

SELECT STORIES FROM PURANAS

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Preface:

Hindu Puranas are replete with Stories with the moral of destroying Evil and vindicating Virtue. They describe incidents related to Avatars, Devas, Vamshas, Kings, Rishis, Demons, and humanity in general. The underlining message in all the Puranas is that all the Species in the Lord's Creation - be it Devas or Demons, humanity or other living Beings are bound by the basic Principle ie. one sows as reaps. One's own 'Karma' or action is decided by the previous action in the never-ending cycle of births and deaths. This current action of any Being shapes the future Karma. The Supreme Force creates 'Maya' or Illusion and influenced by 'Tri Gunas' or The Three Characteristics of Satva-Rajas-Tamas Nature, Maya decides each and every action or the Cause which further leads to the Reaction or the Effect! Hence, morality is the crux and behaviour is the corner stone of all Beings, with special reference to human beings.

Veda Vyasas scripted Eighteen Main Puranas besides several Upa-Puranas. The Main Puranas are Brahma Purana, Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Brahmanda Purana, Bhagavata Purana, Vishnu Purana, Matsya Purana, Kurma Purana, Varaha Purana, Vamana Purana, Shiva Purana, Linga Purana, Skanda Purana, Markandeya Purana, Agni Purana, Narada Purana, Padma Purana, Bhavishya and Garuda Purana. Some of the prominent Upa Puranas include Deva Bhagavata, Narasimha, Vayu, Sthala, Nilamata Puranas.

Some basic facts common to Puranas

The Unknown and Eternal Paramatma or The Supreme Energy materialised the Alternate Power called Prakriti / Maya which further appeared as Maha Tatwa or the Great Awareness. The latter made possible the occurrence of 'Ahamkara' or Ego in Abstract Form or the Inherent Consciousness which got transformed as Bhutas or Tangible Entities the very First Entity being Narayana who created 'Apo Naara' or the Radiant Water who floated on that Water and was hence called Narayana. He deposited his virility with the resolve of creating and there got manifested a Brahmanda, the Huge Golden Egg inside which there was seated Hiranya garbha Brahma. The Egg had two parts viz. Diva/ Urthwa Loka or the Upper Part and 'Bhuva' or Earth and the Space between these Parts was 'Akaasha' the Sky. There were manifestations eventually of Sapta Lokas (Bhuloka, Bhuvarloka, Swarloka, Maharloka, Janarloka, Tapoloka and Satyaloka), Sapta Patalaas (Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Talaatala, Mahatala, Rasatala and Patala); Dasha Dishas or Ten Directions viz. Uttara or North-East or Purva-Dakshina or South-Paschim or West-Ishanya or North East -Agneya or South East-Nirriti or South West- Vayavya or North West-Urthwa or Upper Region and Atho Lokas or the Nether Worlds; Sapta Dwipas (Jambu, Plaksha, Salmaali, Kusha, Krouncha, Shaka and Pushkala); Sapta Samudras (Lavana or Salt, Ikshurasa or Sugarcane juice, Sura or Wine, Ghrita or Classified Butter, Dahi or Curd, Ksheera or Milk and Suswada or Sweet Water); Sapta Parvatas (Sumeru , Kailas, Malaya, Himalaya, Udyachala, Agastyachala, Suvela and Gandhamadana); Ashta Loka Palakas (Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirriti, Varuna, Vayu, Kubera and Ishana); Kaal maana or Time Calculation (Triti-hundred tritis oneVedha- three Vedhas one Lava-Three Lavas on Nimesha- Three Nimeshas one Kshana- five nimeshas one kashta or eight seconds- fifteen kashtas one laghu or two minutes- fifteen laghus one danda- six to seven dandas one fourth of a day or night-four praharas or yamas one day or night- two pakshas a month-two months a Ritu or Season- Six months one Ayana-365 combinations of a day / night one year- one year a Deva year-1200 Yugas comprising Satya of 4800 Deva Years, Treta Yuga of 3600, Dwapara of 2400 and Kaki yuga of 1200 Deva Years make one a Maha Yuga-100 Maha

Yugas one Kalpa and Two Maha Kalpas are one life time of Brahma; Brahma is now passing through his fifty first year and his life span is 100 such years; we are now in the 28th Kali yuga of the first day of the first year of the third Sweta Varaha kalpa, second paraartha in the reign of the Seventh Manu named Vivaswanta. Kali Yuga is calculated to have commenced on 17th February 3102 BC of Julion Calendar). Besides the Kaala maana (Time), other notable creations were Manasa (Thought), Vaak (Speech), Shad Vargas or the Six Aberrations of Kama-Krodha-Lobha-Moha-Mada- Matsara viz. Desire, Anger, Greed, Infatuation, Arrogance and Jealousy; as also: Pancha Bhutas viz. Earth, Water, Agni, Wind and Sky; Nava Grahas of Surya, Chandra, Mangala, Budha, Guru, Shukra, Shani, Rahu-Ketu; Chatur Vedas of Rik-Yajur-Saama and Atharva besides Shat-Vedangas viz. Siksha including Sangeeta and Nayaaya, Vyakarana, Kalpa Grandha, Nirukta, Chandas Shastra and Jyotisha. Ekadasha Rudras or Eleven Rudras viz. Mahaan, Mahatma, Matimaan, Bhishana, Bhayankara, Ritudwaja, Urthwakesha, Pingalaksha, Rucha, Shuchi, and Kalaagni; Sapra Rishis viz. Marichi, Atri, Angirasa, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, and Vasishtha; Four Kumaras viz. Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanat and Sanatana; besides Narada-all Brahma's mind-born sons.; Chaturashramas, Yagnas and Agni Homas like Shodasi, Ukta, Purushi, Agnishtoma, Aptoryama, Atiratra, Vajapeya, Goshava etc. Other facts worth noting in the context of Puranas are Fourteen Manvantaras (Swayambhu, Swarochisha, Uttama, Tamasa, Raivata, Chakshusa, the present Vaivaswata, Savarni, Bhoutya, Rouchya and four more Savarnyas) and Prajapatis and Vamshas, especially of Surya and Chandra and their lineages.

Daksha Prajapati and his wife Prasuti had sixty daughters, ten of whom were given in charity to Dharma, seventeen to Kashyapa Muni, twenty seven to Chandra and two each to Rishis Angira, Krasaswa and Bhuta. Dharma's wives gave birth among others to Twelve Sadhyas called Jaya Devas considered as good as Devas reputed in the context of Yagnas like Darsha, Pounamavasya, Vithi, Vivithi etc. Dharma's another wife Vasu gave birth to Ashta Vasus like Dhara, Soma, Ayu, Pratyusa etc. From Angirasa and Vastu Devi was born Vishwakarma and so on. But the most significant progeny of Daksha's daughters was from Kashyapa Muni as follows: Indras and Devas from Aditi; Diti gave birth to Daityas like Hiranya Kashipu (killed in Narasimha Avatara as he tormented his own son Prahlada) and Hiranyaksha (who dragged Bhu Devi to Rasatala but was rescued by Vishnu's Avatara viz. Matsya Deva) as also Marudganas (when Diti performed a very severe Vrata to destroy Devas and got conceived from Kashyapa, Indra feigned affection to Diti and when she was asleep entered her womb and by his 'Siddhi' called 'Anima' or miniaturising cut the child seven times by his Vajrayudha and made further seven pieces totalling forty nine and after delivery each piece became a Marud by Kashyapa Muni's powers and the Marudganas turned out to be share-holders of Yagnas and as good as Devatas and were Indra's followers!); Danu Devi gave birth to Danavas whose Chief was Viprachit and the latter's wife Simhika gave birth to Simhika who were more cruel and notorious than Danavas in grit for Tapasya, mainly targetting Sages and Brahmanas. Rahu was the eldest son of Simhika; the most infamous among the Simhikas were Vatapi, Bhouma and Namuchi. The worst of Danavas were Shambhara, Maya, Tarakasura, Jambha, Naraka, Pralamba etc. who had passion for destroying Yagnas, Shraddhas, children and cows too. Devi Kadru another wife of Kashyapa Muni was the mother of Serpents, the most famed ones of the species being Sesha, Vasuki and Takshaka besides Irvata, Mahapadma, Kambala, Ashwatara, Shankha, Karkotaka, Dhananjaya, Kaliya and so on. Khasa Devi had two sons one at dawn time and another at dusk; the elder son had four hands and four legs with high hair growth all over his body and the younger one had three heads, three hands and three legs. Both were ferocious and grotesque; one wanted to eat his mother out of extreme hunger and another desired to save the mother. Kashyapa named them Rakshasas; they were weak and dull but as the dusk grew into night they became invincible and all powerful with the ability to change into any Form as they wished enjoying the flesh of Devas, Sages, human beings, animals or birds. Surabhi was the mother of cows and buffalos; Vinata the mother of Garuda and Aruna the

charioteers of Vishnu and Surya; Arista gave birth to Gandharvas; Muni was the mother of Aprasas or Angels; ILA Devi was the mother of creepers; Tamra gave birth to vultures, eagles and large birds; Timi to acuquatics and Saras to tigers, lions and ferocious animals. Thus Kashyapa Vamsha stood for Dharma, Kshama, and Virtue and at the same time for Adharma, jealousy, cruelty and sheer depravity.

Stories related to Manus and Vamshas

As the pace of Creation in the Universe was slow at the beginning, Brahma divided himself into two one as himself and another as a female called Shatarupa. The latter did Tapsya for ten thousand years and begot a husband named Swayambhu Manu born on his own. Manu and Shatarupa gave birth to Veera, Priyavrata and Uttanapada.

Priyavrata ruled Sapta Dwipas of which Jambu Dwipa was a part of Bharata. In his childhood Priyavrata secured Brahma Gyan (Enlightenment) and declined to marry. Manu admonished his son that he was too young to become an ascetic and the Almighty created human beings to pass through childhood, student life, married life, detachment and renunciation and that the golden rule of married life should be like that of a dew on a lotus leaf and so on. Finally, Priyavrata ended up with two wives; he had the distinction of travelling by his chariot and earmarked the entire Bhu Loka into Sapta Dwipas and entrusted the Seven Dwipas to be entrusted to his sons.

Varudhini and Pravarakhya: The births of King Swarochi and Manu Swarochisha had an interesting background. A learned Brahmana youth called Pravarakhya on the banks of River Varuna observed the required rituals regularly and worshipped guests. Once a Siddha who had knowledge of Mantras, Tantras and especially of indigenous herbs and their usages arrived and Pravarakhya evinced interest to visit Himalayas; he gave an exotic herb and asked the youth to apply its 'lepana' or its essence on his feet and he could visit Himalayas instantly by closing his eyes. But the Siddha cautioned that the lepana would dry up by the Sunset. Indeed, Pravarakhya landed in the thick jungles atop Himalayas and was lost in an unparalleled vision of ice mountain linings and the abundant glory of flora and fauna, the dizzy views of valleys, waterfalls etc. The youth was fully conscious that he would have to return by the dusk time. In that place of blissful silence, he spotted a damsel-an Apsara named Varudhini- and initiated conversation; the friendly dialouge ended up with her sincere entries to marry her ; when she was refused , she begged him to atleast mate with her once. Pravara a strict Brahmachari of proven celibacy ran away from her and in the process his lepana on his feet got dried up and he lost his way. As he was badly delayed for his evening rituals back home he prayed to Agni Deva who in the form of an elderly Brahmana appeared and reached him home. Meanwhile the frustrated Varudhini became too passionate for Pravara. A Gandharva boy he was rejected by Varudhini earlier got scent of the situation and having changed his Swarupa as a Maya Pravarakhya approached her and said he changed his mind and cheated her into bed on the condition however that she should close her eyes at the time of their union so that she would not realise that he was not the genuine Pravara . Varudhini and Maya Pravara lived together for a year and Swarochi was born of Pravara's intellect and discipline and Varudhinis's charm and physical attraction.

Swarochisha Manu's story was far more interesting. Once King Swarochi he was wandering in a forest aimlessly and heard a desperate female voice in great anguish as though was being chased. Soon enough, the female appeared and requested Swarochi to save her by a demon; she said that she knew some 'Astras' or Mantrik Arrows from her dead father and he could save her from the Danava who was chasing her. Swarochi then killed the Danava and a grateful female narrated her story: her name was Manorama and along with her friends Vibhavari and Kalavati wandered in a forest and offended a Muni while in his meditation. The Muni cursed Manorama an Apsara to descend to Earth

and her friends to become as lepers. When the Apsaras begged of the Muni, the latter agreed that a brave youth would be chased by a Danava and the curses of the Muni would be reversed. Incidentally, the Danava who was killed was Manorama's own father! Swarochi married Manorama but she was unhappy that her companions remained as lepers. Swarochi cured both Vibhavari and Kalavati of their leprosy by his knowledge of herbal medicines. A grateful Vibhavari said that she was a Gandharva Kanya (unwed) and that she could teach Swarochi the language of animals provided that he would agree to marry her. Kalavati also offered to teach him the 'Padmini Vidya' the art of learning the way to abundant Prosperity that was taught by Devi Parvati herself when Kalavati wanted to commit self-immolation as her father died of a thunderbolt. Thus Swarochi was fortunate to wed three celestial damsels in a row! [Incidentally, Padmini Vidya denotes Eight Sources of Wealth viz. Padma or investments in precious metals used for charities, Maha Padma or wealth from high value acquisitions leading to large scale deeds like Yagnas, Makara or prosperity involving famous deeds like battles, Kacchapa is the wealth that is land based to be utilised for Dharma Karyas or Deeds of Virtue, Mukunda is wealth emerging from Fine Arts leading to fulfillment of life, Nandaka is that kind of wealth utilised for social functions, Neela is that source of wealth involving Dhanya, Vastra and such other transactions and Shankha is the wealth for one's own family.]

Having lived happily for six hundred years, King Swarochi one day went on a hunting spree and witnessed a female deer being chased by a boar; the King tried to kill the boar but the deer begged him to kill it instead but he disagreed since she was defenceless. As she insisted to kill her on mercy grounds so that she would be able to marry a handsome person in her next birth, he asked as to who that handsome could be and she replied coyly pointing to the King; the latter stated that it might not be possible. She then asked her to embrace her once and a miracle would happen by the Vana Devata or the Goddess of the Forest. The King embraced the deer and the deer delivered Swarochisha Manu.

King Uttama fell prey to a dancing girl and abandoned his own wife Bahula and in a weak moment abandoned her to forests. He regretted his action later and tried to recover her but failed. After long lapse of time a Brahmana called Susharma complained that his wife was kidnapped and it was the duty of the King to recover her. He then took the help of a 'Trikalajna' who knew the Present, Past and the Future and came to know that the Brahmana wife was under the duress of a Rakshasa; the King located the Rakshasa and brought him under control. The Trikalajna also informed that in Patala a Naga Raja called Salapotaka was forcing Queen Bahula to marry him and that she should also look after the Naga Princess who was deaf and dumb. With the help of the Rakshasa whose life was spared by the King earlier even if the Rakshasa kidnapped the Brahmana's wife, the King reached Patala and killed the Naga King and sought pardon to the Queen for his foolish act. The Queen desired that the Naga Princess be some how restored her speech and hearing capacity. Susharma the Brahmana who was grateful to the King performed 'Sarasvata Sukta Parayana' (recitation of the Prayers to Goddess Sarasvati) bestowed the power of Speech and Hearing to the Naga Princess. A Maha Muni called Karna visited to the Kingdom and was pleased with the King's good deeds after his initial mistake in restoring the Brahmana's wife, the Queen as also the Speech and Hearing capacity of the Naga Princess and blessed King Uttama to secure a famed son **Uttama Manu** who would control the whole world!

King Surashtra had hundred wives but without a single child. He prayed to Surya Deva to extend his life but all his wives died. He resorted to severe Tapasya standing one legged amid 'Panchagnis' or the Five Sacred Fires in top summer; in acute winter braving the icy exposure in the open and in the rainy season withstanding torrential rains. He got carried away in a flood by holding the tail of a female deer and was eventually washed ashore. The deer talked in a female voice and said that she was his first wife and while in the flood when he held the animal tight, she got pregnant; in her child-

hood, she ran after a deer couple ready for mating and the male deer said she would curse her; when asked as to how a deer could talk in human voice, it replied that he was the son of a Muni in her earlier life and mated with a female deer and was born as a 'Jatismara' with the knowledge of previous birth. The Muni Kumar turned male deer asked the princess to mate but she refused and the male deer cursed the Princess that in the next birth who would be a she-deer. King Surashtra heard about the background of his wife turned deer and in course of time delivered a boy but the deer died. The King brought up the boy as Lola with the pet name as **Tamasa** who became the fourth Manu eventually and ruled the world.

Sage Rutavaak could not secure a child for long and after prolonged Tapasya finally secured a male child in the fourth phase of Revati Nakshatra and the son turned out to be a wicked person of great notoriety. The Sage consulted Muni Garga but the latter could not offer a solution as the last phase of Revati was adverse. Rutavaak performed relentless Tapasya and by the virtue of its power made the fourth phase of the Revati Star fall on a Mountain called Raivataka. That specific part of the Fourth Phase of the Star fell in a Sarovara and due to the impact of the fall was materialised as a baby and a Sage named Pramucha brought her as Revati. The Muni desired that Revati would marry a youth named Durdama and Revati insisted to marry only during the fourth phase of Revati Star which however did not exist since it had already fallen on Raivataka Mountain. The Sage had then to revive it again by his Tapasya and the Durdama-Revati couple got wedded and gave birth to a son named **Raivata** who became the fifth Manu.

The birth of the sixth in the series was traced to a King named Anamishra and Queen Giribhadra who gave birth to a boy who laughed loudly when he was fondled by the mother. As the mother wondered about the reason of the laughter, the boy spoke that there was a cat looking at the child! The mother was frightened and ran away. A Rakshasi appeared in the form of a child frightening the Queen by hiding the original Prince; the Rakshasi smuggled away the child of a Brahmana couple and ate it but spared the Prince. As the Prince called Vikrant grew and at his Upanayana function he asked her mother whether he should seek blessings from his original mother or a duplicate! Apparently, the boy required 'Atma Shuddhi' and proceeded to tapasya to Brahma for a very long time. The latter was very pleased and appointed the Prince as the next Manu and named him **Chakshusa!**

The Story of Surya Deva and Progeny

The Story of the seventh and the current Manu Vaiwaswata was indeed outstanding and eventful. Surya Deva who was also called Viwaswan married Vishwakarma's daughter Sanjna Devi. But since Surya was too powerful and radiant, Sanjna was unable to withstand his heat and light and was so afraid of him that she could glance him with wobbly and unsteady eyes. The couple gave birth to Viwaswata Manu and Yama Dharma Raja. Yet, Sanjna Devi could not adjust and continued to suffer Surya's heat; Surya got annoyed and cursed her that she would give birth to a River named Yamuna whose course was uneven and unsteady. Sanjna Devi couple was unable to hold the wrath of her husband any longer and having created a Chhayaa Sanjna (a shadow of hers) and briefed her to pretend like the original Sanjna, left for her father's home. Her father Vishwakarma chided her and asked her to return to her husband. But she assumed the Swarupa of a mare and commenced performing Tapasya in a far off Mountain meadows. Vishwakarma and Devas prayed to Surya to reduce the severity of his Swarupa to sixteenth of his original energy. [The remaining parts were absorbed in Lord Vishnu's Sudarshana Chakra, Shiva's Trishula, Kubera's Palki or palaanquin, Yama Raja's 'danda' or stick, Kartikeya's weapon called Shakti and various Astras or Mantrika Arrows]. Meanwhile Chhaya Devi settled down and gave birth to Shaneswara and River Tapati. In course of time, Yama Dharma Raja noticed Chhaya Devi's attitudinal changes in displaying partiality

of treatment to Shanishwara, and River Tapati as against the earlier children. As Yama complained to Surya about the partiality of Chhaya Devi, Surya confronted her and she blurted out the Truth that original Sanjna created her as a shadow replacement. On finding out the whereabouts of the original Sanjna Devi, Surya also assumed the form of a horse and landed where the mare was in meditation. Presuming that a horse was trying to reach her, the mare sought to secure her rear and in the process their noses got entangled and two sons named 'Naasatya' or nose-born and 'Dastra' or teeth-born were materialised. There after a horse-riding son with Shield and Sword was born named Revanta. Sanjna was happy that her Tapasya succeeded in reducing the severity of Surya Deva. Eventually Vaiwaswata became the current Manu, Yama Dharma Raja the Lord of Death, Yamuna and Tapati as the famed Rivers and Shaneeswara as a Planet. The Sanjna-Chhaya combine also gave birth to two Ashwini Kumars who became the Physicians of Devas as well as Saavarni the future Manu.

Future Manus-Savarnis, Rouchya and Bhouthya

While the seventh in the series of fourteen Manus viz. Vaiwaswata Manu is the current one, predictions about future Manus also were provided in the Puranas, especially the Markandeya Purana in detail. The Eighth Manu would be Saavarni, to be followed by Daksha Savarni, Brahma Saavar ni, Dharma Saavarni and Rudra Saavarni. There were vivid descriptions about the last two Manus as follows:

Ruchi Muni was unmarried and as a bachelor was not eligible to Agni Karyas. Pitru Devatas appeared and lamented that they were unable to receive any contributions to them; only Grihastis could pronounce 'Swaha' to Agni and 'Swadha' to satisfy Pitru Devatas and the Muni was disabled to satisfy the two other kinds of 'Runas' or indebtedness to Devas and 'Atithis' also. But Ruchi Muni argued with the Pitru Devatas that 'Atma Samyam' or Self-Control was essential to 'Mukti' or Salvation and that he would like to avoid the slush of Samsara or family life. Pitru Devas then advised Ruchi Muni that Vedas prescribed that Samsara was the natural ladder to Moksha and 'Samyama', 'Niyama' or Self Control and 'Karma Phala' or the fruits of duties and obligations were the steps of the ladder. The Pitru Devatas further instructed that what was controversial was not the institution of marriage but overcoming the limits of desire, decency and virtue and that Grihastya was the test of life! Convinced by the instruction of the Pitru Devatas, Ruchi Muni finally agreed to family life and performed Tapasya to Brahma; meanwhile Pitru Devatas located a suitable Apsara to wed the Muni and Brahma blessed him with a glorious son who would be the next Manu viz. **Rouchya**.

Sage Bhuti was the ever-angry disciple of Angirasa Muni who was dreaded by even Devas. Surya Deva desisted from being too hot in his Ashram, and Vayu, Varuna and Chandra could ill-afford to display their extreme features. The Muni had no children and perhaps that was the cause of his frustration and temper. The responsibility of managing the affairs of the Sage's Ashram was entrusted to one of his disciples named Shanti. Bhuti gave a special instruction to Shanti that there should be 'Nityagni' the Constant Fire in the Homa Kunda or the Fire-Pit. Shanti once went out to fetch 'Samidhas' or twigs for the Homas as also flowers, fruits and other material for the Ashram, he returned late to the Ashram and to his utter dismay, the Nityagni was put off. Fortunately, Sage Bhuti was out to perform a Yagna to his elder brother's Ashram as the latter too did not have a child. Shanti then prayed to Agni Deva without food for a week and the latter gave his appearance being pleased by his Stotras. Agni Deva was instantly materialised as 'Nityaagni' and he asked Shanti to choose any boon of his wish; Shanti requested for an illustrious son to his Guru. Agni was pleased with the selflessness of Shanti and granted the wish to bestow a glorious son to the Muni who would be a future Manu called **Bhoutya**; Agni also granted higher Lokas to Shanti.

Dhruva the immortal

Swayambu Manu's son King Uttanapada married to Suniti and Suruchi and the respective sons were Dhruva and Uttama. The younger wife and son dominated the King. Once Dhruva desired to sit on his father's lap as his cousin too did, the younger queen prevented Dhruva and talked insultingly and the father remained passive. The young mind of Dhruva was badly hurt and he walked off to his mother who expressed her helplessness and said that only Bhagavan Narayana could help. The disgusted boy entered a nearby forest where he encountered Sapta Rishis and conveyed his anguish that he was not able to sit on his father's lap. The Rishis unanimously advised that he could sit on 'Moksha Pada' or the Seat of the Supreme, let only on his father's lap provided he could worship Narayana relentlessly and please Him. Dhruva requested the Rishis to teach him as to how to worship and in one voice gave him the Upadesha and the Mantra of *Om Namo Vaasudevaaya Shuddha Jnana Swarupiney*. Armed with the method of puja and Japa, Dhruva entered a forest named Madhubana on the banks of River Yamuna, where subsequently Shatrughna of Ramayana killed Daitya Madhu's son Lavanasura. The young Dhruva performed Dhyana and Puja of Narayana with enormous concentration and dedication for years together; so much so that as a single legged Dhruva leaned to the left, Bhumi too got tilted and vice versa and in the process, Rivers-Samudras and Parvatas got disturbed. Indra utilised all kinds of gimmicks to advise, tempt, frighten and subdue the young Dhruva but to no avail. Finally, delegations of Devas prayed to Janardana but the latter assured that the boy had no ambitions to dislodge any of them of their positions including those of Indra, Surya, Varuna or Kubera and none of them needed to fear on that count. Finally, Bhagavan appeared before Dhruva and asked him to terminate his Tapasya. Dhruva prostrated before Narayana, Dhruva was elevated to heights of trance; he requested Narayana to reveal himself which no Parama Yogi or Maharshi ever realised. Maha Vishnu granted Dhruva the vision of his Brihad Swarupa and bestowed to him the unique 'Dhruvastaana'-the Permanent Place on the Sky even above the Lokas of Chandra, Surya, Mangala, Budha, Brihaspati, Shukra, Shani Grahas, and even above the Places of Nakshatras, Sapta Rishis and Devas. Vishnu assured that while Devas would have the longevity of only Four Yugas and a few only of Manvantaras, Dhruva was granted existence for a full Kalpa! He called Dhruva's mother also to occupy the position of a Nakshatra near Dhruva Loka as she was indeed the very first to inspire Dhruva towards Narayana!

King Vena and Prithu Chakravarti

In the lineage of Chakshusa Manu and the Puru Vamsha were Angira and his wife Sunita the daughter Mrityu who gave birth to **King Vena**. In the beginning, Vena's kingship was normal but eventually he ordered that none should perform Yagnas to Devas but to himself. He was so conceited that he claimed himself as a symbol of bravery, victory and unparalleled knowledge. He enacted Regulations verging on sacrilege and sought them to be enforced. For long time, the Subjects suffered him with hatred but the sages revolted and a day arrived when he was imprisoned; in fact Maharshi Atri the Kula Guru spearheaded the popular uprising. They churned his thighs and there emerged an ugly and Frightful 'Kaala Swarup' which was stated to have misdirected his behaviour despite his glorious ancestry. However when they rubbed his right shoulder, there was a sparkling and imposing Figure materialised with bow and celestial arrows donning a Kavacha or a Body Safeguard.

The new **King Prithu** picked up speedy popularity as he proved to be an ideal and virtuous Administrator endeared by Maharshis and commoners alike. In course of time there were no problems owing to physical ailments, mental tensions and even of natural calamities in the Society. This was the first King ever who performed Rajasuya Yagna. It was this illustrious Emperor who controlled Bhumi (Earth); the latter took the Form of a Cow and sought to run away as was she was expected too much from her by various sections of the Universe. But Prithu Chakravarti (literally he whose chariot

wheels move forward swiftly without being interrupted by any opponent party) however chased and forced her to yield maximum milk to one and all in the form that they desired it. Pruthu himself milked her having converted Swayambhu Manu as the calf and made her yield food grains to all, while in regime of Vena the staple food was of flowers and fruits. Various sections of the world milke the material as they desired; for instance, Rishis converted Chandra as a calf, Brihaspati as the milkman, Tapomaya Brahma as the milk and Vedas as the container to fill up the milk; Devas made Indra as the calf, Surya as the milkman and ‘Pushtikaahara’ or healthy food as milk; Pitru Devas requested Yamadharma Raja as the calf, Antaka Deva as the milk man and ‘Swadha’ as the milk; Nagas selected Takshaka as the calf, Iravata Serpent as the milkmen and Visha (Poison) as the milk; Asuras appointed Mathu Daitya as the milkman, Virochana as the calf and Maya (Illusions) as the milk; Yakshas preferred Kubera as the calf, Rajananaabha Yaksha as the milkman and ‘Antardhaana Vidya’ or the Art of Disappearance as the milk; similarly all other species selected their own Milkmen and calves and Gandharvas opted milk in the form of fragrance; Rakshasas opted for blood, Mountains preferred ‘Aoushadhis’ and soon thus satisfying every one in his governance!

Current Manu Vaiwasvata and Surya Vamsha

King Satyavrata was the subsequent Manu Vivasvanta who had the distinction of playing a major role in the context of Vishnu Bhagavan’s Avatara (Incarnation) as **Matsya** or the Giant Fish. The Story was when Satyavrata was paying offerings of waters in the River Kirtimala, a tiny fish appeared in his palms and requested him not to throw it back into the River as big fishes would swallow it and as such keep it in a container. As the fish was kept in a pot, it became too big for the successive containers and grew into a huge fish which filled in the entire Ocean. The giant fish was none other than Bhagavan Narayana himself; the Matsyaavatara directed King Satyavrata to await the arrival of a mammoth Ship and meanwhile the King should collect samples of good human beings, flora, fauna and so on and load these materials. The Matsya further conveyed that as the Ship would arrive with Sapta Rishes aboard on it, it would be hooked to the horns of the Fish to be propelled by the Great Vasuki Serpent when the totality of the Universe would be submerged in water. Lord Brahma would then be woken up from his slumber as the Demon Hayagriva who would have been killed since he would attempt to steal Vedas and other Scriptures. Subsequently Brahma would resume the task of Creation of the Universe afresh!

Manu Vivaswanta gave birth to ten sons including Ikshvaku, Saryati, Nabhaga and Prushaghna. Episoded related to many of the sons of the Manu are interesting mentioned here-below in brief:

Ikshvaku’s lineage included Puranjaya/ Kakustha, Yuvanashra and Mandhata. **Puranjaya** fought a severe battle with Daityas on behalf of Devas by riding a Great Bull who actually was Indra himself by holding the Kakutsa or the hump of the bull thus obtaining the epithet of **Kakutsa or Indravahana!**

King Yuvanashra performed a noted Yagna targetting Indra Deva to secure a son. During the Sacrifice days, he felt very thirsty one midnight in the Yagna Shaala and drank up the ‘Mantra Jala’ or the Sanctified Water kept in a vessel. The Rishis performing the Yagna were aghast to find the vessel empty next morning as the King drank up the Sacred Water. Eventually, the King got conceived instead of his Queen and a male child came out from his abdomen which had to be cut. The child cried for milk and Indra put his index finger in the child’s mouth and saved him!

The boy thus born was **Mandhata**, the undisputed Emperor of the World comprising Seven Dwipas ‘from where Sun rose at where it was set!’ He was stated to have discovered **Manasa Sarovara** on Mount Kailasha as he was reputed to have performed Tapas at the banks of the Lake. It was believed that there was a Serpent Mansion where the Emperor prayed under a Jamun Tree from which

its fruits (Blackberry) dropped into the Sarovar making the sounds of 'Jam' and the area underneath the Sarovara was called Jambu Dwipa!

Mandhata's wife Bindumati was a pious woman and gave birth to **Purukutsa** and **Muchukunda** and **fifty daughters**. There was an interesting Story about the daughters. Sage **Saubhari** a very old and diseased person who did Tapasya under water for twelve years noticed that fishes in water were having sex and procreating; the Muni got tempted and approached Mandhata to let any of his daughters marry him. The Emperor was afraid that the Sage might give a 'Shaap' if declined and asked that anybody among the daughters was prepared to marry the Sage; none consented as the Sage was very old and disgusting physically with diseases. Mandhata had a problem but cleverly replied that his family custom was that all the daughters would have to wed the same person and none should disagree. The Sage transformed himself into a handsome youth by his mystical powers and presented himself. All the girls vied with each other to marry him and the youthful Sage built mansions and all of them enjoyed. But in course of time, the Sage realised that on account of the fishes in the water, his spiritual life was ruined and although very late in life reverted back to a more introspective life and intensified devotion to Vishnu.

Purukutsa married **Narmada** the sister of Serpent brothers and she took him away to Rasatala the sub-terrain world under instruction from King Vasuki as approved by Bhagavan Vishnu to overpower Gandharvas who invaded Rasatala and other Patala Lokas. Nagas were afraid of Gandharvas as some six crores of the latter descended there for hunting the priceless 'Ratnas' / Jewels. Nagas sought protection and prayed to Vishnu in desperation. Indeed Purukutsa succeeded and Nagas gave a boon to Narmada that whosoever bathed in River Narmada by reciting a Shloka would be safe from Sarpa-Visha or Snake- Poison; the Shloka states: *Narmadaayai Namah Praatarnamaadaayai Namo Nisha, Namostu Narmadey tubhyam traahimaam vishasarpatah/* (Devi Narmada! My salutations to you in the day or night; kindly safeguard me from the fear of Serpents and their poisonous bites!) This recitation while entering dark places as also while eating food would safeguard from any kind of poisons thanks to Purukutsa and Narmada!

Trishanku

It was in the lineage of Purukutsa that Satyavrata or the well known **Trishanku** was born. The latter kidnapped a Commoner bride from her Vivaha-Vedika or Wedding Platform and his father, King Traiyaruni-as prompted by Sage Vasishtha the Guru of the King, banished him for life into his Kingdom; while living in the outskirts of the Kingdom Satyavrata adopted the ways of a Chandala or the lowest caste of the Society. Sage Vishwamitra once left away on a long Tapasya for a period of twelve years and as a long drawn 'Anavrishti' (famine) broke up in the Region, Satyavrata provided food to the Sage's wife and children. But the latter stole Vasishtha's cows in his Yagna Shaala and fed Vishwamitra's wife and family with cow meat and the unsuspecting family ate it especially due to hunger. Yet, on return from his Tapasya, Vishwamitra was extremely pleased and felt highly obliged that Satyavrata supported his family for twelve long years! But Vasishtha never excused Satyavrata on three counts: he adopted the ways of Chandala ; he stole the cows from his Ashram and finally he fed cow meat to the innocent and gullible family of a fellow Sage. Thus he cursed Satyavrata as **Trishanku** on the basis of three unpardonable sins especially to Brahmana families! He cursed Satyavrata to become a fullfledged Chandala thus transforming his body complexion and ways of living. But Vishwamitra espoused the cause of Satyavrata; he not only restored the latter's original position as a Prince but also sought him to despatch him in his mortal form to Swarga by the power of his Tapasya. Devas refused the Prince's entry to Swarga and the Sage took it as a challenge and created a duplicate Swarga in the outer space near the original and thus caused the Prince to hang him upside down creating Trishanku Swarga of the Thrice-Sinned Trishanku!

Harischandra, the son of Trishanku etched himself a unique position for truthfulness and virtue in Indian mythology. He ruled his Kingdom with commitment and honesty on the strict lines of Dharma and became a darling of his Subjects. But he had no offspring and prayed to Varuna Deva; the latter blessed the King with a son no doubt but on the condition of offering the child to him in course of time. As and when Varuna Deva reminded the King of the Sacrifice appearing as a Brahmana, the King kept on postponing on some pretext or another. Meanwhile, Sage Vishwamitra developed extreme jealousy and hatred to Harischandra's Raja Guru Maharshi Vasishtha; the hatred was so intense that they cursed each other to become birds and Lord Brahma had to intervene after a few years and made them reverse the mutual curses. Harischandra's son Rohitasya learnt about the background of his birth viz. Varuna Deva's condition that his father would have to sacrifice him to the Deva sooner or later and fled away to forests. Varuna Deva cursed Harischandra to suffer dropsy since the latter could not fulfil his promise. Rohitasya desired to return to take over the Kingdom. But Indra appeared as an old Sage and advised the boy not to return to the Kingdom, lest Varuna would not leave him for a sacrifice and suggested that he should better proceed on Tirtha Yatras to negate the sacrifice to Varuna. Guru Vasishtha arranged that another person would be sacrificed instead of Rohitasya and prayed Varuna to agree to the arrangement that Harishandra be freed from the disease of dropsy. Keeping in view the background of his long standing enmity with Vasishtha, Vishwamitra decided torment Harischandra. He approached the King that he dreamt of Harischandra's promise to donate his entire Kingdom to the Maharshi! The gullible King was tricked to believe of the Sage's dream and was packed him to Kashi along with his wife and son who had returned back after Tirtha Yatras since he was no longer required for human sacrifice. Vishwamitra tormented Harischandra thereafter to defray an astronomical amount by way of Dakshna or fees to be paid to him that he performed for the King in the past; his wife Chandramati and son Lohitasya had to perform menial jobs and were sold in an auction to a house-holder subsequently; he was employed as a bonded labour himself at a Burial Ground; his son was dead in a snake bite while the wife brought the dead body of the son to the same burial ground where Harischandra was a bonded worker; she had to sell her 'Mangal Sutra' or the precious possession of a house wife, and even had to tear off half of her sari to meet the expenses of the burial ! Such were the extreme tests of fate that Harischandra put to all due to his determination to follow what his conscience had demanded and finally succeeded as Lord Vishnu, Indra and Devas appeared when finally Chandramati was forced to take away the rest of her saree to pay for the last rites of the dead son! As he and his wife stood the tests bravely they attained Vaikuntha as their Example was indeed a benchmark to the posterity! Rohitasya was brought back to life and was made the King.

Muchukunda who too belonged to the ancestry of King Ikshwaku was the able Commander of the Army of Devas in a series of battles with Daityas for long time completely disregarding his family and personal health. Indra expressed his gratitude and asked him for a boon. As he was so tired and sleepy, Muchukunda asked Indra to let him sleep and the latter agreed especially because one Deva year was equal to three sixty five human ears and that would provide Muchukunda ample rest. Indra also gave a boon that none should disturb his sleep and if some body did so that person would be burnt as ash. Muchukunda descended to Earth from Swarga and selected a Mountain cave to sleep. Meanwhile, Vishnu assumed the Incarnation of Krishna and killed innumerable Forces of Evil on Earth. The most vicious of the Kings of the times Kamsa was killed by Krishna and the enraged King Jarasandha decided to uproot Krishna. Since he and his fellow Kings might not be able to do so, he sought the friendship of Kala Yavana the valiant and cruel Yavana King ; the combined army surrounded Mathura where his grand father was reigning under the care of Krishna. Just before the battle was to commence, Krishna left the Mathura Fort by a leisurely walk and Kala Yavana was puzzled and followed Krishna who entered a Cave. Kala Yavana too entered thinking that Krishna

was a schemy person and should be wary of his mischievous plans. The cave was pitch dark and there was no trace of Krishna. Suddenly the Yavana stumbled a human body and the latter growled with shouting anger. Muchukunda got disturbed from sleep and as he opened his eyes, Kala Yavana was burnt like a soft wood into a heap of ash, in keeping with Indra's boon that who so ever disturbed Muchukunda would be burnt alive as ash. Then Krishna made his appearance and Muchukunda recognised Bhagavan who instructed the latter to move to the Ashram of Nara Narayana in 'Badarikashrama' to perform Tapasya till his attainment of Mukti.

The stories of Chyavana Muni and Sukanya, King Nabhaga, Pradyumna and Ila Devi

Vaivaswata Manu's another son *Saryati* gave birth to Sukanya. The latter when she came of age visited a forest once along with her companions and playfully pried into a bush while amused about what she thought were glowing worms. But they were actually the eyes of a Muni named Chyavana performing Tapas with eyes wide open and in the process got blinded. The girl got confused when blood oozed out from the bush and ran away. The blinded Muni realised that a young princess did the indiscretion and gave a Shaap that the entire military force of the King should suffer with stoppage of their excretions. Meanwhile Sukanya conveyed to the King of her playful rashness and of the Muni's shaap. King Saryati along with Sukanya approached the Muni and prostrated to him seeking unreserved pardon; the King offered the young Sukanya to wed the old Muni so that she could serve the Muni in his blindness. In course of time, Sukanya got used to family life serving the blind Muni in his daily puja and other chores. She excelled herself in her 'Pativratya' or undisputed devotion to her husband.

One day, the two Ashvini Kumars who were the Physicians of Devas passed by the Ashram of Chyavana Muni and were highly impressed with the selfless and ideal service being performed by Sukanya as an example of Pativratiya. They cured the Muni's blindness and the grateful Chyavana offered a boon to the Ashvini Kumars. The latter desired that they would like to have access to 'Amrit' which was provided to Devas but was denied to them. Chyavana Muni made a request to Indra but he refused. The Muni took up this as an insult to him and performed an elaborate Yagna in favour of Brahma Deva and the latter who was pleased by the Muni's Yagna instructed Ashvini Kumars to accord the same status to Devas and thus have access to the drink of Amrita ever since.

King Nabhaga was refused of material wealth: Vaivaswata's another son King Nabhaga advised his youngest son Junior Nabhaga to perform a sincere yagna in favour of the Planetary Heads since the junior Nabhaga received a raw deal by his elder brothers in the apportionment of the King's wealth when the senior Nabhaga proceeded to Vanaprastha. The Planetary Heads-the Ashta Dikpalakas- were very pleased with the Yagna and granted enormous wealth. But when the wealth in the form of Bhumi, Rajya, gold, Dhanya, Dhana, and Vahanas was about to be accepted by the junior Nabhaga, a dark and short Swarupa with a frightful face and offensive tone objected to receive the wealth so granted to him. Indeed that dark and dreadful person was Lord Shiva himself chiding the junior Nabhaga who preferred material wealth to Spiritual Prosperity!

King Pradyumna / Ila Devi: Vaivaswata Manu's son *Vishshita* performed a Yagna to secure a son under the supervision of Sage Mitra Varuna but due to a mistake of the 'Hota' of the Yagna, a daughter was conceived to the Queen instead of a son. But the Mantrik powers of the Sage, the daughter was converted as a boy named Pradyumna. As the latter became a King eventually, he went on a hunting spree to a forest and entered a prohibited area in the forest despite warnings; that was a very private area where Shiva-Parvati spent time together and the warning was that who ever entered there would become a woman. As per Shiva's instruction, the King became a woman and had to enter the Royal Palace surrepticiously. Pradyumna called Sage Vasishtha for help and the latter performed Tapas to please Lord Shiva. The Bhagavan bestowed a dispensation to the King that he would be a

male for half year and a female for another half when she would be called Ila. During the womanhood, Budha the son of Chandra Deva met Ila and their wedding resulted in the birth of King **Pururava** who was the foremost King in the **Chandra Vamsha** to be described later.

Other famed Kings of the Surya Vamsha

King *Vidurath* discovered a huge cavity of Earth in a forest in his Kingdom. A Muni in the forest informed that there was a demon of Patala called Kujrumbha made several such cavities in the forest through which the demon entered and killed the passers by including animals. The Muni however cautioned the King that the demon had a potent weapon named Sunanda-a Mushala or a Mace which was originally built by Twashta Prajapati. He further told the King that the Mushala w On return to the Royal Court, the King consulted his Ministers and asked his sons to take large contingents of soldiers and kill thd demon after locating him. The demon destroyed the army and imprisoned the Princes. He also managed to abduct the Princess from the Fort and out of bravado stated that none could do any harm to him till he possessed Sunanda the Mace and thus forced her to marry him. But the Princess knew about the ineffectiveness of the Mace if touched by a woman. The King announced that whosoever could free the princess from the custody of the demon would be wedded to her. An intrepid youth named Vatsandra came forward and killed the demon, since the Mace was ineffective as it was already touched by the princess while being kidnapped. The princess and the youth got married happily.

King *Vishal* of Vidisha Kingdom was blessed with an extraordinarily pretty Princess named Vaishali. The King announced a ‘Swayamvara’ or bride’s choice for marriage and many eligible Princes attended the function. One Prince named *Aveekshith* or the one who was not viewed by any malefic Graha / Planet in his birth chart tried to take away the Princess by force. But those other aspirants who attended the function over powered Aveekshith and imprisoned him. The King then proceeded with the Swayamvara but Vaishali insisted on selecting Aveekshi only. Meanwhile the King Kardama the father of the imprisoned youth attacked Vidisha and freed; the Prince felt humiliated and decided not to wed Vaishali. The disappointed Princess declared that she would wed the Prince or none else! She retired to a hermitage in a forest and performed Tapasya. Devas were happy with her devotion and blessed her with the boon of begetting a famous son who would rule the whole Sapta Dwipas soon. Vaishali wondered that after all she vowed of celibacy excepting Aveekshith. Even while she was thinking about her vow, a demon called Dhrutakesha tried to kidnap Vaishali and a passing Prince Aveekshith fought the demon and saved the Princess. On mutual consent, the married as per the Gadharva way and gave birth to a celebrated son called Marut who indeed became the Supreme Sovereign of the Sapta Dwipas.

Marut Chakravarti not only controlled Sapta Dwipas but also the Sky, Prithvi, Pataala Lokas and all the ‘Jalasthaanaas’ or wherever water existed. He performed thousands of Yagnas under the supervision of Samvarta Muni the son of Angirasa Maharshi and the brother of Brihaspati the Deva Guru. The Yagnas were lavish glittered with gold and jewellery. Brahmanas who were proverbially poor full of family needs and unfulfilled desires were surfeit with Dhana-Dhanya-Vastu-Vahana-Kanakas or cash-foodgrains-material wealth-chariots, horses, elephants and other carriages. The Chakravarti’s sovereignty was at peak when Dharma or Virtue reigned, human desires were nil, Varnashrama Rules were predominant, sins were the lowest and Peace and Contentment were the watch-words. In this idyllic atmosphere however, the ‘Raja Mata’ (Royal Grandmother) sent a precautionary note to Marut and his father Avikshith that there were some lapses in Security arrangements of the Empire as some stray cases of poison deaths of Brahmana Vidyarthi or Students by Nagas from Naga Loka. This information infuriated the Chakravarti and made elaborate preparations to attack Naga loka and destroy it all together. The Naga Kings were worried and

tightened the behaviour of the miscreant elements in Naga loka and apologised to the Chakravati who was however adamant. They also approached Aveekshith for intervention and protection. Marut emphasised 'Raja Dharma' to protect his Subjects and decided to go ahead with the attack of the Naga Loka while the father pleaded mercy to the 'Sharanaarthi' or those who erred but sought pardon which too was an 'Ashrita Dharma' of Kshatriyas. Both the son and father took uncompromising postures and the 'Raja Mata' intervened and prevented ego-clashes of the Son and Father. Meanwhile, those miscreant serpents were rattled that due to their mischief the entire Naga Race faced the huge problem of destruction and by utilising the Mantra Shakti of the Naga experts revived the lives of the dead Brahmana Vidyarthi thus putting a lid on the controversial storm.

Origin of Chandra, wedding, Shaapa, re-emergence and Stories of his Vamsha

Maharshi Atri performed Tapasya for thousand Divya years and pushed up his virility and the magnificent deposit in the form of drops from his eyes spread out outstanding illumination in all over the ten directions. Realising the unique development, Brahma facilitated the emergence of **Chandra** Swarupa and provided to him a Chariot to traverse across the entire Universe. Chandra made twenty one full circles from Prithvi to Great Samudra and in the process transmitted extreme luminosity which when it touched Bhumi created 'Anna' or Foodgrains and derivatives like seeds, herbs, Aoushadhis and so on. Brahma made him in-charge of Brahmanas and their activities. He organised an unprecedented Rajasuya Yagna which was attended by a galaxy of Devas and Maharshis, besides lakhs of Brahmanas who were showered with gifts and 'Dakshinas' or cash money. Nine illustrious women like Sini, Kuhu, Dyuti, Pushti, Prabha, Kirti, Dhriti and so on. At the time of his Avabhruata Snaana or Sacred Bathing to mark the Grand Finale of the Yagna, Chandra was like a personification of humility and honesty. But soon Chandra changed his attitude due to conceit and power; he committed the 'Mahapataka' or a great Sin of enticing Devi **Tara**, the wife of Deva Guru Brihaspati, other Devas and Brahma himself chided his nasty and immoral activity to no avail. Shukracharya the Asura Guru espoused the cause of Chandra and Tara and a fight broke out between Asuras and Devas as Deva Guru headed the Deva Sena (Army). In course of time, Tara was conceived and Brihaspati insisted that the delivery should not be in his residence till Tara's delivery and that she could join him after delivery.

Then **Budha** was born and he grew as an extraordinarily learned Vidwan of Veda-Vedanga-Shastras. Brahma was impressed with Budha and thus appointed him as a fulfilled Graha or Planet. Budha performed great Tapasya to atone the sin of his parents. Brahma considering Chandra's arrogance and selfishness, made Budha's placement in the firmament right opposite to that of his father's but Budha was friendly with Ravi and Shukra. Budha fell in love with **Ila**, a beautiful young woman, little realising that she was actually the King Sudyumna a pious ruler of his Subjects. The King entered into a forest not knowing that it was a forbidden place as Shiva and Parvati spent their privacy and the ban was that any male entering there would become a female. Thus the King became a beautiful woman but due to shyness did not return to his kingdom. Sage Vasishta who was the Raja Guru of King Sudyumna came to know of the curse and performed severe Tapasya to Maha Deva. Meanwhile, Budha met Ila per chance and married her and begot a child called **Pururava**. By then Vasishta was fortunate to secure Maha Deva Shiva's 'darshan' and requested that his King be returned to manhood. Shiva granted a partial dispensation that Sudyumna would become a male for half a year and during the second half continue as Ila Devi.

Pururava after Sudyumana's retirement proved to be a model King administering the Kingdom on the strict principles of Virtue as prescribed in Veda-Shastras. Meanwhile, Apsarasa Urvasi, a Celestial Damsel received a curse that she would have to leave to Earth for a fixed term and since she had the knowledge of youthful Kings in Bharata Desha she seduced Pururava and expressed her consent to

marry him on three conditions viz. she would consume only ghee or classified butter, that she would not view her bare body except in bed and that he should take ample care of two sheep brought by her from Gandharva Loka. Mesmerised by her charm Pururava observed the conditions totally. But in course of time, her hold over him got somewhat diluted due to the urgent demands of governance. Also the tenure of the Sage's curse was over; Indra's men stole her sheep and the King did not pay much attention. He chased a few thieves in his Palace and he himself ran to chase them almost unclad and the celestial 'thieves' outsmarted him. Urvashi got terribly upset as Pururava broke the contract on all the three counts and left him to return to Heaven. Pururava was frustrated as the pangs of separation were so severe that in distress wandered aimlessly. By chance he saw Urvashi at Kurukshetra again and she explained to him that her wedding with him was of purely temporary nature and that he would have to get over his infatuation.

Jahnu was in the lineage of Pururava whom Devi Ganga desired to marry; despite his disinterest as he wanted to marry Kaverti, she changed her course and flowed up to an Yagna Shaala where King Jahnu was performing a Sarpa Yagna. Jahnu was annoyed and drank her up. The Maharshis begged of Jahnu to release her as his daughter and the released Ganga thus secured the encomium as **Jahnavi**.

Nahusha who was also in the lineage of Pururava had the distinction of performing ninety nine Ashwamedha Yagnas and was nearly qualified to become Indra who should have executed hundred Yagnas. Meanwhile there was a temporary vacancy of Indratwa since Indra fled away since he killed Vritrasura with the help of the Vajrayudha made out of Sage Dadhichis's backbone; Vritrasura who was a Brahmana by birth and Brahma Hatya Sin chased Indra. Brahma thus appointed Nahusha as temporary Indra. Nahusha who was originally a King of Great Virtue became arrogant and power-mongering as he became Indra and claimed all the privileges belonging to Indra like Vajrayudha, Irvata the Elephant and even Indra's wife Sachi Devi. Nahusha insisted that Sachi Devi be his keep! Sachi Devi was non-plussed at this proposal. As advised by Deva Guru Brihaspati, she asked Nahusha to come to her residence but he should do so just as Indra was in the habit of arriving at her residence by a Palki (Palanquin) which actually was carried by Maharshis. Nahusha was excited to reach her Palace quickly and having got into the palanquin commanded Agastya Muni to reach him to Sachi Devi's Place at once; he said 'Sarpa Sarpa' meaning 'Quick, Quick' and in the process gave a kick to the Muni to go fast. Agastya purposefully misunderstood the word and converted the arrogant Nahusha as an Ajagara (Python) and dropped the latter to the depths of Bhuloka into thick forests. As a repentant Nahusha begged of clemency, the Maharshi granted a reprieve that the 'Shaapa Vimochana' would be possible only when Pandavas reached the forest for twelve long years before their 'Ajnaata Vasa' or Unknown Destiny having lost a bet in the 'Maya Juda' or wilful game of chess. As Draupadi desired to secure a Sugandhika Flower Bheema got into a pond and the Ajagara caught him and agreed to release him only if he gave correct replies to the Serpent's queries. Yudhishtara had to arrive and release Bhima and Nahusha alike. Meanwhile Brihaspati and Agastya found that Indra was hiding in a lotus stem in Mana Sarovara Lake and brought him back and prayed to Brahma who exonerated Nahusha from the Brahma Hatya Sin on the ground that Vitra was not a Brahmana but committed sins of killing several virtuous and innocent persons.

Yayati, the son of Nahusha and his wife Viraja, was a famed Emperor who defeated all the Kings of the World and married Devayani the daughter of Asura Guru Shukracharya, besides Sharmishtha the daughter of Vishvaparva, a Rakshasa King. Indra was pleased to gift Yayati a Divine Chariot with seven powerful horses with which he traversed the world and divided his Empire into seven divisions to distribute it among five of his sons. A Maharshi gave a boon that if any of his sons could agree to exchange their youth to his old age then he could secure a fresh lease of youth. His eldest son **Yadu** from Devayani refused and so did others excepting Sharmishtha's son **Puru** who readily agreed.

Yayati took over Puru's youth and enabled him travel around to unravel earthly pleasures for long. But finally returned discovering that the ephemeral joys of the world were endless like Agni in a Homa kunda assuming larger and larger proportions as long as ghee is served and no human would be satisfied with food, gold, ornaments or women. By so realising, he returned his youth to Puru and took to Vanaprastha or retirement.

Kartaveeryarjuna in the Haihava Vamsha from the lineage of Yadu was an illustrious and powerful Chakravarti who pleased Indra and obtained thousand mighty hands. The origin of Haihava Vamsha was interesting: Once Surya Deva's son Revanta rode on the Celestial Horse named 'Ucchaishwara' which was manifested in the course of 'Kshira Samudra Mathana' or the churning of the Ocean of Milk. As Revanta reached Vaikuntha, Devi Lakshmi recognised the co-born horse and was engrossed in her thoughts even as she was in intimate conversation with Lord Vishnu. The latter did not like the interference and her thoughts and hence gave a 'shaap' (curse) that she would become a mare as she was lost in indifference to him. Lakshmi Devi requested her companion Parvati to persuade Vishnu to become a horse. The animal forms of Lakshmi and Vishnu gave birth to a male child in the forest and the boy was picked up by King Yayati's son Turvasu (Hari Varma) who was performing Tapasya for several years for a son of celebrity; that boy was named Eka Vira who later became the King. Eka Vira fell in love with Princess Ekavali the daughter of King Raibhya but a demon Kalaketu kidnapped her and taken away to Patala; the companion of the Princess called Yasovati however knew a Seed Mantra which she learnt from Dattareya by means of which Eka Vira reached Patala, killed Kalaketu and married the Princess. The son of Eka Vira and Ekavali was Kartaveeryarjuna who became the famed and undisputed Chakravarti eventually. His valour was such that in an encounter with Ravana-sura the villain of Ramayana subdued and arrested the latter's Ten-Heads under his mighty arms and released him only when Maharshi Pulastya made an appeal for mercy! The Chakravarti was no doubt famed universally as he ruled with Dharma as his cardinal principle but in due course of time, he became too vainglorious and over-domineering. Once he gifted a huge forest to Agni Deva and the latter consumed it to satisfy his pleasure; but unfortunately for Agni and the Chakravarti, Maharshi Vasishta's Ashram too was burnt off and the Maharshi gave a 'shaap' to Kartaveeryarjuna that soon enough Vishnu's incarnation as **Parashurama** would appear and the over-inflated Chakravati would be destroyed, especially because the latter came to ill-treat and even torment Rishis, Brahmanas and the majority of his Subjects. Indeed the curse took shape and Parashurama was born. On one occasion, Kartaveerya visited the Ashram of Maharshi Jamadagni the father of Parashurama when the latter was away in Tapasya. As the King and his army landed at the Ashram, Jamadagni provided hospitality and served nice food to the King and the Army, thanks to the Celestial Cow Kamadhenu was present there in the Ashram serving food to the students of Jamadagni. The King claimed the Cow as the Ashram was in the control of the Kingdom. As an altercation between the Maharshi and the King followed, the King went back but sent his army to overpower the Maharshi and the Kamadhenu and in the encounter that followed, Jamadagni was killed and the Celestial Cow flew off to Swarga. On return from Tapasya, Parashurama learnt of his father's cold-blooded murder and in extreme anguish and anger attacked Kartaveerya and killed him. Not satisfied still, Parashurama invaded the Kings of the nook and corner of Bharat in as many as twenty one battles and uprooted the entire clan of Kshatriyas who all by that time earned the disrepute and hatred of the virtuous Subjects of the respective Kingdoms.

Parashurama's encounter with Ganesha

After avenging his father's death and the massacre of the erring Kshatriyas, Parashurama desired to personally pay homage to Bhagavan Shiva and reached Kailasa; he witnessed Nandeeswara, Maha Kaala, Ruru Bhairava, Rudraganas and Bhuta-Preta-Piscachas but finally Ganesha stopped him. All

kinds of requests, and prayers failed and Ganesha refused entry to Bhargava Rama as Devi Parvati and Shiva were engaged in privacy. Finally, the latter lifted his Parashu (axe) and tried to force his entry; Ganesha lifted his trunk, looped Parashurama with it and encircled him round and round where by Bhargava visioned Sapta Dwipas, Sapta Parvatas, Sapta Samudras and Sapta Lokas viz. Bhur-Bhuvar-Swara-Janar-Tapo-Dhruva-Gouri Lokas and Vaikuntha / and Golokas. In the process, the mighty Parashurama hit one of Ganesha's tusks with the Parashu that Maha Deva once gifted to Bhargava and the tusk fell off and blood gushed out. The resting parents of Ganesha were shocked as Kartikeya rushed and informed them. Parvati's first reaction was to kill Parashurama but being the Loka Mata or the Mother of the Universe restrained herself and addressed Parashurama as follows: 'You are born in Brahma Vamsha to one of the illustrious sons Maharshi Jamadagni and to Devi Renuka of Lakshmi 'Amsha' or alternate Form of Devi Lakshmi. How did you do this to my son! Shiva is your Guru since he taught Trailokya Vijaya Kavacha and countless Asrtras to you. Is this the Guru Dakshina that you thought fit to give your Guru! You could have perhaps given a better Dakshina by cutting Ganesha's head instead of breaking his tusk only! My son Ganesha has the power of destroying crores of cunning animals like you but was only playful with you; yet, you have only wantonly hurt him by breaking his tusk-not as an accident but with vengeance; you may know that he receives the foremost worship all over the Universe!' As Parvati addressed on the above lines, Parashurama felt ashamed of himself, prostrated to his Guru Shiva and Devi Parvati and the Almighty Shri Krishna the Immortal. Meanwhile a Brahmana boy was visioned who actually was Vishnu who analysed the situation; indeed there was no justification of what Parashurama did to Ganesha but Parashurama was momentarily taken aback by folly as otherwise he was also like Ganesha or Skanda! Vishnu therefore pleaded being the Universal Parents might not read much into the happening. Vishnu also assuaged the hurt feelings of Parvati and requested her not to impose personal angles into the unhappy situation; He further said that her son had Eight names viz. Ganesha, Ekadanta, Heramba, Vighna nayaka, Lambodara, Shurpakarna, Gajavakra and Guhaagraja! Parashurama pleaded mercy of Parvati since she was Jagan Mata or the Mother of Creation and begged of Ganesha for pardon of his indiscretion; Ganesha was graceful enough to agree of partial responsibility and the episode was closed happily.

Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Nrisimha, Vamana and Parashurama Avatars

An 'Avatara' (Incarnation) is like the lighting of a lamp from another lamp; like-wise, Bhagavan is a manifestation of same Bhagavan suited to specific purpose and particular end-use. Among such Avatars of Vishnu, the first well-known manifestation of **Matsya** which retrieved the Sacred Vedas stolen from Brahma by Makarasura, the son of Kashyapa Muni by Diti, one of his four wives besides Aditi, Kadru and Vineeta; Diti's other sons included Hayagriva, Hiranyaksha, Hiranya kashipu, Jamba, Maya etc. Makarasura dived deep into the depths of 'Maha Sagara' (The Great Ocean) along with the Vedas and other Scriptures, in the absence of which the entire order of 'Samsara' (Universe) was totally affected: there were no 'Chatur Varnas'; no Yagnas, Swadhaayas, Vashatkara and the Sacred Rites thus upsetting the Equilibrium of Universal Traditions and Religious / Spiritual Practices. This led to the inevitable Avatara as the Preserver of the Universal Order. By assuming the form of a huge Fish, Vishnu entered the Ocean, killed Makarasura and recovered Vedas and Dharma.

Following a curse given by Maharshi Durvasa, son of Sage Atri, to Indra as the latter ignored the Maharshi while passing by an elephant, Devi Lakshmi in the form of Rajya Lakshmi, deserted Indra Loka and the magnificence of Swarga vanished. As Devas, Indra and Brahma approached Vishnu, Narayana suggested that one way to recall Rajya Lakshmi to Swarga would be to resort to a massive churning of the Ocean involving not only Devas but also Danavas, Rakshasas, Gandhtavas and Yakshas. The temptation to Danavas etc. should be to obtain 'Amrit' although there might be several

other products of lesser consequence that might emerge as deftly conveyed to the Danavas. The arrangement of the ‘Samudra Mathana’ was that Manthara Mountain was to be set as the churning rod, Maha Sarpa Vasuki was the string with which to tie up the Mountain and Bhagavan himself as balancing Shakti as the Avatar of **Kurma** (Tortoise) to ensure that the Meru Mountain would be made stable and steady. As the churning started, innumerable of the proud Danavas who opted for the head of thousand faced Vasuki out of pride got perished due to the poisonous flames where as Devas were at the tail end. Eventually, a massive ‘Halahala’ or the sky-rocketing poisonous flames engulfed the Universe and by the grace of Three Names of Lord Vishnu viz. Om Achyutaya Namah, Om Anantaya Namah and Om Govindaya Namah, Bhagavan Shankara gulped the blue poisonous flames in his throat thus giving him the epithet of Neela Kantha. By the power of the three names of Vishnu, there would never be any hardship faced: *Achyutaananta Govinda iti naamatrayam Maha Mantram hareh/ yo japetpriyato Bhaktaayaa Pranavaadhyam namontakam/ Tasya Mrityu bhayam naasti visharogaagnijam mahat/ Naamatrayam Maha Mantramjapedyam prayatatmavaan/ Kaala Mrityu bhayam chaapi tasya naasti kimanyatah* (Whoever recites the Three Names viz. Om Achyutaaya, Om Anantaaya, and Om Govindaaya sincerely and with dedication, none of the poisonous diseases or Agni- based frights/deaths would affect)! As the churning continued, Maha Lakshmi’s elder sister Daridra Devi appeared and was directed to stay in the homes of quarrels, Adharmas, violences and sins as also in the residences where residents of such homes in both the ‘Sandhya’ timings. As the further churning made progress, there emerged Varuni Devi, Nagaraja Ananta, GarudaPatni, Apsaras, Gandhavas, Iravata, Uchhaishrava Ashwa, Dhanvantari, Parijaata Tree, Surabhi, Maha Lakshmi, Chandra and Devi Tulasi. All the Devas and Brahma requested Maha Lakshmi to be seated on Maha Vishnu’s Lotus-like Heart where the whole World would worship on Ekadashi and Dwadashi days. Devas and Brahma eulogized Kurma Rupa Vishnu and requested him to provide shield to Sesa Nag and ‘Diggajaas’ or the Four Directional Elephants as also Bhu Devi all reting on the permanent Avatar of Maha Kurma. While the primary reason in the Kurma Avatar was the resurgence of Maha Lakshmi and her manifestation of Rajya Lakshmi who disappeared in Swaraga pursuant to Durvasa’s curse to Indra Deva, another major fall-out of ‘Ksheera Sagara Mathana’ was the emergence of ‘Amrit’ meant for Devas, which again was distributed by Devi Mohini, another manifestation of Vishnu.

As Hiranyaakasha, the mighty son of Devi Diti pulled up Bhu Devi and dragged her into the depths of the Ocean down deep into the netherland of Rasatala, Lord Vishnu assumed the incarnation of **Maha Varaha** and killed him. Devi Prithvi heaved a great sigh of relief and prayed to Him saying that he was her rediscovery, her mighty ‘Adhara’ or the Hold, his unique rescuer and without her existence was unreal. Since Devi Prithvi was about to sink but for his timely mercy, she was popularly called Madhavi or the Lord as Madhava. Since Maha Varaha roared as an acknowledgement of her ‘Stuti’, the resultant sounds were heard as Sama Veda and he lifted the Earth by his horns in one single ‘go’ and leapt up from Rasatala to restore her back into her original position when Devas showered flowers and Maharshis recited Vedas, describing the Lord’s playful deeds. They said that the distance between the Underworld, Prithi and Sky was the only comprehensible Place that one’s imagination knew as spread over by Him, but the Unknown still remained a great mystery or Maya! Even as Maha Varaha placed Bhu Devi as a mammoth ship on the endless water, Bhagavan made divisions of Sapta Dwipas and materialized the four Lokas afresh viz. Bhuloka, Bhuhvarloka, Swarloka and Maharloka and Lord Brahma resumed his task of Creation.

As Hiranyaaksha was killed, his brother Hiranyakashipu reached Meru Giri and did ruthless Tapasya for thousand ‘Deva’ years and pleased Parama Shiva with the Panchakshari Mantra ‘Om Namah Shivaaya’ and secured the very exhaustive boon of victory over ‘Mrityu’(death) from Devatas, Asuras, Human Beings, Gandharvas, Nagas, Rakshasas, Animals, Birds, Reptiles, Siddhas, Yakshas, Vidyadharas, and Kinnaras, Diseases and ‘Astra-Shastras’. Armed by the all comprehensive boon,

Hiranyakashipu had truly turned to be the Over-Lord of the whole Universe keeping all the Lokas under his control, commanding Devas and even 'Pancha Bhutas'. He had declared that he should be worshipped in Temples and Yagnas be performed in his name! In course of time, he was blessed with a son named Prahlada and as the latter came of the tender age of a boy was sent to Gurukula where all the glories of Danavas were taught. But Prahlada was a staunch Vaishnava with supreme dedication to Narayana. When he returned from his early spell of Gurukula to his father, he stunned the latter when he was all praise for Vishnu and affirmed that Vishnu was the unique driving force of Universal Existence and that he was the Eternal, Timeless, Indestructible, All- Pervading, Omni Potent and Omni-scient Paramatma. Hiranyakashipu was in great rage that his opponent Vishnu who killed his brother Hiranyaksha was being praised in his presence and was about to kill the boy's Guru; Prahlada confirmed that his Guru tried his very best to divert him from Narayana to his own father as the Supreme but failed and thus the Guru was spared. Then Hiranyakashipu himself sought to tutor the boy by cajoling him, endearing him, self-praising his own achievements and so on. He utilized the Sama (Advice and Mild reproach), Bheda (seeking to divide Vishnu as an Evil Force and himself as an Almighty), Daana (gifts of whatever nature on Earth or elsewhere) and even 'Danda' by way of punishment. But, Prahlada never ever relented and continued to extol the virtues of Vishnu. As his father lost all his patience, he resorted to measures of deadly nature and Prahlada's conviction too got redoubled. The paternal care and affection of Hiranya -kashipu were totally replaced by hatred, vengeance and retaliation for his son who turned out to be his sworn enemy; he exposed him to poisonous snakes which gave him the kiss of death but Prahlada survived while extolling Narayana; he threw him into the cages of tigers which ate up his limbs but still the Parama Bhakta survived singing hymns of Govinda; he got the tender boy crushed under elephants but still the matchless follower of Madhusudana survived praising the Leelas of Keshava; he threw him from high mountain tops but still the most trusted devotee survived rejoicing the ecstasy of Madhava's glories! Finally, Hiranyakashipu got on to his wits' end; he said that if Vishnu were 'Sarva Vyapi' (All Pervasive), he asked Prahlada to show that Narayana any where, say in that Pillar and broke it with his mace, or otherwise he would most certainly stop Prahlada's breathing. As though there were earth quakes and storms, there emerged the most fearful Man-Lion, **Narasimha**, who had half-body as a giant- like Lion roaring in a manner that the whole World trembled and the other half like a colossal human being as a personification of 'Mrityu' with mighty thighs and legs; the Strange Creation which was neither human nor leonine lifted the massive body of the Danava on his thighs and tore him into pieces with sharp nails and hefty hands, rejoicing the drink of the victim's blood and eating chunks of his meat! No doubt, Devatas were overjoyed at the death of the Danava but were terrified to vision the unusual form of Nrisimha and prayed to him to cool down; they prayed to Devi Lakshmi to pacify the Lord who made efforts to pacify his anger; Prahlada who too was in shock was declared the King to revive Dharma again.

As the grandson of King Prahlada, the illustrious Danava King Bali (son of Virochana), was born as a devout Vaishnava and 'Dharmajna' but at the same time as an enormous warrior who defeated Devas and Marudganas and controlled the Three Lokas. But in King Bali's regime, his 'Prajā' (the Public) was extremely happy when Lord Varuna gave optimal rains, Devi Prithvi yielded excellent crops, cows gave maximum milk, and there was alround Prosperity and Peace. As King Bali was a highly dedicated to Srihari, the usual bitterness among the Public and the Establishment was absent and the values of 'Dharma' and 'Nyaya' (Virtue and Justice) in the Society were intact. But Lord Indra was dislodged from his throne and so were the various Devas. Sage Kashyapa and Devi Aditi prayed to Srihari and requested to do justice to Devas and Indra as King Bali used 'Maya' to worship Vishnu and at the same time kept Indra and Devas aloof from Swarga cleverly and keeping the best of all the Three worlds with him! Kashyapa thus requested Vishnu to be born to the former and Aditi and by

resorting the same kind of Maya, bestow his Throne and Indratwa to to Indra! Bhagavan agreed to be born to Aditi and Kashyapa as **Vamana Avatar**. As Vamana grew up as a Brahmachari, he learnt Vedas and other Scriptures and sporting 'Mriga Charma' (Skin of a Deer), Danda (Stick) and wooden footwear appeared at the Yagna being performed by King Bali and asked for a mere three feet of land as Bhu daan (charity of Land). Daithya Guru Shukracharya warned that this short man Vamana was a fake and was Bhagavan Vishnu himself. King Bali stated that if the Brahmachari was Vishnu himself, which other greater fortune there could be! Vamana then assumed a sky-high proportion of body and measured one foot as the entire Prithvi with land, Samudra, Parvat, Dwip, etc totalling fifty koti Yojanas (13-16 kilo mtr. perYojana); by way of the 'Dwiteeya Pada'(second foot space), Vamana Deva counted the Nakshtras, Grahas (Planets), Devalokas, Brahmaloaka etc. But the second foot still fell short of the required size of the second foot. Brahma had the opportunity of Vishnu's 'Maha Vishwa Darshan'. As there was no space for the third foot, Vishnu Deva pushed Bali's head down to Rasatala and made him the King of Danavas, Nagas and water-based Beings till the end of the Kalpa!

Maharshi Jamadagni of Bhrugu Vamsha did Tapsya and pleased Surabhi the Celestial Cow and was extremely contented as the Holy Cow fulfilled all his desires and enjoyed a contented life. He married Devi Renuka and performed a Putra Kaameshti Yagna and was blessed with the son named **Parashu Rama**. After his 'Upanayana Samskara' and Gayatri Upadesha, he performed rigorous Tapasya, pleased Kashyapa who taught the Avinashi Mantra *Om Namō Narayanaya Namah* and performed Yagnas, Daanaas etc. One day, Haihaya King Kartavirya happened to visit the Ashram of Jagadagni and was impressed with Surabhi as the Cow that could fulfil all desires and wished to take it away by force. Surabhi killed the King's army and reverted back to Swargaloka. The King grew angry and killed Jamadagni. There Parashurama secured from Lord Vishnu, a 'Parashu' (axe), Vaishnava Dhanush and Shastra-Astras and instructed him to lessen the weight on Earth of highly crazy and egoistic Kshatriyas by killing them. On return to the Ashram, he found his father killed by Kartaviryarjuna and rushed to the latter's Kingdom, killed him, and went all out on a spree of killing Kshatriyas to completely uproot their clans (except Ikshvaku Vamsa as per his mother's request). As Shi Rama pulled down Shiva Dhanush, Parashu Rama surfaced again and challenged Rama to break Vaishnava Dhanush and when Rama did it, retired to the Ashram of Nara-Narayana thereafter.

Quick retrospective of Ramayana

Swayambhu Manu preformed Tapasya to Lord Vishnu for thousand years and when the latter appeared, Manu desired that he would like to have Vishnu as his son. The Lord agreed and said that in fact as a part of the task of Preservation of 'Dharma' (Virtue), he would like to appear on Earth from time to time as and when Dharma was threatened and Evil Forces gathered momentum; he said: *Paritranaaya Sadhunaam Vinaasaaya cha Dushkrutaam, Dharma samsthaapanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge!* (I shall no doubt take human birth to revive Dharma and punish Evil from time to time). As promised by Vishnu, Swayambhu was born in Raghukula as King Dasaratha and became the father of Shri Rama in Treta Yuga, as Vasudeva in Yadava Kula in Dwapara Yuga and one thousand Divya Years hence as Brahmana Harigupta in Samhal Village in Kali Yuga. The two brothers Hirankaksha and Hiranyakashipu of the Satya Yuga were born as Ravana and Kumbhakarna in Treta Yuga. Muni Pulastya's son was Muni Vishvava and the latter's wife was Kaikashi; Ravana and Kumbhakarna were born to Vishvava and Kaikeshi. Kaikeshi also gave birth to Surpanakha and later on to the virtuous devotee of Narayana, Vibhishana. Ravana brothers performed severe Tapasya and secured boons of invincibility from Devas, Danavas and Rakshasas and harassed Devad who fled from Swarga and prayed to Vishnu who assured that he would soon be born to King Dasaratha as Rama and demolish the entire race of Ravana; Vishnu also asked Devas to assume the births of 'Vanaras' and assist in this holy task. In the Surya Vamsa, Vaivasvata Muni begot King Ikshvaku and

Dasaratha was born to Ikshvaku. Devi Koushalya was born to the King of Koushalya and was wedded to King Dasaratha at Ayodhya on the banks of River Sarayu. Dasaratha also married Sumitra and Kaikeyi. He became a powerful yet righteous King with Sage Vasishtha as the Raja Guru and performed the Putra-Kameshthi Yagna. From the 'Agni Kunda' at the eventful Yagna, Maha Vishnu Him self gave Darshan to Dasaratha and assured that he would soon be born to him to save the Devoted and kill the Evil. He handed over a 'Kheer Patra' to the three Devis; Kaushalya and Kaikeyi took half each and gave half of their portions to Sumitra; thus the eldest boy was born to Kaushalya, Bharat was born to Kaikeyi and Lakshmana and Shatrughna were born to Sumitra. Sage Vasishtha named the eldest as 'Shri Rama' since that was the 'Swataha Siddha' name as he was the husband of Shri Devi and the equivalent of Vishnu's Sahasranaamaas, providing salvation to the devotees and since his birth was in Chaitra month dear to Vishnu. As the boys grew up, Rama and Lakshmana was one pair and Bharata and Shatrughna was another. In the meantime, Bhagavati Lakshmi was materialized as King Janaka found her while digging Earth in Yagna by a plough top called 'sita' and thus named Sita and most endearingly brought up as his own daughter. Sage Vishvamitra derided that Rama and Lakshmana should protect one Yagna being organized by him on the banks of Ganga, sine there were always threats of Rakshasas to destroy Yagnas by pouring blood and such other foul material. Very reluctantly, Dasaratha allowed to let them go to protect the Yagna which apparently served many purposes as subtly planned by the Sage: one to let the World realize that Rama a mere teen-ager was of Vishnu 'Amsa' and introduced Rama to the Rakshasas that they should better beware; Vishwamitra could teach the nuances of Shastra-Astra Vidya to the brothers; to afford an exposure to Rama at Sita Swayamvara among the great Kings of the day including a warning to Ravana that the Avatar of Vishnu had arrived; and also to consummate the Sacred Wedding of Rama and Sita. As visualised the Sage, all these and many other events took place: the killing of Rakshasi Tadaki and the Rakshasa called Subahu as also the use of 'Vayavyastra' to sweep away demon Maricha to a far off place so that he would have to float again at a later date to assume the role of 'Maya Golden Deer' before Devi's abduction by Ravana; the liberation of Devi Ahalya by giving her normal form from a stone due to Sage Gautami-her husband's curse; the smash of Shiva Dhanush; the wedding of Rama and Sita apart, Lakshmana was married to Urmila, Bharat to Mandvi, and Shatrughna with Shrutikirti; the rupture of Parasurama's ego by the shatter of Vaishnava Dhanush and his exit from the active life into the Ashram of Nara-Narayana.

Even as the City of Ayodhya was going in euphoria with preparations of Shri Rama's becoming the Yuva Raja (the Heir Apparent) of the Kingdom, Devi Kaikeyi declared her intention known that Rama should proceed for a fourteen year long spell of 'Vana Vasa' (forest life) and Bharata to become the Heir Apparent; this was in the light of a boon that Dasaratha gave to Kaikeyi as she saved him on a war front and she reserved to demand it at this juncture. Bharat was out of station at his maternal uncle's place and did not know about the demand; Devi Sita insisted accompanying Rama and so did Lakshmana; Dasaratha was in a swoon, followed by death; the entire population of the Kingdom was crest-fallen; Bharata insisted on Rama's return but on the latter's refusal took Rama's footwear kept on the Throne which was worshipped daily and he became a temporary Administrator on behalf of King Rama. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana the reached the mountain of Chitrakoot for a brief stay at the Ashram of Bharadwaja, further on to the Ashram of Atri Muni where the Muni's wife Devi Anasuya enlightened the regulations of a 'Pativrata' and finally entered the Dandakaranya where they stayed for long with Munis visiting their 'Panchavati' (a thatched cottage). One frightful day, demoness Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana and Kumbhakarna, arrived at the Parnashala and proposed to Rama. Lakshmana cut off her ears and nose and as retaliation two Rakshasas attacked Rama and Lakshmana and the latter killed the demons. Surpanakha approached Ravana who planned the attraction of the golden deer disguised as Maricha. Sita was tempted to secure the deer and Rama

alone chased the Maya Mriga and killed the demon while the latter shouted loudly the name of Rama to mislead Sita and Lakshmana so that Lakshmana would leave Sita and Ravana could enter the scene. Lakshmana drew a line around Panchavati with Mantras and asked Sita not to go beyond the line. Ravana arrived as a Muni and asked for alms and Sita wanted him to enter the line but Ravana did not and insisted Sita to come out. As soon as she came out, Ravana appeared in his original form and abducted her by his Pushpak Viman. As Sita was sobbing loudly, the giant bird Jatayu, who was a friend of Dasaratha, made desperate attempts to stop Ravana's Viman but the mighty Ravana slashed the bird's wings as it fell down in a faint. As Rama and Lakshmana did not find Sita on their return, they frantically searched and the dying Jatayu conveyed that Sita was abducted by Ravana. Having performed obsequies to Jatayu, Rama and Lakshmana reached the Ashram of Devi Shabari a unique devotee of Shri Rama and treated the brothers with fruits and Rama gave her the boon of Vishnu Sayujya. Hanuman met Rama and Lakshmana and assured all kinds of assistance to Rama in finding Sita and eventually to destroy Ravana and his clan. He introduced the fugitive King of Kishkindha named Sugriva, raised confidence to Sugriva in killing his valiant brother Vaali who occupied his throne and after reoccupying his throne sent Hanuman to Lanka in search of Sita. The mighty Hanuman crossed the ocean and spotted Sita in Ashoka Vatika sobbing under an Ashoka tree. Hanuman convinced Sita as a devotee of Rama by showing Rama's ring and assured her that very soon Rama and Lakshmana would reach Lanka with a huge Vanara Sena (Monkey brigade), kill Ravana and his entire followers and relieve her of bondage. Hanuman created havoc in the Ashoka vatika by killing all the security personnel, five Senapatis, seven sons of Ravana's Ministers, and a son of Ravana. Indrajit the elder son of Ravana who also was a reputed warrior having defeated Indra and specialized in wars on the clouds thus securing the epithet of 'Meghanadha' encountered Hanuman who feigned Indrajit's control; Hanuman was face to face with Ravana in the latter's court and allowed himself to let his tail burn which was extended endlessly and destroyed a large part of Ravana's City as a warning to him that soon Rama and Lakshmana would arrive at Lanka to destroy Ravana and his entire tribe. On return to Kishkintha, Hanuman conveyed Rama and others about Sita's bondage. Rama, Lakshmana and the mammoth Vanara Sena under Sugriva's leadership arrived on the sea coast to reach Lanka on the other side of the Ocean. Rama prayed to Samudra Deva (the Deity of the Ocean) to reduce the force of the violent tides and when Samudra Deva did not relent was even ready to punish the Deity. Samudra Deva facilitated the construction of Rama Setu or the Bridge in the name of Rama across the Ocean; huge boulders were thrown into the Ocean with the name of Rama inscribed and the boulders floated enabling the construction of the Bridge. Meanwhile the younger brother of Ravana called Vibhishana, a staunch devotee of Lord Vishnu approached Rama for refuge and soon became a confidant of Rama about matters related to Ravana and his associates. Having crossed the Rama Setu, the gigantic and mighty Monkey Brigade commenced furious battle with the gallant Rakshasas. Indrajit who was a highly renowned warrior fought and killed thousands of Vanaras and succeeded in tying Rama and Lakshmana with 'Nagastra', when Garuda the Carrier of Vishnu appeared and the snakes withered away. Meanwhile Kumbhakarna, another brother of Ravana who had a giant figure fought recklessly killing tens of thousands of Rama Sena, but finally fell down to the torrential rain-like arrows of Shri Rama. Indrajit attacked Lakshmana and made the latter unconscious when Hanuman brought Sanjeevini Mountain with medicinal shrubs got Lakshmana revived; in the fierce battle that followed, Rama and Lakshmana destroyed Indrajit. In the meantime, Ravana desired to perform an 'Abhicharatmika' (Evil-oriented) Yagna out of desperation for Victory, but a few brave Vanaras got scent of it and destroyed the Yagna. Then Ravana rode into the battle with his entire army of massive strength comprising elephants, horses, chariots and infantry and massacred Vanaras. Indra sent his Divya Ratha (Divine Chariot) to Shri Rama with Matangi as the Charioteer and the Greatest Battle of Treta Yuga was fought for seven days and nights, even as all the Devas headed by Indra, besides Brahma and Rudra,

watched the Grand Spectacle of Rama-Ravana Yuddha! Rama had systematically smashed Ravana's ten heads, but the destroyed heads were sprouting again and again and Ravana was thundering world shaking shrieks to show Rama's helplessness. Lord Shiva gave a boon to Ravana to let the smashed heads be revived again and again. Finally, Rama pulled up his most powerful 'Brahmastra' to destroy a stock of 'Ambrosia' in his belly (as hinted by Vibhishana) and crushed his chest which pierced through Earth and crashed into Rasatala into the nether world. Instantly, Devas who were visioning the proceedings from the Skies went into ecstasy showering rain of scented flowers on Rama; Indra, Brahma and Rudra were relieved; Gandharvas and Kinneras sang tuneless lyrics of the Lord; Apsaras danced with immense joy; Sanaka and Sanandana brothers who gave a curse to Jaya and Vijaya the Dwarapaalakas of Vaikuntha as they were obstructed entry to vision Vishnu were satisfied that out of three births the first human birth was completed; Maharshis and Siddhas recited Vedas and Scriptures as also hymns extolling Shri Rama. Rama then appointed Vibhishana as the King of Lanka and blessed him and his progeny to rule till the next Pralaya!

Thereafter Devi Sita was directed to prove her 'Pativratya' (Purity) by entering into an 'Agni Kunda' since she stayed away for long time in Lanka before a huge gathering of spectators; even Devas, Brahma and Rudra witnessed the scene, let alone Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, human beings etc. Agni Devata himself brought back from the Agni Kunda and declared Devi Sita as an ever Pure, Chaste, Blameless and a peerless epitome of Pativrati. Besides installing Vibhishana as the King, Indra and Devas too were bestowed with their lost glories denied to them for long due to the much-hated Ravana and his clan. The precious possessions of Swarga like Pushpaka Vimana of Kubera Deva were restored to the respective Devas. Accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana as well as Hanuman, Sugriva, Vibhishana, Vanara Yoddhas (Warriors) including Jambavanta, Nala, Neela, Subhaga, Sharabha, Sushena, and all the survivors among Vanara Sena crossed the Rama Setu, proceeded to the site of 'Shiva Linga Pratishtana' at Rameshwara and further on to Ayodhya to join the celebrations of Victory and Rajabhisheka.

On return an anxious Ayodhya awaited the 'Maryada Purusha', the Epic Hero and the Most Significant Avatara of Treta Yuga, proving once again that Lord Vishnu would assume human birth again and again as and when Dharma was in jeopardy and Adharma tended to take an upper hand in the Universe.

In Patala Khanda of Padma Purana, Bhagavan Sesha Nag briefly recalled the Events to Maharshi Vasyayan about the activities of Lord Shri Rama, the Epic Hero of Ramayana, after the killing the infamous Ravana at Lanka providing great relief to Indra and Devas, Rishis and the virtuous as also the entire humanity. While narrating the Events, Sesha Nag was in a trance as the spell of Shri Rama was so intense that the Illustrious Serpent, whose bed Bhagavan Vishnu- the incarnation Shri Rama- rested on. Lord Rama bestowed the Kingship of Lanka to Vibhishana, the younger brother of the slain Ravana and sat on Pushpaka Viman along with Devi Sita, Lakshman, Hanuman, Sugriva and various other stalwarts who fought in the Battle with Ravana. Even as the Pushpaka Viman took off from Lanka to Ayodhya, there were showers of scented flowers and reverberating sounds of 'Dundubhis' (drums) from the skies by Devas and on the entire route on Earth there were loud recitals of Veda Mantras by Rishis and Brahmanas signifying the 'Vijaya Yatra' or the Victorious Return to Ayodhya. Raghunandan Rama showed to Sita some glimpses of Places like the Rama Setu by which Vanara Sena or the Monkey Brigade crossed the Ocean, Kishkindha where he met Sugriva and Hanuman, and the spots where he and Lakshmana searched for Sita. The Pushpak Viman approached Nandigram, where all these years of 'Rama Vanavas' King Bharat was ruling Ayodhya on behalf of Shri Rama by decorating the latter's footwear on the Throne, Hanuman was asked to fly earlier and inform Bharata. As the Vimana touched the ground, there was a high moment of emotional meeting of

Rama and Bharata. As advance notice was sent, the entire City of Ayodyha prepared itself with festivities and colourful receptions with joyous singing and ecstatic dances to welcome the Maryada Purusha Shri Rama, Maha Sadhvi Sita, the illustrious brothers Lakshmana and Bharata. With the Pushpak Viman descending down, the entire population of Ayodhyapuri went rapturous rendering high-pitched slogans viz.: Victory to Shri Rama, Victory to Devi Sita, Victory to Lakshmana and Victory to Raja Bharata. Dressed in their best attires befitting the euphoric moments of bliss, the 'Puravasis' had no bounds of joy in welcoming the Hero and his Parivar emerging from the Viman. The high tides of humanity who suppressed their emotions during his absence of for fourteen long years were surcharged with passions and inexplicable hilarity. Shri Rama first entered Devi Kaikeya's Chambers and after prostrating before her asked her if there were any other wishes of hers yet unfulfilled! She stooped her head down in shame and could not utter one word out of remorse and anguish. From there, Shri Rama accompanied by Sita and Lakshmana visited Devi Sumitra and Shatrughna and prostrated to her too; she expressed overflowing grief and relief and profusely thanked Rama for his highest consideration for her son Lakshmana. Further on both Rama and Sita entered the Chamber of Devi Kaushalya who swooned first for some time and after recovery embraced the son and daughter-in-law and declared that Sadhvi Sita was the finest example of womanhood for ever! After all the euphoria subsided, Bharat called the Ministers, Astrologers and Maharshi Vasishtha to decide on the time and date of Shri Rama Pattabhishekam (Coronation). The Historic Celebration of 'Rama Rajabhisheka' was a landmark in Treta Yuga attended by Lord Brahma, Devas, Maharshis and the highly satisfied 'Praja, and heralded the highly famed Rama Rajya. As Rama was seated as its Head on the Naksha (Atlas) of 'Sapta Lokas' of Prithvi, all the Devas, Daityas, Nagas, Yakshas, Asuras, and of course the entire humanity were performing their respective duties with devotion and care as per established regulations of Dharma (Virtue), Nyaya (Justice), Law and Order, and Social Security. Sadhus and Sages were happy as never before, none resorted to foul means of any kind, women folk had no difficulties and they too observed the regulations as Pativratas; Sacred Activities like Yagnas, Vratas, Punya Karyas, Tirtha Yatras, Daanas, Dhyanas, and Veda Pathanas were in full swing. In response to Rama's appeals Daityas, Maha Sarpas and other Power Joints of the Rajya, none dared to follow the ways of the Evil. To Devas too Shri Ram made requests not to impose any 'Adhi Daivika' based problems such as natural disasters like Earth quakes, floods and droughts or excessive rains or 'Akaala Maranas' or premature deaths. The Praja in Rama Rajya were instructed to observe the 'Varnaashrama Vidhana', perform useful tasks like construction of wells, Sarovars, Temples, Choultries, Udyanavanas or Public Gardens, Pashu Palana or raising cattle, farming and such useful engagements rather than indulge in unhealthy and anti- social activities such as thieving, pilfering, causing hurt to others, amassing money and squandering for foul tasks, prostitution, betting, racing, drinking and yielding to immoral activities. As Shri Rama was an ideal Institution of 'Sishta Rakshaka' (Protector of Virtue and Justice) and 'Dushta Sikshaka' (Punisher of the Evil), the normal Praja (General Public) proved to be a darling King owing to his suave and benevolent treatment and as a severe chastiser and Task Master of wrong doings.

As a petty minded Washerman in the Rama Rajya scandalised Sadhvi Sita once that after all she stayed in Ravana's Lanka for long enough and was not above suspicion concerning her character, Maryada Purusha Shri Rama abandoned her so as to set an example to his Praja. This was the time when Rama intensified the strictness of his administration in the Kingdom. Sesha Nag narrated to Vatsyayana that Agastya Maha Muni visited Rama once and in the course of exchange of views, Rama desired to know from Agastya about Ravana's background, who was the Villian-in-Chief of Ramayana forcing Rama to wage a battle with the Demon for kidnapping Devi Sita. Agastya Muni informed Shri Rama that Lord Brahma's son was Pulastya and the latter's son was Vishwavaka with two wives viz. Mandakini and Kaikasi. Mandakini begot Kubera who by virtue of his Tapsya became

the Chief of Yakshas and a Pushpak Viman. Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana were the sons of Kaikasi. Kubera performed sincere and strict Tapasya and achieved the position of a 'Loka Palaka' and possessed a Vimana too; he was coming and going to meet his parents by the Vimana. Kaikasi was jealous of Mandakini and so were Ravana and Kumbhakarna against Kubera. This prompted Ravana brothers to perform Tapasya, although Vibhishana did the meditation for noble reasons. Lord Brahma was pleased with Ravana's Tapasya and blessed him to become the King of a large Kingdom and made him superior to Devas; as a result Devas fled from Swarga. Ravana occupied Lanka too and forcibly took away Kubera's Viman. Although Ravana and Kumbhakarna were Brahmanas, they took to the habits of Rakshasas, while they suffered Vibhishana who was virtuous and devoted. But as the evil actions of Ravana and Kumbhakarna were reaching a point of no return, Devas and Indra reached Brahma for help and along with Rudra they all approached Lord Vishnu. The latter declared (by way of an Akasha vaani or the Voice of Skies) that soon a high merited King of Ayodhya of Surya Vamsa of the clan of 'Ikshvaku' named Dasaratha would beget four sons from three wives viz. Rama to the eldest wife Kousalya, Lakshmana and Shatrughna to Sumitra and Bharata to Kaikeyi. The declaration also stated that Rama and Lakshmana would completely destroy Ravana and Kumbhakarna as well as their offspring and install Vibhishana as the King of Lanka in a completely new set up following Dharma and Justice. The Akasha vaani further said that several Devatas would be born as 'Vaanas' or monkeys and bears. This was the retrospect of the demolition of Ravana, Kumbhakarna and others of the Clan.

Having learnt of the family background of Ravana and others from Maharshi Agastya, Rama felt extremely remorseful that he had perpetrated 'Brahma hatya' since Ravana was from Brahmana vamsa which was the like the unique tree bearing the various branches of Vedas and Shastras. Agastya told Rama that he was the incarnation of Vishnu who was the Kartha (Originator), Palak (Preserver) and Samharak (Destroyer) and Devi Sita was Maha Vidya Herself and the extreme evil exercised by Ravana gave relief to the world and as such what Rama did was laudable but not regretful. However if there was the least feeling of regret, he might as well perform Aswamedha Yagna as the famous King Manu, Sagara, Marut and Nahusha's son Yayati had in the past and attained 'Parama Pada'. Thus the inspiration to perform the Yagna came forth from Agastya Muni.

As a first step, a suitable, sturdy and steady horse was selected with excellent features. Then under the supervision of Vasishtha Muni, the Kingdom's Chief Rishi, Shri Rama tilled a four yojana wide and long bhumi on Sarayu River banks with a golden plough; selected a suitable Yagna Vedika (Platform) with the required number of Mandapas and Agni Kundas decorated with jewels; invited Maharshis and Tapasvis of high standing like Narada, Asita, Parvat, Kapila, Jaatukarnya, Angira, Aashtishena, Atri, Goutami, Haarita, Yagnavalkya, and Sarvat; constructed suitable Ashramas for the Invitee Rishis and disciples; Conferences were held to decide on the format, procedure and daily programing; prescribed do's and don'ts of physical, moral and spiritual content; 'niyamas and nigrahas' (norms and restrictions) etc. Lakshmana brought the Yagnashwa at the appointed time, formal Pujas were performed by Brahmanas and 'Suvasini' Women; the Surya Vamsa flag of Victory was hoisted on the horse; a gold sheet was hung around the horse-neck with an Inscription saying that the horse belonged to Shri Rama and whosoever stopped it would be severely punished; Shatrughna was made over-all in charge of the huge armed Sena (Army), elephants, horses, chariots and carts leading the Yagnashwa; Pushkala the son of Bharata was made in charge of the rear side of the 'Ashwa'; Bhakta Hanuman headed the entourage and at the most propitious Muhurta the Yagna Horse was released, along with the recitals of Veda Mantras and 'Mangala Vadyas' amid big shouts of Victory to Shri Rama Chandra. The Procession with the Yagnashwa in the lead moved on with instruction from Shri Rama that the course of the Ashwa should not be conducted as the horse would move freely. The first halt was at the Avicchitra Nagari where there was a noted Temple of Devi Kamakshi who appeared before King

Samuda performing Tapasya and gave the boon of invincibility; she also asked the King to offer his entire Kingdom and riches to Shatrughna as he would pass through the Nagari along with the horse of Ashvamedha Yagna to be conducted Shri Rama of Surya Vamsha and the killer of Ravana'sura. Accordingly, Shatrughna was given all kinds of honours by King Samuda. After a three day halt, the King made his son a 'Samanta Raja' of Ayodhya and moved on along with Shatrughna and Pushkala.

As the Yagnashwa moved on nearing the Ashram of Sage Chyavana and Devi Sukanya, Pradhan Mantri Sumati who was in the entourage of Shatrughna explained their episode: The son of Sage Bhrigu named Chyavan was engaged in very rigorous Tapasya when King Sharyati was performing 'snaan' in the River Narmada and Tarpana to Devas and Pitras; the Princess Sukanya along with her companions was moving about in a forest on the banks of Narmada. Out of fun, Sukanya nearing a bush pierced with a piece of wood into perhaps a couple of glittering worms, but got alarmed when blood spilt out and there were trembles of Earth and lightnings. She ran and informed her father who was resting on the river banks about the incident. The King went up to the bush and found to his horror that Sukanya did not pierce the lighting worms but the eyes of a Sage engrossed in Tapasya, causing him to blindness. The King apologised profusely and offered his teen age daughter to the sick and aged Sage in wedding as a compensation. The daughter Sukanya served the Sage with sincerity and once the two Asvini Kumar Brothers who were passing by were impressed with her 'Pativartya' (seva to husband) and gave her the boons of eye sight to her husband as also youth and charm. In gratitude, the Sage Chyavan, by virtue of his Tapasya, gave the boon to Ashvini Kumars to secure sips of 'Somarasa' (the Celestial Drink) denied to them hitherto as also fulfilled Devatva with eligibility for enjoying 'havis' or the fruit of Yagnas. Lord Indra was furious at these boons to Asvini Kumars and raised his hand to punish them all but the Sage Chyavan in turn held Indra's hand tight and Indra had no option to grant the boons to Ashvini Kumars! While Mantri Sumati narrated the Story of the Sacred Couple of Sage Chyavan and Devi Sukanya, the 'Sacrifice Horse', Shatrughna and the entire entourage reached the Ashram, worshipped them and requested them to visit the Place of the Rama Yagna, as Hanuman carried the Chyavana couple to Rama Chandra and the Place of the Maha Yagna in progress.

As the Yagnashva moved ahead, Pradhana Mantri Sumati told Shatrughna that they were about to reach Neelachala and the Sacred Temple of Bhagavan Purushottama with four arms on the Mountain top. They reached Ratnaathata Nagar where King Vimal who became extremely excited and organised refreshments to the entire entourage. He also made a symbolic dedication of his Kingdom to Shri Rama and gave away valuable gifts to Shatrughna and others. King Vimal narrated an unusual story about the incidents which happened in the past about the Neelachala Mountain. He quoted a Brahmana visiting the Neelachala Mountain and found outside the Purushottama Temple there were a few Tirtha Yatri who possessed four hands armed with Gada, Chakra, Saranga and a lotus. Similarly a Kirata (Hunter) saw spectacles of a few children with 'Chaturbhujas' armed likewise with glittering robes! When the children were asked by the Kirata, they said that a few morsels of Maha Prasada which fell on the ground were eaten, they came out with the Chaturbhujas!

From Neelachala, the Yagnashva halted at Chakranga Nagar ruled by King Subahu, where Prince Daman felt that the manner the Ashwamegha was publicised all over the World smacked of pride and ego and ordered his Senapati to keep his army ready to fight. On behalf of Shatrughna, Raja Pratapagna shouted that the Yagnaashva disappeared and Prince Daman replied that he had kept the horse and if possible might get it back after a fight! A battle ensued and Raja Pratapagna was defeated by Daman. Shatrughna wondered as to who was this imp of a Raja Kumar called Daman who did considerable damage to elephants, horses and chariots and felled on ground the capable Raja Pratapagna wounded with blood! Prince Pushkala the son of Bharata was so angry that he swore to

control or kill Daman. A fierce battle took place and finally Pushkala defeated Daman Kumar whose body was profusely bleeding and his horse took back to the Court of King Subahu. The King, his brother Suketu who was a master of Gada Yuddha (Battle of Maces) and Subahu's son Chitranga an expert of Battle Designs had all appeared together and designed a 'Krouncha Vyuha'; the entire strength of the sea-like army of Subahu was mobilised and put Shatrughna on red alert. The most powerful warriors of Subahu were kept at the tactical head position and sides of the 'Krouncha Pakshi's war design. Subahu was in desperate and distressed condition as his son was bleeding with wounds on death bed; revenge was the watchword of Subahu's entire army. Shatrughna knew the seriousness of the situation as a minor scuffle restricted to Daman and Pushkala had snow-balled into a full-fledged battle with military offensives and complicated battle designs. He addressed the Shri Rama Sena and exhorted its warriors that the situation was such that had to be faced with alertness, valour and brain power to be able to break the Krouncha Vyuha. Raja Lakshminidhi the son of King Janaka took a vow that he would face Suketu and destroy the Vyuha designed by the latter in no time. There was a one-to-one battle as both were equally worked up and it continued for long time with ups and downs. The warriors then took to 'Gada-Yuddha' (mace-war) and it prolonged for long time; finally, Lakshminidhi was able to overpower Suketu and there were shouts of relief resounded while both the parties appreciated with each other. In the battle that continued, Pushkala killed Chitranga. Subahu was extremely upset with the killings of his brother and son and became most desperate to kill thousands of warriors, elephants, horses and foot-soldiers and finally challenged Shatrughna. Hanuman who was providing cover to Shatrughna as he was in the defensive position and received showers of arrows of King Subahu which hurt Hanuman. The highly enraged Hanuman kicked King Subahu on his chest by his powerful feet and grounded him. It was in a stage of stupor, the King witnessed a vision when Brahma and Devatas were eulogizing Shri Rama as an Avatar of Vishnu. Having realised his folly, he made desperate shouts to Daman, Suketu and Vichitra saying that Shri Rama was none else but Bhagavan Vishnu and the battle should end forthwith. There after he apologised to Shatrughna for what all had happened, performed 'Atmarpana' (Surrender) and returned the Yagnashva with honour.

As the Yagnashva moved on for a few days, suddenly there emerged a frightful darkness since close friends of the deceased Ravana, two Rakshasas of Patalaloka named Vidyumali and Ugradamshttra wanted to avenge Ravana's death and luckily for them an opportunity came on its own with the launch of the Yagna and to trap the Rama Sena by hiding the Yagnashwa. The Rakshasa Brothers succeeded in hiding the horse. Bharat Kumar Pushkal made a deadly declaration that if he did not return with the Yagnashwa, then he should be deemed a fictitious devotee of Shri Rama. Hanuman too took a similar vow. Other warriors too took vows and Shatrughna was not far behind. Meanwhile the Rakshasa Brothers shouted: where is Rama; we want to kill him and take revenge! Vidyumali straightaway targetted Pushkala and threw a 'Shakti' on his chest, while Pushkala rained arrows on the Rakshasa and the latter's chest was pierced through as lot of blood flowed out from his heart and Vidyumali fell on the ground unconscious. Reacting to this sharply, Ugradamshttra threw a red-hot Trishul from the Demon's viman on Pushkal's heart and the latter fell unconscious inside his chariot. Hanuman witnessed that Bharat Kumar Pushkal was in risk and instantly expanded his body to pull down the Rakshasa occupants of the Viman, especially Ugradamshttra and hurled a hot Trishul on the Rakshasa, who in turn used his Maya to bring in a complete cover of darkness in which it was difficult to perceive who was a companion and who was an opponent. Witnessing these fast developments, Shatrughna took the name of Shri Rama and slashed the Cover of Maya that Ugradamshttra brought in by one arrow and with another quick arrow of Sammohanastra on the battle field. By yet another arrow, he brought down the Viman from where Ugradamshttra was fighting. The demon used 'Paashupatastra' against Shatrughna and the latter had no option but to utilise

‘Narayanastra’ to balance the former. Meanwhile a recovered Vidyumali was about to toss a Trishul on Shatrughna but a smart Shatrughna hacked the hand of Vidyumali with an arrow and simultaneously flinged another arrow to pitch down the demon’s head. Soon after in quick action, Shatrughan also hurled a ‘kripan’ (Small knife) on Ugradamshtara and killed that demon brother too.

As the Yagnyashva ambled along towards the banks of River Narmada, Prime Minister Sumati suggested to Shatrughna a quick visit to the Ashram of Muni Aranyaka. When the Muni was informed by Sumati that an Ashwamedha Yagna was being performed, the Sage replied that those foolish persons who were wasting their time and energy in performing Yagnas and Vratas during the short life span should be advised to best utilise their time to Shri Rama ‘Smarana’ (Memory) as Shri Rama was itself an Yagna, a Vrata, a Puja, a Maha Mantra, Veda and Shastra. Then Suman introduced Shatrughna, Bharat Kumar, Hanuman and others and the Sage was thrilled to see them all and re-emphasised that there was no other Deity like Shri Rama and no there bhajan better than his. Shatrughna then arranged Muni Aranyaka’s visit to Ayodhya and the Muni after meeting Shri Rama in person felt so satisfied that he did not wish for anything else in life and by the grace of Shri Rama left for Vishnu loka!

The Yagnashva reached the beautiful and properous Devapura at Vindhya where even building walls were made of precious stones and the King Veeramani was an extraordinary devotee of Bhagavan Shiva. The elder Prince Rukmanga arrested the Yagnashwa and brought it to the Capital but since he came to know that the horse belonged to Shri Rama in connection with a Yagna, the King was hesitant to approve the action. Nor Shiva, who was prayed to by the King; the latter said that since the action was already taken, it would not be in tune with Kshatriya Dharma to take a retreat step. By way of assurance, Shiva too resolved to fight with Lord Rama, since Shiva as a devotee of Sri Rama had as much responsibility to the King who also was a great devotee of Shiva. Thus a vicious circle got into motion. Meanwhile, Brahmaarshi Narada alerted all concerned ie. Shatrughan, Shri Rama, the King Veeramani and the typical ‘Kalaha Priya’ readied the armies of both Sharughna and the King. Raja Veeramani called his Senatpati and got an excellent army ready and Sharughna advised Rama’s army to get readied too. The opening duel was of Rukmanga and Pushkal. Rukmanga recited a Mantra and the chariot of Pushkala commenced ‘Bhubhraman’ (circling fastly). With difficulty the Rath was stopped but the enraged Pushkala recited a return Mantra which made Rukmanga’s chariot fly right up to the Surya mandal where it got burnt and fell down but Rukmanga was thrown out unconscious. King Veeramani was alarmed with fury approaching Pushkala and as a chain reaction Hanuman sought to reach Pushkala for rescue but Pushkala became over confident and prevented Hanuman and asked the latter to help Shatrughna instead. There was a one-to-one battle between Pushkala and Veeramani and by using a mighty arrow in the name of Shri Rama made Veeramani unconscious. Surprisingly, Bhagavan Shiva himself entered the battle field at this juncture as King Veeramani the unique devotee of Shiva fell unconscious! Shiva instructed Veerabhadra to help Veeramani and Nandi to control Hanuman. Thus Veerabhadra killed Pushkala, Shiva Himself made Shatrughna unconscious; at the same time appreciated Hanuman’s valour. Hanuman addressed Bhagavan Shiva saying that quite often, Shiva was confirming his devotion to Vishnu and his Avatar Shri Rama, but it was surprising that this time he was fighting against Shri Rama! Hanuman replied that King Veeramani was a great devotee of his and it was a ‘Maryada’ or Courtesy to defend a devotee just as Rama too would defend his devotees likewise! Basically both were two entities of the Paramatma! Then Hanuman asked Bhagavan Shankara for granting boons to let all the persons who died in this battle be resuscitated. Shri Rama made his presence at the battle field when Shiva prostrated; Shatrughna, Hanuman and all the rest were highly surprised and the persons who were declared dead in the battle came back alive and all were happy. Shri Rama then explained to one and all that the Dharma of Deities was to safeguard the interests of their Bhaktas and what Shiva did in

defending King Veeramani and his side was the best that he had done; that his heart was full of Shiva and vice-versa and those thought other wise would be dispatched to Kumbhapaka Naraka! Those who were Shiva's devotees were Shri Rama's beloved Bhaktas and those who were Shiva followers were Vishnu's devotees too.

Sesha Nag described to Sage Vatsayan that as the Sacrificial Horse reached the precincts of Valmiki Ashram, Shi Rama's sons Lava and Kusha -who were unaware that Rama was their father as Devi Sita staying in Valmiki Ashram under the care of the Sage's care did not inform the twin boys of the relationship as they were born in the Ashram after Rama abandoned Sita-reacted sharply against the inscription on the Golden Plate hung around the Yagnashva; they tied the horse and brought it inside the Ashram. The soldiers accompanying the horse ignored the two boys who tied the horse out of child play and started untying the horse and instantly, the hands of the soldiers were severed as they ran to Shatrughna to inform the incident. Understandably, Shatrughna grew angry but felt that the boys who did this might not be ordinary but might have perhaps been Devatas at the behest of Indra! Thus he ordered his Senapati Kaalajit to quickly alert the Army for a full-fledged battle. In the battle that ensued between the Senapati and Lava Kumara, the Senatapti was killed and there was allround 'hahakar'(frightened shouts) from the Army. Shatrughna asked Pushkal to take a big Army and proceed against the boy Lava. Pushkal said to Lava that he would be gifted a chariot so that both might fight on equal terms; as a reply, Lava destroyed Pushkal's chariot instantly and asked Pushkal now grounded was heckled by Lava on 'equal terms'! In the battle that followed Pushkal rained arrows on Lava and in response despatched a cobra like poisonous arrow aimed at Pushkal's chest and the latter fell flat on the ground. Hanuman who was nearby took the body of Pushkala to Shatrughna who instructed Hanuman to kill Lava mercilessly. The highly charged Hanuman hurled huge trees and boulders and Lava cut them to pieces as a sport. By the severity and swiftness with which poisonous arrows were flinged at Hanuman, the latter could not control himself even as the gigantic body that he assumed fell flat on the ground! The highly puzzled Shatrughna wondered as to who these two boys were who felled the Most Valiant Hanuman himself! As he drove the Golden Chariot towards the boys, he felt that their resemblance with Shri Ram was so striking that he asked them as to who they were and what their parentage was. The boys gave a stiff reply that it was not essential to know such details since their horse was captured by them and let him try if he could retrieve it. In the course of the battle, Shatrughna was stunned and stumbled as he had to quickly change his bows that were broken and the chariots that were destroyed and was finally knock down with unconsciousness. As Shatrughna was hit, Raja Surath and others surrounded and resorted to 'Adharma Yuddha' or unjust battle and caused Lava to hurt into unconsciousness. As the news of Lava's state was informed, Devi Sita was informed and Kusha hurried to the warfront and instantly faced Shatrughna who by now got revived and nodoubt knew that Kusha and Lava were twins and the sons of Shri Rama, but the most furious Kush had was on attack with the 'Narayana Astra' hurled on Shatrughna but this powerful arrow was turned ineffective. In reply, Shatrughna took a vow in the name of Shri Rama and rleased an arrow but the desperate Kusha took the vow on his Mother Devi Sita and retaliated. Shatrughna fell unconscious again. Sugreeva took over the position of Commander in Chief and fought with Kusha as also with Lava who recovered again by then. Sugreeva too fell down and Lava and Kusha tied both Sugreeva and Hanuman and carried them to Devi Sita who was aghast to witness the Maha Viras in that condition. The boys relented to her instruction to release them but as per Kshatriya Dharma they would have to return to the Battle Field. On releasing both Hanuman and Sugreeva, Devi Sita came to know that Shatrughna was lying unconscious. Devi Sita then remembered Shri Rama and addressed Surya Deva that if she were to be a true Pativrata, Shatrughna should be revived and not only that who ever lost their lives in the Battle should be also revived! Indeed her wish was fulfilled and all was well. As per Sita's instruction, Lava and Kusha released the Yagyashva and the entire entourage

headed by Shatrugna returned to Ayodhya after the successful Victory tour of Yagyashva and all the defeated Kings who clashed with Rama Sena were paraded before Shri Rama. But Shri Rama was more curious to learn more about the valour of Lava and Kusha. He was keen on Devi Sita's return to Ayodhya and despatched Lakshmana to bring her back, but she refused to return. She agreed however to send Lava and Kusha after Sage Valmiki trained the boys to sing a ballad before Shri Rama and others. The boy's sang the entire Ramayana since the birth of Shri Rama and brothers, including Sita's abandon; Lakshmana leaving her to her fate; her rescue by Maharshi Valmiki her 'Agnatavasa' delivery of the twin brothers; the Sage's excellent training of the boys in warfare and Kshatriya Dharmas, knowledge of Administration and of Kingship; Shri Rama's popularity with Sages, citizens, and each and every being as Maryada Purusha; Sage Vishwamitra's insistence to safeguard his Yagna and the killing of Demoness Tataka and Subahu; Sita's Swayamvara; Kaikeyee's desire to Bharata's becoming the Heir Apparent and Ram's Vanavasi; killing of notorious Rakshasas, Sita's 'Apaharana' (kidnap) by Ravana; Rama's befriending with Sugreeva and Hanuman; Hanuman's trip to Lanka to trace Sita; the crossing of the Ocean; the killing of Ravana and the entire clan, Vibheeshana becoming the Lanka King; the Rama Rajya; Rama abandoning Devi Sita on the basis of a Secret Report of a washerman's allegation about Devi Sita's character notwithstanding Sita's pregnancy; and Rama performing Ashvamedha Yagna. Shri Rama was overwhelmed with emotions at the ballad sung by the the twins, his pride to have secured such illustrious twins and the remorse to have abandoned Sadhvi Sita. Already, Sage Valmiki arrived to attend the Ashvamedha Yagna as a respected Guest of Honour at Ayodhya. He narrated how Devi Sita was fortunately seen by him in the forest that Lakshmana abandoned her; her transfer to his Ashram and her continuous grief, the birth of Lava and Kusha, his upbringing with considerable training in Dhanur Veda, Fine Arts, and what all was required by an ideal Kshatriya and a King including the nuances of Administration, Yoga and Siddhis and an exemplary human being worthy of the sons of a Maryada Purusha. Valmiki further stated that he visited Varuna Deva, Agni Deva and other Lokapalaks who had unanimously referred to Devi Sita's purity and piety as a Maha Pativrata Sadhvi born into this world; a ready proof of her 'Shuddhata' and highest devotion to Shri Rama was the coming back alive of lakhs of dead persons at the various battles en route the travel of the Yagnashva, since she wished so! Having heard what all Maharshi Valmiki stated in Public and in the midst of the most recognised and pious Sages-in-Chief soon after the Great Singing of Ramayana by Lava and Kusha, Shri Rama asked Lakshman to visit Valmiki Ashram and invite Devi Sita to Ayodhya, in the context of the Victory Celebrations as also the Sacred and Historic Termination of Ashvamedha Yagna. As Lakshmana reached the Ashram and requested Devi Sita, she asked him as to how could she return to Ayodhya having been humiliated and discarded with baseless allegations. Lakshman narrated most convincingly as to what all happened at Ayodhya, how the Twins sang Ramayana and the spontaneous reactions and glorious comments about Devi Sita from the Maharshis, Devas and Loka Palaks (as reported by Sage Valmiki). He prostrated before her and requested her to visit Ayodhya. The Ashvamedha Yagna concluded with the display of the pride of Surya Vamsha, the unreserved gaiety of the Praja of Rama Rajya, the relentless recitals of Veda Mantras by the Maharshis, the blessings of Brahma and Maha Deva; the showers of flowers from the heavens by Indra, Loka Palaks, Pancha Bhutas and Devas; the joyous singing of Gandarvas and the celestial dances of Apsaras. Most interestingly, even by the touch of Shri Rama the Yagnashva (Sacrificial Horse) turned into a human being redeemed after the touch, since Sage Durvasa cursed the person in the past and when sincerely apologised gave the boon of Rama's sacred touch.

Sesha Nag assured Sage Vatsayana that whoever heard or read the proceedings of Shri Rama's Ashvamedha Yagna would get rid off Maha Patakas, secure prosperity, excellent health, and contentment in life; even a chandala or athiest would attain 'Parama Pada'!

Sita's 'Paramdhana' and termination of Ramavatara: After the successful completion of Ashvamedha Yagna, Shri Rama continued his normal routine of observing celibacy and administration. Shatrughna killed Lavanaura and ruled Madhurapuri; Bharat administered both the banks of River Sindhu and controlled Gandharvas; Lakshman conquered Madra desha, installed his sons as the Kings and returned to Rama for providing service to him. Shri Rama did Ashvamedha Yanga, after installing a Golden Pratima of Sita; in fact he performed several Yagnas in the same manner. Sage Valmiki exhorted Rama about Sita's spotlessness and piousness time and again and Shri Rama finally opined that indeed he was fully aware of her chastity and purity but since the allegation came from the Praja (Public), Sita should prove her innocence before the people. Sita then declared in a huge Sabha that if she performed puja to any body else excepting Shri Ram in her mind, thought, tongue or action then my mother Bhudevi might take her into her mother's fold. Immediately, there was an Earth-quake and Sita entered into a huge cleavage. Bhudevi herself lifted Sita into her belly and the great Garuda, the Carrier of Lord Vishnu, lifted her from Rasatala to Vishnu loka as seated on a Golden Throne. After Sita's disappearance, Shri Rama ruled for eleven thousand years. One day, an old Tapasvi came to see Shri Ram and told him that none should enter his Chamber while he was giving an important message from Lord Brahma in secrecy. Shri Rama called Lakshmana and instructed that none should be allowed to enter as long as he was conversing with the Tapasvi and otherwise that person should be punishable with death. Lakshman himself stood at the door and ensured that none would disturb. The Tapasvi conveyed that since the death of Ravana, Kumbhakarna and other demons Rama was to live for eleven thousand years and that it was time for Rama to leave Earth and return to Vaikuntha. While this secret conversation was going on, Durvasa Maharshi arrived and wished to meet Shri Rama, but Lakshmana declined entry stating that a representative of Brahma was in an important conversation and that he could not see Shri Rama then. Durvasa grew angry and threatened Lakshmana with a severe curse if he did not permit entry. As there was no other alternative between Rama's instruction and Durvasa's threat of curse, Lakshman entered River Sarayu, taking his original Swarupa of Ananta Naga with thousand hoods. After the meeting with Kaala Deva in the form of the old Tapasvi, Rama realised that Lakshman also having gone, it was time for him also to terminate his 'Avatar'; he established Kusha in Kushavati Kingdom and Lava in Dwaravati as their Kings. Taking a hint from Shri Rama, Vibishana, Sugriva, Jambavan, Hanuman, Neela, Nala, Sushena and Nishada Raja Guha arrived. Shatrughna performed the coronation of his sons at Ayodhya. The rest of them said that they would not like to stay back on Earth in the absence of Rama even for a moment. But Rama asked Vibishana to continue in power at Lanka for long time and instructed Hanuman to continue on Earth forever to sustain the message of Shri Rama. The rest of them accompanied Shri Rama into the Sacred Sarayu River. Bharat, Shatrughna, and all the citizens of Ayodhya along with their wives, Mantris, Servants, Vedikas, Brahmanas, the nearby animals, birds, and all other Beings who accompanied Shri Rama never looked back. As Shri Rama went deep into the River, Lord Brahma, Devas, Rishis and all Celestial Beings extolled Raghunatha even as He took the Huge Form of Maha Vishnu with his four hands along with Bharata as Shankha, Shatrughna as Chakra, as also Gada with Sri Devi and Bhudevi beside Him.

Shri Krishna Charitra: his birth, miracles, account of his progeny and Nirvana

As the most dreaded Daitya Kalanemi ruled over the entire Martyaloka and harassed the entire Public day and night, Bhagavan Vishnu terminated him but he came back in his next birth as Kamsha the son of Ugrasena; it was at that juncture there were a huge stock of Rakshasas like Arishta, Dheniuka, Keshi, Pralamba, Naraka, Sunda, and Banasura the son of Bali Chakravarti and most of the Evil spread over as Rulers of several Kingdoms. Devi Bhumi was unable to bear the brunt of such Evil Forces and made a reverential appeal to all the Devas and through them to Brahma Deva and the latter

made a powerful appeal to Bhagvan Vishnu to save the Earth which was being crushed by extraordinary pressure on account of the Evil .

In response to the Stuti by Brahma, Bhagavan assured that two of his 'Keshas'-one Shewta or white one and another a Shyama or dark complexion would be pulled out to soon descend as his 'Amshas' or incarnations on Earth and lighten its weight by uprooting all the Evil Forces and advised the Devas also assume appropriate Rupas as human beings in the task of destroying the Rakshasas and humans in the form of Rakshasas. Bhagavan further instructed Yoga maya to perform a series of deeds including the birth of six sons to Devaki [they were Kalanemi's sons devoted to Vishnu and the father cursed the sons that they would be killed by them in his hands in the next birth as per 'Harivamsha'] As King Kamsa was obsessed with the warning of Sage Narada that the eighth child of Devaki would kill him, he imprisoned Devaki and his brother-in-law who agreed to deliver all his progeny as soon as they would be born, Kamsa spared killing them and merely imprisoned them. Now, the game plan that Vishnu explained to Yogamaya was as follows: She would transfer Devaki's seventh son who would be of Sesha's Amsha as an embriyo into the Garbha of Vasudeva's second wife Rohini so that the Public would believe that out of fear Devaki's seventh child was a miscarriage but that Sesha-amsha would be known as Samkarshana as he would be implanted or attracted to Rohini's garbha; the Ashtami Putra would be Bhagavan himself born to Devaki but Yogamaya would be conceived to Yashoda; there would be a transfer of Bhagavan Krishna by Vasudeva to Yashoda and the girl child Yogamaya would be brought back to Mathura in the prison of Devaki; as in the past, the Yoga maya , the so called Eighth child thus transferred would fly away and warn Kamsa that the real Bhagavan was already born and soon kill Kamsa. Bhagavan blessed Yogamaya to undertake the deeds assigned and Indra would take her as his own sister; she would kill a number of Rakshasas like Shumbha and Nishumbha; she would be known as Bhuti, Sannati, Kshaanti, Kaanti, Akasha, Prithwi, Dhriti, Lajja, Pushti, Usha and various other Shaktis in the Universe.

As per the plan indicated by Bhagavan Vishnu, he was born to Devaki Devi and along with Vasudeva gave his appearance in his full glorious form with four hands armed with Shankha-Chakra-Saranga and Gada for a while before taking the form of a boy; the violent winds sweeping Mathura herebefore became cool and calm by the midnight hour; Gandharvas sang tuneful hymns; Devas showered celestial flowers from the heavens; clouds made lightnings and mild thunders from the sky; Vasudeva transferred the child to Gokula into the house of Yashoda and Nanda wading across the River Yamuna making way during the rain while Sesha Naga provided cover; and Vasudeva brought the female child Yogamaya from the bed of Yashoda who was unconscious back to the prison in Mathura. Meanwhile , the Security personnel of the prison of Devaki-Vasudeva were lulled to deep sleep till the 'Operation of Child Transfers', ie Bhagavan Krishna to Yashoda's bed and of Yogamaya to that of Devaki's. Kamsa reached the prison and despite the wailing protests of his sister sought to toss the child against a stone as he did to seven other babies in the past, but the child flew from his hands and appeared on the sky as a Mayashakti with eight hands and shouted at Kamsa: Hey Kamsa! What is the use of your wasted breath in trying to toss me; your death would take place with certainty soon as the incarnation of Vishnu has already been born and would kill you again as you were the Kalanemi Daitya in your previous birth; so better plan soon to save your skin! Having said, Devi Maha Maya disappeared. Kamsa then thought that there was no point in keeping Devaki and Vasudeva in prison and called for an urgent conference of his Daitya Allies like Keshini, Dhenuka, Putana, Arishta and others to chalk out an action plan to the Boy who was born and addressed them as follows: 'Devas headed by Indra are seeking to kill me and us headed by Jarasandha; we had already witnessed the trials of Devas in several of battles in the past, when they could never show their chests but only their backs! Had Indra forgotten the recent incident of his trial to stop rains in our Kingdoms and we forced the clouds to burst out and we had plentiful of rains and crops! I feel sorry

for the desperation with which the Devas are once again trying to challenge us; it is highly amusing that they desire to kill me! In any case we have to be alert any way and double up our efforts!

In right earnest, the efforts of the Daityas to demolish Krishna even as a toddler were planned and executed; Kamsa first despatched Mayavi **Putana** in disguise as a pretty woman to breast-feed poisonous milk to Krishna but quite playfully Krishna bit her nipple as she was instantly killed; the entire Gokula was aghast as to how the Toddler had a miraculous escape and Nanda prayed to Bhagavan to save the child from all kinds of mishaps saying: May Bhagavan protect the child from all the directions of North-South-East and West; may Madhusudana save the child from the Vidashaas of North East-South East-SouthWest and North West; may Hrishikesha guard the child from the Sky and may Adi Sessa Deva shield the boy from Earth!

There have been a series of miracles that followed the Putana incident from time to time as the two brothers were growing in Yashoda-Nanda's house. One day Madhusudana was kept under a **Shakata** (Cart) in the backyard of their house and the child apparently cried for milk and threw up his legs while lying down and the cart was pushed up and got broken into pieces; the children around witnessed that the child did throw up the cart with his feet! The parents wondered as to how a child could do it! They performed a Puja with flowers-fruits-curd and 'Akshatas' or rice grains to ward off any Evil eye! After a few days Gargaachaarya performed **Namakarana**; the younger one as Krishna and the elder as Balarama. In course of time, the boys were able to crawl and disappear amid the flock of cattle and apply cow dung on their bodies; both Yashoda and Rohini were fed up and tied to a heavy stone used for pounding grains which was kept in between two huge **Yamalarjuna Trees** in the backyard and got busy with their household chores. Suddenly, there were heavy sounds as the two huge trees fell down and the neighbours witnessed that two Celestial Beings emerged from the trees and flew away! Krishna was called Damodara as there was a scar around his waist due to the black mark of the rope with which Yashoda tied Krishna to the heavy stone.

As queer incidents like the killing of Putana, lifting of cart, sudden sand storm and uprooting of huge trees were happening, Nanda desired to shift to **Brindavana** from Gokula and made the entire population agree to the arrangement. All the 'Vraja vaasis' shifted to the new place and in course of time, the boys came of teen age, adopted distinct dress code, sported a golden headgear with peacock feathers and flute and excelled themselves as unique flutists especially as cowherds in the large company of Gopas and Gopikas exchanging practical pranks and mischief. One day, Krishna went with his friends without Balarama and while wandering came across a frightful water body known as the place in which **Kaliya** Serpent and its family stayed; the companions of Krishna suggested that the particular pond should be avoided as the water in it was highly poisonous as thirsty human beings, cattle and even birds would die instantly. But Krishna never heeded the warnings and from a tree top on the banks of the pond dived into it even with full awareness that the tree was burnt due to the poisonous flames that emitted from the pond. Gopala Ganas raised a hue and cry and informed one and all in Brindavan and the entire public got collected around the lake. Nanda Kumar was lost in dismay while Yashoda and quite a few Gopikas were readying to leap into the water, but Balarama cooled down the agitated relatives and the public stating that Krishna was not an ordinary human being and that he was Bhagavan Vishnu himself; he conveyed to Krishna as follows: Deveshwara! Are you not aware that you are Ananta; and if so why are you displaying the Manava Bhaava or the characteristics of human beings! You are yourself the ultimate refuge of the Universe as its Creator-Presever-Terminator just as the axis of a wheel and its spokes! Indeed you are the embodiment of Three Lokaas and Three Vedas; Jagannaatha! You have assumed human form to demolish the Evil Forces and lighten the burden on Earth. Krishna! It is time that you discard this childishness and human features and quickly control the poisonous teeth of the cruel serpent once for all! There inside

the poisonous pond the whole family of Kaliya surrounded Krishna and the enormous serpent sought to encircle his body; but Krishna smiled even as what Balarama said and fisted and pounded the most obnoxious creature in such a way that he held his tail with one hand and jumped up on its hoods and compressed them with mighty force; as Krishna brought the serpent in total control the latter obeyed Jagannatha and the unusual spectacle of floating and dancing Krishna atop the creature's hoods delighted the entire Vraja Praja! The poisonous water of the pond was full of Kaliya's red blood and his wives and children begged of Krishna not to kill it. The humiliated Kalia realised the magnificence of Krishna and extolled him stating: Even Brahma, Rudra, Chandra, Indra, Marudganaas, Ashvini Kumaaraas, Vasuganas and Adityas could not commend you adequately, how could I pay tributes to your excellence! Then Krishna instructed Kaliya and his large family to leave the pond at once and assured that his formidable enemy Garudmaan would recognise his footprints and let them pass to reach the Sea in which they could reside fearlessly for long time.

After the Kaliya incident, there were the exterminations of **Dhenukasura** who entered the group of cows which Krishna took out along with Balarama and other Gopas as also of **Pralambasura** who quietly joined the Gopas and participated in a game of carrying on his back the elder brother Balarama and flying him away but the latter suppressed the Asura by his ever increasing body weight and finally the Asura collapsed to death. There were quite a few other killings by Krishna of many Asuras in an exercise of lightening the evil forces on Earth; Vrishabasura was exterminated, Daitya **Keshi** was despatched to hell and scores of other Daityas were slaughtered. Then there was the anger of Indra who was not traditionally worshipped by Vraja vaasis on the arrival of Sharat Ritu but as per the advice of Krishna they did not; Indra's fury resulted in torrential rains and washed out Vraja Bhumi but Krishna lifted **Govardhana Mountain** by his little finger to protect the Gokula Praja and provided shield to them all and there by destroying the ego of Indra. But Indra's fury was only to popularise Krishna's magnificence by creating an opportunity that Krishna indeed was Supreme. During the times that followed, the Gopikas of Vraja displayed intense attachment and infatuation for Krishna that culminated in Raasa-leelas or ecstatic dances in groups in which there were as many Krishnas as Gopikas on one to one count besides a Unique Krishna belonging to one and all!

Devarshi Narada then felt that the time was ripe enough to provoke and destroy the major villain **Kamsa** and made a friendly call to the King. He conveyed to Kamsa the various deeds of Krishna and Balarama who now entered the teens and that it might be a good idea to invite them to Mathura to meet their parents and celebrate their trip to Mathura. The evil-minded Kamsa felt that as the Vraja Brothers might become more powerful and difficult to destroy by the day, he planned for a friendly trip to Mathura and asked **Akrura** the Yadava Elder to personally visit Gokula- Brindavan and escort Krishna and Balarama, ostensibly to attend a Dhanush Yajna on the next Chaturdashi and also enjoy the celebrations like 'Malla Yuddhas' (wrestling matches) by the notorious Chanura and Mushtikaas. Kamsa day-dreamt that after killing Balarama Krishnas followed by those of Nanda and Vasudeva and his foolish and timid father Ugrasena now in prison, he would annexe Gokula-Brindavan easily and enjoy the property of cows and grains! Akrura left for Brindavana and invited Krishna-Balarama to Mathura to attend the Yagna and Celebrations; their parents were grieved; Vrajavaasis were saddened; Gopaas were upset; Gopikas were alarmed at the absence. As he approached Gokula, Akrura took bath in River Yamuna and happened to meet Krishna and Balarama in person as they too were whiling on the river banks along with their pals; he was in trance in visioning Krishna and broke out in a spontaneous 'Stuti': My hearty salutations to you the Sanmaatra Swarupa, Achintya Mahima, Paramatma, Sarwavyaapi, Aneka Rupaa due to Karanaas / Causes but basically of a Singular / Unique Form--- Namu Vaasudeva, Namu Sankarshana , Pradyumna and Aniruddha!.

As Bhagavan Krishna and Balarama entered Mathura, they asked Akrura to leave them alone as they preferred to walk up by the 'Raja Maarga' to enjoy their interaction with the Public; the passers by were seeing and conversing among themselves in small groups in low tones. Their first encounter was with a **Rajaka** or Washerman who happened to be from the Royal Palace of King Kamsa; as the brothers were attracted to the colourful dresses, they asked the Rajaka to give them a few nice dresses but the haughty washerman talked rudely and arrogantly which provoked Krishna to beat him and pulled him down on the ground and helped themselves a few dresses of their choice. A little ahead, another person kept on staring at the boys and asked them nicely as to where were they coming from; he said that he was a **Maali** or a flower seller and invited them to his home nearby and offered them nice flower garlands; Krishna was pleased at his pleasant conduct and gave him the boon that all along his life, the Maali would be happy, prosperous and well-contented! The next encounter was with a **Kubja** or a short and deformed girl and Krishna asked her as to where was she going and what was she carrying; as she said she was carrying Gandha or sandal wood paste, Krishna wished to provide the fragrant paste to him and in turn, he lifted up by her chin and straightened her up by pressing her feet and she was made straight and shapely at once! She invited the boys to visit her home nearby where she offered them nice scents and aromatic pastes; such were the memorable encounters that Krishna and Balarama had while proceeding to the 'Yaga Shaala' at the end of the Raja Marga. Inside the Yaga shaala there was a massive **Deva Dhanush** and Krishna broke it playfully as the thundering sound was heard all over; as he heard this huge sound, Kamsa realised that the boys had arrived and that they would have broken the Dhanush! He called Chanura and Mushtika and said that the next evening Krishna and Balarama would invite at the Yaaga Shaala to a friendly wrestling and that they should somehow kill them by giving an impression to the Public that the killing was accidental. Next evening the boys arrived at the Yaga Shaala to participate the Royal Celebrations and the Trainer of a huge rouge elephant called **Kuvalkayapeeda** readied the animal to lift up the boys at the Entrance Gate and trample them; Krishna-Balaramas on arrival understood the intention of the elephant and as it lifted them up they landed on its back and pounded it with their fists, twisted its tail and trunk and felled the animal down with a thud and it breathed its last. The entire audience especially the Yadavas cheered up the boys with resounding applause and the men and women in the Sports Arena loudly chattered about the escapades of the Boys ever since their arrival at Mathura including their encounters with the Rajaka, Maali, Kubja, Dhanush and the Rouge Elephant; they kept on discussing about his miracle acts of killing various Asuras, lifting Govardhana Mountain and the juicy tales of Raasa Leelaas! Meanwhile Kamsa announced that the duo of Krishna and Balarama would participate in friendly wrestling matches with the fearful wrestlers like **Chanura and Mushtika**. There were mixed feelings in the audience that such 'Malla Yuddhas' between the untrained teens and expert wrestlers were not just good jokes but of evil intentions and a few others felt that such deeds were indeed meant for fun. The wrestling bouts looked funny and comical in the beginning but as Chanura and Mushtika looked serious, the atmosphere became tense and as the tiny boys were lifted by the mountain-like professionals, the instrumental music in the theatre stopped and every one in the audience were holding their breath. Balarama shouted to Govinda: Victory be with you Krishna! Kill Chanura at once! Krishna sat on the Danava's shoulders and gave a mighty blow on his head which was smashed and the tall and powerful Chanura lost his balance and crashed on the ground with a thud and died instantly! It was then the turn of Balarama to hit on Mushtika's head, stomach and knees and the latter too was shattered. Krishna then took full control of another Malla Raja called Toshkala and both the brothers surrounded him and simultaneously punched and whacked him and that colossal wrestler too went the same way to death; the pack of other wrestlers in the arena ran for their lives and there were such shouts and hoots from the audience cheering and acclaiming Krishna and Balarama with victory. As there was ruckus and uproar in the Hall, Yadavas went wild with ecstasy and other citizens of Mathura too were confident that the last hour of the

tyrant King Kamsa had arrived. Kamsa shouted at the soldiers that let the 'Gwaala baalakaas' be chased and hounded; a smiling Vasudeva leapt up on the Platform where Kamsa sat with his Security Chiefs, dragged him down to the Wrestling Arena and overpowered him; thus the most heinous villain of the Era was exterminated once for all.

Then Krishna and Balarama prostrated before Vasudeva and Devaki who were also in the audience and the latter embraced the dear sons with affection on one hand and unlimited devotion on the other. Vasudeva addressed Krishna as follows: Prabho! Be kind to us; the benediction bestowed by you to Devataas that you would be born to us was amply fulfilled. You had recognised my worship and were born in our household to destroy evil forces on Earth and indeed my Vamsha had since been purified!--We have been in this Maya or Illusion that you are our son and was thus rattled from the fear of Kamsa and took you to Gokula; since you had grown up there and thus we now do not have that extreme obsession for you; so far we have witnessed such impossible deeds by you which were not conceivable of Rudra, Marudganas, Ashvini Kumars or Indra; Now my Moha / passion for you as a son is not there as now I realise you are Bhagavan Himself to protect the World from the Evil.

After prostrating before the parents and receiving their blessings, Krishna and Balarama greeted Yadava elders; consoled Kamsa's wives; released Kamsa's father **Ugrasena** from shackles and appointed him as the King; made Sudharma as the Raja Guru; requested Sandipa Muni to perform the 'Upanayana Samskara' of themselves; and entered into the house of Guru **Sandipa Muni** for tutelage for Veda Parayana, Astramantras and Astra prayoga, besides the nuances of Dhanurvedya -all in just forty six days! Sandipa Muni realised that such impossible and para-human abilities were displayed by Krishna-Balaramaas as though Surya and Chandra were their pupils in his house!). After their studies, Krishna and Balarama offered **Guru Dakshina** and the Muni wailed for their son dead in the Ocean at Prabhasa as he was devoured by a Demon Panchajanya (who had the shape of a conch shell). The boys then entered the Ocean, killed the Demon and by blowing a conch shell made of the skeleton of the Demon entered 'Samyamani' the Abode of Yamadhararaja and brought the dead boy alive and gave the Guru Dakshina to the Muni and his wife!

There after they visited **Uddhava**, their childhood friend and nephew, requested him to visit the Vraja places and meet their parents and well wishers as also the Gopikas and narrate to them an account of their activities at Mathura. Uddhava on reaching the Places met them all, and narrated the happenings. He returned back, after an emotional and tearful send-off with return messages from all of them, especially Gopikas.

The two Queens of the deceased Kamsa, Asti and Prapthi, approached their father Jarasandha, the highly powerful Monarch of Magadha and asked for retribution for the 'misdeeds' of Balarama and Krishna. With a huge army under him, **Jaraasandha** attacked Mathura with some twenty three Akshouhinis of infantry, cavalry and elephantry and challenged Krishna and Balarama. But as Krishna was fighting the massive opponents even with a minor number of Army, he asked for his (Vishnu's) Shaaranga Dhanush with limitless arrows and his Gada /Mace called Kaumudi while Balarama recalled his Hala / plough and Musala; Jarasandha and his huge army was shattered into pieces, but Jarasandha was spared so that he could return back by regrouping his men and material. Indeed he returned back again and again, getting routed for seventeen times. When Jarasandha was expected to attack for the eighteenth time, - his allies viz. Yavanas, the Mleccha foreign forces- headed by **Kalayavana** attacked Mathura with thirty million barbarian soldiers of desperation and cruelty. Krishna and Balarama felt that while they would fight with Yavanas, Jarasandha's army might simultaneously harm Yadus. Thus they planned to build a new place, named Dwaraka (with twelve Gates) and asked Visvakarma, the Architect of Devatas who created a beautiful and well structured fortress City touching the Western Sea. By means of His mystic Yoga Maya (Power of Illusion), the

Citizens of Mathura got transferred, lock-stock and barrel-overnight to **Dwaraka** and found themselves in luxurious palaces.

Even as Balarama was defending Mathura, Krishna attracted the attention of Kalayavana, passing singly by foot, by the Main Gate of Mathura. Kalayavana followed Krishna closely but always unreachable with some distance apart and led the Mlechha into a mountain cave. Thinking that Krishna Himself assumed a new 'Rupa' (Body) as an old and haggardly person in the cave as Krishna was known for such powers, Kalayavana kicked the old man fast asleep. Indeed He was not Krishna but **Muchukunda**, the son of Mandhata of Ikshvaku dynasty. He was the defender of Demi-Gods from Daityas for long but since Lord Kartikeya became the Commander of Demi- Gods, the latter relieved Muchukunda of his duties and Kartikeya advised him of retirement and since then he was sleeping in the cave, unaware of hundreds of years passed by! By his very looks of fire, Muchukunda converted Kalayavana into ashes as per Indra's benediction that if anybody disturbed his slumber would be burnt to ashes! Muchukunda demanded Krishna to identify himself and the latter disclosed that he was the son of Vasudeva of Yadu Kula of Chandra Vamsha; Muchukunda then recalled Gargya Muni's statement that Krishna the son of Vasudeva and the Avatara of Vishnu would liberate him! He greeted Krishna and narrated Gargya Muni's statement and acclaimed him as follows: 'Bhagavan! Just as in the 'Devasura Maha Sangraam' when I helped Devatas to demolish Daiytas, the Daityas were unable to tolerate my radiance; but now I am similarly unable to withstand your extreme illumination of your Physique now! You are indeed the last and total shield against humanity:

Subsequently Krishna granted a wish to Muchukunda to be reborn as a Sage from his Kshatriya's current birth. Muchukunda exited from the cave into a World transformed from what he knew and realised that Kali Yuga was on the anvil, as the size of humans, animals, birds and trees was reduced considerably. He proceeded to Gandhamadana mountain and reached Nara-Narayana Ashram and meditated for the rest his life. Meanwhile, Krishna and Balarama found Mathura under the seige of Yavanas but with their Chief Kalayavana was found missing, they were shattered by a handful of Yadava soldiers and of course by Krishna and Balarama.

[Jarasandha imprisoned a number of Kings at Yudhishtar's Rajasuya Yaga since they agreed to Krishna becoming the Chief Guest; subsequently when Krishna, Bhima and Arjun visited Jarasandha's Palace in disguise as Bramanas to free the Kings, the three of them challenged him for a duel with any one of them and Bhima was chosen. Jarasandha was not getting killed for many days and Krishna hinted to tear the opponent's body by demonstrating the cutting of a branch of a tree and throwing up the pieces upside down in opposite directions; a Rishi blessed King Brihadhratha (father of Jarasandha) for a child but he gave only one fruit, where as the King had two wives; he cut the fruit into two half pieces and distributed to the two wives, but they delivered a child in two pieces; as the two pieces were discarded, a Demoness called Jara collected them and arranged the body pieces upside down and a boy came up with life, who was called as Jara-sandha or the one united by Jara. Hence Krishna's advice to Bhima to tear the body and throw the two parts apart topsy-turvey. After Bhima killed Jarasandha, some 21,000 Kings, defeated in wars and imprisoned, were liberated.]

Rukmini's abduction by Krishna: Maharshi Parashara narrated the story of Devi Rukmini's abduction by Krishna. Both of them were fond of each other and desired to wed together. But, Rukmi the brother of Rukmini hated Krishna and was keen on his sister wedding his friend Sisupala. He influenced his father King Bhishmak and even arranged their engagement much against the objection of Rukmini. At the Wedding Ceremony, the Guest List included Kings like Salva, Jarasandha, Dantavakra and such other opponents of Krishna; the King invited Balarama and Krishna too. Fearing that Krishna, who proposed earlier to wed Rukmini, might create trouble at the Function, Rukmi as well as Sisupala prepared for any eventuality alerting their Armies; Salva, Jarasandha, and other well wishers too

readied their armies too. But so did Balarama. Precisely when the Bride entered the Wedding Platform, Krishna took away Rukmini like a surprise flash and both of them fled away in the Chariot of Krishna with the flag of Garuda atop. The armies of Sisupala and associates could hardly prevent the Glorious Abduction. Rukmi was unable to bear the insult and followed Krishna's chariot but was defeated and his moustache and beard were shorn by Krishna as a symbol of His victory. Subsequently, King Bhishmaka performed the wedding most appropriately.

Pradyumna was born to Rukmini and Krishna and the son looked exactly like Krishna. When he was hardly ten days old, Demon Sambara kidnapped the child not knowing that he was the son of Krishna threw him in the Sea as a huge fish ate him but the child was safe in its belly. A fisherman caught hold of the big fish and presented it to the King Sambara who in turn gave it to Mayavati the head cook of the King's kitchen who cut the fish to find an attractive baby inside. At that very juncture, Brahmarsi Narada appeared in the kitchen and revealed the Story to Mayavati of Lord Rudra turning 'Manmadha' (Cupid) into ashes when he and Rati (Cupid's wife) aimed Floral Arrows. Lord Rudra gave boons that in their next birth, Cupid would be born as Lord Krishna's son Pradyumna and Mayavati as Rati. As Pradyumna grew as a youngman, Mayavati desired to marry him despite wide difference of age. Pradyumna was popularly known as 'Vyuha' as the Lord of Intelligence, along with three of His other names viz Vasudeva (Lord of Consciousness); Sankarshana (Lord of Individuality) and Aniruddha (Lord of Intelligence). Eventually Pradyumna killed Sambara, married Mayavati and stayed with Rukmini and Krishna at Dwaraka.

Narakasura (Bhaumika): The end of notorious Bhaumika, the son of Bhumi (Demi-Goddess of Earth), is celebrated till date on the moon fall day preceding Kartika Month of every year as 'Deepavali' (The Festival of Lights). Krishna, accompanied by Satyabhama flew by Garuda to 'Prajyotisha', Capital City of Bhaumasura [now in Assam], 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 fortresses 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 'Shataghi'- 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. [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 was that the Asura appropriated Varuna Deva's Royalty Insignia which was an Umbrella; the Ear-Rings of Aditi- the Mother- Figure of Devas; and 'Mani Parvata' (Mandara Mountain) where Demi-Gods resided 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 Prithvi sought her apology for her son's sins and reiterated her own devotion to Krishna. She said: 'I was blessed with a son (Bhaumika) and thus you gave me a son and now took him away too now! Please accept the Kundala and other possessions as he has died now but do kindly spare his progeny of any blames. Achyuta! You are the

Creator-Protector and Terminator and the Unique Form of the Universe; how could I indeed acclaim and commend you; Do forgive your own son Narakasura for his misdeeds!

Parijata Apaharana: As the victorious Krishna and Satyabhama fancifully reached Swarga dwaara after the battle with Narakasura, Krishna blew his conchshell and Aditi along with Indra and Devas welcomed the guests. Devi Aditi complemented Krishna while Indra and Devas performed puja to Krishna with various flowers but Shachi Devi disallowed puja by the flowers of Kalpa Vriksha as the Krishna couple were human beings. There after, the latter visited the Garden of Swarga and Satyabhama desired to take the Tree in her garden in Dwaraka. Shachi Devi flatly refused despite the persuasion of Krishna and Devi; surprisingly Indra too sided with Shachi Devi on the plea that Indra gifted it to his wife and he had no hold on it. Arguments between Indra and Krishna ensued and ended up with fights which worsened to fulfilled battles. Indra took up his Vajrayudha and all other Devas fell in line; Krishna blew up his Shanka while Garutman pulled up Varuna Pasha; Yama threw his 'Danda' on Krishna and the latter's mace made smithierins of the hyamna danda; Agni's blistering arrows were instantly cooled with Krishna's Jala Banaas; Garuda and Iravata attached each other. As Indra confronted Krishna with his Vajra and Krishna took up his Sudarshana chakra; Indra was afraid of the consequences and tried to run back and Satyabhama heckled Indra saying that the latter was after all the Devendra and it was not proper to show his back as Shachi would offer him a Parajata garland! Having jeered Indra thus, Satyabhama said that since she was also a woman she talked to Indra in such a jocular tone but in fact she was never serious in demanding the Parijata tree; as Shachi Devi said that it was her property and hence she had no intention of stealing other's property so that this battle might better end up and as the guests to Swarga might as well return back to where they belonged. Indra was put to defensive by Satyabhama's conversation and replied: 'Why should I be ashamed of getting defeated by Vishwa Prabhu who is the Cause of the Existence, Preservation and Termination of the Universe! Who could indeed overcome if that Tinst yet Grossest and Most Magnificent Form which creates the World and Vedas descends on Earth on his own volition to help and correct humanity by assuming human form? When Krishna replied to Indra jocularly that he was after all a human being and what Satyabhama sought was a celestial product, then Indra requested Krishna not to taunt him further and despatched the Parijata Tree to Dwaraka with the assurance that as long as Krishna would be there in human form, the Parijata tree too would be on Earth! On return to Earth Krishna accepted eight thousand wives released from Narakasura's prisons, besides eight Principal wives viz. Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati, Nagnajiti, Mitravinda, Lakshmana, Kalindi and Madri.

Aniruddha's wedding with Usha: Banasura, the grand son of the famed King Bali who gave the entire Universe in charity in lieu of three feet to Lord Vamana, was the father of daughter Usha who fell in love with Aniruddha, the son of Pradyumna and the grand son of Lord Krishna. Banasura was a dedicated devotee of Lord Siva, and the Lord awarded several invaluable benedictions to the Demon including powerful war weapons and thousand hands to relase the armaments simultaneously. Once Usha happened to see both Shiva and Parvati sitting together and being an Antaryami Devi Parvati joked with Usha that one day she would too land up in a situation like that. Usha asked Devi Parvati as to when would that day arrive! Parvati replied that she would dream of a youth on the night of Vaishakha Shukla Dwadashi. As the day arrived, Usha did get the dream and informed of the incidence to her friend Chitrlekha, the daughter of Banasura's Minister named Kushmanda. As Usha was unable to bear the feelings of love, Chitrlekha showed several drawings of eligible amd handsome bachelors and after a few days, Usha succeeded finally to identify the youth. Then it was learnt that the youth was the son of Krishna. In course of time, the couple met and their romance became intense by the day. Learning of the desire of his daughter with Aniruddha, the son of Pradyumana -the erstwhile Cupid who was burnt into ashes by Lord Siva's third eye- and the grand

son of Krishna (Avatar of Lord Vamana), Banasura quashed the wedding proposal and reprimanded his daughter since Krishna was his foe. Banasura prevented his daughter meeting Aniruddha and when the latter fought with him, he imprisoned Aniruddha. Yadavas in Dwaraka wondered as to what happened to Aniruddha. On learning from Narada Muni, it was learnt that Aniruddha was imprisoned in Shonitapur, the Capital of Banasura and Krishna, Balarama and Pradyumna lest by Garuda to that Place. There, they confronted Pramathaganas of Shiva and fought with Jwara the three footed Chief of the 'Parshads' named Maheswara and defeated him. This led to a full-fledged battle between Krishna and others on one side and Banasura, Shankara and Kartikeya on the other. As furious Shastra-Astras were exchanged by both the Parties, the whole world was affected with Pralayaagni. Balarama attacked Banasura and the fight got intensified with alarming consequences. Meanwhile Krishna recalled his Sudarshana Chakra and sliced off the mighty hands of Banasura and was about to cut off the Asura's head too. It was at that climatic moment, Shankara addressed Krishna to stop. "Hey Krishna! I am aware that you are the Purushottama -Parameswara- Paramatmaa and Adyanta-Rahita! Do get cooled down. I have provided shield to Banasura my devotee and assured that I would stand guarantee at the time of his peril; please do not falsify my faith in me. He has not done any thing wrong to you but is egoistic due to my backing and therefore pardon him. Krishna replied: 'Shankara! If you so wish as you had given him a benediction, Banasura would continue to be alive. In order to respect your assurance to him, I am withdrawing Sudarshana Chakra; if you had given him protection, so do I; You should never feel that you are different from me; you should always consider me as yourself and together we are the Devas, Asuras, human beings and all the rest; all those who consider us as different from each other are shrouded in Maya or Illusion; indeed, I am pleased and am gone. There after, Krishna and all the rest headed to Aniruddha's prison, where the latter was released by 'Naga bandhana' or tight-tied by a serpent which ran away at the appearance of Garuda Deva while Banasura politely agreed for the Sacred wedding of Usha-Aniruddhaas.

Krishna kills Sishupala: At the invitation of King Yudhishtara to attend the Rajasuya Yagnam (Horse Sacrifice) being performed by Pandavas especially after the devastation of Jarasandha, Lords Krishna and Balarama arrived at Indraprastha, the new beautiful Capital City, built by Maya. As a climax to the Celebrations, a function was held to select the best personality who graced the 'Yagna'. Nobody wished to comment but Sahadeva, the youngest of Pandavas, proposed the name of Krishna. There was all round approval of the proposal and Dharmaraja initiated the procedure by inviting Krishna.

Just at that time, King Sisupala, a great associate of Jarasandha since killed by Bhima, expressed displeasure at the selection of Krishna on the proposal of a boy, Sahadeva of Pandavas. He said that elders in age, experience, wisdom were available and there was no special qualification for Krishna who ran away from Jarasandha twenty three times in successive wars and his real capability in wars, duels, and dealings involving honesty and frankness were suspect. Sisupala criticised Krishna transgressing all limits of decency. Finally having counted the number of abuses hurled at Him, Krishna hurled His Sudarsana Wheel to slit Sisupala's neck. Sisupala was the son of King Dhamaghosha and Srutadevi, the latter being the sister of Vasudeva whose son was Lord Krishna. In other words Krishna and Sisupala were cousins. When Sisupala was born, he was dark and ugly with three eyes and four hands. His parents had almost decided to disown him, but a voice from Heaven suggested not to do so as an illustrious person would soon fondle the child and snip out his extra limbs and he himself would also kill him. Krishna's aunt Srutadevi requested Him to postpone the killing of the child as far as possible. Krishna promised that He would wait till his hundredth abuse. Incidentally, Sisupala and Dantavakra were stated to be the Demons of 'Dwapara Yuga' born after the curse of Sanaka Kumara brothers to the Vaikuntha Gate Keepers Jaya and Vijaya.

As a sequel to Rajasuya Yagna, there were two major developments: Firstly, the unbearable jealousy of Kauravas against Pandavas who became extremely prosperous and popular among the various contemporary Kings and worse than that, the extremely hurt pride of Duryodhana especially when Draupadi the wife of Pandava sons laughed out loudly when he fell straight into a water pool when he thought that there was no water but ground and when he lifted up his robes as there was no ground but a water body. Secondly, the battles of Sisupala's great friends like Salva and Dantavakra were in the offing against Yadavas. While seeds of jealousy were firmly sown in Duryodhana's mind leading to disastrous consequences for Pandavas thus leading to the Great Battle of Mahabharata, the destructive attempts by Sisupala's friends were almost instant. Salva secured earlier an everlasting air-vehicle from Lord Siva because of deep devotion and landed at Dwaraka when Krishna and Balarama were away at Indraprastha and overpowered Pradyumna who fled from the battle, as Salva presented illusory heads of Krishna and Balarama to him. On return, the Lords shattered the airship and Salva too. Dantavakra and his sons Romaharshana and Viruddha met the same fate. Thus the chapter of Sisupala's death was closed. Simultaneously, the run-up to Mahabharata Battle at Kurukshetra was picking up fast as the foul play of Dices between Shakuni on behalf of Kaurava sons and Dharmaraja on behalf of Pandavas. As the Battle was shaping as an inevitable consequence, Balarama being a neutral figure, especially since Duryodhana was his disciple while Krishna identified himself as Pandava's well-wisher, proceeded on a pilgrimage to Holy Places. His visits covered Prayaga, Ganga, Gaya, Godavari, Srisailem, Venkata Hills, Kanchi, Madurai, Srirangam, Rameswaram and Kanya Kumari. He reached Kurukshetra at the time when Bhima and Duryodhana were engaged in a duel with maces as almost terminating the Great Battle.

Shri Krishna Niryaana was the climax of the termination of Yadukula that got initiated by a few playful Yadu Kumaraas at Pindaraka Tirtha who dressed the son of Jambavati called Saambu as an expectant woman and asked a group of Rishis to ascertain whether the woman would deliver a boy or a baby! The Munis under reference included Kanwa-Narada and Viswamitra who from their Divya drishti realized the hoax of the fake garbhini and said in anger: that the woman would deliver neither a boy nor a girl but a 'Musala' or a lump of an iron instead and that would result in the destruction of Yadu Vamsha! The Yadava Boys were stunned at the reply and reported the matter to Ugrasena! Saambu did deliver a Musala from his stomach which was pounded as powder but the remainder bit was thrown into the Sea and it was devoured by a fish and a fisherman called Jara caught hold of the fish and as he cut it he found a sharp iron piece which he kept for subsequent use. Meanwhile, Indra and Devas despatched Vayu Deva who appeared before Krishna and prayed to him as follows: 'Devaadi Deva! Indra has asked us as well by Ashtaavasus, Marud Devatas, Rudras, Saadhyas and Adityas that at our instance you had very kindly assumed an incarnation and lightened the enormous burden on Earth by demolishing innumerable Danavas and other Dushta Shaktis for a long hundred years and over and the Three crores of Devas are now at peace; we request you to know your mind as to how to proceed further'. Bhagavan replied: 'I am fully aware of my next move; I have already initiated the process of Yadava destruction as considerable annihilation of the enemy forces of the virtuous Pandavas including the killing of Jarasandha besides of Kauravas was concluded too. As I have still to complete the task of terminating Yadavas as I brought them to Dwaraka and that bit of task too once concluded, I shall be freed of my mortal responsibilities and return to Vaikuntha'. So saying, Krishna made arrangements by dispatching Uddhava to Badarikaashrama on Gandhamaadana Parvat to Naranarayana Maharshi Ashrama where he would secure Siddhi after the close of his life. Select Yadavas including himself, Baladeva and elders like Ugrasena, Vasudeva left for Prabhava Kshetra along concerned Devas; remaining Yadavas most of got dead drunk killed each other including Pradyumna, Saamba, Kritavarma, Satyaki, Aniruddha, Pruthu and Akrura by using the high grown sea beach grass roots which sprouted from the powder of the Musala delivered from Saambu's

garbha thus terminating Yadu Vamsha; the elders including Balarama etc who left for Prabhasa Kshetra took resort to Yogic ends and finally Krishna and the famed charioteer Daruka remained; Balarama sat under a Tree and from his face a Maha Sarpa emerged and moved towards the huge Ocean as worshipped by Sidhas and Nagaas while Samudra welcomed and worshipped and the Maha Sarpa entered the Ocean. Meanwhile Krishna assumed his full form with four hands armed while Shankha-Chakra- Gada-Sarangaas performed pradakshinas and he rested under a tree bush. Imagining that a deer was resting since Krishna's feet were moving behind a tree bush, Jara Vyaadha who recovered an iron left-over bit from the fish caught in the Sea, sharpened his arrow and shot at the Lord's moving feet and ashamed to do so but the ever merciful Krishna bestowed him Siddhi. Krishna then sent Daruka to convey the news of Krishna Nirvana to his dear disciple Arjuna to perform the obsequies of himself, of Balarama and the illustrious Yaduveeras; Rukmini and Krishna's wives performed Krishna Sahagamana or sacrificing themselves in the same Fire with which the mortal human form of the Avatara succumbed. Maharshi Parashara commented thus: As He left, Bhagavan Krishna discarded his human form and recalled his Soul which is Aavyaya- Achintya- Vaasudeva Swarupa-Amala-Ajanma- Amara- Aprameya- Akhilaatma-and Brahma Swarupa Vishnu!

As Arjuna was totally drowned in uncontrollable grief and distress, Veda Vyasa assuaged his inner and core-emotions said: Bhagavan Krishna arrived as a human being along with us all as a Marga darshaka or a moral teacher to prescribe and guide us about the virtuous the innate values of life and to uproot the evils of the Society that Daityas and many in the form of Human beings came to adopt; now that the burden of Bhu Devi got lightened Paramatma took up the need and the deed; since the noble reason and requirement were fulfilled, he put the World back on its heels and disappeared, since Jatasya Maranam Dhruvam! Veda Vyasa stated: *Jaatasya niyato Mrityuh patanamcha tathonnatayh, Vipra yogaanasaanaastu samyogah sanchaye kshayah/ Vijnaaya na budhaasshokam na harsha – mupayaanti ye, Teshaameyveytarey cheshtaam sikshantassanti taadrushaah/* (Whatever is born is certain to die; which is grown well has to decrease; Samyoga or Togetherness has to terminate as Viyoga or loneliness; Sanchaya or Increased Collection has to end up as Kshaya or Decay; Intelligent persons do not get elated too much since exultation might end up in depression or even as damage; that is the reason why one ought to realise that great heights might lead to great falls too). *Yaschetaccharitam tasya Krishnasya Shrunuyaatsadaa, Sarna Paapa vinirmukto Vishnu lokam sa gacchati/* (Those persons who listen to Krishna Charitra would surely get relief from sins and attain Vishnu Loka)!

Maha Bharata in brief

Origin of Veda Vyasa: In the times of yore, there was a pious King Uparichara Vasu of Chedi Kingdom whose wife Girik was of compelling charm. The King secured from Indra an air-borne Vimana and in the contemporary world gained fame and respect. Once on the day of Shraddha to his father and forefathers, his wife desired union with him but the King declined due to the Ceremony and left for the forest nearby to bring an animal for sacrifice and other material required for the Shraddha. On return he was overcome by his wife's desire and spilt out his virility on banana leaf and commanded a trained falcon to carry the leaf as a packet to his wife since he did not wish to waste it. He falcon encountered another falcon and forcibly took the packet away but the packet fell in the flow of water. In the meantime an Apsara found the dangling feet of a Muni who was in meditation on the banks of the water body and for fun dragged the feet into water. The Muni cursed the Apsara to turn into a fish and the fish swallowed the packet that fell in the flow and got pregnant. A fisherman who netted the fish took it home and there were two babies in its stomach and the King realised by his mystic powers that the babies were his own. Of the two babies, one was a male child and another a

girl. The King returned the girl child to the fisherman with plenty of money and gifts and retained the boy whom he made as the next King. The female child eventually grew as Satyawati.

Parashara Muni, the grandson of Maharshi Vasishtha the mind-born son of Brahma, during his various travels spent a night in a hamlet on the banks of Ganga in the house of the Village chief and asked his daughter Satyawati to ferry the Muni to the other side of the river. In the boat, he was sick of the strong smell of fish and teased her as Matsyagandhi. But noticing her body beauty desired to have a union with her then and there; he created by his mantra siddhi a misty cover in an island nearby and enjoyed her. He gave her the boon of conceiving an extraordinary son with universal reputation and called her as Yojanagandhi or a female who spread fragrance for a Yojana's width and breadth; the boon also assured her that her chastity would be intact and that she would be a queen. Devi Satyawati gave birth to the illustrious Veda Vyasa who was also famed as Krishna Dwipayana or who was born in a Dwipa or an Island. Vyasa had the unique distinction of dividing the originally Single Veda into four parts as also six Vedangas and scripted Maha Puranas and also Maha Bharata. In an extremely rigorous penance that he performed, Vyasa attained the vision of Maha Deva and the latter blessed Vyasa to secure an eminent son. Excited about his vision of Shankara, Vyasa performed an Agni Homa by creating Agni by the process of 'Arani' or rubbing wooden pieces to light up. Just then an Apsara or a Celestial Nymph took the form of an attractive parrot crossed the Agni Kunda and as his concentration got disturbed she made a flashy appearance of her rare beauty and charm with her amorous looks. The Muni could not control his passion and discharged his virility on the wooden sticks meant for Arani and then emerged from the Arani fire a boy of extraordinary radiance with the features of his father but with a nose resembling that of a parrot. The boy grew up with unique faculties of spirituality as an expert in Veda Vedangas and understandably Vyasa desired Shuka Muni to become a Grihasthi but the latter disagreed vehemently. Vyasa used all his means of persuasion and finally asked him to visit Janaka who through persuasion and arguments succeeded in convincing to become a Grihastha (House holder). But after a few years of house holding, Shuka Muni left for Mount Kailash to realise Paramatma and attained Salvation.

After the departure of his son, Veda Vyasa was a frustrated person and carried on with his disciples Asita, Devala, Vaisampayana, Jaimini, Sumanta and others and after their studies were over, he despatched them with the tasks of propagating Dharma all over. He left Meru Mountain to meet his mother Satyawati whom he left long ago on the banks of Ganges. He realised that his mother was married to the King of Hastinapur, Shantanu on the condition that another son of his, Bhishma born from his first wife Ganga, would neither marry nor beget a child since there should not be any progeny to claim the throne. Shantanu and Satyawati gave birth to Chitrangada and Vichitra-Virya. After Shantanu died, Chitrangada became the King but in a war with Gandharvas, Chitrangada died and Vichitravirya was made the King. Bhishma desired that Vichitravirya be married as he was eligible and when the King of Kasi announced a 'Swayamvara' (bride's choice among the invited Kings), Bhishma forcibly took away three brides- Amba, Ambika and Ambalika to Hastinapura. On arrival, Amba requested that since she already selected the King of Salva at the Swayamvara, she might be please allowed to do so and Bhishma agreed. But the King of Salva did not agree and as she returned back insisting that as per Dharma Bhishma must marry her. Since Bhishma did not agree that even earlier, Amba left for the forest and became an ascetic. King Vichitravirya married Ambika and Ambalika but was not able to extend the progeny and died of premature death. Then came up a crisis of Kingship falling vacant without a heir. Satyawati called for Vedavyasa who was settled on the banks of River Sarasvati to help continue the lineage through Ambika and Ambalika. Ambika closed her eyes in bed with Veda Vyasa as she was not happy with the union and thus a blind boy, Dhritarashtra was delivered. Ambalika sent a servant woman into the bed and a wise boy, Vidura was born. But when the mistake was realised and Ambalika had to go into the bed, she was too frightened into

paleness afraid of the Maha Muni and thus was born Pandu. No doubt Pandu became the King before his elder brother who was born blind but since he died of early death due to illness, Dhritarashtra the blind had to be the King.

Chain reaction of Ganga-King Mahabhisha- Ashta Vasus- King Shantanu: There was a virtuous King Mahabhisha of Ikshvaku Dynasty who pleased Indra with a series of 'Asvametha' and 'Vajapeya' Sacrifices and attained Indra Loka after his death. Once he had attended the Court of Lord Brahma and along with him was seated Devi Ganga. He was immensely attracted to her and she too reciprocated with her amorous glances. Brahma got disturbed and cursed both of them to take to human lives as husband and wife. Mahabhisha opted to be the son of King Pratipa of Puru Dynasty. At the same time Ashta-Vasus (Eight Vasus) of the Celestial Region headed by Vasu Prithi and their families visited Sage Vasishtha's 'Ashram' and admired 'Kama Dhenu' the Sacred Cow whose milk bestowed disease-less longevity and sublime happiness. The wife of one of the Vasus, Dyau was impressed with the Cow and quietly stole it and its calf. Sage Vasishtha found in his 'Diya Drishti' (Celestial Vision) that Nandini the Sacred Cow was in the custody of Vasu Dyau and cursed all the Vasus to be turned as human beings. Being highly repentant, the Vasus beseeched Vasishtha to dilute the effect of the curse and out of compassion the Sage agreed to one year's human life to seven Vasus as their involvement was indirect but Vasu Dyau should have a full life time. The Vasus, who knew about Brahma's curse to Ganga Devi, approached her to give birth to Seven Vasus of one year's human life each and one life time's existence to the last born Vasu. But this was agreed to subject to the condition that her prospective husband should agree to freedom of her action without any reservation and if he did not, she would quit as the husband. Eventually, Ganga waited on the banks of River Ganges and awaited the arrival of King Pradipa of Kuru Dynasty for meditation. The King arrived to perform 'Surya Namaskaras' on the river bed and Ganga appeared as a charming woman and sat straightaway on his right lap, indicating thereby that the place was to seat a son / daughter. The damsel identified herself as Ganga Devi and replied that she would await his son's arrival who was yet to be born. In course of time, King Pradipa got his son, Shantanu, and as he grew as a handsome youth advised him to meet Ganga Devi who would propose but cautioned that he should not ask her questions and agree to whatever she asked. Accordingly, Ganga Devi, the eternal beauty, agreed to wed Shantanu and agreed to her conditions unilaterally. She gave immense happiness to Shantanu, who became the King after his father's abdication of the throne. After a year, they were blessed with a boy, but she took the baby and submerged him in the flow of Ganga! To his great surprise, Shantanu witnessed the horror of the child's cruel drowning in the flow but dared not say one word to his wife. This happening was repeated again and again for seven times and as the eighth child was born, Shantanu protested and Ganga as per their contract left, but requested that the boy be named as Gangeya.

Gangeya, the exemplary Bhishma of Maha Bharata: For a long time since Ganga Devi left Shantanu, the latter had no interest in life and Gangeya, who was increasingly aware of his father's disenchantment in the duties of Kingship, virtually carried on the burden lightly. As a dutiful son, he did whatever was possible or even impossible, but for the replacement of the position of a mother. Once when he accompanied his father on a royal hunt on the banks of River Yamuna and found an extraordinarily stunning woman whose body flavour was heavenly and intoxicating. Her captivating physical features sent tremors in Shantanu's mind and asked his son Gangeya to enquire about her. The lady replied that she was a fisherwoman and any enquiry about herself be ascertained by her father only at their abode. The fisherman was not sure whether her daughter's future would be assured since a grown up King-in-Waiting was already in place. Gangeya gave an assurance that he would not put in a claim for Kingship. But this did not satisfy the fisherman as Gangeya's next kin would definitely make the claim to the throne. Then Gangeya declared that in view of the apprehensions

expressed by the fisherman and subtly endorsed by his daughter, he would take a Sacred Vow before all witnesses concerned that he would never ever marry! Shantanu as well as the entire Kingdom were taken aback by the decision of Gangeya. Shantanu tried to wriggle out of the deal, but Gangeya did not allow any departure from his vow; he said that the sacrifice being performed was not comparable to that of Parasurama, who for the asking by his father Jamadagni, had cut his own mother's head on the flimsy reasoning of her imagined flicker of mind when she saw a Gandharva bathing; or to Lohitasya who allowed himself to be sold to a Brahmin as a servant boy, for working heinous household duties leading to death, to repay his father Harischandra's debt to Sage Visvamitra; or obeying the implicit instruction of his father Dasaratha conveyed by Queen Kaikayi to abandon the self and wife Sita to fourteen years of forest life as an ascetic couple ending by the kidnapping of his wife and undergoing untold misery and torture! Thus quoting such examples, Gangeya announced to the whole World that not only he would not marry but protect the entire progeny of the 'Vamsa' as long as he lived! Thus was given Gangeya the indelible name of Bhishma in the generations to follow!

Pandavas and Kuaravas- Quick proceedings of Maha Bharata: Since the elder issue of Veda Vyasa from Ambika, Dhritrashtra was born blind, Ambalika's son Pandu was made the King with the approval of Bhishma, the driving force of the Kingdom, with Hastinapura as the Capital. The elder brother had two wives Gandhari and Sauvali, the former being the Prime Wife and the latter was a keep in the household. Gandhari, the daughter of Gandhara Desa and brother of Sakuni, gave birth to one hundred sons, the elder two being the notorious Duryodhana and Dussasana (actual names were Suyodhana and Susasana, standing for Good Warrior and Good Administrator). Gandhari preferred to close her eyes always, out of sentiment as her husband was blind. Sauvali's son was Yuyutsu. Pandu Raja, the earlier King, was married to Kunti, the daughter of King Surasena and the paternal aunt of Lord Krishna. The Raja also married Madri, the daughter of King Madra. When Kunti was a very young girl, her father asked her to assist Sage Durvasa in a four month long Sacrifice / Yagna performed by him and after the end of the Function, he was pleased to teach a Mantra to her which could invoke any of the Demi Gods and Allied Devatas including Indra, Surya, Yamadharma Raja and Vayu, as well as allied Demi-Gods like Aswini Kumars. Out of curiosity, Kunti experimented by invoking Sun God in her private chamber and to her great surprise and dismay she found Surya Himself standing before her and asked her as to whether she desired a son or a daughter. Being of a tender age of preteens, she was flabbergasted at the odd statement of Surya's but since the latter understood the predicament of the girl, Surya gave her the boon that her virginity would not be disturbed, but she should however be conceived. Kunti took her personal maid into confidence and even informing her mother of the incident, she did not step out of her chamber. After nine months, she delivered a boy of exceeding radiance and attraction with inborn armoury and ear-rings. With the help of the maid, she arranged the child in a floating box and placed it on a nearby waterbody. A charioteer of the Court of the King, Atiradha and his wife found the floating casket and as they did not have an issue, considered the child as a great blessing and brought him up as 'Karna' since he had ear-rings in-born and as Radheya after the name of the step mother. Thereafter Kunti considered the incident as forgotten of her innocent childhood. Subsequently Kunti married King Pandu in a 'Swayamvara' (as per the bride's own choice), but soon thereafter, King Pandu received a curse from a Brahmana who was targeted by the King's arrow mistaken for a deer in copulation and the curse was that if he slept with a woman, he would fall dead at once. The King knew that without begetting a son he would not be able to cross the River Vaitarani at the entry point of hell itself and the soul would get stuck there itself! Pandu suggested that Scriptures would allow a virtuous Brahmana to sleep with her and Kunti informed that she knew a Mantra as gifted by Durvasa Muni and by reciting that she could be blessed. Thus, Kunti invoked Yama Dharma Raja, Vayu, and Indra from time to time and was blessed with three sons, viz. Dharmaraja, Bhima and Arjuna respectively. She also passed on the Mantra to

Madri who begot Nakula and Sahadeva as twin brothers. Once when Pandu ventured a wrong move to invite Madri in bed, Pandu died because of the Brahmana's curse as expected, and Madri too died in self-immolation, leaving the two sons to Kunti's care. Hence they came to be popular as Pancha-Pandavas. As Pandu died, Dhritarashtra was sworn in as the King and there were quick changes in Hastinapura, because of a blind King dotting on his children especially Duryodhana who was in evil league as 'Dushta Chatushtaya' or the Four Wicked Men along with his younger brother Dussasana, his maternal uncle Sakuni and Karna (who was declared as the Ruler of a Subsidiary Anga Desa, as he was barred otherwise from Royal responsibilities and rights since he did not have Kshatria origin as the son of a charioteer). The Evil Four had constant quarrels with their Pandava cousins, due to jealousy, as the cousins were far more disciplined and stronger as also since Kuru Vamsa elders and others liked them more. The Evil Four pretended sympathy for Pandavas and wanted them to move into a new Palace but their intention was to kill them while sleeping as the Palace was made of lac and susceptible to quick fire. Thanks to Krishna's foresight and precautionary measures, Pandavas exited safe from the burning Palace through a secret passage, as the Evil Four misled the Public that Pandavas and Kunti were burnt. Meanwhile Pandavas masqueraded as Brahmanas and stayed in a poor family house on rent. When the turn of sparing a person from the landlord's house came up for Sacrifice to a Demon, named Bakasura, (as per a contract with the village heads and the Demon that instead of his killing the Villagers indiscriminately), Bhima the strong man opted to reach the Demon's abode away from the Village and brought relief to the Villagers by killing him in a severe duel. From thereon, Pandavas still appearing as Brahmanas, moved on to King Drupada's Court for Druapadi's Swayamvara and succeeded in the test of destroying a fish on a quickly moving wheel kept above one's head by an arrow while viewing its reflection down in a water pool underneath. This feat was possible only to an ace archer. Karna and Kauvaras attended the Swayam Vara too. Only Arjuna could perform the feat as Karna who too was a great archer had failed, again causing jealousy on learning that the Brahmanas were fake and actually they were Pandavas. On hearing the good news that after all Pandavas were not dead, the Elders of Kuru Vamsa including Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Kripacharya were overjoyed but the Evil Four were shaken. They agreed that a portion of the Kingdom be given away to Pandavas as a peace making measure and the Elders like Bhishma appreciated the gesture. Pandavas thus moved to a new Capital at Indraprastha where a fantastic 'Maya Sabha' or a Palace of Illusions built by the Divine Architect-Designer by the name Maya. Recovering from their days of misfortune, Pandavas recouped and performed 'Rajasuya Yagna' and invited Kauravas including the Elders like Bhishma, Drona, Vidura and Kripacharya as well as the Evil Four. Lord Krishna who had always been a staunch supporter of Pandavas was honoured as the Chief Guest and when King Sisupala the evil opponent of Krishna objected and insulted the latter, his Sudarsana Chakra (Wheel) snipped his head. The Evil Four, especially Duryodhana felt highly envious of Pandavas, invited them to Hastinapura only to trap Dharmaraja into an unjust chess game with Sakuni who was an expert in it and defeated Pandavas against stiff conditions of losing their Kingdom and even themselves including Draupadi, with whom an attempt was made for disrobing. The conditions were twelve years of forest life and one year of unidentifiable destination where they should not be recognised failing which, the terms could be doubled! During the forest life of twelve years, Kauravas tormented Pandavas and during the year long 'Ajnanavas' or unrecognizable place, took refuge in changed status with Dharmaraja as Kanku Bhat or Brahmana Adviser to King Virat in his latter's court, Draupadi as 'Sairandhri' as the Maid in the Queen's Chamber, Bhima as the cook in the Royal kitchen, Arjuna as 'Brihannala'-the transgender dance teacher of the Princess Uttara; Nakula and Sahadeva as the keepers of horses and cows. During the course of their stay in the Virat kingdom, Pandavas underwent unknown torture and humiliation including the attempted molestation of Sairandhri by the King's powerful brother-in-law, named Keechaka who was quietly eliminated by Bhima in a night duel. At the end of their stay inognito, Kauravas tried to capture the cows of King

Virat but by that time Brihannala came into the form of Arjuna as the 'Agyata vasa' year was over and destroyed the Kaurava Army single handedly and having utilised the 'Sammohana Astra' or the 'Mantra' which lulled the War Stalwarts like Bhishma, Drona, Asvatthama and of course the Evil Four into long slumber and released the cows of King Virat back home. There were talks of 'Sandhi' or Reconciliation held by Krishna on behalf of Pandavas but the puffed up Evil Four refused even to a pin-some space to Pandavas, let alone five villages to the five some and the Great War of Mahabharata was fought for eighteen days dragging even the Elders of Kuru Vamsa like Bhishma, Drona and quite a few pious persons by the Evil Four on one side and Pandavas on the other with Krishna as Charioteer cum unarmed Adviser of Pandavas. A major casualty from the Pandavas side was that of brave and young Abhimanyu, the son of Arjun and Subhadra, in a 'Chakra Vyuha' (a circular closed fight) among many- to-one unjust encounter. There was mass destruction on both sides and the tragedies of stalwarts including the entire generation of Illustrious Elders who took part in the Battle as also the Evil Four, with Duryodhana as the last to fall to Bhima, who killed Dussasana earlier.

Maha Bhagavati allows vision of the dead at Kurukshetra Battle: Pursuant to the Great Battle, the respected ladies of both Kauravas and Pandavas who lost their husbands, sons, grand sons, grand fathers, fathers, in-laws and nephews collected on the banks of Ganges and prayed to Veda Vyasa to secure a glimpse of the departed, since the ladies could not go to the battle field. Among the ladies were Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi, Subhadra and Uttara. Dhritarashtra and Pandava Heros were also invited to the expected miracle-spectacle. The Maharshi performed Pranayama and deep yoga-oriented meditation to the Unknown and Omniscient Devi Bhagavati. His intense and continued worship for quite sometime and as an indication of the positive response received from Maha Devi, there were indications on a huge sky-long celestial screen and there were quick glimpses of the one-to-one fights and the resultant deaths and reactive celebrations; the screen views of the Linga and Limbless Bodies of the departed souls which were recognised at once by the concerned eyes, but not the converse.

Ashvattama punished and Parikshit born: Ashvathama could not reconcile to the death of his father Drona Acharya who was otherwise invincible but as per Krishna's advice, Bhima killed an elephant named Ashvathama and made Bhima shout that Ashvathama was killed and conveyed the news to Drona Acharya. Drona was horrified at the news, asked Dharmaraja for confirmation and the latter confirmed: 'Ashvathama died-the elephant ! But he said further in a very low tone saying ' Ashvthama hata: Kunjarah'. Thus Drona was cheated, hung his bow and arrows and sat still in meditation, when Arjuna showered arrows and killed Drona.

Desirous of killing Arjuna in sleep, Ashvathama did not find him, but thus killed the full party of Arjuna's sons in sleep. In turn, Arjuna located Ashvathama and fought a fierce battle. Drona's son finally used to 'Brahmastra', the most potent Mantric arrow. Arjuna too retaliated by the use of the same Astra and controlled Ashvathama. Yudhistara and Krishna advised not to kill Ashvathama but cut the naturally born 'Shringa' Jewel (diamond horn), which itself was an ugly insult to him. The impact of Ashvathama's Brahmastra would have normally torn off Arjuna's pregnant daughter-in-law Uttara, but for Lord Krishna's mystic intervention. The child thus born to Uttara was Parikshith who was then the last remnant of Pandavas.

As a King, Parikshith was highly spiritual and benevolent. Once when he concluded a Royal hunt and got thirsty, he visited the Ashram (Hermitage) of Sage Samaika who was in deep meditation and thus did not respond to the King's visit. He was annoyed and picking up a dead snake fallen on the ground nearby picked it up and placed it around the Muni's head as a garland. On return to the hermitage, the

Sage's son Sringeri saw the ugly sight and gave a curse that whoever did this insult to my father would be killed within a week's time. The King having known of the curse readied himself on the banks of River Ganges and requested Maha Muni Suka to enlighten him the Great Purana of Maha Bhagavata. On the seventh day, with all the security in a seven storeyed building on the river banks, Taksha made efforts to sneak in the building somehow and intercepted a Brahmana by name Kasyapa desirous of making wealth from relieving the King's problem as he knew the Mantra of anti snake bite; Daksha gave away plenty of money to the Brahmana and got rid of him; in fact he tested the Brahmana whether he could really administer the Mantra and revive an entire tree burnt by poisonous flames of serpent's bite; the Brahmana did convert the tree's ashes to its original position. Later in the evening Taksha asked disciples to disguise as Brahmanas to carry fruits to the King on the pretext of reciting Atharvana Veda and the fruit which the King ate contained a small insect which was Taksha himself assuming an enormous body and killed the King.

Janamejaya's 'Sarpa Yagna' stopped by Sage Asita and Veda Vyasa: When King Parikshith met his end, his son Janamejaya was hardly a lad of eleven years and was declared as the next King. Guru Kripacharya trained him in the Science of Archery, Administration and Dharmasastra. He was married to Vapustama the daughter of King of Kasi and carried on with pious activities. Meanwhile a Sage Uttanka approached Janamejaya and provoked him to take revenge on his father's killer Taksha and perform Sarpa Yagna (Sacrifice of Serpents) and command Taksha into the Fire Pit (Homa Kunda) and Sacrifice all the Serpents in the process. Sage Uttanka told the King that his father could not go to heaven because of snake bite. Convinced thus, the King ordered that the Yagna be arranged. Thousands of snakes were burnt off and Taksha was so afraid of his life that he sought refuge from Indra. But, so revengeful were Janamejaya and Sage Uttanka that they were prepared to command not only Taksha but even Indra to Sarpa Yajna and haul them into the Fire Pit! Taksha thus approached Sage Asita to call on the King and to refrain from proceeding further in the Sacrifice as thousands of innocent Snakes were burnt off, for the sake of Taksha. Veda Vyasa explained the Episode of Sage Asita and King Ruru to the King. In the olden days, there was a Sage Jaratkratu who was practising high devotion to Devi Bhagavati in a forest. He had a vision of his dead father and forefathers in a cave who asked him to marry and suggested an eligible woman named Jarat Karu, who was the sister of Vasuki. Meanwhile the co-wives of Sage Kasyapa, viz. Kadru and Vinita had an argument as to what was the colour of the horses of the Sun God's chariot. Vinita guessed the color as white but Kadru had a bet that the colour was black. It was agreed that whoever lost the bet would have to carry the other on her back always while going to places. Kadru asked her sons to colour the horses black to win the bet. While some of her sons obeyed her but others did not. Kadru cursed those who did not comply be burnt off in a Fire pit and Vinita virtually became Kadru's slave. Vinita's son 'Garuda' the Carrier of Maha Vishnu, asked for the cause of her sorrow and she narrated as to what happened. Out of his affection for his mother, Garuda approached Kadru to pardon his mother and Kadru agreed provided that Garuda could bring Amrit (nectar) from the custody of Vaikuntha. Garuda was bent on relieving his mother's curse and fetched a jug of Nector from Vaikuntha. Kadru was delighted and released Vinita. All the family members and friends of Kadru were invited and asked to clean up themselves before taking spoonfuls of Amrit. But Indra quietly stole away the jug of Amrit. The invitees of Kadru returned from their baths and found that the jug was missing. They were disappointed but tried their best to lick any drops from out of the jar that might have spilt on the grass (Kusa) and as they licked their tongues were cut and hence were known as 'dvi-jihvas' or two tongued ever since. Vasuki and others who were troubled by Kadru approached Lord Brahma and complained against Kadru, the mother of snakes. He blessed them and said that the younger sister of Vasuki, Jarat Karu, should be proposed to wed Sage Jaratkaru. But the Sage was highly short tempered and the bride should be very obedient and trustworthy and the couple would beget a child

who would enlighten, control and discipline the whole community of snakes and lighten the burden of their over-haughtiness to the world. That was why, Sage Asita prevailed upon King Janamejaya to stop the unique Sarpa Yagna and Veda Vyasa too approved of Sage Asita's request. Maharshi Vyasa had suggested that instead of the revenge-oriented Sarpa Yagna, he should rather build a spacious Temple dedicated to Devi Bhagavati and also perform Devi Maha Yagna and such other Spiritual activities to release the soul of late King Parikshith and relieve the curse of the Brahmana boy.

Some doubts in connection with Maha Bharata

Sage Jaimini requested Markandeya Maharshi for clarifications on a few doubts on the proceedings of Maha Bharata and the Maharshi suggested that the Sage might approach Holy Birds in Vindhya-chala. Understandably, Jaimini asked Markandeya as to who the Holy Birds were and the latter related a Story that involved Indra, Narada and Apsaras or the Celestial Damsels. Narada visited the Court of Indra once and the latter requested as to how the Brahmarshi could be entertained: either by Songs of Gandharvas or by the dances of Apsaras. Narada preferred the dance of Apsaras and named a specific Apsara called Vapu as she was preferred by Narada. The co-Apsaras challenged Narada's preference and a dance competition followed; Narada said that whosoever could attract the attention of Durvasa Muni would be declared the best. The dance extravaganza disturbed Durvasa Muni and cursed Apsara Vapu who resorted to loud singing to become a bird for sixteen years in a series of births and deaths, that she should not give birth to a baby-bird and that she should die by a sharp weapon before securing her original form. The related story was that there were two brothers in the lineage of Garuda the Avian King and the Carrier of Vishnu. The brothers were named Kank and Kandahar; Kank flew freely once and witnessed the scene of a Demon Vidyudrup and his union with his wife Madanika, an Apsara. The demon objected and killed Kank. The infuriated Kandahar killed the demon and Madanika desired to become the wife of Kandahar and changed her form as a bird. Madanika was Vapu in her previous birth and the former and Kandahar gave birth to Taarkshi who married a Brahmana boy. The bird became pregnant at the time of the Great of Maha Bharata and while flying, Arjuna's arrow hurt her and two eggs fell out of her abdomen and the elephant on whose back Arjuna's opponent was riding saved the eggs under a big bell. At the end of the battle, a Sage named Shami found a big bell and underneath the bell were four chicks. The Sage took the chicks to his Ashram and brought them up and as they grew, they learnt Vedas from the recitals taught to the Sage's students. One day the grown up birds spoke in human voice and sought the permission of the Sage before flying away since their studentship was over! The wonder-struck Sage asked how the birds possessed such amazing powers and the latter replied that they were actually the sons of a Muni named Vipulaswan and their names were Sukrish and Tambaru, that his father was engaged in a Yagna when Indra appeared as an old bird and asked for human flesh, that the sons refused to sacrifice themselves while the father did the Sacrifice, that Indra said he was testing them of their devotion and while dying the father blessed the sons to keep their knowledge of the Scriptures in tact as 'Jatismaras' or those born would retain the memory of their previous birth! Guru Shami was pleased at the happening and blessed the Holy Birds to migrate to Vindhya for propagating Dharma! Having learnt about the competence of the Holy Birds, Sage Jaimini who visited the Vindhya and posed four relevant questions in connection with Maha Bharata:

Why did Paramatma the Primeval Force take to various Temporary Forms of existence!

The reply was simple: The *Avyaktam Shasvatam Vishnum Anantam Ajamavyayam* or the Impreciavable, Everlasting, All-Pervading, Endless, Unborn and Indestructible Supreme takes to different Forms as an ordinary Being as a Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-Lion, Midget, or a Full Human Being, depending on exigencies only to ensure Universal Equilibrium so that minimal Virtue was maintained and the permissible level of Evil was not crossed. The Holy Birds asserted: *Yadaa yadaahi*

Dharmasya Glanirbhavati Jaiminey! Abhyudhaanamadharmasya tadaatmaanam srujatasyasou/ (As and when Dharma is distressed and Adharma is encouraged, Paramatma assumes an appropriate Form and corrects the imbalances in the Universe; some times as human being or other times as in any Form of Creation!)

Why did Draupadi consent to marry all the Pandava Brothers together! Indra suspected danger to his position and killed Trishira the son of Sage Twashta. The Sage went into a rage and plucked a strand of hair from his head and offered it homa kunda and by his mantrik power created the mighty Vritrasura with the specific mission to kill Indra. Indra already lost his sheen since he killed Trishira and requested Sapta Rishis to mediate for extending his life. But Indra killed Vritra too disregarding the pact between the Sapta Rishis and Twashta. These actions angered the Rakshasa community and Indra backed by Devas. Continuous warfare resulted in chaos and harassment of Devas, Maharshis, Brahmanas, men, women and children. Bhudevi experienced enormous weight of sin and made an appeal to Indra and Devas. As a result, Yuhishtar the eldest of Pandavas came to be born by Indra's virility to Devi Kunti, Bheema was born to Kunti as the radiance of Indra was passed through Vayu Deva; Indra gave away a part of his own Shakti to Kunti by means of which Arjuna was born; Indra's virility was transferred through the two Ashwini Kumars to Devi Maadri to result in the birth of Nakula and Sahadeva. Thus Indra's manliness was responsible to create the Pancha Pandavas by the 'Amsha' of Indra either directly or through his Alternate Forms! Moreover, Indra's wife Shachi Devi as the 'Yagneshani' was created from Agni and hence Draupadi was Indra's better half. Yogeshwara Purusha Indra could divide his own radiance into as many parts as he wished. Thus, it was amply justified that Draupadi was the common wife of all the Five Pandavas as asserted by the Holy Birds.

Why did Balarama atone for the sin of Brahma Hatya during his pilgrimage! Balarama the elder brother of Shri Krishna remained neutral during the Great Battle of Maha Bharata between Pandavas and Kauravas, mainly since Duryodhana of Kauravas, the arch enemy of Pandavas, was his disciple in Gada-Yuddha or the battle of Maces in which Bheema of Pandavas was an expert too. Along with his wife Devi Revati Balarama proceeded on pilgrimage for twelve years. In course of his travels, he consumed 'toddy' an intoxicant drink and entered a garden of flowers and fruits and enjoyed the atmosphere along with his wife. He entered a hermitage in the forest where there was a congregation of Brahmanas being addressed by Suta Muni. The entire congregation stood up in reverence of Balarama excepting a Brahmana as the latter realised that Balarama was intoxicated. Balarama became furious and killed the Brahmana as the congregation left in disgust at the tragedy. On recovering his senses Balarama realised his great folly and decided to atone for his Brahma hatya Sin as also observed fast during his further pilgrimage and later on worshipped Puloma Saraswati to pay for further penance.

Why were the defenceless sons of Draupadi killed in sleep! Once Sage Vishwamitra decided to harass King Harischandra, partly due to the long standing hatred of the King's Raja Guru Sage Vasishtha but mainly to test the King for his virtue and truthfulness. Vishwamitra approached the King once and requested him to perform one yagna and the latter readily agreed. The Sage said: 'Let us presume that the Yagna was already performed and the Dakshina was already due to the Sage'. The King smiled and said that he was ready to give away the expenses for the Yagna and also his Dakshina. The Sage said that the expenses would be on his terms viz. the entire kingdom excepting the Queen Shaibya and Prince Rohitasya. That would be in addition to the dakshina! As the King had suddenly become a pauper and was further indebted towards the payment of Dakshina, Vishwamitra harassed Harischandra as he was asked to leave his Kingdom which was all over excepting Varanasi the Place of Shiva. The Muni appeared again and again asking for the dues and the Five Lokapalakas sought to intervene as the persecution to Harischandra became uncontrolled. Vishwamitra cursed the

Lokapalakas to be born as human beings. The Lokapalakas were frightened and begged for clemency from the Muni. The Sage softened the curse that they would not get entangled with the worldly affairs after their births and would be killed in sleep without much prolongation of life. It was due to the curse of Vishwamitra to the Lokapalakas that Draupadi gave birth to the sons who were killed in sleep by Ashwatthama, the son of Dronacharya. Ashwatthama wanted to avenge the killing of the Acharya by Arjuna as Yudhishtara shouted a blatant lie to the Acharya about Ashwathama being killed but whispered that an elephant called Ashwatthama was killed; following this Drona stopped the fight and let Arjuna kill the unarmed Drona too.

Episodes related to Shiva and Parvati

Links of Sandhya Devi-Arundhati-Sati-Parvati:

Shiva Purana narrated an interesting link of the most revered Devis: Lord Brahma created **Sandhya** and Manmatha as his 'Manasika' or mind born children. He got infatuated with Sandhya and Lord Rudra chastised Brahma and the latter looked for an opportunity when Rudra might also be a victim of passion and Vishnu said that Maha Deva was above such temptations. Meanwhile Sandhya Devi who was ashamed of Brahma's passion resorted to fierce Tapasya to Maha Deva for thousand years under the tutelage of Maharshi Vasishtha in disguise as Sage Medatithi as per Brahma's instruction. Since there was no response from Shiva she got desperate and tried to jump into the Homa Kunda (The Sacred Fire-Pit) in the Yagna being performed by Medatithi. Shiva made his appearance as she desired that none on her clan should ever be a victim like Brahma, that she should be an example of chastity and her husband should never cast a lustful eye on another woman. Shiva granted her wishes and advised that she might now fall into the fire-pit thinking of a person whom she desired to be her husband in her next birth. Shiva further gave her the boon that she would be the daughter of Daksha Prajapati as Sati Devi and as the daughter of Himavan as Parvati Devi in her subsequent two births. Sandhya then leapt into the fire-pit thinking of Medatithi (Vasishtha) as the husband in the immediate next birth. The Prana Vayu or the Vital Air of Sandhya's burnt body was carried to the Solar System and Surya Deva converted it into three parts as Pratah Sandhya-Madhyahnika Sandhya and Sayah Sandhya or of the morning-noon-evening timings of a day. The Sages at the Yagna were wonder struck that Sandhya was re-born as a girl-child as named **Arundhati** and was married to Vasishtha when she came of age and earned the exemplary fame of chastity; the practice of Vedic weddings is followed by the visioning of the Arundhati Star on the Sky by the new-weds as a part of the wedding procedure till date.

Daksha Yagna, Sati's sacrifice, Shiva-Parvati's wedding, Kumara's birth and Tarakasura Vadha

Brahma blessed Daksha Prajapati to beget a daughter with the 'Amsha' or part-manifestation of Devi Bhagavati as **Devi Sati**. Already Daksha got sixty daughters, ten married to Dharma, thirteen to Kashyapa Muni, twenty seven to Chandra, two to Bhuta Ganas, two to Kushashwa, six to Garuda and so on. As Sati Devi came of age, she fixed her mind on Rudra Deva and resorted to severe Tapasya. Rudra agreed to marry her, Brahma proposed formally and the marriage took place with pomp and show. Sati and Rudra shifted from Kailasa to Himalayas where Bhagavan enlightened Sati Devi on many matters of Spiritual Significance including the nuances of Mantra-Tantra-Yantra and Yoga. But meanwhile, Daksha Prajapati got increasingly jealous of Rudra Deva. At the ill-famed **Daksha Yagna**, Daksha denied 'Pradhana Havis' or the prime part of the Yagna to Rudra as per the usual practice and even as Sage Dadhichi pointed out the lacuna, the caution was ignored. Sati Devi felt that there was a mistake made by her father and insisted on attending the yagna despite Shiva's warning and his subsequent approval with great reluctance as Nandi and Rudra Ganas accompanied her.

Daksha ignored her entry at the Yagna and in fact talked disparagingly against Rudra Deva. She could not contain Daksha's criticism of Maha Deva and having produced Yogic Fire ended herself to unite with Bhagavan. As Nandi informed Shiva of the tragedy, the latter pulled out a few hairs from his Jatajuta or the coarse knotted head- hair against a mountain and the energy so created broke the mountain into two parts, one of which having materialised Veerabhadra and another Devi Bhadra Kaali. The enraged Rudra asked them to destroy Daksha Yagna. Veerabhadra beheaded Daksha and together with Bhadra Kaali turned the Yagna into smithereens. Devi Bhagavata Purana stated that Shiva picked up the body remains of Sati Devi and performed furious Shiva Tandava to release his pent up emotions of intense love of Sati and heightened anger for Daksha; Vishnu apprehended Pralaya and used his Sudarshana Chakra to spread out the body remains of Sati and hundred and eight Shakti Peethas came into being. Veda Vyasa affirmed that worship at these Siddha Peethas or even hearing about these would destroy sins and bestow powers to the devotees concerned. Eventually, the instant fury of Shiva was cooled down by the prayers of Brahma and Devas and the ever merciful Shiva agreed to the resuscitation of Daksha by fixing the Goat-head of the Sacrificial animal. The ever grateful Daksha begged of Shiva's clemency and re-organised Daksha Yagna once again with Maha Deva occupying the High-Seat at any Yagna ever since.

Devi Parvati's wedding with Maha Deva:

Of the sixty daughters of Daksha Prajapati, Swadha Devi was married to Pitru Devas and gave birth to Maina, Dhanya and Kalavati. The three of them once desired to have a 'darshan' of Vishnu and while waiting their turn did not recognise the illustrious Sanaka-Sanandana- Sanat Kumara and Sanatana Brothers. The brothers took offence that the girls did not recognise them and cursed the girls to be born in Bhu Loka. The girls begged of forgiveness and the kind Rishis provided dispensations to the curse that Maina would be the wife of Himavanta; Dhanya would be the wife of King Janaka and secure a daughter called Devi Sita who would marry Shri Rama after breaking the Shiva Dhanush or Maha Deva's own Bow; and Kalavati wed marry Gopa Vrisabhan and give birth to Devi Radha the Spiritual Beloved of Shri Krishna. Thus Maina Devi became the wife of Himavanta and gave birth to Jagadamba herself, besides hundred sons born with wings; Indra was jealous of the sons and clipped their wings excepting of Mainaka who hid himself in Dakshina Samudra as a mountain and years later helped Hanuman during his reconnaissence trip to Lanka to search Devi Sita. Devi Parvati from her childhood was intensely devoted to Maha Deva and dreamt of marrying him. Her parents too were cherishing the wish to have Shiva as their son-in-law. But, after Sati Devi's yogic end, Shiva was roaming around restlessly as a grobe trotter; his memories of Sati made him perspire once and out of his sweat were born Bhauma whom Bhu Devi nurtured and the former eventually attained a position in the Solar System as **Mangala Deva** or Mars.

At the instance of Devi Parvati, Himavan requested Maha Deva to assist him in his Tapasya but Shiva refused. She encountered Shiva and argued that she was Prakriti or Nature and Shiva was Maha Purusha and that his meditation would yield speedy results of his Tapasya! Shiva was impressed of her Spiritual Knowledge and finally agreed that she could assist him in his Tapasya. It was at this juncture the all- powerful **Tarakasura** , the son of Vajrang and the grandson of Diti, who did unprecedented Tapasya, secured Brahma's boon of invincibility excepting by a son of Shiva, presuming that Shiva was highly disillusioned after the death of Sati and it was highly unlikely that there could be even a remote possibility of Shiva's wedding and of the birth of a son to him. But being aware of Parvati being engaged in personal devotion to Shiva, Brahma advised Indra and Devas to pursue the prospect of Shiva's physical nearness to Parvati and seek the help of Kama Deva Manmatha's help to provoke Shiva's passion. But the plan misfired as the Nirvikara Shiva was

annoyed and burnt off Madana into ash by the severity of his third eye, leaving Rati Devi into lurch as she was widowed in the bargain. Her earnest prayers to Shiva that her husband was victimised for a Deva Karya or a Task to Benefit Devas, the merciful Maha Deva gave the dispensation that Manmatha would join Shiva Ganas then and could be visible to Rati Devi only and gave the further boon that eventually Manmatha would be born to Shri Krishna and Devi Rukmini as Pradyumna and Rati Devi would be his wife as Mayavati again. The highly disappointed Parvati intensified her Tapasya and Bhagavan too melted gradually and consented to marry Parvati, as convinced by Vishnu, Brahma and Indra. Shiva deputed Sapta Rishis to test Parvati's seriousness to marry him. The Rishis returned fully convinced but Shiva himself desired to test and in the disguise of a Brahmana to dissuade her to marry her stating that he was a Bhutanatha, a near Digambara and an uncouth and frightening entity with matted hair and serpents and ash all over his body. Parvati vehemently reacted and showed him the door. But she felt that the Tapasya apparently did not satisfy him and out of desperation tried to jump into a fire pit, when Maha Deva gave darshan to her and said: Why did you not realise that we are the Etranal Prakriti and Maha Purusha ourselves!

When the wedding announcement was made by Vishnu and Lakshmi, the entire Universe got transformed with ecstasy. Indra and Devas as also Sivaganas, especially Nandi, Bhairava; Maina and Himavanta; Sapta Matas viz. Brahma, Mahendri, Maheswari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Vaarahi, Indri and Chamunda were overjoyed; Gandharva-Yaksha-Kinnara- Apsaras went into frenzy. The wedding was celebrated as the most memorable event of the Yugas and Kalpas.

The birth of Skanda: After the Wedding, Shiva and Parvati moved to Kailasa to spend their conjugal happiness, Tarakasura's evil activities reached a peak and a delegation of Devas headed by Brahma approached Vishnu who in turn prayed to Shiva about the grim situation. In a great hurry to meet Vishnu, Brahma and the Delegation of Devas, Shiva spilt his semen off ground and Agni Deva transformed into a pigeon pecked up the drops but could not contain the drops. Maha Deva himself suggested to Agni that the drops be better injected into a woman of immense virtue. Agni identified six women of extraordinary virtue and injected the drops into their skin pores. They too could not contain the heaviness and of extreme effervescence and as advised by Himalaya left the drops in the flow of Ganges which carried to the bushes of reed (**Sarkanda**) and there appeared a boy of mysterious radiance. Even while this sequence of events were taking place, Parvati Devi was extremely furious and cursed the Deva Ganas who were all responsible for the huge wastage of Maha Deva's virility and cursed them all to become barren!

The birth of **Kartikeya**, as Kritikas had a role to play, took place at the most sancrosant time viz. Kritika Nakshatra Shashti of Suddha Margasira; Sage Viswamitra arrived and gave him the name of **Guhya** as he bestowed the totality of Vedic Knowledge; the Six Goddesses offered their six heads and six mouths; he was known as **Shanmukha**. As he grew for a couple of years or so he grew restless and moved on to Krouncha Mountain and proved his valour by crumbling it. Shiva Ganas located him and brought him to Shiva and Parvati who knew no bounds of joy that he was finally home. He was crowned as the King of Kailasha puri and Indra appointed him as the **Senapati** or the Commander in Chief of Deva Sena. **Tarakasura** confronted Devas and ridiculed them that he took refuge of a boy little realising that indeed he was a 'wizard boy'! Having despatched a few warm up weapons, Skanda Deva engaged him with light Astras which attracted ridicule but taking an opportune time, threw the Shakti missile suddenly and deftly that the Demon's chest was pounded and the greatest menace to the Universe was smashed for ever.

The erstwhile foe's right and left shoulders called Banasura and Pralamb who suppressed Devas into miserable submission for long many years were cut off by Skanda and the remnants of enemies were wiped too without a scar even!

Glories of Maha Deva, his manifestations , origin of Shiva Lingas, Dwadasha Lingas and significance of Shiva Ratri

Slow-poison of Atheism by Arihan led to the killings of Tripurasuras by Maha Deva:

As Skanda Kumara killed the most dreaded Tarakasura, his sons Tarkasha, Vidyumali and Kamalaksha who were dejected at their father's death were anxious to take revenge against Devas who planned for the birth of Shiva's son Kartikeya. They all resorted to extreme Tapasya to please Brahma and secured boons to construct three invincible forts built of gold, silver and iron situated in the Skies, Earth and the Lower Worlds and dominated the Universe tormenting the three lokas and tormenting Devas and Rishis. Devas had to vacate the higher lokas and approached Brahma and subsequently to Vishnu for succor. Vishnu realised that the Asuras were adept in 'Karmakanda' or performing rituals as per Vedas and Scriptures and as such some another method of deviating from the Rituals. Vishnu created from his body an Athiest called Arihan who made way to the Asuras and in the garb of teaching them rituals taught the medium of Reasoning and created confusion in their minds the concepts of faith versus logic or religion versus skepticism. Thus the slow poison of non-belief got spread out from the Asura Kings to their Subjects. Thus firm grounds were prepared for the destruction of their castles in which rituals were abolished and the 'why and what' kind of so-called rationalism prevailed. Then it was a very easy situation of the invincible forts to be destroyed in one go by Maha Deva himself by his most potent weapon viz. the Pashupatastra to terminate the Asuras and uproot their followers.

Demon Jalandhar supported by Lakshmi but fascinated with Parvati and killed by Shiva :

Even as a child born at Gangasagar the terminal point of Ganga and the Ocean, Jalandhar was so mighty and energetic that when he kicked Brahma in his neck who fondled the child the latter had tears in his eyes! Samudra brought up the child and thus Lakshmi the daughter of Samudra had a soft corner for her brother. As Jalandhar grew up he was married to Vrinda the daughter another Daitya King Kalanemi and he became the most cruel King of Daityas himself and forced Indra and Devas to vacate their positions in Swarga. Vishnu remained neutral due to Lakshmi's reluctance to harm Jalandhar; instead the latter had access to Ksheera Samudra the abode of Lakshmi-Narayana. Narada Muni meanwhile created a problem for Jalandhar on two counts that Shiva's riches and powers were by far the most superior and that his wife Parvati was the prettiest woman in the Universe. Jalandhar sent Rahu as an emissary to Parvati with a proposal to wed him and the latter was motionless at the Daitya's audacity and kicked out Rahu as he was a mere emissary. She complained to Vishnu about this incident and the latter adopted the same technique of approaching Jalandhar's wife Vrinda disguised as a Brahmana with a similar proposal of marrying her. Some time later Vishnu impersonated as Jalandhar and approached Vrinda and on knowing the truth later, she cursed Vishnu before her self-immolation that he too would face similar situation later; indeed Rama was looking for Sita all over as she was abducted by Ravanaasura! Jalandhar instigated the Shubh-Nikumbh brothers to attack Shiva who no doubt subdued them but assured them that eventually they would be terminated by Devi Bhagavati herself. Finally Jalandhar faced Shiva in a battle and the latter slit his throat by a fiery 'chakra' produced from his left toe! Vishnu suffered a guilt complex at the self-immolation of Vrinda and performed penance. Maha Deva asked Parvati to rally the support of Lakshmi and Sarasvati in this context and the three Devis materialised three seeds of trees viz. Amla, Tulsi and Malati and sprayed them at the Place where Vrinda self-immolated. The seeds were sprayed at Vrinda's immolation place and as they grew to become big trees they were sent to Vaikuntha as tokens of blessings to Vrinda's soul there!

Demon Shankhachooda was terminated by Shiva while Vishnu impersonated the Demon to cheat the latter's wife Tulasi!

In his earlier birth the Demon Shankhachooda was Sudama the Chief Attendant of Lord Krishna's 'Raasa mandali' or The Dance Group of Gopikas and Krishna at Brindavana; he was a 'Jatismara' or the person with the knowledge of previous birth. He was cursed by Radha Devi due to an indiscretion to become a Demon. Sudama fell in love with Devi Tulasi and she too was cursed to be born along with Sudama as his wife and she too was a jatismara. Shankachooda was fortified with constant recitation of Narayana Kavacha and thus became an invincible demon with enormous strength and fortitude; he defeated Devas and dislodged Indra and Devas from their thrones. The latter approached Maha Deva who sent Pushpadanta with a warning to Shankhachooda but the demon had the audacity of attacking Maha Deva himself! Shiva sent Shivaganas along with Bhadrakali but to no avail. Then Ganesha and Kartikeya led Devas along with the Eleven Rudras, Dwadasha Bhaskaras and a huge contingent of Pramatha Ganas. While Shankachooda was waging the battle, Vishnu spread out his Maya and entered Devi Tulasi's chamber as Shankhachooda and pretended that there was a victory in the battle and that he was tired to rest with her. In the course of their union, Tulasi cursed Vishnu even as the news of her husband's death was learnt. The distraught Tulasi who lost her chastity gave a curse to Vishnu to turn into a Stone. Vishnu however blessed Tulasi to accept her as his consort and become immortal as a Tree who was worthy of daily worship all over the World. As a result of Tulasi's curse Vishnu turned out to be a 'Salagrama' worthy of daily worship too.

Andhakasura's each blood drop was drenched out by Chandika Devi as instructed by Maha Deva

Originally a darling boy of Devi Parvati, Andhakasura became a menace to the Universe. In a playful mood, she closed Shiva's eyes and the perspiration on the latter's forehead created a boy of muscular strength called Andhaka. Parvati nurtured the boy with affection and care. When the Daitya King Hiranyaksha pleased Maha Deva with the King's rigorous Tapasya for several years and obtained the boons of longevity and invincibility, Lord Shiva also gifted Andhaka to the King to assist him and treat him as his own son. Together, both Hiranyaksha and Andhaka conquered the Three worlds and the former even sought to pull down Bhumi besides Vedas and Scriptures to Rasatala and Vishnu had to assume the Form of Varaha and destroyed Hiranyaksha. Andhaka then resorted to severe Tapasya and obtained the boon that none other than Shiva could kill him. Empowered with the boon, Andhaka became arrogant and tormented Devas and Rishis even ignoring Parvati and Shiva. Meanwhile Daitya Guru Shukracharya pleased Maha Deva with his meditation and secured 'Mrita Sanjeevani' Vidya and stilled the killings of Daitya-Danavas and revived the dead ones also. A fiery Shiva was incensed that the Vidya was being misused and killed Shukracharya; as he was being killed, the Guru expressed his sincere regret and the merciful Shiva released the Guru through his semen. Shiva then applied his Trident and killed Andhakasura but thanks to his boon of Brahma, the Daitya multiplied himself for each drop of his blood. Maha Deva had then to instruct Devi Chandika to expand her tongue and drenched out the blood of Andhakasura's body totally. Shiva lifted the body of the Demon as the latter prayed to Maha Deva to grant him admission to Siva Ganas.

Gajasura's boon to reside in his belly and got killed to attain Shiva Ganatwa:

Gajasura's boon to reside in his belly and get killed only by Maha Deva: Gajasura an ardent devotee of Shiva performed severe penance and secured the boon of Shiva's residing in the belly of the Asura. A highly agitated Parvati requested Vishnu to locate the missing Shiva. Vishnu disguised himself as a street player along with Nandeeswara searched all over the Kingdom of Gajasura and came to learn that Shiva was inside the King's belly. The dance of Nandi pleased the Asura and Vishnu requested the latter to release Shiva on the condition that Shiva could exit from the belly by making him secure

everlasting glory and that was how Shiva wore the skin of the Elephant-Demon as 'Gajambara dhaari' and assumed the name of Krittivaseshwara. [Another interpretation is that having pierced out of the Asura's belly, Shiva blessed the latter to let his head get fixed on his son's shoulders and make Gajasura's memory permanent as Ganesha!]

Several such Shiva Leelas were ascribed to Maha Deva like the Daitya Nirhada the maternal uncle of Prahlada who initiated the practice of co-Daityas killing Brahmanas in the form of tigers when the Brahmanas were asleep at Yagna Shalaas and Shiva too assumed the form of another tiger to kill the Asura tigers. On one Shiva Ratri, thousands of Brahmanas were awake after Shiva Lingaarchanas and Shiva assumed thousands of tiger forms to kill the perpetrator Asuras. Another story described was that of Vidal and Utpal Daityas who entered the Shiva Ganas in their forms during a ball game in which Shiva and Parvati were at play and the Omniscient Super Gods hit the balls so hard that the masquerading Asuras died instantly and the balls got converted as Siva Lingas.

Basic Manifestations of Shiva :

Incarnations as Pancha Mukhaas or the Five Faces are: *Sadyojaata* in white complexion looking westward blessing Brahma to initiate the process of Creation; *Vamadeva* in red complexion looking northward in deep meditative posture; *Aghoresha* in blue complexion looking southward representing destructive as also regenerating energy with Roudra Mukham; *Tatpurusha* in yellow complexion looking Eastward as a deluding or misleading Purusha Swarupa and *Ishaana* facing South East being complexion-less Sada-Shiva who is Eternal, Omni Present- Omni Scient and Omni-Potent!

The Ashta Murtis or Eight Swarupas of Shiva are Sharva, Bhava, Rudra, Ugra, Bhima, Pashupati, Ishana and Maha Deva; these Swarupas represent Pancha Bhutas or Five Elements of Earth-Water-Radiance- Ether and Sky , besides Sun-Moon-and Kshetrajna. Sharva is All-Knowing, Bhava is the Bestower and All- Merciful, Rudra is the Punisher and the Corrector, Ugra or the Destroyer , Bhima the remover of all kinds of difficulties, Pashupati the Liberator of Samsara or the Earthly-bondages or chains, Ishana the Supreme Witness of Actions and Sufferings and Shiva the ever-provider of coolness and fulfillment also manifested in Moon as Maha Deva.

The Ekadasha Rudras are Kapali, Pingala, Bheema, Virupaksha, Vilohita, Shastra, Ajapaada, Ahirbudhya, Shamsu, Chand and Bhava who are the regular and constant destroyers of Evil Forces and the ever generating demoniac Shaktis in the Universe.

The corresponding Dasha Shakti Swarupas or the Counter-Part Maha Vidyas are: Maha Kaal-Kaali, Tar- Tara, Bhuvaneshwar-Bhuvaneshwari, Shodasha-Shodashi or Shri Vidyasha-Shri Vidyeshi, Bhairava-Bharavi, Chhinna mastak-Chhinnamasta, Dhumavan-Dhumavati, BhagalaMukha-Bhagala Mukhi, Matanga-Matangi and Kamal-Kamala.

Arthanareshwara is a significant and Composite Form of Purusha and Prakriti. As Brahma felt a major limitation of not being able to procreate freely and immensely, a Celestial voice was conveyed to him that he should perform Tapasya to Bhagavan Shiva sincerely. Shiva manifested him self as Arthanareshwara and provided guidelines to create male and female beings and thus expedite the process of procreation.

Tri- Sishu Murtis were the Triplets born to Atri-Anasuya couples. Sage Atri was the Manasa Putra or the the mind born son of Lord Brahma; the couple performed a powerful penance to Maha Deva and the severity of the Sacrifice was such that extreme heat from the fire-pit radiated all over the world and Devas approached Brahma who along with Vishnu conferred with Shiva and appeared before Atri and Anasuya and desired to test her chastity in the forms of Munis who demanded that they should serve food to them naked! She donned tree leaves and served food. Three boys were born: Chandra

with Brahma's Amsha, Dattatreya with Vishnu's Amsha and Durvasa with Shiva's Amsha. Devi Anasuya (literally meaning as the person without jealousy) was thus the unique woman with Tri Murtis as her kids!

Durvasa: Being of the Amsha of Maha Deva, Maharshi Durvasa was stated to be of extremely short temper. An interesting happening was narrated by Sage Suta to the congregation of Rishis about Maharshi Durvasa: King Ambarisha was highly virtuous and pious who was in the habit of observing fasts and worship to Bhagavan on every Ekadasi (eleventh) day of a month and on the next day of Dwadasi (twelfth) day, he would break the fast only after a Brahmana or more would commence their food. It was on a Dwadasi day that along with several of his disciples, Durvasa made a sudden appearance, agreed to join for mid day meals and took away all his Sishyas for taking bath in a river nearby. Just at the nick of time when Dwadasi was nearing its end, Durvasa and disciples did not return; the King had to cut-short the fast and took one sip of water and precisely at that split second Durvasa and others arrived. Durvasa became furious that the King did not wait for him but had a sip of water already; he pulled out a lock of hair which became a flame and would have turned the King into ash but for the instantaneous appearance of 'Sudarshan Chakra' (since the King was a very high devotee of Lord Vishnu) which not only put off the fire but chased the Sage. A celestial voice was heard not to hurt the Sage as he was of part embodiment of Bhagavan Siva and that he was only testing Ambarisha. The King beseeched Durvasa's sincere pardon and so did Sudarshan Chakra too. There were many other instances when Sage Durvasa used to test the real characteristics of illustrious personalities- apparently to enlighten the posterity - like Sri Rama who was once ordered not to be disturbed by anyone but Lakshmana had to do so since Durvasa arrived and as an atonement discarded even Lakshmana for his wrong action; when Durvasa was taking bath in Ganga naked by intention or mistake, Draupadi tore a part of her sari to cover the Sage, and he blessed her that at the time of 'Vastrapaharanam' (Draupadi's disrobing) in an open Court, the piece of cloth would come to her rescue as Dussasana tried to disrobe her; and finally saved another great embarrassment to Pandavas and Draupadi by the sudden arrival of Durvasa with many disciples while she was unable to cook so much of food for all of them, but Lord Krishna arrived and suppressed the hunger of all of them as a morsel of rice remained in the utensil and that turned to be plentiful to Durvasa and disciples!

Other manifestations of Maha Deva: Bhagavan Shiva assumed innumerable other forms. He appeared as **Yakshewara** to humble Devas as they became arrogant as they secured 'Amrit' after churning Ocean and asked them to cut pieces of grass and they were so mighty but they failed and realised that He was Maha Deva Himself; He incarnated as **Hanuman** when Lord Siva was infatuated with Mohini, Saptarishis carried His semen to Anjana Devi through Vayu Deva, as a child swallowed Sun God to release him only after Deities requested the child when Sun agreed to be Hanuman's teacher, joined Lord Rama as His devotee, assisted Rama to locate Sita as also destroyed Ravana along with his clan and had become immortal ever since; He assumed the form of **Mahesha** along with Girija since Bhairava, the door keeper of Kailasa, made Parvati unhappy causing Her to curse as mortal named Vetal who performed penance of such intensity that pleased Siva and Parvati; He embodied as **Vrishabha** (Appearance of an Ox) to enter the lower lokas (nether worlds) with the aim of punishing Vishnu's wicked sons but when they were destroyed Vishnu fought with Vrishabha not knowing the Ox-like form was of Siva's; when Vishnu prayed to Siva the latter presented

Sudarsan Chakra to Vishnu. Lord Siva disguised as a **Yatinath** to test the depth of devotion by a Bhil couple named Ahuk and Ahuka and sought resting place overnight but even while Ahuk said that their hut was just enough for two persons, Ahuka agreed to sleep outside to let the guest sleep inside the hut, while a wild animal killed Ahuk yet Ahuka quietly tried to jump in the husband's funeral pyre when Lord Siva manifested and blessed that the couple to become Nala and Damayanti in the next birth as the Lord would appear as a 'Hamsa' (Swan) to unite them; **Siva** disguised as a **beggar** to another poor woman who was hesitating to look after an orphan boy as she had her own child too, yet advised the woman to bring up both the kids, since the orphan boy was the son of King Satyarath who was killed by enemies while the Queen went to forest along with the just born child but was killed by a crocodile in a river thus prevailing on the poor woman not to abandon the orphan and eventually found a pot of gold to her surprise; Lord Siva appeared as **Sureshwara** in the guise of Indra when child Upamanyu performed concentrated penance to Bhagavan to become rich as he did not have enough money to buy milk when his poor mother said that Siva could only provide money but as a result of his penance Indra appeared and not Siva which disappointed Upamanu to resume the Tapasya with far higher devotion and Siva Himself appeared; and Bhagavan's Incarnation as **Kirat** (hunter) when a forest bound boar (actually a Demon Mookasura sent by Duryodhana) killed by Arjuna and Kirata simultaneously was claimed by both ending up in a mutual fight and finally a victorious Siva was impressed by Arjuna's valour and gifted 'Pasupatastra', the most potent arrow of the World!

Nandikeshwara: As regards *Nandikeshwara*, the origin was that Sage Shailada secured a boon from Maha Deva that a son of extraordinary Spiritual Knowledge would be born with four hands and three eyes but would be short lived for seven years only. The boy was born was a prodigy of Vedas. But realising that the lad would be short-lived, the Sage took to severe Tapasya again to Maha Deva who blessed the boy to live for ever! He instructed the Sage that a garland worn by Shiva himself should imbibe His powers and sprinkled water from His locks as the water flowed as 'Panchanadi' or five rivers. Shiva then appointed the boy as the Chief of Shivaganaas. Devi Parvati brought up the boy as her own and gave Nandeswara full freedom in their house-hold! Any prayer to Shiva should be through him only!

Bhairava: was created from Bhagavan Siva's third eye as He decided to snip the fifth head of Brahma who annoyed the Lord for the sin of temptation with his own daughter. But the sin of removing a head of Brahma construed as 'Brahma hatya' (killing a Brahmana that too of the stature of Brahma) haunted Bhairava and he wished to atone the sin by begging alms in the skull of the dropped Head. He reached Vaikuntha and Lakshmi Devi gifted a Vidya or learning called 'Manorath' or fulfilment of one's mental wishes. Lord Siva dropped oegrass (a plant in sea akin to elephant grass) in the skull-bowl and directed Bhairava to Kasi as this sin of Brahmahatya could not enter the Temple but he went to Patalaloka instead. As Bhairava dropped the skull, he got rid of the sin for-ever. The place where the skull fell is regarded as that of 'Kapala Moksha' or Salvation of the Skull.

Sharabheshwara: is another incarnation of Maha Deva, in the curious form of a giant bird which is part-lion and part-human [depicted as a figure in the Temples of South India]. When Lord Vishnu assumed the incarnation of Narasimha (Man-Lion) and devastated the Demon Hiranyakasipu and saved Prahlada- the die-hard devotee of Vishnu, Narasimha continued His fury for a long time and various efforts including Prahlad's prayers and even Veerabhadra's intervention in the form of a mighty fight proved futile. The Giant Bird was able to control

Narasimha and flew the latter away held by its beak. On way, Lord Vishnu recovered His normalcy and praised Siva for averting a universal havoc. The body of Narasimha was destroyed and its Lion's Head was worn in a garland of Sharabhevara or Lord Siva.

The Story of Siva Linga's Origin:

In the secluded and thick forests of Darukavana, select Rishis and Yogis called were engaged in deep Tapasya and their wives who were all Maha Pativratas were engaged in serving the Tapasis in their Spiritual Activities of 'Karma Kanda' like 'Japa-Homas'. Maha Deva arrived in that atmosphere to test the depth and earnestness of their devotion in the disguise of a semi lunatic but as an astonishingly handsome youth; he was half-naked some times laughing and some times crying but behaving erratically. Out of curiosity in the beginning and as a temptation eventually the women folk including the elderly ones, not to mention of the youthful ones and of course the 'kanyas' made a beeline to the handsome young man and the Rishis found a noticeable transformation in their outlook with sympathy and soft corner. Some enterprising women even tried to converse with the person but he did not respond positively. As the men in that small Society reprimanded him and even threatened him to leave the Place, he did not reply and laughed away as though they were in a negative mode. Finally, his presence became a nuisance upsetting their peace of mind as the women folk started getting more and more attracted to him by the day. In one go, the Rishis confronted him and cursed him that his Linga be dropped. Brahma appeared and admonished the Maharshis and apologised to Maha Deva. The Munis too realised their terrible mistake and sought unreserved apologies to the youth in disguise. Maha Deva no doubt accepted their sincere apologies but reprimanded them for their flippant reactions without trying to assess the truth; he said that the entire Srishti occurred due to Stree and Pumlingas and one should not hasten to wrong conclusions ; a Brahmavaadi might be a naked person, or ash-smearred or even a child and least-communicative as he might be engrossed in inner-meditation enjoying bliss or crying for the betterment of Society around and as such 'prima facie' interpretations might be misleading. This was how Shiva guided the Rishis not to confuse Maya for Satya or Illusions for Reality! Maha Deva also suggested that 'Karma Kanda' could certainly be a foundation to the path for Self-Realisation or a means for Salvation but not the end by itself just as mistaking wood for the forest!

Shata-Rudreeyam: Thus Linga Formations are representations of Maha Deva and worship to Lingas is most certainly the worship to Shiva and his virility itself. While there are crores of Linga Swarupas made of sand, rock, metal and various other material bases all over the Universe, distinct Beings like Brahma-Vishnus, Deva-Danavas, Yaksha-Gandharvas, Muni-Manavas and others were stated to worship Shiva Lingas in their own ways having materialised them with varying materials and varying names of Shiva. This staggering material base with which the Lingas were made and distinguished with different names of Maha Devas was called Shata Rudreeyam.: Brahma meditated the feet of a Golden Linga called Jagat Pradhana; Krishna to the head of a black stone Linga named Urjit; Sanakadi Munis to the heart of Jagadrati Linga; Sapta Rishis worshipped a Darbha Linga named Vishwa Yoni; Narada conceived an all-pervasive Akaakasha Linga and worshipped Jagatvija; Indra worshipped a Vajra Linga named Vishwatma; Surya to a copper Linga called Vishwasruga; Chandra to a pearl Linga named Jagatpati; Agni worshipped Indra Nila Mani Linga called Vishweshwara; Brihaspati to a Pushparajamani called Vishwa Yoni; Yama Dharma Raja to a brass Linga called Shambhu; Shukracharya paid penance to Padmaraaga Man Linga called Vishwakarma; Kubera worshipped a Golden Linga called Ishwara; Vishwa Deva Ganas prayed to a Silver Linga named Jagatgati; Ashtavasus to a Glass Linga known as Bhavodbhava; Marud Ganas to TriLoka Linga made of three metals called Umasha/ Bhupesha; Rakshasas prayed to an Iron Linga called Bhuta Bhavya Badhavya; Guhyaka Ganas prayed to a Mirror-made Shiva Linga named Yoga; Jaigeesha Muni

performed puja to Maya Linga named Jaigeeshwara; King Nimi did penance to a Ugala Netra Linga or Two Eyed Linga called Sharva; Dhanvantari worshipped Gomaya Linga (cow-dung) in the name of Sarva Lokeshwreshwara; Gandharvas made pujas to a wooden Linga called Sarva Shreshtha; Lord Rama made intense Japa to Vidyunmani Linga named Jyeshtha; Banasura made sacrifices to a Marakata Mani Linga named Varishtha; Varuna Deva revered Sphatika Mani Linga named Parameshwara; Naga Ganas prayed to Munga (Black Pearl) Linga named Lokatrayankara; Shani Deva performed Japa on Saturday Amavasya Midnights to Bhavari Swarupa Linga (Honey Bee) called Jagannatha; Ravana worshipped Chameli Flower Linga named Sudurjaa; Siddha Ganas prayed to Manasa Linga called 'Kama Mrityu Jaraatiga'; and so on.

Dwadasha Jyotir Lingas: Nandeshwara described the most Celebrated Twelve Shiva Lingas viz. Kedarnath in Himalayas [Uttaranchal], Bhima Shankar in Dakinya [Pune, Maharashtra], Vishweshwara in Varanasi, Triambaka on Godavari Banks, Somanath in Sourashtra [Gujarat], Mallikarjuna in Shri Shaila [Andhra Pradesh], Mahakaala in Ujjain [Madhya Pradesh], Omkareshwara [also in Madhya Pradesh], Vaidyanath at Deogarh [Bihar], Nageshwara near Dwaraka [Gujarat], Rameshwara [Tamil nadu] and Ghishneshwara [near Ellora Caves, Aurangabad, Maharashtra].

Somanath is a Sparsha Linga and the Water Body Chandra Kund is stated to cure Leprosy and Tuberculosis. Its legend originated from Daksha Prajapati's Curse since Daksha married off twenty seven of his daughters to Chandra but the latter displayed extreme affection for Rohini to the complete neglect of others and Daksha cursed Chandra to gradually disappear from the Sky. There was havoc to the worlds in the absence of Chandra as there was neither moon shine nor coolness in the nights and worse still there were no 'Aoushadhis' nor Brahmanas whose Lord Chandra was performing Yagnas. Lord Shiva sorted the problem of creating Shukla Paksha or the First Bright Fortnight as Chandra would reach a peak of Shine upto Pournami and in the subsequent fortnight of Krishna Paksha would wane upto Amavasya.

Shri Shailam: Shiva and Parvati appeared as Mallikarjuna and Bhramaramba as Kartikeya left for Tapasya on the Krouncha Mountain since he felt cheated on his return from a 'Bhu Pradakshina' or circumambulation of Earth as per a Pact approved by his parents for an earlier wedding but his brother Ganesha did not do so and merely performed three Pradakshinas around his parents much faster than Kartik; Ganesha knew that the Pradakshinas were as good as Bhu Pradakshina around their parents as per Scriptures! Shiva and Parvati tried to reach Kartikeya on Mountain to pacify him. Devi Parvati assumed the form of bees all over her body to kill Mahishasura and hence her Avatara as Bhramaramba. It is stated that Vrishabha Deva the Carrier of Maha Deva did severe Tapasya at the same Place and Shiva Parvatis obliged their darshan in the form of Mallikarjuna and Bhramaramba here. Also Rama installed a Sahasra Linga there and so did Pandavas the Pancha Pandava Lingas. Further, Adi Shankara is stated to have scripted his memorable Work of 'Shivananda Lahari' here.

Ujjain: Lord Shiva's Swayambhu (Self- Generated) Linga as Mahakaal on the banks of River Kshipra is a unique specimen of Jyotirlingas maintained on Tantrik Principles. The mythological background of the Temple related to a pious Brahmana well versed in Vedas and Scriptures who gave birth to four highly learned sons named Deva Priya, Priyamedha, Survita and Suvrata. A demon called named Dushana lived on a nearby hill Ratnamala who could not tolerate the very concept of Vedas and their applications and particularly hated the Brahmana brothers and on one day along with his co-demons encountered the brothers while they were engrossed in an 'Abhisheka' to the Mahakaala Linga. As the demons surrounded the Brahmana brothers and were about to kill them, there was a frightful and reverberating roar of 'Humkaara' which instantly exterminated the killer demons. The Brahmana brothers prostrated gratefully before the Linga and recited soulful stotras and Maha Kaala made his unique appearance and intensified their Tri-Kaala pujas which were continued

grom generation to generation. The experience of early morning 'Bhasmabhishekas' with the bhasma / ash of the first dead body of Ujjain as purified appropriate Mantras with the Sacred waters of River Ksdhipra continues to be awe-inspiring till date! Ujjain, the erstwhile Capital of Avanti has a glorious past as it was ruled by Mauryas and Guptas, especially by Vikramaditya and his renowned 'Nava-Ratnas' or the Nine Gems of Poets especially of Kalidaasaa, Vetala Bhatta and Varahamihira; his step brother Saint Bhartuhari who spurned on Kingship is still reputed for Bhartruhari caves as one went inside beyond a point would never return! Kala Bhairava Idol in the Temple in the vicinity of the Caves accepts half of any intoxicating liquor and leaves behind as a 'Prashad ' or return of the Offerings. Ujjain is one of the Seven Illustrious 'Mukti Sthalaas' or Salvation Places in Bharat, besides Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Varanasi, Kanchipuram and Dwaraka.

Omkareshwara: Situated on the banks of River Narmada on the Mandhata Island formed in the shape of OM in Sanskrit, Omkareshwara is another famed Jyoir Lingas. The Legend was that Narada provoked the powerful Vindhya Mountain as the latter boasted of his height and might; Vindhya was noboubt high but was not comparable to that of Meru Mountain, Narada said. Vindhya Raja felt jealous and resorted to concentrated Tapasya to Maha Deva who granted Vindhya's request to establish a Shiva Linga on the banks of Narmada River. Puffed by Shiva's presence there, Vindhya grew taller and taller to compete with Sumeru. This disturbed Surya's routine circumambulation of the Universe as he had to return half way as one half of the Universe remained dark. Devi Bhagavati asked Sage Agastya from Varanasi to visit Vindhya Raja who out of veneration for the Muni bent down as Agastya asked Vindhya to be in that position till he returned and the Muni had yet to return from Dakishna Bharat eversince!

Kedareswara: Flanked the snow-clad peaks of Himalayas at a height of 3585 m from Sea level Kedar is the highest point of human comprehension where the Kedareshwara Jyotirlinga is present. The incarnations of Vishnu as Nara and Narayana Maharshis in the form of Mountains meditated to Shiva for times immemorial. Pandavas performed penance to Shiva for the welfare of humanity and the latter was materialised as a Swayambhu Linga as Kedareshwara- a large expanse of Black Stone with an inclined elevation in the middle. The belief is that the Pancha Pandavas in their final journey reached the Temple chasing a Bull- Lord Shiva Himself-and Bhima sought to catch the tail but failed; finally they all attained Salvation at the Mountain Top. It is also believed that Adi Shankara too attained his Moksha on the Mountain Top.

Bhima Shankar: Located in the Ghat Region of Sahyadri Hills near the head of the Bhima River that merged with River Krishna too, Bhima Shankara Jyotir Linga was stated to have materialised on its own as Maha Deva killed Demon Bhima the son of Kumbhakarna, the brother of Rananasura. Demon Bhima wished to avenge the killings of his father and King Ravana by Shri Rama and secured the boon of invincibility against Devas and other Beings from Brahma by the dint of extreme penance. Besides dislodging Indra and Devas from their Seats of Power, the Demon Bhima provoked Maha Deva as the Demon tormented his devotee a staunch Shiva Bhakta named King Kamarupeshwara insisting that instead of worshipping Shiva the Demoon should worship him instead. As the Demon was about to destroy the Shiva Linga worshipped by the King, Mahadeva appeared and sliced the demon's head and the sweat from Shiva's forehead while killing the demon turned into a water flow since called Bhima River. The Jyotir Linga manifested as a powerful representation of 'Artha Nareeswara' bestowing proof of fulfilment of devotees who throng the Temple in large crowds especially on Mondays and Shiva Ratri. As in respect of Ujjain, the Swayambhu Linga here too is set at a level lower than the normal Ground. The Bhima Shankar Temple is also stated to have ben associated wirh the killing of Tripurasuras and there was a manifestation of Devi Parvati in a Place nearby as Kamalaja since Brahma worshipped her.

Another version from the Koti Rudra Samhita of Shiva Purana indicated *Dakininam Bheema Shankara* as the slayer of Bhimasura and that Bhima Shankara's Temple was situated at **Kamarup** (Assam) on Bhimapur Hill where King Sudakshina was saved and the Jyotir Linga was consecrated as Shiva Rathis were celebrated with tremendous pomp and show with great fervour. Yet another version stated that Bhima Shankar Jyotir Linga appeared as a Swayambhu at Kashipur near **Nainital** which was chronicled as the Dakini Country where Bhima of Pandavas married a Dakini woman named Hidimba and there too there was a Jyotir Linga as Swayambhu.

Varanasi: Famed as the Place of Devas that was founded by Bhagavan Shiva Himself some thousand years ago, Kasi the confluence of Rivers Varana and Asi, has a hoary legend with world-wide reputation, referred to in Rig Veda and Puranas. This was the spot where Bhagavan Vishweshvara manifested as Avimukta Jyotirlinga. Brahma was stated to have made such extraordinary Tapasya to such an extent that Vishnu moved his head across so fast in disbelief and his ear-ring fell on the banks of the River Ganges and continued his search there and the Sacred Spot was named 'Manikarnika' ever since. As Brahma recited Vedas in praise of Maha Deva once, the latter was annoyed as Brahma's wrong and misleading stanza was recited and Shiva sliced one of Brahma's 'Pancha Mukhas' or Five Faces in great exasperation; the sliced head found a lasting Place as Brahmakund. Varanasi is also reputed as one of the Shakti Peethas where Sati Devi's ear-rings fell where Devi Vishalakshi's shrine stands now. The Shrine of Devi Annapurna exists where during a long spell of famine broke in Kasi and Devi Bhagavati herself served 'Anna' or cooked rice food to one and all daily and Maha Deva too was a beneficiary as a beggar of the charity of food so received into the Brahma Kapala of the sliced head of Brahma since the Brahma Hatya sin haunted Shiva till his Vimochana! The illustrious Harischandra Ghat where King Harischandra was posted as a Slave at Smashana or burial ground continues its operations of despatching the Souls of dead bodies to Kailasa! Ranging from Kings and Queens, Foreign Plunderers, Saints like Adi Shankara, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda, Dayananda, Tulasi Das, and Guru Nanak, non-Hindu Followers and even athiests have been attracted to this Unique Kasi and Lord Vishweswara blesses them all!

Tryambakshwara: Located some thirty kilometers away from Nasik in Maharashtra the Jyotirlinga attracts thousands of pilgrims round the year providing boons of fulfillment of material desires and spiritual solace. This is the Source Point of the Holy River Godavari; the famed couple of Sage Gautama and his wife Ahalya made such selfless prayers to end the long spell of famine and Lord Varuna blessed a constant flow of Water. As the incessant flow of water and the resultant abundance of foodgrains created jealousy of co-Sages and their wives, they created a Maya Cow which destroyed grains. Gautama killed the Maya Cow and the co-Sages banished the Gautama couple to a lonely hermitage on the mountain called Brahmagiri. The Sage made an extraordinary penance and the pleased Maha Deva who bestowed a doubled boon of calling up Ganga in the form of a River called Gautami and also to manifest a Jyotir Linga named Traibakeshwara. There was a legendary allusion that when Narayana created from his navel a lotus stem and on top of it Brahma was generated, Brahma did not approve of Narayana's superiority and when a quarrel followed, a mammoth Shiva Linga manifested on its own as a Column of Fire. The Column had no beginning nor top but Brahma lied that he found the height of the Fire Column and quoted a Ketaki Flower as a witness. Shiva gave a curse that the Ketaki flower should not be utilised for worship to any Deity and that there should not be worship to Brahma. Brahma gave a return curse to Shiva that the Trayambakeshwara Linga should be pushed underground. Indeed, the Trayambakeshwara was under Brahmagiri and the Jyotirlinga is small in size in a depression on the floor with water constantly oozing out from the top. Varaha Tirtha is famed as Lord Vishnu had a bath in the River in Varaha Swarupa. Kushwa Tirtha is called so as Sage Gautami spread his Kushasana or Darbhasana while receiving the waters of Ganga.

Vaidyanath (At Deogarh/Parli?): Ravana performed a relentless penance for several years but Shiva remained unresponsive. He dug up a pit and worshipped Shiva Linga and sacrificed his hands one by one and finally Shiva appeared and gave the boon of invincibility of Devas, ignoring however human and other Beings on Earth. He also secured the boon of a carrying Shiva to Lanka for adoration in his Puja Griha; Shiva gave a Linga but cautioned that it should not be kept on ground, lest it would not be pulled out again. Devas were concerned that Shiva's absence from Kailasha might adversely affect Dharma and thus prayed to Parvati and Ganesha to ensure that the Shiva Linga would not reach Lanka. Parvati with Varuna created an illusion of sweet water and Ravana was tempted and got his stomach bloated; he asked a passer-by boy (Ganesha) to hold the Linga for an ablution and the boy kept the Sacred Linga on the ground and got stuck: that was the famed Jyotir Linga of Vaidyanath.

The controversy is whether this Linga is at Deogarh in Jarkhand off some 220km from Patna or at Parli or Kantipura in Maharashtra. In Deogarh, million devotees worship especially in the Shravana Month (July-August). Several pilgrims traditionally carry Ganges water from Sultanganj to Deogarh, a distance of hundred kilometers, to perform Abhisheka to the Linga and some Sadhus even carry by walk water barefooted! The Legend was that Ravana desired to perform ablutions and as there was no water, he used his fist to hit the Earth and there emerged a pond called Shiva Ganga. In Parli in Maharashtra the legend is that Amba Yogeswari desired to marry Vaidyanath (Maha Deva) and waited for the bridegroom party to arrive even past the Muhurta or the precise time of wedding and Amba cursed the party to turn into Stones. Another Story ascribed to this Kshetra was that after Samudra Mathana or the churning of the Ocean of Milk, Dhanvantari was hidden among fourteen gems inside the Shivalinga and as Demons tried to take them away forcibly, huge flames came out and the latter had to retreat. The belief among the devotees is that after performing Abhisheka, the Tirtha water contains medicinal properties to cure all kinds of diseases. This Sacred Place is also considered as Mohini Avatara of Vishnu distributed Amrit to Devas and denied to Danavas. A Vateswara Temple in the vicinity is believed to contain a Vata Vriksha (Banyan Tree) where the incident of Satyavan and Savitri occurred and Yama Deva blessed the couple with long-life! A Pond nearby named after Muni Markandeya signified the hallowed place where the Muni embraced the Shiva Linga to escape death and Maha Deva was pleased by his devotion and granted eternal life.

Nageswara Jyotirlinga (Dwaraka/ Naganath/ Jagdeshwar):

The Place of Maha Deva's manifestation of a Jyotirlinga as Nageswara at Dwaraka in Gujarat or Naganath at Aoudh in Prabhasa Kshetra in Maharashtra or as Jagdeshwar near Almora in Uttarakhand is a controversy but all the three places have substantial following of devotees in all the Kshetras. The legend was that there was a Demon couple named Daruka and Daruki and the latter performed extreme meditation to Devi Parvati who granted her the boon that wherever she went their forest too should travel and the demons created havoc by way of destroying Yagnas and Spiritual Tasks and killing Brahmanas and devotees. Sage Ourva gave a curse to the demons and followers would be destroyed on Earth and the latter had to move into the Seas where too they attacked Ships and harassed the Ship mates. One Vaishya traveller of a Ship named Supriya who was a staunch devotee of Maha Deva was thrown into a prison along with fellow shipmates by the demons and as Vaishya appealed to Shiva the latter appeared and destroyed the Demon and his party. The devotees commemorated the joyous moment as Maha Deva manifested on the Sea Coast as Nageshwara Linga.

Some 18 km from Dwaraka the Jyotirlinga of a small size appeared as set underground of a few feet and it could be touched by devotees. The Story was that Sant Namadeva and approached the Linga and rendered soulful bhajans (group singings) even while a band of Brahmanas were reciting 'Rudra Paaraayana' and the Temple Management asked the Sant's party to shift to the back of the Temple

and when the bhajans were sung the Shiva Linga turned around facing the Bhajan Party and the Management of the Temple prostrated to Namadeva. As the Temple is closed, the belief has been that snakes hover around the Linga with their hoods opened up. A huge Shiva Idol was built to beckon devotees visiting the Nageswara Linga.

The Naganatha Jyotirlinga at Naganatha in Aoudh in Maharashtra was stated to have been visited by Adi Shankaracharya. The legend of this Linga was that when Pandavas visited the Place during their 'Aranya Vasasa' or forest life after being banished as nomads for twelve long years following their loss of Kingdom as Yudhishtara lost the game of dice, Bhima discovered a pond of warm milk in the surroundings and as he tried to dig up the middle of the pond there was blood gushing out; Bhima reached the depths of the pond and was surprised to notice that blood gushed out from a Shiva Linga of extreme radiance. The Story of the demons Daruka and Daruki are also in vogue in this Kshetra. Interestingly there are idols of a sulking Parvati and pacifying Shiva as though Daruki's killing was not appreciated by Parvati and Shiva explained the need to do so.

Bala Jagdeshwara Jyotirlinga at Darukavana in Almora has the Story of 'Balakhilyas' or dwarf Maharshis performing a strict discipline of Tapasya along with their families and Maha Deva desirous of testing them appeared there as a semi-lunatic, half-clad but hefty and handsome youth. The womenfolk came to be increasingly infatuated with the highly reticent and unresponsive youth of wonder and the group of Rishis encountered the youth one day and gave a 'shaap' that his 'Linga' or manhood should be dropped! Indeed that dropped Linga of Shiva was manifested as an extremely brilliant Jyotirlinga as Jagdeshwar who has no physique, Gunas or Characteristics, Sex, Age, Time, Distance and Tatwas. The Rishis were ashamed of their suspicion that the semi-lunatic youth was seeking to woo their women folk but Maha Deva arrived there to guide them that Karma-Kanda or worship for the sake of physical discipline was not enough but that should be accompanied by mental purity and forbearance as well! The main bye-line Mantra from Shukla Yajur Veda which resounds in the Pujas at the Temple is: *Aum Traamabakam Yajamahe Sugandham Pushti Vardhanam, Urvarukamiva bandhanaan Mrityor Mokshiyemaamritaam/* (We pray to Maha Deva whose eyes are the Sun, Moon and Fire; may He protect us from disease, poverty and fear and bless us with prosperity, longevity and good health!)

Rameshwaram: Signifying the celebration of victory following the devastation of Demon Ravana and his clan, Lord Rama performed the installation of Shiva Linga in gratitude and dutiful homage to Maha Deva. Having crossed the 'Setu bandhana' or the bridge across the Sea, Rama decided to install the Linga after prayers at Varanasi and despatched Hanuman to pray Vishwesvara and bring a fascimile of the Kasi Linga for installation but since Hanuman could not return by the Muhurtha or the Exact Time of Auspiciousness, Devi Sita improvised a Langa Swarupa out of Sea-shore Sand and was consecrated formally amid the chanting of Veda Mantras. On return, Hanuman was disturbed that he could not bring the Kashi Linga and tried to remove the 'temporary' Shiva Linga and tried his best to replace it with what he brought from Kashi but could not; instead a separate Linga was installed in the vicinity of the Sand Linga. There are thirty six Tirthas or Water-wells around the Temple-twenty within the Temple Complex itself and all of these are stated to possess medicinal properties. It is customary that several devotees take bath from the water-wells and walk with wet clothes into the nearness of the Jyotirlinga for 'Darshan' for worship to it.

Ghrishneshwara: There was a pious Brahmana Sudharma who had no progeny as his wife Sudeha was barren. She proposed that her younger sister Ghushma / Kusuma- a staunch devotee of Shiva - to wed her husband and made them agree. Eventually, Kusuma gave birth to a boy. But the elder sister became jealous and one day threw the child in a nearby pond; but a Shiva Linga was immersed in the pond too. Kushma wept at the loss of the child and intensified her faith to Maha Deva. A few days

hence, the dead body of the child floated and there was commotion all over in the village. Maha Deva granted his vision to Kusuma and conveyed that he would punish Sudeha but Kusuma requested Shiva to pardon her sister. The ever merciful Shiva brought life to the dead son and the entire village realised the miracle of the dead boy coming back alive. Kusuma prayed to Shiva that he should stay in the pond for ever and that was the origin of Ghrushneshwara or Kusmeshwara Jyotirlinga, which is some thirty km away from Aurangabad in the village of Verul or Yelur where River Yela flows. The Jyotirlinga of Ghrishnashwara is also accompanied by Devi Parvati as Grishneshwari. It is stated that the Patel of the Village secured a treasure in a snake-pit and enabled the construction of a Temple to house the Jyotirlinga. [Ellora and Ajanta caves, which are World Heritage Sites also Shirdi are 30 km, 106 km and 130 km away from the Ghrishneshwara Temple].

Upalings: Apart from the afore-described Dwadasha Jyotirlings, there are quite a few Upalings too like *Atrishwara Linga* in a forest named Kamda on Chitrakuta Mountain where the Maharshi saved people from prolonged drought for some fifty years; once Atri fainted out of thirst and his wife Anasuya went in search of water; Devi Ganga appeared and offered water from a spring and Anasuya carried a Kamandalu-full of water and quenched Atri's thirst. It was from that Spring emerged the Sacred Mandakini River and as the result of the Tapasya, the prolonged drought ended and Bhagavan Shiva appeared as the *Atrishwara Linga*. *Mahabaleshwara Linga* emerged mainly at Gokarna and partly at Murudeshwara, Dhareshwara and Gunavante in Karnataka; Ravana obtained Maha Deva's Atma Linga but despite the warning that it should not be kept on ground upto Lanka from Kailasa, he had to stop over to attend to ablutions and trusted Ganesha who appeared as a boy who downed the Linga which got stuck to the ground. The mighty Ravana tried to pull it out but parts of Linga were scattered yet the Linga was fixed to the Earth. *Batuknath Linga* appeared as a result of intense Tapasya for several years by a son of Dadhichi Muni called Sudarshan since he sinned on Shiva Ratri by sleeping with his wife and without taking bath performed 'Abhisheka' to the Shiva Linga. Devi Parvati requested Shiva to pardon Sudarshan as otherwise he was a steadfast devotee. Satisfied by the sincere atonement of Sudarshana, Maha Deva manifested himself as *Batuka Natha Linga*. Similarly there were many such manifestations of Maha Deva as *Hatakeshwara Linga* signifying Prakriti-Purusha combine at Daruka Forests in Uttaranchal Forests; *Rishishwara Linga* at Naimisharanya; *Laliteshwara Linga* on way from Deva prayaga to Kedareshwara and *Pashupatinatha Linga* in Khatmandu, Nepal.

Pancha Bhuta Lingas: Representing the Pancha Bhutas or the Five Elements of Prithivi (Earth), Aapas (Water), Tejas (Radiance), Vayu (Air) and Akasha (Sky), Five Lingas were manifested as follows: *Prithvi Linga* as *Ekamreshwara* with *Kamakshi* as his consort at Kanchipuram in Tamilnadu; *Jala (Water) Linga* as *Jambukeshwara* with *Akhilandeswari* as his consort at Tiruvanaikaval in Trichinapalli, Tamilnadu; *Tejo Linga* as *Arunachaleshwara* with *Unnamalai Devi* as his consort at Tiruvannamalai again in Tamilnadu; *Vayu Linga* as *Kalahasteswara* with *Devi Jnana Prasoonamba* as his consort at Kalahasti in Andhra Pradesh and *Akasha Linga* as *Vaidya Nateshwara / Nataraja* along with *Devi Shivakami* at Chidambaram in Tamilnadu.

The *Prithvi Linga* called *Ekamreshwara* manifested on its own to enable *Bala Kamakshi* to perform Tapasya in the vicinity of a *Ekamra Vriksha* or a *Mango Tree* in Kanchi Kshetra. The *Linga* is of hand size of the shape of a *Plantain Tree flower* signifying the imprints of the bracelets of Mahadeva's embrace of *Devi Parvati*! The legend of the manifestation of the *Linga* was that as crores of Shaktis who claimed equality to *Parvati*, Mahadeva smiled and all the Shaktis got disrobed and *Parvati* closed his three eyes so that he did not have to see their nudity. But when Mahadeva's eyes were closed there was *Pralaya* and '*Surya Chandradi Devas*' disappeared. *Parvati* was stunned and regretted her indiscretion which actually was an extraordinary sin as the entire Universe was extinguished! *Parvati*

fell on Shiva's feet and he asked her to take the Swarupa of a Bala and perform Tapasya in Kasi first as Katyayani the adopted baby of Katya Muni; at the time of famine in Varanasi, Bala provided food all the population of Kasi and got the encomium as Devi Annapurna. Subsequently Bala shifted to Kanchi as directed by Mahadeva and did Tapasya under the Ekamara Vriksha at Kanchipura and grew up as Kamakshi; that indeed was the background of the Ekamreshwara Linga.

The Jala Linga at Jambukeshwara manifested on its own under a Jambu tree in forest in Tiruvanai - kaval near Chandra Tirtha a tributary of River Kaveri. The legend was that there were two members of Shiva Ganas called Pushpadanta and Malyava who were cursed to become an elephant and a spider; they both worshipped the Jala Linga in their own ways; the elephant with flowers and bathing the Linga with its trunk while the spider ensured that tree leaves would not fall on the Linga by spinning a web. The elephant complained that the spider made the Place dirty above the Linga and the spider defended that the falling of tree leaves would convert dirtier. In the quarrel that followed both died and Shiva granted Kingship to the Spider in its next birth and the elephant was reborn again in the same form and the King built several Shiva Temples including the Jambulinga Temple in which the Shiva Linga was partly submerged in water.

Arunachaleshwara Linga in Tiruvannamalai has the legend that both Brahma and Vishnu found an 'Agni Stambha' or a huge Pillar of Fire and their efforts to know its beginning and end proved futile. Brahma performed Manasika Puja or worship in mind and so did Vishnu; pleased by their devotion granted them the boon to convert the endless Agni Stambha to a miniaturized Linga which could be worshipped not only by Devas but human beings also. Interestingly, even at the Pralaya or the Great Dissolution the Land of Arunachaleshwara was intact. The Arunachala Mountain Range has Pancha Mukhas or the Five Faces of Lord Rudra viz. Tatpurusha, Aghora, Sadyojata, Vamana Deva and Ishana. It is strongly believed that a full 'Pradakshina' or circumambulation of the fourteen km distance of the Mountain would be as good as a Pradakshina of Maha Deva himself. A huge mass of devotees push around the Mountain barefooted on every full moon night and the Pournami of Chaitra Month happens to be very special culminating into a ten day festival of 'Kartika Deepa Darshana' when a mammoth lamp is lit in an open vessel with three tonnes of ghee atop the mountain.

Shri Kalahasteswara Linga too was stated to be a Swayambhu or Self-Generated on the banks of River Swarnamukhi some 36 km away from Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. This is essentially a Vayu Linga and successive Kings of Chola, Raya, Pallava and Pandya Vamshas made enormous contributions of the Buildings of this famed Shiva Linga. The Temple has the Legend that Three Species of God's creation viz. a Spider called Shri, a Snake called Kaala and an Elephant called Hasti were very devout followers of the Swayambhu Linga; Shri the Spider weaved cobwebs on the top of the Linga as Kala the serpent placed Gems on the Top of the Linga and the Hasti collected waters from the Sarovaras and by throwing sharp currents of water worshipped by way of 'Abhishekas' or washings of water. Thus the Spider-Snake-Elephant trio worshipped Shiva on their own thus justifying their Actions. Another Story of Kalahasti related to a legend of Bhakta Kannappa a hunter who offered his hunt as Naivedya or offering every day. One day the Linga showed three eyes weeping and bleeding blood. Kannappa had extreme anguish and cut and fixed one of his own eyes to that of Maha Deva. As the latter's second eye too commenced crying, Kannappa never hesitated and fixed his second eye on Maha Deva's face. That was the heightend faith of Kannappa. Maha Deva appeared and restored the eyes of Kannappa and desired that he should be near to the Linga and ever since he joined the band of sixty three Nayanars in the vicinity of Kalahasteswara. The Kalahasti Temple is reputed to ward off Rahu-Ketu Doshas or deficiencies of Graha Dosha, Sarpa Dosha or of unmarried women or women of barrenness.

Shri Nateshwara (Akasha) Linga at Chidambaram in Tamilnadu is famed for the 'Chidambara Rahasyam' or the Secret of 'Shunya' or 'Nothingness' of the Universe signifying 'Akasha' and the Ever-Repetitive Cyclical Process of Srishti-Sthiti-Laya or Creation-Preservation-Termination. The legend is that Adi Sesha, the bed of Lord Vishnu, desired to witness the Cosmic Dance of Maha Deva and came down to Earth as Patanjali or the one who descended. A high devotee of Shiva called Vyaghrapada who prayed to Mahadeva to grant him the powerful paws of a tiger with which to pluck the leaves of BilwaTrees for worship also desired to witness Shiva's Cosmic Dance. Maha Deva along with Devi Shiva Kami gave an appointment to Patanjali and Vyaghrapada to witness the Unique Shiva Tandava or the Cosmic Dance of Shiva. Lord Vishnu as well as Brahma and Devas went into ecstasy as they were fortunate to vision the spectacle of the Tandava.

Significance of observing Shiva Ratri

Austerities by way of day/night fasts and devotion on Maha Shiva Ratri falling on Krishna Paksha or the Dark fortnight of Phalguna 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 Purnah-Puja and Bhojan to Brahmins along with dakshina. It is stated that observance of Shiva Ratri Fast- Puja-Jagaran 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 an 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 the 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 there after!

The Legends of Venkatachala, Jagannatha and Badari Kshetras

Venkatachala : Skanda Purana described that King Akasha performed an elaborate Yagna on the banks of Arani and while tilling in course of the Yagna tilled the land of Yagna and found a girl child whom he named as **Padmavati** and brought her up with care and affection. Sage Narada who visited the King saw the child and predicted that as she grew of age would wed Lord Srinivasa of Venkatachala. Padmavati as she grew up went out to a forest along with her companions and encountered a handsome youth called Anant (**Srinivasa**) who tried to draw her into conversation and proposed but she rebuffed out of semi-acceptance. But Anant desired Padmavati immensely and sent an emissary named Vakulamala to King Akasha and the latter was happy at the alliance and soon the holy wedding took place in style. Among the various celebrities, Devi Lakshmi too attended and congratulated the new couple! [But Srinivasa had to borrow hefty money from Kubera to defray the wedding expenses and the interest money itself continues to be repaid till date from the earnings of donations being made by the lakhs of devotees!] Padmavati's earlier birth was Vedavati who was a companion of Devi Lakshmi and when the latter became Shri Rama's spouse, Vedavati proceeded for Tapasya to forests but Ravana misbehaved with her and she ended her life by jumping into fire and cursed Ravana that soon he and his clan would be wiped out by Lord Vishnu's Avatara. As the drama unfolded of Sita's abduction following Lakshmana's insult to Ravana's sister Surpanakha, Ravana's masquerading as a Maya Tapaswi, Maricha's taking to the Form of a Maya Mriga (Deer), Rama-Lakshmana's battle with Ravana and his clan and the latter's great destruction, then the question of Sita's purity of character was raised by Rama. Agni Deva who had for long concealed real Sita's identity as she was transferred to Patala, Maya Sita was actually the wife of Agni viz. Swaha Devi; indeed Swaha Devi was Vedavati who turned later as Maya Sita and thereafter as Padmavati Devi!

Skanda Purana delineated some telling episodes highlighting Venkateswara Mahatmya. One was that of a **Nishad** (Hunter) named Vasu, his wife Chitravati and son Vira. Nishad was the Chief of his clan living honestly and peacefully. His daily practice was to offer cooked rice and honey as 'Naivedya' to Venkatachalapati and eat the 'Prashad'. One day, the Nishad who to go out and entrusted the task of offering the Naivedya to his son Vira but instead of performing the offer to Shrinivasa, he gave some to Agni, some to tree bushes and the rest was consumed. On return, the Nishad was extremely agitated that the daily offering was not made to Venkateswara and was even about to kill his son for the greatest sin that he committed; just at that time Lord Venkateshwara appeared before the Nishad in full glory with his four hands ornamented and armed and prevented him from harming the son and said that the acts of his son was in fact worth emulation but not condemnation for he performed a 'homam' as an offering to Agni Deva, a homage to Nature and only the remainder as the left over 'Prashad with devotion. Bhagavan thus appreciated the father and son and blessed them.

The above happening was reported by the Nishad to the King of the Land named **Tondaman**. Even as a Prince, the King was noble, intellectual and devotional. Once as a Prince, he went on hunting in a forest and chased a wild elephant which crossed the River Swarnamukhi and reached the Ashram of Suka Maha Muni and found a parrot in the Ashram which was always screeching the name of 'Srinivasa, Srinivasa'. The Prince chased the bird upto the mountain top where it vanished but he met the Nishad who said that the parrot was a pet of Suka Muni and was always in the habit of screeching the name of Srinivasa. The Nishad then narrated his story of worship to Srinivasa by offering cooked rice and honey. In fact the Nishad took the Prince to have a darshan of Srinivasa and the latter was thrilled. On return to the Kingdom, the Prince was informed by his father to take over as the King

since the latter was retiring. On taking over the responsibility, Tondaman was busy; suddenly after a few months, the Nishada approached the King agitated and conveyed that in a dream he visioned a Varaha Murti and said: 'Nishada! You must reach the King at once and command him to perform 'Abhisheka' with lots of milk to a 'Shila' (Stone) underneath a specific thick bush, pull it out and ask a Shilpi (Sculptor) to form a Varaha Murti with Bhudevi on his lap. King Tondaman followed the instructions of Venkatachalapati as per the Nishada's dream and consecrated the Temple in a magnificent manner. Among the Brahmanas who attended the function, one requested the King to please arrange to look after his pregnant wife till he returned from a Tirtha Yatra. The King agreed and after a few months, the Brahmana returned but found the woman had a miscarriage and expired. The King felt extremely guilty and approached Srinivasa who in a dream directed his wives to take dips in Asthi Sarovara Tirtha; as they did so, the Brahmana's wife who had a miscarriage and died also emerged along with the Queens. This miracle was witnessed by thousands of devotees and the Brahmana was overjoyed!

King Tondaman was in the daily habit of worshipping Bhagavan Venkatachalapati with golden lotuses. He wondered one day how Tulsi leaves pulled out of muddy plants got mixed up with the lotus flowers and a voice came from the Skies that there was a pot-maker (Kumhara) in Karmapuri who also did daily puja to the Lord and that he accepted both the pujas of the King and the Kumhara too in the same manner! The King reached the Kumhara and the latter and his wife denied that they never performed any puja but they heard a voice that the King would knock at their door and simultaneously a Pushpaka Vimana would land to take them to Vishnuloka! Apparently the Kumhara couple did great pujas in their previous births! The King returned to Venkateshwara and a benign Lord appeared and bestowed lasting bliss to him too!

In the vicinity of Tirumaleshwara Temple are **Tirthas** like Swami Pushkarini, Papanashana Tirtha, Krishna Tirtha, Akashaganga Tirtha, Chakra Tirtha and so on; each **one** of these Tirthas had a Sacred Background. For instance Swami Pushkarini washed off the sin of Brahmana Kashyap who had the power of saving a curse; King Parikshit was cursed by Shringi, the son of Samika Muni, as he was infuriated that the King put around a dead snake around the neck of the Muni who was engrossed in deep tapasya. The Great Serpent Takshaka was to bite the King within a week's time as a result of the curse and Brahmana Kashyap had powers of preventing Daksha to do so but the Brahmana was purchased by Daksha and thus did the sin of not saving the King. Papanasha Tirtha eradicated the extreme poverty of a Vedic Scholar called Bhadramati with several sons and daughters and as per an advice of Narada Muni gave a token of 'Bhudaan' of five feet of Land that he received from a rich donor. As the Bhudaan was given away to another virtuous Brahmana the Lord appeared in person and fulfilled all of his desires and provided Salvation later; indeed the Brahmana who received the donation was Venateswara himself! Akasha Ganga Snaan was prescribed by Matangi Muni to Anjana Devi and Vayu Deva as the Snaan bestowed to them an Illustrious Son Hanuman! On a subsequent time, a Brahmana called Ramanuja did Tapasya of extreme rigour with Panchagnis or Five Sacred Flames around him irrespective of Heat-Cold-Rain and attained Narayana Darshana and gave the double boon of Enlightenment and the presence of an Eternal Water Spring of Akasha Ganga.

Eight-fold approach to Venkateshwara: While Suta Muni narrated Skanda Purana to the congregation of Sages at Naimisharanya he prescribed an Eight-fold Bhakti Route to Lord Venkateshwara: 1) To display 'Snehabhava' or feelings of Friendship sincerely towards His Devotees; 2) To provide Service and Satisfaction to the Devotees; 3) To perform Puja without expectations; 4) To direct or dedicate all actions to Him; 5) To generate Bhakti and love in all the Jnanendriyas or Sense Organs like eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skin and the corresponding Karmendriyas or Actionable Organs like seeing, hearing, smelling, speaking and feelings of the Lord; 6) To hear and cogitate about the

‘Mahatmya’ of the Lord and accord importance to whatever is said, described, sung, taught and thought of the Lord; 7) To always keep the name of Srinivasa on one’s lips, thoughts and heart and 8) finally dedicate oneself to Lord Venkateshwara and take comprehensive and absolute refuge unto Him! Those who are fortunate of seeing even a glimpse of the Idol of Venkateshwara are sure to experience the awe and satisfaction of nearness and lasting memory and familiarity. Those who think of Srinivasa either of curiosity, greed, love of materialism, fear, or a casual occurrence undergo a tangible transformation of outlook, approach to life and morality. If even a casual approach to the Lord has a multiplier effect, one could imagine the far reaching impact of the Eight-fold dedication to Him! Just as Fire is capable of pulling down a huge mansion within minutes, the stock-pile of sins gets ablaze into ash as fast, provided one takes the shelter of Srinivasa. Human life is indeed difficult to attain compared to several other species and asylum unto the Lord would surely assure Salvation.

Purushottama (Jagannatha) Kshetra: Sage Jaimini narrated the Story of King Indradyumna, an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu who was keen on having a darshan of the Idol of Neela Madhava at a Temple situated in the Nilachala Mountain on the East Coastal side of Bharata Varsha in the Utkala Region and asked his Priest to ascertain the route and arrange for the trip. One of the Pilgrims (Bhagavan Himself) who said that he just returned from there and described the details of the route. The King and his large entourage undertook an arduous journey and having crossed Mahanadi camped overnight and the Local Chief of Utkal Region gave the disheartening news that there was a huge sand storm and the Idol of Neela Madhava was underneath a heap of debris. Brahmashi Narada appeared and consoled the King and asked him perform hundred Yagnas and then Neela Madhava would manifest from under the debris. Narada further said that a ‘Vata Vriksha’ (Banyan Tree) with four branches would appear near the debris; that Vishvakarma the Celestial Artist would carve out four Idols of Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra the sister of the brothers and a Sudarshana Chakra; that a conch-shaped Purushottama Kshetra would get materialised and that Lord Brahma himself would consecrate the Wooden Idols but the instructions of Neela Madhava must be followed by the King in spirit and deed. Sughat the son of Vishwakarma completed the construction of the Temple within five days while made the Idol of Nrisimha Deva which was installed by Narada. The task of carving wood from for the four major Idols was taken up and a celestial voice was heard saying that the Idols would emerge on their own, that the oldest worker be sent inside the Main Gate which should be closed till the job was over, that the sound of drums be kept on till the task was going on inside to cover the sounds from there, that if somebody heard the sounds from inside then he or she would be stone-deaf forever and if somebody saw any activity from inside that person would lose vision forever! On the fifteenth day a celestial announcement was heard that the Idols were almost ready; instructions were given about the colour schemes of the Idols viz. deep blue cloud for Janannatha, white for Balabhadra, Crimson red like rising Sun for Subhadra and deep red to the Sudarshana Chakra. As the finishing touches were being provided, Indradyumna was in trance and at the time of consecration, Narada, the King and the entire entourage entered the Sanctum Sanctorium chanting Dwadasha Mantra viz. Namō Vaasudevaya in praise of the Lord, Purusha Suktum addressed Balabhadra, Sri Suktam for Subhadra Devi and appropriate Mantras to invoke Sudarshana Chakra. Finally at the Muhurat Time, Lord Brahma initiated the most hallowed function of ‘Kumbha-bhisheka’ on Shuddha Vishakha Ashtami on Thursday with Pushyami as the Nakshatra as witnessed by Deva-Yaksha-Kinnaras and Maharshis. The famous nine day Ratha Yatra commenced on Shuddha Ashadha Vidiya and returned from the banks of Bindu Tirtha on the eighth following day. The Annual Ratha Yatra continues till date.

Badari Kshetra: Badari Kshetra is one of the most outstanding and ancient Pilgrimage Points on Himalayas where Bhagavan Narayana resides. Maha Deva himself was stated to have advised Skanda Kumara that among the various Kshetras of Bharata Desha, Badari was the unique Place of worship

as that not only carried the footprints of Vishnu but Kedara Kshetra was in the same region where the magnificent Shiva Linga was also present thus affording double advantage of worshipping Shiva and Narayana, signifying the unity of both the Swarupas of the same Deity. Again, Badari had been the abode of Agni Deva as he was called ‘Sarvabhakshaka’ or the Consumer of each and every material and was rightly acclaimed as ‘Sarva Papa Naashaka’ or the destroyer of all kinds of sins; Vishnu gave the boon to Agni that he would be a purifier par excellence. Lord Shiva also sensitised Skanda that there were Five Sacred Shilas (Rocks) representing Naradi, Narasimhi, Varaahi, Garudi, and Markandeyi and each one of the Rocks was capable of bestowing boons to whosoever worshipped to them as these were the very Shilas that the Five of the Illustrious Personalities did extreme Tapasyas and secured the Vision of Vishnu in His full and glorious Form.

Another legend ascribed to Badari Kshetra related to a mass Prayer by Devas to Brahma that in the successive yugas access to Vishnu was a great facility but in Kali Yuga it was not so easy. Brahma headed the Delegation of Devas to Narayana lying on ‘Ksheera Sagara’ or the Ocean of Milk and complained. Narayana replied that all the Devas were irresponsible and ignorant that Narayana was difficult to reach in the Kali Yuga! In fact, he was far easier to access in the Kali Yuga than in the earlier Yugas and the Delegation should realise that a fulfilled presence of His was readily available to only to Devas but to human beings even at Badarikashrama! As Devas were ashamed of their lack of awareness, they made instant Yatras along with their families and that was how there was added magnificence of the Kshetra. There is a strong belief down the ages in the current Yuga that visitors who visit the Hallowed Place would have their sins demolished and attain Vishnu Swarupa whose heart would be replete His vision, whose tongue and ears with His glories, whose belly full of even a morsel of the Prashad offered to Him, and whose kneeled head touched the feet of His Idol.

Kapala Tirtha in Badarika is popular for performing ‘Pinda Danaas’ to ‘Pitru Devas’ as that was the hallowed place where Maha Deva snipped Brahma’s fifth head as the latter did the great sin of infatuation of his own daughter Devi Saraswati. Brahma Tirtha was the Place where Vishnu in his incarnation as Hayagriva emerged and expanded his broad thighs to kill Madhu-Kaitabha demon brothers as the latter secured permission from the Avatara that they should be killed simultaneously on the Sea where there was no water. Badari is one significant Place where River Saraswati is visible with her full force adjacent to the Kapala Tirtha where Pitru Karyas are executed.

Ekadashi Vrata-the Legend of King Rukmanga

As ‘Eakadashi’ or the eleventh day of any month is stated to be a special day for worship of Vishnu, observance of ‘Upavas’ (Fasting), Puja and Vrata are stated to be of significance to qualify for the nullification of sins and a stepping stone for attaining ‘Vaikuntha’. In fact the advantage of performing Vrata in full faith and devotion is stated to reap the fruits of Ashwamedha Yagna and Rajasuya Yagna, besides avoiding ‘Yama Darshana’ or the need for the visits of hell. With no exaggeration, observance the Eakadasha Vrata is said to be superior than the bathings in the Sacred Rivers/ Kshetras like Ganga, Kashi, Pushkar, Kukurkshetra, Narmada, Devika, Yamuna, Chandrabhaga etc. To signify the import of the Ekaadasha Vrata, King Rukmanga of Surya Vamsha was in the habit of publicising the Vrata by consistent announcements on Elephant tops to alert all the citizens to compulsorily observe day long fasts with the exceptions however of those above eighty years of age, expectant mothers, Kumari Kanyas, and with severe diseases or of disturbed minds. As the Law was enforced with strictness, there were bee-lines of citizens to ‘Vishnu Dhaama’; but Lord Yama Dharma Raja had free time and Chitragupta was jobless as the paths leading to various Narakas which were always overcrowded with the dead souls waiting in long queues for their turns before admission to

specified Narakas were to be decided had turned quiet ! Dharma Raja was alarmed that the order books were thinning day by day. Lord Brahma was approached and having examined the Order Books he too was astonished and created a Damsel named Mohini and fully briefed her about the purpose of her creation. On the manifestation of Mohini, Brahma Maya overcame King Rukmanda and decided to marry her at any cost. She agreed but on her terms viz. when ever she decided to do any thing should be instantly carried out without asking questions as otherwise she would leave the King at once. She demanded annulment of the Vrata and indeed King's passion for its observance was gradually eroded too! Since then, performance of the Vrata became optional and discretionary! But indeed the faith continues among some Human Beings especially of Vishnu Bhaktas, albeit rather feebly till date.

Ego clashes of illustrious personalities

Puranas were replete with Stories of personality problems due to the inter-play of Satvika- Rajasika- Tamasika 'Gunas' and indeed such clashes were common not only between Devas and Demons, Vamshas vs. Vamshas, Kings versus Kings of course, Maharshis versus Kings and Maharshis among Maharshis, let alone mutual quarrels caused due often to non-issues and wasteful arguments. Glaring examples were Parashurama versus King Kartaveeryarjuna and the blood-shed that followed with Parashurama uprooting traces of Kshatriyas in a series of battles; and King Nahusha and Agastya Muni as the King filled in a temporary vacancy of Indra, claimed Sach Devi as his wife and rushed to her by a Palanquin traditionally carried by Maharshis and kicked Agastya Muni to hurry up and the latter twisted the meaning of the expression 'Sarpa Sarpa' (quick quick) as Maha Sarpa or a Python and threw Nahusha down to Mountain Valleys in Bhu Loka. The above instances were described in the above pages. Following are a few other examples of such personality clashes:

King Nimi Vs. Maharshi Vasishtha : King Nimi of Ikshwaku dynasty was extremely righteous desired to perform a Homa in the name of Bhagavati. The Raja Guru Vasishtha Muni agreed to be the Head Priest and conduct the Yaga. As all the preparations were ready just on the appointed time, Vasishtha Muni sent word that Indra Deva wished to perform a Yagna and thus the homa by the King be deferred to another date. King Nimi was furious and went ahead with his Yagna as scheduled in the absence of Vasishtha Muni. On return Vasishtha saw that the Homa was in the process and cursed the King to drop dead and since the Sacrifice was not yet concluded, Nimi became a 'Videha' or body-less to enable the King to complete the 'Purnaahuti' or the Grand Finale of the Yagna. Lord Yama Dharmaraja was pleased with the Yagna and gave him the option of entering the first Jeeva Body of Brihaspati or continuing the Videha Body and the King preferred to be 'Videha' or body-less. The King on his part gave a return curse to Vasishtha to die too and the latter prayed to Brahma Deva who was Vasishtha's Manasa Putra. Brahma blessed Vasishtha to enter Mitrarvaruna's Jeeva Body which was kept in tact; the earlier Mitrarvaruna was infatuated with Aprara Urvashi and two issues were born of whom one was Agasti who became an ascetic and the other was King Ikshwaku. Mitrarvaruna's jiva body was still in tact even Brahma created Vasishtha; now the jeeva body of Vasishtha since dropped dead as a result of Nimi's curse had entered the duplicate of Mitrarvaruna without any loss of original Vasishtha's wisdom and radiance!

King Yayati Vs. Danava Guru Shukracharya: King Yayati married Shukracharya's daughter Devayani and Sharmishtha the daughter of a Rakshasa. But Shukracharya was unhappy that Yayati married again and there were misunderstandings between the wives. Devayani complained to her father and Shukracharya cursed Yayati to become old and impotent. Yayati could have given a return 'Shaap' but reconciled to the father-in-law's curse and requested him to pardon him. Danava Guru diluted

the Shaap that if any of the King's sons was prepared to take over the old age of Yayati, then he might regain his youth back. The youngest son of Sharmishtha named Puru volunteered to lose his youth and let his father regain his youth. The fall out was that Yayati regained his youth and enjoyed life for thousand years and finally got vexed up and his ways of youth and returned it to Puru with the blessings of Puru's redoubled youth!

Vasishtha Vs. Vishwamitra: Yet another instance of the display of 'Ahamkarra' or intense Self-Image was in respect of the too powerful Munis. Vasishtha was the 'Manasika Putra' of Brahma while Vishwamitra a Kshatriya King Kaushika. The King visited Vasishtha's Ashram and demanded Nandini the calf-daughter of Kamadhenu the Celestial Cow as the calf rightly belonged to him as the King and Vasishtha flatly refused and by his Yogic powers the King failed to possess Nandini. The provoked King performed such extreme tapasya that he possessed enormous mystic powers and was called a Rajarshi to start with and a Brahmarshi subsequently and carried his grudge and jealousy for Vasishtha always. King Trayaruni of Purukutsa Vamsha was advised by Guru Vasishtha to banish the Prince Satyavrata (Trishanku) from the Kingdom since the latter abducted a commoner bride from the wedding platform by force despite her defiance. Satyavrata moved out to the outskirts of the Kingdom and adopted the ways of living a Chandala. But he helped Vishwamitra's wife and children by feeding them during a long spell of famine when the Brahmarshi went away for twelve years. But he served them cow meat to Vishwamitra's family. Vasishtha cursed Satyavrata as Trishanka or on three counts viz. the latter abducted a commoner's bride, he adopted the way of life as a chandala and served the cow-meat to Vishwamitra Muni's family. Yet, Trishanku was endeared by Vishwamitra and sought to send him to Swarga in human form and when Devas kicked him created Trishanku Swarga by using his Tapasya Phala. What was worse he harassed King Harischandra to such an extent that his son died and wife became a desperate wretch. Vasishtha was fed up and cursed Vishwamitra to become a crane and in turn the latter cursed Vasishtha a Sarasa bird and both the birds quarrelled with each other for many years and Brahma had to intervene to relieve them of their mutual curses and bring about a rapprochement.

Yagnavalkya and Vaishampayana: The illustrious Yagnavalkya Rishi was the disciple of Sage Vaishampayana who taught Yajurveda to the former. The Guru and Sishya once had a heated argument about the interpretations of the Veda and the Guru demanded that whatever the Sishya learnt from him be vomitted in the form of digested food. As the vomit came out some of the co-Students of the Guru assumed the forms of 'Titthiris' (partridges) and picked up the 'Ucchishta' or the remains of the vomitting and the same came to be titled as Taittiriya Samhita and the Yajurveda came to be called Krishna Yajur Veda. The disillusioned pupil Yagnavalkya decided not to approach a human Guru and prayed to Surya Deva to accept him as his Guru. Pleased by Yagnavalkya's penance, Surya descended in the form of a horse and disclosed a new form of Yajur Veda called as Shukla Yajur Veda not known to Vaishampayana too; the Shukla Yajur Veda or Vajasaneya (Vaaji being a horse) materialised from his manes; the Shukla Yajur Veda has the rhythm of a horse gallop! Surya Deva directed Yagnavalkya to approach Devi Sarawati also to sharpen the memory of the Maharshi. Pleased by his prayers, Saraswati gave the boon to Yagnavalkya of acquiring qualities of a unique and erudite scholar of unprecedented fame!

Prahlada Vs. Nara Narayana Maharshis: Some times misunderstandings erupt suddenly and unthinkingly leading to unhappy and even disastrous consequences on account of ego clashes. This happened even to King Prahlada a unique and unswerving Narayana Bhakta. As Hiranyakashipu was killed by Vishnu's incarnation of Narasimha Deva, King Prahlada was crowned and his governance was exactly opposite to that of his cruel father as it was highly virtuous and dedicated to Narayana. But the King came to know of a disgraceful incident viz. a highly poisonous snake dragged Chyavana

Maharshi's feet while he was bathing in the Sacred River Narmada into Rasatala. King Prahlada came to know of the incident and apologised to the Muni profusely; during his dharmic discussions with the Muni, Prahlada requested as to which were the most Sacred Places of Bharata. Chyavana singled out Nimisha and he visited that Place at once. In the Nimisha Forests, Prahlada moved about looking prey of deers for his food and found a huge tree on which there were two pairs of oversized bows and arrows hung and under the tree there were two Munis in deep meditation. The King wondered that it was ridiculous to see two Rishis seated on Mrighacharma or deer skin in deep meditation and also sporting bows and arrows. Prahlada approached them and ridiculed them that they were neither Rishis nor warriors; Nara Narayanas were provoked and challenged the King. The mild fight with one arrow from Nara was met with five arrows from Prahlada. This led to a mighty battle; Nara overshadowed the Prithvi, Akaasha and Dishaas. Prahlada pulled up Brahmastra but Narayana released Maheshwarastra. Prahlada was incensed and attacked Narayana with his mace. Narayana Muni rained flames from his eyes and Prithvi trembled and quakes caused heavy destruction. Prahlada prayed to Bhagavan Vishnu and the latter appeared and cautioned the King that Narayana Muni was simply unconquerable on any battle front by Devas or Daityas. Vishnu further stated : ' As a matter of fact, I am Narayana Maharshi myself'! Prahlada prostrated before Narayana Maharshi, renounced Kingship in favour of Andhakasura the son of Hiranyaksha the brother of Hiranyakashipu and took over the Sacred Path of High Devotion.

Saraswati and Lakshmi Devis: Markandeya Purana in the Chapter related to 'Kamakshi Vilasa', there was a reference on how Mahendra and Brahma became victims of the ego-clash of Devis Saraswati and Lakshmi. Motivated by her self-pride and arrogance, Saraswati claimed that she was superior to Lakshmi as she was the Goddess of Learning in the whole Universe while Lakshmi claimed that she was the root cause of wealth and prosperity. Both the Devis approached Indra and the latter opined that Lashmi was not only the origin of 'Bhoga Bhagyas' but also the consort of Narayana. Saraswati was enraged at this reply, called Indra as characterless since he spoilt the purity of Ahalya Devi, that he was arrogant, schemy and partial minded; thus she cursed Mahendra to become an Elephant. Devi Lakshmi felt sorry that on account of her support to her he was victimised but since the curse of Saraswati was to be observed, Indra might descend from Swarga to Simhachala Kshetra in Bhuloka to pray homage to and seek permission from Narasimha Deva to enter Hari Kshetra in Kancheepura. Lakshmi further stated that in the form of an elephant he would meditate deeply and on entering the Hari Kshetra would discover two lizards on his back which actually were Brahmana boys who on instructions from their Guru were collecting wooden twigs for homams but were turned as lizards on account of shaap by one Yaksha since he was disturbed. Soon as the elephant entered Hari Kshetra, Indra recovered from Saraswati's shaapa and the boys too got back their original forms and blessings from Indra. Vishwakarma the Celestial Builder who constructed the Varada Raja Kshetra in Kanchi arranged the two lizards -one made of gold and another of silver- as hung on a ceiling girder to the East of the Temple still by bestowing the boon of prosperity by Lakshmi Devi once they are touched!

Continuing the narration of the ego-clash of Saraswati and Lakshmi, Markandeya referred to the claim of mutual superiority as both the Devis approached Brahma Deva for his opinion and he favoured Lakshmi instantly. Saraswati was highly disappointed with Brahma and took away the 'Danda' or the Insignia that Vishnu once gave to enable Brahma to undertake Srishti or Creation of the 'Charachara Jagat'. This action of Saraswati disabled Brahma to undertake further Srishti. He did not desire to entreat Saraswati to return the Emblem but he performed a massive and unparalleled Yagna at the Harikshetra; however Brahma did not ask Saraswati to participate the Yagna. The latter felt that she was bypassed and out of fury created a Maya Shakti which created huge flames to destroy the Yagna. But the saviour of Hari Kshetra Narayana arrested the hands of Maya. Saraswati took this as a challenge and released Kapalika Shakti but Vishnu in the form of Narasimka Deva destroyed the

Shakti. Enraged by her discomfiture, Saraswati released Daityastra but Daityari Narayana disabled the Astra. Vagdevi then created a 'Karaala Vadana Kalika' but Vishnu materialised an Eight-Hand Maha Swarupa and suppressed the Kalika Devi by sitting heavy on her shoulders. Finally with all her powers being exhausted, Saraswati was humiliated and frustrated and took the Form of Pralaya Swarupi called Vegavati River with disastrous speed from Brahma loka down to Earth heading towards Hari Kshetra. Vishnu sensed the impending danger and decided to resort to her 'manbhanga' by his standing nude like a huge log of wood across the lightning flash of gushing waters. Saraswati having visioned Narayan's nudity felt ashamed and instead of facing him entered a 'Bhu Bila' or a big fissure of Earth and escaped. Then the Yagna resumed without any hindrance and after the 'Purnahuti' Varaja Raja Swami manifested himself and handed over the Insignia to Brahma Deva to resume Srishti again. Such was the high drama that followed the ego-clash of Saraswati and Lakshmi Devis.

Play of 'Maya': The Story of Narada Maharshi

Narada Maharshi and Veda Vyasa exchanged their own experiences about the play of 'Maha Maya' or 'Prakriti'(The Great Illusion) in the Hermitage of Vyasa on the banks of River Saraswati. Vyasa narrated in passing about the incidents relevant to his family as to how his father was enticed with his mother viz.Parashara Maharshi and Satyavati a fisher woman; how his mother Satyavati insisted to sleep with his dead younger brother to beget children to uphold the family royalty; how he himself got tempted with an Apsara called Ghritachi and gave birth to Suka Muni; how intensely he loved his son and wanted him to become a house holder; how frustrated was he till Janaka as 'Videha'(Body-less) was able to become a Grihasti; how elated that he felt when finally his son agreed to be a Grihasti and finally how distraught his son attained Salvation!

It was then the turn of Narada to narrate his autobiography and how Maha Maya had influenced his own life. Narada ('Nara' stands for knowledge and 'Da' stands for Giver or Provider) is popular as a 'Loka Sanchari' or a Universal Tourist. He is also popular as 'Kalaha Priya' or as an instigator but his end-objective would always be for 'Loka Kalyana' or for Universal Benefit. Even at the time of generation as a Manasika Putra or Mind-Born son of Brahma, Narada was engulfed with Maya as Brahma asked the son to become a house-holder and procreate progeny but Narada refused flatly; he said : would there be a fool to leave the outstanding nectar of service to Krishna and take to the drink of poison called Samsara! Brahma was terribly disappointed and visibly angry especially since the earlier brothers of Narada viz. Sanaka-Sanandana-Sanatana and Sanat Kumaras also politely refused to become 'Grihasties' and Narada's reaction was more assertive disregard of his consideration to a father! Brahma then cursed Narada to become a yogi; a quixotic, glibly and dreamy person with frivolous nature; as an indulger in 'Shringar'(Romance) and Music; a Veena Player, a talkative wanderer; as the son of a servant maid, and after repeated births finally he would return to Brahma and become a Supreme Gyani! Narada was taken aback by such lashing of curses from Brahma and having requested the father to bless him to be a Jatismara or with memory of previous births and a staunch devotee of Narayana, gave a return curse to Brahma too that he would not be worshipped in the entire Universe by way of Srotra, Kavacha, Mantra , Puja, Vrata or Agni Homa for the next three Kalpas!

Narada was reborn as a Gandharva Prince named Upabarhana -literally meaning as one with Devotion. He was married to fifty daughters of another Gandharva King and the eldest of his wives was Malavati an illustrious Pativrata. He however had a flimsy fancy for Rambha and for this indiscretion Brahma cursed him to terminate his life by the yogic of death; thus he practised Yoga by

breaking Six Chakras (Muladhara, Swadhistana, Manipura, Anahata, Vishuddha and Agjna) and Sixteen Nadis (Ida, Sushumna, Medha, Pingala, Praanahaarini, Sarva Jnanaprada, Manah Samyamani, Vishuddha, Niruddha, Vayasancharini, Jnana jrumbharana karini, Sarva Pranahara and Punarjeevanakarini) and died the Yoga way! Malavati got furious that on a flimsy cause of fancying Rambha, Brahma gave the disproportionate penalty of death to Narada and protested to Devas and Tri Murtis that she would immolate in Homagni. Vishnu realised how powerful a curse of Maha Pativrata like Malavati could be and assumed the form of a Brahmana Vidyaarthi enquiring of Malavati whether the death of her husband was due to physical nature and if so he could be revived by the means of Ayurved; or else if the death was due to Yoga, then too there would be ways of reviving him the Yoga way! As the death was due to Yoga, the Brahmana boy prayed to Agni and the jatharagini of the Gandharva was kindled; Kama Deva gave back to the latter's desires and aspirations; Vayu gave back his breathing; Surya restored his eye-sight; Vani his power of speech; Dharma revived his Gyan and Brahma and Vishnu revived the Gandharva Narada finally.

Another episode of Narada's life related to Daksha Prajapati's curse to him to become a Grihasti or a house holder as Narada instructed the Prajapati's progeny of Haryasvas to avoid Samsara or family life. Narada and a Devarshi Parvata undertook a journey to Bhuloka once and due to rainy season halted at King Sanjaya as their valued guest. The King asked his unmarried daughter Damayanti to supervise the daily needs of the Rishis for their worship. In course of time Narada developed a fancy for Damayanti since their common interest was music. Parvata Maharshi noticed visible change in Narada and the Princess and confronted Narada who confirmed his longing for the Princess. Parvata Maharshi got annoyed, cursed Narada to get a monkey face and left the Kingdom out of disgust. Meanwhile Damayanti- Narada romance prospered as both were lovers of music. Damayanti argued that Kinnaras had horse faces too but were music experts par excellence; having convinced her parents thus she married Narada. After a few years Parvata Maharshi paid a visit to the Kingdom and finding that Narada- Damayanti couple were happy, withdrew the curse of Narada's monkey face as the couple was happy. Such was the impact of Brahma's curse to Narada that he should be a Grihasti and no longer a Brahmachari.

Yet another Story of Narada was about his womanhood! Lord Vishnu and Narada were exchanging views about the impact of Maya and indirectly mentioned that he saved himself from it excepting that he was cursed by Brahma and Daksha and had problems. Vishnu asked for his vehicle Garuda and suggested to Narada to go for a drive across the sky. He stopped Garuda at the City of Kannauj and desired that he and Narada could refresh bathing in a Lake. Narada kept his clothes, Kamandalu, and Veena on the banks of the Lake and dipped first in the water. The moment he dipped and came out, Narada turned into a charming and youthful maiden not knowing his memory and identity. Vishnu quietly slipped out along with Narada's personal belongings and disappeared. Meanwhile, King of Kannauj arrived at the Lake for a swim and was overwhelmed with the outstanding beauty of the woman (Narada) and asked her antecedents; she did not know but she took her to his Capital and married her as per Vedic tradition and named her Sowbhagya Sundari. The King declared her as the Principal Queen and their marital life was a total success and gave birth to twelve sons. But as there was a terrible war all the sons were killed and the Queen and King reached a lake to observe the obsequies of the sons and the Queen too had a dip in the Sarovara and she emerged from the water as Narada! Such was the power of Maha Maya that Vishnu taught to Narada who learnt its impact the hard way! The Basic Laws prescribed by Maha Maya Bhagavati as enforced by the Trinity and their deputies and the actions are as per the mix of their Actions are performed as per their Gunas in various proportions as per their 'Prarabdha' or fate ! That was the lesson for Narada!

Stories describing the implied messages of Bhatavad Gita Chapters

Shri Krishna asked Arjuna to fight the Battle of Kurukshetra as that was the Kshatriya Dharma (Duty of a Kshatriya) and dedicate all actions and results to Bhagavan, as the latter was the Cause of every action, the Causation or the basis of action and the Causer or the Creator of the Cause. Bhagavan defined that out of the Eighteen 'Adhyayas' or Chapters of Bhagavad Gita, five Adhyayas constituted five of His faces, five Adhyayas his ten hands, one Adhyaya was his belly, and two were his feet. Padma Purana assured that intelligent persons who read one Adhyaya of Gita a day, or half of it, or a quarter of it or even a Stanza at least would pave way to Mukti and cited the example of **Susharma** who was no doubt a Brahmana but a chronic sinner; he did neither 'dhyana' nor 'Japa' nor even Atithi Seva or Service to Guests; on the other hand, he was a drunkard, meat-eater and a womaniser. One day, he died of a snake-bite and after suffering several Narakas and births as the retribution of his sins was born as a bull and served under an oil extractor for many years died of hard work and exhaustion. A few kind persons contributed prayed for its salvation and among them was a Veshya (Prostitute) who donated some 'punya' on her account. In the rebirth the bull was born as a Brahmana in the same village as a 'Jatismara' or with the memory of the previous birth. He located the Veshya and asked her as to which Punya she donated to the dead bull. She said that she bought a parrot which used to mutter a stanza and that gave a soothing effect. The Brahmana learnt from his powers that the parrot learnt the stanza from the cage in which a Rishi stayed in his Ashram but a hunter stole the parrot and sold it to the Veshya. On reaching the Rishi, the Brahmana was told that the Stanza that the parrot learnt was from the *First Chapter* of Gita!

A Vedic Pandit Deva Sharam of Purandarapura of Dakshina Bharata was anxious to learn 'Tatwa Gyana' and approached a 'Mahatma' (Great Learned Person) in this connection. The Mahatma directed the pandit to a Goat Keeper called Mitravan in a forest who was seated on a rock on the banks of a river bed nearby. Mitravan narrated to Deva Sharma about his experience of a tiger attacking a group of goats; while all the goats fled away, one remained as though it invited the tiger to eat it up. The tiger asked the goat as to why it also did not run away as other goats did. The goat asked as to why the tiger did not pounce on it and the tiger replied that its hunger vanished suddenly. Both the tiger and the goat asked a Mahatma who in turn referred both the animals to a Vanara Raja (Monkey). The latter replied that there was a highly religious Brahmana named Sukarna who meditated at a Shiva temple nearby for several years and that he should be asked as to why the tiger did not suddenly lose appetite and did not pounce on the goat which was readily willing to eat it up. Sukarna replied that there was a 'Maha Purusha' or a Great Saint inside the temple and when he (Sukarna) requested him to teach 'Tatwa Gyan' or Self-Realisation, the Maha Purusha asked him to read an inscription on a rock outside the temple which stated : *Karmanyevaadhi kaarastey maa phaleshu kadaachana, maa karmaphalaa heturbhuh maa tey sangostwa karmani/* (Partha! You have freedom only to perform your duty; the rest is not relevant to you; but you should perform the duty without expecting returns and rewards! Bhagavan further clarified that a 'Tatwa Gyani' or He seeks Self-Realisation and a 'Sthita Pragna' or he with stable conscience has to be one who treats happiness or sorrow with equanimity, without desire, fear, or anguish: *Duhkeshwanu dwignamanaah Sukheshu vigataspruhah, Veeta raaga bhayakrodhah sthidheermuniruchyatey/* Thus the chain of Deva Sharma-the Mahatma-Mitravan the goat-keeper-the Tiger and the Goat-the Vanara Raja-Sukarna-and the Maha Purusha revealed the Message of Tatwa Gyan which simply stated that one should practise one's own duty and Tatwa Gyan would unfold itself! This indeed is the message in the *Second Chapter* of Bhagavad Gita.

The *Third Chapter* titled Karma Yoga gives the Message that 'Swadharma' or one's own duty needs to be followed at any cost, even if the Dharma of others is attractive: *Shreyan swadarmo viginah*

paradharmatswanushthaat, Swadarmey nidhanam shreyayah paradharmo bhayaapah/ A Brahmana named Jada practised ‘Vaishya Dharma’ or the profession of a businessman, amassed considerable wealth, became a victim of vices, desired to amass more money, travelled a lot, was killed by a gang of robbers, finally became a Pretatma (Goblin) and stayed on tree. Jada’s son who was a dutiful Brahmana went out in search of his father and having learnt that his father was killed by robbers proceeded to Varanasi and stayed under the same tree coincidentally overnight and before sleeping recited the above Stanza of Gita. Instantly, the father in the form of Pretatma appeared after liberation and was taken away by an air-plane to Vaikuntha and asked the son to proceed to Varanasi and in the course of Shraddha recite the Third Chapter of Gita so that the forefathers too would attain Salvation.

Recitation of the *Fourth Chapter* describing Jnana Yoga redeemed two Apsaras who were cursed by a Tapaswi named Satyatapa as they were bathing nude to attract the attention of the Tapaswi whom Indra suspected to dethrone him and instructed the Apsaras to disturb the Tapaswi. The Apsaras were cursed to become two bilwa trees next to each other on the banks of Ganga in Varanasi and when they begged for pardon the kind Tapaswi agreed for redemption from the curse when a Mahatma called Bharata would lie down between the trees and recite the Fourth Chapter of Gita. As soon as the recitation was over, the trees dried up and when Bharata reached his Ashram, there were two ‘Kanyas’ (maidens) awaiting the return of the Mahatma to thank him. Ever since then the Apsaras (Kanyas) regularly recited the Jnana Yoga chapter; it was in this Chapter Lord Krishna declared: *Yadaa yadaahi Dharmasya glanir bhavati Bharata! Abhyuddhaanamadharnasya sadaatmaan srijaamyaham/ Paritraanaaya Sadhunaam vinashaya cha dushkrutaam Dharma samsthaapa – naarthyaaya sambhavaami yugey yugey/* (Arjuna! As and when Virtue is affected adversely and Vice dominates, I shall take an incarnation to vindicate virtue and destroy the Evil).

In the Karma Sanyasa Yoga dealt with in the *Fifth Chapter* of Gita, the story of a Brahmana named Pingala of Madra Desha was illustrated as he ignored the duties of a Brahmana and took to music and dance and his expertise secured the favour of the King. Pingala married a low class woman named Pingali who eventually disliked the Brahmana and killed him in sleep. Owing to their sins, Pingala and Pingali went through hells and in their next births became a vulture and parrot respectively. Being aware of the memory of past lives, the Vulture met the parrot and tore the latter apart and the parrot got thrown in a pond and died but a hunter trapped the vulture in a net and that too got killed. Surprisingly, both the birds attained salvation! The explanation given by Yama Dharma Raja was that though both the birds were sinners, their dead bodies fell in the same stream on the banks of which a Muni sat reciting the fifth chapter of Gita underlining the Karma Sanyasa Yoga.

The episode of King Janashruti of Pratishtanapuri on the banks of River Godavari was described in the *Sixth Chapter* as he was a rare example of virtue, fame and noble deeds. When the King was strolling on the terrace of his palace he overheard the remarks of a group of ‘Hamsas’ (Swans) since he understood the swan language that the greatness and virtue were nearly reaching the level of Mahatma Riek who resided in the Temple of Chandra sekhar at Manikswar on top of Himalayas in the Kashmira Region. The King decided to visit that Mahatma and proceeded with huge entourage and several chariots- full of gifts including gold, jewellery, clothes, foodgrains and cattle. On way from Pratishtanapuri to Manikswara the King visited many Tirthas including Kasi, Gaya, and Mathura. King Janashruti reached the Shiva Temple at Manikswara and spotted a beggar-like Sadhu stationed on an empty cart who was identified as the Mahatma Riek. The King offered the chariots- full of gifts, the Mahatma became furious and shouted on the King saying that he could not be purchased with huge gifts! The King profusely apologised and fell on the feet of the Mahatma shivering with fear and shame. As the latter cooled down a bit, the Mahatma confessed that he attained celestial vision by constantly reciting the Jnana Yoga from the Sixth Chapter of Gita:

Yadaahi nendriyarteshu na Karmaswanushajjyatey, Sarva Sankalpa Sanyaasee yogaarudhastha dochatey/ (A Sadhaka or Yogi would become ripe only 'Indiraas' or body parts of external and internal nature and their demands are overcome, Karmas or Actions are subdued and the concepts of 'You' and 'I' are eliminated and then only, a person would truly become a real Yogi!

The *Seventh Chapter* titled Vigyana Yoga gave the example of Shankhakarta who followed the profession of a Vaishya ; having become extremely rich and prosperous he married for the fourth time and being avaricious desired to travel to Places to obtain further riches! He was bitten by a serpent and eventually became a serpent. He appeared as a snake in the dreams of his children and asked them to dig up a specified shrub in the backyard of his residence to discover crores of cash and jewellery. The sons who recited the Seventh Chapter of Gita discovered the riches which they decided to utilise for charitable purposes; the father too was liberated as the sons who were extremely pious and reversed the selfish pattern of their father. The underlying message of the Chapter is that Dharma begets Dharma and vice-versa and Vigyana is the doorstep to Dharma. The father lacked the capacity to differentiate duty and virtue as against irresponsibility and evil.

Akshara Brahma Yoga is the title of the *Eighth Chapter* of Gita which underlines the Basic Truth that Parabrahma is the Supreme and Indestructible. The episodes of Bhava Sharma a Brahmana who married a Veshya (Prostitute) with unforgivable habits of meat-eating, wine-drinking and debauchery and a Brahmana couple called Kushibala and Kumati who were involved in base tantric practices and were examples of deceit, greed and anger. The couples died and were converted as 'Brahma Rakshasas' or Huge Demons. They stayed on two Tada Vrikshas or Palm Trees and often regretted their misdeeds. They exchanged their views as to how to obtain 'Mukti' or liberation from their current lives. Once, a Veda Veda Brahmana who came under the shade of the Palm Trees advised the Rakshasa Couple that they could be liberated if they could receive Brahma Vidya's Teaching, Adhyatmika Tatva Vichara or the Awareness of Inner Consciousness and Karma Vidhi Gyan or knowledge of performing Karmas or deeds then they could be liberated from their present condition. The Brahma Rakshasis got utterly confused and said: *Kim tat Brahma!! Kim adhyatmakam! Kim Karma!* (Who is that Brahma! What is that Adhyatma! And which is this Karma!) As soon as the Brahma Rakshasis muttered these words, a miracle happened as the Brahma Rakshasa couples got Mukti and so did the Palm Trees too. These were the opening lines of the Eighth Chapter of Gita! The further lines of the Stanza are: *Adhi bhutam cha kim proktam Adhi Daivam kimuchyatey?* To this query of Arjuna means: What is Adhi Bhutam! What is Adhi Daivam!. To this query Krishna replied: *Aksharam Brahma param Swabhaavodhyatmamuchyatey, Bhuta bhaavodbhaava karovirangaha karma sanjnitah/* (Arjuna! The Supreme Soul is Brahma and His nature is Adhyatmika or the Internal Features, Adhi Bhoutika or the External Features and Adhi Daivika or the happenings created by Paramatma Himself!)

The significance of the *Ninth Chapter* of Gita was explained by the instance of a Sacrificial Goat at one Yagna by Madhava a Brahmana who resided on the banks of River Narmada.. The goat talked suddenly in human voice to the surprise of the 'Ritviks' and onlookers. It said that Yagnas were meaningless as all the human beings would have to go through the process of birth-childhood-youth-old age and death. The same fate was awaiting the goat too, the animal said. The onlookers asked the goat as to who was it in the previous birth and it narrated the story that it was a Brahmana who performed a sacrifice to Devi Chandika as his son was ill; but Devi cursed him as it was improper to sacrifice a goat to cure his son's illness and cursed the Brahmana to become a goat. The goat further narrated that there was a King named Chandra Sharma in Kurukshetra who gave in charity a 'Kaala Purusha Pratima' at the time of Solar Eclipse but a chandala couple emerged from the Pratima and were about to devour the King and the Brahmana and the latter was quick in reciting the Ninth Chapter of Gita entitled 'Raja Vidya Raja Guhya Yoga' and the chandala couple called 'Paapa' (Sin)

and 'Ninda' (Blame) disappeared at once. The substance of the Chapter is : *Ananyaschintanaamtoma maam ye janaah paryupaasatey, tessaam nithyaabhi yuktaanaam yoga kshemam vahaamyaham/* (Those who always think and meditate of me, surely I look after them and assure them of their welfare). Ever since then the King always recited and reflected the purport of the Chapter. Eventually, the goat was released to freedom.

Vibhuti Yoga was the title of the *Tenth Chapter* of Gita. A Brahmana called Dhirabuddhi visioned of Atma Tatwa and Bhagavan Shankara had immense affection for the Brahmana. Once when Bhagavan sat on the mount of Kailasha, a Hamsa (Swan) fell at his feet with a thud and bemoaned that while flying above a Pond in Saurashtra it crossed a lotus shrub and its natural color of crystal white got fully black since the lotus shrub released sixty five bees which blackned the swan. The lotus shrub was in its third previous birth was a Brahmana house-wife called Sarojavadana who was no doubt a Pativrata but was immersed in play with a Mynah bird in a cage when her husband called her and the Brahmana cursed her to become a Mynah. The Mynah was brought up by a Muni Kanya and the Muni was in the constant recital of the the Vibhuti Yoga or the Tenth Chapter of Gita and the bird learnt the 'Adhyaya' fully and in its next birth became an Apsara. The Apsara was bathing in a Sarovara when Sage Durvasa out of fury cursed her to become a lotus shrub and the Swan crossed that very shrub that released the sixty black bees which changed the colour of the Swan! Such was the power of the Vibhuti Yoga in which Lord Krishna told Arjuna that all kinds of 'Vibhutis' or manifestations were his own like radiance, powers, virtues, meditation, prosperity and victory. The Vibhutis in this context included the swan crossing the lotus shrub was out of ignorance; Sarojavana's attachment to the Mynah was out of attraction; her husband's curse was due to anger; the accursed Mynah's learning of the Tenth Chapter was due to concentration and memory power; her becoming an Apsara was an upgradation of life; Muni Durvasa's curse was an expression of anger to create a lotus shrub; Dhirabuddhi's vision of Atma Tatwa and Bhagavan Shiva's affection was due to the devotee's extreme devotion!

The *Eleventh Chapter* of Gita is entitled Vishva Darshana Yoga and one illustration of the effectiveness of the yoga related to the Episode of a Prama Bhakta named Sunandana Muni residing in Meghankara Nagar on the banks of River Pranita. The Muni undertook a travel to visit 'Tirthas' and on way stopped over in a village where the village head warned the Muni that a Rakshasa moved about in the village and might catch hold of a stranger as per an Agreement with the Rakshasa that none of the villagers be killed for his food but might eat up a stranger if required. Next morning it was learnt that by mistake the son of the Village Head was killed! The Muni asked the Head as to how the Rakshasa arrived in the first instance! The background was that there was a Brahmana Farmer in the village who did not heed the loud crying of a stranger when he was chased by a huge vulture and fell in a ditch; the Brahmana Farmer could have easily saved the stranger by lending a helping hand by lifting the stranger but the Brahmana did not bother; a Tapasvi detested the casualness of the Brahmana and let the stranger to be killed and thus cursed the Brahmana to become a Rakshasa. On hearing the background of the Rakshasa, Sunandana Muni recited in full the Eleventh Chapter of Gita and liberated not only the Rakshasa but also lifted to Vishnu Loka by a Vimana the Village Head's son killed by the Rakshasa too. The Chapter quoted Shri Krishna's instruction to Arjuna saying: ' I am enabling you Arjuna! To view the vision of my Supreme Form who has no beginning nor end; whose might is unlimited; who has countless hands; who possesses Surya and Chandra as his eyes; who has a fiery and radiant face like Agni and who has a powerful and red-hot scorching Form!'

The *Twelfth Chapter* is considered as a highlight of Bhagavad Gita since it deals with Bhakti Yoga. A young Prince of Kolhapuri of the south-west of Bharata Varsha visited the most reputed Maha Lakshmi Temple and prayed to Lakshmi Devi most sincerely as the latter was pleased to respond to

the eulogies and asked the Prince of his desire. He narrated that his father King Brihadratha had half-completed an Ashwamedha Yagna and died while the Sacrificial Horse no doubt returned from its 'Vijaya Yatra' or the Victory March but was missing and the Yagna remained half-accomplished. He requested Devi Lakshmi to restore the horse and let the soul of his dead father who was still embalmed in oil be given the satisfaction of completing the Yagna. Bhagavati Lakshmi directed the Prince to approach a Siddha Samadhi Muni at the very entrance of the Temple and that he would do the needful. As directed, the Prince made the request to the Muni and was astonished to invoke certain Devas who confessed that the horse was hidden by them under the instruction of Indra Deva. He pulled up the Devas concerned and commanded that the horse be brought there at once. Indeed the horse was brought there in tact. The Prince was so impressed that he emboldened himself to request the Siddha Muni hesitantly whether his father whose body was still in oil could be brought back to life so that he could complete the Yagna himself! Siddha Muni smiled and asked the Prince to take him to Yagna-shala and having reached there sprinkled 'Mantra jala' or the Sanctified Water and the King came back to life again. The Prince was totally taken aback and asked the Muni as to how the miracles happened including the admonition to Devas to bring back the horse and what was more thrilling the revival of his dead father back to life! The Muni gave a cool reply that the powers that he attained were due to his constant recitation of Bhakti Yoga Chapter of Bhagavad Gita! The Holy Book's Bhakti Yoga Chapter states: 'A devotee who is free from likings and dislikings as also from happiness or unhappiness and who dedicates all his deeds to me totally with unreserved faith is my favourite!'

'Kshetra Kshetragna Yoga' was elucidated in the *Thirteenth Chapter* of Bhagavad Gita: On the banks of the twin River Tunga-Bhadra in the Southern Part of Bharata Varsha, there was a popular Kshetra called Haraihara where a Vedic Brahmana named Hari Dikshit lived. His wife Kuvaacha was however a characterless slut. Looking for a companion in bed, one night she treaded into a forest and faced a Tiger. The tiger felt that if the woman faced was of morality, she should not be killed but the animal pounced on Kuvaacha and killed her straightaway. The woman experienced several hells like Rourava and was born as a Chandalini. As she grew up she became a victim of diseases and reached a Temple of Jambhaka Devi where a Brahmana always recited the thirteenth chapter of Gita the essence of which was to distinguish the 'Kshetra' or the human body and the 'Khetrajna' or the Supreme Being. The woman was fed up through harrowing experiences in Narakas and the incurable diseases in her current life and the meaning of verse by verse of the thirteenth chapter that the Brahmana explained to her was like ambrosia to her inner self and a totally transformed Kuvaacha attained Salvation. The exhortation to Arjuna by Bhagavan Krishna explained the body of every human being was like Kshetra and by inference those who realise this basic Truth would tend to perform honest efforts and aim at Ishwara Prapti. Lord Krishna further asserted: 'Arjuna! Do realise that I am the Kshetragna; the real Jnaana is the awareness of the Kshetra and Kshetragna!'

The *Fourteenth Chapter* of Gita dealing with 'Gunatraya Yoga' highlighted 'Bhava Bandhana Vimochana' or Relief from the shackles of 'Samsaara' or worldly desires and provided the illustration of the King of Simhala, Vikrama Betala who went on a hunting spree on horses chasing a few hares with a few dogs showing the way. The hares crossed a breach but the dogs could not; there was a peaceful Ashram of Vatsa Muni who along with his disciples always recited the Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga of Gita. One of the disciples of the Muni cleaned up his feet with water before entering the Prayer Hall of the Ashram. The sand and water mix turned muddy and the hares fell in the slush. As soon as the hares fell in the slush they were air-lifted by a Vimana bound for Vishnu Loka thanks to the recitation of the Fourteenth Chapter. Meanwhile the dogs chasing the hares fell in the slush and they too were air-lifted to Gandharva Loka. Then followed King Vikrama at the Ashram and the Prayer Hall and asked the Muni as to why the hares and dogs went to higher lokas. The Muni explained that there was a Brahmana named Keshava and his wife Vilobhana who were both quite

vily; the Brahmana killed his wife and in the subsequent birth became as dogs while the wife turned into hares. Both these were the beneficiaries of the recitation of the Fourteenth Chapter. Lord Krishna gave the message of the 'Adhyaaya': 'Once the three Gunas of Satva-Rajasa-Tamasa, which are responsible of old age and death, then human beings break away from the chains of Samsara and attain Salvation. The person concerned who worships Krishna with unreserved devotion would cross the barriers of the Tri-Gunas and would be able to step into the 'Parama Brahma Sthiti' or the Highest Salvation!'

The 'Daivasura Sampad Vibhaga Yoga' of Gita was illustrated by an uncontrollable Rogue Elephant called Arimardan on the Court of King Khangabahu of Saurashtra in Gujarat. Several Elephant Tamers from the Kingdom and many others failed to tame even by using heavy iron rods, piercing tridents and such other weapons even while streams of blood flowed but each time the tamers tried, Arimardan turned more and more violent. One day a Brahmana arrived and touched and cajoled the wild animal with affection as the onlookers wondered as to how such a miracle occurred! The Brahmana confirmed that he was a regular reciter of the Chapter of Gita. The King then ordered that the elephant be set free and as a result even boys and girls played with it on the Streets. Bhagavan Krishna then addressed Arjuna saying: 'Ignorance, arrogance, pretentiousness, egotism, anger and Self-Image are all features of Asuras while the Three enemies of human beings viz. Kama (desire), Krodha (fury) and lobha (avarice) were destroyers of one's own Soul and entry points of Naraka which are avoided by intelligent persons. The ignorance of the elephant misdirected him and taming was accomplished by affection, humility and peacefulness.

The Chapter titled 'Shraddha Traya Vaibhava Yoga' which is the penultimate Adhyaya of Gita illustrates the Story of King Khangabahu of Simhala Dwipa, his servant and their elephant. One Dussahana drove the elephant in a race, made it run too fast by poking it by an 'Ankusha' and out of annoyance the animal dropped Dussahana dead. The servant in his subsequent birth was born as an elephant in the same Royal Court. The new elephant (Dussahana) was gifted by the King to a Poet who in turn sold it to the King of Malwa for a good price. But on reaching Malwa, the elephant took suddenly ill and lied down without food and water. Many experts treated it but to no avail. Medicines, charities and Prayers did not help. Finally, a Brahmana recited the Seventeenth Chapter and the elephant started recovering and tried to stand up but fell down dead. The Brahmana who recited the Chapter explained that the dead elephant in its earlier birth was Dussahana and as a result of the recitation attained Moksha. King of Malwa continued the reading of the Chapter and attained Sayujya later. Lord Krishna told Arjuna: The features and ways of life are normally shaped by every human being by his own 'Swabhava' or personal traits.

The Final Chapter of Bhagavad Gita named 'Moksha Sanyasa Yoga' contained the quintessence of Vedas and Shastras signifying the termination of Samsara Bandha or the shackles of Life. It is the destroyer of 'Arishadvargas' or the Six Enemies of humanity viz. Kama-Krodha-Moha-Mada-Lobha and Matsarya; the final goal of Siddha Purushas and the High-Point of Entertainment of Maharshis. Sincere recitation of this Grand Finale of Gita constitutes sure steps forward to Moksha or the total break-away from the endless cycles of Life! The Episode behind the Final Chapter was that when Indra was enjoying a dance-music ensemble of Apsarasas, a few Vishnu-Dootas rushed in to convey that a new Indra would be soon installed in Swarga Loka. Indra wondered whether the Indra-Elect performed hundred yagnas successfully or constructed lakhs of water-bodies or planted crores of trees for the joy of the travellers or organised countless 'Anna Danas' and charities as he did. He reached Bhagavan Vishnu and expressed agitation about the news of the new incumbent and whether his own position was at stake! Vishnu smiled and asked Indra to meet the new-elect at Kalikagram on the banks of Godavari who was a constant reciter of the Final Chapter of Bhagavad Gita; Vishnu further

assured Indra that he too could retain his position if he performed likewise too. Indra visited the Indra-Elect in the form of a Brahmana and realised that each such recital of the Final chapter would be equated to the fruit of performing one Yagna plus all the Punya Karyas or the benevolent and splendid tasks that Indra did in the past qualifying him to achieve 'Indratwa'! The Supreme Message of the Moksha Sanyasa Yoga is thus summed up as: *Sarva Karmanyapi sadaa kurvaano madvyapaashrayah, Madprasaadaadavapnoti Shasvatam padamavyayam/* (Do accomplish the everlasting and indestructible 'Parama pada' by performing the needful 'Karmas' and keeping complete faith in me!

Interesting Origin of Bhandasura, Manifestaion of Lalitha Devi and Bhandasura Vadha

As Tarakasura was harassing the world and was gloated with a boon from Brahma that only Maha Deva's son Skanda could exterminate the Asura, Indra and Devas were anxious that Devi Parvati should soon wed Maha Deva. The latter approached Vishnu and requested for a quick solution as Maha Deva was absorbed in very long Tapasya after he was totally disenchanted after Devi Sati's self-sacrifice pursuant to Daksha Yagna since Sati was frustrated that her husband Shiva was insulted by her father Daksha in non-invitation of his Yagna to Shiva. In response, Vishnu looked amorously sideways to Devi Lakshmi and there got manifested Manmatha with arrows of flowers and a sugarcane bow. Brahma blessed Manmatha to become an Embodiment of Love on the Universe. Indra and Devas got the hint and requested Manmatha to utilise all their skills to kindle attraction of Maha Deva in favour of Devi Parvati who was already serving Shiva in Tapasya by arranging the wherewith all like fruits, flowers and other material utilised in Shiva's puja in progress. Manmatha agreed and released an arrow of flowers. For a split second, Maha Deva opened his eyes and saw Parvati with a momentary flutter of thought of liking for her, but soon got over that feeling and discovered as to who was behind this disturbance as Manmatha was lurking behind the trees! A furious Maha Deva opened his third eye and converted Manmatha as a heap of ash!

Ganesha was playful and materialised a Purusha from that heap. Ganesha was delighted at his Creation and embraced the Purusha. He advised him to worship Maha Deva so that he could grant Siddhis to him; Ganesha gave the instruction of 'Shata Rudreeya' and the Purusha recited hundred times and sought Shiva's boons; the boon was that half of his enemy's Shakti should be dissipated while he faced them and that the Astra-Shastras of the enemy should become futile; the boon further assured that he should enjoy his privileges for sixty thousand years! As Brahma learnt of the purport of the boon he stated out of desperation : Bhand! Bhand! why was this boon was granted! Eversince the Purusha came to be called as Bhandasura. Bhandasura became a terror to the Universe and Asura Guru Shukra gradually honed his battle skills. He called up Mayasura and made him construct another Amaravati and declared himself as Indra. He acquired a Kireeta which was gifted to Hiranyakashipu by Brahma. Shukra gave him an Umbrella given to him by Brahma and he was never bothered him by disease or fatigue. Thus Bhandasura became an Apara Indra with all the fanfare of Indraloka. Bhandasura had eight warrior sons and four daughters. Eventually, Indra and Devas became subservient to Bhandasura. Being a staunch devotee of Maha Deva, his progeny too adopted the father's qualities; his sons were Indra Shatru, Amitraghna, Vidyunmaali, Vibhishana, Ugrakarma, Ugradhanvu, Vijaya and Shritiparaga. There were regular Yagna Karyas and the Havya bhoktas were Bhandasura and his followers! Vedaadhyayana was common in the houses of common Asuras of Bhandasura's households.

Bhanda's grandeur was ever growing for sixty thousand years but gradually, the splendour slackened and his virtuosity too commenced to wane. That was the time that Vishnu was waiting for as Indra was almost on a breaking point; a **Loka Mohini Maya** was created with the mission of enticing Bhandasura and also despatched a few Apsaras led by Vishvachi to attract Bhanda's key persons in the Court and the Sacred deeds like Yagnas were affected; Vedas were forgotten and Shiva's worship took a backseat. Guru Shukracharya's cautions were ignored and thrown to winds. Sage Narada then took up the mission of reviving the self-confidence of Devas who were dormant in their spirits and self-assurance so far; he prompted Devas to virtually wake up and worship Parashakti. Infused by Narada's sermons, Devas were activated and got refreshed with enthusiasm and reinforcement of devotion to Devi Parvati. While Bhanda's advisers, army and Praja were gradually sinking in moral turpitude, Devas came to enjoy confidence and morale boost-up. Guru Shukracharya warned Bhanda and his men that Vishnu did lasting and irrevocable damage by spreading Maya and inciting them into fast slippages of their erstwhile demeanor of excellence. On realising their mistakes, Bhanda made last-dig amends by reviving Shiva Puja, Homas and Vedadhyanas, but alas his efforts lost the punch and determination.

Lalitodbhavana, Stuti by Devas and Wedding with Shiva : Devas were engaged in collective and continuous efforts of Yagnas and homas. On one glorious day, Indra and Devas witnessed a huge illumination from the 'Mahaagni Kunda' within a circular shaped radiance a profile of a Devi fully ornamented and bright silk dressed with four hands with a Paasha, Ankusha, a Sugarcane bow and five arrows with a smile beaming on her face appeared. Devas were in bliss to witness that Supreme Vision and commended her. As Lalita Devi gave her appearance, Brahma arrived along with Maharshis and so did Vishnu by his Garuda Vahana. Shiva also arrived by his Vrisha Vahana. Narada and Devarshis, Gandharvas, Apsaras too reached there and Vishwakarma was asked to build a suitable Nagari to accommodate several visiting dignitaries including the Mantraadhi Devata Devi Durga, Vidyadhi Devata Shyama and Ambika. **Sapta Matru Devatas** viz. Braahmi, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Vaaraahi, Indraani, and Chamunda came as also **Ashta Siddhi** Devatas viz. Anima, Mahima, Garima, Laghima, Praapti, Praakaamyaa, Ishitwa and Vasitwa. Crores of Yoginis made a bee-line too. Bhairavas, Kshetra palakas, Maha Saasta, Ganeswara, Skanda, Veerabhadra were there to readily serve Devi. Brahma then proposed to Hari that this was the opportune time to perform the Sacred Wedding of Devi Lalita and Maha Deva. With mutual consent, the wedding was celebrated under the auspices of Vishnu the brother of Lalita Devi. The latter gifted to her an arrow of never fading fragrant flowers; Varuna Deva gave a Naaga Paasha, Vishwakarma gave an 'Ankusha'; Agni gave a 'Kireeta'; Chandra Suryas gave her sparkling ear-studs; Ratnaakara Samudra gifted a variety of Ornaments; Devendra gave an 'Akshya Madhu Patra' or a Vessel containing everslasting 'Madhu'; Kubera rewarded a Priceless Chintamani necklace; Ganga and Yamunas gave Vinjaamaras or hand fans; Indra and Devatas, Dikpalakas, Marud Ganas, Sadhyas, Gandharvas, Pramathaganas were delighted to hand over their respective weapons to Lalitha Devi. Then Maheswara and Maheswaris were given a 'Vedokta Mantraabhisheka'. As both of them were seated on a Golden Throne, Brahma named Lalita Devi as Kameshwari or Kamakshi. As the whole Universe was thus replete with joy, excitement and anticipation the Bhandasura would soon be eliminated, Sage Narada prostrated and made a formal request to launch the Vijaya Sena Yatra or the Victory March to kill Bhandasura.

Lalitha Devi's Vijaya Yatra and Bhandasura Vadha: The Victory March commenced with sky-reaching reverberations of 'Vaadyas' or sound instruments of Mridangas, Murajas, Patahas, Jhallaris, Hundukas, Gomukhas, Barbaras, Hunkaaras and so on. From Lalita's Ankusha emerged **Sampatkari Devi** who alighted an Elephant called 'Rana Kolahala' who in turn materialised countless elephants. From Lalita Devi's Pashaayudha were materialised innumerable horses of varied descriptions like Vanayjas, Kambhojaas, Sindhujas, Tankanas, Parvateeyas, Paaraseekas, Kaala vandijas, Yavanobhutas and Gandharvas. Armed by her

various hands, Lalita sat on a horse back even when **Dandanatha** or Senapati named Shrinatha led her army while the former in turn created several **Chandi Shaktis** seated on Mahishas / buffaloes or Lions; in fact, the **Stree Shaktis** created for the occasion were twelve in number viz. Panchami, Dandanaatha, Sanketa, Samayeswari, Samaya Sanketa, Vaaraahi, Potrini, Vaartaali, Maha Sena, Agjna, Chakrewsari, and Arighna. Besides, there were sixteen **Mantra Nayikas** named Sangeeta Yogini, Shyama, Shyamala, Mantranayika, Mantrini, Sachiveshi, Pradhaanesi, Shukapriya, Veenavati, Vainiki, Mudrini, Priyakapriya, Neepapriya, Kadambesi, Kadambavanavaasini and Sadaamada. Meanwhile, a Figure representing Dhanur Veda with four hands, three heads and three eyes gifted a Dhanush (Bow) and two containers full of Arrows to Jagadamba saying these would be useful to fight Bhandasura. Hahagriva then described Parameswari with the following Pancha Vimshati Naamaas viz. Shri Lalitha, Maha Raagni, Paraamkusha, Chaapini, Tripura, Maha Tripura Sundari, Sundari, Chakranatha, Saamraajni, Chakrini, Chakreswari, Maha Devi; Kameshi, Parameshwari, Kamaraga Priya, Kaama koti, Chakravarti, Maha Vidya, Shiva, Ananga Vallabha, Sarva Paaatala; Kulanatha, Amnaaya naatha, Sarvaamnaya Natha, Sarvamnayna Nivasini and Shringrara Nayika; reciting these names of Lalita Parameshwari would bestow name and prosperity.

Tri Ratha Varnana: Ahead of Laliteswari's chariot called Kiri Chakra Ratha, were the Geya Chakra Ratha and Geeti Chakra Ratha. The Nine-Storeyed front-running Chariot that moved towards Bhandasura had huge contingents of Shaktis and these were Ashta Siddhis and Matrikas afore-detailed and **Prakata Shaktis** viz. Sarva Sankshobhini, Sarva Vidraavini, Sarvaakarshanakrunmudra, Sarva Vashankari, Sarovanmadana Mudra, Yashti, Sarva Mahaankusha, Sarva khastra charikaa Mudra, Sarva Beejaa, Sarva Yoni, and Sarvatrikhandika. Also there were sixteen **Chandra Kalaa Shaktis** named Kaamaakarshi Kalaa, Budhyaakarshini Kalaa, Ahankaaraakarshini Kalaa, Sabdaakarshini Kalaa; Gandhaakarshini Kalaa, Chittaakarshini Kalaa, Dhairyaaakarshini Kalaa, Smrityaarshanika Kalaa, Naamaakashinikaa Kalaa, Beejaakarshinikaa Kalaa, Atmaakarshinikaa Kalaa, Amritaakarshinikaa Kalaa and Shareeraakarshinika Kalaa. On the eighth Storey of the Chariot, are four armed and three eyed of the radiance of Surya Chandra and are charged with high emotions to kill Bhandasura. On the seventh Storey were Stree Shaktis like Ananga Madana, Ananga Madanaaturaa, Anangalebhaa, Ananga Vegaa, Anangaankusa, and Anangaalingapara all of whom were anxiously waiting to terminate Bhandasura. On the sixth storey of the Chakra raja Ratha are like Kaalaagni and they possessed Agni Baana, Agni Dhanu, Agni Khadga who were all materialised from the Kaamaagni Shaktis and their names were Sarva Sankshobhini, Sava Vidraarini, Sarva -akarshana, Sarvaahlaadani, Sarva sammohihi, Sarvastambhana, Sarvjumbhana, Sarvonmaadana and Sarva Dwandwaksha -yankari. On the fifth Storey were 'Kulotteernas' who had crooked eye-brows and carriers of Parashu, Paasha, Gada, Ghanta, and Manis. These Stree Shaktis were Sarva Siddhiprada, Sarva Sampadprada, Sarva Priyankara, Sarvanga Sundari, and Sarva Soubhyagyadayani; these were basically the boon-bestowing and merciful Devas. The fourth Storey Devas were ten in number viz. Sarvajna, Sarva Shakti, Sarvaish -warya prada, Sarva Sarva Jnaanamayi, Sarva Vyadhi Nivaasini, Sarvaadhaara Swarupa, Sarvaahapara, Sarvanandamayi, Sarva Rakshaa Swarupini and Sarvepsita phala prayayini. The third Storey Shaktis Vaagadheeswaris, and Veenaa-Pustaka Dharinis called Vashini, Kaameshini, Bhogini, Vimala, Aruna, Javini, Sarveshi, and Kaalini; these were all Rakshasa Samhara kaarinis. The Shaktis in the second Storey of the Chariot are as powerful as Lalita herself and were very close to her and were equally armed like Lalita herself and they were always ready to help, protect and be of forgiving nature! These magnanimous Shaktis were called Kameshi, Bhaga, Nityaklinna, Bherunda, Vahnivaasini, Maha Vajreswari, Dati Twarita, Kula

Sundari, Nityaa, Nilapaakaa, Vijaya, Sarva Mangala, Jwaalaamaalini and Chitra. Such was the magnificent presence of Maha Shaktis accommodated in the Chariot . Similarly Shaktis in the Geya Chakra Ratha Prathama Madhya or the central portion of the first Storey was Sangeeta Yogini who was very intimate to Sri Devi and was the Residence of Mantrinis. Other storeys of the Ratha too were similarly brilliant with other Shaktis. The front chariot was of ten yojana's height; the accompanying Geeti Chakra Ratha had a height of seven yojanas and that of Kiri Chakra Ratha was of six yojanas in which Laliteswari was sitting brilliantly.

Preamble to Dev's battle with Bhandasura: As the Three Chariots were on the move, Rakshasas were mortally frightened and there were deadly omens to them while Devi's entourage were in top spirits anticipating emphatic Victory. The fool hardy Bhandasura was bragging away as in a dream world that a woman called Lalitha was coming to fight who nodoubt was stated to be beautiful and graceful and that instead of encountering in a battle he would like to invite her to a private encounter!! Ha ha! Bhandasura's younger brothers **Vishukra and Vishanga** were the World's most dreaded and terrifying warriors and the erstwhile devotees of Maha Deva who only knew how to subdue and conquer and were unaware of fear or surrender. As Bhandasura was in the fancy and romantic world, the brothers tightened the screws and bolts of the chariots and charioteers. The Great Rakshasa warriors who frightened Devas and kept on them leash as they would to slaves were so strong that each of them were able to make a multitude of Devas demoralised for a very very long sixty thousand years of Bhandasura's unchallenged sovereignty aided by thousands of Akshouhinis of unique strength and of Mastery of Crookedness and Maya! Such powerful Rakshasas uprooted Indra, created a fresh Swarga with modern facilities, controlled Lokapalaks, Panchabhutas, Tri Murtis, and finally approached a Woman to lead! The Rakshasa warriors included Kutilaksha, Durmada Kuranda, Karanka, Kaalavaasita, Vajradanta, Vajramukha, Vajraloma, Vikata, Vikataasana, Karaalaksha, Karkataka, Dirgha Jihva, Humbaka, Karkasha, Pulkasa, Pundraketu, Jumbhakaaksha, Tikshna shringa, Yamantaka, Atimaya, Ulukajit, Kujvilaashwya, Attahasa, Mushaka, and Kumbhotkacha.

Bhandasura's Associates exterminated: Lalitha Devi sounded her 'Pataka Dhvani' or the Sound of The Fluttering Flag as a mark of attack and Bhandasura responded with his 'dandibhis' or war drums which deafened the Three Worlds. As a trial exercise, **Kutilaksha** commenced the Operation with ten lakh Akshouhinis and Sampadkari Devi attacked Durmada and in the first round there were casualties with an edge to Durmada. Sampadkari showed her red eyes and in no time the Shree Shaktis extinguished the well trained opposition and even before the re-fill arrived **Durmada** was killed. Kutilaksha shouted on Sampadkari and said that there was no great reason to celebrate the initial sacrifice which normally assessed the depth of the opposition; so saying, Kutilaksha attacked by a horseback appearing once in the Rakshasa camp and suddenly opposite the Devi's camp; while on one side, Kutilaksha and Samvasraswati were grappled with each other, **Kuranda** faced Sampadkari. The latter put up such an encounter that the rapidity of each other's arrows covered up Surya and the clash of their Astras provided illumination to periodically dispel darkness! Finally, Kuranda fell and Bhandasura realised the Shaktis meant business! **Karanka** and five Daitya Senapatis were then despatched who created a 'Rana Maya' called Sarpini which created poisonous flames and showered serpents but Nakuleshwari Shakti utilised Garudaastra and also showered Mongooses. As Karanka and five other Senapatis were destroyed, Bhandasura and Kutilaksha instructed Seven more Senapatis to face the attack from the side of Devi; these Senapatis were all born to Rakshasi Keekasa (born of Bones) and were named **Baalaka**, Soochi Mukha, Phalamukha, Vikarna, Vikataana, Karaalaayu

and Karataka. The Sapta Senapatis were asked to proceed with three hundred Akshouhinis of army to attack Lalita Devi directly. But the invincible Shaktis displayed their penchant for blood-drinking and apart from the Sapta Senapatis the massive army was destroyed. **Vishanga** the brother of Bhandasura entered the battle and surreptitiously went under Lalitha Devi's chariot and managed to hit his arrow on her hand fan. Kameswari and Tithi Nityaa Shaktis were highly infuriated and Kameswari told in a rather apologetic tone to Devi that since her chariot was fully secured by Maha Mantra Shaktis, the Rakshasaas were trying to use their Maya in the night to make an entry from the rear side under the chariot's wheel and now the Shaktis viz. Vanivaasini, Jwaalaamaalini would then display their power. Then the Nitya Shaktis aimed their arrows and killed countless Daityas ; Kameswari killed Damana, Bhagamala shot straight into the Senanayaka Dirghajihva, Nityaklinna annihilated Humbeka, Bherunda Shakti thrashed Hulmallaka, Vahni vaasaa Shakti crushed Kaklusa, Maha Vajreswari Shakti destroyed Kesivahana, Shivaduti Shakti sent Plukasa to Yamapuri, Twarita cut Pundraketa into pieces; Kulasundari smashed Chandabahu, and so on. The villain who started the Adharma Yuddha viz. Vishanga tried to escape but Kameswari Devi caught him by his neck and tore off his Kavacha with her sharp nails and in the process he escaped narrowly but Kameswari let him off as a retreating timid was not fair to run after and what was more the night was just entering the early morning hours. There were floods of blood and unbearable smell of putrid dead bodies all over. Devi Lalita instructed Jwaalamaalini to encircle the entire area with flames to make the army of Bhandasura and also clean up the mess of dead bodies of his army. Her chariots were lifted up the Mahendra Mountain while Dandini Shakti remained on the left of Kiri Chakra Ratha, Shyamala Devi was in the southern side, in the North was Sampadeswari and in the front Hayasana was present. As **Bhandasura's sons** were asked to attack and display their prowess, Bala Shakti of nine years of age requested Devi to please let her play with the sons of Bhandasura along with a fresh battalion of two hundred akshouhinis and Lalita smiled and consented. Bala Shakti uprooted the progeny of Bhandasura and wiped out the army despatched afresh. At this juncture Bhandasura was not only agitated but demoralised. **Vishukra** then set up a Maha Yantra and made a desperate bid when Ganesha saluted Lalita and took her permission to face the Maha Jaya Yantra as conceived by Vishukra. **Gajasura** arrived to operate the Most Potent Yantra. MahaVighna Nayaka took the forms of Six Vighna Nayakaas viz. Aamoda, Pramoda, Sumukha, Durmukha, Arighna and Vighna karta and each of these were the Chiefs of crores of 'Herambas'; these six forms of Ganesha and the crores of Herambas moved ahead of him and their mere 'Hunkaaraas' wiped out akshouhinis of Daityas, while the power of their trunks destroyed the remnants. Ganesha himself attacked Gajasura and killed him even as Vishukra who invented the so called Jaya Yantra was destroyed into smithereens. An undaunted Bhandasura was no doubt frustrated and humiliated but the show had to go on and hence sent his brothers **Vishukra Vishangas**. Vishukra was so notorious that Trilokas were shivering at one stage and he was the Yuvaraja / successor of Bhandasura. Both the brothers planned to attack Devi together instead of dividing themselves in two directions. Lalita Devi consented that Mantrini Dandini might take the onslaught of the brothers. Mantrini was for all practical purposes the Maha Raajni Lalita herself! All the associated Shaktis of Mantrini were in such inspired disposition as their morale was sky-high; some alighted horses, some were in chariots and others mounted elephants. Shyama Shakti provoked Vishukra; Nakuli Devi fought with Vishu, Maha Maya Kunti with Peshu, Bhauravi with Madada, Laghu Shyama with Kushura, Swapnesi with Mangala, and so on. Vishukra released Trishastra which made all the Shaktis highly thirsty and the army of Lalita had tough time to cope up the situation. Dandini prayed to Sura Samudra and the intoxicated Shaktis were joyfully killing the Daityas with redoubled excitement. The Trishastra instead of creating thirst of water thus ended up in the thirst of Madhu and the Devi Sena had a glorious time in killing

the Daityas with redoubled vigour and adventurism! Danda Nayika encountered both the brothers together and hit Vishanga with a 'hala' (plough) and Vishukra with 'Musala' (mace).

Bhandasura exterminated: With the death of his dear brothers, sons and Senapatis and army of several akshouhinis, Bhandasura was crestfallen and depressed; yet, he proceeded with Kutilaaksha and thirty five Senanayakas and two hundred and eighty five Akshouhinis of army; excepting one woman in Shunyaka Nagari, his Head Quarters, the entire population went fight in the final battle. He alighted his huge chariot drawn by lions; countless of his army members had little space to travel by Bhumi and had to fly on the sky. Soon on spotting Devi Lalita, he despatched the Astra of 'Andhataamishra' and she retaliated it with 'Vishwaavasastra' / 'Suryaasra' and blunted his arrogance. He threw 'Antakaasra' and Devi replied it with the Astra of Maha Mrityunjaya. He used 'Sarvasra Smriti' and she destroyed it with Dharana / Medhasra. Bhandasura utilised Bhayaasra to frighten Shaktis but Amba used 'Aindraastava' to relieve fears. The Asura used Maha Rogasra and she sent back 'Naama Trayaasra' which released the resounding voices of 'Achyuta-Ananda-Govinda' along with 'humkaara' sounds. Bhandasura threw at her the 'Ayushnaasha' or Life Destroying Arrow, and Devi replied that Astra with 'Kala Sankarshini' or Life Extending Astra. The desperate Bhandasura then forwarded **Maha-Asura-Astra** which was the super-combination of the energies of several notorious Asuras like Madhu-Kaitabha, Mahishaasura, Dhumralochana, Chanda-Mundeswara, Chikshibhu, Chamara, Rakta beeja, Shumbha-Nishumbha, Kalakeya, Dhumra and so on. There were 'Hahaakaaras' from the Devi Sena and the combined strength of various Asuras was too overwhelming. Devi then laughed boisterously and materialised Durga who was the Composite Form of all Devaas; Maha Deva provided to her a mighty 'Shula', Vishnu his Sudarshana Chakra, Varuna his conchshell, Agni his heat and radiance, Vayu a bow and arrows, Indra his Vajraayudha, Kubera his chashaka or drinking vessel, Yama his Kala Danda, Maha Danda, and Paasha; Brahma his Kamandalu or vessel, Iravata his bell, Mritya Devata her Khadga and metal resistor, Samudra his 'haara' or necklace, and Vishwakarma gifted ornaments.

Then Devi Lalita assumed various forms: as **Durga** she was in full form of unusual splendour; as **Narayani** she alighted a Simha Vahana and fought; and she destroyed Mahashasura as **Chandika** as described in 'Durga Saptashati'. Bhandasura released 'Mookaasra' and Devi in turn created the Astra of 'Vakvaadini'. He used Vedaapaharana Astra and she met it with her right hand thumb! Bhandasura's 'Arnavaasra' created huge flows of gushing water which was arrested by an **Adi Kurma** of yojana's height and width as created by Devi's right hand's pointing finger. Bhandasura sent an Astra called Hairanyaaksha which created thousands of 'Hiranyakshas' and Devi created **Maha Varaaha** from her right hand middle finger who destroyed them all. An infuriated Bhandasura produced crores of Hiranyakashipus but an unperturbed Devi frowned from where emerged Prahladaas and **Nrisimha Rupas** from her right ring finger who were like Pralaya Rudras laying the Hiranya kashipus on the Deva's lap and pulled out his intestines and blood. Similarly Devi Lalita created **Vamana Devas** from her right hand little finger to control Balendras; **Parashu Ramas** to kill Kartaveerarya- arjunas from her left hand thumb; **Shri Rama** to destroy the ten headed Ravana and Kumbhakarna and **Lakshmana** to kill Indrajit and from Devi's left pointing finger; **Balarama** from materialised from Devi's left middle finger to kill Asuras; **Vaasudeva** was created by the left hand ring finger of Lalita Devi and he terminated countless Rajaasuras and other Rakashasaas like Kamsa, Sishupaala, Dantavakra, Poundraka, Shambara, Pralamba, Narakasura, Banaasura and so on and thereby reduced the weight of Evil on Bhumi and from her left hand little finger created Kali Deva who ended up Huna-Yavana- Kirataka and others. As all the Evil Forces were uptooted by Durga Devi thus,

Devi Lalitamba liquidated Bhandasura's Senapatis with Narayanastra and finally only Bhandasura was left out. She then released 'Maha Kameshwarastra' which had the extraordinary radiance and energy of thousand Suryas and ultimately the greatest menace in Tri Lokaas was demolished; the Sunyaka Nagari was burnt off with the flames of the Kameswarastra and thus the Dwiteeya Swarga which Bhandasura created sixty thousand years ago was turned into heaps of ashes; and so did Bhandasura whom Ganesha materialised from the ashes of Manmatha as a play! With the termination of Maha Bhandasura, Devas celebrated with resonant sounds of Celestial Drums and showers of flowers from Swarga and they were re-installed in their original positions. Whosoever reads or hears the Legend of Lalita Devi's victory over Bhandasura would become fearless; they would attain Siddhis, Bhakti, Shakti, Arogya, Keerti, Aishwarya and Mukti ! At the huge relief that Tri Lokas came to experience, Brahma-Vishnu-Rudras-Indra and Devas-Adityas-Vasus-Maruds- Sadhya Devatas-Siddha-Kimpurusha-Yaksha-Nishaachara-Daityas felt so gladdened in their hearts and Maha Devi Lalita sat on a Golden Throne looking relaxed and satisfied; there was a fresh wave of hope, virtue, courage, confidence and happiness began again to all the Beings with relief and fulfillment. Brahma and others made a spontaneous Commendation at the Victory of Maha Raajni Lalita Devi.

Victory Commendation and revival of Manmatha: Brahma then introduced Rati Devi the widow of **Manmatha** and requested her to terminate her widow-hood and Lalita Devi readily agreed to do so and asked her to be bathed and dressed up as a 'Sumangali' with chandana-kumkuma, flowers and ornaments. Manmatha got revived. Devi bestowed boons to him saying that from the hair roots of his body he would materialise crores of Manmathas for ever and that he would ensure all the married couple to get marital satisfaction for ever; those who blame him would fail in their marriage unions and males turn out to be impotent and females turn out as frigid and barren. The Nava Manmatha was further blessed by Devi that Maha Deva would renounce Vairagya and would be so fond of Parvati that he did not leave her thus acquiring the epithet of 'Arthanaareswara' Manmatha's Senani was Chandra, and Peetha mardakas were 'Raaga' or sweet musical notes, Mandanalaya or provocative winds and the sweet cooing of Kokila or Koel.

Maha Devi destroys Mahishasura and his clan

The most ferocious and brutal Demon of the times, Mahishasura, harassed and subdued King Indra and all the Devas including Surya, Agni, Pavan, Yama, Varuna etc. and occupied the Throne of the Swarga. Mahishasura's cruel acts created havoc among the helpless Munis and human beings and there was no end to the persecution that they were subjected to. The Trimurthis-Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara- got so angry that they their eyebrows released massive Fires of Fury which got combined as a huge 'Agni Parvat' (Fire Mountain), into which the individual Energies of all the Devas headed by Indra got merged too. The Form of Maha Devi so materialised created a luminous face with combined Shaktis in a formidial feminine form: while Yama's powers created her hair, Vishnu's power provided both her arms, Chandra's radiance gave sparkling jewels, Indra contributed the belly, Varuna's powers created thighs, Prithvi the rear, Brahma contributed the feet, Surya provided the fingers of the feet; Vasuganas contributed hand fingers; Kubera's 'Tejas' created the nose, Prajapati's energy provided the teeth, Pavaka created all her three eyes, both the 'Sandhyas' gave away 'bhrukutis' (mid-portion of eye brows) and Vayu supplied the Devi's ears. Maha Deva then contributed his Shula from his own, Narayana gave away a Chakra born out of his Chakra, Varuna gave a Shankha, Hutashana / Agni his Shakti, Vayu the Dhanus with powerful arrows, Indra gave his Vajra and a bell from Iravata, Yama gave his 'Kaladanda', Varuna a 'Pasha',

Daksha Prajapati his Akshaya Maala (Rosary), Brahma his Kamanadolu (water vessel), Surya supplied his rays into Maha Devi's skin pores; Kaal gave away his 'Khadga' (sword); Samudra Deva contributed pure pearls, shining clothes, valuable chudamani, precious ear-rings, and bangles; Moon gave away 'Bhuja Kirtis' (Shoulder-Ornaments), neck laces, and finger rings; Vishwakarma donated 'Astras', 'Kavacha' (Body Secure); Himalaya provided the carrier Simha (Lion); and like wise all the various Devas gifted various items of their valuable possessions. When suddenly, there was a bewildering roar of a Lion's resound, the 'Trilokas' shuddered and felt that it was the end of the Universe! Mahishasura and his followers got startled with unprecedented shivers and took time to realise that indeed that was not the end of the Universe, but the beginning of the historic battle. Maha Devi's radiance got spread all over the directions when her thousand arms came into flashes of mercurial actions. The Senapati of Mahishasura's army named *Chakshusa* began a fierce fight and an additional 'Chaturangani Sena' (Four-winged army force comprising soldiers, horses, elephants and chariots) of an Asura named *Chamara* joined the stream while another sixty thousand chariots and following army led by *Udagra* too joined the Force. A further Force of one crore chariots reinforced the existing army of Mahishasura, which was led by Maha Hanu. Another Asura called *Asiloma* led a five crore ratha sena, and yet another Rakshasa named *Bakshal* brought in sixty thousand chariots further reinforcements, thus making a highly formidable force; further forces joined the fray from other directions. On the other hand, Maha Devi's 'niswas' and 'ucchvas' (exhaling and inhaling of breathing) created crores of her army and killed crores of enemy forces too. The hell-like of Mahishasura army was destroyed like flies in huge flames. In this melee, Chakshura's charioteer died, his chariot was destroyed and as he tried to leap over Maha Devi, her Lion tore his body into pieces; Chamara became offensive as Chakshura died and sped up his elephant towards Devi along with his 'Mayavi' Shakties; Devi's lion leapt in the air sky-high and with one pounce squeezed his elephant to death and Chamara's body was hit with such a smash that there were no traces of his body parts. In the battle that ensued, Udagra was hit by Devi's forceful throws of stones and boulders, while *Uddhatasura* was crushed by Devi's mace hits. Next, the demon *Bashkal* was destroyed by her Bhindipala and *Tamra and Andhak* were shot by her arrows. By the blaze of her Three Eyes, Maha Devi burnt off three demons called *Ugraveerya, Ugrastha and Maha Hanu*. She cut into pieces the head of Bidaladura by the might of her sword. *Durdar and Durmukh* tried to send mantik arrows at her but the return arrows sent them away to Yamaloka. Devi Kaalarathri used Kaladanda and Kalasura was put to instant death. She sported her Khadga with a light touch and *Ugradarshan* flew away to a far off place never to return. *Asiloma* who led a five crore army of Charioteers fell like a sick bird on the battle ground with the fire that emerged from Devi's angry eyebrows! The Devi Ganas and the Great Lion who went berserk as Mahishasura's army made a depleted and demoralised retreat to save them.

Now, **Mahishasura** led a fresh reserve of army, assuming his original form of a Mahisha or a buffalo, made several offensive gestures by way of forcefully pulling up his powerful horns high, by taking speedy circlings, by throwing up his mighty tail and by thumping his hooves making sounds like earth-quakes. The Asura jumped forward towards the Lion who created havoc and killed many of his warriors, whereby Maha Devi became livid with rage but Mahisha too got enraged and dug deep into the Earth and threw mountains by braying with frightful reverberation. The Asura's breathing was so heavy that mountains shivered and sand storms got into motion with high velocity. **Chandi Devi** desired to kill Mahishasura in one go, but Maha Devi restrained Chandi and threw a powerful rope around the buffalo neck; She then assumed the form of a roaring lion, then as a huge elephant, and like a mammoth 'Veera Purusha'. Meanwhile Chandika Devi consumed a huge cup of wine, got drunk with a resounding laugh with blood red eyes and said like a drunkard; 'Oh miserable Stupid! Keep on with your roar as long as my wine is swallowed; your last moments have now started ticking

and you should soon leave this World as your ignominious life would get terminated.’ By so saying, Chandi jumped up and strangled Mahishasura’s mighty neck and sliced it open; soon Rishi ganas performed ‘Veda Parayana’, Gandharvas sang sonorous hymns of praise for Devi Chandi who was but a shadow of Maha Devi, Apsaras danced to their glory and Devas headed by Indra went into deep raptures in great jubilation with unreserved gratitude to Parama Maha Devi. In one high voice, all the Devas glorified Maha Devi as follows: ‘We greet with reverence that Ambika Devi, whose capability is spread all over the moving and non-moving objects of the universe, whose Supreme Energy enables all the Deva Murthis to be on their own; whose Origin or Qualities defy description by Brahma, Vishnu or Mahendra, let alone illustrious Maharshis; and whose unparalleled kindness and consideration is ever-fulfilling and never failing to humanity. We salute Devi Chandika who would ever neglect nor ignore those who have unqualified faith and commitment in that Punya Swarupa or the Embodiment of Propitiousness and also never spare those who persist in evil deeds and never have the psyche of remorse nor any sense of guilt. Highly pleased by the above commendations of Devatas, Maha Devi gave an opportunity to them to ask for boons and they said politely that after the killing of Mahishasura, they had no further requests to make, excepting that She should kindly respond as and when exigencies might arise in future and She said: ‘Thadhaastu’! (Be it so!)

Shumbha and Nishumbha executed by Maha Devi

The immortal Story of the killing of Shumbha Nishumbha Demon brothers as was told by Mahatma Markandeya. The most infamous Danava brothers, from the notorious lineage of the Hiranyakasipu, attacked Indra the King of Devas; diverted the ‘havis’ or the uncooked offerings to Agni at Yagnas meant for Devas to themselves; performed the tasks of Surya, Chandra, Kubera, Varuna, Vayu and other Devatas and turned all the Devas from Swarga, who became wanderers and as refugees in forests. They remembered the assurance given by Devi Vishnu Maya, when they celebrated Her victory at the devastation of Mahishasura and his followers; at that time She said: ‘As and when You remember me when faced with a hardship, I will demolish your difficulties at once!’

As Devas extolled Maha Devi, Devi Parvati was bathing in the pure water of Ganga and realizing that Devas were dislodged from the Swaraloka, appeared before them as Ambika whose popular name was Kaushiki or Kalika of dark skin but of unprecedented charm and beauty. Devas realised that Devi Kaushiki decided to reside at the top of Himalayas. Two Danavas named **Chanda and Munda**, the followers of their Masters **Shumbha and Nishumbha** of the lineage of Hiranyakasipu, happened to vision Kaushiki Devi on the Himalayas and were completely taken aback at her extraordinary magnificence. They hurried up to their Masters and conveyed to them of their greatest discovery of Devi Kausiki. They said that their Masters had no doubt achieved the most precious possessions of the Universe like the Iravata Elephant, Ucchaiswa Horse, Parijata Tree, Hamsa (Swan) Viman, Maha Padma Nidhi of Kubera, Kinjilini called Kamal from Samudra Deva, Kanchanashraavi named Umbrella from Varuna Deva, the most valuable Ratha or Chariot from the Foremost Prajapati, Maranaprada Shakti of Lord Yama, the most potent ‘Pasha’ of Varuna Deva, all the richest ‘Ratnas’ or jewels of Samudra Deva and the ‘Uttariya and Vastra’ (clothes) sanctified by ‘Vahni’ (Flames) of Agni Deva; But without possessing the Rarest ‘Stree Rathna’ or the Most Invaluable Jewel of a Woman was visioned by Chanda and Munda would pale into insignificance before that prized possession! When Chanda and Munda described so much about the ‘Stree Ratna’, Shumbha and Nishumbha sent an able emissary called Sugreeva to Devi Kausiki to convince her about their unique qualities of proven bravery and

capability. Devi replied: What ever had been said was indeed correct, since the two great brothers were the mightiest warriors in the Trilokas, but she had a 'Pratigna' or Vow viz.: Whosoever could win me over in a battle, crush my pride and equalise my Shakti would be my Master; now, let either Shumbh or Nishumbh try their luck and take on me in the duel and why delay further? As the emissary told Devi in great anger that let alone Shumbha or Nishumbha but even he could take her by hair and present her before his Masters, as Devi replied coolly that it was not proper to harm an emissary and as such he would better convey what she had said to his Masters.

Enraged by this arrogance of Devi, Shumbh instructed **Dhumralochan** to bring her by hook or crook. The latter ran up to Devi Ambika with a view to humble her, but by her mere 'Hunkaar' sound, the Demon got turned into ash; his huge army of soldiers came to action as they shot arrows, a variety of objects like Shulas and Shaktis and despatched horses, elephants and chariots. The Carrier of Ambika, named Kesari (Lion) got provoked with anger and with an earth-shaking roar, jumped out in lakhs of Forms and tore the bodies of soldiers apart into pieces. Shumbha went into white rage with biting lips as Dhumralochana was turned into ash and his large army of front ranking soldiers was destroyed; he ordered Chanda and Munda to march a huge army and drag 'that woman' tied up by her long hairs and present her before him. When Chanda Mundas led an ocean-like 'Chaturanga Bala' or the Four Divisioned army comprising Charioteers, Elephants, Horses and Foot Soldiers adept in offensive warfare with high skills of military power, they all witnessed a grand and lonely female figure sporting a mischievous smile on the mountain top. From the smile of Devi's face, there was a sudden transformation of her skin to black, her eyes became red, her teeth got protrusive and her tongue was elongated. This appalling figure of Devi jumped from the mountain top along with the roaring Lion, creating lakhs of such figures all over, and playing one elephant against another, one horse against another and one chariot against another, breaking heads, and turning the battle field into streams of blood and disfigured bodies without heads of many, limbs of several and carcasses of lakhs of dead animals. As the ocean-like army of committed soldiers was massacred, both Mundasura and Chandasura rushed towards Ambika Devi, one raining away strings of 'Astras' and another flinging sharp weapons at mighty speed simultaneously, She threw around illusionary meshes which placed both of them into straight-jackets and with powerful blows smashed their heads; the ferocious Devi took the broken heads of the Asura brothers into her hands and laughed so violently that thundered the Earth and Sky, thus attaining the memorable epithet of **Chamundi**.

The desperate Shumbha and Nikumbha ordered that the entire reserve army be marched with **Udhayudh** leading eighty six core Group of Commanders, **Kambu Daitya** with eighty four, **Kotiveerya** with fifty, **Dhumravamsajat** with hundred Group Commanders, each of them being equal to the combined efforts of Devas who ran away once before as they could hardly defend Indra's Chair. Noticing the desperate effort of the Danava brothers, Parama Devas including Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, Kartikeya and Indra collected their respective Shaktis; Brahma flew by his Hamsa Vahana (Swan) along with his Brahmani Shakti, Vishnu by Garuda as also Varaha Shakti, Narasimha Shakti etc. Devi Chandika asked Shiva to warn the Shumbha and Nishumbha brothers to end up the war even at this stage and make a retreat to Patala and leaving Swarga. But the highly arrogant brothers heckled at Maheswara and there was no way but to return to the battle field. Brahma utilised Brahmani Shakti to pour forceful waterfalls from his Kamanadalu; Maheswari Shakti through Tri-Shulas, Vaishnavi Shakti through innumerable 'Chakras', Kaumari Shakti through Shulas, Indra by Vajra, Varahi Shakti by Damshras, Naarasimha Shakti by the help of sharp nails etc. The highly notorious core Group commanders were thus destroyed without trace.

Raktabija, the sister's son of Shubha and Nishumbha Brothers had the boon of creating as

many Raktabija Danavas as the blood drops of each new body. Devi Ambika desired Chamundi to lap up the blood even before fresh Raktabijas were born. But there was a mismatch in the blood drops and the instant creation of further Danavas and hence Devi decided to extend her tongue so far that finally blood drops dried up and Raktabija met his termination. Both Devas and Munis witnessed this strange happening and were mesmerised as to how Devi Ambika tackled the tricky situation!

When even the invincible Raktabija got killed despite his crafty tricks, Shumbha and Nishumbha came face to face against Devi. Both the brothers rained arrows on her while she poured heavy waterfall-like Astras from the clouds and kept the brothers at dismay. Suddenly, Nishumbh hit the head of Devi's lion on his head. Devi retaliated like a lightning and used an 'Astra' named 'Kshurapra', and destroyed his sword; he used a Shakti while Devi despatched a double Shakti. He threw a 'Shula' against her but she shielded it with her 'Mushtighaath' (grasp of her grip). He threw at Devi his mace and she responded it with her Trishul. Losing further patience, Devi Ambika finally felled Nishumbha on the ground with a torrential knock of her arrows. As Nishumbh fell down, Shumbha expanded his body all over the sky assuming eight hands with a variety of potent arms and approached her like a flash. That was the time when Ambika sounded her conchshell as though the ultimate time had arrived to script the end of Shumbha. In the most ferocious form of Kaali, Devi Ambika jumped up sky high and as she came down with a thud and as Shumbhasura released his final Astra called 'Ugradeepti' emitting flames and heat which was controlled by her 'Maholka' Astra. Then Devi said: 'you 'Duratma', you have still not realised my Power. This is all my Creation; I am the Cause, I am the Doer and I am the Act; you are a part of my scheme; never think high of you; your time of death is ticking!'

As she was saying this, Shumbhasura reached to her like a flash and tried to jump at her but she slapped him so hard that he tumbled down. She pierced her Shula right into his heart and he fell on to earth with a thud as there was a quake and Rivers and Oceans overflowed and mountains quivered momentarily. But soon there was a clear sky, good omens appeared, there were pleasant rains of flowers, Apsaras danced to their glory, Gandharvas sang mellifluous hymns in praise of Devi, Trimurthis exclaimed that truth was vindicated, Devas led by Indra fell into raptures with joyful tears in their eyes and Maharshis and Yogis predicted the arrival of a propitious era here again.

Extremely gratified by the eulogies of Devas, Maha Devi assured unremitting support to Devas as and when there would be a need besides saving the virtuous and punishing the guilty as an integral part of Her scheme of activities. She stated that in the course of Vivaswata Manvantara, She would be born again as Vindhyachalavasini and kill Vaipachitta named Danavas; while She would eat the Rakshasas at that time, She would be known as 'Raktadantika' as Her teeth would look like blood-red 'Dadimi Kusuma'. Some hundred years hence, Munis would make Group Prayers for her as there would be severe drought and famine of water and Munis could perceive her by her red eyes alone as 'Shataakshi' since She would be 'Ayoni janita' or born on Her own. As there would be no rains for long time, She utilised Her own Physique and generated food grains and vegetables to sustain humanity to be acclaimed as 'Shakambhari' and assuming a frightful form at Himalayas killed a very treacherous Demon called Durgama. When Muniganas would pacify her with their prayers, She would be popular as Bhima Devi. When another 'Mahasura', called Aruna would torment Trilokas some time later, She would assume the form of Six-legged 'Bhramaras' (Bees) in countless numbers and annihilate the Asura and his companions.

Epilogue: Vedic Faith is Everlasting despite pulls and pressures!

Even as extension of Dwapara Yuga there had been threats to Arsha Samkrti / Hindu Culture, vide Shi Krishna's efforts to decimate the Yavana King who joined hands with Jarasandha of 'Maha Bhagavata'. The strength and glory of the eras of Panadava clan declined after Parikshit, Janamejaya and Shataanika. In the weak lineage of the Kings, the King Pradyot performed Mleccha Yagna and Kali along with his wife was stated to have made an appeal to Bhagavan Narayana not to create hurdles in the spread and might of Kali Yuga and Narayana assured Kali that soon a man named 'Aadam' and woman named 'Havyavati' would promote the cause of Mlecchas and speed up the spread of Kali Yuga. Vishnu himself appeared to have advised a Mleccha King named 'Nyuh'to build and launch a huge Ship (Novah's Ark?) to save Believers of God. There was continuous storm for forty days and Oceans overflowed and submerged Earth.

In the initial period of Kaliyuga, Bharata Varsha gradually adopted Videsha Samskruti; new culture, life-style and even language. For instance, earlier languages got corrupted and new expressions emerged: Vraja Bhasha, Praakruti, Sanskrit or Sanskrit based Prantiya Bhashaas and various Dravidian languages got adapted to 'Gurundika' (English) and other Mleccha (Alien) Bhashas. In the process, the Vedic Dharma witnessed change and evolution. As the Rulers changed, so did the cultures but the core remained intact. Buddha/Ashoka created a new verion of Hinduism; Vikramaditya resisted the onslaught of Barbarians like Shakas, Mlecchhas, Yavanas, Tursharas, Parasikas (Persians), and Hunas. Shatavahanas controlled Shakas, Chinese, Bahmikas, Kamarupas, Rome and Ishaamashih (Jesus Christ). King Bhoja resisted the cult of Prophet Mahammad. But Pathans overpowered Prithviraja and thus the Bharata Varsha witnessed dissipation of Hindu Dharma, Varnashrama became a virtual non-entity excepting in very feeble form. It was in such extreme situation, the glorious contribution made by renowned 'Acharyas' to revive and sustain Hindu Dharma; the illustrious such Acharyas included Ramananda, Nimbadiya, Madhavachray, Jayadeva, Shankaracharya and his great followers like Giri Sharma, Vana Sharma, Purib Sharma, Dundi Raja and so on; Ramanujacharya, Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, and so on. The role of Regional Kings like Shivaji and even Kings of alien Dharmas like Akbar-as Hindu influence in reverse-was evident on the large canvas of Hinduism. Thus like the 'Jeeva Nadis' (ever flowing Rivers of Bharata Varsha) as Ganges, Vedic Culture will indeed survive, albeit incorporating and absorbing external and internal influences in the process of evolution, and continue in its Core Form for ever till the existence of humanity!

Na mantram no yantram tadaapi cha na jaaey stutimaho/ Na cha-aahvaanam dhyaanam tadaapi cha na jaaney stutikathaa/ Na jaaney Mudsraasthe tadaapi cha na jaaney vilaapanam/ Param jaaney Mathaathwaadanusharanam klesha haranam/ (I am not conversant with Mantras, Yantras, Hymns of Praise, Invocations, Meditation, Sroties of Your Glories, 'Mudraas' (Signs) and Implorations; Yet, I know that if I follow you, I will most certainly overcome my tribulations!) [From Kshamaapana Stotram by Shri Adi Shankaracharya]