



THE SHIVA PURANA

The Shiva Purana has twenty-four thousand shlokas. These are divided into six samhitas or sections. The names of the sections are jnana samhita, vidyeshvara samhita, kailasa samhita, sanatkumar samhita, vayaviya samhita and dharma samhita. Each samhita is further subdivided into chapters (adhyaya). Jnana samhita has seventy-eight chapters, vidyeshvara samhita sixteen, kailasa samhita twelve, sanatkumar samhita fifty-nine, vayaviya samhita thirty and dharma samhita sixty-five.

The Shiva Purana was recited by Vedavyasa's disciple Romaharshana, alternatively, Loma-harshana.

Romaharshana and The Other Sages

There were many sages who lived in a forest named naimisharanya. One day, these sages accosted Romaharshana and said, Romaharshana, you are blessed. You have taught us a lot, but we are still not satisfied. You have had the fortune of studying under Vedavyasa and there is nothing that you do not know, past, present or future. Tell us about Shiva, we do not know very much about Shiva.

Romaharshana replied, I will relate to you that which you want to know. And I am

not going to make anything up. Many years ago, the sage Narada had wanted to find out about Shiva from his father, Brahma. Whatever Brahma had instructed his son. I am going to relate to you.

Brahma

At the beginning of creation, there was nothing in the universe. The universe was not there either. It was only the brahman (divine essence) which was everywhere. The brahman was neither hot nor cold, neither thick or thin. It had no beginning and no end.

There was water everywhere. Lord Vishnu manifested himself in his great form and slept on the water. While Vishnu was sleeping, a lotus flower (padma) sprouted from his navel. It had many petals and its stem shone like a thousand suns. From the cells of the lotus Brahma was born. He began to wonder, There seems to be nothing around except for this lotus. Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I supposed to do? Whose son am I? Who made me?

Brahma thought he might find the answers to these questions if he explored the lotus a bit. Perhaps he ought to try and find the centre of the lotus. Brahma descended down the stem of the lotus and wandered around for a hundred years. But he could not find the flower's centre. He then decided that he might as well go back to the cell from where he had been born. But despite wandering around the stem for another hundred years, Brahma could not find the cell. By then he was so tired that he gave up and rested.

Suddenly he heard the words, Brahma, perform tapasya (meditation).

Brahma meditated for twelve years. When the twelve years were over, the four-armed Vishnu appeared before Brahma. In the four hands Vishnu held a shankha (conch shell), a chakra (a bladed discus), a gada (mace) and a padma. Brahma didn't know who this person was and he asked, Who are you?

Vishnu didn't directly answer the question. Instead, he replied, Son, the great Lord Vishnu has created you.

Who are you to call me a son? demanded Brahma.

Can't you recognize me? came the reply. I am Vishnu. It is from my body that you have been created.

But Brahma was not convinced. He began to fight with Vishnu.

The Linga

While they were thus engaged in fighting, a shining linga (Shiva's image) arrived on the scene. It seemed to have no beginning or end.

Vishnu said, Brahma, let us stop fighting. There is a third being here now. What on earth is this linga? And where did it come from? Let us try and find out what this is. You adopt the form of a swan (hamsa) and go up. I shall adopt the form of boar

(varaha) and go down. Let us try and find the extremities of this linga.

Brahma agreed. He became a white swan and flew up. Vishnu became a white boar and went down. They looked for four thousand years, but could not find the end of the linga. So they returned to where they had started off from and began to pray. They prayed for a hundred years. After the hundred years were over, the sound of om was heard and a being with five faces and ten arms appeared before them. This was Mahadeva or Shiva.

Vishnu said, It is good that Brahma and I have been fighting. It is because of our fight that you arrived.

Shiva replied, We are all three parts of the same entity and have been divided into three. Brahma is the creator. Vishnu is the preserver and I am the destroyer. There is another being named Rudra who will be born from my body, but Rudra and I are really one and the same. Let Brahma create now.

Shiva disappeared and Brahma and Vishnu gave up their forms of a swan and a boar.

Creation

There was water everywhere. In the water, Vishnu created a huge egg (anda). He then himself entered the egg in his huge form.

Meanwhile, Brahma started to pray. From the powers of his meditation he created several sages (rishis). Kardama, Daksha and Marichi were among them. Marichi's son was Kashyapa. Daksha had sixty daughters and thirteen of them were married to Kashyapa. The children of Kashyapa and these daughters became adityas (gods), daityas (demons), danavas (demons), trees, birds, snakes, mountains and creepers. Thus was the world populated.

A being named Rudra, who was none other than Shiva himself, was also born from Brahma. Rudra lived on Mount Kailasa. Daksha's daughter Sati was married to Rudra.

But Daksha and Rudra did not like each other. Daksha arranged a yajna (sacrifice) and he did not invite Rudra to attend this sacrifice. Although Sati was not invited either, she went to attend the ceremony. But Daksha insulted her so much that Sati gave up her life in protest. This so angered Rudra that he sent his companions to destroy the sacrifice, disrupt the ceremony, and kill all the gods who had gone to attend it. This was done. But Rudra was subsequently pacified and brought the dead gods back to life. The sacrifice was completed. Sati herself was reborn as the daughter of the mountain Himalaya and his wife Menaka. She was known as Parvati and she was again married to Rudra or Shiva.

Tarakasura

There was an asura (demon) named Tara. Tara's son was Taraka.

Taraka wished to defeat the gods. He therefore went to a place named Madhuvana and began to perform very difficult tapasya. He gazed at the sun and stood there with his arms raised. He stood on one leg and that too, only on the toes of his feet. A hundred years passed. For those hundred years, Taraka drank only water and had no food to eat. For the next hundreds, he gave up that also and lived only on air. A hundred years were spent in performing tapasya inside water, another hundred years on earth and a hundred years more inside fire. For a hundred years he performed tapasya upside down, standing on his hands. And for yet another hundred years, he hung upside down from the branches of a tree.

The meditation was so difficult that Brahma was pleased. He appeared before Tarakasura and said, I am pleased with your tapasya. What boon do you want?

If you are pleased, replied Tarakasura, grant me two boons. The first boon should be that no one created by you should be as strong as me. The second boon should be that I should be killed only by Shiva's son.

Shiva at that point of time had no sons. Sati had died and although she had been reborn as Parvati, she had not been married to Shiva.

Brahma granted Tarakasura the two boons. The demon went to a city named Shonitapura and began to live there. All the other demons made Tarakasura their king. Thanks to the boon. Tarakasura was so strong that he easily defeated the gods. He conquered the three worlds and drove the gods out of heaven. He stole all their belongings and employed the gods as his servants.

The despondent gods went to Brahma and asked him to find a solution to the Tarakasura problem.

I can't, said Brahma. It is because of my boon that the demon has become so powerful. Besides, my boon says that Tarakasura can only be killed by Shiva's son. Shiva has got to have a son. He is now performing tapasya in the Himalaya mountains. Parvati is also in that region. Do something so that these two fall in love with each other and marry.

The Burning of the God of Love

The gods decided to follow Brahma's advice. But how could it be ensured that Shiva and Parvati fell in love with each other? The king of the gods was Indra and the god of love was Kandarpa or Madana.

Indra summoned Kandarpa. You have to help us, said Indra. There is no other way out. Shiva is performing tapasya in the Himalayas. Parvati is also in the region. Make sure that the two fall in love. That is your job.

Kandarpa went to the place where Shiva was meditating. And as soon as the god of love appeared, the place took on the traits of a spring which was perennial. Flowers bloomed and bees buzzed among the flowers. Cuckoos sang and fragrant breezes started to waft through the forest. Shiva tried to concentrate on his meditation. But

he kept getting distracted.

While all this was going on, who should arrive there but Parvati? She was so beautiful that Shiva was smitten with love for her. Parvati also seemed to like Shiva.

But life is never simple. Shiva was, after all, Shiva. He realized that something was wrong. How could his meditation have been disturbed? How was it that the season seemed to be spring although it had no business to be spring? When Shiva glanced around, his eyes fell on Kandarpa who was hiding. He realized that it was Kandarpa who was responsible for all this mischief.

Shiva was angered. He had a third eye in the middle of his forehead. From this third eye flames sprouted and these flames burnt Kandarpa to ashes.

Kandarpa's wife was Rati. When Rati saw that her husband had been burnt to ashes, her grief knew no bounds. At first she lost consciousness. When she recovered, she lamented, Woe is me. What is going to happen to me? My husband, my love, where have you gone?

The gods and Rati sought out Shiva. They explained that it had been no fault of Kandarpa's. He had been asked to disturb Shiva's tapasya because of the Tarakasua problem. What would happen to Rati now?

Shiva replied, What has happened has happened. Nothing can be done about kandarpa now. He will eventually be born in the city of Dvaraka as Krishna's son Pradyumna. Rati will then be reunited with Kandarpa. But till such time, let her simply wait.

The gods dispersed, still despondent. The matter of Shiva and Parvati's marriage had not progressed at all.

Parvati's Tapasya

But Parvati had fallen in love with Shiva and she didn't know what she could do about it. She thought of Shiva all the time.

One day the sage Narada came and told her, Shiva is only pleased with tapasya. Without tapasya, even Brahma and the other gods do not get to see Shiva. Why don't you perform tapasya?

Parvati decided to do what Narada had asked her to. She asked her parents for permission. Her father agreed with alacrity. Although her mother Menaka was not at all keen that Parvati should perform difficult tapasya, she too eventually agreed.

Parvati gave up her jewellery and handsome clothes. She wore deerskin instead. There is a peak in the Himalayas known as Gouriskikhara. It is there that Parvati went for her tapasya. The meditation was very difficult. During the monsoon Parvati meditated while seated on the ground. In the winter she mediated under the water. Wild beats dared not harm her. All the gods and sages assembled to see this wonderful tapasya. The gods and the sages also began to pray to Shiva. Lord, can't you see that Parvati is performing difficult tapasya? They asked. No one has

meditated like this before. No one will meditate like this in the future. Please grant her what she wants.

Shiva adopted the form of an old brahmana (the first of the four classes) and appeared at Parvati's hermitage. Parvati welcomed the old man and worshipped him with flowers and fruits.

Why are you meditating? asked the brahmana. What is it that you want?

I wish to have Shiva as a husband, replied Parvati.

You are indeed stupid. Said the brahmana. That is like giving up gold for a piece of glass or giving sandalwood for mud. Does anyone give up the water of the Ganga and drink water from a well instead? Marry one of the gods instead, go and marry Indra. Shiva is a stupid fellow. He has three eyes and five faces. His hair is matted and his body is smeared with ashes. He wears snakes as garlands. He is always accompanied by ghosts, He has no clothes and no wealth. No one knows who his parent are. He live sin the forst and his throat is blue with poison. I think you are making a big mistake. Forget about Shiva and don't waste your life.

The brahmana's words angered Parvati. It is you who are stupid, she said. You don't know a thing about Shiva. He is the lord of everthing. You have insulted Shiva and cursed am I that I made the mistake of worshipping you. You are again going to say something nasty about Shiva. But before you can do that, let me go away. I shall not stay to hear Shiva insulted.

As Parvati was about to depart, Shiva adopted his own form and said, Where are you going? I thought that you were praying for me. You can't forsake me now. I am not going to let you go. Ask for a boon.

Please marry me according to the prescribed rites, replied Parvati.

Shiva agreed and Parvati returned home.

The Marriage

Shiva called the seven great sages (saptarshis) and asked them to go to Himalaya as his messengers. The message was that he wished to marry Himalaya's daughter Parvati. Himalaya was delighted to see the sages and even more delighted to learn that Shiva wanted to marry Parvati. A date was fixed for the marriage.

The day of the marriage dawned. Gandharvas (singers of heaven) sang and apsara (dancers of heaven) danced. All the gods came to Kailasa to accompany Shiva on the procession. Himalaya had also got ready. He had built many gates in front of his house and had placed flags on them. The beauty of Himalaya's residence at that time is impossible to describe. When the procession arrived at the residence, Parvati's mother Menaka rushed out.

Let me see Shiva, she exclaimed. Let me see my son-in-law. My daughter Parvati has performed tapasya to obtain Shiva as a husband. He must be exceedingly handsome.

The first person Menaka saw was Vishvavasu, the king of the gandharvas. Vishvavasu was very handsome and, at first, Menaka thought that this was Shiva. But when she was told that this was only a singer who entertained Shiva, she thought that Shiva would be more handsome. Then her eyes fell down on the handsome Kubera, the god of wealth, and she thought that this had to be Shiva. Kubera was more attractive than Vishvavasu. But Menaka was told that this was not Shiva either. Then came Varuna, more attractive than Kubera. But this was not Menaka's son-in-law. Nor was her son-in-law the great god Yama, handsomer than Varuna. The handsome gods Indra, Surya and Chandra passed by. But Narada told Menaka that these were not Shiva, they were simply Shiva's servants.

Menaka's joy knew no bounds. If these were the servants, what was the master going to be like? She mistook Brahma, Vishnu and Brihaspati for Shiva, and each time Narada told her that she was wrong. Where then was Shiva? Finally Shiva came and Narada pointed him out to Menaka. At the sight of her son-in-law, Menaka fell unconscious.

Shiva was surrounded by ghosts on all sides. The faces were fierce, their complexions were dark and they made a tremendous racket. Shiva himself rode on bull. He had three eyes, five faces and ten arms. He was smeared with ashes and the moon adorned his forehead. He was dressed in a tiger's skin and a garland of skulls hung around his neck. No wonder Menaka fainted.

When she recovered, she began to lament. She scolded Himalaya, Narada and Parvati for her misfortune. Brahma, the other gods, and the sages tried to pacify Menaka. But to no avail.

I will not permit my daughter to be married to Shiva, Menaka said. I will give her poison instead. I will throw her into a well and kill her. I will chop her up into pieces with a weapon. I will hurl her into the sea. I will kill myself. I will get Parvati married to someone else. Not to Shiva.

Parvati resolved, I shall not marry anyone other than Shiva. Is a jackal a fit replacement for a lion?

Vishnu then tried to pacify Menaka. But this did not succeed either. Finally Narada asked Shiva to display his beautiful form and Shiva obliged. This form is exhibited only to those who are very faithful to Shiva. Everyone was charmed by this beautiful form, even Menaka. His body shone like a thousand suns and a crown sparkled on his head. His clothes glittered and the lustre of his jewels put the stars to shame.

Menaka begged forgiveness for her foolishness and now there were no further obstacles to the marriage. Under Brahma's supervision, the marriage ceremony took place and Shiva and Parvati returned to Kailasa.

Kartikeya

Shiva and Parvati's son was Skanada or Kartikeya. When the baby was very small, it got lost in some reeds. Six princesses discovered the baby in the reeds and each wanted to bring up the baby as her own son. All of them finally cooperated in bringing up the boy. These princesses were the Krittikas and the boy came to be known as Kartikeya.

The gods got to know from Narada that Kartikeya had been brought up by the Krittikas. They came and appointed Kartikeya their general. The army of gods then invaded Tarakasura's city Shonitapura. A terrible fight raged for ten days. The gods completely decimated the demons and Kartikeya killed Tarakasura.

After the victory celebrations were over, Kartikeya was restored to his parents.

Tipura

Tarakasura had three sons named Vidyunmali, Tarakaksha and Viryavana. These three began to perform tapasya. For a hundred years they meditated standing only on one leg. For a thousand more years they lived on air and meditated. They stood on their heads and meditated in this posture for yet another thousand years.

Brahma was pleased at this difficult tapasya. He appeared before them and said, What boon do you want?

Make us immortal, answered Tarakasura's sons.

I can't make you immortal, replied Brahma. I don't have the power. Ask for something else instead.

Very well, then, said Vidyunmali, Tarakaksha and Viryavana Grant us the following. Let three forts be made. The first will be of gold, the second of silver and the third of iron. We will live in these forts for a thousand years. At the end of the thousand years, the forts will become one. This combined fort will be called Tripura. And if anyone can then destroy Tripura with only a single arrow, that shall be the death destined for us.

This rather unusual boon Brahma granted. There was a danava named Maya who was very good at building work. Brahma asked him to build the forts. The golden fort was built in heaven, the silver one in the sky and the iron one on earth.

Tarakaksha got the golden fort, Viryavana the silver one and Vidyunmali the iron one. Each of the forts was as big as a city and had many palaces and vimanas (spaceships) inside.

The demons populated the three forts and began to flourish. The gods did not like this at all. They first went to Brahma, but Brahma said he could not help them. After all, the demons had got Tripura thanks to his boon. The gods then went to Shiva for help. But Shiva said that the demons were doing nothing wrong. As long as that was the case, he did not see why the gods were so bothered. The gods then went to Vishnu. Vishnu's suggestion was as follows. If the problem was that the demons were doing nothing wrong, the solution was to persuade them to become sinners.

Out of his powers Vishnu created a man. This man's head was shaven, his clothes were faded and he carried a wooden water-pot in his hands. He covered his mouth with a piece of cloth and approached Vishnu.

What are my orders? he asked Vishnu.

Let me explain to you why you have been created, replied Vishnu. I will teach you a religion that is completely against the Vedas. You will then get the impression that there is no svarga (heaven) and no naraka (hell) and that both heaven and hell are on earth. You will not believe that rewards and punishments for deeds committed on earth are meted out after death. Go to Tripura and teach the demons this religion, which they are dislodged from the righteous path. Then we will do something about Tripura.

The being did as he had been asked to. He and four of his disciples went to a forest that was near Tripura and began to preach. They were trained by Vishnu himself. Therefore, their teachings were convincing and they had many converts. Even the sage Narada got confused and was converted.

In fact, it was Narada who carried news of this wonderful new religion to king Vidyunmati.

King, he said, there is a wonderful new teacher with a wonderful new religion. I have never heard before. I have got converted.

Since the great sage Narada had got converted. Vidyunmati also accepted the new religion. And in due course, so did Tarakaksha and Viryavana. The demons gave up revering the Vedas, they stopped worshipping Shiva's linga.

Vishnu and the other gods then went to Shiva and began to pray to him. When Shiva appeared, they told him that the demons had now become evil and should be destroyed. They had even stopped worshipping Shiva's linga.

Shiva agreed to destroy Tripura. Vishvakarma was the architect of the gods. Shiva called Vishvakarma and asked him to make a suitable chariot, bow and arrow. The chariot was made entirely out of gold. Brahma himself became the charioteer and the chariot was speedily driven towards Tripura. The gods accompanied Shiva with diverse weapons.

By then a thousand years had passed so that the three forts had become a single Tripura. Shiva instilled a divine weapon known as pashupata into his arrow and shot it at Tripura. The arrow burnt up Tripura into ashes in a split second.

While the celebrations were going on, the shaven-heads religious teachers arrived. What are we supposed to do now? they asked.

Brahma and Vishnu told them to go and live in the desert. The last of the four eras was kaliyuga and in kaliyuga, evil would reign supreme. When kaliyuga arrived, they were to come back and begin their teaching afresh.

Sita and the Ketaki Flower

Romaharshana told the assembled sages, It is easy to please Shiva. But Shiva must never be worshipped with a ketaki or a champaka flower.

Why, what is wrong with these flowers? asked the sages.

Let me tell you about the ketaki flower first, replied Romaharshana.

Rama's father Dasharatha asked Rama to spend fourteen years in the forest. So Rama went to the forest with his brother Lakshmana and his wife Sita. The three of them started to live on the banks of the river Falgu. News reached the forest that Dasharatha had died in their absence and a shraddha (funeral) ceremony had to be performed for the dead king.

Rama sent Lakshmana to a nearby village to get the necessary ingredients. Time passed and Lakshmana did not return. Rama then went to get the ingredients and look for Lakshmana. But Rama too did not return. It was almost noon and the ceremony had to be performed before noon. In desperation, Sita decided to perform the ceremony herself. She went and bathed in the Falgu river and lit an earthen lamp. She then made the offerings (pinda) to the dead ancestors herself.

Immediately, a voice was heard. Sita, you are blessed, it said. We are satisfied.

In utter amazement Sita watched some disembodied hands appear in the air to accept the offerings.

Who are you? Asked Sita.

I am your dead father-in-law, answered the voice. The funeral ceremony has been successful. I have accepted your offerings.

But Rama and Lakshmana are going to believe me, said Sita. They will never believe that such disembodied hands appeared out of thin air to accept the offerings.

They have to. answered the voice. You have four witnesses. The first is the Falgu river. The second is the cow over there. The third will be the fire. And the last one will be the ketaki bush.

Rama and Lakshmana returned and said, Cook the food quickly. There is very little time left. We have to complete the funeral ceremony before noon.

Sita told them what happened, and naturally, the two brothers did not believe her. They made fun of her and suggested that she was lying. Sita called upon her four witnesses, but each denied that it had seen anything. Without arguing any further, Sita cooked the food and Rama made offerings to his ancestors.

A voice was then heard from the sky. Why are you calling us again? it said. Sita has already satisfied us.

I refuse to believe that, said Rama.

Indeed, it is true, retorted the voice. Ask the sun god.

The sun god confirmed that everything had happened just as Sita had said it had. Rama and Lakshmana were ashamed that they had doubted Sita and were also impressed with the power of her virtue. But Sita cursed the four false witnesses. She cursed the Falgu river that it would henceforth only flow underground. She cursed the ketaki flower (*pandanus odoratissimus*) that it would never be accepted by Shiva as an

offering. She cursed the cow that its mouth would henceforth become impure. It had, after all, lied with its mouth. The hind sections of the cow would however continue to be pure. And finally Sita cursed the fire that it would consume everything indiscriminately.

That is the reason why a ketaki flower must never be used to worship Shiva.

Narada and the Champaka Tree

Nor must a champaka flower be used.

In the land of Gokarna there was a temple dedicated to Shiva. Narada decided that he would go and visit the temple. On the way, he saw a flowering champaka tree and stopped to admire it. A brahmana came there to pluck flowers from the tree. But seeing that Narada was there, the brahmana refrained from plucking any flowers.

Where are you going? asked Narada.

The brahmana lied and replied, To beg some alms.

Narada went to the temple. Meanwhile, the brahmana plucked flowers from the champaka tree and placed them in a basket that he covered up well. Narada met the brahmana again on his way back from the temple.

Where are you going now? He asked the brahmana.

The brahmana lied again, Home, he said, I could n't get any alms.

Narada's suspicions were aroused. He went to the champaka tree and asked, Has that brahmana plucked any flowers?

What brahmana? replied the tree. I don't know of any brahmana. No one has plucked any flowers.

Narada went back to the temple and discovered fresh champaka flowers lying there on top of the Shiva linga. There was another devotee praying there. Narada asked him, Do you know who came to worship with these champaka flowers?

Yes, I do, replied the devotee, It is an evil brahmana. He worships Shiva every day with champaka flowers. Thanks to Shiva's blessings, he has completely brainwashed the king and has secretly been stealing the king's wealth. He also oppresses other brahmanas.

Narada asked Shiva, Why do you encourage such evil?

I am helpless, replied Shiva. I cannot resist it if someone worships me with champaka flowers.

Just then, a brahmana woman came running with her tale of woe. Her husband was crippled. But they had managed to get some money from the king so that their daughter could be married. They had also received a cow from the king. But the evil brahmana was claiming that half of whatever they had received was his. It was due to his good offices that the king had been so generous, he was saying. The evil brahmana had already appropriated half of the money. But how was a cow to be

divided?

Narada then decided that something needed to be done about the champaka tree and the evil brahmana. Apart from everything else, the champaka tree was a liar. Narada cursed the champaka tree that its flowers would never be accepted by Shiva as an offering. He cursed the evil brahmana that he would be born as a rakshasa (demon) named Viradha. But the brahmana had been a devotee of Shiva. So the curse was qualified by the stipulation that Viradha would be killed by Rama and would then again become a brahmana.

Ganesha

The door to Parvati's place was guarded by two of Shiva's companions, Nandi and Bhringi. But Parvati's companions, Jaya and Vijaya, didn't like this at all. They thought that there should be a guard who would be answerable to Parvati rather than to Shiva. It was Parvati's place, not Shiva's. Moreover, Shiva was in the habit of walking in at awkward moments, and Nandi and Bhringi never stopped Shiva. Jaya and Vijaya asked Parvati to do something about this.

Parvati took some clay of a pond and fashioned the clay into a very handsome son. She dressed the son in beautiful clothes and jewellery. He was named Ganesha. Parvati told Ganesha, You are my son. Stand at the gate and do not allow anyone to enter.

Ganesha picked up a rod and began his duty as sentry. Parvati went to have a bath. Soon Shiva turned up with his companions. Where are you going? asked Ganesha. You cannot pass. My mother is having her bath.

I am Shiva, answered Shiva.

Who is Shiva? retorted Ganesha. I don't know of any Shiva. You cannot go in.

Shiva tried to ignore Ganesha and enter, but Ganesha started to beat Shiva with the rod. Shiva then asked his companions to remove this upstart. But they only got thrashed by Ganesha in the process. Nandi tried to grasp one of Ganesha's legs and Bhringi the other. But Ganesha uprooted a wooden door and beat them so hard that they fled. The gods and the sages all came to see what the uproar was about.

Shiva told Brahma, Why don't you try to pacify that creature?

Brahma advanced to reason with Ganesha. But Ganesha didn't know Brahma; he thought that this was another one of Shiva's companions. He therefore grabbed Brahma and tore off Brahma's beard by the handful. Brahma fled in pain.

This had become a matter where Parvati felt her pride to be at stake. So she kept Ganesha supplied with weapons. The gods attacked Ganesha with all sorts of weapons. He drove them back.

Vishnu told Shiva, This fellow can only be killed with some trickery. Otherwise, he seems to be invincible.

Ganesha flung a mace at Vishnu and hurt him considerably. He struck down Shiva's

bow with another mace. Vishnu and Ganesha then began to fight, with the sudarshana chakra being used by Vishnu and maces by Ganesha. While this duel raged, Shiva crept up stealthily from behind and cut off Ganesha's head with his trishula (trident). This was the trickery that Vishnu had planned for.

When Parvati learnt of Ganesha's death, her ire was roused. She got ready to destroy the universe and everyone was alarmed. Narada was sent to Parvati as a messenger. He was to try and pacify Parvati. But Parvati agreed to relent only if two conditions were satisfied. The first condition was that Ganesha should be brought back to life. The second condition was that Ganesha should be accepted as a god and should enjoy all divine rights.

These conditions were readily accepted. Ganesha's headless body was cleaned and bathed. But the head could not be found. It had been lost in the heat of the battle. Shiva sent his companions out with the head of the first living being that they saw. This happened to be an elephant with one tusk. The elephant's head was stuck onto Ganesha's body and Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva combined their powers to bring back life to the dead body.

Shiva accepted Ganesha as his son. He also made Ganesha the lord of all his companions, the ganas. That is why the elephant-god is called Ganapati. It was also decreed that worship to any god would be useless unless it was preceded by prayers to Ganesha.

Chaturthi tithi is the fourth lunar day. Krishnapaksha is that part of the lunar fortnight during which the moon wanes. Since Parvati created Ganesha in the month of Kartika and on chaturthi tithi in Krishnapaksha, that is the day on which Ganapati is worshipped.

Ganesha and Kartikeya Quarrel

Shiva and Parvati had two sons, Ganesha and Kartikeya. Both sons wanted to get married. And Shiva and Parvati found it difficult to decide who should be married first. The other one was bound to feel hurt. Both the sons were equally dear to them. They decided to have a test. They called Ganesha and Kartikeya to them and said, We have devised a competition. Both of you have to travel around the world and return here. Whoever returns first will be married first. That should be fair and square.

As soon as these words were out, Kartikeya dashed out on his journey. But Ganesha tarried and pondered. He realized that this was a task that was impossible for him to accomplish. He found it difficult enough to travel a couple of miles.

Ganesha found a solution. First, he bathed. Then, he made Shiva and Parvati sit on two seats. He worshipped them and circled them seven times. After he finished circling them. Ganesha said, Now please make arrangements for my wedding.

What do you mean, exclaimed Shiva and Parvati. Didn't you hear what we said? We

asked the two of you to travel around the world and come back. You'd better hurry. Kartikeya has already left. If you don't take care, he will beat you to it.

But I have already been round the world seven times, replied Ganesha. Haven't I circled the two of you seven times? The Vedas say that circling one's parents is the same thing as circling the world. If you do not wish to argue that the Vedas are wrong, then you have to agree that I have circled the world seven times.

Shiva and Parvati could not very well argue that the Vedas were wrong. They therefore had to accept Ganesha's logic. Arrangements were made for his wedding. Vishvarua, the son of Kashyapa, had two daughters named Siddhi and Buddhi. These two were married to Ganesha with a lot of fanfare. Ganesha and Siddhi had a son named Laksha and Ganesha and Buddhi had a son named Labha.

Kartikeya returned to Kailasa after traveling around the world and discovered that Ganesha was already married and was already the proud father of two children. He heard the entire story from Narada and felt that he had been cheated. He decided that he would no longer live with his parents. He also decided that he would never marry. That is the reason why Kartikeya is called Kumara, someone who is married.

Kartikeya began to live on Mount Krouncha. Shiva goes to visit him there on the day of the newmoon (amavasya) and parvati goes to visit him on the day of the moon (purnima).

Linga

A linga is an image of Shiva. There are several lingas. Whichever is the place where devotees congregate, there Shiva manifests himself in the form of a linga.

However, there are twelve important lingas and these are known as jyotirlingas are Somanatha, Mallikarjuna, Mahakala, Omkara, Kedara, Bhima-shankara, Vishvanatha, Trymbaka, Vaidyanatha, Nagesha, Rameshvara and Ghushnesha.

Nandikeshvara Tirtha

A tirtha is a place of pilgrimage. At a tirtha named Nandikeshvara, there is a famous Shiva linga.

In a city named Karnaki there used to live a brahmana. He left his two sons with his wife and went to visit the city of Varanasi. It was then learnt that the brahmana had died in Varanasi. His widow brought up her sons and eventually married them off. She became old and it was time for her to die. But death would not come. It seemed to the sons that their mother was hankering after something and would not die until her wish had been satisfied.

Mother, they asked, What is it that you want?

I have always wanted to visit the tirtha of Varanasi, the mother replied. But now I am going to die without ever visitng the place. Promise me that when I am dead, you will take my ashes to Varanasi and throw them into the river Ganga there.

We will, said the sons. You can die in peace.

The mother died and the sons performed her funeral ceremony. Then the eldest son, Suvadi, set out for Varanasi with his mother's ashes. The way was long and he stopped to rest and spend the night in a brahmana's house.

A cow was tied in front of the house and it was time for milking. Suvadi saw that when the brahmana tried to milk the cow, the calf would not permit the milking and kicked the brahmana. The brahmana then hit the calf with a stick. The brahmana went away after the milking. But Suvadi was still there and he heard the cow tell her calf, I am distressed that the brahmana struck you. Tomorrow I am going to gore the brahmana's son to death.

Next day, the brahmana's son came to do the milking. The cow gored him with horns so that he died. But this meant that the cow had committed the sin of killing a brahmana. Immediately, because of the sin, the white cow turned completely black.

The cow left the house. Suvadi followed, amazed at this strange sight. The cow went to the banks of the river Narmada, to the place named Nandikeshvara. She bathed in the river and became white once again. This meant that the sin of killing a brahmana had been completely washed away. Suvadi marvelled at this and realized what a powerful tirtha Nandikeshvara was.

He was about to leave for Varansi after bathing in the river himself, when he was accosted by a beautiful woman.

Where are you going, Suvadi? asked the woman. Throw your mother's ashes in the river here. This is a far greater tirtha than Varanasi.

Who are you? asked Suvadi.

I am the river Gangaa, came the reply.

The woman vanished and Suvadi did as he had been bidden. As soon as he had done this, his dead mother appeared in the sky and told him that she was immensely gratified. She would now go straight to heaven.

Nandikeshvara is a wonderful tirtha because a brahmana woman named Rishika had earlier performed very difficult tapasya there to please Shiva.

Atrishvara Tirtha

There was a forest named Kamada. It did not rain there for a hundred years. The leaves dried up and the dwellers of the forest started to suffer.

The sage Atri decided that he would meditate to try and bring the rains. Atri's wife was Anasuya and she thought that she might as well perform tapasya together with her husband. Both of them started to pray to Shiva and it was very difficult to decide whose tapasya was the more difficult. Fifty-four passed and they meditated without eating or drinking anything.

Atri's meditation was finally over and he felt thirsty. He therefore asked his wife to go and fetch some water so that he might quench his thirst. While Anasuya was going

to fetch the water, the river Ganga appeared before her.

I am pleased with your tapasya, said Ganga. What boon do you desire?

If you are pleased with me, replied Anasuya, please make a pond here and fill the pond with your water.

Ganga obliged. Anasuya filled her water-pot from the pond and brought the water to her husband. Atri drank the water and found that it was far tastier than the water they were used to. When he asked Anasuya why this was so, she told him what happened. Both husband and wife came back to the pond. Anasuya had earned a lot of punya (store of merit) thanks to her tapasya. Ganga agreed to stay on provided Anasuya handed over to Ganga whatever punya she had acquired in one year of tapasya. This condition Anasuya agreed to.

Meanwhile, Shiva appeared and offered to grant Anasuya a boon. Anasuya desired the boon that Shiva would always be present in that forest. Shiva consented.

This sacred place is known as Atrishvara tirtha.

Chandra and Somanatha

Twenty-seven of Daksha's daughters were married to the moon-god Chandra. One of these wives was named Rohini and Chandra loved Rohini more than he loved the other wives. The other wives felt neglected and they complained to their father. Daksha repeatedly warned his son-in-law to devote himself equally to all twenty-seven wives. But Chandra was in no mood to listen.

Daksha thereupon cursed Chandra that he would gradually fade away. Chandra didn't know what to do. He went and sought advice from Brahma and Brahma told him that the only recourse was to pray to Shiva. Chandra went to Prabhasa tirtha and made a linga on the banks of the river Sarasvati. He prayed to Shiva for six months.

At the end of the tapasya Shiva appeared before Chandra and offered to grant him a boon. Chandra explained what the problem was.

Well, said Shiva, Daksha's curse cannot be entirely ignored. Let us have a compromise. During krishnapaksha you will wane. And during shuklapaksha (the bright part of the lunar fortnight) you will wax. That should satisfy everybody.

Chandra was delighted. The linga to which Chandra prayed is Somantha, the first of the jyotirlingas. Shiva is always present at that tirtha.

Mallikarjuna

What about the second jyotirlinga. Mallikarjuna?

You already know that Kartikeya felt cheated when Ganesha got married. He decided that he would not live with Shiva and Parvati any longer, and began to live on the mountain Krouncha.

Parvati was miserable that her son had left her. She sent gods, sages, gandharvas and

apsaras to bring her son back. But Kartikeya would not return. Shiva and Parvati then went to visit Kartikeya themselves, but Kartikeya would not let them get too close.

Shiva and Parvati started to live at a place that was about six miles away from where their son was living. They are always there, so as to be near their son. This place is known as Mallikarjuna.

Dushana and Mahakala

The third of the jyotirlingas is Mahakala.

The city of Avanti is on the banks of the river Kshipra (Shipra).

A brahmana named Vedapriya used to lived in the city of Avanti. He used to worship Shiva everyday and he had brought up his four sons to do the same. These sons were named Devapriya, Priyamedha, Suvrita and Suvrata.

Not very far away, on a hill named Ratnamala, there used to live an asura named Dushana. Dushana was evil, he could not stand the idea of the Vedas being read and the religion prescribed in them followed. He went about destroying this righteous religion wherever he could. Dushana got to know that in the city of Avanti there lived four brahmanas who followed the righteous religion and worshipped Shiva. These were Devapriya, Priyamedha, Suvrita and Suvrata. Their father Vedapriya had died by then.

Dushana and his cohorts came and attacked the city of Avanti. They threatened to kill the four brahmanas, but the brothers were not at all perturbed. They continued to pray to Shiva. They bowed in obeisance before the linga.

Suddenly a tremendous sound was heard and a pit appeared in the ground in front of the linga. Shiva himself appeared in this pit. Dushana was burnt into ashes from the force of Shiva's roar. And Shiva put all of Dushana's soldiers to flight.

The brahmanas prayed that Shiva might always be present at that place and Shiva agreed. This is the place that is known as Mahakala.

Vindhya and Omkara

The fourth of the jyotirlingas is Omkara.

Narada had once gone on a visit to the mountain Vindhya. Vindhya worshipped Narada. But because Vindhya was slightly proud, he also said. I am full of all the desirable objects that one can think of.

Perhaps, replied Narada. But Mount Sumeru is superior to you, because the gods are always there.

Vindhya decided to become the equal of Sumeru. He began to pray to Shiva. For six months he prayed. When Shiva appeared, Vindhya desired that Shiva might always

be present there so that he might become the equal of Sumeru.
The linga that Vindhya worshipped as called Omkara.

Naranarayana and Kedara

The fifth of the jyotirlingas is Kedara. In one of Vishnu's incarnations, he revealed himself as the two sages, Nara and Narayana. These two sages prayed for a long time in the hermitage known as vadrikashrama. Near this hermitage there was a peak of the Himalayas named Kedara.

After the two sages had prayed to Shiva for a very long time, Shiva appeared and said, I don't understand why the two of you worshipping me. It is you who should be worshipped. But since you have been praying to me, let me grant you a boon.

Nara and Narayana desired that Shiva should always be present in the form of a linga on the peak Kedara.

Bhimashankara

The sixth of the jyotirlingas is Bhimashankara.

You know about Rama and Ravana from the Ramayana and you also know that Rama killed not only Ravana, but also his brother Kumbhakarna.

A rakshasa woman named Karkati used to live on the mountains named Sahya. Karkati had been married to Kumbhakarna and her son was named Bhima. One day, Bhima asked Karkati, Mother, whose son am I? Why do we live alone in this forest?

Karkati said, Let me tell you my sad story. I used to be married to the rakshasa Viradha. But Rama killed Viradha. Later on, Kumbhakarna came and married me here and you were born. Kumbhakarna had promised to take me to Lanka. But he was killed by Rama and I never got to see Lanka. That is the reason we live here alone. We have nowhere else to go.

Bhima was very sorry to hear this story. He resolved to avenge himself on Vishnu because he knew that Rama had been an incarnation of Vishnu. For a thousand years he prayed to Brahma with his hands raised up to the sky. When Brahma appeared, Bhima wished for the boon that he might become very strong. This boon Brahma granted.

The first target of Bhima's attention was the king of Kamarupa. The king's crime was that he was devoted to Vishnu. Bhima attacked the king, stole all his belongings, conquered his kingdom and imprisoned him and his wife. He then proceeded to conquer the rest of the world.

In their prison, the king and his wife started to pray to Shiva. This news was brought to Bhima by the rakshasa guards and Bhima decided to kill the king. He found the king praying before a Shiva linga. When Bhima raised his sword to cut off the king's head, Shiva appeared from the linga and repelled the sword with his trident.

Bhima flung a spear at Shiva, but this too was driven back by the trident. Whatever weapon was used by Bhima, Shiva's trident destroyed them all. Finally, Shiva killed Bhima and all his rakshasa cohorts.

The gods were gratified and they craved that Shiva might always remain in the place in the form of the linga.

Vishvanatha and Varanasi

The seventh of the jyotirlingas is named Vishvanatha and it is located in the city of Varanasi or Kashi.

Varanasi is a very sacred place. Brahma himself performed difficult tapasya there. So difficult was the tapasya that Vishnu shook his head in disbelief. When Vishnu shook his head, a jewel (mani) fell down from Vishnu's ear (karna). The place where the jewel fell is known as Manikarnika and it is a famous tirtha.

Varanasi is not destroyed when the rest of the world is destroyed. Shiva himself raises it on the point of his trident and protects it while destruction rages all around. When the world is re-created, Shiva replaces Varanasi to its appointed place.

Shiva and Parvati once went to visit Brahma. Brahma began to chant hymns in Shiva's praise with all of his five mouths. One of the mouths however made mistakes in the pronunciation of the hymns. This angered Shiva and Shiva severed the offending head with a gaze of his third eye. But this effectively amounted to the killing of a brahmana and Shiva committed a crime. The severed head therefore got stuck to Shiva's back and would not come off, no matter where Shiva went. But when Shiva arrived in Varanasi, the head fell off his back. Shiva realized that Varanasi was a special place and he resolved that he would always be present there.

Goutama and Trymbaka

Towards the south of the country there was a mountain named Brahmaparvata. There the sage Goutama and his wife Ahalya performed tapasya for ten thousand years. While they were meditating, there were no rains in the forest for a hundred years and there was a shortage of water. Living beings died from the drought. Goutama prayed to Varuna, the god of the ocean and the rain. Varuna appeared and offered to grant a boon.

Please grant the boon that it might rain, said Goutama.

I can't do that, replied Varuna. That is beyond my powers. Ask for something else instead.

Then let us have a pond in the forest that will always be full of water, said Goutama. This was within Varuna's powers and the pond was created. The other sages also began to use water from this pond. Normally, Goutama sent his disciples to fetch

water. But the disciples complained that the wives of the other sages did not let them take the water. So Ahalya herself started to fetch the water. The wives of the other sages annoyed and pestered Ahalya, but she never reacted. These wives then complained to their husbands about Ahalya and Goutama. At first the sages did not listen, but eventually, they were convinced that Ahalya and Goutama were wicked. They therefore sought to devise a plan so that these two might be punished. They began to pray to Ganesha.

When Ganesha arrived, the sages said, Please grant us the boon that Goutama and Ahalya might be banished from the hermitage.

Although Ganesha realized that this was an unfair boon, he decided to grant it because he realized that the sages and their evil wives needed to be punished.

Goutama had some fields of paddy and grain. Ganesha adopted the form of a lean and starving cow and began to eat up the crop. Goutama tried to drive away the cow with a blade of grass. But as soon as he struck the cow with the blade of grass, the cow fell down and died. This was a terrible calamity. It was the killing of a cow.

The other sages banished Goutama and Ahalya from the hermitage. They had to set up an ashrama (hermitage) that was a fair distance away. The other sages completely disassociated themselves from Goutama and Ahalya. Goutama began to think of ways of performing prayashchitta (penance) for the crime that he had committed. The other sages told him that he would first have to travel around the world. After that, he would have to pray very hard for an entire month. The next task was to circle Brahmavarvata a hundred times and bathe in a hundred pots of water. This would complete the penance. All this Goutama and Ahalya did. They also prayed for a long time to Shiva.

Shiva appeared before them and offered them a boon. Goutama desired the boon that the river Ganga might always be present in the hermitage. Ganga said that she would agree subject to the condition that Shiva and Parvati were also always present in the hermitage. Parvati and Shiva agreed to do this. This established Trymbaka, the eighth of the jyotirlingas. The river Ganga which flowed there came to be known as the Godavari. So Trymbaka is on the banks of the Godavari.

What happened to the evil sages and their wives? Goutama asked that they might be pardoned. They performed penance by circling Brahmavarvata one hundred and one times, and begged forgiveness from Goutama and Ahalya.

Ravana and Vaidyanatha

The ninth of the jyotirlingas is named Vaidyanatha.

Ravana, the king of the rakshasas, meditated in the Himalayas so as to please Shiva. First he prayed on Mount Kailasa, but Shiva did not appear. He then went to a place named Vrikshakhandaka which was a little towards the south. He prayed there, but

Shiva did not appear. Ravana next dug a pit in the earth and started to pray inside the pit. He established a Shiva linga inside the pit. Shiva still not appear.

Ravana therefore decided that he would immolate himself. Ravana, as you know, had ten heads. He lit a fire and severing his heads, began to offer them one by one to the fire. When nine of the heads had thus been offered, Shiva appeared.

Enough is enough, said Shiva. What boon do you want?

Please grant me the boon that I may be very strong. And please restore my nine heads, replied Ravana.

These boons Shiva granted and the place where Ravana prayed is known as Vaidyanatha.

The gods were not at all happy that Ravana had become so strong. They were afraid that the rakshasa might start to oppress them. They therefore sent Narada to create some mischief. Narada met Ravana and asked him why he was looking so happy. Ravana related the story of the boon.

Boon, exclaimed Narada. Who believes in Shiva? Let me see if you can lift up Mount Kailasa. If you can do that, I shall indeed believe that you have become strong.

Incited by Narada, Ravana returned to Kailasa and lifted up the mountain. As the mountain shook, Shiva and Parvati were disturbed. Shiva cursed Ravana that soon a being would be born who would kill Ravana. This being was of course Rama, Vishnu's incarnation.

Nagesha

The tenth of the jyotirlingas is named Nagesha.

There used to be a rakshasa name Daruka. His wife was named Daruki. They lived in a forest on the banks of the western sea. Parvati had granted Daruki the boon that wherever Daruki went, the forest would follow.

Using this forest as a base, Daruka and Daruki began to oppress the world. They destroyed the yajnas and killed all the righteous people. In desperation, the survivors went to a powerful sage named Ourva. They told Ourva that he alone could save the world from the depredations of these rakshasas. Ourva cursed the rakshasas that if they committed any violence on earth, they would immediately die.

As soon as the gods got to know about this curse, they attacked the rakshasas. The demons were in a fix. If they did not fight with the gods, they would be slaughtered. But if they fought with the gods, they would die because of Ourva's curse. They decided that they would go and live in the ocean. Thanks to the boon that Daruki had received from Parvati, the entire forest was also submerged in the ocean and became the home of the rakshasas.

There the rakshasa lived. They did not return to earth. But they imprisoned and

killed any people who travelled in boats across the ocean.

In this fashion, they once captured a vaishya (the third of the four classes) who was devoted to Shiva. The vaishya set up a linga in the prison and began to pray to Shiva. When the rakshasas saw this, they attacked him with weapons so as to kill him. This vaishya was named Supriya. Shiva gave Supriya a pashupata, a divine weapon associated with Shiva. With this the vaishya killed many demons. The remaining rakshasas were saved by Parvati's intervention.

The linga that Supriya worshipped is Nagesha.

Rama and Rameshvara

The eleventh of the jyotirlingas is named Rameshvara.

Ravana had kidnapped Sita and Rama looked for her everywhere. He was aided in his search by the monkeys. The search brought them to the shores of the ocean.

While Rama was trying to decide how to cross the ocean, he felt very thirsty. He therefore asked the monkeys to fetch him some water. But when the water was brought, Rama realized that he should not drink the water without first praying to Shiva.

Rama constructed a linga and worshipped it with many fragrant flowers. Such were the powers of Rama's prayers that Shiva, Parvati and their companions appeared before Rama. Shiva blessed Rama and Rama requested him to stay in that place forever. It is this linga, on the shores of the ocean, that is known as Rameshvara.

Ghushna and Ghushnesha

The twelfth and last of the jyotirlingas is named Ghushnesha.

To the south, there is a mountain named Deva. A brahmana named Sudharma used to live there. His wife was called Sudeha. Husband and wife were righteous and regularly prayed to the gods. They had only one reason for complaint: they had no son. Sudeha was especially disturbed at this. Other women tended to insult her because she had no son.

Sudharma decided to conduct an experiment. He plucked two flowers and offered them in front of a sacred fire. He mentally associated one of the flowers with having a son and asked his wife to choose a flower. Unfortunately, his wife chose the flower that was not associated with having a son. From this Sudharma concluded that they were not going to have a son and he did his best to console Sudeha. But Sudeha refused to be consoled, she was miserable.

Why don't you marry again? asked Sudeha. Perhaps you will then have a son. Marry my niece Gushna.

No, replied Sudharma. You love her now because she is your niece. But if she does

indeed have a son, you will become jealous and will come to hate her.

Sudeha convinced her husband that this would never happen. So Sudharma married Ghushna.

Every day, Ghushna made a hundred and one lingas out of clay and worshipped them. When the day's prayers were over, she immersed the lingas in a pond. When one lakh lingas had thus been worshipped, Ghushna gave birth to a handsome boy. Shiva had taken pity on Sudharma and Ghushna.

But when the son was born, Sudeha's nature changed. As her husband had warned her, she felt jealous. She thought that Ghushna got more important and she was treated like a maid. In the middle of the night, Sudeha slew the boy with a knife and threw the dead body into the pond. This was the pond where the lingas had been immersed.

As was her wont, Ghushna got up in the morning and began to worship a linga. Blood was discovered on the bed, the boy could not be found and everyone raised the alarm. But Ghushna was not distracted by this racket and did not leave her prayers. Shiva was so impressed with Ghushna's devotion that he restored her son back to life. He also wished to kill the evil Sudeha with his trident, but Ghushna begged for her aunt's life and Shiva spared Sudeha. Ghushna's act of forgiveness so impressed Shiva that he wished to grant Ghushna another boon, apart from restoring her son.

Ghushna desired that Shiva might always be present in a linga near the pond. This is known as Ghushnesha.

Arjuna and Shiva

Duryodhana robbed the Pandavas of their rightful share of the kingdom in a game of dice. As a result of this, the Pandavas had to spend many years in the forest. While they were in the forest, Vedavyasa came to visit the Pandavas. Vedavyasa told them that they should pray to Shiva. But since Arjuna was the best suited amongst the Pandavas for worshipping Shiva, Vedavyasa taught Arjuna a special mantra (incantation). Then he asked Arjuna to go to Mount Indrakila and pray to Shiva there. Mount Indrakila was on the banks of the river Bhagirathi.

Arjuna went to Mount Indrakila. He made a linga out of clay and started to pray to Shiva. The news of Arjuna's wonderful tapasya spread everywhere. Arjuna stood on one leg and continually chanted the mantra that Vedavyasa had taught him.

Suddenly, Arjuna saw a boar. Arjuna thought that this fierce boar might have come to distract him from his tapasya. Alternatively, it might be a relative of the several demons that he had killed and therefore might wish him harm. Thinking this, Arjuna picked up his bow and arrow and let fly an arrow at the boar. Meanwhile, Shiva had decided to subject Arjuna to a test and he had also arrived at the spot disguised as a hunter. When Arjuna shot an arrow at the boar, so did Shiva. Shiva's arrow struck the boar in its hindquarters and Arjuna's arrow struck the boar in its mouth. The boar fell down dead.

A dispute started between Arjuna and the hunter about who had killed the boar. Each claimed it for his own. They began to fight. But whatever weapons were hurled by Shiva were easily repelled all of Arjuna's weapons. When all the weapons were exhausted, the two started to wrestle.

After the fight had gone on for a while, Shiva gave up his disguise of a hunter and displayed his true form to Arjuna. Arjuna was ashamed that he had been fighting with the very person to whom he had been praying.

Please forgive me, said Arjuna.

It is all right, replied Shiva. I was just trying to test you. Your weapons have been like offerings to me, you are my devotee. Tell me, what boon do you desire?

Arjuna wanted the boon that he might obtain glory on earth. Shiva gave Arjuna his pashupata weapon. This was such a divine weapon that its possession made Arjuna invincible.

Sudarshana Chakra

Sudarshana chakra (a bladed discus) was Vishnu's weapon. Vishnu received this wonderful weapon as a result of Shiva's grace.

Many years ago, the demons oppressed the gods and the gods went to Vishnu for deliverance. Vishnu said that the demons were so powerful, that he would first have to worship Shiva if something was to be done about the asuras. Vishnu went to Mount Kailasa and began to pray to Shiva. He chanted many mantras, but there was no sign of Shiva. Shiva has a thousand names and Vishnu next started to chant these names. Each day he chanted the thousand names and offered a thousand lotus flowers to Shiva.

Shiva decided to test Vishnu. One day, he stole a lotus flower from the thousand that were to be offered. When Vishnu realized that there was one lotus flower less, he gouged out his own eye and offered it in place of the missing lotus flower. Shiva was now pleased and appeared before Vishnu. He offered to grant Vishnu a boon.

You know that the powerful demons have been oppressing the gods, said Vishnu. I need a weapon to fight the demons with. Please give me a weapon.

Shiva then gave Vishnu the sudarshana chakra. And with this weapon, Vishnu killed the demons.

Shiva's Thousand Names

When the sages heard this story, they said, Romaharshana, what are these thousand names of Shiva that you have mentioned? Relate them to us.

Romaharshana obliged. For convenience, let us list out these thousand names in a hundred groups of ten each.

(1) Shiva, Hara, Mrida, Rudra, Pushkara, Pushpalochana, Arthigamya, Sadachara, Sharva, Shambhu.

(2) Maheshvara, Chandrapida, Chandramouli, Vishva, Vishvamareshvara, Vedantasara-sandoha, Kapali, Nilalohita, Dhyanaadhara, Aparicchedyo.

(3) Gouribharta, Ganeshvara, Ashtamurti, Vishvamurti, Trivargasvargasadhana, Jnanagamya, Dridaprajna, Devadeva, Trilochana, Vamadeva

(4) Madadeva, Patu, Parivrida, Drida, Vishvarupa, Virupaksha, Vagisha, Shuchisattama, Sarvapramanasamvadi, Vrishanka.

(5) Vrishavahana, Isha, Pinaki, Khatvanga, Chitravesha, Chirantana, Tamohara, Mahayogi, Gopta, Brahma.

(6) Dhurjati, Kalakala, Krittivasah, Subhaga, Pranavatmaka, Unnadhra, Purusha, Jushya, Durvasa, Purashasana.

(7) Divyayudha, Skandaguru, Parameshthi, Paratpara, Anadimadhyanidhana, Girisha, Girijadhava, Kuberabandhu, Shrikanatha, Lokavarnottama.

(8) Mridu, Samadhivedya, Kodandi, Nilakantha, Parashvadi, Vishalaksha, Mrigavyadha, Suresha, Suryatapana, Dharmadhama.

(9) Kshamakshetra, Bhagavana, Bhaganetrabhida, Ugra, Pashupati, Tarkshya, Priyabhakta, Parantapa, Data, Dayakara.

(10) Daksha, Karmandi, Kamashasana, Shmashananilaya, Suksha, Shmashanastha, Maheshvara, Lokakarta, Mrigapati, Mahakarta.

(11) Mahoushadhi, Uttara, Gopati, Gopta, Jnanagamya, Puratana, Niti, Suniti, Shuddhatma, Soma.

(12) Somarata, Sukhi, Sompapa, Amritapa, Soumya, Mahatejah, Mahadyuti, Tejomaya, Amritamaya, Annamaya.

(13) Suhapati, Ajatashatru, Aloka, Sambhavya, Havyavahana, Lokakara, Vedakara, Sutrakara, Sanatana, Maharshi.

(14) Kapilacharya, Vishvadipti, Vilochana, Pinakapani, Bhudeva, Svastida, Svastikrita, Sudhi, Dhatriidhama, Dhamakara.

(15) Sarvaga, Sarvagochara, Brahmasrika, Vishvasrika, Sarga, Karnikara, Priya, Kavi, Shakha, Vishakha.

(16) Goshakha, Shiva, Bhishaka, Anuttama, Gangaplavodaka, Bhaya, Pushkala, Sthapati, Sthira, Vijitatma.

(17) Vishayatma, Bhutavahana, Sarathi, Sagana, Ganakaya, Sukirti, Chinnsamshaya, Kamadeva, Kamapala, Bhasmoddhulita-vidraha.

(18) Bhasmapriya, Bhasmashyai, Kami, Kanta, Kritagama, Samavarta, Nivritatma, Dharmapunja, Sadashiva, Akalmasha.

(19) Chaturvahu, Durvasa, Durasada, Durlabha, Durgama, Durga, Sarvayudhavisharada, Adhyatmayoganilaya, Sutantu, Tantuwardhana.

(20) Shubhanga, Lokasaranga, Jagadisha, Janardana, Bhasmashuddhikara, Meru, Ojasvi, Shuddhavidraha, Asadhya, Sadhusadhya.

(21) Bhrityamarkatarupadhrika, Hiranyareta, Pourana, Ripujivahara, Bala,

Mahahrada, Mahagarta, Vyali, Siddhavrindaravandita, Vyaghracharmambara.
(22) Mahabhuta, Mahanidhi, Amritasha, Amritavapu, Panchajanya, Prabhanjana, Panchavimshatitattvastha, Parijata, Para-vara, Sulabha.
(23) Suvrata, Shura, Brahmavedanidhi, Nidhi, Varnashramaguru, Varni, Shatrujita, Shatrutapana, Ashrama, Kshapana.
(24) Kshama, Jnanavana, Achaleshvara, Pramanabhuta, Durjneya, Suparna, Vayuvahana, Dhanurdhara, Dhanurveda, Gunarashi.
(25) Gunakara, Satyasatyapara, Dina, Dharmaga, Ananda, Dharmasadhana, Anantadrishti, Danda, Damayita, Dama.
(26) Abhivadya, Mahamaya, Vishvakarma, Visharada, Vitaraga, Vinitatma, Tapasvi, Bhutabhavana, Unmattavesha, Pracchanna .
(27) Jitakama, Ajitapriya, Kalyanaprakriti, Kalpa, Sarvalokaprajapati, Tarasvi, Tavaka, Dhimana, Pradhanaprabhu, Avyaya.
(28) Lokapala, Antarhitatma, Kalpadi, Kamalekshana, Vedashastrarthatattvajna, Aniyama, Niyatashraya, Chandra, Surya, Shani.
(29) Ketu, Varanga, Vidrumacchavi, Bhaktivashya, Anagha, Parabrahm-amrigavanarpana, Adri, Adryalaya, Kanta, Paramatma.
(30) Jagadguru, Sarvakarmalaya, Tushta, Mangalya, Mangalavrita, Mahatapa, Dirghatapa, Sthavishtha, Sthavira Dhruva.
(31) Aha, Samvatsara, Vyapti, Pramana, Parmatapa, Samvatsarakara, Mantra-pratyaya, Sarvadarshana, Aja, Sarveshvara
(32) Siddha, Mahareta, Mahabala, Yogi, Yogya, Siddhi, Mahateja, Sarvadi, Agraha, Vasu.
(33) Vasumana, Satya, Sarvapaphara, Sukirti, Shobhana, Shrimana, Avanmanasagochara, Amritashashvata, Shanta, Vanahasta.
(34) Pratapavana, Kamandalundhara, Dhanvi, Vedanga, Vedavita, Muni, Bhrajishnu, Bhojana, Bhokta, Lokanantha.
(35) Duradhara, Atindriya, Mahamaya, Sarvavasa, Chatuspatha, Kalayogi, Mahanada, Mahotsaha, Mahabala, Mahabuddhi.
(36) Mahavirya, Bhutachari, Purandara, Nishachara, Pretachari, Mahashakti, Mahadyuti, Ahirdeshyavapu, Shrimana, Sarvacharyamanogati.
(37) Vahushruta, Niyatatma, Dhruva, Adhruva, Sarvashaska, Ojastejodyutidara, Nartaka, Nrityapriya, Nrityanitya, Prakashatma.
(38) Prakashaka, Spashtakshara, Budha, Mantra, Samana, Sarasamplava, Yugadikrida, Yugavarta, Gambhira, Vrishavahana.
(39) Ishta, Vishishta, Shishteshta, Shalabha, Sharabha, Dhanu, Tirtharupa, Tirthanama, Tirthadrishya, Stuta.
(40) Arthada, Apamnidhi, Adhishthana, Vijaya, Jayakalavita, Pratishtita, Pramanajna, Hiranyakavacha, Hari, Vimochana.
(41) Suragana, Vidyasha, Vindusamshraya, Balarupa, Vikarta, Balonmatta, Gahana, Guha, Karana, Karta.

- (42) Sarvabandhavimochana, Vyavasaya, Vyavasthana, Sthanada, Jagadadija, Guruda, Lalita, Abheda, Bhavatmatmasamsthita, Vireshvara.
- (43) Virabhadra, Virasanavidhi, Virata, Virachudamani, Vetta, Tivrananda, Nadidhara, Ajnadhara, Tridhuli, Shipivishta.
- (44) Shivalaya, Balakhilya, Mahachapa, Tigmamshu, Badhira, Khaga, Adhirma, Susharana, Subrahmanya, Sudhapati.
- (45) Maghavana, Koushika, Gomana, Virama, Sarvasadhana, Lalataksha, Vishvadeha, Sara, Samsarachakrabhrita, Amoghadanda.
- (46) Madhyastha, Hiranya, Brahmavarchasi, Paramartha, Para, Mayi, Shambara, Vyaghralochana, Ruchi, Virinchi.
- (47) Svarbandhu, Vachaspati, Aharpati, Ravi, Virochana, Skanda, Shasta, Vaivasvata, Yama, Yukti.
- (48) Unnatakirti, Sanuraga, Paranjaya, Kailashadhipati, Kanta, Savita, Ravilochana, Vidvattama, Vitabhaya, Vishvabharta.
- (49) Anivarita, Nitya, Niyatakalyana, Punyashravanakirtana, Durashrava, Vishvasaha, Dhyeya, Duhsvapnanashana, Uttarana, Dushkritiha.
- (50) Vijneya, Duhsaha, Bhava, Anadi Bhurbhuvakshi, Kiriti, Ruchirangada, Janana, Janajanmadi, Pritimana.
- (51) Nitimana, Dhava, Vasishtha, Kashyapa, Bhanu, Bhima, Bhimaparakrama, Pranava, Satpatchachara, Mahakasha.
- (52) Mahaghana, Janmadhipa, Mahadeva, Sakalagamaparaga, Tattva, Tattavit, Ekatma, Vibhu, Vishvavibhushana, Rishi.
- (53) Brahmana, Aishvaryajanmamrityujaratiga, Panchayajnasamutpatti, Vishvesha, Vimalodaya, Atmayoni, Anadyanta, Vatsala, Bhaktalokadhrika, Gayatrivallabha.
- (54) Pramshu, Vishvavasa, Prabhakara,, Shishu, Giriraha, Samrata, Sushena, Surashatruha, Amogha, Arishtanemi.
- (55) Kumuda, Vigatajvara, Svayamjyoti, Tanujyoti, Achanchala, Atmajyoti, Pingala, Kapilashmashru, Bhalanetra, Trayitanu.
- (56) Jnanaskandamahaniti, Vishvotipatti, Upaplava, Bhaga, Vivasvana, Aditya, Yogapara, Divaspati, Kalyanagunanama, Papaha.
- (57) Punyadarshana, Udarakirti, Udyogi, Sadyogi, Sadasanmaya, Nakshatramali, Nakesha, Svadhishthanapadashraya, Pavitra, Paphari.
- (58) Manipura, Nabhogati, Hrit, Pundarikasina, Shatru, Shranta, Vrishakapi, Ushna, Grihapati, Krishna.
- (59) Paramartha, Anarthanashana, Adharmashatru, Ajneya, Puruhuta, Purushruta, Brahmagarbha, Vrihadgarbha, Dharmadhenu, Dhanagama.
- (60) Jagaddhitaishi, Sugata, Kumara, Kushalagama, Hiranyavarna, Jyotishmana, Nanbhutarata, Dhvani, Araga, Nayandyaksha.
- (61) Vishvamitra, Dhaneshvara, Brahmajyoti, Vasudhama, Mahajyotianuttama, Matamaha, Matarishva, Nabhasvana, Nagaharadhrika, Pulastya.
- (62) Pulaha, Agastya, Jatukarnya, Parashara, Niravarananirvara, Vairanchya,

Vishtarashrava, Atmabhu, Aniruddha, Atri.

(63) Jnanamurti, Mahayasha, Lokaviragranti, Vira, Chanda, Satyaparakrama, Vyalakapa, Mahakalpa, Kalpaviriksha, Kaladhara,

(64) Alankarishnu, Achala, Rochishnu, Vikramonnata. Ayuhsabdapati, Vegi, Plavana, Shikhisarathi, Asamsrishta, Atithi.

(65) Shatrupreamathi, Padapasana, Vasushrava, Pratapa, Havyavaha, Vishvabhajana, Japaya, Jaradishamana, Lohitatma, Tanunapata.

(66) Vrihadashva, Nabhoyoni, Supratika, Tamisraha, Nidagha, Tapan, Megha, Svaksha, Parapuranjaya, Sukhanila.

(67) Sunishpanna, Surabhi, Shishiratmaka, Vasanta, Madhava, Grishma, Nabhasya, Vijavahana, Angira, Guru.

(68) Atreya, Vimala, Vishvavahana, Pavana, Sumati, Vidvana, Travidya, Naravahana, Manobuddhi, Ahamkara.

(69) Kshetrajna, Kshetrapalaka, Jamadagni, Balanidhi, Vigala, Vishvaglava, Aghora, Anuttara, Yajna, Shreye.

(70) Nishshreyahpatha, Shaila, Gaganakundabha, Danavari, Arindama, Rajanijanaka, Charuvishalya, Lokakalpadhrika, Chaturveda, Chatrubhava.

(71) Chatura, Chaturapriya, Amlaya, Samamlaya, Tirthavedashivalaya, Vahurupa, Maharupa, Sarvarupa, Charachara, Nyayanirmayaka.

(72) Nyayi, Nyayagamy, Nirantara, Sahasramurddha, Devendra, Sarvasastraprabhanjana, Munda, Virupa, Vikranta, Dandi.

(73) Danta, Gunottama, Pingalaksha, Janadhyaksha, Nilagriva, Niramaya, Sahasravahu, Sarvesha, Sharanya, Sarvalokadhrika.

(74) Padmasana, Paramjyoti, Parampara, Paramfala, Padmagarbha, Mahagarbha, Vishvagarbha, Vichakshana, Characharajna, Varada.

(75) Varesha, Mahabala, Devasuraguru, Deva, Devasuramahashraya, Devadideva, Devagni, Devagnisukhada, Prabhu, Devasureshvara.

(76) Divya, Devasuramaheshvara, Devadevamaya, Achintya, Devadevatmasambhava, Sadyoni, Asuravyaghra, Devasimha, Divakara, Vibudhagravara.

(77) Shreshtha, Sarvadevottamottama, Shivajnana, Shrimana, Shikhi-shriparvatapriya, Vajrahasta, Siddhakhadgi, Narasimhanipatana, Brahmachari, Lokachari.

(78) Dharmachari, Dhanadhipa, Nandi, Nandishvara, Ananta, Nagnavratadhara Shuchi, Lingadhyaksha, Suradhyaksha, Yogadhyaksha.

(79) Yugavaha, Svadharma, Svargata, Svargakhara, Svaramayasvana, Vanadhyaksha, Vijakarta, Dharmakrit, Dharmasambhava, Dambha.

(80) Alobha, Arthavit, Shambhu, Sarvahbutamaheshvara, Shmashananilaya, Tryksha, Setu, Apratimakriti, Lokottaras-futaloka, Trymbaka.

(81) Nagabhushana, Andhakari, Makhaveshi, Vishnukandharapatana, Hinadosha, Akshayaguna, Dakshari, Pushadantabhit, Dhurjati, Khandaparashu.

- (82) Sakala, Nishkala, Anagha, Akala, Sakaladhara, Pandurabha, Mrida, Nata, Purna, Purayita,
- (83) Punya, Sukumara, Sulochana, Samageyapriya, Akrura, Punyakirti, Anaymaya, Manojava, Tirthakara, Jatila.
- (84) Jiviteshvara, Jivitantakara, Nitya, Vasureta, Vasuprada, Sadgati, Satkriti, Siddhi, Sajjati, Kalakantaka.
- (85) Kaladhara, Mahakala, Bhuasatyapraryana, Lokalavanyakarta, Lokottarasukhalaya, Chandrasanjivana, Shasta, Lokaguda, Mahadhipa, Lokabandhu.
- (86) Lokanatha, Kritajna, Krittibhushana, Anapaya, Akshara, Kanta, Sarvasastrahadvara, Tejomaya, Dyutidhara, Lokagranti.
- (87) Anu, Shuchismita, Prasannatma, Durjjeya, Duratikrama, Jyotirmaya, Jagannatha, Nirakra, Jaleshvara, Tumbavina.
- (88) Mahakopa, Vishoka, Shokanashana, Trilokapa, Triloksha, Sarvasuddhi, Adhokshaja, Avyaktalakshana, Deva, Vyaktavyakta.
- (89) Vishampati, Varashila, Varaguna, Saramandhana, Maya, Brahma, Vishnu, Prajapala, Hamsa, Hamsagati.
- (90) Vaya, Vedha, Vidhata, Dhata, Srashta, Harta, Chaturmukha, Kailasashikharavasi, Sarvavasi, Sadagati.
- (91) Hiranyagarbha, Druhina, Bhutapa, Bhupati, Sadyogi, Yogavit, Yogi, Varada, Brahmanapriya, Devapriya.
- (92) Devanatha, Devajna, Devachintaka, Vishamaksha, Vishalaksha, Vrishada, Vrishavardhana, Nirmama, Nirahamkara, Nirmoha.
- (93) Nirupadrava, Darpha, Darpada, Dripta, Sarvabhutaparivartaka, Sahasrajit, Sahasrarchi, Prabhava, Snigddhaprakriti, Sahasrarchi, Prabhava, Snigddhaprakritidakshina, Bhutabhavyabhavannatha.
- (94) Bhutinashana, Artha, Anartha, Mahakosha, Parakaryaikapandita, Nishkantaka, Kritananda, Nirvyaja, Vyajamardana, Sattvavana.
- (95) Sattvika, Satyakirti, Snehakritagama, Akampita, Gunagrahi, Naikatma, Naikakarmakrit, Suprita, Sumukha, Suksha.
- (96) Sukara, Dakshinaila, Nandiskandhadhara, Dhurya, Prakata, Pritivardhana, Aparajita, Sarvasattva, Govinda, Adhrita.
- (97) Sattvavahana, Svadhrita, Siddha, Putamurti, Yashodhana, Varahabhringadhrika, Bhringi, Balavana, Ekanayaka, Shrutiprakasha.
- (98) Shrutimana, Ekabandhu, Anekakrit, Shrivatsalashivarambha, Shantabhadra, Sama, Yasha, Bhushaya, Bhushana, Bhuti.
- (99) Bhutakrit, Bhutabhavana, Akampa, Bhaktikaya, Kalaha, Nilalohita, Satyavrata, Mahatyagi, Nityashantiparayana, Pararthavritti.
- (100) Vivikshu, Visharada, Shubhada, Shubhakarta, Shubhanama, Shubha, Anarthita, Aguna, Sakshi, Akarta.

You will notice that a few of the names are repeated so that the total number of names do not quite add up to one thousand.

Shivarati Vrata

Shivaratri is the tithi (lunar day) on which Brahma and Vishnu had worshipped Shiva. A vrata is a special religious rite that is performed. A vrata observed on shivaratri (the night dedicated to Shiva) is particularly important. It brings undying punya. One stays up at night and prays to a linga. One also has to observe a fast. There used to be a hunter named Rurudruha. He was not at all righteous. In fact, he was quite evil and cruel. He killed many deer and he was also a robber and thief. Naturally, Rurudruha knew nothing about shivaratri vrata.

But it happened to be shivaratri when the hunter's parents, wife and children felt very hungry. They asked Rurudruha to go and get some meat so that they might eat. The hunter went to the forest to kill deer, but could not find any. It was already evening and no game was to be seen. Rurudruha found a water-hole and decided that he would keep a vigil there. Sooner or later, some animal was bound to turn up. He climbed up onto a bilva tree that was by the side of the water-hole. And in case he should feel thirsty, he kept a pot full of water next to him. There he waited.

Soon a doe turned up to drink water. The hunter picked up his bow and arrow. When he did so, the tree shook and a few bilva leaves fell on a linga that was right under the tree. Bilva leaves are sacred to Shiva. Some water spilled from the pot and also fell on the linga. Rurudruha did not of course know this.

But the doe saw the hunter. Don't kill me right now, said the doe. My children and husband are at home. Let me go and bid them farewell. When I return, you are welcome to kill me.

The hunter was in no mood to let the doe go. Does an animal return to be killed? But the doe took an oath and Rurudruha let her go.

After a short while, another doe turned up to drink water. The two does were sisters and both of them married to the same deer. As before, the tree shook and bilva leaves and some water fell on the linga.

The doe saw the hunter and said, Wait for sometime before you kill me. Let me say goodbye to my husband and children.

The hunter was reluctant to let the doe go. But the second doe also took an oath that she would return. So Rurudruha decided to wait.

After the doe had gone, the deer turned up to drink water. And when the hunter picked up his bow and arrow, bilva leaves and water again fell on the linga.

The deer said, Hunter, let me go now. I will come back and you can kill then. I wish to bid adieu to my two wives and children.

The deer also took an oath that he would return and Rurudruha let him go.

After some time had passed, the two does and the deer came to where Rurudruha was.

Each said, Kill me and spare the others. They need to stay alive to look after the children. The baby deer had also accompanied their parents. They said, Kill us. We don't wish to stay alive when our parents are gone. The hunter was so surprised at these developments that the tree shook again. Bilva leaves and water fell on the linga.

Shiva now took pity on Rurudruha and removed all evil thoughts from his mind. The hunter spared the deer. Shiva himself appeared before Rurudruha and said, From now on your name will be Guha. You will be so blessed that Rama will become your guest.

This story demonstrates that even if shivaratri vrata is performed unconsciously, great punya is obtained.

Vedanidhi

In the city of Avanti there used to be a righteous brahmana. He had two sons, Sunidhi and Vedanidhi. Vedanidhi was wicked.

The king of Avanti was so pleased with the brahmana that he gave him a golden bangle as a present. The brahmana took it home and gave it to his wife to store safely. There it was discovered by Vedanidhi. Vedanidhi stole the ornament and gave it to a dancing-girl.

It so happened that the king was watching a dance performed by the dancing-girl and he noticed the bangle on the girl's hand. He found out from the girl that the bangle had been given to her by Vedanidhi. He retrieved the bangle and called the brahmana. Do you remember the golden bangle that I had give you? said the king. Can you please return it to me? I need it.

The brahmana hurried home and asked his wife for the bangle. But it could not be found and they realized that it was Vedanidhi who had stolen it. Vedanidhi was banished from his parents' house.

He wandered around here and there and begged food so that he might eat. One day, he did not get any food at all. That day happened to be shivaratri. But Vedanidhi didn't know this. He saw several people going to Shiva's temple with all sorts of offerings, including food, in their hands. The evil brahmana thought that he might be able to steal and eat this food. He followed the devotees to the temple and waited till they should fall asleep.

When they did so, Vedanidhi crept up to the place where the offerings had been placed. This was right in front of the linga. It was very dark there and Vedanidhi could not see very well. A lamp was burning and the shadow of the lamp fell on the linga. Vedanidhi tore off a piece of cloth from his clothing and stuffed it into the lamp so that it might burn better. The flame rose and the shadow on the linga was removed.

But when Vedanidhi was about to steal the food, the devotees awoke. They gave

chase to the thief and shot at him with arrows. These arrow struck Vedanidhi and he died.

Yama's messengers arrived and wanted to take the evil brahmana to hell. But Shiva's companions also arrived and they would not permit Vedanidhi to be taken to hell. The brahmana had fasted on shivaratri day, he stay awake at night and he had removed the shadow from the linga. These were acts of the faithful, even if they had been performed unconsciously. Vedanidhi's sins were all forgiven.

Chandrashekhara

Parvati once asked Shiva, Lord, tell me, why do you wear a crescent moon on your forehead? What is the story behind this?

Shiva told her the story.

Earlier, Parvati had been born as Sati, the daughter of Daksha. As Sati, she had been married to Shiva. Since Daksha insulted her husband Shiva, Sati gave up her life.

When Sati died, Shiva no longer found pleasure in anything. He began to live in the forest and started to perform tapasya. Such was the power of the tapasya that any trees or mountains that were near the place where Shiva was meditating used to be burnt into ashes. As Shiva moved from place to place, the earth started to burn and wither away . The gods were greatly alarmed at these developments. They went to Brahma to seek advice as to how the earth might be saved.

Brahma, said, Let us take the moon god Chandra with us and make a present of him to Shiva. Chandra's visage is so pleasing that Shiva may feel happy and pacified.

The gods placed Chandra in a pot of amrita (a life-giving drink). They also had another pot that was full of poison. With these two pots they went to Shiva and offered him the pots.

Brahma said, The gods have brought you two pots. Please accept them.

Shiva first accepted the pot that contained the amrita. As soon as he did this, the crescent moon came out and got fixed to Shiva's forehead. Next Shiva accept the pot of poison and touched it with his middle finger. He touched his throat with the finger and the throat became blue. That is the reason why Shiva is known as Nilakantha, blue of throat. And because the moon is like a crown to Shiva. Shiva is called Chandrashekhara.

At the sight of the moon, Shiva was pacified.

The Ashes

Parvati said, I understand about the moon now. But why do you always smear ashes on your body? What is the reason for that?

Shiva told her the story.

There used to be a brahmana who was descended from the great sage Bhrigu. This brahmana began a very difficult tapasya. The tremendous heat of the summer made

no difference to him. Nor was he disturbed by the downpour of the monsoon. He was only interested in meditating. When he felt hungry, he used to ask the bears, the deer, the lions and the jackals to fetch him some fruits. The wild beasts had lost all fear of him, they served him instead. Later on, the brahmana gave up eating fruits also. He ate only green leaves. And because leaves are called parna, the brahmana came to be known as Parnada. He performed tapasya for many years.

One day, Parnada was cutting some grass and his scythe slipped and sliced off his middle finger. Parnada was amazed to find that no blood issued from the severed joint. Instead, a sap like that which issues from plants came out. Parnada's vanity knew no bounds. He realized that his was due to the fact that he had been living on green leaves for such long time. Parnada began to jump with delight.

Shiva decided that Parnada needed to be taught a lesson. He disguised himself as a brahmana and arrived before Parnada.

Why are you so happy? asked Shiva.

Can't you see? replied Parnada. My tapasya has been so successful that my blood has become like the sap of plants.

This sort of vanity destroys the fruits of all tapasya, said Shiva. What have you got to be so proud about? Your blood has only turned into the sap of plants. What happens when you burn plants? They become ashes. I myself have performed so much tapasya that my blood has become ashes.

Shiva sliced off his middle finger and ashes came out of it. Parnada was impressed. He realized that there was nothing that he could be proud about; here was a far greater hermit than he. He asked Shiva who he was and Shiva then displayed his true form to Parnada.

Ever since that day, there have always been ashes on Shiva's body.

Nandi

There was a sage named Shilada. He once saw that his ancestors were being tortured in hell. When he tried to find out why this was so, he was told that this was because Shilada did not yet have a son.

To obtain a son, Shilada began to pray to Shiva. He prayed for a thousand years. At the end of the tapasya, Shiva appeared and offered to grant Shilada a boon. Shilada wanted the boon that he might have a virtuous son.

A few days later, when Shilada was ploughing the land, he discovered a baby boy on the blade of the plough. The boy was as bright as the sun and the fire. Shilada was frightened and started to run away. But the boy called after him, Father, stop. Father, stop, A voice was then heard from the sky. This voice told Shilada that this was the son he had wanted. Since this son would make everyone happy, he was to be named Nandi.

Shilada brought nandi home to his hermitage. He taught his son the Vedas, the arts

of the medicine and fighting, dancing and singing and several other sacred texts. All this Nandi mastered within fifteen days.

When Nandi was seven years old, two powerful sages arrived in Shilada's hermitage. Their names were Mitra and Varuna. Shilada worshipped them and presented Nandi before them. The sages blessed Nandi with the words, 'Be learned, be faithful to your teacher.'

Shilada said, 'Sages, why didn't you bless my son with a long life?'

'We couldn't,' replied the sages. 'Your son is going to die when he is eight years old. That is written in his stars.'

Shilada was crestfallen to hear this, but Nandi consoled his father. He promised his father that he would do something so that this fate would have to be rewritten. He would pray to Shiva. And when he met Shiva, he would ask of him a boon.

Meeting Shiva, exclaimed Shilada. 'I had to meditate for a thousand years before I could get to meet Shiva. How do you expect to meet Shiva in the one year that is left to you?'

'Wait and see, father,' replied Nandi. 'Shiva is difficult to meet if you only perform tapasya or thirst for knowledge. The secret lies in faith and devotion. I will manage.'

There is a river named Bhuvana. Nandi entered this river and began underwater prayers to Shiva. His efforts pleased Shiva so much that Shiva appeared before him.

'What boon do you want?' asked Shiva.

'Please grant me the boon that I may be devoted to you,' replied Nandi. 'I don't want to be born, become old and die.'

Shiva granted Nandi the boon that he and his father would get to live in Shiva's residence in Shivaloka. Shiva's companions are known as 'ganas'. Shiva made Nandi ganapati, the chief of the ganas and retained him as a perpetual companion. Shiva also gave Nandi a wonderful garland to wear. As soon as he put this garland on, Nandi became resplendent with three eyes and ten hands.

Time

The smallest unit of time is nimesha. This is the amount of time it takes to blink. Fifteen nimeshas make one kashtha and thirty kashthas are one kala. Thirty kalas make one muhurta and thirty muhurtas are one day. Thirty days are one month. Each month is divided into two lunar fortnights, shukapaksha and krishnapaksha. Six months are called an ayana. There are thus two ayanas in a year. Three hundred and sixty human years are equivalent to one year for the gods.

The lengths of the four yugas (eras) are defined in terms of years of the gods, not in terms of human years. There are four eras and their names are kritayuga or satyayuga, tretayuga, dvaparayuga and kaliyuga. Satyayuga lasts for four thousand divine years, tretayuga for three thousand, dvaparayuga for two thousand and kaliyuga for one thousand. This adds up to ten thousand divine years. The sandhyas

and sandhyamshas are the intervening periods between the yugas and these add up to two thousand divine years. Thus, the four yugas taken together last for twelve thousand divine years.

In a kalpa (cycle), each of the four yugas occurs a thousand times. A kalpa has fourteen manvantaras (eras). In a manvantara, each of the four yugas thus occurs seventy one times. One kalpa corresponds to one day for Brahma. One thousand kalpas are one of Brahma's years and eight thousand of Brahma's years make one of Brahma's yugas. One thousand such yugas make up one savana and Brahma lives for three thousand savanas. This period is known as a trivrita.

During each of Vishnu's days, one Brahma is born and dies. And during each of Shiva's days, one Vishnu is born and dies.

Daksha Yajna

The sages aid, Romaharshana, you have not told us the story of the quarrel between Daksha and Shiva which led to Sati's death. You have only mentioned it in passing. Tell us the story now.

Romaharshana related the following story.

Daksha's daughter Sati was married to Shiva. One day, the gods, the demons and the sages went to visit Shiva and Sati in the Himalyas. Daksha accompanied the other gods on this visit. When the gods arrived, Shiva was seated and did not get up. He showed no special honour to Daksha because Daksha happened to be his father-in-law. Daksha interpreted this as a sign of disrespect. He felt insulted.

Subsequently, Daksha arranged for a yajna and sent invitations to all his other sons-in-law and their wives. He did not invite Shiva or Sati. But Sati heard about the sacrifice and resolved that she would attend it, invitation or no invitation. In a beautiful vimana, Sati travelled to her father's house.

Daksha was not at all pleased to see Sati. In fact, he ignored her completely and devoted all his attention to his other daughters. When Sati wished to know the reason for this, Daksha told her that this was because of her husband, who happened to be a worthless fellow and did not deserve any respect. Hearing this, Sati gave up her life.

The mountain Himalaya had prayed that Sati might be born as his daughter. Sati was born as his daughter Parvati and married Shiva again. This story you already know.

Several years later, Daksha resolved to hold an ashvamedha yajna (horse sacrifice) in the Himalayas. The gods and the sages were all invited to this sacrifices, although Shiva was not amongst the invites. The sage Dadhichi did not like this slight to Shiva and he boycotted the yajna in protest.

Parvati heard about this sacrifice and she began to incite Shiva to do something. Shiva created a being named Virabhadhra. Virabhadhra shone with energy and he had thousands of mouths and eyes. His hair glistened like lighting and his hands were full

of all sorts of weapons. When he spoke, it was like thunder. From his body, Virabhadra created a female demon named Bhadrakali.

What are our orders?, asked Virabhadra and Bhadrakali of Shiva.

Go and destroy Daksha's yajna, was the order.

To help them in their endeavour, Virabhadra created several other demons from parts of his body. All of them had a thousand arms and carried weapons. Virabhadra, Bhadrakali and these other demons headed for Daksha's sacrifice.

When they got there, they found that the sacrifice had already started and the sacred fire was burning. The sages were reciting hymns and the gods were watching. Musical instruments were being played. Virabhadra roared and the sound of the roar was so terrible that several of the gods began to run away. The earth shook with the sound of the roar. There were tidal waves in the ocean.

Daksha was frightened. But he summoned up courage and asked, Who are you and why have you come here?

We are Shiva's servants and we have come to take part in the sacrifice, replied Virabhadra.

Virabhadra and the other demons then proceeded to burn down the structure where the sacrifice was being held. They tied up the priests and threw all the offerings away. With their weapons, they attacked the gods. Whatever resistance the gods tried to put up was taken care of by Virabhadra's trident and Bhadrakali's spear. The goddess Sarasvati lost her nose and the god Agni lost his arms. The sage Bhaga had his eyes gouged out and the sage Pusha lost all his teeth. Virabhadra sliced off Daksha's head and gave it to Bhadrakali, who proceeded to kick it around as one kicks a football. Thousand and thousands of gods died and the sacrifice became a battlefield.

Vishu tried to fight it out and he and Virabhadra shot arrows at each other. But one of Virabhadra's arrows struck Vishnu on the chest and he fell down unconscious.

Spurred on by Brahma, the gods began to pray to Shiva. These prayers pacified Shiva and he asked Virabhadra and Bhadrakali to refrain from causing any further damage.

Brahma asked, What about the gods who have been killed? Please bring them back to life,

Since Shiva's anger had been appeased, he restored life to the dead gods. Those who had lost parts of their anatomy got them back again. But what was to be done about Daksha? His head could not be found. A goat's head was therefore stuck onto Daksha's body. Thus restored to life. Daksha begged forgiveness of Shiva.

Parvati Becomes Gouri

There were two asuras named Shumbha and Nishumbha. They meditated a lot and pleased Brahma. Brahma thereupon gave them the boon that they could not be killed

by males. Having obtained the boon, the two demons started to oppress the world. They drove the gods out of heaven and the gods went to Brahma so that a solution might be found to the problem.

Brahma went to Shiva. You have to help the Gods, he told Shiva. I have given Shumbha and Nishumbha the boon that they cannot be killed by males. Find a way so that a female is born out of Parvati's body. She will kill Shumbha and Nishumbha.

I will try, replied Shiva.

When Shiva next met Parvati, he addressed her as Kali. This angered Parvati, since kali means black or dark.

Why did you marry me if you thought I was so dark? she asked Shiva. Why do you pretended to love me? Cursed is the woman who is not loved by her husband. I am going to perform tapasya so that I may become fair. I am going to pray to Brahma.

Parvati went off to meditate. She meditated for many years.

There was a tiger which saw Parvati meditating. It was not a good tiger at all, but an evil one. It thought that Parvati would provide a good meal. It sat down in the front of Parvati to appreciate for a while the treat that was in store for it. Parvati did not realize that the tiger was planning to eat her. She thought that it had sat down in front of her because it wanted to protect her from other wild beasts. She thought that the tiger was one of her devotees and she therefore entered the tiger's soul. As soon as she did this, all thoughts vanished from the tiger's mind. Now it was indeed one of her devotees.

Meanwhile, Brahma arrived to find out who Parvati was meditating. Parvati said that she wanted to become Gouri, that is, someone who was fair. She was sick and tired of being addressed as kali. Brahma granted the boon.

Parvati shed off all the dark cells (kosha) from her body became Gouri. From the cells emerged a dark-hued goddess named Koushiki. Parvati handed over Koushiki to Brahma. Endowed with weapons by Brahma, Koushiki killed Shumbha and Nishumbha.

Parvati returned to her husband as Gouri.

What happened to the tiger? Shiva turned him into a man and he was employed by Nandi as one of Shiva's guards. He was named Somanandi.

Upamanyu

The sage Vyaghrapada had a son named Upamanyu. When he was small, he wanted some milk from his mother. But he was not at all happy with the milk that his mother gave him. He complained that it did not taste like milk at all.

Naturally, said his mother. I did not give you milk. How can we afford milk? We are not rich. I powdered some rice and mixed it with water. That is what I gave to you as milk. Unfortunately, you have tasted milk in your uncle's house and you could make out the difference.

Upamanyu's mother began to cry. But Upamanyu consoled his mother. Don't cry, please, he said. I will pray to Shiva and get milk for myself.

His mother taught him the mantra that was to be used for praying to Shiva. She also taught him another mantra which would summon up a terrible divine weapon named aghorastra. This was just in case there was any danger.

Upamanyu went to the Himalayas and started to meditate. He lived only on air and chanted the incantation that his mother had taught him. He prayed in front of an earthen linga. Demons came to disturb his meditation, but Upamanyu paid no attention to them. Shiva himself was impressed by Upamanyu's difficult tapasya. But he thought that he would test Upamanyu first.

He arrived in front of Upamanyu in the disguise of Indra and asked, Upamanyu, what are you doing?

I am blessed that the king of the gods has arrived before me, replied Upamanu. I am praying to Shiva.

Shiva! Why pray to that useless fellow? asked Shiva.

Upamanu could not stand this insult to Shiva. He summoned up aghorastra by means of the mantra and let it loose at the person he thought was Indra. Shiva then manifested himself in his own form and aghorastra was repelled by Nadi, who had also turned up. Shiva himself taught Upamanu all sorts of sacred knowledge, and arrangements were made so that Upamanyu need never suffer from a lack of milk.

Krishna once came to meet the sage Upamanyu, many years after the milk incident. Upamanyu taught Krishna the words of wisdom that he learned from Shiva; he also taught Krishna to pray to Shiva. It was by praying to Shiva that Krishna obtained his son Samba. For sixteen months Krishna had to pray before Shiva appeared, to grant the boon regarding the son. Parvati also granted Krishna several boons.

Andhakasura

Shiva was once sitting on Mount Mandara. Paravati came up from behind, so that Shiva could not see her, and covered Shiva's eyes with her two hands. Shiva could not see and everything seemed to be dark to him. Parvati's hands sweated from the exertion and the sweat fell down on the ground. From this sweat, a dark and fierce creature was born and started to roar.

Parvati, said Shiva, What are you up to? First, you cover up my eyes so that I can't see. Next, you roar so as to frighten me.

Not I, replied Parvati. See for yourself. I wonder where this creature has come from.

She removed her hands and Shiva saw the being in front of them. It is our son, said Shiva. It was born from your sweat when you covered my eyes. Since it was born when my eyes were in darkness, let it be called Andhaka.

Andhaka was born blind, as Shiva was effectively blind when Andhaka was born.

There was an asura named Hiranyanetra. (In other Puranas, this same asura is referred to as Hiranyaksha.) Hiranyanetra had no sons. He therefore began to pray to Shiva so that he might have a son. Shiva told Hiranyanetra that it was impossible for him to have a son. However, if he so desired, he could have their son Andhaka and bring him up as his own son.

Hiranyanetra gladly agreed to this.

Digresssions on Hiranyanetra and Hiranyakashipu

Hiranyanetra was very strong and powerful. He conquered the three worlds and drove the gods out of heaven. He even took the earth down to the underworld. In desperation, the gods prayed to Vishnu for deliverance.

Vishnu adopted the form of a boar (varaha) and went down to the underworld in search of Hiranyanetra. When he found the asura, he killed him with his sudarshana chakra. He also killed several other asuras with his boar's tusks. Then, he lifted up the earth with his tusks and replaced it where it should be. So far as Hiranyanetra's kingdom was concerned, Vishnu crowned Andhaka king there.

Hiranyanetra had a brother named Hiranyakashipu. This brother prayed to Brahma and obtained a boon that made him virtually impossible to kill. Armed with this boon, Hiranyakashipu conquered the three worlds and drove the gods out of heaven. The gods again started to pray to Vishnu for deliverance.

Vishnu adopted the form of a lion and entered Hiranyakashipu's captial. The lion had a huge mane and sharp teeth and claws. The lion killed several asuras and this news was brought to Hiranyakashipu. He decided to kill the lion.

Hiranyakashipu had several sons, one of whom was named Prahlada. Prahalada alone thought that there was something fishy about the lion and about the way it had suddenly appeared. He thought that the lion might very well be Vishnu in disguise. Prahlada therefore tried to dissuade his father from fighting the lion. He first asked some of his soldiers to capture the lion, but they were all killed. Hiranyakashipu then himself attacked the lion with all sorts of weapons. But all the weapons wre exhausted and the demon could do the lion no harm.

Finally, the lion grasped Hiranyakashipu and tore the asura's heart out with its claws. This was the narasimha (half-man, half-lion) incarnation of Vishu. Having killed Hiranyakashipu, Vishnu crowned Prabhlada king.

Andhaka Again

Andhaka had been crowned king in Hiranyanetra's kingdom. Prahlada and Andhaka's other cousins went to him and said, You are blind. What are you going to do with a kingdom? Give it to us. Our uncle made a mistake in accepting a blind son

from Shiva.

Andhaka was very hurt at these nasty words. He went away to the forest and started to perform tapasya. He prayed to Brahma. For millions of years he stood on one leg, with his arms raised high, and prayed. No one since that day has been able to duplicate Andhaka's wonderful feat of meditation. He did not eat or drink at all. He chopped off parts of his body and offered it to the sacrificial fire. It came to such a pass that there was no more meat or blood left in his body. It had all been offered to the fire. He was just a skeleton. It was then that Brahma appeared before him and offered a boon.

Prahlada and my other cousins have taken over my kingdom, said Andhaka. Please grant me the boon that I may be able to see. Please also grant me the boon that I may not be killed by gods, demons, or humans, or even by the great Vishnu himself.

Brahma was in a fix. Earlier, many demons had asked for similar boons, but they had generally not mentioned Vishnu. So that, when the need arose, Vishnu had been able to kill them. But here was an asura who asking for the boon that even Vishnu would not be able to kill him. This would make him virtually immortal.

Everything that you have asked for is possible, replied Brahma. But all beings have to die. Indicate the circumstances under which you will die and the boons will be granted.

Since I have to die, said Andhaka, Let it be under the following conditions. If I ever wish to marry a beautiful woman who is like a mother unto me, let that be the hour appointed for my death.

This condition was better than nothing at all and Brahma granted Andhaka the boons. Andhaka returned to his kingdom. When Prahala and the other cousins learnt that Andhaka had become so powerful because of the boons, they not only returned to him his kingdom, but theirs as well. Remember that Andhaka could now see.

The first thing that Andhaka did was to invade heaven. He defeated Indra and the other gods and made them pay taxes to the demons. Next he defeated the snakes (nagas), the gandharvas, the rakshasas, the yakshas (companions of Kubera) and the humans. Thus he began to rule over all the three worlds. For millions of years Andhaka ruled in this fashion. The religion of the Vedas suffered during this period, since Andhaka paid no attention to it.

Once Andhaka went to a visit to the Mount Mandara. The place was so beautiful that he made up his mind to live there. Three of Andhaka's generals were named Duryodhana, Vighasa and Hasti.

These three were exploring the environment of Mount Mandara when they came upon a cave. An ascetic was meditating inside the cave. He was dressed in the skin of a tiger, wore a garland of skulls, his hair was matted and he wore a crescent moon on his forehead. There was a beautiful woman near the ascetic. She was more beautiful than any other woman in the three worlds. The three generals concluded that this was the right wife for Andhaka.

When the generals came back to Andhaka and reported on what they had seen, the asura king said, What are you waiting for? Go to the ascetic and ask him for the woman.

Duryodhana, Vighasa and Hasti went back to the ascetic. You are only an ascetic, they said. You don't deserve such a pretty wife. Our master is the lord of everything and he is immensely rich. He is also handsome because of a boon received from Brahma. Give us this woman so that our master Andhaka may marry her.

Ask your master to come and take the woman himself, replied Shiva, for the ascetic, as you have already guessed, was none other than Shiva. And the beautiful woman was Parvati.

As soon as he heard this, Andhaka grasped his sword and came to fight with Shiva. The door to the cave was guarded by Nandi, and Andhaka first had to fight with him. Nandi easily defeated the asura and also defeated the asura soldiers who had accompanied their king. But Andhaka returned and again a fight raged with Nandi for five hundred years. Brahma, Vishnu, Indra and the other gods also came to help in the fight with the demons.

The general Vighasa was a very strong warrior. He opened his mouth wide and swallowed up all the gods, including Vishnu. So far, Shiva himself had not played any part in the fighting. But hearing what Vighasa had done, he ascended his bull and came out to fight. He killed Vighasa and rescued the gods from the asura's stomach. The asuras had a preceptor named Shukracharya who knew the art of bringing back dead beings to life. So Shukracharya moved around the battlefield, bringing back to life any demons that were killed. This was not helping the cause of the gods at all. Shiva's companions (gargas) captured Shukracharya and brought him to Shiva. Shiva promptly swallowed up Shukracharya.

Soon all the demons were taken care of, with the exception of Andhaka. He continued to fight. Vishnu's mace could do him no harm and he only laughed at Indra's arrows. Some of the arrows did pierce the asura's body. But whenever drops of blood from his body onto the ground, asuras who were exactly like him in appearance were created from this blood. As a result, the battlefield was soon populated with thousands and thousands of Andhakas.

Shiva created a goddess known as Devi from his own body. Devi was appointed the task of drinking up the blood of the asuras before it could spill onto the ground. Thus aided by Devi, Shiva started to tackle the demons and soon there was only the original Andhaka left. Shiva flung a trident at him. The trident struck Andhaka on the chest and the asura king fell down dead.

When the war was over, Shukracharya prayed to Shiva and was released from Shiva's stomach.

Ruru

There was another demon who wanted to marry Parvati as well. His name was Ruru. He happened to see Parvati and decided that this was the woman who would be his wife. He began to perform tapasya so that his desire might be satisfied.

Brahma appeared before him and asked, Ruru, why are you performing such difficult tapasya? Can I offer you a boon?

That is a boon that not even I can grant you, said Brahma.

Brahma departed and Ruru continued with his meditation. This meditation was going on in a mountain named Malaya. And such was the power of Ruru's meditation that the mountain started to burn. The fires were so strong that even Shiva and Parvati had to run away from the mountain.

Lord, why are we running away? asked Parvati. Why don't you do something about the fire?

I can't, answered Shiva. This fire is on account of Ruru's tapasya and he is performing this tapasya so as to marry you. It is up to you to do something about Ruru.

Parvati decided that she would. While they were conversing, they saw a lion fighting with an elephant. Parvati slew the lion and skinned it. She wore the lion's pelt as clothing. Her hair became smeared with the lion's blood. Her appearance became terrible.

With a thunderous roar, Parvati went to where Ruru was. Ruru, she said. I have come. I am Parvati. I am the one you have been praying for. Now stop meditating.

Rubbish, replied the demon. Parvati is beautiful. Her face is like the moon, her hue is golden, and her arms are like lotus stems. Just look at yourself. Your looks are terrible. You can't be Parvati. You are lying. Go away, I don't want you.

Saying this, Ruru struck Parvati with a mace. Parvati was angry at this and she hit Ruru with her fists. The two fought, with Ruru flinging boulders and trees at the goddess. Parvati used her nails and her teeth to get at the demon. Ruru created several other asuras from his body. In retaliation, Parvati created many goddesses known as shaktis from her body. The shaktis began to eat up the demons.

Ruru fled. But Parvati pursued him to the ends of the earth. He fled to heaven. Parvati followed him there. He fled to the underworld, but Parvati pursued him there as well. Finally, Ruru could flee no more. Parvati caught hold of him and tore off his head with her nails. She then drank the demon's blood. Parvati also skinned the demon.

Thus it was that Ruru was killed. On her return to Shiva, Parvati gave him the lion's pelt that she had so far been wearing and Shiva donned it. For her own clothing, Parvati put on Ruru's skin.

A False Parvati

Shiva had once gone on a visit to a city named Shonitapura. He was accompanied by many gandharvas and apsaras. Parvati was left behind in Kailasa and Shiva felt lonely without her.

He called Nandi and said, Go to Kailasa and ask Parvati to come here.

Nandi went to kailasa and told Parvati that Shiva wanted her. Parvati said that this would take a little time, since she wanted to get ready first. Nadi went back and reported to Shiva what Parvati had said. Shiva waited for a little while, but Parvati did not come. He therefore sent Nandi again to Kailasa with the injunction that he should not come back without Parvati.

The apasaras meanwhile decided that they would play a trick on Shiva. One of them would disguise herself and pretend to be Parvati. An apsara named Chitrlekha agreed to do this. Another apsara named Urvashi diguised herself as Nandi. Other apsara disguised themselves as companions of Parvati. So good were their disguises that it was impossible to detect them as being false.

The false Nandi then brought the false Parvati to Shiva and said, Parvati has come. Her companions, the other goddesses, have also come.

Shiva was delighted. He was not able to detect that this was a false Parvati. While they were having great fun, the real Parvati, the real Nandi and the real goddesses turned up and there was utter confusion. No one could tell the real ones from the false ones. Finally the mess was sorted out when the apsaras adopted their real forms.

Neither Shiva nor Parvati were angry at this practical joke.

Another False Parvati

This is an incident from the time when Parvati went away to do tapasya so as to become fair. Before going away to meditate, she called Nandi to her and said, My husband does not know the difference between real Parvatis and false ones. Keep careful guard at the gate and do not let any false Parvatis enter.

There was an asura named Adi. He performed tapasya and wanted a boon from Brahma which would make him immortal. Brahma refused to grant him this, but granted him the boon that Adi would be very strong. Happy with this boon, Adi wandered around the Himalayas and discovered Nadi standing guard at the gate to Shiva's palace.

What are you doing here? the asura asked Nandi.

Nandi reported the conversation that had taken place with Parvati.

The demon went away. But he soon returned, this time disguised as Parvati. Lest Nandi not let him pass, he slided through the gate disguised as a snake. And once inside the palace, he resumed his form of Parvati. He then went to meet Shiva. Shiva did not realize that this was a false Parvati and he came forward to embrace Adi. But no sooner had Shiva embraced him, than the asura adopted his own form and tried to kill Shiva. The two fought and Shiva killed Adi. But before dying, the asura played

another trick.

He told Shiva, I have a brother who is stronger than me. He will return here in the form of Parvati and will kill you. This was a blatant lie. Adi had no brother.

The real Parvati returned after finishing her tapasya. But Shiva thought that this was demon disguised as Parvati. He created many beings from his body so as to kill Parvati. But Parvati also created many beings from her own body and these swallowed up Shiva's beings. When this had gone on thousands of times. Shiva realized that this must be the real Paravati.

Shiva and Parvati were united.

There were not more false Parvatis.

Yama's Story

The sage Sanathkumara was Brahma's son, Sanathumara had gone to visit Yama, the god of death. While they were conversing, a shining vimana brought a man to Yama who immediately stood up to honour the guest.

Yama worshipped him and said, I am honoured. I hope you had no problems on the way. The vimana will take you to Brahma's residence in Brahmaloaka.

After this guest had left, another shining vimana brought another guest who was also worshipped in similar fashion by Yama.

Sanatkumara was mystified at this. He asked Yama, Who are these two people? I have never heard of Yama worshipping anyone in such glowing terms. These two must be holy men indeed. They must have accumulated a lot of punya. Who are they? Tell me their stories.

Yama obliged.

There was a city named Vaidisha. The king who ruled there was named Dharapal. Nandi was cursed by Parvati that he would have to spend twelve years on earth as a jackal. His crime was that, when Parvati had gone to perform tapasya, Nandi had permitted a false Parvati to enter Shiva's palace. Nandi was born as a jackal. The jackal went to the confluence of the rivers Vitasta and Vetravati. There it set up a linga and prayed before it, going without food and water. After the twelve years passed, the jackal died and adopted a shining form. In this form, Nandi returned to Shivaloaka.

King Dharapala had seen the jackal fasting and praying. He also witnessed its strange death. The king's wonder knew no bounds. He erected a temple in that wonderful place. He brought several brahmanas to the temple and made them recite the Puranas there. When Dharapala died, it was decided that he would go to Brahmaloaka because of all this punya. This was the first guest who had come before Yama. Such are the wonderful virtues of worshipping Shiva and the Puranas.

What about the second guest? asked Sanatkumara.

The second quest used to be evil. He had never donated anything in his life. But he

once heard the Paranas being recited and was completely converted. He arranged many recitals of the Puranas on his own and donated gold to the reciters.

This punya was going to take him to Brahmaloaka. Such are the wonderful virtues of hearing and reading the Puranas. Doing this is tantamount to worshipping Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Shatanika and Shasranika

In the region named Jambudvipa, there used to rule a king named Shatanika. He was the best among warriors. But he was also very religious. He donated alms and treated his guests well. Every day, the brahmanas received gold and clothes from Shatanika. When Shatanika died, his son Sahasranika became king.

Sahasranika also ruled well and righteously. But he did not donate as much of alms to the brahmanas as his father used to. They took their complaint to the king and said, You do not give as much of alms to us as your father used to. Many brahmanas have already left your kingdom. So will the others, unless you increase the alms you give us.

I have indeed heard that the donation of alms to brahmanas brings punya, replied Sahasranika. I have also heard that all this punya takes one to heaven after death, until the time one has to be born again. Since my father accumulated all this punya by donating alms to brahmanas, he must be in heaven. You are all learned brahmanas. Why don't you tell me where my father is right now?

The brahmanas could not reply. They had no idea where Shatanika was. But later on, they met a learned sage named Bhargava. Bhargava was so powerful that the brahmanas were sure that he would be able to tell where Shatinika was. They begged Bhargava to help them. Bhargava was not very interested in helping the brahmanas. He was busy meditating and had no desire to waste his time on idle pursuits like finding out where dead people now were. But the brahmanas kept begging him and Bhargava eventually agreed.

The sun god himself led the way and, following the sun god, Bhargava went all the way to Yama's abode. It was a long distance away.

The sun god led Bhargava straight to where the twenty-eight crores of narakas (hells) were. The wailings of sinners who were being tortured could be heard. Before they could go any further, their way was barred by a brahmana.

Bhargava, said the brahmana, You owe me a coin for services rendered. You have not paid this and I am dead. Pay me the coin and only then can you proceed further. I am not carrying any coins on me, replied Bhargava. When I return home, I will collect a coin and bring it back to you. Now let me move forward.

Nonsense, said the brahmana. This is hell. Here payments are strictly on a cash basis. There is no question of paying up later. Pay or you shall not proceed. If you do not have any coins, why then, pay me one-sixth of all the punya that you have

earned through your mediations.

Bhargava paid what was asked for and edged forward. He was successively stopped by a cowherd, a washerman, a tailor, a priest and a builder. To each of them Bhargava owed some money and they would not let him go until the debts were cleared. In each case, Bhargava parted with one-sixth of his punya so that he was left with none at all.

When these accounts were settled, the sun god led Bhargava to the hell where Shatanika was. Bhargava was bewildered to find such a righteous king as Shatanika in a hell. The king was hung upside down in a pot and was being boiled in oil.

Bhargava asked Shatanika, What is all this? Why are you in hell? You had accumulated a lot of punya through your righteous deeds.

Not really, replied the king. I did donate a lot of alms, especially to brahmanas. But all the money for the alms came from taxing my subjects severely. So it brought no punya at all. Go and tell my son that punya is best acquired by associating with righteous people. And most important of all, tell him to pray to Shiva in the month of Chaitra and on chaturdashi tithi (fourteenth day of the lunar fortnight).

When Bhargava returned, he related what he had been told to Sahasranika. Sahasranika did not stop donating alms. But the money for such alms no longer came out of the royal treasury. The king worked as a labourer and used this money for the donation of alms. He also observed the vrata that his father had asked him to observe in honour of Shiva.

Parashurama

There was a king named Gadhi. His daughter was name Satyavati. Satyavati was married to the sage Richika.

Richika arranged for a spectacular sacrifice. Some rice pudding was obtained from the yajna and Richika gave it to his wife Satyavati. He said, Split this rice pudding into two halves. Eat half yourself and give the remaining half to your mother. Here, let me divide it. This is your half and that is your mother's. We are brahmanas. So we will have a son who will display the traits of a brahmana. Your father is a kshatriya and your mother will have a son who will behave like a kshatriya.

Saying this, Richika went off to meditate in the forest. But mother and daughter managed to mix up their halves. In the course of his meditations, Richika realized that Satyavati was going to give birth to a brahmana son who would display kshatriya traits. Through his powers, he managed to postpone this birth by a generation. So Satyavati gave birth to Jamadagni. It was Jamadagni's son Parashurama who exhibited all the kshatriya like characteristics.

Gadhi's son was Vishvamitra. Vishvamitra was born a kshatriya. But because of the mixing up of the rice pudding, Vishvamitra turned out to be brahmana-like.

There was a king of the Haihaya dynasty named Arjuna. He had a thousand arms.

He had also obtained the boon that flaming fire itself would be perpetually present on the tip of his arrow. Whenever he shot an arrow, the fire from the tip of the arrow burnt up the target. In this fashion, Arjuna used to burn up villages, cities and forests. He once burnt up the hermitages of sages. And one of the sages cursed Arjuna that he would be killed by Parashurama.

Parashurama learnt the art of fighting from Shiva himself. While Parashurama was away learning how to fight, Arjuna arrived in Jamadagni's hermitage. Jamadagni had a wonderful cow (dhenu), known as a kamadhenu because it produced whatever objects one asked (Kama) from it. Using this kamadhenu, Jamadagni treated Arjuna and his entire retinue to a royal feast.

Arjuna asked Jamadagni to give him this cow, but the sage refused. Arjuna then asked his soldiers to forcibly take away the cow. But just as this was going on, Parashurama arrived. He killed Arjuna, slicing off Arjuna's thousand arms in the process.

Having disposed of Arjuna, Parashurama went off to meditate and pay another visit to Shiva.

Taking advantage of Parashurama's absence, Arjuna's sons invaded Jamadagni's hermitage. They killed Jamadagni. When Parashurama returned, he exacted vengeance for this evil deed. He killed Arjuna's sons. Since Arjuna and his sons happened to be kshatriyas, Parashurama also killed all the kshatriyas in the world. He did this not once, but twenty-one times over. Why twenty-one times? The reason was that there were twenty-one weapon-marks on the dead Jamadagni's body.

But killing was a crime and Parashurama had committed a sin. As penance, Parashurama donated cows and performed a lot of tapasya. He also arranged an ashvamedha yajna. All this did not prove to be atonement enough. To complete the penance, Parashurama sought the advice of the sage Kashyapa.

Kashyapa told him to perform the donation that is known as tulapurusha. A tula (or tuladanda) is a pair of scales. The person (purusha) who is performing the donation is placed on one side of the weighing scale. On the other side are placed objects like honey, clarified butter, molasses, clothing and gold. The weight of the objects being donated has to be equal to the weight of the person performing the donation. This is known as tulapurusha. Parashurama performed tulapurusha and was freed from his sin.

Hells

There are several hells. Each hell is earmarked for a specific type of sinner.

A killer of brahmanas, a false witness, a liar and a drinker of wine is sent to the hell named rourava. Shukara is for thieves and killers of cattle. Killers of kshatriyas and vaishyas are also sent there. Those who commit infanticide are sent to taptalouha. A person who insults his teacher or criticizes the Vedas goes to taptakhala. Those who

insult gods, brahmanas or kings are sent to krimibhaksha. Lalabhaksha is reserved for those who eat without offering food to the gods. A brahmana who eats what he should not goes to vishasana.

Sellers of wine are to be found in rudhirandha and killers of bees in vaitarani. Cheats are sent to krishna and destroyers of trees to asipatravana. A hunter of deer goes to vahnijvala, Agnimaya is for arsonists and sandamsha for those who fail to complete a vrata. If you accept your son as a teacher, you are sure to go to shvabhojana.

The punishment is strictly in proportion to the crime committed. But penance diminishes the severity of the sin. The best form of penance is prayer to Shiva. Even if one merely remembers Shiva, that is enough.

Geography

The earth is divided into seven regions (dvipas), The names of these regions are Jambudvipa, Plakshadvipa, Shalmalidvipa, Kushadvipa, Krounchadvipa, Pushkaradvipa and Shakadvipa. These seven regions are surrounded by seven seas. The names of the seas are Lavana, Ikshu, Sarpi, Dadhi, Dugdha, Jala, and Rasa.

Mount Sumeru is right in the middle of Jambudvipa. To the north of Sumeru are the mountains Nila and Shvetabhangi and to the south of Sumeru are the mountains Himavana. Hemakuta and Nishada. These mountains are full of all sorts of jewels.

Jambudvipa is divided into many parts (varshas). Right in the centre, where Mount Sumeru is located, is Ilavritavarsha. To the south of Sumeru are Bharatavarsha, Kimpurushavarsha and Harivarsha. To the north of Sumeru is Ramyakavarasha. Next to this is Hiranmayavarsha and further north is Uttarakuruvarsha.

The four major mountains in Ilavritavarsha are Mandara, Gandhamadana, Vipula and Suparshva. They are respectively to the east, south, west, and north of Sumeru. Bhadrashvarsha is to the east of Sumeru and Ketumalavarsha is to the west. On the top of Mount Sumeru is Brahma's famous city. The holy river Ganga flows through the sky and divides into four. The names of these tributaries are Sita, Alakanada, Chakshu and Bhadra. Sita flows to the east of Sumeru, Nanda or Alakananda to the south. Chakshu to the west and Bhadra to the north.

Bharatavarsha is bounded by mountain ranges on the north and the sea on the south. Bharatavarsha is divided into nine parts. The names of eight of these parts are Indradyumna, Kaseru, Tamraparna, Soumy, Gabhastimana, Nagadvipa, Gandharva and Varuna. The ninth part is an island surrounded by the ocean. On the eastern side of Bharatavarsha live the kiratas, on the western the yavanas, on the southern the andhras and on the northern the turaskas.

The seven major mountains in Bharatavarsha are named Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Shuktimana, Riksha, Vindhya and Pariyatra. From each of these mountains several rivers flow.

Bharatavarsha is a sacred place. Only those who have accumulated punya over a

thousand human lives get to be born in Bharatavarsha. Shiva is always present here to offer salvation to the residents.

Astronomy

How far do the boundaries of bhuloka (earth) extend? These boundaries extend to the furthest points that can be lit up by the rays of the sun and the moon. Above the region of the sun is that of the moon. This is successively followed by the regions of Budha (Mercury), Shukra (Venus), Mangala (Mars), Brihaspati (Jupiter), Shani (Saturn) and the nakshatras (stars). Next comes saptarshiloka, the circle of the seven great sages (the constellation Ursa majoris), These regions beyond the earth are known as bhuvraloka. Beyond it is svarloka or svarga (heaven). Bhuloka, bhuvraloka and svarloka are destroyed in the destruction that comes at the end of a kalpa.

Regions which are further beyond are not destroyed at the end of a kalpa. The first of these regions is dhruvaloka, the circle of the Pole Star. Next come maharloka, janaloka, tapaloka and satyaloka. Including the earth, there are thus seven regions (lokas) that have been mentioned.

Under the earth is the underworld (patala). This is also divided into seven regions. Their names are patala, sutala, vitala, nitala, mahatala, agryasutala and rasatala.

Manvantaras

Each manvantara is ruled over by a Manu and there are fourteen manvantaras in any kalpa. The gods (devas), the seven great sages (saptarshis), and the Indra, change from one manvantara to another.

The first Manu was Svayambhuva. The names of the gods then were yama and the names of the seven sages were Marichi, Atri, Angira, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and Vashishtha.

The second Manu was Svarochisha. The names of the gods then were tushita and the names of the seven sages were Agnidhra, Agnivaha, Medha, Medhatithi, Vasu, Jyotishvana and Dyutimana.

The third Manu was Uttama. The names of the gods then were rishabha and the names of the seven sages were the urjjas. (The individual names of the sages are not given).

The fourth Manu was Tamasa. The names of the gods then were satya and the names of the seven sages were Gargya, Prithu, Agni, Janya, Dhata, Kapinka and Kapivana.

The fifth manu was Raivata. The names of the gods then were raibhya and the names of the seven sages were Vedavahu, Jaya, Muni, Vedashira, Hiranyaroma, Parjanya and Urddhavahu.

The sixth Manu was Chakshusha. There were five types of gods in the sixth manvantara and their names were adya, prasuta, ribhu, prithugra and lekha. The names of the seven sages were Bhrigu, Naha, Vivasvana, Sudharma, Viraja, Atinama, and Asashishnu.

The seventh manvantara is the manvanatara that is now going on. The seventh Manu is Vaivasvata. The names of the seven sages are Atri, Vashishtha, Bhavya, Kashyapa, Goutama, Bharadvaja and Vishvamitra.

The remaining seven manvantaras will come in the future.

The eight Manu will be Savarni. The Shiva Purana gets extremely confused here and it is not possible to make out clearly who the gods will be in the future manvantaras. But the names of the seven sages of the eighth manvantara are Viravana, Avanivana, Sumantra, Dhritimana, Vasu, Varishnu and Arya.

The nine Manu will be Rohita. The names of the seven sages will be Medhatithi, Vasu, Bhargava, Angira, Savana, Havya and Poulaha.

The tenth Manu will be Merusavarni. The names of the gods then will be dvishimanta and the names of the seven sages will be Havishmana. Pulaha, Sukriti, Ayomukti, Vashishtha, Prayati and Nabhara.

The eleventh Manu will be Brahmasavarni. The names of the seven sages will be Havishmana, Kashyapa, Vapushmana, Varuna, Atreya, Anagha and Angira.

The twelfth Manu will be Dharmasvarni. The names of the sages will be Dyuti, Atreya, Angira, Tapasvai, Kashyapa, Taposhana and Taporati.

The thirteenth Manu will be Rouchya. The names of the seven sages will be Kashyapa, Magadha, Ativahya, Angirasa, Atreya, Vashishtha and Ajita.

The fourteenth and last Manu will be Bhoutya. The names of the seven sages are not mentioned.

What about the gods of the seventh manvantara, the era that is now current? The gods now are forty-nine vayus, eleven rudras, two ashvinis, twelve adityas and eight vasus.

Vaivasvata Manu

The sages wished to know from Romaharshana the details of Vaivasvata Manu's birth.

The sage Kashyapa's son was Vivasvana or the sun. The sun was married to Tvashta's (same as Vishvakarma) daughter Samjna. Vivasvana and Samjana had three children, Vaivasvata, Yama and Yamuna.

Samjna could not however stand the strong energy of her husband, the sun. From her own body she created Chhaya, a woman who looked just like her. Samjna and Chhaya could not be distinguished from each other.

Samjna told Chhaya, Stay here and pretend to be Samjna. Look after my three children, Vaivasvata, Yama and Yamuna. I am going off to my father's house. Don't tell anyone that you are not Samjna.

I will do your bidding, replied Chhaya, But the moment someone grasps me by the hair, I will divulge the truth.

Samjna went to Tvashta's house. When she had spent quite some time there, her father got suspicious and wanted to know why she was not returning to her husband. Samjna therefore adopted the form of a mare and began to live in the kingdom that is known as Uttarakuru.

Meanwhile, the sun and Chhaya had a son named Savarni. It was clear that Chhaya doted on Savarni. In comparison, Yama felt neglected. Yama was still very young and in a fit of rage, he kicked Chhaya. Chhaya cursed Yama. Yama was very surprised at this, since no mother curses her own son. He went and reported it to the sun. The sun deduced that Chhaya could not be Yama's mother. He grasped Chhaya by the hair and the truth came out.

The sun then went to Tvashta in search of Samjna. It was discovered that Samjna had done all this because she could not bear the energy of her husband. Tvashta chiselled off some of the sun's energy so that his radiance become muted.

Learning that Samjna had adopted the form of a mare, the sun adopted the form of a horse. He went and met his wife. As horse and mare, they had two children. These were the twin gods known as the Ashvini. They were also called Nasatya and Dasra.

Vaivasvata Manu performed a yajna so as to have a son. From the sacrifice, a daughter Ila was born. Chandra's son Budha married Ila and they had a son named Pururava. This was the origin of the lunar dynasty which started with Pururva.

Later on, Vaivasvata Manu had nine sons. Their names were Ikshvaku, Shivi, Nabhaga, Dhrishnu, Sharyati, Narishyanta, Isha, Karusha and Priyavrata. These sons were the originators of the solar dynasty.

Epilogue

The assembled sages were gratified at Romaharshana having recited for them the Shiva Purana. They worshipped Romaharshana. But, warned Romaharshana, never divulge what I have told you, to those who are disrespectful or to those who do not believe in god.

Repeatly, Shiva himself appears in order to bless his devotees. A person who donates the Shiva Purana, along with gold and a bull, gets to live for ever in Shivaloka.
