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SIVA PURANAM

- D.S.R. Anjaneyulu

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FOREWORD

In Hindu faith there is godly Trinity, Brahma-Vishnu-Maheswara. They have universal duties as Srishti, Sthiti and Laya, that is, Creation, Protection and Absorption respectively. Maheswara is Siva and also known as Sankara, Gowri Sankara and by many other names.

The onus of Siva is destruction which might seem to be unpleasant but very significant in Nature, Biology and Science. Unless the old is ended new can not arise. So life and death commonly go together and that is the law of life.

Ancient scriptures such as Puranas are the sole resort for self-absorption, and dedication. And the whole grip of devotion is engraved in trusted faith. Reading of Puranas inculcates such solid and undisturbed faith in self and in the Supreme.

The Hindu structure of religion is founded on the ground of Puranas in particular. The Puranas are widely spread as documents of different Hindu religious sects.

Siva puranam is an Indian Epic of Lord Siva narrating number of divine tales of mystic nature. The Saivite stories are very interesting, innovative, idealistic, devotional and guidelines to human beings. Above all they indicate triumph of the right over the wicked.

This book is brought out for the benefit of the wide spread English readers. The author Sri D.S.R. Anjaneyulu has rendered these stories in lucid, readable and versatile language.


As an aroma of Hindu religious fervour, T.T.D. has taken up this work with the spirit of greatly said Hari Hara mantra as,

*“ Sivaya Vishnurupaya
Sivarupaya Vishnave”.*

I hope that this great book will go a long way to infuse blend of spiritual harmony among all devotees.

Tirupati
10-2-2013

In the Service of the Lord


L.V. Subrahmanyam, I.A.S.
Executive Officer,
Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

There flourishes the Ekasila town, in the Siddhavatam Taluk in the Cuddapah district. The golden vessels entrenched on the towers of the temple of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, in that pilgrim centre, otherwise known as 'Onti Mitta', beckoned to me.

Taking the sacred dip in the 'Rama Tirtha' lake, I paid my reverential respects to the shining idols of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, in the sanctum sanctorum built by king Vasumanta.

As I offered my worship and received the sacrament from the priest, I felt the mystic presence of Lord Rama commanding me to write the 'Siva Puranamu'. There and then I decided to compose this work and offer it to Lord Rama.

Of the eighteen Puranas, the Sivapuranam, revels in matchless revelation of the non-sectarian nature of the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent state of Lord Siva.

Although I consulted the Sanskrit original text containing 24000 slokas and eleven chapters, I adapted it independently the most intelligible method of narration. Besides the original work, the 'Siva Puranamu' of the late Sri Naga Virayya Sastri helped me a great deal.

I tried my best to make the narration readable.

The first Part includes the wedding of Parvati and of Valli; the second, the glory of Visvesvara and the tales of various devotees of Lord Siva.

In offering this humble work to the reading public I hope to promote not only the worship of Lord Siva but also the innate consciousness of godhead in all human beings. In the fatherhood of God is the best promotion of brotherhood of man.

D.S.R. ANJANEYULU

Dedication

This work is dedicated

to

**LORD KODANDA RAMA
SWAMI**

who is the central deity, on either side of whom stand his spouse Sita Devi and his brother Lakshmana, in the temple at 'OntiMitta'; in whose service Hanuman and other monkey heroes felt their lives sanctified; to whom Lord Siva offered his worship as 'Onti Mitta Ramalinga; seeking whose constant 'darshan' Hanuman resides there as Sanjivaraya; praying to whom, the sage Sringeri was released from the sin of imprecating king Parikshit; whose resplendent image has been all through the ages worshipped by the deities, Balarama and Krishna, the sages and saints like Ramanujacharya, Krishna Chaitanya and the poets like Potana and Ayyalaraju Ramabhadra; and who is celebrated in legend and song as the symbol of supreme godhead as well as of the immanent and transcendent spirit of the sacred symbol, AUM.

Karamchedu

23-6-1983

D.S.R.ANJANEYULU



SIVA PURANAM

(EPIC OF LORD SIVA)

Prayer to Lord Siva

(in the form of acronym)

Nagendra-haraya Trilochanaya Bhasmanga-ragaya,
Mahesvaraya,
Nityaya Suddhaya Digambaraya tasmai Na-Karaya,
NAMAH SIVAYA.

Mandakini-salila-chandana-charchitaya
Nandisvara-pramatha-natha Mahesvaraya,
Mandara-mukhya-bahu-pushpa-supujitaya
Tasmai Ma-Karaya NAMAH SIVAYA.

Sivaya Gauri-vadanabja-brinda
Suryaya-Daksha-adhvara-nasakaya
Sri Nila-Kanthaya, Vrishadhvajaya
Tasmai Si-Karaya NAMAH SIVAYA.

Vasistha-Kumbhodbhava-Gautama-adi
Munindra Devarchita Sekharaya
Chandra-Arka-Vaisvanara-lochanaya
Tasmai Va-karaya NAMAH SIVAYA

Yaksha-svarupaya jata-dharaya
Pinaka-hastaya Sanatanaya,
Divyaya Devaya Digambaraya
Tasmai Ya-Karaya NAMAH SIVAYA.

Prayer to Lord Vishnu

Suklaambaradharam Vishnum Sasivarnam Chaturbhujam,
prasanna-vadanam dhyayet sarva-vighna-upasantaye,

Prayer to Vighneswara

Vakra-tunda-maha-kaaya, surya-koti-sama-prabha,
Avighnam kuru me Deva, Sarva-karyeshu sarvada.

PART - I HIMALAYAS

There!

Over there are the heaven-caressing towers of the mighty, majestic Himalayas! Their very sight brings about a blissful transformation in the minds of even the sinfully fallen men and women.

From the heights of those Himalayan peaks, flows the holy river Gomati, with a gently cadenced pace, along the hills and dales. The rays of the early morning sun are being sparkingly reflected by those clear, white waters.

The trees and plants all around, shining with their fruity, flowery fertility, seem to bend their 'heads' in deep reverence for the Sun-God.

Indeed, all forms of living creatures appear to be praying at the dawn of a fresh day to the supreme, manifest presence of the unmanifest, Absolute that is the sun- the picture of pure of effulgence, the fire of pure virtue, the witness of all worldly activity, the dispeller of darkness- in these words (composed by the First Poet, Valmiki):

Taptachamikarabhaya vahnaye Visvakarmane,
Namah tamo bhinighnaya ruchaye loka-sakshine.

NAIMISA FOREST

Now, finishing the ablution in the sacred Gomati river, and offering their daily prayers and oblations, the sages and seers are returning to the hermitage in order to perform their sacrificial rites. All over the hallowed ground the ear-delighting echoes of the chanting of the Vedic hymns are being felt inspiringly. The fumes emanating from the sacrificial fire-place are rising up into the skies and are purifying the entire atmosphere in the surroundings.

SAGE SUTA

The disciple of Sage Vyasa, Suta, is presently coming down from the heavenly region to witness the holy sacrifice being collectively performed by the Sages. As they looked up they saw the all-knowing, smiling, merciful reciter of the epics fully bedecked with the holy ashes and the rosary coming up to them, with this prayer on his lips:

Rajatachalendra-sanu-vasine NAMAH SIVAYA!
Rajamana nitya manda-hasine NAMAH SIVAYA!
Rajakoraka-vatamsa-bhasine NAMAH SIVAYA!
Rajaraja-mitrata-prakaasine NAMAH SIVAYA!

(Obeisance to Lord Shiva He who is the denizen of the silver mount Kailasa; He who ever smiles gently and radiantly; He whose tresses are adorned with the crescent moon; He whose spiritual radiance is further brightened by His friendship with Kubera the Lord of the material Wealth!).

The sages bowed to the great raconteur as he touched the ground, and bade him welcome. Offering him a seat worthy of him, they spoke to him thus: "O knower of the past, present and future! Your arrival is a source of supreme gratification to all of us. We are quite aware of your duty of regaling us with the nobly moralising and traditionally evocative stories, during the performance of our sacrificial rites. Now, O sublime story-teller, please tell us the stories, by hearing which, our hearts, minds and souls will be enriched and ennobled, and after learning which, there is nothing left to be learnt".

Pleased by their welcome and their request, sage suta said: "I am honoured by your gracious words. I am gratefully conscious of the elderly esteem you have bestowed on me, though I am your junior in years. By joining you and taking part in your sacred Yajna, I feel that my life is wholly Sanctified. The story of Lord Siva is the most edifying one I can think of. Each and every one who hears this story gains salvation".

SAGE MARKANDEYA

The first person who wanted to listen to the story of Lord Siva was Markandeya. He went up to the Satya Loka (The World of Truth). There he saw the Lord Creator, Brahma, being entertained by his consort, Sarasvati Devi, on the Vina (lute). The sage then prayed to that goddess of speech and learning:

Lalaamaanka-phaalaam lasadgaana-lolaam
Sva-bhaktaika-paalaam yasah-sri-kapolaam,
Kare tu aksha-maalaam kanat-pratna-lolaam
Bhaje Saaradaabaam ajasram madambaam.

(Ever do I pray to goddess Sarasvati, my divine Mother; whose forehead is bedecked with the crimson sacred dot; who is addicted to good music; who is dedicated to protecting her devotees; whose cheeks dazzle with the brightness of her glory; and whose hands are adorned with the constantly revolving golden rosary).

Reciting this sloka (composed by Adi Sankara), he besought the goddess to enlighten him on the story of Lord Siva.

Upon which, the goddess said: “Learned sage, your request is proper, no doubt, but it is not within my power to depict the mighty doings of Lord Siva. You have to go to Vaikuntha and approach Lord Vishnu for that noble purpose”.

Accordingly, Markandeya reached Vaikuntha, and worshipped Lord Vishnu thus:

Saantaakaaram bhujaga-sayanam padmanaabham
suresam
Visvaakaaram gagana-sadrisam megha-varnam subha-
angam,
Lakshmee-kaantam kamala-nayanam, yogi-hrid-dhyaana-
gamyam
Vande Vishnum bhava-bhaya-haram sarva-lokaika-
naatham||

(I pray to Vishnu- the quintessence of peacefulness; the Lord whose bed is the divine serpent and who has the Lotus in the navel; The King of gods, the Form of the universe, the sky-like Immanence; the Cloud-hued, the Auspicious-limbed, the Lotus-eyed One; the consort of goddess Lakshmi; the ultimate goal of Yogic communion; the destroyer of earthly fear and the Monarch of all the worlds).

Requested to be informed about Lord Siva, Lord Vishnu smilingly answered; “Good sage, you seem to be rather innocuous. Only Lord Siva can inform anyone fully about Him-self. Please go to the silver mount Kailasa to get your honest wish fulfilled”.

MOUNT KAILAS

Approaching the silver mountain, Markandeya feasted his eyes on its resplendent beauty and felt the sweet perfumes which the flower-and-fruit-filled trees on it were spreading about. There he saw the blessed Lord, seated on a moonstone altar, and enjoying the company of his consort, parvati.

Enraptured by the divine presence, the sage sought the Lord’s grace and refuge thus:

Dugdhaih madhva-aajya-yuktaih dadhi-guda-sahitaih
snaapitam na eva lingam
No liptam chandana-aadyaih kanaka-virachitaih poojitam na
prasunaih|
Dhupaih karpura-deepaih vividha-rasa-yutaih na eva bakshya-
upahaaraih
Kshantavyah me aparaadhah Siva! Siva! Bhoh, Sree Mahaa-
deva! Sambho !||

(O Lord Siva, forgive me for my remissness in not praying to you by anointing your symbolic Linga with the five kinds of nectar; by smearing it with sandalwood paste; by worshipping it with golden flowers; by offering it the incense of comphor; or by consecrating it with various tasteful oblations!).

Both Lord Siva and goddess Parvati were pleased with the sincere contrition of the sage, and asked him to let his wish be known to them. Then the sage said he wanted to hear the story of Siva from the Lord himself. The divine couple reacted with a smile as though they found the request just enough, but thought that it would not be proper for the Lord to narrate His own tale. Consequently, they suggested that Nandisvara was the right person to oblige the sage. Hearing the suggestion, the divine Bull, Nandi, shed tears of joyful gratification. He realised that by giving him this opportunity, the Lord was expressing His implicit faith in His mount.

NANDISVARA

Markandeya, receiving the blessings of the divine couple, proceeded towards the Nandi: “Dear Nandi, for long years you have been the trusted mount and servant of the blessed first couple, Siva and Parvati. You know all about them, and now they have given you the permission to narrate their history to me. I am all attention to hear you”.

So saying, Markandeya was mentally recollecting the story of that sacred Bull. This Nandi is the God-given son of the great anchorite Silada who found him while digging the hole for the sacrificial fire place. It is the same Nandi who, though granted only a short life by Lord Siva, prayed to that Lord’s image at Kedara with supreme penitence and obtained His boon for a long life. Besides granting him the status of being their mount, the divine couple also saw to it that he should be worshipped along with themselves. And this great Nandi always keeps a watchful eye on his Master and his Mistress, wherever they are.

The Nandi said: “Dear sage, to the best of my ability I shall narrate that sacred history, which was not quite assimilated even by the great sage Narada, about whom I shall tell you something at the outset.

SAGE NARADA

Once sage Narada was performing a penance on the banks of Lake Manasarovar, with the aim of obtaining Lord Siva’s grace. Mistaking his aim, and fearing that the sage might have his eye on his throne, Indra, the Lord of godly hosts, sent the celestial courtesans like Rambha etc, to disturb Narada’s penance. But neither their dance nor their music was of any avail in enticing the sage, and they returned to paradise to report their failure to Indra.

Worried, Indra went down to Narada by himself. The sage was worshipping Lord Siva with great concentration. Seeing for himself that the sage’s purpose was the attainment of Siva’s blessings only, Indra returned to his heavenly home, with his peace of mind restored.

Narada clairvoyantly understood all that transpired: the way he was able to withstand the wiles of the heavenly damsels, convinced him that it was all due to his own individual self-control. But he could not appreciate the fact that it was Siva’s grace that saved him.

Narada then vainly told himself; “Even Lord Siva’s penance was once successfully disturbed by Cupid, but not mine”.

Glorying in such vain thoughts, Narada went up to Satya Loka to broadcast his power resisting the temptation to which he was subjected by Rambha and other damsels. The sage’s parents, Brahma and Sarasvati, were aware of his folly when he boasted to them about his self-restraint, but they also knew that their own counsel would be disregarded by their vainglorious offspring. so they kept mum, in their knowledge that eventually Vishnu and Siva would teach him a lesson in humility.

But the sage misinterpreted the silence of the Lord Creator and goddess Sarasvati, as their tacit appreciation of his ‘feat’ and prided himself on achieving this first recognition of his fame.

As Lord Siva and goddess Paarvati also kept quiet, when he repeated his boasts at mount Kailasa, Narada was further assured of his freshness and thought that it was his second 'Victory'.

Mentally worshipping Lord Vishnu, Narada informed the latter that his penance was gloriously rewarded, in that he could easily withstand the amorous advances of the celestial courtesans. He went on to proclaim that no longer the 'Maya' of Vishnu and Siva would have any effect on him.

Then Lord Vishnu reprimanded him: "Narada, know 'Maya' to be nothing but the source of all creation, the power of nature. It is dependent on Myself and Lord Siva for its efficacy. Beware of its uncanny ability to open the eyes of the vain people. You are in the habit of roaming about the three worlds (heaven, earth and the space in between). You will soon understand for yourself how the power of 'Maya' works its ways inscrutably".

Goddess Lakshmi smiled understandingly. However, Narada could not grasp the force of Vishnu's words. He thought that the Lord was merely speaking in jest. Accordingly, still feeling self-important, he first went down to pay a visit to the Earth.

KALYANA DURGA

The capital of the mighty kingdom of king silanidhi presented a splendid sight, with its sky-kissing palaces and temples made of alabaster and marble. Nature was at its best and brightest. Men and women there were the most beautiful of the human species, and were looking like angels and archangels of the celestial realms.

It is difficult to describe in mere words the splendour of the city of Kalyana Durga, which attracts even the hermits who renounce the world. Everywhere the thresholds are bedecked with multi-coloured festoons; all the streets are sprinkled with perfumed waters.

Sage Narada could not make out the reason for this special decoration of an already lovely city.

King silanidhi, seeing Narada, went forward to greet him, and received him with due honours. Seating the sage on a gem-studded throne, the king sent for his daughter Srimati.

On entering the court the princess bowed to the feet of the sage and was introduced to him by her father, with these words: "This is my daughter Srimati. She has now come of age. Tomorrow I am arranging a 'Svayam-vara' (wherein the suitors are assembled in the court, from among whom the girl chooses the one she likes best for her lifemate) for her. You are a great seer who knows past, present and future. Kindly read her palm and tell me what destiny has in store for her. I also request you to attend the 'Svayam-vara' function tomorrow and see to it that the wedding is celebrated in proper great style."

Narada's mind was unaccountably perturbed. He appeared to be unable to withstand the onslaught of Cupid's arrows, which were imperceptibly emanating from the wonderful good looks of Srimati. He decided upon marrying her. Telling the king that his daughter was the equal of goddess Lakshmi and would get a husband equal to Vishnu, he went back to Vaikuntha and prayed Lord Vishnu thus:

Sriyaa saata-kumbha-dyuti-snigdha-kaantya
Dharanyaa cha durvaa-dala-syaamalaangyaa
Kalatra-dvayena amunaa toshitaaya
Trilokee-grihasthaaya Vishno namaste! (Aadi Sankara)

(I bow to you, Lord Vishnu, who are indeed the 'house-holder of the three worlds; but contented with the two consorts the golden-hued goddess Lakshmi and the Durva-leaf-coloured, dusky Bhudevi).

Although Lord Vishnu realised the real purpose of Narada's visit, he greeted the sage formally as though he knew nothing about the state of his mind.

Since there was no time to lose, the sage came directly to the print and requested the Lord to grant him his form for the duration

of the 'Svayam-vara'. Vishnu acceded to his request, and Narada returned to Kalyana Durga, and took his seat in the royal court, thinking that he was in the guise of Lord Vishnu.

Srimati entered the court. Her maids handed the garland to her. The king addressed the gathering: "Esteemed kings, my daughter is going to choose her husband by garlanding one of you. Kindly conduct yourselves with decorum and dignity, and make this function a great success".

With due grace and bashfulness, Srimati began slowly walking round the assembly of princes, unoffensively observing their mien.

Accompanied by her maids, Srimati came near Narada: finding him repulsive, she proceeded on her quest. Narada could not understand the reason behind her indifference. Actually, Lord Vishnu was also in the assembly, in the form of a prince. Srimati was a great devotee bent upon making Lord Vishnu her sole lifemate. By virtue of her true devotion she could detect the Lord Vishnu who was disguised as a prince. Without wasting another moment, she instantaneously garlanded Lord Vishnu who was in the prince's guise. Silanidhi was delighted with her choice, and felt that his life was at last sanctified perfectly. Lord Vishnu, for his part, took away Srimati along with him, and disappeared from the court. While the courtiers applauded the choice of the princess, the disappointed princes left the assembly hall with their heads bent in shame.

Narada was crestfallen. He began to cogitate: "who was that stranger? Could it be Vishnu Himself? If so, how could He make His own boon ineffective? What harm have I done Him that He should shame me thus? If He has the right to enjoy the company of three wives, why should I be content with leading the life of a celibate? Should He thus deceive those who worship Him? True, I did boast about my self-restraint, which I thought was so inviolable as to withstand the 'tricks' of even Vishnu and Shiva; but should He not have overlooked my prattle as it became an elder like Him? After

all, did He not forgive the follies of many a devotee of his? Indeed, it was my fault to depend on such a god. Henceforth I shall try to forget this Vishnu...

Looking at this grieving sage, the bride's maids laughed in derision. Turning round, he asked them what became of their friend, the princess. Telling him that she was taken away to Vaikuntha by Lord Vishnu, they brought a mirror and asked him to look at his image.

To his amazement he saw the face of a monkey attached to the trunk of Vishnu. Forgetting himself in his sore disappointment, he rushed up to Vaikuntha, with an idea of cursing Vishnu.

The maids wondered among themselves why a sage should thus be struck with wild passion and wilder wish for revenge, and went their way.

When the angry sage came up to him, Vishnu kept quiet. But goddess Lakshmi was somewhat worried.

Narada spoke out: "Lord, under the impression that you were a truthful deity I sought your assistance. But you behaved like a cad. Don't run away with the idea that your foul play will be left unpunished. Do you think that you have done the right thing in abducting the princess whom I loved so much? Was it just on your part to provide me with a monkey's visage and make me the laughing-stock of the entire royal court?"

"For the dishonour you have subjected me to, I am cursing you that come to grief on account of a woman and that you then be helped out of your distress by the very monkey race when you bemoan your loss of your lifemate in your human incarnation".

Despite this imprecation, Lord Vishnu did not lose his equilibrium, but simply kept smiling.

Seeing the quiet dignity of the Lord, Narada was contrite. He realised his folly. Immediately he began begging Vishnu's pardon: "O

Lord, how can I ever be absolved of the sin of cursing you? Cut my body into pieces with your Sudarsana disc (wheel-weapon). That is the right punishment for my crime of abusing and imprecating you”. So saying he began to sob inconsolably.

Then the blessed Lord consoled him: “My dear Narada, forget the past. All that happened was the will of God Almighty whose actions are indeed inscrutable. Now you can save yourself by seeking Lord Siva’s refuge, who is the Lord of all creation. Although as ‘Rudra’ He destroys the wicked, He it is that is responsible for the re-creation of the universe at the time of Pralaya (final cataclysm), in His form of ‘Sadaa Siva’ the eternal Lord of compassion, mercy and grace.

“Even the Lord Creator, Brahma, and his consort, and myself and goddess Lakshmi, ever pray to Him. I need not tell you that I too along with Brahma and Indra, sometimes court trouble, deluded by the mysterious ‘Maya’ of Lord Siva. None can trespass his dictates. “O be careful and attentive. Always remain in the habit of hearing the soulful stories of Siva and in visiting His temples and praying to Him in your mind”.

Accordingly, Narada began visiting the pilgrim-centres consecrated to Lord Siva. At Varanasi he anointed His image (in the form of Visvesvara) with the sacred Ganga waters, worshipped His consort, Annapurna Devi and offered prayers to Kala-bhairava. At Sri Sailam he prayed to the divine couple’s incarnations as Lord Mallikarjuna and goddess Bhramaramba; and at Kalahasti, as Lord Kalahastisvara and Jnana prasunambika. He worshipped the Lord’s other incarnations as Nataraja Svami at Chidambaram; and as Brihadisvara at Tanjavur. Again he paid his worshipful tribute to, and sought the forgiveness of, the godly couple in the form of Sundaresvara and Minakshi at Madhura and of Ramalingesvara and Parvata Vardhani at Ramesvaram.

At each and every temple he offered his prayers, he vowed that he would never again be guilty of the sort of sacrilege he committed against Lord Vishnu.

Convinced that the sage was genuinely repentant, Lord Siva forgave him his sins. Verily Siva and Vishnu alone are so magnanimous as to pardon even the people who offend them.

SIVA TATTVA RAHASYAMU (THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LORD SIVA’S GLORY)

Returning to the celestial region, Narada went up to his father, the Lord Creator, Brahma, and requested him to enlighten him on the Siva mystique, in these words: “Lord, they say that Lord Siva alone is the perfectly whole Incarnation of the Absolute and that you, Vishnu and Rudra (the Trinity of Hindu Gods, of whom the last-mentioned is the phenomenal aspect of the same noumenal Siva) are merely fragmentary aspects of that Supreme Being. Kindly sing to me the praises of that Lord of Mercy and Beatitude!”.

“Narada, I am glad you want to learn about the essence of Siva’s spiritual grace. Indeed, by the mere hearing of that mystic grace, the hearer’s sins will be washed away; his ignorance will be dispelled; and his self-deception will be replaced by self-emancipation.

“Verily, the nature of ‘Siva-tattva’ cannot be depicted either by words or symbols, because It transcends both name and form. The Yogis, who have realised the communion with the Universal Self, discover that essence in their inner selves.

“The spirit of Siva neither grows nor decreases; has neither beginning nor end. It is eternally existent, eternally conscious and eternally blissful. It is one without a second. It has no attributes or qualities of race, nature and action. It can only be known through Itself and by Itself..”

Then Brahma proceeded to narrate how this attributeless Absolute has begun to assume a form, and how It acquired attributes through Its manifestin, and yet in Itself remained without attributes and qualities.

Goaded by the creative principle of Its own 'Maya', It began to conceive the idea of Creation in accordance with the nature of the creational field, which is divided into three essential characteristics, Sattva (the noble), Rajas (the passionate) and Tamas (the dull). At first It assumed the form of the Cosmic Person, who has all the characteristics of manifest perfection. The Transcendent pure Consciousness has now become the Immanent Creative Force.

It has created out of Itself the creative power of Sakti, which follows It like Its own shadow for ever, It is also known as 'Prakriti' (Inherent Nature) and 'Maya' (changing Reality), as opposed to the changeless Ultimate Reality.

Know this 'Sakti' or 'Prakriti' as the mother of all intellect. Indeed, this Sakti is not only the source of all creation but is the mother of the Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara or the personalised form of Siva).

Now hear from me all about the attributes of that primal goddess, Sakti or Mahesvari.

Her hands are adorned with conch-shell, disc, mace, bow and arrow; all those eight hands of hers assume a gesture, which assures absolute protection to the devotee, and exude a scintillatingly lovable effulgence. Her two eyes, which are as delightful as a fullbloomed lotus, shine like twin stars. Her whole golden being is decked with the nine kinds of precious stones and sparkles as brightly as a thousand suns.

As that single prime source of creation evolved into a myriad creatures, even while She remained single in Her own entity, Her Lord, Shiva, with the crescent moon in His matted locks; with His three eyes, five faces and ten hands; with the river Ganga embedded in his braid; and with the trident in His hand glistened with His supreme hue, as pure-white as camphor.

This divine pair Shiva and Shakti are ever united and thus have been living together.

Their dwelling-place is called 'Siva-nagara', because it is the abode of the Siva couple; 'Avimukta', because it knows no extinction; and 'Aananda vana', because it is the resort of the two embodiments of blissful **Aananda**. There they lived for a long while, performing penance and observing Yogic practices.

At one point during their conjugal blessedness, they thought of creating a mighty, magnificent and scholarly son who would take care of the process of creation and would enable them, thereby, to be ever immersed in their Yogic communion.

Such an heir of their's would look after the cycle of creation, preservation and extinction, and would relieve them of their mundane preoccupations.

BIRTH OF VISHNU

As Lord Siva looked on His consort, Sakti, with nectar-raining glances from His graceful eyes, there materialised before them a boy with a resplendent body of sapphire-blue hue, radiant eyes, four strong arms, a diamond called Kaustubha on his chest and a bliss-awakening general mien.

The divine child returned the gratified smile of the first couple with this prayer on his lips:

Bhukti-mukti-divya-bhoga-daayine Namah Sivaaya
Sakti-Kalpita-prapancha-bhaagine Namah Sivaaya|
Bhakta-sankata-apahaara-yogine Namah Sivaaya
Yukta-sanmanah-saroja-yogine Namah Sivaaya||

(I salute Lord Siva who endows material sustenance, salvation and supreme splendour; who creates the entire universe by means of his Sakti-associate; who removes the dangers of his devotees; and who ever dwells in the heart-lotus of his Yogic worshippers).

Upon which, Lord Siva blessed him thus: "Since you pervade the whole universe with your supreme spirit, you will be known as

Vishnu (Visvam vyaapnoti it Vishnuh); since you have eyes which resemble full-blown lotuses, you will be called ‘Kamalaksha’; as you are the destroyer of the demoniac forces, you will have the appellation, ‘Daitya-ari’; in as much as your garments are made of burnished gold, you will have the designation, ‘Kaanchanaambara’; since you never cease to be, you will be hailed as ‘Achyuta’; your lovely locks give you the sobriquet, Kesi; attracting the hearts of all creatures, you gain the title ‘Hari’ (**harati manaamsi iti**); being the noblest of men, you are ‘Purushottama; as the spouse of the goddess of Wealth, Lakshmi (Sree), you are ‘Sreedhara’ in your incarnation as the dark One, you are ‘Krishna’; by virtue of possessing four arms, you are ‘Caturbaahu’; upholding the universe (Visva), you become ‘Visvambhara’; now you live up to all these just titles of yours!”

Then breathing out the scriptural treasures within Him and infusing them into Vishnu’s mind, Lord Siva disappeared along with His consort. Having expressed his gratitude to Lord Siva, Vishnu performed a penance dedicated to the former, for long years. Exhausted with his hard austerities, Vishnu found streams of water pouring down from his body. In those waters he rested himself on a banyan leaf called ‘Brahma’, for several ages. Thereby he came to be known as ‘Naaraayana’ (naaraah aapah ayanam sthaanam yasya sah he whose abode is water).

At the behest of Lord Siva, a lotus sprouted up from Vishnu’s navel. The stalks of that lotus knew neither beginning nor end... At that point an aerial voice was heard: “In the Yogic trance of yours will dawn the light of Knowledge”.

As Vishnu grasped the import of those words, from that primordial ethereal Sound evolved the four Vedas and the twenty-four ‘tattvas’. From ‘Prakriti’ arose ‘Mahat’; from ‘Mahat’ the ‘Ahankaara’ (ego-sense), which evoked the five ‘Tanmaatras’ (the unmanifest five elements) which in turn gave birth to their explicit five elements (earth, water, light, air and space). From the elements

came the five cognitive sense-organs and the three modes Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.

Looking on this process of evolution Vishnu was wonder-struck. Even while he was thus wondering inwardly, from the sweet-smelling lotus-navel of his arose the five-faced Brahma, whose essential nature was that of **Tamas** (the mode of ignorance that is at the root of mundane creation), and whose body was of the colour of a red lily.

Then the newly created Brahma began to think; “Who are my parents? Where is my birthplace? Why don’t - see anyone whom I can call my flesh and blood?”. Finding no answer to his queries, Brahma remained disconsolate. Then Lord Siva appeared before him and suggested that he might chant the transcendently symbolic mantra, **AUM**, in order to find both peace of mind and the answers to his questions. As he did so, Lord Vishnu presented Himself before Brahma. Brahma could not make out who He was. Blinded by his original mode of passion (tamas), he was covered by the darkness of ignorance.

DISCUSSION

The foolish Brahma asked Vishnu: “Who are you?” Unmindful of the insult implied in this query, Vishnu enlightened Brahma on the source of his birth, and added that he was prepared to teach him the scriptures and offer him any boons he sought.

Brahma there upon derided Vishnu: “Who do you think you are that you say that you are the cause of my birth? I don’t believe you. In fact, I myself am the master of all this manifest nature and the creator of the universe. If you think dare not do so, seek my refuge and beg my pardon”.

Still Vishnu was patient with this ‘upstart’. Mistaking Vishnu’s equanimity for His weakness, Brahma challenged Him again and fought with Him for a long while.

Seeking the undesirability of this duel, and realising its futility, Lord Siva, as the cosmic symbol of His supracosmic entity (which knows no beginning, middle or end) erected Himself as a 'Linga' (the form of creative, pervasive principle suggestively expressed through the generative symbol) between the two fighting gods.

There upon Brahma tried to discover the 'head' of the Linga, while Vishnu attempted to find His 'foot'. Brahma assumed the form of a powerful swan and flew up to the sky; still he could not succeed in his search; nor could Vishnu, by going down to the nether world. After a while, they appreciated the fact that it was all the divine mystery of Lord Siva; mutually reconciled, they began praying to Him and begged Him to reveal Himself before them.

Consequently, the five-headed Lord Siva, arrived on the scene, in his fully resplendent glory, which evoked the holy sound of **AUM** on all sides of earth and heaven. He addressed Brahma: "Verily, you were born of the lotus-navel of Vishnu, though you yourself were not aware of the fact. It was this ignorance of yours that made you hit that deity on the chest and pick a quarrel with Him. Now repent and learn from Him all that He so benevolently promised to teach you".

Still blinded by the mode of Tamas, and unconvinced by the advice of Lord Siva, Brahma asked Him: "Who are you? who granted you these five heads of yours? I alone am qualified to possess the five heads. Do you understand?".

Angered, Lord Siva converted his left little finger-nail into a sword and cut off Brahma's fifth head. Having learnt his lesson, the now-four-headed Brahma fell prostrate at the feet of Lord Siva and sought His forgiveness.

Then Lord Siva spoke to Brahma and Vishnu: "Know that you both were created by me. You, Brahma, you are to be the

creator of the manifest world. You, Vishnu, you are responsible for the protection and preservation of the created world. I am to take care of the eventual destruction and re-creation of the world. Actually, there is no substantial difference among us except in the matter of our apparent functions. We are three of us the trinity of godly essence. This Linga of mine is the mundane sign of the triple-faceted **AUM**. It is also the symbol of my creative Truth behind the universal Energy".

So saying, the Lord entered back into his earthly Linga

Brahma duly begged the pardon of Vishnu, and promised to the latter that he would never again be guilty of such things as Vishnu for His part taught him the secrets of creation.

In the end both Brahma and Vishnu also realised the essential unity of the Trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara gods).

WORSHIP OF THE LINGA

Returning to his primordial form, Lord Siva told Vishnu: "This Linga is my worldly representative. Your desires will be fulfilled and your troubles will cease. Similarly, impress on your devotees the need to worship the Linga, in order that they too might be benefited like you".

Brahma and Vishnu expressed their gratitude to Siva, and requested the great God to come to their rescue when they are confronted with any difficulty, They also begged Him to create Himself in a material form, so as to aid them in their worldly functions.

Then the Lord said: "Verily I myself am the creator, preserver and destroyer of this universe. Even in the multiplicity of my manifestations I remain alone in my essence just as, the gold retains its primal essence even in its various forms of ornamental manufacture.

"Brahma, I shall evolve from your forehead, by the name of Rudra, in order to punish the wicked and protect the virtuous. There

is no metaphysical difference between the pure consciousness of my original nature and the explicit image of Rudra. You will be the adjunct to my creative power of the manifest **Maya**. So would you, Vishnu. As Rudra, in whom is mirrored my full incarnation, I will not be bound by the dictates of physical nature. And since there is no essential distinction between my manifest form and my essential self, every one can reap equal benefit by praying to Rudra or to my transcendent reality of Mahesvara entity.

“Brahma, you will be the creator, who evokes the mode of passion (Rajas), and a part of my Sakti aspect will be your consort, Sarasvati. Vishnu, you will represent the mode of nobility (Sattva), and a fragment of my Sakti will be your beloved, Lakshmi. And in my own Rudra form, which symbolises the mode of dullness (Tamas), as reflected in the lower nature of creation (creation) is based on the mixture of the three modes, and God is not directly responsible for it: it creates itself according to the nature of its own modal functioning receiving the pervasive, universal energy of God of Siva), a part of my Sakti will serve me lovingly by the name of Kali.

THE NON-DUALITY OF SIVA & VISHNU

Lord Siva continued: “Vishnu, along with Brahma and every sincere devotee, you must worship me essentially non-different from you (‘ananya bhakti’ means not just “not thinking of, or nor praying to, some other, god”. but to worship God as spiritually non-different from the worshipper).

“Hereafter I shall appear before the world as Rudra. You are henceforth free to rule the world by incarnating yourself in the form suited to the particular time and place. Whenever you feel that your strength is not adequate to punish the wicked and protect the righteous, I shall come to your aid.

“We are really one in spirit. If ever any one tries to separate us, or treats one of us as being superior or antagonistic to the other,

he or she will be consigned to eternal damnation. In fact, if anyone conceives the trinity of us as mutually contradictory, he or she will perish”.

EVOLUTION OF CREATION

Then when Lord Siva was prayed, to by Brahma, to bring about the manifestation of His creative power, and egg-like object sprung up and floated over the cosmic waters. Brahma was amazed at its sight, and spoke to Vishnu thus: “Lord, enter this inanimate egg and instil life into it”.

Accordingly, Lord Vishnu entered it with a myriad eyes and heads (the ‘sahasra’ literally, “thousand” in the Purusha Suktam actually means ‘countless’; so the question eyes?” does not arise at all). Next from the egg evolved the expressive sound of AUM. Brahma then entered the egg through the aperture made by the AUM-evolution. Happily discovering there in the all-pervasive form of Vishnu, Brahma discarded his assumed mode of dullness, and came out of the egg, regaining his four-headed divine form.

From the forehead of this Lord of Creation (Brahma), first came the manifest aspect of **AUM**; then followed the three worlds earth, space and heaven (Bhuh, Bhuvah, Suvah); the Lord of light, the sun-god; and from the sun, the worlds of Penance (Tapah) and Truth (Satyam).

From out of his four faces he created the four Vedas. Following the Rigveda, he began initiating the programme of Creation. The hot rays of the sun caused the waters to evaporate.

Brahma divided into two the egg that came out of the waters. The upper half of the egg became the sky, and the lower one, the earth. Immensely delighted at the sight, Brahma started creating the plant and animal life, along with the Homo sapiens and the great sages like Sanaka and Sanandana. The sages, however, did not co-operative with their parent but went to their hermitages to perform penance.

THE BIRTH OF RUDRA

Brahma was much dejected. Even when he prayed to Lord Siva, he was not granted that God's grace. He began shedding tears of desolation. The tear-drops that fell on the ground turned into supreme sprouts of poison. As the impassioned Brahma's eyebrows began to agitate with an uncanny splendour, Rudra appeared on the scene of Creation. Rudra created his own retinue, known as 'Rudra Gana', and promised to help Brahma.

Then the Trinity divided among themselves the abodes of heaven: the world of Truth (Satya) for Brahma; that of Vaikuntha for Vishnu; and that of Silver Mount for Rudra. To fulfil their respective duties, each god went back to his apportioned world.

CREATION OF THE DEMI-GODS AND OTHERS

Brahma renewed his creational process. From his eyes he created Marichi; from his heart, Bhrigu; from his ears, Atri; from his head, Angirasa; from his arms, Kardama; from his vital breath, Daksha; from his 'samaana' air Vasishtha; from his 'sankalpa' (volition), the sages Dharma, Udana, Pulastya; from his mind, Ruchi; and from his thighs, Andhama.

All these personages were aiding the Creator in his work.

From his own essence, Brahma brought forth the first Emperor, Svayambhuva Manu, and the maidens, Padmagandhi and Satarupa.

Daksha begot sixty-four daughters by Prasuti. Of them ten were given in marriage to sage Kasyapa. Among them, the one named Diti gave birth to the demon race; Aditi was delivered of the godly race; Vinata was the mother of the divine bird Garuda (the mount of Vishnu); and Kadruva had variegated progeny.

The Lord of the divine hosts (the godly race) was named Indra. Lord Siva gave Indra the right to rule the kingdom of paradise,

which included the power to accept the oblations from the sages and others. The people of the godly race were made the denizens of paradise (or heaven).

Since the demoniac race was evil-minded, its members were denied the right to accept any worship, and they were made to live in jungles and caves.

Padmagandhi and Satarupi were married to Svayambhuva Manu. Their offsprings were three boys Priyavrata, Agni and Uttanapada and three girls, Rakuti, Devahuti and Prasuti. Ruchi married Rakuti; Kardama, Devahuti; and Daksha, Prasuti (as noted earlier). Of the other fifty-four daughters of Daksha and Prasuti, thirteen married Dharma, and eleven were wedded to Bhrigu. One of them, Sati, became the wife of Siva. The other girls were married to Marichi, Angirasa, Pulastya, Atri, Vasishtha and other sages.

THE WHEEL OF TIME

The Trinity of gods then created the Sun and the Moon, with the intention of dividing time into day and night. The sun was to provide the light and heat for the earth's fertility. The moon was to promote the herbal growth.

The four sides and the four corners of the universe were then formed, each of which had a presiding deity. Then the day, week, month and year were reckoned, with the six seasons that make up one year. The planetary system was also devised.

For the uplift of mankind, the sacrificial rites were prescribed. These sacrifices are to be performed during the northern solstice (Uttaraayana).

BIRTH OF KUBERA

The city of Kampilya is a storehouse of all the riches. In that town dwelt the Brahmin, named Agnidatta. He is well-versed in the Vedic lore, an erudite preacher of philosophy; a performer of

sacrificial rites; and an ideal householder. He and his wife had a son, by name Gunahina, who was brought up with too much indulgence. When the boy was hardly eight years old, his Upanayanam (thread ceremony) was performed with due splendour. He was then sent to school for his higher education. Whenever he left for school, His mother gave him several sweets and pampered him with similar gifts. The boy used to lie to his parents about his going to school, for, actually, he was playing truant and associating himself with evil characters.

Even when he grew up and became a youth, he did not relinquish his bad habits and bad company. He squandered all his wealth in gambling, and pawned his ornaments. He never observed the austere practices befitting his birth.

Although his character was questionable, he was a man of a very presentable appearance. Besides, knowing him to be the son of a great sage-like householder, a worthy Brahmin offered his daughter's hand in marriage to him. The wedding was celebrated with great pomp and pageantry.

But marriage brought no change in the conduct of Gunahina. Strangely enough, his father, preoccupied with his discourses in the city and the household austerities, could not detect the misconduct of his son. If ever he asked his wife why he could not find the son at home at any time, she would reply that the boy had gone to the temple, after finishing his scriptural studies, in the company of his fellow-students. His query about the boy's observing his sacred daily practices would find similar evasive answers from the over-indulgent mother of the misguided boy. Even though she was thus prevaricating, she was inwardly sorry about the misbehaviour of Gunahina.

One day while serving him his food, the mother spoke to Gunahina thus: "Dear boy, till now I have kept from your father the news of your evil ways. If he comes to know about your conduct

he will severely punish both of us. Don't you know that learning makes a man famous as well as rich? Haven't you heard the great sayings which maintain that even all the riches of the world are useless if one does not have education, that he who has no education is verily a beast, that the only constant ornament is the good speech that comes of education, and that education is the unending latent wealth? Your forefathers had all been great scholars who performed mighty sacrificial rites. Your father himself is a noble example to all Brahmin householders. Aren't you ashamed of yourself to be such a good-for-nothing, being the heir to such glorious ancestors You are already past eighteen years of age. Your wife, Akalmasha, is sixteen. All your in-laws are well-placed in life. I am devoted to my husband and my family. Taking into consideration all these facts, must you not behave yourself?"

But since Gunahina was too far gone in his wild habits like gambling and drinking, hunting and stealing, this motherly supplication fell on deaf ears. Slowly he had been gambling away his possessions and pawning the household goods, one by one.

One day he stole his father's golden ring and lost it in a bet. Agnidatta was astounded to find it on the finger of a gambler; he wanted the man to tell him how he got it and threatened to report the matter to the king if the gambler failed to reveal the truth. Then the gambler confessed that he got it from Gunahina, by way of gambling debt apart from several other valuables on former occasions.

Agnidatta was crestfallen. Bemoaning the blot on the family escutcheon, because of the misconduct of his son, he returned home. Attending to the duties of a host and a pious householder, and completing his meal in the company of saintly guests, he spoke to his wife in solitude: "By pampering our son too much, you spoiled him. You have always been lying to me about his way of life. I will have nothing to do with you. Go your way!"

The lady could only respond in miserable silence.

At last, Gunahina, unable to change his ways, left his home and went away somewhere.

The parents were restless in their anxiety and misery.

Gunahina was roaming about in wild forests. He had nothing to eat nor even fresh water to drink. He began to fear that his end was fast approaching. Too weak to move further, he squatted on the ground. Then his wandering eyes happened to espy a lake in the vicinity. He jumped with joy and crawled up to the lake to drink the water to his heart's content.

Resting himself under a tree, he began to ponder over the past events that brought him to this state. Then he had a delirium in which he saw his mother crying over his lot. He lamented thus: "Mother not at least educate myself for, even though my money is gone, I could have still some-how managed to survive, if only I had that education which no thief can steal and which hidden wealth. Mother, how can I ever make amends to you?". So saying, he tried to fall at her feet to beseech her forgiveness. But feeling no tangible entity before him, he realised it was all dream. Seeing how helpless he was, he began to wail loudly.

After a while, he saw a group of devotees going to the shrine of Somesvara, singing the hymns in praise of Lord Siva. Approaching them, he said: "Great souls, I am a miserable wretch, who paid no heed to the good counsels of my parents. Now I am repentant and penitent. If you will kindly allow me to follow you, I shall be eternally grateful to you. Please rest here for a while, and I will join you after bathing in this tank". The kindly pilgrims acceded to his humble request.

Gunahina remembered the hymns he learnt before he fell into bad company, and praying to Lord Siva, the sacred rivers and the sun-god, he completed his ablution.

Seeking that he was truly contrite, the pilgrims said: "Friend, tomorrow is the holy day of **Mahaa Sivaratri**. By fasting all day, anointing the Linga at the auspicious hour of its 'cosmic manifestation' (Linga-udbhava), taking a dip in the holy river Goutami, and accepting the sacred oblation, you will be purged of your sins".

Mentally worshipping Lord Vighnesvara, the god who wards off the obstacles in the way of his devotees, Gunahina joined the pilgrims on their trek to the temple of Somesvara.

The next morning the pilgrims reached the banks of the river Godavari. The mighty river appeared to be swelling with rapture at the sight of so many pilgrims on its banks.

Gunahina, along with the rest of the devotees, bathed in the sacred river, after reciting the slokas in the river's praise.

They similarly worshipped the sun-god while having their holy bath.

Finally offering the following repentant prayer to Lord Siva, Gunahina entered the holy shrine:

Praudho ham yauvanasthah vishaya-visha-dharaih
 panchabhih marma-sandhau dashtah hashtah vivekah,
 Suta-dhana-yuvati-svaada-saukhye nishannah
 maana-garva-adhirudhah kshantavyah me
 Aparaadhah, Siva, Siva, Siva bhoh Sree Mahaadeva
 Sambho!

(O Lord Siva, please forgive me for the misdeed of not worshipping you in my youth, when I was bitten by the serpent of the five senses, and when my vain, proud mind was thoughtlessly preoccupied with the attachment to my family and my worldly wealth!)

All around, the devotional spirit was evocative, as the hymns to Lord Siva were being chanted; the bells before the sanctum

sanctorum were being rung; the bilva leaves were being used to worship the Lingas; the aborigine-instrels (maaladaasarulu) were displaying their dance-drama, describing the glory of the twelve illumined **Lingas**; the Chenchu tribals, bedecked with peacock-feathers in their headdress, and ringing the bell in the hand were singing saivite songs; and the huge multitude of devotees was watching with rapt attention all these exhibitions of sincere devotion to Lord Siva.

Gunahina joined the chorus of devotees, chanting repeatedly, "Hail, Lord Siva!". As day after day he was fasting, he grew extremely weak in body but his spiritual strength was growing up simultaneously.

The sun had set in the west. It was the time of evening prayers. The devotees were making all the needed preparations to worship the Lord. It was now getting dark. The worshippers were returning home after offering their prayers. Not one of them would deign to share his sacramental oblation (prasadam) with Gunahina, who was dying of hunger, and even the priests who rendered their regular offerings to God seemed to take no notice of him. It was now midnight. The priests were asleep inside the temple.

Gunahina entered the sanctum sanctorum. The flame near the **Linga** was about to be extinguished. Tearing a piece of his upper cloth, Gunahina made a wick of it and saw to it that the light did not go out. Driven by his hunger, he stole the pot containing the oblation. As he was running away with it, accidentally his foot struck against a sleeping devotee who raised an alarm. He was chased by the watchmen and killed by their arrows.

The pot with the holy food seemed to be shedding tears for the dead man. It was sorry because it could not feed a hungry devotee of Lord Siva. At the same time it blessed him that soon he would attain to the beatific union with Lord Siva. Accordingly, at the hour of the rise of the Linga, Gunahina gained the grace of God. The retinue of Lord Siva congratulated him on his blissful accomplishment.

ARINDAMA

By the grace of Lord Siva, Gunahina became the king of Kalinga, in his next birth, and bore the name, Arindama. A staunch devotee of the Lord, he was always engaged in devotional and charitable activities.

Arindama was so imbued with the universality of god-head that he made no distinction between Siva and Vishnu. He was universally known for his magnanimity, and his kingdom was the most prosperous in the world.

On the next Maha Sivaratri day he was united in spirit with Lord Siva.

In his following birth Arindama was born as the son of Brahma's "mental offspring" (manasa putra), Paulastya. He was known as Visravasu. In this existence also Visravasu was entirely devoted to Lord Siva. He had two wives; by the elder one he sired Vaisravana; by the younger one, three sons, named Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana.

CITY OF LANKA

Vaisravana prayed Lord Siva for a long while. Pleased with his devotion, the Lord ordered Visvakarma to build a beautiful town in the middle of the Indian ocean and ceded it to Vaisravana. It was known as Lanka, reputed for its riches and splendour.

Ravana was a wicked man, who was guilty of all the seven deadly sins. He was unbearably jealous of the glory of the city of Lanka, and wanted to win it and rule it. He wanted to usurp his step-brother by hook or by crook.

Eventually Ravana succeeded in driving away his half-brother, Vaisravana, from Lanka. Lord Siva would not intercede on behalf of Vaisravana, because Ravana, for all his vices, was also a devotee of His. It is only because Lord Siva is so lenient towards His devotees of all kinds that He is known as "Bhola Sankar" (the innocuous Sankar).

Running away from Lanka, Vaisravana built the city of Varanasi, where Lord Siva once cut off one of Brahma's five heads. The city was spread over an area of twenty-four square miles.

In that holy city Vaisravana consecrated not only the idol of Lord Siva, in the form of "Prana Linga" (symbol of universal life), also that of His consort, in the form of "Para Devata" (the supreme Sakti).

Standing on one leg, and fasting, Vaisravana prayed Lord Siva for a long duration. He was much emaciated in the process. Delighted with his austerities, Lord Siva, presented Himself, along with His consort, before him, and asked him to seek whatever favours he wanted. Dazzled by the divine brilliance, Vaisravana replied that all that he wanted was the good fortune of serving the Lord. Further pleased with Vaisravana's selfless devotion, the Lord granted him the power of clairvoyance.

Then Vaisravana's eye fell on the resplendently lovely figure of Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva. He began to think; "Who could be this embodiment of womanly perfection? Indeed, how magnificent should have been her worship of Lord Shiva! How did she manage to entice the Lord? Is her worship greater than my penance? Else how is it that the Lord took her so close to His bosom".

Judging Vaisravana's looks properly, the divine consort was much angered. Her angry look at him caused his left eye to be broken. She asked her Lord who this jealous man was. Then the Lord said; "Dear, if you, the divine Mother, do not forgive the sins of the devotee, who else would come to his rescue? Please do forgive him, at least for my sake!".

The goddess was pacified.

Lord Siva told Vaisravana: "Be the Lord of the heavenly clans of Yaksha, Kinnara and Gandharva. You will be the master and owner of the nine kinds of precious riches. You will also be my lifelong friend. May your wealth be the source of charity and goodwill

towards the worthy people. Now seek the forgiveness of this motherly figure of whom you have been needlessly envious". Vaisravana duly fell prostrate at the feet of Parvati and begged her pardon.

Then the goddess spoke to Vaisravana: "Forgive you I will, no doubt. But because of your initial petty-mindedness you will be known as 'kubera' (**Kutsitam beram yasya sah**). Anyway, the boons you receive from my Lord will give you good results. Live up to the good intentions of yours, which made you worthy of receiving them!".

Blessing Kubera, the blessed divine couple left for their heavenly abode.

Later the reddish blue Rudra, along with his retinue, landed on the terrace of the alabaster palace situated in the pleasure garden in the outskirts of the city of Alaka. All the sages in and around that kingdom of Kubera, the Siddhas, the Vedic seers, Brahma and Vishnu came to pay their respects to Rudra. Kubera offered his hospitality to all the visitors, and was further favoured by the grace of Lord Siva. The visitors pronounced that all those who hear the story of Kubera would be equally blessed.

MANMATHA (CUPID)

Manmatha is none other than the son of Lord Vishnu. He has the power to pollute the minds of even the Trinity, by aiming his flower-arrows at them.

On a certain day, at evening, Brahma, just for the fun of it, created a beautiful girl, by name Sandhya (the name itself means 'evening'). Indeed, no prettier woman was ever before seen in heaven or on earth or in the nether world. Her each single move was immensely delighting the on lookers.

Manmatha, without weighing the pros and cons, cast his arrows at the Lord Creator, Brahma, who, in turn unmindful of his incestuous

inclination, fell in love with Sandhya. Likewise, the minor creators (Upa-Brahmas), created by Brahma, also were the target of Cupid's arrows and entertained passionate thoughts towards Sandhya.

Bothered by the impassioned attentions of all these people, Sandhya sought the refuge of Lord Siva. The Lord advised her to worship His consort, Parvati.

Then Lord Siva spoke to Brahma: "You, sir, aren't you surprised that you became an easy target to Manmatha's arrows? Don't you realise that you have fallen in love with your own creation, Sandhya, who is virtually your daughter? Is it right that you, who should guide others along the right lines, yourself became a slave to beastly desire? Please behave yourself, and get rid of this delusion".

Later the Lord spoke similarly to the Upa-Brahmas, reminding them that Sandhya was their sister.

All of them were ashamed of themselves and begged the Lord's forgiveness.

Brahma was angry with Manmatha and cursed him to be consumed by the fire of Lord Siva's third eye.

Then Manmatha said: "Lord, when you created me, did you not, along with Vishnu and siva, tell me that I would be capable of deluding the entire creation, including the Trinity, the demi-gods, the demons and the denizens of both earth and heaven? I only wanted to test my powers. What wrong have I done in doing my appointed duty?"

But Brahma reminded him that once he uttered the curse it could not be taken back. However, Manmatha was assured that he would regain his original body, after the wedding of Lord Siva.

In the meantime before he could be destroyed by the third eye of Lord Siva Manmatha was granted by Brahma the facility of being wedded to Rati Devi, the daughter of Daksha. Manmatha thanked Brahma and retired to his home along with his bride.

Then Brahma turned to Vasishtha: "Revered sage, Sandhya is performing a great penance with goddess Parvati in mind. Go and teach the 'five-lettered' **mantra** (Panchaakshari) of Lord Siva **NAMAH SIVAYA** to her".

Vasishtha did as he was told. After Sandhya started chanting 'Namah Sivaaya' for a while, the Lord appeared before her. The delighted Sandhya requested Him that she be granted another birth, in which she would be entirely devoted to her spouse.

Lord Siva said: "Your wish will be fulfilled. On the banks of the river chandra bhaga, Medhatithi is performing a sacrificial rite. Unseen by others, jump into his sacrificial fire, the while mentally nothing the name of the one whom you wish to marry. That person would eventually become your husband".

After Lord Siva disappeared, Sandhya fancied Vasishtha for her spouse, and thinking of him jumped into the ritual fireplace (Homa-Kunda).

The sun-god cut the burnt body of Sandhya into two, and made of one piece the morning twilight, in favour of the demi-gods, and of the other, the evening twilight, in favour of the forefathers. He turned her soul into a different girl Arundhati. He presented Arundhati to Medhatithi. But that sage thought Vasishtha was the most deserving lifemate for her, and accordingly, performed the wedding of Arundhati and Vasishtha.

The newly married couple were spending their time in tender mutually and with the observance of all the prescribed duties of householders. Sage Sakti and others were born to that blessed couple.

SATI DEVI

Brahma is by nature fickle-minded. He thought that the love he and his sons had bestowed on Sandhya was the result of Manmatha's flower-arrow attack, and that he was needlessly shamed

by Lord Siva in the eyes of the world. Thus he was bent on avenging his discomfiture, and wanted to see Lord Siva also fall a prey to feminine wiles as he and his sons did. Accordingly, he approached Manmatha for co-operation in his scheme. Manmatha said that he needed the help of springtide to make his arrows effective in disturbing the mind of Siva. So Brahma, by virtue of his creative powers, caused the Malaya winds to blow and all nature to blossom in its plenty following which, the god of springtime presented himself before Brahma and Manmatha.

Pleased with this eventuality, Brahma told Manmatha: “Friend, Vasantha (god of springtime) is ready to accompany you. Also take your bride with you and cast your arrows on Siva. When he feels the defect of your attack, I shall create a suitable woman as His wife”.

Rati and Manmatha, followed by the Malaya winds and the spring-god, set off on their errand. The whole neighbourhood was aglow with the flowering of nature, and the bees and the cuckoos were making their love-breeding music. The gentle breezes, coupled with the freshly aroused flora and fauna, incited the males and the females of all species to join in blissful sexual union. The Manmatha couple tried every single trick of theirs to discomfit Siva, but he had not budget an inch and was completely immersed in his Yogic communion.

Thankful that, at least, they were spared the danger of getting burnt by the rays of Siva’s fiery third eye, Rati and Manmatha returned to Brahma and reported their failure.

Brahma was sorely disappointed. He went up to Lord Vishnu and, narrating all that happened, sought His assistance.

Thereupon Vishnu chided him: “My dear fellow, have you forgotten all about the mighty power of Lord Siva? Do you think you can put to shame that great god, who is the primordial Almighty, the saviour of the devotees, the self-effulgent and self-existent Absolute? Do you deceive yourself that you and I, who owe our

very existence to Him, can abuse him with impunity? If you really want to get Him married to one of your own creation, you must ask to pray to Parameswari, the divine mother, directly. Then, on receiving the needed boon from the mother, he would be able to sire Sati Devi, the intended bride of Lord Siva, She will verily be the incarnation of the Sakti, attribute of the Lord and exercise her feminine influence on His mind”.

Brahma then duly commissioned Daksha to do the needful. Daksha performed the requisite penance. In due course Mother Sakti with Her black complexion, crimson eyes, luxuriant tresses and the protection-assuring thousand hands-presented Herself before him. The gratified Daksha then prayerfully requested Her to extend Her infinite grace to him. Pleased with his supplication, she asked him to express his wishes. Daksha replied: “Mother Sakti, Lord Siva is now engaged in Yogic communion, as the offspring of Brahma, in the form of Rudra. If you think that I am worthy of receiving your grace, kindly become my daughter and then marry Him for the salvation of the entire world of virtue and for the destruction of the evil-minded”.

The Sakti said: “I appreciate your intentions and will be born as your daughter. I will perform a great penance to obtain the favours of Lord Siva. But there is one condition. If ever you dishonour me, I shall cease to exist there and then, and will be reborn in another form. Now go home and await my birth through your wedded wife”. So saying, the goddess disappeared.

Mother Sakti entered the mind of Daksha in all Her grace and majesty. He then transferred that supreme presence in him to his spouse, Virini, who duly conceived the divine child.

After nine months, Virini was delivered of a dazzlingly beautiful female child. All over the reach the news spread that a divinely resplendent child was born to Daksha and Virini. The proud parents celebrated the birth of that incarnation of Mother Sakti by offering various kinds of gifts to the chaste ladies and the noble scholars,

and feeding the poor and the needy. The newborn was christened Sati Devi.

Sati Devi was regaling the entire palace with her precocious little pranks. Her favourite toy is an image of Siva. She would caress it with fond cries of “Siva! Siva!”. She would even utter the name of the Lord in her dreams. And she could always be coaxed into eating her food, by chanting the name ‘Siva’ in her presence. Naturally everyone who saw her realised that she would be a great devotee of Lord Siva.

THE PAINTING

None can check the march of time. Sati Devi came of age. Her main hobby was painting. She would order the servants to keep her in constant supply of paints and brushes. At night she would order for brighter and brighter lights.

Sati would draw one imaginary picture of the Lord; not pleased with the first effort, she would make another try. Whenever a visitor asks her to identify the picture she would bashfully say “that is His”, without naming the Lord directly. When pressed for the revelation of the real name, she would close her eyes with her hands and chuckle shyly.

Indeed that painting turned out to be a masterpiece of Art. Painted in variegated hues, it was a perfect representation of the Lord in all his splendour: the braid adorned on one side by the crescent moon and on the other by the river Ganga; the two eyes in the normal position, half-closed; the third eye in the forehead, shining brightly; the mark of dark colour in the throat (which resulted from the drinking of the poisonous Haalaahala); the snake-ornament hanging round the neck, along with the Aksha garland; in the right hand, the rosary and the spear; in the left hand, the staff; the waist covered by deer-skin; and anklets on the feet. By the side of the Lord appears the Kamandalu (begging bowl of the monk).

The maids were all admiration for Sati’s artistic ability. They were wondering who that personage in the picture could be who so took their friend’s fancy.

After the daily ablution, Sati would adorn herself impeccably, and then pray to the Lord’s image in the painting, burning incense and offering a garland of highly perfumed flowers. Offering the consecrated food, she would try to persuade the Lord to accept and eat it. In her zealous imagination she would feel that the Lord was gladly receiving the food she gave Him. When she loses herself in a fit of ecstasy, she would find Him vanish, and that would make her dejected. She would appeal to her maids to join her in searching the pleasure-garden to see if Lord Siva was hiding behind some tree or bush. When they dissuade her that the time was not yet ripe for her to find her Lord, she would be disappointed. To be rid of her desolation, she would go to her painting, and gazing at it with intense longing, take up the lute. Playing the Veena, she would also sing in the highest octave such songs as are dear to the Lord.

Wondering at her own inspired vocalisation and instrumentation, Sati thought that it was all the result of the Lord’s invisible appreciation of her talent. She felt reassured that the Lord in her picture would be her real lifemate.

THE NANDA VOW

Sati Devi decided to perform the Nanda consecration, because it is traditionally held that the girl who celebrates that vow would be favoured with the husband of her choice. Her parents agreed with her intentions.

After Sati started her vow in right earnest, Vishnu went up to Lord Siva and said: “Lord, Sati Devi has begun the Nanda penance to seek your hand. She is verily the embodiment of divine, virtue, majesty and devotion. There is none in heaven or on earth to rival her in any good aspect. Aren’t you committed to fulfilling the just wishes of your devotees? so, may I request you to accept Sati’s hand without further delay?”

Lord Siva was easily persuaded and went down to meet Sati Devi, soon after she finished her **Nanda Vrata**. Seeing Him, Sati was enraptured. As she touched His feet in reverential love, tears of ecstasy rolled down her cheeks. She said: “Lord, have you come to fulfil my earnest wish and answer my sincere prayers? Oh how long have I been praying for your favour! Lord, kindly promise me that you grant my wish to be your life-partner and do give me the opportunity of serving you with love and devotion!

TEST

Lord Siva’s heart mounted. Smilingly, he replied: “Dear Sati, how innocuous and ingenuous you are, indeed! Else, why would such an accomplished girl like you love someone like me? I am extremely poor, Would not Ganga in my braid constantly quarrel with you, if you were to be my wife? Even the moon in my hair would pester you with his cool rays; the snakes round my neck will scare you away. My fingers are always engaged in holding my weapons or in praying to Lord Rama, by turning and counting the beads of the rosary. My waist is covered by the prickly deer-skin. My means of livelihood is begging. My favourite sojourn is the burial-ground. My decoration is smearing myself with ash. I am ever obedient to my devotees, and will leave you very frequently to answer their supplication. So be well advised and don’t entertain the idea of throwing in your lot with such a person as I!”.

Sati was griefstruck. She pleaded: “Lord, is it fair on your part to make fun of me or to test me like this? I am not all that innocent or ignorant. I know what I want and what sort of life I will have to lead in your company. It is only are the greatest of the Trinity of gods; you, who have the power of destruction and of re-creation, what use have you for material wealth? Why should I fall out with Ganga, whom I will gladly worship? And as long as I have you near me, how can the snakes frighten me? Lord Rama is as much my own guardian angel as yours. You who are ever immersed in

austerities, you do not need silken garments, and the deerskin suits you best. Whether the husband earns his bread by begging or by any other means, it matters little to the chaste wife whose sole concern is to please him with her obedience and affection. So please do not test me any more, and accept me and my honest love”.

ASSENT

Lord Siva smiled. Taking it as a sign of his agreement, Sati fell at his feet with grateful self-surrender. The Lord fondly took her into His arms. Sati forgot herself in her beatific ecstasy and by the time she shook herself the Lord vanished.

The maids approached Sati, she looked at them with a quiet smile on her lips, for she was reminding herself of the ecstatic moments she spent in her Lord’s embrace. Asked the reason for her pleased looks and smiles, Sati revealed the truth to them in a whisper. The maids said they would convey the good news to her mother. Sati shyly protested. But the maids took her along to the palace to meet her parents and inform the latter of the happy events.

Daksha then went to Brahma: “Sire, my daughter is determined to marry Lord Siva and none else. You must arrange the wedding of Lord Siva and hers”.

Brahma gladly accepted to be the instrument in bringing about their union. When he called on Lord Siva, the latter told him: “Brahma, Sati is adamant about marrying me. If I do not marry her, she may cause herself some extreme harm. So go and tell Daksha not to come in the way of our marriage”.

Brahma was glad that Lord Siva Himself suggested what the former wanted him to do. Vishnu was pleased that his plan bore fruit of seeking Lord Siva become a slave to the tender passion. Brahma made all the arrangements for the wedding of Sati and Siva; for the that purpose he obtained the ready acquiescence of Daksha, and conveyed that news to Siva.

WEDDING INVITATION

Sage Narada came into the presence of Lord Siva. Siva told the sage; “Narada, the daughter of Daksha has fallen in love with me. Daksha extended an invitation to me through Brahma to go to his realm and get married to his daughter. On my behalf please invite Brahma and Sarasvati Vishnu and Lakshmi, the heavenly sages and angels to attend our wedding”.

All the invitees arrived at the Silver Mount.

The next morning the auspicious **reveille** was sounded. Lord Siva was anointed and given an oil bath. Then he was bedecked with appropriate ornaments. Lakshmi and Sarasvati presided over the arrangements that were in charge of the women for the wedding celebration. The wedding procession was led by Brahma and Vishnu. The Pramatha hordes blow the conches.

Brahma and Vishnu exchanged meaningful glances smilingly; seeing them Lord Siva understood that they were enjoying a silent joke at His expense, because He formerly chided them for falling a prey to the wiles of Manmatha (and now He Himself followed in their footsteps!). Actually, Siva was very impatient to meet Sati Devi. The whole Silver Mount seemed to be infused with blissful delight and to be awaiting the union of Siva and Sati on its hallowed ground.

WEDDING OF SATI AND SIVA

After supervising all the wedding arrangements and finding them to his satisfaction, Daksha went forward to receive the bridegroom and His wedding party. Performing the proper “Varapuja” (worship of the groom), Daksha escorted the wedding party to their various allotted residential quarters and saw to it that they were well attended upon by his men.

Then Daksha bade the Trinity a special welcome and thanked them for gracing the occasion.

The wedding party ceremonially marched to the superbly decorated wedding hall, to the accompaniment of band music. All the guests were seated in the places befitting their respective station. They were greeted with the sprinkling of perfumed water, sandalwood paste and flowers.

All the guests were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. As Lord Siva entered the hall with a bright and benevolent smile on His lips, the whole assembly stood on their feet and greeted Him with folded hands. He was escorted by the priests to the wedding altar and seated on a golden plank.

Here Sati was simultaneously being escorted by the bridesmaids to the wedding altar. She was bedecked with many tastefully precious ornaments. The chaste housewives followed her, carrying with them all the time-honoured and traditional material meant for the auspicious celebration of the wedding.

Lakshmi and Sarasvati went up to Sati, greeted her with fond respect and seated her on the golden plank, by the side of Lord Siva.

Daksha, along with his wife, bowed to the feet of the Trinity and then proceeded to perform the wedding, assisted by the Vedic scholars and the holy priests. Daksha and his spouse then washed the feet of Siva with consecrated water in a golden plate, and then sprinkled it over their heads. Then, dipping Sati Devi’s hand in milk, they placed it in the hands of Lord Siva. Siva and Sati, by joining their hands, became man and wife, to be united for ever in holy matrimony.

The whole assembly clapped their hands in jubilation, and the hall reverberated with the music of the special orchestra and with the chanting of the Vedic wedding hymns.

The bride and the bridegroom garlanded each other, while looking smilingly into each other’s eyes. The snakes around Siva’s neck bowed to the feet of Sati, swearing their allegiance to her

thereby. The angels in heaven dropped flower-petals on the newly wedded blessed couple.

Daksha gave appropriate gifts to the Scholars and to the invited guests. He once again offered special thanks to the Trinity of gods.

THE RETURN JOURNEY

The next day Daksha bade farewell to the newly wed. The divine couple were preceded by the Pramatha hordes, and followed by Brahma and Vishnu and their consorts.

As Daksha and his wife were disconsolate, while their daughter was taking her tearful leave of them, Siva assured the parents that He would take good care of the daughter.

Sati and Siva were seated in a pearl palanquin, as they were lifted up to their Mount Kailaasa, which bade a fitting welcome to them.

As the blessed couple entered their own abode, the gods in heaven again showered flowers of blessing on them. At the threshold, the couple were asked to put the right foot forward, while stepping inside, after the noble ladies offered the traditional incense of welcome to the bride and groom. Following the time-honoured social custom, the guests and inmates pressed the newly wed to speak each other's name aloud. Brahma and Vishnu suggested that Sati should first speak out the name of her husband, whereas their consorts said that it was Siva's duty to tell His wife's name at first.

After some cajoling, Sati was the first to speak: "Sadasiva" (the Eternal Lord of Bliss). Siva followed suit, by saying "Sati Devi" (the goddess of the eternally existing, virtue-symbolising Feminine).

All the guests entered the godly dwelling to participate in the 'housewarming' function. Sati imagined the primal mate of Siva, Mahesvari, in Lakshmi and Sarasvati; in their turn, Lakshmi and Sarasvati saw Mahesvari in Sati Devi. Consequently, one was seen to be saluting the other with utmost devotion and respect, again and

again. The motive behind this overt gesture is known to their spouses, the Trinity, who were suppressing their sardonic smiles skilfully.

All the guests went back to their respective homes, after receiving rich gifts from the Lord of Wealth, and Siva's friend, Kubera. Siva told Sati about His friendship with Kubera.

Commissioning Nandi to stand guard at the outer door, Siva took Sati to the pleasure garden.

There the rivers Nanda and Alakananda are swelling at high tide, and seem to be shouting "Siva!" with reverential pride. There you can see the marble steps paved down to the waters of the river to facilitate Sati's progress towards taking a dip in them. There the nymphs are playing, with glee, aquatic games. The elephants which drink of those waters raise their trunks with gay abandon, and are trumpeting in high spirits. Even the heavenly denizens renounce their kingdom to enjoy the benefit of bathing in those twin rivers.

Nearby is the Saugandhika grove with its all-yielding **Kalpa Vriksha** and other fruitful trees.

Under a banyan tree, Siva was indulging himself in His love-play with Sati. As one sees that Lord, one cannot praying to Lord Rama, the personification of love, truth and goodness. Indeed, how incomparable must be the majesty and greatness of Rama who could inspire the devotion of the greatest god among the Trinity!

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Sati Devi asked her Lord to teach her how the people who are caught in the web of recurring birth and death could be saved.

Lord Siva said: "It is the knowledge of one's real Self that enables one to be freed from the bondage of **Samsara** (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth). True knowledge is that which makes the knower see every one and every thing in God, and God in every one and every thing. If one thinks that his self is separate from the Universal Self, one falls a prey to the attacks of ignorance and

nescience. By knowing the all-knower through non-dual self-awareness, one has nothing else to learn, because the Knower of the Knowledge. In other words, in the spiritual sense, the individual empirical self and the universal transcendental Self are one and the same, albeit the differences of name and form exist on the material plane of manifestation. While the acquisition of self-knowledge. This devotion has nine forms: hearing about God, remembering Him, Chanting His name, serving Him, obeying Him, Worshipping Him, bowing to Him, befriending Him and surrender oneself to Him. At the final stage of self-surrender, the devotee qualifies himself for the non-dual consciousness of the God within. He no longer needs to pray to an entity outside of Him, but has to be in constant communion with God as his own inner Self. His external devotion and good works are merely meant for the guidance of the laymen around him. The man who realised his real self is automatically liberated from the bonds of the false universe so, till seeker attains this self-identifying status, he should ever be engaged in praying to me. I am always at the back and call of the true devotee, and by being sincerely and actively devoted to me one can before long gain Salvation. As you know, formerly I had obliged even the evil devotees of mine, as in the case of Ravana. In order to save the ordinary gods of heaven from the poisonous fire of 'Halahala'. I ate it up at their request. True devotion is the reason behind all this".

Sati Devi was immensely delighted to learn from her Lord about the efficacy of honest devotion. Likewise she was initiated by Lord Siva in the secrets of all arts and science along with the duties of men and women towards one another.

Thus in happy and intellectual companionship were the divine couple glorying for some time.

SACRIFICIAL RITE (YAJNA)

Now let us proceed to the holy city of prayaga. It is the site of the confluence of the sacred rivers-Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati.

A great sacrifice was begun in that pilgrim centre on the auspicious occasion of **Makara Sankranti** (when the sun enters the northern solstice). In order to obtain the benefit of at once witnessing that mighty Yajna and of taking a dip in the holy 'Trinity' (the confluence of the three rivers), all the supreme denizens of the celestial regions visited the place.

Along with the Vedic chanting of the sages could be heard the heavenly music of the Gandharvas. The dances of the Apsara nymphs provided a nobly entertaining backdrop for the delectation of the lay pilgrims.

The various priestly authorities saw to it that all the format paraphernalia were duly arranged.

While the initiator of the sacrifice, and the conductor of the sacrificial proceedings attended the function, and all sages and devotees of the region gathered there, Daksha had not yet presented himself.

Brahma presided over the Yajna. Next to him sat Lord Siva.

The oblation had to be offered by Daksha. That was why the assembly was impatiently awaiting his arrival. After a while, there was a great commotion. Daksha was arriving on the scene, accompanied by his disciples, with much fanfare. The sages and the priests received him with full sacramental honours. The gods garlanded him. Daksha acknowledged with gratitude the honour done him. Then saluting Brahma, Daksha sat next to him. Siva did not greet Daksha, and mistaking the Lord's silence for an insult, Daksha lost his temper.

ABUSING LORD SIVA

The angry Daksha stood up and addressed the assembly as follows: "Learned sages, while you were all respectfully greeting me, my own son-in-law, Siva, would not even deign to look at me. A father-in-law must be treated like a Guru (master). Well, perhaps

a man whose favourite haunts are the burial-grounds cannot be expected to know the way he should conduct himself in an assembly of this kind. It was my fault that I should have offered my dear daughter to such an ill-mannered person. My hope that he would reform himself after the marriage was belied. If I greeted Brahma first, it was only because he conferred on me the honour of 'Prajapathi' (the lord of men). I had no need to accost Siva myself; it was his duty to salute me in the first place. So I am going to place a curse on him now".

Brahma and Vishnu felt that this abuse of Siva was unjustified, and thought that they themselves were dishonored by implication. They realised that anger, man's worst foe, would deprive even a 'Prajapati' of his sense of proportion.

Then Brahma spoke to Daksha: "Sir, you seem to forget, yourself. You have not thought twice before resorting to an abuse of Lord Siva. Know both Siva and Vishnu to be my worshipful masters. After all, Siva was not guilty of any impropriety. There is no rule that a son-in-law should be the first to greet the father-in-law, Don't think that Siva is an ordinary person. He is indeed worshipped by me and Vishnu. Besides, any insult to him applies to the other two of us, in the Trinity. You have made a great mistake and now must face the consequences".

FORBEARANCE

Lord Siva was still keeping quiet. He had not cared to open His third eye. But He was aware of Daksha's early mis-demeanour, in not accosting Him before his seat by the side of Brahma. That was the reason why He did not look at Daksha. Although Siva knew that Daksha must be rightaway punished for his impertinence, he did not take any extreme step out of consideration for the feelings of Sati Devi who might not like to see her father suffer.

But Daksha misunderstood Siva's silence. He directly addressed the Lord: "Sir, you are an unrefined person. You who

think that you are greater than the sages and the gods, may you for ever be denied their oblations! May you be banished from all sacrificial rites!".

The unwise words of Daksha struck the hearts of the sears like thorns. And yet they dared not chide Daksha. The heart of the sacred bull, Nandi, seemed to be broken. He was distressed to see that Daksha, who should ever remain obedient to Siva, had indeed ventured to insult the Lord. So he reprimanded Daksha: "You evil-minded fellow, how dare you imprecate the noblest of all gods, the most benevolent saviour, the teacher of your master Barhma, to be underserving of sacrificial oblations? I say, may you never be able to master self-knowledge! May you for ever be bound by the shackles of a householder's life! May you always be ensnared by the wiles of women! Daksha, soon you will be bleating like a goat. You will be enmeshed in the vicious circle of **Samsaara**".

Daksha rejoined: "Nandi, you spoke like the blind follower of Siva that you are. I am going to curse that you and your likes will henceforth be deprived of Vedic studies and practices, and that you will be going through life by merely smearing yourselves with ashes. I also imprecate that those who think like you, whether they be your family and friends or the sages, should not attain beatitude".

Hearing this wild imprecation, Bhrgu and the other seers were much frightened and best quiet provoked by Daksha's words, Nandi cursed the sages: "May all those people who rejoice in the prattle of Daksha be debarred from Vedic knowledge! May they ever remain vagrant, impassioned, indigent and servile! May they nourish themselves with impure, wretched food and drink!".

Then Lord Siva tried to pacify His devoted mount: "Dear Nandi, is it right that you should curse the sages for the folly of Daksha? The fact that they kept quiet during Daksha's outburst must be due to their dutiful allegiance to their chief (Daksha). So let me amend that only those sages or scholars (Brahmins) who dishonour or abuse the gods, demi-gods and forefathers be the

ones who will come under the purview of your curse. I, however, thank you for your uncompromising devotion to me”.

Brahma, Vishnu and other, praised Lord Siva for his fortitude and forgiveness.

Later, Lord Siva returned to Kailasa. The other gods and guests, too, went back to their respective abodes.

BAD OMENS

The right eye of Sati Devi throbbed. She was much agitated at this sign of forthcoming misfortune. Lord Siva came to her. She bowed to Him. Siva informed her about her father’s misbehaviour. Sati fell in a swoon, hearing the bad news. The Lord did the needful to see her regain consciousness. Coming to, she requested Lord Siva to forgive her father. The benign Siva acceded to her request.

But Daksha was evil-minded. He was still bent upon wreaking vengeance on Siva. Accompanied by his retinue, he went to the Kanakhala pilgrim centre to perform the ‘Vaajapeya’ sacrifice. He did not extend an invitation to his daughter and his son-in-law, but invited all other denizens of paradise, and requested Brihaspati to inaugurate the sacrificial rituals.

DAKSHA YAJNA

As Siva and Sati were loitering in their pleasure garden, they overheard the gods journeying across the celestial path: “Daksha is performing a great sacrifice and invited us. We are going to witness it and blessed thereby”.

Sati said to herself: “How foolish is my father! He did not bother to invite us, his closest relation. Is he under the impression that my Lord is an ordinary person? Has he forgotten the glad words he spoke when he offered my hand to Siva that by having Siva for his son-in-law his life was sanctified? Why was he not convinced by the counsel of Brahma, Vishnu and the sages that my Lord was not

guilty of any disrespect to him? Does not my father realise that by shaming Siva he is shaming me also at the same time? I shall now go and tell him what he should do to make amends for his folly”.

Turning to her Lord, she said: “Lord, it could be that my father was too ashamed of himself for having abused you at Prayaaga that he dared not come here in person to invite you for that Yajna of his. As for why he did not at least send a messenger for that purpose, it must be he was not sure we would respond to such an invitation. You are an ocean of mercy. There have been myraid occasions when you forgave the people who offended you. I shall now go to attend the Yajna, and persuade my father to seek your forgiveness. Kindly permit to do so”.

Siva replied: “Dear Sati, it is but natural that you should hold your father in high esteem. But I am afraid you cannot convince him. On the other hand, your going there may even lead to undesirable consequences. I never want to deny your wishes, but I think it is my duty to warn you of the possible ill-effects of your intended visit. Anyway, if you still wish to go, you are free to do so”.

THE IRONY OF FATE

As Siva and Sati were relaxing under banyan tree, the former felt as though his favourite deity, Rama, was shedding tears of distress, clad in a monk’s ochre robes. Siva was very much moved by this mental picture. So, followed by His consort, He left for the Dandaka forest. There they saw Rama and Lakshmana from a little distance. Saluting the brothers, from afar, Siva told Sati: “There you see Rama, with his brother, Lakshmana. Rama’s self-appointed high duty is to save the virtuous and punish the vicious. He is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and Lakshmana that of Vishnu’s divine ‘bed’, the thousand-hooded serpent-god, Adishesha. During the absence of the brothers, the devilish Ravana abducted Sita Devi, the consort of Rama. Consequently, Rama is in great agony. This moment is

not opportune for us to talk to him directly. So let us bow to him from this distant spot and go back to our home”.

Sati was beset by a doubt, and spoke to Siva: “Lord, if Rama, indeed is the very incarnation of Narayana (Vishnu), why cannot he by his mere wish go and meet his beloved, wherever she is? Why should he lament like this, as though he were an ordinary mortal?”. So saying, even though dissuaded by her Lord, she proceeded to test Rama.

Verily the feminine weakness in Sati got the better of her right judgment. Else why would she try to put her husband’s worshipful Master to any kind of test?

All this was the working of Destiny. Sati assumed the form of Sita. Seeing her, Lakshmana said: “Brother, there is Sita! It is possible that Ravana was afraid of being cursed by her, and so let her go. Come, let us go and receive her with due regard”.

But such tricks as Sati’s would not work with the divine incarnation like Rama. He realised that it was Siva’s consort who took the shape of Sita. Still, he went up to meet her. Lakshmana could not realise the truth.

As Sati bowed to Rama, he said: “O Mother, what made you, the wife of Siva, assume the form of my wife? What is the reason behind you leaving your husband and roaming in this wild jungle? Don’t you know that this place is full of demons? Please be well-advised and go back to Mount Kailasa”.

Sati Devi was amazed. She regretted her ruse, and fell prostrate at Rama’s feet, begging his pardon. Then Lakshmana also realised the truth and the might of his divine brother.

LORD’S TRANFIGURATION (VISVAROOPA SANDARSANAM)

Then Lord Rama displayed his universal manifestation to Sati Devi. Sati was struck with reverential awe, and sang the Lord’s

praises: “Lord, I am able to see the entire world of creation in Thee. There! I can see the sun and the moon; the Lord Creator Brahma, the Lord Siva Himself; the thirty million gods in you. In a trillion forms of creatures, with their countless arms and faces and feet, art Thou now mirrored. Thou art indeed the Alpha and the Omega of all creation, and yet Thou hast be beginning or middle or end. I discern the infinitely iridescent transfiguration of Thine spreading itself in the multiplicity of the **Rudras, Aadityas, Vasus, Saadhyas, Asvins, Maruts, Gandharvas, Yakshas** and the Titans--- all of whom are now gazing at Thine awe-inspiring Light of lights. Oh Lord of grace and mercy, I Knew not Thine absolute power in my former ignorance; now I realise Thine undening glory; so on my bended knees I beseech Thy forgiveness”.

Thereafter she went back to her Lord. Siva spoke nothing. Sati told Him: “My Lord, how absolutely right you were! Rama is verily Lord Narayana (Vishnu) Himself. That all-merciful deity degined to display his universal tranfiguration to me. I was thrice blessed thereby”.

All the same, Sati did not reveal to Siva that she assumed the form of Sita. How innocuous she was! Did she really think that she could hide the truth from that all-seeing, all-knowing divine husband of hers?

Lord Siva told Sati: “You have been very fortunate to be able to see that great god’s **Vishvarupa**. You were indeed for ever sanctified by being addressed as ‘Mother by that supreme being. Now, since Vishnu, Brahma and myself are brotherly facets of one and the same Invisible Existence reflected in the Trinity, virtually you are my brother, too!”.

Hearing those words of her husband, Sati fell in a swoon. Siva could sympathise with her, but He could not forgive her disregarding His advice. Who can fight against the workings of the inexorable Destiny? He told her when she regained consciousness: “Dear, there is no use crying over what already happened. All that we can do is

to spend the rest of our lives in the **Vaanaprastha** way of life, which requires us to be physically apart from each other”.

Sati thereupon took her Lord’s permission to leave for her father’s home. There she was affectionately received by her mother, sisters and friends. Sati Devi began to shed tears of disconsolate grief. Her mother was heart-broken. She tried to console her daughter: “Dear child, your father is now stricken in years. He brought you up properly, no doubt, but he lost his sense of proportion in dealing with your husband, under a false impression which has proved to be his undoing as indeed does misapprehension in the case of every mortal. Your father had turned a deaf ear to all the wise counsel. hitherto. Anyway, I shall try to convince him of his folly. Come along with me to the sacrificial altar”.

On seeing Sati, her father did not greet her with affection, On the contrary, Daksha offened her: “You, why did you come here? I never invited you. At the sacrificial rite performed in Prayaaga your husband insulted me. How could that vagabond appreciate my greatness? I cursed him that he could not share the sacrificial oblations. That is why he has no right to be here. Being the wife of such an unworthy person you too are unwelcome here. Go back!”.

Virini tried to intercede on their daughter’s behalf, by remaining Daksha that it was only because of Lord Siva’s grace that they could get their daughter to be married to Him. Daksha was still adamant and refuted his wife’s Vise argument. He forbade Sati’s entry into the sacrificial hall, and proceeded towards the altar with his eyes bloodshot.

Sati was weeping inconsolably, and realised that her Lord was right in envisaging Daksha’s unthinking obstinacy. Already, by testing Lord Rama against the will of her husband, she antagonised Him. Now, dishonoured by her own father, she felt she could not return to her and and face Him with dignity.

In a sullen mood she approached the sacrificial altar. The ritual assembly, though filled with sages and priests, still looked forlorn. The Lord of Fire seemed to be accepting the consecrated ghee poured into the Homa pit, only grudgingly for fear of inviting the Lords wrath on himself. Neither Brahma nor Vishnu turned up to receive their due oblations. All the assembled priests and sages were extremely worried.

As Sati entered the hall, everyone, excepting her father, stood up in her honour. Daksha was dissatisfied with the regard which the assembly displayed indirectly for Lord Siva and directly for His spouse. However, he kept mum, not even turning his face towards his daughter, and was earnestly gazing at the sacrificial altar.

Sati addressed her father: “Father, there is no sacred code of which you are really unaware. You seem to be too proud of the fact that you are Brahma’s ‘mental offspring’ and the ruler of living creatures (**Prajaapati**). But don’t you see that your overweening pride and abuse of Lord Siva have brought things to such a pass as to make Brahma and Vishnu refuse to enter this hall in order to receive their apportioned oblations? I do not mind the disrespect you have shown me but I cannot tolerate your abuse of my Lord. Lord Siva is indeed so gracious as to forgive the sinners and the people who abuse Him if they seek His refuge.

“By coming here against His will I have offened Him. Now you have put me to shame by not even designing to look at me. I have no more use for this wretched life of mine. I have no choice but to jump into the ritual fire”.

The sages for their part refused to take further part in a Yajna which was not graced by the acceptance of the sacrificial offerings by Brahma and Vishnu, and left for their respective hermitages.

The sacrificial hall looked barren.

Sati again spoke to her father: “Sir, men like you cannot appreciate the greatness of the likes of my husband. Wise men ignore

other's follies and consider their virtues, even going to the extent of reforming the sinners. Indeed, there is nothing surprising about your insulting the great Siva the two syllabus of whose name save the person who merely utters them with sincere conviction and consecration. I no longer want to be known as your daughter, no longer like the idea of my Lord calling me "Daakshaayani" (daughter of Daksha). So I shall burn up this body which you begot".

So speaking, Sati fell in a swoon. Regaining consciousness after a while, she felt the presence of her Lord before her. She then told Him: "Lord, I was guilty of disobeying Thee in testing Lord Rama. I have also come here against Thy will. Forgive me for these lapses. I am now ending this present corporeal existence of mine. My only prayer is that Thou grantest that I shall be Thy lifemate in the next birth of mine".

Lord-Siva was moved. "Dear, do not grieve for the past. You were actually fortunate in being able to see Lord Rama in person. I do not like to desert you. It is only the decree of Fate that all this happened as it did. I will definitely grant your worthy wish. I have also no grouse against your father. It was also Destiny that misled him. The time is fast approaching for him to realise his folly. As for your decision to deliver up your present existence to the Fire-God, Let your conscience lead you. Take my blessings". As she was thinking her Lord, He disappeared.

Then Sati turned northwards, and sat in quiet meditation for a few minutes. With her Lord's figure in mind, she drew up the 'Praana' and the 'Apaana' vital breaths from the region of her navel towards the region of her heart; mingling the vital breaths with intellect, she let them pass through the throat to the mid-brow region. Thereupon she let the flow of the wind-cum-fire power suffuse her entire being. All that she could visualise were the lotus-feet of Lord Siva.

The flames of the sacrificial fire are rising up to the sky. As Sati jumped into them, the people who witnessed the event were

wondering whether they would consume the whole world, besides the physical frame of Sati. Daksha was looking on helplessly and aimlessly.

Ah, there the noble Sati Devi is offering herself to the consecrated fire, rather than put up with the humiliation to which she was subjected by her own father. Verily she is the ideal of all sublime womanhood, of which the Mother Earth is the source especially the sacred soil of Mother India. Oh noble Mother Sati, your self-sacrifice will not be in vain! Surely you will be the literal 'better half' of Lord Siva, when you emerge with renewed splendour from these flames to take your new birth.

When Sati's body was burnt up, there emanated from the fire a supernatural effulgence which reached up to heaven. All those that were gathered there bowed to that resplendence with folded hands, even as then were frightened by that uncanny sight. The sisters of Sati were Wailing desperately. Lord Siva's retinue came on the scene and were about to attack Daksha with their spears and axes. To ward off their attack, sage Bhrigu offered the needed oblation to the **Dakshina** sacred fire. Repelled by the flames emanating from that holy fire, Siva's men stepped back.

AERIAL VOICE

With a terrifying tone, an aerial voice then announced: "You proud Daksha, listen. You brought on yourself disgrace by abusing Lord Siva, against the advice of every well-wisher of yours, including sage Dadhichi. You moron, what made you antagonise Sati Devi, who is not merely your God-given daughter, but also the primal Energy of the whole animate world, the shining light in the minds of the supreme saints and the provider of immense benefits to the worshipful devotees. Indeed, everyone who joined you in this foul deed of yours, by partaking of this ill-consecrated sacrifice's oblations, will all have to pay for their folly along with you".

Terrified by these words, the sages ran up to Lord Vishnu and begged him to intercede on their behalf.

Daksha, equally frightened, prayed thus to Vishnu: “I pray to Lord Vishnu, who is clad in the radiant robes that sparkle like lighting, whose body is dazzlingly dusty like the darkest monsoon cloud, whose chest is adorned with the brightest flowers of the huge forest, whose feet resemble the crimson lotus, and whose eyes are like the selfsame lotus”.

He further requested Vishnu to see that his sacrifice was properly conducted till the end.

Here the retinue of Siva, who fled from the sacrificial hall of Daksha, returned to Kailasa and reported to Lord Siva all that transpired at the sacrifice. And Narada informed Vishnu about Sati Devi’s self-immolation.

Now the supreme light that emanated from the burning Sati Devi was reaching up to the celestial region.

BIRTH OF VIRABHADRA

Meanwhile Lord Siva pulled out one braid from the luxuriant hair-cluster of His head and flung it upon the Silver Mountain. From the hair-impact arose Virabhadra, with a thousand arms, sharp teeth and fierce weapons. Simultaneously arose the protection-offering goddess, Bhadra Kali. Both of them bowed to the Lord and respectfully sought His orders.

Virabhadra said: “Lord, shall I go and drink up the waters of the seven seas, or uproot all the mountains standing on earth, or shatter the trunks of the wild elephants, or persecute the sun, the moon, the stars, the angels and the arch angels? Being Thine own highly favoured creation, there is no heroic deed I cannot do and there is no power on earth or in heaven that can resist my prowess. Kindly order what I should do right now”.

Lord Siva said: “Virabhadra, I know what you are capable of doing. Your present purpose is to go, along with Bhadra Kali and my retinue, to the sacrificial altar of Daksha and cause its ruin and disorder. Kill all those priests who are still under the command of Daksha. I assure you no harm will be done to you who are obeying my orders”.

Accordingly, Virabhadra and Bhadra Kali, accompanied by Siva’s regular hordes, went down to Daksha’s abode in a chariot drawn by a thousand lions. As they were journeying down, the entire space was reverberating with martial music of the conches and drums being sounded by those ferocious servants of Siva. All over can be heard their shouts proclaiming: “We are going to punish all those people who offended our Lord Siva and goddess Sati Devi”.

BAD OMENS

Here Daksha was feeling the foreboding of evil. The sun and the moon appeared to be losing their brightness. The stars seeming to be falling. Blood could be seen dropping from the sky. The dangerous insects were flying about. All around was utter darkness. The flames that arose from the sacrificial was utter darkness. The flames that arose from the sacrificial fireplace were simply covered with smoke-clouds. The locusts entering those flames seemed to be saying, “What have we got to do with this world bereft of Sati Devi?”. All those priests and guests, who were not prepared to offend Daksha and stayed on, were now fleeing in fright from the hall. Gradually the sacrificial ground was becoming empty. Just then arrived on the scene the dreadful messengers of Lord Siva, led by Virabhadra and Bhadra Kali.

But Daksha remained unmoved. Still, he could not help feeling that Virabhadra came to him like the Lord of Death. Similarly, he saw in Virabhadra the image of Lord Siva. Knowing that he could no longer resist the force, of retribution, Daksha prayed to Virabhadra to mete out the punishment he deserved for his misdeeds.

The spear flung by Virabhadra separated Daksha's head from his trunk and the two pieces of his body were flung apart. At the same time, under the orders of Virabhadra, the retinue of Siva threw out here and there the oblations offered by the priests, and put out the sacrificial fire. Following their frightful destruction of Daksha's sacrifice, the hordes of Siva began to perform their war-dance. Both Virabhadra and Bhadra Kali were delighted with the utter annihilation of the sacrifice of Daksha, caused by Siva's army.

The wife of Daksha, Virini, begged Virabhadra to put an end to further desecration and demolition.

Virini is a noble, chaste, sinless woman who had the great good fortune of conceiving Sati Devi. Besides, she formerly advised her husband against his thoughtlessness. So Virabhadra respected her appeal, and returned to Mount Kailasa, along with Bhadra Kali and others. He reported about his successful errand to his Lord. Lord Siva was chanting the name of His favourite deity, Lord Rama. Accompanied by the sages, Brahma and Vishnu came up to Him. Lord Siva bade them welcome.

Vishnu told Siva: "Lord, Daksha's ill-advised actions have been appropriately punished. It was also decreed by Fate that Sati should be separated from you. She had burnt herself up, but she will be reborn as your wife, in the form of Parvati. Daksha's sacrifice was originally meant for the benefit of the world. If it does not come to a successful conclusion, the whole creation will suffer. Therefore we have come to beseech you to come along with us to Daksha's sacrificial hall, and to persuade you to revive Daksha, so that he can complete his task fruitfully".

GENEROSITY

Lord Siva, always at the beck and call of His sincere devotees, left for Daksha's abode. He was sorry that his messenger Virabhadra was overzealous in ruining Daksha's ritual. Moreover he was particularly grieved to see the plight of the sinless wife of Daksha.

She was acutally requesting Him to allow her to die along with Daksha (who was mauled to pieces by Siva's emissaries), by committing 'Sati' (Sahagamanam).

The merciful Siva spoke to Virini: "Mother, none can prevent the workings of predestination. I never really meant to humiliate Daksha. When he called on me I was deeply immersed in praying to Lord Rama, and, therefore, could not get up to welcome him formally. So he unjustifiably took offence. Even when he insulted me I kept quiet. I pacified the Nandi who was trying to castigate Daksha. And yet, Daksha cursed me that I should be unworthy of receiving sacramental oblations. When Sati came here, despite my warning that she would be illtreated, Daksha did not realise the worth of the filial love that brought her here and abused her. She should have come back to me, but her brave spirit goaded her to self-immolation. I perfectly know the plight of the one who is separated from his or her beloved. I admire your wish to join your husband even in his death. But please take heart, for I will presently give back to you your husband, brought back to life".

Virini was enraptured, and bowed to Lord Siva's feet in utmost gratification and sincere gratitude. She now believed that the aerial voice spoke truthfully that Sati would be reborn as the daughter of mount Himalaya, to be married to Siva.

At Siva's behest, His men recovered the trunk of Daksha, but they could not locate his head. Then Siva asked them to bring any head severed from the body, which they which find in the northern direction. They found a sheep's head and grafted it on to Daksha's trunk. Daksha came to life, a man who woke up from sleep. Seeing Lord Siva, he immediately fell at His feet in reverential repentance. Siva forgave him. The Trinity of gods there upon accepted the ritual offerings, as the sacrifice was renewed successfully.

All the assembled men, women and children paid their respects to Siva and received His blessings. At Daksha's request, Lord Siva

agreed to save the devotees by staying on at the sacrificial altar in one of His forms, long with His consort, Parvati. Siva also accepted Daksha's request that Virabhadra should guard the south-east region of the universe.

All returned to their respective abodes.

MOUNT KAILASA

The all-yielding **Kalpa** trees on Mount Kailasa beckon the Yogic **Siddhas** to come and receive from the whatever they wish to have. The Kinnera girls climb up those divine trees and from there sing the praises of Lord Siva. The river Nanda flows majestically, sanctified as it is by the bathing of Sati Devi in it. As the bumblebees hum, the gigantic peacocks dance in gay abandon. Simultaneously the cuckoos join the bird-orchestra to infuse the entire surroundings with a heavenly melody and harmony. In the Nanda river the elephant pairs bathe and indulge in love-sports. The whole mountain is filled with trees of all known varieties, yielding every kind of fruit and flower. There is species of bird or beast unknown to that great mount. The parrots that taste the succulent grapes chant the hymn to Siva: **NAMAH SIVAYA**. The mutually antagonistic animals lose their enmity and play together in those holy environs. Even the swans gloriously recite the Vedic hymns hailing Lord Siva (**Sata Rudriyam**).

Indeed the whole living world on that mountain indicates the awakening of the 'Serpent power' (Kundalini) from the subconscious earth-base (**Muladhara**) amid the hips and the buttocks, the sensual centre of the fire-bearing navel region (**Svadhishthana**), the vitality-source of the watery '**Manipura**' in the belly, the devotional air-filled '**Anahata**' in the lungs, the space-time continuum of the speech-generating '**Visuddha**' in the throat, and the all-knowing mental kingdom (**Aajna**) between the eyebrows, to the supracosmic self-awareness in the thousand-petalled (Sahasrara) lotus of the brain.

The cows over that mount yield sumptuous, sweet milk for the anointment of the 'Linga' of Siva. The Bilva leaves drop of their own accord in constant supply for the highly favoured prayerful offerings to the Linga. The beasts, too, join the co-opetative prayer and sacrificial offerings of the sages and the saints to Lord Siva. In the middle of the mountain stands a huge banyan tree which spreads over an area of a hundred square miles.

Under that sprawling tree-shade sits in meditation the omniscient Lord Siva He who the embodiment of perfect self mastery; the quintessence of peacefulness, prayed to by the great sages like Sanaka and Sanandana and by the master of wealth, Kubera; the favoured deity of the world-renouncing saints who adore His matted tresses, staff, leather-robe, ash-decoration, crescent-moon-adorned hairdo; the perfect form shining with the crimson brightness of the sky at sundown; and the soulful delight of all devotees.

KSHUPA & DADHICHI

Once there was a king named Kshupa. He was a devotee of Vishnu. He ruled his kingdom dutifully. His realm was prosperous.

When he was not engaged in his kingly duties, Kshupa was in the habit of hearing sacred discourses, specially delivered by sage Dadhichi, the son of Chyavana. Dadhichi, however, was a devotee of Siva.

One day Kshupa told Dadhichi: "Dear sage, Siva is the Lord of the south. But Vishnu is the master of the entire universe. Siva is the god of the poor. Vishnu is the bestower of all riches. Therefore, don't you think Vishnu is greater than Siva?"

Dadhichi replied: "Sire, how innocuous you are! Do you imagine that the transitory riches of the world are greater than the eternal wealth of renunciation? Lord Siva offers the perfect peace of mind which comes of true knowledge and which is the highest treasure cherished by all wise men. So it is wiser to pray to Lord Siva".

Angered with these words, Kshupa cut Dadhichi into two pieces with his Vajra weapon. Later he was contrite, and went to his palace with an uneasy mind.

Dadhichi was man of sagacity and great presence of mind. As soon as he was attacked, he prayed to his grandfather Sukra, Sukra taught Dadhichi this death-conquering hymn (Mrityunjaya Mantra);

Tryambakam yajaamahe sugandhim pushti-varadhanam;
Urvaarukam iva bandhnaat mrityoh muksheeya maa amritaata.

(I pray to Lord Siva, who exudes fragrance and enhances spiritual strength. May He release me as the cucumber is released from its stem from the clutches of Death, but not from Immortality).

As Dadhichi recited for a long while such scriptural and non-scriptural hymns, Lord Siva presented Himself before that sage and, bringing him back to life, asked him to seek any favour he wanted from Him.

Dadhichi requested Lord Siva for a diamond like body and for immortality, besides a three longed spear (Trisula) for self-protection. The blessed Lord granted him his wishes.

REVENGE

Bent upon wreaking vengeance, Dadhichi went to the court of Kshupa and spoke to the king: “Sir, blinded by your royal power, you cut me into two with your diamond-weapon. My grandfather initiated me in the Mrityunjaya Mantra, and by worshipping that death-questing God, Siva, I obtained from Him this Trisula. Now pay for your evil deed”.

So saying, Dadhichi kicked away the crown on Kshupa’s head. The crown that fell on to the ground seemed to laugh at the king derisively. Wild with fury, Kshupa hit Dadhichi with his Vajra weapon. The ‘Trisula’ of Dadhichi gently smiled at the ‘Vajra weapon’ of Kshupa. The two combatants were unaware of the significance of that smile. Then the Trisula and the Vajra weapon transformed

themselves into Siva and Vishnu respectively. Dadhichi and Kshupa hanged their heads in shame.

Vishnu told Kshupa: “You do not appreciate the boundless glory of the devotees of Siva, By the grace of Lord Siva, His followers realise salvation, freed from the mental ills of ignorance, instability and impurity; for them there is no rebirth, for they are absolved of all the effects of their past deeds; and they ever rejoice in the power of self-knowledge. You should be ashamed of yourself for your unawareness of the efficacy of Siva-worship. Now repent and make friends with Dadhichi”.

Siva told Dadhichi: “Sir, you should not have wasted the powers you have acquired through penance on seeking mere vengeance. Lord Vishnu is the preserver and protector of the world of creation. He creates the kings of the world as his agents in establishing the rule of law of earth, by protecting the virtuous and punishing the vicious. If there is no powerful king, there is none else who can see that the sacred works like the sacrificial rites are performed successfully. In fact, the very **Dharma** will be in jeopardy if the king is harmed. There is no meaningful difference between Siva and Vishnu. You have now learnt your lesson. Now you and Kshupa should once again be friends”.

When Siva and Vishnu disappeared from the scene, Kshupa and Dadhichi in their newly acquired knowledge once again became good friends.

THE HIMALAYAS

The effulgent energy that arose from the sacrificial fire into which Sati Devi threw herself is now reaching the Himalayas.

Loftiest of them all are Himalayan peaks.

It is here that roam about the royal swans in the soft waves of the divine stream, Ganga; it is here that the heavenly minstrels the Gandharvas, pluck the golden lotuses in the lakes for their garlands;

it is here that the Vidyadhara couples wander, counting the number of pillars erected round the sacrificial altars on earth; here it is that the aborigines hunt the mighty elephants; and it is here, by meditating on the foot prints of Lord Siva, that the sages acquire the eight miraculous powers.

The personification of this mighty mountain range is King Himavan whose personality exudes delightfulness and nobility and virtue and piety. He is born of a fragment of Lord Vishnu's energy.

For the perpetuation of his race, Himavan decided upon taking a wife. Without explicitly expressing his wish, he approached the demi-gods and the sages around him, and asked them if there was anything he could do for them. Realising his inward idea, the sages and the demi-gods went up to the '**Forefathers**' and spoke to them: "For the edification and well-being of yours and ours, we have up our minds to get king Himavan married. So we request you to offer in marriage the hand of your daughter. Menaka".

The '**Forefathers**' gladly acceded to the request.

Now, Daksha had daughter, named Svadha, who was married to the '**Forefathers (Pitri-Devas)**'. The offspring of that marriage were three beautiful girls Menaka, Dhanya and Kalavati. They became life nuns (Yoginis), and travelling all over the universe they once stopped at Vaikuntha, where they paid their respects to Lord Vishnu and took their seats awaiting the Lord's pleasure.

At that juncture the sages, Sanaka, Sanandana and others also visited Vaikuntha. As they were approaching, Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi went forward to greet them. After the sages bowed to Vishnu, the Lord said: "Revered sages, your arrival here brings us great pleasure. Vaikuntha is sanctified by your presence. Please be seated".

INDIFFERENCE

After seating themselves, Sanaka and other sages cast their glances at the daughters of Svadha. The girls had not risen from

their seats, in honour of the sages. They were indeed unaware of the powers of penance of the sages. The sages thought that, if even after seeing Vishnu's gesture they showed their disrespect to them, it must be due to the characteristics they inherited from their grandfather, Daksha.

PUNISHMENT

The offended sages addressed the daughters of Svadha thus: "You girls, don't you know that it is proper for the younger people to show due respect to their elders and receive their blessings? Should you not have at least followed the example of Lord Vishnu? Perhaps you think too much of yourselves because you are the granddaughters of Daksha. We have no choice but to curse you to go down to the earth immediately from this heavenly Vaikuntha".

Svadha's daughters realised their folly and begged the forgiveness of the sages.

Like all noble souls, the sages remain angry for no more than a second. They said: "Dear Yoginis, the imprecation of the sages cannot be undone. However, those people who realise their folly and seek forgiveness must be pardoned. So, although you cannot escape from going down to the earth, we grant that you three beget daughters worthy of the respect of the entire world, Menaka, you will be married to Himavaan and beget Parvati, who will be Lord Siva's spouse. Dhanya, you will marry king Janaka and be the mother of Sita Devi, who will wed Lord Rama. You Kalavati, you will wed Vrishabhanu and beget Radha, who will be the beloved of Lord Krishna".

The girls were much pleased with the words of the sages: eventually they gave birth to a daughter each Parvati, Sita and Radha, who would later live in happiness on Mount Kailasa, in Vaikuntha and in the Go-loka, respectively.

Siva and Vishnu would have new spouses, unasked for.

Hearing the words of the sages, Vishnu kept mum. Maybe he feared Lakshmi would be wild with him if he expressed his joy at getting a new wife! The sages took their leave of Lord Vishnu.

Accompanied by the demi-gods and some sages, Vishnu went down to meet Himavan. Delighted at the visit of the noble personages, the mountain-lord went forward to receive with all royal honours, and asked them to order him to do whatever they wanted from him.

WISE COUNSEL

Lord Vishnu spoke to Himavan: “We thank you for your welcome and your hospitality. Daksha’s daughter, Sati, who married Lord Siva, has immolated herself. Unable to bear the pangs of separation from her, Lord Siva is performing rigorous penance. The Yogic and other holy men are worshipping Him at the same time, in order to see that Sati Devi would be reborn as His wife. Now, the grand daughter of Daksha, Menaka, is as wise as she is lovely, and will be your worthy lifemate in every way. Already the curse of the sages had determined the course of her life which is that she should be your wife. Parvati will be the child of your marriage to Menaka, and when your daughter (Parvathi) marries Lord Siva, Kumara Svami, the saviour of the demi-gods from the attacks of the demon, Taraka will be born. So please be ready to accept the hand of Menaka in marriage”.

Himavan fell in with the wishes of the wise men. Menaka, when she learnt about Himavan’s acceptance, was immensely gratified.

DREAM

On the same night Menaka appeared in a dream to Sati Devi. Menaka seemed to speak to the sad Sati Devi: “Child! what made you look so sorrowful? Your hair is tousled; tears are streaming down your cheeks. You look so emaciated. Oh, do come to me. Let me attend to your toilet and make you look the real beauty that

you are. I will protect you to the best of my ability. In fact, I have no other wish than that you should be my daughter. Ah, are you laughing at me, because you cannot believe that a virgin like me can give birth to a daughter? Please rest assured that the sages have foretold my marriage to Himavan. By the grace of Mother Sakti I am going to give birth to you, and after bringing you up tenderly will get you married to Lord Siva. In accordance with the prophecy of the sages, Himavan had agreed to me”.

The words of Menaka brought forth tears of ecstasy from Sati’s eyes. She replied: “Mother, your kind words have relieved me of the anguish I have been suffering from, because of my father’s misdeeds. Now I can very well believe that the effulgent energy that is pervading the Himalayas will soon take the shape of your offspring”.

MENAKA’S WEDDING

The wedding of Menaka and Himavan was performed with appropriate splendour. Brahma, Vishnu and the great sages attended the function and blessed the young couple. Himavan entertained and rewarded each guest according to his station.

Receiving the blessings of the sages and other guests, Himavan and Menaka spent their wedded life happily for some time.

The demi-gods advised them to pray to Mother Kalika, in order to obtain children.

On the banks of Ganga, Menaka prepared an idol of ‘Mahaa Gauri’ (the supracosmic form of Parvati). On every third and eighth day of the fortnight the couple used to pray, and offer oblations, to it after fasting the previous day. On other days, too, Menaka and Himavan led an austere way of life, with different vows and rituals. All through, their prayers were punctuated with the obeisance to the blessed couple, Siva and Parvati “Namo-namah Sankara-Parvatibhyam”.

On a festival day, during an auspicious period, Menaka thus worshipped the Para Sakti (the personification of the supracosmic energy the feminine counterpart of the creative power of God): “O Mother of Mothers, you are the supreme source of creation, the latent energy of all worldly manifestation, the saviour of your devotees and the queller of their sorrows, and the repository of Yogic powers. May I beseech you to grant me my humble wishes”.

Pleased with this prayer, the Divine Mother of Mothers asked Menaka to speak out her wishes.

Extremely gratified, Menaka said: “Mother, I salute you with deep gratitude. Besides granting me a hundred heroic and scholarly sons, may you be my daughter who will marry Lord Siva and give birth to a son who will punish the wicked demons and protect the good people”.

‘So be it’ said the Para Sakti.

Menaka mothered Mainaka and another ninety-nine sons, and was awaiting the birth of the Mother of Mothers, Parvati.

Eventually the effulgent energy which emanated the self-immolating Sati entered the womb of Menaka. Himavan was pleased to see that the prophecy of the sages was coming true. The new of Menaka’s pregnancy was greeted with joyous celebration all over the mountain kingdom.

As the tenth month of her pregnancy dawned, Menaka was prayerfully chanting the name of the Para Sakti. Himavan surrendered himself to the will of God.

It was the ninth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra (March-April). The star, Mrigasirsha, was in the ascendant at midnight. The moon was shining delectably. The gentle **Malaya** breezes were blowing refreshingly. The flower garden was giving out sweet perfumes. The flames from the sacrificial fires were rising scintillatingly. As the Para Sakti was about to incarnate Herself, the

angels and archangels in heaven dropped flowers from the sky on to the Himalayas.

At last Para Sakti manifested Herself. Menaka was confused. The mighty Sakti reassured her: “Mother, you need not be afraid. Soon I will be born to you and then become the consort of Lord Siva for the benefit of the virtuous and for the detriment of the Vicious”.

At that very moment the **Para Sakti** turned Herself into the little daughter of Menaka and started crying like any other newborn. As the child’s splendence was brightening the entire surroundings, Menaka felt before her the presence of the infant with four arms and the third eye in the forehead. Her whole being was enraptured, and she started praying to the Mother of Mothers inwardly, closing her eyes.

As Menaka opened her eyes, she could see the little child. Looking at her mother, the child smiled meaningfully. Menaka caressed the child fondly and gratefully.

Accompanied by his priest, Himavan visited the mother and the child, and mentally sang the praises of the Mother of Mothers.

The omniscient Siva realised that His future spouse was born as the daughter of the king of Himalaya, and began to perform His cosmic dance with great rejoicing. The moon and Siva exchanged mutually understanding glances. The silver mountain, Kailasa, felt sanctified, and was glad that at last Siva’s lonesomeness was going to end.

CHRISTENING CEREMONY

In celebration of Parvati’s birth, the Vedic scholars recited the relevant sacred hymns from the four Vedas. The king commissioned his priest to perform the ‘Agnishtoma’ sacrifice in honour of the Fire-God. All the gods and demi-gods were invited for the christening ceremony of Parvati. As all the assembled people were fondly staring at her little child, Menaka was concerned about ‘Drishti Dosha’

(evil effect of being stared at by strangers). But, of course, it was only a natural motherly concern, and nothing untoward would happen to that divine child.

In the meantime the aerial voice was heard: “O mountain king, you are so fortunate as to be the father of the Prima (Energy, the Mother of mothers, You will therefore have the additional privilege of naming her after yourself, ‘Parvati’, the daughter of ‘Parvata’ (mountain). She will be the consort of Lord Siva. And your kingdom will be a place of pilgrimage”.

Hearing those nectar-like words Himavan was filled with gratitude and gratification, and did as advised by the aerial voice. Without realising the true origin of Parvati, some of the guests offered the child their blessings as though to an ordinary infant. (Everyone was treated with equal hospitality, and all the guests returned home after taking part in the royal christening ceremony.

PARVATI'S CHILDHOOD

Parvati was growing with regular physical and mental power. She was in the habit of taking the lions by their necks and enjoying a joy-ride on their back amid the surrounding jungles. She would take into her arms, and caress, the baby elephants. Calling herself the mother of the animal cubs she would feed them sumptuously, in the company of her playmates.

At times Parvati realises her motherhood of the universe and would accordingly attend to all the needs of the little animals around her. Calling herself the ‘Kama-Dhenu’ (the wish-fulfilling divine cow) she would cater for all the needs of her friends. When she plays ball, she would claim that she can swing around the three worlds, as though they were mere balls in her hands. Sometimes she actually claims to be the ‘Para Sakti’, and making up toys would call them after the Trinity who obey her orders. Her playmates who do not have an inkling of her divinity would laugh at her, and she would be cross with them.

Parvati was initiated in various studies. Actually, the goddess of Education, Sarasvati, was dancing on her tongue. Effortlessly could she recite the scriptures and all the hymns to Lord Siva. The musk deer offer their obeisance to Parvati and shed their musk ceaselessly for her delectation. The goddesses of the forest prostrate themselves before her and surrender their fruits and flowers for her. The fairies and nymphs visit her, adorning her with sweet-smelling garlands. The **cuckoos** sing joyously, suggesting in their tender notes that there is none to equal Parvati in all the three worlds, in any respect.

Parvati would not respond to anyone's call, unless it is accompanied by the articulation of “Siva!”. She would not wear any other hair-ornament than that of the likeness of the bright crescent. She would not decorate her forehead with anything else than the sacred ash. She would not sing any song other than the hymns from the Sama Veda, the musical scripture. She would not wield any weapon other than the three-pronged spear and the ‘**chandrahaasa**’ sword.

To the extreme delight of her mother she would cry out like a lute making its sweetest sound. She would astonish even the Vidyadhara dancing with her own sparking choreography. She would shame the greatest painter with her skill in drawing the likeness of Lord Siva. Her tutors would be amazed at the poetic felicity she displays in her muse-creation.

NARADA'S VISIT

Understanding that Parvati was none other than the **Para Sakti**, the wandering sage, Narada, prayed to her. She appeared before him. The sage was pleasantly struck by the radiant beauty and splendour of her appearance. As he began to wonder who could be her fitting spouse, he could see Lord Siva before his mind's eye. Thereupon Narada bowed to the lotus-feet of the divine couple's vision.

Narada decided upon being the instrument of bringing together Siva and Parvati, and in pursuance of that plan went down to meet Himavan. Reaching the Himalayas, he feasted his eyes on the sight of young Parvati playing with her mates. Approaching her he said: “Mother, I am agog to see you married. Do you imagine that I have no idea of whom you chose to be your life-partner in your mind? I am prepared to go to that Lord to Kailasa. Please grant that I be your humble emissary”.

Parvati replied: “Dear sage, you are known to be fond of creating dissensions among people. I know of several instance of people who put themselves to serious trouble, by paying heed to your mischievous counsels. Of course, I know that in my case you have no such naughty motive. So I happily bless that you be the instrument of bringing me and Lord Siva together”.

Narada said: “Mother, I thank you for your trust in me, I know that I am no more than a negligible instrument in the hands of a mighty destiny. As for your other words, may I submit that I have no real wish to cause trouble to anybody? I mean well but it is the fate of the individuals concerned that sometimes makes my plans for them go awry. It is a pity that people do not realise that the workings of Fate are inscrutable and inviolable. Anyway, I am glad that at least some sensible men know that I am not really to blame for whatever happens to anyone.

As Parvati and her friends went inside the palace, Narada went into the court of the mountain king. Himavan and Menaka received him with due honours. Narada told them: “Blessed couple, worshipping Lord Siva, your beloved daughter will win the favour of receiving His hand in marriage. Since Kubera ever remains at the beck and call of Lord Siva, and the Lord is the personification of grace, the divine couple will never lack anything. So please encourage your daughter, and do your best to bring about this happy union of Siva and Parvati”.

Himavan said: “I heard that Siva has been performing a solitary, austere penance, like an anchorite, in a distant forest, ever since the self-immolation of Sati Devi. How can I hope that Parvati will accept the hand of such a hermit? On the other hand, if she is willing, and if Siva is unwilling how can I console my daughter?”.

Narada understood the genuine concern of a father. He said: “Sir, you seem to be unaware of the fact that Parvati is the incarnation of Sati Devi. It is indeed to be reunited with her, in the form of Parvati, that Siva is doing His penance”. Parvati, who entered the court during this conversation, bent her head bashfully, when she heard these words. Himavan understood the meaning of her gesture. He expressed his consent to the Siva-Parvati marriage. Delighted, Narada went home along the celestial path, with a devotional song dedicated to Lord Siva on his lips.

MENTAL UNREST

Adorning herself with all her ornaments, Parvati stood before a looking-glass. She then found Siva in the mirror. She could not make out how to greet the Lord. She ordered her friends to bring the various materials used in the sacramental worship of Lord Siva. As soon as they brought the things, the Lord vanished. Crestfallen, the princess fell to the ground, unconscious. Her friends realised that it was all the result of her mental anxiety. As she came to, Parvati was heard speaking: “Lord, what harm have I done you? Narada and others told me that you were the Lord of mercy and compassion. Is it fair on your part to disappear just when I wanted to worship you fondly?”.

Again Siva seemed to stand before her, and she heard him speak thus: “Parvati, how can you fall in love with me? I am a poor man, whereas you are the daughter of a rich king. I wander about with a begging bowl and sleep on bare ground in the cemeteries, and you are used to a life of luxury and comfort in a palace. Forget all about marrying a mendicant like me and seek someone who is more suitable to your royal station in life”.

Parvati: “Sir, what did you say? Have you come to make fun of me or to test my loyalty? I surrendered myself to you long, long ago. There is no going back on my word, no matter what your are and no matter what happens”.

The tender-hearted Siva regretted His words and smiled graciously. Immediately Parvati asked her friends to bring some milk to be consecrated to her Lord.

Again her Lord disappeared, and all that she could see was her mates beside her. Sorely disappointed, she inquired of them as to where her Lord had gone. But they said they saw none.

Parvati realised that it was all a dream. When her maids assured her that her dream would come true, she rewarded them suitably.

Meanwhile Menaka came there to visit her daughter. She told Parvati: “Darling child, do not doubt Narada’s words. But keep praying to Lord Siva and He will be eventually yours, as He is partial to all those who seek His refuge”.

Thankfully embracing her mother for her wise advice and encouragement, Parvati went to her prayer-room, accompanied by her maids.

PRAYER-ROOM

There stands the resplendent image of Lord Siva with His matted locks the deer-skin covering His torso, the drum in one hand and the three-pronged spear (Trisula) in the other. As Parvati offered incense to the Lord, His snake ornaments did not come in her way. And Lord Siva seemed to accept all the consecrated offerings of food and drink with a smiling grace. Parvati felt doubly reassured about the fulfilment of her life’s most ardent wish to be united with Siva. As she, at that juncture, heard the soft singing of the Garuda bird, which is an auspicious omen, she pressed her Lord’s feet against her eyes, as a sign of reverential gratification.

The Lord’s lotus-feet appeared to tell Parvati: “Princess, indeed you are a clever one. Your tender touch is a veritable source of

bliss. Rest assured that you became perfectly worthy of the Lord’s grace. You proved yourself to be capable of alluring even a recluse like Siva. Your life is blessed, and the Lord is yours”.

As the day was dying out, her mother urged Parvati to get done with her prayers. Taking a flower at the Lord’s feet with which to decorate her hair, eating a portion of the consecrated food, and drinking a bit of the sacramental milk, Parvati retired to her room.

SIVA’S PENANCE

Dejected at the separation from Sati Devi, Siva was proceeding to the forest to perform penance in isolation. On his way he ran into Vishnu.

As Vishnu saw Siva’s whole mien denoting desolation and distress, the former advised the latter to chant the mantra of ‘Narayana’ during his penance. Siva accepted the advice and started his penance, seated in the heroic posture of “Virasana”.

As a result of the body-heat generated by the rigorous penance, a drop of sweat fell on to the ground from Lord Siva’s physical frame. From the bit of perspiration arose a gigantic figure, having the colour of blood and large eyes. Siva named him ‘Bhauma’.

When he grew up, Bhauma went to Varanasi and performed a penance, dedicated to Lord Siva. Pleased with his penance, Lord Siva granted that he become one of the nine planets the Lord of the ‘Kuja Mandala’. Bhauma thereafter acquired the synonyms, Kuja and Angaraka. Indeed, Angaraka became a gold-mine to those who are earnestly devoted to him.

Siva continued his penance. At one point he felt the presence of Parvati before him. He was very much impressed by her divinely enchanting good looks. He also realised that she would put herself to any trouble, sacrifice her own life, for His sake. He thought it would be unfair to neglect her much longer. Indeed, He was completely in love with Parvati.

BIRTH OF GANGA

Ah, who is this Ganga Devi?

Once there was hardly any water on earth for the purpose of offering oblations to the deceased forefathers and ancestors of mankind. Then the sages prayed to Brahma. He let a drop of water drop from his sacred bowl (Kamandalu). That drop of water swelled into a ferocious stream, causing frightening sounds. The whole earth trembled at the force of that stream's flow. Mother Earth feared that it was a demoniac stream which came to drown her into nothingness. So she prayed to Lord Siva, who readily obliged her by sucking up the whole river on to his tresses. However, Lord Siva left a portion of the Ganga's water on earth, which formed itself into Lake Manasarovar.

Ganga felt sanctified at Siva's gesture. The entire earth, with its population, felt much relieved and happy.

Learning about Siva's penance in the neighbourhood, Himavan and Menaka went to pay their respects to him. Seeing him engrossed in rigorous meditation the couple wondered what was the aim of this austere vow. After all, they thought, a man of renunciation like Siva had nothing to seek in the world for Him to perform a reward-seeking penance.

Anyway, they bowed to His feet, and offered Him the customary fruits and flowers as a form of devotional service. After which, they addressed Him thus: "O Lord, Thou art omniscient and all-merciful. Thou art the person who should be prayed to and who protected everyone. Then why should Thou pray for something or perform penance? What made Thee leave Thy comfortable abode of Kailasa and expose Thyself to the elements in this snowy region? Thou who art not accessible to even the gods in heaven, hast come to us as a neighbour. We are indeed blessed by Thy presence in our vicinity. We are like Thy servants. Order us whatever Thou wantest us to do".

Siva told Himavan, "O mountain-king, I am pleased with your words. Just see that I am not disturbed. That is all I want from you. You may now go back to your palace".

Who can indeed gauge the depths of Siva's mind? After all, could not He have guessed at the real intention of the visit of Menaka and Himavan? Was it possible that He was putting them off simply to test their good faith? Would Narada's words be proved to be false? Was it not to enable Himself to receive the beloved services of Parvati that Siva came to do penance in the Himalayan kingdom?

Himavan was at a loss to understand what sort of words he should next speak. When the couple were still hesitating to leave the presence of Siva, the Lord asked them: "Why are you still lingering? Please don't worry. Your hopes will soon be realised".

APPEAL

Encouraged, Himavan said: "Lord, our daughter is none other than the incarnation of Para Sakti. She ever thinks of Thee and says will marry none else but Thee. She will not come in the way of Thy penance. All that we request Thee is to permit her to attend to Thy needs. If Thou dost not agree to this humble request, how can we console our daughter who is so determined to serve Thee in every way she can?".

Siva said: "Sir, what madness is this? How can a hermit like me permit a young unmarried woman to serve me? Would not a young lady's company affect the mind of even someone who controlled his senses? My wants are simple, and I do not need anybody's help to meet them. You say your daughter loves me with all her heart. Then, don't you think that her propinquity would disturb the pursuit of my penance? Anyway, why should a princess like Parvati be enamoured of a hermit like me? Why don't you find a suitable prince for her husband?".

Himavan replied: "Lord, we ordinary folks cannot delve into the mystery of Thine actions. We cannot influence the mind of

Parvati. She says she was born to be Thy lifemate, and we cannot change her conviction. If Thou wantest to test us further, let Parvati herself be the target of Thine examination. Neither woman nor gold can really affect Thee, who art above them in Thy true essence”.

Siva could not in all conscience refuse Himavan’s request. He agreed to be attended on by Parvati.

Himavan and Menaka rushed back to convey the good tidings to their daughter. As they approached her room, they found her in deep meditation on Siva. She did not notice their approach. They waited till she opened her eyes, when Menaka told her: “Darling, Siva has consented to being served by you”. Parvati heard the glad news with rapturous relief. Wordlessly she fell into her mother’s arms, as ecstatic tears streamed down her eyes, and the drops of ardour-generated perspiration fell the good news, Parvati’s friends reacted according to their lights.

PRIYAMVADA (friendly maid): Lord Siva has accepted Parvati’s services. I will be receiving a nice present if they get together.

KALAHABHASHINI (quarrelsome maid): If not, there will be a great fight.

P.: You cannot bring about such an eventually.

K.: Yes, I can.

P.: Oh, please don’t!

K.: Well, let’s see.

With the permission of her parents, Parvati went along with her maids to the pleasure garden for a leisurely stroll. The parrots, cuckoos and other singing birds were making delightful music. The peacocks were dancing in full glee. The forest flowers were exuding sweet perfumes. Parvati’s left eye throbbed, as a sign of forthcoming good luck. She felt that the entire world of creation down from the Lord Creator to the tiny insect was permeated with the pure consciousness

of Lord Siva. She was inexpressibly enraptured. She chanted a hymn with the refrain ‘*Namah Sivaaya*’ to the benign Lord Siva who is the Destroyer of the vicious circle of birth-life-death, the Embodiment of pure Energy, the Fulfiller of the devotee’s worthy wishes and the Indwelling Spirit of her entire being.

Hearing her prayer, the gods in heaven dropped flowers of benediction on her.

As it was getting dark, her maids persuaded Parvati to return home. Before retiring to bed, She performed another ‘*Puja*’ (sacramental worship) to Lord Siva. As she was fasting for the night, her maids pressed her to drink some milk, which they brought to her in a golden cup. In that golden cup of mild Parvati saw a vision of Siva, who seemed to urge her to drink the milk without further ado. Gladly Parvati sipped the milk.

When she went to bed she found herself unable to sleep. The moon through the window appeared to be laughing at her restlessness and overwhelming love for Siva. She was suffused with bashfulness. Parvati spent the whole night with sweet thoughts.

SIVA’S MANIFESTATION

Next morning Himavan and Menaka went along with their daughter to meet Lord Siva. Parvati did not feel the strain of the journey, as she was too happy at the thought of her dream coming true to be bothered about physical discomfort.

As Lord Siva opened His eyes, hearing the sound of approaching footsteps, His glance fell on the white-clad figure of Parvati, who was radiating immaculate loveliness and who was about to worship Him with supreme devotion. Struck with the splendour of her innocent mien, matchless beauty and perfect symmetry of form, Siva, with eyes half closed, began to think: “Indeed this indescribable beauty of Parvati can be nothing but the affect of the incarnation of the ‘*Para Sakti*’ ”.

Then, praying to Lord Siva as the all-merciful Lord of Grace, Himavan spoke to Him: “Lord, this is my daughter who has come to serve Thee. Please accept her services and thereby shower Thy grace on all of us”.

Siva once again wanted to test Himavan: “Don’t you know that the company of women leads astray even the greatest of sages? What point is there in offering the services of a delicately nurtured princess to a mendicant monk like me?”.

Neither Priyamvada nor Kalahabhaashini liked Siva’s reply. Parvati, for her part, was anxious to teach Siva a lesson as part of a well-meaning “tit-for-tat” for his repeated ‘tests’. Priyamvada was uneasy about future developments. Kalahabhaashini was wise to Siva’s ‘tricks’. She told Parvati, “Friend, the Lord of Kailasa is a clever god. You know He is again and again trying to test you. You must pay Him back in his own coin!”. Parvati nodded. On the other hand, Priyamvada spoke to Parvati thus: “Don’t doubt Lord Siva. He is yours, without doubt. Only, He is playing His part of **Impresario of World-play**. Your only answer to His ‘examination’ is to take to the way of Devotion”.

Priyamvada’s words pleased Parvati. She told Siva: “Lord, dost Thou mean to say that the services of women hamper the penance of the sages? Dost Thou seriously believe that the minds of the hermits are so unstable? For my part I will stick to my vow of celibacy and austerily and will in no way come in the way of Thy rigorous penance. So kindly accept my humble services in pursuing Thy penance”.

SIVA’S GRACE

Siva was impressed. He granted Parvati’s wish. His love for her was fast growing.

As the tears of ecstasy rolled down her cheeks, Parvati fell prostrated at the feet of Lord Siva. The Lord’s lotusfeet seemed to

say smilingly: “Parvati, you are indeed a fortunate woman. You managed to receive the grace of the Lord. Soon your wishes will be completely fulfilled”.

Similarly her maids complimented on her sincere tenacity which enabled her to obtain Siva’s favour.

Parvati, along with the others, returned home for the day.

PANGS OF SEPARATION

Again Parvati spent a restless night. All the efforts of her maids to soothe her were unavailing. She found life unbearable, away from Siva. But the time was not right for her to go and serve her Lord. If indeed she ventured to approach Him at that hour, she wondered whether Siva would refrain from cursing her.

Rising from her bed, she went up to the terrace of her palace, along with Priyamvada. The moon was shining in full splendour. The ‘Malaya breeze’ was blowing softly. The perfumes from the garden below were soothing and sweet. The love-cries of the parrot pairs were maddening to the ears of the lovelorn Parvati. She then glanced down at the Bilva trees, which are the special favourites of Lord Siva.

Priyamvada spoke to Parvati: “Princess, it is now well past midnight. Soon it will be dawn. Unless you sleep for a while you will not be fit enough to attend to the needs of your Lord tomorrow”.

Then Parvati replied: “Friend, I don’t know but try as I would, I am unable to sleep. It would seem that my Lord has stolen my sleeping ability, too, along with my heart! Even though I am here physically, my mind is with my Lord. I am sorry that you are also robbed of your sleep on my account. Please rest for a while”.

Priyamvada was much moved. She could not entertain the thought of resting while her friend was so restless. So she began singing the songs in praise of Lord Siva, which are so dear to Parvati.

The songs proved to be soothing lullabies, and Parvati dozed off. Priyamvada was much relieved in mind.

The next day dawned. Parvati proceeded to the bathroom, accompanied by Priyamvada. Kalahabhaashini joined them on the way. Applying oil to Parvati's hair, she asked: "Princess, why is it your head is so warm? Couldn't you sleep last night? Were you thinking of Siva all the time?". Parvati "Does your silence mean that you halfagreed with my surmise". This time Parvati was angered. Priyamvada whispered something in Kalahabhashini's ear. The latter stopped her ailing and started smearing Parvati's body with perfumed paste. Priyamvada sprinkled perfumed water over the paste, the while humming songs in praise of Lord Siva. Parvati regained her composure, and after completing her toilet and ornamentation, proceeded to the spot where Siva was doing penance.

SERVING THE LORD

Even as Siva was wondering why Parvati had not yet turned up, she fell prostrate as His feet, with reverential love. Siva was much delighted. The princess washed the Lord's feet with consecrated water, and sprinkled her head with the water that dropped from the deity's feet. She dried the Lord's feet with a pure white piece of cloth, and smeared them with sandalwood paste mixed with musk. Then she worshipped the feet with flowers much fancied by Siva and sang in a higher octave this paean:

Sarva-beeja-rakshanaika-seeline NAMAH SIVAAYA
Paarvatee-priyaaya Bhakta-paaline NAMAH SIVAAYA
Durvidagdha-daitya-sainya-daarine NAMAH SIVAAYA
Sarvareesa-dhaarine Kapaaline NAMAH SIVAAYA

(Salutations to Lord Siva, the dedicated Protector of all humanity, the lover of Parvati, the saviour of the devotees, the destroyer of the demons, the wearer of the crescent in the hair, and the holder of the skull-bowl!)

Seeing her Lord perfectly pleased, Parvati took leave of him with immense satisfaction.

Siva again fell in deep meditation.

The maids who were staying behind the bushes, joined Parvati. Priyamvada realised that the Lord was of a gentle, merciful nature. But true to her nature, Kalahabhaashini felt Siva knew only how to get Himself served by others, without serving them at the same time. The wild ornaments and the ashes which decorate Siva's body appeared to be repellant to her, and she thought He was hard-hearted. Besides, she wondered whether the personified Ganga river in Siva's tresses might not prove to be a 'thorn in the flesh' to Parvati. And yet she knew she could not make Parvati change her mind. So she kept quiet.

All that Parvati wanted was to please her Lord. In the process she could not help exciting His senses by tickling His feet and by her enchanting singing. She made the place surrounding the hermitage look spick and span with her cleaning and decorations. Later she would stand in respectful attention, feasting her eyes on the divine figure and awaiting the least little sign of implicit need, or of explicit command, from Him.

Siva, on his side, would at times steal a loving glance at His beloved, with His eyes half-closed. Deeply stirred by her tender attention, He would be tempted to reveal His own irresistible love for her; yet He would not commit Himself in haste. Looking at her, He would often be put in mind of Sati Devi, and then His eyes would be wet with unshed tears.'

O! how ineffably exemplary is this mutual understanding between the divine couple, which transcends immediate physical relationship at the same time!

DITI

From among the progeny of Daksha, Kasyapa married thirteen daughters, of whom Diti is the eldest. Diti had two wicked sons Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu. There was no limit to the

harm they did to their fellow-beings. Their evil deeds came to an end, only when Lord Vishnu incarnated himself as the Boar (Varaaha) and as the Lion-Man (Narasimha) to kill Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu respectively. Thereby the three worlds were able to breathe in peace. But the heart of the wicked pair's mother, Diti, was broken. She complained to her husband: "Lord, you are not unaware of the maternal grief, resulting from the loss of children: especially should you know the sacred words, 'aputrasya gatih na asti' (there is no salvation for the man without sons). Our sons have been killed by Vishnu. Now please find out some means whereby I can again have children".

Kasyapa saw the justice of Diti's complaint, and also saw to it that she would again conceive. But Indra subtly entered the womb of Diti and cut the foetus into pieces. However, Kasyapa changed those pieces into male children, who were known as Maruts. The Maruts went to heaven and served Indra.

Naturally, Diti was still disappointed and enraged. She did not want such children as would serve her foe, Indra. So she requested her husband for another pregnancy. Kasyapa advised Diti to pray to Brahma for the fulfilment of her wish.

VAJRANGA

Pleased with Diti's penance, Brahma granted her wish. Since the child had a body resembling a diamond (vajra), he was christened Vajranga.

The gods in heaven were uneasy about the harm that might befall them at the hands of the powerful Vajranga.

When Vajranga came of age, Diti addressed him: "Son, Indra is a heartless person. Assuming a false form he made his way into my womb and cut the embryo into pieces, which thanks to the reparation done by your father's saintly powers were born as maruts. But those children, lost to all sense of proportion, are now serving their own natural enemy. Indra. Now, don't you see that you must wreak vengeance upon Indra?".

Duly provoked by his mother's instigation, Vajranga ascended to heaven and captured Indra, as he was seated on his gem-studded throne. Diti's mind was at last at rest.

Nevertheless, Vajranga was by nature a good person. He was contented with whatever he got and was a great devotee of Lord Siva. Brahma, accompanied by Kasyapa, reasoned with Vajranga. Reconciling himself to the wrong done to his mother, Vajranga released Indra magnanimously.

Saying that he had no use for material wealth and comforts, Vajranga requested Brahma to enlighten him on true knowledge. After obliging him accordingly, Brahma created for him a suitable wife, Varangi.

After spending some serenely happy time with Varangi, the pleased Vajranga asked her to seek from him any favour she wanted. Varangi asked him to favour her with a son who could defeat Indra. Realising that this was a test of his honour and integrity (to live up to his word), Vajranga reluctantly prayed Brahma to fulfil Varangi's wish on his behalf 'So be it', said Brahma.

TARAKA

In due course Varangi gave birth to a powerful son. At the time of that child's birth there were manifestations of forthcoming evil the earth quaked; on all sides wild fire seemed to be touching the sky; the whole world was plunged in darkness as thick clouds covered the sun; the rain fell incessantly; there were tidal waves in the seas; the hurricane uprooted trees; stars fell on earth; even the sun and the moon appeared to be losing their brightness; the owls and the jackals hooted frighteningly; and the cattle ran helter-skelter.

Varangi named her son 'Taraka'.

Taraka was growing in strength day by day. His body was as strong as a rough diamond; his mind was filled with evil strategies and schemes. He was restlessly seeking vengeance on his enemies. His mother advised him to perform penance and there by obtain

several invincible powers. Accordingly, Taraka went to the Madhu forest and at a holy spot stood on one leg and prayed to Brahma, fasting all the time. Flames arose from Taraka's head, consuming the plant and animal life all around. The terrified gods ran up to Brahma for succour. He reassured them safety and came down to meet Taraka.

BRAHMA'S BOON

Enraptured Taraka bowed to Brahma. Brahma allowed him to seek any boon of his choice. Taraka said: "Lord, Siva is praying like an anchorite on mount Himalaya. He is not quite prepared yet to marry Parvati. So there is no chance of that couple's coming together and bringing forth a child. I am not afraid of dying at the hands of Siva, or His progeny please grant me the boon that I have the power to conquer all other living creatures and that I could not be killed by anyone born of woman".

Taraka returned to his capital, Sonita-pura, where he was given a royal welcome by his subjects. The teacher of the demons, Sukracharya blessed him and crowned him as the ruler of the three worlds.

Siva, in his aspect of Rudra, symbolised the dull mode of Tamas. Even though he was inwardly regretting the separation from Sati Devi, he was not yet prepared to leave his life of a hermit. Taraka knew that whoever disturbed Siva's penance would be readily destroyed by that deity. Therefore he was under the impression that none could conquer him. But Brahma knew in his heart of hearts that the boon he granted Taraka had an exception, which is the fruit of Taraka's own folly.

With a wish to test the powers he obtained from Brahma's boon, Taraka set off on a crusade. He vanquished Indra and brought under his rule the kingdom of the gods and the demi-gods. Even Kubera, the god of Wealth, was subjugated, and forced to yield all his treasures to Taraka.

Similarly, the frightened Harihaya surrendered his Airavata tusker; the master of the Kinneras ceded the Nine Treasures; Varuna gave away the divine horses; the celestial cow, Kamadhenu, handed over the saint-groups; 'Dogalavinda' showered nectar on him; Mother Earth offered all her produce; the seas gave up their gems all of which enabled Taraka to rule the three worlds with the needed power and skill.

However, the continuous success had warped Taraka's mental outlook. He thought nothing of persecuting all the representatives of virtue, including the harmless sages.

This was the opportunity for which sage Narada was waiting. The sage is fond of creating trouble and engineering quarrels, but with an ulterior good aim.

Narada arrived in Sonitapura. Taraka received him with due honours and inquired of him the state of the three worlds. Narada replied: "Your Highness, you are the mighty hero who conquered Indra, the Lord of the divine hosts. Brahma is the deity who granted you your special powers. Siva is your titular deity. All that you now need to complete your supreme mastery of the universe is to vanquish Lord Vishnu".

Well has it been said, "Vinaasa-Kaale vipareetabuddhih" (one's mind is perverted when the time for one's destruction approaches), Taraka told Narada: "Sage, you know that the might of my boons is so invincible that even Vishnu cannot subdue me. So I will challenge him for a fight. I am sure I will win in such a battle. Please bless me".

Narada said "so be it!" non-committally.

The lover of quarrels, Narada, could never keep a secret. He straightaway went up to Vaikuntha and told Vishnu about Taraka's intention and asked the deity to be prepared for the oncoming fight.

The omniscient Vishnu understood the news conveyed by Narada, with its full significance. Narada took his leave of Vishnu.

As the sound of Taraka's war-drums was heard, Lakshmi Devi began to become nervous.

Taraka, approaching Vishnu, told the latter with contemptuous laughter, "Vishnu, I conquered all the three worlds, with the exception of Vaikuntha. Unless I add your kingdom to my conquests, I cannot be completely happy. Now tell me whether you are prepared to fight with me or going to beg my pardon and seek my refuge".

Enraged at this affront, Vishnu hurled his wheel-weapon at Taraka. It cut off Taraka's head, but the next moment the head regained its position. Lakshmi was astounded. But Brahma's boon cannot be proved to be untrue. Vishnu advised Taraka to go back to Sonitapura, for there was no point in their mutual fight wherein neither could win.

Taraka saw reason and returned to his realm.

At the same time he saw convinced that he vanquished Vishnu, because the latter suggested the way of compromise.

All the gods in heaven, including the lords of Air, Rain, Fire, Death, Medicine, Wealth, and Music were serving Taraka with their special talents. The divine damsels, Apsaras, were dancing for Taraka's delight. Only the sun and the moon were giving warmth and solace respectively to the gods.

The gods and the sages again went up to Brahma and complained to him about Taraka's misdeeds. They impressed on him the need to curb Taraka, for, otherwise, the noble deeds like the sacrificial rites could not be performed with success for the benefit of the entire world.

Brahma told them: "Well, friends, you need not agitate yourselves too much. Circumstances keep changing. Light and darkness ever co-exist, but follow each other. Soon you will see the light of good times. I cannot take back the favours I granted Taraka. The wise men make good use of the boons, whereas the evil ones, misuse them and pave the way to their own ultimate downfall. Taraka's and will come

by his own folly. I will tell you how he can be punished. Parvati is now attending to the needs of Siva during his penance. If you can somehow see to it that they come together as husband and wife, the eventual offspring will crush Taraka and bring you solace. For my part I will advise Taraka to leave heaven and go back to his earthly capital, Sonitapura".

Indra conferred with the teacher of the gods, Brihaspati, and informed him of the words of solace spoken by Brahma. Brihaspati suggested that Manmatha (Cupid) alone could bring about the happy union of Siva and Parvati.

Accordingly, Indra and Brihaspati sent for Manmatha. Manmatha's wife, Rati Devi, had a premonition of disaster. But Manmatha assured her that he would safely return home, after fulfilling the commission of the king of gods.

Rati could only pray to God for succour, as her husband left for heaven to the accompaniment of the music of the loving bird-pair (**chiluka, goruvanka**).

MANMATHA'S MISSION

When Manmatha approached Indra, the latter explained everything and told him that the time had come for him to rise to the occasion, as he alone could come to the aid of the suffering gods and other good people.

But Manmatha protested that he was no match for the wrath of Lord Siva, and suggested someone mightier than himself for the mission.

Nevertheless, Indra reminded him that the teacher of the gods said that only Manmatha could do the needful. Indra assured Manmatha that in as much as the latter was the son of Vishnu and Lakshmi, he had no need to be afraid of Siva, that it was the duty of the one who is capable of helping others to do so even risking personal discomfort, and that the gods would assist him to the best of their ability.

Unable to refuse such convincing persuasion and reassurance, Manmatha accepted the mission entrusted to him, albeit with trepidation and reluctance.

Manmatha introspected: “Oh, who can escape the decrees of Destiny? There is no getting away from the wrath of Siva. Still, rather than go back upon one’s word one should face even death cheerfully, So let me leave for the Bilva forest, to divert Siva’s mind from his austerity”.

Then Manmatha plucked a jasmine and spoke to it: “Dear jasmine, you know how much I love you. Now, can you tell me if there is anything or anyone dearer to me than you?”.

The jasmine replied: “Yes, only one your better half, Rati Devi”.

Manmatha said: “You know, jasmine, Rati loves you very much, because your perfume is the dearest to her. She considers you to be her finest ornament, and even goes to the extent of saying that looking at you she feels the same pleasure as she derives from seeing me. So I shall send you now to my wife to keep her company, because she cannot tolerate the separation from me even for a second. She cannot sleep or eat without first seeing me eat and sleep. She does all the things that are dear to me. She wakes me up first thing in the morning with her sweet songs; whenever I am absent-minded and forget to eat and drink, she herself feeds me and makes me eat and drink whatever I like best. Now please explain to her that I may return home safely if I obtain the grace of Siva. This is my message for her ‘Darling, you know I am entrusted with the task of arranging Siva’s wedding. I shall come back to you alive, with God’s blessing; if not, I shall still be alive in my entity of glory and even then my soul will remain alive to my memory of your love. May God bless you and keep you!’”.

So saying, Manmatha released the arrow which is studded with the jasmine flower.

JASMINE’S EMBASSY

As Rati was eagerly awaiting her husband’s return, she espied the jasmine flying along the celestial path. The sight of the flower gave her new hope, and she was sure that it was carrying news of her lord. Suddenly the jasmine dropped down on Rati’s shoulder. The jasmine seems to have lost its freshness and perfume. Rati’s eyes were filled with tears, seeing the plight of the flower.

Rati seemed to have gathered the message of her husband from the state of the flower, whose embassy was expressed through in its silence.

As Rati was wailing that the heartless Indra was responsible for the self-sacrificing task of Manmatha, her maids consoled her that, since Parvati is the incarnation of ‘Para Sakti’, no harm would befall her husband.

Helplessly, Rati placed the jasmine in her hair and was hoping against for the return of Manmatha.

MANMATHA’S DUTY DONE

As Manmatha arrived in the Bilva garden, he saw Siva engaged in deep penance. There was no sign of Parvati. Getting behind a Bilva tree he aimed a flower-arrow at the Lord’s feet. The flower which fell on target felt that its life was sanctified with the touch of Siva’s feet.

Still Siva did not move a bit. The flower faded.

However, the garden all around was in full flowering. The streams were flowing with limpid water. The **cuckoos** and other spring birds were singing melodiously. The cows were being passionately followed by the stud-bulls. The moon was shining in full splendour. All this was the good effect of Manmatha’s flower-arrow, the harbinger of springtide.

Early next morning Parvati left for the Bilva garden, along with her maids, to serve the needs of Siva. As she entered the garden,

she felt good omens. She expressed her joy indirectly to her friends: “It is time to attend to the morning needs of Siva. If we delay, our hopes may be belied”. To which Kalahabhashini replied: “Well, only people who entertain hopes are likely to be disappointed. What do we, who never hope for anything, care about ‘hopes being belied’?”.

Parvati was offended by her maid’s retort. Kalahabhashini sought her forgiveness.

As Parvati and her mates arrived there, the hermitage looked like a pleasure park. The warm day appeared to be like the soft night and to be showering gently rays of moonlight. Parvati felt a thrill running through her entire being. Reassured that her love would soon bear fruit, she was eager to serve her Lord.

Manmatha was pleurably amazed at the sight of Parvati’s matchless loveliness and grace and poise. He wondered whether Siva’s adamant silence was but a ruse to test the love of Parvati.

Parvati worshipfully placed a few fragrant flowers near Siva’s feet. Siva opened his eyes and saw her. Grasping the opprotune moment, Manmatha aimed at Siva all his five flower-arrows (Aravinda, Asoka, Chuta, Mallika and Utpala). The blue-lily-hit made Siva impassioned.

The sidelong loving look of Parvati drove away Siva’s insentient aspect, and she stole His heart. Siva thought that no other woman was fit to hold a candle to Parvati. The more He gazed at her the more He was attracted by her incomparable beauty. His own glance reciprocated Parvati’s ardent look. Parvati’s friends were gratified.

SIVA’S PENANCE MARRED

Siva was bewildered at the change in His outlook. Seeing that it was due to the mischief of Manmatha, He opened the third eye on His forehead. Terrifying flames rose up from the eye and were about to consume Manmatha.

Manmatha fell prostrate at Siva’s feet and supplicated: “Lord, I did what I was ordered to do by my master, the lord of the gods, Indra, for the benefit of all creation. I admit that I have been otherwise guilty of misleading many a chaste woman and several innocuous young men; maybe these flames are the converted tears of those unfortunates, now about to burn me up. And yet, Lord, my wife Rati is innocent in every way. I leave it to Thy sense of justice to protect her”. As he had his say, the flames consumed him and he turned into ashes. Siva’s heart was hardened. The whole Bilva garden itself was burnt up. All the lookers-on were wondering what further disaster, might befall.

RATI’S LAMENT

Here Rati felt bad omens. Realising that Siva’s third eye burnt up her husband, she ran up to Siva and wailed thus: “Lord, you know my husband is not to blame for what happened. He was doing the bidding of his master to see that you and Parvati beget the offspring who alone would be able to kill the demon Taraka. I do not have to tell you that even death is preferable to widowhood to a woman. If you do not take pity on me and restore my husband to me, I may have to turn to Parvati for help. Thereby I may bring about a rift between you, which I want to avoid if I can. So kindly grant me my humble and just wish”.

Siva’s originally soft heart was moved. He said: “Rati, it is not at all my intention to separate husband and wife. But my third eye opened involuntarily, as a result of the marring of my penance. Your husband’s death is irrevocable. However, I see the justice of your complaint. I revive him to the extent that he would be visible to you alone and that he would be able to discharge his love-inciting duty invisibly. Go and live happily together with your husband, who will now regain his life with the just mentioned stipulation”.

Rati and Manmatha bowed to Siva gratefully and took their leave of him.

Siva gave up his penance and returned to his Kailasa abode.

Parvati was unable to make out Siva's actions. She could not quite see the justice of burning up Manmatha. Nor could she understand his going back to Kailasa without so much as saying a word of farewell to her. Disappointed and dejected, she returned home, along with her maids.

Learning about the happenings from the maids, Parvati's parents were much grieved. Seeing his wife and his daughter mope inconsolably, Himavan told them: "Why do you weep so? All in good time. Siva must have had some reason behind returning to Kailasa. There is no way the birth of the child of Siva and Parvati can be stopped, because Taraka's end is pre-ordained. Just wait and you will see that everything will turn out in our favour".

Meanwhile sage Narada called on them. Seeing him Parvati's hopes were raised. After receiving their words and acts of welcome, the sage told them: "Siva is always partial to those who depend on Him. In due course the wedding of Siva and Parvati will take place with great splendour. A mighty son will be born to them. Who alone will be able to punish Taraka. The sages and the gods are on your side. Therefore rest assured that all will end well".

PARVATI'S PENANCE

Parvati was impressed by Narada's assurance. However, not to leave things to chance, she began performing a great penance in order to obtain the favour of Siva by her own effort. Narada advised her to perform her penance chanting the five-lettered sacred Mantra, '**NAMAH SIVAAYA**', which is preeminently suited to remove all sins and to cause all benefits.

Parvati received the sage's blessings and her parent's permission for her vow. But, true to the feminine instinct, Menaka tried to dissuade her daughter from undertaking a rigorous task, just for the purpose of obtaining a recluse-like spouse. She further told her daughter: "Even if you still want Siva for your husband, you

can pray to him while comfortably staying in the home. I never heard about any woman going to the forest to do penance for obtaining a husband. By offering prayers in their own homes, have not Lakshmi, Sanjna, Sachi and Rohini respectively won the favours of Vishnu, Sun, Indra and Moon?".

When Parvati remained adamant, Menaka said: "At least take your maids with you, if you insist on going to the jungle. May God bless you".

Parvati could not sleep a wink that night. Rising from the bed early next morning she talked to Priyamvada: "Friend, I have to go to the forest, removing all my ornaments, and I have to live there without food and drink. If you like you and some other maids may accompany me. I will be completely immersed in praying to Siva and will not think of anyone or anything else till my prayers are answered".

As her mother and her friends failed to persuade her to stay at home, Parvati set off for the forest, shorn of all her jewellery and rich raiments, Dressed in a plain fibre cloth like a nun, she walked towards the forest, accompanied by a few loyal maids. Even the dumb beasts and birds seemed to shed tears looking at the royal princess walking like a mendicant towards the forlorn forest. Himavan and Menaka bade farewell to her, with tears in their eyes.

Parvati and her maids reached the holy spot by name, "Sringa Teertha". The forest deities bade her welcome. She felt signs of forthcoming good, and began her penance with firm determination and one-pointed devotion. The maids stayed at a respectable distance, guarding her against any possible untoward happening.

To control her body and mind with equal self-forgetfulness, Parvati stood amidst the 'five fires' (Panchagni) during summer; in unprotected open air during monsoon; on snowy mountain peaks during winter. She was all the time fasting. Verily she is

known as 'Aparna', because she would not eat even a tender leaf (parna) during her penance.

When she saw that her rigorous penance was of no avail, she plaintively addressed Siva thus: "O Lord Siva, you are omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent. You are all-merciful and all-powerful. I care not for my personal comfort. I shall surmount any obstacle that comes in the way of my becoming yours. I swear on all that is sacred to me all those ornaments and paraphernalia of yours that I am as pure as the driven snow and an immaculate virgin. I surrender myself entirely to you. Take me my Lord!".

The naturally tender heart, of Siva melted. But if He accepted Parvati's hand, He would again become a householder and has to give up His celibacy. Thereby His ideal of complete detachment will fail. On the other hand, He thought further, if He would not marry Parvati she might even take her own life which would mean that the entire world would blame that tragic eventuality on Him. It was as if He was caught between the devil and the deep sea.

The flames arising from the penance-power of Parvati have been spreading on all sides. The gods and the sages were frightened and they ran up to Brahma took them to Vaikuntha, where they were duly greeted by Lakshmi and Vishnu. Vishnu told Brahma: "I suggest that you take the hordes of the gods to Kailasa to persuade Siva, whose obstinacy saw the burning of Manmatha and not led the flame of Parvati's penance-power to consume the world around her".

But the gods would not dare face Siva. Tremblingly they appealed to Vishnu: "Lord, we cannot bring ourselves to go into the penance of Siva, who is enraged on account of the failure of his penance. We beseech that you and Brahma represent us in this connection".

Agreeing, Vishnu took them along to Kailasa.

EMBASSY

When Vishnu and party arrived at Kailasa, Nandi conveyed the news of their arrival to Siva. Siva received them with due honours and asked them the purpose of their visit.

Brahma and Vishnu requested Siva to marry Parvati rightaway, because only an offspring of their wedding would be able to quell the demoniac Taraka.

Siva said: "I quite understand your position. But you know what marriage does to a austere way of life. Woman is the source of all evil. To become a slave to the sexual passion would ruin my peace of mind and my penance. Of all the worldly bonds, that which makes man attached to a woman is the strongest and vilest. None who seeks bliss should fall a prey to the wiles of woman".

Smilingly Brahma rejoined: "Lord Siva, what you say is true only of the lesser mortals of the world. Besides, there is none in the universe who is the equal of a good woman the ornament of the home, the mother of creation, the noble hostess who has to give the alms to the wandering monks also. After all, how many times before have you not broken your vows for the sake of the suffering world? Have you not saved the entire world from annihilation by drinking up the poisonous holocaust, Haalaahala? Now is the time for you to come to the aid of the good people of the world who are being devoured by the bad people headed by Taraka. You as a noble deity have the sacred responsibility of saving the suffering world which looks up to you".

THE TEST BY THE SEVEN SAGES

Lord Siva commissioned the Seven Sages to go and test the sincerity of Parvati. Accordingly, they went down to meet her and spoke to her: "Parvati, Narada is an unreliable schemer. By initiating the daughters of Daksh in the ways of renunciation he caused a rift between parent and children. Teaching the 'Narayana Mantra' to the wife of Hiranyakasipu, and thereby making her give birth to the

Vishnu-devotees, Prahlada, he made the son eventually bring about the downfall of the father. Please don't heed the advice of this quarrel-monger. You can never hope to divert Siva from his penance. After all, what sort of happiness do you hope to receive from a Mendicant like Siva? Go back to your palace and make yourself comfortable in your natural surroundings".

Smilingly Parvati replied: "Siva, is it fair on the part of such sages as you to speak such words? Do I not know that Siva is the Lord of all spiritual splendour, the Master of scriptural wisdom and the Saviour of the universe? Both His devotees and His foes, Brahma, Vishnu, Indra, Daksha, Manmatha and a host of others can bear witness to his unrivalled valour. Besides, if it is not to enjoy bodily joys that I seek the hand of Siva: if he is a monk I will be a nun; if he is the great destroyer, Mahakala, I will be Kali, and both of us will simultaneously destroy the evil forces and re-create the world of virtue and goodwill. No other penance or vow or prayer or worship is as effective as that directed to Lord Siva. Why should I leave the all-powerful, all-merciful and all-bountiful Siva and seek some other lesser pleasures or comforts of transitory existence?"

Immensely impressed by these words of Parvati, the seven sages returned to Siva and reported to him about her unrelenting devotion and dedication and devotion.

TEST BY SIVA

Assured by the sages of Parvati's sincere love for Him, Siva wanted to test her Himself finally before He made her His own.

He assumed the guise of an old monk, and, limping with the aid of a walking stick, he went near her, as she was immersed in deep meditation. Looking on the evocative effulgence arising from her he was wonder-struck.

Opening her eyes, Parvati greeted the old mendicant cordially, offering him holy waters and sweet fruits. After doing the honours, she said: "Sir, to what do I owe the honour of your gracious visit?"

You indeed look like one of the Trinity, and this hermitage has acquired a new grace by your presence. Kindly reveal your identity".

The monk replied: "I am one of the progeny of Brahma and a wandering monk. Doing penance, I try to benefit the whole world. But tell me, who you are? You look like one of the consorts of the Trinity. Why should you undertake such rigorous penance? What is your purpose? Are you separated from your husband?"

Parvati said: "Lord, you are omniscient. I have been doing penance to receive the favours of Siva. But till now He has not granted me His appearance before me. Just as I was about to immolate myself by jumping into the fire, you have come here. It is only to offer you my humble hospitality I had not yet committed suicide. I have done my duty to you. My sole aim is to be the spouse of Siva, no matter how many rebirths it takes me to achieve it".

So saying, she entered the fire. But the fire made itself cool to her touch. Seeing that miracle, the monk said: "Lady, even the god of fire is reluctant to be his natural self, So your suicide-attempt is in vain. Do not lose hope. Why should you wish to turn your golden being into a useless piece of clod".

Parvati then made a sign to Priyamvada, who then spoke to the monk: "Holy father, this is my friend, She is named Parvati, because she is the daughter of the mountain (Parvata) king, Himavan, She is also known as Kali. She is truly in love with Lord Siva. Although she is born a princess, she is prepared to lead the simple life of the consort of the deity who is the symbol of detachment and renunciation. She is now performing a hard penance because her sole aim in life is to be the spouse of Siva. Before she started her penance she planted some saplings which have now grown into full-blossomed trees. And yet her prayers do not seem to be answered by Siva".

The monk turned towards Parvati and asked whether what her friend said was true. Parvati answered: "As God is my witness

I surrender myself to Siva; I wish to 'buy' his love with my mind, heart and soul, with the power of my penance; with the sincerity of my aim in thought, word and deed; and in short, with my entire conscious being. I do not know whether what I do is right or wrong, but I do know that I am born only to be the consort of Lord Siva".

The monk: "Oh, is this all your wish? Well, I am an old man. I have no business to linger here. I must go on my way".

As the monk turned his back and was leaving, Parvati supplicated: "Holy father, what is all this hurry? Have you no word of encouragement for this hapless woman?".

ABUSE OF SIVA

The monk stopped and spoke to Parvati: "Princess, why do you waste your love on the mendicant, Siva, whose mount is a dull bull, whose retinue is filled with ghosts, whose clothes are made of animal hide, whose body is smeared with ash and who is detached from the world? Like you, Sati Devi fell in love with him; her father fell out with Siva, as a result of which she had to immolate herself in the sacrificial fire. You are a born princess. You who are bedecked in priceless jewels, how can you put up with a person whose ornaments are snakes? If Siva is rich, why should he go about semi-naked? If he has a worthy home why should he dwell in burial-grounds? Above all, if he really loved you, why should he turn Manmatha into ashes? Be advised and turn your attention on someone else, who is your fit partner".

Parvati was offended and said: "Sir, I thought you were a kind soul. But now I see you have come here to disturb me. Stop this meaningless abuse of the great god, and hear from me the truth about Siva".

TRUTH ABOUT THE SIVA-ENTITY

"God the Absolute has no attributes. But, in order to create the world of beings who were destined to be born, the attribute of

Maaya (Nature) was allowed to be attached to It like the reflection in a mirror. The Supremed self has nothing to do with the distinctions of the manifest world like the human of caste and colour and creed. Effortlessly, like the human breath, the scriptures evolved out of the Absolute, and they were handed over to Vishnu by God. The task of creation was entrusted to Brahma. The rulership of heaven was offered to Indra. The nine treasures were left in the care of Kubera. The original form of that Absolute resides in Siva, Now, what makes you think that supreme Siva is a mere mendicant?. Where the eight Siddhis flourish, there is the abode of Siva. Can you really understand the supreme nature of Siva, by worshipping whom the lowliest of the lowly attains his heart's desire, and the worst of the sprites cannot harm one? If, as you say, Siva is such a poor person how is it that He bestows all the riches on those that serve Him? Why is it that the Vedic scholars universally bend their heads in obedience to Him? His residence is the silver mountain; His bow is the golden mountain (mount Meru). Sir, how can a veritable mendicant like you appreciate the phenomenal mendicant who is otherwise the true lord of all riches, the real saviour of the universe? Such men as you who abuse Siva must be taught a severe lesson. If this is not possible, they must be shunned. Come, Priyamvada, let us leave the presence of this false accuser of Siva".

SIVA IS PLEASED

Siva was impressed by the sincerity of Parvati and revealed Himself before her. "Dear, you have conquered me by your true penance and by your sincere chanting of my name ("Namah Sivaya"). I shall reciprocate your love and devotion and affection. Your pains have been rewarded. There is none in the world who is your equal. Forget the past of our separation. Now let us be united in unending love".

Parvati was elated. She thus addressed the personification of true love, the fulfiller of her life wish: "Lord, you know that I am the Sati Devi who is reborn as the daughter of Himavan. Informing my

parents about our mutual love, take me to Kailasa as a true consecrated offering. We must be wed in accordance with the Vedic injunctions. It was because Sita and Rama were married, without the performance of the ‘nine-planet worship’, that they had to go through trials and tribulations later on”.

Smiling with contentment, Siva said: “You are the ‘Maaya’ (natural) attribute of the attributeless Absolute which I originally am, I am the Self of the entire universe. I am the Cosmic Person, and you are the manifest Nature. In our union, the nine planets and other manifestations from an integral part. There is no need for us to worship anything else but to be true to ourselves. You and I represent the phenomenal aspect of creation and the noumenal source of creation respectively”.

Parvati, delighted, said: “Lord, your words are perfectly true. I know you, in your original self, have no need to deal with the world of duality. But since I am the creative principle, comprising the three modes of Nature (**Sattva, Rajas and Tamas**), I have to respect the formalities of the manifest world. So kindly take the permission of my parents for our marriage. When people learn about your humility, in taking this step which you can otherwise dispense with, they will praise you all the more”.

Siva saw the reason of Parvati’s advice.

But before he could fulfil that formality, He had to return to His abode, Kailasa. The ‘pramatha’ hordes who learnt about the fulfilment of the love of Parvati were extremely pleased.

PANGS OF SEPARATION

Parvati was happy on hearing Siva’s request to accompany him to His abode. But she said that she would gladly follow Him after their formal wedding. Then she completed the formal performance of her penance and returned to her palace with her maids.

As she neared her home, Menaka and Himavan went forward and greeted her with affection. Learning from her about the success of her penance, they thanked their lucky stars and were immensely delighted.

Later they placed her in a golden chariot and took her to their palace, where she was given a ceremonial reception with the chanting of the sacred hymns by the Vedic scholars and with the welcoming traditional paraphernalia by her mother and other women. Himavan gave suitable gifts to the Vedic scholars and the lady guests.

Parvati was restless all night. Although Siva invited her to accompany Him to Kailasa straight away, the formality of the wedding stood in the way of her complying with His suggestion. She knew that Siva would never go back on His word, and was joyously recollecting His assurances concerning the reciprocation of her for him. At last when she did doze off Siva appeared in a dream and reassured her about His love for her. When she opened her eyes she could not see Him. As she uncomfortably tossed in her bed in dejection, her maids attended on her and encouraged her with the news of her imminent wedding to Siva.

ALIEN MONK

For his part Siva himself found the time hanging heavily on his hands at Kailasa. He wanted to see Parvati somehow or other. So he put on the garb of a wandering monk and went down to the Himalayas. There he regaled the denizens with his cosmic dance, and his musical blowing of the conch.

Learning about that mysterious visitor who was stealing the hearts of the people at large, Menaka wished to witness his art. As though in ready answer to her prayers, Siva turned up at the gate of the palace-gate no sooner than she entertained that wish.

The false monk blew his conch, beat his drum and began to dance to his own music. Parvati joined her mother. Looking at the splendid countenance of the visitor and his uncanny skill of singing

and dancing, she realised the monk was none other than her would-be spouse in disguise.

The false mendicant also realised that his beloved found him out, and knowingly smiled in response to her reverential glances at him.

Menaka wanted to reward that mendicant-minstrel with pearls and diamonds, But Siva refused them and instead said that he wanted the hand of her daughter. Menaka was enraged at this request of a person whom she mistook for a mere mendicant. She chided him: ‘Fellow, you look like a monk who has renounced the world. How dare you seek the hand of a princess? Go back on your way, you old beggar! If you linger here further, I will have you kicked out by my servants’.

The monk was unmoved by this threat. He resumed his singing and dancing. Parvati told her mother that the visitor was Siva in disguise and requested her to persuade Himavan to arrange the wedding in good time. But Menaka was not yet convinced and complained to Himavan about the monk’s audacity. Himavan, angered, instructed his men to send the mendicant away from the courtyard.

Siva eluded the hands of the king’s men, and put them to great trouble by playing ‘hide-and-peek’ with them.

Siva then turned himself into Vishnu, his four hands each holding the conch, the mace, the disc and the bejewelled bow (saaringa). This was to impress upon the lookers-on the non-duality between Siva and Vishnu.

Parvati alone understood that gesture and bowed to the monk respectfully.

At that point Siva assumed in a flash the forms of Vivasvan and Nataraja successively, and then vanished in thin air.

None could make out the significance of that act, and everybody was fearing the wrath of Siva.

Siva returned to Kailasa. Once again he reported what transpired on the Himalayas to the seven sages. He also requested them to go meet Himavan and make him see reason.

The seven sages were gratified that they were going to be in the instruments in the eventual wedding of Siva and Parvati. Indeed, to be able to see Siva and, more, to help Him, was like the blind gaining sight, the deaf acquiring hearing and the barren woman begetting children-they thought.

ANARANYA

On hearing the news of the arrival of the Seven Sages, Himavan and Menaka received them with appropriate honours.

Vasishtha then told Himavan: ‘O king, a great devotee of Siva, Anaranya, was born in the Manu clan. He had five wives, by whom he had a hundred sons and a daughter. The girl was named Padma. She was as wise as she was lovely. When she came of age, her father was on the lookout for a suitable bridegroom.

PIPPALADA

‘In the Pushpabhadra river, Padma was playing water games with her friends. It so happened that the son Dadhichi, sage Pippalaada, passed that way at that hour. On seeing Padma, he fell in love with her rightaway. Learning that she was the daughter of Anaranya, Pippalaada went to meet him and begged him for the hand of his daughter. He threatened that he would destroy the Anaranya clan in case his request was not honoured by the latter.

‘Anaranya was unhappy at the idea of getting his beautiful young daughter married to an old sage, and sought the help of Siva to avoid that eventuality.

‘In the meantime another sage came on the scene and advised Anaranya to accede to ‘Pippalaada’ request. Anaranya agreed to do so; Padma too accepted the hand of Pippalaada willingly. The wedding of Padma and Pippalaada was performed in great style. The bride and groom were living together happily.

DHARMA

“One day when the lovely Padma was bathing in a lake, Dharma happened to see her and he readily took a fancy to her. He told her: “O beautiful lady, I am the emperor of this world. I am young and romantic, whereas your husband is an aged ascetic. You who are so good-looking that even the damsels of heaven cannot bear comparison with you must realise that you must not waste the few young years of your life. I will see that you have most enjoyable time of your life in my company, and I will make my other queens subservient to you!.

“The chaste Padma was angry with this prattle of the king and replied: “You may be an emperor, but you are the worst of sinners because you who should protect the virtuous and punish the wicked are yourself trying to commit an adulterous crime. My husband is respected by the entire world and I love and worship him. If you try to molest me, you will be the target of the fire of my imprecation, which cannot be put out, even if the real fire may ever become cold”.

“Frightened, Dharma said: ‘Mother, actually I am not a king. I have only come to test your character. Forgive me my folly; henceforth I shall look upon other women as my mother. I will pray to Lord Siva for salvation--- that benign deity who is the saviour of the fallen and the source of the universal energy’.

“Padma was impressed by the sincere contrition of Dharma and told him: ‘Sir, I mistreated you, because of my characteristic feminine frailty. I now understood you. May you grow and decrease in cycles like the moon. You will walk on four legs in the age of Krita; on three legs in the age of Treta; on two legs in the age of Dvapara; and on one leg in the age of Kali. Now it is time for me to go back and serve my husband’.

“Dharma was amazed at her sense of propriety and at her liberality. He blessed her: ‘May you live in continual bliss with your

husband, whom I now grant youth and longevity. Your husband, in his regained youth, will please you in every way, for he will now be as endowed with long life as Markandeya, as rich as Kubera, as powerfully prosperous as Indra, as wise as Siva and Vishnu who treat each other as equals, as knowledgeable as sage Kapila, as pleasing as the full moon, as clever as Angirasa, and as all-knowing as Brahma’.

“Accordingly, the now youthful Pippalada and Padma spent many glorious years of felicitous married life and had ten sons”.

WISE COUNSEL

Then Vasishtha spoke to Himavan: “Please make all the arrangements for the wedding of Siva and Parvati. The auspicious day is the Monday evening in the month of Margasirsha, when all the stars and the planets will be in proper conjunction”.

Himavan agreed with the advice of the sage.

Similarly, Menaka also accepted the advice of Arundhati, the wife of Vasishtha, concerning the wedding and the wedding arrangements.

Parvati bowed to Arundhati and the seven sages, and received their blessings.

Himavan told the sages: “Your advice is a command to us, which we cannot disobey. Henceforth Parvati is the property of Lord Siva. We will be awaiting Siva’s pleasure. Kindly convey to Him our regards”.

Vasistha complimented Himavan on his wisdom.

Himavan, Menaka, Parvati and others gave the sages and Arundhati a fittingly reverential farewell.

Returning to Kailasa, the sages reported to Siva, in glowing terms, about Himavan’s acceptance of their proposal and about the hospitality they received on the Himalayas. They also informed Siva

about the fixing of the 'Muhurta' (auspicious moment) and about the ceding of the heart of Parvati, as a prewedding gift to him.

Siva was pleased. When he said that he had no 'relations' in the world, the sages reminded him about the other members of the Trinity and about the lord of the hosts, Indra, who along with their spouses would take care of all the wedding arrangements on Siva's side.

SUBHA LEKHA (WEDDING CARD)

Himavan himself composed the wedding invitation and sent it to Siva through his son, Mainaka, and his court priest. Before leaving for Kailasa, Mainaka also took a letter from his sister, Parvati, addressed to Siva.

Mainaka and the priest arrived on the silver mount. Siva received them appropriately, when they bowed to his feet.

They handed over Himavan's invitation and Parvati's letter to Siva, who received and read them with great delight.

Siva assured the duo that he would be on mount Himalaya at the appropriate hour before the auspicious moment fixed for the wedding.

Pleased with the success of their mission, Mainaka and the priest returned to Himalayas after taking their leave of Lord Siva.

WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

The three heavenly couples whom Siva requested to make the wedding arrangements arrived on mount Kailasa and gladly accepted Siva's orders in that connection.

The divine architect, Visvakarma, built a magnificent edifice on mount Kailasa, for the residence of Siva and Parvati, after their wedding. Lakshmi and Vishnu provided all the valuable household goods. The Pramatha hordes decorated the surroundings with flowers and festoons.

On the eve of his departure for the wedding at Himalaya, Siva was duly anointed by the chaste ladies. The personified river, Ganga, embedded in Siva's locks, appeared to be enraged. Then Lakshmi and Sarasvati pacified her.

Here on the Himalayas, the successful return of Mainaka and the royal priest was greeted with rejoicing and fanfare. Parvati rewarded her maids with many jewels, on hearing about Siva's acceptance of the marriage proposal.

WEDDING PARTY

Siva sent word to Himavan that he was arriving for the wedding, accompanied, by the other members of the Trinity, the gods and demi-gods in heaven, and their families.

Himavan went forward and greeted them aptly.

The capital of the Himalayan kingdom, Oshadhiprasthapura, was filled with the rejoicing and the glorying in the gracing of the mount with the presence of those supreme celestial denizens.

Lakshmi and Vishnu, Saraswati and Brahma, arrived on their respective mounts, the Garuda eagle and the royal swan. Preceded by Nandi, Shiva arrived on his bull mount.

All the heavenly guests were delighted with the respectful welcome they received from Himavan and his party.

As the wedding party was entering the Himalayan capital, Siva's eyes fell on the shrine wherein the idols of Rama and Seeta were consecrated. Getting down from his mount, Siva walked up to the temple and saluted the divine couple, who appeared to be greeting Siva in their corporeal form. Sita and Rama blessed the bashful bridegroom. The onlookers were impressed with Siva's humility and sense of devotion.

When they entered the wedding hall, the specially arranged orchestra struck up soulful music, and the dancers and danseuses

began displaying their art with splendid skill. Hearing all that joyous clamour, Parvati wanted to steal a glance at the wedding party from the terrace of her palace. She was followed by her maids, who made fun of her, for her impatience.

Siva happened to look up at that moment, and his eyes spoke the language of silent communion to the lovingly reciprocating eyes of Parvati. The hearts of the bride and the bridegroom were suffused with indescribable mutual love. How strong is the love-impulse that it should do overwhelm even the divine couple!

BRIDAL MAKE-UP

Parvati was given the auspicious bath. Then she was adorned with all kinds of ornaments studded with every kind of precious stone.

As the fully made-up Parvati saw herself in the mirror, she found Siva's reflexion instead of hers, saying how he was eagerly awaiting the golden moment of joining hands with her and how he wished he could place a beauty spot on her left cheek, which would add an exotic touch to her pre-eminently graceful complexion!

When Parvati seemed to be enraptured in spite of herself and lost in thought before the mirror, her maids made fun of her, exclaiming how anxious she was to meet her lord.

WORSHIPPING THE DIVINE MOTHER

The pearl-studded palanquin was ready for the escorting of Parvati to the temple of Ambika.

Menaka led the procession as the chaste ladies and the maids carried the flower baskets and the golden vessels containing the material for consecration and worship.

The palanquin-bearers set down the palanquin opposite the Ambika temple. The shrine was reverberating with the sound of the chiming bells and the recitation of the sacred scriptural hymns by the priests.

Menaka and Parvati fell prostrate at the feet of the image of Ambika. The priests then performed the 'Sahasra nama puja' (the chanting of the thousand names of the Goddess).

When the bride broke the coconut on the sacred stone, the fruit was divided into two equal halves a good omen.

After the worship by Parvati, the priests chanted the 'Mantra Pushpam' and offered 'Nirajanam'. Everyone saluted the holy flame and received gratefully and worshipfully the consecrated 'Prasadam' (sacramental food) after the successful completion of the entire 'Puja'.

THE WEDDING OF SIVA AND PARVATI

The auspicious hour of the wedding was approaching. The royal priest, Garga, and the brother of Parvati, Mainaka, went up to the lodgings of the bridegroom's party to welcome and bring Siva to the wedding hall.

After the formal welcome by the bride's representatives, the bridegroom's party set off to the palace of Himavan, as the demi-gods held the white canopy over Siva's head and the Pramatha hordes shouted the slogans hailing the glory of Lord Siva. They were preceded by the group of musicians who struck up the band with the wedding march.

Menaka and Himavan went forward to greet Siva and his party. They sprinkled perfumed water on the groom and the guests, and the chaste ladies completed their formal requirements of ceremonial welcome.

Mainaka led Siva by the hand to the wedding altar. The priest then welcomed Siva to his seat.

Then Parvati's parents and the royal priest went to escort Parvati to the wedding dais.

As the bride was approaching the altar, a golden garment was used as a screen hiding the bride and the groom from seeing each other till the exact auspicious moment of the 'Muhurtam'.

THE 'PRAVARA' EPISODE

The 'Pravara' (lineage) of the bride and of the bridegroom has to be recited before the wedding takes place.

The court priest of the Himalayan kingdom is not aware of Siva's 'Pravara'. When asked for the information about his 'Pravara', Siva merely smiled and kept quiet. The Seven Sages were disgusted with the ignorance and audacity of the priest. Narada chided the priest: "Sir, your question is silly. Don't you know that the Source of all creation has no other source except Himself? Lord Siva assumed this physical form because for the benefit of humanity; else He has no need to take birth among us. Indeed, who can understand the mystery of Siva's immanence or transcendence?".

Himavan was astounded.

Vishnu said that Narada spoke the truth.

'Quite so', said Brahma.

The rest of the gods and the sages expressed their approval in similar words.

Himavan bowed to Siva and prayed for his forgiveness on behalf of his priest.

To make amends the priest then recited the "Siva Stotra" (Paean to Lord Siva).

Siva was pleased. He placed his feet in a golden plate. As Menaka poured the consecrated water, Himavan washed the feet of Siva, and then sprinkled the water that dropped from the feet on his head. Similarly, he sprinkled the same water on the heads of his wife and his daughter.

As a matter of form, Himavan presented Siva with four gold rupees and said: "Lord Siva, I am now offering you my beloved

daughter, who is entirely devoted to you. In doing so I am merely returning to you the gift you yourself have granted me. Hereafter you will be the protector and lover of her till eternity."

When the needed formalities--- such as placing the consecrated paste on the head of the bride by the bridegroom from underneath the screen--- were gone through, the screen separating the couple was removed. At once they looked into each other's eyes ecstatically and significantly.

Now Menaka and Himavan stepped aside.

Siva put on the sacred thread and the golden bracelet handed to him by Garga. The 'Mangala Sutra' (sacred necklace with twin pendants, symbolising the wedded status of a woman, which neither a widow nor a maiden should wear) was passed around the honoured guests for their benedictory handling, and, returned to Siva, was tied around the neck of the bride by the bridegroom, to the accompaniment of holy hymns and auspicious music.

After the wedding, Siva addressed the gathering and assured them of His constant protection. He offered suitable gifts to Garga and the Vedic scholars.

WEDDING FEAST

As the newly wed couple went round the holy fire, the Fire-God obediently blessed them.

Then Himavan requested the guests to accept his hospitality for the wedding feast. Menaka and Himavan went round the guests and entreated them to eat the sumptuous fare to their heart's content...

Parvati was seated next to Siva. According to tradition, the woman must not start eating before her husband does so. Siva was doing nothing. Parvati was at a loss as to what to do. As she sent a sideglance towards her husband, he made a sign which suggested that she begins eating first. She pointed her finger to his plate, to

indicate that he should start first. Again Siva signalled that she should eat first. Parvati bent her head bashfully and kept quiet.

Mentally praying to Sita and Rama, Siva took tiny morsels of various food-items, uttering the “Prana-ahutis” (‘grace’). Parvati ate only those items which Siva did. When Siva placed a few morsels of choice food in Parvati’s plate, she ate them as though they were the most consecrated offerings of God. Meanwhile, the cup with the porridge, which was near Parvati’s plate, disappeared. As she turned towards her lord, he was seen drinking the porridge. She softly asked him how the porridge tasted. He said ‘sour’, and added that the only sweet thing in the world was in her heart. Once more Parvati bent her head shyly.

Brahma and Sarasvati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, and other important guests, were observing this ‘love-play’ between Siva and Parvati, with silent good humour.

After the wedding feast, the guests went to their respective lodgings to take rest.

Siva and Parvati were seated on a diamond-studded throne, exchanging small talk, concerning the various phases of their wedding celebration. They were all praise for the hospitality of Menaka and Himavan.

APPEAL

In the meantime Rati Devi approached Siva and lamented: “Lord, at the behest of Indra, and for the benefit of the entire universe, my husband disturbed your penance, Indeed he was indirectly instrumental in bringing about your union with Parvati. On this auspicious occasion, may I beseech you to restore my husband to me?”

The assembled goddesses joined Rati Devi in her rightful appeal.

Siva acceded to their request and brought back Manmatha to full life. When Rati and Manmatha bowed to him, Siva suggested that Manmatha seek a favour from him. Manmatha merely sought

forgiveness for his folly. Pleased, Siva said: “Manmatha, fear not. Go back to Indra’s court and resume your former activities”.

Indra received Rati and Manmatha with gladness and due honours, when they returned to paradise.

GOOD MORNING

As the auspicious ‘Shehnai’ music was being played at dawn, Parvati woke earlier than her husband, as became a devout wife.

The heralds of the morning were reciting the hymns sacred to Siva. Before long Siva too woke up. The divine couple then blessed all those that assembled there to worship them.

STROLLING IN THE GARDEN

That evening Siva and Parvati took a walk in the pleasure garden. The deities of the forest bade them welcome, along with the flora and fauna which seemed to flourish with greater splendour at the arrival of the blessed pair in their midst.

As they sat on a moonstone seat by the side of a lake, the royal swan couples began moving in the water with cadenced, graceful motions.

Siva and Parvati were gratified to see that both the animate and the inanimate world were sharing their felicity.

UNITY OF TRINITY

When they were alone, Parvati told Siva: “Lord, I am unable to delve into the mystery of your actions. For example, you, Brahma and Vishnu look like brothers. Kindly enlighten me on the true relationship between you and the other two.

Siva said: “I am glad you want to be informed about this vital matter, because this is something which many a wise man is curious about. Actually, God is One. We three are the three facets of a single Entity. By worshipping any one of us, the fruits or praying to all of us will be enjoyed by the devotee. Brahma is responsible for

the creation, Vishnu for the preservation, and I for the extinction, and re-creation, of the species. Similarly, you are like a sister to Sarasvati and Lakshmi.”

DUTIES OF A CHASTE LADY (PATIVRATA)

Earlier, an elderly gentlewoman, Vipra Suvasini, formally spoke to Parvati: “Princess, there is nothing worth knowing that you yourself do not know. But it is our tradition to remind the bride, going to her new home, of the duties she has to perform. It is by observing such rules and regulations that the famous ladies of yore, like Savitri, Anasuya and Arundhati, earned their undying renown in the history of great women... you must eat only after your husband does. You must go to bed after your husband sleeps, and wake up earlier than he does. You must always act in a manner acceptable to him, and must not retaliate even when he has occasion to reprimand you. You must not stand idly at the main door of your house, and must not visit neighbours without obtaining your husband’s permission. Nor should you go all alone on a pilgrimage or attend any function or public meeting. You must first consecrate the food to the family deity, and serve it to your husband and the guests, before you yourself eat. You must regard your husband as your living God and share his joy and grief on all occasions.”

Parvati promised to abide by the sage counsel of the good lady. All the women guests were pleased with Parvati’s humility and sincerity.

FAREWELL

On the fifth day of the wedding celebrations, Parvati and Siva were about to set off to mount Kailasa.

Himavan said: “Dear daughter, the Himalayas will look barren in your absence. Even the flora and fauna around here seem to be distressed at your leaving us. But I know a woman’s place is by her husband’s side. We content ourselves with the happy fact that your

penance has succeeded and you will be the consort of the supreme Lord Siva. Be true to yourself and keep up the noble traditions of both clans your husband’s and your parents.”

Menaka said: “Darling daughter, in you I saw the fulfilment of all my dreams. I brought you up with the tenderest love. Now I cannot bring myself to live without you in our midst. Yet I know you are going to a new home which is the highest abode in the universe physically as well as spiritually. Live up to your noblest ideals and please your husband through thick and thin”.

Parvati acknowledged the affection of her parents: “I am fully aware of the love you have showered on me, dear parents. It is equally painful for me to be parted from you. But my duty is by the side of my husband. I promise to maintain the traditions of our two families to the best of my ability”.

Himavan and Menaka also bade fitting farewell to Siva and begged him to look after their daughter tenderly. Siva replied suitably and assured them of his constant love for Parvati.

Parvati was adorned with the traditional embellishments, as befitting the bride leaving for her husband’s home. Jaya and Vijaya were sent as companions along with Parvati, with the command of Menaka that they take care of the princess as the eyelids do the eyes.

The golden palanquin was ready. Parvati ascended it, placing the right foot in, first. All the traditional bridal materials were placed beside her.

Lord Siva was riding on his Bull mount.

As Siva signalled the palanquin-bearers to start moving, Menaka kissed Parvati for the last time, and the flora and fauna requested Parvati not to forget them. Parvati reiterated her love for

all of them. The denizens of the Himalayan capital stood on both sides of the street as Parvati's palanquin and Siva's bull passed by, and shouted 'Hail to Siva and Parvati. Siva and Parvati acknowledged their greetings fittingly.

TEMPLE OF RAMA

As the divine couple approached the shrine of Rama, they stepped down and paid their respects to Lord Rama and his spouse, Sita. The priests of the temple welcomed them with due honours and offered their blessings on behalf of Rama.

As Siva and Parvati bowed to Rama and Sita, the latter appeared to be smilingly wishing them good luck. To the lookers-on, Siva appeared in the image of Rama, and Parvati in that of Sita.

The devotees realised that it was all the divine mystery exhibited by Siva as part of his creational sport (Lila).

SILVER MOUNTAIN

After passing through some lush and luxuriating forests, and lovely and limpid lakes, wherein the wedding party performed their diurnal ablutions dutifully, they reached Kailasa, the silver mountain, which is the abode of Siva.

The whole hill felt enraptured and seemed to be inwardly grateful to Parvati for having revived the zest for life of Lord Siva, who was previously much run down physically, on account of his rigorous penance.

Hearing the bugle calls of the welcoming Pramatha hordes, the entire Kailasa cried out to the surrounding plant and animal life to bid an enthusiastic welcome to the newly wed blessed couple.

As Siva and Parvati stepped down on Mount Kailasa, the sun-god bade them welcome, and the pious ladies offered them incense and other ceremonial forms of welcome.

The silver mountain shone with supernatural splendour as the newly married divine couple and their heavenly guests assembled there and performed their apportioned duties with great eclat.

Java and Vijaya whispered to Parvati: "This Silver Mountain excels our Himalayas. Your dreams have come true. All the gossip we heard about this being the home of the indigent is now proved to be baseless".

Parvati said: "Yes, Oh, how delighted my parents would have been if they accompanied us here! Alas, they must be missing me and grieving for me!".

At that juncture Siva joined them and spoke to Parvati: "Dear, I know you have come here, leaving behind all those good people and your noble parents who have been showering their immense affection on you. I already promised your parents to see that you lack nothing to make your body and soul feel contented and delighted in this new home of yours. I swear on all that I hold sacred that I will contribute to your happiness in all circumstances and vicissitudes of life. There! The peacocks are dancing in their full plumage. Let us go and watch them."

So saying, he led her to the lonely arbor nearby. There they joined the peacocks in a lively dance. Later, bathing together in perfumed water, they returned to the palace.

Jaya and Vijaya were overjoyed at the loveplay of Siva and Parvati, and inwardly congratulated their friend on her good fortune in getting such a deserving spouse.

Entering the main assembly hall, which was filled to capacity with the guests, including Lakshmi and Vishnu, and Sarasvati and Brahma, Siva entertained them all with grand hospitality and magnanimity.

When the guests returned to their respective homes, after taking their leave of Siva and Parvati, the newly wed retired to their inner

sanctum, which was furnished with all essential comforts by Nandiswara, who stood guard outside.

Siva ordered Nandi not to allow anyone inside, and the bull-god was standing guard watchfully.

As they entered the bedroom, Parvati's right eye throbbed. She was worried about that inauspicious omen. Seeing her uneasiness, the all-knowing Siva assured her that she need not be afraid of anything. She was encouraged by the fact that her omnipotent Lord would see to it that no harm befell her.

When Siva pressed her to join him in a love-dance she willingly did so. As the Kailasa orchestra played lilting tunes, the blessed couple kept perfect time and forgot themselves in the ecstatic entertainment. Outside, Nandi was smilingly struck with the fact that the tender passion of the love between man and woman moves even the divine beings so inexplicably.

Tired after the rapturous dance, the couple went on to the terrace and seated themselves on a moonstone bench. Seeing them engaged in a fond embrace, the stars appeared to be bowing their bashfully.

Then, eating a few succulent fruits and drinking some sweet cow's milk, the couple began to converse in the manner of all the great lovers of the world. Siva said: "Darling, you are exhausted after all that wild dancing of ours. Come, let us go in and rest on the flower-strewn bed."

Parvati replied: "Lord, I know that you are proficient in the art of love-making. You have also a wonderful gift of the gab. Actually, that flower-filled bed is inviting you only." As she was thus joking, two crimson flowers fell at their feet of their own accord.

Parvati now lost her shyness and said: "Lord, don't you see the bees, sucking the honey in these 'Mandara' flowers, are singing love-songs to us, as though asking us to follow their example of

imbi--ing the honey of love? Don't you feel this westerly 'Malaya' breeze, which is exciting our senses? The moon is temporarily hiding behind the clouds. This is the most opportune moment for us to share our flowery soft bed."

So saying, she gently pushed her Lord towards the bed. As Siva kissed her cheeks, she went a step further and kissed his lips. The whole night was thus spent in an exceedingly joyous love-play between the divine pair.

Early next morning Jaya and Vijaya knocked at the door, asking their friend to come out for the morning ablution.

But neither Siva nor Parvati was yet willing to come out of the bedroom. After a little while, Parvati asked Nandi to open the main door. Siva went out.

When Siva left, Jaya told Parvati: "Friend, your hair is dishevelled; your breasts are exuding a peculiar perfume; your clothes are disarranged; your eyes are reddish, perhaps for want of sleep!"

Vijaya said to Jaya: "Well, Jaya, don't think that Parvati is all that innocuous. She has tasted the full love of Siva, quite willingly. She has stolen the heart of Siva and would not like to be away from him even for a second. We have landed ourselves in a tough spot, because we won't be able to see much of Parvati and enjoy her company! Let us go back to the Himalayas!"

Knowing pretty well that her maids were only joking, Parvati said: "Friends, don't be angry with me. Take these two diamond necklaces, one for each of you. After all, you yourselves trained me in the ways of the world, Is it fair that you should now leave me alone here?."

After a little more horse-play, the two maids took Parvati to the bathroom and gave her a splendid oil-bath. After the bath, they attended to Parvati's make-up with meticulous detail. However, they forgot to paint the beauty-spot on her cheek.

Meanwhile Siva came there, with a smile on his lips, walking quietly. Seeing him, the two girls silently went out. Siva came from behind and closed Parvati's eyes with his palms. She mistook the gesture as part of her maid's fun-making and shouted: "Don't you girls know that there is a time for playing the fool and time to be serious? I will report your action to my husband and see that he punishes you!."

Lord Siva began to laugh boisterously. Realising her mistake, she shyly hid her head in the arms of her husband, who then embraced her fondly.

In such love-sport some days passed by.

WISE WORDS

In the meantime the misdeeds of Taraka were on the increase. The very mention of his name struck terror in the hearts of the people.

Unwilling to approach Siva, during his early wedded life, the gods went to meet Brahma, to report to him about their predicament. Brahma, himself unable to deal with their complaint, took them to Vishnu.

At Vaikuntha Vishnu was also engaged in love-play with Lakshmi, but, informed about the arrival of the gods, Vishnu went forward to receive them with due honour.

The gods appealed to Vishnu: "Lord, Taraka is increasingly becoming cruel to us day by day. We are unable to approach Siva, because he is preoccupied with the love-life. You alone are capable of convincing Siva about his duty to save us."

Vishnu replied: "Time is like a ripe fruit; either it is quite eatable or it perishes. We have to bide our time. The love-sport of Siva will last a thousand years, and then will Kumara Svami be born to Siva and Parvati he who alone can quell Taraka. So let us not be impatient. Anyway, it is sinful to disturb the newly married couple. I will tell you a story to prove this point.

"The irritable sage Durvasa once went to meet Indra, while the latter was enjoying the company of the celestial courtesan, Rambha, under the shade of the Parijata tree. Seeing the approaching sage, Rambha, who was in the arms of Indra was embarrassed and ran away.

"Indra kept quiet, afraid of the curse of Durvasa. But, because of his misdeed, Durvasa's wife died soon after. The lesson we have to learn from this episode is that we must never disturb the lovers engaged in their love-play. Be patient. Sooner or later Taraka's killer will be born to the divine couple."

Satisfied with the assurance of Vishnu, the gods and Brahma returned to their respective abodes.

A thousand years passed by. With the ceaseless love-making of Siva and Parvati, the entire earth seemed to be standing still: the atmosphere was devoid of air-flow; the celestial regions were trembling; there were falling stars and meteors everywhere.

Again the gods had to run up to Brahma to seek a way out of their calamity. And again Brahma and others met Vishnu, who escorted them to Kailasa. Nandi was standing guard outside the bedchamber. Vishnu asked him to convey the news of the arrival of the visitors to Siva.

Nandi told Vishnu: "Lord, I have no right to enter the bedchamber. Forgive me." Vishnu suggested that the gods pray to Siva, with the sacred Mantra, "Namah Sivaaya", for thereby the naturally benevolent Siva would come to their rescue instantaneously.

APPEAL

The gods consecrated an idol of Siva and worshipped it thus: "Lord Siva, Thou art the Saviour of the helpless devotees who seek Thy refuge. Kindly live up to Thy name which means the One who

does Good and grants Happiness and save us from the atrocities of Taraka.”

The naturally tender heart of Siva melted, on hearing their worshipful appeal. He came out of the embrace of Parvati and, telling her that he would soon return to her, presented himself before the gods, who then fell prostrate at his feet. Asked for the reason of their visit, the gods reported to him of Taaraka’s cruelty towards them.

Siva told himself that if he acceded to the request of the gods, he would have to displease Parvati and thereby go back on his word to her parents that he would never cause her the least little unhappiness. And yet, he convinced himself, that it was the duty of good men to help others kith and kin, and that he could anyhow go back to his beloved soon after discharging his duty by the gods.

Accordingly he told the gods: “I will release the semen embedded in my conscious self through my power of Yoga. But only the god of Fire can accept it.”

At the request of the gods, the Fire-god received the semen, by assuming the form of a pigeon.

The gods, Brahma and Vishnu thanked Siva for his magnanimity.

IMPRECATION

Here Parvati felt bad omens. Worried, she ran up to her husband. The gods were uneasy about what sort of trouble was in store for them and the world. Even Siva was fighting shy of greeting his spouse in his characteristic style. Learning about the release of her Lord’s semen, she was inconsolably dejected. She felt that her lifelong wish had been unfulfilled. Being a chaste lady, she would not reprimand her husband, but scolded the gods: “You wretched people, have you sacrificed my pleasure for the sake of your selfish ends? Don’t you know that it is the supreme wish of every woman to be a mother? You who have been instrumental in depriving me of

my motherhood, may your own wives become barren.” So cursing the gods, she turned to the Fire-god and cursed him that he should be a mere destroyer.

So speaking, she took her husband to their bedroom.

LAMENT

Parvati spoke to her husband: “Lord, I know you are at the beck and call of your devotees. But was it not to receive your grace that I performed a rigorous penance? Is this the favour you grant me? Are these gods dearer to you than your own wedded wife? What harm have I done you? Are you not aware of the strong wish of women for children of their own? Couldn’t you think of some other means of punishing Taraka? At least, could you not have confided in me before taking this extreme step?”

So speaking, she gave herself up to uncontrollable sobbing.

SOLACE

Siva replied: “Dear, I quite appreciate your grief. But please let me remind you of the purpose behind our marriage. Was it not the gods that invoked me to discard my penance and get married? The idea was to see the birth of the killer of Taaraka. Such a killer cannot be one who comes of a normal birth, through the womb of a woman. My boon to Taraka was that he could not be killed by anyone who came out of woman’s womb. Don’t you see that I cannot go back on my word? Indeed there is none dearer to me than you in this world, but it is the duty of people like us to sacrifice our own wishes for the welfare of the others. If we ourselves forsake our duty, would the rest of the world respect its obligation? You are verily the Supreme Mother. Still, I did not want to inform you and face your disappointment, before I took this dutiful step of mind.”

Parvati, as became her divine heritage, was duly consoled. She regretted cursing the gods and the Fire-gods. She realised that it was to her credit that she was indirectly responsible for the birth

of a son who would save the world from the onslaught of a demon. She sought her husband's forgiveness. As a sign of his forgiveness, Siva took her into his arms. Parvati was ecstatically gratified...

The Fire-god, unable to withhold the semen of Siva for long, prayed to Him for relief. Siva appeared before him and assured him that before long the semen would take birth and relieve him of his burden.

STRANGE WISH

The seven sages, with their spouses seated beside them, began a sacrificial rite. As they were offering the oblations to the Fire-god, his mind was attracted to the wives of the sages. Verily, such mental aberrations precede the fall of men. However, the Fire-god was hesitant to express his amorous wish to the wives of the sages directly.

Lust is an inexorable instinct. Else, would it blind such an individual as the Fire-god to propriety?

Unable to bear the heat of his passion, the Fire-god wished to take his own life, and with that aim walked up to a stream. At that juncture his sagacious wife, Svahaa Devi, successively assuming the forms of the sage-wives with the exception of that of the unimpeachable Arundhati, fulfilled the wish of her husband. At the same time, Svahaa Devi was herself unable to hold for long the semen of Siva which was deposited in her through her husband, and so released it on the White Mountain (Svetaadri).

The mountain was uncomfortably stirred by the heat of that semen and at the behest of the Air-god, to whom it prayed, it threw up the semen into the nearby Ganges. Ganga, too, could not tolerate the force of the semen and sprinkled it out in the Darbha jungle.

BIRTH OF KUMAARA SVAMI (SKANDA)

In course of time, the semen of Siva developed into a viable fetus. At last on the sixth day of the bright fortnight of the month of

Margaseersha, at dawn, it was born as a child who was resplendent like the sun, with six heads and twelve hands to the accompaniment of Vedic chanting and the super natural sound of 'AUM'.

The joyous gods blessed the child by showering flowers from heaven on him.

Hearing the glad news, the wives of the six sages went to visit the newborn, on seeing whom their breasts began oozing milk. Kumara Svami sucked their milk to his heart's content. The surrogate mothers could hardly bring themselves to leave the child and go back to their husbands.

Brahma christened the child 'SKANDA'.

As Siva was engaged in his love-play with Parvati on mount Kailasa, he felt the presence of Skanda before his mind's eye. Seeing her husband absent-minded, Parvati asked him the reason for his distraction.

Siva told her: "Indeed today is a festival day for us and the entire universe. Skanda, the killer of Taraka, was born. You could not have withstood the force of the semen that conceived him, anyway. So don't be angry with me any more on that account. However, I grant that I will sire through you the twenty-one incarnations of Ganapati".

The newborn Kumara Svami was variously named, according to the various connotations of his conception: 'Skanda' ("skandati iti"), because Siva's semen was **scattered** or **ejaculated** at the sight of the sage-wives; 'Agni-bhuh' ("agneh bhavati iti"), because he emanated from the Fire-god; 'Gangeya' ("Gangayah nandanah iti"), because the semen was for a while accepted by Ganga; 'Sara-janmaa' ("Sara-aakhye thrine janma yasya sah"), because his evolution was from the semen scattered among the grass called 'Sara'; and 'Kartikeya' ("Krittikanam apatyam"), because he was conceived, in transition, by the six 'Krittika's (wives of the sages).

Parvati was pleased with Siva's explanation and assurance, and was eager to see Skanda. She told him: "Lord, Skanda is like my own child. Please send Nandi to fetch him here".

Siva was delighted with Parvati's large-heartedness, and commissioned Nandi to bring Skanda to Kailasa.

Nandi went to the Darbha jungle and told Skanda: "prince, by seeing you I feel my life is sanctified. Siva and Parvati are anxiously awaiting your arrival at mount Kailasa. come along with me."

BRAVE DEEDS

The six Krittikaas told Nandi: "Sir, how are Siva and Parvati occupying themselves now? Don't think that Skanda is an ordinary person. His mount is a mighty peacock. He is a valiant hero who, even as a child, is capable of twisting the trunks of the gigantic elephants on the White Mountain. He plays with the lions. Taking up the Siva-bow he cut off the hill-tops with his fierce arrows. He turned the huge Krancha mountain into powder, and shouted with such resounding joy at his feat as to frighten and shake up the four corners of the earth, and even caused some stars to fall from the sky. The demons on that mountain fought with him and died at his hands. When Indra flung his disc-weapon at him, to ward off his frightening feats, which harmed the elements, Skanda rebutted it so easily as to make the Indra weapon return to Indra and attack the latter. When Indra begged Skanda's forgiveness, the Latter allowed him to go unharmed.

JOURNEY TO KAILASA

Skanda told Nandi: "Well, my parents have invited me after such a long while. Anyway, these six Krittikas nourished me like my true mother. I don't feel like leaving them behind here. Let us take them also along with us. Now get the Pushpaka aeroplane ready."

Then the party left in the aircraft singing the hymns consecrated hymn to Lord Siva. The gods showered flowers on the Pushpaka

plane. Brahma and Vishnu, accompanied by the hosts of the gods left for Kailasa to welcome Skanda at that mount.

To the messenger who conveyed the news of Skanda's arrival Parvati presented a diamond necklace. Jaya and Vijaya who saw that presentation were a little envious of the messenger. Judging their jealous looks correctly, Parvati chided her maids: "Forget this idiotic outlook. Skanda was born to fulfil a divine purpose. It is immaterial whether I directly conceived Skanda or whether the Krittikas did so, because it was in making love to me that Siva's semen was extracted, in the first place. Skanda is virtually my own child. So get everything ready for his comfort and well-being."

The maids understood their folly and did as told by Parvati.

WELCOME

As the Pushpaka airplane touched down on mount Kailasa, and Skanda and his six 'mothers' stepped out of it, the entire populace of Siva's realm bade them a rousing welcome and shouted 'Hail Kaartikeya! Hail Skanda!'

As the gods spread roses along his path, Skanda walked up to Siva and Parvati, reciting the Vedic hymns. With hands outstretched, his parents welcomed him fondly. Skanda first, following sacred tradition, bowed to the feet of Parvati. She was not quite aware of the exact blessing she should utter. So she took him into his arms. As she did so, milk flowed out of her breasts, out of her motherly love for Skanda. Skanda could then appreciate how ineffably tender the motherly heart of women in general, and of Parvati in particular, is.

When he next fell prostrate at the feet of Siva, the latter blessed him with the words, "May you live long!", and embraced him. Skanda was ecstatically gratified by that divine touch of his father.

Jaya and Vijaya offered Skanda the water to clean his feet and to drink. Brahma, Vishnu, Indra and other godly dignitaries saluted Skanda appropriately.

The Gandharvas sang and the Apsaras danced, by way of welcoming the divine guest.

UPANAYANAM

(SACRED THREAD CEREMONY)

On the very day Skanda arrived at Mount Kailasa, his parents decided upon performing his Upanayanam.

The waters from the seven seas were collected for the holy sprinkling. In the vast **pandals** the seven sages were performing the **Homa** sacrifice. Parvati and Siva sat on either side of Skanda.

Siva and Parvati placed the sacred thread (**Yajnopavitam**), reciting the sacred ceremonial Mantra, which connotes that this primordial adornment of the Lord Creator, now worn by the initiate, would ensure his good health, personal splendour and longevity:

Yajnopavitam paramam pavitram
Prajapateh yat sahajam purastat|
Aayushyam agryam pratimuncha subhram
Yajnopavitam balam astu tejah||

As dicatated by the priest, Siva intiated Skanda in the **Gaayatri Mantra**, which prays to the Supreme Spirit for the invoking of the worshipper's sublime supra-consciousness. Besides, Siva taught Skanda several of the martial arts and the spiritual studies concerning God.

Siva honoured the six Krittikaas and the other guests suitably.

All the assembled guests sprinkled the consecrated rice (**Akshatalu**) on the bachelor's head and blessed him that he might lead the life of a good scholar, with appropriate awareness of Brahma, as befitting a 'Brahmana'. Lord Vishnu lovingly presented Skanda with a crown fitted with precious gems, a golden disc and a garland of choice flowers. The Sun-god gave him the 'Manojava' chariot, which has the speed of the mind's flight; the Moon-god, the Vessel of Nectar; the Sea-god, the priceless diamonds; the Garuda

bird, a beautiful peacock; the Arna-deity, a gigantic 'Dhvaja' and a lovely copper ornament while Parvati blessed him with longevity and renown; Lakshmi, with luxury and wealth; and Sarasvati, with all learning.

DEVASENA

Devasena is the daughter of Indra, the Lord of Heaven. In a dream she saw the effulgent form of Skanda. His radiant looks stole her heart. She was determined to be his lifemate. As she stood, bashfully bending her head, she felt the presence fell prostrate at his feet, in deep reverence.

Skanda embraced her ardently. Devasena shone with joyous delight. Her maids began singing the aubades. Waking up from her dream, Devasena saw no sign of Skanda. Disappointed, she accompanied her maids to the bathroom and, finishing her toilet, was gossiping with them.

REPENTANCE

Here Indra was telling himself: "Foolishly had I flung the 'Vajra' weapon at Skanda. Indeed he was magnanimous in letting me go unharmed, when I was about to be hoist with my own petard. Now it is neither weapons nor jewels that can repay my debt of gratitude to Skanda. The greatest gift I can offer Skanda is my beautiful daughter. Thereby I can also win the appreciation of his parents. Skanda is sure to accept the hand of my very accomplished daughter. Else, the gods would persuade him to do so. I am sure of having my wish fulfilled, for my right eye is throbbing, as a sign of good omen".

After this soliloquy, Indra escorted Devasena to Kailasa. None of the courtiers in that realm of Siva detected the real reason behind escorting Devasena to Kailasa. The Trinity of gods and their consorts, of course, knew all about it, and were quietly smiling among themselves.

Seeing Devasena, Skanda was spellbound. On her side, Devasena was equally attracted by the actual sight of the handsome

person she saw in her dream, and was shyly standing with bent head. Siva and Parvati, who discovered the secret behind the young people's reactions, were inwardly delighted.

WEDDING

Skanda soliloquised: "How indescribably lovely is this Devasena!. Well as she is embellished with all those precious jewels, and the ornamental forms of make-up, I am struck with her sidelong glance of love she directs towards me, even as she remains with her head bowed.

The Trinity, the seven sages and Parvati approached Devasena and Skanda. Indra placed Devasena's hands in those of Skanda. Parvati and Siva, and the other guests, blessed the young couple. The bride and groom bowed to the feet of the Trinity, Parvati and Indra. The gods in heaven showered flowers of benediction on them. The whole mount Kailasa felt thrilled. The Pramatha hordes shouted victorious slogans.

The parents and the guests offered a variety of invaluable gifts to the newly-wed. When Lakshmi and Sarasvati offered garlands to Skanda, he appeared in his six heads, but when Devasena was about to garland him, he assumed a single-headed shape.

Later a grandly sumptuous wedding feast was arranged by Siva and Parvati. The guests found that day one of the most memorable in their lives. Once again blessing the couple, the guests bade farewell to Siva and Parvati, and returned to their homes.

ACCORD

Again the seven sages approached Lord Siva and complained to him: "Lord, you are aware of the ever-increasing vile deeds of Taaraka. Now that the person who is capable of killing the demon is born, please permit Skanda to do his apportioned duty".

Siva gladly agreed to do so. At his father's bidding, Skanda, accompanied by his spouse, Devasena, was ready to leave for

Indra's realm. Parvati blessed him to complete his mission successfully and return home safely.

Skanda and Devasena together bowed to the feet of Siva and Parvati before being escorted by Indra and Sachi Devi to the latter pair's celestial kingdom.

Indra commissioned the divine architect, Visva Karma, to build a mighty edifice for the residency of Skanda and Devasena. Brahma and Vishnu and their spouses were invited to stay in the guest houses.

ANOINTMENT (ABHISHEKA)

The water from all the sacred waters was fetched. Skanda was seated on a diamond throne. The sacred dot was placed on his bright forehead. Later he wore silken clothes presented by the gods.

After the completion of the ceremonial anointment, Vishnu blessed Skanda to be the lord of the whole universe. Brahma blessed Skanda to become adept in all the Vedas and rule the world for the benefit of the virtuous and the detriment of the vicious.

Skanda thanked all the divine hosts who honoured and blessed him, and promised to live up to their hopes in him.

After the coronation, the guests went their way, singing the praises of Skanda among themselves.

Now seated in the coronation hall Skanda invited the gods to perform the embassy that should precede his victorious deed. But none of them dared to come forward for that purpose, and placed the entire burden of punishing Taraka on his broad shoulders.

MESSAGE

Then Skanda called forth Virabahu and asked him to go to Taaraka and warn the demon that unless he mended his evil ways and went back to his Bhogavati city in the Patala, nether-world, he should be prepared to meet his end at the hands of Skanda.

The next morning, as Taaraka assembled his court, Virabahu went up to him and conveyed Skanda's warning to him.

REBUFF

Angered by the warning of Virabahu, Taaraka said: "You foolish messenger, you repeated your Lord's warning like a parrot. I am letting you go unpunished, because it is not right to hurt a messenger. I have not done any harm either to Siva or to his son, Skanda. Why should they try to fight with me? In fact, the people who came in the way of Parvati's direct conception are the gods; the person who flung his Vajra weapon at Skanda is Indra. How can these misdeeds be offset by Skanda's mere marrying of Indra's daughter? Anyway, I am not worried about Skanda's warning. Even if the skies fall down or the seven seas dry up or the sun and the moon fall to the ground, I am not going to return to my kingdom and I shall gladly face Skanda in battle. You might as well warn Skanda that I myself am a devotee of Siva, and challenging me to a fight does not do him any good."

Later in the night Skanda appeared in a dream to Taraka. Saluting Skanda, Taraka said: "Dear Skanda, am I not virtually your devotee, too, by virtue of my being a great devotee of your own father? has it fair on the part of Indra to kill my father when he was fighting with the demon, Vritra? Am I not, therefore, justified in hurting the killer of my father? Although I have a high regard for you, it is not heroic to turn my back and flee from you on the battlefield. If I conquer you, I will gain eternal fame, and if you vanquish me, I shall be united with Lord Siva. Either way it is right that I should not heed your warning. So here are my deep respects for you; please accept them."

When he woke up, Taaraka saw no sign of Skanda.

BATTLE

As the trumpets were blaring early next morning, the army of Skanda surrounded the capital of Taaraka's realm Sonitapura.

planning a strategic stranglehold on the enemy's forces, the adventurous Skanda blew his conch with extreme vigour. That sound broke the hearts of the demons. The commanders of Taaraka's army ordered their men to fight.

When Skanda was blowing his conch, Taaraka was engaged in worshipping the image of Lord Siva. He mistook that sound as coming from Lord Siva's conch. He chided the god thus: "Lord, art Thou going back on your word? How art Thou justified in calling the very person to fight, whom Thou hast favoured with Thy boon?". At that point Taaraka felt that He saw Skanda in the image of Siva. He was perplexed.

Then Taraka's wife came to him and said: "Lord, the person who blew the conch is Skanda. not Siva. I have reliable news that Siva has not arrived on the battlefield. May I suggest that you do not fight with Skanda? He now has a stranglehold on our forces, and when defeat is inevitable, the correct strategy is to seek a truce with the foe. Please concede the kingdom of heaven to Skanda honourably. Thereby your renown will increase. The earthly kingdom that you reign is large enough for you."

Taraka replied: "Dear, I am sorry I cannot accept your advice. Indara is a self-seeking strategist. He made Skanda his son-in-law to serve his own selfish ends. Just because he is Indra's son-in-law, should Skanda fight with me? Should he not really ask his father-in-law to seek a compromise with me, who am a devotee of Lord Siva? Now, behave like the wife of a hero, and don't advise me to run away from an honourable battle."

Finishing his prayers, Taaraka went out and saw the forces of Skanda surrounding his palace. Ordering his men to repulse Skanda's forces, Taaraka went into his palace.

BATTLEFIELD

Many a soldier died in the ensuing fierce fight, becoming easy prey to the eagles. At the sun set, the battle for the day was stopped.

The generals of Taaraka's army went to consult him. After the consultations, it was decided to fight against the labyrinth-formation of Skanda's forces with a circular formation of their own.

The night passed by inevitably. The next morning both Skanda and Taraka offered prayers to their respective Siva idols and eagerly went forward to the battlefield.

Both the antagonists were seated in a chariot and looked at each other. While Skanda was smiling, Taraka was uneasily fearing that the god of death, himself was facing him in the form of Skanda. The arrow Taraka aimed at the feet of Skanda ricocheted and returned to its quiver.

The rebound arrow whispered into Taraka's ear: "O demon-king, how innocuous you are! How I feel the divine ecstasy of touching the noble feet of Skanda! If only you, too, would enjoy similar bliss by falling prostrate at his feet! Even now it is not too late. Don't walk into the trap the gods set for you, and seek truce with Skanda."

Taraka replied: "Well, arrow, you yourself are the ignorant one, for you do not seem to realise that if I die at the hands of Skanda I will be united in spirit with Lord Siva. I will have no more rebirth, which is what every seeker of Truth and Salvation cherishes most. You were sanctified by touching the feet of Skanda; so should I also very much like to be."

Then Taraka ordered his army to cut into pieces the soldiers of Skanda. Unable to withstand the attack of the demons the army of the gods took to its heels. At the importunate request of Indra, Skanda threw the **Pasupata** weapon, which forced the demons to flee hither and thither. The **Pasupata** weapon lets of the enemy that flees from it.

Dejected and humiliated, Taaraka went back into his palace. He was convinced that it was impossible to defeat Skanda

The next day, Taaraka, aimed his fiercest weapon, the **Mahaa Sakti**, at Skanda, who broke it into pieces with the aid of his own **Brahma** weapon. Thus for twenty-one days the battle continued, without victory for either side.

At last Narada advised Skanda to break the idol of Siva, (which Taaraka was using as a pendant around his neck and which was till then making the demon invincible.) by flinging the Fire-weapon (**Aagneya-astra**). The sage also further suggested to Skanda to pray to the sun-god to build temples out of the scattered pieces of the Siva-image, which would drop from the neck of Taraka, for, otherwise, the image would again form itself into a full-fledged necklace and adorn Taaraka's neck.

Accordingly Skanda worshipped the Sun-god, by reciting "**Aaditya Hridayam**", and placed the burden of converting the image-pieces into sacred shrines on His shoulders.

Here, again, boasting that he is also a devotee of Lord Siva, Taaraka renewed the ferocious attack on Skanda. Taaraka's 'Mahesvara' missile scared away the godly forces, with its severe flames, and they took refuge behind Skanda's back. Even Skanda fell in a swoon by the touch of the heat of the Mahesvara missile. Taraka laughed boisterously, under the impression that his was the victory. But Virabhadra was getting ready to put an end to the demon-king. However, sage Narada persuaded him to desist and leave the task of killing Taraka to Skanda himself.

THE END OF TARAKASURA

After a little while, Skanda regained consciousness. Seeing him get up, the celestial army's morale grew high. They massacred many a demon. Taraka's charmed weapons were no longer fulfilling their intended mission. Skanda broke the Siva-idol-pendant around Taaraka's neck into five pieces with his Fire-missile. The Sun-god built five Saivite temples with them, which are known as the 'Pancha-Bhimeswara-Linga's.

Taraka's strength was dwindling. At the suggestion of an aerial voice, Skanda flung the 'Brahma' missile at Taaraka. The weapon out Taraka into two separating the trunk from the head. The head of Taraka fell at the feet of Skanda and begged him to grant ultimate union with the spirit of Lord Siva. Skanda was deeply moved by Taraka's valour and devotion, and said 'so be it'.

The gods praised the bravery of Skanda and showered flowers on him. The Trinity blessed and congratulated him. They all expressed their gratitude to Indra for his hospitality. Parvati invited Skanda to return to Kailasa, along with his wife.

Skanda and Devasena left for the Silver Mountain. Indra sent with them number of attendants and a large amount of treasures. Parvati and Siva welcomed the newly-wed with open arms when they reached Kailasa. Parvati led the young couple to a richly decorated huge bedroom, wherein they were enjoying themselves to their heart's content.

NARADA'S PROPHECY

After some time Skanda went on hunting, along with his retinue. The quarrel-loving Narada happen to see them. Approaching the hunting party, and after receiving their hospitality, Narada told Skanda: "Lord, there is a place called Pulinda-pura nearby. The realm is being ruled by a Bhil (tribal) king. He is a devotee of Lord Siva. He has a lovely daughter, named Valli. I had an opportunity of casting her horoscope and reading her future. I want to tell you that she will be your wife before long." So saying, he vanished.

Skanda was much pleased. His retinue complimented him on his good luck. After having their fun and sports in the forest, Skanda and party returned to the Silver Mountain.

Devasena escorted her husband to the bathroom and helped him in having his bath. After the bath, she led him to a diamond-studded seat and served him a sumptuous meal. Skanda seemed to be absent-minded, because his thoughts were directed towards Valli.

He was wondering how he could speak to her about Narada's prophecy without hurting her feelings.

Skanda said: "Darling, I am tired after the hunting in the jungle and am not very hungry. I can't eat this heavy food. Just give me a glass of cow's milk. I will drink it and take rest."

Realising that his husband was distracted, Devasena did so, and stood near him with dutiful obedience. Later when she tried to fan him or apply sandalwood paste to his body, in order to comfort him, Skanda appeared to be petulant and refused her services. Actually, the couple spent that night in separate beds.

DREAM-GIRL

Skanda managed to sleep restlessly before dawn. He dreamt that a well-bedecked and supremely lovely maiden was offering him flowers and singing and dancing for him by way of welcoming him to her. Skanda beckoned her to 'come near'. Walking in graceful style she moved towards him and bowed to his feet. The touch of hers thrilled Skanda, and he took her into his arms. At that moment the early morning 'reveille' sounded and Skanda woke up to find out that it was all a dream. Devasena was still asleep.

NARADA'S MISSION

Narada went to Pulindapura and was duly received by the Bhil king and his queen.

Accepting his hospitality, Narada told the king: "O Bhil king, where is your darling daughter? She is accomplished in all ways and extremely beautiful. She has now come of age, and you should now think about finding a suitable husband for her."

The king sent for his daughter, who came to the court and saluted the sage respectfully. The sage blessed her with the wish that she would soon be well married.

The Bhil king, Pulinda, told the sage: “Sir, you are cognisant of the part, the present and the future. Please read my daughter’s palm and tell us what sort of husband she will get and where he is now.”

Narada replied: “You are all lucky people. The great Skanda is going to be Valli’s husband. Before long someone in the guise of a Bhil will come to you and ask for her hand.”

STROLL IN THE GARDEN

Valli went for a stroll in the pleasure-garden, along with her friends. Narada’s words were still delightfully ringing in her ears. She was anxious to see the Siva-off-spring. The singing birds and the sweet flowers were enhancing her restless longing to see Skanda. After wandering about here and there, she sat on a moonstone bench.

At that juncture there was a stir in the garden, as the deer began to run hither and thither, sighting a hunter. The birds were flying higher and higher. The ‘Malaya’ breeze was blowing gently. Valli felt some good omens. She could then hear the whispers of Skanda’s retinue from behind the bushes. She was reminded of the sage’s prophecy, and eagerly awaiting the approach of Skanda.

Skanda, in the guise of a Bhil (hunter), came forward, after instructing his men to stay behind the bushes.

Valli hid herself behind her mates, and was stealing sidelong glances at Skanda from between their ranks.

WITTY CONVERSATION

Valli’s maids were well-versed in the ways of the world, and greeted the false hunter thus: “Sir, you look like a stranger. We are surprised at your manners. You not only entered a private garden without permission but are also stealing amorous glances at our princess. You seem to be unaware of the fact that no stranger is allowed into this garden. Anyway, who are you, what is your name and who are your parents?”

Skanda replied: “I am not a ‘Sathagopher’. I started on a pleasure walk in the forest. My friends escorted me to this garden. I am attracted by this beautiful place. My name is Skanda; my residence is Kailasa; and my parents are Siva and Parvati. Sage Narada told me that the king of this country is a great devotee of Lord Siva and that his daughter is incomparably good-looking. I just wanted to take a look at her. Now I am very much pleased at her sight and my mission is fulfilled. So may I take my leave of you?”

The maids stopped him and said: “Sir, you seem to be very clever. We heard that the person who killed Taaraka has six heads. Why do we see you only with a single head? Are you trying to deceive us? If Lord Siva sent word to our king, asking the hand of our princess for Skanda, would not His wish has been rightaway fulfilled, because our king is an obedient devotee of His? Tell us the truth behind all this strategy of yours.”

As Skanda looked back, he could see Valli smiling at him and standing with quiet grace and bashfulness.

Emboldened, Skanda approached her and said: “Dear Valli, you are very fortunate. Your father is going to be the brother-in-law of Lord Siva. I know Narada’s words will come true. I merely put on this guise because I thought it was fitting to enter the Bhil realm like a Bhil. I will go back to Kailasa and speak to my father about my wish to marry you. Soon your father will hear from him. Now I will reveal my real form, if only to satisfy the curiosity of your maids”.

Seeing the six heads of Skanda, Valli and her maids were astounded. As the maids stepped aside, Valli bowed to the feet of the resplendent Skanda. At her request, Skanda again assumed the form of a tribal (Bhil). At that juncture the Bhil king arrived on the scene. He did not accost the stranger, but took away his daughter to the palace.

PANGS OF SEPARATION

Disappointed with the Bhil king's action, Skanda soliloquised: "Even if the Bhil king and my parents accede to my wish, how can I pacify Devasena who may not like to share my love with another woman? Indeed, the quarrel-loving Narada put me in a fix. Anyway, I can't go back to Kailasa without taking mother look at the lovely Valli."

Valli straight away went to bed. She would not touch the delicious food served by her maids. All the efforts of her friends to comfort her were in vain. At last she dozed off restlessly and in a dream saw Skanda to whom she spoke: "Lord, I am a helpless woman. I always obey my parents. I could not disobey my father when he took me away from your beloved presence. Nor could I find the strength to inform my father that you are the son of Lord Siva. But I assure you I am completely devoted to you and will be yours till eternity. Take me and accept my gratitude for coming to me." Learning from Valli's mates about these words, which she uttered aloud in her dream, her parents were pleased.

Later Valli's parents went up to meet Skanda, who was sitting all alone on the banks of a lake, in the guise of a Bhil. The Bhil king apologised to him for not greeting him when he was unaware of Skanda's real identity. He also promised Skanda the hand of Valli.

Skanda appreciated the king's words and said that he would gladly marry Valli.

WEDDING

Everything was ready for the wedding of Skanda and Valli. The whole town of Pulindapura was richly decorated.

As the auspicious hour of the wedding approached, the Bhil king, Pulinda, addressed the invited guests: "Dear denizens of Pulindapura and guests, once when I was wandering in the forest I heard the cries of an infant. Since I have no children of my own I

took her to my home and brought her up as my own dear daughter. All along I was feeling that it was due to the grace of Lord Siva that I found Valli. And now that she has grown up into a nubile young woman, I was delighted to hear from sage Narada that she would be the daughter-in-law of Lord Siva. Please note that the bridegroom is none other than the great Skanda, the offspring of Lord Siva. Kindly bless the young couple and accept my hospitality."

Then the elderly men of the Bhil tribe stood at Skanda's side, and the elderly Bhil women stood at the side of Valli. They offered garlands to the young couple. Valli and Skanda garlanded each other.

The Bhil king presented a diamond necklace to Skanda, and a necklace studded with the nine precious gems to Valli.

After the priest recited the wedding hymns, the bride and groom went round the sacred fire and promised each other eternal fidelity and love.

After witnessing the due pomp and pageantry, befitting the wedding of royal couple, the guests were duly honoured and feasted by the Bhil king.

Once again thankfully receiving the blessing of the wedding guests, Skanda and Valli retired to their bedroom.

THE STORY OF DEVASENA

Skanda revealed to Valli: "Darling, I once vanquished Indra. He then sought my forgiveness for attacking me, and as a token of his contrition offered me his daughter's hand in marriage. I accepted the offer. She is named Devasena, and we have been living together in perfect marital bliss. She is prepared to make any sacrifice for the sake of my happiness. I never meant to leave her. But as I was wandering in the forest with my friends, Narada prophesied that you would be my second wife. My curiosity was naturally aroused, and when I actually saw you I fell in love with you. I swear that I will

never cause you any distress. I also assure you that Devasena will not come in the way of our mutual enjoyment. You two can live like sisters, and the Trinity and their spouses will stand by through thick and thin.”

VALLI'S BROAD-MINDEDNESS

Valli, instead of being offended, was really pleased with Skanda's revelation. She was impressed by Skanda's depiction of Devasena's generous attitude towards him, and said: “Lord, I am prepared to be even a servant maid of Devasena, far from being her rival.”

Skanda was much relieved to learn about Valli's cheerful acceptance of her role. Indeed he was ashamed of his own fickleness, as compared with the large-hearted attitude of his two consorts.

Skanda and Valli spent that night in complete physical and spiritual communion.

JOURNEY TO KAILASA

Early next morning the young couple finished their ablution and were ready to leave for Kailasa.

Valli's mother handed them several rich gifts to be conveyed to Parvati and Devasena.

Pulinda told Skanda: “Dear son-in-law, what greater happiness do I have than offering to Lord Siva's son the gift that the Lord Himself gave me? I brought her up with the utmost tenderness. I am sure you will look after her with your highest love and affection. Kindly convey my devotional regards to your divine parents.”

GRATITUDE

Valli said: “Father, you made a princess out of the foundling that I was. I shall go to my husband's home with grateful feelings for you and my mother, and I want you both to know that I will so

conduct myself there as to keep up your renown and to enhance the traditional glory of the clans of both my husband's and mine.”

Then, after bidding a tearful farewell to her parents, Valli accompanied Skanda on their journey to Kailasa.

Devasena learnt about the wedding of Skanda and Valli, and took no offence, because it was all the doing of the sage Narada. She was getting ready to welcome the newly-wed with due grace.

Siva and Parvati were also pleased with the second wedding of their son.

As Valli and Skanda reached the Silver Mountain, the Pramatha hordes sounded the bugles in royal welcome. Siva, Parvati and Devasena, followed by their retinue, went forward to greet the newly-wed with open arms.

Valli and Skanda bowed to the feet of Siva and Parvati. Parvati joked: “Sun, you are indeed romantic!”. Skanda was mildly disconcerted; again so, when Devasena looked at him with silent humour. As Valli bowed to Parvati the latter blessed her: “May you live long like a chaste lady (who would never be widowed)!”. She also complimented her on finding such a divine spouse like Skanda.

Valli touched the feet of Devasena in reverence, saying: “Kind lady, my wedding to Skanda was masterminded by sage Narada. As I have not intentionally sought it, please forgive me.”

Devasena embraced Valli and said that she understood everything and had no grouse against either Skanda or Valli.

Looking at their friendliness, Skanda was pleased that the auspicious moment when he was married to the duo separately was proved to be worthy of its name.

When Devasena bowed to Skanda, he did not know how to bless her. As he uneasily kept quiet, Devasena signalled to Valli to stand to the left of Skanda and she herself stood on his right.

The gods and other onlookers blessed the happy trio.

When at night the whole Silver Mountain was bright with multi-coloured lights, Skanda went round the place in a golden chariot, accompanied by his two wives. The entire populace reverentially cheered them, standing on either side of the wide streets.

GAJASURA

As Siva and Parvati were contentedly enjoying their conjugal bliss, the whole world likewise was happily going about its tasks with dutiful dedication. Sacrificial rites and other holy acts were being performed with due regularity and sincerity.

However, in the meantime, the demon, Gajasura, was born in the clan of Tarakasura. He prayed to Brahma and received several boons from the deity. His capital, Sonitapura was flourishing with plenty and prosperity. And like his predecessor, he too began pestering the ranks of gods and the sages.

Indra was determined to put an end to Gajasura and his success. As sage Narada came to his court, singing the glory of Gajasura's realm, Indra was further strengthened in his determination to punish Gajasura.

Narada also went to Sonitapura, and receiving the honours of Gajasura, told the demon: "O demon-king, don't you realise that by praying to Lord Siva, you can bring Him to your side and make yourself invincible? Lord Siva is indeed partial to His devotee, and your prayers will be satisfactorily answered by Him."

Accordingly Gajasura performed a severe penance, with Lord Siva in mind, and found the favour of that god. He actually succeeded in imprisoning Lord Siva in his heart.

When Lord Siva disappeared from the Silver Mountain, its denizens, including Parvati and Skanda, were much perturbed.

Skanda sent the Rudra hordes in search of Siva. After a long search they succeeded in finding out that Siva was incarcerated in

Gajasura's heart. Hearing the news from the messengers, Parvati prayed to Lord Vishnu for his help. He assured her that he would bring back Lord Siva to her.

Accompanied by Brahma, Vishnu went down to Sonitapura, in the guise of a mendicant-entertainer who goes about with a caparisoned bull ("Gangireddu"), doing amusing tricks.

As the disguised divine duo and their fancy bull were roaming the streets of Sonitapura, Gajasura sent his men to fetch them into his presence.

When the false entertainers arrived at the palace gate, Gajasura asked them to display their tricks with the bull. Brahma and Vishnu sang the hymns in praise of Siva, and the bull was dancing to their tune. Hearing the song and dance, the Siva embedded in Gajasura's heart rose up and started inflicting pain in his throat. Realising the success of their mission, Brahma and Vishnu were delighted, as they saw the discomfiture of Gajasura, who addressed Lord Siva thus: "Lord, why art Thou squeezing my neck? Is it fair that Thou shouldst be so captivated by the entertainer's praises of Thee pining for Parvati Devi's company? If Thou really wantest to return to Kailasa, take me along with Thee, for I cannot live even a second outside of Thy presence before me or within me. Is it not to achieve perfect communion with Thee that I hid Thee in my heart?"

Siva replied: "O demon-king, I appreciate your sincere devotion. But my place is on Mount Kailasa and beside my consort Parvati. Anyway, your end is fast approaching, and I have to hurry back to my duty of taking care of the re-creation of the living world which is annihilated in me. So make your final request and I will honour it."

Gajasura replied: "I will not come in the way of the process of re-creation, not will I separate Thee from Parvati. Kindly grant me communion with Thy supreme spirit."

Lord Siva granted that Gajasura could live by his side in the form of a holy rat. Gajasura felt supremely gratified and began chanting the sacred Mantra, “*Namah Sivaaya*”. Siva came out of him, tearing his belly. Gajasura died as a demon, was reborn as a holy rat, and followed Siva wherever the deity went.

Mount Kailasa and its residents greeted the return of Lord Siva with extreme satisfaction and jubilation.

GANAPATI

Parvati was having her oil-bath. To protect the door of the bathroom against intruders, she formed a clay-idol, poured life into it and christened it ‘Ganapati’ (Lord of the divine hosts), after embellishing it with rich ornaments. Ganapati saluted his divine mother, who suitably blessed him, and ordered him not to allow anyone inside, without seeking her permission.

Ganapati duly stood guard at the door, wielding the staff which Parvati gave him.

Meanwhile, Nandi came there to inform Parvati of Siva’s return to Kailasa. Ganapati stopped him. Nandi inquired: “What is she doing?”. Ganapati replied: “She is bathing”. Nandi waited for a long while, and impatiently requested Ganapati to go in and tell her about Siva’s return. Ganapati said that he too was not allowed to go in, unless she called him. Nandi tried to enter the bathroom, but failed in his attempt. When Nandi reported his failure to her, Lord Siva hurried to the room of Parvati, in his eagerness to be re-united with her after the long separation. Outside the room, he saw Ganapati, standing guard.

Smilingly, Siva addressed Ganapati: “Sir, who are you? What is your name? Who commissioned you to keep watch here?”.

Ganapati replied: “Lord, I am the son of Parvati Devi. My name is Ganapati. My mother is bathing inside, and ordered me not

to allow anyone in, without her permission. Kindly note that this is not the opportune moment for Thee to enter this room. Please wait for a little while, and Thou wilt have Thy wishes fulfilled.”

TEMERITY

Parvati has not yet come out of the bathroom. Nor did Ganapati allow the impatient Siva to go in. Nonetheless, Siva’s long absence from His beloved made Him lose His sense of proportion. Angered by Ganapati’s refusal to His entry, He asked the former to step aside. Ganapati was adamant. Infuriated at this rebuff, Siva cut Ganapati’s head into pieces with his spear. Nandi witnessed the incident with glee.

The severed head of Ganapati spoke to Siva: “Father, how thoughtless Thou wert! Why shouldst Thou have punished someone who was merely fulfilling his appointed duty? Please remember that even a deity like Thee cannot escape retribution.”

Finishing her toilet and adorning herself fully, Parvati asked her maid to open the door. The maid saw the horrible scene and reported about it to her mistress. Crestfallen, Parvati rushed up to her bedroom and started sobbing inconsolably. The maid informed Siva about Parvati’s sorrow.

REPENTANCE

By now Siva was contrite. Hurrying to the bedroom he consoled her: “It was only my intense longing for you, darling, that made me lose my temper. I now regret my rash act. I quite understand the nature of mother-love that makes you so sad. Forgive me for my folly, but rest assured that I will give back Ganapati’s life.” So speaking, he led his consort to the outer door where Ganapati was lying with severed head.

REBIRTH

At the sight of the dissected Ganapati, again Parvati broke down and began to weep aloud.

But Siva ordered his men to bring the severed head of Gajasura (elephant-shaped demon) and fixed it to Ganapati's trunk. Ganapati got up, as though from sleep, and at once bowed to his mother's feet. She blessed him to live long. She advised him to salute Siva, too. For a while staring at Siva, Ganapati then fell prostrate at the feet of the Lord. Siva embraced him and said "You are verily the son who conquered his father!"

UPANAYANAM (Sacred-thread Ceremony)

Siva invited Brahma and other scholarly guests, and performed the thread ceremony of Ganapati, in strict accordance with the scriptures. Siva himself initiated Ganapati in the **Gayatri Mantra**.

Various guests made various gifts to Ganapati: Kundika gave him a rosary; Parvati, several precious jewels; Vishnu, a disc-weapon; and the Pramatha hordes, various ornaments.

Ganapati bowed to the feet of the Trinity couples, the seven sages and other honoured guests, and received their blessings.

Siva took Ganapati into his arms and said: "Dear son, you will be the master of the Pramatha hordes, and the deity who will be worshipped in the world in the first place, gaining precedence even the Trinity in the eyes of the devotees. Since you were born on the fourth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Bhadrapada, that day becomes very auspicious, and they that worship you on that day will be freed from all ills. But those people who refrain from that worship will be beset by evil. As you are the deity who prevents all the obstacles that come in the way of your devotees, you will be known as "Vighnesvara" (the Lord who destroys obstacles) and "SiddhiVinayaka" (the Lord who guarantees fulfilment).

'RUNNING RACE'

Skanda was the lord of the divine hosts. So Siva and Parvati thought it would be fitting to entrust the lordship of the Pramatha hordes and their likes to Ganapati. But Skanda protested, and

Ganapati was not prepared to let go his lordship over the divine hordes.

Thereupon Skanda and Ganapati approached their parents to decide the issue between them. Unable to reconcile the two brothers, Siva thought up a solution to the problem. He spoke to them: "He who between you returns first to us, after completing a round trip of the earth, will be the lord of the divine hordes."

Skanda started right away, on his peacock mount, to go round the earth. The mountless Ganapati knew not how to compete with his brother. Seeing their dejected son, Siva and Parvati suggested to him that he seek Vishnu's advice. Accordingly, Ganapati rushed up to Vishnu and respectfully requested the deity's help. Vishnu said: "Just recite 'Namah Sivaaya' for five hundred thousand times and go round your parents twenty-one times. That would amount to going round the earth."

Sitting behind his parents on a seat made of 'Darbha' grass, Ganapati chanted the sacred Mantra as suggested by Vishnu and also went round them twenty-one times. Then he bowed to them humbly and told them that he completed the trip round the earth.

Later Skanda returned, after finishing his round-trip. He was told by the pilgrims how Ganapati completed his 'Round Trip' earlier. Skanda, instead of being disappointed, was largehearted enough to appreciate the wise step taken by his brother.

Siva and Parvati were satisfied with the non-acrimonious way things turned out.

And so Ganapati was ceded the lordship over the divine hordes (**ganas**).

LORDSHIP OVER ALL DIVINE HORDES

To anoint Ganapati as the lord of the hosts, the waters of all the sacred rivers were fetched. He was embellished with various jewels made up of all the precious gems. In front of all the hordes,

Ganapati was sworn in as their Lord. The Trinity couple and the sages blessed him and received his grateful salutations. The gods in heaven showered flowerpetals on him.

As the hordes were dancing in happy celebration of Ganapati's coronation, he wanted to join them. But he felt that his sacred thread was obstructing the movement of his elephant-trunk-head- which discomfiture of his caused good-humoured amusement to the on-lookers.

SIDDHI (FRUITION) & BUDDHI (WISDOM)

Ganapati came of age. His parents thought it was about time he married.

Visvarupa Prajapati had two lovely and clever daughters, named Siddhi and Buddhi. Visvarupa realised that these highly accomplished daughters of his would be worthy wives of Ganapati. So he journeyed to mount Kailasa to make the necessary proposal to Lord Siva.

WOULD-BE BRIDEGROOM

Visvarupa's eyes fell on Ganapati and he was pleased with his looks and embellishments- the short stature; the diamond-studded necklace; the golden bracelets; and anklets; silken robes; a lotus in his left hand; the sacred ashes smeared on his forehead, in the middle of which a vertically weapon-shaped crimson dot; a golden ear ring on his left ear; and a golden sacred thread across his trunk.

He was seated on a diamond-studded throne, with a golden plate, to his right, on which were placed a glass of cow's milk and bunches of various kinds of sweet fruits.

Visvarupa then decided on offering the hand of his daughters to Ganapati. Accordingly he went up to Siva and Parvati, bowed to them and conveyed to them his intention. The divine couple suggested

to him that he first seek the permission of Ganapati, and said that, if agreed to the proposal, they had no objection.

When Visvarupa approached Ganapati with his proposal, the latter said: "I am honoured by your proposal. But don't you think that the girls and I must take a look at one another before we come to a final decision? Therefore It shall come all alone to your home. When the girls and I are pleased with one another, you can proceed with the wedding arrangements."

Visvarupa escorted Ganapati to his residence. Delighted with the hospitality accorded to him, Ganapati started performing a rapturous dance. When the two girls saw him and bowed to his feet, he could discover signs of acceptance in their features. He then blessed them, to the effect that their wishes be fulfilled of getting soon married.

Visvarupa and his two daughters were gladdened.

WEDDING

Visvarupa spoke to Ganapati: "Lord, by your arrival my home was sanctified and our lives are blessed. Just as Indra and Pulinda were each sanctified by offering Devasena and Valli respectively to Skanda, so am I honoured by your accepting my two daughters as your lifemates. Now take the hands of my daughters into yours."

Ganapati beckoned the girls towards him. Then Siddhi stood on his right, and Buddhi on his left.

Later Siddhi took Ganapati's right hand, and Buddhi took his left hand, as they led him to the shrine of Siva and Parvati, where they were greeted with temple honours by the priest.'

Ringing the temple bell the two brides and the bridegroom prayed to the divine couple, who aptly blessed them.

Meanwhile the Trinity and their spouses arrived there at the invitation of Visvarupa. At the behest of Siva, Brahma presided

over the wedding ceremony and conducted the proceedings according to scriptural tradition.

The newly-wed were showered with rich gifts by the honoured guests.

JOURNEY TO KAILASA

Next morning Ganapati left Kailasa, accompanied by his two consorts.

When they reached their destination, the Pramatha and Rudra hordes stood on either side of the streets to shout welcoming slogans. Skanda greeted them, along with his wives, Devasena and Valli. The wives of Skanda kissed the cheeks of the wives of Ganapati, as a sign of good will.

The sound of the bugles, and the shouts of the citizens hailing “Long live Ganapati, Siddhi and Buddhi!”, were resound on all sides.

Skanda escorted the newly-wed to the presence of Lord Siva. As He was waiting at the threshold of His castle side, to receive them the divine couple blessed them duly, as Ganapati and his consorts touched their feet in reverential salutation.

Jaya and Vijaya offered the newly-wed ‘Aarati’, and led them into the interior of the palace.

Siva honoured the male guests, and Parvati, the lady guests, with appropriate gifts.

Narada and Tumbura sang melodiously, and the Apsaras danced delectably, in honour of the newly married.

Siva and Parvati were pleased that their two sons were well married.

All the divine couples were spending their time in well-ordered pleasures and doing their best for the benefit of mankind, through precept and example.

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SIVA PURAANAM

PART II

KILLING OF TRIPURAASURAS

Tarakasura has three sons: Tarakaksha, Kamalaksha, Vidyunmali. After the death of Tarakasura, his wife took these children down to the nether world and brought them up with great care. The teacher of the demonic race, Sukracharya, taught them all the important arts and sciences.

When they grew up the three brothers went up to mount Meru and worshipped Brahma, who was pleased with their devotion and offered them any favour they sought of him.

The brothers said: “Lord, let our death be at the hands of only such a hero as can wield ride a chariot which is not a chariot, and wield a bow and an arrow which is neither. Besides, grant us that we remain ever prosperous and ever devoted to Lord Siva and that we can variously live in the cities built of gold, silver and magnet.”

Accordingly Brahma ordered the divine architect, Visvakarma, to build the three cities (tri-pura), as requested by the brothers.

Tarakaksha was ceded the city of gold; Kamalaksha, that of silver; and Vidyunmali, that of magnet.

The three brothers knew that the cause of their father’s death was the enmity of the gods. Their mother’s instruction in that connection furthered their grudge against the gods. So they began persecuting the ranks of the gods, who, thereupon, went up to Lord Vishnu, accompanied by Brahma, and sought His succour.

Vishnu told them: “The Tripuraasuras are great devotees of Lord Siva. I will suggest to you a method through which you can see that the power of their penance decreases. Go and preach atheism. By coming under its influence the wisdom and the sense of

devotion among the demonic races will diminish. Then their misdeeds will increase and they will be courting their own disaster, because of their sins.

Later, in the halls of the demons the atheists preached: “O citizens, in the process of creation there is no question of predestination or righteous action. The relationships among the creatures and the differences of the sexes are all false, having nothing to do with a divine creator. The Trinity of gods are creatures like ourselves and are in no way superior to us. It was only self-seeking scribes who postulated the theories of vice and virtue, and called them ‘codes’ (Saastras). Do not believe in them. There is neither god nor a rebirth. Just enjoy yourselves as you please, for there is neither heaven nor hell, and this life alone is real.”

The three sons of Taraka were immediately influenced by the tenets of atheism. They and their followers began relinquishing all good deeds and prescribed duties. Consequently the powers of the boons granted to them were evaporating like the dew in the morning sun.

Realising that the opportune moment has come, Brahma, Vishnu and the gods went to meet Lord Siva at Kailasa and to report to Him the happenings engineered by the demons.

Lord Siva is omniscient. He was quite willing to destroy not only the three cities but all the three brothers. At his suggestion, Vishnu made of his consort, Mother Earth, a chariot; of the sun and the moon, the two wheels of the chariot; of the Vedas, horses; of Brahma, the charioteer; of the mount Meru, the bow; of the divine serpent, Sesha, the bowstring; and of himself, the Narayana arrow. Then he requested Siva to ascend the chariot and cast the ‘Narayana Astra’ at the Three Cities and their rulers, in order to destroy both the places and the persons at one stroke.

Lord Siva did so, and that was the end of the Tripura cities and brothers, as the weapon made a sacrifice of them to the Fire-God.

The dying brothers appealed to Siva: “Lord, forgive our foolish deeds. It is our good fortune that we should die at your hands. We will be now united with your spirit. Our last wish is that you grant us no rebirth. We see our father securely embedded in your heart. Please set us by his side.”

Siva accepted them and allowed them into his spiritual heart.

JALANDHARA

Hiranyakasipu’s son, Agnijihva, had son named Sukara. By worshipping Brahma he obtained the boon of being invincible against any demon or serpent or god or human being or weapon. Building himself a mighty capital in the seabed, he started persecuting the three worlds.

This Sukara is the same as Jalandhara. Even hungry babies would be frightened out of suckling, if they heard his name. He destroyed all the sacrificial altars and was molesting the wives of the sages. The helpless wails of those women were extremely bothering the Trinity of gods.

Not content with his misdeeds elsewhere, Jalandhara, accompanied by his army, went up to Kailasa, to challenge Lord Siva for a fight. Since he did not want to negate the boon granted by Brahma, Siva disappeared, leaving behind even his constant companion and consort, Parvati.

Unable to find Siva, Jalandhara went to Vaikuntha and pressed Vishnu to fight with him. Vishnu followed the example of Siva, for the same reason.

Under the impression that he frightened even Siva and Vishnu, Jalandhara returned to his kingdom, like a conquering hero.

Unable to find their husbands, Parvati and Lakshmi were painfully restless.

Siva and Vishnu went down to Lake Manasarovar, and there began praying to Paraa Sakti; the Supreme Mother was impressed

by their worship and, appearing before them, advised them to exchange their weapons in order to kill Jalandhara.

As Siva took Vishnu's Disc-weapon, and Vishnu received Siva's Trident, sage Narada approached them and said: "Sirs, what is the reason behind your coming here leaving behind your homes and wives, and now exchanging your weapons? If you are preoccupied with saving yourselves, from the onslaught of Jalandhara, what happens to the rest of the universe? Is it not your destined duty that you should protect the helpless virtuous beings and punish the vicious people?"

So inciting the two deities, Narada went down to Jalandhara's realm and, receiving his hospitality, spoke to him: "Jalandhara, your valour is matchless. Siva and Vishnu are hiding at Lake Manasarovar and are plotting against you. If you do not manage to separate them, you will be courting disaster."

Jalandhara left for Lake Manasarovar and told the two deities: "Sirs, I pity you, because you ran away like cowards from your own abodes. Don't you know that a real hero cares little for his life? If you want to prove yourselves, come and fight with me."

Siva and Vishnu were amused at Jalandhara's ignorance and vanity, revealed to him the real reason for their self-imposed exile, and added: "You must stop pestering the wives of the sages. Otherwise your sins will destroy you. Go to Vaikuntha or Kailasa and try to rule those kingdoms, if you like."

Jalandhara replied: "Stop this roundabout backchat. If you are genuine heroes, come and fight with me. You cannot escape me, anyway now." So speaking he flung all his mighty weapons against the two gods.

Siva aimed the Disc at Jalandhara, and Vishnu attacked him with the Trident. Jalandhara was unable to withstand the force of that attack. He cried: "Sirs, the weapons you flung at me are torturing

me. Still, I do not want to flee from the battleground. Just grant that I will be accorded Salvation, for I now regret my misdeeds and agree that the tears of the wives of the sages are now virtually burning me. Please receive my last salutations".

Siva and Vishnu then regained their respective weapon, which came back to each of them in the rightful manner after fulfilling the task of killing Jalandhara.

The gods and the sages praised the two deities, who were lovingly received by their consorts, when they returned to their respective abode.

BANASURA

The demon-king Bali had a son named Banasura. He had a thousand arms. He conquered all the three worlds. He was ruling the entire universe, making Sonapura his capital.

As the court orchestra struck the music, he danced with supreme skill in favour of Lord Siva. Siva was pleased with his dance and asked him to seek a favour. The demon requested the deity that the latter stand guard at the gate of his fort. Siva agreed.

Before taking up his duty, Siva went back to Kailasa and reported to Parvati what happened. She was grieved at her lord's thoughtless mercy. Seeing her grief, Siva agreed to take her along with Him to Sonapura. When the divine couple left the place, mount Kailasa lost all its splendour.

Oh, is it not the irony of fate that one of the Trinity of gods should be the gatekeeper of a demon-king?

PRINCESS USHA

Banasura had a daughter, called Usha, whose beauty could not be matched even by that of the celestial courtesans. Besides, she was accomplished in the arts of music, dance and literature.

One day, after she came of age, she went into the forest, accompanied by her maids. The forest-goddess bade her welcome. The flora and fauna appeared to put on a new grace at the sight of her. The swans in the lake moved more delightfully and the peacocks danced more scintillatingly, as they saw the princess.

Usha began swimming in the lake, along with her friends. For the fun of it she assumed the form of Parvati. The maids also put on strange garbs. They all went to visit the Siva temple in the nearby pleasure garden, after finishing their swim. Usha fell prostrate at the feet of the images of Siva and Parvati. Pleased with the princess, Parvati revealed herself and said: “Child, how you should love me that you took on my shape and took me in for a while! I want to grant you a boon. Fast on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of Chaitra. In the night you will see a handsome youth, who will be your husband and will make you immensely happy.”

The princess thanked the goddess suitably and returned to the palace, along with her maids.

Thus several days passed by.

DREAM-BOY

The twelfth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra dawned eventually.

As foretold by Parvati, Usha saw an extremely handsome youth in her dreams at midnight. She cried aloud to her maids: “There, can’t you see the incarnation of Cupid - he who resembles a dark cloud in hue, with his black hair and complexion; he who is resplendent with his gem-studded crown, broad forehead, wide eyes, ornamented ears and neck; he who is silk-clad; he who is stealing sidelong glances at me - who is stealing my heart? Now please get me pure water, fragrant flowers, delicious fruits, and sweet milk - so that I can serve my lord to my heart’s content. Indeed goddess Parvati’s words have come true and my would-be husband has come to me!”

The maids realised that the princess was dreaming aloud, did everything in their power to quieten her, and then woke her up. As Usha opened her eyes she could no longer see her ‘dream-boy’. Consequently, she dropped tears of dejection from her eyes.

CHITRA REKHA

As Usha was drying her eyes with the hem of her saree, one of the maids, Chitra Rekha, said: “Dear princess, have you seen your prince-charming in your dream? Are you afraid you may not see him again? But have you ascertained his whereabouts? If so, tell me, and I will go and fetch him to you!”

Usha replied: “You don’t seem to realise how clever that stranger is? He seems to be adept in the art of love. He simply bewitched me by his good looks. I was so swept off my feet that I could not think of asking me who he was or where he lived. I am sure goddess Parvati’s forecast will not fail. Still, I wish you could go and find him, for you alone are capable of doing so.”

The Chitra Rekha, the eldest and wisest of her maids, told Usha: “Dear princess, why this needless anxiety? Anyway, I shall paint the pictures of all the handsome princes in the three worlds. Point out to me the one who took your fancy, and I will bring him to you.”

After rejecting many pictures and expressing a wish to go to the pleasure-garden to see if the prince was hiding there, at last Usha was shown a picture that convinced her that it was the one she found in her dream. Seeing the true painting, she bent her head bashfully. A little later she addressed Chitra Rekha: “Chitra, you lived up to your name (which means a ‘picture’). I want to reward you suitably.” So speaking, she kissed the cheek of Chitra Rekha. When Chitra asked her: “Is this really the stranger whom you love?”, Usha hid her face in her veil and nodded her head. At last she once again requested her friend to go and bring him to her.

ANIRUDDHA

Then Chitra Rekha told Usha: “Princess, this stranger is no ordinary mortal. He is the son of Rati and Manmatha. He lives in Dvaraka. His name is Aniruddha. He is the grandson of Lord Krishna; a mighty hero; and an extremely handsome prince. Verily it is the grace of goddess Parvati that enabled you to find this charming prince in your dream. Now let us see how you will actually become his life-partner in real life!”

Usha then urged her to go to Dvaraka immediately and bring the prince to her, threatening that otherwise she would put an end to her life.

DVARAKA

Chitra Rekha set off to the city Dvaraka, with a prayer on her lips to Mother Sakti.

The divine Mother responded through an aerial voice: “Chitra, Mother Sakti is pleased with you. She granted you the ability to enter the bedroom of Aniruddha and carry him along with his bed to the bedroom of Usha.”

Encouraged by these words, Chitra left for the city of Dvaraka with redoubled hope. She was delighted to see that hallowed town, where she could see the splendid castle of Lord Krishna himself, next to which was situated that of his brother, Balarama. She guessed that in as much as Aniruddha was the favourite of the Lord, his abode would be on the other side of Krishna’s.

Then her gaze fell on the large sheds wherein the holy cows were being well nourished by the cowherds; on the fond lovers going to meet each other in the bright moonlight; on the lilies in the lakes which were blooming at the sight of the moon.

She decided on first paying her reverential respects to Lord Krishna, before going to meet Aniruddha.

LORD KRISHNA AND SATYABHAMA

Chitrarekha entered the loftiest palace in Dvaraka. The interior was dazzlingly beautiful with the vari-coloured bright lights, and from the bedroom were wafted the winds carrying the perfume of musk. Inside she could see large mirrors on all the four walls, and on a huge table golden vessels containing cow’s milk and golden plates filled with a variety of delicacies.

And on the bed of soft eiderdown she could see the lovely epitome of the highest feminine grace and virtue. She could guess that the lady was Satyabhama. Realising that they were resting after a deliciously wild love-play, she longed for the day when she too would be able to enjoy the caresses of her future husband.

She then began to describe to herself the divine grace and the ethereal beauty of Satyabhama. She bowed to the feet of the blessed couple and mentally prayed for their blessings for the success of her mission.

Then she entered the palace next to that of Lord Krishna, wherein she directly witnessed the sleeping Aniruddha, who looked like an incarnation of Cupid.

DREAM GIRL

At the moment of her entry, Aniruddha was dreaming about Usha and speaking aloud in his sleep: “O precious beauty, I am spellbound by the power of your good looks. I have discovered the meaning of your sidelong glances. You are mine and I am yours. I am looking forward to the moment when I can touch your hand. What are you hesitating for? There is none hereabouts. Come and meet me. All the riches of man and nature are in plenty here. You will not find even the least little desire of yours unfulfilled in my home or town. Let us now be united in mind and body and soul.”

Chitrarekha no longer hesitated. She lifted him and his bed, through the mysterious powers accorded to her by Mother Sakti, and took him to Usha rightaway.

The highly gratified Usha presented her with a necklace studded with all the nine kinds of gems.

As Usha was awaiting his pleasure, Aniruddha woke up and before his eyes he saw the very girl he dreamt about. As he looked around the bedroom of Usha, he could understand that he was not in his own room. He asked Usha: "Princess, may I know who you are? Tell me the secret of my being here."

Usha said "I am the daughter of Banasura. This is Sonapura, the capital of his kingdom. My name is Usha."

Aniruddha then told her about his dream of the previous night.

Usha informed him about her own dream and about how Mother Sakti helped in bringing them together. She also introduced Chitrarekha to him and said that it was this maid of her's that was instrumental in factualising the theoretical boon of the divine Mother. Then she took Aniruddha to the bathroom where she provided him with the choicest bathing material. When he finished his bath, she decorated him with the richest raiment and with the most precious jewels.

Chitrarekha then served the couple with sumptuous food and drink, and went away leaving them alone.

Usha and Aniruddha were feeding each other with loving tenderness.

Aniruddha expressed his admiration for the elegant artfulness with which her bedroom is decorated, and also for the artistic skill of Chitrarekha who painted the pictures on the wall. He jokingly asked her whether it was she herself or her parents that sent for him.

Usha replied that it was the will of God and the grace of the Mother that united them.

She then led him to another room where he had to make his abode incognito.

But still the spies managed to learn about Aniruddha's arrival and informed Banasura about the fact. Bana ordered his men to kill him, because the demon-king was a devotee of Lord Siva and could not relish the idea of a protegee of Lord Vishnu for his son-in-law.

The soldiers of Bana flung several of their wild weapons at Aniruddha, who repulsed them through his 'Parigha' weapon and actually killed them all.

Bana, learning the news of his men's defeat and of the love between Usha and Aniruddha, thought to himself: "How strange that a human being could win the love of a princess of the demonic race! One knows of the many former instances when our people married the human beings, but this is the first time it happened the other way about. This is a crime that cannot be pardoned. I have also to punish Usha's maids who must have misled her."

BATTLE

So deciding, Banasura took along with him the army of Vrishandu and went to attack Aniruddha.

Aniruddha hit Bana with a fierce arrow, as a result of which the latter disappeared into the sky. After hitting Bana, the arrow killed a number of his soldiers nearby. Vrishaandu was amazed at the skill of Aniruddha. Learning about the fight, Usha was much perturbed. She was surprised that her father should have acted against her will; nor could she appreciate the fact that her father was working on Aniruddha the animosity he has against Vishnu. But she could not venture to stop her father who was unjustly trying to separate her from her lover.

Reappearing on the scene, Bana was steadfastly aiming his arrows at Aniruddha. Aniruddha easily repulsed the demonking's

attack. At last when Bana was trying to cut the head of Aniruddha with his sword, Vrishaandu stopped him and suggested that he would imprison Aniruddha instead.

At that juncture an aerial voice was heard saying: “Bana, you are a thoughtless person. Aniruddha is actually a devotee of Lord Siva. You must beware of the sin of separating true lovers. Be patient till your flagmast is struck off. Then your vanity will vanish.”

Bana was bewildered. He arrested Aniruddha by means of ‘serpent-weapon-bonds’ (Naga pasa) and retired to his palace thereafter.

Here the worried Usha prayed Siva and Parvati for help. Aniruddha also begged Parvati to come to his rescue. She took pity on him and kicked the ‘serpent-bonds’ with her left foot. As he was freed from his bonds, she exercised a counterbalancing Yogic power and effected his transfer to the bedroom of Usha, from the prison. The reunited lovers thanked the divine mother reverentially.

There at Dvaraka the disappearance of Aniruda caused great concern to his parents. Krishna was also sorry to hear the wails of Aniruddha’s wives. Learning the news of Aniruddha’s whereabouts from Narada, Krishna set off for Sonipura on his Garuda mount, accompanied by his brothers and cousins.

When they arrived at their destination, Krishna was surprised to see Siva and Parvati keeping watch over the gates of Sonipura.

Siva and Parvati ordered the Pramatha hordes to be prepared for any eventually.

Krishna was laughing within himself, at the thought of any fight with the divine couple who already protected Aniruddha. Krishna expressed his gratitude to them for that good deed of theirs. Siva and Parvati were, for their part, unhappy at the need to fight with Lord Krishna. But it is the ordained duty of Krishna to kill Bana, whereas Siva had to rescue the demon who was his devotee.

BATTLE BETWEEN SIVA AND VISHNU

So Siva and Krishna (incarnation of Vishnu) had no choice out to fight on behalf of, and against, Bana, respectively.

Krishna relieved the ‘disease’ emanating from the Vaishnava power; Siva sent up the ‘disease’ extracted from the Siva energy. And the two disease-causing forces began battling with each other in the celestial region.

The celestial denizens who witnessed that fierce duel were frightened and begged the two deities: “O Lord Siva, O Lord Vishnu, please be reconciled to each other and give up this battle. otherwise the whole universe will soon be exterminated. You whose duty is to save the world, must you indulge in an activity detrimental to the whole world?”

This appeal was followed by Bana’s apology to Vishnu. Consequently Siva and Krishna stopped their fighting.

Siva and Parvati instructed Bana to make necessary arrangements for the wedding of Usha and Aniruddha.

WEDDING OF USHA AND ANIRUDDHA

Bana again begged Siva and Vishnu for forgiveness of his folly and requested them to stay on for the wedding and to bless the young couple. They agreed.

The wedding of Usha and Aniruddha was performed in superb style. The entire city of Sonita shone with the brilliance of the artificial lights and the citizens went wild with the merriment befitting the occasion.

Siva and Parvati and other honoured guests gave and received rich gifts, and returned home after blessing the newly-weds.

Krishna took Usha and Aniruddha to Dvaraka.

Rukmini and Satya fulfilled the formalities of ceremonial welcome to the young couple, and the entire inhabitants turned out to greet them with joy and congratulations.

Bana felt that his life's mission was fulfilled by his daughter is becoming the daughter-in-law of Manmatha.

NANDISVARA

Sage Salankayana had a worthy wise son, named Silada. But Silada himself had no children. As he was praying to Lord Siva, his body was covered by anthills. The worms preyed upon his blood and flesh, and he became much emaciated. Pleased with his rigorous penance, Siva appeared before him, and touched his forehead, whereby Silada regained his fully healthy body. On being asked to seek the boon he wanted, Silada said: "Lord, my craving is for a son who is not born of woman, who will be well-versed in the scriptures, and who will live long in dedicated devotion to Thee."

Siva said 'so be it', and disappeared.

Silada went home and began digging the ground to prepare an altar for the sacrificial fire. When the sacrificial fireplace was ready, from within it appeared a supremely lovely infant. Silada immediately took him into his arms and caressed him, and thanked Lord Siva for the ready manifestation of His boon. Then he took that superbly resplendent child to his wife. Seeing the lady, the infant smiled at her knowingly and stretched his arms towards her. She was extremely delighted at this gesture of the baby, and rightaway carried him in her arms to the cradle and put him to sleep, after mysteriously finding herself suckling him.

The next day Silada and his wife performed the christening ceremony of the child. The priests and the guests blessed the child that he should grow into a wise Vedic scholar. Then an aerial voice was heard: "O sage Silada, name this child of yours as 'Nandi'. Thereby your fame will increase."

Silada gladly did so.

When Nandi was five years old he was sent to the Gurukul (school in the hermitage), where he learnt everything worth learning, after being taught only once by the teacher.

As Nandi was celebrating his Sacred week of initiation, sage Mitravaruna came to the hermitage of Silada. After receiving Silada's hospitality, Mitravaruna was introduced to Nandi. The guest was extremely pleased with the personal grace and the scholarliness of Nandi. Nandi bowed to the feet of Mitravaruna and expressed his gratitude.

Then Mitravaruna read the palm of Nandi and told Silada that the boy was indeed a genius but that he might not live long. Silada was crestfallen.

But Nandi spoke to his father: "Sir, you are needlessly worried. Why should you think that Siva's boon will be set at naught by the God of Death? Hasn't the Lord assured long life to me?"

After thus consoling his father, Nandi went to the forest to perform a great penance. Pleased with his penance, Siva, along with His consort, appeared before him and placed His hand on the boy's head by way of promising him fearlessness (Abhaya-hasta). At the touch of the Lord's hand, Nandi stirred out of his deep meditation. Opening his eyes, he saw the divine couple and fell prostrate at their feet, and begged them that be allowed to stay with them always.

Siva told him: "Good boy, I am very much impressed by your devotion. From now on you are assured of longevity. We also invite you to stay with us for ever."

Parvati placed a lotus garland around Nandi's neck. Siva sprinkled a drop of water from the river Ganga in his braid, by way of holy anointment. The water so sprinkled has formed itself

into five branches of river: Trisrota, Jatodaka, Svarnodaka, Jambu and Vrishadhvani. It is reputed that those who take a dip in them would be delivered from their sins.

Siva took Nandi to Kailasa and made him commander of some of his horses.

The Marut-gods brought one of their daughters, Sukirti, to Siva's abode and requested Him to accept on behalf of Nandi her hand in marriage. Complying with their request, Siva and Parvati first performed Nandi's Upanayanam, in strict accordance with the scriptural instruction, and then celebrated the wedding of Sukirti and Nandi.

Siva told Nandi: "You and your parents can live in comfort in my dwelling. From today onwards you will be my constant companion and adviser, and accompany me wherever I go."

Verily how fortunate is Nandi to receive such a favour from Lord Siva!

KALA BHAIRAVA

Provoked by his self-importance, Brahma declared: "I am the Creator. I am the first of the Trinity. All must worship me, therefore, first of all."

Hearing these vain words of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva called upon the Vedas to inform them about who is the First of the Trinity. The Vedas said that Siva was the First. Still, Brahma maintained that the opinion of the Vedas was wrong. Vishnu kept quiet. Siva was angered and uttered a cry of defiance, 'Hum'. Then a three-eyed ferocious form of his **Rudra** facet, designated as Bhairava, rose from that cry, and, wielding his Trident, beating his drum and dancing the cosmic dance, began shaking up the earth and the sky.

The Bhairava emanation then bowed to the feet of his original progenitor, Siva. Then he drew out from Brahma's head the cortical

tissue (Medas), named 'Ajnaana' (Ignorance), and flung it away. The place where that Medas was thrown is called '**Brahma Kapalam**'. Siva was now pacified. He addressed Bhairava: "Hereafter you will be known as 'Kaala Bhairava'. Since you were born in my presence, you will always remain by my side, as my bodyguard."

By now Brahma's vanity vanished. He apologised to Siva. Siva forgave him. Siva and Vishnu retired to their homes.

Back home, Siva told Bhairava: "You were guilty of killing (a part of) Brahma. The sin that accrues to you because of that act will always stick to you. The place where you cut off Brahma's cortical tissue will be known as Varanasi (Kasi): it will be the greatest pilgrim centre in the world. First take a dip in all the holy rivers, visit all the places of pilgrimage, and then perform the 'Kapalika' (related to the skull) worship, before you settle down at Kaasi. Thereby your sin of killing (a part of) Brahma will be washed away. Later, being the lord of the holy city of Kaasi, you will be serving me forever."

As Kala Bhairava started on his pilgrimage, Vishnu told Narada: "Kalabhairava is going round the world, performing the Kapalika worship. Go and broadcast to the world not to offer him alms wherever he goes."

Narada literally followed Vishnu's instruction.

As none was offering him food, at last KalaBhairava went up to Vishnu and sought his help. Then Vishnu suggested that he would step into the temple of Visvesvara, as soon as he entered Kasi for thereby his sins would be gone.

As he did so, not only was Kala Bhairava freed from his sins, but he also gained a handsome form and became the lord of the sacred city of Kaasi.

(All the devotees who anoint with oil the image of Kaala Bhairava on the 'Sani Trayodasi' day will be delivered from all evil and will enjoy great prosperity).

INCARNATION OF SARABHA

Even after killing Hiranyakasipu, the anger of Narasimha (incarnation of Man-Lion) was not quenched.

At Siva's instance, Virabhadra assumed a gigantic bird's form, with four faces, two feet, two wings, and ferocious claws and eyes, and stood threateningly before Lord Narasimha. The gods requested both of them to become peaceful and be reconciled. Both Virabhadra, who assumed that guise of Sarabha, and Vishnu, as the incarnation of Narasimha, acceded to the request of the gods.

Then Sarabha, reassuming his original form of Virabhadra, bowed to the feet of Vishnu and Lakshmi, who blessed him.

Everyone was happy.

YAKSHESVARA

Lord Vishnu ordered the gods and the demons to churn the Milky Sea. As they did so, first the poisonous fire of Halahala arose from the sea. By imbibing it, Lord Siva saved the world from the holocaust. Since he deposited the flaming poison (garala) in his throat (Kantha), he is also known as 'Garalakantha'.

Later goddess Lakshmi came out of the churned Milky Sea. Lord Vishnu married her.

Indra took possession of the divine elephant (Airavata), the divine horse (Uchchaisravas), the all-yielding Cow (Kama-dhenu) and the all-giving Tree (Kalpa-Vriksha).

Lord Vishnu received the vessel of Nectar that came out of the churning and, craftily assuming the form of the enchantress, Mohini, deceived the demons, and distributed it among the gods, who, thereby became immortal.

The demoness Simhika had a son named Raahu. He found out Vishnu's ruse of denying the ambrosia to the demons.

Thereupon he assumed the shape of gods and sat among them. As he stretched his palm and received the nectar, the sun and the moon discovered who he really was and alerted Vishnu (Mohini) about the fact. Vishnu flung his disc at Rahu; although his head and trunk were separated thereby, he did not die, because of the ambrosia he already drank up. Noticing that fact, Vishnu attached his head to his feet, and allowed him to be one of the planets now bearing his name.

The demons were offended by the ill-treatment received by one of their kin, and began attacking the gods. Still, because of the ambrosia they imbibed, the gods won the fight. The demons took to their heels, leaving behind them their dead.

The gods thought that the victory was due to their own valour and were becoming vain glorious about it, as they returned to their celestial abode. One day Siva, in the guise of a Yaksha, went to the court of Indra, and asked about the reason for the vain prattling of the gods.

The gods said: "Sir, you seem to be an ignoramus. We have taken possession of all the good things that came out of the churning of the Milk-Sea. We have become invincible by virtue of our drinking the nectar, as we proved in our fight with the demons. That is why we are expressing ourselves in this manner, by way of self-congratulation."

Then Siva threw down on to the floor a piece of grass and asked them to lift it. Unable to do so, the gods bent their heads in shame. Then an aerial voice said: "O gods, know this Yaksha to be verily Lord Siva. Without His grace you could not lift even a piece of grass. How could you say that it was your valour that brought you victory? Accept the fact that you are at the mercy of Lord Siva, and then you will continue to receive His grace."

As they followed the aerial voice's advice, Siva was pleased with them.

PIPPALAADA

The wife of Dadhichi, Suvarcha, is virtuous and highly accomplished. She was entirely devoted to her husband, and would never be out of his presence, because she wanted to be ever prepared to attend to his needs. Both husband and wife were devotees of Lord Siva.

When Indra complained to Brahma about the trouble he is being subjected to by the demon, Vritra, Brahma said: "Sage Dadhichi, praying to Siva, obtained the boon which made his bones as hard as diamonds. Go please Dadhichi, and obtain from him one of his bones. With that bone you can make your diamond-weapon, which will enable you to kill the demon."

Accordingly, Indra went to the hermitage of Dadhichi, where the sage was reciting the sacred mantra, 'Namah Sivaaya'. Indra bowed to the sage, and on being asked about the reason of his visit, told him the facts.

Dadhichi then said: "Indra, this is my hermitage. These are my 'weapons'. All that is left is my body. Ask of me any of these things and you will have it."

When Indra asked for the bones of the sage, the latter gladly yielded them to the lord of the gods, and then became united with the sun-god, as his life went out piercing his brain.

Indra took the bones to his court, and after anointing them with the milk of Kamadhenu, commissioned Visvakarma to make the diamond-weapon with the backbone. The divine architect did so and offered to Indra the Vajra-ayudha (Diamond-weapon).

With the rest of Dadhichi's bony remains and sinews, the god of Death, Yama, got his 'rope of death' manufactured.

Here the wife of Dadhichi lamented: "O cruel Indra, how dare you sacrifice my husband's life for your personal ends? Do you want to see the end of our clan? I am with child, and if I were to join my husband on the funeral pyre, as it behoves a pious wife, would it not mean that Dadhichi has none to perpetuate his lineage? How can I live without my husband, even if I do not burn myself along with him?"

The gods were uneasy about the repercussions of this pious lady's calamity.

Meanwhile an aerial voice said: "O Suvarcha, the sacred law decrees that pregnant women should not follow their dead husbands to the funeral pyre (to commit 'Sati'). Rest assured that your offspring will shine with divine splendour".

Suvarcha was partly pacified by this assurance, but she still thought it was right to join her husband in death. So with a hard rock she broke up her womb, drew out the fetus and placed it under a 'Ravi' tree. As she was awaiting the result of her action, from that fetus evolved a resplendent boy. Her heart thrilled with ecstasy. Addressing the newborn, she said: "Darling child, your parents had not the good fortune to bring you up. But you will enjoy longevity. You remain under this 'Ravi', offering all riches to the people who pray to you."

So speaking, she ascended the funeral pyre, placing the responsibility of protecting her child in the hands of God.

The fame of Suvarcha(la) has gained eternal recognition, by virtue of the great self-sacrifice of hers.

The child was named 'Pippalada' by the gods. When he came of age he married a girl named Padma. The happy couple lived happily together, blessing all their devotees with due recognition of their devotion.

Pippalada's disembodied spirit entered the 'Raavi' tree, and ever since has been showering peace and prosperity on all those who prayed to it. Thus the 'Raavi' tree gained a pre-eminent place among the trees.

AHUKA

In a forest near the Silver Mountain, a tribal, by name Ahuka, was dwelling. His wife was named Ahuki.

Ahuka was in the habit of getting up early in the morning and praying to Siva and Parvati, after the ablution. Then he would go a hunting, and bring home venison and the like needed for his and his wife's sustenance. His wife was a chaste lady, entirely devoted to her husband. She serves the guests with exemplary hospitality, and only after attending to the needs of the guests do the couple eat their own meal.

One day Siva told Parvati: "I want to test this tribal (Bhil) couple. You transform yourself into a tigress and kill Ahuka. Then I will come there as a stranger-guest and would put the Bhil couple to a severe test."

Accordingly they went to the Bhil dwelling. Siva, as the stranger, after receiving the hospitality of the Bhil couple, told Ahuka: "O Bhil, I want to spend the night in your home, because I am afraid of the wild animals in the jungle."

The Bhil home is a tiny one which can accommodate only two people. But Ahuki said: "Dear husband, we cannot refuse the request of a guest. So you two sleep inside the home. I shall stay outside, keeping watch over you, with my bow and arrow."

But in the third quarter of the night, she could not keep herself awake and dozed off.

Then there appeared a tigress, roaring ferociously. The guest pretended to be asleep, even though he heard the roaring. In order

to protect him, Ahuka got up, took up his bow and arrows, and went out to fight with the tigress. The tigress tore him up and killed him.

Early next morning Ahuki woke up and saw her dead husband. She also saw that the guest was unhurt.

The aggrieved Ahuki then spoke to the guest: "Sir, my husband was killed. My place is with him, and so permit me to join him on the funeral pyre."

Preparing the fire, she addressed the Fire-God: "O lord of Fire, I cannot bear to live without my husband. Eat me up along with my dead husband."

When she jumped into the fire, it became cool.

Then Siva and Parvati presented themselves before her, and said: "O noble, chaste lady, we merely wanted to test your devotional spirit. Both of you proved yourselves to be exemplary devotees. Now receive your husband, who will just now come back to life."

Ahuka got up as though from sleep. The couple then bowed to Siva and Parvati, and sang their praises.

Siva told Ahuka: "You will become the famous son of the king of Ayodhya, Virasena, and will be known as Nala. Your wife will be Damayanti, the daughter of Bhimasena, king of Vidarbha: she will choose you from among the assembled suitors in the process of 'Svayamvara' (wherein the bride garlands the man she loves in an assembly of many men who seek her hand). We will assume the forms of a royal swan couple and assist you in your courtship".

So saying, Siva and Parvati disappeared.

In course of time Siva's boon came true, and the Bhil couple became the famous Nala and Damayanti, who lived happily together, thanks to their devotion to Lord Siva.

UPAMANYU

Sage Vyaghrapada had a wife named Vimala, a very chaste lady entirely devoted to her husband. Both of them were true devotees of Lord Siva. Although they were attacked by poverty, they managed to serve their guests duly, and would eat their food from what was left thereafter.

By the grace of Siva, a good son was born to them. They christened him 'Upamanyu'. The brothers of Vimala took her and the child to their home for a few days and brought up the child with extreme tenderness.

Upamanyu was being fed by cow's milk, and was clad in rich raiments. One after another, his uncles kept on fondling him. After a while, Vimala wanted to return to her husband, along with her child. So the brothers escorted her back to her husband's home, after presenting her and Upamanyu with rich gifts.

Vyaghrapada was, as noted, rich in spiritual wealth but not in material wealth. But little Upamanyu was not aware of this fact. Accustomed to the rich nourishment he got at his uncle's home, he asked his mother for cow's milk and like. Vimala's heart was broken, for they had no cow which yielded milk at that time. For want of something better, she gave him water mixed with some of milk-powder. Tasting it, Upamanyu said that what she gave him was not real milk, and asked her whether it was fair on her part to deceive him thus. At last he requested her to breast-feed him.

Because of her poor nourishment she could not even suckle him. She regretfully conveyed her helplessness to her son.

The five-year-old Upamanyu told his mother: "I am sorry I spoke rudely to you on account of my infantile ignorance. Please tell who can save us from this poverty, and I will go and pray to them."

Vimala replied that if he prayed to Siva and Parvati he would obtain all kinds of riches.

When Upamanyu assured his mother that he would go and worship the divine couple in order to gain wealth, his father, who heard their conversation, said: "Boy, you seem to be very innocuous. All the worldly wealth is transient. The only prosperity that is eternal is spiritual riches. That is why, though we too worshipped Lord Siva, we never sought material wealth from Him. All that we requested from Him was Salvation. If you still want plenty and prosperity, keep chanting the holy mantra, **NAMAHSIVAAYA.**"

Upamanyu said: "Sir, if we get wealth, we can not only live in comfort ourselves but also help those in need. We will then have the necessary means to do good works and perform sacrificial rites and the like. So please allow me to go and worship Siva."

Both parents blessed Upamanyu, and he went to the forest glades to perform penance.

Seated under a banyan tree, and turning towards Kailasa, Upamanyu began his penance, chanting the sacred Mantra, **NAMASSIVAAYA.** After a while he heard these words: "Upamanyu, you are still a child. This jungle, where the wild animals roam, is no place for you. Stop this penance and go home."

As Upamanyu opened his eyes, he saw Indra before him, speaking further: "Child, if you give up this penance, I shall give you many rich gifts."

Upamanyu replied: "Sir, stop all this nonsense. My sole aim in life is to see Siva and Parvati. Till then my penance will continue."

Discouraged, Indra went away.

As Upamanyu continued his penance, a tiger approached him and began roaring frighteningly. Yet Upamanyu did not stir a bit. Pleased with the boy's determined devotion, Siva and Parvati appeared before

him. Seeing them he saluted them and said: “All that I wanted was to be able to see you. Now my wish is fulfilled. Please remain as consecrated idols in my home and accept my worship and service.”

Caressing the child’s head, the divine couple said: “You have pleased us even as though you are a little boy. So we grant that till the end of ‘Rudra Age’ (which is ever-recurring) you will be alive as a rich, healthy and renowned youth, entirely dedicated to our worship.”

By the mere wish of Parvati and Siva, the hermitage of Vyaghrapada transformed itself into a mighty mansion. All the material that man could ever wish, for his luxury and comfort, was evident there. Upamanyu’s parents realised that their son’s penance was successful and were eagerly awaiting his return home.

Glowing with spiritual splendour, Upamanyu was returning home. Struck by his resplendence, the people on the way offered him obeisance and escorted him with royal honours to his home. Upamanyu hurriedly ran up to his parents and fell prostrate at their feet. His parents knew not how to bless him adequately. They were merely shedding tears of rapture. The gods in heaven began showering flower-petals on the child-devotee.

Then Upamanyu related to the assembly how he was enabled to see Siva and Parvati in person.

Everyone was delighted. The parents embraced the boy again. Upamanyu and his parents thereafter lived in rich comfort, and contributed to the good causes and patronised the poor and the needy.

PASUPATA WEAPON

Visiting the Pandavas in exile, following their defeat in their gambling with the Kauravas, Krishna spoke to the eldest of them;

“O Yudhishtira, if you want to defeat the Kauravas and regain your lost kingdom, you have to pray to Lord Siva.” Then he went back to Dvaaraka.

Later sage Vyasa came there to inquire after the welfare of the Pandavas. After honouring him appropriately, Yudhishtira said: “Holy sage, your arrival has brought us cheer. Just now Lord Krishna advised us to win the favour of Lord Siva. Please enlighten us on the best way of doing so.”

Vyasa replied; “Indeed Krishna’s words must be implicitly obeyed. Arjuna is the most skilled warrior among you. If he worships Lord Siva he will obtain the ‘Pasupata-Astra’. That weapon will enable you to achieve your desired aim. May Lord Krishna bless you!”. So saying, the sage suggested that Arjuna chant the NAMAHA SIVAAYA mantra during his penance, and then went on his way.

Yudhishtira instructed his younger brother to go to Mount Indrakila, pray to Lord Siva, and thereby fulfill the wishes of every one of the brothers.

MOUNT INDRAKILA

Arjuna arrived at Mount Indrakila, which was a veritable feast to the eyes, with its natural wealth and beauty.

He found a delightful lake in the Asoka garden, and decided to do his penance there.

As usual, Indra, who is afraid of the devotees possible usurping of his seat, came there in the guise of a celibate. He talked to Arjuna: “Sir, who are you? Who is your favourite deity? What is the purpose of your penance?”

When Arjuna replied him duly, Indra said: “You seem to be very foolish. You fell into Krishna’s trap. I never heard of anybody who prayed to God in order to be able to defeat his foes. Krishna wanted to test you. Anyway, penance is for the people who want to

gain Salvation. Go back to your brothers, fight like a true hero, and win back your kingdom.”

Arjuna said: “Sir, my wish is to get the Pasupata weapon from Siva. I will pray for Salvation later on. Please don’t discourage me but bless me.”

Then Indra revealed himself and said: “I admire your strong determination. I just came here to test you. Lord Siva is always at the beck and call of His devotees. He will definitely grant you wish. Besides, I will send some of my retinue to be always at your service.” Blessing Arjuna, Indra disappeared.

Arjuna stood on one leg and with one-pointed attention continued to chant the sacred syllables, **NAMASSIVAAYA**.

MUKASURA

The demon Muka, assuming the form of a pig, approached Arjuna, and circling him tried to pierce him.

Arjuna saw the fierce pig and began to think: “This animal who is bothering me must be a demon. Its very sight arouses my hatred and enmity. It could not be a friend, for wise men like me can readily distinguish between a friend and a foe. So I shall kill him and do my penance in peace.” As Arjuna was about to take out an arrow and fling it from the Gandiva bow, he heard a terrible roaring. He discovered the sounds came from Lord Siva.

Arjuna’s discovery was right. To save Arjuna, Siva hit the pig with an arrow. At the same time Arjuna also cast his arrow at the pig. The pig fell to the ground. Revealing his true shape, the demon Muka took to his heels. The gods showered flowers upon Arjuna.

Meanwhile Siva ordered one of his men to recover the arrow he hit the pig with. As the man was plucking out the arrow, Arjuna claimed that it was his own. Arjuna could not realise that it was Siva’s arrow that actually killed Muka.

Siva’s servant said: “Sir, you look like an innocent monk. Don’t you know that you would incur sin by lying like this? My Lord tried to help you. Do you want to be ungrateful to Him? Do you think that Siva’s tribal servants will not come to my aid if you attack me and prevent me from plucking this arrow? Now repent and pray to Lord Siva, who will grant you many more arrows like this one.”

Arjuna was adamant: “You do not know who I really am. I do not know who your real master is. Stop this nonsense and beg me to surrender this arrow to you. Then I may grant your request. If you do not like to do so, bring your master her.”

KIRATISVARA

Lord Siva cognised the situation and told His consort: “Parvati, I would really enjoy a fight with the hero, Arjuna. I will assume the form of a hunter and battle with him. I will then have a chance of seeing his battling skill at first hand.”

Parvati said: “It is not fair on your part to test your devotees in this fashion, because you are by nature obedient to them. Please don’t pick a quarrel with him but assure him of your continuing protection.”

But Siva was bent on his mission. He took long with him the tribal army of his. Arjuna was terribly impressed by the tribal leader’s personal magnetism. And yet he did not flinch from hitting Siva (in disguise) with his arrows in quick succession. On their side, the tribal retinue of Siva kept on aiming their arrows at Arjuna. Arjuna tried to cut off the strings of the Siva-army’s bows. But Siva did not flee; on the other hand, he caused Arjuna’s hits to be ineffective and even broke his armour. Then Arjuna challenged Siva to a duel. After a while he was too tired to continue the duel. Helplessly prostrate on the ground, Arjuna cast a solemn look at the tribal chief. In him he could instantaneously recognise Lord Siva. Seeking the Lord’s forgiveness, he made his obeisance to

His feet. Siva embraced Arjuna in affection and admiration. The gods showered flowers on them.

Siva then told Arjuna: “I am impressed by your penance. My idea in fighting with you was only to let Parvati see the nature of your valour. Now accept the Pasupata weapon, by wielding which you will be ever invincible. Hereafter you and your brothers will enjoy all prosperity and regain your realm. Give your brothers my blessings.”

Arjuna thanked Siva and Parvati for their graciousness, and taking up his newly-acquired Pasupata weapon, went back to his brothers.

His brother and Krishna congratulated Arjuna on the success of his mission. Kunti Devi and Draupadi felt assured that their happy days would soon be coming again.

ATRI AND ANASUYA

Sage Atri and his wife Anasuya were dedicated devotees of Lord Siva. They were praying to the deity in the Kamyaka forest. On account of the heat generated by their rigorous penance, the trees were withering. The flora and fauna were also becoming extinct gradually. Even the rivers around were drying up. The other sages left the forest to seek refuge Siva for succour. Siva appeared before them and assured them that he would see that the ‘heat’ of the penance of Atri and Anasuya would be decreased.

Siva then addressed river Ganga embedded in his tresses: “Go to the hermitage of Atri and Anasuya, and put them to a severe test.”

Accordingly Ganga Devi went down to the Atri hermitage. There Atri just finished his penance. He was feeling extremely thirsty and requested his wife to fetch him water from his ‘Kamandalu’ (water vessel, used by ascetics). He was wondering why Lord Siva

was angry with him, for he was aware that only divine wrath was the reason behind his thirst.

Anasuya went in search of water. Nowhere was water to be found. Then she prayed to Lord Siva to come to the rescue of her husband, by enabling her to find water rightaway.

Ganga Devi heard Anasuya’s wail and took pity on her. She spoke in a disembodied voice: “Anasuya, you are indeed a nobly chaste lady. I am pleased with your devotion to God and to your husband. Just make a small hole in the ground behind. From that hole will rise pure water. You can take it and quench your husband’s thirst.”

As Anasuya followed Ganga’s instructions, the water, tasting like ambrosia, came up. Taking a Kamandalu full of water from it, Anasuya requested Ganga to stay on there till she came back, after giving the water to her husband.

Meanwhile Atri was uneasily wondering at the delay in his wife’s return and at the anger of Lord Siva. But just then Anasuya returned with water, informing him about the arrival of Ganga Devi. Quenching his thirst, Atri dropped tears of ecstasy, on hearing of the grace of Ganga went to meet Ganga Devi. On approaching the spot where the blessed lady appeared, he composed a hymn in praise of her and begged her to remain there in one form of her myriad manifestations. The river goddess acceded to his request, and the little pond became a huge lake.

Siva and Parvati were delighted with the non-dual devotion of Atri and Anasuya, and the divine couple also stayed on there in the form of the cosmic images, to which the saintly couple prayed incessantly during their earthly existence.

MADHU AND KAITABHA

Before Creation, the universe was filled with water everywhere. Lord Vishnu was resting on a banyan leaf, which was a float in the

waters. As he was sleeping, from his ears came out two demons, named Madhu and Kaitabha. They could not see the earth. Tired after their vain quest, they returned to Vishnu and examined him intensely. Then they witnessed in Vishnu's navel the figure of the prayerful Brahma. They asked Brahma who he was and why he was praying.

Without answering their repeated queries directly, Brahma asked them in return to tell him who they were.

Madhu and Kaitabha spoke in unison: "You are being impertinent. We were born of Vishnu's ears. Anyway, to satisfy your curiosity we tell you we are Madhu and Kaitabha. Now tell us who you are." Brahma replied "I came out of Vishnu's navel-lotus. I am praying to Siva to enable me to initiate the process of Creation."

Then the demon-duo said: "You are foolish. You, who were born from a part of Vishnu's entity, have no right to remain there if you want to receive Siva's blessings. Go away to Kailasa. Else you will be put to shame."

Upon which Brahma worshipped the mother of the Vedas, the **PRIMAL ENERGY (PARA SAKTI)**. The Supreme Energy incarnated Herself in the form of Kaali on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Phaalguna (about March). Then Brahma appealed to her: "Mother, these demons are threatening my very existence. Save me." Sakti told him not to worry but to wake Vishnu up, who will protect him and kill the duo.

Then Vishnu opened his eyes. He ordered Madhu and Kaitabha not to quarrel with Brahma, the father of creation, but to seek his blessings.

But the two demons said: "You are not right. How can we tolerate the idea of a man, born of your navel, worshipping Siva? We have power in our own right. We don't need to seek Brahma's favour."

Vishnu realised that the duo would come in the way of Creation, and told them that he would give them a boon which would make them vulnerable only to himself. The two demons agreed to be killed by Vishnu, with the proviso that he kill them anywhere except on water.

Vishnu placed the two men on his thighs and cut them into pieces with his disc-weapon. Brahma sang the praises of Vishnu and of the Mother Sakti (Kaali).

MAHISHASURA (BUFFALO-DEMON)

Mahishasura was the son of Rambhasura. He received many boons from Brahma, and with their aid was persecuting the gods and the sages. They approached Brahma to plead before Siva and Vishnu that, unless Mahishasura was done away with, there would be no peace on earth or in heaven.

GODDESS DURGA

Siva made a sign to Vishnu. Next he took out a bit of the energy of Mother Sakti and, igniting it, created a maiden. The newborn Goddess was filled with the energy of Siva on her forehead; with that of Vishnu in her arms; with that of Brahma, in her feet; with that of the sun, in her tresses; with that of the moon, in her breasts; with that of Sachi Devi, in her waist; with that of Varuna, in her thighs and hips; with that of Kshama, in her buttocks; with that of Gotraripu, in her fingers; with that of Ghrini, in her toes; with that of Dhatri, in her nose; and with that of the Tretagni Fire, in her three eyes.

To that divinely shining maiden were presented: the spear, by Siva; the disc, by Vishnu; the conch and the rope, by Varuna; the Kamandalu bowl, by Brahma; the silken robes, the diamond earrings, the diamond ring, the pearl necklace, the golden anklets, the golden

bracelets and the silver ankle-ornaments, by the Milky Sea; the golden lotus, by 'Malavarthi'; the axe, by Visvakarma; the quiver, by the Fire-God; the bow, by the Air-God; the 'Kala' staff, by the God of Death (Yama); the sword and the shield, by Kaala Murti; the diamond armour and mighty weapons, by Kama-Dhenu; the lion-image, by Himavan; the honey-vessel by the moon; the diamond crown, by Adishesha; the rosary, by Prajapati.

After giving the gifts, they all worshipped her as goddess Durga.

KILLING OF THE DEMON, MAHISHASURA

Enraptured, goddess Durga roared, as a sign of her intention to root out evil and establish the good. The roar of the goddess resounded in all the fourteen worlds. Hearing it, the buffalo-shaped demon, Mahishasura, was angered and challenged her to a duel. Durga took up the challenge with pleasure, and, after battling with him and his army from the first day till the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Asvayuja, put an end to the entire retinue of the demon. Undaunted, the adamant Mahishaasura uprooted many a mountain and flung them at the goddess, who turned them into powder with her charmed weapons.

On the ninth day of the month of Aasvayuja, the goddess assumed the form of Maha Lakshmi and spoke to Mahishasura: "O wretched demon, how dare you fight with me? Now your end is near."

So speaking, she jumped upon him and crushed him under her feet. Then she pierced his body with her spear, and tried to pull half of his body apart. However, Mahishasura managed to extricate himself from her hold, and flying up to the sky began hitting her with a shower of arrows.

Laughingly repulsing his attack, the goddess took on the shape of Sarasvati (goddess of Learning), and, on the tenth day of their

battle, cut off his head. The gods thanked her by way of raining flower petals on her. The **Gandharvas** sang, and the **Apsaras** danced, in celebration of the event.

This very goddess, Durga, assuming the form of Satakshi, killed another demon, Durgasura, with her three pronged spear. By praying to Durga, Lord Parasurama earned his success over the Kshatriyas. By the grace of Durga, Kartaviryarjuna was able to rule the globe for thousands of years. All those who worship Durga will be blessed with every kind of prosperity.

During the nine-day (plus one day of final celebration of the event of the killing of Mahishasura) festival of **DASARA** the goddess Durga is prayed to in several ways and under various names like Kali, Gauri, Maha Lakshmi,

SAGE MRIKANDU

The wife of sage Mrikandu is named Marudvati. She was wholly devoted to the service of her husband, and used to treat his disciples as her own children. The Mrikandu hermitage was the very centre of Vedic learning.

The childless couple were uncomplaining about their fate, but placed their faith in the merciful Providence.

The guests and the students were thanking their lucky stars that they could find such parental and material hospitality in the Mrikandu home.

DISRESPECT

Brahma and his consort were seated in their royal court, as they were visited by the sages from all corners of the world. But the gatekeepers did not allow sage Mrikandu in, because, they said, that the childless sages had no permission to enter Brahma's court. Realising that it was no time to protest, the sage hung down his head in shame and returned home.

Marudvati was not to be seen welcoming him with her usually cheerful countenance. He went inside the hermitage, and, seeing her in distress, asked her the reason why she was sad.

She replied: "Lord, in your absence many wives of the sages called on me. As I was offering them hospitality, they asked me to assemble our children also there. When I said that we had no children, they turned away, saying that they would not receive the hospitality of childless people. I am sorry that all my trouble, in preparing their food, was in vain."

Mrikandu informed her of his own similar disappointing experience in the Satyaloka of Brahma.

There and then the sage decided upon worshipping Siva and Parvati. Marudvati also joined her husband in doing penance, chanting the names of Lord Siva and His consort.

Sage Narada, who witnessed their rigorous penance, was astounded by the sincerity of the couple's devotion, and conveyed the news of that fact to Lord Siva, adding that the sage couple would be put to further shame if he refused their prayerful appeal for progeny.

Parvati was touched. With a tear-filled voice, she said: "Narada, I have many times appealed to my Lord to fulfil the wish of the Mrikandu couple for children. Yet He had not acceded to my request. Now your information will convince him that He should not further delay His boon-offer."

So saying, she convinced Siva about the need to favour His devotees, and together they left for the Mrikandu hermitage.

Here at the hermitage there were signs of coming beneficence. Mrikandu and Marudvati realised that the divine couple were on their way, and were eagerly awaiting their arrival.

SHIVA AND PARVATI

In the celestial sphere the music of the Siva retinue was reverberating scintillatingly. In a little while Siva and Parvati, riding their Nandi mount, touched ground. Mrikandu and Marudvati fell prostrate at their feet.

Siva said: "Sage Mrikandu, I am pleased with the devotion of yours and your spouse's. But before I grant you your wish, I have to inform you that you have to choose between a long-living, atheistic and unworthy son and a worthy and wise devotee of Myself, who will not live long."

The sage couple, without hesitation, asked for a Siva-devotee, albeit he would not live long.

'So be it', said Siva and returned to Kailasa, along with Parvati.

MARKANDEYA

Marudvati was with child. The wives of other sages congratulated her and celebrated the event in traditional style. On an auspicious day she was delivered of a male child. The child was named Markandeya.

Even as a child, Markandeya was in the habit of going to the Siva shrine, embracing and worshipping the Siva idol, reading the Siva lore, chanting **NAMAH SIVAAYA**, praying to Siva image with Bilva leaves, and writing the name of Siva ten million times.

Markandeya's **Upanayanam** was performed when he was seven years old, and later he was sent to the **Gurukul** to pursue the Vedic studies.

Markandeya mastered the scriptural learning within a short period of time. He studied all the branches of Siva scriptures, and was respecting the elders as much as he was worshipping Lord Siva.

The parents of Markandeya were quite gratified by the great learning and good conduct of their son.

Thus fifteen years passed by, when sage Narada arrived at the Mrikandu hermitage. After receiving the honours from the parents and the son, Narada told Mrikandu: “Sir, Lord Siva granted only a limited span of life to your son, simply to test your faith. So please perform another penance and obtain the favour of the Lord to see that your son lives long.”

Mrikandu and his wife decided to accept the advice of Narada.

THE MEANS TO SALVATION

Then Narada addressed Markandeya: “By the grace of Lord Siva you became the offspring of this pious couple. Besides, you have completely studied the significance of the Siva entity. If you keep praying to Him with non-dual devotion and dedication, you are sure to receive His blessing for a long life.”

Markandeya went to the nearby Bilva forest and there installed the earthy image of Lord Siva with due consecration. During the three ‘sandhya’ periods (morning, noon and evening) he was praying to the God, by reciting the Rudriya hymns eleven times. He supported himself, by simply eating fruits for some days and later by just chewing one Bilva leaf. Thus six months passed by.

The book-keeper of Yama, Chitrugupta, read out to the God of Death the record of the worthy actions of Markandeya, but also mentioned that, now that the boy completed his sixteenth year, his life-span was over. Duty-bound, Yama went down to the Bilva forest to carry away the boy-saint to his kingdom of Death.

GOD OF DEATH

Markandeya heard the slight sound of a tingling bell. Yama was arriving near his place of penance, on his buffalo mount. Seeing

Death’s long rope, Markandeya embraced the image of Lord Siva tightly and prayed: “Lord Siva, God of Mercy and Compassion and Forgiveness, the god of Death is approaching me. You alone can prevent his carrying me away. I seek your refuge with all my heart and mind and soul.”

The god of Death was astounded at the uncompromising devotion of the boy-saint. Although he hated to take away that figure of saintly effulgence, he had no choice but to perform his apportioned duty. He threw out his lasso to pull up Markandeya, and it surrounded the Siva image along with the boy. Undeterred, Markandeya began worshipping Lord Siva, by unceasingly repeating NAMASSIVAAYA.

THE GRACE OF LORD SIVA

Yama began to draw in his lasso. His pulling somewhat shook up the Siva idol. And yet Markandeya did not release his hold of the image (Linga). Yama was feeling the heat of Markandeya’s penance-power to be unbearable. The clatter of the broken Linga was heard on all corners of the universe. From inside the Linga the three-eyed, angered Lord Siva arose, and, threatening the god of Death with his terrible trident, said: “How dare you pull my own image? If you persist in your foolish attempt, I will pierce you with this Trisula.”

Yama replied: “Lord, I lassoed Markandeya, only because his life-span had come to an end. Since the boy kept on embracing your idol, my lasso surrounded it. Forgive me for pulling up the idol also, along with the boy.”

Siva said: “Sir, be more careful in future in discharging your duty. In granting him a short life I was merely trying to put his devotion to test. I will now make him longliving. Now go back to your realm.”

Accordingly Yama returned to his abode.

Shedding tears of rapture, Markandeya bowed to the feet of Lord Siva. The Lord's image blessed him: "O noble celibate, you have withstood the trials and tribulations of the test to which you were put. May you always remain a sixteen-year-old boy and please Me and My Consort with your devotion!"

CHIRANJIVI

(LONG-LIVING MAN)

Markandeya performed the sixteen forms of consecrational prayer to the image of Lord Siva. Siva and Parvati blessed him again with long life. Mrikandu and Marudvati thanked the divine couple for their mercy towards their child.

Siva and Parvati smilingly blessed them all again and disappeared.

THE TWELVE LINGAS OF DIVINE LIGHT

1. SOMESVARA LINGA

In the region of Saurashtra, the Somesvara Linga is installed, in the pilgrim centre of Prabhasa.

Daksha Prajaapati had twenty-seven daughters. All those beautiful girls were married to the Moon. Rohini was the most accomplished among those beauties; so the Moon was spending all his time with her. The other sisters were naturally jealous of Rohini. Therefore they complained to their father about the Moon's 'misdeeds'.

Daksha suggested to the Moon that he should treat alike all his wives. The Moon was offended that Daksha was interfering in his 'internal affairs', and rejected his advice. Consequently, Daksha cursed that the Moon be struck with the tubercular disease.

The brightness of the Moon's rays was on the wane. The plants and the trees were losing their sustenance, thereby. The Moon was

astounded, and went up to his father-in-law and prayed for his pardon. Daksha told him: "Go to the Prabhasa region and there install the Linga of Lord Siva in the form of Somesvara and perform a penance by reciting **NAMAH SIVAAYA**. Then you will be freed from my curse."

As the Moon did accordingly, he felt the presence of Siva and Parvati before him after some time. The godly couple told him: "**Chandra**, you will gradually gain in brightness and lose it, in the first half and the second half of the lunar month, respectively. You will henceforth receive the love of all your wives equally."

The Moon said: "O divine couple, I beseech you that you stay on here in one form of your transcendent energy in this idol I have consecrated to you."

They said 'so be it' and entered in the idol in one form of their energy.

The Moon was released from the ill-effects of his father-in-law's imprecation and returned to his celestial abode, to enjoy all prosperity and felicity in the company of his twenty-seven consorts.

Because the Linga was installed by 'Soma' (Moon) the image of Lord Siva at that pilgrim centre is called 'Somesvara'.

This idea is conveyed in this prayerful **sloka** by Sankaracharya:

Sauraashtra dese visade ati-ramye
jyotir-mayam Chandra-kalaa-vatamsam,
Bhakti-pradaanaaya kripaa-avatirnam
Tam Somanaatham saranam prapadye.

2. MALLIKARJUNA (at Srisailam)

Ganapati and Kumarasvami are the beloved sons of Siva and Parvati. The two boys were each pressing their parents that one's wedding should precede the other's. To resolve this competition between them, their parents suggested that he who finishes first, the trip round the world, would be married first.

Agreeing with the suggestion, Kumarasvami started on the round-trip on his peacock mount. Ganapati is fat and his mount is a humble rat. So he had no chance of competing with his brother on equal terms. But using his imaginative power, he just went around his parents, in accordance with sacred authority which sanctions the worth of the round-the-earth trip to the man who goes around his parents, as:

Pitros cha pujanam kritvaa prakaantim cha karoti yah,
Tasya vai prithivee-janyam phalam bhavati nischitam.

Accepting the wise gesture of Ganapati, his parents gave two of Prajapati's daughters Siddhi and Buddhi, in marriage to him.

When Kumarasvami returned from his roundtrip, assured of his success, he was amazed to find his brother there already married. Partly ashamed of his own lack of imagination, and partly offended by the action of his parents (in getting Ganapati married earlier, through a ruse as he thought), Kumarasvami left the Silver Mount in huff and went down to the Krauncha mountain in Srisailam. Although Narada tried to dissuade him, Kumarasvami vowed that he would never return to Kailasa.

Siva and Parvati, out of their great love for their son, went down to the Krauncha Mountain and tried to persuade him to return to the Silver Mountain. But they failed to convince Kumarasvami. So they decided upon entering that pilgrim centre in one form of their primal energy.

This **Jyotirlinga** is named 'Mallikaarjuna', the 'Mallika' (jasmine) standing for Parvati, and 'Arjuna' (white) standing for Siva. Srisailam, where this 'Linga of divine light' is consecrated, is also known as 'Dakshina Kailasa' (the Kailasa stationed in the southern region)

The Puranas declare that those that take a look at the tower of the Mallikarjuna temple in Srisailam would be freed from the vicious circle of birth and death and rebirth:

“Sree-saila-sikharam drishtvaa Punarjanma na vidyate”

The prayer connected with this centre is:

Sree-saila-sange vibudha-atisange
Tulaadri-tunge-api mudaa vasantam,
Tam Arjunam Mallika-purvam Ekam
Namaami samsaara-samudra-setum.

UJJAIN - MAHA KALA LINGA

(AVANTIKA)

In the country of Malaya, on the banks of the river Sipraa, lies the city of Ujjayani, reputed as the place where the divine brothers, Balarama and Krishna, studied under their Guru, Sandipa.

One Siddha of miraculous powers, named Manibhadra, offered to the king of Avanti, Ujjvala, a precious sapphire, which would give the ruler the ability to get his capital city planned in the manner of Amaravati, the capital of Indra's heavenly kingdom. The king commissioned, with the aid of the precious stone's miraculous power, the divine architect, Visvakarma to build a city an area of twelve square miles. That great city is called Ujjayani (Ujjain). It is also known as 'Avanti'. It is said to be one of the seven holy cities, a visit to which paves the way to Salvation, as we learn from this Sloka:

Avodhyaa, Mathuraa, Maayaa, Kaasee, Kaanchee, Avantikaa,
Puri-Dvaaravati cha eva saptaite Moksha-daayakaah.

In that city there once lived a highly learned Vedic scholar, named 'Vedapriya'. He had four sons: Vedapriya, Priyamedha, Sukrita and Suvrata.

Vedapriya's life was dedicated to the worship of Lord Siva, and this devotional spirit of his brought him worldwide recognition and renown.

There is a mountain called 'Ratnamala' near Avanti. On it dwelt a demon, 'Dushana'. Envious of Vedapriya's fame, he entered Avanti with the intention of harming that Vedic scholar. All the other denizens of that town were extremely frightened, but Vedapriya remained unmoved. He continued to pray to Lord Siva. Seeing him thus engaged, Dushana said angrily: "You Vedapriya, throw away your Siva Linga! Else I will cut off your head."

Vedapriya did not respond. Dushana tried to attack him. The scholar sought Siva's refuge with these words: "Hara, Hara, Mahadeva, Pahi maam, Pahi maam, Raksha maam, Raksha maam!". Instantaneously, Bilva leaf came out of the Siva image, shining with supernatural glory, and put an end to the demon and his army.

Appearing in His own form, Siva told the scholar: "Vedapriya, I have fulfilled my duty of punishing the wicked and protecting the pious. Now seek whatever you want from me."

The scholar replied: Lord, all that I wish is that you remain here to save all your devotees."

Accordingly, Siva agreed to remain there in one form of his energy, and that Linga of His is known as "Mahakala Linga".

SRIKARA

Among the rulers of Avanti was one Chandrasena, who was a devotee of Lord Siva. Once a boy, named Srikara, belonging to the shepherd clan, happened to see Chandrasena, while the latter was engaged in worshipping Lord Siva. The boy was thrilled at that splendid sight. He picked up a piece of the rock that was chipped off the Siva idol, and taking it home anointed it with due ceremony. He decorated the piece of rock in the manner of Lord Siva's image, and started praying to that deity. Even when his mother called him to eat his dinner, he could not hear her voice, because he was so

immersed in his devotion. Angered at the lack of response from him, his mother threw away the Siva image. Srikara felt his heart broken. He cried out: Lord Siva, my mother set at naught my devotion and self-surrender to Thee. Forgive her because she knew not what she was doing. Anyway, it is not the idol that matters, but my devotion to Thee. If Thou art satisfied with my prayer, please appear before me at once. Or else I will put an end to my life." So saying he fell in a swoon.

The naturally tender heart of Siva melted. He readily presented Himself before the shepherd-devotee and placed His hand on the head of the boy, by way of assuring him protection. By the grace of that divine touch the boy regained his consciousness. As he opened his eyes, he saw the 'Jyotirlinga' (The Idol of Divine Light) placed in the Maha kala shrine. Immediately he embraced the image in reverential love. His mother, who saw him do so, was immensely gratified at the devotion of her son.

At that point the great devotee-servant of Rama, Hanuman, appeared there and declared: "Srikara's devotion is matchless. It is only because of the non-dual nature of his devotion that Lord Siva with His consort, appeared before him. This boy was born by virtue of divine design. In the eighth generation of his clan will be born another great devotee, Nanda. His son will be born as Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu". Completing his prediction, Hanuman disappeared.

Chandrasena, who also was present there, was highly pleased, and sang the praises of the pilgrim centre, Maha Kala, as expressed in the third verse of the 'Jyotirlinga Stotram':

Avantikaayaam vihita-avataaram
Mukti-pradaanaaya cha sat-janaanaam,
Akaala-mrityoh pari-rakshana-artham
vande Mahaa-Kaala Mahaasuresam.

**OMKARA KSHETRA
(PARAMESVARALINGA)**

River Narmada branched itself into two streams. The river that flows towards the north retained the original name, Narmada, and the one that flows southwards is known as Kaverika. Where the river joins the sea, there is fertile region, which is known as 'Sivapuri' as well as 'Mandhata Puram' (because there the emperor Mandhata prayed to, and obtained the grace of Lord Siva. ('Kapiladhara' is the place of confluence with the sea for river Narmada.

Sage Narada went to the Vindhya mountain on his way back from the pilgrim centre, Gokarna, Kshetra. The mountain king, Vindhya, offered Narada due hospitality, and inquired about the nature of the mountain-king who is said to be much larger than he.

Smilingly, Narada, said: "I take pity on you. There is only one who is greater than you. He is Mount Meru. The sun, the moon and the stars revolve round him. The peaks of that mount kiss the heavens."

Saying that, the sage went on his way.

Vindhya prayed to Lord Siva, so that he could become larger and higher than Mount Meru. The deity was pleased with his penance and offered him any boon he wanted.

Vindhya said: "Lord, I beseech you that you stay on my top in one of your forms of Energy, and that you see that the three worlds consider me to be greater than Mount Meru. At the end of my life I beg that I be granted the union with your universal Soul."

The gods and the sages who assembled there requested Lord Siva to grant Vindhya's wish, because it was just.

Lord Siva acceded to their request and installed Himself there in the forum of the sacred syllable 'AUM', as well as in the image of the Master Spirit, 'Paramesvara'.

Sankaracharya's verse recounts the foregoing:

Kaaverikaa-Narmadayoh pavitre
samaagame sat-jana-taaranaaya,
Sadaa eva Maandhaatri-pure vasantam
Om-kaaram isam Sivam Ekam ide.

**MOUNT HIMALAYA
(KEDAARA LINGA)**

Of all the Himalayan peaks, known for their holy atmosphere, the Kedara pilgrim centre is the holiest. To its west flows the river Mandakini; to the east, river Alakananda. On the banks of Mandakini stands the holy shrine of Kedareshvara, and on the banks of Alakananda lies the temple of Badari-Narayana. Mandakini and Alakananda have their confluence at Rudra-Prayaga, and at Devaprayaga they join the river Ganga. That is why all those pilgrims who take a dip in the river Ganga justly feel that they have the benefit of visiting Kedara and Badari pilgrim centres by doing so.

Nara and Narayana, settling down at the Badarika-Asrama, and daily bathing in the river Mandakini, were in the habit of consecrating the Siva image with the Mandakini water, besides offering the idol the Bilva leaves and the lotus flowers.

One day Siva appeared before them. The duo said: "Lord, we have been praying to Thee, with the idea of doing good to the entire world. Kindly incarnate Thy self in one of Thy forms at this Kedara Kshetra, and grant the wishes of all those devotees who worship Thee here." Since then Lord Siva has been residing there as Kedareshvara.

The Pandavas once visited the Kedara Kshetra. In order to test Bhima, Lord Siva (Kedareshvara) assumed the shape of a 'Mahisha' (buffalo) and was passing by. The Pandavas pursued it. Bhima dragged it by its tail. The tail snapped, and he could not

hold the buffalo. The Pandavas converted that tail into a Linga and consecrated it prayerfully, thereby enabling themselves to enjoy worldly bliss. The head of the 'Mahisha' was installed at Nepal, and was consecrated there as 'Pasupati' (the lord of all living creatures). They who pray to the tail at Kedaresvara shrine and to the head at the Pasupati temple in Nepal, would be granted the Salvation of rebirthlessness.

Here is Adi Sankara's hymn to the Kedaresvara, who is prayed to by all the denizens of both heaven and earth:

Maha-adri paarsve cha tate ramantam
sampujyamaanam satatam munindrai,
Sura-Asuraih Yaksha-Mahoraga-aadyaih
Kedaaram isam Ekam eede.

BHIMA SANKARA

(AT DHAKINI PILGRIM CENTRE)

Among the Sahya mountain-peaks, Dhakini is the most reputed. In the land of 'Kamarupa' there is a place called 'Dhakini', wherein dwelt a demon of the same name. His mother was 'Karkati'. Her father was 'Karkata' and her mother was 'Pushkasi'.

Karkata and Pushkasi tried to catch and eat up the disciple of sage Agastya, Sutikshna. Sutikshna cursed them to turn into ashes.

The beautiful Karkati was roaming all alone in the jungles. The brother of Ravana, Kubhakarna, saw her and fell in love with her. She told him that she was the wife of Viradha, who was killed by Lord Rama. Still, he refused to listen to her plea to leave her alone, and ravished her. Their child is the demon, Bhima (not to be confused with the Pandava of that name).

Karkati told her son that his father and his uncle, Ravana were killed by Rama, and asked him to revenge their death, by persecuting the godly race.

Bhima prayed to Brahma, and received the deity's blessings, to gain matchless strength and valour. To test his newly acquired prowess, Bhima started persecuting the gods. Not content with the harm he had done to the celestial citizens, he went up to Vaikuntha in search of Vishnu. Vishnu could not be seen. Bhima returned home and imprisoned the king of Kamarupa, Sudakshina, and his wife. Sudakshina was since birth an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. He and his wife prayed to Siva for succour.

Bhima threatened that unless they stopped praying to Siva they could not escape death at his hands. They replied that they would rather die than stop praying to Siva. Forgetting himself with wrath, the demon asked them to pray to him. When they refused, Bhima flung his sword at the Linga of the Lord. Then from the image arose Siva's 'pinaka' weapon and turned Bhima's sword into powder. So did Siva break into pieces the spear flung by the demon. Then when Siva shouted in anger, the demon lost his consciousness out of fright, and died right away. His retinue took to their heels. The saintly royal couple, and the gods who saw the fight, requested Siva to stay there in one of His forms. Since he killed Bhima, there, place where he is consecrated is known as 'Bhima-Sankara Linga Kshetra'.

This idea is conveyed by this 'Jyotirlinga Sloka' of 'Sankaracharya:

Yam Dhaakinee-Saakinikaa-samaajaih
nishevyamaanam pisitaasanaih cha,
Sadaa eva Bhima-aadi-pada prasiddham
Tam Sankaram Bhakta-hitam namaami.

SRI KASI (VISVESVARA)

Ravana defeated Vaisravana and became the Lord of Lanka. Then Vaisravana performed a penance, praying to Lord Siva. Pleased with his penance, Siva appeared before him and told him:

“At the spot where I cut off Brahma’s fifth head with my nails, I will offer you an area of ten square miles. There build a holy city with the help of the divine architect, Visvakarma”. Saying which, the Lord disappeared.

Accordingly Vaisravana invited Visvakarma to build a mighty holy city, in accordance with ‘Vastu Sastra’.

When Vaisravana prayed to Siva and Parvati, the divine couple entrusted him with the rulership of the northern world, and rename him ‘Kubera’. The city built by Visvakarma is called ‘Kaasi’. Kubera was ceded the lordship of Kasi as well as of the Yaksha kingdom, with Alaka as its capital. At the request of Kubera, Siva and Parvati respectively incarnated themselves, at Kaasi, as Visvesvara and Annapurna. Since the city is surrounded by the river-branches Varana and Asi on either side, it is also known as ‘Varanasi’.

Varanasi is reputed for its wish-fulfilling presiding deity, Siva, and for the alms-giving of His spouse, Parvati, in the form of their incarnations.

The place where Vishnu performed penance in that holy city is called ‘Mani-Karnika Ghat’; where Brahma performed a sacrificial rite is called ‘Dasasvamedha Ghat’; where Harischandra kept watch over the crematorium is called “Harischandra Ghat”.

It is verily declared that death in Kasi would ensure Immortality (Kaasyaam tu maranaat Mukti), because Lord Visvesvara instructs in the right ear of the dead the salvation assuring Taraka Mantra.

Indeed even the very thought of visiting Kaasi has the effect of actually visiting that city, as this verse says:

Kadaa Kaasim gamishyaami kadaa drakshyaami Sankaram,
Iti bruvaanah satatam Kaasi-vaasa-phalam labhet.

In the Kaasi region itself are several other holy centres, consecrated to the various deities, as one can learn from this verse:

Visvesam Maadhavam Dundhim Dandpaanim cha Bhairavam,
Vande Kaasim Guham Gangaam Bhavaanim Manikarnikaam.

Besides, the spirit of Goddess Sarasvati is latent in Kaasi. Therefore the Vedic scholars at Kasi receive Her grace ceaselessly. Even during Pralaya (period of annihilation), Kasi will avoid destruction, because Lord Siva would lift it up from the universal deluge, by fixing it on his trident.

The real purpose of the establishment of the Kasi pilgrim centre and of the visit to it is to realise the essential identity of the individual creature with its Universal Self. This idea was conveyed by Sage Agastya when he was taking leave of that holy city, in order to go and quell the vanity of the Vindhya mountain.

Sage Vyaasa paid a glorious tribute to the exemplification of all the assets of Lord Siva in the city of Kasi.

Adi Sankara, in his ‘Kasi Panchaka’ prayer made it clear that by visiting the sacred city of Kasi and worshipping Visvanaatha and Annapurna there, one begets the good results of visiting all the holy places, as well as the power of learning the truth of all philosophy, which is that the soul alone is real and that the body is unreal.

The same Aachaarya praises Kaasi in the following ‘Jyothirlinga’ verse as the repository of the powers of Lord Visvanaatha who cleanses the devotee of his sins and creates in him the blissful awareness of the Existence-Consciousness Beatitude of the living God:

Sa-aanandam aananda-vane vasantham
aananda-kandam hata-paapa-brindam,
Vaaraanasi-naatham anaatha-naatham
Sree Visvanaatham saranam prapadye.

MANIKARNIKA

Vishnu, who dwelt in Kasi, with the intention of effecting the universal creation, began worshipping Siva. During the course of

his rigorous penance, many a white drop that emanated out of his tired physique sprouted up into the sky. Looking at that development, Vishnu shook his head. Because of that movement, the diamond ear ring on his right ear dropped down. Where that ornament fell, since then, came to be known as 'Mani Karnika Sthala'.

Here Siva uplifted with his trident the city of Kasi which was about to be submerged in the universal deluge. The Cosmic Person (Vishnu), along with his consort, Mother Nature (Prakriti), rested himself there. From the navel of Vishnu arose Brahma. With the permission of Siva, Brahma began the process of creating the universe.

Sankaracharya praised the Manikarnika pilgrim centre, as the hallowed ground, treading on which, with reverence, the devotee is assured of the kingdom of heaven.

Kala Bhairava, in order to be freed from the sin of killing a Brahmin, went to Kasi and worshipped Visvanatha and Annapurna there.

Sankaracharya hymned the Kala Bhairava deity as one who assures his devotee both worldly felicity and heavenly salvation.

The Acharya, in singing the praises of Bhavani, declared that, by thrice uttering that holy name, the worshipper is guaranteed deliverance from delusion and distress.

Likewise, the great seer composed prayers to Dhundhi (Ganapati) and Kumara Svami, highlighting their various individual virtues, which the devotee is able to reflect within himself, by means of true devotion to those two brothers, the noble sons of Siva and Parvati.

Before worshipping Visvanatha and Annapurna, the pilgrim must take a dip, with his clothes on, at the Mani Karnika Ghat on the banks of the Ganges, and then pray to Vishnu as well as to the Sun-God.

TRYAMBAKALINGA (ON THE BANKS OF GAUTAMI)

In the region of Nasika, near the Sahyagiri, lies Brahmagiri. In its vicinity sage Gautama built his hermitage, and was dwelling in peace along with his wife, Ahalya, and his several disciples. By worshipping Lord Siva for many years, the sage obtained many favours from that deity.

After a few years, there was drought and famine in that area. The agricultural fields became barren. There was not even drinking water available. The cattle had no fodder, and the entire plant life withered away. All creation was crying for help.

Sage Gautama prayed to Lord Varuna for six months. Pleased with his penance, the deity appeared before him and told him to dig a tank, which that God of Waters duly fill up and which would never go dry.

Gautama ordered a tank to be dug, which was replenished by Varuna. The area once again became fertile, and the people and the cattle had plenty of nourishment.

Learning about that meracle, many sages glow with their spouses, migrated to that place, built their respective hermitage, and were living in peace and prosperity.

One day when Gautama's disciples, went to fetch the pure waters from the lake for their Guru's worship, there the wives of the other sages were about to take a dip in it. The pupils requested the ladies to make way for them. The Ladies simply laughed at the boys, saying that it was not only their teacher that was entitled to use the holy waters for his worship but every one of them also had to bathe there and take home that water for the consecration of their favourite deities.

The disciples returned to the hermitage and reported the incident to Ahalya. Ahalya took the vessel herself and left for the lake. The

wives of the other sages were staring at her inquisitively. Quietly Ahalya filled her vessel, and without speaking a word to the ladies, returned home.

The sage-wives were offended at Ahalya's indifference. Bent on revenge, they told lies about Ahalya to their respective husbands.

The other sages prayed to Ganapati, who, pleased with their penance, appeared before them and asked them to seek whatever they want from him. They told him: "Lord, the disciples of Gautama, and Ahalya, shamed our wives. Grant that Gautama leave his hermitage along with his wife and his disciples."

Ganapati reprimanded them for their ingratitude, and warned them that their attempt would only recoil on them. Yet, they persisted. Ganapati thought: "One cannot turn a bad man into a good man, nor can make a bad man of a good man, any more than can a dog become a cow and vice versa."

So thinking, he turned himself into a famished cow and started grazing the fields nearby. Gautama saw that sight. He flung at that false cow a piece of grass, which he endowed with charmed powers. No sooner than the grass-blade fell on it, the cow died. What a pity that even the sages, gifted with clairvoyance, are at times led by destiny into such a thoughtless action!

As soon Gautama and his spouse realised that it was a cow in disguise, they feared what retribution might be in store for them. The other sages told Gautama that, in as much as they cannot bring themselves to look at man who killed the holy cow, he and his wife must leave that place and go elsewhere.

Gautama and his wife then left for a place about four miles away, and there built a new hermitage. The sage prayed to Lord Siva there, for the expiation of his thoughtlessness in killing a holy cow.

Before leaving his old hermitage, Gautama sought the advice of the sages as to how best he can be freed from his folly. The sages suggested that he might go round the earth thrice; that he might similarly walk around the Brahmagiri for a hundred and one times; that he might obtain the grace of Lord Siva by assiduously worshipping His image; that, with the help of Lord Siva's grace, he might bring down the celestial stream, Ganga, to the spot where the false cow was killed; and that when the river flows at that place he would install one crore Lingas of Lord Siva there and pray to them.

When for a few days Gautama prayed to Lord Siva, the merciful deity appeared before him and asked him to seek any boon he wanted. When Gautama confessed to his sin, Lord Siva said that the real fault was with the other ungrateful sages. Then Gautama insisted that the Lord cause the river Ganga to flow along the path where the pseudo-cow died, so that the cow may come back to life and deliver him from his sin.

Accordingly, Lord Siva released the sacred river from his braid. Gautama then prayed to the Mother Ganga thus: "Mother Ganga, you are the most sacred of all rivers. After freeing me from my sin of cow-killing, please sanctify the three worlds by causing your branches to flow here and everywhere."

Ganga acceded to his request, but said that, after flowing at that spot and over the three worlds, she would return to her abode in the tresses of Lord Siva. Gautama was disappointed on hearing her words. He hoped that Ganga would keep flowing there as well as over the rest of the three worlds. Detecting the reason for the sage's disappointment, Siva instructed Ganga to stay there for the duration of that 'Manvantara' (cyclical age). Ganga said that she would gladly do so, only if the Lord too would remain there with her. Siva agreed to do so.

Then Gautama consecrated the idol of Siva there, and called the aspect of Siva's godhead there 'Tryambakesvara'.

Since Gautama brought down the river Ganga to that area, the stream is known as 'Gautami'. It is also called 'Godaavari', because the 'Go' (cow) died there and was brought back to life by the flowing of the celestial stream. On the banks of the river Godavari, the sin remover Siva shines as 'Tryambakesvara', as this 'Jyotirlinga' verse of Adi Sankara celebrates:

Sahya-adri paarsve vimale vasantam
 Godaavari-tira pavitra dese,
 Yat darsanaat paatakam aasu naasam
 Prayaati Tam Tryambakam Isam eede.

SRI VAIDYANATHA LINGA

Ravana, the Lord of Lanka, was a great devotee of Lord Siva. Even when he prayed to the Lord for a long time, on mount Himalaya, He did not appear before him. Undeterred, Ravana increased the intensity of his penance by sitting amidst the 'Five fires'; surrounding himself with fire during summer; sitting in the rain during monsoon; and standing on ice during winter. When Siva still did not present Himself before him, Ravana decided on putting an end to his life. Accordingly, he began cutting off each of his ten heads and was offering them to Siva. Even when he presented the ninth head, Siva did not take pity on him. When at last Ravana was about to sever his last remaining head, Siva was convinced of his true devotion and appeared before him, saying that he could seek any boon he wanted from Him (as soon as Siva made his presence felt, the nine heads of Ravana were restored to their original position.)

Ravana thanked the Lord for appearing before him, and requested Him that He install Himself at Lanka and that even when an enemy cuts off any of his heads they be reinstated readily.

Siva agreed, and offered Ravana his "Aatma-Linga", to be consecrated at Lanka, with the warning that if Ravana put it down on earth on the way back home, it would be firmly rooted in that particular spot and cannot be removed.

Vainglorious in his newly acquired power, Ravana did not grasp the inner meaning of the Lord's warning, and was carrying the 'self-image' of Siva to Lanka.

Lord Ganapati was offended that, as tradition demanded, Ravana did not pray to Him in the first place. So He devised a plan to see that Ravana could not make the 'Aatma-Linga' his own.

On his way to Lanka, Ravana had to answer a call of nature. So he asked a passing shepherd to hold the sacred idol till he returned. The shepherd found the idol increasing steadily in its weight. Unable to hold it in his hands any longer, the boy cried: "O Ravana, I acceded to your request, under the impression that this is a small piece of stone; now I am not able to bear its weight." Ravana was terrified: he feared that his whole penance would be in vain if the boy put down the idol on bare ground. Hurrying back, Ravana shouted: "Dear good boy, please don't drop that image. If you hold on to it, I will present you with a diamond necklace."

However, the shepherd-boy could no longer hold the 'Aatma-Linga', dropped it at a spot known as 'Chitaa-Bhumi', and disappeared instantaneously. The shepherd is none other than Ganapati in disguise.

Ravana tried his best to pull out the Siva image from the ground, but could not. Even though his whole body was wounded and bleeding in the process, Ravana persisted in pulling out the idol. When he was shedding tears of dejection and disappointment, an aerial voice said: "O king of Lanka, you cannot uproot the Aatma-linga. To let the wounds on your body heal, come here at midnight and pray to this idol."

Pleased with this advice, Ravana placed his ring on the Aatma-linga and uttered a prayer consecrated to Lord Siva. Slowly his wounds healed. Enraptured, Ravana composed the 'Siva Tandava Stotra' (the hymn of Siva's Cosmic Dance), which addresses the

Lord as the embodiment of all universal virtues, and, by worshipping the Lord with which prayer, the devotee is delivered from all earthly bonds, if he seeks liberation, or endowed with all riches, if he wants worldly prosperity.

Still singing the praises of Lord Siva, Ravana returned to the city of Lanka.

The Aatma Linga which he installed is known as 'Vaidyanatha Linga', by praying to which the worshipper would be freed from all his ills, according to Adi Sankara who composed this Jyotirlinga verse:

Purva-uttare prajvalikaa-nidhaane
Sadaa vasantam Girijaa-sametam,
Sura-asura-aaraadhita-paada-padmam
Sri Vaidyanaatham tam aham namaami.

NAGA NATHA LINGA

Once upon a time there was a demoness called Darukaa. In her childhood she prayed to Parvati, and obtained from the goddess the boon that her sons might live on the banks of the river Sindhu, amidst the seas.

Darukaa married a demon named Daruka(h). Both of them were living on the West Coast, in an area which extended upto two thousand miles, and were persecuting the sages in the area. Unable to withstand that persecution, the sages went to a sage for help. That great sage imprecated that all those demons who wrong the innocent sages would die instantaneously.

Daruka shifted his residential garden into the middle of the ocean, and was torturing all those people who were sailing by. One of the sailors who was imprisoned by Daruka happened to be Suparva, a devotee of Lord Siva. Suparva placed an idol of Siva in the prison and began praying to it, along with his co-prisoners.

Learning about it, Daruka wanted to punish the prisoners much more cruelly. But in vain. Suparva sought the succour of Siva with an increasingly earnest appeal. Siva then appeared before Suparva and gave him the Pasupata weapon, with the help of which Suparva killed many a demon.

Meanwhile Parvati told Siva: "Lord, Darukaa is a devotee of mine. She received a blessing from me that her sons could live in the midst of the seas. So please save her." Siva agreed and stayed there in the form of 'Nagesa Linga'.

Siva and Parvati were thereafter dwelling in the Daruka forest, with the appellations, 'Nagesvara' and 'Nagesvari' respectively.

That those who pray to that divine couple would receive all blessings is the import of this Jyotirlinga verse:

Yaamyē sadange nagare ati-ramyē
vibhushita-angam vividhah cha bhogaih,
Sat-bhakti-mukti-pradam Eesam Ekam
Sri Naaga-naatham saranam prapadye.

RAMESVARA LINGA

After killing Ravana, Rama crowned Vibhishana as the king of Lanka. On his way back to Ayodha, Rama, accompanied by Sita, Lakshmana and others, stopped at Dhanushkoti. At the suggestion of the wise men, Rama wanted to install the Siva Linga at that spot, as expiation of his sin of killing a Brahmin.

Rama commissioned Hanuman to go to Mount Kailasa and fetch an image of Lord Siva. Even when the auspicious moment for the installation ceremony was approaching, Hanuman had not returned. So Rama had no choice but to install the idol Siva made of the sand particles. When Hanumaan came back with the Siva idol, he learnt about what transpired, with distress. Sita and Rama were sorry to see Hanumaan so distressed.

Rama said: “Hanumaan, go remove the sand idol we already installed and replace it by the one which you brought.”

Hanumaan failed to lift the already-installed sand idol. Hanumaan realised the power of Siva’s might. To placate Hanumaan, Rama installed the idol that the former brought, alongside the sand idol. The one Sita built is called “Rameswara Linga”, and the one Hanuman brought is known as “Hanumadiswara Linga”.

After the consecration of the idols, Ramalingesvara appeared before Rama and told him: “You are now freed from your sin of Brahmin-killing. I shall remain, in one of my aspects, in the two Lingas you have installed, in order to protect all those people who worship the idols.”

It is popularly believed that every devotee who thrice brings the waters of Ganga from Varanasi, and, with them, consecrates the idol at Raamesvara, would be able to fulfil all his wishes.

Here is the Jyotirlinga, sloka dedicated to this place of pilgrimage:

Sutaamra-parnee jalaraasi-yoge
nibadhya setum visikhaih asankhyaih,
Sriraamchandrena samarpitam tam
Raamesvara-aakhyam niyatam namaami.

GHRISHNESVARA LINGA

The Ellora caves are world-renowned for their frescoes. Near those caves is the Devagiri fort. In that place lived a devotee of Lord Siva, the Vedic scholar Sudharma. His wife is Sudeha. The good couple had no children. Since it is said that the couple which have no son are deprived of salvation (“Aputrasya gatih na asti”), they were much perturbed in mind.

One day, after visiting a neighbouring lady, who taunted her that she (Sudeha) would not be her (the neighbour’s) equal, because

the former had no children and the latter had them, Sudeha complained to her husband about the incident. Sudharma consoled her duly and suggested that she touch one of the two flowers they laid on the idol of Siva. Examining the flower she touched, her husband said that it is unlikely she would beget a child. Sudeha was dejected.

Thinking over the matter, Sudeha decided to get her unmarried sister, Ghusmala, to marry Sudharma. She overruled her husband’s protests and got Ghusmala and Sudharma married. Sudharma was treating his two wives with equal love.

Preparing one hundred and one earthy idols of Lord Siva, Sudharma, accompanied by Ghusmala, was every day worshipping them, before immersing them in a nearby lake.

In due course Ghusmala gave birth to a beautiful son. The boy was brought up in proper style and when he came of age was married to an accomplished girl.

Ghusmala was specially honoured by her new in-laws, which aroused the envy of Sudeha. She thought that all this was due to her husband’s neglect of her.

Although Ghusmala asked her sister to treat her son as her (Sudeha’s) own, Sudeha still bore her sister a grudge, and one midnight cut into pieces the sleeping son of Ghusmala. She dropped the pieces of the boy’s body in the lake, and returned to sleep in her bedroom, as though she were not aware of any untoward happening.

The daughter-in-law of Ghusmala went to meet her husband in their bedroom, but could not find him. Broken hearted, after her search for him proved futile, she begged Sudeha to inform her about his whereabouts. When Sudeha expressed her inability to enlighten her, the daughter-in-law went to the prayer-room, wherein Sudharma and Ghusmala were worshipping the earthen idols of Lord Siva. When Ghusmala heard her daughter-in-law’s lament,

she said: “That compassionate Lord who gave me my son in the first place will now see to his safety.” Then prayerfully thinking of Lord Siva, Ghusmala left for the tank for the immersion of the earthen images of His, accompanied by Sudharma and the daughter-in-law.

Ghusmala found the pieces of her son’s dead body and put them together, upon which the boy came back to life and bowed to his parents. His wife went near him. Everyone who saw the miracle praised Lord Siva for His benevolence.

The son revealed Sudeha’s treachery to Ghusmala, but she had not entertained any vengeful thoughts against her wicked sister.

Then Lord Siva appeared before them. Ghusmala, her husband, her son and her daughter-in-law fell prostrate at His feet. Siva admired Ghusmala for her devotion, and asked her to cut her sister’s body in retaliation for her misdeed.

Ghusmala said: “Lord, I appreciate Thine advice, but I know that by Thy grace my sister will reform herself. Forgive her. Kindly remain in this lake in one of Thy forms, and protect all those that pray to Thee.”

Thereupon Lord Siva agreed to stay in the middle of that tank, under the appellation of “**GHRISHNESWARA**”.

Here is the Jyotirlinga verse in praise of that bountiful and merciful Lord:

Ilaa-pure ramya-vasaalake asmin
 samullasantam cha jagat-vareniam,
 Vande mahodaara-tara-svabhavam
 Ghrishnesvara-aakhyam saranam prapadye.

THE POWER OF VIBHUTI (SACRED ASH)

In the clan of sage Bhrgu was born the great Brahmin, Pranada, who was a sincere devotee of Lord Siva.

Merely surviving on forest-leaves, he was offering a severe penance in favour of Lord Siva. Once when he was cutting the Kusa grass, one of his fingers was cut. Since from his finger oozed the blood which resembled the juice of the leaves, and since he lived on leaves, he is known as ‘Pranada’ (the eater of leaves).

Siva went up to Pranada, in the form a Brahmin, in order to grant him a boon. Pranada began to run away from Him. But the ‘Brahmin’ caught him by the hand and said: “Why are you fleeing? Is it because my blood is leaf-green? Just see, how the sacred ash oozes if I cut my finger.” When the Lord suited action to His words, the ash did flow out. Seeing the miracle, Pranada said: “Lord, forgive my folly. I see that Thou art Lord Siva in the guise of a Brahmin. Please reveal Thy real form to me.”

Siva complied with his request and told him: “I am very fond of this sacred ash, and all those who smear themselves with it will be freed from their sins.” Pleased, Pranada smeared himself wholly with the holy ash. The best form of the ash is that which is obtained from the sacrificial fire.

This sloka should be recited at the time of smearing the sacred ash:

Srikaram cha pavitram cha
 soka-roga-nivaaranam,
 Loke vasikaram pumsaam
 bhasman trai-lokya-paavanam.

(The ash, sanctifying the three worlds, is so beneficial to its wearer as to bestow on him wealth, freedom from disease and distress, and the ability to master all the world.

RUDRA-AKSHA-MALA (ROSARY)

Once upon a time Siva paused during his penance and opened His eyes. From them had flown drops of water, which turned into rosary-beads. So they are named after Him, ‘Rudra’ (Siva). Wearing

the rosary-beads, which are beloved of Siva, the wearer gains bliss, and sees his heart's wishes fulfilled.

Among the flowers that are dear to Siva are the lily and the jasmine; and, among the fruits, are the coconut and the banana.

THE SHAPE OF 'AUM'

The three root-letters that together make up the sacred syllable, 'Pranava' (AUM), are 'A', standing for Siva; 'U', for the Primal Energy (Para Shakti); and 'M', for Parvati. So it is always beneficial to utter all the sacred Mantras, prefixing and suffixing them with 'AUM'.

Especially the five-lettered Mantra, NAMAHA SIVAAYA, uttered with 'AUM' confers immeasurable benefit on the utterer. The reason for this is that Siva is the Lord of all studies, of all the living creatures and of the creative energy, as the following Vedic Mantra maintains:

Isaanah sarva-vidyaanaam
 Isvarah sarva-bhutaanaam
 Bhrahmaadhipatih, Brahmanah adhipatih
 Brahmaa Sivah me astu sadaa Sivah AUM

THE GLORIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF SIVA LINGA

By worshipping the image of Lord Siva, the worshipper begets all the fruits of all his wishes. One can make the image from clay or silver or gold. Of the Trinity, Siva is the greatest (because, even though he destroys, he is responsible for the Re-creation). Similarly, of all the rivers, Ganga is the holiest. Of all the Mantras, Gaayatri is the mightiest. Of all the Linga images, the one made of clay is the best.

NANDIKESVARA

On the banks of the river Reva there is a town named Karnataka. There lived a noble Brahmin, called Jnaana Siddha. He

divided his entire property among his sons. Leaving his wife, Sugunaavati, in the care of his eldest son, Karma Siddha, he visited all the important pilgrim centres, including Varanasi, where, deserting his mortal coil, he was finally united with Lord Siva.

Realising that the last moments of his mother's life were approaching, Karma Siddha asked her to let him know her last wishes. She requested him to immerse her ashes in the river Ganga. He promised him to immerse her ashes in the river Ganga. He promised to do so. Pleased, she breathed her last a little later.

Carrying his mother's ashes, and accompanied by a servant, Karma Siddha went to Varanasi, where he was the guest of a Brahmin.

The Brahmin householder released the calf to be suckled by the cow, but the calf would not leave the udder, even after it had its fill of the milk. So the Brahmin had to pull it away mercilessly. By mischance the calf stepped on the owner's foot. He beat the calf with a big stick. Milking the cow, the Brahmin took the milk in a vessel and went into his home.

Karma Siddha who witnessed the scene was distressed. He saw how the cow was pained to see the calf punished. She spoke to the calf: "Child, all that the Brahmin wants is my milk. He doesn't care about our mutual love. I must teach him a lesson by killing his son early next morning. Tomorrow is the auspicious seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaisakha. Since I caused the death of the Brahmin child, I too must bid farewell to my own life. During the last stages of my life you must also accompany me. I am doing all this to let people realise that we are not dumb beasts and that we must not be treated as such."

Karma Siddha heard this with utmost concern.

The next day, the Brahmin householder left for another town, on business, and entrusted the job of milking the cow to his son. No

sooner had the boy gone near her than the cow pierced him, despite the calf's protests, to his death.

Hearing the cries of the bereaved mother, the neighbours tried to beat the cow. They cow and the calf ran away and jumped to their death into the Reva river, near the Nandikesvara pilgrim centre.

Karma Siddha, who followed the escaping cow and calf, saw the tragic scene sorrowfully. As he was thinking over the whole tragic incident, goddess Ganga appeared before him and said: "Today is an auspicious day. All those who are merged with the Reva river today are assured of Liberation."

Karma Siddha immersed his mother's ashes in the river, and took a dip in it later. The disembodied spirit of Sugunavati blessed her son, before ascending to heaven.

Remembering the story of the sanctity of the Reva river and the Nandikesvara Tirtha, Karma Siddha returned home.

BHAKTA KANNAPPA

In South India, on the banks of river Suvarnamukhi, lies the pilgrim centre Kalahasti. Here is consecrated the 'Kala Linga', which represents the Nature (tattva) of touch and smell, and which was there from the beginning of time.

Every day that Siva image is worshipped by a spider, a cobra and an elephant. The spider spins flowers for the worship of the Linga; the serpent would clean the idol with its hood and decorate it with the 'Jewel' in its hood; and the elephant would fetch the pure Suvarnamukhi water with its trunk and anoint the image with it.

Thus several days passed by.

One day the serpent, besides wiping the cobweb, actually crushed the spider with its hood. Then it released the 'diamonds' in its hood, and made up an umbrella with the same hood, to cover the Linga devotionally and surround it with the rest of its body.

Later the elephant came, pulled away the serpent from the image, anointed it with the water, and worshipped it with the lotuses and the Bilva leaves it brought.

The vengeful snake leapt on to the elephant's trunk and stung it fiercely. Simultaneously the elephant pulled the snake down with its trunk and crushed it under its foot. Thus all the three devout creatures died at one and the same time.

Impressed by their devotion to Him, and sorry for their mistaken zeal which caused their mutual destruction, Lord Siva revived them all at once. He asked them to seek from Him any favours they wanted. They said that all that they want was that He would stay there, assuming their collective name besides enabling them to forget their mutual animosity. Since then, Lord Siva has been protecting the devotees there, under the appellation 'Kala-hasti-isvara'.

Near this pilgrim centre is a tribal village, named 'Udumuru'. The tribal chief had a son named Tinnadu. He is in the habit of killing the wild animals and offering them as food for his people.

As usual, one day Tinnadu went hunting. He killed many animals. One wild boar escaped his arrow; so he began chasing it. The animal fled some distance and then suddenly disappeared. The tired Tinnadu rested under an Asoka tree. As he dozed off, he saw in a dream a Yogi, who resembled Lord Siva, and who advised him to worship the Lord of the Universe, whose image was inside a valley on the banks of a sacred river nearby.

Waking up, Tinnadu went in search of the Lord of the Universe whose image is in a nearby valley. As soon as his eyes fell on that holy idol, tears of rapture dropped down his cheeks. Realising that his life was sanctified, he fell prostrate at the feet of the image, and thus addressed it: "Lord, why are you dwelling here amidst the wild beasts that roam about this valley? Have you no friends and relatives to take care of you? Who will fetch you water when you are thirsty,

and feed you when you are hungry? This is no place for you, where people cook the animal food. Come along with me to Udumuru, where I will nourish you with honey and other gentle food.”

When there was no response, Tinnadu repeated his request and told the Lord that he would not stir until his request was complied with. Still no reply from the idol, and still Tinnadu was determined not to leave the place until his wish was fulfilled. He sent away the people who came in search hunted a wild boar. He made victuals art of the dead animal, and insisted on the Lord’s eating them.

The Lord made no response as yet. Tinnadu repeated his appeal, saying that he would die if his request is unheeded.

At last, convinced by the forlorn and fervent wails and appeals of the devotee, Lord Siva appeared before him and said: “Tinna, don’t cry. I will accept the victuals. Get up!”

Since then, every day Tinnadu had been feeding the Lord with the victuals he prepared.

When the priest went to the temple, with the sacrament and the water for consecration, he saw the remnants of the meat-food. So he addressed the Lord: “Lord, why did you tolerate this sort of desecration from some sinner? Why didn’t you punish him suitably?”

As he received no reply from the Lord, he said: “If you do not reveal the identity of this heretic, so as to enable me to punish him duly, I will kill myself in your presence here and now.”

Then Lord Siva came into his presence and told him: “Although his method of devotion is not in accordance with the scriptural instruction, his devotion as such is unimpeachable. He is Tinnadu. Just see how truly devoted he is for he will be presently offering me his consecrated victuals and you will realise why I gladly accepted his offerings.”

When Tinnadu arrived and offered the victuals, as usual, the Lord did not receive them. As he keenly observed the idol, he saw that from one of the Lord’s eyes tears were streaming down. He thought the reason why Siva had not accepted the food was the incidence of the tears. As the tears continued, even after he mopped them up and applied a piece of cloth, heated by his warm breath, to it, he dropped some herbal medicine into the Lord’s eyes, as a result of which the tears did not stop but actually increased in their flow. Since all external aids failed, Tinnadu thought fit to pluck out his own eye and fix it on to the Lord’s tearful one.

The tears from the already-disabled eye ceased to flow, but, strangely, the other eye began to drop tears. So Tinnadu plucked out his other eye, and unmindful of the gushing blood, attached it to the Lord’s second eye. Now blinded, Tinnadu verified with his hands whether the tears from both eyes of the Lord stopped or not. As he felt that there were no more tears, he danced with joy, and the celestial regions reverberated with the sound of divine drumbeats. Lord Siva reinstated Tinnadu’s eyesight.

The priest, who witnessed all these proceedings from behind a tree, ran up to the Lord’s image and bowed to Him. The Lord told Tinnadu: “Verily you sacrificed the organ of utmost important (‘sarva-indriyaanaam nayanam pradhaanam’). I appreciate your uncompromising devotion, and that is why I gave you back your eyesight, after testing your will power.”

Tinnadu fell prostrate at the Lord’s feet in grateful acknowledgement and with reverential self-abnegation.

The priest and Tinnadu were then asked by the Lord to seek whatever they wanted. Both said that all that they wanted was to have their minds entirely and all the time fixed on Him. Siva granted their wish, embraced them fondly and immediately disappeared.

Till the end of his mortal life, Tinnadu ceaselessly worshipped Lord Siva, and in the end was spiritually united with Him.

BHAKTA NANDANAR

In Tamilnadu is a village, named Aadanooru, wherein lived a Vedic scholar, Visvanatha Dikshita. He lived up to all the six duties of a good Brahmin. He and his wife, Sausilyavati, were great devotees of Lord Siva.

Visvanatha had a large landed property. He had many serfs. Once he wished to go on a pilgrimage. He then spoke to one of his two most faithful Harijan servants, Govind, who, along with his son-in-law, Kandasami, was conscientiously looking after Visvanatha's agricultural activities: "Govind, I am not yet favoured by Lord Siva with children. So I hope that if I visit the holy places like Varanasi I will be blessed with progeny. Till my return, please take care of my financial interests. I am leaving tomorrow on my pilgrimage."

As Govind quietly expressed his assent, Kandasami added: "We assure you that your landed interests will be safe in our hands. But I have a simple request, sir. I am too poor to be able to journey to Varanasi. Kindly, therefore, pray to Lord Visvanaatha, on my behalf also, and beg Him for me to favour me with a son."

His master said: "I appreciate your request and admire your devoted spirit. I will send you to Varanasi after I finish my own pilgrimage and pray for you."

Visvanatha and His wife at last reached Varanasi, and after performing the consecration and the anointment to Lord Visvanatha, Vishvanatha said: "Lord, my life is sanctified by my seeing Thine image. Thou hast granted me riches, but not progeny. I beseech Thee that Thou favour me and my servant, Kandasami, with sons."

Thus, after several days of prayer and entreaty, Visvanatha saw Lord Visvanatha in his dream one night, who assured him that he and his servant would before long be blessed with children.

Finally offering his prayers to Lord Visvanatha and goddess Visalakshi, Visvanaatha returned home, along with his wife.

Thus several days passed by.

The wives of Visvanatha and Kandasami became pregnant. After nine months both were delivered of male offsprings. The Brahmin child was named Subrahmanyam; the Harijan child, Nanda.

Subrahmanyam's 'Upanayanam' was duly performed and he was sent to the Gurukul to learn the Vedas. Because of his raw age, he was indolent and associating himself with naughty children. He neglected the Vedic study. Visvanatha was worried about his son's evil ways; all his efforts to reform him by hook or by crook were of no avail. At last, disgusted with the boy's misbehaviour, Visvanatha sent him away from his home. Naturally the tender-hearted mother was distressed. She could not speak against her husband's wishes, but prayed to Lord Visvanatha for her son's quick reformation.

After a while, the parents were greatly disturbed at the lack of news about Subramanyam's whereabouts.

Here Kandasami was bringing up Nanda with much tenderness and affection. Nanda's manners pleased all the people around him. He would fulfil his ablution at regular hours, smear himself with sacred ash, go to the temple of Lord Siva and worship Him regularly. He serves the fellow devotees, and constantly obeys his parent's orders. He feels that all his doings were inspired by Lord Siva and does his work as an offering to the Lord.

Learning about his good ways, the Visvanatha couple were much delighted.

Meanwhile, Subrahmanyam arrived in Varanasi. Bathing in the Ganges and praying to Lord Visvanatha, he went up to a Pundit, told him all about his former ways, and requested him to guide him properly.

The Pundit, Jagadish Panda, said: "Dear boy, don't grieve over what was past. You can stay here as my guest. I will teach you all the worth-learning studies. Lord Visvanatha will surely save you and bless you."

Before long Subrahmanyam became well-versed in all sacred studies, and began studying Panini Sanskrit Grammar.

Whether at play or during agricultural activities, Nanda was ever mindful of Lord Siva. His bullocks would plough the fields without his guidance, and his farm produce was higher than average. He would feed and otherwise help all the Siva devotees who sought his patronage.

Nanda's grandfather, Govinda, was a little worried at the extreme devotion of Nanda. Even some of the neighbours thought that Nanda was afflicted with a strange disease.

Thus several days passed by.

In a neighbouring village, Tiruppangaluru, a traditional festival (Brahmotsava) in honour of Lord Siva was being celebrated. Nanda, along with his devotee-mates, went to witness it.

In accordance with the guidelines offered by the Saivite scripture, the sacred bull, Nandi, was consecrated at that place. Looking at Nandi, Nanda said: "O Nandi, please do not come in my way. I have been waiting here for a long time, amid the vast crowds to get a glimpse of the Lord's holy image." He could not realise that the consecrated Nandi could not step aside for his sake.

When Nandi did not move, Nanda addressed the Lord: "O blessed Lord, at last I was able to see you. Bless me and save me." Nanda saw Siva and Parvati in that Siva idol. He began to dance with rapturous abandonment to the delight of the witnessing adorers. Eventually he fell in a swoon.

When he regained consciousness, Nanda pressed his friends to dig a holy tank in the vicinity. All the tools that they had with them were four nails; so they told Nanda that it was an impossible task and that unless they returned home before the next morning they would be displeasing their master, Visvanatha.

Still, Nanda was adamant, and actually started digging the ground with a fervour greater than that of his friends who followed suit. By the grace of Lord Siva, not only was the digging of the tank completed before dawn but it was also automatically filled with nectar-like water. Nanda took his leave of the Lord and returned home along with his mates.

Subrahmanyam re-entered his home early one fine morning, after completing a fruitful stay of twelve years at the Pundit's home in Varanasi. At first his parents could not recognise him. When he explained everything they were immensely delighted, and invited their friends and neighbours to listen to him, as he expounded his knowledge.

Everyone was pleased with Subrahmanyam's success. He presented gifts to the servants who came to greet him. His parents realised that it was due to the grace of Lord Siva that he became a worthy man.

On a certain night Subrahmanyam saw Siva in a dream. The Lord told him that he would receive instruction from one of his servants the next day. Subrahmanyam was eager to know who that servant would be. Next morning he finished his ablution and prayers early, and was examining his servants with intense care.

Govind then met Subrahmanyam and said: "Sir, my grandson is ever engrossed in devotional activities, and is unmindful of even his food. He seldom attends to his diurnal duties, and would not drive away the birds and beasts that enter our dwelling. We have, thanks to your father's patronage, every material need, but this absent-mindedness of Nanda worries us a great deal."

Subrahmanyam knew this would be his man. Accordingly, he went to visit Nanda, who looked like a noble ascetic (Paramahansa). Subrahmanyam bowed to him and befriended him. Both devotees, who gained their powers through Siva's grace, since then began

offering prayers to the Lord together. The old-fashioned Visvanatha chided his son for befriending a Harijan like Nanda(nar). But Subrahmanyam continued to be friendly with Nanda.

Once Nanda wanted to visit the 'Ardraa-darsana' (seeing the Ardra star) festival consecrated to Lord Nataraja at Chidambaram, and sought the permission of Visvanatha for that purpose. Visvanatha ridiculed him and disallowed his request. Nanda then said that he would rather die than stop paying his devotional respects to Nataraja. Visvanatha said that since the harvest time was approaching, Nanda would be failing in his duty of attending to the farming needs, However, as a challenge, Visvanatha further told him that if Nanda could get the harvest ready for reaping the very next day, he could go on his pilgrimage.

Nanda accepted the challenge and placed the burden of fulfilling his wish on Lord Nataraja. As he woke up next morning, finished his prayers to Lord Siva, and then went to his farm, he saw that the harvest was ready for reaping. He thanked the Lord for His grace, and, getting the harvesting done by his people, sent the produce to his master's home. Visvanatha saw that the produce was double that of the previous year's. Realising that Nanda was a genuine devotee of God, Visvanatha allowed him to go on the pilgrimage to Chidambaram.

Lighting the sacred candles, Nanda went along with his friends and comrades to Chidambaram. Subrahmanyam, unwilling to risk his father's angry disapproval, did not accompany Nanda.

Ah, there you see that splendid Chidambara-kshetra! There you hear the chimes of the temple-bells ringing inspiringly! There you see a sea of devotees, whose waves of devotional hymns dedicated to Lord Siva overwhelm the minds and hearts and souls of the hearers!. The Jangama devotees are smearing the visitors with sacred ash and are receiving gratefully their gifts. All the hordes of devotees are lining up to get their glimpse of Lord Nataraja, an

incarnation of Lord Siva. The priest is giving them the sacred waters and the holy sacrament, in return to the devotional offerings of theirs.

However, Nanda(nar) and his mates were refused entry into the temple, under the pretext of their 'untouchability' as Harijans. Nanda did not want to protest or quarrel with the temple authorities, but was simply performing the Siva Bhajan, along with his friends. All the devotees who heard his inspired and evocative singing were moved by his melodious and sonorous voice, and were surrounding him affectionately. The priests regretted their folly, as the Lord opened their eyes to the universality of divinity immanent in all creation. Consequently, they gladly offered Nanda and his mates all the sacramental foods. Nanda and friends accepted them as direct presents from Lord Nataraja.

The same night Nataraja appeared in a dream to the priests. ("Sahasra-archaka-sreni) and said: "Nanda belongs to the highest order of ascetics. He is one of my dearest devotees, and if you deny entry to him and his mates into the sanctum sanctorum, I will leave this temple and join him and his men." Thereupon the priests assembled in a group, and after careful consultation, agreed to allow Nanda and other Harijans into the temple.

Here Nanda was unable to sleep, although his mates were dozing off, on that night. He continued to supplicate Lord Siva all night and said that, unless he was granted direct Darshan the next morning, he would put an end to his life. After the long supplication, Nanda fell in a swoon.

When he regained consciousness and opened his eyes, he saw before him the repentant priests. He told them that his Lord was inviting him and asked them to take him to the divine presence. The priests told him that they would willingly take him into the sanctum sanctorum, because they realised that he was one of Nataraja's supreme devotees.

Nanda's complexion was suffused with divine splendour, and he was chanting the songs dear to Siva, as he walked into the temple.

The priests showed him the various halls consecrated to Siva and Parvati. By his entry the temple itself seemed to be gaining in splendence, and Nanda was witnessing the godly idols with eyes half-closed in rapture. At last Nanda(nar) caused the sacred flame at the feet of the Lord to flare up ecstatically and consume him. The priests who saw the gloriously touching scene were astounded. After the flare quitted down, they saw no trace of Nanda. They rightly concluded that great devotee became one with Lord Siva, both spiritually and physically. They sang the praises of Nandanar with appropriate devotion and delight.

The news of Nanda's supreme union with the Lord reached his native village. On hearing it from the mates of Nanda, Visvanatha was regretful of his former negligence, Visvanatha and others went to meet Govinda, who, along with his son and daughter-in-law, was grieving the loss of Nandanar. Visvanatha consoled them: "You are indeed blessed people. The fruit you received from one incarnation of Siva, Visvesvara of Varanasi, is now accepted by another incarnation, Nataraja. Nanda is a supreme devotee and an ornament to the whole Harijan race. You must all follow in his footsteps and be worthy of him. Thereby you too can become one with the Lord."

Subrahmanyam was sorry to lose his bosom friend. But at last he understood the true significance of Nandanar's communion with God, and, marrying a chaste and good lady, became the father of worthy children. He instructed several others in the ways of God.

Govinda, Kandasami, and their kith and kin also were reconciled to the loss of Nandanar and followed his example, by becoming great devotees of Lord Siva.

TIRU JNANA SAMBANDHI GURUS

Satrusasana Paandya was ruling the kingdom of Pandya. A brave man, he conquered the kings of Chola and Chera, and incorporated their kingdoms into his. When he died, his son Kubja Pandya succeeded him to the throne.

Kubja married the daughter of the Chola king. Her name was Vanitesvari. Kubja returned the Chola kingdom to his father-in-law. By giving several rich gifts to Kubja, the Chera king also regained his kingdom from Kubja.

At the time of sending Vanitesvari to her husband's home, the Chola king offered Kubja the services of his minister Kulabandhana, who accompanied her. Leaving the care of the kingdom in the capable hands of Kulabandhana, Kubja was spending his time happily in the company of his wife. Everyone was happy with the able administration of Kulabandhana, who saw to it that the kingdom knew no want or poverty.

Thus several years passed by.

In the meantime many Buddhists entered that kingdom. They converted Kubja to their faith. Insulting Hinduism, he even went to the extent of inviting and patronising Buddhists from all corners of the world. He stopped the customary consecration to the presiding deities of his kingdom, goddess Minakshi and Lord Sundaresvara. He had forbidden the smearing of holy ash and the wearing of the Siva-rosary by his people. The people were terrified, and were even hesitating to go to the temple of Minakshi and Sundaresa, for fear of being molested by the king's men.

Kubja paid no heed to the wise counsel of his queen and his minister. He was wholly infatuated with Buddhism. He ordered his queen and his minister also not to worship Siva in any form. When they threatened that they would commit suicide if forbidden the visit to the Siva temple, he allowed it to them, but still forbade them the use of the sacred ash and the Siva-rosary.

Once there was drought in the Pandya kingdom. As the queen and the minister were talking about the best way of bringing the king round to his original love, Hindusim, a great Saivite, Sivananda, arrived there and was duly honoured by the queen and the minister.

Sivananda narrated the following story:

There is a place called Brahmapuram in the Chola country. There lives a great devotee of Siva, named Siva Yogi. By the grace of Lord Siva, he had a son. When the boy was five years old, he was one day taken along by his father to the nearby river. Asking the boy to wait on the bank, Siva Yogi went to bathe in the river.

Siva and Parvati, who were flying above in the sky happened to see the boy. As Parvati was impressed by the boy's good looks, she ordered that the airplane touch down the earth near where the boy was seated. Parvati caressed and suckled the child, before saying: "Child, you will learn in no time the Vedas and the Sastras. You will be known as Jnana Sambandhi Guru, and will disseminate the knowledge about Lord Siva on all sides. I am now presenting you with a golden throne, a pearl-studded white canopy, a golden staff, a pair of precious fans, and a palanquin, pot and tumbler made of fine gold. Accept these and go round the world, equipped with them."

So saying she disappeared rightaway.

When he returned from his bath, Siva Yogi was surprised to see his little son seated on a pearl-studded throne and surrounded by rich belongings. Learning the news from the child, Siva Yogi thanked the Lord and His consort mentally.

The boy started the Vedic studies in right earnest, and before long went about the country refuting the Buddhist teachings, with his own well-reasoned arguments in favour of Hinduism. Unable to withstand his word-power, the Buddhist preachers fled the Chola country. The news of their flight, and of the victorious efforts of Jnana Sambandhi Guru, reached the Pandya country.

The queen and the minister were delighted, and sent an invitation to the Guru to visit the Pandyan kingdom. Accepting the invitation with pleasure, the Guru arrived in Madhura, accompanied by some

sixteen thousand disciples. The visitors took a dip in the Vegavati river, prayed to Minakshi and Sundaresa, besides worshipping Lord Ganapati in the first place.

Meanwhile Vanitesvari and Kulabandhana came there, and, praying to the Guru with golden flowers, explained to him the current situation in their kingdom, because of the King's Buddhist learnings. She requested him to reform her husband. The Guru promised to do his best.

One of the saints of Madhura, named Vagisa Siva Yogi, invited the Guru to his monastery. The Guru and his disciples were provided with all their requirements by the queen during their stay in the monastery.

Kshapana Desika, learning about the Guru's visit and its purpose, performed a voodoo rite (abhichaara homa) aimed at killing the Guru and his retinue. The fire that was produced by that ritual calmed down before reaching the Vagisa Math. So the Desika repeated his rite with greater fervour. This time the flames were coming near the monastery. The disciples requested the Guru to divert them in such a way as to cause the ill-health of the king. And so the flames turned into a disease-causing factor in the palace.

Unable to withstand the pains of disease, the king sent for his queen and his minister. He also had his personal physicians attend on him, but to no purpose. The Buddhist priests tried all their traditional remedies on the king, in vain. In his wretched state of mind, he requested the queen and the minister to throw him into some river.

The two then told him: "A great Yogi, Jnana Sambandhi Guru, has arrived in this town. He can cure you of your malady. If you agree, we will send for him."

The Guru was sent for by the King, and came there with all his paraphernalia and retinue. He asked the King to smear himself with

the sacred ash, but the former refused to do so. Then the Guru asked the Buddhist priests to cure the king and added that if they failed they had to embrace Hinduism. The King also promised to re-embrace Hinduism if the Buddhists could not help him. When they failed, they were asked to go away by the king. When the Guru applied the sacred ash to the King's body, the latter was instantaneously cured.

The King then said: "Revered Guru, you saved me. Initiate me in Siva worship and take me as your disciple." After the initiation of the five-lettered Mantra, and the smearing of the sacred ash, the King not only was free from his fever but also gained a taller stature (he was known to be a 'Kubja' pigmy till then), He told the Guru: "I will do thy bidding."

At the suggestion of the Guru, the King himself decorated his queen and his minister with the sacred ash and the rosary. The Guru changed the King's name as "Sundara Pandya" (handsome Pandya), now that he was no longer short and ugly.

Sundara called upon his people also to take up the special worship of Lord Siva. Everyone was praising the Guru. Jealous of his fame, some of the Buddhist priests sent a message to the King to this effect: "We will send a palm-leaf script with our Mantra. Please ask the Guru to prepare a similar one with his Mantra. Then throw the two scripts into the flames. The writer of the script which is not burnt will be the winner."

The Guru wrote 'Siva' on a similar palm-leaf. The courtiers checked the two palm-leaf scripts and when they were consigned to the flames, the one written by the Buddhists was burnt but not the Guru's. Accusing the Guru of practising a 'fire-stopping' cult, the Buddhists then suggested another competition: "The two palm-leaves, each written by the Buddhists and the Guru, will be thrown into the river Kaveri, and that which is not drowned will give the victory to its writer". The script of the Buddhists was lost in the

waters, whereas that of the Guru reached the shore and shone like a bright lotus.

Sundara Pandya ordered a golden palanquin for the Guru, who was then led in a procession round the town. The Guru was also requested to be seated on the King's throne. As he did so, he was presented with valuable gifts by the king and the queen, after they prayed to his feet in the traditional Hindu style. Later the royal couple arranged the worship of Sundaresvara and Minakshi with a hundred thousand lotuses and ten million Bilva leaves. They also gifted the temple with a golden palanquin and other golden things and ornaments used in the worship of God.

Once again Hinduism flourished in all its glory in the Pandya kingdom.

By the grace of Parvati, Jnana Sambandhi Guru remained ever a five-year-old godly child. It is said that he was the incarnation of Kumara Svami.

BHAKTA SIRYALA

In the town of Kanchi (Conjeevaram) there lived a great Siva devotee, Siriyala. Every day, after his prayers to Lord Siva, he would entertain, as his luncheon guests, six fellow Saivite devotees. Even if one of the six men would not turn up on any day, Siriyala would refrain from eating his lunch. His wife, Sangalavva, was his kindred spirit. They had a son, named Seeraalu, who took after his parents in every respect. The boy learnt all the sacred studies from a worthy Guru.

Thus several days have gone by.

One day, after the daily prayers, Siriyala saw that none of his luncheon guests has arrived. Searching for some other guests in the street, he came across, an old monk, who was dressed like a typical Saivite mendicant. He was none other than Lord Siva, who came in disguise to test the worth of His devotee.

Pleased with the appearance of the monk, Siriyala said: “Today none of my usual guests has come. I cannot eat my food unless I am surrounded by guests. You have come like a godsend. Please come to my home and accept my humble hospitality.”

The old mendicant replied: “I admire your devotional spirit and sense of hospitality. But I will accept your invitation, only if you will serve me the flesh of a young healthy man.” Undeterred, Siriyala said: “I have an eight-year-old handsome son. I will kill him and have his flesh cooked for your meal. Believe me and follow me to my humble home.”

When they reached their destination, Siriyala informed his wife about the condition. She realised that Lord Siva was thus testing them. When she informed their son about the human sacrifice, Seeralu told her: “Mother, I am indeed lucky, because the Lord is pleased to seek my flesh for His food. I am ready to be sacrificed.”

The Siriyala cut his son into pieces and cooked a meal with them. He invited the old guest to partake of it. When the old man finished his bath and sat for the meal, he saw the head of the boy was missing and complained about it to Siriyala. Siriyala said that it was only because he thought the hairy portion of the head would be unsuitable for eating that he did not include it in the food. Upon which the false guest asked Siriyala and his wife to sit beside him during the meal. When the couple complied with his request, he further asked them to invite their son to the meal. Siriyala said that they had only one son, who was already killed for the preparation of the guest’s food. Angered, the guest threatened that he would leave the food untasted, if the boy is not invited to join them. Siriyaala once again expressed his helplessness, and Sangalavva wept aloud for their inability to call forth the dead son.

Then the guest said: “Mother, don’t cry. Just call your son thrice by name. If he does not turn up, we shall discuss the next step later.”

As his mother called out his name thrice, Seeralu Siriyala appeared before them readily. Pleasantly surprised at that miraculous reappearance of their dead son, the couple fell prostrate at the feet of the guest. Lord Siva assumed His real form and congratulated the trio on their devotion, singling out Sangalavva for this special praise: “Lady, you have, by allowing the sacrifice of your only son, proved yourself to be greater than Paulomi, the mother of Jayanta; Aditi, the mother of Vamana; Sarasvati, the mother of Kasyapa and other sages; Lakshmi, the mother of Manmatha; and Parvati, the mother of Kumara Svami and Ganapati.”

Afterwards, to the accompaniment of the singing and dancing of the Pramatha hordes, Siva took along with him the three devotees to Kailasa.

DRAVIDA MANIKYA SACHIVAS

There is a village named Vatapura, near Madhura, the capital of Pandya kingdom. There lived a worthy Brahmin, who performed the Upanayanam of his son when the latter was five years old. The boy was then trained in Vedic learning. By the time he was sixteen, he learnt not only the scriptures but also foreign languages, art and music. He was, further more, dedicated to the worship of Lord Siva.

Hearing about the boy’s great learning, the king of the country, Arimardana, invited him to his court and asked him to be his minister. Accepting the invitation, the boy in due course rose to the rank of the Chief Minister. By stream lining the administration for the greater benefit of the king as well as his subjects, he won the admiration and affection of both the ruler and the ruled. By way of thanks, the king ceded to him the village of Vatapura and offered him many precious gifts, which included mighty horses and gigantic chariots.

The king and the minister were mutually devoted.

The Chief Minister is in the habit of finishing his ablutions in the Suvarna Padmini river, worshipping Lord Siva and then inviting

deserving guests for the luncheon. He would also arrange for the feeding of the poor and needy every day.

When he became a strong young man, he married a worthy Brahmin girl. The couple were living happily together.

Once the king's horses died of a mysterious fever. Then the king requested the chief minister to acquire suitable substitutes, without counting the cost.

Next day, as usual, the chief minister finished his ablution and worship. Later he addressed Lord Siva in the temple thus: "Lord, hither to I could not fulfil the needs of all Thy devotees, for want of funds. Now the king is prepared to spend any amount of money for the purchase of horses of noble breed. I beseech Thee to take care of the king's request, so that I can divert these funds for the patronage of Thy poor devotees."

On an auspicious day the chief minister set out on his errand, accompanied by his retinue and equipped with large funds. He first came across a Brahmin, who offered him the sacred ash, saying that it would bring him good luck. Thanking the Brahmin, he and his party proceeded eastwards.

Before long, they reached the pilgrim centre, Bhuvaneshvara. The chief minister was enraptured at the sight of the presiding deity, Bhuvaneshvara, and decided upon staying on there for the duration of the month of Aashadha (June-July), at the end of which period he told himself that he would try to acquire worthy horses for the king. He sent back some of the retinue to Madhura.

One day when he was proceeding towards the Bhuvaneshvara temple, he happened to see a great Guru surrounded by thousands of pupils. They were all being taught the Vedas, with appropriate intonation (svara). The chief minister saw Lord Siva in the Guru and saluted him. The Guru was pleased with the obedience of the minister and initiated him in several esoteric mantras as well as the skills of

writing poetry and acquiring true knowledge. Investing the minister's speech with spontaneous fluency, the Guru named him "Manikya Vachaka".

Later the Guru said that he had to go away on some business and entrusted to him the job of teaching his myriad disciples. Taking upon himself the responsibility of attending to their needs, the chief minister expended on them some of the funds the king gave him for the purchase of new horses. He also sent some funds to Madhura for the embellishment and upkeep of the Minakshi-Sundareshvara shrine.

Learning about the latest development, the Pandya king was wild with fury, and straightway sent a message to the chief minister to return home immediately, along with the horses. Reading the message, the irresolute Manikya Vachaka thus prayed: "Lord Sundareshvara, I have received a message from the king, which I am unable to obey, because I have not a penny with me. I spent all the funds on good deeds and on the works dedicated to you. Now you are my sole refuge."

Then an aerial voice was heard saying: "O Manikya Vachaka, write a letter to the Pandya king not to trust rumours, but to construct the stables in readiness for the arrival of the horses, which would be brought by you before the end of two months."

Manikya did so. But still he was worried. That night Sundareshvara appeared in a dream to him and asked him to return to Madhura, promising that He would eventually send the horses. Accordingly, Manikya went back to Madhura and requested the king to await the arrival of the noble horses. The king trusted him and presented him with a diamond necklace.

Manikya then bathed in the Padma lake, and going to the temple, prayed to Ganapati, Kumara svami, Minakshi and Sundareshvara, beseeching them all to see that his promise to the

king would be duly fulfilled. The aerial voice again assured him that he would not be disappointed. Pleased, he went home and invited thousands of Brahmin guests for dinner.

Manikya's relatives alerted him that it was not right to spend the royal money in this fashion and that if the horses would not turn up he would be the butt of the king's anger.

Manikya told his dependants: "Please do not worry on my account, I am now completely detached from my worldly bonds. I am just waiting to fulfil my promise to the king. Once the horses arrive, I will leave for the forest to devote the rest of my life doing penance dedicated to Lord Siva."

Next day the king called the minister and said: "Manikya Sachiva, when are you expecting the horses?". The chief minister replied: "In two or three days."

Gladdened, the king ordered that the streets of Madhura be well-decorated in preparation for the arrival of the noble horses. Similarly, visitors from other countries were eagerly staying on in expectation of feasting their eyes on the sight of the mighty horses.

True to the kingly tradition (of rewarding those that please them, and punishing the same people when they displease them), the king ordered that the minister be imprisoned, tortured and killed if the horses would not turn up at the end of the third day.

When actually the horses did not come on the stipulated day, Manikya was imprisoned. As he was being tortured, he supplicated the Lord that he should be saved from the pain and ignominy of his predicament, in as much as he did not squander the royal funds on any unworthy cause but spent them for doing the works dear to God.

At last the heart of Sundaesvara (Lord Siva's incarnation) melted. He commissioned his Pramatha hordes to bring down the

noble horses to Madhura. They transformed their foxes into horses and brought them; Lord Siva also changed his bull into a stallion, and accompanied the horses, riding on it.

The streets of Madhura were reverberating with the sound of the marching horses, and the dust they kicked up was rising up to the skies. The riders of the multi-hued horses got down and entered the court of the Pandya king, flourishing their dazzling swords and armours. On seeing them, the king was awed and asked Manikya Sachiva to introduce to him the chief representatives of the horse-riders. Manikya replied: "Your Majesty, I have no idea. When your men were torturing me, I worshipped Lord Siva. Then the leader of the horse-riders came to me. I informed him of my position and he promised to do the needful. I cannot even say who the leader of the horse-riders is."

But the king pressed the minister further, to try and recognise the leader.

When Manikya was still hesitating, Lord Sundaesvara, in the form of the chief horse-rider, came upon the scene. Looking at his radiant form, the king was dazzled and went forward to greet him obediently.

The 'horse-rider' said: "O king, your chief minister is a noble devotee. He gave me the funds you entrusted him with. You punished him needlessly. Anyway, what is past is past. Now that you are in a position to appreciate the greatness of your minister and expiate your sin of getting him tortured, I assure you I can give you any number of horses or any amount of money you may want from me."

The king said: "Sir, I do not really know who you are. I don't need any money. Just give me the horses to augment the power of my cavalry. Thereby I can conquer my enemies, and then ruling the country without any harmful opposition I can make it fertile and feed all my subjects. I am sorry I had my minister tortured in my

ignorance of his true worth. Now, please explain to me the traits of the best breed of horses.”

When the leader did so, the king was much delighted and gave him and other horse-riders several rich gifts. The leader and his followers then went to the Sundaesvara Minakshi temple and disappeared there and then.

The king rewarded the minister suitably. The people who saw the horses were greatly impressed by their grand looks.

Manikya returned home and entertained several Brahmin guests to dinner.

That very night, the horses returned to their original shape of jackals. They began wailing and committing other acts of nuisance natural to them. Consequently, the citizens were disturbed in their sleep. When they opened their house-doors to see what was wrong, the jackals ran away. The jackals hurt the horses that were formerly in the stable.

Learning the news, the king was angry, and, thinking that it was all the plot of the minister, sent for him. When Manikya came before him, the king said that unless he would bring back the horses or refund the funds, he would again be tortured and killed.

Manikya said that he was innocent; that he was prepared to return the gifts the king gave him; and that he would face with equanimity whatever treatment the king was going to meet out to him.

The hard-hearted king turned a deaf ear to Manikya's plea and ordered his men to torture him. During the torture Manikya prayed to Lord Sundaesvara for succour. Thereupon the Lord ordered the Vegavati river to inundate the entire city of Madhura. The soldiers who were torturing Manikya ran to their homes to protect their families from the flood. By the grace of Sundaesvara,

Manikya was unshackled. Returning home, he bathed and then worshipped Lord Sundaesvara and other dieties gratefully.

As the king was looking for the men to do something to prevent the waters flooding the whole town, not one came in sight. He asked the single available man to cry out for the building of a wall against the flooded river. As the town was about to be submerged in the river waters, the king realised that it was retribution for his getting Manikya tortured. So he sent for Manikya and apologised to him, at the same time asking him to save the town and the town people from a watery grave.

Manikya took along with him the king to the temple and prayed: “Lord, I spent all the royal funds on the deeds dedicated to Thee. Under the wrong impression that I misused them the king punished me. All our human follies are dictated by our natural delusions and illusions. Forgive the king and myself, and save our town and our people.”

The Lord said: “The king should know that the money he has under his control is not really his but given to him by God for the protection of the people. Now that he realises that fact, I will spare him. I wanted to punish him for his folly. He came to his senses. So I order the river Vegavati to recede to its former position.”

After the king and the minister offered their obeisance, the Lord disappeared. The Vegavati river quietened.

All the relieved people offered their thanksgiving prayers to Sundaesvara and Minakshi.

GRAND MINISTER BASAVESVARA

In the Karnataka country, in a Brahmin hamlet lived a pious Vedic scholar named Mandrenga Madiraju. His wife was named Madamba. They had no children. Madamba performed the ‘Nandikesa’ consecration (vrata-vow) for that purpose.

Lord Nandikesvara entered her womb in one of his aspects. But she was not delivered of a child, even after the regular nine months' gestation. Undeterred, the good couple continued to pray to Nandi and to the good deeds like entertaining worthy guests at lunch offering them the food dear to Nandi.

Unable to bear the burden of the fetus any longer, Madamba supplicated Nandi for deliverance. He appeared to her in a dream that night and assured her that soon a male child would be born to her. Accordingly, a son was born to her when an auspicious star was in the ascendent. The child was given the customary purificatory bath. Lord Sangamesvara then entered the child's room and, after smearing the child with sacred ash, decorating him with the Siva emblem (linga) and initiating him in **NAMAH SIVAYA** mantra, He instructed the elders to offer the child the nourishment which is first consecrated to Lord Siva.

On the eleventh day after the birth of the child, his naming ceremony was performed with traditional dignity and decorum, and he was christened 'Basava'.

When Basava was five years old he was sent to a Gurukul where he studied all temporal and spiritual branches of learning. When he was eight years old, his parents wanted to perform his Upanayanam. Then the boy said: "You know that Lord Sangamesvara initiated me in all the sacred duties. I don't see any reason for further consecration or for serving other Gurus."

Madiraju replied: "What you say is true, no doubt. But you see the traditional ceremonies have to be performed duly in all cases. Upanayanam is a mandatory ceremony for all Dvijas, whether they want to enter the life of the householder or become ascetics, later on. The Gayatri Mantra which is taught to the child during this ceremony, starts with 'AUM', which is the 'Pranava' that is sacred to all orders of life. The 'Bharga' term in that mantra represents

Lord Siva. The five tufts of the hair, left after shaving the head on that occasion, the staff, the G-string, the deerskin, and the like, are part of Lord Siva's external paraphernalia. You must respect our family tradition, even if you have no personal conviction in this matter."

But Basava was adamant and reiterated that the initiation he already had in the ways of Siva worship was enough for him. He added that if his father did not see eye to eye with him, he was prepared to leave him. As he was actually getting ready to leave his parents accompanied by his sister, Nagamba, his maternal uncle, Bandari Balideva, the commander-in-chief of King Bijjala, came forward to receive him, and took his nephew and his niece to his home.

Now Basava was sixteen years old. He was now a strong youth. Although he was thinking of nothing or nobody else but Lord Siva, he was now of an age when marriage was part of his mundane duty. So he married a thirteen-year-old daughter of his uncle. The wedding was well-performed and well-attended.

Receiving the blessings of the elders, Basava, accompanied by his wife and his sister, went to pay his respects to his Guru at Kappadi Sangamesvara pilgrim centre. They bowed to Lord Sangamesvara, from outside the temple, by falling prostrate. The Lord showed them the way, assuming the guise of an ascetic. Enraptured, Basava praised the Lord, through scriptural hymns. When Basava offered all the sacred oblations, Sangamesvara blessed him and taught him the ways and means of Siva worship, before re-entering the idol. All those who witnessed that sublime scene were devotionally impressed by the grace of God.

Basava and the two ladies stayed on for some time at that pilgrim centre. All those, who heard him speak about the glory and grace of Lord Siva, became his disciples.

Meanwhile, Bandari Balideva died at Kalyanapura. Regreting his death, the Bijjala King asked his advisers if any of the relatives of the deceased was fit to succeed him. To which the advisers replied that the nephew of the dead commander-in-chief was even greater in every respect than his uncle, and, therefore, should be invited to take the place of Balideva.

Although the Bijjala King was a Jain, he heard with satisfaction the Saivite virtues of Basava, as recounted by the advisers, and willingly sent for him.

Getting the king's message, Basava arrived in Kalyanapura along with his wife, his sister and his pupils.

He was received with honours, as befitting a future commander-in-chief.

When offered the post of the 'defender of the nation', Basavesvara assured the king that Lord Siva would protect them all, if they merely placed their trust in Him, and that he would make the king the lord of the whole world eventually.

The king then took Basava to Balideva's home. Basava offered his condolences to the relations, and later took charge of his apportioned duty with apt skill and dedication. He rose above the distinctions of caste and the order of life, and taught the all-embracing philosophy of the Upanishads to one and all.

Hearing about the glory of Basavesvara, the incarnation of Siva, Lord Allama, went to meet him, with a view to giving him His blessings in person.

Basava received and worshipped the divine guest with due traditional honours. Lord Allama ate up the consecrated food (Prasaadam) meant for one hundred and ninety thousand people, as it was being devotionally offered to Him. Not a morsel of the oblation remained. Having no other go, Basava offered himself to Allama, asking to be eaten by that Lord.

Satisfied with the sincerity and intensity of Basava's devotion, Allama Prabhu said: "Basavesvara, your spirit of devotion is matchless. I am now giving you this 'Prasada' which will make you invincible and grant you double of whatever you wish for. You can withstand the onslaught of your foes and the 'Jangamas', with the aid of this sacrificial offering". So saying, he disappeared.

One night burglars tried to break into Basava's home and steal all his valuables. But they couldn't manage to get in. So they wore black brinjals, as though they were the 'Linga' of Lord Siva, and were awaiting a chance of breaking in. Meanwhile they were observing the worshipping habits of the Rudra hordes inside the mansion. Before long the brinjals round their necks turned into real Siva Lingas. Besides, the devotion for Lord Siva was automatically generated in them. They too took part in the communal Siva worship. Realising their true conversion, Basava rewarded them plentifully. They were ashamed of their former evil ways, and since then became staunch Saivites, as well as the disciples of Basavesvara.

One day a Siva devotee requested Basava to supply him ten tons of pearls, in order to prepare the pearl-powder for the decoration of a Siva shrine. Even as Basava glanced at the heap of corns before him, it was transformed into a mound of pearls. Basava asked the devotee to take them all.

On another day a 'Jangama' devotee came and asked for as much wealth as was in the king's treasury, and Basava readily fulfilled his wish. The king's men informed him about Basava's gift. On being sent for and asked for an explanation, by the king, Basava said that the money that was given to the Jangama was not from the royal treasury, and asked the king to check up. When the king opened his treasury and saw the funds intact, he apologised to Basava.

Once an amorous youth, engaged in the love-play with several courtesans, sent one of the maids of the bawdy-house to fetch a

'nitya padi' from Basava. As the maid was getting it from Basava's place, she saw the bright silk saree which the wife of Basava was wearing, and, going home, incited her mistress to ask Basava for the garment of his wife. Basava agreed without hesitation to give away the rich raiment. As Gangamba, the wife of Basava, was removing the saree she wore, to give it away to the courtesan, a fresh saree appeared again and again in its place all of which were also ceded to the young lover to be presented to the courtesan.

One day the Lord of Kappadi, Sangamesvara, came to Basava in the form of a Jangama (mendicant) and asked for his third eye. Realising that it was Sangamesvara in disguise, he asked the guest to go and look at himself in a mirror. As the 'Jangama' did so, there appeared his third eye in its usual place. Sangamesvara was ashamed of himself for trying to test such a staunch devotee as Basava. As he was trying to disappear, Basava told Sangamesvara: "Lord, how can a devotee of Thine prove himself to be a lesser person than Thyself? Thou art one without beginning and end, and all those who devotionally identify themselves with Thee become Thine equals."

Smiling in approval, Sangamesvara disappeared.

Basava was also able to fulfil his promise of making King Bijjala the emperor of the whole world.

Thus several days passed by.

The Bijjala King in course of time lost his regard for Basava, and caused the eyes of two of the latter's devotees to be plucked out, even though they were not guilty of any crime. Angered at this treacherous act, Basava left the court of Bijjala King with the resolve of seeing his end, and went to the temple of Sangamesvara at Kappadi along with his family and his devotee-mates like Madivala Machayya, Moliga Marayya and Kinnera Brahmayya.

In the meantime, the two blinded men, Mallayya and Madhupayya, went to meet the minister, Jangadeva, and complained

to him about the misdeed of the king. The mother of the minister advised him to kill the Bijjala King. Thereupon the two injured men and the minister went to the court of the king and cut off his head. None of the king's men could resist the three men, who gained their strength from their righteous indignation.

Later the three heroes went to Kappadi and reported to Basavesvara all that transpired, after praying to Lord Sangamesvara.

Basava was relieved to know that the purpose of his birth on earth was fulfilled now. So, deciding to leave the earth and be united with God, he told Sangamesvara: "Lord, my mission is over. Take me!"

Lord Sangamesvara smilingly received him into His Spirit and both of them finally entered the Siva Linga.

All those who saw that sublime scene felt that their lives were sanctified and returned home, singing the praises of Sangamesvara and Basavesvara.

PANDIT MALLIKARJUNA CHAKRAVARTI

On the banks of the river Godavari is situated the pilgrim centre Draksharamam. The presiding deity of the place is Lord Bhimesvara. The priest of that temple is Bhimaradhya, of the lineage of Gautama. Childless, he was constantly uttering the name of Lord Siva, **NAMAH SIVAYA**.

Once he visited SriSailam, and there in the presence of Lord Mallikarjuna was chanting the five lettered Mantra (**NAMAH SIVAYA**). Pleased with his devotion, the Lord granted that his wife be pregnant. In due course she gave birth to a male child, who was named after the Lord that granted his birth 'Mallikarjuna'. He was sent to the Gurukul at the age of five, and his Upanayanam was performed when he was eight. Even as a child, he mastered all temporal and spiritual studies. That was why the honorific prefix,

'Pandita', was added to his name by the people at large. Leaving for Kotipalli, he took the 'Vira Saiva' vow from the Guru, Visvaradhya.

Mallikarjuna was in the habit of praying to the Lord during all his waking hours, and in patronising and honouring the fellow Siva devotees. Some people who were jealous of his piety and fame, started scoffing at the devotees who were displaying the external marks of a Saivite like wearing the Linga-locket and smearing the body with the sacred ash. Then Mallikarjuna called an assembly of wise men, and convincingly explained the need for the external symbols and other practices of the Saivites. Consequently, many of the assembled men became his disciples.

Later Mallikarjuna started travelling over the regions surrounded by the rivers, Godavari, Krishna, Tungabhadra and Kaveri in order to propagate the ideals of Siva cult.

Once Mallikarjuna went to the forest to fetch the flowers and the fruits for the consecration to Lord Siva. As he was returning home, he ran across a Vira Saivite (extreme devotee of the Siva cult), named Mahadevayya. The latter, without noticing it, set his foot on a flower meant for Siva worship. Thereby he felt guilty of sacrilege and cut off his foot. Seeing his piteous state and admiring his extreme devotedness to Siva, Mallikarjuna, returning home, gathered a bit of oil from the lamp lighted in the presence of Lord Siva's image, and applied it to the leg of Mahadevayya. The leg was healed and the foot was set in its proper position. Mahadevayya bowed to Mallikarjuna's feet. The children of Mahadevayya also expressed their admiration to Mallikarjuna and became his ardent disciples.

When he finished his task of propagating the Saivite ideals travelling on foot, from place to place, he set them in the form of a book **SIVA TATTVA SARAMU** (The essence of the Siva entity). Although he heard with pleasure the reports about Basavesvara's

good work, he did not quite appreciate the latter's liberal views to the effect that all that matters is devotion but not the system of caste or the order of life (Varna-asrama-Dharma). Still, the two great devotees respected each other.

Once a Buddhist preacher, accompanied by a thousand followers, entered the Andhra country. In the village of Chandavolu he converted the potentate, Velanati Choda, to Buddhism. He also boasted that the Vedic faith was wrong and that he would defeat the Saivite tenets in a battle of wits. When the potentate informed the preacher about Mallikarjuna, the Buddhist requested the Choda to send for the Saivite leader, so as to enable him to defeat the latter in an argument.

When the debate was arranged, the Buddhist started it thus: "The Vedas have no proper or sacred authority. There is no Creator of the world. The creation comes, and ceases to be, of its own. There is neither rebirth, nor heaven and hell, nor vice and virtue. The only religion is Non-violence (Ahimsaa)."

Uttering a silent prayer to Siva and Parvati, Mallikarjuna retorted: "The Vedas are self-evolved, like the inhalation and exhalation of God. They are eternal. They are needed for the edification of the populace, who have to know what they should and should not do. Just as there is no effect without cause, there can be no creation without the Creator. Even an atheist cannot deny his own existence: God is the Existence behind all existence, because it is an axiom that out of pre-existing life comes life and that nothing comes out of nothing. They who deny the existence of God do so only out of ignorance. The product of Knowledge is the self identity with the Universal Self or the Eternal Source God. An ignorant, mortal being like man cannot by himself be the source of creation, any more than can the clay turn itself into a pot without the aid of the potter. The essence and existence of God can be demonstrated by any authority of the scripture or of logic; that is, direct perception or

indirect inference. As the Chandogya Upanishat puts it: “Sat eva, Saumya, idam agre aaseet” (Pure Existence, only was before this creation). The process of creation, preservation and destruction, followed by re-creation, is the function of an Essence which transcends the limited powers of the individual creature. That primordial essence and existence, which is God, is at the root of the powers of volition, action and knowledge which motivate and animate the human individual. If there were no rebirth or former birth, we cannot explain the differences in the children of the same parents or the ill-luck of virtuous people and the good luck of vicious people. So stop your atheism, accept the existence of all-pervasive, all-merciful God and save yourself before it is too late-- for you do not know when again you will get this human birth, in which alone is there the freedom to act knowingly, to pick and choose.”

As such wise words fell from the learned lips of Mallikarjuna, the Buddhist Guru found himself speechless. The judges awarded victory in the debate to Mallikarjuna.

The Buddhist Guru escaped. Going to the seashore, he made arrangements for the performance of voodoo rites (Abhichara Homa) to kill Mallikarjuna indirectly. Learning about this plot, the disciples of Mallikarjuna, Remaya and Rechaya, went to the Buddhist Teacher and cut off his head. On being queried about the justice of his disciples’ action, by the king, Mallikarjuna justified the murder. Upon which, the king said that it would be equally just on his part to kill Mallikarjuna. Then Mallikarjuna replied that he would kill himself before being killed by the king. So saying, he cut off his head, and yet the head would rejoin the trunk. Then he plucked out his two eyes; the eyes also went back to their original position, All those who saw that miraculous scene were astounded.

And yet the fire of the king’s anger was not quenched. He asked his men to pluck out the eyes of Mallikarjuna, and had

poisonous juice poured into the sockets. Then Mallikarjuna cursed the king that he and his clan would perish.

Later Mallikarjuna left for Amaravati pilgrim centre, where he recited the ‘Amaresa’ hymn extemporaneously. Lord Amaresa was pleased with his prayer and granted him his full eyesight.

All the people praised the devotional spirit of Mallikarjuna.

The Velanaati Choda king and his clan perished.

With the idea of meeting Basavesvara, Mallikarjuna left for Kalyanapura. On the way he stopped for a while in a village, named Irugudumula. Hearing about his arrival there, Basava sent him the sacred ash as a token of goodwill. By accepting that gift, Mallikarjuna was instantaneously able to learn the Kannada language. So he incorporated some hundreds of Kannada verses into his Telugu publication, **SIVATATTVASARAMU**. From Irugudumula, he reached the village of Panuganti, where there was a great Siva devotee, named Dhavalesu Namayya.

Some jealous people carried false tales about him to the ruler of that country. Without properly judging the truth or otherwise of the reports, the ruler ordered the killing of Namayya. Without waiting for the king’s men to carry out the execution, Namayya himself cut off his head. Immediately he was united with Lord Siva.

Learning about this incident, Mallikarjuna soon left that village and went to a village named Vanapuri, near Kalyanapura. There he learnt about how Basava himself joined the spirit of Lord Siva at Kappadi Sangamesvara pilgrim centre. Mallikarjuna lamented his inability to see the corporeal form of Basava.

Thereafter he reached Srisailam, walking from a nearby forest up to the steps of the sacred shrine there. As he saw the temple-tower, Srigriri, he found in it the symbol (Linga) of Lord Siva. Therefore he hesitated to step on the Srisailam hill with his feet.

Accordingly, he commissioned one of his disciples, Dosayya, to go and pray to Lord Mallikarjuna and goddess Bhramaramba on his behalf also.

Lord Mallikarjuna met Dosayya half-way, in the guise of an old hermit, and had shown him around the shrine including the image of the Lord at the top Sikharesvara; the idol of Lord Mallikarjuna; the Sakti symbol of Bhramaramba; the idols of Sakshi Ganapati, of Viresvara and His consort, of Hatakesa, and of Sarangesvara; the Yantra of NAMAHA SIVAYA; the Mallika Kundam; the Patala Ganga; the Linga Ghat; the Siddha cave; the Bilva and the other four gardens; the five Mathas; the miraculous trees, the shining creepers, the magic touchstone (sparsa-vedi) and other worth seeing sights. Dosayya felt that his existence was sanctified. He offered his prayers at the feet of Lord Mallikarjuna and took his leave of the old ascetic.

Returning to the presence of his Guru, Dosayya reported all that happened to him in and around the shrine. Mallikarjuna felt that his own life-purpose was served thereby, and addressed Lord Mallikarjuna to receive him into His Supreme Spirit. Accordingly, Lord Mallikarjuna and goddess Bhramaramba received the Mallikarjuna couple into their innate symbols - Linga and Sakti.

Dosayya informed the son of Pundit Mallikarjuna about the incidents at Srisailam. The son performed the last rites to his parents. He lived in the noble tradition of his noble father. Dosayya was advising him in every desirable manner.

POET MALHANA

In Aryavarta country, a wealthy Brahmin parents had a son late in life. He was named Malhana. Performing his Upanayanam when he was eight years old, the parents sent him to the Gurukul. He soon learnt all the sacred studies.

When Malhana was twelve years old both his parents died. Malhana later went to his maternal grandfather to learn Kanada's Vaiseshika system of philosophy, Panini's Grammar and the Alankara Sastras. He was now eighteen years old, handsome, strong and exuberantly young.

One day he, along with his friends, went to worship the Lord in the town's Siva shrine. After finishing the prayers, he was sitting in the Mandapa. At that time there arrived the sixteen-year-old daughter of the town's chief courtesan. She played the Mohana Raga on the Veena, and held the audience spellbound with her musical skill. As she was leaving the temple, she glanced sideways at Malhana, who, along with his mates, was one of the audience that was moved by her artistry. Their eyes met.

Returning home, Malhana was restless. He could not relish his food or sleep well. Her friends realised the state of his mind and were inwardly laughing at his absent-mindedness. When his grandparents wanted him to marry a girl of his own caste, he said that he was not yet prepared to get married. So the elders left the decision to himself.

One day a friend of his took Malhana to the home of the courtesan. The chief courtesan took them inside and asked them to be seated. Then she asked her daughter to come and bow to Malhana and his friend. Introducing her, the mother said: "Gentlemen, this is my daughter. She is named Pushpagandhi. She is well-versed in music and the arts. She is now of marriageable age. I am on the look out for a suitable husband."

Then Malhana's friend smilingly said: "My friend is a rich bachelor. He loves your daughter and will gladly make her mistress."

The old courtesan said: "Sir, many princes and merchants wanted to marry this daughter of mine, offering many rich gifts. But I refused them all. Now I see that my daughter is also pleased to meet this handsome friend of yours. So I am willing to offer her to

your friend.” So saying, she placed her daughter’s hand in Malhana’s. Malhana’s friend, feeling that his task was finished, quietly left the place. Malhana placed a bundle of golden coins in Pushpagandhi’s hands. She handed it to her mother.

Then the girl led him to the bedchamber, which was already furnished with the customary articles prepared for the nuptial night. The young couple spent the whole night in tender and ardent love-play. Early next morning Malhana unwillingly left Pushpagandhi and returned home.

Thus several days passed by, with Malhana spending the nights in Pushpagandhi’s company. The wise words of his grandparents could not convince him of his folly. He squandered all his property on pleasing Pushpagandhi.

One day when Malhana, now poor, visited the bawdyhouse, with bare hands, the old courtesan asked him what sort of a gift he had brought to her daughter. When he protested that he already gave his all to her daughter, she said: “Which girl will enjoy the company of a poor man? If you do not get out of this house right now, I will ask my servants to kick you out. Go!” Pushpagandhi, still in love with Malhana, wanted to stop her mother’s threats. But the old woman asked her to go inside and stop talking nonsense. As Malhana was shamefacedly returning home, Pushpagandhi met him through the backdoor and asked him to meet her at the Siva shrine at a certain hour in the evening.

When they met at the temple she explained her position regretfully, adding that the world would not appreciate his marriage to a courtesan. So she said she would render any help she asked of her, before they part from each other.

Malhana said he could not think of anything

Then Pushpagandhi said: “Friend, you enjoyed my company for twelve years. There is no contentment in the enjoying of the

sensual pleasures. Desire increases with its enjoyment, like the fire into which the clarified butter or any other oily oblation is poured. So now bid farewell to the physical joys and find your unending bliss in the service and worship of God.”

The wise counsel of Pushpagandhi opened the eyes of Malhana, who readily uttered this prayer:

Kaantaa-kacha-prachaya-pushpa-sugandhi-gandha
lubdha-bhramat-bhramara karbura kandharaaya,
Gandharva-Yaksha-Sura-Siddha kirita-koti
sanghatta ghrishta charanaaya NAMAHA SIVAAYA.

(I bow to Lord Siva whose neck is of the rich hue of the bee which, excited by their perfume, flocks on the flowers that adorn the braids of lovely women, and whose feet are pressed by the crowns of the saluting devotees like Gandharvas, Yakshas, Suras and Siddhas.)

Pushpagandhi was glad that her advice found ready response. Malhana was extemporaneously composing the devotional hymns, as Pushpagandhi was putting them on paper. Thus he recited thirty-six verses. His devotional spirit now became firm. Thankfully escorting Pushpagandhi to her home, Malhana thereafter lived in the ways of God, and finally became one with Lord Siva.

When Pushpagandhi returned home, her mother introduced her to two rich lovers, of whom she was free to choose the one she liked better. Pushpagandhi said: “Mother, I have no more use for money. I have deserted all the cravings of the flesh. My mind is now dedicated to Lord Siva. I am going to be a nun in the service of God. If you force me into the old evil ways, I will certainly hang myself before dawn.”

The mother could not come in the way of her beloved daughter.

Eventually Pushpagandhi was also united with Lord Siva in spirit.

The reading or hearing of the sacred story of Malhana and Pushpagandhi is conducive to self-realisation, besides being a worthy illustration of devotion to Lord Siva.

UDBHATARADHYA GURU

On the lovely Silver Mountain, Kailaasa, Siva and Parvati were strolling in the pleasure garden. Picking the beautiful flowers, Siva was decorating the tresses of Parvati with them. At that juncture a group of Gandharva men and women, from Alakapura, landed there and were making much noise. Nandi, the constant companion of Siva, warned them to go elsewhere, because the divine couple were enjoying together the beauty of nature in its quiet splendour. The Gandharva women neglected the divine Bull's warning, and continued to go towards the bush where Siva and Parvati were sporting. Thereupon Siva cursed them to be born as sprites. As the women were transforming into witches, the Gandharva king, Chitraratha, fell at the feet of Lord Siva and begged, on behalf of the Gandharva women, to forgive them.

Lord Siva said: "Sir, the effects of predestination must be experienced. Anyway, there is a place called Sallaki; let these sprites go and occupy a banyan tree there and from there cause affliction to the good people of that place. Keep eating the meat of animals. My 'mental child', Udbhata, who will be the Guru of the king of Sallaki, will come there. By feeling the smoke of his body's heat you and your women will be freed from my imprecation."

Chitraratha and his retinue, accordingly went to Sallaki, and remaining under the shadows of the Banyan tree were awaiting the arrival of Udbhata.

One day while Lord Siva was meditating on how to release the Gandharvas from His curse, a part of his energy took the shape of a boy who was His exact image. The boy bowed to the Lord's feet and asked for His orders. Siva said: "Go to the town of Sallaki;

give this Siva Linga to Munja Bhoja, the local ruler. Propagate the Vedic religion and release the Gandharvas from My imprecation. You must leave this godly form of yours and go in human shape to Varanasi, and appear there as one born supernaturally (outside of the mother's womb) in the presence of Lord Visvesvara, My direct image there. You will then assume the 'Gotra' of Bharadvaja and marry a chaste daughter of Brahma. You will be blessed with worthy sons who will be the rulers of Mudigonda principality, as well as the 'world-teachers' who will ever strive for the propagation of the Siva cult."

When the boy went to Varanasi, Lord Visvesvara spoke from His image to the priests and the assembled devotees: "Gentlemen, this boy is Udbhata who is born to propagate the religion of the Upanishads and to save the sinners. Please arrange his wedding to some deserving girl and accept him as your Guru so that you and your posterity will ever be blessed."

Miraculously the boy appeared there and then as a six-year-old. A good Brahmin took the boy to his home and got him well educated. When Udbhata came of age he was married to the daughter of another good Brahmin, Subuddhi.

Learning about the arrival and progress of Udbhata, the King of that holy city paid the noble youth his respects and offered him rich gifts.

Udbhata started lecturing daily, in the temple of Lord Visvesvara, about the exclusive worth and importance of the Saivite religion. By virtue of his great teachings, many worthy devotees were converted to the Siva cult and saved themselves from eternal damnation thereby.

Once Udbhata, accompanied by his disciples, went to Kashmir, where at the court of King Jayapida he taught the essence of the Upanishads to the assembled men and women. Receiving many

gifts from the king, he visited several other principalities on his way back home, performing the same function of the teacher of the Upanishadic wisdom to the masses of willing listeners.

Udbhata's wife eventually gave birth to a son, who was named Mallikarjuna Guru. Mallikarjuna, who proved himself, to be a worthy son of a worthy father, authored a scholarly Sanskrit work, called 'Kaavya Alankaara Sangraha'.

Meanwhile, the ruler of Sallaki, Pramatheswara, visited Varanasi and worshipped Visvesvara, along with his wife. The Lord appeared before the royal couple and assured them that if the queen, Prabhaavati, ate the fruit. He was giving them she would soon be with child.

In due course Prabhaavati became pregnant and was delivered of a son, who was christened. 'Bhoja'.

Bhoja followed in the footsteps of his father. He married two worthy girls, Matta and Kasini. He spread his kingdom far and wide, by virtue of his valour. When his father grew old and left Varanasi along his mother, Bhoja succeeded to the throne. Then he kept waiting for a good teacher who would initiate him in the Siva cult.

One early morning, Lord Siva appeared before him and said: "O king, thirty days from now my 'mental child', Udbhataaraadhya will arrive in your court and instruct you the method of wearing the Siva Linga."

Bhoja was waiting for Udbhata's arrival. When Udbhata came on the thirtieth day after the Lord appeared before Bhoja, the king saluted him in traditional reverence. The scholar adorned the ruler with the sacred ash, uttering the words, "Siva Raksha" (may Lord Siva protect you!).

Bhoja then gladly acknowledged his long-felt need for the wearing of the Siva Linga, which alone would drive away man's

innate ignorance, and thanked Udbhata for his gracious initiation. Udbhata said: "It is due to the good works done in your former births that you have cultivated greater love for Lord Siva than for all your kingly and familiar possessions. The best period to be initiated into the coterie of Siva worship and to wear the 'Linga' are the four lunar months of Asvayuja, Kartika, Margasirsha, Phalguna, Vaisakha and Jyeshtha. The month of Magha is only of middle merit for that purpose; the other five months have only a lowly merit. The period of the eclipse, both of the sun and of the moon, is beneficial. Equally auspicious are; bright fortnight; the fifth day of the dark fortnight; the time when the stars, Rohini, Mrigasirsha, Pushyami, Punarvasu, Hasta, Anuraadha, Uttara-phalguna, Uttara-aashaadha, Mula and Revati are in the ascendant; and the 'fixed' constellations. Proscribed are the periods when the constellations are 'on the move' and when it is the fourth or the sixth or the eighth or the ninth or the fourteenth or the fifteenth day of either fortnight."

Munja Bhoja, along with his wives, chose an auspicious period to receive the 'Linga' from Udbhata. At the king's request, Udbhata and his family shifted to Sallaki. Both the scholar and the ruler did their best for the propagation of the Siva cult.

As the number of the Saivites was steadily growing, Udbhata now applied himself to the release of the Gandharvas from Siva's imprecation. Accordingly, he took his sacred dip in the river, wore all the external symbols of Shaivism, and sitting in the highest transcendent Yogic posture, let his mundane life flow out from him through his head into the Infinite.

Udbhata's family and King Bhoja for a while grieved over his end, and later cremated him according to his last wish. As soon as the smoke from the funeral pyre touched them, the sprites in the banyan tree were released from their curse, and, regaining their Gandharva form, returned to Alakapura.

Udbhata's son, Mallikarjuna, after performing his father's funeral rites duly, and firmly establishing over some years the kingdom of Siva in Sallaki, returned to his native Mudigonda.

In due course Mallikarjuna wife gave birth to a worthy son, who was christened Polana. Since then, the lineage of Polana came to be known with the surname 'Mudigonda', and his descendants were scattered over the neighbouring villages of Madala, Rentapalla Medipalem, Dhavalapuri and other places.

Munja Bhoja ruled his people with dedication and finally was united with Lord Siva in spirit.

BHAKTA KINNERA BRAHMAYYA

Once upon a time there lived in the village of Poduru a great devotee named Brahmayya. He was dedicated to Linga worship and his uncompromising devotion was to Lord Siva and Vira Saiva religion. He loved all humanity. He was well-versed in music, and played the Vina exceedingly well. He was in the habit of inviting musicians, hear them sing or play. And he would gift them large property. Since he used to play the instrument 'Kinnera' along with the invited musicians, he was popularly known as 'Kinnera Brahmayya'. His singing, as well as the playing of the instrument, was to the tune of the hymns dedicated to Lord Siva.

To pay his respects to Basavesvara, Brahmayya journeyed to Kalyanapura. Brahmayya was received in traditional style by Basavesvara; at the latter's request Brahmayya stayed on there as his guest.

One day Brahmayya went to the temple of Tripurantaka, and after finishing his prayers, rested in the main hall of meditation. A sheep, which was being taken to the home of a courtesan by her lover, broke loose and was taking shelter in the temple. The lover searched the temple, found the animal and was trying to take it away. Brahmayya told the lover that he would buy the animal and

requested him to release it. The sheep was in the meantime approaching Brahmayya and resting at his feet. The lover said that he would sell the animal for a thousand gold pieces. Brahmayya readily paid the amount. Leaving the animal behind, the lover went to meet his mistress.

On being asked about his promise of offering her a sheep, the lover told her all that happened. As he was trying to pacify her by paying her the gold pieces, she threw them in his face and asked him to get out of her house, because he was a coward who could not keep his promise of offering her the sheep.

Still determined to make good his promise, the lover went back to the temple and wanted to take back the sheep. When Brahmayya protested that the animal was Siva's property, the lover threateningly showed to him a sharp instrument (alugu). Angered, Brahmayya, snatched the 'alugu' from the lover and cut off his head, which flew out of the temple. Since the trunk of a man who set a naught the command of devotee of Siva, it was ordered to be thrown out of the temple immediately.

The relatives of the lover reported the matter to Basavesvara, who then demanded an explanation from Brahmayya for his ghastly deed and asked him to prove the truth of his statement that the lover was a 'Siva-apostate'. Brahmayya appealed to Lord Tripurantakesvara to bear him witness. Instantaneously, the noble sound of 'AUM' was heard all over the shrine. When Brahmayya repeated his request for greater clarification of the Lord's agreement with his deed, the incarnation of Siva thrice spoke out 'yes'.

Basavesvara and other devotees were astonished at the efficacy of Brahmayya's faith in Lord Siva. They also begged him to bring the lover back to life. Brahmayya gladly acceded to their request and brought together the head and the trunk of the lover. Sprinkling the sacred water mixed with the holy ash over the lover, he said: "Get up!"

The revived lover bowed to the feet of Brahmayya and sought his forgiveness.

Brahmayya stayed for a few more days as Basavesvara's guest, taught about the glory of Lord Siva to the devotees, and eventually returned home, where he continued his good deeds dear to Siva, and beneficial to humanity at large.

HEMA REDDI MALLAMMA

In a village near the Srisailam pilgrim centre was living a wealthy householder, named Somi Reddi. He and his wife were gifted by God with a daughter, in their late life. She was christened, Mallamma, because she was the gift of Lord Mallikarjuna.

Mallamma was entirely devoted to the worship of Lord Mallesvara (Mallikarjuna).

When Mallamma came of age she was married to Bhamara Reddi, the son of a rich respectable citizen, Hema Reddi. Although Bhamara Reddi was uneducated and unwise, Somi Reddi, assured of the wealth of the family, gave his daughter's hand in marriage to him.

At the time of sending Mallamma to her new home, Somi Reddi told Hema Reddi: "Mallamma lost her mother in childhood. I have been a father as well as a mother to her since then. Now I am placing her in the hands of your son. You for your part must take my place to her."

Hema Reddi assured Somi Reddi that Mallamma would be well taken care of in her new home and that her father was free to visit her whenever he wanted.

Mallamma, seeing her grieving parent, assured him that she would live up to the ideals handed down by tradition and that he should not be sad to see her go away from her old home, because a woman's place is always by her husband.

After a tearful farewell from the people near and dear to her, Mallamma reached her father-in-law's home in Siddhapuram safely.

Hema Reddi is a perfect gentleman, but his wife, Peddamma is a vixen, in whose hands is the management of the household. Besides, the sister-in-law (wife of the elder brother of Mallamma's husband) of Mallamma, named Nagamma, was jealous of the new bride's good looks and accomplishments. While pressing the feet of her mother-in-law, Nagamma spoke thus: "What kind of a girl is this new daughter-in-law of yours? What for does she put on that ash and wear that rosary? This girl's mother died, and she was brought up by her father. How can such a woman know the ways of a good housewife?"

Later Hema Reddi told his wife that the arrival of the new bride in the home brought them great good fortune, because that year the harvest yielded ten times more than the crop of the previous ten years. Peddamma flared up: "Don't be hasty in your judgment. One swallow does not make a summer. Seeing her queer dress and habits, it would appear that she is not used to household duties. We must teach her how to be a good housewife."

Nagamma heard Peddamma's words with glee, but Hema Reddi was uneasy in mind. However, he is hen-pecked and could not chide wife.

Once when Mallamma finished her prayers and offered the sacramental food and water to her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law ("co-daughter-in-law", in Indian English), they refused the holy offerings and even made fun of her. Mallamma kept quiet, wondering what sort of predestination was it of theirs they refused the offerings of God.

Meanwhile Lord Mallikarjuna presented himself in the form of a Jangama mendicant before the home of Hema Reddi, begging with the words: "Bhavati, bhiksham dehi" (lady, give me alms).

Nagamma scolded the mendicant, saying, “Can’t you work for your living? To patronise a strong sturdy fellow like you is a crime.” Mallamma intervened: “Sister, this Jangama is an incarnation of Lord Siva. Let us give him a bit of our food, for it is wrong to deny the needy when we have the means to help them.” Turning to the Jangama, Mallamma requested him not to take umbrage at the words of her sister-in-law, and added that she would go in and fetch him some food. Jangama thanked Mallamma and blessed her with kind words, which struck Naagamma like arrows. She thought she was slighted by Mallamma and reported the matter to their mother-in-law. Peddamma then came on the scene and told Mallamma, “Who do you think you are? Who gave you the right to patronise beggars? Have you brought any treasure from your father’s home that you think you can do whatever you like with our possessions? Now, listen, you have got some chores to attend to. Fetch water from the lake. Clean the backyard. Grind the corn. Take breakfast to the wage-labourers in the fields.”

Although she was sorry for the folly of her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law, Mallamma gladly accepted the command of her mother-in-law, placing her faith in Lord Mallesvara.

Besides performing these heavy duties, Mallamma would daily serve her innocuous husband in traditional style. If ever her husband praises her to mother-in-law the old woman would send away her son, unwilling to hear such nice words.

The husband of Nagamma, the eldest son of Hema Reddi, is a profligate. He would spend all his time with his mistress and does not care for his wife at all. He contracted several debts and is about to pledge his portion of the house to raise more money. Naagamma could not help obey him.

As the two elder women were not allowing Mallamma to eat her food properly, she was running down physically. Her fingers

began hurting, because of the manual labour. She then lamented: “Lord Mallesvara, I am unable to complete the grinding of this large quantity of corn, because my fingers have already developed blisters. Kindly come to my rescue.” As she fell in a swoon, the Lord ground the whole grain in a trice. Mallamma could visualise the presence of the Lord and begged Him to stop grinding, for she did not like the idea of seeing his fingers hurt in the process. When she opened her eyes, she saw the whole corn ground into flour. She realised it was the work of God and paid Him her grateful thanks mentally.

Next day also the Jangama came to Hema Reddi’s home for alms. Mallamma was getting ready to give him a little corn flour. But the Jangama requested her to give him a full meal. She replied that she was not free to go to the kitchen to fetch him a full meal. The Jangama protested that he being all alone and unlearned in the art of cooking, he had no way of making a cake of the flour. Mallamma had no choice but to apologise to him for her helplessness. The Jangama told her that her troubles would soon be over. The flour disappeared, along with the Jangama.

Nagamma now had a chance of accusing Mallamma with apt evidence that the latter gave away thirty measures of corn to the Jangama. When scolded by her mother-in-law, Mallamma protested that she did not know how the whole flour vanished. But the mother-in-law was not convinced, and asked Mallamma to go to the jungle and look after the cattle. She was just allowed a little gruel by way of nourishment, when she said she was weak with hunger. She was given two old sarees and further ordered by the mother-in-law to stay on in the forest, because she did not deserve to stay in the home. Then her husband came there and asked his mother to allow his wife to stay with them. Peddamma chided him that he was under the spell of his wily wife. After some more pleading from the man and some chiding from the old woman, Mallamma was at last forced to go to the forest. Mallamma bowed to the feet of her husband

before leaving for the forest. She had the mortification of hearing her mother-in-law say that her husband would be found another wife; moreover, she was not even provided with footwear for the journey.

As she was proceeding towards the forest, a monk, Chidananda Yogi, who was building a hermitage near Srisailam happened to see her. He pitied her. She said that she was merely being tested by God. The monk escorted her to Aalamanda. Near that place is a tribal hamlet. There lived the 'Chenchu' (tribal) couple, Naganna and Ambamma. One day the husband told his wife that, thanks to his hunting, with a prayer to Lord Mallesvara, he could easily kill a lion.

Ambamma asked him not to speak too much but get a fit gift for goddess Bhramaramba and Lord Mallesvara whose special festival was being celebrated the following day. Naganna assured her that goddess Bhramaramba, belonging as she does to their own tribe, would certainly come to their aid in seeking the victuals. When asked to accompany him to the forest to see his hunting prowess, Ambamma said that she had to keep Mallamma company, who was attending on the cattle.

In the cattle-shed Mallamma was praying to the image of Lord Siva with Bilva leaves. By then the servant who brought her the gruel went away. Again Lord Mallesvara came to ask alms of Mallamma, in the guise of a Jangama. Mallamma recognised the Lord in him, but said that all that she could offer him was a little gruel. Seeing her plaintive complexion, the Lord took pity on her.

He asked her why she was staying all alone in the jungle. She related her whole sad story since birth till that moment. The 'Jangama' then said: "Don't worry, child. Your favourite deity is all-merciful. On the nearby hill is his temple. Go and fetch the sacred waters from the adjacent 'Patala Ganga' and anoint the idols of

Mallesvara and Bhramaramba with them. Thereby your hard luck will be gone."

As the Jangama said that he would gladly drink the gruel, Mallamma poured it into his joined palms. He said that his hunger was gone and that the gruel, on account of her touch, tasted like nectar. She thanked him ecstatically. But she was not yet satisfied. She begged Lord Mallesvara to grant her the bliss of seeing his real figure with her eyes, and threatened that, if he would not agree to do so, she would break her head against his idol and die.

Then Lord Mallesvara appeared before her in his true form and said: "Dear devotee, I am touched by your sincere resolve. You have really brought renown to the families of both your parents and in-laws. Now seek whatever boon you want from me."

Mallamma said: "Lord, all that I want is the ability to see you. My sole wish is to serve you and your consort. Anyway, please always protect my in-laws, my husband and my other relatives."

The Lord said: "So be it. I shall receive your alms always in the form of a Jangama."

When once Lord Mallesvara went to the home of Hema Reddi, as a Jangama, Nagamma and Peddamma, in place of alms, gave him a severe thrashing with a big stick. They even told Mallamma's husband, that his wife was having illicit relations with the mendicant in the jungle, Bharama Reddi was actually given a sickle by his mother, who asked him to keep the family prestige alive by cutting off the head of his 'unfaithful' wife.

Bharama Reddi went to the jungle, and, standing behind a tree, overheard the conversation between his wife and the Jangama. As he realised that his wife was a true devotee of Lord Mallesvara and that the 'Jangama' was none other than that very Lord, his sickle turned into a golden piece. He fell at the feet of his wife and begged her to see that he could have the 'Darshan' of Lord Mallesvara. At

Mallamma's earnest behest, the Lord appeared before the couple, and promised them that they would eventually be united with Him in spirit.

Bharama Reddi then took his wife to Siddhapuram. As usual, Nagamma and Peddamma scolded them both. The mother-in-law hit Mallamma with a shoe and asked her not to enter the house. Mallamma did not retort in any manner. She returned to the jungle, with the name of Lord Mallesvara on her lips. As her husband tried to follow her, he was stopped by his mother.

Meanwhile, news reached them that two of their bulls died. Also their haystacks were burnt. Their debts grew immensely. There was no stock of grain in the home. The crops were pest-ridden. Hema Reddi was extremely worried. He asked Bharama Reddi to bring the golden ornaments in the home. But when the young man opened the iron safe, no jewellery was to be found in it. Peddamma and Nagamma began crying, saying that their jewels were stolen by thieves. When Hema Reddi learnt the news, his heart was broken.

But who can change the nature of those two women? All that Hema Reddi could say was that he would go and fetch Mallamma home from the jungle.

At the time Hema Reddi reached her residence, Mallamma was awaiting the arrival of the Jangama. When she saw her father-in-law she greeted him with reverence and inquired about the state of his health and his farming. Hema Reddi told her about all that happened to his finances.

Mallamma was grieved to learn the bad news, but she had no complaints against the two women who were instrumental in banishing her. She merely said that because of the exile she could devote her entire time to the devotion of Lord Mallesvara and to the service of the sacred cows. Then she asked her father-in-law to get in, pray to the image of Siva and touch the dung of the holy

cows. As he did so, the dung turned into gold. Hema Reddi thanked Mallamma for saving the family from penury. She said that she was only an instrument in the hands of Lord Mallesvara, whose grace was responsible for the miracle. She suggested that he spends the gold on paying the debts and on farming. The balance, she added, could be expended on the renovation of the dilapidated temple of Lord Mallesvara.

Mallamma's advice was accepted by Hema Reddi. He invited her back to their home. Mallamma said that her duty by the Lord was her prime consideration. When she wanted the Lord to give His 'Darshan' to her father-in-law, He replied that the mind of Hema Reddi was not yet fully purified for such a boon, but He promised, once the remainder of the wealth he received was spent on restoring His temple, He would gladly appear before him.

When she conveyed the promise of the Lord to her father-in-law he was gratified, and for his part promised to spend the money he could spare on the temple-renovation,

In the meantime were heard cries, "Mallamma, save us Nagamma and Peddamma fell prostrate at the feet of Mallamma and begged her to release them from their misfortune. Mallamma requested them not to bow to her, for she was younger than they. She actually thanked them, because by her exile she was blessed with the Darshan of Lord Mallesvara. At that point, Bharama Reddi came there and scolded his mother and his sister-in-law. Mallamma told her husband that it was not right on his part to insult his mother or his sister-in-law, who was the equal of his mother. Although they all requested her to return home, she said that her place was still in the jungle, in the presence of Lord Mallesvara.

After a while, there arrived the poet Ranganaatha, who became blind by praising Vishnu and insulting Siva. When he sought the pardon of Mallesvara, the Lord granted him sight only in one eye; for the restoration of sight to the other eye, he was asked by the

Lord to seek the help of Mallamma. By making him drink the water consecrated to the Lord, she could make his other eye also normal.

When the restoration of the temple was completed, Mallamma accepted the invitation of her in-laws to return to Srisailam.

Mallamma and her husband took a dip in the 'Patala Ganga' and presided over the anointing function after the completion of the renovation of the temple.

After the function, the Lord told Mallamma: "Stay on for a little while in this place, and spread the message of Lord Siva and the glory of the Srisailam pilgrim centre on all sides. You are indeed the incarnation of the bountiful goddess Annapurna. By associating with you, your husband will gain everlasting reputation as a great devotee of mine."

Later Mallamma worshipped goddess Bhramaramba and received the blessings of that incarnation of cosmic Energy.

When the consecration was completed duly, she distributed the food to the multitudes. Every one praised Mallamma for her piety, virtue, nobility and generosity.

BHAKTA SIDDHA RAMA GOPAALA

In the western part of India, there is a village named Sonnalaapur, in which lived a shepherd, Muddayya. He was great devotee of Siva. His wife was Subhangi. By the grace of Lord Siva, they had a son, whom they christened, 'Siddha Rama Gopala.'

When he was eight years old, Gopala began his traditional duties of tending the sheep.

Once he happened to see a large group of Jangama mendicants proceeding to Srisailam. He was curious to learn where they were going to. On enquiry, one of the devotees told Gopala that their destination was the great resort of Lord Mallesvara, Srisailam. When

pressed with further queries from the boy, the devotee described to him the shape of the Lord's image as well as His constant companionship with goddess Parvati (as earlier narrated in this book).

Gopala's curiosity then changed into the actual wish to see Lord Mallesvara. When he requested the pilgrims to take him along with them, they tried to dissuade him by saying that such a boy as he could not walk all that long distance. But Gopala said that he could walk any distance, and further added that he was prepared to leave his home and parents to get a glimpse of the Lord. The devotee who answered his questions was now in a quandary, for nobody who wants to see Srisailam should be denied that opportunity; on the other hand, should not take the boy along with them without informing his parents. Unable to make up his mind, the Jangama devotee began to proceed on his way. The boy kept following him. Then the Jangama, Mahesvara, felt that there was no point in trying to stop the boy. Along the way, he took care of the boy's needs like a fond parent. At last all the pilgrims reached Srisailam, the night before the great festival of Maha Siva Ratri. The Jangama led the boy to the idol of Lord Mallikarjuna (Mallesvara) the next morning, and asked him to fall prostrate at the Lord's feet in self-surrendering devotion.

Looking at the idol, Gopala turned to the Jangama and said: "Sir, do you think that I am a fool? How can this stone image be Lord Mallikarjuna (Siva)? Why don't I see all those appurtenances of the Lord which you graphically described to me? Where is His consort, Parvati? Where is the river Ganga in his hair?"

Then the Jangama replied: "Dear boy, I merely described to you the living form of Lord Siva. When he has no attributes he appears in the 'Linga' (the symbol of God's omnipresence). You cannot see the real Siva with the eyes of the body but you can see him with your eyes of knowledge. So set aside your doubts and pray to this great image."

But Gopala paid no heed to the Jangama's advice. He declared he would not return home till he saw the real form of Lord Siva. Convinced that it was difficult to persuade the boy, the Jangama went his way.

Gopala was worried, now that the Jangama left him. He wondered who would attend to his physical needs of food and raiment. Then he began to wail: "O Lord Mallikarjuna, I am helpless in this big jungle. The Jangama who led me here has disappeared. Take pity on me, a wretched boy who left his home and parents in the hope of seeing you. If do not show mercy towards me, who else can save me?"

Taking pity on the boy, Mallesvara appeared in the form of a devotee-visitor ("Maahesvara") and promised to render him any help he needed.

Gopala told him all about himself and his earnest wish to see Lord Siva in person. The stranger said: "The description of Lord Siva made by the Jangama is right. Come with me. I will show you Lord Mallikarjuna who answers to that description."

The stranger led the boy to the image of Lord Mallikarjuna. Gopala complained that the stranger was merely showing the same old idol, which was earlier shown him by the Jangama. Impressed by the boy's sincere determination, the stranger said: "Close your eyes for a while. When you open your eyes you will be also to see the Mallikarjuna you want to see."

So saying the stranger disappeared. When Gopala opened his eyes he saw Lord Mallikarjuna along with His consort, Bhramaramba.

Gopala cried in ecstasy: "Lord, where hast Thou hidden Thyself all along? I thank Thee with all my heart and mind and soul for giving me the supreme delight of seeing Thee with my own eyes.

If the stranger had not brought me here, I would have been lost forever."

When Gopala looked behind to see the stranger, there was no sign of him. Then Lord Mallikarjuna took the boy into his arms, placed him on His lap and said: "I appreciate your purposeful devotion. I am that stranger. I am now going to transform your humble garb into golden armour. I am presenting you with miraculous sandals and the magic touchstone. You may now seek any boon you want from me." Gopala asked the Lord to go to his native village along with His consort, so that the natives could pray to Him daily. The Lord said: "I and my spouse will gladly come there. But remember, you alone can see us in our real form. The others can see only our idols."

Immensely pleased, Gopala then prayed to the Lord:
 Kaarunyaamrita-varshinam ghana-vipat-greeshma-
 cchidaa-karmatham
 Vidyaa sasya-phala-udayaaya sumanah samsevyam
 icchaa-kritim,
 Nrityat bhakti-mayooram adri-nilayam chanchat jataa-
 mandalam
 Sambho vaanchhati Nila-kantha-dhara! sadaa Tvaam
 me manah chaatakah.

(O Lord Siva, always the Chaataka bird of my mind seeks Thee, who art the showerer of the nectar of grace, the determined destroyer of the heat of the deepest distress, the fertiliser of the farm of education, the quintessence of the all-yielding bounty ever worshipped by scholars, the possessor of the devotion displayed by the dancing devotee-peacocks, the dweller on the Silver Mountain and the bearer of the shining hair.)

After gracefully listening to Gopala's prayer, the divine couple disappeared. The boy formally offered his prayers to Ganapati and

the Virabhadra couple, before putting on his magic slippers which took him to his wished-for destination of his hometown in a trice. As his parents embraced him welcomingly, there was heard the sound of anklets.

That sound, according to the reports brought by the villagers to Gopaala, denoted the appearance of a huge Siva shrine on the outskirts of the village, complete with the images of Lord Siva and goddess Parvati, and the formation of a sacred lake before that temple.

Enraptured, Gopala ran up to the temple, followed by his relatives and the other natives.

Siddha Rama Gopala found his wishes fulfilled. The divine couple appeared to him personally. The others of the whole village gathered there, sang and danced of the newly self-installed idols of Mallikharjuna and Bhramaramba. The temple-bells were ringing solemnly.

Gopala took a dip in the sacred lake, anointed idols with the holy waters, and worshipped them with full mind and consecration. All those who saw the consecration by the installation of the idols, felt that their lives were wholly sanctified.

As long as he lived in his mortal coil, Siddha Rama Gopala fulfilled all his duties by Lord Siva devotees, firmly establishing the glorious on earth. All those who saw and heard him were inspired by the spirit of Siva.

Thereby was perpetuated the worship the Lord Siva.

OM TAT SAT

