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15. MATSYA PURANA

LOMAHARSHANA AND THE OTHER SAGES

There was a forest known as Naimisharanya. Many years ago, several sages organized a yajna (sacrifice) in the forest. After the sacrifice was over, the assembled sages told Lomaharshana.

“You have recited to us many Puranas. These accounts are so sacred that we would like to hear them once more. Please satisfy our thirst for knowledge.”

“I will recount for you the most holy of all the Puranas,” replied Lomaharshana. “This is the great Matsya Purana, told by Vishnu to Manu. Prepare your minds, for I am about begin.”

VISHNU AND MANU

There used to be a king named Vaivasvata Manu. He was the son of the sun-god Vivasvana. When it was time for Manu to retire to the forest, he handed over the kingdom to his son Ikshvaku. Manu then went to the foothills of Mount Malaya and started to perform tapasya (meditation). Thousands and thousands of years passed. Such were the powers of Manu’s meditation that Brahma appeared before him.

“I am pleased with your prayers,” said Brahma. “Ask for a boon.”

“I have only one boon to ask for,” replied Manu. “Sooner or later there will be a destruction (pralaya) and the world will no longer exist. Please grant me the boon that it will be I who will save the world and its begins at the time of the destruction.”

Brahma readily granted this boon.

Days passed. On one particular occasion, Manu was performing ablutions in a pond near his hermitage. He immersed his hands in the water so that he might offer some water to his ancestors. When he raised his cupped hands, he found that there was a minnow (shafari) swimming around in the water. Manu had no desire to kill the minnow. He placed it carefully in his water-pot (kamandalu).

But the minnow started to grow and within a day, it was sixteen fingers in length. “Save me, king,” said the fish. “This water-pot is too small for me.”

Manu then placed the fish in a vat. But the fish continued to grow and, within a day, it was three hands in length. “Save me, king,” said the fish. “This vat is too small for me.”

Manu put the fish in a well, but the well soon became too small for the fish. Manu transferred the fish to a pond, but the pond was also too small for the fish. Manu now removed the fish to the holy river Ganga, but even this was too small for the fish. Finally, Manu transferred the fish to the ocean. There the fish grew so much that it soon occupied the entire ocean.

“Who are you?” asked Manu. “I have never seen or heard of such wonders. Are you a demon that is deluding me with its illusions? No, I do not think that you are a demon. You must be the great Vishnu himself. Please tell me the truth and satisfy my curiosity.”

Vishnu then revealed that it was indeed he who had adopted the form of a fish. He told Manu that the earth would soon be flooded with water. Vishnu had got a boat built by the gods. When the earth was flooded, Manu was to place all living beings in the boat and thus save them.

Vishnu would himself arrive in his form of the fish and Manu was to tie the boat to the fish's horn. Thus the living beings would be saved. And when the waters of the flood receded, Manu could populate the world afresh and rule over it.

Vishnu disappeared, and for a hundred years there was a terrible drought on earth. The drought led to famine and people died of starvation. Meanwhile, the sun blazed in fury and burnt up the entire world. When everything had burnt to ashes, dark clouds loomed in the sky. These are the clouds that appear at the time of destruction and there are seven classes of such clouds, known as samvarta, bhimananda, drona, chanda, valahaka, vidyutapataka and kona. From the clouds, rain began to pour and soon, water engulfed the entire earth. The land mass was flooded. As instructed by Vishnu, Manu gathered together living beings inside the boat. And when the fish appeared, he tied the boat to the fish's horn. What do you think Manu used a rope? He used a gigantic snake.

While the boat was thus tethered and dragged around by the fish, Manu asked Vishnu several questions. The answers that Vishnu provided form the text of the Matsya Purana.

Let us start with the account of the creation.

CREATION

In the beginning, there was nothing in the universe. There was only darkness and the divine essence (brahman). It is impossible to describe the brahman, it has no traits that can be described.

When the time came for creation to start, the brahman removed the darkness and divided itself into three. These three parts came to be known as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The first object that was created was water and Vishnu slept on this water. Since nara means water and ayana means resting-place, Vishnu is accordingly also known as Narayana.

In this water next appeared a golden (hiranya) egg (anda). The egg shone with the radiance of a thousand suns. Inside the egg, Brahma created himself. Since he effectively created (bhava) himself (svayam), Brahma is also known as Svayambhava. The egg, you will remember, was golden. Garbha means womb, and since Brahma was born inside a golden egg, he is also known as Hiranyagarbha.

For a thousand years Brahma stayed inside the egg. He then split the shell into two and emerged out. Heaven (svarga) was made from one half of the shell and the earth from the remaining half. All the land masses, the oceans, the rivers and the mountains, had been inside the egg in embryonic form. Brahma made them manifest.

The sun was also born. Since he was the first (adi) being to be born, he is known as Aditya. The word mrita means dead. Since the sun was born when the egg (anda) died, the sun was also known as Martanda.

Brahma's first act was to meditate. It was while he was meditating that the Vedas, the Puranas and the other shastras (sacred texts) emerged from Brahma's mouth.

Ten sons were also born to Brahma. Created from Brahma's mental powers, they all became sages. Their names were Marichi, Atri, Angira, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Pracheta, Vashishtha, Bhrigu and Narada. There were others too who were born. Daksha was born from Brahma's right toe. And the god Dharma was born from his chest.

But for further creation to continue, it was essential that created beings should have proper mothers and fathers. Brahma accordingly created two beings from his body, one was male and the other was female. The male half was named Svayambhuva Manu and the female half was named Shatarupa.

Shatarupa is also referred to as Savitri, Gayatri, Sarasvati or Brahmani. Since she had been born from Brahma's body, she was like Brahma's daughter. In fact, Vashishtha and the other sages who were Brahma's sons welcomed her as their sister. But Shatarupa was so beautiful that Brahma fell in love with her and wished to marry her.

Shatarupa circled Brahma and showed her respects to him. When she stood in front of him, Brahma gazed upon her with the face that he had. But when she went and stood behind him, Brahma could see her no longer. Another head with another face therefore sprouted behind Brahma's first head so that he might be able to see Shatarupa. In similar fashion, a head sprouted to Brahma's first head so that he might be able to see Shatarpa. In similar fashion, a head sprouted to Brahma's right an another one to his left. And when Shatarupa rose above him, a head sprouted towards the top as well. Thus it was that Brahma came to have five heads and five faces.

Brahma married Shatarupa and they lived together as man and wife for a hundred years. Their son was named Svayambhuva Manu.

Hearing the account, Vaivasvata Manu exclaimed. "But what you have just said is truly amazing. How could Brahma have married his own daughter? Surely that is a sin."

"Perhaps," replied Vishnu, "but it is not for humans to judge the actions of the gods. How could creation proceed if Brahma did not marry Shatarupa?"

To continue with the account of the creation, Brahma created a sage named Sanatakumara and Shiva. Brahma asked Shiva to help him in the act of creation. "Why don't you create some beings as well?" asked Brahma.

Shiva complied and started to create. But all the beings that he created were just like him in appearance. That is, they were all immortal.

"What are you doing?" asked Brahma. "Don't create immortal beings. Create mortal ones instead."

"That I refuse to do," retorted Shiva. "If I am to create, I shall create only immortals."

"Please do not create then," requested Brahma. "I will take care of creation myself."

Svayambhuva Manu performed very difficult tapsya and obtained a wife named Anati. Svayambhuva Manu and Ananti had two sons named Priyavrata and Uttanapada.

From Uttanapada was descended Prachinarahi. Prachinarahi married Savarna, the daughter of the ocean, and they had ten sons. These sons were known as the Prachetas. The ten Prachetas married a woman named Marisha. That is, all of them had the same wife. Daksha was the son of the Prachetas and Marisha.

DAKSHA'S DESCENDANTS

Daksha married Panchajani. Daksha and Panchajani had one thousand sons. These were known as the Haryakshas. Daksha asked his sons to create more living beings.

But the sage Narada came and told the Haryakshas, "You can't possibly create living beings unless you know where they are going to live. Have you explored the universe that your creations are going to populate? Why don't you start out on a voyage of discovery?"

The Haryakshas did this and have never been heard of since. They did not return.

Daksha and Panchajani now had another thousand sons. These were named the Shavalas. Narada asked the Shavalas also to explore the universe and they too disappeared.

Sixty daughters were next born to Daksha and Panchajani. Ten of these daughters were married to the god Dharma, twenty-seven were married to the moon-god Chandra, and thirteen were married to the sage Kashyapa. The remaining daughters were married to various other sages.

The thirteen daughters who were married to Kashyapa were named Aditi, Diti, Danu, Arishta, Surasa, Surabhi, Vinata, Tamra, Krodhavasha, Ira, Kadru, Vishva and Muni.

Aditi's sons were known as the adityas. There were twelve of them and they were named Indra, Dhata, Bhaga, Tvashta, Mitra, Varuna, Yama, Vivasvana, Savita, Pusha, Amshumana and Vishnu. These were the gods.

Diti's sons were the daityas (demons). There were two of them, named Hiranyakshipu and Hiranyaksha. Their sons also came to be known as the daityas. Hiranyaksha's sons were Uluka, Shakuni, Bhutasantapana and Mahanabha. Hiranyakshipu's sons were Prahlada, Anuhlada, Samhlada and Hlada. Prahlada's son was Virochana, Virochana's son was Vali, and Vali's son was Vanasura.

Danu had a hundred sons. These and their descendants were known as the danavas (demons). Chief among the hundred sons was Viprachitti. Maya, the architect of the demons, was descended from this line.

Tamra had six daughters. These were the mothers of the birds and of goats, horse, sheep, camels and donkeys. Vinata had two sons, Aruna and Garuda. Aruna's sons were Sampati and Jatayu. Both Surasa and Kadru gave birth to snakes (nagas or sarpas). Krodhavasha was the mother of

rakshasas (demons); Surabhi of cows and buffaloes; Muni of apsaras (dancers of heaven); Arishta of gandharvas (singers of heaven); Ira of trees and herbs; and Vishva of yakshas (demi-gods).

THE MARUTS

Although the gods and the demons were cousins, they did not like each other and fought amongst themselves all the time. Many daityas were killed by Vishnu and the other gods.

Diti was disconsolate to see her children suffer thus. She resolved that she would meditate so as to obtain a son who would be so powerful that he would kill Indra, the king of the gods. There was a tirtha (place of pilgrimage) named Syamantapanchaka on the banks of the sacred river Sarasvati. Diti went there and started to pray to the sage Kashyapa. She lived on roots and fruits and meditated for a hundred years.

These prayers pleased Kashyapa. "Ask for a boon," he said.

"Please grant me a son who will kill Indra," replied Diti.

"It shall be as you wish," said Kashyapa. "But there are some conditions. You will have to live in this hermitage for a hundred years more. Throughout these hundred years you will bear the baby in your womb. But there are certain conditions of cleanliness that you must observe. You must not eat in the evening, nor must you sleep under a tree at night. Exercise is not permitted in any form. Do not sleep with your hair unbraided, or without having had a bath. If you can observe these rules for a hundred years, you will have the son you wish for."

Kashyapa went away and Diti began to observe the rites that the sage had prescribed. But Indra had got to know what was afoot and he was naturally in no mood to permit the birth of a son who would be the cause of his own destruction. He hung around Diti's hermitage, pretending to serve his aunt. He brought her firewood and fruit and served her in other ways. But in reality, he was merely waiting for an opportunity. He was waiting for the moment when Diti would fail to observe the norms of cleanliness that had been laid down for her.

Ninety-nine years and three hundred and sixty-two days passed. That is, only three days were left for the period of one hundred years to be over. Diti was tired on one particular occasion. Since the period of her ordeal was soon to end, she had also become somewhat careless. She fell asleep without washing her hair. What was worse, she went to sleep without having braided her hair. This was an act of gross uncleanness.

Indra seized his chance. Since Diti had committed an unclean act, her defences had been lowered. Indra entered Diti's womb in a trice. Indra has a wonderful weapon named vajra. With the vajra, Indra sliced the baby in Diti's womb into seven parts. These parts started to cry. "Ma ruda," said Indra. "Don't cry." But the parts continued to cry. Indra therefore chopped up each of the parts into seven more sections, so that there were forty-nine parts in all. Since Diti had failed to observe the prescribed rites, these forty-nine sections were no longer a threat to Indra. When they were born, they came to be known as the maruts from the words Indra had used in

addressing them. They were elevated to the status of gods and became Indra's friends and constant companions.

THE MANVANTARAS

Each manvantara is an era and is ruled over by a Manu. One of Brahma's days is known as a kalpa and there are fourteen manvantaras in every kalpa. At the end of every kalpa, the universe is destroyed and has to be created afresh. In the present kalpa, six manvantaras have already passed and the seventh manvantara is now current. There will be seven more manvantaras in the future before the universe and its inmates are destroyed. The gods, the seven great sages (saptarshis) and the individual who holds the title of Indra, change from one manvantara to another. The fourteen eras of the present kalpa are as follows.

(1) The first Manu was Svayambhuva. The gods then were the yamas.

(2) Svarochisha was the second Manu. The gods were the tushitas and the names of the seven great sages were Dattoli, Chyavana, Stambha, Prana, Kashyapa, Ourva and Brihaspati.

(3) The third Manu was Uttama. The gods were named the bhavanas and Koukurundi, Dalbhya, Shankha, Pravahana, Shiva, Sita and Sasmita were the saptarshis.

(4) Tamas was the fourth Manu. The seven great sages were Kavi, Prithu, Agni, Akapi, Kapi, Jalpa and Dhimana and the gods were known as the sadhyas.

(5) The fifth manvantara was ruled over by a Manu named Raivata. The gods were the abhutarajas and the seven great sages were

Devavahu, Suvahu, Parjanya, Somapa, Munti, Hiranyaroma and Saptashva.

(6) Chakshusha was the sixth Manu. The gods were known as the lekhas and the seven great sages were Bhriгу, Sudhama, Viraja, Sahishnu, Nada, Vivasvana, and Atinama.

(7) The seventh manvantara is the one that is now current and the name of the Manu is Vaivasvata. The saptarshis are Atri, Vashishtha, Kashyapa, Goutama, Bharadvaja, Vishvamitra and Jamadagni. The gods are the sadhyas, the vishvadevas, the maruts, the vasus, the two ashvinis and the adityas.

(8) The eighth Manu will be Savarni and the seven great sages of this era will be Ashvatthama, Sharadvana, Koushika, Galava, Shatananda, Kashyapa and Rama.

(9) The ninth Manu will be Rouchya.

(10) Bhoutya will be the tenth Manu.

(11) The eleventh Manu will be named Merusavarni.

(12) Rita will be the twelfth Manu.

(13) Ritadhama will be the thirteenth Manu.

(14) The fourteenth and final Manu will be named Vishvakasena.

PRITHU

A king named Anga was descended from Svayambhuva Manu. Anga married Sunitha, the daughter of Mrityu, and they had a son named Vena. Mrityu was an evil person. From his childhood, Vena associated with this maternal grandfather of his and thus came to acquire evil ways. When Vena became king after Anga, he started to oppress the world. He stopped all yajnas and the prayers to the gods. He insisted that people should pray only to Vena. The sages did their level best to persuade Vena to return to the righteous path, but Vena would not listen.

The sages then killed Vena. Vena had no sons and a kingdom does not flourish in the absence of a king. Therefore, when Vena was dead, the sages started to knead the dead body so that a son might be born. The first being that emerged as a result of this kneading was a dark and dwarfish son. All the evil that was in Vena's body entered the body of this son so that there was no more evil left in the dead body.

When the kneading continued, a handsome son was born from Vena's right hand. He was born fully grown and held bows, arrows and clubs in his hands when he emerged. His entire body was clad in shining armour. The word prithu means great. Since the son was born after a great deal of effort, he was given the name Prithu.

The sages made arrangements for Prithu's coronation. Prithu was a good king who ruled well. But Prithu's subjects still did not have the wherewithal to make a living. They asked their king to do something about this. Prithu decided that since the earth was not providing any foodgrains, he would kill the earth. The earth adopted the form of a cow and started to flee. Wherever the earth went, the king followed in hot pursuit.

The earth finally realized that she could not escape by running away. She told Prithu, "Please do not kill me. Then your subjects will not even have a place to live in. Your object is to find a means of living for your subjects. How will that be accomplished if you kill me? Milk me instead of killing me. The foodgrains that the milking will yield will provide the sustenance for your subjects."

Prithu accordingly milked the earth. It is because of this that the earth is known as prithivi. Prithu also levelled out the earth with his bow so that his subjects could live in the plains thus created. The earth prospered during Prithu's rule. Poverty, disease and sins were unknown. Everyone was righteous.

THE SOLAR LINE

The sages requested Lomaharshana. "Please tell us the history of the solar line."

Lomaharshana complied.

Aditi and the sage Kashyapa had borne the sun-god, Vivasvana or Surya, as a son. Surya had three wives, Samjna, Rajni and Prabha. Rajna had a son named Revata and Prabha had a son named Prabhata (morning). Surya and Samjna had two sons and a daughter. The eldest son was Vaivasvata Manu. And the remaining two offspring were twins named Yama and Yamuna.

The sun's radiance was however too much for Samjna to bear. After a while, she could not bear it any longer. She therefore created a woman out of her own body. The woman looked exactly like Samjna and was named Chhaya (shadow). There was no way of telling the two apart.

"Stay here and pretend to be me," said Samjna. "Look after my husband and my children. No one will know the truth unless you tell them. As for me, I am going away."

Surya did not realize that Samjna had left. He took Chhaya to be his wife, and Surya and Chhaya had two sons and two daughters. The sons were Savarni Manu and Shani (Saturn) and the daughters were Tapati and Vishti.

Chhaya was clearly fonder of her own children and neglected Samjna's. This did not bother Vaivasvata Manu too much. He was the eldest and more collected and balanced. But Yama resented this favouritism of Chhaya's. In a fit of petulance, he raised his foot to kick Chhaya. Chhaya cursed Yama. "I curse you that your foot may be devoured by worms," she said. "May it be infected with pus and blood."

This alarmed Yama and he rushed to his father. "My mother has cursed me," he told Surya. "I am only a child. Even if I did commit a sin, does a mother ever curse her children? I have serious misgivings that she is not our mother at all."

When Surya taxed Chhaya with this, she came out with the truth and Surya learnt that Samjna had left. Samjna's father was Vishvakarma, the architect of the gods. Surya went to his father-in-law to find out if he knew anything of Chhaya's whereabouts.

"Indeed, I do," replied Vishvakarma. "When Samjna left your house, she came to me in the form of a mare. But I refused to let her live in my house, since she had left her husband's house without seeking his permission. She is living at the moment in the desert. But Samjna did what she did because she could not bear to stand your energy and radiance. If you permit, I shall shave off some of the excess energy, so that people can look at you."

Vishvakarma shaved off some of the sun's energy. With the excess energy were constructed many of the weapons of the gods such as Vishnu's chakra (a bladed-discus), Shiva's trident (trishula) and Indra's vajra. This made the sun's visage much more pleasant and bearable. The only parts of Surya's body that were not thus modified were the feet. No one can bear to look at Surya's feet and it is forbidden to visualise the sun-god's feet when one is praying to him. A person who does not follow this injunction is a sinner and is made to suffer from leprosy.

Surya now went to look for Samjna and found her in the form of a mare. He too adopted the form of a horse and joined her. As horses, they had two sons. Since ashva means horse, the sons were known as the Ashvinis. They became the physicians of the gods and were also known as Nasatya and Dasra. After the Ashvinis were born, Surya and Samjna gave up their forms of horses and returned to their usual forms.

What do you think happened to Savarni Manu? He went away to perform tapasya (meditation) on Mount Sumeru. He is destined to be one of the future Manus. Shani became a planet and Yamuna a river. As for Tapati, she too became a river (Tapai).

Yama had been cursed by Chhaya that his feet would rot and be infected with worms. To mitigate the effects of the curse, Surya gave Yama a bird which ate up all the worms. Thereafter, Yama went to a tirtha named Gokarna and started to pray to Shiva. For thousands of years he prayed and eventually managed to please Shiva. Shiva granted Yama the boon that he would be the god of death. He would mete out punishments to sinners in accordance with the sins (papa) that they had committed. He would also keep account of the store of merit (punya) that righteous people accumulated.

Vaivasvata Manu ruled as Manu. He had ten sons. The eldest was named Ila. The other sons were named Ikshvaku, Kushanabha, Arishta, Dhrishta, Narishyanata, Karusha, Sharyati, Prishadhra and Nabhaga. The solar line owes its origin to Ikshvaku. In this line was born king Bhagiratha, who brought the sacred river Ganga down from heaven. Further down the line was Dasharatha and Dasharatha's son was Rama. You know about Rama from the Ramayana.

ILA AND THE LUNAR LINE

Vaivasvata Manu's eldest son was Ila. When Vaivasvata Manu became old, he retired to the forest. Ila was appointed the ruler in his place. Ila set out on a voyage of conquest and travelled throughout the world. There was a forest named Sharavana, frequented by Shiva and Parvati. Shiva had decreed that any man who entered the forest would become a woman. King Ila did not know about this rule and set foot in the forest inadvertently he immediately got transformed into a woman.

“What is going to happen to me now?” thought Ila. “Where will I live?” He even forgot all about his earlier life. The moon-god, Chandra, had a son named Budha. While Ila was wandering around. Budha came upon her and fell in love with her. The two had a son named Pururava and Pururava was the ancestor of the lunar line.

Meanwhile, Ikshvaku and the other brothers had started to look for Ila. When they could find no trace of their brother, they asked the sage Vashishtha if he knew of Ila's whereabouts. Vashishtha used his mental powers to find out what had happened. He asked the princes to pray to Shiva and Parvati. That was the only way to make Ila a man once more.

The prayers pleased Shiva and Parvati and they found out what the princes want. “But what you desire is quite impossible,” they told Ikshvaku and his brother. “Ila can never be made a man once again. At best, we will grant you the following boon. Ila will alternate between being a man

for one month and a woman for one month.” The princes had to be content with this. As a woman, Ila continued to be known as Ila. But as a man, he came to be known as Sudyumna and had three sons named Utkala, Gaya and Haritashva.

DAKSHA AND SATI

“I will now tell you about Daksha and Sati,” Lomaharshana told the sages.

Daksha had a daughter named Sati who was married to Shiva. Daksha did not like his son-in-law at all. When he organized a yajna, he did not invite Shiva to attend the ceremony. But Sati went to the ceremony, although Shiva had not been invited. “Why did you not invite Shiva?” Sati asked her father.

“Because your husband is undeserving of such honour,” replied Daksha. “He is not fit to be treated on par with the other gods.” These words angered Sati. “I am ashamed that I am your daughter.” She said. “Cursed am I that I have had to hear such abuses of the great Shiva. I no longer wish to be your daughter. I will therefore give up this physical body that I owe to you, by immolating myself. As for you, I curse you that you will be born on earth as the son of the ten Prachetas. You will then try to perform an ashvamedha yajna (horse sacrifice). But Shiva will destroy the ceremony.”

Daksha tried to pacify Sati. “Please have mercy on me,” he said. “You are the mother of the entire universe. How will the universe survive if you die? It is only through your good grace that you condescended to be born as my daughter. Please do not forsake me.”

“What I have said cannot be negated,” replied Sati. “But I will grant you this much. When you are born on earth, you will continue to be devoted to me.”

“Where will I pray to you?” asked Daksha. “At what tirthas? And what are the names by which I will address you in the course of my prayers?”

Sati then told Daksha one hundred and eight of her names. She also told him the names of one hundred and eight tirthas at which she was known by these respective names. These names and tirthas are as follows, with the names being given first and the tirthas second.

(1) Vishalakshi at Varanasi (2) Lingadharini at Naimisha. (3) Lalitadevi at Prayaga. (4) Kamakshi at Gandhamadana. (5) Kumuda at Manasa. (6) Vishvakaya at Ambara. (7) Gomati at Gomanta. (8) Kamacharini at Mandara. (9) Madotkata at Chaitraratha. (10) Jayanti at Hastinapura. (11) Gouri at Kanyakuvja. (12) Rambha at Malayachala. (13) Kirtimati at Ekamra. (14) Vishva at Vishveshvara. (15) Puruhuta at Pushkara. (16) Margadayini at Kedara. (17) Nanda at Himalaya. (18) Bhadrakarnika at Gokarna. (19) Bhavani at Sthaneshvara. (20) Vilvapatricat at Vilva. (21) Madhavi at Shrishaila. (22) Bhadra at Bhadreshvara. (23) Jaya at Varahashaila. (24) Kamala at Kamalalalya. (25) Rudrani at Rudrakoti. (26) Kali at Kalanjara. (27) Kapila at Mahalinga. (28) Mukuteshvari at Markata. (29) Mahadevi at Shalagrama. (30) Janapriya at Shivalinga. (31) Kumari at Mayapuri. (32) Lalita at Santana. (33) Utpalakshi at Sahasraksha (34) Mahotpala at Kamalaksha. (35) Mangala at Gangatira. (36) Vimala at Purushottama. (37)

Amoghakshi at Vipasha. (38) Patala at Pundravardhana. (39) Narayani at Suparshva. (40) Bhadrasundari at Vikuta. (41) Vipula at Vipula. (42) Kalyani at Malalyachala. (43) Kotavi at Kotitirtha. (44) Sugandha at Madhavana. (45) Trisandhya at Godasharma. (46) Ratipriya at Gangadvara. (47) Shivananda at Shivakunda (48) Nandini at Devikatata. (49) Rukmini at Dvaravati. (50) Radha at Vrindavana. (51) Devaki at Mathura. (52) Parameshvari at Patala. (53) Sita at Chitrakuta. (54) Vindyavasini at Vindhya. (55) Ekavira at Sahyadri. (56) Chandrika at Harichandra. (57) Aroga at Vaidyanatha. (58) Maheshvari at Mahakala. (59) Abhaya at Ushnatirtha. (60) Amrita at Vindhyakandara. (61) Mandavi at Mandavya. (62) Svaha at Maheshvarapura. (63) Prachanda at Chhagalanda. (64) Chandrika at Makaranda. (65) Vararooha at Someshvara. (66) Pushkaravati at Prabhasa. (67) Devamata at Sarasvati. (68) Mata at Sagara. (69) Mahabhaga at Mahalaya. (70) Pingaleshvari at Payoshni. (71) Simhika at Kritashoucha. (72) Yashaskari at Kartikeya. (73) Lola at Utapalvarta. (74) Subhadra at Shonasangama. (75) Lakshimata at Siddhapura. (76) Angana at Bharatashrama. (77) Vishvamukhi at Jalandhara. (78) Tara at Kishkindhyachala. (79) Pushti at Devadaruvana. (80) Medha at Kashmiramandala. (81) Bhimadevi at Himachala. (82) Pushti at Vishveshvara. (83) Shuddhi at Kapalamochana. (84) Sita at Mayavarohana. (85) Dhvani at Shankhoddhara. (86) Dhriti at Pendara. (87) Kala at Chandrabhaga. (88) Shivakarini at Achchhodatira. (89) Amrita at Vena. (90) Urvashi at Vadrivina (91) Oushadhi at Uttarakur. (92) Kushodaka at Kushavdvipa (93) Manmatha at Hemakuta. (94) Satyavadini at Mukuta. (95) Vandaniy at Ashvattha. (96) Nidhi at Kuberalaya. (97) Gayatri at Vedavadana. (98) Parvati at Shivasannidhana. (99) Indrani at Devaloka. (100) Sarasvati at Brahmamukha. (101) Prabha at Suryabimba. (102) Vaishnavi at Matrigana. (103) Arundhati at Satismukha. (104) Tilottama. (105) Brahmakala. (106) Shakti.

Having recited these names, Sati immolated herself. She was later reborn as Parvati or Uma, the daughter of Menaka and Himalaya. She was remarried to Shiva. As for Daksha, he was born on earth as the son of the ten Prachetas.

BRAHMADATTA

There used to be a sage named Koushika. Koushika had seven sons named Svasripa, Krodhana, Himsra, Pishuna, Kavi, Vagadushta and Pitrivarti. These sons all became disciples of the sage Garga. After Koushika died, there was a terrible drought on earth. Famine raged and people went hungry. Garga had asked his disciples to tend to his cattle and the seven brothers had taken the cattle to the forest so that they might browse on the grass that grew there. The brothers suffered so much from hunger that they decided to slay one of the cows and eat it.

“Killing a cow would be a sin,” remarked the youngest. “If we have to kill the cow, let us at least perform its funeral ceremony. Perhaps that will reduce the severity of the sin that we are committing.”

The other brothers agreed to this. The funeral rites of the cow were observed. It was then killed and eaten. The brothers returned to Garga and told him. “A cow has been killed and eaten by a tiger.”

Garga saw no reason to disbelieve them. But the sin remained a sin. And as a consequence of having committed a crime, the brothers were born as hunters in their next lives. But they were

born as jatismaras. That is, they remembered the incidents of their earlier lives. Since the brothers remembered what they had been in their earlier lives, they saw no reason to live as hunters. They therefore fasted until they died. They were next reborn as deer. But the deer continued to be jatismaras and fasted to death. The brothers were reborn as birds. Four of the brothers continued to be detached from material pursuits and spent their time in meditation. But the three remaining brothers were not so lucky.

The king of Panchala had once come to the forest with his retinue. The king's name was Vibhrajā. One of the birds was struck by the king's pomp and glory and wished to be born as a king in his next life. King Vibhrajā and two ministers with him and all the soldiers seemed to be following the instructions of the ministers. Accordingly, two of the birds desired to be born as ministers in their next lives.

The one who wished to be a king was born as Brahmādatta, King Vibhrajā's son. The two who desired to be born as ministers became Pundarika and Suvalaka, the sons of the two ministers whom they had seen. The remaining three brothers were not attached to material pursuits and were born as brahmanas (the first of the four classes).

Brahmādatta married Kalyani. You will never guess who Kayanti had been in her earlier life. She had been the cow whom the brothers had killed.

What was most remarkable was the fact that Brahmādatta could understand the languages of all living beings. Brahmādatta and Kalyani were once taking a walk in their garden. Brahmādatta heard two ants conversing. Since he could understand the languages of all living beings, he could follow what the ants were saying.

"Why are you angry with me?" asked the male ant. "Why are you refusing to speak to me?"

"Go away and do not pester me," replied the female ant. "You say you love me very much. And yet, when you got some grains of sugar yesterday, you gave them to another ant and not to me. I refuse to speak to you."

"That was my mistake," said the male ant. "I thought that it was you to whom I was giving the grains of sugar. I will never make such a mistake in the future. Please pardon me and smile. I cannot bear to see you so angry." The ants made up.

The conversation made Brahmādatta laugh. Kalyani naturally wanted to know why Brahmādatta was laughing and the king reported the entire conversation to his wife.

But Kalyani refused to believe her husband. "How can any man understand the language of ants?" she wanted to know. "You are lying. You must have been laughing at me."

Brahmādatta tried to convince his wife, but Kalyani would not listen. The king did not know what to do. But while he was sleeping, he dreamt that Vishnu appeared before him and told him to wait till the next morning. Brahmādatta's mind would be set at rest then.

Four of the brothers had been born as brahmanas. They had been born as the sons of a brahmana named Sudaridra and were named Dhritimana, Tattvadarshi, Vidyachanda and Tapotsuka. Since they were born as jatismaras, they remembered their earlier lives and had no desire to tied down by material pursuits. They wanted to retire to the forest and meditate.

But Sudaridra tried to restrain his sons. “How can you do that?” he asked “How can you retire to the forest to meditate? Your duty is to look after me in my old age. If you do not look after, I shall starve to death. Please do not commit that sin.”

“You will not starve to death,” replied his sons. “Go to King Brahmadata and ask him for wealth. He will give you gold and villages. Tell him to remember the sage Garga, the hunters, the deer and the birds. The four sons went away to the foest. Sudarida came to meet the king. He met the king on the day following Brahmadata’s dream. Sudaridra’s words reminded Brahmadata of what he had been in his earlier lives. He was ashamed that he had forgotten those incidents and had become addicted to material pursuits. He decided to join his brothers in the forest. He gave Sudaridra as much wealth as the brahmana wanted and handed over the kingdom to the prince, Vishvaksena. The brothers Pundarika and Suvalaka also accompanied Brahmadata to the forest. It was thus that Koushika’s seven sons eventually attained salvation. “There is one thing we do not understnad,” said the sages. “How came Brahmadata to understand the languages of all living beings?” “That is easily explained.” Replied Lomaharshana. “King Vibraja had prayed to Vishnu that he might obtain such a son and the boon was granted.”

CHANDRA AND BUDHA

“You forgot to tell us how Budha was born,” remarked the sages. “Nor did you tell us anything about Chandra’s birth.” Lomaharshana filled in the blanks. The sage Atri was Brahma’s son. Atri once performed very difficult tapasya. A tremendous amount of energy was released as a result of this meditation and the moon-god, Chandra or Soma, was born from this energy. Brahma appointed Chandra ruler over all stars, planets and herbs (oshadhi). Twenty-seven of Daksha’s daughter were married to Chandra. These were the nakshatras (stars). Chandra performed a rajasuya yajna (royal sacrifice) and the ceremony was an outstanding success. Bt all this success. But all this success and glory went to Chandra’s head. The preceptor of the gods was the sage Brihaspati and Brihaspati’s wife was Tara. Chandra’s eyes fell upon Tara and he forcibly abducted her. On several occasions Brihaspati asked Chandra to return Tara, but the moon-god would not listen. A terrible war then raged between the gods and demons over Tara. The gods fought on Brihaspati’s side and the demons aided Chandra. Shiva also fought on the side of the gods. As the war raged, Shiva let fly a terrible divine weapon named brahmashirsha at Chandra. Chandra countered this with another terrible divine weapon named somastra. These two weapons of destruction threatened to burn up the entire universe. Brahma decided that it was time for him to intervene. “Stop this nonsense at once,” he told Chandra. “What you have done is most improper. Return Tara at once.” These words ashamed Chandra and he returned Tara. But Chandra and Tara had already had a handsome son named Budha. Budha became very skilled in the handling of elephants. In fact, the knowledge of tackling and handling elephants goes back to Budha. You already know that Budha married Ila and that they had a son named Pururava.

PURURAVA AND URVASHI

Pururava was a very strong king who ruled the earth well. He performed one hundred ashvamedha yajnas. The three goals of human life are dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), and kama (that which is desired). These three goals wished to see which of them Pururava revered the most. They therefore adopted human forms and came to visit Pururava. Pururava treated them with utmost respect and gave them golden seats to sit on. He offered them all sorts of offerings. But in the process, Dharma received more of the offerings than Artha and Kama. This angered Artha and Kama. "You will be destroyed," Artha cursed Pururava. "You will go mad over Urvashi," Kama cursed Pururava. But Dharma blessed Pururava. "You will live for long and you will never deviate from the righteous path," he said. "Your descendants will rule for ever."

Having thus cursed and blessed Pururava, Dharma, Artha, and Kama disappeared. On one particular occasion, Pururava was driving his chariot through a forest. He suddenly found that a demon named Keshi was abducting an apsara (dancer of heaven). This apsara was none other than Urvashi. Pururava defeated the demon and rescued Urvashi. He restored her to Indra, the king of the gods. Indra was delighted at this act and Indra and Pururava became friends. The sage Bharata taught mankind how to sing and dance. To celebrate Urvashi's return, Indra asked Bharata to stage a performance. As artistes, Bharata chose three apsaras. They were Menaka, Urvashi and Rambha. Menaka and Rambha danced as they should. But Urvashi was attracted by King Pururava and kept looking at him. The result was that Urvashi fell out of step. This angered Bharata and he cursed Urvashi that she would have to spend fifty-five years on earth. On earth, Urvashi married Pururava and they had eight sons named Ayu, Dridayau, Ashvayu, Dhanayu, Dhritamana, Vasu, Shuchividya and Shatayu.

YAYATI

In the lunar line there was a king named Nahusha and Nahusha's son was Yayati. Yayati had two wives, Sharmishtha and Devayani. Sharmishtha was the daughter of Vrishaparva, the king of the danavas (demons). And Devayani's father was Shukracharya, the preceptor of the demons. Devayani gave birth to Yadu and Turvasu and Sharmishtha gave birth to Druhya, Anu and Puru. Yayati ruled the world extremely well for many years. He performed many yajnas.

But eventually he grew old. The problem was that although Yayati grew old, he was not yet tired of sensual pleasures. He still desired to savour the joys that the world had to offer. Yayati told his five sons. "Because of Shukracharya's curse, an untimely old age has come upon me and I am not content with what I have savoured of life. I request one of you to give me his youth and accept my old age in return. When I have sated myself with worldly pleasures, I will take back my old age and return the youth." Except for Puru, the other four sons flatly refused such an exchange. They had no desire to part with their valued youth. They were thereupon cursed by their father.

As for Puru, he said, "Please accept my youth and be happy. It is my duty to serve and I will gladly take upon me your old age." For a thousand years Yayati savoured the pleasures of the world with Puru's youth. A thousand years were not than enough to satisfy Yayati. He accepted his old age and returned Puru's youth. He blessed Puru for his obedience and announced to the world that Puru was his only true son.

Puru inherited the kingdom after Yayati. His descendants were known as the Pauravas. It was in this line that King Bharata was born. It is after Bharata that the land we live in is known as Bharatavarsha.

The sages interrupted Lomaharshana. "You are going too fast." They said. "What is this curse of Shukracharya's that Yayati referred to? You have forgotten to tell us about that." "I will," replied Lomaharshana. "But first, let me tell you about Kacha and Devayani." **KACHA AND DEVAYANI**

The gods and the demons fought with each other all the time. Brihaspati was the preceptor of the gods and Shukracharya was the preceptor of the demons. Shukracharya knew a wonderful art known as mritasanjivani. This was the knowledge of bringing back dead people to life.

Since Shukracharya knew this art, the gods were in a terrible fix. Any demons whom the gods killed were promptly brought back to life by Shukracharya. But Brihaspati knew no such art. So any gods that the demons killed, stayed dead. The gods pondered about this problem and finally arrived at a solution. Brihaspati had a son named Kacha. The gods told Kacha. "Go and become Shukracharya's disciple. Try to learn the art of mritasanjivani from him. Shukracharya has a beautiful daughter named Devayani. Try to curry her favour so that your task may become easier."

Kacha went to Shukracharya. "Please accept me as your disciple," he said. "I am the great Brihaspati's son. I will serve you faithfully for a thousand years." Since no mention was made of mritasanjivani. Shukracharya gladly agreed to this proposition. Kacha lived with Shukracharya and served his guru (teacher). He became friendly with Devayani and Devayani started to fall in love with Kacha. Five hundred years passed. The demons got to know that Kacha was Brihaspati's son. Since they hated Brihaspati, they hated Kacha as well. Kacha was in the habit of taking Shukracharya's cattle to the forest to graze. When Kacha was alone in the forest, the demons seized their chance. They slew Kacha and fed his body to the tigers. In the evening, the cattle returned home alone. Kacha was not with them.

Seeing this, Devayani told her father, "The cattle have returned home without Kacha. I am certain that someone has killed him. I am in love with Kacha and cannot survive without him. Please do something." "Do not worry," Shukracharya told Devayani. "I will bring Kacha back to life with the art of mritasanjivani." As soon as Shukracharya recited the magical mantra (incantation), Kacha appeared before them, hale and hearty. Days passed. Kacha went to the forest once more, this time to pluck flowers. The demons killed him again. But this time they burnt the dead body and mixed the ashes in a goblet of wine. They then served the wine to Shukracharya to drink. When Kacha did not return, Devayani again told her father. "I am certain that someone has killed Kacha. I cannot survive without him. Please do something."

Through this powers, Shukracharya discovered what had happened. He told his daughter, "We have a real problem on our hands. Kacha is inside my stomach. I can revive Kacha by summoning him through mritasanjivani. But in the process, he will have to tear asunder my body and I shall die. Tell me, beloved daughter, which do you want ? Either Kacha or your fatehr will live." "I refuse the choice." replied Devayani. "Both you and Kacha must live. I cannot survive

without either.” Shukracharya then decided that there was only one way out. He addressed Kacha, who was inside his stomach, and taught him the words of the mrtasanjivani mantra. He then recited the words himself and out came Kacha. Shukracharya’s body was torn apart and the sage died.

But Kacha had learnt the words of the mantra. He now recited them to bring Shukracharya back to life. Kacha thus learnt what he had set out to achieve. After spending a thousand years with Shukracharya, he prepared to return to heaven. “Where are you going?” asked Devayani. “Do you not know that I am in love with you? Please marry me.” I am afraid that I cannot do that,” replied Kacha. “You are my guru’s daughter. Therefore, you are my superior just as my guru is my superior. I cannot marry you. Moreover, I have spent some time inside his body. And when I came out, it was as if a son had been born from him. You are therefore my sister. How can I possibly marry you?” Thus spurned. Devayani became very angry. “You are playing with words,” she said. “I curse you that although you have learnt the art of mritasanjivani, it will prove to be of no use to you.” “You have needlessly cursed me,” retorted Kacha. “I too curse you that no brahmana will ever marry you and that you will never get whatever it is that you wish for.”

SHARMISHTHA AND DEVAYANI

Sharmishtha was the daughter of Vrishaparva, the king of the danavas. Sharmishtha and Devayani were great friends, until Indra played some mischief. The two friends had gone to bathe in a pond and had left their clothes on the bank. Indra adopted the form of a breeze and mixed up the clothes. When Sharmishtha donned her clothes after having had her bath, she put on Devayani’s clothes by mistake. Devayani said, “How dare you wear my clothes ? My father is your father’s teacher and you are my inferior in every respect. You have no business to put on my clothes.” “I am not your inferior.” Replied Sharmishtha. “It is you who are my inferior. My father is the king and your father thrives on my father’s generosity.” The two friends started to quarrel. Sharmishtha flung Devayani into a well and left her there, taking her to be dead.

At that time, King Yayati came to the forest on a hunt. He was thirsty and looked for some water. When he found the well, he discovered Devayani inside it. He rescued Devayani. Yayati also fell in love with her, so that the two got married. Shukracharya got to know about all this and was furious at the treatment that Sharmishtha had meted out to his daughter. He threatened to leave the demons. Vrishaparva did his best to persuade Shukracharya not to leave them, but Shukracharya insisted that he would stay only if Devayani was pacified. Vrishaparva promised to give Devayani whatever it was that she wished for. “Sharmishtha has insulted me,” said Devayani. “She has called me her inferior. My mind will be set at rest only if Sharmishtha serves as a servant. Vrishaparva agree to this condition and Sharmishtha became Devayani’s servant, together with one thousand other demon women.

After Yayati and Devayani got married, Shukracharya told Yayati, “Sharmishtha is Devayani’s servant and you are married to Devayani. Under no circumstances marry Sharmishtha, otherwise I am going to curse. In due course, Devayani gave birth to Yadu and Turvasu. Sharmishtha had secretly married Yayati and she too gave birth to Druhya, Anu and Puru. “How came you to have sons? Asked Devayani. “Who is your husband? “My husband is a brahmana,” replied

Sharmishtha. “I do not know his name.” But when Devayani asked Druhya, Anu and Puru about their father, the truth came out. They told her that they were King Yayati’s sons. “You have insulted me,” Devayani told Yayati. “Will remain your wife no longer. You have married my servant.”

Shukracharya was also furious. Yayati had gone against his wishes and had married Sharmishtha. Shukracharya cursed Yayati that old age would set upon the king, although he was still in the prime of youth. “Please do not curse me,” said Yayati. “I am married to your daughter. I wish to live with her as her husband. Do you wish your son-in-law to be an old servant?” “My curse cannot be lifted,” replied Shukracharya. “But I will try and mitigate the effects. I grant you the power that you can pass on this old age to whomsoever you wish.” It was this old age that Puru accepted.

MRITASANJIVANI

“But what about mritasanyjivani?” asked the sages. “You haven’t told us how Shukracharya came to acquire this wonderful knowledge.” Lomaharshana told them the following story. The gods and the demons fought all the time and the demons were sometimes worsted in these encounters. Shukracharya consoled the demons. “Do not worry,” he said. “I will try and acquire powers that will make the demons invincible. I am going off to pray. While I am gone, do not fight with the gods. Give up arms and lead the lives of hermits. Wait till my return.” Shukracharya’s father was the sage Bhrigu. The demons were instructed to wait in Bhrigu’s hermitage for Shukracharya’s return. The preceptor of the demons began to pray to Shiva. When Shiva appeared, Shukracharya told him that he wished to be taught a mantra that would make the demons invincible. “I will grant your request,” said Shiva. “But you will have to observe a difficult vrata (religious rite). For a thousand years you will have to meditate. And you will have to live only on smoke.” Shukracharya agreed to observe the vrata.

Meanwhile, the gods got to know what Shukracharya was up to. They realized that, once Shukracharya returned, they would be in no position to tackle the demons. The best thing to do was to attack the demons immediately, when they had given up arms and were living as hermits. The demons tried to tell the gods that this was not fair. They should not be attacked when they had forsaken arms. But the gods would not listen. They started to kill the demons. The demons fled to Shukracharya’s mother, Bhrigu’s wife, for protection. “Do not despair,” she assured the demons. “I will protect you.” When the gods attacked, the lady used her powers to make Indra completely immobile. Indra could not move at all. He stood there like a statue. This strange sight unerved the gods so much that they started to run away. Vishnu came to help Indra. He told Indra to enter his body, so that Vishnu might be able to save him. “I will burn both of you up through my powers,” said Shukracharya’s mother. “What are you waiting for?” Indra asked Vishnu. “Can’t you see that this woman will destroy us both? Kill her at once.” Vishnu summoned up his sudarshana chakra and with this, he neatly severed the lady’s head.

The sage Bhrigu was not present at that time. When he returned and found out what had happened, he was greatly angered. Vishnu had committed the crime of killing a woman. Bhrigu therefore cursed Vishnu that he would have to be born several times on earth. These are Vishnu’s avataras (incarnations). As for his own wife, Bhrigu resurrected her through his powers. Indra

had a daughter named Jayanti. Having failed in his attempt to kill the demons, Indra reasoned that he ought to try and disturb Shukracharya's meditation. He therefore sent Jayanti to the place where Shukracharya was praying. Her instructions were to try and distract the sage. Jayanti served Shukracharya faithfully throughout the appointed period of a thousand years. When the vrata was over, Shiva appeared before Shukracharya and taught him the art of mritasanjivani.

It was then that Shukracharya noticed Jayanti. "Who are you?" he asked. "And why have you been serving me thus? I am exceedingly pleased with what you have done. Tell me what I can do for you." "If you wish to grant me a boon, marry me and live as my husband for ten years," replied Jayanti. Shukracharya was lured away by Jayanti. Indra was bent upon ensuring the destruction of the demons and he now hit upon a plan. He asked Brihaspati to adopt Shukracharya's form and go to the demons. The demons were expecting their guru back after the thousand years were over and took Brihaspati to be Shukracharya. They honoured him and served him faithfully. When the ten years with Jayanti were over, Shukracharya returned and discovered Brihaspati among the demons. "Who is this upstart?" he demanded to know. "Give him up and seek refuge with me. I am the real Shukracharya." "Not at all," replied Brihaspati. "I am the real Shukracharya." The demons were bemused.

Brihaspati and Shukracharya were as alike as two peas in a pod; there was no way of telling the apart. They finally reasoned that the person who had been living with them for the last ten years must be their real guru. They therefore accepted Brihaspati and shooed Shukracharya away. Shukracharya cursed the demons that they were bound to be destroyed. As soon as Shukracharya cursed the demons, Brihaspati adopted his own form. The demons realized that they had been tricked, but the harm had been done.

THE PURANAS

Lomaharshana now gave the sages a list of the eighteen mahapuranas. In the beginning, there was only one Purana. The sage Vedavyasa divided this original Purana into eighteen mahapuranas. The mahapuranas have four lakh shlokas all together and their names are as follows. (i) The Brahma Purana: This was originally recited by Brahma to the sage Marichi and has thirteen thousand shlokas. This text should be donated on a full moon night (purnima) in the month of Vaishakha. Such a donation brings undying punya. (ii) The Padma Purana: This has fifty-five thousand shlokas and should be donated in the month of Jyaishta. (iii) The Vishnu Purana: This was first recited by the sage Parashara and has twenty-three thousand shlokas. It is auspicious to donate this text in the month of Ashada. (iv) The Vayu Purana: This has twenty-four thousand shlokas and was first recited by the wind-god Vayu. It should be donated in the month of Shravana. (v) The Bhagavata Purana: This has eighteen thousand shlokas and should be donated in the month of Bhadra, on the night of the full moon. (vi) The Narada Purana: this was first recited by the sage Narada and has twenty-five thousand shlokas. It should be donated on the night of the new moon (amavasya) in the month of Ashvina. (vii) The Markandeya Purana: This has nine thousand shlokas. A person desirous of obtaining punya should donate this text in month of Margashirsa. (viii) The Agni Purana: This was first recited by the fire-god Agni to the sage Vashishtha. It has sixteen thousand shlokas and should be donated in the month of Margashirsha. (ix) The Bhavishya Purana: Brahma himself was the first reciter of this Purana and it has fourteen thousand and five hundred shlokas. It is primarily concerned with what is due

to happen in the future. The text should be donated on the occasion of purnima, in the month of Pousha. (x) The Brahmavaivarta Purana: This was first recited by Savarni Manu to the sage Narada. It has eighteen thousand shlokas and should be donated on purnima in the month of Magha. (xi) The Linga Purana: Brahma recited this first and it has eleven thousand sholkas. Punya is acquired if this text is donated in the month of Falguna. (xii) The Varaha Purana: The great Vishnu first recited this to the earth. It has twenty-four thousand shlokas and is to be donated in the month of Chaitra. (xiii) The Skanda Purana: This was composed by the god Skanda or Kartikeya. It has eighty-one thousand shlokas and one desirous of punya donates the text in the month of Chaitra. (xiv) The Vamana Purana: Brahma was the first person to recite this. It has ten thousand shlokas and the text should be donated in early autumn (sharat). (xv) The Kurma Purana: Vishnu recited this in his form of a turtle. It has eighteen thousand shlokas and should be donated at the time of the equinoxes. (xvi) The Matsya Purana: Vishnu recited this in his form of a fish to Manu. It has fourteen thousand shlokas and should be donated at the time of the equinoxes. (xvii) The Garuda Purana: Krishna was the first person to recite this and it has eighteen thousand shlokas. (xviii) The Brahmamda Purana: Brahma recited this and it has twelve thousand and two hundred shlokas. But these Puranas, as stated, are merely for human consumption. Much longer versions are read by the gods. The total number of shlokas in the Puranas that the gods read is one hundred crores.

TRIPURA

There was a danava named Maya. Just as Vishvakarma was the architect of the gods, Maya was the architect of the demons. When the demons were defeated by the gods, Maya started to perform very difficult tapasya so that the gods might be defeated. Maya's meditation inspired two other demons to also meditate. Their names were Vidyunmali and Taraka. The meditation was so difficult that the world marvelled at the sight of what the demons were doing.

Finally, Brahma was pleased at all this effort and appeared before the demons. "I am pleased with what you have done," said Brahma. "What boon do you want?" "We have been defeated by the gods," replied Maya. "We wish to build a fort that the gods will not be able to destroy. The fort will be named Tripura and we will live in it and become immortal." "Immortality is a boon that cannot be granted." Said Brahma. "If you want, set fairly difficult conditions for your deaths." "Very well then," replied Maya. "We will be killed only if Shiva himself destroys Tripura with a single arrow. Let that be the appointed method of our deaths." This boon Brahma granted and Maya began the task of constructing the fort.

In fact, he built three (tri) fortresses (pura). One was made of iron, the second of silver and the third of gold. Normally, the fortresses were distinct. But once every thousand years, when the nakshatra Pushya was in the sky, the three cities came together in the sky and were called Tripura. Each of the fortresses was stocked with diverse weapons as protections against raids by the gods. Taraka lived in the fort made of iron, Vidyunmali in the one made of silver, and Maya himself lived in the one that was made of gold. The other demons got to know that three invincible forts had been built. They came and populated the three cities. But the demons were not evil at all. They observed all sorts of religious rites. In particular, they were devoted to Shiva and prayed to him all the time. They did not want Shiva to be angry with them. It was, after all, Shiva alone who could be the instrument for their destruction.

But eventually, the demons became intoxicated with their own power and came upon evil ways. They warred upon other living beings and started to oppress the universe. Maya did try to persuade them to mend their ways, but the demons would not listen to Maya's good advice. All the living beings in the universe went to Brahma to complain. "Please save us from this oppression," They said, "It is because of your boon that the demons have become so powerful. "I cannot help you," replied Brahma. "The boon is such that Shiva alone can destroy Tripura. Let us all pray to Shiva." The gods, the sages and the humans started to pray to Shiva. Pleased with these prayers, Shiva promised to destroy Tripura.

A special chariot was built for Shiva to ride in. Brahma himself agreed to be the charioteer. The army of the gods got ready to help Shiva in his war against Tripura. A terrible war raged between the gods and the demons. Nandi is one of Shiva's companions. Nandi fought with Vidyunmali and slew the demon after a fierce battle. But Maya knew all sorts of magical tricks. He was particularly well-versed in the use of herbs. Maya gave Vidyunmali a bath in the juice of magical herbs and Vidyunmali immediately revived. This act greatly boosted the demons' morale and they began to fight with renewed vigour. Any demons, who were killed, were instantly revived by Maya. But when Shiva himself entered the fray, the demons were put to flight. Even the herbs that resurrected dead demons proved to be of no avail. Nandi killed Tarakasura after a fierce duel.

The demons were disheartened, but Maya reassured them. "Don't forget the boon," he said, "There are only some special conditions under which Tripura can be destroyed. Otherwise it is indestructible. Pushya nakshatra is in the sky now and soon the three cities will come together as one. The only person who can destroy it then is Shiva. And he must do it with a single arrow. All we have to do is ensure that Shiva cannot shoot the arrow and we are safe." But this was easier said than done. It was no mean task to repel Shiva and his cohorts. Nandi killed Vidyunmali a second time. As soon as the three cities came together, Shiva shot a flaming arrow which completely burnt up Tripura and all the demons who were within. The only one who was saved was Maya. He did not die because he was extremely devoted to Shiva. Ever since that day, Maya has lived under the water.

THE MEASUREMENT OF TIME

The smallest unit of time is a nimesha; this is the amount of time it takes to blink. Fifteen nimeshas make one kashtha and thirty kashthas are one kala. Thirty kalas one muhurta and there are thirty muhurtas in one divaratra (one day). Fifteen muhurtas constitute the day and fifteen muhurtas make up the night. One month for humans is one day for the ancestors (pitri). Shuklapaksha is the lunar fortnight during which the moon waxes and krishnapaksha is the lunar fortnight during which the moon wanes. Shuklapaksha corresponds to night for the ancestors and krishnapaksha corresponds to day. Thus, thirty human months are merely one month for the ancestors. Three hundred and sixty human months are one year for the ancestors. One human year is one divaratarata for the gods. The human year is divided into two ayanas, each consisting of six months. These are known as uttarayana and dakshinayana. Uttarayana is day for the gods and dakshinayana is night. Thirty human years are one month for the gods and three hundred and sixty human years are one year for the gods.

Time is divided into four yugas (eras). These are known as satya yuga or krita yuga, treta yuga, dvapara yuga and kali yuga. The lengths of these yugas are defined in terms of years of the gods. Satya yuga has four thousand years of the gods, treta yuga three thousand, dvapara yuga two thousand and kali yuga one thousand. A cycle of satya yuga, treta yuga, dvapara yuga and kali yuga is known as a mahayuga. Thus, a mahayuga would seem to consist of ten thousand years of the gods. But this is not quite correct. In between any two yugas are intervening periods, known as sandhyamshas. For example, the sandhyamsha for satya yuga is four hundred years, for treta yuga three hundred years, for dvapara yuga two hundred years and for kali yuga one hundred years. Once one adds the sandhyamshas, a mahayuga adds up to twelve thousand years of the gods. A little over seventy-one yugas constitute one manvantara. Fourteen such manvantaras are one kalpa. A kalpa is merely one day for Brahma. At the end of Brahma's day, the universe is destroyed. It is then created afresh when a new day dawns for Brahma.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YUGAS

As one progressively moves down the scale from satya yuga to kali yuga, the power of righteous diminishes and evil starts to triumph. In treta yuga people were righteous. The system of varnashrama dharma goes back to treta yuga. This is typified in the principle of four varnas (classes) and four ashramas (stages of life). The four varnas are brhmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. Each class has its proper place, each its assigned occupations as determined by the principles of division of labour. The four ashramas are brhamacharya (celibate studenthood), Garhasthya (householder stage), vanaprastha (forest-dwelling stage), and sannyasa (hermithood). Everyone followed the tenets of varnashrama dharma in treta yuga. Individuals were equally handsome and equally wealthy. Poverty and disease were unknown. The weather was clement and, initially, there was no need to build houses. Cities and villages were not known. People lived freely in the mountains and on the shores of the oceans. But as people became evil, the weather turned inclement. Houses had to be built so the people might be protected from the heat and the cold. Cities and villages were planned and constructed. Evil became even more prevalent in dvapara yuga. In some cases, individuals began to practise that which was against the dictates of varnashrama dharma. To bring men back to the righteous path, the knowledge of the sacred Vedas had to be disseminated amongst humans. To this end, the great Vedavyasa divided the Vedas into four. Various other shastras (sacred texts) were also composed in dvapara yuga. These include ayurveda (medicine), jyotisha (astronomy) and arthashastra (economics). Hatred, jealousy, warfare and other evils first originated in dvapara yuga. Individuals did not stick to their own classes while marrying, and cross-breeds started to be born. But some remnants of righteousness could still be found, so that average life expectancies amounted to two thousand years. Kali yuga is the worst of the four eras. Theft, hatred, falsehood, fraudulence and egotism become the norm. As a natural corollary to such evils, drought and famine recur again and again. Even the brahmanas are led astray. They do not study the Vedas, nor do they perform yajnas. The brahmanas degenerate so much that they mix with shudras. As for the shudras, they become kings. Can anything more ridiculous be imagined? Shudras even start to study the Vedas. Evil always has its effect. Disease becomes rampant and life expectancies go down.

VAJRANAGA

Indra had killed many of Diti's children, the daityas. Diti had wished to obtain a son who would kill Indra. But because she had not been able to adhere to the stipulated religious rites, the sons who had been born had become friends and companions of Indra. But Indra continued to attack and kill the demons. Diti therefore prayed to her husband Kashyapa yet again that she might have a son who would defeat Indra. "Your wish will be granted," said Kashyapa. "But you will have to meditate hard for ten thousand years. Indra's weapon is the vajra and the son who will be born will have a body (anga) that is as tough as the vajra will be able to do him no harm. Diti meditated for ten thousand years and in due course, gave birth to this powerful son. Vajranga was invincible. When Vajranga grew up, Diti told her son, "Indra has killed many of my sons. I am thirsting for revenge. Go and kill Indra."

Vajranga set for heaven. He defeated Indra very easily and tied him up. He then brought Indra home to his mother and prepared to kill the king of the gods. Indra's death would have been a great calamity and Brahma and Kashyapa rushed there. "Vajranga," they said. "Please do not kill Indra. Let him go. If someone who deserves respect is insulted, that is like death for him. Indra has been defeated by you. He has therefore been insulted and is as good as dead. There is no need to physically kill him. Moreover, the very fact that you are letting Indra go at our request will be known to all. Even if he lives, everyone is going to regard him as dead. Listen to our request and let him go."

"I am not averse to that suggestion at all," replied Vajranga. "I have no intention of killing Indra. I was merely obeying my mother's instructions. How can I refuse two such revered individuals like you? One of you is the creator of the whole universe and the other one is my own father. I will let Indra go. But please grant me a boon. Grant me the boon that I may be able to perform a lot of tapasya." This boon was readily granted. In addition, Brahma created a beautiful woman named Varangi and married her off to Vajranga.

Vajranga went to the forest to meditate. For a thousand years, he stood with his arms raised up towards the sky. And in this posture, he meditated. He then stood on his head for a thousand years more and meditated. As a final part of the tapasya, he wished to meditate under the water for a thousand years more. When Vajranga entered the water, his wife Varangi patiently waited for her husband to return. And all the while, she too meditated. But Indra was not going to let sleeping dogs lie. He adopted the form of a monkey and uprooted all the trees in Varangi's hermitage. He next adopted the form of a sheep and ate up all the grass that was there. As a snake, he tried to bite the lady. Finally, he adopted the form of a cloud and drenched the hermitage in torrents of rain. Since Varangi was meditating, she was in no position to retaliate or protect herself. She had to bear all these depredations.

When the thousand years were over, Vajranga returned. He was shocked to learn of the tortures that his wife had been subjected to by Indra. He began to meditate again. This time, he wished for a son who would kill Indra. Brahma appeared and granted Vajranga the desired boon. "You will have a son who will be the scourge of the gods," said Brahma. "He will be called Taraka." For a thousand years Varangi bore the baby in her womb. When Taraka was born, the earth trembled and tidal waves were created in the ocean. Fierce storms started to rage. Wild animals rejoiced and the sages shuddered. In due course, Taraka was crowned the king of the demons.

TARAKA'S TAPASYA

Taraka was hell bent upon defeating the gods. But he realized that, prior to waging war on the gods, he would have to become powerful. Such powers could not be attained through tapasya. Taraka went to the Pariparta mountains and selected a cave there for his meditation. For some days Taraka ate nothing, for some more days he survived only on water, and on other days he ate only leaves. Every day he sliced off some flesh from his body and offered it to the fire as a token of his devotion. All this hardship pleased Brahma and he appeared before Taraka. "Enough is enough," said Brahma. "I am pleased at your devotion. What boon can I grant you?" "I want to fight with the gods," replied Taraka. "The gods have been giving the demons a hard time and I intended to reverse the tide. Please grant me the boon that I may be invincible and immortal." "Immortality is not a boon that can be granted to any living being." Said Brahma. "All living beings must die. But if you want, set fairly difficult conditions for your death." "In that case, please grant me the boon that I can only be killed by a seven year old child," requested Taraka. Brahma gladly granted this boon.

THE WAR BETWEEN THE GODS AND THE DEMONS

Fortified with Brahma's boon, Taraka started to rule the demons. After some years had passed and after Taraka had raised a strong army, he decided to attack heaven. A huge army of demons was accordingly raised. There were thousands of elephants, horses and chariots in the army. Apart from Taraka, the major generals in the army were Jambha, Kujambha, Mahisha, Kunjara, Megha, Kalanemi, Nimi, Mathana, Jambhaka, and Shumbha. Diverse were the weapons that the demons armed themselves with. The gods also prepared themselves for the war, having first appointed Yama as their general. Yama rode into battle on a buffalo. Indra had his chariot, driven by his charioteer Matali. The fire-god Agni rode on a goat and Varuna, the lord of the oceans, rode a snake. Amongst the other gods who were in the army were Chandra, Surya and Kubera, the god of prosperity and wealth. The war was terrible to behold. The trumpeting of elephants, the neighing of horses and the beating of drums made a terrible racket. Above all this there was the noise of weapons clanging and bows twanging. Chariots fought with chariots, elephants with elephants, horses with horses and foot-soldiers with foot-soldiers. The sky was thick with spears, maces, axes, swords, tridents, clubs and arrows flying around. Dead bodies littered the battlefield and rivers of blood began to flow. Yama fought a fierce duel with a demon named Grasana and Kubera fought with Jambha. Kujambha also fought with Kubera and put Kubera to flight. Kalanemi fought with both Chandra and Surya. The two Ashvins received a sound thrashing at Kalanemi's hands. The news that the gods were being slaughtered reached Vishnu and Vishnu joined the fight.

The demons immediately attacked Vishnu, but were no match for him. One of Vishnu's maces knocked Kalanemi unconscious. Vishnu's chakra sliced off Grasana's head. Jambha did manage to knock Vishnu unconscious with a club. But Indra slew Jambha with a divine weapon. The trouble however was with Taraka. When he came to fight, the gods had no option but to flee. Those who did not, were captured and imprisoned. The demon won a resounding victory.

BRAHMA'S ADVICE

Those of the gods who had survived the battle and were still free started to pray to Brahma. "What can I do for you?" asked Brahma. Why are all of you looking so despondent?" "You are the one who is responsible for our misfortune," replied the gods. "You have granted Taraka a boon that has made him virtually invincible. Armed with this boon, he is oppressing the universe and has soundly thrashed us. What are we to do now?" "There is no cause for such despondency," said Brahma. "Taraka is not immortal. He will be slain by a seven year old child. Unfortunately that child has not yet been born. He will be the son of Shiva. The problem is that Shiva is unmarried. He was earlier married to Sati, but Sati immolated herself at the time of a yajna. She has now been reborn as Parvati. The task at hand is to get Shiva and Parvati married. Their son will kill Taraka."

It was necessary to make Shiva fall in love with Parvati. Madana, the god of love, was sent by Indra to Shiva's hermitage so that this might be achieved. But because this disturbed Shiva's meditation, Shiva burnt Madana up. Meanwhile, Parvati had begun to perform tapasya so that she might have Shiva for a husband. For one hundred years more, she ate only one leaf a day. And for the final hundred years, she meditated fasting. The seven great sages went and told Shiva about Parvati's tapasya and Shiva agreed to marry Parvati. The marriage took place amidst a great deal of fanfare. All the rivers and the mountains came to attend the ceremony. So did the sages, the gods, the gandharvas, the apsaras and the yakshas. Brahma himself acted as the priest for the marriage ceremony.

KALI BECOMES GOURI

On one particular occasion, Shiva addressed Parvati as "Kali." The word kali means dark and Parvati thought that Shiva referring to her dark complexion. She did not realize that Shiva was merely trying to tease her a bit. Greatly incensed at the imagined slight, Parvati decided that she would meditate so that she might become fair. She wore clothing made of barks of trees and performed tapasya. In the summer she prayed inside a raging fire and in the winter she prayed under the water. Sometimes, she ate only roots and fruits. At other times, she fasted. Prior to leaving for her tapasaya, Parvati had instructed Nandi that he was to stand guard at Shiva's door and permit no other woman to enter.

There was a demon named Adi. This fellow had performed a lot of tapasya and had manage to please Brahma. When Brahma agreed to grant him a boon. Adi asked for the boon of immortality. Brahma naturally refused this boon. He however granted Adi the boon that the demon would die only when he changd his form twice, not otherwise. Adi happened to come to Shiva and Parvati's house and discovered Nandi standing guard at the door. Wondering what there was to be guarded, he adopted the form of a snake and slithered in. Nandi did not notice the snake, but this was Adi's first transformation. Inside the house, Adi encountered Shiva and thought that he would play a trick on Shiva. He adopted Parvati's form. This was his second transformation. In the form of Parvati, Adi went up to Shiva and greeted him. Initially, Shiva did not realize that this was not Parvati. He greeted the demon and said, "Darling, I am delighted tht you have returned. I can see that your rage has cooled down." But in a little while Shiva realized that this was not Parvati. He slew the demon. Meanwhile, Parvati was continuing with her tapsaya and pleased Brahma with her prayers. Brahma granted her the boon that she would become fair. Since the word gouri means fair, Parvati was thereafter known as Gouri. A goddess

named Koushiki emerged out of Parvati's cells, thus named because the word kosha means cell. The darkness of Parvati's complexion entered Koushiki's body. Brahma requested the goddess Koushiki to go and live in the Vindhya mountains. She is therefore also known as Vindhyaivasini.

KARTIKEYA AND TARAKA

Kartikeya or Skanda was born after some days. The boys shone with the radiance of a thousand suns and had six (shada) faces (anana). He was therefore also known as Shadanana. The gods armed Kartikeya with diverse weapons and appointed him their general. They requested him to kill the demon Taraka and arrangements were made for the battle. When Taraka saw Kartikeya he said, "What is a boy like you doing in a battlefield? Go and play with a ball instead."

A battlefield is not the place for idle talk," replied Kartikeya. "Show me your prowess instead." At these words, Taraka flung a club at Kartikeya. But Kartikeya easily repelled the club with a vajra. The demon next hurled an axe, but Kartikeya effortlessly caught the axe in his hand. He then struck the demon with a club of his own. This angered Taraka so much that the demon showered all sorts of weapons on Kartikeya. But the boy repelled all of these and started to kill demons with his own weapons. Many demons fled in dismay. As for Taraka himself, Kartikeya's spear pierced him in the chest and killed him. Thus it was that Brahma's boon became true.

HIRANYAKASHIPU

Diti had a son named Hiranyakashipu. This demon meditated for eleven thousand years under the water. Through this period, he did not eat or talk at all. These meditations pleased Brahma and Brahma offered to grant Hiranyakashipu a boon. "What boon do you wish for?" he asked. "If you are pleased, grant me the following boon," replied the demon. "I will not be killed by gods, demons, gandharvas, yakshas, rakshasas or snakes. I will not be killed by humans or ghosts. The sages will not be able to curse me. I will not be killed by a weapon, a mountain or a tree. I will not be killed during the day or at night. I will not be killed by something that is dry or by something that is wet." This rather strange boon Brahma granted. But the sages, the gods, the gandharvas and the snakes went and complained to Brahma. "What have you done?" they asked. "This demon is now going to oppress the entire universe." "Don't worry," replied Brahma. "When the time comes, Vishnu himself will kill Hiranyakashipu."

But true to expectations, the demon started to oppress the world. He destroyed the hermitages of the sages and drove the gods out of heaven. All yajnas were stopped. The gods and the sages started praying to Vishnu. Stirred by these prayers, Vishnu adopted the form of a strange being who was half-man and half-lion. Since nara means man and simha means lion, this being was called Narasimha. Narasimha went on a visit to Hiranyakashipu's court. Hiranyakashipu had a son named Prahlada and at the sight of Narasimha. Prahlada exclaimed. "I have a strong suspicion that this being is none other than Vishnu and that we demons will suffer at his hands." Hiranyakashipu asked his soldiers to capture the creature. Or, if that proved to be impossible, to kill it.

But the soldiers could do no such thing; Narasimha killed them all. Hiranyakasipu then himself hurled all sorts of weapons at Narasimha. But great was his bewilderment at finding that all these weapons could do the strange creature no harm. Any weapons could do the strange creature no harm. Any weapon that was hurled was simply swallowed up by Narasimha. The rocks that were flung at him could not even reach him. Narasimha grasped Hiranyakashipu and placed him across his thighs. He then tore apart the demon's chest with his claws. Thus, Hiranyakashipu was not killed by a weapon, a mountain or a tree, or by something that was either wet or dry. Vishnu in his Narasimha form was not a god, a demon, a gandharva, a yaksha, a rakshasa, a snake, a human or a ghost. Since the slaying took place in the evening, it was neither night nor day. All the conditions of Brahma's boon were met. The entire world rejoiced at the demon-king's death.

SAVITRI

There used to be a king named Ashvapati who ruled in the kingdom of Madra. Ashvapati had no sons. He therefore began to pray to the goddess Savitri so that he might have a son. He performed thousands and thousands of yajnas. Eventually the goddess appeared before the king and said, "You will not have a son. But I am going to grant you a daughter." The daughter was named Malati. But since she was born as a result of a boon received from the goddess Savitri, she was more popularly known as Savitri. When Savitri grew up, she was married to Satyavana, the son of King Dyumatsena. The sage Narada once came to visit them and told them. "Satyavana is going to die within a year." Hearing this, Savitri and Satyavana went off to the forest to prepare themselves for the impending death.

When only four days of the appointed life span were left, Savitri observed a religious rite that has now become famous savitri rata. Amongst other things, this involved fasting for a period of three days. On the fourth and final day, Satyavana went to collect fodder, roots and fruits in the dense part of the forest and Savitri also accompanied her husband. When they were tired, Savitri sat down beside a pond to rest. Satyavana continued to collect fodder and firewood near the pond. While he was thus engaged, he started to suffer from a splitting headache. "Savitri," he said, "I cannot bear this pain any longer. Let me rest for a while with my head in your lap." While Satyavana was resting with his head on Savitri's lap, Yama arrived to claim Satyavana. Yama's complexion was dark and he was dressed entirely in yellow. His crown was golden. Armlets graced his arms and necklaces hung around his neck.

In each human body there is an entity that is only the size of a finger in length. This is the part of the body that is claimed by Yama and taken to his abode. When this is done, only the dead body is left. Yama tied up Satyavana's minute body in a noose and prepared to take it to his abode. But when Yama left, Savitri followed him. "Where do you think you are going?" asked Yama. "I am following my husband," replied Savitri. "There is no greater duty for a wife than serving her husband. Since my husband is leaving, I have to leave with him." "I am pleased at your devotion," said Yama. "Ask for a boon and I shall grant it to you. The only thing that you cannot ask for is that Satyavana be brought back to life." "My father-in-law has become blind," replied Savitri. "He can therefore no longer be the king. Please grant me the boon that his eyesight is restored so that he can become the king again." "I grant you that." Said Yama.

“Now please return. You will unnecessarily get tired if you follow me.” “How I can get tired if I follow you?” asked Savitri. “You are the chief of all the gods. Is it possible to get tired if one follows you?” “That pleases me even more,” said Yama. “Ask for another boon. But under no circumstances are you allowed to ask that Satyavana be brought back to life.” “My father has no sons,” replied Savitri. “Please grant me the boon that he may have a hundred sons.” “I grant you that,” said Yama. “Now return. Go and perform your husband’s funeral rites. Serve your parents and parents-in-law well. You are unnecessarily tiring yourself by following me around.”

“I thank you for your advice.” Replied Savitri. “But I have already told you that I cannot possibly get tired. You are the lord of dharma, the lord of righteousness. Can one possibly tire oneself by following such a person?” “Your devotion is truly amazing,” “Ask for another boon. But do not ask for Satyavana’s life.” “Please grant me the boon that Satyavana and I may have a hundred sons,” requested Savitri. Yama granted the boon without thinking and Savitri then pointed out that what Yama had agreed to would be impossible if Satyavana died. Yama had no option but to restore Satyavana to life. Yama blessed Savitri and went away. In due course, Satyavana and Savitri had a hundred sons named that Malvas. Savitri is a model for all devoted wives to follow.

VALI

There was a demon named Vali who was descended from Hiranyakashipu. Extremely strong, he defeated the gods and drove them out of heaven. The mother of all the gods was Aditi and Aditi was despondent that her sons should suffer so at the hands of demons. She therefore began to pray to Vishnu so that she might have a powerful son who would provide a fitting reply to the demons, particularly to Vali. For a thousand years, Aditi meditated. Vishnu was pleased at these prayers and appeared before Aditi. “What boon do you wish for?” he asked. “The demons are oppressing my children,” replied Aditi. “Please grant me a son who will defeat the demons.” “Do not despair,” said Vishnu. “I myself will be born as your son. I will take care of the demons.” You will remember that Aditi’s husband was the sage Kashyapa. Kashyapa and Aditi accordingly had a son. This son was a dwarf (vamana).

Vali happened to organize a yajna and the dwarf came to attend the ceremony. On the occasion of the yajna, Vali had decided that he would not refuse anyone what he asked for. Shukracharya was the preceptor of the demons and naturally, he was Vali’s guru as well. Shukracharya saw through the trickery that was involved and realized that the dwarf was none other than Vishnu. He tried to put Vali on his guard and warned Vali that he should not grant what the dwarf asked for.

But Vali would not listen. “Vishnu is the lord of everything.” He said. “I am indeed fortunate if Vishnu has come to grace my ceremony in the disguise of a dwarf. How can I refuse what he asks for?” Vali welcomed the dwarf with offerings. “What is your desire?” he asked. “I am duty bound to give you what you ask for.” “I desire nothing much,” replied the dwarf. “I do not want gold or riches or elephants or horses. All that I ask for is as much of land as can be covered in three of my footsteps.” “Granted,” said Vali.

No sooner were the words uttered that he dwarf assumed a gigantic form. His head rose way up into the sky. With each one of his footsteps, Vishnu covered one of the three worlds. Thus Vali ended up by donating all of the three worlds to Vishnu and there was nowhere for the demons to live in. But Vishnu was pleased at Vali's generosity. He therefore decreed that, henceforth, the demons would live in the underworld. As for heaven, it was returned to Indra. This was the story of Vishnu's dwarf incarnation.

THE BOAR INCARNATION

At the end of the last kalpa, there was a general destruction and the universe was flooded with water. Vishnu alone slept on this water in his form of Narayana. When it was time for creation to begin, Brahma appeared inside an egg. All the worlds that would be there in the universe and all the beings who would populate these worlds were inside the egg. But before creation could start, the earth had to be created so that living beings might have a place to live in. When the earth was first created, it was full of mountain ranges and these mountains were exceedingly heavy. The upshot of this was that the earth could not bear the weight of these mountains and started to get immersed in the water. She went all the way down to the underworld. The earth started to pray to Vishnu so that she might be saved. Vishnu adopted the form of a gigantic boar (varaha). He entered the water and raised the earth up on his tusks. He laid her to rest on the water, having first levelled out the mountains. This was the story of Vishnu's boar incarnation.

THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN

The gods and the demons always fought with one another. In the process, many demons and gods were killed. This was no problem for the demons. Their teacher, Shukracharya, knew the art of mritasanjivani and immediately brought the dead demons back to life. But the gods who were killed stayed dead. The gods went to Brahma for his advice. "Having a temporary truce with the demons," said Brahma. "Unite with them and churn the ocean. This churning will make you immortal and you will have no reason to fear the demons." The gods went to meet Vali, the king of the demons, with the proposal and Vali agreed to the temporary truce. Preparations were made for the churning of the ocean. Mount Mandara was used as the rod for churning and the great snake Vasuki agreed to be the churning-rope. The problem however was the Mount Mandara had no base to rest on. And without a base, the peak would move and the churning could not proceed. The great Vishnu adopted the form of a huge turtle (kurma). The back of the turtle provided the base on which Mount Mandara could rest. The churning started. The gods held Vasuki's tail and the demons the head. The churning went on for a thousand years of the gods. The first object to emerge as a result of the churning was the moon, Chandra. Shiva accepted Chandra as an adornment for his forehead.

Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, merged next and was united with Vishnu, Sura, the goddess of wine and drinking, came out next. She was followed by the divine horse Uchchaishrava. This was appropriated by Indra. A beautiful jewel named koustubha came out next and was accepted by Vishnu as his adornment. After these wonderful objects had come out, smoke started to billow out and clouded the atmosphere. The cloud was followed by tongues of fire which threatened to burn up the gods and the demons. From the fire there came out all sorts of poisonous snakes and venomous insects. This was followed by a terrible poison known as

kalakuta. No one knew what to do with the poison, it would have killed them all. The gods and the demons began to pray to Shiva for deliverance. Shiva appeared and swallowed up the poison. It stuck in his throat and made his throat blue in colour. Since nila means blue and kantha means throat, Shiva came to be known as Nilakantha.

With the danger removed, the churning continued and Dhanvantari came out of the ocean. He was the physician of the gods and the originator of medicine (ayurveda). Dhanvantari held the pot of amrita in his hands. The demons immediately started to fight over the possession of the amrita. But Vishnu adopted the form of a beautiful woman (known as mohini). This woman was so pretty that all the demons fell in love with her and gladly handed over the pot of amrita to her. But they continued to fight with the gods. While the fighting went on, Vishnu secretly fed the gods the amrita. The gods became immortal. The demons received no amrita, not a single drop. That was not quite true. There was a demon named Rahu. He adopted the form of a god and managed to get a little bit of the amrita. But Surya and Chandra spotted the deception and pointed it out to Vishnu. Vishnu promptly severed Rahu's head with his chakra. The amrita never percolated down beyond Rahu's throat. But the demon's head had had its share of the amrita and became immortal. Rahu never forgave Surya and Chandra for telling on him. Rahu's head tries to swallow up the sun and the moon, given a chance. You can see this happening at the time of the solar and lunar eclipses. This was the story of Vishnu's turtle incarnation.

ARCHITECTURE

The science of architecture owes its origin to eighteen great sages. Their names are Bhrigu, Atri, Vashishtha, Vishvakarma, Maya, Narada, Nagnajita, Vishalaksha, Puranadara, Brahma, Kartikeya, Nandishvara, Shounaka, Garga, Vasudeva, Aniruddha, Shukra, and Brihaspati. The building of a house should never be begun in the month of Chaitra. A person who does this is sure to contract a disease. The month of Vaishakha is a good time to begin. One who does this is bound to own many cows. The months of Agrahayana, Magha and Falguna are also auspicious. An individual who begins the task in Agrahayana has full granaries, one who begins it in Magha attains all sorts of riches and one who begins it in Falguna obtains gold and sons. Ashada is also a good month to start. Servants and animals are owed by a person who starts the building in Ashada. But the months of Jyaishta, Shravana, Bhadra, Ashvina and Pousha are inauspicious. If you start in Jyaishta, you will die soon; you will also die if you begin in Shravana; begin in Bhadra and you will suffer from all manner of losses; your wife will die if you start the task in the month of Ashvina; and all your goods will be stolen if you start in the month of Pousha. It is best to begin the building of a house when the nakshatras Ashvini, Rohini, Mula, Uttarabhadrapada, Uttarashada, Uttarafalguni or Mrigashira are in the sky. Any day is permissible with the exception of Sunday and Tuesday.

The ground on which the house is to be built has to be tested. A pit should be dug and a sapling planted. If the sapling thrives and grows into a big tree, the ground has been well-chosen. But if the tree withers away or does not grow into a strong tree, one ought to move somewhere else. A diagram is then drawn on the ground, in the form of a square with eighty-one smaller squares inside it. That is the larger square will be subdivided into nine squares along every side. Nine multiplied by nine gives the eighty-one smaller squares. In each of these eighty-one smaller squares, a specific god has to be worshipped. There are different types of houses. A house that

has doors on all four sides is known as a sarvatobhadra. Such a configuration is recommended for palaces or temples. A house that does not have a door to the west is known as a nandyavarta; a house that does not have a door to the south is known as a varddhamana; a house that does not have a door to the east is known as a svastika; and a house that does not have a door to the north is known as ruchaka. A palace should be one hundred and eight cubits (hand-lengths) in length. If a prince, and not a king, is to live in the palace, sixty-six cubits are the recommended length. Other recommended lengths are sixty-four cubits for generals, forty-eight cubits for ministers, twenty-eight cubits for artisans and twelve cubits for messengers and guards. Priests and physicians are entitled to twenty-four cubits. An ordinary householder should build a house that is thirty-two cubits in length. The sole exception is an outcast, he is entitled to only sixteen cubits.

There should not be any trees in the front of the house. But trees have to be planted towards the back. The wood with which the house has to be built must be carefully chosen. One must not cut down a tree that birds have built nests on. Certain trees must never be chosen. These include those that have been gashed by an elephant or struck by lightning. They also include trees that grow near temples or at the of rivers and trees from cremation grounds. Neem trees and mango trees must never be used for building houses. The height of the tree should be multiplied by its circumference. This product should now be divided by eight. If the remainder that is left is one, the timber can be used in building any part of the house. Such timber is known as dhvaja. When the remainder is two the timber is known vrisha and should be used in constructing the western door. When the remainder is three the timber is called simha and should be used for the northern door. The name is vrishabha if the remainder is four and such wood should be used for the eastern door. When the remainder is five the timber is given the name of hasti and should be used for the southern door.

IDOLS

Idols have to be instated in temples. Vishnu's image should have either eight hands or four. If there are eight hands, the arms to the right should hold a shankha (concha-shell), a gada (mace), a shara (arrow) and a padma (lotus). The arms to the left should hold dhanu (bow), a padma, a shankha and a chakra (bladed-discus). If there are four hands, the mace and the lotus should be to the right and the chakra and the conch-shell to the left. Vishnu will be shown standing on the world. Garuda, the king of the birds, bears him around Garuda will therefore be shown at Vishnu's feet, towards the right. Lakshmi's image must always be to the left of Vishnu's image and Lakshmi will hold a lotus in her hand. The best idols are made out of gold, silver, copper, jewels, stone, wood, from alloys. The proportions of the various parts of the body must be exactly right. Shiva's image must have matted hair and he must wear a crescent moon on his forehead. The idol must convey the impression that Shiva is sixteen years old. Shiva must be dressed in tigerskin and must be garlanded with snakes. A peacock feather should adorn on ear. If a spear, a rod or a trident are shown, they must be to the right. And if a skull, a snake or a sword are shown, they must be to the left. When Shiva is shown riding a bull, his image has two hands. But when he is shown in a dancing posture, the image has ten hands. If the intention is to show him destroying Tripura, the image must have sixteen hands. There is one particular image that deserves special mention. This is known as arddhanarishvara, half-male and half-female. The Shiva part of the image will be to the right and the Parvati part of the image will be to the

left. The right hand of the image will hold a skull or a trident and the left hand of the image will hold a lotus or a mirror. There is another type of image known as Uma-Maheshvara. In this case, there are two separate images, one of Shiva and the other of Parvati. The idols of various other gods and goddesses are also described.

PAVILIONS (MANDAPA)

These are classified in terms of the number of pillars that are used in their construction, and there are twenty-seven main types of pavilions. (i) A pushpaka pavilion has sixty-four pillars. (ii) A pushpabhadra pavilion has sixty-two pillars. (iii) A suvrata pavilion has sixty pillars. (iv) An amritanandana pavilion has fifty-eight pillars. (v) A doushalya pavilion has fifty-six pillars. (vi) A buddhisamkirna pavilion has fifty-four pillars. (vii) A gajabhadra pavilion has fifty-two pillars. (viii) A jayavaha pavilion has fifty pillars. (ix) A shrivatsa pavilion has forty-eight pillars. (x) A vijaya pavilion has forty-six pillars. (xi) A vastukirti pavilion has forty-four pillars. (xii) A shrutinjaya pavilion has forty-two pillars. (xiii) A yajnabhadra pavilion has forty pillars. (xiv) A vishala pavilion has thirty-eight pillars. (xv) A sushlishta pavilion has thirty-six pillars. (xvi) A shatrumardana pavilion has thirty-four pillars. (xvii) A bhagapancha pavilion has thirty-two pillars. (xviii) A nandana pavilion has thirty pillars. (xix) A manava pavilion has twenty-eight pillars. (xx) A manabhadra pavilion has twenty-six pillars. (xxi) A sugriva pavilion has twenty-four pillars. (xxii) A hairta pavilion has twenty-two pillars. (xxiii) A karnikara pavilion has twenty pillars. (xxiv) A shatarddhika pavilion has eighteen pillars. (xxv) A simha pavilion has sixteen pillars. (xxvi) A shyamabhadra pavilion has fourteen pillars. (xxvii) A samudra pavilion has twelve pillars. Pavilions should be triangular, semi-circular or rectangular.

DONATIONS

There are different methods of donating alms. One of the most sacred is known as tulapurusha. In this, a pair of scales is used. The person who is donating the alms ascends on one side of the scales and gold is placed on the other side until the scales are exactly balanced. This is the amount of gold that has to be donated if punya is to be acquired. A second sort of donation is known as hiranyagarbha. In this, a pot full of gold is donated. In a third form of donation a model of the universe (brahmanda) is fashioned out of gold and donated. This form of donation is therefore known as brahmanda. The fourth form of donation is known as kalpadapa. In this, a tree is made out of gold and donated. The fifth form of donation is known as gosahasra and involves the donation of a thousand cows. The sixth form of donation is known as kamadhenu. The object of donation in this case is a cow and calf, both made out of gold. The seventh form of donation is similar and is known as hiranyashva. A horse made out of gold is donated. The eighth form of donation is called ashvaratha. A horse (ashva) and four chariots (ratha) have to be donated and both have to be made out of gold. Hemahastiratha is the ninth form of donation. The objects of donation in this case are an elephant and a chariot made out of gold.

The tenth form of donation is known as panchalngalaka. In this case, ten ploughs are donated. Five of them have to be made of wood and the remaining five have to be made of gold. The eleven form of donation is dhara. In this case, a golden model of the earth is donated. The twelfth form of donation is known as vishvachakra. The object that is donated is again a model made out of gold. The model is that of the universe in the shape of a wheel. The thirteenth form of

donation is mahakalapalaka. Ten creepers made out of gold are donated. The fourteenth form of donation is saptasagara. Pits are made in the ground, there being seven of them. Each pit stands for one of the seven oceans. In the first pit is put salt, in the second milk, in the third clarified butter, in the fourth molasses, in the fifth curds, in the sixth sugar and in the seventh holy water. An image of a god or goddess is then placed in each pit- Brahma in the first, Vishnu in the second, Shiva in the third, Surya in the fourth, Yama in the fifth. Lakshmi in the sixth and Parvati in the seventh. The images must be made out of gold. The pits are then filled to the brim with jewels and the entire contents donated.

The fifteenth form of donation is called ratnadhenu. In this case, a cow made out of gold is donated. The nose, the eyes, the brows and various other parts of the cow should be made out of jewels. The sixteen form of donation is called mahabhutaghata. A pot is made out of gold, filled with jewels and donated. These different forms of donation are superior to all other forms of donation, and bring undying punya.

EPILOGUE

Lomaharshana completed his recital of the Matsya Purana. This text is exceedingly sacred. A person who reads even one chapter of the text goes to heaven and all his sins are forgiven. The sages thanked Lomaharshana and departed.
