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## 16. VAYU PURANA

### LOMAHARSHANA AND THE OTHER SAGES

King Adhisima Krishna (alternatively, Asima Krishna) ruled the earth well. During his reign, several sages organized a yajna (sacrifice) on the banks of the sacred river Drishadvati. The river flowed through the region that was known as Kurukshetra.

The sacrifice went on for a very long time and the sage Lomaharshana came to visit the sages who were conducting the ceremony. Lomaharshana was so named because his recitals thrilled (harshana) the body-hair (loma) of his listeners. Lomaharshana was the disciple of the great sage Vedavyasa and had learnt the Puranas from his teacher. He was also well-versed in the Vedas and in the stories of the Mahabharata. As soon as Lomaharshana arrived, the other sages greeted him warmly. Lomaharshana greeted them in return. The assembled sages told Lomaharshana, “Great Suta, we are gratified that you have decided to grace our ceremony by your august presence. This is an auspicious occasion for telling us the stories of the Puranas. You have learnt them from the great Vedavyasa himself. Please recite the Puranas and slake our thirst for knowledge.”

Lomaharshana belonged to the suta class. A suta was the son of a kshatriya (the second of the four classes) mother. Looking after horses and acting as charioteers were occupations that were prescribed for sutas. In addition, they sung the glories of kings. The accounts of the Puranas state that sutas were first born when the great king Pirthu organized a yajna. They accordingly became

raconteurs of the great deeds of Prithu, and thereafter, of all kings. They also recited the stories of the Puranas.

“I am a suta,” replied Lomaharshana. “It is therefore my duty to recite the Puranas. You have asked me to do that which is my duty. I shall gladly accede to your request.”

The ancestors (pitri) had a daughter named Vasavi. She was cursed that she would be born as a fish. This fish had a daughter. The great Vedavyasa was born as Satyavati’s son. Vedavyasa learnt the Vedas from the great sage Jatukarna. He also composed the Mahabharata and the Puranas.

“I have learnt the Puranas from Vedvyasa,” continued Lomaharshana. “There were several sages who lived in the forest known as Naimisharanya. They requested the wind-god Vayu to tell them the answers to many questions. Vayu’s replies constitute the Vayu Purana and this is the text that I shall recite for your benefit. It is the most sacred of all the Puranas and is full of wisdom.”

“What is this business of Vayu reciting the Purana to the sages of Naimisharanya?” asked the assembled sages. “We are not aware of it. Please tell us about it first.” Lomaharshana complied. Naimisharanya forest is on the banks of the river Gomati. At a time when King Pururava used to rule the earth, many sages organized a yajna in Naimisharanya. The chief priest at this ceremony was Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods, and the ceremony went on for twelve long years. When the ceremony was over, the wind-god Vayu recited the Vayu Purana to the sages. In reciting the text, Lomaharshana began with the account of the creation.

## CREATION

In the beginning, there was nothing in the universe. The brahman (the divine essence) alone was everywhere. The brahman had neither colour nor scent, it could not be felt or touched. It had no origin, no beginning or no end. The brahman was constant and it was the origin of everything that was destined to be in the universe and the universe was shrouded in darkness. When it was time for creation to begin, the brahman divided itself into three. The first part became Brahma, the creator of the universe. The second part was Vishnu, the preserver of the universe. And the third part was Shiva, the destroyer.

At the time of creation, water appeared in the universe and the water was everywhere. In the water was created a golden (hiranya) egg (anda) that floated like a gigantic bubble. Brahma was born inside the egg. Since garbha means womb, Brahma came to be known as Hiranyagarbha. Since he effectively created (bhu) himself (svayam), he is also referred to as Svayambhu. Brahma had four faces. Also inside the egg were all the worlds (lokas) that would be created, in embryonic form. The earth was there, with its land, mountains, oceans and rivers. The moon, the sun, the stars and the planets were there. Also present were gods, demons, humans and other living beings who would be created. This was the original creation of the universe (sarga).

But at the end of one of Brahma’s days, a minor destruction takes place. The universe is once again flooded with water during Brahma’s night. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are not however destroyed. Each of Brahma’s days is known as a kalpa (cycle). Thus, a minor destruction takes

place at the end of every kalpa. When a new day dawns for Brahma, creation begins afresh. This periodical process of destruction (pralaya) and re-creation is known as pratisarga. The present kalpa is known as varaha kalpa. “Why is the present kalpa known as the varaha kalpa?” asked the sages. Lomaharashana told them the story of Vishnu’s boar (varaha) incarnation.

### **VARAHA KALPA**

At the end of the last kalpa, there was a destruction and the universe was flooded with water. Vishnu slept on the water as long as Brahma’s night lasted. Since nara means water and anyana means resting-place. Vishnu is accordingly known as Narayana.

When Brahma’s day dawned, he wished to embark on the process of creation. But where would the created beings live? There was no earth for them to live on. The earth had been submerged under the water. Vishnu therefore adopted the form of a huge boar (varaha). The boar’s body was as large as a mountain and it had gigantic tusks that were exceedingly sharp. The eyes of the boar blazed like lightning and its roar thundered like the clouds. As a boar, Vishnu entered the water and began to search for the earth. He found the submerged earth and raised it up to its proper place on the tusks of the boar. The earth began to float on the water like a huge boat.

Vishnu also levelled out parts of the earth. The mountains that had existed on earth in the earlier kalpa had been burnt down by the fire that raged at the time of the destruction. Vishnu created new mountains. Because they did not move (chala), the mountains came to be known as achala. And since they had layers (parva) or ranges, they came to be known as parvata. The land masses were also created. The creation of living beings could now begin. And since the creation of this kalpa took place after Vishnu’s boar incarnation, the cycle came to be called varaha kalpa.

Brahma created water, fire, air, the sky, directions, heaven, oceans, rivers, mountains and trees. He also created time, night and days. Through his mental powers, he created three sons named Sanandana, Sanaka, and Sanatana. In each kalpa, there are fourteen manvantaras (eras). Each manvantara is ruled over by a Manu. The gods and the seven great sages (saptarshi) change from one manvantara to another. The title of Indra, king of the gods, also changes hands. In any one particular manvantara, there are twenty-eight crores of gods. Therefore, in fourteen manvantaras, there are three hundred and ninety-two crores of gods.

### **YUGAS**

There are roughly seventy-one mahayugas in a manvantara. A mahayuga lasts for twelve thousand years of the gods and consists of four different eras or yugas - satya yuga or krita yuga, treta yuga, dvapara yuga, and kali yuga. Satya yuga lasts for four thousand years of the gods; treta yuga, dvapara yuga, and kali yuga. Satya yuga lasts for four thousand years of the gods; treta yuga for three thousand; dvapara yuga for two thousand; and kali yuga for one thousand. This adds up to ten thousand years in a mahayuga. Another two thousand years are to be added for intervening periods (sandhyamasha) between two yugas. Hence the total of twelve thousand years in a mahayuga.

In satya yuga, winter, summer and monsoon were unknown. All individuals were equally handsome, equally prosperous and equally happy. There was no concept of dharma (righteousness) or adharma (evil) since people were naturally righteous. There were no prescribed places where people lived, there were no cities or villages. People lived freely on the shores of the oceans and in the mountains. Roots, fruits or flowers did not grow. People lived on juice that came out of the bowels of the earth. This juice was so miraculous that old age and disease were unknown. Hatred and envy did not exist. There was nothing to be envious about, since all individuals were equal. Moreover, people had the mental power to summon up whatever object they desired. There were no shortages.

As one moved from satya yuga to treta yuga, these mental powers that people possessed disappeared. The primary obsession of individuals in satya yuga was meditation; in treta yuga it became knowledge. Thick clouds appeared in the sky and it began to rain. This rain fostered the growth of various trees. People started to live on the fruits of these trees. The trees also provided barks for clothing and honey. These trees were so wonderful that they were known as kalpavrikshas. That is, they provided whatever it was that one desired. But as treta yuga progressed, people became evil and started to fight over the possession of these trees. Consequently, the trees began to wither away. It was then that habitations started to be built, earlier there had been no fixed dwelling-places for humans. Such habitations were built on mountain and near rivers. Villages and cities were constructed. It also became necessary to have units of measurement.

The smallest unit of measurement was an anguli (a finger). Ten angulis made one pradesha. This signified the length from the thumb to the extended index finger. The distance from the thumb to the extended middle finger was tata; from the thumb to the extended ring finger was gokarna; and from the thumb to the extended little finger was vitasti. Thus, twelve angulis were equivalent to one vitasti. Twenty-one angulis made one ratni and twenty-four angulis made one hasta (hand). Forty-two angulis were called one kishku. Four hastas made one dhanu (bow-length); two thousand dhanus were one gavyuti; and four gavyutis constituted one yojana. Thus, one yojana was made up of eight thousand dhanus. The yojana was the basic unit for measuring the sizes of human habitations.

The houses that men built were known as shalas. This is because they were modelled on trees. The branches of a tree (shakha) spread out in all directions. Since the houses spread out in this fashion, they were called shalas. The palaces were called prasada, the word signifying that these dwellings pleased the mind. The kalpavrikshas having disappeared, people had to look for means of sustenance. This they found in trees and herbs. In fact, the discovery of herbs goes back to treta yuga.

But people became evil. They fought over the possessions of rivers, land, mountains, trees and herbs. Might became right and those who were strong managed to establish property rights. The weak suffered. The result of all this fighting was that the trees and the herbs disappeared and foodgrains grew no longer. The entire earth was swallowed up by thick forests. Suffering from hunger and thirst, people went to Brahma in search of a solution.

Brahma milked the earth so that trees, herbs and foodgrains might grow afresh. To make sure that people did not fight again, Brahma laid down the precepts of righteous conduct. This was encapsulated in the principle of varnashrama dharma - the system of four varnas (classes) and four ashramas (stages of life). The principle of varnashrama dharma thus dates back to treta yuga and was enunciated by Brahma himself.

People are divided into four varnas. The first class is that of brahmanas. The brahmanas are those who are knowledgeable in the true nature of the brahman. Their primary occupations are performing sacrifices, studying and receiving alms. The second class consists of kshatriyas. Their primary duties are to bear arms so that they can protect the good and punish the evil. They must also rule and fight. The third class consists of vaishyas. The primary duties of vaishyas are agriculture, animal husbandry and trade. The fourth and final class is that of shudras. The shudras are to serve the other three classes and act as artisans. They are not permitted to study, perform sacrifices or donate alms. These are only permitted for the first three classes. A brahmana who performs his duties well gets to live with Brahma; such a kshatriya gets to live with Indra; such a vaishya with the gods, the maruts; and such a shudra with the gandharvas (singers of heaven).

Brahma also laid down the system of the four ashramas. The first one is brahmacharya (celibate studenthood); the second garhasthya (householder stage); the third vanaprastha (forest-dwelling stage); and the fourth sannyasa (hermitism). In brahmacharya stage, one has to study and serve one's teacher (guru) well. After this period is over, one is married and enters the householder stage. A householder has to perform sacrifices and serve his guests.

Garhasthya is superior to the other three ashramas, since it is on the alms provided by householders that individuals in the other three stages of life subsist. When the householder stage is over and one has had sons, one enters vanaprastha. Such a person retires to the forest and lives on fruits and roots. It is only when the mind is completely detached from material pursuits that one moves on to the final stage of sannyasa.

### **CREATION CONTINUED**

From his mental powers Brahma created ten sons. Their names were Bhrigu, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Angira, Marichi, Daksha, Atri, Vashishtha and Rudra. The first nine became sages and were known as the original brahmanas.

To ensure that creation progressed, Brahma divided his own body into two halves. The male half was known as Svayambhuva Manu and the female half was known as Shatarupa. These two married and had two sons named Priyavarata and Uttanapada. They also had two daughters named Akuti and Prasuti.

Prasuti married Daksha and they had twenty-four daughters. These twenty-four daughters became the mothers of all living beings. Thirteen of the daughters were married to Dharma. Of the remaining eleven daughters, Sati was married to Shiva (Rudra); Khyati to Bhrigu; Sambhuti to Marichi; Smriti to Angira; Priti to Pulastya; Kshama to Pulaha; Sannati to Kratu; Anasuya to Atri; Urjja to Vashishtha; Svaha to Agni; and Svadha to Agni; Svadha to the ancestors (pitris).

Brahma told Shiva, “Why don’t you create some beings?”

Shiva agreed with alacrity. But all the beings whom Shiva created were just like him in form. That is, they were immortal.

“What are you doing?” exclaimed Brahma. “Don’t create beings who are immortal. Create those that are mortal.”

“I will not create mortal beings,” replied Shiva.

“Then stop creating.” responded Brahma. “I will take care of creation myself.”

Shiva ceased to create. But the beings whom he had already created came to be known as the rudras. They were given rights to offering made at sacrifices, together with the other gods.

## YOGA

Shiva taught the world the technique of yoga. Yoga literally means union and is a form of meditation that teaches about the union between the individual human soul (atman) and the divine soul (paramatman). It is this knowledge that is strived for by those who meditate. And one who does not appreciate this union suffers from illusions. Yoga has five components. These are pranayama, dhyana, pratyahara, dharana and smarana.

Pranayama signifies control over the breath of life. A lion or an elephant is a wild animal. But if lions or elephants are caught and tamed, they can be made to serve man’s purpose. Exactly similarly, when the breath of life is controlled and mastered, an individual can use it to serve his own will. Pranayama must always be practised in a proper posture (asana).

Pratyahara signifies the withdrawal of the senses from material attachments. The next step is dharana. One chooses the image that one is contemplating and fixes it in one’s mind. In the process, it is best to concentrate on the tip of one’s nose or at the centre of one’s brows. When the image has been thus fixed, one can begin the actual process of meditation (dhyana). Yoga must however always be practised in a proper place and at a proper time. It must not be practised in the middle of the forest, near a fire, or at a place frequented by wild animals and insects. There must not be any noise to distract the practitioner. Nor must yoga be practised when one is hungry or thirsty, or in an unhappy state of mind. If these injunctions are not adhered to, yoga can bring great harm. It can lead to illness, dumbness, deafness, blindness and old age before the appointed time. But practised properly, yoga is a cure for various illnesses.

When one is practising yoga, there are various disturbances and distractions that impede the progress towards the desired goals. These are known as upasargas. For example, one might become overly attached to relations, to becoming wealthy or to attaining heaven. Noises are heard, although there are no real noises at all. Demons, gods and gandharvas are seen. All of these are illusions and have to be conquered. When the upasargas are successfully conquered, a practitioner of yoga attains various powers. These are known as aishvarya (wealth). There are eight of these powers. The first is known as anima. This enables the individual to obtain

whatever object he desires from anywhere in the universe instantly. The second is known as laghima. This enables one to travel through the sky. The third power is prapti. By means of this, any object in the three worlds can be attained. The fourth power is called prakamya. This gives the individual the power to obtain all the wealth of the universe. The fifth power is called mahima. Through this power, one can be connected to any place or any object in the universe. The sixth power of ishitva gives one the capability to cause happiness or unhappiness anywhere in the three worlds. The seventh power is vashitva. This grants the power to control other living beings and all objects. The final power is known as kamavasayita. By means of this, the individual can travel freely at will. A person who attains these powers knows no birth, death, old age, illness, happiness or unhappiness. The senses mean nothing to him. Nor do material objects. His mind is fixed only on the brahman. Everything else is unreal.

### **DREAMS AND OMENS**

Dreams and omens help people to predict the future. A person who cannot see the Pole Star (Dhruva) or the Milky Way (Chhayapatha) will die within the space of a year. If the sun seems to be faded to you, you will not live for more than eleven months. A person who dreams of vomiting gold or silver is not destined to live for more than ten months. If one's footmarks on dust or mud are not complete, one will die within seven months. If a vulture, a crow, or a dove, alights on your head, that is a reason for sorrow. That means that you will die within six months. A person whose reflection is distorted, or a person who is suddenly surrounded by a cloud of dust, will live for four or five months at the most. If one sees lightning although there are no clouds in the sky, or if one sees a rainbow in the water, the indicated life span is merely of two or three months. If a person sees that his reflection has a severed head, he will live for only one month. A person who reeks of the smell of dead bodies has but a fortnight to live. If you find that your feet are dry after taking a bath, that is a reason for great sorrow. That means that you will die within a space of ten day. The implications are the same if you find that smoke billows out of your head. A person whose thirst is never slaked, will die very soon. Death is also imminent for a dreamer who dreams of travelling southwards in a chariot drawn by bears or monkeys. The connotation is the same if one dreams of travelling southwards, accompanied by singing women dressed in black. Death is nigh if one dreams that one is wearing black clothes with holes in them. Ten days of life is all that is left if one dreams of ashes, coal, hair or dried rivers. It is a bad omen if jackals follow one around at the stroke of dawn. Death will come soon, as it will if your teeth chatter after having a bath. When a lamp is extinguished, a burn smell lingers in the air. If you cannot smell this, you will not live for long. Other bad omens which signal the end of life are the following; seeing a rainbow at night; failing to see one's own reflection in the pupil of another person's eye; continuous watering from one eye; a rough and blackened tongue; deafness; and blindness. There are several other bad omens. It is not the case that these bad dreams and bad omens cannot be countered. The best way to counteract their influence is to chant the mantra (incantation) om.

### **KALPAS**

There was a sage named Savarni. He told the wind-god Vayu, "We know that the present kalpa is called varaha kalpa. But how long is a kalpa? And what are the various other kalpas? Please tell us the answers to these questions." Vayu said the following. There are 4,320,000,000 years in

a kalpa. Each kalpa is only one of Brahma's days and one thousand kalpas constitute one year for Brahma. Eight thousand such years constitute Brahma's yuga and one thousand of these yugas are called a savana. Two thousand savanas constitute a trivrita and this is the period of time for which Brahma lives. The kalpas since the original creation were as follows. (1) Bhava. (2) Bhuva. (3) Tapah. (4) Bhava. (5) Rambha. (6) Ritu. (7) Kratu. (8) Vahni. (9) Havyavahana. (10) Savitra. (11) Bhuvah. (12) Oushika. (13) Kushika. (14) Gandharva. (15) Rishabha. (16) Shadaja. (17) Marjaliya. (18) Madhyama. (19) Vairaja. The great Vairaja Manu was born in this kalpa and his son was the great sage Dadhichi. (20) Nishada. The race of nishadas (hunters) were created during this period. (21) Panchama. (22) Meghavahana. The word megha means cloud and vahana means to bear. In this kalpa, Vishnu adopted the form of a cloud and bore Shiva on his back. It is thus that the kalpa received its name. (23) Chintaka. (24) Akuti. (25) Vijnati. (26) Mana. (27) Bhava. (28) Vrihat. (29) Shvetalohita. (30) Rakta. (31) Pitavasa. (32) Sita. (33) Krishna (34) Vishvarupa. The goddess Sarasvati appeared in this kalpa.

In each dvapara yuga, a Vedavyasa is born. The Vayu Purana lists the names of the twenty-eight Vedavyases who have been born so far.

### **BRAHMA, VISHNU AND SHIVA**

At the end of the last kalpa, there was a minor destruction and the world was flooded with water. Vishnu alone slept on this water, balanced on the hood of the great snake, Ananta. While Vishnu was thus sleeping, a lotus sprouted from his navel. It was a huge lotus and extended for a hundred yojanas. And it shone with radiance. Vishnu began to play with the lotus. While Vishnu was thus playing, Brahma arrived. "Who are you and why are you sleeping on this water?" asked Brahma. "I am Vishnu and I am the lord of everything." replied Vishnu. "But who are you and where are you going?" "How can you be the lord of everything?" asked Brahma. "I am the lord of everything that is in the universe. Everything that will be there in the universe is already there inside my stomach. If you don't believe me, why don't you enter my stomach and see for yourself?" Vishnu's curiosity was stirred and he entered Brahma's stomach. Inside the stomach he was greatly surprised to find all the worlds that would be there in the universe. The mountains and the oceans were all there. So were all the living beings who would be created. Vishnu spent one thousand years inside Brahma's stomach, marvelling at these wonders. But he could find neither the end nor the beginning of Brahma's stomach. He finally made his exit through Brahma's mouth. Vishnu told Brahma, "I bow down before you, you are indeed the lord of everything. There are many marvels that I saw inside your stomach, many are the worlds that are there. But I can also rival you. Why don't you enter my stomach? I too can show you many worlds there." Brahma entered Vishnu's stomach and saw many worlds there, as Vishnu had promised. Brahma spent several years inside the stomach, but could find neither its end nor its beginning. Meanwhile, Vishnu had closed all the exits from his body and Brahma could find no way of coming out. He finally made his body very small and came out through Vishnu's navel. He clambered up the stalk of the lotus and seated himself on the lotus. Since a lotus is called padma and yoni means birth-place, Brahma came to be known as Padmayoni.

While all this was going on, Shiva arrived on the scene. He held a trident in his hand. Such was the speed of Shiva's arrival that huge tidal waves were created in the water. Strong winds started to blow. "What is all this? Why are you shaking the lotus so and creating tidal waves?" Brahma

asked Vishnu. "Who speaks from my navel?" said Vishnu. "Don't you remember?" replied Brahma. "I am Brahma. You had entered my stomach and, thereafter I had entered your stomach. But you had closed all the exits, so that I had no way of getting out. In fact, I ought to be downright angry with you for treating me thus. I had to emerge through your navel and am now seated on the lotus." "I am sorry," said Vishnu. "I had not meant to insult you. I had only wished to play with you for a while. Let us now be friends. And as a token of your friendship, please grant me the boon that you will henceforth be known as my son." "I agree," replied Brahma. "At first, I thought that you were shaking the lotus and creating these tidal waves in the water. But now I see that there is another creature who is advancing towards us. His visage is terrible. He has ten arms and he holds a trident. Who is this demon?" Vishnu told Brahma that this was none other than Shiva, the destroyer, and that the two of them should pray to Shiva. But Brahma flatly refused to do this. He would not acknowledge Shiva as a superior. Vishnu's persuasion however bore fruit and both Brahma and Vishnu started to pray to Shiva. "What can I do for you?" asked Shiva. "What boon do you desire?" "I am sorry that I doubted you," replied Brahma. "Please forgive me. And as a token of your pardon, please grant me the boon that you will be born as my son." Shiva gladly granted this boon.

### **MADHU AND KAITABHA**

After Shiva had left, two brothers named Mahdu and Kaitabha appeared. They were demons. One of the demons wished to eat honey (madhu) as soon as he was born and thus came to be known as Madhu. The other demon looked like an insect (kita) and thus came to be known as Kaitabha. Madhu and Kaitabha wrought havoc. They destroyed the petals of the lotus. Next, they tried to eat up Brahma himself. Vishnu had gone back to sleep again and Brahma woke him up. "Please rescue me from these demons," Brahma told Vishnu. Vishnu created two beings from his mouth. These were known as Vishnu and Jishnu and Vishnu (the original one) instructed them to destroy the demons. The being Vishnu killed Kaitabha and Jishnu killed Madhu. But it took a hundred years for the demons to be killed. The fat (meda) from the dead bodies of the demons formed the earth. That is the reason why the earth is known as medini.

### **RUDRA**

You will remember that Shiva had granted Brahma the boon that he would be born as Brahma's son. To ensure that this indeed happened Brahma began to perform very difficult tapasya (meditation). But despite all this meditation, nothing happened. This failure greatly angered Brahma and he started to cry. As soon as these teardrops fell on the ground, poisonous snakes were born from the tears. This saddened Brahma even more, since unclean creatures had been born as a result of his tapasya. Brahma was so miserable that he fell down unconscious and died. As soon as Brahma died, eleven beings emerged from Brahma's body. They started to cry as soon as they emerged. The word rud means to cry and these beings came to be known as the rudras. The rudras revived Brahma. Brahma realized that Shiva had been born as his son in the form of these eleven rudras and was happy.

Shiva had promised Brahma that he would be born as Brahma's son. To achieve this aim, Brahma started to meditate. While he was meditating, a son suddenly appeared on his lap and began to cry. "Why are you crying?" asked Brahma. "Because I do not have a name." Replied

the boy. "I will give you a name," said Brahma. "Because you have cried, you will be known as Rudra." But the boy continued to cry and it turned out that he wanted a second name. This went on for seven times. Rudra was accordingly given the names Bhava, Shiva Pashupati, Isha, Bhima, Ugra and Mahadeva.

"Where will I live?" asked Rudra. Brahma told him that in his eight different forms, he would live in the sun, the earth, the water, the fire, the air, the sky, the bodies of brahmanas and the moon. The Descendants of Bhrigu The sage Bhrigu married Khyati, Daksha's daughter. Bhrigu and Khyati had two sons named Dhata and Vidhata. These two were gods. Bhrigu and Khyati's daughter was Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Lakshmi was married to Vishnu. The descendants of the sage Bhrigu were known as the Bhargavas. One of these was the great sage Markandeya. The Vayu Purana also enumerates the descendants of the other sages.

## DAKSHA

Daksha's daughter, Sati, was married to Shiva. Daksha was thus Shiva's father-in-law. But, as a son-in-law. Shiva never showed Daksha adequate respect. Or so Daksha felt. For instance, Shiva never bowed down before Daksha. On one occasion, Daksha invited all his daughters to his house. The only one whom he did not invite was Sati, although Sati happened to be his eldest daughter. The reason behind Daksha's not inviting Sati was his hatred of Shiva. Sati however went to visit her father, although she had not been invited. And once she was there, Daksha ignored her and paid her no attention. "Father, why are you treating me thus?" asked Sati. "I am, after all, your eldest daughter." "That may be," replied Daksha. "But consider your husband. He is far inferior to my other sons-in-law. All the others are great sages and show me respect. But your husband is a worthless fellow and is a perpetual thorn in my side. That is the reason I do not treat you with respect.

Sati was aghast at these words. "My husband and I have not sinned," she told her father. "Yet you have insulted us both. I owe this body to you, since you happen to be my father. But I no longer wish to possess a body that owes its origin to you. I shall therefore give up this body. When I am born again, I will be remarried to Shiva." Having said this, Sati started to perform yoga. Such was the power of her meditation that a fire emerged and burnt her physical body into ashes. Shiva learnt this tragic news and was furious. He came to Daksha's house and told Daksha, "For this sin, you will be born on earth. That is my curse on you. As for the sages who are your other sons-in-law, they too are cursed. "I don't care about your curses," replied Daksha. "I will continue to defy you when I am born on earth. And I will instruct the sages that they are not to give you a share of the offerings that are made to gods at sacrifices."

Sati was reborn as Parvati, the daughter of Menaka (alternatively Mena) and Himavana (the Himalayas). She was remarried to Shiva. Because of Shiva's curse, Daksha was born on earth. He was born as the son of Marisha and the ten Prachetas. (The Prachetas were brothers who became sages and subsequently married the same woman, Marisha.) Daksha decided to organize an ashvamedha yajna (horse sacrifice). But due to his earlier enmity with Shiva, Daksha did not invite Shiva to this sacrifice. The sacrifice was being held in the foothills of the Himalayas, on the banks of the holy river Ganga. All the gods and the sages had been invited to the sacrifice and went to the ceremony. The only exception was Shiva and his companions.

There was a sage named Dadhicha (alternatively Dadhichi). He protested to Daksha that a sacrifice should not be held in Shiva's absence. Such a sanctity. But Daksha would not listen to Dadhicha. The sage therefore stated that he would not take any further part in the yajna. Moreover, he assured Daksha that the sacrifice was doomed to be a failure. Shiva and Parvati were seated on Mount Kailasa and they noticed all the vimanas (space vehicles) travelling through the sky, the gods and their wives resplendently seated. "Where are all these gods going?" asked Parvati. "Daksha is performing a yajna and they are all going to attend the sacrifice." replied Shiva. "Why have you not gone?" demanded Parvati. "It must be that you have not been invited. But how is that possible? How can there be a sacrifice without you having been invited? You are superior to all the other gods. Please do something to ensure that you do get your share of the offerings."

Shiva thereupon created a demon from his mouth. The demon's name was Virabhadra. He had a thousand heads, a thousand arms and a thousand feet. Numerous were the weapons that he held in his hands. His fiery visage blazed like the sun itself and his form rose way up into the sky. Virabhadra bowed before Shiva and asked, "What are my orders?" "Go and destroy Daksha's yajna," was the reply. Virabhadra left for the sacrifice. He created several other demons who would aid him in the task of destruction. Parvati also created a goddess out of her own body to act as Virabhadra's companion. This goddess was named Bhadrakali. This army trooped to Daksha's house and proceeded to destroy everything there. The mountains shook and trembled with their roars. The gods and the sages who had come to attend the sacrifice did not know what could be done. They merely stood there and were thrashed. The offerings that had been piled up for the sacrifice were scattered here and there by Virabhadra and his companions. The scaffoldings that had been erected were smashed. Daksha tried to run away. But Virabhadra grabbed him and beheaded him with a slice of his sword.

Brahma and the other gods started to pray to Virabhadra and his companions. "Who are you?" they asked. "Whoever you are, please be pacified. Please listen to our prayers and spare us." "Don't pray to me," replied Virabhadra. "I am merely an instrument of the great Shiva. If you must pray, pray to Shiva himself." The gods and the sages started to pray to Shiva. Pleased by their prayers, Shiva appeared and set things right. He restored the surroundings to what they used to be before Virabhadra's destruction began. Shiva also revived Daksha and Daksha too started to pray to him. Shiva obtained his due respect.

## **GEORGRAPHY**

Svayambhuva Manu had two sons named Priyavrata and Uttanapda. Priyavarata had a hundred sons. Ten of these were named Agnidhra, Vapushmana, Medha, Medhatithi, Vibhu, Jyotishmana, Dyutimana, Havya, Savana and Sarva. When Priyavrata decided to retire to the forest, he divided up his kingdom amongst seven of his sons. Since Priyavrata had ruled over the entire earth, this is how the earth came to be divided into seven regions (dvipas). Agnidhra inherited Jambuvipa, Medhatithi Plakshadvipa, Vapushmana Shalmaladvipa, Jyotishmana Kushadvipa, Dyutimana Krounchadvipa, Havya Shakadvipa and Savana Pushkaradvipa. Agnidhra, the ruler of Jambudvipa, had nine sons. Their names were Nabhi, Kimpurusha, Hari, Ilavrita, Ramya, Harinmana, Kuru, Bhadrashva and Ketumala. When it became time for Agnidhra to retire to the forest, he divided Jambudvipa amongst these nine sons. Nabhi inherited the region that lies to the

south of the Himalayas. This is the region that subsequently came to be known as Bharatavarsha. (The word varsha signifies region.) Kimpurusha received Hemakutavarsha, Hari Naishadhvarsha, Ramya Nilavarsha, Harinmana Shvetavarsha, Bhadrashva Malyavanavarsha and Ketumala Gandhamadanavarsha. Ilvarita inherited the region around Mount Sumeru and Kuru the region to the north of Mount Shringavana. Nabhi had a son named Rishabha and Rishabha's son was Bharata. It was after Bharata that the region which Nabhi ruled over came to be known as Bharatavarsha.

Mount Sumeru (alternatively Meru) is in Jambudvipa. This has a very high altitude and gold can be found in abundance there. The eastern slope of the peak is white and is associated with brahmanas. The northern slope is red and is associated with kshatriyas. The southern slope is yellow and is associated with vaishyas. The western slope is greyish and is associated with shudras. You will remember that Brahma appeared from a lotus flower. Meru was formed out of the stalk of this flower. It is impossible to describe Mount Sumeru. The various sages who have attempted to describe it do not agree in their descriptions. This is because each sage saw, and thus described, only one part of the peak. The sage Atri described it as possessing a hundred angles; the sage Bhrigu maintained that it had a thousand angles; the sage Savarni thought it was octagonal; the sage Bhaguri's description suggests that it had the shape of a quadrilateral; the sage Varshayani maintained that it was as shapeless as the ocean; the sage Kroushtuki described it as circular; and the sage Gargya said that it had the shape of a woman's braided hair. It is only the great Brahma who can describe Mount Sumeru adequately.

But it is known that there are many beautiful valleys in the region surrounding the peak. These valleys have ponds with limpid water and lotuses bloom in thousands in these ponds. There are also many places with bejewelled pillars and golden gates. There are landing strips where the vimanas (space vehicles) of the gods can descend. Apart from the places, there are several hermitages frequented by the sages. But most wonderous of all is Brahma's famous assembly-hall, located atop Mount Sumeru. This assembly-hall is known as Manovati. The Vayu Purana now describes the mountans, rivers, ponds and valleys belonging to the different varshas. These we will gloss over and concentrate only on the description of Bharatavarsha.

Bharatavarsha is bounded by the Himalayas to the north and by the ocean to the south. Bharatavarsha is divided into nine regions (dvipas). The names of these regions are Indradvipa, Kaserumana, Tamraparni, Gabhastimana, Nagadvipa, Soumya, Gandharva and Varuna. This adds up to eight. The ninth region is an island that is surrounded by the ocean on all sides. It is not very easy to travel from one region of Bharatavarsha to another. The transportation problems are enormous. The southern tip of Bharatavarsha is known as Kumarika (Cape Comorin or Kanyakumari). Beyond the boundaries of Bharatavarsha live the disbelievers (that is, those who disbelieve in the Vedas). To the east live the kiratas and to the west live the yavanas. Bharatavarsha proper is populated by brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. There are seven major mountain ranges in Bharatavarsha. These are known as Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Shaktimana, Riksha, Vindhya and Paripatra. There are several other minor ranges, amongst which are Mandara and Raviataka.

Rivers abound in the region, owing their sources to the mountains. The rivers Ganga, Sindhu (Indus), Sarasvati, Shatadru (Sutlej), Chandrabhaga (Chenab), Yamuna, Sarayu, Iravati (Ravi),

Vitasta, Vipasha (Beas), Devika, Kuhu, Gomati, Dhutapapa, Vahuda, Drishadvati, Koushiki, Tritiya, Gandaki, Nishchira, Ikshu and Lohita (Brahmaputra ) originate from the foothills of the Himalyas. The rivers Vedashruti, Vedavati, Vritraghni, Parnasha, Vandana, Satira, Mahati, Para, Charmanvati (Chambal), Vidisha, Vetravati, Shipra and Avanti originate out of the Paripatra range (This identifies the Paripatra as the Arvalli range.) The rivers Shona, Narmada, Mandakini, Dasharna, Chitrakuta, Tamasa, Pippala, Shroni, Karatoya, Pishachika, Nilotapa, Jambula, Valuvahini, Siteraja, Shuktimati, Makruna and Tridiva originate from the Riksha range. (This range thus seems to be the mountains around Chota Nagpur.) Tapi (Tapti), Payoshni, Nirvindhya, Bhadra, Nishadha, Venva, Vaitarani, Shitivahu, Kumudvati, Toya, Mahagouri, Durga and Antahshila are rives that owe their source in the Vindhya range. From the Sahya range there originate the rivers Godavari, Bhimarathi, Krishna, Veni, Vanjula, Tungabhadra, Suproyaga and Kaveri. (The Sahya range thus corresponds to the Western Ghats.) From the Malaya range originate the rivers Kritamala, Tamravarni, Pushapajati and Utpalavati. In the Mahendra range are found the sources of the rivers Trisama, Kratutulya, Ikshula, Tridiva, Langulini and Vamshadhara. The rivers Rishika, Sukumari, Mandaga, Mandavahini, Kupa and Palashini originate in the Shaktimana range.

## ASTRONOMY

The earth is made up of five elements (bhuta). These are earth, wind sky, water and energy. There are seven regions in the underworld (patala). These are known as atala, sutala, vitala, gabhastala, mahatala, shritala and patala. The ground in atala is dark in colour; in sutala it is pale; vitala has ground that is red; in gabhastala the ground becomes yellow; in mahataka it is white; there are numerous stones and boulders in shritala; but in patala, the ground is laced with gold. Snakes and demons live in the underworld. Atala is ruled by the demon Namuchi; sutala by the demon Mahajambha; vitala by the demon Prahlada; gabhastala by the demon Kalanemi; mahatala by the demon Virochana; shritala by the demon Kesari; and patala by the demon Vali.

The great snake Vasuki lives in shritala and the great snake Shesha lives in patala. (Vasuki is a king of the snakes (nagas). He was the son of Daksha's daughter Kadru and the sage Kashyapa. Usually, Vasuki and Shesha are regarded as synonymous, the name Ananta also being used.) The eyes of the snake Shesha are like red lotuses. His complexion is white and he wears blue is thousand hoods glow with radiance.

Just as ther are seven lokas which consitiute the neither regions, there are seven lokas which constitute the upper regions. The universe consists of fourteen lokas. The seven loka which form the upper regions are named bhuloka, bhuvarloka, svaroka, maharloka, janaloka, tapaloka and satyaloka.

The smallest unit of time is a nimesha, the time it takes of the eyes to blink. Fifteen nimeshas constitute a kashtha, thirty kashitas are a kala, thirty kalas make a muhurta and there are thirty muhurtas in the space of one night and one day (ahoratra). The thirty muhurtas in a day are divided into ten units, each unit consisting of three muhurtas. The unit that corresponds to the time of sunrise is known as prata (dawn). The next unit is called sangava (forenoon). Forenoon is followed by madyahna (noon). Next come aparahna (afternoon) and sayahna (evening). These five units made up of fifteen muhurtas, form the day. There is an equal number of muhurtas in

the night. This should not be taken to mean that day and night are always equal. Sometimes the day is longer than the night and sometimes the night is longer than the day. Day and night are equal twice a year. These two occasions are the precise midpoints of early autumn (sharat) and spring (vasanta). Fifteen days make up one paksha (fortnight) and there are two pakshas in every masa (month). Two masas form a ritu (season) and three ritus are called an ayana. There are therefore two ayanas in every varha (year). The months Magha, Falguna, Chaitra, Vaishakha, Jyaishtha and Ashada are referred to as uttarayana. Correspondingly, the months Shravana, Bhadra, Ashvina, Kartika, Agrahayan and Pousha are referred to as dakshinayana.

Svayambhuva Manu had two sons named Uttanapada and Priyavrata. Priyavrata's descendants have already been mentioned. Uttanapada had a son named Dhruva. Dhruva pleased Vishnu through his tapasya and obtained the boon that a place would be reserved for him in the sky. Dhruva became the Pole Star. This is in the constellation of Shishumara (Ursa Minoris or the Little Bear). The moon, the sun, the planets and the stars, all revolve around Dhruva.

The sun's chariot is made of gold and is drawn by seven horses. These horses are named Gayatri, Trishtupa, Anushtupa, Jagati, Pamkti, Vrihati and Ushnika. There are twelve adityas. In each month, two adityas, two sages. Two gandharvas, two apsaras and two rakshasa (demons) ride on the sun's chariot together with the sun. This is as follows. (i) The months Chaitra and Vaishakha - the adityas Dhata and Aryama; the sages Pulastya and Pulaha; the gandharvas Tumburu and Narada; the apsaras Kratushthala and Ppunjikasthala; and the rakshasas Heti and Praheti. (ii) The months Jyaishtha and Ashada - the adityas Mitra and Varuna; the sages Atri and Vashishtha; the gandharvas Haha and Huhu; the apsaras Menaka and Sahajanya; and the rakshasas Pourusheya and Vadha. (iii) The months Shravana and Bhadra - the adityas Indra and Vivasvana; the sages Angira and Bhrigu; the gandharvas Vishvavasu and Ugrasena; the apsaras Promlacha and Nimlocha; and the rakshasa Vyaghra and Shveta. (iv) The months Ashvina and Kartika - the adityas Parjanaya and Pusha; the sages Bharadvaja and Goutama, the gandharvas Vishvavasu and Surabhi; the apsaras Vishvachi and Ghritachi; and the rakshasas Apa and Vata. (v) The months Agrahayana and Pousha - the adityas Amsha and Bhaga; the sages Kashyapa and Ritu; the gandharvas Chitrasena and Urnayu; the apsaras Urvashi and Viprachitti; and the rakshasas Vidyut and Sfurjja. (vi) The months Magha and Falguna - the adityas Tvashta and Jishnu; the sages Jamadagni and Vishvamitra; the gandharvas Dhritarashtra and Suryavarcha; the apsaras Tilottama and Rambha; and the rakshasas Brahmopeta and Yajnopeta.

The moon's chariot is drawn by ten horses. These horses are named Yayu, Trimana, Vrisha, Raji, Bala, Vasa, Turanya, Hamsa, Vyomi and Mriga. Budha's (Mercury) chariot is drawn by eight horses; Shukra's (Venus) by ten; Mangala's (Mars) by eight; and Brihaspati's (Jupiter) and Shani's (Saturn) also by eight.

### **SHIVA'S BLUE THROAT**

Many years ago, in satya yuga, the sage Vashishtha met Kartikeya, the son of Shiva and Parvati. Having worshipped Kartikeya, the sage said, "Please tell me how Shiva's throat came to be blue." "I do know the answer and I will satisfy your curiosity," replied Kartikeya. "I was once on Mount Kailasa, sleeping on my mother's lap. I heard my mother, Parvati, asked my father how his throat came to be blue. And I will relate to you Shiva's reply. The gods and the demons once got

together and decided to churn the ocean (samudra manthana). The gods and the demons were desirous of obtaining the amrita (a life-giving drink) that was expected to emerge as a result of the churning of the ocean. But when the churning began, some terrible poison came out and the gods and the demons were despondent at the sight of this poison, since they thought that it would destroy them all. They therefore fled to Brahma for protection.

“Why are you so despondent?” asked Brahma. “A terrible poison named kalakuta has emerged as a result of the churning of the ocean; replied the gods and the demons. “It is threatening to destroy the entire universe. It has even turned the great Vishnu’s complexion black.” “The only solution is to pray to Shiva,” said Brahma. “He alone can deliver us from the effects of this terrible poison.” Brahma and the other gods started to pray to Shiva. Shiva was pleased at these prayers and appeared. He swallowed up the poison. But such was the strength of the poison that it made Shiva’s throat blue. The word nila means blue and kantha means throat. Since Shiva became blue of throat, ever since that day, he has been known as Nilakantha.

### VEDAVYASA

The sages requested Lomaharshana, “Please tell us how the sacred Vedas came to be divided.” Lomaharshana recounted the following story. When dvapara yuga arrived, Brahma noticed that people were becoming evil and were no longer paying sufficient attention to the Vedas. They were gradually deviating from the righteous path. Brahma decided that the Vedas needed to be divided so that their wisdom might be disseminated amongst people. Brahma accordingly instructed Krishna Dvaipayana Vedavyasa to divide the Vedas into four parts. Vedavyasa had five disciples. These were Jaimini, Sumantu, Vasihampayana, Paila and Lomaharshana. The four parts into which the Vedas were divided were known as the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda. Paila was taught the Rig Veda, Jaimini the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and Sumantu the Atharva Veda. “As for me,” continued Lomaharshana, “the great Vedavyasa taught me the Puranas.” Paila passed on what he had learnt to the sages Indrapramti and Vashkali. They were Paila’s disciples. Indrapramati’s disciple was Markandeya. From Markandeya the knowledge passed successively to Satyashrava, Satyashita, Satyarata and Satyashri. Satyashri had three disciples named Shakalya, Rathitara and Bharadvaja. “Shakalya was so proud that his vanity led to his destruction at the time of King Janaka’s horse sacrifice,” said Lomaharshana.

“We don’t know the story,” responded the sages. “What is this horse sacrifice that you are talking about? Please tell us the story.” This is the story that Lomaharshana told. King Janaka organized an ashvamedha yajna (horse sacrifice). People came from far and near to attend the ceremony and numerous were the sages who graced the occasion with their presences. King Janaka began to wonder if there was any way of finding out who was the best among all the assembled sages. He devised a plan. Janaka decided to donate a thousand head of cattle, a thousand gold pieces, many villages and several servants. He then told the sages, “I have gathered all these riches as a tribute to knowledge. But I am unable to decide who amongst you is the most learned. Why don’t decide for yourselves? Let the person who is the most superior among you claim all this wealth for himself.” Hearing this, the sages started to fight and argue. Each wanted the wealth for himself. Therefore, each sage maintained that he was superior to all the others.

Amongst the sages was the great sage Yajnavalkya and Yajnavalkya told his disciple, “Take all this wealth to my home. I am the most learned amongst the sages. I have studied the Vedas really well. I will debate with anyone who dares to challenge me and establish my supremacy. The other sages were naturally not at all pleased to hear these words and they began to debate with Yajnavalkya. Even though all the sages combined against Yajnavalkya, they were no match for him and Yajnavalkya easily defeated them. Yajnavalkya then addressed the sage Shakalya. “What about you, Shakalya?” he asked. “Why have you kept quiet? I know that you are full of vanity about your learning. What about debating with me?” “It is you who are proud and vain,” retorted Shakalya. “I will bring you down a peg or two. I am certainly going to debate with you.” The debate started. Shakalya asked Yajnavalkya more than a thousand questions, but Yajnavalkya provided the right answers to all of these questions. He then told Shakalya, “I will ask you a single question. If you cannot give me the right answer. I curse you that you will die. Shakalya did not know the answer to the question that Yajnavalkya asked. He therefore died. But prior to these events having taken place, Shakalya had composed five sacred texts known as Samhitas. And he had taught these to his disciples Mudgala, Goloka, Khaliya, Matsya and Shaishireya.

Lomaharshana continued with Yajnavalkya’s story. Vedavyasa taught the Yajnavalkya’s story. Vedavyasa taught the Yajur Veda to Vaishampayana. Vaishampayana composed sixty-six samhitas and taught them to his disciples. These disciples came to be known as the charakas. “Why did these disciples come to be known as the charakas?” the sages asked Lomaharshana. Lomaharshana recited the following story. There was an occasion when an important religious rite had to be performed. All the sages agreed to meet on Mount Sumeru so that they might decide on the modus operandi for observing this religious rite. It was also agreed that any sage who failed to attend the assembly on Mount Sumeru would be regarded as guilty of having committed a sin. And the sin would be equivalent in severity to the sin committed from killing a brahmana.

For various reasons, Vaishampayana could not attend the assembly. For a sin that was equivalent to the sin committed in killing a brahmana. Vaishampayana had to perform severe penance. This involved the observance of a difficult religious rite (vrata). Vaishampayana told all his disciples, “Please help me in the observance of this difficult vrata.” Amongst Vaishampayana’s disciples was Yajnavalkya. Yajnavalkya said, “Why are you bothering all these disciples? My powers of tapasya are such that I alone can perform what is required. Vaishampayana regarded this as unwarranted vanity on his disciple’s part. He therefore told Yajnavalkya that he no longer wished to have Yajnavalkya as a disciple. Yajnavalkya should also return whatever it was that he had learnt from Vaishampayana. Yajnavalkya therefore vomited out his knowledge of the Yajur Veda.

To re-acquire the knowledge of the Vedas, Yajnavalkya started to meditate. He prayed to the sun-god, Surya. From Surya, Yajnavalkya came to acquire knowledge of the Yajur Veda. Yajnavalkya taught this knowledge of the Yajur Veda. (Shuka Yajur Veda.) Yajnavalkya taught this knowledge to fifteen of his disciples. These disciples were named Kanva, Vaidheyashali, Madhyandina, Shapeyi, Vidigdha, Apya, Uddala, Tamrayana, Vatsya, Galava, Shaishiri, Atavi, Eni, Virani and Sapatrayana. Why were Vaishampayana’s disciples known as the charakas? The

word acharana means act. Since Vaishampayana had committed an act that was the equivalent of killing a brahmana, his disciples came to be named Charakas.

Lomaharshana also told the sages that he himself had taught the Puranas to six of his disciple. These disciples were Sumati, Akritavrana, Bharadvaja, Mitrayu, Savarni, and Susharma.

## MANVANTARAS

Lomaharshana next told the sages about the various manvantara (eras). Each of Brahma's days is referred to as a kalpa (cycle) and that there are fourteen manvantaras in each kalpa. Each manvantara is ruled over by a Manu and lasts for a duration of 30,67,20,000 years. The gods, the seven great sages and the individual who holds the title of Indra change from one manvantara to another. In the present kalpa, six manvantaras have already passed. The first Manu was Svayambhuva. The second Manu was Svarochisha. The gods then were the tushitas and the paravatas, and there were twenty-four such gods. Vaidha ruled as Indra then and the seven great sages were Urjja, Stambha, Kashyapa, Bhargava, Drona, Rishabha and Angira. The third Manu was Uttama. The gods then were the sudhamanas, the devas, the pratardanas, the satyas and the shivas. The fourth Manu was Tamasa. The gods of this manvantara were the satyas, the svarupas, the sudhis and the haris. Shibi held the title of Indra then, and the names of the seven great sages were Kavya, Harsha, Kashyapa, Prithu, Atreya, Agni and Jyotirdhama. The fifth Manu was Raivata. The names of gods of this era were the vipras, the amritias, the supatis and various others. The Indra of this period was Vibhu and the seven great sages were Poulastya, Vedavahu, Yajuh, Hiranyaroma, Vedashri, Bhargava and Urddhavahu. The sixth Manu was Chakshusha. The gods then were the adyas, prasutas, the bhavyas, the prithukas and the lekhas. Manojava held the title of Indra and the seven great sages were Havirdhana, Sudhama, Vashishtha, Viraja, Poulastya, Poulaha and Madhuratreya. The present Manu is known as Vaivasvata and this is the seventh manvantara of the present kalpa. The gods of this era are the adityas, the vasus, the rudras, the sadhyas and the vishvadevas. The title of Indra is held by Purandara and the seven great sages are Vishvamitra, Jamadagni, Bharadvaja, Sharadvata, Goutama, Atri, Vasumana, and Vatsari. There will be seven more manvantaras in the future before the universe is destroyed.

The eighth Manu will be Savarni. The seven great sages then will be Galava, Bhargava, Dvaipayna, Kripa, Diptimana, Rishyashringa and Ashvatthama. The gods will be the amitabhas, the sutapas and the sukhas, and the title of Indra will be bestowed on Vali, the son of Virochana. The ninth Manu will be Merusavarani or Dakshasavarni. Adbhuta will hold the title of Indra then. The seven great sages will be Skanda, Medhatithi, Vasu, Jyotishmana, Dyutimana, Havyavahana, Sutapa and Vasita. The tenth Manu will be Dharmasavarni. The gods then will be the sukhamanas and the viruddhas. The title of Indra will be held by Shanti and the seven great sages will be Havishmana, Sukirti, Atri, Apamurti, Pratipa, Nabhaga and Abhimanyu. The eleventh Manu will be Bhavasavarni (alternatively known as Rudrasavarni). The gods then will be the nirmanaratis, the kamajas and the manojavas. The seven great sages will be Havishmana, Vapushamana, Varnui, Bhaga, Pushti, Nishchara and Agniteja and Vrisha will hold the title of Indra. The twelfth Manu will be Ritasavarni. The gods then will be the haritas, the rohitas, the sumanas, the sukarmas and the suparas. The title of Indra will vest with Ritadhama and the seven great sages will be Kriti, Sutapa, Tapomurti, Tapasvi, Taposhayana, Taporati, and Tapomati. The thirteenth Manu will be Rouchya. The sutramas, the sudharmas and the sukarmas will be the

gods then. Divaspati will be the Indra and the seven great sages will be Dhritimana, Pathyavana, Tattvadarshi, Nirutsaka, Nishprakampa, Nirmoha and Svarupa. The fourteenth and final Manu will be Bhoutya.

## VENA AND PRITHU

The sixth Manu was Chakshusha. One of Chakshusha's descendants was the great king Pirthu, the son of Vena. Chakshusha had a son named Uru and Uru had a son named Anga. Agna married Sunitha, and they had a son named Vena. Vena was evil and when he became the king, he started to oppress the world and his subjects. The sages had no option but to kill Vena. The sages then began to knead Vena's dead body. When the right arm of the dead body was kneaded, Prithu was born. He emerged fully grown and with a bow and several arrows held in this hand. He was also dressed in invincible armour. Such was Prithu's radiance that he blazed like the flaming sun.

The sages interrupted Lomaharshana. "How came Vena to be evil?" they asked. "And if Vena was evil, why wasn't Prithu evil as well?" they asked. Vena's mother was Sunitha and Sunitha was the daughter of Mrityu who was really evil. Right from his birth, Vena tended to associate with this maternal grandfather and thus picked up evil ways. He stopped believing in the Vedas. In fact, when he became king, Vena instructed that all yajnas should cease in his kingdom. There was no need to pray to the gods. The only person who was deserving of worship was Vena himself. The sages tried to persuade Vena to give up his evil ways and bring him back to the righteous path, but Vena refused to listen. It was then that the sages slew Vena.

But Vena had no son. Who would be king in his place? There had to be a king, otherwise the kingdom would degenerate into anarchy. To obtain a son, the sages started to knead the dead body. When the left arm was kneaded, a dwarf was born as a result of the kneading. The dwarf was dark in complexion and exceedingly ugly. "Sit," the sages told the dwarf, "nishida." (The word nishida means 'to sit'). All the evil that was in Vena's body went into the body of the dwarf and the dead body was cleansed of all evil. The dwarf came to acquire the name of nishada from the word nishida. His descendants were also known by the same name and became a race of hunters and fishermen. They lived in the Vindhya mountains. Thus, when the dead body was kneaded again, there was no more evil left and Prithu came to be righteous. The word prithu means plump. Since Vena's right palm was fairly plump and since Vena's son was born when the right palm was kneaded, the son acquired the name of Prithu. The sages arranged for Prithu's coronation. The waters of all the rivers and all the oceans were brought for this ceremony. All the gods graced the occasion by their presence. Thus it was that Prithu came to rule over the entire earth. He ruled well and his subjects prospered. The earth yielded an abundant supply of foodgrains. The cows were full of milk.

It was at the time that Brahma organised a yajna. Two classes of people known as the sutas and the magadhas were born from this yajna. They were actually cross-breeds. The sutas were, for example, the offspring of kshatriya fathers and brahmana mothers. The sages asked the sutas and the magadhas to compose and sing songs in praise of the great king Prithu. Even since that day, the sutas and the magadhas became raconteurs who sang songs in praise of kings. The sutas were asked to live in the region known as Anupa and the magadhas in the region known as Magadha.

However, Prithu's subjects still did not possess any specific occupations. They therefore went to their king and said, "Please tell us how we may make a living."

To achieve this end, Prithu decided to level out the earth. But the earth was scared and, adopting the form of a cow, started to flee. This angered Prithu and he pursued the earth with his bow in his hand. Wherever in the three worlds the earth fled to, Prithu followed. He was determined to kill the earth.

Finally, the earth sought refuge with Prithu himself. "Please do not kill me," she said. "I am a woman and killing a woman is a crime. Besides, if you kill me, how will your subjects make a living? I have a better idea. I have adopted the form of cow. Milk me instead and your objective will be attained."

Prithu did what the earth had asked him to. He milked the earth. As a result of this milking, seeds of foodgrains emerged and people could make a living out of these. Prithu also used his bow to level out the earth. Villages and cities could now be built in the plains. Earlier, these had been unknown. Agriculture, animal husbandry and trade had also been unknown earlier.

It was after Prithu that the earth came to be known as prithivi. This milking of the earth was in addition to the original milking of the earth that Brahma had performed. In fact, the earth was milked once in every manvantara.

### **THE PRACHETAS**

Prithu had a son named Antardhana and Antardhana's son was Havirdhana. Havirdhana's son was Prachivarhi. Prachinarvarhi married Savarna, the daughter of the ocean. Prachinarvarhi and Savarna had ten sons known as the Prachetas.

The Prachetas were interested in meditating. They performed tapasya for thousands of years under the oceans. They were actually supposed to rule the earth. As long as the Prachetas meditated, they did not rule. The earth became dense with forests. Trees grew everywhere and so dense was the growth that the wind could not blow. For the ten thousand years that the Prachetas meditated, their subjects suffered.

The news of this mishap eventually reached the Prachetas and their anger was roused. Such was the fury of their anger that flames issued from their mouths and burnt up all the trees. Soma was the god of the trees. When Soma saw that all the trees were being burnt up, he tried to pacify the Prachetas.

"Please restarin your anger," he said. "It is time for you to devote attention to getting married and having children so that the world might be populated. I have with me a woman named Marisha, a daughter of the trees. Please accept her as your wife."

The ten Parchetas married Marisha and a son named Daksha was born.

### **DAKSHA'S DESCENDANTS**

Daksha's descendants have already been mentioned in the section on creation. The Vayu Purana now gives an account which is, in certain respects, contradictory to the earlier account.

Daksha married Asikli, the daughter of Virana, Daksha and Asikli had a thousand sons named the Haryashva. But the sage Narada persuaded the Haryashvas that there was nothing to be gained by being interested in the material world. These sons therefore forsook the world and went away to meditate. Daksha and Asikli then had another thousand sons known as the Shavalshvas. But Narada persuaded these sons also to go away and meditate.

Thereafter, Daksha and Asikli had sixty daughters. Ten of these daughters were married to Dharma. Twenty-seven daughters were married to the moon-god, Chandra. These were the twenty-seven nakshatras (stars). Their names were Ashvini, Bharani, Kritika, Pushya, Ashlesha, Punarvasu, Purvafalguni, Uttarafalguni, Magha, Hasta, Chitra, Svati, Jyestha, Vishakha, Anuradha, Mula, Purvashada, Uttarashada, Shravana, Uttarabhadrapada, Revati, Rohini, Mrigashira, and Ardra.

Fourteen of Daksha's daughters were married to the sage Kashyapa and all living beings in the universe are descended from Kashyapa. The daughters who were married to Kashyapa were named Aditi, Diti, Danu, Khasa, Arishta, Surasa, Surabhi, Vinata, Tamra, Krodhava, Ira, Kadru, and Muni.

Aditi had twelve sons known as the adityas. These were the gods.

Surabhi pleased Shiva with her tapasya and obtained the eleven rudras as her children. She was also the mother of all horses, cows, buffaloes and other quadruped animals.

### **DITI'S CHILDREN**

Diti's sons were known as the daityas (demons). Diti originally had two sons named Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha. Hiranyakashipu was the elder.

Kashyapa once organized an ashvamedha yajna (horse sacrifice). All the gods and the sages came to attend this sacrifice. A golden throne had been prepared for the chief priest. Diti was also present on the occasion then. She had, at the time, been bearing a baby for ten thousand years in her womb. When all arrangements had been made for the sacrifice, the baby was born. The newly born baby ascended the throne reserved for the chief priest and immediately began to recite the Vedas. It was this baby who came to be known as Hiranyakashipu.

Hiranyakashipu hung upside down for one lakh years and prayed to Brahma. Through this period, he fasted. This act of tapasya so pleased Brahma that he granted Hiranyakashipu a boon whereby the demon became invincible. Thus fortified, Hiranyakashipu started to oppress the world. He drove the gods out of heaven. Hiranyakashipu was eventually killed by Vishnu in his narasimha (half-man half-lion) incarnation.

Hiranyakashipu had four sons named Prabhada, Anuhlada, Samhlada and Hlada. Hlada's son was Sunda and Sunda's wife was Tadaka. It was this Tadaka whom Rama (in the Ramayana) killed. Tadaka's son was Muka. Muka was killed by Arjuna (in the Mahabharata).

Prahlada's son was Virochana and Virochana's son was Vali. Vali was defeated by Vishnu in his vamana (dwarf) incarnation. Vali had a son named Vana.

As for Hiranyakashipu's brother Hiranyaksha, he had five sons. They were named Utkara, Shakuni, Kalanabha, Mahanabha and Bhutasantapan. Hiranyaksha was killed by Vishnu in his varaha (boar) incarnation.

Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksha had a sister named Simhika.

Diti noticed that her sons and their descendants were suffering at the hands of the gods, often with the connivance of Vishnu. She therefore did her best to please her husband Kashyapa. Kashyapa was eventually satisfied and agreed to grant Diti a boon.

"Please grant me the boon that I may have a son who will kill Indra." said Diti.

This was slightly awkward for Kashyapa. The gods were also his sons, from his other wife Aditi. He told Diti that she would have to observe cleanliness for a hundred years. If she succeeded in doing this, she would indeed give birth to a son who would slay Indra. But if she failed, the son would become Indra's friend and companion. This condition Diti accepted.

Diti started to perform tapasya so that she might have the son she wanted. But Indra had got to know about what Diti was after. He hung around the hermitage, helping his aunt by fetching fruits, roots and wood from the forest. But this attempt at aiding his aunt was merely a pretext. Indra was the lookout for some unclean act that Diti might commit.

Ninety-nine of the hundred appointed years passed.

It was then that Diti made her first mistake. She was so tired that she fell asleep, resting her head on her thighs. In the process, her hair touched her feet. This was an unclean act. In a flash, Indra seized his opportunity. Now that Diti had committed an unclean act, he could freely enter her body. He entered Diti's womb and found the baby there. Indra possessed a weapon known as the vajra. With the vajra, Indra sliced up the baby into seven parts.

The parts began to cry and Indra said, "ma ruda," which means, "don't cry."

But the parts continued to cry and Indra carved up each of the parts into seven more sections. There were thus forty-nine parts in all.

Meanwhile, Diti had woken up and she begged Indra not to kill her sons. Indra agreed. The sons were born. Because of the words Indra had uttered, they came to be known as the maruts. Thanks to Kashyapa's boon, they became friends and constant companions of Indra. They were elevated to the status of gods.

## KASHYAPA'S OTHER CHILDREN

What of Kashyapa's wife Danu? Her sons came to be known as the danavas (demons). Muni gave birth to the gandharvas (singers of heaven) and apsaras (dancers of heaven). Vinata had two sons named Aruna and Garuda. Their sisters were the mothers of all the birds. Kadru gave birth to the snakes (nagas). Chief among them were Shesha, Vasuki and Takshaka. Khasa gave birth to sons. These sons were exceedingly ugly. The yakshas (demi-gods who were companions of the god Kubera) were descended from the elder brother and the rakshasas (demons) were descended from the younger brother. Surasa's sons were other rakshasas. Ira was the mother of all trees and herbs. Krodhavasha gave birth to the ghosts (pishachas). Tamra's children were wild animals.

## THE ANCESTORS

"Who are the ancestors?" asked the sages.

Lomaharshana recounted the following story. When Brahma first started to create, the gods were born. These gods not only did not worship Brahma, they started to create themselves. Brahma therefore cursed them that they would become ignorant. The gods did not relish this idea, they therefore tried to pacify Brahma.

"You will have to perform penance for your sins." said Brahma. "As for the means of penance, why don't you ask the beings whom you have created? They will instruct you in the ways of wisdom."

The sons accordingly instructed the fathers. A person who instructs is known as a father (pita). The sons of the gods accordingly became like the fathers of the gods and are revered as the ancestors (pitris). It is these pitris who are given offerings at the time of shraddha (funeral) ceremonies. In general, the pitris also include dead ancestors and the ten prajapatis who rule over the universe.

The ancestors had a daughter named Mena who was married to Himavana (the Himalayas). Mena (alternatively Menaka) and Himavana had three daughters named Aparna, Ekaparna, and Ekapatala.

These three daughters meditated for two thousand years. Ekapatala meditated under a snake-gourd (patala) tree. Each day, she ate only one (eka) snake-gourd. It was thus that she came to acquire the name of Ekapatala. The word parna means leaf. Ekaparna ate only one leaf every day and thus acquired her name. Aparna ate nothing at all. Since she did not eat even a leaf, she came to be known as Aparna. Aparna was also known as Uma. And even as Parvati, since she was the daughter of the mountain (parvata) Himavana.

Parvati was married to Shiva. Their son was Skanda or Kumara. Skanda got separated from his parents and was brought up by the Kritikas (goddesses or nakshatras). He therefore obtained the name of Kartikeya.

## THE SOLAR LINE

The sun-god Surya was born as the son of Kashyapa and Aditi. Surya was born as an egg (anda). For days on end, nothing happened to the egg and the shell did not crack. Vishvakarma was the architect of the gods. When Vishvakarma found that nothing was happening to the egg, he cracked it open with a blow. Kashyapa was initially alarmed at this act, since he thought that the son who was inside the egg might have died. But he soon discovered that this was not the case and remarked, “the egg (anda) has not died.” From this expression, the son who was born came to be known as Martanda.

As Martanda, Surya named Samjna, Vishvakarma’s daughter. They had two sons and a daughter. The sons were named Yama and Vaivasvate (this was the one who became a Manu). The daughter was Yami (or Yamuna).

But so strong was the sun’s radiance that Samjna could not bear to look at her husband. She eventually thought of a way out. She created an image who looked exactly like her. This image was called Chhaya (shadow).

“I am going off to my father’s house,” replied Samjna. “Please stay here and pretend to be Samjna. Take care of my children and under no circumstances divulge that you are Chhaya.

“I will do what you ask,” said Chhaya. “But there is a condition. I will not relate the truth as long as I am not cursed or as long as no one grasps me by the hair. But the moment this condition is violated, I will reveal all.”

Samjna agreed to this condition and left for Vishvakarma’s house. Initially, Vishvakarma was quite happy to see his daughter. But days passed and Samjna did not return to her husband. Vishvakarma now realized that something must be amiss and cajoled his daughter to return to Surya. A thousand years passed. Finally, Samjna could bear her father’s scolding no longer. Pretending to return to her husband. She left Vishvakarma’s house. She adopted the form of a mare and started to live in the region known as Uttarakuru.

Meanwhile, Surya had not realized that Samjna had been substituted by Chhaya. Surya and Chhaya had parented two sons and a daughter. The sons were Savarni (who would become a Manu) and Shani (the planet Saturn) and the daughter was Tapati.

Chhaya was clearly more attentive towards her own children than towards Samjna’s.

Vaivasta did not mind this at all. He was the eldest and more collected and balanced. But Yama resented this apparent partiality. In a fit of childish petulance, he kicked Chhaya.

“You have dared to kick your father’s wife,” said Chhaya. “I therefore curse you that your feet will decay. It is with these feet that you have kicked me.”

Yama went and complained to Surya. He had sinned, but he was no more than a child. Might his transgression not have been overlooked on that account? Besides, whatever the provocation, does a mother ever curse her own son?

Surya did what he could to mitigate the effects of the curse. But he also realized that something must be wrong. When he demanded to know the truth from Chhaya, she revealed nothing. But when Surya threatened to curse her and grasped her by the hair, the conditions Chhaya had made were violated. Chhaya now revealed the truth.

Surya went to Vishvakarma's house to find out where Samjna was. Hearing what had happened, Vishvakarma offered to slice off some of the sun's energy. It was, after all, the sun's great radiance that had motivated Samjna to do what she had done. Surya was not averse to this idea and his appearance was greatly improved by Vishvakarma's action.

Surya got to know that Samjna was in the Uttarakuru kingdom in the form of a mare. He adopted the form of a horse and joined his wife there. As horses, Surya and Samjna had two sons named Nasatya and Dasra. Since the word ashva means horse and since these two had been born when their parents had adopted the forms of horse, they were also known as the two Ashvinis. They became the physicians of the gods. After the Ashvinis were born, Surya and Samjna returned to their original forms.

Vaivasvata Manu was the eldest son of Surya and Samjna. Vaivasvata Manu performed a yajna so that he might have a son. But instead of a son, a daughter named Ila was born.

Therafter, nine sons were born to Vaivasvata. They were Ikshvaku, Nahusha, Dhrishhta, Sharyati, Narishyanta, Pramshu, Nabhaga, Karusha, and Prishadhra.

The kings of the solar line (surya vamsha) were descended from Ikshvaku. In this line was born Rama of the Ramayana fame.

## **DHUNDHU**

In the solar line there was a king named Vrihadashva. He had twenty-one thousand sons. The eldest son was known as Kuvalashva. When Vrihadashva aged, he decided to retire to the forest with his wife. As for the kingdom, he resolved that he would hand it over to Kuvalashva.

But as the coronation ceremony was about to take place, a sage named Utanka arrived in the capital. Utanka told Vrihadashva, "King, please do not retire to the forest just yet. If you do so, we will not be able to meditate in peace. My hermitage is on the shores of the ocean and the seashore is frequented by a terrible demon named Dhundhu. He is so powerful that even the gods cannot vanquish him. He hides under the sand and meditates. He exhales his breath once every year and when he does so, all hell breaks loose. Terrible sandstorms are unleashed and the sun is shrouded in dust. For an entire week there are earthquakes. You cannot go away without doing something about Dhundhu."

"Great sage," replied Vrihadashva, "I have given up my weapons. It would be most improper for me to take them up once again. As for Dhundhu, take my son Kuvalashva with you. I am sure that he will vanquish the demon."

Kuvalashva and his twenty-one thousand brothers accompanied Utanka. They came to the shores of the ocean and started to dig up the sand in their search for Dhundhu. When the demon got to know about this, he unleashed a terrible storm. Tidal waves raged. Flames licked with tongues of fire. Dhundhu's soldiers attacked Kuvalashva and his brothers. All the brothers except three were killed.

But Dhundhu had not reckoned with Kuvalashva. The storm, the waves and the fire could do Kuvalashva no harm. He killed the demon and thus acquired the name of Dhundhumara. The sage Utanka blessed him.

### TRISHANKU

Further down the line, there was a king named Trayaruna. His son was Satyavrata. Satyavrata was exceedingly strong. But such was his desire for riches, that he committed many sins. His father Trayaruna therefore decided to banish him. Trayaruna's chief priest was Vashishtha and the sage also supported the king's decision.

"Go away," Trayaruna told his son. "I do not wish to have a son who is like you."

"What will I do and where will I live?" asked Satyavrata.

"Go and live with the chandalas (outcasts)," his father replied.

Satyavrata went and started to live with the outcasts. In due course. Trayaruna retired to the forest and there was no king to rule over the kingdom. In the absence of a king, anarchy prevailed. For twelve long years it did not rain and there was a terrible drought. Famine raged.

At the time, the sage Vishvamitra had gone away to the shores of the great ocean to meditate. The sage's wife found it difficult to make both ends meet. There was no food to be had. She had no option but to sell off one of her sons in exchange for a hundred head of cattle. With this wealth she proposed to feed herself and her remaining sons. The person to whom the son was sold, tied a rope around the son's neck (gala) and proceeded to drag him away from the market-place. The son thus came to acquire the name of Galava.

Satyavrata discovered what was happening. He rescued Galava and he also made arrangements to ensure that Vishvamitra's wife and sons did not suffer in the sage's absence. The entire family was looked after by Satyavrata. Satyavrata killed deer and other wild animals in the forest. He brought the meat to Galava's family. He also tended to his father who had retired to the forest.

One one particular day, there was no game to be had. The sage Vashishtha possessed a cow. Satyavrata was not at all enamoured of Vashishtha. The sage had, after all, recommended that Trayaruna banish his son. Satyavrata therefore stole Vashishtha's cow and slew it. He ate the meat himself and also fed part of it to Vishvamitra's family.

Vashishtha was furious to learn this. He cursed Satyavrata. "You have committed three sins (shanku)," he said. "You have stolen that which belonged to others. That is your first sin. You

have caused unhappiness to your father. That is your second sin. And you have stolen and killed my cow. That is your third sin. Since you have committed three (tri) sins. I curse you that henceforth you will be known as Trishanku.”

After the twelve years of drought were over, Vishvamitra returned from his wanderings and was delighted to learn that Trishanku had taken care of his family in his absence. Despite Vashishtha’s opposition, Vishvamitra arranged for Trishanku’s coronation. As a sage, Vishvamitra had acquired great powers. He used these powers to send Trishanku to heaven in his mortal body. This was such a wonderful act that everyone marvelled at it.

## **SAGARA**

From Trishanku was descended a king named Vahu. Vahu was so addicted to material pursuits that he paid no attention to ruling his kingdom properly. Vahu’s enemies seized the opportunity to defeat him and deprive him of his kingdom. Vahu and his wife fled to the forest. Chief among these enemies were the Haihayas. But they were aided by the Talajanghas, the Shakas, the Yavanas, the Paradas, the Kambojas and the Pahlavas.

Vahu was old when this happened. Moreover, he was so grief-stricken at having lost his kingdom that he had lost all desire to live. He died in the forest.

King Vahu had two wives. One of these was named Yadavi. The second wife was jealous of Yadavi and attempted to kill her by administering some poison. The poison however did Yadavi no harm. When Vahu died, Yadavi decided to immolate herself on her husband’s funeral pyre. But the sage Ourva intervened.

“Please do not do that,” he requested Yadavi. “You are expecting and the act of killing the unborn baby would be a crime. Live and let him live. For, he will rule well and will defeat his father’s enemies.”

Persuaded by Ourva, Yadavi did not kill herself. She began to live in the sage’s hermitage. In due course, she gave birth to a beautiful boy. When the baby was born, the poison (gara) also emerged. Since the word sa means together with, the boy was given the name of Sagara.

Ourva took great interest in Sagara’s upbringing and education. He taught the boy the Vedas and the art of fighting. There was a divine weapon known as agneyastra. Sagara also learnt how to use this wonderful weapon from Ourva.

When Sagara grew up, he decided to tackle his father’s enemies. The knowledge of the divine weapon had made him close to invincible. He defeated the Haihayas, the Shakas, the Yavanas, the Kambojas, the Parada and the Pahlavas. But when he threatened to kill them all, these enemies sought refuge with the sage Vashishtha. The sage asked Sagara to spare them and saved their lives. But they had to be given some sort of punishment. Sagara decreed that the Shakas would have half of their heads shaved off. As for the Yavanas and the Kambojas, their heads were completely shaved off. The Paradas were instructed that they would have to sport long hair and the Pahlavas were forbidden to shave their beards.

King Sagara thus conquered his enemies and became the ruler of the entire world. He decided to perform a horse sacrifice to celebrate his victory.

Sagara had two wives. They were named Keshini and Sumati. Sagara did not have any sons and his wives pleased Ourva with their prayers. Ourva granted them boons that they would have sons. The stipulation however was that one wife would give birth to a single son who would ensure that the line went on. But the other wife would have sixty thousand sons who would perish before having any children of their own.

Keshini desired the single son and accordingly gave birth to Asamanja. Sumati gave birth to a gourd. The gourd was reserved in a vat of clarified butter. After nine months had passed, sixty thousand sons came out of the gourd.

Sagara's sons prospered. When a horse sacrifice is performed, a horse is left free to wander where it wills. At the time when Sagara organized the horse sacrifice, he appointed his sons to look after the horse. These sons insulted the sage Kapila and were burnt into ashes.

### **THE LUNAR LINE**

Chandra or Soma was the son of the sage Atri. Atri was a very powerful sage. He was always busy meditating. For three thousand years he performed tapasya, with his arms raised up into the air. He stood there, immobile like a tree-trunk. As a result of this wonderful tapasya, energy issued out of his body. The goddesses who preside over the ten directions assimilated this energy and produced Chandra. It was in this sense that Chandra was the sage Atri's son.

Brahma gave Chandra a divine chariot to ride on. This chariot was drawn by one thousand white horses. Chandra ascended the chariot and rode around the earth twenty-one times. While he was doing so, some energy from his body fell down on the earth. This was the origin of the herbs. Brahma appointed Chandra ruler over herbs, seeds, brahmanas and the water.

Chandra performed a royal sacrifice (rajasuya yajna). The success of this ceremony however served to turn Chandra's head. The preceptor of the gods was Brihaspati and Brihaspati's wife was named Tara. Although Chandra had already been married to twenty-seven of Daksha's daughters, he abducted Tara. The gods and the sages requested Chandra to return Tara, but he would not listen. A terrible fight then raged between the gods and the demons, the gods fighting on Brihaspati's side and the demons on Chandra's. After Tara's name, this samgraha (war). Finally, Brahma intervened and sorted the matter out. Chandra returned Tara to Brihaspati.

But Chandra and Tara had a son named Budha. You will remember Ila, Vaivasvata Manu's daughter. Budha married Ila and their son was called Pururava. Pururava was the originator of the lunar line.

### **PURURAVA AND URVASHI**

Pururava was a good king who performed many yajnas. He ruled the earth well. Urvashi was a beautiful apsara. Pururava met Urvashi and fell in love with her.

“Please marry me,” he requested.

“I will,” replied Urvashi, “But there is a condition. I love these two sheep and they will always have to stay by bedside. If I ever lose them, I will remain your wife no longer and will return to heaven. Moreover, I shall live only on clarified butter.”

Pururava agreed to these rather strange conditions and the two were married. They lived happily for sixty-four years.

But the gandharvas who were in heaven felt despondent. Heaven seemed to be a dismal place in Urvashi’s absence. They therefore hatched a conspiracy to get her back. On an appropriate occasion, a gandharva named Vishvvasu stole the two sheep. As soon as this happened, Urvashi vanished and returned to heaven.

Pururava pursued Vishvvasu and managed to retrieve the sheep, but by then, Urvashi had disappeared. The miserable king searched throughout the world for her. But in vain. Eventually, Pururava came across Urvashi near a pond in Kurukshetra.

“Why have you forsaken me?” asked Pururava. “You are my wife. Come and live with me.”

“I was your wife,” replied Urvashi. “I no longer am, since the condition was violated. However, I agree to spend a day with you.”

When one year had passed, Urvashi returned to Pururava and presented him with the son she had borne him. She spent a day with him and vanished again. This happened several times and, in this fashion, Urvashi bore Pururava six sons. They were named Ayu, Amvasu, Vishvayu, Shatayu, Gatayu and Dridayu.

## YAYATI

In the lunar line, there was a king named Nahusha. He had six sons and the youngest was named Yayati. After Nahusha, Yayati became king. Yayati had two wives. Shukracharya was the preceptor of the gods and Yayati married Devayani, Shukracharya’s daughter. The king of the danavas was Vrishaparva and he had a daughter named Sharmishtha. Yayati also married Sharmishtha. Devayani gave birth to Yadu and Turvasu and Sharmishtha gave birth to Druhya, Anu and Puru.

Yayati loved Sharmishtha more. Shukracharya therefore cursed Yayati that he would suffer from the untimely onset of old age. When this happened, Yayati was miserable. He was still not content with what he had savoured of the pleasures of life.

He told his son Yadu, “Please take my old age and give me your youth in return. I will return your youth to you when I have finished pleasuring the joys of the world.

“That I will not,” replied Yadu. “Your old age is due to your own sins. Why on earth should I accept it? Please ask my brothers instead.”

These words angered Yayati and he curses Yadu that Yadu or his descendants would never be kings. Yayati next asked Turvasu, but again met with a refusal. A similar curse was therefore imposed on Turvasu and on Druhya and Anu after him. The only son who readily accepted Yayati's request was Puru.

Yayati blessed Puru and took his youth from him. Armed with this borrowed youth, Yayati savoured the pleasures of the world and also performed many yajnas. When a thousand years had thus passed, Yayati got tired of material pursuits. He returned Puru's youth and got back his own old age. Yayati retired to the forest, after having crowned Puru the king.

As for Yadu, he was given some minor kingdoms that lay to the west. In similar fashion, Turvasu was given some kingdoms towards the south-east. Druhya and Anu received kingdoms that lay towards the west, as had Yadu. The descendants of Yadu were known as the Yadavas. In this line was born Krishna. Also in this line was born Kartavirya Arjuna.

### **KARTAVIRYA ARJUNA**

There used to be a king named Kritavirya and Kritavirya's son was known as Kartavirya Arjuna. Arjuna performed tapasya for thousands and thousands of years. Through this meditation, he pleased the sage Dattatreya and obtained four wonderful boons from the sage. The first boon gave Arjuna a thousand arms. The second boon gave him the power to use his persuasion to bring back evil people to the righteous path. The third boon was that he would conquer the entire earth and rule it according to the dictates of righteousness. The fourth and final boon was that Arjuna would meet his end at the hands of an individual who was in every way his superior.

Having obtained these boons, Arjuna conquered the whole earth and ruled it well. He performed ten thousand wonderful yajnas. The gods, the sages, the gandharvas and the apsaras always attended these ceremonies. He ruled for eighty-seven thousand years. One of Arjuna's amazing deeds was his defeat and capture of Ravana, the king of Lanka.

The sun-god, Surya, once came to visit Arjuna in the disguise of a brahmana. "I am hungry," said Surya. "Please give me some food to eat. I will reward you well. I am Surya."

"What sort of food will please you?" asked Arjuna. "What will I bring?" "I want to eat up all the material objects that there are on earth," replied Surya. "Please burn them up so that I may eat my fill." "How do you expect me to burn up all these objects?" asked Arjuna. "I am only a human and have very limited powers." Surya then gave Arjuna many divine arrows and a wonderful quiver to keep these arrows in. These arrows had the property that they burst into flames as soon as they were shot. With these arrows, Arjuna burnt up everything and Surya ate his fill. Hermitages, villages, cities and forests burned. Varuna was the god of the oceans and Varuna had a son named Ashvina. This son performed a lot of tapasya and became a sage named Vashishtha or Apava.

Vashishtha performed tapasya under the water for ten thousand years. When he finished his meditations and returned to his hermitage, he found that the entire place had been burnt up by Arjuna. Vashishtha was greatly incensed. "Since you have not spared my hermitage, I curse

you,” said Vashishtha. “No one who bears your name will ever again become a king. There will be a Pandava named Arjuna, the son of Kunti. But he will not be a king simply because he will bear your name. I also curse you that you will be killed by Parashurama.” Arjuna was eventually killed by Parashurama.

## THE GODS AND THE DEMONS

The gods and the demons did not like each other and fought several wars with each other. There were twelve such terrible wars. On one particular occasion, the demons were defeated by the gods. Extremely disheartened, they went to visit their preceptor, Shukracharya. (son of sage Bhrigu.) The demons told Shukracharya. “We have been defeated by the gods. We have no option but to go and reside in the underworld.” “Don’t be so disconsolate,” replied Shukracharya. “I will protect you. I know that Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods, has obtained wonderful powers by praying to the fire-god, Agni. The gods thrive on these powers. I will pray to Shiva and obtain powers that can counteract these. Till I come back, please be patient. Why don’t you give up arms and live as hermits till I return?” The demons agreed to this proposition.

They informed the gods that they had given up arms and that the gods could do as they willed. They had become hermits and would not fight. Meanwhile, Shukracharya started to pray to Shiva. Shiva appeared before Shukracharya and discovered what the sage desired. Shiva was prepared to grant these powers, subject to a condition being met. Shukracharya would have to meditate for a thousand years. And throughout this period, he would not be allowed to speak and would have to live on smoke. Shukracharya began this process of meditation. The gods got to know what was happening and decided that this was the opportune time to attack the demons. “What are you doing?” said the demons. “We have given up arms. This is not the time to fight.” But the gods would not listen. The demons therefore fled to Bhrigu’s wife and asked her to protect them. Through her powers, the saintly woman completely paralysed Indra so that he could not move. At the sight of what had happened to their leader, the gods fled in disarray. “Why are you running away?” asked Vishnu. “As for you, Indra, enter my body. I will take you away from this place.”

Indra entered Vishnu’s body and Vishnu proceeded to take him away. This angered Bhrigu’s wife and she threatened to burn up both Indra and Vishnu. But before this could happen, Vishnu sliced off the lady’s head with his sudarshana chakra (a bladed-discus).

Bhrigu was aghast at this act. “Killing a woman is a sin,” he told Vishnu. “You have committed a crime. For this crime, I curse you that you will have to be born several times on earth. As for my wife, through my powers I will resurrect her.”

This is what Bhrigu did and this act terrified Indra. He got extremely worried that once Shukracharya returned, there would be no way of controlling the demons. Indra had a daughter named Jayanti. He told her, “Shukracharya is meditating. Please go and try to distract him. Make sure that his meditation is not successfully completed.”

Jayanti did as her father had asked her to. She started to frequent Shukracharya's hermitage and served him faithfully. In due course, Shukracharya's meditation was completed and he obtained the desired boon from Shiva. Once this task was accomplished, Shukracharya noticed Jayanti.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" he asked. "Why have you been serving me thus? In any case, I am pleased with what you have done for me. Please tell me what boon you desire."

"Be my husband for ten years," answered Jayanti. Shukracharya agreed. Shukracharya and Janati had a daughter named Devayani.

Meanwhile, Brihaspati adopted Shukracharya's form and started to live with the demons. The demons were naturally glad to have their teacher back. They did not realize that the person whom they took to be their teacher was actually Brihaspati. After the ten years were over, Shukracharya returned and found that the demons were following Brihaspati.

"Who is this person whom you are following?" he asked. "Give him up. I am the real Shukracharya."

"Not at all," retorted Brihaspati. "I am the real Shukracharya."

The demons did not know what to make of this. The two looked exactly alike and there was absolutely no way of telling them apart. Eventually they concluded that the person with whom they had been associating for the past ten years must be their real guru (teacher). This choice so angered Shukracharya that he left in a huff. When the demons realized their mistake, they sought to pacify Shukracharya and bring him back. But the harm had already been done. The demons could not exploit the powers that Shukracharya had gained.

## VISHNU'S INCARNATIONS

Because of Bhrigu's curse, Vishnu had to be born several times on earth. These are known as avataras (incarnations). The Vayu Purana now catalogues Vishnu's ten incarnations. These are as follows. (1) Matsya or fish. (2) Narasimha or half-man and half-lion (3) Vamana or dwarf. (4) Dattatreya, the sage. (5) Bhavya. (6) Parashurama. (7) Rama. (8) Vedavyasa. (9) Krishna. (10) Kalki.

## EPILOGUE

Lomaharshana finished his recital of the Vayu Purana and told the assembled sages, "You are indeed lucky. You have heard that which is most sacred. This holy act will undoubtedly take you straight to heaven. A person who listens to a recital of this sacred text is rewarded with wealth, health and a long life. All the sins that a listener may have committed are forgiven. Do you know how the knowledge of this Purana was passed down through the ages? It passed from Vayu to Ushana, from Ushana to Brihaspati, from Brihaspati to Savita, from Savita to Mrityu, from Mrityu to Indra, from Indra to Vashishtha, from Vashishtha to Sarasvata, from Sarasvata to Tridhama, from Tridhama to Dhananjaya, from Dhananjaya to Kritanjaya, from Kritanjaya to Trinanjaya, from Trinanjaya to Bharadvaja, from Bharadvaja to Goutama, from Goutama to

Niryantara, from Niryantara to Vajashrava, from Vajashrava to Somashushma, from Somashushma to Trinavindu, from Trinavindu to Daksha, from Daksha to Shaktri, from Shaktri to Parashara, from Parashara to Jatukarna and from Jatukarna to Vedavyasa. I learnt the Purana from the great Vedavyasa himself. This is a lineage of sages that is truly sacred.”

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