

**THE BHAGAVATA PURANA
FOR
THE FIRST TIME READER**



BY

N.KRISHNASWAMY

APUBLICATION



**The Origins of Existence,
Of the Manifest from the Unmanifest
Of the Saguna from the Nirguna
Of the Relative from the Absolute**

This book is inspired by and therefore humbly dedicated to

Swami Tapasyananda,

to whose book on the Bhagavata Purana

I owe my understanding of

the Meaning and Purpose of this great work

THE BHAGAVATA PURANA

LIST OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

- CHAPTER 1 : CREATION**
- CHAPTER 2 : THE AVATAR**
- CHAPTER 3 : DAKSHA**
- CHAPTER 4 : KAPILA**
- CHAPTER 5 : PRAHLADA**
- CHAPTER 6 : PURANJANA**
- CHAPTER 7 : BHARATA**
- CHAPTER 8 : AMRITA**
- CHAPTER 9 : NARADA**
- CHAPTER 10 : INDRA**
- CHAPTER 11 : TAKSHAKA**
- CHAPTER 12 : KRISHNA**

**ANNEXURE 1 : Bhagavata geneologies of
Parikshit & Krishna**

ANNEXURE 2 : Bhagavata predictions for Kaliyuga

ANNEXURE 3 : Bhagavata : Summary of all Skandas

Preface

The Puranas, along with the Vedas and Itihaasas form the massive religious bedrock of the ancient Indian tradition. They go back in time to perhaps more than five millenia. The bulk of them are said to have been compiled from an existing ancient tradition by Vyasa whose birth is dated by one perceptive scholar at 3374 BC. This date of course, needs to be read and reconciled with other details of the timing of the Mahabharata war as described in epic composed by Vyasa. All dates of events of those times are based upon the start of the Kaliyuga Era placed at 3101 BC. The traditional Indian calendar is based on this Era and is maintained in the Panchanga (Almanac) publications of India to the present day. Timings of every day Vedic rituals in Indian homes even today start with a citation of the date and time of observance of the ritual based on this calendar. The above date, 3101 BC is also held to mark the mortal departure and divine ascension of Krishna.

Is there really anything of historical significance in the Vedas, Itihasas and Puranas that constitute the massive bulk of the ancient revered texts of India ? For an answer to this question, we must first ask a more basic question : What is History and what is or should be its objective ? . We have a History of India by Vincent Smith, a Story of Civilization by Will Durant, (it is really a History, though he calls it a Story), a History of Philosophy by Bertrand Russell, and a History of Time by Stephen Hawking. There is even a History of God by Karen Armstrong. Where do the Itihasas and Puranas fit into all these genres of History ? The Itihasa, claims to be History by the very meaning of the word, which is "Thus it was". But they are not accepted as History by the conventional modern Historian or by a august body like the Indian History Congress. The word Purana means an ancient record and the Upanishads regard the Puranas a Itihasas. The ancient definition of the Puranas was that they were a record not only of gods and beings of other worlds and regions of the cosmos, but more importantly, dynasties of rulers and great men who made a great impact on the morals and ethics of the society of their time. Clearly, then, there are Histories presenting different perspectives. Western thinking and writing, is conditioned by the fact that their traditions of myth and legend do not have or even claim to have any claim to conventional History, and hence they have tended to apply the same judgement to the Itihasas and Puranas. It is true that the Indian texts carry a considerable overlay of imaginative myth and legend, especially in the legends of gods and super-men, but isn't there a core of conventional human history that needs to be recognized as such, without being distracted by the overlay ?

The Itihasas and Puranas present the activities of gods, super-men and humans in a human setting, to illustrate vividly, how the purpose of life is

to help the human to rise to the level of the super-human and the divine, and prevent them from descending to the level of the sub-human. Humans competing for existence and subsistence have inevitably been drawn into activities involving war and peace. People are often at war and peace, as much with themselves as with others. These activities obviously involve and fulfil a historic process and purpose, and therefore constitute the essence of History. The setting is human, and the question is whether it is realistic or real, though of course, there is a larger philosophical question whether this really matters, or what reality is. Yet there is, in the narratives of the Itihasas and Puranas a vast measure of internal, consistent detail, in respect of human dynasties that simply clamours to be recognized as real.

We may here take note of the remarkable work of a traditional scholar, Kota Venkatachalam, who analysed the Puranas and presented his findings in more than 20 vast volumes of awesome erudition, with mind-boggling details and deep conviction in their historical veracity. His findings on many of the main events of the Mahabharata and the Puranas are dated and summarised as below in the following two lists :

Puranic Chronological Dates of Important Events - List 1

(Note: all dates are in B.C)

1. Birth of Bhishma 3396 B.C
2. Birth of Vedavyasa..... 3374 ,,
3. Age of Vysampayana..... 3300 ,,
4. Age of Yajñavalkya..... 3280 ,,
5. Kanva Rishi..... 3250 ..
6. Bodhayana (Sutrakara)..... 3200 ,,
7. The Saptarshis (or the Great Bear) aligns with Makha..... 3176 ,,
8. Coronation of Yudhistira at Sakraprastha for his
half portion of Hastinapura empire... 3176 ,,
9. Yudhistira lost his Empire in the game of Dice..... 3151 ..
10. Killing of Keechaka by Bhimasena..... 3139 ,,
11. Date of Mahabharata War..... 3138 ,,
12. Coronation of Yudhistira..... 3138 ,,
13. Yudhistira Era begins..... 3138 ,,
14. Birth of Parikshit..... 3138 ,,
15. Coronation of Brihadratha king of Ayodhya,
Ikshvaku Dynasty..... 3138 ,,
16. Coronation of Mahabharata or Somadhi
(king of Magadha after the War.)..... 3138 ,,
17. Coronation of Gali (king of Nepal) after the War)..... 3138 ,,
18. Coronation of Gonanda-II, King of Kashmir, 1½ years
before the War 3139
19. Sri Krishna Nirvana 3102 ,,
20. Kali Era begins (Cycle year Pramaadhi)... 3102 ,,
21. Submersion of Dwarka-Nagara..... 3102 ,,

22. Annihilation of Yadava Dynasty..... 3102 ,,
23. Coronation of Parikshit..... 3101 ,,
24. Jayabhyudaya Yudhistira Saka begins..... 3101 ,,
25. Yudhistira Kaala (or Saptarshi Era
or Laukikabda or Kashmirabda) begins.
(or Death of Yudhistira)..... 3076 ,,

Puranic chronological Dates of Important events - List 2

- 1 Death of Parikshit..... 3041 B.C
- 2 Coronation of Janamejaya..... 3041 ,,
- 3 Janamejaya's Gift Deed (Cycle year Plavanga).. 3012 ,,
- 4 Age of Aryabhatta..... 2742 ,,
- 5 Yudhistira Saka of the Jains..... 2634 ,,
- 6 Birth of Buddha..... 1887 ,,
- 7 Nirvana of Buddha..... 1807 ,,
- 8 Coronation of Mahapadma Nanda..... 1634 ,,
- 9 Coronation of Chandra Gupta Maurya..... 1534 ,,
- 10 Coronation of Asoka..... 1472 ,,
- 11 The Yayana king 'Amtiyoka' of the Maurya inscriptions..... 1472-36
- 12 Age of Panini..... 1400 ,,
- 13 End of reign of Salisuka of the Maurya dynasty..... 1320 ,,
- 14 Age of the Yavana king "Milinda" (of Milinda-Panha)..... 1320-1307 ,,
- 15 Nagarjuna Yogi..... 1294 ,,
- 16 Kanishka..... 1294-1234 ,,
- 17 Coronation of Pushyamitra Sunga..... 1218 ,,
- 18 Age of Patanjali..... 1218 ,,
- 19 Malava-Gana-Saka..... 725 ,,
- 20 Birth of Vardhamana-Maha-Vira..... 599 ,,
- 21 Birth of Kumarila Bhattacharya..... 557 ,,
- 22 Saka Bhupa Kala (Cyrus Era)..... 550 ,,
- 23 Nirvana of Vardhamana Maha Vira..... 528 ,,
- 24 Kumarilabhatta pushed out from the terrace.... 525 ,,
- 25 Birth of Adi Sankara..... 509 ,,
- 26 Upanayana of Adi Sankara..... 504 ,,
- 27 Death of Siva Guru (Sankara's Father)..... 501 ,,
- 28 Authurasanyaasa of Sankara..... 500 ,,
- 29 Krama sanyasa of Sankara..... 499 ,,
- 30 Death of Aryamba (Sankara's mother)..... 493 ,,
- 31 Nirvana of Govinda Bhagavatpada..... 493 ,,
- 32 Meeting of Sankara with Kumarilabhatta..... 493 ,,
- 33 Death of Kumarila. (Self Immolation)..... 493 ,,

Let us look at some more aspects of the Puranic core. First the Puranas themselves define their own objective clearly as maintaining geneologies of Rishis, Kings and other great personalities. The men who composed these texts clearly were scholars of merit and rectitude who valued truth.

The genealogies that they compiled covered vast numbers of humans, identified by name and inter-se relationships and occupying the same relative sequences within the same vast time line. The Bhagavata itself gives the genealogies of two of its central characters : Krishna, who symbolized its central message of Bhakti for the benefit of humanity, and King Parikshit to whom the Bhagavata was first narrated by Suka, the son of Vyasa who composed this great work. These complete genealogies are reproduced in Annexure – 1. These details are found in many Puranas with astonishing consistency across them, indicating that all the authors were surely talking about the same persons in the same contexts. It would be surely a grave travesty to simply dismiss such an extraordinary corpus of independent and mutually consistent texts as fiction and not fact.

We may cite one specific example illustrating the above perspective. A perceptive scholar, Siddhanta Shastree, was a Professor of Ancient Indian History in the University of Calcutta (now Kolkata). On the basis of painstaking analysis, he presents this argument of consistent identities, beginning with Manu, the founder of the vast Vaivasvata Manvantara. Details in all the Puranas are largely confined to the vast time-span of this Manvantara, as earlier Manvantaras would obviously have been consumed by the Pralayas or Great Dissolutions with which they ended. He has presented consistent name sequences across the Bhagavata Purana, the Vishnu Purana, the Vayu Purana, the Matsya Purana, and the Harivamsa, (which is an Appendix to the Mahabharata). He is able to trace the genealogy of the Solar Dynasty of Kings and has arrived finally at a list of 121 Kings whose names occur with considerable consistency, though with small deviations in name, number, and sequence across these massive texts. The list begins with the dynasty founder, Vaivasvata Manu and ends with Brhadbala who, by some accounts, was killed by Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna in the Mahabharata War. Arjuna, of course, is one of the Pandavas, belonging to the Lunar Dynasty, named after Chandra, son of Rishi Atri, the son of Brahma. (Be it known that Rama and Krishna belong to this dynasty) The author is able to build a similar list of 74 Kings of this dynasty. It is interesting to note that the killing of Brhadbala by Abhimanyu, makes a point of historical convergence of the two dynasties at the Mahabharata War. Dating the Mahabharata War at 3136 BC, and using this as the end marker of the Solar Dynasty, Professor Shastree assumes a more realistic average of 40 years for the reign of each King, (he dismisses the imaginative Puranic reign periods for individual kings, of hundreds or thousands of years). He thereby places the start of the Solar Dynasty, 4840 years earlier, which would place Vaivasvata Manu at around 7976 BC. Much as these projections may appear over-ambitious, if not unreal, the simple point that the Professor makes is that where there is a germ of a possible truth it should be taken note of, and not just peremptorily thrown out : in other words, don't throw the baby out with the bath water.

It may be noted that many of the various dates proposed by the above scholars are largely derived from the astronomical events cited in the texts themselves, and are derived by traditional computations using data from the traditional Indian calendar. What is specially interesting is that some of these dates are confirmed with the use of computers to generate and process the astronomical data of these ancient time periods. An extremely unusual occurrence is recorded by Vyasa in the Mahabharata, of a solar and lunar eclipse within 13 days of each other. Vyasa noted correctly that such eclipses were never known to occur within intervals of less than 14 or 15 days. He therefore referred to this one as foreboding a major disaster. This turned out to be the Mahabharata War that broke out soon after, which incidentally may have marked practically the end of the Solar and Lunar Dynasties. An Indian scientist scholar, Dr B.N.Narahari Achar, Professor of Physics, University of Memphis, USA, has, on the basis of computerised analysis of astronomical data, been able to date this event with precision. He points to the 14th. October, 3067 BC as a strong candidate for this event.

More leads on the question of history are found elsewhere. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad mentions 57 links in the Guru-Parampara ("succession of teachers"), that would add up to about 1400 years. Kalhana was a noted historian of Kashmir of the 12th Century AD. The list of ancient Indian kings in his work, the Rajatarangini, goes back to the 19th century BCE. The list of ancient BCE. And true to tradition, he also traces the history of the Kashmir valley back to the Puranas with an interesting story. According to this, the area of Kashmir was formerly a vast lake, from which most of the water was drained out by the Rishi Kashyapa, grandson of Brahma, by cutting an opening in the surrounding hills at Varaha-mula, identified with Baramula of today. The Bhagavata Purana itself, in its obvious later updates, refers to the emergence of the Yavanas and Turushkas - Greek and Turk invaders - and dynasties of the Maurya, Guptas and other recognized historical dynasties. Arrian (95 - 175 AD) the Greek Historian of Alexander the Great, in his work, the Indica, makes an interesting point. He quotes Megasthenes as stating that "the Indians counted a hundred and fifty-three kings who reigned over six thousand and forty-three years prior to Chandragupta Maurya (320-298 BC). Among modern historians, F.E.Pargiter (1852-1927) was member of the Indian Civil Service in Bengal who studied the ancient Indian texts. He says the Puranic genealogies add up to fantastic time depths and thus did his bit to contribute to building the early biases of Western scholarship.

Most modern historians of course, maintain a very narrow definition of History, and still question the historicity most of the traditional Indian works in terms of that definition. They tend to place the Vedas, mainly on

the basis of debatable principles of linguistic evolution, as taking their final form around 1500 BC and the Puranas around 600 AD. They do concede however, that their origins could be from more ancient oral traditions. But they also consider these texts as too vast to be attributed to a single author like Vyasa. They think it more likely that these texts were accretions of contributions of many persons over several centuries. But surely, the importance of these works do not derive from the identity of who composed or compiled them or when and where. Their significance does not lie only in their massive size. Their far greater significance lies in the consistency of their structure and content, the vast range of human experience, the depth of detail and the profundity of the thought that they encompass. And of course, they were also clothed in delectable use of Sanskrit, a language of the highest sophistication. The highest authorities of modern linguistics consider Sanskrit as surely the highest intellectual accomplishment of the human mind in all of human history. Conventional historians miss all these central facts and dismiss them on the premise that history can be considered reliable only if recorded on paper or stone. Indian history however, is unique in that it is largely recorded in human memory and transmitted through a unique oral tradition with an astonishing fidelity. It is this larger perspective that this book will try to place before the first time reader.

It should not be assumed that the Indian ancients and their texts were largely concerned with only the religious and metaphysical well-being of humanity. On the other hand they were as concerned with the physical well-being of all humans. Indeed, they were concerned with the well being of all forms of existence, living and non-living. For the well being of humans, they created the most durable socio-economic structures of organization and method known to human history. These rested on logical and comprehensive social, economic and ethical principles. The social and economic organization of today largely rests much on the same basic principles of division of labour, but in different forms and submerged by the vast inequities of today. The monstrous distortions of the caste system of today surely cannot be blamed on what was first a logical functional division of labour to meet the socio-economic needs of the simple society of that time. It was the later build-up of the priestly class in alliance with the ruling class that stratified society more rigidly on the basis of birth, rather than functional merit.

The Bhagavata tells of Narada recounting how he was born to a low born maidservant, yet rose to be the Personal Attendant of the Lord, traversing the worlds, solely to sing His praise. And Vyasa, though the son of a fisherwoman, is nevertheless credited with the super-human establishment of the Vedic corpus for the benefit of posterity. Interestingly. Narada is stated to have taken Vyasa to task for focussing so much on the Vedas and Vedic rituals which were beyond the understanding and reach of the

common man. Instead, said Narada, he should have preached the path of devotion which the common man could understand and accept more easily. And the Rishis at Naimisharanya listened with respect and awe to the narration of the Bhagavata by Ugrasravas, the Suta story-teller. The Suta was said to be of a class of a so-called lower birth, but the fact that he commanded the respect of those sages should not be lost on us. These features described in the ancient texts pointed to a tradition where knowledge, ethical values and humanistic concerns counted for a person's status and prestige far more than of whom he was born.

The Indian texts were developed and arranged by the ancients into two distinct frameworks. They are referred to as the Srutis and the Smritis. The word Sruti means "heard", implying that they were received through divine inspiration, and therefore, that they presented authoritative and immutable knowledge that was relevant for all time. The word Smriti means "remembered" implying that they were a record of human thought and experience in the minds of men as they accumulated over time. The Vedas belonged to the former type and the ancient Rishis went to extraordinary lengths to preserve them for all time. First they designed a perfect language in which to clothe the knowledge, This language was Sanskrit (itself a word meaning 'done to perfection'). Secondly they designed extraordinary methods of committing the knowledge to human memory, in ways that would make it immutable in oral transmission through all time.

The Puranas were, on the other hand, designed as a record of continuing human thought and experience. They were constructed as an open book that could be expanded and enriched by human thought and experience as these accumulated in later years and ages. The Puranas indeed, themselves specifically envisaged such a need. The Puranas were certainly as old, if not older than the Vedas. This may be seen from brief references in the Vedas themselves to earlier Puranic events. The Rig Veda for instance, teems with references to two powerful Puranic characters : Indra and Vrtra. This may account for the fact that it was not until around 600 AD that the Bhagavata Purana was thought to have taken its final present form. And it was clearly this that enabled the later great Vaishnava savants to invest this Purana, and indeed the entire Vedic tradition, with a dominantly Bhakti orientation.

The modern First Time Reader may be inclined to accept the above conception of Smriti as rational and reject the conception of Sruti as not so. Yet a little reflection will show that inspired thought received through "hearing" in the sense of inspiration is not something unusual, and can be recognized even in the course of everyone's every day experience today. The most common experience is that when one hears a speech, or piece of music, One then often encounters a brief passage that makes a profound impression both emotionally and intellectually. One can readily recall raga

renderings of a gifted musician, for instance, the great flautist T.R.Mahalingam, where suddenly a sound sequence is rendered that would send a palpable thrill through the entire audience with an electrifying effect. This is certainly the result of the artist's moment of creative inspiration, not just a recalled memory. This, in a very real sense, is Sruti, not Smriti.

Looking at the Vedas, Itihasas and Puranas from within a common perspective, one can see a clear pattern in the way their ideas and objectives developed over a vast stretch of time. It was natural, thus, for early man to live in sheer awe of the vast powers of Nature and gradually envisage them as gods to be feared and placated in return for their protection and favour. The Vedic Rishis had a deep insight into and understanding of this vast interaction between Nature and Human Nature. They built this understanding into the Vedic texts, as a system of prayer and sacrificial offering, Mantra and Yajna. These were then related to whatever reward man received or sought to receive from the gods, in order that he could live in comfort, happiness and hope. Yet the Rishis linked the past and the present with the future, and stressed transient happiness here and eternal happiness thereafter. For this, they always maintained a background refrain of a higher power that could assure both. It was only in the later Upanishad stage of the Vedas, that the eternal came to be increasingly emphasized. It was also realized that the thought and language of the Vedas was beyond the reach of understanding of and benefit to the large masses of the common people. This need got addressed in the format of the stories of the Puranas. These stories were at the same time, vast fantasies which could appeal to the common man, yet were vast allegories that would appeal to the scholar. It is interesting to note that in both cases, the strong emphasis was to shift from attitudes of selfishness to attitudes of selflessness. The Paths of Samkhya or Knowledge, Karma or Selfless Action, Samnyasa or Renunciation, Dhyana or Meditation had greater appeal to the intellectual. The Path of Bhakti or Devotion and Saranagati or Surrender had greater emotional appeal for the common man. It is interesting to note that the Path of Devotion and Surrender was specially emphasized in the Purana by Narada, and then by Vyasa, who had restructured the whole Vedic edifice and by Krishna Himself in the Bhagavad Gita.

The Puranas were compiled as a virtual encyclopedia that took for their canvas the totality of human experience, that was not limited to the physical world of nations, kings and people. Their canvas embraced the entire metaphysical reaches of the human mind. They reached far beyond the limitations of Space and Time. Their Space framework stretched across the heavens and worlds inhabited by gods and powers and spirits, and far beyond towards Infinity, to an Indefinable Ultimate Existence of One Reality. Their Time frame stretched beyond the human scales of Centuries and Millenia to the divine scales of Yugas and Kalpas till it reached it

reached an Ultimate Existence of Eternity. The lifetime of Brahma was reckoned as the equivalent of 31040 billion years on the human time scale. Both the divine and divine time scales were worked out into detailed time units and fitted into one single vast Timeline. Scales of both time and distance were derived from the positions and movements of the Sun and the planets and stars. The Purana stories were woven into very humanistic contexts that would enthrall the common man. The stories would be so internalized by the common man that the Divine would be seen to be living within him and influencing all the actions of his daily life. No stories of any other culture have held such large masses of humanity in their thrall over so many millenia. These stories continue to be told to enthralled audiences of the common man, to the present day in virtually the same delightful weave of narrative of prose, meter of poetry and melody of song. This format is what is today called the Harikatha Kalakshepa.

The descriptions of persons or events in the Puranas, like lifespans of a thousand years or events spanning vast worlds of space and time are certainly far more imaginative than the science fiction of today. The objective clearly was to fire the imagination of the common man with the doings of a Supreme Divine that was Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent in a Time-Space framework of Eternity and Infinity. The method adopted for this was not the Mantra and the Yajna, but the story populated with gods, humans and other life forms and their doings in a very human setting. Even the Gods showed human frailties while humans showed divine qualities. And between the human and the divine were a host of demons and spirits, all making a vast and fascinating retinue of *dramatis personae*. Nothing was ruled out in these stories as impossible. For the divine or super-human characters that figured in them, anything was possible.

If one is to really understand the true import of the Puranas, we need to study them from a mindset that is totally different from that in which we study science or understand science-oriented knowledge today. It must be first recognized that science today is confined largely to the domain of physical, tangible, palpable reality. Science accepts what can be established by physical observation and replication. Science is simply concerned with rational meaning and purpose and matters as are directly related to man's material interests. But it is imagination that takes the human mind far beyond the limits of reason, far beyond limitations of observable events and measurable space and time. It is from there that his inner higher faculties of insight and instinct draw a larger understanding of the totality of existence and its meaning and purpose. This happens even with the exceptional men of Science, like Albert Einstein, who have a deep spiritual side to their personality. His scientific speculations led Einstein to deeper implications of space and time, and for articulating these, he adhered to the recognized boundaries of Science. But where Science did

not satisfy him, he sought the intellectual freedom of Mathematics and beyond that, in the explorations of the spirit. But his spirituality remained a very intense, private and personal matter. In one of his rare open admissions, he talks of moments when “one feels free from one’s own identification with human limitations.....At such moments, one imagines one stands on some spot of a small planet gazing in amazement at the cold, yet profoundly moving beauty of the eternal, the unfathomable. Life and death flow into one, and there is neither evolution nor destiny, only Being

It is from such perceptions and perspectives, that a gifted person draws inspiration and becomes a great teacher or a transformational figure, or an inspirational personality like an Einstein, or a Vyasa or a Krishna. The power of his example or message or teaching persists in the memory of people. The greater the power, the longer and more durable is its impact. In an unlettered society, these persistent memories become articles of faith. In time, these harden into myths, legends or scriptures, that are passed down the generations through the collective memory of posterity. The validity and vitality of a great religion, whether it is Hinduism or Christianity, does not derive from whether Krishna or Christ were historical figures. They stem from their teachings which constitute living truths in the psyche of the people and cause them to live by those teachings through the generations that follow.

The Puranas extant today comprise a massive collection referred to as the 18 Mahapuranas and 18 Upapuranas. Each of them is a massive work devoted to one or other of the large pantheon of Deities who continue to be worshipped by the Indian people to this day. The following list will give an idea of the mind-boggling size of this corpus, not to be found in any other culture of the world today. Brief outline summaries of these Puranas are provided in the Appendix to this book, for the benefit of the Reader.

Name and size		Name and size	
Agni	15400 verses	Linga	9000 verses
Bhagavata	18000	Matsya	14000
Bhavishya	14500	Narada	25000
Brahma	10000	Padma	55000
Brahmanda	12000	Shiva	24000
Brahmavaivarta	17000	Skanda	81000
Garuda	19000	Vamana	10000
Harivamsa	16000	Varaha	24000
Kurma	17000	Vayu	24000

The Upapuranas, as the name suggests, are lesser or ancillary texts. These are generally also said to be eighteen in number. There is not too much agreement on their titles or the authenticity of their texts. Thees works include: Sanat-kumara, Narasimha, Brihan-naradiya, Siva-rahasya,

Durvasa, Kapila, Vamana, Bhargava, Varuna, Kalika, Samba, Nandi, Surya, Parasara, Vasishtha, Devi-Bhagavata, Ganesha, Mudgala, and Hamsa. The Ganesha and Mudgala Puranas are devoted to Ganesha. The Devi-Bhagavata Purana, which extols the goddess Durga, has become (along with the Devi Mahatmya of the Mārkandeya Purana) a basic text for Devi worshipers. What is particularly remarkable is the internal mutual consistency of identities of persons, places, and events across the vast Cosmic canvas shared by all the Puranas and Upapuranas. Some person, place or event which is peripheral or incidental in one, becomes central in another of these works, so that one can pick up an isolated thread in one and follow its detail in another of these works, without any sense of loss of continuity or consistency.

There are still other categories of Puranas spread all over India like :

(a) the Sthala Puranas which tell of the origins and traditions of particular Tamil Shiva temples or shrines.

(b) the Kula Puranas which deal with the origins, myths, stories, and legends of castes and tribes

(c) Jain Puranas deal with Jain myths, history and legends and form a major part of early Kannada literature. The best known is the

(d) Among Buddhist Puranas, Swayambhu Purana narrates the mythological history of Nepal.

It is time now to shift our specific focus to the Bhagavata Purana. But a brief word of its origin and first narration. After Vyasa compilation of all the other Puranas, he composed the Bhagavata Purana. This Purana itself says that Vyasa then taught it to his son Suka, and also his story teller disciple Romaharshana. The very first formal narration of the Bhagavata Purana was by Suka to King Parikshit, the grandson of the Pandavas. The occasion was Parikshit's awaiting the end of his life from a fast unto death he had undertaken in penance for an earlier sin. Ugrasravas, the son of Romaharshana was present on that occasion and heard Suka's narration. Ugrasravas later repeated the story to a great gathering of ascetics during the leisure intervals of the Brahma Satra Sacrifice that they were conducting at the Naimisharanya forest. The Bhagavata story comes to us intact thanks to the great tradition of story telling maintained to the present day by the successors of Suka and Ugrasravas.

This book draws its inspiration, perspective and much of its material from the great book, "Srimad Bhagavata", by Swami Tapasyananda, published in three Volumes by the Ramakrishna Mutt, Chennai. The Swamiji presents this Purana in a perspective of extraordinary beauty, perception and sensitivity. It is hoped that the First Time Reader of the present book will be encouraged to go on to an onward reading of that book and many more on

this subject. We can do no better than closing this Preface at this point with the Swamiji's words in his masterly Introduction to that book :

“Even as the rivers and mountain ranges of a country are the expressions of the natural forces working from within and without this planet of ours, the Puranas are an upthrow of a people's mind struggling to express their quest for a meaning for life and their findings in this respect. They represent the more enduring and enriched reactions of the psyche of a race to the fleeting events of space and time. It is in their cumulative effect and not in the validity of their individual statements or in a critique of their methodology that we should seek the values they embody. They make the dry bones of philosophy, history and traditions into an integrated literature of high potency, capable of stimulating in man a keen sense of an omniscient, omnipotent and all-loving spiritual Reality, who can be communed with, prayed to and visualised In various forms of spiritual glory. God in formful aspects and Divine personages have become concrete to the Hindu mind through the Puranas. Insofar as they are facts of memory in the minds of men, they fulfill the role of history, but insofar as the stimulations they give to spiritual dimensions, the Puranas are linked to the Eternal Verities that transcend history.”

I thought it would be fitting to end this Preface with an interesting personal story that has relevance here. I have a niece who lives in Dallas, USA. One day, a few years ago, her little son, around five years old, went to his class teacher at school and quietly confided in her that he was born in a jail. His teacher felt greatly disturbed and in spite of all her questioning, he stuck to his story. Finally she summoned courage to go and meet his mother to check on whether indeed she had a criminal background. To her great astonishment, my niece told her the story of the birth of Krishna in Kamsa's jail. And this was the story that she had told her son just the other night at bedtime. And the little boy had obviously internalized it to the point of identifying himself with Krishna. The teacher was greatly relieved but nevertheless greatly enjoyed the story. I repeat this little story here to illustrate how the Bhagavata stories continue to echo down the ages and occupy the minds and hearts of the Indian people, young and old, to the present day.

THE BHAGAVATA PURANA

INTRODUCTION

We may well open this book on the Bhagavata Purana with the Invocation with which the Bhagavata itself opens :

जन्माद्यस्य यतोऽन्यादितरतश्चार्थेष्वमिज्ञः स्वराट् तेने ब्रह्म हृदा य
आदिकवये मुहन्ति यत्सूरयः ।
तेजोवारिमृदां यथा विनिमयो यत्र त्रिसर्गोऽमृषा धान्ना स्वेन सदा
निरस्तकुहकं सत्यं परं धिमहि ॥

He, from whom Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution of the Universe take place, Who is both the instrumental and material cause of it; Who is omniscient; Who is the only one having self-mastery, being the One independent entity; Who illumined the mind of Brahma with the Vedic revelation whose wisdom is the wonder of even the greatest sages; in Whom the worlds, the manifestation of the three Gunas, subsist in reality without in the least affecting Him, just as the combination of material elements like fire, water, and earth subsist in their causes without changing their elemental nature; in Whose light of consciousness there is no place for anything false, --- on that Truth Supreme we meditate.

This Invocation is no simple formality of literary composition of a highly religious mind. It presents a profound philosophy that explains Existence. No other philosophy does so in such a vast range and depth. Therefore the Invocation merits closer examination. It talks of all Existence originating in one, single source described as Sat-Cit-Ananda, or Truth-Consciousness-Bliss.

The Manifestation of something from an Unmanifest state is basically an Action. Any conscious Action can originate only from a Consciousness. Creation of a vast Existence is an Effect springing from that Action, which makes it the First Cause which originates from a vast Consciousness. Action has also to be impelled by a power that also originates from the same Consciousness. That power has the capacity to create, preserve and

dissolve that Existence, That power is Prakrti. It has three specializations which introduce a vast variety and multiplicity of form, faculty and function in the created Existence, These specializations bear the names Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The One Consciousness first creates three likenesses of Itself and invests them with these specializations of power, to respectively create, preserve and dissolve Existence. It also provides them with Space and Time in which to administer these functions in respect of all living and non-living forms.

The originating Consciousness is MahaVishnu and His three emanations are Brahma who creates, Vishnu who preserves and Siva who finally dissolves all Existence. The dissolution is at the time of the Great Deluge, the Pralaya, when MahaVishnu withdraws all Existence into Himself and resumes once again His Original Single Unmanifest Form of His Eternal Existence. The three emanations from the One Originating Consciousness may be regarded as the first step from the Nirguna to the Saguna, the Unmanifest to the Manifest state. This first step is dramatically portrayed in the Devi Bhagavata. The onward steps of Creation are then portrayed with the same dramatic effect in the Bhagavata Purana, which therefore can, in a sense, be regarded as a sequel to the Devi Bhagavata. This chronology may not be actual, but can be considered logical. Mixed chronologies may indeed characterise much of the textual corpus of the ancient Indian tradition, but this may be due to the vast time scales involved, relying on orally transmitted ancient memories. The ancients certainly knew how to go back and forth to fit their fact collections and thought formulations into vast but appropriate time sequences.

It is interesting too to see how this vast Divine process on the Cosmic scale is mimicked in the lifetime of a single human endowed with a speck of that large Consciousness. Here too we see how consciousness makes the human aware of how, under the influence of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, he creates, preserves and destroys objects, both internally in his Mind and externally in the physical world around him. Mercifully too, he has his share of what is called the Nitya Pralaya, when the human goes to sleep, a brief period of sleep when every day's experiences are dissolved and he enjoys a daily dose of a human version of Sat-Cit-Ananda. This is

analogous to the Naimittika Pralaya when Brahma goes to sleep, and the Cosmic existence is dissolved for the duration of his long night. The ultimate analogue is the Maha Pralaya also called the Prakrta when, at the end of Brahma's lifetime of a hundred divine years, the entirety of all Existence along with Prakrti and Time merge back into the ultimate Unmanifest Form of MahaVishnu. Luckily the human is able to see from his own hard experiences or from the teachings of the wise, that within him is a small particle of that Eternal Consciousness that lives beyond the creation, preservation and dissolution of his own transient physical existence. When this realization comes to a human, it is by what is called the Saving Grace of the Lord.

We now come to the Puranas, which are but a great elaboration of the above theme. The earliest Vedic reference to them is in the Atharva Veda (XI-7-24) while the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says that together with the Veda, the Purana sprang from the breath of the Paramatman. The word Purana occurs there as a noun in the singular number. This suggested that it was originally, along with the Vedas, a single body of text, and perhaps, formed part of all Vedic learning. There was a tradition of narration of the Purana stories on the occasion of important Vedic sacrifices, the recitals being referred to as Pariplava Akhyanas. It would be therefore useful to pause at this point to look at what the Bhagavata itself says on the origin of the Vedas and Puranas, as narrated by Suta Ugrasravas in the following verses from the first Skanda.

सूत उवाच :

द्वापरे समनुप्राप्ते तृतीये युगपर्यये ।

जातः पराशराद्योगी वासव्यां कलया हरेः १-४-१४

परावरजः स ऋषिः कालेनाव्यक्तरंहसा ।

युगधर्मव्यतिकरं प्राप्तं भुवि युगे युगे ॥ १-४-१६

भौतिकानां च भावानां शक्तिह्रासं च तत्कृतम् ।

अश्रद्धधानान्निःसत्त्वान् दुर्मेधान् हसितायुषः ॥ १-४-१७

दुर्भगांश्च जनान् वीक्ष्य मुनिर्दिव्येन चक्षुणा ।

सर्ववर्णाश्रमाणां यदध्यौ हितममोघदृक् ॥ १-४-१८

चातुर्होत्रं कर्म शुद्धं प्रजानां वीक्ष्य वैदिकम् ।

व्यदधाद्यज्ञसन्तत्यैवेदमेकं चतुर्विधम् ॥ १-४-१९

ऋग्यजुःसामाथर्व्याख्या वेदाश्चतरार उद्धृताः ।

इतिहासपुराणं च पञ्चमो वेद उच्यते ॥ १-४-२०

अथर्वाङ्गरसामासीत् सुमन्तुर्दारुणो मुनिः ।

इतिहासपुराणां पिता मे रोमहर्षणः ॥ १-४-२२

sūta uvāca : dvāparē samanuprāptē tṛtīyē yugaparyayē .

jāta: parāśarādyōgī vāsavyām kalayā harē: 1-4-14

parāvaraja: sa ṛṣi: kālenāvyaktaramhasā .

yugadharmavyatikaram prāptam bhuvi yugē yugē .. 1-4-16

bhautikānām ca bhāvānām śaktihlāsam ca tatkr̥tam .

aśraddadhānānni:sattvān durmēdhān hrasitāyusa: .. 1-4-17

durbhagāṃśca janān vīkṣya munirdivyēna cakṣuṇā .

sarvavarṇāśramāṇām yaddadhyau hitamamōghadr̥k .. 1-4-18

cāturhōtram karma śūśu prajānām vīkṣya vaidikam .

vyadadhādyajñasantatyaivēdamēkaṃ caturvidham .. 1-4-19

rgyaju:sāmātharvyākhyā vēdāścataṛāra uddhṛtā: .

itihāsapurāṇaṃ ca pañcamō vēdaddha ucyatē .. 1-4-20

atharvāṅgarasāmāsīt sumanturdāruṇo muni: .

itihāsapurāṇāṃ pitā mē rōmaharṣaṇa: .. 1-4-22

Suta said :

Towards the end of the Dvapara Yuga, the third of the four Yuga cycle, Maharshi Veda Vyasa was born as a per incarnation of Vishnu, as the son of Parasara through Satyavati, the daughter of the fisherman Vasu. 1-4-14 The Maharshi, who perceived the march of time, through past, present and future, observed the resulting degeneration in the conditions of life and in man's health, strength, longevity intelligence and values became deeply concerned over the future welfare of all classes of mankind : 1-4-16 to 18 He re-edited the Veda, which existed as a single unit, re-structured into the four parts called the Rg, Sama, Yajur and Atharva : 1-4-19 to 20 He taught the Atharva Veda to Sumantu and the Itihasa and Purana to Romaharshana to be further propagated through their disciples.

A brief reference has been made in the Preface to evidence that gives historical credence to the narrations in the Bhagavata. Vyasa, who composed it, himself was also personal witness to the Mahabharata War, and to the role of Krishna in all those tumultuous events that marked the transition from the Dvapara to the Kali Yuga. The above passage makes pointed reference to Vyasa's deep concern for the welfare of humanity, specially in the light of the all-round human degeneration that was setting in and would be accelerating with the onset of the Kali Yuga. In a subsequent passage in the Bhagavata, Vyasa goes on indeed to give a detailed description of how this future would evolve. This passage is reproduced in Annexure 2 and surely shows what a remarkable understanding Vyasa had of Human nature and of the historical process.

It is possible that the Bhagavata could have later evolved through addition, interpolation and embellishment by generations of Sutas, or traditional story tellers. These could have accumulated over centuries around an ancient core that originated in the hoary past of Vedic times. After the original text was reorganized into several Puranas, by Vyasa and taught to his Suta disciple Lomaharshana to be propagated, the recitation function would appear to have passed from the Brahmana priest to the hands of the Sutas who continued the tradition thereafter. Over time, the Puranas could

have been elaborated and embellished till around the 12th Century AD. By then, under the influence of the succession of great saints, specially the Tamil Alwars, they acquired a dominant Vaishnavite character. It would be of interest here to note that the Bhagavata itself records that it was narrated first by Brahma to Narada to be elaborated further as he thought fit. This provided, as it were, a divine authorisation for all its future elaborations, possibly to maintain an evolving tradition committed to promoting the glory of the Lord.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa:(भागवतपुराण) , also known as Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, or Bhāgavata, is one of the "Maha" Puranic texts of Hindu literature, with its primary focus on bhakti (devotion) to the incarnations of Vishnu, particularly Krishna. The title of Bhagavan assigned to Krishna, means a possessor of Bhaga, the six excellences, comprised of Aisvarya (Omnipotence), Dharma (Virtue), Yasas (Glory), Sri (Beauty), Jnana (Omniscience) and Detachment (Vairagya).

The word Purana means “an ancient narrative”, and to qualify as one, had to fulfil several lakshanas or attributes. The Bhagavata prescribed for itself that it should encompass ten topics : Sarga or Primary Creation dealing with the creation of primary elements or what philosophy call categories; Visarga or Secondary Creation leading to sentient and insentient forms from the primary categories; Vritti or the means of sustenance of the system created; Raksha or the protection of all forms of creation; Manvantaras or epochs of Manus or other divine personages who promote the level of their existence and well-being; Vamsaanucharitra, or histories of rulers and dynasties promoting devotion to God and to the well-being of the Universe; Samstha or Dissolution of existence in an intermittent and graduated way, like a daily dissolution in sleep or mortal dissolution in death or the Pralaya or ultimate dissolution of all manifested existence; Hetu, or the purpose of Creation; and lastly Apasraya, or the Ultimate Support for all Existence. Though the Bhagavata lists these ten topics to reflect the prescribed attributes of a Purana, the back-and-forth narrative of story within story, with the narratives and narrators themselves belonging to different periods of a vast timespan, does not allow the narrative to follow the same sequence. Any story can thus be taken up for

narrative by any story teller at any time, as has indeed happened throughout Indian tradition, up to the present day.

The Bhagavata text comprises 335 adhyayas (Chapters) under 12 *skandas* (cantos or books) and generally considered to be comprised of around 18,000 verses. The actual number of verses may be less but since the work has many prose sequences, the higher number could perhaps be derived from an old orthodox convention of counting every thirty eight letters of prose as equivalent to one verse. As it will be impossible in this present small book to deal with all the Skandas and their stories of this monumental work, we can do no better at this point than sketch a broad outline of the 12 Skandas or Cantos comprising the Bhagavata. The ensuing Chapters of this book will present a very small selection of some of the central ideas and important stories the Bhagavata. The selection aims at illustrating the Hetu, the stated objectives of the main work, while also presenting them in a perspective which may find more ready appeal to the modern first time reader. Some related details available in other Puranas are imported into wherever they add to the human interest or give a fuller picture of the characters of the selected stories. A brief summary of the 12 Skandas of the Bhagavata Purana that illustrates how the stories are woven into of one fabric that is mind-boggling in its vastness is provided in the Annexure 3.

The Bhāgavata is widely recognized as the most well known and influential of the *Puranas*. It generally stresses that the philosophical speculations of the scriptures have an appeal to only to the intellectual. Instead it places emphasis largely on appeal to the common man through the eminently simple emotional path of devotion. The gods are therefore often given a human form and their doings placed in an entirely human setting, to illustrate the Divine's protection and sustenance of the weak and virtuous against the strong and the wicked. The stories of Krishna's childhood, in particular, have retained an enduring appeal to generations of common people in India through the millenia.

While the dominant emphasis of the Bhagavata is on the path of Bhakti, it does not avoid reference to the other philosophical streams of thought. The Bhagavata text (12.13.15) refers to itself to as the Fifth Veda and claims to carry the essence of Vedanta. Several of its passages show a synthesis that reflects the positions of the

Samkhya, Yoga, and Vedanta doctrines. This is much as the Bhagavad Gita synthesises all of these doctrines and presents them as different paths to the One Supreme Divine. This is not surprising as Vyasa is credited as the author of the Bhagavata and the Bhagavad Gita, The latter occurs in his magnum opus, the Mahabharata, which provides a lot of the background from which the Bhagavata is developed. If the Gita is a philosophical teaching of Krishna, the Bhagavata is a full biography of Krishna Himself, starting not merely from his birth as a human, but his descent from the Supreme Divine. It would therefore be appropriate to begin the first Chapter of this book with the story of how Creation originated from the Supreme Divine and end the book with the story of Krishna.

CHAPTER -1 : CREATION



MAHAVISHNU : AN ICONIC FORM

(Acknowledged to www.indiamart.com)

BHAGAVATA PURANA

CHAPTER 1 : CREATION

The Bhagavata Purana sets the story of Krishna in a larger story of the Highest Divine, of whom He is an Avatar. The concept of the Avatar occurs in many religions in different forms : the son of God, the Messenger of God, Prophets, Saints and Godmen. But the Bhagavata presents this doctrine in an unusual, comprehensive and imaginative form. Among numerous Avatars of various degrees of divinity, Krishna alone is ranked as the most complete one, the Purna Avatar. His story therefore begins appropriately with MahaVishnu, the Ultimate Non-dual Reality, who initiated the process of all Creation, Interestingly, the Bhagavata sets the story of this origin of Creation in a divine setting by saying that it was narrated by Brahma to his son Narada, where Brahma also says that it was first narrated to him by the Highest Divine Himself. The story is of course repeated as narrated successively through a human chain, from Krishna to his devotee Uddhava, and later from the Rishi Maitreya to Vidura. That Vidura was a step-brother of Dhritarashtra and was born to a woman of low birth, and was himself an incarnation of Yama, the God of Death, makes for another fascinating story that illustrates that, in those times, divine qualities were accepted as reaching into humans across the artificialities of social status that trouble us so much today. The Divine in the Indian Tradition incarnates in varying degrees as man or animal or indeed as a spark in every living being.

Different ancient traditions have looked at the question of the origin, meaning and purpose of Existence in different ways. Of them, the Indian tradition is, without question, not only the most massive, comprehensive, logical, incisive and far-reaching in its intellectual conceptions. The Indian ancients started with the basic questions : What is this world in which I exist ? Is it just whatever is within the reach of my physical senses ? What then is this other inner world that my mind also senses, which seems so vastly different in form and purpose ? Which world is real – the inner, the outer or both ? What really is Reality ? Am I this body that sees, this mind that visualizes, or something higher that is conscious of the body and its faculties ? In short Who am I ?

The Indian ancients pressed all their faculties – the senses, the mind, the intellect into service - to figure out the answers, They also invoked new unexplored faculties – insight, intuition and consciousness. Unrelenting, uncompromising logic led them to find that all the multiplicity of our experience arose from One Single Unitary Source, One Absolute Reality, the Highest Divine, which for want of a better word, they called TAT meaning That. TAT was that single Reality that manifested in a vast multiplicity of form and function that constitute the partial, relative Realities of all human experience. To our final question, 'Who am I', they gave one final answer, through a single, simple declaration : AT TVAM ASI, or THAT ART THOU.

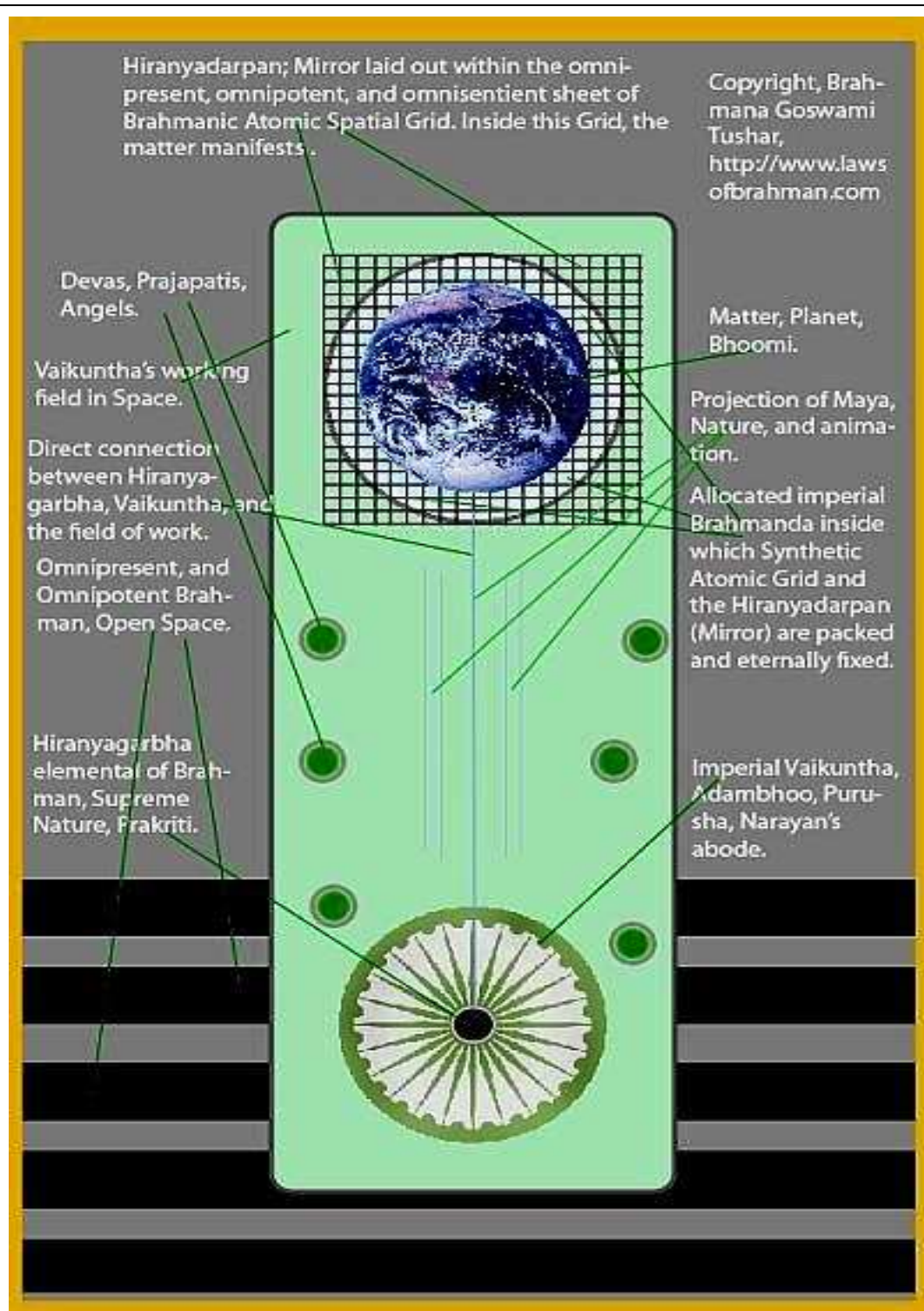
How then does a Single Unmanifest give rise to a vast manifested multiplicity. As in most traditions, the Hindu tradition describes the Highest Divine as Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent. Clearly Creation as a process, needs Space, Time and Power. These are considered part of the Supreme Divine, respectively as Infinity, Eternity and Maya. The Lord possesses a Divine Clock which is a source and regulator of all Time. He sets this Clock to awaken Him from His long night of Yogic slumber, His Yoga-Nidra. This slumber lasts 1000 Chaturyugas (Cosmic Time units explained later) in the Cosmic waters after the last Pralaya, or Great Dissolution of all Existence. During this period, He remains a Single Non-Dual Unmanifested Existence, with all His powers withdrawn into Himself. When He awakens, the Divine Clock of Time is activated and starts ticking. Looking within Himself, the Lord sees the whole Universe there in an ideal but latent form. This glance was thus His first act, the First Cause.

The First Effect of that First Cause is the emergence from the navel of the Lord, as he reclines on the serpent bed provided by Adishesha, a long stalk bearing a Lotus, in which is seated Brahma. Creating this Creator is thus the first act of Creation. Brahma, on emerging in the lotus, started scanning deep into the four directions, to find what existed in them. But he found nothing existed anywhere. He was therefore greatly intrigued on who created him and for what purpose. He thought the source of the Lotus from which he had emerged might give him an answer. So he went as far as he could down the hollow stalk of the Lotus, but found nothing there. There was only a vast darkness, suggestive of the darkness of his ignorance. He therefore went into deep meditation for a period of 100 years. At the end of that period, he realised that the answer was not to be found outside but could well be within himself. Now looking inwards he was thrilled to find the Lord resting in all His glory, on the huge serpent bed of Adishesha, and rising from His navel was the Lotus where he, Brahma himself, was seated. Singing the Lord's glory, Brahma sought the guidance of the Lord on the task he was assigned and how he should proceed to implement it. Pleased with Brahma's devotion, the Lord blessed him to proceed to create the Universe and all its beings as were then latent in Him. The Lord provided His first Manifestation in the form of the Primordial Purusha, whose body is the Brahmanda, the Cosmos, comprised of twenty four fundamental categories, collectively called the Mahatattva.. These categories were the raw materials for creating all of the fourteen worlds, and their Jiva inhabitants of the Universe with His all pervasive Spirit immanent in all of them. Having thus provided Space and Time, the Lord now provided Power, the third component of Creation, This was the Power of Maya who introduced the vast multiplicity of form and function into the onward processes of Creation, subjecting them to three attributes of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, the onward rule of Cause and Effect through the Law of Karma and the transient compulsions of Finite Time.

This first Manifestation constituted the first stage of Creation called Sarga. In the next stage, called the Visarga, the process was taken forward by Brahma who then created from the Mahatattva, all the later forms, Divine, Human, Spirit, Animal and Material, living and non-living, to fill the worlds of Existence. The earliest were the presiding Gods, followed by the Kumaras, Prajapatis and Manus in varying degrees of Divinity, and commissioned to populate the world with all forms of life. All of them emerged physically direct from Brahma, from different parts of his body. The emergence of the first Manu, Svayambhuva, was unique in that along with him was born a woman, Satarupa. The two were married, and through them was inaugurated sexual reproduction as the future process of all living creation. Svayambhuva was given the rulership of the Earth, and fill it with humans and other entities, on which, thanks to the new process, all entities, including mankind rapidly proliferated, much to the satisfaction of Brahma. Of course, there was a downside to this. Sex brought a whole new and powerful dimension to the play of the three Gunas of Prakrti. It shifted the attention of man dramatically from the higher impulses of the mind to the lower demands of the physical body. It subjected humans to more violent fluctuations of emotion and dichotomies of experience. This will be vividly illustrated in a later story of how Rakshasas appeared among the human descendents of the saintly Svayambhuva.

Kapila in his teaching to his mother Devahuti gives the following description (Bhagavata : 3-29-28 to 33) summarises the different entities in the order of increasingly higher faculty levels, in this stage of the Visarga :

Gross inert matter; living creatures that breathe; beings with limited consciousness; those with sense powers; those like vegetation that have only a sense of touch; those like fish that have only a sense of taste; those with a sense of hearing; those that can distinguish colour and form; those with teeth; those with many legs; those creatures with four legs; men with two legs; among men, the brahmanas; among brahmanas, those who have studied the Vedas; among them, those who know the meaning of the Vedas; among them, those who have mastered the meanings and have no doubts; among these, those who discharge their duties faultlessly; among them, those who are desirous of the fruits of their action; and lastly among them, those who have unconditionally surrendered their actions to the Lord; those of this last category see the Lord everywhere.



MAHAVISHNU : HIRANYAGARBHA : SCHEMATIC FORM

(Acknowledged to www.laws ofbrahman.com)

To resume the earlier narrative, what then were the 24 categories and 14 worlds that enabled Brahma to proceed with the onward creation of all the living and non-living contents of those world ? The entire process may be envisioned as a comprehensive, gradual, seamless materialization of everything from the stage of concept right through to the psychological and physical entity. This really, in a sense, is similar the modern process of product development of a concept through a drawing and prototype to a product, except that it is applied to everything that exists ! The 24 Categories or Tattvas are stated to have been derived by the Lord from Prakṛti, first as a Mahatattva or the primal entity, and then as Ahaṁkāra or a sense of Identity. Then in association with the three Guṇas of His Power of Maya, Ahaṁkāra yielded the twenty four categories as follows :

(A) The Vaikarika or Sattvika group : the four Antahkaranas or internal organs of cognition: *manas* (मनस्) - the lower mind; *ahamkāra* (अहंकार) - the empirical ego; *buddhi* (बुद्धि) - the intellect and *cit* () –consciousness

(B) The Taijasa or Rajasa group of two sub-groups :

(1) The five *karmēndriyas* (कर्मेन्द्रिय) - organs of action, namely *pāyu* (पायु) - the excretion organ, *upastha* (उपस्थ) - the sexual organs, *pāda* (पाद) - the organ of locomotion, *pāni* (पाणि) the hand, the organ of holding, and *vāk* (वाक्) - the organ of speech; and

(2) The five *jñānēndriyas* (ज्ञानेन्द्रिय) (20) - sense organs, namely *ghrāṇa* (घ्राण) - nose, *rasanā* (रसना - tongue, *cakṣu* (चक्षु) - eye, *tvak* -(त्वक्) - skin and *śrotra* (श्रोत्र) - ear

(C) The Tamasa Group of two sub-groups :

(1) The five *tanmātras* (तन्मात्र) - transit media of the five senses, namely *gandha* (गन्ध) - the transit medium for smell, *rasa* (रस) - the transit medium for taste, *rūpa* (रूप) - the transit medium for sight, *sparśa* (स्पर्श) - the transit medium for touch, *śabda* (शब्द) - the medium for hearing; and

(2) The five *mahābhūtas* (महाभूत), namely *pṛithvī* (पृथ्वि) - earth, *jala* (जल) - water, *tējas* (तेजस्) - fire, *vāyu* (वायु) - air, and *ākāśa* (आकाश) - ether

Of the fourteen worlds known as *virāṭa* (विराट) the first seven were higher worlds, or levels of existence, called *bhu: bhuva: suva: maha: jana: tapa: satyam* (भूः, भुवः, सुवः, महः, जनः, तपः सत्यं). The first three which refer to the Earth, the *antarikṣa* (अन्तरिक्ष) or the Mid-Space and Heaven were relevant to human existence and the last four were higher worlds comprising the domain of the divine. It is also be noted that all the seven states of existence reach down into the human personality as a psycho-physical spectrum of *sat, cit, ānanda, vijñāna, manasa, prāṇa* and *anna* (सत् , चित् , आनन्द, विज्ञान, मनस्, प्राण तन् अन्न) which translate as Truth, Consciousness, Bliss, Discrimination, Mind, Energy and Food. It may also be noted in this connection that the names of the first worlds, are referred to as the *vyāhrtis*, and are generally invoked in the *Gayathri Mantra* of the *Rig Veda* (V-62-100) which continues to be recited to this day in millions of Hindu households.

While seven worlds are listed as the higher worlds, likened to heaven, the remaining seven are considered to be lower ones, likened to hell. These latter bear the names *atala, vitala, sutala, rasātala, talātala, mahatala* and *pātāla* (अतल, वितल, सुतल, रसातल, तलातल, महतल and पाताल). They are peopled by demons and evil spirits and fallen humans, and would seem to reflect the baser elements and influences in human nature.

The concept of 14 worlds applies as much to the psychological domain of the personality of the individual as to the physical domain of the Cosmos. Even in physical terms the fourteen worlds need not necessarily be of a tangible form accessible to our senses. They could well be the totality of Space pervaded concurrently and coterminously by energy of different frequencies such as we are able to visualize for the electromagnetic spectrum. The first Manifestation of the Divine Himself is symbolized in an anthropomorphic image of the Primordial Purusha typically like the Icon representation shown here of Mahavishnu. This is to provide the common man who may not have the intellectual reach, but has an uninhibited imagination born of faith, as a means of visualizing the Divine and the process of the divine creation. This is indeed the psychological basis for the emphasis of the Bhagavata on the power of devotion.

More specifically the Earth which is of more direct concern to us is set in the ancient cosmic framework as a vast region comprised of seven

concentric spheres, called Dvipas, one inside the other and separated from one another by vast oceans. The Central body which humans inhabit is the Jambu Dvipa and its highest mountain is Meru, and to the south of it is the land of Bharata, the ancient name of India, also adopted officially today. The Lokaloka is the highest mountain of the outermost sphere and the line joining it to Meru is the axis of the Sun's relative movement giving us day and night, The line connecting Meru and the Dhruva constellation (the Pole Star) is the support base of all the galaxies Verse 23-3 of Skanda V of the Bhagavata draws attention to this awesome cosmic spectacle for inspiring devotion to the Divine, in the following words : Let a devotee, sitting alone in the evening, gazing at the stars pray thus “ I meditate on that Supreme Person, of the Nature of the Wheel of Time, forming the support of all these galaxies and all the Powers of Nature”.

We may pause at this point to have a look at how the Bhagavata presents the basic concept of Time and more specifically, the time scales involved in all cosmic and human processes. Time itself is considered a Power of the Divine, subtle, latent and imperceptible in the Lord in His Unmanifest state. Once Manifestation begins, Time becomes gross and perceptible because it is coterminous with manifestation and envelopes and affects everything that manifests. The Divine has Eternal Time as an Unmanifest part of Himself and manifests as Finite Time in human consciousness of humans as a timeline beginning at birth and ending at death, during which time the Indwelling Spirit is present in them. In Skanda 3, of the Bhagavata, Maitreya tells Vidura of how Kapila teaches his mother Devahuti :

अन्तः पुरुषरूपेण कालरूपेण यो बहिः ।

समन्वेत्येष सत्त्वानां भगवानात्ममायया ।। ३-२६-१८

anta: puruṣarūpēṇa kālarūpēṇa yō bahi: .

samanvētyēṣa sattvānām bhagavānātmamāyayā .. 3-26-18

The Supreme Divine, by virtue of His divine power, pervades everything internally as the Indwelling Spirit and externally as Time.

Earlier in Chapter 11 of the same Skanda, Maitreya gives Vidura the following details of how Finite Time becomes measurable using the relative movements of the Sun as the time-keeper. The smallest conceivable particle of matter is the Paramanu, and hence the infinitesimal time the Sun takes to cross this infinitesimal Paramanu is the smallest conceivable unit of time called the Paramanukala, and this is the building block for the larger units of time in the following progression :

3 Paranukalas = 1 Trasarenu; 3 Trasarenu = 1 Truthi; 100 Truthis = 1 Vedha; 3 Vedhas = 1 Lava; 3 Lavas = 1 Nimisha; 3 Nimishas = 1 Kshana; 5 Kshanas = 1 Kastha; 15 Kasthas = 1 Laghu; 15 Laghus = 1 Nadika (24 of

our minutes) 6 or 7 Nadikas = 1 Prahara or Yama; 8 Yamas = 1 and night of man; 15 days and night = 1 Fortnight; 2 Fortnihts = 1 month (this is one day and night f the Pitrs or spirits of our forefathers); 2 months = 1 Season; 6 months = 1 Solstice; 2 Solstices = 1 year (this is one day and night of the gods); 12 months = 1 year and 100 years are considere the lifetime of man. The Sun who is the Divine Timekeeper, the Lord of Time takes one year to traverse the full circle marked by 12 Rasis or Stellar Constellations. This year is also reckoned in other ways :

Samvatsara or the solar year : the time the Sun takes to traverse the 12 Rasis;

Parivatsara : the time Jupiter takes to traverse one Rasi;

Idavatsara : the duration of 12 months of 30 days each;

Anuvatsara : the duration of 12 lunar months, each from a New Moon to the next; and

Vatsara : the time the Moon takes to traverse 27 stellar constellations.

When Time moves from the Human context to the Divine context, it goes into a dramatically larger time scale :

1 Kalpa = 14 Manvantaras;

1 Manvantara = 71 Mahayugas;

1 Mahayuga = 4 Yugas;

1 Divine day = 1 human year;

1 Chaturyuga (a cycle of 4 Yugas) = 4,320,000 human years;

1 Day or 1 Night of Brahma = 1000 Chatur Yugas;

1 Kalpa or full day (day + night) is thus 2000 Chaturyugas;

360 full divine days make one divine year of Brahma;

The lifetime of Brahma is 100 divine years, divided into 2 equal Prarardhas;

The lifetime of Brahma closes with the Pralaya or the total dissolution of all Existence; and

That state of dissolution is for 2 Prarardhas, after which the next cycle of Creation begins under another Brahma.

The 14 Manvantaras bear the following names : Swayambhuva, Swarochisha, Uttama, Taamasa, Raivata, Chaakshusha, Vaivasvata, Savarni, Daksha Savarni, Brahma Savarni, Dharma Savarni, and Rudra Savarni, Of these, the Vaivasvata is the current one. Each Manvantara is ruled by a Manu ; and

Each 14 Manvantara, each ruled on behalf of Brahma, by a Manu. The following is the sequence of the Manvantaras :

Each of the Manvantaras break into 71 Mahayugas, and each Mahayuga consists of a sequence of 4 Yugas with names and durations as below :

Satya (Krita)	17,28,000 years
Treta	12,96,000 years
Dvapara	8,64,000 years
Kali	4,32,000 years

Total

43,20,000 years

We are to-day in the Kali Yuga of the twenty-eighth Mahayuga and the Kali Yuga began in 3101 B.C. One scholar has computed interestingly that If Brahma had a clock like ours, every 43.2 seconds on it would be equal to 1 Mahayuga on the human scale. One of our days in 1995 would show as 11-29 A.M. on what would be "to-day" for Him. On the human scale, around 1,972,949,100 years have passed since the present Kalpa, which is his "to-day", began.

The Bhagavata places at different points of the vast timespan of the present Kalpa, all its revered figures and great events living vividly even to-day in the minds of the millions of India. The Matsya Avatar comes in the dawn before the break of the present Kalpa. The Varaha and Narasimha Avatars along with the Lord's great devotee, Dhruva, later immortalised as the Pole Star, come in the first Manvantara. The present Kalpa is called the Svetavaraha Kalpa as it was ushered in by the Varaha Avatar. Rama , Krishna and Vyasa come in the Dvapara Yuga, and we, today in the Kaliyuga of the twenty-seventh Mahayuga of the current Vaivasvata Manvantara.

The stories that the Bhagavata weaves into this vast matrix of Space and Time are simply mind-boggling in the reach of their imagination. The stories cover the activities of Gods and humans, often both together, often traversing these vast spans of Space and Time. One charming story tells of a human who traversed the vast timespan of the first 27 Mahayugas of the current Vaivasvata Manvantara. Kakudmi was a king who lived on earth in the Satya Yuga of the first Mahayuga of the current Manvantara. Anxious to find a good match for his beautiful daughter Revati, he went to Brahma Loka, the world of Brahma, to get his advice. There, he had to wait for around 20 minutes (on the cosmic scale) for Brahma to return from watching a dance performance. Seeing him, Brahma told Kakudmi that during this period of his waiting, 27 Mahayugas had already elapsed on earth, and if he (Kakudmi) were to return now, he would find people on the earth enjoying the avatar of Krishna. In addition, he would also find in Krishna's brother Balarama, the right match for his daughter. Kakudmi followed Brahma's advice and thus it was that on his return to Earth, Revati came to be married to Balarama. Can the science fiction of today match the magnificence of the Bhagavata story of Kakudmi, either in the sweep of its imagination or the devotional purpose it was designed to serve ?.

But even more fascinating is the way that this vision of Space and Time is embedded as a living presence in the practices of our daily lives to this day. It should be of interest to note any ritual by a brahmana householder of today is always initiated with what is called a Sankalpa, which is a

statement of resolve, wherein the time and place of its performance is stated in terms of the cosmic setting as below :

".... *Dviteeya parardhe* - in the 2nd half of Brahma's life;
Svetavaraha kalpe - in the kalpa of Sveta-Varaha;
Vaivaswatha manvantare - in the reigning period of the current Vaivaswatha manvantara;
Ashta Vimsati tame - in the 28th mahayuga of the current manavantara;
Kaliyuge - in this kali yuga;
Prathame Padhe - in the first quarter of this yuga;
Jamboodvipe – in this continent of Jambudvipa;
Bharata Varshe, Bharata Kande - in the land of Bharata (India);
Sakhabde Mero, Dakshine Parsve - to the South of the Meru Mountain;
Asmin Varthamane Vyavaharike - in the current period now reigning;
Prabhavadi Shasti Samvatsaranam Madye – in the 60 year cycle starting from the year Prabhava;
.....*Nama Samvatsare* – in the (named) year of this 60 year cycle;
....*Ayane* – in the (named) Half-yearly course of the Sun (Dakshinayane, the Southern course or Uttarayane, the Northern course);
....*Ritou* – in the (named) season, (one of the 6 seasons or Ritus, namely – Vasantha, Greeshma, Varsha, Sharadh, Hemantha and Shishira);
....*Mase* – in the (named) month (one of the 12 months);
....*Pakshe* – in the (named) lunar fortnight (Shukla Paksha – the bright or Krishna Paksha – the dark fortnight);
....*Subha Thithou* – the specific day of that fortnight (Prathama, Dvithiya, Trithiya, Chaturthi, Panchami, Shasti, Saptami, Ashtami, Navami, Dasami, Ekadasi, Dwadashi, Trayodasi, Chaturdasi, and Pournami or Amavasya);
....*Vasara Yuktayam* - the (named) day of the week (Bhanu, Soma, Bhowma, Soumya, Guru, Brugu and Sthira); and
....*Nakshatra Yuktayam* – the day's (named) ruling star (one of 27).....

The above text is followed by the ritual which of course, draw heavily on the Mantras and procedures set out in the Vedic texts. The person undertaking the resolve also announces his own identity set in his own geneology going back to Vedic times as follows :

अभिवादये वैश्वामित्र, आघमर्षण, कौशिक, त्रय- आर्षेय प्रवरान्वित,
(कौशिक) गोत्रः (आपस्तम्ब) सूत्रः, यजुः शाखाध्यायी, श्री (-----) शर्मा
नामाऽहं अस्मि भोः।

abhivādayē vaiśvāmitra, āghamarṣaṇa, kauśika, traya-

ārṣēya pravarānvita, kauśika gōtra: āpastamba sūtra:, yaju:
śākhādhyāyī, śrī (— name) śarmā nāmāhaṃ asmi bhō:

Bowing to you, Sir, I announce myself as belonging to the spiritual lineage of the three Sages *Viswamitra, Akarshmana and Kausika*, to the family lineage of the *Kausika Gothra* and to the religious disciplines of the *Apasthamba Sutra* of the *Yajur Veda*, and I bear the name (so-and-so).

The Puranas have a lot of stories about different gods. It is not to be supposed that the gods were always godly. The Puranas have stories without number that tell of how gods had their share of human frailties : anger, envy, mischief and even lust. We noted earlier that Brahma created the first man and woman and endowed them with the sex mechanism for ensuring onward human propagation. There is a story that Brahma himself had a daughter who was so beautiful that he lusted after her and thereby nearly came to grief, a story that proclaims loud and clear that no one, however high, is higher than the moral law of the Supreme. But all stories, whether of Man or God, clearly utilize the human interest format for proclaiming the message that in the great conflict of the forces of Good and Evil, Order and Disorder, Accord and Discord, the Human is bound to the Divine for the purposes of the Divine.

Space is inseparable from Time, as if to reaffirm the fundamental truth that True Existence is One that is indivisible. This is just what Albert Einstein has reaffirmed from the perspectives of Modern Science. The quantum theory of modern Physics now points to the wave and matter are but different manifestations of the same energy : a specific instance of the Manifest emerging from the Unmanifest, of the One becoming the Many. Modern medical science too is beginning to see in the functioning of an intelligence in the cells in every part of the human body, the disappearance of the boundary between mind and matter. These perspectives can be recognized in the far more subtle and comprehensive tasks of Creation by Brahma involving the most fundamental materials, tools and mechanisms : essentially starting with consciousness and energy and letting these aggregate into matter and then aggregate further and proliferate into different types and states of matter of a vast variety of form and function, through complex processes over vast spans of time, by what we call evolution. These basic components, referred in philosophy as categories, are the Tattvas in ancient Indian tradition that traces the evolutionary linkage from the spirit through energy and matter all the way to the physical, psychological and spiritual composites that make up all that exists in the physical world and the psychological personality.

One of the most interesting aspects of the mindset, thinking process and approach to the understanding of the ancients was that Existence was a cyclic progression in Space and Time where Dissolution followed Creation in an endless cycle. This view seemed to follow logically from the cyclic progress of birth and death with the cyclic progression of Time itself, symbolised by the annual revolution of the Earth around the Sun symbolized again in the clock and calendar that we display on the walls of our home, or the watches on our wrist. The mindset of modern Science tends to explain most things in terms of a linear chain of observable and demonstrable physical cause and effect and within the short time frames of the working day or a lifetime. It declines to look at experiences of existences in a holistic perspective of vast time frames because they are not observable or demonstrable in the short time framed of here and now. On the other hand the ancients had an open mind on whatever was experienced by an individual, even if it was way beyond the reach of formal or normal reason. or even if it was no more than a figment of imagination, which could be expressed by a word or a symbol. Their assumption was anything was possible, and nothing was impossible, on the premise that it was the doing of the Highest Divine. This assumption became an article of faith, and the ancients never doubted the power of faith, though even Science may sometimes grudgingly concede by the confession that it does not know ! The assertion that there was a Divine and that there was a spark of it in the Human, considered by Modern Science as a Figment of Imagination, is considered by Veda, the Ancient Science as an Eternal Truth ! It is up to the reader to make up his mind and make his choice.

With this overview of how Creation began, the Bhagavata sets the stage for the appearance of a vast hierarchy of Powers Gods and Humans. This process is punctuated from time to time with the intervention of Avatars, some in human and some in animal form, to apply course corrections, as it were, to ensure that the evolution of the worlds accords with the purposes of the Highest Divine. We may now proceed to the Bhagavata's presentation of the Avatars, some of whom carried the process of Creation forward and some who sustained what was created.

CHAPTER – 2 : THE AVATAR



Dasavata : a 19th Century painting from Wikipedia



The Dasavataram : an iconic representation

(Acknowledgement : www.southindianhandicrafts.co.in)

CHAPTER – 2 : THE AVATAR

The Bhagavata is constructed largely around the Supreme Divine, Mahavishnu and the lives and doings of His Avatars, specially the Avatar of Krishna. The word Avatar comes from the verb “*tri*”, meaning “to cross, and “*ava*”, meaning “down”, making it to “come down”, used in the traditional sense of “divine descent” or “incarnation”. The word “incarnation” itself comes from “carnal”, that which pertains to the flesh”, and hence refers to taking the form of flesh. Thus “Avatar” refers to the Supreme Divine taking a brief human form for his own purposes, which are considered to refer to the welfare of the world which is His own creation.

The Bhagavata talks in the following verses of innumerable Avatars, most of them part representations or Amsas or Kalas, parts or particles,

अवतारा ह्यसंख्येया हरेः सत्त्वनिधेर्द्विजाः ।

यथाविदासिनः कुल्याः सरसः स्युः सहस्रशः ॥ १-३-२६

ऋषयो मनवो देवा मनुपुत्रा महौजसः ।

कलाः सर्वे हरेरेव सप्रजापतयस्तथा ॥ १-३-२७

एते चांशकलाः पुंसः कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम् ।

जन्म गुह्यं भगवतो य एतत्प्रयतो नरः ।

सायं प्रातर्गुणन् भक्त्या दुःखग्रामाद्विमुच्यते ॥ १-३-२८

avatārā hyasamkhyeyā harēḥ sattvanidhērdvijāḥ .

yathāvidāsinaḥ kulyāḥ sarasaḥ syuḥ sahasraśaḥ .. 1-3-26

ṛṣayō manavō dēvā manuputrā mahaujasaḥ .

kalāḥ sarvē harērēva saprajāpatayastathā .. 1-3-27

ētē cāmśakalāḥ puṁsaḥ kṛṣṇastu bhagavān svayam .

janma guhyam bhagavatō ya ētatprayatō naraḥ .

sāyam prātargṛṇan bhaktyā duḥkhagrāmādvimucyātē .. 1-3-28

The descents (Avatars) of Hari, who is of pure Essence, are numerous, as numerous as streams issuing from a perennial lake. 1-3-26

The Rishis, Manus, the sons of Manus and the powerful Prajapatis are but parts and particles of Hari. 1-3-27

But while these are parts and particles of the Supreme Being, Krishna is He, the Bhagavan Himself. Krishna is the full revelation of the Lord, while others come from time to time to relieve mankind from the sufferings caused by the Asuras. 1-3-28

There is an interesting story in the Mahadevi Purana that Mahavishnu had to take so many Avatars as a consequence of a curse He incurred from the Rishi Sukra, the preceptor of the Asuras, suggesting that even the Lord has to suffer the consequences of His acts !. In the course of one of the constant wars between the Devas and Asuras, Mahavishnu Intervened to help Indra. At one stage, the Sudarshana Chakra released by Mahavishnu cut off the head of Sukra's mother Kavyamata. Enraged at this, Sukra cursed Mahavishnu thus : "You are a crooked, deceitful being, guilty of woman-slaughter. I curse you to take countless incarnations in the world and suffer painful confinement for your sins" Of course, the Bhagavata Purana, being more partial to Mahavishnu, does not refer to this story.

There is of course another more important implication that flows from the declaration that the Avatars are innumerable. The Bhagavata description of every Jiva existing always, originally In a latent state within the form of the Unmanifest Divine, the Primordial Purusha, and emerging from that One to the Many that constitute the Manifest. The Indwelling Jiva in every being is in this sense an Avatar, which is best expressed by the Mahavakya, Tat Tvam Asi, That Art Thou ! But for the vast masses of common people, who live in the darkness of ignorance of this fact, the need is for the light of awareness. It is this light that is brought to them by the Avatar who could be a parent, a friend or Acharya or a Rishi. It could be ultimately the complete Avatar, Krishna Himself, that personification of Light itself. Vyasa did not find joy in articulating the philosophy of the Krishna through the Gita, But he did find joy ultimately found in the devotional description of the glory of Krishna, that he set out in the stories of the Bhagavata. He realised that this alone could bring joy and comfort to posterity in the harsh miseries that were clearly in store for the people with the onset of the Kaliyuga. This was what led Vyasa to be recognized as an Avatar. Indeed Sankara Bhagavadpada referred to Vyasa as Bhagavan which was the title of Krishna Himself.

Of all the Avatars, Krishna alone is considered a Purna Avatar, a direct and complete representation of the Supreme Divine Himself. This assertion is the foundation on which the whole Vaishnava edifice is built. The first Avatar , or Primordial Purusha, is called the Viraja Purusha is an eternal existence from whom other transient Avatars, in which He Manifests from time to time for specific cosmic or human purposes. The Bhagavata presents twenty three such Avatars, called the Leelavataras, or Playful Divine Descents. And as they are addressed to vast activities over whole worlds of transient existence they occur over vast spans of Space and Time. In terms of Time, the Sarga marks the first stage of Creation with the Primordial Purusha lying in deep *yoganidra*, yogic slumber, on the Cosmic Waters. From his navel emerges a lotus bud with fourteen worlds for its petals and Brahma seated in it, who then takes Creation into the Visarga or next stage of filling the worlds with their sentient and insentient beings.

The first Vyuhās or emanations of the Supreme Divine, four in number, and still part of Himself are Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Anirudha. In relation to

Krishna, they correspond to Krishna himself, his brother Balarama, son Pradyumna and grandson Aniruddha. In relation to evolutionary categories or states of consciousness, they correspond to Citta (Consciousness), Ahamkara (ego) Buddhi (Intellect) and Manas (Mind). In relation to the psycho-physical states they correspond to the Turiya (Super-consciousness), Sushupti (Deep sleep), Svapna (Dream state) and Jagrat (Waking state). Yet another set of His three forms in this first Avatar are called Gunavataras, arising from association with the three Gunas : in association with Sattva as Vishnu Himself, or with Rajas as Brahma or with Tamas as Rudra, associated in turn respectively, with the functions of Preservation, Creation and Dissolution. The six excellences that comprise Bhaga (Aisvarya (Omnipotence), Dharma (Virtue), Yasas (Glory), Sri (Beauty), Jnana (Omniscience) and Detachment (Vairagya) are retained in Sattva but are obscured in Rajas and Tamas, and hence Mahavishnu retains his primacy and entitled to be referred to as Bhagavan.

While the Bhagavata tells of 23 Lilavataras, there are other traditions that talk of a few more, making 26 and these are : Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana, Sanatkumara, Varaha, Narada, Nara, Kapila, Dattatreya, Yajna, Rshabha, Prthu, Matsya, Mohini, Kurma, Garuda, Dhanvantri, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Vyasa, Rama, Balarama, Krsna, Buddha and Kalki. Interestingly the Avatars take different forms : starting with a sequence of animal forms suggestive of an evolutionary order : Matsya a Fish, Kurma a Tortoise, Varaha a Boar, through Nrsimha, a half-lion Man, making a transition to the human sequence of Vamana, Parasurama, Balarama, Rama, Krsna and Kalki making the ten accepted by the Vaishnava tradition. as Varaha Some Avataras like Narada and some of the Manus and Prajapatis are considered to be descended from Brahma. Siva is not considered to have any Avataras, perhaps because his function is dissolution and not preservation of the world, There is however, one school that suggests that Siva has 28 Avataras who are considered to be the revealers of the Saiva Agamas.

Narada is a particularly fascinating figure. His unremitting devotion to the Divine is rewarded by absorption into the inner circle of the Lord's attendants, with the gift of

retaining memory of all his past lives and traversing and instantly appearing anywhere in the three worlds, simply to sing the glory of the Lord while incidentally fulfilling His purposes.

It would be appropriate to continue now with stories of the many prominent figures of the Bhagavata Purana, Avataras, Devas, Asuras, Devotees or others who received or failed to receive the grace of the Lord.

CHAPTER – 3 : DAKSHA



Statue in Dharmapuri District, Tamilnadu
(Acknowledged to Wikipedia / Creative Commons)

**The end of Daksha at the hands of
Virabhadra**

CHAPTER – 3 : DAKSHA

The Bhagavata story of Daksha illustrates how even at the dawn of Creation, even the earliest creation of the highest of humans, of gods and demi-gods, was marked by the violent play of the frailties of human nature, it would therefore appear as if delegation of power without the restraint of purity, of pure Sattva, is fraught with counter-productive consequences. But perhaps it was a conscious choice of the Supreme Divine to entertain Himself, as the ancient scriptures put it, with staging a Cosmic play called “Evolution” with a fantastic cast of characters, in terms of numbers and variety. It would appear that occasionally some characters would get out of hand, and almost derail the process, requiring the Divine Himself to intervene to keep the play on track.

It would be useful here to recapitulate in outline the sequence of this vast process of Creation. This process occurs in cycles between periods of the Pralaya when all Creation is dissolved and remain latent as part of the Unmanifest Lord. With Manifestation, Creation proceeds in two broad stages, called the Prakrita and Vaikrita comprised of six and three steps respectively, making a total of nine steps.

The Prakrita stage proceeds in six steps, beginning with the Lord's activating Prakriti and thereby its three Gunas or aspects of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, In the first step the dynamism of Rajas initiates creation of the root Universal principle of Existence called the Mahatattva from which springs the subsequent stages of creation. The resulting second step is the emerging of the Ahamkara, the principle of self-identification as “I”, The third step is the creation of the ten Tanmatras, or Bhutasukshmas, or subtle precursors of the ten gross elements. The fourth step is the creation of those ten gross elements, the Bhutas, comprised of the five sensory organs of knowledge and their corresponding sensory organs of action. The fifth step emerging from the Sattva Guna is the creation of the Mind and the presiding deities of all the organs. (This is suggestive of the inner psychological elements that control the personality) The sixth and last step of the Prakrtaa stage springs from the Tamasa Guna to create Avidya, or Ignorance that clouds all the faculties and limits their potentials.

The Vaikrita stage proceeds in last three step. The seventh is the creation of non-moving things, mainly plants classified under six types, largely insentient and largely internal and self-contained in their activities. The eighth step is the creation of brutes, classified under two groups each with 28 species, dominated by Tamas, and unable to think beyond food and the survival needs Their listing is quite interesting : 28 are land-based classified as single hoofed, cloven hoofed or having five toes with nails; 28

are classified as those that can fly. The ninth and last step is the creation of the human species, largely dominated by the Rajas Guna, and addicted to activity prompted by desire.

The creations of Brahma initially had more divine attributes like the Kumaras, and Prajapatis, but were followed by creations with less divine and more human attributes and finally sub-human attributes. This was perhaps inevitable because of their proliferation in a process where the three determining influences of the Gunas meant generation of a vast variety of Guna mixes in different proportions. This may be readily understood in terms of the mathematical process called recursion, where a limited number of symbols generate an unlimited number of identities.

The spectrum of super-humans, humans and sub-humans created by Brahma, started with the Kumaras and Prajapatis and were followed by Devas, Pitris, Asuras, Gandharvas and Apsaras, Bhutas, Pretas and Pisachas, Siddhas, Yakshas, Rakshasas, Charanas, Vidyadharas and Kinnaras. For want a suitable mechanism for reproduction, Brahma had to create his first children from different parts of his own body. The first four were the Kumaras, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata, and then followed the Manus and Prajapatis, Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Bhrigu, Vasishtha, Daksha and Narada. Finding none of them undertaking the onward task of Creation, Brahma finally brought out the first pair of man and woman, Svayambhuva and Satarupa, had them married and invested them with the power of sexual reproduction. Svayambhuva thus became the progenitor of mankind. This couple had two sons and three daughters and through them, much to the satisfaction of Brahma, initiated the vast proliferation of mankind that followed. Svayambhuva gave his third daughter Prasuti in marriage to Daksha Prajapati, and here begins the story of Daksha.

Daksha began his reign with the highest principles, and having mastered the Vedas engaged in all the Yajnas prescribed in them. He attributed all the power and prosperity heaped on him, to the Yajnas in which he engaged, and therefore, at the height of his glory, embarked on a great Satra, the most massive Yajna that would last a thousand years. All the Gods, Deities, Devas, Rishis and great persons of the three worlds were there. And as the Satra was to commence, Daksha went around greeting the guests, who rose in obeisance as he approach each of them and receiving their fulsome praise. The Lord Siva, also known as Rudra, who was married to Daksha's daughter Sati through Askini, was the only one who did not get up to offer his felicitations, simply because he always lived in a world of his own, always absorbed in the Highest Divine. Daksha felt greatly insulted and in a great rage, heaped insult upon insult on Siva. And topping it all, he proclaimed a curse that Rudra would be deprived of his share in the offerings of all future Yajnas. Hearing this Nandiswara, the

leader of Rudra's retinue, in great fury, pronounced a counter curse that Daksha's face would turn into that of a goat, and all his followers would descend into the birth-death cycle of Samsara. Thereupon Bhrigu, the High Priest of the Satra pronounced a curse that all followers of Rudra would become atheists and hostile to the Vedas. The retinue of Rudra was then driven away. Finally Rudra who bore all the insults silently all along, got up and quietly left the place to return home. After some time all who stayed back, resumed the performance of great sacrifice.

Years later Daksha commenced the performance of another grand ritual, the Brihaspatisava, with great pomp and ostentation where all the Brahmarshis, Devarshis, Devas and other celestials participated. Hearing of this, Rudra's wife Sati was filled with desire to attend the function, where she could once again enjoy the company of her old relations and friends. Rudra advised her against going as there was firstly no invitation, but more importantly, she would not only be ignored but insulted by her father who bore so much malice towards him (Rudra). Sati was insistent and finally took her own decision and proceeded to attend the festivities. And sure enough, at the function, she was so deeply insulted by her father Daksha, that she was filled with remorse over her own obstinacy, and decided to give up her life. Raising the yogic fire within herself, she was consumed by it to the consternation of all present. Roused to fury, Rudra's supporters who served as her attendants rose to attack and kill Daksha. Seeing this, Bhrigu, the chief priest invoked by mantra the presence of a host of Devas and Ribhus, who arrived and drove away Rudra's supporters.

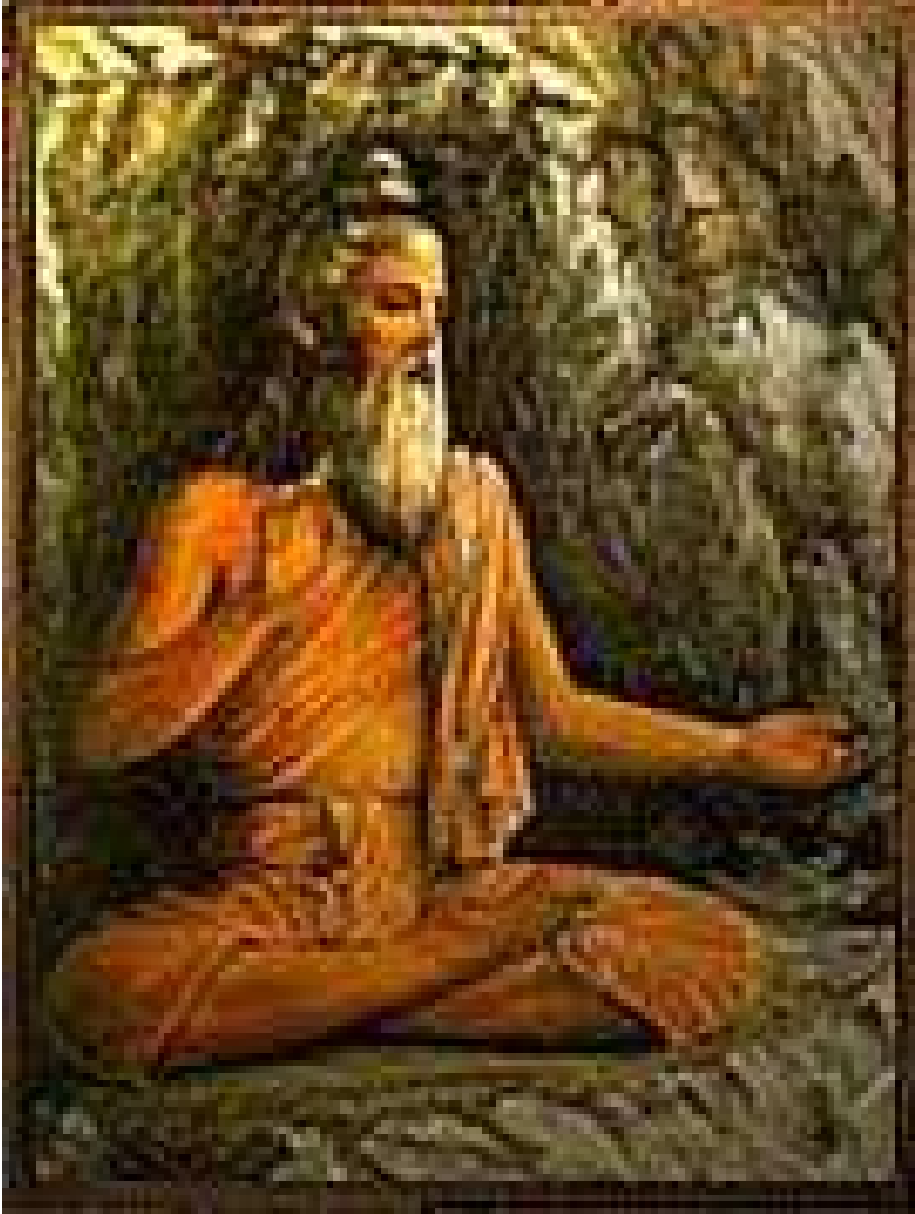
Hearing of these calamitous developments from Narada, Rudra was roused to terrible fury. From a lock of his hair, he raised the most terrifying form of Virabhadra and commissioned him to go and destroy Daksha and his sacrifice. This Virabhadra accomplished with savagery. He cut off Daksha's head and offered it in the sacrificial fire. He set fire to the entire area and then returned to Kailas.

Downcast by their ignominious defeat at the hands of Virabhadra, the Devas went to Brahma to seek his help and guidance. Brahma explained that they were paying for their folly by denying Rudra his rights at the sacrifice and being party to causing him such serious offence. But, he said, Rudra was by nature forgiving and so the only course open to them is to go to him and seek his forgiveness. Brahma too went along with them and pleaded their cause with Rudra. After listening to them patiently, Rudra explained that what happened was for punishing them for their insolence, and though they conducted the Sacrifice in consonance with the Vedas, they did so for their own glorification, and thus they had missed the very spirit of selfless service of the Lord that these observances were intended to inculcate. Rudra then forgave them and followed it up by restoring Daksha to life after the head of a goat was attached to his headless corpse. When Daksha

was restored to life he first saw Rudra in his beneficent aspect. Full of contrition, he shed tears and recited a hymn in praise of Rudra. Thus propitiated by Rudra, and commanded by Brahma, Daksha resumed the great Sacrifice and invoked the presence of the Lord Mahavishnu. The Lord arrived and in His presence, the great Sacrifice of Daksha was finally completed.

The redemption of Daksha does not end Daksha's story. Puranic stories continue through endless Time, with the reappearance of The great characters of the Puranic stories, both divine and human, reappear again and again through vast cycles of avatars and rebirths, almost as if to substantiate the idea that Cause and Effect make an endless chain, which constitutes the doctrine of Karma. Daksha reappears again in a later Manvantara, born to Prachetas, whose story comes later.

CHAPTER – 4 : KAPILA



(Acknowledged to www.bharatwisdom.com)

Kapila

CHAPTER – 4 : KAPILA

Kapila is the name of one of the earliest Rishis descended from Brahma, considered an Avatar of Mahavishnu and founder of the system of Samkhya System of Philosophy. Krishna begins his teaching of the Bhagavad Gita with a summary of the Path of the Samkhya. Of course Krishna knew what he was talking about, because it was a teaching he himself had first imparted in an earlier Avatar as Kapila to his mother Devahuti. It would therefore be interesting to travel back in Time to look at the origins of Devahuti and Kapila, as narrated by Maitreya to Vidura and presented by Vyasa in the Bhagavata.

We have already met with Svayambhuva Manu and his wife Satarupa, the first natural human couple created by Brahma. We have seen also that they had two sons and three daughters. Their daughter Devahuti was married to the great Rishi Kardama who was born to the Prajapati Pulaha and his wife Kshama. Kardama was a great Rishi in his own right, yet he was out-shone by his son Kapila, who was born as an Avatar of Mahavishnu and gave expression to the Samkhya doctrine that explained all Existence. What was even more remarkable was that this teaching emerged from Kapila's own teaching it to his mother Devahuti. In the course of this teaching, Kapila traces in detail the entire course of existence of a Jiva through the control of Prakrti and Time, from conception as a foetus through the 10 months of its gestation. He follows the course of the Jiva's existence thereafter through the whole span human life, thereafter through its cycle of births and deaths, and its transit in different forms through different worlds till the dissolution of all existence in the ultimate Pralaya.

This extraordinary teaching of the course of the Jiva through cosmic existence became the celebrated doctrine of the Samkhya, the first of six great schools of philosophy that emerged in India over the centuries. The word Samkhya means Knowledge of Reality. It is in this sense that Krishna introduces His teaching in the Gita. In describing it as a Yoga, a Path, He goes on to describing other Paths leading up to His final conclusion with the Path of Surrender. More accurately Samkhya would refer to the means of Knowledge. The word Samkhya also means Number or Enumeration. This is because of Kapila's enumerating the basic constituents of Existence. Of course, both meanings figure in the development of the doctrine.

Kapila explains that Knowledge rests on three logical components. The first is Pratyaksha or direct experience ("It stares you in the face"). The second is Anumana or Inference which is indirect experience (Intelligent Guess"). The third is Sabda, ("reliable evidence") or testimony that is authoritative and unquestionable, such as the Vedas. The first component virtually commits the doctrine to the position that what we physically perceive is real. This leads

directly to the conclusion that Prakrti from which all physical phenomena emerge is one Eternal Verity. The second Eternal Verity that is postulated is the Purusha or the Jiva, and these two provide the basis for all Reality. The three Gunas with their unceasing impact on physical body enslaves the Jiva and makes it subject to the Cause-Effect chain. This bondage is said to arise from Avidya or Ignorance, a failure of the individual to discriminate between his pure Consciousness (Purusha) and the physical body (Prakrti). The body has a gross form, the Sthula Sarira, and a subtle form, the Sukshma Sarira, also called the Linga Sarira. At the end of a lifetime the Sthula Sarira perishes. But the Linga Sarira survives and attaches to the Jiva and carries the Karmaic balance-sheet of the earlier lifetime into the later lifetime. Thus it is that the bondage operates through the lifetime and all later lives as well. Liberation from this bondage can come only from VivekaKhyati, Discriminating Knowledge, which helps shaking off this control of the three Gunas and Karma.

Prakrti that is seen as the eternal substratum of all physical existence is said to proliferate into its enormous variety through a first creation of the Tattvas or categories as its first building blocks. This has been described at length in the earlier Chapter on Creation. But it was Kapila who formulated it as a doctrine for future reference and guidance of posterity.

The extraordinary depth of observation and perception of the ancients is found in astonishing detail in the narration of Kapila, as indeed throughout the narrative of the Bhagavata. In the examples given below, Kapila begins his description of the course of a human through life and a succession of lives. Her starts with the following vivid account of the ten month sojourn of the Jiva after its entry as the seed of man's sperm into a woman's womb. This is a translation of his narrative as they appear Verses 1 to 22 of Chapter 31, Skanda 3 of the Bhagavata. They give a depth of detail such as might be given by a modern gynaecologist, though of course, with the devotional touch of the Bhagavata.

The Bhagavan (Kapila) said :

1. After the expiation of his sins in hell and in an animal embodiment, Providence directs the ignorant Jiva again into a human birth suited to the nature of his residuary Karma. He finds entry into a woman's womb through the seed of a man.
2. In one day the male and female elements are combined into one unit called kalala. In five days it is formed into a disk-like body called Budbuda. In ten days it becomes a hard body in the shape of a brinjal , and it is called Karkura. In one month it becomes a lump called Pesi.
3. In one month he develops a head and two months, the rudiments of arms and legs , in three months, nails, hair, bones, skin and a genital opening.
4. By the fourth month he develops the seven bodily dhatus (basic substances like blood, flesh etc); and by the sixth month, hunger and thirst. In the sixth

month, it is covered by a thin membrane called the placenta and its movements come to be felt on the right side by the mother.

5. Now, the foetus starts absorbing nutrition from the mother's food; the foetus finds itself in a very unpleasant place in the midst of bodily filth, breeding worms.
6. He often swoons, his tender skin being bitten and wounded by hungry worms growing there.
7. He also suffers intensely from the contact of the pungent, salty and burning substances consumed by the mother.
8. Covered first by the placenta and then by the intestines of the mother, he rests in the womb with his back, neck and head curled up.
9. He cannot move his limbs, as even as a bird in a cage cannot fly. By the divine will, he now remembers all the actions he had done in his past lives. What happiness can he have in that uncomfortable place, where he is made to continuously think of his acts, unable even to breathe ?.
10. From the seventh month he is conscious but cannot remain still, being pushed by the winds of the womb. Being so pushed, he wriggles like his brother worms born in the dirt of the womb.\.
11. The frightened foetus, bound to the body by the seven basic bodily substances (dhatus) and completely identified with it, now indirectly praises with joined hands, the Lord by whose will he is in the womb.
12. The Jiva says : I seek shelter at the feet of the Lord who assumes at will, the forms of various Divine Incarnations and walks the earth in order to protect and redeem its inhabitants. It is by His grace alone that an iniquitous creature like me has come to this most deserving state.
13. I, whose spiritual nature has been covered up by the forces of Karma, sit here bound by a body of material substances, that are the products of the Cosmic Power ---- I, the Jiva, salute Him who is pure, unchanging and indivisible Consciousness, but is none the less present in my distressed heart too, being the indweller in everything.
14. I salute that Supreme Being who is superior to Purusha and Prakrti (soul and matter), who, unlike myself, is without a body of five elements, whose consciousness is not subject to the deluding influences of the senses and their objects engendered by Prakrti, and who is therefore of unlimited power and wisdom.
15. It is Maya, the power of the Lord, having Karma as its binding cord, that has brought me to this state of bondage, whose innumerable woes have completely effaced the memory of my spiritual nature. There is no other way for me to regain my spiritual status except through His grace.
16. It is by the Lord, by whom the whole universe is pervaded, that has given me the memory of my past, present and future. I pray in adoration of that being for relief from the suffering arising from my entanglement. In Karma as a Jiva.
17. I am lying in the cavity of another body , covered with bodily fluids and tortured by the heat generated in it. Very much distressed in mind, I am counting the days before I shall be released from here. O Lord, when shall that day come ?

18. O Lord, Thou hast out of Thy infinite mercy, bestowed upon me in my tenth month, an awareness of my situation. The satisfaction of having done such a gracious act is the only offering that Thou, the most merciful one, can get in return from it. For a humble Jiva in entanglement that I am, I can offer nothing in return except my repeated salutations.
 19. Other Jivas in animals (in my predicament) are aware of only their bodily instincts, joys and discomfort. But by virtue of the higher understanding given to me, I am naturally conscious of moral values like self-control and the like, and I am aware of that ancient Being within my heart and without, just as I am aware of the physical body, centering on my I-sense.
 20. O Lord, though my stay in the womb is very uncomfortable, I do not wish to come out of it into that pit of entrapment of the world outside. For when I am out, I shall not have the present consciousness but be overcome again by identification with the body, and all the entanglements of Samsara that follow it.
 21. As there is thus the chance of my losing spiritual consciousness on being freed after birth from my present sufferings, I shall make in every way a conscious endeavour to prevent the recurrence of future births in numerous wombs by the remembrance of the Supreme Being, who is the friend and well wisher of all. Becoming a devotee of the Lord and worshipping His holy feet, may I never again have physical embodiment.
- Kapila concludes :*
22. In the tenth month the foetus in the womb, who has made the above resolution and has been engaged in contemplation and praise of the Lord, is pushed out of The womb, head downwards, into the world, by uterine contractions.

After letting the foetus itself virtually speak us up to this point, Kapila takes his narrative of the experience of the new Jiva-body combination through life and thereafter, forward in the following sequence. (III-31- 28 to 47 and III-32-(1 to 33))

A new Jiva, carrying a stamp of experiences of the last body it occupied, now occupies the new body that has taken shape. This somewhat like a person moving out from an old house into a new one, after waiting for an interval in another location.

1. Passing from infancy through childhood to youth, man attains full body-consciousness. Desire, and Anger on desire not being fulfilled and Hostility towards those coming in his way builds up
2. The false identification of himself is firmly established, and he thinks of "I" and "Mine", only in physical terms.
3. Having to sustain himself, he continues in actions specially those driven by hunger and sex, only deepens his bondage in the life-death cycle.

4. The Jiva continues to lose its good and spiritual endowments of truth purity, kindness restraint in speech, control over the mind and senses. Association with evil persons and indulgence in sex lead to degeneration.
5. The body exists at two levels, the gross or Sthula Sarira and the subtle or Linga Sarira, and when on death it is the former that perishes while the latter survives and attaches to the Jiva and carries these influences into new bodies in future lives. The cause-effect of wrong actions leading to bad results persist through future lives as a never-ending cycle as long as he does not avoid wrong actions arising from bondage to the senses. The Jiva of such persons goes to the Pitrloka, the lower world of the Manes, for a brief period to reward whatever good deeds they have done and then return to the next birth to work out their destiny.
6. Man should not consider himself at the mercy of circumstances, but realize that he is the maker of his own destiny, through making the right choices in his actions.
7. The right actions are those undertaken, not for one's own gratification, but done with detachment, without attachment to the fruits of action which should be dedicated to the service of the Lord.
8. The Jiva of such persons, go after death to Satya Loka, the world of Brahma. Those with traces of ego return to fresh birth but those who become pure are finally merged into the Lord Himself at the time of the Brahma Pralaya, the final dissolution when all Existence is reabsorbed into the Supreme Divine.
9. There is after all only One Supreme Divine and there are several paths that lead to Him. One object with different attributes is seen differently by the different senses : a flower is sensed for its fragrance by the smell, for its softness by the touch, or its beauty by the eye. Even so, the One Bhagavan is seen and interpreted differently by the different philosophies and scriptures in the light of their respective traditions.

The story of Kapila has a beautiful ending. His mother Devahuti, having internalized this great teaching imparted to her by Kapila her son, followed it with faith and devotion, and sure enough, in the course of time, attained to the Supreme Divine, at a holy place sanctified for posterity by the name Siddhapada.

CHAPTER 5 : PRAHLADA



(Acknowledged to www.hitsondowlod.blogspot.com)

**Prahlada after the killing of
Hiranyakasipu by Narasimha**

CHAPTER – 5 : PRAHLADA

The story of Prahlada is one of the great stories of the Bhagavata. It is sandwiched between the stories of two mighty Rakshasas, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu. These stories in turn, are spun into the stories of two Avatars, the Varaha and the Narasimha. The first Avatar is a Boar, a full animal and the second is half man - half lion, perhaps suggesting early stages of Evolution, when the animal had to become half a man, before becoming a full man.

The first enveloping story, as typical of all the stories in the Bhagavata, is presented as having first been narrated by Maitreya to Vidura, recorded and narrated by Vyasa to Suka, in turn narrated by Suka to Parikshit. There it was heard by the Suta Ugrasravas, who finally narrated it to the Rishis at Naimisharanya. This transmission chain describes beautifully how myths, traditions and histories get developed over time. This story begins with Sri, also called Lakshmi, the consort of Mahavishnu. Drawn by love of the Lord, she came one day to see Him in Vaikunta. Stopped at the gates by two of the Lord's faithful guards, she became angry and cursed them. Long after this, the same thing happened when the same guards stopped two Kumaras, the early saintly creations of Brahma, who came to Vaikunta to see the Lord. The guards incurred their anger and earned yet another curse. The Lord who just then appeared there, took stock of what happened. He agreed that the guards had only done their duty in their devotion to Him, yet unfortunately, had drawn a curse of two saintly devotees that could not be undone. (Implying that an effect has to follow a cause !) He therefore ordered that they suffer confinement for a term of human birth, the real suffering being separation from Him. However, The Lord however tempered this harsh punishment with mercy, by assuring the guards that, at the end of that spell, they would be re-instated in His service. That is how the two guards took worldly birth as the two Rakshasas, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu which ended in their merciful death at the hands of two Avatars of the Lord Himself. The Lord explained that the punishment was also a fulfilment of the curse inflicted on them earlier by Sri. This is how the Lord fulfils Himself over vast spans of time where humans are unable to see and understand the long chain of cause and effect. Inscrutable, as they say, are the ways of the Lord !

We come now to the story of the chain that led to the birth and death of Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu. Svayambhuva, and his wife Satarupa, whom we have met with earlier, had two sons, Priyavarta and Uttanapada, and three daughters, Akuti, Devahuti and Prasuti. The last daughter, Prasuti, was married to Daksha Prajapati. Thirteen of their daughters were married to the Sage Kasyapa, son of Brahma's son Marichi. Two of these

wives of Kasyapa, Aditi and Diti became mothers of the two great lines, the Devas and Asuras. Aditi was a virtuous devotee of the Lord and produced the Adityas named after her, and also called the Devas. Diti was a slave of her sexual passion and forced herself on her husband disturbing his religious observances and earning his angry curses repeatedly. The first occasion produced two Asuras Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu who were killed by Mahavishnu at the request of Indra. The next such occasion was when she sought a powerful son who would kill Indra in revenge. Luckily one day when she was asleep Indra came by and cut the foetus into 49 pieces which were then born as the 49 Maruts, who later became Indra's loyal followers. And finally Diti launched the long line of sons who came to be known after her as the Daityas. This time she became penitent and sought Kasyapa's forgiveness. Kasyapa then tempered his curse by saying that while her sons would perish, the grace of the Lord would return through a grandson. This would be Prahlada whose story follows later. Aditi and Diti would thus appear to have provided the central faultline that divided all of creation thereafter into the forces of Good and Evil.

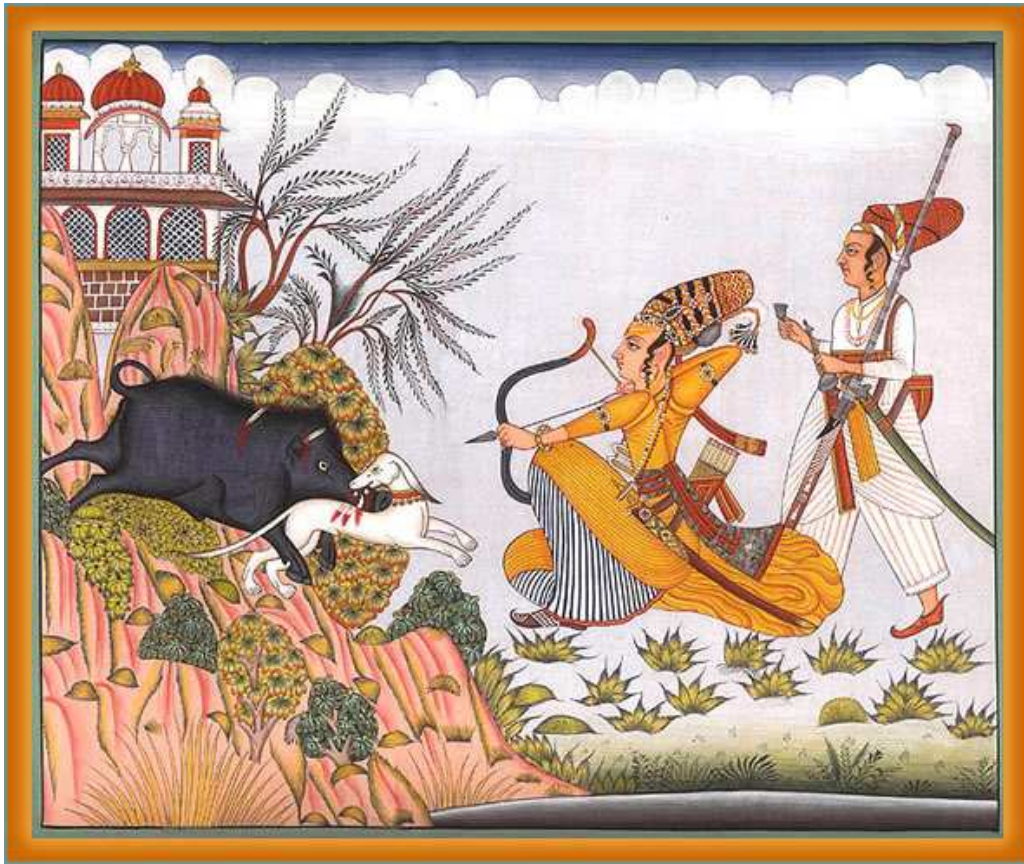
To come now to the story of Diti's first two sons, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu. They grew up to be terrible Rakshasas, who unleashed a reign of terror in the three worlds. Empowered by boons he received from Brahma, Hiranyaksha destroyed everything on Earth and pushed it down the depths of the ocean to the lowest of the worlds, Rasatala. The gods in a panic, went to Brahma and pleaded with him to help. Brahma in turn, sought the help of Mahavishnu. The response of the Lord was to manifest as the Varaha Avatar in the form of a Divine Boar, by issuing forth from the nostril of Brahma, just as other entities of Creation issued from other parts of Brahma's body. Brahma's body, of course, was the Primordial Purusha, the Brahmanda, from which all creation emerged. It was this divine Varaha Avatar that went down to the Rasatala to raise the Earth to its rightful place above the waters.

Meanwhile in his wide-ranging aggression against the gods, while sporting in the cosmic waters, Hiranyaksha encountered and challenged Varuna, the Ocean god. Varuna deftly avoided the challenge by saying he was too small a person for Hiranyaksha to take on, but instead he should really take on Mahavishnu who would be a worthy foe, Pride goeth before a fall, as they say, and in his supreme arrogance, Hiranyaksha went down to Rasatala and there encountered the Lord in the form of the Boar. A great fight ensued in which Hiranyaksha was killed, and the Lord, supporting the Earth on His tusks, raised and restored the Earth to its rightful place. Brahma then assigned the rulership of the Earth to Svayambhuva Manu and commissioned him to undertake the task of onward creation and protection of mankind.

With the killing of Hiranyaksha, only part of the Lord's plan was fulfilled. It was Hiranyakasipu who now remained to be dealt with. This becomes part of the next story. Hiranyakasipu had been angered at Mahavishnu for killing Hiranyaksha and had sworn vengeance. Empowered by boons from Brahma, obtained after long penance, he went on a rampage spreading terror all around, and defeating the gods, assumed rulership of the three worlds. When Hiranyakasipu was engaged in penance, during this conflict with the Gods, Indra abducted Kayadhu, the wife of Hiranyakasipu. Luckily Narada intervened and took charge of her. Narada's vision spanned past, present and future, and he could therefore sense the plans of the Lord. Seeing that she was pregnant at that time. Narada imparted the Vedas and all spiritual knowledge to her and through her to the foetus and later restored her to Hiranyakasipu. In due time a son was born to them and given the name Prahlada.

In high hopes of making his son the instrument of wreaking vengeance on Mahavishnu, Hiranyakasipu entrusted Prahlada's education to the best of teachers, with special instructions to emphasise the supremacy of Hiranyakasipu to the complete effacement of all references to the supremacy of Mahavishnu. Hiranyakasipu had in fact ordained that the invocation "Narayanaya Namah" should be replaced by "Hiranyaya Namah" throughout the land. But, thanks to the teaching of Narada, while yet a foetus, Prahlada had become a devotee of Mahavishnu. Despite several efforts of his teachers, every time Hiranyakasipu tested him, Prahlada always proclaimed the supremacy of Mahavishnu. Ultimately in sheer anger and frustration, after all efforts of even the worst forms of torture failed, Hiranyakasipu embarked on series of attempts to kill Prahlada. The final attempt had all the elements of a powerful drama. In response to the taunts of Hiranyakasipu, Prahlada repeated that Vishnu was here, there, everywhere, and even in these pillars of the palace. In uncontrollable rage, Hiranyakasipu struck the nearest pillar with his sword. That moment, there emerged suddenly from that pillar, the fierce form of a half man - half lion that pounced on Hiranyakasipu and tearing open his entrails killed him. The fierce form then appeared momentarily in his real form of Mahavishnu in benediction to Prahlada and then disappeared. This was thus the Narasimha Avatar of Vishnu, a name where the first part Nara, means man, and the second part Simha, means lion. And thus ends the Tale of Two Rakshasas, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu, and the Tale of Two Avatars, Varaha and Narasimha.

CHAPTER – 6 : PURANJANA



(Acknowledged to www.exoticindia.com)

Puranjana goes hunting

CHAPTER – 6 : PURANJANA

The human family line descended from Swayambhuva was marked by a number of great kings, noted for noble qualities and ascetic inclinations. These included Dhruva, who was a grandson of Svayambhuva. Dhruva was followed by descendents in the following order : Vatsara – Pushparna ‘ Vyushta – Sarvatejas – Chakshus – Ulmuka – Anga – Vena, a cruel exception to the nobility of the line – compensated by Prithu, one of the greatest of the line. From Prithu descended in order Vijitasva – Harvardhana - Barhishat also known as Prachinabarhis – and finally his ten sons, known as the Prachetas. The Bhagavata presents all these ancient genealogies in extraordinary detail with the names of sons and daughters and their spouses at each generation of the vast number of such family lines.

It is in a great interaction with Prachinabarhis and the Prachetas that Narada makes another memorable re-appearance to give their lives a big change of direction. Though commanded by their father to multiply the species, the Prachetas instead, proceeded westward towards the sea coast. There in a vast lake, rendered auspicious with lotuses and other flowers and resorted to by birds and bees, they had an extraordinary vision of Lord Siva who emerged with his retinue from that lake. Praising them and their father as great devotees of the Supreme Vasudeva, Siva delivered an unusual hymn of extraordinary beauty in praise of that Supreme Lord, that has come to known as the Rudra Gita. In this hymn Siva proclaims that he, Brahma and Vishnu are but aspects of the One Supreme Vasudeva. Commanding the Prachetas to engage in their long penance by repeating this hymn, Siva disappeared from their view.

With little hope that the Prachetas would engage in propagating their line, Prachinabarhis sought comfort in performing sacrifices. It is against this setting that Narada comes to see Prachinabarhis. He notes the unceasing involvement of Prachinabarhis in the performance of the Vedic Yajnas and specially the enormous cruelty arising from the slaughter of animals for offer in the sacrifices. Narada takes him to task on all this, saying that the cruelty to animals would certainly rebound in future births on those performing these sacrifices. These rituals are designed only to fulfill the earthly desires of those performing them, These are of no use to the common people who only want happiness and relief from suffering. The only way for them is to forget themselves in singing the praises of the Lord and leaving it to Him to decide whatever is best for them. Praise of the Lord and devotion to Him is the easiest and most practical and effective course available to them. Let me tell you a story, says Narada to Prachinabarhis,

that will illustrate how man must conduct his affairs. Narada then relates the story of Puranjana

The story of Puranjana is one of the most unusual and fascinating stories of the Bhagavata. It is unusual because the story teller is Narada, who is himself one of the most unusual characters of the Bhagavata. And it is fascinating because Narada himself says it is consciously told as an allegory.

The allegory is one story within another, presented thus to add special interest to its special message. We may in a sense, say that humans are prone to allegory when they say one thing but mean something else. But more seriously, much of the Vedas and Puranas may be considered largely allegorical. Many of their gods and powers who are presented as individuals who control the external forces in play in the external cosmos, can be seen at the same time to represent the inner psychological forces at play in the inner personality of the individual. Interestingly even names of characters in the Bhagavata stories are often directly suggestive of psychological traits entering the human downstream. One of Brahma's sons was Adharma, (Unrighteousness). He was married to Mrisha (Untruth) and descended from them were a progeny bearing names like Dambha (Hypocrisy), Maya (Conceit), Lobha (Greed), Nikriti (Obstinacy), Krodha (Anger), Himsa (Slaughter), Kali (Evil) Durukti (foul speech), Yatana (Pain) Bhaya (Fear) Mrityu (Death) and Niraya (Hell). These characters seem to suggest the emergence of all the negative characteristics of the human personality

Incidentally, a word about Narada himself. He is a son of Brahma, the Creator. By unremitting devotion to Mahavishnu, he earned his position as a personal attendant of the Lord. Seeing his constant singing the Lord's praise, the Lord gifted him with a Vina. For this purpose, the Lord also endowed him with the power of traversing all the worlds of Space and all parts of Time, past, present and future. In the course of narrating the story of Puranjana Narada explains of how his own being constantly on the move without respite, was the result of a curse inflicted on him by the daughter of Time, when he rejected her amorous advances. As the story of Puranjana is a long allegory, and to ensure that one does not lose thread of its intent, its narration below has all the intended meanings placed in italics within brackets at appropriate places.

There was a King called Puranjana, who wanted to find a city where he could live and which would fulfil all his physical wants and desires. He set out on a search, accompanied by a mysterious and invisible friend and after a long time came up to a magnificent city with nine gates. These gates

were positioned two in the front, four at the sides, one at the back and two at a lower level below. The city had every possible convenience and facility for entertainment and enjoyment. And there, to top it all, he found a lady of extraordinary beauty, with a large retinue of personal assistants, and with security provided by a retinue of soldiers under the command of a five-headed serpent.

Questioned by Puranjana on her background, the lady replied that like everyone else, she knew nothing of her origin, or who built this city, except that she lived there at that moment, in the company of those around her who were her friends and under the protection of the serpent who guarded the city.

Enchanted by her, Puranjana wooed her, married her and together lived in the city for a hundred years. The city was described as having nine gates leading to different places (*experiences*). Of the two front gates the left one was Khadyota (*the less powerful left eye*). The one at the right was Avirmukhi (*the more powerful right eye*). Through them the master (organ of sight) could go out along with a friend Dhyuman (*the sense of sight*) to the village Vibhrajita (*Forms grasped by the eye*). Between those gates were two more gates, Nalini and Naalini (*the nostrils*). Through them the master (*the organ of smell*) could go along with a friend Avadhuta (*sense of smell*). And the adjacent gate just a little below was called Mukhya and through it, the master (the mouth) could go to the lands called Apana (*eatables*) with two friends, Vipana (*the organ of speech*) and Rasajna (*the organ of taste*). The gate on the right side was called Pitruhu, through which the master could go along with a friend Sutradhara (*the organ of hearing*) to the land of Dakshinapanchala (*the ritual texts*). The gate on the left side was called Devahu, through which the master could go to the land of Uttarapanchala (*the scriptures teaching renunciation*). The gate below in the front was Asuri (*the penis*) through which the master could go along with a friend Durmada (*sex function*) to a place called Gramaka (*sexual enjoyment*). Behind that was the gate Nirriti (*the anus*) where the master could go with a friend Lubdhaka (*excretory function*) to the land Vaisasa (*faecal matter*). The gates at the sides were Nirvak (*the legs*) for mobility and Pesaskrit (*the hands*) for manual work. Lastly when the master enters the Antahpura (*the heart*) along with Vishuchina (*the mind*) he is overcome by attachment to wife and children. It was thereby that Puranjana finally lost all his sense of discrimination and his bondage to the senses was complete.

Now comes another allegory within this allegory. One day Puranjana set out on a hunting expedition in the forest of Panchprastha in his swift chariot (*his dream body*) drawn by five horses (*the five organs of Knowledge*). The chariot had a pair of shafts (*I-ness and My-ness*), two wheels (*Merit and Demerit*), one axle (*Prakrti*), three flagstaffs (*the three*

gunas) and five joints (*the five Pranas*). The chariot had one rein (*the mind*), one charioteer (*Buddhi*), one seat (*the heart*) two yokes (*joy and sorrow*), five shooting counters (*the five sense objects*), seven protective coverings (*the Dhatus*) and five types of movement (*the organs of action*). Protected by golden armour (*Rajoguna*), armed with an inexhaustible quiver of arrows (*Ahamkara and its different variants*) and accompanied by the commander of his forces (*the mind*), Puranjana entered the Panchaprastha forest. In a violent spree of ruthless slaughter, he killed vast numbers of animals, with no place for sympathy or respect for the rules prescribed for the killing of animals for sacrificial purposes. Exhausted at the end of the day, Puranjana returned home and went to sleep.

On waking, fully refreshed, he looked for his wife and could not find her. Her attendants then drew his attention to her lying on the floor in a dishevelled state, overcome by sorrow and anger. Summoning all his charm, he pacified her till she became composed and they were able to forget themselves in an orgy of mutual desire. Puranjana's bondage to her, to their children and to the demands of their senses became complete. In the course of time, the Daughter of Time arrived in the form of age and started to overtake them. This unrelenting person had earlier made amorous advances to Bhaya (Fear) the King of the Yavanas. Not accepting them but yet not distress her, Bhaya put her on to his brother, a fever called Karma, who ruled and consumed the world of humans, while himself (Bhaya) providing her the support of his army. The Daughter of Time now set to work on Puranjana who was thereby rendered weakened and dependent on others who soon started neglecting and ignoring him. Finally death overtook him, but even at his dying moment his bondage remained as he was full of the thought of what would happen to his wife. So it was, that this thought at the time of his death resulted in his next birth as a woman, the noble daughter of Rajasimha, the Bhoja King of Vidharbha. She was married to Malayadhvaja the Pandya King of Madurai to whom many children who continued the Pandya dynasty in that Dravida country.

In due course Malayadhvaja and his wife took to asceticism and worship of the Lord. When he died, his wife started to follow him by entering his funeral pyre. At that point she was stopped by a brahmana, who then told her that she was neither the daughter of Malayadhvaja, nor the wife of the departed king that she thought herself to be, but a man, Puranjana, in a previous birth. These memories notwithstanding, said the brahmana, her real identity was the eternal Jiva which takes residence in different bodies in different births and gives them transient and seeming identities which were false.

Concluding the narration of the story to Prachinabarhis, Narada clarifies that the unknown companion whom Puranjana deserts at the approach of

the nine-gated city (*the human body*) is the Buddhi (*discrimination*). He does so at the instance of Ahamkara (*the sense of "I"*) that creates a false sense of identity under external influences in the shape the woman, Pramada (*false sense of "Mine"*). Narada emphasizes how the performance of Vedic rituals should not be for the sake of selfish rewards or for self-glorification but for the glorification of the Supreme Lord and fulfilment of his purposes. He drives home the point of how the extensive and senseless slaughter of animals had rebounded on Puranjana through the action of Karma.

While there are references in the Vedas and Puranas to animal sacrifice and meat eating, springing from an early human tradition, we can readily see in the story of Puranjana, the origin of the later trend of eschewing this tradition and adoption of vegetarianism. In the present day, vegetarianism is largely concentrated in orthodox sections of Hindus, the Jains and the Buddhists. The following extract from the Manu Smriti would indicate how this trend took final shape in the ancient texts :

Chapter 5 :

48. Meat can never be obtained without injury to living creatures, and injury to sentient beings is detrimental to the attainment of heavenly bliss; let him therefore shun the use of meat.

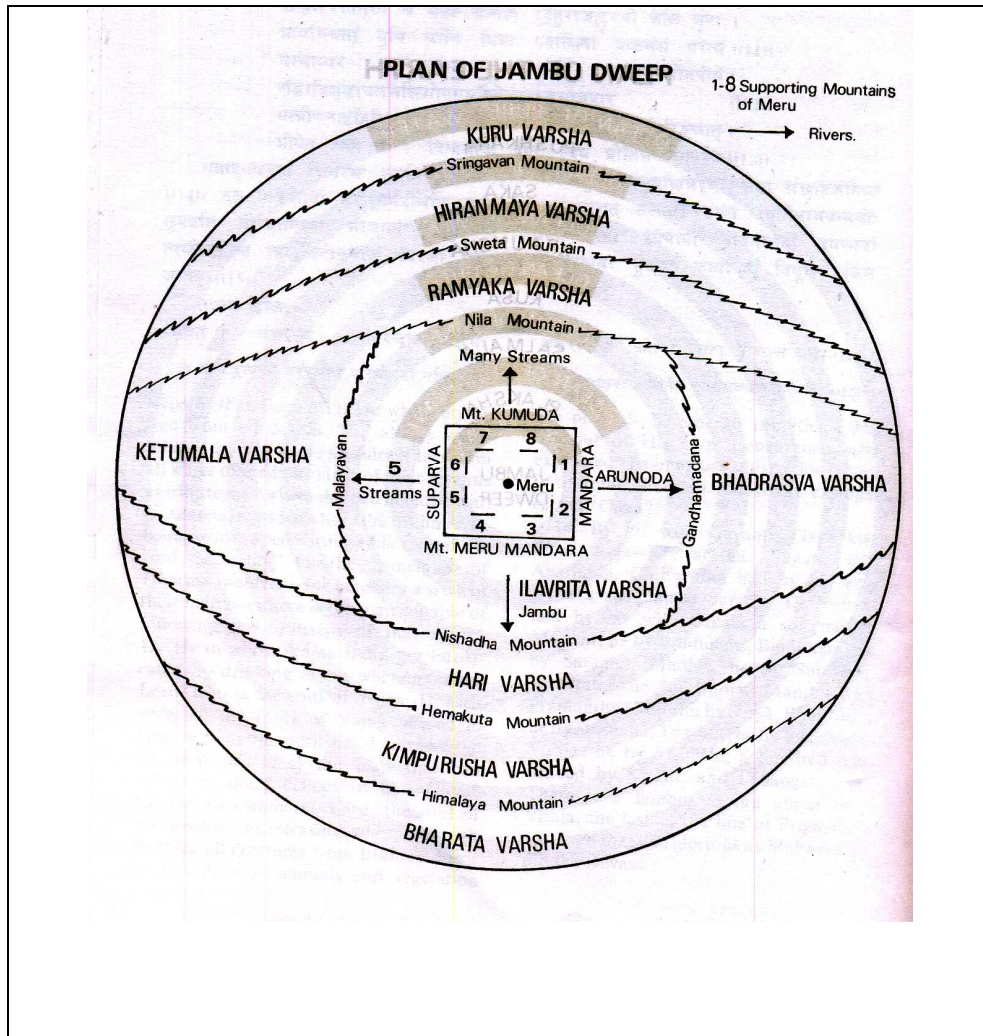
49. Having well considered the disgusting origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let him entirely abstain from eating flesh.

50. He who does not eat meat like a Pisacha, becomes dear to men, and will not be tormented by diseases.

51. He who permits (the slaughter of an animal), he who cuts it up, he who kills it, he who buys or sells (meat), he who cooks it, he who serves it up, and he who eats it, must all be considered as the slayers (of the animal).

52. There is no greater sinner than that man who seeks to increase the bulk of his own flesh by the flesh of other (beings).

CHAPTER – 7 : BHARATA



(Acknowledged to.....)

**India, that is Bharat, as it is portrayed
in the Puranas as part of
the great Island of Jambudvipa**

CHAPTER – 7 : BHARATA

Bharata, is one of the great characters of the Bhagavata, so great that this land was called Bharatavarsha after him, and continues today as Bharat, one of the official names of India as recorded in the Indian Constitution. The Bhagavata presents Bharatavarsha as part of an Island called Jambudvipa, which is the central island of seven concentric islands separated from one another, and together constituting the earth. The Jambudvipa is described as shown in the diagram shown in the previous page. Jambudvipa may be seen here as composed of nine Varshas or regions, of which Bharatavarsha is the southernmost. These regions are demarcated with mountain ranges and criss-crossed with river courses, with the mighty MahaMeru Mountain at its centre. And Indian legend proclaims Meru to be the top of the world ! Most of the rivers exist today in India under the same names.

The great king, Bharata was descended from Priyavrata the son of Svayambhuva through the following succession of noble kings, all great ascetics and devotees of the Lord. : Agnidhra, Nabhi and Rishabha. Bharata's rule had such a profound impact on the land and its people that the land known till then as Ajanabhavarsha, became known as Bharatavarsha. After a long and successful reign marked by the conduct of many large sacrifices with their fruits dedicated to the Lord, meaning the welfare of all, he became deeply drawn into the path of devotion to Lord Vasudeva. He then divided the kingdom among his sons and renouncing the worldly life, and went away to the holy Pulahashrama and became a wandering ascetic. One morning after finishing his ablutions he was sitting on the bank of the holy river Chakranadi (Gandaki of today), when a doe which was pregnant, came by to quench her thirst at the river. Suddenly hearing the roar of a lion from nearby, in fright, she leaped across to the other bank. Landing hard she died, delivering a baby deer. Drawn by compassion, Bharata took charge of the helpless baby deer and thereafter looked after it for many years. His attachment to it became so great that it took away all his attention from his austerities, to the point that after he died, he took birth as a deer. In that birth, he retained memory of his last birth and realised that his present predicament had come as result of his attachment of his last birth. He had to continue commiserating with his lot till that life came to an end.

In his next birth, he was born in a pious brahmana family. Even at an early age he drifted into ascetic ways, completely untouched by the strenuous effort of his father to instruct and train him in the Vedic tradition. After his parents died, his brothers neglected him, thinking him to be a madcap. He

therefore left the home and wandered like a beggar, eating whatever came his way, and it appeared that he was being looked after by the Lord, on whom his mind was wholly centred. Many were the occasions when he was tormented by people who took him to be a lunatic, yet it would appear that the Lord saved him whenever the need arose.

One day while he was wandering about, he was observed by a band of tribals who were looking for a suitable human for a sacrifice to their Goddess Bhadrakali, undertaken by their chieftain. Soon they made all preparations for the sacrifice. Finally at the last moment when the high priest was about to strike the fatal blow, the Goddess Herself burst out in a terrible form from the image that was being worshipped, and destroyed all the tribals and saved Bharata. It would appear that it was the divine yogic power within Bharata that compelled the Goddess to so appear and save him.

Another occasion when Bharata was thus tested, though not in this gruesome way, arose again during one of his wanderings. One day Rahoguna, the King of Sindhu was proceeding in his palanquin to visit the Ashrama of Kapila. On the way, the captain of the palanquin bearers found them getting tired and so he was casting around for replacements to relieve them. Seeing Bharata coming that way he directed him to come and serve in the team. As the journey was recommenced, the King got a feeling of discomfort from irregular movements of the palanquin, Being questioned the team captain pointed to the new bearer and said he was not moving in a way that synchronized with movements of the others and hence was disturbing their smooth rhythmic movement. Questioned angrily by the King, Bharata listened but continued to walk in his own way, which it turned out to be because he was watching his steps to avoid harm to insects on the ground. Now the King got really angry and taunting him, said "You seem to be a living corpse, disobeying me your master. You need to be punished",

Bharata responded in all humility, with a reply reproduced below because it was one of the most beautiful expositions of the ancient teachings.

त्वयोदितं व्यक्तमविप्रलब्धं भर्तुः स मे स्याद्यदि वीर भारः ।

गन्तुर्यदि स्यादधिगम्यमध्वा पीवेति राशौ न विदां प्रवादः ।। ५-१०-९

स्थौल्यं कार्श्यं व्याधय आधयश्च क्षुत्तृड् भयं कलिरिच्छा जरा च ।

निद्रा रतिर्मन्युरहंमदःशुचो देहेन जातस्य हि मे न सन्ति ।। ५-१०-१०

जीवन्मृतत्वं नियमेन राजन् आद्यन्तवद्यद्विकृतस्य दृष्टम् ।

स्वस्वाम्यभावो ध्रुव ईड्य यत्र तर्ह्यु च्यतेऽसौ विधिकृत्ययोगः ।। ५-१०-११

विशेषबुद्धेर्विवरं मनाक् च पश्याम यन्न व्यवहारतोऽन्यत् ।

क ईश्वरस्तत्र किमीशितव्यं तथापि राजन् करवाम किं ते ।। ५-१०-१२

उन्मत्तमत्तजडवत्स्वसंस्थां गतस्य मे वीर चिकित्सितेन ।

अर्थः कियान् भवता शिक्षितेन स्तब्धप्रमत्तस्य च पिष्टपेषः ।। ५-१०-१३

tvayōditam vyaktamavipralabdham bhartuḥ sa me syādyadi vīra bhāraḥ .

ganturyadi syādadhigamyamadhvā pīvēti rāśau na vidāṃ pravādaḥ .. 5-10-9

sthaulyam kārsyam vyādhaya ādhayaśca kṣuttrṛḍ bhayaṃ kaliricchā jarā ca .

nidrā ratirmanyurahamṃmada śucō dēhēna jātasya hi me na santi .. 5-10-10

jīvanmṛtatvaṃ niyamēna rājan ādyantavadyadvikṛtasya dṛṣṭam .

svasvāmyabhāvō dhruva īḍya yatra tarhyu cyatēasau vidhikṛtyayōgaḥ.. 5-10-11

viśēṣabuddhērvivaraṃ manāk ca paśyāma yanna vyavahāratō`nyat .

ka īśvarastatra kimīśitavyaṃ tathāpi rājan karavāma kiṃ tē .. 5-10-12

unmattamattajaḍavatsvasamsthāṃ gatasya mē vīra cikitsitēna .

arthaḥ kiyān bhavatā śikṣitēna stabdhapramattasya ca piṣṭapēṣaḥ .. 5-10-13

O bold one ! Your ridicule has relevance only when there is a thing called a weight to bear, there is a destination to reach, and there is corpulence for the Jiva to be carried. The wise do not accept this proposition. (That is, weight, distance etc are the effects of Maya and as I am the Spirit and not the body, your ridicule is pointless)

Corpulence, leanness, disease, hunger, thirst, fear, quarrel, desire old age, sleep, attachment, old age, sleep, attachment, anger, pride, grief etc are true only in regard to one born with a body, but not to me who am the Atman.

O King, the state of being a living corpse is not an attribute applicable to me. It applies to everything that is an effect. For everything that is an effect, is subject to birth and death, to a beginning and to an end. As for your charge of violating your command, O Worshipful One, it would have been true if the relation between master and servant were permanent. (Meaning a change of circumstance can make a master a servant and a servant a master).

It is only a worldly convention, but there is really no reason for the distinction of master and servant. Who is the master and who is the servant ? Still if you feel that you are the king, you order me what I am to do.

O brave King, If my behaviour as a madcap or a dunce is the result of my establishment in my nature as the Atman, what change can your punishment effect in me ? So also, if I am a confirmed dunce, your attempt to reform me by punishment will be like powdering a powdered stuff once again.

King Rahoguna, who was a fair and just king, realized that this was no ordinary man who spoke thus, and overwhelmed by Bharata's words fell at his feet. "All I can say", he said, "is that if a King is required to punish or correct those who swerve from the path of order, and thus rule the people, it is part of God's dispensation, and for this I am not at fault. But having offended a holy person like you is an unforgivable sin and I deserve to perish for that".

This great story of Bharata tells us of the great traditions that the ancients have bequeathed to the people of Bharat. As a nation, India can do no better than live true to the eternal values proclaimed by that ancient founder whose name it bears today.

CHAPTER – 8 : AMRITA



A 19th Century Painting (Acknowledged to <http://mesosyn.com>)

**The churning of the Ocean
by the Devas and the Asuras
for the Amrita**

CHAPTER – 8 : AMRITA

No allegory could be more profound than the Great Deva-Asura War over acquiring Amrita, the Divine Nectar that conferred immortality. One way of looking at it is that this event arose out of one basic step taken by Brahma in initiating the process of Creation. Whether one would call this step as intended or unintended in its consequences is a matter of how one looks at it. One could consider it as unintended by Brahma, but intended by the Lord as part of his inscrutable design. Quite simply the step introduced the element of mortality, along with the play of Maya, through the influence of the three Gunas, and the operation of Karma in a framework of Time. Let us look at some details.

The early creations of Brahma were born of his mind, rooted in Satva. His first sons, the four Kumaras, or eternal youths, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata, born of this purity, therefore declined to continue the task of creation as desired by him. Brahma's resulting anger led to a son Rudra, bursting forth through his brow. And as commanded by Brahma, Rudra proliferated his body into numerous forms of himself, all becoming personifications of anger. Their anger reached a point of their burning everything that came their way, till they threatened Brahma himself. At that point Brahma had to get Rudra to put a stop to his creative activity and go into prolonged Tapas. Brahma then drew ten sons from different parts of his body, and they became the Rishis, Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Bhrigu, Vasishta, Daksha and Narada. Finally, finding creation not progressing fast enough through them, he willed that two halves of his body should generate two more offspring, one a son Svayambhuva and the other a daughter, Satarupa. He got them married and invested them with the power to procreate through sexual union.

This turned out to be the turning point when the task of procreation moved out from the divine into the human domain, to become an autonomous human operation. This appeared to be a turning point, because the power of sex introduced a whole new dimension into the play of Maya's three Gunas. The three fold facets of Maya's power were Iccha Sakti, Jnana Sakti, and Kriya Sakti, representing the facets of Will, Knowledge and Action. The power of Will, now coloured as sexual desire, introduced a new dynamic in shaping human nature. Such desire brought pleasure when fulfilled, and frustration when denied, and the latter effect proliferated as pain and anger and a whole new spectrum of uncontrollable emotions, making deep inroads into the Sattva inheritance of human creation. From this point onwards, the forces of Rajas and Tamas were unleashed in all

their power and variety. The vast varieties of dichotomies of human nature, the Dvandva, became fully established.

Problems started soon enough when Svayambhuva's daughter Prasuti married Daksha and bore him several daughters all of whom married Kasyapa Rishi. Two of them, Aditi and Diti, are relevant to the story at this point. Aditi's sons by Kasyapa became the Adityas or Devas who were godly. Diti's sons by Kasyapa were the Daitryas or Asuras, who became ungodly in nature. The result in Diti's case arose from her having broken into meditation in which Kasyapa was engaged and insisting on his immediately satisfying her uncontrollable sexual urge. Thus it was that the Asuras were ruled by the passion of Rajas and came into inevitable conflict with the Devas who were ruled more by Sattva. The central and eternal conflict the forces of Good and Evil in human nature, represented now by the Devas and Asuras had been well and truly launched,

Yet, the Asuras who were of divine descent and derived their power from that source, had to be reclaimed and this was a task assumed by the Rishi Bhrgu also known as Sukra, who became their preceptor. The Devas, now with a bit of non-sattvic elements of human nature occasionally asserting itself, also had their share of indiscretions. One such indiscretion by Indra, the Lord of the Devas, almost led to the loss of their primacy in the three worlds. One day, Indra received a divine garland of fragrant flowers from the great Rishi Durvasa whom he met in a chance encounter. Thoughtlessly, Indra placed the garland on the head of his divine elephant, Airavata. In turn Airavata flung the garland away and trampled on it. In great anger, Durvasa cursed Indra with loss of the Deva supremacy.

The curse soon started taking effect. The power of the Asuras started waxing while the power of the Devas started waning, till a point when the Devas suffered huge casualties and found their very existence threatened. In great anxiety they approached Brahma to save them. Brahma was in a fix because both Devas and Asuras were descended from him, and so he took the Devas to the Supreme Lord, MahaVishnu for a decision. The Lord's solution to the Devas was simple but formidable. Churn the Ocean of Milk and you can get Amrita, the Nectar of Immortality, and consuming that will enable you to outlive the Asuras. It was a formidable task, said the Lord, and it would need the strength of both sides, so that they would have to make peace and then share the prize. The task would also require use of the Mandara Mountain as a churn stick and the huge serpent Vasuki as the churning rope. Both sides accepted the solution but it needed the Lord's help to raise the mountain, and move it into position in the sea, He had also to commission Vasuki to function as the rope. And finally the Lord had to himself take the form of a huge tortoise to support the mountain from sinking in the ocean waters during the churning operation.

Tactical differences of course, arose between the two sides, from time to time. Which end of the rope would they take : the inferior tail, or the superior head which however posed the danger of Vasuki's fiery breath ? The Lord prevailed on the Devas to let the Asuras take whatever choices they made. Finally after long and strenuous churning effort by both sides, helped now and then by the Lord, the ocean started yielding its contents. First to come up was the deadly Kalakuta poison, that filled the air with its poisonous fumes that threatened to consume all of them. On the desperate appeal of the Devas, Siva arrived and consumed the entire poison. But the poison could not harm the power of Siva, beyond getting stopped at his throat and cause it to turn blue in colour. Thus it was that Siva became known as Neelakanta, or the Blue-Necked One.

The Ocean then yielded a succession of wonderful gifts, like Kamadhenu the wish-giving cow, the Parijata, the Moon, Mahalakshmi, and finally Dhanvantari bearing a bowl of the Amrita. from which everyone took whatever they wanted. Siva took the Moon and Mahavishnu accepted Mahalakshmi, giving her His chest for residence as desired by her. Seizing an opportunity, the Asuras suddenly snatched the bowl of Amrita from Dhanvantari and ran away. In consternation the Devas appealed to Mahavishnu to intervene.

In an interesting twist to the events, Mahavishnu took the form of an enchanting woman called Mohini and appeared before the Asuras who were quarreling among themselves as to who should get the first serving of the Amrita, some even suggesting that in fairness, the Devas should not be denied their share. But when they beheld the bewitching form of Mohini, they were overcome for desire for her, and started seeking her favour. Finally at her suggestion that the sharing of the Amrita should be settled first, the Asuras handed the bowl of Amrita to Mohini and left its distribution to her, and sat with their eyes closed, waiting for her decision. She quickly handed the Amrita to the Devas and disappeared, while the Devas consumed it in full.

Deeply disappointed, and in great anger, the Asuras resumed their hostilities and a great fearful war ensued. Vast were the methods and weapons used. The entire animal kingdom was pressed into service as vehicles, for speedy surprise moves by the fighters, including birds, serving as aircraft ! Finally, the Asuras were routed, with a large number of them decimated, while the Devas, thanks to the Amrita, survived and enjoyed their victory.

The story of the Amrita brings into focus, not only the eternal conflict between Good and Evil, as personified in the Devas and Asuras, but also the human yearning for a bliss-filled long life, idealized as a Divine Immortality beyond the conflict bound, time bound limitations of Human Mortality. This thus, is the message of the Amrita story. As an inner quest for the higher immortality of the divine, it invests the human with a sense of direction and purpose

CHAPTER – 9 : NARADA



(Acknowledged to <http://buddhasangha.com>)

Narada, on his cosmic travels

CHAPTER – 9 : NARADA

Narada is one of the most unique and charming characters of the Puranas. A son of Brahma, the Creator, he persists through the Manvantara of Cosmic Time and traverses all of Cosmic Space, across all the Puranas. He was, in today's language of Science, the world's first user of the Time Machine, and also the world's first Space Traveller. He provides almost a single thread of connectivity and continuity across the warp and weft of the entire Purana fabric. He interacts with most of the principal characters and seems to impact on their personalities, often in ways that changes the course of their lives, almost like an instrument of destiny. And after a succession of lives of ups and downs, he finally engages wholetime for all time, in single minded singing the praise of the Lord, using a Veena gifted to him by the Lord, perhaps for that very purpose. And now and then he seems to revel in pranks with a purpose, if indeed pranks could have a purpose. Of course, a prank of Narada could be a purpose of his Divine Master. Occasionally his doings lead to his own undoing but his abiding loyalty always helps him to bounce back into the grace of the Lord.

Bits and pieces of Narada's story are spread across different Puranas because of the different context of their characters and events. These have been pieced together here to get a more composite picture. So here is a brief account of his sayings and doings that make him the unique character that he is.

Disappointed that he could not from his own mind, enlarge his progeny as much as he wanted, Daksha decided to take the sexual road to procreation and therefore married Askini, the daughter of Viranaprajapati. She bore him five thousand sons, called the Hariyasvas. When they in turn started to think of multiplying, Narada came along, and in his sweet persuasive words, said they must first move around the earth to find out whether and where there was enough space for their progeny to live and move around. So encouraged, the Hariyasvas went out into the world to find out and in the process got lost and never returned. Disappointed at so losing them Daksha and Askini made another effort and produced another thousand sons, the Sabalasvas. Once again Narada with his penchant for mischief, intervened and as advised by him the Sabalasvas went after their brothers and like them, also got lost and never returned. Furious with Narada, Daksha cursed him, that like his sons, he should become a wanderer, without ever being to stay in place. Thus it was that Narada remained ever after on the move around the three worlds. Another story narrated tells of Narada incurring a similar curse from the daughter of Time, when he rejected her amorous advances.

The more purposeful interventions of Narada related to several occasions when he took those devoted votaries of the Vedic rituals to task for losing themselves in this futile activity. The real way to win the grace of the Lord he stressed, was through devotion by singing His Glory and dedicating all their activities to Him, without seeking any fruits from them for oneself. This way, Narada becomes a ceaseless crusader in the cause of Bhakti, whereby he always returns to the grace of the Lord, even after his occasional deviations from that path. Narada's constant singing the praise of the Lord led to his becoming an expert musician and earning him a gift of a Vina which is his constant accompaniment. Behind this is a story, indeed, are a number of stories.

Narada's ups and downs came through many births, more than seven figuring in varying detail in various Puranas. The first birth of course, was from the lap of Brahma. Declining to marry and procreate, he incurred the anger of Brahma, who cursed him to lose the knowledge which directed his decisions, and be born as a Gandharva, and thereby become a great musician, and marry fifty women and produce a lot of children. This would be followed by birth to a servant woman, when he would become a great devotee of Vishnu, and thereafter return to be born once again as a son to Brahma.

There was a pious Gandharva, by the name of Chitraketu, who performed long penance to propitiate Siva to bless him with a son. Siva was pleased with his devotion and granted him this wish. Soon Chitraketu's wife delivered a son who was given the name Upabarhata. Taught by Brihaspati to worship Vishnu, the boy grew up to become a great devotee of Vishnu. One day while he was in penance on the slopes of the Himalayas, the fifty beautiful daughters of a Gandharva called Citraratha who happened to pass that way, noticed Upabarhata and fell in love with him. Waking from his Samadhi, he too saw them and fell in love with them. They married and lived happily for long years, producing a lot of children. During this time, on one occasion Upabarhata accompanied them to sing at Brahmataloka. There he found himself lustfully attracted to the beautiful Apsara Rambha. Noticing this, the Prajapatis present there cursed him. Soon after Upabarhata returned home, told Malati and his other wives what happened, and lay down on a bed of grass and was given up as dead. In rage, Malati got ready to curse Brahma, and also the messengers of Death, Yama and Mrutyu. In great consternation those Divinities sought refuge in MahaVishnu, who however directed them to go and meet Malati. At that meeting a brahmana who was present, questioned Brahma on the details of his curse. Finding that Upabarhata still had a thousand years to live under the terms of that curse, the brahmana appeared in true form of MahaVishnu and rubbed Upabarhata's eyes. Thereupon Upabarhata awoke, restored to life and

lived happily with his wives for completion of that lifetime. The story of course, illustrates how MahaVishnu never gives up on his true devotees.

In due time Upabarhna and Malati completed their lifetime, spending their last days in austerities on the banks of the Ganga.

Of course Narada had one more life to complete before he could return to Brahma. This was to be as the son of the King Drumila who lived in a place called Kanyakubja. Given to ascetic ways Drumila had renounced his kingdom, and after a long period of austerity in the forest, passed away. Kalavati who was carrying at that time was about to end her life on her husband's funeral pyre, when a celestial voice bade her stop and return to the village. She lived as a servant in a Brahmana's house when her son was born. As the birth seemed to have brought welcome rains to the drought-ridden village, the Brahmana master thought that the child was auspicious and named him Narada, meaning one who provides water. The child grew up to be a great devotee of Vishnu, Soon after his mother Kalavati was bitten by a snake and died.

After long years of penance on the banks of the Ganga, Narada was born once again to Brahma. Once again Brahma tried to persuade him to marry, Finding him still reluctant, Brahma explained that many attained salvation even after a full human life of the Varnashrama, the four stages of a celibate, a house-holder, an anchorite and a sanyasin. He therefore advised Narada to go the Badarikashrama of the Naranarayan, and after his penance there, Maharshi Sanjaya would give to Narada in marriage, his daughter Damayanti, in fulfillment of a boon given by Siva. When Narada and Damayanti first met, they were attracted to each other. During a pilgrimage in this period along with the sage Parvata he incurred the latter's anger for not informing him about his meeting with Damayanti, and thereby violating a pledge to have no secrets between them. Parvata cursed Narada to become a monkey, and Narada in turn cursed Parvata to live a hundred years in Yamaloka. Notwithstanding his becoming a monkey, Damayanti remained loyal to him and insisted on marrying him. Finally when Parvata returned from his stay in hell, Narada treated him so well, that Parvata released Narada from his curse. Resuming his normal form, Narada lived happily with Damayanti, till the end of their lives, when Narada returned to Brahmaloaka.

Once when Narada visited Krishna at Dvaraka, both went on aerial survey in the latter's chariot and landed near a river. Ignoring Krishna's advice, Narada went and drank the water to quench his thirst. At once Narada found himself turned into woman, and Krishna and his chariot were no longer there. After wandering a lot. Narada arrived at an ashrama, just as a Rishi who was there was awakening from a samadhi. Seeing this beautiful woman he readily assented to her request to be accept her as a disciple. In

due course they were married and bore him sixty children. One day, the Rishi and all the children suddenly died, leaving the woman grief stricken. Alone and unable to complete the obsequies, and suddenly seized by hunger she looked around and saw a mango tree nearby laden with fruit. Unable to reach the fruit, she piled the corpses on one another, climbed on the pile and retrieved one fruit. Just then a brahmana arrived her and admonished her for what she had done and directed her to go and have a purificatory bath first. Accordingly, she went to the river, and immersed herself in the water with the hand holding the fruit alone above the water so that it would not get wet. When the woman emerged from the water, Lo and Behold !, it was Narada restored to his old form, except for the hand that held the fruit, which, with its bangles remained a woman's hand, simply because it had not been purified by the water. There on the bank, now stood the brahmana, now transformed as Krishna. Smiling, Krishna bid him immerse himself fully in the water. When he did that and then emerged, Narada was in his full normal form, with the mango turned into his Vina ! The Rishi you lived all this time, said Krishna, was Kalapurusha, the Deity of Time and your sixty children were the years that constitute the Sixty year cycle of time, that constitute our calendar on Earth. Could an allegory get more beautiful or imaginative than this ?

Visiting the Earth one day to review the havoc being wrought by the onset of Kali Yuga, Narada found one day on the banks of the Yamuna, two old men lying on the bank, breathing hard as if dying, while nearby sat a young woman weeping in uncontrollable grief. When Narada approached her and tried to comfort her, she said that her name was Bhakti, and the two old men were her sons named Jnana (knowledge) and Vairagya (detachment). Why, she asked, is this happening to me ? Narada read out the Vedas and Vedangas to her but they brought her no comfort. Then at the invisible promptings of the Kumaras, the eternally youthful sons of Brahma, Narada read out the Bhagavata to the old sons, and to the delight of the woman, she found her sons rising with their youth restored. Here then is the recipe for the disastrous impact of the Kali Yuga : Hear with devotion the great stories of the Bhagavata that recite the glory of the Highest Supreme !

One interesting story illustrates how Narada who got inflated with his own musical prowess was quickly deflated by MahaVishnu. The Lord took Narada to a forest where they found a large number of women with their limbs cut and crying in extreme pain. On Vishnu's asking them how this came to pass they said that they were the Raginis, (different tunes in musical parlance) who were the presiding deities of the different tunes. They said that they had been reduced to their present predicament by the totally erroneous rendering of their tunes by Narada. Poor Narada had to hang his head down in shame. But the lesson went home, that haughtiness does not pay !

One final one event briefly touched on in the Mahabharata would make this story of Narada complete. This is a charming story of Narada's brief existence as a worm. One day while proceeding on a road, as this worm, he had quickly to move to the side of the road to avoid being run over by a chariot that passed that way. Seeing this action of the worm, the King who was seated in that chariot burst out laughing. Drawing himself up proudly to his full height, such height as worms have, Narada addressed the King as follows : "There is nothing to be laughed at in my action. In every birth the body is very much dear to the atman. Just as you love your body, I also love and protect my body".

This little story raises the question : Who is it thus spoke ? Was it a humble worm speaking to a mighty man ? Or was it an atman of one being addressing the atman of a another being on equal terms ? We do not know what the King thought or said in response to this. The chances are that at the level of dharma that prevailed in those holier times, the King must have felt ashamed and chastened.

CHAPTER – 10 : INDRA



(Acknowledged to <http://jnanam.net>)

Indra riding the Airavata

CHAPTER – 10 : INDRA

An interesting point in regard to the various narratives in respect of Indra, is the considerably larger prominence given in the Rig Veda to Indra, in comparison with Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. One possible explanation is that the Rig Veda's focus was on the interface between the forces of Nature and Human Nature. In this perspective, Indra was clearly the pre-eminent figure among the gods that controlled these forces which man needed to address through mantra and sacrifice for a fulfilment of all his physical and psychological needs. The higher reaches of the Divine, reaching right up to the One Unmanifest, remained more implicit in the Vedas, and became more explicit later in the Upanishads, though in both, they continued to be presented largely in an esoteric form. It was in the Puranas, that the total perspectives were presented without any inhibitions and in the popular story format so as to become more easily accessible to the common people.

Clearly Indra emerges as one of the most interesting and dynamic characters of the Puranas. With the universal and eternal conflict between the forces of Good and Evil, the Devas and Asuras, which occupy the centre stage of the Purana saga, Indra, as the Lord of the Devas, surely becomes one of its central characters. He becomes a master strategist, given to all sorts of tactics, but always able, when things go out of hand, to fall back on Brahma or Siva, or finally MahaVishnu, to extricate him. And as with Narada, his sayings and doings - more doings than sayings - are spread across several Puranas and have to be collected from many of them to give a fuller picture of this colourful character.

The Indra that we are concerned is the one that occupies the Cosmic Time Space of the Vaivasvata Manvantara, for, be it known that different Indras forming part of different character sets occupy the different Manvantaras. But obviously the Manvantara provides an adequately vast time frame for the extensive activities of Indra and the other characters of this Manvantara.

Our Indra then, (Our, because in common with us, we all still belong to the same Vaivasvata Manvantara) is born as the first son of Aditi, wife of Kashyapa. Aditi is one of thirteen daughters of Daksha Prajapati, all of whom were given in marriage to Kashyapa, and from whom all living species of all subsequent creation were descended. To recall the family genealogy, these daughters were born to Daksha through Prasuti, the daughter of Svayambhuva Manu, who of course, was the son of Brahma, the Creator. Be it noted here that the Devas were born to Aditi, the Asuras

to Aditi, the Rakshasa or Danavas to Danu, the Rudras to Surabhi, Garuda to Vinata, the Naga serpents to Kadru, and birds and all other creatures and plants from the other wives of Kashyapa. Thus Kashyapa was the builder of all the species, while Brahma was the Architect. And of course the ultimate Designer of even the Creator and his Creations was surely the Supreme Divine.

When Aditi bore her first son Indra, who became Lord of the Devas, her sister Diti was stricken with jealousy, with a craving for a son who would outshine, and possibly displace Indra. In a fit of physical desire one day, she barged into Kasyapa's presence while he was in deep meditation, distracted his attention and demanded immediate physical satisfaction. Kasyapa yielded, but his deep displeasure expressed as a curse, resulted in the birth of the two Asuras, Hanyaksha and Hiranyakasipu. When, long after, at the instance of Indra, these two Asuras were killed by MahaVishnu, Diti swore to take revenge against Indra, and once again got back to Kasyapa with another passionate demand for a son to fulfil her wish to destroy Indra. This time there was an unusual miscarriage, not of the foetus, but of her plan. Sensing the emerging danger, Indra came in one day when she was asleep, and changed the fate of the foetus by cutting it into 49 pieces. This resulted in the birth of 49 sons, who came to be known as the Maruts, who in due course, opted to enter the service of Indra as his soldiers.

There is an interesting story of how Indra got a thousand eyes and Siva getting four faces. At a time when the two Rakshasa brothers Sunda and Upasunda were wreaking havoc in the three worlds, it was decided to create a woman of extraordinary beauty and send them to the two rakshasas who would quarrel over possessing her and in the process kill each other. Commissioned by Brahma, Visvakarma the Divine Architect, collected a large number of the most beautiful small objects and remitted them into the womb of Kasyapa's wife Pradha, where they were born as Tilottama (Til-amsa = objects, small like the Til or mustard seed, read with Uttama = the best, making Tilottama). Tilottama was then sent to appear before Siva and Brahma before being sent on the Sunda-Upasunda mission. Finding Siva seated facing north, and Brahma seated facing south, and at a loss as to how to appear in front of both at the same time, Tilottama stood between them praying to them. Turning to see her, Siva was so fascinated by her beauty, that he wanted to see her wherever she might be. This desire resulted in Siva getting four faces. Later Indra had the same desire on seeing her and this resulted in his getting a thousand eyes ! This story seems to suggest that even the gods are human !

Indra had a chequered history with his share of ups and downs, mainly arising from the never-ending conflict between the Devas and Asuras, over the Lordship of the three worlds, viz. Heaven, Earth and sandwiched

between them, the Antariksha. We have earlier seen one big event to which Indra and the Devas owed their survival : the churning of the Ocean for the Amrita which gave them immortality. Matching that event for dramatic grandeur was the mighty confrontation between Indra and Vrtra echoes of which are heard all over the Rig Veda. Vrtra is one of the greatest Asuras of the Puranic pantheon. One reason for his power which almost equalled Indra's, was that he was a great devotee of Sankarshana, one of the emanations of Maha Vishnu. Here was a unique case of two devotees pitted against each other, and while Indra prevailed in life, Vrtra prevailed in death by a return to the Divine.

Different versions of appear across the Puranas, on the origin of Vrtra, but the most vivid version comes from the Bhagavata Purana. Here his story begins with one of Indra's indiscretions. One day, Indra, seated on his throne with his consort, Paulomi in the grandeur of his court, and puffed up with pride, he failed to respectfully rise and welcome Brihaspati, the preceptor of the Devas, when the latter entered the audience hall. Hurt by Indra's behaviour, Brihaspati left abruptly. Realising and regretting his error, Indra tried to make amends but Brihaspati remained inaccessible to the Devas thereafter. Taking advantage of this situation, the Asuras attacked the Devas and greatly weakened them. In despair, the Devas went to Brahma, who advised them to meet the respected sage Viswarupa, the son of Tvashta and request him to be their preceptor. Viswarupa agreed and became their preceptor and gave them the Narayana Kavacha, a mantra of great power that restored their strength and made them invulnerable to the attacks of the Asuras.

Now Viswarupa happened to be born to Tvashta through Rachna who was an Asura of Daitya descent. Viswarupa loved his mother and would give her part of his sacrificial offerings meant for the gods. This enraged Indra, who, in yet another of his indiscretions, killed Viswarupa, by cutting off his head, or rather, the three heads of which he was possessed. Viswarupa being a brahmana, though born of an Asura woman, this act invited on Indra the grave crime of Brahmahatya (killing a brahmana). Grief stricken by the killing of his son by Indra, Tvashta performed a sacrifice to produce a person powerful enough to kill Indra. From this sacrifice emerged Vrtra, who grew into a monster of fearful appearance, size and power. The great conflict between Indra and Vrtra soon began and Vrtra was able to inflict severe losses on the Devas. All the weapons of Indra and the Devas were of no avail. This time, in despair, the Devas went to Maha Vishnu for help. Maha Vishnu told them that only a weapon made of

the bones of the Sage Dadichi would have the power to kill Vrtra, and therefore they should seek this of Dadichi.

The Devas then went to Dadichi and explained their predicament and how his bones alone could save them. Dadichi was a great soul, a person of great compassion. “It is a pity”, he said, “that man fails to do good to his fellow beings with this body which is transient and worthless, ever threatened by death and becomes food for the dogs”. So saying, by his yogic power he gave up his life, so that his bones could become useful to the Devas. Viswakarma, the divine architect, then took the Sage’s bones and fashioned them into the new thunderbolt weapon for Indra. Armed now with this weapon of great power, Indra resumed his attack on Vrtra. A fearful battle followed with big advances and reverses by both sides, till abandoned by his soldiers, Vrtra alone remained holding his ground. Even in this hopeless situation, with indomitable courage and unyielding valour, Vrtra challenged Indra thus :

दिष्ट्या भवान् मे समवस्थितोरिपुर्यो ब्रह्महा गुरुहा भ्रातृहा च ।
दिष्टयानृणोऽद्याहमसत्तम त्वयामच्छूलनिर्भिन्नदृष्टदधृदाचिरात् ॥ ६-११-१४
यो नोऽग्रजस्यात्मविदो द्विजातेर्गुरोरपापस्य च दीक्षितस्य ।
विश्रभ्य खड्गेन शिरांस्यवृश्चत् पशोरिवाकरुणः स्वर्गकाम ॥ ६-११-१५
हीश्रीदयाकीर्तिभिरुज्झितं त्वां स्वकर्मणा पुरुषदैश्चगर्ह्यम् ।
कृच्छ्रेण मच्छूलविभिन्नदेहमस्पृष्टवह्निं समदन्तिगृध्राः ॥ ६-११-१६
अन्येऽनु ये त्वेह नृशंसमज्ञा ये ह्युद्यतास्त्राः प्रहरन्ति मद्युम् ।
तैर्भूत नाथान् सगणान् निशातत्रिशूलनिर्भिन्नगलैर्यजामि ॥ ६-११-१७
अथो हरे मे कुलिशेन वीर हर्ताप्रमथ्यैव शिरो यदीह ।
तत्रानृणो भूतबलिं विधाय मनस्विनां पादरजः प्रपत्स्ये ॥ ६-११-१८
सुरेश कस्मान्न हिनोषि वज्रं पुरः स्थिते वैरिणि मय्यमोघम् ।
मा संशयिष्ठा न गदेव वज्रं स्यान्निष्फलं कृपणार्थेव याच्ञा ॥ ६-११-१९
नन्वेष वज्रस्तव शक्र तेजसाहरेर्दधीचेस्तपसा च तेजितः ।
तेनैव शत्रुं जहि विष्णुयन्त्रितो यतो हरिर्विजयः श्रीर्गुणास्ततः ॥ ६-११-२०
अहं समाधाय मनो यथाऽऽह सङ्कर्षणस्तच्चरणारविन्दे ।
त्वद्वज्ररंहोलुलितग्राम्यपाशो गतिं मुनेर्याम्यपविद्धलोकः ॥ ६-११-२१

पुंसां किलैकान्तधियां स्वकानां याः सम्पदो दिवि भूमौ रसायाम् ।

न राति यद् द्वेष उद्वेग आधिर्मदः कलिर्व्यसनं संप्रयासः ।। ६-११-२२

vṛtra uvāca :

diṣṭyā bhavān mē samavasthitōripuryō brahmahā guruhā bhrātṛhā ca .

diṣṭyānṛṇōadyāhamasattama tvayāmacchūlanirbhinnadrṣaddhrdācirāt .. 6-11-14

yō nōagrajasyātmavidō dvijātērgurōrapāpasya ca dīkṣitasya .

viśrabhya khadgēna śīrāmsyavṛṣcat paśōrivākaruṇa: svargakāma: .. 6-11-15

hrīśrīdayākīrtibhirujjhitam tvām svakarmanā puruṣādaīśca garhyam .

kṛcchrēṇa macchūlavibhinnadēhamasprṣṭavahniṃ samadantigrḍhrā: .. 6-11-16

anyēanu yē tvēha nṛśaṃsamajñā yē hyudyatāstrā: praharanti mahyum .

tairbhūta nāthān sagaṇān niśātatriśūlanirbhinnagalairyajāmi .. 6-11-17

athō harē mē kulīśēna vīra hartāpramathyaiva śīrō yadīha .

tatrānṛṇō bhūtabaliṃ vidhāya manasvinām pādaraja: prapatsyē .. 6-11-18

surēśa kasmāna hinōṣi vajram pura: sthitē vairiṇi mayyamōgham .

mā saṃśayiṣṭhā na gadēva vajram syānniṣphalam kṛpaṇārthēva yācñā .. 6-11-19

nanvēṣa vajrastava śakra tējasāharērdadhīcēstapasā ca tējita: .

tēnaiva śatrum jahi viṣṇuyantritō yatō harirvijaya: śrīrguṇāstata:.. 6-11-20

aham samādhāya manō yathāaha saṅkarṣaṇastaccaraṇāravindē .

tvadvajraramḥhōlulitagrāmyapāśō gatiṃ munēryāmyapavidddhalōka: .. 6-11-21

pumṣām kilaikāntadhiyām svakānām yā: sampadō divi bhūmau rasāyām .

na rāti yad dvēṣa udvēga ādhirmada kalirvyasanam saṃprayāsa: .. 6-11-22

Translated, Vrta's words run thus :

It is indeed a piece of great fortune that you who are guilty of the slaughter of one so holy as my brother, who was also your Guru, should stand before me for battle. Q ! evil genius, I shall be freed from the debt I owe to my brother, when today your stony heart is pierced by my trident. (14)

Just as a heaven-seeking ritualist decapitates a sacrificial animal, you, practising a confidence trick, mercilessly cut off the heads of my brother, who was at once a holy man, your teacher, a sinless person, an observer of vows and a knower of the Atman. (15)

Devoid, as you are, of modesty, grace, kindness and a good nature, the abomination of even cannibals, you shall, with your body pierced easily by my trident, soon lie uncremated on the battlefield, for vultures to tear open and consume. (16)

And whoever there be ignorantly following your cruel-hearted self, and showering their weapons on me, their heads too chopped off with my sharp trident, shall be made an offering to the lords of elementals and their following (17)

But O ! Indra, if, however, it is I whose head happens to be chopped off with your thunderbolt weapon, then I would thereby be freeing myself from the bondage of Karma and attaining to the realm of heroes, after offering my body as food to the birds and the beasts (18)

O ! Indira, Why do you hesitate to strike me, who stands before you, with your unfailing thunderbolt ? Doubt not that it will be ineffective like the mace you used to strike me earlier, even as the prayer for favours addressed to a miserly person. (19)

This thunderbolt weapon O ! Indra, has been powered by the energy of Maha Vishnu and the austerity of the Rishi Dadichi. Commissioned as you are by Maha Vishnu Himself, destroy me even now with that thunderbolt weapon. Wherever Hari is, there victory follows, and prosperity and virtues too. (20)

As my chosen Deity has commanded me, I shall hold my concentrated mind at His lotus feet, and with all the bonds of my body generating Karma (Prarabhda) cut asunder by your thunderbolt weapon when you destroy my body, I shall go the way of all saintly contemplatives. (21)

The Lord generally grant the felicities of The heavenly realm, or of the earth, or of Rasatala, to his servants who have whole-hearted devotion to Him. For, where wealth is, there also thrive animosity, fear, worry, pride, quarrels, grief and tiresome toil. (22)

It is interesting to note that Indra hesitated before picking up the thunderbolt that had fallen to the ground by the blows of Vritra. Killing Vritra would mean yet another crime of Brahmanahatya on his part and this he knew was condemned by the scriptures, and visited with dire punishment. On the taunts of Vritra, however, he picked up the thunderbolt and resumed the battle. He had earlier cut one arm of Vritra and now he cut the second. Undeterred, Vritra charged with all his strength, and in one huge gulp, swallowed Indra, weapons and all. But protected as he was by the Narayana Kavacha, Indra survived, and tearing open Vritra's entrails, emerged from there intact. And in one final blow with the thunderbolt, he cut off the head of Vritra and brought about his end. The three world's rejoiced at his victory, but Indra found no joy or peace in it. For very soon, the nemesis of the Brahmanahatya caught up with him and started plaguing him giving him no rest or peace of mind. Finally, all the Rishis joined together and arranged for the performance of a great Asvamedha Sacrifice, which countered the effects of the Brahmanahatya sin and brought peace to

Indra. This story of Indra conveys to posterity, that no one, high or low can escape from the consequences of sin, that indeed, the Law of Karma has no exceptions.

CHAPTER 11 - TAKSHAKA



(Acknowledged to kate9alucard.wordpress.com)

Takshaka

CHAPTER – 11: TAKSHAKA

Takshaka is the character who, in a sense, brings the curtain down on the enveloping story of the Bhagavata. Takshaka is the serpent who bites Raja Parikshit and causes his death in fulfilment of a curse inflicted on the Raja seven days earlier. Stricken by remorse for the sin that brought the curse on him, Parikshit entered into a fast unto death. While waiting for his end, he had the benefit of the Bhagavata story being fully narrated to him by Suka. The Bhagavata has since then, followed the same narration. The death of Parikshit would therefore logically make for a last Chapter of this book. But the central character of the Bhagavata is Krishna and is to him and his message that the last Chapter really belongs. It is for this reason that Takshaka occupies this penultimate Chapter. The Bhagavata refers to Takshaka's story in brief, but many of its details as below, come from the Devi Bhagavata and Mahabharata.

Takshaka was the first of the Serpent species of Creation. He was born to the Sage Kashyapa of his wife named Kadru, who was one of the Sage's ten wives, who were the daughters of Daksha Prajapati. To Kashyapa goes the credit of procreating through his numerous wives, not only humans, but also all other forms of life, plant and animal, serpents included. (Maintaining a constant refrain that all Existence is One but appears as Many in form and name). Once Kadru and Vinata, another wife of Kashyapa, had a wager over the colour of the tail of Uchhaishravas, Indra's horse. Kadru maintained that it was black while Vinata said it was white. Kadru then instructed her sons led by Takshaka to go that night and camouflage the horse's tail, so that it would appear black. When Takshaka and a few other of her sons remonstrated against her deceitful approach, Kadru got angry and drove them out of the house, cursing them that one day they would be burnt in a great snake sacrifice. Vinata's son was Garuda, the great eagle king, who of course, makes another interesting story, not told here for want of space.

One day while on a hunt, Raja Parikshit, became tired and thirsty and came upon an ashram in the forest. Entering it, he found a sage called Samika, seated there in deep meditation. In a fit of impatience at the sage not responding to him, Parikshit picked up a dead snake that lay on the floor, with the tip of his bow, put it around the sage's neck and went away. Hearing later about this, Samika's son Srngi became angry and cursed Parikshit that he would die within seven days by a bite of Takshaka. Later Parikshit was filled with remorse over his thoughtless act and resolved to undertake a fast unto death while at the same time taking all precautions against the approach of snakes. On the seventh day however, Takshaka disguised as an old brahmana sought entry to Parikshit's palace, but was stopped by

the guards. He then pleaded that at least the fruits he had brought be taken to the King. When the guards agreed, Takshaka quickly turned himself into a worm and concealed himself in one of the fruits. When these fruits were taken to the King and took one of them, Takshaka emerged from it in his true form, killed the King and made good his escape. Thus it was that the curse took effect on the seventh day and Parkshit perished.

Later, King Janamejaya, the son and successor of Parikshit, after performing all the obsequies for his father, embarked on a great Sarpa Satra, at the suggestion of Uttanka, whereby he could venge himself on the entire snake species, and destroy all of them by attracting them into the sacrificial fire by the power of the mantras of this great sacrifice. Large numbers of snakes thus perished, but Takshaka was not to be found. In fear, Takshaka had fled and taken shelter under Indra, the Lord of the Devas, who was his cousin and was well disposed to him. Informed of this, the priests at the sacrifice invoked their magical mantras to force both Takshaka and his protector Indra, to be drawn into the sacrifice. Stricken with fear, all the Devas rushed to meet Manasadevi, and begged her to get her son, the great ascetic Asita, to intervene and stop the snake sacrifice.

Manasadevi was a Deity born of the mind of Kasyapa, when he was approached by people of the world for protection from the large number of snakes that were endangering their lives. On the advice of Brahma, Kasyapa created a protective mantra, with Manasadevi as its presiding Deity, Manasadevi had her own share of troubles in her life, but was compensated at Kailasa by Siva and Parvati who blessed her with a child. This child, while yet in the womb, having heard the teachings of Siva and Parvati, became a great Yogi even at birth and became famous under the name of Asita. It was this Asita who was present at Janamejaya's sacrifice and to whom Manasadevi conveyed the request of the Devas. Asita thereupon prevailed upon Janamejaya to stop the sacrifice as many snakes had already perished, The King agreed and also handed over Indra and Takshaka to Asita who sought this as a gift. It would thus appear that the snake species owed their birth to Kasyapa through Kadru, but ultimately owed their survival to the protection of Asita. Such was the power of the ancient Rishis who appear all over the Bhagavata ! And such are the complex ways in which the Divine controls all Existence through the processes of Creation, Destruction and Protection !

What is the point of the story of Takshaka, if there is one ? Simply this. It illustrates the principle of Cause and Effect works across Space, Time and all facets of Existence. That anger or indeed any emotion as product of the three Gunas, works through this principle across all living forms. That the principle does not spare anyone, be they divines, humans or non-humans. That the cause-effect is often so delayed over time and so complex that one does not recognize which effect came from which cause. It ultimately

serves of the purpose of trusting in faith rather than reason, and putting our faith in the ultimate First Cause that we do not understand. The story leads us back through Takshaka to his father Kasyapa, through Kasyapa to his 's father Marichi, through Marichi to his father Brahma the Creator, and finally through the Creator to his Creator, the First Cause. All that we can do is raise our hands in devotional prostration in surrender to that Ultimate One ! This indeed is the central message of Krishna, the central voice of the Bhagavata Purana. To Krishna then, shall we turn in the next final Chapter.

CHAPTER – 12 : KRISHNA



(Acknowledged to <http://udaipurtimes.com>)

Krishna in the Viswaroopa

CHAPTER – 12 : KRISHNA

Rama and Krishna are quite certainly the greatest characters of the Puranas dominating the psyche of the Indian people to this day as Avatars of Vishnu. But while Rama does find mention in the Bhagavata Purana, Krishna is clearly its centre-piece, and he also acquires prominence in the Mahabharata. It really needed another great epic, the Ramayana, to do full justice to Rama.

The story of Krishna raises a fundamental question, at the outset. How could Vishnu, the Divine get contained in Krishna, the man, even if it was in the flavour of a full Avatar ? There are some fascinating issues involved here. In the first place we must note that Vishnu, Siva and Brahma have themselves arisen as the first manifestations of Existence. They were the First Effect of that First Cause that originated from the Highest Unmanifest Divine. This was therefore the first link in a chain that persisted within finite manifestations of time, from out of Infinite Time. It was a chain that was subject to the Unmanifest Lord's power of Maya, and Her forces of the three Gunas. This was chain that was governed by Maya's unrelenting Law of Karma. As the First Effect, Vishnu, Brahma and Siva too were subject to these forces, even though they existed respectively in the pure forms of the Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. This high Triumvirate had to manage these very forces, that manifested in vast numbers of composites and combinations. They were required to protect, create or destroy them as the occasion demanded. The environment was rendered even more complex and unpredictable where the Curse seemed to have emerged as a major mechanism that queered the pitch of Karma all the time. The Curse was freely used by many characters to vent their ire and it would seem that even the Three Divines were not exempt from their impact. Narada was cursed on one occasion to become a monkey and on another, a worm. Vishnu himself was cursed by the Rishi Sukra for having killed his mother Kavyamata. The curse was to spend one lifetime as a man, who turned out to be Krishna Himself !. Several celestial women were sent by Indra to Badarikashram to disrupt the penance of the great Yogins, Nara and Narayana and asking to be married to them, Narayana was about to curse them, but luckily Nara intervened, Nara said that if they would respect and protect their penance, he would marry them in a later birth, when he would be born as Krishna. Thus the Curse seemed to operate both within births and across births and invest the working of Karma with the logic of Cause and Effect. The only distinction that it seemed to make was to work on the Divines through Reincarnation and on Humans through Rebirth.

But let us now come back to the story of Krishna. In the Bhagavata Purana, Krishna constitutes its centre-piece, its central thought, and its very heart

and soul. No other Divinity occupies the thoughts, hearts and souls of so many millions in India over such vast stretches of time right up to the present day. His uniqueness lies in that he was everything to everybody. His was a one to one relationship with every man, woman or child, irrespective of the vast range of human attitudes, beliefs, needs, weaknesses and biases of each individual. The debate on whether Krishna was a real character in history or a mythical figure in legend is totally beside the point. The contention of the rationalist that he was unreal, both as a character in a story or a figure in history, or the assertion of the intellectual that his doctrine was also unreal, are equally beside the point. For, the central point is what he means so intimately to the vast masses of humanity, despite their vast mix of good and bad. Millions today bear his name or recite its thousand variants as the Vishnu Sahasranamam, immortalised by Vyasa through the voice of Bhishma in the Mahabharata. Krishna was the only truly and completely human God, who brought God to the door of the common man, to the very threshold of the human heart, His uniqueness lies in that offered himself to everybody without conditions of any kind.

This completely human God was what the Bhagavata termed the Purna Avatar. The Bhagavata asserted that the human Krishna was the Supreme Lord Himself, : “Krishnastu Bhagavan Svayam”. In terms of doctrine, the Bhagavata went beyond the axiomatic Four Purusharthas, the four fundamental aims of Human Existence, namely Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, translated as Ethical Action, Material Satisfaction, Emotional Fulfilment and Spiritual Freedom. It added a fifth aim, Bhakti, or the Devotion to the Divine. The great contribution of Krishna that becomes the central highlight of the Bhagavata was that while Moksha was beyond the reach of most, Bhakti was within the reach of all. Moksha addressed the single individual, Bhakti addressed whole of humanity. As an aim of existence, therefore, Bhakti was just as good, if not indeed, superior to Moksha.

The meaning and purpose of the Life and Purpose of Krishna can best be understood in the context of how he related, and indeed identified with four different personality types that make for a typically and totally human context : with the Rakshasas as an Enemy, the Gopis as a Lover, Sudama as a Friend and Uddhava as a Teacher. From vastly different attitudes to him, all of them get bound to him in total surrender to him as devotees. This sums up the full import of the unique quality and reach of the Bhakti doctrine that left a lasting impact on the Indian psyche. We may begin with the story of Kamsa's relationship with Krishna to illustrate how even a relationship of Enmity had an unusual implication in Bhakti. This would then illustrate how much more easily all other relationships could fall into the ambit of Bhakti.

Krishna takes birth in a most unhospitable, but very human location : the prison where his father Vasudeva and mother Devaki had been cast by Kamsa, the tyrant King of Mathura. Kamsa had done this because of a prediction that he would be killed by a son of Devaki who was his own sister. Devaki's own history goes back to a story of her existence in an earlier birth as Aditi, the daughter of Daksha Prajapati. Aditi's sister Diti, lost her children because of the machinations of Indra who was Aditi's son. As a result of Diti's curse, Aditi was reborn as Devaki and her first six sons prior to the birth of Krishna were killed by Kamsa. The seventh was saved by intervention of the Lord, and a story was put out that it was an abortion, to hide the fact that the foetus had been transferred to the womb of Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva. This child was to be born as Balarama. Krishna was the eighth child, and he was saved as soon as he was born by an arrangement by the Lord, whereby, that night, Vasudeva smuggled the baby out to Gokula and exchanged him with a baby girl child born at the same time to Yashoda and Nandagopa while they were asleep. Hearing that a baby had been born to Devaki, Kamsa rushed to the prison and was about to kill the newborn by smashing it on the ground. To his astonishment the baby slipped from his grip, rose in the sky in the form of a celestial and cried out "Hold your hand O wicked King, Krishna has been already born, so you had better seek him out before he kills you!" Kamsa was overawed by the vision, and stricken with remorse, sought forgiveness of Devaki and Vasudeva and released them from prison. Later however, at the promptings of his Rakshasa advisers, Kamsa's fears were revived and he then unleashed a vicious operation to kill all children born within that 10 day period.

But try as he might, all Kamsa's plans over the years were foiled by Krishna and Balarama. All the killers commissioned by Kamsa to kill them, were instead, killed by them. Informed by Narada that Krishna and Balarama were the sons of Vasudeva through Devaki and Rohini, Kamsa decided to invite them to an Ayudhapuja celebration at Mathura, where he could get them killed. Was this one of those acts of seeming mischief on the part of Narada ? Or was it a pre-vision of a Sage who saw all things through all the phases of time, past, present and future ?. Or was it an act of service to the Lord, to fulfil His Purpose ? These are questions for the Reader to answer for himself. In the event, it proved to be Kamsa's undoing, because Krishna killed all the killers Kamsa set on him, and ultimately killed Kamsa himself.

Where does Bhakti come into the story of Kamsa ?. The logic for this is interesting, if unusual. From the day he was told that he would one day Krishna would kill him, Kamsa's mind became obsessively occupied with Krishna and that he should kill Krishna before Krishna killed him. His mind was occupied by Krishna perhaps much more than in the case of an ardent devotee of Krishna. And it would appear that in his final moments the

images of Krishna that had so filled his mind with fear, seemed to materialise directly in front of him, as if in a benediction to release him from the sinful existence with which he had been burdened for so long. Direct personal redemption by the Lord is a blessing that even devotees do not easily get. The Bhagavata puts vividly this in the following verse :

स नित्यदोद्विग्नधिया तमीश्वरं पिबन् वदन् वाविचरन्स्वपञ्छवसन् ।

ददर्श चक्रायुधमग्रतो यस्तदेव रूपं दुरवापमाप ।। १०-४४-३९

sa nityadōdvignadhiyā tamīśvaram piban vadan vāvicaransvapañchvasan .

dadarśa cakrāyudhamagratō yastadēva rūpaṁ duravāpamāpa .. 10-44-39

Because, in utter fear, Kamsa was always seeing before him the form of Lord Krishna, with the discus in hand, - whether while drinking, speaking, sleeping, walking or breathing, even so did he, at death, enter into that very Form, which is very difficult for others to attain.

We may now come to Krishna's relationship with the Gopis, exemplifying Krishna's larger relationship with numerous women, whether mothers, or sisters or lovers or wives. This covered the entire gamut of man-woman relationship, and ranging from the entirely human to the wholly divine. The Krishna-Gopi relationship strikes an intimate cord in the heart of every woman. The Bhagavata lays their love bare, unvarnished, uninhibited, unapologetic, and this itself presents a simple message : that love is ultimately a pure emotion, that love has no boundaries, that it runs across all that exists, and that, whatever form it takes, it is better recognized and acknowledged than suppressed. At the human end of the spectrum, the physical union of man and woman can be ideally seen as a pure expression of surrender of one's identity in merger with another identity. It is love of this dimension of surrender and merger that makes the heart of Bhakti. What has a physical dimension at one level transforms into a spiritual dimension at another level where ultimately it is the spirit that prevails and pervades all existence. Krishna related and responded to all the Gopis and all his wives on a one to one basis to kindle that very dimension, which is the very essence of the Divine-Human relationship. One such relationship that was special, was that between him and Radha, which is not touched in the Bhagavata but developed in great detail in the Brahmavaivarta Purana and elsewhere. This is described as but a reflection of the relationship of Vishnu with Sri.

One of the stories of the Krishna-Gopi relationship is set in an occasion when the Gopis were observing vows engaged in the worship of the

Goddess Katyayani to mark the start of the winter season. They worship of a sand image of the goddess they make on the banks of the river Kalindi, each praying that they should be blessed with Krishna as their husband. They undress, leave their clothes on the bank and enter the river to enjoy a playful bath. Krishna comes there at that time and in a seeming impulse of mischief collects their garments, gets up a nearby Kadamba tree on the bank and sits there on a branch waiting them to return. When the Gopis are about to emerge from the river, they find their clothes gone and in the possession of Krishna in the tree enjoying himself at their predicament. Krishna then tells them as their conduct was violative of the rules of their worship, he would return their clothes only if they came to him with their hands raised above their heads in supplication to God for forgiveness, Naked as they were in neck deep water they begged him to leave the clothes on the bank, but Krishna would not yield. They had finally to come to him bashfully but remained standing before them enthralled and captivated by his proximity. Krishna returned their garments and then on a more serious note addressed them thus :

मयानुमोदितः सोऽसौ सत्यो भवितुमर्हति ।। १०-२२-२५

नमय्यावेशितधियां कामः कामाय कल्पते ।

भर्जिता क्वथिता धाना प्रायो बीजाय नेष्यते ।। १०-२२-२६

saṅkalpō vidita: sādhvayō bhavatīnām madarcanam .

mayānumōdita: sōasau satyō bhavitumarhati .. 10-22-25

namayyāvēśitadhiyām kāma: kāmāya kalpatē .

bharjitā kvathitā dhānā prāyō bījāya nēṣyatē .. 10-22-26

O virtuous girls, I have understood that the object you have in mind is to serve me. It has my approval and will fructify soon.

Sexual desire directed towards Me, with complete absorption in Me, will not end in sensual enjoyment. Just as grain boiled or fried can never germinate, association with Me destroys the sensual nature of passion

The later story of the Rasalila dance, that appears like a fulfilment of that promise, is therefore even more graphic and more explicitly erotic. Here Krishna creates multiple forms of himself, one exclusively as it were, for each Gopi who danced with him. Here are two telling verses from the Bhagavata narrative :

कस्याश्चिन्नाट्यविक्षिप्तकुण्डलत्विषमण्डितम् ।

गण्डं गण्डे सन्दधत्या अदात्ताम्बूलचर्वितम् ।। १०-३३-१३

नृत्यन्ती गायती कश्चित् कूजन्नूपुरमेखला ।

पार्श्वस्थाच्युतहस्ताब्जं श्रान्ताधात् स्तनयोः शिवम् । । १०-३३-१४

kasyāścinnātyavikṣiptakuṇḍalatviṣamaṇḍitam .

gaṇḍaṃ gaṇḍē sandadhatyā adāttāmbūlacarvitam .. 10-33-13

nṛtyantī gāyatī kaścit kūjannūpuramēkhalā .

pārśvasthācyutahastābjaṃ śrāntādhāt stanayōḥ śivam.. 10-33-14

One of them, whose cheeks were reflecting the brilliance of her ear-pendants rocking by the movements of the dance, closely pressed her cheeks to Krishna's and received from them a roll of betel crushed in his mouth.

Another woman who was vigorously dancing to the accompaniment of her own song and the delightful sound produced by her anklets and the mini-bells in her girdle, now felt tired, and for relief pressed the lotus-like palms of nearby Krishna to her breasts.

Now the question is, what place has does the Erotic have in Bhakti ? . How does one reconcile the sensual with the spiritual in Krishna ? These questions by the sceptic of today, were the very questions that Raja Parikshit asked of Suka who was narrating this story to him. We cannot do better than quote Suka's answer to these questions on the real significance of these events seemingly clothed in such eroticism :

“Supermen have been found to transgress the moral code and indulge in aggressive actions. But, just like fire, which consumes everything, be it dirt or poison, and yet remains pure and unaffected, these great ones cannot be contaminated by any evil. But small men imitate them, even mentally. They cannot consume poison as Rudra did. Intelligent people must follow their teachings and also those actions as are consistent with their teachings. The actions of the great men do not come from any egoistic impulse. The One spirit pervades the souls of all the Gopis, their husbands and everyone else and sees no distinction between one or another. He assumes a body and engages in actions that draw all of them, including even non-believers who hear about them”.

There is a recurring mystical element in all these stories that one must also bear in mind. Krishna takes multiple forms to be able relate individually and exclusively to each Gopi, This is simply to stress that the individual's relationship with God has to rest on a completely personalised one-to-one basis. God accepts each person who seeks him, entirely as that person is, without any pre-conditions, and then helps raise that person from the physical to the spiritual level. If a woman seeks Krishna physically as a man, He draws her to Himself, excites her as if responding to her desires,

and then suddenly disappears. Using separation then, to intensify her craving for Him, He suddenly reappears to show that He really cares, but also uses His mystical disappearance and reappearance to indicate to her that there is more to Him than the physical, with which she could have a higher and more lasting relationship. This is a completely novel methodology for raising an individual from the human to the spiritual on the basis of that person's own initial personality. This is the unique feature of the Bhakti doctrine as launched by Krishna. And it is what accounts for the enormous appeal of Krishna.

No role could better fit a God than the role of a Friend of the humble and the meek. Krishna's friendship for Sudama (also called Sridama) is one the most beautiful stories that have an enduring appeal among the Indian people. Sudama was a child-hood friend, and they lived together for the early years of their tutelage under a Guru. Sudama and his wife were deeply committed to traditional Vedic disciplines and values. They were meek and humble to the point that they lived and subsisted on whatever came their way from day to day. Often they had nothing to eat and reduced to skin and bone, wearing tattered clothes, in sheer penury, yet they lived content with whatever they had or got. One day his wife said his childhood friend being now the powerful King at Dvaraka, Sudama should visit him and on seeing him his friend would surely help them to have at least the basic needs of living beyond hunger. Sudama would not easily accept the idea of troubling anyone for their needs and said that they should trust in God's care. On her repeated entreaties, he finally yielded and got ready leave for Dvaraka.

The true human that she was, Sudama's wife insisted that he should not go to Krishna empty-handed, but carry a small gift, as he was sure to accept anything that came with true love. She gave him all they had for the day, which was a handful of beaten rice. Sudama agreed to take this to Krishna, with a lot of trepidation. Finally the day he arrived at the environs of Krishna's palace at Dvaraka, he was stopped by the guards. But spotting him from a distance, Krishna came running to him, and to the consternation of the guards, enveloped him in a warm embrace and then led him lovingly into the palace. Hesitantly Sudama offered him the gift he brought and to his great surprise Krishna ate it with great delight. They then spent a long time together recalling old times, and when the time came to leave, Sudama was loaded with gifts and sent back with arrangements to travel in comfort. On reaching home, he was astonished to find it was no long the humble hut that he had left. Instead it was a splendid palace with all the comforts and manned by staff, and he found his wife transformed and radiantly happy. Sudama then realized that all this was the doing of his wonderful childhood friend, who was clearly God in human form. But Sudama continued to lead his humble life. He was no longer

hungry, but he remained untouched by all this luxury and ostentation. What greater riches could he have when God, his childhood friend was now his life-long friend.

There are of course, many mystic experiences that form part of the Krishna saga. No experience however can compare with the one where Krishna appeared in all his Cosmic grandeur in the Visvaroopā vision of Himself that he gave Arjuna in the course of his teaching during the Kurukshetra War. This brings us to role of Krishna as a Teacher, best exemplified in his relationship with Uddhava. Interestingly the central point of his teaching to Uddhava too is finally focussed on Bhakti as the ultimate aim of Existence. But while the teaching to Uddhava and Arjuna, is essentially the same, there is an interesting difference. The Bhagavad Gita, is clearly designed as a philosophical teaching that appeals to the intellectual. But the very same teaching is given in a simple form to Uddhava representing the common man, Uddhava sought Krishna's teaching in the following words :

उद्धव उवाच :

सुदुश्चरामिमां मन्ये योगचर्यामनात्मनः ।

यथाञ्जसा पुमान् सिद्ध्येत् तन्मे ब्रूह्यञ्जसाच्युत ॥ ११-२९-१

uddhava uvāca :

suduścarāmimāṃ manyē yōgacaryāmanātmana: .

yathāñjasā pumān siddhyēt tanmē brūhyañjasācyuta .. 11-29-1

Uddhava said : O Lord !, the path of communion through knowledge that you have described is extremely difficult for one who has not yet conquered the senses. O Achyuta ! Expound to me in an easily understandable manner, a way of communion which is practicable for an ordinary person.

One part of Krishna's onward explanation is specially illuminating :

इति सर्वाणि भूतानि मद्भावेन महाद्युते ।

सभाजयन् मन्यमानो ज्ञानं केवलमाश्रितः ॥ ११-२९-१३

ब्राह्मणे पुलकसे स्तेने ब्रह्मण्येऽर्के स्फुलिङ्गके ।

अक्रूरे क्रूरके चैव समदृक् पण्डितो मतः ॥ ११-२९-१४

नरेष्वभीक्ष्णं मद्भावं पुंसो भावयतोऽचिरात् ।

स्पर्धासूयातिरस्काराः साहङ्कारावियन्ति हि ॥ ११-२९-१५

विसृज्य स्मयमानान् स्वान् व्रीडां दैहिकीम् ।

प्रणमेद् दण्डवद् भूमावाश्चचाण्डालगोखरम् ।। ११-२९-१६

sabhājayan manyamānō jñānam kēvalamāśrita: .. 11-29-13

brāhmaṇē pulkasē stēnē brahmaṇyē`rkē sphyuliṅgakē .

akrūrē krūrakē caiva samadrk paṇḍitō mata: .. 11-29-14

narēṣvabhīkṣṇam madbāvam puṁsō bhāvayatōacirāt .

spardhāsūyātiraskārā: sāhaṅkārāviyanti hi .. 11-29-15

visṛjya smayamānān svān vrīḍāṁ daihikīm .

pranamēd daṇḍavad bhūmāvāśvacāṇḍālagōkharam .. 11-29-16

O Uddhava of mighty intelligence, know him to be a man of true illumination (Pandita) who, with the help of the insight born of knowledge, could have evenness of outlook and perceive and honour all beings as My manifestations – be they holy men or outcasts, persecutors or adorers of holy men, the sun or a spark of fire, a tranquil personage or a ferocious and cruel man. (13 – 14)

In those who constantly seek to find My presence in all human beings, there will no longer be any competitiveness with equals, jealousy towards superiors, contempt for inferiors, and too much self-consciousness with regard to oneself. (15)

Overlooking the ridicule of friends and relatives, casting aside the sense of high and low on mere physical considerations, and throwing away all shyness and shame based on such ideas, one should fall down in prostration like a stick before all beings - dogs, outcasts, cattle, asses and the like, seeing all of them as manifestations of the Supreme Being. (16)

This teaching to Uddhava, has therefore gained wide popularity under the name of the Uddhava Gita, by virtue of its directness and simplicity. But either way, whether given to Arjuna or Uddhava, the Gita has come to us as surely the most sublime, the highest summation, of all the teachings that have emanated from ancient India.

Krishna left us at the dawn of Kaliyuga after leaving a message for humanity that would protect them from the great corruptions that were foretold for this Yuga. The Bhagavata gives quite a frightening description of the level of degeneration that would set in during this Yuga, as set out in the Annexure, But it closes with the optimistic note that the end of the period would see the arrival of Kalki, the next Avatar of Vishnu, who would restore righteousness once again and usher in the Krita Yoga of the next great Chautryuga Cycle. Till then of course, we would have to put our faith in the eternal message of Krishna so beautifully summed up by Sanjaya at the conclusion of the Bhagavad Gita :

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।

तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिर्ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥ ७८ ॥

yatra yōgēśvaraḥ kṛṣṇō yatra pāṛthō dhanurdharaḥ ..

tatra śrīrvijayō bhūtirdhruvā nītimatirmama .. 78 ..

Wherever Bhagavan Sri Krishna, the Lord of Yoga is, and wherever there is Arjuna, the wielder of the Gandiva bow is, goodness, victory, glory and unfailing righteousness will always be there: so I declare ! -78-

Where then are Krishna and Arjuna today ? They are surely in the minds of the millions of mankind and will remain there to guide them as in the past, through the millenia of the future.

ANNEXURE

-1

**THE GENEALOGY STARTS WITH THE CREATOR BRAHMA HIMSELF
AND BRANCHES AFTER NAHUSHA AS BELOW
BRAHMA--ATRI--CHANDRA--BUDHA--PURARABAS--AYUS--NAHUSHA
THE TWO RESULTING BRANCHES END WITH PARIKHIT AND KRISHNA**

GENEALOGY OF

GENEALOGY OF KRISHNA

PARIKHIT

S.No	NAME
1	YAYATI
2	PURU
3	JANAMEJAYA-1
4	PRACHINVAT
5	PRABIRA
6	NAMASYU
7	CARUPADA
8	SUHYU
9	BAHUGAVA
10	SAMYATI
11	AHAMYATI
12	RAUDRASVA
13	RTEYU
14	RANTIBHARA
15	SUMATI
16	RAIBHYA
17	DUSHYANTA
18	BHARATA
19	BHARADVAJA
20	MANYU
21	BRHATKSHATRA
22	HASTI
23	RAKSHA
24	SAMBARANA
25	KURU
26	PAIKSHIT-1
27	SURATHA
28	VIDURATHA
29	SARVABHAUMA
30	JAYASENA
31	RADHIKA
32	AYUTA
33	KRODHANA
34	DEVATITHI
35	RSYA
36	DILIPA
37	PRATIPA

S.No	NAME
1	YADU
2	SAHASRAJIT
3	SATAJIT
4	HEHAYA
5	DHARMA
6	KUNI
7	BHADRASENA
8	DHANAKA
9	KRITAVIRA
10	KIRTAVIRYARJUNA
11	MADHU
12	VRSHNI
13	SUDHAJIT
14	SINI
15	SATYAKA
16	SATYAKI
17	JAYA
18	KUNI
19	ANAMITRA
20	PRSN
21	VIDURATHA
22	SURA
23	SINI
24	BHOJA
25	HRIDIKA
26	SURA
27	VASUDEVA
28	KRISHNA

**THE ARROW HERE IS TO INDICATE
THAT YUDHISTHIRA AND KRISHNA**

38 SANTANU
39 VICITRAVIRYA
40 PANDU
41 YUDHISTHIRA
42 **PARIKSHIT-2**

ARE CONTEMPORANEOUS

ANNEXURE - 2

CONDITIONS OF THE KALI YUGA AS FORETOLD IN THE SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

kalim āgatam āiñāya ksetre 'smin vaisnave vayam
āsīnā dīrgha-satrena kathāyām sakṣaṇā hareh 1-1-21

Knowing well that the age of Kali has already begun, we are assembled here in this holy place to hear at great length the transcendental message of Godhead and in this way perform sacrifice.

tvam nah sandarśito dhātrā dustaram nistitīṣatām
kalim sattva-haram pumsām karna-dhāra ivārṇavam 1-1-22

We think that we have met Your Goodness by the will of providence, just so that we may accept you as captain of the ship for those who desire to cross the difficult ocean of Kali, which deteriorates all the good qualities of a human being.

śrī-śuka uvāca tataś cānu-dinam dharmah
satyam śaucam ksamā dayā kālena balinā rājan
nañkṣyaty āyur balam smṛtiḥ 12-2-1

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Then, O King, religion, truthfulness, cleanliness, tolerance, mercy, duration of life, physical strength and memory will all diminish day by day because of the powerful influence of the age of Kali.

vittam eva kalau nṛnām janmācāra-guṇodayaḥ
dharmā-nyāya-vyavasthāyām kāranam balam eva hi 12-2-2

In Kali-yuga, wealth alone will be considered the sign of a man's good birth, proper behavior and fine qualities. And law and justice will be applied only on the basis of one's power.

dāmpatyē 'bhirucir hetur māyaiva vyāvahārike
strīṭve pumṣṭve ca hi ratir vipratve sūtram eva hi 12-2-3

Men and women will live together merely because of superficial attraction, and success in business will depend on deceit. Womanliness and manliness will be judged according to one's expertise in sex, and a man will be known as a [brāhmana](#) just by his wearing a thread.

[liṅgam](#) evāśrama-khyātāv anyonyāpatti-[kāraṇam](#)
[avṛttyā nyāya-daurbalyam](#) [pāṇḍitye cāpalam](#) [vacah](#) 12-2-4

A person's spiritual position will be ascertained merely according to external symbols, and on that same basis people will change from one spiritual order to the next. A person's propriety will be seriously questioned if he does not earn a good living. And one who is very clever at juggling words will be considered a learned scholar.

Anāḍhyataivāsādhutve [sādhutve dambha eva tu](#)
[svīkāra eva](#) codvāhe [snānam eva prasāadhanam](#) 12-2-5

A person will be judged unholy if he does not have money, and hypocrisy will be accepted as virtue. Marriage will be arranged simply by verbal agreement, and a person will think he is fit to appear in public if he has merely taken a bath.

[dūre](#) vāry-[ayanam](#) [tīrtham](#) [lāvanyam](#) [keśa-dhāranam](#)
[udaram](#)-[bharatā](#) svārthaḥ [satyatve dhārṣṭyam](#) [eva hi](#)
[dāksyam](#) [kutumba-bharanam](#) yaśo 'rthe [dharma-sevanam](#) 12-2-6

A sacred place will be taken to consist of no more than a reservoir of water located at a distance, and beauty will be thought to depend on one's hairstyle. Filling the belly will become the goal of life, and one who is audacious will be accepted as truthful. He who can maintain a family will be regarded as an expert man, and the principles of religion will be observed only for the sake of reputation.

[evam](#) prajābhir duṣṭābhir [ākīrne ksiti-mandale](#)
[brahma-vit-ksatra-sūdrānām](#) yo [balī bhavitā nṛpah](#) 12-2-7

As the earth thus becomes crowded with a corrupt population, whoever among any of the social classes shows himself to be the strongest will gain political power.

[prajā hi](#) lubdhai rājanyair nirghṛṇair [dasyu-dharmabhih](#)
[ācchinna-dāra-dravinā yāsyanti giri-kānanam](#) 12-2-8

Losing their wives and properties to such avaricious and merciless rulers, who will behave no better than ordinary thieves, the citizens will flee to the mountains and forests.

[śāka-mūlāmiṣa-ksaudra- phala-puṣpāṣṭi-bhojanāh](#)
[anāvr̥ṣṭyā vinañksyanti durbhikṣa-kara-pīditāh](#) 12-2-9

Harassed by famine and excessive taxes, people will resort to eating leaves, roots, flesh, wild honey, fruits, flowers and seeds. Struck by drought, they will become completely ruined.

[śīta-vātātapa-prāvṛḍ-himair anyonyatah prajāh](#)
[ksut-trdbhyām](#) vyādhibhiś caiva [santapsyante ca cintayā](#) 12-2-10

The citizens will suffer greatly from cold, wind, heat, rain and snow. They will be further tormented by quarrels, hunger, thirst, disease and severe anxiety.

trimśad [vimśati varsāni](#) paramāyuh [kalau nṛnām](#) 12-2-11

The maximum duration of life for human beings in [Kali-yuga](#) will become fifty years.

[kṣīyamānesu dehesu dehinām kali-dosatah](#)
[varṇāśramavatām dharme naste veda-pathe nṛnām](#)
[pāṣaṇḍa-pracure dharme dasyu-prāyeṣu rājasu](#)
[cauryāṇṛta-vr̥thā-himsā- nānā-vrt̥tisv vai nṛsu](#)
[śūdra-prāyeṣu varṇesu cchāga-prāyāsu dhenusu](#)
[gr̥ha-prāyeṣv āśrameṣu yauna-prāyeṣu bandhuṣu](#)
[anu-prāyāsv oṣadhīṣu śamī-prāyeṣu sthāsnūṣu](#)
[vidyut̥-prāyeṣu megheṣu śūnya-prāyeṣu sadmasu](#)
[it̥tham kalau gata-prāye janeṣu khara-dharmisu](#)
[dharma-trāṇāya sattvena bhagavān avatarisyati](#)

1-2-12 to 16

By the time the age of [Kali](#) ends, the bodies of all creatures will be greatly reduced in size, and the religious principles of followers of [varnāśrama](#) will be ruined. The path of the Vedas will be completely forgotten in human society, and so-called religion will be mostly atheistic. The kings will mostly be thieves, the occupations of men will be stealing, lying and needless violence, and all the social classes will be reduced to the lowest level of śūdras. Cows will be like goats, spiritual hermitages will be no different from mundane houses, and family ties will extend no further than the immediate bonds of marriage. Most plants and herbs will be tiny, and all trees will appear like dwarf [śamī](#) trees. Clouds will be full of lightning, homes will be devoid of piety, and all human beings will have become like asses. At that time, the Supreme Personality of Godhead will appear on the earth. Acting with the power of pure spiritual goodness, He will rescue eternal religion.

ANNEXURE 3

Summary of the 12 Skandas of the Bhagavata Purana

Canto 1 (19 Chapters)

The first book introduces a gathering of sages headed by Rishi Saunaka at the Naimisha Forest getting to hear a complete narration of the Bhagavata from the Suta story teller, Ugrasravas. The Suta recited the story exactly as he heard it narrated by Suka, the son of Vyasa, to Raja Parikshit while awaiting his end in a fast unto death undertaken by him in atonement for an earlier sin.

Canto 2 (10 Chapters)

Śuka tells Parikshit that when one is about to die, they should become free of the fear of death and let go of all attachments to pleasure, home, and family. Śuka describes creation and the avatars of Vishnu, concluding with a description of the ten characteristics of a Purana.

Canto 3 (33 Chapters)

Vidura gets to hear from Uddhava many stories : the end of the Kurukshetra War and the death of Krishna. In a later meeting, the sage Maitreya tells Vidura how the worlds were created, the divisions of time, and other subjects. Maitreya also the story of the birth of Hiranyakasipu and his death at the hands of Varaha, the boar avatar of Vishnu. Another important story is that of Devahuti and her son Kapila and his imparting to her the Samkhya teachings to help her to find her final liberation.

Canto 4 (31 Chapters)

The story of Daksha and his sacrifice is told, in which he mocks Shiva in front of Dakshayani—his own daughter and Shiva's consort—resulting in Dakshayani's self-immolation, which later came to be known by one of her names, *Satī*. The legend of Dhruva's penance and devotion to Vishnu is also recounted, along with the related story of king Prithu. The book ends with the recounting of the renunciation and liberation of the Pracetas brothers.

Canto 5 (26 Chapters)

The story of Manu's sons and their children leads eventually to Bharat and a description of the world, the sun and its course, the moon and the planets, the regions below the earth, and the twenty-eight hells (*naraka*).

Canto 6 (19 Chapters)

This Canto includes the story of Ajāmila, who escaped from the Yamadutas for chanting the Holy Name "Na-ra-ya-na" on his deathbed, even though he was only intending to call his son. Later he left his home and went to Haridwar to perfect himself for self realization through Bhakthi-Yoga. The stories of the victory of Indra over Viśvarūpa and the birth of the Maruts are recounted..

Canto 7 (15 Chapters)

The main portion of the seventh book is dedicated to the well known story of Hiranyakaśipu, his son Prahlada, and the death of Hiranyakaśipu at the hands of Narasimha, an avatar of Vishnu. Book seven also includes a discussion of the dharma involved with the different varnas and with the four ashramas (stages) of life comprising the structure of society.

Canto 8 (24 Chapters)

The description of the six past *Manvantaras* (ages or time periods of Manu) and the seven future ages of Manu includes several stories, many involving the avatars of Vishnu. Nine chapters are dedicated to the oft told story of Vishnu's Vamana (dwarf) avatar and his defeat of Bali. The story of the churning of the ocean of milk is also recounted, which is done with the help of the Kurma avatar of Vishnu.

Canto 9 (24 Chapters)

The current age of Manu is described at length, including the traditional history of the Solar Dynasty founded by Ikshvaku and the Lunar Dynasty of Pururavas. A long history of dynasties is described—Panchala, Magadha, Kuru, Anu, Druhyus, Turvasu, and others—leading up to the Yadu dynasty and the birth of Krishna to his parents Vasudeva and Devaki.

Canto 10 (90 Chapters)

The tenth book, dedicated to Krishna, is responsible for the widespread popularity of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Book Ten includes the most enduring images and stories of Krishna. The tenth book is by far the lengthiest, taking up almost one quarter of the entire *Bhāgavata*. While the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita* show Krishna in various roles as teacher and diplomat, Book Ten shows Krishna simply engaging in *lila*, or divine and intimate play with his devotees. It presents this intimate relationship of humans with God as the highest goal of human existence.

Canto 11 (31 Chapters)

The destruction of the Yadava dynasty, including Krishna and all his kinsmen, is caused by the curse of a brahmin—instigated by Krishna himself. The Yadavas kill each other in a drunken fight and Krishna dies as a result of the same curse, the result of a metal-tipped arrow striking his foot. The last chapter describes Krishna's ascent to Vaikuntha. Book eleven also includes the so-called *Uddhava Gita*, the last discourse of Krishna which he addresses to his dear friend Uddhava.

Canto 12 (13 Chapters)

The future rulers of Magadha are predicted, along with the evils of Kali Yuga and the future destruction of the world (*pralaya*). The main story ends with the death of King Parikshit—cursed to die from snakebite—and the thwarted snake sacrifice of his son Janamejaya. The text finally concludes with a second description of the ten characteristics of a Purana, the life of Markandeya, a summary of the Bhāgavata, and the assertion that it is the greatest among the Puranas.

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