

ESSENCE OF HINDU FESTIVALS AND AUSTERITIES

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Other Scripts by the same Author:

Essence of Puranas:-

Maha Bhagavata, Vishnu Purana, Matsya Purana, Varaha Purana, Kurma Purana, Vamana Purana, Narada Purana, Padma Purana; Shiva Purana, Linga Purana, Skanda Purana, Markandeya Purana, Devi Bhagavata; Brahma Purana, Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Agni Purana, Bhavishya Purana, Nilamata Purana; Shri Kamakshi Vilasa

Dwadasha Divya Sahasranaama:

a) Devi Chaturvidha Sahasra naama: Lakshmi, Lalitha, Saraswati, Gayatri;

b) Chaturvidha Shiva Sahasra naama-Linga-Shiva-Brahma Puranas and Maha Bhagavata;

c) Trividha Vishnu and Yugala Radha-Krishna Sahasra naama-Padma-Skanda-Maha Bharata and Narada Purana.

Stotra Kavacha- A Shield of Prayers

Purana Saaraamsha; Select Stories from Puranas

Essence of Dharma Sindhu

Essence of Shiva Sahasra Lingarchana

Essence of Paraashara Smtiti

Essence of Pradhana Tirtha Mahima

Dharma Bindu

Essence of Upanishads : Brihadaranyaka , Katha, Tittiriya, Isha, Svetashwara of Yajur Veda- Chhandogya and Kena of Saama Veda-Atreya and Kausheetaki of Rig Veda-Mundaka, Mandukya and Prashna of Atharva Veda ; Also 'Upanishad Saaraamsa' (Quintessence of Upanishads)

Essence of Virat Parva of Maha Bharata

Essence of Bharat Yatra Smriti

Essence of Brahma Sutras*

Essence of Sankhya Parijnaana*- Also Essence of Knowledge of Numbers

Essence of Narada Charitra

Essence Neeti Chandrika*

[Note: All the above Scriptures already released on [www. Kamakoti. Org/news](http://www.Kamakoti.Org/news) as also on Google by the respective references. The one with * is under process]

PREFACE

Dharma and Adharma are the two wheels of Life's Chariot pulling against each other. The pulls and pressures seek to dominate each other and that is what human life is all about. In this struggle, material impulses and nuances of morality have defined zones and festivals play a subtle role in the interaction.

Festivals are excellent social joints all over the world. Hindu Festivals too are of collective joys couched in individual austerities. The latter emanate from Vratas which no doubt have a social connotation but the individual inputs tend to overweigh the objective angles. Thus social outlooks are mixed up with the personal selves and Vratas having festive outlooks amalgamated into the folds of the Self. While some are extremely popular in all the cross sections of the national calendar, many more are restricted to regions and diversified faiths of Hinduism itself; and the latter too are signified equally as oriented to groups of the like-minded. Such Hindu Festivals as are invariably connected to vratas and austerities by the larger parts of Bharat do find a pride of place in the current script. These are being presented in the sequence of Hindu months and of the tithis / dates as well. Each of the Maasa or Month highlights the marked festivals and vratas in the ever evolving Kaala chakra or Cycle of Time. The astrological calculations of the Kaala Maana had successfully been exercised by the Sages of the Yore for the benefit of the ongoing generations and are interpreted by the intellectuals of the day. The details thus forwarded need to be followed ever since.

On the occasion of the silver jubilee of the Sri Lakshmi Kamakshi Nilayam, may we in the family dedicate this humble script to Late Shri Chavali Subramanya Shastri and Late Smt. Adi Lakshmi, the founding patrons of the temple on the auspicious occasion of Devi Nava Ratra Celebrations. Shri Shastri's intense spiritual bonds with the Ever Present Paramacharya culminated with the Consecration of 'Shri Lakshmi Kamakshi Nilaya' at Greenways Rd. Extn. Chennai-28 twenty five years ago in Feb. 1990 ; his Presidentship of the Premier Institute of Chartered Accountants Association of India, New Delhi and his professional expertise got paled into insignificance before the charisma of Paramacharya! Shri Shastri's close and deeply personal association with Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai- who personally gifted the Ashvattha Ganapati Pratima secure in the Temple- as also the Mother of Pondicherry were literally capped by those of the blessings of Shri Paramacharya of Kanchi Mutt!

Truly indeed with Paramacharya's *anugraham*, Shri Lakshmi Kamakshi and all the *Parivara Devatas* in the Temple continue to bless the family members and devotees always. Both HH Jayendra Saraswati and HH Vijayendra Saraswati performed the First ever Kumbha-bhishekam on behalf of Paramacharya who personally blessed the occasion. Needless to mention of the extraordinary blessings of HH Jayendra Saraswati and of HH Vijayendra Saraswati, who continue to provide a unique path of spiritual intensity to all the family members and circle of devotees of the Temple; not only they visit it often but the recent one during March-April this year is ever fresh in one's memories!

VDN Rao

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*Vedah Smrutih Sadaachaaraha swasya cha Priyamaatmanah
Etacchaturvidham praahuh sakshaat Dharmasya lakshanam/*

(Veda-Smriti-Sadaachara-and one's own Conscience constitute the four corner-stones of Dharma)

Introduction

In the 'Kaalamana' or the Cycle of Time the details are: * Samvatsara, each comprising Two Ayanas-Six 'Rithus' or Seasons-Twelve Months- and Seven Days. The Chandra or Saura Varshas are based on the movement of Solar or Lunar entities. The Chandra maana procedure varies in the sense that the cycle of Seasons starts from the first day of Chaitra commencing from Ugadi .Then are the Tithis of Prathama- to Amavasya or Prathama to Purnima respectively and the months of Chaitra-Vaishakha-Jyeshtha-Ashadha-Shravana-Bhadrapada-Ashviniyuja- Kartika- Margashira-Pushya- Maagha-Phalgunas. The months coincide approximately with March to February totalling 365 days. Ritus or Seasons approximately coincide with Chaitra-Vaishakha or end March to the last weeks of May when festivals like Ugadi, Shri Rama Navami, and Vaishakhi are celebrated. Greeshma Ritu or Summer during April-July during Jyeshtha-Ashadha when festivals like Ratha Yatra and Guru Purnima are observed and Dakshinayana or the Solar downtrend commences. Varsha Ritu or monsoon coincides with Shravana-Bhadrapadas or the last portions of July-September when Mangala Gauri and Vara Lakshmi Vratas, Raksha Bandhan, Krishna Ashtami, Ganesh Chaturthi and Onam are celebrated. Sharad Ritu or Autumn Season coinciding with Ashvin-Kartika months extending portions of September to November being mild weather the famed Sharannava Ratri and Depaavali are celebrated. Hemanta Ritu or pre-winter Season coinciding with Margaseersha and the last days of November-January, the festivals of Vasanta Panchami, Shiva Ratri and Holi are observed; and finally Shishira Ritu or winter coinciding with Maagha-Phalguna months during the last quarter of January to March is the time of Vasanta Panchami, Shiva Ratri and Holi.

* [Prabhava, Vibhava, Shukla, Pramodoota, Prajopatti, Aangirasa, Shrimukha, Bhava, Yuva, Dhaata, Ishwara, Bahudhanya, Pramaati, Vikrama, Vrisha, Chitrabhanu, Swayambhanu, Taarana, Parthiva, Vyaya, Vrisha, Sarvajit, Sarvadhari, Virodhi, Vikruti, Khara, Nandana, Vijaya, Jaya, **Manmatha**, Durmukhi, Helambi, Vilambi, Vikaari, Sharvaani, Plava, Shubhkrut, Krodhi, Vishwaavasuu, Paraabhava, Plavanga, Keelaka, Soumya, Saadhaarana, Virodhikrut, Pareedhaavi, Pramaadeecha, Ananda, Raakshasa, Nala, Pingala, Kaala Yukti, Siddharthi, Roudri, Durmati, Dundhubhi, Rudhi-rodgaari, Raktakshi, Krodhana and Akshaya; all these are of repetitive/ cyclical nature.]

CHAITRA MAASA

Chaitra Shukla Pratipaada heralds the New Year. In Mesha Sankranti, the first and previous ten ghadis are considered as Punyakaala. If the Samkramana starts before the previous midnight, then the Punyakaala is stated to commence on the previous night and otherwise then the Uttaraartha Punya kaala is considered as on the following day. In case the Sankramana is exactly on the midnight then both the days are deemed as of Punyakaala. Even if Chaitra Maasa happens to be an Adhika Maasa / Mala Maasa, then also the 'Tailaabhyangana' / oily head bath and other formal duties need to be performed and the New Year is declared as has begun. Each house-hold would then have a festive look and the Praatipada Morning should witness freshness with Nimba Patra Bhakshama with gud /jaggery and raw Mango pieces signifying equanimity of the mixed tastes of the New Year. That indeed announces the Vasanta Nava Rathris or the Devi Sharannava Raatris (Nine Nights).

[Parameswari is stated to assume Nine Swarupas of Devi viz. Brahmi / Devi Sharada as ‘Hamsavaahini’ / seated on a Swan with Kamandalu, Aksha Maala, Pustaka, Paasha and Chinmudra; Maheswari-Vrishabha Vaahini / seated in a bull, wearing a Crest Moon and Trishula /Trident; Koumaari as Mayura Vaahini / riding a Mayura or peacock with Shakti as her Aayudha / weapon; Vaishnavi as Garuda Vaahini with Shankha-Chakra-Gadaa (conchshell, disc and mace); Indrani with Vajraayudha; Sharada with Veena bestowing knowledge; Mohini with Amrita Kalasha distributing Nectar to Devas and denying to Asuras; Raja Rajeswari / Kameshwari seated on a lotus with Paasha, Ankusha, Pushpa Baana and Chaapa bestowing wealth, food, happiness and contentment; Devi Chamundi the Simha Vaahini /seated on a lion and destroying the most potent Demons like Chanda-Mundas and protecting the virtuous and the wise from their torment and finally as Gajalakshmi seated on a lotus with elephants geeting her with their trunks aloft and providing happiness to her devotees. The Nava Swarupas of Jagan Maata signify the assurance to the Universe the truism: *Ekaivaaham Jagatyaatraa dwiteeyaa kaa mamaaparaa/* (I am the eternal and unique Shakti and none else!)]

Chaitra Shukla Paksha Vrata Pradaana: On *Pratipa Tithi*, Prapeya (Pousala or Water supplying rest houses) daana is observed to satisfy Pitru Devataas; if one is unable to do so every day in the Month pots of water are given as Daana to Brahmanas; the relevant Mantra is: *Esha Dharma ghato datto Brahma Vishnu Shivaatmakah, Asya Pradaanaatsakalaa mama santhu manorathaah/* (This dharma ghata or pot of Dharma representing Brahma-Vishnu- Maheshwara is being given as charity so that my ‘manoratha’ or menal desires be fulfilled). This type of Daana is not only done on Pratipada Tithi of Chaitra Maasa, but on Chaitra Shukla Panchami, Vaishakha Shukla Triteeya, Maagha Shuka Trayodashi, Kartika Saptami, Maargaseersha Navami and Phalguna Krishna Triteeya; these are the days when Pitru Shraadh is to be performed. Some persons believe that Matsya Jayanti is also observed on Chaitra Shukla Pratipaada. On Chaitra Shukla Patipaada, Gouri Vrata is also observed by performing ‘Dampati Puja’ or worship of respected couples signifying Gouri Puja and by avoiding Ksheera-Ghrita-Madhus or Milk-Curd-Honey. On the Chaitra Shukla *Dwiteeya* Pradosha (Sun-set time), Chandra Vrata is observed by worshipping Bala Chandra. On Chaitra Shukla *Triteeya*, Andolini Vrata is executed after worshipping Shiva-Parvatis; if triteeya has commenced on the previous day itself, then too this Vrata has to be observed on the next day itself. On the Triteeya itself Shri Ramachandra ‘Dolotsava’ should begin and the Puja should continue till the end of the entire Chaitra Maasa. On the Chaitra Shukla Triteeya itself the *Manvaadis* or the beginning of reign of Fourteen Manus; in fact the *Manvaadis* are celebrated on Chaitra Shukla Triteeya and Purnima, Jyeshtha Purnima, Ashadha Shukla Dashami and Purnima, Shraavana Krishnaashtami, Bhadrpada Shukla Triteeya, Ashvayuja Shukla Navami, Kartika Shukla Dwadashi and Pournamaasi, Pousha Shuklaikaadashi, Maagha Shukla Saptami and Phalguna Purnima and Amavaashya. Incidentally, the Fourteen Manus are: Swayambhu, Swarochisha, Aouttama, Tamasa, Raivata, Chakshusa, *Vaiwasvanta*, Savarni, Daksha Savarni, Brahma Savarni, Dharma Savarni, Rudra Savarni, Rouchya, and Indra Savarni. On all these Manvaadis, one is required to perform Pindarahita Shraaddhaas. In fact in each year there are ninety six Shraaddhas to be performed and these are: twelve Amavasyas, four yugaadis, fourteen Manvantaraas, Twelve Kranthis, Twelve Vaidhritis, twelve Vyatipaataas, Mahalayaas fifteen , Ashtaka-ashaadhas as five, Anvashtakas five , Purveddha shraaddhas five, totalling ‘Shannavati’ Shraaddhaas.

Dashaavataara Jayantis: On Chaitra Shukla Triteeya there was the Origin of Matsya-Avataara; at the evening of Vaishakha Purnima was of the Kurmaavataara; Varahaavataara at the Aparaaahna of Bhadrpada Shukla Triteeya; Nrisimaavataara at the evening of Vaishakha Shuka Chaturdashi; Vaamanaavataara in the Madhyaahna of Chaitra Shukla Dwaadashi; Parashu Rama at the Madhyaahna on Vaishakha Shukla Triteeya ; Chaitra Shukla Madhyaahna Shri Rama; Shri Krishna at the midnight of Shraavana Krishnaashtami; Buddhaavataara in the evening of Ashvviyuja Shukla Dashami; and on Kalkyaavataara on Sharavana Shukala Shashthi on the evening. *Ganesha Damana Puja* is performed all over Bharata Varsha on Chaitra Shukla *Chaturthi* for *Vighna naasham Sarvakaamaapnuyaat* or for overcoming all difficulties

and fulfilling all kinds of desires. Any Puja or auspicious tasks should be initiated only after Ganesha Puja always. *Panchami naaga Puja* is observed in Chaitra Shukla Paksha by offering Ksheera- Ghrita to Naaga Devataas / Serpent Gods. Also this Panchami is the day of re-incarnation of Goddess of Wealth Lakshmi Devi pursuant to the ‘Ksheera Mathana’ or the churning of the Ocean of Milk by Deva-Daityas as also of the emergence of ‘Ucchaishravaas’ or the Divine Horses and thus Lakshmi worship and Haya Vrata are observed on the same day. Chaitra Shukla *Shasthi* is the Skanda Shashthi and worship of Shiva Kumara Skanda. Chaitra Shukla *Ashtami* is the day of Bhavani Devi’s Puja. On the same day, if Punarvasu Nakshatra coincides too that auspicious day is to be observed as of the worship of Ashvatha (Peepal) Tree by consuming eight tender buds of the flowers of the tree for fulfillment of human desires. Again, *Punarvasu Budhopetaa Chaitrey Maasi sitaashami, Praatastu Vidhivatsnaatvaa Vaajapeya phalam labhet/* (If formal bathing is done on the early morning of Wednesday coinciding with Punarvasu Nakshatra of Chaitra Shukla Ashtami followed by the worship of ‘Ishta Devata’, then that auspicious act would bestow the fruit of executing Vaajapeya Yagna!)

Shri Rama Navami Vrata: on Chaitra Shukla *Navami*: Lord Shri Rama assumed the incarnation of Bhagavan Vishnu on Chaitra Shukla Navami’s Madhyaahna, during the Punarvasu Nakshatra in the Karkataka Lagna when Surya Deva was in Mesha Raasi as five Grahas / Planets were in ascendancy or predominance. As such, persons dedicated to Shri Rama Vrata should initiate their Upavaasa’s morning on the presumption of Navami extending upto the afternoon but if Navami arrived on the previous day and extends on the next afternoon, then the Sankalpa of Upavasa should be on the previous day itself and the Upavasa would be for two days. The Vrata Sankalpa commences with Shri Rama Pratimaa Daana to the Acharya, by reciting the Shloka: *Shri Rama Pratimaa Daanam -kareshyam Dwijottama, Tatraachaaryo Bhava preeta sshreemaarosi twamevamey/* (I pray to Shri Rama and offer the Shri Rama Pratima presuming th Acharya is Shri Rama himself); the Karta should further take a vow: *Navamiya anga bhutena eka bhuktena Raghavaa! Ikshwaaku Vamsha Tilaka preetobhava bhavapriya/* (As part of the Navami Vrata, I do resolve hereby that I will fast till the end of the Vrata; Shri Ragava! The jewel of the Ikshwaku Vamsha! Shiva Priya!). There after, Puja Vedika / Platform is made, take the vow to keep fast for eight yaamas, and recite : *Shri Rama Navami Vrataangabhuta Shodashopachaara Pujaam karishye/* and initiate the Puja comprising sixteen services like Aavahana- Shuddhodaka Snaana-Vastra-Gandha-Pushpa-Phala-Naivedyaadis. Then invoke Devi Kousalya with the Mantra: *Raamasya jananichaasi Raamatmakamidam Jagat/* Then worship Dasharatha saying *Om Namu Dasharadhaaya./* This would be followed by Shanka Puja with the recital: *Dashaanana Vadhaarthaaya Dharma Samshaapanaaya cha, Daanavaanaam Vinaashaaya Daityaanaam nithanaaya cha/ Paritraanaaya Saadhunaam jaato Raamasswayam harih, Grihaanaarghyam mayaa duttam bhraatrubhissahitonagha/* (Shri Rama! You are indeed the incarnation of Shri Hari who has descended to earth to destroy the powerful Ten-headed Ravana and other Daitya-Daanavaas and re-instate Dharma in the Universe; may offer this obeisance to you along with your brothers). This Puja would be followed by night long ‘jaagarana’ and Punah Puja next morning along with Agni Homa and Mula Mantra Pathana hundred times. On conclusion, Patimaadi daanaas, Dakshina Pradaana and Prasaada Sweekaarana Paarana / Brahmana Bhojana.

Shri Krishna aanandolanotsava: on Chaitra Shukla *Ekaadashi* (Celebration of Baala Krishna in cradle): *Dolaarudham prapashyanti Krishnam Kalimalaapaham, Aparaadha sahasraistu Muktaastey dhoonaney kritey/ Taavatthishthanti paapaani janmakotikritaanyapi kreedantey Vishnunaasaardham V aikunthey Deva Pujitaah/* (Mere vision of Bala Krishna playful in a cradle is enough to destroy the sins of Kali Yuga; if the cradle is swung, thousands of misdoings are forgiven and ‘Janmaantaraaparaadhaas’ or sins of previous births are destroyed at once and if the Pratima of Krishna is played with in full faith and devotion, Vishnu Saayujya is assured).

Damanotsava: (Festival of Damana Devata) on Chaitra Shukla *Chaturdashi*: Damana literally means self- restraint and conquering Evil Forces. Observing Upavasa and Nitya Puja on this occasion, the Karta of Festival enters the Damana Sthaana, cleans it up with ‘Pancha Gavyas’ (Five products of Cow viz. milk, curd, ghee, dung and urine), decorates it with Chandana-Pushpa-Phalaas, initiates puja with the invocation of *Shri Krishna Pujaartham twaam nesheye*, meditate Sarva Devas and performs Puja to Kama Devata with the Mantra: *Namostu Pushpa baanaaya Jagadaahlaada kaariney, Manmathaaya Jagannetrey Rati preeti priyaayatey/* (I greet Manmatha Deva-the carrier of Flowery Arrows to bestow happiness of the entire Universe, the Saviour of all Beings in the Lord’s Creation and the beloved of Rati Devi). Then at the Damana Sthaana, instal a ‘Kalasha’/ vessel in the center of a Square over a white cloth and propitiate Damana Devata with the Prayer: *Pujaartham Deva Devasya Vishnorlakshmi patey Prabho, Damanatwamihaagaccha saannidhyam kurutey namah/* (May I greet Lakshmi Pati Vishnu before I invoke Damana Devata from the ‘Ashta Diks’ or the Eight Directions) with the Mantras: *Kleem Kama Devaaya Namah, Hreem Ratyai Namah, Kleem Bhasma Shareeraaya Namah, Hreem Ratyai Namah, Kleem Anangaaya Namah, Hreem Ratyai Namah, Kleem Manmadhaaya Namah, Kleem Vasanta Sukhaaya Namah, Kleem Smaraaya Namah, Kleem Ikshu chaapaaya Namah, Kleem Pushpa Baanaaya Nama etc.* and Gayatri Damana Mantra viz. *Tatpurushaaya Vidmahey, Kaama Devaaya dheemahi, Tannanangah prachodayaat.* Subsequently, the Karta greets Bhagavan Vishnu as follows: *Ksheerodadhi Maha Naaga shayyaavasthita Vighraha, Praatastwaam pujayishyaami sannidhou bhavatey namah/* (Parameswara who is resting on the ‘Sesha Talpa’! May I offer my Morning Puja; do provide my nearness to you!) and observes ‘Ekaadasha Jaagarana’ or Night Vigil all through the Ekaadashi. Next Morning after performing Nitya Puja , execute worship to Damana Devata and after reciting ‘Mula Mantra’, pray to Paramatma with the Stanza: *Deva Deva Jagannatha vaanchitaartha pradaayaka, Hruthpaan purayamey Vishno kaamaan Kameshwari Priya/ Idam damanakam Deva grihana madanugrahaat, Imaam Saam vatsaram Pujaam Bhagavan Paripuraya/* (Deva Deva Jagannaatha! Parameswara! As you always fulfill every body’s desires, do grant my wishes too and accept my Damana Puja over the Year) .Nrisimha Dolotsava again on Chaitra Shukla Chaturdashi is a Damana Puja to Parama Shiva, Ekaveera Devi and Bhairava. This Chaturdashi has to extend upto the noon if commenced on the previous day itself. If not, it should be considered as Chaitra Purnima in which case, Damana Puja has to be performed to all Devas. If Chaitra Purnima coincides with Chitra Nakshatra, Chitra Vastra Daana would bestow excellent prosperity. If that day falls on Sunday-Thursday- Saturday then Praatahsnaana-Shraaddaas would grant the Punya of performing Ashwamedha yagna.

VAISHAKHA MAASA

Vaishakha Snaan: are scheduled during Chaitra Shukla Ekaadashi to Purnima with the arrival Mesha Samkraanti: *Vaishaakham sakalam maasam Mesha sankraman Raveh, Praatassnnimaya-ssnaassy preeyataam Madhu Sudanah/ Madhu hantuh prasaadana Brahmanaamanugrahaat, nirvighnamastu mey Punyam Vaishaakha snaanamavaham, Maadhavey Meshagebhaanow Muraarey Madhusudana/ Praatassnaanena mey Naatha Phalado Bhava Paapahan/* (During the entire Vaishakha Maasa when Mesha Sankraanti occurs, I resolve that I shall take formal baths by which Madhusudana would be pleased; give my devotion to Him and th blessings of Brahmanas, may the series of th Snaanas be completed without hindrance and break; in the exception of a break if need be, at least three Snaanas be performed from Tayosashi onward. As stated earlier, Manvaadis are on Purnimas; in case, Chaitra KrishnaTrayodashi coincideswith Shatabhisha that day is reckoned as a ‘Vaaruni’ and is worthy of Snaanas on the days of ‘Grahana’. If there is Shubha Yoga or auspicious coincidence of a Saturday and Shatabhisha Nakshatra, then that day is called Maha Vaaruni. F urther, there is a belief that Snaan in Ganga on Chaitra Krishna Chaturdashi on a Tuesday in the presence of a Shiva Temple could even get rid of a person from Pishaachatwa! In Vaishakha Maasa’s Vrishabha Sankranti time ie. sixteen Ghadiyas

before the First day, Tila Tarpana and Ghata Daana are stated to be significance. Vasanta Puja to Brahmanas with Sandalwood paste(Gandha)-Jaggery water and Plantain fruits is also of great value. In Vaishakha Maasa (as also in Jyeshtha) when summer gets intense, then after Nitya Puja keep a full vessel of Sandalwood water and Tulasi leaves with ‘Panchopacharaas’ to Vishnu and perform ‘Maarjana’ or sprinkle drops to purify ‘Griha Dwaaraas’ and on retaining the same Tirtha pour around an Ashwatta (Pipal) Tree by doing Pradakshinas on the next morning then several Pitru Devataas are stated to redeem their souls; also the skin-itches of cows are believed to be cured. In the Vaishakha Maasa, voluntary ‘Nakta Bhojanas’ are stated to fulfill longstanding desires of the persons concerned. Shiva Lingaarchana with cotinuous pourings of Sacred Water as Abhishkaas along with Namaka-Chamaka Mantras would bestow far reaching Punya. Similarly Chhatra-Paada raksha daanaas would yield Maha-Phala. Skanda Purana highlights Vaishakha Month’s significance as follows: Sage Narada confirmed from Brahma that ‘Vaisakha Masa’ was of immense consequence as it fulfills all desires to human beings just as a mother does to children. The month is very dear to Vishnu and confers several boons to those who deserve. The month is the essence of Dharma, Yagna, Kriya (noble tasks) and Tapasya. Vaisakha is a ‘Dharma Sadhaka’(Virtue-prone) month, just as Veda Vidya is the preeminent of Vidyas, ‘Pranava’ is the superlative of Mantras, ‘Kalpa Vriksha’ is the paramount of Trees, Surya Deva is the most superior of all radiances, Sudarshan Chakra is the most powerful among all Shastraas and Astras, Gold is the best of all metals, Siva is the unique among Vaishnavas and ‘Kaustubh’ is the best among the jewels. Those who perform ‘Snaan’ even before Sunrise are valued by Narayana. Just as Vaishakha, there is no Yuga like Satya, no charity like that of water, no prosperity like farming, no Tapasya like Upavas (fasting), no happiness like giving away, no virtue like mercy and forgiving, no superiority like good health, and above all there is no Bhagavan like Vishnu. During the month of Vaishakha, ‘Jala Daan’ assumes high importance as those who wish to attain affluence must resort to ways and means of supplying water to public; road side outlets to travellers are of great utility especially in Summer season. Planting trees for shade, providing umbrellas, footwear and fans to individuals, ‘Anna daan’ or mid day meals and free accommodation in rest houses especially to ‘Yatris’ and devising other facilities have enormous and far reaching ‘Punya’; the donors of these items would automatically receive manifold benefits in ‘Iham’ (current life) and ‘Param’, especially the ‘Naraka lokas’ which one ought to visit after life. To those who give away clothing in charity would be rid of difficulties at birth and death; to those who donate mats that Lord Vishnu Himself rests on; to those who give away bed sheets would have comfortable sleep; to those who provide relaxed clothing to Brahmanas their life span would be extended; to those who donate flowers would be blessed with luxuries in life; to those who offer chandan would enjoy happiness; to those who construct free rest houses would become Kings; to those who provide free facilities of gardens, water wells, and ‘Mandapas’ would have the happiness of good children; and to those who perform rites to ‘Pitras’ by offering Kasturi, Camphor, fragrant material and pots full of scented waters are sure to achieve various types of reliefs in the ‘Paraloka’. While these are illustrative types of charities and the far reaching results of benevolence, the avoidable tasks during the Vaisakha month are eight-folded viz. applying oils on body, bathing in the house, sleeping during the day timings, eating in glass utensils, sleeping on water beds, keeping away from avoidable foods, eating more than once a day and eating in the night. If one takes Vaishakha bath before Sun-rise in any of the Seven Gangas viz. Ganga, Buddha Ganga (Godavari), Kalindi or Yamuna, Saraswathi, Kaveri, Narmada and Veni, the person concerned would be saved from even ‘Pancha Patakas’, let alone lesser level sins. Daanas of ‘Kanda’/ ‘Moola’ (Underground Vegetables), Phala (Fruits) Shakha (Plain Vegetables), Salt, Gud, Edible Leaves, and water would have endless benefits. While performing ‘Snaanas’ during Vaishaka, the following Mantras should be read in praise of Madhusudan as follows: *Madhusudan Devesha Vaishaakhe Meshage Ravai, Prathahsnaanam karishyaami nirvighnam kuru Madhava.* (Hey Madhusudan, Deveswara Madhava, I am performing Vaishakha month bathing early morning when Surya Deva is situated in Mesha Rasi; Kindly accomplish my bathing without hindrance and bless me). After the bath, one should offer ‘Arghya’ (Handful of water) looking at Sun: *Vaishaakhe Meshage Bhaanau Praathah Snaana*

paraayanah, Arghyam theham pradaasmahi gruhaana Madhusudana. (I do formally offer the 'Arghya' during early morning of Vaishaka when Surya is in Mesha Rasi; kindly accept, Madhusudana!)

Once there was a King named Kirtiman in Kashipura who went hunting in forests and being desirous of visiting the 'Ashram' of Sage Vasishtha found several of the Sage's disciples offering the shade of umbrellas, fruits and cool drinks to passers by. They were unmindful of normal human beings and Kings like him and asked why were they doing the service, they did not reply. On meeting Vasishtha, the King enquired about the acts of the disciples and the Sage described the significance of Vaisakha Month. Pursuant to this the King ordered that the good example of the disciples of the Sage be followed in the nook and corner of the entire Kingdom and was able to save the lives of several of his subjects, especially Brahmanas by providing rest houses, planting trees, supplying food and cool water and creating innumerable facilities to his people. Also, the King organised a Kingdom-wide campaign of propagating Dharma in the Vaishakha Month and spreading the awareness of the 'do's and don'ts' as also strictly enforcing early morning bathings, performances of daanas, 'Pujas' by individual families and a general uplift of Dharma. This resulted in a very thin outgo of deaths from his Kingdom in the months of Vaishaka and Lord Yamaraja made an appeal to Brahma that the traffic of deaths and births registered in the Kingdom of Kirtiman was highly disturbed, that there was little difference of 'Swarga' and 'Naraka' and even those few deaths in the Kingdom made a bee-line to Vaikuntha! Amused by the complaint of Yamaraja, Brahma accompanied by Yamaraja approached the 'Ksheera Sagar' (Ocean of Milk) and Vishnu replied smilingly that He would rather leave away His Srivatsa, Kaustubh jewel, Vijayanti Mala, Sweta Dwip, Vaikuntha, Ksheera Sagar, Sesa Nag, Garuda or even Devi Lakshmi, but would never abandon His Bhakta Raja Kirtiman. He further said that He would desire to multiply the good illustrations of that King and extend their lives for thousands of Years. He warned Yamadhararaja not to interfere with the observance of the 'Mahatmya' of the month of Vaisakha. However, Lord Vishnu provided for a special dispensation in favour of Yamadhararaja that the devotees of Vaisakha month should perform a special Puja in his favour during the first half of the month before Purnima and give away a Daan of potful of water, curd and Anna (rice/foodgrains) to appease him. Only after the special Puja that one should observe Pujas to Pitras, Gurus and Bhagavan Vishnu in their names and charity be given to Brahmanas offering cool water, curd, Anna, fruits, betel leaves/ nuts and 'dakshina' along with a copper vessel and an Idol of Maha Vishnu.

The importance of Vaisakha *Akshaya Tritēya* through the end of the month was illustrated by a King Purushaya of Panchaladesha who no doubt was virtuous and noble but lost his kingdom following a famine in his Kingdom and the opportune neighbouring Kings defeated and sent Purushaya into exile. Two Sages explained that Purushaya was a cruel hunter in his previous birth but luckily he showed two old and very thirsty passers-by about the location of a waterbody and hence he became a King; yet Purushaya never performed charity and hence faced bad days. The Sages suggested that the next day was Vaisakha Akshaya Tritēya and the King could therefore observe early morning Snaan, Puja to Lakshmi, perform charity by way of water-dispensers for the benefit of thirsty passers-by and such other good deeds. Purushaya realised the fault and executed several charitable deeds during Akshaya Tritēya through Amavasya and regained his kingdom eventually and decided to provide many charities in the entire month of Vaisakha month every year. Eventually, the King became a great devotee of Lord Vishnu, had His darshan and attained 'Sayujya'.

While all the days of Vaishakha Month are significant, *Ekadashi*, assumes special value. The ideal deeds like Snaan, Daan, Homa, Deva Puja and other Punya Karmas like Japas, Stotras and Katha Shravanas bestow instant results. Those who suffer from illness and acute poverty would be free from Purana Shravana; those who are blind, widows, or normal men, women, and children, youth, old, decrepit and the rest would all be able to lessen or even remove their problems as a result of their virtues on Ekadashi of the month. Similarly, *Amavasya* of Vaisakha Month is of the great impact for Pitru Puja and for performing 'Shraddhas', 'Pinda daanas' and 'Tila Tarpanas'.

Akshaya Tritiya / Parashu Rama Puja: The fruits of virtuous deeds on this day should yield far reaching ; *Asyaam Yatinchitjapahoma Pitru tarpana daanaadi kriyatey tatsarvamakshayam, Iyam Rohini Budha Yogey Mahaa Punyaa/ Asyaam Japahomaadi krityepi Vakshyamaana yugaadivan –nirnayah, Iyam kritaugasyaadiah/* (On this Akshaya Triteeya, whatever little is performed by way of Japa-Homa- Pitru Tarpana-Daanaadi Dharma karyaas would never be wasted; especially when these Karyaas are done on Wednesdays coinciding Rohini Nakshatra would bestow ‘Mahaa phala’. Such Japa-Homa and such acts are as good as those performed at the Yugaadis. Yugaadi Shraaddha should be Pinda rahita or without resorting to offer of Pindaas. If Shraaddha is not possible on these lines , tila tarpana would suffice. However, Kumbha daana is stated to be essential; a Kumbha (pot) has to be covered with a cloth and filled up with ‘Gandhodaka’ before giving away as a kumbha daana by reciting: *Esha Dharma Ghato dutto Brahma Vishnu Shiaamakah, Asya pradaanaatrupyantu Pitarassapitaamahah/ Gandhodaka tilairyuktam snaanam kumbham phalaanvitah Pitrubhyas- sampradaasyaami Akshayamupatishthatu/* (I am giving away this ‘Kalasha’ filled with tila-phala-Gandhotakas through you Brahmanas in favour of my Pitru Devataas; may this daana bestow to me endless benefits. At the Yugaadis like this Akshaya Triteeya, ‘Samudra Snaana’ and ‘Upavasa’ are stated to be immense ‘Punya’.

On this Triteeya, Parashu Rama Jayanti is also observed; on this day’s ‘Pradosha’ Time, Parashu Rama puja is performed by offering ‘Arghya’ or Sacred Water to Parashu Rama with the Mantra: *Jaamadagnya Mahaa Vira Kshatriyaantakara Prabho, Grihaanaarghyam mayaa duttam kripayaa Parameswara!* (Parmeswara Parashu Rama who uprooted the entire Kshatriya Vamsha! Do accept the offer of the Arghya from me and safeguard me always!) Agni Purana briefly accounts for Parashu Rama Charitra : As per the ‘Varna Dharma’ of Hinduism there are four categories of castes of which the first category is of ‘Brahmins’ practising ritualistic prayers, Sacrifices, religious preaching, temple-running etc. Next category comprises ‘Kshatriyas’ or the Warriors and Kings, whose duty is to protect all other classes of people, especially the Brahmins. In this background, Kshatriyas had over a few generations neglected the interests of the three ‘Varnas’ and became despotic and cruel. It was at this time, that Lord Vishnu came to mortal life as the son of Sage ‘Jamadagni’ and ‘Renuka’ and assumed the name of ‘Parasu Rama’ or the one with an axe to punish the evil. ‘Kartaveerya’ was the contemporary King who was an ill-famed and cruel tyrant, with thousand hands. He not only subjected his own people with oppression and brutality but became a terror among his neighbouring Kingdoms too. He had a few boons from Lord Dattatreya which were misused and tormented one and all. On one occasion, the King visited the Ashram (the Hermitage) of Jamadagni and was impressed with the Holy Cow, ‘Kamadhenu’, as the cow could fulfill all desires of human beings. The King had forcibly taken away the Cow, despite Jamadagni’s protests. Parasurama waged a war with the King and cut off his thousand hands. His sons retaliated by killing Jamadagni and destroyed the Hermitage, when Parasurama was away. As a sequel, Parasurama had not only killed the progeny of Kartaveerya, but also hunted and shattered the totality of the Kshatriya clan by waging some twenty one wars to avenge the killings of his father and followers. Eventually, Parasurama retired and lived at Mount Mahendra. He returned again to Earth only in the subsequent ‘Yuga’ (the second in the Time-series of human existence, viz. Treta Yuga’).

Gangaavatarana: In the Vaishakha Maasa *Saptami*, Ganga Devi was brought down from Heavens by Bhagiradha to purify the ashes of his great grand parents and Ganga Puja had been observed eversince. Brahma Purana explains the origin of Ganga and how Bhagirath was brought down from the feet of Maha Vishnu himself: Sagara Chakravarti alias King Baahu defeated Haihaya Kings and decided to perform Ashwamedha Yagna to celebrate his victories. He had two wives named Keshini and Mahati. But as he had no progeny, Maharshi offered two options to the two wives, one with a fruit with sixty thousand seeds and another with just one seed- one full of warriors and another as a Ruler; the one who accepted the big number was given a pot full of embriyos and the other had normal delivery. On way the sacrificial horse was lost; Sagara’s sons who were sixty thousand strong dug up the sea suspecting that the animal was hidden under the Sea and thus the epithet of Samudra as ‘Sagara’. The sons discovered Maharshi

Kapila and as the sons harassed the Maharshi, they were all burnt off as ashes instantly excepting four. The elder son Amshuman gave birth to Dilip and the latter was blessed with **Bhagiratha** who made an all-out effort to bring Ganga River from Swarga to Bharat and the place where the ashes were lying so that the souls of his fore-fathers were redeemed; in this exercise Bhagirath went through such insurmountable obstacles at each step of his Tapasya to gain the confidence of Ganesha, Vishnu, Shiva and Devi Ganga herself! Since Bhagirath was wholly instrumental in this most distinguishing Act Ganga Devi was also known as Bhagirathi. The lineage of Bhagirath included Shruta, Naabhaga, and Ambarisha; thereafter there was a long lineage till Dulip, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, **Shri Rama Chandra** the Epic Hero who firmly stood tall in reference to the immortal Ramayana, his valiant son Kusha and so on. Such was the most glorious chapter of Surya Vamsha and Ikshwaku Vamsha which dominated the Global Scene in the History of Mankind through the two significant Satya and Treta Yugas!

Ganga Stotra: Adi Shanakara in praise of Ganga scripted a Stotra as follows:

*Devi, Sureswari Bhagavat Gange Tribhuvana taarini taralatarange, Shanara mouli viharini Vimale
Mama matiraastaam tava padakamale/ Bhagitathi Sykha daayani Maatah stava jala mahimaa nigame
khyataah, Naaham jaane tava mahimaanam paahi kripaamayi maamaginaanam/ Haripada paadya
tarangini Gange Himavidhu muktaadhavala tarange, Dooreekuru mama dushkriti bhaaram, kuru
kripayaa bhava saagara paaram/ Tava jalamalam yena nipeetam paramapadam khalu tena
griheetam, Maatar gange twayi yo bhaktah kilatam drashtum na yamaasshaktah/ Patitoddhhaarini
jaanavi Gange khandita girivaramandita bhange Bhishma janani he Munivarakanye patita nivaarini
Tribhuvana dhanye/Kalpa lataamiva phaladaam loke pranamati yastyam na patati shoke, Paaraavaara
vihaarini Gange vimukhayuvatikritataralaapaange/ Tavachen maatah snaatah punarapi jathare sopi na
jaatah, Naraka nivaarini jaahnavi Gange kalusha nivaarini mahimottunge/ Punasadasadange Punya
tarange jaya jaya jaahnavi karunaapaange/ Indramakutamani raajita charane Sukhade Shubhade
Bhritya sharanye/ Rogam shokam taapam paapam harame bhagavati kumalakalaapam, Tribhuvana
saare Vasudhaahaare twamasi gatirmama khalu samsaare/ Alakaanande paramaanande kuru karunaam
mayi kaataravandye/ Tava tatakanite yasya nivaahah khalu vaikunthe tasya nivaasah/Varamihara neere
katho meenah kim ha teere sudrudhah ksheenah athavaa shvapachoh malino deenah na tava hi dooe
nriпти kuleenah/ Bho Bhuvaneshwari Punye dhanye Devi dravamayi Muni varakanye, Gangaastava mima
mamalam nityam, Pathati naro yassajayati punyah/ Yeshaam hridaye Gangaa bhakti steshaam bhavati
sadaa sukhamuktih, Mathuraakaantaasanghatikaabhih paramaananakalita lalitaabhih/ Gangaa
stotramidam bhavapaaram vaanchitaphaladam vimala saaram, Shankara sevak Shankara rachitam
pathati sukhee bhavati samaaptam//*

Adi Shankara Jayanti for all the Advaitas all over Bharat and overseas. Bhavishya Purana traces the origin of Shankara: In the current Manvantara of Vaivasvata, Brahma performed one Yagna in Utpalaranya in the beginning of Satya Yuga, when Devi Sarasvati arrived in the form of a River. Then Brahma created Brahmanas from his face, Kshatriyas from his arms, Vaishvas from his thighs and Shudras from his feet. Much earlier, he created Chandra the in-charge of Brahmanas, Surya, Kashyap, Marichi, Ratnakar Samudra Deva and Daksha. From Daksha's mind were born a number of girls in the forms of 'Kalas' on Earth by Vishnu Maya. Brahma also created twenty seven 'Nakshatras' (Stars) to Chandra, thirteen women like Aditi to Kashyapa and Kirti like other Kanyas to Dharma. As per Brahma's instruction, Daksha was made Prajapati and while every body else were obedient to him, Rudra was defiant and that was why Daksha denied the 'Havirbhaga' or the due from Yagnas meant for Rudra. Shiva got angry and created Verabhadra and Shiva Ganas viz. Trishara, Trinetra and Tripada also arrived. Veerabhadra and the Shiva Ganas frightened Devas, Munis and whoever else took part in the Yagna of Daksha; even Yagna Purusha ran away like a deer but Shiva took the form of a 'Kirata' (hunter) and tore off the limbs of the Yagna Purusha. Then Brahma intervened with his sweet words which somewhat pacified Shiva. As Surya Deva entered Tula Rasi, Rudra entered the form of Chandra, Brahma returned to Satya Loka and

Veerabhadra was instructed by Shiva to enter the house of a Brahmana called Bhairavadutta. Once the most obnoxious Kali Yuga arrived he would be born to Bhairavadutta as *Shankara Acharya*. Even at a very age, Shankara took to 'Sanyasa' (Renunciation), became an unparalleled Scholar of Vedas and Shastras, scripted Shankara Bhashya and resuscitated Shaiva Religion. Also, he popularised 'Advaita' discipline which affirmed 'Aham Brahmaasmi' or "I am Brahma", 'Tripundra' (three cross-lines across the forehead with ash from Yagna kundas, or burnt cow-dung), 'Rudra Aksha Mala' and Panchakshara Mantra viz. *Om Namasshivaaya*. He established the Advaita Philosophy with such very strong foundations that it continued in full swing till date.

Kaladi: 'Kaal adi' in Malayalam and Tamil literally means 'Foot Step' or 'Foot Print'. The original name of Kaaladi was Shiva Rahasyam on the banks of River Purna now named Periyar. From the important Shornoor Railway Junction, Kaaladi is some 30 km via Angamaali Station, where a 'Shrotriya' or Vedic Brahmana couple called Shiva Guru and Aryamba. To recall a reference from Trissur Kshetra in this Script, the couple worshipped Vadukunatha Shiva Linga and prayed for an excellent son who would be an erudite Veda-Shastra Pandita; in their dreams Maha Deva gave an option of either a 'Murkha' or a useless and ignorant son with long life span or a very short lived but brilliant Vedic Brahmana and the combined desire was to grant the latter option. Thus was born Shankara but even at a very age, the father died even as the son's knowledge was just flowering. The mother some how dragged a life of want and misery in bringing up Shankara against odds. One day she returned back home in fetching drinking water for the house from Purna River some distance away and fainted on return. The hapless boy Shankara prayed to Krishna, his favorite God of Miracles, whose Idol that he kept for his daily prayers and recited 'Achyuta Ashtakam'. Lord Krishna was too pleased to slightly change the course and direction of the River whispering to the boy that Purna would be at your foot step, Shankara! And since then indeed the mother had no difficulty in collecting water as the flow touched the back yard of their house garden! Today Shankara Temple with the Pratima of Adi Shankaracharya as also of Goddess Sharada Devi at Kaaladi is run by Shringeri Mutt and manned by Smarta Brahmin from the Main Shringeri and not Nambodirs. There is also the Samadhi of Aryamba, the mother of Shankaracharya whose last rites were performed by himself! Adi Shankara Kirti Stambha Mandapa with eight sides is also erected not far from the Shankara Temple. Both Shringeri and Kamakoti Mutts too are adjacent to the Keerti Stambha. The Temples near Kaaladi are of Manikyamangalam Katyayani, referred to in Soundarya Lahari, Vellamman Thuli Shiva, Shankara Narayana etc. The famed two Ghats at Periyar are Kaaladi Kadavu where the course of the Purna River changed direction and Muthala Kadavu or Crocodile Ghat where young Shankara threatened to be killed by a crocodile if she did not consent to take to sanyasa. The two major festivals are Shankaara Jayanti for five days (April-May) and Navaratri climaxed with 'Rathotsava' or the Chariot Festival. Immediate disciples of Adi Shankara were Padmapada, Sureshwara, Hastaamalakaacharya, and Totakaacharya who were commanded by Adi Shankara to propagate his Advaita Principle in the East, South, West and North in the four principal Sampradaayas of Bhogavala based on Rig Veda, Bhuurivala based on Yajur Veda, Kitavalabased on Sama Veda and Nandavala based on Atharva Veda respectively. The relevant Maha Vaakyas governing the four Precepts respectively are *Pragjaanam Brahma or Consciousness of Brahma; Aham Brahmaasmi or I am Brahman, Tatvamasi or Thou art Thou and Ayamatra Brahma or This Atman is Brahman*/ Major details of Adi Shankara are reported vide Kamakoti.org/

Nrisimha Jayanti: On the *Chaturdashi*, especially if coincides with Swati Nakshatra and a Saturday would be of great consequence. The Narasimha Vrata should actually commence on the preceding Trayodashi

itself as 'Eka Bhukta' or on a single meal and after the Nitya Karmaas on the morning of Chaturdashi and on its afternoon the Karta should take bath with Tilaas and the dried powder of Amla (goosebury) fruit. In the Evening, instal a Golden Pratima of Nrisimha Deva on a 'Purna Kumbha Paatra' or a Vessel filled up with Sacred Water and offer 'Arghya' along with 'Shodashopacharaas' to Nrisimha Deva reciting : *Paritraanaaya saadhunaam jaato Vishnurnrukesari, Grihaanaartghyam maya duttam sa Lakshmirruharey swayam/* (Lakshmi yuta Vishnu's Avataara Nrisimha Deva! You assumed the Incarnation of Vishnu to save Sadhus and punish the Evil Forces; do kindly accept the Sacred Water and the Sixteen Services of Abhisheka, Vastra, Yagnopaveeta, Gandha, Pushpa, Phala, Deepa, Dhupa-Naivedyaadi). After the offerings, the Devotee should pray to say: *Mad Vamshey ye Naraa jaataa ye janishyanti chaaparey, Taan Samuddhara Devesha dusshaad bhava Saagaraat/ Paatakaarnava magnasya vyaadhi dukkhaambu Vaaridheyh, Neechaischa paribhutasya Mahaa Dukkagatasamey/ Karaavakambanam dehi Sesha shaayin agatpatey, Shri Nrisimha Ramaakaanta bhaktaanaam bhaya naashana, Ksheeraambudhi nivaasastwam Chakrapaaney Janaardana Vratenaanena Devesha Bhukti Muktiprado bhava!* (Sesha shaayi! Jagannatha! Shri Nrisimha! Lakshi Priya! and the Resident of the Ocean of Milk ! Do please save and protect those who were born or would be born in future in my Vamsha from the tortures of Samsara- Samudra from their sins, diseases, and banes as they are often subjected with insults and annoyances; do always lend them with your helping hand, accept my Vrata and bestow to me fruits of Bhoga-Mokshaas). The following steps in the Nrisimha Vrata include Paarana/ brahmana Bhojana and daanas of Kumbha- Go- Suvarna- Krishnajina and Bhu Daana ; Madhu-Tila Taila and Ghee etc. Also TilaSnaana, Tila Homa; Tilataila Deepa Daana, Tila Pitru Tarpana, Tila-Madhu Daana and so on are executed to secure Maha Phala. Vaishakha 'Snaanaas' (popularly called Aakaamavau Snaanas viz. the Snaanaas of Ashwiyuja-Kaartika- Maagha-Vaishakha) are concluded on Vaishakha Purnami or even earlier on the previous Shukla Dwadashi itself. On the occasion of the 'Snaana Udyapanas', Go- Paduka- Chhatra- Vyajana Daanaas are commended.

While Temples of Nrisimha Swami are popular as at Tadava near Jaipur, Rajasthan and so on in Uttara Bharat , Ahobila in Andhra Pradesh is considered as extremely significant especially on Swati Nakshatra through out the year but most significant on chaturdashi of Vaishakha. *Aho veeryam aho shouryam aho bahu parakramam, Narasimham para daivam aho bilam aho balam/* Ahobila Kshetra is a popular Vaishnava (Vadakala) Kshetra split at two levels called in the Telugu local language as 'Eguva' and 'Diguva' or Upper and Lower levels- in the 'nallamala' forests of Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh at the distance of 40 km from Nandyala or 150 km from Hyderabad at the Nallamala forest range at an altitude of 1000 ft. plus. That is the fabled Abode of Lord Narasimha or Prahlada Varada, the fourth incarnation of Maha Vishnu to terminate Hiranya Kashipu the demon who rescued Prahlada the illustrious Vishnu Bhakta. Amrita Valli is the corresponding Devi Lakshmi of the Godeess. Ahobila Kshetra opposite the Akshaya Tirtha where devotees purify themselves with snanas, before entering the Sacred Place portrays nine forms of Narasimha spread among nine Temples viz. Bhargava Nrisimha bestowing Lakshmikara siddhi or excellent prosperity as incarnate at the lower level of Ahobila, Yogananda Nrisimha also at the lower level signifying the aspect of compassion and overcoming problems of one's life; Chatravata Narasimha representing Ketu Graha bestowing comforts of Life and expertise in Fine Arts; Ugra Nrisimha Temple at the upper level along with Chenchu Lakshmi or a Goddess as of a local Tribe Leader's daughter who sought to cool down the fierce form of the Lord and eventually married to her representing Dei Lakshmi herself and teaching devotees the qualities of courage and timidity yet of maturity; Varaha Narasimha Swami at the upper level again along with his consort of Lakshmi; Malova Vara Nrisimha along with Shri Lakshmi at Lakshmi Hill granting total fulfillment and auspiciousness to devotees; Jwala Nrisimha as had just annihilated Haranya kashipu since a pond of brick colour with which the Lord had just washed his hands with the blood of the demon called Rakta gunta Tirtham; Paavana Nrisimha or Kshetra Ratna Nrisimha or Pamulati Nrisimha Swami who provides safety and succor to devotees and finally Karanja Nrisimha or He who represents Shadvidha or six types of austerities and purities viz. those of 'Kara- charana- vaak- kaaya-karma- shravana- nayana' or by hands,

legs, tongue, mouth, body, actions and mid-borne nature! At the Ahobila Complex, the significant Festivities are Phalguna Month celebrations, Janma Nakshatra (Swati) Mahotsavas, Gramotsavas, Monthly Celebrations and Tirumanjana Sevas.

Simhachala Tirtha: Some 16 km near Vishakapattanam in Andhra Pradesh is another significant Nrisimha Kshetra in Bharat is at Simhachala or the Lion Giri viz. Varaha Lakshmi Nrisimha of 15th century built by Gajapati Raja of Kalinga, the present part of Odisha State and King Krishnadeva Raya of Vijayanagara also attended the Opening Ceremony Brahmotsavas as given in available Inscriptions. The Legend about this incarnation of Nrisimha is due to the curse to the Gate keepers to Maha Vishnu's Vaikuntha by Brahma Manasa Putras viz. Sanaka Sanandana Sanat Sanatana Kumaras who were stopped entry; the respective Danavas were Harayaksha in Varaha; Ravanaasura and Kumbhakarna in Shri Rama Avatara, and Kamsa and Shishupalain Krishnavatara, besides Hiranya kashipu in Nrisimha Avatara. The Bhakta saved from Hiranya kashipu in the Nrisimha Avatara was Prahlada. Special Festivals at Simhachala are of Akshaya Triteeya with Chandana Lepana or Alankara with Gandha and during Vaishakha Month. The main attractions at the Temple are a fantastic Stone Ratha and a 16 pillored Mandapa depicting Dashawataras and many Nrisimha Swarupas.

Brief on Narasimha Avatara: As his elder brother Hiranyaksha was killed by Lord Vishnu, 'Hiranyakashipa' desired to avenge the death. But he realized that unless he pleased Brahma (Lord of Creation) with rigorous meditation and sacrifice, he would not receive the boons that he wanted. Finally, Brahma acceded to all of his wishes that he could not be killed by any human being or beast, by night or day, in the sky or on the Earth or in water. Having secured the boons, the Demon became all powerful and tormented one and all, especially those who prayed to Lord Vishnu. In fact, he insisted that he alone should be prayed to. He attacked Sages, destroyed 'Yagnyas' (Sacrifices) and temples and sought to terminate the Good and the righteous. But his own son, named 'Prahlada', was an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu from his childhood. Hiranyakashipa tried all means of cajoling, threatening and finally used various methods of killing him. Yet, each time that he sought to destroy the son, he was saved and Prahlada's devotion became more intense than ever. Finally in a fit of desperation, the father asked the son: 'Many a time, I tried to murder you, you are saved! Where is your Vishnu? You say that he is everywhere! Can you show him to me in this pillar?' The son replied coolly that He is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent! Enraged by this reply, the Demon struck the pillar and there emerged Lord Vishnu in the form of Narasimha (Half-Man and Half-Lion), kept the Demon on His lap and tore him into pieces. As per the prescription of the boon received by the demon from Lord Brahma, the annihilation happened neither by a human being nor a beast, not at a time when it was night or day (viz. dusk time) and neither on earth, sky or water! In this Incarnation, Lord Vishnu had thus not only saved Prahlada, as also established a firm victory of Goodness over Evil, Virtue over Sin, and Permanent over Ephemeral!

JYESHTHA MAASA

Mithuna Sankranti Punya kaala is stated to arrive sixteen ghadiyas after the Jyeshtha Shukla *Pratipada*. In case the Punya Kaala commences on that night, Brahma Deva's Pratima is made of Wheat flour and worshipped with Vastra-Pushpaas to reap Suryaloka Prapti. In this Jyeshtha Maasa, Jala Dhenu daana is prescribed. On this Pratipada Tithi, Karaveera Vrata is scheduled. On Jyeshtha Shukla *Triteeya*, Rambha Vrata is an important Vrata which is observed only those men and women performing Panchagni Tapas are qualified; they make a Swarna Pratima of Devi Parvati and execute formal worship by way of Homaas and offer the Pratima finally donate it to a virtuous Brahmana couple to whom a self-contained house is to be given away as Daana. Jyeshtha Shukla *Chaturdashi* happens to be the birth day of Uma Devi and hence her worship is significant on that Tithi. On that *Ashtami* Shukla Devi is to be worshipped and on the following Navami Upavaasa is prescribed and repeat puja is to be performed on *Dashami*.

Ganga Vrata on Dwadashi: The most auspicious time that the most Sacred River Ganga was manifested was stated to possess ten Yogaas: *Jyeshtha Maasi Sita Pakshey Dwadashyaam Budhahaspatayoh Vyateepatey garaanandey Kanyaachandrey Vrusho Ravou!* These yogaas are Jyeshtha-Shukla Paksha-Dashama Tithi- Budha Vaara-Hastaa Nakshatra-Vyateepaata-Gara Karana-Ananda Yoga- Kaanyaa's Chandra-and Vrisha's Surya. Even if this happens to be an Adhika Maasa, there is no objection to observe the 'Gangaa Vrata'. Those who are fortunate to reach Ganga on this day, especially in Varanaasi make the Sankalpa after stating the Desha Kaala and recite as follows : *Mamaitatjjanma janmaantara sumudbhuta trividhakaayika Chaturvidha vaachika trividha maanasika swarupa Skaandokta dasa vidha paapaniraasatraya strimshacchata Pitruddhaara Brahma lokaavyaaptaadi phala Praaptyhardham Jyeshthamaa Shukla Paksha Dashami Budhavaasara Hastaanakshatra Gara karana Vyatipaataananda yoga Kanyaastha Chandra Vrishastha Suryeti Dasha Yoga Parvanyasyaam Mahaa Nadyaam Snaanam Tirtha Pujanam pratiyaamaam Jahnavi pujaam Tilaadi daanam Mula Mantra Japamaajya homam cha Yathaa shakti Karishye!* (I have the great satisfaction to bathe in the Holy River of Ganga and seek to wash off the cumulative sins of this and previous birth on account of three kinds of Physical ailments, four kinds of vocal problems and three kinds of mental agonies as described in Skanda Purana. The 'Snaana' is also to redeem three thousand thirty three Pitru Devataas besides attaining Brahma loka. This type of Sacred Snaana is ideal in Jyeshtha Shukla Paksha-Dashami Tithi- Wednesday-Hasta Nakshatra-Gara Karana-Vyatipaata and Ananda Yoga as also in Chandra in Kanya Raashi, and Surya in Vrisha Raashi- all totalling ten Yogaas when Ganga was materialised. It is in such Most Illutrious and Highly Sacrosanct River that Snaana- Tirtha Pujana-Tila and other Daanas, Mula Mantra Japa and Homaas would be performed by me as per my capacity!) After making this Sankalpa or Determination, the devotees concerned should dip in Ganga ten times, render Stotraas, wear dry clothing, perform Nitya Karma, Tirtha Puja, Pitru/ Tila Tarpana by taking ten handfuls of Ghee and jaggery mixed Pindas in favour of Pitru devataas and finally invoke Ganga stating: *Namo Bhagavatyai Dasha Paapa haraayai Gangaayai Naraayanyai Revathai Shivaayai Dakshaayai Amritaayai Vishwa Rupinyai nandinyai tey Namoh Namah/* After the invocation as above, render 'Aavaahana' Mantra viz. *Om Namasshivaayai Narayanyai Dasha Paapa haraayai Gangaayai swaaha*, thus inviting Narayana, Rudra, Brahma, Surya, Himavan, Bhagiratha and execute 'Shodashopachaaraas'. 'Pujaanantara Stotra' addressing Ganga as given in Skanda Purana after the Puja is as follows: *Namasshivayai Gangaayai Shivadaayai Namoh Namah, Namastey Rudra Rupinyai Shaankaryetey Namoh Namah/ Sarva Deva Swarupinyai Namoh Bhashaja Murtaye, Sarvaswa Sarva Vyaadheenam Bhashak Shreshthiyai Namoh namah/ Sthaanu jangama sambhutaVisha hantrai namonamah, Bhogopabhoga daayinyai Bhogha Vatyai namonamah/ ---* (Devi Ganga! You are the auspicious Form of Rudra, Vishwa Swarupa, Brahma Murti and Sarva Deva Swarupa, the Curer of all kinds of ailments and diseases; the destroyer of pousons of animate and inanimate beings; the bestower of all kinds of happiness; Bhogavati! Mandakini! 'Swarna Daata' or the giver of gold and precious Stones; you are the Triloka Maata! Your unique presence at Gangaa Dwaara, Prayaga and Saagara Sangama grants immense joy to us; I greet you with several titles as Nanda, Loka Dhatri, Linga Dharini, Narayani, Vishwa Mukhya, Revati, Brihati, Tejovati, Vishwa Mitra, Prithvi, Shiva, Amrita, Suvrusha, Shanta, Varishtha, Varada, Usra, Sukhadrogi, Sanjeevani, Brahmishtha, Brahmada, Duritaghni, Pranataarti bhanjani, Jaganmata, and the extinguisher of all possible difficulties and Mangala! Devi Ganga! Kindly stay secure and firm always by my sides ahead and behind as my very existence in your waters is solely due to your courtesy; in fact, your presence in Srishti-Sthiti-Laya is a known realism as you are the Mula Prakriti, Narayana, Shiva, Paramatma. Those who recite your Stotra with faith and devotion by the means of hearing or pronouncing or by mental concentration should definitely extinguish all kinds of sins and fulfill any type of desires.) Among the tangible sins the ten prominent ones are: acceptance of other's material without permission; commit acts of violence disapproved by Shastras and other Scriptures; and desire for other women : these are by way of Physical acts; Parusha Bhashana or Utterances of Unsavoury language, lies, gossip, etc. are of 'Vaachaka' or vocal-based; 'Paradravyaabhilaasha' or interest in other's money-property-belongings; thinking of and doing acts that

hurt others; and useless ego problems which are all mind-based. Devi Ganga! You have the unique distinction of redeeming the Souls of Three thousand thirty three Pitru Devaas! You are seated on a white Crocodile, hold a 'Kalasha' with a 'Kamala' by your hands, wear a white silk Vastra; and is a Brahma-Vishnu-Rudra-Rupini. You are the Sacred Water in Brahma's Kamandulu utilised for 'Srishti'; the Water with which Bali Chakravarti washed the consecrated feet of Vamana Deva; and the hallowed water of Ganga retained in the 'Jataajuta' or the curled and twisted coarse hairs of Parama Shiva a strain of which was released in response to the earnest prayers of Bhagiratha to redeem the Souls of the latter's ancestry. Such is the illustrious history of Ganga that even a 'Smarana' or thought of the River from hundreds of yojanas would suffice to wash off sins and Vaikuntha!

Nirjala Vrata: on *Jyeshtha Shuklaikaadashi*: This Vrata is observed by avoiding water except for the 'Nityaachamaniya' purposes or of formal sippings of water for Pujas. Such Nirjala Vrataas on twelve successive Ekaadashis would indeed qualify for far reaching phala. After observing the Upavaasa and Vrata on the Ekaadashi there should be daana of '*Sahiranya Sharkarodaka Kumbha* or charity of Potful of sugar water with Gold Dakshina. In fact, Puja of Trivikrama Vaamana Deva on the following Dwadashi and a Gavaamaya Kratu are of immense benefits. 'Tila Darpana' on Jyeshtha Purnima'' is stated to yield Ashvamedha Phala. In the Jyeshtha Nakshatra, Chhatra-Paada Raksha Daanaas bestows superiority. 'Bilva Raatri Traya Vrata' / Vata Savitri Vrata from Trayodashi to Purnima Tithis -with atleast Trayodashi Nakta Bhojana- is observed in the Jyeshtha Shula Paksha. However women folk normally observe the Vrata without fasting; those women in menstrual circle might opt for Brahmanas to carry out the Vrata on their behalf although there is a strong opinion that the concerned women must not perform the Vrata in that state. On Jyeshtha *Pourmami*, if there is a conjunction of Brihaspati and Chandra with Jyeshtha Nakshatra or Surya with Rohini Nakshatra, that specific Tithi is called *Mahaa Jyaishthi*; that day is extremely appropriate for Snaana-Daanaas; as that Tithi is also significant as the 'Manvaadi' and Pinda Rahita Shraaddha is to be performed. In fact, the entire Jyeshtha Maasa is of Trivikrama 'Preeti' or of great fondness of Vamana Deva and Daanas of 'Chandanodaka Kumbha' and such other Daanaas are stated to have far reaching consequence.

ASHAADHA MAASA

Dakshinayana / Karkataka Sankranti: occurs in Ashaadha Maasa. Some thirty ghadiyas before that is reckoned as Punya kaala; that too those ghadiyas nearing the specific time is supposed to be the most auspicious Punya kaala. If Karkataka Sankramana takes place at mid night or nearabout, then the Punya kaala is stated to have arrived as on the previous Tithi, but the Sankramana is after Sunrise within two ghadiyas then the Punya kaala is reckoned as on the same day and Daana-Upavaasaas are to be observed then. In case Surya is in Karkataka Raashi, or Kanya, or Dhanush or Kumbha, then Chudaa karmaadi are prohibited. In the Ashadha Maasa, observance of 'Eka Bhukta' or single meal a day would yield generous money, grains and progeny. In this month, Vamana Deva is propitiated by daanaas of footwear, umbrellas, salt and Amla fruit. On Ashaadha Shukla *Dwiteeya*, preferably in Pushya Nakshatra, Shri Jagannatha Rathotsava is popular. *Ekaadasahi* is notable as 'Vishnu Shayanotsava' or when Vishnu Pratima is placed in a swing resting on a soft bed and pillow as though on the high tide of Ksheera Sagara fully ornamented with his four hands wearing Shankha-Chakra- Saranga and Gada while Devi Lakshmi pressing his feet; then elaborate puja is performed and a devotee's prayer would be : *Twayi Suptey Jagannatha Jagatsuptam bhavedimam, Vibuddhey twayi Buddheta tat sarvam sa charaacharam/* (Jagannatha! If you resort to sleep, then the Universe is put to sleep. As you are awake, the Universe is woken up too). On the Dwadashi day, Puja would continue followed by 'Jaagarana' or night vigil well spent with songs, music and dances and on the early morning of Trayodashi again, Puna Puja is executed ; thus this 'Utsava' or celebration is a three- day long affair.

Jagannaatha Ratha Yatra at Puri (Odisha) Shri Jagannadh is among the foremost four ‘Dhaams’ of Bharata Varsha, viz. Badarinath in Satya Yuga, Rameshwar in Treta Yuga, Dwaraka in Dwapar Yuga and Jagannadha in Kali Yuga. This Dhaam is called with several names such as Shri Kshetra, Purushottama Puri, Shankha Kshetra as it has the outline of Conch shell or Vishnu Bhagavan’s ‘Panchajanya’ as also as Shakteyas call it as Uddiyan Peeth since the navel of Devi Sati’s Yagjna Swarup fell here as one of the major Shakti Peethas. The legendary belief is that in the distant past, there was the worship of Neelachal and on its top there was Nila Madhava Temple and as the Mountain eventually came down to the ground level as the Nilachala Chhatra where Jagannadha Puri exists now. Lord Brahma performed the Consecration on Suddha Visakha Ashtami on Thursday with Pushyami as the Nakshatra, as witnessed by Devas, Yakshas, Kinnaras and Maharshis! The famous nine day **Ratha Yatra** commences on Suddha Ashadha Vidiya and returned from the banks of Bindu Tirtha on the eighth day. In Skanda Purana, Sage Jaimini explained that Lord Brahma clarified about a doubt as to *why Jagannath assumed the Wooden Form of Idols*. The ‘Daru’ (Wooden) Idols represent ‘Duhkha vidarana’ or destroying of distress and bestowing of endless happiness; as Srihari is ‘Darumaya’. He therefore manifested in wooden form. At the time of ‘Srishti’ (Creation) following Pralaya, Parabrahma (The Supreme Being) manifested in the Form of Vedas or the mix of ‘Sabda Brahma’ and ‘Artha Brahma’. Bhagavan Balabhadra is of Rig Ved Swarup, while Subhadra is of Yajur Veda Swarup. Nrisimha is of Sama Veda Swarup and Sudarshan is of Atharva Veda Swarup. If a composite view is taken, the Deities thus represented all the Veda Swarupas and Jagannatha is the sum total and likewise all these forms are Jagannatha Himself. The ‘Vata Vriksha’ on the Sea Bed at the time of Pralaya was thus the depiction of Bhagavan and the Wooden Idols made out of the Tree are His Symbols! The Sacred Jagannatha Mandir is very wide and large within a courtyard with four major gates, the principal Mandir with four gates comprising three portions, one being the ‘Sri Mandir’ with its minaret which is the highest in which Jagannatha is set up with three huge and most impressive semi ready Vighras of Jagannatha in the middle, Devi Subhadra the sister and Baabhadra to the extreme left with their half carved hands shown up as though blessing the Universe; the second portion devoted to Jagan Mohana Mandir and the third portion as Mukha shaala including a Bhog Mandap. The Main Mandir has the Simha Dwara in the Eastern side, Ashwadwaar in the Southern side, Vyaghra dwaar in the Western side and Hasti Dwaar in the Northern side. Facing right outside the Basic Mandir or the Sanctum is the Aruna Sthambha and having performed a Pradakshina or circumambulation of the Pillar, one enters the right side of the gate into the Sanctum to vision of the most thrilling experience of Jagannatha Tri- Vighras. Opposite the Sanctum, there is a small Vishwanatha Linga; to signify the Linga, the story narrated in the Jagannatha Temple is that a Brahmana had a dream that only after performing Vishweshwara Lingaarchana at Kasi only that Puri Jagannatha darshana and puja would become fruitful. Outside the Pradhana Mandir, an ascent by 25 stepped ladder would lead to a 25 divisioned view of Prakriti or Nature. From the second ‘Praakaara’ of the Main Temple Dwara one could view the Prasada Market within the Temple itself. Further in the Temple are Agajanana Natha ganesh, Vatera Maha Deva, PataMangala Devi, Satyanarayana Bhagavan, and Vata Vriksha famed as Kalpa Vriksha, Bala Mukunda Vatapatra shaayi, Ganesha Mandir called Siddha Ganesha, Sarva Mangala Devi and so on. In front of the Jagannatha Nija Mandir is a Mukti Mandala with a Simhasana or Throne where Brahma himself used to be seated. Behind the Mukti Mandap is the Mukta Nrisimha Mandir and most significantly Vimala Devi Mandira, the Shakti Peetha of the Kshetra, followed by Sarasvati, Lakshmi Mandiras and in between that of Nila Madhava Mandir and many such other Temples. Special Festivals are organised from Vaishakha ShuklaTritiya to Jyeshtha Krishna Ashtami when Vighras of Madan Mohan, Rama Krishna, Lakshmi- Sarasvati, Pancha Mahadevas viz. Nila kantheshwar, Markandeshwar, Lokanatha, Kapala Lochana, and Jammeshwara Utsava Vighras are taken to Chandana Tataka or Sarovara for bathing and later on for Nouka Vihara or boat sail. On Jyeshtha Shukla Ekadashi, Rukmini harana by Lord Krishna is enacted in the Mandir itself. On Jyeshtha Purnima day, the Vighras of Jagannatha, Subhadra and Balarama are duly bathed and brought to Snaana Mandapa where 108 ghadas of Sacredwaters are engaged to bathe the Vighras; it is stated that after the bathing ceremony, Bhagavan Jagannatha gives the Swarupa as Lord Ganesha only for a fortnight the Mandir is re-opened. *The famed*

Annual Ratha Yatra of Lord Jaannatha is scheduled to take place on *Ashaadha Shukla Dwiteeya*/ Three chariots which are large and roomy and the first one is to install Lord Bala Rama, the second one to accommodate Subhadra Devi and Sudarshana Chakra and the third one exclusively for Lord Jagannaatha himself. By the evening the Chariots reach the Gundicha Mandir. On the second day the Idols are placed in the Mandir and provide darshan to the masses for seven days till Dashami and return. These nine days are called that Jagannatha and other Murtis provide what is called 'Aadapadarshana' and this darshan in a year is considered as most significant. On Shravan Amavasya, Jagannath's 'Sevik Utsav' or Services Festival is celebrated. On Shravan Shukla Paksha Dashami 'Jhoolan Yatra' or Swing Travel Festival is celebrated. On Janmashtami the Lord's Birth day is performed with great pomp and show. On Bhadrapada Krishna Ekadashi the Kaliya Serpent's Damana is observed. Like wise, Bhadrapada Shukla Ekadashi for Parshwa Parivarta- notsava, Vamana Dwadashi; Sudarshana Vijayotsava on Ashwiyuja Purnima, Navaratri Festivities and Vimala Devi Utsava and so on are observed, besides on all significant days concerned. Incidentally, Jagannaatha Maha Prasad Mahima is universally reputed as it is blemishless and consumed without restrictions of 'Uchchittashtata dosha' or eating of the remains of what others already ate or handled by others etc and hence the adage of *Sarvam Jagannaatham!* As regards the 'Snaana prakriya' or bathing at this Tirtha, major Places for the purpose are Mahodadhi or Samudra itself especially at Swarga Dwaara or the Sea Shore which is walking distance of a km. or so from the Main Dwara of the Mandir itself, besides Rohini Kund, Indradyumna Sarovar, Markandeya Sarovar, Shweta Ganga, Chandana Taalaab, Lokanaatha Sarovar, and Chakra Tirtha, all not very distant. Other important Mandirs in Puri are Gundicha Mandir already referred to above in the context of the Ratha Yatra about a Km. plus; Kapala Mochana in the South West of the Main Mandir; *Sakshi Gopal Mandir*; Amaramuth right before the Simha Dwaara or the Main Gate of the Main Mandir; Gambhira Math / Radhakanta Math on way to Swarga daara of the Sea, where Chaitanya Maha Prabhu lived for 18 long years; Siddha Bakul where Haridasa Bhajana Sthal is active; Govardhana Peeth or one of the Four Maths established by Adi Shankaraacharya viz. Kanchi Kama Koti, Shringeri Sharadamba, Dwaraka Math, and now the Puri Math, besides of course Badari; Kabira Math at Swarga Dwara on the Sea shore where Patala Ganga Kupa or Well is and where Sant Kabir stayed for some time; Lokanatha Mahadeva Linga Mandir within water also called Shiva Ganga and Chakra Tirtha and Chakra Narayana Mandir opposite Bedi Hanuman Madir or shackled Hanuman since once Hanuman left for Shri Rama Navami Celebrations to Ayodhya and returned and thus is chained ever since! Indeed this Purushottama Kshetra is distinct as *Shankha Kshetra* since it has the Form and Shape of a Conchshell like 'Pancha janya'. This Shape is explained and represented by Maha Deva since on the Western side is Vrishabhadvaja, Eastern side is Neeka Kantha, Centre is Kapala Mochana and Arthaasani Devi on the North. This is also the Abode of Eight Devi Peethas: Vata Moola of Jagannatha Mandir is Mangala Devi, on the western side is Vimala Devi, Shankhaakara Prishtha or the Rear Form of Shankha is Sarva Mangala Devi, Eastern side is Marichi, Northern Side is Ardhaasani and Lamba Devi, and Dakshina is represented by Kala Ratri and Chandika. Also, Vateshwara, Kapalamochana, Kshetrapaala, Yameshwara, Markandeshwara, Ishana, Vishweshha and Neela kantha on the eight places of the Shankha is another explanation.

Observance of Chaaturmaasa:

Skanda Purana highlights the Chaturmasya Mahatmya as follows: Chaturmasa or Four Month period commencing from Ashadha Shukla Ekadasi known as Devashayani Ekadasi (when God sleeps) till Kartika Shukla Ekadasi called Deva Prabodhini Ekadasi (when God is awake) is observed by persons of all 'Varnas' with piety, Indriya Nigraha or Self control of Organs and Rituals. (Chaturmasa commences from Ashadha Purnima or Guru Purnima till Kartika Purnima for Sanyasins). Bhagavan Vishnu is stated to rest on 'Ksheera Sagar' (Ocean of Milk) during the Chaturmasya (Four Month) period and hence all Oceans, Rivers, Ponds and Water Bodies acquire divinity. Bathing in these Places is thus a significant exercise as Bhagavan Narayana spreads out Himself in water and destroys sins of those who bathe especially in the holy rivers like Pushkar, Prayag, Narmada, Bhaskara Kshetra, Prachi Saraswati, Samudra

Sangam, Godavari, or Ganga. For example, bathing in Narmada even for three days with great piety and concentration results in demolition of sins; Godavari baths for a fortnight of early mornings secure devastation of old and current account failings in life and pave the way to Vishnudham. ‘Snaans’ with tila and Amla mix or Tulasi or Bilva leaves placed on head and reciting Vishnu namaas on the lips and in mind during as many days as possible during the Chaturmasya would yield instant results by providing physical freshness, mental contentment and purity of thought and action. According to Scriptures, Snaan is the first step of physical cleanness and ‘Anthassuddhi’ (internal purity), before taking up any task to invoke the Almighty. During the four-month period of Sacrifice and Sanctity, ‘Tarpanas’ to Devas, Rishis and Pitras after the holy baths are natural duties, followed by ‘Anushthaana’, Agni havans, Veda Paatha, Satsang, Bhakti, and charities especially of Anna daanas. The Chaturmasya is the period for abstinence, ‘Ishta Vasthu Parithyaga’ or leaving out material dear to oneself and strict following up of daily ‘niyamas’ and continuous recital of Bhagavan’s glories by way of hymns, Japas, Mantras and Bhakti Songs. *Satkarmah Satkathachaiva Satseva Darshanam sathaam, Vishnu Pujarathidaaney Chaaturmasya sudurlabha* (Superior Tasks, Quality Stories in Praise of Vishnu, Pure hearted Service to Noble Persons, Darshanam or Viewing of Saints, Bhagavan Vishnu’s devotion and sincere interest in charities are all stated to yield excellent results during the Chaaturmasya Period). Some of the items of daily utility are avoided during the Holy Period such as eating/drinking in metal plates and vessels; eating in leaves of Vata tree; consumption of hot and sour food, Chillies, pulses like urad and Chana; wearing silks and dark clothes; avoid flowers, beds, and Kesar; shun indulgence of lying, carrying tales, rude conversation and ‘Para ninda’ or criticising others; observe silence or limited conversation, truthfulness, piety, mercifulness, nonviolence, patience and equanimity. It is said that there are eight ways of observing the Chaturmasa Vrata as follows: *Vishno Kathaya Shraavanam Vachanam Guna Kirtanam/ Maha Puja Mantra Japah Stotra paatha Pradakshina/ Saashtaanga Pranatischeti niyama uttama mataah/ Eteshvekatamo bhaktaaya dhaaraniiyo Viseshatah/* (To listen the Stories of Vishnu Bhagavan or recite them or sing hymns in His Praise, to perform Maha Puja to His Murthi, to chant His Mantras or ‘Naamas’ as in ‘Vishnu Sahasranamaa’ or Stotras, to do Pradakshina to His Murthi and bow to Him with veneration are the aptest duties to be executed with dedication). *Shodasopacharas:* Bhagavan Narayana is in Yoga nidra during the Chaturmasya period as He lies on water that is omnipresent; water is the root of ‘Anna (food) and the entire Universe is sustained by food which causes ‘Tripti’ (contentment). Thus ‘Anna Brahma’ is the origin of Paramatma or the Supreme Energy. When a devotee appeals to that Great Force, the invocation or Avahana instantly responds to a true and hearty dedication with the recital of the Sixteen Stanza ‘Maha Purusha Suktam’ of Yajurveda stating: *Om Sahasra Seersha Purushah Sahasraakshasahasra paath/Sa Bhumim Viswato Vrutwa Athathishtha Dassangulam/* In response to the Avahana one visions the appearance of Vishnu as : Jyotissantham Sarva Lokantharastham, Omkaarakhyam Yogi Hridhdhyana gamyam, Sangam Shaktim Sayudham Bhaktasevyam, Sarvakaaram Vishnumaavaahayami. With the Second ‘Rucha’ (Stanza) stating: *Purusha Evedagum Sarvam, Yadbhutam yaccha bhavyam/Utaamrutatva syeshanah, yadanney naa thirohati/ Asanam:* Kalpadrumuley Manivedimadhye, Simhaasanam Swarnamayam SuRatnam/VichitraVastraavruthamachyutaPrabha, GrihanaLakshmidharanisamanvita! Nava rathnakhachitahea Simhaasanam Samarpayami. Padyam: *Etavanasya mahima Atojayayagums cha Puurushah, Paadosya Viswabhuutaatri paadasya amrutamdivi/ Sri Krishna Sarva Devaanamadhikah sarva Kaamadah, Mayaniveditamthubhyam Samgraahana Supaadyakam Paadyam Samarpayami; Arghyam:* *Tripaadauurdhva UdaPurushaha Paadosyaabhavathpunah Tato Vishvajvyakraamat, saasanaanasane abhi/* Gangajalam Samaaneetham Suvarna Kalase Sthitham, Arghyam Grihaana Bhagavan Kaala Rupa Namostuthey; Arghyam Samarpayami. Achamaneeyam: *Tasmadviraadajayatha Virajo Adhi Puurushah / Sajaatho Athyarichyatha Paschadbhumi matho purah/* Namo Janaardanaaya Devaaya Samstha Jagadaatmaney, Nirmala Jnaana Rupaya dattamaachaneeyakam; Mukhe Achamaneeyam Samarpayami. Madhuparkam: *Yatpurushena havisha Devaa Yagnamathanvatha, Vasantho asya see dajyam Greeshma Idhma ssaradhhavihi/* Madhyajya Dadhi Samyuktam Swarna PatreyPrathishthitam, Madhuparkam Grihaanathvam Lakshmi kantha Namesthuthey; Madhuparkam Samarpa yami. Snaanam *Saptasyasanparidhaya Trissaptha Samidhahkritah/ Devaadyagnam tanvaanaa Abhadhna*

purusham Pasum. Panchamrita Snaanam Samarpayami [Cow milk, Curd, ghee, honey, coconut water] Vastram: *Tam Yagnam barhishi prokshan Purusham jaathamagrathaha, Thena Devaa Ajayantha Saadhya Rishayascha ye/ Swarnaanchalam Swarnavichitra Sobhitham, Kauseya Yugmam Parikalpitham maya, Daamodara Praavaranam grahana, Maayaabala pravrittha Divya rupa; Vastra Yugmam Samarpayami.* Yagnovapeetham: *Thasmadyajñath Sarvahuthah, Sambhrutam Prushadaajam, Pasuugum stagumschakreyVayavyan, Aranyan Graamaashaye/ Suvarnathanthuudbhava Yagna Sutram, Mukataphalasyutha manekaratnam, Grihaana tadvakritha mutthareeyam, Swakarma sutram dharathey namosthu.* Yagnopaveetham samarpayami Chandanam: *Thasmat yajñath sarva huthah rucha ssaamaani jajnirey, Chhandagumsi jajnirey thasmat dajaayatha/* Kasthurika kardama chandanaani, Kashmirā Samyojitha Gandha Saraih/ Vilepanam Sweekuru Deva Deva! Sri Devi Vakshoja vilopanaamkam; Gandham Samarpayami; Pushpam: *ThasmaadaswaAjaayantha, Ekechobhayadathah/ Gaavo ha jajnire tasmaatjaatha Ajaavah/* Chaamantika vakula champaka Paatalaabja Punnaga Jaaji karaveera rasaala Pushpaih, Bilva Pravaala Tulasi dhala mallikaabhih twaam Pujayaami Jagadeeswara Vasu Deva! Pushpai Pujayami. Dhupam: *Brahmanosya mukhamaaseeth Baahuu Raajanyah Krithah, Vuuru thadasya Yadvasyaih Padbhaagum Suudro Ajaayatha/* Vanaspathudbhavair Divyair naanaa gandhaissu samyuthah, Aaghreyassrava Devaanaam Dhuupoyam Prathi gruhyataam. Dhupamaaghraapayami. Deepam: *Chandramamanaso Jaataah, Chakshoh Suryo ajaayatha, Mukhaadrindraaschagnischa Praanadwaayu ra -jayatha; Saajyam Trivarti Samyuktam Vahnina Yojitham Priyam, Grihaana Mangalam Deepam Thrailokya Thimiraapahaaram, Bhaktya Deepam Prayacchaami Devaaya Paramaatmaney, Thraahi maam Narakaadghorat Divya Jyothir namosthuthy; Deepam Darsayaami.* Naivedyam /Anna daanam: *Nabhyaa Aaseedantariksham, Seersho dyaouh Samavarthatha, Padbhyam Bhumirdisah Srotraat Tatha Lokaagum Akalpayan/* Naivedyam is performed by sprinkling water on the Anna Prasada and recites the Mantra: Om Bhurbhuvassuvah, Tat Savithur Varenyam, Bhargo Devasya Dheemahih, Dhiyo yonah Prachodayaat. Thereafter recite ‘Satyamtharthena Parishinchaami’ if the Naivedya is during the day; in the night, recite the Mantra: Ruthamthwa Sathyena Parishinchaami; then round up the Material for Naivedya with water and recite Amritamasthu and leave water in a Plate and again recite: ‘Amritopastharamamasi’ and show the Prasad to Deva reciting Om Praanaya Swaha, Om Apaanaaya Swaha, Om Udaanaaya Swaha, Om Samaanaaya Swaha, and after Naivedya one must address Deva saying Madhyey Madhyey Paaneeeyam Samarpayami, Hasthou Prakshaalayami, Paadou Prakshaalayami, Suddhaachamaneeyam Samarpayami. After Naivedyam, the devotee performs the Thirteenth Service by way of Punarachamana; the corresponding Rucha states: *Vedaahametham Purusham Mahaantham, Aadityavarnam thamasasthu paare, Sarvaani Ruupaani Vichitya Dheerah, Naamaani Krutwabhivadan yadaasthey/* The fourteenth Service is executed by Sashtanga Namaskara and the Rucha of Purusha Suktam states: *Dhatapurasthadyamudaaajahaara, Sakrah Pravidvaanpradisachathasrah Thamevam Vidvanamritha Iha Bhavati, Naanyah Pandhaa Ayanaaya Vidyathey.* The fifteenth Service is by way of Parikrama (Circumambulation) as the corresponding Rucha is: *Yagnena Yagna mayajamtha Devaah, Thani Dharmani Prathamaanyaasan, the ha naakam Mahimaanah Sachamthey yathra Puurvey Saadhyaah Santhi Devaah.* Finally the Sixteenth Service is Self realisation that is to identify the self with Bhagavan Vishnu Himself! The relevant Stanza of Purusha Suktam states: *Vedahametham Purusham Mahaantam Aditya Varnam Tamasah Parasthat, Thamevam Vidwanamritha Iha Bhavati, Naanyah Panthah Vidyatheyanaaya* (I know Purusha or Bhagavan who is Mahantham or Supreme; who is resplendent like Sun and is very far off from darkness. Whoever could realise Him attains Salvation in this world itself; there is no other way indeed.)

This Vrata is not to be initiated on Thursday and Fridays, preferably at the beginning of Ashaadha Shukla Dwadashi evening after ‘Paarana’. This Vrata could be accomplished by not only Sanyasis but Grihasthis too. This is initiated by Jaati-Pushpa Maha Puja with the ‘Sankalpa’ commencing with the same above Prayer viz. *Twayi Suptey Jagannaadha-----* and as follows: *Chaturo Vaarshikaan Maasaan Devasyothaapanaavadhi, Shraavaney varjyayecchaakam dadhi Bhaadrapadey tatha/ Dugdhamaswayujey maasi Kartikey dwidalam thyajet, Imam Karishyenyamam nirvighnam*

kurumechyuta/ Idam Vratam mayaaadeva gruheetam puratastawa, Nirvighnam Siddhimaayaatu prasaadaatey Ramaa patey/ gruheetesmin Vratey Deva panchatwam yadimey bhavet, Tadaa bhavatu sampurnam prasaadaattye Janardana/ (Jagannadha! If you resort to sleep, the whole Universe falls in slumber and if you are out of your 'yoga nidra' the World is active too. Be kind to me! I resolve hereby to observe the regulation of 'Chaturmaasya' as follows: Chaturro Vaarshikaan maasaan devasyotthaapanaa - vadhi, Shraavaney varjyaye shaakam dadhi Bhadrapadey tathaa/ Dugdharmaashwayuje maasi Kartikey dwidalam tathaa, Imam Karishye niyamam nirvighnam kurumeychyuta! (In the Year's four months, I will not eat vegetables during Shravana Month, nor consume curds during Bhadrapada month, milk on Aswayuja, and 'dwidalam' (Pulses) during Karthika maasa; may I be blessed to observe the regulations as above and be ensured that no obstacles should stop me from being strictly adhered to). Bhagavan! in the event of my death during this Chaaturmaasya Vrata, then may I be considered as eligible to have successfully completed the Vrata; so saying the Karta would offer Shankhu Tirtha to Bhagavan.

On the same lines as the Chaaturmaasya Vrata, similar resolutions could be made in other Vrataas as well. For instance, resolves be made about 'Guda anna'dharana or Varjana and so on as applicable in relevant resolutions: *Varjayashey gudam Deva Madhura swara siddhaye, Varjyayishye tailamaham sundaraan gatwa siddhaye/ Yogaabhaasi Bhavishyaami praaptum Brahma padam param, Mounavratati bhavishyaami swaagnaapaalana siddhaye/Ekaantaropavaasi cha praaptum Brahmaaputam param/-----Iti sankalpah/ (There might be similar Resolutions: Avoiding Jaggery eating would improve sweet voice; evading oil consumption would enhance physical charm; Yogaabhyaasa will be observed to facilitate Brahma pada prapti; Mouna Vrata will be followed to enable me self control; fasting of alternate days should help secure Brahma pada and so on). There are also some nishiddha or avoidable materials and actions in the course of Chaaturmaasa Vrata: no material should be offered as Naivedya as water in leather sachets, the burnt ash of dead animals or flies collected from Agni, Yagna's left over cooked rice, burnt food, Masura or Meat products, seedless or of too many seed vegetables, Mulaka or Mulis, Kushmanda / pumpkin , sugar cane, black gram, brinjal, snake gourd, tamarind , salt , honey etc. are strictly forbidden. *Vrintaaka bilvodumbara kalinga bhissataastu Vaishnavaih sarvamaaseshu varjyayaah/ (Brinjal, bilwa, udumbara, Kalinga, bhissata are forbidden by Vaishnavaites always.)* Milk and products of any animal excepting cows, buffalos or goats are not worthy of offering as Naivedya to Bhagavan. During the entire Chaaturmaasaas, those who consume Havishya bhojana are commended. Those who refrain from eating jaggery would have soft voices; avoiding oils would help develop attractive body parts; refrain from eating 'taamboola' would possess sweet voice; ghee consumption spoils skin; avoiding milk and curd leads to Vishnu loka; those who sleep on mats on ground become the beloved of Bhagavan. Eating by squatting on the ground would bestow royalty. Ridding of 'Madhu Maamsa' or honey and meat makes a person a Muni / hermit. Eating on alternate days paves the way to Brahmaloaka. Growing hairs and nails yields Ganga Snaana phala. Silence is like giving instructions to others. Vishnu Vandana yields Go-daana phala. Vishnu paada sparsha is 'kritartatwa or a life well spent in fulfillment . Cleaning 'Devagriha' provides kingship. Hundred 'pradakshinaas' or circumambulations of Bhagavan bestows ' Vishnu Sayujya'. 'Ekabhuktaashana' or a meal a day provides 'Agnihotra karma phala'. Construction of wells or water bodies confers fame and 'Punya'. Eating at the sixth part of days together as habit grants 'Swargavaasa'. Eating on leaves gives Kurukshetra Vaasa phala. Bhojana squatted on rocks endows Prayaaga Snaana. On these lines, if Chaturmaas Vrata is observed from Ashaadha Ekaadashi /Dwadashi to Shravana Maasa, a person is stated to have made a significant accomplishment!*

Chaturmaasa Vrata is stated to have terminated on Shravana Purnima. For those Grihastis observing The Vrata as also to Yatis / Sanyasis, Vyasa Puja is scheduled on the Purnima's Sunrise presuming that the Tithi is valid at least upto six ghadis thereafter. Vyasa Puja commences after the Kshura Karma or shaving the head-hair and beard. During these four months or atleast a minimum of two months, the Yati is required to stay at the same place. After the shaving of head, the Karta or Yati has to perform twelve 'Mrittikaa Snaanaas' followed by Vyasa Puja as celebrated on Guru Purnima: This Puja is celebrated with

great devotion at Ashrams like at Shivananda at Rishikesh, Sai Babas at Shirdi/Puttaparti and at various Mathas all across Bharat and abroad. The Sankalpa of such Vyasa Pujas is to conclude the Charurmasya Vrata Puja normally is stated to be on the following lines: *Chaaturmaasya Vaasam kartum Shri Krishna Vyasa bhaashyakaaraanaam saporivaaraanaam pujanam karishye/* In this Sankalpa, the Placements of the ‘Saparivaaraas’ are: Shri Krishna in the Centre along with Vaasudeva- Sankarshana- Pradyumna- Aniruddha are invoked first; to the South of Krishna be Vyasa-Sumantu- Jaimini-Vyashampaayana-and Paila; to the left of Krishna and others be the Bhashyakaara Adi- Shankara and Padmapaada- Vishwarupa-Totaka-and Hastaaala; to the sides of Shri Krishna would be Brahma and Rudra; and on the four sides would be Sanaka-Sanandana- Sanaatana-Sanatkumaaraas; Brahma-Vasishtha-Shakti-Paraashara-Vyaasa-Shuka-Goudapada-Govindapaada and Shankaraachaarya; then Ganesha in Agneya, Kshetrapaala in Ishana, Durga in Vaayavya, Sarasvati in Nirruti, and staring from the outer East the Ashtapaalakaas. After the Avaahana Puja, Narayana Saatsakshra Mantra and Omkaara Namasshabda mantras be recited. After Lakshmi-Narayana worshipping is performed, there must be prayers in favour of married Grihastis to mean that the Chaturmaasa Vrata should now terminate successfully and there should not be mutual absence from each other. At the end of the Nakta Bhojana, the couple should perform the Krishna-Lakshmi ‘Shayya’ (bed) and Pratima daana and the Brahmanas should bless the couple observing the Vrata successfully that the Vrata should bestow them ‘Akshya Daampathya Sukha’, ‘Putra-Dhana-Vidya yoga’ and ‘Sapta Janma Sukruta Phala’!

SHRAAVANA MAASA

The Punya kaala in Shravana Maasa is stated to occur sixteen ghadiyas later than Simha Sankramana. In this Maasa the basic requirements are Eka Bhukta / Nakta Vrata and Abhishakaas of Vishnu and Shiva. In case, a cow gives birth when Surya is in Simha Sankramana, the owner of the cow is to perform thousand homaas and give it away as Daana to a Brahmana. If the cow cries in the night, there is a need to perform Mrityunjaya Homa and Shanti. Hence the saying: *Maaghey Budhecha Mahishi Shraavaney badabaa Diva, Simhey prasuyante Swamino mrityu daayakah/* (If a buffalo gives birth on Budha Vaara of MaghaMaasa, a horse gives birth in Shraavana Maasa, or if a cow gives birth in Simha Sankranti, the concerned owner risks his/ her own life. The ‘Shaanti’ or the way of appeasement for the occurrence in Shravana Maasa is to execute Soma Vaara Vrata formally as per laid procedure and if unable to do so, atleast Nakta Bhojana must be observed. On Shravana MangalaVaaraas, *Mangala Gauri Vrata* is definitely prescribed especially by the newly married ‘Grihinis’. Shravana Shukla *Panchami* is popularly called *Naaga Panchami* and is observed upto six ghadiyas after Suryodaya when serpents are worshipped in Snake Pits or in Temples to Subrahmanya Kumara by offering milk and Pushpa-Gandha-Dhupa-Deepa-Phala Naivedyas. On Shravana Shukla *Dwadashis*, Shaakha Vrata is observed when ‘Shaakaas’ or vegetables are donated by the ‘Sankalpa’ saying *Brahmanaaya Shaaka daanam karishye/* Then after worshipping Brahmana, recite the Mantra: *Upaayanamidam Deva Vrata Sampurta hetavey, Shaakantu Dwija Varyaya sahiranyam dadaamyaham/* With this Mantra, cooked or raw vegetables in good stock be donated along with ‘dakshinaas’.

Pavitraaropana: On the Paarana day of *Shravana Dwadashi or Trayodashi or Purnima*, ‘Pavitraadhiropana’ or providing spun cotton Sacred Threads on Vishnu Idol is observed. Shiva Pavitraaropana is done in the Shravana Shukla Paksha on Chatudrashi, Ashtami or Pournamaasi. In respect of Devi Ganesha or Durgaadi Devatas, Pavitraaropana is accomplished on any of the Tithis viz. Charurdasi, Chaturthi, Triteeya or Navami as per one’s own ‘Kulaachaara’. If not, this is performed on Shravana Purnima. Cotton threads are in the clusters of nine with twenty four grandhis (knots) each and are called *Nava Sutris* (or nine threads) representing hundred eight Devataas and this option is stated to be the best. The medium alternative has fifty four Nava Sutris with twenty four grandhis and these cover upto the thighs of Bhagavan’s idol. The minimum option is of twenty seven Nava Sutris with twelve grandhis covering upto the navel of the idol. In the case of Shiva Linga, the length and width of the Sutris

are taken into account to cover the Linga. The Pavitras are all treated by Pancha Gavyaas and the Pranavaakshara OM. Then Kumkuma (Safron) is applied over the Grandhis of the Sacred Threads while reciting the Mula Mantras hundred eight times and cover up Vastras and pray to Bhagavan seeking pardon for lapses in the observance of the formal procedure: *Kriyaalopa vidhaanaardham yatwayaa vihita Prabho, Mayaitatkriyatey Deva tava thushtai pavitrakam/ Na vighno bhaveddeva kuru Naatha dayaammayi, Sarvatha Sarvadaa Vishno mamatwam paramaa gatih/* (Deva! May deficiencies in the Procedure be taken care of by the Pavitra as ordained for your pleasure; do very kindly ensure that there should be any obstacles in our worship as you are the Ultimate Refuge to us). After the Prayer, Sankalpa be made for sanctifying the Samvatsara Puja, invoke the Tri Sutri with Brahma-Vishnu-Maheswara and the Nava Sutri with Omkaara, Vahni, Brahma, Nagesha, Surya, Shiva and Vishwa Deva with the Mula Mantra, and perform 'Panchopa –chaaraas' to the Pavitraas and thus accomplish Pavitraaropana to Vishnu or Shiva as the case may be.

Upaakarma Vidhi: Among the formal and initial 'Veda Karmas' is the Upaakarma. Bhavishya Purana states: *Sampraaptey Shraavanasyaantey Pournimaasyaam Dinodaye, Snaanam kurvaanti Matimaan Smriti Shrutu Vidhaanatah/ Upaakarmaadikam proktamrusheenaam chiva Tarpanam, Shudraanaam Mantra rahitam snaanam daanam cha shyaashyatey/ Upaakarmaani kartavyamrusheenam chaiva pujanam/* (On the arrival of Shraavana Maasa Pournami's Sun Rise, Wisemen perform Upaakarmaadika Karmaas including Tarpanam as per the Instructions of Veda Shastraas; even the lower caste varanaas are required to perform 'snaana daanaas' without Mantras. After the Upakarma, the duty is to perform Puja). To Rigvedis, 'Upaakarma Kaala' is determined on Shravana Shukla Paksha Purnima in Shravana Nakshatra and Panchami's Hasta Nakshatra; rather the former option. Upaakarma is performed during the period when there is no Grahana or Samkranti and this principle is followed by both Rigvedis and Yajurvedis. Otherwise, during Hasta-Panchami Yoga or atleast Hasta or Panchami separately is allowed. In case, Shravana Nakshatra is on two days of Pournami and the next, then the earlier day's Suryodaya and upto the next day's Suryodaya, there could be a carry forward of three muhurtas to allow the Upakarma on the Pournami (broadly stated from sunrise to midday). Even otherwise, ie. even if the Shravana Nakshatra is over on the day, the next Nakshatra of Dhanishtha is allowed. However, the 'Sesha' of the previous Nakshatra to Shravana viz. of Utraraashaadha is not suitable. To Yajurvedis also, Upaakarma Kaala is suitable to Shravana Purnami's Shravana Nakshatra. In case there is a Khanda Purnima ie. if Purnima entered after the Sunrise of the previous day and extends to the next day upto six muhurtas then all Yajurvedis would consider the suitable time for Upakarma as on the next day. However there are different opinions based on the number of Ghadis extended after Sunrise of the Khanda Purnima on the subsequent day; in case both the days happen to extend beyond Sunrise, then all the Yajurvedis agree that the Upaakarma Kaala is on the previous day. In case Purnima occurs on the previous day's Muhurtha and extends to the next day by two or three muhurtaas but by less than six muhurtaas, then Taittiriyaas consider that the Upaakarma Kaala would be on the next day's Purnima; but Yajurvedis other than the Taittiriyaas consider the Kaala in favour of the previous day's Purnima. Hiranyakeshi Taittiriyaas consider the 'Aavaraniya (extended) Purnima as the Upaakarma Kaala. Other wise, they might consider Shraavana Maasa Hasta Nakshatra. Apastambha Sutrasthaas no doubt prefer Shraavana Purnima but alternatively could consider Bhadrpada Purnima. Bodhayanaas too prefer Shravana Purnima or as an alternative Ashaadha Purnima be considered. Kanva/ Madhyam Dinaas or Katyaayanaas feel that either 'Shraavana sahita Purnima' or Hastaayukta Panchami or since Shravana Maasa is full of controversies Bhadrpada Purnima or Panchami would be suitable. The short point however is that Shravana Pournami is the appropriate tithi for the Upaakarma, while taking into account the different permutations of muhurtas at or after the Sun Rise of the Khanda Pournami Tithi. If Shravana Pournami for any reason or interpretation is not fully satisfactory, then another alternative would be either Bhadrpada Pournima or Panchami. As regards Saama Vedis, the decision is as follows: *Saam Vedinaam Bhadrpada Shukley Hastaa Nakshatram Mukhyakaalah, Sankraantyaadi doshana tatraa sambhavey Shraavana aasey Hastograahya iti Nirnaya Sindhu/* (To Saama Vedikaas, Bhadra pada Shukla Paksha

Hastaa Nakshatra is the best option for performing Upaakarma; in case however there is a Sankraanti Dosha then, Shravana Shukla Hasta Nakshatra as stated by the Nirnaya Sindhu.) Another School of Thought is that while Upakarma is performed on Sharvana Pourami but should be activated till Bhadrapada Hasta! If there is a Hastaa Nakshatra Khanda carried forward to the next day then the remainder Hasta must extend up to Aparahna, since to Saama Vedis, Upakarma kaala is Aparahna. To Atharva Vedis, both the options of Shraavana Purnima and Bhaadrapada Purnima are equally acceptable. Purnima however has to be Udaya Vyapini or should span upto Sun Rise next.

[In sum, Upaakarma by Rig Vedis prefer Shravana Nakshatra on Shraavana Purnima spanning atleast from Sunrise to mid day or Panchami's Hasta Nakshatra. Sama Vedis prefer Shravana Purnima's Hasta Nakshatra or Bhadrapada Shukla Hasta. Yajur Vedis basically approve of Shravana Purnima but for interpretations of Purnima's extensions after Sun Rises on the next day as detailed above]

Upaakarma Saamaanya Nirnaya: The normal practice of performing Upaakarma to 'Sarva Shaakhaas' is in Shravana- Bhadrapada Maasaas- Shukla Panchami or Pournamis as per their own Home-Rules, subject however to limitations such as Grahana-Sankranti, Ashuchi and such exigencies. But those in the North of Narmada give consideration to Panchami etc. of Surya in Simha Raashi in Shravana while those in Dakshina Desha pay attention to Surya in Karka Raashi in Shraavana on Panchami-Pournamis.

Prathama Upakarma to new Yagnopaveethis: The first Upaakarma to new Yagnopaviti Brahmacharis should not be performed on Guru-Shukraastaas, Mala Maasaas, and when Guru Graha is in Simha Raashi. First Upaakarma is to be observed with Swasti Vaachana and Nandi Shraadhha. Those who are 'Nutana Yagnopaveetis' or newly inducted to the Sacred Thread and Gayatri Mantra should initiate Upaakarma in Shraavana Maasa on Panchami-Hasta /Shravana Kaala-Guru Shukraasta Samaya; if this is not possible then another alternative would be Bhadrapada Panchami- Shravana Nakshatra. The required paraphernalia are: *Mounjeem Yagnopaveetam cha Navam dandamcha dhaarayet, Ajinam Katisutram cha navam Vastram tathaiva cha/ Iti Brahmachaarino visheshah Prativarsham dhyeyah/* (Mounjee or String of Darbha /Kusha grass, Yagnopaveetam or the Sacred Thread, Navam Dandam or Palasha Danda or New Stick; Mriga Charma or Deer-Skin, Ajinam Kati Sutram or waist-band and Navam Vastram or new clothing; these are the Annual Specialities of a Brahmachari). Learning of Vedas invariably begins in Shraavana Maasa with Upaakarma; the learning process is terminated temporarily in 'Makara Raashi' with the Utsarjana Ritual but would be revived in Shraavana Maasa again. Both in the case of Upaakarma and Utsarjana , Brahmacharis as also Grihasthis and Vanaprasthas are required to follow the procedure and Nirnaya Sindhu Grandha mentioned that there would be 'Prayaschitta' or atonement by way of 'Praajaapatya Kruccha' or atleast Upavasa Prayaschitta. However the practice has been otherwise since both Upakarma and Utsarjana are performed at the same time; the relevant Sankalpa states: *Adheetaanaam Chhandasaamaapyaayana dwaaraa Shri Parameshwara preetyarthamupaakarmaa diney adhyotyasarjanaakhyaam Karma karishye /* (As per the Vedaas studied, I shall now perform on the Upaakarma day itself the Utsarjanaa Karma also). However, Dharma Sindhu states that the Karmaas are apparently observed as per one's own family traditions.

Rakshaabandhana: The task of 'Rakshaabandhana' is observed in several parts of Bharat to one's sisters, both married or unmarried as the brothers assure all kinds of protection, attachment, and affection especially assuring the unmarried ones in parental or their own care and homes or by inviting the married sisters to their homes with her husband and their own family members, treat them and offer gifts, security and assurances of needs. This family function is celebrated on Shaavana Purnima from morning till Aparahna or Pradosha provided Bhadra Nakshatras are not in predominance; otherwise if Purnima is short of three muhurtas on that day then Rakshabandhana be observed on the previous day upto Padoshakaala if Bhadra is not present. The Sankalpa of 'Rakshaabandhana' or tying of the Security Band on the Right Wrist is: *Yena baddho Bali Raaja Daanavendro Maha Balah, Tenatwaamabhi badhnaami*

Rakshamaachalamaachala/ (Raksha Bandhana! I am tying this to you as was tied by King Bali of Vamana Avataara fame; be steady and firm)/.

Krishna Ashtami: The Ashtami is of two kinds viz. Shudda and Viddha. When there is no Saptami Yoga then Ashtami is Shudda and it could occur during the day or night. But the Viddha is determined by the extent to which Ashtami Yoga is affected by the Saptami sesha. Again the permutations of Rohini Nakshatra and Krishna Ashtami are several offering hair- splitting juxtapositions of Saptami-Ashtami and Krittika-Rohini. Added to this is the interpretation by Koustubha Grandhas as per Madhwaacharya followers that Krishnaashtami by itself is the Janmaashtami and the one with Rohini Nakshatra is Krishna Jayanti. Other followers of Madhwacharya assert that Janmaashtami on Shukla Ashtami is significant for the Vrata and if there is no coincidence with Rohini, Jayanti need to be observed. Another interpretation is that if need be both the Vratas be duplicated or observed twice.

Vrata vidhana: In any case, the Janmaashtami Vrata be performed on a day when Ashtami is predominant. In the morning of that main Ashtami after Nitya Karmaas, the Kartha should resolve: *Shri Krishna preetyartham Janmaashtami Vratam karishye/* Alternatively the Sankalpa might be *Janmaashtami Vratam/ Jayanti Vratam karishye/* Then sip spoonful water thrice from a Copper Vessel and state: *Vaasu Devam samuddisya Sarva Paaao prashantaye, Upavaasam karishyaami Janmaashtamyaam Nabhasyam;* in case of incompetence of observing fast, then one might imply *Phalaani bhakshaishyaam/* Afterwards, perform ‘Aachamana’ and take the Vow: *Ajanmamaranam yaavadyanmayaa dushkrutam kritam, Tatpranaashaaya Govinda praseeda Purushottama* (Purushottama! Do destroy the sins that got accumulated in the past from my birth and might be committed in my future till my death as I am now observing the Sacred Vrata on this most propitious day of your mortal birth and save me). Then after purifying with a bath at midnight, the Karta who pre-arranged - as per one’s own capacity and devotion, a Platform made of gold-silver-metal-or earthen with a large swing with Baby Krishna on bed cushions and design an appropriate background with Pratimas of Devaki-Vasudeva, Yashoda-Nanda Gopa , Balarama-Revati and groups of Gopa-Gopikas along with Lakshmi at Krishna’s feet. Then the Puja commences reciting: *Shri Krishna preetyartham saparivaara Shri Krishna pujaam karishye/* This would be followed by the ‘Nyaasaas’ by way of Anganyaasa and Karanyaasa, worship of Shankha- Chakra- Gadaa- Sarangaas and perform ‘Dhyaana’ as follows: *Paryankasthaam Kinaaraadyairyutaam dhyaayettu Devakim, Shri Krishna baalakam dhyaayetparyankeystanapaayinam/ Shri Vatsa vaksha samshaantam neelotpala dalacchavim, Samvaahayanteem Devakyaah paadou dhyaayecchataam Shriyam/* (May I now meditate ‘Neelotpala Shyaama- Shri Vatsaanka- Shri Krishna Baalaka!’ as you are engaged in enjoying the breast-milk of Mother Devaki and experiencing the soft pressings of your tender feet by Devi Lakshmi!) Then the Puja is initiated with concentration by the Mula Mantra and ‘Purusha Sukta Ruks’ as follows: *Shri Krishnaaya Namah, Devakyaai Namah, Vasudevaayai Namah, Yashodaayai Namah, Nandaaya Namah, Shri Ramaaya Namah, Chandikaayai Namah* and so on and *Sakala -parivaara Devataabhyo Namah---Atraavaahita DevakyaadiParivaara Devataa sahita Shri Krishnaaya Namah/* There after Worship would continue by the offerings of Aasana- Paadya- Arghya- Aachamaniya- Abhyanga Snaana-Panchaamrita Snaana- Chandana lepana- Vasstra-Yagnopaveeta-Gandha-Pushpa-Dhoopa-Deepa along with the Mantraas viz. *Visveshwaraaya Vishvaaya tathaa Vishvodbhavaaya cha, Vishyasya pataye tubhyam Govindaaya Namoh namah/* The various Upachaaraas /Services performed, Naivedya is offered to the Lord with the Mantra: *Jagannaatha Namastubhyam Samsaara bhaya naashana, Jagadeeshvaraaya Devaaya Bhutaanaam Pataye Namah/* Then, Taambula-Pradakshna- Namasaaraa- Pushpaanjalis are proposed. Finally ‘Udyaapana’ of the Vrata is accomplished with repeat Puja and Samasta Raajopachaara- Mantropachaara-Bhagavat Kathaa Pathana/ Shravana, Geeta -Nritthya and various Services along with Shadrasopeta Bhojana- Brahmana Puja-Dakshina and so on.

Kusha sangrahana: Yet another Sacred Deed that is executed on ‘Shraavana Maasa Krishnaamavaasya’ is reaping and preserving Darbhaas for repeated usages for Yagnaas, Homaas, Vrataas, Pitru Karyaas and

so on. *Nabho maasasya darshey tu Shuchirbhaanupaaharet, Ayaatayaamaastey darbhaa viniyojyahah punah punah/* Some opine that the ‘Kusha Sangrahana’ is to be effected on Bhadrapada ‘Krishnaamavaashya’. Kushaas are ten varieties : *Kushaah kaashaa yavaa durvaa Vusheeraascha sa kundakaah godhuma vreehayoMunjaa Dasha Darbhaassabalajaah/* (The ten varieties of Darbhaas are Kusha, Khasha or a kind of dried grass flower used for mats and house-roofs, Yava truna, Durva, Vusheera or the grass providing relief from heat, Kundaka, Godhuma graas, Rice / dhanya grass, Munja grass and Ulapa truna). *Virinchinaa sahotpanna Parameshthi nisargaja, Nuda sarvaani paapaani darbha swasti karobhava/* (Darbha! You are the one born along with Brahma or Srishtih Prarambha thus imbibing the Sacred Nature of Brahma Himself; hence destroy all kinds of Sins and bestow propitiousness). *Yevam mantram samuccharya tatah purvottaramukhah, Humphat kaarena mantrena sakrucchitwaa samuddaret/* (With this Mantra one should face Ishana Disha and cut the darbhaas in one go) and pronounce the Mantra again saying *Hum Phat/* Such four darbhaas make a PAVITRA for Brahmanaas and reduce the number by each darbha for Khatriya-Vaishya-Shudraas.

Varalashmi Vrata: Preferably on the first Friday-failing which on the following Fridays of Shravana Month, several parts of Bharat, especially in Dakshina Bharat, married women invariably observe this Vrata with dedication and faith. Subsequent to the compulsory act of any Vrata-Puja- Shubha karyas or auspicious deeds, initial invocation and worship of Ganesha ought to precede along with Kalsasa Puja. This should follow up with Vara Lakshmi’s ‘Praana Praishtha’ Mantras: *aam, hreem, hrum, haim, hroum, hrah,* along respectively with ‘kara nyaasa’ and ‘angayaasa’ followed by *asunite punarasmaasu chakshuh punahpraanamihano dhehi bhogam jyokpashyema Suryamuccharanta manumate mridayaa nah swasti/ Aavaahitaa bhava sthaapitaa bhava suprasanaa bhava sthiraasanam kuru!* Now, initiate the Puja: *Padmaasane padmakare sarva lokaika pujite, Narayana priye Devi supreetaa bhava sarvadaa/ Ksheerodaarnava ambhute kamale kamalaalaye, Susthira bhava me gehe Suraasura namaskrite/ -Sarva mangala maangalye Vishnuvakshasthalaalaye aavaahayaami Devi supreetaa bhava sarvadaa/ Sa kumkuma vilepanaamalikachumbi kasturikaam, Samanta hasitekshanaam sasharachaapa paashaan - kushaam/ Ashesha jana mohineemarunamaalya bhushaambaraam, Japaa kusuma bhaasuraam japavidhou smaredambikaam/* Vara Lakshmi Devataam ‘dhaayaami’. *Asanam: Amulya Ratna saaram cha nirmitam Vishwakarmanaa, Pashyaani prakrushtaani varaani durlabhaani cha, Aasaanamcha vichitram cha Maha Lakshmi pragruhnataam/* (Bhagavati Maha Lakshmi! May I offer in your service an invaluable and distinguished seat made of Choicest Jewels specially designed and crafted by Vishwakarma, the Celestial Designer!) *Paadyam: Shuddham Gangodakamidam Sarva Vandita meepsi - tam, Paapedhma vahni rupam cha gruhyataam Kamalaalay/* (Kamalaalaye! This pure and hallowed Ganga water is borne by the heads of one and all as the same is endeared and revered by them; this is considered as Agni Swarupa which burns off all kinds of sins; do kindly accept it to wash your sacred feet); *Arghyam: Pushpa chandana durvaadi samyuktam Jaahnaveejalam, Shankha garbhasthitam shuddham gruhnataam Padma vaasini/ Shuddhodakam cha paatrastham gandhapushpaadi mishritam, arghyam daasyaami te Devi grihnaata Surapujite/* (Padmavaasini! This Ganga water in a Shankha along with flowers, Chandana, Durva and such other consecrated material is offered to you as a welcome drink) *Sugandhi Pushpa thailam: Sugandhi pushpa thailam cha Sugandhaamalaki phalam, Deha Soundrya beejam cha gruhnataam Shri Harey Priye!* (Shri Hari Priye! This fragrant oil extracted from Amala fruit is a pleasing application to enrich physical beauty and skin smoothening; do please allow it to be used as a bathing device); *Dhoop :Vriksha niryaa swarupam cha Gandhadravyaadi samyutam, Shri Krishna kaantey dhupam cha pavitram prati-guhyataam/*(Shri Krishna Kantey! I proffer ‘dhoop’ or the aromatic smoke of incense material mixed with a vegetable gum; do kindly accept this smoke offered with sanctity); *Chandan: Malayaachala sambhutam vriksha saaram manoharam, Sugandha yuktam sukhadam Chandanam Devi gruhnataam/* (Devi! this chandana ‘gandha’ which originated from the chandana tree on Malaya mountain is not only sweet-smelling but also provider of coolness; I request you to apply on your body to give soothing effect); *Deepam: Jagacchasthuh swarupam cha dhwaanta pradhwanasa kaaranam, Pradeepam shuddha rupam cha gruhyataam Parameswari/* (Parameswari! Kindly allow

this Sacred Light which is the vision of eyes, remover of darkness and a symbol of Purity to please you and light the surroundings); *Naivedya: Naanopahaara rupam cha nanaa rasa samanvitam, Naanaa swaadukaram chaiva Naivedyam Pratigruhnataam/* (Devi! I am tendering this ‘Naivedya’ or the offering of various eats and juices which have been prepared with taste and flavor; I should be obliged of these snacks are consumed to please me). *Anna: Annam Brahma swarupam cha Pranarakshana kaaranam, Tushtidam Pushtidam chaiva Devyaannam pratigruhyataam/* (Devi! Annam/ food is considered to be of Brahma Swarupa; food is also a life saving material which ensures eating-satisfaction and enhances strength in the natural way; I request you to taste this food); *Kheer: Shaalyakshata supakwam cha sharkaraagavya samyutam suswaadu samanoharam, Swaadu yuktam Maha -Lakshmi Paramaannam Pratigruhyataam/* (Maha Lakshmi! This Kheer or cooked rice with sugar and ghee is specially prepared for your taste; please taste this preparation); *Swaastika Mrishtaanna: Shakaraa gavya pakwam cha suswaadu sumanoharam, Mayaa niveditam LakshmiSwaastikam pratigruhnataam/* (Lakshmi! This is ‘Mrishta- anna’/Sweet rice called Swastika which is a mix of sugar and ghee in cooked rice which is being offered as a Naivedya to you for your kind acceptance). *Phala: Naanaa vidhani ramyaani pakkvaani cha phalaanicha, Swaaduyuktaani Kamaley gruhyataam phaladaani cha/* (Devi Kamaley! These are various fruits ripe for eating, which are not only sweet luscious but also desire-fulfilling; may I present these juicy fruits for approval). *Dughdha: Surabhistana sambhutam swaadu sumanoharam, Martra -amrutam sugavyam cha gruhnnataamachyuta priye/* (Achyuta Priye! This pure milk which is fresh from Surabhi cow’s udder is meant for Martyaloka residents and is tasty like ambrosia; I beseech you to taste it and gratify me!) *Gud / Jaggery: Suswaada rasa samyuktamikshu vriksha samudbhavam, Agnipakkamati swaadu gudam cha prati- guhyataam/* (Devi! this jaggery has been made of sugarcane juice heated up and solidified; indeed this is very sweet and fresh; please savour this). *Mrishtaanna: Yava godhuma sashyaanaam churna renu samudbhavam, Supakvam guda gavyaaktam Mrishtaannam Devi gruhyataam/* (Devi! This is a sweet preparation made of wheat and ‘Yava’ grains-mix, nicely cooked with jaggery and ghee which too is very appetizing for favour of your taste); *Pishtak: Shasyachurnodbhavam pakkvam Swastikaadi samanvitam, Mayaa niveditam DeviPishtakam pratigruhyataam/* (Devi! This pisthak made of rice powder with Swastika and other signs is a fried and crisp savoury for your taste); *Eik/ Sugar cane: Paarthivo vriksha bhedascha vividha dravya kaaranam, Suswaadurasa samyutam Eikshuscha pratigruhyatam/* (Devi! This sugar cane is an extraordinary tree on Earth and is a source of several bye products like jaggery, sugar and simple juice from raw cane; this juice is indeed very sweet and succulent; it is my prayer that you may drink up this juice!); *Vyanjan: Sheeta vaayu pradham chaiva daahey cha sukhadam param, Kamaley! Gruhyataam chedam vyajanam shweta chaamaram/* (Kamaley! In this stuffy climate, a white ‘chamara’/ hand fan would certainly bring relief and happiness; may I serve you with ‘Vyanjana’ for your comfort); *Taamboola: Taambulamcha varam ramyam karpuraadi suvaasitam, Jihvaa jaadyachedakaram Taamboolam Devi gruhyataam/* (Devi! This ‘Taamboola’ made of tender betel leaves and fragrant materials like ‘karpura’/ camphor and other scented edible digestibles would provide freshness and good feeling to your tongue and mouth; may I tender this to you); *Jala: Suvaasitam sheetalamcha pipaasaa naashakaaranam, Jagajjevaa rupamcha jeevanam Devi gruhyataam/* (Devi! To quench thirst, there is nothing like very cold, nicely scented and life-reviving water; do please accept this as well); *Maalya: Deha soundarya bijam cha sadaa Shobha vivardhanam, Kaarpaasaja cha krumijam vasanam Devi gruhyataam/* (Devi! The bouquets and garlands made of a wide variety of fresh and perfumed seasonal flowers provide invaluable joy to the wearers of these as also enhance beauty and grace to them; it is my privilege and unique opportunity to proffer these flowers to you); *Achamaneeya: Punya tirthakam chaiva Vishuddham Suddhidam sadaa, Grhnateem Krishna Kaantey twam ramyamaachaneeyakam/* (Krishna Kaantey! This ‘Tirtha jala’ which is sanctified on its own as also purify others is highly worthy of ‘Achamaneeya’; do accept the same); *Shayya: Ratnasaaraadi nirmaanam pushpachandana samyutm, Ratnabhusha bhushaadhyam sutalpam Devi gruhnnataam/* (This invaluable and highly comfortable bed with soft cotton and silk clothing, which is bejewelled and treated with fresh and intoxicating flowers and fragrances, is tendered to you Devi! please do accept this for your relaxation); *Apurva Dravya: Yadyad dravyamapurvam cha Prithivyaapi durlabham, Deva*

bhushaarbhogyam cha taddrayam Devi gruhnataam/ (Devi! Not only these but whatever invaluable and even impossible materials are available on Earth or elsewhere that are worthy of adorning your body would be available at your nod of head!

[An alternate version of Puja is to recite the Shri Sukta Mantras as follows:

Hiranya varnaam harineem suvarna rajastarajaam, Chandraam Hiranmayim Lakshimim jaatamevo mamaavah// Sahasra dala padmasthaam swasthaam cha sumanoharaam, Shantaam cha Shrihareh kaantaam taam bhaje jagataam prasuum/ Shri Varalakshmi Devyai namah--Aavaahayaami/

Taam ma aavaha jaatavedo Lakshmimanapagaaminim, Yasyaam hiranyam vindeyam gaamashvam purushaanaham// Amulya ratnasaaram cha nirmitam vishwa karmanaa, Aasanam cha prasannam cha Maha Devi pragruhyataam/ Shri Varalakshmi Devyai namah Divya simhasanam samarpayaami/

Ashwa purvaam ratha madhyaam hasinaada prabodhinim, Shriyam Devimupahye Shriirmaam Deveemupahvaye Shriirmaam Devijushataam// Shuddha Gangodakamidam sarvavantitameepsitam, Paapedhmavahnirupam cha grihyataam Parameswari/ Shri Varalakshmyai namah-Paadyayoh paadyam/

Kaamsosmitaam Hiranya praakaaramaardraam jvyalanteem trptaam tarpayanteem/ Padmesthitaam padma varnaam taamihopahvaye shriyam// Pushpachandana durvaadi samyutam jaahnavi jalam, Shankha garbha sthitam shuddham grihyataam padma vaasini/ ShriVaralahshmyainamah-arghyamidam/

Chandraam prabhaasaam yashasaa jwalanteem Shriyam loke Deva jushtaamudaaraam, taam Padminimeem shantanamaham prapadye, Lakshmirme nashyataam twaam vrine// Punya tirthaadikam chiva vishuddham shuddhidam sadaa, Grihyataam krishna kaante cha ramyamaachamaneeyakam-Shri Varalakshmi Devyai namah mukhe aachamaneeyam samaspayaami/

Adityavarne tapasodhijaato vanaspatistava vrikshetha bilwah, Tasya phalaani tapasaamudantu maayaantaraayaascha baahyaa Alakshmi/ Sugadhi Vishnu tailam cha sugandhaamalaki jalam, Deha Soundarya beejam cha grihyataam Shriharipriye/ Shri Varalakshmi Devyai shuddhodakena snapayaami/

Upaitumaam Devasakhah keertischa maninaa saha, praaturbhutosmi raastresmin keertimriddhim dadaatume// Soundarya mukhaalankaaram sadaa shobha vivardhanam, kaarpaasajam vasanam Devi grihyataam/ Shri Vara Lakshmi Devyai namah Vastra yugmam samarpayaami/

Kshutpipaasaamalaam Jyeshthaamalakshmir naashayaamyaham, Abhutimasamriddhim cha sarvaannirnudame grihaat// Shiva vaayupradechaiva dehe cha sukhadaa vare, Kamale grihyataam cheme vyajana shweta chaamare/ Shri Vara Lakshmi Devyainamah vyajana chaamare veejayaami/

Gandhadwaaraam dhuraadarshaam nityapushtaam kareeshineem, Ishwarigim sarva bhutaanaam taamihopahvaye shriyam// Malayaachala sambhutam vriksha saaram manoharam, sugandha yuktam sukhadam chandanam Devi grihyataam/ Shri Vara Lakshmi Devyai namah Shri gandhaan dhaarayaami/

Manasah kaamamaakuutim vaachassatya mashimahi, Pashuunaagum rupamannaya mayi shrisshraya taam yashah// Ratna swarna vikaaramcha dehaalankaaravardhanam, shobhaadaanam Shrikaram cha bhushanam pratigrihyataam/ Shri Vara Lakshmi Devyainamah sarvaabharaani samarpayaami/ Kardameva prajaabhutaa mayi sambhava Kardama, Shriyamvaasaya me kule Maataram Padma maalineem/ Naanaa kusuma nirmaanam bahy shobhaapradam param, Sarva bhuta priyam shuddham maalyam Devi pratigrihyataam/ Pushpam samarpayaami/]

This is followed by Anga Puja along with Om aim hreem shreem with each: *chanchakaaya namah paadoupujayaami-chapalaaya namah jaanunipujayaami-peetaambaraaya namah urum pujayaami-kamala vaasinyai namah katim pujayaami-padmaalayaayai namah naabhim pujayaami-madana maatenamah stanou pujayaami- Lalitaayai namah bhuja dwandwam pujayaami-Kambukanthaayanah kantham pujayaami- Sumukhaaya namah mukham pujayaami-Shriyai namah oushthau pujayaami-Sunaasikaayai namah naasikaam pujayaami-Sunetrai namah netre pujayaami- Ramaayai namah karnou pujayaami-Kamalaalayai namah shirah pujayaami- Shri Varalakshmai namah sarvaannyangaani pujayaami/*

This puja is followed by recitals and Pushpa puja of Lakshmi Ashtottara and Sahasra naama puja with flowers. Then the dhupa -deepa-naivedya-taambulaadi.

Dhupa: *Dashaagulam guggulopetam sugandham cha manoharam, Dhupam daashyaami te Deveshi Varalakshmi grihaanatham/ Vriksha niryaasa rupamcha gandha dravyaadi sayutam, Shri Krishna kaante dhupam pavitram pratigrihyataam/*

[*Shri Sukta prakaarena: Aapahsrijanti snigdhaani chikleeta vasame grihe, nicha Deveem maataragum shriyam vaasayamekule// Shri Vara Lakshmi Devyai namah dhupamaaghraapayaami/*]

Deepah: *Ghritaakta varti samyuktamandhakaara vinaashakam Deepam daasyaami te Devi grihaana muditaabhava/*

[*Shri Sukta prakaarena: Ardraam pushkarinim pushtim suvarnaam hemamaalineem, Suryam Hiranmayim Lakshmiim jaatavedomavaavah// Shri Vara Lakshmi Devayai namah deepam darshayaami/*]

Naivedya: *Naivedyam shadrasopetam dadhimajjya samhutam, naanaa bhakshya phalopetam grihaana hari vallabhe/*

[*Shri Sukta prakaarena: Ardraam yah karineem yashtim pingalaam padmamaalineem, Chandraam Hiranmayim Lashmeem jaatavedomamaahah// Naanopahaara rupamcha naanaavirasa samanvitam, naanaa swaadukaram chaiva naivedyam pratigrihyataam/ Shri Vara Lakshmi Devyai namah naivedyam samarpayaami/*]

Om bhurbhuvassuvah tatsaviturvarenyam, bhargo Devasya dheemahi dhiyoyonah prachodayaat, satyam-twartena parishimchaami/ Amritopasranamasi/ Om Praanaaya swaaha, om apaanaaya swaaha, om udaayanaaya swaaha, om vyanaaya swaaha, om udaayana swaaha om samaanaaya swaaha, madhye madhye paaniyam samarpayaami, uttaraaposhanam samarpayaami, hastaparakshalanam-paadah prakshaalanam samarpayaami- shuddhhaachamaniyam samarpayaami.

Taambulam: *Pugeephalasamaayuktam naagavalli dalairyutam, karpura churna samyuktam taamboolam prati grihyataam/*

[*Shri Sukta prakaarena: Taam ma aavah jaatavedo Lakshmiimanapagaamineem, yasyaam hiranyam prabhutam gaavo daashyoshvaan vindeyam purushaanaham// Taambulam cha varam ramyam karpuraadisuvaasitam, Jihvaajaadyachedakaram taamboolam Devi grihyataam/Shri Vara Lakshmi Devai namah, taambulam samarpayaami/*]

Neeraajanam: *Neeraajanam samaaneetam karpurena samanvitam, tubhyam daasyaamyaham Devi grihyataam Vishnuvallabhe// Saamraajyam cha viraajam chaabhi Shriyaachanogrihe, Lakshmi raashtrasya yaa mukhe tayaa maa sagumsrijaamasi// Karpura deepa tejastwam agjnaaa timiraapaha, Swaami preetikaram chaiva mama suokhyam vivardhaya/ Shri Vara akshmi Devyai namah karpura neeraaganm darshayaami/*

Neeraajanaanataram aachamaneeyam samarpayaami/

Dhyaana : *Padmaasane Padmakare sarva lokaika pujite, Naaraayana priye Devi supreetaa bhava sarvadaa/ Mantra Pushpa: Yopaam pushpam veda pushpavaan prajaavaan pashuman bhavati; agnirvaa-vaayurvaa- asouvai tapannapa-nakshatraani vaa-parjanyovaa-samvatsarovaa-yopsunaavam pratishthitaam veda pratyeva tishthati- --tanno vishnuh prachdayaat///*

Pradakshina: *Yaanikaani cha paapaani janmaatara kritaanicha, taani taani pranashyanti pradakshina pade pade/Namastryilokya janani namaste Vishnu vallabhe, traahi maam bhakta varade, Vara Lakshmi*

namo namah// Atha 'Nava Sutra Tora grandhi puja': Kamalaayai namah prathama grandhi pujayaami- Ramaayai namah dwiteeya grandhi pujayaami-Loka maatrenamah triteeya grandhi pujayaami- Vishvajanyai namah chaturgrandhi pujayaam- Maha Lakshmyai namah panchama grandhi pujayaami- Ksheeraabdhi tanayaayai namah shashtha granthi pujayaam-Vishva saakshinyanamah saptama grandhim pujayaami- Chandra sahodaryai namah ashtama grandhim pyjayaami- Hari vallabhaayai namah navama grandhim pujayaami/ Now, the Mantra tying the 'torana' or the trumeric coated thread of auspiciousness states as repeatedly nine times states: badhnaami dakshina haste nana sutram shubha pradam, putra poutraabhi vridhdhimcha sowbhaagyam dehi me rame/

Thereafter Brahmana vaayana is offered with the Mantra: *Indiraa pratigrihnaatu Indiraavai dadaaticha, Indiraa Taarakobhaabhyaam Indiraayai namo namah/ Goddess Lakshmi herself is the giver, taker or acceptor, may be they are all blessed! We all prostrate to her for ever! The Vrata concludes as follows: Yasyasmrityaa cha naamoktyaa tapah puja kriyaadishu, nyunam sampurnataam yaati sadyo vandetamachyutam/ Mantra heenam kriyaa heenam bhakti heenam Maheshwari, yat pujitam mayaa Devi paripurnam tadastute/ Anayaa Kalpokta prakaarena kritayaa shodashopachaara pujayaa Bhagavati sarva Devaatmika Vara Lakshmi Devataa supreetaa suprasannaa varadaa bhavatu/ Mama ishta kaamyartha siddhirastu/*

Reading or hearing the relevant Auspicious 'Katha' and reciting the Japa of Moola Mantras including: 'Shri Beeja' (Shreem), 'Maya Beeja' (Hreem), 'Kama Beeja' (Kleem), and 'Vani Beeja' (Aim), followed by the word 'Kamala vaasinyai' ie. the Mantrarajaa viz. SHREEM HREEM KLEEM AIM KAMALA VAASINYAI SWAAHAA/, the Vrata is signified as fullfilling!

Mangala Gauri Puja: This is performed on possibly every, or atleast one Tuesday of married women of the Shravana month as eligible soon after one's wedding. Duly after Ganesh Puja and sankalpa, kalasha puja, Mangala Gauri prathisthapana is set, with the mantra: *aam hreem krom yam rum lam vam sham shum sam ham ksham hum sah/ Shri Mangala Devata sthiro bhavatu suprasannaa bhavatu/* There after lighting a lamp with cotton vick with the shloka *Deepastwam Brahma ruosi jyotishaam prabhur avya yah, Sowbhagyam dehi putraamscha sarvaan kaamaanscha dehime/* Then dhyaanam: *Sakumkuma vilepanaamalika kasturikaam, Samanda hasitekshanaam sashara chaapa paashaankushaam / Ashesha jana mohineemarunamaalya bhushaambaraam japavidhau smaremambikaam/ Deveem shodasha varsheeyaam shashvat susthira youvanaam, bimboshtheem sudateem shuddhaam sharatpadma nibhaananaam, shveta champaka varnaabham suneelotpala lochanaam, Jagaddhhaatreem cha daatreem cha sarvebhyah sarva sampadaam, Samsaara saagare ghore jyoteerupaam sadaa bhaje/*The dhyana as above the puja would be followed by flowers the acts of Aavaahana- Simhaasana-Paadya-Pushpa jala- arghyah hastou-kalasadaka prokshana-Panchaamrita-vastra yugma-swarna yagjopaveeta-navaratna khachita aabharanas-chandana tilaka-and Anga Puja with scented flower variety: Umaayai namah paadou pujayaami; Gaurya namah janghe pujayaami, parvatyaui nama jaanuni; Jajan maatre uruh; jagatpratishthai katim; Mula Prakrithai naabhim; Ambikaayai udaram; Annapurnaayai stanou; Shiva Sundaryai namah vaksham; Maha balaayai baahum; Varapradaayai hastaan pujayaami; Kambukanthya kantham; Brahma vidyaayai jihvaam pujayaami; Shaakaryai namah mukham pujayaami; Shivaayai namah netre pujayaami; Rudraanyai namah karnou pujayaami; Sarva Mangalaayai namah lalaatam pujayaami; Sarveshwaryai namah shirah pujayaami; Mangala Gauryai namah sarvaanyaani pujayaami/ As this part of the Puja is concluded, the relevant ashtottara and shasra naama recitals be followed and dhoopa- deepa darshana- Naivedya- karpura harati- mantra pushpa recitals be offered and Chhatra-chamara-geeta shraavya and naanaa vidha raajopachaara- bhaktyopachara puja is concluded with leaving akshatas and water stating: *Mantra heenam kriyaa heenam bhakti heenam maheshwari, that sarvam khsamyataam devi Katyaaayani namostute.* The 'vaayana' or the offerings of fruits -flowers-sweets and savouries are offered to Suvasinis, especially the mother and close relatives reciting: *Kaatyaayani Shiva Gauri Saavitri Sarva Mangalaa, Suvaasinibhyo daasyaami vaayanaani praseedatu/* Katha shranava and samaraadhana would follow.

BHADRAPADA MAASA

The Punya Kaala of Bhadrapada Maasa is counted sixteen ghadiyaas after Kanyaa Sankramana. Observing 'Ekaannaahaara Vrata' or One Meal a day Vrata in this Month would bestow 'Dhana-Arogya Phala' or wealth and health. In this Month, Guda-Lavana Daana or charity of jaggery and salt in favour of Hrishiksha would yield far reaching results. Haritaalika Vrata is performed on Bhadrapada Shukla *Triteeya*. If even one Muhurta less for *Triteeya* then the Vratakaala is to be counted on the next day viz. Chaturthi. Gana Yoga on the Vrata is considered as auspicious. This Vrata is mainly observed by House wives by Upavaasa and Puja aiming Parvati- Parameshwara with the oft repeated Puja-Mantra viz. *Mandaara Maalaa kulitaalakaayai Kapaala Maalaankita Shekharaayai Divyaambaraaayaicha Digambaraaya Namasshivaayai cha Namasshivaayai/*

Siddhi Vinayaka Vrata: All the Hindus worth their name celebrate Ganeshwara Vrat with devotion, faith and dedication all over Bharata Desha and elsewhere on Bhadrapada Shukla Chaturthi with the Chaturthi extending upto Madhyaahna. If *Triteeya* and Chaturthi are on both the days, then the determining factor is whether *Triteeya* is longer or Chaturthi is present on that day. If the Vrata falls on a Sunday or Tuesday, it has an added significance. *Atra Chaturdhyam Chandra darshaney Mithyaabhi dushana doshastena Chaturthaamuditasya panchamyam darshanam Vinaayaka Vrata dinepi na doshaaya/ Purva diney saahaynamaarambhya pravruttaayam haturtheem Vinaayakavrataabhaavepi purvadyureva Candra darshaney dosha iti sidhyati/ Chaturthaamuditasya na darshana miti pakshetu Avishta panchashnar -muhurtamaatra Chaturthi dinepi nishedhaapatih/Ideenaam lokaastu eekatarapakshaashrayena Vinaaka Vrata diney eva Chandram na pashyanti na tudaya kaaley darshana aaley vaasatvaa satvey nyamenaashrayanti/ Darshaneyjaatey taddosha shantaey:* On this Chaturthi, Chandra darshana is believed strongly to 'Mithyaapavaada' or false allegations. In case, Chaturthi occurs in that evening and Chandra Darshana was performed but Vinayaka Vrata is performed on the Chaturthi day, it does not matter. But Chandra Darshana on the next morning must be avoided at any cost. People tend not to do so and this would result in a 'dosha' or failure; the ready remedy is to perform the Vrata sincerely and avoid Chandra Darshana on that day but certainly witness the same on Panchami Ratri on Chandrodya. If by mischance, Chandra darshana is seen on Chaturthi, then the atonement Mantra be recited viz. *Simhaha Prasenavadheessimaho Jambavataah hatah, Sukumaarodeestavahyeshas-shamantakah/* Iti Shloka Japa Karyah/ (A lion killed Prasena the younger brother of Satraajit; Jaambavanta killed the lion and gifted away the 'Shyamantaka Mani' to you Kumara! This Shloka be rendered for the Praayaschitta definitely). Lord Vinayaka assumes several sahasra naamaas but the most significant ones as Devi Parvati herself recognised are eight names viz. Ganesha, Ekadanta, Heramba, Vighna nayaka, Lambodara, Shurpakarna, Gajavakra and Guhaagraja!

Renowned Ganesha Temples in Bharat and elsewhere as dotted in the length and breath devoted to Hindu Dharma. The most sancrosant and age old Ganesha Temples in Bharat are the following 21 Kshetras: *Moreshwara*: Mayuresha Ganesha is stated to be of Ganapatya 'Mukhananda' Kshetra which is some 35 km from Pune in Maharashtra; *Prayaga* in Uttar Pradesh is 'Omkaara Ganapati' stated to have been installed in the Adi Kalpa of the Yore and worshipped ever thereafter; *Dundiraja Ganapati* at Kashi Mandir; At Kalamba village near Pune is *Chantamani Ganapati* stated to have worshipped by Lord Indra to alleviate the curse of Gautama Maharshi and is famed to reduce the extremely difficult hardships of the devotees with faith. *Adosha Ganapati* on Nagpur-Chhindwaa line at Saamner is famed as Shami Vighnesha Kshetra which was stated to have been worshipped by Vamana Avatara of Lord Vishnu to be able to suppress Bali Chakravarti and demanded three feet viz. Prithvi-Paatala-Antariksha Lokas. *Pali Ganapati* or Ballal Ganapati again in Maharashtra was stated to have worshipped by a Vaishya boy of

Pali in Kulaba Dt. for salvation . *Mangala Ganapati* at Pariner on the banks of Narmada was the Kshetra where Mangal Graha was stated to have worshipped. *Phaala Chandra Ganesha* near Parbhani on the Kachiguda-Manmad- where Parbhani Jyotir Linga is also situated where Lord Chandra was stated to have worshipped nearby the Sacred Godavari River flows at a place called Ganga Masale. A place called Rakshasa Bhuvana on Kachiguda Manmad Railway Line again there is *Vignana Ganesha Khetra* where Lord Dattaatereya venerated. Very near to Pune Yevur, Lord Brahma himself was stated to have worshipped *Vighnanaashaka Ganesha* to ward off all hurdles and obstacles before launching his creation. The eleventh manifestation of the twenty one series of Pracheena Ganesha is at Siddhitek on Mumbai-Raichur Railway Line named *Siddhi Ganesha* who was worshipped by Lord Vishnu Himself before he launched offensive against the invincible Madhu Kaitabha Demons in the form of Hayagriva. This Siddhi Vinayaka of Siddhitek was also venerated by Maharshi Veda Vyasa before he launched the onerous task of dividing the Single Veda into the present Chatur Vedas. Lord Shiva himself adored the ‘Tripura-dhwamsa’ Ganesha as the twelfth in the current series of Prachina Ganapati Deva at Manipura Kshetra at Rajan gaon near Pune. at the launch of the battle with the Asura. The next significant Ganesha Kshetra is of *Vijaya Mangala Ganeshwara* at Vijayapura / Vijaya Mangala on Chennai- Mangalore Railway line as Ganesh Deva was manifested to destroy Anala-sura. At Kashyapashrama yet unknown about his whereabouts, Kashyapa Maharshi was stated to have meditated at his Ashram and constantly worshipped for Loka Kshema. At Jalesha pura, Tripurasura too performed puja for victory. The whereabouts of these Kshetras were not known. At Lehyadri near Pune in Juwar Taluk, Devi Parvati worshipped Ganesha to be born as her most popular son as *Putra Ganesha*. At Berol or Ailapur near Ellora near Aourangabad, right within the premises of Ghrishneshwar Jyotir Linga afore mentioned, Ganesha Murti was set up by Skanda Deva as *Lakshya Vinayaka*. At ‘pracheena’ Pravala Kshetra called *Padmalaya Tirtha*, on Mumbai- Bhusaval Line of Railways, Karta Veeryajuna venerated both Ganesha and Shesha Sarpa on the banks of Ugama Sarovara. At Naamalagao from Jalna to Beed road is the *Amalaakama Kshetra*, Lord Yama Dharma Raja was stated to have worshipped Ganesha to ward off the curse of his mother on the banks of *Sadbuddhiprada Tirtha*. The penultimate ‘pracheena’ Ganesh is at *Raja sadana Kshetra* where Sindurasura was killed by himself and taught *Ganesha Gita* to Varenya Raja and eversince became popular as ‘Ganapati Rajur Kshetra’. Among the most illustrious Pradhana Ganapati Kshetras of the times immemorial, the twenty first and ever popular one is at *Shveta Vighneshwara Kshetra* at Kumbhakokam in Tamilnadu on the banks of the Sacred River Kaveri *Sudha Ganesha Murti* who was worshipped by Deva Danavas before the churning of Ksheera Sagara for the manifestation of Amrit!

Extensive presence of Ganesha elsewhere: It is not a possible task of counting country wide presence of Ganesha Mandirs as each and every village, township, city is replete with them all at countless street corners, for all the Hindus and of other faiths would not only venerate as a habit but many are even obsessed with His presence, since who indeed is such as to ignore the launch of any action seeking auspiciousness! All the same some of the very popular Ganesha Temples- quite apart from sub-temples in the main temples of Devas and Devis, are mentioned : *Andhra:* Hydereabad/ Secunderabad at Nampalli, Karvan Shahu, Vijay Nagar, Lalguda, Turkman gate, Station Road, Marepalli, Lalapet, and Mahindra Hills; Bhadrachalam, Draksharama, Kalahasti, Kani-pakkam; Rayadurg, Vijaywada-*Bihar* Sharif, Deoghar; Mandara Parvat; Raj Griha, Masai near Arra; Ramgarha, Ucchita- *Delhi* Siddha Buddhi Vinayaka, Sarojini Nagar, Vinyaka Mandir, Connaght Place-*Goa:* Khandole, Bandiwade- *Gujarat:* Bhadra Ganapati in Ahmedabad; Baroda Siddha nadha; Dushiraraj Ekadanta, Sarvarkar Ganapati; Dharangadhara

Eka Danta; Girnar Mt. Revati Ganapati; Modhera, Navari, Samlaji; Somnatha Durga Kuta Ganapati; Baijnatha Ganapati;- *Karnataka*: Bangalore: Panchamukha, Jambu Ganapati at Malleswaram; Dodda Ganapati at Kempegouda; Gokarana; Hampi Vighnantaka; Kollur Pancha Mukha Ganapati-*Kashmir*, Srinagar: Near by, a rock at the rock bottom of Hariparbar worshipped as Ganapati Bhimaswamin; Ganesh Bal Swayambhu on Rivar Lidar and Ganesh ghati near Sharada shrine-*Kerala*: Shrimadnant Temple's Trigarsthapit Ganesha; Kochi's Royal Palace's Dasha Hasta Panchaloha Murti; Panangad Swayayambhu Murti; Calicut's Maha Ganapati; Guruvayur's Ganesha Temple; Maha Ganapati near Kasargod; Tiruvanantapura's Agrasala Ganapati' Pazhavangadi Ganapati and Mangala Vinayakar-*Madhya Pradesh*'s Amarkantak Dwibhuja Siddhi Vinayaka; Indore's 4m tall Bada Ganesh; Omkareshwar's Pancha Mukha Ganesha; Ujjain's Chintamani, Bade Ganesh and Nishkalankeshwar Ganesh; *Maharashtra's Ashta Vinayaka Temples: Mayureshwara at Moregaon; Siddhi Vinayaka at Sidditek; Ballala Vinayaka at Pali; Varada Vinayaka at Madha; Vighneshwara at Ojhar; Girija Mataa Temple at Lohyadri near Pune; Maha Ganapati at Ranjan gaon and Chitamani at Theur.* Besides, Maharashtra is flooded with Ganesha Temples such as Vakratunda at Aawas; Swami Vighnesha at Adosha near Nagpur; Ganesha and Hanuman as Protective devatas at Ahmednagar; Laksha Vinayaka at Berola; Mangala Murti at Chinchwad; Ganapatiphule the famed Swayambhu near seashore a in Ganesh form hill worthy of Parikrama; Dasha bhuja Lakshmi Ganesha at Hedvi in RatnagirinDt. Where Magh Ganesha Jayanti is performed on grand scale; Cave Ganesha at Junnar; Digambar Siddhi Ganesha at Kadav; Ekachakra Ganesha where Bhima of Pandavas worshipped before killing Bakasura; Chitrakuta Ganesha at Nanded; Shri Ganapati with trunk turned its right and is spiritually awoken as at Nagpur; Modakeshwara at Nasik; Dagdusetha Halwai Ganapati at Pune; Dashabhuj Vinayaka erected by Peshwas at Pune; Tishuna Ganapati at Pune; Ganapati Murti like Hanuman of 1.8 m with mace and slim stomach near Pune; Swayambhu Ganesha installed over a Shiva Linga on the banks of River Krishna ar Sangli; and Siddhi Vinayaka Temples at at Prabha Devi and Jetha Kapad Market; besides at Borivilli, Dadar and Goregaon-*Odisha*; Maha Vinayakla Temples at Cuttak; Siddhi Vinayaka at Dashashvamedha Ghat on the banks of Vaitarani; Ganesh Cave at Khandagiri near Bhuvaneshwar and Ajanatha Ganesha in the Jagannadha Temple at Puri. *Tamil nadu*: There are as many as 120 Vinayaka Temples in Chennai alone, literally at every important street! Examples are Ishta Siddhi Vinayagar Temple, Sundar Vinayagar at Gandhi Nagar, Ananda Vinayagar at Madhya Kailash in Adyar; Poiyya Varada Vinayagar at Alwar pet, Prasanna Vinayagar Temple, Flower Basar, some 20 plus Vinayagar Temples in George Town alone, as many as 22 in Mylapore; Vara Shakti Vinayagar Temple at Nanganallur to name just a few. Eacchanari Vinayagar Temple with an ancient idol of Asia's biggest 6 ft height and 3 ft width is popular in Coimbatore. Pilliarpatti Karpaga Vinayagar of rock carved idol of 4th century antiquity is famed in Tirupatthur with its trunk hurled to the right side near Karaikudi. Kubhakonam is famed with Uchchipilliar, Sudha Ganesha, Adi Kampatta Vinayagar and other Temples; Tiruvalanchuzhi Koil etc. Madurai, besides at Mayapuram, Nagapattinam, Tiruchentankudi near Nalliyam with Vatapi Ganapati and so on. In *Uttara Pradesh*, Omkara Ganapati at Allhabad and Dhundi Raja at Varanasi are popular. Ashtabhuj Temple at Vadanagar on the banks of Hoogly is popular in *West Bengal*. In South East Asia Ganesha Temples are popular in Cambodia, Indonesia / Bali; Malyasia, Nepal, Singapore, Srilanka while in Australia especially Brisbane, Adelaide and Melborne; Canada mainly at Brapton, Scarborough, Toronto in Ontario and Edmonton in Alberta; Manikka Vinayakar Aalayam in Paris; in Germany at Haltingen; Hamm and Heilbronn. In South Africa, Vinayaka Temples are popular at Durban, Ladysmith and Mt. Edgecombe. In London Shri Ganapati Temple is popular at Effra Rd; while in USA at Anchorage in Alaska, Flushing and

Flushing Meadow in New York; Nashville in Tennessee; Phoenix in Arizona, Salt Lake City in Utah and Seattle in Washington.

Interesting references about Ganesha from Maha Puranas:

Relevant chapter of Matsya Purana as summarised states: As Devas faced a strange problem of recurring failures as and when they take up a fresh assignment whereas Demons seemed to be going ahead with novel operations, they approached Lord Siva and Devi Parvati to provide a solution. In reply Bhagavan Siva started thinking that among the Panchabhutas (Five Elements), there was an identifiable personification of a Deity among Prithvi (Earth), Varun (Water), Tejas (Fire) and Vayu (Wind God), but how was it that 'Akash' (Sky) did not have? By so thinking Lord Siva laughed loudly and Devi Parvati could guess by her Jnana Shakti (Power of Knowledge) what Bhagavan was laughing boisterously about. From that energetic hilarity with an open mouth emerged a replica of Siva who was strong, handsome and powerful whom Devi Parvati kept gazing at and got mesmerised about. Lord Siva got annoyed by the instant reaction of Devi Parvati, became jealous of the Super Boy and infact got angry and cursed him saying that he would possess of an elephant face, disproportionate belly and serpented Yagnopaveeth (Holy Thread). Siva was still angry and from His body hair roots kept on multiplying innumerable Vinayakas resembling the original and Lord Brahma flew over the Sky and as 'Akashvani' (a loud announcement from the Sky) declared that Devas should be grateful to Lord Siva to have provided the solution to the problem posed by them and that the various forms of Vinayak which got materialised would indeed ensure that as and when Devas (and human beings) initiated a task they should invoke the blessings of Vinayak foremost. As the announcement from Brahma was heard, Siva was by then cooled down and addressed Vinayaka endearingly: 'Vinayako Vighnakaro Gajasyo Ganesha naamaacha Bhavasya Putrah, Yethecha Sarvam thava yanthu Bhruthya Vinayakayaah Kruura drishtah Prachandah- Vucchushma daanaadi vuvruddhva dehaha Karyeshu siddhim prati paadayanthah, Bhavaamsva Deveshu thadha makeshu kaaryashu chanteshu Mahanubhavat-Agreshu Pujam Labhatenyatha cha Vinashayishyastatha kaarya siddhim' (Hey Putra! Vinayaka, Vighnakara, Gajavadana, Ganesha, Shankara Putra; all these cruel-eyed, harsh and angry Vinayaks will be your servants; those who are desirous of giving well earned materials as 'daanas' or alms be provided with Siddhis or boons. At Yajnas or various Propitious Tasks, all the devotees shall be provided the highest veneration, lest their tasks or worships be discounted'). As Devas performed 'Abhishek' (Sacred Bath) to Ganesha, they extolled him as follows: ' Namasthe Gajavaktraya Namasthe Gananayaka, Viyayaka Namastestu Namaste Chanda Vikrama-Namastestu tey Vighna kartha Namaste Sarpa Mekhala Namaste Rudra Vaktrotha Pralambajatharaasrita- Sarva Deva Namaskaaradavighnam kuru Sarvada ('We greet you Gajavadan, Gananayak, Prachanda Vikram, Vighna kartha, Naga bhushana, Rudra Mukha Utpanna, Lambodhara, Avighna Karak, Kalyan Pradata ; Sarva devas are greeting you, Kindly ensure that we enjoy Avighnam always). Since Ganapati was born on Chaturthi, this day of each month is worthy of His worship; but Bhadrpada Sukla Paksha Chaturdhi is the most auspicious day for a fulfilled worship with 'Shodasha Upacharas' or Sixteen Services of Avahana (Welcome), Asana (Seating), Padyam (water for washing feet), Arghya (water for sipping), Snana or body wash, Gandham (Sandal wood paste), Dhupam (Incense), Deepam (offering lights), Naivedyam (Food and Fruits) Tambula (betel leaves and nuts), Paneeya (coconut water), Vastram (clothing), Alankaram (Decoration), Abharanam (Jewellery), Stotram (Extolling) and 'Arati' (Camphor lighting).

Brahma Vaivarta Purana states in summary as follows: Maharshi Narayana recounted to Narada Muni the account of Ganesha commencing from his birth, the significant events that followed with impact on Universal welfare and his 'Mahatmya'. Maha Deva advised that Devi Parvati should perform a Sacred *Vrata Punyaka* in favour of Shri Hari which was like a 'Kalpa Vriksha' that fulfilled all kinds of desires including 'Uttama Putra Prapti'; this Vrata was the best like Ganga among Rivers, Shi Hari among Devas, Shiva among the Vaishnavites, Brahmana among Chatur Varnas, Pushkara among Tirthas, Tulasi dala among leaves, Parijata among flowers, Ekadashi among Punya Tithis, Ravi Vara among the a week days, Margasirsha among the Maasas, Vasanta among Ritus, Mother among the Gurus, wife among the closest relative, Mango among the fruits, Pati among Priyajanas, son among the Bandhujanas, Priya bhashana among sweets, Puranas among Kavyaas, and so on. Bhagavan Shiva appointed Sanat Kumara as the Purohit of the Vrata along several Rishis to acquire Puja materials and initiated the proceedings of the year-long vrata on Magha Shukla Trayodashi with the objective of securing an extraordinary male child with Vishnu's 'Amsha'. Brahma and many important Devas arrived to attend the Vrata, besides innumerable Maharshis and Rishis like Kapila, Kratu, Vasishtha, Pulaha, Atri, Gauthma, Bhrigu and arkandeya. Dharma Putra Nara-Narayanans, Dikpalakas, Devas, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Vidyadharas and so on. Bhagavan Vishnu and Devi Lakshmi too arrived, to initiate the Maha Vrata. Vishnu Deva addressed the illustrious gathering and blessed Devi Parvati for performing this unique Vrata which would grant her the benefit of thousand Rajasuya Yagnas and Golokanath Shri Krishna himself would be born as partial 'Amsha' to the Shiva-Parvati pair. He further declared that the boy to be born would have over thousands of epithets like *Ganesha* the house hold word in Trilokas and as the Lord of Ganas; *Vighna nighna* as he would bless that no obstacles would be faced by the Performers of any deed the Worlds over; *Lambodara* since his Bhaktas would pamper and offer him food specialities that he liked and his stomach would be thus elongated; *Gajaanana* since an elephant face would be fixed on his shoulders soon; *Ekadanta* as he lost one of his tusks in an encounter with Parashurama. Lord Vishnu ordained that if Ganesha were not worshipped no puja would be ever successful anywhere in the Trilokas. As the Vrata was executed perfectly as per the prescribed 'Vidhana', the illustrious guests were treated in high esteem, appropriately gifted and respectfully provided unique 'Bhojanas'. Then the question of Dakshina was raised by the Purohit Sanat Kumara for successfully conducting the Vrata; he said that either Devi Parvati would part with the Tapsya that she had been putting in all through her life or give away her husband Parama Shiva. Devi Parvati argued that if her Vrata were to be fruitful by giving away either her Tapasya or her husband, then the vrata was not worth it, except that she would beget a son and secure Dharma! It was like performing puja to a tree by ignoring the interest of the Bhumi! A husband would be more worthy to a Pativrata than obtaining hundred sons! As Parvati was arguing like this, Vishnu offered the solution of giving away Shiva as Dakshina and got him back in exchange of cows which were of Vishnu Swarupa. Evenwhile Parvati was not satisfied the solution, Sanat Kumara performed 'Purnaahuti' of the Vrata and Maharshis recited the Swasti Mantras and the Sacred Vrata was concluded. But Parvati was none too happy about the deal suggested by Vishnu. However she offered one lakh cows in exchange of her husband, especially since Vedas underlined that the price of a cow was that of a husband. The problem was still not settled as Sanat Kumara said as to what would do with one lakh cows in place of an invaluable Shiva! Devi Parvati was non-plussed since neither she was able to secure the Vrata Phala by getting a son of Krishna Amsha as assured by Vishnu, nor could even get the 'darshan' of Shri Krishna. Just as her mind was disturbed on these lines, there descended a big blaze from the high skies like thousand Suryas and all the dignitary Deities present looked up in awe and dread; Vishnu, Brahma, Mahadeva, Dharma, Saraswati, Savitri, Lakshmi, Himalaya and various Devas. Devi Parvati was overcome at the vision of an all encompassing radiance and broke into grateful tears that after all the Vrata that she performed was indeed triumphant and that the Mula Purusha had acknowledged its success! She was literally dazed and prayed to that huge illumination and Paramatma obliged her with his physical vision for a while eventually the vision disappeared. Sanat Kumara released Shiva, gifts were given away liberally to all the invitees, excellent food was served, music and dance were displayed and Shiva and Parvati knew no bounds of joy. Meanwhile a hungry Brahmana appeared on the scene and after

taking food counselled the couple about the Parama Tatwa of the Unparalleled, Ever lasting Truth and about the Most Compassionate Supreme Power and he too disappeared suddenly. Even as Parvati was utterly bewildered in that stage of heightened astonishment and shock with incidents happening so swiftly that she was in unbelievable dreams, an ‘Akash Vani’ was heard loudly and clearly that Shiva and Parvati should immediately reach their Mandir: The Celestial Voice said: ‘Jaganmaataa! Please be composed and see for your self your own son in your Chamber; he is indeed the Goloka Pati Paratpara Shri Krishna Him self! The boy is the sweet fruit of the Magnificent Tree of the Punyaka Vrata that you had so successfully accomplished! It is that Parama Teja which the highest yogis dream of visioning; it is that Adi Purusha whom Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are constantly absorbed in with Dhyana; and it is that Punya Rasi Swarupa whose very thought dispels all Vighnas of all Beings in Trilokas who is lying playfully in your bed chamber indeed!!’ As soon as the Akashavani Devi Saraswati made the celestial announcement, the Shiva-Parvati couple made a swift dash into their Mandir, embraced the child by quick turns and gave ‘Mangala Snaana’; even before the Snaana, all the Devatas, Dikpalakas, Gandharvas, Apsaras, Maharshis got collected and instantly Vishnu, Brahma, Dharma and their spouses were anxiously waiting for the Darshan of the Sacred Child. Vishnu blessed the child with ‘Deerghaayu’/ long life, Vignaan like that of Shiva, and ‘Sarva Puujata’/ Worship worthiness soon! Brahma said that the child’s fame and Shakti be known all over at once. Maha Deva blessed his son that like himself he should become a Daata (Philanthropist), Hari Bhakta, Buddhimaan, Vidyaavaan, Punyavaan, a Jitendriya and Shanta Murti. Dharma Deva blessed to be a Dharmika / the Form of Virtue, Sarvagjna/ the All- Knowing, Dayaalu / Kind hearted, and ‘Shri Hari Samaana’/ equivalent to Shri Hari. Devi blessed him to be a resident of each and every home and be an ever charming and Powerful source of Strength to every body. Saraswati blessed him Dharana and Smarana Shakti /Memory Power, Vivechana Shakti / Thinking Power and Kavita Shakti (Power of Imagination). Veda Maata Savitri blessed that he should become a Veda Gnaani. Vasundhara (Bhu Devi) blessed Ganesha to be an emblem of Kshama (Forbearance), Sharana daata (Provider of Refuge), Ratna Sampanna (The Fund of Opulence), Vighna Rahita and Vighna naashaka (The destroyer of Obstacles). Parvati blessed Vinayaka to excel in his father’s traits as Maha Yogi, Siddha, Siddha pradaata, Shubha karaka / Giver of Auspiciousness, Mritunjaya / the Conqueror of Death and ‘Atyanta Nipuna’ or the Embodiment of Skills. Those who read or hear about the ‘Ganesha Janma Vrittanta’ are blessed in several ways: the childless would get children, the poor gets rich, the wifeless gets wife, the diseased gets healthy, an unfortunate woman gets fortunate, a spoilt child gets disciplined, money lost gets recovered and an unhappy person finds himself extremely joyful.

Shani veekshana: Once Devi Parvati happened to meet Lord Shaneswara the Planet and the son of Surya Deva during the Festive days of Ganesha’s birth celebrations and asked him to bless the child. Shani Deva declined politely as his looks falling on a newly-born (or for that matter on any person) would not be auspicious to the child, since he was cursed by the daughter of Gandharva King called Chitraratha, to whom she was engaged as decided by his father. Unfortunately, he encountered the woman when she was about to have her bathing after menses; she cursed Shaneswara that whom soever he would see a person even by mistake would have his head cut! Parvati did not take what Shani Deva said seriously and prevailed on him to bless Ganesha. Although Shani Deva glanced the child through the corners of his eyes, Ganesha’s head dropped abruptly and Devi Parvati fainted at this sudden tragedy. The dropped head of the boy reached Goloka and Vishnu realised as to what had happened. He jumped on Garuda and flew towards North to locate any ‘Praani’ sleeping northward and found a bull elephant; its head was sliced with his Sudarshana Chakra and fixed the elephant head in place of the head of Ganesha and blessed the child foremost after the fixation of the elephant head and returned to Kailasa. After getting better from her faint, she found Vishnu who had completed the task of fixation of the elephant head. Meanwhile Maha Deva realised what all happened and so did Brahma, Dharma and Devatas. Vishnu blessed Ganesha and gifted his Kaustubha Mani; Brahma gifted a precious kireeta /headgear, Dharma a Ratnaabharana and all other Devatas followed suit. As Devi Parvati became extremely upset with Shaneswara, she cursed him to become ‘Angaheen’ but Devas requested Devi Parvati to reconsider her lightening the curse especially she took Shaneswara’s warning lightly, she reduced the severity of her

curse by revising it that Shaneswara might turn lame for ever. On his very first puja, with ‘shodashopachaaraas’ or the first puja, after Ganesha’s as executed by Vishnu Ganesha’s celestial form emerged and he blessed Ganesha that at each Puja, Vrata, or at the shubhaaramha of any Sacred Deed, prathama puja must be performed to Vighnanayaka himself ; then Vishnu garlanded him with a ‘Vanamaala’. Vishnu performed the ‘nama karana’ (name giving) in the presence of Devas, Maharshis and Munis; he gave eight names: *Vighnesha, Ganesha, Heramba, Gajaanana, Lambodara, Ekadanta, Shurpa-karna and Vinayaka*. Devi Parvati made Ganesha sit on a golden chair, gave ‘Padya’ with the holy waters of Ganga, Godavari etc.; offered Akshatas, flowers, chandana, Kasturi, Agar Dhupa, Deepa, and Naivedya with a variety of Bhakshya, Bhojya, Lehya, Choshya and Paniyas, besides a wide range of fruits. Tri Murtis and their spouses, Devas and Devis, Menaka and Himalaya had all chanted the Mantra: *OM Shreem Hreem Kleem Ganeswaraaya Brahma ruupaaya chaaravey, Sarvasiddhi pradashaaya Vighneshaaya Namoh namah/* Bhagavan Vishnu then recited the Sacred **Ganesha Kavacha** to Shanaischara as follows:

*Samsaara mohanasyasya Kavachasya Prajapatih, Rishirschhandascha Brihati Devo Lambodarah
Swayam/ Dharmaartha kaama moksheshu viniyogah Prakirtitah/
Sarveshaam kavachaanaam cha saarabhutamidam Muney, Om Gam Hum Shri Ganeshaya swaaha mey
paatu mastakam, Dwatrimshadaksharo Mantra mey sadaavatu/
Om Hreem Kleem Shreem Gamiti cha Satatam paatu lochanam,
Taalukam paatu Vighneshah Satatam Dharani taley/
Om Hreem Shreem Kleemiti cha satatam paatu naasikaam/
Om Gaim Gam Shoorpakarnaaya Swaaha paatwadharam mama,
Dantaani taalukaam jihwaam paatu mey shodashaaksharah/
Om Lam Shreem Lambodaraayeti swaaha gandam sadaavatu,
Om Kleem Hreem Vighnanaashaaya swaah karnam sadaavatu/
Om Shreem Gam Gajaananaayeti swaaha skandham sadaavatu,
Om Hreem Vinaayaketi swaaha pushtam sadaavatu/
Om Kleem Hreemiti Kankaalam paatu Vakshahsthalamscha gam,
Karow Paadow sadaa paatu Sarvaangam Vighna nighnakrit/
Praachyam Lambodaram paatu Aagneyyam Vighna naayakah,
Dakshiney paatu Vighnesho naairrutyam paatu Gajaanana/
Paschimey Parvati putro Vaayavyam Shankaraatmajah,
Krishnashyaamshaschottarey cha Pari purnatamasya cha/
Eshaanmekadantascha Herambah paatu chordhvatah,
Adho Ganaadhipaha paatu Sarva pujacha Sarvatah/
Swapney Jaagaaney chaiva paatu maam Yoginaam Guruh/
Iti tey kathitam Vatsa Sarvamantrougha Vighram,
Samsaara mohanam naama Kavacham Paramaadhbhutam,
Shri Krishnena puraa dattham Golokey Raasamandaley,
Vrindaavaney vinitaaya Mahyam Dinakarajam/
Mayaadattam cha tubhyam cha yasmai kasmai na daasyasi,
Param Varam Sarva Pujyam Sarva sankata taaranam/
Gurumabhyarchya vidhivat Kavacham Dhaarayetuh yah,
Kanthevaa dakshiney baahow sopi Vishnurnasamshayah/
Ashwamedha sahasraani Vaajapeya shataanicha,
Shatalaksha Prajastopi na Mantrah Siddhi daayakah/*

(This ‘Samsaara Mohana Kavacha’s Prajapati is Rishi, Brihati is the Chhanda, Swayam Lambodara Ganesha is Devata; Dharma, Artha, Kaama and Moksha is the ‘Viniyoga’; this entire Kavacha is of great essence: Let the Mantra *Om gam hum Shri Ganeshaya swaaha* safeguard my head; the Dwadashokshara Manta save my forehead; let *Om Hreem Kleem Shreem Gam* protect my netras / eyes; may Vighnesha

protect my ear lobes; let the Mantra *Om Hreem Shreem Kleem* protect my nose; let the Mantra *Goum Gam Shurpaanyaya Swaha* guard my lips and tongue; let the Mantra *Om Lam Shreem Lambodaraaya Swaaha* secure my cheeks; may the Mantra *Om Kleem Hreem Vighna naashaaya swaaha* keep my ears safe; let *Om Shreem Gam Gajaananaaya swaaha* secure my shoulders; may the Mantra *Om Hreem Vinaayakaaya swaaha* guard my rear part of my body; let *Om Kleem Hreem* protect my 'kamkaal'/ skeleton and the Mantra *Gam* save my chest. Let Vighna-nihanta provide safety to my hands, feet and the entire body! May Lambodara save my Eastern side, Vighnanayaka the Agneya side, Vighnesha the Southern side, Gajaanana the Nirruti side, Parvati putra the West, Shankaraatmaja the Vaayavya side, Shri Krishna the North, Ekadanta the Ishaana kona, Heramba the Urthwa bhaga / skyward, and Ganaadhipa the 'Adhobhaga' the underground. May the 'Yogi Guru' protect my while asleep or awake. This is how I explained the whole 'Samsara Mohana naama Kavacha' to you Suryanandana Shaneswara. This Kavacha was bestowed to me when I attended the 'raasa leela' convention at Goloka and this should be divulged to one and all. If a person wears the Kavacha after Guru Puja, it shall indeed safeguard him or her and bestows the boons of performing thousand Ashwamedha Yagnas and thousand Vaajapeya Yagnaas. The Siddhi of this Kavacha is attainable after hundred lakh japas of it.)

Kashyapa Munis curse to Shiva: Besides the Shani Vikshana, there was another reason for Ganesha's Elephant head. Once Surya Deva attacked two demon brothers Mali and Sumali and the ever-kind Maha Deva saved the brothers by throwing his Trishul on Surya and the latter became motionless with a serious injury on his chest and his chariot fell down too. The whole Universe came to stand still, the highly frightened Devas were stunned at the happening and the Universe was drowned in complete darkness. The highly grieved father of Surya Deva, the powerful Kashyapa Muni, was shattered and gave a curse to Maha Deva that just as his son's chest was broken open by the Trishul, Shiva's future son too would drop off as suddenly. The momentary anger of Shiva got cooled down and from his Yogic powers recovered Surya's normalcy. The demon brothers received their retribution at once as they became victims of dreaded diseases as their limbs were dried up and they lost their strength and shine. Brahma advised that since they annoyed Surya and contracted the incurable diseases, they had to worship Surya himself to please him. He taught the remorseful demons the method of worship to Surya, his Stuti and Kavacha and regained their might and sheen. But Kashyapa Muni's curse as irretrievable and Ganesha's head had to be replaced.

Parashu Rama's encounter with Ganesha and loss of the latter's half-tusk: The famed Emperor Kartaveeryarjuna visited the Ashram of Maharshi Jamadagni as he and his huge army was tired by the dusk; the kind Maharshi treated the Emperor and army with excellent food and 'Atithya' or hospitality becoming of their stature. The Emperor wondered as to how a Sage could afford such royal meals and generosity. The Muni explained that this was all due to the grace of Surabhi Kamadhenu. A jealous Kartaveerya desired that Surabhi was worthy of the custody of an Emperor but not a poor Muni and that Jamadagni would better give charity to him so that the huge army could be properly taken care of their food needs by Surabhi, whose security also would be provided from enemy Kings since the safety of all the Subjects of the Empire was after all his responsibility! Jamadagni replied that Maharshis would only accept charity but not give to Emperors, that Surabhi was awarded by Indra and that neither he nor Surabhi could be given away in charity without Indra's permission, and as regards Surabhi's safety, she had adequate might and mind to conquer any enemy. As mutual arguments got heated up, Kartaveerya decided to take away the Cow by force and Surabhi was prepared for the fight when Sage Kapila at the instance of Brahma Deva prevented the altercation. But, the hurt ego of Kartaveerya propelled him to revisit the Ashram of Jamadagni and killed him with the Shakti sword gifted to him by Dattatreya. Jamadagni's wife Renuka Devi became uncontrollable and prepared herself as a Pativrata to immolate herself. Parashu Rama, the son of Jamadagni and Renuka arrived at the Ashram and took a vow not only to kill Kartaveerya but the entire race of Kshatriyas and offer Tarpan of blood to the departed soul of his father. Brahma Deva advised Parashurama to visit Shivaloka and please him with his darshan. Shiva was indeed pleased when Parashurama gave details of his 'Pratigna' to avenge the death of his father and also root out the Kshatriya Vamsha as a whole. On hearing this Bhadra Kaali got furious but Parashu Rama

broke into tears by narrating the extremities that Kartaveerya in particular and all the contemporary Kshatriya Kings in general were assuming alarming proportions against the Brahmanas, Sages, Maharshis and the very concept of Virtue and justice. Shiva was convinced and awarded a magnificent Trailokya Vijaya Maha Kavacha, besides innumerable ‘Astras’ to Parashurama like Nagapasha, Pasuhpatastra, Brahmastra, Agneyastra, Narayanastra, Vayavyastra etc. After practising the Trailokya Vijaya Kavacha at Pushkara Tirtha and pleased Parama Shiva, Parashurama then started his battles with Kshatriya Kings like Matsya Raja, Suchandra, Kaalistavana, Sahasraaksha, and finally the invincible Kartaveeraarjuna who was a Symbol of Kshatriyas who were all fortified with Kavachas and blessings from several Devas and Devis, including Maha Deva himself. It was at that moment of Glory when Parashurama avenged his father’s killing and when the atrocities that thousands of Kshatriya Kings perpetrated on humanity and virtue were ended -recalling Shri Krishna’s human incarnation that Narayana would take birth as and when Dharma was in jeopardy-that Parashurama desired to meet Maha Deva and Ganesha objected to the meeting! As he entered Kailasha, Parashurama witnessed Nandeswara, Mahaa Kaal, Pingalaksha, Vishalaksha, Bana, Virupaaksha, Vikataasha, Bhaskaraksha, Kaala Bharava, Ruru Bhairava, Rudraganas, Vidyadharas, Bhuta Preta Piscachas, Yogendras, Yakshas, Kimpurushas and Kinnaras. As Parashurama passed through several layers of security, finally he landed at the Place where Mahtma Ganesha stopped him. The great veneration, he greeted Ganesha and requested him to allow into the Interior of Shiva. Parashuram utilised all his tactics of justification and persuasion but Ganesha became stiffer than ever. When all kinds of requests, entreaties and prayers to Ganesha failed, Parashurama lifted his ‘Parashu’ and Skanda Deva intervened and tried to keep him cool. But still when Parashurama tried to force entry; Ganesha lifted his trunk, looped the latter with his trunk and encircled the hapless Parashurama round and round to show him Sapta Dwipas, Sapta Parvataas, Sapta Sagaras, Bhuloka, Bhuvarloka, Swarloka, Janaloka, Tapoloka, Dhruvaloka, Gauriloka, and through him into one of the Oceans, lifted him again and showed him Vaikuntha and Goloka where he had the vision of Shri Krishna too. As this playful activity of Ganesha was in progress, the mighty Parashurama hit one of Ganesha’s tusks with the ‘Parashu’ (axe) that Maha Deva himself gifted and the tusk fell off as blood gushed out. As this accident took place, Kartikeya ran towards his parents with fear. The resting parents were shocked and Devi Parvati’s instant reaction was to kill Parashurama but being the Loka Mata restrained herself and addressed Parashurama as follows: You are born in Brahma Vamsha to one of the illustrious sons viz. Maharshi Jamadagni and also the son of Renuka of Lakshmi Amsha. You are one of the greatest devotees of Maha Deva. How did you do this to my son! Shiva Deva is your Guru since he taught the Trailokya Vijaya Kavacha and countless Astras from him. Is this the Guru Dakshina that you thought fit to give your Guru! You could have perhaps given a better Dakshina of cutting Ganesha’s head instead of breaking his tusk only! My son Ganesha no doubt has the Shakti of destroying crores of cunning animals like you but was only playful with you; yet you have wantonly hurt him by breaking his tusk not as an accident but with vengeance! You may know that he is of Paramatma Shri Krishna’s ‘Amsha’ and the Deity who receives the foremost puja all over the Universe!’ As she addressed Parashurama with great restraint and reasoning, he felt ashamed of himself, greeted his Guru Shiva in his own heart and prayed to his ‘Ishta Deva’ Shri Krishna. Devi Parvati visioned a Brahmana boy who met her earlier at the time of Ganesha’s birth; Maha Deva too had the vision of the boy like a quick flash and disappeared. Meantime, Vishnu appeared and analyzed the critical situation that had arisen out of the serious sin done by Parashurama since what he had was tantamount to Guru Ninda and downright betrayal of the faith that Shankara gave to his sishya! Vishnu further said that Parashurama was momentarily taken by folly as otherwise he too was like Ganesha or Kartikeya; as the Universal Deities with responsibilities like Shiva and Parvati might not impose personal angles into such happenings. Vishnu extolled Devi Parvati in extolling Ganesha as follows:

*Ganeshamekadantam cha Herambam Vighna nayakam,
Lambodaram Shurpakarnam Gaja Vaktram Guhaagrajam/
Naamaashtaratham cha Putrasya Shrunu Maata Haripriye,
Stotraanaam saarabhutam cha Sarva Vighna haram param/
Jnaanaartha vaachako gascha nascha nirvaana vaachakah,*

*Tayoreesham param Brahma Ganesham pranamaamyaham/
 Ekashabdah pradhaanartho dantascha Balavaachakah,
 Balam pradhaanam sarvasmaadeka dantam namaamyaham/
 Deenaartha vaachako hescha rambah palaka vaachakah,
 paripaalakam deenaanaam Herambah pranamaamyaham/
 Vipattha vaachako vighno Nayakah khandanaartha- kakah,
 Vipat khandana kaarakah namaami Vighnanaayakam/
 Vishnudatthaaischa naivedyairyasya Lambodaram puraa,
 Pitraa datthaaischa vividhairvandey Lambodaram cha tam/
 Surpakaarou cha yatkarnaam Vighnavaarana kaaranow,
 Sampadyow Jnaana rupow cha Surpakarnam namaamyaham/
 Vishnu prasaada pushpam cha yanmurdhni Munidattakam,
 yad Gajendra vaktra yuktam Gaja vaktram namaamyaham/
 Guhasyaagrey cha jaatoyamaavirbhuto Haraalaye,
 Vande Guhaagrajam Devam Sarvadevaagra pujitam/
 Yetanmaashtakam Durgey Namaabhih samyuktam param,
 Putrasya pasya Vedey cha tadaa kopam thathaa kuru/
 Yetanmaashtakam Stotram naanaartha samyutam shubham,
 Trisandhyam yah pathennithyam sa sukhee sarvato jayee/
 Tato Vighnaam palaayantey vaina teyaad yathoragah,
 Ganeswaraprasaadena mahajnaani bhaved dhruvam/
 Putraarthe labhatey putram Bhaaryaarthe vipulam striam,
 Maha jadam Kaveendrascha vidyaa vaancham bhaved dhruvam/*

(Mother Parvati! your son has eight names viz. Ganesha, Ekadanta, Heramba, Vighnanayaka, Lambodara, Shurpakarna, Gajavaktra, and Guhaagraja. Please listen to the meanings of these names; this Great Stotra is the essence of several Stotras and is the demolisher of all kinds of obstacles. In the word Ganesha, the letter ‘Ga’ is ‘Jnaanaartha vaachaka’ and ‘na’ is ‘nirvaana vaachaka’; the letters ‘Ga’, ‘na’ and ‘Isha’ together denote the ‘Isha’ or the Supreme of ‘Ganas’; thus one should say: I greet Ganesha. In the word Eka dantha, Eka is pradhaanarthak and Danta is Bala vaachaka; thus it is said: I salute Eka danta. In the word Heramba, ‘Hey’ is Deenaartha vaachaka and ‘ramba’ is paalana vaachaka and the total meaning would be the Administrator of Deenaas or the Needy who seek asylum. In the word ‘Vighna naayaka’, Vighna is vipatti vachaka and naayaka is khandanaarthak vachaka, meaning thereby Ganesha is the demolisher of hindrances. Lamba + Udara or Ganesha has an Extended Tummy as he is fond of consuming large quantities of Savouries and sweets; I adore ‘Lambodara’! My salutations to you, ‘Surpakarna’! with surpaakara/Vikrita/ strained + Karna or ears. ‘Gajavaktra’ or Elephant faced Deva, my prostrations to you! ‘Guhaagraja’ or the elder brother of Guha Deva / Skanda; I pay my reverences to you! Devi Parvati! Kindly listen to the Sacred Eight Names of Ganesha and bear with me before getting angry, if need be. Those who recite these names during the three Sandhya timings with sincerity and devotion would always be happy and victorious, from whom any kind of obstacles run away like snakes approaching Garuda. By the great grace of Ganeswara, those who have no children would be blessed with children, those who have no wives would have them too and those who have the least intelligence would flourish as Vidwans and Poet. Parashurama prostrated before Devi Parvati and begged her of pardon that he as her own child should, since she was the ‘Jagat Janani’/ the Mother of the Universe and said that the he had perpetrated a sin to his Guru and Gurupatni of which he was ashamed. He also performed Puja to Ganesha who too excused Parashurama for his indiscretion, for which Ganesha too claimed partial-responsibility.

Ganesha’s encounter with Devi Tulasi: As Devi Tulasi was seeking to perform Tapasya on the banks of Ganga, she saw Ganesha a young and handsome youth moving about enjoying the refreshing coolness of the River. Tulasi was readily attracted to him, drew him into conversation by amply indicating her fascination to him and finally proposed to him for marriage with him. Ganesha was taken aback and

spurred that she was like his own mother and what was more that he hated to be drawn into any marriage in life as the very concept of family was abhorring to him; he said that the institution of marriage was the terminator of Hari-Bhakti, the destroyer of Tapasya, the indestructible knot of 'Bhava Bandhana' or the inescapable rope of family ties, the demolisher of Tatwa Gyana, the closure of the Moksha dwara and the end of personal freedom. Ganesha therefore advised the Kanya to seek somebody else as her life partner and leave him free. Devi Tulasi got terribly annoyed with Ganesha's weird arguments and the way that he discarded her summarily. She cursed Ganesha that he would be married definitely despite his wishes and Ganesha gave a reverse curse that since she was insensitive of other's feelings, she would become a the wife of a demon (Shankhachooda) and subsequently become a Tree. On realising the backround of each other, they complemented each other as Tulasi was destined to the wife of Narayana and Ganesha was the famed son of Maha Deva and Parvati Devi. But Tulasi leaves should not be offered in Ganesh Puja, excepting just one leaf perhaps!

The above references of the Mahatmya of Vinayaka along with his spouses of Siddhi and Buddhi could indeed be multiplied!

Ganesha Vrata Puja Vidhana: The foremost prayer to Ganesha states : *Sumukhaschaika dantascha kapilo Gajakarnikah, Lambodarascha vikato Vighna Raajo Ganaadhipah, Dhumaketurganaadhyashah phala chandro Gajaanah, Vakra tundah Shurpakarno herambahskanda purvajah, Shodashaitaani naamaani yah patheh shrunuyaadapi vidyaarambhe vivaacheha praveshe nirgame tathaa, sangraame sarva kaaryeshu vighnastasya na jaayate, abheepsitaartham pujito yassurairapi, sarva vighnacchide tasai Shri Ganaadhipaye namah/* Then follow the Sankalpa, Kalasha puja, 'Shodaashopa-chaara' or the formal Services to Ganesha with Dhyaana-Aavaahana-Vaahanaadis and Shuddhodaka Snaana- Vastra-Yagnopaveeta-Gandha-Pushpa-Phala- Dhupa -Deepa- Avasara Naivedyas-Tambula - Neeraajana-Achamaniyas - Mantra pushpa- pradakshina namaskaarasa- are offered in the opening phase of the Puja stating : *Ganaadhipa prasaadam shirasaa grihnaami/* Thus one's own head is adorned with 'akshata-pushpas. Then commences the further phase of Phala Siddhi Vinaayaka Puja with Praana pratishtha: *Asya Shri Vara Siddhi Vinaayaka praana pratishthaapana mantrasya, Brahma Vishnu Maheshwaraa Rishah, Rikyajursaamaadharvaani chhandaamsi, praanah shaktih paraadevataa, hraum beejam, hreem shaktih, hruum keelakam, mama Varashiddhi Vinaayaka praana pratishthaa shiddhyarthe jape viniyogah/ Kara nyaasa:* *hraam angushthaabhyaam namah, hreem tarjanibhyaam namah, hruum madhyamaabhyaam namah, hraum anaamikaabhyaam namah, hraum kanishtikaabhyaam namah, hraham karatala prishthaabhaam namah; Anga nyaasa:* *hraam hridayaaya namah, hreem shirase swaaha, hroom shikhaayai vashat, hraum kavachaaya hum, hruum netratrayaaya voushat, hraham astraaya phut/ Bhurbhuvassuromiti digbandhah/ Dhyaanam: Raktaambhodisthapotollaasadaruna sarojaadhiroodhaa karaabjai, paasham kodandamikshhoodbhava maliganapyankusham pancha baanaan/ Bibhraanaa - srukkapaalam trinayana lasitaa peena vakshoruhaadhyaa devi baalaaka varnaa bhavatu sukha kree praana shaktih paraanah// Hraum hreem krom ya ra la va sha sah om/ Varasiddhi Vinaayaka! Praanah mama praanah Varasiddhi Vinaayaka jeevah mama jeevah vaangnahshrotra jihvaa ghraanaih ucchvaasa rupena bahiraagatya, asmin bimbe-asmin kalashe- asyaam pratimaayaam-sukhena charan tishtthantu swaaha/ Mantram: Asuneete punarasmaasu chakshuh punah praanamihanodhehi bhogam, jyokpashyema Suryamuccharantamanumate mridayaanasswasti, amritam vai praanaa amritamaapah praanaanena yathaa sthaanamupahvayate// Swamin sarva jagannaatha yaavat pujaavaanakam, taavatvam yathaa preetibhaavena bimbesmin sannidhim kuru/ Aavaahito bhava, sthaapito bhava, suprasannobhava, varado bhava, avakunthitobhava, sthiraasanam kuru, praseeda praseda praseeda// Mantrah: Aaa twaavahantu harayassacheta sashvaitairashaisah ketumadbhiih vaataajavairbalavadbhirnojavairaayaahi sheeghram mama havaaya sharvom/(while reciting this mantra, akshata-pushpas be kept on the head of the Idol and offer some naivedya like a fruit and gud to signify the 'praana pratishtha'.*

Pujaa praarambhah:

Bhava sanchita paapougha vidhvamsana vichakshanam, Vighnaandhakaara bhaswantam Vighnaraajamaham bhaje/ Shurpakantham Gaja vaktram chaturbhujam, Paashanaang -kushadharam

Devam dhyayetsiddhi Vinaayakam/ Uttamam Gananaathasya vratam sampatkaram shubham, Bhaktaabheeshtapradam tasmaad dhyayettam Vighna naayakam/ Dhyayet Gajaananam Devam taptakaanachana nannibham, Chaturbhujam mahaa kaayam sarvaabharana bhushitam/ Dhyayaami- Atraagaccha jagadvandya suraasuraarchiteshwara, Anaatha naatha sarvajna Gauri garbhaa samudbhava/Aavaahayaami- Mouktikaih Pushparaagaischa naanaaratnairviraajitam, Ratna simhaasanam chaaru preetyartham pratigruhyataam-Aasanam samarpayaami/ Gauriputra namastestu Shankara priya nandana, Grihaanaarghyam mayaadattam grihaanad - viradaanana: Paadyam samarpayaami/ Anaadha naadha sarvagjna geervaana varapujita, Grihaanaachamanam Deva tubhyam dattam mayaa prabho-Aachamaniyam samarpayaami- Dadhiksheera samaayuktam madhvaajyena samanvitam, Madhuparkam grihaanedam Gajavaktra namostute-Madhuparkam samarpayaami/ Snaanam panchaamritairdeva grihaana Gana naayaka, Anaadha naatha sarvagjna Girvaana gana pujita/ Panchaamrita snaanam samarpayaami/ [Milk-Aapyaayasva sametu te vishvatassomavrishniyam, bhavaa vaajasya sangadhe-Shri Vinaayakam snapayaami; Curd:Dadhikraavno akaarsham jishnorash -vasyavaaginah, Surabhino mukhaaratprana aayugumshitaarishat-Shri Vinaayakam dadhnaa snapa -yaami/Ghee:Shukramasi jyotirasi tejosi Devovassavitot punaatvat chidrena pavitrenavapoh Suryasya rashmibhih-Shri Vinaayakam aajyena snapayaami/ Honey:Madhu vaataa rutaayate madhu kharanti sindhavah, maadhveernassvantyoshadhih-Shri Vinaayakam Madhunaasnapayaami/ Sugar:Swaaduh pavaswa dishyaaya jinvane swaadurindraaya suhave tu naamne swaadurmitraaya Varunaaya Vaayave Brihaspataye madhumaagum adaabhyah- Shri Vinaayakam sharkaraa snapayaami/] Phalodakam: Yaah phalineeryaa aphalaa apushpaa yaascha pushpineeh Brihaspati prasutaastaa no munjavagumhasah- Shri Vinaayakam phalodkena snapayaami/ Shuddhodakam:Gangaadi sarva tirthebhya aahrutairamalair -jalaih, snaanam kurushva bhagannumaaputra namostute/ Shri Vinaayakam shuddhodaka snaanam kaarayaami/ Mantram: Aapohishthaa mayobhuvah, taana urje dathaatana, maheranaaya chakshase, yovasshivatamo rasah, tasya bhaajayate hanah, ushiteeriva maatarah, tasmaa arangamaamavah 'yasya kshayaaya jinvatha' aapo janayathaa cha nah// Vastram: Raktavastra dwayam chaaru Devayogyam cha mangalam, Shubhaprada grihaana twam Lambodara Haraatmaja/ Shri Vinaayakam Vastra yugmam samarpayaami// Mantram: Abhivastraa suvasanyaanyarshaabhidhenoh sudughaahpuyamaanaah, Abhichandraabhartaveno hiranyobhyashvaan rathino devasoma// Yagnoveetam: Raajatam Brahma sutram cha kaanchanamchottareeyakam, grihaana Deva sarvagjna bhaktaanaanishtadaayaka/ Shri Vinaayaka yagnopaveetam samarpayaami/ Mantram- Yagnopaveetan paramam pavitram prajaapateryatsahajam purastaat, Aayushyamagryam pratimuncha shubhram yagnopaveetam balamastu tejah// Gandham: Chandanaagaru karpura kasturi kunkumaanvitam, vilepanam Surashreshtha preetyartham pratigrihya taam/ Shri Vinaayakam gandhaan dhaarayaami/ Mantram: Gandhadwaaraam duraadharshaam nityapushtaam kareeshineem, Ishwareegum satyabhutaanaam twaamihopahvaye shriyam/ Akshataalankaaram: Akshataan dhavalaan divyaan shaaliyaamh tandulaan shubhaan, grihaana paramaanada Shambhu putra namostute/ Shri Vinaayakaaya Alankaranaartham akshataan samarpayaami/ Mantram: Ayanete paraayane durvaarohantu pushpineeh, hradaascha pundareekaani samudrasya grihaa ime/ Pushpa Puja: Sugandhaani cha pushpaani jaatikundamukhaani cha, Eka vimshati patraani sangrihaana namostute/ Shri Vinaayakam pushpaih pujayaami/ Athaanga pujawith flowers: Ganeshaaya namah paadou pujayaami-Ekadantaayanamah gulphou [ankle joints] pujayaami-Shurpa karnaayanamah jaanuni[knees]pujayaami-Vighna Rajaya namah janghe pujayaami[ankle]-Aakhuvaahanaaya namah uru [thigh] pujayaami-Herambaaya namah katim [loin]pujayaami- Lambodaraaya namah udaram [tummy] pujayaami-Gana naathaaya namah naabhim [umbilical chord] pujayaami- Ganeshaaya namah hridayam [heart] pujayaami-Sthula kanthaaya namah

kantham [throat] pujayaami-Skandaagrajaaya namah skandham[shoulders] pujayaami-Paasha hastaaya [hands] pujayaami-Gaja vaktraaya [face] vaktram pujayaami-Vighna hantre namah netrou [eyes] pujayaamu-Shurpakarnaaya namah karnou [ears] pujayaami-Phaalachandraaya namah lalaatam [forehead] pujayaami-Sarveswaraaya namah shirah[head] pujayaami- Vighnaraajaaya namah sarvaanyangaani [all the body parts] pujayaami/

Atha ekavimshati or 21 Patra Puja: Sumukhaaya namah Maachi patram pujayaami-Ganaadhipaaya namah Brihati patram pujayaami-Umaadhipaaya namah bilwa [bael or stone apple tree leaf considered as highly sacred for Shiva-Uma- Ganesha-Skanda Kumara pujas]-Gajaana -naaya namah durvaa yugmam [two pieced -grass]- Harasunave namah dutthura patram pujayaami-Lambodaraaya namah badari patram pujayaami-Gahaagrajaaya namah apaamaaragapatram pujayaami-Gaja karnaaya namah tulasi patram [exceptionally] pujayaami- Ekadantaaya namah chuta patram[mangoe leaf] pujayaami-Vikataaya namah karaveera patram pujayaami- Bhinna dantaaya namah Vishnukranta patram pujayaami- Vatave namah daadimi patram pujayaami-Sarveswaraaya namah Devadaaru patram pujayaami-Phaalachandraaya namah Maruvaka patram pujayaami-Herambaaya namah sindhuvaara patram pujayaami-Shurpakarnaayana mah jaati patram pujayaami-Suraagrajaaya namah ganaki patram pujayaami-Ibhavaktraaya namah shami patram pujayaami-Vinaayakaaya namah ashvattha patram pujayaami-Surasevitaaya namah Arjuna patram pujayaami-Kapilaaya namah arka patram pujayaami-Ganeshwaraaya namah eka vimshati patraani pujayaami/

The Sahasra naama/ Ashtottara Pujaam samarpayaami/

Dhupam: Dasaangulam guggulopetam sugandhi sumanoharam, Umaasuta namastubhyam grihaana varadi bhava/ Shri Varasiddhi Vinayaka namah dhupamaaghraapayaami; Mantram: Dhurasi dhurva dhurvantam dhurvatom yosmaan dhurvati tam dhurvayam vayam dhurvaamah/ Deepam: Saajyam trivarti samyuktam vahninaadyotitam mayaa, Grihaanamangalam Eshaputra namostute/ Shri Vara Siddhi Vinaayakam deepam darshayaami;Mantram:Uddipasya swajaatavedopagham nirrutam mama, Pashugascha mahyamaahava jeenanancha disho dasha, maanohigumsih jaatavedo gaamashvam purusham jagat, abhibhradaghna aag hi shriyaa maa paripaalaya/

Naivedyam: Sugandhaan sukraamschiva modakaan ghritapaachitaan, naivedyam grihyataam devachanamudgaih prakalpitaan// Bhakshyam bhojyamscha lehyamcha choshyam paaniyamevacha, Idam grihaana naivedyam maaa dattam Vinaayaka/ Shri Varasiddhi Vinaayaka namah Maha Naivedyam samarpayaami/ Mantram: Deva savitah prasuva satyamtvartena parishimchaami Amritamastu Amritopastaranamasi swah, Udaanaaya swaah, samaanaaya swaah, Brahmane swah/ Madhye paaneeyam samarpayaami, hastou prakshaalanam samarpayaami, paada prakshaalanam samarpayaami, shuddhaachaneeyam samarpayaami// Taamboolam: Poogiphalasamaayuktam naagavallidalairyutam, karpura churna samyuktam taamboolam pratiguhyataam/ Shri Vara Siddhi Vinaayaka Swamine taamboolam samarpayaami/ Suvarna Pushpam: Sadaanandada Vighnesha pushkalaani dhannaanicha, Bhumyaam sthitaani Bhagavan sweekurushva Vinaayaka/ Shri Varasiddhi Vinaayaka namah suvarna pushpam samarpayaami/ Neeraajanam: Ghritavarti sahasraischa karpurashakalaistathaa, neeraajanam mayaa dattam grihaana varado bhava/ Shri Varasiddhi Vinaayaka namah Neeraajanam darshayaami-neeraajanaanantaram aachamaniam samarpayaami/ Mantram: Hiranya paatram madhoh purnam dathaatimadhavyosaaneeti, ekadhaa brahmana upaharati ekadhaiva yajamaana aayustejo dadhaati/ Durvaa yugma puja: Ganaadhipaaya namah durvaayugmam pujayaami-Umaaputraaya namah---, Aakhuvaahanaayananaah--,Vinayakaaya namah---, Isha putraayanamah---, Sarvasiddhipradaayanamah-- Ekadantaaya namah--, Ibhavaktraaya namah---,Mooshaka vaahanaaya namah--, Kumara gurave namah/ Mantra Pushpam: Yopaam pushpam veda pushpavaan prajaavaan pashumaam bhavati- Chandra maa vaa apaam pushpam--Agnirvaa ---/

Ganaadhipa namastestu Umaaputraagha naashana, Vinaayakeshatanay sarva siddhi pradaayaka/ Ekadantaika vadana tathaa Mooshaka Vaahana, Kumaara gurave tubhyamarpayaami sumaanjalim/ Pradakshinnopachaaraan: Yaani kaani cha paapaani janmaantara kritaayacha, taani taani pranashyanti pradakshina pade pade/ Paapoham paapa karmaaham paapaatmaa paapasambhavah, traahi maam kripayaa Deva sharanaagata vatsala/ Anyathaa sharanam naasti twameva sharanam mama, tasmaad

kaarunya bhaavena raksha raksha janaardana/ Pradikshanam karishyaami satatam modaka priya, Namaster Vighna raajaaya namase vighna naashana/ Shri Vara Siddhi Vinaayakaaya namah Atma pradakshina namaskaaraan samarpayaami; Chatram aacchhaadayaami, chaamaram veejayaami, nrityam darshayaami, geetam shraavayaami, aandalikaamaarohayaami, Ashvaanaarohayaami, Gajaa naarohayaami, samasta Raajopachaara shaktyupachaara bhaktyupachaaramantropachaara devopachaara sarvopachaara pujaam samarpayaami/ Punararghyam: Arghyam grihaana Heramba sarva bhadra pradaayaka, Gandha pushpair yuktam paatrastham paapa naashana/ Praarthana: Yam Brahma vedaanta vido vadantiparam Purusham tathaanye, Visyodgatehkaaranameeshwaram vaa tasmai namo Vighna vinaayakaaya/ Namastubhyam Ganesaana namaste vighna naashana, Ipsitam me varam dehi paratra cha paraam gatim/ Vinaayaka namastubhyam satatam modaka priya, Nirvighnam kuru me deva paratra cha paraam gatim, Nirvighnam kurume Deva sarva kaaryeshu sarvadaa// Vaayana daanam: Respective Mantas of the Provider and Reciever : 1) Ganeshah pratigrihaat Ganesho vai dadaati cha, Ganeshastarakobhyaam Ganeshaya namah/ 2) Devasya twaa savituh prasave asvinoh baahubhyaam pushno hastaabhyaamaadade/

Vinaayaka Vrata Katha is essentially heard or read with attention and devotion besides being self adorned or blessed by elders on head with akshatas and flowers to ward off the curse of chandra darshana as Lord Krishna himself was a victim of seeing the reflection of Moon in the milk yielded inside the vessel on Ganesha Chaturthi; Krishna was subsequently troubled and doubted of robbing ‘Shamankaka Mani’ of Satraajit which yielded tons of gold daily!

Vinayaka vrata concludes thus.

Rishi Panchami: This Vrata is observed on Bhadrapada Shukla Panchami. Besides performing worship to Rishis, the Karta should consume the leaves of vegetable plants grown on untilled land. On Bhadrapada Shukla *Shashthi*, Surya Puja be performed: *Snaanam Bhaskara pujanam, Praashnam Panchagavyasyacha aaswamedha Phalaadikam* / (After Snaana and Surya Puja, Pancha Gavya praashana should be take in to qualify the Phala or the Punya of executing Ashwamegha Yagna). On this very day of Surya Shashti, darshan of Kumara Swami would bestow relief for Brahma Hatya too. On *Shuklaashtami* Durvashtami Vrata is observed. This Vrata is performed by women aiming Jyeshtha Devi with primacy on Ashtami and on Jyeshtha but not in Jyeshtha- Mula Nakshatra yoga and when Surya is not in Kanya Rashi. Persons in Dakshina Bharata normally observe the Vrata with importance on Jyeshtha Nakshatra. This is a three day Vrata with Aaaahana on Anuradha, Puja on Jyeshtha and Moola for Visarjana.

Vishnu Parivartanotsava: is implemented on Bhadrapada Shukla *Ekaadashi or Dwaadashi*. Parivartana means inter-change of phases; in Kaalamaan, the Supreme Energy called Vishnu changes the course of Kaala’s Yuga-Manvantara- Samvatsara-Raashi-Maasa- Tithi-Nakshatras. The Vishnu Parivartana is executed every year’s Bhadrapada Shukla Paksha’s Ekaadashi or Dwaadashi and keeping in view the ‘Vachana’ (Statement) viz. *Shrutechcha madhye parivartameti*, the Shravana Nakshatra’s coincidence of either of the three parts of Ekaadashi or Dwaadashi would be the appropriate time for the Vishnu Parivartanotsava. At the Sandhya Kaala of the Dwaadashi, Vishnu Puja is performed reciting: *Vaasudeva Jagannaatha praapteyam Dwaadashi tava, Paarshvena parivartasya sukham swapihi Madhava!* (Vaasudva! Jagannaatha! Your Dwaadashi has arrived. Now you may turn around / or perform the Parivartana and resort back to your Yoga Nidra comfortably!)

Onam in Kerala: This ten day long festival ending Bhadrapada Shukla Ekaadashi coincides with Malayalam New Year ‘chingam’ heralding the harvest season, celebrating with back water boat races, ‘pookkalam’, traditional group dances and singing and adorning dresses of Maha Bali, a Vishnu Bhakta. Vamana Purana is quoted: As King Bali of Daityas took over the reins of Trilokas from Virochana the

son of Prahlada and the great Grand father of Hiranyakashipu, Devas lost power in Swarga and the mighty Mayasura and Shambara flew the Flag of Vijayanti too. Yet, the Daityas were steeply engaged in Dharmik deeds, and they were guarding the Sky providing stability all-around: *Abhaavey Sarva paapaanaam Dharma bhavey sadothitey, Chatush paadey sthitey dharmey hyadharmey paada vighrahey, Prajaapaalanayukteshu bhraajamaa -neshu Raajasu, Sarva dharma samprayukteshu tadhaashrama nivaasishu/* (There was complete absence of sinners in the Kingdom and Dharma was predominate; Dharma was established on four feet except on one; all the Deputised Kings were performing Administration ideally and all the Four Varnaas of population were observing Dharma perfectly) It was at that opportune time that the Coronation of Bali Chakravarti took place amidst the chanting of Victory by all concerned. Devi Lakshmi appeared and congratulated at Bali's Elevation to Supremacy along with her 'Amsaas' like the Devis named Hreem, Kirti, Dyuti, Prabha, Dhruvi, Kshama, Bhuti, Ruddhi, Divya, Mahamati, Shruti, Smriti, Ida, Shanti, Pushti, Kriya, and also select Apsaraas. Meanwhile, Devataas were disillusioned at their discomfiture and the climax of Bali's high status especially because of Daitya King's unchallenged success owing to his Dharma Paalana and the lack of any record of Evil deeds by Daityas; they were also denied their shares of Yahna Phalaas. They approached their mother Aditi for solace and advice and in turn she reached her husband Kashyapa Muni. Kashyapa found the situation was delicate and even Brahma might find it difficult as strictly speaking the record of Daityas was above board! Brahma advised that the only way out would be that Tapasya and Aditi would perform strict Tapasya to Vishnu Deva and seek the most difficult boon of Vishnu taking birth as their son! The Couple reached the Banks of Kshira Samudra at a holy spot called Amrita, performed austere Tapasya and 'Kaamada Vrata' for thousand years by controlling their Indriyas, observing silence and chanting Veda Yukta Sukta called Parama Stuti. As both Kashyapa Muni and Devi Aditi made their Soul-full Prayers, the impossible Darshan of Bhagavan Vishnu appeared and granted the wish that he would indeed assume His Incarnation with a view to reinstate Indra and Devas to Swarga and Trilokas. As Aditi got conceived and Bhagavan Vishnu agreed to do so, Prithvi got tremored, Mountains were shaken, and Sapta Samudras were agitated with wobbles of waves and there was strangeness all-around! Bali Chakravarti felt that there were considerable changes in the Nature as mountians were trembling and high Sea tides were on new high and more than that the Daityas were experiencing paleness and loss of their normal instincts of courage, assertiveness and egoism. Bali approached his grand father Prahlada and asked for the causes of these omens and premonitions. Parama Bhakta Prahlada deeply meditated Bhagavan Srihari and visualised the latter in the Garbha of Devi Aditi and had fleeting scenes of Ashtaadasha Vasus, Ekadasha Rudras, Dwadasha Adityas, two Ashvini Kumaraas, Forty Nine Maruts, Sandhyas, Vishwa Devas, Gandharvas, Nagas, Rakshasaas, his Son Virochana, Bali Chakravarti, Jambha, Kujumbha, Narakasura, Baana, and several other Daityas, Pancha Bhutas, Seas, Mountains, Rivers, Satpa Dwipaas, Brahma, Shiva, Nava Grahas, Daksha and other Prajapatis, Sapta Rishis and so on. Prahlada gave a heavy exhalation and conveyed the datails what all he visioned and said that the Greatest Narayana in would soon be descending on Earth in his incarnation as Vamana Deva! Bali could not comprehend the full import of what Prahlada underlined and expressed his surprise whether Vamana Deva could be ever comparable with the Senior most Rakshasaas like Viprachitta, Shibi, Sankha, Ayamshanku, Hayashira, Ashwa Shira, Bhanghakaara, Maha Hanu, Kakkuraaksha and Durjaya. As Bali talked in such thoughtless comparisons with Paramatma and some examples of Danavas however mighty they might be, Parhlada got highly infuriated and shouted at Bali that there could not be bigger immature fool and hollow minded; he said that Bali's evil frame of mind would certainly lead the entire Vamsha of Daityas to doom. Chakravarti Bali was distraught and distressed at this most unforunate happening of Prahlada's curse and was ashamed of himself for his rash, thoughtless and sinful belittling of Bhagavan's uniqueness which had understandably stirred up the anger of a legendary Bhakta of the unparalleled stature of Prahlada. He confessed that there was a total loss of his mental faculties when he conversed at that time due to superciliousness and over-enthusiasm of having defeated Devas which propelled his traits of arrogance; indeed his remarks had correclry hurt his grand father who was fully justified in giving him an irreparable curse but far worse than the curse, his behaviour which hurt the elders, especially of Prahlada, who built a

reputation of the family as Narayana Bhaktas, was sullied in the memory of future generations. This indeed was humiliating to the Vamsha that he was squarely responsible! He begged of Prahlaadaa's forgiveness which he did not deserve and would ignite his repentance for ever day in and day out. Prahlaada appreciated Bali's remorse and said that he was incensed up at that moment and the anger led him to obsession; he also lost his mental equilibrium that caused the pronouncement of the curse, for which he felt extremely sad. But a lesson was provided to Bali and completely converted him as a Parama Bhakta of Narayana. Mean while, Devi Aditi delivered a lovely male child in short stature when Nature assumed a blossomed freshness that was rare, the Gagana Mandala was clean without any trace of pollution and Vayu was pleasantly soft and nicely odoured quite unfamiliar in the human world. The proud parents invited Brahma to perform Jaatakarma and Namakarana as **Vamana Murti**. As Vamana Deva arrived at the Yagna shaala, Bali welcomed him, offered 'Arghya', 'Aasana', Puja and offered him limitless gold, jewellery, elephants, horses, cows, women, clothes, bunches of villages or townships or whatever would be his wish! Vamana Deva replied smilingly: ***Mamagnisharanaarthaaya dehi Rajan Padatrayam, Suvarnagraamaratnaadi tadarthibhyah pradeeyataam/*** (Raja! Please provide to me three feet of land to enable me to set up an Agni- Shaala). Bali said that after all three feet would be nothing as he could ask for a lakh of feet which could be given away, but Vamana Deva replied that he was indeed satisfied with that much of Bhumi and if the King were to offer more he might as well provide to the other needy! Bali Chakravarti readily agreed not understanding the implication and as the deed of Daana was being executed and Vamana Deva extended his hand to the King and expanded his Vamana Rupa gradually immediately (Instantly, Vamana Murti displayed his Virat Swarupa: Chandra and Surya were his two Eyes, Shy was his head, Prithvi his feet, Pishachaas were his foot-fingers, Gruhyakaas were his hand fingers, Vishwa Deva Ganaas were in his jaanus /knees, Sadhyas were his janghaas, Yakshaas were his nails, Apsarsaas were his palm lines, Nakshatras were his Eye sight, Surya kiranas were his hairs, Stars were his body hairs, Maharshiganaas were in the hair roots, Vidishas were his hands, Dishaas were his ears, Ashwini Kumars were his faculty of hearing, Vayu was his nose, Chandra Deva was his joking faculty, Dharma Deva was his thinking capacity, Satya was his voice and Saraswati was his tongue, Deva Mata Aditi was his neck, Vidya was his valiyaas or long poles; Pushas were his eye brows, Swarga dwar was his anus, Vaishvanara his face, Prajapati his vrushanaas, Param Brahma was his heart, Kashyapa Muni was his Pumstwa, Vasu Devata was his back, Marutganaas were his Sandhis, Rudra was his Vakshasthala, Mahaarnavaa was his Dhairya, Gangharvas were in his stomach; Lakshmi, Medha, Dhruvi, Kaanti and all Vidyaas were in his 'Kati Pradesh'; the luster and radiance in the total Universe as also the Tapo teja or the power of meditation was the reflection of the magnificence of Natayana; Vedas and Scriptions and the huge Yagnaas and the Sacred Deeds of the Virtuous like Maharshis and Brahmanas were all inside in his 'kukshi' or belly. On viewing the Paramatma's 'Virat Swarupa', the so called 'Mahaasuraas' referred to earlier in ignorance by Chakravarti Bali before Prahlada's curse to him got burnt off like flies before a gigantic out break of Fire! Having thus occupied the Universe in totality including the sub-terrain Sapta Paatalaas, Vamana Deva stated that since Bali took the water in his hand and donated the THREE FEET of Land, and blessed him to be the King of the Sapta Paatalaas and granted him long life till the end of Manvantara of the on-going Vaisawata Manu. He also blessed Bali that all the 'Homa Phalas' at the time of Shraddhas to be performed even by Brahmanas, besides incomplete and defective Vratas, Agni Kaaryaas without ghee, and Kusha grass roots as also the daanas without detachment would belong to Bali and his followers. '*Vamana Jayanti*': 'Vaamanaavataara' occurs on Bhadrpada Shukla Dwadashi's Shravana Nakshatra in the 'Madhyaahna'. Thus whenever Dwadashi extends to Madyahna coinciding with Shravana yoga is to be reckoned as the Vamanavatara. If Shravana Yoga is on both the Tithis of Ekadashi and Dwadashi then Ekadashi be finalised as the Avatara Jayanti. At the Madhyaana time the Karta should purify with 'Nadi Sangama Snaana' and offer Arghya to a Vamanamurti with a Golden Vessel and initiate the Puja with the Prayer: *Deveshwaraaya Devaaya Deva sambhuti kaariney, Prabhavey Sarva Devaanaam Vamanaaya namo namah/* Then Arghya is offered with the Mantra: *Namastey Padma -naabhaaya Namastey Jala shaayiney, Tubhyamarghyam prayacchaami Bala Vamana Rupiney/ Namasshaaranga dhanurbaana*

paanaye Vamanaayacha, Yagnabhukphala daatrey cha Vamnanaaya namo namah/ On the following day, the Karta and family members should give away the Daana of the Suvarna Vamana with the Daana Mantra : *Vamanah pratigruhnaati Vamanohamdadaami tey, Vamanam sarvatobhadram Dwijaaya pratipaadaye/* Thus the Deva Puja is concluded on the Dwadashi night itself, but if not possible then *Dadhi Vrata* is dedicated to Bhagavan Vishnu by performing Dadhi Daana and accomplish Dugdha Vrata; in the Payo Vrata, ‘Anna Paayasa’ is offered too. But milk of those cows which yielded a calf within ten days of delivery is prohibited for use in this Vrata.

Ananta Vrata: This Vrata is performed on Bhadrapada Shukla *Chaturdashi* when Chaturdashi should extend atleast by three Muhurtaas of the Morning or atleast by two Muhurtaas. Otherwise, the Vrata Kaala should be determined as the previous day; if the Tithi is on both the days, then the suitable time for the Vrata is stated to be on the previous day; but the Tithi must be at the Madhyahna Kaala either way. The Vrata Vidhana as explained in Koustubha grandhaas requires that ‘Torana’/ String of silk of twenty four grandhis / knots on the wrist for the Puja as per the Puja Vidhana. The Procedure requires Homaas numbering hundred eight and by reciting as many Vaasudeva Dwaadashaakshara Mantra. Any shortcoming in the Procedure is recoverable by ‘Krucchaadi Prayaschitta Vrata’.

Matsya Purana however states differently: This Vrata is observed on Shukla Triteeya of Bhadrapada, Vaishakha, Pousha, or Margasirsha months by either male or female after taking bath with yellow mustard seeds and wearing ‘tilakam’ on the forehead by a mix of ‘chandana’, curd, ‘gomutra’, cowdung, ‘gorochana’ and mushta (cyprus rotundus) which is a favourite of Devi Parvati. The color of ‘Vastras’ may be yellow of men, red for women, unmarried girls white and widows ochre or terracota / Indian Red colour. The Idol of Devi should be bathed first in Panchagavya (cow’s milk, curd, urine, dung and ghee) and later in milk, honey, chandana and flower mix. Lalitha Devi is fond of white flowers, variety of fruits, milk and curd. Puja is to be performed as follows: *Varadaai Namah (paadow pujayami/ feet), Shria namah (gulfow/ ankles), Parvathainamah (Janghow lower sheen) Ahokayai namah (Jaanuh or knees) Mangala kaarinyai naah (Uru or hips), Vamadevyai namah (kati or waist), Padmodaraayai namah (udara or stomach), Kaamaashriyai namah (vakshasthala), Sowbhaagyadaayinyai namah (both hands), Shriyai namah (hands, stomach and face), Darpana vaasinyai namah (mirror-like or teeth), Smaradaayai namah (smile), Gouryai namah (nasika or nose), Utpalaayai namah (netra or eyes), tushtyai namah (lalaata or forehead), Katyaayanyai namah (head and hair); thereafter, touch the feet of the idol by saying: Dhishtyai namah, Kaanthyai namah, Shriyai namah, Rambhaayai namah, Lalitaayia namah, and Vaasudevyai namah/* After the puja on the above lines, ‘Archana’ with ‘Kunkuma’ with lotus leaves spread over on the platform twelve times be performed to the Idol; then set up Pratimas of Gauri and Aparna on the Eastern side, Devi Bhavani on the Southern side, Nirruti side Rudrani, Western side Sowmya Rupa Madanavasini, Vayavya side Devi Paatala, and on the Northern side Devi Uma. In the Madhya bhaaga or the middle area, the idols of Lakshmi, Swaha, Swadha, Tushti, Mangala, Kumuda and Sati should be set up. Lord Rudra is to be set up in the Central portion of the Lotus and on the Lotus ear side, Lalita Devi is to be established. Then, songs and musical instruments may be organised; white ‘Akshatas’ and plain water be used to sprinkled on the Deity, red clothing be offered, red flower garland be worn, and hair-parting on her head be coloured with ‘sindoor’; Devi is fond of Sindoor and Kunkuma always. Guru / Acharya puja is also done later as a finale.

In Bhadrapada month, the puja is done with Neel Kamal (Blue Lotus), in Aswin Month with Bandhujiva flowers, in Kartik with Shatapatrak Kamal, in Margashira month with Jaati Malati, in Pushya Month with yellow Kurantak/Katasaraia flowers, in Maagha Month with Kunda and kumkuma, in Phalgun with Sinduwara or Malati, in Chaitra with Mallika and Ashoka, in Vaishakha with Gandhapatala, in Jyeshtha with Lotus and Mandara, Ashadha with Champa and in Shravana with Kadamba and Malati. In the months of Bhadrapada through Ashwin, the material to be used are Gomutra, Gobar, milk, curd, Ghee, Kushodak, Bilwa patra, Mandara flower, Goghrundeka, Panchagavya, and Bel patra; and in other months Naivadya is as per standards prescribed. At the end, there must be Dampati Puja or reverence to husband-

wife pair by way of Vastra, flower garland, and chandana-Tambula. Ananta Triteeya Vrata shall indeed yield long life, ideal progeny, excellent health, prosperity, contentment and 'Shilaloka prapti' at the end of life.

Proshthapaadi Shraddha: On *Bhadrapada Purnima day*, Proshthapadi Shraaddha is performed addressed to Pitru Devas in Vasu-Rudra-Aditya Swarupaas of three generations with their wives ie. 'Saptneekaas'. As this Shraaddha is of Paarvana type, Pinda daanas are required to be done recalling 'Pururava- Aardra Devaas too. Some believers invoke Vishwadevaas too and perform 'Naandi Shraaddha'.

Mahalaya Pakshas: Shraaddhaas are required to be observed in the Mahaalaya Paksha starting from *Bhadrapada Krishna Pratipada till Amavasya. Shraaddham Kanyaagatey Baanou yo na kuryaad Grihaashrami, Dhanam Putraa kruta tasya Pithru kopaagni peedanaat/ Yavaccha Kanyaa Tulaayoti kramaadastey Divaakarrah, Shunyam Pretaapuram taavad yaavad vrischika darshanam/* (If a Grihasti does not perform Mahalaya Shraaddha, how could he deserve prosperity, propitiousness and excellent progeny! He would surely be subject to the severe curses of Pitru Devataas as their Souls are not liberated when Surya moves from Virgo and Libra to Scorpio. In turn they should most certainly rebuff their golden opportunities in their lives). Those who have the ability execute the Ceremonies are indeed blessed. Those who are unable to do so might perform from Panchami or Shashthi or Ashtami or Dashami or Ekadashi till Amavasya. If even this is not possible, then atleast Mahalaya Amavasya might be the last resort but those must be 'Sakrun -Mahalayas' or with pinda pradaana. In case only Mahaalya Amavasya Shraaddha is performed, then the avoidable Tithis are Pratipada, Shashthi, Ekaadashi, **Chaturdashi** and Shukravaara besides the tenth and nineteenth Tithi from one's own Janma Nakshatra as also Rohini, Magha and Revati. Some believe that Trayodashi, Saptami and Sunday/ Tuesday too are avoidable. However, if the Tithis of Father's or Mother's Death anniversary falls on any of the Mahalaya Paksha Tithis there should not be any objection to perform fulfilled Shraddha. Another important aspect of Mahalaya Paksha Shraaddha is expected to be performed on the same lines as the Abdika Shraaddha as explicit in the Stanza: *Mahaalaye Gayaa shraaddhey Maataa Pitromriteyhani, Krutwedaahopi kutveetapinda daanam yathaavidhi/* (Mahaalaya Shraaddha is just like that which is performed as 'pratyaabdika' or an Annual Ceremony). The Out line of the Deva Sankalpa Mantra- which needs to be amended as applicable to individual cases – is as follows: *Pitru Pitaamaha Prapitaamahaanaam Maatru tatsapatni pitaamahi tatsa patni prapitaamahi tat sapatni naamastatsaaptnya maatuditivaa Maataamaha Maatuh Pitaamaha Maatuh prapitaa-mahaanaam sapatneekaanaam yathaa naama gotraanaam Vasu Rudraaditya rupaanaam paarvana vidhinaa Patnyaaha Putrasya Kanyaayaah Pitruvyasya Maatulasya Bhraatuh Pitruashvasuh Maatrushvasuraatma Bhaginyaah Pitruvy putrasya jaamaturbhaaginey yasya swasurasya swasrwaah Achaaryasya Upaadhyayasya Guroh Sakhyussishyasyai tessaam yathaa naama gotraanaam purusha vishaye sapatneekaanaam streevishaye sabhatrika sapatyaanaam Ekokodishta vidhinaa Mahalayaapara paksha shraaddham vaa Sa Daivam sadyah karishey/* In case of those who are alive, those designations be deleted from the Sankalpa. However the expression of 'Saptneekam' is used in respect of women in case of grand mothers etc are alive but if the husband is alive the expression of 'Sabhateekam' is not essential. Further, *Mahaalaye Gayaashraddhey Vruddhou chaanvashtakaasu cha, Nava Daivata Manreshtam sesham shaatpourusham viduh/ Anvashtakaasu Vruddhoucha Prati Samvatsarey tathaa , Mahaalaye Gayaayaamcha Sapindikaramaatpuraa, Maatushraaddham Pruthakkaryamanyatra Patinaa saha/* (In respect of Mahalaya Shraaddha, Gaya Shraddha, Vriddhi Shraaddha / Nandi Shraaddha and Anvashtaka Shraaddha there are Nine Pitru Devataas and for the rest, there should be 'Shaddevataas' or Six only . In case of the above mentioned Shraaddhaas and the Regular Abdikaas, Sapindikarana for Maatru Shraaddha is accounted seperately. For other Shraddhaas there should be three Paarvanaas as mother's Shraaddha is already included among all the three generations of father-grand father and great grand father. Some opine that there should be four Paarvanaas as the fourth one represents the wives of the three generations in which case, Pitru Devataas are counted as twelve. (Anvashtaka Shraaddha relates to the nine Navami Tithis of Bhadrapada, Margaseersha, Pushya, Maagha

and Phalgunaas in Bahula Paksha. Nandi Shraaddha is performed during the start of any happy occasion or Sixteen religious rites like Karmaanga Shraaddha at Garbhaa Daana or Vriddhi Shraaddha at the birth of a Child. Tirtha Shraaddha is like Gaya Shraaddha).

Thus the procedure of determining the nine Pitru Devataas for Mahalaya Shraaddha is the same as that of the afore-mentioned Anvashtaaadi Shraaddhas too. Now, in the case of Mahalaya, Vishwa Devataas are called 'Dhuri Vilochanaas' and if one could afford in terms of money or availability of Brahmanas then two extra priests could be arranged. At the close of the ceremony, one Brahmana be detailed to represent Vishnu. Incidentally, if there is no availability of adequate number or none of Brahmanas, then at the 'Swagriha Deva Shtaana' one could improvise a Brahmachari with Darbhaas Mahalaya Shraaddha be performed as a last resort but the Sankalpa should not include Arghya daana, Samantrakaavaahana, Agnoukarana, pinda daana, Swadhaa vachana Sananklpa ought to be avoided!

(Background of Shraaddhas : There are Shannavati Shraaddhaas (Ninety Six) viz. Fourteen Manvantasaas; Four Yugaadi days of Krita-Tretaa-Dwapara-Kali; Twelve Sankramana Days of each year; Twelve Amavasya Days; Fifteen Days of the Krishna Paksha of Bhadrapada Maasa; Twelve Vyatipata Yoga days in a year when calamities might happen; Twelve Vaidhruti or forbidden days of the Year; Five Purvavedu or Saptami days of Krishna Pakshas of Bhadrapada, Margashira, Pushya, Maagha, and Phalgunaas; Ashta Tithis of Krishna Pakshas of the afore-mentioned Maasaas; and Anvashtaka Krishna Navamis of the same Months. These include Ardhodaya days of Sundays associated with Amavasya-Shravana Nakshatra and Vyatipata Yoga/ and Mahodaya. Matsya Purana mentioned Nitya, Naimittika and Kamyaa Shraaddhas viz, Daily /Regular, Periodic and Kaamyaa Shraaddhas. If daily Shraaddhais not possible, Darsha Shraaddha be performed at least on Amavasya days; if not do perform on Chaitra-Bhadrapada-Ashviyuja Amavasyas; even this is not possible, do accomplish Mahalaya Amavasya Shraaddha atleast or at any suitable day of Mahalaya Paksha! Additionally there could be any number of Kamyaa Shraaddhas ranging from Shuddhi, Pushti, Yatra, Ghrita- Dadhi, Daivika, Hiranya or Gold / Uncooked food, Hasta or foodgrains and so on.)

[Brahma Purana describes Shraaddha Kalpa Varnana as follows: At the Naimisha forest at the congregation of Munis requested Veda Vyasa to explain in brief the procedure of Shraaddha Karma: and the latter explained as follows: those who belonged to the Vranaas of Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishyas were required to perform Shraaddhaas as per their own Kula Dharma according to the prescribed 'Veda Mantrocchaarana'. When done by only Women and Shudras, the relevant Mantras were not to be recited nor Agni Homas done while doing Shraaddhas on their behalf. The hallowed places where Shraaddhas could be performed included Tirthas like Pushkara, Holy Temples, Mountian tops, Sacred Places, Holy Rivers, Sarovaras, Sangamas, Sea shores, own residences, Holy Tree root bottoms, and Yagna Kundas. There are three kinds of Shraaddhaas viz. *Nitya, Naimittika and Kaamyaa* Shraaddhas. At Jaata Karma and such other occasions, Abhudaayika or Vriddhi daayika Shraaddha too is required to be performed. *When Surya is in kanya Rasi*, Saaddhaas are best performed for fifteen days: Padyami Shraaddhaas bestow Dhanalaabha, Vidiya Pashu sampada or the benefit of cattle, Tadiya Putras, Chaturthi Shatru Naashana, Panchami Aishwaryaprada, Shashthi Loka Puja, Sapatami Ganaadhipatya, Ashtami Jnaana prada, Navami Stree Labha, Dashami Sarvaabhistha, Ekadashi Veda Sampannata, Dwadashi Vijaya Labha, Trayodashi Santaana Vriddhi and Deerghaayu, Chaturdashi Shraaddha blesses those who perform to appease the Souls of those who died in battles and Amavaasya Shaaddhyaas provide all-round well-being.

Gaya Shraaddhas would yield long term benefits, especially when performed with jaggery, honey and black 'tilas', since Pitru Devas would look forward to such opportunities to their 'Vamseeayas'; they crave for tarpanas in the rainy season of Magha-Phalguna months and Gudaanna / Rice-Jaggery Payasas mixed with honey; they hope that atleast one son might turn up at Gaya to offer Pinda Pradaana and that was their desire when alive to procure many sons; they wished that at least one kanyaa daana or one Nila Vrishabha Utsarga might be executed! Pitru Shraaddha during Krittika Star provides paasage to Swarga;

Rohini Nakshathra gives good progeny; Mriga Shira Nakshatra Shraaddha gives Tejas, Ardra secures Shourya; Purvasu Kshetra darshana prapti, Pushyami Akshayadhana, Aslesha purnaaryrdaaya, Magha Santaanapushti, Purvaphaluni sowbhaayga, Uttara phalguni uttama santaana, Hasta Shraaddha yields Shasrtra vidya phala, Chitra secures tejas and santaana, Swaati Vyaapaara laabha, Vishakha putraprada, Auradha Nakshatra Shraaddha provides Chakravartitwa, Jeshtha gives Aadhipatya, Moola excellent health, Purvaashadha gives fame and name, Uttaraahaashaadha demolishes grief and troubles, Shravana provided Shubha lokas, Dhanisdhtha dhana samruddhi, Abhijit gives knowledge Vedas, Shatabhisha Vaidya Siddhi, Purvabhadra gives goat-sheep sampada, Uttaraabhadra provides Go Sampada, Revati Rajata samruddhi, Ahwavi Ashwa Sampatti, and Bharani nakshatra shraaddha provides 'Deerghaayu - raarogya'; thus Gaya Shraaddha at any time during any Nakshatra bestows all kinds of auspicious tidings! When Surya is in Kanya rashi, those who offer Shraaddha Pindaas would fulfill all their desires as Pitras look forward to them; in fact the entire fortnight during this Mahalaya Period, Tarpana Pinda Pradaanaas are stated to be of high value resulting in Raajasua -ashwamedha Phalaas. Shraaddhas are to be offered at this time with water, leafy vegetables and 'kanda mulaas' or ground sprouted ones only. Devotees would do well in performing such Shraaddhaas as Surya enters Uttara-Hasta Nakshatra timings; such offerings when Ravi would enter Hasta in Vrishchik Raasi, but beyond Vrishchika raashi, Pinda pranaanaas are not only counter-productive but might have adverse effects as Pitru Devas might even curse them for belated offerings!]Also, Shraaddhaas need to be performed during Ashtakas, Manvantaras and Anvashtakas; Ashtakaas are known as Krishna Paksha Ashtamis of the months of Pousha, Maagha, Phalgun and Chaitra. Manvantaraas denote Ashadha Shukla Dashami, Shraavana Krishna Ashtami and Bhadra Shukla Triteeya, since Utsavaas / celebrations were organized at these Manvantaraas. Anvashtakaas signify the Navamis followed by the Ahtakaas. AbhyudayasAbhyudayas denote the above three categories of Ashtakas-Manvantaraas-Anvashtakaas as these are first and foremost addressed invoke Maata- Pitaamahi-Pranitaamahi and then by Pita-Pitaamaha-Prapitaamaha. In other words, Maatru Varga would be addressed first, followed by Pitru varga and finally to *Mataamaha- Pramitgaamah- Vriddha Mataamaha*. Shraaddhaas are also required to be performed at Grahanas or Solar-Lunar Eclipses, Vyatipatas, Surya-Chandrama Sangamaas, Janma Nakshatraas, and Graha Peedaavasaras; these Shraaddhaas are to be Paarana Shraaddhas. At the timings of Aayana kramana or change of Dakshinatana-Uttaraayana as also the two Vishus (or when Surya reaches the line when the day-night calculations are equivalent) as also on Samkraanti day, vidhi purvaka Shraaddhas need to be performed in a full-fledged form, but minus Pindapradaada. Shraaddhas are required to be performed on Vaishakha Shukla Triteeya and Kartika Shukla Navami as per the Samkraanti Vidhi; again on Bhadra Shukla Trayodashi and Magha Amavasya days, Paayasa Shraaddha or Cooked rice in boiled sweet milk should be offered to Pitru Devaas. When ever a VedaVetta or Nityaagnihotriya Brahmana arrives at a Brahmana's house, then too a Shraaddha would better be given. On the days of death of one's own parents Shraaddhas are required to be performed in a fulfilled manner every year including to Pitru devatas and Vishva Devatas separately. *Prati Samvararam Kaaryam Maataa Pitromrotay hani, Pitruvyasyaapya putrasya Bhraatur Jyeshthasya chaivahi/ Paarvanam Devapuryam syaadekoddhishtam Surairvinaa, Dyuodevey Pitrukaaryea Treenakaikamubhayatravaa/* (On the day of the passing away of one's own father or mother, one has to perform Ekoddishta Shraaddha; if father's brother had no male issue then too the Ekoddishta Shraaddha be performed. In the Parvana Shraaddha, Vishva Devas are to be invoked first and their puja is to be performed. But without Vishvadevas in Ekoddishta Shraaddha, Brahmanas are arranged in Deva Pitru Shtaanaas and worshipped. In the Deva Kaarya, two Brahmanas are to be arranged and for Pitru Karyaa three Brahmanas; Or at least one each of the Karyas are required as minimum. Pretajeeva deeds to be kept in the form of a Pinda on Bhumi beneath Kushaa grass with black Tilas and water. Brahmanaas would get shuddhi on the eleventh day of the demise, while Kshatriyas get purified on the thirteenth day, Vaishyas on the sixteenth day and Shudras on the thirty first day. On the termination of Sutaka or Asuddhi, Brahmanas should perform Ekoddishta Shraaddha on the twelfth day, after a month, after Traipaksha or three weeks and every month thereafter for a year. Then the action of 'Sapindeekarana Paarana Vidhhaana' must be followed, when the departed Soul would abandon the 'Pretha Swarupa' and

attain the status of 'Pitru Devatva'. The Pitaras are of two types viz. Amurtaas (Formless) and Murtimaan (with Form). Naandimukhaas are stated to be Formless and Paarvanaas are Murtimaans. Now, the procedure of Sapindeekarana is as follows: In the context of Sapindeekarana, Vishwa Devaas are not invoked, only one 'Arghya'/ water is given, no Agnikarana or invocation of Agni is done, four Patras or small vessels are used with Tilodakaas or water with black Tilas and chandana; three of the Paatras are to invite to three generations of forefathers and one for the Preta: *Paatratraye pretapaatraadarghyam chaiva prasechayet, Yesamaanaah iti japanpurva -vacchhesha maacharet/* (while reciting the Mantra 'Yenamaanaah', the Kartaa should perform 'Jala Prokshana' (sprinkle of water); even in respect of the diseased women the same procedure of Ekoddhishta should be adopted, but no need for Sapindeekarana is required in respect of women without children and the concerned relatives of husband or her own brothers could take up the task of Shraaddha. In case, there is none, the King becomes responsible as he would be the relative to all the prajaa who are helpless and execute all the related actions including the annual Shraaddhaas. Even related women could assume the charges, provided no Mantras are recited.

Nitya Naimittika Shraadhhas would follow sapindeekarana, when the departed father would join the ranks of the earlier three generations viz. the Karta's departed father, grand father and the great grandfather who would all be the 'Pinda bhukts'; actually, seven previous generations of the Karta would be eligible for the fruits of the shraddha: *Pindasambandhino hyetey vigjneyaah Purushaatrayah, Lepa sambandhinaschaaney pitaamah pitaamahaah/ Prabhrutyuktaa -strayastashaam yajamaanascha saptamah, Ityasha Munibhih proktah sambandhaha Saapta Pourushah/* But those who were beyond the three earlier generations viz. those of Sapta Pourushaas of four further earlier generations would be satisfied with the particles of 'Anna' or rice grains spread along and around the leaf above the kushagrass on which three pindas are placed in a line; the water drops from the clothes after taking bath by the Karta would provide relief to those who might have turned as Piscachas; those who might have been born as trees would be satisfied too by the water drops from the body of snaana of the Kartha; and those who might have been born as Pashu-Pakshis would be satisfied from the water drops while performing prokshana around the pindas in the process of worship. As the bhojana of the Brahmana bhoktas would be complete, the water drops to wash the hands and feet of the Bhoktas would relieve those who might have been born otherwise. Thus each Shraaddha would liberate the Souls of Seven Generations and none indeed would be dis-satisfied in the 'Kula' for seven generations! Those who perform Shraaddha even by the low caste human beings with Shraddha or Faith would relieve the misery of the departed Souls, while those Brahmanaas who are virtuous observing daily tasks would indeed be responsible for the certain salvation of the ancestors. Now, the Bhahmanas who are selected as bhoktas must also have proper qualifications; they should preferably be Veda vettaas, maatra-pitru bhaktas, Acharyas, Panditaas, father-in-laws, brothers-in-law, Purana TatvaVetta, and such others. Those who are selected as the representatives of Vishwadeva Pitraas too should be equally learned. The Kartha should feed such ideal Brahmanas as would indeed alleviate the miseries of the departed ones and hence the care for the selection. The services provided to the bhoktas are as good as those given to the departed parents or others concerned. In this context, Vastra daana was emphasized: *Vastraabhaavey kriyaanaasti yajgnaa Vedaastapaamsicha, Tasmaadwaasaamsi deyaani Shraaddha kaaley viseshitah/ Kauseyam kshaama kaarpaasam dukulamahatam tathaa, Shraaddheytwetaani yo dadyaat kaamaanaapnotichottamaan/* (Without the charity of Vastraas, no task of Shraaddha would be complete; in fact, no sacred task like Yagnaas, Vedaas and Tapaas would be complete without Vastra daana. More particularly so, in respect of Shraaddhaas as Pitru Devas would not be appeased otherwise. Silk Vastraas or at least new cotton Vastraas constitute a definite input in Shraaddhas. *Yathaa goshu prabhutaasu vatso vindati maataram,*

Tathaannam tatra Vipraanaam janturyatraavasishthatey/ Naama gotrancha mantrascha dattham annamnayantitey, Aapiye nidhanam praaptaas trupistaanupatishthatey/ (Just as a calf reaches its mother's udder on a group of cows, Anna daana to Brahmanaas too is an inclusive input in Shraaddhaas to enable the relief of the departed Souls; recitation of Naama-Gotraas in the formal medium of Mantras would reach the fruits of Shraaddhaas to the concerned Vamsha-Gotra-Naamaas so that the respective categories are satiated.) The relevant Mantra further states: *Deataabhyah Pitrubhyascha Mahaa Yogibhy yevacha, Namah Swadhhaayai Swaahaayai Nithyameva bhanantiti, Adhaavasaaney Shraaddhasya traavruttvaa japettadaa, Pinda nirvahaney vaapi japedevam samaahitah/ Kshipramaayaanti pitaro Raahshasaah pradravanti cha, Preeyantey trishu lokeshu Mantroyam taarayatyuta/*(My obeisances to Pitraas and Devataas; to my homage to Swadhaa Devi and Swaahaadevi; May these be always with me; This Mantra must be recited thrice at the time of Pinda-Nirvahana of while performing the Task of Pindaas as also at the time end of the Shraadda. The recitation of this Mantra would instantly respond to the Pitra Devas and the Rakshasaas would run away; the Tri Lokas would be satisfied and the Performer would fully bless with salvation. Offering away the Pindaas to Agni in the Homakunda would bless the Karta would secure Bhoga Vriddhi or enhance pleasures; offering the Pindas to the Karta's wife would result in Putra Prapti; offering them to Cows would ensure 'Tejovriddhi'; immerse the pindaas would increase Keerti /fame; feeding them to crows would provide long life; and some Pandits stated that 'Pindaagraas' or tops of the Pindaas should be lifted. *Tasmaatsam Pujayet bhaktya swapitruun vidhivannarah, Kaamaanabhhepsinsakalaan –paadaatma vimochanam, Vasuun Rudraamstathaadityaan Nakshatra graha taarakaah/ Preenayanti Manushyaanaam Pitarah Shraaddha tarpitaah, Aayuh Prajaam Dhanam Vidyaam Swargam Moksham sukhaanicha/ Prayacchanti tathaa Raajyam Pitarah Shraaddha tarpitaah, Tathaapahaarnah Purvaahnaat pitruunaamatirichyatey/ Sampujya Swaagateynaitaan sadanebhyaagataandvijaan, Pavitra paaniraachaantaan nasaneyshupa –vesayet/ Shaadham krutvaa vidhaanena sambhojya cha Dwijottamaan, Visarjaeyt priyaanyukaa pranipatya cha bhaktitah/ Aadwara manugacchhecchaa gacchedan moditah, Tato nitya kriyaamkuryaad bhojayeccha tathaa tithheen/ Nithya kriyaam pitruunaamcha kechidicchanti Sattamaah/* (As the Shraaddha Karta is anxiously awaited by the concerned Pitru Devaas, he should worship them with faith and devotion as prescribed so that the desires of Karta are fulfilled; the Ashtaa Vasus, Ekaadasha Rudraas, Dwadasha Adityas , Nava Grahas and Nakshatraas would all be satisfied with the Shraaddhas and bestow long and healthy life, good progeney, prosperity, Vidya, over-all fulfillment and Swarga. As 'Aparaahna' or mid-day is the appropriate time, the Kartha should welcome the Brahmanaas with devotion, make them feel comfortable and conduct the proceedings with perseverance and fortitude, perform the duties till the end and then take the Nitya Karmas after duly sending them off with reverence). In conclusion, Veda Vyasa Maharshi assured: *Ajaaramaacharedyastu Pitru medhha shritam Narah, Ayushaa dhana putraischa vardhastyasu na samshayah/ Pitrumedhaadhyaya mimam Shraaddha kaaleshu yah pathet, Tadannamasya pitarosh - nanti cha tri-yugam dwijaah/ Yevam mayoktah Pitrumedha kalpah paaapahah punyavivaddha nas cha/ Shrotavya yesha prayatainaraihscha shraaddegha chainaa -pyanu keertayet/* (Those who observe the traditions of Pitrumedha Kalpa, are blessed with Dhana-Dhanya-Ayuraarogya- Putra Poutra-Vardhana. Those who read 'Pitrumedha-adhyaa' of this Purana, would be blessed with the contentment of Pitru Devatas of the past three yugas! The recitation or patient hearing of the contents of the Adhyaya itself would bestow the boon of demolishing sins and of ushering propitiousness).]

Nakshatra wise Shraddhas: Having discussed the significance of Mahalaya Pakshaa, Dharma Sindhu narrates the Bhadrapada Krishna Shraaddhas with the orientation of Nakshatras. *Bharani Nakshatra Shraaddha* is as good as of Gaya Shraaddha phala. This is of ‘Sapindeeka’ variety in which Shaddaivata Sankalpa is involved ie . of three generations. This Kanya Vrata is performed aiming Pururavaadrava Pitru Devaas or Vishva Devaas who are Dhuri Vilochanaas as described in the context of Mahalatya Paksha Shraaddhaas. Normally , this ceremony is executed in the first year of the demise of a parent. But not in the Second year as suggested by some but actually Dharma Sindhu opines that the second year might be a better option for the reason that during the course of the first year of demise, the dead parent might not have secured Pitrutwa Siddhi yet; more over the Gaya Shraaddha is expected to aim at three generations but that status of joining the two higher generations would not have attained before the close of first year of the death; nor one Paarvana which was to be offered to Devas was not acceptable to Devaas before the first anniversary of the deceased. *Maghaa yukta Trayodashi* is performed in either of the Trayodashis of Bhadrapada Maasa. This ceremony is performed with the Sankalpa of ‘Pindarahita Shraaddha’ and should be restricted to the Mantra: *Eshaam trupyartham Brahmana Puja karishye; Pitru rupiney Brahmanaaya gandham samarpayaami/* Thus having provided ‘Panchopachaaraas’, the Karta would recite the Mantras: ‘*Brahmaarpanam Brahma havi’-Anena Brahmana Bhojanena Pitraadi rupeshwara preeyataa etc.* and then satisfy the Brahmanaas with ‘Madhura Padaadhaas’ sweets only without cooked Anna Bhojana. Like wise *Shastrahata Mahalaya Shraaddha* is performed on *Krishna Chaturdashi* of Bhadrapada Month is performed to father or his brothers by sons or cousins as the formers die on account of weapons, poison, Fire, water, snakes or cruel animals. Shraaddhas in respect of such accidental deaths are performed on *Ekoddhishta* basis with the Sankalpa viz. *Amukanimittey namrutasya chaturdashi nimitta –mekoddhishtam shraaddham sa Daivam sa pindakam karishye/* (I shall perform Shraddha with Arghya etc. and on ‘Sa-pinda’ and ‘ Sa-Daiva’ basis but by offering a single Pinda). However, this Shraaddha is not to be considered as a substitution of repetitive and regular Shraaddhas on the death anniversary Tithis. *Kapilaa Shashthi Shraaddha:* In case a Tuesday with Rohini Nakshatra appears in Krishna Bhadrapada Month on Shashthi, it is considered as a very significant and Sacred day; when Surya is in Hasta Nakshatra then too that day is extremely fruitful. Kapila Shashthi Homas and Daanaas are stated to yield Koti-Koti Phala! *Asyaam hutam cha duttam cha Sarvam koti gunam bhavet! Atra Shraaddham kaaryamiti visesha vachanam nopalabhyatey tathaapi Alabhyagogy Shraaddhavidhaanaaddarshavat Shaddevatam kaaryam/* (There would be no better deed that could be described in words leading to ‘Alabhya Yoga’ than performing Shraaddha on this day and that Karya is to be like what is executed on the lines of Amaavasya Shraaddha aiming at ‘Shaddevataas’ or the Six Devataas).

Surya Vrata: In the context of observing Kapila Shashthi, *Surya Vrata Vidhaana* has also been described by Dharma Sindhu. Addressing Surya Deva in the ‘Sankalpa’, the Vrata Karta proposes to observe ‘Upavaasa’ and take Sacred Bath by applying the paste of Devadar Tree Bark, Khusha, Cardamom, Manassila, Padmakaashtha and rice mixed with honey and Cow milk while reciting the Mantra: *Ataswamasi Devesha Jyotishaam patirevacha, Paapam naashaaya mey Deva Vaagmanah kaaya karmajam/* (Devesha! You are the Jala Swarupa and Jyotishpati! Kindly destroy my ‘Trikarana Paapaas’ involved in Speech, Thought and Action). Thus beseeching Surya, the Vrata Karta smears ‘Pancha Gavya’ made of the five cow products, cleanses the body with ‘Pancha Pallavaas’ or five kinds of tender leaves, smudges the body with ‘Mrittika’ or Earth, takes bath again, performs Tarpana and other Nitya Karmaas, worships Varuna Deva, arranges a ‘Kalasha’ with rice in the center of a platform, draws a Lotus with eight leaves and recites from the East invoking Sun God in the form of a Golden ‘Pratima’

with his eight names as follows: *Suryam, Tapanam, Swarna lepanam, Ravim, Adityam, Divaakaram, Prabhakaram, Suryam aavaaha –yaami/* Later invoke Aruna Deva who is the charioteer of Surya and to ‘Ashta Dikpaalakaas’ viz. Indra-Agni-Yama-Nirrti-Varuna-Vaayu- Kubera and Ishaana with ‘Karaveeraadi’ flowers, offer twelve ‘Arghyaas’ standing before him and perform worship to Surya with the Prayer as follows: *Prabhakara Namastubhyam Samsaaraanmaam samuddhara, Bhukti Mukti prado yasmaattasmaa- chhaanti prayacchamey/ Namō Namaste Varada Ruksaamayajushaam patey, Namostu Vishwa Rupaaya Vishwa dhaatreya namo Namah/* (Prabhakara! My obeisances to you. You are the bestower of Bhoga and Mokshaa; do grant me peace, fulfillment and Salkvation. You are the Master of Three-Vedas; Jagadrupa! Jagatposhaka!). The Vrata Karta then observes ‘Raatri Jaagarana’ reciting ‘Soura Sukta’ and other Prayers and next morning takes bath, executes Nitya Karmaas and performs Homaas with ‘Arka Samidhaas’ / twigs, ghee, tila and so on. Then he ushers Kapila Cow bedecked with decoratives, colourful ‘Vastraas’, jingle bells and so on, performs Puja and gives it away as ‘Daana’ to a Brahmana saying: *Namaste Kapiley Devi Sarva paapa pranaashani, Sasaaraanavamagnam maam Gomaataastaatu marhasi/* (Kapila Devi! Gomaataa! My worshipful respects to you; do relieve me of my sins and save me from the Ocean of Samsara). The Daana be given with satisfactory Dakshina along with the Golden Pratima of Surya Deva thus concluding the SuryaVrata successfully.

Markandeya Purana while describing the Vedic origin, physical birth, wedding and progeny of Surya Deva detailed at a Brahmana Kroushti as follows: As Lord Brahma desired to initiate the task of Creation, he created Daksha from his right thumb and Aditi from his left thumb and their children were Kashyapa and Martanda Deva. The latter is of Brahma Swarupa; the Provider of boons to the entire Universe; is present at ‘Adi-Madhy-Antha’ (the Beginning, Middle and End) of ‘Srishti- Sthiti and Pralaya’ (Creation-Preservation and Termination); ‘Sarva Bhuta Swarupa’ (The Form of all Beings), ‘Sarvatma’ (The Soul of the Entirety) and ‘Sanatana Paramatma’ (The Most Ancient and Greatest Soul). He has many names like Vispashta, Parama, Vidya, Jyoti, Shaswati, Prakashita, Deepti, Kaivalya, Gyan, Aavirbhava, Praakaamya, Samvita, Bodha, Avitgati, Smriti and Vigyan. Herebefore Creation, when there was utter darkness, an endless Egg was materialised, in the midst of which, Pitamaha Brahma was present atop a lotus stem. As he broke open the Egg in the middle and from his mouth emerged the ‘Maha Shabda’ (The Enormous Sound) ‘AUM’. This Sound was followed by the the Foremost Sound ‘BHU’; then came BHUVAH, followed by SVAHA; the Sum of these Three Echos formed Surya. The Maha Shabda AUM constituted the ‘Sukshma Rupa’ or the Tiniest Form Surya Deva; this was tagged along the ‘Sthula Rupas’ or the Gross Forms viz. MAHAH, JANAHA, TAPAH, and SATYA (*Omityasmatswarupatu Sukshma Rupam Raveh Param/Tatho Mahariti sthulam janam sthulataram tathah, tathasthapasthah satyamiti murtaani saptadha/ Sthitaani tasya rupaani bhavanti na bhavanti cha, Swabhaava bhaavayorbhaavam yato gacchanti samsayam/Aadyantam tatparam suhksmam rupam param sthitam, Omithuktam maya Vipra! Tatpara Brahma tadyupuh/*) Markandeya continued to explain to Brahmana Kroshti that when the Sacred Egg was burst and Brahma emerged, his principal head released Rig Veda; from his eastern head came out Yajur Veda; from the western head came out Sama Veda and from the mouth of the northern head materialized Atharva Veda. Rig Veda was of Rajo Guna, Yajur Veda of Satvika Guna, Sama Veda of Tamasika Guna and Atharva Veda of a blend of Satvika and Tamo Gunas. The splendour of Rig Veda gave a powerful sound ‘AUM’; the first segment was encircled by a second circle of Yajur Veda giving out a reverberation of AUM, the third circle of radiance being of Sama Veda furnished the resonance of AUM again and the final segment too echoed the sound of AUM; thus AUM was the common feature of all the Vedas. The Rig, Yajur and Sama Vedas are of the nature of ‘Shanti’ (Peace), ‘Pushti’ (Well being) and ‘Abhicharika’ (Negative) respectively while Atharva Veda is an ‘Antargita’ (enclosed) entity. Since the entire Universe was engulfed in darkness and just emerged clean, it had instantly become lit up on its upper, lower and side ways, following the radiance of Vedas and had thus assumed an identity and definiteness; the initial signs of illumination of ‘Adyagni’ (the foremost blaze) came into being then! The three Vedas of Rig, Yajur and Sama attained prominence at the mornings, noons and evenings respectively. Before the ‘Purvahna’ (pre-noon), Rig Veda based ‘Shanti

Karmas' of positive nature are performed; at 'Madhyahna' (noon), Yajur based Pushti Karyas (growth oriented tasks) are performed; at 'Aparahna' (afternoon) are executed Sama Veda Karyas of Pitras; while at 'Sayamahna' or even later only negative or maledictory nature are done based essentially on Atharva Veda. It is stated that Srishti Kaala is of Brahma Swarupa signifying Rig Veda or of Satvika character, Sthiti Kaala is of Vishnu meant for Yajur Veda highlighting Rajasika Guna and Samhaara Kaala is of Rudra Deva based on Sama Veda representing Tamasika Guna; thus Aparahna Kaala is of 'Asuchi' (impurity). These timings are hence of Vedatma, Veda Samsthita and Veda Vidyatmika respectively of Purvahna, Madhyahna/ Aparahna and Sayahna. Since radiance and radiation constitute the essential ingredients of Srishti (Creation), -besides of course water, the primary hold of existence of all Beings- Lord Brahma before initiating 'Srishti' formally acknowledged the primacy of Surya Deva and eulogised him to say that Sun God was the 'Atma Swarupa' or the Soul Form of the Universe as also the 'Vishva Rupa' and 'Vishva Murthi' (the Form and Profile of the Universe), and the Unique Embodiment of Luminosity and Heat which were the sine-qua-non of Existence. Brahma also said that Surya Deva was the nucleus of Vedas, and the featureless 'Para Brahma' Swarupa possessing all powers of Creation, Preservation and Annihilation; that he had the Omnipotence which facilitated the existence of 'Pancha Bhutas' or the Five Elements of Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and Sky; that he was the Omni-Present Saviour of the Worlds. Having said thus Lord Brahma initiated the process of Creation. As happened at the erstwhile Kalpanta, Brahma created Devas, Asuras, human beings, animals, trees, and the rest of flora and fauna. Kashyapa and Aditi were responsible to produce Devas while the former and Diti created Daityas. Among Kashyapa's other wives Daan produced Danavas, Vinati gave birth to Garuda and Aruna; Khasa produced Yakshas and Rakshasas; Kadruma gave birth to 'Nagas' (reptiles); Muni produced Gandharvas; Krodha produced Kulyaganas; Riskta gave birth to Apsaraas; Ira created Iravata and all other Elephants; Tamna created Shyeni and such other Kanyas; Ukka produced Shyana, khechara ganas including parrots and Pratha produced the rest of the birds.

As Devas on the one hand and Danavas, Rakshasas and Daityas on the other confronted each other, Aditi extolled Surya Deva and prayed for victory to Devas in their battles: *Namastubhyam Paraam Sukshmam Souvarnim vibratey tanum, Dhaamdhaama vataamesha dhaamnaadhara Sahvata!* (You are the smart archer of golden arrows; the profile of luminosity and the Holder of radiance, my greetings to you!). Aditi eulogised him further to say that he would assume a mercilessly blistering form to absorb water for eight long months and facilitate timely rains as Maha Megha Murti or the Grand Form of Clouds and save the World from famines and droughts; that he saved the World from diseases and untimely deaths by making available 'Aushadhis' from Nature; that he was entirely responsible for the lives of human beings by nurturing crops, foodgrains, fruits, vegetables and flowers; that he was enabling Yagna Karyas, Tarpanas, and other holy tasks and satisfy Devas and Pitru ganas; that he was the Omkara Rupa determined to save Dharma (Virtue) and nullify Evil and preserve and promote Peace and Prosperity. Aditi further praised Surya Deva saying: *Twam Brahma Harirajasanjnita stwamindro Vitteshaha pitrupatiratpatih Sameeraha Somognirgaganapatihir maheedharobhihi kim stavya tava sakalaatmarupadhaamnih* (You are Brahma, Vishnu, Maha Deva, Indra, Kubera, Pitru Pati Yama, Ambupati Varuna, Sameera Vayu, Soma, Agni, Gagana, Mahidhara, Samudra, Teja and Sakalatma Rupa! How much could I extol you! Please save my children Devas and vindicate justice and virtue!). As Aditi prayed to Surya Deva, the latter appeared before her and bestowed the boon to her that he would be born to her, destroy the enemies and make Devas happy. So saying, the 'Soushumna Kiran' or the Sun Ray called Soushumna of 'Sahasraamshu' or the Thousand Rayed Surya Deva entered Aditi's garbha (womb). Devi Aditi performed 'Chandrayana and such other 'Vratas' and drastically reduced her food intake. Her husband Kashyapa Muni was highly annoyed at her heavy penances and questioned: *Kim maarayasi garbhaanda miti Nityopa- vasini!* (Why are you destroying the conception with your heavy penances?). Aditi replied: *Sa cha tam praaha garbhaanda metat pashyati Kopana! Na maaranti vipakshaanaam mrutavey tadbhavishyati* (Hey Angry man! This garbhaanda which you see is not being destroyed by me; this shall destroy the enemies!) However, Aditi felt insulted by the remarks of Kashyapa and tried to remove the conception, but Kashyapa Muni revived the same with appropriate 'Mantras' and the kind Ravi Deva came out of her

abdomen even as a loud ‘Asharira Vani’ or a Celestial Voice was heard addressing Kashyapa Muni to say: *Maaranti the yatah proktametadanda twaya Muney, tasmaan Muney stutasteyam Maartaandakhyo bhavishyati/ Suryadhi kaaramcha vibhur jagatesha karishyati, Hamishyatya suraanaamschaayam yagna bhaagaharaanareen* (Hey Muni! You said that the ‘Anda’ (Egg) would be destroyed (Maarit)! That is why your son would be called **Martanda**. This ‘Vibhu’ would replace Surya Deva and destroy the ‘Yagna bhaaga haari’ or the thieves of ‘Yagna Phala’ (the fruits of Yagnas), viz. Asuras! On hearing the Celestial Announcement, Devas became extremely delighted but Daanavas realised that their end would arrive soon. As prophesied, Devas headed by Indra challenged Danavas, Daityas and Rakshasaas and Martanda Deva’s blaze and illumination burnt the latter into ashes and Devas regained their lost glory once again.

Prajapati Viswakarma’s daughter Sanjna was married to Vivaswan or Surya Deva. Their elder son was Vaivasvata (the present Manu) followed by Yama and daughter Yami. But Sanjna was unable to withstand the vision of Martanda and hence materialised Chhaya Devi who promised to replace Sanjna as long as Surya Deva would not touch her hairs and would not curse her with a ‘Shaap’ on learning the truth that she was a surrogate! Sanjna shifted to the abode of her father Viswakarma, who in course of time nagged his daughter to get back to her husband; as the father’s pressure became intense, she left her father’s residence too and became a mare to perform ‘Tapas’ in a forest. Chhaya Devi who proxied for Sanjna gave birth to Saavarni who too was destined to become a future Manu and Shaneswara, besides a daughter called Tapati who married a King called Samvaran eventually. Yama was annoyed at her mother’s partial treatment to some children at the cost of others and in the course of a heated argument, he raised his ankle. The angry mother Chhaya said that after all she was the wife of a glorious Deity and certainly deserved respect to her and since he did not do so, the flesh of his ankle would fall off!

Dharmatma Yama was taken aback by this curse and in righteous agitation approached Surya Deva in great despair along with his brother Vivasvata. He told the father that indeed he behaved rashly with her mother for which he readily sought her forgiveness and that he would never repeat the mistake again; however, the curse given was unduly disproportionate to his relatively minor act of indiscretion that no mother would award. Even if a son did a mistake, a mother would ignore or chide the son, but in this case the curse given smacked of vengeance. Surya Deva too wondered that a person of Yama’s virtue and truthfulness was indeed badly hurt and asked Sanjna about her version. Chhaya Sanjna got afraid when she was confronted and made a clean confession that she was a replacement to the original Sanjna who went to her father’s abode as she was unable to bear the excessive heat and dazzle of Surya Deva. On enquiry, Viswakarma too suggested the Sanjna should return to her husband and thought that she did so. From his Inner Vision, Surya Deva realised that Sanjna got converted as a mare and was performing Tapasya at Shaka Dwipa eversince. Surya Deva felt remorseful of what all happened. He sought Brahma’s approval to reduce the severity of his heat and radiance gradually and Brahma instructed Viswakarma to take actions as follows: Original Surya Deva be kept as a reserve in the Surya Mandala (Solar Orbit) by one-sixteenth; of the rest, one-fifteenth part was utilised to materialise Vishnu Bhagavan’s Sudarshana Chakra, Shiva’s Trishula, Kubera’s Palki (Palanquin), Yama’s ‘Danda’, Kartikeya’s Shakti and various ‘Astras’ of Devas. Thus Surya Deva became less severe and manageable of his vision to Trilokas, which however was harsh enough to destroy enemies. Subsequently, Bhanu Deva assumed the form of a horse and shifted to the Place where Sanjna was performing Tapasya in the form of a mare. Sanjna mistook the horse as a stranger and sought to secure back. The mare and the horse rubbed their noses and Surya’s virility entered through the noses to the mare’s ‘garbha’ (womb); instantly two Ashwani Kumars called ‘Naasatya’ and ‘Dastra’ as the horses gave out similar sounds in their union. Out of the rest of Surya’s semen, another son called Revanta emerged as seated on a horse back carrying bow and arrows and a powerful sword. Both Surya Deva and Sanjna returned to their original forms and abodes. The eldest son Vivaswanta was declared as the Seventh Manu, Yama Dharma Raja was blessed to become ‘Lokapalak’ and also as the Chief of Pitruganas, Yamuna became a holynriver, Aswani Kumars were appointed as Physicians to Devas, Revant became the Chief of Guhyaganas, Saavarni was declared as the eighth Manu, Shaneswara became a popular ‘Graha’ (Planet) and Tapti too became a holy River.

Brahma Purana too signifies Surya Mahatmya and of Dwashashaadityas: Brahma was stated to have affirmed that Bhagavan Surya was the soul of each and every body in the Lord's creation, as Surya was the Devata of Devatas. All the formal 'Ahutis' (Oblations) in Agni Deva have to reach Surya and then to the respective Devatas. Surya has the greatest role of absorbing water from various sources including Akasha Ganga and provides rains due to which the life-giving 'Anna' (Food) to one and all. None else is responsible to regulate 'Kaalamaana' (Time) commencing from the count of Kshanaas, Muhurtas, days, nights, Pakshas (fortnights), 'Maasaas' or months, Samvatsaras, (years), Rithus, and Ayanaas (half years) and this would never be possible but for the punctuality of Surya, and no other Devata could ever be capable of! How could one comprehend as to when trees would yield fruits and flowers without the sense of Ritus! How could one calculate when to sow and when to reap! In the same way, Swarga Vasis too get attuned to time calculations as to how and when various tasks were scheduled; for instance, even Brahma has to abide by the procedure of Srishti and Yama has to await the appropriate time to terminate! Also, the respective 'Amsaas' of Surya Deva tend to dominate each month, such as Vishnu Rupa in Chaitra month, Aryama in Vaishakha month, Vivaswaan in Jyeshtha month, Amshumaan in Ashaadha month, Parjanya in Shraavana month, Varuna in Bhaadra month, Indra in Aswin month, Dhata in Kartika month, Mitra in Agahana month, Pusha in Poushya month and Twashta in Magha and Phalguna months. Additionally the names of Dwadasha Adityas are Aditya, Savita, Surya, Mihira, Arka, Prabhakara, Martaanda, Bhaskara, Bhanu, Chitrabhanu, Diwakara and Ravi. Thus twenty Suryas are popular. Brahma assured Maharshis and Munis that one needed to recite the following names of Surya and would indeed be not necessary to recite the Surya Samasra naamaas! The following are the most sanctified twenty one namaas: *Vikartano Viviswaanicha Martanda Bhaskaro Ravih, Loka prakaashakah Shrimaan lokachakshur -maheswarah/ Lokasaakshi Trilokeshaha Kartaa Hartaa Tamishrahaa, Tapanastaapana -schaiva Shuchih Saptaashwavaahanah/ Gabhasti hasto Brahma cha Sarvadeva Namaskrutah Ekavimshati rityesha stava ishtavah sadaa Raveyh/* (Vikartana, Viviswaan, Martanda, Bhaskara, Ravi, Loka Prakaashaka, Shrimaan, Lokachakshu, Maheswara, Loka Saakshi, Triloksha, Karta, Harta, Tamishraha, Tapan, Taapana, Shuchi, Saptaashwa vaahana, Gabhasti hasta, Brahma, and Sarva Deva Namaskruta are the Sacred Naamaas). Surya Deva would be extremely pleased by his 'Stuti' with these naamaas and bestow to the Reciters with excellent health, Dhana Vriddhi, and Yasha Prapti. Recital of these naamaas at the time of Sun Rise and Sun Set would demolish one's own sins on account Manasika (Mental), Vaachika (Vocal), Shaareerika (Physical) and Karmajanita (arising of deeds) sources. Explaining the **birth of Surya**, Brahma recounted that Daksha Prajapati had sixty celebrated daughters of whom thirteen were wedded to Kashayapa Muni, who begot by Aditi the whole lot of Devas; by Diti were born Daityas, by Danu were born danavas; by Vinata the vamsa of birds like the famed Garutmant; and 'Sthaavara Jangamas' or Immobile and Moving species other than human beings. Aditi's progeny viz. Devas were born out of Satvika Guna, while Daitya, Danava, and such other negative children were born of Rajasika and Tamasika Gunaas. As Aditi gave birth to Surya Deva, she eulogized him as follows: *Namastubhyam Param Sukshmam Sumupunya bibhrateytulam, Dhaama Dhaamavataameesham Dharmaadhaaram cha Shaswaram/ Jajataamanupa karaaya Twaaham Stoumi Gopatey, Aada daanasya yadрупam teevram tasmai Naaamyaham/ Graheetumashtamaasena kaalenaambumayam rasam, Bibhraataswa yadрупamati teevram nataasmi tat/ Sametamagnisomaabhyaam Namastasmai Gunaatmaney, Yadrupa mrugyajuh saamnaa maikyena tapatey tawah/ Viswametatravi samjnam Namastasmai Vibhaavaso, yattu tasmaatparam rupa motyuktvaabhi samhita/ Asthuulam Shulamayam Namastasmai Sanaatana/* (My greetings to you! You possess a very pure and unique Form of effulgence as the Lord of Radiance and the Hold of Illumination of everlasting nature! Keeping in view the huge advantages arising out of your existence to the whole Universe, may I offer my sincere reverences to you! I salute that magnificent yet fierce Form of yours especially when you seek to absorb water from Prithvi for eight long months. Surya Deva! Your Swarupa is a mix of Rik-Yajur-Saama Vedas all rolled in one with the symbol of 'Trayi Sanjna' and even more than that of the OM sound which denotes both the 'Sthula' or gross and the 'Sukshma' or miniscule)! Pleased by her prayers, Surya asked Aditi to ask for a boon and the latter made

an appeal to Surya that Daityas had been stealing the Yagna Phala which was actually due to Devas and as such Surya might please give birth to her as the elder brother of Devas and bless her to be born to her and destroy the Daityas. Surya agreed to do so and as a gesture of her gratitude, Aditi took to extreme penance by observing Kruchhu and Chandrayana Vratas but her husband Kashyapa was angry that she was killing the child in her garbha by such severe Vratas; he said: *Kim maarayasi garbhdamiti, Nityopa Vaasini!* (Hey Aditi, the ever fasting woman! Why are you destroying the embriyo!). In reply Aditi shouted back to Kashyapa saying: *Saachatam Praaha Garbhanda metatpasyeti Kopanaa, Samaaritam vipakshaathaam Mrityu deva bhavishyati/* (Look at my Garbha! His is not destroyed indeed, but is going to destroy the enemies); by so saying, she relieved her Garbha and a huge mass of Radiance was materialized. Meanwhile, there was an ‘Akashavani’ (Celestial Voice) resounded to say: *Maaritam tey yatah prokta meta dandam twayaaditeyh, Tasyaanmuney sutastyeyam Martaandobhyo bhavishyati!* (Kashyapa Muney! You apprehended that the embriyo might be killed, but it would surely kill these who steal the ‘Havishyas’ viz. Asuras! It was at that time when **Martanda** was generated from Aditi Garbha that Asuras challenged Indra and Devatas and were instantly burnt off into ashes by his fierce looks. Brahma Deva commended the great significance of **Suryaaraadhana** and stated: *Bhava Suddhih Prayoktavya Niyamaachara samyuktaa, Bhava shuddhayaa kriyatey yatthasswargam saphalam bhavet/ Stutijapyopahaarena pujayaapi Vivaswatah, Upavaasena Bhaktya vai Sarva Paapaih pramuchyatey/ Pranidhaaya shiro bhumyaam namaskaaram karoti yah, Tatkshanaatsarva Paapebhoymuchyatey naatra Samshayah/ Bhaktiyukto Naroyosou Raveh kuryad pradakshinam, Pradakshani krutwaa tena Saptadwipaa Vasundharaa/ Suryam manasi yah krutwaa kuryaad vyoma pradakshinaam, Pradakshneekrutaastena Sarvam Devaa bhavanti hii/* (Those who pray to Surya Deva with mental discipline and devotion by performing Upavaasa (Fasting), Stavan (Eulogy), Japa (continuous nama smarana), Upahara Samarpana or offer of gifts, Puja or formal ‘shodasopacharas’ or the prescribed sixteen services like Avaahana (Invocation), Aasana (Seating), Snaana (Holy bathing), Pushpa- Phala- Dhupa-Deepa-Naivedyaa - Arati, Swasti, Bhojana, and Brahmana Dakshina, as also Bhajana (Group singing) would instantly demolish sins and acquire positive fruits. Those who seek to vision Surya Bhagavan by keeping their heads upside down the Earth and lift up their bodies would also attain positive benefits undoubtedly. Those who perform ‘Surya Pradakshina’ (Self-Circumambulation) of Akaash (Sky) carrying Sapta Dwipas by their mind would be executing ‘Parikrama’ to all the Devas! Those who observe fasting on Shashthi / Saptami with single Bhojana a day as also perform Puja in the prescribed manner as outlined above with devotion secure the fruit of executing an Ashvamedha Yagna. On Shukla Paksha Saptami, possibly coinciding with a Sunday, performances of Snaana, Daana, Tapa, Homa, Puja and Upavasa would have considerable impact in fulfilling desired objectives. Any ‘dharmic karya’ aimed at Surya Deva would assure that there would be no ‘daridrata’ or poverty and ‘Anarogya’ or illnesses in the entire Kula / Vamsha of the family. Those who would paint Sun Bhagavan’s temple with white, brown or yellow colours and decorate the walls of the Temple with all sand possible alternatives would fulfill all their wishes. Those who light lamps with ghee or sesame / gingelly oil and offer to Surya deva would have their eye sight excellent and none in his Vamsha would ever be blind, especially if they perform Deep-Daana. Such Deepa Daana in temples, cross-roads or public places is blessed with prosperity. Anybody who steals lit-up deepas or spoils them is sure to have adverse effects like imprisonment, family loss and dispatch to dark narakas. Early morning offers of water to Surya become eligible for Siddhis. Observance of Aditya Vrata by reciting hymns like Aditya Hridaya by standing from sunrise to sunset facing Surya Deva would have far reaching effects of immense Punya. Also, *Arghena sahitam chaiva Sarva saangam pradaapayet, Udaye Shraddhaa Yuktah Sarva Paapaaih pramuchyatey/* (Offering water with devotion and faith at Sunrise time and performing ‘Saangopanga’ or prostration and daana would yield excellent results, especially in demolishing sins. Arghya or water along with Agni, Aakasha, Bhumi, Surya Pratima and Pindi or platform of the Pratima is to be offered to Surya with sincerity to reap far reaching benefits. In fact, worship to Surya Deva at the Uttaraayana and Dakshinaayana timings (when the course of Surya changes from South to North and vice versa) would have very significant effects of far reaching benefits. Any charity in the dedication of Surya like Chhatra

(Umbrella), Dhwaja or Pataka (Flags) and Chavara (hand fan with which to please a Deity) would result in a lakh-fold advantage to the donor. *Maanasam vaachikam vaapi kaayajam yaccha dushkrutam, Sarvam Surya prasaadena tadasesham vyapohatih/ Ekahenaapi yad Bhaano pujaayaa praapyatey phalam, Yadhokta dakshinairviprainna tat kratushatairapi/* (Bhagavan Surya awards the gift of trouncing offences committed by way of Sharirika or Physical, Vaachika or spoken and Manasika or thought-wise media. Even a day's worship with all the inputs like Snaana, Shodasopachara, Daana and Stuti would excel the observance of several Yagnas).

Brahma described **Aditya Mahatmya** by saying that as soon as Surya Deva emerges on the horizon early in a day, his powerful rays destroy darkness and the Unique and Readily realizable Deity (Pratyaksha Devata) on the Sky who has neither beginning nor end; the indestructible and everlasting Aditya grows by the day with ferocity and temperature, spreading heat all across the Tri Bhuvanaas, creating-preserving and terminating the 'Charaachara Jagat'. He is Dhata, Vidhata, and the root-cause of Srishti; Surya Mandala is everlasting and eternal; he is the Father of Pitruganaas and the Supreme Deva of Devas. Countless Yogis who leave their 'Bhoutika Dehas' (mortal bodies) have their Souls carried by Vayudeva and get absorbed into Him; Renowned Grihasti Yogis like King Janaka, Vaalakhilya like Brahmavaadi Maharshis, Veda Vyasa like Vaanaprastha Rishis and Shuka Deva like illustrious Veda Vedaanga Brahma Yogis and innumerable such Maha Yogi Purushas were all the memorable entrants into Suryamandala. Prajapatis had all divided their 'Tejas' or Inner Radiance and paved the way to materialization of **Dwadasa Adityas** viz. *Indra, Dhata, Parjanya, Twashta, Pusha, Aryama, Bhaga, Vivaswaan, Vishnu, Amshuman, Varuna, and Mitra*; Surya Deva got spread all over the Universe by these Twelve Forms. Indra is the 'Prathama Murti' of Surya Deva who is the Chief of Devas and the Prime Enemy of Daityas. Dhata is second Amsha of Surya being the Prajapati the Creator of Prajas. Parjanya is the third name whose major function is to absorb water from all possible sources and meterialise clouds. The Fourth Amsha of Surya is Twashta the unique embodiment of Vanaspatis and Aoushadhis (vegetable oils and herbs / medicines respectively). Pusha represents Pushti or excellent health and physical well being as existent in 'Anna' or food. Aryama is the sixth Form of Surya Deva who symbolizes all the Devas in the form of Vayu. As is existent in the form of Aishwarya / prosperity and the Physique of humanity, Bhaga is the seventh Amsha of Surya. The eighth Form of Aditi Putra is Vaiwasvaan as existent in Agni (Jatharaagni) responsible for digesting the food consumed by all living beings. The ninth Amsha of Sun God is Vishnu who is 'Sarva Vyapi' the Omni Present and all – pervading. Amshuman is the tenth Murti of Surya Deva who provides the aspect of everlasting joy to humanity and all other species of Srishti. The eleventh Amsha of Bhaskara is in the Form of Varuna who exists as Jala /Water and preserves and sustains life to all Beings of Creation. Finally, the Twelfth Rupa of Surya Deva is Mitra, who exists in the form of friend, philospher and guide to the entire Universe, performing Tapasya on the banks of Chandra River and wishing and enabling the Totality of 'Charaachara Jagat' to source happiness and contentment. *Dwadashiva pruthaktena taani vakshaamaseshatah, Adityah Savitaa Suryo Mihirorkah Prabhaakarrah/ Maartando Bhaaskaro Bhanuschitra Bhaanu Divaakarrah, Ravirdwaadashabhisheshaam Jneyah Saamaanya naamabhih/ Visnurdhaataa Bhagah Pushaa Mitrendrou Varunyornamaa Vivaswaa namsumaam Twashtaa Parjanyo Dwaadashah smritaah/ Ityety Dwadasha –adittaah pruthaktena Vyavastithaah, Uttishthanti Sadaahyety maasthairvaa Dasabhih kramaat/* (Normally Surya Deva's names in vogue are Aditya, Savitru, Surya, Mihira, Arka, Prabhakara, Martanada, Bhaskara, Bhanu, Chitrabhanu, Divakara, Ravi and so on. But the additional names are Vishnu, Dhata, Bhaga, Pusha, Mitra, Indra, Varuna, Aryama, Vivasvata, Amsuvan, Twashta and Parjanya. Vishnu shines with twelve hundred rays in Chaitra Maasa, Aryama with thirteen hundred rays in Vaishakha Maasa, Vaivaswata in Jyeshtha Maasa with fourteen hundred raus, Amsuaan shines with fifteen hundred rays in Ashadha, Parjanya in Shravana Maasa with fourteen hundred rays, Varuna in Bhadrpada Maasa with as many rays as the previous month, Indra Swarupa Surya with twelve hundred rays in Kartika Maasa, Mitra in Margasirha month with the same as in the previous month, as Pusha in Poushya Maasa with nine hundred rays, as Bhaga in Magha and Twastha in Phalguna with eleven hundred hundred rays in each case. The number of Surya Kiranas would be on the ascent in Uttaraayana and on the descent in

Dakshinaayana. Daily recital of the above Twenty Names of Surya Deva at both the Sandhya timings would fetch the fruits of excellent health, prosperity, reputation and recognition. ‘*Sanatana Rahasya*’: Sage Narada having performed Tapasya asked Mitra Deva as to why the latter being the Omniscient, Omni Present and Omni Potent Overlord of the Universe, revered by Chaturashramas, Chatur Yugas and Chatur Varnas, besides all the Devaas, Danava-Daithya-Rakshas and Pitras still adored some distinct Entity himself! Mitra Deva sensitized Nara as follows: ‘Narada! There is a Supreme Power which exists in the Universe-or rather the Universe exists in that Supreme Power- which is ‘Sukshma’ (the miniscule yet mammoth), ‘Avigneya’ (Unrecognisable), ‘Avyatka’ (Unvisionable), ‘Achala’(Immovable), Dhruva (Fixed), ‘Indriya Rahita’ (Devoid of Limbs and Senses), ‘Vishaya rahita’(feature less), ‘Antaratma’ (The Supreme Inner Conscience) called ‘Kshetrajna’, the ‘Adi Purusha’, the ‘Hiranya Garbha’, ‘Vishwaatma’, ‘Sharva’, ‘Akshara’, devoid of Tri Gunas of Satvika-Rajasika-Tamasika nature. That Supreme Shakti is at once Saguna, Nirguna, Vishwa Rupa, and Jnaanagamy and Sarvavyapi: *Vasannapi shareereshu na sa lipyeta karmabhih, Mamaantaraatma tava cha ye chaanyey dehasamsthitaah/ Sarveshaam Saakshibhutesow na graahyah kenichat kvachit, Saguno Nirguno Vishvo Jnaanagamyo hyasow smritah/ Sarvatah Paanipaataantah sarvatokshishiromukhah, Sarvatah Shrumaamlokey Sarvamaavrutya tishthati/* (Heads of one and all in Srishti are his Unique Head; hands, shoulders, feet and all other body parts are his own of every person and of various other species are his of own as well. He is Unique Paramatma manifested in myriad forms multiplied.) It is that Parama Shakti which is at once in a cognizant, perceivable and ready Form with the ‘Amsha’ of the Self is Surya Deva. Brahma gave Upadesha to Narada by the recitation-power of which one would be free from ill-health, unfulfilled desires, poverty and ignorance of knowledge!

Note: See more details on Ratha Saptami in Maagha Shukla Saptami]

Bhadrapada Purnima: This day long festival and of austerities is revered as the grand ‘finale’ of Daksha Yagna as the day of Lord Vishnu slicing off the yogic body of Sati Devi forming 108 Shati Peethas; this is the star attraction at AMBAJI Temples in Gujarat, essentially up the Gabbar hills and in the plains as well. Shri Ambaji is represented by the Triangular SHRI YANTRA popular all over.

Note: This Bhadrapada Purnima is very reputed for performing SATYA NARAYANA VRATA, the details of which are provided towards the ending pages of this script.

In Tamil Solar Calendar, Bhadrapada Month known as ‘Purattaasi’ is popular for recitings of Maha Mrityunjaya Havans, recitals of Trayambika Mantra and Lingarcharnas.

ASHVIYUJA MAASA

Devi Navaraatraas: One of the famed Festivals occupying a social and spiritual attachment in entire Bharat, especially in the Eastern and Southern belts covering West Bengal and NorthEast, Odisha, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. In Uttar Bharat, Ram Leelas climaxed with Ravana effigy burnings and in Paschima Bharat Gadbha and Dandiya Raas are significant. Besides Pujas in Temples, temporary and brightly lit and street corners and socially vantage points in all villages, townships and cities, the annual social gatherings come alive in full glory. ‘Kulus’ are a compelling annual festivities looked forward to by men and women, boys and girls and children especially in Tamilnadu and Karnataka, while this social joy is rampant in Andhra/ Telangana as reserved for Makara Sankranti. Sharannava Ratris are the duration of worship to Adi Para Shakti and Sapta Matrikas *Brahmi* of Brahma Shakti who is the Shabda Swarupa and the Repository of Knowledge being of Satva Guna and of Shrishti Kaaraka; *Vaishnavi* is originated from Tejas and Rajas the Shiti kaaraka; *Maheshwari* , the Tamo Shaki or

of the Antaryami or the latent Energy emanating from Maha Maya; *Kaumari* the Sadhana Jnaana Shakti originated from Jnaana and Dharma being the root of 'Shaasta'; *Vaarahi* the Yajna Shakti being the embodiment of physical strength and well being originating for 'Anna' or Food Energy; *Aindri* the Shakti of Courage, Protection and Prowess like from Indra's Vajraayudha; and *Chamundi* the Pauranic Annihilator of the Demon Rakta Beeja or the True Balancer of the Virtue and Vice who manifests herself at the joints of Creation and Destruction which is signified as a state of Samadhi!

Nava Durgas as worshipped during the Nava Ratrias are *Shaila Putri* of Himalayas with Crescent Moon providing Mental Peace and Equanimity; *Brahmacharini* holding rosary and kamandalu being the Devi of Srishti-Sthiti-Vigjnaana-Moksha daayani or of Creation-Existence-Knowledge- and Absolute Bliss; she is the Yogini and Tapaswini as of Virgin form- *Chandraghanta Durga* riding a Vyaghra or Tiger as the embodiment of wrath and violence adorned with half moon and a ghanta or bell-*Kushmanda Durga* carrying loads of blood spilling out of a pumpkin with hands of blood as also being responsible for sustaining the Solar System headed by the radiant Surya Deva- *Skanda Maata Durga* seated on a jewelled throne of Gold ever propitious nature to the virtuous and the quick destroyer of evil as the symbol of courage and 'Dharma Shaasana' being 'Dharma Shaasta'- *Katyaayani* holding a 'Chandhrahaasa' or a long and unsheathed sword of valor and intrepidity ever ready to destroy the evil and riding high on a sky bound lion-*Kaala Raatri* the most ferocious Devi with protruded and elongated lips riding an ass and destroying pitch darkness and severe Agjnaana or pure lack of Understanding and mental maturity with ever sharp and dazzling sword of golden sheath; *Devi Maha Gauri* riding a vrishabha or a bull with resplendent clothes bestowing all-round auspiciousness; and *Siddhi daatri* who is ever victorious paving ways and means success and fulfillment.

Nava Ratra Nirnaya: Tula Sankranti and Mesha Sankranti are designated as *Vishu*. Fifteen ghadiyaas before and thereafter is the Vishu Punya kaala mand the one before Vishu is known as significant. Devi Navaraatraas commence from Ashviniya Shukla Pratipada to Mahanavami signifying 'Karma Praadhan - yata' or performing Acts of Dharma Karmaas of which Puja is the essential along with Upavaasa , Stora, Japa etc. As per one's own 'Kulaachara' or family tradition, Upavaasaas are observed as Eka Bhukta, Nakta Bhojana or Ayaachita Bhojana; recitals of Stotras of 'Sapta Shati', Lakshmi Hridaya, Lalitha-Lakshmi-Durga Sahasra Naamaas are rendered daily and formal Pujas to Devi are executed with dedication and involvement during the concerned Tithis regularly. Navaraatra Pujas begin on the Pratipada Tithi morning after Sunrise upto six ghadiyas or two Muhurtaas since the Puja is not to commence with an extension of time of the previous Amavasya into the Praatipada. In case the Pratipada Tithi does not occur even ten ghadiyas after Sun rise, then the Sankalpa could still be done looking East upto the Abhijin-muhurta upto 'Madhyaahna' but certainly not in the 'Aparaahna'. The Navaraatra Pujas could be observed by all of the Chaturvarnaas and even 'Mlecchaas'. But Brahmanaas should perform only 'Saatvika Puja' with Japa-Homa-Annabali-Naivedyas; in fact *Naivedyascha niraamishaih Madyam datvaa Brahmanastu Braahmanyaa Deva heeyatey, Madyamapeyamadeyam/* (Thus Brahmanaas have no authorization to resort to Raajasa Puja since they have no access to Madya-Maamsa). *Madya paaney Maranaanta praayaschittokteyhi, Sparsham tadangachedokteyschaalpapraaayschittena doshaanapoagamena paatityaapaataat/* ('Madya paana' attracts the extreme 'praayaschitta' or atonement of life unto death to a Brahmana and the limb of his body is required to be mutilated). Even in the case of Kshtriyaas-Vaishyaas and others, Maamsa-Madyaas are totally banned in respect of Nitya Pujas although these Varnaas might resort to them in the case of Kaamyas Karmaas. However in reference to Kamyas karmaas too their worship would secure additional and quicker results without Madya-Maamsaas. In any case, Japa-Homaadi Karyas need to be necessarily executed by Brahmanaas alone.

Navaraatri Celebrations are held for nine days twice every year during the first half of 'Asvayuja' and 'Chaitra' months from 'Pratipad' to 'Dashami'. The Navaraatra festivals in Asvayuja month are known as Sarat Navaratrias and the Chaitra month festivals are popularly known as Vasanta Navaratrias. The

preparation for Sarat Navaratri in the Autumn season commencing from Asvayuja Pradhama Tithi actually starts from Bhadrapada Amavasya itself with one meal of 'Homa Anna' or 'Sacred Agni Prasada'. At a designated Place in the center of a Hall, a raised platform made of bricks, called 'Vedi' of six feet wide and one and half feet height be arranged. On the Pratipad Tithi of Asvayuja, the Person(s) concerned sponsoring the Navarathras must arrive clean and composed, having already performed their 'Sandhavandanam' or daily pujas and should seek the blessings of Brahmanas appointed (either nine, or five or three or atleast one) after presenting them new clothes and Dakshina. 'Swasti' Mantras followed by Veda Parayana would be recited. An Idol of nicely decorated Durga Devi seated on a Lion, with either four or eighteen hands, with symbolic arms and jewellery be installed as also a Pot of Sacred River Water placed over an 'Yantra' (diagram) representing Grandhis (Chambers) of Trinity and relevant Demi-Gods and Planetary Heads, while rendering the relevant Mantras. With various Worship Materials in place, the Puja would commence along with the Mantram 'Om Hrim Srim Chandikaya namah'; 'Arthies' (Camphor cum oil soaked cotton vick lamps shown to Deity) are performed, accompanied by instrumental music, singing and dance in praise of Maha Devi Bhagavati. 'Bala Kanya Bhog' or Prasad (Food material offered to Deity) to Virgins of the ages of two to ten would follow. The virgins of two years are named Kumaris, three years are Trimurthies, four years are Kalyanis, five years are Rohinis, five years are Kalikas, six years are Chandika, seven years Sambhavi, eight years Durga and Nine years as Subhadra. Blessings of these Virgins provide removal of problems, wealth, longevity, happiness, health and Peace. The procedure for the evenings too is similar in the Sandhya Puja viz. the 'Arti' Worship to Goddess accompanied by instrumental music, 'Shodasa Upacharas' or Sixteen kinds of worship ranging from holding an Umbrella to the Deity, hand fanning, showing a mirror, camphor lighting, Veda Recital, Singing and dancing in praise of Amba, 'Naivedyam' or offering varieties of food, and 'Parikrama' or taking the Deity around the worship place, or a temple or surrounding areas and so on. At the end, Bhajans (Group Singing), Purana Pravachana (Lectures on the Mysteries of Goddess), 'Harikathas' or Musical renderings of Stories of Religious nature) and so on are performed. Special worship is arranged on the 'Saptami', 'Durga Ashtami', and ' Maha Navami' days ie. the seventh, eighth and the ninth days of the Festival. Devotees not quite involved in the previous days too would like to invariably perform Worship as per their choices in their own Puja Places in their own residences, or Temples or Specially built up (improvised) Group 'Mandaps' for community worship. Saptami is described as the day when Maha Bhagavati takes a 'Saakar' or Bodily Incarnation to destroy the Demon 'Mahisha Asura' who had the form of a Buffalo, creating havoc to the World. The following day, popular as 'Durga Ashtami', Maha Bhagavati in the Incarnation as Durga Devi looks fierce and angry with the Demon and prepares for a violent battle with him and fellow Demons and massacres them all. It is also believed that Bhadra Kali was incarnated in a furious and gruesome form to devastate the 'Yajna' that was performed by Daksha Prajapati, the father of 'Maha Sati', the better half of Lord Siva and the Kali Incarnation was surrounded by innumerable 'Yoginis' or the multiple permutations of Sixty Attendants of Bhadra Kali who created mayhem at the Yajna and killed Daksha and his followers. On Maha Navami Day, Maha Bhagavati in the forms of fury and destruction punished the evil forces and brought back Her own Creation to normalcy and established balance of power. Thus the two days of Durga Ashtami and Maha Navami are the days of the Grand Finale of the Navarathras, which are remembered for the relief, climactic joy and devotion experienced by the humans and Gods alike. The day next day falling on Vijaya Dasami is the day of high celebration and gratitude to Maha Bhagavati for Her 'Leelas' or Playful Actions that remain complex forever in human minds, soaked deep in the grip of Maya or Illusion! Whoever observes Navarathri Pujas with devotion are certain to reap benefits- Dharma (Virtue), Artha (Prosperity), Kama (Worldly fulfillments) and Moksha (Eternal Bliss) with the blessings of Maha Bhagavati. Even those who committed unpardonable misdeeds earlier- 'Pancha Patakas' or heinous acts viz. killing Sages and Brahmanas, stealing gold or valuables, drinking and gambling, adultery or association with perpetrators of sins-would be spared if only the Navaratra Worship is performed with faith. Veda Vyasa described to King Janamejaya the illustration of how Lord Ramachandra had conquered the indomitable Ravana, when the latter had kidnapped Bhagavati Sita by deception in disguise as a Fake Sage and on securing tip offs

that She was in Lanka under Ravana's custody. In fact, the earlier forest life of Lord Rama was a dismal experience consequent on his Step mother Kaikeyi's demand to send away Lord Rama and Lady Sita to forest life for fourteen years. Sri Rama had to invade Ravana's Lanka to recover Sita, with the help of King Sugriva of Kishkindha and his Monkey brigade including Heros like Lord Anjaneya, Jambavanta and Angada. It was at that critical time that Maharshi Narada met Lord Rama and advised Him to perform Navaratra Pujas to fulfill the objective of destroying the unbeatable Ravana and his entire followers and for recovering Sita Devi. (In fact, Ravana was seeking Maya Sita Devi, as real Sita in her earlier birth was an ascetic daughter of a Sage and Ravana was reproached by her when he made advances to her. He caught her hairs and she felt her body became impure and cursed that she would destroy him and his clan in her next birth and ended her life in Yoga Fire. As Sita Devi as the wife of Sri Rama, she gave away her Maya (Illusion) to Ravana and he actually stole away a poisonous serpent in the form of Maya Sita in the 'Ashoka Vana'!) Narada told Sri Rama that in the past, Navaratras were observed in sincerity by Indra, many other Demi-Gods as also Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara and obtained their Blessings from Maha Devi to fulfill their own wishes and prayers. As advised by Narada Maharshi, Lord Rama performed the Navaratras and secured Bhagavati Devi's blessings. The battle was fought killing Rakshasas and the mighty Indrajit, Kumbhakarna and Ravana by Sri Rama as an instrument of Devi Bhagavati.

Navaraatri Vidhis: *Atra Nava Raatrey Ghatasthaapanam Pratarmadhyaahney Pradosha kaaley cheti Trikaalam Dwikaalam-Eeka kaalam vaa Swaswa Kula Devataa pujanam Saptashatyaadi japokhanda deepah Achaaraprapta maalaa bandhanam Upavaasa Nakthaikabhaktaadi niyamah Suvaasini bhojanm Kumaari bhojana pujaadi antey Saptashatyaadi Stotra Mantra Homaadi ityetaani vihitaani/* (During these Navaraatraas the Duties required to be performed include Kalasha Sthaapana followed by daily Trikaala Puja as per 'Vamshaachara', Saptapadi and other Japaas, Akhanda Deepa, Maalaa bandhana as per Kulaachara, Upavaasa, Nakta-Eka bhuktaadi niyama, Suvaasini –Kanyaa pujaas and Bhojana and Homa Karyas). Kalasha Sthaapana should not be performed in the nights. The Kalasha should be arranged on a Clean Vedika / Platform made of Pancha Pallavaas, milk, fruits, 'taambula'/betel nuts and leaves, Kunkuma, Dhupa, Deepa and such other requirements of Puja. On Pratipaada morning after 'Abhyangana' or head bath, be seated by Grihastis along with wife and make the Sankalpa as follows: *Mama saha kutumba syaamuka Devataa preeti dwaaraa Sarvaapadccaanti purvaka Deergaayurdhana putraadi vriddhi Shatru Jaya keertilaabha pramukha Charurvidha Purushaatha siddhyartha Madhya Prabhruti Mahaa Navamiparyanta trikaala mekakaalamvaamuka Devataapujaamupavaasaa Naktaikabhaktaanyata niyama sahitamakhanda deepajwaalana Kumaaripujana Chandi Saptashati paatha Suvaasini bhojanaadi rupam Sharada nava raatrotsavaakhyam karma karishye!* After the Sankalpa as above Kalasha Sthaapana follows; *Tadadou Nirvighnataa siddhyartham Ganapati Pujamam Punyaahvachanam Chandi Saptashati Japaadyartham Brahman varanam karishye/* As the Kalasha Sthapana is being performed, Bhumi is prayed to and touched with the Mantra *Mahaadyou;* to perform 'Ankuraaropana' collect some 'Mrittika' for the Ankuraaropana and recite the Mantras: *Aoushaddhayassa- Akaleshu- Imammey Gangey- Gandha dwaaraa- Kandaatkaanda- Ashwattaveh- Syonaa Prithivi-Yaah phalineeh-Sahiratnaani Hiranya Rupam-Uvaasu vaasaa-Purnaadarvi-Tatwaayaami/* by inferring various acts of collecting Aoushadhis from Mrittika to fill up the Kalasha with the Sacred Water along with Pancha Pallavaas, Ratna-Hiranyaas, and perform Puja to Varuna Deva, Kula Devata and Devi in various Forms as follows: *Jayanti Mangalaa Kashi Bhadra Kaali Kapaalini, Durgaa Kshamaa Shiva Dhaatri Swaahaa Swadhaa Namostutey/ Aagaccha Varadey Devi Daithua darpa nishudini, Pujaam grahaana Sumikhi namastey Shankara priye!* There after along with other Stotraas like Shri Sukta, Purusha Sukta and Prathama Ruks and formally worship with 'Shodasopacharaas' like Aasana-Padya-Vastra-Dhupa-Deepa-Naivedyas and *Sarva Mangala Maangaley* and other 'Praarthanaas'. Offer of 'Bali daana', Kushmaanda daana, 'Kushmaanda Khandana' and Shanti mantraas ending up with *Om Shaantishshaanthishshaantih/* Finally at the end of the daily Nava Raatri Puja there should be resolve : *Akhanda deepakam Devyaah preetaye Nmava traatrakam,*

Ujjwalaye dahoraatra mekachitto Dhrudha Vrata/ (I resolve with unswerving devotion that the Akhanda Deepa shall be firmly set aflame all through the Nava Raatris and the daily formal worship as prescribed!)

Saptashati Pathana Vidhana: With the resolution of reading Chandi Sapta Shati or Narayana Hridaya or Lakshmi Hridaya, one should be seated comfortably and commence with Salutations to Bhagavan of *Om Namō Narayanaaya Namah, Om Naraaya Narottamaaya Namah, Om Sarasvatyai Namah, Om Vyaasaaya Namah.* Reading the book holding in hands is not in order. There should not be a break while reading and if so it should start again from the beginning. Reading must be done by clearly pronouncing the letters and understanding the meaning; the voice must be uniform and modulated and in proper 'Swara'. *Shanti karmani sarvatra tathaa Dussapna darshane, Graha peedaasu chograasu Mayatmyam shrunuyaanmaya/* ie. when Shanti Karmaas are being done or when bad dreams occur or while entering frightening places, reading the Devi Mahatmya would bar any kind of impediments. While entering water and forests or sudden outbreaks of fire or attack by robbers or enemies, recitation of Sapta Shati happens to be a sure remedy. Its recital thrice wards off 'Upadravaas' or calamities; 'graha peedaa nivrutti' is assured by the recital by five times; undergoing 'Maha Bhaya' is overcome by seven recitals; For Shaanti and Vaajapeya Phala praapti by nine times; Raja Vasya by eleven times; Shatru naashana by reciting twelve times; 'Stree-Purusha Vasyata' by fourteen times; Putra-Poutra-Dhana-Dhaanya-Arthaas are attainable by the 'Paath' of the 'Shati' by sixteen times; Raja bhaya naasha by seventeen times; Vana Bhaya by twenty times; freedom from shackles by twenty five times; and concentrated recital of the Sapta Shati by hundred times would accomplish curing of Impossible diseases, Kulaccheda nivaarana, Ayur-naashana and so on. 'Sahasra Paatha' of the Sacred Sapta Shati would indeed bestow 'Shataashwamedha phala' and Moksha Prapti!

Navaavarana Puja:

After ensuring external and internal purity ('Bahya Suddhi' and 'Antar Suddhi') and squatted with concentration, one should initiate 'Achamana' (sipping water thrice) with 'Kesavaya Svaha, Narayanaya Svaha, Madhavaya Svaha etc; be ready with articles of worship; perform 'Pranayama' or controlled breathing; follow by 'Bhuta Suddhi' or purification of the old and installing the new representation of Devi Bhagavati and observe internal 'dhyana' (meditating) to mean: dissolve Earth into Water, Water into Fire, Fire into Air, Air into Ether, Ether into 'Ahankara', 'Ahankara' into 'Mahat'(Great Energy) and 'Mahat' into 'Prakriti' or 'Maya', or in other words imagine transformation of the Five Elements into Moola Prakriti; follow Bhuta Suddhi by 'Jeeva Suddhi' or align the Self with Parama Devi; proceed further by mentally setting Six Chakras (outer- most circle inserted by an inner circle, further inserted by four more inner circles one within another) thus arranging the installation of 'Shat chakropasthitha Samsthitha' simultaneously pronouncing the afore mentioned nine lettered Mantra, viz. 'Om Aim Hrim Kleem Chamundaya Vicche' and align the Mantra to the six chakras as also touching the relevant body parts of the Worshipper concerned. The 'Karthā' or the Worshipper should perform 'Sankalpa' or mentioning the 'Tidhi'(date), 'Vara' (day) 'Nakshatra' or the relevant 'Star' of the day, 'Aayana' or the Course of the Solar Movement, Month, Year, Manvantara, Yuga, Place, Name of the Performer, 'Gotra' etc.; sprinkle water on the self, surroundings, articles and place of worship and recite the Mantra to remove obstacles for worship viz. 'Astraya Phat'; place the Sacred Copper Plate in position; [readily available from contemporary markets or draw two hexagonal triangles - one straight and another inverted- crossing each other, draw a figure outside that image, an octagonal form of eight petals and outside this a 'Bhupura' or boundary lines. On the eight petals are inscribed the Bija Mantras with the ninth word inscribed at the central Ovum]. The 'Bindu' or 'Adhara Shakti' or the Super Energy at the Central Ovum which one has to worship. The 'Yantra'(diagram) is expected to resemble human body and is a mystical representation of Devi Maha Bhagavati to be worshipped.

Actual Puja commences while seated facing east and looking at the tip of the top triangle of the Yantra. The lowest triangle at the bottom right represents Lord Ganesha whose prayer is a traditional must. The

bottom left hand side is governed by Sun God, top left Corner by Lord Vishnu, and top right corner by Lord Shiva. The 'Lokapalas' or Direction-wise Guards protect as follows: Indra guards East, Agni (Fire) guards South East, Lord Yama guards South, Nirruti South West, Varuna the God of Rain and Water guards the West, 'Vayu' the God of Air guards North West, Soma or Moon guards North, and Ishana protects North East. After propitiating the Devas and Lokapalaks, Puja to Devi Bhagavati starts by Kara Nyasa and Anga Nyasa. The Karanyasa Mantras are: Aim- angushttabhyam Namah, Hreem- Tarjaneebhyam Namah, Sreem - Madhyamabham Namah, Aim- Anamikabhyam Namah, Kleem Kanishthikam Namah, Souh Karatala prushthabhyam Namah. Anganyasa Mantras are: Aim Hridayaya Namah, Hreem Sirase Svaha, Sreem Sikhayavoushat, Aim Kavachahum, Kleem Netratraya aushath, Sauh Astrayaphut. Salutations to Maha Devi as follows:

Om Aim Sreem Aim Kleem Souh-Kriya Shakti Peethayai-Shri Padukayam Pujaami

Om Aim Sreem Aim Kleem Souh-Jnana Shakti Kundalinyai- -DO-

Om Aim Sreem Aim Kleem Souh- Iccha Shakti Maha Tripura Sundaryai- -DO-

Nityamba Pujas: The following Mantras to added after each Nityamba:-

Om Aim Hreem Shreem Aim Kleem Souh XXXX Sri Padukayam Pujaya Namah

Example: Do Kameswari Nityamba Do

Bhagamalini Nityamba, Nityaklinna Nityamba, Bherunda Nityamba, Vahnivasini Nityamba, Maha Vajreswari Nityamba, Sivaduti Nityamba, Tvarita Nityama, Kula Sundari Nityamba, Nitya Nityamba, Neelapataka Nityamba, Vijaya Nityamba, Sarva Mangala Nityamba, Jwalamalini Nitymaba, Chitra Nityamba, Maha Nitya Nityamba, Parameswara Nityamba, Parameswari Devi, Mitresamayi Devi, Shashtheesa Mayi Devi, Uddishamayi Devi, Charyanathamayi Devi, Lopamudramayi Devi, Agashyamayi Devi, Kala- tapanamayi Devi, Dharmacharyamayi Devi, Muthakesivaramayi Devi, Deepakalanathamayi Devi, Vishnudevamayi Devi, Prabhakara Devamayi Devi, Vasudevayamayi Devi, Ratnadevimayi Devi and Sri Ramanandamayi Devi.

Navavarana Puja- Names of Devis in Nine Enclosures

Prathama Avarana: (First Enclosure) in Three Outer Lines:

First Line: Anima Sidhamba, Laghima Sidhamba, Mahima Sidhamba, Isitva Sidhamba, Vasitva Sidhamba, Prakamya Sidhamba, Bhuti Sidhamba, Iccha Sidhamba, Prapti Sidhamba and Sarva Kama Sidhamba.

Second Line: Sri Brahmi Matraka, Maheswari Matraka, Kaumari Matraka, Vaishnavi Matraka, Varahi Matraka, Mahendri Matraka, Chamunda Matraka, and Mahalakshmi Matraka.

Third Line: Sarva Sankshobhini Devi, Sarva Vidravini Devi, Sarvakarshini Devi, Sarva vashankari Devi, Sarvonmadini Devi, Sarva Mahankusa Devi, Sarva Khechari Devi, Sarva Beeja Devi, Sarva Yoni Devi, Sarva Trikhandi Devi, Trilokya Mohana Chakraswamini Devi and Prakata Yogini Devi.

Dwiteeya Avarana (Second Enclosure): Kamakarshini Shakti, Buddhyakarshini Shakti, Ahankarakarshini Shakti, Sabdakarshini Shakti, Sparshakarshini Shakti, Rupakarshini Shakti, Rasakarshini Shakti, Gandhakarshini Shakti, Chittakarshini Shakti, Dhairyakarshini Shakti, Smrutyakarshini Shakti, Namakarshini Shakti, Beejakarshini Shakti, Atmakarshini Shakti, Amrutakarshini Shakti, Sharirakarshini Shakti, Sarva Aasha Paripurka Chakraswamini and Gupta Yogini.

Triteeya Avarana (Third Enclosure): Anga Kusuma Shakti, Ananga Mekhala Shakti, Ananga Madana Shakti, Ananga Madanatura Shakti, Ananga Rekha Shakti, Ananga Vegini Shakti, Ananga Ankusha Shakti, Ananga Malini Shakti, Sarva Sankshobhana Chakraswamini, and Gupta thara Yogini.

Chaturdha Avarana (Fourth Enclosure): Sarvakshobhini Devi, Sarva Vidravini Devi, Sarvakarshini Devi, Sarvahladini Devi, Sarva Sammohini Devi, Sarva-Sthambhini Devi, Sarvajhrumbhini Devi, Sarvavashankari Devi, Sarva Ranjani Devi, Sarvonmadini Devi, Sarvatha Sadhika Devi, Sarva Sampatti Purani Devi, Sarva Mantramayi Devi, Sarva Dvandva Kshayankari Devi, Sarva Soubhagya Dayaka Chakraswamini Devi and Sampradaya Yogini Devi.

Panchama Avarana (Fifth Enclosure): Sarva Siddhiprada Devi, Sarva Sampathprada Devi, Sarva Priyankari Devi, Sarva Mangala Karini Devi, Sarva

Kamaprada Devi, Sarva Dhukha Vimochani Devi, Sarva Mrithyu Prasamani Devi, Sarva Vighna Nivarini Devi, Sarvanga Sundari Devi, Sarva Sowbhagya Dayani Devi, Sarva Ardha Sadhaka Chakraswamini and Kulotheerna Yogini.

Shashtha Avarana (Sixth Enclosure): Sarvagya Devi, Sarva Shakti Devi, Sarva Aishvarya Pradayani Devi, Sarva Jnanamayi Devi, Sarva Vyadhi Vinasini Devi, Sarvadhara Swarupa Devi, Sarva Papahari Devi, Sarva Anandamayi Devi, Sarva Raksha Swarupini Devi, Sara Epsitha Phalaprada Devi, Sarva Rakshakara Chakra Swamini and Nigarbha Yogini.

Saptama Avarana (Seventh Enclosure): Vasini Vagdevi, Kameswari Vagdevi, Modhini Vagdevi, Vimala Vagdevi, Aruna Vagdevi, Jayani Vagdevi, Sarva Eswari Vagdevi, Kaulini Vagdevi, Sarva Rogahara Chakraswaini, Rahasya yogini, Banini, Chapini, Paasini and Ankusini.

Ashtama Avarana (Eighth Enclosure): Maha Kameswari Devi, Maha Vajreswari Devi, Maha Bhagamalini Devi, Sarva Siddhiprada Chakraswamini and Ati Rahasya Yogini.

Navama Avarana (Ninth Enclosure): Sri Sri Bhattarika, Sarvanandamaya Chakraswamini and Parapara Rahasya Yogini.

Conclusion of Navavarana Puja: Tripura Devi Namah: Dhyayami; Tripuresi Devi Namah: Avahayami; Tripura Sundari Devi Namah :Asanam Samarpayami; Tripurasiddhi Devi Namah: Snanam Samarpayami; Tripuramba Devi Namah: Vastram Samarpayami; Maha Tripura Sundari Devi Namah: Abharamam Samarpayami; Maha Maheswari Devi Namah: Gandham Dharayami; Maha Maharagni Devi Namah: Pushpam Pujayami; Srimad Simhasana Iiswaryai Devi Namah:Padam Pujaami; Lalitha Devi Namah: Gulphou Pujayami; Maha Raagni Namah: Janghou Pujayami; Paramakushi Namah: Januni Pujayami; Chapinyai Namah :Urum Pujayami; Tripurayi Namah:Katim Pujayami; Maha Sundaryai Namah: Nabhim Pujayami; Sundaryai Namah: Vasitrayam Pujayami; Chakranathaya Namah:Udaram Pujayami; Charinyai Namah: Kantham Pujayami; Chakreswaryai Namah:Oshtham Pujayami; Maha Devai Namah: Kapolam Pujayami; Kameswaryai Namah: Dantapanktim Pujayami; Parama Eswaryai Namah:Chbukam Pujayami; Kamaraja Priyayai Namah:Nasika Dwayam Pujaami; Kamakotikayai Namah: Bhru Madhyam Pujaami; Sarv Patalayai Namah: Mukham Pujayami; Kulanthayai Namh: Parswam Pujaami; Amnayanathayai Namah: Siram Pujamami; Sarva Amnaya Nivasinyai Namah : Padukam Pujayami; Maha Sringara Nayikayai Namah : Sarvangyani Pujayami. Maha Shakti Devi Namah:Dhoopam Aghrapaami; Maha Guptha Devi Namah: Deepam Darshayami; Maha Gupta Devi Namah: Nivedaym Samarpayami; Maha Ananda Devi Namah:Tamboolam Saparpayami; Maha Skanda Devi Namah: Mantra Pushpam Samarpayami; Maha Maha Sri Chakra Nagara Samragini Namah: Pradakshina Namaskaran Samarpayami. [Note: If the detailed worship on the above lines is not possible to perform, at least the following powerful Panchadasakshari mantra may be recited 108 times each day keeping in view the Sri Yantra with concentration: Ka E La Hreem-Ha Sa Ka Ha La Hreem-Sa Ka La Hreem]

Mani Dwipa Varnana : Being far superior to Kailasa, Vaikuntha and Goloka, the Sarvaloka or Mani Dvipa is the residence of Devi Bhagavati in whom the entire Creation rests! Indeed She resides everywhere and anywhere but notionally at Mani Dvipa and the description is transcribed in detail by Maharshi Veda Vyasa apparently for the consumption of mortals to carry conviction into their consciousness. Surrounded by ‘Sudha Sagara’ (The Ocean of Nectar), Manidvipa has a strong iron enclosure of several Yojanas far and wide with four gates well guarded by Devas and Devis. Within the First Enclosure, there is an Enclosure of white metal made of an amalgam of zinc and tin/copper which touches Heavens and is hundred times higher than the walls of the outer Enclosure.This Enclosure is interspersed with gardens and forests with a wide range of trees and plants, flowers with intoxicating fragrances, luscious fruits along with streams of fruit juices and gregarious animals and birds of staggering variety. The third Enclosure is made of copper with a height of seven yojanas comprising several ‘Kalpavrikshas’, with golden leaves/ flowers and fruits yielding gems, fulfilling desires of any imagination.The King of the Gardens along with the wives Madhu Sri and Madhava Sri maintains an excellent Spring Season, where Gandharvas reside, rendering divinely songs and music. The Fourth

Enclosure made of lead with its wall height is again seven yojanas and within the Enclosure are the Sanatanaka trees with flowers whose fragrance reaches as far as ten yojanas and fresh fruits providing sweet juices of great quality and its King with the two queens Sukra Sri and Sudha Sri always maintains enjoyable mild summer where Siddhas and Devas reside here. The Fifth Enclosure made of brass with a spread of ten yojanas is maintained by its Chief as a perennial Rainy Season accompanied by twelve of his wives, viz. Nabha Sri, Nabhyasya Sri, Sravasya, Rasyasalini, Amba, Dula, Niranti, Varidhara, Abhramanti, Megha Yantika, Varshayanti, and Chivunika. The Trees grown in the Gardens of this Enclosure are Hari Chandana. The Sixth Enclosure is made of walls with five-fold irons and its Gardens grow Mandara Trees and creepers; the wives of its Chief are Isalakshmi and Urjalakshmi maintaining the Season of Autumn. Here again Siddhas reside with their wives. The Seventh Enclosure of seven Yojanas of length is made of Silver, its Chief maintaining Hemanta (dewy) Season with his two wives Saha Sri and Sahasya Sri with Parijata as its main tree and flowers. The Eighth Enclosure is made of molten gold with Kadamba garden in the center with Tapas Sri and Tapasya Sri as the wives of the King and the fruits of the trees yield honey that is consumed aplenty by Siddhas and wives who are the inhabitants and the season again is dewy. The 'Navavarana' or the Ninth Enclosure is made of Pushparaga gems of Kumkum (saffron) colour which is abundant all over inside the Enclosure like forests, trees, rivers, flowers, lotuses, 'Mandapas' (Halls), pillars and so on. All the 'Dikpalakas' of High Regency reside in the Eight Directions of the Enclosure, with the thousand eye bodied Indra in the East in Amaravati on Airavata with Sachi Devi, 'Vajra Ayudha' or thunderbolt, the Celestial Apsarasas and the rest; Agni Deva in South East with his two wives Svaha and Svadha , his Vahana and other belongings; Yama Dharma Raja in the South with his 'Yama danda' (his Symbol the Celestial Rod) along with Chitrugupta; Nirutti in the South West with his axe and wife representing Rakshasas'; Varuna Deva in the West with his wife Varuni and 'Pasa' (the noose), drinking Varuni honey and with the King of Fishes as his Vahana (Vehicle) and surrounded by aquatic animals; Vayu Deva in the North West with his wife, forty nine members of his Vayu family along with groups of Yogis adept in Pranayama and other practices along with his Deer Vahana; the King of Yakshas and Unparalleled Possessor of Gems and Jewels Kubera in the North along with his two Shaktis Viriddhi and Riddhi and his Generals Manibhadra, Purnabhadra, Maniman, Manikandhara, Manisvargi, Manibhushana and Manikar Muktheadhari; Rudra Deva in the North East with other Rudras who are angry and red eyed, armed and mighty, frightful and revolting, fiery mouthed and detestably distorted, some times ten handed or thousand handed, odd number footed and odd number mouthed; in the company of Bhadrakalis and Matriganas, Rudranis and Pramadhaganas making 'Attahasas' or reverberating screeches and so on. Tenth Enclosure made of Padmaraga Mani inside which are the Sixty four 'Kalas' like Pingalakshi, Visalakshi, Vriddhi, Samriddhi, Svaha, Svadha and so on each of these having hundreds of akshouhini strong armies and individually each of these 'Kalas' have the unimaginable Power of destroying a lakh of 'Brahmandas'(Universes)! The Eleventh Enclosure is made of Gomeda Mani and within this are the sin-destroying and beneficent Maha Shaktis viz. Vidya, Hri, Pushti, Prajna, Sinivali, Kuhu, Rudra, Virya, Prabha, Nanda, Poshani, Riddhida, Subha, Kalaratri, Maharatri, Bhadra Kali, Kapardini, Vikriti, Dandi, Mundini, Sendhu Kanda, Sikhandini, Nisumbha Sumbha Madini, Mahishasura Mardini, Rudrani, Sankarardha Saririni, Nari, Nirayani, Trisulini, Palini, Ambika and Hladini. The Twelfth Enclosure made of Diamonds and is the dwelling place of Bhuvaneswari, and is surrounded by Eight Shakties viz. Anangarupa, Ananaga Madana, Madanantara, Bhuvana Vega, Bhuvana Palika, Sarvasisira, Ananga Vedana and Ananda Madana; each of these Main Attendants of Bhuvaneswari has a lakh of Attendants. The Thirteenth Enclosure is made of Vaiduryas and the Residences of Eight Matrikas viz. Brahmi, Mahesvari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Indrani, Chamunda and Mahalakshmi. The Fourteenth Enclosure made of Indranilamani, which is the Most Auspicious Place of the Sixteen Petalled Holy Lotus with Sixteen Maha Shaktis resident viz. Karali, Vikarali, Uma, Sarasvati, Sri, Durga, Ushas, Lakshmi, Sruti, Smriti, Dhriti, Sraddha, Medha, Mati, Kanti and Arya. The Fifteenth Enclosure made of 'Mukta' or Pearls inside which reside Eight Shaktis Ananga Kusuma, Ananga Kusuma Tura, Ananga Madana, Ananga Madanatura, Bhuvanapala, Ganganavega, Sasirekha, and Gangana Vegarekha. The Sixteenth Enclosure which is made of Marakatha (Vaidurya) is

hexagonal of Yantra Shape, and on the eastern corner of the Center is the Brahma with Devi Gayatri with Vedas, Sastras and Puranas as well as their Expansions; on the Western corner is Maha Vishnu and Savitri along with their own Expansions; on the North Western corner is Maha Rudra and Sarasvati with Rudra and Parvati Expansions and Sixty four Agamas and all Tantras; on the South Eastern side is the abodes of Kubera and Maha Lakshmi; on the Western corner side are the Couple of Madana and Rati Devi and on the North Eastern side are Ganesha and Pushti Devi. The Seventeenth one is made of Prabala (Red like Saffron) Devi Bhagavati's five Elements viz. Hrillekha, Gagana, Raktha, Karailika, and Mahochuchusma; and finally, the Eighteenth Enclosure is built with Navaratnas (Nine Jewels) with Bhagavati in the Center with 'Pancha Amnyas' (Eastern Amnaya is Creation by Mantra Yoga, Southern is Maintenance by Bhakti, Western is Pralay by Karma Yoga, Northern is Grace by Jnana Yoga and Urdhva Amnaya is Liberation); ten Maha Vidyas (Kali, Tara, Chhinnamasta, Bhuvaneshwari, Bagala, Dhumavati, Matangi, Shodasi and Bhairavi) and Avatars viz. Bhuvaneshwari Pasamkusavari, Bhairavi, Kapala, Amkusa, Paramada, Sri Krodha, Triptavasardha, Nityaklinna, Annapurneshwari and Tvarita. Ratnagriha or the Crown Palace of Mula Prakriti or Maha Devi Bhagavati is beyond the Eighteenth Enclosure, built of Chintamani Gems with thousands of pillars built by Suryamani Gems or Vidyutkantamani Gems. Four huge 'Mandapas' or halls each with thousand pillars in the Palace are made of kaleidoscopic and artistic mix of 'Navaratnas' (The Nine Gems) viz. Mukta, Manikya, Vaidurya, Gomeda, Vajra, Vidruma, Padmaraga, Nila and Marakatas with dazzling lights and exhilarating perfumes suited to the Themes of the Halls designated as Shringara, Mukti, Jnana and Ekanta. In the Central place of each of the Halls, there is a Very Special Chintamani Griha or the Sanctum Sanctorum on a raised platform with a plank supported by the four legs of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Maheshwara and the plank is Sadasiva Himself! The Maha Tatvas are the stair cases leading to the Upper Chambers. Mula Prakriti and Maha Purusha constitute two halves of the Physical Formation of Maha Devi cum Maha Deva with Five Faces of Each Half, with corresponding three Eyes and four arms and armoury, one hand reserved exclusively for providing boons. The Attending Sakhies are those surrounding the 'Ardhanarisara' are Iccha Sakti, Jnana Sakti and Kriya Sakti who are always present with the Maha Bhagavati along with Lajja, Tushti, Pushti, Kirti, Kanti, Kshama, Daya, Buddhi, Medha, Smriti and Lakshmi in their physical Forms. The Nine Pitha Shaktis Jaya, Vijaya, Ajita, Aparajita, Nitya, Vilasini, Dogdhri, Aghora and Mangala are at the constant Service. Devi Bhagavati is simultaneously present in all the Mandapas; enjoying Vedas, Hymns of Praise, and Music in Shringara Hall; freeing Jivas from bondages in Mukti Hall; rendering advice and instructions in Jnana Hall and conducting consultations in Ekanta Mandapa with Ministers like Ananga Kusuma etc. on matters of vital significance related to Creation, Preservation and Destruction of Evil. Indeed the inhabitants of Mani Dvipa are all those who have attained Samipya, Salokya, Sarupya and Sarsti. They have no Arishdvargas to overcome, no tatvas to gain, no gunas to regulate, no Yogas to perform, no ambitions or desires to fulfil. They have no concepts of time, death, age, distance, body, mind, light, season or the 'Tapatriyas'. Human beings normally tend to describe the negativity of life always but the Eternal State of Perfect Equilibrium is some thing utterly unimaginable! Maharshi Veda Vyas assured that reading, listening or imagining about Mani Dvipa and of the Glories of Devi Bhagavati would provide peace of mind, contentment and fresh springs of hope, purpose and direction of life. Especially so, when new projects are launched and new actions are initiated as also when apprehensions, obstacles, diseases, tragedies or even the facing of death are envisaged by anybody

Kumari Puja: Excepting a baby of one year, Kanyas from two to ten years of age are worthy of worship. Such Kanyaas are designated as *Kumari, Trimurti, Kalyani, Rohini, Kaali, Chandika, Shambhavi, Durga and Bhadra*. 'Aavahana' or Invocation of such Kumaris in their Puja would be as follows: *Mantraakshara mayeem Lakshmin Maatranaam Rupa dhaarineem, Nava Durgaatmikaam Saakshaat kanyaanamavaa hyamyaham/ Jagatpujye Jagadwandye Sarva Shakti Swarupini, Pujaam grihaana Koumaari Jaganmaatarnamostutey/* After the Aavahana Mantra the Kanyaa Puja is commenced with Paada prakshaalana or washing the feet of the Kumari and offering Vastra-Kumkuma-Gandha-Dhupa-Deepa-Bhojanas. During the Puja, recitation of Chandi-Paatha is required while others prescribe Lalita

Sahasranaamaa too. *Upaanga Lalita Vrata*: This Vrata is scheduled on Ashwiyuja Shukla *Panchami* and ‘Aparaahna’ is suitable; if Aparaaahna is not available on Panchami, then the previous Aparaaahna would be suitable. Some opine that Lalitha Puja is better performed in the night.

Saraswati Puja: This popular and Sacred Puja of Devi Saraswati is performed on Ashwiyuja Shukla Paksha Saptami but significantly in the *Moola Nakshatra*. Sthaapana has to be in Moola, Avahana and Puja are to be in Purvaashaadha Nakshatra, Bali daana in Uttaraashaadha and Udwaasana in Shravana: *Mooleshu Sthaapanam Devyaah Purvaashaadhaasu pujanam, Uttaraasu Balim tadyacchravaney na visarjayet/* But Rudraamala Grandha states: Avahana and Anga Puja be done in Moola Nakshatra, detailed Puja in Purvaashadha without Avahana, Bali daana in Uttaraashaadha, and Anga Puja before Visarjana in Shravana Nakshatra. In any case, Avahana of Saraswati is to be done three muhurtaas before ‘Suryastama’ but if Moola Nakshatra is unavailable at that time then Avahana is done next day’s Moola’s dwiteeya paada. The Puja in brief is initiated as follows: *Pustakeshu yato Devi kreedate paramaarthatah, tatastatra prakurveeta dhyaanamaavaahanaadikam/ Dhyanamevam prakurveeta saadhako vijitendriyah Pranavaasanamaarudhyam tadardhatvena nishchitaam/ Ankusham chaaksha sutram cha paasham veenaamcha dhaarineem, Muktaahaara samaayuktaam moda rupaam manoharaam/ Kritena darpanaa bhyena vastrenopari bhushitaam, sustaneem veda vedyaamcha chandraarthakrita shekharaam/ Jataa kalaapa yuktaam purna chandranibhaananaam, Trilochanaam Maha Deveem swarna nupura dhaarineem/ Katakaih swarnaratnaadyairmuktaavalaya bhushitaam, Kambukanthim sutaamroshtheem sarvaabharana bhushitaam/ Keyurairmekhalaadyascha dyotayanteem jagatrayam, Shabda rahmaatmikaam Deveem dhyaana karma samaahitah/ Sarasvateemaavaahayaami-aasanam samarpayaami-paadyam-arghyam-aachananeeyam-madhuparkam-pancaamritasnaanam-vastrayugmam-brahma sutra/ yagnopaveeta-aabharana-gandha-akshata-puhspaan- deepa-dhopanaivedya-taamboola-neeraajana-mantrapushpa- pradakshina- namaskaaraan samarpayaami/ Praardhanaas: Paahi paahi Jagadvande namaste bhakti vatsale, Namastubhyam namastubhyam namastubhyam namo namah// Paashankusha dharaa Vaani Veena pustaka dhaarini, Mama vaktre vasennityam dugdhakundendu nirmalaa/ Chaturdashasu vidyaasu ramate yaa Saraswati, Chaturdashasu lokeshu saa me vaachi vasescharim/* The Saraswati Vrata concludes with Kathaa shravana-pathana.

Maha Ashtami Nirnaya: If Ashtami is mixed even by a negligible time at the Suryodaya Kaala then Ashtami is called as Namavi. Similarly if Saptami is mixed with Ashtami at the Sun Rise even by one ghadi then that Tithi is not determined as Ashtami. The combination of Tuesday and Ashtami Tithi are notable and highly auspicious. Incidentally, those who have sons should not observe Upavaasa on this Ashtami; at least they should consume even a little food.

Mahishaasura Vadha: for establishing Universal Peace. Here is the essence of this episode as per Devi Purana: There were two mighty Demon brothers Karambha and Rambha, both desirous of begetting brave children and practised severe ‘Tapasya’. Karambha did his devotion inside deep waters and Indra having taken the form of a crocodile dragged the Danava’s feet and killed him. Rambha sat on the banks of River Indus and performed a rigorous Sacrifice to Lord Agni. Meanwhile, he found his elder brother dead in the depths of River Sindhu and desired to quit life but Fire-God did his appearance and prevented the suicide. The Fire-God also gave him the boon of securing a son who would shake up the entire world. Rambha found that in the vicinity there was a passionate She-Bufferalo with whom he mated and at the same time a he-buffalo desired to mate with the she-buffalo and as Rambha sought to prevent, the he-buffalo killed Rambha. The she-buffalo killed herself on the funeral fire and while doing so gave birth to a hefty and ferocious Buffalo-Demon Mahishasura. Rambha too emerged from the Fire as The Fire God recreated him in another form who was eventually noted as ‘Rakta Bija’ or the Seed of Blood. As Mahishasura grew, he performed tough penance and pleased Lord Brahma who gave him the boons that no force on earth could kill him except by a woman whom the Danava made fun of, little realising that the exception might soon be a reality of his death. Puffed up by the boons secured, the Demon

Mahishasura created havoc in the World by trying to dislodge Devas from Heaven, torturing Sages and Munis; slaughtering men, women and children, rejoicing in all kinds of sinful activities and finally attempting to dislodge Indra and Devas from the Heaven. He sent a messenger to Indra asking Him to surrender or get ready for a war. Indra got furious and warned the Demon. The latter convened a War Conference and alerted all the Danavas to get ready and assured them that he secured great boons from Brahma and that he was as good as immortal against any male power or animal power, excepting womanhood which was in any case helpless without male power! Indra too called for an urgent Conference of Devas including all the Planetary Heads like Varuna, Vayu, Agni, Surya, Saturn, Yama, Budha, Guru Brihaspati and so on to position themselves ready with their respective Vehicles and followers. So far, it was a battle between Indra and Mahisasura, during which the former Commander-in-Chief Chiksusa, General Vidala and Danava Tamra took up the offensive which Indra could control. But as Mahishasura himself entered the field and spread out his 'Samavari Maya' or the Illusion for all and thousands of Mahishasuras appeared on the battle field each acting as powerful as the other, Devas including Varuna, Yama, Kubera and Agni fled away. Indra in his fast-track mind prayed to Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra about Mahishasura's Illusionary tactics. Brahma got His conveyance Hamsa or the Swan, Vishnu by Garuda, Kartika His peacock, and Rudra His bull. While Indra controlled Chaksura, Varuna by Asiloma, Yama by Trinetra, Kubera by Maha Hanu, Vishna fought Andhaka and Rudra restricted Mahishasura. But when the battle went on for hundred years and each year Mahishasura became mightier, it became clear that the Demon would not be shattered unless a female 'Shakti' would have to be thought of for the purpose. It was also realised that instead of depending on the female power of one Devi, say Sachi Devi, Vani, Lakshmi or Parvathi individually, it would be ideal to unify the Powers of all and generate one Maha Nirguna Shakti who would destroy the Demons once and for all. The Composite Super Energy converging into a Unique Shakti thus emerged with all the Individual Shaktis of Trinity, Devas and their respective female powers embodying a mountain like Fire and dazzle which was not visualised even by Devas themselves let alone normal species. The Supreme Deity was endowed with the armoury and 'Mantras' of Gods together too.

Maharshi Veda Vyasa ventured to describe the splendid outline of Her Image to King Janamejaya: Her Form was a mass of blistering dazzle, Her Charming Extraordinary Face was that of Maha Deva represented by 'Tamoguna'; Her long and black Hair overhanging from Head to knees was like the Power of Yamaraja; Her three Eyes were the intensity and ferocity of 'Agni', the pupils being black, middle portion being white and the end of the eye balls being red; the two Eye Brows were black like 'Sandhyas' (twilights) curved like the arrows of Cupid; the two Ears created by Vayu or Air, Her Nose chiselled and attractive; teeth like gems of Daksha; lower lip like 'Aruna' the Charioteer of Sun and the upper lip after Lord Kartika; thighs and legs of Earth and Varuna; eighteen hands of Vishnu and red fingers like the glitter of Vasu Devatas. Soon after The Maha Devi was formed, various presentations were made to Her by the Devatas: the Ocean of Milk gifted a pearl necklace and eternal red robes; Vishvakarma provided ornaments for each part of Her Physique never seen in the Universe earlier; Varuna presented flowers of everlasting fragrance and freshness as well as a Vijayanti garland on her chest; Mountain Himalaya a ferocious lion as Her Conveyance; Maha Vishnu gave a Chakra (Discus); Sankara a 'Trisula' (Trident); Agni (Fire) Deva gifted a 'Sataghni' Weapon; Conch by Varuna; Divine Bow and Arrows by Vayu Deva (Wind God); Yama God of Death a Sceptre; Indra his thundebolt; Brahma a 'Kamandalu' a vessel of Holy Water Ganges; Kubera gifted a Drinking Cup of Gold and an everfresh Lotus; Varuna a 'Pasa' (A Destructive Rope) capable of rounding off hundreds of Demons together and Visvakarma a high voltage Kaumudi Mace and so on. With all the armoury and ornaments Maha Devi was comfortably mounted on the Lion and laughed so deafeningly that the entire Universe trembled with fear as though a catastrophe occurred. Mahishasura too was shuddered at the roar and his associates ran helter skelter to ascertain what was it about! One messenger reported to the Demon that he had an illusionary appearance of a huge sheet of light and when seen intently looked like an outlined feminine figure, with a cool and smiling face of rare beauty, fully armoured and ornamented, seated on a lion with several Gods surrounded around Her. Mahishasura, who never ever realised that a female figure

was mounted on a Lion with eighteen hands and was fully armoured as though ready to fight, felt that the Messenger must be crazy or the view was an Illusion created by the Devatas to frighten Danavas. Any way he sent his Prime Minister to take a personal Message to ‘that Woman’ to say that if really She were not an Illusion, She should meet and surrender to him and that he would assure Her to make her a life partner as the Reports received were that she was of marriageable age without a husband. She roared in loud laughter and asked him to convey the message to the stupid Demon to withdraw his fight if he had any sense (which a Mahisha as an animal normally lacked), apologise to Her and quietly to go down to the nether world Patala to save himself! The Prime Minister talked highly arrogantly and even desired to attack Her but for Her being a woman and Maha Devi said that She could have smothered him then and there but for His being a Messenger and Dharma Shastras or the discipline of War prevented Her to kill a Messenger. The Prime Minister left for Mahisha still asking for the Devi’s rethinking about the possibility of marrying his King and not to finally close the chapter of his King’s amorous offer to Her! The Messenger met the King and conveyed the proceedings that She was ready to fight. Mahisha called for a Conference and many opinions were expressed including a ridiculous explanation that the Devi indirectly meant that She could kill him by the corner looks of Her eyes, that She would lay him down(for sex?) and that She could take out his vitality in no time! The Resolution was that all the Four Methods viz. ‘Sama’ (Counselling), ‘Dana’ or material temptation, ‘Bheda’ (divide and rule) and finally ‘Danda’ or punishment. Thus Demon Tamra was sent to the battle field with the Brief that he should try all the Methods before punishing Her. Tamra did use the methods of good counselling, the temptation of marrying a hero like Mahisha and seeking to divide Her and the ‘timid’ Devas. Maha Devi laughed at the foolish alternatives proposed by Tamra and when he kept on arguing about the happiness that She could attain by Her union with Mahisha got terribly annoyed and roared thunderously when mountains shook and Tamra fled away back to Mahisha.

Carnage of Mahishasura’s army: As Tamra returned without result that the three initial methods of Sama, Dana and Bheda did not yield results, the Danavas got the firm reply that war was imminent. But one elderly Statesman among the Danavas, *Vidaliksa* expressed the concern that by taking advantage of the loophole in the boon given by Brahma to Mahisha of not getting killed by any species *excepting by a female* should cause concern; it might well be that by placing Her ahead, Devatas might kill Mahisha! *Durmukha* said that whatever might happen the situation was of no return and they have to fight out without showing their backs any way. *Vaskala* bragged that when the entire Deva army including Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra had retreated and collapsed, why should one think and plan strategies at this late stage; this is an hour of action and not of precious- little- do- nothings and thus therefore was high time for action! As an initial step in the battle, the two Demons-Durmukha and Valsala- once again used the catch phrase of Devi’s romance with Mahisha. Maha Devi got infuriated, lost patience that She displayed for long and fired five arrows against Vaskala to start with. When he took up his club aloft, She hurled her own club and smashed his head to death. Her action was so swift that Durmukha’s reflexes did not work for a while as there were shrill shouts of Victory to Maha Devi and after regaining some composure Durmukha reacted with his arrows and bow. Meanwhile Maha Devi rained piercing arrows all around and hundreds of Danava heads rolled all over and Durmukha’s chariot was shattered. As he jumped out and hit Devi’s lion with his club, She cut his throat with Her axe. There were screams of happiness heard from Devas, Gandharvas and Kannaras as also Great Sages and Siddhas from Earth. As the armies of Vaksala and Durmukha ran for their lives and fled back to convey the killings of their masters, Demon Mahisha got a shock that two great warriors had succumbed to death and that was unbelievable indeed. His General *Chiksuraska*, a Danava of never-ending cruelty and intense loyalty to Mahisha leapt from his seat and shouted with rage that the Devi would be destroyed for sure. He took Mahisha’s permission to shatter that Woman and bring her back to Mahisha dead or alive. Demon *Tamra* too accompanied the General. The moment he entered the war field, Chiksuraska kept on shouting at Devi that he had arrived to avenge the death of Vaksala and Durmukha and bombarded with arrows, spears, maces, sharp swords and a lashing tongue. Tamra went near Bhagavati and hit the lion on its head with an iron ‘musala’ (club) when Devi was provoked and hurled Her axe with dashing speed as the Demon fell,

turned around and tried to throw his musala but took the last breathing. The General Chiksaruska started screaming with rage and flew across to reach Devi who pierced with Her spear through his body. The entire army ran for their lives in the same direction that they arrived. *Asiloma and Vidalaksa* were the two top Demons who not only had valour and might but were well versed in war tactics and diplomacy too. In fact these two were in the inner ring of Mahishasura's court and get rarely provoked but could call a spade a spade always counselling their King Mahisha about the pros and cons of a given situation. Asiloma addressed Devi Bhagavati and asked Her as to why She had been killing Danava soldiers wrecklessly without least provocation, excepting request Her fair hand in wedding to their master. Was it a sin to ask Her for Mahisha's wedding? After all She could simply say 'no', but why this carnage? Maha Devi replied to the calm reasoning put forth by Asiloma: ' I have no desire nor hatred. I stand for 'Dharma' and 'Nyaya' (Virtue and Justice). Your King had perpetrated endless sins of severe nature and interfered with the natural way of human life and destroyed all norms of decency. He had hurt Devas, Indra and Trinity. Having secured boons from Brahma, he had harmed Brahma Himself and thus proved to be an ungrateful demon who should never be excused. I am the Origin of the Universe- The timeless, featureless, sexless, and faultless Super Energy without fear or favour. Mahisha's conscience is impure and had been wanting to marry Me; this is clear that he had no sense as he had been possessed by high degree of Maya.' Thus explaining in an impassioned manner, She advised Asiloma and Vidalaksa to retreat to 'Patala' but both of the Demons decided to die while fighting rather than betraying their Master. Knowing fully well that Maha Bhagavati would kill them any way, they wished rather to get killed valiantly on the battle field than show their backs. Maha Bhagavati had fully acknowledged the maturity of their thinking and felled both of them after their waging a brilliant battle.

Durga Maha Devi destroys Mahashasura: So far Mahishasura was despatching his warriors to fight Maha Devi but when his most trusted Asiloma and Vidalaksa had also got smashed, he got into his chariot and faced the Devi in a handsome human form to impress Her with his smartness. The all- knowing Devi smiled and said that his human form did not make any impact on Her. The Demon harped again on the same topic of union between them. She said that the only union possible could be of a sincere devotee and Almighty as She was a Parashakti and Prakrithi wedded to Maha Purusha who was also the Maha Purusha Himself! She was requested by all the Devas and the Trinity to protect them and wipe out the demons including him. Still persistent, the foolish Mahishasura gave the example of Mandodari, the daughter of King Chandrasena of Simhala, who took a vow of celibacy but when her younger sister was arranged a 'Svayamvara' (bride's choice of wedding) from a group of select suitors, Mandodari was tempted to select a husband although he proved to be a cheat later as caught red handed enjoying a servant maid; Mahisha assured that he would never be like him. Maha Devi got highly infuriated with such narrations and said that he was not only stupid but also a coward and perverse and that he should decide at once either to fight or withdraw to 'Patala', lest he would not avail of the chance of fight but would unilaterally decide to destroy him. Meanwhile, two other followers of Mahisha viz. *Durandhara and Trinetra* had duels separately and got exterminated. Mahishasura changed his forms first like a lion and later on as an elephant and finally in his Sarabha form. The entire Universe and the Pancha Bhutas (The Five Elements) were dislocated from their axis as the duel was in progress. The Danava tied up his tail to mountains and whirled them against Maha Devi, who was enjoying cups of Grape juice meanwhile. The Demon kept on transforming his body forms in such quick succession that one could hardly realise what was happening and each time there was a change, he was striking from various angles with different kinds of arms like arrows, swords, Trisulas (Tridents), clubs, and maces. Charged then with red eyes looking like torrential balls of fire, Devi Bhagavati finally lost Her cool and commanded Her Chakra (discus) which broke Mahisha's body split into two, each part jumping one over another and the Greatest menace on Earth had thus been terminated; there were hysteric shriekings and reverberations of earsplitting sounds of high volume drummings spread across the entire Universe to the utmost relief and ecstasy of all Devas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Kimpurushas, Apsaras and world wide congregations of Sages all rejoicing with celebrations. As normalcy prevailed somewhat, the Devas and Trinity assembled in a Grand Felicitation

Function with Maha Devi presiding. The magnificent congregation described the features, miracles and recent happenings. Maha Devi replied that both Danavas and Devas were of the same creation of Hers and that there was nothing like a distinct categorisation of Danavas and Devas, except that the proportion of the Three Gunas-Satvik, Rajas and Tamasic-varied from person to person and even different situations facing each person. The Eight Vices-Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada and Matsarya- existed in the same person as the mind and heart at variance with each other; it would thus be a common enemy to both divinity and humanity in varying degrees; interaction of these common enemies needed to be minimised and that was the Tatva Gyan all about. Added to these features were the 'Tapatrya' or the three kinds of problems inherent in human life ('Adibhautika' or external pains like physical infirmities, pains from animals and co-humans; 'Adhyatmika' or internal diseases; and 'Adhidaivika' or natural occurrences like cold, heat, rain, thunders, earthquakes etc.) over which fate determined the circumstances over which there could be little control anyway. But where there would be scope for self-control, which was of utmost importance to balance the 'Gunas' properly. She Herself noted the individual accounts of Prarabhdha, Sanchitha, Vartamana and Bhavisya of all the beings - be it Brahma or a piece of grass. Nobody could escape the good and bad dimension or magnitude of each action. Thus life would be assessed in the strict accordance of the Rules already laid. Having said these words, Maha Bhagavati disappeared.

Maha Navami Niraya: In case the previous day has sixty ghadiyas and on the following day there is a muhurta or so, then the previous day is taken as Navami and excepting Bali daan, Upavaasa and Puja be performed in the Ashtami Viddha. Similarly, Navami- yukta Balidaan be performed in Dashami Viddha Navami. In the Ashtami and Navami Sandhikaala one has to perform a Sandhi Puja separately. There is a need to implement a Homa after Navami Puja. Since no homa is done in the nights, this has to be necessarily done in the day time itself. This homa needs to be accomplished with the Durga navaakshari Mantra or with the Sapta shati Mantra of Namu Devavyai Maha Devayai etc. The Homa dravyaas include ghee mixed with white Tilaas, 'Paayasam'/'Ksheeraanna', Kishuka Pushpa, Yava, Durvaasa, Shri phala, Rakta Chandana, Nuts /Supari, bilwa etc. The Homa Sankhya is to be one tenth of the Japa Sankhya. At the end of Navami Vrata and Homa, Brahmanas should perform Devtodwaasana, Paarana, Brahmana Bhojana and Dakshinaadi Daanaas. As regards *Bali Vidhana* (sacrifice) in the Nava Raatraas, 'Maasha Sahitaanna' or 'Kushmaanda' or Pumpkin are the appropriate items as far as Brahmanas are concerned; as already mentioned above in the Preface of Navaratri Vrataas, *Brahmanena Pashu maamsa Madyaadi Bali daaney, Brahmantwa bhrashtata!* (If Bali is given by Brahmanas in terms of Madya Maamsaas, Brahmantwa is lost forever!

Chhatra Puja: During the Nava Raatraas, the ancient custom followed by Kings was to observe 'Lohaabhisaarika Vrata' and Chhatra Puja during the first eight days from Patipada to Ashtami of Ashwiyuja Shukla Paksha. The Puja involves installation of the Pratima of Indra's Divine Horse called 'Ucchaishrava' and worshipped by Homaas and formal Puja while 'Pratyaksha' or live 'Gajaashvaas' are duly bathed, cleaned and displayed along with their Royal Insigniyas or 'Raja Chinaas' like 'Chhatra Chaamaras' or Umbrellas and Huge Hand-carried Fans with colourful Vastras on their backs. The Divine Horse as also the live Royal Animals are worshipped with 'Neeraajana' or camphor light. The 'Ashirwaada'(blessing) Mantras signify: 'Let the Ashva-Gaja generations thrive forever and let their 'Vamshaas' generated out of the grace of Brahma, Soma and Varuna continue for ever to serve the Kings and their families well to enable their administration providing peace and contentment to their Subjects.

Vijaya Dashami Celebrations: The Treatise of 'Nirnaya Sindhu' states that even there is a fraction of Shravana Nakshatra yoga at the 'Aparaahna' of that day, then that day be considered as Dashami or else on the following day. The custom had been that none should leave the boundaries of their village or township on that day without performing Aparajita Devi Puja. It is on this day's Aparahna that the residents of the villages or townships assemble at the 'Shami Vrikshaas' towards Ishaanya, clean up the

area, decorate a raised platform with 'Ashtadala Padma' / or Lotus of Eight Leaves and perform Puja to the Idols of Aparajita Devi and Vijaya Devi with 'Shodashopacharaas' or the prescribed Sixteen Services and at the end of the worship pray to them reciting : *Imam Pujaam maya Devi yadhaa Shakti Niveditam, Rakshaarthantu samaadaaya Vraja swasthaana muttamam/* After the prayers the Vrata is concluded reciting : *Haarnena tu Vichitrtena bhaswat Kanaka mekhala, Aparajita bhadrataa karotu Vijayam mama/* (May the Mangalakaari Aparajita Devi as ornamented in gold with Kati Sutra or waist band and so on bestow to us with propitiousness and victory always. Brahmana priests would convey the blessings of the Devi to the King and Subjects to say : *Yatrayam Vijaya Siddhartha!*

Those who are desirous of undertaking any type of Auspicious Task including Travel on Vijaya Dashami day are most certainly blessed, irrespective of Muhurta, Taaraa Phala or Chandra phala: *Ashvayuja Shukla Dashami Vijayaakhyakshiley Shubhaa, Prayaaney tu visheshena kim Shravanaanvita!* (Ashvayuja Shukla Vijaya Dashami is the most auspicious day to take up travels or any other Shubha Karyaas; more so if that day is of Shravana Nakshatra!) *Ashwiyuja Karma:* Rigvedis perform this karma on Pournami. In case the Parva is of 'dwividha sandhi' or of Chaturdashi and Pournami, then the Karma is 'Prakruti Vishti' or worthy of initiation in the Purvaahna Sandhi and terminable or 'Vikritishta' in the Aparahna Sandhi.

Padmanaabha Vrata: is observed on Aswayuja Sukla Dwadashi with piety, fasting and cleanliness. Observance of the Vrata is stated to assure the benefit of thousand Maha Yagnas. Worship of Padmanabha starts with bathing the 'Vigraha' with milk with the Mantra *Namaste Padmanaabhaaya;* the Mantra should be continued while doing the Puja with Gandha, flowers, etc. Hundred and eight oblations to Agni as a mix of til, cooked rice and ghee are also done with it. After Jaagaran, three Pujas and singing, there would be a repeat Puja on the next morning, followed by daana to a Brahmana with lot of honey and dakshina; the Mantra along the daana is: *Padmanaabha namastubhyam Sarva loka Pitamaha, Madhu daanena supreeto bhava Sarva sukhapradah/* (Our Salutations to You Padmanaabha, the great grand father of the Universe! Please be gratified with this daana of honey and bestow comforts to us).

Go-Vatsa Dwadashi: This is observed on Ashwina Krishna Dwadashi and should be at Pradosha Kaala only; if Pradosha Time coincides with Dwadashi it would be in order but otherwise, the Vrata would have to be held on the following day. Worship is done to Cow and Calf by offering Arghya in copper vessels with the Mantra: *Ksheerodaarnava sumbhutey Suraasura namskritey, Sarva Deva maye Maatargrihaanaarghyam Namostutey/* Then Naivedya is offered by way of fried 'Maasha Sthaalipaakam' avoiding cow products of milk, ghee and curd followed by 'Neeraajana' with lit-camphor. The Kartha himself should consume 'Maashaanna Bhojana' and sleep on ground observing celibacy.

Deepavali Celebrations: Naraka Chaturdashi Nirnaya: *Ashwina Krishna Chaturdashyaam Chandrodaya vyaapinyaam Naraka bheerubhishtila tailaabhyaangana snaanam karyaam/* (Those who are afraid of Narakaas should perform oil and tila snaana in the early hours of Amavasya and thereafter wear Tilaka or Sindur). Thereafter the Grihastis should execute *Yama Tarpana* reciting *Yamaaya Namaha-Yamaam tarpayaami* with tilodakaas three times either in 'Savyopaveeta' in the normal position of the Sacred Thread to Devataas and in 'Apasavya' manner invoking Jeeva Pitrus; in both the cases the Kartha should face South but in the case of Devataas, the Tarpana has to be from the right finger tips and in the case of Jeeva Pitrus [Kashyapa, Atri, Vashishtha, Vishvamitra, Goutama, Bharadwaaja, Jamadagni, Angira, Kutsa, Bhrguyadi Rishis; Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanaatana, Sanatkumaara, Kapilaadi Divya Manushyaas] from the middle of Angushtha and Tarjani /Thumb and fore-finger. To Yama Devata the invocation would be as follows: *Dharma raajaaya namah, Mrityavey namah, Antakaaya namah, Vaivaswataaya namah, Kaalaaya namah, Sarva bhuta kshayaaya namah, Dadhyaya namah, Neelaaya namah, Parameshthiney namah, Vrikodaraaya namah, Chitraaya namah, Chitraguptaaya namah/* At the

pradosha time of Chaturdashi, there would be *Deepa prajjvalam* or fulfilled illumination all over in the temples, praakaaraas, streets, Goshaalaas, Hasti-Ashwa shaalaas, market places and in each and every house! This kind of illumination should for three evenings in a row! *Tulaasamsthe Saharaamshou pradoshey Bhuta darshayoh, Ulkaahastaa Naraah kuryuh Pitrunaam maargadarshanam/ Tatra Daana mantrah: Agni dagdhaascha ye jeevaapyadagdhaah kuley mama, Ujjvala jyotishaa dagdhastey yaantu oparamaam gatim/ Yamalokam parityajja aagataa ye Mahaalaye, Ujjvala jyotishaa varta prapasyantu vajrantu tey/ Asyaam Nakta bhojanam mahaa phala pradam/* (While Surya is in Mesha at Pradosha time on Chaturdashi, human beings should show the way in the full illumination made for Naraka Chaturdashi by way of Ulkaas to Pitru Devataas who would have arrived for their Shraddhaas in the Mahalaya Pakshaas . The relevant Mantra for giving away Daana in this connection in favour of the visiting Pitru Devaas is: May all the Pitru ganaas who were dead and burnt in Agni -or not burnt in Agni formally- be redeemed to attain Mukti. May those Pitraas who came out from Yama loka to receive the Shraaddha Tarpanaas offered by their progeny on Earth in connection with Mahalaya Pakshaas be shown the way by the illumination made on Chaturdashi celebrations from Earth through by the Ulkaas or Meteors! Human beings experiencing the Illuminative Celebrations on the Ashwiyuja Shukla Chaturdasi Pradosha are suggested to better observe Nakta Bhojana on that day.

Amavasya Vidhis on Deepavali day: After performing Yama Tarpana and Pitru Marga Darshana on the previous day, there should be the observance of ‘Pratah kaalaabhyangana’ in the early morning hours of Amavasya, Nitya Karmaas followed by ‘Aparaahna Parvana Shraaddha’ to Pitru ganaas and at Pradosha Samaya the worship of Devi Lakshmi. In view of the Darsha Shraaddha in the Aparaaahna and Pradosha Puja of Lakshmi, bhojana during the Amavasya Day is disallowed except for children and the elders.

Deepaavali’s background: The interesting episode of Narakasura’s extermination by Lord Krishna aided by Devi Satyabhama was essentially due to latter’s obsession to possess Parijata Tree in Swarga Loka in her own backyard. This enabled her an opportunity to accompany Lord Krishna to a battle field; that was in fulfillment of a standing boon of his kept still as a reserve. Narakusura tormented Indra and Deva ganas at the latter’s request to Krishna to kill the demon. After the battle she desired to avail of the opportunity to ask Indra as a gift since the battle would certainly be won anyway! Krishna, accompanied by Satyabhama flew by Garuda to ‘Pragjyotisha’, Capital City of Bhaumasura [now in Assaam] , surrounded by mountains and ramparts defended by fire, water and unmanned automatic weapons as also protected by ‘Mura Pasha’ - thousand miles-long deadly and sturdy wires as designed by Demon Mura. Krishna shattered the defence buttresses and blew His Panchajanya (Conch shell) with deadening reverberation as Demon Mura’s frontal fortification was destroyed. When provoked, the Demon tossed his powerful club which was slashed by Krishna’s Sudarsana Chakra into pieces and devastated Mura. Seven deadly sons of Mura, who had the knowledge of weapons as fully as their father, pounced in a group but Krishna’s Supreme powers were no match and they too were cracked. Bhaumasura shot at his ‘Shataghni’ - the powerful disc with hundred blades- and later on with his mighty spear with which he defeated Indra too both of which proved futile. Finally Krishna gave His nod to Sudarsana Chakra (Wheel) to pull down the Demon and exterminate him. Thus Bhaumasura was sent to ‘Naraka’ and hence his ignominious title as Narakasura. Indeed the end of the notorious Bhaumika Narakasura, the son of Bhumi (Earth) is celebrated as the date of the Moon fall day Amavasya in Kartika Month every year and the day of Lord Krishna and Devi Satyabhama victorious on the subsequent day as Deepavali or the Festival of Lights and Sky reverberating sounds with joy! [Another version is that the Demon was arrowed down by Satyabhama herself, as he secured a blessing from Lord Brahma that only his mother Goddess of Earth (Bhumi) could kill him; Satyabhama was the reincarnation of Goddess Earth . It was at Indra’s distress

call that received Krishna's attention as Varuna's Royalty Insignia, a Mother- Figure Aditi's earrings, and 'Mani Parvata' (Mandara Mountain) where Demi-Gods reside were among the abominable acts of the Demon. As a gesture of good-will, Satyabhama's desire to transfer the 'Parijata' Tree (which emerged in the churning process of Ocean) to her garden from the Heaven was obliged by Indra. Krishna on His part released sixteen thousand royal maidens of Kings defeated by Bhaumasura and consented to marry them, in addition to the eight principal wives. Goddess Earth sought her apology for her son's sins and reiterated her own devotion to Krishna.]

KARTIKA MAASA

Skanda Purana seeks highlight the significance of the austerities and duties as follows: Sage Narada enquired of Lord Brahma as to which was the best month of a year, who was the best Deity to worship and which was the best Tirtha to visit. Brahma's instant reply was that the best month of a Year was Kartika, the Supreme Deity to worship was Narayana and the most Sacred Tirtha was Badari Kshetra. As regards Kartika Month, Bhagavan Vishnu always accorded high esteem and whatever good deeds were performed in the 'Masa' were fully accepted by all the Devas since they were readily available there through out the month. The acts and endeavours of the devotees like 'Snaan', 'Daan', 'Bhojan', 'Vrath', 'Til' (Sesame Seeds), Dhenu (Cows), 'Suvarna' (Gold), 'Rajat' (Silver), 'Bhumi' (Land), 'Vastra' (Clothing), Tapasya, Japa, Homa, Yagna, Annadaan, Puja with Tulasi leaves, Abhishek of Vishnu's Idol with Ganges and other holy river waters as also 'Panchamrit' comprising milk, ghee, curd, honey and sugar; 'Shodasopacharas' to Deities, Veda- parayana, Purana Shraavan, Bhajans, Deva Stutis, Visits to Temples, fasting, abstinence, 'Jaagarans' (Keeping awake in the night singing hymns), Guru Seva etc. would indeed secure manifold returns in the consecrated month of Kartik. At every time during the day and night, 'kirtans' (Stanzas) on one's own lips must be uttered like 'Govinda Govinda Hare Murari, Govinda Govinda Mukunda Krishna, Govinda Govinda Rathangapane, Govinda Damodara Maadhaveti'. Specific time on each day must also be apportioned for 'Bhagavat Geeta Paath' or reading as many Chapters as possible. Also, a devotee must observe sleeping on the floor and if possible perform Kanya Daan and Vidya Daan in the month. Practice of the month long austerity and good conduct even in one Kartika month in a year ought to result in tangible benefits for sure! One has to observe certain don't's during Kartika Month such as **avoiding** use of oil on the body and food (except on Naraka Chaturdasi), food from others, fruits with many seeds, rice, left over or spoiled food, heavy food and twice a day, drinking intoxicants, use of glass items, eating group food or from prostitute, Grama Purohit, Sudras, Shraddhas and from women during menses period; eating in lotus leaves, consuming brinjals, carrots, 'Loki, onions and masoor dal; eating on Ekadashi days; turning off guests at eating time; conversing with chandal, Mlechha, Patita (women with bad character), Vratahin (those not observing the rules of Kartika month), hater of Brahmanas, those who talk ill of others, non believers of God/ Godmen and immoral beings. During the month of Kartika, Snaan (bathings) acquire considerable importance. Those who are devoted to Surya Deva, Ganesha, Shakti, Siva and Vishnu are all required to formally observe Kartika Snanas. Snanas in favour of Surya need to be followed as long as Surya is in 'Tula' Rasi. Snanas in favour of Shankara be performed from Asvayuja Pournami to Kartika Pournami. Bathings in favour of Devis be observed from Aswayuja Shukla Pradhana day till Karthika Krishna Chaturdasi while for Ganesha Snanas are to be performed From Ashvin Krishna Chaturdasi till Kartika Krishna Chaturdasi. Bhagavan Janardana would be pleased with formal Snaan from Aswin Shukla Ekadashi till Kartika Shukla Ekadashi. Those who observe the Snana Procedure during the month of Kartika would be free from the tributations of Yama Dharma Raja. Special Snaans and worship to Radha and Gopala during the month preferably under a Tulasi Tree have immense significance. While observing Kartika Snaans the following Stanza is recited: *Kartikeham Karishyami Pratha Snaanam Janardana, Preethyartham Tava*

Devesha Damodara maya sahadh. (Janardana! Deveshwara Damodara! I am performing my early morning Snaan to please You and Devi Lakshmi). Also recite the following: *Grihaanaarghya maya dattam Radhaya Sahiti Hare, Namah Kamala -naabhaaya Namasthey Jalashhayiney, Namasthesthu Hrishikeshu Gruhaanaarghya Namosthutey.* (Bhagavan! Please accept this ‘Arghya’ (handful of water) of mine to please You and Devi Radha; My greetings to you Kamalanaabha, greetings to You Jalashaayiney; greetings to You Hrishikeshu; my repeated greetings to You!). Before taking bath, one should take the name of ‘Pavitra Ganga’ (Holy Ganges); while taking the bath on the head, recite ‘Purusha Suktam’ / ‘Sri Suktam’ and after the Snaan, take Tulasi in hand and perform ‘Achaman’ (Sipping water thrice with the Names of Keshava, Narayana, Madhava etc.) and later apply Tilak / Vibhudi/ Kumkum on the forehead. Cold water snaan is always preferable to hot water for double Punya. It is said that there are four types of Snaan viz. ‘Vayavya’ (along with ‘Godhuli’/Cow dung); ‘Varuna’ (in the Sea and Holy Rivers); ‘Brahma’ or with Veda Mantras and ‘Divya’ or as Sun rays pass on the body. Snaan by women should not be with Veda Mantras.

Lord Brahma affirmed that the fortnight from Kartika Krishna Trayodasi to the end of the month ie from Deepavali on the Amavasya of Aswayuja should be observed as Festival Days. The ‘Pradosha’ time of that Trayodasi is the most significant time when Lord Yama is worshipped with ‘Deepas’ at the main door of the residence and Naivedya to ensure that there would never be an ‘Apamrityu’ or Akaala Mrithyu (premature and sudden death) in the family. Yama Raja would be pleased with the recitation of the Mantra after the worship: *Mrityuna pasha dandaabhyaam Kaalena cha maya saha, Trayodashyam Deepa daanaath Suryajah Preeyathamiti* [With this Deepa daan on Trayodashi, may Surya’s son Yama be pleased without Mrityu (Death), Pasha (Yama’s rope of death), Danda (Yama’s stick) and ‘Kaal’ (Death time)] Thereafter, on Kartika Amavasya morning, worship is to be performed to Devatas and at the Pradosha time of the same evening, strings of ‘Deepas’ should be lit and Devi Lakshmi is worshipped saying: ‘Devi Lakshmi! We welcome You with ‘Deepa Jyoti’ (the splendour of these Lamps) as You are the Symbol of Limitless Illumination; You are the representation of Surya, Chandra, Agni, and Gold (Prosperity); Do make Your residence as our own!’ Thus the Kartika Krishna Paksha is the most auspicious fortnight praying for ‘Apamrityu’ / Good Health to Yama raja and Wealth for Devi Lakshmi ushering an era of happiness. If during the entire Kartik Month-or atleast ‘Pancha Rathras’ (five nights), a devotee recites ‘Om Namoh Narayanaya’ as well as reads / hears ‘Vishnu Sahasranam’ and ‘Gajendra Moksha Paatha’, he secures freedom from want, disease, adversity and discontent. Most certainly, the austerities observed on Kartika Ekadashi day alone would ensure contentment in ‘Iham’ (Current Life) and bliss in ‘Param’ (Post Life). Each act of virtue on the most auspicious day of Kartika Ekadashi is bound to obtain a multiplier effect endlessly.

Kartik Snaanaas are observed commencing from Ashviniyuja Shukla Dashami, or Ekaadashi or Pournami waking up even from two ghadiyas before Sun rise and after ablutions praying to Vishnu Bhagavan with Arghya as : *Namah Kamala naabhaaya namasthey Jalashaayiney, Namastestu Hrishikeshu grihaanaarghyam namosthutey/ (Snaanam) Kartikeyamkarishyaami Praatahsnaanam Janaardana, Preetyartham tava Deva Devesha jalesmin snaatumudyatah/ Tava prasaadaat paapam meya Damodara Vivasyatu/ (Punararghyam) Nityey naimittikay Krishna Kaartikey Paapa naashaney, Grihaanaarghyam mayaa dattam Raadhyaah sahito Harey!* Thus the Kartika offers ‘Arghya’ to Bhagavan Vishnu, ‘Snaana’ to Him and ‘Repeat Arghyam’. As there would be added significance to the Snaanaas in the Tirthaas like Kurukshetra, Ganga, Pushkara etc. the Snaana kartaa resolves as follows: *Kartikam sakalam maasam nitya snaayitendriyah, japa havishya bhuktaancha sarva paapaih pramuchyatetye/ Smritvaha Bhaageeradheem Vishnum Shivam Suryam Jalam vishet, Naabhi maatra jaley tishthan vratey snaayaadyathaavidhi/* (One should perform formal bathing by entering water waist deep through out the entire Kartika Maasa by observing piety after the morning duties and Japa-homaas consuming only the ‘havishaanna seshu’ or the left over offerings to Agni Deva and praying to Bhaagirathi, Shiva, Vishnu and Surya Deva). Thus Kartika Snaanaas should be accomplished each morning and evening in the rest

of Kartika month. In case however the Kartika snaanaas are not possible although, these may be executed at least three days in the month.

Tulasi Puja be performed in the same way of observance, as a part of the Kartika Vrataas since installing Tulasi plant, growing it and constantly touching it are all propitious acts dissolving sins; in fact performance of Pitru Shraaddhaas under the shade of Tulasi tree bestows 'PitruTripti'. A decorated and well worshipped Tulasi plant or tree would ward off 'Yama Kinkaras' or followers. *Tulasi dala lakshena Kartikeyorchayeddharim, Patrey patreymuni sreshtha mouktikam Phalamasnutey/* (There sure would be encouraging results if Tulasi dalaas are offered to Harihara Devaas).

Background of Tulasi Devi: Brahma Vaivarta Purana traces the background of Tulasi Devi from the lineage of Manu Savarnis and Indra Savarni's son King Kushadhwaaja and Malavati; the entire clan of Kings were extreme Vishnu Baktas and the last mentioned couple too were similar. They were blessed delivered a daughter and even as she was a toddler she recited Vedas and was thus named as Vedavati. In course of time, Vedavati took to severe Tapasya. There was an Akasha Vani (Celestial Voice) which pronounced that Vedavati in her next birth would be Vishnu's wife. On hearing this, Vedavati left for Gandhamadana Mountain and intensified her Tapasya further. The demon Ravana spotted Vedavati in Tapasya and made advances to her; she cursed Ravana at his misbehaviour, declared that she would sacrifice her life by jumping into Agni Kunda and in her next birth would become responsible for his death as Devi Sita, the wife of a human Avatara of Vishnu to be called Shri Rama. Devi Sita was wedded to Shri Rama in the next birth. To keep up the word of his father Dasharatha, Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana moved on to the forests and Agni Deva approached Rama as a Brahmana and conveyed that since the time for Sita's abduction by Ravana was imminent, he (Agni) should replace Devi Sita with *Maya Sita* and after the episode of Ravana's killing was over, he would replace real Sita with the shadow Sita after the 'Agni Pariksha' time. Vedavati alias Chhaya Sita proceeded to perform Tapasya at Pushkara Kshetra and in Dwapara Yuga became *Draupadi* as the daughter of Drupada Raja and further as the wife of Pandavas. Thus Vedavati was blessed as a *Trihaayani* born in Satya, Treta and Dwapara yugas. The daughter of King Dharmadhwaaja and Malati was named *Tulasi* as both men and women could not weigh the beauty and charm of the Child-Tulanaasmartha- she was named as **Tulasi**. Being a 'Jatismara' with the memory of her previous births, Tulasi performed very strict Tapasya to Brahma Deva who appeared and asked Tulasi to seek a boon. Tulasi recalled that she was in her earlier birth she was a Gopi by the same name as Tulasi, that she was in Goloka as a close companion of Devi Radha and was fond of a boy called Govinda who was too a Gopa boy in the 'Raasa Sammaaja', that their freindship blossomed into lust, that Devi Radha cursed the lovers to be born into 'Martyaloka' / in Bhuloka and assured that on performing Tapasya to Brahma Deva the latter would give the boon of marrying Shri Krishna. Brahma smiled and told Tulasi that the same Gopa was already born with the 'Amsha' of Shri Krishna as a Danava King called Shankhhooda residing in Samudra, who was invincible to even Parama Shiva and that he would be her husband initially and subsequently wed Vishnu Deva as his very dear wife when Tulasi would become a Tree /Shrub when the whole Universe would worship as *Vrindaavani*. Devi Tulasi was thrilled at what Brahma revealed about the future course of events, but had a lurking fear of Radha Devi as to whether she would make this dream-like future possible as predicted by Brahma. Brahma again smiled and taught the procedure of pleasing Devi Radha by a Shodashopachara Mantra, Radha Stotra, Kavacha and Puja Vidhana. Tulasi was determined to please Radha and performed incessant 'Raadhopaasana'. In course of time, Tulasi had dreamt of a handsome youth and on the next day a Yogi called Shankhhooda landed at 'Badarivana' who practised Shri Krishna Mantra and Kavacha, thanks to Jaigeeshva Muni. As Tulasi got his darshan at a common place she was readily got attracted to him and vice versa. They exchanged pleasantries as also serious matters of Vedanta content, especially in the background of both of them being Jatismaras, when Brahma appeared and encouraged their Gandharva Vivaha. Even as Shankhhooda was enjoying his new marital life, he was simultaneously warring with Devas, as he was essentially a Danava and tortured Devas and forcibly dislodged them from Indraloka.

He acquired three crore 'Dhanurdhaaris', three lakh race horses, five lakh top rate elephants, Trishula dhaaris, countless chariots, and highly trained Maharathis and virtually became an unconquerable force in the entire Universe. On top of it he was a staunch Krishna devotee and the latter himself bestowed a talisman which fortified his prowess further. Shri Krishna was no doubt aware that the Danava King was performing all acts of Viciousness, brutality and violence; yet the demon's staunch devotion to him far outweighed his vices and cruelties to Devas, Maharhis, Sages and Brahmanas. This situation prompted Bhagavan Shiva to advise the Danava King and mediated peace with Devas. He used all his skills and powers of bringing about rapprochement; he said: 'Raja! You release the kingdom of Devas and make me and every body happy; you enjoy your own Kingdom and desist from fraternal enmities as Daityas, Danavaas and Devatas are all from the Kashyapa Muni and the own sisters of Diti, Danu and Aditi respectively. Brahma hatya and Jaati droha would be equally despicable etc. He also threatened that besides Indra, Surya, Yama, Varuna, Vayu, Shaneswara, Kubera etc. the illustrious Kumara, Nandi, Bhadra Kaali and he himself too would fight against him and the opponents. But the good advice given by Maha Deva himself fell flat on Shankhachooda's deaf ears and the great battle of Devas and Daanavas which could have been avoided did take place due to the persistence of one Daitya King Shankhachooda! The Danava King descended to the battle field adorned with the Dhanush and arrows that Bhagavan Vishnu gifted to him once. Skanda initiated the battle by destroying Shankhachooda's chariot, Kavacha, the charioteer and his headgear and making the Danava faint. But the latter recovered quickly and took up a Vishnu Shakti and attacked Skanda, by the powerful strike of which Skanda fell down. Devi Kaali took over and assaulted the Danava who was an expert in Maya Shakti and dodged the Devi. Bhagavan Shiva revived Skanda by his Jnaana Shakti in a moment. Maha Deva then declared a fulfilled war in which Indra was pitted against Vrishaparva, Surya Deva against Viprachittha, Chandra against Dambha, Kaala Deva against Kaleswara, Agni against Gokarna, Kubera versus Kalakeya, Vishwakarma against Mayasura, Mrityu Devata against Bhayankara, Yama Raja against Samhara Danava, Varuna against Kalivinka, Vayu versus Chanchalasura, Budha against Ghrataprishtha and Shanaischara versus Raktaksha, Jayanta versus Ratnasaara, Vasugana versus Varchogana, Nalakubara versus Dhumra, Dharma vs. Dhanurdhara, and Mangala vs. Mandukasha. The Adityaganas, Ekadasha Rudras, Rudra ganas headed by Nandeswara, Gandharvas, Yakshas and Kinnaras were all at the battle where the Danava Sena was annihilated mercilessly and there were streams of blood and floating dead bodies of soldiers and animals on the battle front. As there was a climatic moment at the combat, Maha Kali released Brahmastra at the Danava King who retaliated with another Brahmastra with the result was a nought. Then Devi Kaali initiated the Mantra to release 'Brahmastra' when a Celestial Voice was heard to say: King Shankhachooda is a 'Maha Purusha' (Illustrious Noble Being) and Pashupatastra should not be released against him, since he would not be killed by it. In fact, as long as a 'Kavacha' (Shield) given by Shri Hari was carried on his body and as long as his wife's 'Pativratya' (High devotion to her husband) would last, the Danava would continue to be indestructible as these were the boons to him by Brahma. Bhadrakali then refrained from attacking the King but concentrated on destroying the rest of the Danavas and their Chiefs and so did the other Devas. Meanwhile, Bhagavan Vishnu took the form of an old Brahmana and approached for a boon. When Danava King replied that he could grant him anything, the Brahmana asked for the 'Krishna Kavacha'; the Danava King who abided by his word parted with the Kavacha. Bhagavan Vishnu then assumed the Form of Shankhachooda and entered Devi Tulasi's interior room in a delightful mood saying that he won the battle and wished to rest. Devi Tulasi was full of joy and in a celebrating mood of relaxation; the Maya Shankhachooda and Devi Tulasi were happy in their union and thus Tulasi's pativratya got affected. As both the hurdles of 'Krishna Kavacha' being donated by the Danava King to a Brahmana and the ruin of Tulasi's Pativratya by Vishnu impersonating as Shankhachooda were removed, it was easy for Mahadeva terminating the Danava King who returned to Devi Radha's Rasa-leela party at Goloka as Sudama and Bhagavan Krishna and Devi Radha welcomed him back into their fold. From the body bone remains of Shankhachooda emerged several kinds of 'Shankhaas' (conchshells) which was not only adorned one of Shri Krishna's hands but had since then found a permanent place in every Puja of Govinda. Meanwhile Devi Tulasi suspected the Maya Shankhachooda and as Vishnu revealed himself she

was upset that original Danava King was no more, cursed Vishnu to become a 'Paashaana'(rock piece) since he was unscrupulous and heartless and played the drama and removed her husband from the scene; eversince formal Vishnu Puja had been through the Sacred Form of a *Shaaligraama*. Vishnu then gave a reverse curse that Tulasi would become a holy River Gandaki as also as a Sacred Tree / shrub worshipped throught the Universe including Bhuloka, Swargaloka and Pataalalokas; Vishnu further said that 'Abhisheka' with Tulasi leaves to Narayana would provide the same effect as 'Sampurna Snaan' or baths in all hallowed places including Sarva Kshetras; performing several Yagnas; satisfying Shri Hari with thousands of Abhishekas of holy waters along with 'Tulasi Dalaas'; thousnad 'godaanas' to equate a Tulasi patra daan; serving tulasi water at the time of a death; any puja with Tulasi to any Deity as good as lakhs of Ashwanmedha Yagnas or death with a tulasi on hand resulting in access to Vaikuntha. If a person swears with a Tulasi on hand, his pledge is considered to be an unquestioned belief and breaking the vow with a Tulasi would attract Kalasutra and Kubhipaaka Narakas. Bhagavan Shri Hari futher said that in order to make her curse to him true, he would become black 'Paashaanas' (Saligramas) on the banks of River Gandaki and several 'krimi keedas' would bite the imprints of Shri Chakra thus becoming eligible for worship. Those Saligrams which have the colour of Cloud / Shyama Varna would be called Lakshmi Narayana; those stones which have one door and four chakras are called 'Vanamaali'; stones of light blue colour are called 'Lakshmi Janaardana'; those with two doors, four chakras and a cow's horn are called 'Raghavendra'; small stones with two chakras of black colour are known as 'Dadhi Vaamanaas'; very small stones with two chakras and vanamaali are called 'Shridhara'; round stones with clear chakra and Vanamali sign are 'Damodaras'; and so on. Narayana Rishi described the Puja to Devi Tulasi with the 'Dasaakshara' (Ten worded) Mula Mantra / Beeja Mantra viz. (OM) *SHREEM HREEM KLEEM AIM BRINDAAVINYAI SWAAHAA* comprising Lakshmi Beeja (Shreem), Maya beeja (Hreem), Kaama bija (Kleem) and Vaani beeja (Aim). After reciting the Mantra, formal Puja must be performed, followed by offering ghee soaked Deepa, Dhupa, Sindura, Chandana, Naivedya and flowers followed by the 'Stuti' that Vishnu himself recited: *Vrindaa rupascha vrikshaascha yadaiktra bhavanti cha, Vidhurbhudaastena Vrindam matpriyaam taam bhajaamyaham/ Puraa babhuva yaa Devi twaadow vrindaavaney vaney, Tena Vrindaavani khyaataa soybhaagyam taam bhajaamyaham/ Asamkhyeshu cha viseshu pujitaa yaa nirantaram, Tena Vishwapujitaakhyaam Jagat-pujyaam bhajaamyaham/ Asamkhyaaani cha Vishwaani pavitraani yayaa sadaa, Taam Vishwapaavaneem Deveem virahena smraanyaham/ Devaa na tushtaah pushpaanaam samuhena yaya vinaa, Taam Pushpa saaraam Shraddhaam cha drashtumicchhaami shokatah/ Vishwey yatpraaptimaatrena bhaktaanando bhaveda dhruvam, Nandini tena vikhyaataa saa preetaa bhavataabhi mey/Yasya Devyaastulaa naast Visweshu nikhileshu cha, Tulasee tena vikhyaataa taam yaami sharanam priyaam/ Krishna jeevana rupaa yaa shaswatpriyatamaa Sati, Tena Krishna jeevaneeti mama rakkshantu jeevanam/* (When Vrinda tree and another kind of tree look alike, then intelligent persons call the group of trees as Vrinda only! It is that Vrinda which is popular that I pray; my greetings to that auspicious Devi who emerged in ancient times in Brindavana and was called as *Brindaavani*; I implore that unique tree which is worshipped among innumerable other trees and is called as *Vishwa pujita*; I greet that universally revered tree in veneration; it is the *Pushpasaaraa* which is held in high esteem among several other flowers and is meditated by all Devas that I yearn to vision with emotion and anxiety; may Tulasi be kind to me as she is known for spreading happiness around and fulfil one's desires and that is why her epithet is *Nandini*. I seek shelter from that Devi whose inherent values are impossible to weigh (tulana) and therefore called *Tulasi*. It is that Vrinda Swarupa who is considered as *Krishna jeevani* that protects the life of Shri Krishna!). In short, Tulasi Stotra is: *Vrindaa Vrindaavani Vishwapijita Vishwapaavani, Pushpa -saaraa Nandini cha Tulasi Krishna jeevani/ Etannaamaashtakam chaiva Stotram Naamaartha samyutam, yah pathet taam cha sapujya soshwamedha phalam labhet/* After the Stotra as above, the formal Puja comprising the 'Shodashopacharaas' are required to be performed by men and women for prosperity, long and healthy life.

Dhaatri Mahatmya: Like wise, worship of Dhatri (Amla) Tree has considerable significance. *Kartikey Dhaatri vrikshaadhas chitraannaistoshayeddharam, Brahmanaan bhojayedbhaktyaa swayam bhujitam*

bandhubhih/ (Naivedya to Hari be performed under the shade of an Amla Tree, organise a Brahmana-Bandhu- Sweeya Bhojana as also use Amla leaves for Hari Puja and for Pitru Shraddhas. It is believed that Devas, Rishis and Sarva Tirthaas surround the Sacred Trees and Hari Jagaranaas are observed under these Trees too.

Hari Jaagarana Vrata: Hari Jaagarana in Kartika Month before Bhagavan Vishnu imparts Sahasra Godaana phala especially in Shiva-Vishnu or other Temples or under an Ashvattha Tree or Tulasi Vana reciting Bhagavan's Stotraas; playing Vaadyas or musical instruments in eulogies of Bhagavan would yield vajapeya phala; Nritya or dances in the praise of Shiva-Narayana-Devis gives away the Sarva Tirtha Snaana Phala; those witnessing the musical / dance concerts in the name of Gods affords one-sixth of the players; if nothing mere stay by way of Jaagarana in these hallowed places during Kartika Maasa fetches Punya. Kartika Deva Puja or Upavaasaas, or bhojana of selected or restricted items during the month as per one's own resolve are significant too. Upavasaas in Kartika as a part of Maasa Vrataas are of far reaching consequence: *Krucchram Vyaapati Krucchramvaa Praajaapatyamathaapi vaa, Eka Raatra Vratam kuryaatiratra Vratamevavaa./ Shaakhaaaram Phalaahaaram Payohaarama- thaapi vaa, charedyaavannaahaaram vaa sdampraaptey Kartikey Vrat/* (During the Kartika Month, there are Vratas o fvarious kinds of fastings like Krucchra bhojana, or Ati Krucchra, Praajaapatya, Eka- Raatra, Tri Raatra or of restricted consumption of Shaaka-Phala-Ksheera and so on).

Varjita Padaardhas in Kartika Maasa Vratas: During the course of the Vrataas, consumption of certain materials are prohibited such as onions, lahasuna, hing, Mulis , brinjals, kushmanda, kalinga, oils, salt, saag, twice cooked or burnt food; pulses like urada, masoora, chana etc. Specifically Amla on Saptamis; oils and coconuts on Ashtamis; and Amla phala on Sundays are strictly forbidden.

Kartika Daana Mahima: In observing a Vrata in the Month of not eating in a Kamsya or bronze vessel, the person following the Vrata should give a daana of five broze vessels full of ghee at the end of the Vrata; if honey is left out then ghee, sugar and kseeraana 2should be given away; in Tila 'thyaga' tila daana; in mouna bhojana vrata or eating in silence then ghanta (Bell) daana; in case of Phala varjana then Phala rasa daana; for dhanya varjana go daana and so on. But nothing like Deepa daana : *Ekatassarvva daanaani deepa daanam tathai kathah, Kartika deepa daanasya kalaam naarhanti shodashim/* (All types of Daanaas would equate one 'Deepa Daana'; in Kartika Month deepa daanaa might not be like sixteenth of any daana!) Also, if no Vrata in any month including the Chaaturmaasya Vrata is not observed, any Vrata in Kartika month ought to be performed. *Avratah Kartiko eshaam gato mudhadhiyaamiha, Tesham Punyasya leshopi nabhavetsooraraatmanam/ Ityukteh/* (Those stupid who do not observe any Vrata in the course of Kartika maasa are as bad as pigs and do not deserve even a grain of Punya!).

Purana Shravana in Kartika Maasa: 'Puranetihaasa' shravana is a requirement in Kartika month and to do this only a well read Brahmana is qualified while others could hear and imbibe the contents of the Puranas; *Vispashtamadbhutam shaantam spashtaakshara padam tathaa, Kalaa swara samaayuktam rasabhaava samanvitam/ Brahmanaadishu sarveshu grandhaartham chaarpayenn nrupa, Ya yevam vaachadrajansa vipro Vyaasa ucchyatey/* (Those of Brahmanaas who could pronounce each 'Akshara' of the narration clearly and audibly in a juicy, vivid and impressive manner are like Vyasa Bhagavan himself!). Such a narrator should be honoured and respected worthy of worshipping. The significance of Purana shravana in the context of Kartika Snaanaas is amply described in the Kashi Khanda of Skanda / Kartika Maha Purana.

Akaasha Deepa Daana: The significance of Kartika Deepa has been emphasised : Ahead of each house, one should arrange a man size pole with the formation of a Deepa Yantra to facilitate the display of eight Deepas with a main deepa in the middle to signify a swing to let Shri Vishnu be seated and enjoy the oscillation ! The relevant Mantra would say: *Damodaraaya nabhasi tulaayandolayaa saha, Pradeepantey prayacchaami Namonantaaya vedhasey!* (May I offer a Deepa-like swing to Lord Ananta which would oscillate back and forth on the Sky in the form of an Akaasha Deepa or a Sky Light!). This symbolic Akaasha Deepa should last through out the Kartika Maasa, conveying the blessings of Vishnu the Creator of the entire Universe to all!

Kartika Bali Puja: As the Vrischika Sankranti takes place and Kartika Shukla Pratipaada arrives, Abyangana Snaana is necessary. In fact, the Saanaas are performed continuously on three days till the Shukla Triteeya not only for avoiding Narakaas but for Lakshmi Prapti. On this Pratipaada a series of Karyaas are scheduled viz. Bali Pujana, Go kreedana, Govardhana Puja, Margapali bandhana (dry grass rope tied to a high pole worshipped as route to Skies and Swarga), Nutana Vastra Dharana and Dyuta Naari kartruka Neeraajana Mangalaacharana. As there is plenty of time till Chandra Darshana, all these Karyaas could be comfortably done in the Pratipaada Tithi itself. Before the Bali Puja, a huge Figure of King Bali with two hands is improvised and decorated in Pancha Varna colours while persons from the Public supply Rice grains to ornate the Symbol of Bali. Then Bali is invoked with the Mantra: *Bali Raja namastubhyam Virojana Suta Prabho, Bhavishyendra Suraataatey pujeyamprati gruhyataam/* (Bali Raja, the son of Virojana and the future enemy of Indra and Devaas; do accept my greetings). *Balibhuddushya yatkinchit Daana karannokshayam Vishnu preeti karam tat, yaa drushena bhaavena tishthatyasyaam Muneeswara/ Harsha Danytaadi bhavena tasya varsham prayaatih/* (Whatever charity is offered today should become Akshaya or of endless value and be appreciated by Vishnu himself! The feeling of happiness or sadness of mine today should be the harbinger of the same feeling throught the year next!) *Asyaam dyutam Bali Raajye prakrutavyam sarva maanavaih, Tasmindyutey jayo yasya samvatsaram jayah/ Visheshavaccha bhoktavyam prashastai Braahmanaaih saha, Bali raajjyai Deepa daanaastadaa Lakshmih sthira bhavet/* (Those who play gambling on this morning oo Kartika Pratipaada are sure to win the game and so should happen to those concerned a winning spree throught out the year ahead. Feasts should be treated to learned Brahmanas that day. Indeed, Deepa Daana in Bali Rajya should bestow stability of Devi Lakshmi and in that house illumination sparkles constantly!)

'Karva Chauth': A very significant Festival widely popular among married women especially in Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and so on on Kartika Shukla Chaturthi. This day of fasting by the married women is dedicated to one's husbands and their welfare, longevity and happiness. The day commences with fasting from dawa to dusk when Moon is visible. The literal meaning of karwa is clay and chouth is the fourth day after Karthika Purnima signifying the harvest of autumn. The pot with sprouts from earth inside is to be offered to the 'Adi Dampathis' or the foremost Universal Couple H Lord Shiva and Devi Parvati the 'Sumangali' or Soubhagyavati wife, with intense prayers and group bhajans and traditional group dances with joy, but without water and food daylong till Moon is sighted . On this day and night till Moon Sight, relatives are approached the woman with gifts, especially with the blessings of mother and mother in law, father and father in law and of course of the husband.

Naga Panchami in Kartika Shuddha Month- Origin and worship:

Bhavishya Purana states: When Rakshasas and Devas undertook the task of churning the Ocean to seek the emergence of 'Amrit', several entities got materialised among whom was a Horse named 'Uchhah Shrava' with a white body but black in hair. Kadru the mother of Nagas (Snakes) remarked to her 'Sapatni' (co-wife) Vinata that Uchhah Shrava was white in body but black in hair, but Vinata replied that the horse was all white. The 'Sapatnis' took a bet and to prove her point, Kadru called her Naga sons to paint the horse hair white all over. The Naga sons did not do so as it was immoral and an angry Kadru gave a 'Shaap' (curse) to her sons that after the Great Battle of Maha Bharata between Pandavas and Kauravas, a Pandava King named Janamejaya would perform a 'Sarpa Yagna' in which the entire 'Sarpa Vamsa' would be destroyed. The 'Naga Ganas' were afraid of their mother's curse and with the help of Vasuki approached Lord Brahma who assuaged their fears and said that 'Tapasvi' Brahmana called Astika, son of Jaratkaaru, would save a sizeable snake population from destruction. Lord Shri Krishna also confirmed the fact to Yudhishtara of Pandavas in the Epic of Maha Bharata that some

hundred years hence King Janamejaya would perform ‘Sarpa Yagna’ or Sacrifice of Serpents to avenge the death of his father King Pareekshit who died of the bite of Taksha the most obnoxious serpent following a curse of a Brahmana son of a Sage in meditation for an insult caused by the King to the Sage by hanging a dead snake around the Sage’s neck. The intervention of Astika to stop the Sarpa Yagna of burning crores of poisonous snakes in the ‘Homaagni’ or the Sacrificial Fire was held on a Panchami Tithi Day when the Snake Vamsa was rescued and that was why Naga Panchami, the fifth day of Shravana Shuddha Fortnight came to be observed. Thus worship of poisonous Snakes on that day by way of washing and feeding them at their pits with milk as also performing formal Pujas with flowers, ‘Dhup’ by incense sticks, ‘Arati’ with camphor lighting or Oil-soaked cotton vicks, and Naivedya with ‘Kheer’ to the Serpent. Brahmanas recite Mantras like the following to protect the devotees: *Sarva Nagaah preeyantam mey yey kechit Prithivithaley, yey cha helimarichistha yentarey Divi samstithah/ Yey Nadeeshu Mahanaga ye Sarasvati gaaminah, yey cha Vaapee tadagashu teshu sarveshu vai namah* (May all Nagas whether on Earth, Sky, Swarga, in the Sun rays, Sarovaras or lakes, wells or other water bodies, be appeased as we greet these deities again and again). After the formal worship, Brahmanas are treated by good food commencing with sweets and savouries and by ‘dakshinas’ or cash and gifts. The ‘Sarpa Vrata’ is best observed in the Panchami Tithis of all the months by worshipping the Twelve leading Snakes named: Ananta, Vasuki, Shankha, Padma, Kambala, Karkotaka, Aswatara, Dhrita Rashtira, Shankhapaala, Kaaliya, Takshaka and Pingala. Sincere devotion to Naga Devas by performing the Pujas would save the entire family of ‘Naga Bhaya’ or the Fear of Snakes as also of Snake bites to the entire generation of their lives. Nag Puja also bestows health, longevity, and great peace of mind. Sage Sumantu quoted to King Shatani the conversation between Maharshis Kashyapa and Gautama about the features, appearances and types of serpents: During the Jyeshtha and Ashaadha months, serpents tend to very aggressive and the male /female variety turns into mutual union. During the rainy season, the female snake conceives and remains pregnant for four months and during the Kartika month delivers two hundred forty eggs but by the dispensation of Mother Nature only a very few remain intact. The mother snake retain the eggs for six months and seven days after their emergence, the baby serpents assume black colour. Normally the life span of a serpent is twenty years but it is a known fact that every day there is a threat of life to the reptile from peacocks, human beings, chakora birds, cats, pigs, scorpions, as also by cows, buffalos, horses and camels which kill the snakes by their horns and feet. After a bite, its poison gets immediately gets replenished. A serpent has two hundred feet enabling tremendous speed in mobility but in a stationary state not visible. It has a mouth, two tongues, thirty two teeth and four extended teeth called makari, karaali, kaalaratri and yamaduti stated to signify Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Yama. There are eight reasons as to why a snake bites, viz. by way of hard weight, erstwhile enmity, fear, arrogance, hunger, speedy production of excessive poison, safety of its progeny and provocation. A snake bite is normally irrevocable causing death. But, depending on physical indications of the affected person, there certainly are ‘Aoushadhis’ which could do miracles! Seven Stages of physical features as per the speed impact of the poison after the snake bite: In the first stage of the speed effect, the indication is ‘Romancha’ or stiffening of body hair; in the second stage, there would be excessive sweating; in the third stage, there would be body shiver; in the fourth stage hearing capacity is affected; in the fifth stage, there would be hiccups or gulping sounds; in the sixth stage the neck gets dropped; in the seventh stage, poison gets spread all over the body. If eye-vision is diminishing and the whole body has a burning sensation, then probably the skin of the poisoned person is affected; a pounded mixture of ‘Aak Jad’, ‘Apamaarg’, ‘Tagar’ and ‘Priyangu’ in water should reduce the impact of the poison. Since blood flow into the skin

pores is spreading poison, the person feels excessively thirsty and might even swoon and hence cold items be provided with a grinding of 'Usheer' /'Khas', 'chandan', 'kuut', 'Tagar', 'Neelotpal', 'Sinduvaar Jada', 'Dhuter jad', 'Hing' (Asafoetida), and 'mircha' should help; if not: 'Bhatakatayya', 'Indrana jad', and 'Sarpagandhi' should be ground in a mix and administered; if this mix is also ineffective, grinding of Sinduvar and Hing powder be given as a drink with water; these powders could also be used as 'Anjan' and 'Lepa'. If poison enters 'pitta' into blood, the patient jumps up and down, the body becomes yellowish, vision becomes yellowish too, the person gets thirsty and swooning; at this stage, a mixture of Peepul, honey, mahuva, ghee, 'thumba jad' and Indrayana Jad should all be ground together and along with Cow's urine made into a paste as powder, lepana and Anjana. If poison enters 'Kapha' due to Pitta, the body becomes stiff, breathing becomes difficult, throat makes sounds, and 'lar' comes out of mouth; then 'Peepul, mirch, sounth, sleshmataka of bahuvara vriksha/tree and lodh and Madhusara' should be mixed (grinding) and an equal part with cow's urine and used as a lepana /anjana. If poison enters Vaata with Kapha, the affected person's stomach gets bloated and vision gets blocked, then 'Shona (Sonagaachha) jad, Priyal, Gajapeepul, Bhaarangi, Vacha, Peepul, Devadaru, Mahuva, Madhusara, Sinduvara and Hing' should be powdered (grinding) in 'golis' and make the patient eat, as also use as lepana/anjana. If poison enters 'Mazza' due to Vaata, the affected person gets blinded and all body parts get disfunctioned, then a mixture of ghee, honey, sugar with Khas, ane chandana be pounded and given as a drink, or administer its powder through inhaling. If poison enters majja to 'marmasthaan', all body parts fail and the body drops on the Earth; by cutting the veins blood is not shown, then the ultimate medicine prescribed by Lord Rudra would be '*Mritasanjeevani Auoshadhi*' viz. Peacock Pitta and Marajarika Pitta, Gandhanadi jad, Kumkum, tagar, kut, Kaasamarda's chhaal, Utpal, Kumud and Kamal all in equal parts along with Cow's urine be mixed (grinding) and use a nashya/anjana; by so doing Kalasarpa becomes a Hamsa (swan).

Sage Kashyapa advised humanity through Gautama Muni, that recital of the following Mantra especially after sincerely performing Naga Panchami Vrata on the Panchami Tithis of Shravana Shukla, Bhadrpada Shukla as also Ahwiyuja Shukla months viz. **Om Kurukulley phat swaha**. Recital of the Mantra is a Heavy Security Shield and no snake of any description would and could approach the devotee concerned.

Skanda Shashthi Vrata: Kartika Deva's 'Avirbhaava' or Holy Appearance was stated to have occurred in Kartika Month on the Shashthi day of the Shukla Paksha (Fortnight), as Kritthika Devis enabled his birth; Bhagavan Shiva, Agni Deva and Devi Ganga had vital roles in the birth. Again, it was on the same Tithi of Shashthi that Kartikeya was conferred the Title of Deva Senapati. The Skanda Vrata is performed on both the Shukla and Krishna Paksha Shashthis of the month. On these days, the ground rules are to observe fasting (except consume a few fruits), celibacy and sleeping on ground, and worship Kartikeya 'Pratima' (Idol) with 'Arghya Pradaana' or offering Water by the Mantra: *Saptarshidaaraja Skanda Swaahaapati samudbhava, Rudraaryamaagnija vibho Gangaagarbha namostutey, Preeyatam Devasenaaneeh sapaadayatu hrudgutam*. The Vrata proceeds with the worship of Skanda by flowers, ghee, curd and such other material. Brahmanas are to be satisfied with Bhojan, dakshinas and Vastra. By the grace of Skanda Deva, performance of this Vrata in a formal manner would bestow Siddhi (Achievement), Dhruiti (Firmness), Tushti (Contentment), Rajya (Kingship), Ayu (Longevity), Arogya (Health) and Mukti (Salvation). Kartikeya Vrata is performed on Shashthi day of Bhadrpada month also in the same manner and veneration as above. In fact, the Vrata is also observed on the Shashthi of Maragasirsha Shukla Month too. It was in this context that Sumantu Muni emphasised that 'Vedadhyaana'

was indeed a pre-requisite of 'Vrata paalana', but the principal objective is 'Sadacharana' or Good Practice / Application of Values in the performance of Vratas; *Achaara heenan na punanti Veda yadyapyadheetah saha shatbhirangaih, shilpam hi Vedadhyanam Dwijaanam vrutam Smrutam Brahmana lakshmanam tu/* (Reating Vedas is no doubt an important requisite, since Vedas form the framework but practice of what Vedas contained is the principal objective of Brahmanas.) Hence Practice of Vratas with sincerity is far more crucial than the knowledge of performing them.

Kartikeya Mahatmya: Skanda Purana details the background of Daksha Yajna havoc with Devi Sati's self immolation and the terrible aftermath, Parvati retired to intense Tapasya even as Tarakasura did rigorous penance and obtained Lord Brahma's boon of invincibility except by a child of Lord Shiva who might very unlikely wed again. At the same time, Devi Parvati was born to the King Himavanta and eventually got absorbed in Shiva's unflinching worship while Lord Shiva continued in his Tapasya. Meanwhile Parvati was fully engrossed in high meditation. Bhagavan Shiva was indeed impressed but desired to test her sincerity and unswerving attachment to Him. He took the form of a Brahmachari and enquired from Devi Girija's associates around her as to who she was and why was she performing such severe Tapasya? The associates replied to the queries and the Brahmachari had a hearty laugh that the Tapasya of such severity was a sheer waste as the Tapaswini was replete with ignorance since Rudra was an abhorable and wild person with a 'kapaala' (skull) in hand, a dweller of Smashana (Burial Ground), an odd exhibitionist of poisonous serpents all over His Body, a bearer of Tiger skin as Loin Cloth, an unkempt and ugly hair style with water flowing from head, always in the highly inauspicious and disgusting company of Pisachas, Goblins, Pramathas Ganas and a typically crazy creation of God! This beautiful and attractive lady coming of a wonderful family background could indeed wed a Demi-God like Indra, Dharmaraja, Varuna Deva, Kubera, Vayu or Agni, but never ever that horrible species like Rudra! Devi Parvati got infuriated with white anger and asked the Brahmachari to be lifted and thrown out at once to have affronted such Mahatma; the stupid and arrogant person was an unpardonable sinner, a Veda-dushak and a brainless brute! Bhagavan Shiva then showed up in His real form to Devi Parvati who felt shy and reminded Rudra that She was a reincarnation of Devi Sati and that She gave birth to Devi Meena with the immediate and noble cause of begetting a Son, who alone could free the Universe from the great peril of Tarakasura. On being asked her by Lord Shiva for a boon, Devi Parvati desired that Bhagavan should approach her father Himavanta to allow Him to wed her! To this Shiva replied that Parvati had indeed declared her real form of Maya or Illusion and that of Maha Tatva which was a display of the interaction of three Gunas of Satva, Rajas and Tamas and that He would never extend His hand to "receive" as Bhagavan was always a "Giver"! However, Bhagavan Shiva deputed "Sapta Rishis"-the illustrious Seven Sages viz. Marichi, Atri, Angera, Pulasthya, Pulaha, Kratu and Vasishtha- to Himavanta's residence to formally present Devi Parvati and Himavanta proposed his daughter to wed Shiva after consulting the bride's mother Mena and the co-Mountains like Meru, Nishadha, Gandhamadana, Mandarachala and Mainak. The Sapta Rishis who conveyed the most auspicious news to Shiva and suggested that Lord Vishnu be immediately called and along with Him Lord Brahma, Indra, Dikpals, Devas, Rishiganas, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Nagas, Siddhas, Vidyadharas, Kinnaras, Apsaras and their spouses and cohorts. Sage Narada among the Sapta Rishis was commissioned to personally invite Vishnu, Brahma, Indra and Devas. Gargacharya was asked to supervise the rituals of the wedding and Viswakarma constructed the „Mangala Vedika" or the Auspicious Platform to perform the Wedding and oversee the decorations. Chandra provided coolness in the atmosphere, Surya the luminosity, Vayu Deva

blew fragrant airs and Indra organised dance, music and instrumental extravaganza. The Bridegroom arrived on Nandi, accompanied by Vishnu, Brahma and Devas, Maharshis, Pramathaganas, Rakshasas, Ghosts, Goblins, Pisachas and Spirits. Indeed the unprecedented and the Most Glorious Wedding of Siva-Parvati was the unique talk of the entire Universe. At the Wedding “Muhurat”, Himavan declared: “I, Himavan of the Gotra and clan of Mountains have the greatest privilege of offering the hand of my daughter Devi Parvati to Parama Siva in the august presence of Brahma and Vishnu. In turn, I wish to know the Gotra and Vamsa of Bhagavan. As Sage Narada lifted his Veena instrument, Himavan stopped Narada not to play on it as a reply about the Gotra and Vamsa of Bhagavan; Narada told Himavan that the Gotra and Vamsa of Maha Siva was “Naad” or Sound and that was why Narada lifted the Veena as a reply! Bhagavan is ‘Naadamaya’ or the Embodiment of Naada and one could realise Siva only through Naada, as He has no Gotra and no Vamsa since He is above these nomenclatures and yet belongs to all Gotras and all Vamsas. He has neither beginning nor end; He is the Most Supreme Energy beyond comprehension! Then Himavan gave the „Kanyadaan” or the offering of his daughter saying: „Imam Kanyaam thubhyamaham dadami Parameswara! ‘Bharyartham prathi gruhneeshva’ (Parameswara! I am offering my daughter as your „Dharma Patni”; kindly accept). After wedding, Maha Deva and Devi Parvathi moved on to Mountain Gandhamadan to a luxurious and lonely place for their honeymoon. As Bhagavan’s virility was so potent that parts of humanity were getting destroyed and Vishnu asked Agni Deva to take the form of a Hermit and asked Parvati to donate it and extended his hand which was immediately consumed by Agni even before Her eyes. Parvati got angry and cursed Agni to become ‘Sarva Bhakshak’ or he who consumes everything. Agni could not bear the brunt of the virility of Maha Siva and begged Him to show a way to pass it on to someone; Siva advised that the same be planted into virtuous women and Sage Narada annotated that such women of high merit taking bath on an early morning in the instant month of Magha would be attracted to Agni and his hot flames and they would be the best choice for the transfer of the virility in particles. As advised by Narada, Kritthikas approached Agni seeking warmth from the cold morning and Agni transferred some drops of virility to the ladies through their skin pores. Kritthikas got pregnant and their angry husbands gave a curse to them to roam on the Sky. They became Stars in a constellation and aborted their pregnancies. The major portion of the virility got left however on top of the Himalayas which was lifted by a crane and pushed into Ganges and the drops which were radiant like fire sparks got meshed up in the river bed plants (Sarkhand) of Ganges, who carried the foetus to a secluded place in the bushes thus emerging a Six Headed Child Kartikeya! As soon as the boy of highly chiselled face and limbs was born with extraordinary splendour, there was such illumination that travelled all over the Three Worlds instantly. Siva Deva and Devi Parvati appeared at once on their Vrishaba carrier and were overwhelmed with parental love and affection. Soon Brahma, Vishnu, Indra and the entire Devaloka assembled and so did Rishis, Yakshas, Gandharvas and all Celestial Beings. Veerabhadra and Pramathaganas as also the whole entourage of Maha Deva were ecstatic with boundless rapture. Devas put their chins up with indescribable relief that it would not be far for the greatest menace of Takakasura to be devastated by the new arrival on the scene! The whole atmosphere was of liberation, festivity and celebration. The Deities commenced preparations of war to kill Tarakasura but a Celestial Voice was heard that victory would be assured only under the Leadership of Kartikeya and hence all the Devas requested Skanda to become the Chief of the Army of Devas. Meanwhile, Devasena, the daughter of Mrityu Devata, became his wife and hence Skanda was known as Deva Senapati. Kartikeya led the army of Devas of the rank of Indra, Agni, Vayu, Kubera and Yama Dharma Raja and was seated on an elephant. Tarakasura arrived with a huge army of mighty warriors

who dominated and controlled the opponents initially. Indra's 'Vajra' was overpowered by Tarakasura's weapon called Shakti and wounded Indra. King Muchukunda who fought for Devas and sought to stop the domination of Daityas but Tarakasura felled him on the ground; Muchukunda wanted to use the 'Brahmastra' but was restrained by Sage Narada as that weapon would no doubt create havoc but would be ineffective to destroy Tarakasura and hence Kartikeya would have to be warmed up gradually. Veerabhadra swung into action and slaughtered thousands of Demons; Tarakasura realised that Veerabhadra was not easy to control and thus used his 'Maya' and assumed a thousand arms. Lord Vishnu suggested that the time was ripe to kill the Big Demon before he became more powerful and asked Skanda to charge him. With his mighty weapon Shakti on hand, Kartikeya chased Tarakasura but the latter retaliated with his own 'Shakti' and even got Skanda unconscious for a while. After quickly recovering his poise, Kartikeya prayed to his parents and released the Maha Shakti which was fortified with the blessings of Bhagavan and Bhagavati and finally annihilated Tarakasura who incidentally was a Great Siva Bhakta! But Siva Himself was so pleased at the valour of the lad who was more than a match to the Greatest Demon of the times who sent shock waves across the Three Worlds! While Devas and Gandharvas were engaged in unending praises and noise of resounding musical notes, Rishis were engaged in Vedic Hymns to please Kartikeya and there was ecstasy across the Globe. Whoever reads or hears the details of the historic victory of Deva Senapati over the obnoxious Demon would be rid of Sins of even great severity and magnitude.

Pradhana Subrahmanya Kshetras:*Swami Malai:* One of significant six Subrahmanya Kshetras worthy of visit in Dakshina Bharat viz. Tiruttani, Palani, Tiruchendur, Tiruppuramkunnam and Palamudircholai is Swami Malai-literally meaning God's Hill- some 30 km near Kumbhakonam at an elevation of 82 ft. totally dedicated to Swami Nathan, called locally as 'Tagapan Swami' or Father God! The legendary background was that the Lord taught the true meaning of OM or Pranava to Maha Deva himself! As Brahma Deva failed to interpret the word adequately to Kumara Swami, he chided him; when Maha Deva asked Kumara to explain in a convincing manner, he analysed the depth of the meaning he did so even as the father learnt it intently as though a Teacher to a Vidyarthi! The Swami Malai Temple performs 'shat kaala dainika puja' or six worships a day round the year, besides celebrates many festivals like Kritikai every month, Rathotsava in April, Vishakha in May, Navaratri in May, Kanda Shashthi in October, Kartikai Utsav in November, Taipuccham in January and so on. The Golden Chariot utilised for all the festivals are made of 7 kg of gold and 85 kg of silver-copper alloy with sparkling illumination. There is a Sweta Vinayaka Temple made of white foam of Sea representing Ksheera sagara that created Amrit!

Palani: Some 38 km from Trichy and 100 km near Coimbatore is another Subrahmanya Kshetra of the reputed Six as mentioned above, the Abode of Dandayudhapani. There are two mythological references to this Temple; one is that since this Palani Hill was of the 'amsha' or of relationship with the highest mountain of the Universe viz. Meru, Sage Narada provoked Vindhya that the latter was, after all, not taller than Meru; this hurt Vindhya and tried to grow even taller as one side of the Universe was bright but the other side remained dark for ever since Sun became unreachable to the side at all. Parama Shiva asked Agastya Muni who was a resident of Kashi to teach a lesson to Vindhya; the Muni reached Vindhya who as a reverent to the Muni bent down and the Muni asked Vindhya never to stand. Agastya then moved to Dakshina Bharat to stay at Palani Hills for long before moving down further down to other Southern parts of Bharat. Another explanation about Palani Hills was that Sage Narada visited Kailasa to pay respects to Shiva and Parvati and gifted a Fruit of Jnana or Knowledge; he requested to conduct a test between

Ganesha and Kartikeya viz. pradakshina or circumambulation of the Universe. Kartikeya instantly flew by his Peacock Vehicle while Ganesha performed a pradakshina and was rewarded with the Fruit. Kumara on return got furious and made Palani his abode as an ascetic assuming danda or a staff and 'koupeena' or loin cloth. Subsequently the parents Shiva and Parvati reached Palani to cajole the Dadaayudhapani saying: *Gnaana paam nee Appa!* Or 'Indeed you are the personification of the fruit of Knowledge yourself, darling son!' There are daily worships including Kaala and Shanti Pujas- Alankaras-Aariti-Deepa- Swarna Raratha/ Golden Chariot Darshana. Festivals like Thai-Poosam/ Purnima, Tirtha Kavadi Yatras, Diamond Vel or Shula (javelin) yatras, Pankhuni Uttiram, Vaishakhas, Soora samhara etc. all drawing large crowds, especially due to the rope way facility up the hill, although many climb by steps owing to vows with or without foot wear or by Kavadis slung on shoulders!

Tiruttani: Yet another among the six Subrahmanya Tirthas is of Murugan Temple at Tiruttani, near by the border of Andhra Pradesh and distant by 84 km from Chennai up a hill of 250 ft elevation connected by good hill motorable road. Besides the Sanctum of Muruga, there are Temples of Mkahashasura Mardini, Veera Anjaneya, Arumuga Swami, Narasimha Swami, Mangaleshwara Shiva and so on. Besides Trikala Pujas and Deepa-aradhanas, festivals as observed at other Subrahmanya Tirthas as at Swami Malai are celebrated, especially Kanda Shashti, Nava Ratras, Krittikas and Vishakhas as also Shiva Ratri penances. From Madurai to about 3 km is *Tiruppuramkkundam* and nearby there is a small mountain and up there is a cave inside which a Sarovar and a fairly big Mandir with a high rise gopura dedicated to Lord Subramanya , besides Murtis of Shiva-Parvati-Ganesha Idols; the belief is that Kumara's wedding was celebrated here and a row of Peacocks with Shiva- Parvati-Ganesha Murtis present as the audience! This is one of the six Subramanya sthalas of Dakshina Bharat. Passing by near the southern side of Vaigai river, one encounters a large Sarovara where the Ratha Yatra of Meenakshi-Sundareshwara Parikrama terminates at the Maryamman Koil. *Palamoodicholai* hardly 2km from Alagar Koyil up the Mountain and this too is one another six Abodes of Lord Kumara as a Tiruppuruk kundam. This too is one of the six Subramanya sthalas of Dakshina Bharata. *Tiruchendur* is among the Five most famous and Sacred Subrahmanya Tirthas in Bharat, viz. *Swami Malai, Tiruttani, Tiru- chendur, Palani and Tirukundram.* Tiruchendur is on the shores of the Sea and normally yatris perform Samudra Snana before entering this Sacred Kshetra, which has a large Mandapa after crossing which only the Main Temple unfolds the Lord's darshan. The Golden Murti of the Lord Swami Kartikeya is indeed brilliant both in terms readily arresting features and shape as also the artistic attraction readily experiencing inner vibration of feelings. *Vaitheeswara Koil of Angaraka: Dharani garbhasambhutam Vidyurkanti sama prabham, Kumaram Shakti hastam tam Mangalam pranamaamyaham/* Being the son of Bhu Devi Mangala Deva is of the flashy brightness of a Lightning and he too like Lord Subrahmanya the embodiment of Power and Courage ever worthy of worship. The Temple of Lord Vaideeswaran the Supreme Deity of Healing and of Medical Treatment as the key to Arogya or Health is situated some 27 km of Chidambaram and 52km from Kumbhakonam. Built by Kulottnuga Chola of 11th century, Vaideeswaran Temple encompasses large precincts with a 5tier Gopuram with its principal Sanctum dedicated to Vaideeswara Linga and a metal image of Muttukumara Subramanya, besides those of Nataraja, Soma Skanda, Angaraka as also stone sculptures of Durga, Dakshina murti, Surya, Jatayu, Vedas and Sampatti. Temples of Taila Nayaki standing with medical oils to cure diseases and another of Dhanvantari and Angaraka are in Place, besides a Vriksha Sthala with medicinal properties in the vicinity. Nadi Jyotisha written in Tamil Script is practised in Vaideeswaran extensively and near the

Temple. Brahmotsavas during January- February, Kartigai Festival during November and Kanti Shashtis at Muttukumara Temple are big draws besides on Tuesdays.

Subrahmanya Kshetra: Within the State of Karnataka in South Kanara District is the renowned Koumara Kshetra where Parashu Rama established a Mukti Kshetra like Mookambika, Udipi, Gokarna etc. Mangalore is the nearest Railway Station from where Subrahmanya is some 40 km although the roads are through forests and dusty and rather difficult to reach in rainy season but recommended from November till May. Main Mandir is of Lord Subrahmanya as seated on a Mayuraasana or on a Peacock. On the platform up at the Temple He is a Shadaanana Murti or of Six Heads, with a Pratima of Sarparaja Vasuki in the middle and at the bottom is Sessa Bhagavan and facing the Temple is a Garuda Dhwaja stated to offset the impact of poisonous flames emitted by the Sarpas. There is a Bhairava Mandir to the South, a Mandir for Uma Maheshwara in the northern side, a VedaVyasa Samputa Nrisimha Mandir in the Southern side of the Main Mandir, besides a Parashurama Mandir again in South. In Kerala, the main places of worship are Kasargod, Payyanur, Haripad etc. In Andhra, Skandagiri in Hyderabad is famed while in East Godavari's Bikka volu is well known for worship of Subrahmanya Swami just as Karnataka has exclusive Temples venerated Him as Kukke Subrahmanya.

Apart from the famed Subrahmanya Khetras in Southern India, there has been a considerable following in North too. Pehova in Ambala of Punjab is the famed Swami Kartik Mandir near Prithishwar Maha Dev who is of Four Faces. Pilgrims worship him with oil and sindur as also perform Pitru Karyas on the banks of Sarasvati River. Swami Malai in New Delhi too has acquired great name for daily abhishakea pujas daily twice to the imposing figure of Lord Murugan at Vasanta Vihar. Worship of Kartikeya especially during Devi Navaraatras and all through the Kartika Month in West Bengal and Odisha is extensive. In Sri Lanka, there is a huge following of Murugan, especially at Jafna. Batu Caves in Kaula lumpur and ardent worship of Dandapani on Tank Road of Singapore are widely popular and so are in the Subrahmanya Temples in London, Midlands and Liester. Murugan worship is also widespread in USA, Canada, Australia, not to mention of Mauritius and South Africa.

Lakshmi and Kubera Pujas: *Lashmiriyaa Lokapaalaanaam Dhenu rupena samsthitaa, Ghritam vahati yajnerthaa mama paapam vyapohatu/ Agratassantu mey gaavo gaavomey santu prishthatah, Go mey hridaye santu gavaam mey santu vasaamyaham/* (Lakshmi has assumed the Form of a Sacred Cow for all the Lokapaalakaas to facilitate Yagna Karyaas by way of supplying plentiful ghee. May She destroy all my sins. May She stay with ahead and behind me as also in my heart. I do unfailing worship to the calf and bull too to enable milking and carrying weight respectively. If 'Govardhana Parvata' is in the reach, or else materialise a formation of the Govardhana, do perform the Parvata and worship Krishna by invoking both the Govardhana and Krishna : *Shri Krishna preetyartham Govardhana Pujanam Gopaalpujanam cha karishye/* Then recite the Mantra: *Gopala Murtey Vishvesha Shakratotsava bhedaka, Govardhanakrita cchatra pujaam mey Hara Gopatey! Govardhana dharaadhaara Gokulatraana kaaraka, Vishnubaahukritacchhaaya gavaam koti pradobhava/* (Gopaala Murti! Vishvesha! You had resisted the observance of Indrotsava Vrata and lifted the huge Govardhana Mountain as an umbrella and saved Gokula from the fury of incessant rains created by Indra; do kindly provide abundance of cows and milk); so saying 'Shodashopacharaas' or the formal services of sixteen offerings like Dhupa-Deepa-Naivedyaas to Go-Gopala-Govardhanaas and provide Go daana- Anna daana- Trina Daana- Dhana Daana to Brahmanas and BaliDaana in favour of Govardhana, climaxed by Brahmana Bhojana and Pratyaksha Go-Pradakshinaas. Bhishma Panchaka Vrata: This is a Kanya (optional) Vrata to secure prosperity, progeny, fame, progress in life and finally Moksha-in short, 'Iham' and 'Param'

which is observed men, women and even widows. This is observed from Kartika Shukla Ekadashi to Purnima. On the Tenth day of Maha Bharata Battle, Arjuna found Bhishma was invincible and on the advice of Bhishma himself brought Eunuch Prince called Shikhandi- the son of King Drupada to face him so that he would assume 'Astra Sanyasa' and Arjuna pierced Bhishma's body with Astras and made a bed of arrows on the battle field. Bhishma had the boon of death at will and waited till the arrival of Uttarayana for his death. Hence the significance of the Panchaka Vrata since Bhagavan Krishna himself narrated the Vrata Vidhana to Bheeshma. The Vrata Vidhana includes Kankalpa-Three Arghyaseach day-Tilodaka-DevaTarpana- Deepa Daana to Brahmanas-Upavaasa-Pancha Gavya Paaraayana- Naivedya of Pancha Bhakshya-Naivedya- Brahman Bhojana-Shaastra Shravana- Udyapaana and at the end of the Vrata –'Tirtha Prasada viyiyoga'. The Sakalpa states: *Putraabhilaasha kaamyartham Dhanaabhilaasha kamyartham, Putri Vivaaha kaamyartham, Arogya-Aishwarya kaamyartham, Bhishma Panchaka Vratam Kartika Shudda Ekaadashim Arrambhya Purnimaaparyantam Bhahmana Suvaashini Puja mukhena mayaa upavaasa charana mukhena karishye!*

Mantra Grahana Diksha: On Kartika Shudda Ekaadashi Shiva Vishnu-adi Mantra grahana can be done by a Guru after referring Chandra-Taaraa bala on that day. Maharshi Narada was quoted having stated: *Kartiketu kritaa deekshaa Nrinaam Janma mochan!* (Any Mantra Diksha in Kartika is highly significant as it paves way to Janma Vimochana.) Yaamala Tantra provides the 'Utpatti' or the root meaning of Diksha: *Divyam Jnaanam yato datthaat kuryaat paapasya sankshamam, Tasmaat diksheti saa proktaa Munibhihstantra vedibhih//* It states more damagingly further: *Adikshitaanaam Martyaanaam dosham shunvantu Saadhakaah, Annam vishtaasamam jneyam Jalam mutra samam tathaa/ Adikshita kritam Shraaddham Shraaddham chaa Dikshitasya cha, Griheetvaa Pitarastasya Narakey chaashu daaruney!!* (To those who have not taken up Diksha, Annam is as bad as defecation and warer as as bad as urine. The Shraaddhas offered by a person without Diksha would not save Pitrus from Narakaas!)

Tulasi kaashthaa Maala Dharana/ Vishnu Prabotsava Tulasi Vivah: Skanda Purana asserts: *Nivedya Keshavey maalaam Tulasi kaashtha sambhavaam, Vahateyo NaroBhaktyaa tgasya naivaasti paatakam/ Tulasi kaashtha sambhutey maaley Krishna jana priye, Vibharmi twaamaham kanthe kurumaam Krishna vallabham/ Yevam sampraarthya vidhivanmaalaam Krishna galerpitaam, Dhaarayey Kartikey yo vai sagacchey Vishnavam padam/* (Since there is an assurance that the Tulasi Kaashtha Maala which was garlanded around the neck of Bhagavan Krishna Himself, how could there be any kind of sins reach me wearing the neck of a Krishna Bhakta like me; for sure I too on the path of Vishnu Sthaana!) Same kind of assurances are voiced in Nirnaya Sindhu, Padm Purana and so on. Hence one should wear the Tulasi Kaashtha Maal like Rudrakshaas and perform Devatarchana to please not only Devataas but satisfy the Pitru ganaasalso while performing Shraaddhas.Referring to Tulasi Vivaha, Dharma Sindhu states that there is no Tithi Nirnaya but could be celebrated on any of the three days during Kartika Ekadashi to Purnima. After Sankalpa, Veda Pathana, Mangala Snaana to Vishnu and Tulasi, Vastra-Yagnopaveeta-Pushpa- Gandha-Phalaadi 'Shodashopachaaraas' on the basis of Purusha Sukta be done along side 'Mangala Vaadyaas'; the same Vivaha Vidhis be followed by first facing the bride and groom with a screen in between before Vishnu's tying Mangala Sutra and thereafter together thus accomplishing the Shubha Vivaha, stating: *Mayaa samvardhitaam yadhaashaktyalankrutaamimaam Tulasi Deveem Daamodaraaya Shridharaaya Varaaya tubhyamaham sampradadey/* (Organised under my supervision as per my limited capacity of 'Alankaara' and 'Aoupachaaraas', I have the unique honour and humility to offer the Sacred Hands of Tulasi Devi to Damodara in the august presence of the full congregation of Devas and Devis). As the Karta would leave 'Gandhaakshata Jala' on the Vivaha Vedika, it would be said as mutual approval while the Deva and Devi are made to improvise 'Kara sparsha' signifying exchange of mutual approvals as Mantras are recited : *Ka dam kasmaa adaatkaamah Kaamaayaadaat-Kaamo Daataa kaamah pratigriheetaa Kaamam Samudramaavisha, Kaamenatwaa pratiguhnami KaaaitattheyVrishtirasi dyostwaa dadaatu Prithivi pratigrunantu/* The Mantraas would follow prayers, Tulasi Daana to Brahmanaas with appropriate Dakshinnaas and 'Swasti Vaachanaas'.

Vaikuntha Chaturdashi: Observing Upavaasa on the previous day and performing Shiva Puja in the early hours of Arunodaya on the Chaturdashi, so that fasting would have been considered as during the entire previous day and night. In case Chaturdashi occurs at Arunodaya of the previous and the following days, then the Puja is to be observed on the second Arunodaya. Again it is on this Chaturdashi when Amavashya occurs then ‘Kartika Maasa Vratodyaapana’ be performed too, in which case there might be an extra Upavaasa and Raatri Jaagaran with Geeta-Nrityaas and then the Karta is qualified to reap ‘Go Sahasra Daana Phala’; the ‘Vratodyaapana’ is to be then performed on the Purnima day with his wife after Agni- Homa of Tilaas and Paayasa along with Godaana.

Chaturmasya Vrata Samapti: The end of the Chaturmasya Varata on the Manvaadi Tithis of Kartika Shukla Dwadashi or Pournami there should be Daanaas, offering of Vastra dwaayaas in connection with Nakta Vrataas, Ekaantaropvaasa, Go Daana, Bhu shayana, Shashtha kaala Bhojana Vrata Go daana, Swarna vreehi Swarna Godhuma daana, Goyugma daana in the context of Kruccha Vrata, Godaana in the context of ‘Shaakhaahaara’ Vrata, Ksheera Bhakshana / Ksheera Varjna pursuant to Payo Vrata and Go Daana; Vastra daana and Go daana in connection with Madhu-Dadhi- Ghrita Varjana Vrata; Suvarna daana on account of Brahmacharya paalana, Vastra yugma daana due to Tambula tyaaga Vrata; Ghantaa daana for observing silence; Deepa-Vastra dwaaya daana for observing Deepa Vrata; Kaamsya Paatra/ Go daana for Bhumi Bhojana Vrata; Lavana Purna Tamra Paatra daana for Lavaana Varjana Vrata and so on. Again it would be the Udyapana of Laksha Pradakshina- Laksha Namaskaara Vrata initiated on Ashaadha Purnima or Maagha Purnima. Pushpa-Patra Laksha Vratodyapana too is scheduled on Kartika Shukla Dwaadashi and among these Pujaas, Bilwa patra Laksha Puja endows Lakshmi Prapti; Durvaapatra Laksha puja grants Arishta Shanti; Champaka Laksha Puja provides longevity of life; Atasi laksha puja gives Vidya; Tulasi Laksha Puja grants Vishnu Prasada; Godhuma-Dhanya Lajksha Puja entails Duhkha naashana and Sarva Pushpa Laksha Puja yields Sarva Kaamaavapnoti. Such Laksha Pushpa- Patra pujas are commenced in Maasa Traya of Kartika- Maagha-Vaishakhaas and their Udyapana or Auspicious Terminations are best executed on Kartika Purnimaas.

Kartikeya Darshana: **Kartika Purnima** with the Yoga of Krittika Nakshatra is of Maha Punya and in Rohini Yoga is called ‘Maha Kartiki’. Kumara Kartikeya’s Darshana in the Kartika Purnami-KrittikaYoga bestows such prosperity as would not be available for ‘Sapta Janmaas’ or Seven Births and the one born in this Yoga Kala would be an ideal Vipra with extraordinary learning of VedaVidya. If Surya in Vishakha and the Dina Kakshatra is Krittika then that glorious time is of Padmaka Yoga. This is considered as highly significant at Pushkara Tirtha when Triparaakhya Deepa Daana is most auspicious. Kartika Purnima is a very popular festival almost across Bharat and is observed with devotion and faith when Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. Andhra and Karnataka observe Shiva Lingarchana, Rajasthan with Pushkar Mela, Haryana’s Yamuna nagar, UP’s Varanasi, Madha Pradesh’s Ujjain and Omkareshwar, devotees of Radha Krishna all over, Guru Nanak’s Jayanti, significance of Matsyavatara, Jagannath’s special adorations and above all the Maha Deepa Sandarshana at Tiruvannamalai of Tamilnadu. The last mentioned is outstanding signifi-nance in Dakshina Bharat: This Place is in the South of Bharat and Arunachal (Tiruvannamalai) is in the form of Mountain Range comprising the ‘Pancha Mukhas’ or the Five Faces of Lord Rudra viz. ‘TatpuruSha’, ‘Aghora’, ‘Sadyojata’, ‘Vamadeva’, ‘Eshana’ which are visible till date. Nandikeswara told Markandeya that this Sacred Region is like the heart of Devi Prithvi. This Arunachal is expected to be Parameswar Himself and a fourteen kilometre distance surrounding the Mountain is as good as a complete ‘Pradakshina’ (Circumambulation) of Lord Siva. A large number of persons perform the Pradakshina on every full moon night barefooted and Pournami of Chaitra Month is a very special day as over hundreds of thousands throng the Temple and the Mountain displaying sincere devotion from all over the World. A ten day long celebration culminating on the day of Karthika Deepam or lights day is a massive crowd puller; on that evening a huge lamp is lit in an open vessel with three tons of ghee from the mountain top. Among the ‘Pancha Bhutas’ (Five Elements), viz. Earth, Water, Fire,

Wind and Sky, the Fire is the symbol of Arunachaleswar as a corollary of the Agni Stumbh referred to as above. (The 'Tiruvannaikavil' / 'Jalakantheswara' Linga represents Water, Kancheepuram / Ekambareshwara Linga the Earth, Kalahasti represents Vayu and Chidambaram represents Akash or Sky).

Vrishotsarga: On Kartika Purnima 'Virshotsarga' or branding / castration of a bull is been a custom especially in rural areas of Bharata . The practice is also performed on Ashwiyuja Purnima, during the Surya and Chandra Grahanaas, Karkata Makara Sankrantis or Mesha Tula Sankrantis. Some Grandhaas also prescribed Vrishotsarga on the Purnima Tithis of Maagha-Chaitra-Vaishakha, Phalguna-Ashadhas also. Also, this Practice is also witnessed on Yuga-Manvaadis, Pitru Mrita Tithis and Ashta Shraaddha Tithis also. In Matsya Purana the reference is : *Kaartikaayaam Vrishotsargam krutwaa naktam Samaacharet, Shaivam padamavaapnoti Shibavrata midam smrutam/*

MARGASHIRSHA MAASA

There is a Punya Kaala of sixteen Ghadiyas at 'Dhanussankraanti'. On Margashirsha Shukla Panchami Naga Puja is observed especially in the Southern parts of Bharat. The Shukla Shashthi called Champa Shashti is significant among Maharashtriyans. If there is a Khanda Tithi of Panchami-Shashthi on a Sunday or Tuesday of Shatabhisha Nakshatra then of the two day an extension of three muhurtaas, then the next day is to be confirmed as Shashthi. Otherwise, the previous Tithi is to be reckoned as Shashthi; this is also called as Skanda Shashthi. As per Kousthabha Grandha, Margashirsha Saptami is suitable for performing Surya Vrata. In this month, Purnima with Mrigashira Nakshatra is considered appropriate for Lavana Daana or charity of Salt which endows beauty of body skin.

Birth of Dattaatreya: is stated to be on this Purnima itself; however this Purnima should be applicable upto the Pradosha Time. Considered as 'Dutta' or awarded by Trimurtis and born to Sage 'Atreya' and Sati Anasuya, Dattatreya is a combined 'Avatar' (Incarnation). He was a mystic Saint called 'Avadhuta' or of the eccentric type. The word 'Ava' denotes 'bad materials' and 'dhuta' denotes 'washed away' thus meaning that he washed away all bad things. Such a Person is stated to be of Pure consciousness in human form. Depicted as a Three headed Avatar, representing the Three Gods of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva; the Three 'Gunas' of Rajasik, Satvik and Tamasik nature; Three Stages of Consciousness viz. waking, dreaming and dreamless Sleep; and the Three Time Capsules of Past, Present and Future, Dattatreya is pictured as seated in meditation along with his Shakti, under an 'Udumbara' or Tree of fulfillment of desires on a Rock- a Gyana Peetha, along with Four Dogs denoting the Four Vedas. He was considered as the Guru of 'Ashtanga Yoga' or the Eight-folded Yoga comprising Yama (Truthfulness and Morality), Niyama (Cleanliness and discipline), Asana (Right Posture), Pranayama (Control of Life Force), Pratyahara (Withdrawal of Senses from Wordly objects and desires), Dharana (Concentration), Dhyana (Meditation) and Samadhi (Alignment of Super Consciousness with Almighty). The main Principles of 'Dattatreya-following' are Self-Realisation and of the equation of Antaratma and Paramatma; inter-relation of God and of Beings by way of Creation; overcoming Ego by Yoga and Renunciation, and Gyana or Enlightenment and the inevitability of a Guru. Even from the childhood, Dattatreya was full of 'Vairagya' (Renunciation), and his followers and admirers were several. He always desired to have privacy, introspection and aloofness and shunned adulation, popularity and proximity. That was why he avoided company and preferred staying indoors. With a view to escape from the attention of Muni Kumars, he meditated on the banks of a Sarovar incognito in disguise for innumerable years. He was inside water practising 'Ahstanga Yoga' (Eight Limbed Yoga) and finally emerged with a façade of a being a drunkard, a debauch and a degraded person devoid of morals and social values. He displayed nudity with a youthful and coquettish woman, in obscene poses, while drinking and loose-mannered fashion. Despite these efforts of being corrupt, care-less and licentious, the followers of Dattatreya did not get deterred but made great efforts to get closer to him. King Kartaveeryarjuna, the thousand armed tyrant was a great devotee of Dattatreya. His might was such that when Rananasura of Ramayana fame

confronted the former, Kartaveerya was visiting the Samudras and being busy did not have time to converse with Ravana and till the trip to the Seas was concluded shoved Ramana's ten heads under his thousand hands and freed his hold only after the Sea visits! But in course of time Kartaveeryarjuna became too arrogant and even killed Maharshi Jamadagni in the latter's Ashram and tried to forcibly take away Kama dhenu. Parasurama who was the father of the great Sage Jamadagni's death was avenged by killing the mighty Kartaveerya and even as Kamadhenu disappeared. Parasurama who not only killed Kaartaveerya but attacked the entire clan of Kshatriya kings who harrassed Brahmanas and Rishis. After so avenging his father's killing Parashurama, Sage Jamadagni came alive back to life due to his own karmaphala! It was at this juncture that Kartaveerya's son Arjun approached Dattatreya seeking his blessings and Dattatreya as advised by Mahashri Garg to visit Sahyadri to seek Dattatreya's blessings to take over his dead father's throne. Mahatma Dattatreya hinted the prospective Prince Arjuna not to emulate the example of Kartaveerya to become arrogant and meet the fate of his father. Indra was defeated by Daityas headed by Kartaveerya and finally Vishnu's incarnation as Parashurama had to kill the oversized Kartaveerya to reassert the Supremacy of Dhama in the long run although there might be temporary setbacks and in the long run, Satyameva Jayate or the Truth would triumph on the long run. Thus indeed even as Kartaveerya who assumed too much of arrogance eventually although he was originally a follower of Dattatreya, had even killed Sage Jamadagni and received his due retribution of being killed by Parashurama. In fact, Deva Guru recalled that desired that even before the battle of Devas against with Kartaveerya, Indra should immediately worship Dattatreya and seek an audience with Dattatreya. Indra approached the latter but he said that he was not in a fit condition as he was drunk in the amorous and unclean company of a woman. Being aware of the misleading statement of Dattatreya, Indra recalled though late that just as the powerful and auspicious Sun rays did not become impure by touching either a chandala or a Brahmana, the holy union of Lakshmi and Vishnu could never ever be construed as unclean and unholy! Mahatma Dattatreya smiled since He was only testing Indra's sincerity. He then asked to challenge the most leading Daityas to a Battle in His presence at His Place; the Daityas assembled (into a trap) and asked to show up in the presence of Maha Lakshmi. The Daityas were mesmerised by Devi Lakshmi's form and face and even forgetting that they were challenged to a fight, became extremely passionate and when she hinted that she would like to leave to her abode, pushed aside her servants and lifted the 'palki' on their heads. Dattatreya once again smiled and told Indra and Devas that for sure the Daityas would be defeated now as they kept Lakshmi on their head indicating that she would leave them all now. He explained that Devi Lakshmi when falls on the feet of human beings blesses them with happy homes, falls on either of the thighs bestows clothes and jewellery, on secret place blesses with life-partners, on the lap gives children, on the heart fulfills all the desires, on the neck gives ornaments on the necks, beloved distant relations and good company of women; if Lakshmi falls on the face of human beings she approves attraction and brightness of the visage, accomplishments and a literary outlook. But if Lakshmi falls on one's head, then she is ready to leave the person concerned.) Thus, Dattatreya advised Devas as a guideline for all the times that they should take up arms and attack since his vision would further weaken the Demons; also, when the Demons have committed the sin of becoming highly passionate over another person's wife, their strength would get diluted. Devas attack over the Demons was readily successful and Indra regained his Throne in Swarga Loka. Sage Garg advised Prince Arjun, to pray to Dattatreya who gave the Prince considerable confidence and courage to face the institution of Kingship by following justice yet with 'dharma' and 'nyaaya'.

Datta Peethas: Shandilya Upanishad describes Lord Dattatreya Avadhuta, as the amalgam of Omkara AUM representing the Three Words of Gayatri viz. Bhur-Bhuva-Swah, the Three Lokas; the Trinity of Brahma-Vishnu-Maheshwara; the Three Vedas of Rig -Yjur-Saama; the Tri Varnas of Brahmana-Kshatriya-Vaishyas; and the Tri-Agnis of Garhapatya-Aahavaniya- Dakshina- all backed by Shakti.

Datta Gurus's presence is not limited to any one country but in Bharat, His influence is strongly realised in places like Sucheendram, Seetamangalam, Mt.Girnar, Nagalapuram in Andhra, Prayaga, Dutta Guha in

the Himalayas, Gulbarga-Gangapura, Narasimhavadi in Maharashtra, Qutambara in Pune; Avadumbara, Somapura, Chandradrona giri, and Datta Peetha at Ganapati Sacchidanana Ashram, Mysore, Karnataka. Also, the centers are at Vadodra/ Surat in Gujarat, Delhi, Chennai, Pondicherry, Alwayi in Kerala, and over a dozen centers all across in Andhra Pradesh. There is also considerable presence of the Avadhuta abroad, especially Melbourne, Australia; Dusseldorf, West Germany; Netherlanda, Trinidad & Tobago; Kaulalumpur in Malaysia; USA in various centers and the UK.

Ashtaka Shraaddha :The four month period from Margashirsha to Maagha Maasa is stated to be suitable for performing this Dharma on the Krishna Paksha- Ashtakaas; on the preceding Saptamis *Purvedyu Shraaddhas* are scheduled and on the following Navamis *Anvashtaka Shraaddhas* are required to be executed. However, there are views that the Ashtaka Shraaddhas be performed in Bhadrapada Krishna paksha-Ashtamis and some others opine that these be done in Pousha Krishna Pakshas. In any case, if one is able to perform only one Shraaddhha in the concerned periods then that too is not unacceptable. Even if that might not be possible, there are Pratyamnaayaas or alternatives; for eg. Vrishbha has to be fed with dry grass, Agni too be offered grass and water pots to Veda-Vetthaas; as a last resort Shraaddha Mantras be recited and Upavasa be observed. Inability to perform Ashtaa Shraaddha then the prayaschitta is to fast on the lines of Praajaapatya krucchra; if Anvashtaka is not performed, atonement is to recite the *Yebhirdyubhissumanaa* Mantra hundred times.

Margashira Mahatmya: Skanda Purana is quoted on the subject: While addressing a group of Munis, Sage Sutha narrated that Lord Brahma asked Bhagavan Narayana about the significance of Margashirsha Month and the reply was that in His earlier incarnation as Krishna, He advised thousands of Gopikas and Gopas to observe austerities during that month by performing ‘Snaans’, ‘Pujas’, fastings and total dedication to Him to attain Salvation. Thus Gopikas and Gopas adopted a daily routine of waking up early; taking bath with Tulasi roots of earth on head by reciting the Mula Mantra of ‘Om Namo Narayanaya’ and Gayatri Mantra; praying to Ganga saying ‘Vishnupaada prasuthaasi Vaishnavi Vishnu devatha, Thrashi naha thvam aghaatthasmaat aajanma maranaanthikat’ (Hey Gangey, You were materialised from Vishnu’s feet, thus known as Vaishnavi, Vishnu is your Devata, please save me of my sins from birth to death); and applying mritthika (earth) on the body by reciting ‘Ashvakraanthey Rathakraanthey Vishnu kraanthey Vasundharey, Mrittikey hara mey Paapam yanmayaa dushkrutam krutam/ Uddhrutasi Varaahena Krishnena Shata baahunaa, Namasthey Sarva bhutaanam prabhavarani Suvrathey’ (Hey Vasundharey, Bhagavan Vishnu rides horses and chariots over your physique, I request your Mrittika to wash off my sins like the fire from the pit, you are the creator and tolerator of all beings and the Supreme Lord Varaha lifted you with His thousand hands from deep waters, I salute you!). After the former bath and wearing clean clothes, the routine continues with applying ‘Vibhudi’ (ash of homa or of cow dung), perform ‘Sandhya Vandan’/ Gayatri Japa followed by Vishnu Puja with ‘Ghantanaad’ (ringing bell), Chandana, Pushpa, Tulasidal, dhoop, deepa and other ‘Shodasopacharas’, ‘Stutipath’ (Extolling hymns) of Vishnu Sahasranaam, Bhishmastavaraj, Gajendra Moksha, Anusmriti and Bhagavad Gita, Mantrajap viz. ‘Om Namo Damodaraya Namah’ and ‘Saastanga Pranaam’ (prostration or lying on the ground by putting both the hands, both the feet, both the knees together, as also chest, forehead, heart, mouth, and vision) and finally recite the Mantra: *Mantra heenam, Kriya heenam, Bhakti heenam Janaardana, Yat pujitam maya Deva Paripurnam tha dasthu the/ Anaya Dhyanaa vaahanaadi Shodasopachaaraaya Bhagavaan Sarvaatmakah-Supreeta Suparasanno varado bhavatu-* so saying-*Devataa Prasaadam Sirasa grihnnami, ye that phalam Parameswar-arpanamasthu.* (Hey Janaardana, my worship to You is without Mantras, without rituals, and without devotion; kindly accept my worship without these qualities; also without meditation, ‘Vahanas’ or Carriers, and such other Sixteen Services, I am concluding my worship; kindly be pleased with my worship and ignore all my limitations).

Akhanda Ekaadashi Vrata: In Kampilya Nagar in the past, there was a King Virabahu who was righteous and devoted and his wife Kantimati too was devout. He was visited by Sage Bharadvaj and was pleased

by their high merit and good qualities. The Sage told the King that he was a cruel and sinful Shudra in his previous birth who never believed in Narayana, but his present wife was his previous wife too and was a dutiful and devout woman. While in a forest hunting once, the Shudra found an aged Muni named Devasharma who lost his way into the forest and was pitifully exhausted unable to move. The cruel hunter somehow felt pity on the old person and carried him into his abode and offered him fruits and water. Asked about him, the Shudra confessed to the Muni that he was a cruel hunter, was irreligious and unpardonable; meanwhile his wife gave some fruits and water which the Muni accepted. As the hunter expressed sincere remorse for his earlier actions and showed keen desire to pray to Vishnu. Muni Devasharma opined that the sincerity shown by the hunter in rescuing an old and tired Sanyasi like him and providing timely assistance and service to him was itself an indication of the innumerable sins committed by him in the past. The Sage having narrated the story of the hunter gave 'Upadesha' (teaching) to the King about the significance of the month of Margashirsha and of the worship of Narayana by performing the Akhanda Ekaadashi vrata commencing from Dashami through Dwadashi. On the evening of Dashami when Sun becomes less severe, one has to observe 'Nakta Vrata' or light meal; on Ekadashi day, one should avoid frequent drinking of water, violence, impurity, speaking lies, consumption of betel leaves, cleaning of teeth more than once, sleeping during the day, mating, gambling, non-observance of Jaagaran and conversation with sinners. On Ekadashi day, one should observe strict fasting which means avoiding comfort. On the following Dwadashi day, one should observe the avoidables of Ekadashi as also keep away from other's food, honey, and use of oils on the body as also consume the same. But the fast could be terminated to the 'Karta' (the devotee) on Dwadashi, only after providing Bhojan to Brahmanas. After observing the Akhanda Vrata for one full year till the last Dwadashi, 'Udyapan' or conclusion is executed on the Margashirsha Shukla Ekadashi by engaging twelve Brahmanas and one 'Acharya' (Chief) and his wife. First of all, the Acharya and the Brahmanas should be invited with Arghya, Padya, Vastra and Dakshina. The Acharya would then supervise the preparation of 'Chakra Kamala Mandala' based on a white cloth, sub-divided into five segments each having five copper 'Kalashas' (vessels) duly garlanded around and on top of the Kalashas are set with the Idols of Lakshmi Narayana and the Shankha and Chakra. To the northern side there should be 'Havan Kund' where 'homas' are performed with Veda Mantras. The Idols are worshipped with Dhupa, Deepa, Naivedya, Arathi and other services, besides Yaksha Kardama Puja (comprising Camphor, Agar, Kasturi, and Anga lepa) and Parikrama / Pradakshina. Later on, there should be recitals of Pavamana Sukta, Mantras viz. 'Madhuvata ruthaayatey', 'Tejosi' etc. Sukranja etc. Vaachyam Brahma (Samam), 'Pavitravantam Suryasya', 'Vishnormahasi' etc. followed by Samidha homa, Charu homa, Tila homa and so on. Finally, charities should take place including Kalasha (Vessel) Daan, Vastra (Clothing) Daan, Suvarna (Gold) Daan and Artha (Cash) Daan as per the devotee's capacity and convenience.

Soura Vrata: During the Margashirsha month Soura Vrata is to be implemented on Sundays. In fact, the Ravi Vrata should be initiated on the first Sunday of Margashirsha Shukla Paksha and its end should be on the last Sunday of Vaishakha Shukla Paksha; it is further stated : *Vrischika Meshantey Ravi Vaaro yadaa bhavet, Tadaa Ravi Vrataarambha visargey Shastra sammitou/* Ravi Vrata is a Nakta Bhojana Vrata. The prescribed material for the Soura Vrata are : three Tulasi leaves in Margashirsha, on the Maagha Sundays three 'palaas' or small measures of ghee, in Maagha three fistful 'tilas', in Phalguna three palaas of curd, in Chaitra three palaas of milk, in Vaishakha Gomayam, in Jyeshtha three 'anjalis' of water, in Ashaadha three Marichaka tratam or three pieces of black pepper, in Shravana three palaas of sattava powder, in Bhadrpada Gomutra, in Ashvin some sugar and in Kartika 'Havishya' or cooked rice offering in Agni Homa Karyaas.

Maheshwara / Shiva Chaturdashi Vrata: Nandikeswara described the Procedure of the Vrata to Brahmaarshi Narada which is observed in all the Lokas. On Margashirsha Shukla Trayodasi, a person resolving to perform the Vrata should take food only once on the day and declare to Maha Deva: *Margaseersha Trayodasyaam sitaayekabhojam, Praarthayet Devadevesham twaamaham sharanam*

gatah/ Chaturdashyam niraahaaram samyagbhyarchya Shankaram, Suvarma Vrishabham datwaa bhyokshyaami chaparehani/ (Shankara! As a first of this Vrata, I shall take only one meal on Margaseersha Sukla Trayodashi as you should take me in my 'sharan' / procection; being on fast on Chaturdashi and only after my worship to you and daana of a Golden Vrishabha to a deserving Brahmana that I shall take next meal again.) Next morning after ablutions, Snaana and Nitya Karmas, the Karta should perform puja to Maha Deva and Devi Parvati with lotus and other flowers, Chandana and Dhupa/ Deepa as follows: *Paadow namah Shivaayeti- Shirah Sarvaatmaney namah, Trinetraayeti netraani-Lalaatam Haraye Namah/ Mukhamindu mukhaayeti-Shrikanthaayeti kandharam, Sadyojaataaya karnou tu Vaamadevaayai bhujow/ Aghora hridayaayeti-hridayam chaabhipujayet, Stanow Tatpurushaayeti tatheshaanaaya chodaram/ Parshou chaananta Dharmaaya Jnaana bhutaaya vai katim, Uru chaananta vairaagya simhaayetyabhi pujayet, Anaantyaaiswarya nathaaya jaanunee chaaryayed Budhaah, Prathanaya namo janghai gulfou Vyomaatmaney namah/ Vyomakeshaatma rupaaya keshaan pushtam cha pujayet, Namah Pushtyai Namasyushtyai Parvateem chaapi pujayet/* Thus after worshipping the feet, head, forehead, face, neck, ears, hands, heart, chest, stomach, waist, knees, lower sheen, ankles, back etc. of Shiva and Parvati 'Pratimas', the Karta should perform 'daana' to a Brahmana of waterful 'Kalasha', white flower garland, Vastras, pratima of golden Vrishabha studded with Pancha Ratnas and a variety of food preparations and treat Brahmanas to hearty meals and give ample 'dakshinas'/ cash. The Karta himself should take in that night only curd and ghee of cows and sleep on floor northward (Uttaabhimukha). On the next morning, after Puja again, then only the fast would be broken along with Brahmanas. The Vrata is to be performed every month year-long on Shukla Trayodashi-Chaturdashi ending with Krishna Chaturdashi next.

The repeat Pujas every month till Kartika month should be performed as follows: *Shankaraaya namastestu namastey karaveeraka/ Traimabakaaya namastestu Maheswaramatah param, Namastestu Mahaa Deva Staanavecha tatah param/ Namah Pashupatey naatha Namastey Shaambhavey punah, Namastey Paramaananda Namah Somaartha dhaariney/ Namu Bheemaaya ityevam twaamaham sharanam gatah/* Every month on Trayodashi-Chaturdashi days, the Karta's intake should alternatively be Gomutra, Gobar, milk, curd, ghee, kushodak, Panchagavya, bel, karpur, Agar, Yava, and black til. Similarly, the special flower of the respective months would be Mandara (Paribhadra), Malati, Dhatura, Sinduvaara, Ashoka, Mallika, Paatala or red rose, Mandara (Suryamukhi), Kadamba, Shatapati (White Lotus or Gulab), and Kamal. On the Kartika Krishna Chaturdashi, similar program is to be repeated as on the final day of the previous year. Those who duly observe the Shiva Chaturdashi Vrata as prescribed secure the fruits of performing thousand Ashvamedha Yagnas. If he or his father / brothers had perpetrated huge sins like Brahma hatya or equivalent ones would be free from these 'paatakaas'. The Kartas would receive long life, excellent health, prosperity to his/ her entire family and even to their 'Vamsa'. After their life they would be four armed Ganaadhipas in Swarga and later on in Shivaloka for several 'Kalpas'.

POUSHA MAASA

Makara Sankranti Nirnaya: If Makara Sankranti is in the day time and Punya Kaala is upto forty ghadis and thus the remainder time is small and negligible, then Snaana- Daana- Shraaddha- Bhojanaas are required to be completed on the pevious day itself, since Shraaddha Karmaas are not to be performed in the night of the Sankranti. Thus Punya Kaala is to be counted as on the previous day. But if Sankranti occurs in the night, the next day is of Punya and of course the earlier part of the folowing day , especially some five ghadiyas before Sunrise are 'Punyatara' or of immense propitiousness. In case this Sankranti occurs on Poushya Shukla Saptami, it is considered as much of great significance as Grahana. The duties to be performed at that time are very important: *Ravi Samkaraney praaptey na snaannadyastu Maanavah, Sapta janmasu rogeesyaannirdhanaschaiv jaayatey!*(Those persons who do not bathe at the time of Ravi

Sankranti would become diseased and unfotunate for Seven Births hence) and that is why Snaana at that time is compulsory).

Again, Shraddha karma is of equal importance, albeit without Pinda Daana: *Sankraantou yaani duttaani havya kavyaani daatrubhih, Taani nithyam dadaadyarkah punarjanmani janmani/* (Those daanaas and such virtuous karmaas like Havya-Kavyaas or Homas and Shraaddhaas that are acted at the time of Ravi Sankranti would repeatedly get fructified by the grace of Surya Deva). That is why ‘Tridinopavaasaas’ or fasts for three days are to be accomplished. Further, at this Uttaraayana Kaala, Tila-Dhenu Daanaas, Tila Taila Deepaas at Shivaalayaas and Tila-Tandula Shiva Pujaas, Tila Snaanaabhyangaas, White Tila Pujaas to Devaasas and Black Tila Tarpanaas to Pitru Devataas and above all Ghritaabhishtikaas to Shiva Lingaas are of far reaching impact.

A three day **Sankranti** Festival viz.Pushya Makara Sankranti from Navami -Dashami-Ekadashi is ushered in with great joy in parts of Bharat like Andhra, Karnataka and parts ofTamilnadu, due to arrival of new ‘paddy’ from corn fields to homes and ‘mandis’ or market places aplenty with high liquidity of wealth and prosperity to such an extent of family unions and annual exchanges of friends and relatives. Social Gatherings, new clothes and home appliances and ‘Kolus’ of Idols of Gods and Goddesses mark significant tempo building exercises all due to kharif crops. Most of theTamilian families however prepone the Kolus during Navaatras of Asviyuja maasa itself.

Shiva Puja Vrata: ‘Upavaasa’ on the day before the Makara Sankranti and Shiva Puja in the Sankranti day are duties prescribed. Tila Snaana- Tila Tarpana-Ghritaabhyangana-Vastra –dyupachaara- Suvarnaarpana- Pancha Ratnaakarshana- Tila deepa-Tila Homa-Tilasahita Pancha Gavya Bhakshana- Tilaayukta Suvarna daana- Brahmana Bhojana-Vastra Daana are among the constituents of the Shiva Vrata. *Tila purvamanadwaaham datvaa rogaih pramuchyatey/* (Vrishabha daana along with Tilas is stated to be a warranty against diseases!). Similarly Surya Snaana with Ksheera on the Sankranti day paves the way to Surya Loka. Poushta Shuklaashtami especially coinciding with Wednesday as also with Bharani or Rohini or Ardra Nakshatraas is stated to bestow Maha Punya on implementing Snaana- Japa-Homa-Tarpana-Vipra Bhojanas.

Pushya Shukla Ekadashi popular in Andhra as Mukkoki Ekaadashi is known for day long Upavasa and Vishnu Naama Smarana; terminating the Dharur Maasa and followed by Makara Sankranti festival signifying the reaping and home coming of new agricultural crops heralding prosperity.

Ardhodaya Yoga and Vrata: Pousha Amavasya is the day of Ardhodaya Yoga; *Amaarka paata Shravanair –yuktaachetposha maasa yoh, Ardhodayassavigneyaha Koti Surya grahaihssamah/* (Ardhodaya Yoga is to occur on Amavasyaas in Pushya-Maagha Maasaas on Sundays in Vyatipata Yoga along with Shravana Nakshatra; this unique combination is equivalent to Koti Suryas!) If any of these conditions of Maasa-Dina-Nakshatra yogaas are absent then the Yoga is called ‘Mahodaya’. It is further stated: *Divaiya yogasstoyam na tu raatrou kadaachana, Ardhodaye tu sampraaptey sarvam Gangaa samam jalam/ Shuddhaatmaano Dwijaassarvey bhaveyurBrahma sannibhaah, Yatkinchiddeyatey daanam taddaanam Meru sannibham/* (This Ardhodaya yoga is worthy of note if it occurs in the day time but not in the night. Soon on its occurrence, this Yoga would instantly turn all the waters in the Universe into full Sanctity and all the Dwijaas in the world transform themselves into Brahma Swarupaas. It is at that most propitious time that even insignificant ‘Daanaas’ would assume the proportions of Meru Parvata! Then the Ardhodaya Vrata be performed with the Sankalpa of giving away of ‘Patra daana’, clean up the ground, draw an Illustration of Ashta Padma Dalaas with white rice grains, keep a bronze plate on raised platform, place a bronze vessel full of ‘Kheer’ or cooked rice in milk and sugar, invoke the Pratimaas of Brahma Vishnu Rudra-Linga, perform Agni homa sahita- MantraYukta ‘shodashopa-chaaraas’.

MAAGHA MAASA

Maagha Snaanās: Commencing from Pousha Shukylaikaadashi or Purnima or Amaavaasya, Maagha Snaanās would continue upto Maagha Dwaadashi or Purnima; or else Maagha Snaanās could take place from Makara Sankramana to Kumbha Sankarana. The Snaana Kaala should be at Arunodaya to Praatah kaala; it is emphasised that bathing in the waters at the time of Suryodaya would purify even those who are the sinners of Brahma hatya or Suraa paana; any human being irrespective of caste, age or sex could take Maagha Snaanās. Again the Snaana Phala as per the type of waters at different places are stated as follows: *Taptena Vaarinaa snaanam yadgrihey kriyatey naraihi, Shadbadam phaladam taddhi Makarasye Divaakarey/ Vyaapadou Dwaadashaabda phalam Tadaagey taddwigunam Nadyaam tadtrigunam, Mahaanadyaam Shatagunam Maha Nad sangamey tadchaturgunam/ Gangaayaam Sahasra gunam angaa Yamunaa sangamey yetadcchadgunamiti, Yatra krutraapi snaaney Prayaaga smaranamkaryam/ Idam Samudrepyati prashasttam/* (Maagha Snaanās with hot waters at one's own home would allow the fruits of six years; Well Snaanās of twelve years; Tataaka (Water body) Snaana Phala twice over; Nadi Snaanās by four times; Snaanās at Maha Nadis bestow the Punya by four times; Ganga Snaana by thousand times; Snaanās at Ganga-Yamuna Sangama by another hundred times while any Snaana anywhere in waters should be announced as Prayaga Snaana. But the best Snaana ever is in the Seas / Oceans. The Snaana vidhi is to resolve with the the 'sankalpa': *Maagha Maasa mimam Punyam snaasyeham Deva Madhava, Tirthasyaasya jaley nityamati Sankalpya chetasi/--Duhkha daardrya naashaaya Vishno- stoshanaayacha, Paatahsnaanm karomyadya Maaghe Paapa Vinaashanam/ Makarasthey Ravou Maaghey Govindyaachyuta Maadhava, Snaaneynaanena mey Deva Mayokta phalado bhava/* (Hey Madhava! As I have resolved that I would perform Snaanās every day during the entire Maagha maasa, I shall do so to alleviate my sorrows and poverty as also to please you. Do grant me Govindaayhuta Madhava! the Snaana Phala as per your pleasure if I deserve). The regulations to be followed in this Vrata are to sleep on the ground, defray the 'nitya naimittika' duties including Tila-Ghrita Homaas, Deva Tarpanas, Havishyaashana or eat only the havishya bhojana, and observe Brahma charya during the month of Magha Snaanās. Also performing daanaas of Vastra-Paada raksha- Chhatra-Ghrita-Tila Purna Ghata-Suvarna and Anna as also of Dampati Pujaas -- are among the requirements of the Maagha Snaanās.

Devi Saraswati worship: Brahma Vaivarta Purana commends Devi Saraswati puja on Maagha Shula Panchami as ordained by Shri Krishna when all over the Universe the Puja as also 'Vidyarambha' (initiation of Studies) is performed by human beings, Manuganas, Devatas, Muniganas, Vasus, Yogis, Siddhas, Nagas, Gandharvas and Rakshasas with the traditional 'Shodashopacharas' by invoking Saraswati into a Kalasha or a Book. Then puja should be done to six Devatas viz. Ganesha, Surya, Agni, Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi Parvati before performing Puja to Devi Saraswati. For 'Naivedya' / Offering, the mix of butter, curd, milk, white sesame, sugarcane juice, jaggery, white rice, ghee, etc. should be the 'Havishaanna'. White flowers, white Chandana, white Vastra, and white decoratives would all be the inputs for the Puja. Then would be followed Dhyana (Meditation), Kavacha, Mula Mantra and regular puja. The Dhyana would describe the Deity as having Shukla Varna (white complexion) of great beauty and smile, well dressed with white robes, with one hand carrying a Book, both the hands a 'Veena' instrument, adorned with jewellery and white flower garlands, with Brahma-Vishnu and Shiva nearby and surrounded by Devatas, Munis, Manus and Manavas executing prostrations. The Ashtaakshara Vaidika Mula Mantra is: *Shreem Hreem Saraswatyai Swaaha/* Bhagavan Narayana gave 'Upadesha' (administering) of this Mantra to Valmika Muni on the banks of River Ganga; Bhrgu Muni gave Upadesha to Shukra during a 'Surya grahana' (Solar Eclipse); Marichi's son Kashyapa Muni gave the Upadesha to Deva Guru Brihaspati during Chandra Grahana (Lunar Eclipse); Brahma gave the Upadesha to Bhrgu Muni at Badarika Ashram and so on. Without Upadesha, the Mula Mantra is ineffective, but once Upadesha is performed, the Mantra becomes a powerful tool in enhancing thinking capability and widening mental horizons. *Sarasvati Kavacha titled Vishwa Vijaya* (as provided by Brahma to Bhrgu) is

as follows: *Shrunu Vatsa pravakshaami Kavacham Sarva Kaamadam, Shruti saaram Shruti Sukham Shrutyuktam Shruti pujitam/ Uktam Krishnena Golokey Mahyam Brindaa -vaney Vaney, Raaseshvarena Vibhunaa Raaseyvai Raasa mandaley/ Ateeva gopaneeyam chaKalpavriksha samam param, Ashrutaadbhuta manraanaam Samuhai -scha samanvitam/ Yad dhrutwaa Bhagavaacchhrukra Sarava daityeshu pujitah, Yad dhrutwaa pathanaad Brahman Buddhimaamscha Brihaspatih/ Pathaanaddhaaranaad gaami Kaveendro Vaalmiko Munih, Swaayambhuvo Manuschaiva yaddhrutwaa Sarva pujitah/ Kanaado Gautamah Kanvah Paaninih Shakataayanah, Grandhah chakaara yad dhrutwaa Dakshah Kaatyayaanah Swayam/ Shaataatapascha Samvartho Vashishthascha Paraasharah, Yad dhutwaa pathanaad grandham Yagjnyavalkyas -chakaara sah/ Sushyashringo Bharadwajaschaasteeko Devalastathaa, Jaigeesha vyotha Jaabaalir yad dhrutvaa Sarva pujitaah/ (Brahma told Bhrgu that he was giving a Kavacha of Saraswati which was the essence of Shrutis, which was sonorous to the ears, proposed in Vedas and fully approved. Raaseshwara Bhagavan Shri Krishna in Goloka where Raasamandalis were in progress preached this Kavacha which was confidential and unheard by anybody earlier. Shukraachaarya became worthy of worship by all Daityas due to this Kavacha. Brihaspati's mental sharpness came about due to the power of this. Valmiki came to be known as a 'Kaveeswara' only due to the might of this Kavacha. Swayambhu Manu came to be revered due to its constant Recitation. The famous writers viz. Kanaad, Gautam, Kanva, Panini, Shaakataayan, Daksha and Kaatyayana gained reputation due to this Kavacha. So did Veda Vyasa, Shatatapa, Samvarta, Vasishtha, Paraashara, Yaagnyavakya, Rishyashringa, Bharadwaja, Aasteeka, Devala, Jaigeeshya, and Jaabaali scripted their masterpieces by power of the recitation of this 'Kavacha'). Kavachasyaascha Viprendra Rishireva Prajapatih, Swayam chhandascha Brihati Devataa Shaaradaambika/ Sarva tatwa parignaaney Sarvaardha saadhaneshucha, Kavitaasu cha Sarvaasu viniyogah prakeertitah/ Shreem Hreem Sarasvatyai Swaha Shiromey paatu Sarvatah/ Shree Vaagdevataayai swaahaa bhaalam mey sarvadaavatu/ Om Sarasvatyai swaaheti shrotrey paatu niranteram, Om Shreem Hreem Bhaaratyai swaahaa netra yugmam sadaavatu/ Aim hreem Vaagvaadinyai swaahaa naasaam mey sarvatovatu, Om Hreem Vidyadhishthaatu Devyai Swaahaa oshtham sadaavatu/ Om Shrim Hreem baahvyai swaaheti danta panktim sadaavatu, Emityekaaksharo Mantra mama kantham sadaavatu/ Om Shreem Hreem paatu mey greevaam skandhoumey Shreem sadaavatu, Om Shreem Vidyadhishthaatru Devyai swaahaa vakshah sadaavatu/ Om Hreem Vidyaswarupaayai swaahaamey paatu naabhikaam, Om Hreem kleem Vaanyai swaaheti mama hastow sadaavatu/ Om Sarva varnaatmikaayai paada yugmam sadaavatu, Om Vaagaadhishthaatu Devyai swaaha Sarvam sadaavatu/ Om Sarva kantha vaasinyai swaahaa praachyaam sadaavatu, Om Hreem Jihvaagra vaasinyai swaahaagnidishi rakshatu/ Om Aaim Hreem Shreem Kleem Sarasvatyai Budha jananyai Swaahaa, Satatam Mantra raajeyam dakshiney -maam sadaavatu/ Aim Hreem Shreem Trayksharo Mantra Naairyuttyaam mey sadaavatu, Kavi jihvaagra vaasinyai swaaha maam vaarunovatu/ Om Sarvaambi -kaayai swaahaa vaayavye maam sadaavatu, Om Aim Shreem Gadya padya vaasinyai swaahaa maamuttharevatu/ Aim Sarva shastra vaasinyai swahaishaanyam sadaavatu, Om Hreem Sarva pujitaayai swaahachhodhravam sadaavatu/ Aim Hreem Pustaka vaasinyai swaahaadho maam sadaavatu, Om Grandha rupaayai swaahaa maam sarvatovatu/ Iti tey kathitam Vipra Brahma mantraugha vigraham, Idam Viswa jayam naama Kavacham Brahma rupakam/ Puraashrutam Dharma vaktraat Parvatey Gandhamaadaney, Tawa snehyaanmaya khyaatam pravarttavyam na kasyachit/ Gurumabhyaarchya vidhivadsnaanaalamkaara chanadanaih, Pranamya dandavavad -bhumou kavacham dhaarayet sudheeh/ Pancha laksha japeynaiva siddham tu Kavacham bhavet, Yadi syaat siddha kavacho Brihaspati samo bhavet/ Mahaavaagmi Kaveendrascha Trailokya vijayee bhavet, Shakroti sarvam jeytum cha Kavachasya prasaadatah/ (Viprendra! Prajapati is the Rishi to this Kavacha; Brihati is the Chhanda; Mother Sharada is the Adhishtaatri Devi; the 'Prayoga' (application) of this Kavacha is an attempt to realise the meaning of 'Tatwa parigyana' or the knowledge of Tatwas and a synthesis of Kavitas (Poetry) and their absorptive capacity. Shraddha is given as my sacrifice to Shreem-Hreem- Swarupini Saraswati and I request that she must please guard my head from all the directions. I offer my Shraddha to Om Shreem 'Vaag Devata' and I implore her to secure my forehead; I offer my devotion to Om Hreem Bhagavati Saraswati and I beseech her to keep my ears intact;*

my surrender to Om Shreem Hreem Bhagavati Bharati and my sincere request to her is to protect my eyes; my prostration to Aim-Hreem Swarupini Vagdevi with the supplication to shield my nose; my submission to Om Shreem Hreem Vidya Adhishtaatri and appeal to her to safe-guard my 'danta-pankti' or row of teeth; 'Aim' is the letter with which I offer my reverences to Devi Sarasvati and I seek her kindness to keep my throat in tact; with humility I approach Om Shreem Hreem Vidya Swarupi to save my navel; may Om Hreem Kleem Swarupi Devi Vaani strengthen my hands with power as I bow my head to her with respects; I approach Om Swarupini Bhagavati 'Sarva Varnaatmika' my unreserved humbleness with the folded hands to secure my feet; Let my very existence which is owed to Omkaara Devi be fortified by my earnest prayer to provide me all-round safety. Mother Saraswati Veda Swarupa! do provide my safety from the Eastern side; I offer my Shraddha to Om Hreem Swarupini to kindly protect me from the 'Agneya' side; You are the Mantra Swarupa of Om Aim Hreem Kleem Saraswatyai Budha Jananyai Swaaha; please safeguard me from the Southern direction. May the Tryakshara Mantra of Aim Hreem Shreem keep me safe from the Nirruti Kona'. As the tip of my tongue is dedicated to Om Swarupini, kindly protect my western disha. May Bhagavati Sarvaambika keep safe of my 'Vaayavya kona'; may Gadya-Padya Nivaasini in the Form of 'Om Aim' keep safe my northern direction; the Sampurna Shastra 'Aim Swarupini' who is worshipped by one and all is an emblem of Mercy and should strengthen my 'Ishana' direction; from above the top of my being, may 'Om Shreem Swarupi' help me to protect always; the mother of Vidya who resides in Sacred books is revered by sincere prostration and may her secure me down under; and finally, my obeisances to you Om Swarupini and Grandha beejara! Preserve me safe from all directions). Recitation of this Kavacha yields memory power, mental sharpness and immense knowledge. Its recitation by five lakh times would definitely yield 'Parama Siddhis' to excel Deva Guru Brihaspati!

Kumbha Sankranti: Kumbha Sankranti occurs on Maagha Amavasya and some sixteen ghadiyas before that is stated to be the Punya Kaala; Prayaga Veni Snaanaas are significant at the Kumbha . Skanda Purana in its Naagara Khanda states: *Maaghaamaasyaam Mrigey Bhaanou Mesha Raashimatey Gurou/ Kumbha Yoge bhavayttatra Prayaageytwati durlabhah/* In Maagha Month Prayaaga Kshetra witnesses the Kumbha Sankranti where there is the Sangam or confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna Rivers: *Sitaasmitey tu yassnaanaam Maagha Maasey Yudhishtara, Na tessaam punaraavrittithi Kalpa koti shatairapi/* (Krishna Bhagavan assured Yudhishtara of Maha Bharata fame that the Sweta-Krishna Ganga-Yamuna Sangama Snaana on the Kumbha Sankramana time would signify that there would not be rebirths for crore Kalpa kaalaas together!) The Punya that accrues to the Maagha Snaana at Prayaga is equivalent to the Kumbha Snaana at Kurukshetra Ganga and ten times better than the Gangaa Snaana at Vindhyaachalaas and hundred times superior than that of Kashi Ganga Snaana! On the occasion of Kumbha Sankranti Tila Patra daana is stated to be of high significance: *Taamra paatretyilaan krutwaa pala shodasha nirmitey Sa Hiranyam Swa Shaktyaavaa Vipraaya pratipaadayet/* (Tila daana in a copper vessel along with Hiranya Dakshina to a Vipra is the requirement on this occasion). While offering the Daana after Vipra Puja, the Prayer to Bhagavan Vishnu is: *Deva Deva Jagannaadha! Vaanchitaartha phalaprada, Tila Paatram pradaasyaami tavaagrey samshitohyaham/* (Deva Deva! The Provider of all my desires: I am hereby offering the Tila Patra Daana under your own auspices!) Further Prayer states: *Tilaah Punyaah pavitraascha Sarva Paapa Haraah smritaah, Shuklaaschaiva tathaakrishnaa Vishnu gaatra samudbhavaah/ Yaanikaanicha Paapaani Brahma hatyaa samaanicha, Tila paatra pradaanena taani nashyantu mey sadaa/* (The white and black Tilaas are generated from Vishnu's body itself and thus are of unique propitiousness and sin-destroying; this is why I resolve to offer the Tila Patra Daana).

Veni Daana at Prayaga: When any person pays a visit to the Maha Tirtha of Prayaga for the first time, then a Prayaschitta is required to be observed by way of 'Veni Samhaara'; this requirement is for Garbhini Strees, children after their 'Chudaa karma' and 'Sabhatrika Strees'-all in their first visits. To the 'Sabhatrika Strees' women visiting along with their husbands would have to scissored the ends of their head hairs by two inches after their husbands' approval and after the Snaana should

perform Puja to the Sangama, place the kesha khandas on a matted container in their palms and leave the container in the Sacred Flow of the Sangama while Brahmanas bless them in response to their prayer stating: *Venyaam Veni pradaanena mama paapam vyapohatu, Janmaantareyshwapi sadaa Soubhagyam mama Vardhataam*/ (By way of this Veni daana to Triveni Sangama or at the confluence of Ganga-Yamuna and the Antarvaahini Sarasvati, may my sins be destroyed and my Sowbhagya be increased). Dharma Sindhu also describes that Deha Tyaaga at the Tirtha is 'Swarga prada'. Jeevat Shraaddha Vidhi or Shraaddha even when is alive in the case of those without progeny is also prescribed by way of Pinda Daanaanta Godaanaas and Vishnu Dhyaana -Tila Snaana-Tila Homa-Tilodaka Deva PujaaTarpanaas.

Dundhu Raja Vrata and Vasanta Panchami: On Maagha Shukla Chaturthi, the Dhundhi Raaja-Ganesha Vrata is observed with Nakta Vrata and Puja at the Pradosha Kaala when Tila yukta Laddu and Tila 'Padaardhaas' are offered as Naivedya; as such Pradosha Vyapta Chaturthi is suitable. It is stated that Puja on this day is not less important than the Ganesha Chaturthi Vrata in Bhadrapada Shukla Chaturthi. Maagha Shukla Panchami is called Vasanta Panchami marking the beginning of Vasantotsavaas when Rati-Manmadha Puja too is prescribed too.

Ratha Saptami: Maagha Shuka Saptami popularly called Ratha Saptami has to be in Arunodaya or else the previous day's Shashthi-Saptami yoga be considered as suitable for the Snaanaas provided the Saptami ghadiyas are not too far away from the Arunodaya of the previous day. *Asyaam snaana vidhiruktah, arunodaya vyaapinaam snaanam kaaryam taduktam Madana Ratne Smriti sangahe: Surya grahanaatulyaa saa shuklaa Maaghasya Saptami, Arunodaya velaa snaanam tatra mahaa phalam/ Maaghe maasisite pakshhe Saptami koti punyadaa, kurutsnaanaarghyadaayaanichaayuraarogyaa sampadah/* (On a specific Maagha Saptami day when Arunodaya or early Sun Rise occurs, Ratha Saptami is required to be observed. On that morning after due snaana vidhi, one should light up on golden-silveren-copper or even a metallic base with a Surya Narayana Pratima, then worship with 'shodashopachaaras' or the proverbial sixteen services of aavaahana-dhyana- pushpa- neeraajana-naivedyaadi and leave the light on the sacred water surface, perform pitru tarpanas and pray to the Sun God sincerely to reap the benefits of good health, longevity and life's fulfillment)

The Arunodaya Snaana Mantra states: *Yada Janma krutam paapam mayaa janmasu Janmasu, Tanmey Rogam cha shokam cha Maakarihantu Saptami/ Yetatjjanmakrutam paapam yaccha janmaantaraarjitam, Manovaakkaayajam yaccha jnaataajnaatey cha ye punah/Iti Sapta vidham paapam Snaanmey Sapta Saptikey, Sapta Vyaadhi samaayuktam hara Maakari Saptami /* (May the entirety of my sins accumulated in my present and previous births on account of conscious and unconscious acts or those perpetrated by my vocal or mental roots be dissolved on this Makara Saptami and may this Sacred Snaana with my earnest and heartfelt supplications and obeisances to you Surya Deva, in the form of Seven kinds of Sins and Seven types of Diseases be destroyed for ever!). The Arghya Mantra to the 'Pratyaksha Devata' Bhagavan Surya states: *Sapta Saptivaha preeta Saptaloka pradeepana, Saptami sahito Deva gruhanaarghya Divaakara/* (Divaakara! You are affectionate of riding on the chariot driven by Seven Horses with Seven Names and bestow splendour to Seven Lokaas obviously fond of the numeral of Seven; Bhagavan! may I have the privilege of offering 'Arghya' on this Saptami Tithi to mark my reverence!

Bhavishya Purana explains in detail as follows: It was on 'Saptami' Tithi that Bhagavan Surya made his initial manifestation to the Universe. His original Appearance inside a Holy Egg continued and from there itself, he grew and hence was called 'Martaanda'. He was wedded to the daughter of Daksha Prajapati, called Sanjna, and begot Dharma Raja, Vaivasvata and Yamuna Devi. But since Sanjna was unable to bear the heat and dazzle of Surya Deva, created from her shadow a similar substitute, called Chhaya Devi to proxy her and left for Uttarakuru Desha to perform Tapasya in the form of as a horse. Meanwhile, Chhaya Devi gave birth to Shaneswara and Devi Tapati, but aftersome time, Chhaya Devi's partial

attitude to her own children and those of Sanjna came to be noticed; Yama Dharma pointed out to Chhaya Devi about the differential treatment and in course of the argument, Yama raised his right leg's ankle which was objected to by Chhaya and she gave a curse to Yama that if his feet ankles were placed on Earth they would be eaten by worms! As Dharma Raja complained to Surya Deva, the father assuaged the feelings of his son, who was in fact a specimen of virtue, saying that the 'shaap' of Sandhya Devi was not to be too harmful since, after all, worms might take away the flesh and blood of his ankle to Bhuloka but feet would be in tact any way. Sandhya was frightened and blurted the truth to Surya Deva that Sanjna materialised her to deputise her and the latter left to her father's place; Daksha told Surya Deva that Sanjna could not withstand his heat and had been performing Tapasya in the form of a horse at Uttarakuru. Surya requested Vishwakarma to reduce his heat and radiance and after assuming the forms of a horse approached Sanjna and by the mutual contact of the noses of Surya and Sanjana in horse forms were born Ashvini Kumars and Raivata. Since the Episode of Sanjna and Surya occurred on Sapta Tithi of Magha Shukla Paksha as above, the day is considered as most auspicious to signify the union the Couple. Those who perform the Saptami Vrata of Bhagavan Surya by keeping fast on Shashthi, the previous day as well as on that day till the dusk time, perform formal Puja on Saptami, give away a good food with plenty of Vegetables to Brahmanas along with Vastras, dakshina and gifts, and break the fast with the food observing silence during the night would be eligible to the fulfillment of desires, victory, and even Kingship. King Kuru observed this Vrata for several years at Kurukshetra on Magha Saptami and attained fulfillment of all desires. Kartika Shukla Saptami, Bhadrapada Panchami /Shashthi, Vaisakha Triteeya, and again on Ashvin Navami are also considered auspicious to observe the Vrata. Lord Shri Krishna advised his son Samba that there could be no other Deity like Suryanayana since he could be sighted readily on the Sky. He said: *Pratyaksham Devata Suryo Jagatchhaykshu Divakarah, Tasmaadabhayadhika kaachiddevata naasti shaashvati/ yasmaadidam jagajjaatam layam yaasyati yatracha/* (Bhagavan Suryanarayana is the readily available vision to the eyes in the whole Universe beyond whom could be no other Deity; the entire 'Jagat' has emerged and also terminated only by him.) Time measurement is facilitated only by him since the earliest Satya Yuga; he is the unique cause for the Presence of Grahas (Planets), Nakshatras (Stars), Yogas, Karanaas, Rashis, Aditya, Vasu, Rudra, Vayu, Agni, Ashvani Kumaras, Indra, Prajapati, Dishas, Bhuh, Bhuvah, and Swah. Besides, he is the permanent 'Saakshi' (Evidence) of Mountains, Rivers, Samudra, Naga and all other 'Charaachara' or Stationary and Mobile Beings; the World wakes up with him and sleeps due to him; Vedas, Shastras and Itihasas are never tired of praising him as Paramatma, Antaratma and such other truisms; he is present every where, he is eternal and he is all-knowing; and he is the only and distinctive refuge-point to every one always. Having said this, Lord Shri Krishna advised his son Samba about the method of regular and daily worship so demolish sins and 'Vighnas' (obstacles). Early morning, before Sun rise, one should complete the ablutions, bathing, wearing clean clothes and offering 'Achamana' or sipping of three spoonful water by reciting Kesavaya Swaha, Narayana Swaha, and Madhvavaya Swaha etc. and offer 'Arghya' (water with both the palms) to Suryanarayana by mentally reciting the 'Sakshaatkara Mantra' viz. *OM KHAKHOL - KHAYA SWAHA*; perform Tri-vidha Praanaayama of Purak, Rechak and Kumbhak or the inhaling, holding and exhaling the four kinds airs viz. Vayavi, Agneyi, Mahendri and Vaaruni for attaining 'baahyaantara suddhi' or external and internal purity by means of 'Soshan', 'Dahan', 'Stambhan' and 'Plaavan' of one's body. Then, one has to integrate the 'Sthula' or the physical and 'Sukshma' or the miniscule 'Indriyas' or limbs. Thereafter one has to perform 'Anganyasa' as follows: *OM KHAH SWAHA HRIDAYAYANAMAH, OM KHAM SWAHA SHIRASEY SWAHA, OM ULKAAYA SWAHA SHIKHAANAI VASHATU, OM YAYA SWAHA KAVACHAAYA HUM, OM SWAAM SWAHA NETRATHRAYAYA AUSHATU, OM HAAM SWAHA ASTRAAYA PHAT*. Thereafter, water is sprinkled on all the worship materials and performs the worship by way of all the Services including offerings of flowers, incense material, lighting of oil-soaked cotton vicks and camphor lighting, Naivedya etc. Worship by day is to be done to Surya Deva's idol and by the night through Agni Deva and facing East in the morning while facing west in the evening and night. At all these times, the worship is to be performed by thinking of an Eight Leaf Lotus with Surya in the center and reciting the mantra *Om kakholkhaya Swaha*. After the

Services of Dhyana (meditation), Awahana (welcome), Naama Puja, Pushparchana, Dhupa, Deepa, Naivedya, Vastra etc. ‘Mudras’ should be displayed viz. Vyoma Mudra, Ravi Mudra, Padma Mudra, Mahaswata Mudra and Astra Mudras. If the worship is carried out in this manner for a year with devotion and sincerity, then no diseases would reach that person anywhere nearby, no shortage of monetary funds would ever be felt, no possibility of disrepute or controversy would occur in life and no limitation of well being and success is faced ever. Lord Shri Krishna further described to son Samba the names of Surya Deva to be worshipped on each Saptami of in months of a year: In Magha month, he is worshipped by the name of ‘Varuna’; in Phalgun month as ‘Surya’, in Chaitra as ‘Vaishakha’; in Vaishakha as ‘Dhata’; in Jeshtha as Indra; in Ashaadha as ‘Ravi’, in Shravana as ‘Nabha’; in Bhadrapada as ‘Yama’, in Ashwin as ‘Parjanya’; in Kartika as ‘Twashta’, in Margasirsha as ‘Mitra’; and in Poushya as ‘Vishnu’. After performing the Saptami Vrata year-long as above, Ratha Saptami is to be executed on Magha Shukla Saptami, marking the seventh day of ‘Uttarayana’ or the northerly movement of Surya Deva in a year. Vernal equinox starting from Capricorn or Makara symbolically reverses the direction of Surya’s chariot from his southerly to northerly direction. The Charioteer Aruna is seated facing Surya Deva on the chariot drawn by seven horses representing seven colours the names of the horses being Jaya, Vijaya, Ajaya, Jayanti, Aparajita, Mahajaya, Nanda and Bhadra. Ratha Saptami also marks the birth day of Surya Deva, heralding the commencement of Spring Season celebrated as the season of harvesting and is celebrated as season of joy and auspiciousness all over Bharat. Surya Deva’s chariot has one ‘Chakra’, three ‘Naabhi’ or Chakra fixer, five ‘ares’ or cutters and eight ‘nemis’ ((nails); the length of the Ratha is of ten thousand yojanas of length and width; Devas, Rishis, Gandharvas, Apsaras, Nagas and Rakshasas travel along on the Chariot on bi-monthly basis of change; Bhagavan Suryanarayana is always mobile day and night taking rounds of Sapta Dwipas. The names of the ‘Saptaashvas’ are If the Ratha is at Amaravati of Indra then it happens to be noon, Sunrise time at Samyamnipuri of Lord Yama, midnight at Varuna Deva’s City called Sukha, and at Chandra Deva’s Vibha Nagari the Suryasta / evening. Thus Sun God circumambulates the entire Universe daily. The directions are also determined by the movement of Surya Deva; similarly the degrees from zero to three hundred sixty as Surya moves to twenty, thirty, forty and so on till ninety by mid-day; Surya Deva’s movement also decides the position of the Navagrahas (Planets); he decides the rotation of ‘Ritus’ or Seasons of Vasanta, Greeshma, Varsha, Sharad, Hemanta, and Sishira. Surya Deva’s colours also are transformed according to the Seasons, viz. Kapila Varna in Vasanta, furnace gold in Greeshma, Sweta or white in Varsha / rainy season, Pandu Varna in Sharad Ritu, copper colour in Hemanta Ritu and Rakta Varna (blood red) in Sishira Ritu. [Incidentally there are seven notes of Music-Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Da and Ni; there are Seven Chakras in a human body viz. Mulaadhara, Swaadhishtana, Manipuraka, Anahata, Vishuddhi, Aagna, and Sahasrara; seven kinds of Sahitya, viz. Kaavya, Nataka, Alamkara, Purana, Itihaasa, Shastra and Smritis; and Seven Chhandas viz. Jayanti, Jagati, Usnik, Trishthup, Anushthup, Pankti and Bhubhruti].

Surya Deva’s ‘Ratha Yatra and ‘Indrotsava’ are propitious to the whole Universe and where ever these are celebrated there would be any famine, natural calamities, fear of robberies or political upheavals. On Margaseersha Shukla Saptami, if one takes a devotional bath and after Surya Puja offers ‘Naivedya’ of cooked rice with ghee and jaggery, the person concerned would be destined to reach Brahmhaloka.

Nadee Snaan: On Poushya Shukla Saptami, holy bathings along with Veda Mantras in favour of Surya Deva, preferably coinciding Surya ‘Abhishekas’, would assume considerable significance at Prayaga, Pushkara, Kurukshetra, Naimisha, Pruthudak (Pehva), Shona, Gokarna, Brahmaavarta, Kushhavarta, Bilvaka, Neelaparnvat, Gangaadwar, Kaalapriya, Mitra van, Chakra Tirtha, Rama Tirtha, Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Sindhu, Chandrabhaaga, Narmada, Vipaasha (Vyasanaadi), Taapi, Shiva, Vetravati, Godavari, Payohni (Mandakini), Krishna, Venya, Shatadru (Satej), Pushkarini, Kaushiki (Kosi) and Sarayu. The holy baths accompanied by worship of Sun God with devotion would certainly yield memorable results. After the baths in the Rivers and Abhishekas to Suryanarayana ‘Pratima’, the Idols of Surya as well as those of Sanjna and Chhaya are transferred to a Chariot drawn by seven horses as also Aruna, the Ratha

Sarathi , and with decorate the interior of the chariot with figurines of Tri Murthis of Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara, Dikpalakas and so on; the Ratha should be accompanied by Seven Brahmanas, signifying Sapta Rishis reciting Veda Mantras, as also Gandharvas denoting singers and dancers and taken around a Temple / main roads of the Villages/ Town ships etc. The Organisers, participants, Brahmanas and all who witness the Ratha Yatra would be blessed as their mere presence at the Event removes property, enhances health, great opportunities of Life and attainment of Suryaloka.

Maagha Shukla Bhishma Ekadashi: is observed with Bhishmoddishya Shraaddha Tarpanas only by those Grhastis who have children alive; but otherwise considered as compulsory. But Maagha Shukla Dwadashi is to be noted as significant for Tila Snaana, Tila Puja to Vishnu, Tila Naivedya, Tila Taila Deepa Daana, Tila Homa, Tila Daana, and Tila Bhakshana.

Maagha Snaanodyopana: or the Formal Termination of Maagha Snaanas with worship to Surya Deva with the Sankalpa stating: *Savitrey prasavitrey cha Paramdhaama Jaley mama, Twattejasaa paribhrashtam Paapam yaatu Sahasradha/Diwaakara Jagannaatha Prabhaakara Namotutey, Paripurnam karishyeham Maagha Snaanam tadaagayaa/* On Shukla Chaturdashi the Kartaas intending to perform the Udayaana and on the following Purnima accomplish Ashtottara Shata Homa and offer thirty 'Vayanaas' of Tila-Sharkara Modakaas and Shadrasa Bhojanaas and Vastra Daanaas to Brahmanaas and Suvasinis with the recital of the Mantra: *Suryomey preeyataam Devo Vishnu Murti Niranjanah, Itih/ Evam Maaghaplavi yaati bhitwaa Devam Divaakaram, Parivraadyoga yuktascha Ranechaabhi mukho hatah/* (Those who have successfully concluded this Maagha Snaana Vrata or Yogis or Parivraajakaas or those who never looked back waging a battle and attain Veera Swarga are all acclaimed as breaking through the Surya Mandala!)

Shiva Raatri Vrata: Shiv Raatri- in Maagha Krishna Paksha before Amavasya has to extend into the Nisheeha or mid- night, that is two ghadiyaas past the fourteen ghadiyas therebefore; of such time extension occurs then Shiva Raatri is reckoned as on the following day or therewise on the preceding day. This significant day coinciding with Sun Day or Tuesday attains added Shiva Yoga. A person intending to implement the Shiva Raatri Vrata needs to observe 'Ekabhukta' or single meal on the Trayodashi and having done the Nitya karmaas in the morning of Chaturdashi and recite a Mantra Purvaka Sankalpa: *Shiva Raatri Vratam hyetat karishyehum Mahaa Phalam, Nirvighnam kuru Devaatratwat prasaadaa Jagatpatey/ Chaturda-shyaam niraahaaro bhutwaa Shambho parehani, Bhakshyeham Bhuki Muktyartham Sharanam my Bhaveshwara!* (Jagadeshwara! This is my resolve to perform the most propitious Shiva Raatri Vrata and pray that with your grace the Vrata be completed without any kind of obstacles! I further resolve that on shall keep up fast on Chaturdashi and conclude it next forenoon only after the completion of of the formalities. Do bless me to achieve fulfillment!). Then the Vrata Karta should take Tila Snaana again, keep 'Tripundra Bhasma' on the forehead and Rudraaksha Maalaas, enter Shivaalaya /Pujaa Griha at the Pradosha Time, be seated as 'Uttaraabhimukha', after 'Aachamana' and Sankalpa with *Shiva preetyartham Shiva Raatrou Shiva Pujaam karishye* and initiate the Puja: Prathama Yaama Puja: The Text of the Puja is: *Asya Shri Shiva Panchaakshari Maha Mantrasya, Vaama Deva Rishih, Anushtup chhandaha Shri Sadaa Shivo Devataa, Nyaasey Pujaney Japey viniyogah, Vaama Devaaya Rishiye namah, Shirasi Anushtupchandasey namah; Mukhey Shreem Sadaa Shiva Devataayai namah, Hridi Om Nam Tatpurushaaya namah, Hridaye Om Nam Aghoraaya, Paadayoh Om shim Sadyojaataaya namah, Guhye Om Vaam Vaama Devaaya namah, Murdhini Om yam Ishaayaaya namah, Mukhey Om Om Hridayaaya namah, Om Nam Shirase swaaha, Om mam Shikhaayai vashat, Om shim Kavachaaya hum, OmVaam Netratrayaaya voushat, Om Astraaya phat/* This was how 'Nyaasa' was done, then perform Kalasha Puja and take to Dhyaana: *Dhyaaye nityam Mahesham Rajata giri nibham chaaru Chandraavatamsam, Ratnaakalpojjvalaangam Oparashu Mrigahraabheeti hastam prasannam/ Padmaaseenam Samantaatsutamamara Ganair vyaagrakruttim vasaanam, Vishvaadyam Vishwa vandyam nikhila bhaya haram Pancha Vaktram Trinetrangam/* After Dhyaana, Shiva Linga Praana

Pratishtha be done while touching the Linga and performing Aavaahana: *Om Bhuh Purusham Saamba Sadaa Shiva maavaahayaami, Om Bhuvah Saamba Sadaa Sadaa Shiva maavaahayaami, Om Swaaha Saamba Sadaa maavaahayaami, Om Bhur-bhuvahswaha Saamba Sadaa Shiva maavaahayaami/* Pushpaanjali: *Swaamin Sarva Jagannaatha Yaavat Pujaavasaanakam, Taawatwam preetibhaavena Lingesminsannithim kuru/ Upacharas* (Services): *Om Sadyojaatam prapadyaami Sadyojaataayavai namonamah-Aasanam samarpayaami Om namasshivaaya; Om bhavey bhavey naati bhavey bhavaswaam Om Namasshivaaya Paadyam samarpayaami; Om Bhavodbhavaaya Om Namasshivaaya Arghyam samarpayaami; Om Vaama Devaaya namah Om Namasshivaaya Achamaneeyam samarpayaami; Om Jyeshthaaya namah Om Namasshivaaya Snaanam samarpayaami .* These Upacharaas would be followed by the Mula Mantraas as also Panchaamrita Snaanaas with *Aapyaayasva Mantraas* and Shuddhodaka Snaanaas with *Aapohishthaa Mantraas*. Brahmanaas would then render group recitals of Ekaadashi (or atleast one) Rudraas and Purusha Sukta while performing Abhishekaas mixed with Chandana-Kumkuma-Karpura waters. The Abhishekaas shall follow Tarpanas as follows: *Om Bhavam Devam Tarpayaami, Om Sharvam Devam Tarpayaami, Om Ishaanam Devam Tarpayaami, Om Pashupatim Devam Tarpayaami, Om Ugram Devam Tarpayaami, Om Rudram Devam Tarpayaami, Om Bhimam Devam Tarpayaami, Om Mahaantam Devam Tarpayaami, Om Bhavasya Devasya Patneem Tarpayaami, Om Sharvasya Devasya Patneem Tarpayaami, Om Ishanasya Devasya Patneem Tarpayaami, Om Pashupater -devasya Patneem Tarpayaami, Om Ugrasya Devasya Patneem Tarpayaami, Rudrasya Devasya Patneem Tarpayaami, Om Bhimasya Devasya Patneem Tarpayaami, Om Mahato Devasya atneem Tarpayaami/* Tarpanaanta Puja is executed then: *Om Shreshthaa namah, Om Namasshivaaya, Shri Saamba Shivaaa namah Vastram samarpayaami/ Om Namasshivaaya Achamaniyam, Om Rudraaya Om Namasshivaaya Yagnopavitam, Om Kaalaaya Namah Om Namasshivaaya Shri Chandanam, Om Balavikaranaaya Om Namasshivaaya Akshataan Samarpayaami, Om Balavika -ranaaya Namah Om Namasshivaaya Pushpaani- Bilwa dalaani Samarpayaami .* This Service with Pushpa-Bilwa-Akshataas should be offered while reciting Shivaashtottaraa- Sahasra Naamaavalis. There after other Services should follow: *Om Balaayanamah Dhupamaaghraapyaami, Om Bala -pramathanaaya namah Deepam darshayaami, Om Sarva Bhuta damanaayanamah Naivedyam samarpayaami, Om Manonmanayaa namah taambulam samarpayaami, Om namasshivaa Vedaahametam Saamraajya bhojyam Shri Saambashivaayanamah neeraajanam darshayaami, and the Mantra Pushpam samarpayaami viz. Om Ishaanassarva- Vidyaanaam Ishwarassarva Bhutaa -naam Brahmaadipatih Brahmanodhipatih Brahmaa Shivomey astu Sadaa Shivom/* The Prathama Yaama Puja would thus be concluded by reciting the Twelve significant Shiva Naamaas viz: *Shivaaya namah, Rudraaya namah, Pashuopataye namah, Neelakanthaaya namah, Maheshwa raaya namah, Hari kashaaya namah, Virupaakshaaya namah, Pinaakiney namah, Tripuraantakaaya namah, Shambhavey namah, Shuliney namah and Maha -Devaaya namah/* Finally after Aparaadha Kshamaa- Pradakshina-Saashtaanga Namaskaaraas, the Karta would leave Akshataas and water on the ground stating: *Anena Pujanena Shri Saamba Sadaa Shiva preeyataam/* Three more Yaama Pujas should be accomplished on the same lines with Jaagaranas, Hara naama Stutis, Purana Vachana especially of Shiva, Linga, Skanda, Markandeya orientations, Bhajanaas and so on with full involvement. Next morning after Nitya Karmas and Puna Pujaas, Paarana- Brahmana Bhojana Daanaas are concluded and the Vrata samapti be fulfilled by dedicating it to Maha Deva: *Yanmaadyakrutam Punyam tadrudrasya Niveditam, Tatprasaadaan Maha Deva Vratamadya samarpitam, Prasanno bhavamey Shriman sadgatih pratipaadyataam/ Twadaalokana maatrena Pavbitrosmi na samshayah/* (What ever Sukruti is achieved by this Vrata is dedicated to you as I am purified by your grace without doubt; do kindly accept my offerings and bestow Sadgati to me.) *Samsaara klesha dagdhashya Vratenaanena Shankara, Praseeda Sumukho Naatha Jnaana drishti padobhava/* (Shankara! Kindly be pleased with this Vrata executed by me as per my ability and devotion; Parameshwara! As I am in the deep distress of the Ocean of ‘Sansaara’, do kindly grant me ‘Jnaana Drishti’ and liberate me with your grace and benevolence!).

Parthiva (Mrinmaya) Linga Puja: It was stated that in Dwapara Yuga Rasa Linga was popular but in Kali Yuga Shiva Lingas are earthen. The Puja Vidhana of Parthiva Lingas is prescribed as under; at the outset, the Shiva Linga is installed on a Platform worthy of worship decorated with Bilwa leaves by saying : *Om Shula Paanaye namah Shiveha pratishthito bhava* and meditate Bhagavan Mahesha with the Mula Mantra and the Panchaakshari of *Om Namasshivaaya*. Then the ‘Upacharaas’ like Paadya-Arghya- Aachamaniya-Snaana- Vastra-Yagnopaveeta- Gandha-Pushpa- Dhupa-Deepa-Naivedya-Phala-Taambula-Neeraajana-Mantra Pushpaanjalis along with appropriate Mantraas in making the various offerings. The Pujaas are made to Bhagavan in various Dishaas / Directions: salute the Eastern side with the Prayer of *Sharvaaya Kshiti (Earth) murthaye namah* ; to Ishaanya side with *Bhavaaya Jala (Water) Murthaye namah*; to the Northern side with the prayer of *Rudraayaagni(Fire) murthaye namah*; to Vaayavya side with *Ugraaya Vaayu (Wind) murtaye namah*; to the western side with *Bhimaayaakaasha (Sky) murtaye namah*; to Nirruti Dasha with *Pashupataye Yajamaana (Yama) murtaye namah*; to Dakshina / Southern side with the Supplication of *Maha Devaaya Soma (Chandra) murtaye namah*; to *Ishaanaaya Surya murthaye namah* and to Agneya with sincere obeisances to *Maha Devaaya namah/ Shiva Linga Vishesh Phalas*: Construction of a Vajra Linga bestows longevity; Mouktika Linga assures Roga naashana; Vaidurya Linga gives Shatru naashana; Padmaraaga Linga grants Lakshmi or Ishwarya; Puspa raaga happiness; Indra Nila fame; Marakata Linga excellent health; Sphatika Linga fulfills all kinds of desires; Silver Lingaas Kingships and Pitru Mukti; Hema Linga affords Satyaloka; Copper Lingas provide excellent physique and ‘Aayushya’; Brass Lingas give ‘Tushti’ or Fulfillment in Life; Shiva Lingas made of glass provide name and fame; Loha Lingaas destroy enemies; Lingaas made of Lead bless with long and healthy life and so on. Also, Gandha Lingas provide ‘Sowbhagya’ or propitiousness, Gaja danta or ivory Lingas grant ‘Senaadhipatya’ or Military Authority, Rice/Wheat flour Lingas pushti and killer of illnesses, Pulse flour made Lingas accord ‘Stree Laabha’, Butter made Lingas afford happiness, Jaggery-Rice Lingas bestow Vamsha Vriddhi and so on.

Observance of Shiva Raatri and its unique signifiacnce: Austerities by way of day/night fasts and devotion on Maha Shiva Ratri falling on Krishna Paksha or the Dark fortnight of Maagha Month is considered as extremely fruitful. In the early morning of Shivarati Day, a devotee should take a vow to observe the day/night fast and perform Archana, Abhisheka, Japa with ‘shodasopacharas’ or Sixteen Services like Gandha-Pushpa-Dhupa-Deepa- Naivedyas every three hours followed by ‘Jagarana’ till next morning. Next morning, the devotee should perform Punaah-Puja and Bhojan to Brahmnas along with dakshina. It is stated that observance of Shiva Ratri Fast- Puja-Jagan even by mistake, let alone proper and systematic worship, would lead to enormous fruits. In this connection, Suta Muni described in Shiva Purana an episode to Sages at Naimisharanya as follows: There was a poor hunter named Gurudruha who got extremely hungry along with his family members on a full day and that night happened to be Shiva Ratri. He entered a forest on the eve of Shivaratri and waited for any animal as a prey to satisfy the hunger of the family; he waited near a waterbody over a ‘Bilwa Vriksha’ or a bel tree under which there was a Shiva Linga as a coincidence. Having waited for three hours (first Prahara) in the night, he was lucky to sight a female deer along its kids approaching the waterbody to quench their thirst. He pulled out his bow and a arrow ready to aim at the mother deer and by a twist of fate the branch of the bel tree on which he sat moved, some leaves of the branch showered on the ShivaLinga and some water in a vessel carried by him spilt down on the Linga, thus performing the first Prahara Puja! The deer which was very sensitive even to small sounds of leaves and water falling from the tree noticed that thd hunter was ready to kill it. The animal made a sincere and convincing request to the hunter that if he allowed it desired to leave the deer kids to their father and definitely return back to be killed by him. The hunter agreed very reluctantly and let the animals leave. The second Prahara was closing but there was no trace of the animal. But the sister of the earlier deer approached the pond along with her kids and the earlier happenings repeated viz.the hunter pulled out his bow and arrow, the bel tree leaves as also the water drops from the hunter’s vessel fell on the Shiva Linga and the sister of the earlier deer made a similar request and the hunter let

the animal leave as in the case of the earlier deer thus accomplishing the next the worship of the Shiva Linga. As the third Prahara was closing, the husband of the original deer came in search of his wife and the kids and the happenings of the previous Prahara repeated again. During the Fourth Prahara, all the animals arrived viz. the original deer, her sister and the respective husbands. But the psychology was the hunter was transformed as the animals displayed their truthfulness and high sincerity, spared all the animals and performed sincere worship to the Shiva Linga with Bilwa leaves and water from the pond. Luckily for him he sighted a few fruits from a banana tree nearby with which he performed 'Naivedya' and served the Prashad to his wife and children. He repented for his evil deeds as even animals displayed virtue and sincerity. Bhagana Shiva revealed himself and blessed him that in his next birth he would be a Nishad again during Shri Rama's incarnation of Vishnu and attain Vaikuntha!

PHALGUNA MAASA

Punya Kaala at the occurrence of Meena Sankranti is sixteen ghadiyas past the arrival of Phalguna Maasa. From Phalguna Shukla Praatipada upto twelve days hence is the period of Payovrata as prescribed in the Maha Bhagavata Purana.

Holika Puja and Holika Mahotsava are to take place on Phalguna Pournami depending on Pournami-Bhadraa Nakshatra, provided the third phase or 'triteeya paada' does not cross Pournami. Having constructed a platform hallowed with 'Go Maya' (Cow dung) one should arrange a stack of sticks with Agni and perform Holika Puja with the 'Sankalpa' and 'Aavaahana' of *Sakutumbasya mama Dhundhaa Rakshasi preetyartham tatpeedaa parihaa -raartham Holikaa pujanam karishye/ --- Asmaadbhirbhayasantrastaih krutaatwam Holikeyatah, Atastwaam Pujayishyaami bhutabhuti pradaabhava/* (As were afraid of you Holika Devi! we seek your compassion and thus are resorting to shodashopacharaas to you. Do kindly show us fearlessness and prosperity!) The Mantras addressing Holika Devi state that the ten days from Panchami and Purnima are quite propitious and during these days even stealing of 'Indhana' or fire-wood ignored to celebrate Holi Fire on the Purnima Day when throwing of water, smearing on other's faces with colours and using of indecent language etc. are ignored as gestures of friendship especially with neighbours and friendship circles ; there would be group singing, dances and extravaganza of merriment all through the day and night. This is how the Raakshasi would be satisfied. Next morning, a Chandaala is touched before taking bath and after carrying out nitya karmaas, Holika Devi be greeted and take up one's own duties so that the year ahead would be devoid of diseases, difficulties and mental problems. The five days before the Holika Puja on Pournami are of 'Kari Sangjna' and thus Shubha Karyaas are not to be performed in that period. On the days of Holi, Grahana, Uttaraayanaa and Dakshinaayana, Auspicious Tasks are not performed due to the Kari Sangjna (Stigma of an Elephant) is attached to it.

Vasantotsava occurs on Phalguna Krishna Pratipada; the Tithi is to be considered as from the morning; in case the Tithi occurs on the previous and next day's morning then the morning of the previous day is to be considered as the beginning of Vasantotsava. Then on the Dwiteeya, 'Tailaa bhyangana' or head bath with oil and 'Chuta Kusuma Bhakshana' or eating Mango leafy flower with chandana are required to be performed while new white clothes are donned and enjoy wearing Tilaka on the face and 'Neeraajana' and recite : *Chutamagryam Vasantasya maakanda kusumantava, Sa Chandanam pibaamyadya Sarva Kaamaartha siddhaye/* (Vasanta Vriksha! I am consuming your tender leafy flower with Chandana on the First day of Vasanta Ritu; do fulfil my heart-felt desires!)

[Thus closes the Dwadasha Maasas of Chaitra- Vaishakha- Jyeshtha- Aashadha-Shravana -Bhadrapada-Asviyuja-Kartika-Maargashira-Pushya-Maagha Maasa Nirnayas and Festival-Vrata-Austerities; the Hindu Maasa Namas approximate mid March-to early April]

Monthwise Shiva Vratas especially Umamaheshwara Vrata

Linga Purana details monthwise Shiva Vratas and Umamaheshwara Vratas as follows: **Shiva Vratas:** In both the Shukla and Krishna Pakshas of a month, day time worship of Shiva Linga is of great significance on Ashtamis and Chaturdashis and observance of day long fasts; this procedure for a year would fetch sampurna yajna phala. Kheera dhaara Vrata on Prathamas and Panchamis of every month would yield Ashwamedha Yagna. Daily worship of Shiva for a full year by way of Shuchi, Satya bhashana, day long fast and very limited Ahaara in the nights, daily havan, Brahmacharya, Prithvi shayana and such other measures of Idriya nigrhana would assure Parama Gati.

Monthwise Shiva Vratas were also prescribed by Nandi Deva to Skanda as follows: *Pushya Purnami:* Shiva Pujaabhisheka with Ghrita, Ksheera, Dadhi etc followed by Brahmana bhojana and Godaana , Ratri bhojana; Phala: Brahmaloaka Prapti. *Maagha Chaturdhasis:* Shiva Pujaabhisheka, Raatri Bhojana of limited Ghritaanna, Brahmana Bhojana and daana of horse; Phala: Yamaloka kreedha or playful activities. *Phalguna Ashtami Chaturdhasis:* Sivaabhisheka, Day long fasting and only milk/ghee in the nights, Bhojanas to two Brahmanas and Tamra varna Go-daana; Phala: Chandraloka. *Chaitra Purnima:* Shiva Pujaabhisheka, Raatri bhojana of rice and ghee, Brahmana Bhojana and daana of two white cows; *Vaishakha Purnami:* Shiva Pujaabhisheka with Panchagavyas, Ratri bhojana, Brahmana Bhojana and Go-Daana; Phala: Ashwamedha Yagna. *Jeyshtha Purnima:* Shiva Pujaabhisheka, Ratri Bhojana, Brahmana Seva and Dhumravarna Godaana; Phala: Vaayu loka prapti. *Ashadha Purnima:* Shiva Pujabhisheka, Ratri bhojana, Brahmana Seva, Gaura varna Godaana; Phala: Varuna Loka. *Shravana Purnima:* Shiva Pujaabhisheka, Ratri Bhojana, Vrushabha daana; Phala: Vayu loka. *Bhadrapada Purnima:* Havana, Abhishka and Puja; Veda Parayana, Brahmana puja, Vrishabha dwaya daana Phala: Yaksha loka Rajastwa. *Ashviniyuja Purnima:* Shiva Pujaabhisheka, day long fast, Brahmana Bhojana and Nila Varna Vishabha daana. Phala: Ishana loka prapti. *Kartika Month:* The entire month is of significance and daily Shivaarchana-Abhisheka with Sacred water, Milk, Coconut water, Curd, Ghee, Chandana, and Bhasma with Maha Nyasa Purvaka, Maha Rudra Purvaka Snaanaas to Shiva Linga, Day long fasting and Alpaahara in the nights, complete abstinence, Bhu Shayana and various sacrifices should be in place; all kinds of Daanaas on anyday or as many days are encouraged in the Month and similarly Pandita Seva of any kind would be fruitful in the Month. Emphasis is stressed on Anna Daanaas during the month. Phala: Surya Loka Prapti. *Margasirsha Month* is considered an extension of the previous month when again austerities would spill over from the previous month; Upavaasaas, Shiva worship by way of Abhishekas, Brahmana Sevas, Anna and other kinds of daanaas especially to Daridras, would be of significance and the Phala would be of Chandra loka prapti.

Uma Maheswara Vrata: Shiva himself described the significance of the Uma Maheswara Vrata as narrated by Suta Muni. The best days for the worship of the Uma Maheswara are stated to be Purnima, Amavasya, Ashtami and Chaturdashi. After a year long worship on these days, Uma Maheswara Pratimas made of gold or silver or according to one's capacity could be installed in a Temple, by carrying these by a chariot with Veda Mantras amid fanfare and provide bhojanas to Brahmanas and Annadanas to the visitors. The Mahima of the Pratimas thus installed would be enormous; for example, a Kanya or a widow who observed the Vrata for a year and instal the Vighras formally would have miraculous results in the on-going life and Shiva Loka Sayujya by the grace of Devi Uma. Now, month-wise daanaas and pratishthas by devotees are given below: In Margaseersha month, daanaa of a sturdy bull to a Brahmana would please Shiva and Uma; in Pousha month, the Vrata requires Trishula Daana; during Maagha Maasa, Ratha daana would need to be performed; in Phalguna month, the requirement is to install Shiva-Maheswari Pratimas made of gold or silver or copper to qualify the attainment of Shiva Sayujya. In Chaitra Month, the Devotee

has to do the Pratishtha of Shiva- Bhavani and Nandi Vighras in copper; in the month of Vaishakha, the Vrata has to be performed by the daana of Kailasha Mountain in the name of Shiva and Parvati and indeed the phala of the worship during the month would bestow Kailasha Parvata prapti. In the Jyeshtha month, formal installation of Shiva Linga and Bhavani, while in Ashadha a brick built house has to be given away in charity to a Brahmachari with expertise in Vedas and Vedangas and the donor would be destined to accomplish Goloka. In the Shravana month, a huge heap of tilaas and vastras along with Brahmana Bhojana and Anna daana would qualify for Goloka too; In the month of Bhadrapada, a parvata like supply of rice is to be given in charity to attain Bhavani's presence; in Ashvayuja charity of a Parvata like Anna /cooked rice along with gold to a learned Brahmana and with his approval organise Anna Daana to the poor; during Kartika month, Swarna Pratimas of Shiva and Parvati are to be installed in a temple, besides Brahmana bhojanaas. Additionally the Bhaktas observing the Uma-Maheshwara Vrata need to follow one meal a day, Bhumi shayana and celibacy, besides daily worship to Maha Deva and Uma Devi.

Mukhya Tithi Nirnayas

The norms of determining Thithis from Prathama to 'Pancha Dashi' or Purnima/Amavasya as per Krishna Paksha, the Dark Fortnight commencing the Prathama from Amavasya in the ascending order while Chandra or Shukla Paksha commencing from Purnima to Amavasya as the case that may be are detailed: Prathama Tithi nirnaya: *Shukla paksho darsha viddhaa Krishny viddhaa dviteeyayaa, Uposhya pratipat Shukle mukhyaasyaadaa paraahnakui, Tadabhavetu saayaahyaavyaapini parigruhyaataam/* (If darsha viddha extends from Amavasya during the Krishna Paksha upto Dviteeya, then 'Upavasa' or fasting becomes fruitful; incidentally fasting on Prathama Tithi of Shukla Paksha is required to be observed up to noon on the following day; in case dviteeya occurs beyond the next noon then the fast should continue till the evening) *Praatassangava madhyaahnaa paraahnaassaayamityasau, Atrahnah pancadhaa bhago mukhyodvityaadi bhaagatah/* (It is necessary to divide the day time of a day in to five parts viz. Praatahkaala or early morning, sangava or prenoon, Madhyaahna or noon, Aparahna or post noon and Sayamkaala ie up to Sun set period; in any case it is required to divide the day time on two three parts) *Purvaahno chatu paraahnah itidvedhaa vibhaagah, Purvaahno madhyaahnoparaahnah itidvedhaa vibhaagah/ Purvaahno madhyaahnoparaahnassaayaahno iti charurvibhaahah, Praatassangava madhyahanna aparaahnassaayaahna iti panchathaa vibhagah/* (Purvaahna and Parahna are of two divisions; or there could be three units of Purvaahna-Madhyaahna-Aparahna. Purvaahna, Madhyaahna, Aparahna- and Saayaahna could be four units; or as per the five divisions mentioned above). *Devala Rishi* states: *Yaam tithim samanupraapya tvastam yaati Divaakaraha, Saathihih sakalaagjneyaa daanaadhyayana karmasu/* The specific tithi when Sunset takes place would be the one when Daana-Adhyayana- Karmas or charity, scripture reading and all other deeds of virtue- be performed) *Sourepi* states: *Yaam praapyaastamuh iti arkassyaaccchet saa trimuhurtagaah, Dharma krutyeshu sarveshu sampurnaantaam vidurbudhaah/* (Those with knowledge state that all acts of virtue be completed on that Tithi itself of Sun set with a possible extension of three 'muhutras') *Sumantu Rishi* is of the view: *Tithi nakshatra niyame tithi bhantecha paaranam, Athonyadhaa paaranetu vrata bhangamavaapnuyaat/* There might be risk of failure of the 'Vrata' or the act of virtue performed with Shuchi-Uposha- Naivedya-Paaranas in the Dharma Karyas without reference to the prescribed Tithi- Nakshatra Regulations) *Tithyante cha bhante cha paaranam yatrachodyate, yaama trayordhva vartinaampraatarevahi paaranam/* (If three 'yaamas' exceed the limits of Tithi-Nakshatras, then paarana or breaking 'upavaasa' should be done only next morning) *Mukhya Tithyantaraayeshu tithisheshopi grihyataam, Yo yasya*

vihitah kaalah tatkaala vyaapitaan tithih/ (In case there is a problem of specified Tithi, then the extension of Tithi be also considered for the fasting limit; in any case, it would be advisable to decide on the preferred tithi for performing the Vrata keeping various such considerations.) Now, about 'Eka Bhukta Nirnaya' or Eating once a day only, Skaanda Purana defined as follows: *Dinardha samayaateete bhujyate niyamena yat ekabhuktamiti proktam atatsyaa siddhivaivah./* or eating limited meals in a formal way as per prescribed procedure that too once a full day/night after half day is known as 'Eka Bhukta'. Bodhayana Maharshi qualified further: *Madhyaana vyaapini graahyaa ekabhukta vrata tithih, Pujaa vrateshu sarvatra madhyaahna vyaapini tithih/* (Eka Bhukta vrata should be definitely extended to post noon, that too after the prescribed duties from morning thereafter) . In this connection there are six interpretations: *Purvedyureva madhyaana vyaapitam, Paredyureva madhyaahna vyaapitam, Ubhayatra tadvyaapitvam, Ubayatra tadavyaapitvam, Ubhayatrena saamyena tadekadesha vyaapitvam, Vaishamyena tadeka desha vyaapitvam/* (Deciding on the applications of timings in the context of 'Eka Bhukta' or one meal a day, there are six variations: the fasting on the basis of one meal a day be effective from the previous day's noon meal, noon day meal extended till next noon, both kinds of meals covering noon meals of the previous day and the current noon, both kinds of afore said noon meals of yester and current days excluded, avoiding one of the previous or following day noon meals, or avoiding both these previous two alternatives. 'Nakta Vrata Nirnaya': Varaaha Purana prescribes *Margasheershe site pakshe Pratipadyaa tithirbhavet, tasyaam naktam prakurveeta raatrou Vishnum pujayet/* (This nakta vrata is prescribed to be observed on Margaseersha Shukla Prathama and worship Vishnu on that night by fasting through out the day and breaking it by the night with prescribed food like 'kheer' and gram flour with classified butter; through out the day Agni Karyas be performed with appropriate mantras in praise of Agni, the representative of Vishnu followed by Vishnu Puja; normally Satya narayana Vrata is stated to be performed. Varaha Purana also describes a series of Vratas like Kanti Vrata, Siubhagya Vrata, Shanti Vrata , Arogya Vrata and so on. Reverting back to Nakta Vrata 'Kaala Darsha' mentions: *Trimuhurtaa - astamanaat praak paracascha tathaavidhaa, tasyaam nakta vratam kuryaad harinakta vrataadyatah/* (The Ratri Nakta named Hari Nakta is to commence three muhurtas before and anotherthree muhurtas later) Vyasa Maharshi states: *Tri muhurtah pradoshasyaat bhaanaavastangate sati , naktam tatra tu kartavyam iti Shastra vinischayah/* (As three muhurtas after Sunset is 'pradosha' time, and nakta by performed at that time as prescribed by Shastras) Skaanda qualifies: *Pradosha vyapini nassaadduivaa naktam vidheeyate, Atmanodvigunacchaayaam ati kraamati Bhaskare, tannaktannakta mityaahuh na naktam nishi bhojanam/* (Day time naktam is necessarily extended upto Pradosha while over double the length of the shadow of Surya would be the nakta time, but food in the night is not considered as nakta. More over: *Arka dviparya raatrou cha chaturdashyashtami divaa/* (When Nakta is observed the nights of Sundays, Amavasyas, and Pournamis are not appropriate for taking food and the respective previous days too food is to be unconsumed too.) Vriddha Yagjnyavalkya assures: *Purvaahnikaastu tithayah Daiva kaarye phala pradaah/* (During Deva Karyas, observance of nakta during the pre noon and day time periods would be of double the fruits)

[Varaha Purana highlights the Prathama Tithi signifying the origin of Agni, his several names and implications of Agni Worship on that Tithi and mentions as follows: When Maha Vishnu created 'Panchabhutas'(Five Elements) and Loka Pitamah Brahma and commanded the latter to initiate creation, Brahma could not do so and he was extremely confused and hence angry and the rage created thousands of flames called Agni who became extremely thirsty. When Agni asked Brahma as to how his thirst could

be quenched, Brahma showed three types of satisfying it viz. sharing the 'Dakshinas' received by Devas and hence Agni was known as 'Dakshinagni'; the second way of Agni's thirst was by carrying the Havans (Homas and Yajnas) performed in the Trilokas (Three Worlds) in favour of various Deities as their 'Vahan', thus becoming Agni popular as 'Havyavahan'; the third way is that since Agni is present in each 'Griha' or household, he is known as 'Garhapatyagni'. Brahma further named Agni as 'Vaisvanara' as the latter provides the means of bestowing 'Sadgati' (Salvation) to the virtuous beings performing havans and other good deeds. Agni is 'Jataveda' or protector of both Known and Unknown material; 'Naaraa Prashamsa' - 'Naar' or people, especially 'Dwijas' or twice born Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vysyas do 'Prashamsa' or praise; Known as 'Dravinoda' as Agni provides money power. The other popular names accorded by Brahma to Agni are 'Tanunpath' (Agni protects Sharir/Asharir), 'Prapura' (full of everything) and many other names. Agni desired to Brahma to designate a day of each Month so that all concerned would perform worship to Him. Since this was a unique request made by any Deity for the first time, Brahma confirmed *Pratipada* as a day of significance for Agni. Brahma blessed Agni that *Pratipada* be popularised among all the Lokas and worship to Agni by way of fasting (Upavas) or at the most by taking milk would qualify a devotee to acquire prosperity and Tejas (radiance) during the current birth and to secure Kingship in the next birth and certainly please the Pitru Loka.

Dviteeya Tithi nirnaya: *Ekaaddasyashtamishashti dviteeyaa cha chaturdasi, Trayodasheetvamaavaasyo uposhyaassyuh paraanvita/* (Bhrigu Maharshi suggested that the day after Ekadashi, Ashtami, Shashthi, Dviteeya, Chaturdashi, Trayodashi and Amavasya are worthy of Uposhya or fasting) [Varaha Purana signifies the origin of Aswini Kumars and their worship of on the Dwitiya Tithis: Sage Mahatapa explained to Prajapal how Aswini Kumars were born. Marichi was Brahma's son and Kashyap was the son of Marichi. Kashyap and Aditi begot Twelve 'Adityas' (Suns). [According to Vishnupurana the Adityas were Amsa, Aryaman, Bhaga, Dhuti, Mitra, Pusan, Sakra, Savitur, Twastha, Varuna, Vishnu/Vamana, Vaivaswat; Martand too was known as one of these, but Aditi appeared to have disowned him?] Martand wedded Viswakarma's daughter Sangya and begot two children-Yama and Yami. Sangya was unable to bear the extreme heat of Martand, thus created her shadow counterpart with instructions to serve her husband in all ways and left for a place known as Uttarkuru. Eventually Martand came to know the truth, discovered her in the form of a mare, married her and gave birth to two **Aswini Kumars!** Martand instructed the sons to dedicate themselves in the worship of Narayana and after severe 'Tapasya' by incessantly uttering 'Narayana Mantra' which was taught by Martand, Prajapati Narayan was finally pleased to appear Himself before them. When King Prajapal desired to learn the Mantra from the Sage Mahatapa, the latter obliged and recited it.

The Text of the Narayana Mantra is as follows: 'Namastey Nishkriya Nishprapancha Nirashraya Nirapeksha, Niralamba Nirguna Niraloka Niradhara Nirjara Nirakara-Brahman Maha Brahman Brahmanapriya Purusha Maha Puroshottama-Deva Maha Devottam Sthano Sthitasthapaka, Bhuta Maha Bhuta Bhutadhipati Yaksha Maha Yaksha Yakshadhipatey-Griha Maha Grihatipatey Sowmya Maha Sowmya Sowmyadhipathey, Pakshi Mahapakshapathey Ditya Maha Dityadhi pathey-Rudra Maha Rudradhipathey Vishnu Maha Vishnupathey, Parameswara Narayana Prajapathaye Namah-Evam Stuthastada Thabhyama Sivabhyam sa Prajapathih, Thrutosha Paramapreetya Vakyamcheda mukhavachah-Varam Varayatham Sheeghram Daivaih Paramadurlabham, yena me varadaaney charathastridivam Sukham'.

Aswini Kumars had 'Darshan' of Narayana and were blessed with boons of securing portions of Yajna, the authority of obtaining Amrit along with Devas, handsome figures, radiance and knowledge of medicine. As the Aswini Kumars are two in number, Brahma designated the second day of month or 'Dviteeya' as the day of worship to them. Whoever reads or hears the story of Aswini Kumars and recites Narayana Matra would be blessed with noble sons and be relieved of sins.]

Triteeya Tithi nirnaya: *Rambhaakhyaam varjayitvaat triteeyaantu Dvija sattama, Anyeshu sava karyeshu ganayuktau prashastate/* (Brahama Vaivarta Purana states that excepting Rambha vrata all other acts of virtue are of 'Para viddha' and thus auspicious on Triteeya) [Varaha Purana underlines the significance of Triteeya as the day of worship of Gauri Devi and states as follows: Brahma created Lord Rudra and instructed Him to organise Creation, but Rudra being extremely spiritual executed penance. Meanwhile **Devi Gauri** was born to Daksha Prajapati and was known as Dakshayani. Rudra got disturbed in His 'Tapasya' as Daksha initiated one Yagna which was supported by Lord Vishnu. There was an altercation between Rudra and Vishnu but Brahma intervened as both of them were imperative in the context of Universal Existence and thus declared that both Hari and Hara would be equally crucial. To appease Rudra, Brahma offered a major portion of 'Havis' or the oblations to Agni for distribution to various Devas who sought to cool down Rudra by extolling Him: Rudra Stuti: ' Bhaganetra haram Devam Pushno danta vinasanam, Stutim kuruth ma Seeghram Geetyirethesthu Namamih-Namo Vishama netraya Nameste Triambakayacha, Namah Sahsara netraya Namasthe Suulipaanine-Namah Khatvanga hasthaaya Dandabhruvey kare, Tvam Deva Hutabhungjwala kotibhanu samaprabahah-Adarshaneyat Deva Mridavijnanatodhuna, Krutamasmabhirevesha Thadatra kshayataam Prabho-Namah Trinetrayatriharaya Shambho, Trisulapaney Vikritasya rupa- Samasta Deveswara Suddha bhava, Praseeda Rudrachyuta Sarvabhava- Pushnosya Dantatmaka Bhima rupa Pralambabhogindra lulinthakanthah, Vishala Dehachyuta Neelakantha Praseeda Visweswara Viswamurthih- Bhagakshi Samsphotana Dakshakarma, Grihanabagam muhatah pradhanam, Praseeda Deveshwara Neela kantha Prapahinah Sarvagunopapannah-Sitangaraga pratipanna murthyem Kapaladhaarim Tripuraghna Deva, Prapahinah Sarva Bhayashu chaiva Umapathay Pushakaranala janma- Pashyamte Dehagatan Suresh Sargadayo Vedavaraananta,Saangaan Savidhyan Sapadakramancha Sarvaan Nileenaamsthvayi Deva Deva-Bhava Sarva Mahadeva Pinaakin Rudra the Hara, Natah sma Sarvam Viswesa Aahinah Parameswara'. Rudra was pleased with Devas who prevailed on Rudra to wed Devi Gauri eventually. As time passed on, Daksha Prajapati planned another Yagna but did not invite either his daughter or Rudra who ought to have occupied the Prime Seat being eligible for the major portion of the 'Havis'! More than Rudra who was immune from such lapses as not inviting Him, Devi Gauri felt insulted and despite Rudra's protests attended her father's Yagna Ceremony uninvited. Daksha was not only cool at his daughter but started abusing Rudra; she could not control Herself and immolated Her life in Yoga Agni. As a sequel to this most unfortunate development, Rudra created Veerabhadra, got the 'Daksha Yagna' devastated and severed the head of Daksha. Later on, Rudra was reconciled and as Devas sincerely entreated to forgive Daksha in the interest of Universal Governance as he was Prajapati, revived the latter by refixing the head of the Goat meant for Sacrifice at the Yagna. As time rolled on, **Devi Parvati** was born to the King of Himalayas viz. Himavanth and since Her childhood yearned to wed Lord Siva. A powerful 'Asura' (Demon) named Tarakasura secured boons from Brahma that none in the Universe could kill him except Lord Siva's son, presuming since Lord Siva would never marry, especially after the Daksha Yagna.. Brahma and Vishnu accompanied by all the Devas approached Lord Siva to marry but Maha Deva was in

Tapasya. Devi Parvati in Her firm resolve to wed Siva approached Him to perform services like timely provision of flowers and such other material such as fruits, Dhoop and 'Arthi' (Light) to Siva for enabling worship by Himself to the Supreme Power. Devas utilised the services of 'Mammadha'-son of Lord Narayana- and his wife Devi Sati to somehow draw Siva's attention to Devi Parvati and change Siva's attitude in favour of Devi Parvati and pave the way for their wedding so that Siva would beget a son who could kill the Demon Tarakasura. But unfortunately the desires of Devi Parvati and Devas misfired and Siva opened His third eye to punish Manmadha by converting him as Ashes! As time passed, Lord Siva married Devi Parvati and was blessed with Son, Lord Subrahmanya who annihilated Takasura the dreaded Demon. Since the birth and wedding of Devi Gauri as also of Devi Parvati coincided on the *Thriteeya day of a month*, Lord Brahma declared that this day is worthy of special worship and austerity to Devi Parvati. Both men and women ought to avoid consumption of salt or salted material and those who observe this practice would certainly become prosperous, healthy and famous.]

Chaturthi Nirnaya: *Chaturthee Gananaadhasya Maatru viddhaa prashasyate, Mandhyaana vyaapini chetsyaatparatas -chetparehani/* (Brihaspati states that Vinayaka Chaturthi being of Maatru viddha if extends upto Madhyaana or post noon is considered as auspicious, but there beyond then the Vrata be performed in the next day) [Varaha Purana emphasises that each and every Hindu irrespective of caste, sex and occupation must observe Ganesha Chaturthi worship and narrates the following: As Devas faced a strange problem of recurring failures as and when they take up a fresh assignment whereas Demons seemed to be going ahead with novel operations, they approached Lord Siva and Devi Parvati to provide a solution. In reply Bhagavan Siva started thinking that among the Panchabhutas (Five Elements), there was an identifiable personification of a Deity among Prithvi (Earth), Varun (Water), Tejas (Fire) and Vayu (Wind God), but how was it that 'Akash' (Sky) did not have? By so thinking Lord Siva laughed loudly and Devi Parvati could guess by her Jnana Shakti (Power of Knowledge) what Bhagavan was laughing boisterously about. From that energetic hilarity with an open mouth emerged a replica of Siva who was strong, handsome and powerful whom Devi Parvati kept gazing and got mesmerised. Lord Siva got annoyed by the instant reaction of Devi Parvati, became jealous of the Super Boy and infact got angry and cursed him saying that he would possess an elephant face, disproportionate belly and serpented Yagnopaveeth (Holy Thread). Siva was still angry and from His body hair roots kept on multiplying innumerable Vinayaks resembling the original and Lord Brahma flew over the Sky and as 'Akashvani' (a loud announcement from the Sky) declared that Devas should be grateful to Lord Siva to have provided the solution to the problem posed by them and that the various forms of Vinayak which got materialised would indeed ensure that as and when Devas (and human beings) initiated a task they should invoke the blessings of Vinayak foremost. As the announcement from Brahma was heard, Siva was by then cooled down and addressed Vinayaka endearingly: 'Vinayako Vighnakaro Gajasyo Ganesha naamaacha Bhavasya Putrah, Yethecha Sarvam thava yanthu Bhruthya Vinayakayaah Kruura drishtah Prachandah- Vucchushma daanaadi vuvruddhva dehaha Karyeshu siddhim prati paadayanthah, Bhavaamsva Deveshu thadha makeshu kaaryashu chanteshu Mahanubhavat-Agreshu Pujam Labhatenyatha cha Vinashayishyastatha kaarya siddhim' (Hey Putra! Vinayaka, Vighnakara, Gajavadana, Ganesha, Shankara Putra; all these cruel-eyed, harsh and angry Vinayaks will be your servants; those who are desirous of giving well earned materials as 'daanas' or alms be provided with Siddhis or boons. At Yajnas or various Propitious Tasks, all the devotees shall be provided the highest veneration, lest their tasks or worships be discounted'). As Devas performed 'Abhishek' (Sacred Bath to Ganesha, they extolled him as

follows: ‘ Namasthe Gajavaktraya Namasthe Gananayaka, Viyayaka Namastestu Namaste Chanda Vikrama-Namastestu tey Vighna kartha Namaste Sarpa Mekhala Namaste Rudra Vaktrotha Pralambajatharaasrita- Sarva Deva Namaskaaradavighnam kuru Sarvada (‘We greet you Gajavadan, Gananayak, Prachanda Vikram, Vighna kartha, Naga bhushana, Rudra Mukha Utpanna, Lambodhara, Avighna Karak, Kalyan Pradata ; Sarva devas are greeting you, Kindy ensure that we enjoy Avighnam always). Since Ganapati was born on Chaturthi, this day of each month is worthy of His worship; but Bhadrapada Sukla Paksha Chaturdhi is the most auspicious day for a fulfilled worship with ‘Shodasa Upacharas’ or Sixteen Services of Avahana (Welcome), Asana (Seating), Padyam (water for washing feet), Arghya (water for sipping), Snana or body wash, Gandham (Sandal wood paste), Dhupam (Incense), Deepam (offering lights), Naivedyam (Food and Fruits) Tambula (betel leaves and nuts), Paneeya (coconut water), Vastram (clothing), Alankaram (Decoration), Abharanam (Jewellery), Stotram (Extolling) and ‘Arati’ (Camphor lighting).]

Panchami nirnaya: *Chaturthee samyutaakaaryaa panchami parayaa natu, Daive karmani pitrecha Shukla pakshe tathaasite/* (Haritasa Maharshi states that Pitru karyas be performed on Chaturthi either in Shukla Paksha or Krishna Paksha on Panchami preceding Chaturthi but not in the subsequent tithi of Shasthi)

[Varaha Purana underlines the adulation of **Naaga Devatas** on Panchami Days: Before Sage Mahatapa’s explanation to King Prajapal about the significance of Panchami Puja every month, he first narrated the origin of the Serpents. In Lord Brahma’s creation, Sage Marichi gave birth to Kashyap and the latter’s wife Kadru begot mighty sons like Ananth Nag, Vasuki, Kambal, Karkotak, Padma, Maha Padma, Shankh, Kulik, and Aparajit. No doubt some of these serpents were illustrious and were utilised for Deva Karyas (or tasks entrusted to them by Devas) like Vasuki used for churning the Ocean to secure Amrit, Sesha Nag underneath Lord Narayana as his bed and a few more exceptions, but by virtue of their nature and nurture, the majority of the race of serpents was ferocious, vengeful and crooked utilising their natural tendency of producing poison most of which being used for killings. In fact some of the notorious leaders of serpents as mentioned above kill for kicks, some out of spite and some for self-defence. Lord Brahma was approached by Devas and Great Sages that the untimely, indiscriminate and defenceless deaths especially among human beings were very frequent, unprovoked and unnatural. Lord Brahma called for a large gathering of Serpents and threatened them for dire consequences and warned them severly; He commanded them to migrate to their abodes permanently to the lower regions of the Universe like Rasatala, Patala and so on. He threatened them that if they did not mend their ways, He would have the immoral serpents exterminated in the ensuing Vaivasvata Manvantara and encourage ‘Sarpa Yagnas’ as King Janamejaya would indeed execute when only the virtuous ones might manage to survive. In response to the warning by Brahma, most of the venomous serpents did migrate to the lower regions, barring a very few still moving surreptitiously causing sporadic incidents of poisonous killings. Brahma advised the serpents as a race to refrain from the areas where herbs, medicinal plants and Kites fly on the Sky which have a powerful eyesight from far off distances. Unfortunately, even the well meaning serpents of non-poisonous type are hunted out and killed by human beings. But those remaining type are venerated especially girls desirous of marrying good husbands and women craving for children by providing milk and eats. Come Naga Panchami, especially in the week following Deepavali celebrations, women observe fast and refrain from eating sour and milk preparations of food in several parts of Bharat till date.

Shashthi Nirnaya: *Krishnashtami Skhanda Shashthi Shivaraatrirchaturdashi, Yetaah puva yutaah kaaryaah tithyante paaranam bhavet/* (Vashishtha Maharshi opines that auspicious days of Krishnashtami, Skanda Shashthi, Shiva Ratri, Chaturdashi be observed only if they are preceded by the earlier Tithis and ‘Paarana’ or naivedya be performed at the end of the Tithi)

[Varaha Purana signifies the worship of Lord Skanda on Shashtis and provides an account of its rewards as follows: In a ferocious battle between Devas and Demons once, Devas were defeated severely and the lack of a suitable Commander-in- Chief was realised as the major cause for the defeat. Devas and Brahma approached Maha Deva Siva for a quick solution. It was realised that in the union of Siva and Devi Parvati, an unknown power was created called ‘Ahamkar’ a Personality Ego or Self-Image. It was this ‘Ahamkar’ which was personified and created as Lord Kartikeya. Maha Deva declared that Kumar would be the best choice for the position of Deva Senapati or the Commander-in-Chief of the Deities. He was named after ‘Krittikas’ who fed the boy with their breast-milk. Infact, as Sage Mahatapa explained to King Prajapaal, Krittikas, Agni, other Matru Gana, and Devi Parvati, aside from, of course, Maha Deva the Principal Cause and the ‘Ahankar’ were all responsible for the Genesis of Kartikeya. [‘Krittikas’ were the Six wives of Sapta Rishis-named the Pleides or the Nymphs in modern Astronomy; when Lord Siva and Devi Parvati were enjoying conjugal happiness at Kailasa, all the Devas, Brahma and Vishnu sought an emergency audience with Lord Siva who in a hurry spilt his semen on the ground and Agni Deva transformed as a pigeon pecked up the drops but could not bear the inflammation. Maha Deva Himself advised the pigeon to inject the drops into a woman of unparalleled virtue. Agni identified Six Women-supposed to be the Six wives of Sapta Rishis- and injected the drops into the pores of hairs of their body; the Six women too could not bear the extreme effervescence and relocated the drops into the violent flow of River Ganges which in turn carried to the bushes of the reed (Sarkanda) and there appeared a boy of mysterious magnificence. Devi Parvati came to learn of the incident and cursed all the Devas who disturbed Her privacy with Siva and cursed their wives to become barren. Sage Visvamitra appeared at the bushes and named the boy as Guha and bestowed him the totality of Vedic Knowledge and the title Brahmarshi; the Six Krittikas tried to breast feed and the boy solved the problem by assuming six heads and mouths and is called Shanmukha .]

Lord Siva gifted Kumar two significant ‘toys’ to play with, one a live ‘Kukkut’(rooster) and branch of Tree as also a play mate named ‘Visakha’. All the Devas who present congratulated Kumar and commended (‘Stuti’) him as follows:*Bhavasva Deva Senani Maheswarasuta prabho Shanmukha Kanda Vishweshha Kukkutadhwaja Paavake-Kampitare Kumaresha Skanda Balagrahanuga Jitaare Krouncha viddhvamsa Kritthikaasuta Maatruja-Bhutagrahaoati shreshtha Paavaki Priya darshana, Maha Bhutapati shreshthrh putra Trilochana mamostute- yevam sutastada Devaih vavardha Bhava nandanah,Dwaadashhditya samkaasho abhuvaadhuta darshanah Trilokamapi tatthejasthaapayamaasa parthiva!* The birth of Kartikeya at the Krittika Star on the Sixth day of the bright fortnight of Margasira month (Krittika Nakshatra of Shashthi Tithi of Suddha Paksha of Margasirsha Month) brought relief to the Universe, immense joy to the Siva Couple, sense of liberation to all Devas who were indeed the direct beneficiaries since Brahma’s boon was that only Siva’s son could terminate the Demon Tarakasura and finally great fear and apprehension to Tarakasura and followers! Brahma had formally declared Shashthi of every month would be a day of austerity and fast only with ‘Phalaahar’ or fruits as food. Those who are devoid of sons, prosperity and status ought to observe the fast and recite the above Karikeya Stuti for instant results.

Saptami Nirnaya: *Saptami poorva viddhaiva vrateshu nikhileshyapi, Alaabhe purva viddhaayaah paraviddhaapi grihyataam/* (Kaala Nirnaya states: In respect of all the vratas on the relevant Tithi, only Saptami Purva Viddha be considered, lest it be construed as Para viddha)

[Varaha Purana explains in detail of the unique value of daily worship or atleast on the Saptami Tithis of the Pratyakta Paramatma the Lord Surya! In this connection the Purana states: The unparalleled and ageless Jnana Shakti of the Supreme Energy is but a token sign on the Sky in the form of Surya's everlasting luminosity and heat, constantly reminding human beings of the wonder of Creation. The unique radiance of Surya on the Sky providing fleeting glimpses of 'Mahan Atma' is named *Ravi* Surya is also called *Bhaskara or Prabhakara*. As he is visible during daytime, Surya is called *Divakara*. Since He is the known Deity from the beginning, one calls Him *Aditya*. Although the presence of Surya was a matter of immense happiness initially, Devas started to feel the excessive illumination and heat and as such prayed to Him to tone down these to bearable levels; They said that He was too sizzling and literally burning Devalokas; the glow emerging from the Chariot is too dazzling to look at; that He was always invited to share the oblations of Ghee (Classified butter) in Yagnas and they were grateful to do so; but He must become far less blistering and radiant to limits of tolerance and that they would sincerely beseech Him to do so. Sun God responded to the requests of Devas and since that day of 'Saptami' became visible at Prithvi also initially. Those human beings on Earth sincerely worship Surya Deva along with recitation of 'Aditya Hridayam' on this day would certainly have their desires fulfilled. In this context the text of Aditya Hridayam is quoted: ' *Thato Yuddha parishrantham Samare*

chinmayaasthitham, Raavanam chaagratho dhrushtva Yuddhaya Samupasthitham / Daivathescha samaagamy drashtumaabhayagato ranam, Upagamy braveedrama magastyo Bhagavan Rishih/ Raama Raama mahabaho, Shrunu Guhyam Sanaathanam, Ena sarvaanareenvathsa Samere vijayashasi. Aditya Hridayam Punyam Sarva Shathru vinaasanam, Jayaavaham Japennithyam akshayyam pramam Shivam / Sarva Mangala maanganglyam sarva paapa pranasanam chintashoka prashamana mayurvardhana muttamam / Rashmimantham Samudyantam Devasura Namaskrutam, Pujayaswa vivaswantham Bhaaskaram Bhuvaneshwaram/ Sarva Vedaanthako heysshas Tejasvi rasmibhaavanah yesha Devaassura gananlokan paathi gabhastibhih / Esha Brahmecha Vishnuscha Shiva Skanda Prajapathih, Mahendro Dhanadah Kaalo Yama Somohyapaampathim/ Pitaro Vasavassaadhya Hyashvino marutomaruh, Vaayurvahni Prajaaprana ritukartha Prabhakarrah/ Aaditya Savithassuryah khagah pushaa Gabhastiman, Suvarna sadruso Bhaanuh vishva retha Divaakarrah/ Hardasyva ssahasararchi Sapta Saptir Marichiman / Timironmadhana Shambhustwasthta Martandam Anushman/ Hiranyagarbhas sisirahstapano Bhaskaro Ravih, Agnigarbhodite putrah sankhassisira naashanah/ Vyomanathahstamo bhedi Rig yajur Saama paaragah Ghanavrishtirapam mitro vindhya Veedheeh plavangamaha/ Aatapee mandalir mrutyur pingalah sarva thaapanah, Kavirvisvo Maha Tejah rakta sarva ssabodbhavah/ Nakshatragana Taaraana madhipo Viswa bhaavana, Tejasamapi Tejasvi Dwadashatma namosthutey/Namah purvaya giraye paschimaadrayenamah, Jyotiraganam dinadhi pathaye namah/ Jayaya Jaya Bhadraya Haryasvaya namonamah, Namonamassahasramso Adityaya nomonamah/ Namah Ugraya Veeraya Saarangaya namonamah, Namah Padma Prabhodaya Marthandaya namah / Brahmeshanaachuteshaya Suryaadithya vachase, Bhaaswate Sarva bhakshaya Roudraya Vapushe namah / Tamoghnyaya Himagnhaya Shatrughnyaya amithatmany Krithaghna hanyaya Devaya Jyotishampathaye namah/ Taptachaamika rabhyaya Haraye Vishvakarmane, Namasthamobhignaya Ruchaye Loka Saakshiney/ Naasayatyesha vibhutam tha Deva srujatih Prabhuh, Payatyasha Tapatyasha

varshatyasha gabhasitih/ Esha Supteshu Jaagarti Bhuteshu parinishthithah, Esha evagnihothramcha phalam chaivagnihotrinam/ Vedantha kratavaschiva Kratuunam Phalamevacha, Yani krutyani lokeshu Sarva esha Ravi Prabhu/ Yena maapathsyu krushcheshu kanthareshu bhayeshucha, kirthayan Purusha kaschinnavaseedhati Raghava/ Pujasvinamekagro Deva Devam Jagatpatim, ethah Trigunitham jatva Yuddesh vijaishyasi/ Asmin kshane Maha Baaho Ravanam twam Vadhishtyasi, Evamuktwa Agasthyo jagam yadhagatham/ Edhat srutwa Maha Teja nashta shoka abhavat tada, Dharayamasa Suptreetho Raghava prayathtmaavan/ Adithya preksha japtwa thu pavan Harsha mavaptavaan, Thriraachamya Suchirbhuthva dhanuraadhaaya Viryavan/ Ravanam preshya hrushtatma yuddhaya samupagamat, Sarva yathnena Mahata vadhetasya dhruto bhavat/ Adhaaraveera vadha nireekshya Ramam, Muditamana paramam prahurshyamana/ Nisicharapathi Samakshyam vidhitwa, Suragana madhyo vachaswarethi/ (A meditative Lord Rama was about to commence the battle with Ravana and an all-knowing Sage Agasthya who joined Gods to witness the Great Battle assured that the victory would indeed be Lord Rama's for sure! This Sacred Hymn 'Adithya Hridayam' dedicated to Sun God is highly propitious, extinguishes all enemies, ushers Glorious Victory and is worthy of reciting always ensuring eternal bliss. This Holy Prayer is a guarantee to achieve Prosperity; destroys sins, anxieties and wavering thoughts as also secures long life with contentment. We pray to Sun God as He has fully risen on the sky and is revered by Devas for the high splendour providing to the entire Universe. He embodies the totality of Celestial Deities and is self-radiant nourished by His own rays and heat, energising the whole world with its inhabitants including all the Objects of God's creation. He is Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Skanda, Prajapathi, Mahendra, Kubera, Kala, Soma, and Varuna. He is Pitras, Vasus, Sadhyas, Asvini Kumars (Physicians of Gods), Marud Ganas responsible for breeze, Manu, Vayu, Agni, Prana, the Season Maker and Prabhakara, the Provider of radiance. He is the son of Aditi, Savitha, Surya, Traversor of Sky, the Energy to perform various things, the cause for rains, the One to create shining Golden rays and the Maker of the Day. He has propitiously green horses, emits innumerable rays, rides seven horses, dispels darkness, destroys life, enables rebirth and provides unending effulgence. He is the Sourcer of Gold, imparts coolness, provides heat, causes illumination, has fire within, praised by one and all, melts off snow and enjoys sky-wide rides. He is the Lord of the Sky; Master of Rig, Yajur and Sama Vedas; cause of heavy rains, friend of water and rapid traveller over Vindhya Mountains. He originates heat, causes death, provides shape to the Universe, assumes colour of gold, heats up everything, connoisseur of knowledge, loved universally, Manager of the Universe and Great Organiser. Our Salutations to Him who has Twelve Forms, is the Chief of Stars, Planets and Zodiac and the Great Illuminator. Our reverences to Him who rises from the East and sinks in the West, the Master of Jyotirganas, the Sovereign of the Days and the Lord of Objects that shines. Our veneration to Him the embodiment and basis of Victories and Eternal Rider of the memorable Green Horses, the immortal personality of Thousand Rays and the Illustrious Son of Aditi Devi. Greetings to Him, who is a terror to the Vicious, a hero to the admirers, a prompt and fast voyager of the Sky, an efficient opener of Lotus and an efficient Energiser of lives. Our worship to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as also Surya who is blessed with Aditi; He is ever shining, consumes everything and has a formidable form of Rudra! He destroys darkness, snow and enemies; has a huge body, devastates the ungrateful and the Lord of everything that shines. Our Salutations to Him who is yellow like molten gold, has the form of Fire, is the Creator of the World and the demolisher of ignorance; He endears one and all, and the ready witness to all! This God facilitates everything to grow and also demolishes; with His powerful rays, He generates extreme heat and also causes heavy rains! He is awake and active when everybody is fast asleep without even our knowing about it; He is the Fire Sacrifice Himself and also the

one who performs the Sacrifice too. All the pious tasks carried on in the Universe related to Vedas, Yagnas and Yagas are Lord Surya Himself. Hey Raghava, any one who recites this Hymn in praise of Adithya in times of danger or suffering or in wild forests, and in times of fear shall indeed cross over the problems for sure. Do worship this Lord of the Universe with single minded devotion and faith thrice and indeed the Victory shall be yours. Sri Rama, the Her of Heros, you shall annihilate the Demon Ravana in a second, thus said Sage Agasthya and left his way. On hearing this, Lord Rama became free from any sorrow and prepared Himself to execute the Prayer with utmost devotion; He cleaned Himself, did 'Achamana' thrice, lifted the bow towards Sun God and was excited with happiness to commence the Battle. He faced Ravana with the firm resolve to destroy the Demon. The Lord of Skies Bhagavan Adithya, along a bevy of Gods, blessed Rama to kill the Demon forthwith.]

Ashtami Tithi Nirnaya: *Shukla paksheshtami chaiva Shukla pakshe Chaturdashi, Purva viddhaana kartavyaa kartavyaa parasam yutaa/* (In the case of Purva Viddha occurring the Shukla Paksha Ashtami, or Shukla Paksha Chaturdashi, then para viddha or the subsequent Tithi be considered; for instance Kraishnaashtami, in Krishna Paksha Shravana month, Durga Puja on Ashvin Shukla Ashtami)

Krishna Ashtami nirnaya : *Shravane bahule pakshe krishnaashtami vratamn na karoti naroyantu bhavati krura raakshasah/ Shraavanasya cha maasasya krishnaashtaam- yaam naraadhipa, Rohini yadilabheta janyanti naamasaa tithih//* (He who does not observe Krishnaashtami Vrata on Shraavana Bahula ashtami is destined to be reborn as a cruel demon; if Rohini nakshatra also coincides on that day, performance of the Vrata is doubly effective and victorious!) *Shraavanevaa nabhasyevaa rohini sahitaashtami, yadaa krishna narairlabdhaa saa jayantiti keertitaa/* (Vashishya Samhita is quoted: Krishna paksha Ashtami in Shravana month or Bhadrapada coinciding with Rohini Star is renowned especially as highly significant) *Shraavanyaam proushapadyaam vaayadaa simham gatoravih, Jayantyaaraadhanam kuryaannatu karkata kanyaayoriti// Yasminvarshe Shraavane vaanabhasyevaa jayantina sambhavati, Tasmin varshe Shraavana maasa yeva krishnaashtami vratamanushtheyam//* (Jyotishaarnava prescribes that in the event of Shravana or Bhadrapada, Surya enters Simha raashi the Krishna jayanti be observed then only; also in a year if there is no coincidence of Rohini and Ashtami, then Krishnashtami be necessarily observed in Shravana month only) *Simharaashi gate Surye gagane jaladaakule, Maasiproshtha padoaushtamyaam artha raatre vidhudaye, Budhavaar vrisha lagne rohinyascharamaamshake, Shubye harshana yoge cha kaulavena yute tathaa, Vasudevena devakyaam aham jaatosmi padmaja/* (Varaaha Purana states that Lord Krishna declared that he would be born to Vasudeva and Devaki when Surya was in Simha Rashi, as the Sky looked thickly clouded, at the mid night of Bhadrapada months' s Krishna Ashtami as Chandra appeared, on a Wednesday in Vrishabha lagna, Rohini's last phase in Harshanamanugraha yoga with koulamvamanukarana!) *Yaihkritaa Shraavane maasi Ashtami Rohiniyutaa kimpunarudbudha vaarena somenaapi visheshatah// Ashtami Rohiniyuktaa nishyardhe yadi drishyate, Purvedyurnisheedhaaduur-dhvam aarabhyaparedyuh/ Nisheedhaadarvaak yaa samaapyte Ashtami, Tatra ubhaytra raatri samban - dhaat kutra upavaasa iti chet, Paredyureva upavaasah praatah sankalpa kaalamaarabhya pravatta - maanatvaat/* (Padma Purana explains about the great distinction of performing Krishnaashtami in Shravana month coinciding with Rohini and Monday or Wednesdays, especially if Moon is cited on Ashtami Rohini when the Vrata would yield outstanding results. Upavasa is best performed commencing from the previous night of Ashtami till the present night of Ashtami; in case Ashtami starts from the previous morning itself then the Upavas be observed on the nexr day.

[Varaha Purana is quoted again to qualify the worship of Ashta Matrikas and describes of their origin and importance: The entire Universe was upset by the wickedness and glaring transgression of morals by the uninterrupted evils displayed by Demon Andhakasura; Siva Purana states that Devi Parvati was playful with Maha Deva by closing His eyes tightly and from the Lord's perspiration on His forehead a boy of muscular strength was created. Eventually Andhakasura became the Unconquered King of the Lower Regions like Patala and tormented the entire Universe. After a series of battles were won with Devas who were driven away from the Heaven, Indra approached Brahma and Vishnu who too were ineffective to conquer the Demon as he was fortified with the boons of Brahma. They had finally approached Maha Deva and to His utter surprise He too could not conquer him as each time Maha Deva applied His trident against the Demon, blood streams of the Demon's body created endless number of Andhakasuras with each drop of his blood. Lord Rudra became so infuriated that from His face produced a mighty conflagration or an inferno-like flame viz. the Yogeshwari Shakti. Vishnu too created a highly powerful Shakti named Devi Vaishnavi and other Deities followed suit by creating their Shakti counter-parts viz. Brahmi from Brahma, Kaumari from Kartikeya, Mahendri from Indra, Yami or Pousnyam from Yama, Vaaraahi from Varaha Deva and Maheswari from Narayana. The Eight Matrikas represented the Eight Mind born Enemies viz. Kama or Desire from Yogeshwari, Krodha or fury from Maheswari, lobha or avarice from Vaishnavi, Mada or Ego from Brahmani, Moha or infatuation from Kaumari, Poushunya or wickedness from Yamadharani, Matsarya from Indrani and Jealousy from Varahi. The blood streams from Andhaka's body got dried up by the Matrikas; the Rakshasa Maya or the illusion created by the Demon was terminated and Andhaka too got exterminated. The combined strength of Matrikas is an extraordinary might of Eight Shaktis providing security and propitiousness to devotees and Lord Brahma declared 'Ashtami Thithi' in the Monthly Calendar. Those who observe this particular day with fast by eating 'Bel patra' with devotion are blessed with excellent health, well being and contentment.

Navami Tithi nirnaya: *Chaitra shuddhaatu Navami punarvasu yutaa yadi, Saitra madhyaahna yogena maha punyatamaabhavet/Shri Rama navamee proktaa koti Surya grahaadhikaa, tasmindine mahaa punye Rama muddhisya bhaktitah/ Yatkinchit kriyate Karma tadbhavatyakshaya kaaranam, Uposhanam jaaganam pitru nirdisya tarpanam, Tasmindinetu kartavyayam Brahmavaaptimabheepsubhih/* (Agastya Maharshi confirms that Chaitra Shuddha Navami if coinciding with Punarvasu nakshatra till the noon is ideal for observing Shri Rama Navami. Shri Rama Navami Vrata is far superior by a crore of observing a crore of Surya grahanas. On that day, even 'Rama maatra smarana' or memory of Shri Rama's sacred name would yield lasting significance; if Uposhana, Jaagarana and Pitru Tarpana are performed, these would result in never ending fruits!) [Varaha Purana then traces the highly rewarding worship of devotees of the outstanding significance of Navami Tithi worship and recalls the episode of how Durga Devi rescued the Universe: As a King of yore called Sindhudweep carried out a relentless 'Tapasya' to avenge the killing of his son by Indra, a beautiful woman approached him introducing herself as Vetravati (a River), the wife of Deity Varuna, since she was infatuated with the King. The King obliged and she was blessed with a boy instantly who was named Vetrasur who became a powerful King of Pragjyotishpuram, eventually the Lord of Saptadwipas and conquered all the Deities and Indra. Brahma wondered as to how a single Demon and followers could control the Deities and succeed to pierce through the ever potent and Universally spread out net of 'Maya' or the Adi Shakti! Even as Brahma was seriously thinking on these lines, there emerged from water a figure with white robes, bejewelled, head-gear, sheet of astonishing brightness, and eight arms wearing Chakra (Wheel), Saranga (Conchshell),

Gada (Mace), Paasha (chord), Khadga (Sword), Dhanush (bow) and Thuuneer (to keep arrows). It was child's play for **Devi Durga** as seated on a lion to slay the potent followers and of Vetrasura with ease and Maha Deva Shankara Himself complimented and praised as follows: 'Jayasva Devi Gayatri Maha Maaye Maha Prabho, Maha Devi Mahabhaage Maha Satve-Divyagandhanu liptanga Divyastragdhama bhushithe, Vedamatar namastubhyam Tryaksharasthey Maheswari, Trilokasthey Tri-tatvasthey Trivahnisthey Tri Sulini- Trinetreya Bhouma Vaktre cha Bhimanetre Bhayanake-Kamala asanaje Devi Sarasvati Namostutey, Namah Pankaja patrakshi Mahamayamrutastravey-Sarvagey Sarva Bhuteshu Swaahakaarey Swadembikey, Sampurnam Purnachandraabhey Bhasvaraangey Bhavodbhavye-Maha Vidye Maha Vaidye Maha Daityavinasini, Mahabuddhiryudbhavye Devi Veetashoke kiratini-Tvam nitistvam Mahabhaage Twam Gostvam Goustva- maksharam, Tvam Dhirastwam Sristatvam omkarastatve chapi Paristhitha'. (Hey Maha Maya, Mahaprabha, Mahabhaga, Mahotsava, Maha Devi Gayatri-My Greetings- your body parts smeared with Sandalwood paste and decorated with Divinely 'Mala', hey Veda Mata or Mother of Vedas and Maheswari, My Greetings! Hey Trilokastha, Tritatvastha, Tri vahnistha, Tri Sulini, Trinetra, Bhima Vaktra, Bhima netra, Bhayanaka, Kamalasan's daughter Sarasvati, My Greetings! Hey Maha Maya with Lotus like eyes, Omnipresent, Sarva Bhuteswari, Svahakara and Svadhakara Rupini Ambika; With Full Moon like Face and Illuminated Body, an embodiment of Knowledge and Medicine, Great Annihilator of Demons, Fund of Maha Buddhi, Sorrowless, Devi Kiratini, Mahabhaga, You are the personification of Morality, Sarasvathi, You are the origin of Sound and Undiminishing wisdom, you are the Courage, Omkarasthita and The Provider of Boons, I greet you). Lord Brahma requested Devi Durga to shift to Himalayas and let all the Deities worship Her. The Navami of each month should be celebrated with sincere dedication to Devi Durga by consuming only material made of wheat flour after observing day long fast till the evening and by reciting Durga Sukti as given above. For sure, men and women who keep this as a regular practice on Navami days would attract Devi Durga's kind attention.]

Dashaavataaraas: Each of these 'Avatara dinas' bestows enormous results viz. Matsya on Chaitra Krishna Trayodashi; Kurma on Jyeshtha Krishna Dvaadashi; Varaha on Chaitra Krishna Panchami; Narasimha on Vaishakha Shukla Charurdashi-Swaati nakshatra evening; Vaamana on Bhadrapada Shukla dvaadashi Shravana nakshatra; Parashu Rama on Margashira Krishna dviteeya; Shri Rama on Chaitra shukla navami punarvasu nakshatra; Bala Rama; Vaishakha Shukla triteeya; Krishna on Shraavana Krishnaashtami Rohini Nakshatra and finally Kalki on Bhadrapada Shukla Dviteeya. *Avatara dine punye Harimuddhisya bhaktitak, Upavaasaadi yatkinchit tadaanantyaya kalpate/* (Worshipping Maha Vishnu by observing Vratas and Upavasas in respect of any or all Incarnations of Him would indeed bestow Ananta Phala or Lasting Benefits!

Dashami Nirnaya: *Shukla pakshetithirgraahyaa yasyaamabhyudite Ravih, Krishna pakshetithirgraahyaa yasyaamastamito Ravih/* (Shankha Nirnaya states: To decide on Dashami Tithi in Shukla Paksha, Sun rise be considered and in Krishna Paksha Sun set be taken into account. Vijaya Dashami in Ashvini Shukla paksha as also Gangavatarana snaanas be observed accordingly. [Varaha Purana then refers to the need for worship to Dasha Dishas commencing from East to Agneya or South East- South to Nirruti or South West - West to Vayavya or North West - North to Ishanya or North East-plus the Sky and the Lower Lokaas. Concerned about the population of the Universe and their mind-set of Directions so that orderliness should prevail to let them realise where they were, Lord Brahma devised a Plan. He created from His ears Six Devis viz. Purvi, Dakshina, Prathichi, Uttara, Urdhva, and Adhara- East, South, West,

North, Above and Below respectively. The four other Devis thus created viz. Shobhaniya, Rupavati, Maha Bhagya Shalini and Gambhira Yukta represented the intermittent Four ‘Directions’. These virgins who were created requested Lord Brahma to name Lokpals also who would be the male counterparts and Brahma named them too viz. Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirruti, Varun, Vayu, Kubera and Eshana; Brahma Himself agreed to man Urdhva and the remaining Tenth Dasha (Direction) was spare. The Devi-Lokanayak equation was determined by Brahma. He also selected Dashami to observe the day for penance and eat only ‘Dahi’ or curd to protect human beings from movement of Grahas, changes of ‘Ayanas’ or Solar Progress and transformations of ‘Ritus’ or Seasons and astrological and astronomical differences].

Ekaadasha Nirnaya: *Ekaadashee sadoposhyaa pakshayoh Shukla Krishnayoh// Ekaa -dashyaam upavasevna kadaa chidati kramet, Nishkrutirmadyapa- syoktaa Dharma Shastre maneeshibhih, Ekaadasyannakaaasya nishkrutihkvaapinoditaa// Ati vedhaa Maha vedha vedhaasti dhishu smritaah, Savyepya vedhaa vigjneyaa vedhassuryodaye matah/* (Sanatkumara Samhita states: Ekadashi fasting is a must both in Shukla Paksha and Krishna Paksha; this regulation ought to be observed; those who resort to Madya paana or bhojana have no excuse of pardon at all! There is no need to consider Ati Vedhaa or Maha Vedhaa while determining Ekadasha Tithi but is adequate to ensure vedha if any at the time of Sun Rise!) *Yadecchedvishnu saayujyam sukham sampadamaatmanah, Ekaadashyaam na bhunjeeta pakshayo rubhayorapi// Dvaadashitithiralpaayadi nasyaatparehani, Dashami mishritaakaarya - anadoshsteeti vedhanah// Ekaadasheetu sampurnaa dvaadasheetu sampurnaa dvaadashi vridhhi gaamininanjali naama saa proktaa koto yagjna phalapraadaa// Adityehani samkra -antyaam ashitaikaadashhechucha, Vyati paate krite shraaddhe putrinopavashedgruhi// Shamani bodhani madhye krishnaikaadashi bhavet, Saivoposhya grihasthena naanyaakrishnaakadaachana//* (On the subject of Ekadashi, Vishnu Rahasya Grandha narrates the relevant stanzas: Those who aim at happiness, prosperity and ‘Vishnu Saayujya’ must necessarily abstain from food on both the Ekadashis. In case the following day is extended to Dvadashi or preceded by Dashami, Ekadashi fasting would be in order. If the whole day is of Ekadashi only plus some Dvadashi then the fasting is named ‘najanjuli’ and yields ‘koti yaginaphala. But ‘grihasthis’ or house holders are refrained from observing Ekadashi fasting on the days of Solar Eclipse, on shraddha days or on those who beget children on Shraddha days, on Ekadhis falling in Krishna paksha and on days of ‘Vyatipaata’. Further house holders are definitely required to observe fasting on Shayni Ekadashi, Utthaana or Bodhana Ekadashi.) *Chatusro ghatikaah praatah Arunodaya sangjnakaah, Chatushtaya vibhaagotra vedhaa- deenaam kiloditah, Arunodaya vedhasyaat saardhantu ghatikaatrayam/ Athavedopi ghatikaa pramaa sandarshanaarraveh mahavedhopitartaiva drishyaterkona drishyate, Tooriyastatravihitah yogah suryodaye budhhaih// Dashami shesha samyukto yadisyaad arunodayah, Nainoposhyam Vaishnavena tadvinaikaadashivratam//*(Brahma Vaivarta Purana states that in the context of early mornings, four ‘ghadiyas’ are stated to be relevant as called Vedhaa chatusraya: three and half ghadiyas are known as Arunodaya Vedha and the rest as Surya darshana; if Surya is not seen then also Mahavedha is stated to prevail as Tureeya Yoga. Now, in case there is dashami Sesta at the Sun Rise, Vaishnavaites normally perform Vrata without fasting) In this connection Narada states: *No poshyaa Dashami viddhaa sadaiva Ekadashi tithih, Taamupohya narajuhnaat punyam varsha shato bhavam/*(Fasting on Ekadashi with Dashami Viddha annuls the fruits of hundred years!) Be that as it may the Ekaadasha Vrata is outlined as follows: The Invocation states: *Dashami dinaarambha kaarsheham vratam tavaa, Tridinam Deva devesha nirvighnam kuru Keshava!* Or ‘Keshava! I resolve to observe the

Ekadasha Vrata for three days of Dashami-Ekadashi-Dvadashi; do kindly bless me to perform without any hindrance!’ Then the karta should observe Eha Bhukta or one simple meal a day with no fries and grams, keep restraint on excessive quantity of eating and drinking juices, observe celibacy and abstinence, observe silence, and declare: *Ekaadshyaam niraahaarobhutvaaha maparehani, Bhakshyaami Punareekaahsha sharanamme bhavaacchryutaa/* or Pundarikaaksha! I will fast on Ekadashi and break the fast on the following day; kindly ensure my health. With *namo Narayana Mantra* ringing in the ears form, the puja be performed with Deepa-Dhupa-Pushpa-Phala-Snaana of the Murti- yagnopaveeta-vastra-naivedya-arathi- mangala vaadya-geeta- nrityaadi upacharas and Ratri jagarana with japa-dhyana-pathana- gaana-nrityaadi krama till next day with patience, calmness and truthfulness followed by Punah Puja the next morning and Brahamana-vidyarthi bhojana the next noon!

[Narada Purana narrates as follows: Maharshi Vasishtha underlined the special connotation of Ekadashi Vrata to King Mandhata of Ikshavaku Clan and the ancestor of Lord Shi Rama. As Ekadashi was stated to be the Special Day of Vishnu, observance of ‘Upavasa’, ‘Puja’ and ‘Vrata’ on this day ought to be a pre-requisite to qualify the abolition of all the sins of a devotee. In fact, the advantage of performing the Vrata in full faith and high dedication as prescribed would secure the fruits of executing several Ashwamedha and Rajasuya Yagas, besides avoiding Yama Darshana! It is neither the Sacred Ganga, Gaya, Kashi, Pushkar, Kurukshetra, Narmada, Devika, Yamuna and Chandrabhaga that are stated to be more momentous than the Vrata. To signify the import of the Vrata, the Story of King Rukmangada was mentioned; he was in the habit of publicising through announcements on elephant tops the fact that the specific day was that of Ekadashi Vrata and all the citizens must observe fast, Puja, and penances as prescribed. The announcement was to alert that all the citizens in the age groups between eight and eighty five years ought to observe the fast and puja on that day and whosoever ate food and did not worship Vishnu would be liable for heavy punishment. Thus since a law was enforced, most of the citizens made a bee-line to Vishnu-dham and Lord Yama Dharma Raja became free and Chitragupta was jobless, as the paths leading to Yamaloka which were otherwise over-crowded had very few sinners in thin streams. Maharshi Narada made a visit to Yama loka and enquired of Dharma Raja as to why the hells which were highly noisy and bristling with tremendous activity became suddenly quiet and motionless! Dharma Raja informed Narada that King Rukmangada enforced ‘Upavas’ and Puja on Ekadashi days extended to Dwadashis also. As prompted by Narada, Dharma Raja accompanied by Chitragupta reached Lord Brahma and complained that King Rukmangada was creating obstacles in the discharge of their duties and as per the Book of Instructions in Naraka, those who did not discharge their responsibilities even receiving their remunerations and enjoying the benefits of their postings would become worms; those officials who were corrupt and negligent of duties would suffer in Narakas for hundred ‘Kalpas’ of time; those who perform a deed by cheating the Master would serve as mice in the house of the Master; and those officials who misuse the services of subordinates for their own personal benefit would become cats. In the background of the Rule Book, King Rukmangada was placing hardship in the discharge of the duties of the Officials; so complained Dharma Raja and Chitragupta. Lord Brahma replied that after all even by saying one word of ‘Hari’ by the tip of a person’s tongue, the Punya accrued would surpass that of Tirtha Yatras to Kurushetra and Kasi; if a person had done the Ekadasha Vrat then ‘Yagna Phalas’ would be surely accrued and as such the actions taken by King Rukmangada were worthy of emulation, but not of condemnation. Yama Raja too was basically agreeable, as Narayana Himself involved in this case. To overcome this peculiar situation of encouraging King Rukamanda’s efforts to popularise the ‘Ekadasha Vrata’ and at the same

time ensure that Dharma Raja's duties are not stalled, Brahma created a charming woman called 'Mohini' who enticed the King Rukmangada while seated near a famous Shiva Linga on top of Mandarachala in the Kingdom, singing a highly enchanting lyric. The King who excelled in Vishnu's worship and even succeeded that the out flow of his citizens to Vaikuntha far exceeded to that of Yamaloka asked his son Dharmanga to share the responsibilities of Kingship, but tutored him well in following the principles of Dharma, especially in performing the Ekadasha Vrata. He however conceded that there could be exceptions to observe the Vrata such as expectant mothers, Kumari Kanyas, persons suffering from diseases or with disturbed minds due to reasons beyond their control. Meanwhile, with the arrival of Mohini on the scene, King Rukmanga lost control of his senses and decided to marry her at any cost. She agreed but said that although she might not ask for anything including his entire Kingdom, the only condition however was that what ever she might ask for must be instantly agreed to by him. The King stated that he would never disagree to whatever she desired and as he belonged to the illustrious Ikshvaku Vamsa he would never lie in his life time. Mohini asserted that she was the daughter of Brahma and would not like to be wedded without 'Veda Sakshi'. On way to his Capital along with Mohini, a lizard came under the feet of the horse on which the King and Mohini were seated. The lizard was crushed and was about to die but talked in a female human voice and requested the King to bestow the 'Punya' that he earned from the Vijaya Dwadashi Vrata as earned by him recently so that she could attain Salvation; Mohini did not like the entire incident and asked the King to travel forthwith without wasting time; the merciful King ignored Mohini's wish and donated the Punya of the Dwadashi Vrata to the lizard; the latter narrated the account of her previous birth and used 'Vashikarana Mantra' so that her husband was under thumb always and hence her birth as a lizard yet with the memory of her previous life. On reaching his Palace, the son Dharmanga welcomed the new couple who were married, and openly conveyed his request to the father's earlier wives including his mother that whatever was instructed by Mohini should be considered as the King's personal instructions. But, there were quite a few personal insinuations that Mohini subjected to the King to show him down but he suffered. Both the Prince Dharmanga and his mother cooperated with Mohini whole-heartedly since they did not desire to hurt the King. But the blow came when Mohini insisted that the King should not fast on Ekadashi days! The King begged Mohini not to insist to do so since he observed the Vrata all through his life and in fact enforced a law among his subjects who adopted the habit through the entire Kingdom. There are so many sins like 'sambhog' on Amavasya, hair-cut on Chaturdashi and use of oil on Shashthi which are balanced by fasting on Ekadashi; giving wrong evidences, cheating the management of Establishments being served, obstructing wedding proposals of unmarried Kanyas, ingratitude, breaking promises of charity to Brahmanas, 'Manikut' or selling fake jewellery against market prices, 'Tulakut' or incorrect use of 'Sensitive Balances' while selling material, 'Kanyakut' or arranging a blemished girl, etc. are too excused by Ekadashi fasting. But Mohini was unconvinced and insisted against Ekadashi Vrata and blamed the King to break the promises to her at their wedding time. She even argued with several Brahmanas and Rishis like Gautam that only Sanyasis or widows are justified to undertake fastings on Ekadashi. King Rukmangada's senior wife Sandhyavali too tried to convince Mohini not to insist on husband's observing Eakadasi Vrata / taking food against his wishes and cited the examples of 'Pativratas'. In turn, Mohini asked Sandhyavali that in case the King did not agree to observe the Ekadashi Upavas, then she (Sandhyavali) might as well ask the King to lift his sword to cut the Prince Dharmangada's head and throw into her (Mohini's) lap! The son Dharmangada happily agreed to the proposal of getting killed rather than letting his father down and forcing him to break the Ekadashi Vrata. As the King was rather prepared to cut his own son's head,

Mohini became unconscious. Just at that time, Bhagavan Vishnu appeared and bestowed Vaikuntha not only to the King, but to the Prince and the Queen Sandhyavali for their firm convictions and steadfastness to cling to Virtues as great and memorable examples to the world thus vindicating the magnitude and high value of the Ekadashi Vrata to the posterity. The hapless woman Mohini when regained consciousness found the dead bodies of the King, Sandhyavali and Dharmangada and was totally shocked and almost deranged, even as the Purohit of Rukmangada sprinkled water from his vessel and cursed her that she would be burnt into ashes. Vayu Deva refused to take away her soul which when reached on the path of heavens and even hells, her entry was denied. Her tormented soul was refused entry into the Patala and other lower lokas too. Finally, the Raja Purohit of Lord Brahma, called Vasudeva, took pity on the devastated, shamefully shaken and highly repentant soul of Mohini, revived her human form and sought to provide a fresh lease of life as a part of reformation process by describing the ‘Mahimas’ of the soul purifying Ganga ‘Snaan’ and observance of ‘Nakta Vratas’, Shiva Pujas, Shivaradhana on successive Purnima and Amavasya fastings, and Tirtha Yatras to Gaya for Pindadaanas for five days, Avamukti Kshetra, Purushottama Kshetra in Utkala Desha for darshan of Bhagavan Krishna, Balarama and Subhadra, darshanas of Bhagavan Nrisimha, Sweta Madhava, Matsya Madhava, Kalpa Vriksha, Prayaga Kshetra, Kuru Kshetra, Ganga Dwara (Hari Dwara), Badarikashrama, Siddhanatha Kamakshi, Prabhasa Kshetra, Pushkara, Panchavati, Pubdaripura, Gokarna, Lakshmanachala, Setu Kshetra, Narmada, Avanti, Mathura and Brindavana; ultimately Mohini having performed different kinds of ‘Prayaschittas’ (atonements), performed ‘Mantra Yukta Yamuna Pravesha’ or dissolution into the Holy River of Yamuna along with appropriate recitation of Mantras. Such was the story of Ekashi Vrata!]

An additional aspect of how Lord Kubera has also been revered on Ekadashi days is given in Varaha Purana too as follows: In the process of Creation, Brahma happened to bellow and the wind inside His body got momentarily disconnected when a Divine Figure was materialized from the gush of air from His mouth. Brahma named the Figure as Kubera and assigned him the task of protecting the material prosperity and possessions of all the Deities. He also made Kubera the Head of the Yaksha Clan to execute the assignment of Brahma. Also, worship of Kubera on Ekadashi day by cooking eats with the help of clean Agni- preferably by the person who eats himself after day-long fast would instantly make him eligible for wealth and also protection of wealth so earned.

Satya Narayana Vrata: One of the most popular Vratas observed across the length and breadth of Bharat, especially on Ekaadashis is of the Lord of Eternal Truth popular as Satya Narayana. This is observed by all sections of Hindus with no restriction of caste and creed. Bhavishya Purana is quoted about the proceedings of the Vrata and significantly enough of the Stories of Past who had very successfully observed the vrata and the huge benefits that accrued to them: *Satyavratam Satyaparam Trisatyam Satyasya yonim nihitam cha Satyey, Satyasya Satyamrita Satyanetram Satyaatmikam twaam Sharanam prapannah/Antarbhavenanta bhavantamevahyatatya janto mrigayanti santah, Asantama pya ntyahimantarena Santam gunamtam kimu yanti santah/* (The objective of accomplishing Sacchinaananda Paramaatma is to perform Satya Narayana Vratam- which is the vehicle full of Truth, always absorptive of Truth, True-visioned and Truth-Souled; I seek refuge in Swami Satyanarayana! The fact that all human beings seek ‘Satya Tatva’ or the Consciousness of Truth is indeed transparent and patent; it is also clear that selfless dedication to Satya Narayana is the ultimate goal!) Vyasa Deva narrated that Sage Shounaka requested Sutha Maha Muni on behalf of a congregation of Munis at Naimisharanya as to which would be the most effective and none-too-complicated method of Realisation of Paramatma! Maha Muni Suta

instanly took the name of Satyanarayana and prayed to him as follows: *Navaambhojanetram Ramakelipaattram Chaturbaahu chaameekaram chaarugaatram/ Jagatraana hetum ripow dhumraketum sadaa Satyanaraayanam stoumi Devam* (I pray to Bhagavan Satyanarayana who has the enchanting eyes of delicate and fully opened Lotus, who is deservingly playful with Bhagavati Lakshmi, who possesses four shapely arms and stunningly shimmering Physique of gold and the Unique Source of Might to shield the Universe against Evil Forces!) *Shri Ramam Saha Lakshmanam Sakarunam Seetaanvitam Satvikam, Vaidehimukhapadma lubdha mathupam Poulasya samhaarakam/ Vandey Vandya padaambujam Suravaram Bhaktaanukampaakaram, Shatrughnena Hanumantaacha Bharatena sevitam Raghavam* (I salute with reverence Bhagavan Shri Rama who is the epitome of benevolence, whose lotus-like feet are always worshipped, who readily responds to devotees with mercy, who retains Lakshmana with Him and is accompanied by Devi Sita while benignly glancing at her lotus-like graceful face; who is worshipped by Shatrughna, Hanuman and Bharata; who is the destroyer of Poulasya, and the Symbol of Truth and Virtue as the Supreme of Devas).

Sutha Maha Muni then proceeded to narrate the **First Katha (Episode)** of Devarshi **Narada** who having gone around the World in his periodic visits came down to Martya Loka (Bhu Loka) and felt sad that human beings were suffering a lot without any relief from their miseries; he approached Vishnu Deva and prayed for a solution to offer to the human beings who were constant targets of diseases, poverty, natural calamities and discontentment. Lord Vishnu replied instantly that the easiest and effective means of providing reprieve from human sufferings would be the sincere performance of Satyanarayana Vrata; genuine and heartfelt observance of this Vrata would indeed effect in endowing with wealth to the unfortunate, excellent children, Kingdoms to those who lost their positions, good quality vision to the blind, freedom to those who were imprisoned, courage to the frightened and fulfillment of one's wants long cherished. The brief procedure of executing the Vrata is to make a firm resolve to do so without hindrances, keep a Tulasi Manjari in hands and pray to Shrihari as follows: *Narayanam saandraghanaava daantam, Chaturbhujam peetamaarvaasasam/ Prasanna vaktram Navakanja lochanam, Sanandanaadyaika rupa sevitam bhaje/ Karomi the Vratam Deva saayamkaaley twadarchanam, Shrutva Gaadhaam twadeeyam hi prasaadam tey bhajaamyaham/* (Bhagavan Narayana! You possess dark-cloud complexion, grand four arms, tranquil appearance, attractive eyes like fresh lotus, and worshipped by Sanaka Sanandana and other well-known Sages; I am always dedicated in my sincere devotion to You and have determined to perform puja by this evening and then only secure your 'Prasad' (blessings). Thereafter, commence the formal worship with five 'Kalashas' and instal Satyanarayana 'Pratima' in gold or silver or as per one's convenience. The Puja would be according to 'Purusha Sukta Mantra vidhana' by way of the prescribed '**Shodasopacharas**' viz. 'Avaahayami' (Invocation), 'Suvarna Simha Samarpana' (improvising a Golden chair), 'Padyam' (washing the Deity's feet), 'Arghyam' (providing water to clean His hands), 'Aachamaneeyam' (offering water for sipping), 'Suddhodaka Snaana' (bathing the Deity's Pratima with appropriate Mantra), 'Vastra Yugmam' (offering double clothing), 'Yagnopaveetam' (Providing the Sacred Thread), 'Gandham' (offering Sandal Paste), then 'Puja' by reciting the Names of Satyanarayana /Vishnu, either sixteen or hundred sixteen or thousand hundred sixteen, along with flowers or Tulasi leaves only by men and 'Akshatas' or rice grains mixed with turmeric powder, 'Dhupam' (Incense material), 'Deepam' or lighting of oil-soaked cotton vicks, 'Puspham' or a variety of fragrant flowers; 'Naivedyam' or a full meal as Prasada comprising 'Bhakshya' or Sweets and Savouries, 'Bhojya' or cereals and preparations, 'lehya' or items of tongue-licking type, 'Choshya' or items taken in

as liquids and ‘Paneeya’ or drinks; ‘Tambula’ or betel leaves and betel nuts’, ‘Neerajanam’ or camphor lighting shown to Deity with the accompanying sounds of bells, ‘Matra Pupshpam’ / Vedic Chanting, ‘Pradakshina’ or circumambulation, ‘Saastanga Namaskara’ or reverential prostration along with ‘Aparaadha Mantra’ to say that the Puja so performed was incomplete with accepted mistakes and should be forgiven. The worship should climax with ‘Chatram’ or symbolic holding of umbrella, ‘Chamaram’ or symbolic fanning to the Deity, ‘Nrittyam’ or devotional ecstasy displayed in dance form, ‘Geetam’ or devotional singing in praise of Satyanarayana, ‘Andolika’ or symbolic swinging of Deity in a decorated swing; ‘Ashwaarohana’ and ‘Gajaarohana’ or symbolic rides of the Lord on horses and elephants and all other possible ‘Upacharas’ or Devotional Services devoid of capacity, devotion, ‘Mantram’ or requisite formality and attention! At the End, the following Mantra be recited while performing ‘Homa’ or offering to Agnihotra atleast hundred and eight times, viz. Namoh Bhagavatey nityam Satyadevaaya dheemahi, Chatuh Pradaatha daatrey cha Namastubhyam Namoh namah (My humble salutations to You Satyanarayana to whom we meditate always; You are the Master and Donor of the Four Kinds of ‘Purusha Arthaas’ viz. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha’; do grant us the same to us too). By so saying, Devarshi Narada left for Satya loka with the resolve of performing Satya Narayana ‘Puja’ as soon as possible. Suta Maha Muni then narrated **Second Katha** (Episode) signifying the ‘Mahatmya’ of Bhagavan Satyanarayana to the Sages who convened at Naimisharanya: In the city of Kashi, there was a pious, learned and poor Brahmana, called **Shatananda** with his wife and children, eking his livelihood by ‘Yayavaara’ or begging for rice from door to door. During his rounds of begging, an old Brahmana approached Shatananda and advised that instead of begging to look after his family, he should certainly perform the formal worship of Bhagavan Satyanarayana who was like a boat in the deep waters of ‘Samsara’. By so saying the old Brahmana disappeared and there was a stunning and dazzling figure of Narayana Himself standing before Shatananda with Shankha, Chakra, Gada and Saranga! The Brahmana got utterly shocked, instantly prostrated and prayed to Bhagavan as follows: Bhagavan Satyanarayana! You are the Cause and the Cause-Maker of the Universe, the Saviour of the Hapless, the Provider of Propitiousness, the Last Resort of Shelter and Protection, the Epitome of Virtue, the Form of Purity and Auspiciousness, the Invisible yet Visible, the destroyer of the ‘Tapatrayas’ of Adhi Bhautika, Adhi Daivika and Adhyatmika Nature; the Designer and the Design of the Universe as well as its final Demolisher; the Unique Provider of the Best of the World; today I am the most contented as my life’s unknown and impossible desire has been achieved and what is more that I have heard Your Voice; could there be a bigger miracle that very effortlessly this dream has really come true! When asked by Shatananda as to the procedure of performing the Vrata, Bhagavan replied that there was no need for ample money to perform it, but it would involve endless devotion and sincerity of purpose. What ever daily earnings that might be secured on account of pleading for food that day would be sufficient, with which to fetch the Puja material required for sugar, milk, gandha, flowers, fruits, dhup / deepa, betel leaves and coconuts and after Puja, the Prashad be shared with Brahmanas, family members, neighbours, relatives and others irrespective of caste, creed and social status. Bhagavan further asked that the Vrata be popularised along with the details of the Procedure and the Mantras to be utilised for it among Kings, Merchants and all the Commoners so that they too would get the advantage. By so saying, the Lord disappeared and on the following day, Shatananda took a resolve to perform the Vrata to the best of his ability and on receiving double the amount than his daily earnings, secured the material as required and managed the Vrata very well. He strained every breath of his to popularise the purpose, procedure and reward of observing the Vrata and eversince then, Satyanarayana Vrata became popular all over since

quick rewards started flowing in; thus there emerged universal acceptance and popularity of the most famous Satyanarayana Vrata. On his part, Shatananda attained recognition and social esteem not only in Kashi but all over wherever Hindu Faith prevailed and after his end his Soul got absorbed into Bhagavan. The **Third Katha** related to the King of Badari Khanda named **Chandrachuda** at Manipurak Nagara who was highly virtuous, soft spoken and popular among his Subjects. He was a devout 'Vishnu Bhakta'. But, the Mlecchas of Vindhya Desha attacked Chandrachuda who having been defeated in a fierce battle had to flee into forests and strayed into Kashi Nagara and discovered that the entire population was highly contented and enjoyed quality life devoid of diseases, untimely deaths, robberies and natural calamities. He then came to realise that the key to the all round happiness of Kasi was entirely due to the constant observance of Satya Narayana Vrata and that the Originator of this Sacred Vrata was a Brahmana called Sadananda (Shatanand) who had the Vision of Bhagavan Vishnu Himself. Chandrachuda approached Sadananda and secured his 'Upadesha' of the Format, Content, Method and the instant Fruit of the Vrata and immediately performed the Vrata sincerely. Bhagavan Satya Narayana appeared before the King and presented a powerful Sword to use against the Mlecchas who had forcefully occupied his throne and Kingdom. The King thanked Sadananda profusely and having reassembled his army devastated six thousand Mlecchas, retrieved his Kingdom and the lost prestige, thanks to the observance of Satya Narayan Vrata. Back to his throne, King Chandrachuda prevailed on all his Subjects to perform Satya Narayana Vrata as often as possible and before all Auspicious Tasks like Weddings, Birth days and Nama Karana functions were initiated and most definitely on every Purnima day of each month. The King ruled his Kingdom with great veneration for Satya Deva for sixty long years having built a new Capital and ultimately reached Vishnu loka leaving behind a great heritage of peace, prosperity and lasting fame. The **Fourth Episode** was of Bhills/ Nishadas (Wood cutters) who happened to visit Kashi Nagar to sell their wood, got lost in the City and approached the Hermitage of Vishnu Das (Shatananda) as they felt thirsty. They were impressed with an on-going worship in the Hermitage, even as Vishnu Das not only quenched their thirst but also encouraged witnessing the proceedings of Satya Narayana Vrata. The Nishads took the Prasad at the conclusion of the Vrata with humility and high devotion and tried to take leave of Vishnu Das. The latter enquired whether they would also like to perform the Vrata and the Nishads exclaimed that it was not possible for them to do so; they said that performance of a Puja was not only expensive but they were completely illiterate and could never observe this kind of a complicated Puja in their life time ever! *Satyanarayana Vrata is neither expensive nor complicated*; what is significant is the devotion and commitment rather than riches nor knowledge. This was made amply clear to the Bhills; he said that Lord Krishna while visiting Hastinapura did not accept the Chief Guest Status of Duryodhana but stayed in the humble cottage of Vidura instead! Krishna again took away the 'tandulakanas' (rice-fries) from Sudama (Kuchela) with affection and bestowed such wealth that was not in the reach of Kings even; similarly He was so close to the illiterate and innocent Gopas and Gopis but kept aloof from even Great Sages! Having said this, Vishnu Das prescribed a simple and straight-forward format of observing the Vrata and enabled the Bhills to perform the worship in an effortless and easy way which even unintelligent children could follow provided however their hearts were transparent and Bhakti was paramount. The community of Bhills was thus prompted and encouraged by Vishnu Das, whereby they started earning by the sale of wood and gained profits and confidence in course of time. Eventually, their devotion became intense and their life-style changed so much that took firm steps towards attainment Vishnu Loka!

The Fifth Episode centered on a Vaisya called Sadhu and his son-in-law. The famous King Chandrachuda of Manipuraka Nagar referred to in the Third Episode above was once performing Satya Narayana Puja along with a large number of followers, when a wealthy Vanika from Ratnapur landed by his ship filled up with considerable riches. When the highly decorated Puja Mandap, Sadhu enquired as to what was going on at that busy Place, he was told that Satyanarayana Vrat was being performed under the auspices of Chandrachuda Maharaj along with several other devotees. Sadhu was also interested as he had no offspring and thus joined the group and prayed to Satya Narayana to bless him with a child. The Sabhapati was conveyed of the wish of the Vanika and as though Bhagavan Himself approved the wish, the desire was approved but on the condition that soon after securing a child he should perform the Vrata in a manner that would become of the rich Vanika. In course of time, Sadhu's wife conceived and a female child was born. The Name-Giving Function was celebrated with great pomp and show of the wealthy Vanika and the baby was named Kalavati after consultations of her 'Kundalini'. The wife of Vanika reminded of Sadhu's promise that now that they were blessed with a child, the Vanika should recall the promise made by him to perform Satya Narayana Vrata. He kept on delaying the fulfillment the promise somehow. Meanwhile, Kalavati was growing into a fine girl and Vanika commenced searching for a suitable bridegroom; *Ashta varsha bhaved Gauri Nava varsha cha Rohini, Dasa varsha bhavet Kanya tathah proudhaa Rajaswala* (An eight year old girl is known as Gauri and a Nine Year old is Rohini, a ten year old is said to be a Kanya and Proudha having come of age suitable for marriage!). Thus Vanika Sadhu planned for Kalavati's wedding first rather than redeeming the promise made to Satya Narayana Deva. A suitable son-in-law named Sankhapati who was very rich too was selected as Kalavati's husband. After the wedding, Sadhu kept his son-in-law in his own house as his business partner and the joint business flourished well. On the reminder of Sadhu's wife about the promise to perform Satya Narayana Vrata, Sadhu postponed again till his daughter's securing a child. A few days later, Sadhu accompanied by his son-in-law undertook a business tour beyond River Narmada. They stayed out for long and the promise to perform the Vrata was almost forgotten. As though Bhagavan got angry about the callousness of Sadhu in redeeming his promise about the Vrata, the two-some of in-laws faced considerable difficulties in the business and on their return journey back home stayed at a Guest house overnight and at that very night there was a theft in the King's Palace and both Sadhu and son-in-law got entangled as they were strangers there and got imprisoned; moreover, there was expensive pearl-necklace found on the body of the son-in-law of Sadhu. While the two were languishing in the prison awaiting judgment for robbery, there was a theft in Sadhu's house at his native place and both Kalavati and daughter suddenly turned as paupers and were some how eking their existence.

In the **Sixth Katha**, Suta Maha Muni explained that Bhagavan Vishnu could utilise the means of 'Tapatrayas' viz. Adhyatmika, Adhi Daivika and Adhi-Bhoutika forms to punish a human being when a person would go astray from 'Dharma'; in the case of Vanika Sadhu, the promise to execute Satya Narayana Vrata was wantonly ignored. Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi Devi had four sons viz. Dharma, Yagna, King and Thief and Lakshmi was equally fond of all of them. The charity given to Brahmanas and Guests is of the form of Dharma which targets Money; the Deva Yagna and Pitru Yagna are of the forms of Yagnas and in this case too Money is involved; a King who is responsible to safeguard both Dharma and Yagna also aims at Rajya Lakshmi and finally a 'Chor' (Thief) too is after Money in the final analysis. In the case of Vanika Sadhu, he was basically a Thief as he did not redeem his pledge to Satya Narayana Himself and hence there were two thefts were involved-one by way of suspicion by the King and another a theft in Sadhu's own residence. Thus the victims of the unhappiness of Satya Narayana

were all the members of Sadhu's family, thus analysed Suta Muni about the consequences. Be that as it might, Kalavati could not withstand her hunger and approached a Brahmana's house where a Vrata of Satya Narayana was being observed; she returned home late along with the 'Prashad' or the remains of the Offering to the Deity at the Puja. The mother was annoyed that Kalavati returned home late but as was conveyed by Kalavati that the delay was due to a Satya Narayana Vrata; Kalavati was then reminded of the lapse that occurred in not performing the Vrata and approached a past companion's house and begged money for performing the Vrata. Her companion replied that in the heydays of Kalavati, the latter gave a loan which would now be returned. Thus, Kalavati performed the Vrata as prescribed and Swami Satyanarayana was indeed satisfied. As a result, Vishnu Deva came into the dreams of the King who kept Sadhu and son-in-law in his custody; the former ordered the King to free the alleged prisoners, Sadhu and Shankhapati at once. Next morning the King called the Minister about the strange dream of Satya Narayana and his instruction to the King. The Minister called the Prisoners and found out their full antecedents. The King apologised to Sadhu, gave lot of money and freed them. Sadhu and son-in-law got back to their ship but even now there was no hint of remorse for not having performed the Vrata. Bhagavan took the form of a Hermit near the Ship and asked Sadhu and his son-in-law as to what was in the Ship. As a matter of fact there were many valuables forcefully taken by the King's soldiers from the Ship and since restored, besides many gifts from the King to them when released after their imprisonment. But Sadhu and son-in-law mocked at the Hermit and replied that the ship contained only dried leaves and grass and there was nothing worthy of donating to him. The hermit replied: 'Tadhasu' (So be it!). Sadhu and son-in-law really and literally discovered dried leaves and grass, instead of the valuables in the Ship! They were stunned and searched for the hermit and fell on his feet. The hermit reprimanded Sadhu by recalling all the incidents when Sadhu first encountered the 'Pratima' (Idol) of the Satya Narayana at the Palace of King Chandrachuda; he prayed for a child and pledged that he would perform Satya Narayana Vrata befitting his status but on getting a child he did not do so; he said that when the child grew of age and after her wedding, he would perform the Vrata but again he did not; he asked for lot of wealth which was also granted, but still he did not redeem the pledge; when he was imprisoned and sought help then too, did not; when he was let free from the prison and Bhagavan's help was sought even then he never thought that Bhagavan gave the help; now too, he lied and said there was nothing for charity in the ship except grass and dried leaves! Sadhu fell flat on his knees, displayed genuine shame and repentance and prayed as follows: *Satya Swarupam Satyasandham Satya Narayanam Harim, Yatsatyatvena Jagatastvam Satyam twaam Namaamyaham/ Twanmayaa mohitat-mano na Pashyayantyatmanah Shubham, Duhkaambhodhou sadaa magna Duhkhecha Sukhamaaninah/ Moodhoham Dhana garvena Madaandheekruta lochanah, na jaane swaatmanah Kshemam kathampashyaami Mudhadhih/ Kshamaswa mamadouraatmyam tapodhaamne Hare Namah, Aajnaapayatmadaasyam me yena tey charanow smarey/* (Satya Swarupa! Satyasandha! Satya Narayana Bhagavan Hari! Human Beings tend to become victims of 'Maya' (Illusion) and get victimised with the thoughts that happiness is in the deep Oceans of 'Samsara' and seek to attain those momentary joys; persons like me become arrogant and ego owing to small amounts of wealth and imagine no end of themselves foolishly; You are well-known as ever-merciful to those who are repentant. Mahatma! Could You not provide me one chance of correcting myself to devote my entire Self at the lotus-like feet of yours!). Bhagavan Satya Narayana, the ever-compassionate replied positively and blessed the Vanika. A few days later, the ship of Sadhu sailed off and a message reached Kalavati that her husband was arriving ashore soon. She was so excited that the concluding part of the Satya Narayana Vrata being performed

was ignored and did not even secure the ‘Prasada’ presented to Bhagavan as the ‘Naivedya’ and ran off to welcome the husband. But as soon as the ship was cited from a distance, she witnessed the horror of the sinking ship! Kalavati fell unconscious and after recovering her senses prepared herself to immolate in a Fire- Pit. As she was about to jump into the Fire, a Celestial Voice was heard saying that Kalavati who was already performing the Vrata did the unpardonable indiscretion of ignoring the Prasada and hence the calamity of the sinking ship, but if she went back to the house and took the Prasada with veneration, then the situation might change for the better! Kalavati was ashamed of her and did the amends at once; the sinking ship stood up and got anchored safe. There was a happy reunion of the family. Indeed, none could ever ignore the Lord who is other-wise ever-forgiving, considerate and clement! In Kali Yuga, the most fruitful, effective and instantly result-oriented worship is indeed that of **Satya Narayana Vrata**, undoubtedly.

Dwaadashi nirnaya: *Shuklaava ayadivaa Krishnaa dvadashi shravanaanvita, Tayorevopavaasasch a trayo dashyaantu paaranam/ Chaturmuhurtam dwaadashyaam aadyamekaadashi tuthou, Ante chatur muhur - tam yattatkaalam Harivaasaram, Nakaaryam paaranam tatra Vishnuprenana tatparaih//* (Brahmarshi Narada affirms that Dwaadashi Tithi either in Shukla Paksha or Krishna Paksha needs to be united with Shravana nakshatra worthy of observing ‘upavasa’ and also ‘Paarana’ is required to be observed only on the following Trayodashi. More over, those who are genuine devotees of Vishnu should not perform paarana during ‘Hari vaasara’ time ie. During the last four muhurthas of Ekadashi and the first four muhurthas of Dwaadashi) *Yadaatvalpaadvaadashi syaadapa -karsho bhujor bhavet, Praatarmaadhyaanikasyaapi tatrasyaadapakarshanam/* (Garuda Purana states that if Dwaadashi prevails a bit in the early morning hours, then one could quickly execute morning and noon rituals and give up dvadashi upavaasa therebefore and this kind of alternative is called ‘apkarshana’) Devala Maharshi states: ‘ *Sanghate vishame prapte dwaadashyaam paaranam kathaim, Adbhistu paaranam kuryaat punar bhuktam na dishakrit/* (Devala Maharshi provides a convenient alternative that in extreme situations, ‘paarana’ before Dwaadashi ghadiyas be executed and ‘uopashya’ be called off too. Incidentally, there are eight kinds of Maha dwadashis: that tithi which is predominantly Ekadashi but extends into Dwaadashi is called Unmeelani dwadashi; that which is Shuddha or of Shukla paksha extending to the next phase of krishna paksha is called ‘Vaangjuli; if Ekadashi occurs at Suryodaya and extends upto the next morning’s Trayodashi then the Maha Dwaadashi is called Tridarshi Dwaadashi; if Dwaadashi extends towards Darshani/Amavasya or Pournamithen that is named Paksha vardhini; if it is with Pushyami then it is called Jaya dwaadashi; with Shravana then Vijaya, with Punarvasu then Jayanti and with Rohini then paapanaashani! Upavaasaas on these Dwaadashis are stated to be extremely fruitful!

Shukla Paksha Dwaadashi Vratas from Margashirsha to Kartika Months: Narada Purana commends the specified Shukla Dwaadashis: Sage Narada desired to ascertain the procedure of performing monthly Dwaadashi Vratas from Sanaka Kumara with a view to enlightening the normal Public; Bhagavan Vishnu is pleased easily with devotees performing Vratas by way of ‘Puja’(worship), ‘Dhyana’(meditation), ‘Bhajan’ (collective singing) and ‘Stutis’ with ‘Shraddha’ (sincerity) and ‘Bhakti’ (Devotion). Indeed it is not essential to execute ‘Yagnas’ and ‘Tapas’ involving considerable rituals and complications, but simple Pujas by merely taking the name of Bhagavan. Such Vratas have far reaching impact for fulfilling desires in ‘Iham’ or the on-going life and attainment of Mukti in ‘Param’ or post-life. On Shukla Dwaadashi in **Margashirsha** month, a devotee needs to observe fasting and silence and perform dutiful worship with Gandha (Sandalwood paste), Pushpa (flowers), Akshata (rice grains mixed with turmeric

powder), Dhupa (Incense), Deepa (Light), Naivedya (offering of food items and fruits) and such other Upacharas (Services), while reciting the simple Mantra at each service viz. *Keshavaya namastubhyam*. By reciting the same Mantra, one should offer hundred eight oblations to Agni Deva with ghee mixed with til (sesame seed) oil, keep awake through night ensuring the lights are lit and perform three 'Abhishekas' (bathing by milk the Salagram / Pratima representing Bhagavan Vishnu along with Maha Lakshmi) followed by three 'pujas' with a gap of three hours along with the Upacharas of Dhupa, Deepa, Naivedya etc. as also devotional music and dances in praise of Bhagavan. Next morning, after ablutions and bathing, maintaining external and internal cleanliness), one should Puja again and offer 'Kheer' (boiled milk and cooked rice with jaggery) along with coconut / fruits and 'dakshina' (cash) to the Brahmana engaged for the Vrata or otherwise), while reciting the following Mantra: *Keshavam Keshiha Devah Sarva Sampat pradaayakah, Paramaanna pradaanena mama swadishtadayakah/* (Keshava! You had destroyed the Keshi named Daitya; You are the provider of boons to me to receive all kinds of wealth; I am hereby giving away charity of Quality Anna to a Brahmana). After the 'daana', satisfy the Brahmana with good food and eat along with family and friends with devotion and silence. Conclusion of the Vrata on the above would fetch the 'Punya' of eight Paundarika Yagnas. On Shukla Paksha Dwadashi of **Pousha** Month, a devotee should observe fasting and silence as also perform Puja to Narayana as above by continuously reciting the Mantra *Om Namō Narayanaaya* and provide Naivedya of 'Kheer' along with fruits. Jaagaran (keeping awake through out the night), performing three Pujas as also intermittent musicals and 'nrityas' of devotional kind in exalting Bhagavan's deeds and miracles are observed. Next morning after the Punah Puja (repeat worship), give away 'daana' of 'Khichidi' (cooked rice / wheat grains and vegetables) along with dakshina by reciting the Mantra: *Saravatmaa Sarva Lokeshah Sarva Vyaapi Sanaatanah, Narayanah Prasannah Syat Kushaanna pradaanatah/* (May Narayana - who is the Soul present in every body, the Over Lord of the Universe, the All Pervasive and the Timeless-be contented as I am offering the daan of 'Khichidi' along with dakshina). Then full meals are organized to Brahmanas and eat the food later along with family and friends; observance of this Vrata would secure the fruits of executing eight Agnishtoma Yagnas. Observing a Madhava Vrata as above with fast and devotion, the Shukla Dwadashi Vrata of '**Magha Maasa**' is also performed, while the devotee offers eight oblations to Agni Deva with ghee by reciting the Mantra *Namastey Maadhavaaya*, performs 'Abhisheka' (Bathing) to Bhagavan Madhava and Puja as above with Gandha, Pushpa, Akshata etc. followed by 'Jaagaran', three Pujas during the night and 'Punah Puja' next morning. With a view to destroying sins, 'daana' of til, clothing and dakshina should be given away by reciting the following Mantra: *Maadhavah Sarva Bhutaatmaa Sarvakarma phala pradah, Tila daaneyna mahata Sarvaan kaamaan prayachhatu/* (Bhagavan Lakshmipati! You are the bestower of all of our desires and the Omni-Present Supreme Soul; kindly be contented with this Maha Daan of Tilas and fulfill our wishes too). The Vrata is concluded by organizing satisfactory food and Dakshina to Brahmanas. By performing the Vrata as above, the devotee is qualified for the 'Punya' of executing hundred Vajapeya Yagnas. **Phalguna** Shukla Paksha Dwadashi Vrata of Govinda is observed with the key Mantra of *Govindaaya Namastubhyam* along with one hundred and eight oblations of Til and Ghee into the Fire Place; 'Snaan' to Govinda; formal worship with the services, day-night fasting, jaagaran and three Pujas in the night as described above. Next morning, after Punah Puja along with the prescribed 'Upacharas' (Services), daana is given away to a Brahmana comprising four big measures of food grains while reciting the Mantra as follows: *Namo Govinda Sarvesha Gopikaajana vallabha, Anena Dhaanya daanena Preeto bhava Jagadguro/* (Govinda! Sarveshwara! Gopi Vallabha! Kindly be pleased with this daana of 'Dhaanya'). By

performing this Vrata with Bhakti and Shraddha (devotion and conviction), the devotee would get rid of all the sins committed in the current birth, besides reaping the fruits of a Maha Yagna. *Namostu Vaishnavay Tubhyam* is the Mantra to be recited at all the Pujas to be done at the Vrata of **Chaitra** Shukla Dwadashi. 'Abhisheka' is performed with milk and / ghee before worship as suggested at that of Margasirsha month's puja above. Observing fast, Jaagaran, musical intermissions after the three pujas in the night, the schedule for the next morning would include one hundred 'Ahutis' (oblations) in the 'homasy' using honey, ghee and thila-mixed rice as also Daana to Brahmana of big measures (four seers) of rice while reciting the Mantra: *Praana ruupih Maha Vishnuh Praanadah Sarva Vallabhaha, Tandulaadhaka daanena preeyataam me Janaardana/* (Bhagavan Maha Vishnu is the epitome and bestower of Life to all the Beings in Creation; May Janaardana be pleased with this daana of major measure of rice). A devotee who performs the Chaitra Shukla Dwadashi Vrata would not only be free from sins but would also obtain the fruits of executing 'Atyagnishtoma Yagnas' eight times! A devotee desirous of observing **Vaishakha** Shuddha Dwadashi Vrata has to fast with dedication and give 'Shuddhodaka Snaana' (Pure water bathing) to Madhusudana with milk and perform worship as prescribed above in the context of Margasirsha month's Vrata; oblations of ghee to Agni Deva be offered hundred and eight times along with the Key Mantra *Om Namastey Madhu hantrey* followed by Puja with the usual services like Gandha, Pushpa, Dhupa, Deepa, and Naivedya. During the night that would follow, the devotee would perform three Pujas with attention and devotion and on the next morning after repeat Puja, he should give away daan and dakshina in the name of Maha Vishnu with the Mantra *Om Namo Vaasudevaaya*. Whoever does the Vrata would qualify for abolition of sins and be eligible of securing the fruits of eight Ashwamedha Yagnas. The key Mantra to be recited at the Vrata of **Jyeshtha** Shukla Dwadashi is *Namas Trivikrama* as the name that Vishnu is worshipped on that day is Trivikrama. The hundred and eight oblations to Agni would be in the form of 'Kheer', following which there would be 'Abhisheka' (Sacred bath) to the Trivikrama Rupa Vishnu by a very large measure of milk (four seers) continuously reciting the Mula Mantra of the day as mentioned. The Homa and Abhisheka is followed by the formal worship by the prescribed Sevas (Services) viz. Gandha, Pushpa, Dhupa, Deepa and Naivedya. Observing a day-night fast and silence, the devotee would be engaged in three Pujas and 'Bhaganan naama smarana' viz. the Key Mantra, besides Sangeeta-Nrittha-Vaayidya or music-dance and instrumentals all dedicated to Lord Trivikrama. On the next morning after repeat Puja, 'daana pradaana' or giving away charity of twenty measures of food grains along with Dakshina by reciting the daana mantra as follows: *Deva Deva Jagannatha Praseeda Parameswara, Upaayanam cha samgruha mamaabhishta prado bhava/* (Deva Deva! Jagannaatha! Parameswara! Kindly be pleased with me by accepting the daana and fulfilling my desires). This Trivikrama Vrata shall indeed help eradicate the sins of the 'Vrata Karta' and bestow the Punya of Eight Yagnas. Dedicated to Vamana Swarupa Vishnu, the **Aashaadha** Shukla Dwadashi Vrata has to be given a heavy bath of milk with the Mantra viz. *Namastey Vaamanaaya*, besides oblations of hundred and eight inputs of ghee and durvara tree figs to Agni Deva, followed by Vamana Deva Puja with the services of Gandha-Pushpa-Dhupa-Deepa and Naivedya. Observing fast and Jaagaran the devotee would perform three pujas through the night along with intermittent hymns, bhajans and Vishnu-related activities and on the following morning after Punah-Puja, charity to Brahmana be given by way of cooked rice, curd and coconut simultaneously reciting the Mantra : *Vaamano Buddhido hota dravyasto Vaamanah sadaa, Vaamanas taarakosmaachya Vaamanaaya namonamah/* (Bhagavan Vaamana is a Provider of intellect; he is the 'hota' or the Chief Priest of Yagnas; he is also known for his wealth; he is the unique device to cross the deep ocean of

‘Samsara’; my sincere salutations to Vamana Deva again and again). Thereafter, Brahmanas are treated with good food and dakshina. Vamana Vrata would confer the advantage of Agnishtoma. On the Shukla Dwadashi of **Shraavana** month, execution of the Shridhara Vrata grants the benefit of one thousand Ashwamedha Yagnas. Bathing with honey and milk of Bhagavan Shridhara is an integral component of the worship on this day along with the recitation of the Shridhara Mantra viz. *Namostu Shridharaaya*, besides the Puja with Gandha, Pushpa, Dhupa, Deepa and Naivedya as well as hundred eight ‘Ahutis’ to Agni with curd /ghee. After jaagaran and three hourly pujas, the next morning Puja would be followed by daana to Brahmana of large quantity of milk, ‘vastra dwaya’ and dakshina while reciting the Mantra: *Ksheerabdhi shayana Devesha Ramaakaanta Jagatpatey, Ksheera daanena supreeto bhava Sarva sukhah pradah/* (Deveshwara who rests on the Ocean of Milk! Lakshmi kaanta! Kindly be contented with this ‘daana’ of milk and fulfill all our comforts). After the Daana, full meals should be served to Brahmanas and satisfied with dakshinas.) As always on Shukla Dwadashi Vratas, fasting is a must on **Bhadrapada** month also which is dedicated to Hrishiksha when the Idol is bathed by milk by reciting the Mantra viz. *Hrishiksha Namostutey*. After the formal Puja to the Deity with the requisite ‘Upacharas’, hundred eight ‘Ahutis’ are offered to Agni with honey. Having done Jaagaran and three pujas through the night, the Vrata performer has to purify with bath for doing Puna Puja and then give away ‘daan’ of large measures (six seers) of wheat grains if possible with gold as dakshina while reciting the Mantra: *Hrishiksha namastubhyam Sarva lokaika hetavey, Mahyaam sarva sukham dehi godhumasya pradaanatah/* (Bhagavan Hrishiksha! You are the chief cause of Creation and my sincere Salutations to You; do accept this daana of wheat and confer to me all kinds of happiness). By completing the Vrata after ‘bhojan’ to Brahmanas, the devotee would have no sins left, besides acquiring the fruits of performing a Maha Yagna. Padmanabha Vrata is observed on **Aswayuja** Sukla Dwadashi with piety, fasting and cleanliness. Observance of the Vrata is stated to assure the benefit of thousand Maha Yagnas. Worship of Padmanabha starts with bathing the ‘Vigraha’ with milk with the Mantra *Namastey Padmanaabhaaya*; the Mantra should be continued while doing the Puja with Gandha, flowers, etc. Hundred and eight oblations to Agni as a mix of til, cooked rice and ghee are also done with it. After Jaagaran, three Pujas and singing, there would be a repeat Puja on the next morning, followed by daana to a Brahmana with lot of honey and dakshina; the Mantra along the daana is: *Padmanaabha namastubhyam Sarva loka Pitamaha, Madhu daanena supreeto bhava Sarva sukhapradah/* (Our Salutations to You Pamnanaabha, the great grand father of the Universe! Please be gratified with this daana of honey and bestow comforts to us). Damodara Vrata on **Kartika** Shukla Dwadashi is stated to be of extremely high in significance as the ‘Punya’ to be acquired would equal to two thousand Ashwamedha Yagnas! The key Mantra to be recited is *Om Namo Damodaraya* at the time of ‘Abhisheka’ of the Deity which is prescribed as large quantity of milk (four seers), curd / ghee; or at the time of hundred and eight ‘Ahutis’ to Agni with honey, ghee and til seeds; or at the time of Jaagaran in the night and the three hourly Pujas as also the hymns in commendation of Lord Vishnu who incarnated himself as Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, and so on; or at the Puna Pujas with lotus flowers on the day after. When the devotee performs daana to Brahmanas with five kinds of ‘Bhakshya Padarthas’ (Snacks and food recipes) along with dakshina, the following Mantra is to be recited: *Damodara Jagannatha Sarva kaarana kaarana, trahimam kripayaa Deva Sharanaagata Paalaka/* (Daamodara! Jagannatha! You are the Cause of Causes and the Supreme Protector of refugees; my sincere request to You Bhagavan to provide me fortification). If the Vratas on all the Shukla Dwadashis in a year are performed, **Udyapana** (winding up) needs to be performed in Margasirsha month by Pujas, Homams, Illuminations, Ringing bells, floral arrangements, flying Dwaja

Flags, Purana Shravanas, musical and dance extravaganza, Anna Daanas, and so on. The Concluding obeisance and prostration to the Lord would say: *Lakshmi patey namastubhyam Ksheeraarnava nivaasiney, Arghyam grihaana Devesha Lakshmyaaka Sahitam Prabho/ Yasya smrityaa cha naamoktya tapoyagna kriyaadishu, nuunam Sampurnatam yaati Sadyo vande tamachytam/* (Lakshmi Pati who is lying on the Ocean of Milk! My salutations to you and Lakshmi; please accept our ‘Arghya’. The Yagnas and Tapas pale into insignificance when Your mighty names are memorized and uttered with commitment; there is no end to our worship to you, excepting that we bend our heads in awe and total dedication.

Dashavataras and Vratas

Varaha Purana details in essence as follows:

Matsya Vrata related to the rescue of Devi Bhumi by Lord Vishnu from Rasatala in the Incarnation of Matsya is to be performed in the month of *Margaseersha*. On Dashami day itself, Deva Puja and Havan to Agni are executed and Havan Prasad be consumed. On the following Ekadasi day, one should perform fast and worship to Pundarikaksha by the ‘Sankalpa’ or resolve pleading Him that just as He rescued Prithvi, He should rescue him too and recite Om Nano Narayana Manthra. Next morning, Prithvi and Varun (Earth and Water) be invoked and Ashtanga Narayana Puja be performed by touching the concerned limbs of the Deity’s Murthi and reciting the Mantras as follows: Om Keshavayanamah (charanam Pujayami / feet), Damodarayanamah (katim / waist), Narasimhayanah (vurum or two thighs), Srvatsadharinenamh (kantham / throat), Sripathayenamah (Vakshasthal / chest), Trilochanayanamah (Bahum / hands), Swaminenamah (Shiram / head), Rathangadharinenamah (chakra), Shankarayanamah (Shankha), Gambhirayanamah (Gada), and Shantamurthayenamh (Kamal). Then the Puja commences by offering Garland and Chandana to the Kumbha with water. [Model ‘**Shodasopacharas**’ (Sixteen Services) to be performed to the Deity installed would be as follows: ‘Avahayami’ (Welcome); ‘Suvarnarathna simhasanam samarpayami’ (offering a Golden Throne as improvised); ‘Padayoh Paadyam Samarpayami’ (washing the feet of the Deity); ‘Hastayorarghyam Samarpayami (providing water to clean hands); ‘Achamaneeyam Samarpayami’ (offering water for sipping); ‘Abhishekam’ or ‘Suddhodaka Snanam’ (Bathing) while reciting the following Mantra: ‘Om aapohishtha mayo bhuvah thaa na urjey dadhatana Maheranaya chakshasey, Yo vassivatamo rasah thasya bhajayateha nah, usateeriva maatharah, thasma aranga maamavah, yasya kshayaya jinvathaha aapo janaatha cha nah; Snaanatharam Shuddhaachamaneeyam Samarpayami; Vastra yugmam samarpayami (two pieces of Cloth); wear Yagnopaveetam or the Sacred Thread by reciting the Mantra: ‘Om Yagnopaveetam Paramam Pavitram, Prajaapateryat saham purastath, Aayushyamagryam pratimuncha Shubhram Yagnopaveetam balamastu Tejaha’; offer next Gandham (Sandal paste) by reciting the Mantra: Om Gandhadwaraam duradharshaam nityapushtam kareeshineem Eswareegum sarva Bhutanaam tha mihopahvaye shriyam; then a short Puja of Sixteen names with flowers; Dhupam (Incense) by reciting the Mantram ‘Vanasthyudbhavaihi divyaih naanaa Gandhiih samyutaha Aaghreyah Sarva Devaanam Dhupoyam pratigruhyataam; then Deepam darsayaami (Oil soaked vick lighting) by uttering ‘Saajyam Trivarti Samyuktam vahnina yojitham Priyam, Grihaana Mangalam Deepam Thrilokya thimiraapaham Bhaktya Deepam Prayacchaami Devaaya Paramaathmane thrahimam narakaadghoraat Divya Jyotirnamosthuthe’; offer Pushpam (flowers); then Naivedyam (Offering Full Meal) with the following Mantra: ‘Om bhurbhavah suvah thatsavithur varenyam Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi Dhiyoyonah prachodayat satyam tvarthena parishinchaami ,

Amritamastu Amrithopasmtarana masi , Om Praanaya swaha, Om Apaanaya swaha, Om Vyanaya swaha Om Samaanaaya swaha, Madhye madhye Paaneeyam samarpayami, uttaraaposanam samarpayaami-hastha prakshaalanam samarpayami paaada prakshhalanam Samarpayaami, Suddhaachamaneeyam samarpayami (by sprinkling water and cirle round the items meant for ‘Naivedyam’and say ‘Satyam tvarthena parishinchami’ during day time or say ‘Rutamva Satyena Parishinchami’ if the offering is in night; then comes Tambulam (betel and nuts) by reciting the following Mantra: ‘Puugiphalaissa Karpuriah Nagavalleedalairyutham Muktaachurnena samyuktam Thaambulam prathiguhyataam’; thereafter there should be ‘Karpura Aarathi’/ Neerajanam (camphor lit lighting with hands by showing to the Deity while bells are sounded along with the following Mantra: ‘Om Gaanaam tva Ganapatigum havamahe kavim Kaveena mupamasravastamam, Jyeshtha rajam Brahmanaam Brahmanaspata Aaa naha srunvannnuthi bhiih seeda saadanam’; then Mantra Pushpa Mantram and Veda Pathanam etc. are offered by reciting the relevant Mantras. Then follows ‘Anyadha Sharanam naasti Mantram’ along with three circumambulations by reciting: ‘Yanikaanicha paapani Janmam tara krithaanicha thani thani Pranasyanthi pradakshina Padey Padey, Paapoham Paapakarmaham Paapaatma Paaapa Sambhavaha, Trahi maam kripaya Deva Sharanaagatavatsalaha, Anyadha Sharanam naasti thvameva Sharanam mamah thasmat kaarunya bhaavena raksha raksha Janaardana. Om Maha Vishnavey Namah, Atma Pradakshina Namakaran Samarpayami, Chhatram Aachhadayami, Chamaram Veejayami, Nritthyam Darsayami, Geetham Sraavayaami, Andolika marohayami, Ashvaanaanaarohayami, Gajaanaarohayami, Samasta Raajopachaara Shaktyupachaara Bhaktyupachaara Mantropachaara Pujaam samarpayami; Mantriheenam kriyaheenam Bhaktiheenam Janardana, Yatpujitam maya Deva paripurnam tha dasthute]

The execution of the Vrata as above would provide longevity, good children, ‘Dhan’ and Dhanya (Prosperity and fame).

Kurma Vrata is on the basis of the Lord Vishnu’s enormous role in His Incarnation as Tortoise to stabilise the massive mountain of Manthara in the context of churning the Great Ocean to produce several holy objects and finally the ‘Amrit’ on Shukla Dwadashi of *Pousyha* month. The procedure of the Vrata is similar as in the case of Matsya Vrata, excepting the Ashtanga Puja Mantras of Lord Janardana would be ‘Om Kurmayanamah’(feet), Om Naranayanamah (katim), Om Sankarshanayanamh (abdomen), Om Vishokayanamah (chest), Om Bhavayanamah (throat), Om Subahavey Namah (two hands), and Om Vishalayanamah (Chakra). The fruits of executing the Vrata with faith and diligence would help yield instant obliteration of sins, excellent family life and salvation.

Varaha Vrata is to celebrate the victory of Lord Keshava over the killing of Demon Hiranyakasipu and uplifting Prithvi. The Vrata is prformed on Shukla Dwadashi of *Magha* month. The relevant Ashtanga Mantras are: Om Varahayanamah (feet), Om Madhavaya namah (katim), Om Khetrajaya Namah (Stomach), Om Vishvarupayanah (Chest), Om Sarvajnayanamah (throat), Om Prajapataye namah (Head), Om Pradyumnayanamah (hands), Om Divyastrayanamah (Sudarshan Chakra), and Om Amrithodbhavanamah (Sankham).The ‘Vrata Phal’ or the benefits of performing the Vrata are immediate Sowbhagya, Laksmi and Tripti (contentment).

Nrisimha Vrata is to signify the appearance of Narasimha Deva in the dual form of Man-Lion to liberate Devotee Illustrious Prahlada from the extreme cruelties of Demon Hiranyaksha and is achieved on Shukla Dwadashi of *Phalguna* month. Other details of the Puja procedure being as in Matsya Vrata indicated

above, the Ashtanga Mantras to the Deity's Murthi would be as follows: Om Narasimhaya Namah (feet), Om Govindaya Namah (Thighs), Om Viswabhujenamah (katim), Om Aniduddhayanamah (chest), Om Sithikanthayanamah (throat), Om Pingakeshayanamah (head), Om Asuradhvanshanaya namah (Chakram), and Om Tayotmane namah (Sankham). Maharshi Durvasa told Satyapal that once a King Vatsa got badly defeated in a war by enemies and took refuge in the Ashram (hermitage) of the renowned Vasishtha. The Sage asked the fugitive King to observe the Narasimha Vrata and taught him about the method of accomplishing it. Lord Narasimha made a rare appearance and pleased King Vatsa, notably due to the perfection with which the Vrat was fulfilled under the best possible of guidance of the famed Vasishtha himself. Even as the Lord appeared before the King, all his enemies fled away and the Kingdom was restored. The Vrat restores one's confidence, overcomes enemies and vindicates the Victory of devotion and faith.

Vamana Vrata is performed to remind that Deva Deva incarnated as a Dwarf Brahmachari and tricked and humbled the mighty Demon King Bali, not by valour but by wits, by seeking merely three feet of Bhumi for His Tapasya. The Vrata is scheduled on every Shukla Dwadasi of *Chaitra* Month. The Puja procedure being as above in the Matsya Vrat, the Ashtanga Mantras are to be: Om Vamanayanamaha (feet), Om Vishnavay namah (katim), Om Vasudevayanamaha (abdomen), Om Sampurnakaya namah (Chest), Om Viwakruthenamah (throat), Om Vyomarupineynamah (head) and Om Vishwajiteynamah (Sankham). There was a King named Haryashwa who accomplished a 'Putra Kameshthi' Vrat and an old Tapasvi Brahmana came as a Guest who was Narayana Himself. The Brahmana desired that the King should implement Chaitra Sukla Dwadasi Vrat sincerely as per prescribed procedure and Vamana Deva would definitely bless a powerful and memorable Chakravarthi (Emperor) as a son, Kuvalleshvaya; by so predicting the Old Brahmana disappeared. The Vrata would certainly fructify a multi-desired boon by Narayana to those who attain it with devotion and dedication.

Jaamadagnya (Parasurama) Vrata is achieved to illustrate the outstanding son of Sage Jamadagni, incarnated as **Parasurama** who annihilated countless haughty and arrogant 'Kshatriyas' in utter disregard to the Virtuous and helpless subjects with special reference to Brahmanas, Sages and the Pious. This Vrata occurs on Shukla Dwadasi of *Vaisakha* month and is performed with veneration by the Ashtanga Matras viz. Om Jaamadagnyaya Namah (feet), Om Sarva dharinenamah (Abdomen), Om Madhusudhanaya namah (katim pujayami), Om Srivatsadhaariney namah (Uram / Chest pujayami), Om Kshtrranthakayanamah (Baahum Pujayami), Om Manikanthayanamah (Kantham Pujayami), Shankhayanamah (Shankham pujayami), Chakrayanamah (Chakram Pujayami) and Brahmanda dhariney namah (Siram pujayami). The worship of Parasurama was indicated by Sage Yagnavalka to King Virasena who had earlier completed several Yagnas but his desire to beget a child was not fulfilled. When the Sage taught the method of the Vrat and the King did it with full dedication, he was blessed with the birth of the famous Nala who along with Damayanti immortalised human history as the Greatest Lovers!

Taraka Rama Vrata is accomplished on Suddha Dwadashi of *Jeyshtha* month. Sage Vasistha taught the Vrata Vidhan to King Dasaratha first. King Dasaratha made a firm resolution to do the Vrat in the name of Maha Vishnu and the result was indeed unbelievable as the Supreme Lord Himself incarnated as Shri Rama along His accompanists Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna. The procedure of the Vrat is to commence with 'Shubh Sankalpa' and Ashtanga Puja: Om Namoh Ramaabhiramaya (feet), Om Trivikramaya (kati), Om Dhrita Vishvayah Namah (Udaram), Om Samvatsarayanamah (Chest), Om

Samvarthakaya Namah (kantham Pujayami), Om Sarvastradharineynamah (Chakra and Padma), and Sarva sirasey namah (head). Thereafter, perform 'Kumbha Sthapana' or Setting-up of Kumbha, 'Vastra acchaadana' (covering with cloth) of Rama Lakshmana Murthi Puja with Shodasa upacharas (Sixteen Services) and charity of the Murthis to Brahmanas. The fruits of the Vrata are self-evident since sons of immense virtue, valour, fame and dignity are bound to be born as a result of this incomparable Vrat! Moreover, those who partake in this auspicious Vrat would be blessed with all the above qualities and be assured of access to Vishnu loka.

Sri Krishna Vrata is scheduled on Shukla Dwadashi of *Ashadha* month. The origin of the Vrat was that Vasudev and Devi Devaki together did it as advised by Sage Narada since they were childless. Narada attended a Devasabha (Congregation of Devas) and Devi Prithvi complained that she was no longer able to withstand the evil deeds of Demons in the form of cruel Kings and their associates such as Sheva, Kamsa, Jarasandha, Naraka, Kuru, Panchala and Bhojas. They all approached Lord Vishnu who no doubt agreed to incarnate Himself but virtuous couples like Vasudeva and Devaki should perform Vrata on the specific day; Narada taught the procedure to carry out the entire function with dutifulness and conviction. After a firm resolve, the Vrat was accomplished with 'Ashtanga' puja as follows: Om Vasudevaya namah (charanam pujayami), Om Sankarshayanamah (katim pujayami), Om Padmanabhayanamah (Udamam pujayami), Om Aniruddhayanamah (Urasthalam pujayami), Om Chakrapaaninenamah (bhujam pujayami), Om Bhupatayenamah (kantham pujayami), Om Krishnayanamah (Shanka Chakram Pujayami) and Om Purushayanamah (Siram Pujayami). After successfully completing the Vrat as prescribed, the Lord confirmed that a boy of His traits would be blessed soon.

Buddha Vrata is to be performed on Suddha Dwadasi of *Shravan* month in the name of Lord Vishnu as He assumed the form of Buddha during a critical stage of Kali Yuga when Violence and Sinfulness were rampant in the World. Lord Buddha preached the principles of 'Ahimsa' (Non-Violence), 'Satyam' (Truth) and 'Dharmam' (Virtue) world-wide and as He mustered substantial support from 'Sangham' (Society) He created a great following of majority of people. As a young Prince, He decided to renounce luxurious life and wandered like a commoner. It was at that time that He strayed into jungles by horse back and rested under a tree through a night, when He attracted attention by several jungle men for His ornaments and cruel animals for His flesh. As He was being attacked, a Devi Shakti protected Him and killed the thieves and animals seeking to kill Him. A Sage in the forest explained to Buddha Deva that the Devi Shakti protecting His body was an inherent power safeguarding His body always as in His earlier birth he was of a low varna but witnessed the entire proceedings of the Vrata and thus imbibed the strength in His body as a result of the 'Punya' or the propitiousness accrued. This was the far-reaching impact carried forward to the current birth of Buddha, told the Sage. It was against this background that the Buddha Vrat should be performed for protection and success. The Puja procedure includes the 'Ashtanga' Mantras as follows: Om Damodarayanamah (Charanam pujayami), Om Hrishikeshayanamah (Katim), Om Sanatanayanamah (Udamam), Om Srivatsadharine namah (Vakshasthal), Om Chakrapaninenamah (hands), Om Harayanamah (throat), Om Manju keshayanamah (Head) and Bhadrayanamah (Sikha or tuft). Thereafter, Shodasopacharas are to be performed and Bhojan (Meals) and charity to Brahmanas would complete the Vrat which ought to be effected as per Regulations for the best benefits.

Kalki Vrata is observed in Sukla Dwadasi of *Bhadrapad* month. Before he outlined the broad method of carrying out the Vratha, Sage Durvasa told Satyapal that a King of Kasipur named Vishal who was a virtuous person doing several Spiritual activities like Yagnas and was widely liked by his subjects. But his own close relatives planned a coup and assumed power of the kingdom. The fugitive King wandered incognito and landed on the mountain slopes of Badari when he came across two ever-shining Sages viz. Nara and Narayana. Sage Nara enquired about Vishal's background and suggested to worship Maha Vishnu by means of any of the Dwadashi Vrathas occurring of 'Shukla Pakshas of most of the Months.

Trayodashi nirnaya: *Trayodashi prakartavyaa dwaadashi sahita Munaih/* Dwadashi extending to Trayodashi is of significance to Sages. Not only that: Trayodashi falling before Shukla Paksha and after Krishna Paksha are of significance. Beginning from a Shukla Paksha Trayodashi falling on a Saturday, pradosha kaala pujas to Bhagavan Shiva as also nakta bhojana executed on twenty four Shukla Trayodashis would lead to Shiva Prapti!

Varaha Purana assures as to how Dharma or Virtue could be sustained by worship on Trayodashis as follows: As Paramatma set the process of Creation, He felt that there was need for forming an Entity to sustain Virtue and set off the forces of the Evil and instantly, there appeared a Bull-shaped 'Purush' from the right ear of Almighty with white ear-rings and white garland and the latter asked to maintain and promote Virtue, Justice, Penance, Purity and Charity. The Dharma Purush so manifested by the Almighty as a Bull would have four legs in Satya Yuga, three legs in Treta Yuga, two legs in Dvatar Yuga and with just one leg in Kali Yuga. The four legs of Dharma Purush are 'Dravya' (Prosperity), 'Guna' (Characteristic), 'Kriya' (Industriousness / Sincerity) and 'Jaathi' (Caste). The mix of these four ingredients of Dharma's feet denotes the strength of these legs Yuga after Yuga. In fact, Brahma was impressed by the way that Dharma Purush solved a controversy raised by Moon God in enticing Devi Tara the wife of Brihaspati (the Deva Guru was a mother figure to Moon as well as all Devas! [There was an impending war between Devas and Demons since Sage Sukracharya the Guru of Demons sought revenge against Brihaspati and thus espoused the cause of Moon by assuring the help of Demons to wage a war. Dharma Purush used his good offices among Moon / Devi Tara, Sukracharya and Demons on one side and Brihaspati, Indra and Devas on the other. The delicate issue was settled by restoring Devi Tara back to Brihaspathi's residence, even though Tara was carrying a child of Moon and thus averted Deva-Danava war!]) Lord Brahma who flew down to Swarga Loka from Satya loka by his Swan chariot, complimented Dharma Purush and commended that from then onward human beings should observe 'Trayodasi' Day, perform Shraddh and offer 'Ksheer' (Sweet Milk and cooked Rice) to fore fathers to ensure that their past sins are demolished and longevity and well-being assured.

Chaturdashi nirnaya: *Madhu Shravana maasasya Shuklaayaa cha Chaturdashi, Saa raatri vyaapini graahyaa paraapurvaahna gaamini/* Extending from the night of Shravana Shukla Chaturdashi upto the following day's pre noon, performance of AnantaVrata is fruitful. Chaturdashi is counted as occurs before Purnima in Shukla Paksha, or alternatively on a day before Amavasya in Krishna Paksha. [Varaha Purana tracks up the manifestation of Rudra Deva and commends penance of purity and dedication to the latter and describes as follows: Unable to commence the task of Creation at the beginning, Brahma got frustrated, angry and even failed to control emotions by crying away, when a Powerful Manifestation of the Supreme Energy evolved as an incredible Illumination appearing gradually as a 'Puran Purusha' entreating Brahma not to cry; 'Twam ma Rudd!' Hence the Maha Purusha was named 'Rudra'. Brahma

desired that Rudra should take up the task of Creation but the latter jumped into water to execute penance. He got disturbed by the 'Yagna' being performed by Daksha Prajapati and was enraged as the flames from His mouth created Ghosts and Goblins. He destroyed the Yagna but at the intervention of Brahma was cooled down; He was pleased when a major part of the fruits of the Yajna was offered to Him and as Devas eulogised Him as follows: ' We salute you Devadeva, Jatajutadhari, Blood red Trinetra; you are worshipped by Bhutas and Bethals sporting ferocious serpents all over your body, especially as your Yagnopateeth (Sacred Thread); Your visage is ferocious, Your laughter is frightening; You are Maha Bhutapathi, Kapardi, Sthanu, Pushna danta Vinasaya, Bhaga Netraya ; in future you are going to annihilate the most dreaded Tripura and Andhaka demons; We salute Kalisavasi, Gajacharma dhari, Vikaral Urdhvakeshava Bhairava, Fire like Bhayankar, Chandramastak dhari, destroyer of Daruvana, Trisuladhari, Wearer of Sarparaja Kankana, Neelakantha, Badavagni mukha, Vedantha Vedya, Yagna Murthi, Daksha Yagna Dhvamsi, Visweswara Deva, Siva, Shambhu, Bhava, Devadi Deva, Bestow to us the Secrets of Vedas and Shastras!' Thereafter Brahma declared that worship of Rudra Deva on the 'Chaturdasi Day' of a month by sincere devotion and austerity would be blessed].

Pournami- Amavasya nirnaya: Except Savitri Vrata which can be observed on both Pournami or Amavasya, all other vratas are scheduled on both the days; the principle is that even there is a vedha from chaturdasi to the next tithi by eight ghadis: *Bhuta viddhaa na kartavyaa Amavasyaa cha Purnima, Varjayatwaa Munishreshtha Savitri vratamuttamam/* (Purva viddhas are not to be considered as a hindrance to perform any Vrata excepting that of Savitri Vrata as a single exception). In fact, Amavasyas coinciding with Mondays and Tuesdays are considered as very auspicious for snaana-daanas! Pournami worship of Chandra Deva is delineated in Varaha Purana as to how Prajapati Daksha cursed the Moon, his reappearance and worship on Pournami tithis of each 'maasa'. One of Lord Brahma's distinguished Manasa Putras named Sage Atri begot Soma (Moon) who too was illustrious. Prajapati Daksha married off all his twenty seven daughters to Soma. But the latter was ignoring all the daughters, excepting Devi Rohini. The rest of them complained to their father Daksha who reprimanded Soma to behave but Soma ignored the repeated warnings of Daksha. Out of exasperation, Daksha cursed Soma to gradually decline and finally disappear. In the absence of Soma, there were far reaching adverse effects in the Universe. Devas including Vanaspati felt Soma's absence and so did human beings, trees, animals and worst of all medicinal plants, herbs and so on. The Sky was dark and the Stars too lost the shine. As Devas approached Vishnu, He advised the solution of Churning the Ocean by both Devas and Danavas and latter too agreed to the proposal for the lure of securing 'Amrit'. In the process of churning, Moon was given birth again. This had brought great relief to Devas, human beings whose 'Ekadasha Indriyas' (Eleven Body parts), 'Pancha Bhutas' (Five Elements), Solah Kshetra Devatas, Trees and Medicines. Even Rudra's head was without Soma and so did water. Lord Brahma blessed Pournami thithi and selected the day for worship to Chandra Deva when fast is viewed propitious along with token amount of money and material as charity. That specific day 'Yava' Bhojan (Barley food) or barley made material is considered to bless a person with Gyan (Knowledge), radiance, health, prosperity, foodgrains and salvation.

Tarpanas on Amavasyas: Deva tarpana of Vasu-Rudra-Adityas; Rishi tarpana to Kashyapa- Atri- Vasishtha- Vishwamidraadis; Divya Manushya Tarpana of Sanaka Sanandanaadi- Kapilaadis; Divya Pitru Tarpana, and the three generation of Pitru devatas is stated to be a grihasthi dharma. Maha Bharata Anushasanika Parva-125 Adhyaaya states that Amavasya Phala Shruti is as follows: *Amaavaasyastu ye martyaah prayacchanti tilodakam, paatramoudumbaram graahyam madhu mishram tapodhanam/ Kritam*

bhagavati taih shraaddham sahasram yathaa vidhi, hrishta pushtamanaastesham prajayante prajaa dhruvam/ Kula vamshasya vriddhistu pindadasya phalam bhavet, shraddhaayutastu yah kuryaatritrinaa manrunnaa manruno bhavet/ (Pitru devas assert: Amavasya tila tarpana from a honey mixed aoudumbara patra is as fruitful as a formal Shraaddha Kriya; this would bestow the fruits of excellent progeny and vamsha vriddhi besides fulfillment and happy life ahead) Yama tarpana is to be performed on Ashvini Krishna Chaturdashi or on Krishna Paksha Chaturdashi coinciding with Tuesdays: the relevant Mantra is as follows: *Pretotsava chaturdashyaam kaaryantu Yama tarpanam, Krishnaagaara chaturdashyaapi kaaryam sadaigva vaa/ Yamaaya Dharma Raajaaya Mritave chaantakaayacha, Vaivasvataaya Kaalaaya Sarva bhuta kshayaayacha/ Ouodumbaraaya Dadhnaaya Neelaaya Parameshtine, Vrikodaraaya Chitraaya Chitraguptaaya te namah/* Such is the significance of Tarpanas! [Detailing reverence to Pitru Devatas on Amavasya days and their benefits, Varaha Purana describes as follows: As Lord Brahma was engaged in the serious task of Creation, He became aware of ‘Tanmatras’ or the subtle forms of matter viz. interaction of the Three ‘Gunas’ or characteristics viz. Satvik, Rajasik and Tamasik as also ‘Panchendriyas’, ‘Jnanendriyas’ and ‘Karmendriyas’. The Tanmatras displayed themselves in ‘Dhumra Varna’ or ash colour and evinced interest to reach Heavens. But Brahma convinced them that the entire community of Tanmatras belonged to the Pitras and whatever veneration was provided by ‘Grihasthies’ (householders) would belong to Tanmatras too. For instance, Brahmanas execute reverences to Pitras through ‘Agni’ by way of ‘Nitya’ (regular), ‘Naimittika’ (as per needs of functions to be performed) and ‘Kamyas’ (as per desires of the householders) or Parvana Shraddhas; similarly Kshatriyas and Vaisyas too perform ‘Agni Karyas’ or reverences to Pitras through Fire-oriented tasks. Likewise ‘tarpanas’ or libations are performed periodically. In all these cases whatever benefits would accrue to Pitras would be accumulated to Tanmatras also. Brahma thus indicated ‘Dakshinayan’ route to Pitras as also to Tanmatras. Moreso, He designated ‘Amavasya’ as the most important day for worship to ‘Pitras’ and Tanmatras as well. Human beings perform Tarpanas along with ‘Kusha’ and ‘Tilas’ on Amavasyas falling in each month which would indeed provide contentment to Pitras as well as Tanmatras. Thus Amavasya is required to be the special day when fast is observed and ‘tildaan’ is performed without fail, and that would not only give satisfaction to Pitras but the Kartas or the Performing Devotees who are provided ‘Iham’ or during the current birth of prosperity, peace, health and longevity but also ‘Param’ or post life].

Proceedings of Amavasya Tarpanas:

Tarpana Vidhana: *Ruk Saamaadrthvaa Vedoktaan Japya mantraaan yajushim cha, Japitwaivam tatah kuryaaddevarshi pitru tarpanam/ Tava Vashishtah/* (Vashishtha Maharshi affirmed that even after studying Ruk-Saamaadharvana Vedas, it is essential to recite Pranava and perform tarpana to fructify the knowledge of Vedas. Vishnu Purana emphasized: *Shuchi Vastradharah snaato Devarshi Pitru tarpanam, Tessaameva hi tirthena kurveet susamaahitah/* (Only on wearing clean clothes after bathing and poised with unperturbed conscience, Tarpana is to be undertaken thereafter). To Devas only one tarpana/ Jalaanjali each be executed, while to Rishis twice and to Pitru Devas thrice respectively for their satisfaction. *Praaggeshu Suranstarpenmanushyaanchaiva madhyatah, Pitramstu dakshinaareshu chaika dwi trijalaanjaleen/* (As prescribed for example in Agni Purana: Tarpana Karya needs to be performed facing East in the Savya Yagnopaveeta position to Devas; to Rishis facing the East again with yagnopaveeta as a garland but to Pitru Devatas the tarpana should be performed facing south with the yagnopaveeta worn as ‘apa savya’ or ‘Praacheena veeti’ or in the reverse position reciting ‘Swadhaanamah tarpayami’. While performing nitya tarpana, both the hands can be used while

Shradhaadi tarpana needs to be performed with one hand only. Pitru Devas would not be contented of tarpan is performed from a higher plane position into water flows nor with wet clothes. In fact, Pitru tarpana needs to be performed with dry clothes only preferably seated on spread over darbhas. Also tarpana be done with water drawn from one vessel and transferred to a smaller vessel into a lower plane but due to the apprehension that a lower plane on the ground might be sullied with hair, ash, coal particles, thorns, and even bones on the ground and hence the tarpana is preferably done on a clean place with darbhas are spread over. Alternatively, tarpana may be done in a large flat plate or container. For performing tarpana only vessels of gold, silver, copper, brass, bronze or any metal vessels may be used but not earthen pots; however neither metal vessels nor hands without darbhas be used for the tarpana. Deva tarpana and Rishi apana needs to be performed along with water mixed with plain rice grains or white tilas. Pitru tarpana needs to be necessarily done with water mixed with black tilas. One theory is that tila tarpana should be avoided in house holds on Saptami Sundays keeping in view the welfare of wife and sons. Also for one year after weddings and half a year after Upanayanas, tila tarpana be avoided in the house holds but on water banks. Now, tarpana needs to be dne in favour of one and all: Maharshi Yagjnvalkya confirms: *Brahmaanam tarpayet purvam Vishnum Rudram Prajapatim, Vedaan Chhandaamsi Devaamscha Rishem chaiva tapodhanaan/Tathaa Devaan Gandharva Naagaan Saagaraani Parvataanapi, Saritotha Manushyaamcha Yakshaan Rakshaamsi chaivahi/ Pishaachaamscha Suparmaascha bhutaananyatha pashumstathaa, Vanaspatinoshadheemscha bhutagraamaamscha turvidhaan----*sarvaan pitruganaamsthaa Maataamahaamscha satatam shraddhayaa tarpate Dwija/(One needs to perform Tarpana to one and all right from Vishnu Rudra Prajapati, Vedas, Chhandaas, Devataas , Rishis, Gandharvas, Nagas, Saagaras, Parvatas, Saritas or water flows, Manushyas, Yakshas, Raakshasaas, Pishaachas, Suparnas, Bhutaas, Pashus, Vanaspatis, Ouashadhis, and so on).

Deva Tarpana: This tarpana is to satiate Devas and the Devatva or the Divinity that is microcosmically present in all Beings in the Universe. Seated facing the east direction with the right knee kept in contact with the ground, placing the left leg over the right leg so that the knee is above the ground, keeping Akshatas in the water pot, holding the water pot on the right hand palm, covering it with left left hand palm reciting *Brahmaadaya Suraah Sarvey Rishayah Kashyapaadayah, Aagacchantu Mahaa Bhaagaa Brahmaandodaravartinah/* Now pour water with the left hand into the opne right palm releasing water from the tips of four fingers; three darbhas need to be placed on the rigt palm with the tips of darbhas aligned with finger tips while reciting the following in favour of each Devata: *Om Brahmaa tripyataam, Om Vishnum tripyataam, Om Rudrah tripyataam, Om Prajapatih tripyataam, Om Devaah tripyantaam, Om Devyah tripyantaam, Om Vasavah Tripyantaam, Om Rudraah tripyantaam, Om Adityaag tripyantaam, Om Chhandaamsi tripyantaam, Om Vedaah tripyantaam, Om Rishayah tripyantaam, Om Gandharvaah tripyantaam, Om Apsaraah tripyantaam, Om Devaanugah tripyantaam, Om Naagaah tripyantaam, Om Saagaraah tripyantaam, Om Parvataah tripyantaam, Om Saritah tripyantaam, Om Manushyaah tripyantaam, Om Yakshaah tripyantaam, Om Rakshaamsi tripyantaam, Om Pishcaachaah tripyantaam, Om Suparnaah tripyantaam, Om Bhutaani tripyantaam, Om Pashavah tripyantaam, Om Vanaspatayah tripyantaam, Om Oshadhyah tripyantaam*[Details of Vasu Rudra Adityaas : *Dhruvo Dharmascha Somascha Aapaschaivaanilonalah, Pratyushascha Prabhaatascha Vasavoshtoa prakeertitaah/ Ajaikapaada-ahirbudhnaghyo Virupaakshoya Raivatah/ Harascha Bahurupascha Trayambikascha Sureshwarah, Saavitrasha Jayantascha Pinaaki chaaparaajitah, Yeto Rudraah samaakyaataa Ekaadasha Surottamaah/ Indro Dhaataa Bhagah Pushaa Mitroya*

Varunoryamaa/AhirVishwaan Twashtaa cha Savitaa Vishnurevacha, Yeto Divyaah Pitarah Pujyaa sarvey prayatratah/ (Paitheena Darshana) (Ashta Vasus are Dhruva, Dharma, Soma, Apa, Anila, Anila, Pratyusha, and Prabhasa; Ekaadasha Rudraas are Ajaikapaada, Ahibudhna, Virupaaksha, Raivata, Hara, Bahu Rupa, Trayambaka, Sureshwara, Saavitra, Jayanta, and Pinaki. Dwadashaadityas are Indra, Daata, Bhaga, Pusha, Mitra, Varuna, Aryama, Archi, Vivaswaan, Twashta, and Vishnu)].

Rishi Tarpana: The same procedure as in Deva Tarpana above to be followed. *Om Kashyapah tripyataam, Om Atrih tripyataam, Om Vasishthah tripyataam, Om Vishwaamitra tripyataam, Om Gautamah tripyataam, Om Bharadwaajah tripyataam, Om Jamagagnih tripyataam, Om Angeeraah tripyataam, Om Kutsah tripyataam, Om Bhriguh tripyataam/Divya Manushya Tarpana:* The revised procedure requires change of sitting position to face the northern direction and wearing the Yaginopaveeta like a garland and with raised knees and making two oblations in respect of each : *Om Sanakah tripyataam Om Sanakah tripyataam, Om Sanandah tripyataam Om Sanandah tripyataam, Om Sanaatanah tripyataam om Sanaatanah tripyataam, Om Sanatkumarah tripyataam om Sanatkumara tripyataam, Om Kapilah tripyataam om Kapilah tripyataam, Om Aasurih tripyataam om Aasurih tripyataam, Om Odhuh tripyataam om Odhuh tripyataam, Om Pancha Sikhah tripyataam om Pancha Sikhah tripyataam/ Divya Pitri Tarpana:* The revised procedure for tarpana to the Divine Devas and Manes requires change of sitting position to face the Southern direction and wearing the yaginopaveeta in reverse position as ‘praacheena veeti’, with left knee to be in contact with the ground while the right knee to be above the ground yet not touching it with left leg on the ground and the right leg on top of left leg; pour some black tilas (sesame seeds) in the water pot; now the offerings would be made thrice each time to Agni-Soma-Yama and Aryama ie. Agni the Divine Fire God who carries the soul of the burnt body, Soma the Water God who carries the soul of the drowned body, Yama the Maintainer of Dharma and the Judge of Karmas of the deceased and Aryama the Ruler of the Domain of Souls :*Om Agnih tripyataam idam salilam jalam tasmai swadhaa namah, tasmai swadhaa namah, tasmai swadhaa namah/ Om Somah tripyataam idam salilam jalam tasmai swadhaa namah, tasmai swadhaa namah, tasmai swadhaa namah/ Om Yamah tripyataam idam salilam jalam tasmai swadhaa namah, tasmai swadhaa namah, tasmai swadhaa namah/ Om Aryamaah tripyataam idam salilam jalam, tasmai swadhaa namah, tasmai swadhaa namah/* The next three mantras are for the three Divine Manes-as were associated with the souls who were burnt or drowned and carried to the Skies till the latter are tendered to their destinations: *Om Agnishu aatthaah Pitarah idam salilam jalam tebhayah swadhaa namah,tebhayah swadhaa namah, tebhayah swadhha namah/ Om Somapaah Pitarah tripyantaam idam salilam jalam tebhayah swadhaa namah,tebhayah swadhaa namah, tebhayah swadhaa namah/ Om Barhishadah Pitarah tripyantaam idam salilam jalam tebhayah swadhaa namah, tebhayah swadhaa namah tebhayah swadhaa namah/*

Pitri Tarpana: *Om aagacchantu me piratah imam gruhnantu jalaanjalam/ (May my ancestors present themselves here and receive my oblations) Mama Sarva janmeshu Pitarah/ Pitaamahaah/ Prapitaamahaah/trupyantaam idam tilodakam swadhaayibhyah **tebhayah** swadhaa namah, **tebhayah** swadhaa namah/ **tebhayah** swadhaa namah/ Mama Sarva janmeshu Maatarah/ Pitaamahyah/ Prapitaamahyah/ trupyantaam idam tilodakam swadhaaibhyah **taabhyah** swadhaa namah, **taabhyah** swadhaa namah/ **taabhyah** swadhaa namah/* On this pattern, replacing ‘tebhayah’ for males and ‘taabhyah’ for females, following tarpanas be performed **alternatively**. In respect of Male Pitras: Patayah/ Putraah/ Mataamahah/ Pra mataamahaah/ Vriddha pramaataamahah/ Bhraatarah or brothers/

Pitruvyah or father's brother(s)/ Swasurah or fathers in law, Maatula or mother's brother; guravah or teacher, sishyaah or disciples, sakhaah or friend/ Aptajanaah or dear ones. In respect of Female Pitris: Wives/ Kanyas/ Mataamahyah or Mother's father/ Pramaataa mahyah or mother's grand father/ Vriddha Pramaataamaha or mother's great grand father/ bhaginya or sisters/ pitru bhaginya or father's sister/ Matru bhaginya or mother's sister/ Swasura patni or mother in law/ and so on. All the above are in reference of *Mama sarva janmeshu---*Now in reference to the Kartha's own Pitru ganas: *Aadou Pitaa tathaa aataa saapatni janani tathaa, Maataa mahi ssapatnikaa Atma Patnyastwanantaram / Sutabhraatru Pitruvyascha Maatulaascha Sabharyakaah, Duhitaa Bhagini chaiva Douhitro bhaagineyakah/ Pirushvasaa Maatrushvasaa Jaamaataa Bhaukah Snushaa, Shwashurah Syalakaschiva Shwashrushascha Guru rikthinah/* (Following is the line in which Pitru Tarpana is to be performed: Foremost to father, grand father, Great grand father, mother, father's mother, father's grand mother, Co mother if any, datta / adopted putra's parents if any, mother's father, mother's grandfather, mother's mother and the latter's mother in law, wife, sons, self's brothers, father's brothers, mother's brothers and their wives, daughters, sisters, grand sons, father's sisters, mother's sisters, son-in-law, brother's-in-law, and their wives, daughter-in-law, mother's brothers, wife's brothers, mother-in-law, Guru and the Trader, the Supplier of household goods)

Tarpana prayoga: Achamya; *Mamopaattha durita kshaya dwaaraa Parameshwara preetyartham evam guna Pituh Pitrunaam akshayya punyaloka phalaavaapyartham darsha prayukta maha punya kale tila tarpanam karishye/ --Iti sankalpya, praacheenaaveeti dakshinaabhimukhah savyam jaanvaachya/* (After achamana and sankalpa, assume praacheenaaveeti, face Southern direction and bend the left knee being seated and commence the tila tarpana). Brahmanas should address the Pitru Devas as *sharmaanam*, Kshatriyas as *Varmaanam* and Vaishyas as *Guptam/*

Following is the order in which the tarpana is made: *Pitaram-gotram-sharmanam-Swadhaanamah tarpayaami-Swadhaanamah tarpayami Swadhaanamah tarpayaami/ Pitaamaham----Prapitaamaham---/Maataram-gotraam-daam-Swadhaanamah tarpayami (three times)/ Pitaamaheem-gotraamdaam-Swadhaanamahtarpayami (three times); Prapitaamahim-gotramdaam-Swadhaanamah tarpayaami(3 times)* Likewise, Sa-patni maataram or step mother-gotraamdaam-swadhaa-(3); as also Janaka pitaram/ Janaka Mataram. *Maataamaham* or mother's father-gotram-swadhaanamah tarpayami (3); *Maatuh pitaamaham—Maatuh Prapitaamaham---*; *Maataamahim* or mother's mother- gotramdaam-Swadhaanamah tarpayaami (3); *Maatuh Pitaahim- gotram daam-Swadhaanamah tarpayaami (3); Maatuh Praptamahim-gotramdaam-Swadhaanah tarpayaami (3);Atma patnim* or karta's wife-*gotramdaam swadhaanah tarpayaami (3); Sutam* or sons/ *bhraataram* or brothers; *Pitruvyam* or father's brother; *Matulam* or mother's brother; *duhitaram* or daughter; *bhagini* or sister; *Douhitrah / douhitri* or daughter's son/ daughter; *bhaagineyam* or sister's son; *Pitru bhagini* father's sister; *Maatru bhagini* or mother's sister; *Jaamaataram* or son-in-law; *bhaavukam* or brother-in-law; *Snushaam* or wife of brother in law; *Swasura* or father in law; *Swashrum* or mother in-law; *Syalakam* or wife's brother; Gurum; Rikthinam or House hold trader. After duly performing tarpana to all the relatives, the rest of the tilodaka on the vessel be released reciting: *Narakeshu samasteshu yaatanaasu cha ye sthitaah, tessaam aapyaayanaayaitat eayate salilam mayaa, Ye bandhavaa baandhavaascha yenya janmani baandhavaa, te triptimakhisaayaantu yaschaasmattobhi vaanchati/ Ye mey kuley lupta pindaah putra daara vivarjitaah, tessaam hi datthamakshayyam idamastu tilodakam, Aabrahmastamba paryantam Devarshi Pitru maanavaah, Trupyantu Pitarah sarve Maatru Maataa mahaadayah, Ateeta kula koteenam Sapta dwipa*

nivaasinaam, Aabrahma bhuvanaat lokaat idamastu tilodakam/ There after recite the following: *Yekechaasmat kule jaataa Aputra agotrinomritaah, Te gruhnantu mayaa dattam sutra nishpeeda - nodakam/* (In our Vamsha among our gotra dharis, those who died without sons and thus could not perform obsequies, may I offer due homage by way of ‘sutra nishpeedanam’ or pressing water out of my yagnopaveeta which is being worn as a garland now before wearing normally!) At the end of the Tarpana Kriya as described above, the remaining water meant for tila tarpana be thrown away, fill up the vessel with fresh water, sit in eastward and perform Deva Tarpana by looking at Surya Deva and recite: Om Suryaya namah, Om Agnaye namah, Om Prithivya namah, Om Varunaaya namah, Om Shivaaya namah, Om Vishnave namah/ *Anena yathaa shakti kritena Devarshi Pitru tarpanaakhyena karmanaa Bhagavan Pitru swarupi Janaardana Vaasu deva Parameshwara preeetaam na mama/ Om tat sat/ Om Shri Krishnaarpanamastu/ Om Lokaah samastaa sukhino bhavantu/ Om Sarve Janaah sukhino bhavantu/ Om Shaantih Shantih Shantih/*

Amaavasya Tarpana Phala Shruti: Amaavaasyastu ye Martyaah prayacchanti tilodakam, Paatramoudumbaram graahyam Madhu mishram tapodhanam/ Kritam bhagvati taih Shraaddham sarahasyam yathaa vidhi, Hrishta pushtamanaasteshaam prajayante prajaa dhruvam/ Kula Vamshasya Vriddhistu pindadasya phalam labhet, Shraddhaayutastu yah kuryaatritrunaa manrunaa manruno bhavet/ (Maha Bharata Anushaasanika Parva-125 Adhyaaya) (Pitru Devas asserted: Amavasya tila tarpana from a madhu mishra Aoudumbara Paatra is as fruitful as a formal Shraddha Kriya; this would bestow the fruits of excellent progeny and Vamsha Vriddhi besides fulfillment and happy life ahead!) *Yama Tarpana:* This tarpana is to be performed on Aswiyaja Krishna Chaturdashi or on Krishna Paksha Chaturdashi coinciding with Tuesdays: *Pretotsava Chaturdashyaam kaaryantu Yama tarpanam, Krishnangaara Chaturdashyaamapi kaaryam sadaiva vaa/ Yamaaya Dharma Raajaaya Mrityave chaanta kaayacha, Vaivaswataaya Kaalaaya Sarva Bhuta Kshayaaya cha/ Ouodumbaraaya Dadhnaaya Neelaaya Parameshthiney, Vrikodaraaya Chitraaya Chitraguptaaya tey namah/* (Yama tarpana is to be performed on Aswiyuja Krishna Chaturdashi or on Krishna Paksha coinciding with Tuesday. This has to be addressed to: Yamaaya namah, Dharmaraa Rajaaya namah, Mrityave namah, Antakaaya namah, Vaivaswataaya namah, Kaalaaya namah, Sarva BhutaKshayaaya namah, Oudumbaraaya namah, Dadhnaaya namah, Neelaaya namah, Parameshthiney namah, Vrikodaraaya namah, Chitraaya namah, Chitra guptaaya namah); *Dakshinaabhi mukho bhutwaa tilaih savyam samaahitah, Daiva tirthena Devataatilaih Pretaadhipaaya cha/* (the tarpana is to be executed facing South in Savya Yagnopaveeta position with ghee and tilas and each oblation needs to be done thrice against each name) .

Over-view of Sixty Vratas:

Matsya Purana quotes Nandikeswara as having indicated that while innumerable Vratas were described in the Eighteen Maha Puranas or otherwise as per the beliefs of humanity in several parts of Bharat, sixty select Vratas were worthy of shortlisting. *Persons observing day long fast till the evening for the duration of a full year, after performing daily puja to Bhagavan Shiva and after a year donating a golden Chakra and Trishula to a family Brahamana along with food and dakshina is called *Deva Vrata* which entitles Shivaloka Prapti.* Those who perform *Rudra Vrata* by fasting similarly during every day till the dusk time to worship Shiva and after a year donate a pair of golden pratimas of a cow and ox to a Brahamana with bhojan and dakshina are also sanctioned Rudra loka, besides destroying their previous sins and future discomfitures in life.* Similar day time fasting and worship of Vishnu for a year and

giving away daana of a sugarful of vessel and a golden neel-kamal (blue lotus) along with a live 'Vrishabha'/Ox is called *Neela Vrata* bestowing great contentment in life and Vaikuntha thereafter. * *Preeti Vrata* is called when a devotee observes it without applying and using oil for four months beginning from 'Ashadha' month and donates Bhojana Material including vessels to vegetables and glasses to grains at the end of the Vrata would endear himself to one and all. *Those who abstain from milk, curd, ghee and sugar as also their related products during the Chaitra month and resort to sincere worship to Devi Gauri daily after which make charity to a Brahmana couple with silver vessels full of various fruits and juices and honour them with Vastras and gifts are stated to have acted upon *Devi Gauri Vrata*. * Persons who execute *Kama Vrata* resort to fasting day long on the day previous to Trayodadshi coinciding with Pushya Nakshatra and donate a golden Ashoka tree of ten inches along with sugar cane and vastras to a Brahmana before proper Puja to Pradyumna Deva are blessed with destruction of all difficulties and obstacles in life and attain Vishnu loka there after. *Those observing four-month long *Shiva Vrata* from Ashadha Purnima to Kartika Purnima without cutting hair and nails and refraining from eating 'bhanta' or round brinjals and at the end of that period donating pots of honey and ghee and donating a golden bhanta on the Purnima to a Brahmana are destined to contentment in life and 'Sivaloka prapti' thereafter. *Resisting from the beauty and fragrance of the seasonal flowers during 'Hemanta and Shishira Ritus' (winter and cold /dewy seasons), persons observing *Sowmya Vrata* on Phalgun Purnima day would perform puja to Bhagavan Shiva and Keshava would donate seasonal flowers of their choice in gold to a Brahmana in the evening time for fulfilment of desires and attaining 'Paramapada' after life. **Sowbhagya Vrata* commences from Phalgun Month's Tritheeya Tithi for a full year when the Karta should stop consuming salt and salty food and the Deity for worship is Devi Bhavani. At the close of the Vrata, Karta and his wife should perform 'Dampati Puja'-husband and wife-presuming that the worship was for 'Adi- Dampatis' of Bhagavan Shiva and Bhavani and give away all kinds of household items as donation, especially beds; this Vrata bestows the fruits of 'Gauri loka Nivas' till 'Kalpanta'to both Karta and his wife. *Those who take up the *Sarasvata Vrata* should observe silence in evening Sandhyas for a year and at the end of the year donate gheeful 'ghatas'/ pots, Vastras, tila seeds, and ghanta (bell). The Kartas would be blessed with Soundarya, Vidya and intelligence and 'Sarasvata Pada'/ Vidyadhara and Brahmaloкас later on. **Sampad Vrata* is commenced on a 'Panchami' and goes on for a year on a Panchami again when Lakshmi's puja is held to Devi Lakshmi. On the concluding day, formal Puja is performed and a cow as also a golden lotus is given as 'daan' to a Brahmana. In the present life, the Karta's sorrows and difficulties are terminated and in every subsequent life he would be born in exceedingly properous and renowned families. **Ayur Vrata* is performed by those who carry out 'lepana' or paste their heads to the Bhumi before the Idols of Shiva and Keshava for a year and at the close of the year donate a cow with waterful of pot would be Kings for thousand years (ie. for long, long time) and after death reach Shivaloka. * Persons who abstain from jealousy, take food once a day, practise silence and try to worship 'peepul' tree, Surya Deva and Ganga for a year and at the end donate three cows and golden tree replicas to a husband-wife pair are known to have observed *Kirti Vrata* who are blessed with instant opulence and reputation and attain the benefit of organising an Ashwamedha Yagna. * *Saama Vrata* is successfully done by devotees of Bhagavan Shiva or Keshava who are required to reside in a cow-dung house for a year and worship the Deities by performing snaan with ghee and puja with flowers, Akshatas, Dhupa, Deepa etc. After a year's observance of the Vrata, charity of a cow with Tila seeds as also an eight inch long golden lotus is to be made a Sama Veda Pandit for attainment of Shivaloka.* *Veera Vrata* is essentially meant for women and observed on Navami days for a year ; they should take a

single meal in the day along with as many 'Kanyas' as possible and gift them 'Asanas' (Chairs) along with gold embroidered jackets with stars and sarees, besides a golden Simha / Lion as a symbol of bravery and strength to be given away to a Brahmana; such ladies would become prettier, healthier and happier by the day and through crores of births ahead to finally reach Shivaloka. **Pitru Vrata* commences on a Purnima day and goes on for a year when the Karta lives only on milk and at the twelfth Purnima again, perform Shraadhha and provide 'daanaa' of five milk yielding cows, red Vastras and waterful of pots; this Vrata would relieve of the 'pitaras' of hundred past generations, and bestow them Kingship for the current and next Kalpa times too. *Those persons who perform *Ananda Vrata* for four months from Chaitra Month by providing running water or 'Jala daana' without asking and at the end provide 'Anna daana', besides donate Vastras and pots of water with tila seeds apart from suvarna (gold) to a Brahmana would certainly become a 'Bhupala' / King in the same life and at the end of his/her life qualify to reach Brahmaloaka. * *Ghriti Vrata* is observed by performing 'Panchamrita Snaana' (bathing with milk, curd, ghee, madhu/honey, and sugar) to the Idol of Bhagavan for a year daily and after the year donating a cow with Panchaamrita and a 'Shankha' / conchshell would yield the fruits of becoming a King and attaining Brahmaloaka. * Those that do not eat meat for a year and donate a cow and a golden deer's pratima at the end would get the fruit of performing Ashwamedha Yagna and becoming a King at the 'Kalpantha' and this is known as *Ahimsa Vrata*. * If a person takes bath in the 'Brahma Muhurta' in Magha Month, prays to rising Sun and performs 'Brahmana Dampati Puja' by providing 'Bhojan' along with donation of Vastras and ornaments, that is called *Surya Vrata* and he is entitled with Suryaloka till 'Kalpaanta'. * *Vishnu Vrata* has duration of four months from the beginning of Ashadha month till Kartika Purnima and its procedure is to worship Vishnu Deva commencing from 'pratahkaala snaana', daily puja to Vishnu Pratima by way of Pushpa, Gandha, Dhupa, Deepa and Naivedya and Brahmana Bhojana every day and Go-daana at the close of the Vrata; this Vrata bestows Vishnu loka.*Those devoted persons who abstain from flowers and ghee from Uttarayana to Dakshinayana and at the end of the Vrata at the Uttarayana time, donate a cow to a Brahmana with 'pushpa malaas' / flower garlands along with 'Khaadya Padaarthaas' / sweets and savouries made of milk and ghee would accomplish Shivaloka; this is called *Sheela Vrata* which bestows 'Sushilata' / Excellent Manners and 'Neerogata' / Good health. * Persons who give 'deepa daana' every evening for a year, give up oil and ghee items of food and at the end of a year donate golden chakra, Trishula, two Vastras and deepas become 'Tejaswis' or bright and brilliant and after their life attain Rudraloka and this is called *Deepa Vrata*. * *Ishwara Vrata* is observed for a year from the beginning of Kartika Month to perform 'Nakta Vrata' or eating food only at the night and donate a cow at the end; this Vrata provides Kingship and the 'phala' of residing in Gauri loka till Kalpanta. **Dhrudha Vrata* involves abstinence of 'Sugandhas' or scented materials from Chaitra Month and gives up 'Gandha dharana' for a year and at the end of the Vrata donates a variety of scented material and vastras; those who observe the Vrata attain Varuna loka. * *Kanti Vrata* bestows body radiance and brilliance of mind to the Karta of the Vrata who has to give up salt and flowers during Vaishakha month and at the close of the Vrata performs 'Godaana'; at the end of the Vrata, the Karta would achieve a position of royalty and fame during his on-going life and thereafter accomplish Vishnu loka. *Those who observe *Brahma Vrata* should prepare an Idol of 'Brahmaanda' (Universe) in gold and set it on a 'tila raashi', perform Agni homas for three days and organise meals to Brahmanas with til daanas, and on the fourth day execute Brahmana Dampati Puja while donating 'pushpamaalaas' / flower garlands, vastras / clothes and golden ornaments as also the Brahmanda Pratima in gold would attain Moksha and have no rebirth. * *Dhenu Vrata* is performed by taking a little milk only for a full day and the

next morning donate a 'dwi-mukhi pratima' (two faced idol) of a cow and calf with as much gold as possible to a Brahmana; this would impart the blessing of Moksha on 'punaraagamana rahit' or non-return to another life basis. * Similarly, if a Karta carries out a three day long milk-consuming Payovrata and donates a golden Kalpa Vriksha / tree pratima on top of a heap of rice on the next day, he/she would achieve Brahmopada as a result of *Kalpa Vrata*. * Those devotees who are 'nirahaars' without food and complete a month observing *Bhima Vrata* and donate a healthy cow to a Brahmana would possess right of entry to Vishnu loka. * By executing *Dhara Vrata*, an individual takes milk once a day and next morning gives charity of a golden replica of Prithvi, he/she is allowed firm and lasting entry to Rudra loka. * If a human being performs 'Gud-Dhenu daan' / molasses-cow charity after keeping a 'guda vrata' either on Chaitra or Maagha Triteeya, that human being would attain Gauri loka and that is called *Maha Vrata*. * *Prabha Vrata* requires 'nirahara' / without food for a fortnight and donation of two 'kapila' cows thereafter; such a devotee who does so becomes worship-worthy by both Danavas and Devas and is readily admitted into Brahmhaloka and after one Kalpa becomes a Sovereign on Earth. * If a person takes only one meal a day for a year and thereafter provides a full-fledged bhojan with 'Shadrasas' or six courses of tastes to a Brahmana along with a big pot of water, this activity is called *Prapti Vrata* and the Karta would be destined to Shivaloka for a Kalpa time. * *Sugati Vrata* is to be observed by fasting till the evening on every Ashtami day of a year and donates a cow at the conclusion of the Vrata and it entitles Indraloka after life. * From Varsha Ritu (rainy season) for four Ritus onward, if cooking material is donated daily to a Brahmana, and at the end of the Vrata a cow is donated then the donor's sins are washed out and after death gets absorbed in Parabrahma; this is called *Vaishvanara Vrata*. * If a day long fast is observed for a year on every Ekadashi and on the last Ekadashi evening a Brahmana is treated to a wholesome meal along with a golden Vishnu Chakra, the *Krishna Vrata* facilitates the donor to reach Vishnu loka and by the 'Kalpantara' enables the donor to become an Emperor. * Eating 'Kheer' (milk and cooked rice /wheat grains) once a day for a year and donating two cows after the Vrata enables a person performing *Devi Vrata* to get prosperous in life and reach Lakshmi loka after life. * *Bhanu Vrata* involves single bhojan on Saptami after sun-sets during a full year and provides charity of a healthy cow on the last Saptami after prayers to Surya Deva at the Sun-set time blesses the Karta with good health and Suryaloka prapti. * For one full year on every Chaturthi if day-long 'Upavaas' is exercised and on the last Chaturthi donation of a golden elephant is given to a Brahmana, *Vinayaka Vrata* enables removal of obstacles in life and Shivaloka prapti there after. * *Phala Vrata* involves avoidance of five fruits viz. bel fruit, jamun (Indian blackberry), ber (Indian jubub), kaith (wood apple) and seedy lemon for four months preceding Kartika Purnima and donation of the five fruit pratimas in gold and a cow, resulting in contentment in on-going life and Vishnuloka prapti after life. * *Soura Vrata* entails fastings on Saptami days for a year and donation of a golden lotus, cow, potful of water, and Bhojana to a Brahmana on the last Saptami shall result in Surya loka prapti and great fame in the on-going life. * Dwadashi Upavasas for a year and 'daanaas' of vastra, dhenu and suvarna help secure eventful and long healthy life and attainment of Vaikuntha after life in *Vishnu Vrata*. * Nakta Vrata on Kartika Purnima as also 'Vrushotsarga' (release of a bull) is known as *Vaarsha Vrata*. * Those perform Krucchrut- Chandrayana Vrata (increasing the daily measures of food-units from Prathama to Purnima Tithis in Shukla paksha and decreasing the daily intakes from Prathama to Amavasya in Krishna paksha) and at the end of the month, provide Bhojana and dakshina to as many Brahmanas as possible is called *Praajaapatya Vrata* its punya would be such that the Karta is blessed with health and wealth on his life and Shivaloka later. * *Triayabaka Vrata* is observed by fasting on all Chaturdashis till the nights for a year and providing go-daan at the close of the Vrata which

secures Shivaloka prapti. *Those performing day-long fasts till the nights and at the end of the week donates 'Ghata purna Ghrita' or pot-ful of ghee are stated as *Ghrita Vrata* kartas and their destiny after death would be Brahma loka.* Whoever sleeps in the open during the Varsha Ritu or rainy season and at the end of the Season donates a cow with calf shall be gifted with access to Indraloka to stay there for long time and this is called *Indra Vrata*. *Persons not eating cooked items on Triteeya tithis for a year and concludes the *Shreyo Vrata* by Go-daan would reap excellent happiness and health and reach Shivaloka after life. * Without taking food till night, *Ashwa Vrata* is concluded after a year with food and donation of a golden pratima of a chariot drawn by two horses to a Brahmana and this would yield the fruits of becoming a King in life and residence of several Kalpas in Satyaloka.* Similar is the pattern of *Kari Vrata* of daily fasting for a year and donation of golden pratima of two elephants drawing a chariot to a Brahmana and the results would be similar too. * Observance of day-long 'upavasa' for a year and performing Go-daana at the end is called *Sukha Vrata* which would yield happiness as long the Karta lives and later on would be in high position in Yakshaloka. * If a person lives in water through out the night and performs Go-daana next morning, he / she would be eligible for Varunaloka and the task is known as *Varuna Vrata*. * Chandraloka prapti is bestowed on a person practising *Chandrayana Vrata* or eating measured meals as per the Tithis of Shukla and Krishna Pakshas respectively and at the end donating a golden Pratima of Moon.* *Maha Rudra Vrata* is practised by those who stay with Panchagnis around through out the day till the evenings of Jyeshtha Ashtami and Chaturdashi days and by the evening of the latter tithi make a donation of gold made cow would be ever contented in life and attain Swargaloka eventually. * A person arranging silver work in a Shiva Temple on a Triteeya tithi and after a year executes Go-daan is blessed with entry in Bhavaniloka for the successful completion of *Bhavani Vrata*. * *Pavana Vrata* involves any bhakta of Vayu Deva who keeps drenched wearing wet Vastras through out Magha Saptami night and donates a cow next morning after ablutions and bathing; such a person would become a King and a resident of Swara for a period of a Kalpa. * *Dhaama Vrata* is observed a person who practises 'Upavaasa' for three nights and donates a beautiful house to a Brahmana on Phalgun Purnima day; that person is bestowed with opulence in the on-going life and Surya loka prapti thereafter. * A fasting person who would perform 'Dampati Pujas' to Brahman couples three times a day in the morning, afternoon and evening with ornaments, vastras and gifts is stated to be executing more than *Indra Vrata* and eventually would be highly prosperous and happy in the on-going life and finally qualify for Moksha Prapti. * There is a reputed Vrata in the name of Soma Deva called *Soma Vrata* and whosoever would perform this has to donate to a Brahmana a vessel full of salt in the name of the Deva on a Shukla Paksha Dwiteeya and at the end of a year make go-daana; the fruits of the Vrata are immense including contented and healthy life besides Shivaloka Prapti and Kingship on Prithvi by the Kalpantara. * *Maha Deva Vrata* is observed on Pratipada Tithi by taking only one meal a day and at the end of a year donates a kapila cow, and then the person concerned would accomplish 'Vaishwanara loka'. * Those who take a single meal a day commencing from Dashamis and after a year donate golden plaque depicting 'Dasa dishas' / ten directions and ten cows to Brahmanas are stated to have successfully concluded the *Vishwa Vrata* and such persons attain great fame besides eventually becoming highly renowned 'Adhipatis' or Overlords of 'Brahmanda'(Universe). This Vrata destroys 'Maha Patakas' or the Greatest Sins. Those persons who read or listen about the afore-mentioned accounts of the SHASTHA VRATAS would indeed qualify for Gandharva Loka. [* indicates each Vrata shown in *Italics*]

Prominent Tirthas in Bharata: Padma Purana describes: The entire Bharata Varsha is laced with several Tirthas, mostly to cater to the devotional feelings of persons at Places situated nearby as also to attract quite a few devotees from far off Places depending on the intensity of their Bhakti and the pull of such Tirthas owing to their reputation. Tirthas are the abodes of Rishis. It is strongly believed that Devas made frequent expeditions and Lord Brahma stayed there for long durations. In fact, only those whose physical abilities are in order, or are disciplined, non-egoistic, performers of Vratas, truthful, determined and highly devotional would reap maximum advantage rather than the run of the mill crowds without aim or purpose. For example, those visiting Pushkara Tirtha ought to observe a strict regimen of Snaana-Deva Puja-Pitra Shraaddha-Agni Karyas- Daana- Dhyana-Tapsya and total dedication, and then only the real fruits are reaped, including transfers to Brahma Loka! Casual visits to the Tirtha are of academic interest to merely publicise that they have too registered a trip! Any marginal return of Tirtha Visits of informal nature is peripheral. It is said that the best route to Tirthas is to commence the Yatra from Jambu Marg, observe single meal for five nights and worship Bhagavan Vishnu with austerity. From Jambu Marg to Tundulikashram to Agastyashram where three nights are to be spent fasting and performing Deva Puja and Pitra Puja which would give Agnishtom Yagna Phala. Further on visit Kanyashram Tirtha for worshipping Devi Lakshmi and proceed to Yayati Patana Sthan and perform 'Parikrama'; this entire package would bestow the fruit of executing Ashvamedha Yagna. Continuing the austerity of moderate food, one should carry on visiting Mahaakala Tirtha at Ujjain, to worship Mahaa Kala Linga by 'Abhisheka' with milk followed by the sacred Snaana at Koti Tirtha. There after one should continue the Yatra at Umapati Tirtha at Bhadravati Sthan. The worship at these Tirthas would fetch the Punya of Godaan and joining Shivaganas. Deva Puja and Pitru Tarpan at Holy Narmada provide the fruits of Agnishtoma Yagna and automatic demolisher of sins. It is said that even the vision of Narmada River is as good as snaanas at Sarasvati and Yamuna for seven days each and a mere 'sparsha' (touch) of Ganga River. Narmada is said to be a highly Sacred River in Three Lokas, where Devatas, Asuras, Gandharvas, Rishis and others attain siddhis by performing Tapasya on its banks. Sage Narada told Yudhihara of Pandavas that after taking 'Vidhivat' (formal) snaana in Narmada and spending even one night's stay on its banks would demolish hundred 'peedas' or serious impediments of severe nature. Those who perform formal 'Pinda daan' with Veda Mantras at 'Janeswar Tirtha' would satisfy Pitras till 'Maha Pralaya Kaal'. On the four sides of 'Amarakanta Parvata' are set up Koti Rudras; if a devotee were to take a sacred 'Snaana' (Bathing) and worship with flowers and chandana to as many Rudra Lingas as possible, the Koti Rudra Bhagavan would be extremely pleased most certainly and without doubt. On the western side of the Amarakanta Mountain, there is a Presence of Bhagavan Maheswara and worship of this Idol would provide salvation to seven previous generations! In fact, there are some sixty crore and sixty lakh Tirthas around all the four sides of Amarakanta Mountain and those who stay there for good time by observing Brahmacharya with full control of Indriyas devoid of violence and falsity would indeed be blessed by Maha Deva. River Kapila in the Southern part of the Mountain, is highly sacred and propitious and worship of innumerable Tirthas around fetch funds of Punya; River Vishalyakarana is another holy entity which tears down sins instantly and wrecks all traces of unhappiness in life! Snaana- Dhyana-Puja-Tarpana-Shraaddha-Daana- Dakshina at the time of Surya Grahana or Chandra Grahana (Solar / Lunar Eclipses) at Narmada or Kapila / Vishalyakarana would bestow ten-time more of Punya along with Pundareeka Yagna Phal. Finally, Snaana- worship at Jwaleswara Maha Deva Temple provides Swarga and death at this Tirtha would free the soul from the cycle of births and deaths! The Narmada-Kaveri Sangam, like Ganga-Yamuna Sangam, is another holy spot where Snaana, worship of Devas/ Pitras and

Yagna Karyas are performed to accomplish superior levels of 'Mahatmya'. Among the various Tirthas on the Narmada banks are Panneswar where Devas come down to bathe; Garjan (Indrajit) which fulfills ambitions and enterprise; Brahmaavart where Lord Brahma bestows Gyan and Creative Power; Angareshwar where one worships Bhagavan Rudra for 'Rudra Loka Praapti'; Kundaleshwar where Shankara and Devi Parvati take frequent sojourns; Pippaleswar for the benefit of Rudra loka nivasa; Vimaleswar to purify soul and if dead tavel to Rudra Loka; and Pushkarini Tirtha for eligibility of half of Indra's throne. Devatas and Gandharvas greet the Sacred Nirmada thus: 'Namah Punya jaley Aadye namah Saagaragaamini, Namostu tey Rishiganaih Shankara dehaanaih srutey/ Namostutey Dharma bhrutey varaananey Namostutey Deva ganaika vanditey, Namostutey Sarva Pavitra Paavaney Namostutey Sarvajatprasupujitey' (Punyajala Narmada! You are among the leading Rivers and my greetings to you. You are the one worshipped by Rishis as materialised by Mahadeva; you are the preserver of Dharma and Devas bend their heads down to your feet. You have the power of purifying each and every material and are worshipped by everybody.) If any Brahmana recites this Stotra would become a Veda Vidwan; a Kshatriya would attain victory in battles; a Vaishya gains profits in business, and a Shudra achieves 'Uttama Gati' (higher status). Apart from the above, many other Tirthas are distributed on either the banks of the Sacred Narmada such as Shulabhadra, Bhimeswar, Narmadeswar, Adityaswar, Mallikeswara, Varuneswara, Neerajeswara, Koteswara, Vamaneswara, Vateswara, Bhimeswara, Nandi Tirtha, Vyasa Tirtha, Erandi Tirtha, Suvarna Tilaka, Skanda Tirtha, Sarva Tirtha, Shakra Tirtha, and so on. Having heard about the Tirthas on the banks of River Narmada from Devarshi Narada, King Yudhishtara became enthusiastic to learn about the other important Tirthas in Bharata Varsha. He evinced interest for instance in the magnificence of Sage Vasishtha's Ashram on Arbuda Mountain (who was the son of Himalaya) where a single night stay bestowed the Punya of daana of thousand cows. Likewise, one should visit Pinga Tirtha where the fruit of charity of hundred cows was received. One should also visit Prabhas Kshetra where Agni Deva stayed always and would be qualified for the Punya of 'Manava Agnishtoma' and 'Atirathra Yagna'. Further one should witness the Sangam of River Sarasvati and the Sea on the western Bharata, where also the 'phala' of charity of one thousand cows would be reaped. Stay of three nights and simultaneous performance of Pitru Tatpanas at Varuna Tirtha would award Ashwamedha Yagna phal. Vara daana Tirtha was also stated to endow Sahasra Go Daana Phala. Visit to Dwarakapuri could not be missed as even now 'Mudras' or reproductions of Trishul on Lotus Leaves are visioned there. Snaana- Rudra Puja- Pradakshina at Shankha kantheswara Tirtha would grant ten Ashwamedha Phal and remission of sins for the entire life. Even mere reaching Vasudhara Tirtha would provide the fruit of the Horse-Sacrifice while Tarpana to Pitras would benefit far further. Not far from here were Vasu Tirtha immensely liked by the Ashta Vasus as also Brahma Tunga Tirtha for pleasing Lord Brahma by worship and Renuka Tirtha for purifying of conscience. In the near vicinity were Pancha Nada Tirtha, Bhima Tirtha and Giri Kunja Tirtha. In Kashmira Pradesha the Tirthas are Vitasta Tirtha, Malada Tirtha, Dirgha Satra Tirtha, Shashayana Tirtha (reputed for Snaanah in River Saraswati on Kartika Pournimas), Kumarakoti Tirtha, Rudra koti Tirtha and the most renowned Sangama Tirtha for bathing in the River Saraswati for destroying life-long sins. In Kurukshetra, Narada's recommendation was for a month-long stay, where Bhagavan Vishnu was stated to have been very receptive to the desires of his devotees, where there was a Place known as 'Satata Sthan' or Place Forever quite appropriately. The popular Tirthas in Kurukshetra included Shalvikini, Panchanada, Soma Tirtha, Kruta Shoucha, Pampa, Varaha Tirtha, Kaaya shodhana, Lokoddhara, Kapila and Go -Bhavana. Even if the air-borne dust of Kurukshetra got deposited in the skin pores of a Pilgrim, sins of the traveller in the region evaporate away

into thin air; this was what Sage Narada affirmed! From Kurukshetra, Narada desired to visit Brahmavarta and gradually reach Kasishwara to get rid of sins, proceed to Sheetavana and Swarnalomapanayana. It was recommended that one should preferably enter Pundarika Tirtha on Shukla Paksha Dashami and after reaching Trivishatp Tirtha, take bath in the River Vaitarini to wash off sins and worship Bhagavan Shankara. Thereafter, a devotee should visit Paanikhyat Tirtha and Mishrikha Tirtha. It was stated that Maharshi Veda Vyas sought to unite the Tirthas around and hence the name was Mishrika. There was Runantak Kuup where Til daan be performed and two very significant Tirthas named Ahan and Sudina Tirthas where Snaanast bestow the blessings of Surya Deva. Snaanast and Pujast at Koti Tirtha would enable charity of thousand cows. Kapalamochana Tirtha on the banks of the Holy River Sarasvati and the highly popular Pruthudak Tirtha for worshipping Devas and Pitras were two holy spots with unbelievable power. The belief had been that there would be no ‘Punarjanma’ after worship at these two Tirthast! At the Samgam (Confluence) of Rivers Saraswati and Aruna, a three-night stay at the world renowned Tirtha would relieve sins of seven generations including Brahma hatya. From there, two Tirthast called Shathasahastra and Sasahastra are reputed too as visits and Pujast endow the Punya of donating a thousand cows. Snaanast and Worshipst at Renuka Tirtha, Panchavat Tirtha and Sthanuvata Tirtha were all highly significant, before a devotee reached Sannihita Tirtha where sacred snaanast during Solar Eclipses are stated to equate those at all the Tirthast, Jalasayast, Kupast and Mandirast. Naimisharanya, -stated to be the most significant Knowledge Center and the unique Meeting Point of Rishist and their deliberationst signifying the contents of all the Holy Puranast and Scriptures addressed by Veda Vyast, Maha Muni Suthast, Sage Shounakast and others- was the famed Region where the Kali Kala Chakra could not enter and kept the age-old Sancity of earlier Yugas in tact. From Kurukshetra to Dharma Tirtha where Yama Dharma Raja performed penance of thousands of years, followed by a visit to Kalaapa Vana, Suvarna Tirtha and Sougandhika Vana is stated to be a great experience since the sins of seven generations would get evaporated. Pilgrimage to Gangadwar (Haridwar), Koti Tirtha Snaan and worship at Sapta Ganga, Tri Ganga and Shakravarta Tirthast would fetch the fruits of performing Pundarika Yagna and Sahasra Go Daana. The most important ‘Yatra’ as commended by Narada Muni related to Kalindi Tirtha. The Devarshi asserted that the ‘Punya’ earned from the pilgrimage to Pushkar, Kutukshetra, Bhahmaavarta, Pruthudak, Avamukta Kshetra (Kashi) and Suvarna Tirtha could be equated to that of Yamuna Snaan! Bathing in Yamuna with or without ‘Sakaama’ or ‘Nishkama’ ie with or without objective was certain like what a ‘Kama dhenu’ or ‘Chintamani’ (desire- fulfillers) would impart instantly. Those bathing in Kalindi waters irrespective of their ‘Varnast’ or castes would become handsome, healthy and strong and what was more, they would be highly blessed. Narada Muni said that in Satya Yuga, persons are liberated by means of Penance and Tapast; in Treta Yuga by Gyan, in Dwapara Yuga by Yagnast, and in Kali Yuga by giving away ‘Daanast’, but Kalindi Kanya or Devi Yamuna surpassed these limitations since even a worshipful ‘Snaana’ would be enough to liberate the person concerned in the present Yuga. In this connection, Sage Narada gave the illustration of a Vaishya called Hemakundal who amassed riches, although by fair means, but did not beget children for long. He followed a highly virtuous life of Deva Puja, giving away donations, Atithi-Satkar (Respects to Guests) and such other ‘Punya Karyast’. As a result, he was blessed with two sons, but both of them squandered money and out of helplessness, the Vaishya retired into forests. The sons Shrikundal and Vikundal squandered the hard earned and honest money oh the father and became victims of wine, women and gambling. They died early due to vices almost simultanenously. Yamadootast took away the two brothers to Yamaloka where the elder son was sent to Rourava Naraka while the second son was sent to Swarga. This happened so, even though both the

sons did same kind of vicious deeds but the second son took only two dips in River Yamuna; the first ‘snaan’ liberated his sins and the second dip granted him Swarga! As the Yamadootas conveyed to Vikundal that it might be possible to transfer his elder brother also to Swarga, there was perhaps a possibility to do so if only the Punya of the younger brother could be donated to his elder brother, then the younger decided to do so; by this transfer, the elder brother no doubt was able to reach Swarga, but in view of the self-less sacrifice of the younger one in the process of donation so liberally given away to the elder brother, he too was given a berth in Swarga! Devarshi Narada described then the magnitude of Kashipura to Yudhishtara. Bhagavan Shiva and Devi Parvati adorned the Throne atop the mount of Meru Parvat once and the latter desired to know as to how his devotees could vision the Bhagavan without experiencing too many insurmountable obstacles. Parama Shiva then gave away the secret that Kashipura was the unique Place of his residence where his devotees could observe the requisite regulations of Dharma and vision him instantly. Kashipura thus came to be known as the Avimukta Kshetra which had been dear to him; whatever endeavours that human beings could perform at Varanasi by way of Daana-Japa-Homa-Yagna-Tapasya-Dhyana-Adyayana and Gyan would all be everlasting. The past sins of all the Beings stored for thousands of births would vanish even while entering Kashipura. This would be applicable to Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, Varnasankaras or of mixed varnas, women, Mlecchhas, Chandalas, animals, birds and worms and ants. Yatra saakshan Mahadevo dehaantey Swayameeshwarah, Vyachashtey taarakam Brahma tatraivahyavi muktakey/ Vaaranaasthaa chaasya madhye Vaaranaasipuri, tatraiva samshitam Tatvam nithyamevam vimuktakam/ Varanasyam param sthanam na bhutam na bhavishyati, Yatra Narayano Devo Mahadevo Diviswarah/ Mahapathakino Devi ye tebhya paapakrutamaah, Vaaraanaseem samaasaadhya tey yaanti paramaam gatim/ Tasmanmumukshurniyato vasudvai maranaantakam, Vaaranasyam Maha Devaajnaanam labdhwa vimuchyatey/ (To those who were about to die in the Avimukta Kshetra, Bhagavan himself would preach the Taraka Brahma Mantra. The Sacred Place called Varanasi in between the two Rivers of ‘Varana’ and ‘Asi’ is full of ‘Nitya Vimukta Tatwa’ or the Philosophy of Permanance and Liberation. There was never a Place like Varanasi nor ever be where Bhagavan Narayana and Deveswara resided with luminosity. A Great Sinner or even a worse example like him would qualify for liberation as soon as he entered Varanasi. That was the reason why ‘Mumukshus’ or those desirous of achieving liberation desired to reside in Kasi with self-control and dedication till their termination and prompt Bhagavan Shiva himself to bestow ‘Gyan’ and ‘Mukti’ to them). Narada asserted that just as Purushothama Narayana was the superior among Devas, and Maha Deva was the utmost among Ishwaras, Kashipura was the most significant among the Tirthas. This was why people of high understanding longed with the cherished hope of living and if possible die at Varanasi. At Varanasi, there is a popular Shiva Linga called Kapardeswar, where devotees perform Pujas and Pitru Tarpans; in fact, they should stay there for six months to achieve ‘Yoga Siddhi’. Also, taking baths at Pischacha Mochana Kund nearby the Temple and carrying on with Pujas to Kapardeshwar would result in demolition of ‘Maha Patakas’ like ‘Brahma hatya’. In the days of yore, a Tapaswi Brahmana named Shankhakarna performed Puja, ‘Rudra Paath’ and ‘Pranava Japa’; he decided to worship Kapardeswara always till the end of his life’s journey accordingly. One day Shankhakarna visioned a hungry Piscacha nearby and when asked by the Brahmana, the Piscacha narrated that in his last birth he was a prosperous Brahmana with a large family, but did not heed to perform pujas to Devas, Cows and Guests nor did any worthy task. The Pischacha asked Shankhakarna to suggest a way out for getting rid of his existing status. The latter asked the Piscacha to take the Sacred Name of Kapardewara and immediately jump into the Kund nearby the Temple and the Piscacha died while

swimming. The Brahmana was happy that the Piscacha was relieved and he prayed to Kapardeswar as follows: ‘Bhagavan’! You wear ‘Jata-jut’ (twisted and coarse hair on head and face) and known as ‘Kapardi’; you are ‘Paratpar’, saviour, unique, Purana Purusha, Yogeswaa, and ‘Agni Rupa’, mounted on the Sacred Nandiswar; I take refuge in you; You are ‘Ru’ or the Distancer of Sorrows thus known as Rudra; you extend all over the Sky, Brahma Swarupa! I seek your protection; you possess thousand feet, eyes, heads and Forms; you are incomprehensible even to Vedas; You are ‘Lingarहित’ or beyond understanding as a man or a woman; ‘Aloka Shunya’, Swayam Prakash’ or Auto-illuminated; You are ‘hara’ or the eliminator of obstacles; ‘Bheda Shunya’ or ‘Adviteeya’ (Exclusive)! I seek your fortification! By so saying, Shankhakarna fell down the Earth while reciting ‘Pranava Mantra’ and integrated into ‘Shivaswarpa’ which was Eternal and Blissful. From Varanasi to Gaya, Narada suggested the course to perform Pinda Daana at the Vata Vriksha named Akshaya vat and after taking bath at Maha Nadi, execute Tarpanas to Devas and Pitras. This would firm up ‘Kulodhaara’ or purify the ‘Kula Vamsa’. Thereafter pay visits to Brahmaranya, Dhenuka Tirtha, Grudhnavati (for Bhasma Snaan), Udaya Parvat (for Darshan of Savitri and to render ‘Sandhyopaasana’ to obtain the benefit of rendering Gayatri Mantra for Twelve Years), Yonivaasa (to avoid the nine-month Garbhavaasa), Phalgu River Snaana, Dharma Pushti Yatra, Mani Naga tirtha, Brahmarshi Gautami Vana, Ahalya Kunda Snaana, Gandaki Nadi atra, Maheswari Dhara, Narayana Sthaana (where Brahma, Devas, Rishis, Twelve Adityas, Eight Vasus, and Eleven Rudras worship Janaardana), Shaaligrama Tirtha (where a Well contained the waters from Four Oceans), Jatismara Tirtha, Vateswara, Patakanashini Koushiki, (Kosi Nadi), Champakaranya, Koushala Nadi, Kaala Tirtha (where charity of Twelve Bulls was exexcised), Sona-Jyotirathi Sangam, Pushpavati Snaan, Mahendra Parvat, Matanga Kshetra, and finally Gokarna Tirtha. Sage Narada made a special mention of Prayaga as one of the most Sacred Tirthas of Bharata Varsha where Brahma and Narayana were both ready to bestow their blessings to mankind. This is also the unique ‘Sangam’ (Confluence) Point of two illustrious Rivers of Bharata viz. Ganga and Yamuna. It was stated that the Region between these two glorious Rivers constituted the middle portions of Prithvi. Prayag’s name, if heard, or sung was worthy of prostration. Being the Yagna Bhumi of Devatas, the Sangama Snaana is known as the most outstanding experience witnessed ever by Devas. Even a small ‘Danaa’ at Prayaga is stated to have a snow-balling effect to assume manifold times. The saying was that one should perform Tapasya at Pushkara, Daan on a Mahalaya day, and Upavas (fasting) at Bhru-gu-tunga. Mere Snaanas at Pushkar, Kurukshetra and Ganga would register freedom of sins for seven generations in the previous births and seven generations ahead. The moment that a person touched his or her backbone in Ganga, that person’s details would get recorded. Where ever Ganga flows, all the Regions and Tapovanas on the River Banks are known as Siddha Kshetras. If a person were unable to actually visit Prayaga and experience the Sangama Snaana, atleast even mental desire would yield Punya. Also, Punya begets Punya and those who possess strong faith would certainly fulfill their desires to take up the pilgrimage. Qualifying further the ‘Mahatmya’ of Prayaga, Suta Maha Muni narrated the illustration of Yudhishtara; he experienced untold misery that the icon of Kuru Vamsa like Bhishma, Gurus like Drona and Kripacharya, First Cousins, Karna and countless close relatives were all mercilessly killed and could not overcome the grief yet, quite after the passage of time. As though in response to the predicament of Yudhishtara, Mahatma Markandeya visited Yudhishtara. He assured that what Yudhishtara and other Pandavas had done was not only a duty of a Kshatriya, but also a grand vindication of Dharma and justice vis-a-vis the vicious and highly sinful actions perpetrated by Kauravas; the Elders and some of the Virtuous personalities who sided the wrongdoings had to suffer too in the bargain. Having fully justified

the actions of Pandavas and assuaged the personal feelings of Yudhishtara, Mahatma Markandeya recommended Tirtha Yatra to Prajapati Kshetra starting from Prayaga to Pratihsthanapura. Lord Brahma and Devatas were in complete charge of this memorable Tirtha. Vishnu and Maheswara too protect Prayaga and the adjoining Region with vehemence. A three-night stay fasting at Prayaga, especially after bathing, Pinda daana and charity of cows, gold and Bhumi would readily bestow the fruits of Ashwamedha Yagna and more than that great mental peace to have killed so many enemies at the Maha Bharata Battle, assured Markandeya. Any person performing Panchagni Sewa between at the Sangam area of Ganga and Yamuna would never have physical disabilities and diseases, besides Swargawas in as many years as hairs on the body. A death at Prayaga would secure relief from the cycle of further lives and deaths. Accordingly, Pandavas did the 'Sevas' at Prayaga and several Tirthas around by way of daily Snaanas, liberal Daanas, fastings, Pinda Daanas, Keshava Pujas and so on.

Sacred Tirthas and Rivers of Bharata and Pushkara nirnya of the famed ones

Bharat Desha is replete with various temples, vratas, sacred rivers and spiritual followings. The entire Bharata Varsha is laced with several Tirthas, mostly to cater to the devotional feelings of persons at Places situated nearby as also to attract quite a few devotees from far off Places depending on the intensity of their Bhakti and the pull of such Tirthas owing to their reputation. Tirthas are the abodes of Rishis. It is strongly believed that Devas made frequent expeditions and Lord Brahma stayed there for long durations. In fact, only those whose physical abilities are in order, or are disciplined, non-egoistic, performers of Vratas, truthful, determined and highly devotional would reap maximum advantage rather than the run of the mill crowds without aim or purpose. For example, those visiting *Pushkara* Tirtha ought to observe a strict regimen of Snaana-Deva Puja-Pitra Shraaddha-Agni Karyas- Daana- Dhyana-Tapsya and total dedication, and then only the real fruits are reaped, including transfers to Brahma Loka! Casual visits to the Tirtha are of academic interest to merely publicise that they have too registered a trip! Any marginal return of Tirtha Visits of informal nature is peripheral. It is said that the best route to Tirthas is to commence the Yatra from Jambu Marg, observe single meal for five nights and worship Bhagavan Vishnu with austerity. From Jambu Marg to Tundulikashram to Agastyashram where three nights are to be spent fasting and performing Deva Puja and Pitra Puja which would give Agnishtom Yagna Phala. Further on visit Kanyashram Tirtha for worshipping Devi Lakshmi and proceed to Yayati Patana Sthan and perform 'Parikrama'; this entire package would bestow the fruit of executing Ashvamedha Yagna. Continuing the austerity of moderate food, one should carry on visiting *Mahakaala Tirtha at Ujjain*, to worship Mahaa Kala Linga by 'Abhisheka' with milk followed by the sacred Snaana at Koti Tirtha. There after one should continue the Yatra at Umapati Tirtha at Bhadravati Sthaan. The worship at these Tirthas would fetch the Punya of Godaan and joining Shivaganas. Deva Puja and Pitru Tarpan at Holy *Narmada* provide the fruits of Agnishtoma Yagna and automatic demolisher of sins. It is said that even the vision of Narmada River is as good as snaanas at Sarasvati and Yamuna for seven days each and a mere 'sparsha' (touch) of Ganga River. Narmada is said to be a highly Sacred River in Three Lokas, where Devatas, Asuras, Gandharvas, Rishis and others attain siddhis by performing Tapasya on its banks. Sage Narada told Yudhishtara of Pandavas that after taking 'Vidhivat' (formal) snaana in Narmada and spending even one night's stay on its banks would demolish hundred 'peedas' or serious impediments of severe nature. Those who perform formal 'Pinda daan' with Veda Mantras at 'Janeswar

Tirtha' would satisfy Pitras till 'Maha Pralaya Kaal'. On the four sides of 'Amarakanta Parvata' are set up Koti Rudras; if a devotee were to take a sacred 'Snaana' (Bathing) and worship with flowers and chandana to as many Rudra Lingas as possible, the Koti Rudra Bhagavan would be extremely pleased most certainly and without doubt. On the western side of the Amarakanta Mountain, there is a Presence of Bhagavan Maheswara and worship of this Idol would provide salvation to seven previous generations! In fact, there are some sixty crore and sixty lakh Tirthas around all the four sides of Amarakanta Mountain and those who stay there for good time by observing Brahmacharya with full control of Indriyas devoid of violence and falsity would indeed be blessed by Maha Deva. River Kapila in the Southern part of the Mountain, is highly sacred and propitious and worship of innumerable Tirthas around fetch funds of Punya; River Vishalyakarana is another holy entity which tears down sins instantly and wrecks all traces of unhappiness in life! Snaana- Dhyana-Puja-Tarpana-Shraaddha-Daana- Dakshina at the time of Surya Grahana or Chandra Grahana (Solar / Lunar Eclipses) at Narmada or Kapila / Vishalyakarana would bestow ten-time more of Punya along with Pundareeka Yagna Phal. Finally, Snaana- worship at Jwaleswara Maha Deva Temple provides Swarga and death at this Tirtha would free the soul from the cycle of births and deaths! The *Narmada- Kaveri Sangam*, like *Ganga-Yamuna Sangam*, is another holy spot where Snaana, worship of Devas/ Pitras and Yagna Karyas are performed to accomplish superior levels of 'Mahatmya'. Among the various Tirthas on the Narmada banks are Panneswar where Devas come down to bathe; Garjan (Indrajit) which fulfills ambitions and enterprise; Brahmaavart where Lord Brahma bestows Gyan and Creative Power; Angareshwar where one worships Bhagavan Rudra for 'Rudra Loka Praapti'; Kundaleshwar where Shankara and Devi Parvati take frequent sojourns; Pippaleswar for the benefit of Rudra loka nivasa; Vimalleswar to purify soul and if dead tavel to Rudra Loka; and Pushkarini Tirtha for eligibility of half of Indra's throne. Devatas and Gandharvas greet the Sacred Nirmada thus: '*Namah Punya jaley Aadye namah Saagaragaamini, Namostu tey Rishiganaih Shankara dehaanaih srutey/ Namostutey Dharma bhrutey varaananey Namostutey Deva ganaika vanditey, Namostutey Sarva Pavitra Paavaney Namostutey Sarvajatprasupujitey*' (Punyajala Narmada! You are among the leading Rivers and my greetings to you. You are the one worshipped by Rishis as materialised by Mahadeva; you are the preserver of Dharma and Devas bend their heads down to your feet. You have the power of purifying each and every material and are worshipped by everybody.) If any Brahmana recites this Stotra would become a Veda Vidwan; a Kshatriya would attain victory in battles; a Vaishya gains profits in business, and a Shudra achieves 'Uttama Gati' (higher status). Apart from the above, many other Tirthas are distributed on either the banks of the Sacred Narmada such as Shulabhadra, Bhimeswar, Narmadeswar, Adityaswar, Mallikeswara, Varuneswara, Neerajeswara, Koteswara, Vamaneswara, Vateswara, Bhimeswara, Nandi Tirtha, Vyasa Tirtha, Erandi Tirtha, Suvarna Tilaka, Skanda Tirtha, Sarva Tirtha, Shakra Tirtha, and so on. Having heard about the Tirthas on the banks of River Narmada from Devarshi Narada, King Yudhishtara became enthusiastic to learn about the other important Tirthas in Bharata Varsha. He evinced interest for instance in the magnificence of Sage Vasishtha's Ashram on Arbuda Mountain (who was the son of Himalaya) where a single night stay bestowed the Punya of daana of thousand cows. Likewise, one should visit Pinga Tirtha where the fruit of charity of hundred cows was received. One should also visit Prabhas Kshetra where Agni Deva stayed always and would be qualified for the Punya of 'Manava Agnishtoma' and 'Atirathra Yagna'. Further one should witness the Sangam of River Sarasvati and the Sea on the western Bharata, where also the 'phala' of charity of one thousand cows would be reaped. Stay of three nights and simultaneous performance of Pitru Tatpanas at Varuna Tirtha would award Ashwamedha Yagna phal. Vara daana Tirtha was also

stated to endow Sahasra Go Daana Phala. Visit to Dwarakapuri could not be missed as even now 'Mudras' or reproductions of Trishul on Lotus Leaves are visioned there. Snaana- Rudra Puja- Pradakshina at Shankha kantheswara Tirtha would grant ten Ashwamedha Phal and remission of sins for the entire life. Even mere reaching Vasudhara Tirtha would provide the fruit of the Horse-Sacrifice while Tarpana to Pitras would benefit far further. Not far from here were Vasu Tirtha immensely liked by the Ashta Vasus as also Brahma Tunga Tirtha for pleasing Lord Brahma by worship and Renuka Tirtha for purifying of conscience. In the near vicinity were Pancha Nada Tirtha, Bhima Tirtha and Giri Kunja Tirtha. In Kashmira Pradesh the Tirthas are Vitasta Tirtha, Malada Tirtha, Dirgha Satra Tirtha, Shashayana Tirtha (reputed for Snaanans in River Saraswati on Kartika Pournimas), Kumarakoti Tirtha, Rudra koti Tirtha and the most renowned Sangama Tirtha for bathing in the River Saraswati for destroying life-long sins. In Kurukshetra, Narada's recommendation was for a month-long stay, where Bhagavan Vishnu was stated to have been very receptive to the desires of his devotees, where there was a Place known as 'Satata Sthan' or Place Forever quite appropriately. The popular Tirthas in Kurukshetra included Shalvikini, Panchanada, Soma Tirtha, Kruta Shoucha, Pampa, Varaha Tirtha, Kaaya shodhana, Lokodhhara, Kapila and Go -Bhavana. Even if the air-borne dust of Kurukshetra got deposited in the skin pores of a Pilgrim, sins of the traveller in the region evaporate away into thin air; this was what Sage Narada affirmed! From Kurukshetra, Narada desired to visit Brahmavarta and gradually reach Kasishwara to get rid of sins, proceed to Sheetavana and Swarnalomapanayana. It was recommended that one should preferably enter Pundarika Tirtha on Shukla Paksha Dashami and after reaching Trivishtap Tirtha, take bath in the River Vaitarini to wash off sins and worship Bhagavan Shankara. Thereafter, a devotee should visit Paanikhyat Tirtha and Mishrikha Tirtha. It was stated that Maharshi Veda Vyas sought to unite the Tirthas around and hence the name was Mishrika. There was Runantak Kuup where Til daan be performed and two very significant Tirthas named Ahan and Sudina Tirthas where Snaanans bestow the blessings of Surya Deva. Snaanans and Pujas at Koti Tirtha would enable charity of thousand cows. Kapalamochana Tirtha on the banks of the Holy River Saraswati and the highly popular Pruthudak Tirtha for worshipping Devas and Pitras were two holy spots with unbelievable power. The belief had been that there would be no 'Punarjanma' after worship at these two Tirthas! At the Samgam (Confluence) of Rivers Saraswati and Aruna, a three-night stay at the world renowned Tirtha would relieve sins of seven generations including Brahma hatya. From there, two Tirthas called Shathasahastra and Sasahastra are reputed too as visits and Pujas endow the Punya of donating a thousand cows. Snaanans and Worships at Renuka Tirtha, Panchavat Tirtha and Sthanuvata Tirtha were all highly significant, before a devotee reached Sannihita Tirtha where sacred snaanas during Solar Eclipses are stated to equate those at all the Tirthas, Jalasayas, Kupas and Mandirs. Naimisharanya, -stated to be the most significant Knowledge Center and the unique Meeting Point of Rishis and their deliberations signifying the contents of all the Holy Puranas and Scriptures addressed by Veda Vyasa, Maha Muni Sutha, Sage Shounaka and others- was the famed Region where the Kali Kala Chakra could not enter and kept the age-old Sancity of earlier Yugas in tact. From Kurukshetra to Dharma Tirtha where Yama Dharma Raja performed penance of thousands of years, folowed by a visit to Kalaapa Vana, Suvarna Tirtha and Sougandhika Vana is stated to be a great experience since the sins of seven generations would get evaporated. Pilgrimage to Gangadwar (Haridwar), Koti Tirtha Snaan and worship at Sapta Ganga, Tri Ganga and Shakravarta Tirthas would fetch the fruits of performing Pundarika Yagna and Sahasra Go Daana. The most important 'Yatra' as commended by Narada Muni related to Kalindi Tirtha. The Devarshi asserted that the 'Punya' earned from the pilgrimage to Pushkar, Kutukshetra, Bhahmaavarta, Pruthudak, Avamukta Kshetra

(Kashi) and Suvarna Tirtha could be equated to that of Yamuna Snaan! Bathing in Yamuna with or without ‘Sakaama’ or ‘Nishkama’ ie with or without objective was certain like what a ‘Kama dhenu’ or ‘Chintamani’ (desire- fulfillers) would impart instantly. Those bathing in Kalindi waters irrespective of their ‘Varnas’ or castes would become handsome, healthy and strong and what was more, they would be highly blessed. Narada Muni said that in Satya Yuga, persons are liberated by means of Penance and Tapas; in Treta Yuga by Gyan, in Dwapara Yuga by Yagnas, and in Kali Yuga by giving away ‘Daanas’, but Kalindi Kanya or Devi Yamuna surpassed these limitations since even a worshipful ‘Snaana’ would be enough to liberate the person concerned in the present Yuga. In this connection, Sage Narada gave the illustration of a Vaishya called Hemakundal who amassed riches, although by fair means, but did not beget children for long. He followed a highly virtuous life of Deva Puja, giving away donations, Atithi-Satkar (Respects to Guests) and such other ‘Punya Karyas’. As a result, he was blessed with two sons, but both of them squandered money and out of helplessness, the Vaishya retired into forests. The sons Shrikundal and Vikundal squandered the hard earned and honest money of the father and became victims of wine, women and gambling. They died early due to vices almost simultaneously. Yamadootas took away the two brothers to Yamaloka where the elder son was sent to Rourava Naraka while the second son was sent to Swarga. This happened so, even though both the sons did same kind of vicious deeds but the second son took only two dips in River Yamuna; the first ‘snaan’ liberated his sins and the second dip granted him Swarga! As the Yamadootas conveyed to Vikundal that it might be possible to transfer his elder brother also to Swarga, there was perhaps a possibility to do so if only the Punya of the younger brother could be donated to his elder brother, then the younger decided to do so; by this transfer, the elder brother no doubt was able to reach Swarga, but in view of the self-less sacrifice of the younger one in the process of donation so liberally given away to the elder brother, he too was given a berth in Swarga! Devarshi Narada described then the magnitude of Kashipura to Yudhishtara. Bhagavan Shiva and Devi Parvati adorned the Throne atop the mount of Meru Parvat once and the latter desired to know as to how his devotees could vision the Bhagavan without experiencing too many insurmountable obstacles. Parama Shiva then gave away the secret that Kashipura was the unique Place of his residence where his devotees could observe the requisite regulations of Dharma and vision him instantly. Kashipura thus came to be known as the Avimukta Kshetra which had been dear to him; whatever endeavours that human beings could perform at Varanasi by way of Daana-Japa-Homa-Yagna-Tapasya-Dhyana-Adhyayana and Gyan would all be everlasting. The past sins of all the Beings stored for thousands of births would vanish even while entering Kashipura. This would be applicable to Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Lower Varnas, Varnasankaras or of mixed varnas, women, Mlecchhas, Chandalas, animals, birds and worms and ants.

Yatra saakshan Mahadevo dehaantey Swayameeshwarah, Vyachashtey taarakam Brahma tatraivahyavi muktakey/ Vaaranaasthaa chaasya madhye Vaaranaasipuri, tatraiva samshitam Tatvam nithyamevam vimuktakam/ Varanasyam param sthanam na bhutam na bhavishyati, Yatra Narayano Devo Mahadevo Diviswarah/ Mahapathakino Devi ye tebhyaaha paapakrutamaah, Vaaraanaseem samaasaadhya tey yaanti paramaam gatim/ Tasmannumukshurniyato vasudvai maranaantakam, Vaaranasyam Maha Devaajnaanam labdhwa vimuchyatey/ (To those who were about to die in the Avimukta Kshetra, Bhagavan himself would preach the Taraka Brahma Mantra. The Sacred Place called Varanasi in between the two Rivers of ‘Varana’ and ‘Asi’ is full of ‘Nitya Vimukta Tatwa’ or the Philosophy of Permanence and Liberation. There was never a Place like Varanasi nor ever be where Bhagavan Narayana and Deveswara resided with luminosity. A Great Sinner or even a worse example like him would qualify for liberation as soon as he entered Varanasi. That was the reason why ‘Mumukshus’ or those desirous of

achieving liberation desired to reside in Kasi with self-control and dedication till their termination and prompt Bhagavan Shiva himself to bestow ‘Gyan’ and ‘Mukti’ to them). Narada asserted that just as Purushotthama Narayana was the superior among Devas, and Maha Deva was the utmost among Ishwaras, Kashi-pura was the most significant among the Tirthas. This was why people of high understanding longed with the cherished hope of living and if possible die at Varanasi. At Varanasi, there is a popular Shiva Linga called Kapardeswar, where devotees perform Pujas and Pitru Tarpanas; in fact, they should stay there for six months to achieve ‘Yoga Siddhi’. Also, taking baths at Pischacha Mochana Kund nearby the Temple and carrying on with Pujas to Kapardeshwar would result in demolition of ‘Maha Patakas’ like ‘Brahma hatya’. In the days of yore, a Tapaswi Brahmana named Shankhakarna performed Puja, ‘Rudra Paath’ and ‘Pranava Japa’; he decided to worship Kapardeswara always till the end of his life’s journey accordingly. One day Shankhakarna visioned a hungry Piscacha nearby and when asked by the Brahmana, the Piscacha narrated that in his last birth he was a prosperous Brahmana with a large family, but did not heed to perform pujas to Devas, Cows and Guests nor did any worthy task. The Piscacha asked Shankhakarna to suggest a way out for getting rid of his existing status. The latter asked the Piscacha to take the Sacred Name of Kapardewara and immediately jump into the Kund nearby the Temple and the Piscacha died while swimming. The Brahmana was happy that the Piscacha was relieved and he prayed to Kapardeswar as follows: ‘Bhagavan’! You wear ‘Jata-jut’ (twisted and coarse hair on head and face) and known as ‘Kapardi’; you are ‘Paratpar’, saviour, unique, Purana Purusha, Yogeswara, and ‘Agni Rupa’, mounted on the Sacred Nandiswar; I take refuge in you; You are ‘Ru’ or the Distancer of Sorrows thus known as Rudra; you extend all over the Sky, Brahma Swarupa! I seek your protection; you possess thousand feet, eyes, heads and Forms; you are incomprehensible even to Vedas; You are ‘Lingarहित’ or beyond understanding as a man or a woman; ‘Aloka Shunya’, Swayam Prakash’ or Auto-illuminated; You are ‘hara’ or the eliminator of obstacles; ‘Bheda Shunya’ or ‘Adviteeya’ (Exclusive)! I seek your fortification! By so saying, Shankhakarna fell down the Earth while reciting ‘Pranava Mantra’ and integrated into ‘Shivaswarpa’ which was Eternal and Blissful. From Varanasi to Gaya, Narada suggested the course to perform Pinda Daana at the Vata Vriksha named Akshaya vat and after taking bath at *Maha Nadi*, execute Tarpanas to Devas and Pitras. This would firm up ‘Kulodhaara’ or purify the ‘Kula Vamsa’. Thereafter pay visits to Brahmaranya, Dhenuka Tirtha, Grudhnavati (for Bhasma Snaan), Udaya Parvat (for Darshan of Savitri and to render ‘Sandhyopaasana’ to obtain the benefit of rendering Gayatri Mantra for Twelve Years), Yonivaasa (to avoid the nine-month Garbhavaasa), Phalgu River Snaana, Dharma Pushti Yatra, Mani Naga tirtha, Brahmarshi Gautami Vana, Ahalya Kunda Snaana, Gandaki Nadi atra, Maheswari Dhara, Narayana Sthaana (where Brahma, Devas, Rishis, Twelve Adityas, Eight Vasus, and Eleven Rudras worship Janaardana), Shaaligrama Tirtha (where a Well contained the waters from Four Oceans), Jatismara Tirtha, Vateswara, Patakanashini Koushiki, (Kosi Nadi), Champakaranya, Koushala Nadi, Kaala Tirtha (where charity of Twelve Bulls was excised), Sona-Jyotirathi Sangam, Pushpavati Snaan, Mahendra Parvat, Matanga Kshetra, and finally Gokarna Tirtha. Sage Narada made a special mention of *Prayaga* as one of the most Sacred Tirthas of Bharata Varsha where Brahma and Narayana were both ready to bestow their blessings to mankind. This is also the unique ‘Sangam’ (Confluence) Point of two illustrious Rivers of Bharata viz. Ganga and Yamuna. It was stated that the Region between these two glorious Rivers constituted the middle portions of Prithvi. Prayag’s name, if heard, or sung was worthy of prostration. Being the Yagna Bhumi of Devas, the Sangama Snaan is known as the most outstanding experience witnessed ever by Devas. Even a small ‘Danaa’ at Prayaga is stated to have a snow-balling effect to assume manifold times. The saying was that

one should perform Tapasya at Pushkara, Daan on a Mahalaya day, and Upavas (fasting) at Bhru-gu-tunga. Mere Snaan at Pushkar, Kurukshetra and Ganga would register freedom of sins for seven generations in the previous births and seven generations ahead. The moment that a person touched his or her backbone in Ganga, that person's details would get recorded. Where ever Ganga flows, all the Regions and Tapovanas on the River Banks are known as Siddha Kshetras. If a person were unable to actually visit Prayaga and experience the Sangama Snaana, atleast even mental desire would yield Punya. Also, Punya begets Punya and those who possess strong faith would certainly fulfill their desires to take up the pilgrimage. Qualifying further the 'Mahatmya' of Prayaga, Suta Maha Muni narrated the illustration of Yudhishtara; he experienced untold misery that the icon of Kuru Vamsa like Bhishma, Gurus like Drona and Kripacharya, First Cousins, Karna and countless close relatives were all mercilessly killed and could not overcome the grief yet, quite after the passage of time. As though in response to the predicament of Yudhishtara, Mahatma Markandeya visited Yudhishtara. He assured that what Yudhishtara and other Pandavas had done was not only a duty of a Kshatriya, but also a grand vindication of Dharma and justice vis-a-vis the vicious and highly sinful actions perpetrated by Kauravas; the Elders and some of the Virtuous personalities who sided the wrongdoings had to suffer too in the bargain. Having fully justified the actions of Pandavas and assuaged the personal feelings of Yudhishtara, Mahatma Markandeya recommended Tirtha Yatra to Prajapati Kshetra starting from Prayaga to Pratihthanapura. Lord Brahma and Devatas were in complete charge of this memorable Tirtha. Vishnu and Maheswara too protect Prayaga and the adjoining Region with vehemence. A three-night stay fasting at Prayaga, especially after bathing, Pinda daana and charity of cows, gold and Bhumi would readily bestow the fruits of Ashwamedha Yagna and more than that great mental peace to have killed so many enemies at the Maha Bharata Battle, assured Markandeya. Any person performing Panchagni Sewa between at the Sangam area of Ganga and Yamuna would never have physical disabilities and diseases, besides Swargawas in as many years as hairs on the body. A death at Prayaga would secure relief from the cycle of further lives and deaths. Accordingly, Panadavas did the 'Sevas' at Prayaga and several Tirthas around by way of daily Snaan, liberal Daanas, fastings, Pinda Daanas, Keshava Pujas and so on.

Nadi Pushkara Nirnaya: Among the great crowd pullers and festivals, Nadi-Pushkaras are significant which occur every twelve years invariably during Chaitra- Vaishakha-Jyesththa months normally coinciding April-June excepting in respect of Kaveri in September. Also the most distinguished Rivers are stated to be associated with the Janma Raasis or Birth Charts of human beings viz. Mesha/ Aries for Ganga River; Vrishabha / Taurus for Saraswati River; Karka / Cancer for River Yamuna; Simha / Leo for Godavari River; Kanya/Virgo for River Krishna' Tula /Libra for Kaveri; Vrischika / Scorpion for Bhima River; Dhanush /Saggitarius for Brahmaputra; Makara/ Capricorn for Tunga- Bhadra Rivers; Kumbha / Aquarius for Sindhu and Meena/ Pisces for Pranahita or Parinita River. For instance Ganga Pushkaras for twelve days are calculated from April 22-May 5,2023. Like wise the Pushkaras for Narmada during April 22-May 5, 2024; Saraswati from May 15-26, 2025; Yamuna from June 2-15,2016; Godavari from Ashadha Chaturdasi enters Simha Raashi ie from July 14-25, 2015 again in 2027; Krishna Pushkaras from August 12-23, '16 ; Kaveri from Sept. 12-23, 17; Bhima from September 12-23, 217; Tapti / Brahma putra in Assam from March 29, 2019; Tungabhadra from March 39-April 10, 2020; Sindhu from April 6-17, 2021; and Pranahita / Parineeti from April 13-24, 2022.

Conclusion: Every human being is essentially a social animal, irrespective of religion, country, or creed. There has to be a constant interaction with one's own family, environs, and the concerned Society; yet religion does condition one's actions and hence the Bhagavad Gita's counsel of 'Swadharmā'; It states : *Shreyaan swadharmo niginah paradharmatsanushthitaat, Swadharme nidhanam shreyah paradharmo bhahaapahah/ - Karma Yoga of Chapter III, stanza 35* (The best principle is always to follow one's own 'Dharmaachara' or religion even if it has its limitations; the customs of other religions may seem attractive; but one ought to pursue one's own since even death could be a better alternative!) Each human being is to follow one's *own duty* in the overall social framework. All Hindus are required to ensure cleanliness viz. *baahyaatara shuchi* or physical and internal cleanliness, Deva Puja, daily duties, Atithi Seva, meditation or introspection and Dharmaacharana. The last stated precept involves control of passion, anger, avarice, arrogance, ego and detachment. Against this background, festivities and austerities go hand in hand as these are the two sides of the same coin. All this is in the spirit of Bhagawad Archana, to be able to bond with Divinity externally in form of social gatherings in these festivals and internally through the various austerities and vrata acharana. Hence the maxim of *Iham Param* or the fulfillment of this life and and of its beyond, invariably another birth again!

Quite a few of the renowned social festivals in Bharat are widespread country wide like Dussera and Deepaavalis; some are extremely popular like Ganesh Chaturthis, Shiva Ratris, Devi Pujas, Shri Rama Navami, Krishna Jayantis, Lakshmi Pujas and so on which too are observed nation wide. But there are extremely essential festivals typically exclusive for specified regions. Women normally influence the men folk and children as the driving forces. Invariably, all these are signified with religious overtones and undertones. Thus these Festivals at the country-regional-sub regional-township or village levels even to extent of family circles and orientation. Vratas, Deva-Devis, Temples, Sarovaras and Rivers are intertwined with festivals and the austerities involved.

Thus religious and social customs centred around the festivities have a deep dent on any individual Hindu psyche or for that matter of any other faith on the analogy of: *aakaashat patitam toyam yathaa gacchati saagaram!* - or rain water collected from the heavens would finally be absorbed into the Great Oceans! Indeed festivals and austerities finally merge into each other excepting that their individual intensities and sensitivities are polarized gloriously!

*OM PURNAM-ADAH PURNAM-IDAM PURNAAT-PURNAM UDACHYATE,PURNASYA PURNAM
AADAAYA PURNAM EVA AVASISHYATE/OM SHANTIH SHANTIH SHANTIH/*

(Almighty is the Totality and Complete in Perfection, while countless units and forms radiate and derive from this Entirety; Indeed That Supreme Energy keeps up the Balance. Thus let Peace prevail for ever and ever!)