not our fault, my lord. This newcomer is not falling into step with us and hence the inconvenience to you." The king looked at the newcomer and he looked him up and down.

In a sarcastic voice he said: "Poor man, you look pitiable. You have been carrying the burden all by yourself all this distance. You are very tired and your form is so thin and, in fact, emaciated. Your muscles are flabby and you are not tough like the others. My friend, you are also too old to work." Bharata was silent. He did not speak a word in retort but silently he lifted up the palanquin to his shoulders. They began to move. A few steps had been taken, a few feet of ground had been covered and again, the same thing happened. This time the king was openly angry. He said: "You fool! what do you think you are doing? You are behaving like a walking corpse. You disregard my commands and you are behaving impertinently. I will

teach you a lesson: and I will do it so thoroughly that you will get some sense into your head. I must punish your arrogance."

The king was proud of the fact that he was a king: the master who could do what he liked with his servants. In him the two *gunas*, *Tamas* and *Rajas*, were predominant and so his pride, his arrogance had grown beyond all control. He thought that he was a great man and that every other man was inferior to him. He had not benefited by the company of good and god-loving people who could have, if they had been given a chance, instilled in him some wisdom. This foolish king spoke cruel and arrogant words to the Brahmin who would not hurt anyone or anything: not even a worm crawling on the ground.

Bharata looked long and silently at the king. A slight smile was seen at the corner of his mouth. Without raising his voice, without any rancour he said: "You are angry with me because you think that I am not carrying your palanquin properly. You spoke with sarcasm when you said that I have been carrying the burden too long and that I am tired. Your meaning is that I am not one bit tired by this burden. In a way, your words are true. But your desire to hurt me with your sarcasm is, I am afraid, pointless. It does not hurt me. Shall I tell you why? You are under the impression that this body of mine is real and that the burden it has been carrying all the while, is also real. If this is true, then your words should certainly have hurt me. But then, how can you be sure that these two are real? I cannot prove that this body of mine is real nor can I prove that the burden it has been carrying is also real. Under the circumstances, how can it be possible to hurt a person or a thing which is non-existent? *The real "I" in me*, has absolutely no connection with this so-called body of mine: and insults to this body or injustices heaped on this body do not affect *ME* in the least. You said that I have been carrying the burden alone for a long distance and that I am tired. You meant to insult me, I know, but I do not choose to be insulted. The reason is this: if it is true there is a distance to be covered: if there is a purpose to be achieved by covering that distance: and if these two factors have anything to do with *Me, then and only* then, should I be affected by your remarks. But then, I am not sure of the existence of either of these things or my connection with them. And so I am not affected by

your words. You said that I am not big but emaciated. The words are meaningless considering that "I" am formless and the qualification 'big' and 'small', 'lean' and 'fat' do not apply to it. These words are for describing the body, the *home* of the "Atman" and *not the Atman*. Fatness or leanness, diseases of the mind and the body, hunger, thirst, fear, quarrelsomeness, desire, old age, sleep, lust, avarice, pain: all these affect one who thinks that he has a body and not me who knows the Truth about myself. This body is short-lived, limited, while "I" am endless, eternal. You called me a walking corpse. So are you and so is every man and animal on this earth. O king, the process of birth and death do not confine themselves to me alone. All things which are undergoing change are liable to birth and death. Every moment there is birth and there is death. If, by any chance, wealth and the owning of wealth are permanent, then this command of yours and this threat of yours that you will punish me, will all be plausible. But it is not so. The difference between a king and a servant arises because of the sense of duality and I cannot find any other reason for it. There is no such thing as a superior person and there is no one inferior to him. But you do not seem to realise it. Tell me what I should do now. I have realised myself. I do appear to be stupid man: a deaf man without any feelings: a fool. But really, the things of the world do not affect me: not in the least. How then is your punishment going to affect me since I know that I am far away from all this? It will be like kneading flour which has already been kneaded. It will have no effect on my behaviour."

Bharata took the palanquin and tried to place it once again on his shoulders.

BHARATA TEACHES BRAHMA VIDYA

Drained of all pride and arrogance by the words of Bharata, king Rahugana fell at his feet and spoke in a voice choked with tears born of shame. He said: "My pride has been destroyed by you. Forgive me for my impertinence and please grant me a boon. Please be gracious enough to tell me who you are. I am the ruler of Sindhu and Sauvira and they call me Rahugana. I was on my way to the great Kapila to sit at his feet and learn *Brahma Vidya* from him. But you seem to be Kapila himself who has come to me on his own accord to save me. To what good actions in my previous *janma* do I owe this great good fortune that has befallen me? Please initiate me into the science of Truth."

Bharata was filled with pity for this king who seem to be really eager to learn. He said: "I will try to help you and you will find the path to salvation. Listen to me very carefully while I explain it all to you.

Bharata sat on a large slab of rock which was nearby and the king sat most humbly at the feet of the master. Bharata then began his discourse on *Brahma Vidya*. He said:

"It is the mind of man which causes him either to fall into the morass called *Samsara* or to find freedom from it. It is the mind which should be subdued. When the mind is tainted with the three *gunas*: *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* its path is set in the world of objects. It will have to keep on performing actions, good or bad: and the cycle of births and deaths will be endless. It will acquire desires and, according to the desires, its progress will be towards the higher or towards the lower, as the case may be. Pleasure and pain will affect the life of man and there will be no end to it. So long as the mind is attached to the things of the world it can never glow on its own accord.

"Take the example of a little lamp. It has a wick and the wick is fed by a quantity of ghee. When it burns the flame will be coloured because of the quality of the ghee which is feeding it and the smoke and light emanating from it will all have the quality of the ghee. If, however, the ghee is all exhausted the wick will then burn on its own accord with a colour and glow which is natural: and, it will, eventually be converted to nothingness. Even so, the mind. So long as it is fed by the *gunas* it will become coloured by them and act accordingly. When the *gunas* leave the mind, it will soon reach a stage when it will have no existence. Just as the wind pervades the entire space the Lord pervades the entire Universe. When the *Jiva* sheds all attachment, conquers the six enemies and illuminates itself with the lamp of wisdom, then the *Jiva* will be free. But till then he will have to go through the pain of being born again and again into this world.

"The mind should be controlled if the senses and the six archenemies have to be conquered. The mind, if it is led towards the Feet of the Lords, if it takes refuge there: then there is no fear of its losing itself in the forest called *Samsara*. Once the *Jiva* is set on the path called *Karma* it is beset with many pitfalls. Birth and death comprise a forest. The *Jiva* gets lost in this forest deluded in many ways: deluded mostly by *Maya*. The three *gunas* make him perform actions which are good, bad or indifferent and in proportion to them he acquires a certain amount of *punya* or *papa*. The aim of the *Jiva* now becomes the pursuit of happiness and in this search for happiness it gets lost in the wilderness called *Samsara*. The six senses are well-nigh six thieves who steal on you when you are unaware of their approach and rob you of your wisdom. They make you become attached to woman, home, child, money, wealth, power and such-like: you get involved in *Maya* and are helpless in finding your way out. You are then well established in *Grihashthashrama* which is indeed a very sad state of affairs.

"The earth, though it looks as though all the plants have been removed from its surface, is, in reality, not bare. The seeds which have already been buried in it sprout forth in no time and this cycle will go on and on until the seeds are burnt away. The *Grihashthashrama* is like a box of camphor. In course of time the camphor gets sublimated and it looks as though the

box is empty. But the smell, the *Vasana*, is still remaining and it will cling to the box. So long as the box has an existence, .so long as the box has an entity the *vasana* will persist and it will remain part of the box until the box is completely destroyed. Once you get involved in the *ashrama* by name *Grihastha* there is no salvation for you. *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Lobha*, *Moha*, *Mada* and *Matsarya*, the senses and the mind which is the master of the senses, all these will lure you away from the path to salvation.

"Think of the life on the earth. There is so much pain, loss, happiness, sorrow, love, hatred, fear, delusion, madness, avarice, jealousy, hunger, thirst, pain in the mind and pain in the body: Birth and its archenemy, death, are all there.

"Man has no time to think of the Lord and he never keeps the company of saints who have renounced worldly things. Still, even in spite of all these drawbacks, there is hope for man. If he controls the mind, if he learns the art of pulling the reins of the mind, if he can conquer the six enemies and turn his mind towards the Lord he can be rid of the cycle of birth and death.

"This wisdom cannot be obtained by penance: not by performing your religious rites faultlessly: not by feeding a thousand people: not by charities performed by *grihasthas*: not by chanting the Vedas incessantly, nor by the worship of the gods. Only by falling at the feet of the saints and taking the dust of their feet and surrendering himself to a *guru* can a man attain salvation. Let a man, then, desirous of getting freedom spend all his time with the *Bhaktas* of the Lord. He will then learn how to break away from the bondage called delusion: *Maya*. The stories of the Lord and the singing of his praises will guard his spiritual wealth from the thieves who are lodged in his body: the six thieves, *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Lobha*, *Moha*, *Mada* and *Matsarya*. Soon, very soon, man will give up his ego and his mind will obey him. The rest is easy.

"O king, learn to renounce everything. Be compassionate towards all living beings. Sever the bonds of attachment to everything. With a mind pure and free, you will soon reach the other shores of this immense ocean called *Samsara* and I assure you, you will not come back."

Rahugana prostrated before Bharata and said: "My lord, being born as a man is the greatest of blessings granted to the *Jiva* by the Lord. I am not jealous of the gods at all, since it is not given to everyone, not even the gods, to have the good fortune of coming across great souls like you. I have had that unique privilege. By your company for just a *muhurta* all my ignorance has been driven away. I am rid of my pride and ego. You have taught me that there is only one duty for man and that is, to surrender to the Lord. I bow before you again and again. There is no other way in which I can express my gratefulness to you."

Bharata blessed him and went his way to wander on the face of the earth as long as the Lord thought it fit to keep his body alive.

AJAMILA'S DEATH

Man absorbed, as he is, in worldly things, worldly pleasures and the pursuit of worldly happiness, has his mind clouded by ignorance of the Truth about his real nature. To him, the eternal cycle of births and deaths will always exist. It is only with the help of knowledge that the veil can be torn, this chain can be snapped. Discipline is essential. By discipline is meant spiritual discipline. Just as a man who always eats clean, wholesome food will never be troubled by diseases; even so, a man who partakes of spiritual food will never suffer. This food is discipline. Controlling the mind is essential. Mental concentration on the Brahman, withdrawal of the senses from the sense objects, conquest of the mind in its wanderings in the morass of the senses, self denial, speaking the truth at all times, cleanliness internal and external, compassion towards all living beings, abhorrence of stealing and avoiding receiving gifts from others; all these will help to destroy the ignorance in the mind like fire destroys a bamboo forest—fire, concealed in the bamboo itself. One's salvation is within one's own power and it can be achieved only by one's own self.

There are, however, some who have reached the Lord by unconditional surrender: "Sharanagati". Their sins are destroyed like the snow by the sun. And a man who offers himself to the Lord reaches a stage higher than that of anyone else. This path of devotion is the highest and the most effective path. No *tapas*, no penance, no privations can equal this *Bhakti* to the Lord. Once a man fixes his mind on the feet of the Lord, then sin and death will not come near him, not even in his dreams. So potent is the power of this *yoga* called *Bhakti yoga*.

There is an ancient story to illustrate the power of this *Bhakti* towards Narayana.

There lived a brahmin called Ajamila in the country which was famed as Kanyakubja. Though he had been born as a brahmin, this man had fallen on evil ways and had lost all goodness. He was living in sin with a woman of the lower class. He, who was once compassionate towards all, became cruel. He became a cheat and gambler and also, he became avaricious. He would steal the wealth of others and his life was full of sin. He would not protect his family which was lawfully his: in short, he was detested by all.

Time passed on and he was getting old. Of this low-born woman he had ten sons and the youngest of them was called Narayana. He was the beloved of his father and mother. Ajamila would spend all his time in the company of the child. In his extreme love for the son the father thought of nothing else. While eating, he would not eat alone. He would call out to his son and say: "Narayana, you should also eat this and eat before I eat". When he drank anything he would first offer it to his son saying: "Narayana, you drink this first."

Spending his time like this, involved with his woman and his children Ajamila never realised that death was drawing near. When death was very near all his thoughts and actions were bent on his son and he would speak only his name all the time. Finally the dreadful messengers of death approached him. He saw them at a distance: and, he saw his son Narayana playing in the courtyard. In a failing voice he called out: "Narayana, come to me. Narayana!" and then he died.

When he spoke the words: "Narayana, come to me" with his dying breath, the servants of Narayana heard him and they came to him at once. They saw the messengers of Yama-the god of death-dragging the brahmin's soul away from the body. Narayana's men stopped them. The yamadutas were very angry and said: "Pray, who may you be that have the audacity to prevent the servants of Yama from doing their duty? Where do you come from? To whom do you belong? Are you gods or demi-gods? Why do you stop us?" The servants of Narayana smiled at them and said: "If, as you say, you are the servants of Dharma, please tell us about Dharma. Tell us the criterion which governs the punishment meted out to people by Dharma. Who are the persons who should be punished? What are

punishable actions? Are only human beings punished, or does the rule apply to animals also?

"Tell us since we are interested."

Yamadutas said: "Whatever has been ordained by the Vedas is Dharma. Dharma can well be called the very breath of Lord Narayana. What is not in accordance with the Vedas is called Adharma. Dharma is the Lord himself. Those who do not follow the dharma prescribed for them are punished by Yama. Man lives by his actions alone. No man can be without action. And, according to a man's actions—meaning, according as they are good or bad—man is rewarded or punished. A man's future birth is determined by his actions in this birth even as his present birth was determined by the actions he performed in his previous birth. Even as the season Spring, this moment is but a continuation of the many springs that have come and gone already, this spring will hold in it the seeds of the next spring. Residing in the city called Samyami, the lord Yama decides on the next birth of a man according to the actions of his in this birth.

"Man, however, in his ignorance does not pay attention to the instability of the human body. His intelligence is clouded by ignorance and he thinks that this body is the only one he has and that this birth is the only birth he has. He does not think of his previous birth or the one to come. A man who is dreaming does not remember his body of the waking state: nor does he remember the bodies he has had while he was dreaming other dreams. Like a cocoon covered by silk of its own making, man covers his *Atman* by the results of his *karma* and deludes himself that he is bound. He cannot ever extricate himself unless and until he realises that it is entirely within his power for him to free himself.

"We will tell you about Ajamila. He was once a good man, a very good brahmin. He was a righteous brahmin. He was well read, well behaved and he walked in the path of *dharma*.

"Once when he had been to the forest to collect Kusa grass, flowers and fruits for the worship of the Lord which his father used, to perform Ajamila saw a drunken man making love to a low-born woman. The sight made Ajamila think of the pleasures of the body, of the senses, of the

satiation to be got from them. He wanted to have that woman and experience the thrill which could be seen on the face of the man who was with her.

"Ajamila tried his best to use his intelligence and his self-control. But it was all to no purpose. He had fallen a prey to the gnawing hunger of the flesh. It was just a matter of moments before he forgot all the learning he had acquired and all the discipline he had undergone. He lost his way and strayed from the path of *dharma*. He became a slave to that woman and lost himself completely. He had to steal in order to satisfy her avarice and he had to gamble. In short, all sins became natural to him. He abandoned his father, his wedded wife and he lived with this woman in sin. He is an *adharmi* and therefore he deserves to be punished."

Narayana's men listened to the words of the *yamakinkaras* and then said: "All that you say about this man is true. No doubt he was a sinner. But, at the moment when his life was about to leave his body he called out: "Narayana, come here."

"And that has saved him from your hands. When His name is called the Lord will never abandon His caller. He treats him as His *bhakta* and all his sins are washed white. This man is no longer a sinner in the eyes of the Lord and he has, therefore, no place in the region of Yama. You may say that he did not mean the Lord when he called out: "Narayana." He called his son. We know that. But still, such is the power of the name of the Lord that He protects even those who inadvertently pronounced His name. Like a strong and potent medicine which, even when swallowed unintentionally, still cures the sick man who has taken it, even so, Ajamila, because he said "Narayana, come here" has been saved from punishment by Yama.

"A man can be a thief, a drunkard, one who deceives his friend, a killer of a brahmin, one who lusts after his *guru's* wife, the killer of a king, woman, father or a cow: or a man, who has committed a sin greater than all these, may exist. But the name of the Lord, when pronounced, will save him from the effects of the sins he has committed.

If his child is called by the Lord's name: if the Lord's name is spoken even in a jest: even if it occurs in a song sung for pure pleasure: even if spoken

in disparagement of the Lord: even under such circumstances the very fact that His name is spoken is enough to make Lord compassionate towards him and He will save the man. If a man has a sudden mishap like falling down the steps or being stung by a serpent or suffering from a fever, if his subconscious self calls out the Lord's name out of sheer habit he is saved. The great *rishis* have prescribed several kinds of atonements for several sins. Each sin has to be atoned for in a particular manner. And, even after that, there is no assurance that the man will not repeat the sinful act. These rites are like temporary cures for a disease. They do not get to the core of the matter and destroy the sin in the heart of man. However, surrender at the feet of the Lord destroys all sin: it kills the root of sin.

"Consider a large expanse of darkness. Is not a tiny lamp enough to dispel it? And, if the lamp is kept burning steadily by being fed with the proper oil darkness can never come to that spot. The name of the Lord invokes thoughts on the Lord and these in their turn, make a man lose his sinfulness. The Vasanas get destroyed on their own accord and man sins no more. This man Ajamila did not know the power of the name of the Lord and so, you may say, what he did not do conscientiously cannot have any effect. You are wrong. Like a spark of fire touching a piece of wood accidentally still burns it completely till nothing remains, even so, his sins have all been burnt away. If you are still not convinced by our words, go to your master Yama and ask him if our words are true."

YAMA EXPLAINS

The servants of Yama released Ajamila and went back to their master. They told him about the happenings on the earth: about how, when they went to bring Ajamila they were prevented from doing so by some demi-gods. They recounted the discussion they had with the servants of Narayana. The servants of Yama said: "It has never happened before, my lord. You are the Lord of Dharma and till now, no one has been able to escape the punishments meted out by you. But today four strange beings flaunted your authority. We captured Ajamila but they cut the noose of death and released him. He spoke the name "Narayana" just before he died and at once they came to his side. They would not let us do our duty. They told us so much about the glory of the name of Narayana and added that you would clarify the matter fully. Tell us why it has to be so. Their words were so full of authority that we had to obey them. What strange power is this which saves a sinner from the Noose of Yama?"

Contrary to their expectations Yama smiled with happiness and spoke softly to them. He said: "I have great power over the lives of human beings and I have the power to punish them. You are right so far. But there is one above me whom I have to honour and obey. That is Lord Narayana. Have you seen a piece of cloth? It is woven out of threads and they make up the woof and warp of the cloth. Even so this entire universe is woven by Him and He is the Power which causes the creation, the maintenance of the universe and the destruction of this entire universe.

"Like a bullock led by the string which runs through his nostrils, this world and those living in it are guided by the strings called the Vedas. All of us, Indra, Varuna, Vayu, Surya, all the guardians of the eight quarters and Brahma and Agni and, in short, all the gods have not still been able to realise the glory of the Lord. Nor do they grasp his *Maya*. Man is endowed with the organs of sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing. For him to enjoy

the objects of the senses, that is to say, for him to see, to smell, to touch, to taste and to hear, there is something inside him which makes these functions possible. That something inside the heart of man, is the "DRASHTA," the seer. Man cannot understand the nature of this something inside him. He is so enveloped in the veil called *Maya* that it clouds his intelligence and he is not able to realise the *Atman* inside him.

"There are very few who have understood the law laid down by the Lord. I am one of the few and the others are Brahma, Narada, Sanatkumara, Kapila, Manu, Prahlada, Janaka, Bali and Vyasa's son Sukabrahma.

"The name of the Lord when spoken constantly by man is called *Bhakti yoga* and that is said to be the easiest path to the Lord. It is the greatest *dharma* to be practised by man. By pronouncing it just once see, how Ajamila was saved from me and the deserts for his sins! Constant thought on the Lord is not just the destroyer of sins. It also grants *Mukti*, *Moksha*, release from the bondage called *Karma*. Those who are ever devoted to the Lord can easily be recognised. They will be even minded. They will not be troubled by the opposites. They will have tranquillity and they are always protected by the armour which is the Lord's name.

"I am telling you, you should never even go near such people. Your victims are only those who have become so involved in the pleasures of the world that they have no thought for other things. They are caught up in the web of *Maya* woven by love for wife, for children, for home, for wealth, and for pleasures. Brings to me the man who has never once pronounced His name: whose ears have never once heard the stories of the Lord. Remember the Lord's name is powerful enough to destroy all the great sins. Penance, *tapas*, *Vratas* and other forms of self-denial do not grant man so much Grace. In future, remember, the devotees of Narayana are exempt from punishment by me."

Ajamila, in the meantime, released from the clutches of death, fell at the feet of his saviours. Before he could speak they vanished from his sight. Ajamila had heard all the words spoken by the participants in the discussion.

Ajamila was filled with repugnance when he thought of the life he had been leading till then. He spoke to himself: "I have been a great sinner. Because of my submitting to the temptations of the flesh I have descended so low. All good men hate me and censure my behaviour. I abandoned my young wife and my aged parents who should have been cherished by me and honoured to the end.

"It is true that I have been a great sinner but then, I have had the good fortune to see the servants of the Lord. I must have performed some good acts in my previous *janma* or else this would never have happened to me: or else this sinful tongue of mine would not have had the sense to speak the name of the Lord. What a distance there is between that holy word and me, a hateful sinner of the worst type? Now that I have been given a second chance, now that the Lord has assured me that my sins are all burnt out, I will live a new life. I have been granted a new lease of life and I will try to use it profitably. I will fight ignorance. I will try to shed the bondage of *karma*. I will be friendly towards all human beings. I will be at peace with myself and I will release myself from this world of sin by my efforts."

Because of his momentary contact with the good, Ajamila was able to practise renunciation. He became a great devotee of Narayana. He had no attachments. He reached the banks of the river Ganga and there he meditated on the Lord. He was so sincere and so eager that soon he was able to find freedom from the bondage called the human body. Once again he saw the same servants of the Lord whom he had seen before and he greeted them with a bowed head. His body fell lifeless on the river bank and Ajamila became one with the Lord.

DAKSHA'S DESCENDANTS

Daksha, the son of the Prachetasa brothers married Asikni and they had sixty daughters who have been responsible for the population of the world during that Manvantara. Of these girls ten were given to Dharma, thirteen to Kashyapa Prajapati, twenty-seven to Chandra, the moon. Bhuta, Angiras and Krishashva had two each. Tarkshya was given four daughters of Daksha. It is said that Tarkshya is another name for Kashyapa. Nandi was a descendant of Daksha. The Vishvedevas were the sons of one of the daughters. Marutvati, was the mother of Marutvan and Jayanta. This Jayanta is sometimes called Upendra. He was an amsha of Vaasudeva. Sankalpa was a daughter whose son also was called Sankalpa. Kama is said to be his son. Vasu was the mother of the eight Vasus: Drona, Prana, Dhruva, Arka, Dosha, Vasu, Vibhavas and Agni.

Vasu had a wife by name Angirasi and their son was called Vishvakarma. He was the architect of the gods. The son of Vishvakarma was Chakshusha who later became a Manu.

Sarupa, the wife of Bhuta became the mother of crores of Rudras eleven of whom are famous: Raivata, Aja, Bhava, Bhima, Vama, Ugra, Vrishakapi, Ajaikapati, Ahirbudhnya, Bahurupa and Maha. Tarkshya's wives were Vinata, Kadru, Patangi and Yamini. Patangi produced birds, and Yamini, the moths and similar short-lived insects which could fly. Vinata had the good fortune to be the mother of two sons both of whom are famous. One is Aruna, the charioteer of the sun and the other is Garuda, the bird who carried Lord Narayana. Kadru was the mother of serpents the more famed ones being Shesha, Vasuki, Takshaka, and Karkotaka.

Chandra's wives were the stars: Chitra, Kritika and Rohini being the more famous of the twenty-seven stars.

Kashyapa's wives were: Aditi, Diti, Dhanu, Kashtha, Arishta, Surasa, Ila, Muni, Krodhavasha, Tamra, Surabhi, Sarama, Timi. Timi became the mother of the sea animals, the chief of them being the Timingala, the whale. Sarama became the mother of wild and other animals. It is interesting to note that a dog is called "Sarameya," the son of Sarama.

Surabhi produced cows and buffaloes and animals with split hooves. Tamra gave birth to hawks, falcons, eagles and such like, while Muni was the woman who gave the Apsaras to the heavens. Krodhavasha was the mother of serpents with fangs—serpents which have poison in their fangs. Ila caused the trees to grow. Arishta was the mother of the gandharvas and animals without the spilt hooves were born to Kashtha.

Dhanu had sixty-one sons and some of them are known to the world of men: Shambara, Hayagriva, Vibhavas, Vrishaparva, Svarbhanu, Vaishravas, and others. Svarbhanu's daughter who was called Suprabha was married to Namuchi. Vrishaparva was the father of Sharmishtha who later became the wife of Yayati, the son of Nahusha. Vaishvanara, another son of Dhanu was the father of four lovely daughters: Upadanavi, Hayashira, Puloma and Kalaka. Upadanavi married Hiranyaksha. Kratu married her sister Hayashira. Kashyapa Prajapati married Puloma and Kalaka. The sons of these two women were great warriors. They were famed as the terrible Kalakeya and Nivatakavacha asuras. Arjuna, in later years was the one who vanquished them. Viprasiddhi, a son of Dhanu married Simhika, the daughter of Hiranyakashipu and he had a hundred sons the eldest of whom was Rahu and another was Ketu. These two were granted the privilege of being placed among the Navagrahas.

Aditi, another daughter of Daksha was a very fortunate woman since she was chosen as his mother by the Lord himself when he took the form of Vamana, Upendra. The sons of Aditi were: Vivasvan, Aryama, Pusha, Twashta, Savita, Bhaga, Dhata, Vidhata, Varuna, Mitra, Sakra and Urukrama.

Vivasvan became the father of Shraddhadeva, Manu, and the twins Yama and Yami. The wife of Vivasvan whose name was Samgya took the form of a mare and living on the earth, became the mother of the Ashvini twins.

Chhaya, another wife of Vivasvan gave birth to Shanaishchara, the Manu who was Savarni and a daughter by name Tapati. Aryama's wife was Matrika. Their children were ordained to be human beings by Brahma.

Pusha had no children. He was the one who laughed when Lord Mahadeva was being insulted by Daksha. Later his teeth were broken and he is said to feed on flout and milk since he had no front teeth with which to chew food. Twashta married Rachana, the sister of Rachana and their son was Vishvarupa and another son was named Sannivesha. The *devas*, when their *guru* had abandoned them, approached this Vishvarupa and requested him to be their guru.

King Parikshit intervened here and said: "What a fascinating story! But tell me my lord, why did their *guru* abandon the *devas*? They must have offended him to a great extent or else Bhrihaspati has never been known to have shown his anger towards Indra and his subjects. My curiosity is kindled. Please enlighten me my lord."

Sukabrahma smiled his usual smile at the excited questions of the king and said: "It is a long story. I will be only too happy to tell you."

THE BIRTH OF VRITRASURA

Indra had become proud because he was lord of the heavens. Once he was seated on the throne with Shachi by his side. All the heavenly attendants were surrounding him and his glories were sung by the Gandharvas. Apsaras were entertaining him with their dances and the court of Indra was glowing with beauty and music: the music of the Gandharvas and the Kinnaras. The seven Maruts, the eleven Rudras, the twelve Adityas, the Ashvini twins and all the lords of the quarters were there to pay homage to Indra.

The great Brihaspati, the divine preceptor came to the court. In his arrogance Indra did not get up from his seat and honour his *guru*. Brihaspati could not brook this insult. Without speaking he stood for a long moment staring at the arrogant Indra on the throne, and turning back walked away from there. He left the court and then reached home. Only after his *guru* left did Indra realise the magnitude of his impertinence. He chided himself with the words: "In my pride I have insulted my *kulaguru*. I must go to him at once and fall at his feet. I must crave his pardon." Indra rushed to the home of Brihaspati. But the *guru*, anticipating this move from Indra had already made himself invisible and Indra could not find him. He was at a loss as to what he should do.

The news spread like wild fire: that Indra was without his religious mentor and that he was feeling lost without him. Taking advantage of his helplessness the asuras headed by their *guru* Sukra, waged war on Indra and the heavenly host. The *devas* were, as usual, defeated shamefully. Hurt by their position more than by the weapons of the *asuras* the *devas* went to Brahma and poured out their misery. They asked him to advise them as to what they should do now.

Brahma, taking pity on the *devas* and on Indra specially, said: "Indra, you have, in your pride, insulted a great man. It is very unfortunate that this

should have happened. I can only suggest one thing. You must go now and request Vishvarupa, the son of Twashta to help you. He is great and he is fit to be your *guru*. He should be made to accept the role of 'The preceptor of the Devas.' Being an *asura*, his sympathies will, however, be with the *asuras*. You should be able to overlook that and ask him to be your *guru*. He will help you."

The *devas* went to Vishvarupa and falling at his feet Indra said: "We have come to you as supplicants: nay, beggars. It is not right that we should teach you the nuances of *dharma*, but we wish to remind you that a *guru* who teaches the Vedas is the personification of the Vedas themselves. A father is the image of Prajapati and a mother, the image of the earth. A brother is the image of Indra and a sister, the image of compassion. An uninvited guest is the lord Dharma himself while an invited guest is the image of Agni. All living beings are but forms of the Lord. As such, you should treat us as your equal. You should become our *guru* and lead us to victory. You are younger than me in age. But I fall at your feet since you are going to grant me a boon and I am going to receive it. Since you will have to be our *guru* age does not stand in the way of our salutations to you. Please grant us our desire. Please be one of us."

Vishvarupa smiled at them and said: "The role of a preceptor is not good for me. Being a preceptor is a thing which has been disapproved of by the wise since it will cloud the Brahmatejas in a *rishi*. But you are in trouble and you have asked me to help you. It is the *dharma* to help those who are in need of help and I will accept your offer. It is a big sacrifice you are asking me to make and yet, caught as I am, in a dilemma, I am not able to refuse you this favour. I will be your *guru*."

Vishvarupa became their *guru* and since he was conversant with many arts he was able to restore their lost ways to the *devas*. His greatest service to Indra was the powerful armour by name "NARAYANA KAVACHA" which he placed on him. He initiated the king of the *devas* in the incantation of the sacred mantra: "AUM NAMO NARAYANAYA." Every organ of sense and thought and action is made to be covered with thoughts on Narayana and this becomes an armour against all evil. Incessant repetition of the *mantra*: "Aum Namo Narayanaya" was the secret of the *Kavacha*. Wearing

his *kavacha* Indra was able to defeat the asuras in the war with them. Once a *yajna* was performed with Vishvarupa as the preceptor. While he was the officiating priest for Indra, the lord of the *devas*, Vishvarupa had to invoke the *devas* for their share of the *havis* with the words "Indraya idam"; "Varunaya idam."

Vishvarupa who was an *asura* was, naturally, partial to the *asuras* and, by trickery, he made the *havis* to reach the *asuras* when he pronounced the above mantras. Indra saw that he was being deceived by his preceptor. Brahma had warned him of this contingency and had told Indra that he should put up with it. But Indra could not brook this behaviour of the *asura*. He took up his sword and cut off the three heads of Vishvarupa. The head by name 'Somapitham' which was so named because he would drink Soma with it, was the first head to go. This, when severed from his body, became a bird by name Kapinjala. The head which would drink 'Sura' and was hence called 'Surapitham' became another bird by name Kalavinga. The third called 'Annadam' because he would eat food with it, became the bird Tittiri.

Since he had killed a brahmin, Indra was visited by the dread curse Brahmahatya. For one year he suffered it. After the year was over he requested the earth, the trees, woman and water to share it among themselves and rid him of the sin. In return he granted them boons which made the Brahmahatya ineffective in the long run.

Twashtha was very angry with Indra for having killed his son. He performed a *homa* and the invocation was: "Arise! Indrashatru. Come out and kill your enemy soon." When the *yaga* was over there arose out of the fire a dreadful form. He was dark and huge and he glowed like a cluster of clouds at close of day. His hair was copper red and so were his eyes. They were hot and burning like the sun at his zenith. He held a trident in his hand and looking at him people fled in sheer terror. So fearful was his form, his voice, his roar. He was called VRITRA.

INDRA GETS HIS VAJRA

Vritra led the *asura* host against that of the *devas*. He was so powerful that the *devas* could not withstand his prowess. He would not be quelled by anything. The *astras* of the *devas* were all ineffectual and they were swallowed by the son of Twashta! Vritra glowed with added brilliance because of the divine *astras* which were now lodged inside him.

The *devas* fled from his presence in terror and panic. They rushed to Adipurusha, Narayana. The Lord of lords appeared before them and said: "Be without fear. I will suggest to you a method by which you can destroy Vritra. I suggest that you approach the great *rishi* called DADHICHI. He is the one who taught *Brahma Vidya* to the Ashvini twins. In return, the Ashvini Kumaras have granted him immortality. You go to Dadhichi and ask him for his strong and powerful bones. Dadhichi is the one who gave the impregnable armour to Twashta. He gave it to his son and the son, in his turn, gave it to you, Indra. If you take the Ashvin twins with you and, with their help ask the *rishi* for his body he will renounce it for you. Out of his bones ask your architect Vishvakarma to fashion a dreadful weapon. Call it VAJRAYUDHA. Backed up, as you always are, with my glory, you will kill Vritra with the Vajra. You will cut off his head and after his death you will get back your glory and all your *astras* will come back to you."

The *devas* went to the presence of Dadhichi and stood before him in a shamefaced manner. They fell at his feet. In a hesitant voice Indra told him that he had come to ask a favour of the old man. The old man sat silently smiling at them, waiting for Indra to continue. Indra told him about his desire for his body-for his bones-and explained the reason why.

Dadhichi smiled scathingly at them and said: "Death, my dear *devas*, is abhorrent even to the most dispassionate of men. You have lost your senses. Even if the Lord Himself asks for it man finds it difficult to part with his life. I do not desire to die. I have been granted immortality and I

do not see why I should forgo the privilege for your sakes. I do not wish to die and I will not renounce this body."

The *devas* said: "My lord, you are a great man full of love and compassion for those who are suffering. How can you speak such words? If a man has the good fortune to possess, the means to cure himself of his pains, he will never ask another man for help. But we are in trouble and we cannot do anything by ourselves to ward off this trouble. We are driven to ask this favour of you though we realise that it is a heinous thing we are doing. This is the only thing which will save us. Please grant it to us."

Dadhichi said: "You have trapped me with an argument which cannot be disputed. A man who will not help those who are in trouble does not inherit the higher worlds. I am prepared to die for you. A really compassionate man will consider the pain of others as though it is his own. And, knowing it, if he does not do anything to help others, to alleviate their pain, there is then, no difference between him and a tree. I will help you in your distress. Be without any worry. I will abandon this body of mine for your sakes and because Narayana himself has said that it will be of use to you."

Dadhichi set his mind on the Brahman and went into a *samadhi*. He then renounced his body which the *devas* coveted. Indra took the mighty bones of the brahmin and gave them to Vishvakarma.

The divine architect fashioned out of them the terrible weapon, the thunderbolt, which is famed the world over by the name VAJRA.

COMBAT BETWEEN INDRA AND VRITRA

Mounted on his favourite elephant Airavata, Indra set out to fight with Vritra. Led by Indra the host of the *devas* travelled towards the spot where Vritra stood with his army. On the banks of the river Narmada a dreadful battle was fought between Indra and Vritra. On the one side was Vritra with the host of the *asuras* the chief among them being Namuchi, Shambara, Hayagriva, Puloma, Vrishaparva, Heti, Praheti, Mali and Sumali and, of course, many others. Indra had with him the eleven Rudras, the eight Vasus, the twelve Adityas, the two Ashvins, the four Pitris, the forty-nine Agnis, forty-nine Maruts, the ten Vishvedevas, and many others.

The battle was frightful. This time the *devas* were not affected by the *astras* of the *asuras*. They stood firm like good men who are unaffected by the wounding words of small-minded men. The *deva* host was gaining the upper hand and the *asuras* were abandoning the field of battle and running away. Seeing the demoralisation which had set in, Vritra was quite angry with his men. He raised his voice and said:

"Listen to me, all of you. Death is something no one can avoid. Once you are born, you are certain to die. Death comes in a myriad forms: but eventually, it does come to each and every one. When such is the case, when you know you have to die some time or other, is it not right that you should stop and consider about this death for a moment? When death which is unavoidable, brings fame and a name and a good place in the heavens after this life on earth, is not death then, desirable? Abandoning this mortal frame when in *yoga*, and dying without turning one's back in the field of battle are both desirable and both are not possible for everyone. It is given only to the chosen few and you should therefore be not afraid of death, considering it is but a necessary end to life."

The *asuras* heeded him not. Vritra then turned towards the *devas* and spoke in anger. He said: "What is the use of harassing these poor *asuras* who are

fleeing from you? It brings no credit to you if you hurt those who are running away from you in fear. If you are really brave come and face me and see if you can fight with me."

Vritra sent up a mighty roar and it sent shafts of fear through the hearts of the *devas*. With his trident raised aloft Vritra entered the army of the *devas* and single-handed, began to destroy it. Indra hurled a huge mace at Vritra who caught it with his left hand, brandished it, and flung it at the elephant called Airavata. The elephant retreated a few paces, wounded as it was, by the mace. Seeing his opponent in trouble Vritra did not use the mace again. Indra was getting ready to attack him and Vritra laughed at Indra and said: "It is fortunate that I am fighting you, a great sinner. You killed my brother, your preceptor, a brahmin who was bent on doing good to you. I will run my trident through your heart and thus clear the debt I owe my brother who is dead. Why are you not trying to hit me with the Vajra? Are you, by any chance, afraid of me, afraid that it may fail you? This Vajra of yours has been fashioned from the body of a great man at the behest of Lord Narayana himself. It owes its power to Dadhichi and to the sanctity bestowed on it by Narayana. Use the Vajra on me. Wherever the Lord is, there will victory be. I, for one, will think on the Lord and rest my thoughts on him. If I am killed I will only be giving up this sinful body. I am not grieved. Use your Vajra on me. Are you afraid that it will prove ineffectual against me, like a request is ineffectual when it is made to a sinner? Are you afraid that the Vajra will fail you like your mace did? Do not worry. This Vajra which has been blessed by the Lord will not fail you. You are sure to kill me."

Indra was standing like one amazed by the unexpected. These were the sort of words one never expected an enemy to speak. The entire army was listening as though spell-bound to the words of Vritra. Vritra continued:

"As for me, I have set my mind on the feet of Narayana and, when I am killed I will find release from this body which is but a bondage. I will reach the state which *yogis* attain because of the *tapas* they perform. This Lord, when he loves his *bhakta*, does not give him the wealth of the three worlds. Do you know why? He knows that wealth is the cause of hatred, of fear, mental pain, arrogance, quarrels, unhappiness and extreme fatigue.

Indra, believe me, the Lord grants freedom from all these, and more. The thrill of his gifts can only be realised and cannot be described. A wealthy man can never know it."

Suddenly Vritra lost all thought of the battlefield and of his surroundings. His mind went to Narayana and he said: "O Lord, please make me the servant of your servants. Make my mind think only of your qualities. Let my voice sing of only your greatness. Let my body perform only such actions which are dear to you. I want you, my lord and there is no desire in me for the realms of Brahma or the state of Dhruva. I do not want to be the emperor on the earth, nor do I desire to rule the nether world. I do not want *moksha*, nor do I want proficiency in the many *yogas*. Lord, I am aching for you like a little fledgling aches for its mother bird: like a tethered calf aches for the mother cow: like a woman pines for her lord who has travelled far from her to unknown countries. I am caught up in the whirlpool called birth. Please grant me freedom from it. Let me love your *bhaktas* because that is the sure way to become dear to you. Because of the veil of *maya* which you have thrown in my path I am attached to my body, to my wife, my children, my home and many other possessions of mine. Please withdraw this veil and help me to break this attachment to the things of the world."

THE KILLING OF VRITRA

Vritra prepared himself for the fight. With his trident raised aloft he rushed towards Indra shouting: "Indra, prepare yourself to die." He brandished his trident and threw it at Indra with great force. It coursed through the sky like a planet on fire. Indra raised his Vajra and cut off the arm of Vritra: the arm which had hurled the trident. Indra cut up the arm into little bits. With his arm cut off Vritra was in great pain and he was mad with anger and pain. He rushed towards Indra and with his other arm he held an iron club. Indra had the Vajra in his hand. When Vritra hit Indra and his elephant on the chin with his club the force of the blow was so great that the Vajra slipped from the right hand of Indra. Ashamed of himself Indra would not stoop down to the ground to pick it up in the presence of his enemy. Vritra said: "Indra, why do you hesitate? This is not the time to think: not should one grieve over what has happened. Take up your Vajra and kill me, your enemy.

"Victory and defeat, Indra, are daily happenings in the life of every man. One cannot win all the time. It is all in the hands of the Lord who controls the world and the happenings in the world. Poor ignorant people do not know the truth and they consider the body to be the end and aim of existence. Indra, take note of one truth. This world, why! this entire universe is under the sway of some power: something other than all the many we have known. Have you not seen animals and forms of women cut out of wood to perform antics in a puppet show? Do they not move as the master of ceremonies guides them? Have they any power to act on their own? Even so, we are all moved by the strings in His hands. The Lord preserves with the help of living beings and He also destroys with the help of the same living beings. We are but instruments in His hands. Even a man without desires, even he, becomes different when he is victorious. He begins to get attached to life, to glory, to fame and wealth. That is the reason why the wise say that one should have equanimity. When faced

with victory and defeat: fame and infamy: death and life: pain and pleasure: when one is confronted with these opposites one should neither be too depressed nor too elated. The three qualities *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Minas* are parts of nature and they have nothing to do with the *Atman*. One who has realised the *Atman*, who has reached the *Brahmi* state will never be affected by the opposites. Just look at me. My weapon is broken by you and my arm has been cut by you. This fight between you and me is like a game where the stake is the life of either of us and no one is sure as to who is going to win. It is all just a gamble. Let us leave the result on the laps of the gods and do our duty to the best of our ability. Come, Indra, let us fight on."

Indra was overcome with admiration for this great opponent of his who was so wise: who was so noble: such a great philosopher. He said: "I am amazed at the greatness that is part of you. Your mind is far above the things of this world. You are a *Siddha*. You have transcended *maya* which deludes all men. You have nothing of the *asuric* temperament in you. Asura as you are, you are expected to be full of *Rajoguna*. Strangely enough, it is not so at all. You are a pure *Sattvic* and your mind is lost in the Lord. I salute your greatness."

They began to fight according to the rules of *dharma*. Vritra hurled a terrible pestle at Indra which was broken into pieces by Indra's Vajra. The other arm of Vritra was cut off by Indra. Vritra then opened his mouth wide. It stretched like a cavern between the earth and the sky. He swallowed Indra and his elephant too. There was horror in the *Deva* camp when this happened. Indra, however, had been protected by the Narayana Kavacha and he did not die though he had been swallowed by Vritra. Instead of being killed, Indra, with his Vajra, cut open the insides of Vritra and emerged unharmed. He then took up his Vajra and cut off the head of Vritra. Even as everyone was looking, Vritra's life came out of his body in the form of a glow and lost itself in the lotus feet of Narayana.

BRAHMA-HATYA PAPA

When Vritra died the entire world and the heavenly world were without fear and everyone was happy. Indra was not. Earlier, when Vritra was harassing them, the *devas* implored Indra to hurry up and kill Vritra. He was not quite willing. He was afraid of the dread sin *Brahma-hatya*. He said: "Earlier, when I killed Vishvarupa this sin clung to me for one year. Because of the kindness of earthly objects I was able to rid of it. If I kill Vritra who has been born out of the sacrificial fire this sin will again hold me under its sway and who is going to share it with me?"

The *rishis* said: "Do not fear. We will officiate at a *yagna*: the ashvamedha which should be performed by you. The *yajna* will cleanse you of your sin." Indra looked dubious. They said: "*Ashvamedha* is a yaga where the lord is worshipped. He will cleanse man of all sins. By singing his names man will be rid of great and fearful sins like the killing of a brahmin, of a father, cow, of his mother, or his guru. When such is the case, and again, when you are killing him for the sake of the good of the world, this sin will not cling to you."

With his confidence restored by the *rishis* Indra killed Vritra. With the killing *Brahma-hatya* pursued Indra like avenging fury. Only he suffered and no one else shared his sufferings. Indra fled all over the surface of the earth and finally entered the lake called Manasa. For a thousand years he took refuge inside the stalk of a lotus and stayed without accepting his share of the *havis* in the many *yajnas* which were performed. The lake Manasa was guarded by Lakshmi and *Brahmahatya* could not come near it. All the while when he spent the time in the stalk of the lotus Indra thought up methods by which he could shake off this sin. He realised that *Tapas* was the only way.

Because of the penance he performed for the thousand years, Indra was finally cleansed of *Brahma-hatya* and was summoned to the heavens by

Brahma. Indra then performed the *Ashvamedha*.

During his absence, king Nahusha had been requested by the gods to rule the heaven: to officiate as Indra.

KING CHITRAKETU

Parikshit intervened and said: "My lord, you have been telling about the *asuric* birth of Vritra. You also related the cruelties perpetrated by him on the *devas* during the great fight. And yet, my lord, he spoke words which only a great *bhakta* of the Lord can speak. How is it possible for this dread *asura* to have been a *bhakta* of the Lord? Please enlighten me about this which is puzzling me so much. Even the *devas* who are said to be endowed with *Sattvic* qualities, even *rishis* who are pure minded do not seem to have so much devotion to the Lord as Vritra seems to have had. In this world there are more living beings than grains of sand on the sea shore. Among them a few, very few, walk in the path of *dharma*. Again, among this small minority very few think of *moksha* as the ultimate aim of living. Among a thousand people who desire *moksha* only one is able to really shed the bondage named worldly attachments. Among a crore of such sublimated souls one will be able to reach the feet of the Lord. When such is the case, how is it that Vritra, who was an *asura*, who was bent on harassing the *devas*, who was a sinner; how is it that he had so much *bhakti* for the Lord? How is it that his life was lost in the feet of the Lord? Please elucidate this mystery to me."

Sukabrahma was pleased with the pertinent question of Parikshit. He said: "Your question is very apt. It is a great story: the background to the spiritual perfection of Vritra, the *asura*. I will be only too glad to narrate the story to you. In the country named Surasena was a king by name Chitraketu. He ruled the world righteously. He was a very good king and there was only one thing which marred the happiness of the king. Though he had many wives the king had no children. He was blessed with everything except a son and that made him very unhappy.

"Once the sage Angirasa came to his country by accident during his wanderings over the face of the earth. The king received him with all

humility and honoured him as was his due. Pleased with his good qualities the sage said: "I am very pleased to see a king who is the very flower of courteous behaviour. You are a very good man and you seem to respect elders. You have been granted all the things which men usually crave for and you deserve all the good fortune that has been granted you. Yet, when I look at you it seems to me, you are not happy. Tell me what it is that is worrying you so much that I can easily read your unhappiness on your face?"

The king told him about his misfortune. He said: "You are a seer and surely you must be able to guess the canker that is eating into my vitals. And yet, since you ask me, I will tell you. Blessed as I am with beautiful and good wives, with all the good things of the world, I have not the good fortune to be the father of a son. These other things with which I am blessed do not really please me just as a hungry man will not be pleased with offerings of flowers and sandal paste when he wants nothing but food. If you will take pity on me you will surely be able to help me and save me from the hell meant for those who have no children. Please take pity on me."

Angiras, the son of Brahma, took pity on him and, preparing a divine concoction over which the lord Twashta presided, he gave it to the king and asked him to give it to his eldest wife. The king Chitraketu sent for his wife and after purifying themselves the king and queen saluted the *rishi*. The king then gave the concoction to his wife as commanded by the *rishi*. After she had partaken of it *rishi* Angiras went away from there to continue his wanderings. In course of time a son was born to the king. Great was the rejoicing in the entire kingdom.

THE DEATH OF THE PRINCE

As for the king, his joy knew no bounds. He became attached to the child and spent most of his time with him. The mother of the child naturally became the favourite queen and the others felt neglected. They thought that they were now being treated worse than servant maids since the king did not even visit them as he was wont to in the days before the birth of the prince. And again, they were jealous of mother of the child since only she was blessed with motherhood and its joys while they had been denied that pleasure. This jealousy made them lose their right thinking and in desperation they made up their minds to do something drastic. One day they poisoned the child.

The mother had left the child in his bed and when she looked at him she thought that he was sleeping. She went about her daily duties. After a while she thought that the child had been sleeping too long and asked the maid to bring the child to her. The maid went and saw the child dead. She sent up such a heartrending cry that the mother rushed to see what had happened. In a moment the news spread like wild fire: that the king's son was dead. The queen had fainted away and the king rushed to her apartments. When he saw his beloved son dead the king thought that he would lose his reason. Both the father and mother cried like demented persons and the entire palace was sunk in woe and the entire country presented a dismal appearance.

To them came Angiras who had granted them the child: and with him came Narada. They approached the king and spoke words of wisdom to the unhappy man. They said: "O king, you are now mourning the death of your son. But if you look at it in a sensible manner you will realise that you are doing a foolish thing. What is he to you that you should weep for him? How are you related to him? You think that you are the father and that he is your son. But think for a moment. In your previous birth and in his

previous birth: and again, in your next birth and his next birth: will you both have the same relationship as you are having now? Did you have the same relationship during your earlier births? This son of yours who seems to be yours now, is not going to be your son in your next birth. He may be your friend or your enemy or, perhaps, an entire stranger to you, altogether. This relationship of father and son is so indeterminate. When the river is flowing fast, grains of sand which flow along with it travel together for a while: and then they are parted, never to meet again. Even so, in this stream called TIME you and your son travelled together for a while and now the parting of the ways has come. Like a plant is born of another because of the seeds, even so children are born in this world. No one has a claim on his child. There is nothing here to be sorry for. Deluded by *maya* you think that you are the father of this child and so you weep. Shed this delusion.

"You and I and all living and non-living things on the face of this earth are here for a while in this birth. After death there will never be a meeting of all of us. This is just a temporary abode for all of us who stay together. Why then should you feel sad? The Lord creates: he preserves and he destroys. This is the law of nature.

"Out of the body of the *DEHI* called father: out of the body of the *DEHI* called mother is born the body of the *DEHI* called the son. This is as natural as the birth of a seed from a tree. The bodies get destroyed following the law of nature: the law that what is born must die. However, the *DEHI*, the *atman* never gets destroyed and so there is no need to mourn the "death" of something which has no death. This demarcation between the body and the *atman* exists because of the ignorance of the true nature of the *atman*. Once you shed this ignorance, this *avidya*, your sorrow will disappear. Come, rouse yourself and get over this false sense of loss and pain. There is no need for pain here."

King Chitraketu heard these words and wiping his face with his hands he said: "Who may you be that speak such comforting words to me? It is known that the emancipated souls like you travel the world over to teach the Truth to deluded mortals like myself who behave as we do, like mad people because of grief which, in turn, is born of attachment. You are the

lords of my soul which is floundering in the sea of ignorance. Please kindle inside my dark heart the light of wisdom and grant me happiness."

Angirasa said: "O king, I am Angiras who once granted you the son whom you desired. This Narada, the son of Brahma is my brother. Burning as you are with grief at losing your son you are not able to recognise me. We have come to save you. You are devoted to the Lord and it is not right that you should be unhappy. When I came to you last I would have taught you the *Brahma Vidya*. But I saw that you were not ripe enough for it then. You were still caught up in the *maya* of the Lord. You had a desire for an earthly object: a son. And so, I granted you a son. Now you are going through the tortures of a man who has lost his son.

"O king, woman, home, wealth, glory, the objects of the senses, royalty, servants, friends, relations: all these are but so many causes of pain, of unhappiness, of delusion, fear and sorrow. Consider for a moment. Have you never stood on the terrace of your palace and watched the clouds chasing each other? At times have you not observed that they look like a large city with battlements, with palaces, with spires and castles? Has not your imagination ever conjured up a city out of nothing? This cloud city is called by the wise: GANDHARVANAGARI: a city built entirely out of the power of the imagination.

"Have you never dreamed? And, during the duration of the dream, have you not felt that you were part of it? Once the dream is over, once you wake up, then you *KNOW* that it was all unreal that *THIS* waking state is real. Once the clouds are scattered by the passing breeze you see the Gandharvanagari melting away and you realise that it was all unreal and that there was really no such thing as a city. Have you not felt all these things? Even so are the things of the world.

"This kingdom, this wealth, these wives and this son whose death you are mourning: all these things are like objects which you saw in a dream. They do not exist. Like when you get up from a dream you realise that it was an unreal world you were living in, even so, when you *wake up into the real BRAHMI state*, this world will appear to you like a dream from which you have woken up. Wake up from this dream, O king. Realise that nothing in

this world is real or lasting and you will then be able to shed this unhappiness."

Narada said: "I will teach you a *mantra* from the Upanishads. After repeating it for a week you will see the Lord Adishesha. You will then shed this sense of duality and reach the state which all emancipated souls have reached."

With his *yogic* power Narada made them all see the dead prince. He spoke to him and said: "I greet you; you are the soul of the dead prince. Look on these kinsmen of yours. Your father and mother and others are grieving because you have left them. Please return to the body which you have abandoned: accept the wealth and the kingdom which your father is eager to give you. Be seated on the throne and make them all happy."

The soul spoke: "The divine soul, because of its getting involved in karma, is born in this world as child of man, bird or beast. When considered in that respect everyone who has been born in this world has, at some time or other, been the son, or father or mother of someone else: or relation or a friend or enemy. Like gold and other commodities which are bought and sold, which change hands constantly, even so, the soul passes from body to body: from one father to another. This relationship is transient and unreal. As long as there is this relationship so long does the word MINE exist. But the *atman*, though enclosed in a human body, does not have this delusion. It is only when there is involvement that pain arises. It is like a bar of gold.

"Consider a bar of gold. It is today placed in a box which belongs to a miser. Yesterday it was in the strong box of a goldsmith. Years later it will be placed in the treasury of a king. Each of them will say that the gold is in his box: so long as it was in the goldsmith's box or in that of the miser or in that of the king. But they do not realise that the gold does not *belong to the box* nor to the owner of the box. Even so the *atman* has no attachments and so, no pain. Nor does it experience any pleasure. It does not grieve when parted from the body which was, till then, holding it." Thus spoke the soul of the dead child and disappeared from the sight of all of them.

Amazed at the spectacle conjured up before them and by the words of the dead prince the people were rid of their sorrow and were able to comfort themselves. The chain of bondage was snapped and they did not have any more pain: They then performed the funeral rites for the prince, or rather, the dead body. The step-mothers, repentant now, took up *vratas* to rid themselves of the sin they had committed.

The king, with his mind cleared as a pond because of the words of Angirasa and Narada, left his country and wandered away like an elephant abandons a lake filled with mire.

BRAHMA VIDYA

King Chitraketu reached the banks of the river Yamuna. Having bathed in its holy waters he sat down in meditation. He thought of the two *rishis* and invoking them mentally he saluted them with his mind. Narada appeared before him and he was accompanied by Angirasa. They taught the king the *mantra* which they had promised: the *mantra* which would help him to reach the presence of Adishesha. They blessed the king and went away.

Chitraketu repeated the *mantra* for seven days and seven nights. His food was water and nothing else. On the seventh night he became a Vidyadhara. His mind had now become clear and, bright. In a few days he reached the presence of the seer, Adishesha which is said to be the other form of the Lord. Pleased with the praises of the king Adishesha said: "I am very pleased with your devotion. Narada and Angirasa have asked you to come to me for knowledge. I will teach you the *Brahma Vidya* which will clear your mind and rid you forever of the veil called *maya*.

"This entire Universe is pervaded by me. I am the SEER, the SEEN, and the process of SEEING. Since I am both the seer and the seen, the Drashta and the Drishtam, there is no difference between the two. I invest myself in the object and I enter the frame of the seer: there is no difference between the two. There is, on one hand, the world of objects and, on the other, there is the one who enjoys the world of objects. Since both are, in reality, the same: since both are myself in two different forms, there is no difference between two. I pervade both. I will elaborate on this theme with the simile of a dream, and a dreamer.

"When he is sleeping a man sees a world of trees, mountains and many other objects. It stands to reason that this entire world is created by him alone, by his mind, and it has no existence APART from him. And again, in the dream itself, man dreams of being awake, or of being in some spot other than where he lay down to sleep. One who is sleeping in a house in

Kosala can well dream of something happening to him in Gandhara. These are all common experiences of a dreamer. If you shift the view-point and consider *atman* as the dreamer, then this world becomes something else than what it appears to ordinary man. To one who has realised the Brahman this world assumes the semblance of a dream. The entire world is created by the dreamer which is the *atman* as against the other world of dreams created by the sleeping mind of man. And, when he wakes up from this dream, meaning, when he realises that he is awakened, the *atman* will then know that the entire world of objects is but illusion: *maya*.

"A man passes through three stages: he is awake, he is dreaming, and he is in deep sleep. These three stages occur one after another regularly to everyone. When he is awake the dream world does not exist for him. When he is dreaming the waking world does not exist. In the deep sleep stage *both these conditions* are absent. BUT, throughout these three stages or states, there is SOMETHING which says: "I am awake: I am sleeping: I was in deep sleep." It is THAT which is the *atman* and that is you and I. I am there in every one and once you realise this truth there is, afterwards, no cause for pleasure or pain or any of the opposites since the world of plurality vanishes. To you all things will look alike: the trees and the blade of grass: the mountain and the grain of sand: since everything is but the one and only *atman* which is you. You cannot differentiate between two things since you know that both are the same. The state which makes you see everything as pervaded by me is the BRAHMI state.

"Whenever this truth is forgotten then the soul gets involved in the world of objects. And, forgetting its real nature it becomes a victim to the play of the opposites. It will have no peace. The wise should, therefore, strive for the attainment of this equanimity: this capability to look on everything as similar. Everything should look alike to one who is proficient in the *Brahma Vidya*.

"The wise man should first learn the art of detachment. This is the first step to the path of freedom: to the state which is called the Brahmi state.

"In the world of men, people strive to attain happiness and they try to avoid unhappiness. All the actions they perform have only this end in

view: happiness and the escape from unhappiness. But, strangely enough, the result is not what they expect. Neither do they achieve any happiness nor is there any freedom for them from pain and unhappiness. A man who strives for something must really strive to realise *that one thing*: THAT which is common to the three states. O king, realise that this truth is ME. Man should concentrate his thoughts on me. Meditate on me.

"Ponder on this teaching of mine and you will soon reach me and be one with me."

Adishesha disappeared from his sight and the king was filled with peace which is beyond all understanding. He was happy and he knew that he could never be unhappy again. Chitraketu travelled in the skies mounted on a chariot which could fly. Thousands of years passed happily for him who had no attachments and so, no pain. He spent his time in singing the praises of the Lord and so time passed.

THE CURSE OF SATI

Once, when he was passing the mountain home of lord Mahadeva Chitraketu saw the glowing form of Mahadeva. From his chariot, which had been given to him by Narayana, king Chitraketu saw the mountain Kailasa, the Pramatha *ganas* surrounding their Master and the Master himself. He was seated in the midst of the *rishis* and on his lap was seated Sati. With one hand he was embracing her. Looking on this, Chitraketu laughed loudly enough to be heard by all of them. He then said: "It is a great surprise to me to see lord Mahadeva like this. He is said to be the Lord of the world. He is acclaimed teacher of all. He is presiding over an assembly of sages. And, what do I see? I see him making love to his wife in public. Dressed as he is like an ascetic in matted locks, well-versed as he is in all the sacred lore, this god is behaving like an ordinary uncultured ignorant man by making love to his woman in the presence of all. Why! Even the ignorant man whom I mentioned is not so shameless. He takes a woman only in secret. How then can one explain this scene?"

Mahadeva heard his words but said nothing. He sat smiling and the others in the assembly followed his example. No one spoke a word. But Sati could not brook his impertinence. She thought that he was proud of his own control over his senses and she felt that he needed to be taught a lesson which would curb his impertinence. She spoke with her eyes glowing with anger. She said: "This man is now so great that he thinks he is fit enough to teach the rules of conduct and decorum to "shameless" people like us.

"Evidently, those who follow the words of Brahma, the sons of Brahma, the *rishis* Bhrigu and Narada or the others who are here do not know anything about the rules of conduct. According to this upstart they are all fools and this, my Lord, Mahadeva is not worthy of respect. It is time the pride of this king is curbed: it is high time he is punished. He is unfit to be

anywhere near the feet of Narayana. And so, Chitraketu, I curse you to be born in the dread clan of asuras as a punishment for your arrogance."

Chitraketu climbed down of his chariot and prostrated before the Devi in all humility. He said: "Mother of the world, I receive your curse with folded palms. What has been ordained by the gods for man has, in reality, been decided by his own actions long ago. The human animal caught up as it is, in the delusion *maya*, moves round and round in circles without knowing how to get out of this *samsara* and it undergoes pain and pleasure which visit him in turns. The *atman* has nothing to do with this alternation of the opposites. Nor is anyone capable of causing this cycle. In this world which is but an illusory stream flowing endlessly, where is the place for either a curse or a blessing? Is there a heaven? and is there such a place as Hell? Happiness? Sorrow? It is the Paramatma Who creates living beings with His *maya* and it is He who gives them bondage or release from bondage: and, all the while, He is never involved. He loves no one nor does He hate any one. He has no kinsmen and no friends. Everything looks alike to Him and in Him the opposite feelings are absent too. How then can anger find a place in Him? 'Never, Mother, mind, I am not angry... with you for cursing me nor am I going to ask you to withdraw or modify the curse. If my words have offended you, please forgive them."

After saluting the heavenly pair Chitraketu ascended the chariot and went away with a smile on his face.

Mahadeva was watching him, also with a smile on his face. He then turned to Sati and said: "Now do you see the greatness of the *bhakta* of Narayana? Nothing will affect him. Heaven, Hell, Curse, blessing will all mean the same to a *bhakta* of the Lord. His nature is so placid that he will find peace wherever he is. Everything looks the same to him. He is well-versed in *Brahma Vidya* and the opposites mean nothing to him. Look at the peace on the face of this man who has been condemned by you to a terrible birth." Sati's anger abated and she looked at Chitraketu and his calmness: Chitraketu who did not curse her in return even though he had the power to do so. He accepted the curse with an unruffled frame of mind.

It was this Chitraketu who was born as Vritra, because of the curse of Sati.

THE BIRTH OF THE MARUTS

Once, when the *asuras* were all being killed by Indra who had the support of Narayana, Diti was very angry and unhappy. She decided that Indra should die: Indra who was the killer of his cousins, who was always indulging in the pleasures of the senses, who was cruel and who was a sinner. She said: "This Indra is very foolish. For the sake of preserving the life within his body he has ignored the dictates of Dharma. What is a human body even if it is that of a king? a ruler? a demi-god? After death, hardly two days after or three, vultures, dogs and worms have a feast of it. If the body is burnt the ashes do not make up even a handful. When such is the case is it not foolish and utterly selfish to commit sins for preserving this body? I must become the mother of a son who will destroy this Indra."

Diti approached her husband Kashyapa with her request and asked him to help her to realise her desire. She adopted a subterfuge to get her husband's promise. She served him so well for a long while that he was pleased with her and said: "I am so pleased with you that I will grant you any boon you want. Ask me." She then told him about her wish to have a son who would destroy Indra. Kashyapa was quite upset by this unholy desire in her. He regretted his impulsive promise but he had to keep his word. So he told her: "I will teach you the incantations for a *Vrata* which you have to observe for an entire year. It is very difficult and you should obey my instructions implicitly. If you do it, at the end of the year, a son will be born to you and he will be the answer to your prayers." He then taught her the ritual which went by the name "Pumsavanam."

Bearing the child of Kashyapa in her womb Diti observed the *Vrata* very strictly. Indra, in the meantime, knew the anger of Diti, his aunt. He also knew about the *Vrata* which she was observing to produce a child which would kill him. Indra came to Diti and took upon himself the task of attending on her. Daily he would bring flowers and fruits and *Samidha*

with Kusha grass for her. He would himself carry for her pure water for her requirements. He was always with her watching her incessantly. Diti was touched by the devotion of her nephew and in her womanly generosity did not gauge the depth of the hypocrisy that was part of Indra's devotion to her. Indra was waiting for the moment when she would forget herself and relax from the strict observance of the *Vrata*. He was like a hunter stalking his prey. But try as he might, he could not see her relaxing even for a moment. She was observing all the rules set down by Kashyapa and she had not made a single mistake. Still he persevered.

Finally his patience was rewarded. One day Diti was very tired because of the severe disciplining of the *Vrata* and the fatigue attending on the advanced condition of her pregnancy. She went to sleep at evening time without having a bath and without doing her *Achamana*. Indra grabbed the chance which, to him, was a godsend. He entered her womb with the help of his *yoga*. He saw the golden coloured child which was still in the making. Indra took up his Vajra and cut it up into seven pieces. The pieces began to cry. He said: "Maa Ruda" meaning "Do not cry." And each piece he cut up further into seven pieces each. All the little pieces folded their tiny hands together and said: "Indra, we are your brothers. Why do you do this to us?" Indra said: "Do not be afraid. It is because I want you to be my brothers that I am doing this to you. You will be one with me in the *deva* host and you will be called the MARUTs."

Diti woke up from her sleep and found that her children had been born. They were glowing like fire and they stood by the side of Indra. She looked at them and at Indra. She said: "Indra, my child, I have been observing this difficult *Vrata* with the desire of getting a son to kill you. How is it there are forty nine sons? Do not try to deceive me with lies. Tell me the truth if you are capable of speaking it." Indra said: "Mother, I crave your pardon. With a desire to protect myself from your fury I entered your womb and tried to destroy the unborn child. But though it was cut up again and again by my Vajra the child would not die. I fall at your feet and ask you to pardon me for this atrocity. It was a wicked act on my part, I know. But, mother, the desire to live is in the heart of everyone and that was

responsible for this. Your sons, however, are all alive. I could not kill them."

Diti's anger against Indra evaporated. Her hatred also went along with it. She said: "It is Fate which made me lapse for a moment from the severity of the *vrata* and my strict observance of it. I was so careful and today I went wrong. It is not my carelessness but the *Maya* of Narayana which caused it. My child had been granted immortality by their father and that is the reason why your Vajra was powerless. But you have achieved what you wanted. I have also been fortunate in the fact that my child is not dead."

Diti was silent for a few moments. And Indra was standing with his head bowed down and his palms nervously folded together. The curse of a good woman is worse than death and he did not know how angry she was.

Diti, however, composed herself. Her anger and her hatred had left her and she said: "The wishes of the Lord can never be transgressed. Take my sons with you and they will be your companions. As you are a *deva*, they will also be *devas* though they were born of Diti."

YUDHISHTHIRA'S DOUBT

During Dvapara, the third quarter of time, Yudhishtira, the Pandava, performed the Rajasuya. When the *yaga* was concluded the Pandavas worshipped Krishna as the best among the guests. This incensed Shishupala, the king of the Chedis. He spoke disparagingly of Krishna. Krishna had to kill him to put an end to his tirade. When Shishupala died, his life, released from his body, went straight to the feet of Krishna and became lost there. Only some people could see this: the glow from Shishupala's body travelling towards the feet of Krishna and getting salvation at the lotus feet of the Lord. Yudhishtira was one of the few who saw this and he at once asked Narada: "My lord, I am amazed at the sight of Shishupala's becoming one with the Lord.

"People who have been *bhaktas* of the Lord, who have thought of nothing but the blessed feet of the Lord, even they have not been able to reach His feet easily. But this man, this Shishupala, this sinner who has ever hated Krishna, whose first lisping words were decrying Krishna, this Shishupala, I say, has been killed by Krishna and he was reached the blessed feet of Krishna. My mind is whirling like a flame caught in a gale. Please tell me how, instead of going to hell for the words he spoke about Krishna, Shishupala has found refuge at his feet." Narada said: "Yudhishtira, yours is a pertinent question. You want to know why a man who has been decrying Krishna has not been punished. Let me tell you something which you may not know.

"Insult, praise, honour and dishonour are all terms which are associated with the body. It is man who is entrapped in a human body who has occasion to feel these things. When the feelings of "I" and "MINE" lodge in the heart, the ego begins to feel elated or angry according as whether it is praised or insulted. And it is this ego which thinks of punishments or rewards for another man who hurts it or displeases it. But the Lord is beyond all this. These insults, as you call them, do not affect Him in the

least and He is not interested in punishing a man for speaking disparagingly of Him. Nor is He pleased to send someone to heaven because He spoke well of Him. The rules of *bhakti* and of reaching the Lord are indeed quaint. I will explain it to you.

"Continuous hatred, continuous *bhakti*, continuous affection or constant desire for the Lord: all these look alike to Him and He saves such people. There are several pathways of approach to God and these are some of them. The ultimate aim is to think on the Lord all the time *bhakti*, fear, affection, and desire, as well as HATRED are all paths that lead to Him. You know how the worm is captured by the wasp and placed in a little mud-covered hole. Constant fear of the wasp and its sting makes the worm think only of the wasp and in course of time it becomes changed into a wasp. Even so, constant hatred of the Lord makes His image stay in the mind forever and I have known such people to have been cleansed of their sins and they have reached His feet. Hatred of the Lord is a kind of *yoga* by name SAMBHRAMA YOGA and it is almost a short cut to His feet! What a *bhakta* reaches by a long wandering is reached sooner by this so-called hater of Him! Like *bhakti* which is a desire for Him, this hatred of Him, fear of Him, affection for Him, all these are equally effective paths.

"Impelled by a desire for Krishna the Gopis thought of him day and night and they will attain *mukti*. We have been impelled by *bhakti* to think on him all the time and we have found freedom from the world of *maya*. Kamsa was afraid of Krishna and that fear made him think on Krishna day and night: and he thought of no one else and so, when he died he reached the feet of the Lord. Because they are his kinsmen the Yadavas think of Krishna with love and they will attain *Mukti* when their time comes. You and your brothers, because of the affection you have for Krishna think of him and only him day and night and you are assured of a place at his feet. The end is important and not the means. Whatever be the force motivating them, if a man's thoughts are firmly fixed on the Lord he will obtain *Mukti*. As for Shishupala, he has been granted a special boon that his hatred for the Lord will lead him straight to Vaikuntha, the abode of the Lord. In ancient times when Jaya and Vijaya, the doorkeepers of Narayana were cursed by the *rishis* Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and

Sanatsujata to be born on the earth the Lord had assured them that He would himself grant them freedom from the bondage of birth. They were told that they would hate the Lord so much that they would have thoughts for no one else except Narayana and this constant hatred would grant them freedom.

"Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu in the Krita yuga, Ravana and Kumbhakarna during the Treta yuga, Shishupala and his cousin Dantavakra during Dvapara are the three births of Jaya and Vijaya. Now that the third birth is ended Shishupala has reached the feet of the Lord from where he had been exiled so long ago. Dantavakra will follow very soon."

Yudhishtira said: "Tell me more about them. I am fascinated by the story of these two."

Narada said: "Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu were the sons of Diti. Hiranyaksha was killed in the form of Varaha: the form he took 'to raise Mother Earth from the nether world'. Hiranyaksha fought a duel with the Lord and was killed by Him."

HIRANYAKASHIPU

When he saw that his brother had been killed by Narayana who had assumed the form of a boar, Hiranyakashipu became very unhappy and very angry. His eyes were red and he caught his throbbing lips between his teeth. He raised his trident aloft and said: "My comrades, you all know how terrible has been the fate of my brother. He is killed and killed by our arch enemy Narayana. I cannot brook this. I will plunge this trident of mine into the neck of that Narayana and with his blood I will pacify the soul of my dead brother. Only then will I be rid of this gnawing pain which is eating into my vitals. Once Narayana is dead all his devotees will take thought and die of their own accord like creepers dry up when the tree is uprooted: the tree to which they have been clinging. At the present moment this is what you should all do. Go to the earth which is crowded with brahmins and the kshatriyas. Destroy all those who are bent on *tapas*, *yajna*, learning and penance. Narayana is said to be the abode of *dharma* and he is said to be present where *yajnas* are being performed: where brahmins congregate and pursue their daily rituals: where the *devas* are ever present. Wherever you see brahmins, cows, vedas and rituals being performed according to the vedic dicta, go to that spot and destroy everything. Burn everything. Kill everyone. Uproot the sacred trees. Do everything you possibly can to make Narayana homeless."

Commanded by their master the *asuras* began to harass everyone. Cities, villages, cowsheds, flower gardens, hermitages where *rishis* lived, fields and homes were all destroyed. With crowbars, with hatchets, with spades and lances they razed to the ground temples, cities, city walls and buildings. They broke bridges and they ripped up the roads. Trees like the mango and other fruit-giving trees reputed to be sacred to Narayana were cut down. With torches in their hands they set fire to the huts of the people who were poor because they had been told that the poor are dear to Narayana.

The *devas* were so troubled by the *asuras* that they abandoned their heaven and moved about on the earth in different guises.

Hiranyakashipu comforted his relatives who were mourning the death of Hiranyaksha. He said: "It is not right that you should mourn the death of a hero. Death in the battle is to be desired by a warrior. It is because of the *karma* of long ago that two people are brought together in this birth. According to their *karma* in this birth they are separated. This meeting and this living together for a while, is like meeting at a *mela*. Let me tell you that you are grieving for someone who is not dead. The *Atman* is eternal, pure and indestructible. It is something apart from the body which it inhabits. The *Atman* assumes a body and the qualities of a human being: and when the body dies we think that the man is dead. But that is wrong. The happiness and sorrow and all the many things that flesh is heir to are not meant to affect the *Atman*. When a river has its banks lined with trees have you not seen the shadows of the trees on the water? When the water moves it seems as though the shadows are also moving. But the trees as well as their shadows are fixed. They have no movement. When one is turning round and round it seems as though the world around us is turning round. But that is not so. Even so, when we consider the *Atman* encased in the human body we think that the different feelings of a human being are experienced by the *Atman*, but that is not so. The free *Atman* and the conditioned *Atman* appear to be different. The latter, when it gets involved in a body, seems to go through the feelings of separation, meeting, being born, dying, worry, sorrow and all the many things common to man. But if we look at it intelligently it is obvious that this is not so. The *Atman* is not going through the travails of a human being's feelings and sufferings since it is something apart. Abandon your grief and let us consider our next action. I will find methods of avenging the death of my dear brother by destroying our arch enemy Narayana.

HIRANYAKASHIPU IS GRANTED A BOON

Hiranyakashipu had but one desire. He wanted to be invincible. He wanted to be immortal. He wanted to be the sole Lord of all the three worlds. He decided to perform *tapas*. With the power of his *tapas*, which would be intense, he thought of pleasing Brahma so that his desires would be granted by Him. Hiranya went to the Mandara mountain and with intense concentration he performed *tapas* for years together. When he was absorbed in his *tapas* the *devas* came back to their abode abandoning their disguises. As days passed, the *tapas* of Hiranya became so intense that he began to glow like the sun at noon. Every lock on his head was spitting fire. The entire world was feeling the heat and it looked as though the world would be burnt to ashes. The rivers and the sea became turbulent. The earth quaked and the mountains threw up fire. Stars fell to the earth and the quarter began to burn because of the *tapas* of Hiranyakashipu.

The *devas*, as usual, went to Brahma and said: "My lord, it is time you went to your *bhakta* and grant him whatever he desires. We are unable to bear the heat emanating from his *tapas* and its glory. As for what he desires, it is not as though you do not know it. Still we give you a word of warning. Hiranya seems to have said: 'Brahma, with the power of his *tapas*, was once able to create the universe and also his own abode, the Satyaloka which is far superior to any other abode of the *devas*. I know that if I try hard enough I will be able to become Brahma. I will then be able to take the Satyaloka for myself. I will create a new world where the laws will all be changed. The laws which have existed so far will all be changed: why, they will be abolished altogether. What was all these days considered to be sin will, thereafter, be holy. The asuras will become *devas* and as for the *devas*, they will be the asuras when I am Brahma.' That is the purpose for which Hiranya is performing *tapas* so intensely. Please be sure to remember all this, my lord, when you go to him and grant him his boons."

Brahma listened to their words and went to the cave where Hiranya was lost in his *tapas*. Brahma could not see him at first: so completely had the weeds and anthills covered him. Brahma went to him and said: "My child, I am pleased with the *tapas* which has never been performed before with so much devotion and such concentration. I am very pleased with you. Ask anything of me and I will grant it."

Brahma who was so overcome with joy at the devotion of his *bhakta* must, evidently, have forgotten the words of warning spoken by the *devas*. Hiranya fell at the feet of Brahma who sprinkled water on him from his *kamandalu*. At once the asura regained all the strength, freshness and beauty of form which he had neglected all these years. He now glowed like molten gold. He spoke with a faltering voice and with tears in his eyes. He was overcome with joy at the sight of Brahma. He spoke words of praise and then said: "I want one boon from you: only one. I had several other desires but the moment I saw you in person I know that they have been granted even without my asking. The only boon I want is: I WANT TO BE IMMORTAL."

Brahma said: "My child, considering that I am myself not immortal, I am not able to grant you that boon. But mention the things from which you want to be immune and I will grant you that. I cannot do more."

Hiranya said: "Then grant me that none of your creations will be the cause of my death. Not one of the things which you have created must be the death of me. No weapons should cause my death. I must not die inside the house nor should I die outside the house: not during the day nor during the night: not on the earth nor in the sky. Man should not kill me nor should an animal. Living things should not cause my death nor should non-living things be the instruments of my end. *Devas*, *asuras* or reptiles should all be unable to destroy me. Please grant me this boon. Please also assure me that I will be the sole suzerain of the universe and my wealth should be immense. It should never diminish."

Brahma granted him the boons he asked for and vanished from the Mandara mountains.

Hiranyakashipu set out on his conquests. In accordance with the boons granted him by Brahma he was able to conquer all the three worlds and the guardians of the four quarters, Indra, Varuna, Kubera and Yama were now his vassals. He then went to heaven and occupied the palace of Indra. All the servants of Indra had to serve Hiranya now. He received all the *havis* meant for Indra, and the other *devas*. The earth had to yield up her crop even without ploughing and the seven seas gave up their gems to Hiranya.

And yet, he was not happy. He hated Narayana and that hatred was smouldering inside him like the fire inside a bamboo forest. Years passed. The atrocities committed by the *asura* became intolerable. People prayed to the Lord secretly in the caves of their hearts and for the sake of appearance, pretended to be devoted to Hiranya. The *devas* in desperation went to the presence of Narayana and asked him to deliver them from the tyranny of the *asura* king.

The Lord comforted them and said: "Do not fear. Leave it to me. I know the sufferings you have been undergoing. Hiranya's wickedness is becoming unbearable. He will be the father of a good son. When this sinful Hiranya ill-treats his son who will be the very image of love and friendliness and all the many qualities dear to me: when such a *bhagavata* is hurt by the *asura* then will I make an appearance. And, in spite of the many boons granted him by Brahma, I will destroy Hiranyakashipu. Do you not know that one who hates the *devas*: insults the Vedas, brahmins, cows, sages, *dharma* and me is but waiting for his destruction at my hands? It is just a matter of time. Do not fear. His son will be the immediate cause of the death of Hiranyakashipu. I will kill him."

Comforted by his words of assurance the *devas* went away from his presence. The fact that the end of Hiranya was near, that their sufferings would be at an end, made them feel that they could somehow bear with patience the period of waiting. There was now hope in their hearts and that made them live in anticipation of the good times to come.

PRAHLADA, THE SON OF HIRANYA

Hiranyakashipu became the father of four sons: Samhrada, Anuhrada, Hrada and Prahlada. Prahlada, the youngest was endowed with qualities which are the heritage of the *devas*. He honoured the elders. He loved brahmins. His conduct was faultless. He was truthful and disciplined. He had his senses under control. He loved all living beings. He had a good heart. He was a good friend to all those who were in pain. He would serve wise people like a servant. He would comfort the afflicted like a father would, his son, his child. He would behave like a brother with those who were his equals in age. He had no ego and he was filled with humility. He was ever full of equanimity. In short, he was not, in any manner, fit to be the son of an *asura*, and an *asura* like Hiranya.

Sukra, the *guru* of the *asuras* had two sons by name Chanda and Amarka. They had been appointed by Hiranyakashipu to instruct Prahlada in the rules of conduct according to the code of the *asuras*. This was when Prahlada was five years old. Along with Prahlada other *asura* children were also made to learn under the tutelage of these *gurus*. Prahlada heard the lessons taught by them and also repeated them to please the *gurus* but he did not approve of them in his heart.

Once Hiranya took his son on his lap and said: "My child, you have been learning lessons from your *gurus* for quite some time now. Tell me what you think is the best thing in this world?" Prahlada said: "My lord, people, I have noticed, are always caught up in the web of sorrow. I think it is because of their delusion caused by two things: "I" and "MINE." It is this false conception which is the cause of pain and it is the surest path for the downfall of the *Atman*. According to me, the best thing in the world is, to abandon the home: abandon all one's belongings like one would, a well which has gone dry, and go to the forest. Take refuge in the feet of Lord Narayana."

For a moment Hiranya sat speechless. This was the last thing he expected to hear from the lips of a child of five. He should have been angry. But he controlled his anger and laughed.

He told himself: "My son is yet a child. He can only repeat what others tell him. What he said are the words of those who love Narayana. This is a favourite theme of theirs. Evidently the child has been seeing some *bhaktas* of Narayana. I must not blame my child for talking such nonsense."

Hiranya summoned the two *gurus* and told them: "See that the *bhaktas* of that Narayana: *bhaktas* like Narada and others do not come near my child. Do not let him out of your sight. Let him stay with you in your house and learn from you." Hiranya obviously thought that the *bhaktas* of the Lord who were wandering around in the guise of ordinary citizens were trying to influence his son. By making Prahlada remain in the house of the *gurus* he thought that the child would be saved from 'contamination' from the *bhaktas* of Narayana..

In the home of the *gurus* the little boy was placed between the two sons of Sukra. With soft words, and in a gentle manner they asked him: "Child, how is it, your mind works in a way different from others? You are not like the other *asura* children. Please tell us the truth. Are these thoughts your own or have they been instilled into you by someone else? If so, who is that person? Tell us without fear. We will not punish you.

Prahlada said: "I salute the Lord who gave me these noble thoughts. Listen to me my lords and consider the words with care. Man in his ignorance thinks of the differences "I" and "MINE." There is really no such thing. It is your delusion which makes you think that my own thoughts and those of others are different. When the Lord decides to bless a man, the man is rid of the duality which robs him of his power of reasoning: which duality involves him in this world of sorrow which is false. Unwise men think that the Lord is different and that man is different. Even great Vedantins have been floundering in this quicksand called ignorance. The Lord who is beyond duality has put these thoughts into my mind and none else. Like a piece of iron is drawn irrevocably towards a magnet my mind is drawn to

Him on its own accord. The Lord is the pivot around which my thoughts revolve endlessly. I do not know what good actions I have performed in my previous birth that I should have been fortunate enough to have this craving now for Narayana."

The *gurus* lost their temper. One of them said: "Bring a stick to beat this impertinent boy. He will only bring disgrace and discredit to us. He has a bad mind and he is like fire in the bamboo which will burn the entire family. The only way to bring him to the right path is punishment. In a forest of sandalwood trees this boy is an alien tree. Narayana, the axe bent on destroying this wood will use this boy as the handle." With threats of punishment Chanda and Amarka tried to teach the young boy what they thought was the essential knowledge for an *asura* prince.

Some time passed. The *gurus* thought that they had instilled in the child enough fear of punishment and that he had learnt all that they had taught him. They thought that they could now present him to his father. And so they took young Prahlada to the presence of Hiranyakashipu. The child fell at the feet of the father and took the dust of his feet on his head. With tears of joy Hiranya took the child in his arms and placed him on his lap. He then said: "You have learnt so much from your *gurus* now. Tell me something of what you have learnt and gladden my heart."

THE LESSONS WHICH PRAHLADA LEARNT

Prahlada's eyes were thoughtful. He raised them to his father's face and said in a soft voice: "Father, I have learnt NINE important lessons which will help me."

"And what are they?" asked the doting father.

"They are", the child replied, "Shravana, listening: Kirtana, Singing: Smarana, Meditation: Padasevana: serving, Archana, Praising: Vandana, Worshipping: Dasya, slaving: Sakhyam, Friendship and Atmanivedana, Surrender of the self"

"Excellent! Excellent!" said Hiranya. If you employ even one of these methods to serve me you will be pleasing me immensely. You have learnt your lessons well."

He turned his pleased eyes on the *gurus* also who, in their turn looked happy and complacent. Hiranya looked at Prahlada with loving eyes and he caressed the young child.

"Father", said Prahlada. "These are the methods of worshipping Narayana. The Lord, who is all pervading, can be approached by any one of these nine methods and that is the lesson I have been fortunate enough to learn."

The boy sat silent and the father too: but only for a moment. Hiranya's anger boiled over and he turned his glowering eyes on the sons of Sukra and said: "What is this I hear? Is this the lesson I asked you to teach him? You are trying to ruin my child. I can see that you are not loyal to me. You are taking sides with my enemy and you are teaching my child things which are worthless. I have been deceived by you." The *gurus* were desperate in their attempt to convince the king of their innocence. They said: "My lord, this is not our doing. Please believe us. We did not teach him these things: nor did anyone else, to our knowledge. It comes

naturally to him. Please control your anger. Do not ascribe his impertinence to us. We are innocent."

Slightly mollified by their obvious sincerity Hiranya turned to his son and said: "Look, my son, they say they did not teach you this arrant nonsense. Tell me then, who taught you these dreadful lessons which are sure to ruin you and me?" Unperturbed by the anger of his father the child looked steadily at Hiranya and said: "It is not given to people like you to know the greatness of the Lord. People who are caught up in the possessions of this world, in the enjoyment of the senses, in going through the channels of pleasure though they know that they yield no pleasure, are like blind men being led by other blind men. You perform the rites that are prescribed in the Vedas: the Karma Kanda of the Vedas. And those who ask you to perform them are as ignorant as you are about the Truth. You think that the end and aim of this life is the gratification of your desires and your small, petty ambitions. Yours is indeed a pitiable state.

"So long as you do not take the dust of the feet of persons who are unattached to the things of the world, your mind will never lodge in the feet of the Lord who is the only Truth. It is only when you tear yourself away from this world that you can set your mind on the Lord. This desire for the Lord should come on its own accord. No amount of teaching by a *guru* nor the company of good people will help you to get into that frame of mind. Unless and until you abandon the thoughts of the worldly things you cannot learn the lessons I have learnt."

Hiranyakashipu was speechless for a long moment. His anger was too intense for words to come out of his lips. He pushed the child rudely from his lap. He called out to his servants and said: "Take the sinner away from my presence. He should be put to death. He has no affection for his people. In my presence he has the audacity to praise my dread enemy, Narayana, who killed my beloved brother. He sings the praises of Narayana. When I see this inordinate love he has for the "Lord" as he calls him, I am sure this son of mine is none other than my enemy. He has renounced his father at the age of five. He will not be of any good to me. When a son, though born of oneself behaves thus towards his father it is but right that he should be cast away like a dread disease. When a part of the body

threatens to hurt the entire body then, the sensible thing will be to get rid of the offending part. Only thus can the body be saved. You think of him as my son. But he is my enemy. He is like desire dwelling inside the heart of a sage. If it is not destroyed it will, in its turn, destroy the dwelling place. This child should be killed as soon as possible."

In the presence of the king his henchmen took up their dreadful javelins and tridents and began to hurt the child. Prahlada stood unmoved. His mind was far away, with the Lord. A miracle was seen. The weapons were ineffectual in their attempt to wound the child. It was like the futility of a man's attempts to achieve something when he has not the grace of the Lord to bless his attempts. Amazed at the spectacle Hiranya stopped the servants and said "We will try other methods."

Many methods of killing were tried. Prahlada was made to lie on the ground and wild elephants were made to walk on him. The king hoped that he would be crushed to death. But he could not be killed. He was thrown into a pit filled with serpents which stung him. But nothing happened. He was thrown to the ground from the top of a mountain and he got up unhurt. They dug a pit and placing him inside it covered him with earth. He was not killed. They made him drink poison. They tried to burn him alive. But Prahlada continued to live. The king was desperate since he could not put to death a small, tender young child of five.

The *gurus* approached the king who was sunk in thought and said: "In course of time the child may be corrected. We will take him with us and try once again. We will keep other *asura* children also and together, they may be able to make him interested in the things which amuse them."

The king sent Prahlada once again to the home of the *gurus* hoping for the best.

HOW HE KNEW ABOUT NARAYANA

Chanda and Amarka taught him about all the charms which beguile the mind of man. They also gave him lessons on *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama* and all the while his thoughts were on the fourth aim, *Moksha*. During his stay with the *gurus* Pahlada was with them bodily but his mind was far away and never with them.

Once the *gurus* had gone out and Pahlada was left alone with his playmates. They were all very fond of their gentle sweet companion who was being ill-treated by his father. Even their *gurus* were ill-using the prince and the children loved him all the more for it. Pahlada began to talk to his companions! Unsullied as yet by hatred and its kindred qualities which invade the mind only when one grows older, the young boys were attracted by the talk of Pahlada. He said: "Listen to me, all of you. We are all blessed with these bodies and these wonderful minds. It will be a crime if we waste them. They are given to us for a purpose. The mind should be set on the Lord. The body should be used only for the worship of the Lord. Abandon the *asuric* qualities which are your heritage and replace them with good one like loving everyone: hating no one: having nothing but compassion towards all living beings. God will be very easily pleased and you will reach him effortlessly this way. Think on him. Sing His praise and we will reach him easily."

"How do you know?" asked the boys. "You speak so surely: as though you know for certain that it is the truth. Tell us how you know these things."

"The *rishi* Narada, a devotee of Narayana taught me this," said Pahlada.

The boys were puzzled. They said: "Ever since we were born we have been together. We have known no other *guru* than the ones we have. When did you meet this Narada and learn so much from him?"

Prahlada smiled and said: "Long ago, when my father had been to the mountain Mandara to perform *tapas*, the *devas*, thinking that he was sure to meet his end on the mountain, began to fight with the *asuras* in the kingdom. The *asuras* were fleeing from the onslaught. The *devas* entered my father's palace and looted it. Indra captured my mother. She was weeping and he paid no heed to her entreaties. Then, by chance, the sage Narada saw him and said: "Indra, it is not right that you should carry away this woman. Is this the *dharma* which the gods observe? Shame on you! Abandon her please, at once."

Indra said: "My lord, you do not understand. I am not carrying her off with bad intentions. She has, growing inside her, an asura who is even now glowing like fire. I want to keep her with me until the child is born. After killing the newly born child which if allowed to live, will harass us, I will release her." Narada said: "You are wrong. The child that is to be born will not harass you. It will not be the cause of further distress to the *devas*. On the other hand, it will be a devotee of Narayana and will be the cause of your later happiness and freedom from the father's tyranny."

"Indra trusted the *rishi* and his words. He released my mother and went away. Narada took my mother to his hermitage. He comforted her and said: "You can live in my *ashrama* until your child is born: until your husband returns from his penance. You can rest assured that you can be happy here." My mother was engaged in serving the *rishi* during her stay in the *ashrama* of Narada. With me in mind Narada would every day teach her the *yoga* by name BHAKTI, the easiest path by which the Lord can be reached. And he would speak to her about the boon of knowledge: the Ultimate Truth: the realisation of the *Atman* in one's body to be none other than the Eternal Soul, the Paramatma, the *Parabrahma*. She heard it all but it did not stay long in her mind. But I heard it and I have not forgotten it."

Prahlada told them in great detail about the lessons he had learnt and the path of *Bhakti* appealed to the children naturally. When the *gurus* came back they found that the youngsters, all of them, were singing the praises of Narayana and the chorus was led by Prahlada. They put a stop to it and proceeded with their teaching. But they found to their dismay that their

words were making absolutely no impression on the children. Young Prahlada had converted them all to his way of thinking.

In despair they went to the presence of Hiranyakashipu and told him about the happenings in their house. The anger of the king was terrible. He decided that this was too much. The trouble which his little son was causing was not to be excused any longer. At first it seemed as though he were just mumbling words which he had heard and whose meaning he had not grasped. Later it came to pass that he did mean what he said: he had the audacity to criticise his father's way of thinking and way of living. He had asked his father to 'abandon' them! Hiranya had asked his myrmidons to put Prahlada to death but they had bungled it. There were reports of miracles happening and about the boy being saved. Hiranya thought that they had all become soft because the victim was a child and they did not have the heart to be really firm with him.

Hiranya decided that he would kill his son with his own hands. All the love he had for his son had vanished long ago. The fact that Prahlada was a staunch *bhakta* of Narayana was enough for him. The king made up his mind to put the boy to death. With a firm voice he shouted: "Bring that son of mine here to my presence at this very instant. I will deal with him and his impertinence."

THE FINAL ENCOUNTER

Hiranya sent for his son and Prahlada came and stood in front of him with folded palms after taking the dust of his father's feet. Hiranya spoke harshly to his son. He said: "You are a fool, a stupid fool. You are the son of a great king like me and you talk highly of a mere *deva* who has not courage to meet me in fight. I have put up with you and your impertinence all these days. But I now realise that you have become a menace. You will be the ruin of the entire House. You do not respect me and my words and I have reached the limits of my patience. I am today going to despatch you to the abode of Yama. Prepare yourself."

The child stood calm and unruffled as though the words of censure were addressed to someone else. And his imperturbable expression incensed Hiranya more. He bent his furious eyes on Prahlada who was standing before him in the same respectful stance and said: "I have had enough of your hypocrisy and this assumption of a false respect for me. You have been harassing me enough with praises of my enemy. How dare you continue to do what you have been forbidden to do? How could you pluck up enough courage to mention his name in my kingdom? I have decided to kill you."

Prahlada's eyes met those of his father. His were calm while the father's were red and burning. There was a look of pity and sadness in the eyes of Prahlada. He said: "My father, you think that I am a bad son. But the truth is, I am not. I only want to help you. Even now, if you listen to me, you will be saved. The Lord, Narayana, is the most powerful of all the gods. He is greater than all the *devas*: greater than Brahma, the creator: greater than all the powers which are considered great. He is the Glow which illumines the senses, the mind and the intellect. The world is created by Him: sustained by Him and destroyed by Him. Please accept that He is more powerful than you. Lord Narayana is not your enemy. It is your own mind

which is your enemy. It runs riot in wrong paths. Your mind is the enemy which has to be subdued and not Narayana.

"There is no greater enemy than a mind uncontrolled, unsubdued. Please subdue your mind. Infuse equanimity into your mind. Let your mind be rid of the dread qualities *Raga*: *Dvesha*: love and hatred. That is the only worship dear to the Lord. You say you have conquered the ten quarters. How untrue! You have not been able to conquer the six dread enemies which are inside you: *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Lobha*, *Moha*, *Mada* and *Matsara*. When a man has conquered these enemies, when he has controlled his mind, when he has brought his senses under control, when he is wise enough to know that the same *Atman* is lodged in the hearts of all, can he have an enemy? You are your enemy, my father. Please conquer yourself."

Hiranya was furious. He glowered at his son and said: "Indeed, you are very modest. You think you are wise enough to teach *Dharma* to your father who, in reality, should be treated as a *guru*: honoured as a god by you. But all that is beside the point. You say that there is a 'Lord' who is greater than me. Tell me who he is and where he is."

"He is Narayana, my father, and He is everywhere," said the young child. He was unafraid and there was not even the trace of fear in his voice or in his attitude. He stood with a calm look on his face. Hiranya could also detect the respect with which his son spoke to him. Only, instead of pleasing him it infuriated the *asura* since Prahlada's words were not pleasing to his ears. "Everywhere?" asked Hiranya. His red eyes came to rest on a huge pillar in the council hall. He sneered at Prahlada and said: "Is he then, inside this pillar?"

Prahlada prostrated before the pillar and said: "Yes, He is. I can see Him there, inside the pillar."

Hiranyakashipu looked around the pillar: he looked up and down and he could find nothing. He said: "I am now going to kill you. Let the Lord you speak of, your Narayana come out of the pillar and rescue you from death at my hands." With a loud cry Hiranyakashipu jumped down from his seat with a drawn sword in his hand. With his strong and powerful fist he hit the pillar.

NARASIMHA

A terrible noise was heard. It was like the clap of thunder. The entire world trembled in fear on hearing the noise: but Hiranya was not afraid. He kept on staring at the pillar. Even as he was looking, the pillar split into two and out of it emerged the Lord.

The Lord had assumed a terrible form. Glowing like molten gold he stood there. His eyes which were flecked with gold, looked at Hiranya and they were glaring out of the face of a lion. An immense tongue red like blood, was lashing in the huge mouth which was like a cavern. The tongue looked like a sword dipped in blood. The lion had an immense mane. Its chest was immense too and the waist was slender like that of a lion. Waist downwards, however, it was the form of a man, a human being. Everyone who saw it was struck with terror. But not Hiranya. He stood staring at it and thinking to himself: "What a strange looking thing is this! It is neither a man nor is it an animal."

Suddenly his mind went back several years. He was standing on the slope of the Mandara mountain and Brahma was before him. He remembered the boon he had asked for: the boon of immortality and he remembered *Brahma* saying that he was unable to do so. He had then said: "Grant me that none of your creations will be the cause of my death. None of the things created by you should be able to kill me." Hiranya came back with a start to the present. This was definitely not a thing created by *Brahma*. Could it be possible that this was his death?

Hiranya shrugged the thought away and with his weapon upraised he rushed towards the Lord. For a moment he could not be seen because of the glow emanating from Narasimha. Hiranya hit the Lord with his mace. The Lord lifted him bodily like Garuda would, a snake, Hiranya wriggled out of his grasp and again he attacked Narasimha with his mace. The Lord caught him in his mighty arms. Carrying him to the door of the hall

Narasimha paused at the threshold. He placed the asura on his lap after sitting on the threshold.

Hiranya looked helplessly around. The sky was deepening into darkness. It was neither day nor night. He smiled to himself and realised that this was the end. It was neither day or night, he was on the threshold of the hall which was neither inside the house nor outside it. He was caught in the arms of this beast which was not a beast and man who was not a man. He had placed him on his own lap. That was again one of the boons he had asked. He should die neither in the sky nor on the earth. With a strange clarity all his words came back to him: like a landscape is reflected in a drop of dew. And yet he was not afraid. He tried to fight again but the grip of his enemy was too strong. He turned his eyes on his son as if to say: perhaps what you said is right. There seems to be someone stronger and more powerful than me.

Placing Hiranyakashipu on his lap Narasimha tore his entrails out with his nails and his teeth. The sight was dreadful. He plucked the entrails out and placing them round his neck like a garland, Narasimha looked fiercely around.

The world suffered agony as a result of his wrath. The sea was shaken into mighty waves and the earth trembled in fear. The sky and the heavens lost their glow because his lustre swallowed all other light. The clouds were scattered here and there and the planets were all suffering under an eclipse. The oceans were heaving as though there was an upheaval in the nether world. The elephants guarding the quarters were frightened because of the roar of the lion-god. The earth was quaking since she could not bear up under his powerful stride.

The Lord walked with his dead victim and sat on the throne. No one dared to go near him. No one dared accost his angry form: not the *devas*, nor *Brahma*, nor Lakshmi.

Standing far away from him *Brahma* spoke words of praise. The *devas* and *Brahma* along with Mahadeva said: "Strange indeed are the ways of the Lord. You are the motivating force in every thing that happens. You were the one who originally caused anger in the minds of the Sanaka brothers. It

was you who caused your *bhaktas* Jaya and Vijaya to be hurled into the world of sin. You are the one who made me deluded enough to grant all the boons which Hiranya asked for. And in the house of this asura was born the greatest of your *bhaktas*: and that too was because you wanted it. You made the father try to kill the son and finally to protect your *bhakta* you have taken upon yourself this task of destroying the wicked *asura*. Who can gauge the purpose behind your actions? We salute you in all humility."

Narasimha was anger personified. When the *devas* with *Brahma* had gone to him long ago asking him to help them: to rid the world of Hiranyakashipu and his tyranny the Lord had said: "When he hurts his son who will be my *bhakta*: his son who will be untainted by faults like enmity and cruelty: who will ever be tranquil and unruffled by the sufferings inflicted on him because of his devotion to me, then will I appear in person and destroy Hiranya though he is protected by the many boons you have granted him."

It was the Lord's anger against a man who had dared to offend his *bhakta* which had taken the form of Narasimha. Long after the killing of Hiranya his anger had not abated. The *devas* led by *Brahma* were not able to approach him: so terrible was his appearance. Standing at a distance they spoke words in praise of the Lord.

They then went to Lakshmi the goddess and said: "Mother, only you can appease your Lord and his anger. The earth and the skies are suffering as a result of his coming. The clouds are scattered far and wide by the shake of his mane. The planets in the skies are not glowing since they are eclipsed by his glory. The oceans are suffering great upheaval because the waves are being tossed about by his breath. The elephants which are bearing up the earth in eight quarters are all trembling since they think that thunder and lightning are striking them down and the earth, as a result, is trembling. Not being able to bear the hot breath of the lord, the heavens are receding far away. The mountains are threatening to move since the earth is trembling. Unless the Lord is appeased, the world will come to an end and so will the heavens."

Lakshmi took one look at her lord and her face went pale with fright and she said: "I do not have the courage to approach him when he is in this mood. I have never seen him like this and I am afraid."

PRAHLADA'S PRAYER

Narasimha was seated on the throne of Hiranyakashipu and praises were reaching him from a distance. *Brahma* then went to Prahlada and said: "Child, the Lord took this form and killed your father because of the affection he has for you, his dear *bhakta*. It is up to you to appease his anger. None of us can approach him. Only you can save the world from his wrath."

Without speaking a word, with his eyes streaming with tears of joy at seeing his beloved Lord, the young child went near Narasimha and fell at his feet, washing them with his tears. The Lord looked at Prahlada and his glance rested tenderly on him. He placed his hand on the head of the child after raising him up. Prahlada felt a thrill running through his entire body at the touch of the Lord's hand. His sins were all gone and at that moment was revealed to him the Truth about the *Brahman*. His eyes were closed. His palms were folded together like a lotus bud and his eyes were raining tears incessantly. He stood still like a tree and his voice was choked with sobs as he began to praise the Lord and his glory in his childish treble: "My lord, you are inaccessible to *Brahma* and the *devas*: to the *rishis* who sit in meditation for aeons of time: to wise people whose words flow like water and who are very great and good men: all these are unable to have a glimpse of your form and yet, low born *asura* as I am, how can I have been blessed by the sight of you? In your infinite love for me, you have shown yourself to me. I am the most fortunate of all beings. They say that twelve qualities are dear to you. Birth in a noble family, wealth, beauty of form, *tapas*, scholarship, skill in work, glory, fame, strength, courage, effort and intellect. What is greater than all these is said to be the Ashtanga *yoga* which is supposed to lead straight to you. But you have shown me and the world that *bhakti*, mere love for you is enough and, in fact, all these other things stand in the way of reaching you. Even Ashtanga *yoga* is far inferior

to *bhakti*. I am sure of it. Or else, how could a mere animal, an elephant get your mercy?

"The Lord, I know is pleased only with *bhakti*. If a man has a beautiful body, or a handsome mate, or wealth as great as the mountain Meru, or great mastery over the use of words: and, if he has no devotion for the Lord what then is the use of all these things which he possesses? *Bhakti* and nothing else pleases you.

"Lord, all these gods who have assembled here are your *bhaktas* and they are all dear to you. We *asuras* worship you but the devotion of the *devas* is superior to ours. Even they are frightened of you. Your *avatara* should bless the world. It is for the sake of increasing the glory of the world and to make everyone happy that you have taken this form. Please shed this anger, my lord. The *asura* who incensed you is dead and I am asking you to give up this anger for the sake of others. I am not frightened of you or your anger or your form. But I am afraid of only one thing: the dread ocean called Samsara. That is what is terrible in form and unbearable for one who wants to be with you. Like the time when the *asura* servants of my father tied me up and threw me into the waters to be drowned, I am tied by the bonds of *Karma* which are of my own making and I am being thrown into the ocean called Samsara. I have had a sight of you and I am praying that my bonds have been burnt away: that I will reach you soon."

Lord Narasimha abandoned his anger and placing the young child on his lap he said: "Child, I am very fond of you. You are the greatest of the *asuras* and the noblest. I want to grant you any boon you desire. Ask me. I am here to satisfy all the desires of men. Ask me what you desire most and I will grant it."

The Lord was trying to tempt the child with the things of the world but Prahlada was not affected by the offer of a boon. He smiled very sweetly and said: "Do not try, my lord, to deceive me and deny me the place by your side which is all I want. I am an *asura* and the *asuric* nature runs after the objects of the senses. Knowing this weakness in us you are trying to tell me that I should plunge into this ocean called Samsara of my own accord. No, my lord. I have seen you and you know that I have always

loved you. I am afraid of the group of senses and I detest the objects of these. I think you are trying to test the strength of my devotion to you. One who asks a favour of you in return for his devotion is not a *bhakta* but a trader. I am only your *bhakta* without any desires and as for you, you are my lord who does not expect anything from a *bhakta* except *bhakti*. Where does the need arise here for the talk about desires and the granting of them?

"And yet, since you have commanded me to ask a boon of you I will not insult you by refusing it. I want a boon from you. I want your form to be in my heart for ever and thus I should be able to have no place for worldly desires there where you are. If love for you is steadfast in this heart of mine, then the Indriyas, the mind, the breath of life, the body, *Dharma*, courage, intellect, shamefacedness, wealth, glory, memory, and even truth will all have to leave the place and become destroyed by the fire which is *Bhakti*. When *Bhakti* is firm the first thing which goes is EGO and with the ego will vanish all the qualities associated with it. When man sheds the desires in his heart he becomes as rich as you are, my lord.

"I salute you, the Ancient *Purusha*, the Parabrahman, Hari, Narayana, Narasimha."

Narasimha was now a Shantamurti and everyone came near to him, stood in his presence and praised him. Lakshmi came and sat by his side and he became Lakshmi-Narasimha. He said: "My child, you will live till the end of this *kalpa*. Without getting involved in them you will enjoy the pleasures of the world. You will be free of the bondage of *karma* and finally you will reach me." Prahlada bowed his head and said: "Lord, be gracious to my father. He was ignorant of the glory that is you and he spent his entire life hating you. You were angry with him for his treatment of me. Forgive him and let him be rid of the sin by name: "*Bhagavadbhaktanindana*" which is an unforgivable sin in your eyes."

"So be it," said Narasimha. He smiled and added: "Because you have been born in the line of Hiranya, he and twenty one of his ancestral lines have been purified. He has reached the land of your *pitris*. You may perform the rites for him. I also want you to know that all your descendants will be

dear to me." Narasimha then told *Brahma*: "You should not, from now, grant boons indiscriminately to the *asuras*. It is like feeding the serpents with nectar."

Narasimha vanished from their sight. Prahlada then honoured the *devas* and *Brahma* and they returned happily to their homes. The thorn which had been lodged in their sides for all their years of suffering had been removed and they were happy. Narada continued his narration to Yudhishtira. He said: "Thus Diti's sons were killed by Narayana. They had been constantly thinking of him though the feeling was hatred. Because of the curse of Sanaka and his brothers the doorkeepers of Vishnu, Jaya and Vijaya were again born as Ravana and Kumbhakarna. Narayana was born as Rama and killed them. Shishupala and Dantavakra are the two remaining *janmas* of Jaya and Vijaya. Jaya has now reached the feet of the Lord and Vijaya will follow very soon.

"Yudhishtira, you must have noticed that the first *janma* of these two was such that KRODHA was predominant and it was accompanied by MADA. In the birth as Ravana, KAMA was the main vice which was rampant. In this *janma* MATSARA is the predominant emotion in the minds of these two.

"The one who listens to the story of Prahlada, and the grace of the Lord to this *bhakta* will never again be born in this world," said Narada and concluded his story.

Yudhishtira was silent for a moment and then said: "Fortunate indeed was the *asura* child Prahlada who has seen the Lord in person." Narada smiled pityingly at him and said: "Yudhishtira, have you not realised yet that you are more fortunate than all the others? I will explain it to you.

"Prahlada and his *guru*—who is myself—were not as fortunate as you are. Your ancestors like Pururavas: *rishis* like the great Vasishtha: why, even Brahma the creator are inferior to you. They spent ages studying the Upanishads and searched for the *Brahman* who has been said to be hidden therein. As for you, this *Brahman*, this quintessence of the Upanishads is living with you even if you do not ask him to. Your home is as pure, as holy, as sacred as all the Upanishads put together. The *Parabrahman* did

not live in the house of the child Prahlada. And the *rishis* did not go to his house to see the Brahman. Do you know what has happened now?

"The *rishis* are searching for the *Brahman* in Vaikuntha: in the solar space: in the ocean of milk: in Shveta-dvipa: and not finding it there, they are looking for him everywhere. He has concealed himself in a human form and He is running errands for you. Tell me, are the others fortunate? or you? Krishna, as the Parabrahman, is living here, with you. He is dear to you and he is your cousin. He is your well wisher. He does not expect anything from you. He is your uncle's son. 'He is my very soul,' you say in affection for him. But it is true. At times he is your *guru* and at other times he is your kinsman who works for you. Do you not remember that he worked for you when he had this Indraprastha built for you and that when he went to the castle of Jarasandha with your brothers and had him killed so that you could perform the Rajasuya? At times he is your mentor and at other times he is your cousin, one younger than you and one who prostrates before you. The *munis* searched for him everywhere and not finding him there, they came to the earth. They went to Mathura and then to Brindavan. They then went to Dwaraka and finally they followed him to your house where he is living as any other human being. Even Brahma and Mahadeva are, at times, unable to know his true nature. The *rishis* worship him with silence, their *bhakti* and their *sanyasa*: and yet, they are not able to realise Him. They know about Him but they have not seen Him. That *Brahman* is this Krishna: and fortunate indeed is the world since he is walking on it: and fortunate are you and your brothers to have him all for yourselves."

THE ELEPHANT AND THE CROCODILE

There was a hill by name Trikuta. It was famed for its beauty and it was surrounded on all sides by an ocean of milk. The creepers which grew on the hill were incandescent like gold and silver and the quarters would glow because of the light from the hill. It was a hundred *yojanas* in extent. Conchs were there in plenty and precious stones as well. From a height, the earth, dark in colour, the sea white and milky and the hill green in colour with the trees and shrubs and creepers together gave the effect of an emerald set in silver. It was a beautiful hill. Wild animals were there and sweet music from the nests of the birds would mingle with the roar of the lions and tigers that lived in the caves. The fragrance of the air which had been perfumed by the many sweet-scented flowers would draw the divine beings to spend their time there. It became the playground of many of the divine beings. Siddhas, Charanas and Gandharvas would go there very often and spend their time in the caves and valleys which glowed with the lustre of the many precious gems embedded in the rocks.

In that hill was a garden by name Rituman. It was crowded with flowering trees of every kind: Mandara, Parijata, Patala, Ashoka, Champaka, Chuta, and fruit trees like the pomegranate and the mango. There were tall trees which touched the skies, Devadaru and Sala trees.

The garden belonged to Varuna. There was also a beautiful lake in that hill. It was a very large lake and on its face floated lotuses blue, white and red. The makaranda from them was so profuse that there could always be heard the humming of summer bees which were hovering round the flowers. Water birds like the crane and the swan were always to be found there and the fish and the tortoises inside the water could be seen clearly since the water was so placid. The banks of the lake had flowering shrubs like the jasmine, the kunda and the jaji: punnaga, and Kuravaka and the creeper Madhavi. The scent there was overpowering so much so one felt faint.

In that hill dwelt an immense elephant with his entire herd. He would wander at will and his herd would ever be with him. His favourite pastime was to uproot the bamboo groves and the tender sprouts from the canes were the favourite food of the elephants and they would wander at will in the forest. The elephant was so wild and so powerful that even wild animals like the lion and the tiger and wild boar and bulls would run from the spot where the elephant stood.

Once during summer, after a long march with his companions, the elephant was feeling very tired and extremely thirsty. From a distance he smelt the perfume which was part of the lake and he went fast towards the lake. His herd came with him and soon they reached the lake and entered it. It was refreshing to bathe in the lake and to drink the sweet water. Once their thirst was quenched they did not feel like coming out of the lake. They spent a long time playing in the clear water and making it muddy and full of mire. The master elephant would take water in his trunk and pour it over the backs of the small ones and the she-elephants. Like a man absorbed in the pleasures of Samsara takes no heed of the fact that his life is getting shorter day by day, the elephant paid no heed to the passage of time. All unaware of the danger lurking in the waters he went on playing, like a samsari who does not see that it is a trap to catch him and bind him for ever.

Instigated by Fate, a crocodile which had been living in the lake for a long time grasped the leg of the elephant in its mighty jaws. The unexpected pain made the elephant wince and he tried to shake off the crocodile. But it was not possible. Try as he might, the elephant found it impossible to get out of the clutches of the crocodile. His companions tried to help him but it was all in vain. The grip of the crocodile was too strong and the elephant, strong as he was, was not strong enough to shake off the crocodile. The tussle went on for a long time, for years. Even the *devas* were present to see this mighty duel between the lord of the forest and the king of the rivers. Slowly but very steadily the strength of the elephant was ebbing away. The crocodile was gaining ascendancy; he found himself growing stronger and more powerful. The elephant finally realised that it was, for him, a losing fight and that soon his life would also leave his

body. At that moment he began to see everything in the proper perspective. He pondered for a long while and told himself: "I am in great trouble and these, my dependants are unable to extricate me from my predicament. I have realised that no one can help me now in this dire calamity which has befallen me. But still, I have one hope. I can surrender to the Lord who is the refuge of even gods like Brahma. He is sure to protect me from the dread serpent called Yama who is trying to frighten me. If He is with me, death himself will flee from me since he is afraid of the Lord. I will pray to the Lord."

He composed his mind and his thoughts, and set them steadily on Narayana and began his song of praise. He said: "Salutations to you, Lord of lords. You are the Ancient; the *Purusha* and the *Prakriti* born of *Purusha*. You are the light which illumines the intellect of the human being. This entire universe is established in you. It was born of you and it has no existence apart from you. After creating it you, at the time of the deluge, withdrew it into yourself. You are the light beyond the sources of all light.

"You stand on the edge of the sea of darkness, of *tamas* which is all that is found at the end of *Pralaya* and you bring new life into the new creation which is born of the old. The cycle is unending and you are the cause behind the cosmos. It is to have a vision of you that *rishis* spend millions of years absorbed in meditation. You have no birth: no *karma* to perform: no names nor any qualities to distinguish you from the others. And yet out of your *maya* you create forms for yourself and these have names and qualities ascribed to them. The formlessness of you is forgotten by those who see you take up a form for the sake of the good of the world. You are beyond the reach of the senses, the mind, the emotions, the intellect. Still, though you are beyond comprehension there are some who have realised you by becoming one with you.

"You are the seer, the *Drashta*, for the functioning of the *Indriyas*, and their different individual behaviour. You are the cause of everything but nothing has caused you since you are Ancient: eternal: everlasting: without a beginning and so, without an end. There is no limit to you since you are the Infinite.

"You are unaffected by the *gunas* and their interplay and, as a result, those who succumb to the *maya* caused by the *gunas* are not able to realise the truth about you. Even as the glow from the sun and the fire erupt from it, glow for a while and are lost in the source itself even so, your glory emanates from you. This stream of *gunas*, this mind, intellect, senses, and the bodies which enjoy these are all born out of you: and, in the end, are again lost only in you. They have no separate entity. Famed as you are to be beyond the *gunas*, still, you have been known to be the personification of compassion as far as beings like me are concerned: beings who surrender themselves entirely to you are sure to be cured of their ignorance, their *Avidya* and will be made to have a vision of the Truth that is you.

"This birth of mine which is full of *Avidya* inside as well as outside, this elephant's form and mind is of no use to me. I have no desire to live any more. I want that *moksha* which will not be destroyed by the passage of time. *Punya* which is acquired is rewarded by a length of time in heaven. When that *punya* gets exhausted man is again thrown back to the world of sin. I want a *moksha* different from this. I want to be cured of *Avidya*. I am a *mumukshu* and I salute you who is the cause of this universe: who pervades everything: and yet, who is apart from all that you have created: who are the ultimate Truth. Yogis see you in their hearts since their *karmas* and the results of their *karmas* have all been burnt in the flame of self-knowledge. The greatness that is you is hidden from foolish beings like me because our thinking power is clouded by the sense of "I" and "MINE." I surrender myself to that infinite power, truth, light that is you."

The *devas* and *Brahma* and all the others were listening to the words of the elephant. The praise was for the *Purusha* and each one of them knew that he was not fit for the words of praise which were used by the animal. Narayana was touched by the plight of the elephant and assuming the form Hari, appeared before him on the shores of the lake.

Garuda was carrying Him. In his hand glowed the *chakra* by name Sudarshana. Looking on him the elephant raised his trunk which held a lotus and said: "Lord! Narayana! I salute you." Narayana was overcome with compassion for the poor elephant and his plight. He entered the lake,

killed the crocodile with His Sudarshana and pulled the elephant out of the lake. To the leg of the elephant was still clinging the dead form of the crocodile with its mouth gaping open.

All the denizens of the heavens were watching in awe. They stood around the Lord and the elephant, exhausted by the fight which had lasted all these years, was standing with its trunk still raised aloft. With infinite love the Lord accepted the lotus which was held in the trunk and the elephant was happy.

LIBERATION

Even as they were looking on, there appeared a divine being out of the carcass of the crocodile. It was a *gandharva* by name Hu Hu. He fell at the feet of the Lord and praised him with songs which came out of his *gandharva* form. The people there came to know the reason for his having assumed the form of a crocodile all these years and the liberation he had at the hands of Narayana.

Years ago, he was bathing in this self same lake with his wives. Into that same lake plunged the great sage Devala. The *gandharva* was in a playful mood and not knowing the gravity of his offence he swam under water and from under, he pulled the leg of the *rishi* who was standing in the water. Incensed at the act which disturbed his meditation the *rishi* cursed him and said: "Since you enjoy this sport so much, you will become a crocodile and do this all your life." The *gandharva*, now contrite, begged him to reverse his curse and his wives joined him in trying to appease the anger of the *rishi*. Devala relented and said: "You will live here for a long time. Once the king of elephants will enter the lake with his herd. You must grab his leg and remember not to let go at any cost. The elephant will invoke the Lord and He, in the form of HARI, will grant you freedom from this form by killing you with his chakra."

The *gandharva* made *pradakshina* to the rishi Lord and went away from there singing the praises of the Lord.

Sukabrahma saw the puzzled look on the face of Parikshit. Before he could frame the question, Suka said: "I know what you are thinking. You are surprised to find a mere animal speaking words which the greatest of the *yogis* have not been able to speak. How could it be possible for the elephant to know the truth about the Purusha? I will tell you.

"The southern country of Pandya was once ruled by a righteous king by name Indradyumna. He was ever devoted to Narayana. Once, he was worshipping the Lord silently on the slopes of the Malaya mountain. Having bathed in the river he restrained his thought, mind and breath: he meditated on the form of the Lord and he was observing the vow of silence while praying. The sage Agastya who lived on that mountain came, by chance, to that spot and he was surrounded by his disciples. The king, lost as he was to the world around him, did not see the rishi and so did not worship him in the manner which is customary. A brahmin and that, a *rishi* had come with his disciples and the king had apparently ignored him.

"Agastya, incensed at this apparent misconduct said: "Since he is standing thus, like a personification of *Tamas*, this king will be born as an elephant which is a symbol of nothing but *Tamas*." After cursing him the *rishi* went away. As for that great king Indradyumna, he was not, in the least, angry with the *rishi* for the curse. He took it as the command of the Lord and he undertook the curse visited on him with humility. He became an elephant and wandered in the forests of the Trikuta mountain. But there was one remarkable thing about his life as an animal. Since his mind and his thoughts had been steeped in *bhakti* for the Lord he remembered his previous birth. And so, when he was in trouble, he could pray to the Lord in words which a mere animal could not have known.

"Indradyumna was now released from his curse and he had also obtained liberation from the bondage called *samsara*. When the Lord touched him he changed his form: he now became one of the attendants of the Lord Narayana. He attained what is known as the *Sarupa* of Narayana. He was placed along with Narayana on the Garuda and soon was lost to the world of men. Garuda soared into the sky and soon he vanished from the sight of everyone on the banks of the lake in the garden by name Rituman on the mountain Trikuta."

AMRITA MANTHANA

There was war in the high heavens between the *devas* and the *asuras*. The *devas* could not stand the fierceness of the attack of the *asuras*. They were not able to bring back to life many of the *devas* who were dying in the war. Indra, Varuna and the others held a council of war and they could not find a way out of the dreadful predicament. They decided to approach Brahma, the Father of Creation. When they went to him he said that there was only one way to solve their problem: that was to go to Lord Narayana and pray to him. He would help them out of their trouble.

They proceeded to the presence of the Lord. Brahma prayed to him and asked him to take pity on the *devas*. Narayana appeared before them and after listening to their words of praise he said: "I know how you can achieve what you want. The first thing to do is: you should make peace with the *asuras*. We are in need of time to prepare ourselves and until you succeed in your new attempts it is but politic to call for a truce.

"When the endeavour is for something great the methods adopted should be as peaceful as possible. My suggestion to you is this: you should obtain AMRITA, the elixir which will protect you from death. It will also bring back to life one who is dead. How are we to get Amrita? is your next question.

"You should churn the ocean with the mountain Mandara as the churning staff and with Vasuki, the serpent, as the rope. For this churning you need the powerful arms of the *asuras*. You cannot do this all by yourself. I will also take part in the churning operations. You should strive for the coming of the Amrita out of the ocean. I will see to it that you get the entire benefit of the Amrita and not the *asuras*. But I must give you a word of warning. Do not oppose the *asuras* in anything. Pretend as though you are willing to fall in with all their suggestions. There is another word of warning. The first thing that will be born out of the churning will be

KALAKUTA, the dread poison. Do not be frightened of it. And again, several other things will be born of the ocean before Amrita. Do not covet any of them and do not ask for them if you feel that the *asuras* desire them. Your aim is the Amrita and the rest is immaterial. Now go and make peace with Bali and begin your work." The Lord disappeared from their presence and the *devas* led by Brahma returned to their abode.

Bali was the son of Virochana, the son of Prahlada. The *devas* led by Indra went to the palace of Bali. The servants of Bali, on seeing the *devas*, prepared themselves to attack them. But Bali came there and told them that they should abstain from any rash act. Indra was led with all honour to the court of Bali. The *asura* monarch then asked him what he could do to entertain his distinguished guest. Indra, remembering the words of Lord Narayana spoke softly. His manner was very tactful and his words were persuasive. He told Bali about the proposed churning of the ocean of milk. He said: "Here is something which was not known before. Let us not fight but be friendly for a while: at least till the adventure of the Amrita is concluded. I hope you will co-operate with us and join in the venture. It is a stupendous task which we are undertaking but the result is so attractive that I feel it is worthwhile making an attempt." Bali welcomed the suggestion and so did his associates Shambara, Arishtanemi and the Tripuras. And they decided to forget their enmity for the time being. Together they would strive for the Amrita.

Everyone was excited. The *asuras* plucked the Mandara out of the earth with their mighty arms and the *devas* and *asuras* together carried it to the sea shore. The mountain, however, was too heavy for them and they dropped it on the way and a number of *devas* and *asuras* were crushed under it. Before they could recover from the stunning effect of the blow Narayana appeared. He lifted the mountain and took it to the shore of the ocean. The *devas* had already convinced Vasuki that he would be doing a service to the *asuras* by becoming the rope which would wind round the mountain during the churning. He was also promised a share of the Amrita when it appeared.

THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN: KURMA AVATARA

The two hosts began to churn the ocean. Narayana was there. He went to the head of Vasuki and grasped it in his hands. The *devas* followed the lord and they too placed their hands on the head of Vasuki. The asuras were very angry. They felt that they were insulted by this gesture on the part of the *Devas* led by their Lord. They thought it beneath their dignity to grasp the tail of Vasuki. The *asuras* who thought too highly of themselves said: "We are learned in the sacred lore of the Vedas and we are famed the world over for the greatness of our deeds and the loftiness of our births. It is beneath our dignity to touch the tail of the serpent when you *devas* hold its head. We refuse to assist you in this churning."

They stood firm and would not move a step. The Lord looked at them and smiling sweetly at them he relinquished the head of Vasuki and went to the tail of the snake: the *devas* of course followed him in his action.

The initial misunderstanding was cleared and the *asuras*, feeling happy that they had gained their point, began to churn the mountain along with the *devas* led by Narayana.

In spite of the many powerful arms which were engaged in the task the mountain Mandara sank into the ocean because of its great weight. There was depression in the hearts of the two hosts because of this unexpected calamity. Narayana knew that this had happened because they had all ignored Lord Vighneshvara: and so He went under the waters. Lord Narayana took the form of an immense TORTOISE- Kurma—and lifted the mountain on to his back. The Mandara mountain rose out of the water and there was great rejoicing everywhere. Only, very few knew why it went down and why it had been able to come up again. The Lord went on top of the mountain and from there he placed his thousand hands to steady it and to hold it erect. He entered the hearts of the *devas* and the *asuras*. The enthusiasm in the hearts of the churners was the Lord and the

ignorance and apathy in the mind of Vasuki was again the Lord. He was the thousand-armed Lord on top of the mountain: he was the immense tortoise under the mountain, he was the nature of the *asuras* and he was the gentleness of the *devas* and he was the firmness in the Mandara mountain. He pervaded everything and he was here, there and everywhere.

The churning went on and the tempo increased. Pulled powerfully in both the directions Vasuki could not bear it. Out of his mouth came fire and poisonous smoke and the *asuras* were greatly afflicted by these since they were at the head of the snake. They could not do anything about it.

The Lord took pity on everyone since the fumes were choking them all. In his infinite kindness he commanded the rain clouds to collect and cool the air. The rains came and a soft cool breeze blew from the ocean. And still the churning went on.

There was no sign of the Amrita appearing and, to cheer the toiling hosts the Lord again took part in the churning. Dark as a rain cloud he stood there with golden silk covering him. The fish shaped earrings gleamed in his ears like streaks of lightning: now appearing, now vanishing, as he churned steadily with the *devas*. His hair strayed on to his forehead and with a toss of his head he would push it back again and again. The garland on his chest tossed to and fro and his eyes turned red with exhaustion. His arms which were the refuge of the entire universe were moving up and down as though he were intent only on churning and nothing else. So wonderful was he that it seemed as though there was another mountain on the shore of the sea glowing with its own radiance.

The waters of the sea, filled as they were now with the juices of the many medicinal herbs which had been thrown into it for churning, became white like milk. And still there was no sign of the Amrita. It was to cheer the disappointed hosts that the Lord kept on churning.

The churning went on. The fish in the ocean, the sharks and even the whales were tossed up and down ruthlessly and still the churning went on.

KALAKUTA

Suddenly they saw that something was making its appearance on the surface of the ocean. Before they could look they were all feeling choked and breathless. It was the dread poison Halahala. Narayana had already warned the *devas* about it. But the poison was so fierce that it was beyond all imagination. It spread all over the place. The entire air was fouled because of its virulence and no one could bear its potency. Dropping the snake which they were holding in their hands the *devas* and the *asuras* fled from the spot as fast as they could and still the fumes of the poison followed them. The *devas* fell at the feet of Mahadeva and prayed to him. "My Lord", they said, "You are the Lord of lords and you are the protector of the Universe. We are frightened of this poison. Please protect us from it." Mahadeva was overcome with compassion for his suppliants.

He looked at his consort and said: "Look at the entire host of *devas* and *asuras* who are looking to me to save them from the dread Kalakuta which is born of the ocean. It is my first duty to protect them who trust me. I will therefore swallow this poison and thus save the frightened suppliants." The mother of the universe smilingly gave her approval. Lord Mahadeva then took the poison in the palm of his hand and swallowed it. The poison entered his throat and stayed there for ever staining the white neck of the Lord with blue. The stain seemed to enhance the beauty of Mahadeva's neck. It looked like a dark jewel placed on His fair neck. The good and the compassionate, take it upon themselves to suffer along with suffering humanity. When a human being emulates the Lord in this manner this very act is the greatest act of worship that can please the *Purusha* who created the Universe.

While he was drinking the poison an infinitesimal drop slipped from his hand and spilled on the ground. This was taken by poisonous creatures like snakes, scorpions and creatures which have poison in their fangs and some

creepers got it on them and were later classified as poison creepers which are avoided by bees, birds and beasts.

THE BIRTH OF LAKSHMI

After the poison had been swallowed by Mahadeva the *devas* and the *asuras* resumed the churning of the ocean. There appeared a beautiful cow by name KAMADHENU. The *rishis*, steeped in the lore of the Vedas and Vedic rites thought that she would be useful to them for preparing the *Havis* (which is made out of cow's milk and butter). *Havis* was the offering to the fire in the *yajnas* which they would perform endlessly.

Then came UCHCHAISHRAVAS, a horse white like the Kunda flower. Bali wanted the horse. Indra, remembering the advice of Narayana did not ask for it. There then arose out of the ocean a magnificent elephant, vying with Kailasa the abode of Mahadeva, in whiteness. It had four tusks and it was given to Indra. It was named AIRAVATA.

There appeared a beautiful gem by name KAUSTUBHA which was pinkish red like the lotus. Strangely enough, Narayana said that he would like to wear it as an ornament. The tree by name PARIJATA was born and following it came a crowd of beautiful women. They were wearing beautiful ornaments made of gold on their necks and arms and they were wearing beautiful drapes round their waists. They walked beautifully and their wanton ways and grace pleased the *devas*. They were the APSARAS and they, and the tree Parijata, were annexed by Indra. The *asuras* were not interested in these and that was why the *devas* took them.

Like a streak of lightning illuminating the hill Sudhama, there appeared out of the sea, the gracious figure of LAKSHMI. All of them wanted her. They could not tear their eyes away from her. Indra hurried to place a throne for her to sit. The rivers took forms and brought water for her in pots of gold. Mother earth brought all her precious herbs to bathe the newcomer. The cows yielded their milk for her. Vasanta, the god of Spring, brought her the flowers which bloom only in the months of Chaitra and Vaishakha. The *rishis* gave her the holy bath and the *gandharvas* sang her

praises. The *gandharva* women danced in her presence and the clouds rained music on her. The Diggajas, the elephants in charge of the quarters, brought water in their trunks and poured it on her. The lord of the oceans brought pure white silks for her to wear. Varuna brought her a garland by name *Vaijayanti* which had bees hovering over it. Vishvakarma, the divine architect brought her curiously wrought jewels. Sarasvati gave her a necklace made of pearls. Brahma's gift was a lotus and the Nagas gave her earrings. Lakshmi had a garland of lotuses in her hands and she wandered among them with a shy smile hovering on her lips.

She looked around to find for herself a husband. The *yakshas*, *gandharvas*, *siddhas*, *charanas*, and the *devas* were all there. The *asuras* were all there. But she was not pleased with any of them. The *rishis* were there and she thought: "They have wealth of *tapas* but they have not conquered anger. As for *Guru* and Sukra, they have wisdom but they do not know the meaning of detachment. Chandra is young and handsome but he has not conquered lust. As for Indra, though he is the Lord of the heavens he has not conquered desire. Each one of the gods who have assembled here has something wanting. No one is perfect except Lord Narayana. He is complete in himself: so much so, he does not desire me." She looked at Narayana who had crossed the *trigunas*, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*: who was not moved by the passions which affect the others: who was like a lake unruffled by the passing breeze. She walked up to him, placed the lotus garland on his neck and stood by his side. The Lord took her and placed her on his chest: they glowed like a thunder cloud with a streak of lightning flashing across it.

The churning was resumed. There arose the lovely figure of a young girl with eyes like lotuses. Her name was VARUNI, the most delightful, the most intoxicating drink. The *asuras* took her for themselves.

AMRITA, AT LAST

The churning went on. Suddenly, out of the ocean there arose the form of a divine looking being. He was dark and his arms were long and powerful: a young man, with a garland round his neck. His chest was broad and powerful and he was wearing many ornaments wrought in gold inlaid with precious stones. He was dressed in yellow silk and in his jewelled hands he held a large vessel of gold.

He was DHANVANTARI, an incarnation of Narayana and the *devas* as well as the *asuras* realised that their task was ended. The vessel of gold held the precious elixir, AMRITA. The *asuras* dropped Vasuki in a hurry and rushed towards Dhanvantari. They snatched the vessel from his hands and ran away from there. The *devas* stood stunned at the unexpected turn of events. They fell at the feet of Narayana and he smiled at them and said: "I have already told you that I will make you the sole possessors of the Amrita. Leave your worries to me." He stood watching the antics of the *asuras*.

There was already a big fight among the *asuras* as to who should taste the amrita first. In that host were also some righteous *asuras* who said: "This churning of the ocean was performed like a *yajna*. The *devas* and we undertook the task. And it is but right that they should get their share of the Amrita." They were of course, not heard by the *asuras* who were surrounding the vessel of gold. In short while they had gone far away from the shores of the ocean arguing about who should have the first taste of Amrita.

A silence fell on the crowd. Till now they were fighting but all that stopped. All eyes were turned on someone who was approaching them. It was a woman. She was a very beautiful woman. They had never seen such a woman before: such charm and such beauty had never crossed their eyes before. They had seen eyes before but not such eyes: they were very dark

blue, like the heart of a blue lotus. The woman's form and features were all so perfect that they could not tear their eyes off this vision.

They went near her, crowded round her and bombarded her with questions.

"Tell us who you are. Your eyes are more beautiful than lotuses and your smile has captivated us. We will do anything you ask. Look, we are *asuras*, we are the sons of Kashyapa. This bowl of gold holds Amrita and we are fighting over it. Take it in your hands. We leave the decision in your hands as to who should get the first share of the Amrita. You are a stranger and you will be impartial. Please distribute the Amrita as you think fit."

Narayana who had assumed the form of MOHINI for the benefit of the *devas*, smiled charmingly at them and said: "Brave sons of Kashyapa, how is it you have so much confidence in me whom you do not know at all? I am a woman who seems to have pleased you with my looks. The wise say that one who is really sensible should not have any faith in a woman who kindles lust in man. They say that such faith is like trusting a wolf."

Since it was the truth which Mohini spoke no one would believe her. They laughed at her and placed the vessel of gold in her hands. Mohini took it in her hands and said: "If you are prepared to abide by my decision and accept my actions, whether they are good or bad, I am ready to oblige you."

"So be it," said the infatuated *asuras*, drinking her with their eyes. Their thinking power was lost.

Kusa grass was spread on the ground and the *asuras* had holy baths, and dressing themselves very carefully they all stood on the kusa grass. By this time the *devas* had also arrived: the two hosts stood facing the east. When they had all assembled, Mohini entered with the Amrita in her hands. Her hips which were covered by white silk swayed seductively and the pearls on her neck swayed to and fro tossing about on her heaving breasts. The *devas* and the *asuras*, lost as they were in the beauty of Mohini, took leave of their senses and sat like dumb beings.

Narayana knew that it was not right to give Amrita to the *asuras*. They were cruel by nature and giving Amrita to them would be like feeding

snakes with milk: it would only enhance the virulence of the poison in them. He therefore seated the *devas* and the *asuras* in two different groups. Taking the golden vessel in her hand Mohini walked in their midst. Her smiles, her loving glances, and her lisping words were all for the *asuras*. But her hand was ladling out the Amrita only to the *devas*. Because of the spell she had cast on them the *asuras* never realised that they were being cheated of their share of Amrita. After a while, a semblance of consciousness was dawning in their minds, and still, they were unwilling to censure the lovely woman of their choice and so they were silent. There were some who thought to themselves: "These *devas* are, indeed, without any feeling of beauty. They cannot appreciate the beauty of this woman. They are so greedy that they think only of Amrita. Well, let them take their share first. Surely, she loves us and she will not cheat us." One *asura*, however, was alert. He was Rahu. He was watching the behaviour of Mohini and he saw that she would never grant them any favour: not as far as Amrita was concerned. He quickly assumed the form of a *deva* and sat between the sun and the moon. He held out his hand for the Amrita. Mohini filled his palm and he quaffed it. The next moment Surya and Chandra together made signs to her and made Narayana recognise the impostor. The Lord at once took up the *chakra* out of the air and cut off his head. He had swallowed Amrita and so he could not die. His body which had not absorbed Amrita fell down senseless, lifeless: but his head was alive.

Brahma honoured Rahu by making him one of the planets. As a punishment for the sun and moon the planet Rahu was allowed to swallow them during certain times and then they are said to be eclipsed by the *graha* Rahu.

This is said to be a moral lesson for children not to carry tales about others!

When he saw that the *devas* had been served with Amrita, the Lord abandoned the guise of Mohini and resumed his natural appearance.

This incident of the churning of the ocean must be pondered over. The *devas* and the *asuras* were both working towards the same end: finding of

Amrita. Both worked strenuously and equally sincerely towards this end. They both pulled the mountain Mandara with the snake Vasuki as the rope and both efforts were equal: as a matter of fact, the *asuras* put in more work since they had more powerful arms.

As for the result, however, the *devas* enjoyed the benefit while the efforts of the *asuras* were all wasted. This was because the *devas* had surrendered themselves to the Lord. They had taken the dust of the feet of the Lord and their labour was duly rewarded. Men of the world, when they strain their minds, their riches, their actions and other similar things towards benefiting themselves, their children, their homes and their personal happiness, their actions become all futile like watering the branches of a tree to make it live. If, however, man does the same things dedicating the actions to the Lord it will then be like watering the roots of a tree and man's actions will never be fruitless in such cases. Self-surrender is the highest form of *bhakti*.

THE WAR RESUMED

When Narayana assumed his natural form the asuras were, for a moment, dumb founded by the calamity that had overtaken them. Before they could think, the Lord vanished from their sight. They were startled into action. Lifting their weapons high in the air the asura host rushed towards the devas and there ensued a terrible battle on the shores of the ocean. The asuras were furious because of the deception to which they had succumbed and this enraged them. They fought with added fury. Each one of them was intent on destroying as many of the devas as possible.

Many duels were fought but the most spectacular of them was that between Indra and Bali. Each was as powerful as the other and all eyes were watching the fight. Indra was full of energy after he had partaken on Amrita while Bali, being the master in the art of fighting with *Maya* weapons would not be subdued by the arrows of Indra. Out of the sky rained weapons like fire and stones, and javelins. This caused havoc in the *deva* host and the *devas* did not know how to counteract it. Ever mindful of his *bhaktas* Lord Narayana appeared and his presence was enough to dispel Bali's *maya* and its effect on all of them. The very thought of the Lord is said to be enough to dispel *maya*. When such is the case how can *maya* exist when his presence was felt? Like a dream world fading when a person wakes up, all the illusions melted away.

But Bali was undaunted. He attacked Narayana himself with his many weapons. Kalanemi, one of the henchmen of Bali threw a javelin at the Lord and he was killed when Narayana caught it in his hand and sent it back to Kalanemi. Mali and Sumali were killed by the chakra of the Lord.

Indra then challenged Bali for a duel. He said: "You fool! Like a conjurer you took resort to your *maya* tactics. Can you not see how futile your powers are? Look, with my Vajra I am going to smash your head into a thousand pieces. Prepare yourself to meet your death."

Bali looked at him with a slow smile and spoke in a low voice. He said: "Men who have been propelled towards fighting, who have been goaded by Time and again as the result of their actions: these men, I say, have been impelled to pursue particular line of action. It is not in their hands to decide for themselves what is going to happen. To such men fame or victory on the one hand or defeat, on the other, are sure to happen. It stands to reason that it should be so. The wise know that it is all because of *kala* and they neither rejoice nor mourn when these things happen to them. Such wisdom has, of course, never been your heritage. You confuse your *Atman* with the *dehin* who enjoys fame and victory and so, you have nothing but eternal sorrow and dissatisfaction in your minds. Foolish as you are, you think your foul words will hurt us to the core. But we do not listen to such words. They are treated with the contempt they deserve."

Indra's anger knew no bounds when he heard the scathing words spoken by Bali. Since they were true, every one of them, they hurt him and angered him all the more. He hurled his Vajra at Bali which threw Bali on the ground. The friends of Bali hurried to the spot and took him away from there. A few moments later he came back to fight and the fury of their fight would not abate even a little bit.

NAMUCHI was a powerful *asura* and he attacked Indra with his powerful arrows. They fought for a long time. Many of the associates of Namuchi were killed and the fight became more intense. Indra hurled his Vajra at Namuchi and he was astounded when he found that it did not even graze the skin of the enemy. Vajra which could kill Vritra came back to Indra without hurting Namuchi. Indra was lost in thought. This Vajra which had been fashioned by Vishvakarma out of the bones of Dadhichi: which killed Vritra: which had punished all the mountains by snipping off their wings: this Vajra was without power now. How could it happen? And a voice spoke to him out of nowhere: "This asura Namuchi has obtained a boon which has assured him that the things which are dry and things which are wet: neither of them will be able to kill him. That is the boon granted him by Brahma. You will have to think of a method which will help you to circumvent it." Indra thought for a while and his eyes rested unseeingly on the waves of the sea which lashed against the shores. He looked at the

foam which was edging the waves and suddenly a thought struck him. He thought that here, perhaps, was the weapon. "The foam of the sea which is neither dry nor wet will surely serve the purpose," thought Indra. He therefore, took up a handful of it and threw it at the head of Namuchi which, at once rolled to the ground.

There was rain of flowers from the heaven since this was a great achievement on the part of Indra.

The fight threatened to continue. But Narada, the son of Brahma came up to them and said: "You wanted the Amrita. By the grace of Narayana whom you chose as your refuge you have got it. Lakshmi, the consort of the Lord is again on your side. Desist from this fight and go back to your abode." The *devas* agreed to do as he told them and the *asuras* had to agree. They knew that fortune was not in their favour at the moment. And with crest-fallen looks, they went back to their homes.

BALI, THE POWERFUL

Bali, the lord of the *asuras* was robbed of all his wealth and all his glory because of Indra. Large hearted as he was, he did not grieve for himself and his inglorious defeat in the war. He owed his life to the sons of the Bhrigu House. He was a great soul and he did not grieve for himself: he did not waste time in self pity over his sad plight. He went to Sukracharya, the Bhargava, and surrendered to him. He said: "My lord, you are my *guru*, my saviour. I am ready to do what you ask me to do. I am yours to do what you will with me. I know that there is never a *guru* who will abandon a disciple who comes to him for succour."

The Bhargavas knew the desire in the heart of Bali: his desire to conquer the heavens. In anticipation of that they gave him the coronation bath called Mahabhisheka and said: "We will perform for you a *yajna* which will grant you what you desire." They decided to make Bali powerful enough to defeat Indra and conquer the heavens. They anointed him and made him perform the *yajna* by name Vishvajit. The fire was worshipped with sacred *havis* and incantations went on for a long duration. Out of the glowing fire arose a golden chariot. The horses were like those of Indra and the flagstaff was decorated with a lion. Inside the chariot was placed a bow with gold inlay work: and with it, a quiver which would never be empty, and a divine armour. When the chariot thus came out of the fire lord Brahma came to the presence of Bali and gave him a garland of flowers which were ever fresh. Sukra, his preceptor gave Bali a conch. Bali made *pradakshina* to all those who made this miracle possible.

Bali's days of eclipse were at an end and he looked like his old self now. He looked more glorious, more handsome because of the power he had acquired. He collected an immense army and went towards the city of Indra. Seated in the golden chariot, wearing the divine armour and the bow adorning his hand and the quiver fastened to his shoulder: with golden bracelets shining on his powerful arms and with earrings of emerald

gleaming in his ears he looked like the fire by name Ahavani. His army which went with him caused fear in the hearts of the beholders.

Bali ascended the chariot made of gold and proceeded towards Indra's city by name Amaravati.

Amaravati was famed for its beauty. It was the pleasure ground of the lord of the heavens and everything which was beautiful had been accumulated there to give pleasure to the denizens of the heavens. It had numerous gardens with trees bearing fruits and innumerable flowering shrubs, creepers and plants. The music made by bees and by the birds was always heard, putting the senses to sleep.

A large moat surrounded the city and there was a fort which protected the inside of the city. The city itself was very beautiful filled as it was, by houses with golden doorways and door wrought with silver and wood. Vishvakarma himself had paid special attention for the construction of the entire city and it was a city faultlessly built. The streets were wide and clean and they were strewn with flowers which had slipped out of the hair of the lovely women who lived there. The word old-age was not known: nor was ugliness to be seen anywhere. Divine music, divine perfume, divine beauty: in short, anything that a human mind aches for, could be found in the city Amaravati.

Bali proceeded towards this Amaravati with the intention of conquering the city after defeating Indra and his army. When he arrived at the gates of Amaravati, Bali blew lustily on his conch. Indra saw Bali: saw the golden chariot and the divine armour, bow and quiver with which he had been equipped. He also saw the immense army which looked formidable. Indra did not take long to realise what the result of encounter with Bali would be. He rushed to his *guru* Brihaspati and said: "My lord, our ancient enemy is again here spoiling for a fight with us and seems to me, we will not be able to defeat him. Tell me what makes him so powerful? Why has he become invincible? He is powerful physically, morally and, spiritually. He seems to glow like fire. What makes him so glorious? I am indeed curious."

Brihaspati said : "He owes his greatness to his *guru*. Sukracharya has made his power increase though it was once on the wane. As a matter of fact, no one will be able to stand up to Bali except Narayana. I advise you to let discretion govern your actions. It will be foolish on your part to oppose Bali now. It will be futile. Time is against you. The best thing will be for you and the other *devas* to abandon Amaravati and leave it for him to occupy. In course of time Bali who owes his greatness to the favour of the Bhargava will be deprived of his glory because of this same *guru* and his anger. For the present, the best course open to you is to run away from here."

Indra looked shocked. "Abandon Amaravati! How can I leave my beloved Amaravati into the hands of the enemy? I will fight and see what happens. We are not powerless, we are *devas* and Bali is a mere *asura*. I will not abandon Amaravati."

Brihaspati convinced him that the only thing to do was to abandon the city or else there would be unnecessary havoc played in the *deva* host by the lusty *asuras*. Finally Indra was convinced and according to the advice given by their preceptor the *devas* fled from the city by name Amaravati.

Bali found that the city became his without his fighting for it. He smiled with contempt at the cowardice of the *Devas*. He established himself there and ruled the world from the heavens. He became lord of the three worlds. There was nothing left for him to conquer. His guru told him that he could perform the *Ashvamedha*. Bali performed a hundred *Ashvamedhas*. His fame spread all over the world like the beams from the moon. His goodness, his generosity, and his many qualities of head and heart became known the world over.

THE BIRTH OF VAMANA

Aditi, the mother of Indra and the other gods was very unhappy since her sons had been vanquished by Bali. Once, Kashyapa had been away from the *ashrama* for a long time. He had been engaged in intense *samadhi*. When he had completed it, he came back to the *ashrama*. Aditi received him with due honour and stood silent by his side. He looked at her and her pale face. He asked her: "What is worrying you? You do not seem to be happy. Has any calamity overtaken you? Or the world? Has *dharma* been banished from the minds of men? Have you, by any chance, inadvertently insulted any guests as a result of which they have gone away without accepting your hospitality? What has happened? Are your sons well? Looking at you I can see that you are greatly pained at something. Tell me what it is."

Aditi lifted her downcast eyes and they were filled with tears. She said: "My lord, nothing dreadful has happened as you fear. There has been no mishap in the *ashrama* nor has there been any lapse of *dharma* as far as my behaviour is concerned. The pain that is eating into my vitals is on account of my children. My sons have been treated ill by Bali. The *asuras* have driven the *devas* from their city and have taken all their glory and wealth and riches. My children are homeless and without any hope of regaining their lost glory. Have mercy on me and my sons and help us in our calamity."

Kashyapa Prajapati smiled gently at her and said: "Indeed, the *maya* of the Lord is amazing. This entire world is under bondage because of the ties of affection. That is the wonderful thing about Vishnu Maya. Or else, what connection is there between this body made up of the five elements and the *Atman* which is a thing apart: which is different from *Prakriti*? Who is the husband of whom: and who, the son of whom? *Maya* it is, which makes one think of such things as I, and Mine: I am the mother and these are my

sons. I am unhappy because they are unhappy." He paused for a while and then, looking kindly at her said: "The only path open to you is to worship the Lord, Narayana, who dwells in the hearts of all. He has ever been compassionate towards those who love him and He will grant you your desire. Pray to him. Worship Him." She looked at him and said: "I am a woman and I do not know the methods by which the Lord has to be worshipped. Great beings have performed *tapas* for years and years to please him and they are still performing *tapas*. I am but a woman and how can I do that? Tell me about an easier method by which an ignorant woman like me can find favour in the eyes of the Lord."

Kashyapa said: "There is a *vrata* by name PAYOVRATA. Brahma once taught me this *vrata*. In the month of Phalguna, from the first to the twelfth day of the brighter fortnight, you should worship Narayana day and night with only milk as your food. Recite the *mantra* with the twelve letters: the great *Dvadashanama*: "AUM NAMO BHAGAVATE VASUDEVAYA." If you observe this *vrata* with intense devotion and concentration the Lord will grant your wishes."

Aditi performed the *Payovrata*. Her mind was stilled and her senses were kept under control: her thoughts were all lost in the feet of Narayana. At the end of twelve days the Lord appeared before her. She stood up. She fell at his feet again and again and then stood in his presence with her palms folded, tears were running down her eyes. She could not speak a word. After a while words came haltingly and indistinctly to her lips. "I do not know how to praise you and to recount your qualities. Ignorant woman that I am, I have not the art nor the learning to understand your greatness. But this I know. You are kind and you are compassionate. I am your slave, my lord. I am in pain. Please take pity on me."

The Lord looked kindly at her with lotus eyes and said: "Mother of gods, you do not have to tell me what is paining you. I know that your sons are at the mercy of the *asuras*. You want to see your sons back in power. I know that. All that will come to pass. But you have to wait. The time is not yet ripe for it. At the moment Bali's star is in the ascent because he has Sukra as his *guru* as also Sukra's disciples. The glory of Sukra is such that his protege, Bali, will not come to harm.

However, I am pleased with your *Vrata* and I will grant you your wish. I will be born as your son and then I will be able to help your sons. Do not breathe a word of this to any one since my birth will have to be a *devarahasya*." The Lord then vanished from her sight. Kashyapa, with his yogic power knew what was to happen. He was happy because his wife was happy.

A son was born to Aditi. When the child was born it had the form of the Lord as Aditi had seen it: as though he wanted to assure her that it was, indeed He, who had been born as her son in accordance with his promise to her. A moment later he assumed the form of a child and there was great rejoicing in the three worlds. The *devas* and the other gods were pleased. The earth became lovely because the Lord had chosen to walk on her. The water of the lakes became pure and clear. The sky took on a glorious blue tinge. The seasons rushed in all together. The flowers of all the seasons were blooming and filling the air with their perfume.

It was the month of Bhadrapada: *Suklapaksha: Dvadashi* and ABHIJIT was the star under which the child was born. In later days this *dvadashi* has been known as *Vijaya dvadashi*.

The child grew up to be a boy. He was small made and he was indeed a VAMANA. When the time came *Upanayana* was performed for him. Surya himself taught him the Gayatri. Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods gave him the sacred thread and Kashyapa gave him the Maunji. The earth gave him the Krishnajina: deer-skin. The moon gave him the brahmin's staff: the Brahma *danda*. Aditi gave him the *Kaupina* and the *Dyurloka* world gave him the umbrella. Brahma who held the Vedas inside him gave him the *Kamandalu* and the seven great *rishis* gave him the bundle of Kusa grass. Sarasvati gave him the *akshamala*.

Kubera granted him the vessel with which to collect his alms. Parvati, the consort of Mahadeva who goes by the name Annapurna, gave the child Vamana his first Bhiksha. Vamana's other name was UPENDRA.

BALI'S YAJNA

On the holy grounds of Bhrigukachchha the *asura* monarch Bali was performing the *Ashvamedha* under the direct guidance of Sukra and his Bhrigu clan. Vamana decided to go there and attend the *yaga*. Bhrigukachchha was on the northern banks of the sacred river Narmada.

The *yaga* was proceeding and suddenly there seemed to be a great glow emanating from somewhere. When they all looked around, it seemed to be coming towards them. They all paused and spoke to themselves: "It seems as though the rising sun is walking towards us." They all looked at the tiny little brahmin child walking towards them with the *kamandalu* in one hand and the umbrella in the other. "Is it the sun who has assumed this diminutive form to watch this *yaga* in person? Is it the lord of Fire who has come to bless us? Or is it Sanatkumara, the son of Brahma who has designed to sanctify the *yagashala* with his presence?" So thought all of them when they saw his glory.

Even as they were conjecturing as to who he was, Vamana walked into the *yajnishala*. His tiny chest covered by the *maunji*, with the sacred thread glowing like a streak of lightning across his chest, with his head covered by a charming *Jata*, with the *kamandalu* in one hand and the umbrella in the other, the tiny young brahmin stood there. The entire assembly stood up as one man: so great was the glory of the boy who was hardly a child. Bali rushed to his presence, fell at his feet, honoured him and offered him a noble seat. He washed the tiny feet of the young brahmin and placed the water on his head. He then said: "Welcome to you, my lord. I do not know who you are: but this I know. You have come here to bless me and to grace this *yajnishala*. To me you look like the *tapas* of all the Brahmarishis taken collectively and given a form. By your coming I have been blessed and so have my forefathers. My life is now made pure because of you. By placing the water of your feet on my head I feel that I have become purified of all my sins and my *ashvamedha yaga* has become fruitful. Tell

me, my lord, what I can do for you. Great souls like you bless their devotees by asking them for some favours. That is the privilege of a brahmin and the good fortune of a kshatriya is, that he can grant it. A brahmin blesses by asking and a kshatriya is blessed by the act: granting the favour. Tell me what I can give you. Do you want the earth? or gold? or houses? Shall I give you beautiful maidens or shall I give you horses or elephants or cows? Please command me and honour me by accepting a gift from me."

The small young brahmin smiled very sweetly on Bali and said: "It is but right that you should speak these words which are so full of humility, nobility and righteousness. It is not, however, surprising that it should be so. The great Sukra and the Bhrigus are your *acharyas*. And, as for your ancestors, your grandfather was the great Prahlada! your father, Virochana who was famed for giving. I know that in your family there has never been born one who has ever refused anything to those who came with a desire. None has refused anything to those who came for alms: nor has there been any instance of a promise, once given, having been withdrawn. Hiranyaksha, who was your ancestor, had but one weapon in his hand and that was the *gada*. With the help of just this gada he had conquered all the three worlds and he was unhappy that he could not find one powerful enough to fight with him. When Narayana in the form of a Varaha met him in a fight: when he was carrying the earth to the surface from Rasatala, when Varaha was challenged by Hiranyaksha: Hiranyaksha fought with Varaha and was killed. But, believe me, the Lord was not happy about it at all, because he often remembered the prowess of Hiranya and felt that he was not a conqueror at all! And then what happened?

"Hiranyakashipu, when he heard that his brother had been killed, rushed to the Vaikuntha to kill Narayana. Looking at him with his trident upraised Narayana thought to himself: "Wherever I go this Hiranya is sure to chase me and, incidentally he will destroy all the spots where I am known to dwell. His eyes, his mind and his thoughts are all turned outwards and so, I will enter his mind." Accordingly, when he inhaled breath Hiranya inhaled the Lord also who had assumed the form of the tiniest of tiny particles. Hatred for the Lord is more intense than love for the Lord: and because of

his hatred, because of his thinking on Him night and day Hiranyakashipu attained death at the hands of the Lord himself.

"As for Virochana, your father, has there been a giver as great as he? Once the *devas* came to him as beggars assuming the form of brahmins. Even though he knew that they were *devas* your father gave them his very life since they asked for it and it was his rule in life never to refuse alms to anyone. Born as you are, in such illustrious family, is it a wonder that you are so righteous? I will certainly ask a boon of you. I know you will grant me that. I WANT FROM YOU THREE PACES OF GROUND MEASURED BY MY FOOT."

Bali was amazed and he stood speechless for a moment. Then, with a tender smile lighting up his face he said: "Indeed, you are a child. You spoke words of wisdom and they please the wise. Nevertheless, I am afraid you are still a child. Your behaviour is also childish, because you do not know what is good for you. You seem to be ignorant of what is good for you: what is advantageous. Look on me. I am the sole lord of the entire world. You have pleased me with your charming words and yet, instead of asking me for whole islands and heaps of gold, you ask me for three paces of ground measured by these tiny feet! Once I give there will be no need for you to desire anything more at any time. Revise your words and take from me land large enough to keep you in comfort through life. Come, ask me."

Vamana said: "I appreciate your words and your generous gesture, O king, believe me, if a man has not conquered desire, all the desirable things in the worlds will not be enough to satisfy him. A man who is not satisfied with three paces of ground will not find the seven islands with all their wealth enough to satisfy him. We have been told that the lords of the seven islands have not yet attained the state when they can say: "I have enough." A man who is pleased with what he gets is always happy. But the man who is swayed by the wanderings of the wayward mind will never find happiness since he is always discontented. It is this discontent which is the cause of sorrow in man. A contented man is fit for emancipation and his glory waxes day by day. You are the greatest of givers. You are the Duni

Samrat. I therefore ask you to grant me just this: three paces of ground which will be covered by my foot."

Bali laughed again. Smiling indulgently he said: "So be it. I will grant you three paces of ground measured with your Tiny Foot"; and he looked at the tiny lotus feet of the Lord in the form of a Vamana.

With the smile hovering still on his lips Bali took up the vessel full of water to pour a few drops of it on the lotus palm of the youngster and say: "I have given you what you asked for."

"DO NOT GIVE", SAYS SUKRA

Sukra the preceptor stopped him. Without speaking a word the king lifted his eyes and there was a questioning look on his face. Sukra was the wisest of the wise men. He was known by the name 'Kavi'. There were some who said that he was wiser than even Brihaspati, the preceptor of Indra. Sukra loved the Daityas and Bali was his favoured disciple. He did not want Bali to be deceived. He looked kindly at the king and said: "My son, you do not know what you are doing. This sweet young brahmin boy who, according to you is still a child who does not know what is good for him' is not what you think he is. He is the Lord Narayana himself. He is set on helping the *devas* and so he is born as the son of Kashyapa and Aditi. You are, at heart, a very simple person and you have been very rash in promising to grant a boon to this 'youngster.' It is not going to be a simple boon. I know that it will only spell destruction to you and to the entire asura clan. An injustice is being contemplated. I do not think you should be the victim to it.

"This Narayana who is standing before you is going to deprive you of all your wealth. You will lose all that you have. Your power will be snatched from you and as for your glory, it will all be swallowed by the *devas*, thanks to their lord, their champion, Narayana. Indeed, my son, you are a fool. After giving away all that you possess where will you live? You will have no place even to stand. This "child" has asked for three paces of ground: paces measured by his small lotus feet. Are you not aware that with one foot the Lord will measure the entire earth? The second pace will cover the world of the gods. Where will the foot be placed a third time? Can you not see that He will place it on your head and push you down to the nether world? It stands to reason that you are not in a position to grant the boon to him. I know the problem that is worrying you. You have promised him something and it is not *dharma* to take back your promise. I grant that. The subject has been well discussed in the Rigveda. I will explain it to you.

"To say 'I will give' is speaking the truth. After saying that if a man says: 'I will not' then an untruth is spoken. Truth is considered to be the flower and fruit born of the tree named speech. One who speaks the truth will be famed for his goodness. He is, after all, the tree which grants such beautiful flowers and fruits by name truth.

"Untruth, on the other hand, strikes at the root of the words. A tree, which has been uprooted, whose roots are visible, visible to the naked eye, will dry up in no time and it will fall to the ground. Even so, a man who speaks an untruth will make his *atman* rootless, infirm: and his body will fall to the ground. And so, man should never speak an untruth. BUT, an untruth is allowed under certain circumstances. When there is danger indicated to his body as a consequence of a gift he has promised, a man can retract his promise and refuse to grant it. Under special circumstances, like when a man has to coax a woman to listen to him: when he is joking: when a marriage is to be performed—praising the qualities of the young man or woman and exaggerating them—: when one's life is in danger, when the intension is to do good to cows or to brahmins or to save the life of someone in danger: Under these circumstances, the Rigveda allows a man to speak an untruth. When this boon you have granted is sure to destroy you, you are perfectly justified in taking back your word. No sin will be ascribed to you. I am telling you that the only course open to you is to refuse the boon."

Bali listened to his *guru* with great attention. He was silent for a long moment. He then said: "I am quite convinced by your argument that a man need not have any qualms about refusing to grant a boon which will endanger his security. But, my lord, look at me! I am not like the ordinary human beings to whom worldly security is important. I am the son of Virochana and my grandfather was Prahlada. Being a scion of that noble race, how can I do what you ask me to do? Can I even consider it for a moment? Is it not shameful? If I listen to you I will have to behave like an ordinary man who is unwilling to part with his wealth. Again and again it has been proclaimed that there is nothing more heinous than untruth. I can be burdened with any terrible sin except this: speaking an untruth. Deceiving a brahmin is the greatest calamity that can visit me. I am not so

afraid of hell or poverty or sorrow or loss of position or even death. I am afraid only of INFAMY.

"Wealth and position stay with a man only as long as he lives. Once he is dead they become meaningless. Why then, should they be important when he is alive? Again, you say that my life is in danger and so a lie is justified. To me, it does not seem to be such an important issue at all. I prefer to please a brahmin. Consider great souls like Dadhichi and Shibi. They did not think of themselves when they gave. Think of my father whose name is still remembered because he was a giver and not because he was a king. This kingdom of mine has been ruled by great *asuras* who have never known what defeat is. They are all gone, every one of them: but their fame is still perfuming the earth.

"It is easy enough to find heroes who have died fighting. But it is rare to find a person who has had the good fortune to give wealth to a deserving person. It will be commendable if I can give away my wealth. Poverty which follows such a gift will indeed be desirable. Even if the man is just an ordinary poor man it is good when the recipient is a great brahmin of your class, to give: then poverty itself will be an ornament to me and to my name. I have decided to grant the boon to this young brahmin boy. If, as you say, he is lord Narayana himself who is asking me to grant him a boon, I am all the more excited at the thought of giving it to him. HIS HAND will be underneath mine! Can anything be a greater good fortune than that? Granted that his request is unfair. That is not, in any way, going to affect or alter my decision. I will grant him the three paces of ground he has asked for."

Sukra was highly incensed at the insult offered by Bali. He was the *guru* and Bali had not obeyed him. In a fit of anger Sukra cursed Bali. He said: "You seem to think that you are wiser than me. You are really an ignorant man. You are lacking in respect to the elders since you chose to ignore my words. You will soon find yourself without a kingdom. I curse you that your glory and your success and wealth will soon leave you and you will fall from grace."

The curse of the brahmin did not affect Bali. He called for his wife VindhyaVali. She brought the golden vessel in her hand, the vessel which held purified water. Bali and his wife sat at the feet of Vamana and washed his dear feet and took the water on their heads. The heavens rained flowers on Bali and his wife VindhyaVali. The sky was filled with the music from heavenly instruments. The gandharvas began to dance and the kinnaras were singing. Flowers were falling on Bali incessantly.

"THREE PACES OF GROUND"

The gift had been given and received. Bali lifted his eyes and looked at Vamana. Even as he was looking the small brahmin boy grew to immense proportions. Bali looked with tears of joy at the Vishvarupa of Narayana. He was granted the privilege of seeing the form of the Virat Purusha. He saw the universe which is formed of the *mahabhutas*, the three *gunas*, the Indriyas, the Chitta and the Jiva. He saw the Rasatala at the feet of the Lord: and the earth, in the soles of the feet: the knees were the mountains and the birds: while the thighs were seen to be the homes of the winds. He saw the Prajapatis and the asuras. The Lord's navel was the sky and inside him were the seven seas. On His chest were the stars clustered and forming a garland of beauty. In the heart of the Virat Purusha Bali found *Dharma* and in his chest "Rita" sweet words spoken with righteousness. Satya was also there. In the mind was found Chandra. Lakshmi with the lotus in her hand was in his broad chest. His throat contained all the Sama vedas and all sacred incantations as well as sound in all its forms. The shoulders revealed the *devas* led by Indra. His ears were the quarters: his head, the heavens. The sun was in his eyes and his mouth held fire. His throat had the vedas and his tongue, Varuna. His eye lashes were the fates and derision in the lift of the eyebrows. Bali saw on his forehead night, and day and anger while the Lord's lower lip was an epitome of greed. His touch was lust: his gait was *yajna* and his shadow was death. His smile was *Maya*. The hair on his body was the trees, creepers and shrubs on the earth while the rivers were his veins. His intellect was Brahma. His body was the home of all movable and immovable things: the *deva ganas*, the *rishis* and, in short, everything.

The *asuras* who were the attendants of Bali found, to their consternation, that the prophecy of Sukra had come true. They could not bear the brilliance of the Lord's form. They fell down in a faint. When they woke from the faint they saw the form of Narayana and not the Virat Purusha.

The attendants of the Lord had all come from Vaikuntha. The weapons of the Lord were all there: the glorious Sudarshana, the bow by name Sharnga, the conch which was famed by the name Panchajanya, and the *gada* Kaumodaki. The attendants were led by Sunanda, the favourite of the Lord.

The Lord was glowing with his crown with jewels gleaming from it. His bracelets adorned his magnificent arms and his earrings shaped like fish gleamed with every movement of his head. Srivatsa, the mark of his chest was made more beautiful by the jewel Kaustubha he wore on his chest. His golden yellow silk was flying in the breeze and a beautiful smile lighted his face.

The immense form of the Lord reached the heavens. Narayana, with one foot covered the earth which belonged to Bali: his frame filled the skies and his arms spread wide, enveloped the quarters. For the second pace only a part of the heavens was visible. He raised his foot and it reached the *maharloka*: and passing it, it went to *Janaloka*, *Satyaloka* and *Dyurloka*. Brahma, who was in *Satyaloka* went with great excitement near the foot of the Lord. The gleam from the nails was like the soft light of the moon and it beautified the Satyaloka. With him came the *rishis* Marichi; the Sanaka brothers: the *yogis*, the Vedas and their branches and they all worshipped the foot of the Lord. Brahma performed *puja* to the foot of the Lord with the water from his Kamandalu and the water which fell from it to the Foot of the Lord flowed as a river by name "MANDAKINI" purifying all the spots she touched. On the earth, when she was brought there later, she became known as Ganga.

The Lord had measured the entire earth and the heavens too. He resumed the form of the Vamana and stood there smiling. The *asuras* saw their master robbed of all his wealth and his kingdom. They decided to fight with Vamana. They thought that they could fight with Vamana: destroy him and re-establish Bali on the throne. They rushed towards the diminutive form of Narayana with their weapons uplifted. The attendants of Vishnu who were there already prepared themselves to fight with the *asuras*. Bali saw all this and he became angry with his attendants. He said: "Listen to my words and abandon this resolve to fight. Evidently, the time

is not favourable to us. Indeed, Time is the most powerful of all factors. Time is the Lord himself and according to Him and His wish man is granted happiness and sorrow. Man is helpless in His presence. There was a time when this same Time favoured us and it spelt ill for the *Devas*. We were powerful and they were suffering. Time has now decided to reverse His tactics. Nothing, not a large army, nor incantations nor *tapas* can stem the tide of Time. We can only wait for the moment when there is a change in our fortunes. Till then, be wise and control yourselves. Do not fight. It is futile."

Garuda was standing by the side of the Lord. He stole one glance at his master and then, with Varuna Pasha he tied up Bali. There were shouts of horror and indignation from all quarters when this happened.

Bali smiled to himself. He knew why this happened. Narayana wanted him to be rid of the two dread sins which had found a place in his heart: the twins "I" and "MINE". When he had said, "I can give the entire earth to you. It is mine," the Lord must have smiled to himself and decided to punish him for that. He looked at Vamana. When he saw the love and grace there, Bali knew that he was wrong. The Lord had come to bless him. By asking the boon he had taken away all that he had and the sin "MINE" had been washed away. The Lord now wanted to let the world know that only by surrender can one lose "I" and that was why he had asked Garuda to bind him. The kindness of the Lord made Bali's eyes fill with tears and he bowed his head with humility while he was being tied up with the Varuna Pasha by Garuda.

BALI KEEPS HIS PROMISE

The Lord looked at Bali who was now a captive: who had lost all he had because he would not swerve from truth. And Narayana said: "You are the king of the *asuras* and you promised me ground which will be covered by three paces measured by my foot. Two of them, as you have seen, have been covered and they are mine. There is still one pace left. Where will I place my foot? Tell me. You have not kept your word and you know what the punishment is, for one who speaks an untruth. You will have to be pushed into the nether world. Your *guru* has already told you about it."

Bali was neither frightened not hurt by the words of Vamana. He smiled and said: "Lord, I do not consider my words to be lies. There is still place for your third pace. Please be gracious enough to place your foot on my head. I am not afraid of Naraka but I am afraid of being called a sinner. I am not afraid of these bonds which have tied me up. I am not afraid of poverty and eternal sorrow. Punishment which is meted out to a man by one who is dear to him: dear like a mother, a brother, a father or well-wisher is indeed, a blessing. In the eyes of the world you are supposed to have punished me for my pride and my arrogance. But in reality, you have blessed me. You have opened my inner eye-the eye of wisdom-and you are a friend of the *asuras* and not their enemy.

"You love my grandfather, Prahlada. You were silent when he was tortured by his father because Prahlada knew that the physical frame which was going through so much pain is, in reality, nothing. He knew that the body was of no help: that wealth and friends were of no assistance when there was danger of one's wisdom being eclipsed. He did not think of any of them even for a moment but spent all his time thinking on you and your blessed feet. I have also done that. It is wealth, that makes man proud and arrogant. Man becomes blind and loses sight of the fact that death is the end of the body. And now, what have you done to me, my Lord? You have

forced this wealth away from me and you have made it possible for me to reach you sooner than would have been the case otherwise. I am the most fortunate among men."

At that moment Prahlada, the grandfather of Bali, came. He was the beloved *Bhakta* of Narayana and Bali wanted to fall at his feet and honour him but he could not, since he was bound by the Varuna Pasha. He welcomed him and worshipped him with his tears. Prahlada went straight to Vamana and fell at his feet. With his tears he washed the feet of the Lord. Brahma came to Narayana and said: "Do not distress Vindhyaavali any longer. Please release Bali from his bonds. He has given you all that he had. Have you not said that a man who has had his thoughts always with you will attain your nearness even if he worships you with water and a few blades of grass? This Bali has given away everything to you and he has surrendered himself to you. He should be rewarded by you."

Narayana said: "When I want to destroy a man I grant him all the wealth and power in the world. He then gets involved in them and forgets his real nature. If, however, I desire to save a man from this *Maya*, I take away his wealth, his all. Rid of all his faults, he will become mine. Once he is saved, my *bhakta* will never be destroyed.

"As for Bali, never once has he swerved from the path of truth. He has conquered *Maya*. He has suffered so much. He has lost his wealth, his power and his position as the lord of men. His enemies are laughing at him tied up as he is by this Varuna Pasha. His kinsmen have now abandoned him. His guru has cursed him. And yet, his firmness to stay in the path of *Dharma* is commendable. I spoke such deceptive words and his *guru* spoke so many truths from the vedas to convince him that he could call untruth, truth. But he would not listen. Bali has now attained a state which is to be envied by the *devas*. Blessed by me, he will be the Indra during the Manvantara by name SAVARNI. He will stay till that time in Sutala which is dear to me. Bali, king of men, you will now go to Sutala. I will be there with you to protect you. I will always be with you. All your *asuric* nature will vanish very soon and you will be a great Indra during Savarni Manvantara."

Bali was so overcome that he could not talk. His eyes were raining tears and his words were buried in his throat which was too full of tears to function properly. After a while he composed himself and said: "My lord, you came to me and asked for a gift. I was so absorbed, so intent in granting it to you that my mind did not think of saluting you properly. I made only an attempt at prostrating before you. Even that small effort has granted me your infinite grace. You have placed your blessed foot on the head of this contemptible Bali who was blinded by his power and wealth. How can I praise your kindness towards me?"

Bali was released from the Varuna Pasha. He walked round the Lord, Rudra and Brahma. He then entered the Satalaloka. Prahlada spoke to the Lord. He said: "The denizens of the heavens prostrate at your feet for your blessings. As for my grandson and me, we are not *devas*. We are mere *asuras*. By birth we are inferior to the *devas*. And yet, your love for us is great: so great that I consider that our fortune is far greater than theirs. How can I thank you, Lord, for the kindness you have showered on this child of mine? You had made him Indra. When there was danger of his forgetting himself because of the splendour of it, you have come yourself, taken his glory away from him and blessed him. And you have promised to be the guardian of Bali in Satalaloka. I do not know what we have done to deserve this favour from you."

Vamana smiled kindly at him and said: "Prahlada, please enter the Satalaloka and stay with your grandson. I will always be there in your presence. Mace in hand, I will guard the portals of your house."

Prahlada then entered the Satalaloka after saluting all the gods. At the command of the Lord Sukra completed the *yajna* which had been begun by Bali.

MATSYA AVATARA

Parikshit then asked Suka to relate to him in detail the Matsya Avatara of the Lord.

Suka said: "Whenever there is harm threatening the cows, the brahmins, the *devas* or the good men: when there is a fear of destruction for *Dharma* or the *Vedas* or the world itself, the Lord then descends to the earth to protect them. At the end of the previous *kalpa* Brahma went to sleep and the world became submerged under the waters. When Brahma was sleeping an *asura* by name Hayagriva stole the Vedas from him. The asura then disappeared under the waters with the Vedas. The deluge, Mahapralaya was *Naimittika* and it was as a consequence of this *pralaya* that the world became completely submerged in the oceans.

"There was, then, at that time, a king by name Satyavrata who ruled the world. He was a saint among men: a great devotee of Narayana. At the end of the *Pralaya*, when the world was re-created, king Satyavrata was born as the son of Vivasvat, one of the twelve Adityas. And the Manvantara was called by the name Vaivasvata Manvantara. Shraddhadeva was the name he was then given.

"One day Satyavrata was performing his morning ablutions on the banks of the river Kritamala. When he had taken up the water in his cupped palms to offer *arghya* to the Pitris he found a tiny fish in the water held in his hands. He promptly dropped the fish in the river. The fish spoke in a human voice and said: "O king, have pity on me. I am so small and I am afraid of the big fish in the river: the big fish which threaten to eat me up. Please take me away from these waters and protect me." The king was touched by the appeal in the voice of the fish and, taking it up in his hand he dropped it into his Kamandalu and went home.

"A night passed. The next morning the fish said: "There is not space enough for me inside the vessel. Please place me in a wider place where I can move freely." The king placed it in a large pot filled with water. Within an hour the fish had outgrown the pot. Satyavrata then placed it in a pond and the same thing happened. The fish complained that there was not enough space for it. The king kept on placing it in larger and larger areas filled with water and yet the fish complained the same way: that it had not enough space to move about. The king finally took it to the sea and dropped it there. The fish said: "The sea is full of sharks and whales which will surely eat me up. Why did you bring me here?"

"Satyavrata smiled slightly and said: "You are a very strange fish. You can grow larger than a pond which is a hundred miles in length and this has happened in an hour. I have never seen such a thing before. You are no ordinary fish. I know who you are. You are Lord Narayana who has donned this form for some purpose which is not known to me. Lord of lords, I salute you. You are the refuge of all beings. When you take up a form it is surely to protect helpless beings like me. Since you have revealed yourself to me please tell me why you have assumed this form." The Lord in the form of a fish then spoke to him and said: "You are right. I have taken this form with a purpose. Seven days from today the three worlds will be submerged under the waters. Mahapralaya is coming. When the world goes completely under, you will see a boat which will be floating towards you. Be on the look out for it. When you see it you will have to enter it. Collect all the Oshadhis, seeds: and, accompanied by the *rishis*: the seven *rishis*, take your place in the boat. There will be dead darkness all around you but the glow of the tejas emanating from the *rishis* will guide you. You will be tossed hither and thither by the giant waves of the angry ocean. But be not afraid. I will be in the waters. When you see me tie the boat to one of my horns with the help of Vasuki who will serve you as a rope. I will play to my heart's content on the ocean for the duration of a single Brahma's night and you will also be with me."

"The fish vanished from the sight of the king."

"Satyavrata spread kusa grass on the ground and spent the next few days sitting on it and meditating incessantly on the Lord. On the seventh day he

saw dark clouds enveloping the heavens and the rains came. The earth was fast disappearing and, at a distance he saw the promised boat coming fast towards him. As he had been instructed he entered the boat with the oshadhis and seeds of all the many plants.

The seven *rishis* were with him. They were repeating the names of the Lord and they said: "Be not afraid, O king. The Lord's name will tide us over this perilous journey."

"They were all singing the praises of the Lord when they could discern the form of an immense fish, golden in colour. It came near. As he had been instructed Satyavrata tied the boat to the horn of the fish. The boat was tossed about by the waves and yet they were not afraid since the Lord had taken them under his wing.

"The king saluted the Lord and said: "My Lord, it is with your grace that human beings who are tossed about in the world of ignorance attain salvation. You guide them into light out of darkness and it is up to you to teach us the *Atma Vidya*: the knowledge which will make us realise ourselves as one with you. Please teach me the secret of it. Teach me how to unravel the knots of *Ahamkara* and *Mamakara* which blind man into thinking that the *Maya* which envelops him is true. Help us to break this veil asunder and see ourselves as we are, one with you."

"In His infinite kindness the Lord took it upon himself to teach Brahmavidya to Satyavrata. He taught him about *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* Yogas.

"During the "Play" of the Lord in the waters, Narayana in the form of a fish fought with the *asura* Hayagriva and restored the Vedas to Brahma at the end of the *Pralaya*.

"Satyavrata was born as Shraddhadeva, the son of the Sun, Vivasvat, and became the Manu for the Manvantara which is Vaivasvata Manvantara."

MARKANDEYA THE BHARGAVA

When Ugrasrava was recounting the Bhagavata as related by Suka to Parikshit, Shaunaka had a sudden desire to know about Markandeya and so he interrupted the narrator and said: "My lord, a doubt has assailed me. We have been told that at the time of the *Mahapralaya* when the entire world had been submerged under the waters Markandeya, the son of Mrikandu did not suffer since he was granted immortality. I am intrigued as to how it was possible. As far as I know, this Markandeya has been born in our clan: the clan of the Bhargavas. We have known him ever since he was born and we have not witnessed any deluge so far. How then is it possible for this story to have a basis that Markandeya was unhurt during the *Pralaya*? We have also heard that on the waters of the ocean he saw the Lord in the form of a child lying on the Ashwattha leaf: with his lotus hands holding the great toe of his lotus foot to his lips: with a smile of contentment lighting his face. Please elucidate this seeming puzzle to us, my lord."

Ugrasrava, the *suta* said: "Your question is proper and quite reasonable. Also, it gives me and thus the world, a chance to relate and to learn the story of Narayana and an incident which has the power to rid the mind of man of all the *Maya* and the ignorance which is the predominant feature of *Kali*, the fourth quarter of time.

"Markandeya, the son of Mrikandu, was initiated into the Gayatri by his father, by the sacred thread being placed on his shoulder. The young boy was intent on mastering the Vedas and the Vedangas. He studied them incessantly and he had perfected *Tapas*, Svadhyayana. He was a Naishtika Brahmachari. He was dressed in the bark of the tree. His hair was matted and his face had a look of peace which great *yogis* might well envy. The Kamandalu graced his hand. Maunji, and the skin of the deer were adorning him and enhancing his glow. The *Japamala* was ever in his hand and his lips were ever chanting the names of the Lord. Morning and

evening he would go out silently with a begging bowl and bring it back to his *guru*. If he was given something by the *guru* he would eat or else he would starve. So devoted was he to his ways of worship that his accumulated *tapas* granted him conquest over death. It was a source of wonder to everyone: Brahma, Bhrigu, Mahadeva, Daksha and the other sons of Brahma, the *devas* and the Pitris. This great *yogi* had no disturbances in his mind. It was calm and serene like a lake and only the thoughts of Narayana found a place in his mind.

"Indra doubted the steadfastness of his *tapas*. He wanted to disturb the *tapas* of Markandeya. He sent his troupe to play havoc in the mind of the *yogi*. Gandharvas were there to sing and the *apsaras* to dance. Manmatha the god of love was leading them all and his companions were Vasanta, the spring and Malaya, the soft breeze which is said to kindle love. On the northern side of the Himavat, on the banks of the river Pushpabhadra, is a rock by name Chitra. There Markandeya had built his *ashrama*. It was a holy spot. The lakes near the *ashrama* were fringed with plants and creepers bearing flowers fit for the worship of the Lord. There was peace, and nothing but peace pervading the surroundings of the *ashrama*. Into that spot entered *Vayu* and armed with *Kama*, he sprinkled the waters of the waterfalls around. The bees began to sing drunkenly and even the *koils* sang impassioned songs of love. The peacocks danced in a frenzy and the birds felt the intoxication in the air. Vasanta then entered the spot and concealed himself behind the green leaves and boughs of the trees and behind the flowers which sent forth a maddening perfume. Manmatha, accompanied by his musicians and dancers came there and planned his attack.

"Markandeya was seated in a *yogic* trance. He had finished the worship of the fire and his eyes were closed. It looked like fire had taken a form and was seated there.

"The celestial maidens danced in his presence. Manmatha took up his bow made of sugar cane and fixed his five headed arrow to it. Punjikastali, one of the favourite *apsaras* of Indra had come there to tempt the rishi. He opened his eyes and Manmatha sent his arrows thinking that the moment was ideal. But then, like the attempts of man become futile if they have

not been granted the grace of the Lord, even so, all the attempts of Manmatha and the others proved in vain. They felt the fire of his *tapas* and they ran away from there in terror like children who had unwittingly roused a sleeping cobra. He did not, however, curse them and lose his poise. It was indeed a great trait in him.

"Indra saw Manmatha and the others returning to him and their crestfallen look told him everything and he was amazed that such a thing could happen!

"To Markandeya who was rich in *Tapas*, *Svadhyaya* and *Samyama*, came the Lord Narayana in the form Nara and Narayana. One was dark and the other was fair. Their eyes were like the petals of a newly blown lotus. Each had four arms. They were dressed in deer skin and tree bark. Pavitra made of Kusa was found on their fingers and the sacred white thread gleamed on their chests. Kamandalus were in their hands: *japamalas*, and the *brahma dandas*. Markandeya thought that the *tapas* of all his ancestors of all times had taken forms and appeared before him. He stood up with great excitement and fell at their feet. He could not see them because tears blinded his eyes. He then folded his palms together and with faltering words welcomed them. He gave them *arghya*, *padya* and made them take their seats. He worshipped them with flowers and incense. He composed himself and spoke words praising them. He said: "Lord, you pervade the universe. You are Brahma, Mahadeva and you are the *Atman* inside me. You are the Lord of the power of speech, of the mind and of the senses. You make men dance to the call of the senses and, at the same time you are the one to save man from this puppet show. This twin form of yours has been assumed by you for the good of the world. Like a spider weaves his web with fibre from inside himself and later, unwinds it and swallows it all, you create the universe and you are the one who withdraws it into yourself.

"For one who has found refuge at your lotus feet, there is no fear of *Karma*, clinging to him: nor will the *gunas* or Time itself have any effect on him. I have thought only of you and now you have graced me with showing yourself to me. Nothing is greater than the touch of your feet. Once man is granted the sight of you how can he be still devoted to this

human body which is perishable: which is untrue: which serves no purpose: which hides the truth about the *atman* from the mind of man. The creation, the preserving and the destruction of this entire universe is but your Maya: embellished as it is by the three *gunas*, and the ignorance of man. I salute you, the Purusha, the omniscient, the eternal. You pervade the entire universe, my lord and there is nothing which can confine you. You are the Lord of everything and I salute you. Man who is deluded by the subtle sway of the Indriyas, loses the power of thinking. He does not realise your presence in the same Indriyas, in his life breath, in his heart. Caught in the web of *Maya* which is your doing, he flounders in the sea of ignorance. It has been said that even the great Brahma, the creator, was, for a time, lost in this same *Avidya* until you taught him the *vedas* and made him realise the truth. I salute you Lord of lords."

"Nara and Narayana listened to his worship with smiling eyes. They then said: "Your *Samyama*, your *tapas* and *svadhyaya* and your steadfast bhakti towards us have made you a *Siddha* and we are very pleased with you. Ask any boon of us and we will grant you your wish."

"Markandeya said: "After seeing you, can man have any wish for anything else? Yet, it is disrespectful for a man to ignore the commands of the Lord. I will therefore ask a boon of you. Please let me know the *Maya* which causes this ignorance in the mind of man."

"So be it. The *Maya* of the Lord will be revealed to you," said the smiling *rishis* and went away to their dwelling place, the *ashrama* by name Badarika.

THE VISION SEEN BY MARKANDEYA

On the banks of the river Pushpabhadra, in the *ashrama* built for himself on the rock Chitra, Markandeya spent his time in prayer, in meditation and in remembering the glorious day when the Lord had appeared before him in the form of Nara and Narayana. He saw the Lord and only the Lord in everything and sometimes, so absorbed would he be in the thoughts of Him that he would forget even the daily worship and the daily rituals he would normally go through.

One day, all on a sudden a strong wind began to blow. It was a fierce storm and along with it came heavy rain clouds. Thunder seemed to crash from rock to rock and lightning lit up the entire place with incessant flashes. Suddenly it began to rain. It was no ordinary rain. The drops fell in a continuous stream and the stream was as thick as the spoke of a wheel. The four seas were filling up and soon they were about to meet. The earth was hidden and all that could be seen were the immense sea lions and sharks and whales and crocodiles. There were whirlpools everywhere and they were sucking up all that came within their grasp. The noise of the rain and the tumult of the oceans were deafening and fierce.

Even as he was looking Markandeya saw the earth disappear in the waters of the ocean and he was frightened at the sight. Very soon the highlands and the mountains also went under the waters. The line which divided the sky from the earth was not seen since the earth was not there. He saw the other two worlds and the *devas* and the stars also being swallowed up by the waters. He found himself floating about in the water like some flotsam, without any destination, without any sense of direction. He was tormented by hunger and thirst. The fish and sharks and whales were fearful and there was nothing but darkness around him. He was whirling like driftwood and he was extremely frightened and lonely. He would be caught up in a whirlpool once and when he was thrown out of it, a huge

wave would toss him here and there. All the fears which he had thought he had conquered, came to him all together. He was feeling distressed because of sickness, and he was sad. He felt deluded and frightened. He thought he was going to die and he dreaded the thought. At the same time he knew that he had once conquered DEATH! and yet, now he was actually afraid that he was going to die. So he drifted about, tossed by the waves, and tossed about by his own fears and pains.

All on a sudden, while he was thus floating Markandeya saw a beautiful Ashwattha tree at a distance. He could see the burden of the new leaves on the branches and it was a big tree. He could see clearly, one of the branches leaning towards the spot where he was. On a leaf of the Ashwattha tree the *rishi* saw a strange sight.

He saw a child sleeping on the leaf of the Ashwattha. The glow from the child was so great that it pierced the blinding darkness around him. The child was dark like an emerald. The face was beautiful like a lotus. The neck was lovely like a conch. The child had a wide chest and his nose was chiselled. The curls from his head fell on his face and his breath played softly with them. The ears like shells were wearing the flowers of the pomegranate. There was a slight smile on the coral lips of the child. With his tender hands the child had taken hold of his foot and placed the lotus-like foot on to his lips and was sucking the toe ecstatically.

Markandeya saw the child and he could not take his eyes away from the heap of beauty which met his eyes. When he saw the child the *rishi* found that all his fatigue had left him. His eyes were wide open drinking in the beauty of the child and his heart was filled with joy. He felt within himself who the child was. Still, he went nearer to see the child at closer range. When he went near he found that the breath of the child was pulling him. Markandeya entered the child's body along with a breath from him: like a mosquito.

When he was inside, the *rishi* found the world as it was, before the rains came. Amazed at the sight Markandeya kept looking around. He saw the entire earth. He saw the heavens and the sky studded with stars. The mountains were there: the islands and the four quarters with the *devas*

guarding them. He saw the *asuras*. He saw forests, cities and all the *ashramas* and he saw the Himavat: the river Pushpabhadra, and the rock Chitra and his *ashrama* on top of it. Suddenly he was thrown out by an expiration from the child and he found himself on the waters once again. He could still see the child and drawn towards it he swam towards it to embrace it. The child vanished from there. The Ashwattha tree vanished and the waters and the tossing waves. Markandeya found that he was on firm land: on the firm floor of his own *Ashrama*.

Overpowered by the experience Markandeya stood as though in a trance with his mind set on Narayana.

Mahadeva and Parvati were passing by on the sky surrounded by the Pramatha *ganas*. Parvati saw him and asked her Lord to go near the *rishi* and bless him. They descended to the earth and appeared before Markandeya. Thrilled with their visit he welcomed them with all the honour due to them. Flowers and incense welcomed them all and he fell at their feet and offered words of prayer to them. Mahadeva then spoke to him. He said: "Because of your devotion to Narayana you have obtained *siddhi* in everything. You had been granted a boon by the Lord and you were granted the privilege of knowing his *Maya*. You will live for ever and you will be famed as a Puranacharya. Men will benefit by the stories of the Lord which you will relate to them."

Mahadeva and his companion returned to the skies and the *rishi* Markandeya spent all his time thinking again and again of the unique experience he had: the great deluge and the beautiful child lying on the Ashwattha leaf.

At the end of the *Pralaya* only the Lord was, and nothing else. Out of the navel of the Lord appeared a lotus and, out of that lotus appeared Brahma. Marichi was born out of the mind of Brahma. Marichi's wife was Dakshayani and their son was Kashyapa. Kashyapa's wife was Aditi and their son was Surya. Surya's son was Shraddhadeva who had been Satyavrata during the previous *kalpa*. Ikshvaku was the son of Shraddhadeva who, being the son of Vivasvat and also being Manu, is famed as Vaivasvata Manu. The line of Vaivasvata was called the SURYA VAMSHA and later, Ikshvaku *vamsha* since Ikshvaku was a great and famous king.

One of the sons of Manu was Sharyati. He was a very righteous man and he had a daughter by name Sukanya. She was beautiful with eyes like lotus flowers. Though she had grown into a maiden her father thought of her as still a child and he was extremely fond of her. She in her turn, was a child at heart and she was the beloved of all those at the court.

Once, when the king had gone to the forest with his retinue this daughter accompanied him. They came to the *ashrama* of Chyavana, a great *rishi*. Chyavana was absorbed in meditation and such a long time had passed since he began his tapas that the earth had covered him like a shell and he could not be seen. Sukanya, the young princess, was wandering about: and she was intrigued by the mud heap. She went near and through an opening in the shell she could see two little points of light gleaming like a couple of glow worms. In her own childish way she took up a piece of darbha grass and pushing it inside touched the points of light. They were, of course, the eyes of the *rishi* and Sukanya had hurt him. As a result of the *rishi's* anger the entire army of the king was paralysed and he did not know what had caused this calamity. He called everyone and asked them if anyone had insulted the *rishi*. Sukanya walked hesitantly towards her

father and told him what she had done. The king was horrified and he rushed to the presence of the *rishi*. He beseeched him to forgive his daughter and himself for the sin which had been committed unwittingly. The king offered the hand of his daughter to Chyavana and pacified the *rishi*.

Sukanya was given in marriage to Chyavana and she went with him to stay in his *ashrama*. In that one moment when her father's army suffered because of her thoughtlessness, Sukanya lost her childishness and became a woman. She served her lord like Devahuti served Kardama.

Once, the heavenly twins, the Ashvini Kumaras came to the *ashrama* of Chyavana. The rishi had been pleased with the devotion of Sukanya and he wanted to please her. He therefore asked a boon of the Ashvins, after honouring them. He said: "You are the divine physicians. Because of the fact that you are professionals the *devas* do not give you a share of the Soma during the *yajnas*. You are considered as the inferior gods. If you make me young and handsome and desirable I will, in return, make you get a share of the Soma."

The twins were thrilled at the thought of the rise in their status and promised to give him youth. After several incantations they asked Chyavana to enter a lake which had been treated by them. He did so, and so did they. A moment passed and out of the lake there arose three young men: all were handsome and all three of them were wearing garlands of lotuses. Their ears were decked with jewels and they were wearing lovely silks. Sukanya, the purest of women looked at them and was at a loss as to who was her lord. She fell on the ground and addressed the twins: "Please have pity on me and see to it that my chastity is not harmed in any way. Please stand apart and let me know who my lord is." They were pleased with her and revealed themselves as apart from Chyavana. They then took leave of them and went back to the heavens.

In the meantime Sharyati, Sukanya's father wanted to perform a *yajna* and he came to Chyavana's *ashrama* to consult him about it. When he entered the *ashrama* he found his daughter with a young man who was as handsome as a god. The king was horrified at the sight. Sukanya rushed to

him with a glad cry and fell at his feet. The father, however, would not bless her and turned his face away. She did not know what had displeased him. There was an angry look on her father's face and very naively she asked: "Father, why are you looking so angry? Why do you look as though you are displeased with me? I am seeing you after so many days and I am hurt that you are not pleased to see me. You were once so fond of me but now you are not, evidently. Tell me, father, what I have done to incur this displeasure?" Sharyati looked at her and said: "How dare you stand before me and ask such a question? You are not fit to be my daughter. Born as you are in the great race of Manu, how could you become an ASATI? Indeed, the great *rishi* Chyavana has been deceived by you. I am surprised that he has not cursed you. How could you be so shameless? You are living in sin with this young man and you ask me to bless you even after I have seen you with him. You are not my daughter any more. I do not want to look at you." He turned away.

A peal of ringing laughter which sounded like silver bells tinkling, made him pause. He turned round and looked at her in surprise. The young man joined in the laughter. They both came near him and Sukanya said: "Father, I have not sinned. This young Man IS your son-in-law. He is the great *rishi* and no one else."

They told him what had happened: all about how the Ashvins were responsible for their good fortune.

Chyavana performed the *Somayajna* for Sharyati and during the *yajna* he offered the soma to the Ashvins also. The gods were displeased and Indra came there. So incensed was he that he lifted up his dread Vajra to destroy Chyavana. However, the power of Chyavana's *tapas* was such that he could paralyse the arm of Indra. The lord of heavens found his arm could not be moved and the Vajra was lying inert in his fist. Indra then realised that he was unnecessarily selfish and the *devas* agreed to let the Ashvin twins have a share of the soma from then on.

NAABHAAKA

Nabhaka was a great king in the line of the Ikshvakus and his son was Naabhaaka. This young man was so devoted to learning that he spent most of his time with his *guru*. So much so, when the time came for the partitioning of their father's wealth his brothers forgot all about the existence of Naabhaaka and divided it all among themselves. Naabhaaka came back from the abode of his *guru* and went to his brothers. He asked them: "Which is my share of my father's wealth?" They said: "Actually we forgot all about you since you were away so long. Now it is too late to divide it all over again. But father is still unclaimed. We therefore allot our father to you as your share. Take him with you and take good care of him."

Naabhaaka went to his father and related to him about the words spoken by his brothers. The father said: "My son, they have become avaricious and they have deceived you. I am not like wealth which will help you to make a living. Still, since it has happened like this, I will think up something to help you." The old man pondered for a while and then said: "I know how to help you to make a living. I know a method by which you can acquire wealth. Here, nearby, the Angirasas are performing *yajnas* by name "Abhiplava" and "Prishthya." These have to be concluded six days after the commencement. Now, these Angirasas, though they are learned and wise, will not be able to remember the vital *mantra* without which the *yajna* cannot be completed. You stay in the spot and repeat these two *mantras* which I will teach you. Since they will attain the heavens because of these *yajnas* being completed successfully they will, in gratitude, give you all the valuable things which will be left over in the *yajnashala*. With that wealth you can live in great comfort."

Naabhaaka did as he was told: and as the old father had predicted, the Agirases gave him the wealth which was left in the *yajnashala*. When he

was collecting all that was given to him, Naabhaaka saw a dark man coming towards him from the northern direction. He came near and said: "All this belongs to me. You have no right over it."

Naabhaaka told him the story of how the Agirasas had given it all to him as a token of their appreciation and gratitude. But it was of no avail. So young Naabhaaka said: "This has to be decided by a third person." "So be it", said the dark stranger who was Rudra. "Go to your father and tell him what has happened. I will abide by what he says."

Nabhaka heard the story and said: "My son, long ago, during the *yajna* performed by Daksha the *rishis* announced that the wealth left in the *yaj nabhumi* always belongs to Rudra. It is Rudra who has come to claim it. He was every right over it and again he is a *deva*. We cannot dispute his claim." Naabhaaka, the young man went back to Rudra and said: "My father says that the wealth is entirely yours and that I have no claim on it. Please forgive me for my ignorance of your true self and bless me who has fallen at your feet." Rudra was immensely pleased with the behaviour of the young prince and said: "You are honest and straightforward. You also know how to respect one who is older than you. I am pleased with you. I will teach you the Brahma Vidya. And also, as a reward for your righteousness, I will make a gift of this wealth to you."

Naabhaaka became one of the great seers of his time.

AMBARISHA

Naabhaaka's son was Ambarisha, who was lord of the entire earth and possessed immense wealth. But he was a wise man. He knew that the things of the world are all transient and that they try and ensnare man's wisdom. He therefore considered it all as a passing pageant which occurs in a dream. He lived as a king: he enjoyed all his wealth and the glory of kingship: *but* with the knowledge that it was not a lasting thing. He was not involved with the worldly things. Because he was the son like his father, his mind was steeped in Brahma Vidya. He had great devotion to Narayana which made it easier for him to treat the entire world and its charms like a clod of mud. He was a *bhagavata* in the true sense of the word. His mind was always lost in the feet of Narayana. His words were only words of praise of the Lord. His hands were ever engaged in doing menial service in the temple of the Lord. His ears were eager to listen to the stories of the Lord and his eyes were happy only when they looked at the image of the Lord in the temples. His feet, he felt, were blessed only when they went on a pilgrimage to holy spots.

This king who was a Narayana *bhakta*, ruled the earth and he ruled it well. Vasishtha and Asita and Gautama helped him to perform the *Ashvamedha* on the banks of the Sarasvati. Ambarisha lived in the world of men without any bondage: without any attachment. Narayana was so pleased with him that he gave his personal weapon Sudarshana *chakra* to the king. This protected the king and his country. And so time went on.

Once the king heard about the sanctity of the *vrata* by name Dvadashi *vrata*. He and his wife therefore, observed the *vrata* for a whole year. At the termination of the *vrata* which was observed during the month of Kartika, the king fasted for three days. He then went to the grove by name Madhuvana and worshipped the Lord. After giving away gifts of gold and

cows to brahmins he came back to his palace and sat down to break the fast with his wife by his side.

At that moment there appeared before him the sage Durvasa. The king got up in a hurry and placed a noble seat for the *rishi*. He honoured him with *Arghya*, *Padya* and *Achamaniya*. The king then prostrated before the great man and requested him to honour him by taking his food in his house. Durvasa was very pleased with the humility of the king and said: "Certainly, I will accept your hospitality. I will first go to the river to perform my morning ablutions and come back".

Durvasa entered the river and was having his bath, all the while reciting the *mantra*, the *sutra* by name Aghamarshana. In the meantime the king was in a difficult position. Dvadashi was fast drawing to a close. Only a few moments were left and it was imperative that he should do "*Parana*" — have his food—before Dvadashi ended in order to make his *vrata* successful. It was not only essential that he should eat: but it was sin if, after performing the *vrata*, a man did not eat during Dvadashi. He asked the advice of the learned brahmins and they said that a few drops of water purified with Tulasi leaves would avert the sin. Accordingly the king wetted his lips with a few drops of this water which is said to be as pure as Ganga, and waited for the coming of the *rishi*.

Durvasa came back. He was received humbly by the king. But the *rishi* saw with his mind's eye what had happened. He was highly insulted that the host, a king, should have ignored an honoured guest to the extent of beginning the *parana* without his guest. His body was trembling with anger and his eyes were spitting fire. He said : "You are drunk with power and wealth. You are an arrogant man who does not know how to honour a guest. I will teach you what it is to insult me. You will be punished for this." He pulled out a lock from his matted hair and created a being named Kritya. This being held a sword in his hand and he rushed towards the king. Ambarisha stood unmoved.

Before anything could happen Sudarshana *chakra* came on the scene and burnt the new-born, newly-created being to ashes. Durvasa was amazed at this. Sudarshana did not stop there. It rushed towards Durvasa and he tried

to escape from its fury by running away. He ran from the spot and the *Chakra* followed him. He ran into the forest and it pursued him like a forest fire. He entered a cave in the mountain Meru and he found the *chakra* there. He ran to the heavens and to the abode of Indra. The *chakra* pursued him. He went to Brahma the creator of the Universe and said: "Help me! Help me ! Protect me from the weapon of Narayana." Brahma said: "I am a servant of the Lord and I am helpless. I will not intervene between you and the weapon of Narayana." Durvasa went to Mahadeva and asked him to help him. Mahadeva asked him to go to Narayana himself and fall at his feet. Durvasa went to Vaikuntha the dwelling place of the Lord. He was there and so was Lakshmi, his consort. The *rishi* rushed to him, fell at his feet and said: "Please protect me. Ask this *chakra* of yours to leave me. I am not able to withstand the fire emanating from your Sudarshana. I am being burnt and you are the only saviour." "How did it happen?", asked the Lord. "How is it my *chakra* is pursuing you like this? Tell me." With a shamed look and with faltering words Durvasa related the entire incident and said: "I have offended your *bhakta* and your *chakra* is trying to punish me for it. Please help me. There is nothing that is impossible for the Lord of lords. I am repentant about my behaviour. Please save me.

Narayana smiled and said: "My dear Durvasa, can you not see that I am also just as helpless as Brahma or Rudra? Evidently you do not know about me. I am not a free person. I may be able to do anything I like. But first and foremost, I belong to my *bhaktas*. All that is mine belongs to them. They have renounced everything and have chosen me as their sole companion. They have abandoned everything for my sake: wife, home, child, and kinsmen: their very lives. They have no thought of this world or the next. Heaven holds no charm for them. All they want is my grace. In return I have sworn that I will never abandon them. The foremost thought in my mind is the *bhakti* they have for me. They have conquered me with their love and I am powerless against their love. I have no will of my own. Their sorrow is my sorrow and their happiness is mine. I am famed by the name "*Bhaktaparadhina*." I am not as fond of myself or even my *devi* Lakshmi as I am of my *bhaktas*. When such is the case, how can I treat them casually? Any insult offered to my *bhakta* is considered as an insult

to me. Just as good women make slaves of their husbands by the extreme love they have for them, even so my *bhaktas* have made me their slave.

As for you, you are also my *bhakta*. But I cannot ask this *chakra* to move away from the course it has chosen. I will tell you what you can do to save yourself. There is one way and only one way out for you. Go back to the earth: fall at the feet of the *bhakta* whom you have offended. Perhaps Sudarshana will listen to the entreaties of Ambarisha, the son of Naabhaaka. He may withdraw it for your sake and you may be saved." With a crestfallen look Durvasa arrived at the palace doors of Ambarisha. He went to the king and falling at his feet he caught them in his two hands. Ambarisha was greatly embarrassed and he at once began to offer prayers to Sudarshana, the *chakra* of the Lord. "Sudarshana, I salute you. You are Agni, Surya, Chandra and the stars. You pervade the universe. You are the favourite weapon of Narayana who is the ocean of mercy. You are so great that all the *astras* are powerless against your glory. I fall at your feet and ask you to forgive this Brahmin. You destroy evil and evil doers. Please do not show your anger against a poor and powerless brahmin."

Pleased with his prayers Sudarshana became cool and Durvasa was no longer pursued by the dread weapon. The chastened *rishi* then spoke to the king. He said: "You are a very noble man. You are gentle even with me who insulted you for no reason at all. I have realised the greatness of the devotees of Narayana. For those who have captivated the Lord with their devotion nothing is impossible. By holding His image in your minds for ever, men like you become so pure and holy that they are as sacred as the river Ganga. I have been treated very kindly by you. You have forgotten the insulting words I hurled at you and you have saved my life."

The king made him feel less embarrassed because it was quite a humiliating experience for a great *rishi* like Durvasa to fall at the feet of a king who, he had thought, had not paid him enough respect. Somehow the moment passed: the moment which was painful to both of them.

The time which Durvasa took to go to the three *lokas* and come back to Ambarisha was one year. During that entire year the king had not eaten a morsel of food. Durvasa was horrified at the enormity of the consequences

of his rashness and he beseeched the king to have his food. The guest had to be honoured first, according to the king. So, with a pleased mind and with happiness in his heart the rishi accepted the "atithya" of the king Ambarisha. Both of them partook of the good food, the king, after the rishi had been satisfied.

Durvasa said: "I have been blessed by my contact with you, a bhakta of Narayana. The world will ever remember this incident in my life and yours." He left the presence of the king and went away. As for the king, the incident had assumed the semblance of a dream. The coming of Durvasa, his anger, and, later, his repentance following the wrath of the Chakra were all amazing happenings and while he thought over them Ambarisha told himself: "It is all the Lila of the lord. Who can fathom the purpose behind all this?"

KAKUTSTHA AND OTHERS

Puranjaya was one of the descendants of Ikshvaku. He was later known as Indravahana. There was war in the heavens between the *devas* and the *asuras* and, as happened often, Indra asked one of the kings on the earth to help him. The king was Puranjaya of the Surya Vamsa. Puranjaya said: "I will fight for you on one condition: you should be the one to carry me during the fight. You must be my "*Vahana*." Indra did not like it at all since he thought it was below his dignity: the dignity of the lord of the heavens to be the *vahana* for a mere mortal. Narayana, however, knowing what was passing in his mind, told him that he should agree to it since Puranjaya was their only hope of winning the war. According to the advice of the Lord, Indra agreed to become the *Vahana* for the king. Indra took the form of a bull and Puranjaya sat on the hump on the back of the bull. He was a great warrior and he had the grace of Narayana to give him victory over the *asuras* whom he drove with his sharp arrows to the nether world. He fought gloriously and, after the *asuras* had abandoned their city, the king took all their wealth and gave it to Indra. This king Puranjaya was famed in later days as Indravahana and a more popular name was KAKUTSTHA. All the kings of the race who came after him were called Kaakutsthas. This name was frequently used for Rama, the son of Dasharatha.

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Yuvanashva was a king who was born in the line of Ikshvaku. He had no children. Disgusted with his life he went to the forest accompanied by his wives, who were a hundred in number. The *rishis* in the forest took pity on the king and offered to perform a *yajna* to propitiate Indra.

When the *yajna* was concluded they filled a pot with water and they invoked the gods to bless the water. The water was then placed in a holy spot inside the *yajnashala*. It was meant for the wives of the king.

In the middle of the night Yuvanashva got up. He was feeling extremely thirsty. He entered the *yajnashala* and found that everyone was asleep. He knew nothing about the special qualities in the water which was in a pot right in front of him. He drank up the water and went back to sleep. In the morning when the *rishis* got up and found the pot empty they asked everyone: "Who has drunk this water?" The king told them that he had drunk it during the night since he was very thirsty. No one knew what to do. They did not know what was going to happen.

A few months passed and the right flank of the king had become big with child. It had to be torn apart and a son was born. The child, as soon as it was born, cried lustily with hunger, Indra who had been the god propitiated for the sake of the child for Yuvanashva, rushed to the spot. He placed his right forefinger inside the mouth of the child. The child drank the Amrita which flowed out of Indra's finger.

As for Yuvanashva, he did not die because of the power of the *rishis*. He later performed *tapas* and attained salvation.

The child was named Mandhatri and became one of the great monarchs who ruled the earth. Men in later times called him the ornament of Krita yuga.

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Satyavrata was a later king in the line. His son was Trishanku. Trishanku was the king who wanted to reach the heavens with a human body. Vasishtha and his sons refused to perform a *yajna* to grant him this strange desire and cursed him to become a *chandala*. Vishvamitra, the generous hearted rishi agreed to perform a *yajna* to send him to the heavens. He did perform the *yajna* and the king was raised to the heavens. The gods led by Indra resented this intrusion of an earthly person who was *chandala* by his looks. They threw him down. Vishvamitra, hearing his piteous cry grew extremely wrathful. He stopped him in mid air and created a new heaven solely for the sake of Trishanku. Before he could create a new Brahma the *devas* came and pacified him. Trishanku lives for ever in the special heaven created for him by Vishvamitra.

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Trishanku's son was Harishchandra. He had no sons and he prayed to Varuna, the Lord of the oceans. He said: "All I want to have is a son. This is for the purpose of saving myself from the hell by name Puth. When a son is born to me I will perform a *yajna* with my son as the offering and give him to you." In course of time a son was born to the king. The child was named Rohita. Varuna came to Harishchandra and said: "You promised to perform a *yajna* with this child as the offering." The king said: "A new born child is unclean. It is only after ten days that it becomes clean. I will give him to you after that."

Ten days later Varuna came to claim his due. The king then said: "A *yajnapashu* has to have teeth and so please wait till he cuts his teeth." When Varuna came again the king came up with the excuse that the milk teeth should fall: and then, later, that they should or should grow again. And so it went on. The king, attached inordinately to his son, began to think up many excuses: "Let my son wear armour. A kshatriya is pure only when he is armed."

Rohita in the meanwhile, came to know all about what was to happen to him. He wanted to escape his doom by running away to the forest with a bow in his hand. The king, in his turn, was afflicted by the dread disease dropsy which Varuna caused as a punishment to the untruthful king. Hearing about it Rohita started to go home to save his father. Indra stopped him. He told the young prince that he should go and visit all the holy rivers. One year passed and again it happened and yet again. Five years passed and finally Rohita decided to go back to his kingdom and to his father.

On the way he met a brahmin who had three sons and bought one of them as an offering for Varuna. His name was Sunashepha. Harishchandra, with the affliction still tormenting him, performed the *yaga* by name Narmedha where the sacrifice is a human being and not an animal. Vishvamitra, who was the hota taught the incantation by name Varuna Japa to the young boy Sunashepha which pleased the god immensely. Indra was pleased with the *yaga* and granted a golden chariot to Harishchandra.

Varuna was pleased with the youngster Sunashepha and he was allowed to live: Vishvamitra adopted him as his son and the *yajna* came to a satisfactory conclusion. The gods were pleased and Harishchandra did not lose his son. He was also cured of the disease which had been troubling him for years.

Vishvamitra, who had been very fond of Trishanku took it upon himself to teach the Brahma Vidya to Harishchandra.

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One of the descendants of this line was the king Katvanga. He was a great warrior. Once, when the *devas*, as usual, were harassed by the *asuras* they asked this king from the earth to help them. Katvanga went and assisted Indra in subduing the *asuras*. The *devas* were very pleased with him and asked him to ask any boon he wished. He said: "Please tell me how many more years I have left out of my lifetime." The *devas* looked at each other and finally, with a lot of hesitation said: "It is a *devarahasya*. But we will tell you since we promised to grant you a boon. You have just ONE MUHURTA left. (A muhurta is roughly twenty minutes).

Katvanga was not unhappy. He rushed to the earth and sat down in meditation. He contemplated on the form of the Lord. He spoke words of supplication. He said: "Nothing is dear to me in this world. I have never been an *adharmi* at any time in my life. I have thought of you, my Lord and of no one else. The *devas* tempted me with Svarga but I was not enamoured of it and the joys it promises. The *devas* themselves do not know the form of you, my lord, caught as they are, in the web of Maya. I take refuge in the lotus feet of you, Narayana, abandoning the world of illusion which is created by the mind and the senses." So saying, king Katvanga abandoned everything and became one with the Lord.

SAGARA AND HIS SONS

In the line of Ikshvaku was born a king by name Bahuka. When his land had been taken by force by his enemies Bahuka went to the forest and with him went his wife. The king died when he was in the forest. When he died his grief-stricken wife was about to enter the fire which was kindled on his funeral pyre. But she was stopped from doing so by the *rishis* since she was with child.

The other wives of the king did not like this news at all. They did not like her since she had the good fortune which had been denied to them. They did not like her to be the mother of the future king. Therefore they mixed poison with the food she was want to eat, and with great affection fed her with it. But, contrary to their expectations nothing happened either to the mother or to the unborn child. The child, when it was born, was covered by the poison which his mother had swallowed. And so the *rishis* called him "SAGARA."

Sagara became a famous king and he later became the emperor. He wanted to perform the *yaga* by name *Ashvamedha*. The horse meant for the sacrifice had been sent out. Indra, as was his usual custom, stole the horse. The king asked his sons Sixty Thousand in number to go in search of the horse and to bring it back. The sons of the king were all valiant. But they were equally arrogant. They set out in search of the horse.

They searched all over the world and could not find the horse. They then dug the earth with their immensely powerful arms and entered the nether world. When they proceeded in the north-easterly direction they found a cave. Inside the cave was sitting a *rishi* in *Samadhi* and by the side of the *rishi* they found their horse grazing happily.

"Look at this thief!" exclaimed the proud princes. "Having stolen our horse he is sitting with his eyes closed as though he knows nothing. Let us kill

him. "So saying, the sixty thousand stalwarts grasped their weapons in their hands and rushed towards the *rishi*.

It was Kapila who was in the cave. He opened his eyes. His angry glance lighted on them and the sons of Sagara were turned to a heap of ashes.

Perhaps it is wrong to say that the anger of Kapila burnt them. Kapila was *Sattva guna* which had taken a form for the good of mankind and it is not possible for *Tamoguna* to be found in him. *Tamoguna* is essentially earthly and the *rishis* are so rich spiritually. And again, it was this Kapila who taught man who was floundering in the morass called Samsara, how to cross it easily. It is with the help of this raft that man is able to make this fearful journey across the ocean. Such a personage can have neither friend nor foe. How then were the *Sagaraputras* killed? They died because they had insulted a great man: and Indra had robbed them of their power of thinking.

Sagara had two wives. The mother of these unfortunate sixty thousand was Sumati. The other wife was Keshini. She had a son by name Asamanja. Asamanja's son was Amshuman and he was greatly devoted to his grandfather.

Asamanja was a strange being. He had been a *yogi* in his previous birth. Unfortunately he became involved in sanga: attachment. As a result of this he was born as the son of a king. He was, however, able to remember his previous birth. In the present birth he protected himself from bondage, Bandha, by pretending to be a cruel man. Even as a young man his many acts appeared to be inhuman. He displeased everyone around him and thus escaped the powerful bondage called affection. He would frighten the citizens by catching hold of young children and throwing them into the river Sarayu and clapping his hands as though in glee. His behaviour was intolerable.

His atrocities were so many that the people complained to the king that he had to be punished. According to the law of the land Asamanja was banished from the country. Just before leaving for the forest he restored all the children to life and before the amazed people could say anything he walked away and in the forest Asamanja performed *tapas* and attained

Moksha. The king was unhappy that he had lost a good son and so he showered all his love on Amshuman, the only remnant of the line of Ikshvaku.

AMSHUMAN

Since the *ashvamedha* had to be concluded the king sent his grandson in search of his sons and the vanished horse. A long time had passed since the valiant brothers had gone in search of the horse and they did not come back. The king was worried as to what had happened. Amshuman left the city in search of his uncles. He followed the path which they had taken and pursued the traces which they had left. He went under the earth along the path newly dug by them. After a long trek he came to the cave where the horse was still tied: even as his uncles did he found Kapila in Samadhi. By the side of the *rishi* he found an immense heap of ashes and wondered what it was.

He went near the presence of Kapila Vaasudeva and saluted him. He spoke words full of praise and reverence. He said: "My lord, even Brahma the creator has not been able to know you completely. When such is the case how is it possible for ordinary mortals like us, mortals who have been caught in the web woven of *Maya*: the web made up of the three *gunas* *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* and the mind and the intellect? We are blind to the light which will reveal to us the likes of you: this is because we are enveloped by the *Avarana*, *Maya*. We can see the things only of the world. We can only see the object of the senses. And, all the while, we are unaware of the glory that is lodged inside us: the glory that is YOU. We know the three stages: the *Avasthatrayas*: *Jagravastha*, *Svapna* and *Sushupti*: waking, dream and deep sleep stages. But we have never been able to go beyond that. Ignorant human that I am, how is it possible for me to know you and talk about you? I can only say: I salute you who is the refuge of the Universe: who is beyond the three *gunas* and the involvement caused by them: who is beyond cause and effect: who came into this world to teach Man the Truth about himself. You are the Ancient: the immutable. You are the Lord of lords and because I have had the good fortune to see

you I know I am cured of the bondage of *Maya* which is the home of desires, of *Karma* and of the senses. I salute you, my lord."

With his eyes raining tears Amshuman fell at the feet of Kapila. The great man was pleased at the humility and devotion of the young prince and said: "Child, take this horse which belongs to your grandfather. Indra brought it and left it here when I was in my *yoganidra*. As for your uncles, they have been burnt because of their arrogance and the only water which will cleanse their souls and take them to the *Pitriloka* is the water of Mandakini: Ganga from the heavens."

Amshuman went round him and prostrated before him. He then took the horse with him and came back to the city. His grandfather performed the *yaga* to completion. Unhappy at the thought of the fate of his sons the old king Sagara crowned Amshuman as king and went away to the forest to perform *tapas* and find peace and *moksha*.

Amshuman performed *tapas* to please Ganga and make her come down to the earth. But he could not achieve his desire. Old age overtook him and he died. His son Dilipa was also unsuccessful in his attempts to please Ganga. He too left his work unfinished and died.

GANGA-BHAGIRATHI

Dilipa's son Bhagiratha left his kingdom in the hands of his ministers and was intent on only one thing: the bringing of Ganga down to the earth and granting *Pitriloka* to his ancestors. He performed *tapas* so long and so devoutly that Ganga was pleased and appeared before him. With folded palms he prostrated at her feet and addressed her. "Devi! Ganga! Mandakini! You have been born of the feet of the Lord. When Vamana begged three paces of ground from Bali and was granted them he took his Vishvarupa. The foot which covered the heavens reached the heavenly *lokas* and in Satyaloka Brahma, with the seven *rishis* washed His blessed feet with water from his *kamandalu* and that is YOU. You are called by the name Vishnupadi and you are called Mandakini. Please have mercy on me and on our house."

Mandakini smiled on him and asked him what he desired. He told her about the words of Kapila and said: "Blessed mother, please grant the heavenly abode to my ancestors. For three generations they have been denied it."

Ganga said: "Bhagiratha, you have, evidently, no conception of the speed with which I will flow if I descend to the earth from the heavens. Who is there powerful enough to break my fall? If I am not stopped, the force of my descent will be so great that I will enter the nether regions straight and your *tapas* will all be wasted. And again, I do not see why I should leave my heavenly home and come down to this sinful earth. People will bathe in my waters and shed their sins in me. I will have to be the recipient of them all. How can I be purified? Who will do it for me?"

Bhagiratha stood humbly before her and said: "As for the sinfulness you are afraid of, it is not such a problem. I have been told that great seers who have passed beyond the bondage of *Karma*: who have no thought other than that of the Lord: who have Narayana lodged in their minds forever:

these seers, I say, when they bathe in your waters, will purify you. They are named the Tirtharupas and they will cleanse you. And no sin will cling to them since they have the power to destroy sin. The other problem will have to be solved and that can be done only with the grace of Lord Mahadeva. I will pray to him. Mother, if he agrees to take you on his head and break your force will you cleanse my ancestors?"

"I will. I promise", said Ganga.

Bhagiratha began to perform *tapas* once again: this time the god to be propitiated was Mahadeva. However, Mahadeva, who is famed for the quickness with which he grants the prayers of his devotees appeared soon before Bhagiratha and asked him what he wanted. The suppliant king after his eulogy said: "My lord, you know all about how my ancestors were turned into a heap of ashes because of their offending the great Kapila. The *rishi* told my grandfather that they would be purified only if Mandakini comes down to the earth and washes the ashes. I have spent years praying to her and she was agreed to come down to this earth. But she has told me of a difficulty in her descent. The force of her descent will be so great that there will be no strength on the face of the earth to bear it. I have therefore been praying to you, my lord. When she comes down you must take her on your head and break her fall". Mahadeva was happy to say: "Yes".

Mandakini rushed down with great force from the heavens. The entire heavenly host stood watching the onrush. Mahadeva was standing with his head slightly raised: with his trident held at his back with his two hands. His chest was thrust forward. The snakes on his arms were swaying to and fro. The dark blue spot on his neck glowed against the gold of his skin. There was a slight smile on his lips and the world stood in awe as the river came down. Bhagiratha was there with his eyes wide open: with his hands folded together. His heart was beating fast since, finally, his ancestors would reach the home of the *Pitris*.

Ganga had become slightly proud of her powers. She came down as fast as she could. Mahadeva took her on his matted locks. And, a strange sight was to be seen! The river which rushed down with so much tumult was not

to be seen! It was lost entirely in the matted locks of the Lord. Ganga tried her best to get out of the tangled mass which was the *Jata* of the Lord Mahadeva and she could not.

Poor Bhagiratha said: "My lord! What has happened? Is all my penance going to waste? Please have mercy on me and release the mother". With the same smile at the corners of his lips Mahadeva allowed her to trickle from a strand of his hair. Mandakini, chastened and penitent, descended to the earth drop by drop. A lake was formed which was called "Bindusaras" and also "Saptasrotas".

Ganga divided herself into seven streams. Three of them flowed eastward and three westward. The seventh stream followed the chariot of Bhagiratha as he proceeded towards the cave of Kapila.

Wherever she touched the earth Ganga purified it. The entire world stood in amazement watching the scene: the chariot of the king Bhagiratha speeding and the thin silvery trickle of Ganga following him, like a daughter, her father. Soon Kapila's cave was reached and she wetted the heap of ashes which was all that was left of the sixty thousand valiant sons of Sagara. They reached the *loka* meant for the *Pitris*.

Mandakini, as she was called in the heavens, was Ganga on the earth. Since Bhagiratha brought her to the world, she was considered to be the daughter of Bhagiratha and she was given the name Bhagirathi.

KING SAUDASA

One of the descendants of Bhagiratha was Saudasa, the son of Sudasa. Like all the kings of the solar race, this king was a very righteous and god-fearing man. Once, he had gone out hunting and while he was engaged in the pastime came across a *rakshasa*. The king killed him and came back to his city. He did not, however, know that the dead *rakshasa* had a brother who was now bent on avenging the death of his brother. He came to the city and managed to enter the palace of the king. He assumed the guise of a cook and stayed in the kitchen of the king.

Once, when the king was hosting the great Vasishtha, who was his *kulaguru*, this *rakshasa* cooked human flesh and served it to the brahmin. Vasishtha realised that the food served to him was unfit to be eaten. He became very angry with the king and cursed him with the words: "You will become a *rakshasa* who is the only one who will eat the food you have served me".

As is usual with short-tempered brahmins Vasishtha thought about the incident for a while and realised that it was the doing of the *rakshasa* and that the king was innocent. He therefore said that he would modify his curse: the king would be a *rakshasa* for the duration of just twelve years. Saudasa, however, was very angry with Vasishtha for the injustice of the curse. He was a very righteous man and he took water in his hand with the intention of cursing the *rishi* in return. But his wife Madayanti who was a god-fearing and good woman knew that her husband was doing a wrong thing. She rushed to him and said: "Please desist from this action. Brahmins and *rishis* should be honoured and it is wrong on your part to be angry with your kulaguru even if he has been unjust in cursing you. It is not good for you or for your descendants". The king was convinced by the words of his wife. He realised that he should not have given in to his anger.

He poured the water on his own feet which became dark as night: he earned the name "*Kalmashapada*".

He became a *rakshasa* and spent his time in the forest. Once he saw a brahmin couple in the forest and, according to his *rakshasic* nature he caught hold of the brahmin to eat him up. The wife entreated him to leave her husband. She said: "You are a hero. You are a kshatriya. You are a righteous king. You are not really a *rakshasa*. You are a scion of the line of Ikshvaku. You are a *maharatha* and your wife is the noble Madayanti. Please remember your real nature and let my husband live. Killing a brahmin is like killing a cow which is said to contain the universe. Please kill me and leave my husband alone".

He would not listen. With his mind clouded because of the curse king Saudasa killed the brahmin and ate him up. The woman was beside herself with grief and anger and she said: "Since you have parted a husband and wife you will have to accept my curse. You will die when you try to take your wife". She then cremated her husband's bones and threw herself into the fire.

After the duration of twelve years the king resumed his former self. He went back to his kingdom. When he went to his wife with his heart full of love she told him about the curse of the brahmin's wife, and he had to refrain from taking her. According to the custom of those days Vasishtha, the *guru*, procreated a son for him by taking Madayanti. The child was in her womb for seven years and Vasishtha had to expel it with the help of a stone. The child was, therefore, named "Ashmaka". He was a very good ruler and upheld the name of his ancestors. Khatvanga, the great king of the solar race, was a descendant of this Saudasa, whose other name was Vishvasaha.

SHRI RAMA

Khatvanga's son was Dirghabahu and his son was Raghu. Aja was the son of Raghu and Aja's son was Dasharatha. The Lord, to rid the *devas* of the atrocities of Ravana agreed to descend to the earth. He was born as the son of Dasharatha. Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna were the four forms the Lord took to rid the world of its sins. You have heard the story of Rama often enough: of his wandering in the Dandaka forest accompanied by Sita, his consort and by Lakshmana, his devoted brother. This was at the behest of his father. Rama, who was so tenderly brought up by his father that his feet, when touched by the soft palms of his beloved Sita, would become red and hurt like a faded lotus, walked with bare feet in the forest so that his father's name should be unsullied.

When Rama was a youngster of sixteen the great Vishvamitra came to the court of Dasharatha and said: "I am performing a great *yajna* in the Siddhashrama. The *rakshasas* Maricha and Subahu are always trying to pollute the spot and prevent the *yajna* from being performed. I want to take your son Rama with me. He will destroy the *rakshasas*. Give Rama to me".

Dasharatha was so lost in his son that he did not want to send him. But Vasishtha convinced the king that he should not let his love blind him to the consequences of the anger of Vishvamitra. Rama and Lakshmana went with Vishvamitra to the forest. They reached the famed Siddhashrama. When the *yajna* was being performed the *rakshasas* appeared in the sky. Rama killed Subahu and drove Maricha to the shores of the ocean. The *yajna* was brought to a successful end. Vishvamitra then took Rama and Lakshmana to Mithila, the city where Janaka ruled. Janaka was the Lord of the Videha kingdom. He had, with him, the great bow of Shiva. Rama broke the great bow and won the hand of Sita, the daughter of Janaka. Sita

was his equal in every way: in beauty, youth, in her noble qualities and modesty.

When he was taking her back to Ayodhya, Rama met Parasurama who had destroyed the kshatriyas of the earth twenty one times with a terrible intentness. Rama took up the challenge of Parasurama and stringing the bow of Vishnu humiliated him.

Dasharatha, because of his rash promise to his wife Kaikeyi, was forced to ask Rama to leave the kingdom and live in the forest Dandaka for fourteen years. Rama, ever mindful of his duties towards his elders left his kingdom, his wealth, his devoted kinsmen and his dear city Ayodhya without even a trace of regret like a *yogi* who has no attachments abandons his body and gives up his breath. Accompanied by his wife Sita and Lakshmana Rama left for the forest.

While they were in the forest Shurpanakha, the sister of the famed Ravana saw Rama and she became enamoured of him. Rama punished her sinfulness by deforming her. She summoned the *Rakshasas* Khara, Dushana, and Trishiras to punish Rama. These were the *rakshasas* whom Ravana had placed in the Janasthana to represent him and his power. They were famed for their cruelty to the *rishis* living nearby. Rama was faced with the task of facing these three with their immense army. But he destroyed them all with the Kodanda famed the world over.

Ravana heard about the beauty of Sita and about the killing of the army in Janasthana. He decided to avenge the insult to his sister, and the killing of the *rakshasas*. He had already fallen in love with Sita and had decided to take her. He instigated Maricha to assume the form of a golden deer. Sita saw the deer wandering near the *ashrama* and captivated by its beauty she asked Rama to get it for her. To please her Rama pursued it to make a gift of it to her who had never asked him for anything till then. After a while he knew that it was a *rakhasa* who had donned the form of a deer. He sent an arrow which hissed like Rudra's anger against Daksha. Maricha was killed. But during Rama's absence from the *ashrama* Ravana had entered it and had carried away his beloved Sita.

Rama and Lakshmana wandered in the forest in search of Sita and, on the way, they came across Jatayu who had been a friend of their father. He was dying as a result of his fight with Ravana. After cremating him with the proper rites which a son observes when cremating his father, Rama wandered in search of Sita with his brother who tried his best to comfort him in his sorrow. The bereavement from Sita was too much for him to bear. He would lament and say: "Lakshmana, this is the state of a man who becomes too attached to a woman. I feel so lost without Sita".

The brothers continued on their way. Kabandha, a *rakshasa* tried to capture them within his outstretched arms and he was killed. They then reached a hill by name Rishyamukha and there, made friends with Sugriva, the king of monkeys. After killing Vali the brother of Sugriva and restoring the kingdom to him, Rama took Sugriva and the monkey host to the shores of the southern ocean. For three nights Rama waited on the shores thinking that the lord of the ocean would make way for him. When he found that he would not let him cross the ocean to the island Lanka Rama's anger knew no bounds. He threatened to burn up the entire ocean. The lord of the oceans then came out with the accessories for the worship of the Lord and begging his pardon said: "You are the Lord of lords and you have become angry with me. Please forgive me for my ignorant behaviour. You ask the monkeys to build a bridge across me and I promise to keep it afloat". They built the bridge, crossed it and reached Lanka which had once been burnt by Hanuman when he had come in search of Sita. The beautiful city of Lanka with its spacious courtyards, its innumerable gardens, granaries, council halls, aviaries, and many places of amusement was being destroyed by the army of monkeys like a lotus lake is, by a herd of elephants.

Ravana was furious with Rama and his army which had caused such havoc. He sent Nikumbha, Kumbha, Dhumraksha, Durmukha, Surantaka and Narantaka to fight with the enemies. These were later followed by Ravana's son Indrajit, his chief army leader: Prahasta: Atikaya and Vikampana and finally Kumbhakarna, the brother of Ravana. All of them were killed by Rama and Lakshmana assisted by Sugriva, Hanuman, Nila, Angada, Jambavan and others. Ravana then entered the battle-field intent

on killing Rama. The heavenly beings were watching the fight. When he saw Ravana entering the field in his chariot, Indra, the lord of the *Devas* sent his own chariot driven by Matali.

Rama and Ravana fought a memorable duel in which Ravana was killed by the Brahmastra sent by Rama.

Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana performed the funeral rites for all his kinsmen who were dead. Rama crowned Vibhishana as king and after granting him life till the end of the Kalpa Rama took Sita with him and left Lanka. He was accompanied by Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman and Vibhishana.

He hurried to Ayodhya where his beloved brother Bharata was waiting for him. This Bharata had donned the garb of an ascetic refusing to wear the silks which were denied to his brother. He had matted his locks even as his brother had, and slept on the floor. He was living in Nandigram on the outskirts of Ayodhya and he was ruling the kingdom in the name of Rama. He had placed the sandals of Rama on the throne as the insignia of the real ruler.

When he heard that Rama was on his way Bharata, placing the sandals on his head rushed out of Nandigram and met Rama and Lakshmana. He placed the sandals on the ground and after falling at the feet of his brother he stood with his eyes filled with tears. Rama embraced him and together they stood, while the brahmins chanted hymns to welcome the ruler.

Rama entered Ayodhya with all his brothers and citizens. There was great rejoicing in the city. Rama was given the coronation bath and was crowned as king.

He performed several *yagas* and ruled the kingdom well.

Once he came to know that one of his subjects spoke ill of his wife. He sneered at Rama and said: "Once a woman stays in the house of another man she should not be allowed into the house. In his infatuation for his wife Rama accepted her. But I will not do so." When he heard this Rama decided to abandon his wife since he felt that it was the first duty of a king

to please his subjects. Sita was with child and she went to the *ashrama* of Valmiki. Two sons were born to her: twins, by name Lava and Kusha.

Leaving her sons with Valmiki Sita entered the earth who held out her arms to her. Rama heard about it and was sunk in sorrow. But he remembered that a king had no right to have feelings of his own. He ruled the earth for thirteen thousand years and went back to the glory which was his own.

THE CHANDRA VAMSA

Out of the navel of Lord Narayana was born Brahma, the creator. Brahma had a son by name Atri. Out of the tears of joy which he once shed was born a son to Atri and this son was named "Soma." He was made of Amrita and Brahma the creator made him the lord of the *oshadhis* (medicinal herbs) and of the stars. Soma conquered the three worlds and performed the Rajasuya. He was so handsome and so great was his charm that no one could help loving him.

In course of time he became proud and arrogant. And, as a result of this his righteousness was dimmed. Brihaspati, the *guru* of the *devas* had a beautiful wife by name Tara. Soma took her by force. He was handsome and charming that Tara did not resist him and his love. Brihaspati was extremely fond of his wife. He asked Soma again and again to return his wife but Soma refused to do so.

As a result of this there was a war in the heavens. Sukra, the *guru* of the *asuras* had never been fond of Brihaspati and so, when this incident took place he took sides with Soma and, naturally the *asuras* sided with Soma. Mahadeva sided with Brihaspati who was the son of Angirasa. Mahadeva had great respect for Angirasa: he almost considered him to be his *guru*. There was a reason for it. When Sati, the wife of Mahadeva and daughter of Daksha abandoned her body during the *yajna* which Daksha performed, Mahadeva was so full of sorrow that he forgot his real nature. Narayana sent Angirasa to Mahadeva and asked him to comfort the sorrowing god: to remind him as to who he was. Angirasa did this and so Mahadeva was grateful to the *rishi* who had saved him from the extreme sorrow which had threatened to overpower him.

Indra with all the *devas* took sides with Brihaspati, his *guru* and the war was quite intense. It seemed as though both the hosts would be destroyed: all because of the arrogance of Soma. Brahma felt that he should interfere.

He went to his grandson and after scolding him thoroughly he took Tara with him and restored her to Brihaspati.

Brihaspati found that she was with child. He loved her so much that he could not be very angry with her for her lapse. He said: "You are with child and I do not know whose child it is. Shed the baby from your womb so that I can call myself a father. You are a woman and I will not curse you. Do not be afraid." The child was born. It was a boy and it was very beautiful. Brihaspati became very much attached to it and Soma also. He claimed that the child was his. Both the men were quarrelling over it. The *rishis* and the *devas* questioned Tara but she would not reply, overcome as she was, with shame. The new born child began to speak and he said: "Woman, why do you keep silent? You have been unfaithful to your husband and now you refuse to speak when he wants to know the truth about me. Tell me who I am." Brahma took her aside and asked her in secret who the father of the child was. After a lot of coaxing she replied in a soft and halting voice that Chandra (Soma) was the father. Chandra then took the child with him. Brahma was amazed at the righteousness of the new born child who wanted truth at any cost. He was so wise and so Brahma called him "BUDHA"— the one who knows.

Shraddhadeva, the son of Vivasvat, the founder of the Surya Vamsa was childless for a long time. He requested his *guru* Vasishtha to perform *yajna* in supplication to Mitra and Varuna. His wife, however, wanted a daughter. When the *yajna* was in progress she asked the Hota to make her wish to come true. The Hota obliged and a daughter was born. The king was very disappointed and asked Vasishtha how it could happen. The *guru* told him about the Hota changing the incantations in order to please the queen who desired a daughter to be born. The girl was called ILA. Vasishtha told the king that he would, with the power of his *tapas*, make the child change sex. The girl became a boy as a consequence of Vasishtha's power. The prince was named Sudyumna.

Once the prince had gone out hunting in the northern direction. Under the slopes of the Meru mountain nestled a coppice and, when he entered it with his companions Sudyumna realised that he had become a woman. His

horse had changed sex also and his companions too were in the same plight. This was because of the curse of Lord Mahadeva.

Once the *rishis* came to the forest to worship Mahadeva who was staying there. He was, as was his custom, accompanied by Parvati. The *rishis*, in their eagerness to see the Lord, entered his presence without announcing themselves. Parvati was seated on the lap of Mahadeva and she was not dressed. Seeing the *rishis* she was overcome with shyness and, covering herself with her cloth she left the lap of Mahadeva. The *rishis* felt embarrassed and went away from there. They went to the *ashrama* to Nara and Narayana.

Lord Mahadeva, to pacify his consort pronounced a curse saying: "Those who enter this forest will become women." In course of time no man would enter the forest because of the curse. Vasishtha prayed to Mahadeva to help the young prince. The Lord then said that he would be a woman for a month and a man for a month and so he lived till he gave away his kingdom to his son and went to the forest to perform *tapas*.

When Sudyumna was wandering in the forest in the form of a woman Budha, the son of Soma saw a beautiful woman and fell in love with her. Sudyumna was ILA for that length of time. A son was born to the two: BUDHA and ILA. This son was named PURURAVAS and he was the first king of the race of the Moon.

PURURAVAS

Pururavas had inherited the wisdom of his father and the handsomeness and charm of his grandfather, Soma. When his father Sudyumna left the kingdom in his hands and went away to the forest Pururavas began to rule the kingdom well. His fame spread far and wide.

Once, in the court of Indra, Narada was speaking about the greatness of Pururavas: about his handsomeness, his nobility, and his righteousness. He said that all the great and good qualities of a king were found in him. Hearing the praises of the king Urvashi, the divine dancer fell in love with him. When she found herself pining for the king she came down to the earth. She went to the presence of Pururavas. He was taken aback at the sight of so much beauty. His eyes were drinking in her beauty and his voice was soft when he said: "Please be seated. Tell me what I should do to please you." She stood silent and her eyes spoke volumes. The king felt that he would not be given those looks and loving smiles unless she was also interested in him. He said: "I am enchanted by you. Will you become mine?"

Urvashi said: "When such a handsome man like you is standing before me and asking me if I will become his, can I refuse? I do not think there is any woman on this earth or in the heavens who can resist your charm. My mind and my eyes are lost in you. I have come to you with a heart full of love for you. But then, there are two conditions which you have to fulfil if you want me to be yours."

The king said: "Command me, my love. I will do anything you say." She said: "These are my pet goats. They must be protected. And again, you must promise me that no harm will come to them. The other condition is: I should never see you without your clothes except when we are making love. If you agree to these I will be yours. Also, I will eat nothing but ghee."

The king agreed to all her conditions and they became husband and wife. They spent many happy years in the gardens, earthly and heavenly. Kubera's garden Chaitra was their favourite haunt.

Indra, in the meantime, was finding the heavens lifeless without Urvashi. He decided to get her back. One day, when the king and Urvashi were fast asleep *gandharvas* sent by Indra came and took away the pet goats of Urvashi. They bleated when they were carried away and the sound woke her up. Urvashi was like one demented. She woke up Pururavas and spoke harsh words to him in her grief. She said: "Fool that I was to have considered you to be a hero. I trusted you to guard my pets and now they are gone. You are not a man. You are man only when there is light illuminating the world. At nights you sleep like a timid woman afraid to go out and rescue my goats. I have been deceived."

Touched to the quick by her words the king leaped out of his bed and grasping the sword in his hand he rushed out in pursuit of the thieves. He had no garment on. Just then, because of Indra's trickery, the sky was lit up by a brilliant streak of lightning. The *gandharvas* left the goats and vanished. But Urvashi had seen the king when he was naked and she too disappeared. The king came back and found that she had gone.

Pururavas found it impossible to live without her. He would wander all over the surface of the earth looking for her. He went to the banks of the Sarasvati and there he found five maidens who were the

companions of Urvashi. His message to her was: "Do not go away, my beloved. Please stay. You should not treat me so cruelly. I have been made to wander so far because of you. This body of mine which you once loved is now going to drop down dead. Hawks and wolves will make a meal of me."

Urvashi sent back her reply: "Do not lie. Wolves need not eat you up. Have you not yet realised that women should never be trusted? They have no lasting love for anyone or anything. Their hearts are like those of wolves. They are without any compassion. They are cruel: heartless: impatient and obstinate about their wishes and their gratification. On the slightest pretext they will even kill the brother, or lover or husband who trusts them. But

leave all that alone. At the end of this year you will meet me and spend a night with me. You will also get your son then."

Pururavas was thrilled that he would meet her again and that she was with child: that she would give him an heir to the throne. As per her promise Urvashi spent a night with the king Pururavas and when she had to go away he was very unhappy. Urvashi said: "Pray to the *gandharvas*. They will bring us together."

He prayed to the *gandharvas* and they gave him a pot of fire. They said: "Perform the rites we tell you with the help of this pot. You will finally reach Urvashi."

He buried the pot under the tree and that night he spent in thoughts of her. That night he dreamt of the three Vedas. In the morning he went to the spot where he had buried the pot of fire. He rubbed the pieces of Arani as he had been instructed. He found fire being formed. The fire assumed three forms to represent the three fires presided over by the three Vedas: Gurhapatya, Ahavaniya and Dakshinagni.

With this fire the king worshipped Narayana asking him to grant him his wish.

Pururavas was granted his wish. He reached the abode of the *gandharvas* and there he was united with Urvashi.

PARASURAMA

In line of Pururavas was born a king named Gadhi. His daughter was Satyavati. Ruchika, a brahmin came to the king and asked for the hand of his daughter in marriage. The king said: "If you want her you must give me a thousand horses which are milky white like the moon and which have ears which are black. If you love my daughter enough you must be able to pay this Kanya sulka. We are not usually in the habit of asking for this sulka but I want to see how much you love my daughter." Ruchika went to Varuna, the lord of the oceans, and asked him to help him. He came back with the thousand white horses and claimed the hand of the king's daughter. Gadhi was quite satisfied that his daughter would have a loving husband and gave Satyavati to Ruchika.

Gadhi had no son and Ruchika did not have one either. Gadhi's wife and Satyavati asked Ruchika to help them realise their wishes. He agreed to do so.

He prepared for them holy water sanctified by incantations. Two pots held the water. One was meant for the king's wife. Ruchika had asked for a son full of the qualities of a kshatriya to be born to the woman who drank out of that pot. The other pot which was meant for his wife contained water which would grant a son with brahmanic qualities. Having placed them in the *ashrama* Ruchika went to the river to perform his daily *sandhya* rituals.

The two women came into the *ashrama* and saw the pots of water meant for them. The queen, Gadhi's wife had a suspicion that Ruchika would naturally be partial to his wife. She thought that the Charu meant for Satyavati would be better than the one meant for herself. She wanted her own son to be superior to her grandson. So she told Satyavati that no harm would come to them if they exchanged the pots since both were meant to grant them children. Satyavati was very sweet by nature and she said: "So

be it." And before Ruchika came back from his bath they had drunk the water. Satyavati later told him about the suggestion of her mother about the exchange of the pots. He was very angry with the women for their foolishness.

"Why did you both do it without asking me?" he said. "Since you both wanted sons I prepared the water for your mother so that her son will have the qualities of a kshatriya and the pot I prepared for you was to give you a son who has the qualities of a brahmin. All that is changed now. Your brother will be a saintly person while your son will have the nature of a kshatriya." Satyavati was greatly upset and fell at his feet asking him to somehow modify the situation. Ruchika said: "I can only do one thing. I can shift it by a generation. Your son will be sweet tempered and your grandson will be the one to inherit the nature of a kshatriya."

Satyavati gave birth to a son Jamadagni. He was saintliness personified. He was gentle and affectionate like his mother. When Satyavati died she was transformed into a river by name KAUSHIKI and it was reputed to purify the world.

Jamadagni the Bhargava, married Renuka and five sons were born to them. They were Vasuman, Vasu, Vasushena, Rumanvan and Rama. It was this Rama who had been born with the qualities of a kshatriya. He became known the world over as a hater of kshatriyas later on. He was said to be the *avatara* of the Lord born to rid the world of sinful kings like the Hehayas. Rama was the personification of the gunas Rajasa and Tamasa. It was well known that the smallest insult was felt to be enormous by Rama and he would not rest until he had punished the offender. He was a kshatriya by nature. But since he was a brahmin by birth he was bent upon punishing the kshatriyas who did not respect the brahmins.

KARTAVIRYA, THE HEHAYA

The king of the country by name Hehaya was Kartaviryarjuna. He had propitiated Dattatreya, an amsha of Narayana. He had a thousand arms and he was invincible. He was powerful and he was famed the world over for his strength and glory. He became arrogant because of his extreme power over others. Once he was bathing in the river Narmada with his women. He held back the river with his thousand arms and it was arrested in its flow. Ravana, who had camped on the other side of the river found his tent wetted by the river and he found the cause of it. He could not brook the action of the Lord of the Hehayas. He went to him and tried to insult him. But Kartavirya made him the laughing stock of the women by capturing him. He kept Ravana as a prisoner in the city of Mahishmati and released him after insulting him.

Once Kartavirya was hunting in the forest and during his wandering he came, by chance, to the *ashrama* of Jamadagni. The *rishi* entertained the king and his entire host with the help of Kamadhenu, the divine cow. Kartavirya was greatly impressed by the powers of Kamadhenu: so much so, he became jealous of Jamadagni. When he had left the *ashrama* with his attendants he instructed his men to steal the cow and bring it to his city. His orders were obeyed and the cow, crying piteously, was carried by force to Mahishmati, the capital of Hehaya. Rama, who had gone out, came back to the *ashrama* of his father and heard about the stealing of Kamadhenu. He was hissing like a serpent which had been beaten by a stick. He took up his terrible axe, his bow and quiver full of arrows and hurried to the city of the miscreant.

Kartavirya was nearing the city of Mahishmati when he saw Rama pursuing him. He had not seen Rama before. Rama was a glowing figure dressed in deer skin like a brahmin. But there the resemblance ended. This brahmin had a bow and arrows and on his shoulder was placed an immense axe. He was glowing like the sun at the time of the deluge. Kartavirya

realised that this man had come to fight with him and he despatched an army consisting of seventeen akshohinis.

Single handed, Rama destroyed the entire army. Seeing his army destroyed like that, Arjuna entered the field of battle. He had five hundred bows in his five hundred hands and the other five hundred hands were busy sending arrows at Rama. But Rama broke all the bows and when Arjuna tried to fight by hurling stones and trees at Rama his arms were cut away by Rama. A moment later, Rama cut off the head of Kartavirya. Arjuna's ten thousand sons were stunned by the death of their father and ran away from the spot in terror.

Rama then took Kamadhenu and her calf with him and went back to the *ashrama*. Jamadagni listened to the narration of the fight and about the death of Kartavirya. He was silent for a moment and then said: "Rama, my son, killing a king is a sin and you have incurred it. Your anger is your weakness. You should learn to be patient. We brahmins were respected by others because of this quality in us. The glow of a brahmin is because of his patience. And it is this quality which makes us dear to the Lord. Kartavirya was an anointed king and he had been killed by you. The sin is greater than the killing of a brahmin. You can be cleansed of this sin only by visiting the sacred rivers. Spend a year in all the *tirthas* and then come back to me". "So be it", said a strangely chastened Rama and he went on a pilgrimage to the holy waters.

One year passed and Rama came back from his pilgrimage. He was welcomed with great affection by his father and mother. Once, Renuka the wife of Jamadagni went to the banks of the river to bring water as was her daily custom. There she saw the *Gandharva* by name Chitrasena and he was playing in the water with his *apsara* consorts. She was looking on and told herself: "What a handsome man he is", and she stayed on the river banks longer than usual. When she went back to the *ashrama* it was past the time for homa. She entered with great hesitation afraid that her husband would be angry with her for her delay. She placed the pot of water at his feet and stood with folded palms. The *rishi* saw with his mind's eye the cause of her delay. He was incensed at her sin though it was committed mentally for a few moments. The thought that a man other than her lord

was handsome was a sin. He called out to his sons and said: "This woman has sinned. Kill her at once". The sons were hesitant. They could not make up their minds to kill their mother at their father's angry command. Jamadagni then called his youngest son Rama and said: "Rama, kill your mother and your brothers. It is my command". Rama did not hesitate even for a moment. He killed them all and his father was pleased with him. He said: "My son, I am so pleased with the promptness with which you obeyed me. Ask any boon of me. I will grant it to you".

Rama fell at his feet and said: "Father, all I want if that they should all come back to life: moreover, when they wake up, they should not remember what has happened." His father's anger against his wife and children had evaporated and he was only too happy to grant the boon to his son. They got up as though after a deep sleep and they did not know what had happened.

Kartavirya's sons, in the meantime, were nursing their anger against Rama for the killing of their father. Once, when Rama had gone to the forest with his brothers, the sons of Kartavirya came to the *ashrama* of Jamadagni. Finding the old couple alone they thought that the time was opportune. The *rishi* was seated in front of the fire and Renuka was attending on him. The sons of the king of Mahishmati rushed towards the *rishi* with their swords raised. She knew what they were planning to do. She implored them not to kill her husband but they would not listen. They cut off the head of the *rishi* who was meditating on the Lord. The moment they had achieved their object they ran away from the spot.

Renuka shouted out, "Rama! Rama!" and hearing her voice at a distance Rama heard the pain and agony in her voice and he rushed to the *ashrama* to see what had happened. He had one look at his dead father. Leaving everything in the hands of his brothers Rama lifted his terrible axe, slung it on his shoulder and ran out of the *ashrama*. In that one moment Rama decided to destroy the entire kshatriya clan. He went with the speed of lightning to the city by name Mahishmati. It was child's play for him to kill the sons of Kartavirya. They could do nothing in the presence of this avenging fury. He cut off their heads and made a small mountain of the

heads heaped together. The city was devastated and the river of blood ran, in the literal sense.

Rama's anger had not abated. He travelled the world over and his one aim was to destroy the lusty kshatriyas whose blood was to be shed. All the kshatriyas had to be killed. He went round the world twenty-one times and, with the blood of the dead kings he filled up five lakes which went by the name Samantapanchaka. He performed the funeral rites to his father on the spot Samantapanchaka. Only Rama used blood instead of water for the funeral oblations to his father.

He then performed *yajnas* to purify himself of the sins of killing so many kings. It is said that this Rama, is an *avatara* of the Lord meant to rid the world of the burden of sinful men like the Hehayas. It is also said that Rama will be one of the seven *rishis* in the next Manvantara.

VASISHTHA HOSTS THE KING

Pururavas had six sons the eldest of whom was Ayu. His descendants were Nahusha, his son Yayati and, after Yayati, Puru. The later kings were more famed as Pauravas.

Vijaya was the name of the youngest son of Pururavas. Vijaya was the father of a son by name Bhima. Bhima's son was Kanchana and his son was Jahnu, who later swallowed the river Ganga when she rushed in tumult following Bhagiratha. Jahnu's son was Puru and his son was Balaka. Balaka's son was Ajaka. Ajaka had a son by name KUSHA and Kusha had four sons the youngest of whom was KUSHANABHA. GADHI, the father of Satyavati was the son of Kushanabha. Gadhi's son was KAUSHIKA, later more famous by name Vishvamitra.

Kaushika was a very famous king. He ruled his subjects well and he was reputed to be a very good king.

Once, he had gone to the forest with a large army. He was visiting several places. He visited cities which were ruled by him and in the course of his journey he saw many beautiful rivers, hills and ashramas nestling at their sides. One such *ashrama* was that of Vasishtha, the son of Brahma. From a distance Kaushika could see the flowering trees and shrubs and he could see the orchards: and there was a small stream flowing slowly past the *ashrama*. Several deer and other tame animals could be seen and the king was surprised that Siddhas, Charanas as well as Gandharvas and Kinnaras could be seen in the spot. The place resounded with the music made by the birds which had nests on the trees and there was nothing but peace reigning there in the *ashrama* and in the forest surrounding the *ashrama*. On going nearer the king saw several *rishis* performing *tapas* and there were many who were bent on meditation and who seemed lost to the outside world. It seemed to him that Brahmaloaka of which he had heard was not in the heavens, but here, on the earth, where Vasishtha was.

It is a rule among kshatriyas that they should not pass the *ashrama* of a *rishi* without paying respect to him. In return, the *rishi* welcomes him and honours him since the king is said to be Narayana himself. Kaushika entered the *ashrama* of the great Vasishtha and prostrated before the *rishi*. Vasishtha was very pleased to see him and welcomed him with great joy and excitement. He sent for a seat noble enough to befit a king and he made Kaushika sit on it. He then offered fruits and water. Kaushika received all this with a humility befitting a great king and they spoke to each other about general things. Vasishtha asked the conventional questions which should be asked. He said: "I hope you are well. I am sure your subjects are happy under your rule which I am sure, is very righteous. I hope your servants are well behaved and obedient. Are all your enemies subdued and is your army large and powerful? Is your treasury full? Are your children well and happy?" Kaushika answered them all in the affirmative and in his turn enquired about the well being of the *rishi* and the inmates of his *ashrama* and if they were able to pursue their *tapas* without disturbance from wild animals and such.

Each had great respect for the other and they spent a long time talking to each other about many things. After a long time had passed Vasishtha said: "I want you to accept my hospitality. It is a rare honour that you have visited my *ashrama* with your army. I want to entertain you. You are a righteous king and a good man. I am pleased of doing so."

Kaushika was greatly touched by the words of the *rishi*. He spoke humbly and said: your words full of affection have done more than a feast can do. You have already given me fruits and milk. The sight of you has made us pure for birth after birth. What need is there for you to entertain us? You are the person who should be honoured as a god and it is not right that you should say I am to be honoured. I will soon be taking leave of you to continue my journey." Kaushika felt that if would just embarrass the *rishi* to feed so many of them and, to save him from this, he rose up very tactfully as if to go. Vasishtha would have none of it. Again and again he insisted that the king with his retinue should accept his hospitality. Finally Kaushika had to accede to his request and said: "So be it, my lord. You are so eager to play host to us and I do not have the chance to escape from

your goodness!" They laughed together and they walked out of the *ashrama*. Vasishtha called out: "Surabhi! Child, Shabale! come here at once."

Kaushika was wondering whom he was calling and even as he was thinking about it a beautiful cow came and stood before Vasishtha and said: "You called me, father?" Kaushika saw that the cow was beautiful. She had a lovely shape and her hide was mottled black and white. Her eyes were soft and gentle. Vasishtha said: "Shabale, listen to my words. This is the king of this country and his name is Kaushika. He has come with his army and I wish to entertain him and his retinue. Prepare for them a feast with all the necessary things. Let there be nothing lacking and I want them all to go back satisfied. Hurry and create everything."

Shabala was Kamadhenu, the divine cow which rose up out of the ocean of milk when the *devas* and *asuras* churned her for amrita. She had been given to Vasishtha.

She created a feast for the royal guest and his attendants. There were drinks of all kinds and food of every kind: to suit every palate. There were heaps and heaps of all edibles they could think of and the guests were served with affection and care so that everyone had his fill of food and was satisfied. Kaushika was extremely happy and he saluted the *rishi* with his ministers and commanders. He then said: "My lord, never in my life have I tasted food like the one I ate today.

I want to ask a favour of you. I was greatly impressed by the power of Shabala, your cow. A cow such as she, should be in the possession of the king of the country. Bounty like hers should benefit everyone. Please give her to me and in return, I will give you a hundred thousand cows. This cow is a jewel and any precious jewel should rightfully belong to the king. I want her. Please give her to me."

Vasishtha was taken aback by the words of Kaushika. But he composed himself and softly said: "I hate to refuse anyone anything. But Shabala is something different. Not even in exchange for a hundred thousand or a thousand thousand cows will I give my Surabhi. You may say that you will

give me heaps and heaps of silver and gold. But it will be of no use. I will not part with Shabala and that is certain."

Kaushika stood as though he were stunned. Vasishtha's eyes were now wet and he said: "O king! Shabala is part of me and she cannot be separated from me. It is like trying to part the fame from the man who is famous. All my religious rites are performed because of the gifts of Shabala. I cannot give her to you."

Kaushika would not give up. He said: "I will give you a thousand elephants fully caparisoned, in gold and silks. I will give you eight hundred horses and chariots. I will give you more than all that if you so desire. I will give you a crore of Kapila cows. Please give this one cow to me. If you so desire, I will give you gold and precious stones without number."

Vasishtha shook his head sadly but firmly and said: "No. She is my wealth. She is my everything and she is my very life. My *tapas* is all comprised in her. What is the use of dilating on the subject? I will never part with her and it is useless on your part to offer me wealth. I have no use for any of the things you mention. I have Shabala. She is mine and she will be mine for ever."

A FRUSTRATED KING

Kaushika was a kshatriya and his anger made its appearance. Never before had he been baulked in his desire and he had set his heart on getting this wonderful cow. He became very angry and he walked out of the *ashrama*. He commanded his servants to take the cow by force and they led her out of the shed. She thought to herself: "Why has the noble Vasishtha abandoned me like this? What have I done that he should punish me? The servants of this king are dragging me away from here and my father has not done anything about it." She was crying and her tears were falling fast. Her sighs were audible and she told herself: "I will go to him and ask him why he has allowed this insult to me by the king's servants." Suddenly she broke away from the hands of her captors and ran with the speed of wind. She reached the presence of Vasishtha: she fell at his feet and said: "Father, why have you forsaken me? Even as you are looking on, these men are carrying me away. Why do you allow this?" Vasishtha said: "Child, you have done no wrong and I am not punishing you. I will never forsake you. This king is powerful and he is dragging you away by force. This army of one akshowhini is his and hence he thinks he is invincible. This is why he has asked that you should be taken by force."

Shabala said: "But, my lord, what is the power of a king in the presence of a brahmin? Brahma-bala is far superior to that of a kshatriya. Your greatness is unequalled in all the several worlds. Kaushika is powerful, no doubt, and a great kshatriya. Give me permission, father, to show him that even a weakling like me, when blessed by you, can be more powerful than he is. I will punish his arrogance and humble his pride." Vasishtha looked at the cow whose breath was coming in gasps: she was so angry. Her eyes had become red and her tail was lifted up in anger. Vasishtha smiled at her: he stroked her back and said: "Alright. I grant you permission. Create, in a moment, an army which can tackle the king's army."

Surabhi just shook her body and there appeared a huge army; hundreds of warriors appeared and they went to fight with the king's army. Finding his army being defeated by the one created by a mere cow, Kaushika with his eyes red with anger, entered the fight and fought with the army of Surabhi. When she saw the valour of the king and the way he was destroying her army Surabhi created more warriors to join the fight. Even as the army got thinned out Surabhi kept on creating more and more. Kaushika was now joined by his sons and they all fought together and they attacked Vasishtha himself. The *rishi*, with a 'Hunkara' burnt them all and only a heap of ashes was what remained of the sons of Kaushika.

The king was heartbroken. His army was gone and his sons were dead. He was completely beaten. He was like the ocean without its power: like a serpent with its fangs pulled out: like a bird whose wings had been clipped. His pride was gone and his face was like that of the setting sun: all its fierceness had vanished.

Without a word, with his head bent, with his eyes trained on the ground Kaushika left the *ashrama* of Vasishtha and went back to his kingdom.

KAUSHIKA'S TAPAS

Kaushika's anger was unappeased and his thoughts were always hovering round the humiliating defeat he had had at the hands of the "Cow's army" in the *ashrama* of Vasishtha. He was disgusted with everything and he made his son stay and mind the kingdom. He then went to the forest. He went to the slopes of the Himavat where the *kinnaras* were, and he performed a great *tapas* for years together and Mahadeva, satisfied with the devotion of Kaushika, appeared before him and asked him: "Why are you performing this *tapas*? What do you desire? I will grant you whatever you desire."

Kaushika prostrated before him and, singing his praises, he said: "My lord, if you are pleased with me, then grant me the boon that I am proficient in archery. Grant me that I am the master of all the divine *astras*. Please grant me these." Shankara said: "I have given them to you. Go in peace." Kaushika went back to his kingdom. His self-respect had been restored and with it, his pride came back. It had grown tenfold now. He told himself: "Vasishtha the great, is as good as dead. How can he withstand the *astras* presided over by the gods? I will destroy him and bring that cow to my kingdom."

Kaushika went to the *ashrama* of Vasishtha and, without warning, he began to despatch the *astras* one after another. The birds and the tame animals which were in the *ashrama*, ran out of it in panic. The disciples of the *rishi*, who were living there, in the *ashrama*, were also scared by the sudden harassment and they fled from there in fear. The *ashrama* and its surroundings were now as bare as soil which is salty and so fit for nothing. There was silence reigning there and Vasishtha's anger was roused. He told himself; "For no reason at all this king is troubling me again and again. I will destroy him like the sun burns up snow."

He came and stood before Kaushika and said: "This peaceful hermitage has been destroyed by you and I am very angry with you. You do not seem to know anything about propriety and you are, I am afraid, a fool. I am going to kill you."

He lifted up his staff which began to glow like the fire which burns bright, without smoke, at the end of the *yuga*: it looked like the staff of Yama, the lord of death.

Kaushika was not frightened by his words since he had the divine *astras* with him. He invoked the *astra* presided over by Agni, the god of fire. Vasishtha hurled his *danda* at Kaushika and said. "So you have come to challenge me with your 'divine' *astras*. Let me see your prowess. I am here standing in front of you and show me what you can do. Let us see if your Kshatriya-bala is great or, if my Brahmapala is. You fool! You are a disgrace to the kshatriya clan to which you belong. You will now see the superiority of the divine powers of a brahmin."

The *astra* sent by Kaushika was rushing towards Vasishtha spitting fire. When it touched the Brahmadanda which the *rishi* had placed in front of him the fire was extinguished like when it is touched by water. Kaushika then sent the *astras* Varuna, Raudra, Aindra, Pashupata, Aishika, and his brows were knit with anger and frustration when he found each one of them swallowed up by the Brahmadanda.

Manavastra was sent in vain and Gandharva, Jrumbhana and Swapana. Even Vajra, the *astra* presided over by Indra: which had killed the great Vritra: even that proved ineffectual. Kaushika then sent the Pashas: Kalapasha, Varunapasha which tied up Bali in the days of old: and Brahmapasha. The *chakras* and these were followed by many other *astras* reputed to be invincible. Not one of them was capable of doing anything to Vasishtha whose Brahmadanda was planted firmly before him.

The *devas* were assembled in the skies by now to witness this glorious scene where Brahma-bala was proving itself to be greater than other powers in the three worlds. In despair the king sent the great Brahmastra and everyone was watching its progress. Even that followed the same path as the others. Vasishtha was now glowing like the god of fire and every

pore in his skin was spitting fire. The Brahmada was resplendent like fire without smoke. The *rishis* from the skies and from all over the heavens proclaimed: "Your power is the greatest power we have ever known. You are capable of bearing any of these fires with your own glory. The great king Kaushika has, indeed, been vanquished by you. Please abandon this anger and let not the world suffer because of your wrath."

Vasishtha accordingly calmed himself and his Brahmada too became cool.

As for Kaushika he threw down his bow and arrow and, with a long sigh exclaimed: "Fie on this *bala* of a Kshatriya! The only *bala* worthwhile is the *bala* of a brahmin. With his mere staff this brahmin has been able to hold at bay all the *astras* which had been given to me by Mahadeva. I have decided that I will perform *tapas* so that I will become like him: equal to him in *bala*: and that will be Kshatriya-bala. I will realise Brahma with my *tapas*."

Kaushika's heart was full of diverse feelings. His heart was sore with the defeat he had met with at the hands of Vasishtha. His sighs were like the hissings of an angry serpent which had been beaten with a stick. His hatred for the *rishi* was also immense. With so many emotions racing in his heart, Kaushika proceeded towards the south and began to perform *tapas* with intensity. His desire was to become a Brahmarshi. Years passed and yet he was absorbed in his *tapas*.

When a thousand years had passed Brahma the creator came to him and said: "Kaushika, your *tapas* has been so intense that we in heaven are very pleased with your concentrated effort. You have achieved what seemed to be impossible. You will, from now, be known as RAJARSHI KAUSHIKA. Having granted the boon to Kaushika Brahma went back to Satyaloka.

Kaushika, however, was not as pleased as he should have been. On the contrary he was very unhappy. His grief was intense and so was his frustration. He wanted the world and he was granted a fistful of sand! He told himself: "After all these years of *tapas* I have been called a Rajarshi. I feel that I have not done enough. I will try again."

And so, Kaushika persisted with his fearful *tapas*.

KING TRISHANKU OF THE SOLAR RACE

In the dynasty of the sun was a famous king by name Trishanku. He was a good king and very righteous as all the kings of the race were. All on a sudden the king was filled with a strange desire. He wanted to reach the heavens with a human body. He approached his *guru* Vasishtha with this desire in his heart and asked him to perform a *yajna* which would help him achieve this end. Vasishtha refused saying: "This is an unnatural and impious wish on your part. I cannot help you to reach the heaven with this body."

Trishanku was sorely disappointed. He renounced his throne and travelled south. There he met the sons of Vasishtha and asked them to help him gratify his desire. They were a hundred in number and they had performed *tapas* for several years.

They were rich in *tapas*. Trishanku, when he approached them saluted them with reverence and standing with folded palms he said: "I have surrendered myself to you. I am the king whose *guru* is your dear father. I request you to perform for me a sacrifice which will make me reach the heavens with this human body. Guru Vasishtha the famed, refused to help me and asked me to look for someone else to do it for me. I have no one else but the sons of my *guru* and so I have come to you for help. Rich as you are in the wealth of *tapas*, I beseech you to help me. It has always been your ancestors who have been the preceptors for the line of Ikshvaku. You are like gods to us and you should grant me my prayer."

The sons of Vasishtha were very angry with the king. They said: "You are very sinful and stupid. When our father has refused to perform a sacrifice saying that it is against all *dharma*, how dare you approach us with the same request?"

"Vasishtha has been your kulaguru. He has advised the kings of your line ever since Ikshvaku ruled the earth and he has disapproved of your desire. He has told you that it is not possible to do such a thing. How then do you expect us to do something which our father has not sanctioned? You are indeed childish in your desire. Go back to your city and resume your kingly duties. We are not prepared to insult our father by taking up your cause." The king was very unhappy at their reply. He said: "If my *guru* refuses to help me and his sons too, what am I going to do? I have only one course open. I will go in search of another *guru* who will grant me what I desire." Vasishtha's sons were furious with him. They could not brook the insult to their father and to themselves. They therefore cursed him and said: "You are a *gurudrohi*. From this moment you will become a *chandala*." Having cursed him they returned to the *ashrama*.

The unhappy king returned to his city with his heart heavy with pain and disappointment. When the night passed the king found that he had become a *chandala*. His clothes were black and his skin which was once golden, had turned black. His neck was adorned with wild flowers and the ornaments of gold which he had been wearing had turned into crude ones made of iron. When he entered the city the people jeered at him and they could not recognise him. Even his ministers were unable to believe him when he told them who he was.

He was chased out of the city by the citizens who made fun of his appearance. Trishanku thought for a while and decided that there was one person who would surely help him. He had heard so much about the intense *tapas* which Kaushika, the king had been performing: and about his becoming a *rajarshi* because of his *tapas*. Trishanku hurried towards the spot where Kaushika was absorbed in *tapas*.

TRISHANKU SVARGA

Kaushika was intent on his meditation and Trishanku stood by silently without disturbing him. And so he stood for a long time. Kaushika felt someone standing near him and opened his eyes. He saw the dark and ugly-looking *chandala* standing at some distance. His eyes and his face were the very picture of woe and Kaushika whose heart was always ready with sympathy felt that this man was suffering intensely. He called him near and asked him: "How can I help you? I can see that you are Trishanku, the king of Ayodhya. You are a great warrior and a good king. Tell me what can I do for you? I can guess that this *chandala's* form which you are suffering is the result of some curse. Tell me what I can do to alleviate your pain."

Hearing the words of affection which were spoken by Kaushika the king was overcome with gratitude and his eyes filled with tears. He folded his palms and said: "My *guru*, Vasishtha and his sons have refused to help me realise my desire. I asked them to make me reach the heavens with this human body and they would not grant me my desire. I have performed a hundred *yajnas* but they are not enough, evidently, to allow me the privilege. I have never in my life spoken a lie and I will never do so hereafter. I swear that I have ruled my subjects with great affection. Never once have I transgressed the rules which a *kshatriya* should follow. I have always tried to please elders and I have always set my mind on *dharma*. Seeing that all this has been but futile when it cannot grant me a small desire, I realise that man's attempts are always useless and fate is the only powerful factor. Everything is controlled by fate and fate is the ultimate refuge of all. I have now come to you asking you if you will help me realise my desire: to reach the heavens with this mortal body. I have no one else to whom I can go with this request. It is up to you to help me and to prove to the world that even fate can be subdued by the attempts of man, that the will of man is more powerful."

Kaushika was filled with affection for this child of fate. He spoke in a soft and gentle voice and he said: "O king! you are welcome to be with me in my home, here. The world knows what a righteous monarch you are. I have decided to help you. Do not be afraid. I will summon all the *rishis* and ask them to help me to perform a *yajna*. With this form, with this *chandala's* form which the *guru's* curse has given you, with this form, I say, I will make you ascend the heavens. Kaushika had been approached by you. You have considered him to be your refuge and you cannot go away empty-handed. I will do it for you."

Kaushika then instigated his sons to collect all that was necessary for the performance of a *yajna*. He summoned all his disciples and said: "Go and ask all the *rishis* to come here. Tell them it is my request. Let them bring their entire *ashramas* with them." The disciples went in all quarters to bring the many *rishis*. They came, all of them, to the presence of Kaushika: all except Vasishtha and his sons. The words spoken by Vasishtha's sons were conveyed to Kaushika. They had said: "Very comical indeed will this *yajna* be, with a *chandala* as the object of the *yajna* and a *kshatriya* to perform it. It will be a wonderful sight. One is doubtful as to what the participants will do: how they will react. We wonder how the divine beings will react when they are summoned to receive their share of the *havis* at the hands of a non-brahmin. They will have to eat food touched by a *chandala* and served by a *kshatriya*!" Kaushika was extremely incensed by their words and he cursed them to become *Nishadhas*.

Kaushika then addressed the *rishis* who had come there at his request and said: "This is king Trishanku a descendant of the noble Ikshvaku: a righteous king famed in all the three worlds. He has come to me with a request. He wants to reach the heavens with this body. I have promised to help him and I appeal to all of you to assist me in this attempt."

Hearing the words of Kaushika the *rishis* said to themselves: "This Kaushika is a man with a very short temper. His anger is dangerous. If we do not assist him he is sure to get angry and we can never guess what he will do if his anger is turned against us. We have seen the fate of the sons of Vasishtha. It is better to help him perform the *yajna*."

Kaushika was the Yajaka and the *rishis* were all willing to do the needful. The *yajna* proceeded in the proper manner. At the final stage when the *havis* was to be offered Kaushika summoned the *devas* one by one to receive their share. But not one of them came to accept the *havis*. Their disapproval of the *yajna* was obvious. Kaushika was furious at this insult. But he composed himself and, with his eyes blazing with anger and his frame trembling he raised the Sruva—the spoon with which ghee is poured into the sacrificial fire—aloft and said: "Look on the power of my *tapas*. I will raise this king to the heavens with the human body." Kaushika then turned to the king and said: "I command you, O king, to rise into the air and to reach the heavens with this body of yours. If at all I have performed any *tapas* I give the result of all that with this end in view: to raise you to the heavens. Rise, Trishanku and reach the heavens."

Everyone was watching with bated breath. Suddenly Trishanku began to rise above the ground. He folded his palms and saluting the *rishi* he rose in the air. And even as they were all looking on, he vanished into the clouds.

Indra, however, was not pleased with this intruder. He said: "Trishanku, go back to the earth. You are not fit to dwell in the heavens cursed as you are, by your *guru*. We are not prepared to make you one of us". Trishanku was pushed rudely and he found himself falling downwards. He called out to Kaushika and said "My lord, they have thrown me out and I am falling down. Save me!"

Kaushika was very angry and very sad too. He could not bear the thought that the *devas* could be so jealous and so selfish. He said: "Stop wherever you are."

The fall of Trishanku was arrested halfway. Then in the presence of all the *rishis* Kaushika, like another Brahma, began to create a new heaven for Trishanku. In the southern direction he created the seven *rishis* and other stars. He created the several clusters of stars. He then said: "I am going to create another Indra who will eclipse the present Indra." Kaushika began his task and his intention was to make an entirely new host of *devas* also.

There was great commotion in the heavens and the *rishis*, and the *devas* from the heavens approached Kaushika with great humility and said:

"Kaushika, please listen to our words. It has been said that one who has been cursed by his *guru* cannot reach the heavens and that was why we did what we did. It was in no way meant to cast aspersions on your greatness." Hearing their words Kaushika said: You are jealous of him and so you treated him thus. I will not let him come back to the earth. He is a righteous man and he does not deserve the curse of his *guru* nor the punishment you are trying to mete out to him." The *devas* then said: "We take back what we said. We agree to anything you say."

Kaushika said: "I will not go back on my promise to Trishanku that I will let him go to the heavens with his earthly body. The heavens I have created for him will be permanent. The stars and the seven *rishis* and the entire galaxy which have been created by me will be permanent. Indras may come and Indras may go but the heaven I have built for Trishanku will last for ever. Trishanku *svarga* will be for ever."

The *devas* led by Indra agreed with humility and Indra said: "So be it. This world of stars and gods which you have created out of your *tapas* will remain for ever proclaiming to the world your greatness. Trishanku will rule the heaven built for him, like another Indra. All the stars will move in their orbits for him and his fame and name will last for ever". Kaushika was satisfied by their promise and Trishanku was very happy. And the *rishis* went back to their *ashramas*, and the *devas* to their abode.

Only Kaushika was left. He was all alone and his treasury of *tapas* was empty. He had given all he had for the sake of a king whose suffering was too much. Kaushika, however, was happy, that he had helped someone in trouble.

SHUNAHSHEPA

Kaushika, after the Trishanku episode, told himself: "This *tapas* which I performed in the south has had interruptions and I have used it all up. I will go towards the west and begin all over again. I will choose a spot which is very much concealed from the sight of people and on the shores of some lake I will have my *ashrama* and perform my *tapas* there". In the holy spot named Pushkarakshetra, on the banks of a lake Kaushika began his *tapas* again.

As has already been mentioned elsewhere, Trishanku's son was Harishchandra. He was granted a son by Varuna on condition that the king gave him back to the lord of the oceans as soon as he was born. Harishchandra became too fond of his son to part with him. He gave excuse after excuse and kept postponing the Naramedha which had been promised. Rohita, the child, had grown up to be a youth and he came to know about his father's rash promise. He went away to the forest and hoped to escape the fate meant for him. For years he roamed the forest. Varuna, with the intention of punishing the king, made him suffer the dread disease by name Mahodara—dropsy. When he heard that his father was very ill Rohita felt that he had to go back to the kingdom and try to save his father's life. Indra stopped him and sent him on a *tirthayatra*. Again and again it happened and five years passed. Rohita finally decided to go back to his kingdom and to his father.

On his way home Rohita met a brahmin by name Ajigarta. He was travelling with his three sons and his wife. The prince thought that his father's disease would be cured and he could also escape death if only he could get someone else to die instead of himself. The sight of the brahmin gave the idea to him. If he could sacrifice some other youngster to Varuna the calamity to his royal house could, perhaps, be averted. He saluted the brahmin who stood silent to find out what the prince wanted. Rohita said:

"My lord, I will give you one hundred thousand cows. Are you willing to trade one of your sons for it?" The brahmin was taken aback and wanted to know more about it. The prince told him about his predicament. He said: "I am the only son and our line will be dead if I should die. My father also is very sick. By giving your son you will be saving two lives and you will be serving the country also. Will you give one of your sons to me?"

Ajigarta said: "I will not part from my eldest son. He is too dear to me and I will not be able to live without him". The wife of the brahmin said: "My husband the Bhargava, says that our eldest son is dear to him and therefore he cannot be given to you. I want you to know that the youngest child is very dear to me and I cannot bear to give him up. It is always the way of the world that the eldest is the favourite of the father and the youngest, that of the mother".

The second son's name was Shunahshepa. He spoke in a soft and slightly sad voice. He said: "Listen to me, O Prince. My father favours my elder brother and my mother, my younger brother. It is as good as understood that I have been sold to you by my parents. Take me with you". The prince gave the promised number of cows to the brahmin and he was very happy to take the brahmin boy with him.

It was noon when Rohita and Shunahshepa reached the holy spot by name Pushkara. There the young brahmin boy saw Kaushika absorbed in *tapas*. The child was hungry, thirsty and very depressed because he knew that he was unwanted by his parents: or else would they have sold him for a few cows knowing that he was going to his death? He knew that Kaushika was distantly related to the Bhargava clan and he felt that he had a claim on him. Shunahshepa impulsively rushed to the presence of Kaushika and fell on his lap sobbing. Rudely awakened from his trance, Kaushika looked at the intruder. He saw a young boy with a woe begone face and he was sobbing his heart out. The child said: "I have no father and no mother. As for kinsmen I have none. You are my only refuge. You must save my life. I have been told that you are very powerful: very noble and very compassionate: that you can never bear to see anyone unhappy. I saw you and I have come to you for help". Kaushika wanted to know what was worrying him and the boy told him the entire story. Kaushika's heart was

full of love for this foundling. Shunahshepa said: "My lord, since my father has sold me for the purpose of the king's *yajna* I do not want the *yajna* to be spoilt, nor do I want to lose my life. Only you can work things in such a way that both these will be accomplished. I want to live long, perform *tapas* and then reach the heavens. You are the succour of unfortunate beings like me and you are a father to me who is now an orphan".

Kaushika pacified the weeping child with gentle words and promises and he summoned his sons and said: "Parents create their children so that they will guide them to heaven: to assure them of a place in the next world. I want to see if you will justify your births. Here is this child who has come to me asking me to save him. You are all well-read and you have acquired so much *tapas*. Do what is expected of you by me. One of you should become the *yajna pashu* for the *naramedha* to be performed by Harishchandra. Thus I will be saving this child and will also let the *yajna* be concluded successfully. Will you do it?"

The sons led by *Madhuchhandas* considered it to be a big joke and laughing at their father said: "Father, how can you find it in your heart to abandon your own sons for the sake of some foundling who weeps his heart out? It is improbable that we should accept your suggestion: as improbable as it is to eat the flesh of a dog". Kaushika's anger rose to the surface and he said: "Your behaviour and your words are unworthy of your birth. You are not fit to be my sons. Those who disobey a father are not fit to be honoured. Like the sons of Vasishtha you will also be Nishadhas and eat the flesh of dogs for a thousand years".

After cursing his sons Kaushika turned to Shunahshepa and assured him that he would somehow save his life. He said: "You must go with the prince Rohita and allow yourself to be tied to the sacrificial post, the *yajnastambha*. They will place garlands of red flowers round your neck and smear red sandal paste on your body. They will tie you up with ropes which have been purified by incantations. I will teach you these two verses and in your mind repeat them till you have memorised them. Then, during the *yajna* sing these hymns. The *yajna* will be as good as performed successfully".

Shunahshepa learnt the hymn with great care. He then went to the presence of Rohita who had been resting all the while. The boy said: "Let us hurry and go to your city. Take me to the spot where the *yajna* is to be performed. I am well prepared for it."

Rohita was happy to see him so willing. And they hurried to the presence of the sick king. Harishchandra was immensely pleased at the turn of events. He went to the *yajnishala* and began the performance of it although he was sorely afflicted by the disease Mahodara. Kaushika came there and the king made him the hota. Jamadagni was the Adhvaryu: Vasishtha was Brahma. Ayasya was the Udghata.

Harishchandra tied the young boy to the *yajnyastupa* and when they were getting ready to sacrifice him the young child began to sing in his childish treble the hymns taught him by Kaushika. The *yajnishala* was silent: first with surprise and then with admiration for the noble hymns which were in praise of the *devas*: Indra, Varuna and others. Indra was pleased and so was Varuna. They appeared in person and granted long life to Shunahshepa. The king was forgiven for his lapse and he was cured of his disease, Mahodara. The experiences he had gone through because of his excessive attachment to his son had taught him a lesson and Harishchandra wanted to learn *Brahma Vidya* from Kaushika. Kaushika was only too happy to do so. Harishchandra was a changed man after this.

Kaushika adopted Shunahshepa as his own son and told his sons Madhuchhandas by name that they should treat him as their elder brother. "He belongs to the Bhrigu clan", said the father. "He is now one of you". The elder sons were not happy at the thought of the adoption and the father, angry at their behaviour, cursed them to be low born. Fifty of them were cursed. The other fifty sons led by Madhuchhandas fell at his feet and said: "We are willing to obey you in everything. We are only too happy to accept Shunahshepa as our elder brother."

The father, naturally, was very pleased with them and said: "I am pleased with you. You are good sons. Led by this new son of mine you will be known as the Kaushikas and our House will be famed the world over as the KAUSHIKA GOTRA."

Kaushika continued his *tapas* for another thousand years. At the end of it Brahma appeared before him and said: "We are pleased and amazed by your *tapas*. We are pleased to confer on you the title "Rishi."

Kaushika was not satisfied with this. It was not enough for him. A *rishi*, he knew, was far inferior to the title Brahmarshi. He was determined to achieve the status of "Brahmarshi" and he pursued his *tapas* more intensely.

KAUSHIKA'S LAPSE

The *devas* were worried about the *tapas* of Kaushika. Indra was afraid that his status as Indra might be in danger. He decided to disturb the *tapas* and he summoned to his presence Menaka, the *apsara* of his court. He said: "You are the best among my *apsaras*. I want your help. I will tell you what I want you to do. Kaushika is performing *tapas* and he is glowing like the noonday sun: so fierce is the *tapas* he has accumulated. If he does succeed there is every danger of my being pushed out of my throne. I want you to go to his presence. He has all his senses under control and with single mindedness he is absorbed in meditation. With your beauty and with your winning ways you should tempt him and make him succumb to the weakness which is in the heart of every man. Make him abandon his *tapas* and I will be pleased with you."

Menaka was afraid to go. She said: "Lord, I have been told that he is very powerful and that he is very quick tempered. Think of the combination of these two qualities, my lord! *Tapas* and anger! How can I survive these? You are yourself afraid of him and yet you want me to face him. He has cursed sons of Vasishtha. He was a kshatriya and by his own efforts he has become a brahmin. He has been like Brahma in creating a new heaven for the sake of king Trishanku. Such a powerful *tapasvin* will surely have gone beyond the sway of the senses: How can I dare to go near him? What if he curses me? If you can assure me that he will not curse me I will do what you ask me to. Send Manmatha and Vasanta with me. Make the wind Mandanila also to come with us. Under such pleasing conditions, which are always conducive to the act of love, I will try to tempt him."

Menaka went down to the earth and, in the neighbourhood of the spot where Kaushika was, she spent her time waiting for the proper moment when she could make her appearance. Kaushika had got up from his meditation and was moving about, one day. Menaka thought that the

chance she had been waiting for, had come her way now: and she was not wrong.

She walked around in the lovely spot where he was. Looking at her beautiful form and her winning ways Kaushika was bewitched and he succumbed to the temptation.

Five years passed and another five years. He woke up suddenly from this dream one day. He realised that ten precious years had been wasted. His *tapas* had been disturbed and he had lost much of what he had accumulated. He was full of sorrow and anger with himself. He then realised that it was the work of the *devas* who were set on disturbing any *tapas* performed by anyone. When she saw him like this, Menaka, who held a child in her arms, was overcome with fear lest he should vent his anger on her. She stood with folded palms and her tears were trembling on her lashes. But Kaushika was not angry with her. He told her that he was going to continue where he had left off.

He went to the banks of the river Kaushiki: Kaushiki, who had been his sister Satyavati. His *tapas* was terrible. After a long time the *devas* and Brahma were pleased with him. Brahma led the host and they appeared before Kaushika and said: "Kaushika, you are now a MAHARSHI. You have performed a severe penance. I tell you that you are the greatest of the *rishis*". Kaushika was neither pleased nor displeased with the words of Brahma. He said: "With my *tapas*, I have earned the title Maharshi. But tell me, my lord, have I become one who has conquered his senses?" Brahma said: "I am afraid not. You are not a complete Jitendriya". Kaushika's face fell and Brahma said: "You must try to achieve that also."

The most difficult part of his *tapas* was performed by Kaushika during the next few years. He held his arms aloft and he starved. Only the air was his food. In the midst of five fires he stood during summer and during the cold season he stood in the midst of water. His *tapas* had become intense and, as was his custom Indra summoned one of the *apsaras* to tempt him. It was Rambha this time who was summoned by Indra. He said: "Go and try to tempt Kaushika as Menaka did before". Rambha was very much afraid. And she said: "I dare not go, my lord. His anger will be unbearable". But

Indra assured her that nothing would happen to her and she went down to the earth as her predecessor had done. Indra told her that he would himself be with her. The nightingale would sing from the branches of a beautiful tree near where Kaushika was, and on that tree would be seated Manmatha and Indra. Rambha went to the earth and there she reached the presence of Kaushika.

While he was in the midst of his meditation Kaushika was disturbed by the music of the nightingale. He smelt the perfume of the flowers which would normally grow in the season named Vasanta: spring. He opened his eyes and he saw this beautiful woman standing before him. Kaushika knew that it was the work of Indra or else how could Vasanta come long before it was due? And again, how could a beautiful and delicately made woman find her way into the heart of the terrible forest unless she had been brought there? His anger came up at once and he cursed Rambha: "You have come here at the behest of Indra to tempt me by your wiles and your wanton ways. You want to rob me of my *tapas*. You will be turned to stone and stay on the earth for a thousand years". The moment he cursed her Kaushika repented his action and said: "Brahma was right. I am not a Jitendriya. I am not able to subdue my anger. So long as the senses are unconquered the *Atman* will not attain tranquillity. From now on, I will never be angry and I will not speak a word. I will drain myself of all feelings and perform *tapas* once again. Then, and only then will I attain the fruits of my *tapas*".

VISHVAMITRA, THE BRAHMARSHI

Kaushika abandoned the North and walked towards the east. And there, he again performed *tapas*. For a thousand years he was silent and the world as well as the celestial world were all being burnt up by the fire of his penance. Kaushika had become as thin as a stick and he had surmounted several obstacles placed in the way of his achievement. He banished anger completely from his mind.

One day he broke his fast and cooked some rice for himself. Just as he was about to eat it Indra, taking the form of a brahmin came to him and begged him for food. Kaushika spoke not a word and gave the entire food to the brahmin and resumed his *tapas*. It had now become more intense. Even the air which he was breathing he had controlled so well that he would stay without breathing for a long time. Smoke began to emanate from his head and the world was suffering because of his *tapas*. Indra and the *devas* went to Brahma and told him: "Kaushika has now begun to glow with the greatness of his *tapas*. If you do not grant him what he had been wanting all these years his *tapas* will destroy the three worlds. His glory is so great that the sun and fire have lost their lustre. The seas are lashing their waves in torment and the mountains are spitting fire. The earth is trembling and there is storm in the skies. Kaushika is like the fire at the end of time and it is up to you to save the Universe from this fire."

Brahma hurried to the presence of Kaushika and said: "Welcome to you, BRAHMARSHI! We have been pleased with the *tapas* you have performed. With your own efforts you have achieved the status of Brahmarshi. May you prosper."

A thin flash of pleasure lit up the face of Kaushika. He prostrated before Brahma and said: "If what you have granted me is really true: if I am brahmarsahi and if I am long-lived by your grace let the Vedas accept me as a Brahmarshi. I have but one desire. Vasishtha, your son should recognise

me as such." They brought Vasishtha and he smiled with affection at Kaushika and said: "You are a great man: a brahmarshi. There is no doubt about it." Kaushika honoured Vasishtha and he was free to go where he pleased. The foremost thought in his mind was to do good to others and he was given the name VISHVAMITRA : the friend of the Universe.

NAHUSHA

Pururavas had a son by name Ayu. His sons were four in number of whom Nahusha was the foremost. He was a very good king and he ruled his subjects well. He had conquered the kings in all the quarters and had amassed immense wealth. He had performed several *yajnas* and as a result he was fit enough to be Indra. Once, when Indra was suffering from the calumny of Brahmahatya which was pursuing him, he had to go into hiding. During that period the *devas* approached Nahusha and asked him to officiate as Indra till such time as was possible for Indra to be rid of his Brahmahatya. "So be it", said Nahusha and went to the heavens after appointing Yayati, his son, as king.

In course of time, Nahusha became arrogant. The wealth he had amassed, the power he had over the entire world, the fact that he had performed several *yajnas* and, last of all, the decision of the *devas* that he should be made Indra, made Nahusha proud and arrogant. Nahusha was a great king but he was now afflicted by pride born of the sense of power.

Indra had a special privilege. His palanquin was borne by the seven *rishis* and whenever Nahusha went out on errands of state he would be carried by the *rishis*. This made him very happy. He suffered under the delusion that the *rishis* were his slaves. In his arrogance he could not see that the honour the *rishis* paid was to his status as Indra and not to Nahusha the king from the earth.

Another feeling came on this unfortunate king. He thought that his being Indra allowed him the privilege of taking Shachi as wife. He decided that he would visit her quarters and so he called for his palanquin. The *rishis* brought it and he got into it. He was impatient to reach her palace and he, naturally, felt that they were not going fast enough. How can the speed of even the wind equal that of the mind of a man bent on love? Nahusha became impatient and he addressed the *rishis*: "Go faster, faster." SARPA,

SARPA was the word he used. Agastya who knew what was in his mind could not brook his arrogance any longer and he lowered the palanquin to the ground. He came near the king and said: "You stupid fool! You do not know what you are saying or what you are doing. Your arrogance has become intolerable. There is only one way to cure it. You said: "*sarpa, sarpa*." So be it. You will become a *sarpa* and not a *sarpa* which can move about and get its food. You will be a python who has to wait for food to come to him and you will be in the forest Dvaitavana for thousands of years."

As soon as he was cursed, the king was cleansed of his pride and conceit and with great humility he said: "It is but right that you should curse me who has insulted you all. I deserve worse punishment. In your goodness of heart you have minimised it. Please have mercy on me and tell me how long I am to be on the earth and how my curse will be lifted. Great men give us these poisons to cure us of dread feelings which are unbecoming to us. But they will also have antidotes which will remove the poison once its work is done."

Agastya was really sorry for Nahusha. The anger of a great man is short-lived. He said: "The curse cannot be recalled. But you will be rid of the form of a python and come back to the heavens during Dwaparayuga: the third quarter of time. In your line will be born a great man by name Yudhishtira and he will be an *amsha* of *Dharma*. He will release you from your curse. Your memory will be clear. You will capture his brother and when Yudhishtira comes to you and asks you to release his brother you will ask him questions about dharma which Yudhishtira will answer. After that you will shed the skin of a python and come back to the heavens."

At the termination of their twelve years' exile the five Pandavas passed through Dvaitavana and there, the incident which was predicted by Agastya took place and Nahusha was released from his curse.

THE QUARREL

The *asuras* had Vrishaparva as their ruler and his *guru* was Shukra. Shukra had a daughter named Devayani and her father was extremely fond of her. Vrishaparva had a daughter by name Sharmishtha. The two girls were very good friends.

One day these two with their friends had been to the river to bathe. They had left their clothes on the banks and while they were sporting in the water they saw Lord Mahadeva with his attendants in the sky and he was riding on his Vrishabha. Parvati was with him. The girls became embarrassed and rushed to the banks of the river and dressed themselves. The passing breeze, in the meantime had mixed up the clothes and when the girls dressed themselves in a hurry it was discovered that Sharmishtha had worn the clothes of Devayani. The garments of the *asura* princess were the ones left which Devayani had to wear.

Devayani who was, till then, very fond of Sharmishtha was suddenly angry with her. It was not a deliberate thing the *asura* girl had done but Devayani chose to think so and said: "You are an *asura* woman far inferior to me. I am the daughter of a brahmin and I feel that my clothes have been polluted because of you. You have no sense of decorum." Sharmishtha the daughter of the king and an *asuri* by nature, could not bear the insulting words of Devayani. She was also quick tempered and she said: "Do not think so highly of yourself. You are, after all, the daughter of a beggar. Your father waits on my father whether he is sitting or lying down. He spends all his time flattering my father. He hangs on his words and stands humbly before his master waiting for favours and eager to please his slightest whim. You are his daughter: daughter of Shukra who lives on the charity of my father. Who is going to pay attention to you or to your anger or hatred? Seeing you lose your temper with me, the daughter of the king, makes me think of a man without a weapon fighting with an armed man. I do not care for you:

a beggar who has the courage to talk to me like this." Sharmishtha was overcome with anger and she beat up Devayani. She grabbed her clothes and pushed the brahmin girl into disused well and went off to her city. "The impertinent beggar is dead", she told herself and spoke to no one at home about what had taken place.

A KING TO THE RESCUE

In the line of Pururavas was born the famed Yayati. He was the son of Nahusha who was chosen as Indra by the *devas* when Indra went into hiding. Pururavas had a son named Ayu and his son was Nahusha.

Like all the kings of old Yayati was very fond of hunting and he came to the forest in search of game. His horse had brought him far away into the forest and he was thirsty. He saw a well at a distance and the king spurred his horse and soon he came to the well. When he leaned down to get water out of the well he found that it was a disused well and that there was no water in it. He was about to walk away in disgust when he thought he heard a moan from somewhere near. He listened and realised that it came from inside the well. He leaned down and he heard a woman sobbing. He looked again and saw a very beautiful woman inside the well. She was so beautiful that she looked like a glowing flame. He was intrigued by the situation and again he knew that she was sorely in need of help. He therefore spoke in soft and compassionate terms to her. He said: "Who are you? From here I can only see your beautiful arms raised aloft for help and I can see your lovely hands: your finger nails as red as copper. I can guess that you are a young woman. What ails you and why are your sighs angry as well as sad? How did it happen that you have fallen into this well covered with grass and which is dry? Whose daughter are you? Tell me everything since I am puzzled by this situation."

Devayani said: "You must have heard how, in the war between the *asuras* and the *devas*, the asuras have been winning because the dead *asuras* were brought back to life by their *guru* Shukra. I am the daughter of Shukra. But you are a stranger to me. You seem to be young, powerful and handsome. Who are you and why have you come here?"

The king said: "I am the son of the monarch Nahusha and my name is Yayati. I belong to the line of the Moon. I came here since I was thirsty

after hunting. When I looked into the well in search of water I saw you."

Devayani told him that she had no clothes on. The king felt very sorry for her and he threw his upper cloth down to her. She covered herself with it and then said: "Look, here is my right hand with the copper coloured nails, as you described. You seem to be a good man and I think it is Fate which has brought you here to rescue me. Please raise me up from here and save me." The king took her right hand and raised her aloft: he lifted her out of the well and placed her on the ground. He then said: "Now you are saved. You need have no more fear of dying unnoticed. You can reach home soon." Devayani would not move. She looked at him and said: "I have nowhere else to go. I will come with you."

The king was surprised at her words. He said: "Just a while back you said that you were the daughter of Shukra and now you say you have nowhere to go. I do not understand."

"You do not understand?," asked Devayani with a smile. "I will explain to you. I am an unmarried young woman and you took me by the right hand. You have become my husband and it is but right that you should take me with you."

Yayati said: "That, I am afraid, is impossible. I am a king: a kshatriya, and you are the daughter of a brahmin. It is against all *dharma* that a kshatriya should marry into the superior caste."

Devayani refused to listen to his words. She said: "I have chosen you as my husband. You may refuse me now. But when my father sends for you, then you will come and see me again." Yayati took leave of her and went to the city.

DEVAYANI'S REVENGE

Devayani sat at the foot of a tree and sat weeping. Shukra, in the meantime, was getting worried about his daughter since she had not come home. It was evening and he could wait no more. He asked the maid to go and look for Devayani. She went from there to the houses of all her friends and could not find her anywhere. Finally she went to the river where they had all gone to bathe. There, near a tree, she found the young maiden weeping. She went to her and asked: "What has happened? Why are you weeping? Your father is worried about you." Devayani told her about what had happened between her and Sharmishtha and said: "Churnike, go to my father and tell him all this. Tell him also that I refuse to enter the city belonging to Vrishaparva, the father of that devil." The maid hurried to the presence of Shukra and related the entire story to him. In her own way she exaggerated the incident and said: "My lord, Devayani is there in the forest. She is dead. The daughter of the king, Sharmishtha killed her."

Shukra rushed out of the house as though he were demented. He ran to the forest lamenting the death of Devayani. He found her alive, though, and she was leaning against a tree. Seeing her father, Devayani's sobs burst forth anew. He ran to her and embraced her with affection and said: "For some sin which I must have committed sometime I am made to suffer like this." Devayani spoke impatiently and said: "Sin or no sin: that is beside the point now. It is not of importance. Listen to my words father. I am still smarting under the insulting words spoken by the daughter of Vrishaparva."

"Father, she said that you are just a sycophant of the king: that you sing his praises and do nothing else. She called me the daughter of a flatterer, of a beggar, of one who receives gifts constantly: who is incapable of returning the favours done to him. I will never forget her arrogant look and her angry eyes when she spoke those sharp words to me. She went on hurting me with these words and dragging me to the well she pushed me into it

and went away. But tell me, father, am I the daughter of a flatterer? a beggar?"

Shukra shed tears of love for his daughter and said: "My child, you are not the daughter of a beggar. Your father is a man who is praised in all the three worlds: he does not praise anyone. All the kings of all the worlds, Vrishaparva, Indra and Yayati know that my wealth is my knowledge and that I am richer than anyone else in the universe."

Devayani said: "In which case, I find it all the more difficult to forgive that woman for the words she spoke. I do not want to stay in a place where we are not honoured. I will not enter the city." Her father tried in vain to convince her that anger was wrong and that she should be generous. She would not listen.

To Shukra, his daughter was everything. He went to the *asura* king Vrishaparva the next morning and told him about the unpleasant happenings of the previous day. He then said: "I have no desires but one and that is the happiness of my daughter. I will go where she wants to go. I cannot live without her." Vrishaparva rushed to the forest with Shukra and he tried to pacify Devayani. He fell at her feet and said: "My wealth, my prowess, my fame all are because of the grace of your father. If he leaves me and goes away I have to kill myself. No other course is open to me. Please be gracious and let him remain with me. Command me and I will do anything you ask me to do." Devayani pondered for a moment and said: "Your daughter, accompanied by a thousand maids, should become my slave and she should come with me as my slave wherever I go. I will be given in marriage to someone and your daughter should accompany me there as my slave."

Vrishaparva sent one of the maids and asked her to bring his daughter. Sharmishtha was told all about the conditions imposed on the royal house because of the brahmin girl. The princess never spoke a word in protest. Quietly she collected her maids and accompanied by them she went back to the presence of her father. She walked quietly towards Devayani and spoke softly: "I am your slave and so are these maids I have brought with me. I will accompany you wherever you go."

Devayani looked at her and asked in a disdainful voice: "How can the daughter of one who is praised become the slave of the daughter of the flatterer? Is it possible?"

Sharmishtha said in the same soft voice: "When one's people are in trouble: when they are distressed, it is the duty of one to do all one can to relieve them of their worries and their troubles. This is the rule which has been spoken of in ancient times. This rule applies to every human being. But it is more necessary in the case of a king and his children. I do not want my father and his people to suffer because of me. I will, therefore, be your slave: obey you in all things and follow you wherever you go."

Devayani then spoke to her father and said: "Father, I am pacified and we will return to the city."

With their minds busy with their individual thoughts they all entered the city. Devayani was triumphant. Shukra was glad because she was. Vrishaparva was unhappy but there was also relief in his mind since a *guru* is the most important person in the court of a king. As for Sharmishtha, no one could fathom the thoughts which were in her mind. Her eyes were downcast but there was an expression of great calm on her face. She was prepared to do anything for her father since she loved him very much.

YAYATI WEDS DEVAYANI

Several days passed thus. One day Devayani, surrounded by the many maids led by Sharmishtha, went to the forest. It seemed as though the enmity between the girls had been forgotten. They were all playing, singing, dancing and they were bent on enjoying themselves in the forest.

To that forest once again came Yayati, the king from Hastina. From a distance he saw a group of girls and he came nearer. Among them he noticed that two maidens were beautiful. When he observed them closely he saw that he had already seen one of them before. It was the brahmin girl whom he had rescued from the well and—here he smiled to himself—who claimed that he should take her since he had grasped her right hand in his! She was indeed beautiful: but this other girl was equally lovely if not more!

The king saw Devayani seated on a jewelled seat but the second girl who was so beautiful, did not have many jewels on her. And she was sitting at the feet of Devayani. She was massaging the feet of Devayani. Yayati was extremely curious to know who she was and on the pretext of greeting his old acquaintance Devayani, he went near them and spoke to Devayani. He behaved as though he were a stranger. He said: "In the midst of a thousand girls I see two of you, as though you are presiding over the others. My curiosity is kindled. May I know who you are?" Devayani said: "I will tell you. Please listen to me. The *guru* of the *asuras* is Shukra and he has a daughter. I happen to be that daughter. The maiden is my friend and my slave. She is present wherever I am and she is the daughter of Vrishaparva, the king of the *asuras*."

Yayati spoke impulsively and said: "What a beautiful woman she is! No celestial woman, nor a *gandharva* maid nor a Kinnari can equal her in beauty. As for mortals, I have not seen the like of her. Her lotus eyes large and liquid, are like those of goddess Lakshmi and she is perfection itself."

The princess from the *asura's* palace has been surely cursed by the gods or by some *rishi*: or else how can she be a slave of yours?" Devayani listened to his eulogy and evidently did not like it. She said: "Everything in this world is according to fate. Consider this also as the work of fate and do not waste any more thought on it. Please tell us who you are. You are dressed like a king and your words are those of a well read man. What is your name? Where do you come from? Whose son are you and why have you come here?"

Yayati smiled to himself at the arrogant manner in which Devayani spoke and he thought he would help her to keep up appearances. He said: "I have been educated in the lore of the Vedas when I was a student. I am a king, the son of a king. I am the famed Yayati, of the race of the Moon." Devayani asked: "Have you come to the forest with a definite purpose? It is to conquer some enemy or is it just a desire to hunt which has brought a king like you to the forest?" The king said: "Your guess is right. I have come to hunt. As for my approaching a crowd of your maidens it is because I am thirsty: and with a desire to assuage it I have come to you. Now that you know all about me, tell me what I should do."

Devayani said: "I have chosen you to be my husband. Accept me and make me your wife." Yayati's eyes were drinking in the beauty of Sharmishtha. He wanted her to be his wife. He was taken aback by the bold proposal of Devayani. He said: "It is not meet that I should marry you. I am a king, a kshatriya and you are the daughter of a famous brahmin: the noble Shukracharya. Even now I am afraid your father may disapprove of my talking to you even, unmarried as you are. The wise say that no man should approach the wife of another man, his daughter-in-law, a woman who belongs to a caste which is superior to his own, a woman who belongs to the same *gotra* as himself, his sister, a very poor woman and a sick woman. I will not take your words seriously."

Devayani spoke impatiently: "I have also some knowledge of the *shastras*. But I also know that brahmins have taken women of the kshatriya caste. As for Kshatriyas marrying brahmin maids, even that has happened before. The two are very similar and very close. There is not much difference in status as far as these two castes are concerned. And again, you are the son

of Nahusha. That means you are a *rishi* and the son of a *rishi*. Take me for wife."

While discussing this they had wandered away from the others. Devayani said: "When I had been pushed into the well and was in distress you came along, took me by the right hand and raised me up. Which brahmin youth will now touch my right hand which has already been held by you. I told you even then that I had decided that you are my husband."

Yayati tried another argument. He said: "Evidently you do not know the power of a brahmin's anger. The poison which an angry serpent spits: the hurt which is caused by sharp weapons: the helplessness caused by fire which surrounds you on all sides: all these are not as dangerous as the anger of a brahmin who is displeased."

"Which brahmin is angry?" wailed the love-borne maid. "I do not understand your words."

The king said: "The serpent kills only when it stings. The weapon kills only when it is aimed against someone. But the brahmin who is angry can destroy a man along with his entire army, with his entire kingdom. I dare not promise that I will marry you lest your father should curse me and my descendants. Unless your father gives you to me I will not accept your love." Devayani's face was lit up with joy. She said: "You need have no fear about that. Wait for a while. You will meet my father." She summoned one of her maids and said: "Go at once and bring my father to this spot."

Very soon Shukra came. As soon as he saw the glorious brahmin Yayati fell at his feet and taking the dust said: "I am Yayati, the son of Nahusha."

Devayani saw the puzzled look on her father's face and said: "Father do you remember the day when I was pushed into the well and you searched for me all evening? Do you remember finding me under a tree and do you remember my telling you that a noble man came and saved me from death by raising me out of the well? This was that noble man. This king took me by my right hand and lifted me from the depths of the well.

"No man has touched this hand before. I beseech you, give me to him, father. I have chosen him as my husband."

Shukra was trying to look pleased. He said: "He is a kshatriya and you are a brahmin. You belong to different castes. You belong to different *dharma*s. I am worried. But, my child, you have chosen him and there ends the matter."

Shukra then turned to the king and said: "She has chosen you, my son, and you can take her for your queen. I give her to you willingly. Accept my daughter."

Yayati said: "O noble Bhargava, I am afraid. It is *adharma* to marry like this. The mixing of castes is a sin and I do not want to commit sin. That is what is making me hesitate." Shukra was pleased with the king's words. He said: "I will assure you that no sin will touch you because of this act. It might have been a sin but I have given my approval and so you will be free of sin. Take Devayani for wife. She has immense love for you and she will make you happy."

With rare insight the brahmin spoke secretly to the king and said: "This young woman who is with my daughter is Sharmishtha, the daughter of Vrishaparva. Do not, on any account, fall in love with her or have thoughts of her in your mind. Take Devayani with you and keep her happy." "I will try, in every way, to make her happy", said Yayati.

The marriage was celebrated according to religious rites and Yayati went to his kingdom accompanied by Devayani. With her went Sharmishtha and the thousand maids.

SHARMISHTHA

Yayati took Devayani to his *antahpura* and she was very happy there. Sharmishtha, who had come with her, was made to reside in a small house built in the ashoka vana: the garden adjoining the palace. With her had come the thousand maids, according to the condition imposed on her long ago, by Devayani. Yayati was very happy with Devayani. In course of time a son was born to her.

One day Sharmishtha was wandering in the garden. Her heart was heavy with grief. She was bemoaning her fate and she compared herself to Devayani who had a handsome husband and a beautiful child. Devayani's womanhood had been fulfilled while Sharmishtha was still a maiden: and all because of some childish action of hers. There was no use looking back but on that day she was particularly unhappy. Leaning against an ashoka tree she stood, her thoughts wandering at will. The tree was in full bloom and the branches were laden with the orange flowers and buds which were blooming in clusters. She stood leaning against the tree, her arms clinging to the flowering branch.

So he saw her: the king, who had wandered into the garden by chance. He stood looking at her for a long time. He had never seen a woman as beautiful as this one. He had fallen in love with her long ago, when he was forced into the marriage with Devayani. He was happy, no doubt with his wife: but his heart had always been given to Sharmishtha. If it had not been for the words of warning spoken by Shukra he would have married her long ago. But he was a righteous king and he did not want to break a promise. He was also afraid to incur the wrath of a brahmin. These were the reasons why he had never given a thought to his love for Sharmishtha. Today he saw her alone and her beauty was captivating. He could not move from there but stood rooted to the spot.

Suddenly Sharmishtha turned round and found the king standing not far away. For the last so many days, nay, months, she had been in love with him: ever since he came on the scene when she was pressing the feet of Devayani. She had known from his eyes that he wanted her. But Devayani had chosen him as hers already and she had come to the city with the newly weds. She had to suffer the torture of seeing the king everyday and live with only thoughts of him.

She saw him and with her palms folded she saluted him. And so they stood for a while. Then she said: "You are the king and you are like a god since you grant the prayers of those who are dependant on you. I want to ask a favour of you."

The king lifted his eyebrow as if to say: "What do you want?" She said: "I want you to take me for wife."

Yayati said: "I know who you are. You are the daughter of Vrishaparva and you are the maid who has accompanied my wife. Ever since I saw you I have not forgotten you. You are a very beautiful woman. There is no one to equal you. But I have been commanded by Acharya Shukra not to entertain any thoughts of you in my mind and it is this promise which has held me away from you."

Sharmishtha smiled and said: "Well-versed in the shastras, as you are, have you not been taught that lies are allowed on FIVE occasions? When a man and woman are making love the man is allowed to speak untruths which are meant as jokes. When a man wants a woman, to get her, he may speak words which are not true. These are not considered as lies. When a marriage is to be performed it is often necessary to speak untruths which are not considered to be lies. When a life is in danger lies are allowed: provided the life can be saved thereby. When all one's wealth is about to be lost lies are allowed to be spoken. Under these conditions man is forgiven if he sheds his uprightness.

"And again, my lord, I am the slave of your wife. What is hers is yours too. You can take me since I am already yours. You have proclaimed in the streets of the city everyday: "Anything anyone wants will be granted by me." Were you then telling just a lie when you made that proclamation?"

The king smiled his consent and they became man and wife by *Gandharva* rule which applies to kshatriyas.

In course of time a son was born to them. The king was very happy with Sharmishtha. He told himself: "She is to me like wealth is to the kingdom: like the rains to thirsty plants: like nectar to the *devas*. She has been born for my happiness, this lovely woman, this Sharmishtha."

When Devayani heard that a son had been born to Sharmishtha she was sorely puzzled as to who her husband could be. She tried to guess and could not. Finally she could not contain herself. She went straight to her and asked her: "What is this you have done? Have you become such a slave to lust that you have forgotten the rules of decorum? Who has taken you and made a mother of you? How could you let this shameful thing happen to you?" The princess said: "A *rishi* came here by chance. I was, as you know, an unmarried maid and that is a sin. A woman who is not married and a woman who has no child live but in vain as the *shastras* say and they have no hope of a life after, either. I, therefore, asked him to rid me of this sin and that is the truth. It was not lust which prompted me to take a husband but it was fear of sin."

"Then it is a perfectly right thing you have done", said the queen. "I see nothing wrong in that. Tell me who this *rishi* is. What is his name and to what *gotra* does he belong?"

"He was glorious like the sun", said the princess. "He was so full of power and virtue, I was overcome with wonder. I was not able to ask him these things."

Devayani was not quite satisfied with her reply but she did not think much on it. She went back to her chambers and Sharmishtha breathed a sigh of relief

Two sons were born to Devayani and they were named YADU and Turvasu. They were as handsome as their father and were the pets of the entire palace.

Devayani became addicted to drinking and often she would use harsh words to the king: she would often weep and sometimes she would sing

and dance. She would say: "Why have you come to this forest which is unpeopled? Why do you disguise yourself as a king and come near me? You are a brahmin and you dress like a king. My husband Yayati is the best among men and if he sees you he will be very angry with you. Go away from here at once."

She would make the king go away from her presence. He tried to bring her back to normalcy and could not. He made the old attendants in the palace to take care of her during these drunken spells. He found that he could now take advantage of her weakness. He encouraged her to drink and he chose deformed people to guard her. When she was sunk in a drunken stupor the king would escape to the ashoka vana and spend the time with his beloved Sharmishtha.

And so it went on for a long time without Devayani knowing anything about it. Three sons were born to Sharmishtha; they were Druhyu, Anu and PURU.

One day, Devayani, accompanied by the king, went to the ashoka vana. While they were there she saw three handsome young boys playing. Devayani was amazed at their looks and showing them to the king she said: "My lord, look how handsome they are! Who can they be? They look as though they are celestial beings. Their beauty is unearthly. On looking closer, they resemble YOU, my lord!"

Getting no reply from him she went near the children and looked inquiringly at the maid who was with them. She smiled at her charges and said: "Look sons, the lady wants to know who you are. Tell her." They looked up from their play and said: "Our father is a *rishi*. Our mother says that he belongs to both castes. As for our mother, she is Sharmishtha."

Devayani composed herself and asked: "What is your father's name and to which *gotra* does he belong? Do you know where he is?" They looked at her and spying Yayati standing at a distance they pointed him out to her and said: "He is our father."

DEVAYANI'S ANGER AND SHUKRA'S CURSE

Devayani took the children with her and stood them before the king. Afraid to displease Devayani Yayati did not look at his sons at all. Unused to this treatment from him the children went to their mother crying. They said: "Mother, our father is behaving strangely today. He does not talk to us at all." Sharmishtha came out of her house and saw the king at a distance. She saw too that he was accompanied by his queen.

Devayani had been watching the entire scene and she knew for certain the entire story. She looked again at the king and he stood silent. His head was bowed and he looked ashamed and quite sorry for himself.

Devayani went to Sharmishtha and grasping her hand rudely in hers said: "You deceived me by telling me that a *rishi* is the father of your child when I asked you long ago. I now realise that it is the king who is your '*Rishi*'. You are my slave and you had no right to act on your own. You should have asked me and I would have tried to get a good husband for you. But you have no fear of me. Your behaviour is typical of the *asuras*." Sharmishtha spoke in soft tones. She said: "When I said it was a *rishi* I did not tell a lie. The king is well known as a Rajarishi the world over. As for my behaviour it is well within the rules of conduct. When you chose the king as your husband I did so too: in my role of slave to you. Since you belong to him; those who are your slaves are his too. You are the daughter of my father's *guru* and respect you as my father does, your father. Your lord demands respect from me too, as from you. When you were given to him in marriage, I was, too, since I am your slave. He provided me with a home and clothes and everything ever since I came here with you. Why then should he not take and make me the mother of his sons?"

Devayani's anger was now unbearable. Her lips were throbbing and her eyes were red. She shook her one-time friend by the shoulders and said: "I do not want to talk to you any more." She then turned to the king who was

standing silent and said: "As for you, O king, you can enjoy yourself to the utmost with this slave Sharmishtha here. I will not remain with you even for a moment more since you have displeased me.

Devayani was looking like a flame. She removed her ornaments and threw them on the ground in front of the king. She looked at him and Sharmishtha as though she would burn them alive. She walked away from there with speed. The king, frightened of her and her anger, ran after her and tried to take her hand and pacify her. But she would not be pacified. She would not reply to the king's words and rushed out of the ashoka vana. Devayani sent for the royal chariot and in a very short time she reached the home of her father. Shukra was alone and she rushed to him like a whirlwind and fell at his feet. Shukra looked up and down. He lifted her up and saw her face full of unhappiness. Over her shoulder he saw the king walk towards them with a crestfallen look. He too fell at the feet of the brahmin. Shukra could not understand this drama. Before Yayati could speak Devayani had spoken: her words came fast and the fury in her heart could be seen by the way she told her father about everything: the story of how the king had betrayed her. "*Dharma* has been vanquished by *Adharma*" , said Devayani. "I have been superseded by Sharmishtha the daughter of Vrishaparva. The king Yayati has made her the mother of three sons and I have two sons. This king, who is reputed to be righteous, is really one who has no morals: no conscience. He has betrayed the trust I placed in him."

Shukra who loved his daughter to distraction was like one possessed when he turned his angry eyes towards Yayati. From the look on the face of the king he knew that his daughter had only spoken the truth. He was furious. Even at the time of marrying his daughter to him the brahmin had told the king not to cast his eyes at Sharmishtha and this was exactly what he had done. His daughter was unhappy and with his mind full of his love for the father said: "Yayati, in spite of the fact you are well-versed in the rules of conduct, you have transgressed them for the sake of your *kama*. I curse you for making my daughter unhappy. Old age, which is unwelcome to those who run after the pleasures of the world will soon come to you and envelop you."

Yayati was struck dumb for a while by the terrible curse. If at all this '*Rajarishi*' had any weakness, it was DESIRE: and this was his undoing. And now this curse had blighted his life for ever. With folded palms and with tears in his voice Yayati said: "You have not heard my version of the incident, my lord. This young woman, the daughter of Vrishaparva, this Sharmishtha beseeched me to take her since she was in her youth and her life threatened to go waste. In the rules of conduct which have been taught to me, it is said: "When a woman, on her own, asks a man to take her, he will have to satisfy her or else he will be burdened by the sin of infanticide. If a man behaves differently in such a situation he is doing so by force of circumstance: not on his own.

And again, I have made it a rule in my life and announced it too, that anything anyone asks of me will be granted. She desired me and asked a favour of me. I took her because I was afraid of being called unrighteous."

Shukra said: "I still maintain that you were in the wrong. You are a man who has broken the code of honour: you have not behaved properly towards your wedded wife and I say that old age will be yours very soon."

Even as he was saying this, Yayati found his limbs growing weak and old and he looked at his strong, powerful beautiful arms. They had become shrunken and were covered by skin which had become wrinkled all on a sudden. He was horrified as he looked at himself. He wailed and said: "My lord, I still have so many desires left in my mind. Please make this old age leave me. Please help me. I have so many years of life left in which I can satisfy your daughter in a thousand ways and I have been made to take on this old age by you. You must help me." Shukra said: "A brahmin speaks and his words cannot be taken back. When I say something it will happen. I have never spoken an untruth. I can, however, modify my curse. If anyone is ready to exchange his youth for your old age, you can certainly borrow it from him. After you are satisfied with your life: after your desires are appeased with this borrowed youth, you can return it to the donor."

THE SONS OF YAYATI

Yayati felt a ray of hope lighting up the darkness which had befallen him. He said: "I am very grateful to you. I have five sons and I will ask them. The one who is willing to forgo his pleasures for my sake will be the emperor of the land after me and he will be remembered in aftertimes for this gesture. Immense *punya* will be his."

The king took leave of the brahmin whose anger had abated to an extent. He said: "Go your ways. The son who gives up his youth for you will be the king after you. He will be famous. He will live a long life and he will have many sons."

Tottering and weeping, Yayati entered the city. No sooner had he entered his palace than he sent for his eldest son: Yadu. Yadu was the son of Devayani. He came and stood before his father. He did not know what had happened and silently he stood, wondering what had happened to cause his father to look so old and so weak, unhappy and tearful.

The king said: "Look, my child, old age has come on me all on a sudden. My limbs have grown weak and I am not able to move around even. This is the result of the curse of Shukra, your grandfather. I do not want to be old so suddenly. I still have so many desires which have not been fulfilled. You are my son and you can help me. If you will give me youth and take my old age in exchange, I will satisfy myself for a thousand years and return your youth to you."

Yadu pondered for a moment and said: "Father, old age is not welcome to anyone: least of all, to a youth who has all his life before him. With my hair whitened, weak in every organ of the body, bent double because of weakness, how can I perform my daily duties even, leave alone the duties of a king? I do not want this sudden old age which you want to thrust on me. Old age, my lord, is not welcome."

Yayati pleaded with his son. He said: "Look, it is only for a while. Afterwards you will get it back and you can be happy for a long time."

Yadu, of all the king's sons, had an inclination to renounce everything and spend his time in meditating on the Lord. For that *Vairagya*, detachment is essential. *Vairagya* can be achieved only after one has gone through the usual spell of the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. To Yadu, youth was the time of preparation for the Eternity which he was eager to find. This old age, which was offered to him, would come too soon to him. He was not ready for it. This unnatural old age would never let him attain his goal.

Again, old age, when it comes on one in the natural course of events, will, in its wake, bring a sense of detachment from the world and an attachment to the next: devotion to the Lord. But the old age which his father offered him was the result of a brahmin's curse and it might prove a deterrent in his progress. There was also a third reason for Yadu's refusing old age. He told himself: "My father wants my youth: not for any noble purpose but to enjoy himself with my mother. If I give my youth to him he will use *my youth* to please *my mother*. I will be sinning against my mother since I will, in a way, be taking her. The only thing to do is to incur my father's displeasure. I cannot explain the motives behind my refusal."

Yadu looked sad and yet he would not change his mind. He said: "This sudden old age is not welcome to me. Man reaches *Vairagya* only when he gets old gradually and not when he grows old suddenly. I do not welcome your gift. I am not prepared to part with my youth. Pardon me, father."

Yayati was very angry with his son and said: "You are born of me. You owe your existence to me. And yet, you are not prepared to do this for me. I say that you will not inherit this kingdom. You will only be a subject and never a ruler."

Yadu did not speak a word in reply. He saluted his father and walked away from there.

The king then sent for Turvasu, the other son of Devayani. He spoke the same words to him: that he would like to exchange the suddenly descended old age for youth for a thousand years: and that he would return it after

that. The son shook his head firmly and said: "No, father I do not want this old age which will steal my strength, my beauty, and my ability to enjoy myself. It will dull my intellect and may even take away my life soon. I will not accept old age."

Yayati's anger which had been kindled by Yadu had grown now and he said: "You are unwilling to do what is dear to me. You will not be king after me. But you will be king of the *Mlechhas* who are lacking in decorum: who have mixed marriages: who are very narrow minded and who are disliked by the world in general. You will be the foolish ruler of foolish subjects."

The king then called the sons of Sharmishtha. Druhyu and Anu were just as unwilling as the other sons of the king and they were also told that they would not get the kingdom. This threat did not affect anyone in the least: so frightening was the thought of old age that youth refused to countenance it even when the king pleaded with them.

Yayati had now lost all hopes of getting rid of his old age. He had one more son left. He sent for Puru and spoke to him the same words which he did to the others.

Puru said: "I will obey commands, O king! I have been taught that it is the duty of everyone to obey the commands of his elders. He will be blessed with long life and it is the path to heaven. I will exchange with you, father, and I will gladly accept your old age. If it is my life you want, I will lay it down for you, father. You can enjoy life with my youth and I will remain here dressed in your old age till it pleases you to take it back."

Yayati was thrilled with the words of his son. He said: "You will be king after me. I can assure you that your subjects will be happy to be ruled by you, a righteous and god-fearing man."

DISSATISFACTION

The exchange was made and Yayati spent his time as he had planned to do. He drank his fill of the cup of pleasure and, all the while, he did not neglect his duties as a king. Devayani was now a chastened woman and her anger had left her. She had Yayati's love and he was capable of pleasing her in a thousand ways.

A thousand years passed and the king knew that the end of his youth was drawing near. He realised that he was not yet satisfied with the pleasures which youth gave him. He spoke to Devayani about it. He said: "All these years, my queen, ever since the day I took you by the right hand and lifted you out of the well, my thoughts have been with you. I have thought of nothing else but you and the love I have for you and the pleasure I have had being with you. It is now time to think of other things. Caught in the snare called *Maya*, bound by the ties of love which we have for each other, I spent all my time with you and I had no time to think of the afterwards: I neglected to learn *Atmavidya*. In this life of mine I have learnt one lesson: neither gold, nor grains, nor cows, nor woman will satisfy man. So long as DESIRE is alive in the heart of man, so long as he relishes these things, he will never be able to say: "Enough."

"The desires which go by the name 'lust' will never be assuaged by enjoyment. But, like fire which is only strengthened by the offering of ghee which is poured into it: just as it burns more furiously the more it is fed, even so, the objects of one's desire never satisfy man but they only serve to increase the appetite. This desire which is the most difficult thing to give up even when age creeps on one, is the one thing to be given up if man wants happiness: if he wants to avoid being drowned in the sea called sorrow.

"It has been said that the *Indriyas* are powerful, so powerful that they will pull even a wise man into the snare of sin. That is why the wise have said

that one should not sit on the same seat with his sisters or even daughter. Such is the power of the senses that man may forget himself in the blindness of the moment.

"As for me, I have been pursuing this 'desire' for a thousand years and I am still dissatisfied. I should, therefore, try and abandon it entirely. I must set my heart on the Brahman, on the everlasting. Forgetting the opposites, I should wander around like a deer in the forest, bereft of the twin feelings of "I" and "MINE."

"Man should realise that the objects of the senses are not permanent: that they threaten to destroy your soul and they lead you into the morass called *Samsara* again and again. Man should therefore, withdraw his mind from them and set it on the everlasting."

Yayati went to his son Puru and returned his youth to him. With peace in his mind he took back the old age which had once seemed a curse to him. Now he wore it willingly since his mind had become purified. He was without any desire now and he had no anger in his heart towards his other sons. He made Yadu rule the South: Druhyu, the south-west. The west was to be ruled by Turvasu and Anu, North Puru was crowned emperor.

Yayati went to the forest and wandered about. Freed of his desires he was like a young fledgling which renounces its nest when its wings are fully grown.

In course of time Yayati reached his end. Devayani too, after the example set by him, abandoned her body after setting her mind on the Lord.

DUSHYANTA

Puru was considered to be one of the foremost kings of the race of the moon. Kuru was another: and so the line is called "The Paurava line" or "The Kaurava line."

In the line of the Pauravas was born the king by name ILILA and his son was named DUSHYANTA. There were other sons born to Ilila but being the eldest son, Dushyanta was crowned as the monarch. He conquered all the kings in all the four quarters and was claimed the undisputed suzerain of the world. He was a very noble king and during his reign the earth enjoyed prosperity. His subjects did not know what it was to be hungry and the word 'Thief' was not known at all. There was no sickness. Parjanya rained during the seasons and the crop was abundant. The earth was peopled with big, milk giving cows. There was food in plenty for everyone and everyone was happy.

The king was beloved by all. He was a great warrior and was famed for his skill in archery and in wielding the *gada*.

In strength he was like Vishnu: in glory, like the sun: like the sea in nobility and in patience mother earth was compared to him. In short, the earth was very happy when she was ruled by Dushyanta.

Once there was a slight upheaval in the villages adjoining his city. Cruel animals were reported to have entered some of the villages and hurt the cows. The news reached the king and he set out to the forest. Surrounded by his army and full of pomp and glory the king set out hunting. When he was passing them the people were saying: "This is Dushyanta who is like a tiger in his prowess. He is said to be invincible in war. Everyone stands in awe of his strength and his reputation as a great fighter." Listening to these words which were spoken in whispers, the king, with a slight smile on his lips, went on his way to the forest.

He passed the palace gardens and then the short coppices which were on the outskirts of the city. He then entered the forest and there he spent a long time killing innumerable tigers, lions wild boars and wild bulls. There were elephants which crossed his path and herds of deer.

One deer was very beautiful and the king wanted to aim his arrow at this deer. He found that the animal, seeing his intention and sensing the danger that was threatening it, ran away as fast as his thin legs could carry him. The king followed the deer in his chariot. He lost count of time and suddenly he found himself very tired and very thirsty. Still he followed the deer which now entered another forest.

The king also entered this forest. He found, to his surprise, that it was very pleasant there. The mind seemed to find peace and there was found an all-pervading tranquillity. A cool breeze was blowing and the trees, laden with flowers and fruits, seemed to be waving their branches in welcome. The place was dark with shady trees and the music made by the birds was exceedingly sweet. The drowsy music of the bees haunting the clusters of flowers and the intoxicating scent of the flowers together made the senses reel with pleasure. Every now and then, the breeze would shake the trees and there would rain on the earth a shower of flowers and the soft carpet made by them was beautiful.

The king was filled with amazement at the sight of so much beauty. Dushyanta saw a small brook running swiftly across the edge of the forest. While he was wondering how he had missed this beautiful spot during the last so many years of hunting, the king saw a cluster of hermitages nearby. He recognised the river flowing as Malini. The river embraced the *ashramas* as a mother would, her children, in her arms.

Dushyanta knew that the great sage Kanva had his hermitage on the banks of the river Malini. He therefore decided that it would be impolite if he did not go to the *ashrama* to pay his respects to the rishi. He asked his small army which was with him to stay where it was. He said: You must not proceed any further since this is an *ashrama*. Remain here till I come back. I am going to the *ashrama* to salute the *rishi*." The king then removed his rich dresses and jewels. Dressed simply, in a manner befitting the

simplicity of the great man residing there, he proceeded towards the *ashrama*. He was accompanied only by the brahmin priest who was always by his side. The two of them walked through the place where beauty and peace were found in abundance.

SHAKUNTALA

In that atmosphere of peace and beauty Dushyanta forgot all his worries as a king and his thoughts were now bent only on seeing the *rishi* and taking the dust of his feet.

The king went to the spot where the *ashrama* was located and entered it with reverence. But he found, to his surprise, that no one was there. The place was empty: as though it were deserted. He looked around and found no one. He stood for a while and then raising his voice said: "Is anyone here?" His voice was resounding and it could be heard even at a distance. While he was looking for some response to his call the king saw a beautiful woman emerge from inside the *ashrama*: so swiftly did she move, he thought of a streak of lightning emerging from a thunder cloud.

She was like Shri in beauty. Her snapping black eyes looked inquiringly and when she saw the king she was taken aback. She saw a very handsome man standing there. His chest was broad and his eyes were long and beautiful like the petals of a lotus. His neck was like that of a lion and his arms were long and powerful. As for the king, he saw a young woman who was perfectly proportioned. She was as charming as the moon and she looked like Vasanta had taken the form of a woman: so fresh and lovely was the apparition. And so they stood looking at each other for a long moment. She then rushed into the *ashrama*. Before he could miss her she came back with *Arghya* and *Padya* and offered them to him saying: "You are welcome to the *ashrama*." She made him take a seat and asked him to receive the hospitality of the *ashrama*. She then stood silent for a while. She felt his eyes on her and very shyly she asked him: "What shall I do to please you, a guest? May I ask the reason which has prompted you to visit our *ashrama*? May I know who you are? Where you come from?"

Dushyanta said: "I am the son of Ilila, the *rajarshi*. I am called Dushyanta. I have come here to pay my respects to the *rishi* Kanva. I do not find him

here. Can you tell me where he has gone?" "My father", said the young woman, "has gone out of the *ashrama* just some time back to collect fruits. If you wait for a while he will come back and you can see him."

The king sat silent while she spoke. He was captivated by her beauty which was brightening the *ashrama* like a soft lamp. Her youth and her beauty were combined with a serenity which was something he had never seen before. The king spoke: Who are you? To whom do you belong? You are the last person I expected to meet in an *ashrama* inhabited by those who have renounced the world. You are a lovely woman. Ever since the moment I laid my eyes on you my mind has been carried away by your beauty. Listen to my words, please. I am a king, born in the line of Puru, the famed one. I am Dushyanta and I have fallen in love with you, you beautiful woman. I am born in the line of righteous men and my mind can never think wrong thoughts. My mind cannot be guilty of anything sinful and it is improbable that I should have fallen in love with a brahmin maid: one who is the daughter of a *rishi*. Speak to me and assure me that you are not a brahmin maid: that my love has been given to the right person. I am hopelessly unhappy with this burning desire for you. You should accept me and my love."

The young woman spoke nothing for a moment. But there was a smile hovering on her lips. So they sat alone in the *ashrama* for a while. She then spoke in a soft voice: "I am the daughter of the *rishi* Kanva. He is a *tapasvi*, a firm-minded man and he knows all the rules of moral conduct. His fame has spread all over the world. Kanva is my father, my *guru* and I am not free to do anything without his permission. It is not right that you should approach me with your proposal. Please ask my father. I am not a free woman to do as I please. "Dushyanta said: You are right about the fame of your father spreading all over the world. I am well aware of his greatness. I am also aware of the fact that he has never been known to have married. From *Brahmacharya ashrama* he has reached the *sanyasa* stage without passing through the *Grihastha ashrama*. The world knows this truth. How then could this have happened that you are his daughter? It seems improbable: so much so doubts enter my mind. Please clear them for me. How did it happen?"

The girl smiled once again and looking at the king and at the ground at once, not being able to look into his face, spoke in a soft voice: "You are right. I am the adopted daughter of Kanva." She paused and the king sat silent waiting for her to go on. She then continued to talk.

She said: "Once a *rishi* had come to visit my father and he saw me. Father told him that I was his daughter. The *rishi* said what you have just said and asked him how I could be his daughter. My father told him about me and I heard the truth about myself then. My father said:

"There was time when my friend Vishvamitra made the world and the heavens tremble with the *tapas* he was performing. Indra was afraid that his position as Indra was in danger because of the *tapas* of Vishvamitra. He therefore decided to spoil it. He summoned Menaka, the *apsara*, and asked her to go near the great man and beguile him with her beauty. Menaka was afraid to go near the *rishi* since he was well known for his anger. But Indra assured her that she would not be cursed. And so she, accompanied by Manmatha, Vasanta and Malayamaruta, went to the spot where Vishvamitra was.

"Menaka achieved what she had come for and to them was born a daughter. When she took the child to the *rishi* he was overcome with horror at his lapse. He refused even to look at Menaka or the child. As for Menaka she did not want to get involved with a child. She returned to the heavens leaving the child alone in the forest on the banks of the river Malini.

"It was a forest inhabited by lions and other wild animals. The child was lying on the grass. The shakunta birds which were on the trees took pity on the child and protected it from the glare of the sun and the fury of the passing wind by surrounding the child on all sides.

"I went to the river early in the morning for my morning bath and the worship of the sun. In the forest, all alone, protected by the feeble birds I saw this child. The shakunta birds, on seeing me, said: 'O *rishi*! this child is the daughter of Vishvamitra, your friend. He was very angry with himself for what has happened and has gone away to the banks of the river Kaushiki to resume his penance: penance which was disturbed, interrupted, ruined by Menaka. The mother of the child had no wish to be

burdened with a child and leaving it here she has gone back to the heavens. You are a kind hearted man and you should take this child home with you and bring her up.' The birds were right. I am very compassionate by nature and the sight of the new born child lying in the forest on the grass protected by the shakunta birds was very sad.

I took the child in my arms and went back to my *ashrama*. Since she was guarded by Shakunta birds I have named her "Shakuntala" and this is how she has become my daughter. She too considers me to be her father."

"This was the story", said Shakuntala, "told by my father to the guest and so I know that I am the daughter of the sage Vishvamitra and Menaka, the *apsara*. But as for me, I think only of Kanva as my father and I will obey him in all my actions."

THE KING WEDS SHAKUNTALA

Dushyanta was very happy since his love for this woman was not wrong. She was the daughter of a kshatriya and she was fit to be his queen. He smiled at her and said: "I am happy to know that you are the daughter of a kshatriya. There is nothing to prevent you from becoming my wife. I will do anything you ask of me. I want you. I cannot live without you. I will give you my entire kingdom if you so desire. I cannot wait for your father to come. I am a kshatriya and I am allowed to marry you by the *Gandharva* rites. It is considered the best of marriages since it has love for its foundation." Shakuntala said: "In a short while my father will return from the forest nearby. Please wait for him. I consider my father to be my god and I will accept as my husband the man to whom my father gives me. Is it not known the world over that a woman is never free? Her childhood is in the care of her father: her youth is given to her husband and in her old age her son will guard a woman. Never is woman free to do what she wants to do. I will not ignore my father and accept your love." "Do not say so", said Dushyanta. "The great Kanva is incapable of being angry with you if that is what is making you hesitate. The great Kanva is ever compassionate and he will not be displeased with your choice and do not think that you will be insulting him by accepting me now."

"I have been told," said the maid, "that Brahmins use their anger as their weapons and these are more effective than the ordinary weapons which hurt only the body. Fire burns with its heat: the sun, with his hot rays: 'the king with his sceptre and the brahmin, with his anger. An angry *rishi* kills like Indra with his Vajra."

Dushyanta would not let her think for herself. He said: "I know all about the *rishi* and his kind nature. You need not fear him. As for you, you must become my wife. I am distracted by the thoughts of you and your beauty has bewitched me. Let me tell you something. The *atman* is the only

kinsman one has: the only friend one has: the *atman* is one's father and mother and one's everything. You can, without transgressing *dharma*, give yourself to me with the consent of your *atman*. Marry me according to the *Gandharva* rites. Become mine." Shakuntala was pleased and flattered by his impatience: his commanding love. And yet, she was not sure of herself or of him. She said: "If, as you say, the path you have indicated is the right path: if it is really not wrong on my part to give myself to you with just the consent of my *atman*, then I will accept your love. But you must promise me most solemnly that the son born to us will be crowned as monarch after you. If you promise me to do that, I will marry you."

Dushyanta promised her that he would do anything she desired. Shakuntala then said: "I have been told that the wise approve only of a properly performed marriage: that the world will talk well only of a properly wedded couple. This is for the benefit of the child to be born. I do not want any calumny to taint my name or that of my child. I want to be married to you properly. There are all the necessary things here in the *ashrama*. The *yajñashala* has all the things you require for performing a marriage. Here are the vessels. Here is the *darbhasana*: here is rice. The glory of the child depends on the purity of the marriage. Brahmins are here and make them perform the marriage with Ajya, Havis, Laja and the fire. I know that you are not for it: that you do not approve of all the fuss I am making but you should forgive me since it is *dharma* I want to follow."

Dushyanta agreed to everything she said. He called his brahmin friend who had accompanied him to the *ashrama* and said: "I am getting married to this princess. Make all the preparations so that the marriage is performed in the proper manner. I do not want my son to have any slur on his name. Make it brief but let it be a proper function."

The brahmin was only too happy to oblige. The king was soon ready for the ceremony and soon he took the hand of the lovely woman, Shakuntala and they were proclaimed man and wife. The king spent some time with her and then it was time for him to go. He told her: "As soon as I reach the city I will despatch an army consisting of elephants and horses. I will send palanquins and my kinsfolk will come to take you back to the city. Attendants will be there and they will come for you. I have to go back in a

hurry. I will also come with the entourage and take you home with me: to your home, to the city over which you will be the queen. I promise you, it will only be a short time before I come again for you."

The king took her in his arms and embraced her again and again. He took her hand in his and promised to send for her soon. His smiling face was asking her to let him go.

Shakuntala went round him and with tears in her eyes fell at his feet. He lifted her up and comforted her saying: "Do not weep, my queen. It is only for a while that we are to be parted. I will come very soon. I swear on all the punya that I have accumulated that I will be here soon."

Even as he was saying so, the king pictured in his mind's eye the coming of Kanva. "Kanva is a *rishi* rich in *tapas*. I wonder what he will do to me when he hears of this act of mine. I have come here and taken his daughter without his consent and his good wishes. I am afraid." These were the thoughts that tormented Dushyanta when he left Shakuntala and went back to his city.

HER CONFESSION

Kanva returned to the *ashrama* after the king had gone away. Contrary to her usual custom Shakuntala did not rush to welcome him. She was overcome with shame. And again, she was afraid of his disapproval. Slowly and haltingly she came to his presence. She took the basket of fruits from his hands and placed a seat for him. She brought water for washing his feet. As she was washing them she spoke not a word: nor did she raise her eyes from the ground. Silently she sat there without speaking a word and it was out of fear and shame. She felt that she had done something very wrong and she was afraid of his censure. She felt helplessly caught up in a web of intrigue and her guilt made her dumb.

Kanva looked at her in surprise and said: "Child, this is the first time I have seen you shy. Today you have been so different from your usual self I am not able to recognise my child at all in this new Shakuntala. Tell me what has caused this change in you." Still she spoke not a word. She was busy peeling fruit. After he had partaken of them and after he had rested his limbs on the seat she had placed for him Shakuntala began to talk softly and haltingly. She thought of Dushyanta her husband, and knew that she had to talk to her father of him. Her face was red with shame and her voice was choked since tears were threatening to fill her eyes. She braced herself Massaging her father's feet all the while she said: "Father, when you had gone away, Dushyanta, the sons of Ilila had come to the *ashrama*. I think it was fate which brought him since I chose him to be my lord from the moment I saw him. He took me, father. I fall at your feet. Please do not be angry with him. With the power of your *tapas* you are able to see everything with your inner eye. I do not have to tell you in detail what happened. I ask you to be kind and tolerant with our impulsive marriage. He was insistent and I succumbed."

The *rishi* sat silent for a while with his eyes closed. With his inner eye he saw everything which had taken place. He did not find anything wrong with the hurried marriage. He smiled on his daughter and said: "No, my child, I am not angry. I know what took place here when I was absent. Without taking me into consideration Dushyanta, a king of the Paurava House and you, my daughter, have entered into this holy state of marriage. You, naturally, think that I will be offended. But I am not. Do not be afraid either for yourself or for your husband. You have done well by choosing a good man for yourself. As for the *Gandharva* marriage, the king was right. It is very common among kshatriyas and you have also insisted on the correct rituals to make sure of the future of the child. You will be the mother of a noble son.

"Dushyanta is a righteous king and he is famed the world over for his upright character. He is the best among men and he has chosen you as his wife. You will be the mother of a son who will rule the entire earth bound by the seas on all sides. He will be a monarch. I am really very happy about your choice of Dushyanta. Several years have passed since you came to me and the thoughts of finding a worthy husband for you have been in my mind constantly. You have solved the problem for me. I am pleased with you and to show my pleasure I am ready to grant you any boon you ask of me."

Shakuntala cried openly now and said: "My father, do I have to ask a boon of you? You have ever given me everything, I wanted. Yet, since you have commanded me I will ask you. I want you to be kindly disposed towards Dushyanta who is my husband. I want nothing more of you."

Kanva willingly granted her wish and stroked her head with affection. He said: "From today you should learn the ways of the city and learn how to deport yourself as the queen of the Paurava monarch." He then thought of purifying her and with this thought in mind he stroked her gently. With his touch all her feelings of guilt vanished and Shakuntala was happy. She knew that her father had condoned her act and that was enough for her.

SHAKUNTALA WAITS IN VAIN

Shakuntala realised after some days that she was bearing the son of Dushyanta in her womb. She was very happy. The child was growing inside her. But along with that, a new worry was growing too. The king had told her that he would come again and take her back with him to the city. For the first few days she did not think much of the delay in his coming. But the days became weeks and still he did not come: nor did she receive any news of him or from him. She said: "He must be busy with the problems of a ruler and so he could not find time to devote to me and the thoughts of my going to him. I will wait patiently."

She waited and still he did not come. She was now very unhappy. She lost interest in everything. She would not eat. Day and night she spent without sleep and food thinking of the king and her position. Still a little pulse of hope would beat within her and she would say: "Today, or tomorrow or the day after he is sure to come with his army as he promised. He is a very righteous king. He is a Paurava and he cannot abandon me like this." She would count the days and the days became weeks and now months passed by.

Three years thus passed her by and Shakuntala had become the mother of a son. The child was in her womb for three years before he was born. He was a very beautiful child and when he was born flowers rained on him from the skies. Divine music could be heard to celebrate the birth of a child who would later be the greatest of the monarchs of the line of the Moon. Indra came to Shakuntala and said: "Shakuntala, your son will become the emperor of this entire world. No one will equal him in strength, beauty, glory, prowess. He will perform the *Ashvamedha* and *Rajasuya* several times. This son of yours will be the greatest of the Paurava kings."

The inmates of Kanva's *ashrama* were greatly excited by the prophecy about the new-born child. To think that their Shakuntala would be the

mother of the emperor of the world was thrilling to the inhabitants of the *ashrama*. They were simple folk whose needs were so few and their desires were much less. They were happy for their daughter whom they had cherished as their own. Kanva performed all the rites necessary for a new-born.

The child was growing fast. Tiny white teeth soon appeared, like jasmine buds. Lispings words from his lips were the delight of the listeners. A strange habit this child had. Even when he was hardly able to walk the little boy enjoyed rushing into the den of a lion and from the side of the lioness he would snatch the cubs in his tiny arms and walk away. He knew no fear when his mother frightened him about the anger of the lioness. He would fight with the lions with his little arms and frighten them away and this was a wonder which was always the talk of the people in the *ashrama*. As he was growing up his fearlessness became proverbial. And so he grew, the son of Shakuntala.

When he was six years old the child became an extremely capable hunter. He took great delight in fighting lions, tigers, wild boars, wolves, wild bulls and bears which were in the forest adjoining the *ashrama*. Seeing his prowess the *rishi* Kanva, his grandfather, called him "Sarvadamana."

As for Dushyanta, when he returned to the city his thoughts were with Shakuntala. But he was terribly afraid of Kanva. He was afraid to face the *rishi* and his anger and so he kept silent about going to the forest and bringing his newly wedded wife with him back to the city. And, as time passed, the memory of that mad moment with Shakuntala began to wane away and in a short time it was lost in the clouds of oblivion.

THE LEAVE—TAKING

As time passed, Kanva found that his daughter was wasting away. She would always be immersed in thought. She was not the playful happy girl who was wont to delight the old man's heart in the days of old. Her eyes were sunken and her words were few. She had become pale and Kanva knew that she was not happy at all. The boy had reached the age of twelve and he had been taught the vedas and the *shastras* like all the children of the *rishis* in the *ashrama*. Kanva decided that it was time for them to go to the city to the presence of the king. He knew that the time had come when the youngster should be crowned as the *yuvaraja*.

Kanva called Shakuntala to his side and made her sit near him. He stroked her head gently and the very touch was enough to make her weep without restraint. He comforted her for a while and then said: "I know the grief which is gnawing at your heart strings. Listen to me, my child. To a woman, the only place is by the side of her husband. It has been said that for a woman the path to heaven is through serving her husband and pleasing him in every way. You have waited all this while for the king to send for you. Since he has not done so, it is essential that you should go to him. You have waited long enough for him to come.

"Since this Paurava king does not seem to have any intention of coming for you I have decided to send you to him. Do not bear him any ill will because of his seeming indifference. Seeing his son the king is sure to be happy. Your son will be crowned the *yuvaraja* and that will make you happy."

Kanva paused and looked at Shakuntala. He could see that she was not at all happy at the thought of going to the king who had hurt her so deeply. She was about to say something when Kanva held up his hand and said: "No, my child. I do not want you to contradict me. I wish that you should go to your husband. It is not right for a woman to stay at her father's house

for a long time once she married. I am only doing what is expected of a father who wishes his daughter to be happy." She was silent. Kanva made all the preparations for the mother and son to make the journey. Very soon the day came when Shakuntala had to leave for the city.

Kanva embraced his daughter with affection and took his dear grandson on his lap. He smelt the top of his head and said: "Child, Sarvadamana, there is a great line of rulers by the name 'Paurava' and the king who rules us now comes of that noble line and his name is Dushyanta. Your mother is the queen of that king. She will be going to her husband's house accompanied by you, the king's heir. Go and salute your father. You are to be crowned as the *Yuvaraja*. Treat the king with respect. And in course of time, rule the land which has come to you from a long line of great and illustrious kings. And, when you are king, and when you are seated on the throne think of me sometime." The old man's eyes were filled with tears.

The child fell at his feet and said: "You are a father to me and you are my mother. I do not want any other father. I want only you. In this world and in the world to come, it is serving you which will grant me *punya* and nothing else. As for my mother Shakuntala, she can go to her husband on her own. I will sit at your feet and spend all my life with you. I think you are angry with me for my wild pranks with the animals of the forest and you want to punish me by sending me away from you. I assure you, father, I will not molest the animals any more and I will sit at your feet and learn my lessons well and with great attention. Please do not banish me." The little boy clung to the feet of the old man and wept as though his heart would break. Shakuntala sobbed her heart out. Her love for her father was so great: and the words of her son made her more unhappy. The son, hearing his mother sob said: "Listening to the words of our father, why do you weep? If you are in love with your husband and want to join him you can go at once. I will stay with father."

His words hurt her and she said: "One man commits sin and many people suffer for it. The one who commits the crime manages to escape the results of it but others suffer for it. Even so, it has been with me. I am the one to suffer. My son, do not think I want to go. I want only one thing and that is a place at the feet of my father. Nothing else." Like a fallen creeper

she fell at the feet of *rishi* Kanva and he lifted her up and pacified her. He wiped her tears and made her sit down. He then spoke softly and gently, persuading her to abandon her obstinate refusal. The young boy was also listening to his words. Kanva said: "Listen to me, Shankuntala. I am saying only what is good for you. You have lived like a flower in this *ashrama* which is far removed from civilization and I think I have not taught you the rules which are usually taught to young maids. Your motherless state and my bachelorhood are together to be blamed for this innocence in you. A *Pativrata* has no place except by the side of her husband. *Pativrata* means: a woman who has no religion except her husband. For a *Pativrata* the heavens always keep their gates open. The gods are pleased with her. This is the reward she gets for her devotion to her husband. You have a great future ahead of you and also, your son's future is at stake. For his future happiness if not for yours, you should go to Dushyanta."

Kanva then stroked his grandson's head with his old and gnarled hands and said: "Child, you are my grandson and you are also the grandson of Ilila, the king of the Lunar race. You must do your duty so that your mother does not fail in hers. She loves her husband. No woman can forget a man once she has loved him. But she does not want to go to him. You are Paurava and you are the future king of the world. Now be a man and take your mother to your father. If you do not like it there, then come back to me. You are always welcome."

Neither of them spoke a word. Kanva summoned his disciples and said: "Take Shakuntala and leave her with her husband. I am sending her: not because I want to, but because a woman's place is by the side of her husband and stay with her father for a long time is not good for her. People will not think highly of her."

Sarvadamana, with the hope of coming back to the *ashrama*, did not object so much to the journey now. He said: "Mother, do not delay. Let us go to the king's presence."

He then fell at the feet of his grandfather and received his blessings. Shakuntala went round her father and then prostrated before him. Her eyes

were raining tears while she stood with folded palms and said: "During all these years when you brought me up, I have often, out of ignorance or out of carelessness, spoken harshly to you perhaps: been disrespectful, or at times, even indifferent. I must have done so many wrong things but you must be tolerant and forgive me for all these happenings."

Kanva's tears were falling fast now. He could not speak and his heart was heavy with grief: the grief of parting from his beloved daughter. He composed himself and addressing his disciples who were to accompany her he said: "This child of mine has been brought up with tender care by me, as you all know. She was born in the forest and she has, all her life, lived only in the forest and she knows nothing of the world. Take great care of this Shakuntala who is already very unhappy. Give her to the king and come back."

He then said: "This is my message to the king. 'This woman, Shakuntala whom you married years ago when you had come to my *ashrama*, has become the mother of your son. They are sent to you with my blessings. Take them and be happy'." Shakuntala and her son finally took leave of Kanva and walked slowly and unwillingly towards the road which was to take them to a new life. Shakuntala's mind was full of sadness at the thought of leaving all that had meant so much to her for so many years. Her father's tears were still wet on her head when she finally took leave of him.

MOTHER AND SON

After travelling by stages they finally arrived at the gates of the city Pratishthana. This was the city where Pururavas lived with Urvashi in the days of old: Pururavas, the ancestor of Dushyanta. When they reached the gates of the city they found out that the palace of the king was in the centre of the city and that it was like the mansion of Indra himself. In the palace, they were told, was the courtyard where the king granted audience to anyone who wished to see him. Near the gates of the city people began to stare curiously at the new arrivals. They were particularly interested in the companions of Shakuntala. Their ascetic garbs and their matted hair drew the attention of everyone and some people commented on it. The disciples of Kanva did not relish this.

They stopped abruptly and said: "Shakuntala, as per the desire of our *guru* we have brought you to the city where your husband rules. We will now leave you and return to the *ashrama*." Shakuntala was afraid of the new place, the new surroundings. She was feeling lost. And again, it was so long since she had seen the king and she did not know how he would receive her. She said: "Please come with me to the palace and after the king has seen us you can go back."

They shook their heads and said: "It cannot be done. In our way of life the rules forbid a hermit from entering a city. We have brought you safely to the gates of the city. You can easily find your way to the palace. As for us, we have nothing to do with cities nor with the people who live there. This place and its urbanity are of no use to the likes of us who have renounced all forms of bondage. We wish to go back." Shakuntala's eyes were full of tears. They comforted her saying: "Do not be afraid. You will be alright. We have been observing the omens all the way and they have been good throughout. Your son will certainly be crowned. You have been blessed by our *guru* and his words have never been known to be wasted." They turned

away from the city and began walking fast. She stood there holding her son's hand in hers and so she stood until they were out of sight. They took away with them her last link with the *ashrama*.

Shakuntala stood like a statue, lost in a reverie and her son brought her back to reality. He tugged at her hand and she walked slowly into the city with her mind still pining for her father and her life in the *ashrama*. Her steps were slow and hesitant and her eyes had a scared look like that of a stricken deer. Her son held her hand firmly in his and it was he who supported her while they walked through the king's way. The child was highly impressed by the lofty buildings which seemed to vie with each other in an attempt to touch the clouds. The youngster's eyes were bright with excitement. She was listless and so they walked towards the palace.

The people on the road were struck by the sight of this very beautiful woman with such sad eyes and the youngster who walked like a lion. They seemed to be mother and son. Some said: "She looks like the queen of the heavens, Shachi devi walking with her son Jayanta." Others said: "What a beautiful woman! One would think it is the goddess Lakshmi herself walking into our city. We wonder if it is she and decide it is not, since she does not hold the red lotus in her hand."

Shakuntala was talking softly to her son as they proceeded and the people said: "Surely it must be someone from the other world. We have not seen the like of them before. Look at the young man! He looks noble like a lion and he walks like a lion. His neck and chest are as powerful as those of a lion! What a perfectly made figure he has! His feet are so beautiful and the soles are red: and they are planted so firmly on the ground with every step he takes. His walk is like that of a king." Another said: "When you say king, I am struck by something in his face and form. Why, he does look like our king Dushyanta! Whose son can he be? The lady with her gait like that of a swan, talks like a nightingale. Her voice is so sweet. Her face is like the moon and she reminds one of a string of jasmine buds when she smiles. Her complexion is like a lotus petal. Her eyes are long and liquid and again one thinks only of the lotus petal when we see her. Her skin is glowing like molten gold. She is surely someone from the heavens who has strayed into this world. She is not earthly." So spoke the people in the

city and unheeding their words and their curiosity Shakuntala walked towards the palace of the king. Several of the citizens followed the two and soon they reached the gates of the palace.

Shakuntala was trembling in every limb and she did not know what she should do now. She stood still for a while and with her free hand she stilled the beating of her heart. She felt her son's hand in hers and she made up her mind to be brave: brave for the sake of this son of hers who was to be lord of the world. Her father had told her so and it would be so. It was necessary that she should have the courage to accost the king. She began to walk towards the assembly hall where the king was said to spend his time granting audience to the people and listening to their grievances.

Her mind was busy composing sentences with which she should address the king. Shyness overwhelmed her when she thought of Dushyanta and she asked herself: "What shall I say when I stand before him?" Shall I call him 'Beloved' or 'Your Majesty'? Even as she was thinking on these she found that she had arrived in the council hall.

Holding her son who looked like the rising sun, Shakuntala entered the hall.

DUSHYANTA—THE KING

From a distance Shakuntala raised her eyes and saw her dear beloved lord. The king was seated on the throne. He was like Indra and her eyes rested longingly on his face since they had been long absent from a sight of him. She was very happy to see him and with bent head she walked towards the throne. Having saluted him properly she then propelled her son towards the throne and said: "My son, make your prostrations to the king, your father." After saying this she stood silent, shyness stopping her from saying anything more. She stood there and she was holding on to a pillar nearby leaning against it and stealing glances at him. Her eyes were excessively bright with excitement and she could hardly restrain herself.

Sarvadamana prostrated before the king and stood by the side of his mother. His eyes were curious, questioning and excited. "So this is my father!" he told himself. "He seems to be so noble and so good. I would like to be with him." He looked at his mother and she smiled at him.

The king, in the meantime, did not know who they were and what they had come to him for. Her words: "Make your prostrations to the king, your father", had made him sit up. It was sheer impertinence on her part to talk like that! But he composed himself and, with a thoughtful look on his face he spoke to her: "What can I do for you? What is your purpose in coming here to my presence and specially with your son? Tell me what you want and I will do what is right."

Shakuntala's voice was very soft and he could hardly hear her. She said: "May it please your majesty, I will certainly speak. This youth is your son born of me. I have come to ask you to fulfil your promise to me and to crown him as the *Yuvaraja*. I need hardly remind you that in the *ashrama* of the sage Kanva you took my hand in yours and asked me to be your wife. Please remember those days, my lord, and accept your son and your wife who have been separated from you for the last many years."

Dushyanta, a king with many loves, had long ago forgotten Shakuntala and her love. She had been just a moment in his love life and it had been sunk in the depths of oblivion. When she spoke those soft hesitant words he began to remember hazily and, suddenly, he remembered everything. But he did not want to admit it. He said: "I remember no such thing. I do not think I have ever seen you before. You are a stranger to me and it is impossible that I took you for wife and that this child is mine." He paused for a moment and waited for her to speak. Shakuntala was too stunned to talk. He said: "I do not believe your story. I think you are an adventuress who is bent on getting something out of me and you have invented this marriage. I have nothing to do with you. You can stay here or you can go. You can do as you please."

His words were like burning poison entering the ears. Shakuntala stood spell-bound. It seemed to her that she would soon fall down in a faint. She had not expected such words and her heart was sorely hurt. But she composed herself. Anger, a wave of uncontrollable anger replaced the despair in her heart and she stood straight. Her lips were throbbing with emotion and her eyes, which were soft till now, became brilliant with anger. She seemed to burn the king with the fire in her eyes. She looked at him for a long moment and then said: "You do remember: I know that you remember everything and yet you behave like a villager and tell me you do not remember. Your heart and the *Atman* which is lodged inside your heart will tell you everything. You are not speaking the truth, O king! You are deliberately telling a lie. You are well versed in the sacred books. Can you not see that you are insulting the *atman* in you with this lie? *Dharma* is the only thing which will protect good and gentle people and you are transgressing all *dharma*: you are a king and you speak a lie.

"Man commits sin in secret and tells himself: 'I am safe: No one knows what I have done and I will not be found out.' But the *Devas* know what he has done: the *bhutas* know: the sun, the moon, fire, Vayu, the heavens and earth and *Yama*, the lord of *Dharma* know what he had done: day and night and the two *Sandhyas* know: righteousness itself knows about the behaviour of the sinner. *Yama*, *Vaivasvata* will punish him for his sin.

"The Kshetrajna, the *atman* inside his heart, the eternal witness of all the acts of man will know.

"A man who deceives himself, and thus, his *atman*, will not be respected by the gods. Listen to me, O King! I will try to refresh your memory.

"You came to the *ashrama* of Kanva on your own and you sought my hand. I am your lawful wedded wife and it is not right that you should insult a righteous woman, *pativrata*, as you have done in the presence of everyone. If I so desire I can destroy this entire palace and your head will break into a thousand pieces. But a woman loves her husband even though he is a sinner and that is why I do not desire to vent my anger on you and your kingdom.

"It has been said that there is no glory greater than being the father of a son. I have brought your son to you. The world can see how glorious he is and how noble he looks. Which man will be so foolish as to refuse a son like this? The wise say man is born again in the form of his son and you can see yourself in your son. A son saves you from the hell by name PUTH and you do not accept him. Indeed it is strange.

"I will try once again to remind you of what happened long ago. You had come to the forest to hunt and a deer led you away far into the forest and from there to the *ashrama* of Kanva which is situated on the banks of the river Malini. You met me in the *ashrama*. I was alone. My father had gone out. I honoured you as a guest should be. You wanted to know who I was and I told you that I am the daughter of the *apsara* Menaka and that my father is the great *rishi* Vishvamitra. You spoke gentle and soft words to me. They were steeped in honey and they were lies. You stayed in the *ashrama* with me and took my hand in yours. You said you were marrying me by the *Gandharva* rite. Fool that I was, I believed you: I trusted you and I accepted your love. Surely after all this, surely you cannot say that you still do not remember! It is not becoming that a Paurava monarch should speak an untruth: should abandon one who is his. You are the lord of the world and you are my lord. You should not refuse to accept me and your son. I have ever been unfortunate. As soon as I was born my father refused to recognise me and my mother did not want me either. She left

me in the forest and went away. Birds took pity on me and then my father Kanva protected me. I was living a sheltered life. And then you came. After ruining me you have also decided not to admit your actions. I will return to the *ashrama* of my father. You do not have to take me. But please do not refuse to accept your son. He is your son and you must make him the *Yuvaraja*."

Dushyanta's voice was impatient and very harsh. He said: "I do not know of any son born of you. Women are reputed to speak untruth always. How do you expect me to believe you because you are cleverly weaving a plausible story? You are indeed shameless to come to me like this and talk about things which no woman will mention in public. You are a wicked *Tapasi*. Get out of this place. Where is that *rishi* of terrible *tapas* Vishvamitra and where is Menaka! You dare to say that you are the child of these two! You should not talk like this.

"You bring a boy who seems to be strong and well built and you want to make me believe that he is mine. I think you are a low-born woman who has no morals to speak of and you are not fit to associate with good women. If it is wealth you want I will ask my treasurer to give you gold and jewels. Please go somewhere else and ply your trade. But go away from here. I do not want to see you any more."

Shakuntala was past caring. Her sorrow had given her courage and again, she was a mother fighting for the rights of her son. She looked at the king with contempt in her eyes and said: "It is amusing to hear your words accusing me of these terrible things. You deem it fit to see so many sins in me: and yet, they are all the size of a mustard seed compared to the mountainous sin which you have committed and to which you turn a blind eye so deliberately! I am the daughter of a *rishi* and an *Apsara* while you are just an ordinary man and a sinful one at that. I can walk in the skies while you walk on the ground. I am like the Meru mountain and you are to me as small and insignificant as a mustard seed. Your ancestor Ayu was the son of Pururavas and an *apsara* by name Urvashi. And the mother of your son is also the daughter of an *apsara*. No one has, so far, thought of these children as beyond the pale of society.

"Do you not know that speaking truth is as great as learning all the Vedas and bathing in all the holy rivers? There is no *dharma* greater than truth and no sin worse than speaking a lie. The Brahman is nothing but Absolute Truth. Do not insult the Brahman and the *Atman* in you by persisting in your *adharma*. I am telling you that my son will rule this world even if he is not recognised by you. When he was born Indra, the lord of the heaven told me: "Shakuntala, your son will be the emperor." His words will not go false. But now, since there is no witness to the visit you paid to the *ashrama* of Kanva I am going back to my father."

Shakuntala turned away from the throne and began to walk towards the doorway. Her anger could almost be seen in the form of smoke rising from her hair! With great difficulty she controlled her fury and grasping her son by the hand she began to walk out of the palace, out of the city.

THE PENITENT KING

Everyone in the hall was watching this scene with bated breath. Not a whisper could be heard: so absorbing was the drama. Shakuntala had gone past the doorway and no one moved. All on a sudden there came a voice from the heavens and it said: "Dushyanta, this woman is your wife and the young child is, indeed, your son. Shakuntala spoke nothing but the truth. It is up to you to honour her and take the child on your lap. Protect this son as though he is your very life since he will be a greater king than you. Do not insult Shakuntala who has suffered enough."

The *devas* now assembled in the sky and they could be seen. They said: "Take your son at once and proclaim him to be your heir. Shakuntala spoke nothing but the truth when she said that you promised to her that her son would be king after you. A woman's anger will destroy the entire family. Make haste and pacify your noble wife. Call your son by the name BHARATA since we have asked you to take him: (Bhara means honour: protect: guard). Because of your son your family will be named the Bharata line and the world will hence be named BHARATA".

The celestials rained flowers on Shakuntala and Bharata. Dushyanta rushed down from his throne and worshipped the *devas*. He then addressed the entire assembly and said: "You have all heard the words of the *devas* and the *rishis*. I spoke no truth. I knew that this was my child that was born to me. I remembered my dear wife also. But I did not want to accept her and her son on the strength of just her words: I did not want anyone to have any doubt about the purity of the parentage of my son. It was equally necessary for you all to know that Shakuntala is really my lawful wedded wife. I did not want the pointing finger of the world turned towards me saying: 'Dushyanta, the Paurava took into his *antahpura* a woman who claimed to be his wife. She was beautiful and our king did not try to find out if she spoke the truth.' I did not want any slur on the names of any one

of us: not me, nor my wife nor my dear son who is my image. I hope my queen will be gracious enough to forgive my words which were spoken to benefit her, in reality."

Dushyanta walked up to the young boy, Sarvadamana and, taking him by the hand he drew him to his breast and embraced him warmly. He smelt his forehead as was the custom. He then took hesitant steps towards Shakuntala and pacified her. He said: "My beloved, when I met you and took you for wife, my people knew nothing about it. They might not have believed it if I had accepted you without questioning you: without proving to them that you are my queen. The world is always ready to believe ill of others and this is more true in case of a woman and also that of a man in a high position, like a king. That was the only reason why I spoke harshly to you. You must forgive me my words and my behaviour. Pativratas will forgive readily even if their husbands have wronged them really. And you will surely forget the entire episode."

Dushyanta took Shakuntala by the hand and took her to his *antahpura*. He took her to his mother and said. "Mother, look on your daughter and your grandson." Her surprised eyes were questioning. He told her: "Mother, this my wife, is the daughter of Menaka and Vishvamitra. She was brought up by the sage Kanva and she is now your daughter. Shakuntala fell at her feet and the old queen lifted her up and embraced her. She then said: "You are a beautiful woman and you are the fortunate mother of a son who will be monarch of the entire world. He will conquer all the worlds. You must be happy in your new surroundings and make my son happy."

Shakuntala was claimed to be the queen of the kingdom and the king asked the purohits to set an auspicious hour for the young prince to be crowned as the *Yuvaraja*.

The child was formally named Bharata and he was crowned as the *Yuvaraja*. There was great joy in the heart of everyone in the country. Dushyanta ruled the kingdom for a hundred years.

RANTIDEVA

In the line of Bharata was born a prince named Rantideva. The fame of this man has spread in all the three worlds and he is still remembered as the greatest of givers.

He had immense wealth which came to him as easily as the rains from the heavens. But he would give away all that he had: and there came a time when he had nothing which he could call his own. He would be hungry but that would not, in any way, stop him from giving his food to others.

He became very poor and forty-eight days he spent in absolute poverty. He had nothing to eat for these days and his wife with his children was hungry too. On the forty-ninth day, by some chance, he managed to get some rice cooked in milk, ghee, wheat cakes and water. After performing the *anushtanas* he was about to sit down and eat, when a brahmin came. He asked for food. Rantideva told himself: "Lord Narayana is everywhere and it is indeed He who has come to me asking for food." He gave the brahmin the milk and rice which, he thought, was the best part of the food he had. The guest went away satisfied. With a happy heart Rantideva tried to resume his interrupted meal. He gave a portion of what was left to his wife and children. He was planning to eat the rest. A low-born man then came and asked him for food. The prince realised that the Brahman is all pervading and gave him his own share of the food. After he went away another beggar came and with him he had four dogs. Rantideva gave away all that was left of the food he had and he was pleased since he had appeased the hunger of a guest and his animals too. Only water was now left.

Even the water was enough for just one person and when he was on the point of drinking it a *chandala*—an untouchable—came to him and asked for water. The heart of Rantideva was torn with compassion for the *chandala*. He said: "I do not desire wealth: nor do I ask for a place in the

heavens. All I desire is that I should take upon myself the sufferings of others and relieve them of it. When I gave this water to this poor man I feel I have given him new life. My hunger, thirst, tiredness, weakness, sorrow or pain have all left me and with them I have rid myself of all attachments and all delusion;" and he gave the water, the precious water he had with him, to the *chandala*. The guests now revealed their true forms to him and they were Brahma and the devas. They told him that they were pleased with him. Rantideva worshipped them but did not ask them for anything. His mind was set on Narayana and nothing else. Even as he was contemplating on the Lord, the *Avarana* called *Maya* which is made up of the three *gunas* left him like a dream abandons the mind of a man who has woken up. Rantideva became one with the *Paramatma*.

Rantideva was the brother of KURU, one of the famous kings of the line of the moon. He was a descendant of Bharata. The kingdom was very happy under his rule. Kuru performed *tapas* in a spot named Kurujangala and the spot became sanctified and was named KURUKSHETRA.

Divodasa was one of the kings of the lunar race. Many were the descendants of this king. Prisht was one of them. He was the youngest of a hundred sons and his son was DRUPADA. Uparichara Vasu was one of the kings of this line and his son was Brihadratha. This king is never to be forgotten since his son was the famous JARASANDHA. One of the brothers of Brihadratha was the lord of Chedi.

Pratipu was the immediate ancestor of the Kauravas. He had three sons: Devapi, Shantanu and Bahlika. Devapi was never interested in ruling the kingdom and so, abandoning the city he went to the forest early in his life.

Shantanu became king. Once, there was a drought in his kingdom. For twelve years the rain clouds would not give rain to the land. When he wanted to know the reason for this the king Shantanu was told: "Since you are enjoying the kingdom which rightfully belongs to your elder brother, you have been tainted by the sin "*Parivetta*." Approach your brother and

offer the kingdom to him." Shantanu did as he was advised. But, before that Devapi had accepted the cult by name *Pashanda* which was not approved by the Vedas. Indra then decided that this man was unfit to rule the land and sent the rain clouds to wet the dry land. Devapi, however, became a *yogi* and it is said that he is living in a village by name Kalapi. During Kali, the fourth quarter of time, when the line of the moon is dead, he will re-establish it during the next Manvantara, the next Kritayuga.

Bahlika, the other brother of Shantanu was the father of Somadatta. His son was Bhuri and the son of Bhuri was Bhurishravas. Shala was the son of Bhuri.

GANGA AND THE VASUS

There was once a great king named Mahabhashak. He had been to the court of Indra and he was given *Ardhasana* by Indra: an honour conferred on very few kings of the earth.

Ganga had come to the court and her eyes fell on the king. She dropped them immediately but Indra noticed it. He said: "Even though you are a celestial, your eyes are pleased with the looks of a mere mortal. You must therefore be born on the earth as a mortal and be the spouse of this king during his next birth."

When she was walking despondently away, the eight Vasus, who had been cursed to be born on the earth accosted her and each told the other about their misfortunes. The Vasus then said: "Mother Mandakini, please do us a favour. We will be born as your sons. But we dread the thought of living in the world of men. So, please drop us into the river as soon as we are born. This way we will fulfil the curse as well as escape it." Ganga agreed to oblige them.

She kept her promise but one of the Vasus who was the chief miscreant could not be thrown into the river. He had to live in the world of men and he was DEVAVRATA.

Mahabhashak was born again as Shantanu and he married Ganga. Seven of their sons were thrown into the river and when she was about to throw the eighth child he stopped her from doing so. She therefore left him and went away taking her son with her. This son was brought up under the guidance of the divine preceptors and returned to Shantanu later. He was Devavrata.

Shantanu later fell in love with a beautiful woman by name Satyawati. She was the daughter of a fisherman and he wanted the son born of his daughter to be the emperor.

Shantanu could not agree to it since Devavrata was the crown prince. However, the prince came to know about the incident and, without his father knowing about it, he went to the fisherman and brought his daughter to the city as the bride of the king. Devavrata took an oath that he would never marry and that the son of Satyawati would rule the world after his father. So terrible was the oath that the prince has been called BHISHMA ever since then.

Chitrangada was the elder son and Vichitravirya was the other son whom Satyawati bore. Both of them died early: the elder in a fight with a *Gandharva* and the younger, because of a wasting disease. Before he died he was married to Ambika and Ambalika, the daughters of the king of Kasi. He died childless and there was the fear that the Chandravamsha would have no descendants.

Before her marriage with Shantanu Satyawati had been taken by the sage Parashara and to them was born the great VYASA. When Vichitravirya died his mother summoned her son Vyasa and asked him to take the wives of her dead son. Vyasa did and three sons were born: Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura. The last was the son of a maid and so he could not be called a kshatriya.

Dhritarashtra married Gandhari, the princess of Gandhara and she bore him a hundred sons the eldest of whom was named Duryodhana. A daughter named Duhshala was also born.

Because of a curse Pandu could not take his wives Kunti and Madri. With the help of a divine incantation Kunti had learnt long ago, she summoned *Dharma*, Vayu and Indra and her three sons were Yudhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna. Madri, with the help of the same *mantra* summoned the Ashvini twins and her sons were Nakula and Sahadeva.

These five brothers married Draupadi, the daughter of Drupada. Bhima also married Hidimbi and her son was Ghatotkacha. Arjuna had a son named Iravan by a Naga princess by name Ulupi. Chitrangada, the princess of Manipuri was his other wife and her son was named Babhruvahana. But he was a Putrikasuta, meaning, he became heir to the throne of his grandfather since there was no son born to the king. Arjuna married

Subhadra, and her son was Abhimanyu. "Abhimanyu married Uttaraa and you were born as their son," said Shuka to Parikshit. "You were saved from the *astra* of Ashwatthama by the grace of Krishna, the Yadava."

THE YADAVA LINE

Yayati had five sons: Yadu, Druhyu, Turvasu, Anu and Puru. Puru, as we have already seen, became the favourite of his father and Yayati left the entire kingdom in the hands of Puru. His descendant was Shantanu who was the grandfather of the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

Yadu, the eldest was never really interested in ruling a kingdom. He had been made to rule one of the smaller kingdoms. One of his descendants was Vitihotra and his son was MADHU. Madhu's son was VRISHNI and ninety-nine more. Since the later sons were all descendants of these two, they are referred to as the MADHAVAs or the VRISHNIs. A later descendant was DASHARHA and so DAASHARHAs was another name for the Yadava clan. Satvata was one of the Yadavas and he had seven sons: Bhajamana, Bhaji, Divya, Vrishni, Devavrita, Andhaka and Mahabhoja. These became the ancestors of the Andhaka, Vrishni and Bhoja kingdoms.

Vrishni was the father of two sons, one of whom was YUDHAJIT. His son was SINI and the other son was Anamitra. Sini had a son by name SATYAKA. Satyaka's son was YUYUDHANA, better known as SAATYAKI. Anamitra had a son named Nirmana and his sons were SATRAJIT and PRASENA.

Andhaka was one of the Yadavas. His descendant was Aahuka whose sons were DEVAKA and UGRASENA. Devaka had a daughter by name DEVAKI who was given in marriage to VASUDEVA.

The son of DEVAMIDHA was SHURA who had ten sons the eldest of whom was VASUDEVA. When this son was born the heavens made music and the celestial trumpets blared forth the birth of the child who would, later, be the father of Narayana himself in human form: and so Vasudeva was famed as ANAKADUNDUBHI. Sini had a son by name Svayambhoja

and his son was HRIDIKA. SHATADHANU, DEVABAHU and KRITAVARMA were the sons of Hridika. Vasudeva had five sisters: PRITHA, SHRUTADEVI, SHRUTAKIRTI, SHRUTASHRAVAS, and RAJADHIDEVI. Kunti Bhoja was a friend of Shura and was childless and so Shura gave his daughter Pritha to his friend and she was better known as KUNTI, the mother of the Pandavas.

Shrutadevi was given in marriage to Vriddhasarma, the lord of Karusha. The son of Shrutadevi was DANTAVAKRA, the third birth of Jaya, the door keeper of Narayana. His previous births were Hiranyakashipu and Ravana.

Shrutakirti was married to the Kekaya prince and five sons were born to her. These were the famed KEKAYA BROTHERS who took such an active part in the war on the field KURUKSHETRA. Rajadhidevi was married to Jayasena the lord of Avanti and her sons were VINDA and ANUVINDA who were again prominent participants in the great war. Her daughter MITRAVINDA was married to Krishna later.

Shrutashravas was married to DAMAGHOSHA the lord of the Chedis and her son was SHISHUPALA. This Shishupala was the third birth of Vijaya whose earlier births were Hiranyaksha and Kumbhakarna.

Vasudeva had seven wives: Pauravi, Rohini, Bhadra, Madira, Rochana, Ila and Devaki.

The sons of Rohini were GADA, SARANA, BALARAMA and others. Eight sons were born to Devaki six of whom were killed by KAMSA. The seventh was Balarama who was first conceived by Devaki and was later placed in the womb of Rohini by Vishnumaya. Lord Narayana was born as the eighth child of Devaki and Vasudeva.

When there is a dearth of *Dharma* on the earth: when there is an increase in *adharma* the Lord decides to be born in the world of men. To rid the earth of kings who were drunk with power: kings who were *asuras* in the form of human beings, the Lord was born in the Yadava House. The unrighteousness of the lords of the earth were choking her and they had to be destroyed so that the earth could be cleansed with the blood of these

lustly kshatriyas. For this purpose the Lord, with Balarama, the image of Ananta, appeared in the family of the Vrishnis. He performed deeds which can never be forgotten by anyone at any time. So glorious was the *avatara* of the Lord that it is called the best of his *avataras*: the Purnavatara.

During Kali, the fourth Quarter of Time when the world is full of sinfulness, it will be the fame of the Lord during his birth as the son of Vasudeva which will rid men of sorrow and pain and ignorance. Listening to the feats of Krishna even once is enough to rid man of the *Vasanas* caused by *Karma*. It is as pure as the *achamana* performed in the waters of the purest of *tirthas*. He was beloved of the Bhojas, the Vrishnis, Andhakas, Madhus, Shurasenas and Dasharhas. Even more dear was he to the Pandavas.

His form was beautiful. His glances were kind. His smile was captivating. His words were ever full of dignity. His prowess was well known. And, with this *avatara* the Lord charmed the world. With his ears decorated with the earrings shaped like fish, with his smile captivating all those whose eyes rested on his beautiful face, this Krishna performed glorious deeds and pleased the earth. He was born with his own form: with the *shankha* and *chakra* and four arms to Devaki to show them that he had kept his promise and a few moments later took the shape of a human child.

He was brought up in Gokula. He destroyed so many *asuras* and later, many great achievements were his. He lived on this earth for a hundred and twenty five years and then went back to the heavens where he came from. He lived this glorious life on the earth for the good of mankind.

ADHARMA IS RAMPANT

Shuka had stopped talking and Parikshit was waiting for him to continue the narration. But the *rishi* was lost in meditation. He had told the king about Vasudeva and Devaki and his mind now rested at the feet of the Lord who had taken a name and a form to rid the world of the poisons which were choking her. Shuka saw in his mind's eye all the many actions of the Lord. Tears were flowing from his eyes and he could not speak for a while. He opened his eyes after a few moments.

Parikshit said: "My lord, you have so far told me the stories of the kings who ruled in the line of the sun and that of the moon. And you told me about the line of Yadu which was chosen by the Lord for his next *avatara*. You told me that Krishna is the sampurna avatara of the Lord and that Balarama is the image of Ananta. Please tell me in great detail the many events in the life of that great being during his life on this earth.

"Men like you, who have gone beyond the reach of desires, sing the praises of Krishna daily, eternally. Listening to the praises of the Lord, man is cured of the dread disease by name 'Birth' and 'Death'. Even a man who has committed the sin of killing a cow is absolved of his sin if he listens to the stories of the Lord. A *Mukta*, a *Mumukshu* or a *Vishayi*: all three of them reach salvation sooner or later. A *mumukshu* wants to attain *moksha*, that is, release from earthly ties. And his attempts are rewarded. But even a *Vishayi*, one who is still wallowing in the mire by name '*Samsara*' has hopes of salvation if only he makes a sincere attempt to listen to the stories of Krishna. Apart from all these considerations, I have another great impulse which impels me to listen to his stories. During the great war in Kurukshetra Krishna was the raft which carried my ancestors safe across the river called the Kurukshetra war. The river had Bhishma and Drona as the two banks. The waters were made up of the immense army with Jayadratha leading them on. Kripa was the swift current which

carried destruction with it: Karna was the mighty waves which rose high to drown the Pandavas. Shalya was the shark which was lurking inside the waters and he was accompanied by Ashwatthama and Vikarna. Duryodhana was the whirlpool which sucked everything along with it to destruction. Such a river was crossed by the Pandavas because the saviour was Krishna. He made them cross the ocean of despair and reach the shore safely.

And again, when the *Brahmastra* sent by Ashwatthama was threatening to destroy me, the only scion of the Kaurava and Pandava line, it was Krishna who protected me with his *chakra* and his *gada*. I heard it from you and I remember it too. Krishna pervades the inside of all living beings and, in the name of *Antaryami* he grants them *Moksha*. And this same Lord pervades the outside world and in the form of *Kala*, creates the Universe and its attendant *Maya*. Tell me, my lord, why he took the form of a human being: why he was born as the son of Devaki and was brought up by Yashoda: How did he spend his childhood? his youth? his later years? Why did he kill his mother's brother? Why did he have to commit this dread sin? Please tell me in detail all about everything. When I think of the nectar in the form of his stories, I am not hungry or thirsty for ordinary food. Please grant me this favour."

Shuka, the son of Vyasa was immensely pleased with the genuine devotion of Parikshit which prompted him to ask these questions and with a smile he said: "Your mind is, indeed, well established in the right path or else you would not have been impelled by such an eager wish to listen to the stories of Krishna. Listening to the stories of Krishna purifies the one who narrates them, those who listen to them and the one who asks to be told the stories. It is as purifying as the waters of the Ganga which flows from the feet of the Lord. Listen to me carefully and I will tell you in great detail all the many events which led to the Lord Narayana deciding to be born on this sinful earth.

"Once, mother earth, burdened as she was with too many sinners could bear the pain no more. She assumed the form of a cow and went to Brahma, the creator and stood before him with tears in her eyes. When he asked her why she was so despondent she told him how much she was

suffering because of the *adharma* which was rampant: about the sinful kshatriyas who were polluting her. Brahma listened to her and said: "My dear woman, there is only one Being who can help you and that is Narayana." With Mahadeva and the *devas* accompanying him Brahma went and stood on the shore of the Ocean of Milk. There he stood with his mind still and keen as a pointed flame, thinking on the Lord of lords, the saviour of the *devas*. Silently Brahma praised Narayana with the Purushasukta.

"He then heard the voice of the Lord within his mind and he spoke to those who had come with him: "Listen to the words of Lord Narayana," he said. "He is aware of the fever which is burning the frame of mother earth. He has decided to take a form and a name. He will live on the face of the earth till her troubles are over. During that time he wants all of you to take births and stay on the earth. You are to be born in the House of Yadu. As for the Lord, he will be born as the son of Devaki and Vasudeva. Adishesha, his inseparable, will be born as the elder brother of the Lord. She, whose power drowns the entire world in delusion, that Vishnumaya will also be born since the Lord will command her to. And so, with all the denizens of the heavens born on the earth and with the Lord of lords walking the earth for a while with the sole purpose of destroying evil, the world will be cleansed of all her sins and sinners too."

"Mother earth was thus comforted and all the *devas* went back to their abodes with great joy in their hearts since the world would soon be rid of her pain."

A VOICE FROM THE HEAVENS

Shura was the lord of the Yadavas. The Yadavas were the descendants of Yadu, the son of Yayati. His kingdom was divided into two parts: Mathura and Shurasena. There were two brothers by name Ugrasena and Devaka. Ugrasena was ruling the kingdom by name Mathura. He had a son called Kamsa. Devaka had a daughter named Devaki.

A marriage was arranged between Vasudeva and Devaki. Vasudeva was the son of Shura. Kamsa was very fond of his sister Devaki since he had no sister of his own. After the marriage celebrations were over Vasudeva made preparations to take his bride home. A hundred golden chariots were to form the escort for the jewelled chariot which was carrying the newlyweds. Devaka had given four hundred elephants, fifteen thousand horses, two hundred beautiful maidens and a thousand and eight hundreds chariot as dowry for his daughter.

Auspicious music was played while Vasudeva and Devaki took their seats in the beautiful chariot. Kamsa came near and asking the charioteer to descend climbed on to the place himself and took up the reins of the horses in his hand. This was his gesture of affection for (the sake of) his sister.

He had just applied the whip gently to the back of the horses and the procession was on the point of starting. All on a sudden a Voice came from nowhere. The music crashed into silence and all eyes were looking here, there and everywhere to locate where the voice came from. It said: "YOU FOOL!" and it was evident that the voice was addressing Kamsa. The voice paused for a while as though it were waiting for the attention of the entire crowd. Then it went on: "You fool! this woman whom you are taking to her husband's place is going to be the death of you. The eighth child born to her will kill you."

In a flash Kamsa jumped down from his place in the chariot. With one hand he pulled his sister by her long hair and with the other he drew his sword out of the scabbard. He said: "So you are going to be the mother of my killer. Let me see how that can happen. I will, this moment, send you to the abode of Yama. Then I have nothing to fear." His right hand was raised to strike her down and his sword gleamed in the rays of the sun.

Vasudeva ran towards him and caught hold of his right hand. He tried to pacify Kamsa: "Kamsa, you are the scion of a reputed House: the House of Shurasena: and you are a noble-minded prince. Are you going to lose your good name by killing a woman? your sister? You are a wise man. A wise man knows that death is born along with the birth of man. When man is born, one thing is certain: he will have to die. It may be any time. It may be today or it may be a hundred years from today. The *atman* in him holds on to another body and releases this body. Like a man who walks on the road by placing one foot after the other, even so, the soul takes one body after another in an endless chain. It is like the worm crawling on the grass securing one end of itself on the ground before releasing its other end from its hold. And a man's birth and death are always together. They can never be separated. When a man is born there is one fact which is certain and that is: he will die. Death is certain. It is only the time that is a variant. The DEHIN, that is the *atman* which inhabits the body is deathless. The dehin, governed as it is, by the actions he has performed in this birth will in the next birth, assume a form, a body and a name which will be in accordance with his actions and the fruits thereof. When the dehin abandons the body it has already been decided as to what type of life his next is going to be. Death is but an intermittent stage between two births.

"When an ordinary man sees, during the course of the day, the face of a king: or perhaps, hears stories concerning Indra, the lord of the *devas* and such like, these leave an impression on his mind. With these thoughts prevailing in his mind if he goes to sleep, he dreams of them: and in that dream world created by himself he is the king or the lord Indra himself. While he is under the influence of his dreams, man forgets his waking state and his real self which is that of an ordinary man. Even so, like the impressions of the waking state influence the dream state of man, the

actions which man has performed in one lifetime forms the basis for the next lifetime, the next birth of the *dehin*. And, just as a man forgets his waking state when he is living in the dream world, even so, the *dehin* when he assumes the form for his next birth, forgets his previous birth. He loses himself in the delusion that he is what he is: that he is a sinner, or a saint, or a king or a beggar as the case may be, forgetting that this condition has been preordained: not by fate, but by his own actions in his previous birth. When a light, steadfast in itself, is reflected in a pot of water or of oil whose surface is ruffled by the passing breeze, it SEEMS to tremble, to move, to quiver, to be unsteady. But in reality it is the reflecting surface which trembles and not the light. Even so, the *Atman*, conditioned as it is, by the body, mind and intellect, does not realise that it is apart from all this. Because of its ignorance of the Truth about itself, the conditioned *Atman* becomes deluded by many desires, joys and pains which are the heritage of the world man.

"And so the thought that one *atman* will hurt or kill another *atman* is foolish. And being under the delusion that someone will hurt you and so if you kill that person, it is wrong.

"You are a prince, Kamsa. A scion of a noble race and you are extremely fond of your sister. How is it that all your love for her has dried up all on a sudden? How can you find it in your heart to kill your only sister who has just been married? Hardly a few hours have passed since she was given to me. She is your beloved sister and you have loved her till a moment ago. Her eyes are now wide open with fright and her form is trembling with fright and shock. Her eyes are streaming with tears. It is not right that you should kill this poor innocent maiden. Put up your sword, Kamsa. It does not become you to behave like this."

But Kamsa would not listen. He was bent upon killing Devaki who was a source of danger to him. Vasudeva found that his words were of no avail. He thought that he had to do some quick thinking if his wife had to be saved. He told himself:

"A wise man should use his wits and try to avert death which is imminent. If, after one's attempts, the killing is not averted, then man need have no

regrets. It is up to me to think of some way out of this danger to my wife. I will talk to Kamsa and tell him that I will make a gift of her sons to him. My sons are not yet born. Let me wait and see what happens before they are born. She will at least be alive till her children are born. Who knows! Death may come to Kamsa before the child happens (is born). Even if he is alive when my children happen (are born) maybe, he will die at the hands of one of my sons. The heavens have prophesied it and the words cannot be false. When a forest fire is raging one or two trees may remain untouched by the fire: this will be by purest chance. This is but fate. Even so, Devaki, if she is fated to live, may live in spite of the danger to her now. There is nothing wrong in trying to pacify Kamsa with the promise that I will make a gift of the children to him when they are born."

With a face unruffled by the sorrow inside him Vasudeva said: "Kamsa, the heavenly voice did not say that Devaki is going to kill you. The danger is from her children. I promise to give the children to you as soon as they are born. Spare the life of this young bride of mine: this dear sister of yours." Kamsa thought for a moment and felt that Vasudeva's suggestion was good. He lowered his sword and said: "So be it."

SANKARSHANA

Vasudeva and Devaki then entered the palace set apart for them and lived there. In course of time a son was born to them. Vasudeva called him "Kirtiman" and with pain his heart carried the new-born child to the presence of Kamsa according to his promise. After all, to a great saint, there is nothing which is unbearable and a wise man knows that he should never look forward to anything good or bad but take it as it comes, with a mind serene and tranquil. Nothing is too low or beneath his dignity when a man decides to act with detachment. And to a man whose mind is firmly fixed on the feet of the Lord, nothing is impossible. Vasudeva was a man blessed with equanimity and wisdom and it was possible for him to take the child and lay it at the feet of Kamsa and say: "Here is my child. I promised to deliver him to you as soon as he was born."

Kamsa was very pleased with this noble gesture on the part of Vasudeva. With a smiling face he took the child and, placing it in the hands of Vasudeva said: "Please take this child back with you. I am not going to kill it. After all, I have been told that it is your eighth child which will be the death of me. This is your first born. I have no fear from him."

Vasudeva went back with the child in his arms. But knowing the mind of his brother-in-law, he could not quite have faith in his words or his actions.

Narada, the divine sage came to see Kamsa. He spoke to him about many things and among them was the news that the cowherds in Gokula with Nanda as their head, the wives of the Yadavas, their cousins, friends and kinsmen and many others were all *devas* born on the earth at the command of lord Narayana and that the purpose of their birth was the destruction – nay - the annihilation of all *asuras*. Kamsa was taken aback at the news. On top of that Narada said: "I do not think you should be so complacent about the sons of Devaki. The unseen voice proclaimed that her eighth child would kill you and so you are allowing this first child to live. Think

for a moment. What exactly does eighth mean? If you count backwards from the eighth, the first one becomes the eighth. If from the second, again the first will be the eighth. If you count from the third, the second will be the eighth, and so on. I do not think it is wise on your part to be careless about this vital matter." After sowing the seed of doubt in the mind of Kamsa the *rishi* went away singing the praises of Narayana as was his habit.

Kamsa was now almost sure that the new-born child was Narayana and that it was born to kill him. He rushed to the house of Vasudeva and snatching it from the mother's hand, killed it. And he kept on Killing every child as soon as it was born. Is it not a feat that in this world, a man who is greedy enough to save his life at the cost of another's will not hesitate to kill his father, mother, brothers, friends: in short, everyone else? Kamsa was also such a man. And again, Narada had told him that he was himself a great *asura*, by name KALANEMI who, in his previous birth, had been killed by Narayana. And so he was sure that the child of Devaki would surely kill him if he did not take proper precautions. Kamsa began to hate the Yadavas and he started harassing them. Ugrasena was the ruler of the kingdom of Yadu, Bhoja and Andhaka. Kamsa did not hesitate to suppress his father and put him in prison. He then began a rule of tyranny over the entire kingdom.

Jarasandha, the king of Magadha had given his daughters to Kamsa in marriage, and so, Kamsa had many powerful allies. Jarasandha, Pralambha, Baka, Chanura, Trinavarta, Aghasura, Mushtika, Arishta, Dvividha, Putana (this was a woman), Keshi, Dhenuka. Excepting Jarasandha all the others were *asuras*. Along with these, many kings were friendly with Kamsa. The Yadavas, harassed as they were by Kamsa. took refuge in countries like Kuru, Panchala, Kekaya, Salva, Vidarbha, Nishadha, Videha and Kosala. Some of them thought it wiser and more politic to stay with him and become his adherents. Six of Devaki's children had been killed and her seventh had already assumed a form in her womb. Adishesha, one of the aspects of Narayana had entered her womb to bring joy and sorrow to the mother who bore him.

Lord Narayana knew that the time had come when the *adharma* in the world had to come to an end. He called Yogamaya and He commanded her thus: "Devi, go at once to Gokula where the cowherds are ruled by Nanda. Vasudeva's wife Rohini is there. The other wives of Vasudeva have gone into hiding, fearing the wrath of Kamsa. My *amsha* who is Adishesha, has entered the womb of Devaki at my command. You must now go there, extract the child from the womb of Devaki and place it inside Rohini. The next child which Devaki will bear will be myself. You will, at the same time, be born as the child of Yashoda and Nanda. Because of this great event you will, in future times, be known as Ishwari who will grant children to the childless and grant all the boons people ask of you. Men will worship you with Naivedyas, with incense and with sacrifices. People will build temples for you and you will be called by many names: DURGA, BHADRAKALI, VIJAYA, VAISHNAVI, KUMUDA, CHANDIKA, KRISHNA, KANNIKA, MAYA, NARAYANI, ISHANI, SHARADA, AMBIKA.

"As for the child who will be transferred from Devaki's womb to that of Rohini he will be known as SANKARSHANA: and RAMA, since he will charm the entire world: and BALA since he will be very powerful."

Yogamaya took the permission of the Lord and descended to the earth. Devaki went into a trance and the transfer of the child was performed without her knowing about it. The next day people said that the child had been lost even before it was born. Kamsa also heard the same story. Sankarshana grew in the womb of Rohini.

THE BIRTH OF KRISHNA

Lord Narayana who is the Soul of the Universe, who is the refuge of everyone, entered the mind of Vasudeva. People were amazed to see glow that emanated from Vasudeva. He shone like the noonday sun since the Lord had found an abode in him.

Devaki received in her the embodiment of auspiciousness, the essence of all the wealth and glory of the Universe, the Soul of the Universe, the indestructible *Atman* which resides in every living and non-living things. Devaki had the great good fortune of becoming the mother of the Lord of lords. Like the east glows with the newly risen moon she looked beautiful. Her form was radiant. But the world could not see it since she was a captive in the house of Kamsa. Her glory was hidden like a lamp placed inside a pot: like Sarasvati, the goddess of learning is hidden in the mind of a pandit who is greedy about his learning and refuses to impart it to others.

Kamsa, however, knew that she was glowing with an unearthly light. Devaki was holding the Lord in her womb and the entire house was bathed in a strange light since she was there. Her lips bore a beautiful smile and Kamsa, looking at her spoke to himself and said: "Devaki has never looked like this before. It seems to me, this strange glow in her is there because of the child that is to be born. I think it is Narayana who is to be born and that is why she looks so very beautiful. I must take proper precautions lest he should do what he was promised to do! I do not want to die. I could kill her now. But then, she is a woman: she is my sister and she is with child. Each killing in itself is an unforgivable crime and the world will condemn me if I kill her now. All my fame and all my wealth and even my life-span will suffer because of this sin. Is it not a fact that a man who lives in constant association with terrible deeds is but a walking corpse? When he

is alive people will curse him and when he dies he will go to the hell which goes by the name *Andhatamas'*."

Kamsa desisted from killing his sister and awaited the birth of the child with impatience. The thoughts of the coming child had become with him, and an obsession. While sitting down on a seat he would suddenly stop and look at the seat since he thought he saw a child on the seat. He would tell himself: "There was a child on the seat and I was about to sit on it! Terrible!" He would then go to bed and try to lie down and there too he would see the child. He would move away from there and stand far away. Looking down he would see a child at his feet. He would go and sit down to eat. Instead of food he would see the child on the plate. He would get up in disgust and walk from there. At every step the child would persist in lying in his way. To Kamsa the entire world seemed to be pervaded by the Lord of lords in the form of a mere child.

The time was drawing near. Brahma, Mahadeva and all the devas went to the presence of Devaki and stood in front of her with folded palms and praised the Lord. They said: "Salutations to thee, O Lord! You were gracious enough to take different forms at different times to save us from despair. You were Matsya, Hayagriva, Kurma, Narasimha, Varaha, Hamsa, Parasurama, Rama, Yajna and Kapila. Many other forms were assumed by you. Now, when the earth needs you, please save the world from the great suffering she is undergoing. We bow down to you."

They then spoke to Devaki and said: "You are a fortunate princess since you will be the mother of Lord Narayana Himself. Adishesha has already been born to you and now this child which is to be born will be the saviour of the world. You need have no more fear of Kamsa. His days are numbered." Having pacified her and encouraged her Brahma and the rest of the celestial host vanished from their presence.

The time was auspicious. It had the charm of all the six seasons. The planets and the stars were in the positions from where they showered peace and joy to the world. The four quarters were clear and placid and the star ROHINI was in the ascent: the star which is governed by Prajapati. The sky was clear and studded with stars which were shining brightly. The

waters in the rivers were clear and sweet. The lakes were filled with flowers: lotuses and Utpalas. The trees were covered with flowers. A gentle breeze was flowing and it brought soft and intense scents of the flowers with it. The fires which were kindled by the brahmins were burning without smoke and an air of peace and tranquillity pervaded the earth. The minds of all men were happy for no reason. Only Kamsa was unhappy. The divine Dundubhi was being played in the heavens: Kinnaras were singing and so were the *Gandharvas*. *Siddhas* and *Charanas* were chanting words of praise: the *apsaras* and the *Vidyadhara* women were dancing with abandon. The *devas* and the *rishis* showered flowers on the earth. There was heard a great rumbling from the clouds which was like the roar of the ocean. It was midnight. The *muhurta* was ABHIJIT and Narayana, who is in the hearts of everyone, was born to Devaki, the wife of Vasudeva.

Devaki gave birth to Narayana like the east brings forth the glorious moon.

KRISHNA IS TAKEN TO GOKULA

Vasudeva looked at the new-born child and he was amazed. It was not an ordinary child. *Narayana* had appeared in his real form. Vasudeva saw that it was not a child but *Narayana* himself who was lying there in his arms. He looked at the child's eyes: at his four arms: at the *Shankha*, *Chakra*, *Gada* and *Padma* in his four hands. Vasudeva saw the famed mark on the chest of the child: the mark known as *Srivatsa*. The jewel *Kaustubha* was gleaming on his neck and he was wearing yellow silk. Dark as a rain cloud, he made the entire place shine with the splendour of his crown, his earrings which were shaped like fish, with the glory that was himself. Vasudeva looked at this glorious form and kept on looking without moving his eyes. It looked as if he was drinking the beauty of the child with his eyes. He came to his senses realising that he had just become the father of a child and being a *kshatriya* he had to perform the usual rites for the child. He worshipped a thousand brahmins and with his clothes dripping with the holy waters of the river he gave away a thousand cows as gifts. All this he did in his mind, promising to himself that he would do it all the moment he could do so.

Vasudeva then placed the child on the ground. With folded palms and with his head bowed in humble worship he spoke words of prayer to the *Paramapurusha*. He then said: "In your infinite kindness to the earth and to poor Vasudeva and Devaki, you have assumed the form of a human being. How can I speak the words of thrill that are rushing to my lips? I am no longer unfortunate. I am the most fortunate among men and my wife has the honour of being the mother of the Lord himself. Great is your mercy towards us."

Devaki then said: "You are the sole destroyer of everything. Please have pity on mother earth and on us and put an end to the tyranny of Kamsa. And please let not Kamsa see you in this form: the form to see which *Yogis*

spend endless years in penance: the form which is granted to the sight of very few men. It is not meant for ordinary eyes like mine to dwell on your divine form. Please hide this glorious vision. Your birth has made me sad. Unlike other mothers I cannot keep you for myself. You know, my lord, how Kamsa has killed all the children I have borne all these years. Even now, word would have reached him that you have been born. He must now be rushing towards you with his sword held aloft in his right hand. Let him not see you in this form. He does not deserve it." The Lord said: "Devaki, you are the purest of women. In your previous *janma* you were born in the line of Svayambhu Manu and your name was PRISHNI: this Vasudeva went by the name of SUTAPAS. You both were commanded by Prajapati to create and both of you performed strenuous *tapas*. Your mind was set on me and only me. The penance went on for twelve thousand years. I was pleased with your devotion and appeared before you in this very form which you see now. I asked what boon you wanted. You were both deluded by *Maya* at the moment. After all the severity of the penance you had performed you would have had to ask for *Moksha*: release from human bondage. But you wanted ME as your son. You then became involved in the pleasures of the world and in course of time I was born to you. I was called PRISHNIGARBHA and became famed for my good qualities. Later you both were famed by the names KASHYAPA and ADITI. I was then born as your son. UPENDRA was my name but I am better known as VAMANA who stopped Bali's *yajna*. This is the third time I am born as your son. It is to prove to you that Narayana has kept his word, that he would be born as your son again and again, that this form was assumed by me. If you do not see me in my real form you will again get involved in the *Maya* of the world and will be unable to attain *Moksha*. But now you will think of me as your son and also realise that I am the BRAHMAN. After this birth you will attain *Moksha*. You can be sure of that."

The Lord was silent and even as they were looking on, his divine form was lost and he became an ordinary child in their eyes. Vasudeva had been commanded to take the new-born child and leave it in Gokula in the house of Nanda, the chief of the cowherds. He was to bring back with him the child which had been born to Yashoda, the wife of Nanda. Vasudeva and Devaki were wondering how this could be achieved, considering that the

doors were all locked and armed guards were stationed at every doorway. Kamsa had doubled the guards ever since he knew about the child to be born to Devaki.

Vasudeva placed the child in a small wicker basket and covered him with his upper cloth. He held the basket in his hands and looked in despair at the locked doorways.

A miracle was seen. The locks snapped open on their own accord and with amazement writ on their faces they watched the doors swing open. Vasudeva walked towards the door and found that the watchmen were all sunk in deep sleep. He walked out without any trouble and reached the banks of the river Yamuna. The sky was suddenly overcast and dense black clouds gathered in the heavens. Rain began to fall in torrents and Vasudeva did not know how he was going to cross the river which threatened to brim her banks. Placing his faith in the Lord Vasudeva stepped in to the waters. Without his knowing, Adishesha followed him: and with his thousand hoods he protected the child from the rain. The river Yamuna whose waters had swollen so much because of the downpour caused by Indra himself, suddenly gave way to Vasudeva even as the ocean gave way to Sri Ramachandra when he wanted to cross the sea and reach Lanka.

Vasudeva reached Nanda Gokula following the commands of the Lord. He went straight to the home of Nanda. He reached the apartments of Yashoda, Nanda's queen. Vasudeva saw a child lying by her side. Gently he lifted that child after placing his own son by the side of Yashoda. He placed the other child in his basket. It was a girl. The entire Gokula was asleep: in a trance.

Vasudeva traced his steps back to Mathura and came back to his prison. He placed the child by the side of Devaki and he found that the doors had locked themselves. He placed the irons on his ankles and hands. And they waited for the coming of Kamsa.

The palace was roused by the lusty cries of a new-born child. The guards who were at the doorways rushed to the presence of Kamsa and said: "My lord, Devaki's child has been born. We hurried here at once to inform you about it."

Kamsa was lying on his bed, trying to sleep. Sleep had forsaken him long ago. Ever since he knew that Devaki was with child, that it was her eighth child, he knew no peace. Seeing the unearthly halo which had surrounded her he knew that the child to be born would be the death of him. And he could not sleep. When he heard that the child had been born he snatched his sword and with his hair flying in the breeze he rushed to the prison which held Devaki and Vasudeva.

Devaki saw him and thought it was the god of death who was coming towards her: so terrible was the look on his face. She fell at his feet and said: "My beloved brother, please do not kill this child.

Spare her to me because it is a girl which has been born to me. Every one of my sons I gave you and you killed them all. But this is a girl. What can a poor girl do? I am sure she is incapable of fulfilling the prophecy which has frightened you. Spare her. Killing a woman is a terrible sin. Do not commit that folly. I was once dear to you. In the name of that love I ask you. Please give me this one child." She held the child to her bosom and held it tight. Tears were bathing the form of the new-born child.

Devaki's prayers fell on deaf ears. Kamsa was like one possessed and the fear of death had made a beast of him. He snatched the child roughly from the weak hands of his sister and, holding the child with its tender legs he tried to dash it against a piece of stone.

The child which was Vishnumaya slipped from his grip and flew into the sky. Amazed at what had happened everyone looked up. There, high up in

the sky, they saw the form of Devi. She held several weapons of destructions in her eight hands: her neck was adorned with a garland of sweet flowers. Jewels gleamed from her neck, arms and feet. She was holding a bow, a trident, arrows, sword, conch, discus, and a mace. *Siddhas, Charanas, Gandharvas, Apsaras, Kinnaras* and other celestial beings were around her and they worshipped her. From above the world, from the sky where she was poised she spoke to Kamsa and said: "Stupid fool! How foolish of you to try and kill me! What can you achieve by killing me? Your enemy, the lord, the child which is destined to kill you has already been born. Do not kill innocent people without cause: for no reason." She vanished from the sky and the earth was left in darkness.

The miracle which happened and the words of Vishnumaya had a strange effect on Kamsa. He was suddenly ashamed of himself for his spite against Vasudeva and Devaki. Full of remorse, Kamsa, with his own hands removed the handcuffs and chains which had bound their hands and feet and said: "Oh! My dear sister! My dear Vasudeva! I feel extremely sorry for all that has happened to both of you because of me and my cruel nature. In my love for myself I became a demon and killed all your children. My heart had become empty of all compassion and love for others. I dread to think of the future: about the special hell which will be waiting for me when I am dead. I have been guilty of child murder."

For a while he was silent and then spoke again: "I have known that human beings speak lies to serve their purpose. But till now I did not realise that even the gods speak lies. Believing the words of an unknown voice from the skies I killed my sister's children. Devaki, please forgive me and please do not grieve for your dead children. This earthly body of ours is transient. It is like a vessel made out of mud. Like a pot, when broken, loses its form, even so, the human body loses its form when death comes. But the *atman* inside it is like the air in the pot, and is never destroyed. Here there is no cause to grieve. The one who knows, does not feel sad at the recurrence of death and birth. But the ignorant person who does not know the truth about Brahman gets deluded by the EGO. He feels that the *Atman* and the body are inseparable. Life on this earth with the *Samsara* where man marries woman and gets children is the life led by an ignorant

man and to him the earth is full of pain and pleasure alternately depending on whether he is with his children and those dear to him or parted from them by death and such like. As long as man is caught in the web of *Maya* he will not learn the Truth and so he keeps on grieving.

"But you are both different. You know that every being born on this earth has been born so because of the *karma* it has performed in its previous birth. Ignorant people think ignorantly and consider that someone has killed and someone has been killed. But you know that it is not so. And so, armed as you are, with real wisdom, please be gracious enough to forgive this sinner Kamsa." With tears flowing from his eyes he fell at the feet of the two erstwhile captives and clasped them in his hands.

Devaki and Vasudeva being very noble and good, realised that he was genuinely repentant and unhappy. They raised him up and told him that they had quite forgotten his misdemeanour. Devaki smiled at him and said: "My dear brother, what you say is quite right. It is only the unwise, those uninitiated in the truth about the *atman*: it is they who suffer from the pain of separation and pleasure due to passing things. So long as the difference between illusion and reality is not realised, feelings of sadness, happiness, sorrow, fear, hatred, avarice, obsession, arrogance and such like develop in the heart of man. They envelop his thinking powers and blind him. When a man hates another he hates himself since the same *atman* is residing in the bodies of the hater and the hated. If this truth is realised man will never more be involved in the world of pain."

When he found out how noble and forgiving they were Kamsa felt even more humble and, taking leave of them went back to his palace with a light heart.

KAMSA'S CAMPAIGNS

When the sky is overcast with dense clouds it is not possible for the sun to be seen. At times, the clouds do part for a moment and there is a gleam of sunlight caught by the eye. But the clouds cover it again and darkness is there again and the gleam of sunlight is just a memory which fades only too soon. It was even so with Kamsa. When he was in the presence of good people like Vasudeva and Devaki who were so good that the Lord chose them to be His parents, the goodness was contagious and Kamsa felt that he had understood the Truth about one's life on earth: about the foolishness in thinking of oneself as living for ever: about loving every living being since we are all the reflections of the same light.

Once he left their presence and went back to his natural company the mind of Kamsa became clouded as before. The next day he called his ministers and he told them about the strange happenings in the prison about the words spoken by Vishnumaya.

His ministers, who were all haters of the *devas* and who were all embodiments of ignorance and foolishness and pride, spoke with great passion and vehemence. The suggestions offered by them were profuse. They said: "It is obvious that the child is kept somewhere secretly: most probably away from the city of Mathura. Maybe, another city, a village, in the suburbs, perhaps where the cowherds live. The sensible way to tackle the problem is to destroy all children around us who are less than a year old; have not cut their milk teeth yet. The *devas* can do nothing to harm you. They have all been defeated by you so often in the wars that they are scared of you. Why, even the mention of your name is enough to drive them away from any place. As for Narayana, your arch enemy, what can he do? He is always hiding somewhere, afraid to come out and face you in a real fight. Lord Mahadeva is but half a man and the other half is his wife. What can he do? Brahma is far inferior to these two. Indra, as you know, is powerless against you and your prowess.

"Even so, it is but right that we should take proper precautions. We should pull out roots of our enemies when they are tender. When a disease finds a home in the human body we should find out what it is, where it is, and attend to it immediately. If we ignore it for a while it will grow suddenly or gradually, and later, it will be the death of the body: even Indriyas. If they are not controlled and brought to bay at once, they will run away with the wisdom of man like horses drag a chariot when the reins are not held properly.

"Narayana is the refuge of the *devas*. He is the very root of the tree called *Svarga*. It has been said that he is found wherever *Sanatana dharma* is practised. And the very foundation, the key stone of this *dharma* is the chanting of the Vedas, cows, brahmins who are forever performing *yagas*, *yajnas*, *tapas*. The best way, my lord, to destroy this Narayana is to kill all these brahmins who study and propagate the Vedas: kill the *rishis* who perform *tapas*: kill the cows in the *ashramas* since they give butter and ghee to feed the fires in the *ashramas*: the sacrificial fires.

"The several forms of Narayana are reputed to be the brahmins, cows and the Vedas and abstract qualities like *Tapas*, Truth speaking, self control, subduing the Indriyas: concentration in one's meditation, compassion, patience and *Yagas*. Narayana loves the *devas* and the entire celestial host led by Mahadeva and Indra. He is a well known hater of the *asuras*. As we told you before the *devas* and the others can do you no harm. It is only Narayana who is our only danger."

Wearing the noose of death round his neck thinking that it was a garland of flowers, Kamsa forgot all the many good qualities he was born with. He was pleased with his ministers who, to him, were his well wishers, friends. At once he made arrangements for *asuras* to go in all the four quarters and harass the many brahmins and the *yajnas*. The *asuras*, went about their tasks happily, not knowing that death was fast approaching every one of them. Is there anything more powerful than the hurting of good men to shorten one's life, to take away his wealth, his fame and righteousness, his wife and children, his hope of salvation? Nothing can help an evil doer who is ever eager to perform evil.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

When Vishnumaya was born to Yashoda, everyone in Gokula went into a trance and they only knew that a child had been born to Yashoda. They did not even know whether it was a boy or a girl. After Vasudeva came and the exchange of the children had taken place, they all woke up from the deep sleep and news spread like wild fire: A SON HAD BEEN BORN TO NANDA. The entire Gokula rushed to the house of their chief to see the child. There he lay, the Lord of the Universe, by the side of his 'mother'. Small and frail, held in her arms, they said he looked like a blue lotus. Nanda was in the seventh heaven. He had a son who was beautiful as the moon. He made the brahmins recite the holy *mantras* to avert all evil and he gave away gifts to many people. The purification ceremony, by name *Jatakarma*, was performed for the new-born child.

The earth is purified by *Kala*, Time: the human body is purified by bathing in clean water: dirty vessels and such like, by cleaning with cleansing agents: the child which has been born of the womb of a woman is cleansed by *Jatakarma*: brahmins are cleansed by *yagas*: wealth is purified by giving: the senses, the Indriyas, by *Tapas*: the mind when it is made to realise contentment and the *Atman*, when it has learnt *Atmavidya*, the Truth about itself.

The entire Gokula had a festive look since a prince had been born there: Every house was decorated and the streets were all sprinkled with perfumed water. The women wore gay coloured clothes and the *gopas* and the *gopis* were dancing in the streets. The women waved silver plates filled with saffron water in front of the child and said: "May you live long! Let no evil befall you!"

Rohini had given birth to a son too and she was sister of Yashoda. She was hiding in Gokula to escape the tyranny of Kamsa, who had been harassing all the Yadavas and their women. So the two sisters with their sons were

glowing like queens in the midst of the *Gopis*. Rohini's son was fair and Yashoda's son was dark.

Nandagopa was one of the vassals of Kamsa and the time had come when he had to make his annual visit to Mathura to pay his tribute to the treasury as was the custom. He went to Mathura. Hearing that Nanda had come to Mathura Vasudeva went to see him. They had been very close friends and they embraced each other with affection like the body welcomes the soul. Vasudeva then said: "I heard that you are the father of a son. I am indeed fortunate that I am able to see you and tell you about my happiness at the good fortune that has befallen you. You are very dear to me and yet it is very rarely that we meet. In this world, those who love each other, those who would love to be together always, are very rarely granted their wish. We are like pieces of driftwood floating on the surface of the waters of a river which flows on and on. We meet for a while and for a while we are together and then time parts us and our paths become different. I am happy, however, to know that you are surrounded by your people in Gokula. I hope that my son is well since you and I are like one soul with two bodies, he is as much my son as yours!"

Nanda spoke with tears in his eyes and said: "You have been very unfortunate. Your sons have been killed by Kamsa and the last one was a girl child and she too, I am told, left you and flew into the sky. Fortune, good or bad, rules the life of man, and we are powerless in its presence. Misfortune has been your constant companion so far. Who knows, times may change. However, man who does not set any great store by the wayward ways of fortune, is one who has understood the Truth about the *Atman*. And such a man is unmoved by the vagaries of fate."

Vasudeva replied suitably and said: "My friend, do not tarry in Mathura too long. You have paid your dues to the king. I feel that there are evil omens to be seen in Gokula. It is better that you hurry back to your wife and child."

They took tender leave of each other and Nanda proceeded towards Gokula in a cart drawn by high-born bullocks. His mind was uneasy since Vasudeva had spoken of evil omens. He knew that Vasudeva would not have spoken thus unless something was threatening them. Praying to Narayana, Nanda hurried his dear bullocks and travelled towards Gokula.

Kamsa thought that the time had come when he should act according to the advice of his evil mentors. He decided to begin the killing of all the newborn children in the country. He thought up methods of doing it and finally decided on the right person to execute his orders.

The wife of one of his mentors went by the name of Putana and she was a dreadful *asura* woman. Kamsa summoned her to his presence and told her what he wanted her to do. Without a qualm she agreed to do as she was bid.

From that moment she began wandering at will in the nearby cities, villages, places where people had their homes. Is it not a fact that the *asuras* can show their power only in places where the praises of the Lord are not heard? When such is the case, how could Putana ever hope to do harm to the Lord himself who was living in Gokula in human form?

Wandering as she was, at will, one day Putana, who was flying in the air saw Gokula and since she had not gone there yet, decided that she would go there. With her powers of *Maya*, she changed herself into a beautiful woman and she went to the sacred spot by name Gokula. She looked around and seeing a large house where a number of women were coming and going, she entered the house. It happened to be the palace of Nanda. Putana had tied up her hair in a loose knot and had placed a wreath of jasmines on it. With her wide hips and lovely breasts she caught the eyes of everyone there. She was indeed charming. Her hair was curly and fell in tight little curls around her face and the passing breeze played with it lending charm to her face. She smiled often and in her hand she held a lotus. The *gopis* thought that it was the goddess Lakshmi herself: so beautiful was Putana in her disguise. She won the hearts of the simple *gopis* who were all guileless.

She entered the house of Nanda and reached the courtyard where the Lord was. He had concealed all His glory in the form of a small child and he was like a live coal covered with ashes. It was by chance that Putana saw this beautiful child in the cradle. As soon as she set foot in the courtyard the child closed his eyes. Perhaps the Lord knew that she would be blessed with his grace if his eyes fell on her! and that would indeed, be a hindrance to his self-appointed task: destroying the wicked and protecting the good, for which purpose he had been born!

Putana looked all around her. It so happened that no one was about. She lifted the child from the cradle. Taking him in her arms she sat down and placed him on her lap. It was as foolish as taking a live cobra which is sleeping and placing it on your neck thinking that it is just a piece of string. So she sat there. The maids and others who were passing by did not pay any attention to this stranger who was having the child on her lap. They were so overcome by her beauty and apparent charm that they did not attach any importance to her actions.

Putana then loosened the knot which held her blouse tight and, with the child on her lap, she put his lips to her breast which was filled with poisoned milk. The Lord held her breast firmly in his two little hands and began to suck lustily. After a few seconds she realised that he was sucking her very life. She was in great pain and all her vitals were tortured when he sucked at her breast. She began to scream. Her purpose was all forgotten. "Leave me! Leave me!" she kept on saying and she tried to pluck her breast away from the mouth of the child. But it was of no avail. She shrieked in agony and the earth, the sky, even the planets shook in response: so loud was her pain-filled voice. People thought that there was a thunderbolt which had fallen on the earth somewhere. With a last cry of agony Putana lost her life.

Her beautiful form was all gone. She fell down dead and she looked like the great Vritra after he had fallen a victim to Indra's Vajra. When she fell, trees around her to the extent of six krosas fell like pieces of twigs. People rushed to the spot where the noise came from and found this mountain of a woman fallen on the ground. They stood amazed and suddenly they saw Nanda's little son playing on her immense breast. They

rushed towards him and carried him away from there. Yashoda and Rohini then performed so many of the rites which are meant to protect a child from evil and they all stood around the form of the dead Putana. Yashoda hurried inside with the child and having fed him at her breast she put him to sleep and covered him with a piece of silk.

Nanda arrived just then from Mathura and he was taken aback at the scene which met his eyes. He told everyone: "Indeed my friend Vasudeva has divine gifts. Or else how could he know that there would be danger here? He told that evil omens would be seen in Gokula and asked me to hurry home."

It took all the *gopas* a very long time to move the body of Putana. They had to cut her up like they would, logs of wood and piling them all up they set fire to it. There was a great conflagration and the sky was lit up by the glow from the pyre. When the body was burning people around were amazed at something unusual. There arose from her burning body the perfume of sandalwood and divine scents. No one could explain it.

Putana who was an *asuri* was killed by the Lord. He had drunk of her breast and all her sins had been sucked out of her. She had become purified since she had touched the Lord and he had touched her with his lips. Fortunate Putana. When the grace of the Lord is given to a woman who wanted to feed him with poison, what then, of those who worship him with milk and Payasa as offerings? Fortunate indeed was Yashoda and the *gopis* and the cows in Gokula who fed him with milk. They reached *Moksha* from which no one comes back to the earth.

The cowherds could not connect the divine scent which pervaded the place and the burning body of Putana who had now become Punita. They just wondered as to where the perfume came from and went to their homes.

Nanda was then told about how a beautiful woman came into Gokula and had deceived everyone there. No one had guessed that she was an *asuri* and it was the good fortune of all of them and the grace of Narayana that protected the child from the dread calamity which might have overtaken him. They talked about it far into the night and went to sleep, still unable to explain how the child had managed to escape from the dreadful woman

and once again they offered up prayers to Narayana for protecting the child.

PHALASHRITI

"Anyone who listens to the story by name Putanamoksham ' with attention and reverence will be blessed by the good fortune of having his mind eternally set on Krishna. He will have unswerving devotion to Krishna."

King Parikshit said: "My lord, you have told me the stories or the many *avatars* of Narayana. Matsya *avatara* was wonderful and so were the others: and the purpose for which the Lord assumed these *avatars* have amazed me and filled my ears and my mind with undiluted pleasure. But this *avatara* of the Lord, I feel is the most beautiful of them all. I have been told that listening to the stories of Krishnavatara makes the despondency in the mind vanish. And the many desires which make a man unhappy, also vanish. The mind becomes cleansed of all impure thoughts. The mind thinks only of the Lord and it wants only the company of the devotees of Narayana. Please have the goodness to fill the last few days of my life with the infinite pleasure of listening to the praises of Krishna and about the incidents in Gokula which thrilled all the men who were fortunate to have been with Him."

Shuka continued the narration of Krishna's lilas.

SHAKATASURA AND TRINAVARTA

The little son of Nanda and Yashoda was fast growing up. He was now three months old and he had just learnt how to turn over on his belly! There was great joy in the heart of Yashoda when she saw her son lying on his stomach and smiling at her. The day happened to be the Janmanakshatra of the child and so she decided to have a great celebration. She had invited all the people in Gokula and the large group of men and women went to the banks of the Yamuna. In the midst of music and dancing and the chanting of mantras by the brahmins the child was given a bath and gifts were given away to everyone who had come.

Yashoda looked at her son found that he looked tired out, and sleepy because of the bath and excitement of the day. She therefore placed him in a cradle which was placed under the cart in which they had come to the river bank.

She was sitting with all her friends and did not notice that the child had got up after a while. He cried and no one paid any attention to him. He became very angry and with his little legs more tender than the creeper clinging to a tree, he kicked the cart whereunder he was placed. There was a great noise and the people saw that the cart had fallen far away as though it had been flung away. All the vessels and pots which had been placed in it had been either broken or crushed: and the wheel had come off the cart. The cart had fallen on its side. No one knew what had happened.

Some of the little boys who had been there said that the child had kicked the cart and this was the result. The people did not know how it could be possible for such a small child to perform such a feat. They thought for a while and the mother gathered the child in her arms thanking God that nothing had happened to her darling.

No one knew that Kamsa's henchman was an asura by name Shakata. He had come to Gokula and he had entered the wheel of the cart with the intention of running away with the child and later, killing it. The Lord knew what he was up to and with a kick of his sacred foot he killed the asura and no one knew what had happened.

Once Yashoda, after bathing her son sat in the courtyard with the child on her lap. All on a sudden she found that the child was very heavy. She did not know why and thinking that it was just her imagination she tried to forget it. But the weight become more and more and finally, finding it unbearable she placed the child on the ground. Seeing that he was sleeping she went inside the house to mind several duties of the household.

Another of Kamsa's myrmidons, Trinavarta by name, had come to Gokula to kill the new-born child. Ever since Putana died they must all have come to the conclusion that the danger to their king lay in Gokula: in the form of the dark-skinned child which was the darling of everyone.

Trinavarta took the form of a whirlwind. Everyone in Gokula was suddenly overpowered by the fury of the sudden blast. There was so much power in the current and so much of dust that no one was able to see anything. They had to close their eyes and hold on to something firm lest they should be swept off their feet. The eight quarters were resounding with the noise of the whirlwind and there was darkness everywhere. People were rushing here and there in panic. Suddenly the fury of the wind abated. They could now open their eyes. Yashoda, who rushed to the courtyard to take her child, could not find it. She called out to others and they all looked everywhere for the child and could not find it. Stones and dust were falling from the sky incessantly, blinding them off and on and still the search went on for the child which could not be found. The entire Gokula was plunged in woe since their dear beloved child was nowhere to be seen.

Trinavarta in the meantime, had carried the child far away, high in the sky. His aim was to rise as high as he could and then to dash the child to the ground and thus kill it. The child, however, had become very heavy: so heavy that he found it impossible to lift the child. He tried to drop it but he could not. The child caught his neck between its two little hands and

Trinavarta found himself choking. It seemed to him as though a huge rock had been tied to his neck and that it was throttling him. He could let his breath come only in great gasps: and even that stopped after a while. Trinavarta was dead. When the fury of the whirlwind had abated the people of Gokula saw the huge form of the asura fall down. In his arms they found the child. They took the child which was clinging to the immense chest of the dead asura and gave it to Yashoda. No one could understand how it happened: how the child escaped death at the hands of one who, evidently, was an asura. In their joy at getting him back no one paid much attention to the fact that this young child had killed the asura. They spoke to themselves and said: "Those who wish evil to others are destroyed: they die because of their own evil nature." Someone else said: "It is fortunate that Narayana looks kindly on us and ours or else how could the child have lived?" A third man said: "Nanda has performed so many good actions: he has spent so much wealth on charity and he is such a good man that God is good to him."

One day Yashoda was feeding her son. He drank his fill and he was playing with her for a while. Suddenly he felt sleepy and Yashoda was looking at him with a tender smile: he was yawning and his little mouth was small and round like a flower. When she was thus looking at his mouth which was open, Yashoda was taken aback at what she saw. Inside the little mouth she saw the Universe. She saw the sky: the three worlds: the clusters of stars: the sun, the moon, *agni*, *vayu* and the lords of all the quarters. She saw the oceans and all the islands. She saw mountains, forests, animals and everything that had been created.

A trembling seized her and she wondered what it was all about. Before she could even think on it, the Lord covered her with his Maya and she forgot the entire incident.

THE NAMING OF THE CHILDREN

Vasudeva was very particular that the religious rites for his sons should be performed properly. He summoned his family priest Garga by name. He told him about the children who were growing up in Gokula and asked him to go there as though by chance and to name them and to perform the other rites necessary for kshatriya children.

Garga arrived in Gokula. Nanda received him with great joy and excitement and reverence. He prostrated before him: he honoured him duly and after offering him *arghya* and *padya* he placed him on an honoured seat and said: "Brahman, how can I express my happiness at your coming? When great men like you leave your *ashrams* and come to the houses of ordinary men like me, it is clear that your desire is to do good to us. Or else how can I, tied as I am to my 'household, who has no time to visit holy places, who is the lowest of all people because of my inability to spend time on noble actions like Tirthayatra and visiting holy spots: how can I, I say, be blessed with the sight a great personage like your gracious self? You are proficient in the study of "JYOTISHAMAYANAM" which is supposed to teach men knowledge which is beyond the comprehension of the senses. Please let me take advantage of the good fortune that has befallen me. I have two sons and, if you will grace me with your blessings, please perform their naming ceremony and the accompanying rites."

Garga said: "Nanda, I am the family priest of the Yadavas. And I have earned some reputation in the world and people follow my action intently. If I perform the rites you speak of, Kamsa will hear about it and try to guess to why a priest of the Yadava house should have performed them and he may-rashly-arrive at the conclusion that your son is the son of Devaki. When her eighth child was born it is well known that Kamsa found it to be a girl child. This child flew into the skies out of his hands, as you must

have heard, and told him that the son who is meant to kill Kamsa has already been born and is growing up somewhere. And again, Kamsa will think about the great friendship which exists between you and Vasudeva. On top of all this, if Kamsa hears that it was I who performed the rites for the child, he is sure to cause a lot of trouble to you and to your child."

Nanda said: "We can avert all that you are afraid of. In this Gokula, in my house, without the knowledge of even my nearest kinsmen please perform the rites secretly. I will not have any open celebrations or announcements. I am very keen that you should be the one to name the children."

Garga agreed to do what he had actually come there to do: the mission for which he had travelled all the way to Gokula.

He said: "This young child, this son of Rohini charms everyone with his beauty and will, in later life, charm everyone with his excellent qualities. I will name him RAMA: since he will also be very powerful he will be known as BALA. He is also to be named as SANKARASHNA.

"This other son of yours is dark in complexion and I will call him KRISHNA. Once, in his previous birth, he was the son of Vasudeva and so we can call him VAASUDEVA. But do not let that name be used. Let it be a secret. The wise say that your son has many names according to his many qualities. I know them but the men of the world do not know them. This child which is the source of joy to you and all these in Gokula will bring you great good fortune. Because of him, all your troubles will disappear. In one of his previous births the kingdom was without a king and, as a result of this, the country became harassed by thieves and atheists. This son of yours was born as the king of the country and delivered it of its trouble. (This refers to the avatara Prithu. Vena was a king who was bent on harassing his subjects. He would punish all those who protected the Vedas and the Vedangas and atheism was gaining the upper hand: it followed that thieving and other similar adharmas became rampant in the country after the death of Vena. Lord Narayana was born as king PRITHU and delivered the earth of her pain).

"Those who love this son of yours, this Krishna, will not be troubled by enemies, just as asuras who are devoted to Narayana are not troubled

because of their asuric birth. Please take very good care of Krishna your son, who will be performing great things for the good of all of you."

After blessing all of them Garga left them and went his way to tell Vasudeva and Devaki all about the happenings at Gokula and about the welfare of the children.

Rama and Krishna were growing up like the moon during the days of waxing. They were now able to crawl on their fours and the silver anklets which they were wearing would make sweet music wherever they went. Soon they were able to toddle and it was the eternal delight of their mothers and the women of Gokula to watch them taking hesitant steps and fall down and cry as though they were hurt.

They would wander into streets and covering themselves with mud they would come home and stand with their eyes wide open, as though they were afraid of their mothers and their scolding. The mothers would gather them in their arms and with the dust and mud soiling their silken dresses they would hug their children. The children would smile and their teeth which had just begun to appear would charm all of them like the thin silver of the moon which is seen in the sky. The gopis would forget their daily tasks: so absorbed would they be with the antics of the two children in Nanda's house.

They grew up enough to run around all over the place. They began to play in Gokula with the children in the other houses. For hours on end they would be missing and Yashoda with Rohini would begin to worry. So passed the days of their early childhood.

KRISHNA'S PRANKS

Krishna was old enough to begin his pranks! It was his eternal delight to tease the gopis. Yashoda had to listen often to the complaints about her son's mischief in the houses of the gopis. It became almost a daily ritual: this string of complaints about Krishna.

One of them told her: "Your son has become mischievous beyond words. One day, it was time for me to milk the cow. I went there and what do I find? Your son has untied the calf and it had drunk all the milk and I found nothing for myself. When I saw him standing by I scolded him. He just laughed at me." Another gopi said: "Your son has become proficient in the art of stealing. He has a hundred ways of stealing curds and butter from my house. He eats up some of it and the rest, he gives to the monkeys which are waiting on the trees. He then breaks the pots. His mischief is too much."

A third gopi said: "He comes to my house looking for curds and butter and milk. Sometimes he does not find them. Then he hurts the children by pinching them and runs away after making them cry."

Yet another complaint was: "We are bent on our household tasks. We cannot always sit on guard over the butter pot. So we keep it in a dark room and even that, in a dark corner. Your son does not care how dark the room is. The jewels he wears are like lamps and he finds out where the pot is placed and steals all of it if we are not there."

"If I keep it beyond his reach," said another gopi, "he tries another trick. He sees the butter pot hanging from the roof. It is placed in a receptacle made up of rope. Krishna first places the tripod I use for churning the butter. On that he places the mortar and on that he makes one of his friends stand. He gets up on the back of this boy and makes a hole in the pot of milk or curds or butter. If I come there and find him out I shout, 'Krishna, I

have caught you today. You are stealing from my house.' He is undaunted. He makes faces at me and says: 'I am the owner of this house and you are the thief.'

"I had just cleaned up", said another. "I had cleaned up the place. Krishna came and he asked for butter. I did not give him any butter and he became very angry with me. When I was busy with other things he brought all sorts of muck from outside, from the street and he brought dirty water and he poured it inside the house. He strewed the entire house with the dirt he had brought with him."

All the while, Krishna would stand by his mother's side. One gopi, enraged at the look on his face said: "Look at him! He looks as though he is the most innocent of all children and yet, Yashoda, the pranks of your son are really and truly too many for us to bear them. Punish him." Yashoda would turn towards her son with angry eyes. But looking at his tear-filled eyes and his lips trembling as though with fear and his eyebrows drawn together as though in anticipation of pain, she would not have the heart to scold him. The gopis would also go back to their houses forgetting their anger and thinking all the while of the beautiful face of Krishna: of his innocent eyes: of his sweet smile and his mischievous ways.

YASHODA SEES A VISION

One day, the children were all playing in the courtyard in front of the house and Yashoda was inside busy with some task pertaining to the household. Suddenly Balarama rushed to her and said: "Mother! Mother! Krishna is eating mud by handfuls." She looked at him as though she did not believe it but the other boys who had come with Balarama nodded their heads and said: "Yes, mother. We saw with our eyes Krishna eating mud." Yashoda rushed up to Krishna and caught hold of him with her left hand with her right hand raised as though to strike him she said: "Is there no end to your mischief? Why did you eat mud? I am going to punish you today."

Krishna shook his head and said: "Of course I did not eat mud. I never eat mud. I hate mud. I hate to eat such stuff." Yashoda said: "But these boys saw you eating mud. This Balarama, your brother, saw you and they told me you ate mud."

"Mother", Krishna said. "They are all telling a lie. Try and check if they are speaking the truth. Look into my mouth and see if there is any mud there."

"Show me your mouth," said Yashoda and the Lord of lords, Narayana who had assumed a human form for the welfare of mankind, Krishna, opened his mouth for his mother to see. She looked and what she saw there filled her with awe!

Inside the sweet mouth of her son Yashoda saw the entire Universe. Moving objects and immovable things. She saw the heavens and the eight quarters: the mountains and islands and all the seven oceans which surrounded this earth: she saw the seven islands which comprised this earth. She saw the lord of the winds and she saw the celestial world, the abode of the devas where she discerned the great Agni by name Vadava

and she saw the moon and the stars: the five elements, fire, earth, water, air and ether, wherein is placed the earth. She saw the gods who presided over the senses and the indriyas themselves in their glowing forms. She saw the mind, the Mahat-tattva, the Tanmatras: the three gunas, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. She could perceive the balance of the three gunas which goes by the name Prakriti. She saw it all.

When the Paramatma and the Jivatma are one with each other then there is no disturbance in the equilibrium of the three gunas. But when the Jivatma moves away from the other there is an imbalance in the state of equilibrium which had been holding them so far and there is a movement in the state of the gunas. This is because Kala becomes one of the factors. When the time has come the Svabhava of the Jivatma causes the involvement of the atman in the world and the manifestation of the world itself is a result of this imbalance: this throb in the state of the static gunas. Yashoda saw all this and she saw the birth of the Universe. And, strange sight! She saw the Gokula and there she saw herself looking inside the open mouth of her little son.

She looked around her and there was no one and she asked herself: "Can this be a dream?" And she told herself again and again: "No, it is not a dream. I am wide awake. This is indeed the Maya of lord Narayana. If it is so, then everyone must have seen this. Is it an illusion-born image like the image of myself which I see in the mirror? But then, how can my son Krishna also be seen by me in this picture? How can one see the mirror also, in the picture caused by reflection in the mirror? Is it then, some power possessed by my child?" So she speculated with wonderment writ on her face. She then said: "I salute that state which is beyond the comprehension of the mind, of action and of words. It is the basis, the essential factor of this Universe. This entire world and other worlds shine with life and glory because of this state which is the cause of action: of movement: of life. This Universe unfolds itself because of the movement in the state: and I salute that state. The Lord has caused in me the Maya which makes me think that I am an entity by name Yashoda: that I have a husband, Nanda: that this is my son: that I am the queen of Gokula: that I

am the mistress of all the people in Gokula. My Maya is now apparent to me and I prostrate before the Lord who is the cause of all this Maya."

When he saw his mother in this condition Krishna brought to bear on her the great Vishnumaya which goes by the name Putrasneha: meaning love for one's child. Yashoda at once forgot all the words which she had spoken till then all the realisation of the Truth, of the Brahman, left her. She shook herself as if from a trance and once again she was caught up in the web of Maya. She did not even remember what had happened. It was like a dream which is entirely forgotten.

The absolute Truth, the Paramatma who is called INDRA to those who perform the yagas by name RIK, YAJUS and SAMAN (the KarmaKanda is comprised of these rites): who is called the BRAHMAN by the Upanishads: (Vedanta, the ultimate knowledge of the Vedas is called the Upanishads): who is called by the name PURUSHA by the SANKHYA philosophers: who is called the PARAMATMA by the YOGIs: that Paramatma was, to Yashoda, her son and a mischievous son who had to be punished off and on for his pranks! Who had a long string of thefts to his credit!

King Parikshit, who was listening to the story intently said: "What an amount of Punya the Nandas must have accumulated to have the great good fortune of calling HIM their child! Devaki and Vasudeva did not have the luck. Gods like Brahma do but sing the praises of the Lord. They are not as fortunate as these cowherd couple who had HIM all for themselves. Yashoda, the most fortunate of women whose breasts fed the Lord Narayana! Tell me, my lord, how did it happen that Narayana chose these two to receive this great honour?"

Shuka said: "The Vasu by name DRONA and his wife DHARA had been asked by Brahma to be born on the earth during the time when Narayana had promised to be born. They had asked him for a boon. They said: "We will be born on the earth and will be beset with the qualities of the earth and the taints which are earthly. Please grant us the boon that we should have absolute bhakti towards Narayana which is the only way to cross the sea of pain which is another name for life on the earth."

"So be it", said Brahma. Drona was born as Nanda and his wife, Dhara as Yashoda.

YASHODA TIES UP KRISHNA

It was one of the usual days in Gokula. Yashoda found that her maids were busy with other tasks and so she thought that she would herself churn the curds for butter. She went to the vessel containing curds and began to churn it. While she was at her task Krishna came to her. He was hungry and he wanted to be fed. He looked at his mother who was looking beautiful. Unaccustomed as she was to work which others did for her usually, Yashoda looked tired. Her face was like a lotus touched with rain drops. Her hands had bangles on them which tinkled as she churned. Her hair was all coming loose and the string of Malati flowers she was wearing was trying to fall off. Her earrings tossed to and fro and her silken dress was whirling along with the movement of her hands and arms. Krishna went near her and playfully caught the churning as if to say: "That is enough. Please look at me and feed me since I am hungry."

Yashoda smiled at him and gathering up her child in her arms she sat down. Placing him on her lap she began to feed him.

While she was feeding Yashoda smelt the milk overflowing in the vessel which she had placed on the fire. Placing the child on the ground she rushed to the kitchen to save the milk. Krishna was very angry with her since she had not satisfied his hunger. With his throbbing lip caught between his teeth Krishna took up the churning in his hand and hit the vessel filled with the curds. The pot broke and he took a large helping of the butter which had been formed there. He then brought false tears to his eyes and going out into the courtyard concealed himself in a corner and went on eating the butter.

Yashoda, after attending to the milk, came out with the idea of resuming the task of making butter. She saw the broken pot, the curds which were flowing all over the place. Krishna was not to be seen at all. She smiled to herself at his sweet mischief and began to look for him. He was sitting on

the mortar and he was eating butter: the monkeys around him were also being fed. Yashoda approached him from behind. She had a little stick in her hand. Krishna saw her when she had come very near and seeing the stick in her hand he tried to run away as though he were terribly afraid of her: frightened of the punishment in store for him. Yashoda was running after him to catch hold of him: Him, whom the yogis had not been able to realise: Him whom they cannot touch even with their minds! Yashoda was trying to capture Him, beat him up and tie him up to stop him from further mischief.

Krishna saw his mother tired out by the chasing game he was bent on playing with her. Her dress was all awry and her face was wet with sweat. With her large breasts and wide hips she found it difficult to keep pace with the little mite who was teasing her. Her hair had come loose and the ground was strewn with the Malati flowers she had been wearing in her tresses. Krishna felt sorry for her and allowed himself to be caught by her finally.

She held him tight in her left hand and went on scolding him. Krishna was crying and his eyes filled with tears. He rubbed his eyes with his little fists and all around his eyes the black collyrium had run making his face more beautiful than before. He looked this way and that not meeting his mother's eyes. Holding him firmly in her hand she said: "Your mischief has become too much for even me to bear. It is not possible to control you any more. I have to punish you in some drastic manner since words of persuasion do not seem to have any effect on your naughty mind. You little monkey! You stole the butter and, sitting on the mortar you kept on eating it as though you have done nothing wrong. Just you wait. See if I do not beat you with this stick."

Krishna looked scared and he clung to her as though in sheer fright. Yashoda loved her son very much: so much so she felt like gathering him up in her arms and hugging him. But she thought that she had to act firm and so she said: "All right, I will not beat you. But I am going to tie you up to this mortar which was your throne some time back. I will see how you can do any more mischief when you are so securely tied up." Yashoda brought a piece of rope and placing Krishna by the side of the mortar she

tried to tie him up. She tried to tie up that Absolute Truth ! Him who has no inside and no outside! Who is above the worlds and below the worlds and in the worlds too! Who is Himself the Universe and all the living and nonliving beings on it! Who, to save mankind, had taken the form of a human being! Him, Yashoda tried to tie up with a piece of string!!! She bound him up and now began to tie the little boy to the mortar. When she tried to knot the rope she found it was too short. She got another piece and tied it to the one on the waist of Krishna. Again, after trying, she found that she could not tie him up. Again she got another length and the same problem confronted her. The length was not enough. It was short by two inches. She did not think what was happening nor why. She kept on bringing rope after rope, string after string, and all the rope in the house was exhausted and still she was not able to tie up her little son. A crowd had collected round her by then. The gopis at home were watching her chagrin with amusement. Looking at her and her tired face Krishna felt sorry for her and taking pity on her he allowed himself to be tied up. This entire universe is under his control and, with a piece of rope Yashoda was able to tie him up. Is it not evident that the Lord can be tied up only with the thread, silken and fragile though it be, which goes by the name BHAKTI? Yashoda was fortunate to achieve what Brahma could not: nor Mahadeva nor even Lakshmi. This innocent gopi could grab him in her arms and tie him up to a mortar.

Heaving a sigh of relief Yashoda went inside the house to resume her duties saying: "I can have some peace now that you are tied up securely."

THE TWIN TREES IN THE COURTYARD

Krishna sat on the mortar for a while and he got bored with sitting quietly. He played with the monkeys for a while and even that game palled after a time. He then began to crawl with the mortar trailing behind him. He was going on all fours and he reached the front courtyard of the house. Some boys were playing at some distance. Otherwise there was no one around. Krishna saw two big trees growing together like they were twins. They were Arjuna trees.

Krishna paused for a while and then he went between them. He crossed the spot where they were joined but the mortar got stuck. Krishna pulled the mortar along with him, while crawling, and he went on without looking back.

There was a sudden noise. The trees had been uprooted by the mortar which Krishna had dragged along with him. They fell to the ground with a crash. Out of each of the fallen trees there arose a glowing form. The two fell at his feet and said: "Great is our good fortune. The curse of Narada is now ended since your gracious feet touched us. We are now pure enough to go back to our abode in the earth. We can go back to our father, Kubera." They then vanished from the earth.

The curiosity of Parikshit was aroused. He said: "My lord, please tell me the story of these two sons of Kubera. Why did Narada curse them?"

Shuka said: "I will tell you. Kubera, the lord of wealth and the guardian of the northern quarter had two sons by name Nalakubera and Manigriva. These young men were young, good looking and, naturally rich. It goes without saying that as a result of these "blessings" they were arrogant. Once, on the banks of the celestial Ganga which was flowing at the foot of the Kailasa mountain these two young men were sporting with their women. They had taken too much of the divine drink by name Varuni and

they were deaf and blind to the world outside. They were sporting on the waters of the Ganga like a pair of wild elephants with their harem.

"Narada, the divine sage was passing that way by chance. He saw them but they, even after seeing him, were too drunk to pay any attention to him. They forgot that they should have honoured the rishi: nor did they realise that they were behaving indecently in the presence of great man. The women rushed to the banks and quickly covered themselves up with the clothes which they had left there. They then saluted Narada. But the two brothers heeded him not. Narada wanted to cure them of the dread disease which goes by the name Arrogance and he also wanted to grace them with the good fortune of being saved by Krishna. Narada spoke. He said: "Man is visited by different types of Mada-arrogance. A highborn prince is arrogant: a scholar will sometimes be arrogant. Rajoguna is often the cause of arrogance. But there is arrogance of a different type: different from all the others and which is far worse. It is the arrogance born of SHREE - wealth. Because, with wealth, man gets involved with woman, with gambling, with drinking: and, when such a formidable arrogance visits him man loses all perspective and becomes blind and deaf to ordinary rules of decorum even. Man loses his self-control and he becomes devoid of even kindness. He deludes himself into thinking that this body is permanent. To satisfy the thirsts of this body he does not hesitate even to kill. The king who rules the entire earth and the beggar on the road-side are both equal: when death comes, it equals them and both are reduced to the same handful of ashes. But the arrogant man does not realise this. He kills, not realising what is in store for him. This body belongs to the one who feeds it: to the father and mother who made it: and in the end, to worms like ants and animals like the dog which consume it. Only a fool will consider this body to live for ever since he does not know the difference between the body and the dweller in it: the DEHA and the DEHIN. To one whose intellect is clouded because of arrogance the only cure is poverty. Only a poor man will know that he is equal to the animals. A man who has suffered the pricks of thorns for lack of a better bed: whose face is weak for want of food: such a man will never wish another living being to come to harm. Even so, a man who has not gone through these tortures will not know the meaning of the word compassion.

"A man who is without ego, who is without the three Madas: Vidyamada - arrogance born of one being well read: Dhanamada - arrogance because of wealth: and Kulamada - arrogance because he is high-born: a man who does not suffer from these three madas is absolutely impossible to find. Only a poor man can be free of these madas and his suffering is the *tapas* he performs leading him to worlds more lasting than this world of ours. To a poor man there is an eternal lack of food. His frame is shrunken and he is always aching for food to satisfy his hunger. To such a man the senses have no meaning. Unfed as they are, the senses shrink into nothingness. He has no thought of hurting his fellow man or any living being. Sadhus who treat all being alike are naturally drawn towards the poor man whose senses have flown away from him. And in the company of good people the poor man becomes released from this world of desires. A sadhu who has equanimity under all circumstances, who has no feelings other than devotion to Narayana, has no use for the contemptible one who is drunk with power and Mada.

"As for you both, you are drunk with the nectar by name Varuni: you have lost your power of reasoning because you are drunk with the power of your wealth. You do not have your senses under control: you do not even conform to the rules of common etiquette that you should behave with decorum in the presence of sadhus like me. You are the sons of Kubera. Since you are full of Tamas and irreverence you will be born as a couple of trees on the earth. You will remember your previous birth and wait with impatience for your deliverance.

"When you will be born, there will also be born the Lord of lords, Narayana and He will deliver you from the earthly imprisonment and he will also cure you of your arrogance which has been your undoing." After cursing them Narada went on his way and the two sons of Kubera were twin trees growing in Gokula. Krishna decided that the time had come when the two brothers should have their deliverance. And so he went between the trees and made them fall on the ground.

Hearing the loud noise the inmates of all the houses and also Yashoda rushed out to see what had been happening. When she saw that her son had just escaped being crushed by the two huge trees poor Yashoda was

overcome with remorse for having tied up her son to the mortar. Quickly she untied the knots which bound him to the mortar not knowing that he was the one who can untie the Knots of Karma and lead you to Moksha. When they were wondering about how the trees fell and how miraculously the child was saved from certain death, some children who were playing nearby said: "This Krishna crawled out of the house with the mortar trailing behind him. He was the one who went between the trees and the trees fell only after that. We also saw two men who looked like they were made of light and they spoke to Krishna. He spoke to them too and then they rose up into the air and into the sky like birds of fire." No one, however, believed the words of the children. They said to themselves: "It is an impossible thing to have happened. How can a small child like Krishna fell two trees at the same time? The falling of the trees and Krishna's coming out must have been so close to each other that it must have seemed to these children as though Krishna did it. As for the men of light, as they put it, - (here they hid a smile as if to say, 'after all, children are gifted with imagination') - they must have thought up this strange sight to make their story more convincing."

So ended the Shapavimochana of the two Gandharva princes, Nalakubera and Manigriva.

KRISHNA, THE LIFE AND SOUL OF GOKULA

Krishna was a great favourite of the gopis. He would spend all his time in their houses. He would dance to please them when they asked him to. They would clap their hands and he would turn round and round on his heels like atop and they would all look at his flying hair and lovely necklaces falling on his tiny chest and they would clasp him to their breasts. He would then smile at them and entertain them with his singing. Suddenly one of the gopis would say: "Krishna, go there and bring that pot or vessel or churner for me." Krishna would rush to obey her bidding and clasping the object in his hands he would pretend as though it was too heavy for him and that he was straining under its immense weight. Laying it on the ground he would shake his arms as if to shake off the fatigue caused by the task.

Krishna and Rama would spend hours together playing around in the mud and would never listen to their mothers calling out to them asking them to come in and have their food. One day Rohini called out to Krishna and then to Rama: "Look, you are both so soiled with mud in which you have been playing for so long. Come inside. Rama, today is your janmanakshatra. Come inside. Have a holy bath, both of you since your father wants to perform the rites proper for today. Look at the other boys. They are all dressed. Only you are both still dirty." The boys would not listen and Rohini gave up. She spoke to Yashoda and said: "Sister, only you will be able to make the children come inside and have a bath. I tried, but I could do nothing with them." Yashoda then came out and said: "Krishna! O Krishna! My darling son with lovely eyes like the lotus! Please stop your play. You are both tired out since you have been playing for so long. You do not realise it but you are very hungry. Come inside. Rama, my child, my darling child, come inside and with your younger brother, have your baths and your food. Your father is waiting for both of you. Please come." And, with a firm voice she spoke to the other children playing with Krishna and Rama: "Look, children, please go to your homes. Only then

will these two listen to me." Krishna and Rama behaved like all naughty children do in every household. They took great care not to let anyone know or guess the divinity of their birth or the great purpose for which they had taken these avatars. The innocence of the people of Gokula was too beautiful to be sullied by the immensity of the knowledge that their charges were Ananta and Narayana. They could never have grasped the truth nor would they have behaved so naturally with the children as they did.

If Yashoda had known who her son was, she would not have been able to bear the burden. That was why, after granting her a moment's glimpse of his real nature Krishna enveloped her again with his Maya and made her forget what she saw.

To them Krishna was a delightful boy, hardly a boy. He was so full of mischief and so dear to everyone.

Without their knowing why, everyone was drawn to him and they loved him. Narayana had never been loved as He was in Gokula by the gopis and the gopas. He was extremely happy in this role He played. He could relax and he did not have to let anyone into the secret about Himself except Rama who was Himself an avatara. Krishna's only task was hiding his divinity and he did his best to do it. The killing of the asuras should have made the people wonder as to who he was. But they did not since Krishna managed to make them blind to the extraordinary feats he performed. Every one thanked Narayana for sparing their child without thinking about the incident and about Krishna's part in it. So well did Krishna conceal his divinity that only very few could see behind the veil.

A HANDFUL OF ARANYAKA FRUITS

One day, when Krishna was playing in the courtyard he heard a voice in the street: "Fruits! Jambul fruits!!" He rushed to the door and saw a nishadha woman with a basketful of Aranyaka fruits poised on her head. Krishna called out to her and said: "Give me some fruit. I love these fruits." She smiled at him and his childish lisp and said: "Sure, I will give you the fruits. But you must pay for them."

"Pay?" he asked with his eyes open with wonderment. "What does pay mean?"

"You must give me something in return for which I will give you the fruits", she said.

"All right", said Krishna. "I will give you grains. Will you give me the fruits then?"

"Bring the grain. I will certainly give the fruits", she said. She placed the basket on the ground while Krishna rushed in. Krishna went inside to the storing place and with both his palms held together like the bud of the lotus he took the grain from the vessel where it was stored. He ran towards the woman. And, all the while the grain kept on falling all along the passage from where the grains were stored, to the door of the house! He went to her and holding out his hands he said: "See, I have brought grains for you. Now give me the fruits." She saw his sweet little hands empty of grain and pink with beauty. She looked beyond and saw the spilt grain all along the trail. She took both his hands in hers and filled his palms with the choicest fruits from her basket.

The Paramatma who is beyond the comprehension of the intellect, beyond all the Aranyakas-the Upanishads-that have ever been spoken, wanted a handful of Aranyaka fruits! Such was His Lila on the earth. Those who

listen to this story will have no need of Aranyakas to reach Him when the time comes.

The nishadha woman went home and found her basket to be very heavy. She placed it on the ground and looked inside. She found it to be filled with precious gems. She sat and wondered about it and could not solve the riddle.

FROM GOKULA TO BRINDAVAN

The gopas in Gokula held a council with Nanda at the head. The subject was the danger which had been assailing Krishna so often and so, the safety of Krishna became their chief concern. The elders of the place were there and the oldest of them was called UPANANDA. He spoke first and said: "In my opinion we should abandon this place altogether and seek some other safer place. This place has become too dangerous for the child. The Utpatas are all bad. Premonitions tell us that there is more trouble in store for our little prince. As it is, he has escaped destruction four times. There was the rakshasi who was bent on killing him. Then there was the cart which would have crushed him. Very soon after that, we had the dust storm which threatened our little darling. And now, these two trees would surely have been the death of our Krishna if it had not been for the grace of Narayana. Fortunately Gokula has not been touched yet by evil agencies. Before that happens we must make preparations to leave this place. The children should be protected at any cost. That should be our main concern.

"I have been told that there is a spot by name BRINDAVAN. This nestles at the foot of the small mountain by name GOVARDHANA. The name itself assures us that our cattle wealth will be protected by this mountain. The forest surrounding the mountain, I have heard, is full of luscious grass and our cows will be happy. Our gopas and gopis will surely be happy in this new place I suggest. If everyone is agreeable to my suggestion let us not waste even a moment."

All the gopas were quite willing to abide by the decision of the old man and Nanda. Soon, there was seen the caravan which took the entire population of Gokula to the new dwelling place Brindavan. Cart after cart wended slowly, filled with all the belongings of the gopas. Women, children and old men with the older women were made to sit in the carts

while the younger men walked with their bows and other things like bugles and trumpets and such like in their hands. The cows from Gokula went ahead in large herds protected well by gopals.

Brahmins went along with them chanting mantras to ward off evil. As for the women, they looked like they were on their way to attend some festival. Each one of them was wearing her best silks: with flowers in their hair and garlands on their necks, they went all the way singing songs which spoke of no one but Krishna and his thousand pranks. Yashoda and Rohini were seated in a cart and with them were Rama and Krishna. They would have loved to walk along with the others singing and dancing but they could not do so. A silent pair of children they were, and the mothers were thrilled since they had their sons to themselves for a while for the first time after they learnt to toddle around the place!

The trail ended. The journey was over. They had arrived at Brindavan. Rama and Krishna jumped down from the carts. Their eyes rested on the majestic mountain Govardhana: on the lush green forest at its feet: and the beautiful, dark river YAMUNA flowing placidly. Their eyes blessed the spot before the others saw it.

Life in Brindavan became a great adventure for the children. Rama and Krishna were now old enough to go out with the older gopas. The younger boys were allowed to graze the calves and that was the task assigned to Krishna and Rama also. They would spend all their time playing and, when the boys came home, they would re-live the day thinking of the fun they had during the day. Everyday, before leaving for the copse they would collect playthings which they would need there and once they were out of the sight of their mothers, there was no holding them back. Krishna would sometimes play the flute. Sometimes they would have fun throwing stones at the trees bearing fruits and eating the half ripe fruits of the Bilva tree. With their anklets making sweet music Rama and Krishna would spend their time kicking the trees around and running around with the other boys. Covering themselves with blankets they would play at the game of make-believe: frightening each other and pretending to be cows or bulls. Sometimes they would sing like the birds of the forest and laugh heartily at nothing at all, which only children have the good fortune to do.

VATSA AND BAKA

One day, while Rama and Krishna were grazing their calves on the banks of the Yamuna an asura who had been sent by Kamsa went there to kill them. This asura assumed the form of a calf and, joining the herd of calves, he went wherever they went. Krishna saw him and knew who he was. Quietly and secretly he spoke to Rama about it. He then pretended as though he knew nothing about it: as though nothing untoward was happening. Very slowly and very casually Krishna approached the asura who was unaware of the fact that his guise had been discovered.

Suddenly Krishna grasped the hind legs of the 'little calf' and whirled him round and round. When he flung him down on the ground the asura whose name was VATSA was dead. While falling he hit against all the trees and the ground was covered with the fruits of the wood apple tree. The children who were with him were amazed at what Krishna had done. Flowers fell on Krishna from the heavens. The devas were so pleased with the deeds of Krishna and they were happy that another asura had been killed without any effort.

These two gods who were the protectors of the Universe walked the woods of Brindavan like ordinary cowherd boys who were set to the task of guarding the calves.

One day they went to the banks of Yamuna to give water to the calves which had had their fill of grass. The boys too had long, drinks of water and when they looked around they found a new kind of being on the banks. This was a frightening-looking bird if bird it might be called. It appeared to be a piece of a mountain cut off by Indra with his Vajra: so big was it in size. They found that it was an immense crane. An asura by name BAKA was waiting there to kill Krishna. He was lying prone and the boys came near to see what the object was. Before they knew what was happening, the object came to life and with its beak opened wide, it swallowed Krishna.

It had happened so suddenly that no one knew what to do. Krishna, their Krishna had been swallowed by a terrible looking bird: that was all they could grasp and they were stunned with grief. Baka, in the meantime, felt a ball of fire travel ling down his long neck and he could not bear the pain. He spat out the child whom he had swallowed. He then rushed towards Krishna to peck at him with his powerful beaks which were like large spikes of iron.

Krishna waited for this henchman of Kamsa to come near him. When Baka was close enough Krishna caught hold of the two halves of the open beak and, while the others were looking on, he split the terrible bird in two. Flowers rained from the heavens and there could be heard divine music to celebrate the achievement of the wonder boy of Brindavan. Balarama and the other boys rushed to Krishna and embraced him. Before they could suffer the agony of the thought Krishna was killed they had seen him emerge from the mouth of the bird and the next moment Krishna had killed it: and now it seemed to be not a bird at all but dreadful asura!

They rushed back to their homes and told everyone about the wonderful feat of Krishna. Nanda and the others thanked the heavens for protecting the children from these dreadful happenings. They spoke among themselves: "How often has death threatened these children! And, strangely enough, it is the good fortune of all of us that the killers themselves have been killed. Why? They must have sinned much before and, when they approached our Krishna with the intention of killing him, they have been killed: like moths are destroyed while approaching a flame with the intention of eating it. Nanda thought to himself: "What the great Garga said is true. This son of mine will be long-lived and he will be famed the world over for his bravery and for his prowess."

AGHASURA

One day Krishna was in a mood to have a very good time in the forest. He called all his friends and said: "Look, I will bring my flute and my bugle and trumpet. You can all bring whatever you want. Tomorrow we will have a glorious time in the forest and we will spend the whole day playing different kinds of games." The boys agreed with great pleasure and there was great excitement in the minds of all of them as they set out ostensibly to graze the calves but really to have a good time.

They left their homes early in the morning. Krishna, with his bugle, led the gang; the calves and the boys followed him. They had little sticks to handle the calves in their hands and some had flutes and horns and all kinds of material: all meant to produce as much noise as possible! They were all wearing necklaces made of shells and tiny beads which had been fashioned out of shells: and yet, they got more pleasure out of the garlands which they wove for themselves in the forest out of the leaves and flowers of the wild plants and trees. They rubbed their faces with the powder of the pink shell which was therein abundance on the banks of the river. They played pranks on each other and teasing each other and everyone who passed them by, they spent all their time laughing and playing. Krishna was the wildest of them all, surpassing everyone in his ability to think up new games.

He would go far in advance of the others and dare them to catch him and they would chase him all over the place. He would allow himself to be caught and there would be great clapping of hands and shouting and the words: "Krishna has been caught," could be heard all over. When they were tired of this game they thought of imitating the noises made by the inmates of the forest. Some tried to sing like the koil and some tried to hum like the bee. Some clasped and chased the shadows of the birds flying in the air and some sat on the riverbank like cranes waiting for fish. Some

danced like peacocks and others were hanging from the boughs of the trees imitating the monkeys. The monkeys made faces at them and the boys vied with each other to return the grimaces. Krishna suddenly jumped into the river to swim and the whole crowd went swimming with him.

How can one gauge the good fortune of the gopas who had the Lord all for themselves? He, the Paramapurusha, the dust of whose feet is not possible to be obtained unless one spends millions of years contemplating on Him with the senses under absolute control: the sight of whose face is very difficult even after many and many *janmas* of pure living: that same Paramatma who can be realised only by the knowing ones: He is the servant of his devotees and he is Krishna who could roll on the sandy banks of the Yamuna with the ignorant and innocent boys of Brindavan ! Fortunate indeed was Brindavan and the inmates of Brindavan who knew Krishna so well and who were granted the privilege of living day and night with him. While they were thus engaged in the games which held their attention all the while, an asura approached them. He was named AGHA: a fitting name for the personification of evil. He had been sent by Kamsa to try and destroy Krishna. He was not fortunate enough to know to enjoy the pranks of Krishna which the devas from the heavens did. They derived greater joy by looking at Krishna than even from a draught of Amrita.

This Agha was the brother Putana and Baka. He was not only eager to obey his lord and master, Kamsa: but he also had his personal grievance against Krishna who was the cause of the death of the other two. Looking at Rama and Krishna he licked his chops and said to himself: "So this is the little fellow who is the killer of my brother and my dear sister. In return for that pain he caused me I will destroy these two brothers and remove the thorn lodged in my mind and in that of my master at the same time. The death of these two boys will be the 'Tarpana' for my dear departed kinsfolk. Once these two die, Brindavan will cease to exist since their entire life seems to resolve around these children. I must hasten and do the needful."

Aghasura went and stayed in the path the children were sure to take. He changed himself into an immense python. It was eight miles long and huge like a small mountain. His enormous mouth he kept open and waited for the coming of the children. The lower jaw of the python was placed firmly

on the ground and the upper jaw reached the sky. His mouth looked like a huge cavern and his fangs looked like little peaks on the edge of the cavern. Right in the middle of the cavern could be seen his red tongue and his breath was hot and burning the air around him. He had so arranged himself that the gopa boys never for a moment thought that he was anything apart from the scenery around. Some of them even commented: "Look! With a slight stretch of the imagination you can say that this cavern looks like the wide open mouth of an immense snake!"

They began to elaborate on the comparison. "See", said one. "It definitely looks like a big snake with its mouth wide open: as if it is waiting to swallow us. The roof of the cavern, when lit by the rays of the sun gives the effect of the jaws of the snake! And the shadow of the roof falling on the ground further enhances the effect. Look at the tiny peaks and rocks at the edge! They look like the fangs of a snake and this steep pathway, this road like a crimson bridge across the cavern does look like the red tongue of the snake. The surrounding area is so dark that it is just like mouth of snake. It is really amazing how, even the air around, hot because of the mid-day sun, feels hot and uncomfortable like the poisonous breath of a snake!"

One of them said: "Suppose we enter this cavern. Will it get transformed into a snake and swallow us? What will happen then?" Another boy said: "Nothing will happen. This Krishna of ours will kill him like that big crane and we will be all right. Let us go in: it will be an adventure."

The children began to enter the mouth of the asura one by one. Krishna knew that it was a python and that it was sure death to enter the mouth of the dread snake. He stood silent and watched and waited till all his playmates with their calves too, had entered the huge 'cave' in search of 'adventure'. Krishna was the only one left. The mouth was still open since Agha wanted to wait till Krishna entered his mouth. Or else his revenge and his mission would not be achieved. His master's injunctions could not be fulfilled.

Krishna knew the fate of all those who had come with him and had entered the mouth of the snake saying: "If it is a snake, our Krishna will kill it and

everything will be all right. "Krishna smiled to himself and knowing that the end of Agha had come, he entered the cavernous mouth of the snake. At the sight of the mouth closing firmly after Krishna entered it, even the devas who knew the divinity of Krishna shouted in alarm and waited tensely to see what would happen. When he reached the throat of the python Krishna began to grow bigger and bigger in size. Aghasura tried his best to spit him out and save himself but it was not possible. Slowly, steadily, life was being choked out of him and Aghasura could do nothing about it. He lashed his immense tail in agony but the pain in his throat was getting more and more until it was unbearable. Finally, a huge gust of air which was his life breath escaped from his head which had split under the pressure.

As soon as he died, Krishna looked with his eyes full of love on the forms of his companions who had fainted under the power of the poison in the snake. They all rushed out and when they had all gone Krishna came out at last.

A glow was seen at the mouth of the cavern that was the mouth of the python. The four quarters were lit by the brilliance. Even as everyone was looking the glow entered the feet of Krishna. The devas who were watching everything rained flowers on Krishna. There was music and dancing in the heavens. Brahma who was inside his dwelling heard the music and came out to see what was happening and when he knew about it he was amazed at the feat of the young boy.

Agha, who had been killed by the touch of Krishna was rid of all his sins and was granted the privilege of entering the feet of the Lord. Is it any wonder that this happened? If the form of the Lord is lodged firmly in the mind of man he is sure of salvation. When such is the case, when Agha took the form of a python Krishna himself entered his mouth, touched with his dear feet and he had entered into him on his own. Is there any doubt then, that Moksha awaited Agha, the personification of sin, though he was?

BRAHMA'S DOUBT

Most of the boys were about five years old when this event took place and they went home and told their mothers and fathers about how Krishna had saved their lives. But they spoke about it only a year later: when they were six years old.

King Parikshit sat silent for a while, thrilled at the story he had heard. After a moment he said: "My lord, you must clear a doubt for me. You tell me that the children spoke about the great event only one year after it happened. How is that possible? Children's excitement is such that even if Krishna had asked them not to talk about it, they would not been able to obey him. How could children, fresh from such an exciting event, wait for a whole year before talking about it? Did Krishna blind them with some oath of secrecy? If not, this is impossible. I do not understand it. Please enlighten me."

Shukabrahma was pleased with Parikshit. When he heard the voice of the king asking him about the strange silence of the children for one whole year, it took him some time to answer him. In relating the story of the Lord he would often lose himself and he would forget himself as his mind became crowded with the thoughts of Krishna and his Lila. It would take him a while to come back to the earth, as it were. Shuka said: "Your question is very pertinent. And let me tell you how much pleasure you are giving me by asking me to recount to you the story of the Lord. Hear it as often as you can, the story of the Lord is ever new to the hearer and to the one who is fortunate enough to narrate it. Even as the talk about a woman is ever delightful to the ears of a lustful person, the mind of a devotee thrills when the stories of the Lord are related to him. I will now tell you how it happened that a year had to elapse before the cowherds and their wives heard the story of the killing of Aghasura from their children.

"While they were playing in the forest running around, the boys with the calves came to the spot where Aghasura was waiting. After the killing of the asura Krishna wanted to distract their minds from the wonderment of the killing. He did not want them to attach too much importance to the incident. He tried to make them forget it. Throughout the avataras, and specially in Krishnavatara, the Lord has tried his best to keep up the illusion that he was a human being and not god. But off and on the veil would be rent and the divinity would have to be revealed. With the assistance of his Maya he managed to make people forget these incidents and people's memory became quite short. At the moment there would be amazement writ on their faces but as time passed the dimness of Time would erase the divinity of the person who could work such wonderful miracle. They would just say: "Our Krishna is wonderful", and that was what Krishna wanted.

"Krishna led the entire host of mischievous boys to the sandy banks of the Yamuna. He said: "Look friends. We have been so busy playing that we forgot all about our hunger. I am hungry and I am not able to lift my foot to walk even a small distance. Look at the bank of the river. The sand is as clear and white as milk and it is so soft and lovely. The trees are so shady that we can hardly feel the heat of the noonday sun. The noise made by the bees hovering round the flowers: the rustling of the flying birds: the music made by the running waters: all of them together are making such wonderful music that my mind refuses to move away from here. Let us sit on the sands and have our food. Let the calves eat grass, drink water from the river and chew the cud slowly while we are eating." There was never a 'No' to the suggestion of Krishna at any time in their lives. "So be it", said the boys clapping their hands. Aghasura's killing had already receded into the recesses of their minds and it was the thought of eating that was foremost in their minds now.

"All of them sat in a rough circle and Krishna sat in their midst. They began to eat. Each child undid the packet of food which had been prepared for him by his mother. Some were wrapped up in lotus leaves and some in the bark of a plantain tree. Some were packed in small earthen vessels and some in stoneware jugs. Each boy was full of spirits and they all laughed

and giggled while they ate, each one teasing the other: making another laugh or laughing at the pranks of another.

"Krishna, the Paramatma to whom is offered the Havis in every Yajna which is performed: to whom is offered everything and in whom is contained everything: that Paramatman had taken the form of a young human boy and was seated in their midst unpacking his own food packet. Great indeed was the good fortune of those in Gokula who had this Krishna all for themselves for so many years: during the best years of his life.

"Krishna stuck his flute in the tiny fold between his waistband and his yellow silk which he was wearing. He placed the bamboo stick with which he was supposed to drive the calves under his arm. He then sat at the centre of the group of boys and they were all looking at him and laughing at the thousand jokes which seemed to be pouring out of his mouth. Everyone wanted Krishna for himself and so he kept looking at all of them and at each one of them at the same time. In his left hand he held the lovely white curds and rice and in between his fingers he kept the different pickles. The celestials were ranged in the sky looking on this beautiful sight, with envy of the gopala boys.

"While they were absorbed in their fun the calves, which were grazing nearby, left them and went far away from there, deep inside the forest. Suddenly one of the boys saw what had taken place and shouted: "Where are the calves? Krishna, a terrible thing has happened. The calves have wandered into the forest and I am sure the wild animals will eat them up. How can we answer the elders?"

"Other boys joined in the lament and Krishna said: "Do not worry, any of you. I will go and see how they are faring. Go on, finish your eating. I will bring the calves back." The boys said: "That's right. We do not have anything to worry so long as Krishna is there to take care of us and our worries." Krishna smiled at them and went into the forest.

"With the left hand holding the rice and curds Krishna wandered all over the hill and into the caves and along the slopes of Govardhana: and still he could not find the calves. When he found his search for the calves was

fruitless, Krishna came back to the banks of the Yamuna where he had left his playmates. He found the place empty and he looked all around and could not find any of them.

"He thought for a moment and realised what had happened. When Krishna killed Aghasura there was great celebration in the heavens and Brahma, the creator heard the music and the dancing. He came out of his dwelling to find out what was happening and was amazed at the prowess of the young boy. He decided to test this prowess further. He therefore captured the calves and hid them. He overpowered the boys of Brindavan with sleep when Krishna was away and capturing them, he hid them also in the cave with the calves.

"Krishna smiled to himself and said "So this is Brahma's game. I can play a game just as well as he can."

"The Lord of lords, the Paramatma who resides in every person in the form of the Jivatma, this Universal Soul which pervades the entire world of creation, this Narayana decided to let Brahma know that he was Narayana and not just a child which could perform one or two laudable deeds."

THE MASQUERADE FOR A YEAR

He was one and he became many. He became the cowherds and he became the calves that were grazing. He became the rope round the neck of the calf and he became the bamboo stick in the hand of each cowherd. He became the vessels which held their food. He became their torn dress, or silken garment, or coloured upper cloth or white waist band as the case might be. He became everything. He assumed not only the form of each boy but he assumed the nature of each and every one of them. Their different individual qualities and idiosyncrasies. The little army then proceeded towards Brindavan when evening drew near. Krishna led the host made up of hundreds of Krishna dressed differently.

Each little gopa entered his house with his calf or calves. The mothers clasped their sons to their breasts and Krishna went to his house to be petted by Yashoda. This masquerade continued the next day and every day thereafter. There were, however, slight change in some things. Like, for instance, the mother cows would rush home and lick their calves with more affection and concern than was usual with them. They were yielding more milk than they used to. The mothers and fathers behaved the same way with their children as before but there seemed to be a subtle difference. A silken thread of affection, some tenderness, some extra sweetness in the relationship between the parents and children was felt in each and every home. The mothers thought for a moment that their sons were just as sweet and lovable as Krishna was. The feeling was there and they were all aware of it only subconsciously. They did not know it and they did not try to analyse it and seek an explanation for it.

And so it went on for a full year. One day when the year was almost over: when just four or five days more were left, Krishna and Balarama went into the forest with the entire host of calves and the cowherd boys and all their accessories. While they were grazing the calves at the foot of the hill

by name Govardhana the mother cows which were on the top of the hill saw their calves. Forgetting themselves, their hunger and the command of the cowherds that they should not run so, the cows rushed headlong to the spot where their calves grazing and began to feed them their milk which was overflowing.

The cowherds, finding their efforts to be futile, ran down the slopes to collect the cows and take them back. They were bent on scolding them and beating them up, if necessary. They reached the foot of the hill and their eyes fell on their sons who were with Krishna and Balarama grazing the calves. When they saw their sons their hearts were filled to overflowing with love for them and they forgot their anger and tiredness. When they embraced their sons they forgot all their fatigue. There were tears in the eyes of the older men when they took leave of their sons and dragged themselves away from there with the equally unwilling cows with them.

Balarama was standing by and watching this unusual demonstration of love by the cows and, by the cowherds, in an equally violent manner. He was amazed at it. He stood apart and thought for a while. He felt that even he was drawn towards the cowherd's children by a love which he had only for Krishna and he was really surprised at this. He said: "Can it be the Maya of the devas? or that of men? or that of asuras? No, it cannot be, since I am also getting involved and no deva or asura can influence my mind. This must be an enchantment practised by Krishna and by no one else." He opened his mind's eye and looked at all the calves and his playmates and found that he saw Krishna everywhere and no one else. He went to Krishna and said: "For a while I thought this was the work of the devas or the asuras or by some human being blessed with the power of witchcraft. But I realise that it is you and your power which has brought about this strange course of events. Tell me, Krishna, why this masquerade? What happened to all of them? Where are they? And how long is this game going to be played?"

Krishna related to him the background and, even as they were talking, Brahma, the author of the mischief came to see what was happening. He had, in the meantime had a humiliating experience. He was still smarting under it.

BRAHMA'S CHAGRIN

After hiding the calves and the young boys in a cave Brahma went back to Satyaloka, his home. The doorkeepers there looked at him and refused to let him enter. Taken aback by their impertinence Brahma said: "What game is this? I am Brahma and I am trying to enter my house: and both of you who are just my servants, refuse me entrance! If it had not been so comical I would have been angry." The doorkeepers laughed at him and said: "We have never laid our eyes on you before and we do not want you here. You are dressed up as our master but we know you are not he, since he is already inside." "Already inside!" shouted Brahma. "I do not believe it." "All right, if you do not believe us, see for yourself," said the laughing servants and made him take a peep inside the council hall.

There, in the midst of all the rishis and the devas he found himself, or someone who was just like himself, sitting on his hallowed seat. Sarasvati, was playing on the vina and there was nothing but silence in the hall which was filled with music.

Incensed beyond measure Brahma walked back and went to Brindavan to see what was happening there. He saw what Krishna had done. He saw the daily events going on as usual and he saw the host of boys led by Krishna and Balarama with the calves following them. He rubbed his eyes and told himself: "The boys and calves are sleeping in the cave: how come, they are all here with Krishna?" He rushed to the cave to see if they had been found by Krishna and released from there. But no! they were all there sleeping the deep sleep inflicted on them by Brahma. Again and again he tried to solve the mystery but he could not. He became covered with confusion: with the Maya of the Lord, and he grovelled in the darkness called ignorance. The faint attempt of Brahma at unravelling the mystery was as ineffectual as the light of the glow-worm when the sun is shining.

Seeing his stupefaction Krishna took pity on him. At once Brahma saw that each and every calf and boy was dark like the rain cloud: that he was wearing yellow silk: each one had four arms and in the four hands glowed the white conch, the discus, the mace and the red lotus. Brahma saw the form which the formless one had taken for the benefit of his bhaktas. Brahma stood like he was carved out of stone and stood staring at the myriads of Narayanas that were before his eyes. Krishna realised that the time had come when Brahma should be made to realise his arrogance and the lesson which has to follow for any one smitten with that disease. Brahma saw the forms of Narayana vanish and the calves and cowherd boys took their places. Realising the immensity of his impertinence Brahma fell at the feet of Krishna and begged him to forgive him for his stupid prank which he played not knowing the real nature of the Lord. He then went round Krishna three times as is the custom when you wish to honour someone greater than yourself and went back to his Satyaloka, a chastened and a wiser Brahma.

Krishna collected the lost calves which Brahma had restored to the forest and went back to the spot where he had left his dear playmates. They were all there waiting for him. They said: "How quickly you have found the calves, Krishna! We have not eaten even a mouthful of food since you left: so quick is your return. Come, come quickly. Let us finish our meal and play again." Krishna smiled his charming smile and finished the rest of the curd and rice which he still held in his left hand.

Krishna plucked all the flowers on the way and making a garland of them wore it on his lovely neck: He picked up the feather of a peacock and tucked it in his crown of hair: Powdered pink shell he rubbed on his face as a cosmetic and, sounding his flute he entered Brindavan followed by his playmates and they were making music with bugles and trumpets !

The children rushed to their homes and each one told his parents how Krishna saved them from the jaws of death: how Krishna killed the python and how they all came out of the insides of the dead snake.

BALARAMA KILLS DHENUKA

Krishna was now six years old and so were his companions. They were now considered old enough to graze cows. Sanctifying every spot he touched with his lotus feet, Krishna spent his time grazing cows in Brindavan. He became proficient in playing on the flute and he would gather his friends and the cows around him after they had been fed, with the music of his flute.

One day, as usual, Krishna and Balarama entered the beautiful forest with their retinue. There were flowers everywhere. Deer were running here and there and the music made by the birds and the murmuring of the bees was soothing. The waters of the river were flowing placidly and the tranquillity that was there was like that in the minds of great men. Krishna called Balarama and said: "Look at the forest, my dear brother! Look at the trees laden with flowers. The boughs are so heavy with the flowers they are bearing, they are almost touching the ground. It seems to me like they are falling at your feet and asking you to rid them of some sin which they have committed in some previous birth of theirs which has made them to be born as trees. The bees are singing your praises since they know you are the Lord who has deigned to be born into this world of sin to rid her of her pain. The rishis in the forest are not seen but they are concealed somewhere in these trees and birds and bees. Look at that peacock and his dance of joy! What a wonderful tail he has! Those deer running as a herd look like a group of maidens with scared eyes: and the koils are making music in praise of you. Fortunate indeed is this Brindavan and these lovely spots which have been sanctified by the fact that you have trod on them." Balarama accepted all this tribute with a smile. It was very rare for Krishna to get so emotional and sentimental. They went along with the other boys to graze the cows in the forest. Krishna would look often at his brother and smile.

Krishna was in a very happy mood. He danced with the peacocks, ran with the deer and sang with the bees in the same pitch. The cows had wandered far and with a voice like a rumbling cloud he called them all by their names and called them back into the fold. They ran hither and thither and had a good time as was usual.

Balarama was tired out. Krishna made him lie down on his lap and massaged his tired feet.

Sridhama, Subala and Stoka-Krishna were three of the very dear friends of Krishna. They came near Krishna and said: "Look, Krishna. There is a beautiful palmgrove very near. There are ripe fruit there. Some have fallen on the ground and some are still clinging to the trees. They are very tasty but we cannot get them because a wicked asura by name Dhenuka guards the grove and lives there. You and Balarama are powerful enough to kill him since we know how strong you are. But we have to warn you. Dhenuka is not alone there. He had quite a few relations, kinsmen of his who are just as terrible as he is. He eats human flesh and so no one dares to enter the grove.

But the smell of the delicious fruits is wafted to us by the passing breeze and it is so tempting. We are longing to taste the fruits and only the two of you are able to help us get what we want. Will you get the fruits for us?"

Balarama and Krishna laughed at the youngsters who had such a simple desire: to eat the dates from the palm trees. Therefore they set out in the direction of the grove guided by the host of happy youngsters.

As soon as they entered the grove of palms Balarama went to work. With his powerful and mighty arms he shook the trees one by one and soon the ground was carpeted by the fruit so much desired by their friends. The children hurriedly picked up the fruits. Hearing the noise made by Balarama, DHENUKASURA, who was in the form of a mule, rushed to the spot. The earth trembled at his strides.

Dhenuka rushed towards Balarama and with a fearful cry he kicked Rama on the chest and started running around. Again he approached Rama: again and again he raised his two hind legs to kick Rama and kill him. Balarama

caught the two hind legs of the rakshasa: the legs which were raised aloft. He then whirled him round and round above his head and threw him on the trees. The asura was dead and with his fall the trees fell too. One tree fell and this felled its neighbour and that, the next and all the trees rocked to and fro like they were shaken by a strong wind.

Adishesha pervades this Universe. Just as a piece of cloth is woven with the woof and warp even so the Universe is knit into the Lord Adishesha who is only another aspect of Lord Narayana. Can one, then, be surprised at this feat of Balarama?

The kinsmen of Dhenuka, seeing their master killed by the young boy rushed towards Rama and Krishna with the intention of avenging the death of Dhenuka. Rama and Krishna stood where they were and, as each asura came near, they grabbed him by his legs and they whirled each one of them and threw him on the trees.

Soon, the trees, instead of bearing their natural fruit, were seen bearing the dead forms of the asuras on their crests. The celestials were pleased with this action of the brothers.

Late in the evening the children with Rama and Krishna came back to Brindavan and the mothers rushed to see Krishna, beautiful Krishna, with his body and his hair red with the dust of the roads and with his peacock feather fluttering from his head: with his neck adorned with the Vanamala, the garland woven out of all the wild flowers in the forest and with the eternal smile on his lips. Krishna was a beautiful vision for which the gopas and the gopis would wait every evening.

THE POISONED LAKE

One day, Krishna went towards the river Yamuna with his friends to graze the cows like everyday: only this day he went alone. Balarama did not go with them. They were all sitting in their favourite spot talking and laughing and playing. The heat was intense that day and the cows had wandered on their own with some of the boys towards the Yamuna. Since they were very thirsty the boys did not think of the spot where they were drinking from.

Close by the bank of the river Yamuna there was a lake—Madu as it was called. This lake was inhabited by a dread snake by name KALIYA and he had poisoned the waters of the Madu-lake. No one who drank water from the Kaliya Madu could live after: so virulent was the poison. The boys of Brindavan, in their eagerness to quench their thirst, did not remember the warnings about the danger lurking in the waters and drank freely of the water as also the thirsty cows. At once they fell down in a dead faint. The virulence of the poison was so much that the birds which flew across the Madu would fall down and die: the fumes were so far-reaching.

After a while Krishna noticed that some of his companions who had gone for a drink of water had not come and he saw that the cows were also missing. He got up and with him, the rest of the boys. They followed the footsteps which marked the progress of the others and found that they went towards Yamuna. This was no surprise since they went to drink water. But the path had deviated a bit and, after a few moments of searching Krishna saw all of them senseless: in a deathlike swoon. His dear cows were also lying on the ground as though they were dead.

Krishna's anger knew no bounds. He looked at the Madu. The blue waters of the Yamuna which had flown into the Madu had become black with the poison which had been constantly emitted by Kaliya over the span of several years. The waters were simmering and frothing: so hot was the

water and they all stood around gazing at the painful sight. There rose a cry of lament from the other boys: "Oh! Misery! Our friends and playmates are dead and our cows are dead! Without thinking, they have all drunk water out of this Kaliya Madu. How can we go home without them? How can we live without them? What are we to do?" They wrung their hands in sorrow and despair: tears flowed from their childish eyes.

Krishna stood for a while looking around. The bank of the Madu had a few trees but all of them were dead since the poisonous air had killed all the roots and the leaves had dried long ago. It was indeed sad to see the immense trees, all standing stark without leaves on their branches, like men who were once powerful but who had now lost all their power and strength.

Krishna saw a KADAMBA tree which was very tall and it was the sole tree which did not have its limbs scorched by the poison. There was a story prevalent that Garuda, when he brought the golden vessel filled with nectar to the earth to please his cousins and to release his mother from bondage, rested here for a while on that tree: and that was why Kaliya's poison could not quite kill the tree. Anyway, the tree seemed sturdy enough to Krishna and he promptly began to climb the tree. The boys were looking on with puzzled eyes. They did not know what Krishna was planning to do. He just held out his hand to them as if to say: "Stay a while and be not afraid. I will tackle this problem all by myself. You just stand and watch."

Even as they were looking Krishna looked once at them and then reached the top of the tree. A strange sight met their eyes. Whenever his tiny feet touched the tree, green leaves sprouted at the spot and soon the tree was a glorious sight with green leaves and sweet smelling flowers. As their amazement grew, their eyes opened wider and Krishna suddenly jumped. From the scaffolding he had made for himself by reaching the top of Kadamba tree he dived into the Madu.

The children who were watching were horrified. They knew that Krishna would die in a matter of minutes. Some of them rushed to the house of Nandagopa and told him what had happened. Yashoda rushed out of the

inner apartments and she heard them saying: "The cows and some of the boys have drunk water out of Kaliya Madu and they are lying dead on the banks of the Madu. Seeing this Krishna has jumped into the Madu. He is going to die! Krishna is going to die!"

Yashoda fell down in a swoon. She was revived by the others and the state of Nanda was equally pitiable. The light of their lives was gone and there was nothing left to live for. So they moaned and wept. By this time the entire Brindavan came to hear the dreadful news brought by the gopala children and there was lamentation in every house. No one thought of his son or his cow which was dead. They were all lamenting the fact that Krishna had jumped into the Madu and was at the mercy of the dreadful snake Kaliya.

Everyone rushed to the banks of Yamuna. They all thought that they should not have allowed the child to go without the protection of Balarama who was his elder brother! In spite of the many miracles performed by him, Krishna was not known to them! They could not know that he was Narayana himself! To them he was a child who bore a charmed life since so many of the dangers which threatened him had been averted by the grace of Narayana and because of the good fortune of his parents. Balarama had been left behind and now look! What had happened!

Balarama had been listening to it all and smiled to himself. He knew who Krishna was and who he himself was! He could not tell them the divine secret – Devarahasya - the birth of Krishna and the purpose of his birth and that of himself.

Without speaking a word he also went with them to the banks of the Yamuna and there, stood with them on the banks of the famed Kaliya Madu.

In the meantime Krishna, who had tightened the cloth round his waist had dived into the Madu with his two arms held together as if to beckon Kaliya to his death. So powerful was his dive that the waters began to come to life and there were waves created in the seemingly placid lake. With the diving of Krishna the waters seemed to raise and to envelop him in their arms. The waves seemed to try and grasp him and suck him into their dark depths. Krishna began to swim around in the waters of the lake as though he were sporting there.

For years the lake had been undisturbed and the surface of the lake had ever been placid. Kaliya suddenly found that his calm was being disturbed. It seemed to him something was ruffling the surface of the lake. He did not pay much heed to it and stayed under as was his custom. After a while he found that the waters were being churned and the upheaval on the surface was so great that he was being tossed about!

Amazed at this phenomenon which had never happened to him before Kaliya moved his immense body and tried to rise to the surface of the lake. Till now no one had dared to come near the lake and today seemed to be different!

Kaliya raised his five heads and looked at the world of men. He saw the banks of the lake. He saw hundreds of men and women weeping tears of sorrow. There was beating of breasts and there were women who were trying to jump into the lake and they were being held back by their men. There was one woman in particular who was weeping and she seemed heartbroken. She was saying: "Krishna, my son, once you are dead, where is the point in any of us living any more? Kaliya has killed you and I will also be killed by him. I have no wish to live once I lose my son." Balarama and Nanda were holding her back and Balarama said: "Look, mother, Krishna can never be killed: not so easily as all that. He had decided to

punish the dreadful Kaliya who has been polluting our Yamuna for years. He has killed our cows and our playmates and it is but right that he should be punished and that is the only reason why Krishna has jumped into the Madu. Please, mother, possess your soul in patience and he will come out triumphant. Just watch and see."

Krishna had all this while been diving under the surface and no one could see him. He now emerged out of the surface of the lake like the moon out of the eastern sky. Kaliya looked: and he saw a young boy, rising out of waters. He was wearing a silken garment yellow like the sun and it was all drenched with the waters of the Kaliya Madu. He had a lovely mole on his chest and his face had a divine smile playing on it. Of fear or worry, there was not even a trace and he was so beautiful, and his charm was so great, that even Kaliya the dread snake was, for a moment, nonplussed at the sight of this heap of beauty. But he shook himself out of this slight moment of hesitation and began to lash at Krishna. He caught hold of Krishna and he wound his entire length round the form of the young body; with his five heads he spat his virulent poison on the child. He dug his fangs deep into all the limbs of the little boy and those who were watching from the banks could only look on with horror: and with a strange fascination they stood spellbound waiting for the moment when their beloved Krishna would fall down dead and become submerged under the blackened waters of the Madu. Most of them were down on the ground and they had fainted away unable to see horror of their child being killed. Nanda himself was in a swoon and Balarama was the only who could keep Yashoda and Rohini from jumping into Kaliya Madu. He spoke words of comfort to them. They could not believe him though, since they knew all about the fate of one who had been caught up in the coils of Kaliya.

Nanda woke up from his swoon and tried to kill himself by falling all into the waters and it was a hard task for Balarama to keep them all away from the waters.

For a while Krishna allowed this farce to go on: that he was caught up in the coils of the serpent and that he was being crushed to death. Kaliya himself thought that the end of Krishna had come. Suddenly he felt that something was happening to him. A great weight seemed to be pressing on

him: on his entire length. It seemed to him as though someone was trying to tear him apart. He saw that Krishna was growing in size and that he was now straining at the bonds which tried to hold him. Kaliya tried his best to tighten his hold but it was of no avail. Krishna slipped easily out of his coils and the sight brought new life into the hearts of those who were watching. Despair now gave place to curiosity and with wonderment they stood watching what was happening. A ray of hope began to illuminate their faces since their little Krishna had managed to escape from Kaliya's hold. "Come, come quickly, Krishna!" they shouted. "Come to the banks and we will pull you out. You can escape the clutches of this demon and you can be alive. Come before he gets hold of you again." So shouted all those on the banks. Krishna smiled at all of them and held out his palms as if to say: "Just stay and watch. You will see a lot of fun."

Kaliya's anger knew no bounds. He opened his five hoods to the full and hissing like the sea he pounced on Krishna with the desire to sting him with all his fangs. He beat against the young form again and again and every time Krishna eluded the strike of the snake. Here, there, everywhere was Krishna to be seen: and the dread Kaliya chased him with his hood upraised. His fangs were poised to strike and just when Kaliya was sure he got Krishna the young boy would escape and the game went on for a while. For a moment the five heads of the snake were still. The eyes were spitting fire and the tongues were literally spitting poison. There was nothing but hatred in the red eyes of the snake and it seemed as though he was ready to burn the child with his fury: the child who had dared to defy him and play with him so; the pranks were not to his liking and Kaliya wanted to punish Krishna.

KALIYA SUBDUED

Suddenly Krishna leaped into the sky and landed right on the heads of the snake. There was great commotion everywhere. Krishna had evidently beaten Kaliya since he was standing on the heads of the snake. Try as he would, Kaliya could not extricate himself from under the feet of Krishna. Krishna stood on one of the heads and Kaliya tried to sting him with the fangs of other four. At once Krishna's foot would be on the other head and one after another he jumped on them. After a while Krishna began to dance on the heads of Kaliya. The waters of the lake were lashing against the banks and they made sweet music and the waves kept time to the dancing of the Lord. His twinkling feet danced with abandon and they were lit up by the gems on the heads of the snake. The tempo rose and rose and there was no sign of Krishna ending his dance.

The lashing of Kaliya's tail began to grow less and less and he was getting tired. His exhaustion could be seen. He was, till now, spitting poison but now he was spitting blood instead. Seeing the glorious dance of Krishna the denizens of the heavens rejoiced and the people of Brindavan standing on the banks now beat time with their hands. They were no longer afraid for Krishna. Krishna danced and every time a head of Kaliya tried to rise up Krishna stamped on it and subdued it; and so it went on.

Kaliya now realised who it was that had graced his head by dancing on it. He saluted Narayana mentally. His wives were now sure that their lord would die if Krishna did not show any mercy. They rose up to the surface of the lake and worshipped Krishna. They prayed to him to spare the life of their lord. Krishna saw them and their children and they were standing with their palms held together worshipping him. They said: "You are Lord of lords. The punishment you have meted out to our lord is but right and fair. We are not questioning it at all. The purpose of your *avatar* is to subdue the wicked and you have done that now. You have punished us:

according to us it is not punishment but your divine grace granted to us. We know when Lord Narayana decides to punish a wrong-doer his real intention is to grace the sinner and to rid him of all the sins he has committed. Because of sins committed in our previous births, we have been doomed to assume this dread form of snakes. But then, this Kaliya has also accumulated a lot of *punya* in some previous birth or else how could he have had the good fortune of having your lotus feet planted on his heads? The great Lakshmi herself performs pujas and penances for a touch of the dust of your feet. When such is the case, without even asking for it, Kaliya has been granted the privilege, the good fortune, of the touch of your sacred feet. Can anyone be more lucky? After touching your feet no one desires heavenly bliss or the status of Brahma or the enviable position of being the lord of the nether regions. That bliss has been granted to our husband. We salute you with all our hearts.

"We have seen you and we have no desire at all. But we have to ask you to spare Kaliya to us. You are the sea of affection and forgiveness and we are thirsty for a drop from that ocean. Please forgive him this sin and grant him life. He was ignorant of your real nature and he behaved as he did because of that. Please grant us this boon. Let Kaliya live and make us happy."

Kaliya was limp with fatigue. His heads were all hanging down and nothing was left of his arrogance. Krishna jumped off his heads. Kaliya breathed with great difficulty. Holding his palms together he said: "My lord, it is hard for one to abandon the dread disease called 'I'. It is this ego which is the ruin of all living beings. And I was smitten by this dread disease. But you have cured me. My serpentine form is the embodiment of wickedness and I acted according to my nature. I have now been roused from this sleep of ignorance. I know who you are and I will never go back to my old nature."

Krishna said: "Kaliya, you are forgiven. But you should not stay here any more. Go back to the ocean and live with your kinsfolk. A river is meant for the use of human beings and their lives depend on the river and her water. It is not right that you should poison it. Anyone who listens to this

story of your conflict with me will never be afraid of snakes. Go back to where you came from."

Seeing him standing silent Krishna smiled and said: "I know what is worrying you. In the Ramanaka island, there is the dread of Garuda for you and so you are worried. But let me assure you that Garuda will not harass you any more. When I danced on your heads my foot has marked each one of your hoods and seeing that, Garuda will leave you

Kaliya worshipped Krishna with flowers and gems and garlands of blue lotuses. He then prostrated before him with his wives and children and went away to the island by name Ramanaka. Yamuna became then free of the poison which polluted her.

So Kaliya, bearing the imprint of the Lord's feet on his hoods, left the lake and crawled away. The water became sweet and pure and the gopas and gopis rejoiced when they saw Krishna emerge from the lake like the full moon after the eclipse. Yashoda, Rohini, Nanda and all the others wanted to rush to him and embrace him but their happiness was so great that they stood spellbound as though they were unable to move. Balarama, however, strolled lazily towards his brother and they embraced each other warmly. Only they understood the smile which lit up their faces.

The elders and also the Nanda couple were again caught up in the Maya of the Lord and they spoke to one another and said: "It is indeed Providence which saved our little Krishna from the danger of Kaliya's poison. Gifts should be given lavishly to the brahmins and to the poor and Krishna should be protected from evil eyes." This, after seeing with their own eyes the divinity of Krishna when he danced on the heads of Kaliya; so great was the Maya which Krishna deliberately wove round the simple folk of Brindavan. Yashoda took Krishna on her lap and shed tears of joy at the great good fortune of Brindavan since their darling was spared to them. They thanked Narayana for it and there was great celebration all round. The cows and the boys had got up as though from a long sleep. None of them went home that night but spent it on the banks of the Yamuna.

THE FEUD IN RAMANAKA

King Parikshit spoke interrupting Suka. He said: "My lord, my curiosity is kindled. What is the story behind Kaliya's dread of Garuda while in the Ramanaka island? Please relate the reason to me."

Suka smiled as if to say: "Your curiosity is insatiable," and then said: "People are scared of the bite of the snake and they try, in several ways, to avert the danger from snakes. People, therefore, tried to pacify the snakes by offering some 'bali' - eatable - for the snakes on every new moon day. This offering would be left under the *ashwattha* tree and the snakes, bound as they were, by their promise, would accept the 'bali' and leave the people unmolested.

"The snakes, in their turn, were afraid of Garuda. So, to pacify him, they would give a portion of their food to him on the same new moon day. Kaliya, the son of Kadru, was a youngster and full of arrogance. The poison that was in him made him more arrogant than the rest of his clan. He said that this offering to Garuda was just a sign of cowardice and defiantly ate up what should have been offered to Garuda.

"Garuda, naturally, could not brook this insult offered to him and he rushed towards Kaliya with his immense wings outspread. Garuda's enmity towards the sons of Kadru was still green in his mind. He remembered the years of servitude his mother had to undergo because of the tyranny of Kadru and her wicked sons. So Garuda, finding an opportunity to vent his anger, rushed with great fury towards Kaliya.

"The youngster was undaunted. With his five heads spitting poison he stood up fearlessly and faced the onslaught of Garuda. He stung him often with his poison fangs. Garuda, the *vahana* of the Lord Himself, the great devotee of Narayana, treated this onslaught with great contempt and he pushed Kaliya on to the ground with his right wing: the wing golden in

colour and which gave Garuda the name Suparna. Kaliya could not withstand the pain caused by the fall. He rushed away from the spot and he hurried to the banks of the Yamuna: to the small lake which had formed on the banks of the river. Garuda did not have the courage to enter the *Madu* * in Yamuna." Here Suka smiled and said: "There is a reason for this. I will tell you."

"There used to be a number of fish living in this lake once upon a time. Once, an eagle which was flying near the lake saw a fish near the shore and he swooped down to eat it up. There was a rishi named Shaubari standing there. He tried to prevent the eagle from catching the fish by stopping him. He remonstrated with the eagle but the bird paid no heed to his words. It ate up the fish. Shaubari watched with compassion the young fish in the water which were missing their mother who had just been killed. His anger knew no bounds. He cursed all the birds with the words: "From now on, if ever any bird, why, even if it is Garuda himself, enters this lake and touches the fish here, his head will break into a thousand pieces."

"By some strange channel Kaliya had come to know of this curse of Shaubari and he rushed to this *Madu* knowing that this was the one spot where Garuda could do nothing to him."

It was midnight on the banks of Yamuna. Everyone had been just exhausted by the events of the day and they were almost senseless with the deep sleep which had descended on them. All on a sudden the forest around caught fire. It was summer and the fire raged and it surrounded the sleeping gopas all around. They got up and found themselves surrounded by the flames which were licking the trees and the grass around. At once they looked to Krishna and said: "Krishna you are our saviour. You must save us and help us to get out of the fire alive. We have no one but you to mind us. Please, Krishna, have pity on us and do something." Krishna took their words to heart and in his love for them he swallowed the forest fire and saved all of them: even as Mahadeva once swallowed the dread Halahala and saved the heavenly host.

* Small lake

PRALAMBHA

The summer months set in. The season was, no doubt, summer but in Brindavan where Krishna and Balarama were present, it was always Vasanta. The waterfalls from the mountain were making sweet music and the murmur of insects in the thickets was a hypnotic drone which accompanied the music of the falling waters. The trees were clad in fragrant flowers and the rivers and lakes were filled with flowering lotuses, red, white and blue and it looked as though the sky had descended to the earth. The breeze which blew across the waters carried with it the fragrance of the flowers and the grass which was everywhere made the earth cool and pleasant. The harsh and hot rays of the sun could do not havoc here. The earth was ever wet with the waters from the spring which were perennial and the deer, birds and the cuckoos were making music; the peacocks danced with their feathers spread out like rainbows.

Krishna went frequently to this forest with his friends. He would have his flute in one hand and the cowherd's whip in the other. They would spend all their time playing, singing and dancing. The games they played were so many, so varied and so absorbing that they would always return home late forgetting the passage of time. The devas would stand and watch the companions of Krishna with jealousy while they played hide and seek, leap frog, wrestling and other similar games which were purely rustic.

Fortunate were the cowherd boys who had Krishna all for themselves: this Krishna who was beyond the reach of the greatest of the ascetics and tapasvins.

There was an asura named Pralambha. He was one of the myrmidons of Kamsa. He had been sent by Kamsa to kill Krishna. As soon as he arrived in the forest Krishna knew that the asura had come. Pralambha took the form of a cowherd and joined in their game as though he belonged there. No one noticed him except the brothers Rama and Krishna. Krishna

allowed him to play with them as though he had been taken in by the disguise of the asura.

The game they were playing was roughly like the game which is played by all boys even now. There was a slight variation in the game. The whole lot had to be divided into two groups, and the winning team had to be carried by the losing team at the end of the game. Rama led one group and Krishna, the other. Krishna's group was the losing team and so they had to carry each and everyone of the other team. And thus they reached a huge big *ashwattha* tree by name Pandiraka. Krishna was carrying a boy by name Sridhama: and Pralambha, in the guise of a cowherd boy, was carrying Balarama.

When he had gone some distance Pralambha thought that the time had come when he could run away with his victim. When he thought that no one was looking he hurried away from where he was till now, along with the others. He hurried away with Balarama on his back with the intention of killing him.

With Balarama on his neck he went some distance and after he had covered enough ground he assumed immense form which was natural to him.

With Balarama on his neck he looked like a rain-bearing cloud with a flash of lightning streaking across its immense length: like a midnight cloud with the full moon touching its edge. Seeing him grow to that size even Balarama was taken aback. Rama folded his palm tight and with his fist he hit Pralambha. The blow was like that from Indra's Vajrayudha. Pralambha's head was reeling with the blow and the next moment it was crushed. Blood gushed from his immense mouth and he fell down like a mountain felled by Indra. The boys had now reached the spot and they all embraced Balarama and said: "Fortunately you were able to kill this asura." The devas rained flowers on Balarama and the whole crowd returned to Brindavan talking about the great event and about Rama's strength.

THE FOREST FIRE

Once, when they were engaged as usual in one of their all-absorbing games the youngsters realised that the cows and calves had strayed away from them. They could not be seen and there was panic among the boys. The cows, meanwhile, had gone in search of fresh pastures. The grass was very green some distance away and they went there. The grass was slightly different from that which was growing in their usual haunts. While they were busy eating, the cows found that a forest fire had begun to eat up the tree and grass and they cried in distress. The fire had surrounded the animals on all sides and they could not find their way out.

The boys, in the meantime, went here and there searching for their charges. They followed the hoof marks and the trail of blunted grass which had been eaten by the cows. They could not find their charges anywhere. Krishna called out their names one by one in his resonant voice. Hearing him call out to them the cows mooed back in reply. There was relief and there was agony in their cries.

The fire, in the meantime, had spread. Tongues of flames were soaring to the skies and hot air filled the surrounding atmosphere. The fire now enveloped the boys also. The children were panic-stricken and they shouted: "Krishna! Krishna! Please do something. Rama, help us. Only you both are capable of helping us; of saving the cattle. Again and again you have done it. The fire is eating up everything and if you delay we will all perish. Please Krishna, save us from this calamity." Krishna listened to their cries and said: "Please do not be afraid. So long as I am here there is no need for anyone to be afraid. Close your eyes every one of you and do not open them until and unless I ask you to."

The children obeyed him. Implicit obedience to Krishna was not a new thing to them. They all stood with their eyes closed tightly and with their minds set on Krishna and only Krishna. Krishna used his yogic powers and

sucked all the fire towards himself and swallowed it entirely, like he did on the day he danced on the head of Kaliya.

When the fury of the fire had abated and when the earth felt a cool breeze caressing her, Krishna led his companions and the cows and calves to the *ashwattha* tree by name Pandiraka. He said: "Now open your eyes my friends."

The young boys saw that they were back again where they had been playing. The fire and the piteous cry of the cows were still fresh in their minds. They could not grasp it at all: that the fire had abated and that they were all safe. For a moment, in their amazement they thought that Krishna was the Lord of lords who had no beginning and no end: that he was Narayana himself. But very soon that feeling vanished. They only knew their playmate, their darling Krishna was capable of saving them from any dire calamity and that he was a wonderful person. Beyond that, they could not gauge him. They went home and told the people of Brindavan about the great achievements of Balarama and Krishna.

The men and women of Brindavan thought that it was indeed their great good fortune that two divine beings had been born in their midst as their children.

THE RAINY SEASON

The heat of summer had abated. Summer had now been lost in the rainy season. Grishma ritu was over and Varsha ritu was fast approaching. The skies lost their pure blue and there were clouds scattered here and there: the harbingers of the rain clouds that were to come. Soon the sky was overcast and a dull grey skin seemed to be stretched across the entire expanse of the sky. All on a sudden there could be heard deep rumbling noises from afar. The darkness of the skies would be rent for a moment or two by streaks of lightning. It looked like the three gunas all in the same place. The sky made one think of the Brahman: it was covered by the dense black clouds which stood for Tamoguna. The thunder which was rumbling seemed to personify Rajoguna and the lightning which lit up the darkness, for Sattvaguna. Like the Paramatma, when caught in the *Avaranas*, becomes the Jivatma, even so the sky appeared to be full of clouds, of thunder and lightning.

For the last eight months the sun had been sucking dry all the waters that he could lay his rays on; and now he decided to return it all to mother earth. This was like the action of kings who take as much wealth as they can in the form of taxes and, when the time comes, return them to the people in the form of benefits. Great souls are prepared to lay down their lives if, by their action, they can benefit humanity. Even so, the clouds annihilated themselves by giving all their waters to the earth below. Blown hither and thither by the strong winds, the clouds shed water incessantly. The earth which had become thin, emaciated, because of the heat of summer, once again became luscious and full of greenery.

When night set in, the stars and planets could not be seen. The only light that could be found was the twinkling uncertain light shed by the glow-worms. It seemed like the Kali yuga, when the Vedic paths would be forgotten and only improper and immoral ways of life would be evident.

The frogs which had been silent till now began to croak incessantly all of a sudden which brought to mind the parallel of young boys at their studies who, when they find their master approaching, will suddenly begin to recite their lessons in a loud voice. Small and insignificant brooks and streams, which till now were unnoticed, suddenly filled up with water and they resembled small men who had been denied the pleasure of the senses for a long time, who had been denied the thrill of being rich, and who, when they suddenly achieved these, behaved turbulently, without knowing how to curb their vain desires and who did not know how to pull the reins on their wayward minds. The fields were green with the crops growing lush and luxuriant. Everything looked beautiful on the face of the earth which was drenched in the pure water from the clouds: water which was sweet, fresh and cool.

Along with a strong wind the waters of the sea which had a sudden influx of a myriad rivers flowing into it became very clouded bringing to mind the parallel of the mind of a yogi which had been, for a long time, calm and tranquil, far removed from the onslaught of the senses and which, taken unawares, falls a victim to the torrential awareness of the senses and becomes helplessly muddled, losing all his calmness.

The well-worn paths which people used to tread everyday were now covered with new grass and therefore could not be seen at all: it was like the Vedas which, if neglected for a long time, become forgotten and lost to the world.

The lightning which went to embrace the rain cloud incessantly suddenly lost all interest in it, once it became emptied of all water like a devadasi who will not pay heed to a rich admirer of hers who has now become poor. The rainbow with its seven colours gleamed in the sky: even like the Brahman who is without gunas but who *appears* to be invested with the gunas in the world of men. On the other hand the moon, hidden behind a dark cloud could not shed his true light, like the glory of a man is dimmed if his intellect is clouded by *ego*, by his *ahamkara*.

The peacocks were spreading their plumage and were dancing everywhere. Trees which had been dry and thirsty were now filled with sap and looked

satisfied. At places, the banks of rivers had been broken and wherever the eye could see, there was water and green and the eye could do nothing but feast itself on the glorious face of the earth.

The young boys of Brindavan enjoyed themselves in the rain. They delighted in rushing to the caves, sitting there eating the roots and other delicacies which could be found at the bases of the trees and their trunks and in the fields; getting drenched in the rain. Krishna would stand there, staring at the falling rain, at the mountain torrents rushing down, at the cows which were heavy with their milk and which walked towards their beloved Krishna slowly and softly; at the hunters women who were wandering here and there collecting honey from the hives. The boys with Krishna would sit on the rocks and eat their food watching the river water flowing rapidly by their side. Krishna would suddenly lie down on the grass and stare for hours at the sky and at the tree tops which would wave in the strong winds which blew across the earth. All around him would be his cows and their calves and, of course, his playmates.

And so passed the rainy season bringing joy to everyone. The winds became suddenly less violent and they became soft and gentle breezes which just brushed the earth and the trees and the green grass with their gentle touch. The sky was now clear and cloudless and the waters in the lakes and rivers were also clear: without any clouded and muddled look.

The lotuses bloomed again indicating that the minds of yogis which had, for a time, strayed from the path of meditation, had come back from their lapse and were again calm and filled with tranquillity.

SHARAD RITU

The life of man has been divided into four stages: Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. Each is, in its own way, a difficult stage. During the Brahmacharya stage the youngster has to be under the care of his guru—preceptor. He should obey him in all ways: collecting *samits* for his guru, washing his clothes, massaging his feet when he is tired; and doing a thousand other small jobs which will try the patience of a youngster who will be lacking, in patience. This stage is said to discipline the minds and its waywardness. One sure way of being able to tackle all these little pinpricks is to set the mind firmly on the Lord and practise Bhakti. Then troubles cease to be troubles.

Grihasthashrama is the next stage. The youngster who is now a man, gets caught up in the coils which go by the name Samsara. He gets a wife and he has a home to maintain and he now has children to bring, up in the right manner. He has to earn his livelihood. All these troubles are apt to make a man unhappy and the only way to be happy though living the life of a Grihastha is to set one's mind on the Lord. Practise Bhakti and the troubles will not be troubles any longer.

Vanaprastha is the next stage. Man is said to have attained a slight degree of detachment from his erstwhile Grihasthashrama and he is said to abandon his involvement with the family. This is also beset with troubles; mostly physical discomforts which assail him. Used as he is to comforts, man finds it hard to get accustomed to a new way of life. Here too Bhakti will help him to surmount these small troubles and they will cease to be troubles.

The last stage is Sanyasa. Man is now said to have shed everything which binds him to the earth. His love for home, wife, child and belongings are said to have been left behind and he is on his way to Moksha. But it is not easy to be a Sanyasi. Try as he might, man finds that his senses are

sometimes too powerful for him to resist and the arch enemies, six in number, led by the worst of them all, Kama, surrounded him on all sides and very often he falls a victim to their machinations. At this stage it is Bhakti and only Bhakti which can save man. With his mind set on the Lord, man can gain victory over his troubles and they will not be troubles any longer. Bhakti is the one thing that helps man all through his lifetime. It is the only yoga that should be followed.

When Sharad Ritu came it was like the Bhakti for the Lord clearing every obstacle. The sky was rid of the clouds which had been black and heavy like the troubles of a brahmachari. The animals which would stay huddled together during the rainy days were now free to go their own ways like the Grihastha who can live without attachment. The earth was rid of her slush and muddiness like the Vanaprastha gets rid of his physical discomforts with the help of Bhakti ! The waters became clear and sweet like the mind of the Sanyasi with his mind filled to the brim with Bhakti for the Lord.

The clouds which had become white and light after they had shed their accumulated waters looked like the *munis* who were at peace because they had cast out the love for son, love for wealth and love for the worldly goods. The mountains now allowed clear placid water to flow from it only at several select spots: like learned and wise men who impart their knowledge to only a select few and not to everyone. When the water was plentiful in small puddles during the rainy season fish and other water creatures invaded them. However, when the rains had stopped, the waters were drying up but these creatures, ignorant of the lessening of the water, went on staying there resembling men who live engrossed in the worldly things and in worldly affairs, worldly pleasures, not realising that day by day, life is getting shortened. The earth shed its muddiness and the transient creepers which covered it, like a man who, with the help of his intellect, sheds the inconstant things like "I" and "MINE". When the rains stopped, the sea was not turbulent any more, but placid, like the mind of one who has learnt to control his mind and its actions.

The sun began to burn hot again during Sharad Ritu. But the moon made the nights pleasant for everyone making them forget the discomforts of the day: it was like *atmajnana*, the knowledge about Self, destroying the

attachment one has for the body. The night sky with its bright stars and white cloudless sky was like the intellect which is all Sattvaguna, which has reached the bourne of knowledge. The world of men had been thrown out of action during the rainy season and now, when the rains were over, when the rain clouds had become white once again, when the sky had become clear, life began to assume its previous form. People began to resume their daily tasks and everything assumed a new look. There was a freshness in the forests which had been washed clean by the rains. The lakes were full of lotuses, red, white and blue. The rivers had now slowed down in their speed and the mad rush was not there. They were flowing softly and very gently. The very air was perfumed with the scent of the flowers which began to bloom again. Brindavan was drenched in beauty.

THE MAGIC OF KRISHNA'S FLUTE

There was a grove by name Madhuvana on the banks of the Yamuna. Krishna, with his team of cowherds and cows and calves, entered the grove one day. The waters of Yamuna were clear and sweet. The air was laden with the perfume of the lotuses blooming on the lakes. All the trees were covered with flowers and there was music made by the bees hovering around the flowers and by the birds living on the trees. Everyone was in a gay and happy mood and they entered the grove with music and dancing.

Krishna took up his flute in his hands and breathed music into it. The notes spilling out of it could be heard for miles around and the gopis heard it. They became quite intoxicated with it and with love for Krishna. They talked to each other about him and about his many feats which had held them spellbound all these years. They thought of Krishna and his handsome figure. His hair was all curly and the curls would fly in the breeze when he walked. On top of his head he had stuck the feather of a peacock and this lent an unbelievably lovely glow to his face. His figure was perfect like that of a dancer and his ears were decorated with the white flowers of the Karnikara tree. He was wearing a garland of flowers: the flowers were of such different hues: white, red, yellow and blue: white and green leaves were woven in between. This garland was called VAIJAYANTI. He would always dress himself in silk which was golden yellow in colour and his dark complexion was set off very well by the yellow silk. Dressed as though for a festive occasion Krishna stood in the midst of his friends and touched the flute with his lips and began to play sweet notes on it. The youngsters with him danced to the tune of the flute and there was great rejoicing in the Madhuvana.

The gopis spoke among themselves and they could talk of Krishna and nothing else. One gopi said: "When I think of the face of Krishna with his lips touching the flute and his eyes bent lovingly on his friends and on the

cows and on the trees and, in short, on everything around him, can one think of anything else? Fortunate indeed are we that he should be among us always. I feel jealous of the flute when I see how fortunate it is. It can be near the lips of my beloved Krishna and touch them while here I am, pining for a look from him.

"Fortunate is Brindavan which has Krishna's feet touching it all over. The peacocks dance with joy since Krishna plays music for them. The bamboo trees shed honey since they are proud that their child has been chosen by Krishna for his music. All the animals at the foot of the hill stand like they have been painted pictures. The very earth is proud since Krishna has chosen to walk on her. Fortunate are the deer which stand by the side of Krishna when he makes music in Madhuvana. The divine dancers, while passing in the sky, stop in their tracks and stand spellbound, charmed by the music of Krishna's flute. They pay no heed to the flowers which are all slipping away from their hair, nor to their silken garments which get displaced by the passing breeze. The cows have stopped grazing and the grass in their mouths is just half chewed and they pay no heed to the grass which is falling down from their mouths. The calves stop halfway through their feed and the milk is flowing in dribblets along the corners of their mouths. They have forgotten to swallow the milk.

The sages are said to think only on the Lord and not think on anything else. If such is the case then all the inmates of the forest are sages since they are doing just that. They look at Krishna, they listen to Krishna and they think of nothing else but Krishna. The very river has fallen in love with him and with its tiny waves it touches the feet of Krishna and asks him to be kind to her. This hill Govardhana is the most fortunate of all the hills in the world since Krishna is for ever wandering on its slopes. His cows are grazed there and he is ever playing in its caves. He plucks flowers growing on its slopes and fruits from the trees there. Like a Bhakta offers flowers, water and fruits to his god, Govardhana does this service to him and it is his greatest devotee since this service has been done for the last so many days. Not a single day has been missed. It is strange that Krishna's loving eyes rest lovingly on the slopes of this hill? this Govardhana?"

KRISHNA'S PROMISE TO THE GOPIS

The gopis were full of love for Krishna and the season acted like a stimulant to their senses. The gopis had heard that the month of Margashirsha was the holiest of the months and that prayers offered up to Devi Katyayani would always be answered. The month was the earlier one during the season by name Hemanta and the river Yamuna was filled with pure and clear water. The young maidens in the houses of the gopas decided to pray to the Devi Katyayani. Early in the morning they would observe all the rules of the *Vrata* and come to the banks of the Yamuna. They would bathe in the cold waters of the river and on the banks, would fashion the form of the Devi with mud. They would then offer fruits and flowers and Naivedya to her and pray to her to grant them their desire.

"Devi ! Katyayani! Maye! Yogini ! Adhishwari! We are your devotees. Please be kind to us. Please make Krishna, the son of Nandagopa, look on us with love," asked everyone of the young maids and they spoke no other words in their minds except these. The days were passing and every day there would be seen in the streets of Brindavan the crowd of young girls singing, dancing, holding hands and running towards the banks of the Yamuna. The quarters would resound with the music of the young girls and they would spend a long time in the river to their hearts content and singing about their beloved.

One morning Krishna decided to play a prank on them. Silently and without their being aware of it, he followed them to the banks of Yamuna. When they were all well and truly submerged in the waters he came out of his hiding place. So lost were they in their enjoyment on their own, repeating Krishna's pranks, and his many deeds of wondrousness that they did not notice his latest prank. Quietly he crept towards the spot where they had left their clothes. He collected all their clothes and climbed quickly to the top of the tree on the bank; and he sat there waiting and listening to their talk. When they had tired of their bathing the young

gopis came to the river bank. To their dismay they found that the heap of clothes was missing. They went back to the waters and tried to locate with their eyes where their clothes were. They looked in vain. Their eyes were darting hither and thither but they could not find their clothes. When they were at a loss as to what should be done they heard Krishna's voice. He said: "O Gopis, your clothes are here, with me. I promise to give them to you if you come here and ask me for them. I feel very sorry for all of you. You have become so thin with fasts and the other strenuous *Vratas* you are observing. You will not be able to stand in the waters very long and so I am telling you. Come all together or come one by one and accept your clothes from me."

The girls did not know what to do or what to say. They looked at each other and they could not even be angry with Krishna whom they loved and for whose sake they were rigorously doing puja to Katyayani ! The water was cold and they were shivering because of the morning chill. Finally they said: "Krishna, do not torment us with this prank of yours. You are a good boy, we know. Please give our clothes back to us. We are feeling cold and we cannot bear it. Son of the lord of Brindavan as you are, you should not persecute your subjects. We are your slaves and we will obey every one of your commands. But please restore our clothes to us. Or else!"

Hearing the half-finished sentence Krishna said: "Or else? What will you do?"

One of the girls bolder than the others said: "We will go to the king and complain about you."

Krishna laughed outright and said: "How you contradict yourself! You say that you will obey every command of mine. All right. This is my command. Come here at once and take your clothes."

The girls realised that they had no alternative. With their forms trembling in the morning chill, with their eyes, frightened lest someone should come to the river banks and see their plight, they rushed towards the tree with their slender arms trying to cover up as much of themselves as possible. Krishna had hung out their garments one by one the boughs of the tree and with mischief in his eyes he looked at them. He then said: "You are all

performing a *Vrata* and yet, not knowing the rules of conduct you are all committing the sin of entering the holy waters without any cloth covering you. It is a wrong thing to do. It is an insult to Varuna, the lord of the waters. To make expiation you will have to keep both your hands on your heads and make *Anjali* to me. Only then will I return your clothes to you."

They tried to cover up their shame with one hand and to salute him with the other. But Krishna was shaking his head. He said: "An *Anjali* is made up of two palms, my dear girls! And again, you should not salute me with one hand. It is as bad and useless as an incomplete puja. The *Vrata* you have been observing all these days will be futile if you persist in insulting Varuna."

The young gopis did not want their *Vrata* to be wasted, and again, they knew that Krishna would persist in this wicked game of his. Time was fast running out and it was time for the entire Gokula to come there for the morning ablutions. They roused themselves out of their stupor. They held their palms over their heads and walked towards the foot of the tree where Krishna was sitting. Pleased with their utter devotion to him Krishna gave them back their clothes.

Indeed it is strange: The young girls had been deceived by Krishna: they had been ridiculed by him and he played with them like they had been puppets in the hands of an artist. Their clothes had been stolen by him and yet, the girls were not angry with him. They stood looking at him with their eyes drinking his beauty: and there was no anger in their minds because of this episode. They loved him so much.

Krishna knew what lay behind their observing the *Vrata* for Katyayani and he was full of love for these young maidens who loved him so much. He spoke to them in a kind voice. He said: "I know what is in your minds and I have accepted your devotion to me. Believe me, devotion to me has never gone unrewarded. You have given me your hearts and your minds and there is nothing in your minds except love for me. Listen to me. The love which is lodged in your hearts is so pure that it can never become lust of the type which lies in the ordinary human heart. The seed of a plant will give forth new shoots when planted in the earth. But if it is fried or baked,

then it will not be able to sprout again. Even so, love of a human type which is for human beings will give birth to further involvements with this world. But love which is directed towards me will be an end in itself and it will never make you earth-bound. Go home with the assurance from me that your efforts will not go unrewarded."

Overwhelmed by his words of assurance the gopi maidens went back to their homes and they were a strangely subdued group when they entered their homes.

Only one thought was uppermost in the mind of each one of them. Krishna had said: "I know what is in your minds and I assure you that your *Vrata* will not go unrewarded." That meant that Krishna had accepted their love for him and, what was more, had told them in so many words that he loved them. Instead of the song and dance which was part of them the girls now moved about as though they harboured a great secret in their hearts and they moved about with smiles of joy in their eyes and a sense of happiness which comes of having attained some desired object. And so, the days passed.

THE DEVOTION OF THE YAJNA-PATNIS

Krishna was apt to comment on the surroundings when he was in a mood for it. Once, as usual, the youngsters had left Brindavan early in the morning and they had reached the forest which was their favourite playground. This was on the slopes of the Govardhana hill. The heat was unbearable and the trees cast a welcome shade for the children. Krishna was in a very sentimental mood. He spoke to his companions about the place around him and how beautiful it all was.

"Look", he said. "Look how gracious these trees are. With their branches interlaced so beautifully they seem to have prepared a beautiful umbrella for our sake. Indeed they are fortunate since they live only for the good of others and not for themselves. They bear without complaint the intensity of the heat of summer, the violence of the storms and rains, and the chilling fire of the frost; and they do all this so that they can protect us from the fury of nature. Their life is the ideal of life one should strive for. When they are approached with a favour they never send away the seeker empty-handed, unlike human beings. A tree gives leaves, flowers, fruit, shade, root, bark and even its body after it is dead. To do good to others even at the cost of one's own life is the ideal taught in our sacred books and these trees follow that rule much more sincerely than the best among men."

They walked in silence: Krishna still overcome with emotion at the thoughts that had been provoked in his mind by the trees: and the others, the boys, chastened for a moment by Krishna and his serious talk which was so different from his usual pranks. They reached the banks of the Yamuna and then they began to play as usual and soon the river's flow mingled with the laughter of the boys at play.

Suddenly the youngsters said: "Krishna, look, it is very late and the sun has come to the mid-heavens. In our absorption in our games we never

thought of it and now we are all very hungry. Rama, you and Krishna should do something for us. It is not a hard task for both of you. Please get us something to eat." Krishna thought for a moment and said: "Look, we have not brought anything with us today. But I have an idea. Nearby is a spot holy for performing sacrifices. There are several great brahmins well versed in the Vedas and they are performing a yajna by name 'Angirasa'. Go there, and tell them that Rama and Krishna from Brindavan have sent you there asking them for food." The young boys rushed off in glee and reached the sacrificial spot very soon. They went near the brahmins and falling at their feet said: "O! Holy men! Please listen to our plea. We are hungry and we are the cowherds from Brindavan. We were in the forest grazing our cows. Rama and Krishna, the sons of Nanda, are with us and they sent us to you and asked us to tell you: We are hungry. Please give us food and satisfy our hunger.' They asked us to tell you that the yajna you are performing is not '*Saudramani*' wherein the food given by the performer of the yajna should not be eaten. In this yajna, since the *yajnapashu* has already been sanctified, it is not wrong to give food to others."

The brahmins listened to their words in silence. They were the deplorable type of sacrificers who had only the attainment of the heavens as their aim. Karma Kanda and the accompanying rites were important to them and in addition, they thought that they were very wise. So, even after the Lord in human form had asked them for food, they did not pay heed to it.

The five sacrificial fires, the devas led by Indra, the yajamana who performs the yajna, the rewards of the yajna and everything associated with a yajna are all only different aspects of the same Narayana who is Yajnesvara and that Narayana had asked them for food. And these unfortunate men were so intent on the world to come, that they did not know anything of the world around them: could not grasp the fact that Krishna was Narayana. They thought that he was just like anyone else and so they sat silent without replying to the plea of the cowherds.

The young boys stood for a while and there was nothing but silence which greeted them. The brahmins said neither "Yes" nor "No". Tired of standing there the boys ran away from there and reached the spot where Rama and

Krishna were standing waiting. They said: "We went to the yajnishala and spoke to the brahmins. We told them that you asked them for food; how hungry we all were but it was no use, Krishna. They stood silent and we got tired of standing there and came away. Now tell what we should do. You know how hungry we are and you both are equally hungry. Come, think up some way out of this."

"Look friends", said Krishna. "A beggar has always to face these moments of humiliation. It is no matter. Go now to the wives of these brahmins and tell them I am here with my brother Balarama. They know no Vedas but they know what it is to love me. Their minds are always set on me and they are sure to give you food."

The young cowherds rushed again to the yajnishala but this time they went to the spot where the wives of the brahmins were stationed and spoke to them after falling at their feet. They said: "We are prostrate before you. Please listen to us. We have been sent by Krishna and Rama and they are waiting close by. Krishna has sent you a message: 'With the cows, and with my comrades and my brother Balarama I came into the forest and we find we have come very far indeed. We are hungry and please give us some food.'" The brahmins' wives could not wait for the words to be ended. Hearing that Krishna was in the neighbourhood they become excited and happy. Collecting all the many different types of food they had prepared for the yajna they placed them in all the vessels they could find and rushed towards the spot where Krishna was, like rivers rushing eagerly towards the sea, their Lord, whom they have been impatient to meet.

Krishna had decided to grant an "audience" to his Bhaktas. He was wearing his silken garment yellow in colour and his chest was beautiful with the Vanamala which he was wont to wear. His lovely locks were gathered up on a crown and the feather of a peacock was waving triumphantly from his locks. He took the powder of the pink shell which was lying on the ground and he coloured his cheeks with it. He held a lotus in his right hand and his left rested lightly on the shoulder of his companion. This was the beautiful sight which greeted the eager eyes of the Yajna-patnis.

They saw his stance: his glorious smile and his lotus-like eyes with smiles hovering in them. They had heard all the stories of his escapades in Gokula and later, in Brindavan and now, what they had tasted through their ears they could drink with their eyes. They stood there looking at him and they were not aware of the world around them: they were unaware of themselves. They were not conscious of anything except the fact that Krishna whom they had been loving all these years, Krishna whom they had been longing to see, now stood before them with a smile on his face and a wealth of affection in his eyes. Like when the mind reaches the state called "Sushupti" where the ego is totally absent, they lost themselves in the thrill of being with Krishna.

Krishna knew what was passing in their minds and spoke to them with a smile. He said: "Welcome to you, my mothers. Please be seated. What shall we do to please you? It is indeed our good fortune that you came all this distance to see us. You are wise and your devotion to me, a devotion which does not ask for anything in return, has been constant towards me. I will have to tell you something which may not be palatable to you. In your love for me you abandoned every other dharma which is expected of you. When the things of the world have no meaning—things like one's life, mind and intellect and one's relations like the body, children, husband, wealth and such like that state is said to be the Brahmi state and that is the state you have reached in your love for me. Your love is selfless. But mothers, you have to go back to the yajnasala. Your husbands need your presence to complete the yajna which they are performing with so much concentration."

The women began to shed tears and they said: "It is not right that you should speak such cruel words to us. You have sworn that not one of your Bhaktas will be destroyed. Please make it true them. We have come to you abandoning everything. All we want is the garland made of Tulasi leaves which has touched your blessed feet. Now that we have come to you, we have no place where we can go to. Our husbands will not take us back and our fathers, mothers and sons will also refuse to take us back.

"We have no one except you. Please take us with you." Krishna said: "Please do not be distressed. Your husbands will not find fault with you.

No one will talk ill of you. Commanded by me, the devas will also see no fault in your behaviour. I assure you of that.

"I know too that the real reason for your unwillingness to go back is because you do not want to leave me. I am always in your hearts. Mothers, this combination of the soul with the body which is called life on earth, has no effect on persons like you: in your cases there is no desire for the pleasures of the body nor is there any involvement with others out of affection. What is left of your lives will be spent in the thoughts of me, contemplation on me and you will soon become part of me. And again, staying constantly in my company is never equal to the Bhakti you have for me through listening to stories about me, seeing me, contemplating on me and my form, singing my praises. Listen to me and go back to your homes and your husbands and your daily duties."

The Yajna-patnis went back to the yajnashala and in their company the brahmins completed their yajna. One of the Yajna-patnis shed her body as soon as she went back, with her mind fixed firmly on Krishna.

THE REPENTANCE OF THE BRAHMINS

Ashamed of themselves and their inferiority to their wives the brahmins were full of shame and self-accusation. They had missed the greatest opportunity of their lives and the devotion of their wives who know no shastras proved to be whiplashes which tortured them: "How unfortunate that we denied food to Krishna and Rama! We are guilty of the worst of crimes because of our behaviour.

"We are said to be thrice purified: first, our birth is pure because we are born of pure parents. The second cause for our purity is because we have been initiated into the great Gayatri mantra. Again, for the third time, we have been purified because we have undergone special purification rites to make us fit to perform this yajna. And yet, what is the use of all these external purifications when we did not have the inner purity to show affection towards these children who are but the human forms of the Parabrahman? Cursed is our birth, our studies in the Vedas and the Vedic lore: our observance of strict vows of Brahmacharya and such like. Curse on the extensive knowledge we have acquired, our high birth, our achievements in the field of performing yajnas correctly, our proficiency in the field of performing yajnas correctly, our proficiency in the Karma Kanda. We have so far prided ourselves on the fact that we are the leading brahmins, learned as we are, in the sacred lore. It is this pride of our 'Knowledge' which has blinded us to reality. We could not see TRUTH when it started us in the face. What Maya was this that covered us?

"In contrast, consider our wives! Look at their devotion to the Lord! It is indeed an amazing fact that they have never known the shastras: they have not undergone the rite by name "Upanayana" wherein one is initiated into the mysteries of the Gayatri and Brahma Vidya. They have not learnt the sacred Vedas under the tutelage of a guru. They have performed no tapas. They have not studied the Atma Vidya, the search after the Truth about the

Brahman. They have not been considered pure since they do not perform the Sandhya Vandana. And yet, 'impure' as they are, ignorant as they are, foolish as they are, these women have found it in them to develop Bhakti towards the Lord of lords, Krishna. We did not have it. We were so absorbed in our rites that even when Krishna reminded us of the duties of a Grihastha, that feeding others before the yajna is over is not wrong under the circumstances—words which the young cowherds repeated to us—we had no ears for them. He gave us a chance to redeem ourselves or else what does the Lord want of us that he should have BEGGED for food? Narayana whose feet are ever pressed by Lakshmi: Lakshmi who has, for once, abandoned her fickleness and her arrogance, and, eager to have him all for herself, presses his feet constantly asking him to favour her! That Lord Narayana came to us asking for food saying that he was hungry and we refused! Can anything be more terrible than what we have done? It is not as though we did not know about him. We cannot plead ignorance. We have been told that Yogeshvara, Narayana, has been born in the House of the Yadus. And yet, when we needed it most, our thinking power deserted us. Our wives had to show us that the only thing worthwhile is unswerving devotion to the Lord. We salute most humbly Krishna, the home of infinite Knowledge: we, who had our intellect clouded by our absorption in rituals. In His infinite compassion for us, He will be kind and forgive us for this unforgivable sin. We were deluded and we were ignorant of the honour which was offered to us and which, in our foolishness we refused. May He forgive us."

So overcome with shame were the brahmins that they did not have the courage to face Krishna and Rama: and again, they knew about the wickedness that was Kamsa and they did not want him to know about this incident and so they were quiet; they did not come and see the brothers who were divine by birth.

NOT INDRA, BUT GOVARDHANA!

Once, Krishna noticed that the entire population of Brindavan was busy about something. In his house also everyone was busy: apparently preparing for some great event. Though he knew what it was all about, Krishna approached his father Nanda and very humbly stood before him and he found the old men of the community also in the company of Nanda. They were all there and this young child went and stood with folded palms before his father and asked him: "Father, everyone seems to be busy about something. There is great excitement everywhere and I can see that some big festival is to be observed. Tell me, father, what it is all about." Nanda took him on his lap and, fondling his unruly curls, said: "My son, we are all preparing to perform a yaga."

"Yaga?", asked Krishna with his eyes wide open. "Who is the god for whom this yaga is to be performed? Father, there must be some great desire in your hearts which is prompting you to do this. You have always told me what I have wanted to know, and now you must tell me what you desire so much that a yaga has to be performed for it! People who have ever held the Atman to be greater than everything else, who can see no difference between theirs and those of others, no difference between friend or foe, who have learnt to treat all opposites alike, will have no desires.

"People of weak intellect, who have small desires, whose aims are ordinary and worldly: it is such people who perform yajnas and such like, which have their basis in the Karma Kanda. Strangely enough, when a man who knows the many nuances of what he is doing performs these rites and, on the other hand, a man who has blind faith in these does the same things, it is the former who is rewarded for his efforts and not the other one who is, in reality, ignorant of the acts he is performing.

"Now father, tell me about the yaga you are going to perform. I want to know about it. Are you doing it after studying the purpose of it or, are you

observing it just because it has been done before by your ancestors and because you do not want to override custom? Please explain to me what the yaga is: what the motive behind it is: the motive which is spurring you to perform the yaga."

Nanda said: "I will explain it all to you. You are right in one thing. I have no personal wish or desire to be fulfilled. I am doing it only for the general good. Indra, the lord of the heavens is the god who gives us rain. The clouds are meant to be his limbs and these clouds give rain plentifully so that we and our cattle-wealth and the arable lands benefit by them. Our wealth is, as you know, cattle and they thrive because of the plentiful grass. With the gifts of Indra we worship him. What has been his gift to us, we use as a means to achieve the ends of man: Dharma, Artha, Kama and these, when observed properly, will lead to the fourth, Moksha. It is the cloud which rewards man in his efforts. This worship of Indra has been the custom since so many generations and we have always been observing this yaga by name "Indra's festival." It does not bode good for any man who does not perform this properly. No man should be indifferent towards Indra and his bounty."

Krishna thought to himself and decided to tease Indra and see the fun. He therefore looked at all the elders assembled there and said: "I do not agree with you."

Nanda and the others were taken aback. They said: "You are a child and you do not know what you are saying."

Krishna said, "Please listen to my arguments carefully. If, after that, you are not convinced, you can proceed with the yaga."

They were all curious as to what this child was going to say. They sat in silence while Krishna spoke.

He said: "Living beings are born as a result of Karma and they cease to exist because of this same Karma. Happiness, sorrow, fear, well-being are all results of one's own Karma and I do not see the hand of any deva in this cycle of births and deaths, and the fortunes of man while he is alive. Even if, as you say, there is a deva who gives man what he deserves, even this

deva will have to act only according to the Karma of a man and the results of it. What we have done in our previous birth is what governs our fortunes in this birth and no god nor Indra can change the fate of man. People are dependent entirely on their nature, "Svabhava", which is moulded by Karma: the Karma which they have done in their previous birth. Whether he is an asura or a human being depends entirely on this. A living being is born in the high range of human beings or in the lower range of animals according to his Karma. Even among human beings he can belong to the high order or the low order according to his Karma. An enemy or a friend or one who is neither, are all naturally moulded by Karma.

"Karma is what decides and governs the life and actions of man and not any celestial being. And so, man who is still under the sway of Karma and Svabhava should worship Karma as his Lord. His code of conduct should be dictated by Karma. When he is dependent on one thing, it is wrong and UNTRUE for him to accept another god and worship him.

"A brahmin lives by his knowledge of the Vedas, a kshatriya, by protecting the country which is his, a vyshya lives by selling and buying and by the power of his words, his ability to talk glibly, while a shudra lives by serving his superiors.

"Agriculture, selling and buying, guarding the cows and lending money are four types of living adopted by workers. As for us, we belong to the third category which is purely guarding the cows and living out of the wealth obtained by them.

"The three gunas, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas are respectively the causes of living, birth and destruction. Static and moving objects are all the results of Rajoguna and the clouds are formed in all the four quarters because of this guna in Nature by name Rajas. They rain on the earth and beings are able to exist because of this rain. What has Indra to do with this rain? It is but a natural phenomenon and he is not responsible for it. As for us, we have no land which we rule. We have no cities and we have no country which we can call ours: not a village nor even huts which we can call ours. We are simple wandering folk who lives in these forests and on the slopes

of these hills. We have but one wish: to thank the giver of grass to our cows which, in their turn, give us our wealth.

"I suggest, therefore, that we worship cows, the brahmins and this hill which goes by the name "GOVARDHANA"—the nourisher of cows. You have collected so many objects for the worship of Indra. Let them all be used to worship this hill. Keep the milk of the cows as an offering for the hill. Prepare a feast and make an offering of it to the hill. Summon well-read brahmins to kindle a sacrificial fire and make them offer all the many things we get from cows like milk, curds, butter and ghee into the fire reciting the holy mantras. Let us feed the poor and the hungry. Let the cows be worshipped and Govardhana hill. Let us all dress in our silks and ornaments; let us apply sandal paste to our bodies and wear flowers on our necks and hair. In this festive mood let us go round the Govardhana and thank the hill for its bounty. I have given you my arguments and my suggestion. If it is agreeable, please do what I have suggested."

The Lord who was Time itself, had assumed the form of a young child and he wanted to punish Indra for his arrogance. When the Lord speaks is it strange that Nanda and the other elders were convinced? They accepted his suggestion and performed the puja as suggested by Krishna. They made brahmins recite the sacred mantras and pour Agyas into the fire and they then worshipped the brahmins and then the cows and later, the Govardhana hill. They placed the offerings at the foot of the hill.

To convince them that they had done the right thing, Krishna assumed a suitable form and announced that he was the "Spirit of Govardhana." No one but Balarama knew who the spirit was!

The gopis and the gopalas then dressed themselves in their best clothes and, with music and dancing, they went round the hill and everyone prostrated before the "Spirit of Govardhana."

They were thrilled at the thought that their worship had been rewarded so soon. The festival was over, and the gopalas returned to Vrajabhumi, their home.

INDRA'S ANGER

Indra was furious. He could not brook this insult which had been deliberately offered by the gopalas at the suggestion of Krishna. He decided to punish all of them and he summoned the group of clouds by name "Samvartaka" and he said: "Look on this cowherd clan which has dared to insult me on the advice of a human being: Krishna, who is still a child. He tells them that the offerings made to me are of no use and the entire clan obeys him. They have treated me with indifference. They have not performed the "Indra festival" which they were performing all these years. I will punish them for this. These fools are hoping to cross the ocean of births and deaths with the help of a boat which is a boat in name only. They know nothing of Atma Vidya and they know nothing of the rituals which are performed for the attainment of salvation by men. They have only paid heed to the words of Krishna and what sort of a person is Krishna? He is a young child, he is ignorant and he talks too much. He considers himself to be very wise and he is arrogant that he does not know who is to be honoured. And such a man—nay child—has become the mentor of this clan of ignorant cowherds. They have displeased me. They have become arrogant as a result of the wealth they have somehow acquired. I command you to go and punish them. Make them lose their pride. Kill all the cows which have been worshipped instead of me. I will follow you on my Airavata and see that the proper punishment is meted out to these people."

The entire group of clouds which had been released by Indra travelled fast towards Brindavan. All on a sudden in Brindavan it began to rain. No one paid any attention to it in the beginning. But then it became a downpour: a terrible downpour. Lightning flashed incessantly and thunder crashed from crag to crag and the reverberation was fearsome. Spurred by the furious winds by name Avaha and Pravaha the clouds rained with a ruthless fervour and hailstones began to fall in great quantities. Soon the ground

had become so covered with water that there could be seen no ups and downs: it was like the sea. The cows began to be scared of the fury of the lashing rain and it had become unbearably cold. The cowherds, their wives and children were helpless against the onslaught and they rushed to the presence of Krishna and asked him to help them out of this predicament. It was pitiable to see the cows protecting themselves by putting their heads between their legs. The gopas set up a wail and they cried out: "Krishna, Krishna, save us from this danger. Save us from the wrath of Indra and his rain clouds."

Krishna knew what lay behind this downpour. He could gauge the anger of Indra by the devastation he had planned so deliberately. He thought to himself: "Now is the time to punish Indra who has considered himself to be the lord of all the three worlds. He assumes too much. It does not befit anyone in such a high position to be filled with Ego. I will show how I can, all by myself, protect my people who are being harassed."

When they were all looking Krishna went to the foot of the hill Govardhana and, like a child uproots a mushroom and holds it in his hand, Krishna lifted Govardhana aloft and told his people: "Get underneath the mountain, all of you, with your cows and calves and all the things you need. Please rest assured that it will not slip out of my hand and crush all of you! I promise you, it will not. As it is, you are all scared of this torrent and this stormy wind blowing across Brindavan. Your troubles are over. I will give you protection." They were staring alternately at Krishna and the immense hill and knowing what they were afraid of, Krishna assured them once again that they were safe. As they were bid the gopas rushed to their homes, collected all the essential things and went to stay under the hill. Krishna abandoned all thought of resting. He neither ate nor slept but stood there holding the hill while his people stood safe from the rain.

The deluge went on for seven days and seven nights. It would not stop. But Indra's anger was of no avail. The people whom he desired to punish were safe from him because of Krishna.

This yogic achievement of Krishna amazed him and all the denizens of the heavens. Chastened of his arrogance and his pride, Indra withdrew his rain

clouds from the skies. The rains stopped.

The skies became blue once again and the earth began to show signs of drying up. Krishna spoke to his people words of joy and said: "The rains have ceased. The sun has come back to the sky in all its glory. The skies are blue once again and the earth is warm with the touch of the sun. You can all come out of the shelter and go back to your homes and you can now resume your daily routine. The rains will never more visit you out of season."

Again they did as they were bid and went back to Brindavan. From a distance they saw Krishna still standing with the hill Govardhana in his hand. And while they were watching, he placed it on the ground. All of them went to him and embraced him with affection and gratitude. The youngsters danced around him and the elders blessed him with their arms raised. In the skies also was heard the music made by heavenly instruments and the devas rained flowers on Krishna.

After the incident of the Govardhana the dwellers in Brindavan began to seriously consider the achievements of Krishna: they began to wonder how it was possible for a child to lift up a mountain like a young elephant lifting a lotus out of a pond! They knew nothing of his divinity and they wondered. They said: "Nanda, indeed, your son is a strange being. How is it possible for a child to do all these things? He is not at all like the son of a cowherd. He is set here in Brindavan like a gem is set in an ordinary setting. Now that we think back, even as a child he has worked wonders. When he was a small child he killed the asura woman Putana by sucking her life out of her breast. It was like Time sucking out of a human being when his age on the earth is over. Think again of the killing of the other asura by name Shakata. Krishna was a child too then and crying lustily he kicked the cart and the asura who had concealed himself in the wheel was at once destroyed. Trinavarta raised him aloft but Krishna killed him with ease. How is it possible for an ordinary child to crawl between the trunks of two trees and fell them to the ground? We were told by the children how he killed another asura by name Baka on the banks of the Yamuna. There is also the story of Pralambha and Dhenuka. We are only too familiar with the day when Krishna, all alone, made the forest fire abate and he saved

our children and the cattle. When we were looking on, Krishna danced on the heads of Kaliya, the dread snake and made him leave the lake. Krishna made the waters sweet for us. Nanda, explain to us again why we love him so much as though he is our very life? We have begun to wonder who he is and what made him to be born in the midst of all of us as an ordinary gopala boy?"

Nanda thought that he should tell them something which he had been told long ago. He spoke to the elders since he saw that they were genuinely wondering about the wonder boy. He said: "I think I will try to tell you what I know. This is Lord Narayana who assume different forms during different yugas and this is also an *avatara* and the Lord has assumed a dark complexion. The wise man Garga told me this once. He said: "This child of yours was once the son of Vasudeva and so he is VAASUDEVA. He has many names and many forms. I know about them but ordinary human beings know nothing of it. He has come to Gokula to bring good fortune to you and for the good of mankind. This son of yours is the equal of Narayana for his beauty, his greatness and his fame. None of his actions need amaze you.

"This is what Garga told me and I believe every word of that wise man. I consider Krishna to be a divine child and an *amsha* of Narayana and so his actions which amaze us are but natural to him if he is the Lord of lords."

The elders listened to the words of Nanda and, for a while, remembered the divinity of Krishna. But then, like things possessed for long do lose their charm and their novelty the men in Brindavan forgot all about his divinity and this was exactly what Krishna wanted.

KRISHNA IS CROWNED AS GOVINDA

Krishna waited for everyone to move away from the hill by name Govardhana before he replaced it on the earth. When he was alone there came to him Indra: a strangely subdued and contrite Indra who felt so ashamed of himself that he could not speak. With him came Kamadhenu, the divine cow. When Krishna was standing all alone at the foot of Govardhana, Indra came near him and fell at his feet placing his crown at the feet of the Lord. He then stood up and with folded palms spoke words in praise of Krishna. He said: "Forgive me for this behaviour of mine.

"My lord, rid as you are, of the gunas Tamas and Rajas you, who is the embodiment of Sattvaguna, will not find it hard to forgive me. This Universe which is made up of Avidya, ignorance of Truth; of Maya, illusion, which hides the Truth which lies at the bottom of all this; and of the combination of the gunas: this, I say, has no effect on you nor can it, in any way, bind you since you are the STHANU, the permanent among impermanent things, the Truth underlying all this. Ordinary faults which beset man do not dare to come near you: faults like Lobha, avarice which is born of the body and one's involvement with it: faults which are the causes of the next birth of the human being: faults which are but so many proofs of the ignorance of man.

"Even though worldly things do not affect you, even though you are not, in any way, involved with this world, yet, for the sake of establishing Dharma, to protect it, and to punish those who are walking in the path of adharma, you take a human form and a name and live on this sinful earth like other men. Many of us do not realise it.

"You are the father of the Universe, the ruler, and you are Time which is without end. You are here to punish those who, like me, are blinded by arrogance and who overreach the rules of conduct. You lead us back into the path of an Arya. By definition an Arya is 'one who acts without

transgressing the rules of behaviour set down by the Vedas.' One who does not follow these rules is called an Anarya. Please forgive me for my behaviour which was unforgivable. I was proud of my wealth: of my power: the fact that I am the lord of the devas. I did not realise your greatness and I have committed the most heinous mistakes of underrating you and pitting my power against yours. My only prayer is that you should pardon me and guard me from such a predicament in the future."

Krishna smiled at him and said: "Indra, you have ever been dear to me. I am your brother, Upendra, am I not? Why did I make this incident happen? It was only to make you realise that you are in a bad state. Your power and the feeling that you are the lord of the heavens have gone to your head and I felt that you should shed these unbecoming qualities and be your old self again. That was the reason why I manoeuvred this incident: I stopped the gopalas from performing the "Indra festival." I have no rancour against you. On the other hand, I have your welfare at heart. I wanted you to be the old Indra who has, for his brother, Upendra.

"Let me tell you something. One whose inner eye becomes blinded by the dazzle of gold does not see me and when I want to favour him and make him my Bhakta I make him lose all his wealth. It is when a man is in adversity that he realises the greatness of the powers above. I have ever been fond of you and you can go in peace."

Kamadhenu came to him and said: "It is our great good fortune that you should have taken it upon yourself to be a cowherd in Brindavan. You are a protector of my children and they have no sorrow and they are happy since you have been tending them. To me you are the Lord of lords. You are our king: our Indra. I have got the permission of Brahma to crown you as our lord. You are born to rid the world of adharma which is trying to swallow it and our salutations to you."

Kamadhenu then poured the waters brought from the heavens and her own milk and bathed Krishna for the coronation. Indra had asked his Airavata to bring water from the Ganga which flows in the heavens: the river Mandakini which has its source at the feet of Narayana. Indra then gave the coronation bath to Krishna and said: "From now on you will be known

as GOVINDA. You are Govinda because you protect the cows and you are the protector of the entire world: of all living beings and so you are Govinda. The men of the world who are like cattle will, in later times, talk of you with affection as Govinda.

"I am Indra, the lord of the devas. But you are Indra for all living beings. In all the three worlds you will be famed as Govinda. The name will last for ever."

The divine rishis Narada and Tumburu sang the praises of the Lord and the Gandharvas, the Vidyadharas, Siddhas and the Charanas sang songs in praise of Krishna. The apsaras danced with joy. All the celestials rained flowers on Krishna and the sky was filled with their words of praise.

The three worlds were happy. The earth was drenched with the milk of the cows which flowed from them in their happiness. The rivers were filled with waters which were as sweet as milk. Honey dripped from the trees. The mountains were full of the health-giving herbs, the Oshadhis and their tops were gleaming with precious stones. It looked as though they had dressed up for the great occasion: the coronation of Krishna!

When Krishna was crowned, even animals who were natural enemies behaved as though they were friends.

Indra then took leave of Krishna and went back to the heavens, accompanied by Kamadhenu and the other celestials.

Krishna walked to his home as though nothing had happened.

NANDA RESCUED FROM VARUNA

Once Nanda, observing the *Ekadashi Vrata* went to bathe in the river Yamuna. The *Vrata* was mainly the observance of strict fast on Ekadashi day: praying to Lord Narayana all day through and the night too and, after a bath in the river, to have an early meal on the next day, Dvadashi. As per the rules of the *Vrata*, on the morning of Dvadashi Nanda entered the waters of Yamuna. The sun had not yet risen and the time was said to belong to the asuras. And when he saw Nanda bathing in the river an asura grabbed him and took him to the presence of Varuna, the lord of the waters.

The gopalas, seeing that Nanda had not come out of the water became anxious and later, frantic. They rushed to Krishna and Rama and told them what had happened. Krishna knew that this was Varuna's mischief. He went into the nether world and entered the palace of Varuna. Varuna fell at his feet, worshipped him and said: "Only now have I become blessed. The purpose of my birth has been served. Those who touch your feet once are rid for ever from the bondage of births and deaths. Please forgive my servant who is just an ignorant being. He did not know who you are nor did he know that he had captured your father. Please bear us no and go back with your father." Krishna went back to the earth and to Brindavan with Nanda.

Nanda was amazed at the Bhakti which Varuna showed to his son and he saw the wealth and greatness of Varuna. He wondered at the greatness of his son: that such a demi-god like Varuna should have laid all his wealth at his feet and asked him for forgiveness. He spoke about it to all his people and what had been creeping into their minds for the past few days became now a certainty: that Krishna was a god and not a human being. They thought to themselves: "We know that he is the Lord of lords. Will he, in his infinite kindness, let us reach Vaikunta, his abode?"

Krishna knew what was in their minds. He thought about it for a long time. He told himself: "The Brahman is without any gunas; when it is touched by the quality "Aham" meaning , when the ego sprouts in the placid lake called the Atman where all the gunas are in equilibrium; when this happens, Maya takes command of the situation. The Atman forgets its true nature and becomes involved in Samsara. Ahankara leads to Avidya—ignorance—meaning, ignorance of one's real self. This Avidya leads to Kama and the attendant evils and this, in its turn, leads to Karma. Once the Atman gets entangled in the web called Karma he has to go through the cycle of births and deaths and this goes on until he realises the truth about himself: that he is but the Brahman. There is no chance for these innocent people to realise the Brahman unless I show it to them."

Krishna then, in his infinite kindness and affection for the gopalas revealed to them the Brahman. He made them see Vaikunta, the abode of Narayana, because they had performed one tapas and only one tapas and that was the pure love they had for Krishna. This was the only tapas they were capable of and they had performed it well.

Brahman which is apart from the play of the Prakriti: which is pure Knowledge—meaning, self-luminous: self-illuminating which—means it needs no light of knowledge or of the intellect to be shed on it since it is itself the intellect and knowledge: which is Truth—meaning, which is never born and which can never die: which is Ananta—that is, which has neither a beginning nor an end: which is realised by minds which are capable of shedding the screen called Maya: that Brahman revealed to the gopalas: the poor ignorant uneducated gopalas because they were great in their love for the lord: their Bhakti.

Then they saw Vaikunta. First they lost their entity in the Brahman as though they had been drowned in the immensity of the Universal soul. Krishna knew that they could not bear it for a long time and he got them back from their trance and made them see Vaikunta. The Lord Narayana was Krishna and he was worshipped by the Vedas: and when they looked away, the gopalas saw the same Krishna by their side in the Brindavan.

They shook themselves and there was a lost look in their eyes as if to say:
"Was it real, what we saw? Or was it a vision?"

ON A MOONLIGHT NIGHT

Sharad Ritu had set in. The nights were filled with the perfume of the jasmines and the season made Krishna remember the promise he had given to the gopis on the day he had taken away their garments on the banks of the Yamuna early in the morning one day, during the month of Marghashirsha. The Lord who is the refuge of all beings, of all things, animate and inanimate, made up his mind to make his devotees happy. The night of the full moon was fast approaching.

On the night which He had decided on, the moon, the king of the stars, rose in the east. The east was red with the soft rays of the rising moon. He was like a lover who, after a long absence, caresses the face of his beloved, wiping her tears. Even so, he assuaged the fatigue of the people with his cool light. Krishna went to the banks of the Yamuna. The sands were silvery and golden with light of the newly risen moon and the moon itself looked like a huge orange globe. It was as beautiful as the face of Lakshmi. The forest nearby was bathed in the light of the moon.

Krishna took up his flute, placed it on his lips and breathed softly into it. The notes of music which came from the river bank far away reached the houses in Brindavan and they reached the ears of the young gopis who were thinking of Krishna and only Krishna. In their hearts there was place for no other thought. The music was maddening and they could not resist it. Each one of them wanted to go where Krishna was, and their madness was so intense that they did not even pause to think. They rushed out of their houses and with their earrings swinging in harmony with their thoughts, they ran fast towards the banks of Yamuna.

One of the girls was milking the cow when she heard the divine music and she left her cow as it was, dropped the vessel into which she was milking and rushed out of the house. Some of them were watching the milk which they had placed on the fire and they did not wait to see if the milk boiled

over: they rushed out. One woman left the pot with the rice boiling on the oven and did not bother about what happened to it. While serving food to the elders one girl heard the music of Krishna's flute and she ran out not caring what they thought of her. The women forgot their husbands, their elders, their children, their duties and their everything: the only desire in their minds was to be with Krishna. They even forgot to dress themselves beautifully. One girl had not finished applying the collyrium to her eye and another was half way through placing a string of flowers in her hair. With her looks all awry she ran too. The people at home tried to stop them and ask them where they were going but the gopis paid no heed to their questions or to their restraining hands.

There were some who had been successfully restrained by the people at home and these women thought only of Krishna. With their minds set on Krishna they went into a deep trance-like state wherein their sins became destroyed because of their devotion to Krishna and they attained Moksha. It is said that when a man performs acts which are good and collects punya, he reaches the punyalokas; and when his papa is accumulated he gets a papajanma: meaning that of birds or animals. If, however, there is a mixture of punya and papa he is then thinking on the Lord and their punya was lost since they thought of the Lord as their lover and so, left as they were with neither papa nor punya they reached salvation: Moksha.

After listening to the words of Suka King Parikshit asked him: "My lord, my mind is assailed with a doubt. You tell me that these women attained salvation because they loved Krishna. But they did not worship him as Parabrahman but they loved him as they would a lover who can grant them sensual pleasure. How can their love be rewarded with Moksha? Krishna to them was a *Jarapurusha* and not a god. He was very handsome and desirable and they were eager to have him. How can you call their love by the name Devotion? Bhakti? Please, elucidate this mystery to me."

Suka said: "Have you not heard that when a man drinks nectar even if he is under the impression that it is poison, he does not become affected by the poison but benefits by the nectar? Even so, the gopis, no doubt, thought of Krishna as an earthly lover. But the fact that Krishna was the Parabrahman changed this love into Bhakti and they attained salvation. Have I not told

you how Shishupala hated the Lord and he attained Moksha in spite of this hatred because the object of his hatred was the Paramatman and he had been thinking incessantly on the Lord. Even so, the gopis, by thinking on the Lord all the time, became released from the bondage called Karma.

"The Paramatma and the Pratyagatma are the same unpolluted truth. But the *Avaranas*, the endless Vasanas attached to the Atman during its many transits through the world of living, cover up the purity, screen it, veil it, and the Brahman is not seen. But Krishna who was beyond the pale of the Vasanas, beyond the reach of the opposites, was the object of the devotion of these ignorant women and so, the fact that they did not know that he was the Paramatman; the fact that their love for him was sensual; neither of these in any way detracted from the fact that their Bhakti was for the Paramatma and so, they attained salvation.

"Those who have constant desire for him, constant anger against him, constant hatred towards him, constant love for him or any other kind of kinship are sure to attain salvation."

KRISHNA AND THE GOPIS

Krishna saw all the gopis surrounding him, lost in the music of his magic flute. He looked at all of them and spoke sweet words. He said: "In the middle of the forest, at this time of the night you have all come here. What can I do to please you all? Please tell me the reason why you have come here in a group. It is late in the night and there may be dangerous animals lurking in the bushes. Please go back to your homes. It is not right that you should be here now. Your kinsfolk will all be waiting for you. Go back before their anger swells up. You must have come to see the river in the moonlight. Look at the forest around you.

The beams of the silver moon have made it so very beautiful and the cool breeze which comes after caressing the waves of the river is indeed very soothing to the limbs. Now that you have stood here for a while, please do not tarry but go back to your homes. Your husbands are waiting for you. Your children will be crying for your comforting arms around them. You will have to attend to your cows and calves. Why do you look accusingly at me? Have you, by any chance, come here to spend your time with me? I am pleased to know that it is so. All beings are full of love for me. But you should not forget where your duties lie. Attending to your husbands and to your children should be your prime consideration. This love you have for me, for someone other than your husbands, is not good for any woman. It leads you away from heaven. It is futile and it brings a stigma to your name. It is a secret desire and, as such, the fear of being found out is always there. Please desist from this action. Go back home and remember the great devotion you have for me which is because you have been constantly hearing about my actions: by thinking on me: by singing about me and seeing me often. That devotion will not equal this love which is wrong. So, once again I am asking you, please go back to your homes".

The gopis stood as though they had been carved out of stones. The words of Krishna were unwelcome and they were not pleasing to their ears. They felt frustrated and their faces faded like flowers. Their hearts were filled with sorrow and they cast their faces down. Sighs escaped their red lips and their eyes filled with tears.

They stood silent and Krishna could see their tears glistening in the light of the moon. With soft timid voices they began to talk indistinctly to Krishna who had spoken such harsh words to them. Their tears were falling incessantly and they paid no heed to the fact that their eye-black was all being erased: that their hair was all awry: that their garments had not been worn properly since they had been in such a hurry to reach the presence of Krishna. All these things were unheeded. All that they knew was that their quest was in vain and Krishna had spoken unkindly to them. They all spoke together and one by one: "Krishna, it is not becoming of you that you should talk like this. We have abandoned everything and come to you for succour. Please do not cast us away. You talk so glibly about rules of conduct: that our place is our homes and that we should attend to our husbands, to our elders and to our children. You can keep your sermons to yourself. We came here not to listen to a discourse on how to conduct oneself: on how a woman should behave. We have come to you trusting that you will never abandon us.

"You ask us to be faithful to the home, to the husband and child: if all these do not grant you happiness what then, is the use of such a dharma? Learned men have said that abandoning these bondages, one should set one's mind on the Eternal One. And we have also been told that you are the Eternal One who has assumed a human form. We know nothing of Shastras and the nuances of dharma. We have seen the learned ones thinking on you and saying that you are the path to Moksha. Be that as it may, we have come to you because we love you. We are doing only what the wise are doing. Krishna, remember, this love of ours for you has been there birth after birth: it must be, or else the intensity of our love cannot be explained.

"All these days we were absorbed in our household duties and were fairly happy and contented: or, so we thought until you came. You stole our hearts and ever since then we cannot become absorbed in the things which

interested us before. It is very strange but true. Our eyes seek only for a sight of you. Our ears are ever waiting to hear the music of your anklets when you walk. You ask us to go back to our homes but our feet are firmly planted and they refuse to move away from here. We are aching for a smiling look from your eyes, for your music, for an embrace from you which will assuage this thirst for you.

"Once our minds have been led towards your feet, they can think of nothing else and every action of ours is guided only by the thoughts of you. Please look kindly on us. We are your slaves. Tell us, which woman, after seeing you and your handsomeness, your smiling eyes, your face, your broad chest and your long and lovely arms: which woman, we say, is able to resist you? Please have compassion on us, our condition and accept our love."

Krishna smiled kindly on them and accepted their offering. Krishna who was the incarnation of Narayana, who was the Lord of lords, who was the Eternal Soul, who was the Parabrahman, who had no desires to be fulfilled, pretended to be an ordinary human being and allowed the gopis to make love to him

Krishna looked like the moon surrounded by the stars. He sang with them, he danced with them. With the fragrance of the Vaijayantimala filling the air, with his hair flying in the breeze, he played with the women as though he were enjoying it all immensely. After a while, the gopis were so full of Krishna that they thought that Krishna belonged to them and to them only.

Each one of the gopis thought to herself : "This Krishna has fallen in love with me and he loves no one else. He belongs to me and only to me.

Pride found a corner in the heart of every one of them. Krishna had to teach them a lesson and he suddenly vanished from their presence.

THE SEARCH FOR THEIR LOST LOVE

Despair seized them when they realised that Krishna was really not to be found anywhere. Their love had reached the *Unmattaavastha*, meaning, they were almost bereft of reason. They sang songs praising him and recounting his many deeds and his exploits ever since he was born.

The gopis wandered in the forest looking for Krishna. They asked the trees if they knew where Krishna was: "O Ashwattha tree, O banyan tree, did you, by any chance, see our Krishna who has stolen our hearts? Ashoka, Punnaga, Champaka, did you by any chance see Krishna? He was with us and in our foolishness we thought we owned him and so, to punish, us, he has gone away and left us lamenting. Tell us if you saw him. Tulasi, Mallika, Malati, did any of you see our Krishna?" And so they kept on moaning and weeping and looking for the Lord.

They suddenly saw Krishna's footprints and they seemed to be fresh. At once they tried to track him down. They went some distance and found, to their dismay, the footprints of a woman alongside. Burning with jealousy they spoke to each other: "Look! Some woman has been dearer to Krishna than all of us. Look at the way the prints are twining with each other. She has been clinging to him all the way. And look, suddenly her footprints are not seen at all! And Krishna's have sunk deep into the earth and that means the woman, whoever she may be, has asked Krishna to carry her and he has been doing so. Come, let us go further and see where this leads us. Look at the flowers from the creepers scattered here. Krishna must have plucked flowers for her. Fortunate indeed is this gopi who has claimed such privileges from him! He has been sitting here and he has dressed her hair with the flowers."

The gopi who had gone alone with Krishna was also later filled with pride since she told herself: "Krishna loves me most. He has left all the others behind and come with me. He carried me in his arms and he dressed my

hair with flowers. He loves me and only me. I said 'I am tired' and at once, without a frown he raised me and held me in his arms. He then asked me to cling to his back. When I was thrilled with the thought that I was one with Krishna he dropped me and vanished. Where are you? Where have you gone, Krishna?" The gopis who were going in search of Krishna found her and she told them how she too had been abandoned.

They all came back to the banks of the Yamuna and, with tears in their eyes and with sobs punctuating their words they sang the praises of Krishna and prayed to him to come back to them. Krishna knew that they were now rid of their pride and he appeared in their midst. Dressed in his favourite yellow silk, with the garland of wild flowers tossing on his chest, with the fish shaped earrings glinting in the moonlight, with the peacock's feather dancing amongst his lovely curls Krishna appeared in their midst.

They stood up with great joy and rushed towards him. They all tried to embrace him, to hold his hands, to place their heads on his shoulders, to stay as close to him as they could. They were like *Mumukshus* who had attained Kaivalya: like the Samsarins who had found one who was proficient in Brahma Vidya, who could lead them out of the morass in which they had been caught up: like the Vishva and Tejasa which had reached the Sushupti stage: that is, when the waking state and the dream state have passed, the Atman reaches the Sushupti state, the deep sleep state, with a sigh of relief, because this is the state where the opposites go to sleep, where there are no feelings, where there is nothing but peace, dreamless, thoughtless, agitationless peace: the state just short of Turiya.

The night had advanced far, now. The moon whose white beams silvered the surroundings had now reached the zenith. The flowers had all blossomed and the air was laden with their perfume. The night had dissolved in the silver light of the moon and the river Yamuna, dark in colour, seemed to become golden like her elder sister, Ganga. The sands on the banks of the river were touched by the waves from Yamuna and the music of it was intoxicating.

DISCOURSE ON LOVE

Krishna led the gopis to the sands and they sat there talking to him, drinking him with their eyes. One of the gopis said: "Krishna, I have a doubt which you must clear for me." Krishna smiled and silently asked her to proceed with her question. She said: "In this world, there are different types of love and different types of lovers. Some people are capable only of returning the love given to them. There are others who behave in the opposite way. They give love without expecting love in return. Even if they are not loved, they love others since it is their nature to do so. There is a third category of people who, even when they are loved, do not return the affection shown to them; nor are they affected if they are not loved by others. Krishna please tell us which of these types is the best and why."

Krishna's face took on a serious look and he answered them after a while. He said: "The first type you spoke about: those who love and expect love in return are, in my opinion, selfish, bent on their own comfort and happiness. The two people who make up this pair are similar. They have no affection in their hearts, no source of happiness and neither is there Dharma in their behaviour. It is useful to love and to be loved and that is just for their own good. There is nothing unselfish or noble about such beings.

"The second type you spoke of: those who love though there is no love given in return: their love is like that of parents for their children. Such people are very compassionate. They will be very kind and they will make good friends, full of affection as they are.

"There is, you said, another type of people who are different from both these. They are incapable of returning the love that is offered to them. What then, about the situation when no love is offered to them! These people can be divided into four groups, four types.

"Atmaramas, that is to say, people who are self-contained whose only joy is to revel in the realisation of the Brahman: they neither want love from others nor are they desirous of giving it. The second type are the Aptakamas: that is, those whose every desire has been satisfied: whose hearts do not hanker after anything. Such people have no need of others and their love and hence, they are indifferent. The third type is persons who are ungrateful: who do not have it in them to give anything but who take from others. The fourth type is called 'Gurudrohi'. Such a person is one who has betrayed the affection which elders have for him and who behaves disrespectfully towards them.

"As for me, even when love is showered on me, sometimes I do not return it. The reason is because I want them to love me more: to become more devoted to me: to think on me and only me: to become my Bhaktas. Take, for instance, a very poor man who has found wealth suddenly. If, after having it with him he loses it, his pain will be more than when he was poor, and his thoughts will be more intense about wealth: wealth which he had found only to lose it. Even so, I vanished from your sight because I wanted to know how dear I am to you and how indispensable. Your devotion to me has become more now when you went through the agony of losing me for a while. You had abandoned all that you had, till now considered dear to you. To make your Bhakti more firm I did what I did. I will now tell you how touched I am by your love and your unselfish—nay—selfless devotion to me. I will never forget how much you love me."

Strangely enough, when they heard the words of Krishna the gopis found themselves chastened of their sensual love for Krishna and their only wish was to be with Krishna for ever.

RASA KRIDA

Krishna suggested that they should dance the Rasa. The gopis stood in a circle and between two gopis was found a Krishna. Each one thought that he was holding only her hand. They sang all together. And they danced.

With silk garment flying in the breeze, with his blue form decked with sandal paste, with his garland of flowers tossing on his beautiful chest, with his golden earrings striking against his cheeks whenever he moved, with his smile charming all around him, Krishna danced the Rasa with the innocent gopis of Brindavan on that moonlit night on the banks of Yamuna.

The sky was crowded with all the denizens of the heavens who had assembled there to see the Rasa Krida. The heavenly instruments made sweet music and the Gandharvas sang the praises of the Lord.

The tempo of the dance grew faster and the noise of the anklets on the feet of the women, of their bangles and their bracelets was growing too. Krishna looked like an immense sapphire set in a circlet of gold. The celestial damsels were full of jealousy for the gopis on the earth who had the unique good fortune of having the Lord all for themselves. The moon and the planets stopped in their tracks watching the beauty of the Rasa and so, the night was longer than other nights.

Krishna then entered the waters of the Yamuna with the crowd of gopis following him. They swam in the river and they played there for a long time.

King Parikshit intervened once again and said: "My lord, still I am not convinced by your arguments. How could Krishna, the *sampurna avatara* of Bhagavan Narayana Himself, who had been born on the earth for the sole purpose of establishing Dharma: who was meant to set an example to others so that they could follow him: how could he do this? How could he

make love to the wives of other men? How could he behave like a *jara* to the gopis and make them unfaithful to their husbands? You told me earlier that since he is an Aptakarma he has no desires and so these revels meant nothing to him. But then, the act was wrong. It was not Dharma."

Shuka said: "You are looking at it like an ordinary human being does. Viewed thus it may appear wrong. But it is not Adharma. If it had been an ordinary human being who had done it then it would have been considered wrong. But here, the love of the women for Krishna was Bhakti for the Lord which everyone has. Their Bhakti was rewarded in the only manner which could be understood by them: that was physically. But that does not, in any way, detract from the truth that anyone who is a Bhakta of the Lord will find Sayujya with him. Is that not what we desire? A woman, if she is devoted to the Lord and thinks of him night and day, cannot be accused of being unfaithful to her husband if, in the end, she reaches Him. It is not Adharma.

"The gopis, on the other hand, were so devoted to Krishna that he decided to reward them even on this earth and so he granted them oneness with him on that moonlit night. It seems like a lustful revel but it was only the utmost realisation of Bhakti that the gopis experienced."

The long, long night came to an end and the east showed signs of the red tint which indicated that Aruna was on his way. Krishna made the unwilling gopis go home and when they went home they found that no one blamed them for staying away for the whole night. The people at home, because of the yogic power of Krishna, were unaware of the absence of their women and soon the night became, to each one of them, beautiful memory which they re-lived again and again in their minds.

SUDARSHANA, THE VIDYADHARA

It was the festival of Mahadeva. The dwellers of Brindavan went to the grove by name Ambikavana, it was like a picnic to the children when the many carts went one after another. Some went in the carts and some walked along. The youngsters would jump and dance and climb the trees, slide along the branches or jump on someone walking on the road and then laugh boisterously. And so they went to Ambikavana and there they had to have bath in the sacred river Sarasvati. The elders bathed in the river and then very reverently offered flowers and naivedya to Mahadeva and Devi. They prayed to the Lord that they should be blessed. They then pacified the brahmins with cows which could give large quantities of milk, with gold and silken dresses and sweetened food. They went through the rites as prescribed by the sacred books and with only water as food the elders spent that night, on the banks of the river. During the night, when it was halfway through, a huge python which lived in the surrounding forest crawled out of its habitat and reached the spot where they were. It began to swallow Nanda who was sleeping. He woke up in panic and he shouted: - Krishna! Krishna! This big snake is swallowing me and I am helpless. Help me." The people around got up in a flurry and they lighted torches and tried to frighten the snake away by burning it. But nothing would work. Nanda was slowly disappearing inside the body of the python like the moon under the eclipse. Krishna went near and stood for a while.

He then touched the snake with his feet. The moment he did so the python lost its form and became transformed into a divine form: that of a Vidyadhara. His form was glowing and he was wearing garlands made of gold on his neck. He prostrated before Krishna and stood with folded palms.

Krishna spoke to him. He said, "You look like a demi-god and you are so handsome. Your form is pleasing to the eye. How did it happen that you

were living so long assuming the form of a python? Tell me what misfortune caused it."

The Vidyadhara said : "I am a Vidyadhara named Sudarshana. I was once famed in the heavens. I would wander around in my chariot. Endowed as I was with wealth and with good looks I became proud of them. My arrogance was evident to everyone. Once, while passing a group of men I saw that they were very ugly and, in my pride I did not pause to think but laughed at them and their ugliness. Unluckily for me, they happened to be the rishis by name Angirasas. They cursed me to assume the form of a python and live on earth. When I see that I have been released from that sinful form by the touch of your sacred feet I say that the rishis did not curse me but blessed me. Or else, I would never have had the good fortune which is denied even to rishis lost for ever in meditation: a sight of you in human form. I prostrate at your feet once again and seek your permission to go back to my home." And Sudarshana went back to Gandharvaloka which had been his home.

The gopas led by Nanda could not go back to sleep. They spent the night talking about the many miracles which Krishna had performed and about their special good fortune that Krishna was with them in their midst all the time. Once, in Brindavan during one of the moonlight nights Krishna and Balarama were in their favourite spot: the banks of the Yamuna. Krishna touched the flute with his lips. The music was enough to draw the gopis from their houses. When they were all there and when they were dancing in a group a servant of Kubera by name Shankhachuda came there and carried away the gopis. They set up a wail: "Krishna! Rama! Save us, we are being carried away." The brothers followed the miscreant and seeing them and their anger Shankhachuda got frightened and, leaving the women alone, he began to run away from the spot. Rama stayed behind guarding the women and Krishna followed Shankhachuda. Run as fast as he could, he could not escape from the anger of Krishna. Following him wherever he went, Krishna overtook him and with one blow from his hand he hit the wicked one on the head. He died on the spot. Krishna took the jewel which he wore on his head and coming back to the banks of Yamuna, gave the jewel to Balarama and asked him to wear it.

ARISHTA'S DEATH

There was an asura by name Arishta. He came to Brindavan to kill Krishna. He took the form of a bull. The earth trembled under the impact of his hoofs and his bellowing would strike terror in the hearts of the hearers. With his tail raised up and with his sharp and big horns he pierced the trees around making some of them shake as though they would fall down. His appearance was so frightening that everyone began to run hither and thither in panic. As was their custom they rushed to Krishna and told him about this newcomer. Krishna said: "Do not be afraid. I will protect you."

He went near the asura and said: "What do you gain by frightening these innocent men, women and children with your bellowing which is like that of a summer cloud? I am the one who has been born to destroy wicked beings like you." Krishna stood before the bull and tried to infuriate him more and more. With his hoofs the bull pawed the ground and tossed his head right and left. Breathing fire through his nostrils and with his tail raised aloft the bull rushed towards Krishna. His horns were pointing at Krishna: his head was lowered and his reddened eyes were glaring steadily at Krishna. Krishna waited for him to come near enough and then caught hold of both the horns with his hands. He pulled the bull forward and then, with all his might, he pushed him back and the bull went back about eighteen feet. Furious with Krishna whom he had come to destroy, the bull rushed once again towards him.

Krishna caught hold of his horns once again and this time he tossed him to the ground. He stamped on the bull till he became exhausted and limp like a rag. He pulled out a horn with great force and with that horn beat the bull. The asura struggled for a few moments and then, spitting blood, he lay dead. There was great rejoicing in Brindavan when Krishna, with his form covered by dust and drops of blood which had spurted from the dying

Arishta, entered the streets of Brindavan which had been lined with the gopalas and gopis. They had been watching the fight with such tense faces.

ONCE AGAIN NARADA VISITS KAMSA

Narada, the divine sage, knew that with the killing of Arishta almost all the myrmidons of Kamsa had been destroyed. He knew that the end of Kamsa was drawing near. Narada decided to precipitate matters and hasten the end.

Narada went to the court of Kamsa. He was received with great respect and after he had seated the rishi on a noble seat Kamsa said: "My lord, it is quite some time since you thought fit to come and see me. When you were last here..."

"I remember", interrupted Narada. "I came to tell you that you were foolish to let Vasudeva keep his other children: that you could not be sure which would be the eighth child of Devaki." He smiled at Kamsa and Kamsa said: "All my attempts have failed, my lord. When the eighth child came, I rushed to the prison where my sister and her husband had been kept prisoners. Do you know what happened?"

Narada said: "I have heard several garbled versions of it. Tell me what exactly happened."

Kamsa said: "It was the most humiliating moment in my life. I went there and my sister—poor unfortunate woman—held a female child in her arms. I held out my hand for the child and she said: 'My dear, brother, this is not a boy. Please do not be afraid of a woman, Kamsa. Spare this child for me. Let me keep her. This is not a son. The prophecy was that my eighth son would kill you. But this is not a son'. I did not pay heed to her piteous cry. I grasped the child in my left hand. You know how I killed the other children. I would throw them in the air with my left hand and when they descended, I would hold out my sword and they would be cut into two. In the same manner I wanted to kill this child.

"I threw her up and do you know what happened? The child stayed in the air! I rubbed my eyes to see if it was really happening. It was. I stood there with my right hand holding the sword and my left still held aloft and my face filled with wonder and chagrin! And then..." He stopped in the middle.

Narada, with a smile in his eyes and also with a touch of compassion said: "And then what happened?"

"And then," continued Kamsa. "The child changed its form. It was not a child any more. It was Devi Parvati. She held all the different weapons in her many hands and she spoke to me. She said: 'You stupid fool! Do you think you can cheat Destiny? The son who is to be your death has already been born. As for me, I am going away from you and I will watch the eighth son of your sister kill you very soon.' The child vanished, my lord. I should never have listened to you. I could at least have let my sister keep her children. I have committed the dread sin of killing children and I have ill-treated my sister whom I loved so dearly. All because of a few words spoken in the air! I am very unhappy."

Narada said: "Did you not make any attempts to trace the whereabouts of your 'nephew' who has already been born, as the Devi said?"

"Of course I have made attempts," said Kamsa. "Several attempts. His presence is not certain. But then, all the asuras I have been sending to the four quarters have been killed and they have all been killed by one boy: a youngster, if you please. He is the son of Nanda, the chief of the cowherds clan. I have been told that this boy has beauty which is unearthly. But he cannot be the son of Devaki since he is known to be the son of Nanda and Yashoda."

Narada sat silent for a while. He then said: 'Kamsa, listen to me carefully. I will tell you where the son of Devaki is.' "Where? Where is he, my lord?", said Kamsa jumping up from his throne. 'Please tell me quickly so that I can kill him at once.' Narada asked him to sit down and said: "If you promise to be calm and listen to me, I will tell you."

"I promise to do anything you say," said he impatiently. "Only tell me at once where he is."

"He is in Brindavan," said Narada slowly.

Kamsa looked puzzled. He then asked: "Are you trying to tell me that this prince of the cowherds, Nanda's son, Krishna as he is called, is this dark-skinned youngster the supposed killer of Mathura's monarch? You are teasing me, my lord. Once before you advised me wrongly and I wonder if you are again playing a game with me."

"No, Kamsa. I am telling you the truth," said Narada seriously. "This young dark-skinned boy, this Krishna is not the son of Nanda. He is Vasudeva's son and he is going to be your death." Kamsa was speechless with surprise and anger. "How did it happen?", he said. "Vasudeva was in prison all the time. I had them both guarded all the while. The very air could not move inside the prison without my knowing about it. How then could the son of Vasudeva have been born in Brindavan? You are, for once, misinformed. It is not possible."

"I will tell you how it happened," said the divine rishi and told Kamsa how Balarama had been transferred from Devaki's womb to that of Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva who was living in Brindavan. He then told him in detail about the events which took place on the night of the eighth day of the dark fortnight: how the child was born: how Vasudeva, to protect it from the sword of Kamsa took it to Gokula, the home of his friend Nanda and how he exchanged the babies.

Kamsa's anger had been growing as the tale went on and it now reached the limit. He drew out his sword and said: "She has deceived me, after all, and Vasudeva too. I will, this moment, go and kill that Vasudeva and his scheming wife Devaki."

Narada said: "There is no use in your punishing them now. If you are so desirous, you can imprison them. As it is, you have accumulated enough sin by killing children. Do not add to it the sin of killing a woman and a sister at that. This Krishna has, so far, killed almost all your myrmidons.

Try to get at him somehow. He is getting to be more than a handful. Try to destroy him and all your problems will be solved."

Kamsa said he would make every attempt to get the youngster killed. Narada, his mission over, went away from there singing the praises of Narayana as was his custom always.

KAMSA SENDS FOR AKRURA

Kamsa summoned the most powerful asura in his retinue. His name was Keshi. Kamsa said: "Look, you must go immediately to Brindavan and kill those two young men who go by the name of Balarama and Krishna."

After despatching Keshi, Kamsa, the lord of the Bhojas, collected his ministers around him; among them were Mushtika, Chanura, Shala and Toshala; he also summoned his mahout. He then spoke to them: "Friends, warriors, you are all mighty supporters of me and my throne. You have known how I have been seeking the hiding place of the young boy who is supposed to be the cause of my death. I have now come to know for certain that he is in Brindavan, the home of Nanda, the cowherd chief. Two boys by name Rama and Krishna are there in Brindavan in the home of Nanda. These boys, I am told, are the sons of Devaki and Vasudeva. I have sent Keshi to destroy them and I am sure he will come back victorious.

"If, however, he does not, I depend on all of you to do the needful. You are all famed wrestlers and when the time comes, I will arrange to have them brought to Mathura. You should arrange arenas for wrestling and you should destroy these two cowherds who are supposed to destroy me. Let these wrestling bouts be so arranged that the entire city will witness it. When the boys are dead it will seem as though they were killed in fair fight and not by planned attack. Mahamatra, you own the elephant by name Kuvalayapida. Bring it to the doorway of the Nartanashala and try to kill these youngsters when they come near you. On the fourteenth day of the lunar fortnight I am ostensibly going to perform the yaga by name Dhanuryaga where the bows will all be worshipped. You should make preparations for the commencement of the yaga even from now, by offering up sacrifices for the evil spirits."

Kamsa who was proficient in the art of wielding all the many weapons then called Akrura, one of the Yadavas. Placing both his hands in those of

Akrura, Kamsa said: "My dear Akrura, you must now do for me something very dear to my heart. You have been a good friend and you should now try to behave as a friend towards me. There is no better well-wisher for me than you among the Bhojas and the Yadavas. In the sacred lores, I have heard that Indra, when he wanted a favour to be done to him, would always approach Narayana. Even so, I am asking you to do me a favour which will benefit me".

Akrura waited for him to proceed. He guessed what was coming but he spoke not a word. Even Kamsa, hardened sinner that he was, had to pause for a while before revealing his thoughts to this good man, Akrura. He said: "Akrura, please proceed to the home of Nanda, the cowherd chief. It is called Brindavan, I am told. The two sons of Vasudeva are there. Bring them to Mathura with you. I cannot brook any delay. I am told by Narada that the devas went to Narayana and he has told them that he will take a human form and a name for the sake of 'destroying sinners like Kamsa.' Those are the words of Narada. These boys are supposed to be the death of me. But I can protect myself. It is only when man is unprepared for it, that death overtakes him. But I will see that these youngsters are killed as soon as they arrive in Mathura. I have so arranged their end that no blame will be attached to my name.

"Bring Nanda and the entire gopala clan here. I will punish them all for harbouring these boys. But that is all for later days. Now, the first thing is for you to set out as early as possible." Akrura spoke hesitantly and asked: "What exactly are your plans?" Kamsa laughed loudly and said: "First I will arrange it in such a way that they meet my elephant Kuvalayapida. This monster will crush them to powder."

Kamsa paused for a moment. Then he resumed in a low voice. "If, if they survive this, I have then arranged wrestling bouts with Mushtika and Chanura who, as you know, are as dreadful as thunderbolts. After the killing of these young men, it will be the turn of Vasudeva, all the Yadavas, Bhojas, Dasharhas, and all their kinsmen. Later will follow the death of the old man Ugrasena and his brother Devaka. If there are any more enemies of mine left, they will also walk the way their brothers have trod. The earth will then be rid of all my enemies."

"Jarasandha, the powerful king of Magadha, is my father-in-law. Dvividha is a very dear friend. Shambara, Naraka and Bana are three asuras who are very fond of me. They will ever be my friends. With their assistance I can be the monarch of this entire world and nothing will stand in the way of my ambition." He paused for a few moments. His eyes were dreaming of the day when he would be the sole lord of the entire world. With a shake of his head he came back to the present and said: "But that is all yet to come. The immediate duty which stares you in the face is your journey to Brindavan. Invite them with a very innocent face. Use soft words and cajole them into accepting my invitation to Mathura. Tell them about the Dhanuryaga. Describe the beauty of Mathura in glowing terms and the country-bred yokels are sure to be thrilled at the thought of seeing the city. Please go and make preparations to leave tomorrow very early in the morning so that you can reach Brindavan soon."

Akrura thought for a while and decided to speak a few words of advice. He said: "My king, you said that you consider me to be your well-wisher. I am pleased with the faith you have in my affection for you. It is because of that love I have for you that I dare to speak these words to you. I quite appreciate the plans you have made to save yourself from the killing prophesied by the heavens. But then, my lord, a man should realise that the success or failure of a plan does not lie in his hands. There are equal chances of the plans succeeding or failing. The wise man should realise this. It is in the hands of the gods and not in his. Man has great aspirations: he dreams of many things which he is sure to do: he has many noble thoughts and ignoble thoughts which crowd his mind. But he forgets one thing: Once the gods have decided to destroy a man, no amount of cleverness on his part will avert the fate that is in store for him. Please remember my words. As for me, I am but a courtier in your sabha and it is my duty to obey you. I will proceed to Brindavan tomorrow and bring Rama and Krishna to Mathura."

KESHI IS KILLED

In the meantime, the asura by name Keshi went fast towards Brindavan. He was eager to do what his master had asked him to do. He had so many comrades and they had all been killed by this young boy called Krishna. Ever since Putana died, ever since she went away from their midst this chain of calamities began to happen and it had not ceased. He had been missing his companions: Dhenuka, Arishta, Baka and so many others. Whoever this Krishna might be, Keshi was sure he could tackle him. Nothing was too difficult for him who had a long series of killings to his credit. He wanted to avenge the death of his friends without whom life had become so dull for him. He would succeed where the others had failed. So, with great expectations he went to the hated place Brindavan.

Keshi was famed for the shape of a horse which he was wont to assume when he went on his excapades. Even so, here in Brindavan, he proceeded towards the haunts of Krishna in the form of a horse. His frame was immense and his speed was equal to that of the mind. His mane flew in the breeze and the clouds in the sky were scattered here and there: so great was the speed of the 'horse'. His eyes were large and red and his mouth breathed fire. His long and powerful neck was terrible in its beauty. He was dark like a rain-bearing cloud. His mind was black and sinful like the darkest of nights. His neighing could be heard for miles around and his hoofs stamped the earth and seemed to rend it with every footfall of his.

While he was galloping here and there looking for Krishna, his enemy, Krishna knew who he was and why he had come. He stood apart and signalled to the horse to come near him. Keshi roared like a lion. Then, angry like a thunderbolt, fast as the wind during a storm, he rushed towards Krishna who had the audacity to beckon him! He came close to the young boy and opened his mouth wide as though he wanted to drink in the entire sky. He then kicked Krishna with his hind leg. Krishna nimbly

stepped out of the angle of the kick and suddenly he grabbed the legs which had just missed kicking him. Holding him firmly in both his hands he raised the horse aloft like Garuda lifts a king cobra before killing it. Krishna twirled the horse in his arms like a discus and flung it away from him. It fell a hundred yojanas away from there. Keshi was so strong that he was not killed. His mouth was red with blood which was gushing from his mouth but he came again to kill Krishna.

Krishna smiled with glee and thrust his arm into the mouth of Keshi which was wide open. Like a snake enters its hole the arm of Krishna entered the mouth of the asura. But once inside, the arm began to swell to immense proportions. Keshi was finding it difficult to breathe. He sucked air in great gulps but even that was made impossible after a few moments. His huge body was now covered with sweat. His eyes rolled desperately and his legs were kicking desperately. With a last futile attempt to breathe Keshi died. When he was lying still Krishna withdrew his arm from inside the mouth of the asura and told himself that this asura was almost the last one to have been sent by Kamsa to kill him!

SAGE NARADA VISITS KRISHNA

Narada came to Krishna and prostrated before him. He spoke to him sweet words of praise. He then, in secret, spoke to Krishna about the role he had to play in the present *avatara* of his. Narada said: "Krishna! O Krishna! You, who are formless, have taken on the form of a human being for the good of mankind. You are Yageshvara and you are the Lord of the Universe. You are the home of everything. Everything is born of you and is later, withdrawn into you. You are Ishvara who lodges inside the heart of everyone and everything like the fire *arani* which dwells unseen in the log of wood. You are the Antaratman. You are the Mahapurusha. With your Maya you make the three gunas appear and with these three gunas you make the Universe appear in its entirety. You create the Universe, you sustain it and you destroy it yourself. That infinite Truth, that Paramatma which is YOU, has thought fit to be born on this sinful earth, in the world of men with but one purpose: destruction. The daityas of old have been born on the earth in the form of kings: also asuras and rakshasas. The earth has reached the limit of her patience and you have taken this form to destroy these daityas and asuras to establish Dharma since there is a great fear of its being forgotten entirely by the world of men.

"This Keshi, whose neighing would frighten even the devas, so much so they would run as far away as they could: this Keshi was killed by you like a worm is crushed by the foot of an elephant. It was a great sight to watch.

"Two days from today, my lord, I will have the pleasure of seeing you kill Mushtika and Chanura. Later there will be the killing of Shankha, Kalayavana, Mura, Narakasura.

"I will then see you taking the Parijata tree from the heavens and there will be a treat in store for us watchers when you fight with Indra.

"I will see you married to the many young maidens. Nrika will attain moksha in Dwaraka.

"There will then be the incident of the Syamantaka jewel and your marriage with Bhama.

"You will then rescue the boys from Mahakalapura.

"This will be followed by the killing of the famed Paundraka Vasudeva who will challenge you to fight with him.

"The city of Kasi will be burnt by you.

"Later, in the yaga by name Rajasuya performed by your cousins, the Pandavas, you will kill Shishupala.

"In the city of Dwaraka you will stay to the delight of poets and your devotees.

"You, who are Kala himself, will later realise the reason for your coming to this earth: to lessen the burden of the earth and to relieve her. You will then be the charioteer of your cousin Arjuna and you will destroy *akshowhini after akshowhini* of armies during the great war that is to be fought in Kurukshetra.

"O thou who are the form assumed by the formless, who are the pure intellect, pure knowledge, pure realisation of the Truth, we salute you. You are Ishvara who, with his Maya, creates the Vishva, the Universe made up of the Mahat, Aham tattvas. For your own pleasure you have deigned to don this human form and to you, my salutations."

After prostrating before Krishna again and again Narada went away with great elation in his heart.

The time of waiting was over. The play was about to begin. Two days more and the earth would be rid of Kamsa and with that as the beginning great events would be set in motion. They were waiting in the womb of Time.

VYOMA, THE LAST OF THE ASURAS

The boys were fond of playing games while tending the cows. One of their favourite games was "Catching the thief." The last of the asuras in the troupe of Kamsa was one by name Vyoma. He came to Brindavan and he decided to join in their games. The game was simple: some of the boys would pretend that they were goats and go about fearlessly. Others would pretend to be thieves and catch hold of the goats. And so the game would proceed. Until they got tired of it!

Vyoma took the form of a cowherd and joined the group of the 'thieves' and one by one the 'goats' were stolen by him. He brought them all to a cave which was nearby and closed it up with a big rock covering its mouth. There were only four or five boys left.

Krishna knew who was making this mischief and he became very angry. When anyone came to attack him or Rama, Krishna would smile and tackle the miscreant with that smile ever on his face. But if someone hurt his comrades or his devotees his anger would be terrible. This was what happened during, the Kaliya incident: during the night when Shankhachuda carried away the gopis and on several other occasions.

Finding that his friends had been kidnapped by the asura Krishna sprang on him like a lion would, on his victim.

Vyoma, as befitted his name, assumed his huge form but he could not slip out of the hold Krishna had on him. Krishna lifted him up and dashed him to the ground and killed him like he would a wild animal which was dangerous to others.

He then, with great effort, released the gopala boys from inside the cave and they went back to Brindavan.

AKRURA ARRIVES IN BRINDAVAN

Akrura spent a sleepless night. He was so excited at the thought of seeing Krishna and Rama in person. He knew who they were and this secret had been jealously guarded by some of them. Now Kamsa evidently knew it because Narada had made it a point to tell him. Akrura was worried as to what the future of Mathura would be: would Kamsa's plans succeed? or fail?

Early in the morning Akrura left Mathura with his thoughts set on Krishna and he travelled impatiently. He found that time seemed to be long: that the moments were dragging by and he smiled to himself since he knew that the horses were going as fast as they could. The cloud of dust which rose behind the chariot was ample proof of that. The horses were as fleet as the wind but then, his mind was faster. He was already in the blessed spot named Brindavan and in his mind's eye he could see the handsome brothers with their glowing faces. Akrura thought to himself:

"I do not know how much Punya I have accumulated in my previous births for me to have this heaven-sent opportunity of seeing the Lord in person. Punya is not enough. I must have performed tapas intensely. No, even that is not enough. This is the grace of some great person who, in his compassion, has granted me this good fortune. Here I am, with my mind tainted with the things of the world, the gratification of the senses and ridden with the six dread enemies: Kama, and its attendants. And I, this sinful I, will be seeing Krishna, the Lord of lords.

"It is as hard to attain as the proper pronunciation of the Vedas for a low-born man. And yet, it is not strange. I think of a river which is Time and on its surface twigs and pieces of straw, low beings like me, float. By the result of Karma, one among millions may find the solace of seeing the Lord: like a stray twig may be propelled towards the banks of the river and so, be saved from drifting along infinitely.

"All my sins must have been washed away or else how would this have been possible? The lotus feet of the Lord which are what the rishis meditate upon: those very feet will be touched by these sinful hands tonight. Kamsa is indeed, the kindest of men since he has chosen me to go on this errand of his. The portents are indeed favourable to me. The animals pass me on the right side. I will see Krishna: his beautiful face illuminated by his smile. Narayana has assumed the form of Krishna to save this world, they say, from its sinfulness. And that Krishna, that Narayana in human form, I will see with these earthly eyes tonight.

"Mahadeva and the other gods worship him incessantly and he has granted infinite wealth to them. Shridevi has ever been sitting at his feet and Saubhagya is hers for ever. Devotees and rishis worship his sacred feet and they have realised the Brahman. The lotus feet of the Lord have wandered all over Brindavan with the gopas and he has been full of compassion for them. His feet have been caressed by the gopis and they have found love. And I, with these sinful hands will touch his feet, these same feet and He will grant me all these things. What wonderful luck is mine! I will reach Brindavan this evening. I will go straight to the house of Nandagopa.

"When I reach there, I will jump down from the chariot and rush inside. There I will see Krishna and Rama with their parents and their friends. Great joy will be mine. I will fall at his feet and he will place his hand on my head. Krishna will be kind to me. Even after I tell him that I have been sent by Kamsa to fetch him to Mathura: even when he knows the purpose of this mission of mine he will not hate me. I am but the arrow shot by Kamsa and Kamsa is the miscreant. Krishna will know that and so he will be gracious to me. With a smiling face he will welcome me and all my sins will be burnt away like moths when they touch a flame. He will then raise me up and embrace me. My body will be purified by the touch of his mighty arms."

Thinking on Krishna thus, Akrura, the son of Shvaphalka, reached Brindavan. The western sky was reddened by the rays of the setting sun. Akrura's excitement was so great that he could not stay in the chariot any longer. Getting down from the chariot he looked all around him. "So this is where Krishna lives! These are his favourite haunts!" Thinking thus

Akrura bent his eyes on the ground. There he saw a glorious sight. The ground had strange markings on it. He had never seen the like of it before. He bent down to have a clearer look. The entire ground was covered with the signs of Shankha and Chakra: the conch and the discus, the two sacred things held in the hands of Narayana. Akrura was on the point of fainting. He knew then that the tiny feet of Krishna had these markings on them and they had left their impress wherever they went. All the lines which stood for good fortune like Abjarekha, Yavarekha, Ankusharekha, could be found on the ground and the eyes of Akrura filled with tears of joy. He said: "These are the markings made by the feet of my lord. Fortunate indeed is Brindavan which has become sanctified for ever by the fact that the Lord once walked here. How can I set my feet on this holy spot?" He fell down, placed the dust on his head and he rolled towards the home of Krishna saying: "I will not touch with my feet what my lord has sanctified."

In the meantime Rama and Krishna had come back from the forest after grazing the cows. They knew what Akrura was expecting to see them and to please him they gave him darshan which he had been imagining in his mind all through the journey to Brindavan.

Akrura arrived at the house of Nanda. He reached the doorway. He entered and feasted his eyes on the glorious sight which he had been aching for: the sight of the two brothers.

They looked so much alike and so different. One was wearing blue silk and the other wore a garment of silk which was golden yellow. One was fair like the moon and the other, dark like a rain cloud. Both were young and their eyes were like newly-bloomed lotuses. Long lovely arms which reached their knees: handsome beyond the bourne of description; soft and gentle eyes which were full of compassion: eyes which smiled at everyone: their walk, like that of young elephants: with dignity and grace writ on their faces. They were wearing jewelled necklaces and also garlands strung with wild flowers. Akrura saw them and knew that they were two forms of the Paramapurusha: the beginning which causes the Universe to exist. He knew that the Lord had taken these human forms and these human names Rama and Krishna for the welfare of mankind and for the establishing of dharma.

Akrura rushed towards them and fell at their feet. He wanted to announce to them his name and where he came from; but his eyes were full of tears, his throat was choked and he could not speak, overcome as he was with so much emotion.

Krishna lifted him up and embraced him even as Akrura had imagined. Balarama then embraced him. Both the brothers took his hands in theirs and led him to the inner chambers. They gave him water to wash his feet and hands and then offered *Madhuparka*, a concoction of honey, curds and ghee which was the time-honoured way to greet honoured guests. After they had made him rested, they made him partake of rice cooked in milk and other delicious food. After they had eaten, Balarama went and brought garlands of sweet-smelling flowers and he gave Akrura *tambula* which was fragrant with camphor powder. He smeared sandal-paste on the arms and chest of Akrura and made him feel most embarrassed. The Lord of lords was treating him like an honoured guest: as a great man, and he knew he did not deserve the honour which they lavished on him. But he was, at the same time, thrilled. When they were sitting relaxed Nanda asked him: "You are a scion of the Dasharha House. How then is it possible to be alive in the court of Kamsa? You make me think of a goat which is being brought up by a butcher. How can I ask you if you are all well, knowing that you live under the rule of a man who loves himself so much that he killed new-born infants which were born to his sister, his once-beloved sister?"

Krishna now took up the questioning and he asked in detail about the GOOD people of Mathura and their welfare. About how they were able to bear the tyranny of Kamsa. He then said: "There must be a reason for your coming to Brindavan. Kamsa would not have let you come unless he had some purpose to be served. Please tell us."

Akrura began to talk. He told them the old story of the wedding of Devaki and the prophecy and about how, ever since then, Kamsa had been persecuting the Yadavas, and their kinsmen. He told them about Narada's visit and the attempts of Kamsa to kill Vasudeva and Devaki for the deceit practised by them in concealing the child: and about Narada telling him that it was quite unnecessary and pointless: that the first thing Kamsa

should do was to get rid of the youngsters first and the killing of the others could follow later as a matter of course.

He then said: "Kamsa is now sure that you are the two sons of Devaki and he will not rest until he sees the end of you. He has a dreadful elephant which is named Kuvalayapida and he is hoping to see both of you crushed by this elephant. If that fails, he has asked the most fierce of his wrestlers to tackle you and he is sure that they will kill you. To give a semblance of friendship Kamsa has arranged a yaga: a Dhanuryaga which is the excuse he has thought up to get you to Mathura. If, during your visit there the wrestling bouts are arranged and you both get killed, the people will not blame him: that is his fond hope.

"The invitation to the Dhanuryaga has been sent through me. I am the emissary and since I am a Dasharha and partial to the Yadava clan Kamsa thinks that you will both be deceived.

"Nanda, you have also been asked to attend the yaga. I am to take these young men with me in the chariot which brought me here." The brothers smiled very sweetly and said: "So be it. We will go to Mathura with you as per our dear uncle's wish."

Nanda then gave orders for milk and other offerings, and the tributes to be given to the king by smaller chiefs like him. He gave orders that early in the morning he would go with some of the elders to Mathura at the behest of the king. He asked the town-crier to announce to everyone about the Dhanuryaga and that they were most welcome to join him in the journey to Mathura to see the festival.

AKRURA, THE CRUEL!

Early in the morning one of the gopis got up to sprinkle water at her doorstep and to paint pictures with flour as was the custom. She saw a strange chariot at the door of Nanda's house. Dropping her vessel full of water and the dish containing rice flour she rushed to the other houses and spread the news that someone had come to see Nanda. And she added: "The chariot is such as we have never seen before. It seems to be someone from the royal house who has come. Come, let us go and see." All the women came one by one to the neighbourhood of Nanda's house and waited to see what was happening. One bolder than the others went nearer and from somewhere near the house saw what was going on. She rushed out in panic and said: "Stop that chariot! Take it away! Hide it! Do something with it!" Her eyes were ready to spill tears which had gathered there. The others clustered round her and made her talk. With sobs punctuating her words she said: "I do not know what is going to happen nor do I know who the newcomer is. But it seems to me he has come to take Krishna away from us."

"Take away Krishna?," screamed the others. "How can that happen? Take him where? He belongs to us."

"I do not know ," sobbed the girl. "I know they are going since Rama and Krishna are dressed up as though they are going out. Have you ever seen them get up this early? Today seems to be unlike the other days. Nanda is standing stern and sad while Yashoda is weeping her heart out with her arms round Krishna. He is trying to wipe her eyes and speak comfortingly to her, while Rama is trying to rouse Rohinidevi who seems to be in a dead faint. It looks frightening. I am sure Krishna and Rama are going away with this man in the royal chariot."

With beating hearts and with their eyes blinded by tears the women stood around and waited to see what would happen.

They saw a movement near the door. A stranger came out of the house and his dress was all rich silk and brocade proclaiming him to have come from the 'city': most probably from the court. Nanda followed him and behind him came Rama and Krishna. Yashoda and Rohini stood in the doorway clinging to it for support and they had covered their eyes with their hands and their bodies were shaking because of their anguished crying.

For the first time they saw Krishna looking serious and as for Rama, a frown sat on his noble brow and he looked angry. The gopis saw Krishna and he rushed to them. He was embraced by each and every one of them and they could not talk, any of them. They did not ask him where he was going. They knew that he was going: it did not matter where.

Krishna told them about the royal command and about how he had to obey or else the entire Brindavan would be destroyed.

"Brindavan destroyed?", asked a lovelorn girl. "What do you think it will be like when you are gone? Do you think we will be able to live even for a moment without looking at your dear face? Krishna, do not leave us and go away. If Kamsa destroys us, it is no matter. We will die with our eyes trained on you and with our lips breathing your name. Do not make Brindavan barren and do not kill all of us. We have no one else except you and how can you find it possible to abandon us?"

They turned to Akrura and spoke harsh words to him: "How dare you take away our darling Krishna with you? What an unsuitable name they have given you! considering you are the personification of cruelty. You are Yama, the god of death and you have come to take away our lives. We will die if Krishna leaves us."

Krishna pacified them and told them that he had to go and that his father would be punished if he did not go; he did not want to be failing in his duty to his parents and to the king even if he happened to be a bad king. None of these words would comfort the lamenting women.

Krishna left them and went to his playmates. They were numb with the thought that their Krishna, their playmate, their companion from childhood was going to the city. They had one comforting thought though:

they would also be going to Mathura with their fathers and who knows! Krishna might come back with them!

Krishna took leave of them and his eyes were sad since he knew that he would never come back to Brindavan: never again to the slopes of Govardhana: never again to the banks of the Yamuna. Never more would he make sweet music on the sands when the moon shed its soft beams: never again would he hold the stick of bamboo in his hand and drive the cows to the forests. He had bade farewell to his cows. But once again he went into the sheds where his beloved cows were standing and they were all weeping. He wiped their tears and with his forearm wiped his own tears and went to the presence of his mother. He fell at her feet and once again took leave of her. She clung to him and he had to disentangle himself from her restraining hands. Rama had already gone towards the chariot. Akrura helped him into the chariot. He placed Krishna by the side of Rama. He then sat in the driver's seat and took the whip in his hand. Krishna's eyes were trained on the faces of his beloved friends and the gopis who were devoted to him and who were heart-broken now.

The carts with Nanda and the other cowherds in them were being loaded with gifts for the king and soon they would begin their slow journey to Mathura.

After a few stunned moments the gopis realised that their Krishna had begun his journey to the city. They spoke to themselves: "Look at this Krishna! How hard his heart is! How could he leave us like this and go away? God Himself is against us or else something would have happened to stop their progress. On the other hand all the signs are good and they prophecy success. Which is our defeat. Come, let us stop him from going. Let the elders try and stop us: we will pay no heed." They tried in vain to stop the chariot. Akrura laid his whip across the horses' flanks and at once they began to move. The gopis and the young boys set up such a wail that the very skies resounded with their piteous cry. The chariot went further and Krishna held his hands out asking them not to follow him and often he looked back at them and their hands held out to him. He called out to them: I will come back soon. I will send word to you. Please do not be so unhappy."

They stood staring in the direction where the chariot was fast disappearing. They wiped their eyes and stared intently until the dust rising from the progress of the chariot had settled down and they saw nothing there, far away in the distance. Krishna had gone away from them.

AKRURA SEES A VISION

The chariot went fast. Soon they reached the banks of Yamuna. Rama and Krishna got down from the chariot and went to the waters of the river. In the morning light the sapphire blue of the river was beautiful, enchanting. Both the brothers stood there for a while, each busy with the thoughts of the many years they had spent there. They were the two forms the Paramatma had assumed, the Brahman which has no involvement with the feelings which are kin to the world of men. Yet, even they were beset with sadness as they took the water in their hands and performed the *achamana* and other morning rites. Having donned the human form, perhaps, they had to feel as human beings did. They stood for a while talking of the carefree days they had so far. They knew that those days were over: they would never be boys again. They went back to the chariot and seated themselves.

Akrura then went on the Yamuna to perform his ablutions which have to be performed after the sun rises. He entered the river to have his bath. Reciting the sacred mantra which goes by the name *Savitri* he dived under the water. A strange thing happened. He saw, in the waters, the two brothers, Rama and Krishna. He was taken aback. Puzzled as to how the sons of Vasudeva could have come into the waters so soon, he got out of the waters and raising his head he looked towards the chariot. There he saw the two boys talking animatedly about something and laughing, like any other young boys. Akrura dived again under the waters. Now the sight which greeted his eyes was different.

He saw the thousand-headed Adishesha coiled up. And Akrura saw Narayana reclining on Adishesha. He saw the rishis led by Sanaka and the seven rishis and all the denizens of the heavens adoring Narayana. This was the vision granted to him.

Akrura was speechless with happiness at the great good fortune that had been his. He realised what he had heard: that Narayana and Shesha had been born on the earth as the sons of Vasudeva to rid the earth of the poisons which were choking her. He prayed to the Paramapurusha, Narayana.

Even as he was praying the vision vanished from his sight. The wonderment of it could still be perceived in his eyes and Krishna asked him: "My lord, what strange expression is this I see on your face? Did you, by any chance, see anything wonderful? Something you have not seen before? Please tell us. Let us share whatever it is that has brought this ecstatic look on your face." He smiled mischievously.

Akrura said: "Strange things! Things I have never seen before! You are right. I saw a vision today which has opened my eyes. All the amazing and wonderful things which greet my eyes are all contained in you. I know it. I have seen you, the Paramatman, moving on the earth as though you are an ordinary man: as human and ordinary as anyone else and ridden with the same pain and pleasure cycle as the ordinary mortal. Having seen this can anything else be the cause of amazement or wonderment in me? I salute you, Lord of lords."

With these words Akrura, the son of Gandini took up the reins of the horses in his hands and began to drive the chariot fast in the direction of Mathura.

The sun had reached the western sky when they entered the city of Mathura. The passers-by saw the two handsome youths in the company of Akrura and they could not take their eyes off them: such was the charm they exerted on all.

Nanda and his companions had already reached the royal gardens and were waiting for the arrival of the children. Akrura took the chariot straight to the place where Nanda was. Rama and Krishna then took the hands of Akrura after falling at the feet of their father, Nanda. Krishna said: "Akrura, your mission is fulfilled. Go now straight to your home and tell your king that you have brought the 'youngsters' as per his instructions. As for us, we will stay here for a while. We will then walk around and see

what the city is like. You must remember we are just folk from the country, from the cowsheds and we do not know anything about the beauties of the city."

The twinkle in his eyes brought a smile to the lips of the listeners and Akrura said: "It is not right that you should abandon me like this. I will not enter Mathura without you. Please honour me by coming to my humble house with your brother and make it sanctified. Please let the dust of your blessed feet make my home a hallowed spot in Mathura. Let me wash your feet and the water will purify me from the dread sin of Karma: of being born again and again in this world of sin. Bali, the asura king, eternal fame to his because he had washed your feet. Lord Mahadeva held the river Ganga in his matted locks and it was this Ganga who, later, flowed on the earth and gave sanctity and a place in the world of the Manes for the sons of Sagara who were a heap of ashes for aeons of time. That Ganga is but the water which washed your sacred feet. Even so, make me fortunate enough to wash your feet with my hands and let pure Ganga flow in my home."

Krishna wiped the tears from the devoted Akrura and said: "I have ever been fond of my Bhaktas. They are always dear to me and I have never refused them anything. But then, Akrura, let me attend to the more urgent task that is mine. I have to rid the earth of this sinner by name Kamsa. I must comfort my kinsmen, the Yadavas. I must meet my parents for the first time. When that task is over I will surely come to your home and spend some time with you. But now it is not right for you to stay so long with me. Go back to the city and tell Kamsa about the success of your mission."

Akrura went back with a heavy heart. Krishna and Rama, who were now reunited with their playmates, took the permission of Nanda and the other elders to go around the city and see the sights.

IN THE STREETS OF MATHURA

Mathura was a beautiful city. Every house had beautifully carved doorways and the turrets in many houses were enclosed in sheets of gold or silver. The doorways were made out of beautiful dark wood and inlaid with gleaming metals like silver, gold, copper or brass. The entire city was surrounded by a large and deep moat. There were many gardens and these were full of flowering shrubs and trees: the air was laden with the scent of the flowers. They could see that only rich men lived in some of the houses. The signs of affluence were so apparent. There were terraces in many of the houses and peacocks were strutting about in every house. The cooing of the pigeons could be heard everywhere. The roads were wide and sprinkled with water and the shops were filled with wares from all over the world. Vendors were selling their silks and silverware with loud voices. Everything was new and amusing and the children from Brindavan walked about the place as though they had never seen the like of this city before.

They were walking along the *Rajaviti*, the widest road which led to the palace and the people of the city were amazed to see these newcomers. They stared at them and spoke among themselves speculating about their identity. As though did not hear the words of the people the boys went on their way. News had already spread in the city that Krishna and Rama, the sons of Nanda, the performers of miracles, the youngsters who had killed so many asuras, had been asked to attend the Dhanuryaga and the people were sure that these were none other than the famed boys: Rama and Krishna. The women crowded to the terraces and windows and other places to drink in their beauty with their eyes and so the two heroes walked like lions in the streets of Mathura in the midst of all that noise and all that excitement.

When they were walking thus, they saw a washerman coming towards them with a large bundle of clothes strapped to his back. Krishna stopped

him and asked him what he was carrying. The washerman was the personal attendant of Kamsa and the arrogance of the king had rubbed off on him to a large extent. He said:

"I am the king's personal washerman. He is happy only if I wash his clothes. This bundle contains the silks which are to be worn by the king, Kamsa Maharaja."

With a smile Krishna said : "Look ! there are so many clothes in your bundle. We have come to watch the Dhanuryaga and in our hurry we did not bring good clothes. Please give us some silks from your bundle and I assure you that you will not regret it. Come, give us some silks."

The washerman laughed loudly and said : "You are too audacious, I must say! How dare you aspire to the honour of wearing silks fit for the king? I can see that you come from the villages. You are used to wandering around in the hills and meadows. Your rough clothes are a sure indication of that. That is perhaps why you beg of me for soft and delicate cloth which you might never have seen before. Get away from here before I get angry: or, before the king's men come to know of your impertinence. They may beat you up." He looked around to see how the lookers-on were responding to his high talk.

Krishna was very angry. With a sudden blow from his hand he hit the washerman on his head. So powerful was the blow and so very unexpected that the washerman received the full impact of it. His head fell apart from his body. His companions got scared and ran away from there.

Calmly and in a very leisurely manner Krishna opened the bundle of clothes and choosing silks for himself and his companions he dressed himself up in them and so did Rama. The others put on the other garments, and what was left over, they left on the road and went on their way.

There was a weaver on that road. From his shop he brought them shawls which were very beautifully embroidered with coloured silk threads and they accepted them graciously. Krishna granted him great riches and what was more, revealed his real form to him. From there they went to the house of a flower-seller. He had already heard about the coming of Nanda's

sons. He never even dreamed that he would have the good fortune to have them in his humble house. When the brothers walked in, he fell at their feet and stood with folded arms. He said: "How can I return the favour granted me by you, my lord? I am but a flower-seller."

Krishna was pleased with the affection showed by the flower-seller by name Sudama and he stayed in his house for a while. Dressing himself with the flower garlands and the sandal paste and *tambula* Krishna let Sudama give the same things to Rama and his companions and then left the house of the flower-seller. Krishna said : "Since you seem to think I am the Lord of lords, ask me then anything you desire and I will grant it to you." Sudama smiled sweetly at Krishna and said: "Having seen you and your beautiful face, having heard your sweet words and the affection in it, do you think I have any more desires? All I want, my lord, is constant Bhakti towards you. I want to have love for your Bhaktas. Please make me compassionate towards all human beings: all living beings. These are the only things I desire most in this world."

Krishna granted him all these and immense wealth and fame. The young men walked out of the house of the flower-seller with happy faces and laughter.

TRIVAKRA

The two youngsters with their followers were again resuming their walk along the road to the palace. Walking towards them was a woman. She was a young woman and her face was very lovely. In her hands she held vessels filled with perfumes and the paste made of sandal wood. The scent was so powerful that the entire road was filled with fragrance. Krishna looked at her. Poor woman, she was a hunchback. In fact, she had three bends in her body which had made her a hunchback. Krishna smiled his sweet smile and asked her: "You are beautiful. Tell me who you are. What are you having in your hands? It seems to me the vessel is full of perfume. Who is meant to use it? Tell me. If you are so inclined, please give it to me. I want it and I assure you, it will bring you good fortune if you give it to me."

The woman said: "I am a *Sairandree*. I work in the palace. My name is Trivakra, as you can see." There was a sad smile on her face when she said it. She continued: "I am very good at mixing sandal paste with perfumes and the king uses only the sandal paste prepared by me. But then, when I look at you, I think you both are the only ones fitted to use my sandal paste. You are so very handsome: so young: so charming. You seem to be an artist in recognising good things. And your words, your looks and your smile are captivating. You talk so well and you are kind. I am happy you asked me for the perfumes. I will give them to you willingly."

She gave the scents to Rama and Krishna and watched them with an indulgent smile as they smeared the sweet smelling paste all over their chests, their arms and palms.

Krishna decided that he would reward this woman immediately. He went near her and smiled into her eyes. He then placed his two feet on her two small feet. Standing very close to her, so close that she could feel his sweet breath on her face, he placed his two fingers under her chin and

gently lifted her; raised her face and her neck gently and firmly. And those who stood around gasped with surprise.

Trivakra was no longer Trivakra. She stood straight as a young tree, her limbs and her figure in perfect proportion. She was a very beautiful woman. She looked at herself and looked again to make sure that she had indeed been cured of her deformity. With brimming eyes she fell at his feet and he raised her and asked her: "Is there anything else you want me to do?", and his eyes smiled into hers as he said it. She blushed and twisting the end of her upper cloth and with her eyes downcast she spoke to him halting words; smiles lit her face and eyes as she said: "You know that I want nothing else except you. Come to my house which is nearby. Take pity on me and make me yours." Rama was watching with a mischievous smile and all his comrades were sharing the amusement of Rama. Krishna laughed with glee and said : "My dear woman, you are very beautiful and I will certainly give you what you are asking for. But then, you have to wait. I have a task to perform and I can do nothing until that major task is accomplished. Wait for me till then."

They passed on, with Trivakra and the others staring after them.

THE GREAT BOW IS BROKEN

They would ask the passers-by about the location of the Ayudhashala where the Dhanus was placed: the great bow which was used as an excuse to bring Rama and Krishna to Mathura. They reached the Ayudhashala and entered it. The great bow was placed there. It was to be worshipped the next morning. It was a beautiful sight: awe-inspiring. The brothers stood with reverence writ on their faces. Guards were standing all around the bow and it was decorated with costly gems. It looked like Indradhanus: so colourful and so powerful was it.

Krishna went near the bow and tried to lift it. The guards tried to prevent him from touching it. But Krishna paid no heed to their remonstrances. The people around were watching him and casually, very casually, Krishna raised the bow in his left hand. He then tightened the bowstring and while he went on bending the bow, there was a noise like a thunderbolt had dropped: and the people saw that the bow had been broken.

Kamsa heard the noise and sent his servants to find out what had happened. In the meantime the guards surrounded the young boys. Shouts of "Catch him! Hold Him! Beat him! Capture him and tie him up!" could be heard. Surrounded as they were by many of the king's men Rama and Krishna each took a piece of the broken bow and began to beat up their assailants.

Kamsa heard what has happened and he sent his army to quell the disturbance. Rama and Krishna destroyed the army as well. After all this, as though nothing had happened to disturb their sight-seeing, they went back to the road and continued their desultory walk.

The citizens of Mathura were amazed at the feats of the young boys and the news spread like wild fire. People came out of their houses, out of the terraces, on the doorsteps and cheered them. They knew by instinct that

they would be delivered from the tyranny of Kamsa by these children. But they could not side with them openly: so great was their fear of Kamsa.

Even as they were creating so much sensation in the city the sun set. Krishna and Rama with their companions went back to the palace gardens where the Brindavan clan was staying. They washed their hands and feet and after eating rice mixed with milk they slept.

Kamsa, on the other hand, could not sleep. He had been told about the coming of Rama and Krishna. He knew about the killing of the washerman. He was trying not to be impressed by the miracle which made Trivakra straight and beautiful. The really frightening event was the breaking of the dhanus and the routing of the king's army. He was worried as to what the morning held in store for him. The portents were all indicating some dread calamity for him.

His dreams also were indicating his death and he was afraid. He dreamed that he was riding a mule: that he had swallowed poison: that he was wearing a garland made of red flowers: that he was having an Oil bath and that he was being carried to an unknown destination. He got up from his sleep with alarm. The entire night he spent sleeplessly since he had a premonition that the morning held something terrible in store for him. The breaking of the great bow was the cause of his fear of the boys. The prophecy sounded again in his mind and he felt that it might come true.

"But then," he told himself. "I have great faith in my wrestlers: Mushtika and Chanura can make them look foolish and they will surely be killed by these two. Perhaps, they will be killed sooner by my dear elephant Kuvalayapida. No one can escape from under its feet and the weight of it." Comforting himself with these thoughts Kamsa tried in vain to sleep.

THE KILLING OF KUVALAYAPIDA

The east was red with the rays of the rising sun and the entire city had dressed in her best. The Dhanuryaga would be a farce since the dhanus itself was broken. Kamsa had the town-criers proclaim that there would be a great display of wrestling by the famed Mushtika, Chanura, Shala and Toshala. An arena had been erected specially for this and the people were quite eager to see the different bouts.

The place was filling up with the eager spectators. Bugles and trumpets made noise incessantly. The place had been decorated with flowers and garlands of flowers and everything looked very gay and the entire place had a festive look. People had come to enjoy themselves and no one seemed to have any worry. No one knew, of course, that this was just a seemingly innocent show put up and that the real purpose behind it was the killing of the two young boys from Brindavan.

There was a sudden silence as though the roaring sea had been muted by a magic wand. Kamsa came with his innumerable guards. He stood on the terrace and all the people cheered. He accepted their homage and seated himself on the throne. The vassals brought their tributes, their offerings to him and laid them at the feet of their king. Nanda was one of them. After placing his offerings at the foot of the throne Nanda went back and sat in the place specially allotted to him. His friends from Brindavan also sat with him.

The trumpets sounded announcing the arrival of the wrestlers and one by one they entered. They ascended the platform and bowed before Kamsa. They were Mushtika, Chanura, Kuta, Shala and Toshala. They were formidable to look at.

Krishna and Rama, in the meantime, had reached the streets of Mathura long before their father left the encampment. They heard the sounds made

by the trumpets and bugles and they went near the palace to see what was happening. According to the advice of Kamsa several guards were following them wherever they went. As though they were unaware of it the two brothers moved around with ease. When they came to the entrance of the arena Krishna pointed out to Rama an elephant of immense size. They spoke to each other with their eyes. Krishna then went near the mahout and said: "Listen to me. Please do not block the entrance to this public place with your elephant. We want to go in and see the fun. Do not obstruct the way." The mahout, who had been stationed there just for the purpose of meeting the two brothers, said: "What if I refuse?"

"If you refuse," said Krishna in a dangerous voice which was extra soft. "If you refuse, I will despatch you and your big elephant to the abode of Yama."

The mahout's eyes became red with fury and he spurred the elephant to rush towards Krishna. The brothers had already decided that Krishna should tackle the elephant. The elephant rushed towards Krishna, caught him up in his trunk and tried to dash him to the ground. Krishna hurt the elephant with a blow from his fist and the elephant, in its sudden pain, dropped Krishna. The young boy then rushed towards the four legs of Kuvalayapida and hid himself. The elephant could not make up his mind as to where he was. Finally, finding him, caught hold of Krishna again with his trunk; but, like Garuda slipping out of the coils of a snake Krishna slipped out of its grasp nimbly and grasping its tail he twisted it again and again. The poor elephant went round and round searching for his assailant and all the while, Krishna teased him by darting here and there. He would go to the front of the elephant, beat him with his fists and again, rushing between his legs make the elephant spin around. The elephant fell down and to deceive it Krishna also pretended to fall down. Thinking that he could now be killed the animal dug his tusks into Krishna.

The victim, however, escaped, and the tusks buried themselves in the ground. Extricating himself with difficulty the elephant which was now mad with pain and frustration rushed towards Krishna. He grasped it with ease by the trunk and felled it to the ground. He then climbed the elephant

like a lion and, with a twist of his wrist, broke the tusk of the elephant. With the same tusk he killed Kuvalayapida and the mahout also.

Krishna, who had killed asuras so easily, took a long time to kill this ordinary elephant just to let the watching crowd have excitement. He also wanted to infuse hope into their hearts and bring a gleam to their eyes which had been filled with despair. He wanted them to know that he could and would kill Kamsa with his bare hands as he did the great royal elephant, Kuvalayapida. There was great cheering to be heard.

Leaving the dead elephant Krishna placed the tusk on his own shoulder. The drops of blood and rut which were on the tusk dripped on him. His dress was soiled and his face was covered with drops of sweat like a lotus is enhanced in its beauty by the drops of water clinging to its petals.

Rama and Krishna appeared in the courtyard of the palace near the arena and the crowd stared at them as if spellbound.

They appeared different to different people. The wrestlers led by Chanura thought that they were two thunderbolts personified: men who were watching thought that they were the best among men: the women thought that each of them was Manmatha in human form: the gopas were thrilled that they were one of them, their Suhrit: the wicked kings thought of them as the punishers of their wrong-doings: to their parents they seemed like infants: Kamsa thought of them as death incarnate: the ignorant knew them not but each one thought differently of them according to his wisdom or lack of it: the yogis thought that they were the ultimate Truth and the Vrishnis thought of them as their gods, who had come as their saviours.

Thus, all the ten rasas: Raudra, Adbhuta, Shringara, Hasya, Vira, Daya, Bhayanaka, Bhibhatsa, Shanta and Prema-bhakti were inspired in those who looked at them.

THE KILLING OF KAMSA

Kamsa realised that Kuvalayapida, the most powerful weapon he had in his armoury, had been killed by this young man, hardly a child. Krishna came nearer and stood on the stage. This was the first time Kamsa saw his enemy face to face. He had, all these days, thought of him: dreamed of him. His nightmares were many and frequent. But he had not seen Krishna.

Kamsa looked at the beautiful eyes of Krishna staring into his even from that distance and Kamsa's heart was full of fear. The youngsters held the crowd spellbound: so beautiful was their appearance and so dramatic, their entrance.

The crowd began to chatter. Small whispers breathed across the air. Some of the knowing ones said: "These two must be the *avatars* of Narayana who were born some time back in the house of Vasudeva. We have heard that Vasudeva took these children to Gokula to be brought up by Nanda."

One other person intervened and said: "How can you say that? One of them is slightly older than the other: the fair one is the elder of the two. How could both of them be taken to Gokula? You are just saying things to make others think that you know everything."

Not to be quelled by this the first citizen said: "Maybe I am wrong about the elder one. But the dark one, the younger one, the boy with the peacock feather in his hair, the one who has just killed Kuvalayapida, was born to Devaki and on the night he was born he was taken to Gokula: or else our good king would have killed him."

Another man joined in and said: "It must be so. This Krishna is said to have killed Putana when he was a baby and later, he killed Shakatasura. And so many others. I have been told that he did it all single-handed. He must be the *avatara* as our friend claims him to be. Let us see. Perhaps our troubles will soon be over."

While they spoke there was a sudden blare of trumpets. All eyes were turned towards the arena and Chanura was calling out to the newcomers. He said: "We have been told that both of you are very brave and strong: that you have performed several feats which are considered to be superhuman. The lord of the Bhojas has invited you and your people to take part in the festivities to be observed in Mathura. One of them is this wrestling bout. The king is very eager to see your prowess in wrestling. You have to obey your lord and master, king Kamsa in everything, considering you are the sons of a lesser chief. Come now. Let us see how far these reports about you are true: about your skill in wrestling."

Krishna was only too happy to oblige. But he spoke words which were apparently very humble. He said: "We are people from the villages and we do not know the polish which is the outstanding characteristic of city folk. But we have the desire to please the lord of the Bhojas as much as you have. It is a privilege for us to be given an opportunity like this. But then, we are young. We are much smaller in size than any of you. It will be a fair display only if equals fight. Please let us fight with someone equal to us in age and size. You are all too powerful and for you to pit your strength against our puny strength will be considered unfair: it is your reputation which will acquire a blot. We do not want that to happen to you."

Chanura did not relish his words. He said: "Enough of this talk. Just a moment back you killed Kuvalayapida which had the strength of a thousand elephants. You are not a young child: any way, not in strength. We do not consider it an unfair fight if you both fight with us. You fight with me and let Mushtika fight with your brother Balarama."

"So be it," said Krishna and both the brothers stepped into the arena. Chanura came and stood before Krishna and Mushtika in front of Rama. The fight began. It was so obviously an uneven fight that the women who had come there were filled with love and pity for the 'poor children' who, they were sure, would be killed by the dreadful wrestlers of the king's court. They said: "What an unfair fight this is! It is the duty of the king to stop this; or at least, the wise men in the court. But they are all silent. What a sad state of affairs."

One woman said: "Look at the strength of the wrestlers! Just look at the roughened and hardened chest of Chanura, the fighter and look at the soft and tender limbs of Krishna. One is like a mountain and the other is like a creeper growing on it. It is the dearth of Dharma which is evident in the court of the king. It is a sin to countenance such a fight."

The citizens of Mathura did not dare to protest since they were very much afraid of the king. Even their words were spoken in whispers. The spies of the king were everywhere.

Krishna was just sparring with Chanura. After a while he made up his mind that he should kill him now. He looked around and saw the women of the city grieving for him and his defeat—nay—his death! Nanda and the gopals were equally upset since they knew the hatred Kamsa bore towards the two boys. Krishna looked at his father as if to say: "Do not worry, father."

The bout went on. Chanura suddenly realised that the complexion of the game had changed entirely: so did Mushtika. There rained on Chanura blows which made him reel with pain and his limbs felt as though they had been broken into a thousand pieces. He went to some distance and from there he rushed suddenly towards Krishna like a hawk swooping on its prey. He hit Krishna on the chest. Unaffected by it Krishna grabbed Chanura by his arm and raising him aloft twirled him round and round and then, he dashed him to the ground. Almost at the same moment the people saw Mushtika fall to the ground spitting blood and they found that both of the wrestlers were dead.

Rama then took Kuta into the arena and killed him very easily. Krishna had already killed Shala, and Toshala was split into two effortlessly by him. The rest of the wrestling crowd just ran away from the spot. The gopala youngsters who were the constant companions of Krishna and Rama rushed to the arena and they all danced with joy keeping time to the music that was playing. The crowd joined in the merriment and there was again a festive look about the place. Everyone was happy: everyone except Kamsa who found all his plans going wrong. His elephant was gone and

the wrestlers on whom he had depended so much were now dead: killed by these 'ruffians' from Brindavan.

He stood up and signalled for the music to stop. There fell on the entire assembly a sudden silence. Kamsa spoke in a voice full of fury: "Make haste to drive away these wicked sons of Vasudeva. Confiscate all the wealth of the gopalas. Capture this Nanda and place chains of iron on his hands and legs. Put him in prison for life. Make all arrangements for the execution of Vasudeva who has deceived me: also my father Ugrasena, the old man who thought fit to side with my enemies."

Kamsa was still talking improper words: sinful words and Krishna could no longer bear it. He leaped to the terrace after covering the steps which led to it with quick and eager steps. He went towards the throne of Kamsa. He advanced fast towards the spot where Kamsa was standing. Seeing him so near Kamsa became very much afraid and, falling back a step or two, drew his sword from its scabbard. He advanced towards Krishna with his sword waving above his head. Krishna caught hold of Kamsa like Garuda grasping a king cobra. He held him by the locks and the crown fell to the ground. From the dais Krishna threw him on the ground and fell on him. Krishna held Kamsa's neck in his two hands and crushed the life out of him. He then dragged his body on the ground. There arose a tremendous cry from the crowd when they saw what had happened.

Kamsa had been afraid of Krishna and this fear made him think of Krishna all the time: while drinking, talking, walking, sleeping, even while breathing. And so, when he died the Lord made him attain the state called Sarupya.

There are several yogas prescribed to attain the feet of the Lord. One of them is this *Sambhrama* yoga wherein the Lord is hated; and because of the hatred the hater thinks on the Lord all the time and reaches him in the end. Hiranya was one of the many who practised this *Sambhrama* yoga.

Kamsa's brothers were eight in number. They were Kanka, and Nyagrodhaka and six more. They were incensed by the killing of their brother and they rushed at Krishna. Rama barred their progress. He had taken a huge iron pestle which was lying by and within a matter of

moments all of them were destroyed. Heavenly music could be heard. The devas rained flowers on the brothers. The citizens of Mathura were speechless with wonder and amazement and happiness. They could not believe that their troubles were all at an end and that the tyrant king Kamsa would not harass them any more. They ran hither and thither and there was nothing but confusion all over the place. Those who had not come to the arena but had stayed at home, now cursed themselves for having missed the greatest event in their lives and they now rushed towards the place to see the heroes, Rama and Krishna.

It was now a sad sight which met the eyes of Krishna. The wives of the dead king were there, crying loudly and he had to comfort them. He spoke to them in soft and comforting tones about the evil which Kamsa had been doing all these many years and how he had to be killed for the good of mankind. They knew it all of course. They had no part in his tyranny but the fact that they were his wives was enough to make them suffer so. Krishna knew that his words were not going to be of any solace to them. But these things had to happen. But for these wives of Kamsa and a few loyal servants the entire palace and the entire city of Mathura was full of joy, of happiness, of freedom from the fear of a wicked king and his caprices. Mathura was happy.

AT LAST, AT LONG LAST

Krishna and Balarama went now towards the prison house where their father and mother had been prisoners for the last so many years. Vasudeva and Devaki had just been told about the dramatic happenings in the palace and they awaited the coming of their sons. At last, at long last they would see their sons. They did not know what they looked like. They knew nothing about them except what people from Brindavan would tell them in secret. But now they were going to see them!

Rama and Krishna went to them. With streaming eyes they removed the chains which had scarred the ankles of their father. They brought them out of the prison and fell at their feet touching them with their heads. Vasudeva and Devaki knew that their sons were incarnations of Narayana and so, when Narayana himself was saluting them they felt embarrassed and did not know how to react. After a moment's hesitation they lifted up the boys and embraced them.

Krishna realised that his parents would not behave with them naturally as long as they were aware of his divinity. He told himself: "These two unfortunate beings have never known what it is to be parents. Every time a child was born, they had to lose it. When I was born they were made, by me, to realise that their child was Narayana and that knowledge is still in their minds. And my recent actions have only served to make them more sure of my divinity. Their faith in me as a god is now established more firmly. They are highly evolved souls who can grasp the truth about me easily. I will, therefore, never be able to get the love of a parent from either of them. The love a Bhakta has for his god is not as dear to me as the love of a father or a mother. I had Nanda and Yashoda in the Brindavan days. It is but right that Rama and I should satisfy the ache in the minds of these two by teaching them, to love us as parents and not as devotees."

Krishna, therefore, cast on them his spell, his Maya and when they were quite under the spell he said: "Indeed we have been unfortunate all these days. Because of this villain you could not have us with you during our childhood and our baby talk and our childish pranks were denied to you. You did not have the good fortune which ordinary men and women have, though you bore eight children. It is indeed sad that it should have been so. As for us, we were denied the simple privilege of being brought up by our mother and our father. The debt one owes to one's father and mother, the service with which we should clear the debt we owe you, has not been possible for us all these years because of the whims of fate. It is said in the holy books that a man, even if he is cleverer than his father, should take care of his aged father and mother in their old age. One who does not care for them or for his wife, his child, his preceptor, or anyone who is in trouble: such a son, they say, is like a dead man even though he breathes.

"We have never had the opportunity to serve you all these years and they have been wasted but it was not because we wanted it so. Please let us make up for it: for lost time and give us the honour of serving you day and night."

Listening to the words of Krishna who was the personification of Maya, the old couple were once more subject to the spell cast by him and they talked to their children as though they had been ordinary children and not divine beings. They forgot that some time back they had felt their divinity. They placed the sons on their laps and with tears in their eyes caressed them.

After a while they all went to the prison where the old king Ugrasena was kept as captive. Krishna released him from his prison and asked him to take up the role of king once again. The old man said: "I am old and I am not interested in ruling the land any longer. You are young and it is but right that the vanquishers of the enemy should rule the kingdom."

Krishna spoke very humbly and said: "You seem to have forgotten the curse of Yayati, our ancestor. No Yadava is allowed to sit on a throne. I will be by your side and so will my brother. We will both help you to rule the kingdom."

Krishna then collected the many Vrishnis, Andhakas, Yadavas, Madhus, Dasharhas, and others who had fled from there because of their dread of Kamsa. Once again they were made to live in peace and comfort. Mathura once again became a happy city: like it was before the day of Devaki's wedding when the voice from the heavens upset the peace and joy that was in the heart of Kamsa, and made him so much of a sinner.

Some days passed and it was time for Nanda to go back to his Brindavan. Krishna had a very difficult task ahead of him. He embraced his erstwhile father and spoke in a voice choked with tears. He said: "Dear father, we have been your sons ever since we were aware of our surroundings. We have never known another father and mother. Only the love of parents is unselfish and such love was showered on us by you. One does not have to be born as a son to be treated as a son. We know that. It is not easy to say farewell to you, father. Please tell everyone at home that we will be coming there after comforting these people here, for a space of time. Tell of them. Tell our mothers and tell the gopis who are devoted to me."

Krishna embraced his companions one by one and they all sobbed their hearts out when they realised that their Krishna was no longer theirs: that he had other claimants to his affection. They now knew that the days of playing and grazing the cows were all lost in the past. The days when they listened to the music of the flute which would bring all the cows together: the days when they made him bring fruits from the forest nearby and the day when the forest fire nearly burned them up. They thought of the many things which had happened when they had Krishna by their side. They would now go back and graze the cows as of old. But Krishna would not be there and their future seemed to them dark and dismal. Krishna had to comfort them and make them laugh reminding them of some old story or some escapade. After a lot of persuasion finally his companions agreed to go back to Brindavan: to a place which would be a desert to them.

The caravan left for Brindavan and Krishna and Rama stood there watching the slow meandering of the line of carts until dust swallowed up everything and, with a sigh of sadness, they walked back to the palace. Their boyhood was over and now they had to befit themselves to be princes.

THE ASHRAMA OF SANDIPANI

Vasudeva, when his sons were born, had given away mentally, thousands of cows and gold and silk to brahmins. He now fulfilled that promise. He then approached their family priest Garga and asked him to initiate the two boys in the sacred mantra Gayatri. It was indeed strange for the divine rishis to watch Narayana, the Lord of lords, and Adishesha, the father of all knowledge, sitting at the feet of guru Garga and learning the mantra by name Gayatri with all humility. "They are playing their parts to perfection," said the rishis and blessed them and their *avatars*.

Krishna and Rama had now to go through their education. Till now they were brought up as cowherds were. But now they were recognised to be kshatriyas. They had to go and live in the gurukula as was the custom. There was a learned man by name Sandipani. Born in Varanasi he was living in Avani and to him went the youngsters for being taught the Vedas and Shastras.

They were perfect students: ever eager to please their guru they spent all their time in serving him and listening to his words of teaching with great earnestness. Pleased with them and their devotion their guru taught them the Vedas and the Vedangas and the Upanishads. Krishna who was the essence of all the Upanishads sat at the feet of his master and learnt the Mahavakyas. They were also taught the art of fighting, handling of the bow and arrow and the essential requisites of a kshatriya. Along with this they learnt Dharmashastra, Mimamsa, Tarka and the nuances of the rules of governing a kingdom. Their guru found them to be highly intelligent and they learnt everything very easily and in a very short time. The sixty-four arts were mastered by them in a matter of sixty-four days.

Their stay at the gurukula had come to an end and, as was the custom, the brothers asked their guru what they could do to please him: how best they could pay their gurudakshina. Sandipani first said that it was all

unnecessary but the brothers were insisting that he should name something. Their guru therefore spoke to his wife and together they came to a decision. Their guru came to them and said: "Rama, Krishna, since you both insist on doing something which will please us, I am asking you to do a difficult thing. I have, however, been told about the many wonderful deeds you have performed in Brindavan and so I have hopes of your being successful in the task I am setting for you. It is a long story. Many years back my wife and I with our son went to Prabhasa. There, when we were bathing in the sea, our son was drowned and we could not even find his body. If you can bring him to us and bring him alive, that is the greatest service you can do for me."

"So be it," said Krishna and Rama.

After taking leave of the old couple they climbed into their chariot and reached the place named Prabhasa.

They sat on the shores of the sea for a while. Seeing them, the lords of the oceans came there and paid his respects to them. Krishna said: "We accept your worship. But then, if you really want to please us, return to us the young boy whom your waves swallowed years back. The boy was the son of our guru, the great Sandipani. We have promised to him that we would restore their son to the old couple. Please let us have the boy."

The king of the oceans said: "Krishna, my lord, I am innocent. It was not I who took him. There dwells under the sea an asura by name Panchajana. He always assumes the form of a conch and it was he who stole the young son of your guru."

Krishna promptly leaped into the ocean and soon he found the asura. He killed him and opened up his entrails but could not find the young boy. Krishna found a conch which was formed out of the body of the dead asura. He took it for himself and from there he went to the city by name Samyamani, the favourite place of Yama, the god of death. Krishna and Balarama entered the city together and standing at the portals of the city, Krishna blew loudly on his conch which he called *Panchajanya*—meaning, born of Panchajana. Yama heard the notes of the conch and rushed out to

receive Rama and Krishna. After worshipping them he stood with folded palms and said: "What will I have to do to please the Lord of lords?"

Krishna said: "O king of the dead, please do me a favour. We have promised to restore to our guru their dead son who was drowned in the sea at Prabhasa long ago. This is the dakshina we have been asked to pay and, I am sure, with your help we can do it." Charmed by his gentle words and, at the same time, his commanding voice, Yama said: "But certainly, my lord."

Yama then asked his servants to bring the son of Sandipani. Krishna took him with them and came back to the earth. They took their son to their guru Sandipani and his wife.

The old man could not speak for joy. After a while he composed himself and said: "I have been the most fortunate among all gurus and I am sure no one has had such a pleasing dakshina from his disciples as I have been given. With you both as my disciples I have been cured of the diseases which are led by desire. You are great heroes and go home laden with my blessings. Infinite will be the fame that will be yours."

Krishna and Rama took leave of the old couple and of their new companions in the gurukula and came back to Mathura.

UDDHAVA SENT TO BRINDAVAN

Among the Vrishnis, Andhakas and Bhojas there was one person who was very dear to Krishna. His name was Uddhava and he had been a disciple of Brihaspati, the guru of devas. He was a man of high intellect and after great deliberation Krishna decided that he would be the best person to go to Brindavan and carry his message of love to those who were living there. He took Uddhava's hand in his and said: "My dear friend, Uddhava, I want you to go to Brindavan and see my parents, Nanda and Yashoda. They will be very unhappy because I have left them and come away. The gopis there are all lost in me and if you carry to them my message of love, they will be comforted

"Of all the friends I have, you, I think, are most fitted to do what I have assigned to you. I assure you, it will not be easy. But I owe it to them: since I am not able to go there you have to carry my message for me.

"Tell me merely about the gopis so that I will know more about the type of people I have met," said Uddhava and Krishna smiled with a reminiscent look in his eyes.

He said: "Their minds are ever bent on me I am their very life and for my sake they have forsaken home, husband, child and riches. I have taken it upon myself to grant them all that they have been pining for. They love me and I have come very far away from them. I know that they are very unhappy. They have told me that they belong to me and when I came away I told them that I would come back to them. Hoping that I will one day go to them they are managing to hold on to their lives. They will be happy if you give them the message that their Krishna has not forgotten them and that he will go and see them as soon as he is free. Uddhava, they need this reassurance from me or else they will pine away and die."

Uddhava was quite willing to do what Krishna had asked him to do. He was also keen on visiting this Brindavan he had heard so much about: the place which was supposed to be heaven on earth. Early next morning Uddhava left Mathura in a chariot drawn by fast horses and when the sun had almost touched the rim of the western sky he reached Brindavan. He was thrilled to see the famed Brindavan, the place which had become hallowed because of the years Krishna spent there. Everywhere he saw cows and their calves, handsome bulls and the bellowing of these filled the sky. The streets were peopled mostly by the gopis who were singing at their tasks. When he listened intently Uddhava found that all the songs were in praise of Krishna: they were all narrations of the many pranks which he had played there. The gopis thought of no one else and Uddhava understood what Krishna had meant when he said that to the gopis Krishna was their very life: their everything.

Nanda saw him coming and welcomed him with great affection. After offering milk and honey and other sweet eatables Nanda made Uddhava seat himself on a soft mattress and said: "How is my dear friend Vasudeva after he was freed from the bondage imposed on him by the terrible Kamsa? It was indeed great good fortune which befell the Yadavas when Kamsa was killed. Does Krishna remember us? Does he think of his father and mother whom he has left behind in Brindavan?" Here the voice of Nanda was choked with tears and he stopped talking. From the door across Uddhava could hear muted sobbing and he knew that Yashoda was not far away. Composing himself Nanda said: "His friends, the gopalas, are lost without him. They no longer find it exciting to go out grazing the cows. The cows miss him and the music of his flute. I have often seen them go to the Nipa tree under which he would usually stand while playing the flute. There the cows wander about, sniffing the ground and the foot of the tree and they moo piteously. If only Krishna could hear them call I am sure he will leave everyone in Mathura and come back to his beloved Brindavan. The slopes of Govardhana are not half as green as they used to be when Krishna's feet used to tread them. The hill itself seems to weep silently since the Lord of the Govardhana is absent. Tell him we are longing to see him again: just once again. Ask him to come and stay with us at least for a while so that the ache in the heart of each one of us is assuaged." Nanda

wiped his eyes with his upper cloth and sat silent thinking of Krishna and his many *lilas* which he performed in Brindavan.

Uddhava could hear the sobbing of Yashoda, the mother of Krishna. Every word spoken by Nanda served only to accentuate her sorrow at parting from Krishna and she could not be comforted easily.

Uddhava spoke softly to them and his manner was very gentle. He said: "Fortunate indeed are you both and fortunate is this Brindavan since you have had the privilege of having Krishna with you all these years. You know the purpose of the birth of Rama and Krishna on this earth. They have been born for the protection of the world, and at the same time, for its destruction. They are the Purusha and the manifestation of the Purusha. They are the absolute Truth, immutable, constant, and they are the ones who, entering into the bodies of living things, give life to them and they make them act in the manner they do.

"When the life is about to be separated from the body which has been its home for many years: if, at that moment, man is able to lead his thoughts towards the Lord he will then attain the Brahmi state. When such is the case, need I say about you? You love Krishna. The Paramapurusha who is Krishna is ever in your hearts and your thoughts are forever centred on him. You are blessed. You are also forever in his heart.

"Krishna has sent me to you with a message: he will soon be in Brindavan to see all of you. He will never go back on his word and he will be coming to you. Mother Yashoda, please do not look so sad. He is ever in your minds like the fire which is ever present in the wood of the *Ashwattha* tree. Unless two pieces of wood are taken and churned the fire cannot be manifest. Even so, this suffering makes you sure that you will see Krishna soon. This suffering has made the Bhakti you have for Krishna manifest itself and he will never disappoint his Bhaktas. You have had the good fortune which was denied to Devaki and Vasudeva since you were the ones to bring him up. You were the ones who saw his childhood and his boyhood. Though they were his parents it was your privilege to be his parents. Krishna is better known as Nandakumara than as Vasudevaputra. Please be resigned to the fact that one stage of his life is passed: his

childhood. The entire time was given to you and to Brindavan and to the innocent gopis and the gopalas. He now has so many things to do in order to fulfil the purpose of his *avatara* and you should help him in the performing of it by being patient.

"Nanda, think on him as the Parabrahman and not as your son. If you do that you will realise that he has no feelings like an ordinary man has. He is beyond the feelings. No one is dear to him and he hates no one. He has no desires and he has no likes and dislikes. He is not attached to anyone or anything. To him no one is high and neither does he consider anyone to be low. Equality and inequality do not exist for him. He has no mother: no father: no wife or children. He has no friends nor has he enemies. He is not confined by a body and so he has no birth or death. There is nothing in this world which he has to achieve for himself. But then, to save mankind, for the welfare of men, he is born in the world infested as it is with the three gunas: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.

"He is the one without birth and he is born: he is beyond the reach of the gunas and he is born with the gunas. This is a voluntary birth he has taken for the good of others. He uses the world as his playground and he sports here at will. When a man turns round and round and stops, to him the world seems to be going round and round. Even so, when the intellect and the jivatma are clouded by the *ahankara*, it seems as though the atman is involved in the play of the gunas and in the world of action. But in reality it is not so. The eternal soul has no desires and such, no need to act in the world.

"This Krishna does not belong to you alone. He belongs to all. He is son to everyone: he is the father, mother and every type of kinsman to everyone since he is the Antaratma: the soul pervading every living being. He pervades the entire Universe. Things seen by the eyes: what is heard by the ears: what has happened in the past: what is happening now and what is to happen later: moving and non-moving objects, big and small things, all of these are but manifestations of the Lord and the Lord has assumed the forms, Krishna and Rama.

"Shed this sorrow, both of you and consider yourselves to be the chosen ones." So they talked on: Uddhava and Nanda with Yashoda as listening. And the night passed into day.

UDDHAVA COMFORTS THE GOPIS

Early in the morning one of the gopis saw the chariot at the door of Nanda's house. She was greatly excited and she ran to the others and said: "There is a chariot near our Nanda's house and it is very much like the one in which Krishna and Rama went away on that terrible day. Perhaps Akrura has come again! But why? What could have brought him here now?"

So speculated the gopis and stood watching the front of the house. They then saw Uddhava. He was a very handsome man. With long arms reaching to his knees and with his lotus eyes, golden complexion and golden coloured silks, with earrings which were tossing in the breeze and with a walk like that of a lion he walked towards them. Since he was distantly related to Krishna the gopis, who were obsessed with Krishna and thoughts of him, were confused for a moment: they thought that Krishna had come back to them. They rushed towards him and found to their disappointment that it was not Krishna. But composing themselves they gave way to their curiosity and said: "Who can this be who looks like our Krishna? He dresses like him and his eyes are somewhat like the eyes of our darling. Where has he come from?"

They came near him and Uddhava approached them. He told them that he had come from Krishna and that he had a message for them from Krishna.

At once they began to talk without letting him proceed. They said: "We can guess everything. You are a companion to Krishna. He has sent you here to give his love to his father and his mother. Or else why should Krishna think of Brindavan at all? What is there for him in Brindavan except his parents? The only lasting love a man has is that for his father and mother. All his other loves are not permanent. His love for another woman is like the love a bee has for the flower whose honey he sucks. It is all a pretence of love which he uses to serve his own ends.

"Lovers abandon the women they have loved like a *veshya* does a man who has no wealth: like subjects abandon the king who is impure: like students give up their teachers after they have learnt everything from them: like Ritviks abandon the yajamana who does not give them dakshina: like birds desert a tree which is stripped of its fruits: like guests take leave of the house where they have had their food: like a deer runs away from the forest which is burnt in a fire. Krishna has sent a message to his father and to his mother to tell them that he is happy in the big palace of the kings."

They began their talk addressing Uddhava but after a while they forgot his presence. They were lost in memories of Krishna and the fifteen odd years he had spent with them. One of the gopis was so full of Krishna and his love for her that she began to talk to a bee which was there. She began to address it as if it were a messenger from Krishna. She said:

"You are a worthy person to be the messenger of the faithless Krishna. You are also skilled in drinking honey from flowers and then abandoning them. I know you were till a moment ago, sucking the honey from the flowers which the women were wearing: the women who are now dear to Krishna: the women of the city. Do not dare to touch my feet and pacify me with your hypocrisy. You have come from that man who can well be happy there. He does not need us and our love any more. You are as dark and as fickle as your master. He did the same thing to us. He took the honey from us and after leading us to heaven for a moment he dropped us ruthlessly and went away. He is such an ungrateful person. How is it possible for Lakshmi to worship him so constantly? Poor woman. She must have been misled, like us, with the stories about him: that he is a man of excellent character: that he is godlike in his qualities.

"You stupid bee, do not come near us with your six legs seeking our pardon. We have no faith in that man who is happy with other women: women in the heavens, in the nether world, in the cities and many other places. He has no use for us any more. Tell him from us that the name "Uttamasloka" does not befit him. It applies only to one who is compassionate towards his poor devotees. But he has forgotten us and our love. Do not try to pacify us with your clever words composed by him: we have given up our everything: our homes, our husbands and children and

we love only him and he has thought fit to abandon us. What is there to talk about? It is all over. You may ask me why I still sing songs which speak only of him and his deeds! We are not able to forget them. We know that it is a pastime which robs man of many things. Singing his praises makes man lose all the many feelings like Raga and Dvesha: all the opposites get erased. People abandon their homes and every belonging of theirs and become Sanyasis and beg in the streets. *Sarvasangaparityaga*, is the name given to this lunacy. We know it and yet we are not able to abandon this madness!" They turned to Uddhava and spoke to him. "Let us talk of something else and not about Krishna and the happy days we spent with him. He has a woman always in his chest and he does not need us now. How is he? Is he living in Mathura? Has he come back from his gurukula? Does he, at any time, think of Brindavan? about the home of Nanda? about his playmates, the gopas? does he ever talk about us, who have ever been his slaves? We wonder if we will ever see him again!" Another gopi said: "How is our Krishna? Have you been sent by Krishna? We honour you. Will you take pity on us and our sad condition and take us to Krishna? But then, he is now in the city and the women of the city would have won him over with their civilised ways and wiles. What use has he now for *gramya* women like us who know not the art of pleasing him? Tell us truly if he thinks of us at all."

Uddhava saw the weeping women and the love they had for Krishna and he was overcome with amazement. He spoke to them words of comfort. He said: "Indeed, I am amazed at the devotion you have for Krishna. It is not given to everyone to have this Bhakti for him. People who have performed good actions, for several births and those who have performed tapas for thousands of years are the ones who are privileged to have this Bhakti for him. But you have the same Bhakti and it comes effortlessly to you. When I see your devotion I feel that I have been purified: as though I have bathed in holy waters.

"Krishna has not forgotten you. He thinks of you all the time and he has asked me to give you this message: "My dear gopis, I know how hard it is for you to live without me. But, believe me, this your parting from me, is only a parting of the bodies. My soul and yours are always one. Let me try

and tell you some facts about me. I am the Antaratma of everyone and everything; and you will never be separated from me. The movable and the immovable objects of the world are made up of the five elements: ether, air, fire, water and the earth. Even so, the mind, the five pranas, the bhutas, the indriyas and the causes of all these are all finding refuge in me and me only. I pervade the entire Universe. Because of the power of my Maya I manifest myself in different forms and they are all only different aspects of me. I am the creator, the sustainer and the destroyer of the Universe. The Eternal soul is pure knowledge: pure Truth and it is something apart from the things of the world as well as the elements or the indriyas. But, because of Maya it is deluded into thinking that it is involved in the combination of the gunas. The soul which is permanent behind the different *avasthas* of man: the Jagrat, Swapna and Sushupti *avasthas* is none other than me and so, if a man wants to attain Moksha he should try and realise this world to be an illusion like a waking man realises that the dream-world is an illusion. He should learn to control the mind: the indriyas. He should know the yoga by name Ashtanga yoga: the Vedas; the difference between the atman and the world of Maya: Sanyasa.

"The rishis have tried to attain this state of oneness with me by their different ways of worship like Ashtanga yoga, tapas, extreme physical suffering, with a view to concentrate on me. But all these attempts of the rishis have been surpassed by you and your love for me. I assure you that your love for me has exceeded all the tapas that I have seen performed. You will soon reach me. Like the many rivers flow with but one thought: the desire to join their Lord, the sea, even so, your thoughts have been flowing towards me night and day and the reward for your love will soon be granted to you.

"This separation from me is good for you. It will make your love for me far more intense. Your thoughts of me will become more constant and steady. The love for a distant object is always greater than that one has for an object, a beloved object which is within your reach. Please do not, even for a moment, think that I have abandoned you or that I have forgotten you. It can never be. I will never forget you and my love for you is the

same as it was before, when I was with you in Brindavan. Be comforted by my words and remember you will reach me very soon."

With great difficulty the gopis comforted themselves by the words of Krishna as conveyed by Uddhava. They could not follow half the words which Uddhava spoke but they understood one thing: their Krishna had not forgotten them and he had sent a messenger just for the sake of bringing them the comforting news that he loved them and that he will always love them. Uddhava spent some time in Brindavan and all the time he heard about all the many deeds of Krishna. He had nothing but respect, admiration and affection for the gopis who had assured for themselves a place by the side of the Lord in the next world.

After some time he took leave of Nanda and Yashoda and all the inmates of Brindavan and, with tender leave-takings he left the gopis and ascended his chariot. They sent messages to Krishna and their eyes were pools of tears.

Uddhava went back to Mathura and reached the presence of Krishna. He told him about all the many things which had happened in Brindavan and Krishna was happy.

Krishna remembered his promise to Trivakra, the *Sairandhree*. Once he went to the house of Uddhava and from there he went to her house. It was decorated with beautiful ornaments and Trivakra was speechless with joy when she found Krishna in her home.

She offered seats covered with costly silks to both of them. Uddhava, however, touched the seat with his hands and sat on the ground. So they sat for a while and Krishna looked at her who was feeling shy even to look at him. He knew how much she wanted him and, according to his promise, he took her by the hand and led her to the inner chambers and pleased her.

AKRURA SENT TO HASTINA

Krishna would sit by the side of his parents and listen to them while they recounted to him about the happenings in Mathura and in their families when the two brothers were growing up in Brindavan in the home of Nanda. The boys wanted to know all about the relations they had and their names and what they were doing, where they were and what types of persons they were!

"My sons," said Vasudeva, "you must meet all your relations and your uncles and aunts who are many in number." He told them about his sisters. One of them had been given away by their father Shooru to his friend Kunti Bhoja who had no children. This girl was named Pritha and she became Kunti after her adoption.

Kunti was very beautiful and extremely sweet-natured. In course of time she was given in marriage to Pandu, the prince of the Kuru House. The Kauravas were cousins to the Yadava clan. Yadu, their ancestor and Puru the ancestor of the Kauravas, had been brothers, the sons of Yayati, the famed monarch of the Lunar race. Pandu had a brother by name Dhritarashtra and he was blind: born that way. So it was Pandu who had to manage the kingdom assisted by his grandsire, Devavrata, who was better known as Bhishma since he had taken a terrible oath of celibacy for the sake of his father's pleasure.

Pandu had preferred to stay in the forest with his two wives Kunti and Madri. He died there in the forest, and his children, five of them, had come to Hastinapura, the capital of the kings of Chandravamsha. They were accompanied by their mother Kunti. The other wife Madri had ascended the funeral pyre with her lord.

After recounting the entire story to his sons Vasudeva said: "I hear that things are not very pleasant for my sister and her sons in Hastina.

Dhritarashtra's son, Duryodhana, resents the coming of his cousins and with his brothers he is said to be ill-treating the sons of Kunti. I was so full of misery myself all these years to think of others. But you have come and you have saved the Yadava clan from the tyranny of Kamsa.

I think the time has come when you should begin to interest yourselves in their welfare. You should try and help my sister and save her from her unhappy position."

"We will look into it at once, father," said Krishna. Krishna decided to send Akrura to Hastina to find out what was happening there. He went to Akrura's house accompanied by Rama and Uddhava. As for Akrura, the moment he saw the brothers and their cousin from a distance he was thrilled and he rushed to the doorstep to receive them. He embraced them and after saluting them he made them sit on precious seats. He washed their feet with water and touched his head and forehead with that water. Flowers and sandalwood paste he offered to them and, kneeling at their feet, began to massage them with his hands. Tears were flowing from his eyes and his voice was often choked with tears when he spoke. He composed himself and said: "How can I express the joy you have given us by destroying Kamsa and his clan? We are able to breathe freely now that we are freed from his tyrannical rule. The entire clan of Vrishnis, Bhojas, Yadavas and Andhakas are liberated from fear by the prowess of both of you. The city of Mathura has become beautiful again. I, for one, know your real nature. You are the cause of the entire Universe and so, you comprise the Universe. Excepting you, there is no cause nor effect. The three gunas, Rajas, Tamas and Sattva are used by you to create the Universe; the movable and the immovable things of the Universe. You create the illusion that you live on this earth which is untrue since the earth itself is you. You are the creator, the preserver and the destroyer of this entire Universe. Though you have created the fetters which are Maya, Bandha, you are yourself free from them. You are not involved with the things you have created. Bandha is there because of Avidya, ignorance of the Truth about oneself. Since you are yourself the TRUTH, how then can Bandha affect you? or Maya? or Avidya?

"Why have you taken this birth? This form? this illusion that you are the sons of Devaki and Vasudeva? I have been fortunate enough to know the purpose of your coming. You are here to destroy the many kings who have asuric qualities in them: to destroy hundreds of *akshowhinis* and lessen the burden on the earth. I have but one desire and you should grant me that. Please rid me of the bondage, the Bandha which goes under the name of love for son, for wife, for wealth, for kinsmen, for the body which holds the atman as a captive. I have no other wish."

Krishna smiled softly and said: "You are my elder and you are my uncle. We are like sons to you. You should love us and protect us like parents do. The celestial beings who go by the name 'devas' are, in reality, bent only on one thing: getting their way in everything. They are selfish. It is only the wise and holy men on this earth who, by their selflessness and their wisdom excel the gods of the heavens who deserve to be called 'worthy of worship'. It is men like you who should be worshipped. Waters are holy and they are called *tirthas*. And they are said to purify those who bathe in them. Idols are made of stone and even of mud and god dwells in them. By worshipping these men become pure. But these two purifications take a long time. Man does not attain absolute purity at once. It is a penance he has to perform.

"However, the sight of a selfless, holy man, is capable of purifying a man at once. We are indeed fortunate to have you as our kinsman and our well-wisher."

They sat talking about many things and finally Krishna brought the conversation round to Hastina and said: "I have heard that our cousins, the Pandavas, are not happy in Hastina. Duryodhana seems to be jealous of them and he is said to harass them and his father, though he is their uncle, does not look kindly on these young men. He is reported to be countenancing the atrocities committed by his son. My father has asked me to help his sister Kunti and her sons. But, before I meet them, I would like you to go to Hastina as an ordinary visitor and find out the state of affairs there. You are a diplomat and you can, with discretion, find out the real state of affairs. After you come back, we will, if necessary, interfere

and do something to ensure their well-being and happiness. But now, I would like you to go there and find out the lay of the land."

"So be it," said Akrura.

HASTINA, THE FAMED CITY

Akrura reached Hastina, the famed capital of the kings of the Paurava race. Wherever his eyes turned he could see signs of the achievements of each of the many kings who had ruled there. He spent some time admiring the beauty of the city and finally arrived at the palace gates. He was met with great honour and respect by Bhishma, the veteran; and the old blind king Dhritarashtra, the son of Ambika. Vidura was there, the brother of the king and his mentor. Kunti, Somadatta with his son; Drona and Kripa, the preceptors of the princes; Duryodhana, his friend Radheya and Ashwatthama, the son of Drona; and the Pandavas. Akrura met all of them and they were all very cordial and they spoke very happily about the release of Mathura from the tyranny of Kamsa. Kunti was solicitous about the welfare of her brother and his wife, Devaki. Akrura told them all that they wanted to know.

Bhishma and the others pressed him to stay on with them for a while and he readily agreed to, since that was the very purpose of his visit to Hastina.

Akrura saw for himself the prowess of the Pandavas, their goodness and the magnetism they had. Everyone who met them could not but love them. Akrura also saw the dexterity with which they handled their weapons; he saw their bravery and, more than all these, their humility. At the same time he saw too, the eyes of Duryodhana and the jealousy that was mirrored in them. He saw the many small ways in which the Pandavas were being ill-treated by their cousins. Akrura saw how the old king allowed this all the while because he was himself jealous of his own brother once, and now, of his brother's sons.

Kunti and Vidura had long sessions with him and they told him about the attempts of Duryodhana to kill Bhima.

Kunti's tears flowed without restraint. Till now she had only Vidura as her confidant. Seeing Akrura and knowing that he had been sent by Vasudeva her grief was finding some solace. She could speak to him without fear. She said: "O, my dear brother, how is everyone at Mathura? Do they at any time think of me? do they remember me at all? Unfortunate woman that I am I have not had the privilege of being with them during their days of pain nor am I able to share their joy now. Do the sons of Vasudeva know about me at all? Do they know that they have an aunt who has ever been the victim of fate; who has not tasted happiness ever since she was a young girl? Here I am, caught like a deer, in the midst of wolves. My children and I have no hope of being left alive. Does Krishna, who rescued my brother from Kamsa, have any idea of saving me too, with my sons? Tell him that I am thinking of him day and night and that I am waiting for a sign from him that he will take care of us: of our welfare. We are in his hands."

Akrura and Vidura comforted her and then Akrura told her the purpose of the birth of Krishna: that he was on the earth only to punish the wrong-doers like Duryodhana and that she should possess her soul in patience.

When he had gathered all the information he wanted, Akrura expressed his desire to go back to Mathura. Bhishma and the other elders pressed him to stay longer. He told them that he had already spent quite a few happy months with them in Hastina and that he had to go since king Ugrasena and Vasudeva would need him. Reluctantly Bhishma agreed to let him go.

Before leaving he thought that a piece of advice should be given to Dhritarashtra. Perhaps, if he took it in the spirit in which it was offered, a lot of unpleasantness might be avoided and the eyes of the old king might open at least inside his mind and make him more righteous in his attitude towards the orphans.

When he was with Bhishma and Vidura, Akrura wanted to talk to Dhritarashtra. This man was evil by nature and his love for his son had made him suffer from this dread sin of injustice. He decided to speak a few words of censure and advice and then leave for Mathura.

A PIECE OF ADVICE

When all three of them were found together Akrura said: "My dear king, Dhritarashtra, you are the son of Vichitravirya. You are a descendant of a very noble line of kings. You should bring fame to the family in which you are born. When your brother Pandu died, you became the king of Hastina. Surely you will reap the reward if you rule the kingdom righteously: if you please your subjects in every way. If you treat your own sons and those of others with the same affection: if you love yours and those of others equally you will be remembered in aftertimes as a worthy king of the Lunar race. I do not need to tell you that you should give the same love and affection to the sons of Pandu as you give your sons. If you do not, the censure of good people will visit you and your after-life will be miserable since you will not inherit her heavens.

"My lord, in this world, you should realise that we should not become inordinately attached to anyone or anything. When the body which we think is ours: when even this has to be abandoned when we leave this world, what then can one say about one's sons and one's wife? Alone we come into this world and alone we walk the road to dusty death. Alone, man earns punya and again, alone, man earns papa also. Wealth which man has earned by unrighteous means is taken away from him by his enemies who come in the shape of his sons and his dear ones and near ones! The man who guards such wealth which is earned unrighteously, is indeed, a fool. He is never happy since he has done wrong. He does not enjoy the wealth either. When he dies, abandoned already by his sons and others, his life also abandons his body. He finds himself without any wealth: the earthly one is taken away from him already and as for the wealth one accumulates for the next world, he has not tried to amass that, busy as he was with the wealth of this world!

"O king! be wise. Consider this world to be Maya: the world which is conjured up in one's dream. This is as unreal as that. Use your intellect: control the wayward mind and try to maintain a neutral state of mind wherein you will be able to treat all things alike: where there is no feeling of mine and thine."

Dhritarashtra said: "Akrura, I am touched by your concern and by the words of wisdom which you have spoken to me. These words of yours are like nectar to a parched throat and the more I drink them with my ears, the more thirsty for more of it have I become. I have understood what you are trying to warn me about. If my mind had been level like a plain, your words then, like water, would have stayed on to wet the land and make it fruitful. But my mind, coloured as it is with the excessive love I have for my son, is like an expanse of rugged hills and your words do not stay firmly there. Like lightning which brightens the sky for a moment and then disappears, your words show me light for a second but then darkness envelops me again.

"I have been told by my father Vyasa that Krishna who has been born in the House of the Yadus is the Lord Himself and his purpose is the destruction of the evil-doers and he will soon rid the earth of the burden which is pressing on her. I have known it for some time now. What can man do but bow down under the divine will? All I can do is to prostrate before Him. Who can gauge the ways of the Lord? Out of his Maya he has created this Universe. He enters it too without getting involved in it. He is the one who decides the Karma of a man and the rewards for it. This whirligig which goes by the name of Samsara is entirely his *lila* and we are helpless puppets in His hand. Please tell him that you spoke to me and convey to him my salutations. Tell him I am waiting to see him once."

Akrura took leave of all the elders and young men individually and left for Mathura. Soon he reached the city where Krishna and Rama were waiting for news of their cousins and their welfare. As soon as he reached Mathura Akrura went straight to the abode of Vasudeva and there he related in detail all the happenings in Hastina: his conversations with different people and their different reactions, different attitudes: and finally his advice to Dhritarashtra and his ambiguous reply. He expressed his opinion

that the old man would never side with the Pandavas and let them be happy.

JARASANDHA: THE SIEGE OF MATHURA

Kamsa had two wives by name Asti and Prapti. They were the daughters of Jarasandha, the powerful ruler of Magadha. When their lord Kamsa was killed by Krishna these two queens of the dead king went to Magadha and related to their father about the happenings at Mathura and about the killing of Kamsa by Krishna. Highly incensed by this news Jarasandha decided to rid the earth of the entire Yadava clan. He collected a huge army. It was made up of twenty-three *akshowhinis* which surrounded the city of Mathura on all sides.

Krishna saw what was happening. He saw the army which was like an ocean of men and this army was covering up the city on all sides. The city of Mathura was so small and the people were panic-stricken when they realised what was happening. Krishna had several thoughts in his mind. He had to make up his mind about the course of action. He thought to himself: "Shall I kill only Jarasandha without killing the army? shall I command the entire army after that? or shall I destroy him as well as his army?" He thought for a while and told himself : "I have come down to this earth assuming the form of Krishna solely for the purpose of lessening the burden of the earth. It is but meet that I destroy the army and not Jarasandha. He will then come again and again: and I will keep destroying his army which is sure to be as immense as the present one every time he comes." Krishna and Rama decided to fight: destroy the army and let the master return to his kingdom unharmed.

Even as they were discussing the matter the brothers saw two chariots which appeared before them and they appeared from the heavens. They were as glorious as the sun and the charioteers looked like beings from the other world. All the equipments for fighting were placed in the chariots and the charioteers came and stood before Rama and Krishna after saluting them. Krishna said: "My dear brother, Rama. The chariots that have been sent to us have all the weapons necessary for us and I therefore ask you to

take arms against this ocean of men and lead us to victory. You know the purpose for which we have taken this birth. Let us destroy this immense army."

Dressed in the garb of warriors ready to fight in the forefront the two young men sallied forth out of the city for the fight. The army they commanded was very small and meagre compared to the one that faced them. Krishna's charioteer was called Daruka and when they came out into the open Krishna blew on his conch which he had acquired from Panchajana and which he had named Panchajanya. The sound of the conch filled the minds of the enemy host with fear.

Jarasandha saw Krishna for the first time. He came near and said: "So you are Krishna! You are the lowest of the low, killer as you are of your own uncle. I do not like to fight with a sinner like you. It is beneath my dignity. I am ashamed to fight with a coward like you. Go back into the city. As for you, Balarama, if you can muster up enough courage to fight with me you can. When your body is split by my sharp arrows you will surely reach the heavens reserved for heroes. There is, of course, the alternative: that you may kill me."

Krishna interrupted him and said: "You are a king and you should know by now, that real heroes do not brag about their prowess but show it in action. You are, however, forgiven because you are fast approaching your end and a dying man is apt to talk in a disjointed Manner."

The fight began in right earnest and there was such a cloud of dust covering the entire field that the citizens of Mathura who stood on the terraces of their houses, could see nothing but the red cloud. They could not see Krishna or Rama nor could they see their chariots and their insignia: Garuda for Krishna and the palm tree for Rama. Krishna and Rama, in the meantime, were bent on destroying the army in a systematic manner. They went round the ocean of men and killed them all ruthlessly. By now Jarasandha had lost his army, his chariot and his charioteer. Balarama grabbed him in his arms. Krishna, however, did not wish for the death of Jarasandha then. He therefore prevailed on his brother to let him go free.

Jarasandha was beside himself with grief and anger: grief that his invasion had proved fruitless and anger because these two youngsters were able to vanquish his army so easily and because one of them had nearly killed him and the other, taking pity on him, had let him go free. It was Krishna who had spared him his life: Krishna whom he had called a coward and a sinner. But he did not appreciate the gesture of Krishna. He felt highly insulted and he could not forgive the two brothers easily. He went back to Magadha: the insult was still rankling in his heart.

Several of his friends comforted him saying: "That you should have been defeated by these youngsters is not because you are lacking in bravery but because the fates were against you. There is no need for you to be so depressed on account of this failure."

Jarasandha would not be comforted. He decided to perform tapas and then come back to fight.

Krishna, in the meantime, went back to Mathura. He had killed Kamsa and now the two valiant brothers had sent back Jarasandha after destroying his army. There was great joy in the heart of everyone. The city had a festive appearance and everyone was happy. Jarasandha, however, would not let them rest in peace. Seventeen times he invaded the city of Mathura with his many *akshowhinis*. And seventeen times his army was destroyed fully and his life was spared.

Every time the humiliation was felt intensely by Jarasandha but he would not give up. And so things stood until he found another person who was ready to help him fight the Yadavas.

KALAYAVANA

The eighteenth time Jarasandha collected a fresh army and was on his way to the siege of Mathura. On the way he met a very powerful king by name Kalayavana. This Kalayavana considered himself to be undaunted; and when he heard about the many humiliating defeats which Jarasandha had had at the hands of the Yadava brothers, Kalayavana decided to help him. He promised to augment the army of Jarasandha with his own which was made up of three crores of Mlechhas.

Mathura was surrounded by the immense Mlechha army of Kalayavana. For the first time in the series of sieges, Krishna and Rama paused to think about the course of action they should take. Krishna said: "Look, dear brother, the Yadavas are surely in great trouble. We are now surrounded by the enemy on all sides. Kalayavana is reputed to be a very powerful fighter and he has teamed up with Jarasandha. There is a possibility that these two together may take the Yadavas as captives or they may kill our kinsmen. I suggest that we build a city in the middle of the sea and transport our people to the new city where they will be safe. We will then kill this Kalayavana." Balarama thought it was a good suggestion.

Krishna then summoned Vishvakarma the architect of the gods, and told him about the city that had to be built in the midst of the sea. "So be it," said Vishvakarma.

There rose out of the sea, a golden city. It was not easily accessible and it was built in the pattern of the city of the gods. With golden spires decorating the houses which lined the wide and beautiful roads, with gardens and groves lending charm to it, with its terraces inlaid with emeralds and corals and moonstones, the rose-red city with its golden turrets rose up into the sky like the dream of a poet rising out of the mind's eye - the city called Dwaraka.

Gifts were sent to the city by the devas. Indra sent a hall, an assembly hall by name Sudharma. Varuna sent horses which could run as fast as the wind. Kubera sent immense wealth to fill up the coffers of the king. Each one of the gods remembered that Lord Narayana had given them their wealth and their power: and, accordingly, they sent all they could to enrich the city which had been built for Krishna.

With the power of his yoga Krishna took all his beloved subjects to the new city. Overnight, the city of Mathura became empty. Krishna then conferred with his brother about the next step which should be taken.

The army of Kalayavana had surrounded the city and since it was night they were all resting. Early in the morning everyone was awake.

And instinctly they looked towards the gates of the city which they had to invade during the course of the day. The soldiers spotted a young man walking out of the gates of the city and by the way he looked hither and thither before taking halting steps, they decided that he was someone who was trying to run away from there. At once they rushed to the presence of Kalayavana and said: "My lord, there is a young man at the gates of the city of Mathura. It looks as though he is trying to escape from the city. It is but meet that you should see him for yourself and tell us what we should do." Kalayavana stepped out of his tent and walked to the spot indicated by his men. He stood rooted to the spot for a while: so beautiful was the appearance of Krishna.

Like the full moon just rising, he stood there: handsome like one descended from the heavens. His dark frame was enveloped in his favourite golden silk. On his chest could be seen the large mole Srivatsa and on his neck he was wearing the jewel Kaustubha. His eyes slightly red at the edges looked like newly opened lotuses. There was a slight smile on his lips and his ears were gleaming with the earrings shaped like fish.

Kalayavana had heard the description of Krishna from Narada and he said: "This must be Krishna, Vaasudeva. I have heard so much about his prowess and fortunately for me, he is here now, alone, without even a single weapon to defend himself. Now is the time to capture him and kill

him. My friend Jarasandha, who is on his way, will be pleased and so will many of Kamsa's friends who bear this Krishna so much ill-will."

Krishna paused long enough to make sure that he was noticed and, what was more important, that he was recognised. Then, as though he were trying to escape unnoticed, he looked all around him with his eyes darting furtively on all sides and he began to walk away fast towards the open: away from the city from which he seemed to be running away as fast as he could.

Kalayavana did not have a weapon in his hand and he began to follow Krishna. Krishna looked back and now he began to run as though he were fleeing for life. Yavana also ran faster saying: "Stop! You coward! You are said to be a brave youngster. You are said to have killed Kamsa with your bare hands and Jarasandha has fought with you often and has been defeated, I know. And yet, I find you to be different from the picture I had formed of you! Evidently people have told me wrong stories. Why do you run away from me? If you have courage enough, come and fight with me. See, I have no weapons either. Come and wrestle with me. Do not think I belong to the class of Chanura and Mushtika. I am made of iron. It will not be so easy to kill me. Perhaps that is why you are running away from me."

All the time he increased his speed and it seemed as though Krishna was within his reach. Krishna, the Parabrahman, who is beyond the reach of the greatest of the great yogis, pretended to be within the reach of this Kalayavana!

Suddenly, like a deer which runs away from danger in the form of a tiger, Krishna ran with frightened eyes and flying locks. With a loud laugh Kalayavana followed him and said: "You are such a tender young boy: you make me think of a young sapling in my queen's garden. I almost wish I did not have to kill you. But I have known how deceptive your appearance is. I am nearing the end of my quest. A few moments more and you will be within my clutches. You cannot escape me."

So the race went on: Krishna eluding his grasp, tantalisingly near and frustratingly distant. They had now travelled quite some distance. They reached the end of the path they had been following. Ahead of them was a

mountain and Krishna, to the great amusement of Kalayavana, looked around desperately. He espied a cave and running towards it he revealed his intention. "So this is your plan," said Yavana. "Do you think you can escape from me by hiding in that cave?" Krishna ran on and suddenly disappeared into the cave.

A few moments later Kalayavana entered the cave. For a moment he could see nothing; so dark was the inside of the cave, and he had just entered from the brightly lit outside. After a while Yavana's eyes got used to the darkness and he looked around for Krishna. He could not see him. He searched for a few moments and a few feet away from him he saw a form. He was lying flat as though he were sleeping and his face could not be seen.

Kalayavana said: 'I do not know why people talk so highly of you. Actually you are very stupid, Krishna. Do you think I will let you go because you are lying down pretending to sleep? Come, get up and fight with me.'

The sleeping form would not move. Yavana was annoyed and he was impatient for action. He waited for a while and when he found that his challenge went unheeded he lost his patience and, approaching the sleeping form, said: "Soft words will not wake you up. This is the only way to make you get up; and, suiting the action to the words he kicked the sleeping 'Krishna.' The sleeping form stirred and slowly opened his eyes and looked all around to see who had disturbed him. It was not Krishna. Even as he realised it, Kalayavana found the eyes of the stranger resting on him. They were red with anger and fire sprang out of them. The next moment Kalayavana was a heap of ashes.

THE KING MUCHUKUNDA

King Parikshit interrupted Suka in his characteristic way and asked him: "I am amazed to hear that a sleeper awakened should have the power to burn up the powerful Kalayavana. Who was he, my lord? What was his strength that he could use his eyes like my lord Mahadeva did, when he saw Kama? What was his ancestry? Why was he sleeping in the cave?"

Suka said: "In the Krita Yuga there was a great monarch by name Mandhata. The sleeping man was the son of Mandhata. His name was Muchukunda and he was a jewel in the solar line of kings. A great man, a great ruler, fighter and a righteous king, he was very much loved by the devas and by everyone. The devas were particularly fond of him.

For a very long period of time this Muchukunda was fighting with the asuras along with the devas and was successful in protecting them. Later, Kumara, the son of Mahadeva, was made the commander of the heavenly host and the devas came to the earthly king Muchukunda and Indra said: "My dear friend, we do know how best to reward you for having been our succour for these many years. Since Kumara is now born to help us and lead us to victory we feel that we can relieve you of your responsibility. But we have done you a great injustice. During the years you served our cause, the earth has changed so much that you may not be able to recognise your own city. The sons whom you appointed to guard the land during your absence, are all dead. Your kinsmen, your mentors, your preceptors and your citizens are all gone: lost in the huge cauldron called 'Time' and they have lost their entity. Wise as you are, it is not necessary to tell you that the Lord, in the form of Time, destroys everything. Since you have lost your everything because of us, I am prepared to grant you any boon except Moksha: that can be granted only by Narayana."

Muchukunda could not grasp it all in a single moment. All that he knew were two things: one was the fact that there was nothing left for him on the

earth: no bond, no desire to pull him back to his kingdom. The other fact was: HE WAS TIRED : unbelievably, immensely tired. That was foremost in his mind. He said: "Look, all I want is sleep. Please grant me the boon that I will sleep for a long, long time: a very long time undisturbed by anything. Grant me also this: the one who disturbs my sleep and wakes me up will at once be burnt to ashes."

"So be it," said Indra and added: "You can rest assured that the one who will be foolish enough to wake you up will be burnt at once by the fire from your sleepy eyes."

Muchukunda entered the cave and he had been sleeping there throughout Krita Yuga and the Treta Yuga. Dwapara had almost come to an end. Krishna wanted to grant Moksha to Muchukunda: the Moksha he had wanted long ago and which he deserved so richly. He also knew that the only way to kill Kalayavana was to have him destroyed by the angry eyes of Muchukunda. Muchukunda was now fully awake. He looked up and saw before him a heavenly form. Dark as a rain-bearing cloud with golden-hued silk covering him, with the Srivatsa staining his chest, with the Kaustubha on his chest, with the many-jewelled necklace named Vaijayanti adorning his neck, with four arms holding the Shankha, Chakra, Gada and Padma, with a face which had infinite grace flowing from it, with his face glowing because of the fish-shaped earrings flashing in his ears, with a gentle smile hovering on his lips, with a handsomeness which had never before been seen by him, with glory radiating from him. Muchukunda stood up with folded palms and said: "Who are you? You seem to be a divine being: In this lonely spot where even thorns are as sharp as arrows, how could your lotus feet walk up to this cave? You seem to be the light which illumines Light itself. Are you the god of fire? or are you Surya? Oh No! I am wrong. Self-illuminant as you are, you must be one of the three Murtis: Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva. No, I am still wrong. I know now. You are Lord Narayana. I am a poor mortal. I was a king belonging to the race of the sun. I am the grandson of the famed Yuvanashva and my father was Mandhata, the monarch. They call me Muchukunda. I rendered some slight service to Indra in the days of old: days of the long ago. As I was very tired, he allowed me to sleep as long as

I desired. I was woken up rudely by someone whom I have never seen before. He was reduced to ashes as a result of his own sins, I think. Then my eyes lighted on you, my lord. I salute you."

Lifting up the prostrate form of Muchukunda the Lord spoke in a voice resembling the rumbling of a rain-cloud. He said: "You desired to know who I am and what my name is! The names I have used, the births I have taken, the actions I have performed, are thousands and thousands. They have no beginning and no end. One may, perhaps, be able to count the grains of sand that make up this earth but not my names and my births and my actions. I belong to the past, the present and the future. I am Time and as such, I am infinite.

"But let me explain to you the circumstances that led to my coming to you now, at the present moment.

"The earth is now heavy with the burden of sinful kings who are asuras born as kings. Adharma is rampant on the earth.

"She, therefore, went to Brahma the creator and he came to me. I promised to help her. There is a dynasty of the moon and one of the smaller branches of this Chandravamsha goes by the name Yadava. Vasudeva is a Yadava and I have been born as his son. I am called Krishna, Vaasudeva; I have killed Kamsa, a sinner and several asuras. The man you burned with your eyes was a terrible and sinful king by name Kalayavana. I came to this cave because I knew that you were here. You have ever been my Bhakta and I thought the time had come when you should get what you have been wanting. I am waiting for you to ask me. I will grant you anything you ask for. None of my Bhaktas has been unhappy. Please make your wishes known so that I can grant them to you."

MOKSHA FOR MUCHUKUNDA

Muchukunda was speechless for a long time. Tears flowed from his eyes. Twice he tried to talk and twice his voice was choked with emotion. Finally he said: "The Lord should grant me something which is not easy to get. As for the pleasures of the earth, they are easy enough to find. Nor will I be led astray by a wish to enjoy them.

"My lord, this entire world is easily deluded by your Maya. Men and women, caught as they are in the whirlpool of desires, do not know the truth about anything. They do not realise that it is all transient. They do not set their minds on you. Again and again, they become attached to their homes, their small belongings, and they are full of unhappiness. Rare indeed is the privilege of being born as a human being. But people do not realise it. They make no attempt to justify their being born as human beings. But, instead, they get deceived by the senses. A cow which is grazing goes in search of grass and when a well is deceptively covered by grass, the cow, not knowing the danger that is in store for it, walks to the brink of the well and, drawn by the luscious grass, goes all the way and falls into it. Even so, man is deceived by the senses and falls into this pit again and again and this is because his mind is not set on you: his thoughts are not bent on you.

"Why should I go for an example? Take me, for instance. I was lord of the world. Rajyalakshmi had showered her favours on me without stinting and I thought there was no one to equal me. I was attached to my children and my wives and to my kingdom. I wasted so much of my life caught up in this web of Maya. I was so busy enjoying myself and the things of this world that I had no time for thoughts of you. I spent my time in making plans thousands in number and never reckoned on the fact that you are Kala which swallows everything.

"From the ceiling of the kitchen is hanging a pot filled with butter. A rat has been wanting to eat it. Therefore, it gets at the top of the rope which is holding the pot and is trying to reach the pot by sliding along the rope: all the while, a snake which has been wanting to eat the rat is licking its chops, waiting to spring on the rat which is all unconscious of the danger threatening it. Even so, man, in pursuit of happiness which is earthly, does not pay heed to the fact that Time is waiting to put an end to him and to his desires too.

"This same body which, when dressed in silken garments and golden ornaments calls itself king of the world, is destroyed by you in the form of Kala. He then becomes dirt, or a host for a number of worms or a heap of ashes.

"Even, at times, he is reminded of the fact that he has to die some time, man sets his mind on performing penance and the purpose of the penance is: "May I become the lord of the heavens." What happens to him? After the punya he has acquired becomes exhausted, he comes again into this world and the cycle goes on indefinitely. The end of this cycle comes within sight of the man only when he is blessed by the company of Sadhus: wise men who can tell him what path he should pursue to get freedom from bondage. They will teach this lesson, the one lesson worth learning: abandoning earthly loves and setting the mind on the feet of the Lord: of you.

"As for me, I have been fortunate in one thing. By accident I have been released from the bondage which is made up of children and kingdom since I was absent from them long enough to forget them and for them to leave me without my knowing about it. This, I am sure, is but your grace. I ask only one boon of you. I want to serve you and I want a place at your blessed feet. I want nothing else. Wealth which is the form assumed by Rajoguna: enemies and the desire to fight which are the forms which Tamoguna assumes: the desire to do good to others and to get a good name, which are the forms which Sattva guna takes: I want to be rid of all three of them. I surrender myself at your feet since you are without any guna: any Upadhi. You are the ONE and there is no second. You are Knowledge and you are the Paramapurusha.

"I am tired, my lord, of the many births I have gone through in this world of sufferings. In spite of so much suffering, the mind still refuses to abandon its involvement with the senses: with the six enemies: and, because of these, man loses his peace of mind. Please grant me a place at your feet so that I will have no more fear, no more suffering."

Krishna said: "I am pleased with you and your devotion to me. Even when you were tempted by me by asking you to name your desire, you did not ask for anything and that is proof enough that you will never again be tempted into this world of men. You will be able to wander in the world with a mind free of all attachment and I assure you that your mind will never stay away from thoughts of me. You have to live some more years on the earth since you have to expiate the sins you have committed because of your being a kshatriya whose Dharma is hunting: killing of innocent animals. Once you are dead, you will have only one more birth. But during that birth you will not forget me. You will reach me after that."

Muchukunda then emerged out of the cave with Krishna. Krishna took leave of him and went away. Muchukunda looked around him and found that the world had changed beyond all recognition. He saw that even the trees and animals had become very much reduced in size. He realised that Kali Yuga was fast approaching. He turned his steps towards the North desirous of performing tapas. He had acquired equanimity and with a clear mind he walked and reached the sacred mountains by name Gandhamadana. There he went to the ashrama by name Badarikashrama where Nara and Narayana had performed tapas long ago.

Muchukunda settled there and, indifferent to the opposites, he pursued his worship of Narayana till such time as he had to spend on the earth.

JARASANDHA IS DECEIVED

Krishna, in the meantime, went back happily to Mathura. Balarama and he were now busy destroying the Mlechha army brought by Kalayavana. The army did not know that their master was dead and while they waited for him, they were destroyed. Krishna looted their wealth and he was transporting that also to their new city, Dwaraka.

Jarasandha, happy in the thought that Kalayavana was there to assist him in raiding Mathura, arrived in the vicinity of the city with twenty-three *akshowhinis*. Krishna and Balarama appeared at the gates of the city and when they saw the large army brought by Jarasandha they began to run fast as though they were fleeing for their very lives. Jarasandha was quite taken aback by this behaviour of the brothers. It was unlike them. It was quite out of character because he remembered how they had fought all the other battles. This sudden cowardice was unexpected. However, there was no time for him to speculate on this change in Yadava brothers. He saw that they were without weapons and that they were running away from him as fast as their legs could carry them. He gave them chase seated in his chariot and his army followed him. The chase went on for a long time. The two boys could be seen all the while and they finally reached the foot of the mountain by name Pravarshana. It was always wet with rain since Indra was partial to this mountain. Krishna and Rama ran to the top of the hill with their steps covering the slopes fast. Suddenly they disappeared from the view of Jarasandha. A search party was formed and the Magadhav himself tried his level best to locate the hiding place of the youngsters. He could not. He said: "They should not escape from me. Surround the mountain on all sides. Place dry wood and set fire to the forest growing on top of the hill. Let my enemies burn in the conflagration and so, let me wipe the tears of my daughters who suffered widowhood because of them."

The fire roared on all sides and from the side nearest to the sea, Rama and Krishna jumped down on the ground: from there, without being noticed by the enemy went safely to the city Dwaraka.

KALAYAVANA'S STORY

Parikshit interrupted again and said: "My lord, why did Krishna lead Kalayavana into the cave wherein Muchukunda was sleeping? Why did he make the king of the solar face burn him when he could have killed him himself? Krishna could have done it easily considering the number of asuras whom he killed even when he was a child. Please let me know the reason for this manoeuvre of Krishna because there must have been a reason."

Sukabrahma said: "Your guess is right. It is a long story. There was once a large gathering of the Yadavas. Two great rishis Shyala, the family priest of the Yadavas, and Gargya, another great man were both there. While the conversation was going on, there was suddenly an argument between the rishis. The talk became heated and before anyone could intervene Gargya said that he had been insulted by Shyala and the Yadavas wanted to know what exactly were the words spoken. Gargya said: "He called me a eunuch." Thoughtlessly the Yadavas laughed and this incensed the rishi all the more. He walked out of the hall. He went straight to a mountain top and performed a severe tapas to please Lord Mahadeva. Twelve years passed and the Lord, pleased with his devotion, appeared before him and asked him what he desired. Gargya said: "I want the Yadavas to be punished. I want a son of whom they will all be scared. For this purpose I have been consuming powdered iron as my daily food. I want also to prove that I am not a eunuch which was the word the rishi Shyala used when he insulted me."

Mahadeva was sad that so much penance was wasted for such a paltry purpose. But he had promised to grant him anything he had desired. He therefore said: "So be it," and vanished from the sight of Gargya who came back to civilization with a glad heart.

"There was a king by name Yavanesa who had no children. He prayed in vain for an heir to the throne. He then went to the rishi Gargya and, as was the custom in those days, beseeched him to grant him a child by taking his queen. The rishi agreed to do so and he took the wife of the king. In course of time a son was born to Yavanesa's queen. He was dark as a beetle. He was named Kalayavana.

"Krishna could easily have killed Kalayavana but he had to fulfil the prophecy that the Yadavas would be afraid of the son of Gargya. That was why he built the city by name Dwaraka. That was the reason for his leading the ill-fated Kalayavana to the cave where Muchukunda was sleeping so that he would be the one to kill the king. Also, Krishna wanted to grant Moksha to Muchukunda who had been sleeping so long.

"The many kings whom the Lord had promised to destroy had to be killed one by one. Kamsa led the long procession of the kings who were killed. Kalayavana was the next to go. Before he went back to the glory that is his, the Lord kept his promise to mother earth and one by one, and all together, the sinful kings were sent to the abode of death by Krishna. Some he killed himself and some he made others kill. In the Kurukshetra war, the main purpose of his birth, Krishna was just the charioteer of Arjuna and he made a promise that he would not touch a single weapon and that was the occasion when he destroyed almost the entire kshatriya clan. Strange are the ways of the Lord. We can but listen to his stories and be thrilled by them. The purpose of it all is but a glimmer in the distance. But we are almost always in the dark as to the 'why' of many things."

RUKMINI, THE PRINCESS OF VIDARBHA

The country called Vidarbha was ruled by a king named Bhishmaka. He was a good man: saintly, god-fearing, and ever interested in doing good to others. He had six children: five of them were sons and the youngest was a daughter. Rukmi was the eldest son and Rukmaratha, Rukmabahu, Rukmakesha and Rukmamali were the other four sons. The daughter was called Rukmini. Rukmini was the favourite of them all but she was the particular pet of her father. He would always have her by his side even when he was attending to the affairs of the state. The little girl would sit on the same seat with him and with her wide eyes would look at everyone and everything. She was the darling of the palace and her will was never thwarted. She was such a pet of everyone that they waited on her like servants.

King Bhishmaka was a saintly man and he revelled in listening to the words of saintly men. He would spend days and months in the company of the rishis and other holy men who would visit him often. He would listen for hours together on their discourses on Vedanta and on similar topics and, all the while, Rukmini too would sit by his side and listen to all of it.

One of the frequent visitors was Narada, the son of Brahma. Every time he came, he would sit and talk about Krishna. The old king Bhishmaka had heard again and again about the prowess of Krishna, his handsomeness, his sweet nature, his love for those who were devoted to him, his divinity. The king was never tired of listening to the many qualities of Krishna nor was Narada ever tired of relating them. All the while Rukmini would sit by the side of her father and listen to the words of Narada.

Years passed and from being a child Rukmini had now grown up: grown into a beautiful woman and her father had to think of her marriage. To him, Krishna seemed to be the perfect choice. He would be the ideal husband for his darling child, Rukmini. Rukmi was the eldest son and the

king spoke to him about the ideas he had about the marriage of Rukmini. He said: "Rukmini's wedding has to be performed soon. She has grown into womanhood. My son, I have chosen a good husband for her."

"So you have saved me that trouble," said Rukmi with a laugh. "Who is it, father?"

"Krishna, the son of Vasudeva," said the king.

Before he could finish the sentence Rukmi sprang up from his seat and shouted: "What! Are you mad, father? Krishna, indeed! I will not allow such a thing."

Rukmi was a great friend of Jarasandha and Kalayavana who had died during the last siege of Mathura. His other friends were all of the same calibre as these two: Paundraka, Viduratha, Salva, Dantavakra and Shishupala, the son of Damaghosha. All of them were confirmed haters of Krishna and Rama. The words of Bhishmaka naturally incensed Rukmi no end. He went on: "Father, my sister is the princess of the kingdom of Vidarbha and this man you have chosen is not even a vassal king. He was a cowherd in his early days and then he killed Kamsa by foul means. Even then, he did not have the courage to take the throne. Like a tiger covering itself with the skin of a cow, he assumes humility and makes the old man Ugrasena the king. Does he think he is deceiving anyone by this show of 'great respect' for the elders? He is a low-born man and he assumes roles which do not suit him. I know that he is far inferior to us in position, in wealth, and in everything. I do not approve of Rukmini being given to him in marriage. I will not countenance it."

Bhishmaka was unhappy at the words spoken by his son. He tried to speak but his son would not allow him to. The old man had to agree to the words of his son and he said: "If you do not approve of my choice, who then, do you think, is worthy of your sister?" Rukmi said: "I have decided long ago that Shishupala, the son of Damaghosha, should be the groom for our fair Rukmini."

Bhishmaka did not approve of the suggestion at all. He knew about this Shishupala: what an arrogant and vain man he was. But he could do

nothing about it. He therefore agreed to the marriage between the two. Happy in the thought that his father was easy to manage, Rukmi made haste to make all arrangements for the wedding of his sister with his friend.

RUKMINI SENDS A MESSENGER

Rukmini was heart-broken. For days and years she had been hearing the stories of Krishna and she had given her heart to him long ago. She had chosen him as her lord and when she heard from her maids that her father had decided to give her to Krishna her thrill was great. But she now realised that her dream might have to end as just a dream and nothing more. She remembered the words of Narada who told her about the beauty of Krishna: of his great bravery even as a child: of his magnetism which drew everyone to him and made slaves of them: of the many lovable qualities which had enslaved her young heart.

The decision of Rukmi seemed irrevocable since it had always been the rule in the house that his words had to be obeyed. Rukmini thought to herself: "My brother has made up his mind about who should be his brother-in-law. He has not even thought of asking me if I approve. As for the lord whom I have chosen, surely he must have known how it is with me. He knows everything. How could he not know that Rukmini has chosen him as her lord since long ago? Knowing this he has not made any attempt to take me. Evidently he does not love me and he loves some other woman who is more fortunate than I am. I have been told that he was loved by so many women when he was in Brindavan. What shall I do now? I cannot touch another man even with my thoughts since my heart is given to Krishna. I will marry him or else I will give up my life. I am not able to tell my mother or others about this since it is considered improper behaviour on my part. I have, however, made up my mind. There is only one way open to me. I will have to tell him that I love him and ask him to save me. I have been told that he has never abandoned those who have surrendered themselves to him. Shyness has no place where the situation is so critical. I will send word to him to save me from this danger. If he does not do so, I will kill myself; but I will never accede to my brother's wishes." So she pondered for a long time till she came to this decision.

There used to come to the palace apartments an old brahmin. Rukmini had known him for a long time, ever since she could remember. He would always spend some time with her talking to her. She decided that she would send him to Krishna with a message. She felt that he would keep her secret well and that he would do all that he could to help her.

Fortunately, even as she was thinking of him, he came to the inner apartments and greeted Rukmini. Seeing her sad face the old man said: "My dear child, what makes you so unhappy? Tell me." And she said: "You must have heard all about the way my brother has decided my future. You must have heard about the preparations that are going on in the palace; having known me all these years you know where my heart is. How then can I look happy?" He saw the tears in her eyes and said: "Krishna will not abandon you to this dreadful fate. He will take care of his Bhaktas."

Rukmini said: "Generalisations are not enough, good friend. I want you to do something for me."

"Tell me what I should do and I will certainly do anything to wipe those tears from your eyes," said the old brahmin. Rukmini told him what she wanted him to do and gave him the message to be given to Krishna. She said: "Krishna is said to be fond of brahmins and that he will always receive them with great respect. You need have no fear of going to his presence as soon as you reach his palace."

The old brahmin took leave of her and hurried in the direction of Dwaraka.

DWARAKA, THE ROSE-RED CITY

Perhaps it was the urgency of his mission or perhaps it was the witchery of Krishna. But the old man was surprised to find himself in Dwaraka very soon. He sensed where the house was, where Krishna lived. He hurried towards it. The door-keepers received him with respect and led him to the inner apartments. The old man looked up and there, on a seat which was golden, sat Krishna, the Lord of lords. So overcome was the brahmin with emotion and happiness, he spoke not a word but stood there, with his eyes drinking in the beauty of Krishna. Krishna got up quickly from his seat and coming towards the brahmin fell at his feet and asked for his blessings. He then led the guest to the seat where he was sitting. He waited on him himself and making him refreshed after the journey he had made, Krishna made him partake of food and asked him to rest himself.

After he had rested for a while Krishna pressed his feet with his lotus hands and said: "My lord, are the people in your country righteous? Are you and the likes of you allowed to pursue your duties without any trouble? Are the people contented in the country where you come from? If a brahmin has this one quality: that of saying 'What I have is enough' and does not aspire for many things he will have no cause to be unhappy. If, however, there is no contentment in the heart, then, even if he is given the honour of being Indra, he will not be happy. To me, the people worthy of worship are the brahmins who are contented with what they have, who are ever bent on the knowledge of the Atman, who never swerve from the Dharma which is theirs, who are without ego, who are ever tranquil under all circumstances.

"Such brahmins are found only in the country where the ruler is righteous. Is your king good to you? Is he walking in the path of Dharma? If so, he is dear to me.

"You have come to see me. From a distance you have come as I can see from the signs of travel on you. Crossing so many rivers and forests, and crossing the big moat which surrounds my city you have come to me. If you can tell me what I can do for you, I will do it gladly. If it is no secret tell me what has made you undertake such a long and tiresome journey at this age. It is an age when you should rest and not tire yourself. Please tell me if it is not a breach of confidence why you came."

The brahmin was charmed with the words of Krishna. He said: "You are the Lord of the entire Universe, they say. And there is nothing which you do not know. And yet, since you have honoured me so much and asked me why I have come, I am only too happy to tell you."

"I come from the country by name Vidarbha. Kundinapura is the chief city and the country is ruled by the very righteous king by name Bhishmaka. He has a daughter and her name is Rukmini." Here the brahmin paused and looked at Krishna as if to ask: "Have you heard of her?" Krishna had a gentle smile on his lips and he said nothing. The brahmin continued to talk. He said: "The king has also five sons and the eldest of them is known as Rukmi. The king, feeling that his daughter is of marriageable age, considered, that you are a worthy person and decided to give his daughter to you."

Again he paused and Krishna had a gleam in his eyes and said: "Me? He wants to give his daughter to me? But then no one has approached me as yet nor has my father received any message from Vidarbha. Are you the emissary the king has sent?"

The brahmin said: "No, things are not so easy to manage there. The king wanted to give his daughter to you but his son would not let him do so. He wants his sister to wed Shishupala, the son of Damaghosha. He is the lord of the Chedi country." Krishna's face assumed a serious look: He said: "I have heard very ill-favoured reports about Shishupala. Did the king agree to this unsuitable marriage?" "He had to," said the brahmin. "Because Rukmi is a powerful prince and his word is law."

"And so, where do I come in?", asked Krishna with a mischievous look. "Rukmini, my lord," said the brahmin, "has ever been in love with you."

Ever since she was a child I have known her and she has told me how much she loves you. And to a *pativrata* like her, this news is poison., She is heart-broken. She is desperate and she has sent you a message through me. She asked me to hurry as much as I could and deliver it to you. I will relate it to you and the rest is in your hands."

RUKMINI'S MESSAGE

The old brahmin sat up straight and Krishna sat with his eyes wide open to listen to the message of Rukmini.

"Achyuta, Krishna, you are the most handsome person in the entire world: so I have been told. I have heard about your many noble qualities: that you are ever compassionate towards those who are devoted to you. I have heard about your looks, your greatness, your nobility and all these I have heard from great rishis like Narada. My ears have been, for a long time, drinking in these words and my mind is lost in you. I feel no shame in telling you of my love for you.

"Is it surprising that a woman should love you, who has all these qualities? Perhaps you may think that a high-born maiden like me is lacking in decorum when I approach you with my love. Mukunda, how can anything else be possible? How can I help it? How can I help loving you? Krishna, you are a lion among men. As for me, I am a brave woman and I am intelligent. I am also possessed of great and good qualities. I am born in a noble family. In every way I am your equal and a fitting wife to you. And you are the only man fit enough to take me. You are generous, born in noble line, capable, well-versed in the fine arts and the arts which please a woman. You are young and rich. Your patience and your sweet nature are known the world over. You are ever full of affection for others and the praises heaped on you are countless. How then can a woman like me help loving you and choosing you as her lord? You must take me and make me yours. Please do not let a small-minded mean jackal touch what is meant for a lion: the prince of Chedi who has been chosen by my brother should not touch me even with his thoughts. Make me yours before he sees me.

"Whether you will take me or not will soon be made known to me by the messenger I have sent you. But remember, my lord, please remember, I have performed severe penances in my own way to make you accept me. I

have performed charitable deeds: I have worshipped fire and I have given away gold and other gifts to deserving people. I have performed Vratas and have ever been paying respect to elders and brahmins. All these acts of mine must grant me my wish and that is, to be yours. Only *YOU* should take my hand in yours and not this son of Damaghosha. It is only the hope of your accepting my love that is keeping me alive. If, by chance, you do not come and if this man touches me, I will die consumed by the fire of separation from you. Your lotus eyes will ever be in my mind's eye when I die and I will not be unhappy to die. Only, you will have to suffer because of the stigma attached to your name: that you did not save your devotee who had surrendered her everything to you.

"Perhaps you are wondering about the means by which I should be taken away. You may be saying: "Rukmini, your father and brother have already made up their minds about the man who is to have you. The marriage is to take place in two days. There is so little time. How then can I do what you ask me to do? I know that you are invincible and, in this entire world, there is no one to equal you in prowess. Please come to our city the day before the wedding. Then, with your army you can destroy those of Shishupala and Jarasandha and carry me away forcibly in the manner known as *Rakshasa*. I do not have to tell you that among the kshatriyas, when the maiden's people do not approve of the man she has chosen, this is the method by which he marries her.

"You may have another doubt. You may say: For the sake of carrying you away I will have to enter the chambers set apart for women, the antahpura, and hurt innocent women and guards. Is it right?' I have a solution for that also. On the day before the wedding there is a custom that the bride should leave the antahpura and come out into the open. While auspicious instruments make music she will have to walk to the temple of Devi Parvati and pray to her. The temple is quite some distance from the palace. When I have come out of the palace it will be easy for you to take me away when everyone is looking on. Great Sadhus want but the dust of your feet to cure them of their Tamoguna: it is that very dust which will keep me alive. If, however, I do not achieve my heart's desire I will abandon this body of mine which is already wasted by constant fasts and Vratas. I

will die with the hope that you will take me at least in my next janma or, if that fails, in the next. Hundreds of births may pass, but finally you will be my lord and till then I will pray for your grace and wait for it. Please do not abandon me who is ever devoted to you and whose life depends on you."

The message was over. The brahmin stopped for a moment and then said: "This, my lord, is what Rukmini asked me to repeat to you. I have laid the facts before you. It is up to you now to do what you please."

Krishna stood up. He took the hands of the brahmin in his and smiled at him. He then said: "I am not shy to tell you that I have been in love with Rukmini too, for the last so many years. Just as she has heard about me and my qualities and loved me for them, I have also done the same. Narada has described her to me. He has told me: "She glows like gold. Her hair is dark like a beetle. Her face is like the full moon and her eyes are wide and beautiful like those of a stricken deer. Her nose is small and straight. Her teeth are like a string of jasmine buds her smile is captivating. Her ears are like shells and her voice is like that of the nightingale. Her neck is white and beautiful like a conch. Her lips are more red than the Bimba fruit. Her red feet are soft and her soft palms bear auspicious signs like the Shankha and the Chakra. Her waist is small and her thighs are soft and straight like the trunk of a plantain tree. Her hips are large and beautiful. She walks like a swan and her face is ever smiling and calm.'

"Ever since I heard the words of Narada I have been wanting to take her hand. Narada also told me that her father was planning to give her to me. Now, even before she told me, I have heard that her brother's hatred for me has caused a change of plans and ever since then I have not been able to sleep at nights. Look at my eyes! Are they not red? Can you not see that they are tired?"

Krishna paused for a moment and then said: "I will, this very moment, destroy those sinful men who disgrace the kshatriya caste to which they belong. I will snatch the beautiful princess Rukmini under their very eyes

and bring her back with me to Dwaraka. I will not abandon Rukmini whose heart is already mine."

Krishna knew that he had very little time since the marriage was decided to take place two days later. Krishna called for his charioteer Daruka and said: "Daruka, get my chariot ready. I must leave immediately."

Krishna's favourite horses Shaibya, Sugriva, Meghapushpa and Valahaka were soon yoked and Daruka brought the chariot to the door and came and stood before Krishna as if to say: "The chariot is ready."

Krishna helped the old brahmin into the chariot and then he ascended it himself. The horses were fleeter than the wind and they travelled all night. Early in the morning they reached Vidarbha.

Balarama, in the meantime, heard that Krishna had left in a hurry for Vidarbha and that he had every intention of bringing Rukmini with him. Balarama guessed that there would be some trouble caused by the others there and so he hurried to Vidarbha with Yadava army.

RUKMINI'S DESPAIR

Bhishmaka, in the meantime, had made all the preparations for the wedding. The city of Kundinapura had a festive look. The streets were sprinkled with scented water and all the houses were decorated with wreaths of flowers. The pillars and the flagstaffs were all gay with fettering flags and banners. All the people were dressed in their silks and every house bore a gay look since their princess was to be married. The palace was a hive of activity. The preparations were endless. The poor were fed and the brahmins were honoured with feasts and gifts of gold and silks. They were asked to bless the young princess who was to be the bride the next day. The walls were resounding with the chanting of the Vedas and the singing of the women who surrounded Rukmini. They dressed her in new clothes and they tied charms and amulets and yellow thread round her wrist to ward off evil eyes.

Damaghosha, the king of Chedi, did the same things for his son and brought Shishupala to Vidarbha. He brought a large army with him and they came to the city early enough. Bhishmaka received them with due honour and took them to their apartments: palaces set apart for them. With Shishupala had come Jarasandha, Salva, Dantavakra, Viduratha and Paundraka. They were all confirmed enemies of Krishna and Rama. They had also brought their armies with them. They were all familiar with the fact that Bhishmaka had wanted to give Rukmini to Krishna and that it was the firm voice of Rukmi which had averted the 'calamity'. They wanted, therefore, to be there to help Shishupala in case any crisis occurred and hence, the large armies.

Rukmini took no interest in the surroundings and in the excitement which was in the heart of everyone. She sat like a puppet while all the preparations were going on. Her heart was with Krishna and her mind was clouded since her messenger, the old brahmin, had not come back from Dwaraka. She thought: "There is just one night left and then day of the

marriage will follow. Krishna has not come nor has the old man. Perhaps Krishna, who was interested in marrying me, became suddenly displeased with me because of my shamelessness in telling him of my love and so, perhaps, he does not want to come. The old man is too fond of me to tell me this and that is why he has not come. I am sure of it. Or, perhaps, because of my misfortune, he has come across some obstacle on the way and is hence delayed. Or is it that the gods are angry and their anger has made me the most miserable among women? Have I been careless in my worship of god? It cannot be. Mahadeva is the Lord of lords and he is compassionate enough to overlook the faults of the likes of me. Even if he is angry with me for some fault of mine, why is Gowri, Parvati, the goddess whom I worship everyday, why is she also indifferent? By herself she is compassionate. Perhaps her constant association with Rudra must have made her also like him in her anger. She knows that I am just about to kill myself and yet she does not relent. It is but natural for her, Girija, the daughter of a mountain, to be born with a heart of stone!"

With her mind filled with misgivings like these, Rukmini closed her eyes and sat silent. She comforted herself with the thought that there was still time for Krishna to come. She did not want anyone to see her tears. Closing her eyes she told herself: "Let me not despair. The time is not yet past. There is still a chance of his coming. I must not die yet. If he comes and then finds that I have given up my life, what then? What will he think of my faith in him?"

Suddenly Rukmini found her left eye throbbing: her left thigh and left shoulder were also throbbing. All these sudden signs were indicating that something good was to happen to her and she opened her eyes and her heart felt lighter. She felt that all hope was not lost.

Krishna, in the meantime, had arrived at the garden which was located just outside the outskirts of the city. He asked the brahmin to go to the palace and assure Rukmini that her troubles were at an end and that Krishna was in the city. When Rukmini opened her eyes which were full of tears, she espied someone familiar at the distance. She wiped her eyes and looked again and it was not imagination. The old man had come! He was approaching her fast. From the smile on his face she knew that he was

bringing good tidings. He had seen her walking up and down the terrace and he saw her sit down with despair writ in her every movement. He hurried towards her. When she saw him she questioned him with her eyes and he could convey to her the message that the Lord was in the city. Very casually she took him aside and then asked him what had happened. He related to her in detail his visit to Dwaraka and Krishna's confiding in him that he was also in love with her. Tears flowed from her eyes and she said: "I do not know how to reward you, my friend, for this your kindness. There is only one thing I can do," and she fell at his feet and washed them with her tears.

News reached Bhishmaka that Krishna and Rama had arrived in the city. He thought that they had come to join in the wedding celebrations. He went to them and offered milk and honey, costly clothes and gems. In his mind he had chosen Krishna as the groom and he was not happy at the thought that someone else had taken his place. He honoured Krishna as he would his son-to-be! He led them to a very grand apartment and requested them to honour him by attending the wedding. Krishna smiled and said: "Have no fear. I have come just for that: the wedding of your daughter." Balarama looked serious and the two brothers stayed together long after the old king had left them.

The citizens heard that Krishna had come to their city with Rama and they rushed to the palace where they were staying to have a look at them. They told themselves: "Krishna is the man who should have married our Rukmini. See how well they are suited to each other! If at all, we have obtained any punya in our previous births and in this birth, we will offer it all up as the price if this Krishna will be made to marry Rukmini by the gods." So they spoke but it was all in whispers. They did not dare express their feelings since Rukmi was not fond of Krishna and he would punish them if he heard them.

THE PRINCESS WALKS TO THE TEMPLE

The hallowed moment had come when the princess had to come out of her apartments to proceed to the temple of Parvati. On all sides she was heavily guarded by soldiers with drawn swords and Rukmini walked with halting steps. With her went her mother and her companions and the royal guard. Her mind fixed on Krishna, her eyes half closed, Rukmini walked as though in a trance. It was a long procession and the women carried the auspicious materials for the worship of the Devi.

There was music and there was chanting of the Vedas and the princess reached the temple. She washed her feet and her hands and eyes. Old brahmin Suvasinis took her by the hand and led her to the shrine of Parvati. Rukmini prayed: "Mother, I salute you again and again." Her silent prayer was: "Mother mine, please make Krishna my lord. I have but one desire and you must grant me that. Make me Krishna's." She then worshipped the Devi and performed the puja as was directed by the older women. She received the prasada from them after falling at their feet. Her vow of silence had been broken by her prayer and with her jewelled fingers holding on to the arm of her companion she emerged out of the temple.

All the princes who had assembled there for the wedding saw her and her immense charm. Her waist was so small it could not be seen but for the band of gold which encircled it. The gems set in it pulled the eyes of the beholders to her waist and made them gasp in admiration. With her earrings moving in the breeze; with her eyes like those of a deer; with her smile bright like moonlight; with the gait of a swan, she walked slowly and those who saw her were faint with too much beauty. Some of them did actually faint.

Rukmini knew that Krishna was somewhere there and that he would take her away from there. A faint smile hovered on her red lips and there was

eagerness in her steps. And yet, she did not dare to walk fast. It was not done. And again, once she had covered the distance between the temple and the palace her chance of staying out in the open would be gone forever. But her eagerness to see Krishna was overwhelming. In the breeze her dark curls tended to flutter around her face. With her left hand she pushed them away and under this pretext she raised her eyes from the ground and looked around furtively for a sight of her lord.

At the same time she felt his presence and looked up. She saw the most divinely handsome man standing on the terrace of a chariot and his right hand was held out to her. He leaned out of the chariot and he grasped her right hand firmly and he lifted her bodily and placed her in his chariot. Even as the others were looking on, Krishna spurred his horses and drove away from there. Balarama and the Yadava host followed him slowly. Krishna looked like a lion walking away with his prey from the midst of a pack of jackals.

For a moment there was silence and then there was confusion among the kings who had come there for the wedding. Salva and Jarasandha and the others could not bear this insult to their friend and said: "Shame on us that we stood helpless while a cowherd walked away with the prize which rightly belongs to a kshatriya."

Soon they were riding on their chariots with their armies following them and tried to overtake Krishna and claim their friend's bride-to-be! But the foresight of Balarama prevented them from doing this. The Yadava army held them at bay and would not let them proceed further. From the terrace of the chariot Rukmini saw the fight that was going on and her eyes were scared. Drinking her beauty with his eyes Krishna said: "Do not be afraid. The enemies will soon be routed by our your army." Her face was red with shyness and she would not look up at Krishna who, she knew, was looking at her with a smile in his eyes.

RUKMI FRUSTRATED

Soon the kings had to admit defeat and returned crestfallen. Jarasandha led the others in the retreat and they went to Shishupala. He was looking like a rich man who had suddenly lost all his wealth. He looked so unhappy. And again, his face was dark with anger and disappointment and he looked at his friends with questioning eyes. They shrugged their shoulders. And Jarasandha said: "Forget your worries, friend. Nothing is permanent in this world: whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. Man has to act according to the situation in which the vagaries of fortune have tossed him. He should continue his actions as though he is indifferent to all this. Man is after all but a helpless puppet in the hands of fate. Even as a wooden doll performs according to the wishes of the man who pulls of strings, man has to act according to the wishes of his Maker. Look at me, and consider how often I have been made to return to my kingdom, frustrated in my attempts by this wily Krishna. His guile is well known. I have learnt one thing: this world is ruled by fate and time combined and hence I have learnt to take everything with equanimity. If it had not been fate, how could our combined army have been routed by the negligible army which that Balarama brought with him? Let us wait. Soon things will change. Some day the fates will favour us and then we will be on top: they will be the losers."

Not comforted one bit by these dry words of comfort which his friend spoke, Shishupala returned to his country since there was nothing else to do. Bhishmaka, however, was extremely happy at the turn of events. Rukmi's anger was terrible. He collected one *akshowhini* and went in the direction in which Krishna went. He was bent upon killing Krishna. Before leaving he took his bow in his hand and took an oath: "I swear that I will not enter this city of mine unless I kill Krishna and rescue Rukmini."

He ordered his charioteer to go fast and overtake Krishna. Perhaps Krishna anticipated his coming. His chariot was going slowly and Rukmi was able to spot the lonely chariot carrying his sister and her abductor. He came near and shouted: "Stop! Stop! You thief! How dare you lay hands on my sister?"

With three arrows Rukmi hit Krishna. And he went on hurling insult after insult which were hurting, which were as sharp and as wounding as his arrows. Krishna smiled all the while. With six arrows he hit Rukmi and his four horses were hit by six arrows from the bow of Krishna. The charioteer was then wounded by two more arrows and the flagstaff of the chariot was felled by three more. Rukmi went on with the fight and Krishna was unruffled. Bow after bow was taken by Rukmi and each one was broken as soon as it was taken. Rukmi then took up several other weapons and each one of them was splintered with the arrows sent by Krishna. Rukmi jumped down from his chariot and, with his sword in hand, he rushed towards Krishna with the desire to kill him: he looked like a moth rushing madly towards a flame. Krishna broke his sword into several pieces and himself took up his sword and went towards Rukmi to kill him.

Rukmini was frightened for her brother. She fell at the feet of Krishna and said: "Please do not kill my brother. I beseech you, do not let my brother die." Her form was trembling with fear and her face was pale. Her voice was faint and her words were indistinct as she prayed for the life of her brother. Krishna let him off without killing him. He insulted him, however, by disfiguring him: Rukmi's locks were cut off and his moustache too.

By this time the Yadava army led by Balarama came there. Balarama took pity on Rukmi and his condition and said:

"Krishna, you should not have done this to him." He then spoke words of comfort to Rukmini and said: "In your love for your brother, you are upset. But believe me, there is no need for you to be upset. Krishna was provoked into insulting your brother. You should not think on it any more but go with Krishna with a happy heart. After all, your prayers have been answered and Rukmi's life has been spared."

The Yadava host moved towards Dwaraka. Soon the chariot of Krishna with the Garuda flag was just a speck in the distance and even that was lost to view. Rukmi stood watching the dust long after the chariot had vanished. He would not go back to his city. He stayed where he was. Later he built a city and lived there.

PRADYUMNA

Lord Mahadeva, when he had lost Sati during the yajna of Daksha, was lost in meditation and was performing tapas on the mountain Himavan. Sati had been born as the daughter of Himavan and she was famed as Parvati, the daughter of Parvata. She was bent on becoming the spouse of Mahadeva and she was attending on him and serving him. He took no notice of her, absorbed as he was in his tapas.

The devas had been told that the son born to Mahadeva and Parvati would be Kumara and that he would become the commander of the heavenly host. Indra wanted to precipitate matters. He therefore sent Kama, the god of love, to the spot where the Lord Mahadeva was performing intense tapas. Kama was attended by Vasanta, the season of spring laden with freshness and with all the flowers which are in the quiver of Kama: the Lotus, Ashoka, Chuta, the flower of the mango, Navamallika, and the Blue lotus. Mandanila, the soft breeze from the south laden with the perfume of the mountain flowers was also with them. When they came to the mountain the air was balmy and there was every hope of their mission being achieved.

Parvati was attending on the Lord and Kama shot his arrows of flowers at the Lord Mahadeva. He opened his eyes and they lighted on Parvati. But Mahadeva was angry at the thought of his tapas being disturbed. He looked around and his angry eyes spied Kama who stood trembling. Mahadeva opened his third eye and out of it streamed forth fire which consumed Kama.

Rati, the wife of Kama, went to the Lord and her lamentation was heart-rending. The Lord took pity on her and told her that after his marriage with Parvati he would see that Kama was restored to her. But Kama would be visible only to her. She then said: "My lord, will my husband never have a form any more?" Mahadeva thought for a while and said: "During

Dwapara Lord Narayana will be born as Krishna and his son will be your Kama. You will be a maid in the house of Shambara, an asura and there, your re-union will take place."

According to this prophecy, a son was born to Krishna and Rukmini. This was Kama. The child was named Pradyumna and great celebrations went on in the city of Dwaraka.

Shambara was an asura who had been told that the child born of Krishna and Rukmini would be the death of him. He therefore came to Dwaraka and when he heard about the birth of a child he decided to hesitate no longer. It was not even ten days since the child was born.

When everyone was engaged in some task or other, Shambara, who was waiting for his chance, found the child to have been left alone, unattended, for a moment. That was enough for him. He stole the child and vanished from the neighbourhood of the city. He placed a great distance between himself and the city of Dwaraka. He thought of different ways of killing the child. Looking at the beauty of the newborn child he could not do it himself and so he decided to drown it in the sea. That way he could avoid seeing the child being killed and at the same time he could be sure that it was dead. He therefore threw the child into the sea and went away to his city with an easy mind.

Dwaraka was a city of woe and Rukmini was inconsolable. But time is a great healer and gradually, people began to forget that there was once a child born to Krishna and Rukmini and that it was lost to them.

The child which had been thrown into the sea did not die. A large fish thought it was a morsel of food and swallowed it whole. And the fish was caught by a group of fishermen. They found the fish to be so big and unusual that they took it to the king as a gift. The king who was Shambara accepted it and it was duly sent to the kitchen to be cooked. The woman in charge of the kitchen was a beautiful girl by name Mayavati. When they cut up the fish they found a child inside the fish and they told Mayavati about it. She was charmed by the beauty of it and her heart was full of compassion for the child. She took it and brought it up as her child. This son was growing up into a handsome boy.

Narada came to see her one day. He looked at the young boy and asked Mayavati who he was. She told him the entire story of the fish: the strange finding of a child inside a fish which had been caught in the seas. Narada heard of it all. He then looked at her and said: "Do you remember anything about your past life at all?"

"No, my lord," said Mayavati. "I know nothing of it. And yet, at times, I dream and in that dream I feel that I am a goddess and always there are flowers around me. I dream that I am wandering among them and by my side is a man, a handsome man, the most handsome man that ever can be seen. But then, before I can find out how it all happened, my companion vanishes, and I see a heap of ashes by my side. This is the dream that often visits me in my sleep. Can you tell me why it happens?"

"My child," said Narada. "It is not a dream but fragments of your previous birth. This was the most tragic event in your life and so it persists in your memory and haunts you in this life too."

"Tell me," she said. "Tell me what it is all about." "You are Rati," said Narada. "Rati, the wife of Kama."

She looked at him with unbelieving eyes. Narada then recounted to her the entire story and added: "This child you are now bringing up is none other than your lord Kama. Mahadeva had so ordained it that he should kill Shambara and then be united with you."

Narada left her and went away. Mayavati was deeply immersed in thought. She knew that the words of rishis can never be false. She waited for the time when the little boy would grow up to be a man. She would tell him what he should do.

MAYAVATI

Time rolled slowly on for Mayavati. Her time of waiting came to an end finally. The young boy now reached manhood and his beauty was captivating. He had inherited his father's long eyes: eyes like the petals of a lotus. His arms were long and his smile was like that of Krishna. Mayavati loved him. It was evident to the young man that with every action, with every lift of her eyebrows, and with her smiles she was expressing her love for him and questioning him silently if he would accept her love.

One day he came to her and said: "This behaviour of yours is puzzling me. You have brought me up ever since I was a child and you have been a mother to me. All these days and all these years it has been like that. And now, all on a sudden, you do not seem to think of me as your son. In fact, your eyes make your intentions very clear. Please do not embarrass me. Please forget these thoughts which are unbecoming to you."

Mayavati told him about herself and about him. She said: "You were born to Krishna in the House of the Yadavas.

"Rukmini is your mother. Shambara stole you from your mother's side and with the intentions of destroying you he threw you into the sea. A fish swallowed you and by a freak of fate the fish was brought to the kitchen of Shambara. I have taken care of you all these years. The sage Narada, the son of Brahma, told me all these. You must kill Shambara who is a pastmaster in the art of fighting with the help of Maya. Your mother has never forgotten her child whom she lost when he was a week old. Please do not worry about how you are going to kill Shambara. I know the art of Maya and I will teach you."

She taught him the mantra by name 'Mahamaya.'

Pradyumna then challenged Shambara to fight with him. Taken by surprise at the courage of this youngster who was calling him such insulting names Shambara came out with his mace uplifted. The fight between the two was long and fierce. Surprised by the prowess of the young man Shambara decided to use his powers of Maya and the fight became more intense. None of the guiles of Shambara were effective against the young adversary. Pradyumna proved to be superior to him in every way. Finally Pradyumna took up his sword and cut off the head of Shambara

Mayavati who could fly in the air, carried Pradyumna to the city of Dwaraka. She led him to the palace of Krishna. The servants, attendants, maids and others who were busy with their daily tasks saw a young man enter with a very beautiful woman. The youngster was, in every way, like Lord Krishna and they thought for a while it was Krishna and they were speculating as to who the woman was. It took them some time to realise that he was not Krishna. Each one was asking the other. "Who is this young man?"

Rukmini heard about the arrival of a young couple and she came to see who they were. When she saw him her eyes filled with tears. She said to herself: "If my child had been alive he would have been just like this young man. I wonder who he is. It is strange that he should resemble my lord so much. Can it be my son who has been considered lost?"

She was still considering the newcomer's likeness to Krishna and wondering about who he was and why he had come there when Krishna came there with Vasudeva and Devaki. Krishna who knew everything, stood there as though he knew nothing. Mayavati was about to speak when Narada appeared on the scene and cleared all their doubts.

Pradyumna was embraced by everyone and Mayavati found herself in the arms of Rukmini. Rukmini proudly announced that her son was lost and found again: as though he had died and was granted life again.

Soon the entire city came to see their young prince and there was joy in the heart of everyone. It seemed as though a child had been born only then, at that very moment: so great was the excitement in Dwaraka!

KRISHNA MUST HAVE STOLEN IT

One of the kinsmen of Krishna was Satrajit. He was a Bhakta of Surya and in fact, Surya considered him as one of his friends and not as just a Bhakta. Once Surya was in a happy frame of mind and he said: "Satrajit, my friend, I would like to give you a costly gem as my gift. Please take it and it will give you immense fortune." So saying, Surya gave the jewel by name Syamantaka to Satrajit.

This jewel was as dazzling as the sun himself and when Satrajit entered the city wearing the jewel on his neck the people thought that the sun had come down to the earth. He then showed it to everyone very proudly. There was some special quality about the jewel. It would yield twelve maunds of gold everyday to the owner.

When the people saw the jewel and the glow of it they went to Krishna and said: "Krishna, please come and listen to this wonderful news. The sun has come down to the earth and even now he is walking towards your palace to visit you. Our eyes are hurting us, dazzled as we are by the glow of the sun." Krishna laughed at the ignorance of the people and said: "It is not the sun. It is Satrajit wearing a jewel given to him by the sun." After showing the jewel to all his kinsmen Satrajit took the jewel to his puja room and placed it in a sanctified place.

The fame of the gem spread far and wide. It was said that there would be no famine nor poverty in the place where the jewel was worshipped. Everyday twelve maunds of gold would be found near the jewel and Satrajit became very rich and alongside, he became very arrogant also.

One day, Krishna had been to the house of Satrajit. During the conversation Krishna said: "It is said that the place where this jewel is placed will not have poverty nor will there be famine in the country. It is said to avert accidental deaths and also diseases. The mind, I have been

told, will always be tranquil and bodily pains will not be felt. Evil portents will not be seen nor will there be any deceit or theft. Considering all these, it is, to my mind, a good idea if you leave this gem with the king Ugrasena so that the entire country will benefit by the grace of Surya and not just you and your family."

Satrajit had become too arrogant to let these words of Krishna have any influence on him. And again, he had become too fond of money. He laughed at Krishna and said: "This was given to me by Surya as a keepsake, as a token of our dear friendship. If you want a similar jewel pray to him and he may grant you one, who knows!" Krishna said nothing after that and there the matter ended.

Some days later, one day, Prasenajit, the brother of Satrajit, asked his brother if he could wear the jewel for a day. The brother agreed to it and Prasenajit went out to hunt with the jewel on his neck. The sun had set and still he had not come home. Satrajit, worried about him and, perhaps, more about his jewel, waited impatiently for the night to pass. Day dawned and still there was no sign of Prasenajit. Satrajit was extremely worried and he went to the forest and with him went a search party. There, in the heart of the dense forest, they found the dead body of the horse he had been riding. They went further and there they found the lifeless body of Prasenajit. They brought him home. Sure enough the jewel was not found on him.

Sad and angry at the death of his brother, Satrajit told someone: "My brother has been killed. It is because someone wanted the Syamantaka. That someone wanted to possess it. Some days back Krishna had come here. He asked me to give the gem to his grandfather and I refused. Because of that Krishna must have been angry and this, I am sure, is his doing. He has killed my brother and taken the Syamantaka. I am sure of it. Krishna must have stolen the gem."

The accusation was passed on from lip to lip and finally it reached the ears of Krishna. He was at first amused. But he realised that people were apt to believe anything ill of others: even of their beloved Krishna! He was anxious now to vindicate his honour in the eyes of his people since he now realised that everyone was willing to believe him guilty. Krishna collected

a crowd of his friends and went to the forest to find a clue to the death of Prasenajit. He went to the spot where Prasenajit was found dead. In their eagerness to take the body home Satrajit and the others had not tried to look around and see what had happened. Krishna looked around and near the spot where Prasenajit was found dead he saw the tracks of a lion and they were leading away from there.

They were to be found for quite some distance and Krishna could see that there were signs of blood in the tracks. He now followed the tracks and after going quite some distance they stopped. Krishna and his companions found a dead lion. They searched the lion but could not find the jewel there. They saw, however, signs of a struggle and found that a bear and a lion had fought there and the lion had been killed by the bear.

Krishna now had to follow the tracks made by the bear and he soon found himself at the mouth of an immense cave. He asked his companions to stay outside and went inside alone to see if the bear was there, and, what was more important, to see if the jewel Syamantaka was there.

THE BEAR'S CAVE

Krishna stood at the entrance to the cave and looked. He did not have to see twice to find out if the jewel was there. A child was crawling on the ground and in its hand was the jewel Syamantaka. For a moment he stood as though spellbound and then went near the child to take the jewel from its hands. The mother bear was nearby and when she saw a human being approaching her child she let out a frightened cry. In a moment a great big bear as old as time, came near Krishna. Finding that the stranger was trying to snatch the jewel from the hands of the child, the bear tried to attack Krishna. The bear was Jambavan: the bear which played such a great part during the war which Sri Rama fought with Ravana during the Treta Yuga. He was a chiranjivi and he was dwelling in this cave. Krishna knew who he was.

The fight began and it went on. For twenty eight days and twenty eight nights it went on.

Finding the opponent so powerful Jambavan was really amazed and he said: "I have so far seen only one person who was as skilful and as powerful as you in fighting."

"Who was that?", asked Krishna.

Jambavan said: "Perhaps you might not have heard of him. He belonged to a generation which was far earlier than yours. His name was Rama and he was a prince of the race of the sun. He was a great fighter and he killed the rakshasa Ravana."

"Is he the same Rama who wept for ten months since his wife was carried away by the rakshasa Ravana? I have been told that he was banished to the forest by his stepmother, and, with his wife and his brother, he walked the forests for years together. I personally do not think very highly of him," said Krishna with a deliberate sneer.

Jambavan's anger knew no bounds. He said: "How dare you talk so disparagingly of my Lord? He was Lord Narayana himself who had been born on the earth for the suppression of Adharma and you have the impertinence to say you do not think very highly of him! Evidently you think too highly of yourself!" And Jambavan attacked him once again. Krishna proved to be more powerful and Jambavan fell down in a faint. He opened his eyes after a while and looked up. He saw Sri Rama with the famed Kodanda in his hand. With a smile on his face Rama said: "Jambavan!"

Jambavan fell at his feet and said: "My lord! My eyes have been aching for a sight of you for this many a day and today you have come before me. I thought you had forgotten your promise to me that I would see you in the Dwapara Yuga. You have, in your infinite mercy, come to me to feast my eyes." Jambavan wiped his eyes which were full of tears and looked again. He could not see Rama but he saw, instead, his enemy with whom he had been fighting all this while, all these days. "Where is my Rama?", he kept on asking and searched all over the cave and came back to the spot where Krishna was. He looked and saw that it was Rama. A moment he would look away and Krishna would be there and after a while Rama would be there again. Finally Jambavan said: "Rama, I do not know what is happening. Please tell me why you are confusing me like this? Why do you make me confuse you with this man who has been impertinent enough to talk ill of you?" He was seeing Rama and even as he was seeing him, Rama changed into Krishna and again into Rama.

The Rama said: "I am Krishna and this is the *avatara* I have assumed during Dwapara for the upholding of Dharma. I had promised to you that I would grant you my darshan when I took leave of you and I wanted you to know that I am now the son of the Yadava House. I am the son of Vasudeva and I came here to take the jewel and restore it to the owner." He told Jambavan about the very urgent need he had of the jewel. Jambavan paid homage to him and gave him the jewel and with it his daughter Jambavati. He asked Krishna to honour him by accepting his daughter and Krishna accepted her gladly.

Krishna took leave of Jambavan and returned to Dwaraka with Jambavati and the jewel.

THE VINDICATION

The companions of Krishna, in the meantime, waited for twelve days and nights at the entrance to the cave. They heard the fighting and finally they thought that Krishna had been killed and so returned to the city with the news that Krishna had been vanquished in a fight with a wild animal.

Great was the woe in Dwaraka. Everyone was cursing Satrajit for wrongly accusing Krishna of theft and thus causing his death. They all went to the temple of Devi Durga and prayed to her to give them some hope that Krishna was not dead. At the conclusion of the puja she spoke the words: "You will all see Krishna very soon." When their prayers were over they emerged out of the temple and found their prayers had been answered by the Devi.

They saw Krishna with the jewel glowing on his neck and by his side stood a beautiful maiden. He said: "Please let everyone assemble in king's assembly hall. Please ask Satrajit also to be present. I will be there soon."

In the great hall named Sudharma, in the presence of everyone Krishna stood up and related to them the truth about the killing of Prasenajit and the later happenings. He then took the disputed jewel Syamantaka and placed it on the neck of Satrajit and said: "Now I am vindicated. I am freed of the stigma which was attached to my name."

Satrajit was so ashamed of himself that he could not hold up his head and with bowed head he walked out of the hall. He was extremely unhappy at the course of events. He had now been cured of his arrogance and his avarice. He did not know how to make it up with Krishna whom he had wounded so much. "How to expiate my sins?", he asked himself. "What shall I do to please Krishna and make him forget this incident? How can I wipe out the unpopularity which I am suffering now because of my thoughtless words and action?"

Finally he decided that the only way to please Krishna and to make amends for all the unpleasantness of the past few months would be to give his daughter Satyabhama to Krishna.

During the wedding Satrajit gave the gem to Krishna. But Krishna refused to take it. He said: "Surya gave it to you and it is but right that you should have it. Believe me, it is not out of pique that I am saying these words. You had two jewels and you have given me the better of the two." He smiled at Bhama whose face was suffused with her blush.

Satyabhama was a very beautiful girl and all the young men of the Vrishni, Andhaka and Yadava Houses had been a little bit in love with her. Chief among them was Kritavarma, the son of Hridika. He had asked Satrajit for her hand once but the father had not given reply and he was living on hopes. But then, Satrajit, in a moment of generosity had given her to Krishna as a peace offering. Krishna was very pleased to take her hand: and as for Satyabhama she was only too happy to have Krishna as her lord.

THE KILLING OF SATRAJIT

Krishna had been following the fortunes of the Pandavas. He knew that they were very badly treated by the old king and his sons. But he was not prepared for the terrible news which reached them. News came to Dwaraka that the Pandavas, with their mother Kunti, were spending a year in the city by name Varanavata at the wish of Dhritarashtra. When the year was nearly over the palace in which they were staying had caught fire and all of them were destroyed by the fire. Their dead and charred bodies were found. People said that the palace had been built specially for the stay of the Pandavas: that Purochana, the architect was the favoured friend of the sons of Dhritarashtra and he had used inflammable material like lac and wax for building the palace in Varanavata.

Krishna and Balarama went to Hastina to offer their condolences to Bhishma and to Dhritarashtra, Vidura and the others. The blind king pretended to be unhappy and they had to look as though they believed him. Bhishma was very unhappy and he was heartbroken. So was Drona whose favourite pupil was Arjuna, the Pandava. Krishna saw that Vidura did not look as sad as he should have done and he guessed that the Pandavas had escaped from the fire and that they were in hiding somewhere. But then he was not supposed to know about it and so the 'sad scene' went on with Dhritarashtra shedding tears profusely and saying: "O my dear nephews! O my dear Yudhishtira! How can I bear this grief? Duryodhana was sitting quietly and he did not pretend to be unhappy or broken-hearted. But his hatred for the Pandavas was well known and it would have looked odd, thought Krishna, if he did look sad!

While Krishna and Balarama were in Hastina a terrible intrigue was going on in Dwaraka. Kritavarma had not forgiven Satrajit for having given Satyabhama to Krishna. Satrajit had given him hopes that she would be given to him, Kritavarma, though not in words and now, in a sudden

impulsive fit he had given her away to Krishna. Another suitor to the hand of Satyabhama was Shatadhanva, another Yadava. Surprisingly enough, the one to back up Kritavarma was Akrura, who had once been a devotee of Krishna! Such is the power of wealth and avarice. The desire to possess the jewel blinded even this saintly man who had once seen Krishna and Balarama as the incarnations of the Lord Narayana and Adishesha. Sad indeed is the lure of gold which can dazzle even men like Akrura.

Akrura, incidentally, was also an aspirant for the hand of Satyabhama. Kritavarma and Akrura approached Shatadhanva with a dastardly plan. They said: "Look, this Satrajit has deceived all of us. He had promised his daughter to one of us and then, suddenly he gives her away to Krishna. It is but right that we should punish him. The time is ripe since Krishna and Rama are away in Hastina. Why should we not kill him and make him join his brother Prasenajit?" The sinful-minded Shatadhanva, who could easily be led into evil paths, agreed readily. During the night when Satrajit was sleeping Shatadhanva killed him and grabbing the jewel ran away from there like a thief.

The women in the house found Satrajit killed and there was a wail of woe which rose to the heavens. Satyabhama was extremely fond of her father and she was inconsolable. She insisted on the body of her father being preserved in oil and went all the way to Hastina to tell Krishna about it.

Krishna was horrified at the terrible deed that had been done by the jealous men in Dwaraka. He pacified Satyabhama as best as he could. He said that he would avenge the death of her father and he rushed back to Dwaraka with intention of killing Shatadhanva.

SHATADHANVA

Hearing that Krishna was coming back to Dwaraka with wrathful eyes which were spitting fire Shatadhanva went to Kritavarma and said: "You are the one who instigated me to do this dreadful thing. It is up to you to save me from the fury of Krishna." Kritavarma would not accede to his request. He said: "I dare not oppose the terrible brothers and lose my life. I have been told that they are incarnations of god. I will not do anything to displease them. They are powerful. Kamsa lost his life at the hands of Krishna who was yet a young boy. And, have you not heard how the brothers defeated Jarasandha by destroying his army again and again? I can do nothing to help you." Shatadhanva was shocked by the behaviour of Kritavarma who was the one who had made him commit the terrible crime. But he had no time even to quarrel with him. He asked Akrura to aid him in his hour of need. He too proved a broken reed. Akrura became sanctimonious and god-fearing, suddenly. Perhaps, it was a pose he assumed or perhaps it was because he was repenting for his momentary lapse. Shatadhanva could not make out what made him talk like he did. Akrura said: "Look, my friend, which man in his proper senses will invite the anger of the terrible brothers? Krishna is the Lord of lords. He is the Parabrahman: he is the creator, the preserver and the destroyer of this Universe. I know who he is and I now salute him." Akrura closed his eyes and it seemed as though he were lost in meditation. Poor Shatadhanva did not know what he should do. He said nothing. He placed the jewel on Akrura's lap and jumping on a horse which could cover a hundred yojanas a day, fled from the spot as fast as he could.

Balarama and Krishna followed him in the chariot which Daruka was driving. When he reached the outskirts of Mithila and the gardens skirting the city, Shatadhanva's horse fell down dead. Leaving it there he began to run desperately. Krishna jumped down from his chariot and ran after him. He caught up with him very soon and using his chakra, Krishna cut his

head off. When he was dead Krishna looked for the jewel among his clothes and could not find it. He went back to his brother and said: "The killing of Shatadhanva was unnecessary. The jewel could not be found on him."

Balarama said: "Do not acquit him so easily, Krishna. We know that he killed Satrajit and the culprit has been punished. You did no wrong. And, as the killing of Bhama's father was for the sake of the jewel Syamantaka I am sure the sinner has left it in someone's charge in the city. Go back to Dwaraka and look for it there. As for me, now that we have come this far, I would like to see my friend the king of Videha and then return of Dwaraka."

Balarama entered Videha and proceeded towards the king's palace. Krishna hurried back to the city and went straight to Satyabhama. He told her that he had killed Shatadhanva and had thus avenged the killing of her father. But the jewel could not be found. Satrajit had no sons and so, Krishna took care of the final rites for the dead man.

After all the ceremonies were over, Krishna began making enquiries about the missing jewel. He found out that Kritavarma and Akrura, the instigators of the crime had run away from Dwaraka.

In course of time the story of Satrajit and the ill-fated gem, Syamantaka which brought nothing but misfortune to the one who possessed it, became an old story. Everyone began to think less and less of it and finally, no one spoke of it.

AKRURA'S BOUNTY

News reached Dwaraka that Akrura was performing yajna after yajna: each greater than the other, in the city of Kashi: that he was spending money like water: that daily he fed thousands and thousands of poor people: and so on and so on. At the same time ill omens were seen in Dwaraka. Troubles visited several people and the citizens began to talk. They said: "Years ago, there was a king of Kashi who had been worried because there was no rain in the country and the people were suffering as a result of this famine. Then there came to him a rishi by name Shvaphalka. The king gave his daughter Gandini to him in marriage. After that rains came and the country became happy once again. This Akrura is the son of the rishi Shvaphalka and Gandini. The god of rain, Indra, is very fond of him and so there is always rain where Akrura is. Also, there are no sufferings or diseases where Akrura is. All this is true. But the ill omens seen in Dwaraka and the yajnas performed by Akrura in Kashi and also the many auspicious happenings there make us suspect that the jewel Syamantaka is with him. Akrura is now called Danapati, the king amongst givers and it seems as though our Krishna has given him the jewel and asked him to stay away from here. Nothing else can explain all these happenings."

As is usual with rumour, its tongues which are a thousand in number, began to spread this story about Krishna and to his dismay even Balarama and Satyabhama seemed to have lost faith in him. He could easily believe their telling themselves: "Perhaps the story is true. It seems probable. Akrura has always been a great friend of Krishna. Who knows?"

Again Krishna had to vindicate himself in the eyes of the people of Dwaraka and, what was more, he had to regain the confidence of Balarama and Satyabhama.

Krishna sent messengers to Kashi and had Akrura brought to Dwaraka. He came but very unwillingly and with great fear in his heart. Krishna made

the people and his father and brother to be present in the council hall. Akrura was asked to come there. As soon as he came Krishna walked to him with a smiling face and took his hands in his. Placing him on the honoured seat he treated him as a special guest. Everyone was watching this and eager to know what it was all about: what was going to happen. Krishna asked Akrura about his welfare and his new life in Kashi. He then said: "I am told that you are acquiring a lot of punya by innumerable charitable deeds and by the many yajnas you have performed. I am very proud to know that you are now called 'Danapati', the king among givers. It is as it should be.

"But please clear one doubt in the minds of all the people of Dwaraka and those of my own people. Please admit to everyone that Shatadhanva gave you the gem Syamantaka. I have known this for a long time and did not want to take it from you since you were doing so much good with it. So many are benefiting from it and you are the cause of it. But, my dear Akrura, you are the cause of something else also. You have made me seen as an accomplice in the theft! That is what the citizens of Dwaraka think: that I gave the jewel to you. Please convince them that I had nothing to do with it. Actually, since Satrajit died without a son to perform his obsequies, this jewel should be handed down to his daughter and her sons who will offer rice and til to the dead man every year. But we do not want it. You observe all the rules of purity so well and you are a very good man. The jewel can stay with you. We really do not want it. Only, please be good enough to make my brother and my wife believe that I had nothing to do with you running away with it: that you did it on your own and not at my request."

Shamed to the verge of tears Akrura removed the upper cloth he was wearing and out of a knot in it he brought out the Syamantaka and placed it in Krishna's hand. Krishna held it in his hand for a while. His face was grim and sad and after a moment, his old smile came back. He showed it to everyone assembled there and gave it back to Akrura.

Krishna walked quietly out of the hall and no one spoke a word.

DRAUPADI'S SWAYAMVARA

One year had passed. Messengers came from Panchala to announce the swayamvara of Draupadi, the daughter of Drupada. Krishna, as she was named, had been born of the sacrificial fire along with her brother Dhrishtadyumna and there was a story behind it. Drupada had performed a sacrifice with a desire to get a son who could kill Drona, his enemy, and a daughter fit enough to be the bride of Arjuna. He admired Arjuna so much.

But the fates had so conspired that the desire of Drupada was not to be achieved. The Pandavas had perished in the fire at Varanavata and the king had to hold a swayamvara for Draupadi. The feat which the hero was to perform was a test of an archer's skill. If not Arjuna, at least an archer near enough to Arjuna in archery, was the desire of Drupada.

Krishna knew already that the Pandavas had escaped from the house of lac. As though he knew nothing he accepted the invitation for the swayamvara. The entire Yadava clan went to Panchala. But Krishna, at the eleventh hour, had told his son Pradyumna and his cousin Satyaki that, they should desist from attempting the Matsya yantra, which was the test. He wanted Arjuna to win the bride who was born for him. The five brothers would somehow manage to be there: he knew that.

Thing happened as predicted. Arjuna in the role of a brahmin pierced the Matsya yantra and won the hand of Draupadi. Later Drupada came to know that the Pandavas were alive and that it was Arjuna who had won Draupadi in the contest.

Krishna and Balarama went to the potter's house where the Pandavas were staying with their mother Kunti. It was the first time the cousins met. They fell at the feet of Yudhishtira and Bhima. Krishna embraced Arjuna: Nakula and Sahadeva prostrated at the feet of the Yadava brothers. At that moment was formed a friendship between Krishna and Arjuna and the

decision on the part of Krishna to be with the five brothers through the troubles that were in store for them.

A few months after this Krishna went to Indraprasta with his cousin Satyaki to spend a few months with Yudhishtira and his brothers. Thrilled at the thought that they would all be together for some time the Pandavas welcomed Krishna and Satyaki with great affection. Krishna went and greeted Kunti prostrating before her and taking the dust of her feet. He said: How are you? Is everything well with you? Now that your sons have come out of their hiding like the moon after an eclipse your troubles must be over." Kunti looked at his smiling face. Her voice was hoarse with pain: remembered pain is as terrible as the pain itself and her thoughts went back to the days of their hiding: their escape through the tunnel during the middle of the night: the long walk from Varanavata to the banks of the Ganga and again, from the banks of the river to the forest: their troubled sleep there: Hidimba's death. It all came back to her mind vividly and she related them all to Krishna and she spoke of the final humiliation when they lived at Ekachakra on the alms brought by her sons. "Krishna", she said, "You are with us now and that is enough. I can go through any amount of pain and suffering so long as I know that you are with us in thought and you will protect us. I knew it on the day you sent Ahura to Hastina long ago, after you had killed Kamsa. It is this love you have for us that has kept me hopeful all these years. I know that you are the Paramatma and that to you there is no illusion of "I" and "MINE". Still, you have been giving us your affection always and we will not perish." Yudhishtira said: "My lord, you are beyond the reach of the thoughts of the greatest of rishis who have performed tapas for years and yet it is our special privilege that you are one with us: that you have taken a human form and name for the sake of beings like us. I do not know what good deeds we have done to deserve this." Krishna stayed with them through the rainy season. The four months were the happiest months in the lives of the Pandavas. The Rajasuya followed afterwards and that was the end of their peace of mind and then began their years of exile and its attendant sufferings. But now they were happy.

KALINDI, MITRAVINDA AND SATYA

One day, during Krishna's stay with the Pandavas, Krishna and Arjuna decided to go and hunt in the dense forest which was said to be inhabited by many wild beasts. Tigers, wild boars and gentle deer were there in plenty. Both the friends enjoyed their hunt killing the wilder animals and frightening the deer and watching their frightened eyes when they ran.

It was late and they were tired. Arjuna was very thirsty and they went to the banks of the river Yamuna. After quenching their thirst with the waters of the river they sat down on the grass and rested their tired limbs.

While they were seated there, they found a young girl walking towards them. She was dark and very beautiful. She halted when she was some distance from them. They could see that she wanted to come nearer but was too nervous to do so. Krishna asked his friend to go and find out what she wanted. Arjuna approached her and said: "A beautiful and young woman like you should not be wandering alone like this in this wild spot. Who are you? Whose daughter are you? Where do you come from? Is there any help we can render you? Are you in trouble? tell us."

She looked at him and said: "I am the daughter of Surya and my name is Kalindi. I have been performing tapas with the desire of becoming the wife of Narayana. I have sworn that I will marry him or I will die. I have built for myself a small hermitage on the banks of the Yamuna and I am spending my time waiting for the coming of the Lord. Now my prayers have been answered and I have seen him."

She cast her eyes down when she saw Krishna smiling at her. Arjuna went to Krishna and related to him the story which Kalindi told him. Krishna went to Kalindi who prostrated at his feet. He lifted her up. He placed her in the chariot and went to Yudhishtira. Kalindi spent a happy time with Draupadi and the other women in the antahpura of the Pandavas.

It was during their stay on the banks of the Yamuna that one day. Agni, the god of fire, came to Krishna and Arjuna and asked them to help him burn the forest by name Khandava. They helped him consume it. Indra tried to put out the fire since he did not want the forest to be destroyed. But he found the prowess of his son to be too much to cope with.

When Agni asked them to help him consume the forest Arjuna told him: "If I have a powerful bow and a quiver with an infinite number of arrows, a good chariot and swift horses, then I can help you. Or else, it will not be easy." Agni asked Varuna for help. Varuna, the god of the waters appeared before them and he presented Arjuna with the famed bow by name Gandiva, an inexhaustible quiver and a chariot which was drawn by four white horses which earned for him the name 'Shvetavahana.' Arjuna rode round the entire forest with Krishna to whom Varuna had given the chakra. They prevented the creatures from escaping out of the conflagration. A few did, however, escape from the fire and one of them was Maya who fell at the feet of Arjuna and begged him for life. The rule set down for a kshatriya is that he should not kill anyone who has surrendered himself and begs to be left alive. And so Maya was allowed to go unscathed. In his gratitude Maya insisted on building a sabha for Yudhishtira in his city, Indraprasta.

When he returned to Dwaraka Krishna married Kalindi according to Vedic rites.

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Vasudeva had a sister by name Rajadhidevi and she was given in marriage to the king of Avanti. She had three children. The two sons were called Vinda and Anuvinda while the daughter was named Mitravinda. A swayamvara was held when she was of the marriageable age and Krishna went for the swayamvara. Mitravinda had chosen Krishna as her lord but the Avanti brothers who were friends of Duryodhana would not let her have her wish. Krishna knew that she had chosen him and so, while the other aspirants for her hand were looking on, and while the brothers stood helplessly by, Krishna took her and carried her away to Dwaraka and married her there.

* * *

Kosala was ruled by a saintly king by name Nagnajit. He had a beautiful daughter who was called Satya. People called her Nagnajiti after her father. Nagnajit had set a test for the prince who wished to marry her. He had seven wild bulls and they were uncontrollable: they had sharp horns and they were known to be wicked and vicious. No one could tame them and the king had said that he would give his daughter to the one who would be able to tame the wild bulls. Any number of princes went to the country of Kosala with a desire to tame the bulls and win the hand of Satya. Her beauty was famed the world over and great was the desire in the heart of everyone who came to Kosala. But not one of them could tame the wild bulls. Krishna, too, was one of the princes who went there. King Nagnajit was pleased to receive Krishna and he was very pleased and happy at the respect and deference shown him by the young man. When he was conversing with the king Krishna was seen by Satya. She had, like Rukmini, heard about Krishna and had been wanting to be his wife. Her heart was his already and she was dreading lest someone else should achieve the difficult victory over the wild bulls. She prayed and her thoughts were: "If I have been really sincere in my Vratas and pujas with this end in view, let them not go wasted. Let me be the fortunate one to have Krishna as my lord. But then, what have I got, or what have I done to deserve so much honour? The gods in heaven are ever laying their crowned heads at his feet. Years of meditation and tapas have not rewarded rishis with a sight of the lord. He has, for the good of mankind, assumed this form and I have the audacity to want him for myself. I can only pray for his favour."

The king then asked Krishna: "To what do I owe this honour? What can I do to please you?" Krishna smiled at him and, in a voice like the rumbling of a thunder cloud, he said: "It has been said by the wise that a kshatriya should not beg from another kshatriya. But I am making an exception. I desire your friendship and to forge it, I want the hand of your daughter." The king shed tears of joy and said: "It is indeed an honour you have bestowed on me by asking for the hand of Satya. The goddess Lakshmi is forever dwelling in your heart. What greater man can I choose for my

child?" He paused for a moment and said: "But, long ago, I have announced that my daughter will be given to the one who tames my seven wild bulls. You must have heard about it. You must also have been told how many young men have met their end in the duels they have fought with these animals. I do not want the world to talk ill of me or of you. If I give my Satya to you without your achieving a victory over the animals people are apt to say that I have broken my word and they will talk disparagingly of you too: that you did not dare to tackle the bulls. I know that to Krishna who killed Shakatasura when he was a child, who could lift the asura Trinavarta to the skies, who could lift up a mountain with his little finger, this task is contemptible. But please make the world believe that you won the contest and won Satya. It is a simple task I am asking you to perform."

Krishna laughed aloud and said: "So be it. I will do what you are asking of me." He then asked to be led to the place where the bulls were tied up. Taming the bulls was like child's play to him. He assumed seven forms and within moments of his touching them they followed him like calves. Their pride was gone and gone was their strength. He tied ropes round their necks and pulled them towards the stakes as though he were a child dragging toy animals made of wood.

The king and others who were watching set up a shout of joy and Satya became the wife of Krishna. The city was decorated very beautifully since the princess was marrying a hero and the hero was Krishna, the Yadava. After the wedding was over Krishna spent a few days with the king and then, placing his bride in his chariot and followed by the army given by king Nagnajit, Krishna returned to Dwaraka.

The kings who had been unable to win Satya were, naturally, angry with Krishna and they tried to fight with him while he was on his way to Dwaraka. After defeating them all Krishna went to his city and was greeted with joy by everyone since he had been away on a dangerous mission. Very few people knew who he really was, and to the ordinary men, the taming of the seven wild bulls was a hard task: specially so since they were reputed to have killed several of the aspirants to the hand of the princess.

BHADRA AND LAKSHMANA

Shrutakirti was Krishna's aunt, Vasudeva's sister and her daughter was Bhadra. She was the princess of Kekaya. She became Krishna's wife.

Lakshmana was a princess of Madra desa. Like Rukmini, she was in the habit of listening to people talk about Krishna and she wanted to be his wife. Her father Brihatsena knew what his daughter desired. He also knew that several princes were interested in her. He was not a very powerful king and so he could not afford to incur their enmity by openly showing his preference for Krishna. He, therefore, set a test and the winner could have Lakshmana's hand.

The test was similar to the Matsya yantra which Drupada had set up and which Arjuna pierced with five arrows. There was a slight difference, though. What Arjuna tackled was a target in the shape of fish which was revolving at a height. The contestant was not able to see it directly. He should see the reflection in a vessel filled with oil which was placed underneath it. Looking at the reflection he had to shoot his arrows and fell the Matsya. This fish could be seen clearly when one looked inside the vessel of oil.

But the one set up Brihatsena was even more difficult. The Matsya was covered. The contestant had to look at the vessel of oil in which the entire yantra was reflected but the Matsya was not visible from outside. The archer had to gauge instinctively where to shoot and fell the Matsya.

Many kings had assembled in the hall and one after another they went to the dais where the yantra was set up. And one by one, they came back without being able to hit the target. The Kaurava princes were there and also the Pandavas. Seeing that Krishna had come as a seeker of the hand of the princess Arjuna made up his mind not to try, remembering the swayamvara of Draupadi when Krishna assumed the role of a spectator.

Finally, when everyone had failed Krishna went up to the platform. He lifted the bow and strung it effortlessly. He then took up an arrow and looking inside the vessel full of oil he shot the arrow. With a single arrow he felled the Matsya.

The sun was in conjunction with the star Abhijit when this was achieved by Krishna. The heavens made music and rained flowers on Krishna when the Matsya was hit by him.

Lakshmana, dressed in white silks, walked to Krishna. Her face was down because of her shyness and slight smile lit up the blush which suffused her face. Her steps were slow and she looked a swan when she walked. The anklets she wore made tinkling music and there was no other noise in the hall. She stole a glance at him who was standing with a smile on his lips and she placed a garland made of gems on his neck. There was great celebration which followed the event.

Krishna placed her in his chariot and was about to leave when the other kings who had not been successful tried to stop him and tried to fight with him.

Krishna's bow famed by the name sharanga was too powerful for all of them and soon they had to beat a hasty retreat. In the chariot driven by Daruka Krishna returned to Dwaraka with his new bride.

All the eight queens of Krishna were very happy and among them Rukmini was dearest to the heart of Krishna.

NARAKASURA

Narakasura was a thorn on the side of Indra. He had become very powerful and he was able to defeat Indra. He took the precious earrings which adorned the ears of Aditi, the mother of Indra. He also took by force the famed umbrella of Varuna. The mountain Meru which was the favourite resort of Indra was now Naraka's and his harassment became so much that the devas could no longer put up with it. Indra came to Krishna and asked him to help him: the devas were desperate.

Krishna agreed to do so and he took Satyabhama with him. Narakasura lived in a fabulous city by name Pragjyotisha. It was very well fortified. It was surrounded on all sides by hills which were very difficult to scale. The city was guarded by an army made up of asuras carrying dreadful weapons. The weapons themselves formed a formidable barrier. After that, water, fire and air were all made to serve the purpose of defending the city. Tens of thousands of 'Pashas' given him by an asura named Mura were further strengthening the city. Krishna approached the city of Pragjyotisha. He took up his gada and with it he broke open the first obstacle which was the range of mountains. With his arrows he broke through the defence made up of weapons. His discus destroyed the defence made up of water and air: with his sword he snapped the Pashas laid there by Mura.

Krishna blew triumphantly on his conch, and the notes filled the minds of the people with terror. Krishna took up his gada again and split the fortress with it. When he heard the loud notes from Panchajanya the asura by name Mura woke up from his sleep. He was lying inside the water sleeping. From under the waters emerged Mura with his five heads which would strike terror into the hearts of all his enemies. His form was glowing like the sun and Agni at the end of the yuga. With his trident lifted high in the air he rushed towards Krishna. His five heads and ten arms looked like they were going to swallow up Krishna. Krishna had come to the fight

riding on his Garuda. Mura hurled his trident at Krishna's vahana, Garuda and shouted with all his five throats. He thought that he had achieved his desire. The very air in all the three worlds quivered with the echo of his shouting.

Krishna sent three arrows and broke the trident which had been hurled at Garuda. And, with his arrows Krishna hurt Mura in his faces. Mura was furious with anger and pain and he hurled his gada at Krishna. Krishna raised his own gada and the gada of the enemy was split into fragments. Mura now rushed towards Krishna with uplifted arms. Krishna used his chakra to cut off all the five heads of Mura who fell into the water like a huge mountain whose wings had been cut off by Indra's Vajra.

Mura had seven sons: Tamra, Antariksha, Shravana, Vibhavasū, Vasu, Nabhasvan and Aruna. They were very sad at the thought that their father had been vanquished so easily by this mere man. Their sorrow turned into anger and they came out of the city to fight with Krishna. They were led by Pita, the commander-in-chief who had been sent by Narakasura. In a matter of a few moments Krishna destroyed all of them.

Narakasura, the son of Bhumi, mother earth, was amazed at the fact that all of them had been killed by Krishna. He emerged out of the city and with him came an army of elephants: noble beasts which belonged to the clan of Airavata. They were also born of the ocean of milk and the air was filled with the sweet scent of the rut flowing from their heads. It was magnificent sight, this army made up of elephants.

Naraka came out and stood firm. He looked around and saw Krishna seated on the Garuda and with him was his wife Bhama. Krishna looked like a rain-bearing cloud with a streak of lightning across illuminating it. Naraka sent an astra by name Shataghni. The army which was attacking Krishna and Garuda was destroyed by Krishna's arrows and the elephants were almost all killed or wounded by Garuda and Krishna. Naraka was very angry since his astra became futile against Krishna. He fought with great ferocity and yet he could not upset Garuda even one bit. The bird stood firm as a small mountain. Naraka now used his Shakti and tried to hurt the bird. This also proved ineffective. Naraka decided that he would try to kill

Krishna and so he took up his trident. Even before he could hurl it Krishna threw his chakra and severed the head of Narakasura from his body.

There was great jubilation in the heavens when they saw the head of Naraka fallen on the ground. Bhumi, the mother of Naraka, came to Krishna, and placed at his feet the glorious kundalas (earrings) of Aditi: the umbrella which was the insignia of Varuna and finally she gave Krishna Mandara, the jewelled peak of the mountain Meru. She stood with folded palms in front of Krishna and praised him and then said: "My lord! ages back, when I had been taken to nether world by Hiranyaksha you took the form of a boar and lifted me out of the sea. Because of the thrill of your embrace this son Naraka was born to me. You gave him to me and now you have yourself taken him away from me. Please have mercy and spare this son of Naraka and let him live."

Krishna raised up the son of Naraka whom she had placed at his feet. Holding his hand Krishna entered the city called Pragjyotisha. There he saw many beautiful women. He found that Narakasura defeating so many kings and devas and nagas, had brought with him all the young maidens who where to be found in the cities he had conquered. There were sixteen thousand and one hundred maidens. He sent them all to Dwaraka. He also sent sixty-four white elephants which were the pride of Naraka to his city.

Taking the kundalas of Aditi in his hands he thought of going to the heavens and returning them himself to Indra and so Bhama and he were carried by Garuda to the heavens. Indra received them with great excitement and honoured Krishna who was their saviour. Indrani welcomed Bhama and the earthly couple spent some time with the heavenly ones.

One day, while looking at the rare sights in the heavens Bhama saw the tree by name Parijata. It had flowers whose perfume was unknown on the earth. Bhama fell in love with the tree and asked Krishna to get it for her.

Krishna told Indra that he would take the Parijata tree with him since Bhama wanted it. Indra refused to give it since he felt that the things belonging to the heavens should not be seen on the earth.

Krishna was first amused and later, angry with Indra for his behaviour. He pulled out the tree from the garden and, placing it on Garuda, returned to the earth. Indra could not brook this. He came in mid-air and fought with Krishna. The heavenly host was scattered and Indra was vanquished. Krishna brought the tree and had it placed in Satyabhama's garden. Indra, who had fallen at the feet of Krishna and asked such a great favour of him when he was troubled by Naraka had his wish granted. And, when his desire was fulfilled the mind of Indra became again clouded with arrogance and the pride born of wealth and power and he would not give a tree to Krishna. Strange indeed are the antics which wealth plays. So thought Krishna and, after a moment, forgot the entire incident.

* * *

RUKMI'S DAUGHTER

Rukmi, who had refused to enter the city of Kundinapura without his sister kept his word. He built a city named Bhojakata and lived there. He had a daughter by name Rukmavati. He held a swayamvara for her and Pradyumna, the son of Krishna, went there as a suitor. Much to the dismay of Rukmi his daughter seemed to have a desire to garland his enemy's son! He tried to dissuade her but Pradyumna, realising that she had chosen him, took her away forcibly from the hall and rode away.

Rukmi did not stop him nor did he fight with him since he loved his sister immensely and did not want to fight with her son.

To Pradyumna and Rukmavati was born a son and his name was Aniruddha. He was just as handsome as his father or his grandfather.

BANASURA, THE SON OF BALI

When Lord Narayana took the form of Vamana and asked Bali for the gift of three feet of land he had been so touched by the Bhakti which Bali displayed towards him that he promised to be the doorkeeper to Bali in the nether world. There was also the fact that Bali was the grandson of Prahlada, the favoured Bhakta of the Lord.

This Bali had a hundred sons, the eldest of whom was Banasura. He was a great devotee of Mahadeva. He commanded great respect in all the three worlds since he was a good person. He was a great giver: ever truthful and highly intelligent. He had very strong principles and he ruled the city by name Shonita. Because of the love he had for Mahadeva, and because he was the favourite Bhakta of Mahadeva, all the devas served Banasura as though they were his servants.

Once, during the dance of Mahadeva, Banasura who had as many as thousand hands, played on the drum – Mridanga - as the accompaniment to the divine dance and Mahadeva was so pleased with him that he asked him to name any boon he desired. Bana had, by now, become slightly arrogant about his strength and about the love the Lord had for him. He laid his jewelled head at the feet of Mahadeva and said: "My lord, I am so bored."

"In this entire world there is no one except yourself to match his strength with mine. These thousand arms which you have given me are just a burden since they have no work. I went to the mountains and crushed them to dust. I then challenged the elephants which guard the eight quarters and they became so frightened that they ran away from me.

"I want someone to fight with me. Is there anyone strong enough? That is all I desire."

Mahadeva knew that his end was drawing near and he said: "You stupid fool! I thought that you were different from the others: that you would

have some sense. Even you have succumbed to the dread enemy: arrogance. Your desire will be granted, I assure you. When your flagstaff breaks and falls to the ground you will be made to fight with one who is as powerful as I am then your arrogance will be punished."

USHA'S DREAM

Banasura had a beautiful daughter by name Usha. One night she had a dream. In her dream she met a very handsome young man whom she had never seen before. He spent the night with her and when she woke up she found that it was all a dream. Her friend, Chitralekha, the daughter of the king's minister, found her in tears.

"What has upset you, my friend?", she asked with great concern in her voice. "I have never seen you like this before. Tell me." Usha said: "You are the only one to whom I can tell what has happened to me. Last night I dreamed of a very handsome young man. He was very young. His eyes were like the petals of a lotus. He was wearing yellow-coloured silk and his arms were long and beautiful. He held me in his arms and I was happy the whole night. And now, I am sunk in woe because he left me and went away." And Usha placed her head in her two palms and wept. Chitralekha said: "Listen! Perhaps you have seen some young man some time back and he has managed to enter your dream since your thoughts opened the gateway of the dream world to him. It is your own mind which has conjured up such an elaborate vision. It is not possible for someone whom you have never seen to be seen by you in a dream. Think, Usha. Have you seen him?"

Usha said: "But I am telling you, I have never seen this man before. If I had, do you think I would have been able to forget him? Chitra, I do not know what to do. Do you think I will dream of him tonight also? That is my only hope." Chitralekha thought for a while and then said: "Look, I have learnt the art of painting. Sage Narada was the one who has taught me to paint. I will paint the gods and the kings on the face of the earth and every human being who is reputed to be handsome. You tell me which of them your lover is."

Chitralekha began to paint. She first painted lord Ganesha who averts all obstacles in any mission. She then painted her guru Narada. Then the devas, gandharvas, siddhas, charanas, pannagas, daityas, vidyadharas, yakshas. For everyone of them Usha shook her head and said: "Not he, MY lord was much more handsome than this." And so it went on. Chitralekha now began to paint the kings on the earth. House after House was rejected by the princess. When she came to the House of the Yadavas Usha said:- "Wait, there is some sort of resemblance between the one you have painted and my lord. Who is this?"

It was Vasudeva. Chitralekha then painted Balarama and then Krishna. The resemblance was more pronounced, according to Usha, specially when Krishna was painted. Chitralekha then painted Pradyumna. Usha said: "It is almost the portrait of my lord. Only he was younger." Chitralekha finally painted the picture of Aniruddha and from the blush on the face of Usha she knew that was the man. She smiled at Usha and said: "Now that I know who has stolen your heart, I will steal him and bring him to you."

"How?", asked Usha with her eyes wide open.

"Just wait and see," said Chitralekha.

Night had fallen. Chitralekha was well versed in yoga. And she flew in the air and reached the city of Dwaraka. She entered the inner apartments of the palace and after searching for a while, she found Aniruddha sleeping alone on a cot. She lifted him bodily and brought him to Shonitapura and left him by the side of Usha.

When he was woken up gently by a pair of flower-like hands Aniruddha opened his eyes. But he thought that he was dreaming of a beautiful woman making love to him. It took him some time to realise what had happened.

Chitralekha and Usha concealed him in the antahpura very effectively and time passed by unnoticed. At least by the lovers. Chitralekha kept jealous guard over the lovers. But somehow, the servants came to know of it and one by one they started noticing Usha and her face suffused with joy. They

knew that only the love of a man can bring that look to a woman's eyes. Usha was in love and her lover was there.

Soon they went to Banasura and said: "My lord, we have come to tell you about something which is happening in the apartments of your daughter. We have been guarding her very carefully but somehow, a man has entered the inner chambers and, we are afraid, he has been with her for quite some time. We were not sure till now. But we know for certain that there is a man in the palace and we thought it our duty to inform you. It is up to you to do what you will."

Banasura rushed to the apartments of Usha. His coming was so sudden that he was able to find out what was happening. He found Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna, was sitting on the cot with his daughter and they were playing a game of dice. For a moment Bana was taken aback with the handsomeness of the young man.

Aniruddha was quickly surrounded by the guards and he tried to fight with them and with Bana also. Seeing that it would be hard to capture this young man Bana used the Nagapasha and bound up the offending young lover of his Usha and took him captive in spite of Usha's weeping remonstrances.

In the meantime Dwaraka was sunk in woe. The people in the palace could not find the young prince anywhere and try as they might, they were unable to find him. They had no clue as to where he had gone or what had happened to him. Four months passed by.

To the presence of Krishna came Narada, who was welcomed eagerly by the brothers. They honoured him as was big due and after he was seated in a high seat Narada looked at them and asked them: "You are all looking preoccupied. Something seems to be worrying you. What has happened?"

Krishna said: "Of course you know why we are worried but because you have to ask, you are asking us, my lord." Narada smiled as Krishna continued: "It is about my grandson Aniruddha. One night he suddenly disappeared and so many days have passed and still we have not been able

to locate his whereabouts. Only you can help us. Please tell us where he is."

"I know where he is," said Narada.

"Where?", asked Krishna and Rama eagerly. "Where is he?"

"He is a captive," said the rishi. "Banasura has tied him up with his Nagapasha and Aniruddha is in captivity."

"But how can that be possible, my lord?", asked the Yadava brothers in surprise. "He had no quarrel with Banasura. He does not even know that such a person exists."

"You are right," said Narada. "Aniruddha has no quarrel with Bana. But Banasura is highly incensed with Aniruddha." They were silent for a moment. Then Krishna said: "There is, evidently, a story behind this captivity of the youngster. Please tell us what happened, my lord."

"I came just for that. I am sure you will enjoy the story," said Narada and told them about how Usha dreamed of Aniruddha: about her laments and about Chitrlekha's attempts to find out who the young man was: about the painting of the portraits and he elaborated on it. He smiled mischievously and said: "Krishna, when Chitrlekha painted your picture Usha said: 'He was very much like this. But he is much more handsome and much younger.'"

"Krishna," said Balarama, "evidently your days of charm are all over; your grandson is 'more handsome' according to a girl in the asura house!" Krishna smiled at his words and looked at Narada as if asking him to proceed. Narada then told them about how Chitrlekha carried away the young prince to please her friend. And about how Bana came to know of it and rushed into the antahpura to find Usha and her Aniruddha playing a game of dice!

Balarama laughed loudly and Krishna was equally amused to hear about the escapade of his grandson.

After a while they became serious and said: "But we have to go now and rescue our young gallant."

THE ATTACK ON BANA'S CITY

Krishna collected a large army and marched towards Shonitapura. He was accompanied by Balarama, Satyaki, Pradyumna and other Yadava heroes. They attacked the capital city of Bana on all sides. The Yadava army was twelve *akshowhinis* in strength and with an equal number of men Bana came out to fight with them. An unusual feature of this fight was the duel fought between Krishna and lord Mahadeva. Mahadeva came to fight for his Bhakta and his son Kumara had come with him. Krishna fought with Shankara and Pradyumna fought with Kumara. Balarama was left to tackle the ministers of Bana.

Krishna's Sharanga was busy and so was Mahadeva's Pinaka. The gods assembled in the skies to watch the fight. During the fight Mahadeva was made to sleep by the astra by name Jrumbhana. Krishna then began to fight with the rest of the army.

Seeing the havoc played on his army Bana came out and fighting first with Satyaki, Bana abandoned him and came to fight with Krishna. He used his bows, several of them, and Krishna broke each one of them. During a lapse in the fight Bana went into his castle and after a while came out refreshed and ready to fight once again. He seemed like he was willing to fight for ever. Krishna took up his chakra and cut off his arms.

Most of them had fallen to the ground when Mahadeva intervened and said: "Krishna Banasura is a favoured Bhakta of mine. I do not want him to be killed. I have protected him for so long and he depends on me for his very life. Do not kill him." Krishna said: "I will certainly obey your commands, my Lord. This Bana is the son of Bali, one of my Bhaktas. And again, none of the descendants of Prahlada will be killed by me.

"I have promised that to him. I cut away the arms of Bana so that he will be cured of his arrogance about his strength. This Bana will be one of your

attendants ever by your side and he need fear no one." Chastened beyond words, Bana prostrated before Rama and Krishna. He went inside his palace and placing Usha and Aniruddha in his chariot brought them to Krishna. In the midst of great celebrations the young couple were taken to Dwaraka.

NRUKA, THE SON OF IKSHVAKU

Once the sons of the Yadava heroes led by Samba, Pradyumna and others were playing in the gardens adjoining the outskirts of the city. When they had been playing for a long time they were thirsty and so they went in search of a lake, a river or a well. Soon they came to a well. They looked inside but found that the well was dry and there was not even a drop of water. But, what made them forget even their extreme thirst was a big garden lizard. It was enormous in size and it looked at them. They took pity on it and tried to lift it out of the well into which it had fallen by chance; or so they thought.

They tied threads and then stronger threads and finally ropes to lift it out of the well. They could not do so. They were really surprised at the unusual reptile and they rushed to Krishna and told him about it: about the strange creature which they saw inside the well. They insisted on his coming with them to see it.

He went and when he saw the poor garden lizard he lifted it out of the well with his left hand. Even as the amazed boys were looking on, the lizard changed its form. They found a divine form standing before them. He was golden in colour and his clothes and the garlands of flowers round his neck and everything about him proclaimed him to be a celestial being. He stood in the presence of Krishna with folded palms, after prostrating before him. His eyes were wet with tears of joy.

Krishna asked him: "You must be out of the dwellers in the heavens. If you will not mind telling us about it, please let us know what sin you have committed in your previous janma that you were forced to take the form which you have just abandoned. We are all very eager and curious to know your story. Please recount it to us."

The divine being bowed his head and once again touched the feet of Krishna with his jewelled head and said:

"My lord, I am the son of Ikshvaku, the king of the solar race. My name is Nruka. I have been famous in my days. When the names of those who have given gifts in plenty are spoken of, my name will also be mentioned. You must have heard about me. You are the Lord of lords and you are the watcher in the mind of every man. Time has no meaning for you since you are yourself Time and there is nothing which you do not know. And yet, since I have been commanded by you I will tell you the story of my life. Let the youngsters listen.

"First let me assure you that I am not bragging. I am relating only facts when I tell you that you can, perhaps, count the grains of sand on the earth: the number of stars which light up the sky: the drops of rain which wet the earth when the rainy season sets in: but you will not be able to count the number of cows which I have given away as gifts to brahmins.

"The ten different types of superior cows which go by the name Kapila were given by me as gifts. And those who received them were all good men, righteous and god-fearing brahmins who were poor and who would use the cows properly and with great affection. And I also gave away other types of cows, land, gold, houses, horses, and elephants and many other things. I also performed many yajnas. I had tanks dug for the use of my subjects and I had arranged that thirsty travellers should always be given water placed for them on the way wherever they travelled.

"Once, I had given a cow as a gift to a brahmin. By some mistake, by carelessness on the part of some servant or something, this cow had strayed back into my fold. I did not know this. During the next few days I gave it away as a gift to another brahmin who had come for the purpose of receiving something. When this man was taking it home the previous owner saw it and said: "That cow is mine."

" 'No, it is mine since the king Nruka gave it to me,' said the second brahmin.' "

" 'The same cow was given to me by the same king Nruka,' said the other man and they quarrelled. Finally they came to me and, together they began to accuse me. 'You are indeed a contemptible man,' said they. 'You gave something as a gift and you have, with the same hand, taken it back.' "

"I was horrified by their words. I had been placed in a dilemma. I fell at their feet and said: 'Please forget all about this cow. I will give each one of you one lakh of cows far superior to this cow. Please abandon this cow. I am falling at your feet and I ask you to forgive me. Do not assign me to the hell meant for sinners who give and take back what they have given.' "

"Both of them refused to take anything from me and they walked away, both of them, in wrath. It was at that moment that messengers came from the God of Death to take me away.

"I was in the presence of Yama and he said: 'O king! you have done so much good to the world and the punya you have acquired will be enjoyed by you. You will also have to suffer for that one sin you have committed though inadvertently. Would you like to enjoy the fruits of your good actions first or would you like first, to suffer for the one sin?' I said: 'Let me suffer for my sin first.' "

'Then fall,' said Yama, and the next moment I found myself to be a dreadful lizard. I have had the good fortune to remember my previous birth, however.

"I have been seen by your merciful eyes and your hands have touched me and it is the touch of Amrita which the devas drink. I now think it was not a sin which pushed me into this well but all my good actions put together; or else, would I have had the privilege of being rescued by you? Please grant me the boon that I will ever think of you and your lotus feet."

Prostrating again at the feet of Krishna the king Nruka who was now a celestial, left them and went into the sky to be lost in the clouds in a matter of moments.

BALARAMA'S ANGER

Once, Balarama suddenly thought of the days he had spent in Brindavan and he decided to go there and see his old friends. As always, to think was to act, as far as Balarama was concerned. He called for his chariot and went to Brindavan.

Great was the excitement when Balarama went there. Everyone was thrilled. Rama prostrated before Nanda and Yashoda. After they had talked for a while and after spending some time happily with them Balarama went to visit all his old friends. It was thrilling for him and for the others to recall past days. They had all grown up and their children were now grazing the cows and calves. They spoke about the many things they were wont to do in those days: the games they played and the great fun they had. They spoke about Krishna and they wanted to know every little thing which had happened to the brothers ever since they had parted in Mathura after Kamsa had been killed. It was all so long ago! Rama and Krishna were just boys and now they were married and had children! They kept on asking question after question and Balarama answered everyone of them in great detail. They were greatly excited when he told them about the frequent invasions of Jarasandha into Mathura and about how the entire city was evacuated to a new city which had been built in the midst of the sea.

The gopis also joined in the talks. They asked Balarama: "Rama, tell us if Krishna is having a happy life with the women in the city. Does he think of us at all? and about the days he spent here with us? Does his mind ever wander back some time to the days of his childhood? Will he come at least once to Brindavan? To see his parents if not us! For his sake we gave up everything: mother and father meant nothing to us. Brother and sister was a relationship we forgot completely. Why! we never gave a thought to our children or to our husbands when our minds were filled with the image of Krishna.

"He abandoned us and with you and that man Akrura he went away to the city. When we prayed to him and asked him not to go he said: 'I have to go now. But I will certainly come back to you.'

"We were, for a long time, living on hopes: hoping that he would come back to us. We thought he would be with us again. He sent a messenger, Uddhava: and again our spirits rose. But he never came. He is an ungrateful man: a fickle-minded person like the bee which sucks honey from the flower and then flies away never to return. We are sorry for the women in the city who, we are sure, will be deceived like we were by his winning ways and his lies steeped in honey. When we think of his face, his smile and his voice when he spoke those lies, how can we be angry with him? Even now we feel like believing his words. Such is the charm he has. Come, let us shake ourselves and talk of other things. It is a fruitless task. If he can do without us, so can we."

The women were weeping openly and Balarama pacified them with loving words. Like the moon is glorious when the sun has set, even so, when Krishna was there they had not thought much of Balarama and now they realised how charming he was and full of love for them. Balarama spent two full months with them: Chaitra and Vaishakha. He spent the time with them on the banks of the Yamuna.

Balarama was very fond of drink by name Varuni. It was a very intoxicating drink and he would wander around in Brindavan in the forests, their old haunts when they used to graze the cows. His thoughts would soon become sad and that would make him take more of the Varuni to make him forget the pain caused by remembering those happy days.

He looked like a wild elephant when he wandered around like this. One day he was so intoxicated that he did not know what was happening to him. He had lost one of his earrings and his blue silk was slipping. His face, wet with sweat, looked like a lotus with water drops clinging to it.

In his intoxication he wanted the river Yamuna to come to the spot where he was, so that he could have a bath in the cool blue waters. Yamuna thought that he was so drunk he did not know what he was saying. And so, she ignored his command. Balarama became furious and he said; "You are

arrogant and you deserve to be punished. I will split you into a thousand little rivulets and see that you do not exist any more," and he lifted up his weapon, the plough. Yamuna was shocked into realising that he was really angry. She rushed to him and, falling at his feet, prayed to him to spare her.

The great-hearted Balarama dropped his weapon and forgot all about her offending him, at once.

He then entered the river with the gopis and spent a long time in spot. When he came out of the river the goddess Lakshmi appeared before him and gave him two pieces of blue silk and golden garlands and many ornaments. Wearing them, Balarama looked like the Airavata, the elephant of Indra. Even now, there can be seen the groove which was caused by Balarama when he tried to change the course of Yamuna.

PAUNDRAKA VAASUDEVA

There was a country named Karusha. The king of that country was Paundraka. He was one of the many friends of Jarasandha. He had accompanied Shishupala when he went to Vidarbha for a wedding which did not take place! Paundraka had always hated Krishna. On the one hand it was jealousy and on the other, it was loyalty to his friends.

When Balarama had been to Brindavan Paundraka wanted to fight with Krishna. He sent a messenger to Dwaraka. Krishna was in the assembly hall with his father Vasudeva and his grandfather, Ugrasena. Paundraka's messenger came and said: "I have brought a message for you from my king Paundraka of Karusha. I am just the carrier of the message and remember, please, that they are not my words." Having assured himself that he would not be killed for the words he was about to speak, he said:

" 'You are going about saying that you are Vaasudeva, the *avatara* of Lord Narayana. Abandon that thought at once. *I am the real Vaasudeva*. Like children call each other king and queen and minister when they play a game, someone has called you by this name and has said that you are an incarnation of Narayana; and, in your foolishness, you have begun to believe it. Actually, I am the real *avatara*. I have been born to be the succour of all human beings. As for you, you must give up the name Vaasudeva. You seem to be wearing the weapons and other things which, in reality, belong to me and only to me. Surrender yourself to me and all my things to me in which case I will be merciful to you like the Lord whose *avatara* I am. Or, else, you will have to meet me in a fight.' "

Peal on peal of laughter greeted the words of Paundraka which were repeated by the messenger. Krishna joined in the merriment and after they spoke of it as an immense joke Krishna turned to the messenger and said: "You thought I would get angry with you because of the words of your foolish king and so you asked me to assure you that I will not hurt you.

Contrary to your expectations, or rather, your fears, I am grateful to you for the role you are playing. We have never laughed as much as we have laughed today."

He then said: "I will give you a message to be taken to your king. This is it: 'You fool! You have acquired some stupid discus and other things and you dare to call yourself Lord Narayana. I will soon make you part with these accessories. I will cure you of your bragging. Soon you will lie dead and the only succour you will be capable of giving will be to the crows, hawks and dogs which will draw near your body to make a meal of you.' "

The messenger went back to his king and delivered the reply which Krishna had given to the words of Paundraka.

Krishna called for his chariot and went to Karusha. Paundraka heard about the coming of Krishna and he emerged out of the city with three *akshowhinis* of army. The king of Kashi who was Paundraka's friend had brought his three *akshowhinis* and joined the fight.

Krishna saw Paundraka. He had a conch, a discus, a mace and he had managed to acquire a mole on his chest to look like the Srivatsa on the chest of the Lord. He was wearing a jewel and it was supposed to be Kaustubha. A garland adorned his neck like the Vanamala which Narayana has on his neck. Two pieces of yellow silk covered his frame. Krishna looked at Paundraka dressed like himself and laughed with great amusement like one would at an actor who had assumed the role of another man and was trying to live the part and failing!

The fight began in right earnest and it was furious. Krishna destroyed most of the army which was fighting with him. He then approached Paundraka in single fight and said: "Paundraka you sent word through your messenger about the weapons which have to be abandoned by me because they belong to you. I am now going to send those very weapons against you.

"I never did want to fight with anyone. You provoked me and asked me to give up my name. You challenged me to fight with you. You will now be made to give up your entity because of your foolishness." He sent sharp

arrows to hurt Paundraka. The king of Karusha was badly hurt and still he fought on. Finally Krishna severed his head from his body with his chakra.

In a matter of moments the king of Kashi was also killed and his head was hurled into the city by the arrow which had cut it off. The unnecessary fight was at an end and Krishna, more sad than angry, returned to Dwaraka.

The son of the king of Kashi by name Sudakshina performed the funeral rites for his father and he swore to himself: "I will avenge the death of my father," and he sought the help of his preceptors to teach him how to perform a penance to please Mahadeva.

When his tapas was concluded Mahadeva came to him: listened to his desire and said: "I will teach you the cult by name Abhichara which is a special homa performed with the death of someone in mind." Sudakshina performed it as he was taught to do and out of the fire was born a terrible being. It was glowing like the fire whose other form it was. Its hair was like copper wires. The eyes were spitting fire and it was brandishing a trident in its immense arm. The earth trembled at every step it took and, shouting hideously the newly created form which spelt death rushed towards Dwaraka.

The citizens in Dwaraka hid themselves wherever they could when they saw this dreadful being. Krishna was relaxing in his chambers playing a game of dice. He heard the men screaming with fear. He came out on the terrace and he saw the citizens rushing to his palace. They saw him and said: "Krishna! Krishna! A dreadful fire has entered the city and it is burning everything in its path. It is hurrying towards your palace. Do something and save us from this fear." Krishna held out his hand and said: "Do not be afraid. I will take care of you." The dice was still in his hand and with the other he took the chakra and sent it towards the form of fire which, he knew, was the gift of the Lord Mahadeva to Sudakshina. It was a demon, a durdevata, one of the lesser gods and it had to be quelled only by a weapon which was more powerful than itself. The chakra, glowing like the twelve suns at the end of the yuga, approached the form of fire. It could not bear the fury of the chakra and so it turned round and fled from there. The chakra was pursuing it and it entered the city of Sudakshina

and, since he had sent it, it turned against him and burned him up. The city was also burnt and the chakra went back to Krishna.

BALARAMA KILLS DVIVIDHA

In the meantime Balarama had another adventure. He was very fond of wandering in the forests on the hill Raivataka which was very near the country, Anarta. One day while he was there with his many women Balarama encountered a monkey by name Dvividha. Dvividha was a monkey and he had been a great friend of Naraka who had been killed by Krishna. This Dvividha was also an ancient monkey. He was the brother of Mainda. He was once the minister of Sugriva during the Treta Yuga. Time, perhaps, dulls the sensibilities of even good people. How else can one explain the fact that this monkey which had spent so much time with Sri Rama, could become so wicked?

Anyway, he became a devoted friend of Naraka. At his death Dvividha decided to avenge the killing of his dear friend. He was bent on destroying the cities and the villages and the gokulas systematically. He would pull out small hillocks and with these as weapons he would destroy entire villages. His anger was mostly against Krishna and so he was aiming to destroy as much of Anarta as possible. He had the strength of ten thousand elephants. Once he dived into the sea and with his arms he churned the waters. So powerful were his arms that the waters overflowed and the country nearby was completely submerged under water. This wicked monkey would enter the ashramas of the rishis and break the fruit-giving trees there. He would put out the sacred fires there which the rishis tended with so much care. He would kidnap men and women and keep them inside caves in the mountains and close up the mouths of the caves like wasps would tiny worms in mud houses.

Once when Balarama was wandering on the Raivataka with his women, Dvividha heard sweet music coming from the mountain side and went there. There he saw many women surrounding a handsome man. Balarama

was wearing a garland of lotuses: his eyes were rolling with intoxication. He was singing with the women.

Dvividha climbed on top of a tree and played his pranks like shaking the branches, making faces at the women and grinning away and chattering. The women laughed at the antics of the monkey who looked so strange and so big. Dvividha did not like their laughing at him. Ignoring the presence of Balarama Dvividha began to tease the women. Balarama became angry and he threw a stone at the monkey. The monkey evaded the stone skilfully and he grabbed the pot of wine which had held the favourite drink of Balarama: his Varuni! He broke the pot and, at the same time, he tried to grab the garments of the women, tear them and ill-treat the women.

Before breaking the pot Dvividha had drunk quite a large quantity of the wine which served only to make him more objectionable to Balarama. His behaviour was not like that of ordinary monkeys and Balarama's anger knew no bounds. He raised his weapons, the plough and the pestle. Dvividha had broken a bough from a tree and with this he hit Balarama on the head. In return he was hit by the pestle by name Sunanda. Blood began to flow from the wound but he heeded it not. He tore up tree after tree and threw them at Balarama who broke everyone of them. Dvividha then began to rain stones on his opponent. They were like raindrops to Balarama. Dvividha now came very near Rama and with his immense fists he hit Balarama on the chest. Rama dropped his weapons and hit him on the chin. It was a single blow and that was enough. Dvividha fell and blood flowed from his mouth like a river. And so ended the terrible monkey who was causing such havoc in Anarta.

LAKSHANA, DURYODHANA'S DAUGHTER

A swayamvara was held in Hastina. The princess was Lakshana, the daughter of Duryodhana. Samba, the son of Krishna and Jambavati went there and forcibly carried away the princess. The Kauravas were displeased at this and said: "This young man is far inferior to us in every way. He should not be allowed to marry our princess. His behaviour is not good. Without asking for her hand in the approved manner, he has forced his attentions on our Lakshana. Let us capture him and tie him up. What can the Yadavas do? They are, after all, our vassals and they can do nothing to us. When they hear that their son has been captured by us and imprisoned, they will then realise our power. Their arrogance will be brought under control, like the senses are, when a man practices Pranayama."

Karna, Shala, Bhuri and Duryodhana led the group. The elders like Bhishma did not object to this.

Samba saw that he was being pursued by the Kaurava host. He fought single-handed with them. They could not face his valour. He fought with them for a long time and they were not able to do anything to him. Finally they all surrounded him and all together they vanquished him and captured him.

It was Narada, as usual, who gave the news to Balarama and to Krishna: that Samba had been captured by the Kauravas and imprisoned. The Yadavas were getting ready to fight: to attack Hastina and to teach the Kauravas a lesson. Balarama, however, had ever been a peace-loving man. He tried to avert the fight. He pacified his angry kinsmen and, accompanied only by some elders and several brahmins, he rode to Hastina in his chariot. Like the sun surrounded by the planets he stood outside the city of Hastina. He stopped the chariot in the gardens on the outskirts of the city.

Balarama sent Uddhava as a messenger to Dhritarashtra to announce to him and to the elders, Bhishma and Drona and others that Balarama had come to Hastina and that he wanted to meet them.

Uddhava went with the message to the court of the king. Bhishma was there: Dhritarashtra and Drona as well as Kripa: also Duryodhana and his inevitable companions: Karma and Shakuni. They received Uddhava's message very graciously and came out to meet Balarama with rich gifts and the many articles which are, as a rule, taken when receiving an honoured guest.

They met Balarama and honoured him as was his due. They then exchanged courtesies and enquired after the well-being of all those at Dwaraka and at Hastina.

After all these exchanges were over Balarama said: "Please listen carefully to the message sent by our king, my grandfather, king Ugrasena. 'We have come to know that our child Samba has been captured, in an Adharma fight by you, and that he has been kept as a prisoner. We do not like to let misunderstandings spoil family feeling and the friendly relationship we have been having all these years. There should be union amongst kinsmen and so, without delay, please return our child to us after releasing him from this humiliating bondage.'"

These words of Balarama couched in much gentle and soft terms were not received well by the Kauravas. They laughed at him and said: "Indeed, you think too highly of yourselves. You have become our kinsmen because of the fact that Kunti, one of your daughters, was given in marriage to our prince. Or else how can you claim this 'kinship' with us? With the great House of the Kauravas? In our generosity we have let you rule the kingdom which rightly belongs to us. And again, since we are not very particular, we have let you behave as though you are our equals. Actually we should have objected long ago to your use of a throne and a white umbrella which are the insignia of royalty. Evidently these favours have gone to your heads and you seem to be under the impression that you can dictate terms to us. How can you dare to hope that the captive we have will be given a chance to come back to you?"

Without waiting for a reply from Balarama they turned their faces towards the city. Balarama was so shocked by the behaviour of the Kauravas and their words which were so very insulting that for a moment he stood stunned. He did not know what to say for a while. He then spoke to his companions and said: "I made a mistake. The Yadavas were very keen on fighting with these men. Krishna was furious because of his son being captured and they all wanted to come and fight. The army was being assembled. I was the one who stopped them and said that one should try and avoid a quarrel with one's kinsmen at any cost. Evidently Krishna and the others were right and I was in the wrong. Animals which have too much fat in them should be punished only by beating and soft words will not get you anywhere with arrogant people since they do not understand them.

"The Kauravas are slow-witted and proud and evidently they are spoiling for a fight and that is why they had the courage to talk like this to me! There is nothing which makes man lose his sense except power and the pride born of wealth. I will teach them a lesson. I will make the world Kaurava-less." He took up his weapon the plough and he said: "I will pull the entire city of Hastina and drown it in the river Ganga."

Balarama struck the earth with his plough and began to pull the city towards the river.

The men in the city felt a tremor in the earth. A moment later the tremor increased and it seemed as though the earth were shaking. The city began to move slowly but steadily towards the river. People rushed out of their houses in panic. The Kauravas saw what was happening. Too late they realised it. They had to appease Balarama at any cost. They rushed to the prison where Samba was held captive and hurriedly they placed him in a chariot and with him they placed the princess. They rushed to the spot where Rama was stationed: and all the while the city was moving steadily towards the river.

The citizens followed their kings and everyone rushed to Rama and said: 'Please desist from the destruction of innocent people. We have sinned against you and we ask you to forgive us. In our arrogance we were blind

and we insulted the power that is you. You must take pity on us and be merciful. Save us. Forgive us."

Balarama was famed for his short temper. He could get angry very easily but he could be pacified easily too. He was pleased with the way they realised their fault and he pulled out his plough from the ground saying: "Do not be afraid. I will not hurt your city any more."

Duryodhana fell at his feet with tears in his eyes. When Balarama was in Mithila during the unpleasant episode relating to the killing of Satrajit and the pursuit of the killer Shatadhanva, Duryodhana had come to Mithila and had spent a long time with Balarama. He had become the pupil of Rama and had learnt the art of fighting with the mace from Balarama. It was this: the fact that his pupil should have treated him like this which had angered Balarama so much. But Duryodhana, now repentant, made up for it by giving costly gems and clothes and fully caparisoned horses and elephants and other suitable gifts to young Samba.

After having been honoured like this, Balarama left for his Dwaraka with the young couple.

He related to his brother and the others the happenings at Hastina and his own anger which was pacified later.

It is said that even now the city of Hastina shows the signs of Balarama's wrath by leaning towards the river Ganga on the southern side.

TWO REQUESTS TO KRISHNA

Once, when Krishna was seated in the council hall by name Sudharma with his brother and others, there came to see him a stranger. He was announced and was asked to come in. He entered and he saluted the entire assembly. He had placed both his hands on his head and he stood like that for a while. He then fell at the feet of Krishna and said: "I have come from Girivraja, the capital of Jarasandha."

A sudden silence fell on the entire group of listeners. The name of their old enemy was enough to alert them. The stranger felt the silence and looked inquiringly at them. They looked at Krishna and he said: "And what is the message sent to us by our enemy, Jarasandha?"

The messenger shook his head and said: "It is not from Jarasandha. I am sorry I did not speak clearly right from the beginning. I am coming from the many kings whom he has kept as prisoners in his mountain fort. Jarasandha, as you know, is a great Bhakta of Lord Mahadeva and he has sworn that he would offer a garland, a mala, made of the heads of kings: a Rundamala of crowned heads. With this intention he has defeated several kings and if they are still alive it is because a hundred has not been reached yet. These captive kings have sent you a message through me. They say: 'Krishna! We have been told that your prowess is unequalled and that you have ever protected those who have come to you for succour. We have surrendered ourselves to you entirely. We have no one else but you.

"They say that a man who is so fond of his life that he forgets to perform any good actions: who is intent on doing only wrong things: who has not earned the punya of having a darshan of the Lord: such a man will not live very long and his next birth will also be lacking in the grace of the Lord.

"As for us, we have long abandoned the desire to live long. Our thoughts have been set only on you and your glory. Because of our constant

meditation on you the desires of the world have no charm for us. You are Time and we salute you. We have been told that you have taken this human form for the purpose of destroying sinfulness and to establish Dharma on the earth once again. When such is the case, how is it possible for an ordinary mortal like Jarasandha to make us, so many of us, unhappy? It is indeed sad that such pain and suffering and unhappiness should exist on the earth where Narayana and Adishesha are said to be walking as ordinary human beings. Such a thing should not happen, my lord.

"The many pleasures of the world which are the birthright of kings are, to us, very much like some glorious dreams we had, and they are just as evanescent. We know it and we have realised it: and yet we are unhappy because of the Maya created by you. We are worrying about our children and our people whom we have been forced to abandon because of Jarasandha. We should, in the natural course of events, forget all these things, break all these bondages and think on your lotus feet to attain tranquillity. But we are not able to do so. We are unhappy that this has happened to us and it is up to you to help us. Jarasandha, who has the strength of ten thousand elephants has tied us up like a herd of cattle. This bondage is giving us pain even as the bondage of Karma. Please release us from these, Lord."

The messenger said: "This is the message which the captive kings have sent through me secretly. They have set all their hopes on your helping them. You have to release them."

Even as he was finishing his talk Sage Narada, glowing like a heap of gold, appeared in their midst. Everyone stood up as one man and honoured the son of Brahma. He was seated on a high and noble seat and then Krishna said: "My lord, we are eager, as always, to hear what is happening in the world of men as you see it! There is nothing which you do not know and so please tell us the purpose of your visit and what my immediate duty is." Krishna smiled mischievously as he said this and Narada smiled back.

Narada said: "Krishna, if you had spoken these words to someone else it would have been fitting. But I am the wrong person. I happen to know who you are. You are the Absolute Truth and I have seen your Maya too often

to be deceived by it. It does amuse me to see you talk as though you know nothing about what is happening in the world outside."

"Still, to please you, I will also keep up the pretence and answer accordingly. Nothing very important is happening, nothing worth mentioning, except perhaps, the one thought in the mind of your cousin Yudhishtira. He wants to perform the Rajasuya. He wants to honour you after the yaga is ended. I request you to accept the honour when it is conferred on you.

"The very flower of chivalry will assemble in the great hall when Yudhishtira performs the Rajasuya.

"It has been said that even, low-born men have been born so because of sins committed in previous janmas: even they, I have been told, are cleansed of all their sins if they have a chance to look at you even once. Listening to your stories, singing your praises, meditating on you, are all paths that lead to liberation. When such is the case, need I say how much more easily man can obtain salvation if he sees your Shree Moorti? When you enter the hall it will be as pure as the river Ganga which flows from your feet: who is called Mandakini in the heavens: Ganga on the earth and Bhogavati in the nether regions. Such is the sanctity the earth gets by the touch of your feet. Please make the Rajasuya hallowed by your presence."

Narada was wiping the tears which had sprung to his eyes when he spoke of the glory of the Lord.

Krishna looked around him. He could see that his Yadava kinsmen were more desirous of fighting with Jarasandha and releasing the kings who had asked for help than thinking about the doubtful thrill of attending the Rajasuya in the distant future. Krishna turned his large eyes on Uddhava and said: "Uddhava, you are the wisest of our counsellors and you have ever wished us well. Your thought will penetrate into the root of the matter under consideration and you will be able to tell us if a thing is possible or if it is out of the question. Please consider well and tell us what should be done now, under the circumstances."

Set a difficult task by the all-knowing who pretended that he knew nothing, and that he wanted advice on how to act under the circumstances, Uddhava stood up and spoke. In a moment he grasped that the words of the messenger from Girivraja and the words of Narada had different effects on different people. The princes and the other Yadavas were for fighting with Jarasandha and as for Krishna, he was all for going to Indraprasta and meeting Yudhishtira. Uddhava thought for a while and then said: "Krishna, it seems to me, both the tasks are equally important and both of them need urgent attention. Your cousin Yudhishtira needs your help and advice in the great task he is going to undertake and, as for the kings who have been imprisoned, every day is a day more of torture for them and they must be released as early as we can: the sooner the better.

"If I have heard right, Rajasuya can be performed only by a king who has defeated *all* the kings of the world. Which means that Yudhishtira cannot perform the Rajasuya unless and until he conquers Jarasandha. By your attending the Rajasuya you will be serving both ends: you will be pleasing Yudhishtira who needs you now and you will also be hastening the rescue of the kings who have appealed to you for help. You will get the credit of having helped the captive kings.

"I am also thinking of a method of vanquishing Jarasandha. We have heard that he has the strength of ten thousand elephants. The only way in which he can be killed is by fighting a duel with him. And the one who can do that must also have the same strength. Bhima, the brother of Yudhishtira, is reputed for his strength. If Bhima calls Jarasandha for a fight, he, being a kshatriya, cannot refuse a challenge, and will have to fight with Bhima. Bhima will surely win.

"You asked me for a suggestion and I have thought out the problem well and this is the only way which seems to me practicable."

Everyone appreciated to the deep thought which was spent by him in arriving at the solution to the difficult problem.

Narada, the elders of the court, and even the youngsters who were itching to fight Jarasandha, had to accept the suggestion as a wise one. As for Krishna, he was very happy since Uddhava had voiced his opinion. He

spoke to the messenger from Girivraja. He said: "Convey to the kings that we will soon release them from their prison and we will bear their troubles in mind and find the way out very soon. Ask them to be patient for just a while more. They will soon be happy."

The messenger, after saluting them all, went back to Girivraja and reported to the captive kings that help was on its way and their troubles would soon be ended.

Narada, finding that his journey to Dwaraka was fruitful, went on his way singing the praises of Narayana. In his mind's eye he saw the Rajasuya, its conclusion and the end of Shishupala. Krishna began to make preparations to go to Indraprasta. He asked Daruka to get his chariot ready and soon it was at the doorstep of the palace.

Krishna crossed many countries: Anarta, Sauvira, Maru and he passed Kurukshetra. Rivers and mountains passed by and cities, villages, gokulas and several fields of luscious green. The holy river by name Dhrishadvati and then Saraswathi were next crossed. Panchala had been reached; Matsya and then the famous city: Indraprasta.

Before Krishna reached the outskirts of the city Yudhishtira had been told Krishna had arrived. With his powerful brothers and with brahmins and several friends the eldest Pandava went to the gateway of the city to receive their cousin. Trumpets were sounded and sweet music. Krishna descended from the chariot holding on to the hand of Yudhishtira who embraced him again and again like a long-lost friend. Tears of joy filled the eyes of the brothers and those of Krishna too. Krishna was particularly fond of these cousins of his who were not as fortunate as they ought to have been considering that they were the sons of Pandu. It was their good fortune that they were able to surmount so many of the troubles which came their way. Now, finally they were settled and it looked as though nothing would happen to shake them out of this secure position.

Yudhishtira was bent on performing the Rajasuya which meant that the entire world should accept him as the suzerain.

Bhima smiled widely as he embraced Krishna and Krishna patted him on his back and laughed with him. Krishna fell at the feet of Yudhishtira and Bhima and embraced Arjuna who was his equal in age. Nakula and Sahadeva fell at his feet. He lifted them up and spoke sweet words to all of them.

The streets had been decorated since Krishna was coming and scented water had been sprinkled all along the path which Krishna was to take on his way to the palace.

Krishna went first to the apartments of Kunti and prostrated before her. She blessed him with tears in her eyes. Krishna extricated himself from her embrace with difficulty: she was so fond of him. He then greeted Draupadi, the queen of the five Pandavas. She stood by the side of Kunti and Yudhishtira, in the joy of seeing Krishna, forgot even his daily duties! Draupadi went to the wives of Krishna who had come with him and took them with her to her apartments.

Several days passed happily for Krishna and the Pandavas. They would wander around in the gardens and they would spend their time admiring the Mayasabha which was so skilfully wrought by him. Often they would go out hunting and often they would play dice to pass the time.

DISCUSSIONS

One day, when the assembly hall was full of the ministers, elders and other well-wishers, Yudhishtira addressed Krishna seriously and said: "Krishna, my lord, you must have been told by Narada about my thoughts. For the last few months I have been considering if I should perform this Rajasuya. But unless and until you approve of my desire I will not pursue it any further." He paused and looked at Krishna, who looked serious and seemed intent on the next words which were to follow. Yudhishtira cleared his throat and said: "I know why you sit silent. To you it seems such an unlikely desire on my part: this desire to be lord of the world! You are right. I have never been ambitious. But I have been told that my father has no right to be in court of Indra unless he has performed the Rajasuya. Since he died before he could perform it, he has sent word to me asking me to do it for his sake and that is the only reason why I am thinking of it.

"I want to perform the Rajasuya if possible. If you think it is possible, I will do it. I will devote further thought to it or else I will not think on it any more. I know that you are the only one who will consider all the possibilities and tell me clearly if it is too ambitious on my part to consider this step or no."

Silence reigned in the hall for a while. Krishna, after a long pause, spoke with great deliberation. He said: "No. I do not think that you are too ambitious, Yudhishtira. You will be doing something which will win the approval of rishis, pitris, the devas and your friends. As for you, you are capable of defeating all the kings of Bharatavarsha. You are yourself no mean warrior and your powerful brothers will, I know, win the entire world for you. You are all the sons of gods who guard the quarters and the kings born of earth will easily be defeated by your brothers. But..."

Yudhishtira at once said: "But? What is the obstacle you are thinking of, Krishna?"

Krishna looked at everyone and said: "Jarasandha, my very dear enemy," and smiled at them all.

Yudhishtira's face fell. He said: "I think I will give up all thoughts of Rajasuya, Krishna. Jarasandha is invincible. You are right. Even you and Rama had to keep on fighting with him. When even you could not kill him, who can? He does not love us either. He is a great friend of the Kauravas and he will not be my friend. You are the best friend I have and you have shown me what a foolish desire it was of mine to perform this yaga."

Krishna said: "You should not abandon an enterprise of such importance all because of one powerful man whom you have to subdue. There will be some way out of it."

Yudhishtira went off at a tangent and asked: "Krishna, tell me, what does this Jarasandha possess that he should have been able to withstand you and your prowess? I think he cannot be killed by anyone since you have not been able to do it."

Krishna said: "His birth is one reason and his devotion to Lord Mahadeva has lent him the cloak of invincibility and this is very difficult to penetrate. He is not an ordinary man and ordinary methods will not suffice to quell him."

"Do you know that he is planning to offer a Rundamala to his beloved lord Mahadeva?"

"A Rundamala? I do not understand," said Yudhishtira.

"He has defeated so many kings and he has kept them all as captives. He has about ninety-five or so now. When he makes up a hundred he is going to sever the heads and thread them and offer the garland as his gift to Mahadeva."

The entire court was horrified to hear this. Yudhishtira said: "You said something about his birth which was not ordinary. Tell us about it. Tell us why he is so powerful."

JARASANDHA, THE POWERFUL

"Brihadrata, the king of Magadha, had no children. He was very despondent and deciding to assume the life of a Sanyasi he went to the forest. There he saw a rishi who saw why he was so sad. He told the king that he would give him a fruit eating which his wife would get a son who would be famed throughout the world for his strength and for his devotion to Mahadeva. The king accepted the fruit. Since he had two wives he cut it into two and gave one half to each of them.

"In time they were both heavy with child. As soon as they reached their time there was great excitement in the city and the king was eagerly waiting for the birth of his sons.

"But there was nothing but pain in the mind of the king when the children were born because there was no child at all! Each queen gave birth to half a child. There was no life in the half-child which was lying by the side of each of them. It was horrible to see the lifeless body with half a head, one eye, one nostril, one eyebrow, one shoulder and so on. The king, in disgust, asked the halves to be thrown away. There was nothing but sadness reigning in the city that night.

"Jara was a rakshasi who would enter the city by night and eat whatever she found. That night she came and found the two pieces of a new-born child's body. She was happy that she had found something to eat. She took the two pieces and took them to a lonely spot where she would be undisturbed while eating and where no one would see her. There she sat and, to facilitate eating, she placed the two halves together. Suddenly she heard the cry of a new-born child. She looked around to see where the cry came from. To her amazement she found that the two halves, when they were placed together, had joined up and had become whole. There was now life in the child and it was crying.

Jara did not have the heart to kill it and eat it. She took the child to the king and gave it to him saying: "Here is your son." With wonder in his voice he said: "I have no child and who are you? Why do you bring a newborn child to me and say it is mine?" Jara told him what had happened and the king was thrilled. So grateful was he to the rakshasi that he called his son Jarasandha. He was immensely pleased that he now had a son and a son who would be powerful as well as god-fearing.

Jarasandha is a great devotee of Mahadeva. He had with him a gada which was the gift of the Lord to him. As long as he had it this king was invincible. But, when he followed Balarama and me to the hill Pravarsana we escaped by vanishing from the top of the hill. In his anger he threw the gada in our direction. It broke a part of the hill and, when Jarasandha tried to take it back it would not get disengaged. A voice from the sky said that he could not get it out of the hill and that he had lost it. Now that he is without his gada, Jarasandha is not as powerful as he once was. He can be tackled."

Yudhishtira went into a deep silence and everyone was thinking too. Bhima was frowning with anger and Arjuna stood up suddenly and said: "This is not a decision to be made by thinking. It should be made by the sword, by the bow and arrow, or by mace. We are kshatriyas and we have never been afraid of anyone or anything. What strange hesitation is this, my lord, that you should abandon all thoughts of Rajasuya because one man is powerful? Are we not powerful? If he has the grace of Shankara to protect him do we not have the Lord of lords here with us? Why should you worry, brother, when Krishna is here?"

Bhima rushed to him and embraced him and said: "That was just what I was thinking. Only I can never speak. I am still nervous in the presence of my elder brother."

Everyone laughed at this naive talk and Krishna slapped him on his back and holding Arjuna's hand in his, he said: "I am pleased with your talk. I think we should go to Girivraja, the fort of Jarasandha and fight with him."

Bhima threw up his gada in joy and Yudhishtira had a questioning look in his eyes as if to say: "How are these three going to manage it?"

But he knew that Krishna had some plan and he did not want to ask him about it.

JARASANDHA FIGHTS A DUEL

Krishna, Arjuna and Bhima went to Girivraja. They had dressed themselves as Snataka brahmins and they entered the fort by jumping over the wall. It was midday and this was the time when Jarasandha who was an ardent devotee of Mahadeva would finish his puja of the Lord and then would honour the yachakas: those who had come to him for favours. These three from Indraprasta went to the courtyard where the yachakas had assembled.

Jarasandha entered the courtyard. They went promptly to him and said: "We have come from a great distance and we have hopes of our wishes being granted by you. Please grant us our wish." Jarasandha stood staring at them and he spoke not a word. They continued: "Nothing is unbearable for the patient: nothing is impossible or wrong for the wicked: for the givers, there is nothing that cannot be given. For those who are blessed with the gift of looking on everything and everyone as equals, is there such a person as a stranger?"

"If there is such a man who is capable of giving and does not acquire for himself fame and a lasting name by giving what has been asked, such a man is indeed pitiable and to be condemned too. The kings of yore, Harishchandra, Rantideva, the brahmin by name Mudgala, the king Shibi, Bali, the pigeon which entertained the hunter, are all remembered long after they are gone because of their giving."

Jarasandha was quite intrigued by these strangers. Their garments were those of Snatakas. But their voices, their figures, their shoulders which had been scarred as though by constant practice with bows and arrows belied their Snataka appearance. Jarasandha thought to himself: "Surely these are not brahmins. They must be kshatriyas and I have a feeling there is some mischief afoot. But it has been my rule never to refuse what a brahmin asks for: and since these men who seem to be kshatriyas, who seem to be

too old to be Snatakas, are wearing the garbs of brahmins, I have to give them what they ask for, even if it is my life. Have I not heard the story of king Bali? He knew that Vamana was Narayana who had come to beggar him of all his wealth which he had taken from Indra. But Bali would not hesitate. His fame is more alive than that of Vamana who was but the receiver. What is the use of living with this body which will die any moment if one does not aid a brahmin who asks me for a gift?"

So thought Jarasandha the noble the great giver. He smiled at them and with magnanimity he said: "Ask me anything you want and I can assure you, you will not be disappointed. Even if you ask me for my head I will give it."

Krishna took a step forward and said: "If you are willing, we would like a duel with you. We are not brahmins and we are all three of us kshatriyas and we ask not for food but for fight." Jarasandha said: "As soon as I saw you, I knew that you are not brahmins. I am paying honour to the garb of a brahmin which each one of you has donned. That is the reason why I said I would give you anything you ask." He looked at Krishna and looked again. He then laughed loudly and said: "Your face seemed rather familiar. It is quite some time since I last saw you and that is why I could not recognise you at once. Are you not the cowherd who killed his uncle?" He looked at the other two and said: "Who are these two youngsters? Are they cowherds too?"

Krishna said: "You are quite right. I am the same cowherd who fought with you so often in those days. This young man is Bhima, the son of Kunti and the other is Arjuna, his younger brother." Jarasandha said: "Of course I will fight with you since you ask for it. I refuse, however, to fight with a coward who was so scared to face me in battle that he fled to the middle of the ocean and is living there ever since in dread of me. As for this Arjuna, his frame is too young and too delicate. It will not be fair to choose him as my opponent in a fight. Bhima seems to be more fit. He seems bigger and he seems to be strong too. He might offer me some good fight."

Jarasandha then asked for two gadas to be brought. One he gave to Bhima and the other he took in his hands. They came out into the open and began

their fight. Both were equally matched and both of them were enjoying themselves while fighting.

The sound which arose when they hit each other was like two elephants hitting each other or like two thunder clouds crashing against each other. Neither was inferior to the other and it looked as though the fight would never end. For twenty-eight days the fight went on. Their relationship was strange. During the nights they would all sit together like friends and during the day they fought.

One night Bhima told Krishna: "Look, Krishna, I do not think it will be possible for me to kill this Jarasandha. He is my equal in every way and I am getting quite tired of this fight which promises to be eternal!"

Krishna said: "Tomorrow you will be able to kill him."

The fight began once again. Once Bhima pushed Jarasandha to the ground and Krishna caught the eye of Bhima. Krishna had a leaf in his hand and while Bhima was looking he split the leaf into two. Bhima at once understood what he had to do. Standing on one leg of Jarasandha, the fallen king, he took the other leg in his two hands and tore him into two.

The people saw that the king of Magadha was dead and there rose up a mighty roar as of the sea breaking its bounds. Krishna and Arjuna embraced Bhima who had achieved the seemingly impossible. Krishna crowned the son of Jarasandha as the king of Magadha and the three of them went to the city by name Girivraja where the many kings were imprisoned. They saw their deliverer and their gratitude was so great that they could not talk. They could only weep and wash his feet with their tears. They thanked him with faltering words and Krishna said: "I have kept my promise and released you from the captivity which Jarasandha had imposed on you. All I ask in return is that you should go back to your kingdoms and rule them well without letting power go to your heads and make you forget righteousness. Later, when king Yudhishtira performs the Rajasuya I would like you all to attend it and lend your support to him."

Krishna left Girivraja accompanied by Bhima and Arjuna. The young prince Sahadeva, who had been crowned as the king, bade them farewell.

Yudhishtira was thrilled when he heard the music of the conchs which they blew triumphantly when they reached the outskirts of Indraprasta. He rushed out with the others to welcome the heroes and brought them home with all honour.

THE RAJASUYA YAGA

The four brothers of Yudhishtira were sent to the four quarters to proclaim the sovereignty of Yudhishtira. They returned with immense wealth and they were mostly unopposed by the kings of the countries they visited. The reason was simple. Yudhishtira was respected by everyone because he was a righteous king, a very gentle and noble man who had undergone so many tribulations. Only now he had acquired the status of a king. They had no great objections to his performing the Rajasuya and they were all willing to attend the yaga. One or two kings opposed the Pandava princes and soon they were vanquished and they paid their homage to the conqueror. They were asked to attend the yaga.

Yudhishtira began the preparations for the yaga. He personally requested the rishis who were well versed in the rituals to be observed, the proper location of the yaga bhumi and similar things. The season was usually Vasanta when the yaga was performed. All the rishis had agreed to attend: Vyasa, Bharadwaja, Sumantu, Kratu, Jaimini, Paila, Parasara, Parasurama, Vitihotra, and many other holy men. Yudhishtira sent- his youngest brother Sahadeva to Hastina to invite Bhishma, Dhritarashtra, Drona, Kripa, Vidura and the cousins, Duryodhana and his brothers, as also Shakuni with Karna and Ashwatthama, the son of Drona.

All the kings of Bharatavarsha had been invited and soon, when Vasanta ritu came, Yudhishtira was made to plough the yajnashala himself on an auspicious day and he was initiated into the rites preceding the yaga.

The yaga began and proceeded without any trouble. The rishis from the heavens had come to watch the yaga and Narada led the group. The pomp and glory of the function was talked about even in the court of Indra. It was said that it resembled the Rajasuya performed once by Varuna.

At the conclusion of the yaga a formality had to be observed. There had to be a special function where honour was paid to the foremost among the guests. Yudhishtira had honoured everyone equally and this was a task beset with a certain amount of embarrassment to him, to the recipient and to the other great men who were apt to feel slighted by the so-called preferential treatment. As he was trying to solve this problem with the necessary amount of tact or diplomacy, Sahadeva, the youngest of the Pandavas, who was said to be the wisest of them all, stood up and said: "There is only one man here who has to be honoured as the foremost among men and that is Krishna. He is not just a man: he is the Lord Himself who is walking on this earth with a form and a name for the good of foolish men like us. He is the foundation on which rests this entire Universe. He is the soul of all yagas, of all the incantations. The speculations of all the Upanishads are about him and he is the only one to be worshipped. He creates and he sustains: and finally he is the one who destroys this entire Universe. Who is able to gauge his infiniteness? the immensity of his glory? If we honour Krishna we will be honouring all living and non-living objects since he is the Brahman which pervades the Universe. Let us, by all means, honour Krishna as the foremost among men."

All the wise men who had assembled there in that great hall were pleased with the words of Sahadeva. They knew the truth of his words: that Krishna was the Paramapurusha himself and that he was the only one fit to be honoured as the foremost among men. Yudhishtira was happy that the words of Sahadeva were approved by everyone. He had the same desire in his mind and he had been trying to put that into words when Sahadeva spoke.

With great joy in his heart he began to offer puja to Krishna. He washed his feet while Draupadi poured water from a vessel made of gold. The water which had wetted the feet of the Lord, he took and sprinkled on his head and on that of his wife and brothers. Years back it was this same water which was named Mandakini and which was brought to the earth by Bhagiratha and given the name Ganga. Yudhishtira's eyes were so full of

tears that he could not look at Krishna when he stood before him with his palms folded and his thoughts flowing towards him.

SHISHUPALA OF CHEDI

"Enough of this foolishness," said a voice suddenly and all the people in the hall were surprised. They had all joined in the worship of the Lord and this was a sudden note of discord which no one expected. All eyes were turned in the direction from which the sound came. They found Shishupala, the son of Damaghosha, standing up. His arm was lifted up as if in remonstrance. His eyes were red with anger and his hand was trembling while he showed his disapproval. He began to speak disparagingly of Krishna. He said scathing words about Yudhishtira also.

"It is indeed true," he said, "that no one can alter the course of Time. I can see now that the statement is true of those who have reached their old age too. The words of this youngster who has no experience of worldly things are excusable. He has been thrown in the company of Krishna and he feels that this man deserves to be honoured:

"But what surprises me is the fact that the older men here, the veterans who should have better sense, have also let their minds be influenced by the words of Sahadeva. I appeal to the really wise men in this assembly. Please do not give your consent to this foolishness on the part of Yudhishtira. Use your powers of thinking and tell me in what way this man, this blot on the name of the Yadu House, this cowherd, deserves this honour! There are so many great men here. The rishis who are rich in tapas, in knowledge. They have been honoured by the celestials. They are sinless and they are forever absorbed in the contemplation of the Brahman. Ignoring them, Yudhishtira has, foolishly, paid honour to this man.

"His accepting the honour is like a crow snatching the havis that is meant for the devas.

"He belongs to no high family. Born in a prison and brought or in a cowshed, how can he be civilised enough to mix with kings? He does not

know or observe even the common rules of conduct and he is so wilful he does not ask for the advice of his elders in his actions. There is not a single quality in him which can be spoken of highly. Think of the House to which he belongs. Yadu, the son of Yayati, was their ancestor. And Yadu was a son who would not listen to his father when he asked him for a favour. And the father was so displeased with him that he disowned him, his eldest son!

"The entire family is well known for its drunkenness and its thieving instincts. They are aloof from the countries where the brahmarishis dwell and they have a city in the middle of the sea. That itself shows how different they are from the others. This man is a cowherd, a thief, one who aspires to be a king when the world knows that they can never be kings. Such a man should not be honoured in this assembly. Even ordinarily he should not be honoured. How then can he be called as the foremost among men? It is not true. This worship is all wrong."

There was an awed silence when Shishupala finished his tirade. Like a lion which listens to the howls of a jackal Krishna sat without any expression on his face. Many of the lovers of the Lord closed their ears with both their hands and walked out of the hall. It is the Dharma prescribed by the ancients that a man, when he listens to insults aimed at the Lord or at the devotees of the Lord: if he does not walk out so that the words do not reach his ears, he will then be condemned to hell and all his punya will be snatched away from him. So terrible is this Bhagavanninda.

The Pandavas were horrified by the words of Shishupala and along with the Kekayas, Matsyas, Srinjayas, they reached out their arms for their weapons so that they could punish this man who spoke such blasphemy. Bhima could not bear it. He raised his gada and was trying to rush towards Shishupala. Krishna signalled to all of them to be quiet and he sat with that bland smile on his face.

Bhishma spoke to Bhima and said: "It has been ordained that Shishupala should be killed only by Krishna. When he was born the voice from the heavens prophesied this. The mother of Shishupala who is your aunt, your mother's sister, had requested Krishna to falsify the prophecy and to spare

her son. She thought that Shishupala would be spared. Krishna has told her that he will forgive hundred insults from her son. She was sure that her son would never reach that number and is therefore secure in her hope that her son will not be harmed. But look! By the side of Krishna is a heap of flowers: the very same flowers with which your brother worshipped him. Krishna has been dropping those flowers on the ground one by one and the heap is now made up of more than a hundred flowers. Krishna has to kill Shishupala now."

Even as he was saying it, Krishna stood up suddenly. His face had lost its softness and gentleness. A frown like that of the frown on the sky sat on his noble brow and he waited for the coming of Shishupala who was rushing towards him with a sword in his hand and with him came his followers.

Everyone was looking on helplessly. They were speechless and breathless when Krishna took up his chakra and severed the head of Shishupala from his body.

There was a roar as that of the sea if it had broken its bounds. Some wise men like Narada and Vyasa and Yudhishtira saw a glow emanate from the fallen body of Shishupala and move towards Krishna and when it came near Krishna, the glow reached his feet and was lost to view.

One of the door-keepers of Vaikunta, Jaya, had gone back to the place he had lost ages ago when he was cursed by the rishis Sanaka and his brothers. The Lord, in his infinite mercy, had released him from the third and last birth in the world of men and the world of sin, of pain and unhappiness. This long separation from the Lord was now over and Jaya need never again be away from the side of Lord Narayana.

The Rajasuya yaga was over. The guests were all honoured as was their due and when he had performed all the necessary duties Yudhishtira had concluded the yaga.

At the request of Yudhishtira Krishna stayed on even after the others had left Indraprasta. A few weeks later, in spite of the remonstrances of the Pandava brothers, Krishna returned to his city, Dwaraka.

SALVA ATTACKS DWARAKA

Salva was a great friend of Shishupala. He had also gone to Vidarbha when Shishupala was invited by Rukmi. That was when they thought that Rukmini would become the bride of Shishupala. Krishna had carried her away. Since then Krishna had been hated by Shishupala and all his friends. After the Rajasuya and the tragic death of his friend, Salva's anger against Krishna was immense. Because of Krishna he had lost two of his good friends: Jarasandha and Shishupala. In his anger he took an oath. "I will make the earth Yadava-less."

Salva went to the mountains and there he performed severe tapas to please lord Mahadeva. He would eat a handful of mud every day and that was all the food he had. Of all the gods, the easiest to please is Mahadeva. He was gratified by the penance of Salva and he asked Salva what he wanted. Salva asked for a Vimana. It had to be unbreakable by the devas, asuras, human beings, gandharvas, nagas or rakshasas. It should go wherever he wanted it to go: earth, air or water. It should be frightening to the Yadavas. Shankara granted it to him. Maya made it for him.

The chariot was called Saubha and. it was given to Salva. It was not just a chariot. It was miniature city. Seated in this, Salva would be able to go wherever he wanted. Salva decided that the time had come when Dwaraka should be destroyed.

He armed himself with all the weapons he had and, collecting a huge army, he went to Dwaraka and surrounded it on all sides. He was bent on destroying the entire city. The gardens, the gateways which were decorated beautifully, houses and turrets which had been designed by Vishvakarma, the walls which were meant to guard the city were all destroyed by Salva. Seated in his new chariot Salva rained arrows and stones: small and big boulders from the mountains and various other things like serpents and vicious things on the city. He caused a big cyclone to be formed and city

could not be seen because of the dust which covered it. Krishna's city resembled the earth when the asura named Tripura harassed it.

Pradyumna, the son of Krishna, set out from the city to fight with Salva. He was accompanied by Satyaki, Samba, Akrura and Kritavarma and several other Yadavas. A great battle was fought by Satyaki and others. The son of Krishna fought valiantly. Well versed as he was in Mahamaya when he was with Sambara, Pradyumna was able to tackle all the tricks of Salva. But the chariot by name Saubha was able to withstand all the arrows of Pradyumna. The chariot would be in the air and the next moment it would descend on the earth and before anyone could follow its path it would streak into the air. At times it would be very big and at other times, it would become exceedingly small. Salva would move so nimbly that they could not take aim at him and shoot arrows at him. He was proving too powerful for the Yadava heroes. No one could tackle him.

Dyuman was the minister of Salva and he accosted Pradyumna. He hit Pradyumna with his gada which made Pradyumna faint. His charioteer carried him away from the spot. When he regained consciousness Pradyumna was furious with his charioteer because of this act. He said: "Why did you do this? The enemy host will think that I ran away from the spot because I was afraid. It is a slur on the name of the House of the Yadavas. I am displeased with you." The charioteer who was the son of Daruka said: "There is nothing to indicate that you are afraid, O Prince. The rules of war have declared that when a charioteer is in trouble the warrior should protect him and when the warrior is in trouble it is the duty of the charioteer to do likewise. I have not brought shame to your name, do not worry. I will take you back to the forefront." Pradyumna encountered Dyuman again and killed him easily. The army of Salva was being destroyed systematically by the Yadava heroes. The battle went on for twenty-seven days and yet, Salva could not be killed.

While Krishna was staying in Indraprasta after the Rajasuya this was happening in Dwaraka. Ill omens were seen and Krishna felt that some bad event was taking place in Dwaraka. That was why he hurried to Dwaraka.

KRISHNA ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Krishna told himself: "Because of the killing of Shishupala some of his friends are harassing the city. I am sure of it." When he came home he heard all about the exploits of Salva. He left Balarama behind in Dwaraka to guard the city and the citizens and hurried to the battlefield.

From a distance the Yadava army saw the Garuda banner fluttering in the distance. Salva saw it too and both the hosts were happy. The aim of Salva was to kill Krishna and the Yadavas knew that he would soon be killed since Krishna had come on the scene.

Salva hurled the fearful Shakti with the intention of killing the charioteer of Krishna. The Shakti was making the earth and the sky glow with its brilliance and the noise it made while it approached them was like a thousand thunders crashing together. Krishna broke the Shakti into splinters with his sharp arrows. The arrows released from his bow were flying, so fast that they soon covered the chariot Saubha and it could not be seen. Salva hit Krishna's left shoulder with an arrow: so sharp was the pain that Krishna's bow Sharanga slipped from his hand. Salva spoke words which, he thought, would frighten Krishna. He said: "You stupid fool! I am going to punish you for the many wrongdoings of yours. You are but a common thief. And, more than that, you are a coward. While we were watching you carried away the wife of Shishupala and made her yours. You ran away instead of winning her by fair fight. And now what have you done? While he was unprepared for it, you killed my dear friend Shishupala in the Rajasuya hall. I will avenge the death of my friend by killing you with my arrows."

Krishna's eyes were flashing fire. He said: "You brag too much. Real heroes do not talk but show in action what they mean to do." Even as he was talking Krishna hit Salva on the chin with his gada. Salva was spitting

blood and when the gada returned to him Krishna looked again but Salva had vanished from there with the help of his Maya.

When he was trying to locate his enemy Krishna was stopped by a messenger from Dwaraka. He had run all the distance and he said: "Krishna! Krishna! Your mother sent me to you in a hurry. Your father Vasudeva has been captured and tied up like a sheep by a butcher."

When he heard this Krishna became extremely despondent like any ordinary mortal afflicted by sorrows and sufferings. He said: "How could this coward Salva have managed to defeat my brother Balarama who is invincible? When such a thing has happened, it is clear then that Fate singles out some men, even men like my dear brother and father, and makes them suffer humiliations. Fate is the most powerful of all enemies."

Salva suddenly appeared before Krishna and he had the captive Vasudeva with him. He said: "Krishna, look! This is the man whom you respect most: your father. I will kill him even while you are looking. If you have strength enough to save him do it now. Let me see how valiant you are."

Before Krishna could touch his bow Salva cut off the head of Vasudeva and, flying in the air, he entered his chariot Saubha. Krishna was sunk in woe: but it was only for a while. Like a cloud releasing the moon which had been hidden behind it for a while, the Maya which had eclipsed even the mind of Krishna slid away and he realised that it was a trick played by Salva. Like a man does not see the world of dreams when he gets up, even so Krishna did not see the messenger from the city nor could he see the body of his father which had fallen on the ground a while back. Krishna was furious, with himself more than even with Salva. That he should have been deceived by the Maya cast by this contemptible man, was too much for Krishna.

Krishna tried to kill Salva who had found refuge in his Saubha. After toying with him for a while Krishna found that the time had come when he had to finish the sport. Krishna broke the armour of Salva with his arrows: he then broke his bow and the jewel which he was wearing on his head. Along with this Krishna hit the chariot Saubha with his gada and crushed it

to dust. It was amazing that the so-called unbreakable Saubha should have been broken so easily.

Salva now stood on the ground with his gada upraised. Krishna took up his chakra and with a twist of his wrist sent it spinning. The head of Salva with its jewelled crown fell on the ground. There was great joy in the heart of each one of the men who had been fighting. They had been fighting for the last so many days on the battlefield.

Dantavakra, one of the remaining friends of Shishupala, now came on the field to fight with Krishna. He was also a cousin of Krishna as Shishupala was.

Dantavakra thought that he should avenge the death of his brother, Shishupala and his friends, Paundraka, and now Salva. They had all been companions who had been inseparable.

Dantavakra was fond of using the gada while fighting. He came to Krishna and straightaway began to fight with him. He hit Krishna with his gada. Unruffled by this sudden attack Krishna took up his own gada by name Kaumodaki and with it, hit his opponent Dantavakra on the chest. The lifeless form of the man Dantavakra fell on the ground like a fallen palm tree. From the dead form emanated a glow and travelled towards the feet of Krishna where it got lost.

The three births of the door-keepers of Narayana were now at an end. They were now restored to their old place by the side of the Lord never to leave him anymore.

Viduratha, the brother of Dantavakra, came to the field and in a matter of moments his head had also been severed and it lay on the battlefield.

The long, long battle was at an end and the Yadavas entered the city in triumph.

KRISHNA AND SUDHAMA

There was a brahmin who was a great devotee of Krishna. In his young days he had been the companion of Krishna in the gurukula of Sandipani. Years had passed and they had not dealt kindly with him. He was a man of simple tastes and he had no desires. His senses were under control and he had no attachment to worldly things. He was very poor but he was satisfied with anything he got and he never blamed fate or the gods for his poverty. He was fortunate in his wife who was similar to him in her qualities. She was lean and, devoted as she was to her husband, she would eat only what was left after he ate. And necessarily, considering their poverty, she had very little to eat. Constant fasting had made her lean but her face had the same tranquil look which her husband had. They were called Sudhama and Kalyani.

Once, however, she could not bear to see the sufferings of her husband, because of poverty. After great deliberation she made up her mind to talk to him. She went and stood before him and, with a hesitant voice she began to talk to him. Her words were halting and her voice was so soft that he could not even hear them properly. She said: "My lord, you have often told me that Krishna the lord of Dwaraka was once your friend and playmate. He is a great prince now. He is reputed to be very considerate towards brahmins: and about those who have surrendered themselves to him. His spouse is goddess Lakshmi herself and is there any doubt about his immense wealth?"

Sudhama looked at her and felt sorry for her. She was wearing the simplest of garments and it was torn in several places as his own was, too. She had not had a full meal ever since she had married him; and yet, never once had she complained. Now it was evident that she was trying to ask for something. He waited for her to continue. After some hesitation she said: "My lord, why should you not go and see him? He is sure to give you

wealth if he sees you. He is now in Dwaraka surrounded by all his kinsmen. He will surely be happy to see you and relieve you of your poverty which is killing you." She stood silent, afraid lest she had spoken too much. She did not dare to lift up her eyes. Sudhama felt sorry for her. This was the first time she had asked for something and even that, because she wanted to see him happy, comfortable. He told himself: "I will please her and go. Incidentally, I will be very happy since I will be seeing my friend after many years. We can sit and talk about the days of our boyhood and we are sure to enjoy our meeting after these many years."

He spoke to his wife and said that he would go. And added: "Kalyani, have you anything in the house which I can take as a gift? I cannot go empty-handed."

Quietly she went out of the presence of her husband and went to the house of the neighbour. She asked the housewife if she had anything to give her. She had to refuse since she did not have anything. Kalyani walked out of the house with disappointment. The man of the house came in just then and he asked his wife about the lady who walked out with so much sadness writ on her face. His wife told him what she had wanted and how she could not comply with her wishes.

He said: "Lady, please wait." And he took a handful of rice which he had brought home tied in his upper cloth. She accepted it with gratitude. She realised that it would not be enough. So she went to three more houses and asked for just a fistful of rice in every house. She thus collected four handfuls and no more. She thought that this was all she was fated to get. With great care she beaten the rice, tied it up in an old piece of cloth and gave it to her husband.

Taking the small bundle in his hand the poor brahmin Sudhama left his home with great joy in his mind since he was going to see his friend and at the same time, he was worried about how he was going to get an audience with Krishna. It was not the old playmate Krishna he was going to see: it was now Krishna, a member of the royal house-hold and not just his companion of the long ago! Perhaps the door-keepers would not let him in. How could he announce himself? They would laugh if he told them that he

was a friend of Krishna: a very dear friend. But that was what he had been and he smiled to himself thinking of the days which they had spent together.

Even as he was thinking of the Lord and his meeting with him, Sudhama found that he was in Dwaraka. Evidently Krishna, knowing that he was coming to see him, transported him by his Maya to Dwaraka in a short time.

Sudhama looked around and stood admiring the beauty of the city. He reached the section where the army was placed and, crossing that, he passed three wide and large roads and found several glorious mansions there. He entered one which seemed more beautiful than the others and no one stopped him. He passed the doorway and reached the inner hall. There he stood rooted to the spot and he could not move. His eyes were drinking in the scene. He saw Krishna seated on a beautiful seat with his dear Rukmini by his side.

Even as he entered Krishna jumped out of his seat and ran towards Sudhama. He embraced him warmly. There were tears in the eyes of Krishna and they spilled out like drops of water from a lotus. Sudhama was weeping openly with joy at the reunion. Krishna took both his hands in his own and led him to the seat which he had been using. He washed the worn feet of Sudhama and he sprinkled the water on his own head and that of Rukmini. He gave the fan made of the feathers of the peacock to Rukmini who stood by the side of the poor brahmin. She fanned him while Krishna cooled his limbs with sandal paste and perfumed water.

The people in the apartments were watching Krishna and the poor emaciated frame of the brahmin who was all skin and bone: whose clothes were old, dirty, and torn in several places. His face was sad and his skin was dry and he looked like a beggar. And the Lord of lords washed his feet and took the water on his head as though it were some *tirtha*! How fortunate was this man that he should be honoured so by Krishna! Thoughts like these passed through the minds of those who were standing by.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Krishna sat by his side and holding his hand in his, spoke to Sudhama about the many happy days they had spent together in the gurukula of Sandipani. Happy days they had been.

"Do you remember?" "Do you remember?" was the beginning of each one of the sentences each one of them spoke. So they sat for a long time. Krishna then said: "Sudhama, my friend, how have you been all these days? After going back to your home from the gurukula did you get married? Is your wife as gentle and good as you are? You have never been very fond of the things of this world and so you seem to have abandoned the ordinary pleasures of the world which other men pursue so eagerly. Tell me, I want to know all that has been happening to you." Krishna looked at the distress writ on the face of his friend and pretended not to have noticed it and, without giving a chance to his friend to talk he said: "Do you think often of the days we spent in the home of our guru? A father who gives birth is the first guru and the preceptor who initiates us into the world of knowledge is the second guru and this second guru has to be honoured more. The one who has taught us the path of Brahman, to realise the Brahman, that teacher is our third guru.

"My friend, do you remember one of the many incidents which happened when we were in the gurukula? Our mother, our guru's wife had asked us to go to the forest to collect Samidh—the twigs used to feed the fire. We were wandering in the forest and suddenly, without warning, there was a heavy rain. A stormy wind was blowing and the thunder and lightning frightened us. The sun had set and there was darkness all around us. We were not able to make out the pitfalls in the path we were wandering in, because of the rain and the darkness. Clinging to each other we wandered all around the forest since we had lost our way. So passed the whole night."

Sudhama took up the story and said: "Yes, early in the morning as soon the sun had risen our guru who had been worried about us came to the forest in search of us and found us with great difficulty."

Krishna said: "He was overcome with compassion for us and he said: 'O my sons! what a lot of suffering you have undergone for my sake! The best way to pay respect to one's guru is to serve him without thinking of one's own bodily comforts. And you have all done that. The only way in which I can bless you is by saying that all your desires will be granted. All the lessons you have learnt from me will reward you in this life and in the life after.' Sudhama, I can never forget that night we spent together." Incidents like this were remembered by both of them and time passed pleasantly for both.

Krishna who knew the mind of everyone, who loved brahmins more than his kinsmen even: who was the ultimate solace of all who need comfort: who was the Lord of lords, knew what had brought Sudhama to Dwaraka. But he wanted to tease his friend. So he said: "My dear friend, what have you brought for me from your home? Sudhama was silent. He was feeling ashamed of the tiny bundle of cloth which held the fried rice. But Krishna would not let him change the subject. "Perhaps you have brought me something very simple: perhaps you think it is not rich enough for these surroundings. But, Sudhama, do you not know that to me, what is given with love and Bhakti is very dear, even if it is a small gift? smaller than an atom? A gift which is not accompanied by Bhakti will never please me. But, let it be a flower, a leaf, a fruit or even a drop of water: if it is offered to me with Bhakti, by one whose mind is pure and is without sin, that is what is dear to me and I will accept it with love. Give me what you have brought."

Even then Sudhama was feeling shy. Krishna thought to himself: "My poor friend has been poor all these years and yet he has never once thought of asking me to help him. Because of his wife's insistence he has come to me. I must grant him what he has not asked me for." Krishna waited for his friend to give him something as though he were a child waiting for a gift from his mother. He then caught hold of Sudhama's upper cloth and said: "Look, my sister has sent me something which you do not want to give

me!" and he opened the tiny bundle which contained the beaten rice full of chaff and little specks of dust. The wife and Sudhama did not have time to clean it even: such was the hurry with which Sudhama left for the city of his friend. Krishna clapped his hands in glee and said: "Sudhama! So you remembered that this fried rice is a great favourite of mine! Remember your sharing yours with me in those days?"

Sudhama smiled since he remembered the incident. In the meantime Krishna took up a handful of the rice and was munching it with great enjoyment. When he had swallowed a mouthful, he took up another fistful and was about to take it near his lips, when Rukmini who was Lakshmi Devi herself, caught his hand and stopped him with a smile. With her eyes she spoke to him and said: "My lord! The one handful which you have already eaten is enough to fill the house of your Bhakta with all the wealth of the world. Another mouthful and I will also have to go away from you and stay in his house!"

Sudhama saw none of this. He was happy in the company of his friend and the whole night they spent happily together. Early in the morning when the sun had risen Sudhama thought that he should not strain the hospitality of Krishna too much and said: "I have been wanting to see you for a long time, Krishna. I have heard that you have done great deeds and that you are an honoured prince and that you are the beloved cousin of the great Pandavas. I have been keeping track of news of you and I do not have to tell you that I think of you day and night. I will have to go back now. But only my body will go. I will leave my heart behind with you."

Krishna and his wives prostrated before Sudhama and then he left for his home. Krishna walked part of the way with him and went back after a tender leave-taking.

A HANDFUL OF RICE

Sudhama felt ashamed of himself when he thought of the reason for his coming to Dwaraka. He felt happy that he had the good sense not to ask Krishna for anything. With his mind thinking back on the dreamlike experience he had of having spent a day with Krishna Sudhama reached his own city. His body thrilled even now when he thought how warmly Krishna had embraced him: him, a poor brahmin wearing torn, dirty old clothes. "I am the lowest of the low and he is the Lord of lords and yet he embraced me. Is it not wonderful?" Again Sudhama spoke to himself: "His chest which is the abode of Lakshmi touched this hard and bony chest of mine and his eyes were full of tears of love when he embraced me. He made me sit on his own cot and his wife fanned me with her tender hands. He touched these feet of mine! feet full of dust and full of corns and rough with walking on the ground incessantly. And these feet he took in his hands, washed them and took the water and placed it on his head! Can anything be more gracious than this gesture of my friend?

"For those who have found refuge in his feet nothing is impossible. I know why he did not give me anything else but his love. He knows that the possession of wealth is the easiest way to make a man forget him: and Krishna loves me so much he does not want me to forget him. How infinite is his goodness to me!"

Sudhama was approaching his house. He was attracted by the sight of a beautiful mansion which was seen from a distance. He thought to himself: "What a beautiful sight! I have never seen it before. It seems to be made of light, so lovely it is. It seems to be so near my house and yet how is it I have not noticed it all these years? Am I so absent-minded as all that? If I remember right all my neighbours are like me and no one has wealth enough to have a house like this."

With his mind busy with thoughts like these he was walking when several people who looked like divine beings received him and took him to the door of the house. "Have I come back to Dwaraka?" Sudhama asked himself and when he looked up and down, his wife, looking like the goddess Lakshmi came forward to the door and falling at his feet welcomed him with tears. He was amazed at the sight of his wife looking so beautiful and so much like a woman from the heavens. He entered his house which was like the mansion of Indra. He stood silent while his eyes took in the picture. His mind was busy with thought's which chased each other. He told himself: "It is the good fortune of having seen the Lord which has blessed me with so much wealth. Krishna, the Yadava, Krishna my friend and playmate was seen by me in his rich surroundings. He gives even when his favour is not solicited. And this way of his giving is like the bounty of the rain-cloud. The cloud, though it is capable of filling up the entire ocean with water, is so humble about the good it wants to do that it works silently and when a farmer is sleeping it pours rain on his crops without letting him know that it has come and gone. Krishna does not want to talk about the wealth that he is capable of giving since, to him, it is such a minor matter: he considers love and Bhakti to be much superior to wealth. And so he never did want to talk to me about this: he did not want to embarrass me by saying: 'I will give you wealth.' Since he does not consider wealth to be equal to Bhakti and in his eyes I saw that my love for him seemed to please him so much. To him, the handful of rice I took was dearer than all the nectar and honey which was there for him in plenty."

With these thoughts Sudhama accepted the gift of the Lord and with his wife he enjoyed the wealth that was granted to him.

All the while, however, he and his wife were ever devoted to Krishna and his feet were ever placed in their hearts. Gradually they practised the art of detachment from worldly things. Unaffected by the earlier poverty and now the later wealth, the brahmin couple lived happily with their minds full of thoughts of Krishna.

A VISION OF THE FUTURE

There was once a total eclipse of the sun. Tradition had it that during the eclipse people should go to a holy spot and bathe in the waters before and after the eclipse. The great Parasurama the Bhargava, had performed the tarpana for his parents with the blood of the kshatriyas: the spot was where five lakes had been filled with the blood. And this place had been sanctified by the gods and it was called Samantapanchaka. All the kings of Bharatavarsha journeyed towards Samantapanchaka when they heard that there was to be an eclipse of the sun. Aniruddha and Kritavarma were asked to remain in Dwaraka guarding the city and the rest of the Yadavas left for the holy place. The journey proved to be a pleasure trip for all of them and the women and children joined in the group and so there was a great crowd travelling towards Samanta. And, to the same holy waters had come the other kings from other countries: Matsya, Kosala, Vidarbha, Kekaya and Kambhoja. The Kauravas were also there surrounding Duryodhana: all his friends and all his kinsmen had come with him.

To the great delight of Krishna Nandagopa had come with Yashoda and the gopas were there with gopis.

Kunti was there and she greeted her brother Vasudeva as though she had a grievance against him. She said: "You are my eldest brother. I consider myself singularly unfortunate that you should have been so indifferent about me and my misfortunes. It is the rule of life that one whom the gods do not favour is not treated with the affection and respect due to them by others: even their near kinsmen, brothers, cousins and even sons."

Vasudeva was sorely hurt by this, unjust accusation and he said: "Look, my dear sister, please do not blame us who have been but puppets in the hands of fate. The world and its welfare are in the hands of the Lord and man is helpless. The Lord spurs man into action and He stops his *lila* when he pleases. You were given to Kunti Bhoja when you were very young and

you have been living in comfort when we Bhojas and Andhakas and the Yadavas were running all over the world to escape the tyranny of Kamsa. As for me, I spent most of my youth in the cell, the prison house which Kamsa placed at our disposal. I could not even have the thrill of holding my sons in my arms. You were spared at least that torture." With these words Vasudeva sat silent for a while and walked away from there, leaving Kunti to regret her hasty words which she had spoken on impulse.

The entire kshatriya clan was there assembled on the holy spot by name Samantapanchaka. The field Kurukshetra was there, on the banks of the lake Vaishampayana. They were all there: Bhishma, Drona, and the blind king, and his wife Gandhari with their sons and their friends: Kunti with her sons and their wives: Vidura, Kripa: the kings, Kunti Bhoja, Virata, Bhishmaka, Nagnajit, Purijit, Drupada, Shalya, Drishtaketu, the king of Kashi: the lords of the countries: Madra, Kekaya and Mithila: Yudhamanyu, and Susharma. They were all there.

Krishna looked at all of them: at their powerful forms and their arrogant laughter: at their wealth and their pride. It seemed to him as though they had all assembled there to see the ground: to inspect it and see if it was good enough to be their final bed in a few years' time. Krishna and only Krishna with the exception of the rishis, knew what was to happen to *all of them* when Kurukshetra war was to be fought.

That was the purpose for which he was born: he knew it. He was born to kill all of them and establish Dharma once again: to plant the seed of Dharma on this same holy spot which seemed to be fated for blood-baths every time. Parasurama once filled up the five lakes with the blood of kshatriyas and as for Krishna, the entire field of Kurukshetra would be soaked with the blood of kshatriyas and on that red soil would be planted the seed of Dharma by him.

Krishna sat silent for a long time and his mind's eye saw all the events that were to happen and it made him sad. Sthitaprajna that he was, he was beyond the effect of the opposites and yet, even he was unhappy at the thought of the task ahead of him. Painful indeed it was to contemplate

without emotion this celebration and later, the river of blood which was to flow here.

He roused himself out of his reverie before anyone could notice him: but Balarama had been watching him all the while. He came near and said: "Come Krishna, shake yourself out of this despondency into which you seem to have fallen. I can guess what you are thinking about. But it is not going to help: this sadness. Whatever has to happen, will happen. It is destined: the future you are dreading. It is unfortunate that you and I are able to look into the future. Ignorance would have been much more welcome than this power. Forget it, brother, and come with me. Look who has come to talk to us."

Krishna smiled sadly and took his brother's hand which had been held out to him and stood up. In the near distance they saw Nandagopa. The brothers ran to him and they fell at his feet and those of Yashoda who stood by his side. They shed tears of joy when their parents embraced them. Devaki went near Yashoda and said: "My dear sister, I just bore these sons. They have been your sons and they will always be only your sons. How can I forget the favour you did us by taking these sons of mine in your care? You guarded them like the eyelids guard the eyes. Though you knew that you were courting the displeasure of Kamsa you did not hesitate even for a moment. How can I thank you?"

Yashoda said: "You thank me! It is strange that you should talk like this! We are the ones to thank you: not just me and my lord but the entire Brindavan. Can we ever forget the glorious years when I had these two boys all for myself? Can I forget the happiness which was all mine? the happiness of being known as Krishna's mother? It is the thoughts of those days which are keeping us alive: or else, who can live after being parted from Balarama and Krishna?"

AN ECHO FROM THE PAST

Krishna looked beyond the shoulder of his mother. At some distance were assembled the gopis. Their eyes, which had been starved so long for a look at his face, were now feasting themselves. There was surprise in their eyes since they saw that he was now a man and not the young Krishna whom they had known: the Krishna who used to tease them on the banks of the Yamuna: who was wont to hide their water pots and would give them back to them only after they had given him what he asked for: who had danced with them all through the night on the white sands of the river bank on that moonlit night when all the world held its breath watching the Rasa: the Krishna who had stolen their garments when they were bathing on that cold morning in the month of Margashirsha. Even now, their faces would be suffused with red when they thought of the many things which had happened when Krishna was in Brindavan.

And now after all these years Krishna was there and they could see him. They were feeling nervous. So many kings and their queens were there. They were so different from the gopis and this made them worried lest someone should point out to them and say: "Look at those women. They are the gopis and it has been said that Krishna was a great favourite with them," and then laugh as though it were very amusing. Krishna was theirs and he seemed so distant, so far away from them.

Krishna looked at them and he knew what was passing in their innocent minds. He went to the spot where they were grouped and smiled his old charming smile. They were drinking with their eyes: so beautiful was he to look at! He walked past them and they followed.

When he was alone with them he embraced each one of them and made them happy. They forgot all their anger against him and all their grievances. They were all happy that their Krishna was the same Krishna

they had known: the wealth and royalty and city life which had all been imposed on him had not changed him a bit.

They stood with him smiling and weeping with joy and Krishna spoke to them with love, a great deal of love and his voice was full of tenderness when he spoke. He said: "My dear companions, my beloved friends of the long ago! How far away it seems since I last saw you! You must have been thinking of me as a man who spoke lies. You must have been saying: 'Krishna is ungrateful. He has forgotten all the love we gave him'. You must have said: 'Krishna told us a lie when he told us that he would come back. He has deceived us.'" He smiled at them when they looked down ashamed that he had guessed all that they had been thinking! Krishna continued: "I know all that you would have felt and I do not blame you. But then, I could not help it, my friends. I was caught up in a snarl of intrigue and deceit and I had to play a different role from the carefree cowherd's life which I enjoyed so much. Then I had nothing to worry my mind except the trysts I had to have with you and how to arrange them!

"Now I have been made to bear the burden of the kinsmen who are dependent on me for their well-being. Believe me, you do not know how often I have thought of the days I spent in Brindavan and often, I have wished that I could go back to those days and to you all. But it is all in the past." Krishna was silent for a while. His face lost its teasing look and the smile vanished from his face and even from his eyes. He shook himself.

Krishna brought himself back to his old frame of mind and said: "Friends, one thing is certain. God joins people: makes them meet and spend some time together. And, when they become involved with each other emotionally, it is the same God who separates them: parts them forever. The wind that blows scatters the clouds in all the four directions and it assembles them too. Pieces of straw fly together in the wind and then their courses are entirely different. A wisp of cotton or a particle of dust: it is no matter what it is. For a while they are all brought together and later they are scattered. Even so, I was made to spend some time with you and now I have been taken away from you. One thing, however, cannot be taken away from you or from me and that is the love I have for you and the Bhakti you have for me. You must never have the thought that I am away

from you. I am you and let this thought rid you of your unhappiness at being parted from me."

THE HOMAGE OF THE RISHIS

The rishis had come there to Samantapanchaka since they wanted to spend some time with Rama and Krishna. The entire galaxy of the heavenly rishis was present there: Vyasa, Narada, Chayavana, Asita, Devala, Vishvamisra, Sandananda, Bharadwaja, Gautama, Parasurama with his disciples, Vashishta, Galava, Bhrigu, Pulastya, Kashyapa, Atri, Markandeya, Brihaspati, Angiras, Agastya, Yajnavalkya, Vamadeva and many others.

All the kings stood up as one man. This rare honour was, indeed, a godsend to them. Krishna and Balarama rose up from where they were sitting and with great excitement they honoured the rishis along with the other kings. When the *arghya* and *achamaniya* and *padya* and other forms of worshipping the honoured guests were offered and accepted the rishis were seated in that sabha which glowed like Satyaloka: with purity and with the brahmajnanis. Assemblies of kings were so poor and so insignificant in comparison with this congregation of rishis, each of whom had accumulated tapas enough to destroy the entire world or to create a new world. These great men had come to pay their homage to Rama and Krishna: the young men of the Yadava House who had been born, and who were living as ordinary human beings: these *avatars* of Narayana.

Krishna said: "There is no doubt that we have achieved the greatest punya in our lives since we have been blessed by the sight of so many great men all at the same time. And we are blessed in the fact that we have been, at a single stroke, cleansed of all our sins.

"The elders have taught us several methods of washing away one's sins. Bathing in the rivers which are holy, is one method. Another is worshipping the Lord by invoking him and making him reside in an image made of stone. How can these compare with the punya obtained by the sight of men like you? We can touch you and we can converse with you:

we can take the dust of your feet and the water with which we wash your feet, when sprinkled on our heads, will cure us of the disease of birth and death.

"This does not mean that *tirthas* do not purify: that worshipping the Lord in the form of an image does not purify. They do, but it takes a long time. Sadhus, however, purify us the moment their eyes light on us. The fire does not purify by sight alone. The sun does not. The moon and the stars which crowd the heavens do not purify by just the sight of them. The earth and the other four elements do not do it. Even the worship of the WORD as the Brahman, does not purify immediately. All these do purify in the sense that when they are worshipped they rid the devotee of his sins. But the cause of the sins which is Ajnana —ignorance of the Truth — that is not removed by these objects of worship. But the great wise ones remove one's sins as well as one's ignorance at the same instant and they do not need a long period of worship to grant us this. Their eyes, when they rest on us with kindness, perform this miracle.

"Man who suffers from the sense of 'I' in spite of his knowing that this body is made up of just so much water, some bones, and a large area of skin: a quantity of fat and blood: man, who suffers from the disease 'MINE' about his wife and children is taught the simple lesson that by visiting the *tirthas* and by worshipping the little figures made of earth and stone, he will win the grace of the Lord. The really wise man is one who worships sadhus like you and gains salvation immediately."

The rishis could not follow what he meant when Krishna spoke these words of praise. He was the Parabrahman and he spoke words which praised them! They tried to find the reason why he did it. This was the charming quality of their greatness which Krishna loved: they were humble. They did not know, could not grasp how much they meant to Krishna.

They smiled to themselves when the truth was the opposite as far as they were concerned: they came to see him so that a sight of him would cure them of the many bondages of the world and he spoke as though he were an ordinary mortal.

The rishis worshipped him with their minds and with their thoughts and Krishna accepted their worship and their homage with his eyes and his mind. They knew him for what he was but then they could not speak about it. Krishna knew it and he smiled at them as if to say: "I thank you for helping me keep up this appearance. I am just Krishna the Yadava and Rama is my elder brother. That is all they know and all they need to know about us." The rishis said with their minds: "Your actions, my lord, are ever beyond the comprehension of mortal man. The same earth is used to fashion different shaped pots and each pot assumes an entity of its own but they are all the same earth. Even so, you have, yourself, assumed different shapes and forms to create, to protect and to destroy this Universe. Untouched as you are by the bondages you impose on yourself in these different forms, people get deluded that you are an ordinary mortal and that you will go through the same pain and pleasure cycle as they do.

"You have been born again and again and the purpose of your birth everytime is to re-establish Dharma which threatens to get eclipsed often. You are the Parabrahman and we worship you in that form. Your blessed feet which have granted to Ganga her purity have been in our minds for long and it is to touch them with our eyes and worship them silently that we have come here. Please accept our homage."

They took leave of everyone there and made as if to go their ways. Vasudeva followed them and stopping them said: "Please accept my worship. I have a favour to ask of you. Please teach me the path to be followed: the path which will rid me of sinfulness." Narada was amused by his words. He spoke in an undertone to his companions and said: "What a foolish man he is! But he is ignorant. He has the Lord of lords as his son, as his constant companion. And yet, thinking of Krishna as his child, he is ignorant of his good fortune and he comes to us to tell him how to rid himself of sinfulness! It is indeed true that constant association with anyone breeds indifference towards that person and it has happened to Vasudeva. When Krishna was born, Narayana revealed himself to this man in his own form and yet, now, because of having him with him all the time Vasudeva has forgotten his rare privilege and behaves like other common men. A man living forever on the banks of the Ganga does, often, go in

search of a *tirtha* to purify himself. Even so, Vasudeva with Krishna by his side, wants to know ways of worship which will cure him of his sinfulness! Strange are the ways of the Lord."

The rishis said: "The worship of Lord Narayana is the path you should follow. This is the easiest, the best and the quickest way to find salvation. A king should, at some time in his life, perform yagas and do acts of charity and he will find salvation easily."

Vasudeva requested them to oblige him by officiating at a yajna which he wanted to perform there, in the holy spot Samantapanchaka.

They agreed to do so. And soon the preparations were made for the performance of the yaga.

The wise man, the rishis had said, should perform the yagas by doing which he will be rid of his love of wealth, love of wife and love of children and other worldly desires. He should not have a desire even for the achievement of Swarga, the pleasures of the heavenly life. This was detrimental to the realisation of the Atman. Kings of old were, for this reason, abandoning their kingdoms and their wealth and all their many attachments in order to attain salvation. A Dvija, who is a Brahmin or a kshatriya or a vaishya has three duties to be done: duties to the gods, to rishis and to the pitris. These three are in order, yaga, Adhyayana and fathering sons. In so doing they clear their debts to the three.

Vasudeva, they said, had only one debt to clear: that for the gods which could be done by the yaga.

The yaga was performed and the rishis acted as the Ritviks to him because they could spend more time with Krishna! Vasudeva was very happy that they had come to Samantapanchaka since it led to so many great events: the meeting of all his friends who ruled the other countries, the reunion with Nandagopa and the meeting of the rishis who helped him to perform the yajna. He felt happy and very contented.

DEVAKI'S DESIRE

Once Devaki called Balarama and Krishna to her side and said: "The rishis tell me that you are the incarnations of Narayana. I believe it because they told me so. To me, however, you are my sons and I am happy in the thought that I am your mother. I know that years back, when your guru wanted his dead son brought back to life as a gurudakshina, you both performed the seemingly impossible task of entering the city of Yama and getting him back. I have long felt sad at the thought of the sons whom I bore before you both were born: sons whom Kamsa killed. I wonder if it will be possible for me to see those sons of mine with your help."

Rama and Krishna entered the world Sutala with the help of their yoga. Bali was the lord there and he welcomed them with great joy. He honoured them since he knew who they were and he praised them with words which only the really wise could speak. Krishna accepted the worship of this favourite Bhakta of his and said: "We have come to ask a favour of you. During the great Swayambhu Manvantara Marichi and Oorna had six sons. Once, Brahma tried to make love to his own daughter Saraswati. The six brothers, seeing this, laughed at him. Because of this they were cursed to be born as asuras. They were born as the sons of Hiranyakashipu. They were later born as the sons of Devaki and, as soon as they were born, were killed by Kamsa. They are now with you. My mother Devaki is pining for her dead sons and wants to see them. I will take them from here. They will then be free from the curse which has dogged them so long and they will be able to reach the heavens."

Balarama and Krishna took the six sons of Devaki with them. They were named Smara, Udgita, Parishvanga, Patanga, Kshudrabhrit and Ghrini. They reached Dwaraka and the brothers led the six to the presence of Devaki. She was overcome with joy at seeing the sons who were dead. She placed them on her lap and bathed them with her tears. They were now free of their curse and after prostrating before Vasudeva and Devaki they

ascended to the heavens. The ache and longing which Devaki had been having all these years now left her and she did not mourn the fact that her sons were restored to her only to vanish soon.

SUBHADRAHARANA

Parikshit wanted to know how Arjuna married Subhadra, his grandmother. Suka told him the story.

Once Arjuna had to spend one year wandering all over Bharata. It was a *tirtha yatra* forced upon him. While he was travelling news reached him that Balarama was planning to give his beautiful sister Subhadra, to Duryodhana. Earlier, when Krishna's cousins and the Yadava youngsters spent their time in the city of Indraprasta they were in the habit of talking about their city. From them Arjuna had heard about the extremely lovely sister of Krishna: about her charm and about her many other qualities. Hearing about her had made him fall in love with Subhadra and even so, Subhadra had heard many stories about the valour of Arjuna and his handsomeness and had chosen him as her lord. When news reached Arjuna that Balarama might upset his plans Arjuna assumed the form of a Sanyasi and with a trident in his hand and with ochre robes concealing his princely frame Arjuna arrived in the city of Dwaraka.

The citizens and the simple-minded Balarama did not see through his disguise. Arjuna had planned his visit to coincide with the four rainy months when yatis would stay in one place and accept the hospitality of some king. Accordingly during the Chaturmasa Arjuna, whom Balarama found in the temple courtyard on the hill by name Rai vataka, took him home and falling at his feet, he requested him to accept the hospitality of the Yadava House. "So be it," said the love-lorn yati.

There was a custom among kshatriyas that a young girl who was of marriageable age should wait on the rishi who would be the guests of the kings. If she did, they would bless her and she would get a good husband. In accordance with this custom Rama asked Subhadra to attend to the wants of the yati. Krishna remonstrated saying: "My dear brother, I do not like the idea of our Subhadra, young and lovely, attending to the comforts

of this yati." Balarama wanted to know what his reasons were for objecting to this plan. Krishna said: "This yati is too young and too handsome to be beyond the desires of the world. I do not think it is safe to keep him in the midst of any group of girls, leave alone Subhadra. He seems to be a false yati." Balarama was beside himself with anger and he said: "Krishna, do not dare to talk like that about great people. Why should you assume that this man is false just because he is young? You are wrong. Look at the tejas on his face! Apologise to him." Krishna meekly stood by while Subhadra was summoned from inside and asked to be in charge of the yati. Krishna smiled as the 'yati' tried not to show the desire in his eyes which were half-closed! The only way to make Balarama do what he had done was by telling him not to do so and Krishna knew it only too well. He wanted his sister to marry his beloved friend Arjuna and not the eldest Kaurava.

Arjuna spent a very happy time in the palace gardens with his beloved Subhadra to attend to his wants. Soon she came to know that it was Arjuna who had come there in the form of a yati. When Krishna saw how things were, he arranged a great festival which had to take place outside the city and when she came out of the fort Arjuna carried away Subhadra to Indraprasta.

Balarama was furious and he wanted to pursue Arjuna and bring Subhadra back. Krishna told him that it was foolish to do so. "Right from the beginning I was against that yati staying in our gardens with Subhadra attending on him," said Krishna quietly and Balarama shouted at him saying: "Krishna, do not try to deceive me with all this talk. You must have known all along that it was Arjuna." After pacifying his brother Krishna said: "Nothing terrible has happened, my dear brother. She has married only a great hero. He is the son of your father's sister and he is the mightiest archer in the world. A hero's sister should be the wife of a hero and meet it is that Balarama's sister should have chosen his cousin as her lord." Rama was mollified by these words of his dear brother Krishna and he went to Indraprasta later, with Krishna and some other Yadavas with gifts and offerings for the bride and groom.

SHRUTADEVA AND BAHULASHVA

In the kingdom of Videha, there was a city by name Mithila, and here dwelt a brahmin called Shrutadeva. He was famed for his devotion to Krishna. He was a wise man. He was ever contented and he was a grihastha. He had that rare virtue of being satisfied with what he had. Everyday he was able to get just enough food to keep body and soul together and never once had he got more than that: and never once had he expressed a desire to get more. With what he got, he would satisfy his wants and his wife and children followed his example.

In the same city of Mithila lived the king of the country by name Bahulashva who was a descendant of the great Rajarshi, Janaka. This king was as great a man as Janaka in the sense that he had no illusions of "I" and "MINE". He was a noble man and he was also a great Bhakta of Krishna.

Krishna took it upon himself to visit these two Bhaktas of his and he set out for Mithila. With him went the rishis Narada, Vamadeva, Atri, Vyasa, Parasurama, Asita, Aruni, Suka, Kanva, Brihaspati, Maitreya and Chyavana.

All the way to Mithila Krishna's chariot was stopped often and he was made to accept the worship of the citizens and the kings who ruled those countries. Thus they passed Anarta, Dhanva, Kuru, Kanka, Matsya, Panchala, Madhu, Kekaya and Kosala. Worshipped by all of them Krishna proceeded to Mithila. When they heard that Krishna had come to Mithila, the people of the city rushed to the outskirts of the city and worshipped him: welcomed him with offerings of flowers and scented water and all the articles used for a royal reception. The rishis were honoured in the same manner and they were pleased.

Out of the city came Shrutadeva and Bahulashva. Their eyes were closed and tears were there for everyone to see. Their arms were raised aloft and the palms were placed on their heads. Thus they fell at the feet of Krishna and requested him to accept their hospitalities. Each of them asked him and Krishna acceded to the requests of both of them.

He entered the homes of both of them by assuming two forms and enjoyed their hospitality. Bahulashva's joy was great when he knew that Krishna whom he had been worshipping since so many years had, at last, taken it into his mind to bless him by entering his house and sanctifying it.

He sat at the feet of Krishna and massaged it with reverential hands. The rishis were honoured as was their due. He then said: "My lord, you have made me happy by coming to see me. You have once said: Adishesha may be my kinsman: Lakshmi may be my beloved wife: Brahma, the creator may be my dear son. Still, all these are not as dear to me as a Bhakta whose mind is set on me constantly.' To prove this statement you have come to bless me and my country. You are born in the House of the Yadavas to glorify that name and how can one, who has come to know the truth about you, that you are the Parabrahman: how can he ever forget your lotus feet? You must stay for a few days with me and make my home heaven on earth." "So be it," said Krishna and stayed in the palace of the king for a few days.

Even as Bahulashva welcomed Krishna, Shrutadeva was extremely happy to see Krishna and the rishis as his guests. He borrowed some seats and grass mats from his neighbours. There was darbha grass piled in a corner and that was also used as a seat.

Making Krishna sit on a darbhasana Shrutadeva washed his feet and with his wife and children by his side he sprinkled the water on his head and those of his family. He offered the fruit amla and perfumed waters. With the tulasi leaves and with tender young blades of grass which he had collected and with lotuses which bloomed on the lake he worshipped Krishna, and he sat at the feet of the Lord and again and again fell at his feet and took the dust of his feet on his head.

Krishna spent several days at the house of Shrutadeva also and went back to Dwaraka.

THE DOUBT OF PARIKSHIT

Parikshit had a doubt which he wanted to be cleared by Suka. He said: "My lord, ever since you have been telling me about the grace of the Lord: his infinite mercy and his bounty, I have been noticing one thing. Asuras, devas, and human beings have all known to worship the different forms of the same One: the Brahman. One fact stands out clear. Lord Mahadeva is ever described as one who has abandoned all the riches of the world: or of the heavens, for that matter. He wears no ornaments except a mala up of the heads of corpses found in the burning ground which he frequents. He is dressed in the skin of a tiger and that of an elephant. His jewels are snakes and he smears ashes on his body: ashes, again, from the burning ground. He lives on top of the cold and harsh mountain where there is eternal snow: His attendants are the Pramatha ganas and it is evident that there is not a sign of wealth anywhere about him.

"Narayana, on the other hand, is described as entirely the opposite. His spouse is Lakshmi the goddess of wealth and he wears yellow silk and earrings made of gold and on his chest gleams the jewel by name Kaustubha. He smears sandal paste on his body and he wears a crown set with precious stones. Even the sword he holds in his hand and the bow he uses are inlaid with precious stones and gold.

"And yet, and yet, my lord, those who have chosen Mahadeva as their Ishta daiva are blessed with wealth: riches beyond the dreams of anyone and they enjoy the pleasures of the world to which the giver is a stranger. On the other hand, those who have chosen Narayana as their Ishta daiva find themselves to be always poor. They have never been blessed with wealth like the others and their lives are also more full of suffering than those of the others. Tell me why it is so. The gift of each of these: Mahadeva and Narayana is the opposite of what he is described to possess. Please clear this doubt for me."

Suka said: "It is indeed a pertinent question you have asked. I will try to answer it as best as I can. What a man reaps as a result of his worship depends on his knowledge of the Brahman. If he is not fully conversant with the real Truth, he then chooses his Ishta daiva: the absolute Truth, the Brahman, which has no form and which has none of the three gunas, is however, conditioned by the three gunas and the different conditionings have been given different names. A man who worships one or the other of these conditioned forms of the Brahman as his Ishta daiva worships it as such and gains his small desires very soon.

"The three gunas are said to be represented by the three Murtis: Brahma, the creator stands for Rajas: Mahadeva for Tamas and Narayana for Sattva. In reality these three gunas together cause the Universe but for the sake of explaining the Absolute in terms which are so inadequate, these definitions are chosen.

"When the Brahman assumes the form of one of the gunas, he is called by that name. Mahadeva, or Shiva or Shankara, is ever said to be the symbol of the Aham Tattva: the Maya associated with Aham. There are three forms he is said to take up. The first is pure Tamas: the second is Tamas blended with Rajas: and the third is Tamas blended with Sattva. Mahadeva, therefore is ever endowed with the gunas.

"Now, Aham Tattva is actually the three powers: Vaikarika which is Rajasa, Taijasa which is Sattvika and pure Tamas. Out of these three forms of the Aham Tattva sixteen Vikaras, that is, distortions, alterations, are formed: the five karmendriyas, the five jnanendriyas, the five elements, and the mind. When a man of little knowledge worships one of these 'gunas-infested forms' of the Absolute, his desires are soon fulfilled.

"Narayana is to be known as without any of the three gunas: who is not conditioned by these: who is the Purusha: who was there before the gunas made their appearance: who is apart from Prakriti which is but a manifestation of the Purusha: the illuminator of the illumined: the one apart which is the Sakshi for the entire manifestation called the Universe.

"When a man realises Narayana to be this, his devotion to Narayana naturally makes him guna-less which means that he has no desires. Wealth

has no meaning for him and he is granted tranquillity.

"When the ashvamedha was over, Yudhishtira, your ancestor, asked the same question of Krishna. And Krishna said: 'When I am pleased with a man and wish to reward him I have taken away his wealth from him. The man wants to give it all up since he knows they are transient and he wants to come to me. But, caught as he is in the web of Karma, the bondage which is so powerful, he is distressed since, in spite of himself, he has formed some attachments to the things of this world. For such a man my anugraha, grace, takes the form of poverty. I take away his worldly possessions. Once a man becomes poor he suffers very much and his friends and kinsmen abandon a man who is poor. Even if he tries to earn money and wealth for the sake of pleasing his dependents and others, because of my grace, he will find that his attempts will be fruitless and he will learn to banish these thoughts from his mind. His attachment will vanish and he will abandon his desire to acquire worldly goods. When he becomes detached from these his mind becomes pure and it will turn towards good people, men are devoted to me.

“ ‘Yudhishtira, some, however, even when their wealth is taken away from them, worship the gods endowed with gunas and such men soon get what they want. The gods grant them wealth which makes them proud, arrogant, and they forget even the gods who granted them these and insult them.

"Brahma, Mahadeva and Narayana are good at granting all that they are asked for and they can also ruin a man. The two Murtis, Brahma and Mahadeva grant your desires soon. They are easily pleased but Narayana is not easily pleased.

“ ‘ I will tell you the story of Vrika, an asura. Once, this evil-minded Vrika met Narada and asked him: "Tell me, which of the three Murtis is most easily pleased. I want to know because I want to pray only to him." "

" Narada said: "Mahadeva is easily pleased with the worship of those like you. He has done it quite often. Ravana was one of the Bhaktas of Mahadeva and Banasura was another. These earned great wealth and power because of their devotion to Mahadeva. You can also please him easily." ' "

" Narada deliberately did not tell him that these same devotees had to suffer later for the benefits they got from Mahadeva.' "

THE STORY OF VRIKA

" Vrika went to the holy place named Kedara and worshipped the lord Mahadeva who is known in that kshetra as Kedareshwara. Vrika sacrificed his own flesh and prayed to his lord. He built a great fire and cut pieces of flesh from his body and threw them into the fire as offerings to Mahadeva. For seven days he performed this unique sacrifice and on the eighth day he was desperate because the lord had not appeared before him yet. He took the waters of the Abhisheka of the lord on his head and, with his sword, he tried to cut off his head, as Ravana did of yore.

" Mahadeva emerged out of the fire and held the two arms of Vrika. His divine touch made the devotee whole again. The lord asked him what he desired. Vrika said: "Please grant me only one desire which I have had for a long time. Anyone whom I touch on the head must die at once.' " "

" Mahadeva had to let him have his wish, stupid as it was.' "

" Vrika then said: "I want to test the power which you have granted me. I will touch your head now.' "

" Mahadeva had to leave the spot and run in the direction of his mountain home with the asura following him. He passed all the many worlds: of the nagas, and the gandharvas and the devas. He arrived in Vaikunta, the abode of Narayana.

" `Narayana saw the coming of the asura. He knew that he was trying to pursue Mahadeva. With his yogamaya assumed the form of a young brahmachari. He had a maunji round his waist and he had a sacred thread from which was pendant, a krishnajina. He had a stick of the Ashwattha tree in his hand and on his neck gleamed a japamala. He was like little Vamana who had come again to please those who had not seen him then.

" 'He encountered Vrika and said: "Vrika, you seem to be very tired. What is bothering you? Rest for a while and tell me what you have been doing which has brought on this tired look to your limbs and this worried look to your face. If you think I can be of some help in what you are pursuing, I will then do it for you. I like you since you seem to be very naive and a person who can be deceived easily. In this world man should help his fellow-being if it is in his power to do so.' " "

" 'Vrika was charmed by the sweet words of this young boy who was glowing as though with his own glory. He told the boy all about his sacrifice and the boon he had obtained. He said: "All I wanted to know was to see if the boon would work. But Mahadeva has escaped from me and I am pursuing him.'"

" Narayana laughed and said: "Indeed, you have been foolish. From the moment I saw you I knew that you are very credulous. Don't you know that Mahadeva's words can never be believed ?" "

" Vrika was taken aback. He asked: "What do you mean? Is he not the lord who granted the boons to Ravana and Bana? Narada told me so and he cannot tell lies.' " "

" `Narayana said: "I do not know about that. But Daksha himself, who was a Prajapati, did not honour Mahadeva. We do not have much faith in him. Do you know why he ran away from you? It is not because he is afraid. It is because he does not want you to find out that his boon is false.'"

" `Vrika stood with a perplexed look on his face. Narayana said: "All right listen to me. Just try and see if his words are true. Place your hand on your head and see. I can assure you, nothing will happen . We will then go together and look for him and take him to task as to why he did this to you.' " "

" 'So charmed was Vrika by the words and the voice of the young boy that he lost his power of thinking: before he knew what he was doing, he placed his hand on his own head. The next moment his head split into two and he fell down lifeless. The sky was filled with the jubilant cry of the devas. Narayana then went to Mahadeva and said: - This sinner was destroyed

because of his many sins. A man who insults good people will come to no good. When such is the case, need I say anything about one who has offended you?" ' "

THE BEST AMONG THE THREE

Once the rishis headed by Bhrigu were performing a satra on the banks of the river Saraswati. Narada came to them and he asked them: "Who is the one who is worshipped by you now?"

"For whose sake are you making the offerings? Which of the three Murtis?"

"To the best among them," said Bhrigu.

After sowing the seed of doubt in their minds Narada left them. The rishis argued amongst themselves about the qualities of the three Murtis and finally decided that Bhrigu should go and find out by visiting all three of them.

He first went to Satyaloka. Since he went there to find out the real nature of the deity he did not prostrate before him nor did he speak the customary words of praise. Brahma was angry with Bhrigu since he did not pay him the respect that was due to him. Bhrigu was his son and so, with great difficulty he controlled the anger which threatened to burst forth. Bhrigu saw what was happening and, without a word, left the presence of Brahma and went to Kailasa, the abode of Mahadeva.

Mahadeva rose up from his seat and welcomed Bhrigu with the words: "You are my brother, I welcome you." Bhrigu, however, with the intention of testing him averted the embrace with which Mahadeva was trying to welcome him and said: "You follow wrong paths." Mahadeva became furious and with his trident uplifted, rushed towards Bhrigu to destroy him. Devi Parvati intervened and pacified him.

Bhrigu left Kailasa and went to Vaikunta. There he saw the lord Narayana lying down on the lap of Lakshmi and resting. Bhrigu went to him and kicked him on the chest. The Lord sprang up at once and fell at his feet. He

then said: "You are welcome. Please honour me by accepting this seat. Forgive us for not receiving you at the doorstep. My lord, your feet must have been hurt by touching my hard chest. Please let me wash your feet and take the *tirtha* on my head so that I can be purified." Bhrigu heard the words and he was thrilled by the nobility with which they were spoken. He knew now, who was the best among the three.

ARJUNA'S OATH

There was once a brahmin in Dwaraka who was singularly unfortunate. His son died the moment it was born. The brahmin was very unhappy and so clouded did become his mind because of this misfortune that he began to blame the king for it. He brought the dead form of the child to the palace and placed it on the doorstep. He then said: "My son is dead because the ruler of this country is a sinner. He must be a hater of us, brahmins: a man with a mind which cheats others: a miser who is ever lost in the pleasures of the world. Such a blot on the name 'kshatriya' is ruling this kingdom and that is why this has happened to me." He would not stop there. He said: "We are the subjects of a king who enjoys hurting others: whose character is not good: who is not able to keep his senses under perfect control."

A second child was born to him which also died in the same manner and again the brahmin went his tirade against the ruler. This happened nine times. Nine of his sons died as soon as they were born and it was painful for all.

When his ninth child had died and he was at the doorstep with the child in his arms and the tirade on his lips, Arjuna, the Pandava happened to be in Dwaraka. He heard the words of the brahmin and he said: "O brahmin! is there no archer in the place where you live? Is there no kshatriya to protect you? Why do you weep incessantly? and unnecessarily? The Yadavas are here, and they are, evidently more fitted to be brahmins and perform yajnas. The country where a brahmin loses his wife, his child, or his wealth and is unhappy because of that, is not ruled by a kshatriya. The ruler is like an actor who wears the dress of a king but is, in reality, not a kshatriya. The very word means one who saves the suffering and it is up to us to live up to name. I will now protect your child. I promise to do so. If I fail to keep my word, I will then enter the fire and wash away my sins."

The brahmin, chastened to some extent said: "This is Dwaraka where great men live: great heroes like Balarama, Krishna, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, not to mention Satyaki, Kritavarma and many others. All of them have not been able to do anything for me. How can you succeed where they have failed? You are foolishly obstinate. I have no faith in your words."

Arjuna said: "I am not Balarama, I grant you that. Nor am I Krishna nor his son Pradyumna nor Aniruddha, his son. But I am Arjuna, the Pandava, and I have with me the bow Gandiva which is famed the world over. I am also a famous archer. Please do not belittle my prowess with which I have pleased even my lord Mahadeva. I will fight with Yama and get your child back for you. I promise you I will do it.

After so much talk the brahmin thought that he could have faith in the words of Arjuna. He went home with a happy heart. When the time came for his wife to deliver her child, the brahmin became worried and he came to Arjuna and said: "Please come and protect my child. Save him from death as you promised to." Arjuna did Achamana with pure water and with great humility he worshipped lord Mahadeva. He then took up his Gandiva and he went with the brahmin.

He went to the room where the woman was laid to bed and with his astras he built a cage round the room.

A few moment later was heard the cry of a new-born child. The next moment the child rose up into the sky and vanished from their sight. The brahmin was so angry with Arjuna that even his grief was forgotten. He said: "I should never have placed my faith in the words of a coward and braggart. Where Pradyumna failed, where Aniruddha could not succeed, where even Balarama and Krishna were not able to do anything, how could this Arjuna be successful? Stupid fool that I was, I placed so much faith in this Arjuna who has spoken a lie."

While the brahmin went on cursing himself Arjuna carried his weapons and with the power of his yogamaya he went to Samyamani which was the home of Yama. He could not find the child there. He went to the homes of the devas who guard the eight quarters and found that the child was not

with anyone of them. He was now sure that the child could not be brought back to life. He came back to Dwaraka and built a fire into which he wanted to fall and kill himself since he had failed to keep his promise to the brahmin.

Krishna stopped him and with proper reasons convinced him that this self-immolation on was unnecessary. He told him in secret: "I will show you the sons of this brahmin. Never insult or blame yourself . This man who has been cursing me for so long will soon praise us very profusely."

Krishna took Arjuna in his chariot and went towards the west. They crossed the seven islands and the seven seas. After a long travel they reached a very dark region. The four horses of Krishna could not see what was in front of them and they could not pull the chariot. Krishna threw his chakra into the darkness and when it began to glow like the sun the horses proceeded forward. The brightness of the chakra by name Sudarshana, was too much for the eyes of Arjuna and he closed them.

When he opened his eyes he saw the ocean and they were entering the waters. They travelled in the midst of the waves and under the sea Arjuna saw a city and there was a mansion in that city. The city was called Mahakalapura. There Krishna showed him the fabulous serpent by name Adishesha. It was an immense serpent with a thousand heads and the jewels on its heads were like so many suns. His eyes were red and they darted on all sides with flames rising out of them. He was as large as a mountain of silver and his neck and tongue were black. It was a sight fascinating enough to hold Arjuna spellbound.

He raised his eyes. Reclining on the soft bed which Adishesha made for him was the Lord of lords, Narayana, and Arjuna saw him. Even as he was watching with awe and a trembling of his limbs Krishna saluted Narayana and when he got his thinking power back Arjuna saluted him hurriedly. So they stood in the presence of the Paramatma and the Lord spoke to them with a slight smile. He said: "Krishna and Arjuna, you have been born into this world to protect Dharma and you are both my Amshas. I wanted both of you to see me and that was the reason why I brought the sons of the brahmin here. You can restore them to him.

"As for you, make haste and reduce the weight of the earth: burdened as she is by the many asuras who have taken the forms of kings. You can then come back to me. You are Nara and Narayana. You are above the desires of the world and its Maya and yet, you have been born as human beings for the general good of mankind."

They prostrated before the Lord once again and went back to the earth with the children of the brahmin.

Arjuna was a chastened man when he came back. He realised that his prowess and strength of his Gandiva and his astras, were all because of the grace of Krishna and that he was just nothing without Krishna.

So Krishna lived on in this world of men showing his prowess now and again: behaving like any ordinary mortal now and again: waiting for the fulfilment of the purpose for which he had descended to the earth. Like others he performed the duties as a kshatriya: worshipping the devas and performing yajnas to pacify them even though he knew himself to be Narayana for pleasing whom yajnas are performed!

He had to set an example to men as to how a man should walk in the world: how he should behave: what actions were good for him and these he could teach only by behaving like an ordinary mortal. Krishna had no desires but he could not avoid work because if he did, people would become lazy and avoid doing duties and desist from work.

And so passed the time of waiting for Krishna.

THE CURSE OF THE RISHIS

The asuras who had been born on the earth were being destroyed one by one. Several of them had been killed by Krishna when he was in Brindavan and some, by Balarama. The others were just waiting to be killed.

Something else had to be arranged before that. When Narayana took the form of Krishna at the request of mother earth and Brahma, he had asked the devas to be born as his kinsmen in the House of the Yadavas. Before his time came, Krishna had to see that the entire clan was annihilated. Since they were devas and since they had the special good fortune of being constantly in the company of Krishna they could not be killed by anyone else. Krishna thought: "Even after the war which is to take place the burden of the earth will still be heavy because of the immense group of the Yadavas, Andhakas, Bhojas, Vrishnis and Dasharhas. They are invincible. And, as Kali Yuga, the fourth quarter of time draws near, they will lose their righteousness and again, the earth will suffer. Even as a bamboo grove is burnt by the fire produced by itself even so, I should be the one to destroy them. I will keep that as my last duty before I go back." He decided that a brahmin's curse would be the best way for his purpose to be achieved.

Krishna was TIME in the human form: and, at his behest, several rishis thought of visiting a holy spot by name Pindaraka. The rishis were Vishvamitra, Asita, Kanva, Durvasa, Bhrigu, Angiras, Kashyapa, Vamadeva, Atri, Vashishta and Narada. On their way to Pindaraka Kshetra the rishis thought they would go to Dwaraka, visit Krishna and Balarama, and then proceed to their destination. They were received with great excitement by Krishna and the other elders. They were asked to stay for a while with them and the rishis agreed. The palace gardens were kept apart for their use.

The youngsters of the house were full of pranks and they wanted to tease the rishis. They dressed up Samba as a woman: Samba, the son of Krishna and Jambavati. They went to the presence of the rishis. Falling at their feet with humility they asked them: "Please do us a favour. This woman with the dark eyes is with child and she is eager to know if she will give birth to a son or a daughter. Woman that she is, she is feeling too shy to approach you herself and so she asked us to question you."

The rishis looked at the youngsters and then at Samba. They became very angry and they said: "A pestle will be born and this pestle will be the cause of the destruction of your entire clan."

The youngsters were scared out of their wits and they did not know what to do. They rushed out of the gardens and, when they took off the disguise of Samba they found an iron pestle in his garments. Something had to be done about it. And, with worried looks and halting steps they entered the council hall where the elders had assembled. They placed the pestle at the foot of the throne and stood silent. Krishna saw their scared looks and spoke to them softly and asked them what had been happening which could dampen their spirits so much! Something serious should have happened or else they would not have come into the assembly hall.

Encouraged by his tone they told them all that had happened. Balarama was furious with them. The old king Ugrasena and Rama ordered the iron pestle to be ground into fine powder and thrown into the sea. Thus, they thought, they could avert the fate predicted by the rishis.

The pestle was powdered and thrown into the sea. Only one sharp piece was left behind and it could not be broken up. This was also thrown into the sea. And all the Yadavas breathed freely after this was done and they could even find it in their hearts to forgive the youngsters for their prank. It was only a natural thing for children to do.

THE GREAT WAR

Time moved relentlessly on. The blind king Dhritarashtra, in his love for his sons and also because of his avarice, had the Pandava princes banished to the forest on the pretext of a game of dice. They stayed in the forest for twelve years and another year had to be spent in disguise. This condition also they satisfied by living in the court of Virata, the king of Matsya. When it was all completed the Pandavas asked their cousins for their kingdom to be returned to them since they had fulfilled all the conditions of the exile.

This request of Yudhishtira was firmly refused by Duryodhana. Several attempts were made by several people to make him give it back but he would not listen to any of his elders. Yudhishtira asked Krishna to go on a peace mission since there was no desire in the heart of Yudhishtira to fight. He knew that nothing was beyond the power of Krishna and if he so desired, he could avert the war which seemed to loom in the immediate horizon.

Yudhishtira did not know the purpose of the birth of Krishna which was for engineering the very war which the gentle Pandava was trying to avert. Krishna went to Hastina and it was to no purpose, apparently. Yudhishtira was unhappy since war had now become inevitable.

The spot chosen for the war was Kurukshetra. The Kauravas, represented by Duryodhana and the Pandavas, represented by Arjuna, had both come to Dwaraka to ask the Yadavas, and particularly Balarama and Krishna to help them: to befriend them. Krishna had offered them a choice: on the one hand was the immense Yadava army and on the other, himself without any weapons. Arjuna, being the younger of the two, was asked to make the first choice. He wanted Krishna and he wanted Krishna to be his charioteer. Krishna agreed to do so and the Yadava army was to join the ranks of the Kauravas.

Duryodhana, the favourite pupil of Balarama, went to him and asked him to join his side. Balarama said: "Look , the Pandavas are my cousins and so are you. I do not want to be partial to either of you. Krishna is foolish to take sides. I will not. And again, since Krishna is siding with the Pandavas, I do not want to join you and fight with my brother. I want to be left alone and you know my affection for you. Go, my dear Duryodhana, and behave like a true kshatriya." Duryodhana went away disappointed but happy that he had the Yadava army.

Balarama felt that he would have no peace of mind if he stayed in Dwaraka when the war was in progress. He therefore told everyone that he was going on a *tirtha yatra*.

* * *

On the sacred spot named Kurukshetra was fought the war which lasted for eighteen days. At the end of the war, there were very few who were left alive. All the great kings, warriors, Maharathikas, Atirathas, archers and heroes shed their blood and the field was flooded with the blood of the noblest of princes. High-born and proud kings lay on the ground and there were only women on the field sitting by the sides of their men and weeping.

* * *

The Pandavas were rulers of the world. After he had thus established Dharma on the earth, there was very little left for Krishna. He was impatiently waiting for the day when he could go back to his abode.

BALARAMA'S TIRTHA YATRA

Balarama first went to Prabhasa tirtha. From there he went north towards Saraswati. Thereafter he visited Prithudaka, Bindusaras, Sudarshana tirtha, Shakra tirtha. He bathed in the river Saraswati again when she began to flow eastward. The tributaries of the Yamuna and Ganga were visited by him. He then reached the holy spot by name Naimisha where the rishis were performing a yajna.

He was welcomed with a great show of respect and reverence since the rishis knew he was an *avatara* of Adishesha. He accepted their worship and then seated himself. He then saw Romaharshana, the disciple of Vyasa. He was the only one who had not stood up and honoured him when Balarama entered the ashrama. Romaharshana was a suta, and Balarama was angry since this suta was occupying a seat higher than the one given to himself. He thought: "This is a congregation of brahmins who pay respect to a kshatriya when he comes as a guest. But this man who is inferior to both of us by birth has insulted me. He is a disciple of Vyasa and he is supposed to have become proficient in the study of the Dharma shastras. And yet, he does not seem to know the rudiments of good behaviour. I think he deserves to be killed." Thinking on these lines Balarama took up a kusa grass and killed Romaharshana with it.

The rishis were horrified by this unexpected action of Balarama. They were very unhappy since this should not have happened. They said: "Balarama, what you did was wrong. We granted this man Romaharshana the seat of Brahma. He was to have long life, and perfect health till the end of this yajna. A reciter of the Vedas and the Itihasas and Puranas is said to be the equal of a brahmin and he occupied the seat of a preceptor and that was why he did not get up when you entered. What you have done will give you the sin by name Brahmavadha.

"We know who you are and the purpose for which you and your brother are born in this world. But, to show the path of behaviour to humanity you will have to do expiation for your sin." Balarama was full of contrition and he asked them: "I will do so. Tell me what I should do and I will do it. As for this Romaharshana, tell me how long a life he should live and I will, with my yoga, bring him back to life."

The rishis said: "Your astra and your valour should not go waste and the rule of the world is that dead men do not come back to life. You should also observe it. At the same time, our granting him long life and good health should not be falsified. You must find a compromise."

Balarama thought for a while and said: "The Vedas say that the father's body is born again as the son. And so, let his son Ugrasrava assume all the qualities of his father.

"And now, command me as to what I should do. I have killed a brahmin and the expiation should be prescribed by men like you." The rishis said: "Ilvala of ancient fame has a son by name Palvala. This asura is a great hindrance to us. Every full moon day and new moon day finds him visiting us and our yajna is polluted. He is made up of all that is filthy. If you will kill him and do us this great service it will cure you of the sin of Brahmahatya. You can then continue for twelve months the *tirtha yatra* which has been interrupted."

Balarama was waiting for the coming of Palvala. When the time came he could recognise the coming of the asura by the terrible smell assailing his nostrils. There never had been such a bad stench before. Balarama was almost breathless for a while. There rained a ghastly rain of filth on the yajnashala and soon there appeared with his trident, the asura Palvala. He was unbelievably ugly and he approached Balarama with his trident uplifted. Balarama at once thought of his plough and his pestle. They came to his hands. Balarama dragged the asura down to the earth with his plough and hit him with his pestle. His head was split and, spitting blood he fell down like a mountain hit by Indra's Vajra.

The rishis were greatly relieved at this and they praised Balarama as the rishis did when Indra killed Vritra.

Balarama took leave of them and proceeded southwards. After visiting all the *tirthas* he went and paid his respects to Agastya. He then turned his steps northwards thinking that the great war would have ended. Because, on the way he heard that all the kings of Bharatavarsha had been killed on the field of battle.

He arrived on the scene when Duryodhana and Bhima were about to fight the gada yuddha.

Balarama went to them and said: "My dear disciples, you have both learnt this gada yuddha from me and I know both of you and your ways of fighting. You are equal in every way. Bhima, you are stronger and Duryodhana, you are better-trained and more nimble on your feet. Neither of you will be able to vanquish the other. Stop this fight."

The two heroes, Duryodhana and Bhima, had been waiting for this fight for the last so many years and they hated each other too much to listen to the words of Balarama.

He realised that Fate was stronger than all the efforts of man and with a sad heart, Balarama returned to Dwaraka.

He performed several yajnas with the assistance of the rishis in Naimisha by going back to that spot. He found peace there and he spent several happy days with the rishis and returned to Dwaraka.

THE VISIT OF THE DEVAS

Brahma accompanied by his sons led by Sanaka, the devas led by Indra and by the Prajapatis and by lord Mahadeva, came to Dwaraka. They had all come to see Krishna and his Maya: his living as an ordinary mortal: his life on earth in the midst of his kinsmen and so there came with Brahma and Indra, the other celestials: the twelve Adityas, the eight Vasus, the Ashvin twins, the eleven Rudras, the Vishvadevas, Gandharvas and Apsaras, rishis and all the celestial beings. They came to see Krishna since very soon he would abandon this human form.

They covered him with garlands strung with the flowers from the gardens in the heavens. They spoke words of praise to Krishna addressing him as the Lord of lords: as Narayana. Brahma worshipped him by repeating the Purushasukta, the greatest of all prayers. Brahma then said: "My lord, we came once to you and asked you to rid the world of the burden which was too much for her to bear. You acceded to our request and took this charming form for that purpose. You have established Dharma and your fame has spread to all the eight quarters. This Yadu House has been fortunate to have you as its scion.

"In the yuga to come, Kali, men will attain Moksha easily by hearing the stories of you during your birth as Krishna, the Yadava. They can cross the ocean of Samsara easily if they do but remember you as Krishna, the Yadava who came down to the earth to save mankind.

"We do not have to tell you why we have come. One hundred and twenty years have gone by since you came down to the earth. The purpose of your birth has been served and there is nothing left for you to do now. This Yadava House has also been destroyed by the curse of the brahmins. It is only a question of time before the words of the rishis come true. Please return to your abode Vaikunta. Please protect us, your servants."

Krishna looked at all of them and said: "What you have told me is already known to me. I have already made up my mind. I have done what you had asked me to do, then. The earth is free now. This Yadava House is now swollen with pride and arrogance and is being held under control by me like the sea by its shores. The arrogance of these Yadavas is increasing day by day. If I leave now and come away, they will have no one to keep them under control. The entire world will be destroyed by them.

"The time is fast approaching when the curse of the brahmins will come true. When that chapter also is written on the scrolls of time, I will come back to your midst."

Brahma and his associates saluted him once again and went away from there, happy in the thought that soon the Lord could be back in their midst.

Soon after this, evil omens were seen in Dwaraka and the people were getting worried about the constant signs in the heavens and on the earth about some calamity which was impending.

Krishna collected all of them and spoke to them. He said: "These evil omens are frightening. On every side I am seeing them. Our Yadava House has also been cursed by the rishis years ago. I, for one, am afraid to stay without doing something about it. If we really want to escape with our lives we should leave this place for a while. I remember a story I once heard.

"During the days when Daksha gave his daughters in marriage to Chandra, the Prajapati was incensed because his daughters complained to their father about Chandra's partiality to Chitra: that he was ignoring all the others because of this, his preference. Daksha therefore cursed Chandra that he should contract the dreadful disease called kshaya and that made him waste away. Chandra went to a holy spot by name Prabhasa and there he performed tapas to Mahadeva who, pleased with him, modified the curse and so the moon waxes and wanes and is never full always.

This spot Prabhasa is very near to Dwaraka. Let us go there without delay. Bathing in the holy waters and purifying ourselves we will offer sacrifices to the pitrus and the devas. We will honour the brahmins and give gifts to

them. Like the sea is crossed by a boat we will cross the ocean of sins we might have committed."

Krishna's word was law, and soon the caravan was ready to leave for Prabhasa Tirtha.

KRISHNA AND UDDHAVA

Uddhava was one of the Yadavas who was always with Krishna and who was very near to him. He saw the evil omens and he heard the words of Krishna. He waited for the time to see Krishna alone. He wanted him all for himself. When he did find him alone he went to Krishna and falling at his feet held on to them firmly and said: "Krishna, Yogesa, you are the Lord of lords and you have made a decision. You are going to destroy this Yadava clan and then you will go away. I guessed it when you did not avert the curse of the brahmins even though you could have, if you had wished to. You are the Lord Narayana and could you not have saved us all if you had wanted to?"

"You have a purpose in coming to this decision. I am not here to ask you why all this is happening. I have come to you to ask a boon of you: a favour."

"What do you want to ask of me?", asked Krishna with his hand in that of his friend. Uddhava was very dear to Krishna.

"You, Krishna," said Uddhava. "I want you, and your nearness. All these years I have been always with you and not a moment has passed when I did not see you or talk to you. If you leave me, what will happen to me? I cannot remain here for even half a moment when your holy feet have become lost to me. I have ever been with you and I cannot be alone after you are gone. Please take me with you and bless me."

Uddhava was sobbing his heart out and Krishna looked at him with his eyes full of love. He could never bear to see his Bhaktas suffer. The Lord's love for his Bhaktas was far greater than the love he had even for Lakshmi, his wife.

With infinite tenderness Krishna took the hands of Uddhava in his hands and said: "You have spoken nothing but the truth when you said that my

purpose is to lead the Yadava House to its destruction. They will all die by their own hands. Brahma, Mahadeva and the devas came to me and asked me to go back to my abode. Once, years ago, at the request of Brahma I promised to take a human form along with Adishesha and the reason for this birth was to establish Dharma on the earth. I have achieved it and I have nothing else to achieve now. There is just a week more left for me to finish the last of my tasks: the annihilation of the House of the Yadavas and, as for Dwaraka, the sea will break her bounds and enter the city when I am gone.

"My dear Uddhava, the moment I leave this earth, her glory will diminish and Kali Yuga which is waiting to be born, will occupy her completely.

"Do not live in the world abandoned by me. Men during the Kali

Yuga will take great delight in committing sin. You will have to spend the rest of your time: the rest of the lifetime assigned to you in this world with your mind completely detached from your kinsmen and from everyone who have been, all these days, near, to you and very dear to you. Let your mind be set on me and only on me. With an even temperament move in this world of men waiting for the end.

"Let me tell you something, Uddhava. I will describe what Maya is. You will then know how to avoid getting entangled in its web. When the senses are in action, they perceive the world outside. There are sights which the eye sees: sounds which the ears hear: tastes which the tongue relishes, and so on. These experiences are called 'Manomaya' meaning, they are born of the mind and so they are considered transient.

This is Maya. To a mind which runs in pursuit of these which feed the senses, there occurs a kind of delusion. And, out of this delusion is born what is called 'Gunadosha'. Gunadosha is a condition when the Atman becomes 'tainted' with the gunas. This involves him further into the sea called Samsara and it is not easy for him to extricate himself from this morass.

"You should, therefore, control your senses and control your mind too, and stop these from straying into dangerous ground. Since you have been with

me so long you will not stray from the constant contemplation on the Brahman."

Uddhava shook his head sadly and said: "No, Krishna, it will not be easy. To withdraw the mind from the objects of the senses is not possible. When I say it, I, *who has ever been devoted to you*, what then, of those who have no Bhakti for you? This lesson you are teaching about keeping the senses under control is so hard to learn and harder to practise. Caught as I am in the snare made up of 'I' and 'MINE' I need your guidance to shake off this mire from my feet and reach firm ground. Tell me how." Krishna said: "Most of those who have tasted the worldly pleasures and have finally arrived at the truth have been, mostly, those who have done it by themselves. They have tried again and again and have finally succeeded in bringing their senses under control: first the senses, and then the mind. The 'stigma' of the Vasanas has to be erased by one's own efforts. It is one's own mind which should be used to achieve this detachment. Man is given the power of discrimination and, with the help of this, he should arrive at the Truth.

"Two things confront a man who is in search of Truth. They are: Pratyaksha and Anumana. Pratyaksha is what he can perceive with his senses and Anumana is what he conceives with his mind. The fearless ones who are not afraid to follow their quest, their search to the end: those who are proficient in the two schools of thought: Sankhya and Yoga: even they look only for me. The human mind comes to the conclusion that I am something apart from the things which can be perceived. When the mind is illuminated, when the senses are roused, when the eye sees or the skin feels, it is not on its own accord but it is because of something else, some other power which has got to be present: this is the 'Anumana' at which the mind arrives and because of Pratyaksha which is the reality around us, and Anumana which is the speculation which is based on reality but goes further, deeper, into the real nature of the Pratyaksha: with these two the wise arrive at the Truth which is myself. I will explain this further the help of a story."

WADHUTA GITA — I

"Once there was a conversation between Yadu, my ancestor and Dattatreya, who was an Avadhuta. Yadu was once wandering on the face of the earth and he came across a young man who was naked and was walking without fear. Yadu recognised him as an Avadhuta. He accosted him and said:

" 'You appear to me to be happy man. Your face has a tranquillity which can be seen only in one who has found inner peace. Men in this world run after transient things like wealth and the pleasing of the senses: in their midst you seem to stand apart. When a forest is caught in a conflagration if an elephant is able to escape from it and soaks itself in the waters of the Ganga, the satisfaction it will have, is seen in your face since you seem to have escaped from the fire of desire and the pursuit of the things of the earth which is the lot of the common man. The joy you seem to have inside you is reflected in your calm face and if you will be willing enough, will you tell me how you arrived at this state?'"

Dattatreya said: "O king! This was culled by me from various sources. I have finally reached the end of my quest and in my wanderings in search of peace and in search of Truth my teachers have been many. I will tell you who they are who taught me how to live without being affected by the desires.

"My teachers are: the earth, the wind, the sky, water, fire, the moon, the sun, a pigeon, a python, the ocean, a moth, the honey-bee, the keeper of a beehive, an elephant, a deer and a fish, a woman by the name Pingala, a small animal like the squirrel which is called 'Kurari', a child, a young girl, an archer, a snake, a spider, and a wasp which builds its own shell. These twenty-four were my teachers whom my mind chose as my gurus. From their behaviour I selected for myself the lessons which were

essential for the advancement of my search after truth. I will elaborate on this and tell you what lesson each one of these was able to teach me.

"Even if he is oppressed by the things of the world the firm man never moves away from the right path. This I learnt from the earth. The power of enduring anything is what the earth has taught me. A wise man will ever be interested in doing good to others and he is convinced that he is born on this earth as a human being just for that purpose: that is the lesson I learnt from the mountain. To stand firm and to be unmoved is the lesson these two taught me.

"Man should learn to live with the barest minimum which is needed for him to live. He should not indulge. The really wise man, though he is placed in the midst of the objects of the senses, should learn to live without getting attached to any of them. The wind taught me this lesson. The man who has realised the Truth about himself will know that the Atman which is inhabiting this body, this body made up of the five elements, has to pass through the different stages: of childhood, youth and old age: but the one who is wise will know that he need not suffer the delusion that it is all real and he can easily pass through this world without getting involved in it, like the wind which blows through different places but is never attached to any spot.

"One of the most important truths about the Atman I learnt from the sky. When the wind blows a number of clouds are found all across the sky: and it seems to us that the sky is covered by these clouds. But in reality, they have not covered the sky. There is no contact between them and the sky though the sky *seems* to be completely covered by the clouds. Even so, the Brahman. The five elements have been used to form this entire Universe and the Atman is encased in the body made up of these elements and the abstract gunas. But, in reality, the Atman inside you is not involved with the body which is holding it and the Brahman is apart from the visible world which is born out of it: its manifestation.

"The *waters* of a river are ever pure: full of love for mankind, sweet in nature and apt to purify those who come to it. The good men of the world

are like the river which cleanses all. They do so by their sight, their touch and their words.

"Fire which is full of its own light consumes everything but is not contaminated by what it eats. Its heat is enough to purify what it consumes. Even so, the man who has tapas as his wealth will glow like fire, will be untainted even if he enjoys the things the world has to offer: he will not be sullied by them because he will purify them. He never discriminates between what is good and what is bad, when he is given something to eat. But he is so full of tapas that nothing which touches him will taint him. Even as fire is concealed in wood: the wood which it consumes, the Atman is concealed in the human body and is not visible to ordinary beings.

"The moon taught me a lesson. A great lesson it was I learnt. When we follow the waxing and waning of the moon we see that from the new moon stage when there is nothing visible in the sky to the third day when a thin sliver is seen, there is a change in the appearance of the moon. From then on, it is evident that the moon grows bigger and bigger and, finally on the Purnima day, the day of the full moon, it shines in all its glory. From the next day, however, the glory becomes less and less until, finally, we do not see the moon at all. If we consider this phenomenon properly we see that they are just the phases of the moon: the Kalas as they are called, undergo a change and these lead us to the supposition that the moon grows: stops growing: and gets smaller and smaller: and finally is no more! Even so, the stages called birth, growth and decay which the body goes through, do not affect the Atman. Man seems to be born, seems to grow up into youth, manhood, old age, and then seems to decay and finally die. But all these 'stages' are not applicable to the Atman which is eternal: indestructible. Birth dies into child, and that into youth, later, into old age, and finally, death. But these changes are for the body and the unchanged Atman remains unchanged even after this cycle of changes, even as the moon goes through its phases, waxes, then wanes and waxes again.

"When the flames rise from the fire in a continuous flow no one knows how it begins and how it ends. The particles in the fire which burn and produce the flame, are kindled, burn for a while and then die. But the

flame is so steady and continuous that no one is able to trace the birth and death of an individual particle. Several drops, after all, make up the river. The flow of the river is continuous and TIME which drives everything to its finality does not reveal to us the course of the individual drop of water. The river flows and that is all that is perceptible. Even so, in its endless journey through TIME, the Atman assumes several bodies which, each in itself, is born and dies: but, as a whole, the Atman continues its journey without any interruptions.

"The sun absorbs the waters with the help of his rays and, when the time comes, gives it to one who desires it and wants it. He is never interested in the water except with the desire to do good to others. Even so, the really wise man is never attached to the things which gratify the senses. But he takes them so that he may give them to others and see them benefit by what he has collected: like wealth, like grains and such like. This is the lesson I learnt from the sun. Another lesson was taught by him. When the sun is reflected in different-shaped vessels or in puddles on the ground: or in the dents made by the hoofs of cows while they walk, the sun we see in these different reflecting surfaces is just a reflection of the sun and not the sun itself. Again, the reflection in each case is different but it is the same sun who is reflected: even so, the Atman which is enclosed in different bodies seems to be different in each person. But in reality, it is the same Atman in all of them.

"From a pigeon I learnt the lesson that too much attachment to anything or any person will only cause pain and unhappiness. There was male pigeon and its mate and, together, they had built a nest on top of a tree. They were absolutely devoted to each other. They did everything together whether it was flying, or perching on a twig, lying down in their nest, eating, or hunting for food. If at any time, the female bird wanted anything, the male pigeon would try his utmost to get what she wanted. And so they lived happily in their nest.

"In course of time the female laid eggs in the nest. The eggs hatched and young pigeons emerged out of them. They were soft and so tender. The parent birds spent all their time in tending them and they derived a lot of happiness out of the fact that they had these young ones all for themselves.

The young ones were learning to play and gradually they sprouted wings. They delighted their parents with their attempts at learning to fly.

"Once, the parents had gone out to collect food for their young. When they were absent, the young ones were found by hunter. They were playing near their nest. He found it easy to capture them and he placed them in his net.

"After collecting food for their young, the parent birds came home. As soon as they came they found that their young ones had been caught in the hunter's net. The mother bird was distraught with grief: so much so, that she, wishing to be with the young ones, rushed into the net and was also entrapped.

"The male pigeon saw what had happened and he began to lament loudly about the misfortune that had befallen him. He said: 'My dear wife who meant everything to me is now going to leave me and with her will go my children. I lived only for the sake of these. What is the use of my being alive without them?' And so, unable to bear the sight of his dear ones trying in vain to get out of the net, the father bird also rushed into the net and was trapped. The hunter came along and taking all of them, went home happily.

"Like this pigeon, one who is ever spending his thoughts only on his possessions: on his homes, and who is bent on acquiring wealth and other worldly things to please his dear ones, will, like the pigeon, be destroyed with all those who depend on him. This birth as a human being is the gateway to the path which leads to salvation. If man does not realise this and gets involved with worldly desires, he will be like one who, having begun to climb up, falls down: and the fall is greater since the height to which he had been raised was great."

AVADHUTA GITA II

"A really detached person will not go in search of the pleasures of the senses. He should be indifferent to everything. Like the python which eats what comes its way whether it is tasty or not, whether it is small or big. The python never goes out of its way to get food for itself nor does it make any special attempt to satisfy its hunger. This was the lesson I learnt from the *python*. Even so, man should be satisfied with what he gets and he should never go in pursuit of worldly things. The python does not grieve if it does not get food daily but waits with patience: even starving for days together without thinking that it is a misfortune. Man should also have the fortitude to put up with the fact that he will be denied many of the so-called good things in life. The really wise man should learn to control his desires, the senses, to such an extent that he should forget they even exist! Though his senses are alert: though his mind is active: though his body has strength: still, man should so school these that he should be sleeping as far as they are concerned: not only sleeping but inert. He should have but one desire: Moksha and this should be his aim.

"A wise man should appear like the *ocean*. His surface should be clear and lucid but he should be so deep that no one can gauge the depth. Meaning, a man should appear as though he is very simple. Since he does not behave as the others do, the 'sensible' men of the world, he will appear simple to the common man.

"But his thoughts should be so deep that no one can guess what they are. No one should be able to cross him in his purpose since he will be a spiritual giant. Nothing should be able to upset him or cause any kind of disturbance in his mind: in his mental make-up. Meaning, the senses and the objects of the senses should be powerless to upset him or cause any kind of disturbance in his mind. When the rainy season fills the mountain torrents with water they rush down in tumult but they do not cause any

tumult in the sea when they empty themselves into it. And when, in summer time, the waters flowing into the sea are scanty, the sea does not decrease in level. Even so, when in the grip of the passions man should not let it affect him nor should he be depressed when his desires are frustrated.

"Woman who has been created, is the personification of the Maya of the Lord: and as such, she is indeed tempting. If a man loses his power of reasoning and thinking and falls a victim to her charms he is destroyed even as the *moth* that flirts with a flame. This is the lesson which a *moth* taught me. The five Indriyas, the sense organs, are for seeing, smelling, touching, hearing and tasting. The moth is destroyed as a result of the sense of sight which beguiles it. So does man, since his eyes betray him into foolishness.

"When one eats, one should take in only the amount which is necessary to keep body and soul together. And man should eat this slowly, very slowly and not swallow it all in one single mouthful. The *honey-bee* collects honey from the flowers. He does not, however, beggar them of all the honey they have, nor does he become avaricious. He takes only what he needs and, in the bargain, he is careful not to hurt the flower from which he takes the honey. Even so, a real Sanyasi should accept from the grihastha, the family man, just so much and not more: and he should not embarrass the host. Even as a honey-bee collects honey from all flowers, small or big, even so, man should cull knowledge from the big and the small. All the shastras must be studied and he should take from them what he thinks is the essence of them.

"If a man tries to save up for tomorrow he will come to ruin. When he gets food the Sanyasi should not keep some of it by say: 'I will eat this tonight' or 'It will serve me for tomorrow.' This is wrong. His hands should form the begging bowl and his stomach should be the vessel wherein the food is stored. If he does not do this he will come to grief like the honey-bee. If man collects wealth and does not give it to others nor enjoys it himself he is like the honey-bee. The man is foolish since his wealth will be taken by one who is stronger than him. The wise man knows how to make others work for him like the keeper of a beehive makes the bee work for him and benefits by their work.

"A real Sanyasi should not touch, even with his toes, the figure of a woman: even if it is a doll made of wood. If he does so, he will fall, like the male *elephant*, which is lured into a pit by the sight of a female *elephant*.

"Even beautiful music and music which has been sung with a desire to please the senses should not be heard by a Sanyasi. His mind will be, without his knowledge, bent towards the many temptations that come his way and, like a *deer* caught in a net, he will be caught in the meshes of delusion. No one is exempt from this rule. The great rishis Vibhandaka had a son by name Rishyashringa whom he had brought up as innocent as the deer he lived with. And yet, even this young innocent man was lured away from the side of his father by music and dancing which were meant to tempt him.

"The fish is tempted by the piece of meat placed as a bait and it is easily caught. Man should beware of the sense of taste. To eat less is the first lesson one should learn. Even the wise man can conquer all his other senses. But this one sense, the one sense-organ, the tongue is not easy to control. It is a strange quality of this organ that even when it is starved, it feeds on thoughts of food. A jitendriya, one who has conquered his senses, is, in reality, one whose taste-buds have been destroyed by self-control.

"The time-honoured examples of the tyranny of the senses are: the bee, the elephant, the moth and the fish. The sense of smell is responsible for the downfall of the bee which rushes to the flower with which bears that scent. The touch of the female elephant is enough to drag the male animal into the pit. Sound kills the deer. The lion roars with its mouth on the ground and the deer, not knowing where it comes from, rushes towards the lion and gets killed. The fish is tempted by the sense of taste. The piece of meat which is the bait really is the cause of its undoing. As for the moth, the sense of sight kills it. The sight of flame is enough to destroy it completely. When just the single sense and its potency is enough to destroy it completely the one who has succumbed to it, what then can one say about the condition of man beset as he is on all sides by the objects of the five senses and himself possessing no strength to resist them? Unless

he is alert always: waking or sleeping, man will fall into these pits and get lost.

"There was once a dancing girl by name *Pingala* in the country by name Videha. Her profession was such that she had to make her living out of men who paid for their pleasure.

"One night she dressed herself up with great care as it was very necessary in her profession. And, as was her custom, with a desire to tempt some man into her house she stood at the doorstep looking at the passers-by. She wanted money and so she was set on finding a rich man who would look at her and come into her house to please himself and at the same time, make her rich. For a long time she waited but no one came. She would go into the house and come out again and all the while she searched for someone who would look at her and come in. And so passed half the night. Pingala was very unhappy. Her face was drawn with disappointment and her eyes filled with tears of anger and frustration.

"Suddenly she became disgusted with herself and noble thoughts came to her mind. She said: 'A person who has not realised the ALONENESS of Atman is fit for nothing. He will never be able to shed the love he has for his possessions like wife, wealth, children, home and so on. He will not be able to give up the love he has for his own body. Look at myself! I have never been able to control the course of my mind in the wrong paths. In my desire to enjoy the pleasures of the body with a man, I have abandoned the Lord and have become foolish and obstinate . What a fool I am. Inside me is the Lord who will ever be mine and who will grant me Moksha . And having Him inside me, I have been blind and deaf. I have, all these days, been going in search of mere mortal men to give me happiness. For the sake of this doubtful pleasure which lasts for a moment: which is ever accompanied by pain, sadness and misery, I have abandoned the Lord and submitted this body of mine to endless indignities. This body of mine which is like a house built of bamboo sticks tied loosely and covered with a thin skin: this body is made up of water and blood and bones: to gratify this body I have lost sight of the Lord who still has the mercy to live inside this disgusting shell called 'the body.'

"I will not be foolish any more. I will no longer think on the things of the world which do but decay soon. That I should have had my eyes opened now, is indeed proof that the Lord has not forgotten me though I had forgotten Him till now. The troubles I have had are but the blessings sent me by Him or else I would never have come back to the right path so soon."

"And so, with the sudden realisation of the foolishness of years, Pingala abandoned all her desires and went to bed deciding that she would think on the Lord and no one else."

"Even like her, one should give up thoughts on earthly things and set one's mind on the Lord. This is the way to gain Peace. When a man becomes fond of some object in his possession, that very possession will cause him unhappiness. Once he abandons it he gains happiness. This lesson I learnt from a *Kurari*'. This small being had a piece of meat with it. Birds which were larger and stronger than it surrounded the Kurari and went on pecking it. It suffered the harassment for a while and held on to the piece of meat. But when it became unbearable, it gave up its hold on the piece of meat. At once, at that very moment, the birds, which were torturing it so long left it in peace and the Kurari went on its way without a care.

"I have no possessions and I am not affected by praise of others or by their censure. I have no wife and children to claim my affection. I am happy in the thought that I am free of the bondages which are earthly and that is why I look so happy and tranquil."

AVADHUTA GITA — III

"I will tell you about the lesson I learnt from a *young girl*. There was a young girl who was left alone in the house while her parents had gone out somewhere. They had been to some place nearby and they were to come back only the next day. When she was alone unexpected guests arrived in her house and she had to entertain them. There was no rice ready in the house. The young girl went to the backyard and tried to pound some grains. She was trying to do this in secret lest her guests should know it: but the bangles in her hand slid down to her wrist and threatened to expose her poverty by making music while she plied her pestle.

"Promptly she broke most of them and with just two bangles on each hand, she continued her work. Even these two made some noise.

She then broke one on each wrist. The single bangle did not make any noise and she could do her work noiselessly.

"The lesson I learnt from this young girl was priceless. Living with many people will only cause quarrels and dissatisfaction. Even two people are enough to cause conversation which may lead to unpleasantness later. So, like the single bangle on the girl's wrist, one should be alone in this world. Concentration is essential if one desires to attain one-ness with the Paramatman.

"If man desires to attain the Brahmi state he must perceive the one-ness with the other Atman and for reaching the Samadhi concentration is essential. The breath should first be brought under control: Pranayama. This makes the mind to be brought under control. The mind will lose its Vikshepa, its fickleness by renouncing the objects of the senses. This comes only by practice. When it is awake the mind is never steady but moves from object to object: from thought to thought: from one thing to another. It is ever restless. In the dream state the mind is rarer, no doubt,

but it is involved in a world of its own, peopled by its own creations. In the deep sleep state the mind lies dormant. It is inactive, but only as long as it is in that state. This is the condition of man's mind.

"But a mind which is, by practice, brought under control to such an extent that it has, on its own accord, given up desires, the Vasanas which accompany one from janma to janma because of the Karma we have performed, is free. Then it can be free of the gunas also easily, and become pure Sattva which is only one step less than becoming one with the *dhyeya*; the absolute. This lesson I gathered from an archer who, when taking aim, did not know what was happening around him: this archer did not know that a king had passed him by. He was so intent on aiming at the target that nothing engaged his attention except the thought that his arrow should hit his target.

"A *snake* avoids the company of men since it is highly suspicious of their intentions. It is alone and has no dwelling place of its own. It never transgresses any rule and it lives alone with itself. Even so, should a Sanyasi live: alone, without contact with another human being. He should not have a home of his own because that is only the beginning of other bondages. He should try to be as much away from the world of men as possible, by living in caves, hermitages and such like.

"The *dehin*, the dweller in the body, when it begins to think of some object intensely to the exclusion of everything else, becomes like the object thought of, like the worm which the wasp captures and keeps in its shell becomes, out of fear, like the wasp itself in course of time. When the mind thinks on the Paramatman with intense concentration, it will, in course of time, become one with it.

"The *spider* taught me the final lesson. I was watching him. He was sitting quietly on a piece of twig of a tree. Suddenly, when there was a slight breeze he spat out some thin filament out of itself: and, swinging in the breeze it reached another twig and, between the two twigs it travelled to and fro: and, in a very short time, built a web.

"A few days later I saw the same spider eating up the threads and undoing the web and soon, there was nothing left of the very beautiful web it had

woven.

"Even so, the Paramatman. He has no desires and he is beyond the reach of cause and effect. At the end of the Kalpa there is nothing. When the equilibrium of the gunas is upset by Time it is called Maya: and the Paramatman manifests Himself in the form of the Mahat Tattva and the Aham Tattva and the entire Universe made up of the elements: and, at the end of the Kalpa, he withdraws into Himself the Universe."

"The Avadhuta continued: 'O king! these are the lessons which I learnt from the twenty-four gurus I mentioned. And I have been practicing what I have learnt. This body of mine has its own lesson to teach, has also been studied by me. It is the base, the foundation on which one's very life exists: and yet, when the Atman leaves the body it becomes fit only to be the food of animals or worms or it becomes a handful of ashes. I therefore gave up all attachment to the body.

‘For the sake of pleasing the body man spends endless time and energy: he finds a wife , son, wealth, cows, servants, house, and friends. All these are assembled with great difficulty and man takes very good care of them. And what does this body do? This wooden case created by karmas of his previous birth binds him to another body in his next birth, and, without any consideration for the man who built it, decays and dies.

‘Consider the man who is fond of his body. To pacify the tongue he is drawn in one direction and in search of water since the throat is parched. The sex urge pulls him one way and stomach bothers him in another manner. The ears want good music pleasant for them to listen to and the nose wants him to provide sweet scents. The eyes want beautiful things to look at and he has to satisfy all these cravings. Like a man with many wives man is made to satisfy many desires at the same time.

‘When he was created man was given the power of discrimination and he is given a good intellect. These should help him to set his thoughts on the Brahman. After so many births far inferior to the human status, after passing through the worm state and then reptile state and then animal state man is granted the privilege of having a human form and a human mind and a human intellect. Why?so that he can use them properly. This body

should be kept alive very carefully for but one purpose: to attain salvation because that is the only reason why we are .given this form. I have realised it.

‘I have learnt absolute Vairagya: non-attachment. My mind is illuminated by the wisdom I have garnered from my wanderings on the earth and from the gurus I told you about. There is no feelings of 'I' in my mind and I have never suffered from the other disease: 'MINE' . I am wandering on the face of the earth without any desire and without any attachments and that is the reason why there is tranquillity on my face.’”

"Yadu saluted him with great reverence and bidding him adieu, the Avadhuta went away from there."

Krishna said: "Uddhava, live in the world of men without being attached to anyone or anything. Set your thoughts on me. Act in the world without any desire to please yourself. It is when desire taints actions that they become productive and karma is born: karma which causes bondage and another birth after this. Your daily duties should be performed and if they are done without any purpose behind them they will not bind you to the world of action. Fill your mind with noble thoughts. The requisites of the Ashtanga Yoga should all fill your mind: ahimsa, not hurting anyone, satya, truthfulness, astheya, non-stealing, asanga, non-attachment, lajja, shamefulness at performing wrong things, asanchaya, not collecting wealth and such like, brahmacharya, having the senses under control, mauna, silence, sthairyaa, steadfastness, kshama, forgiving, abhaya, fearlessness; these are the qualities you should cultivate in your mind and none else.

"Spend your thoughts on the nature of the Atman. Remember the example of the fire inside the wood. It is contained in the wood. When it is churned it comes out and it destroys the container. Even so, the Atman inside you, when it is seen as separate from the body which contains it, will help you to lose your 'SELF' and become one with it.

"You have heard me often enough expounding about the different pathways of approach to me. Of all the pathways, the easiest is the Bhakti yoga. It is easy and it leads you to me quickly. You will become a

jivanmukta very soon if you practise Bhakti yoga." Here Krishna smiled and said: "It is nothing new for you since you have been practising it all these years! I know the infinite amount of love you have for me. I am asking you to stay back in the world of men to teach them the Atmavidya I have taught you."

Uddhava wanted to know how long he had to live on in the world of men. "I do not see how it is going to be possible, Krishna," he sobbed and Krishna spent some more time telling him about the art of detachment: about how a baddha—one who is bound—can become a mukta—one who has found release—by constant meditation and thinking on the Lord.

It was time for them to part. Uddhava folded both his hands and falling at the feet of Krishna he shed tears profusely. Then in a voice full of emotion he said: "Krishna, the delusion which had been covering me like a cloak of darkness has been lifted by you and I have been taught the right path by you: the way out of this world of Maya. The Lamp of Knowledge has been kindled and given to me by you. Because of this, the bonds I had till now for my people, my kinsmen and others have been snapped and I feel free. Please grant me only this: that I should have this clarity till the end of my life". Krishna said: "Uddhava, go now to Badarikashrama where I once performed tapas. Stay there seeing the Ganga every day and bathing in her pure water. She is pure since she flows from my feet. Live in the forest. Eat as little as you can and go about like an Avadhuta without any attachment to anything . You will reach me very soon."

Uddhava prostrated once again before Krishna and took leave of him. The parting from Krishna was very hard for him: and even for Krishna it was a sad moment.

Without looking back Uddhava turned his steps towards the ashrama named Badarika where Nara and Narayana had once performed tapas.

THE END OF THE YADU HOUSE

Krishna had asked the Yadavas to assemble in the great hall by name Sudharma. When they were all there Krishna stood up and said: "The evil omens, as I told you, seem to be numerous. It bodes no good to our clan. I do not think it is safe for us to stay here in Dwaraka even for a moment more. We will make a pilgrimage. Nearby is the tirtha Sangotra. Let the women and children go to this tirtha. We will bathe in the waters there, purify ourselves and from there, we the menfolk will go further and reach Prabhasa tirtha. We will bathe in the waters and, purifying ourselves and let us observe fasts and other Vratas. We will offer up sacrifices to the gods and give lavishly to brahmins and the poor. This way, we can avert the calamity which seems to threaten us."

As per his wish the women, children and the old men went to Sangotra and the others to Prabhasa.

They performed all the many yagas which they had planned to, in Prabhasa. They were now sure that they had pacified the gods and that the evil which was prophesied by the skies and on the earth would be falsified. As for the curse of the rishis, why, that was so long ago that it was forgotten by all of them: and those who remembered thought of it as a mere joke since the iron pestle had been destroyed. They were safe:

One night they were all relaxing after the strenuous Vratas they had been observing all these days. All of them partook of the wine by name Maireyaka. It was an extremely tasty drink and they drank too much. Not one of them had any control over his senses or his tongue.

They began to talk drunkenly: words added to words became arguments and the arguments grew into quarrels. Within a matter of moments a great fight rose out of small arguments and each one of the heroes reached for his bow and arrows or his gada or his sword. It was indeed a dreadful

scene. They were camping on the shores of the sea and soon they came out of their tents to fight in the open, on the seashore.

The fight was terrible. Unbelievable and dreadful. Krishna stood silent all the while: he stood apart and he saw the Yadavas killing each other. He stood unmoved. He stood watching and there was impatience in his eyes.

Just when the fight began Balarama knew what was going to happen. In sheer disgust at the sight of the drunken brawl he retired to a great distance. He met Krishna's eyes and walked away. Krishna knew that Balarama would abandon his body with the help of his yoga.

Krishna turned his eyes on the fighting heroes. Soon their weapons were broken and they looked around for something to use. It was the seashore and so they found no tree which they could uproot.

On the edge of the seashore they saw a dense growth of grass. There was quite a lot of this grass and they pulled out handfuls of the grass and hit each other with it. Contrary to their expectations the weapon proved to be very effective. Each blade of grass was as powerful as Indra's Vajra. They were too drunk to consider how this could be possible. Krishna knew that each blade of grass had grown out of the powdered iron pestle which had been thrown into the sea.

Krishna stood watching as they killed each other. He saw them all die: Satyaki, Kritavarma, Aniruddha, Pradyumna, Gada, Samba, Sarana. He stood unmoved: unperturbed. Perhaps there was some emotion inside his mighty heart but no one knew. In a matter of moments the seashore was strewn with the bodies of the Yadvas. They were all dead: every one of them. Krishna stood over them and looked for a long moment.

Was this not what he had planned? Was this not the scene which he had to witness before returning to his abode?

He shook himself as if out of a reverie. Krishna walked fast: he wanted to go as far away from there as possible.

THE FINAL HOUR

Only the waves of the sea and the blue sky and an occasional bird which would wheel across the sky saw the glorious form of Krishna during his last hour on this earth. He shone like fire which burns without smoke hiding its flames. His form, dark like a rainbearing cloud, was dressed as usual with the two pieces of his favourite yellow silk. The mole Srivatsa was there to beautify his broad chest where rested the jewel: Kaustubha. His face bore a smile and the smile was made up of so many emotions: relief at the thought that at last he was free: pity for the world of men which would again drift into unrighteous ways the moment he left the earth: a sigh half sad and half affectionate for the dead men who had all been his kinsmen till a few moments ago.

The impatient look which was on his face was gone now. His mind dwelt for a while on Uddhava and again the smile came on his face and vanished.

Krishna came to an Ashwattha tree and under the shade of the tree he sat down. He assumed the Padmasana and sat in meditation. He had still one more problem which he had to solve. He had assumed the form of a human being and it was essential that he should die like a human being. How could that be possible? He smiled to himself. He was the last of the Yadavas and he knew what was going to happen to him.

Krishna sat there with the Vanamala flying in the breeze. His right-hand showed the Chinmudra and his left-hand was resting on his lap. His legs were crossed and his left foot was resting on his right thigh: and so he sat for a long hour, deep in meditation.

A hunter by name Jara was passing that way. For a second he paused and looked. From a distance he saw Krishna. He saw the yellow silk covering the limbs and on the silk could be seen the left foot. The sole was red and tender like a lotus petal and from that distance the total impression the

hunter got was that a deer was standing there. He hurried with his bow and arrow. The deer was standing still and he had to use that to advantage. He fixed an arrow to his bow with dexterity and he shot at the deer. The hunter heard a human voice cry out in pain. He hurried to the spot and found Krishna lying on the ground. He was holding his left foot which had been hurt in his two hands and there was pain written on his face. His brows were wet with sweat and the hunter was filled with horror at what he had done. He fell at Krishna's feet and said: "What am I to do, my lord? Unwittingly I have committed a crime which cannot be pardoned. Please tell me what I should do."

Krishna said: "I am not angry with you. On the contrary, I am happy that you have done me a great favour: a great service. But now, please leave me. Please let me be alone. I assure you that you will go to heaven straight for this service that you have rendered me. Do not worry but go in peace."

The hunter could not follow what the Lord had said. He only knew that he had been forgiven. With a heavy heart he walked away from there. He had killed a noble man. That was all he knew.

Daruka, the charioteer of Krishna was searching for his master for a long time. He knew that Krishna had left the spot where the terrible fighting had raged just a while back. He tried to find the path which Krishna had taken. He followed the footsteps and later, the scent of the tulasi which was ever on the neck of Krishna led Daruka to where Krishna was. Daruka saw Krishna with the arrow buried deep in his foot. Krishna had fallen on the ground and it was evident that he was in great pain. Daruka rushed to him: fell at his feet and said: "What has happened, my lord? Who did this to my master?"

Krishna said: "Daruka, there is no time to discuss all that. You must go now, at once, to Dwaraka. I am setting you a very hard task. You must tell my parents about the death of the entire Yadava clan and about the decision of Balarama to abandon his human form with the help of his yoga. After that, see to it that *no one* stays in Dwaraka. Because the sea will enter the city after I am gone.

"Tell Arjuna that he should take the women and children: and also the old and weak beings to Indraprasta.

"As for you, set your mind on me constantly and soon you will reach me." Krishna paused for a moment. He winced with pain and he said: "Daruka, there is one task more which you have to do. Please do it for my sake. Just pull out this arrow which is hurting me."

Daruka was sobbing openly and, with trembling hands, he pulled out the arrow. The Lord cried out in pain and then he took the arrow in his hand. Daruka went round him three times and he prostrated before Krishna.

"You must hurry, Daruka. Life is fast ebbing out of me," said Krishna. And Daruka left him like that.

When he looked back he saw Krishna sitting on the ground with the arrow in his hand and a smile of infinite peace was on his face.

Krishna looked at the arrow for a long time. He remembered the incident of the curse of the rishis. The iron pestle had been powdered and thrown into the waters. He remembered the servants telling Balarama that one piece of iron could not be broken up. "It is no matter," said Balarama. "Throw that also into the sea." Krishna knew that the piece had been swallowed by a fish. It was, in course of time, caught and while it was being cleaned, the iron piece which was found inside it was taken by the hunter who fixed it on his arrow since it was perfect for that purpose. It was this same arrow which had been used. Krishna did not want the words of the rishis to be falsified and he was happy. He had ever held brahmins in great reverence and even at the last moment of his life he had made it possible for the words of brahmins to come true.

Brahma, accompanied by the celestial host came to the spot where Krishna was. They were all there to take him back with them. Indra and his comrades, the prajapatis, the pitris, siddhas, gandharvas and the lesser gods, the rishis led by Maitreya. There was not space enough in the sky to accommodate the divine chariots. Flowers rained incessantly from the heavens.

Krishna looked at all of them and then he closed his lotus eyes. He went into a yogic trance and in his own form he reached his abode, Vaikunta.

THE AFTERMATH

The heavenly host could not see when the Lord went back to His abode. When the lightning leaves the cloud and enters the sky human beings are not able to follow its course and, even so, the disappearance of Krishna could not be seen even by the celestials. They returned to their places, happy at the thought that the Lord had come back to Vaikunta after he had performed those many glorious deeds for the sake of keeping his promise to mother earth.

But when Krishna left, Satya, truth, Dharma, righteousness, Kirti, fame, Shree, beauty and wealth and all that is auspicious followed him and the earth was left empty of all the glory that was hers till now.

Daruka reached Dwaraka. He went to the presence of the old people: Ugrasena, Vasudeva and Devaki: He told them about the annihilation of the Yadava clan and about the end of the great Balarama and Krishna. Vasudeva and Devaki heard the news and fell down senseless. They did not get up. In the midst of the heartbroken cries and lamentations of the women who had lost their men: and the citizens who had lost everything which they thought was worthwhile: who had nothing to live for, now that the brothers were dead, Daruka rushed to Arjuna. Painful tasks were lying on the shoulders of Arjuna.

Many of the princesses ascended the funeral pyres. Arjuna saw to it that the proper rites were observed when the Tarpanas were offered for the dead. He collected all the citizens and the remaining few young women and children and led them towards Indraprasta.

With a sudden roar, the sea rushed towards the city by name Dwaraka. It was entirely covered with water. Nothing could be seen except the turret of the mansion where Krishna lived. Very soon, Arjuna reached Indraprasta. Hearing about the tragedy at Prabhasa Yudhishtira and the Pandavas with

their queen Draupadi left their kingdom and proceeded towards the Himalayas, towards the north.

THE END OF PARIKSHIT

Suka had come almost to the end of his narration. The end of Parikshit was also drawing near.

The great Sukabrahman then said: "I have been talking to you all these days about the many *avataras* of the Lord. For those who have listened to these stories there is no suffering. There will be no such feeling as the fear of death. Abandon, therefore, the fear about your impending death.

"This body was not there in the beginning: it happened in the middle and in the end it will not be there. But the opposite is true of the Atman.

"There never was a time when the Atman was not: nor will there be a time when it will cease to be. You are not going to be born fresh, like the sprout from the seed. It applies only to the body which is perishable. Fire which is concealed in the wood, is not part of the wood but seems to be so because it is contained in the wood, even so, this Atman of yours is not prone to die.

"When a man sleeps he dreams that he has been beheaded: and he believes it to be true *until he wakes up*. He then realises that it was in a dream that he was beheaded and that it was all unreal. When a man sees his kinsman die, his father, or his mother or someone near and dear, he knows that it is death and that he will also go the same way some day. But this, like the dream of the wakened man, is but an illusion. When you wake up in the Brahmi state you will then realise that death which you have seen often enough, is for the body made up of the elements and not for the Atman which resides therein.

"A pot is filled with air. And, as long as it has the form of a pot it has an entity and a name. But, the moment the pot breaks, the air inside it becomes one with the air outside it. Even so, the Atman, when it abandons

the body which it had inhabited, becomes one with the Paramatman: the Brahman.

"Maya creates the mind and the mind, in its turn, creates the bodies, the gunas which control the behaviour of the body when life is infused into it. Because of this conditioning caused by Maya, the Atman is caught in the whirlpool called Samsara.

"But once he escapes the bondage of Maya, the Atman is free to return to the state which was his, before he became involved with the body, the mind, the gunas and the rest of it.

"Consider a flame. How is it formed? A container in the form of a lamp, oil, a wick, and fire which should be there to kindle the lamp: by combination of all these objects a flame is seen. And the flame is seen so long as, *and only so long as*, these objects are present. Even so, this Samsara.

"The oil which is the essential factor for the flame, is the object which is compared to the karma, the cause of the birth of man into this world. The lamp can be compared to the mind which holds one's feelings, emotions, the gunas. The body can be compared to the wick without which the other objects cannot function. And the kindling fire can be compared to the Chaitanya, the awareness, the life-giving factor. When these combine, the flame which is compared to Samsara comes into being.

"O king! contemplate on this illusory body and the Atman which is permanent. They are together now. You have been thinking on the Lord and only on the Lord for the past few days. The curse of the brahmin and the sting of the serpent Takshaka are not capable of killing the real YOU. You are the Brahman and you cannot suffer from the fear of death. Parikshit said should he "If you have anything else to ask of me, I will tell you can be." "I am rid of the fear of death and the happiest days of my life have been these seven days when I listened to the stories of the Lord. I have been twice blessed since I have heard the stories of the Lord and I have them from *your* lips. It is your infinite kindness towards men like me who are caught up in the bondage of Samsara which has made you come to me and bless me with your grace.

"You have taught me about the Brahman and after learning that lesson I have been rid of the slight fear I had about being bitten by the dread serpent Takshaka. My ignorance is now destroyed. I feel happy and free.

"Please grant me permission to go. I am well prepared to shed this earthly body and to reach the feet of the Lord who has been in my heart all these days. I will withdraw my senses into myself and meditate on Him.

Parikshit then worshipped Sukabrahman with all the honour due to him. He worshipped all the many rishis who had come there to help him obtain peace and comfort.

Suka, after blessing him, went away from there attended by all the other rishis.

Parikshit was alone. He sat on the darbhasana and became absorbed in meditation. So intense was his concentration that he became like a block of wood, without feelings or sensation. So he sat and fixed his mind on the form of Narayana.

Takshaka took the form of a brahmin and approached king Parikshit who was lost to the world in his meditation. No one who was surrounding the king recognised the brahmin as Takshaka. When he came near the king Takshaka took up his serpentine form and stung the king.

Even as they were all looking, the people around saw the poison fuming like liquid fire and it burnt the body of king Parikshit. In a matter of moments the great scion of the Kuru house was just a heap of ashes.

UDDHAVA'S GRIEF

The purpose for which the Lord had assumed the form of Krishna had been served. Mother earth had been relieved of the burden which had been oppressing her. The great war fought on the field of Kurukshetra for eighteen days had caused the annihilation of the entire clan of the lusty kshatriya and the earth had been drenched with their blood. On this soil the Lord had sown the seed of Dharma.

The denizens of the heavens led by Brahma came down to the earth and went to the presence of Krishna and said: "My lord, come back to where you belong. Come back to us. For a hundred and twenty-five years you have been on this earth. Putana served to be the Nandi for the cleansing ritual which you had undertaken. Now that it has been accomplished, please come back to Vaikunta." Krishna spoke in a soft and gentle voice but they could detect the firmness behind it. He spoke with a faraway look in his eyes. He was looking, they thought, into the future and not at the past and the many achievements of his which they had been enumerating. There was a sad and pained look in his eyes but his voice was firm when Krishna said: "My dear ones, my purpose is still not fulfilled. Once years back, all of you came to me and asked me to rid the world of the poisons which were choking her. I came down to the earth as you know and I have almost completed the task you set me."

Krishna paused for a long moment and continued: "But it is not complete. Look around you and what do you see? Can you not perceive that the mighty Yadava clan is still alive? These proud, arrogant, powerful and lusty Yadavas resemble the mighty ocean which is held in check by me: Only I can hold them in check. Once I go, they will be the cause of the corruption of the entire human race. Their sinfulness will increase by leaps and bounds and all the good work I have done these many years will be in vain. The Yadavas, powerful as they are, will certainly corrupt the world if they allowed to thrive. I have to be here to prevent the destruction of

Dharma on the earth. But then, the end of the Yadavas is very near. The curse of the brahmins will soon come true. When the Yadavas are no more I will be ready to abandon this world of men."

Narada and only Narada could detect the weariness in the voice of Krishna as he said this. The celestials returned to their abode and Krishna sat silent, lost in a reverie.

Dread omens could be seen in the skies, and the people were afraid that a great calamity was imminent. Krishna collected his people around him in the great hall by name Sudharma and he spoke to them in a persuasive manner. He told them about how afraid he was of portents. He reminded them of the curse of the brahmins which was pronounced long ago. Krishna continued: "Let us all go to Prabhasa which is sacred to my Lord Shankara. In the days of the long ago, Shankara is said to have cured Chandra of a wasting disease which had visited him as a result of the curse of Daksha, his father-in-law. Let us go there and offer prayers to the Lord, bathe in the pure waters, feed the poor and, by and large, wash away our sins by performing good deeds and we can thus avert the calamity which seems to be threatening our entire race. Let us not waste time."

Preparations were being made and that was when Uddhava, the companion of Krishna, came to him and fell at his feet. He was shedding tears and Krishna lifted him up. He wiped the tears from the eyes of his friend and asked: "How now, Uddhava, what worries you? Why are you sad?"

Uddhava said: "I know everything, my Lord, Krishna. You have decided to destroy the entire Yadava clan. It is to be very soon, and it will be a complete destruction. I know it. But that does not worry me. What worries me is the fact that you will go away after that. You will leave me and go away. Please take me with you, Krishna. I cannot live without you. Ever since the day you came to Mathura and killed Kamsa I have been with you and I have never been away from you even for a moment. I want to be with you forever. Please take me with you."

"You are right," said Krishna with a grim smile. "Every word you spoke is true. The Yadavas will be destroyed in a week from today. On the seventh day this Dwaraka, this beautiful city will be covered by the sea and

nothing will be left except the memory of it. But then, Uddhava, you cannot come with me. You have to live in this world of men. The world needs you. Abandoning all desires, you must walk about in the world of men telling them about the Brahma Vidya which you have to master." Krishna then taught him the Great Truth by recounting to him the story of the Avadhuta and his teachings to King Yadu.

Krishna realised that it was not enough. The teaching had to be more detailed and more explicit, and more detailed and more intense. The examples given by the Avadhuta and the lessons which had been garnered from them had not been enough to drive home the truth to Uddhava. Krishna therefore decided to teach him the Atma Vidya in detail.

Krishna said: "Uddhava, be devoted to me. Surrender yourself to me and, in that state of mind, perform your daily duties and other duties. There should always be one thought in your mind: there should be no desire for any rewards for these actions of yours. Cleanse your mind with these selfless actions and cultivate a serenity of mind. This serenity is got by the realisation that only sorrow results from actions which are performed with a desire for happiness." Krishna paused for a moment since he realised that Uddhava was looking puzzled. "I do not understand," said the disciple. "Please elaborate on this, Krishna."

THE REQUISITES

"Consider the dream world," said Krishna. "When a man is dreaming several events take place. Man goes through the many travails of sorrow or he reaches the very pinnacles of ecstasy. He is happy or he is sad and he is both. But, when he wakes up the entire dream world melts away and he knows now that it was all a figment of his imagination and there was, in reality, no sorrow nor was there any happiness. Even so, consider this world to be very much like the world of dreams conjured up by the dreamer.

"Again, think of a man who indulges in 'daydreaming'. All his many unfulfilled desires sprout wings and they seem to have all come true in this state of his mind. This process of thinking is called "manoratha"—the chariot of the mind. Actually not one of the experiences of the daydreamer is real but they are all fabrications of the mind. Even so, this world is made up of neither sorrow nor happiness: neither pleasure nor pain. If you school your mind to think on this long enough to realise the truth of it, you will be rid of the bondage of karma. The world of plurality is a result of the play of the senses, the Indriyas. When they become involved with the sense-objects the world then seems to be full of these feelings made up of the opposites and man loses his power of thinking.

"Hold fast to this one rule: never act with desire tainting the action. Live in the world like anyone else and behave so too. It is your-inside which has to be trained in the path of the Brahman. Cultivate the qualities which are essential for the realisation of the Brahman.

"Ahimsa, which means an unwillingness to hurt anyone or anything: Satyam, which is speaking the truth always. Asteyam, which is 'not stealing' what belongs to another: Asangam, meaning, not becoming extremely attached to anyone or anything. The greater the attachment, the greater will be pain when the wrench comes. Never become attached to

anyone. Lajja is the other requisite quality. By Lajja is meant shame to do actions which are unworthy, shame even to think of such things.

"Asanchayam is essential. Never store up anything, since storing up gold and wealth will only lead you away from higher things. Day and night you will think only of hoarding more and more. Avoid it. Astikam is the next quality I recommend. By this is meant a firm faith in the existence of the higher power. Unless this basic faith is present, the rest of the teaching loses all meaning. Brahmacharya has to be practised. The word has several meanings, the common one being celibacy, a denial to the senses of the pleasures of the body. Maunam is silence. By silence it meant: "Do not talk unnecessarily and do not waste time and words in the company of inferior beings, beings who are driven towards the world of pleasure. Such people are sure to make you follow them. Silence is the most effective weapon to be used against the temptation of talking to these worldly men. Sthairyam is a quality which is always needed. To be firm in everything, in your actions, in your words, in your faith, in your convictions: that is Sthairyam. Kshama is forgiveness. One should have the generosity of the heart to be able to forgive those who have hurt you in different ways. Abhaya is almost synonymous with Sthairya. Only, Sthairya is a condition of the mind while Abhaya is not only that but also fearlessness which is prepared to tackle any kind of trouble or opposition in one's faith.

"One who desires to reach me should have power to look on everything as the same: meaning, to him a tree and a blade of grass will look alike: an enemy and a friend will look alike. He will have no desire to 'OWN' anything. His wife, children, home, land, wealth, kith and kin: none of these will have any special significance for him. When he has realised that the same Brahman dwells in everyone, where then is the possibility of his suffering from the feeling that these things 'belong' to him? The feelings of "I" and "MINE" would have vanished from the mind of a man who has reached me. This does not mean that he should abandon all these and run away from them. He can be with them by all means. Only, he should know how to rise above them. He should be beyond their reach, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

"Consider fire and its nature. It is lodged inside a piece of wood. As long as it is inside the piece of wood it assumes all the qualities of the wood: its length, its thickness, its colour, its nature in every way. But then, it is not part of the wood in reality. It is a thing APART. This apparent identity of the fire with the piece of wood is very much like the world of Maya, illusion, which we live in.

"The Atman which, in reality, is a thing apart from the body it dwells in, which is different from the body it dwells in, *seems* to be one with the body and this feeling is nurtured in the mind of man since he is ignorant, since the veil of Avidya, ignorance of the reality, the Truth, has enveloped his power of thinking. His awareness will begin when he knows how to shed the cloak of darkness. The world of illusion will now disappear even as the fire in the wood which has the power, once it is manifested, to destroy the wood completely and glow in its own glory; And, when the wood has ceased to burn, when nothing of the wood remains, this same fire will, on its own accord, vanish leaving behind no trace of its presence.

"Even so, the Atman which has been trapped inside this equipment makeup of the body, mind and intellect, will never again appear as the inhabitant of this body but will become one with the Absolute: with the Brahman. The jivatma will have no existence after this awakening.

"The Atman is self-luminous. It is pure awareness. It is eternal. But the so-called 'life'-defined by the performance of actions and other similar things, comprising the behaviour of a human being - is because of the fact that there is a body which is enveloping the Atman. Remember, Uddhava, the Atman is the only Truth and all the rest is false. With this conviction in your mind, abandon all the things of this world, even your affection for me which brings sorrow at the thought of parting from me. Consider me as something apart from this garb which I have donned and which goes by the name 'Krishna.' I am the Brahman. Realising that, cultivate detachment and you will easily learn to see the Truth.

"In this world of men, no man is able to get what he wants. Man who is a slave to actions, to the sway of the emotions which grant pleasure and pain, is never free. It is only those who know the real nature of the world

of Maya who are ever happy. A simple fact will be enough to prove this to you. Anyone who claims to have found a panacea for all pains, and to have discovered the elixir which will grant continued happiness is still, in truth, helpless. Since he has not been able to find a cure for the greatest pain of all: DEATH. When death is ever by the side of a man born in this world, how can the things of the world grant him happiness? It is like offering perfumed sandal paste and beautiful garlands of flowers to a man who is being led to the hangman's rope.

"There are those who performed yagas and yajnas. Man performs yajnas and because he has pleased Indra he reaches Swarga, the abode of the gods; as a consequence of his accumulated punya man is able to move about in the heavens as one among the devas. Dressed in delicate silks and wandering around in chariots made of silver and gold, he has the company of the damsels who are part of the court of Indra. The gandharvas sing his praises and his ears have become so attuned to the music of the tiny bells on the anklets of the women around him that he is not able to hear the inner voice inside him which tries to tell him that even all this is false. With the passage of time, the punya he has acquired on the earth becomes less and less. Finally, when it is all exhausted, man is pushed down to the earth and the cycle begins all over again.

"The human body and the actions performed by a human being who is ignorant of the truth about the human body, lead him again and again into the same path. Happiness in the real sense of the word will never be his. This involvement in the world of action goes by the name 'Pravritti'. The man who is absorbed in this Pravritti will never reach me. The only cure for this is the opposite, Nivritti.'

"Nivritti is turning away from the so-called labyrinth formed by the so-called pleasures of the world since they are not pleasures.

Remember, the Indriyas, the sense organs perform the actions and not the Atman presiding over them. It is because of his inherent "guna", whether it is Sattva or Rajas or Tamas that man behaves as he does. He goes through the cycle of the opposites, pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow and

this is because of the play of the gunas and the Indriyas and of course, the world of objects around him.

"So long as the 'Ego,' the 'Ahamkara' is present, the Atman in man gets deluded in the world of plurality. When such is the case, is it any wonder that man is ever a slave to others? The feelings of 'I' and 'MINE' which are twins residing in the mind of man make him move away from me and get more and more involved in the world of pain. Uddhava, if you desire to reach me you should first learn this lesson: there is only one TRUTH, the Brahman. This world and its many beautiful, fascinating, absorbing objects is but a snare to trap the Atman which is really untrammelled but which deludes itself into thinking that it is bound."

THE FREE MAN

Uddhava intervened with a question. He asked: "My lord, you tell me that the Atman is free: that he is not bound by the play of the gunas and by the actions performed by the body and the sense organs. I am not able to grasp it. Realising the Truth about himself makes man free of this bondage, is the lesson you are trying to teach me. When you say that man is free of this bondage that statement assumes that there is a bondage of some kind which is tying him down. Tell me more about this freedom from bondage. Does man attain salvation when he is without the gunas? or even when they are present in him? If the gunas are not there in the make-up of man, how can he exist and how can he find a path to you? If freedom is attained even when the gunas are present where then does the bondage come in? Please elucidate this for me. I have so far understood that the gunas are always present in man. But when a man refuses to identify himself with the gunas and their play he is free and his bondage begins when he forgets this 'apartness'. How is one to recognize an emancipated soul and one who is not? How does a free man move in this world of men? And how does the other man, the ordinary man, behave? Tell me."

Krishna said: "Uddhava, you do not have to go very far to find an answer to your question. Look at me. The gunas are caused because of my Maya. I am the one who spreads the net of Maya and the gunas in the world. But I have no bondage and, obviously I do not need to be freed of this bondage! The body with its attendant pleasures and pains are because of my Maya. Like I said before, it is as unreal as the world of dreams to a sleeper awakened. Uddhava, remember Awareness as well as Ignorance are both manifestations of my power. They are eternal and they are the causes of freedom or bondage as the case may be.

"Consider the moon in the sky. When there are several pools, ponds, eddies, little pits filled with water, this moon is reflected in all of them.

When a breeze is rustling by, there is a wave of unrest passing across the surface of the water. The reflected moon trembles and this trembling is apparent only in the reflected moon and not in the moon who is shining in the sky, serene and resplendent. Even so, the play of the gunas and the Indriyas cause the Atman in you to allow itself to be moved by them. I will explain again. The sun is reflected in several pots, pots of different shapes and different sizes.

"And the same sun is reflected in all of them filled as they are with water. But then, the moment one of them breaks and loses its identity, namely, a large pot, a small pot, and so on, the image vanishes and becomes one with the sun above. This one-ness happens when and *only when* the pot breaks. Even so, when man realises that the feeling of 'I' is false, the truth dawns on him immediately and there is no more bondage for him.

"I will give you another analogy. On a Peepul tree are living two birds. They have built their nests on the tree. One of them has its nest on the topmost branch of the tree and he is happily viewing the sky around him, the free air is all around him and he does not need any food other than this joy. The other bird has built its nest not so high but much lower down. He hunts for his food all day long and all around him is found nothing but the shadow cast by the tree. The two birds have been greatly attached to each other. They had been like twins each being the alter ego of the other. But the difference between the two has now sprung up because of the involvement of the one with its surroundings. The Vedantins compare the free bird to the emancipated soul and the other bird, to the man caught in the web of Maya. The bird on the topmost branch does not find any difference between himself and other birds but the other bird considers himself to be unhappy: that he is suffering and that he is different from his one-time friend.

"The ignorant man who does not know that his Atman is the same as the Brahman is suffering from bondage and the one who has realised this truth is considered to be free. When a man wakes up from sleep he often remembers the dreams very vividly. But he is conscious that it was all unreal and that it was just an illusion conjured up by the mind during sleep. He does not suffer the pangs of hunger because he was a beggar in

the dream, nor does he walk about with arrogance and pride since he was king in his dream. The ignorant man, the man suffering from bondage is comparable to the man who is still dreaming. While dreaming, the dream seems very real to the dreamer and to realise that it is all a dream, it is necessary for a man to wake up. Even so, man should wake up to the Reality of the Brahman. Then he will not be bound even though he walks about among the objects of the world. They do not move him or bind him down since he knows that he is the Brahman and these are but illusory objects.

"The man who has learnt detachment can move in the world littered with the sense objects and yet be free from them since they can hold no sway over him. He will realise that action, action wedded to the gunas, makes a man a slave and so the really free man will be unattached even to small details like food, bathing, clothes, and similar things. He will be indifferent to all of them. His behaviour where his life is concerned, where his senses are concerned, where his power of thinking is concerned, will all have no end in view and so, even when he is living and moving with the others in the world of men he will be free. If he is hurt bodily he will not mind it nor will he be elated when someone praises him. He will not praise or flatter those who do him good or speak well of him: nor will he condemn those who talk ill of him and who act wrongly. He will not be interested in doing either good or evil since both of them look the same to him. His speech will have neither of these and hence he will be considered to be stupid. But that will not in any way affect him.

"The Upanishads are defined as the Brahman captured by sound. I have seen men who have known the entire storehouse of the Upanishads, who are able to repeat it word for word and who have still not been able to realise the Paramatman described therein. They are like cows which are incapable of yielding milk.

"Uddhava, let me assure you, in later times a man with a cow which cannot give milk or a wife who does not love him, a body which is a constant source of different types of pains and aches, a son who is of no use to his father, or wealth which is not given to the deserving: all these or any one of these will make him heir to nothing but suffering on top of suffering.

"A man's wealth of learning may be immense. But it is not enough if it is just an accumulation of the learning of the Vedas and the Shastras without being leavened by the stories of me and my avataras. Uddhava, I know that it is not easy to devote one's mind completely to me and to thoughts of me. Such a man can do Karma Yoga: meaning let him perform actions in the world. But let him not, at any time, desire the fruits of this actions. He should not expect rewards for his efforts. Let him act like this in the world of men and let him think on me as often as he can and he will soon become my Bhakta and he will reach me."

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BHAKTI - A DEFINITION

Uddhava asked Krishna: "Krishna, tell me what Bhakti is. Tell me, which type of a sadhu is dear to you? I know that rishis like Narada are dear to you. What are the qualities which are predominant in the mental make-up of a Bhakta?"

With a slight smile Krishna said: "The man who is dear to me is sure to have several qualities in him. To me, the most important of all of them is compassion. Man should be full of compassion for the sufferings of others. He should not betray anyone's faith in him. He should be patient, truthful at any cost and without envy for anyone. He should be neither elated when happiness comes his way nor should he be sunk in the depths of despondency when suffering visits him. He should help others as much as is possible for him. His senses should never carry him away from the path he has set for himself. His heart should be ready to melt at the sight of pain in others: on the other hand, when troubles visit him he should be firm and unmoved.

"He should be clean in the sense that his principles should be blameless. He should have no desires and, naturally, he should never think of doing anything with a desire for reward. He should not overact and his mind should ever be placid. Equanimity is essential in my Bhakta. He should perform his duties and other tasks without any lapse. But his mind should

ever be trained on me. Unruffled at all times, he should not let the different agitations of the mind or even calamities trouble his mental peace. Hunger and thirst, sadness and gladness, old age and death: these six should not appear fearful to him.

"He should never expect praise or honour from others but then, he should not fail in his duty, that of paying respect to others. If he finds anyone genuinely interested in learning something from him, he should, on no account, withhold that knowledge. He should not deceive others and he should never get involved in anything unless the motive is purely for the sake of doing good to others: out of compassion for one in trouble. When he is engaged in worshipping me, endowed as he is, already, with these qualities I have enumerated, he will, in course of time, be like Narada and the others and will not have to perform even his daily duties. He can spend all his time thinking on me.

"Such a man will never assume the garb of a holy man nor will he talk about the good deeds he has done to help others.

"Uddhava, you are my Bhakta and you are very dear to me and so I will tell you this secret of secrets, the secret of winning my love, the secret of Bhakti yoga.

"Hata yoga and Pranayama do not win my heart as the company of good men does. A knowledge of the great Sankhya, intellectual comprehension of the teachings of the Sankhya will not please me as much as Bhakti will. Reciting the Vedas incessantly, Tapas, Sanyasa which is an apparent renunciation of all worldly things: all these do not charm me. Nor all the many Vratas and privations prescribed by the wise men. I respond to love and only love. Those who have reached me have done so out of pure affection for me, Bhakti, and nothing else. Bhakti knows no caste or creed. I will recount to you the names of some of my Bhaktas. Vritra, Prahlada, Bali, Banasura, Maya, Vibhishana, Sugriva, Hanuman, Jambavan, Gajendra, the elephant, Jatayu, the eagle, Tuladhara, Dharmavyadha, Trivakra, the hunchback, the gopis in Brindavan, the yajna- patnis and several others have reached me with the power of their devotion to me. They knew no Vedas. They served no gurus in the gurukulas with a thirst

for knowledge. They observed no Vratas nor did they perform tapas. Because of the company of sadhus they let their minds dwell on me and they became mine. When the munis reach the Samadhi state they have no remembrance of their names and their homes. Even so, the gopis remembered nothing except the time they spent with me when I was in their midst and they will reach me in the end. Their way of worship was to desire me physically and in reality, this seeming unfaithfulness to their men was not, in any way, different from the Bhakti anyone has for me. Uddhava, you should, therefore, abandon all thoughts of performing tapas. Do not waste time in considering the duties you have to perform, the grihastha life you have been leading, the Sanyasa which you think you have to adopt and the many other small duties prescribed by the Vedas. Do not worry about any of them. Pray to me. Set your mind on me and try to find refuge at my feet. You will reach me."

KARMA YOGA AND BHAKTI YOGA

Uddhava said: "Krishna, my mind is again confused. A little while back you had said: 'Performing duties need not be avoided. On the other hand, do your daily duties and other duties.' Now you are asking me to give up everything. Please explain to me the two apparently contradictory pathway."

"I will explain it to you," said Krishna. "I will have to go back to the beginnings of creation to make it simple for you. When Ishvara created Maya the world was manifested. The five elements called the Mahabhutas, the Indriyas, the Tanmatras, and later, the many lokas were manifested. Ishvara pervades this entire Universe but because of Maya, the Avidya which envelops the mind of man, this Universality of the Ishvara is hidden, concealed. Man gets involved in the illusion: 'I am the doer,' I am enjoying the fruits of my action,' and such like. This again leads to further details about action like: 'You shall do this' and 'this act is forbidden.' It is then said that certain acts should be performed for enhancing the Sattvic nature in man. When the Sattvic nature gains ascendancy the mind becomes clear. Once the mind is clear, it is up to man to rid himself of the bondage called "action".

"The mind should now be trained to discard its attachment to the world of action. Here Bhakti replaces Karma—action. Abandon everything else and take refuge in the feet of the Ishvara. To avoid the many pitfalls which beset the journey towards the Brahman, Bhakti has to be practised constantly. Once the Brahman is realised there is no need for action since it ceases to have any significance. This Jiva, this Ishvara was the Seer and there was nothing to be seen. There then appeared the world made up of the elements. Ishvara Himself assumes the form of the gunas and the play of the gunas too. Even as a cloth is made up of the warp and woof this entire Universe is but the display of Ishvara.

"When two pieces of bamboo rub against each other fire is produced and this fire, after destroying the entire forest of bamboos, becomes assuaged and is not to be seen. Even so, this body made up of the combination of the elements and the gunas gets destroyed when its Avidya is gone. And when Avidya, the veil of ignorance, is withdrawn, the Jivatma becomes one with the Paramatma and there is no longer a separate entity for it since the Ego, the feeling of "I" has been destroyed.

"This tree by name Samsara has two seeds: Papa and Punya. Hundreds of Vasanas are the roots of this tree. The trunk is made up of the three gunas. The five elements form the branches and the life-giving sap is made up of the Tanmatras like Shabda, Sparsha, Rupa, Rasa and Gandha. The eleven Indriyas are the further branches of the large branches.

"The Jivatma and the Paramatma are two eagles which have built their nests in this tree. Happiness and sorrow are the two fruits of this tree. Grihasthas who are involved in the pleasures of this world of illusion taste one of the fruits and that fruit is sorrow. Sanyasis, the wise ones, who have abandoned worldly things knowing them to be unreal, taste of the other fruit, eternal happiness.

"So, Uddhava, cut down this tree of Samsara with the power of your intellect. Destroy it and you will be free to reach me. When You have tasted of this fruit once nothing else will seem attractive to you. You can walk in the world of men with a free mind since you will not be involved in the actions you have to perform as long as you are alive. Your thoughts will be on me and your freedom is assured."

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HAMSA AVATARA

Uddhava was satisfied with the explanation given by Krishna. He then came up with another question. He said: "Krishna, man who is fairly intelligent knows that the objects of the senses lead to nothing but danger and yet he pursues them. Why?" The Lord said: "Uddhava, it is a pertinent question. Man, though endowed with intelligence, is also cursed with the

dread disease by name 'I'. The ego transcends all good traits in him. When this ego takes a hand in running the life of man, and when he allows his behaviour to be guided by this ego, his mind, which might once have been full of only Sattva guna, now becomes tainted with the terrible Rajoguna. When this happens, man begins to tell himself: 'I must enjoy this pleasure. It will grant me happiness, pleasure, excitement,' and so it goes on. His desires multiply very rapidly and man is incapable of controlling his senses and the Rajoguna in him blinds him to the consequences of his actions. Though in his heart of hearts he knows that he is wrong, still, his Indriyas are so powerful that he is helpless in their grip.

"Even when man is in such dire straits I can save him if he but thinks on me. Let him learn the art of Pranayama. Let him make an attempt to shake off his laziness and try to bend his mind on me three times during the day: during the three Sandhyas. In course of time the mind can be brought under control and the man can be saved from destroying himself. This was the lesson which I taught the Sanaka brothers once in the form of a Hamsa, a swan, many many ages back."

Uddhava was full of curiosity. He wanted to know when the form of a Hamsa was assumed by the Lord and for what purpose. Krishna said: "Brahma has four sons born of his mind. They are the Sanaka brothers, four in number. They once went to their father and asked him which was the best yoga to be pursued. They asked: 'Lord, the mind of man is, by nature, always eager to follow the dictates of the emotions and Indriyas which govern them. Kama, Krodha and the other four feelings always capture the intelligence of man and eclipse it. Once the objects of the senses are enjoyed, these enter the mind of man in the form of Vasanas. How then can a Mumukshu, one desirous of freedom, separate these two? How is one to withdraw the mind from the sense-objects' Though he had been engaged in the work of creation at my behest, though he was born of me, Brahma was still unable to answer their question since he was also, to an extent, involved in karma and its consequence. He thought of me and I went to his presence in the form of a Hamsa. The Sanaka brothers prostrated before me along with Brahma and then asked me: 'Who may you be?' I said: 'When the Paramatman the Universal Spirit is known to be

the only one and to be indivisible, how can your question arise? When the same Brahman dwells in everyone of us, how can I differentiate and tell you who I am? Still, I will answer you.

" 'Realise the truth that I am the Brahman which should be realised by the mind, by the Indriyas, by the words, by the eyes. There is nothing which is other than me. I understand the problem which you were asking your father to elucidate.

“ ‘The mind gets involved with the senses and the senses hold absolute sway over the mind. But, remember, the mind, the gunas as well as the senses are manifestations of me alone and so, there is no meaning in your question. You were asking your father for the method by which the mind can be withdrawn from the senses and the resultant Vasanas. I will tell you. It is simple. Abandon the feeling that the mind, the senses and the Vasanas are things which are other than me. If you realise this truth and give up your desire for the sense-objects, then that yoga is the best yoga to follow.

“ ‘The waking state, the dream state and the deep sleep state are all three different aspects of the same mind: or rather, they are different conditions of the same mind. But there is ONE which is common to all three of these. A person is able to say: "I am awake," "I was dreaming," and "I had a long dreamless sleep." It is this ONE, common to all three of these states, the one who is a spectator of the phenomena which are three in number, who is the Truth. He does not get involved in the sufferings of the waking state, the thrill of wandering around in the world of dreams or again in the depths of sleep where there are no feelings or emotions to make one either to be happy or to be unhappy.

“ ‘That spectator in you who views these states dispassionately is Myself. Men should realise the truth that the one real thing in this world of Maya is myself and he should be able to merge the mind in the Atman and attain detachment from the senses and the objects of the senses. The Vasanas can then do nothing to the evolution of man. The intellect, the power of discrimination should be brought to use and this keen intellect, sharp and

swift as a sword, should be able to rid man of the tentacles of Maya which are trying to drag him down.

"The bandha, bondage to the world, comes because of Ahamkara, the preponderance of the Ego. If the ego is suppressed, if man surrenders himself to me realising that the entire world is but the manifestation of the Brahman he will then be able to attain the state you desire.

"So long as man does not wake up to this awareness he is said to be asleep even though he performs sincerely all the duties prescribed by the Karma Kanda. Even the rewards promised for those who are devoted to the Karma Kanda, rewards like dwelling in the heavens and similar pleasures, are all still illusory since they are also part of the Maya created by me.

“ ‘All the senses and the objects of the senses which a man enjoys during his waking state are perishable and not permanent. The same man lives in the world of dreams which is populated by objects created by his own mind and the Vasanas which are persistent in him: and in the deep sleep state he forgets everything till he wakes up into another day. That man, however, when he realises that the same man was awake during the waking state, dreaming during the dream state and fast asleep during the deep sleep state, is well set on the path of realising the truth about the Brahman. Such a man becomes the one who acts as well as the spectator of his own actions.

" 'As for these three states, Avasthatraya as it is called, they have their origin in Avidya, the darkness of ignorance. This Avidya is again, an aspect of me. If man is able to comprehend this, he is free of bondage. The Shrutis have taught you this: the wise have spoken only this truth. As for you, because of these and because of the conclusions which you can draw with the use of your own powers of thinking, you can realise the truth and destroy the ego.

" 'The world is called ‘Mayika’ meaning , created out of Maya, and it is apt to make you bewildered. When a torch is held in the hand and whirled around fast, it seems to be a circle of fire. But the circle is illusory, only the torch is the truth. Even so, the objects of the world are but illusions created by the play of Maya on the mind which is not evolved. The one

appears to be many and the one is myself. Once you realise this basic truth, you will never more be deluded by the play of Maya. You will know that all the pleasures which the world holds out to you are false: even the promised treasures of the heavens. The body has to live on in the world as long as it is destined to. But the Atman can be freed as soon as the power of the intellect, the power to discriminate, makes it realise its true nature. After this realisation it means nothing to the freed soul whether he lives in this world for a moment more or for a hundred years more.

" 'I am the ultimate Truth which the yogis seek in the caves of their hearts and I am the Brahman. I have come to you to teach you this eternal truth so that you can propagate it in the world of men. The one who has realised the truth about me will no longer be troubled by the inter-mixture of the gunas. He will have no desires. He will have nothing but compassion towards all beings and he will love them all knowing that the same Brahman dwells in everything.' "

Krishna continued his discourse and said: "I taught this ultimate truth to the Sanaka brothers and disappeared from their presence."

BHAKTI - AGAIN

Uddhava wanted to know more about the excellence of the Bhakti yoga. He said: "Krishna, different people advocate different pathways to obtain Moksha. Do they all lead to the same goal? Does each one choose the pathway suited to his temperament and reach the goal in his own way? Tell me, is Bhakti yoga which has been described by you the best yoga? Is it the best means to help man draw his mind away from all attachments and think on you and only you? contemplate on you night and day?"

The Lord said: "If you have been following my words all this while you will surely have been convinced that it is so. Still, I will elaborate on it once again.

"During the great Deluge, the Vedas which form the keystone of all Dharma became submerged under the waters. At the beginning of creation I taught the Vedas to Brahma the creator. He taught the lesson to his son Manu and from him it passed on to Bhrigu, Marichi and the other brothers. Their sons learnt the Vedas from their fathers and so the great teachings were well and truly propagated in the world.

"During creation when Prakriti manifested itself the gunas made their appearance too. They caused the desires and subsequent Vasanas in created beings. Each one interpreted the Vedas according to the manner in which his Vasanas influenced his way of thinking. There is a story about this.

"The devas, asuras and the human beings were all asking the Prajapati to guide them in the proper way of living. To each Prajapati answered 'Da'.

"The devas understood the letter to mean 'Damayata' meaning control your Indriyas. The asuras understood it to mean 'Dayadhvam' meaning, do not ill-treat others but be compassionate. Human beings understood the letter to mean 'Datta' meaning, be charitable. Give as much as you can. Uddhava, you can see how the Vasanas have influenced the three classes to

understand the same letter. The devas are famed for giving free rein to the Indriyas, the asuras for their cruelty and humans for their miserliness and so they read their own meanings into the word.

"The word Moksha itself is defined differently by different people. The advocates of the Karma Kanda consider Dharma and Moksha to be synonyms. Those who have studied Kavyalankara, the students of poetics, consider fame to be the ultimate Moksha. According to them man enjoys the pleasures of Swarga for a certain duration of time: this time is thousand times as much as the time his fame remains alive on the earth. Some even consider the gratification of desires as Moksha! The realists speak of Moksha as a word meaning truthspeaking, controlling the senses, and reining the wandering mind. Yajna, Tapas, Dana, Vratas are all considered as Moksha by different persons.

"Now the rewards obtained by some of these are, no doubt, there. Dwelling in the heavens for a certain length of time and similar rewards are obtained by those who strive for them. But, Uddhava, all these have a beginning and so, an end. Pleasure in the beginning becomes but sorrow in the end.

"As for Bhakti towards me, the results are different. On the one hand there are these pleasures and on the other, the ultimate happiness one gets by surrendering himself to me. My Bhakta has no desires and no wishes to fulfil except to think on me. How can you equate the smallness of the one with the enormity of the other? My Bhakta will have no thought of owning anything and calling it his. His Indriyas have been conquered by him long ago. His mind, his thoughts, and even his words are all set on me and only me. He has attained such a degree of perfection in maintaining his equanimity that the heavens, the earth and the nether world will all look alike to him. He is happy only when he thinks of me. Such a man does not desire the Satyaloka which is the abode of Brahma. He is not interested in the state of Indra, the lord of the heavens. He does not hanker after the sovereignty of the entire world. He does not seek the achievement of the eight Siddhis. In short, he does not ask for Moksha. All that he asks for is that his thoughts should forever rest on me. Release from other thoughts is his definition of Moksha.

"Uddhava, you do not know how much I love you since you are my Bhakta. Brahmadeva who is my son is not so dear to me. Mahadeva, my alter ego, is not so dear to me. Though he is my brother, even Balarama is not as dear to me as you are, nor is my beloved wife Lakshmi. This very body of mine is not a thing of importance. My thoughts pursue the muni who is without any desires, whose mind is tranquil, who hates no one and who considers heaven and hell as equal. The dust of his feet is enough to purify the entire Universe which is inside me.

"The joy which is in the minds of my Bhaktas will never be like the inferior kind of pleasure which others manage to obtain by pursuing the Karma Kanda. If, at the beginning of his attempts my Bhakta finds it hard to control his Indriyas, still, because of his Bhakti for me, he will cease to be bothered by them very soon. Even like firewood is turned to ashes because of the fire burning it, Bhakti will destroy all the sins of man. The practice of yoga, knowledge of Sankhya, the practice of Dharma, knowledge of the Vedas, Tapas or Sanyasa: none of these will charm me and enslave me as Bhakti will.

"A Bhakta is easily recognised by the softness of his heart, his compassionate nature, the tears of joy which flow from his eyes when he hears my name or even when he thinks of me, the thrill he experiences when he reaches the very pinnacle of joy which makes him dance and sing without restraint. If there is no Bhakti in the heart of man, his mind then cannot be purified. Gold which is thrown into the blazing fire will melt, lose all its gross in the process and become pure again. Even so, my Bhakti purifies the worst of sinners. Thoughts on things of the world make a man strive for them and similarly, constant contemplation on me makes the mind of man strive for me and me alone.

"And so, Uddhava, avoid unreal things which are like the objects seen in a dream world and think on me and me alone.

"A man with a good intellect will be able to achieve perfect control over the senses. Consider the body as a chariot and the Atman as the owner of the chariot, you. Make your intellect the charioteer and let his hands hold

the reins of the unruly steeds which go by the name "senses". Believe me, you will soon reach me and attain eternal happiness."

THE VIBHUTIS OF THE LORD

Uddhava asked Krishna: "You are the Parabrahman. You are the cause of the creation as well as the destruction of this Universe and you sustain it too. You have no beginning and you have no end. No *avarana* covers you. Tell me about your many Vibhutis. Tell me about the objects which are the objects of worship for those who are considered to be your Bhaktas. I salute you and take the dust of your feet, your blessed feet where the sacred Ganga had her birth."

Krishna's smile was full of reminiscence and he said: "Uddhava, on the battlefield by name Kurukshetra I was asked the same question by Arjuna the Pandava. He was sorely distressed. He was against killing his cousins. He told me that it was sinful to fight. He was sure that the war was against all codes of Dharma and he wanted to go away from the field of battle. I had to teach him the Brahma Vidya to rid him of the delusion he was suffering from, the delusion that he was the killer and that the doomed men were different from him, and that killing them would surely make him a sinner. I convinced him that he should fight and it was then, when he realised that I am the Brahman, that he asked me the same question you now pose before me. I will tell you what I told him then.

"I am the soul of all living things here, in this world. I am also your cousin and your lord too. I am the cause of the birth and the death of all things. Among the gunas I am the balance maintained by them before creation manifests itself because of me. I am the Supreme Spirit out of which is manifested Prakriti. I am the Mahat Tattva. Among the things which it is not easy to conquer, I am the mind. Among the teachers of the Vedas, I am Brahmadeva. Among the mantras, I am "AUM", the Pranava: Among the letter I am the letter "A." I am Gayatri among the Chhandases. I am Indra among the gods, Agni among the Vasus, Vishnu among the Adityas, and Mahadeva among the Rudras. I am Bhrigu among the Brahmarishis.

Among the Devarishis I am Narada and I am Kamadhenu among the cows. Kapila among the Siddhas, Daksha among the Prajapatis and Garuda among the birds. Among the pitris I am Aryama. Among the Daityas I am Prahlada, Chandra among the celestial bodies, Kubera among the Yakshas and I am Airavata, the best among the elephants. I choose to be Varuna among the inmates of the ocean and among luminous things. I am the Sun. I am the horse Uchhaishravas and I am the king among human beings. I am gold among the metals and among punishers I am Yama: Vasuki among the serpents and Adishesha among the Nagas. I am the lion among the animals. The best among ashramas is Sanyasa and I am that. Among the flowing rivers I am Ganga and among the storehouses of water I am the ocean. Among the weapons I am the bow: I am Mahadeva, the killer of Tripura, among the archers. I am the Meru peak and among mountains I am Himavan. I am Ashvattha among the trees. I am Vasishtha among the purohitas and, among the scholars I am Brihaspati. I am Skanda among warriors. I am the Brahma Yajna and I am the Samadhi which goes by the name Chitta Nirodha, meaning, controlling the mind. Among the many branches of knowledge I am the Brahma Vidya.

"I am Vasanta among the seasons, Margashirsha among the twelve months and Abhijit among the stars. (Abhijit is made up of the last four padas of Uttarashada and the first four padas of Shravana.) I am the Krita Yuga, and among the wise I am Shukra. Among my Bhaktas I am you, Uddhava. I am the kusha grass among the darbhas and among the types of havis I am the cow's ghee.

"I am Shatarupa among women and Swayambhu Manu among men: Narayana among the munis and Sanatkumara among the Brahmacharins. I am wealth for those who strive and among cheaters I am the game of dice. I am the patience in a patient man and I am the Sattva in the Sattvica. I am Vasudeva among the nine Bhagavatas: Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, Narayana, Hayagriva, Varaha, Nrisimha and Brahmadeva.

"I am the firmness in the mountains and the fragrance of the earth. I am the sweetness in water. Among the good I am Bali and among heroes I am Arjuna. Karmendriyas, Jnanendriyas and their power to function are all

because of me. I am the Tanmatras of the five elements, and the Aham Tattva which is the cause of these: the five Mahabhutas and the eleven Indriyas and their functioning: the Purusha, Prakriti, and the three gunas and the Brahman whose manifestations are these. There is nothing which is not me. I pervade everything and I am everything.

"Uddhava, I have tried to tell you some of my Vibhutis. I may be able to count the grains of sand which comprise the earth but I cannot count my Vibhutis. Remember this. Wherever you see extraordinary glory, wealth, fame, power, goodness, generosity, beauty which pleases the eye and the mind, good fortune, bravery, control of the six enemies lodged inside you, wisdom and serenity know that I am there always.

"But, Uddhava, these Vibhutis are but incidental. Do not spend too much time or thought on them. If you want to reach me control your speech, control your mind, your breath, your senses. Cultivate Sattva guna thus, and only thus, can you reach me. Once, you have mastered these you will never again fall into the morass by name Samsara.

"Without these, the performing of Vratas and even tapas will be like water escaping from a mud vessel which has not been burnt in fire. One who has chosen me as his saviour will surrender his thoughts, his words, his very life to me and he can be assured of becoming one with me.' "

THE DIFFERENT PATHWAYS

‘Uddhava," continued the Lord, " as long as man is alive, as long as he continues to live in this world of men, three types of tribulations visit him and he has to live with them. They go by the name ‘Tapatraya', the three tapas—Adhyatmika, Adidaivika and Adibhautika. These three were not there in the beginning nor will they exist at the end. Therefore, since they occur during the transit of the Atman through this world of illusion they are also the products of Maya. These Vikaras as they are called, have a birth, a period of time while they exist and they have an end. As such, they have no power to upset the really wise man. Once you realise that you are pure Awareness you need have no fear of them. They will never be able to come in the way of your realisation of the Truth.

"Man, in his ignorance, sees a rope and mistakes it to be a snake. When the mistake is there it is accompanied by a fear of the 'snake'. But then, once he realises that it is his own imagination which has caused this misconception and nothing else, man is free from the fear. The snake made its appearance and 'existed' during a particular interval of time during which the intelligence of man was clouded. When he realised his error the snake vanished. The rope, however, was there before the man saw it, was there when he mistook it for a snake and it continued to be there after he realised its true nature. Even so, the Tapatrayas—Adhyatmika. Adidaivika and Adibhautika—occur only during the transit of the Atman through the world of illusion and are, themselves, part of this Maya.

"And so, Uddhava, try your utmost to obtain true ‘jnana', understanding. With this jnana you will realise your Pratyagatma to be the Brahman himself. The only yajna you have to perform is this yajna whose purpose is the realisation of the Brahman. The purification ceremony for this jnana yajna is Bhakti. With your thoughts and your mind purified by your

absolute Bhakti in me, pursue the path of jnana and you will attain your goal."

Uddhava was still puzzled by the different terms which had been used by Krishna. He asked: "Krishna, tell me something about Vairagya and Vijnana and tell me how they are linked with Bhakti yoga which, in your opinion, is the best pathway? If one can reach you by practising Bhakti alone, why should one worry about Jnana, Vijnana and Vairagya? I am confused by the many terms used by you."

Krishna said: "When Bhishma, the great Kaurava veteran was lying on the bed of arrows waiting for the advent of Uttarayana so that he could shed his earthly frame, Yudhishtira the Pandava asked him the same question. Bhishma taught him the Moksha dharma comprised of Jnana, Vairagya, Vijnana, Shraddha and Bhakti. I will try and recount to you his words.

"Prakriti, Purusha, Mahat Tattva, Ahamkara, the five Tanmatras, form a group of nine: the five karmendriyas, the five jnanendriyas and the mind, form eleven: the five Mahabhutas and the three gunas, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas form eight. All these together make up the number twenty-eight. These are the factors which determine the manifestation of the world of Maya. When the intellect is able to perceive the truth beyond these manifestations, when it is possible for one to realise that the same Paramatman pervades all these, this ability to realise the Brahman, to see the Brahman as the cause and the effect which are responsible for this world of objects, is, in the opinion of the wise, Jnana.

"One should be able to perceive that the chain of effects which have their origin in the primal cause and consider the world around us—the Samsara made up of the three gunas— has a birth, an existence and death. As a consequence of this, it is not permanent, nor eternal, nor present forever. This primal cause which does undergo these *apparent* changes, assumes a certain form in the beginning, goes through the cycle of changes and at the end of it, seem to be completely different from what it was in the beginning. At the time of the great deluge only the cause will remain and that will be constant. That is the only truth and the search for this truth, the cause for the phenomenon called Maya, is Vijnana.

"And again, intellectually, you may know the cause of the Universe and the end of it. You may have been taught the lesson that everything is Brahman and all the rest is but Maya. To understand a truth is one thing and to realise it is quite another. The knowledge that the world of objects is illusion is called 'Paroksha Jnana'. You are aware of the fact that there is a cause for the manifestation called the world and you can arrive at the reality behind this only by 'realising' the truth, and this realisation is called 'Aparoksha Jnana'. This attempt and the success of it are called, Jnana and Vijnana.

"I will now tell you about Vairagya. Shruti, Pratyaksha and Anumana are three things which lead man into the state of Vairagya. The sacred book says that there is no truth other than the Brahman. This is Shruti. This truth has been taught by the Vedas and the Upanishads. When we see a cloth which is made up of threads which form the woof and warp of the cloth we realise that the cloth is nothing other than the threads which make it look like cloth and that the cloth is, in reality, nothing but the combination of the threads. The threads are there and their combination goes by the name 'cloth'. But when the essentials are studied the threads are permanent while the cloth disappears: for instance, when the threads are pulled apart. This goes by the name Pratyaksha'.

"Great seers have spoken from their experience of the Truth, from their realisation of it, that the world of plurality is false. It is there but it is not there like the silver in a seashell. When a seashell is seen in the light of the sun its lustre gives the impression that it is lined with silver. The silver is seen by the eye but the man of intelligence *knows* that it only *seems* to be silver but it is not silver, this glow which lines the inside of a seashell.

"From the words of the wise and from one's own thinking on it, the Vijnani realises that the world of objects is a web of Maya, that it is a result of the combination of the gunas and the Mahabhutas and their various combinations, that in reality there is nothing permanent except the Brahman. Hence, he develops Vairagya which is non-attachment to the things of the world knowing them to be impermanent. Even when man performs actions prescribed by the karma and inherits the heavens because of them, the Vairagi knows that even this is false.

"As for Bhakti I have already spoken to you about it. I have elaborated on it. Even an ordinary man can be trained to develop Bhakti in me. A desire to listen to stories about me, relating these stories to others, worshipping me with real earnestness, honouring those who are my Bhaktas, considering all beings with love and compassion, talking only about me even while engaged in worldly duties and tasks, surrendering the mind to me, abandoning all desires, and wants: all these will make a man devoted to me on his own accord, and he will be my Bhakta. Even if he does not succeed in the beginning to devote all his attention to me he will, in course of time, do so because of practice, application. The achievement of the Siddhis is wealth, the realisation that there is but one Brahman is jnana and non-attachment to the objects of world is Vairagya."

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THE THREE PATHS

"For man to obtain Moksha three pathways have been indicated. These are Jnana, Karma and Bhakti. There is no fourth pathway to salvation. There are some emancipated souls who have reached the conclusion that action leads to nothing but sorrow and the results of one's actions lead one to further entanglement. They never lead one to freedom from pleasure or pain. Those who have realised this are those who have voluntarily given up all action and have adopted Sanyasa. For them Jnana Yoga grants freedom easily since they have already travelled a great distance towards the realisation of Truth.

"There are those who have not yet learnt to give up the results of their actions: who do not aspire to Vairagya since they are still harbouring desires in their hearts and they want the fulfilment of these desires. For such men Karma Yoga has been prescribed as the best pathway.

"There are, however, a fortunate few who, because of some rare good fortune, have been blessed with a love for me and a desire to listen to stories about me. Such a man is not a jnani like the one who has abandoned all desires. He has not learnt the art of detachment nor has he

developed Vairagya in the real sense of the word. He is not lost in the worldly possessions completely but neither is he completely rid of his bonds. Such a man should pursue Karma yoga until he attains Vairagya. That is to say, he should pursue the duties prescribed for a grihastha but he should perform them in such a manner that his mind does not dwell on the promised rewards. In course of time he will attain Vairagya. He will become my Bhakta if, along with this Vairagya, there is, in his mind, Bhakti for me.

"One thing essential for the practice of Bhakti Yoga is the human body! Even heavenly beings pine for this human form. The celestial or astral bodies are not fitted for the rigorous demands of jnana or Bhakti Yoga: the grace of the Lord, the company of Sadhus, a love for the Lord and eternal presence in the places where the stories of the Lord are related or sung. This is possible only for a human being and that is the reason why great rishis like Vyasa prefer to wander on the face of the earth rather than go to the heavens where they have places assured since ever so long ago because of their tapas. And since this human body is the best among created beings man should not desire to be born again as a human being either. Though it is a means to the great end, namely, realisation of the Truth, still the body in itself is perishable and death will come soon. So, man should try and achieve his goal before death can claim his body. It is like a tree, this body.

"A bird has built a nest in it and has been living in it for a long time. All on a sudden a man with an axe approaches the tree and, without consideration for the birds living in the nests on the tree, he cuts it down and the tree as well as the nests in it fall to the ground. A really wise bird will not sit and mourn it and try to return to the fallen tree.

"Man should shed idleness and with eagerness he should pursue the path to Moksha. Only a man who has learnt detachment can achieve this. Several days and several nights have passed by. One's life is being nibbled away slowly but very steadily day after day. Realising this, man should try to hasten in the practice of the yogas. He should learn Bhakti and Vairagya and he will surely reach the coveted liberation from bondage.

"This life of man on the earth can be compared to a boat which is sailing on the sea by name Samsara. For the boat to reach across safely the oarsman should be a guru who knows how to help man. He is not to be found easily. But, when found, he will do his utmost to steer your boat safely. I am the breeze, the favourable breeze which will waft the boat safely. Without these two, the boat will sink, meaning, man will, forever, be sunk in the morass called Samsara and will never find freedom from it.

"Man should, on his own accord, become disgusted with the performing of actions. He should control his Indriyas so that his mind is not led into the world of objects. He should train the mind on the contemplation of the Eternal and he should practice to steady the mind in this task. His meditation should be incessant. This is Dharana. The mind, when it is engaged in Dharana is apt to lose power to concentrate and to wander towards earthly objects. When this happens, it should be brought under control gradually. One who is engaged in meditation and is troubled by this wandering of the mind, should take the trouble not to starve the mind and deny it the pleasure it craves for. On the other hand, the desire should be granted. The Vasanas should be exhausted and not suppressed. Once this happens the rebel mind will be more docile and become pliable. Pranayama will bring the physical body under control while meditation will discipline the mind. Even as a wise horseman will be able to tame a wild horse more easily if he allows it to run around for a while even so should the intellect of man control the mind and its waywardness.

"A man who practises Bhakti Yoga has me and my image in his mind always and so, all other desires get destroyed on their own accord without any strenuous attempt on the part of the man. Man's ego gets destroyed when he thinks on me. And with the ego most of the feelings which go with it get destroyed too. Even the karmas which have been accumulated in previous janmas become destroyed because of his Bhakti.

"A real Bhakta does not consider Jnana Yoga or Vairagya to be very great and he attains Moksha in this birth itself. By means of Bhakti he attains all that can be achieved by the practice of Karma, by Tapas, by Vairagya, Yoga, Dana and Dharma, by travelling to holy spots on a pilgrimage with the intention of washing one's accumulated sins. Sadhus who are my

Bhaktas desire nothing but Bhakti for me and their Bhakti to be in their minds forever and forever. They do not desire Satyaloka or even Kaivalya.

"It will be evident that Bhakti for me will be found only in the hearts of those to whom the objects of the world have no attraction, whom the sense-objects do not attract even to a small extent. That is the peculiar quality and greatness of the Bhakti Yoga."

THE BEGINNING—CREATION

"In ancient times," said the Lord, "Kapila Vasudeva taught the Sankhya to his mother Devahuti listening to which she was rid of the delusion which follows the feelings of "I" and "MINE". Man will no longer be caught in the puzzlement caused by the alternating flow of happiness and sorrow since he knows there is neither sorrow nor happiness if he knows the truth about himself: the truth about the Jivatma and the Paramatma. During the great deluge, long before Time caused the Krita, the first of the yugas, the Brahman was, and nothing was manifested. The Seer and the Seen were the same and there was no difference between the two: meaning, it was all Brahman and nothing else.

"Brahman, because of Maya and the power of Maya, appeared to have two forms, the Seer and the Seen, Drishta and Drishtam. The Seer was named Purusha and the Seen was Prakriti. This Prakriti is made up of cause and effect. The Purusha is pure knowledge, Jnana. Prakriti began to function and out of it were manifested the three gunas: Tamas, Rajas and Sattva. Out of these gunas was born the Sukhshmatma, the subtle power, which causes kriya, action. Sukhshmatma is the nucleus of the power of action.

"Jnana Shakti was the cause of the formation of the Mahat Tattva. Out of the Mahat was formed the Aham Tattva which is the sole cause of delusion in the mind of man. This Aham is of three kinds, Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. The Ahamkara is also the cause of the Tanmatras, the five Mahabhutas, the Indriyas and the Manas. The five Mahabhutas were first formed and out of them, the Linga Sharira. The Brahmanda, the enormous egg, was then formed and inside that was enthroned the Vairajapurusha. Sriman Narayana is the soul of this Vairajapurusha. The Aham Tattva which has Tamoguna as its predominant feature was the cause of the Tanmatras beginning with Shabda and the Pancha Mahabhutas. Out of the Tattva with Rajoguna predominant were born the Indriyas, ten in number. Out of the Tattva with Sattva guna predominant, were born Dik, Vata,

Arka, Prachetas, Ashvinis, Vanhi, Indra, Upendra, Mitra, Prajapati, Chandra and, along with these eleven gods was born the mind, Manas.

"They all entered the enormous egg wherein was lodged the Vairajapurusha. I then entered the egg in the form of Narayana. I manifested myself again as a lotus and out of this lotus was born Brahma with the four faces. It was myself who was the Vairajapurusha as well as Brahma. There is nothing other than me and all these are different aspects of me.

"Ichchha Shakti, Jnana Shakti and Kriya Shakti are again but aspects of me. This Brahma who is the personification of the Rajoguna created the three worlds by name Bhuh, Bhuvah and Svah. The lords for these worlds were created too. Svarloka was the dwelling place of the devas, Bhuvarloka, of the Bhutas and Bhuloka, that of human beings. Above these, Maharloka, Jana, Tapoloka and Satya were created. And below the Bhuh were Atala, Vitala, Rasatala, Patala and other lokas. These were inhabited by the Nagas, asuras and similar beings.

"I will explain to you the absolute truth behind all this creation. That which is the cause of a certain object and the ultimate end of the same object is, in the natural course of logic, the state of existence also of the object under consideration. Consider things like mud or gold. Gold can be made into jewels, earrings, bracelets or chains. In the beginning, before it was fashioned into a jewel, it was gold. When the jewel is melted it becomes gold again, pure and simple gold with no modification. It is evident, therefore, that it was the same gold even during its existence as a jewel, whatever the jewel might have been. A lump of mud becomes a pot or a plate in the hands of the potter. Later, when it is broken, it becomes mud again. So, during its existence as a pot also, it was still mud and nothing else. Even so, in spite of the many manifestations there is only one truth and that is the Brahman. For the sake of action Aham and Mahat were created, or rather, fashioned and these have their existence only in Prakriti which is the first manifestation of the truth. Prakriti which is the home of action, Purusha Who is the Adhishtata of Prakriti and Kala which is the cause of the play of the gunas by upsetting their balance: all these three are but aspects of the Brahman and I am that Brahman."

BHAKTI YOGA—AGAIN AND AGAIN

Uddhava had been listening very carefully to the words of Krishna who was explaining the different yogas to him. Krishna had also been explaining to him the methods of approach to the Brahmi state. He has just spoken about the Sankhya and about creation. Krishna now told him about the end of creation. He said: "I have told you that out of Prakriti is born the Mahat and this becomes the Aham Tattva. Out of this are born the five Tanmatras and then come the Mahabhutas and the rest of creation. At the time when the end comes, the earth, the grossest of them all, gets lost in water, the water in fire, the fire in air, the air in ether, the ether in the Tanmatras, they in the Aham Tattva and this in the Mahat. Mahat becomes one with Prakriti and Prakriti in her turn, becomes one with the Purusha and again, there will be the Brahman and nothing else.

"This, in short, is the beginning and end of creation." Krishna was silent and Uddhava with the unsatiable desire for knowledge asked: "Krishna, I have heard you expound on the different yogas. I have been listening carefully and I have come to the conclusion that Jnana Yoga which you have described, is very difficult to practise unless man has his mind completely under control. I do not think I will ever be able to take to it. Even great yogis have found it immensely difficult and almost impossible to control the wayward mind.

"When there is a much easier path which leads to you, why should anyone pursue the hard way? The wise men have realised that by worshipping you and your blessed feet they will be granted the wisdom to differentiate between what is true and what is false. Your Bhaktas are never destroyed. Because they are never obsessed with Ahamkara. They never have any pride in their achievements since they ascribe it all to you and your mercy. Others, deluded by Maya, consider themselves to be great yogins. They think that they are skilful in their work and they allow pride to enter their hearts. Such people will not be able to approach you.

"You are a slave to your Bhakta. Bali, the asura monarch, Nandagopa the king of the cowherds, and the gopis who were ignorant of the ways of the world were all dear to you. They would think on you and only you incessantly and they have accomplished what Brahma and Indra have not been able to do. When you were born as Rama the monkeys were more dear to you than all the devas. When you are so easily pleased by mere Bhakti why should man strive after the difficult yoga named Jnana Yoga? I consider myself to be your Bhakta because you are ever in my thoughts and I love no one else but you. I am not eager to have any riches or for any place in the heavens, nor for salvation. You are my acharya and you are the one who dwells inside me."

Krishna smiled his beautiful smile and said: "Uddhava, you are really dear to me and I will now tell you once again the secret by which man can conquer death, fear of death. Man who desires to please me should think only of me. His mind and his thoughts should all be only about me. His love for me should be constant. He should follow with love my ways of teaching and he should act in such a manner that I will be pleased. He should follow the behaviour of my Bhaktas: Bhaktas like Narada, Prahlada or Dhruva. One is divine, one was an asura child and the third a human and also a child.

"My Bhakta should worship me always. By worship I do not mean the bhajans in which several people combine and sing, more to impress others of their piety than because they feel like doing so. I do not ask for puja with Chhatra-Chamaras, Simhasana and such ostentatious offerings. One need not observe any Vratas like Ekadashi and other such severe tasks. Nor does he have to go on pilgrimages to all the holy spots in order to worship me. I am pleased if, with a clear mind, man makes an attempt to see me in everyone and everything. If he realises that everything is pervaded by me and only me there is then no need for him to perform any Japa or Tapa since he will be an evolved soul. The avaranas do not envelop him and so he is free like the air or the sky. The wise man is he who has realised me and to him everything looks alike. All things seem to him to be but manifestations of me and only me. He finds no difference between a high-born and a low-born man since he loves both with the same affection. He

sees me in the sun, in a spark of fire, in a man whose equanimity is evident and in a man full of cruel thoughts. He knows that the same Brahman dwells in all these and because of the avarana they do not realise it.

"To a man with thoughts like these, it is easy to be without ego or envy, arrogance or hatred.

"It is unbelievable but true that the wise man who can see the Brahman in everything around him, who has shed all desires, who is unaffected by the opposites, who is unmoved either by pain or by pleasure, will reach the Brahmi state. I can assure you of it. His Atman, lodged as it is in this perishable, false cage called the human body, will reach me who is eternal, who is the Truth. This, which is a secret even from the devas, has been taught by me to you since you are dear to me and you are my Bhakta. I have taught you the Jnana Yoga also. When Bhakti and Jnana are combined in a man, he is sure of attaining salvation. Anyone who has followed this lesson which I have taught you will surely reach the Brahman who is the secret of the Vedas: the quintessence of it. One who reads this lesson of mine to you everyday will draw nearer and nearer to me with the light of Jnana and will become pure in thought and deed. One who listens to this discourse will never be entrained in the meshes of Samsara which is made up of karma.

"My friend, Uddhava, have you learnt the lesson well enough? Have all your doubts been cleared? Have you now shed the sorrow which you had before you came to me? Are you now free of all the delusions?

"One word of warning I have to give you. You shall not, on any account, teach this lesson to undeserving people. A pretender, an atheist, a deceiver, one who does not believe in the yoga by name Bhakti or to one who is lacking in humility. These are men whom I consider to be unfit to be taught this great lesson. You should propagate this truth only among those who are rid of these qualities I have mentioned.

"Do not grieve when I am gone but go about in this world of men and teach Dharma whenever you can. Dharma will leave this earth when I go and it is up to you and others like you to see that it is still alive in the

world of men. I have taken so much trouble to establish it on the earth and you should tend and nurture this plant when I am gone."

Uddhava stood with his palms folded and with his eyes red with tears. They were flowing fast and he could not find his voice since it was choked with emotion. After a while he controlled the sorrow which was threatening to fill his mind and falling at Krishna's feet he placed his head on them and said: "Krishna, my delusions are all gone because of your presence. How can fear of darkness frighten one who is standing in the presence of the sun? In your kindness you have lighted in my heart the lamp of wisdom. You have been so full of affection for me that you have taught me how to cut asunder the bonds of affection I have been having for my kith and kin in this immense Yadava clan. I have but one request. Please grant me that this love of mine for you, this Bhakti I have for you will never leave me and will be as firm as a rock in this weak and wavering heart of mine."

Krishna smiled with infinite love in his eyes and said: "Uddhava, proceed to the ashrama by name Badari which is mine. Ganga flows there and the very sight of her will be enough to rid you of all your sins. Stay there, bathing in her waters and live like a Sanyasi with your thoughts Set on me. After you have done all that I have asked you to do you will reach me."

Uddhava left his presence with great unwillingness. Steeped as he was in the lesson of Jnana, still he could not leave Krishna. He followed him to Prabhasa and during the last hours of Krishna, Uddhava was there with the sage Maitreya who had also come there. Krishna once again spoke to them and he returned to the Glory that was his own.

When the Lord went, Dharma, Purity, Beauty and all that was good and great went with him and mother earth was left lamenting.

In the beginning, Brahman was, and nothing else. Brahman, the Soul of all souls, the Lord of Prakriti, the Cause and the Effect blended into one. He was the Seer and, in the beginning there was nothing to be seen. The Brahman was self-luminous. Prakriti was in him. The power to manifest himself was in him.

In the beginning, the three gunas, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas were perfectly balanced. They were in equilibrium. Another powerful aspect of the Brahman is Kala, Time. Now, because of the passage of time, the balance in the gunas was upset, disturbed. There was a throb of unrest and this disturbance had in it, the Germ of Creation.

The power because of which the Purusha creates the Universe is called Prakriti, the active aspect of the Brahman which is all consciousness, awareness.

This consciousness manifested itself in the form of the Universe ruled by the three gunas and their sway. The Original Soul, the Universal Spirit altered its appearance, meaning, it became the Cause as well as the Effect, the Seer as well as the Seen, the Doer as well as the Deed.

The disturbance in the equilibrium of the gunas was the cause of the manifestation of Prakriti. Out of Prakriti was evolved the Mahat Tattva. Mahat is all light. It swallowed the darkness which had enveloped everything during the great Annihilation, the great Deluge during the previous Kalpa. The Mahat Tattva became transformed into the Aham Tattva.

Aham Tattva is Kriya Shakti, the power of action.

Aham Tattva is seen to have three aspects:

Sattvic Aham Tattva which is also called Vaikarika,

Rajas Aham Tattva which is also called Taijasa,

Tamasa Aham Tattva which is called Tamasa.

Out of the Sattvic Aham Tattva is born the Mind, Manas.

Out of the Rajasic Aham Tattva are born the Indriyas, the sense-organs.

Out of the Tamasic Aham Tattva are born the five Mahabhutas.

The essential features of the Aham Tattva are again three:

Karya - action itself because of the Tamasic aspect.

Kartrutva - the power of becoming the performer of action, as a result of the Sattvik aspect.

Karanatva - causing the performance of the action which is a result of the Rajasic aspect.

Peace, which is Shanti, anger which goes by the name Raudra, ignorance which is named Avidya, are again three more characteristics of Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic Aham Tattvas. Because of the Sattvic Aham Tattva the mind begins to function. The power to think is there and out of it are born perception and desire.

The Karmendriyas, the organs of action, and the Jnanendriyas, the organs of perception are born of the Rajasic Aham Tattva. Out of the Tamasic Aham Tattva are born the Mahabhutas, the elements, the Tanmatras.

The first is the Shabda Tanmatra, sound, the subtlest of the five: in association with it is born Akasha, the sky, ether.

Ether conducts sound and it is like sound, all-pervading.

Sparsha Tanmatra occurs next: the sense of touch, and in association with it, Vayu, the air which, again, permeates everything. Sparsha has in it the quality of Shabda also. Vayu conveys sound as well as touch, both these sensations. Incidentally, the air is slightly more tangible than the ether, and, to that extent, it is grosser than ether.

Then is formed Rupa Tanmatra: what can be perceived since it will have a form. With this Tanmatra, in association with it, was born Fire or Light. Rupa Tanmatra has three qualities now, Shabda, Sparsha and Rupa. It is evidently, more gross than air, more tangible.

The next Tanmatra to be formed is Rasa Tanmatra, and complementary to it, Water. Water has four qualities: Shabda, Sparsha, Rupa and Rasa.

The last and the grossest of them all is formed last, Gandha Tanmatra, the sense of smell and with it is born the Earth. The earth has all the five qualities in it, Shabda, Sparsha, Rupa and Gandha.

Prakriti is also known as the Saguna Brahman as against the Nirguna Brahman which is the Brahman in the absolute form. The power underlying the five Mahabhutas is collectively known as Dravya Shakti; the power lying in the Indriyas is known collectively as Kriya Shakti and the power of Prakriti and the Ishvara presiding over these is known as the Jnana Shakti.

Prakriti is made up of:

1. The Five *Mahabhutas*

- i) *Prithvi* (Earth)
- ii) *Ap* (Water)
- iii) *Tejas* (Fire or Light)
- iv) *Vayu* (Air)
- v) *Akasha* (Ether or Sky)

2. The Five *Tanmatras*

- i) *Gandha* (Smell)
- ii) *Rasa* (Taste)
- iii) *Rupa* (Sight)
- iv) *Sparsha* (Touch)
- v) *Shabda* (Sound)

3. The corresponding *Indriyas*

- i) *Shrotra* (Ears)
- ii) *Tvak* (Skin)

- iii) *Chakshus* (Eyes)
- iv) *Rasana* (Tongue)
- v) *Ghrana* (Nose)

4. The *Karmendriyas*

- i) *Vak* (Speech)
- ii) *Pani* (Hands)
- iii) *Padam* (Foot)
- iv) *Upastham* (Generative organ)
- v) *Payu* (Excretory organ)

The Antahkarana is of four kinds: Manas, Buddhi, Ahamkara and Chitta.

These twenty-four features namely, the five Mahabhutas, the five Tanmatras, the five Indriyas, the five Karmendriyas along with the four Antahkaranas comprise the Saguna Brahman.

Kala, Time, is considered as the twenty-fifth feature. Some thinkers deem Kala to be that Ultimate end of which men are frightened, men who are ignorant of the glory of Ishvara and who are caught up in the web spun by Prakriti, men who are deluded by the Ego which manifests itself and becomes all-powerful.

Ishvara who is without the gunas, who is the cause of the manifestation of Prakriti is the twenty-fifth feature. With his Maya and with the help of Kala Ishvara inhabits every living and every created being: the living beings as Purusha and the outside as Kala which is the end of everything and the beginning too.

The supreme aspect of the Antahkarana is reflected in the Mahat Tattva which is all light. Purusha is ever found in the Mahat. This is to be worshipped as Vaasudeva, the highest Purusha. Ananta, the thousand-headed who pervades the Bhutas, the Manas and the Indriyas has to be worshipped as Sankarshana in the Aham Tattva. Sankarshana has to be worshipped since he is the Ahamkara in its absolute form: the Ego before any transformation takes place.

Manas Tattva is the power of thinking, particularly in the field of feelings, Kama or desire, likes and dislikes, mental bondage and similar feelings. This aspect of the Aham Tattva is worshipped as Aniruddha, dark and charming like the blue lotus flowering during the season, autumn, when the skies are blue and not marred by the rainbearing clouds.

Chitta is the Buddhi which functions through the brain of created beings. This is more intellectual than emotional and Pradyumna is the form in which Chitta is worshipped. The Adhishtata, the controlling power for the Mahat Tattva, which is worshipped as Vaasudeva is Kshetrajna. For Ahamkara worshipped as Sankarshana, the Adhishtata is Rudra. Chandra is the Adhishtata for Manas which is worshipped as Aniruddha while Brahma is the Adhishtata for the Chitta or Buddhi which is worshipped as Pradyumna.

Vaasudeva, is also said to represent the Vishva,

Sankarshana, the Taijasa,

Pradyumna, the Praagnya, and

Aniruddha, the Turiya.

THE FIRST AVATARA—PURUSHA

Prakriti, made up of its many components was, in the beginning, not able to become a comprehensive whole. Kala which is destructive, Karma which is the cause of the cycle of births and the gunas which are the natural and essential factors of the process of creation were all together but all apart. The conglomeration formed an inert egg which goes by the name Brahmanda.

This egg stayed in the waters for thousands of years. When the period of hibernation was at an end several openings were formed in the egg one by one.

The mouth opened first and Vak entered it, and along with it, Agni, fire, which holds sway over Vak.

The nostrils opened, the sense of smell entered them and along with it entered Vayu, the patron of the sense of smell.

The eyes opened and the sense of sight entered them and, with this, entered Surya, the sun.

The ears opened and the sense of sound, and with it the quarters, "Dik's" entered them.

The skin became alive and the sense of touch was carried to it by the Oshadhis.

The hands emerged and strength came to them given by Indra.

The feet emerged, movement came to them and Vishnu entered them.

The veins were formed and the rivers entered them.

The stomach was formed and with it, hunger and thirst. The sea then entered it.

The heart was formed and the mind emerged out of it and Chandra became the guardian deity.

Buddhi emerged and with it, Brahma.

Ahamkara was the next to make its appearance and with it, Rudra.

And yet, all these lesser gods were not able to bring to life the Brahmanda. The Vairajapurusha as he is called, who pervaded the Brahmanda was sleeping and he could not be awakened. The gods prayed to the Brahman.

The Kshetrajna who is the Purusha entered the heart of the Vairajapurusha, the heart where Chitta is located. Chaitanya made its appearance and the Vairajapurusha then rose out of the waters.

THE VIRAT PURUSHA AS DESCRIBED BY THE VEDAS

Purusha entered the waters which formed the contents of the Brahmanda and he was resplendent as Narayana reclining on the thousand-headed Adishesha. Out of his Navel rose an immense lotus. This was the seat of Brahma who had been commanded by the Lord to begin the task of creation.

The Virat, the Hiranya Garbha which is the embryo of Creation and the Purusha Himself who pervades it all should all be the objects of Dharana during the Ashtanga Yoga.

The Virat Purusha is the form of the Bhagawan which is all-comprehensive. Prithvi, Ap, Tejas, Vayu, Akasha, Aham Tattva, and the Mahat Tattva form the seven sheaths, the Avaranas of the Vairajapurusha who resides in the Brahmanda. He is the SOUL pervading the Hiranya Garbha as he is called. This Universal form of the Purusha should be the object of meditation.

The soles of the Virat Purusha form the Patala loka.

Rasatala forms his insteps and Mahatala forms his heels.

His ankles are fashioned by Talatala, so say the Vedas.

His two knees cover the Sutala. Vitala and Atala are his thighs.

Bhutala is said to be the back of his waist, the sky is the navel of the Virat Purusha: so the Vedas say.

Swarga which is a cluster of celestial fires is the chest of the Virat Purusha. Maharloka is his chest and Jana, his face.

The Vedas say that Tapoloka is but his forehead and Satyaloka, his myriad heads. The devas led by Indra are his arms and the quarters, his ears. The

Ashvini twins are his nostrils and Agni, his mouth, so say the Vedas.

The Antariksha with the Sun and the Moon are his eyes. The night and day form his eyelashes. The Brahmaloaka is but lifting of his eyebrows. Water forms his palate.

The Vedas are his head, Yama forms his molars and the emotions are his teeth.

Maya which deludes man is his smile and glance from his eyes causes the entire creation.

His upper lip is bashfulness and the lower, avarice.

In his chest is lodged Dharma. The ocean is his stomach and the mountains form his bones.

His veins, the Vedas say, are the rivers and the trees, the hair on his body.

Time is his stride and his breath is Vayu.

The Samsara, the Universe is the Play of the Lord.

The clouds make up his locks and the evening, his clothing. The unknown, the Avyakta, is his heart and Chandra, his mind. His Chitta is the Mahat. Rudra is his Ahamkara.

Yajna is his action.

In short, even as the consciousness in man creates the world of dreams and itself becomes every object which makes up the world of dreams, even so, Bhagawan Narayana, the Purusha, is the Soul of everything in the Universe.

PHALASHRUTI

"Aum Namō Bhagavate Vāsudevaya"—this Mantra is enough to destroy all the many ills that visit man. Like the Sun which dispels darkness, like the breeze which scatters dense clouds which have gathered in abundance in the pure blue sky, this mantra dispels the sorrows and ignorance in the mind of man.

He who dwells on the stories of the Lord even for a moment, who relates the stories to others, who listens to the stories as often as he can, is assured of his Atman becoming cleansed, purified.

One who studies the Bhagavata Purana on Ekadashi or Dvadashi will be absolved of all sins.

The Bhagavata had been taught by the Lord Himself to Brahma, born of the Lotus. Vairagya, which is detachment, and Bhakti, which is devotion, form the main theme of the entire narration. Bhagavata is the quintessence of the Vedas. It is the pathway to the Brahman and it has no equal in the entire range of holy books. Even as Ganga is the best among the rivers, like Vishnu among the gods, like Varanasi among the Punyakshetras, holy cities, even so, the Bhagavata is the greatest among books.

It is considered the greatest since it purifies man of all sins and the man who studies it with Bhakti will soon be rid of this painful bondage by name Samsara.

Bhagavata kindles in man Bhakti for the Lord. Out of Bhakti is born Vairagya and Vairagya leads to Jnana, realisation or the Self Atmajnana.

The Truth is called the Brahman by the Upanishads, Paramatma or Ishvara by the Sankhyans and Bhagawan by Bhaktas. That Truth can be realised by the study of the Bhagavata Purana—the Light which will, for ever, dispel the darkness called Avidya.

Salutations to Him whom Brahma, Varuna, Indra, the Rudras and the Maruts praise with sacred hymns: they praise with the help of the Vedas and the many branches of the Vedas and the Upanishads: whom the Samavedins praise with their musical recitations, whom the yogis are able to perceive by intense meditation and by training their minds steadily on him, whom neither the devas nor the asuras are able to realise in His true form.

GLOSSARY

A

Abhaya : Fearlessness.

Abhichara: Exorcising: incantations.

Abhijit: The last one-fifth of the star Uttarashadha and the first one-fifth of the star Shravana combine to form the star Abhijit. This was the star under which Vamana was born.

Abhijit: Twenty-eight minutes before and twenty-eight minutes after midnight is called Abhijit muhurta. This is also true of the day time: i.e., 28 minutes before and 28 minutes after midday is also Abhijit. This was the muhurta during the night when Krishna was born.

Abhiplava: Name of a religious ceremony which is said to last for six days.

Abhisheka: Anointing, inaugurating, or consecrating: inauguration of the king: bathing of divinity to whom worship is offered.

Abhivandanam : Greeting: walking towards a person and honouring him by greeting him.

Abharekha: The sign of the lotus either on the palm or the sole of the foot. This is to indicate the divinity of the person: especially the amsha of Narayana.

Achamana: Sipping water from the palm of the hand for the sake of purifying oneself.

Achamaniya: Water used for Achamana: a vessel used for holding water for Achamana.

Achyuta: Imperishable, permanent. Name of Vishnu, Narayana and also Krishna.

Adharma: Unrighteousness, injustice, wickedness.

Adharmi: One who is unrighteous, wicked, unjust.

Adhvaryu: Any officiating priest of a particular class. An *Adhvaryu* had to measure the ground, build the altar, prepare the sacrificial vessels, fetch wood and water and to light the fire: all the while, repeating the hymns of the *Yajur Veda*. Hence the Veda itself is called "Adhvaryu".

Adhyatmika: Relating to the Self or the Soul: relating to the Supreme Spirit.

Adhyayana: Study.

Adibhautika: Relating to material things.

Adidaivika: Relating to Fate or Chance.

Adipurusha: Narayana: at times, the Brahman is also referred to as Adipurusha.

Adishesha: The name of the celebrated mythological thousand-headed serpent represented as forming the couch and canopy of Narayana while He sleeps during the intervals of Creation.

Aditi: Daughter of Daksha and wife of Kashyapa: she was the mother of the Adityas and the gods.

Aditya: Son of Aditi. In the period of the Brahmanas these sons of Aditi are twelve in number and are called the "Dvadasha Adityas".

Adivaraha: The *avatara* of Narayana when He took the form of a boar to bring the earth back from the nether world.

Aghamarshana: meaning: "Sin-effacing". It is the name of a particular hymn from the Vedas still used as a daily prayer. It is said that the author of this prayer is the son of Madhuchchhandas, who was the son of Vishvamitra.

Aham Tattva: The third of the eight producers or sources of creation, viz., the conceit or concept of individuality, individualisation. (Sankhya).

Ahavani: An oblation: to be offered as an oblation.

Ahimsa: Not injuring anything: abstaining from killing or giving pain to others by thought, word or deed. (See *Ashtanga Yoga*).

Aindastra: The astra presided over by Indra.

Aja: Unborn: Existing throughout Eternity: it is an epithet of the Almighty Being: also name of Narayana, Mahadeva or Brahma.

Aksha: An axis: axle: the pole of a cart. The seed of which rosaries are made.

Akshamala: A rosary: a string of beads used for meditation.

Akshowhini: A large army consisting of 21870 chariots, as many elephants, 65610 horses and 109350 footmen.

Anita: A fruit sour to taste: said to be medicinal.

Amrita: Nectar of immortality: Ambrosia: beverage of the gods.

Amritamanthana: Churning of the ocean for getting nectar.

Amsha: A portion of divinity, as, for instance, the *avatars* are *amshas* of the Lord.

Anakadundubhi: Epithet of Vasudeva, the father of Krishna. It is said that the heavenly instrument *Dundubhi* was played when he was born since the gods knew that Vasudeva was destined to be the father of the Lord during his *Purna Avatara*.

Ananta: Endless, boundless. Name of Adishesha.

Anarya: Not honourable: not behaving like an Arya.

Angirasa Yajna : A *yajna* performed by the descendants of Angiras, the father of Brihaspati.

Anima: Superhuman power of becoming as small as an atom (Anu). One of the Siddhis.

Aniruddha: The son of Pradyumna and the grandson of Krishna. The name is used in Vedanta in connection with the birth of the Universe.

Anjali: The open hands placed side by side and slightly hollowed: a mark of reverence, supplication, salutation.

Ankusharekha: The sign of the elephant-driver's hook on the palm or on the sole of the foot. This is said to show that the person is endowed with great powers: either a ruler of men or a person who is a divine being. Krishna is said to have had it.

Antahpura: The apartments set apart for his queens in the palace of the king.

Antaratma: The soul, the deity that resides in the mind of man and witnesses all his actions.

Antariksha: The intermediate region between heaven and earth: the air, the atmosphere, the sky.

Antaryami: A synonym for Antaratma.

Anugraha: Favour: benefit. Conferring benefits.

Anumana: Conclusion from given premises: an inference: a conclusion.

Ap (Appu): Water. One of the five elements mentioned in creation.

Apana: One of the five life-giving breaths in the body.

Aparigraha: Non-acceptance: rejection. One of the requisites of *Ashtanga Yoga*.

Aptakama: One who has gained his wishes: who is satisfied. In philosophy the term is used for one who knows the identity of the

Brahman and the *Atman*: the Supreme Soul.

Arani: A piece of wood from the Shami tree used for kindling fire by attrition. It is also understood that the fire kindled thus is always the sacred fire.

Aranyaka: 1. A class of religious and philosophical writings closely connected with the Brahmanas. They are called Aranyakas because they are either composed in the forests or studied there. The Upanishads are said to be attached to the Aranyakas. 2. Fruit growing wild in the forest: usually, the wild Jambul fruit.

Arbuda: Wonderful, marvellous. One of the nine rasas: the sentiment of marvel.

Archana: Worship. Reverence paid to deities or to one's elders, superiors.

Ardhasana: Literally, half a seat. It is considered to be a mark of respect to make room for a guest on the same seat on which one is seated. This gesture is a particularly favourite one of Indra.

Arghya: A respectful offering or oblation to a venerable person who has come as a guest.

Arjuna: A tree whose rind is useful and whose trunk is white in colour.

Artha: Wealth, riches, property, money. Attainment of riches or worldly prosperity regarded as one of the four ends of human existence, the other three being *Dharma*, *Kama* and *Moksha*.

Arya: A worthy man, respectable, honourable and noble: noble in thinking, in speech and in action.

Aryama: The Sun: the head of the Manes, or the *Pitris*. The milky way is called his path. He presides over the star Uttara Phalguni.

Asadhu: Not good: wicked. Anything bad or evil.

Asanchaya: Not storing up or collecting worldly goods.

Asanga: Free from worldly ties: not attached.

Asati: An unchaste woman.

Asava: Distillation: decoction. Any spiritual liquor.

Ashoka: Name of a tree having red and orange flowers which bloom in clusters. Ashoka is one of the five arrows in the quiver of Manmatha, the god of love.

Ashokavana: Literally, a grove of Ashoka trees. Generally it is a pleasure garden of a king.

Ashrama: A hermitage, the adobe of saints, ascetics. Also, a stage, order or period of the religious life of a brahmin. These are four *Brahmacharya*, where he is a student of the Vedas: *Grihastha*, where he is a householder. Then comes *Vanaprastha* which makes him an anchorite: and, finally, *Sanyasa*, when he abandons all worldly concerns.

Ashtanga Yoga: The *yoga* prescribed for a person who is bent on concentrating the mind on the form of the Lord and thus obtain *Mukti*.

Ashtanga Yoga is a preparation for this *Mukti*.

Ashvamedha: The Horse Sacrifice. Tradition has it that a king should perform it and, if he performs a hundred *Ashvamedha yagas* he will attain the state of Indra.

Ashvattha: The tree held to be very sacred. It is mentioned in the *Kathopanishad* and also in the *Gita*.

Ashvattha Leaf: During the Great Deluge, the Lord, in the form of a child is said to recline on an *Ashvattha* leaf with his toe held to his lips with the help of his hands. This was a vision which was seen by the sage Markandeya.

Asteya: Not stealing.

Astra: A missile, an arrow, generally: with this special quality that it requires a *mantra*, an incantation to be repeated before discharging or withdrawing the missile.

Asura: A general name for the enemies of the gods: Daityas and the Danavas.

Asuric (nature): Belonging to the asuras: infernal, demoniacal.

Atharva Veda: The fourth Veda which contains many forms of imperfections for the destruction of enemies, and also a great number of prayers for safety and for averting mishaps, evils, sins or calamities: and a number of hymns as in the other Vedas, addressed to the gods with prayers to be used at religious and solemn rites.

Atiratha: An unrivalled warrior fighting from a chariot.

Atithi: A guest: an unexpected guest.

Atithya: Hospitable reception: hospitality.

Atmajnana: Knowing one's self: knowing the Supreme Spirit.

Atman: The Soul: the principle of life and sensation: the individual soul, the Self.

Atmanivedana: Offering one's self to the deity: surrender of one's self to the Lord.

Atmarama: Rejoicing in one's self or in the Supreme Spirit.

Atmasamarpana: Synonym to *Atmanivedana*. Self-surrender.

Atmasiddhi: The realisation that one's Self is the Supreme Spirit.

Aum: Aum is a sacred word placed at the commencement and ending of a reading of the Vedas or previous to any prayer. In the Upanishads it appears as a monosyllable and is therefore set forth as the object of profound meditation, religious meditation, the highest spiritual efficacy being attributed not only to the whole word, but also to the three sounds: 'A', 'U', 'M', of which the word consists. According to the *Mandukya* the three letters are said to represent the Avasthatraya. The word 'AUM' is better known by the name Pranava'.

Avadhuta: One who has shaken off from himself worldly feelings and obligations: a philosopher.

Avarana: Literally, it means covering, concealing, obscuring. In philosophic language it means mental ignorance which veils the real nature of the Atman.

Avasthatraya: State: condition. The three states, *Jagriti*, which is waking, *Swapna*, which is dreaming and *Sushupti* which is deep sleep.

Avatara: Descent: advent. Descent of a deity upon the earth. An incarnation of the Lord.

Avidya: Spiritual ignorance. Illusion personified as *Maya*. This term *Avidya* is frequently used in Vedanta. Because of one's *Avidya* one does not realise the Truth about the *Brahman* which alone exists.

Avyakta: Indistinct: not manifest or apparent. In *Sankhya* philosophy the Primary Germ of Nature, the primordial or Primary Productive principle from which all phenomena of the material world are developed.

Ayasya: Made of iron: Agile, dextrous, valiant.

Ayudhashala: Armoury: arsenal.

B

Badarikashrama: Name of one of the sources of the Ganges and the neighbouring penance-grove or hermitage of the sages Nara and Narayana.

Baddha: Bound, chained, fastened, fettered, caught, confined. Bound by the fetters of existence, of *Samsara*.

Bala: Power, strength, might, vigour.

Bali: Tribute, offering, gift, oblation, propitiatory oblation: especially an offering of food, rice, etc., to certain gods or demi-gods, spirits, men, birds, and other animals.

Bandha: Literally a bondage, a fastening. Bondage by the fetters of existence, or of evil, sin, experience, suffering.

Barhis: Sacrificial grass. A bed or layer of this grass also called *Kusha* grass is usually strewn over the sacrificial ground and especially over the *Vedi*, to serve as a sacred surface on which to pour the oblations, and as a seat for the gods and for the sacrificers.

Barhishat: Seated on a layer of *Kusha* grass: the Manes.

Barhishmati: The city where Svayambhu Manu ruled.

Bhadrapada: A lunar month corresponding to the latter half of August and the former half of September.

Bhagavad Gita: The glorious, divine song referring to the discourse on the field on battle, in the *Mahabharata*. The speaker was Lord Narayana Himself.

Bhagavad Bhakta Ninda: Insult to a devotee of the Lord which the Lord will not forgive. He will forgive insults hurled at Himself but not at his *Bhaktas*.

Bhagawan: A god, deity: an epithet of Narayana.

Bhagavanninda: Words of disparagement spoken of the Lord which should not be heard by real *Bhaktas* of the Lord. It is said that they should punish the speaker. If, however, the speaker is physically too strong, the *Bhakta* should leave the spot so that the words do not enter his ears.

Bhagavata: Stories relating to Lord Vishnu or worshipping the Lord by words of praise or extolling his doings.

Bhagirathi: The river Ganga: so called because she was brought down to the earth by Bhagiratha, a king of the solar race.

Bhajamana: Fit, right, proper.

Bhaji: One who is entitled to a share.

Bhakta: A worshipper, an adorer, a devotee.

Bhakti: Reverence worship, devotion.

Bhakta - Paradhina: The Lord has this epithet ascribed to 'Him' since He is said to be a slave to his *Bhaktas*, devotees.

Bhakti Marga: Of the several pathways of approach to the Feet of the Lord, this path, the path of Bhakti is said to be the easiest. The *Bhagavata Purana* is devoted to this path only and the several stories are illustrations of the lesson that *Bhakti* is enough to deliver man from bondage.

Bhaya: Fear, alarm, dread, apprehension.

Bhayanaka: Fearful, horrible, terrible, frightful. One of the nine sentiments, *rasas*, in poetry.

Bheda: Difference, distinction. One of the four methods of persuasion: the other three being *Sama*, *Dana* and *Danda*

Bhiksha: Anything given as alms.

Bhrigukachchha: The name of the town or sacred place on the northern bank of the river Narmada (now called by the name Broach).

Bhriguvamsha: One of the chief brahminical families whose ancestor was Bhrigu, the son of Brahma.

Bhumi: The earth. Also a place, spot or ground.

Bhuta: A spirit, a ghost.

Bhutala: The surface of the ground: the earth.

Bibhatsa: Disgusting, loathsome, revolting. Arjuna was called Bhibhatsu since he never once performed an action which was disgusting or loathsome.

Bilva: The wood-apple tree, commonly called 'Bel.' Its leaves are employed in the ceremonial worship of Lord Mahadeva.

Bindusaras: A lake formed by drops of water. One of them is a lake on the banks of which Kardama Prajapati had his ashrama.

Brahma: The One Impersonal Universal Spirit manifested itself as the first of the Triad of personal gods. He never appears to have become an object of general worship though he has two temples in India. His wife is Saraswati.

Brahmabala: Brahmanic power.

Brahmacharya: Study of the Vedas: the state of an unmarried religious student: a state of continence and chastity.

Brahmadanda: Brahma's staff, the staff which is always in the hand of a brahmin.

Brahmajnani: One who has divine or sacred knowledge: especially knowledge of the Universal permeation of the ONE SPIRIT as taught by the Vedanta. Spiritual wisdom.

Brahmahatya: Killing of a brahmin.

Brahman: According to the Vedantins the Brahman is both the efficient and material cause of the visible Universe, the all-pervading soul and spirit of the Universe: the essence from which all created things are produced and into which they are all absorbed. Brahman is not generally an object of worship but rather, it is an object of meditation and the ultimate aim of knowledge.

Brahmanya: Befitting a brahmin: the station or rank of a brahmin priestly or sacerdotal character.

Brahmapasha: "Brahma's Noose": the name of a mythical weapon.

Brahmarishi: A brahmanical sage.

Brahmashastra: The study of the Brahman.

Brahma Vidya: The pursuit of knowledge: knowledge of the Truth about the Brahman. The Ultimate Quest.

Brahmavarta: One of the names given to India.

Brahmi state: The word is from the *Bhagvad Gita*. It is Mentioned as the 'Brahmi Sthiti'. It is the attainment of the Brahman. The realisation that the *Jivatma* and the *Paramatma* are one.

Buddhi: Perception, comprehension. Intellect, understanding, intelligence.

C

Chaitanya: Spirit: life: intelligence: sensation. In our Vedanta philosophy it is the Supreme spirit considered as the essence of all being and the source of all sensation.

Chaitra: Name of a Lunar month in which the full moon stands in the constellation Chitra: this corresponds to the month made up the second half of March and the first half of April.

Chakra: A sharp circular weapon, missile, a disc: this term is specially applied to the weapon of Narayana.

Chakra: A river by name Chakra: a holy spot.

Chakshusha Manu: One of the Manu who started a Manvantara. He was the sixth Manu.

Chamara: A chowrie or bushy tail of the 'Chamara' used as a flyflap or a fan: this is reckoned as one of the insignia of Royalty.

Champaka: A yellow fragrant flower.

Chandala: A general name for a low and despicable class of men.

Chhandas: The Vedas: the sacred text of the Vedic hymns: a metre. Metrical science. Prosody. Chhandas is regarded as one of the six *Vedangas* or the auxiliaries of the Vedas, the other five being *Shiksha*, *Vyakarana*, *Kalpa*, *Nirukta* and *Jyotisha*.

Chhandavega: Fierce, violent, impetuous, passionate, angry, wrathful. This is the name given by Narada to one of the characters in an allegory narrated him to king Prachinabarhis.

Chandikeshvara: Chandika is the name of Durga, Devi, Parvati: and Chandikeshvara is her Lord Mahadeva.

Chandra: The moon.

Charana: A celestial singer: heavenly chorister.

Charu: An oblation of rice, barley and pulse prepared by boiling it in butter and milk for Naivedya to the gods or the Manes.

Chaturloka: The four words.

Chaturmasya: During a period of four months reckoned from the eleventh day of the bright half of Ashadha to the eleventh day in the bright half of the month Kartika, *Yatis* or *Sanyasis*, choose a place to stay. They are usually on the move but during the rainy months they select the kingdom of some good king and accept his hospitality during that time. The kings, of course, would consider it a privilege to entertain great *Sadhus* during the four months. This custom of the *Sanyasis* is called "Chaturmasya".

Chinmudra: The tip of the forefinger and the thumb (of the right-hand) are held together while the other three fingers stand apart in a straight vertical line. This is supposed to be the sign by which the Truth about the Brahman was taught to his disciples by Lord Dakshinamurti who was the Lord Mahadeva Himself.

Chiranjivi: Long-lived. An epithet of seven persons who are considered to be deathless: Ashvatthaman, Bali, Vyasa, Hanuman, Vibhishana, Kripa and Parasurama. Markandeya, the son of Mrikandu was also called a Chiranjivi: he never crossed the age of sixteen.

Chitra: The name of the fourteenth lunar mansion which consists of one star, Chitra.

Chitta-Samyamana: The art of controlling the unbridled mind which loves to wander at will.

Chutha: The mango tree. The flower is said to be one of the arrows in Manmatha's quiver, the other four being Aravinda, Ashoka, Navamallika and Nilotpala.

D

Dadhi: Milk which has been converted into curds. In other words, coagulated milk.

Daitya: A son of Diti: a *rakshasa*. The name is particularly applied to Hiranyakashipu, the son of Diti and Kashyapa.

Dakshaprajapati: Name of the celebrated son of Brahma. He was the chief of the patriarchs of mankind.

Dakshinagni: Name of the southern fire, the sacred fire which is placed southwards.

Dakshinayana: The southern progress of the sun: his progress south of the equator: the half year in which the sun moves from the north to south: the winter solstice.

Dana: A gift, a donation, present. Bribery, as one of the four Upayas or expedients of overcoming one's enemy or even ordinary problems.

Danava: A demon: a rakshasa.

Danda: Violence, punishment: the last of the four Upayas, or expedients of persuasion.

Dani Samrat: 'The king of givers - a title given to the *asura* king Bali by the Lord Himself.

Darbha: A kind of grass called *Kusha* grass which is used at sacrificial ceremonies. (see Barhis).

Darbhasana: A seat covered by darbha grass placed for guests to honour them.

Darshana: Sight, vision. The word is usually used when the Lord is said to grant a sight of himself to his devotee.

Dasya: Servitude, slavery. service. One of the ways of worshipping the Lord.

Darn: Compassion, sympathy, mercy.

Delia: The body, the material container, as it were, of the *Atman* which is not material.

Dehin: The spirit, the soul, the *Atman* contained in the material body.

Deva: A divine being: a celestial.

Devadaru: The tree Deodar: a variety of the pine.

Devarahasya: A divine mystery. It is actually a fact known to the gods but which, a mortal man, and earthly being, is forbidden to know.

Devi: Any goddess: but it is usually Parvati, the consort of Lord Mahadeva who is meant when the word *Devi* is used alone. Otherwise it is a goddess as when Lakshmi is addressed as Lakshmi *Devi*.

Dhanamada: The arrogance born of wealth. One of the three *Madas* which are supposed to rob man of his intelligence, his power of thinking: and make him blind in the inner eye: the other two *Madas* being *Vidya Mada* and *Kula Mada*. Incidentally, Ravana suffered from all the three *Madas*.

Dhanus: A bow: It is also the sign of Sagittarius in the Zodiac.

Dhanuryajna: A kind of festival, a puja, where a great bow, usually a celestial bow, is worshipped.

Dhartvantari: Name of the physician of the gods, said to have been born during the great churning of the ocean. He appeared holding the bowl of nectar in his hand.

Dharma: The word has several usages. Religious or moral merit, virtue, righteousness. The second meaning is in association with the three other words: *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*. These four are said to be the four ends of human existence.

Dharmashastra: A code of laws.

Dharana: One of the rules of *Ashtanga Yoga* where *Dharana* has to be practised. *Dharana* is: keeping the mind collected, holding the breath suspended, steady abstraction of the mind: followed by placing the image of the Lord in one's mind to the exclusion of everything else.

Dhyana: Meditation, contemplation: especially religious meditation. Abstract contemplation.

Diggajas: The eight quarters are supposed to be held up by eight elephants which are called the *Diggajas*.

Dikpalaka: Each one of the eight quarters is said to be presided over by one of the gods: the East, by Indra, the west by Varuna, the north by Kubera and the south by Yama. The other four dikpalakas are: Agni, Ishana, Vayu and Nirut.

Drasta: A seer: one who sees mentally.

Drashtam: That which has been seen.

Dvadashanama: The mantra AUM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAASUDEVAYA', which is the life-breath of the *Bhagavata Purana*. The twelve letters which make up the mantra give it the name *Dvadashanama*.

Dvadashi: The twelfth day after the full moon or the new moon.

Dvaitavana: The name of a forest which has become immortal because the Pandavas spent part of their exile there.

Dvesha: Hatred, enmity, hostility.

Dvapara: Name of the third yoga: the third quarter of Time.

Dvija: Literally, one who is born twice. A man of any of the first three castes of the Hindus: a *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya* or *Vaishya*.

Dundubhi; A sort of a large kettle-drum. It is usually associated with heavenly music : Devadundubhi is a favourite word used to describe celebrations in the sky.

Durdevata: One of the evil spirits summoned by incantations with the purpose of causing the death of an enemy.

Dyurloka: The sky: the heavens.

E

Ekadashi: The eleventh day after the full or new moon.

G

Gadayuddha: Actually, it is a fight, a duel between two with the mace, or the club, gada, as it is called. However, *Gadayuddha* always brings to mind the fight to the end between Duryodhana and Bhima during the Kurukshetra war when the Kaurava died.

Gandhamadana: Name of a particular mountain to the east of Meru renowned for its fragrant forests. The perfume is so great, it is intoxicating and hence the name Gandhamadana.

Gandharva: A celestial musician. A class of demi-gods who are regarded as the singers, the musicians of the gods. If they are so inclined, they are said to grant sweet and agreeable voices to young maidens.

Gandharvavivaha: One of the eight forms of marriage described in *Manusmriti*. In this form marriage proceeds entirely from love or mutual inclination of the youth and the maid without ceremonies and without consulting relatives. This form of marriage is the special privilege of Kshatriyas.

Gandharvanagari: An imaginary city in the sky, conjured up by the imagination which gives a form and shape to some natural phenomenon like a cluster of clouds. The word is very frequently used in Vedanta to illustrate the transitoriness of the world: the *Samsara* born of *Maya*, of illusion.

Gandiva: The bow of Arjuna presented by Soma to Varuna, by Varuna to Agni and by Agni to Arjuna when the latter assisted Agni to burn the Khandava forest.

Garga: The *Kulaguru* of the Yadavas, of Vasudeva. He was the one who went to the home of Nanda and named the young boys Krishna and Balarama.

Garhapatya: One of the three sacred fires maintained by a householder: this he receives from his father and hands down to his descendants. This is the fire from which fires for sacrificial purposes are lighted.

Gokula: The place where cows are kept. The cluster of huts or houses where the cowherds lived with their cows.

Gopa: Literally, one who guards or protects. It is usually used, however, as shortened form of Gopala, a cowherd. Krishna was himself called Gopala.

Gopala: Gopala is the term used for a cowherd. But by Gopala we usually mean the Lord, Krishna, when he tended cows in Gokula.

Gopi: The woman, the wife of the cowherd.

Gotra: A family, race or lineage. A *gotra* is always named after a rishi of ancient times to denote that he is the

ancestor: like Kaushika *gotra*, Bharadwaja *gotra*, Harita *gotra*.

Govinda: Again, a keeper of cows, a chief herdsman. One of the epithets of Krishna. The name was conferred on him by Kamadhenu, the heavenly cow.

Graha: A planet. There are nine: Surya, Chandra, Mangala, Budha, Brihaspati, Shukra, Shanaishchara, Rahu and Ketu.

Grahachara: The motion of the planets which, according to one school of thinking, exercises its influence on human beings.

Gramya: Living in a village, rural, rustic: ignorant of polished behaviour.

Grihasthashrama: The order of a householder, the second stage in the religious life of a Brahmana. There are four stages: *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha* and, lastly, *Sanyasa*.

Grishma: The summer, the hot season, corresponding to the months of Jyeshtha and Ashadha.

Gunadosha: The merits and demerits taken together.

Guru: Literally, heavy weighty. Usually ascribed to any venerable or respectable person, an elderly person, or relative. A teacher, a preceptor: particularly a religious teacher, spiritual preceptor.

Gurudakshina: Fee given to a preceptor.

Gurudrohi: One who betrays his *guru*: this betrayal is said to be an unforgivable sin, as terrible as patricide.

Gurukula: After the *Upanayana* a young boy is said to learn from his guru. He is made to spend the time of his education in the home of his guru and he is a *brahmachari* till his education is over. This period of education when a student spends his time with the guru is called 'Gurukulavasa'.

H

Halahala: A deadly poison produced during the churning of the ocean in search of nectar.

Hari: Name of Narayana. It is said to be an *avatara* assumed by him when he came down to the hill by name Trikuta to save the elephant from the jaws of a crocodile.

Haridwara: Name of a sacred Tirtha or bathing place.

Harikirtana: Singing the praises of the Lord, Narayana.

Hasya: The sentiment of mirth or humour: one of the nine *rasas* or sentiments in poetry.

Havis: An oblation or burnt offering in general. Anything offered as an oblation with fire: as clarified butter, *soma*, milk grain.

Hemanta One of the six seasons, cold or winter season comprising the months Margashirsha and Pausha.

Hunkara: Uttering the sound "Hum", a menacing sound which, when pronounced, by great *rishis*, is capable of burning a miscreant to ashes.

Hree: Shyness, shame.

I

Ikshu: The sugar cane. It is said to be the bow used by Manmatha. It is also the name of one of the seven oceans.

Indra: The lord of the gods: the god of rain. Indra, the god of the firmament is the Jupiter Plunius of the Indian Aryans. In the Vedas he is placed in the first rank among the gods. But in later mythology he falls to the second rank. He is now inferior to the Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha. But he is the chief of all the other gods. As in the Vedas, so in later mythology, he is the regent of the atmosphere, and of the eastern quarter. His world is called *Swarga*. He sends the lightning, the thunderbolt and the rain.

Indradhanus: The rainbow. Perhaps called so because it is seen after a downpour of rain which is sent by Indra.

Indriya: An organ of sense. There are two sets of *Indriyas*: *Jnanendriyas* and *Karmendriyas*. Hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell form one set of *Indriyas* while the ears, the skin, the eyes, the tongue and nose form the other set.

Indrotsava: A festival in honour of Indra: performed usually by cowherds and such like to show their gratitude for the rain sent by Indra.

Ishatvam: Superiority, greatness. One of the eight *Siddhis*.

Ishta Daiva: A favourite god, one's tutelary deity.

Ishvara: The supreme God: name of Siva, Mahadeva.

Itihasa: 'So indeed it was'-is the meaning of the word. Talk, legend, tradition, history, traditional accounts of former events: heroic history.

J

Jagravastha: The waking state.

Jaji: A delicately scented variety of the jasmine.

Jalodara: The disease by name Dropsy.

Janaloka: The fifth of the seven divisions of the Universe situated above the *Maharloka*.

Janasthana: Name of a part of the Dandaka forest.

Janina: Birth.

Janmanakshatra: The natal star. Usually, when a child is very precious, the day on which the natal star of the child is in the ascent, is celebrated by the parents as a festive day. This was particularly true in the case of Krishna.

Japamala: A rosary: a string of beads which helps the mind to concentrate on the prayers which one is trying to repeat mentally.

Jara: 1. Old age: decrepitude, infirmity, general debility consequent on old age.

2. Name of a female demon. She is said to have given life to Jarasandha who, at birth, was born as two halves and was, therefore, thrown away. Jara placed the two halves together to eat and found that it came to life. The king, in gratitude, called his son Jarasandha.

3. A hunter by name Jara who shot an arrow at the foot of Krishna mistaking it for the head of a deer.

Jarapurusha: A paramour, a gallant, a lover.

Jata: The hair matted and twisted together: matted or clotted hair. This is a characteristic of all *rishis*, *yatis*, *sanyasis* and such like. But when one speaks of Jata one always thinks of the matted locks of Lord Mahadeva.

Jatakarma: The ceremony performed at the birth of a child.

Jitendriya: One who has his senses under control.

Jiva: The individual or personal soul enshrined in the human body and imparting to it, life, motion and sensation. The *jiva* is the *jivatman* as opposed to the paramatman, the Universal Soul.

Jivanmukta: 'Liberated while living': a man who being purified by the true knowledge of the Supreme Spirit, is freed from future birth and all ceremonial rites while yet living.

Jivatma: (See Jiva above)

Juana: Knowing, understanding. Sacred knowledge: specially knowledge derived from meditation on the higher

truths of religion and philosophy which teaches man to understand his own nature and how he may be re-united to the Supreme Spirit.

Jnanendriya: An organ of perception. There are five of these: *Tvacha*, the skin: *Rasana*, the tongue: *Chakshus*, the eye: *Karna*, the ear: and *Ghrana*, the nose.

Jrumbhnastra: One of the astras which causes the victims to yawn and sleep a heavy deep sleep.

K

Kadamba: A kind of tree which has fragrant orange coloured flowers. This tree is said to thrill into flowers at the sound of thunder.

Kailasa: Name of a mountain. A peak of the Himalayas and the residence of Mahadeva and Kubera.

Kaivalya: Perfect isolation: aloneness: detachment of the soul from matter: the identification with the Spirit which is Supreme: the final Emancipation or Beatitude.

Kala: A small portion of anything : a digit of the moon which is said to have sixteen *Kalas*.

Kala: TIME. The Supreme Spirit regarded as the destroyer of the Universe, being a personification of the principle of destruction.

Kalakuta: Deadly poison: another name for Halahala, born of the ocean while it was churned.

Kalapasha: The noose of Yama or Death.

Kalavinga: A sparrow: the Indian cuckoo.

Kaliyuga: The fourth age of the world. This *yuga* is supposed to be made up of 432,000 years of man and beginning from the year 3102 B.C.

Kalpa: End of the world: universal destruction. A day of Brahma or 1000 *yugas* being a period of 432 million years of mortals measuring the duration of the world, after which comes annihilation.

Kalpa Vriksha: One of the trees of heaven or Indra's paradise. Like Kamadhenu, it is said to grant all desires.

Kama: 1. Cupid the god of Love of Hindu mythology: his other name being Manmatha.
2. Lust: one of the six arch enemies which beset the path of man's spiritual progress: the other five are Krodha (anger), Lobha (avarice), Moha (delusion), Mada (arrogance) and Matsarya (envy).

Kamadhenu: A fabulous cow which was born when the ocean was churned for *Amrita*. She is said to grant all one's desires. She was given to Vasishtha.

Kamandalu: A water pot, earthen or wooden, used by ascetics.

Kamini: A beautiful woman: woman in general.

Kanchana: Gold, wealth.

Kanya Shulka: Money given to the bride's father as the price of the bride: purchase money of a girl.

Kapila Cows: A cow, tawny in colour: it is said to be superior in class to other cows.

Kapinjala: The Chataka bird: some say the Tittiri bird.

Karma: Action, work, deed. Fate, the certain consequence of acts done in a former life.

Karmendriya: An organ of action as opposed to Jnanendriya.

Karma Kanda: That department of the Vedas which relates to the ceremonial, religious acts and to sacrificial rites and the merits rising from a due performance of these acts and rites.

Karma Yoga: The yoga prescribed in the *Bhagavad Gita* in which man performs actions worldly or otherwise, but always with this thought in mind: that the results are dedicated to the Lord and not to the doer. Krishna propounds the theory that action performed in this manner rids man of the cycle of birth and death: that man is free of the bondage of action.

Karnikara: Name of a tree whose flower has been the full favourite of the heroines of old: Sita, Shakuntala and others.

Kartika: Name of the month in which the full moon is near the Krittika or the Pleiades: the month is made up of the latter half of October and the first half of November.

Kasha: A kind of grass used for mats, roofs, etc. A flower of that grass is called Kasha.

Kaurava: A descendant of Kuru, a famed monarch of the Lunar race. Paurava is another name for a Kaurava.

Kaushika Gotra: The *gotra* started by Kaushika, later famed as the great Vishvamitra.

Kavacha: Armour, coat of mail.

Kavi: A wise man, a thinker, a sage, a poet. An epithet of Shukra, the preceptor of the *Asuras*. Also of Valmiki, the first poet.

Kedarakshetra: A particular mountain forming part of the Himalayas: this holy spot is sacred to Mahadeva.

Kedareshvara: Mahadeva, Siva, the deity worshipped in the above spot.

Ketu: The descending node considered as the ninth planet.

Khandava-Prastha: A piece of arid land which was given to the prince Yudhishtira as his share of the kingdom. This was transformed into a beautiful kingdom with the famed Indraprastha as its capital by the grace of Krishna and the witchery of Vishvakarma, the architect of the gods.

Kimpurusha: The word is usually identified with Kinnara though it is sometimes applied to other beings in which the figure of a man and that of an animal are combined. These beings are supposed to live in Hemakuta and are regarded as the attendants of Kubera.

Kinnara and Kinnari: Another name for a Kimpurusha, while Kinnari is the feminine counterpart of a Kinnara.

Kirtana: Narration, recital: usually associated with singing the praises of the Lord, His Glory. One of the many pathways of approach to Him.

Kirti: Fame, renown, glory.

Kodanda: A bow. The name is always associated with Sri Rama.

Krauncha: One of the seven islands into which the earth was split by the chariot of Priyavrata.

Kritamala: Name of a river.

Krita Yuga: The first quarter of Time: the others being, *Treta*, *Dvapara* and *Kali*.

Kritya: Duty, function, deed.

Krodha: Anger, one of the six arch enemies of man.

Krosha: A measure of distance equal to one-fourth of a *Yojana*.

Kshama: Patience, forbearance, forgiveness.

Kshatriya: A member of the military or the second caste. The name stands for domination, power, might, supremacy which are the inherent qualities of one who is born a Kshatriya.

Kshaya: Wane, decay: also a disease which is called by the name consumption.

Kshetragna: Clever, dextrous, skilful: knowing the body: i.e., the difference between the body and the soul which resides in it: one who knows the truth about the soul, the conscious principle in the corporeal frame.

Kshira: Milk. One of the seven seas surrounding the world.

Kulaguru: Every royal family or even those belonging to the families in heaven, has a preceptor to guide the rulers in the right path. Indra's *Kulaguru* is Brihaspati: the asuras have *Shukra* as their *Kulaguru*. The kings of the Solar race had the *rishi* Vasishta as their *Kulaguru*, and so on.

Kulamada: The arrogance born of the fact that one belongs to a great family.

Kunda: A variety of the Jasmine flower.

Kurari: A female Osprey.

Kurma: A tortoise. The Lord took the form of a tortoise during the churning of the ocean so that the great Mandara mountain could stay steady.

Kusha: 1. Another name for Darbha grass. (see Darbha).

2. The name of one of the seven islands into which the earth was split.

L

Laghima: The supernatural power of assuming excessive lightness at will: one of the eight *Siddhis*.

Laja: Parched or fried grain.

Lajja: Bashfulness, modesty, shyness.

Lavana: Salt: the name of one of the seven seas.

Lobha: Covetousness, avarice. One of the six enemies in the mind of man impeding his spiritual progress.

M

Mada: Pride, arrogance, conceit. One of the six enemies mentioned above (with Lobha).

Madhavi: The spring creeper (Vasanti) with white fragrant flowers.

Madhu (country): An epithet of the kingdom of Mathura.

Madhuparka: 'A mixture of honey': a respectful offering made to an honoured guest. Its usual ingredients are five: curds, butter, water, milk and sugar candy or honey.

Madhuvana: The forest inhabited by the demon Madhu. Madhuvana was a favourite haunt of Krishna during his days at Vrindavan.

Madhu (Kaliya's): A lake formed by water filling up a depression.

Magadha: A professional bard or panegyrist.

Mahabharata: Name of the celebrated epic which describes the rivalries and contests of the sons of Pandu and the sons of Dhritarashtra.

Mahapralaya: 'The great dissolution'— the total annihilation of the Universe at the end of the life of Brahma when all the Lokas with their inhabitants, the gods, saints, including Brahma himself are all annihilated.

Mahapurusha: A great man: an eminent and distinguished person: also, the Supreme Spirit.

Maharaja: A great king, sovereign or supreme ruler.

Maharathika: A great warrior hero.

Maharloka: The fourth of the seven worlds which rise one above the other from the earth: *Maharloka* is between *Suvarloka* and *Janaloka*.

Maharshi: A great sage or saint. The term is applied in *Manusmriti* to the ten *Prajapatis* or patriarchs of mankind. But it is also used in the general sense: a great sage.

Mahatala: Name of one of the lower regions.

Mahar Tattva: The second of the twenty-five principles of Sankhya philosophy.

Mahodara: Dropsy: a synonym of Jalodara.

Maireyaka: A kind of intoxicating drink.

Makaranda: The honey of the flowers: also the flower dust: the pollen.

Malati: A variety of Jasmine with tiny fragrant flowers. It blooms as soon as the sun sets.

Malaya and Malaya Maruta: Name of a mountain range, in the south of India abounding in sandal trees. Poets usually like to represent the breeze from the Malaya mountain as wafting the odour of sandal trees and other plants growing thereon, which affects peculiarity those smitten with love. Malaya Maruta is, like Vasanta, a necessary companion of Manmatha.

Mamakara: The feeling of 'MINE': sense of ownership.

Manasa-Sarovara: Name of a sacred lake on the mountain Kailasa. It is said to be the native place of swans which are described as

migrating to its shores every year at the commencement of the breeding season or the monsoons.

Mandanila: A gentle breeze.

Mandara: 1. The coral tree: one of the five trees of Indra's paradise.

2. Name of a mountain used by the *devas* and the *asuras* as a churning stick when they churned the ocean in search of nectar: *Amrita*.

Manmatha: The god of love: Kama.

Manomaya: Mental, spiritual.

Manu: Name of a celebrated personage regarded as the representative man and father of the human race. The fourteen successive Manus are mentioned in the *Manusmriti*. The first Manu called by the name Svayambhuva Manu is said to be a sort of secondary character who produced the children who further increased the population. To this Manu is ascribed the code of laws: *Manusmriti*.

Manuputra: During every Manvantara the Lord is said to be born as a Manuputra.

Manvantara: The age of Manu. This period, according to *Manusmriti*, comprises 4,320,000 human years: or one-fourteenth of a day of Brahma's life, the fourteen *Manvantaras* making up one whole day for him. Each of these periods is supposed to be presided over by its own Manu. Six such periods have already passed by: we are, at the moment, living in the seventh, and seven more are yet to come.

Marghashirsha: Name of the ninth lunar month of the Hindu year. It is made up of the latter half of the month of November and the first half of December: the month when the full moon is in the constellation by name Mrigashiras.

Marut: Wind, air, breeze: the god of wind. The Maruts are generally said to be seven in number but actually, according to

the *Bhagavata*, forty-nine.

Marutvan: A cloud: Name of Indra.

Matruka: Coming, on inherited from, the mother.
Maternal.

Matsya: 1. Fish. The Lord, at the time of the Deluge, took the form of a fish and he made Vaivasvata the Manu after the Deluge.

2. The name of the country where the Pandavas took refuge during their one year of exile: this year being special since it was the last year and they had to live incognito during the year.

Matsya Yantra: The mechanical fish target set up by Drupada during the *swayamvara* of his daughter Draupadi. A similar *yantra* was set up during the *swayamvara* of one of the wives of Krishna.

Maunji: The girdle which a brahmana has to wear. It is made up of a triple string of *Munja*: this is part of the necessary requirements for the *Upanayanam* when the young boy is invested with the sacred thread. *Munja* is a sort of rush grass.

Maya: An architect of the asuras who is said to have built a splendid Hall for the Pandavas. In Vedantic philosophy it is unreality: the illusion by virtue of which one considers the unreal Universe as really existent and, as distinct from the Supreme Spirit.

Maya Sabha: The Hall which Maya built for Yudhishtira, the Pandava.

Meru: Name of a fabulous mountain round which all the planets are said to revolve: it is also said to contain gold and gems.

Mimamsa: Name of one of the six systems of Indian philosophy.

Mlechchha: A barbarian, non-Aryan. One not conforming to the Hindu or Aryan institutions or traditions.

Moksha: Final emancipation, deliverance of the soul from recurring births and transmigration: the last of the four ends of human existence: *Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksha*.

Mridanga: A kind of drum or tabor used in music as an accompaniment.

Muhurta: A moment: any short time. A period of forty eight minutes according to astrology.

Mukta: The emancipated Soul: free, liberated.

Muktasanga: One who has renounced all worldly attachments and secured final Beatitude: an absolved saint.

Mukti: Liberation, release: deliverance, freedom from earthly bondage.

Mumukshu: One who desires *Mukti* is called a *Mumukshu*.

Muni: A sage, a' holy man, saint, devotee: as ascetic.

Murti: An image, an idol, a statue.

N

Naga: A tribe of men living in the North-East of India. One of their princesses, Ulupi, became the bride of Arjuna during his wanderings : and the son born to them, Iravan, was left behind according to Putrikadharma.

Nagapasha: A magical noose used in battle to entangle the enemy.

Naimisharanya: The name of a forest celebrated as the residence of certain sages to whom *Sutapauranika* related the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata*.

Naimittika-Karma: An occasional rite, a periodic ceremony.

Naishtika- Brahmachari: A perpetual religious student who continues with his spiritual preceptor even after the prescribed period, and vows life-long abstinence and chastity.

Naivedya: An offering of eatables presented to a deity or to an idol while performing puja.

Nandana: The garden of India.

Naraka: Hell, the infernal regions.

Naramedha: A human sacrifice.

Nartanashala: A dancing hall.

Navagraha: The nine planets: Surya, Chandra, Mangala, Budha, Brihaspati, Shukra, Shanaishchara, Rahu and Ketu.

Navamallika: A variety of Jasmine: one of the arrows in the quiver of Manmatha.

Nilotpala: The blue lotus: another arrow of Manmatha.

Nipa tree: The *Kadamba* tree whose flowers thrill into life when there is a rumbling of the thunder cloud.

Nirguna: Without being involved in the three *gunas* and their influence: without attributes: the Supreme Spirit: the Brahman.

Nishada: Name of one of the wild tribes like hunters and fishermen.

Nyagrodha: The sacred fig tree: the Ashvattha tree.

O

Ojas: Bodily strength, vigour, energy.

Oshadhi: A herb, a plant in general, but usually a plant or herb which has medicinal properties.

P

Padasevana: Worshipping by just touching the feet and showing one's devotion in this manner. Padasevana is one of the ways of worship: pathways to the Lord.

Padmasana: A particular posture in sitting: this is usually adopted while in prayer or in deep meditation.

Padya: Water offered to a guest for washing his feet. If he is a distinguished guest like a *rishi* or such, the host washes the feet with his own hands and places the water on his head and on those of his family.

Pampasaras: Name of a lake in the South: made immortal by the poet Valmiki since Rama stayed here during his wanderings in search of Sita.

Panchajanya: The famed conch belonging to Krishna.

Pandiraka: A tree which was the haunt of Krishna and his playmates during his stay in Vrindavan.

Papa: Evil, sinfulness, wickedness.

Papajanma: Being born as an evil person.

Parabrahman: The Supreme Spirit.

Paramatma: The Supreme Spirit: the Brahman.

Parijata: Name of one of the trees in Indra's heavenly garden. The tree is said to have appeared during the churning of the ocean. The coral tree which sheds its leaves in June and is then covered with large crimson flowers.

Parishvanga: An embrace.

Parivetha: A younger brother married before the elder brother.

Parjanya: A rain-cloud, a thunder cloud, a cloud in general. Indra, the god of rain.

Parvata: A mountain, a hill. Often times identified with Himavan, the king of mountains and the father of Parvati who married Mahadeva after a severe penance.

Pasha: A noose, chain, fetter: usually ascribed to Yama and to Varuna.

Pashandi: A religious hypocrite.

Pashupata:

1. Relating to Pashupati, Lord Mahadeva.
2. It is usually the *astra* which is named after Him.
3. There is also a religious sect which is called *Pashupata*. The followers of this type of worship are fanatical devotees of Mahadeva and observe strange rituals.

Patala: The last of the seven region or worlds under the earth said to be peopled by Nagas (serpents). The seven regions are Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Rasatala, Talatala, Mahatala and Patala.

Pativrata: A devoted, faithful wife, loyal, chaste and virtuous.

Pavitra:

1. Sacred, holy, sanctified, pure, cleansed.
2. A ring of kusha grass worn on the fourth finger on certain occasions which are religious.

Payasa : Rice boiled in milk and sweetened.

Payovrata: A particular religious ceremony observed by Aditi for the sake of the welfare of her sons.

Phalashruti: A type of benediction uttered at the end of the relation of a story of the Lord. It is said that the *punya* obtained by listening to the story is assured only when one hears the Phalashruti.

Phalguna: Name of the lunar month which is made up of the second half of February and the first half of March.

Pinaka: The bow of Mahadeva.

Pishacha: A fiend, a malevolent spirit.

Pita: Yellow. The favourite colour of Krishna who dressed himself always in yellow silk.

Pitris: Paternal ancestors taken collectively: the Mane.

Pitrodaka: The water thrown out of the right hand at the time of oblations as an offering to the *Pitris* or the deceased ancestors

Plaksha: One of the seven islands into which the earth was split in ancient times.

Prabhasa: Name of a well-known place of pilgrimage near the city Dwaraka.

Prabhasa Tirtha: Another name for Prabhasa.

Pradakshina: Circumambulation from left to right, so that the right side is always turned towards the person or object who is thus honoured. It is a very reverential salutation made by walking in this manner.

Pradyumna: A son of Krishna. One of the terms used in *Vedanta*.

Prakriti : In Sankhya philosophy *Prakriti* is Nature as distinguished from *Purusha*: the original source of the material world, consisting of the three essential qualities: *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Also the personified Will of the Supreme Spirit in the creation (identified with Maya or illusion).

Pramathagana: Name of a class of beings attending on Mahadeva.

Prapti: The power of obtaining anything: one of the *Siddhis* which are eight in number.

Prarabdha-Karma: Action which has begun in the previous birth, the benefits or punishments for which one is supposed to obtain during the present *janma*.

Pratyagatma: The individual soul.

Pratyaksha: Clear, distinct, manifest.

Pratyudgamanam: Going out or rising from one's seat to greet or honour a guest who has arrived.

Pravaha: A fabulous rain-cloud.

Prayopavesha: Giving up one's life-breath with the mind set on the Lord.

Preta: Dead, deceased. The body without the life in it.

Prithvi: The earth: so-called because she was considered to be his daughter by the great king Prithu.

Pumsavanam: The first of the purificatory *samskaras*: rituals.

Punita: Cleansed, purified.

Punnaga: A fragrant flower.

Punya: Good work, meritorious act.

Purana: Belonging to the past: ancient. An ancient story or legend.

Puranacharya: Title given to Markandeya since he was very good at relating stories. This is seen in the *Mahabharata* when he relates many stories to Yudhishtira and when Krishna sits at his feet listening to the stories.

Purohita: The officiating priest for any religious ceremony.

Purusha: The Supreme Being: the Soul of the Universe.

Purushasukta: Name of the 90th hymn of the 10th Mandala of the *Rigveda*: regarded as a very sacred hymn.

Pushkara: One of the seven islands: the great divisions of the earth.

Puth Naraka: A particular division of the infernal regions to which a childless person is said to be condemned.

Putrika Dharma and Putrika Suta: A daughter's son who, by agreement, becomes the son of her father according to *Manusmriti*: and a daughter who, being regarded as a son, returns to her father's house after her son is born with the son as a gift for her father.

R

Raga: Passion, feeling, emotion, joy.

Rahu: In astronomy Rahu, like Ketu is regarded as the ascending node of the moon. He is one of the planets in astrology.

Raivataka: Name of a mountain near Dwaraka (most probably Girnar).

Raja: A king, ruler, prince.

Rajadharma: A king's duty: law or rule relating to kings.

Rajasa and Rajasic: Relating to or influenced by the quality *Rajas*: endowed with the quality *Rajas* which is one of the three *gunas*, the other two being *Sattva* and *Tamasa*. *Rajas* stands for all active emotions like anger and passion: not easily controlled.

Rajasuya: A great sacrifice performed by a universal monarch (in which the tributary princes also take part) at the time of his

coronation as a mark of his undisputed sovereignty.

Raja Vithi: The widest or the main road in a city in which the king is wont to be seen in his chariot or his horse.

Rajyalakshmi: The affluence and wealth of a king granted him by the goddess Lakshmi.

Rajyalobha: Greed of dominion, desire for territorial aggrandisement.

Raksha: Protection, preservation, guarding, caring.

An amulet or mystical object used as a charm.

Rakhasa and Rakshasi: Belonging to, or like an evil spirit: demoniacal.

Rakhasa (marriage): One of the eight forms of marriage in Hindu law in which a girl is forcibly seized and carried away after the defeat and destruction of her relatives in battle. This form is also the privilege of *kshatriyas*.

Rasa Krida: A dance practised by Krishna and the *gopikas* on the banks of the river Yamuna.

Rasatala: Name of one of the seven regions below the earth.

Rati: Pleasure, delight. The goddess of love, the wife of Manmatha or Kama

Raudra: Violent, fierce, terrible. One of the *Rasas*.

Rigveda: The first of the four Vedas, the other three being *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda* and *Atharvaveda*. The most ancient and sacred book of the Hindu.

Rishi: A sanctified sage, an ascetic, an anchorite.

Rishyamukha: A mountain near the lake Pampa which formed the temporary abode of Rama with Sugriva.

Rita: A fixed or settled rule, law (religious).
Truth, Integrity.

Rudra Geeta: The praise of Narayana as taught by Rudra to the Prachetas brothers.

Rundamala: Lord Mahadeva is said to wear a garland made of skulls.

S

Sadhu: A good and virtuous man, a saint.

Sahadarmachari: A lawful wife.

Sairandhri: A maid-servant or female attendant in the apartments of women: specially the apartments of a queen.

Sakhya: Friendship, companionship.

Sakshi: A witness, an observer, an eye-witness.

Samana: One of the five life-giving breaths.

Samantapanchaka: Name of place near Kurukshetra. This is the spot where the *gadayuddha*, the famed fight between Bhima and Duryodhana was fought. When Parasurama killed all the *kshatriyas* their blood filled five lakes and these lakes together were called by the name Samantapanchaka.

Sambhrama Yoga: Fear of the Lord, hatred or malice, makes one think on him day and night and so, at the time of death, he is said to reach the feet of the Lord: Kamsa and Shishupala being famed examples of this.

Samidh: Wood, fuel: specially fuel or sacrificial sticks meant for the sacrificial fire.

Samsara: The course or circuit of worldly life, secular life, mundane existence.

Samskara: Making perfect: refining. Refinement, perfection. A purificatory rite, ceremony.

Samyamanam: Discipline of the mind: of thought and the senses.

Samyami: One who has his senses under absolute control as also his mind and his thoughts.

Sanatana Dharma: The Law which is perpetual, constant, eternal, permanent, primeval.

Sandhya: Morning or evening twilight.

Sankhya Yoga: Name of one of the six systems of philosophy attributed to the sage Kapila Vasudeva. This philosophy is so called because it 'enumerates' twenty-five tattvas or principles: and its chief object is to effect the final emancipation of the twenty-fifth *tattva* which is the Purusha' or Soul, from the bonds of this worldly existence.

Sannivesha: A situation.

Sandhya-Vandana: The morning, noon and evening prayers of a brahmin.

Sanga: Attachment.

Sanyasa: The fourth stage of human existence beginning from *Brahmacharya* through *Grihastha* and *Vanaprastha*. Complete renunciation of the world and possessions and one's attachments.

Saptasrotas: Saptasrotas is the spot where Mandakini, the divine river descends to the earth after being released from the matted locks of Mahadeva. She divides herself into seven streams: three flow eastward and three, westwards. The seventh follows Bhagiratha's chariot.

Sarpa Sarpa: "Sarp" is a root meaning "To move". It is said that Nahusha, when he was Indra for a while, was in a hurry to reach the apartments of Shachi and he said: "Sarpa, Sarpa" to the bearers of the palanquin who were the seven rishis. Incidentally this was a special honour granted to Indra. One of the rishis Agastya, could not bear his arrogance and said: "You will descend to the earth and be a sarpa for many years."

<i>Sarpi:</i>	One of the seven seas.
<i>Sarupya:</i>	Sameness of form, similarity. Assimilation to the deity: one of the four states of <i>Mukti</i> . <i>Samipyra</i> , <i>Salokya</i> , <i>Sarupya</i> and <i>Sayujya</i> .
<i>Sarvasangaparityaga:</i>	Renunciation of all attachments.
<i>Satsanga:</i>	Company or society of the good. Association with the good.
<i>Sattva:</i>	One of the three <i>gunas</i> : the quality of goodness or purity: the highest of the three <i>gunas</i> .
<i>Satya:</i>	True, real, genuine.
<i>Satyaloka:</i>	The abode of Brahma, the uppermost of the seven worlds or <i>lokas</i> above the earth.
<i>Sava:</i>	An offering, a libation, sacrifice: literally, extraction of the Soma juice.
<i>Savarni Manu:</i>	The Eighth Manu.
<i>Savitri:</i>	Name of a celebrated verse of the Rigveda: so called because it is addressed to <i>Savita</i> , the Sun. It is better known as Gayatri.
<i>Saubhagya:</i>	Good fortune or luck: fortunateness chiefly consisting in a man's and a woman's securing the favour and firm devotion of each other. Blessedness: The auspicious state of womanhood as opposed to widowhood.
<i>Saugandhika:</i>	One of the fragrant flowers growing in the garden of Kubera.
<i>Sayujya:</i>	The ultimate stage of <i>Mukti</i> : absorption into the Lord: Oneness with Him.
<i>Shaka:</i>	One of the seven islands into which the earth was split up.

Shakti: 1. Power, ability, prowess.

2. A spear, dart, pike, lance.

Shala: Name of a tree. A valuable timber tree.

Shaligrama (kshetra): A village situated on the river Gandaki and which is regarded as sacred by the Vaishnavas—its name comes from the Shala trees growing near it. The river is said to be full of Shalagramas. Shalagrama is a sacred stone said to be pervaded by the presence of Narayana. It is a black stone containing a fossil ammonite.

Shalmali: One of the seven islands.

Shankha: A conch: always associated with Vishnu who holds it in his hand. It is said to be the quintessence of the Vedas.

Shanta: 1. Calm, undisturbed, tranquil.

2. One of the *Rasas*.

Shantam Papam: "Good forbid such an untoward or unfortunate event:" a favourite expression when one hears anything unpleasant or painful.

Shapavimochana: Release from a curse.

Sharanga: The mighty bow of Narayana.

Sharadritu: The autumn or autumnal season comprising the two months Ashvina and Kartika.

Sharanagati: Seeking the Feet of the Lord for refuge, succour.

Shastra: A sacred precept or rule. A religious or sacred treatise: a sacred book: scripture. Any department of knowledge or science. Often at the end of a compound following the word denoting the subject: like *Vedanta Shastra*, *Nyaya Shastra*, *Tarka Shastra*, *Alankara Shastra*, etc.

Shaucha: Purity, cleanliness.

Shiva: Auspicious, propitious, lucky. Attributed to the Lord Mahadeva.

Shishya: A pupil, disciple.

Shishuhatya: Infanticide.

Shraddha: Sedateness: composure of the mind, strong or vehement desire: eagerness.

Shravana: Hearing: as a term in the *Bhakti* cult, it is one of the pathways to God: listening to the praises of the Lord.

Shravana (month): Name of the lunar month made up of the second half of July and the first half of August.

Shree: 1. Wealth, grace, beauty, splendour: in short, all that is beautiful.

2. The name of Lakshmi, the consort of Lord Narayana.

Shringara: The sentiment of love or passion: the erotic sentiment: the first of the nine sentiments or *Rasas* in poetry.

Shuklapaksha: The bright or light half of the lunar month.

Shvetadvipa: Name of a mythical abode of the blessed.

Shvetavahana: One of the names of Arjuna. This name is because he had a chariot to which four white horses were yoked.

Shyala: Wife's brother.

Siddha: A semi-divine being who is supposed to be of great purity and holiness: he is said to be particularly characterised by eight supernatural faculties called the *Siddhis*. They are: *Anima*, *Mahinta*, *Garinta*, *Laghima*, *Prapti*, *Prakamyam*, *Ishatvam* and *Vashitvam*.

Siddhaloka: The world peopled by the Siddhas.

Siddhashrama: "Hermitage of the blessed"—Name of a hermitage in the Himalayas where Narayana is said to have performed *tapas* during his birth as Vamana. This *ashrama* has been immortalised by Valmiki in the *Ramayana* where the great sage Vishvamitra performed a *yaga* which was guarded by Rama and Lakshmana: it has then that Rama killed Subahu with a single arrow and plunged Maricha into the sea with another.

Smarana: Act of remembering or calling to the mind: mental recitation of the name of the Lord with the help of a *Japamala*, a rosary.

Smaya: Astonishment, surprise, wonder, wonderment.

Smritis: What was delivered by human authors, Law, Traditional Law. The body of traditional or memorial law, civil or religious opposed to *Shruti*. A code of law: law-books: a text of *Smriti*, a canon, rule of law.

Snataka : A brahmana who, after finishing his studentship as a *brahmachari*, under a religious teacher, returns home.

Soma: The juice of the Soma plant: the plant itself, the stalks of which were, in those days, pressed between the stones by the priests, then sprinkled with water and purified in a strainer. After this, it was mixed with clarified butter, flour, etc., made to ferment and then offered in libations to the gods: and was also drunk by the brahmins.

Soma: One of the names of the Moon.

Somapitam: One of the heads of Vishvarupa cut off by Indra.

Somayajna: A sacrifice: a great triennial sacrifice at which the juice of the Soma is drunk.

Srimurti: Any divine image: an image or idol or any personification of the Lord.

<i>Srivatsa:</i> Krishna.	A particular mole on the chest of Vishnu or Krishna.
<i>Sruva:</i>	A sacrificial implement.
<i>Sthanu:</i>	Firm, steady, fixed, immovable, motionless. This term is applied to the Brahman.
<i>Sthitaprajna:</i>	Firm in judgement or wisdom, free from agitations of all kinds, contented, tranquil.
<i>Sudarshana:</i> Narayana.	The discus or Chakra in the hand of Narayana.
<i>Sudharma:</i>	The royal court in Dwaraka which was a gift to Krishna by Indra.
<i>Suhrid:</i>	‘Good-hearted’, kind-hearted, well-disposed: a friend, an ally.
<i>Sunanda:</i>	The pestle belonging to Balarama.
<i>Sura</i>	1. A celestial: a denizen of the heavens. 2. One of the seven seas. 3. The drink of the gods: generally "drink".
<i>Surapitam:</i>	One of the heads of Vishvarupa which was cut off by Indra in anger.
<i>Surasena:</i>	The heavenly host: Indra's army.
<i>Sureshvara:</i>	The title of Indra. In every Manvantara, there has to be a Sureshvara.
<i>Sushupti:</i>	Deep or profound sleep, profound repose. The third of the <i>Avasthatraya</i> .
<i>Suta:</i>	The son of a <i>kshatriya</i> by a brahmin woman: his vocation is usually that of a charioteer.
<i>Sutala:</i>	One of the regions under the earth.

Sutapauranika: The great bard Romaharshana and his son Ugrashrava were called by this name.

Suvarloka: One of the lokas above the earth.

Suvasini: *Saubhagyavati, Sumangali*, who is worshipped on special occasions so that the person, usually a woman, honouring her, will also live to be a *Sumangali* till death.

Svayambhu Manu: The first Manu who was the son of Brahma.

Swabhava: 1. Part of one's own nature: innate, inherent, that which comes naturally to one. The inclinations or aptitudes one is born with is called Swabhava.

2. A sect of thinkers who accounted for all happenings by the theory that it was the law of nature.

Swadhyayana: Study of the scriptures: one of the *angas* of the *Ashtanga Yoga*.

Swarga: Heaven: Indra's paradise.

Swayamvara: The occasion when a princess is asked to choose her spouse from among the crowd of princes who have been invited for the purpose.

T

Taijasa: In Vedantic thought this corresponds to the *Svapna avastha*. *Vishva* is the macrocosm while *Jagra* is the microcosm: *Taijasa* is the macrocosm while *Svapna* is the microcosm: *Prajna* is the macrocosm while *Shushupti* is the microcosm.

Tamas: Literally, darkness. In Vedanta, it is one of the three qualities or constituents of everything in nature, the other two being *Sattva* and *Rajas*.

Tambula: The leaf of the piper—batel which, together with areca-nut and catechu is chewed after meals: said to be a carminative.

When a guest has to be honoured Tambula and the offering of it is essential.

Tanmatras: The Indriyas, the intelligence behind them, the motivating power.

Tapa (verb): to mortify the body, to undergo penance.

Tapas: Penance: religious austerities.

Tapasi: A woman who has assumed the garb of an ascetic.

Tapasvi : Practising penance, devout.

Tapatraya: The three kinds of miseries which human beings have to suffer in this world: *Adhyatmika*, *Adidaivika* and *Adibhautika*.

Tapoloka: The world above *Janaloka*.

Tarka: Speculation, discussion, abstract reasoning: the science of logic.

Tarpana: Presenting libations of water to the Manes of the deceased ancestors.

Tejas: Lustre, light, brilliance, splendour. Heat or light considered as the third of the five elements of creation: Prithvi, Ap, Tejas, Vayu and Akasha.

Timingila: A whale.

Tirtha: A holy place, place of pilgrimage, a shrine etc., dedicated to some deity: especially on the banks of a sacred river or in its vicinity.

Tittiri: 1. The partridge.

2. Name of a sage who is said to be the first teacher of the *Krishna Yajurveda*.

Treta Yuga The second of the four *yugas*: quarters of Time.

Trikuta: The mountain in the forests of which roamed the elephant which was saved from the jaws of a crocodile by Narayana.

Tulasi: The holy Basil held in veneration by the Hindus.

Turiya: The Vedanta philosophy after the Avasthatraya the fourth state of the soul which is constant, which, in that state becomes one with the *Brahman*, is called the Turiya.

U

Udana: One of the five life-giving breaths of the body.

Udghata: Raising, elevation.

Udgita: Chanting of the Sama Veda: singing aloud.

Unmattavastha: A state of intoxication: insane, frantic, mad.

Upadhi : Limitation, condition as of time, space etc. Often occurring in Vedanta.

Uparayana: Investiture with the sacred thread.

Upanishads: Name of certain mystical writings attached to the Brahmanas, the chief aim of which is to ascertain the secret meaning of the *Vedas*: quest after the true knowledge regarding the Supreme Spirit can be said to be the aim of all the Upanishads. In the *Muktakopanishad* there are 108 Upanishads which are mentioned, but some have been added to this number later on.

Ushanas: Name of Shukra, son of Bhrigu and the preceptor of the *asuras*. In the Vedas he is given the epithet 'Kavi':

probably because he was noted for his wisdom. He is also known as a writer on civil law and religious law. He was an authority on civil polity.

Utpala: The blue-lotus : a water-lily.

Uttamashloka: Of excellent fame, illustrious, glorious, well-known.

Uttarayana: The progress of the sun towards the north of the equator. It was believed that the life, if it is abandoned during Uttarayana, will not be caught again in the cycle of birth and death.

V

Vadavanala: Submarine fire, "Mare's fire" or the fire of the lower regions fabled to emerge from a cavity called the "Mare's Mouth" under the sea at the South Pole.

Vaikuntha: The heavenly abode of Narayana, Vishnu.

Vairagya: Absence of worldly desires or passions: indifference to the world: asceticism.

Vajra: A thunderbolt, the weapon of Indra. This weapon was fashioned by Vishvakarma out of the bones of the sage Dadhichi.

Vanaprastha: A brahmana in the third stage of his life: anchorite.

Vandana: Worship, adoration, praise, of the Lord.

Vandhi: A panegyrist, bard. The bards form a distinct caste sprung from a *kshatriya* father and a *shudra* mother.

Vashitvam: The art of bewitching: one of the eight *Siddhis*.

Vayu: 1. The god of wind: the deity supposed to preside over the wind.

2. One of the dikpalakas.

Veda: The scripture of the Hindus. Originally there were three Vedas: *Rig*, *Yajur* and *Sama Vedas* which are collectively called "Trayi" or the "Triad". A fourth, the *Atharva Veda* was later added to the existing three and the *Vedas* are now four in number.

Vibhuti: Magnificence, splendour, glory.

Vidyadhara: A class of demi-gods or semi-divine beings.

Vidyamada: Arrogance born of learning.

Vikshepa: Agitation. This, with *avarana* causes the veil by name *Maya*.

Vimana : A heavenly car.

Virat Rupa: The first form assumed by the Brahman when the *Vairajapurusha* is represented as being born from *Purusha*.

Virya: Heroism, valour, power, prowess.

Vishvarupa: The Supreme Being revealing Himself as existing in all forms, all-pervading, omnipresent.

Vitala: The second of the seven regions below the earth.

Vrata: 1. A religious act of devotion or austerity.
2. Vow.

Y

Yachaka: A mendicant, a beggar, a petitioner.

Yadava: A descendant of Yadu. Krishna is often called by the name, Yadava.

Yaga or Yajna: A sacrifice, an offering: any ceremony in which oblations are presented. Yajna is also a sacrifice. Sacrificial rites. An act of worship. Any pious or devotional act. Every householder, but particularly a brahmana, has to perform five such devotional acts every

day: their names are: *Bhutayajna*, *Manushvayajna*, *Pitruiyajna*, *Devayajna* and *Brahamayajna*.

Yajaka: A sacrificer: sacrificing priest.

Yajamana: A person who performs a regular sacrifice and pays its expenses. A person who employs a priest or priests to perform the sacrifice for him.

Yajnapashu: An animal for sacrifice, a sacrificial victim.

Yajnapatni: The wife of the Yajamana of a sacrifice.

Yajna Purusha: Epithet of Narayana.

Yajnashala: A sacrificial hall.

Yajnastambha: A sacrificial post to which the victim is tied.

Yajna Varaha: Narayana in his incarnation as a boar.

Yajna Vedi: A sacrificial altar.

Yajnesvara: Name of Narayana.

Yajurveda: The second of the four principle Vedas which is a collection of sacred texts in prose relating to sacrifices. It has two branches or recensions, *Taittiriya* or *Krishna Yajurveda* and *Vajasaneyi* or *Shukla Yajurveda*.

Yaksha: Name of a class of demi-gods who are described as the attendants of Kubera, the god of wealth. Yakshas are employed in guarding his gardens and his wealth.

Yama: 1. Control, restraint, self-control. The god of death personified.

2. One-eighth part of a day: three hours.

Yamaduta: Yama's messenger: a messenger of death.

Yamini: Night.

Yamakinkara: Same as Yamaduta: A servant of Yama.

Yati: One who has renounced the world and controlled his passions: an ascetic.

Yavarekha: A mark like the barley corn on the finger of the hand or on the sole is supposed, according to its position, to indicate wealth, progeny, good fortune, etc. Vrindavan was supposed to be covered with the footsteps of Krishna and *Ankusharekha*, *Abjarekha* and *Yavarekha* with *Shankha* and *Chakra* greeted the eyes of Akrura when he went there.

Yoga 1. Literally, it is joining, uniting, union, junction, combination.

2. Deep and abstract meditation, with great concentration of the mind: contemplation of the Supreme Spirit which, in Yoga philosophy, is defined as 'Chitta Vritti Nirodha.'

3. The system of philosophy established by Patanjali, which is considered to be the second division of the Sankhya philosophy but it is practically reckoned as a separate system. The chief aim of the Yoga philosophy is to teach the means by which the human soul may be completely united with the Supreme Spirit and thus secure absolution: and deep, abstract meditation on the Brahman or the word 'AUM' is laid down as the chief means of securing this end.

Yogamaya: Vaishnavi: the goddess Durga.

Yoganidra: A state of half-contemplation and half-sleep: a state between sleep and wakefulness: particularly the sleep of Narayana at the end of *Mahapralaya*.

Yogi: A contemplative saint: a devotee: an ascetic.

Yojana: A measure of distance equal to four kroshas or eight to nine miles.

Yuga: An age of the world. The *yugas* are four in number. *Kritayuga*, *Tretayuga*, *Dvaparayuga* and *Kaliyuga*. The duration of each is

said to be respectively:

Krita: 1,728,000 years.

Treta: 1,296,000 years.

Dvapara: 864,000 years.

Kali: 432,000 years of men.

The four altogether comprising 4,320,000 years is equal to one *Mahayuga*. It is also supposed that the regular descending length of the *yugas* represents a corresponding physical and moral deterioration in the people who live during that age: *Krita* being the 'Golden' *yuga* and *Kali*, the 'Iron' age.

Yuvaraja: An heir-apparent: a prince-royal: a crown prince.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born on October 4, 1916, at Bangalore and educated in that city, the author Smt. Kamala Subramaniam had the privilege of studying under the distinguished Professor B.M. Srikantiah, Professor and Head of the English Department, Central College, Bangalore, and top litterateur in modern Kannada. She developed early in life an avid taste for English literature and particularly love for Shakespeare's plays.

In 1937, she married Dr. V.S. Subramaniam, the renowned E.N.T surgeon of Madras.

Inspite of being pre-occupied with the affairs of her family, she wrote a series of "Imaginary Conversations" on the model of Landor's for the *Triveni* under the pen-name of "Ketaki."

Her love of literature, nursed over the years, expressed itself in her developing fascination for the Epics and Puranas of India.

Smt. Kamala Subramaniam's condensation of the *Mahabharata* – a Bhavan's publication – has won wide acclaim.

She now makes available to the English knowing public a faithful condensation of the *Bhagavata Purana*, retaining by far all the piety and pathos of the original.

This is the second in the author's triad, the third one being the condensations of Valmiki's *Ramayana* also published by the Bhavan.

If the setting of the *Bhagavad Gita* is a battle-field where opposing armies are arrayed against each other, the setting of the *Bhagavata Purana* is no less arresting and awe-inspiring.

A great and virtuous king Parikshit, by a quirk of fate, is doomed to die of snakebite in seven days. As the *Bhagavatam* opens, we see him listening

with faith and devotion to the recitation of the Purana, seeking the ultimate that any human being can aspire for, namely freedom or liberation, after attaining which one knows no fear and is all peace.

Indeed the serpent king, Takshaka, dramatically arrives at the appointed hour and deals death to the king's body which is reduced to ashes by the fiery venom. But by that time, death had lost all its sting for the king.

Did not Parikshit tell Suka at the conclusion of the *Bhagavata* Purana recital : "Lord, I fear neither Takshaka nor death, now that I have entered the fearless and blissful state of Brahman?"

This then is the glory of *Bhagavatam*, acclaimed as the essence of all Vedic wisdom, namely, its power to make one remain poised, even at the point of death.

And if India's spiritual tradition is kept alive today it is largely because of the *Bhagavatam* and its systematic exposition throughout the country - with the result that its teachings have permeated the subconscious of the masses.

The *Bhagavatam* has been aptly described as the spiritual butter churned out of the ocean of the Veda milk for the benefit of those "who are pure in heart, free from malice and envy, and are keen to hear it."

All mankind is destined to hear the message of the *Bhagavatam*, but the message will come loud and clear only when one really yearns for it, when "Shraddha" enters the soul as it did in the case of Nachiketas.

Bhagavatam, being the culmination of Jnana and Bhakti, is dear alike to the Advaitin, Vishishtadvaitin and the Dvaitin. Its appeal is to the head as well as to the heart.

The very fact that it is a *Purana* proclaims aloud the truth that it is not an esoteric text meant for a select few but a sacred scripture meant to bring within the reach of all, including householders, the peace that passeth understanding.

Dry philosophy seldom appeals to the human mind. But in the *Bhagavatam* even the most abstruse philosophic truths are put across by means of

stories and legends. This is the secret of its popularity among all classes of people.

THE FRONT COVER

Aum Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaya

MARKANDEYA'S VISION

Once, when Markandeya was in his Ashrama on the banks of the river Pushpabhadra, he saw that a strong gale was blowing and this was followed by a fierce storm. Before many moments had passed, he saw that the earth was covered with water. He realised that The Great Deluge had come.

Markandeya was floating on the turbulent sea which carried him away from his Ashrama. He knew not that this was Vishnumaya which he had been wanting to see.

All on a sudden he saw a *Nyagrodha* trees which was standing firm in the midst of the waves. A branch of the tree could be seen, pointing towards the direction *Ishanya*. There, on a leaf, he saw a lovely child which was dispelling the darkness around with its glow. Green like a newly broken piece of an emerald mountain with the red flowers of the pomegranate adorning its ears, the child had raised his foot to his lips. It was sucking its toe with a beatific smile on its face.

Markandeya was swept near and was sucked into the body of the child along with its breath. Inside, when he opened his eyes, Markandeya saw the Universe. The small child, small enough to lie on an Ashwattha leaf, held inside it the entire Universe. Yashoda was also granted this vision when Krishna opened his mouth. This was the Vision of Markandeya.

*kararavindena padaravindam mukharavinde vinivesayantam
vatasya patrasya pute sayanam balam mukundam manasa smarami*
