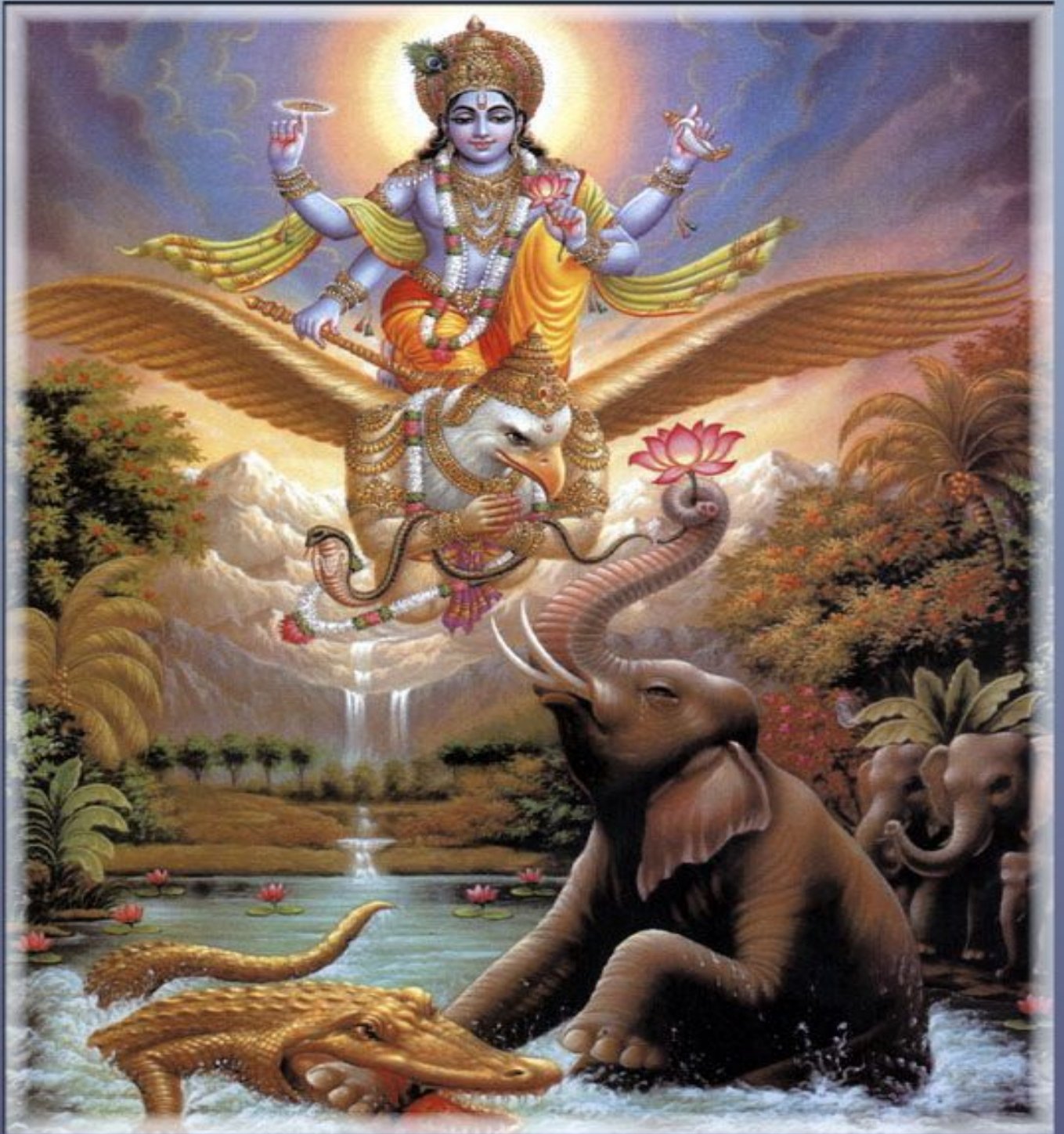


# Srimad Bhagavata



By S.S. Cohen

# SRIMAD BHAGAVATA CONDENSED

S. S. COHEN

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Sri Ramanasramam takes great pleasure in publishing this fourth edition of the *Srimad Bhagavata* (condensed) by Sri S. S. Cohen. The first edition was published by the Chinmaya Mission in 1965, after which the author gave over the copyright to Sri Ramanasramam.

S. S. Cohen's keen intellect and insight, spiritually honed by his long association with Bhagavan Ramana, never fails to sift out the unadulterated essence, the uniquely practical and inspirational. All his writings are a testament to this exceptional quality, which is particularly evident in this present volume, the *Srimad Bhagavata*.

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## PREFACE

What distinguishes the *Bhagavata Purana* from the other monumental works which claim to be the workmanship of Vyasadeva or Badarayana, and gives it the supreme sanctity it possesses in the eyes of the pious Hindus, is not only its exhaustive account of the life of the Lord's fullest manifestation on earth as Sri Krishna *Avatara*, but His fullest teaching to His beloved disciple Uddhava on the eve of His withdrawal from the world. This sometimes goes by the name of *Uddhava Gita*. This teaching, notwithstanding what the historians say of its age and authorship, is regarded by many as a development and an elucidation of the instructions He had given to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra and form the celebrated *Bhagavad Gita*.

The latter is purported to have been propounded in the midst of a great human crisis, which threatened to engulf millions of warriors who were fighting for a righteous cause. It was given to nip in the bud the despondency which was growing in the hearts of its foremost leaders. In contrast, *Uddhava Gita* is the direct, untrammelled, uninhibited teaching of a Master to His disciple, who had no other aim in life but to attain union with Him, and, as such, it is of the greatest practical value to those who seek to reach the same height, the State of the Lord Himself, which is the Supreme Enlightenment or Liberation. *Srimad Bhagavata* is, in effect, planned to resolve all the spiritual doubts of the ardent, self-dedicated seekers of all ages. They are represented here by a great, pious king — Parikshit — who is sitting on his deathbed praying for light from the assembled sages, so to face calmly and with a purified, illumined mind the last solemn moments of his life. What is more, it creates in the seeker the fervent devotion, which can impel him to make the strenuous efforts which are needed for the fruition and consummation of his spiritual yearnings.

The difference in the teachings of these two masterpieces does not actually exist save in the characters of the persons to whom they were respectively addressed, the circumstances in which they were delivered, and the developments of their themes. Great seers, ancient and modern, did not fail to recognise and extol the superiority of the *Bhagavata* in this last respect, namely, in its lucid expositions reiterated again and again. This is elucidated in a variety of forms, in different contexts, and from every possible angle of vision, with or without illustrative anecdotes, by a number

of sages —Sukadeva, the Divine Rishabha, his nine ascetic sons, Lord Kapila, the celestial Narada and many others — and, above all, by the Supreme Teacher, Sri Krishna Himself, so that no room is left for misinterpretations or partisan interpretations, as is the case with the pithy, distilled expositions of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The *Bhagavata Mahatmya (Padma Purana)* says that Brahma, having weighed all the Scriptures against the *Bhagavata*, found the latter to outweigh them all, “because it is the embodiment of the Lord in this Kali age,” that is, it stands for Him in His physical absence. When the four Kumaras told Narada that *Bhakti*, *Vairagya*, and *Jnana* (devotion, dispassion and knowledge respectively), the three *padas* (feet) on which the highest *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) stands, spontaneously rises in him who daily recites it, and Narada inquired as to the reasons why these do not result from the recitation of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, they gave the pregnant answer that so long as the essence is not separated from the mass of the substance, as the butter is extracted from every particle of the milk, no benefit can be derived from it. This essence — the spiritual butter — is the *Bhagavata*, which has been churned out of the ocean of the *Veda* milk for the benefit of those “who are pure in heart, free from malice and envy, and are keen to hear it”. (p. 2).

The reader will have no need to go very far in search of the message of the *Bhagavata*: it is given to him at its very commencement in a clear, ringing note, which is echoed again and again in the text to the very end.

“The highest good,” it says, “consists in the attainment by the soul of its true, ultimate object, which is the realisation of God, the absolute Reality, through complete surrender and selfless devotion.... There can be no doubt that the object in being in a human body is not the gratification of the senses, nor the attainment of heaven through religious worship and pious acts, but the investigation into the ultimate Truth which goes by various names; *Brahman*, *Paramatman*, *Bhagavan*, etc., Who is one and indivisible admitting no duality or distinctions whatever. Rishis have realised this Truth as their very Self, as seated in their very hearts through study, devotion, and constant recital of this sacred *Bhagavata*.” (p. 3).

This puts in a nutshell the whole theme of the *Bhagavata* — the essential purpose of the human life, the meaning of the absolute Reality, and the way of attaining it. It practically tells us that God is our very Self

and that He can be realised through inquiry or knowledge (*Jnana*) generated by intense devotion (*Bhakti*) and detachment (*Vairagya*) — the three *padas* mentioned above. There can be no rest from the ceaseless and hydra-headed misery of life till the realisation of the truth of oneself is achieved. It is the inborn urge of the soul and the object of all its endeavours, whether it is conscious of it or not, to discover its own truth and release itself from this misery and from the bondage, which arises out of its ignorance of itself which it mistakes for its body. It is this wrong identification of the insentient body with the sentient soul or self that lies at the root of this troublesome *samsara* and of all human ills and it is for its eradication that all the *Vedas* have been written and all the *sadhanas* prescribed.

This may seem to imply that the *Bhagavata* is meant only for yogis who work for immediate redemption. But to say that it is not also for the householder and the ordinary man of calm mind who aspires for happiness in his own life and peace with the world, is saying only half the truth. For, apart from their narrative appeal and the devotion they induce, its lavish, kaleidoscopic legends are mines of wisdom which do not fail to impress themselves upon the character and conduct of the thoughtful reader, especially in these days when innumerable forces are at work to divert men's attentions from their deep-seated urge of self-fulfilment and self-knowledge to the transient satisfaction of their elementary needs by the easy, descending path of rank materialism.

For this reason this condensation attempts to bring out all the stories and the instructions given in the original, curtailing nothing but the least significant anecdotes, long lists of names which mean nothing to us today, constant iterations of ideas, hymns and accounts of the creation, and details which are likely to cause a flagging of interest in the modern reader.

In pruning these deterrents care has been taken to retain all the features, structure, and almost the very words of the original, especially in the dialogues, which form its most instructive parts, where I preserved them as quotations, using *italics* for the most significant dicta to draw earnest attention to them. I have, however, found it necessary to add my own interpretative remarks to bring clarity where needed, and these I placed in brackets to distinguish them from the text.

Readers who are not used to the *Bhagavata* will find in it frequent interruptions, lack of cohesion, and much chronological disarray in its stories, barring those relating to the life of Krishna. It has to be remembered that the author's supreme aim is to propound the sublime Truth, using the narrative as best suits his purpose, irrespective of historical sequence, to create both an atmosphere for his teaching as well as lasting impressions upon the reader's mind. Even a *grihasta* will feel uplifted by the moral lessons it imparts and by its devotional philosophy. It is, therefore, important to view the instructions, which are prodigally strewn all over the work, not as isolated discourses befitting the particular related events, and, thus, may be lost sight of no sooner read, but as essential parts of a whole system of knowledge to be carefully noted, co-ordinated and treasured in the memory. This is complete scripture by itself, as the *Bhagavata Mahatmya* (previously quoted) rightly claims it to be, which promises to lead directly to *Jnana*, the portals of the supreme Liberation, without the assistance of any other spiritual work.

The contemplative student should not be misled by the easy presentation and widely diffused instructions of the *Bhagavata* to permit a single useful point to slip into oblivion. He will then find all his questions answered, even those of which he has been vaguely aware but unable mentally to grasp or formulate, and all his problems solved. Therefore to allow its blazing light to dispel the darkness of primeval *avidya* from the mind, constant repetitions and an intensely close study of it are most essential.

The Roman figures which headline the sections of this book represent the numbers of the corresponding chapters or discourses (*adhyayas*) in the original.

**S.S. Cohen**

**Vellore, 1965**



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## BOOK ONE

### I

#### INVOCATION

Let us meditate on the Supreme Lord, the transcendent Reality, from Whom the universe rises, in Whom it dwells, and by Whom it is re-absorbed, the self-effulgent Lord, Who is in all things yet distinct from them, the Revealer of the Vedas to the four-faced Brahma, the first Seer, the Lord in Whom this threefold creation, though unreal (like a mirage), appears as real because of His being its substratum (even as earth is the substratum of the mirage).

Let us, as long as life lasts, taste the divine joy that flows from this nectar-dripping *Bhagavata*, which is the essence of the Veda, as it fell from the blissful lips of the sage Suka.

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## *Installation of the Preacher*

After Sri Krishna, the Lord of Yoga and Defender of the righteous, fulfilled His mission on earth and ascended to His abode, closing the *Dwapara* age and heralding the new age of *Kali*, known as *Kaliyuga*, wherein the lowest *gunas* were to be ascendant to disturb men's minds and corrupt their hearts, the sages, anxious to mitigate the hardships of the new era and realise the Lord, gathered together in the forest known as Naimisharanya and started a great sacrifice, that was to take a thousand years to complete. It was in that holy assembly that *Srimad Bhagavata*, which had been conceived by the great sage Vedavyasa, also called Badarayana, to teach the *Bhagavata Dharma* (the Supreme Religion) or the highest worship of God, was recited by Ugrasrava Suta, who had been present at the time when the sage Suka, the son of its author, expounded it to King Parikshit on the bank of the Ganga.

This sacred *Bhagavata* expounds the absolute Reality to those who are pure in heart, free from malice and envy, and are keen to hear it, and frees them from the triple affliction of bodily diseases, natural calamities, and distress caused by the action of others.

One morning, after pouring oblations over the sacred fire, the Rishis sat round Suta and with due respect addressed him thus:

“O sinless One, you have learned and expounded all the *Puranas* (legends), *Itihasas* (epics) and Ethics, and have gained by your purity the confidence of the Rishis, who had experienced both the relative and the absolute aspects of the Lord, to impart to you their deepest secrets. You certainly know all that Badarayana and other sages know. Pray tell us what you have, from all this knowledge, determined to be the highest good for man, and the easiest and safest way of attaining it. For in this Kali age human beings are short-lived, dull-witted, inauspicious, extremely loath to take to the path of virtue and Self-realisation, and are afflicted with physical and moral diseases of all kinds. The Scriptures also do not help: they propound a variety of disciplines and rituals which bewilder and confuse. They are, besides, too voluminous to be heard and comprehended within a reasonable compass of time.

“Merciful that you are, O Suta, be kind to give us their essence, so that our minds may be at rest. We wish, in particular, to hear the story of the descent of the almighty Sri Hari in the womb of Devaki and of His divine sports in a human body. Now that the Kali age has begun and we have retired to this holy place to perform a *yajna* (sacrifice) of a long duration, we have abundant time to listen to a detailed account of Sri Hari’s incarnation on earth. It is our firm belief that it is He Who has sent you to pilot us across the troubled sea of this age, since Lord Krishna is no longer with us to protect and guide us.”

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## II

### *The Highest Good*

The Suta, pleased to discourse on the life of Sri Krishna and God-realisation, answered:

“Your questions, O noble Sages, relate to subjects which concern the perennial welfare of humanity. The highest good is the attainment by the soul of its true, ultimate object, which is the realisation of the blissful God or absolute Reality, through complete surrender and selfless devotion, which unfailingly awaken dispassion (*vairagya*) and direct knowledge (*jnana*). The end of *dharma* (piety, or practice of virtue) is not the accumulation of wealth, but Emancipation, though wealth, rightly used, can promote the earning of merits by useful work. There can be no doubt that the object of being in a human body is not the gratification of the senses, nor the attainment of heaven through religious actions, but the investigation into the ultimate Truth, which goes by various names: *Brahman* (Absolute Reality), *Paramatman* (Supreme Self), *Bhagavan* (God), etc. which is one, indivisible and eternal, admitting no duality or distinctions whatever. Rishis realised this Truth as their very Self, as seated in their hearts, through study, dispassion, devotion, and constant recital of this sacred *Bhagavata*.

“When the evil propensities – lust, envy, anger, greed, etc. — have been overcome by these practices and by association with holy men, by meditation, reflection and inquiry, this realisation rises spontaneously in the heart, cutting the knot of ignorance which is lodged therein and putting an end not only to all doubts, but also to the residual karma (destiny) which awaits fruition in a future life.

“Therefore, O Sages, be ever ready to listen to the purifying praises of Lord Hari, to worship Him and meditate on Him.”

Suta continues:

“The Lord Who is only one is known by various names: Hari or Vishnu, Virinchi or Brahma, and Hara or Shiva, according to the roles, He appears to play in His manifestations as the *gunas* — *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Yet in ancient days sages worshipped Bhagavan Vishnu alone to attain Salvation: His body being made of pure *sattva* (harmony), free from (*rajas*) activity and (*tamas*) inertia or darkness, (meditation on Him helps

the development of *sattvic* qualities that serve as instruments for Realisation). Although He is pure consciousness, and one only, He assumes the *gunas* and appears as many by His power of illusion (*Maya*), which itself consists of the *gunas*, to enjoy the sense-objects. He is thus the Real as pure consciousness (knower), and the unreal as the world of multiplicity (known).

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### III

#### *The Lord's Avataras*

“When the Lord decided to create, He assumed a form and became the *Purusha* (the First Person). While the *Purusha* was reclining on the causal waters, immersed in *Yoga samadhi*, a lotus sprang from His navel that gave birth to Brahma, from whom all beings were born. The *Purusha*, known by the name of Narayana (stretched on the water), is perceived by the yogis as possessing thousands of heads, of eyes, of arms, of feet, etc., and is the seed of all *avataras* (divine incarnations).

“In His first incarnation Lord Narayana was the four Kumaras, the eternal celibates who remained action-less, immersed in the quest of their true Self. In His second He was the divine Boar, who lifted up the earth from the bottom of the sea to make it a dwelling place for all creatures. He was the celestial Rishi Narada in His third *avatara* to preach the Vaishnava Gospel (the Pancharatra), which shows the way of doing action without involving oneself into bondage. His fourth descent was the Rishis Nara and Narayana who practise penance in Badari (Badrinath).

“In His fifth He was Lord Kapila who founded the Sankhya philosophical system that preaches the twenty-five fundamental principles or categories in manifestation. When Atri, one of the seven ancient Rishis (*saptarishis*) who had transcended the *gunas*, prayed for a son, the Lord responded by, ‘I shall give Myself as a son to you,’ and was born as the famous Dattatreya, teacher of the science of the Self to King Alarka, Prahlada, Parasurama, and others in his sixth descent.

“In His seventh He held the office of Indra. In His eighth manifestation He was Lord Rishabha, and in His ninth Prithu who sprang from Vena's arm. His tenth was *Matsya* (fish) *avatara*, and His eleventh *Kurma* (tortoise), when the *devas* and *asuras* churned the Ocean of Milk to extract nectar from it. Next He was Dhanvantari, who carried the jar of the nectar so extracted. In His thirteenth He appeared as the charming Mohini, who saved the nectar for the gods alone. His fourteenth *avatara* was the Man-lion (*Narasimha*), who killed Hiranyakasipu, and His fifteenth the dwarf Vamana. Next He took birth as Parasurama to subdue the arrogant Kshatriyas. He became the great Vyasa, son of Parasara and Satyavati, in His seventeenth descent. In His eighteenth He was Sri Rama, the hero of the

great *Ramayana* epic, and in His nineteenth Sri Balarama, the elder brother of Sri Krishna, to work with Him as the twentieth and full descent (Whose full story is the main theme of this *Bhagavata* as told by Sri Suka in Book Ten, q. v.)

“In the twenty-first the Lord will be born in this Kali age in Maghada as the Buddha, and in the twenty-second as Lord Kalki, towards the end of Kali, when kings will lose their royal *dharma* and rob the people whom they had vowed to protect from robbers.

As countless rivers flow from an ocean that never goes dry, so countless are the descents of the Lord, of which some are major, like Rama, Krishna, etc., but most are minor *amsas* (rays, so to say) from His supreme radiance. All these gross manifestations of the Lord, Who is by nature formless, bodiless consciousness, are the creation of *Maya*, from *Mahat* (the Cosmic Mind) downward, and superimposed on Him, their Witness. The ignorant take them as the Witness Himself. Beyond this material form there is the subtle body of the Lord, which is constituted of the undeveloped *gunas*, and which cannot be seen nor heard.

“This is the subtle body<sup>[1]</sup> which by ignorance the *jiva* (soul or individual man), superimposes on himself and causes him to undergo transmigration. When by self-knowledge the illusion of the superimposition breaks, the *jiva* at once realises his identity with the Absolute, merges in It, and shines in his native glory. The descents and deeds of the Lord are likewise illusory; for the Lord is changeless and has neither birth nor action.

“The great *siddha* Vedavyasa composed this blessed *Purana*, which is equal to the Veda and which recounts the glory of the Lord, and imparted it to his Self-realised son Sukadeva, who recited it to King Parikshit and the assembled Rishis on the bank of the Ganga in my presence. The Dark Age having begun, and Sri Krishna being no longer in the world to teach the Truth in person, this *Purana* which contains the quintessence of the Veda and the epics, and which shines by its spiritual radiance like the sun, has been given for the benefit of those who are seeking the light of Truth in the darkness of ignorance.”

[1] This subtle body is the *anandamayakosha* (sheath of bliss) which the *jiva* retains in deep sleep, wherein the *gunas* practically do not function. It is this amorphous body which holds to the *jiva* throughout the period of transmigration, endowing, him in each life with a new material

body, as determined by the karmic seeds which it had garnered within itself in the previous one. Hence it is also termed 'seed or causal body'; it does not drop off until Self-realisation is achieved, when the *jiva* regains his native state, free from superimpositions and is no longer *jiva* but the Absolute Itself or Himself. It is called 'bliss sheath' because it is made of the purest *sattva* and is in close proximity to the Self which is pure *ananda*. It is in this state that Brahman turns into a creator (*Ishwara*) when He causes the body to sprout from the karmic seed and the world from the body.

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## IV – V

### *Vedavyasa*

Saunaka, who was a student of the Rigveda, the head of a big college, and the senior-most of the assembled sages, hearing this, was very pleased and said:

“You are the chief of expounders, O blessed Suta, pray repeat to us what you have heard of the Lord from Sukadeva. We know the greatness of Suka, a yogi of the highest order; he who had broken the world illusion and the vision of diversity, and whose mind was perpetually immersed in the Divine Consciousness. We have heard the story that when once his father wanted to initiate him in the thread-ceremony as a Brahmin, he ran away to the forest stark naked like a madman. Passing by a pond where ladies were bathing he was taken no notice of by them; but when Vyasa, following him, approached, they all rushed for their clothes and covered themselves. Vyasa, astonished, drew their attention to this paradoxical behaviour towards his son, who was naked and towards himself who was decorously dressed. They answered that his son knew no distinction in the sexes which was not the case with him, Vyasa.

“Tell us, O Suta, how did the people of Hastinapura recognise the greatness of Suka when he visited that city, although to all appearance he was demented, deaf and dumb? Who was King Parikshit, and why did he abandon the throne and family, young though he was, taking a vow to fast unto death, waiting only to hear the stories of Sri Krishna and discard his body? How did he come to know of the distinction of Sri Suka, causing him to invite him to recite the sacred *Bhagavata*?”

To answer all these questions Suta recounted how in the previous *yuga* (age) one day the great Vyasa, who was a partial incarnation of Lord Hari, after the morning bath, had sat pondering over the decline of the physical, moral and spiritual powers of humanity and had come to the conviction that only worship through sacrifices could stop further degeneration and uplift and purify the mind. Thinking that the Veda was too cumbersome and contained too many instructions on the variety of religious practices to reach and be comprehended by every member of the Brahmin caste that had access to it, let alone other castes and women, who were

interdicted from even hearing it, he took up the Veda and divided it into four parts and left it to his disciples and their own disciples to sub-divide it into still smaller parts, so that it could be read piecemeal. Further, to benefit the whole humanity, he added to it the *Puranas* and *Itihasas* as the fifth Veda, composing at the same time the superb voluminous epic known as the *Mahabharata*, which all could read and which contained the full purport of the Veda in matters of worship, rules of social and domestic conduct, and even the most intimate knowledge of the absolute Truth, which is its heart and essence.

Yet Vyasa was not happy at heart with these achievements, though very considerable they were, and, as one day he sat reflecting, dejected, and in low spirits, sage Narada all of a sudden appeared by his side and highly praised his vast erudition, his expositions of the attainment of the Absolute, and his remarkable *Mahabharata*. Narada, however, then pointed out two cardinal defects, which, he thought, contributed to Vyasa's despondency and which could yet be mended. They were, first, Vyasa's failure to promote devotion to Lord Vasudeva (Krishna) by telling His stories and singing His praise, which were conducive to *Mukti* (Liberation), and secondly his encouragement of the slaughter of living beings as offerings to Him (as sacrifices), saying:

“You have not, O wise Rishi, sufficiently dealt with the glory of the Lord, but expatiated more on *dharma* and social relationship. Highly eloquent speeches that do not deal with the Lord's deeds appeal to people who delight in sensual pleasure, like the crows who relish unclean, discarded food; but those who extol Him, though deficient in form, wipe off all sins and please men of true piety. Even the preaching of the path of Liberation is not appreciated if it is not tinged with *bhakti* to Lord Achyuta (Krishna).

“Again, by recommending destruction of life in the name of religion to people who are naturally inclined to it, you have led them to disbelieve the wholesome teaching which condemns it and which yet leads to Enlightenment. For the Lord's devotees never return to transmigration, whereas those who take to action (sacrifices) do.

“Therefore, O Vyasa, devote yourself to the singing of the perfections of Sri Hari and take forward the Liberation of mankind. You are certainly aware of your being a ray of His Radiance and, though

unborn, you have taken birth to instruct the world. The action which is done by the common people leads to transmigration, but that done in the service of the Lord and dedicated to Him does not. From it arise wisdom and devotion, which ultimately liberate.”

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## VII – XVII

### *Birth and Trials of Parikshit*

Suta continues:

Thereafter day after day did Vedavyasa sit in his hermitage on the Western bank of the sacred river Saraswati in profound concentration, composing this *Bhagavata*, which celebrates the life and deeds of Lord Krishna, to instil in the hearts of those who hear it the necessary devotion, which will help them to break the powerful self-identification with the *gunas*, which is responsible for the never-ending misery of birth and death. After completing and revising it, the great Rishi taught it to his son Sukadeva, who though he was ever withdrawn into the contemplation of the Supreme Self retained devotion for Sri Hari, like his father.

Turning to Parikshit's life and birth circumstances, Suta begins with the despicable deed of Aswathama during the great Kurukshetra War. When heroes of both the Kauravas and Pandavas were falling on the battlefield, to please, as he thought, Duryodhana, this son of Drona entered the Pandavas' tent at night and murdered Draupadi's (their wife) small children in their sleep. Duryodhana himself condemned this heinous act. The mother, seeing her children in a pool of blood, ran weeping to her heroic husband Arjuna and demanded vengeance. Arjuna vowed to bind Aswathama and bring him to her. But when the criminal was actually brought, Draupadi relented and ordered his release. Arjuna let him go after shaving the tuft of hair on his head as the only penalty for his crime. Aswathama considered this the greatest insult to him, a Brahmin, whose tuft stands as the symbol of the sanctity of his caste. Boiling with resentment, he deliberated a new crime against Arjuna's progeny and, taking up his divine weapon (the fiery discus), he released it against Parikshit, Arjuna's grandson, who was still in his mother's womb. Uttara, the pregnant widow, seeing it coming towards her, ran in terror to Krishna and appealed to Him to save her unborn baby. The Lord surrounded her womb with His yogic force and saved the child. Aswathama intended not only to hurt Arjuna, but also to annihilate the Pandava dynasty, which depended on Parikshit's survival as the only male scion of the Pandavas, who had won the war and had become the sole rulers.

The Pandavas lived for a long time in Hastinapura under the Kingship of the righteous Yudhishtira, their eldest, and the protection of Sri Krishna, Who, after the battle of Kurukshetra and the death of Bhishma, returned to Dwaraka, His capital. But when the Lord altogether left the earth the brothers fell in great despondency and retired to an ascetic solitude to engage in an uninterrupted thought of Him, Who was as dear to them as life itself. Having abdicated the throne, Yudhishtira left it to Parikshit, who had by then grown to full manhood and all-round accomplishments to the full satisfaction of his elders.

At the very moment, Suta continues, the Lord stepped out of the earth the Kali age commenced. All the virtues of which He was the embodiment began one by one to leave the world, which saddened King Parikshit, its ruler and protector. One day as he was going round his domain to see things for himself, Parikshit saw a *Sudra* dressed in royal garb kicking and belabouring a white bull, which had lost three of its legs, and a cow, which was shedding tears of grief. The sight greatly perturbed the King, who drew his sword to kill the cruel Sudra. But the latter fell at his feet and demanded a hearing. The Sudra “king” turned out to be Kali himself, the spirit of the incoming age, and the white bull *dharma*, which, as decreed by Providence, was to be beaten off its fourth leg to deprive the earth of the four fundamental virtues — purity, truthfulness, piety and compassion — during his term of office. The cow represented the earth, which was to pass through many trials and tribulations. Touched by the explanations and humility of Kali, Parikshit pardoned him on the condition that he, Kali, would leave the earth during his reign, to which Kali agreed, but pleaded that having no home anywhere he might be permitted to reside in the earth in a restricted place, which Parikshit himself might be pleased to determine. Parikshit named four areas where he could stay, namely, dicing, wine, women, and cruelty to living beings and, when Kali remonstrated that that was too restricted a field for him, he added gold, which is the source of almost all the strife and discord between men. This pleased Kali, who immediately occupied his new domain, which was forbidden to seekers of Truth, righteous kings, and spiritual teachers.

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## XVIII

### *The Curse on Parikshit*

Suta continues:

King Parikshit bent all the powers of his soul to enlarge his territory and work for the happiness and prosperity of his people through justice and fair-play to all. In the course of his studies he came to know all that Krishna had done for his forefathers; how He had always befriended them and won for them the greatest war in history against the mighty Kauravas, their cousins, which saved them from total extinction and the loss of their hereditary property, and finally how by the might of His Yoga He had counteracted the deadly weapon of Aswathama which was shot at himself (Parikshit) to scorch him to death while he was still in his mother's womb. All this contributed to kindle a great devotion in Parikshit's heart for the Lord, so that when his hour came to face death by the curse of a Brahmin youth, he exhibited an exemplary indifference and courage, keeping his mind unflinchingly fixed on the Lord, Whose stories he had just heard from the lips of Sukadeva.

Suta now relates the circumstances which led to the curse on Parikshit and then to his death. One day this King went out alone to hunt when, yielding to the excitement of the game, he penetrated deep into the forest and grew hot, hungry and thirsty. Searching for water, he ventured to enter the hermitage of Rishi Samiga, where he found none but the Sage, who was sitting in an erect posture, stark still, with eyes closed, senses inactive and apparently lost to the world. He yet asked for water from the immovable figure, and was prompted to be angry and hate the Rishi when he received no response from him. As he was leaving the hermitage, he saw the corpse of a snake lying about. He lifted it with the end of his bow and deposited it on the Sage's shoulder, with the half intention of testing the genuineness of his *samadhi*, and departed. The Rishi's son, who had been playing with the children, returned to the hermitage and saw what had happened. He was so overwhelmed by resentment and anger that he, possessed of much spiritual power, vowed to teach a lesson to "this scion of the unrighteous ruling class who has violated the rules of dharma". Sipping water, he pronounced a curse in a tone which sounded like thunder: "Commanded by me, Takshaka (a celestial serpent) shall on the seventh day bite to death that accursed

Kshatriya who has so shamelessly transgressed against us and shown disrespect to my holy father.”

Then he set up a howl which brought Samika back to the normal consciousness. The Sage learned of the curse and rebuked his son for having inflicted a terrible punishment for a trifling offence. “Kings,” said he, “should not be judged by the ordinary standard, for they have a great many duties to perform and shoulder many great responsibilities in the protection of their people.” Besides, he added, Parikshit was an Emperor widely known for his righteousness, his extreme devotion to the Lord, and for the many costly horse-sacrifices (*aswamedhas*) he had performed. If he sought their hermitage, he opined, it was by no means with the intention of doing them any harm, but with the hope of getting some refreshment and rest. The Rishi prayed the Lord to forgive the sin of his foolish son for causing the death of such a great man and king. (Not once did he refer to the King’s insult to himself.)

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## XIX

### *Parikshit Meets Suka*

Suta continues:

On his part the King was seized with a great remorse at his own reprehensible conduct towards the saintly Brahmin, whose spiritual glory, he thought, resembled that of the Lord Himself, so that he welcomed the death sentence passed on him by the saint's son as a just retribution for his sin. He resolved to spend these seven days in fast and meditation on the Lord on the bank of the sacred Ganga which flows from the feet of Sri Vishnu. Arriving there, he saw a number of ancient Rishis coming, to call on him — Vasishtha, Angira, Agastya, Maitreya, Vyasa and dozens of other Brahmin and royal Rishis, who grouped round him affectionately. Parikshit related to them the whole incident and his resolve to fast unto death. Then calling, his eldest son Janamejaya, he transferred to him his royal duties and then sat on *kusa* grass facing North to carry out his vow in the presence of the assembled sages, who were determined to stay with him to the end.

As Parikshit was seeking instructions from the sages, the divine Sukadeva walked in, in his usual leisurely amble, wearing nothing but the glory of his Self-realisation and the graceful, fresh looks of sixteen summers. Recognising his exalted state, all the Rishis stood up in salutation and placed him in the highest seat. The King prostrated himself before him, touched his feet with his head, then stood up, and with joined palms expressed his intense delight at the honour done to him by the sages who thought him, “a vile Kshatriya,” worthy of their visit. To Suka he said:

“If the very thought of you, O Master Yogi, purifies one's mind and that of one's whole family, how much more does your presence purify! I feel that Sri Krishna is pleased with me, the scion of His cousins the Pandavas, to direct your steps to this spot, or else what have I, who am about to die, done to deserve the blessings of your visit — you who have attained the summit of spiritual glory! Do instruct me, O teacher of yogis, on the nature of the highest realisation and on the means of attaining it. Also pray describe to me the right conduct of the man who stands at death's door and of people in normal times. For you are rarely seen and scarcely stand at any door more than the time required to milk a cow.”



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# BOOK TWO

## I – III

### *Suka's Sermon On Meditation*

Suta continues:

Thus addressed, the divine son of Badarayana said:

“I am greatly pleased with your question, O King because it concerns the good of humanity and delights the knowers of the Self. Men who are attached to their homes and rituals, find interest in thousands of useless things. They waste their nights in sleep and copulation and their days in amassing wealth. They fail to perceive the vanity of their endeavours and of their objects — body, wife, children — although they see with their own eyes how perishable all these are. He who, O King, seeks to transcend the attachment to transitory things to reach the eternal, should study and reflect on the supreme virtues and deeds of Lord Narayana, Who is the Self of the universe. To think of Him at the last hour of one's life is the supreme reward of one's birth. Even yogis who are firmly established in the absolute Brahman and are no longer bound by the ordinary rules of human conduct, delight in conversing about the life and deeds of Sri Krishna.

“I shall recite to you, a devotee of the Lord, the *Bhagavata Purana*, which is as sacred as the Veda, and which I learned from my revered father Krishna Dwaipayana (Vyasa, who was present) at the end of the last *Dwapara* age, though I was then fully established in my own Self. For the hearing of it promotes devotion and dispels fear. At the moment of death one should shed all fear by severing one's attachment to the body and everything that is connected with it. Retiring from home to solitude to concentrate one's whole mind on the Lord is the best way of facing death.”

Parikshit asked:

“How is concentration to be achieved, O holy Suka, and what form of it is quickest in its results?”

Sri Suka replied:

“Brahma had to concentrate his mind for one thousand years to receive from Lord Vishnu the knowledge of the previous creation in order that he might construct the new one on its model. (Similarly the import of

the Veda cannot be grasped, nor the bliss of Liberation enjoyed without concentration.) The Veda is so flowing that the mind in its search for happiness is likely to be caught by empty words which have no basis in reality. Seeking happiness in this world of illusion, the soul wanders from place to place and from one situation to another, as he does in dream, but fails to obtain but the most transitory satisfaction. The wise man should, therefore, reduce his activities to the minimum possible, just to keep the body alive for its destined duration, and should devote most of his time in concentration on Him Who resides in it as his beloved Self, so that he may receive His Grace and destroy the seeds of transmigration.

“Some strivers find it easier to concentrate on the form of the Lord, which has four arms, holding a discus, a lotus, a conch and a mace, standing in the lotus of their hearts of the size of the thumb. Gazing on it with his mental eye from down upwards, the meditator should reach the smiling face, to which he should cling until he frees himself from other thoughts. Then he should stop visualising and shift to the true Nature of the Lord, which is the all-witnessing Consciousness.

“The devotee whose time of dying is drawing nigh should abstain from all activity and, choosing a quiet, clean place, he should sit in it in a steady posture withdraw his mind from the external objects, and fix it on the *Kshetrajna* (the intelligent principle or the “owner of the field”) which dwells in his body (the field), namely, his own Self, then merge this Self in the Absolute Being, in Whom there exists neither *ahankara* (ego), *gunas*, nor *mahat*, nor still *pradhana*(undifferentiated matter). This is the supreme essence of the all-pervading Lord, on Whom alone he should concentrate, rejecting everything else as ‘not this’, including the self-identification with the body. Shedding the body, he attains union with the Lord. *This is the direct or immediate Liberation*, that is, release from transmigration.

The other way, the indirect or gradual, is for those who hanker after the abode of Brahma, or the company of *siddhas*(disembodied seers), who use supernatural powers to roam about the universe as they like. At death they take their mind and senses with them to enjoy the illusory pleasures of the other spheres. While in the body they follow the path of the *sushumna*,[\[2\]](#) and after death they go first to the home of the fire-

god (Vaishvanara), where they clean themselves of their impurities, and then rise to the sidereal sphere, which has the shape of a fish and is presided over by Sri Vishnu, and so on, ascending higher and higher, staying in each plane some millions of years to enjoy the fruits of their earthly penance till they reach the highest, Brahmaloaka, where after another very long stay, the constituents of their bodies begin to disintegrate, each merging in the next higher element until all the *gunas* are re-absorbed in their original source, the Self, which is their own true being, pure Spirit, the blissful Lord Himself. They who attain this state become liberated; they will never return to the world of transmigration.

“These are, O King, the two eternal paths which were taught by Lord Vasudeva to Brahma, to guide those who have fallen victims to illusion but are prepared to lend their ears to them and purify their hearts from the contamination of the senses by devotion and meditation.”

The foregoing are the two paths, the direct and the gradual, which lead to Liberation. Sri Suka also enumerates other forms of worship, which aim not at *Mukti* but at gaining petty ends. The worship of Brihaspati, for example, aims at erudition; of the prajapatis at progeny; of Maya, the goddess of wealth, at prosperity; and so on. But the wise “take to the worship of the Supreme Person, confers the eternal bliss which kills all taste for the illusory sense indulgence.

[2] “The path of the *sushumna*” passes through *pranayama*, control of the breath. The *sushumna* is the central channel of consciousness which runs along the spinal column, and into which the breath has eventually to be retained through the practice of *kumbhaka*, of which there are many varieties, according to the method one follows and the results expected.

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## IV – VII

### *Creation*

King Parikshit said:

“Your words of truth, O sinless, all-knowing Sage, have dispelled the darkness of my ignorance, yet the illusory sport of the Lord in creating and dissolving the universe remains a mystery to me, as it is even to the greatest gods. His plays with Himself — creating, multiplying, and then destroying Himself, again and again — are too intricate and too profound to be easily apprehended. For Him is one without a second and changeless, to assume all these changing forms and perform the infinite functions in the universe through the *gunas* is a mystery which none but you, who have realised Him, can fathom.”

Sri Suka concentrated his mind on Sri Krishna, bowed with joined palms, and prayed:

“I bow to the Supreme Person of infinite glory, the Inner Ruler of all things, Whose true Nature is beyond the grasp of the intellect, Who removes the afflictions of His devotees, permeates their hearts with love for Himself, and finally grants them Emancipation, as He grants Self-realisation to the *Paramahamsas* who perform severe penance for it.

“Hail to You, Who turn away from those who turn away from You, Who, by virtue of the bliss which is inherent in Your Nature, delight in Your own Essence, which is the absolute Brahman! You are the Veda to those who are addicted to the practice of rituals, *Dharma* to those who adhere to the rules of righteousness, and *Tapas* to the ascetics who perform penance. May You, O Lord, grant me easy expression to expound the wisdom which I learned from my father Vedavyasa, who is no other than Your own Self, Lord Vasudeva!”

Then turning to Parikshit he repeated to him the discussion which had once taken place between Narada and Brahma concerning the Creation, which the former ascribed to the latter through the exercise of his creative power (*Maya*). Narada considered this power of Brahma to be like the web which the spider projects from its mouth by its own inherent energy.

Brahma answered:

“Praiseworthy are your inquiries, my son, in that they induce me to reveal to you the glory of the Lord. Until one comes to know Him, all the creation appears to have been made by me, whereas actually it is the manifestation of His effulgence, much like the sun, the moon and the stars, which appear to illumine the world by their own lights, when in truth they themselves are illumined by the Lord. Those who, like you, mistake me to be the father of the universe are as deluded by *Maya* as the fools who mistake their bodies for their ‘I’ and their appurtenances for their ‘mine’.

“O divine Narada, there is only one Substance in existence, and it is Lord Vasudeva Himself. Neither the material elements nor karma, nor time, nor nature, nor even the human soul have any substance of their own other than Narayana, Who is the aim and object of the Veda. of all sacrifice, all yoga, all penance, all knowledge, and all seeking. He is not only all these, but their Ruler and Perceiver as well. *Though ever free, He appears to be bound by Karma (destiny), as the human soul, and subject to illusions; though pure sentience, He identifies Himself with the insentient body, the senses, the mind and the intellect, covering Himself with them as His sheaths (koshas), albeit their being the creation of His own power of Illusion (Maya).*

“The Lord of *Maya* intent upon assuming diverse forms, *made by His mere thought* a locus in Himself for Time, Karma, and Nature, which were necessary for their manifestation. By the power of His *Maya*, Time (*Kala*) disturbed the *gunas* and the creation proceeded in descending order, expanding and multiplying as it went lower and lower, undergoing divisions and subdivisions as spheres, gods, demi-gods, humans, celestials, animate and inanimate beings (of which Brahma gave long details).”

Brahma continued:

“The Primal *Purusha*, the Unborn, creates, maintains and destroys Himself time after time, though in Himself He is ever pure, indestructible, attributeless, changeless, perfect and one without a second. Sages realise Him only when they succeed in completely subduing their body, senses and mind. But He disappears from the view of those who attempt to reach Him by sophisticated reasoning.”

Speaking of the Lord's special Incarnations on earth, Brahma gives a brief sketch of them (see p. 5) and concludes with:

“This, dear Narada, is a brief exposition of the universe which is created by the very thought of the Lord, Who is, thus, the cause as well as itself, the effect. This is the *Bhagavata* which the Lord was pleased to teach me. Do amplify it in a way which will create devotion for Him. He who will recite it, and he who will hear it with faith, will never be deluded by *Maya*.”

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## VIII – X

### *The Origin of the Bhagavata*

The dialogue between Brahma and Narada having terminated, Parikshit asks about the Lord's creation, person, abode, the yoga that should be practised to attain to Him, also how the soul, which is said to be untouched by the elements, takes a body which is made of the elements. Sri Suka answers the last question first:

“As the dreamer imagines himself in contact with real objects *where actually none exists*, so does *Atman*, as *Jiva*, imagine himself in contact with real elements, which do not actually exist. It is *Maya* which is responsible for this delusion as well as for the appearance of multiplicity in *Atman*. *Atman*, deluded by *Maya*, becomes fascinated by His own sports in the body and thinks ‘I’ and ‘mine’. When, however, He is in the realisation of His own essential nature, He transcends *Maya*, as the dreamer transcends the dream experience on his waking.

“When Brahma, sitting in the lotus on the waters cogitating over his next creation, failed to have a vision of it, he heard a word of two syllables which meant “Do penance” distinctly pronounced twice. He looked around for the source of that sound and finding none, he felt convinced that it was the Lord's wish that he should take to a long *tapas*. Accordingly, for one thousand celestial years he sat in meditation in complete control of his breath and mind and succeeded in gaining the knowledge he needed.

“Pleased with him, the glorious Lord revealed to him His own abode, *Vaikuntha*, than which there is none higher, where afflictions, delusions, and fear find no place, nor do *Rajas*, *Tamas* and Time. *Vaikuntha* of great splendour with its rows of multi-storeyed mansions of great beauty and effulgence, is reserved for great souls. There Brahma beheld the beautiful Lakshmi singing the praise of her Lord, Who was seated on His Supreme Throne surrounded by His lustrous attendants and the twenty-five *Shaktis* with which He manifests the twenty-five principles of creation, wearing a crown, ear-rings, four arms and dazzling countenance and smiles. The sight filled Brahma's heart with joy. He bowed to the Lord with adoration, tears of love pouring from his eyes and hair standing.

“Deeming him fit to receive the secret of the creation, the Lord took him by the hand and praised him for having understood His mandate to take to a very long penance, for, He said:

‘Penance, O sinless One, is My very heart, Myself being the very soul of penance. It is by penance alone that I create this universe, by penance I maintain it, and by penance again I re-absorb it into Myself, nay, My very strength consists of penance.’

“Brahma humbly replied:

‘You Who dwell in all hearts, know my mind, yet I pray to you, O Lord, to grant this petition of mine, namely, that I may be blessed with the knowledge of both the relative as well as the absolute aspects of Your Divine Self. Just as the spider spins its web from itself, so do You, O Madhava, multiply Yourself by the power of Your illusion in play, and then withdraw it again into yourself. Pray bestow on me the knowledge of this process, and also, while I indefatigably go on with the creation, grant that I may not be attached to it nor swell with pride as if it were my own handicraft.’

“The Supreme Lord answered:

‘By My Grace you will have a comprehensive knowledge of Myself — extent, nature, qualities, virtues and actions. Before the creation I alone was in My absolute aspect and nothing else. In creation I alone exist, both as Myself and as the world, and what remains in dissolution is also Myself. Know you that it is due to My *Maya* that there is an appearance of existence in the non-existent, like a second moon (in a pool of water), and of non-existence in the existent, like the invisible Rahu among the visible planets. I am in the elements and the bodies as their indwelling spirit, as well as not in them. He who is determined to know the *Atman* by investigation will not fail to realise it as existent at all times and in all places, whether he proceeds negatively by discarding everything that changes as ‘Not That’, ‘Not That’, or positively by affirming everything to be ‘That’.

‘With perfect concentration, O Brahma, follow this doctrine and you will never be confused nor fall victim to pride while occupied in your creative work.’”

Sri Suka continues: Narada, the most beloved son of Brahma, anxious to know all about this deluding *Maya* of Lord Vishnu, closely questioned his father, who thought it best to answer by repeating to him this *Bhagavata Purana* as it had been taught to him by the Supreme Vishnu Himself in the first *kalpa* of his life known as *Brahmakalpa*. Narada imparted it to the sage Vyasa while he was meditating on the bank of the Saraswati (see p. 8).

Sri Suka now describes the ten topics of the *Bhagavata* of which nine refer to the creation from *Sarga*, the lowest element, to *Mahat*, the highest. From these was made the body of the Cosmic Being and all its organs. The tenth refers to *Asraya*, the Source of all these, which the Scriptures call by the name of Absolute or Supreme Self. He concludes by saying:

“Beyond this gross form of the Lord lies His most subtle form which is unmanifest, unqualified, having no beginning, nor end, eternal, and beyond mind and speech. Yet it is as much the creation of *Maya* as the gross form, and the wise refuse to make either of them the object of their worship. For truly speaking, the Lord is action-less, having no connection whatever with the creation and its activities. If the Scriptures ascribe them to Him it is with the intention of repudiating them as super-impositions on Him by the power of illusion which is His very own.”

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# BOOK THREE

MAITREYA'S INSTRUCTIONS TO VIDURA

## I – VI

### *Vidura Meets Uddhava and Maitreya*

Sri Suka takes us back again to the scenes of the *Mahabharata* wherein Vidura, disgusted with the behaviour of the wicked sons of Dhritarashtra, his half-brother, left his home on the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra and went on pilgrimage to all the holy places in Bharatvarsha on foot. By the time he reached Prabhasa, near Dwaraka, the great war had ended in the complete defeat of the Kauravas and the establishment of Yudhishtira as the undisputed sovereign at Hastinapura. Moving leisurely from place to place, he reached the river Yamuna, where he found Uddhava, a reputed devotee of Sri Krishna, coming from Dwaraka. Their joy at meeting knew no bounds. They embraced, and without loss of time started talking of Sri Krishna and His life, from the time He was born to the moment Uddhava left Him, preparing to part with His body. Describing this last scene, Uddhava said:

“When the Lord made up His mind to destroy the Yadavas, His own race, He called me in Dwaraka and urged me to go to Badari, where the divine Rishis Nara and Narayana — His *avatara* — perform penance; yet guessing His intentions, I continued to follow Him until He reached the banks of the Saraswati and sat crossed legs, leaning on a peepul tree, full of joy. Rishi Maitreya (the co-disciple of Vedavyasa, who roams aimlessly in the world) by chance passed that way. He approached the Lord and bowed deeply to Him in salutation. Then Krishna turned to me and with an affectionate smile said:

‘Dwelling in you, I know your heart’s desire, O good Uddhava. As a Vasu you worshipped Me in your last life, and in this one you have served Me with an unswerving devotion. This certainly will be your last birth on earth. Now that I am about to leave this mortal body I will reveal to you the supreme wisdom called the *Bhagavata* which I taught to the unborn Brahma in a former cycle called the *Padma kalpa* (Lotus Cycle), after the lotus from which he rose and in which he lived.’

“Overwhelmed by His speech, I joined my palms and with streaming tears I spoke:

‘I crave for none of the four human pursuits — *kama*, *artha*, *dharma* and *moksha* (sense-enjoyment, wealth, performance of duty and Liberation) — for nothing appeals to me more than devotion to You, O Perfect Master. That You Who are action-less take to action, unborn take a birth and fearless, run away on the battlefield; that You, Whose sole delight is the enjoyment of the bliss of Your own Self, marry more than fifteen thousand wives, or You, Who are all knowing, take my advice on occasions (all this will be explained in the tenth Book) just like any ordinary mortal, is a constant puzzle to me. I beg You, Supreme Lord, to reveal to me the mystery of Your Being.’

“Thereupon the Lord showed me His transcendental nature and the way of realising Him. Then prostrating myself at His feet, I bade Him farewell, greatly distressed at parting with Him. I am now going to Badari as He commanded me to do. As for you, O Vidura, the sage Maitreya was personally instructed by Him in my presence to impart to you the secret of His eternal nature.”

Vidura, overwhelmed by the news of Sri Krishna’s passing and by His gracious remembrance of him at the last moment of His life, wept, and, leaving the bank of the Yamuna, proceeded to Gangadwar (Hardwar) on the celestial river Ganga, which he reached in a few days and where lived the sage Maitreya. The Rishi, being very pleased with His dispositions, received him well and prepared to answer his questions. Vidura began:

“People work with the object of gaining happiness, but reap nothing but suffering. Devotees of Sri Krishna (like your good self) move about the world in order to bring men to the path of righteousness, so that the Lord may save them from misery by revealing Himself in their hearts. Now I pray you, O worshipful Sage, to indicate to me the easiest path to that end. Be pleased also to tell me how the action-less Lord takes to action by assuming all this diversity through His *Yogamaya*.”

Rishi Maitreya answered:

“Your mind, O pious Vidura, is already free from sense objects and firmly fixed on the Lord. It is therefore not surprising that at the moment of His return to His eternal *Vaikuntha*, He commanded me to teach you this supreme wisdom. I will now explain to you how He uses His *Maya* in sport to create and destroy the world.”

The Rishi then gave full details of the evolutionary unfoldment and manifestation of the Lord's cosmic body, which consists of twenty-three categories. namely, *mahat* (cosmic intellect), *ahankara* (ego), *manas* (mind), the five subtle elements (*tanmatras*), *jnanendriyas* (the five sensory organs), *karmendriyas* (the five organs of action) and the *bhutas* (the five gross elements — earth, water, fire, air, and ether). The twenty-fourth principle is the supreme *Purusha* or Cosmic Person (or Being), Who consists of all the *jivas* who inhabit the twenty-three categories. The *Purusha* is the Lord Himself (see p. 60).

(Not completely satisfied with the above reply) Vidura requested the Sage to elucidate further his answer to his question, which he expanded as follows:

“How did the Lord, O holy Saint, who is pure, changeless, attributeless consciousness, come to possess attributes and change even in play? If a child takes to play it is with the purpose of deriving some fun from it: what fun can the Lord, Who is bliss itself, derive from this play which He knows to be illusory and to result in suffering? How (in the first instance) does He, Who is knowledge absolute, think it fit to cover Himself with ignorance and subject Himself to (the laws of transmigration and) the agony of retribution, karma (which is anything but fun)? I am much confused, O wise One. Stuck as I am in the darkness of ignorance, I pray to you to remove my blindness.”

Maitreya answered:

“It is certainly highly illogical that the Atman who is ever blissful and free should voluntarily fall a prey to the misery of bondage, but (you must know that) this bondage does not exist but in appearance, like the trembling of the moon in the water, in which it is reflected, and the feeling of horror at seeing oneself beheaded in dream. As neither of these two is real, existing only in the fancy of its perceiver, so is the bondage fancied by the *jiva*, who identifies himself with the body. Once this identification disappears through devotion to the Lord and the performance of the *nivritti dharma* (*sadhana*, discipline) all this confusion disappears with it.”

Vidura pleased, answered:

“Your grace, O Rishi, has dispelled my doubts. I have now clearly understood that suffering and bondage are only imagined — unreal —

for the world itself does not exist but in fancy. As I now see it, he who is in dense ignorance and he who has transcended the mind, both lead a carefree life, but misery is the lot of him who stands in between them. I shall now devote myself to your service, so that I may rid myself of this world-illusion, for service done to the living devotee of the Lord is as good as done to the Lord Himself.

“You have just told me, O sinless One, that after creating the twenty-three categories and forming the cosmic body, the Lord entered it as the Cosmic Being, Whom the Veda calls the *Purusha*, endowed with thousands of organs, limbs, arms, eyes, etc., and in Whom all the universes dwell. Pray now tell me of His manifestation as Brahma, as the prajapatis, as their sons, grandsons and all classes of beings, as the Manus and their lines of rulers; as the various *Varnas* (social grades or castes) and *Ashramas* (stages in life), etc. Be so kind as to explain the teaching of the Veda concerning the performance of sacrifices and the threefold Yoga — *Karma*, *Bhakti* and *Jnana* (selfless action, devotion and knowledge respectively) — as well as the path of the Vaishnava cult (*Pancharatra Agama*) as taught by the Lord to Narada, etc. For how can wisdom arise without the guiding grace of a preceptor? You are my friend and well disposed towards me: do answer all these questions of mine; for it is said that all the study of the Veda, all penance, and all charitable acts do not earn even a fraction of the merits which are earned by saving a soul from the suffering of birth and death.”

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## VIII – IX

### *Birth and Vision of Brahma*

Maitreya answered:

“Your birth in the line of Puru has sanctified it, since you are not other than god Yama himself, who is greatly devoted to the Lord. To relieve the suffering of those who are trapped by their senses, I will recite to you the *Bhagavata Purana* which was imparted by Lord Sankarshana (Sesha) to Sanatkumara, who passed it on to Sankhyayana, who had taken a vow of eternal celibacy. Sankhyayana taught it to Parasara who taught it to me.

“Before the creation there was nothing but the flood of the *pralaya* (dissolution), over which Lord Narayana lay on His Sesha bed in *yoganidra* (yogic sleep), though His Consciousness was awake, enjoying the bliss of His own nature, retaining His function as Time alone active, while the subtle bodies of all the jivas lay latent in His body like fire in the wood. Having thus slept for four-thousand *yugas* equal in duration to the four-thousand of activity — His waking state — He was shown by Time the karmas of all the latent *jivas*, when He saw all the worlds in His body. *Now the subtle bodies of the jivas began to stir by the impulsion of rajoguna* (the qualities of activity) *as influenced by Time*, seeking expression in a gross form, when all of a sudden they sprouted from His navel in the form of a lotus, which illuminated by its splendour the darkness of the *pralaya* waters, like a sun. The Lord entered the lotus, and Brahma, the creator, rose from it. Hence the Veda calls him the self-born. Looking intently around and, seeing nothing but the lotus rooted in the water, Brahma developed four faces which could survey all directions simultaneously, and started puzzling about his identity and situation, but found no solution in his external survey. So he shut his eyes and looked within himself in intense concentration for one hundred years, when he suddenly saw in his heart Lord Narayana stretched in great splendour on Sesha (the ten-thousand-hooded divine serpent which rested on the water) containing all the worlds in His Person. Brahma immediately worshipped Him and prayed to Him to start creating and save him from this despondency, or, alternatively, to grant him the

same wisdom and supernatural powers which he had enjoyed in the preceding *kalpa* and which were actually the Lord's own.

“The Lord kindly answered:

‘Do not lose yourself in despair, O Vedagarbha (storehouse of the Veda), make effort and you will create; for what you pray for is already prepared for you. Perform penance once again with the mantra which is dear to Me and you will find, O Brahma, the plan of all the worlds unfolded to your view. When your concentration becomes perfect and your devotion intense you will find Me pervading you as well as the universe and all the *jivas*. He, who sees Me dwelling in everything like fire in every particle of the wood, will that very moment be rid of all misapprehensions and will realise his identity with Me, Who am devoid of qualities, bodies, senses, elements. I am the Self of all the *jivas*, O Brahma, *and the most loved of all loveable things, for the body is loved only because of My dwelling in it* (as life or consciousness). By means of your own person, which is the embodiment of all the Scriptures and born of Myself, do as before: create the worlds and the beings that lie hidden within Me’.”

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## X – XII

### *Brahma Creates in Meditation*

Maitreya continues:

Thus Brahma fell back again in meditation for another hundred years with his mind fixed on the Lord, when he saw the lotus on which he was seated as high as the sky, and the water which supports it heaving in a stormy wind. It occurred to him to start recreating the worlds which had been destroyed at the end of the previous *kalpa*, using the all-powerful mantra of the Lord. He sucked into himself both the wind and the water, and entered into the lotus stalk, splitting it into three parts making them the three worlds — *Bhu*, *Bhuvah* and *Swah* — which the *jivas* inhabit to suffer and enjoy the fruits of their actions.

The Rishi now explains the roles and functions of Time in the process of creation when it stirs the *gunas* for the Lord's cosmic play, for the changes or evolution of the phenomena in the nine-fold creation from *Mahat* down to all the mobile and immobile beings in heaven, on earth, and underneath the earth, in their different stages of manifestation. The smallest indivisible particle of matter in existence is called *paramanu*, of which all the material universe is constructed by combination and permutation. The smallest particle, or unit, of Time is also called *paramanu*, which, like the Lord, pervades all things and sets limits to their extents.

Each creation is equal to one day of the life of Brahma called *kalpa*, which consists of one thousand cycles of four *yugas*(ages) — *Satya* (or *Krita*), *Treta*, *Dwapara* and *Kali*, lasting aggregately twelve thousand celestial<sup>[3]</sup> years, divided in the ratio of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively (so that our *kali* age has a duration of or 432,000 terrestrial years, whereas *satya* lasts four times as much, *i.e.* 1,728,000 years). Each *kalpa* is divided into fourteen *manvantaras*, each of which is presided over by a Manu, ruling for about 72 cycles. At the end of the *kalpa* the night of Brahma falls, when he withdraws all things back into himself and goes to sleep for a duration equal to his day. Brahma lives for one hundred years (of 360 *kalpas* each) made up of *twoparardhas* (two halves), and passes off into *Mahapralaya* (Great Dissolution), after which an altogether new Brahma and a new form of creation come into being.

Maitreya concludes:

“I have explained to you, O Vidura, the glory of the Supreme Spirit called Time. Now listen to the story of how Brahma started his creation. He first made the five *avidyas* (varieties of ignorance), namely, 1– ignorance of one’s true self, 2 – ignorance in taking the body for oneself,

3 – ignorance in seeking enjoyment, 4 – ignorance in yielding to anger and 5 – ignorance in mistaking death as one’s end. Then by the purity of mind he had gained in meditation, he saw that it was a wicked creation: so he concentrated again this time on a healthy creation and produced the four celibate Kumaras — Sanaka, Sanatana, Sanandana and Sanatkumara (mentioned before) — and commanded them to go and beget children, but they refused, preferring to contemplate their own Supreme Self rather than work, which set Brahma in such a violent anger that it broke out from the middle of his brows as a personified male being of dark-eyed complexion. Very pleased, Brahma called him Rudra (dark-red), adding another eleven names — Shiva, Bhava, Manu, Kala, Vamadeva, etc. — after the fields of activity he assigned to him. Rudra married eleven wives and started breeding such undesirable beings and at such a rapid rate that Brahma, greatly alarmed, beseeched him to stop at once and instead take to penance, praying to the Lord to help him bring happiness to the world rather than this monstrous progeny, who were scorching the earth with their flaming eyes. Brahma on his part went on multiplying himself by producing Narada and the nine prajapatis, the first progenitors: Marichi from his mind, Bhrigu from his skin, Angira from his mouth, Kratu from his hand, Atri from his eyes, Narada from his lap, Vasishtha from his breath, Daksha from his thumb, Pulaha from his navel, and Pulastya from his ears, to whom he added Dharma from his right breast, Adharma from his back, Kama from his heart, Krodha from his brows, Kardama from his shadow, Vak (goddess of speech) from his mouth and Niritti (god of sins and chief of the rakshasas) from his anus. (Dharma, Adharma, Kama and Krodha are the gods of righteousness, unrighteousness, love and anger respectively).

“Once Brahma was reflecting over the Creation when the four Vedas issued out of his mouth followed by the sciences — logic, medicine, archery, the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*, and the science of duty and virtues. When he, likewise reflected over the poor productivity of the prajapatis, all of a sudden his body broke into two and became man

and woman. The male was Swayambhuva Manu, the first Sovereign of the earth, and the female Satarupa his queen. From this time humanity started multiplying through the act of copulation. This royal couple begot two sons — Priyavrata and Uttanapada — and three daughters — Akuti, Devahuti, and Prasuti — whose progeny filled the whole world.”

[3] A celestial day is equal to one terrestrial year. Therefore each cycle of four *yugas* is equal to  $12,000 \times 360 = 4,320,000$  earthly years. The *kalpa* works out to 4,320 million years, and the life of Brahma to  $4,320 \times 360 \times 100 = 15.552$  billion earthly years.

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## XIII

### *Boar Avatara*

Maitreya continues:

Manu was happy at the rapid increase of living beings, particularly through his daughters, but the problem of finding a home for them stared him in the face. He approached his father Brahma and suggested that the earth, which had gone to the bottom of the waters in the last *pralaya* might be re-floated for men and others to live in, which set Brahma thinking and wishing in his heart that the Lord might do something about it, when a boar as small as a man's thumb leaped out of one of his nostrils and rapidly grew to the size of an elephant, and then of a mountain, shaking the world with his roar. Plunging headlong into the sea, the boar tore its very depths, as it were, causing it to rumble like thunder and heave in mountainous waves. It was clear that the boar was none other than the Lord Himself Who had responded to Brahma's prayer. Reaching the bottom of the ocean, He soon rose carrying the vast sphere on His tusks. While He was still in the water, Hiranyaksha, the terrible daitya, attacked Him with his club, but the Lord quickly clawed and pierced him to death, which caused Brahma and the celestials, who were watching the fight, to sing hymns in His praise.

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## XIV

### *Origin of the Daityas*

Speaking of Hiranyaksha reminds Vidura to request Maitreya to relate the story of the rise of the Daitya race, which gave so much trouble to the gods, and of which Hiranyaksha was the first. The Rishi resumes his narrative:

“Once Kasyapa, the son of Marichi the prajapati, was performing his worship at sunset near the sacrificial fire and, as he finished pouring the last libation and sat to meditate, his wife Diti, Daksha’s daughter, approached him and expressed her love agony, saying: “O Sage, as a wild elephant torments a banana tree by crushing it under foot, so is the god of love now tormenting me, a frail woman, for the love of you. Bestow your grace on me as you have done on my twelve sisters, my co-wives, in giving them children; for, seeing their happiness, my heart burns. Be pleased, blessed Lord, to grant my wish and assuage my suffering.”

Kasyapa was moved by her piteous pleading and intense passion, and promised to satisfy her wish as a good wife, if she could wait for one hour till the unfavourable time for lovemaking had passed, adding:

“This is a terrible hour when Rudra, the Lord of the shades and *pischachas* (evil spirits), riding on His bull, moves about the skies accompanied by His retinue. He, Lord Shankara, your sister’s husband, watches with all His three eyes. There is none like Him, none higher than He in the whole universe. The wise who wish to break through the screen of *avidyasing* His faultless qualities. He, the goal of the righteous, adopted this *pischacha* appearance of His own free will to set an example to those who seek *Brahmajnana* (knowledge of Truth). The unfortunate people who adorn their bodies, which are food for dogs, with costly dresses, flower garlands and cosmetics, mistaking them to be their very self, seeing Him going about naked, covered all over with ash, a garland of skulls round His neck and hair heavily matted by the dust-clouds that rise from the cremation grounds, in their ignorance laugh at Him — the Supreme Shiva — not knowing His purpose to teach them indifference to the useless body. He spurns the wealth and powers which *Maya* offers and which we, pitiable beings,

expect as a reward for our religious observances and piety. He alone is the cause of the universe and *Maya* His slave, He, the absolute, perfect Being, Whose doings are inscrutable.”

Yet Diti was beside herself with passion: she seized Kasyapa’s garments like a vulgar woman and compelled him, as it were, to go to her, after which he bathed and sat to meditate on the self-effulgent Brahman. Diti felt remorseful and, fearing evil consequences from her sin, approached her husband with downcast eyes and appealed for forgiveness:

“Do not, O holy Sage, let Lord Rudra, the Ruler of the spirits, destroy the seed which you have just deposited in my womb because of my offence. I bow to the great Shiva of irresistible power, Who removes the afflictions of His devotees, Who is all bliss and compassion, though He becomes anger personified at the time of the universal *pralaya*. May He, the almighty Lord, the Spouse of my sister Sati, be gracious to us.”

Kasyapa, seeing Diti so badly shaken, praying for the safety of her newly-conceived offspring, answered with severity not untempered by compassion:

“Since your mind was full of lust at the wrong hour and you transgressed my command, two wicked sons will be born to you, who will make the three worlds quail by their cruelties — murder innocent beings, violate chaste women and insult exalted Rishis. Their evil deeds will so enrage the Supreme Being that He will come down in person to rid the world of them.”

Diti was satisfied and answered that she would rather have her sons die at the hands of the Lord than at the curse of an angered Brahmin (like him, her husband), which pleased Kasyapa, who replied:

“Since you are penitent and reasonable, and since you revere Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and me, your husband, one of the four sons of your younger son (Hiranyakasipu) will be a very great devotee of the Lord whose fame will fill the universe and whose virtue will be sung by even holy men,” a prospect which greatly pleased Diti.



## XV – XVI

Maitreya continues:

Anticipating great mischief to the gods from the birth of her sons, Diti managed to retain them in her womb for one-hundred years. Kasyapa's seeds were extremely powerful on account of the following incident which had taken place in *Vaikuntha*.

Brahma's first mind-born sons, the four Kumaras (p. 5) who were the oldest living beings, although they looked like five-year old boys, once found themselves at the gates of *Vaikuntha*, where Lord Vishnu and His attendants lived in a form which is made of pure *sattva*, which sees oneness everywhere. They passed six gates unchallenged, but when they arrived at the seventh and last gate, the gatekeepers, Jaya and Vijaya, two shining beings who looked of the same age, barred their way with their staffs, mistaking them for small children, which greatly pained the visiting Rishis. The latter drew the attention of the shining ones to their anomalous behaviour in perceiving inequality and suspicion in a sphere which is immune to them, and declared that since they did not fit in with the *sattvic* plane they should descend to the earth, where diversity which arises from the three vices — lust, anger and greed — prevails. Jaya and Vijaya, realising that the Sages had pronounced a terrible curse on them, which nothing, they knew, could contravene, immediately prostrated themselves before them, admitted their fault, and prayed that the curse might take immediate effect, so that they might quickly return purified to their office in *Vaikuntha*. They also prayed that their memory of the Lord might not be lost in their infatuation for the world to which they were to descend.

The Lord Who, in His omniscience, knew what had happened, suddenly appeared at the gate and apologised to the Brahmin sages for the treatment meted out to them by His servants. He asked them the favour to permit the culprits to return to His service after paying the penalty of their offence. The Sages, seeing the glory of the Lord, melted in love and adoration for Him and begged His forgiveness for having punished His servants so severely and prayed that the curse might be withdrawn or substituted by a milder punishment. But the Lord answered that they need not trouble about the curse, which was not theirs but His own, passed on by Him to their mind, and was a right punishment. The culprits, He said, would

be born in the asuric race but would remain firmly united with Him in thought, intensified by anger (or hatred), and would return to His service soon afterwards. Turning to Jaya and Vijaya, He said:

“Get out of this place, but do not fear; all will be well with you; I would have neutralised the curse of the Brahmins, were it not already pronounced on you by Ram (His Consort Lakshmi or Sree) when you stopped Her also on a previous occasion while I was immersed in *Yoganidra*. You will return to My presence as soon as you have purified yourselves from this sin.”

The splendour of the gatekeepers immediately faded, and, coming down to the earth, they entered the seeds of Kasyapa in Diti’s womb.

## XVII – XX

Maitreya continues:

At the end of one hundred years of confinement in virtuous Diti's womb the asura twins were at last born in Kasyapa's hermitage, causing evil omens to appear in every part of the world: mountains trembled, the sky caught fire, meteors fell on the earth in large numbers and caused great damage to living beings, violent storms uprooted trees and demolished houses and whole villages, cows yielded blood instead of milk, and human beings, badly shaken by these misfortunes, quailed in mortal fear.

Soon the two *daityas* (born from Diti) showed their mettle: in a little time their statures rose to the height of mountains; so did their pride and vanity. Kasyapa named them Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu. Armed with the boon which they had somehow obtained from Brahma, they started challenging anyone they met in the three spheres. Hiranyaksha, mace on shoulder, ascended to Indraloka and found it deserted: its denizens having hid themselves out of fear of him. He roared challenges to the absent Indra and his staff to come out and fight him, accusing them of tyranny and abuse of power, and other evils. As there was no response and no one to be seen anywhere, he grew tired, returned to the earth, and plunged into the sea to challenge its ruler Varuna. Here too all the sea creatures fled save Varuna himself, who stood his ground and bravely answered his taunts and jeers, saying:

“O Chief of the asuras, I have given up fighting, having grown too old for that. Besides, I have nothing now in my mind but the Supreme Vishnu, Who, I am sure, will take your challenge and give you satisfaction, you who have grown so skilful in fighting. You had better approach Him and you will in no time be rid of your pride, when you will lie dead on the battleground with dogs feeding on your flesh and licking off your wickedness.”

The daitya took Varuna's suggestion very seriously and decided to fight the Lord. Inquiring from Narada of His whereabouts, and learning that He was at the time in the bottom of the sea to raise the earth (p.42), he dived in the sea and addressed Him derisively thus:

“Oho! the boar has now turned amphibious — a miracle, hein! Come, come! leave that earth alone. It has been entrusted to our care and you

cannot meddle with it with impunity before my eyes. A God disguised as a boar, indeed; You grew accustomed to kill asuras by the deception of Your *Yogamaya*, Yourself remaining invisible. Now that You are visible I will dispose of You and wipe off the tears of my race.”

The divine Boar took no notice of the daitya’s threat, but carried the earth on His tusks and rose with it, followed by the enemy who continued to jeer at Him that He was cowardly running away from a challenge to fight and so on. Reaching the surface and firmly fixing the earth in its place, transferring to it some of His own energy to enable it to stand by its own strength, the Lord squarely faced the daitya and, with a highly-kindled temper, assumed a mock humility goading him to fight. The combat started in all seriousness and grew in fierceness until the demon, supported by his whole race, resorted to magical tricks, which the Lord defeated at every turn and finally dealt him such a blow that it knocked him down altogether. His eyes bulged out and his body spun round and round and fell with a mighty thud. The three worlds, relieved of their fear, rendered thanks to Mahavishnu and rejoiced.”

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## XXI – XXIII

### *Kardama*

Sri Suka continues:

Vidura wanted to know how the progeny of Swayambhuva Manu flourished on the newly introduced act of copulation, which had already produced three daughters and two boys to him.

Rishi Maitreya started with the story of Kardama, one of Brahma's sons (prajapatis) who had been commanded by their father to "go and beget children". Kardama who had sprung from Brahma's shadow, betook himself to the bank of the Saraswati and started worshipping Sri Hari for the blessing of a beautiful and good wife, "who will be like a cow to a householder and the source of all desired objects." After 10,000 years of penance the Lord appeared and told him that He had arranged everything to his heart's content, for which the Emperor (Manu) would on the third day come in person to give him his beautiful and accomplished daughter as a wife, that he would beget with her nine girls who would be the mothers of great Rishis.

"And," He added, "by obeying My command, surrendering to Me the fruit of your action, and showing compassion to all living beings, you will ultimately attain Self-realisation, identifying yourself completely with Me: you will perceive Me in yourself and yourself and the universe in Me. I shall, besides, manifest a part of My being in Devahuti as a son, who will reveal the ultimate Truth to her by the method which will be known as the Sankhya."

Maitreya continues:

As foretold by the Lord, Swayambhuva Manu mounted his gilded chariot with his queen, daughter and retinue, and journeyed from place to place till they reached Kardama's hermitage, where they found him occupied in his worship, pouring oblations over the sacred fire. Although dressed in rags and unwashed, the Sage shone like an unpolished gem. He rose and courteously received the royal party, bowed before the King and praised him for his virtues. The King reciprocated the praises and at the right moment broached the subject of marriage.

“Be gracious, O Sage,” he said, “to listen to my humble prayer. I am concerned about my daughter’s happiness. She, the sister of the princes Priyavrata and Uttanapada, has been looking for a husband worthy of her in age, character and virtues, and hearing from Narada of your noble self, your learning, handsome features, youth<sup>[4]</sup> and virtuous nature, she set her heart on you. I respectfully offer her to you as wife, O chief of the Brahmins, convinced as I am of her ability to be your help-mate in maintaining a household.”

The Sage replied:

“I certainly accept your offer, O great Monarch, and will feel honoured to marry your noble daughter, whose artless splendour makes her outshine the very ornaments she wears. She will be my wife on one condition, namely, that I remain with her till she bears me a son, who will be a ray of the Supreme Vishnu, after which I will devote my whole time to the practice of yoga in seclusion, as taught to me by the Lord in person.”

The royal parents agreed, and gave away the Princess to the Sage. Then they embraced her affectionately, bade the couple farewell and departed, leaving behind valuable presents, jewellery, clothes and household utensils.

Barhismati, Manu’s capital, enjoyed considerable wealth and prosperity. It derived its name from the hair which Sri Vishnu, as the Divine Boar, had dropped in this place after coming out of the ocean and shaking His body and which turned into the evergreen *kusa* grass, also called Barhi, used in the sacrifice.

Devahuti proved to be the best of wives: she did not only attend to the comforts of her saintly husband, but also evinced purity of mind and sweet dispositions and performed religious observances for a long time until she grew very weak and emaciated. Kardama did not fail to notice the deterioration in her health and appearance, so that he could no longer keep silent about it. One day he stopped her and said:

“I am pleased with your supreme wifely devotion, O daughter of Manu. You have wasted your body in ascetic patience without a murmur. I will now open your spiritual eye so that you may see for yourself the power which I wield and the blessings which I have earned by my long penance and which I will now share with you for

your selfless service to my person. I place at your disposal unbounded enjoyments which are not accessible to ordinary mortals.”

Devahuti’s drooping spirits rose when she saw her husband’s yogic powers and gave her courage to speak to him on a subject which had until then been her dearest secret. For the first time she opened her mouth and said:

“I know now, my lord, your unfailing powers, but I pray that you may, O great One, remember your promise to my father to permit me the touch of your body; for it is the prerogative of a virtuous wife to beget children to her lord. Now command me to make the necessary preparations.”

Appreciating the justice of her plea, Kardama set his yogic power in motion and produced from his mind an aerial palace with parks, bathing pools, furniture, extensive grounds, men and maid servants and every imaginable luxury on the most lavish scale, which soon restored to Devahuti her original beauty and happy spirits. She shone in her new dresses and jewels with an unprecedented lustre, yet like her husband she did not lose her mental balance, spiritual merits and self-control. In their many storeyed flying mansion the couple scoured the skies of the world and saw the wonders of many lands for a long time and finally returned home to consummate the marriage, for which the Princess’s heart longed. To fill her with conjugal delight, Kardama multiplied himself to nine and begot with her one daughter from each, perfect in every respect — figure, complexion, features and fragrance which was like that of the red lotus. This marital bliss lasted a hundred years, which appeared to them like a hundred days.

The time for Kardama to retire to seclusion had now drawn nigh and Devahuti, who still yearned for a son, guessed what was in his mind. One day she approached him with bent head and suspended tears, scratching the ground with her toe (a sign of bashfulness) and, with a tremulous voice, said:

“My lord husband has redeemed all his pledges to me, but has not provided for my protection in the event of his retiring to the forest. Our daughters will find suitable matches and will go, leaving me alone and disconsolate. I have lost myself enough in sense enjoyment, neglecting the Supreme *Atman*. All I ask is that the love which I bear for you should rid me of all fear; for the love conceived for the wicked through

ignorance leads to *Samsara* (transmigration), but that conceived for the wise leads to Emancipation. He whose activities are not devoted to religious practices, or to the service of the Lord, is as good as dead; and, wretched that I am, I allowed myself to be deceived by the Lord's *maya* and did not seek Liberation from the world bondage, although I had you, the bestower of the bliss of final Liberation.”

[4] Youth! Ten thousand years did not seem to mean much in those days. Perhaps because those were the days before the number zero was known. 10,000 could have been equal to 100 or even 20 years.

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## XXIV – XXV

### *Kapila Avatara*

Hearing this, the sage Kardama, recalled to mind the promise of the Lord and affectionately answered:

“Fear not for yourself, O irreproachable Princess, the eternal Lord will soon enter your womb as your son, who will cut the knot of ignorance and attachment from your heart by the instructions which He will give you on the immortal Self. You have already done much austerity, God bless you: continue your sense-control, charitable disposition and devotion to the Lord, and all will be well with you.”

As advised by her lord, Devahuti took to the worship of the Supreme *Atman* for a long time, when the Lord entered her through Kardama’s seed and manifested Himself on earth as their son. At the moment of His birth the gods rained flowers and the minds of men were freed from their usual agitation. Brahma, Narada, the four Kumaras and the nine prajapatis came to the hermitage to see the newborn Lord and congratulate His parents. Brahma explained to them the mission of the Lord, Whose fame would spread throughout the world as Kapila, the founder of the Sankhya philosophy, and advised them to give their daughters in marriage to the nine prajapatis present. Then he, Narada, and the Kumaras withdrew, leaving behind the prajapatis as Kardama’s prospective sons-in-law. Taking the consent of the girls, Kardama performed the marriage ceremony according to the precepts of the Scriptures and married Kala to Marichi, Anasuya to Atri, Shraddha to Angira, Havirbhu to Pulastya, Gati to Pulaha, Kriya to Kratu, Khyati to Bhrigu, Arundhati to Vasishtha, and Shanti to Atharva, after which the Rishis left the hermitage with their brides for their respective places, their hearts brimming with joy.

Remaining alone, Kardama approached his divine Son and, bowing to Him, said:

“You have, O Lord, taken birth in my house in fulfilment of Your promise to impart the Sankhya knowledge to the world. Though formless by nature, You have assumed a human form for this purpose, but Your transcendental form alone shows You best. I take refuge in

You, Who project the world as phenomena out of Yourself and re-absorb it through Your eternal energy which is the all-witnessing Consciousness. Having fulfilled my father's (Brahma's) command and begot children, and having gained all my heart's desires by Your Grace, it is time for me to withdraw from the world to surrender my mind completely to the contemplation of You, my Lord."

The infant Kapila answered:

"It is undoubtedly true that I have come to you in fulfilment of my pledge to expound the true nature of the phenomena (categories) to those who seek release from their bodies' encumbrances: for the mysterious path of Self-knowledge has fallen into disuse by long neglect. As for yourself, you may go wherever you like to pursue your worship of Me till you realise Me as the supreme, effulgent Self which dwells in all hearts, when you will attain final Beatitude. My mother I shall also free from the bondage of action and the fear of transmigration by My spiritual instructions."

Kardama immediately left the hermitage as well as the sacrificial fire, and started roaming about with mind fixed on the infinite Brahman Who is beyond causality and *gunas*. Giving up the sense of distinctions, he turned his gaze inwardly and attained a perfect mental poise, which resembled a waveless ocean, wherein he realised the identity of the Lord with his own Self as well as with the Self of all beings. Thus by devotion to the Lord Kardama attained union with Him.

Kapila continued to live in the hermitage to please his mother. One day his mother sat by his side and spoke her mind thus:

"My constant effort to gratify my senses, O perfect One, has caused me to fall into this abysmal *samsara*. I am now determined that this will be my last birth. Your Grace will help me to pierce through this impenetrable darkness by dislodging from my heart the entrenched sense of 'I' and 'mine.' I take refuge in you who alone know the real nature of Spirit and Matter, the Self and the not-Self, and the secrets of true religion."

Lord Kapila answered:

*"Yoga, that is, contemplation of the Supreme Self, is the only means to absolute Liberation. I shall now explain to you this Yoga, which is*

perfect in every part and which in olden days I taught to the Rishis. Bondage and Liberation are the creation of the mind. Attachment to the sense objects leads to bondage, and renunciation of them to Liberation. *Purged of lust, greed, envy, etc., which are rooted in the sense of 'I' and 'mine', the mind becomes pure and develops indifference and steadiness.* By adding knowledge and devotion to renunciation, the Purusha will be able to perceive Himself as He really is, as the pure *Atman* distinct from prakriti, not subject to division or change, self-luminous and subtle.

“To seekers of Self-realisation, no path is easier and happier than devotion to the Lord, Who is the soul of the universe. Attachment to objects is an inveterate fetter, but attachment to saints opens the door to Liberation; for saints possess compassion and goodwill towards all beings and occupy their minds in the contemplation of Me, and can therefore induce in others alike dispassion and mind-control, which will end by destroying the darkness of *avidya in this very body.*”

Devahuti prayed to be instructed in that form of devotion which would suit her condition and which would quickly unite her with His Being in Liberation.

Kapila answered:

“Motiveless devotion is superior even to Beatitude, in that it speedily dissolves the subtle body (footnote p. 7) as the gastric fire dissolves the food consumed. There are those who do action only for My sake and in My service, not even for union with My Being. They are fascinated by My divine form with the beauty of its countenance, complexion, smiles, etc., and which speaks to them, for which they renounce even *Satyaloka* (the world of Brahma, which is the highest except Vaikuntha).

“Yet, although they do not seek it, their devotion entitles them to a place in My own splendid sphere (*Vaikuntha*, which consists of pure *sattva*), where I be to them son, friend, *guru*, chosen deity and all that is near and dear. They cross forever the ocean of birth and death. Perceiving Me everywhere, they renounce this world and the next, nay, even their individual self.”

## XXVI

Kapila continued:

“I shall now describe to you, O Mother, the different categories of the manifestation, by knowing which you will free yourself forever from the bondage of *prakriti* (matter or *gunas*). I shall also explain the essential nature of that knowledge which leads to Self-realisation, wherein lies the final Beatitude.

“The *Purusha* is the *Atman* Who is eternal, free from all attributes, distinct from and transcends *prakriti*, Who dwells in the hearts of all beings and is self-luminous and because of Whom the universe, which He pervades, is tendered perceptible. By His *leela* He accepted the superimposition upon Himself of the subtle, divine *prakriti*, which creates illusory forms and obscures knowledge and forgot Himself. Thus when the *gunas* are active the *Purusha* identifies Himself with them and attributes to Himself their action. He becomes the doer with the sense of doership, which henceforth binds Him to action and its consequences — karma and transmigration — although actually He is the mere witness of the action, ever free, unborn and changeless. The *gunas* are, therefore, responsible for the identification of the soul with the body, the senses and the mind.”

Devahuti wanted to know the distinguishing characteristics respectively of *Purusha* and *prakriti*, which are the cause as well as the subtle and gross forms of the universe. Kapila explained that *Pradhana* (radical matter) is *prakriti*, which consists of the three *gunas* and which, though un-manifest and eternal, is the cause of the twenty-four categories, namely, the five-gross elements — earth, water, fire, air and ether; the five senses — smell, taste, etc.; the five sensory organs — eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin; the five organs of action — hands, legs, vocal organ, genitals and anus; also *chitta* (reason, same as mahat mentioned before p. 34), *ahankara* (ego), *buddhi* (understanding, missing from the enumeration given by Rishi Maitreya, p. 34) and *manas* (thoughts and reflections). The last four are held to be internal principles, making twenty-four principles[5] in all. *Kala* (Time) is the twenty-fifth principle which moves the *gunas* from their state of equilibrium (their un-manifest states). *Kala* is spoken of as the destructive power of the *Purusha* which causes fear to the *jiva* that has fallen victim to the illusion of doership. But in effect it is the

Lord Himself Who stirs *prakriti* to action so that He may live within all things as consciousness (and energy) and appear as *Kala* outside them.

Having established the twenty-five categories as the basis of his Sankhya system, Kapila proceeds to give details of the unfoldment of the universe from them. The first manifestation is *chitta* or *mahat* from which *ahankara* (ego) is evolved, and from the latter all the rest spring up.

## XXVII

Lord Kapila now turns to the means of attaining liberation.

“Just as the sun is unaffected by the movement, colour, quantity, warmth, etc., of the water in which it is reflected, *so is the Atman unaffected by the experience of the body in which He resides. Yet when He gets deluded by the actions of the gunas and mistakes them for his own, He loses the knowledge of Himself as well as the peace which is inherent in that knowledge. Instead He imagines in Himself the evil which is inseparable from action. Thence starts karma (destiny) for Him, which pushes Him into all sorts of wombs in the long process of transmigration.* Just as a dreamer continues to suffer dream sorrow so long as he remains in the dream, *the Purusha continues to suffer birth and death so long as He attributes to Himself the actions of the gunas, which appear as the objects of sense.* Self-control, non-violence (*ahimsa*), reverence for those who have realised the *Purusha* as distinct from *prakriti*, devotion to Me, study of My Nature, even-mindedness, friendliness towards all beings, contentment, contemplative habits, seclusion, and mental composure are the means of breaking the self-identification with the actions of the *gunas*, transcending the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. *Gunas* transcended, the *Purusha* will perceive Himself as He really is by nature as clearly as seeing the sun with one’s eyes. This is Liberation or direct experience of Brahman, the substratum of *prakriti*.”

Devahuti remarked:

“*Purusha* and *prakriti*, O Lord, are said to be interdependent, [6] inseparable, like water and its taste, milk and its colour. How can there be freedom for the *Purusha*, as *Jiva*, for whom bondage has already taken place? Even if this bondage is surmounted by investigation into the categories, it may return again by the actions of the *gunas*.”

Kapila answered:

“*Prakriti* will not return if persistently assailed by the above-mentioned method, O Mother, but gradually disappears like the matchstick that kindles the sacred fire and gets itself consumed by its own flame. Although it is the source of all trouble, it ceases to harm

the *jiva* who has attained absolute freedom, like the dream suffering which ceases to afflict the dreamer the moment he wakes.

*“He who takes to the contemplation of the Self for many lives loses the taste of even Brahmaloaka and attains the supremely blissful Realisation called Final Beatitude in this very life. If he also renounces the siddhis (supernormal powers) acquired in the course of his practice, this perfect yogi will not fail to attain My immortal State, over which death has no power.”*

## XXVIII

Kapila, who has so far dealt with the path of knowledge or the *nirguna* (formless) method of attaining Liberation, now turns to expound the *Saguna* (with *gunas* or form) method, which enjoins the practice of virtues (usually called *yama* and *niyama*) with the object of diverting the mind from its old evil habits to the renunciation of everything other than the form of the Lord, on which it has to be focused. The virtues are: doing one's duties to the best of one's ability, refraining from prohibited acts, contentment, service of saints, abandonment of all external religious practices, living in seclusion in places which are free from danger, non-violence in deed, thought and word, non-thieving, continence, purity of body and mind, charity, moderation in eating, control of breath and body, study of the Scripture and contemplation of the form of Lord Vishnu. Breathing exercise is recommended to steady and prepare the mind for meditation. As the gold sheds its dross when heated, so does the mind shed its impurity by the fire of breathing. Having attained the requisite calm, the yogi should fix his mental eye on the splendour of the Lord's countenance and figure, visualising every part of them; eyes, ear, nose, hands, legs, garments, decorations, etc., in meticulous detail. In course of time this will wear away the mind and will dissolve it into Brahman, one's immortal Self.

Kapila concludes:

“The yogi who has firmly established himself in his own pure Being now realises that the *actions and experiences which he has so far attributed to himself have been so perceived through avidya born of illusion. Although his body continues to live and enjoy the senses, it henceforth moves and acts as directed by Providence until the store of retribution (karma) which has caused it comes to an end;* but the yogi himself heeds it as little as the drunken man heeds his loin-wrap whether it is on or off him; for he no longer sees it as himself to be attentive to it. *The subject now stands completely apart from the object (the body) and perceives himself in all beings, all souls.* Just as fire is the same everywhere but assumes different shapes in different pieces of wood, so is the subject one only, although he appears to be in multitudes of bodies.”



## XXIX

Devahuti asks about the Yoga of Devotion (*Bhakti-yoga*), which is said to be the object of all spiritual investigations, and about the nature of Time (*Kala*) who rules everything from Brahma downward and concludes with a hymn:

“You have come down, O Lord, to spread the light of yoga everywhere like a spiritual sun and awaken those who, having been blinded by the unreal objects of sense and by attachment to action, lie asleep in abysmal darkness.”

Kapila replies:

“The Yoga of Devotion, O mother, is manifold, differing according to the natural propensities of the devotees. He who takes Me as separate from himself and worships Me with a mind which is full of anger, violence, jealousy and hypocrisy, his is *tamasic* devotion (the lowest). He who worships Me through an image different from, and external to himself, with the motive of gaining worldly power, fame, offspring or a desired object, his devotion is *rajasic*. The devotee who worships Me in expiation of his sins or who, as a duty, surrenders all his actions to Me as distinguished from himself, his devotion is *sattvic*. But the devotion of him who is motiveless and whose love towards Me, the Dweller in all hearts is like the uninterrupted flow of the sacred Ganga towards the ocean: it is the highest yoga called the unqualified *Bhakti yoga*, which transcends the *gunas* and for which he forgoes the five forms of bliss offered by Me as a reward for his devotion, namely, 1. *Salokya* (dwelling in My own abode), 2. *Sarshiti* (*siddhis*), 3. *Samipyā* (residing ever in My presence in a form), 4. *Sarupyā* (assuming a form like Mine), and 5. *Sayujya* (absorption into My Being). This devotee attains My very State.

“Attending spiritual discourses, chanting holy names, and residence with saints purify the mind and develop devotion to Me without great effort. Just as a perfume is carried by the wind to the organ of smell, so is devotion to Me carried through these means to the mind that has acquired steadiness by the practice of yoga. *The worship of Me, the inner Ruler of all beings, through an idol is disrespectful and a mock worship. He who ignores My Supreme Nature and stupidly represents Me by an idol is like him who pours oblations over ashes (rather than over the sacred fire).*

“Again he who is full of anger hates Me in the body of another, imagining him to be different from himself and bears malice to living beings. This man can never find peace, and I am never pleased with him even if he worships My image with the costliest materials, O sinless Mother, I frighten with the terror of death him who makes distinctions between himself and others, because I am their very Self. Of the inanimate creatures, the animate are higher. Higher than the latter are those who have perceptions. Superior to these are human beings, of whom those who belong to the four castes are better; and of the four the Brahmin caste is the best. The knowers of the Veda are superior to the Brahmins, and superior to them is he who performs his duty well. Superior to him is the man who works with detachment. Higher than the latter is he who dedicates his actions, their fruits and even his body to Me, seeing no distinction between himself and Myself. And I find him peerless and above all others who views all beings as himself. Respecting all as the dwelling places of the Lord, nay, as the Lord Himself, one should be humble in dealing with them even mentally.

“These are the various yogas, O Princess, following which one attains the Supreme Self, which is the absolute Brahman of the Vedanta and Supreme Purusha of the Sankhya. It is also Providence, Who dispenses karmas to the Jivas, as well as Time, who causes unceasing changes in things and phenomena and terror to those who identify themselves with the products of the gunas. Himself unborn, Time causes a beginning to the universe, and Himself endless He ends the universe, after having maintained it by making one individual spring up from another, etc.”

[5] It is obvious that the distinction in these twenty-four categories is one of function, and not of substance, which is the same for all, and functions are evidently the properties of the substance – the *Purusha*. The *Bhagavata* again and again equates them with the *gunas* or *Maya*, a fact which is of the utmost importance to remember by non-monists, who ignore the unreality of the world. The categories have no existence apart from consciousness – *Purusha* which projects them in the state called “waking” and which withdraws them *ad libidum*, say, in sleep or in the *pralayas*, etc.

[6] Devahuti’s doubt resembles that of Uddhava and is common to those who have no clear idea of the nature of *prakriti*, which they often identify with *Shakti*. *Prakriti* is not eternal like *Purusha*, because it is *jada*, insentient, unintelligent and merely the property of *Purusha*. It is said to be eternal only in the sense of its dependence on *Purusha*, whether un-manifest (*pradhana*), or manifest

(*gunas*) like the qualities of a person which do not exist apart from him, so that the claim of interdependence between *Purusha* and *prakriti* is absurd.

As for the relation of *Prakriti* to *Shakti*, which is *Purusha* itself in active creation, it may be illustrated by the relation of a mighty tree to the life-energy which keeps it as a living organism after having caused its growth from a tiny living seed. *Prakriti* consists of all the perceptible characteristics of the tree: height, thickness, shapes and colours of its branches, leaves and roots, their smells and tastes, etc. All these change and finally perish; whereas *Shakti*, its life-energy principle, is indestructible, as its very name, life or existence, denotes. In the animal and man the intelligence of this life-energy becomes patently obvious. This is the *jiva* which the *Bhagavata* like the Upanishads, identifies with Brahman. At the other end it is the absolute indestructible atomic energy which forms the substance of the “inanimate” physical universe. See also the answer of Sri Krishna to Uddhava (p. 398).

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## XXX – XXXII

### *Woman is Maya Personified*

Lord Kapila continues:

“Being incessantly subjected to birth and death, man (*jiva*) remains blind to the blighting power of Time on everything he takes great pains to amass. Like the clouds which are unaware of the winds that drive them hither and thither, he stupidly entertains a belief in the permanence of all his acquisitions — property, position, family — and is struck down by grief and amazement when he loses them. In his anxiety to retain his possessions and *nurture the very people who are the cause of his damnation*, the foolish lout does not hesitate to commit any evil deed, even violence (against others).”

Kapila now describes the futile endeavours of the people who are attached to their bodies and their conditions after death. He also draws a lucid picture of the whole process of gestation from the moment the body is conceived in the woman’s womb to the moment of its birth, and warns the devotee to keep away from men who are fond of women’s company which kills all purity, truthfulness, benevolence, control of speech and mind, etc. Of all objects, he declares women to be the most desired, and infatuation for them the most complete, from which none is exempt but the strongest of beings. For even Brahma once fell victim to his daughter’s charm and pursued her in the form of a stag while she was in that of a hind.

“He who aspires to attain perfection in yoga”, Kapila counsels, “as well as he who has realised the Self *must not consort with young women who are sure to lead him to perdition*, for women are *Maya* personified, as dangerous as an open pit whose mouth is covered by grass. Likewise, a woman (devotee) should know that her present female body is the result of her attachment to women in previous lives and that the husband who gives her children, wealth and comforts is only *MyMaya* and, thus, harmful to her.”

Kapila winds up by decrying *the poor results of religious rites which are performed for worldly advantages by the deluded householder and which he calls the “dark path,” as against the glorious path of*

*Renunciation which leads to the bliss of the Lord Himself.* Summing up, he said:

“*The Lord is naught but Absolute Consciousness, Transcendent Brahman, Supreme Purusha, which is attributeless,* though to the outgoing senses He appears as objects possessing qualities such as sound, size, colour, etc. Renunciation of the qualities is the aim of all yoga, so that He may be perceived as He is in Himself, the yogi’s own Self.

“I have revealed to you, O revered Mother, the absolute truth about *Purusha* and *prakriti* and the way to realise it. The path of *Jnana* and the path of *Bhakti* which is free from the *gunas*, lead to the same Goal, known by the name *Bhagavan* (God). Just as the one and the same object is perceived differently as smell, as taste, as shape, as sound, so is the Lord realised in different ways: through service, penance, study of the Scriptures; through mind and sense control; through renunciation of action; through yoga, devotion and, finally, through *Jnana*.

“This teaching, O Mother, must not be imparted to a wicked person, nor to him who lacks modesty, nor to the arrogant, the immoral and, by no means, to the hypocrite. It should not also be taught to him who is attached to sensuous pleasure or whose mind is rooted in domestic life, nor to the one who is not My devotee. It may be certainly imparted to him who is full of reverence, devotion and meekness, who is sincere, friendly to all, or who has developed dispassion, serenity of mind, freedom from jealousy and, above all, to the one who is pure within and without and holds Me dearest of all. By listening to this My discourse one will end by attaining My State.”

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## XXXIII

### *Devahuti Attains Enlightenment*

When Kapila finished His discourse, Devahuti bowed low to Him and said that it was strange that He in Whose belly the whole universe disappears at the time of *pralaya* should be borne by a belly like hers. She realised Him, she said, to be none other than Lord Vishnu Himself come down to the earth to exterminate the sinful and spread the teaching of the Sankhya, whereby devotees might learn the way to Self-realisation. He was the Supreme Reality, the recitation of Whose Name would exalt even a pariah, who eats dogs' flesh, to the state of a Brahmin, who performs the most sacred and most meritorious *Somaworship*.

Kapila, pleased, asked her to go and follow the doctrine he had taught her and she would soon attain Supreme Beatitude. Bidding her farewell, He departed, leaving her to practise her sadhana in solitude.

Devahuti soon developed indifference to the luxury of the palace, which Kardama had created by his *yogamaya* for her enjoyment, and fixed her mind on the form of the Lord, as had been described by her son. Gradually she turned to the contemplation of her own Self as all pervading and free from the superimpositions of *prakriti*. Having established herself in perpetual *samadhi*, she attained final Beatitude in the spot known in the three worlds as *Siddhapada*, where her body, purified by yoga, turned into a river, which became a sacred resort for (disembodied) *siddhas*.

As for Kapila himself, he took a north-east direction and established his *Ashrama* in a place, where even now he practises meditation for the benefit of the whole creation.

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# BOOK FOUR

MAITREYA'S INSTRUCTIONS TO VIDURA (Contd.)

## I – VII

### *Sati*

Rishi Maitreya now traces minutely the line of Swayambhuva Manu — children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren for a great many generations. He starts with the names of Devahuti's grandchildren from her nine daughters (p. 54), of whom many are famous: Kasyapa (p. 42) from Kala; Dattatreya and Durvasa, who were rays of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva respectively, from Anasuya; Brihaspati, the guru of the celestials, from Shraddha; Agastya from Havirbhu; and so on. The number of the sons and grandsons of these daughters rose to hundreds of thousands. [7]

Akuti, Devahuti's sister, married Ruchi and gave birth to Yajna, the lord of sacrifice, and a daughter called Dakshina. The two became husband and wife and begot twelve sons who held the offices of presiding deities over various forces of nature in the *manvantara* of Swayambhuva Manu.

The last daughter of Manu, Prasuti, married Daksha the prajapati, and bore him sixteen daughters, of whom thirteen were given to Dharma (yajna) and one Sati, married Lord Shiva out of intense devotion. Once in a big sacrifice performed by the prajapatis, Daksha was highly honoured when the congregation rose to a man to receive him as he entered, but was ignored by Shiva Who remained seated, which incensed Daksha to such a degree that in his sacrificial speech he abused Him as shameless, envious, jealous, lacking gratitude for the accomplished wife he had gifted to Him, like the ingratitude, he said, of the Sudra towards the teacher who has initiated him in the Sacred Word. He finally stood up, sipped a little water and, notwithstanding the warning of others, uttered a curse which deprived his Son-in-law of His share of this and all future sacrifices, which was considered a great insult to Shiva indeed. Although He heard every word of this, Shiva remained composed and decorous. But Nandishwara, His chief devotee, unable to contain himself, got up, in his turn, sipped water, and pronounced a counter-curse on Daksha that he would remain chained to the path of karma (ritual), performing sacrifices in complete ignorance of their import with his memory of the Supreme Self, which is Shiva Himself, completely blotted out; that, further, he would, like a brute, be extremely attached to the female sex and his head would turn into that of a goat. Nandishwara, likewise, cursed the Brahmins, who approved of Daksha's



disgraceful conduct, to remain in the bondage of transmigration, bereft of intelligence and ever devoted to learning, whereby they earn their livelihood as wandering beggars, delighting in the accumulation of wealth and the gratification of the senses.

Thereupon the Sage Bhrigu rose to his feet in great indignation and cursed Shiva's followers that since one of them had condemned to ignominy all the Brahmins, who were the custodians of the Vedas and *Varnas*, they would become heretics, take to impure habits, wear matted locks, ashes and bones, drink intoxicants and continue to worship the Lord of the ghosts (Siva) as their Deity.

Hearing this, Shiva rose and left the assembly hall without a word, followed by His retinue. This started a long drawn-out enmity between Daksha and his divine Son-in-law.

Daksha was then appointed as the chief of the prajapatis, which gave him cause to puff up still more with pride and hate Shiva. True to Nandi's curse, he conceived a passion for ritual and sacrifices, mistaking them for the highest religious virtues and piety. He performed the *Vajapeya* and started the great *Brihaspati-Seva* (service of the guru) sacrifice, which usually follows it, to which he invited all the Rishis, gods, the *pitris* (the manes) and their wives and on the appointed day received them with great pomp, but he did not invite Shiva and His wife. Sati heard of it and, seeing the beautiful Gandharva women dressed in festive costumes, bejewelled, and rushing from all directions in their aerial cars accompanied by their lords, grew enraged at her father's outrageous neglect of her husband and herself and determined to attend the celebration, albeit uninvited. She implored her Lord to permit her to visit her mother, sisters and cousins, using all her art to persuade Him to accompany her, but Shiva remained unmoved, and warned her that if she went, no good would come out of it, although He well knew whether staying or going her death was inevitable. Having set her whole heart on the visit, Sati could not be dissuaded: she wept bitterly and finally went without Him, accompanied by her personal attendants and all the insignia of royalty. On arrival she found herself ignored. Afraid of Daksha, none of the guests dared to welcome her, except her mother and sisters, who embraced her and offered her a seat. Keenly feeling her discomfiture and, seeing that her Husband's share of the *yajna* had not been reserved for him, she refused the seat and loudly

rebuked her father and his Brahmins of misdemeanour and blind ignorance in attaching more importance to the insentient body than to the soul, which is Shiva Himself, the one Friend and Life of the universe, Whose feet are worshipped by the Devotees whose sole aim in life is to drink the blissful wine of the pure Brahman. Determined to give up the body which had been begotten by Daksha, she dressed herself in yellow silk, made *eachamana* (the rite which precedes meditation or prayer), sipped water, and sat in a yogic posture, facing north. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the air and fire elements in her body and on the blissful feet of her Lord. Suddenly her body caught fire, which, in a trice, reduced it to ashes. Great was the uproar among the assembled people at the sudden death of this divine queen, and great was the consternation and sorrow of Daksha himself, who now belatedly realised the folly of keeping a lasting enmity and behaving without considered thinking.

As Lord Shiva heard from Narada of Sati's death, He rose in a raging fury, pulled out one of His matted locks, and dashed it to the ground, instantly turning it into a human colossus, Virabhadra by name, reaching heaven in height, black like a thick cloud, with eyes flaming like the burning sun, teeth fierce, hair fiery red, and wearing a garland of human skulls, and in his thousand arms, he carried raised weapons as if about to strike. Commanded by his Lord to proceed with his whole army of warriors to Daksha's sacrifice, and crush it, Virabhadra with his monstrous hosts descended like a dust-storm on it, polluted and destroyed it, maimed many of its priests, routed the guests, and severed Daksha's head. Sorely aggrieved, the defeated party repaired to Brahma and complained of the great havoc wrought on them by Shiva's followers. Brahma turned round on them and reproached them for their own sinful conduct, which had time and again given the Lord of yogis great provocations. He advised them to repent sincerely and go to Mount Kailas, where Shiva dwells ever rapt in *yogasamadhi*, and beg His forgiveness. To help them win His Grace he went with them. Addressing the great Host, who rose to welcome him affectionately, Brahma spoke with great humility:

“You are the Ruler of the universe, the undifferentiated, absolute Brahman, who comprises both Shakti, the Divine Energy, and Shiva, the Spirit (*Purusha*); both the seed and support of the creation. It is You who established the institution of sacrifice and ritualistic worship to reward virtue and punish evil. Let not Your anger kill those who

offer sacrifices though they may be of a malignant nature, their hearts full of jealousy and their tongues utter unmerited abuses. Their kind are bewildered by the almighty *Maya* of Lord Vishnu which makes them perceive diversity. Omniscient that You are, Your judgement cannot be clouded by this *Maya*. Therefore, O Lord, be pleased to show Your Grace to Daksha and his guests by restoring them to life and reviving his sacrifice.”

The Lord of Destruction smilingly answered that He metes out just retributions, according to people’s deserts to teach them the way to righteousness, and commanded that Daksha be revived but with a goat’s head (p. 74), that the limbs of those who had been maimed be restored to health and the *yajna* restarted, now that His share of it had been secured.

Daksha, revived, joined his palms in obeisance, penitently demanded forgiveness, sang Shiva’s praise with true feeling, and started again the *yajna*. Sati, his daughter, was born to Mena, the wife of Himavat and again sought and obtained the love of Rudra, with Whom she enjoyed a happy marital life for one hundred years without bearing Him children.

[7] Their fertility was designed to be extremely prolific for the specific purpose of populating the earth.

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## VIII – XII

### Dhruva

Having disposed of the story of the three daughters of Manu, Rishi Maitreya turns to that of their second brother Uttanapada, who had two very young wives: Suniti the elder and Suruchi the younger, of whom he was very fond, which did not fail to excite an excessive pride in her. When one day Dhruva, the former's five-year-old son, was climbing to his father's knees, as Suruchi's son was doing, this lady rebuked him and said that although he was the eldest son of the King he could not aspire to the throne unless he took birth from her own womb, for which she advised him to perform penance and seek the Lord's Grace. Uttanapada heard this and remained silent, but continued to fondle her son, ignoring Dhruva. Though a mere child, the latter took very much to heart this paternal conduct towards himself and his step-mother's taunt, and went straight to his mother and, with quivering lips, told her all that had happened. Broken-hearted, Suniti tried to console him by speaking of the justice which the Lord dispenses according to men's merits and, finally, advised him to act upon his step-mother's suggestion and take to austerities, trusting the Supreme Master to assuage his sorrow through unceasing devotion. Dhruva resolved to do so immediately and, leaving mother, playmates and home, he disappeared in the wilderness.

Seeing the plight of the child, Narada ran after him and advised him not to feel insults so acutely, but to surrender to the will of Providence Who had destined what had befallen him, also to endeavour himself to live righteously and compassionately towards his fellowmen. This, he said, is an infallible cure to all afflictions. Dhruva thanked Narada for his good advice, but said since he had inherited the Kshatriya martial spirit, he could not help feeling bruised by the taunt of his stepmother (supported by his father's silent acquiescence) and requested him to direct him how to attain the highest abode which no one had yet attained. Narada, much struck by the acuteness and lofty aspirations of the child, instructed him to worship Lord Vasudeva with one-pointed mind on the banks of the sacred river Kalindi by meditating on His blessed form, using the mantra and the prescribed ritual in which he initiated him, then and there.

Dhruva followed Narada's directions but greatly exceeded them in rigor: he fasted, lived on withered leaves and grass, went into long *samadhi*, sipped water once in nine days and breathed only once in a while. In the beginning of the fifth month he stopped even the movements of his body and stood on the big toe of only one foot with mind poised in Brahman. All the worlds began to rock by the force of his *tapas* and the earth tilted at the spot at which his toe pressed the ground. When he retained his breath in *samadhi*, the breath of all the worlds and of their guardian deities likewise stopped to near suffocation.

The Lord, longing to see this child prodigy, rode His royal Garuda and landed near him. Slowly opening his eyes and seeing the august Presence, Dhruva fell full length in prostration before Him, but when he rose and fixed his gaze on the adorable Countenance, he was struck mute and could not utter a word. The Lord lovingly touched him with His conch, which immediately opened the flood of feeling and speech in him.

“Hail to You, glorious, omnipotent Lord!” he cried, “Hail to You, Who have entered my inmost being and awakened my speech and senses! You are the refuge of the afflicted and the essence of bliss! Grant that I may ever enjoy the fellowship of the blessed who are pure in heart and devoted solely to Your sacred feet, so that I may cross the perilous ocean of transmigration and be ever drunk with the nectar of Your eternal Being. I ask no other boon but to be protected by You, my Lord, as the newborn calf is protected by its mother.”

The Lord answered:

“I know, My child, your heart's cherished desire and grant you the boon. But when your father will retire to the forest you will have to ascend the throne and govern righteously for 36,000 years. Your half-brother will perish in a hunting expedition and his mother will likewise die in a forest-fire while searching for him. After enjoying true blessings for this long period you will ascend to the highest sphere which no one has yet entered and from which there is no return to this perishable world.”

Dhruva was very reluctant to return to the capital, but had to obey the Divine command. His father, his two wives, the Brahmins, the ministers, and all the citizens came out with musicians and all the royal paraphernalia to a great distance from the city to receive him with great fanfare and

jubilant. The two little brothers were overwhelmed with love at seeing each other: they embraced again and again with floods of tears pouring from their eyes and from the eyes of their mothers. Dhruva shone in the palace like a god, whose spiritual glory could not escape anyone, and ascended his father's throne when after some time Uttanapada, mother and step-brother died as foretold by the Lord.

Dhruva married two wives, Ila and Brahmi and got by the former Utkala and a daughter, and by the latter two sons, of whom Vatsara was the elder. At the end of 36,000 years he retired to Vishala after making over the throne to Utkala and took to a strenuous *tapas*, till one day two messengers came down from heaven and carried him in their celestial car to the highest sphere promised by the Lord, where he perpetually shines as the famous star Dhruva (known to the astronomers as Polaris).

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## XIII – XIV

### *Vena*

Maitreya continues:

Dhruva's throne remained vacant for some time, for Utkala was not willing to occupy it. His mind, which had been purified in previous lives, completed its redemption in this one and remained immersed in the bliss of its own nature, feeling no inclination nor need to work. He pretended to be demented, deaf and dumb, so that nothing could be done with him. The royal household and ministers found themselves compelled to crown his half-brother Vatsara as ruler. Vatsara married and prospered. One of his descendants, the most virtuous King Anga, was issueless on account of a sin committed in a former birth. The Brahmins advised him to offer a special sacrifice to Vishnu for the boon of a son. When oblations were being made, all of a sudden a superhuman being, adorned with a gold necklace and bearing a golden cup, sprang up from the fire. The cup contained the blessing of fecundity which he offered to the King, who passed it on to his queen Sunita to eat its content. In course of time Sunita gave birth to a male child. This was the cruel Vena who took after his maternal grandfather Mrityu, the god of death, who had been begotten by *Adharma* (the spirit of unrighteousness) and had turned impious. Even as a child Vena used to shoot down innocent animals with his arrow and strangle his little playmates with his own hands. The people looked at him with horror as a future tyrant. It broke the paternal heart of the virtuous King to witness the criminal propensities of his only son, who could by no means be straightened, which made him (Anga) turn against the wretched life of the world and against all human attachment. He spent many sleepless nights in these thoughts to which he found no solution but doing away with throne, home and family. He rose at dead of night and left the country for a place which no one has to this day succeeded in finding, which constrained his family and ministers to crown Vena in his place, causing the people to mourn the event as a national calamity.

Vena ruled with an iron hand, rushed from one end of the country to the other, shaking heaven and earth as it were, demonstrating his arrogance and regal powers and forbidding all sacrifice and worship to any god other than himself, who, he claimed, embodied all the gods, not excluding the

Supreme Vishnu Himself. All persuasion failed to moderate his temper, which went on increasing in violence and hostility to the Brahmins, whom he dubbed as foolish and ignorant, till the latter resolved to do away with him and his intolerable rule.

One day all the Brahmins assembled and worked themselves up to such a religious frenzy that they killed the tyrant by the sheer sound of the fearful “Hum” mantra, but they unwittingly released the anti-social forces which had been restrained by his stringent rule: dacoits and highwaymen came out in the open in number and harassed the people in all the parts of the country. Fearing a collapse in the law and order situation, the elders resolved to extract a child from the dead body of Vena (who died issueless), as none could govern but of royal blood. By churning a thigh of his, a dwarf, black like a crow, with red hair and bloodshot eyes, emerged and was called Nisada, who became the founder of the dwarf race known as Nisadas who now live on mountains and in forests. By giving birth to this subhuman creature, all Vena’s sins were expiated.

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## XV — XXIII

### *Prithu*

Maitreya continues:

The elders, however, did not give up, but tried again to extract a child from Vena's corpse, and succeeded in extracting a boy from one arm and called him Prithu and a girl from the other and called her Archis. They were most beautiful children, being rays of Sri Hari and His consort respectively. Prithu and Archis became husband and wife and together ruled like two halves of the same being. On the throne they shone like twin stars to whom even the gods paid homage and whom men worshipped as the Supreme Vishnu and Lakshmi, judging by the birthmarks on their bodies and the celestial ornaments and weapons they had brought with them at birth.

Prithu ruled with justice and dedication and performed many expensive *aswamedhas* which pleased the gods, the people and the Brahmins, so much so that the Supreme Narayana Himself with all His retinue graced the last sacrifice by His presence and taught the King the duties of sovereigns and the way to *Moksha*, which is the life-objective of every intelligent man. The Lord said:

*“The awakened man knows that the body is the product of desire and action begotten by ignorance and, therefore, he conceives no attachment for it and for all its appurtenances — family, property, name, fame, etc. He, likewise, knows that the Self is changeless and untainted by the illusion of the qualities, of which it is the source, the ground and the witness; that though the Self pervades the body it remains unaffected by its actions. He who knows this truth is well-established in Me, the Supreme Spirit and the final Beatitude.”*

Prithu was not only the ruler but also the teacher of his people, to whom from time to time he gave discourses on the rules of *dharma* and the way to contentment and happiness. His conduct expiated all the remaining sins of Vena, who was now transferred from the lowest regions to the highest heaven.

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## XXIV — XXXI

### *Prachinabarhi*

Maitreya continues:

Barishad, a great grandson of King Prithu, was well-versed in the ritualistic section of the Vedas and was addicted to the offering of sacrifices on such a lavish scale and in such number that the whole countryside became covered with the *kusa* blades he had used in them, which earned for him the nickname of Prachinabarhi — he who fills (the earth) with *kusa* grass, with the tips turned to the east. Sage Narada in his compassion for the innocent animals which were being so sacrificed, found it necessary to go to him to set him right. He admonished:

“What do you gain, O King, by the ritual you are performing? *True well-being consists in the cessation of sorrow and the attainment of happiness, which cannot result from sacrifices.* Behold the countless animals you have slaughtered mercilessly who will retain the memory of their suffering at your hands and will demand vengeance on you.

“The *jiva* enveloped by ignorance dwells in a body for a hundred years and thinks ‘I’ and ‘mine’, which gives him trivial pleasures but involves him in all sorts of activities which keep him attached to the modes of *prakriti* and toss him about from life to life in circumstances high and low, good and bad, to reap pleasure and pain like the hungry dog that goes from door to door receiving a cudgel here and a morsel of food there, as ordained by its destiny. He finds no rest from the known triple affliction whatever, for the short-lived relief he gains in one circumstance becomes the precursor of a suffering in the following one, like the load which is transferred from the head to the shoulder, and back again to the head without a lasting relief. As moving from one dream to another does not end the dream, *so action does not end action which is the cause of suffering: by knowledge of the Truth alone action ceases.*

“*Therefore, O Prachinabarhi, do not imagine that ritualistic worship can lead to the Real; for it has no relation whatever to it, which is absolute knowledge. Those who view the Vedas as ritualistic do not know the Vedas: stupid as they are they do not comprehend the meaning of consciousness which is their very essence Lord Janardana Himself.* You seem to feel very

elated for having performed so many sacrifices and covered the land with *kusa* blades and slaughtered such a vast number of innocent animals, though you knew neither the meaning of sacrifice nor the wisdom that underlies it. *That alone is true sacrifice which pleases Sri Hari, and that true wisdom which places faith in Him and knows His true Nature.*

“You resemble the deer, O King, which, losing itself in the act of copulation with its mate in a scented, sense-bewitching garden, forgets the wolves in front of it and the pursuing hunter behind it. You seek delight in a house full of women, lending your heart and ears to their charming voices and the babbles of their children, forgetting the wasted days and nights which are hounding you like a pack of dogs to deliver you to Death the hunter, who is relentlessly pursuing you.”

King Prachinabarhi answered:

“I have attentively listened, holy Narada, to these your instructions, with which my preceptors in rituals did not seem to be well-acquainted, or else they would have imparted them to me. You have now resolved the doubt which I had always entertained about them. There remains one single doubt in my mind which I pray to you to clear. We are again and again told that the consequences of the actions done in one body are reaped in a future body. How can that be possible, considering the fact that once an action is done it ends there and then, and so must be its results.”

Narada answered:

*“The jiva performs actions through the mind and reaps its consequences also through the mind. Even in sleep it is the mind which is the real actor when it reproduces in dreams the impressions it has received in the waking state, while the body lies senseless in bed. As the mind carries to the dream state the impressions it gathers in the waking, so does it carry to another body the karma sown in this one. The thought ‘I am so-and-so’ and ‘This is mine’ which the jiva by ignorance makes in respect to a body, he carries with him the karma wrought by that thought to a new body. (Each body is thus determined by the thoughts generated in the previous ones).*

“In deep sleep, swoon and extreme grief when the senses are suspended (and the body is not perceived), the ‘I’ sense is also suspended and thus no karma is then generated. Likewise in infancy the variety of forms of the ‘I’ notion remain subdued like the moon

which, although always existing, is invisible on the last night of the lunar month. Even though the world of sense does not really exist, transmigration and self-identification with the body will not cease for the *jiva* which is engrossed by its reality and by the imaginary sense pleasure derived from it, so that (*at the moment of death*) the thought ‘I’ and ‘mine’ brings about the birth of another body (*to which he transfers in turn his self-identification*) like the leech which does not leave its foothold on a straw until it has set it firmly on another.

*Therefore liberate yourself O King from this attachment to the body and from the external rituals which are made for its welfare, and take to the worship of Sri Hari alone.”*

Greatly impressed by Narada’s instructions, Prachinabarhi left the kingdom to the care of his sons and retired to Kapila’s Ashram at the mouth of the Ganga, where he practised rigorous *tapas* till he rid himself of all attachments and attained Godhead after death.

Vidura, overwhelmed by the narrative of Maitreya and by the words of wisdom that fell from his mouth, addressed him thus:

“Your mercy, O great Yogi, has brought me within sight of Lord Hari Who dwells on the other shore of the great ocean of *avidya* (ignorance). Now permit me to proceed with a peaceful mind to Hastinapura to see my kith and kin.”

So saying, Vidura bowed to the Sage and departed.

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# BOOK FIVE

# I

## *Priyavrata*

Sri Suka now completes the history of Manu's line by taking up the line of his eldest son, Priyavrata, who had received spiritual instructions from Narada and had in the course of time attained the Supreme Abode.

King Parikshit asks Suka:

“How is it, O Sage, that Priyavrata, who was so devoted to the glorious Lord, and whose mind was so serene, consented to enter the life of a householder which distracts the mind, obscures the vision of the Real and subjects one to the bondage of action?”

Sri Suka answers that those whose hearts are by nature bent on contemplation do not abandon this practice however strong the obstacles. He continues:

“After Priyavrata obtained the full light of Truth from Narada and determined to devote his whole life to contemplation, his father called on him to take up the royal duties, which had fallen to his lot, and be the repository of all the great virtues as a ruling monarch. Seeing him reluctant to obey this paternal command, Brahma, his grandfather, appeared in person and counselled him as follows:

‘Everything is ordained by the Un-manifest Being according to the laws of karma. *Even liberated souls reap the fruits of destiny in their bodies, though they do not identify themselves with them, like the person who wakes up from sleep but continues to remember his dream experience.* There is always rebirth for him who is under the control of the six enemies — the five senses and the mind — *even if he dwells in a forest, but no harm can the home do to the wise man who has subdued these enemies. To the one who strives for self-control the home may even prove an indispensable refuge, like a fortress to the person who is pursued by enemies.* You O Prince, have already conquered your senses at the feet of Sri Hari and are free to enjoy on this earth the blessings which He confers on you, well established as you are in the Pure Self.’”

Sri Suka continues:

Priyavrata accepted the throne and the life of a householder and begot ten sons, of whom three took to the path of Renunciation and a daughter, whom he married to the celebrated Sukracharya, the priest of the asuras, and who became the mother of Devayani.

Priyavrata ruled for millions of years and then retired to the forest after dividing the earth among his remaining seven sons.

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## II – VI

### *Rishabha Avatara*

Sri Suka continues:

Agnidhra, Priyavrata's eldest son, proved to be a great monarch. He obeyed his father's command and the ordinances of the Scriptures and loved his people like his own children. He propitiated Brahma and was awarded by him a most beautiful *apsara* (nymph) — Purvachitti — for wife. In a million years she gave him nine sons, of whom Nabhi was the eldest, and returned to Brahmaloaka from which she had descended. Unable to bear the separation, the love-lorn Agnidhra, divided his kingdom among his sons, performed special rites which permitted him to enter Brahmaloaka, discarded his body and followed her. Nabhi married the daughter of Sumeru and, as she gave him no sons, both of them performed much penance till Sri Vishnu appeared to them and promised to be Himself their son. This was the great Lord Rishabha, who was of such dazzling beauty that Indra went mad with jealousy and spitefully withheld rain from Nabhi's kingdom. Child Rishabha laughed merrily when he heard of Indra's behaviour and, using his *yogamaya* he sent down pouring rain all over his father's territory to the relief and delight of all his people. Not long afterwards Nabhi abdicated the throne in favour of Rishabha, who had by then attained an unprecedented popularity among the citizens, and retired to Vishala, holy Badarikashrama, with his queen, where both performed *tapas* and attained oneness with Lord Vasudeva, to Whom they were particularly attached.

Although an *avatara* of the Lord, Rishabha wanted to set an example to others: he studied under a preceptor, married Jayanti, who had been gifted to him by Indra (who seems to have become friendly after his discomfiture), and got by her one hundred sons, his exact replica in moral and spiritual virtues. Bharata, the eldest, was endowed with the highest qualities and was a great adept in Yoga. All the others were also highly versed in the Vedas, so that they passed for Brahmins. King Rishabha was aware that he was the Lord Himself and enjoyed absolute bliss, yet he acted like an ordinary mortal for the sake of his people and, although he knew the hidden truths of the Vedas and the essence of *dharma*, he ruled by the guidance of the Brahmins, worshipped the Lord through all kinds of rituals and became to his subjects a model of righteousness, so that they ceased to



envy or harm one another. One day Rishabha gathered his sons, who were already well disciplined, and in the presence of the Brahmins and the people addressed them thus:

“To live in this world one must have a body, but this must not be given to the sensuous pleasures *which are enjoyed by even pigs, dogs and animals that feed on ordure*. It must be trained to be a useful instrument to the *jiva* that dwells in it to *enjoy the bliss of absorption in the Absolute*. To wait on saints and sages is the way to salvation, whereas the way to bondage lies in the company of women and their admirers. They are great who possess serenity of mind, piety, devotion to the Lord, contempt for bad society, and freedom from anger.

*“Ignorance of the Self lasts so long as no inquiry is made for the Self, and so long as action is done; for action keeps the mind disposed to action, by which bondage and rebirth are caused. So long as action sways the mind, the Self remains enveloped in avidya, compelling further action. So long as the jiva does not realise the unreality of action, it will not be in a position to discriminate and give up action, thus losing the memory of its own essence, involving itself in sexual relations from which it reaps nothing but afflictions.*

“The love-union between man and woman forms another knot which binds the hearts of both parties to one another, from which the delusion ‘I’ and ‘mine’ arises. When this hard knot is loosened by purification, attachment and bondage drop off and the *jiva* becomes free to reach the supreme Goal — its essence. By devotion to Me, the Supreme Self, and to the *Guru*; by control of the senses and speech; by investigation into the nature of things; by abstaining from selfish action and from self-identification with the body; by living in seclusion with a concentrated mind, and by deep meditation, O Sons, you will completely shake off your *ahankara* and thus will cut the knot which has been tied to your hearts by *avidya*, evil tendencies and past actions.

“My heart is pure *sattva*, wherein abides *dharma* (all virtues), and you are born from that heart. All of you, therefore, dutifully serve your eldest brother Bharata, and I will consider it as service to me. With a pure mind, my sons, respect all things, animate and inanimate, and it will be considered as worship to Me who dwell in them. Pleasing me in mind, speech and action will earn for you redemption from death.”

Saying this, Lord Rishabha crowned Bharata king and left for a place outside his dominion where he was not known and where he discarded his clothes, took to complete silence and feigned to be deaf, dumb and demented, which caused people to jeer at him and pelt him with stones and dirt to his utter indifference. Yet his body was so handsome and lithe that, notwithstanding its uncouth appearance, it could inflame women with passion. To obviate this, Rishabha imitated the serpent in eating, drinking, urinating, and defecating in the lying posture, so that his body might be plastered with its own evacuations and rendered unpleasant both to the eye and the nose that came near it. He alternated this with the standing posture, in which he did all these acts, like an animal, to keep people away from him, whilst his mind remained in self-absorption. *Siddhis* soon appeared in him, but he refrained from manifesting any of them, retaining the bliss of That which transcends all manifestations.

King Parikshit asked:

“I cannot understand, O holy Suka, why Lord Rishabha, who was firmly established in the Self and who had burnt the whole stock of his karma, did not like the *siddhis* which had come unsolicited to him and which would not have possibly caused him any distraction.”

The Sage answered that some people are not disposed to trust the fickle mind, just as the experienced hunter does not trust the trapped deer. The mind of the yogi who exhibits these powers opens the gates to its enemies greed, vanity, sorrow, lust, anger and fear, like the unchaste wife who opens the door of her husband’s house to her lovers to murder him. The glorious Rishabha, he said, was not afraid for his own fall, but by example taught yogis to pursue the path of Salvation rather than fall prey to the glamour of *siddhis*. He continued to roam about in this weird appearance until one day, as he was crossing a bamboo forest to which Providence had directed his steps, the forest suddenly caught fire which quickly spread and consumed him.

Thus ended the sacred story of the *avatara* of Lord Narayana as the supremely adored Rishabha, a story which wipes out all the sins of him who recites it and him who hears it with faith and devotion and affords perennial solace to His devotees.

Sri Suka prayed:

“Obeisance to Lord Rishabha, who is entirely free from desires, who possesses the precious wealth of the eternal realisation of his own Self, and who, in his boundless compassion, revealed it to many of those who were oblivious of it to their everlasting benefit.”

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## VII – VIII

### *King Bharata*

Sri Suka continues:

Bharata ascended the throne of a part of *Jambudwipa*, which now assumed the name of *Bharatavarsha*, after the name of this Sovereign. From the daughter of Viswarupa he begot five sons who took after him in every way. For millions of years Bharata ruled the country and his people, who remained law-abiding and virtuous as in the days of his father, and when he decided to retire for *tapas* he divided his territory among his five sons and went to live in the hermitage of Pulaha on the Gandaki river, where, it is said, Lord Hari reveals Himself to His devotees from time to time to this day. By reciting the most sacred *Gayatri mantra* and meditation he enjoyed there a great peace.

One day when Bharata, dressed in deer skin, was sitting in meditation after his bath, as usual, a deer which had strayed from its herd, plunged into the river to refresh itself and slake its thirst. Suddenly a tremendous roar of a lion issued out of the neighbouring forest, which so terrified the deer that it delivered a baby in the water and then leaped into a cave for safety, where it collapsed and died. Greatly distressed at this incident, the royal Sage was overwhelmed with pity for the helpless tiny animal which was left floating in the stream. He picked it up and brought it to his hermitage and started feeding and looking after it, which caused his spiritual decline. It not only interfered with, and finally stopped, his devotional practices, but it substituted them by a gnawing anxiety about its safety. It was obviously the work of a bad destiny.

After some time Bharata took ill and, as he was about to die, he saw the deer, now grown up, shedding tears by his bedside, like a son, which impressed his mind at the moment of death so profoundly that he took immediate birth in a deer body, not far from that spot, with the memory of his previous human birth unimpaired. Full of contrition for his straying from the path of non-attachment, he left his deer relatives and repaired to Pulaha's hermitage, where he awaited the fall of his animal body which made meditation impossible. When its hour came to drop off, he entered Gandaki and, half immersed in it (in the *ardhajala* posture prescribed by the Scriptures), breathed his last.

## IX

Sri Suka continues: From the loins of a holy Brahmin a descendant of the sage Angira, Bharata was born as a twin with a girl from the younger wife. Still remembering the unfortunate experience of his previous two lives consequent on his attachment to the deer, he was now extremely chary of contracting new associations and resolved to shun society by feigning insanity. His father, however, treated him as a normal child: he performed all the religious ceremonies for him, taught him cleanliness and social etiquette, and was about to initiate him in ritualism when the Brahmin suddenly died, and with him also died Bharata's mother who ascended his funeral pyre, after commending Bharata and his twin sister to the care of the elder wife and the tender mercy of her nine sons.

His step-brothers, who understood only ritualistic worship took Bharata for mad and stopped his education. He started roaming about naked like an ownerless bull, exposed to all weather, with his spiritual glory concealed under a coarse appearance. Sometimes a dirty sacred thread hung carelessly over his shoulder, denoting his Brahmin caste. People of poor understanding jeered at his Brahminism, worked him hard and compensated him with anything that was handy, such as oil-cakes, husks, charred food, broken rice and worm-eaten grains, which he gobbled with an apparent relish as if they were nectar (which earned for him the nick-name of *Jadabharata*, insentient Bharata).

Once a robber chief, wanting to propitiate the goddess Bhadrakali to bless him with a son, prepared to offer her a human sacrifice in the night with the human victim made ready to be slaughtered. But the latter was lucky enough to effect his escape in the dark, defeating all the robbers' efforts to capture him. While hunting for him these robbers stumbled on Bharata, who was keeping a watch over a field against the marauding deer and wild boar. They pounced on him and carried him to the shrine of the goddess in the forest. Finding him of stout and blemishless physique — a fitting sacrifice — their master caused him to be given the ceremonial bath, a new cloth, jewels, sandalwood paste, fresh flower garlands and a sumptuous meal. They then placed him before the statue to the accompaniment of songs, hymns and beating drums. When everything was ready, the chieftain drew his sword, blessed it with a mantra and approached to cut off the too-indifferent Bharata's head. All of a sudden the goddess

issued out of the statue, snatched the sword from the chief's hand and, in a great rage, lopped off his head and the heads of his whole gang, and drank the hot blood which streamed from their necks, saving the life of Bharata, who throughout maintained a detached attitude. "This is the way," Sage Suka added, "the Lord protects His devotees and punishes their oppressors."

## X – XI

On another occasion Rahugana, King of Sindhu and Sauvira, was travelling in a palanquin to the hermitage of Kapila. The king was in haste and the palanquin was going too slow. Seeing Bharata loitering near the river, the king's servants brought him to help them carry it a little faster, admiring his sturdy stature which resembled that of an ox. But the Sage continued to move under the palanquin at his own leisurely pace, causing a still greater slowness and, what is worse, unevenness in the carriage. After giving one or two unheeded warnings, the badly-jolted king got incensed and spoke to Bharata with a biting sarcasm, contrasting his slow movement to his stout build, which completely fell flat on its victim, who continued to jog along as before. The king now lost his temper and, notwithstanding his constant contact with sages, spoke threateningly to him:

“Though living,” he said, “you are as good as dead: you not only ignore the presence of your king but also his command. I will punish you, perverse that you are, as Yama, the lord of death, punishes people.”

Now Bharata thought it fit to open his mouth and show his mettle. He answered:

“Your implied irony, O valiant king, is, no doubt true; for how can I, a bodiless spirit, be tired or carry anything, or be conscious of a destination to move towards it! You call me ‘stout’; know you that stoutness and leanness, hunger and thirst, disease, worry, fear, anger, vanity, attachment, sleep, old age, life and death pertain to the one who identifies himself with the body, and not to me, the pure Self, wherein there is neither a master to command nor a servant to obey. What avail you then, O King, to reprimand me, who am ever established in the glory of my own being, although I appear to be in an utterly useless body?”

So saying, Bharata continued to carry as before, but the King, who, through a strong faith, was qualified to inquire into the Truth, immediately alighted, shorn of his pomp and pride, prostrated himself flat on the ground with his head on the feet of the Sage and asked:

“Who are you among the *Avadhutas* (naked ascetics), like Lord Dattatreya; or are you Lord Kapila Himself who is purity personified?”

You seem to belong to the Brahmin caste, disrespect to whom makes me tremble more than even the rod of Yama. Your declaration of being absorbed in the Self is very difficult to understand. I am now proceeding to Lord Kapila, who is Sri Hari Himself, to receive from Him the remedy for this disease of *samsara* (transmigration). Perhaps you are, Sir, Kapila Himself going about in disguise to see for yourself how the world goes. Can he who is blindly attached to home and family understand the ways of the Masters of Yoga? Deign, O friend of the distressed, to cast a gracious glance on me, who, through a ruler's vanity, have treated you, a most holy sage, with shameful disrespect."

Bharata replied:

"Though not wise you speak like the wise; for the knowers of Truth do not speak of worldly matters, of kings and subjects, masters and servants, side by side with those relating to the absolute Reality. Even the Vedas keep them separate. The parts which deal with the heavenly enjoyments which result from the practice of ritual and sacrifices make no mention of the Absolute and the means of Its attainment, which prohibit injury to life and which is bound with the acts of sacrifice. Similarly, the most sacred Upanishads which deal solely with the Absolute and which are the heart and essence of the Vedas do not deal with the futile enjoyments of heaven and ritual. *So long as the mind is dominated by the qualities (gunas), it continues to act and earn sins and virtues for the individual and assume different forms and names.* It is this mind which (though a function of the soul) covers up the soul and drags it into the turmoil of the senses, into pleasure and pain, birth and death, etc. The knowers of Truth, therefore hold the mind responsible for this deceptive *samsara as well as for Liberation, according as it is dominated by ignorance or by knowledge.* Therefore, O King, free your mind from the *gunas* by worshipping Lord Vasudeva through the Guru with all your heart, in which He, the all-perfect, self-effulgent, is seated as the all-witnessing consciousness, whereby you will destroy your powerful enemy *Maya*, which is robbing you of the supreme knowledge of your true Self."



## XII

King Rahugana with folded palms said:

“Hail to you, Master of Yoga, who ever rest in the supreme bliss of yourself, disguised though you are in the uncouth appearance of a besotted Brahmin. Your words are to me, an unworthy man, like nectar which cures all diseases and grants immortality. Deign to remove my doubt about a statement which you have just made concerning action which, it appears, has no standing in an investigation into the Absolute.”

The wise Brahmin answered:

*“Action is done by the body, which (like everything else) comes from the earth and goes back again to the earth. Where is, therefore, the reality of any action, when the body, its doer, itself is unreal? There is only a temporary perception of action, like the perception of dream action.*

*“Again, this earth is constituted of tiny particles or atoms, which are nothing but the beginning-less creative energy (Maya) of the Lord, which makes all things to which we give names: gross and subtle elements, qualities, attributes, time, destiny, predispositions, nature, etc. All these are produced by His power of illusion. Consciousness alone is real, perfect, changeless, known as Vasudeva or Bhagavan (the Lord). This Consciousness, O King, cannot be attained by asceticism, nor by Vedic rites, nor by charity, nor by the study of the Vedas, nor by worship with water, fire, or sun: It can be realised only by covering oneself with the dust of the feet of great saints, from whose lips one learns the knowledge of the Most High and Salvation.*

“In a previous life I was king Bharata when I succeeded in shaking off all attachment for this world as well as for heaven, but subsequently, on account of an accidental love for a deer, I was given a deer body but made to retain my memory of the earlier human life and my devotion to Lord Vishnu. Hence in this life I took care not to be trapped again by new attachments and roamed about, keeping only the company of the wise until I attained God-consciousness.”

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# BOOK SIX

## I – II

### *Ajamila – The Power of the Sacred Name*

Parikshit, addressing Suka, said:

“The path of Return (*nivritti*) which ends in the cessation of action, that is, in freedom from rebirth, has been clearly described by your worshipful self. Now be pleased, O highly blessed Sage, to explain the means of escaping the torture of hell by a sinner.”

The Sage replied:

“A sinner must atone, according to what the Scriptures ordain, in the very life in which he has committed sins in thought, word, or deed. *While the body is still strong to bear the strain of penance, he must take prompt and adequate action to counteract the effects of his sins, like the able physician who betimes administers the medicine which is commensurate with the nature and seriousness of his patient’s illness.*”

The King asked:

“Granting that the sinner promptly atones for his sins, *of what value will that be if the propensity of sinning still sticks to him? He will then resemble the elephant who sprays himself with a cloud of dust immediately after he has taken his bath.*”

Sri Suka answered:

“Indeed counteracting an act of sin by an act of penance is not a radical cure, for (as you say) new sins will crop up nullifying the penance, *but it is necessary as a temporary measure in a temporary body. Self-knowledge is the permanent cure and the radical atonement; for sickness never visits him who eats only wholesome food. No atonement can purify, O King, the person who has turned his face from Lord Narayana, as no number of rivers can purify a bottle of wine.*”

Then the Sage told the story of the fallen Brahmin Ajamila who was saved from death and later completely redeemed by taking the name of the Lord and by penance.

Ajamila was a very pious Brahmin, most devoted to Lord Narayana and to his young wife and children. He was well-versed in the Vedas, truthful and of good conduct. One day when he was crossing a forest

he saw a maidservant in an intoxicated state, half naked and making obscene gestures in the arms of her Sudra lover, who was also in the same degree of inebriation. Ajamila conceived an unbounded passion for the woman, so much so that he abandoned his wife and children and lived with her till she gave him ten children, whom he adored, especially the youngest, whom he named Narayana. When his time came to die and he was lying ill, Yama sent his messengers to take away his life. At that moment the youngest son, from whom he was never separated, happened to be playing at some distance from his bed. He loudly called "Narayana" to bring him to himself, but this name was heard by the Lord's attendants, who rushed to the spot, faced the messengers of Yama and challenged them to prove their right to be in that place by quoting from the Scriptures, which resulted in long religious discourses on the rules of *dharma* and *moksha* by both sides and ended in the victory of Lord Narayana's messengers. Ajamila was saved and, on hearing the discourses of the Divine messengers, he was also completely cured of his infatuation for the unclean woman and her children. He retired to a secluded place in Gangadwara and took to the practice of Yoga, fixing his mind on the Pure Consciousness which is the essence of Lord Narayana. Then dissociating himself from the body, and getting absorbed in this pure consciousness, he saw before him the same messengers of the Lord. After greeting them he discarded his body and, assuming their form, he mounted their aerial car and ascended with them to the highest abode of Lord Narayana. Thus the Name of the Lord first saved him from death and then by constant repetition, purified him from the two lower *gunas* and made him fit to live in the *sattvic* sphere, the blessed *Vaikuntha*.

### III

Lord Yama, hearing of the victory of Sri Hari's messengers in Ajamila's house, was very pleased with the correct behaviour of his servants and calling them to him, he adjured them:

“Never approach the wise men who take with an undivided mind to the constant chanting of the Lord's name, O Sons, protected as they are by the all-powerful mace of Sri Hari. Neither we nor Time have power over them. Bring me those impious men, whose hearts are given to the delights of a domestic life and who never devote themselves or render any service to Him. Say hail, all hail to the Supreme Lord Who pervades the universe.”

Sri Suka concluded:

“Therefore, O Scion of the Kurus, know that fasts and worship cannot purify the mind as quickly as the devotion which His Name and the thought of Him evoke in the heart.

“This mystic story was told to me by the great sage Agastya, who worships the Lord on the summit of Mount Malaya where he perpetually dwells.”

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## IV – VI

### *Daksha the Prachetasa*

At the request of Parikshit, Sri Suka gave the story of the creation of the gods, humans, demons, reptiles, mammals, birds, etc., and then of Daksha, the Prachetasa (the son of the ten Prachetas and grandson of Prachinabarhi, p. 74). Knowing that he was born with a mandate to populate the earth, Daksha first attempted to create with his mind, but seeing its poor result, he repaired to the Vindya Mountain and practised austerities. Lord Hari appeared and told him:

“When I created the cosmos by the power of My *maya*, Brahma sprang up from it to create living beings, but, seeing himself unequal to the task, he performed *tapas* and by My help he evolved from his mind nine *prajapatis* of whom you were one. Afterwards the union of males with females was found to be the quickest means of multiplying living beings. Therefore, dear Daksha, get yourself united by marriage to Askini, daughter of Panchajana the *prajapati*, and you will also beget children from her in large numbers, and they in turn will beget their own children by lawful sexual union. *By copulating with My deluding Maya, which assumes alluring feminine forms, human beings will go on procreating their kind.*”

Accordingly, energised by the Lord’s creative power, Daksha begot through Askini ten thousand sons, whom he named Haryashwas, and commanded them to go and beget their own children. The Haryashwas went to the confluence of the Sindhu River with the sea, dipped in it, cleansed their minds of impurities, and developed the greatest renunciation. Narada, finding them qualified for the Supreme Knowledge though bent upon obeying their father’s order, appeared before them to dissuade them from choosing the wrong course, which would deny them the bliss of Emancipation. He spoke to them in riddles which they, in their sagacity, interpreted as follows:

*“The mind which has existed from time immemorial and has earned merits and demerits, pleasure and pain is a fetter to the perception of the Truth, which is the almighty Self, the Witness of all the three states — waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep (jagrat, svapna and*

*sushupti*). Not to work for the destruction of this mind and for the realisation of the Self which transcends these three states and, thus, the cycle of birth and death, is a wasted labour. The mind which is dominated by the gunas, which appear as the objects of sense — smells, colours, shapes, etc., — is like a harlot dressed in attractive skirts to seduce unwary men. To identify oneself with it is to feel the humiliation of the harlot's husband and suffer the consequences.

“To ignore the teaching of God, which separates the eternal Spirit from the transitory matter, like the swan which separates the milk from the water, and which enables one to perceive the true nature of bondage and freedom, is doing no good to the world. *All the activities of such a man will be swept away by the mighty broom of Time, like a straw by a mighty hurricane.*”

One and all the Haryashwas approved of the Sage's counsel, went round him clockwise (as a sign of respect) and took to the path of Self-realisation.

Daksha was very distressed to hear of what had befallen his sons and, to make up for their loss, he procreated another one thousand sons on the same wife and named them Shabalashwas. These made a firm resolve to respect their father's express wish and marry, for which they took to penance in the same place where their elder brothers had attained Self-realisation. They bathed in the identical spot, lived for some months only on water and air, repeating the sacred word ceaselessly and worshipped the Lord with the following formula:

“We bow to Lord Narayana, Who is denoted by the mystic syllable OM, the most Sublime Principle, the Supreme Consciousness, the Purest of the pure.”

After they cleansed their minds, Narada appeared and advised them as he had done to their brothers:

“Listen to me, O Sons of Daksha. You must follow the path trodden by your elder brothers, whom you love so much, and you will enjoy the heaven of the Maruts (the forty-nine wind gods who are excessively devoted to one another as brothers).”

The Shabalashwas followed the Haryashwas in their quest for Self-realisation, leaving Daksha overwhelmed with sorrow at their defection and

sore at Narada's mischief. He could not wait till he met the Sage, but went immediately in search of him and, when at last he found him, he addressed him with lips quivering with rage:

“Ahah! dressed in a holy garb, O wicked One, you have beguiled my young innocent sons, turned them into mendicants and ruined their prospects in this world and the next. By unsettling their minds and diverting them from the path of duty to the path of renunciation, O sinful One, you have tarnished the sacred Name of the Lord, among Whose attendants you shamelessly move, as if you were one of them. You have trampled over our love and shown us enmity. All the devotees of the Lord save your wretched self help those who are in need of help. Know you that renunciation can never rise in the mind spontaneously, as you, odious ascetic, imagine. *He who has not tasted the bitter consequences of sensuous enjoyments cannot feel the disgust which induces true renunciation.*

“We can afford to forget the wrong you have done us, vowed that we are to the propagation of the human race and the performance of rituals. But since you have for the second time given us offence and put obstacles to our destined goal, you shall, O fool, forever remain a wanderer with no halting place you call your own for rest”.

Without rancour the virtuous Narada accepted the curse with the words “So be it.”

Having been unlucky in his sons, Daksha now turned to beget daughters, of whom he produced sixty, and was not disappointed. Their offspring filled the earth and all the spheres with humans, gods, demi-gods, birds, insects, reptiles, mammals, *apsaras*, *rakshasas*, *gandharvas*, Vedic Rishis and many known and unknown beings, from their husbands the moon-god and Rishis. Of the first thirteen daughters, whom Daksha married to Kasyapa, two, Diti and Aditi, became famous as the mothers of two rival races, the Daityas, who sided with the asuras, and the Adityas, who sided with the gods against the asuras, respectively.

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## VII — XII

### *The Sorrows of Indra*

Sri Suka continues:

Brihaspati is the priest and preceptor of the celestials, at whose head stands Indra, who has a thousand eyes and an infinite power over the forces of nature which are under the directions of his staff — the various classes of gods. His abode is *Swarga* or simply heaven. Indra, unfortunately, possesses all the human foibles — envy, arrogance, hatred, anger, fear, etc. — and at times acts on the impulse of one or other of these emotions, thus transgressing the laws of righteousness, and comes to grief.

When his mind was one day wrapped up in the infatuating glamour of *Swarga*, of which, he thought, he was the absolute master, he felt no inclination to rise and receive Brihaspati when he entered, as was the custom, which greatly infuriated the Sage, who immediately turned his back and returned to his place. Indra took no time to realise the gravity of his mistake but forthwith rose, took his attendants and went in search of the preceptor to make amends. Still in dudgeon, Brihaspati made himself invisible, which greatly worried the chief of the gods, who knew that without a teacher his would be the weaker side, if his enemies sought to fight him, as he was sure they would, no sooner they came to know of his falling out with his *guru*. His fear proved justified, for Sukracharya, the asuras' preceptor, soon got wind of it and advised the demons to attack Indra without delay. The result was disastrous to the gods, who were completely routed and had to rush with broken limbs and gushing wounds to Brahma, their main refuge. Brahma reproved the arrogance of Indra and reminded him that Brihaspati was not only self-disciplined but also a Self-realised Sage who was endowed with all *siddhis*. Indra, he said, must have surely forgotten that the asuras had also once insulted their priest and had grown very weak, as the gods now were, on account of it, but had later regained strength after repenting and making abundant amends to him. He now advised them to go to Viswarupa, the young son of Twastadeva, who was a Brahmin recluse practising yoga, and humbly request him to be their preceptor.

Viswarupa accepted Indra's request with rueful reluctance because of the spiritual fall he was going to suffer on account of it. He told the gods:

*“The wise justly condemn priesthood for a Brahmin who has fixed his mind on the Absolute, because it is a deviation from the highest path and loss of glory. This is a reprehensible profession which pleases only fools. Yet I do not dare to turn down your request even at the cost of my life.”*

Viswarupa was an eminent ascetic who wielded extraordinary powers by means of the potent prayer to Lord Narayana known as *Narayana Kavacha*, which he now taught to Indra. Supported by this *Kavacha*, Indra attacked the asuras, and scored a sweeping victory over them.

Unfortunately for Indra, Viswarupa was a daitya from the side of his mother, who was Diti’s daughter, and a god from his father’s side. When he poured oblations over the sacrificial fire for the gods, he secretly offered a share of it to the asuras. Somehow Indra discovered the fraud, which so much agitated him that without thinking of the consequences of his action, he drew his sword and cut off Viswarupa’s head (legends ascribe three heads to him) from behind, while he was engaged in his worship.

Hearing of the treacherous assassination of his son, Twasta lit a sacrificial fire, poured oblations into it and demanded a terrible demon to rise from it to destroy Indra. At once from the fire leaped up the ferocious demon Vritra, who looked as dreadful as *Kalagnirudra* the spirit of destruction which is let loose on doomsday. His breath filled the air with fire and showed a tongue which could lick off the stellar universe. The denizens of the three worlds, on seeing him, ran helter-skelter to hide from his sight. The gods, however, plucked courage, gathered their hosts and fiercely attacked him from all sides with all the weapons on which they could lay hands. But Vritra swallowed all the weapons which were hurled at him, as if they were luscious fruits. In their despair the gods turned their minds to Lord Narayana, Who appeared and said:

*“He who knows the Truth does not ask for anything other than Me. He who looks upon the world, which is constituted of nothing but qualities, as real, is a fool, and does not know his own good. Fool is he also who gives material gifts to others. The wise never advise the ignorant to take to action which earns nothing for reward but unreal things, like the good physician who refrains from prescribing a harmful diet to an ailing patient.*

“However, dear Indra, go now to Rishi Dadhichi, the son of Rishi Atharva, one of the noblest *siddhas*, and ask him to gift you his body, which has acquired a formidable strength from the constant use of the *Narayana Kavacha*. It was from him that Twasta Rishi learned it and taught it to his son Viswarupa, who imparted it to you. From the bones of his arms a weapon will issue with which you will be able to cut off Vritra’s head.”

The magnanimous Dadhichi, who had attained Self-realisation and did not care a bit for the body, was then in a bantering mood and asked if the gods who had demanded his body, had an idea of what it means to part with one’s body and suffer the agony of death.

“Who”, he ironically exclaimed, “has the courage to give up his body, which is one’s dearest possession, even for the sake of the Supreme Vishnu Himself!”

The gods answered that there was nothing a noble Soul would not part with if it was used for the good of all. Thereupon the Rishi gladly cast off his body.

Sri Suka remarks that *it is indeed sad to think of men who retain all their wealth to themselves only to leave it behind with the body for others to squander.*

The gods extracted the weapon from Dadhichi’s bones and the Lord sharpened it by His own power. Carrying it, Indra collected all his hosts and confronted Vritra and his army of asuras and *daityas* on the banks of the Narmada. A sanguinary battle ensued, in which the latter were completely routed, leaving Vritra alone on the field, not in the least daunted, for he had only to open his mouth and roar, and thousands of gods fell down unconscious for him to trample on, as easily as a royal elephant tramples over a lotus bed. Amazed at his power, Indra hurled at him the charmed weapon, but Vritra deftly picked it up and struck the head of Airavata with it, Indra’s giant elephant, which made it fall back by a dozen yards and render blood from its broken jaw. Indra dismounted and sought to fight Vritra on equal terms on the ground. As he saw the slayer of his brother Viswarupa face to face, Vritra was filled with a mournful rage (but spoke with a dignified restraint).

“I deem myself fortunate,” he said, “for having you at this close quarter that I may pierce your stony heart with my trident and

discharge my debt to my brother, whom you have so perfidiously slain. He was a Brahmin, a *guru*, a priest, also a Self-realised Rishi who had attained union with the Lord. While he was performing the propitiatory rites for your prosperity in good faith you, in a dastardly manner, cut off his head from behind, as if he were an animal for sacrifice. Shame, grace, compassion, and reason seem to have forsaken you at the moment, for which even cannibal *rakshasas* condemn you. Do not imagine that I do not know that the weapon which you carry in your hand has been extracted from the bones of the mighty Dadhichi and whetted by Sri Hari's own power, as Hari Himself has prompted you to do, to kill me with it. Now accomplish your task without hesitation, so that getting rid of my attachment by the touch of your sacred weapon I may be entitled to tread the path of Yoga and reach the sacred feet of the Lord, Who deprives His intimate devotees of all heavenly and earthly enjoyment by thwarting their endeavours at every turn, so that they may turn to Him, receive His Grace and finally merge into Him."

Then turning his mind to Lord Narayana, Vritra bowed low and with folded palms prayed:

"Grant, O Master, that my next birth be utterly dedicated to You in thought, word and deed. I desire, O Essence of blessedness, not Dhruva's world, which is higher than that of Indra, nor of Brahma's, nor the lordship of the infernal regions, nor still the sovereignty of the universe, nor *siddhis* nor even the Liberation of the path of Yoga. As an unfledged sparrow yearns for the return of its mother, so does my heart yearn, O Lord, for the sight of You. Let my lot be ever cast among Your devotees, rather than among householders who have surrendered themselves to the pleasures of a domestic life."

So saying, Vritra with a tremendous roar hurled his trident, which shot through space like a flaming meteor, at Indra who met it with his charmed weapon and coolly destroyed it, wrenching at the same time the arm which had projected it. Undaunted and full of rage, Vritra took up his iron club in the single hand left to him and struck Indra and his elephant with it, bringing down the charmed weapon to the earth from Indra's hand. All the gathered hosts — friends and foes — loudly cheered Vritra's remarkable feat and took Indra for lost. Indra himself was struck dumb with abashment and stood undecided. But the magnanimous Vritra encouraged him to pick

up the celestial weapon and kill him with it, as he was destined to do, for none, he said, was exempt from his predestined fate but the Lord Himself, Who is the mover of the whole creation, like the master of a puppet show.

Heartened by this speech, and wondering at the noble dispositions of his enemy, Indra said:

“You have achieved your object, O chief of the demons: by your devotion you have transcended the delusions of the Lord’s *Maya* and have cast away your demoniacal nature, reaching the very state of sainthood, which is eternal *bhakti* to the Lord.”

Vritra conversed with Indra on *Dharma*, then whirled his strong iron mace and hurled it at him. Indra, as before, destroyed it with his divine weapon, wrenching off the remaining hand. Deprived of both hands, Vritra opened his cavernous mouth and swallowed both Indra and Airavata in one gulp, as a snake swallows a frog. When they saw their chief so quickly despatched, the gods were seized with an indescribable fear. Fortunately for them, Indra was saved by the *Narayana Kavacha* and his own mystical powers. As soon as he reached the demon’s belly, he ripped it open with the charmed weapon still in his hand and came out safely, and with one blow he chopped off the enemy’s head, which toppled down like the top of a mountain which had been blasted by a thunderbolt.

A miracle now happened: the soul of Vritra no sooner left his body than it entered the Lord, Who was present, in front of all the heavenly hosts and to their utter bewilderment.

But Indra’s trouble was not to end with the death of the demon, for he had hardly recovered from the fight when he found himself tortured by remorse for having killed another Brahmin. The sin of murdering Viswarupa had hung heavy on his soul and he was not relieved from it until he distributed it among four classes of beings: women, water, earth and trees, which accepted it and shared it among themselves. But the murder of Vritra gave him no peace, and the performance of an *aswamedha* advised by the Brahmins in expiation of it, found no favour with him, who saw his sin hounding him in the guise of a pariah woman, worn out by consumption and age, dressed in blood-stained rags, dishevelled, and with a stinking breath howling after him “Stop, stop!” He rushed from place to place in distraction and, finding nowhere in heaven or on earth to hide from that wraith and its terrifying voice, he plunged into Manasa lake and entered the

stalk of a lotus, where he remained concealed for one thousand years, during which Nahusha, who was qualified for the post, acted as chief of the celestials. But one thousand years was too long a period for Nahusha to keep his pride within bounds, surrounded that he was by all the heavenly comforts, pomp and the homage of its vast hosts, of whom he found himself the undisputed monarch. He developed arrogance and claimed a right to the hand of Sachi, the most beautiful wife of the absent Indra, in consequence of which he fell into the trap laid for him by Sachi herself in conspiracy with the Brahmins, which resulted in his being hurled down to the earth into the animal species (serpent). To fill his seat the Brahmins gathered their forces and used powerful invocations, forcing Indra to come out of his hiding place and re-occupy the throne he had vacated. They then performed a magnificent *aswamedha* which completely cleared him of the sin of killing Vritra, son of Twasta.

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## XIV – XVIII

### *Chitraketu*

King Parikshit was greatly perplexed that a monstrous demon like Vritra could conceive the exalted degree of devotion to the Lord, which entitled him to merge in Him at the moment of death. He told Suka:

“Living creatures are as numerous as grains of sand. Of them only a few adhere to the path of virtue. Of these only a few seek Liberation, and of these again hardly one succeeds in ridding himself of attachment and attains it. How then did the sinful Vritra, who tormented the gods and the thousand-eyed Indra, succeed in retaining a steadfast devotion to the Lord at moments when even pious people lose control of themselves (on the battle field)? Pray, Master, resolve this my doubt.”

The glorious son of Vedavyasa was pleased to recount to him a true story which he had heard from the mouth of his blessed father.

The country which lies about the city of Mathura was ruled by king Chitraketu. He had thousands of wives but none of them bore him a child, which caused him much unhappiness. When one day Rishi Angira paid him a visit and enquired after his welfare, Chitraketu confessed to him the one sorrow of his life and implored him to grant him this object of his yearnings. Angira performed a special *puja* to the aforesaid god Twasta, and from the offerings he gave a portion to the eldest queen Kritadyuti, but warned the royal couple that the son who would be born to them from this worship would prove to be the source of not only joy but also much grief to them.

The queen delivered a son at the right time, to the supreme delight of the Court and the people. Like a rich water-bearing cloud the King showered gifts on the Brahmins, the courtiers and the citizens with unparalleled lavishness. The royal parents went almost mad with love for the child, who was never allowed to be out of their sight for long. It was but natural that the King should show partiality to the child’s mother, which did not fail to create jealousy in the hearts of the other queens to such an extent that some of them entered into a conspiracy to poison the infant. One day, thinking that the baby slept too long, his mother sent the nurse to bring him

to her. With what dreadful horror did the latter see the pupils of the baby's eyes turned upward and his life extinguished! She dropped to the ground beating her breast and emitting soul-rending howls which brought the terrified mother, the ministers, the father, and all the queens to the spot with tears and shrieks in which even the murderesses joined. The King lost his sight and, stumbling, fell unconscious near the child's corpse. The state of the mother was indescribably piteous.

Having known of this disaster, Angira and Narada hastened to the palace and tried to console the King, who was stretched on the ground moaning. They spoke to him thus:

“Just as grains of sand gather together and then separate by the ebbs and flows of a river, so are living creatures brought together and then parted by Time. What was that son to you before birth and what is he now or will be to you in future? Even now we are different only in bodies. As souls we are one and immortals, like God Himself, the one and only reality. The identification of the body with the soul has existed from time immemorial and is born of ignorance.”

The King who was listening, sat up, wiped his face, and asked the Rishis who they were, and begged them to enlighten him with their wisdom, him who deemed himself “a sensual brute, blinded by abysmal ignorance.” Rishi Angira answered:

“You remember me, Angira, who conferred on you the boon of this son, for whom your heart had yearned, and this is the divine Narada, the son of Brahma. Seeing you, a devotee of the Lord, grief-stricken, we have come to show you the right path. On my last visit I had intended to impart to you *Brahmavidya* (the supreme wisdom), but, perceiving your mind to be entirely fixed on a child, I granted you instead the object of your desire. Now you have seen for yourself, O King, the agony, grief, fear, and afflictions of all kinds which material possessions beget in the mind by their fleeting nature. They appear and disappear like dreams. *The meritorious actions which are said to earn these worldly benefits are themselves illusory, created by the mind which thinks of them and which, of necessity, develops a desire for action in a body which it identifies with the soul.* Therefore, O King of kings, abjure your faith in the reality of the objects, and with a peaceful



mind take to inquiry into the nature of your own self, which, alone, is the abiding truth.”

Narada advised Chitraketu to dispose of his child’s body and, after undergoing purificatory rites and baths, to recite the sacred text he had given him with a concentrated mind for seven days, when Lord Sankarshana would appear, to rid him of the world illusion and ultimately unite him with His own Self. Then, to show the bereaved royal family the futility of the sense of parental ownership, Narada by his yogic powers arrested the soul of their son, which was wrapped in its astral sheath in its return journey to the other world, and addressed it as follows:

“May you be blessed, O Beloved! Do come and have a look at your parents, who are grief stricken at your leaving them so soon. You will do well to return to your father’s throne.”

The soul replied:

“I have no recollection of the birth in which these were parents to me. Moved by karma I was born at different times among gods, animals and men. Like gold coins which circulate from hand to hand, souls pass from one womb to another and from parents to parents in transitory family relationships, though by nature they are unborn, unrelated, free from the sense of ownership and identical with Brahman, which is ever un-manifest as the substratum of all bodies and all thoughts.”

So saying, the soul vanished, but greatly relieved his parents anguish. The queens who were guilty of his murder, stricken with remorse, repaired to Mathura and performed a long penance on the bank of the holy Yamuna. Chitraketu, now comforted, sat at the feet of the Sages and from Narada learned a prayer which he continually recited for seven days, fasting, till his mind was purified, when the Lord appeared to him in His aspect of Sesha. Falling at His feet and, with tears of love streaming down his face, he said:

“Hail to You almighty Lord, Who can be conquered by none but by those whom You conquer! You create devotion in their hearts and then reciprocate it by giving them Yourself. Blind are they whose desires for sensual pleasure impel them to worship the gods who are mere sparks of Your infinite splendour, instead of worshipping You, the pure Consciousness, and Whose body is pure Consciousness, and Who

alone can save them from the suffering of births and deaths which result from these their *guna*-ridden actions.

“The spiritual path which You, O Divine Teacher delineate in the impeccable *Bhagavata Dharma* is the easiest for all to follow to gain a loving devotion to You, which frees them from the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ contrary to the other paths which, based as they are on unhealthy dualistic outlook, indulge in ritualistic worship producing sinful, perishable results. No permanent good can ensue to anyone from rituals in which pain is inflicted on You, O Lord, by self-mortification and by torturing others (animal sacrifices).

“Hail to You the Purest of the pure, Whose Nature remains ever a mystery to the sense-bound seekers who retain their sense of separateness.”

Lord Ananta replied:

“You have, O King, fully understood the teaching of Narada and Angira. It is a fact that all created beings are Myself. The Vedas which reveal the Reality are My own body. The subject (or perceiver) should understand himself to pervade the whole universe, which is the object of his perception, (that is, the universe, which appears to be the field of his actions, resides in himself). He should, again, view Me as pervading him as well as the universe — both being My own conception. Just as a dreamer dreams his being fast asleep and dreaming of things (friends, relations, business, etc.), which are really inside him, and when he wakes up from this dream to the original one, imagines himself awake though he is still dreaming, even so the perceiver should realise this waking as a mere dream created by Maya, the *jiva*'s own deluding power. Therefore one should break the illusion of this waking state by fixing one's attention only on Me, its Witness. Know Me to be the transcendental Reality, the very Self (of the dreaming *jiva*), Brahman, the Consciousness which experiences and transcends the three states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep.

“When this My essence, is forgotten, the *jiva* comes to imagine himself different from Me and, thus, starts turning endlessly on the wheel of birth and death. He who *fails to take advantage of his human body through which he can acquire Self-knowledge can never hope to live in peace*. One should, therefore, stop indulging in activities which appear

to be conducive to freedom and happiness, but from which one reaps nothing but misery. Using discrimination and wisdom one should give up the sense pleasure of this world and the next and develop devotion to Me. For only through intense concentration can the mind acquire the power to realise the identity of the *jiva* with the Supreme Spirit (Myself) which is the sole aim of all human endeavour.

“Bear this teaching in mind, O Chitraketu, and act diligently upon it, and you will not fail to gain this Knowledge which is the Supreme Perfection.”

Chitraketu attained oneness with the Lord and lived millions of years in the valleys of Mount Meru with all his bodily organs in perfect working condition. One day as he was enjoying an aerial ride in the celestial car which had been presented to him by Lord Vishnu, he saw many sages assembled on Mount Kailas and Lord Shiva, seated in the place of honour teaching them, with Parvati, His Consort, on His lap. By some misfortune Chitraketu passed an unbecoming remark about the public exhibition of Shiva’s love, which the Divine Couple overheard and greatly incensed the Goddess. On the spot She pronounced a curse on him to be born as a terrible demon to expiate for this sin of his, though Her Lord did not approve of it.

Chitraketu, who could have easily uttered a counter-curse on Her, accepted the sentence, and, descending from his car, bowed before Her and spoke wisely and respectfully, which not a little astonished the Divine Queen. Lord Shiva, guessing Her mind, said to Her:

“Do not marvel, O fair One, at Chitraketu’s righteous behaviour: it is common to all the devotees of Lord Narayana, who know no fear and see everything with an equal eye. Hell, heaven and even the bliss of Liberation itself are the same to them, who see the same Reality pervading them all. It is the divine power of *Maya* which casts the illusion of separate bodies, subject to the pairs of opposites — pleasure and pain, life and death, blessing and curses, etc. As the Self of all, the Lord is loved by all with a love with which each person loves his own self.”

Although the Goddess was pacified, the curse had to take effect on Chitraketu, who had set an example of non-violence and humility by forbearing from revenging himself by a counter-curse on Her. Thus, when

Twasta (in the previous story) invoked a demon to fight Indra, Chitraketu sprang up from the ceremonial fire as Vritra with all his spiritual knowledge undimmed, which is the reason why Vritra, though a frightful demon, turned a great Hari *bhakta* and at the last moment merged in Him.

Thus Suka gave a complete answer to Parikshit's doubts.

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# BOOK SEVEN

VISHNU AVATARAS – I

## I – X

### *Prahlada – Narasimha Avatara*

Parikshit now turns to the subject of the Lord's apparent partiality for the gods against their enemies, the asuras and daityas, and submits his doubt to Sri Suka. He asked:

“Why, O Sage, did the Lord, Who loves and befriends all alike, and is free from the taint of the *gunas*, take the side of Indra, bear grudge to the *daityas* and kill them (as in the story of Vritra, for example)?”

Suka bowed to his father Vedavyasa and answered:

“You have asked a very thoughtful question, O King, concerning the apparent partiality of Sri Hari. Know you that He transcends the *gunas* though He works through them for His purpose: once He promotes one *guna* and once the other, according to the spirit and natural tendencies of the time. He co-operates with the *devas* and Rishis when *sattva guna* prevails, with the *asuras* and *daityas* when *rajas* is predominant, and with the *yakshas* (demi-gods) and *rakshasas* (ogres) when *tamas* preponderates. Even in creation He assumes various forms conforming to the various *gunas*. He becomes the numerous *jivas* for example, as well as their bodies through the activation of the *rajasic* qualities. In order to enjoy through these bodies He evolves the qualities of *sattva*, and to retire from them (at death) those of *tamas*. As an example of the Lord's encouragement of the *sattvic* qualities at the right time and His impartiality, let me recount Narada's story of Sri Krishna's slaying of Sisupala, His mortal enemy, at Yudhishtira's *Rajasuya* sacrifice and then absorbing him in Himself, an act of infinite mercy on His part, which extremely puzzled everyone present, more so Yudhishtira himself, to whom Narada had to give the following explanation.

Yuddhishtira said:

“The absorption of Sisupala into Krishna is very puzzling to us all, O Divine Sage. We like very much to know the reason for it. To be absorbed into the Lord even with the greatest devotion and the most strenuous penance, is an extremely difficult achievement. King Vena was thrown into hell by the Brahmins because he merely uttered a blasphemy against the Lord: how did the sinful Sisupala who hated Sri

Krishna from the time he started lisping his words, deserve this unique favour?”

Narada answered:

“Thinking constantly of the Lord either through intense love or intense hate keeps the mind fixed on Him. The caterpillar which gets imprisoned in a wasp’s nest ends by becoming a wasp itself by developing a wasp complex, that is, intense fear of, and hatred for, the wasp. The *gopis* attained union with Krishna through a long-sustained love,<sup>[8]</sup> which kept their hearts and minds ceaselessly centred on Him.

“Moreover, O noble Yudhishtira, Sisupala and the sinful Dantavakra, the sons of your maternal aunt, are none other than the shining gatekeepers of the Lord’s abode, Jaya and Vijaya (p. 46). In their first birth after the curse they were the great demons Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu, in their second Ravana and Kumbhakarna; and that was their third and last birth, after which they were destined to return to *Vaikuntha*, which the touch of the Lord’s discus enabled them to do by purifying them from their sin’.”

Sri Suka continues:

Yudhishtira, hearing the name of Hiranyakasipu, remembered the extreme torture which this asura had inflicted on his own son Prahlada, because of his unwavering devotion for the Lord, and requested Narada to tell his story. Narada began with the death of Hiranyaksha at the hand of the Divine Boar (p. 42), which plunged his family in profound grief. With flaming eyes and rage-contorted countenance, Narada said, Hiranyakasipu complained to the chief demons who had assembled in his house to condole him that their “petty enemies” (the gods) managed to take Hari to their side, and caused his beloved brother’s death, that though Hari was usually impartial,<sup>[9]</sup> He was flattered like a fickle-minded child by their praises and some small offerings. He solemnly vowed that he would not rest until his spear had severed Hari’s head, his brother’s blood avenged, and his spirit appeased. “Meanwhile,” he adjured them, Narada continued,

“spread yourselves all over the land which has been made prosperous by the priests and the ruling race, and destroy all those who are engaged in *tapas*, in sacrifice, in the study of the Vedas, in upholding the *varnas* and in charity and worship. For Vishnu’s existence depends

on ritual and the practice of *dharma*, of which He is the personification. Set fire to their lands and uproot them completely.”

Thereupon, the asuras, rakshasas, and daityas, most of whom were deformed and hideous: one with two heads, another with three eyes, a third with one hundred arms, a horse’s head, etc., all fierce, terrible to look at and lovers of destruction, swooped down on towns and villages, and devastated gardens, cow-pens, parks, cornfields, hermitages, bridges, fortresses, fruit trees, houses, etc., inflicting great suffering on humans and animals.

Hiranyakasipu called his brother’s family — wife and nine sons — and his mother Diti, and performed the ceremony for the dead to appease his brother’s soul. He tried to console them with a soft-worded speech in which he praised the heroism of Hiranyakasha in dying a glorious death on the battlefield, a death which should not, he said, be lamented but should be taken as the work of Providence, Who created the souls like pilgrims who meet for a short while in a watering-place and then part forever. Then he told them the story of the illustrious Suyajna, King of Ushinara, who had been killed in battle and lay bleeding on the ground surrounded by his queens, who clutched at his corpse lamenting for so long that they prevented its cremation before sunset, which compelled Yama to appear in disguise and advise them not to be so foolish as to think that what they were hugging was their husband. He said:

“It is strange, indeed, O Queens, that you should weep over a mere corpse, which is not king Suyajna who used to see, hear, speak, and drink, and whom you cannot now see anymore than you could even before the death of his body. You should understand that *the intelligent entity which uses the (unintelligent) body to perceive and enjoy through it can never be perceived. So long as Suyajna acted through the body, he and you all mistook it for him as you are now mistaking his corpse for himself and your own bodies for yourselves.* The knowers of truth grieve neither for the living nor for the dead, for both are changeable and transient. Once a fowler caught a female sparrow in his net. Seeing her tragic state, her mate bewailed her lot as well as his own loneliness.

“‘What’, he moaned, ‘will the merciless Providence do with my wretched wife, who is now grieving for the little ones she had left in the nest and for my wretched self! Having snatched my half, why



should He leave behind the other half (himself), who will remain desolate, not knowing how to look after and feed the babies now anxiously awaiting the return of their beloved mother!’ While he was thus lamenting (as you are now doing) with tears streaming down his cheeks, the Fowler’s arrow struck him dead. Now, dear Queens, not thinking of your own death, you roll on the ground mourning your husband who will never return to you.”

Thus Hiranyakasipu spoke to his relatives and solaced them. But he did not give up his murderous intent on Sri Hari through sheer *tapas*. He retired to a valley in Mount Mandara and took to the most severe self-mortification, whose power scorched anything it met on its way and dislocated the normal movements of the spheres. The waters of the oceans rose very high, the mountains rocked, the stars and planets changed their orbits and positions in the firmament, and the cardinal points caught fire. Feeling the unbearable heat, the devas appealed to Brahma to save them from the disaster which the king of the *daityas* was brewing for them in his extraordinarily-potent penance. To see things for himself Brahma went to the demon’s hermitage accompanied by Daksha, Bhrigu, and others, and all were wonder-struck to find him covered by anthills and wild grass, denuded of his flesh and blood, which had been entirely devoured by insects. Brahma could not resist showing his sympathy.

“Rise, O son of Kasyapa,” he commanded, “Yours is the hardest *tapas* I have so far seen. No one has endured such mortifications and for such a long period as one hundred celestial years as you have done. Your tenacity of purpose and endurance are amazing in giving your flesh and blood to the worms, keeping your life literally hanging on your bare bones. You have thoroughly won me, O son of Diti. Ask a boon and I will grant it.”

Taking some water from his *kamandalu* Brahma sprinkled it on the demon, when lo! Hiranyakasipu shot out of the earth and the thorn bushes like a flame from an oil tank that had caught fire, perfect in every limb, shining like molten gold, and brimming with the freshness of adamant youth. Looking up and seeing Brahma on his usual mount (a swan) in mid-air, he prostrated himself before him and, standing up in a supplicant posture, spoke with streaming eyes and folded palms:

“This boon I demand, my Lord: let not my death be at the hands of any being created by you, nor of anyone not so created — be it a god, man, animal, demon, or even an inanimate thing. Let it not be either by day or by night, indoors or outdoors, on the earth or in the sky, nor by any weapon whatsoever. Grant me also, O Lord, an undisputed sovereignty over all embodied beings, a glory like your own amongst the lords of the spheres and, besides, mystical powers equal to those which are acquired by the greatest *tapas* and mind control.”

Brahma readily granted all this, which made the terrible daitya lose no time in taking advantage of the newly acquired boon. He immediately invaded the three worlds and brought under his control gods, *siddhas*, *yakshas*, *rakshasas*, men and all beings in nature and installed himself on the thrones of the guardians of the spheres, usurping the palace and dominions of Indra. He governed by stringent laws which violated the Scriptures and oppressed his subjects so hard, that they repaired to the Supreme Vishnu and respectfully put the matter before Him. But the Lord had known all about it and advised them to have patience for a little longer.

“For,” he said, “*no one who nourishes hatred against his fellow-beings can enjoy prosperity for long*, and this devil is hating and torturing all creatures, even his own righteous son Prahlada. I will certainly destroy him notwithstanding the boons he has wheedled out of Brahma.”

### ***Prahlada***

Narada now takes up the story of Prahlada, Hiranyakasipu’s five-year-old son, who was one of the most exalted souls that ever lived and a great devotee of the Lord. Although a daitya by birth, like his other three brothers, he was completely free from demoniacal propensities. Even the gods who were the enemies of his race spoke in high terms of his noble traits and spiritual merits in their meetings. The deeds and glory of Sri Vishnu, Whom he saw everywhere and in Whose arms he felt himself carried, filled his heart and mind from infancy, which alarmed his demon father, who thought it an unnatural “obsession” in a daitya.

The glorious Sukracharya, the Brahmin teacher of the asuras, lived near the royal palace with his two sons to give tuition to the King’s children and the young asura nobles. Prahlada was very quick in learning: no sooner he heard a lesson than he immediately repeated it, though at heart he

disapproved of the asuric teaching which distinguished between friends and foes.

When one day his father took him on his lap to see what progress he had made in his studies and questioned him about what he regarded as the highest good, quick came the child's answer:

*“Quitting home where one cannot escape the evil habit of thinking ‘I’ and ‘mine’ and taking to meditation on Sri Hari in the forest is I consider the highest good.”*

“Sri Hari!” the very sound of it shocked the chief demon, but probably the child, he thought, did not know that that was the name of the worst enemy of his race and of himself, Hiranyakasipu. So he laughed it out but commanded that the Prince be taken carefully in hand and not be allowed to consort with the Brahmins who might be living secretly in the teacher's house and might be responsible for the corruption of his mind.

In order to exonerate himself of the charge of having a corrupting influence in his house, Sukracharya tried to coax the secret out of Prahlada as to the source of the “false” teaching he had represented to his father and, receiving nothing in return but praises of Sri Hari, he reproached him of being a disgrace to his race and a potential instrument for its destruction. He, finally, taught him the text which dealt with the three objects of the human endeavour, namely, *Kama*, *Artha* and *Dharma* omitting the fourth — *Moksha* — and expounded the means of attaining them, which were: constant demands of favours and gifts, coercion, causing dissensions and the like, according to the asuric *dharma*. Prahlada repeated this lesson after him, which satisfied the teacher so much that he took him immediately to his father to recite it in his presence. But, before the King, Prahlada digressed and reaffirmed his faith in Sri Hari, to Whom, he said, one should surrender completely oneself, body, possessions and all actions, which confirmed the King's suspicion in his priest, at whom he yelled:

“You have, O vile Brahmin, espoused our enemy's cause and taught these hateful notions to my son. You are one of those impious people who conceal their treachery to their friends under a deceptive garb, yet they are eventually unmasked, like the secret disease which, cannot but declare itself at the right time.”

Turning to Prahlada, Hiranyakasipu asked him whence he got these “heretical” ideas, but, instead of giving a direct answer, the child poured out

a whole sermon on the blindness of the people who are attached to action and to the enjoyments they derive birth after birth from the same objects and the same actions, which keep them bound to Vedic rituals, like the oxen which are always tied by the same rope.

Sukracharya was struck mute with shame at Prahlada's *volte face*, and Hiranyakasipu was seized by such a frenzy on hearing these traitorous words of his son that he pushed him out of his lap and commanded that he should be put to death at once.

“Look at this vile child,” he roared, “who deserts his kith and kin, spurns his paternal love, and sides with the enemy! A son who betrays his own family and people is worse than a generous foe and should be cut off from them.”

The attendants pounced on the helpless child and speared his bowels screaming ‘Tear him!’ ‘Finish him!’ But great was their consternation when they saw the ineffectiveness of their weapons on him. Shaken out of his wits by this extraordinary phenomenon though he was, Hiranyakasipu was not deflected from his resolve to do away with his son and ordered all the instruments of torture to be used on him. Prahlada was trampled on by giant elephants, bitten by poisonous snakes, made the butt of the most fiendish magical spells, dropped to the earth from great heights, given poisoned food, confined to solitary underground cells without any nourishment and exposed to snow, wind, fire and rain, but nothing could destroy him or affect his mental composure.

His asura father felt numb with frustration and was tormented by his miraculous immunity to death (the cause of which was completely beyond him to discover). It was, besides, not a mean challenge to his authority and a profound humiliation to his pride, which had, until then, known no fear, failure, or submission. He was so broken that the sons of the Brahmin priest pitied him and succeeded in persuading him that Prahlada was too small a child to realise what was at stake or what he was saying and doing and that, therefore, he should be left entirely to himself till he attained the age of reason, when of his own accord he would come round to the right asuric path. Recognising the force of this argument, Hiranyakasipu reluctantly ordered the release of Prahlada, but issued strict directions to the teacher to instruct him in the duties of a royal householder and the three asuric principles (mentioned before).

One day the tutor was absent and the asura boys were allowed to play as they pleased. Prahlada collected all those who loved and befriended him and whose minds had not yet been corrupted, and lectured to them:

“The wise man should try to lead a virtuous life *right from childhood* to attain God-realisation. *To seek pleasure in a transitory body is a wasted effort; for pleasure, like pain, comes of its own accord by the mere contact with the body. To make special efforts for it, would, in fact, detract from the true and lasting happiness which the knowledge of Truth and the feet of Sri Hari alone can bestow.*

“Just consider how the hundred years of a man’s life are being frittered away on useless things. Half of them are wasted on sleep, eating, cleaning the body, etc. Of the remaining fifty years fifteen to twenty are spent in infancy, childhood and youth, when one’s reason is not developed enough to discriminate between right and wrong. Another five or ten go in impotent senility and the remaining comparatively few years are thrown on sensual pleasure in gross negligence of one’s eternal good. *No extremely passionate man, a slave to women’s lust, is known to have gained the eternal bliss of Liberation.*

“Therefore, O young Daityas, shun the company of people of your race, whose hearts are given to sensuality, and worship Lord Narayana. Give up your *asuric* dispositions and develop, dear children, love and compassion for all, which will please the Infinite Being, Who will do everything to your satisfaction. Failing this, nothing of permanent value can be obtained from rituals, which are, after all, performed for transient, worldly gains.”

Addressing Yuddhishtira, Narada continues:

The asura children who heard Prahlada’s exposition of Truth and the way to Emancipation declared themselves wholeheartedly for it, denouncing the asuric teaching which discriminates against living beings. Overhearing this talk, the preceptor’s son went to the King and reported the matter in detail to him. The latter summoned his son to his presence and, trembling with anger, said:

“Wretch, you seem to be determined to create discord in our ranks. That not only you shake yourself loose from my authority, though this extends to the three worlds, but that you should also sow dissension among our race is more than I can bear. I will this very day pack you

off to Yama and put an end to your constant thwarting of my purpose and authority. You seem to possess extraordinary notions of your powers to stand against me, O fool, though I cannot imagine from whom you derive them.”

Without a moment’s hesitation the child answered:

“From Whom you and all beings derive yours. Give up, O King, your evil dispositions and gain peace. *There is no greater enemy than one’s own distracted mind which is begotten by ignorance.*

The royal Asura quivered and barked:

“I see that you are destined to die now, O braggart! But I want you for just one second to think if there is a Lord in all the three worlds other than I. You seem to conceive a being who pervades everything. If so, he must surely also be in this pillar. Let him show himself and protect you from my sword.”

So saying, the King struck the pillar of the throne-room with his fist with great vehemence and drew his sword to cut off his son’s head. But great was his dismay when from the pillar rose the sound of a crash so terrific that it reached the seventh world of Brahma and brought down all the denizens of the spheres, who thought the hour of universal dissolution had struck. Out of the pillar issued a mighty Being, who was neither man nor lion, but both man and lion — *Narasimha* — of an immense, magnificent stature, and stood in the middle of the room with eyes, face, hair and mane shedding an indescribable lustre all around. He had a number of arms, a short, thick neck, a broad chest, a tongue as sharp as the edge of a razor, tremendous teeth and claws. He was the Lord Himself. Seeing Him, the danavas and daityas, who were armed with their sharpest weapons, took fright and scattered like chaff before a hurricane. Hiranyakasipu lifted his mace to strike Him, but, forestalling him, Narasimha caught him as the hawk catches a snake and then let him go, as if in play. The asura then drew his sword to cut Him, but the Lord roared with a man’s laughter and a lion’s roar and seized him again, bent him on His thighs, tore his bowels and heart with His claws, and threw his carcass on the ground. He then turned His countless arms against his thousands of followers, who rushed at Him with their weapons, and despatched them all, and in one leap He sat on the dead King’s throne. Showers of flowers fell on Him from the celestial hosts who had watched the fight. Brahma, Shiva, Indra, *siddhas* and Rishis, all the

gods and goddesses with their retinues sang hymns of praise to the Supreme Narayana and there was universal rejoicing in heaven and on earth. Yet Lord Narasimha continued to quiver so much that neither Lord Shiva, Brahma, nor even Sree, His beloved Consort Herself, dared approach Him. Brahma thought it best to send to Him child Prahlada, who slowly approached, bowed low and prostrated full length on the ground before Him. The Lord out of the fullness of His love, placed His hand on his head and raised him to his feet. But the touch completely transformed the little devotee: it swept away all the inhibitions and the latent impressions which he had carried from the past birth to the present and revealed to him the pure Being — the true nature of the Lord — which thrilled his heart and diffused joy to his whole frail body. Then regaining composure, he addressed Lord Narasimha thus:

“All the hosts of heaven: all the gods, *siddhas* and *munis* who have just now poured out streams of hymns in Your glory, have not succeeded, O Lord, to quench Your anger: how can I, born of a *tamasic* race, succeed! But, O Master, we know that nothing can please You more than devotion, be it that of an outcast who feeds on dogs’ flesh but who has surrendered his thought, action and speech to You. You deem such a man far holier than a Brahmin who has turned his back on You; for the former can redeem his whole tribe, whereas the erring Brahmin cannot redeem even his own soul. The devotion for which You hanker, we know, is not for Your own benefit, O Merciful One, Who ever enjoy the bliss of Your own Self, but for the benefit of the devotee himself, because the devotion so offered reflects back on its offerer, like the reflection of one’s own face in the mirror.

“All the devotees here assembled: Brahma, Shiva and others ever think of You with faith and love, although they are now afraid of You, the embodiment of *Sattva*. Be pleased to restrain Your anger now that the enemy who provoked it is no longer alive.”

Prahlada continued for a long time this spontaneous outpouring which revealed his profound insight in the Lord’s true nature and soothed Lord Narasimha Who now gave His gracious answer:

“I am pleased with you, O noble Prahlada, Chief of the *asuras*, ask a boon and it will be granted. Those who do not seek to please Me will never be able to perceive Me. But those who do, will be favoured by a

sight of Me, be it only once, and they will never again have an occasion to grieve.”

But this did not tempt the child’s heart for boons. Thanking the Lord for His gracious offer, Prahlada said:

“Pray do not tempt me, O Lord, belonging that I am to a race which is attached to the senses. Afraid of again falling victim to them, I have come to You for protection, thus securing freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Besides, he who demands worldly boons for devotion is not a true devotee but a trader, nor is he a true master who tempts the servant with gifts in order to establish his masterhood. Between us no such considerations exist: for neither I have cravings that demand satisfaction nor You a motive in satisfying them, unlike an earthly king and his servant, whose relation is governed by self-interest. The only boon I ask is that no desires be born again in my heart to drive from it righteousness, honesty, modesty and truthfulness — my sole qualifications for the attainment of Your Divine Glory.”

The Lord replied:

“Those who, like you, have dedicated themselves solely to Me, do not seek reward either in this world or in the next. Nevertheless it is My wish that you should enjoy regal honours and splendour as the Lord of the *Daityas* for a whole *manvantara* losing nothing of your devotion to Me and renouncing the fruits of your action. You will acquire a fame for righteousness which will be celebrated in all the worlds. At the end of that time you will cast off your body and will attain to Me.”

Prahlada accepted the gracious offer, but demanded the following favour:

“May my father, O Supreme Lord, who, ignorant of the immensity of Your might and glory, spoke disparagingly of You, imagining You to be the murderer of his brother, be forgiven his sins, although, I am convinced, they have already been forgiven him the moment You set Your compassionate eye on him.”

The Lord answered:

“Your father, O sinless Prahlada, was already freed from all his sins with all his forefathers unto the twenty-first generation by your very birth in their race. Of the man who is devoted to Me, whose mind is



perfectly calm, pious, extremely noble and has a universal outlook, not only his forefathers but also the land in which he lives and all who inhabit it are sanctified. You will be a model devotee to those who will tread the path of devotion.

“Go now, dear son, perform your father’s funeral rites, although he was already purified by the touch of My person and ascend his throne, keeping Me always in your mind and doing your royal duties as laid down by the Scriptures.”

Narada said that Prahlada obeyed the Lord’s command and was crowned king by the Brahmins with due pomp and ceremonies. Brahma, repentant for having granted boons to Hiranyakasipu on account of his severe *tapas*, which served to stamp out of him all virtues, approached the Lord and expressed his joy at the death of the tyrant. Lord Narasimha advised him to confer no more boons on asuras in future, for boons given to cruel persons are as harmful to the world as milk to poisonous snakes.

“This, O Yudhishthira,” Narada concluded, “is the mercy of the Lord on those who fix their minds on Him. Sisupala (as I have already said) merged in Him because of it, and because he had to return to his old office in *Vaikuntha* immediately.”

[8] Concentration on the Lord acts not only positively by turning the mind into the very nature of the Lord, Pure Consciousness, but also negatively by diverting it from distracting sensuous objects, which helps the attainment of the former.

[9] It is to be observed that Hiranyakasipu did not reveal the real cause of his brother’s death, namely, his pursuit and challenge of the Lord to fight him, but twisted the truth to make Hiranyaksha appear innocent, a victim of Sri Hari’s “partiality.”

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## XI – XII

### *Narada's Sermon to Yudhishtira*

Sri Suka continues:

Yudhishtira, delighted with hearing the inspiring story of Prahlada, requested Narada to explain to him the *Sanatana Dharma*, which lays down the eternal rules of right conduct for all men according to their *varnas* and *ashramas* by knowing and strictly acting on which, King Yuddhishtira believed, one attains the Supreme.

Narada bowed in homage to the Lord and expounded the eternal *Dharma* which, he said, he had heard from the mouth of the great sage Narayana who, with Sage Nara, was a manifestation of Sri Vishnu and who perpetually dwells in his hermitage at Badari. After giving minute details of the duties of each *varna* and each *ashrama*, Narada spoke of the *vanaprastha ashrama* (of the forest dweller who had already passed through the householder life) which ends by merging the individual *jiva* in the absolute Self. The hermit discards the material body and the principles which manifest in it, namely, the five senses, the five elements, the thinking faculty, etc., by dissolving each of them in the one from which it has emanated, from the gross to the subtle, from the subtle to the subtler, until the *gunas* regain their balanced state, which is their *pradhana* (un-manifest state). *Thus the superimposition of a separate entity as jiva, caused by the disturbed gunas will automatically dissolve and there will remain nothing but its ground, the absolute Brahman.*

Narada likewise gave details of *sannyasa* (the Path of Renunciation), which is taken by the person who has a natural tendency for it, and has renounced everything but the body. *The Sannyasi's whole endeavour should be directed towards the discovery of the true Self at the point of contact between*[\[10\]](#) *sushupti (deep sleep) and jagrat (waking state), and should look upon both bondage and freedom, birth and death, as unreal. He should not read profane books nor live by any profession, nor indulge in polemics, nor take sides in a partisan spirit, nor accept disciples, nor do much reading which would divert his mind from his spiritual practice, nor make speeches, nor undertake any responsible work. After attaining enlightenment he may continue to behave as before or alter his ways as will suit his convenience. To give no external signs by which others can recognise his attainment, he*

*retains his usual mode of life or pursuit.* Some *muktas*, to divert others' attention from their greatness, pose as imbeciles, or as deaf, dumb, etc. Narada illustrates this by a story in which King Prahlada once met a very holy ascetic covered with dust and lay on the bare earth but looked very contented, and inquired of him the secret of this contentment of his, which seemed to arise from his abstention from all activity, when the world, contrariwise, seek it in feverish activity. The holy man answered:

“Perceiving the frustration of every attempt made for happiness, I have, O Chief of the asuras, determined to abstain from all actions. *The very essence of oneself is bliss, which is inactive. To close the eyes to this happiness (which is already available to us as our very Self) and instead seek it where it does not exist, that is, in action, which is external to us (as the not-Self), should evidently result in frustration. It is like ignoring the pool of good water which is at the thirsty man's very elbow because it is covered with sedge and run after a mirage.* I have personally observed the torments of moneyed people: fear, avarice, anger, arrogance and danger dog their heels. Hence I am perfectly satisfied with the company of my own Self and with whatever food chance puts in my way. A man of contemplation should merge all he perceives in his own self-luminous being, which is the effortless Reality and should thus remain action-less. Since you are the beloved of the Lord I have explained to you my conduct in life.”

## XIV – XV

Sri Suka continues:

Yudhishtira asks what should a householder, who is deeply attached to his domestic life “like me,” do to attain Liberation. The sage Narada replies:

“He should perform his duties as a dedication to the Lord for the Lord’s own sake, without demanding anything in return, and should seek the company of sages who are calm and speak only of the Lord. He should not despise any living being but take him to be the Lord Himself,” etc.

[10] Of the many hints which the *Bhagavata* offers to the practising yogi, this is one of the most precious, which is apt to escape the general reader. Attempts to catch this point never fail to reveal the source from which *jagrat* issues out. *Jagrat*, being nothing else but the senses and the active intellect, cannot be realised as such except at the moment of its collapse or resurgence (as is deliberately brought about in *samadhi*), when these are too debilitated to oppose a perception of their ground. Those who find it difficult to follow up this process at the outset, will do well to begin with tackling the relaxation of the body, preparatory to falling asleep, which is natural to every living being, when the peace which ensues therefrom and which is obvious to one, will lead to the locus in which it is felt. This locus is the SOURCE, into which all the thinking and perceiving, that is, *jagrat*, sinks and from which it emerges. This is the Self or the absolute Being.

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# BOOK EIGHT

VISHNU AVATARAS – II

## I – III

### *Gajendra Moksha*

Sri Suka proceeds to describe in brief the number of *manvantaras* in each *kalpa*, or day of Brahma (see footnote, p. 40), and mentions the names of the Manus who governed the earth in the first six *manvantaras* of this *kalpa*, which have already passed, as well as of the present Manu — the seventh. It was in the fourth *manvantara*, whose Manu was Tamasa, the son of Priyavrata (p. 90), he said, that the Liberation of the elephant Gajendra took place.

In one of the secluded valleys of Mount Trikuta, which was surrounded on all sides by the Ocean of Milk and intersected by rivers and lakes of all sizes, perennially supplied with fresh, limpid water and whose banks glittered with powdered gems of all qualities and colours, there was a garden which belonged to Varuna, the lord of the oceans. It was full of celestial trees which were in all seasons loaded with fragrant flowers and fruits, which caused the *apsaras* to choose it as their sporting ground and its lakes as their bathing pools.

A family of elephants which inhabited the forest on the mountain, once entered that garden led by their mammoth chief Gajendra, and made to a big lake in it to drink water and cool themselves. As soon as Gajendra dipped his feet in the lake, a vicious alligator clutched at one of them and started dragging him into the water. The elephant's wives and young ones shrieked, trumpeted and pulled Gajendra from behind to help him out of his enemy's jaw, but all their efforts proved of no avail. The fierce tug of war went on and on for one-thousand years, which left the unfortunate victim exhausted in body and spirit. When all hope of rescue faded away and death was staring at him in the face, Gajendra turned his thoughts to the Lord and recalled to mind a hymn which he had learnt in his previous life as a virtuous Pandya king, and which he had in that animal body forgotten. He recited it now with great feeling, praising the Lord for His many mercies and ended with a prayer to Him to listen to his cry of distress and save him. He sang:

“I salute the Supreme, Omnipotent Lord, Who is denoted by the mystical syllable OM, Who forms the bodies as *prakriti* and dwells in them as *Purusha*, the Self-efficient Lord, from Whom this universe

emanates, and in Whom it lives, Who is verily the universe itself, yet beyond it as its un-manifest Cause.

“May that all-pervading Lord, Who sheds His light everywhere and Whose Nature cannot be comprehended, much less described, by even gods and *siddhas* protect me. Him alone I take as my refuge, Him for the perception of Whom, yogis who have radically shed their attachments to the world take to rigorous *tapas*, which is far beyond ordinary mortals to perform.

“I bow to Him, the perceiver of the senses as well as their objects, the Source and Cogniser of all cognitions. I bow to Him *Who is attainable by the pure mind that has divested itself of all worldly activities*, the Lord of the final Beatitude, as well as of the realisation of its bliss, the Lord of infinite compassion, Who releases from bondage the souls that have completely surrendered themselves to Him.

“May that Lord of infinite mercy effect my deliverance.”

Hearing the death-cry of the royal Gajendra, Sri Hari hastened to his rescue and, stretching His hand, pulled him out of the water along with his captor, whose mouth He slit open with His discus and set the spent elephant free.

## IV

Going into the history of the case, Sri Suka said that the alligator was previously a chief of the *Gandharvas* (celestial musicians), Hutu by name, who was cursed by Rishi Devala for some fault. Now by the touch of the Lord's discus he was released from the curse and reverted to his old *Gandharva* form, whereas Gajendra in his previous life was Indrayumna, a Pandya king (Dravidian) and a great devotee of the Lord. Later he turned ascetic on Kulachala mountain. One day Rishi Agastya accompanied by his numerous disciples entered his hermitage while he was rapt in meditation. As he did not rise to receive the Rishi, the latter thought that the host had deliberately disregarded him and cursed<sup>[11]</sup> him to turn into a thick-skinned elephant in his next life (dull-witted that he appeared to the irate Rishi). Though he was in an elephant body, by virtue of his past ascetic devotion, Indrayumna regained consciousness of the Lord in his dire extremity, when life was ebbing by inches and his mind in profound despair. The Lord not only saved him from death but granted him immortality by endowing him with a form like His own and took him on Garuda's back with Him to *Vaikuntha*, where he was made His personal attendant.

<sup>[11]</sup>To our modern way of thinking this and, in fact, most of the curses recorded in the sacred *Bhagavata*, judged by any standard, seem to be curiously harsh and irreligious. The curse, for example, pronounced by the Kumaras on Jaya and Vijaya (p. 47), is cruel and out of all proportions to the unintentional error the latter had committed in the discharge of their duty – if error it was. The same may be said of the curse of Kasyapa on poor Diti, or on Parikshit by the Brahmin youth. But, taking a long view of the matter, we find the curses to be not arbitrary, but governed by the laws of predestination to the lasting benefit of the persons affected. When for instance, the Kumaras offered to withdraw the curse the Lord intervened and said that He would have cancelled it of His own accord were it not already pronounced on them by Sree Herself (p. 47). That they badly needed purification was proved by later events which showed them to be profoundly satanic, a trait which was temporarily covered up by the *sattvic* atmosphere in which they lived. As Hiranyakasipu and Ravana they were veritable monsters of arrogance, lust, greed, treachery, tyranny, and what not, and needed a birth in a plane which offered a scope for their manifestation, so that they might be scotched. The benefit to Indrayumna was, likewise, obvious for his terrible experience as Gajendra was rewarded by the Lord bestowing on him His very form, which would have otherwise been impossible. The case of Diti was pathetic indeed, but what was her reward when through her



grandson Prahlada, as the Lord expressed it, she secured Liberation along with all his ancestors unto the twenty-first generation!

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## V – IX

### *Kurma Avatara*

Sri Suka continues:

In the sixth *manvantara* which was ruled by Chakshusna Manu, the churning of the Ocean of Milk took place, from which nectar was extracted to immortalise the gods, for which Lord Vishnu had to appear in the form of a tortoise (*kurma*). Before then when they were attacked by sharp weapons the gods used to fall stark dead on the field without the possibility of revival. Their predicament became serious when Durvasa cursed [\[12\]](#) Indra and his three worlds. *Swarga* and the earth were immediately stripped of their splendour, all religious practices were abandoned, and the gods felt weak and at the mercy of their enemies, the asuras. Fearing a major disaster to their existence, the leaders of the gods called a big conference to find a solution to their difficulties, but could come to no decision. Nor could Brahma, to whom appeal was made, solve them. And when, finally, Lord Vishnu's help was sought, He was pleased to prescribe the sovereign remedy to all their ills, namely, the immortalising *amrita*, which had to be extracted from the sea, and advised them on the means of doing it. He said:

“Go immediately and conclude a peace treaty with your enemies, who are now having the upper hand. To accomplish a task of great importance, enemies must be won over and made to co-operate. Once you achieve your purpose, you must treat them as a serpent treats a rat. Bend all the powers of your souls to extract nectar without delay from the Ocean of Milk to render yourselves immortal by drinking it. Collect all the varieties of plants, herbs, grass and creepers and throw them into the ocean and churn them, and I will help you. You may use Mt. Mandara as the churning rod and Vasuki (the king of serpents) the churning rope, and throw the energy of all the gods and their enemies into the churning. Accept with kindness all the terms of the *daityas* and bring them to help you, and they will get nothing in the end for their labour. All the anger in the world cannot achieve what kind words can. Deadly poison called Halahala will emerge from the sea too, but do not mind it.”

Accordingly, the gods led by Indra called on Bali, king of the *daityas*, who was as astute a commander as he was wise, and knew when to fight

and when to make peace. The proposal of sharing the nectar found favour with him, and thus a friendship was struck between the former enemies, so that they joined forces and uprooted Mt. Mandara. Vasuki also agreed to the terms of the gods which entitled him to a share of the *amrita*. The churning started with the gods on Vasuki's head-side and the asuras on the tail-side. The Lord also contributed His energy by conferring the *rajasic* on the *daityas* and the *sattvic* on the gods. But Mt. Mandara proved too heavy for their joint strength and quickly went down to the bottom of the ocean. Lord Vishnu assumed the form of a giant tortoise, dived, passed under it and refloated it and continued to support it on its back till the end.

When after much churning nothing came out, Sri Vishnu Himself stretched out His hands and agitated the sea, when lo! the most poisonous (*halahala*) emanations rose, spread everywhere, and suffocated all the animals in the sea, on land, and in the air. The big sea animals ran to Sadasiva (Shiva) on Mt. Kailas and prayed for His help. Shiva, taking the permission of His Consort, squeezed the poison in the palm of one hand and swallowed it, which painted His throat blue (hence His nickname *Neelakantha*, blue-throat). A few drops of it fell to the ground, and these were quickly swallowed by snakes, scorpions and some other animals and plants turning them poisonous. Relieved of the fumes, the celestials and their collaborators churned with great vigour when Surabhi, a sacrificial vessel, rose and was taken by the Rishis. It was followed by the famous white horse Uchchaishrava which was taken by Bali, then by Airavata, the splendid elephant, which was taken by Indra for his personal mount. Out of the sea then issued the famous *kaustubha*, a ruby-like gem, which Sri Hari took and pinned on His chest. This was followed by the *parijata* tree, which satisfies all wishes, and by the most beautiful nymphs and then by the glorious Ram, the beautiful Lakshmi, Whose splendour illumined all the quarters. She, Devi the auspicious, the pure, chose Sri Hari as Her Spouse by placing on His shoulder the wreath of fresh lotuses She was carrying in Her hand, and by standing by His side. Shiva, Brahma and all the devas worshipped Her and the Brahmins chanted Vedic hymns and sprinkled Her with consecrated water from golden pots. The Father of the world made His bosom Her permanent abode, from where She — the Fount of all fortune — casts Her munificent glances on all the creatures of the world. After Her rose Varuni, the goddess of intoxicants, who was taken by the asuras with Vishnu's consent. She was followed by a most wonderful youth carrying the

jar of nectar in hands which were decked with bracelets. He was Danvantari, the celebrated *amsa* of the Lord, who revealed the Ayurvedic medical science to the world. Tempted by the sight of the *amrita* and in violation of their agreement with the devas, the asuras, forcibly snatched the pot from his hand and started quarrelling among themselves for its possession, the stronger pushing away the weaker. The gentle gods, finding themselves deprived of their prize and fearing the consequences of the immortalising elixir falling to their enemies, appealed to the Lord to help them. To deceive the *daityas* Sri Vishnu manifested Himself as the beautiful damsel Mohini, who kindled passion in their hearts and so charmed them that they delivered the jar to her to distribute its content as she pleased. When the devas and the asuras collected in the hall after their bath, Mohini separated them and started the distribution with the former and by the time she finished with them the jar was empty. Only Rahu, one of the *daityas*, having disguised himself as a celestial, succeeded in receiving some nectar, but before he could swallow it he was recognised and denounced by Sun and Moon to Sri Hari Who lost no time to sever his head with His discus, immortalising the head which contained the nectar, and destroying the body. The Lord turned the head into the planet Rahu, which causes eclipses to the sun and the moon as a mark of his perennial enmity to them.

[12] When once Rishi Durvasa was on his way down from *Vaikuntha* he met Indra and presented to him the flower garland which Sri Vishnu had just gifted to him. Indra threw it rudely on his elephant's back. The animal shook it down and trampled on it. The Rishi, incensed, cursed Indra and the three worlds which he ruled to lose their prosperity and glory, which took effect immediately.

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## X — XI

### *Deva-Asura War*

Sri Suka continues:

When the *daityas* awoke from their infatuation and realised that they had been tricked out of the fruit of their labour, they gathered their forces and hurled themselves with great violence on the celestials, using any weapon that was handy, starting the great Deva-Asura War in which the former, strengthened by the nectar they had just consumed and by the Lord's own might, fought valiantly with all their war instruments. Bali in his aerial car led the asura hosts, while the devas were commanded by Indra riding on his newly-acquired Airavata. The battle was extremely severe and sanguinary, mostly in hand-to-hand fight: Bali confronted Indra, Rahu fought with Moon, and so on. When Bali saw that the gods were invincible, he started using magical spells: he raised a violent storm which rained fire and agitated a sea which surged into mountainous fiery waves, rapidly advancing to engulf the celestial hosts. These were so overwhelmed with fear that they appealed in their minds to the Lord, Who immediately appeared, dispelled their illusion and encouraged them to exterminate their enemies. Bali and his generals were killed and his hosts completely routed. It was a great victory for the celestials. Sukracharya by his knowledge of *sanjivinee* science revived Bali and all the asuras who had not suffered injury in their necks, or whose heads had not been severed from their bodies.

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## XII

### *Infatuation of Lord Shankara*

Sri Suka now relates the fantastic story of how Lord Shiva, by wanting to have a practical knowledge of how the *daityas* had been beguiled by Sri Hari, disguised as a maiden, Himself fell victim to the same delusion. It seems that when Shiva heard of the Lord's manifestation as Mohini He grew curious to see that bewitching form, and rode on His bull accompanied by His Consort to *Vaikuntha* to see Sri Hari about it. On arrival there He praised the Lord in a hymn which ran:

“Sages who seek the highest good and are free from attachment to this and other worlds worship Your feet alone. You are perfect, absolute bliss untainted by sorrow, the Cause and Effect of all things, like gold which ever remains gold whether it is moulded into jewellery or not. It is by ignorance that diversity is perceived in You, the one changeless substance. Your descents among mortals through the activation of the *gunas* have all been witnessed by Me save the last one with which, as the damsel Mohini, You bewitched the *daityas* out of their share of the *amrita*. Great is My curiosity, O Lord, to see that form.”

The Lord answered that to save the gods He had to take a female form which had a great appeal for the asuras. “I shall show You,” He said, “that form which highly delights libidinous men and excites passion in them.”

Saying this, the Lord vanished, and on that spot suddenly appeared a beautiful garden full of trees heavily-laden with scented blossoms of fruits and flowers, and in it a ravishing damsel sporting with a ball, which exposed the witchery of her curves and so overwhelmed Shiva's senses that He forgot Himself and, in the very presence of His Consort and attendants, ran after her, stricken with an infatuation which she greatly encouraged. But whenever He came very near enfolding her in His arms, she escaped and playfully hid behind a tree. And when, at last, He succeeded in catching her, she managed gently to extricate herself and make for the forests, the mountains, the lakes, rivers, valleys and hermitages with Shiva in mad panting pursuit. His excitement reached now such a climax that His vital fluid escaped, when lo! His infatuation promptly vanished, and He realised His folly, yet He was neither repentant nor ashamed of His loss of self-control. The places where His seeds dropped became gold and silver fields,

for they never go to waste. Sri Vishnu appeared again and expressed His admiration of Shiva that He could not only by Himself conquer the Lord's powerful *Maya*, which none lesser than He could have done in such a short time, but also quickly regain His natural, serene state and promised "Never again, O foremost of the celestials, shall My *Maya* make a prey of you."

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## XIII — XIV

### *Future Manus*

To complete the list of the fourteen Manus of this *kalpa*, Sri Suka enumerates the seven who will be in charge of the world during the remaining seven *manvantaras* and their genealogies and activities, as well as the Indras and Rishis who will co-operate with them in their administrations and in the revival of virtues and the quest for Truth, which Time may have by then obliterated or caused to fall into desuetude. Finally the Sage exhorts Parikshit to remember that:

“the Manus and their sons, the sages and Indras, as well as the various classes of gods, O Ruler of the earth, are all directed by the Supreme *Atman*. In every *yuga* Lord Hari assumes the forms of *siddhas* to impart wisdom and teach yoga and ritualistic worship, and of rulers to administer justice and suppress the wicked. The Lord is all things and all characteristics and *though variously depicted by the learned in their philosophical systems under the influence of Maya, He remains unknown to them.*”

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## XV — XXIII

### *Vamana Avatara*

King Parikshit inquires how Sri Vishnu, Who is the personification of all virtues, tricked the generous Bali out of the rulership of the three worlds, when He disguised Himself as a Brahmin dwarf. Sri Suka explains that the defeat of the asuras by the gods which resulted in the death of a countless number of their followers and of Bali himself, though he was revived by his preceptor, badly rankled in Bali's breast and gave him no peace. With the help of the Brahmins, who belonged to the Bhrigu race, he planned his revenge, performed the *viswajit yajna*, and received from the sacrificial fire a gold-plated aerial car and all the weapons which were necessary for the conquest of heaven. He gathered his vast hosts, armed them to the teeth, assaulted Indra's capital and took it by storm, completely routing the celestials and making himself the lord of the three worlds. To give thanks to the Lord, and spread virtues in all parts of his spheres Bali performed one hundred *aswamedhas*.

Aditi, the mother of the gods, was sorely afflicted at the defeat of her sons by those of her sister Diti. Kasyapa, rising from his long meditation in the forest, visited Aditi's hermitage and, seeing her sunk in misery, remarked:

“The Lord's *Maya* is powerful, indeed. The world is bound by bonds of affection between bodies. *What relation can there be between the insentient body and Atman! Who is husband or son to whom! Ignorance lies at the root of all these attachments.* Do worship the Perfect *Atman* and pray Him to restore *swarga* to your sons. In the bright fortnight of the month of Phalguna take the vow of *payovrata* (living only on milk, singing devotional hymns, repeating certain mantras) for twelve days.”

Aditi followed the instructions of her saintly husband with such meticulous care that Sri Hari appeared in person and said that He had known of her misfortune and the yearnings of her heart, but that at that time the asuras were invincible, due to the support given to them by the Brahmins, to whom Time was just then favourable. Nevertheless, He assured her, He would take birth from her womb through the energy of the

faultless Kasyapa, whom she should seek and look upon as the Lord Himself.

Having gained her life's object in seeing the Lord in person and receiving His direct command, Aditi waited on her husband with exemplary devotion. In his profound insight the latter actually perceived a portion of the Lord entering him and, concentrating his mind, injected his seeds into Aditi, passing on to her the Lord's *amsa* as the wind passes the spark of fire into the firewood and kindles it.

On the twelfth day of the bright half of Bhadrapada, when the sun reached the meridian, the Lord came out of Aditi's womb as a fully grown-up dwarf to the beating of the celestial drums and the rejoicing of the three worlds. Brihaspati, the Rishis and the gods gathered in Kasyapa's hermitage and performed the sacred thread ceremony, initiating the newborn into the *Brahmacharya Ashrama*, naming him Vamana. The gods and goddesses presented him with the various articles needed by a *Brahmachari*: sacred thread, string round the waist, codpiece, loin wrap, *kamandalu*, rosary, tiger skin and begging bowl. The auspicious Uma was chosen to give him his first *bhiksha* (begged midday meal).

Without loss of time Vamana went to meet Bali, who was then performing an *aswamedha* on the banks of Narmada and was received with great respect by his priests, who thought he resembled the four Kumaras in spiritual splendour and youth. Bali welcomed him affectionately, washed his feet and sprinkled his own head with the washing and finally requested him to name his wish, land, gold, a comfortable house, a cow, elephant, horse, or, "perhaps, a girl," which he vowed to grant readily. Greatly pleased, the dwarf answered that Bali's speech was worthy of him and his race, wherein no one was known to have lacked generosity or broken a promise. He remembered the host's grandfather Prahlada, who was a perfect model in the practice of *dharma*, and his great-grandfather Hiranyakasipu, whose renowned valour made even Lord Vishnu run away from *Vaikuntha* and, it was said, finding no place where He could hide, entered the nostril of the pursuer himself, where alone He felt Himself safe, and concluded with:

"Like your celebrated forefather, you have, O King, been foremost in the observance of the rules of *dharma* and lavish charity. Of you, the great giver, I ask a small bit of land which measures not more than

three of my own (dwarfish) paces: for to take more than he needs the wise man transgresses.”

The ridiculous pettiness of the demand greatly amused Bali, who could not resist reminding his guest that he was too young to be alive to his interest in asking for such a tiny bit when he could have a whole continent, and added that now that he was disposed to be generous, Vamana could take as much land as would secure him a decent living.

The divine dwarf answered:

*“The possession of all the three worlds cannot satisfy a man of unrestrained ambition. He who cannot be satisfied with three paces will not be satisfied with a whole continent. Prithu, Gaya and other kings who ruled over all the seven continents could never have enough, so great was their greed. The contented person can easily live on what chance places at his disposal. The hunger for wealth and sense-enjoyment is responsible for rebirth, whereas contentment inherits the great treasures of Liberation. I ask, therefore, O Protector of men, for only three paces of land which will cover my bare necessity.”*

Bali laughed and, pouring water in the palm of one hand, he pronounced his solemn promise to grant the gift demanded. Sukracharya warned Bali against this grant, the pettiness of which appeared to him to be very ominous. It might conceal a serious design on the part of Vishnu Himself to dispossess the asuras in favour of the celestials. He foresaw what was actually to take place and advised Bali to retract, which, he said, was legitimate to do when one’s life and the lives of one’s dependants were exposed to grave danger. But Bali was not prepared to go back on his pledged word and, with great respect to his preceptor, magnanimously answered:

“It is true, O worshipful Brahmin, that a householder must not part with his means of livelihood; but, having promised, I cannot be guilty of breach of promise to a holy Brahmin, like a base swindler, out of greed. I do not fear hell, poverty, loss of throne or even death as much as I fear playing false to a Brahmin. In any case all the wealth in the world has to be abandoned at death. Time has taken away all the enjoyments of the *daityas* (my forefathers), who owned the whole universe, but could not extinguish their fame as heroes, who had never known what retreating in battle was. The fame of the magnanimous

man who gives away all his fortune to needy supplicants, more so to knowers of Brahman, like your good self and this dwarf, and turns poor is far greater than even that of warriors, who lay down their lives on the battlefield. I will give to the Brahmin the land promised, be He Lord Vishnu Himself Whom we daily worship, or an enemy.”

Sukracharya got very enraged at Bali’s disobedience and, impelled by destiny, cursed him in the words, “Because you have shown arrogance to me your *guru*, you shall, O fool, soon fall from your royal splendour,” which did not in the least deflect Bali’s resolve to grant the promised gift. He washed the feet of Vamana from a golden vessel of water, which his queen herself had carried for the purpose. All the celestials applauded the magnanimity of Bali and showered celestial flowers on him. They beat their drums and sang hymns in his praise. But lo! the dwarf started expanding at such a rate that in a little time he filled all the spheres. Bali and his priests were staggered to see the whole creation in his body and, when he started measuring the three paces, he covered the whole earth and the cardinal points with one. His second covered *swarga* and stretched to the highest *satyaloka*, leaving no room for his third pace. There rose a great outcry among the *daityas* and the *danavas* at the deceit of Vamana, who proved a traitor to their cause, and rushed with weapons to attack him, but Vamana’s attendants gave them a good beating and Bali, remembering the curse of his *guru*, knew that his fall was inevitable. He ordered his followers to retreat, saying that Vishnu, who had brought him to power by the *Viswajit* sacrifice was now standing against him, because time was now favourable to the celestials and advised them to wait patiently when time will turn in their favour and they will have the upper hand. The righteous Bali was bound by ropes and taken prisoner, to the sorrow of both the gods and the asuras.

Lord Vamana charged Bali with perjury for having promised three paces of ground but gave only two, and sentenced him to imprisonment in the nether regions. Bali bore the sentence with equanimity and calmly answered:

“I did not intend, O Illustrious Lord, to deceive You. You have taken everything I possess, yet if You think that I owe You some more space for Your third step, You may be pleased to place it on my head. Fallen that I am, I am not afraid of the infernal regions nor of the loss of my kingdom, nor of any punishment, which the Great may deem fit to

inflict on me. You now pose as our enemy, but I know You to be our greatest benefactor — You Who have blessed us with a vision of Yourself on the pretence of causing our downfall, having had which vision many an asura attained Liberation. In his profound wisdom my illustrious grandfather Prahlada, of universal fame, suffered all the variety of torture to preserve his firm devotion to You, although You exterminated his kinsmen the asuras, *knowing full well that no lasting benefit can be gained from relatives who are disposed to rob one of ones wealth, or from wife who is the cause of transmigration, or even from one's own body which abandons one at death.* How good is my destiny to bring me in direct contact with You, disguised as enemy though You may be!”

Suddenly Prahlada appeared and prostrated himself before the Lord and with tears of joy addressed Him:

“O Lord, it was by You that the exalted office of Indra was conferred on Bali and by you that it has now been taken away. Whatever You do is always for one's good. *Especially the taking away of one's possessions which usually corrupt the mind, must be deemed to be a great favour: for no man of wealth can make any attempt to seek his true nature. Even men of learning fall victims to delusion if they are wealthy.* Hail to You, Lord of the universe and Witness of all things!”

Brahma, who also arrived, interceded on Bali's behalf. The glorious Lord replied:

“Whomever I want to favour with My Grace I divest him of his fortune — the fortune which hardens the heart against living beings and against Me. If pride of lineage, wealth, physical graces, learning and power do not appear in the man who owns them, it must be considered as a favour from Me. My devotee who deserves these advantages is not corrupted by them as the foolish man is.

“This leader of the *daityas* and *danavas* (Bali) has already conquered My invincible *Maya*, which is the reason why he is unperturbed by the calamity which has befallen him and stood firm by his promise even at the great cost of disobeying his *guru* and suffering his curse. He deserves to dwell in My own *Vaikuntha*, but he will have first to occupy the seat of Indra under My guardianship in the next *Manvantara* (the eighth) of Savarni Manu, ruling in the meantime

*Sutalaloka*, whose natural beauty has been enhanced by the art of Viswakarma, the celestial architect, where no anxiety, disease, fatigue, disappointment and other afflictions exist.

“O great Indrasena (Bali, Indra elect), may you flourish! Go now with your kinsmen to Sutala, which is envied even by the celestials, where none can harm you. My discus will destroy the *daityas* who will disobey your command and will protect you, your followers, and all your possessions. You will shed your demoniacal dispositions at the sight of My glory, which will be ever present there.”

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## XXIV

### *Matsya Avatara*

Having heard the story of the *Vamana Avatara*, King Parikshit requests Suka to tell him about the Lord's Descent as a Fish, which to him was very queer, considering the repugnance which the *tamasic* nature of the fish creates in the minds of the people.

Suka answers:

“The almighty Lord assumes any form which He deems necessary for the purpose in hand without being tainted by it, like space (which is not tainted by the objects that occupy it), He being without *gunas*.

“At the end of the previous *kalpa* the night of Brahma fell on all existence. The three worlds were flooded by the waters of the ocean and the Creator went to sleep covering them all in darkness. As he was overcome by sleep, Brahma unconsciously let the demon chief Hayagriva steal from his mouth the Veda, which was automatically recited by his breathing. To take it back from the daitya, the Lord took the form of a fish. This is how it happened.”

Sri Suka recounts that in that *kalpa* there lived a king in the land of the Dravidians, Satyavrata by name. He was a great devotee of Lord Narayana and practised penance, living only on water. One day as he was doing his ablutions a tiny fish came out of his *kamandalu* to the palm of his hand. To save its life, he took it and put it in the river. No sooner there than the tiny one piteously cried to him to save it from the bigger animals in the river which would surely swallow it. Satyavrata placed it back in the *kamandalu* which was full of water. In the morning he found it filling the whole *kamandalu* and crying for a larger space. He placed it in a much bigger vessel, which it again quickly filled and cried for a still bigger vessel. He went on changing vessels as the fish went on increasing in bulk, till he placed it in a lake, which it again filled and cried for a larger place. The ocean, he thought, was the only vessel large enough for it. When there, it started complaining not for lack of space but of fear of being killed by alligators and other big aquatic animals. Satyavrata was now at his wit's end, when suddenly a thought struck him that the fish had been fooling him

and that it could be none other than Lord Narayana Himself. So he addressed it:

“I have never known a fish that can grow in a single day from a dot to the size of a lake eight hundred miles long. Tell me who you are: you can be none other than the Lord Himself, taking this form for a purpose of Your own. Hail to You, Supreme *Purusha*, Ruler of the universe, the Self of all and the Goal of Your devotees! That You descend to the earth for the welfare of Your creatures, I know, but I am unable to find the reason for your assuming this form. Deign, O Lord, to enlighten me, Your devotee.”

The Lord answered:

“On the seventh day from today, the earth, the sky and the heavens will be under water, when the ocean will rise to cause a universal dissolution (*pralaya*). A large boat will then approach you. In the meantime go gather herbs, plants and seeds of trees of all kinds and all species of animals and enter the boat with the seven Rishis and, without light, move about the ocean fearlessly: the effulgence of the Rishis will alone suffice to light your way. Tie the boat to my horn, using Vasuki (the king of serpents which had a very long body) as a rope, so that it may not be tossed about by the mighty storms. I shall carry you on the water for the whole duration of the *pralaya*, which will last as long as the day of Brahma (the previous *kalpa*), O King, when by My Grace you will realise in your own heart My Supreme State as the *Parabrahman*, the transcendent Reality.”

On the appointed day storms raged and clouds incessantly poured thick sheets of rain which overflowed the ocean and completely blotted out the earth’s boundaries. In obedience to the Lord’s command King Satyavrata with all the plants and animals he had collected and the seven Sages boarded the big ship which approached them and sat in meditation appealing to the Lord to help them in that boundless, storm-tossed ocean, which was covered by darkness. A vast, horned whale, which measured 800,000 miles in length, presently drew near. The ship was tied to its horn with Vasuki’s long body. Overjoyed, the King prayed:

“Those whose knowledge of the Self is obscured by ignorance, in consequence of which they are worn out by the turbulent worldly existence, realise You by taking refuge in You, Who are the sole



teacher and bestower of the final Beatitude. *As the adulterated gold sheds its impurity and attains its native lustre by contact with fire, so does the jiva shed its ignorance and regain its native bliss by worshipping You, O Lord, Who are not only self-illuminated, like the sun, but also illumine all the senses.*<sup>[13]</sup> The knowledge imparted by an ignorant man is like guiding the blind by the blind and is sure to lead to transmigration. But the knowledge which You impart infallibly leads to illumination, which is the realisation by the individual (*jiva*) of his own essential nature. The world, being dominated by desire, does not recognise You, though You dwell in its heart. I, therefore, come, to appeal to You, almighty, adorable Lord, to enlighten me with your words on the absolute Truth, cut the knot of ignorance from my heart and reveal Your true Self to me.”

In that long, long night of Brahma, Lord Vishnu sported on the waters of the universal flood as He pleased, and revealed to Satyavrata the mystery of the Self in its entirety which now goes by the name of *Matsya Purana*, as approached by Yoga, Sankhya and ritual. As he sat with the other Rishis in the boat, the King intently listened to the discourses of the Divine Fish on the Self, which is identical with the infinite and eternal Brahman, and attained Illumination. When Brahma awoke from his sleep, the Lord, Who had already killed Hayagriva, returned the Veda to him and made Satyavrata the Manu of the seventh *Manvantara* (the present one) of this *kalpa* under the name of Vaivasvata Manu (whose dynasty Sri Suka traces in the next Book).

[13]The senses are prakriti, insentient. The light of cognition in the perception does not, therefore, arise from them, but from the cogniser, who is pure consciousness, the Lord Himself. Who owns the senses, as functions of the consciousness. To attribute sentience to the senses is like attributing light to the moon. Conversely, the Lord, being pure consciousness, pure sentience, is the cogniser of all cognitions and the doer of all actions.

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# BOOK NINE

## THE SOLAR AND LUNAR DYNASTIES

### *Rejuvenation of Rishi Chyavana*

Sri Suka follows the story of Satyavrata (last page).

In the present *kalpa* he was born as a son of Vivaswan, son of Kasyapa and Aditi, and his name was Shraddhadeva, who later became the Manu of the seventh *manvantara* (the running one) under the name of Vaivasvata. Then sons were born to him from his wife Shraddha, of whom the eldest was Ikshwaku, the father of a long line of solar kings. Another son was the most pious and learned king Sharyati, of whom the following story was told.

Once Sharyati and his beautiful daughter Sukanya and their entourage went on an outing in a neighbouring forest and entered the hermitage of Rishi Chyavana. Surrounded by her maids, Sukanya moved about admiring the trees, when two lights emerging from an anthill and resembling fire-flies caught her eye. In her childishness she picked up a thorn and thrust it into them, when, to her dismay, blood gushed out of them. There and then all the soldiers who accompanied her father felt the blocking of both their lower orifices, so that they could not void stool or urinate. The wise King immediately guessed that some injury had been done to the Rishi and, when upon inquiry he came to know of what his daughter had done, he went in great agitation to the Sage to apologise and offer him his daughter in expiation of her trespass. The Sage readily accepted the gift.

The Princess made an ideally diligent wife to a most irascible husband. She studied all his whims and did her best to satisfy them. Some time later the Aswin twins called at the hermitage. Recognising them, the Sage received them respectfully and made a request to them, as celestial physicians who certainly knew the secret of rejuvenation, to give his body a thorough overhauling as to make it desirable to young women, in payment for which he promised to secure for them a cup of the *soma* juice from the sacrifice, which ordinarily was forbidden to them. They agreed and ordered the Sage to “plunge into this pool formed by the *siddhas*” and plunged with him. Chyavana’s body was then bent with age and covered with bulging veins, wrinkles and white hair, but when the three dipped, they rose from the water looking exactly alike: handsome, fresh youths, radiant like the sun and decked in garlands of fresh lotuses, gold ear-rings and fine dresses, so

that the virtuous Princess was dazed and bewildered, unable to distinguish her husband from the others. As she could not address her husband by name, she appealed to the Aswins to declare themselves, so that she might recognise her husband in the third youth. Pleased with her wifely virtue the twins pointed him out to her and flew back to heaven in their aerial car. Some time after this Sharyati was going to perform a sacrifice and called at the hermitage to invite his daughter and son-in-law to it. Great was his consternation to see his daughter sitting by the side of a resplendent youth. When she rose and touched his feet in filial greetings, he did not have the heart to give her the usual paternal blessings, but instead spoke in an angry tone and called her names.

“What is this you are doing, O vile girl!” he chided. “How can you abandon a husband renowned for his saintliness, because he is aged, in favour of a vagabond of a lover? Have you lost your reason and sense of shame to bring this blot on the stainless name of your family and noble ancestry? This scandalous behaviour of yours will condemn us all to the torture of hell.”

The innocent girl bashfully answered that the youth was none other than his son-in-law and recounted to him the incident of the transfiguration of her husband, which immensely pleased him and made him apologise to her for his harsh words and embrace her. The now youthful Chyavana induced Sharyati to perform the *Soma* sacrifice, from which he took the promised *Soma* juice to the Aswins. This so much incensed Indra that he lifted his thunder-bolt to hurl it at the Sage, but the latter by his ascetic power paralysed the hand that held it. To please the Sage to restore their Chief’s hand to normal, the anxious gods lifted the ban on the award of the *Soma* juice to the twins for all time.

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## VI

### *Mandhata and Saubhari*

Sri Suka continues:

King Yuvanasva, a descendant of Ikshwaku, had one-hundred wives, but none of them gave him a child, which made him greatly dispirited. On the advice of his Brahmins he retired with his wives to the forest hermitage where they were conducting a special sacrifice on his behalf to propitiate Indra to grant him a son. As fate would have it, the King at midnight felt very thirsty and, finding water nowhere but in a vessel in the sacrificial hall, he drank it. This turned out to be consecrated water to be given on the morrow to his chief queen to make her conceive a male child. As the consecration was infallible, it made the King big with child, and when its time came to be delivered, the King's right abdomen bust open and a male baby issued from it and cried for milk. As the father had no milk to give it, Indra dipped his index finger, which dripped nectar, into the child's mouth and fed it. Hence the latter was named "Mandhata", after the words which Indra had used — *Mam dhata* (suck me)" — when he gave it his finger. The King by the Lord's Grace recovered from this unnatural confinement and took to penance until he attained perfection in that very hermitage, whereas Mandhata grew to be a great Emperor, the terror of the wicked and the lord of the seven continents on which the sun never set.

From his queen, Mandhata had three sons and fifty daughters, who married the ascetic Saubhari out of love. Saubhari was a great *tapasvin* who lived half immersed in the water of the sacred Yamuna. One day as he saw two fishes copulating in the water, he conceived an intense urge for a woman. Rising from the river he made straight to the Emperor and petitioned him for a maid. Mandhata agreed to give him the girl who would accept him of her own free will, which struck the ascetic that the proviso was made in the belief that no maid would choose him, decrepit and wrinkled that he was, with the head incessantly shaking and covered with white hair. To outwit the Emperor Saubhari used his yogic power and brought about such transformations in his body as it became irresistibly attractive to even celestial nymphs, so that when he presented himself to the Emperor's harem all the fifty daughters fell for him and started quarrelling among themselves to have him each for herself. Now the husband of fifty

young princesses, Saubhari created a veritable paradise on earth for them and plunged with them in marital delights whose relish increased by indulgence, like the fire which is constantly fed with oil. This life of dissipation lasted very long, but it could not last forever: Saubhari started again to introspect, and soon realised that he had very badly fallen from his ascetic vows and seeking because of just one little incident — the coupling of the fishes — which he had permitted to sway and sully the purity of his mind.

*“He who seeks Liberation”, he mused, “must eschew the company of married people. Living alone, he should fix his mind on the Lord and, should he feel the need for human company, he should seek it among the pious who are devoted to Him. I was first single, then I became fifty (wives), then increased to five thousand, when each wife begot me one hundred sons till I lost my reason by getting attached to these numerous parts of my body. I find no limit to attachments and to domestic responsibilities.”*

Thereupon he renounced his place and withdrew with his wives to the forest, where he performed *tapas* till he merged with the Supreme, to which state his wives followed him by imitating him and by the help of his spiritual glory.

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## VII — XIV

### *Rama Avatara*

In three chapters (VII — IX) Sri Suka narrates a number of incidents in the lives of some of the children and grandchildren of Vaivasvata Manu and enumerates them from father to son till he reaches King Dasaratha from whom Sri Rama, a great *Avatara* of Lord Vishnu, was born.

Appealed to by the celestials, Lord Hari, who is absolute consciousness, descended on earth as the four sons of Dasaratha (by his three wives), of whom Rama was the eldest and the full manifestation of the Lord. The other three — Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna, were only His partial manifestations. “Their full story,” Suka tells Parikshit, “has been already told in the great epic known by the name of Ramayana compiled by the sage Valmiki, from whom you must have time and again heard it.” Yet Suka gives a very brief sketch of it.

Bharata’s mother who was the favourite of Dasaratha, managed to extract from her royal husband a promise to transfer the throne not to Rama but to her own son Bharata. Acting on this promise, the King advised Rama to retire to the forest for fourteen years. Rama obeyed and left Ayodhya, the capital, with his beloved wife Sita and his younger brother Lakshmana, who was most devoted to him, and took to wander about in the forests. Prior to this, Viswamitra Rishi once called at the palace and requested the King to send Rama to his hermitage to clear the neighbouring forest of the *rakshasas* who were destroying all life from it and polluting the Rishi’s own sacrifices. Rama went and liquidated them all. Among the *rakshasas* was the wicked Shurpanakha, the sister of Ravana, the ten-headed demon king of Lanka, whose ears and nose were cut off by Lakshmana. Ravana sought Rama’s hermitage in the forest to avenge this mutilation as well as to possess Sita, of whose great beauty he had heard from his sister. By his magic tricks Ravana managed to keep the two brothers away for some time, and carried away Sita, who was then defenceless. When Rama returned and did not find Sita he nearly lost his mind, both out of regret for having left her alone and out of sorrow for her loss, which shows the plight of those who get attached to women. Following the clues of Ravana’s escape route, the brothers traced him to the island of Lanka, to which they hastened with all their might, contracting friendship with the chiefs of the monkeys who

inhabited the land on their way. These were Hanuman, Sugriva, Nila and others, who became immortalised in history for their services and loyalty to Rama's cause and devotion to his divine person. They all marched at the head of their armies to the sea of Lanka.

At the approach of Rama the animals which lived in the sea grew immensely agitated, reflecting the mental agitation in which he then was. Varuna, the sea god, having known the reason, came to Rama and invited him to build a bridge across the sea to Lanka and defeat the monster Ravana. This was immediately done, when mountains were wholesale uprooted from their bases and dumped into the sea. Millions of monkeys and bears then poured into Lanka. Before that Hanuman had gone alone to the island and had found out Ravana's palace and the part of the garden where Sita lived with her maid-servants, who were unavailingly pleading the cause of their master Ravana with her and had actually spoken to her. Headed by their kings, Sugriva, Nila and Hanuman, the monkey hordes invaded and completely wrecked all the places which belonged to Ravana and his government: Treasury, Council halls, fortresses, barracks, arm-stores and ammunition dumps.

A single fight between Rama and Ravana eventually became inevitable, which ended when an arrow of Rama deeply pierced the heart of the demon, and sent his blood pouring out of his ten mouths, leaving his body stretched on the ground stark dead. Rama then hastened to the retreat of Sita and, seeing her seated under an Ashoka tree greatly emaciated and shorn of her royal ornaments and woe-begone, he lifted her to his aerial car and flew with her back to Ayodhya, the fourteen years of banishment having ended, accompanied by Lakshmana, Hanuman and Sugriva, after having placed Vibhishana, the youngest brother of Ravana, who was loyal and helpful to him, on the throne of Lanka.

On his arrival at the capital Sri Rama was greatly grieved to learn that Bharata, far from usurping his place as the heir to the throne, had taken to severe penance during his long absence. He had wrapped his body with bark of trees, lived on barley cooked with cow's urine, slept on the bare ground covered only by *kusa* grass, and worshipped the sandals which Rama had given him as a token of his love. When the news of the return of Rama reached him, Bharata came out with the citizens and ministers to receive him, Brahmins chanting Vedic hymns and musicians playing. His



mother, step-mothers and Rishi Vasishtha, the palace *guru*, welcomed him most affectionately on the steps of the palace and the joy of the nation knew no bounds at the restoration to them of their beloved king. His father Dasaratha had, many years earlier, died of grief and remorse for having behaved unrighteously towards his most beloved son. The love of Rama for his people and his reign, known as *Ramarajya*, became a byword for good government, national prosperity and tranquillity for all time.

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## XV – XVII

### *Parasurama Avatara*

Requested by Parikshit, Sri Suka now relates the story of another *Avatara* of the Lord, the great ascetic Parasurama, who had in his youth single-handedly exterminated the Kshatriya race twenty-one times.

Rishi Jamadagni had a number of sons, of whom Rama or Parasurama was the youngest. The Kshatriyas were then sunk in *rajas* and *tamas* (passion and ignorance). One of them, King Arjuna, the ruler of the Haihayas, had worshipped Lord Dattatreya and had earned the boon of possessing one thousand hands, mastery of yoga and supernatural powers such as travelling through the air with the speed of thought, stopping or reversing the natural flows of rivers, etc. One day Arjuna went out with his ministers and whole army on a hunting expedition and by chance entered Jamadagni's hermitage. The Sage received them fittingly and fed them all well with the help of his celestial cow Kamadhenu, which could supply all edibles in abundance, making the prosperity of the hermitage surpass even that of the King's palace. This excited Arjuna's envy. At parting the latter unceremoniously drove with Kamadhenu and her calf to his capital Mahismati, disregarding the feelings of his host and of the kidnapped animals. Parasurama, who happened to return home just at that time, rushed with his bow and axe after the royal party, caught up with them before they entered the capital, and exterminated the formidable force which Arjuna had sent to meet him, making streams of their blood to flow on the battlefield. Greatly amazed, Arjuna himself took up the challenge, and with five-hundred bows simultaneously strung by his one thousand hands he rained arrows on Rama, which did not prevent the latter from fiercely attacking him and axing down all his arms one by one and, lastly, his head. When they saw the incredible feat of Rama, Arjuna's ten thousand sons, ministers and retinue took to their heels, leaving the field to Rama, who took back the cow and her calf, now happy at their release, to his father, and briefed him with the news of the fight. But the Sage, instead of rejoicing, rebuked him.

“You have, O Rama of mighty arms,” he said, “committed a grave sin in killing a ruler of men, who is the representative of all the gods on earth, for nothing. We Brahmins, dear son, have earned respect by our

forgiveness alone, by which we shine like the sun and please Lord Vishnu. Cutting off a consecrated head is more sinful than slaying a Brahmin. You have to atone for it by spending a whole year in pilgrimage to all the holy places, keeping your mind fixed on the Supreme Lord.”

At the end of the year Rama returned from pilgrimage only to find himself faced with new compulsions to massacre Kshatriyas. The sons of Arjuna who had not forgotten his debt to them, were on the lookout for a chance to revenge themselves on him. As one day Jamadagni was sitting near the sacrificial fire, absorbed in meditation, and his sons were absent, they entered the hermitage, slashed off his head and carried it away with them. The loud cries of the mother, whose pleading with the murderers to spare her husband’s life had proved unavailing, brought her sons from the forest. Rama shouldered his axe and sped like the wind to Mahismati, where he met the culprits and laid them all low, together with the whole princely race. Collecting their heads he made a very high tower of them in the centre of the city, leaving their blood to flow like a river. He then took back his father’s head, joined it to the body and performed a number of sacrifices in the worship of Sri Vishnu. Regaining his spiritualised body, Jamadagni became the seventh star in the constellation of the seven Rishis who look after the welfare of humanity (identified by some with Ursa Major).

Twenty-one times did Parasurama go round the world and liquidate the Kshatriyas from it, collecting their blood in five tanks which he dug at Samantapanchaka in Kurukshetra and made it a place of pilgrimage on big ceremonial occasions. Then purifying himself of all sins, he gave up violence and retired to Mt. Mahendra to perform *tapas* with a serene mind and prepare himself for his destined task of propounding the Vedas to the world in the next *manvantara* (the eighth).

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## XVIII — XIX

### *Yayati*

Sri Suka sketches from generation to generation the Lunar Dynasty which was started by Soma, the moon-god, the mind-born son of Atri, when he begot a natural son from Tara, the wife of Brihaspati, whom he had seduced. King Arjuna (previously mentioned) was one in that line, and Nahusha another. Nahusha, who was hurled down from heaven for his rudeness to Indra's consort (p. 120) and transformed into a python, was succeeded by his second son, the virtuous Yayati, who, though a Kshatriya, married Devayani, the daughter of Sukracharya, whom he met as if by accident, but actually at the behest of destiny.

Once Sarmistha, the virgin daughter of the Danava king Vrishaparva, went out with her maids and Devayani for a stroll in the garden. Reaching a pool of clear water, they all undressed and plunged into it and started sporting with one another. At that moment Lord Shankara happened to pass that way with Parvati. All the girls ran for their clothes to cover themselves, and in her haste the Princess by mistake wore Devayani's clothes, at which the latter felt offended and rebuked the Princess, who not only answered in a sharp language, but also pushed Devayani into a well and went her way with her companions. Soon afterwards Yayati passed by that road and, feeling thirsty, he looked in that well to see if it contained water, when to his great surprise he saw the naked girl. He threw to her his upper-cloth to cover herself, then gave her his hand and pulled her out. Seeing his youthful beauty, the girl fell in love with him and frankly told him that since he had touched her hand it was clear that he accepted her as his wife, which, she was convinced, was the will of Providence, as, although a Brahmin by birth, on account of a curse, she was not destined to marry a Brahmin. Yayati thought over her proposal for a minute, accepted it on the spot, and departed. But Devayani's grievance against the Princess did not abate: she went weeping to her father and reported the whole story to him, which so incensed him that he forthwith left the service of Vrishaparva. When the latter got to know of the priest's departure, he rushed after him, fell at his feet, and promised to make ample amends for his daughter's misdemeanour. He was seized with a great fear that Sukracharya might join his enemies the gods, and do him a great harm by his supernatural powers. As a condition

for his return, the Brahmin demanded the satisfaction of his daughter's terms, which were that the Princess should henceforth consider herself and her thousand maids as Devayani's servants to follow her everywhere. The king accepted the terms and brought back the Brahmin and his daughter, whom the Princess and her maids started loyally serving.

Yayati married Devayani and brought to his house Sarmistha and her thousand maids, on the private understanding with Sukracharya that he would not go to bed with the Princess. But when at the right time his wife was blessed with a son, and Sarmistha, who had retained her virginity, demanded of him to give her also children, he complied with her wishes. In course of time he got three sons by her and two by the Brahmin wife. The matter came to a pitch when Devayani could no longer contain her jealousy and went to complain to her father, followed by Yayati, who passionately loved her and was trying to conciliate her. Sukracharya, flaming with rage, rebuked and cursed his son-in-law. "Fool and perjured!" he cried, "your lewdness will be punished by your instantly assuming a great old age to disfigure you (and make you unfit for young women)." Greatly abashed, Yayati pleaded that he was still in love with Devayani and entertained a strong desire for her, which made the Brahmin relent and soften the curse by making his senility transferable in exchange for the youth of anyone who was willing to accept it.

(Now looking extremely senile) King Yayati called his sons, first the two from Devayani, then the three from Sarmistha and coaxed one by one to accept his throne in exchange for his youth. But all of them wriggled out of "their duty to a king and a father" on one pretext or other, except the youngest, Puru — Sarmistha's son — who agreed with alacrity. For one thousand years did Yayati enjoy sex pleasure vicariously through Puru's youth, at the same time prayed to Lord Vasudeva in his heart to rid him of these gnawing and never-ending desires, which he knew to be merely the product of imagination. The Lord seemed to have heard his prayer, when He gave him the courage one day to call Devayani and explain to her his spiritual downfall by an impressive parable, and ended with:

*"Pulled by the strings of your love, I lost myself in your delusive charm, wretch that I am! All the gold, possessions, delicious food and all the women in the world cannot satiate the man whose mind is captivated by lust. Sensuous desires are not killed, but sharpened and*

*increased by gratification, like the flame which is fed by oil. For one thousand years have I enjoyed again and again the very same thing, and again and again have I longed for it: my thirst for lust has never been slaked. I will now definitely give it up and take to roam with the deer, fixing my mind on the absolute Reality and no longer on the mirage. Knowing that everything that is seen and heard is unreal and leads to degradation and transmigration, I will abstain from all desires and get Redemption.”*

Summoning Puru to his presence, Yayati returned his youth to him and received back his senility, keeping him on his throne and appointing the other four sons to the governorship of the four quarters of the earth under Puru’s suzerainty and left for the forest, where he practised[14] tapas till he attained absorption in the Supreme Brahman. Devayani followed his example and was liberated like him.

[14] It will be of benefit to record here the account given in the *Mahabharata* of the strenuous *sadhana* of Yayati and of the valuable message he left with Puru before he left home for the forest. The 86th and 87th chapters of the *Sambha Parva* of the *Adi Parva* say that Yayati, son of Nahusha, performed most severe penance for more than one thousand years by living only on corn which he gleaned from the fields. Then he fasted, remained sleepless and surrounded himself by a blazing fire for one year, which entitled him to ascend to heaven, where he lived thereafter. When meeting with Indra in heaven, he related to him his whole life-story and the message he had left with Puru, which was:

*“If wronged, dear Son, you should not wrong in return. He who does not yield to anger earns all the merits of him who displays it. Never should you hurt others by cruel words nor defeat your foe by despicable means. He who utters scorching words to torture others carries rakshasas in his mouth: prosperity and luck fly away from him. You should always keep the virtuous as a model for all your behaviour and should compare your acts retrospectively with theirs. You should ignore the hard words of the wicked. He who is wounded by the shafts of a cruel speech nurses his wounds by weeping day and night, which strikes at the very core of his being. The wise never fling such arrows as these. There is nothing in the three worlds which can please the gods more than kindness, friendship, charity, sympathy and sweet speech. You should show regard to those who deserve it and should always give but never beg.”*

It is evident that Yayati had strong reasons to lay emphasis on “sweet speech”. He had before him two cases of very regrettable hasty words. One was the unfortunate remark of his father Nahusha to Indra’s wife, which caused him to be turned into a python. The other was poor Sarmistha’s in her early youth to Devayani, for which she had to serve the latter for two thousand years. But the advice is extremely salutary to people of even the 20th century.

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*Shakuntala*

Sri Suka continues:

Dushyanta was a descendant of Puru (of the Lunar Dynasty). One day he went out hunting with his body-guards and entered the hermitage of the sage Kanwar where he saw a maiden who looked the personification of the goddess of beauty and prosperity, illumining the hermitage with her lustre, and instantly fell in love with her. He gently approached her and enquired about her name, parentage and the reason of her being in that place, etc. She gave her name as Shakuntala and innocently said that she was the daughter of the sage Viswamitra from Menaka, [15] of which her father Kanwa was well aware. She gracefully invited the King to take his seat and accept their hospitality. Dushyanta accepted the hospitality and offered to marry her by the Gandharva system which required nothing but mutual consent. There and then they united, and next morning the King departed to his capital, promising to return to take her, which he never did. In course of time Shakuntala gave birth to a son, who was so strong and fearless that while still an infant he could play with lion cubs and tie them with ropes. It was said that he was a tiny *amsa* of Lord Vishnu. Then there came a time when Shakuntala found it necessary to go seeking her husband, having waited for so long in vain for him. When she at last reached his palace with the child, Dushyanta (who had apparently completely forgotten her) refused to acknowledge them, but was seized with amazement and fear when a celestial voice loudly cried: "Do not spurn Shakuntala and your son, who is yours alone, O King. The son who begets children saves his father from the jaws of death. Shakuntala is your wife, the mother of your son." Dushyanta who had no further reasons to doubt Shakuntala, immediately acknowledged her and her son as his own. Bharata, the son, succeeded Dushyanta to the throne and became a celebrated monarch. In his long reign of 27,000 years the people enjoyed a great prosperity. Eventually he realised that everything, even life itself, was unreal, and retired from the world. From him descended the Pandavas and the Kauravas, who were the chief combatants in the great battle of Kurukshetra.

[15] Menaka was a celestial *apsara* (nymph) whom Indra sent to the earth to spoil the severe *tapas* of Vishwamitra, which threatened to dethrone him from the rulership of the three worlds.

“Go” Indra commanded Menaka, “O slender-waisted Menaka and tempt Vishwamitra out of his penance by your beauty, art, smiles and speech. My heart is trembling with fear at his most severe *tapas*.”

The sage sported with her for some time and gave her a baby girl, whom they abandoned in the forest and departed. Soon afterwards sage Kanwa found the baby and brought her up as his daughter in his hermitage.

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## XXI – XXII

### *The Birth of the Pandavas and Kauravas*

The sage Suka traces the dynasty of Bharata from father to son to king Santanu who married Ganga, the presiding goddess of the sacred river which goes by that name, who, on account of a curse, had to take a human birth as an extremely beautiful woman and got the world-renowned Bhishma by him. Bhishma was of great spiritual enlightenment, the embodiment of *dharma*, a great devotee of the Lord and a leader of heroes, whose preceptor in archery was not less a person than the great Parasurama (p. 183). By his other wife, Satyavati, Santanu got Chitrangada, who was killed in battle while still a bachelor, and Vichitravirya. Before marrying Santanu, Satyavati had an affair with Rishi Parasara and got by him the great Vedavyasa, (the author of this *Bhagavata*).

Vichitravirya married Ambika and Ambalika, the two daughters of the king of Kashi, but before he had time to have children from them he died of phthisis, which made his mother Satyavati anxious to save his soul for heaven by begetting offspring for him vicariously. She chose for this purpose her son Vyasadeva, who begot the blind Dhritarashtra with Ambika, Pandu with Ambalika, and with one of their maid-servants the virtuous Vidura, who out stood by his righteousness and devotion to his friend Sri Krishna.

One hundred sons were born to Dhritarashtra by his wife Gandhari, a princess of Gandhara, of whom the wicked Duryodhana was the eldest. Pandu, who, on account of a curse, feared to copulate with his wives on penalty of death, had also vicariously, on his wife Kunti, the great Yudhishtira by god *Dharma*, the lord of piety, Bhima by the wind god, and Arjuna by Indra. By his second wife, Madri, he got Sahadeva and Nakula from the Aswinikumaras, the twin celestial physicians. These were the five Pandava brothers, the heroes of Kurukshetra war, who all married Draupadi and each got one son by her, although two of the brothers, Bhima and Arjuna, had also other children by other wives. Arjuna's other wife was Subhadra, the grandmother of Parikshit (who is listening to this recitation). Suka repeats the story of how Parikshit was saved from death by the powers of Sri Krishna, while he was still in his mother's womb and forecasts the

continuation of his dynasty far into the *Kali* age, ending with king Kshemaka, passing through fifteen generations.

Taking up the Magadha dynasty (Brihadratha's line), Sri Suka starts with Sahadeva, Jarasandha's son (Book Ten), and ends with Ripunjaya (or Puranjaya), naming all the kings who will rule for one thousand years in the Kali Yuga (and completes their enumeration in Book Twelve, q.v.).

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## XXIII – XXIV

### *The Yadus*

Having dealt with the line of Puru, the youngest son of Yayati and Sarmistha, Sri Suka takes up the lines of Yayati's other four sons and lingers long on the descendants of Yadu, the elder son of Devayani, who founded the famous Yadu race, into which not only Sri Krishna, the principal hero of the *Bhagavata*, was born, but also Sisupala, His mortal enemy.

Making this ninth Book the herald of the tenth, in which the glorious sun, Sri Krishna, rises to shed light on a world which was sunk in the darkness of unrighteousness, Sri Suka closes it with the words:

“Whenever there is a decline of *dharma* and ascendance of *adharma*, the almighty Lord manifests Himself among men to alleviate their suffering at the hands of demons who invade the earth and install themselves as its rulers and ‘saviours’. Before the dark age of *kali* commenced, the Lord descended as Sri Krishna and His brother Sankarashana (or Balarama) to drive away sorrow and ignorance from the hearts and minds of men by killing the wicked and by teaching the highest truth to prepare them for the very strenuous age which was to follow.”

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BOOK TEN  
LORD KRISHNA

**I - II**

## *Prologue*

The curtain now rises on the most splendid and most colourful scenes of the *Bhagavata*.

Lord Narayana, resolving to descend to the earth in His full glory in the complete (*purna*) *avatara* of Himself, is born in Mathura as Lord Krishna from Devaki, preceded by hosts of celestials, who, likewise, took birth — not only as humans — friends, relatives, *gopis* and ministers — but also as cows, deer, snakes, etc., to assist Him in His purifying mission and give Him on earth the comforts and delights which He enjoys in His celestial abode — *Vaikuntha*.

As the story unfolds and draws nearer to familiar scenes in his own life, king Parikshit grows insistent on the fullest details possible to make him forget, he says, the tormenting fast, which he has vowed to carry out unto death, and ends with a eulogy of Sri Suka, saying: “Hunger and thirst no longer afflict me, O omniscient Sage, now that I am drinking the nectar which drops from your lips.”

Rising to the occasion, the Sage answers:

“You have made, O Jewel of saintly kings, a right resolve, which has resulted in your hunger for the Lord’s stories, which purify him that recites and him that listens to them, like the water which has been touched by His sacred feet.

“Mother earth, sorely oppressed by the millions of arrogant *daityas* who had assumed sovereignty over her children, disguised as a cow, sought the help of Brahma to rid her of them. In sympathy with her, the Creator, accompanied by Lord Shiva and the gods, proceeded to the Ocean of Milk, where Lord Vishnu dwelt, and recited the Vedic hymn known as *Purusha-Sukta*, and in the *samadhi* which followed it he heard a celestial voice which he comprehended as saying that the Supreme Person had already known of the Earth’s tribulations and had decided to manifest Himself in the house of Vasudeva, that Lord Ananta (Sesha) would precede Him as His elder brother, and that the gods and nymphs would also take birth among men.”

Sri Suka begins the story at the wedding scene of Sri Krishna’s parents in Mathura, the capital city of king Ugrasena, whose younger brother’s

daughter Devaki was. As Vasudeva, after the marriage ceremony, carried his bride Devaki to his gilded chariot, which was surrounded by hundreds of similar chariots of princes and nobles, and Kamsa, the son of Ugrasena, held the reins of its horses as a mark of his cousinly affection and honour for Devaki, and the wedding procession was about to start to the sounds of the conches, trumpets and drums, an aerial voice sounded in Kamsa's ears which said: "Fool! the eighth son of this very girl will be your slayer." Believing implicitly the celestial voice, the wicked Kamsa, without much ado, seized the bride by the hair and drew his sword to cut off her head. Vasudeva, the bridegroom, stopped him and in gentle accent said:

"Your virtues, O Prince, have exalted you among heroes as the glory of the Bhojas: it is not becoming of you, therefore, to slay a woman and a cousin on the very day of her marriage, which is a day of rejoicing. Death is indeed inevitable and ordained on the very day of one's birth, according to one's past attachments and deeds. He who seeks his own good must therefore try to injure no one, so that he may be spared the suffering of undesirable births. This cousin of yours is innocent and helpless. (Why incur the sin of killing her when what you are destined to suffer you will suffer whether she is alive or dead?)

This homily made no impression on Kamsa, who was determined to do away with the bride, when a thought occurred to Vasudeva to promise to deliver to the Prince every child who would be born to her, which would safeguard him from the eventuality of being killed by any of her sons. This practical proposal found favour with the tyrant, who released the bride and ordered the wedding procession to move. In making this proposal Vasudeva laid all his hopes in divine intercession at the right time to save Devaki's offspring.

At the turn of the year Devaki gave birth to a boy, whom Vasudeva, true to his word, immediately delivered to Kamsa, who appreciated his gesture, in recognition of which he returned the child to him with the remark that since his death was decreed to be at the hands of the eighth son, there was no point in slaying that innocent one. But Narada (who seems always to act as an instrument of Providence or Destiny) went to Kamsa and gave away to him all that had been planned by Lord Narayana, all that had transpired and would transpire, namely, that all the cowherds in Vraja, beginning with their relative Nanda and his wives, Vasudeva and his wives,

all the Yadava women headed by Devaki, and all their relatives and friends were celestials who had taken special births to fight the *daityas* — Kamsa's allies — side by side with the Lord when He came as Devaki's eighth son.

This revelation greatly shocked and alarmed Kamsa and made him instantly put Devaki and her husband in fetters and decree that every child of theirs should be put to death at the moment of its birth, lest it should also be a celestial or ray of Vishnu Himself.

In his previous life Kamsa was the great asura Kalanemi, whom the Lord then slew. Although now a Yadu, because his slayer was destined to be a Yadu, he pledged himself to exterminate the Yadus, for which he entered into a league with many asura kings and with Jarasandha, his father-in-law. In anticipation of the practical application of this evil design of his, the people migrated to other territories, to the land of the Kurus, the Panchalas, Videhas, Vidarbhas, etc., leaving behind only the most loyal of Kamsa's kinsmen who were actively supporting him. Kamsa started the purge with his own father Ugrasena, whom he dethroned and dispossessed, and descended to the rank and file until he consolidated himself as the king of the Yadus.

When six sons of Devaki were killed by Kamsa and the seventh — Lord Ananta — entered her womb, Lord Vishnu commanded Yogamaya — His Creative Power — to go to Vraja (district of Gokula), where Rohini and the other wives of Vasudeva had migrated and were living secretly in different places, and transfer Ananta from Devaki's womb to Rohini's, so that He Himself might enter Devaki's (as the eighth conception) with all His powers, while She, Yogamaya, should enter Yasoda's (Nanda's wife) womb and be born as a girl. Yogamaya carried out the Lord's mandate. Entering the mind of Vasudeva, the Lord gave his countenance an unprecedented lustre, which was passed on to Devaki's mind by Vasudeva. The auspicious Devaki now carried the Lord in her as the eastern horizon carries the glorious full moon. Even Kamsa did not fail to observe Devaki's splendour, which gave him cause for anxiety, for he strongly suspected the conception of his mortal enemy by her. To kill her at this juncture, he thought, was the safest thing for him to do, but to kill a helpless, pregnant woman would damn him for all time: he would lose his glory and prosperity, if not also his very life, besmirch his name, and, after death, he would go straight to the infernal regions. He preferred to wait till his enemy



was born, when he would immediately dispose of him, although he might run the risk of being killed by the child himself, for which purpose he was, after all, descending. Although he found the latter alternative to be more suitable, because of its being less heinous, Kamsa completely lost his peace of mind and lived as if on the rack.

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### III

#### *The Advent*

It was just midnight. The darkness was thickest in Kamsa's palace, and men of piety were in the midst of their prayer. Rohini was ascending in the high heaven, and the stars were shining with an unusual brilliancy in a cloudless sky. The sacrificial flames which had been suppressed by Kamsa were leaping sky-high from thousands of altars, and in heaven musicians played, *apsaras* danced, and all the gods stood in their aerial cars to witness the most blessed event which was taking place on earth. At that moment the Supreme Lord manifested Himself in His fullness through Devaki, illumining her prison chamber like the sun and driving away from it all fear of the tyrant. His parents were transported with a heavenly joy, but immediately realised that they were in the Divine Presence, for the Baby was born in the form of Vishnu with four arms, holding the discus, the conch, the mace and the lotus. *Srivatsa* on His bosom, *Kaustubha* gem shining on His breast, also earrings, anklets, yellow silk dress, etc. His complexion resembled a water-bearing cloud, whose beauty was enhanced by the glittering diadem which was charmingly poised on His pretty baby brows. Vasudeva bowed low and addressed Him with joined palms:

“We know, O Lord, that You are the Supreme Self, whose nature is absolute consciousness and absolute bliss, which is above and transcends *prakriti*. You are conceived to have entered Your own creation, which consists of the three *gunas*, as You have entered Devaki's womb, when actually You have not done so, being changeless and imperceptible.

“To help the world You deigned to take birth, O Ruler of the universe, in my house. Anticipating this birth, the cruel Kamsa has already killed Your elder brothers and now he will rush to kill You the moment he will be informed of it.”

Devaki followed Vasudeva in her eulogies of the Divine Baby and gave expression to what was in her maternal heart. She appealed:

“You who are the dispeller of your servants' fear, dispel our fear of the terrible Kamsa. Let not that wicked one know of Your birth through me, O Slayer of Madhu. I am greatly agitated at heart for Your safety.

Besides, be kind not to reveal to the ignorant this supreme form of Yours. Withdraw, O Soul of the universe, Your four arms and assume a human form. It is a mystery that You, Who absorb in Your own body the whole of this vast universe at the time of *pralaya*, should have entered my womb like an ordinary mortal.”

The Divine Baby answered:

“In a previous life, O good Lady, you were Prisni and your husband was Sutapa, a sinless prajapati. When commanded by Brahma to beget offspring you both took to severe penance for twelve thousand years, living on air and withered leaves until you thoroughly purified yourselves by worshipping Me. When I appeared and asked you to name your wish, instead of praying for Liberation, you demanded a son like Me and proceeded to enjoy marital pleasure and had Me as your son Prsnigarbha. You again had Me as Upendra Vamana, the dwarf, when you were Aditi and your husband was Kasyapa. This is the third time that I have come in your womb and have appeared in My celestial form to remind you of My previous births to you, or else you would not have known My identity. I will now assume the appearance of an ordinary baby, as you have asked Me to do. You have constantly to think of Me as your son as well as the absolute Brahman and, by bestowing your love on Me, you will both attain union with Me in My highest State.”

Then the Lord ordered Vasudeva to start immediately for Vraja with Him, the Baby, and leave Him in Yasoda’s bed. etc. As soon as He finished His directions, the Divine Form turned human in every respect. At that very moment Yogamaya was born to Yasoda, the wife of Nanda, chief of Vraja, in Gokula, and in Mathura she deprived the gate-keepers of Kamsa’s palace of their consciousness and laid a heavy sleep upon all the citizens. Vasudeva got up, wrapped the Child with a cloth and carried Him in his arms through the prison doors, which flew open before him, through the main gates, and on to the streets, as easily as darkness disperses at the rise of the sun. He hastened out of the city, meeting no one on the way because of the small showers which fell off and on to keep people indoors, protected by Lord Sesha Who followed them, spreading His thousand hoods over their heads like an umbrella. The river Yamuna, which had been in a swirling flood, subsided at their approach and offered them an easy ford. At Gokula

Vasudeva found the people sunk in a heavy sleep, cast on them by Yogamaya, so that he could enter the house of Nanda, the lying-in-chamber of Yasoda, exchange her baby daughter for baby Krishna and return by the same way to Mathura and to Devaki's room without being seen by anyone and without the least obstacle. He replaced on his feet the fetters which had fallen of their own accord when he started. Likewise all the gates and doors of the palace assumed their bolts and locks as before, as if nothing had happened. Yasoda, who had been overcome with sleep when she got confined and could not see the sex of the child born to her, woke up and saw a bonny male babe in her bed and naturally took him to be her son.

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## IV

### *The Sorrows of Kamsa*

No sooner did the guards stationed at Devaki's prison chamber hear the cries of a baby than they reported the matter to Kamsa, who lost no time in coming staggering with dishevelled hair, red, bleared eyes and head still whirling in the torpor of the sleep from which he had been hurriedly awakened. Devaki, seeing his frightful condition, appealed in a tremulous voice for mercy to a harmless girl.

“This baby,” she said, “deserves the protection of a daughter-in-law, whom it is not lawful to kill. You have disposed of all my little ones who shone like beams of light, impelled as you were by destiny, O brother mine! Let this single girl be spared to me as a gift to a younger cousin. I am suffering torture for the untimely loss of all my innocent sons. Deign, O lord, to grant me the life of this last child of mine.”

Devaki wept piteously and hugged the baby to her breast. But the wicked one snatched it from her arms, held it by its feet and dashed it against the stone wall. The baby instantly glanced from his coarse hand and stood up in the air, a resplendent goddess, flourishing eight mighty arms, each of which brandishing a celestial weapon, and cried:

“Fool, the enemy who is destined to destroy you is born already. You will gain nothing by destroying other innocent children,”

and disappeared on the spot, leaving Kamsa in a dazed horror.

When the tyrant came to his senses, he was all contrition: he released the couple from their chains and spoke with a great humility:

“Sinner that I am, I killed your sons as a cannibal kills his own children. To what hell will I not descend for having abandoned virtue and my own kinsmen and taken to sinful ways! Forgive my wickedness, O pious cousins, friends of the afflicted!”

He fell at their feet, a repentant sinner, with tears streaming down his face. Devaki forthwith forgave him and forgot her anger as well; whereas Vasudeva laughed and said:

“What you said, O blessed One, is true, that the loss of one's virtues is based on ignorance and on the feeling ‘I am this body’, which prevents

people from perceiving God in all beings and induces them to kill one another.”

Summoning his counsellors Kamsa briefed them with the whole episode. Most of them, being *daityas* and very stupid, advised him to kill all the children born within the last ten days in his domain, and if the gods attacked him, they were confident that they, the *daityas* and asuras, would rout them. They asked him to command them and they would do the deed — to destroy Vishnu Who had come disguised as a baby and Who alone was the support of the gods, their enemies:

“Indeed,” they argued, “Hari is the mainstay of the gods, and His mainstay is the Veda. The supports of the Veda are the ascetics, the Brahmins who perform Vedic sacrifices, and the cows, which supply the materials for these — milk, ghee, curds. Therefore, if we destroy all these three we will destroy Vishnu Himself.”

Caught in the mesh of their asuric arguments and by Death, which lay in wait for him, Kamsa gave his consent and ordered the demons to put their suggestions into practice.

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### *Festivities at Gokula*

Sri Suka takes us now to happy scenes at Gokula in Vraja, where the celebration of the birth of Nanda's son from the most auspicious Yasoda was going on as a local festival; to well swept streets, decorated with flags, buntings, flower arches and sight-seers; to Nanda's house where hundreds of Brahmins chanted hymns and invoked blessings on the new-born baby and were rewarded by two hundred thousand newly-calved and richly-adorned cows with their calves and seven big mounds of sesamum seeds, studded with precious stones; where Sutas recited the *Puranas*, bards sang the heroism of ancient kings, and musicians played their instruments; where *gopas* (cowherds) wearing costly clothes flocked, and *gopis*, dressed in multicoloured garments and beautified with rich ornaments and collyrium, exhibited their feminine charms, all wishing good luck to the infant and His parents, and sprinkled one another with auspicious water mixed with oil and turmeric powder for good luck. From that time on Vraja enjoyed an unprecedented prosperity on account of the presence in Nanda's house of both the divine brothers — Balarama from Rohini, and Krishna from Devaki, though believed to be the son of Yasoda. When the festivities came to an end, Nanda went to Mathura to pay his annual dues to Kamsa. Hearing of his visit, Vasudeva went to his camp to felicitate him for the birth of a son (Krishna) in his old age, after having despaired of getting children. After enquiring about his own son (Balarama), he mysteriously hinted that strange things were happening in Gokula and that he should hurry back, now that he paid his dues to the Treasury. Acting on the hint, Nanda returned in all speed to Vraja, praying to the Lord in his heart to spare him from the perils which might be brewing for them in Gokula.

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## VI

### *Putana*

Sri Suka continues:

Putana was a frightful demoness, extremely resourceful in villainy, and wielded vast magical powers which she placed at the disposal of Kamsa in the execution of his tyrannical will. She appeared in Gokula with the mission of exterminating all the newborn children. By her sorcery she transformed her hideousness into a most comely young woman, dressed in the best fashion of the day: in rustling silk, costly jewels, and coronet of fresh jasmin flowers, which charmed the eyes and noses of those who met her. Moving from place to place on her nefarious duty, she came at last to Nanda's house, which she entered with large, exuberant breasts and ingratiating smiles, and made straight to Krishna's cradle. Recognising her as an infanticide, Krishna closed His eyes, but Yasoda and Rohini were impressed by her presentability and let her do what she pleased without suspicion. The demoness lifted up Krishna, as if to nurse Him a little, as was the custom, as a mark of the visitor's goodwill, and put Him to her breast, which was smeared with deadly poison. Krishna grasped the breast with both hands and sucked the poison, then the milk, then her life: He sucked, and sucked, and sucked and would not let her go. She gasped, writhed and screamed with pain, and appealed to Him to let her go, but He held her as in a vice until He drained the last drop of life from her, when with eyes dilated, hands and feet twitching, and body drenched with perspiration she uttered a roar, which restored her old demoniacal form, and fell dead with the crash of a thunderbolt. Her fall uprooted all the trees and shook the people who lived within a twelve-mile radius, yet baby Krishna was found playing on her vast bosom completely unharmed. Yasoda and Rohini suspected in this the mischief of some evil spirit and took swift measures to protect Him from it. They waved the tail of a cow round Him, bathed Him in cow's urine, sprinkled on Him the dust collected from the hoof of a cow and plastered Him with cow-dung in twelve different places and corners of the house, at each of which they invoked one of the many names of the Lord. Having protected the child from every possible evil influence, Yasoda put Him to the breast and then to bed. By then Nanda and his party arrived from Mathura and heard the whole story of Putana, which



reminded Nanda of Vasudeva's hint. The people of Gokula chopped Putana's body to pieces and, piling them over logs of wood, set fire to it, when lo! out of her smoking bones and flesh rose a sweet smell which pervaded the whole town, denoting her purification from her demoniacal nature by the touch of Krishna's body.

Sri Suka rightly concludes that if *Vaikuntha* be the Lord's reward for the mere touch of His body by a blood-sucking monster who had come to take away His life, how much more it is so to those who offer Him unconditional devotion and love like Yasoda and the cows who gave Him suck!

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## VII

### *Trinavartasura*

The time to celebrate the child's *Uthanika* (turning in bed) ceremony has come. The priests went through all the stages of the ritual and gave Him the necessary ablution at the moment when the constellation Rohini was ascending, as it was at the time of His birth. After the elaborate ceremony was over and the child showed much drowsiness, Yasoda put Him to sleep in His cradle under a cart (supposed to be an asura in disguise), which was loaded with metal utensils full of edibles of all kinds prepared for this auspicious occasion. After a short nap Krishna awoke and cried for feed, but Yasoda was too far and too preoccupied to hear His cry. Getting excited, He kicked in His bed and one of the kicks happened to touch the cart which was over the cradle, but it proved hard enough to smash to pieces the wheels, the axle and the pole of the cart and to send the foodstuff flying into the mud. It was a perplexing phenomenon to all the guests present and, when inquired into, the little boys who were playing near the cradle held the tiny soft foot of Krishna responsible for the havoc. They were eye-witnesses and unanimous in their evidence, which immensely increased Yasoda's worry over her child's welfare. She called the Brahmins to exorcise all possible evil spirits and invoke the Lord's blessings on Him. Nanda was perfectly satisfied that the mantras recited from the Yajur and Sama Vedas and the herbs used in the invocations offered an adequate protection to his house and his child from any evil influence, present or potential.

Krishna has now happily turned His first year. One day as He was in Yasoda's lap and she was fondling Him she suddenly felt that the trouble was going to start again. His weight was increasing every moment until He became so heavy for her lap that she had to put Him down on the floor. Fearing it to be the prelude to a new calamity, she called in the Brahmins once again to avert it with their mantras, *puja* and invocations.

Kamsa on his part did not remain idle after Putana's death, but sent Trinavarta, a demon who could raise violent storms and whirlwinds which could sweep away the heaviest object. At Gokula this asura released one of his worst tempests, which raged and howled and covered the town with blinding dust, darkness and high wind, in which he managed to carry off

Krishna. Reaching for her baby in that darkness and not finding Him, Yasoda screamed and fell senseless to the ground. When the darkness cleared the *gopis* rushed to her side to solace her and search for him.

Trinavarta soared in the sky with the intention of dashing Krishna to the earth from a great height, killing Him instantaneously, but soon he found further flight impossible. The weight of the child was so prodigiously increasing and His grip on his throat so tenacious that in a short while he gasped for breath, lost height and crashed down dead on a rock, which shattered his limbs and pushed his eyes out of their sockets. The *gopis*' search party found Krishna crawling on his body in the outskirts of Gokula. When He was restored to His parents, sound in every limb, the people attributed his safety to the mantras and *pujas* which had been performed for His protection. Once again Nanda recalled to mind the warning of Vasudeva at Mathura.

One day, sometime afterwards, when Krishna had finished His suck and Yasoda was caressing His lips, he opened His mouth and Lo, inside that tiny mouth she saw the whole cosmos — sun, moon, stars, mountains, oceans and all living and non-living beings in the earth. She trembled and closed her eyes, overwhelmed.

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## VIII

### *Naming Ceremony*

Vasudeva now felt that the time had come for his son by Rohini who was then in Nanda's house to undergo the naming ceremony, which had to be done by the *guru* (the Brahmin family preceptor) of the Yadus, Vasudeva's own community. He solicited the great Rishi Garga to undertake the journey to Gokula for the purpose. Nanda received Garga with great honour as the writer of a famous treatise on astrology, and requested him to perform also the purificatory rites of his own son (Krishna), since, he said, Garga was a supreme master of this art, his ceremonials would be perfect and most efficacious. Garga answered that it was not safe for Krishna to undergo this ceremony through himself (Garga), because the whole world knew him to be the Yadus' *guru* and would suspect Krishna to be Vasudeva's son and not Nanda's especially Kamsa, who, since Devaki's daughter, who had turned into a goddess, had warned him that his slayer had already been born, was on the lookout for a boy, who might be Devaki's eighth son. His suspicion would be now confirmed if he performed this ceremony for Krishna. But Nanda did not want to miss this unique opportunity of having a great astrologer performing the rites for his son's purification, especially after the great ordeals through which his child had recently passed. He promised that no one would know of it, not even the servants, for it could be made in the *goshala* (cow pen) in complete secrecy. (Knowing that Krishna was Vasudeva's son and, therefore, his own responsibility, Garga readily agreed without divulging his secret to Nanda, who continued to believe Krishna to be his own son.) The great Sage performed the ceremony for both the children and ended with the following highly significant speech:

“We shall call Rama this son of Rohini, because he will delight his kinsmen with the many virtues in which he will excel. But people will remember him by his great strength and will call him Bala (strength personified) as well as Sankarshana, the unifier, because he will recognise no distinction between his parents and you. This other child — Yasoda's — He appears in every age in different names, colours and forms. Though He assumes three different complexions — white, red and yellow — this time He is dark (hence we call Him Krishna). In the

past He took birth in Vasudeva's house, hence the wise call Him Vasudeva (the son of Vasudeva). He is known by many names according to the roles He plays. He will bring you happiness and prosperity and will extricate you from all difficulties, as in the past. He saved many pious people from the tyranny of their oppressors. No enemy can prevail over those who give their whole-hearted love to Him, no demon can conquer those whom Lord Vishnu shelters. Therefore, O Nanda, this son of yours is equal to Lord Narayana. Look carefully after Him."

Then Garga rose and left for Mathura.

Now the two brothers started crawling on hands and knees and were seen anywhere and everywhere in Gokula, bespattered with mud and bedraggling their chubby little legs, shaking the tiny little bells in their anklets and girdles, whose sounds were very pleasing to their ears and to those of their hearers. They would sometimes follow a passer-by to some distance and then return home as if affrighted, when their mothers clasped them to their breasts and gave them suck.

As they grew up the boys became uncontrollable. They did not fear to sport with any animal, particularly calves, to whose tails they would hold tightly and allow themselves to be dragged here and there, which caused much anxiety to their mothers, who could no longer lend their whole attention to their domestic duties, but had to keep a constant watch over them. Krishna, in particular, developed a special partiality for butter, milk and curd and invented various devices by which He could get at them, not only for himself but also for the monkeys and the calves. The latter He would release from their tethers too early, so that they might suck the whole milk from their mothers' udders before their owners knew of it. And when He went to a house and found nothing to rob or eat, He would pinch the little children there and set them howling with pain; and if the *gopis* complained to His mother of His antics, though they loved Him at heart, He would hang His head, sit still, and assume a perfectly innocent countenance, which completely disarmed Yasoda from punishing Him.

Once His playmates saw Him eating mud and reported Him to His mother, who took Him by the hand and demanded an explanation. He dilated His eyes in utter astonishment and denied everything, in proof of which He invited her to look into His mouth. When she did so, she was

staggered to see once again the whole creation in it, except that this time she had a comprehension of its significance — the *jiva*, the modifications of the *gunas*, the inherent tendency to action, karma, etc., — which set her puzzling whether she was dreaming, or these were the signs of her son's divinity. She finally bowed to the absolute Brahman, Whose ways, she was convinced, she could never fathom. As the vision faded, her memory of her child's glory also faded, and once again she put Him in her lap and dotingly fondled Him as she would an ordinary human child.

The heavenly delight which Nanda and Yasoda were deriving from the presence and plays of Krishna and the supreme merits which Yasoda, in particular, was earning by suckling Him with her own milk, bathing Him with her own hands and coming in immediate contact with His divine body, every day and every minute, whereas His real mother and father were deprived of all this, set Parikshit wondering. He asked Suka to explain the reason for it.

The Sage answered that Nanda was Drona, a Vasu leader in Brahmaloaka, and Yasoda was his wife Dhara. When at the command of Brahma they were to be born in Vraja (preparatory to the Lord's descent) as *gopa* and *gopi* they prayed to the Creator that when on earth they should be given the opportunity of developing the highest *bhakti* for the Supreme Hari, which Brahma promised. By virtue of that promise the Lord came to their house as, they believed, their son, which inspired them with the greatest and most selfless love for Him.

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## IX – X

### *Release of Kubera's Sons*

Sri Suka continues:

When all the maid-servants were one day on various duties in the house preparing for a festival, Yasoda herself had to see to the boiling of the milk and the churning of the curd. She kept the milk on the fire and sat down to churn curd, singing the songs which the *gopis* had composed on Krishna's pranks. She churned for some time when the child, feeling hungry, climbed to her lap and started sucking, holding the rod of the mortar with His little hand. Before He finished she suddenly saw the milk on the fire heaving, about to overflow its container. She hurriedly removed Him from her lap and hastened to the boiling milk. On her return she found the pot of the curd broken and the child absent. Searching for Him, she found Him standing on a wooden mortar distributing butter to the monkeys from a vessel which was hanging down from the roof. Caught red-handed, He first wore an appearance of amazed innocence and then ran away. She pursued Him with a stick, but seeing Him greatly frightened, with tears pouring from His eyes, which He rubbed with His tiny knuckles, spreading the collyrium all over His face, she threw away the stick and attempted to tie Him to the mortar with a string. But the string was too short by about two inches. She added a piece much longer than two inches, but still the string remained short by the same length. She added another length, but the string did not become any longer. She collected all the strings in the house and added them, yet the shortage remained two inches. When He saw how ignorant Yasoda was of His *leela* (mystic play), and how exhausted was she by endlessly adding strings, He allowed her to tie Him, which demonstrated the surrender of His will to that of His devotee.

While He was so tied and Yasoda elsewhere occupied, Krishna saw two *arjuna* trees standing side by side, as if they were twins, and recognised them to be two *yakshas* — sons of Kubera, the god of wealth — who had been cursed by Narada to stand as trees for one hundred celestial years until released by Lord Vasudeva in person, because they had been guilty, while in their youth, of an arrogant indecency in his presence. Krishna thought the time had come for their redemption. He crawled to the trees, dragging the mortar with Him until He passed between them, letting the mortar, which

was tied to His waist, fall astride them. Then He pulled and brought down both the trees together in a great crash — trunk, root and branch. Two celestial beings, shorn of their old pride, shot out of them, bowed low to the Lord and fittingly eulogised Him, to which Krishna, still tied to the mortar, answered with a smile:

“I already know Narada’s grace in cursing you both, who were sunk in degradation because of the pride of your wealth. There can be no bondage for the virtuous who apply their minds to Me, no more than there can be obstruction to the sight of light to a healthy eye. Now that you have realised Me, O sons of Kubera, as deserving the highest worship, the supreme *bhakti*, which you are aspiring to possess, and which leads to the cessation of transmigration has been born in you, I give you leave to return to your celestial abode.”

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## XI

### *Migration to Brindavan*

Sri Suka says that the sound of the crash brought to the spot many cowherds headed by Nanda, who was bewildered to see two giant trees lying flat on the ground with Krishna tied to the mortar among their debris, and did not know what to think of it, but certainly it could not be a good omen, he concluded. The children who were present at the scene testified to the fact that it was Krishna's pull, after wedging Himself between them, that brought down the trees, causing two men to issue from them and fly to heaven. This failed to convince the *gopas*, though some of them, remembering His treatment of Putana and Trinavarta, held different views on the subject. Nevertheless, Nanda had a good laugh at seeing his child tied to a mortar which He dragged here and there, and released Him from it.

Apart from these amusements, Krishna learned how to dance and sing at the top of his voice and mimic others when the *gopis* wanted him to entertain them. He sang the pieces they ordered Him to sing, and acted the parts they ordered Him to act, delighting His audiences and devotees. One day hearing a fruit-seller calling "O buy my fruits!", Krishna ran to her and begged some. She had the good heart to fill both His hands with fruits, and also the good luck to see her basket fill with precious gems in return. Yet the people of Gokula were not easy about these curious phenomena, which, in their traditional superstitions, they ascribed to demoniacal influence. The chiefs assembled in Nanda's house and reviewed the whole situation from Putana's episode to the last fruit-seller's, and came to the conclusion that they had better migrate to Brindavan, which contained an ever-green pasture-land eminently suitable to cattle-rearing, and was, besides, surrounded by beautiful hills fit for grazing. They collected their cattle and all their belongings and left with their families for the new paradise. Krishna and Balarama, who were placed in one chariot with their mothers, were filled with ecstasy at the sight of Brindavan, the sacred hill Govardhana, and the flowing beauty of Yamuna. When the boys grew up a little they were given calves to graze.

One day as they were looking at the calves, Krishna pointed out one of them to Balarama and, quietly approaching it from behind, caught it by the

hind legs, whirled it round, and dashed it against a *kappitha* tree, killing it. The calf's corpse turned into that of a demon, Vatsasura by name.

On another day the cow boys were in a wood and, as they and their calves emerged from a tank after a wash and a drink, they saw a monstrous crane standing close by which rushed at Krishna and swallowed Him. The boys fainted at the sight, but soon the crane brought Him out because of a scorching sensation it felt in its throat, and started attacking Him with its long beak. Krishna swiftly caught the beak and tore it asunder, splitting its body into two, which greatly pleased the celestials who were watching the fight. The crane proved to be the great demon Baka, Putana's brother, who had come to avenge the death of his sister. Celestial flowers rained on Krishna to the sound of drums and conches, and the cow boys, revived, embraced Him affectionately and, when they returned home that day, they spread the story everywhere, which earned for Krishna the heartfelt sympathy and congratulations of the people for having been miraculously snatched from the jaws of death. Not knowing who He was, they wondered why of all the boys He should be singled out for this series of ordeals, and how, though a mere infant, He could single-handedly dispose of vicious asuras without suffering a scratch. His parents then remembered what the sage Garga had told them of Him.

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## XII

### *Aghasura*

Sri Suka continues:

When Krishna was still in His fifth year, desiring one day to have breakfast in a far off forest, He rose very early in the morning and with the sound of His flute woke all the boys who issued out of Vraja in thousands, each driving about a thousand calves and provided with the usual playthings. As they marched the boys enjoyed themselves in various ways: they wrestled, did acrobatics, cracked jokes, ragged and hoaxed one another. Some sang and danced, some competed in racing to catch Krishna, some mimicked the cries of birds and other animals — all completely unaware of the danger that lay ahead of them.

The mighty demon Agha, the younger brother of Putana and Baka, disguised as a mammoth python eight-miles long, lay in wait for them in the new forest. Opening his mouth wide, he rested his lower jaw immovably on the earth like a giant rock, and his upper in the cloud, ready to swallow them all in one gulp. As the youths approached in groups, they playfully speculated about the colossus, taking it to be part of the physical topography of the place, and unsuspectingly walked straight into its mouth with their cows, loudly laughing and clapping their hands, mistaking its tongue for a smooth, broad road. The monster did not immediately close its mouth, but waited for Krishna, its chief attraction, to enter. Krishna had known of this death-trap, and had unsuccessfully tried to dissuade his companions from walking into it. Now that every one of the boys and their calves disappeared into the fatal jaws He grew very uneasy and after a little hesitation, He too entered, but wedged Himself in the demon's throat until He completely blocked its breath, which, finding no way of escape, forced itself out of the top of its head, taking its life with it. Krishna lost no time in bringing his friends and their animals out of the demon's gastric fire, where they were about to dissolve, and revived them, to the distress of Kamsa and his confederates, who were invisibly watching the fight, and to the rejoicing of the gods, who were also present in their celestial cars and now broke into songs in praise of the Lord.

Presently a column of light shot up from the serpent's corpse, hovered for a while and, as soon as Krishna emerged out of its mouth, entered Him,

denoting the attainment of oneness of Aghasura with Him. But this episode did not reach the people of Vraja till a year later for the following reason.

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### XIII — XIV

#### *Disillusionment of Brahma*

Sri Suka continues:

Krishna now took the boys to the riverside and made them sit to eat in peace the food they carried in their wallets. Letting their calves graze as they pleased, they arranged themselves in concentric circles with Krishna in the centre facing them all (which was a miracle of His to show only face and no back), and sat to breakfast. In the middle of the meal the cow boys missed their animals, which totally disappeared from their sight. Krishna noticed anxiety in their faces, which he allayed by rising and offering to go in search of them, while the boys could go on with their meal undisturbed. Krishna searched the hill, the forest, the valley, but found no trace of the calves, and returned to inform His friends of it. To His utter astonishment He found the latter also gone. He stopped for a moment to think, when in His omniscience He discovered the hand of Brahma in it. Brahma had watched His fight with Aghasura and had conceived a longing to experience some of the Lord's powers on himself, and sought to provoke Him by this yogic trick, whereby he hid the cattle in one place and their keepers in another (by a simple illusory feat), and waited for the result. Krishna guessed his intentions and, to overpower him with His own supreme *Maya*, as well as benefit the mothers of the boys, who were all more or less of His own age, He multiplied Himself by assuming the shape, size, complexion and all physical and mental characteristics of each and every boy and each and every calf, so that their mothers might not recognise the difference in their children. At dusk all the Krishna-boys and Krishna-calves drove to their respective homes as usual, behaving exactly like their originals. At the sound of their horns and flutes their mothers came out to receive them, lifted them up to their arms, hugged them, and suckled them from breasts which more than usual flowed with the milk of their love. Likewise the cows exhibited more than their usual tenderness towards their calves, when they licked them, smelt them, and gave them suck, whereby Krishna received the services and love of thousands of human and animal mothers simultaneously, and compensated them by filling their hearts with the delight which is generated by that love. The dotting mothers bathed their sons, smeared their bodies with sandalwood paste, ornamented them with

jewels, applied the *tilak* (sacred mark) to their foreheads, waved cow tails round them to protect them from evil eyes, and fed them.

This process repeated itself daily, and Brindavan was soaked in an atmosphere of inebriating love in each and every house, each and every family for one whole year till Brahma remembered and was curious to know the upshot of his game. He was staggered to see with Krishna the very same boys and the very same calves he had concealed in two different places a year earlier by his own *Maya*. Going to his hideouts, he found those he had hidden still there, exactly as he had left them, and grew dizzy with confusion at seeing them all also with Krishna and himself utterly unable to distinguish the real from the unreal, the original from the duplicate. Wanting to delude the Lord, he found himself deluded by His infinitely superior *Maya*. While he was still in this haze, he suddenly saw the cow boys he had seen on his arrival assuming the dark complexion of Krishna and the form of Lord Vishnu, which had four arms, holding a discus, a conch, a lotus, and a mace. This solved the mystery and made him guess what had happened. Hastily dismounting from his swan, he fell flat in prostration before Krishna, touching His feet with his head. Then rising, he stood up with joined palms and addressed Him thus:

“I bow in homage to You, O Lord, son of a *gopa*, of a dark complexion, tender feet, and a crest adorned with a peacock feather and armed with a stick, a flute and a horn, You, Whose Nature cannot be comprehended even by me, Brahma, with an inward-bent mind. Fool that I was to think that I could cast my spell on You, the Deluder of the deluders and Dispeller of all delusions. Have you not shown to Yasoda the illusory nature of the universe by making her see it inside Your tiny mouth! What difference is there between what she saw inside You and what she sees outside, which is also the freaks of deluding power! Have You not shown me this very day Yourself to be the thousands of the cow boys as so many Haris, each having four arms, attended on by all the celestials, as well as the thousands of thousands of calves! Were not all these Your own forms, as were also the original boys and calves — all the creation of Your *Maya*! Blessed are the *gopis* of Vraja who mistook You for their children and gave You suck. Most blessed is Nandagopa’s family which is nearest and dearest to You, the embodiment of Supreme Bliss!”

Brahma went thrice round Krishna, bowed to Him and left, and with him also disappeared the (imitation) Krishna-boys and Krishna-calves, leaving on the scene the original boys sitting at their meal in concentric circles in the exact place and position in which they were when he cast his spell on them a year ago. They now saw Krishna, Who had gone to collect their kine, return with the animals and congratulated Him for having done the job so quickly before they “had time[16] to take another mouthful,” and each boy lovingly invited Him to share his meal. Krishna laughed and showed them the python’s corpse which he had only an “hour ago” killed. That night the boys told their people of the miracle which Krishna had, on that day, performed in saving them and their calves from the belly of the terrible asura whose dead body they exhibited everywhere.

All these deeds of Krishna the people of Vraja treasured up in their memory and turned into songs, although they remained ignorant of His real identity (having been unaware of the illusory cow boys they had fondly loved and nurtured for one whole year), which suited well His and His brother’s purpose to continue their childish amusements — playing hide-and-peek, constructing dams and bridges in mud, and romping as they pleased.

[16] It is obvious that the young cowherds who were covered by the cloud of Brahma’s illusion were not aware of what happened in the interval, nor of the interval itself. When the illusion lifted. Krishna, Who alone knew the secret and did not divulge it, picked up the scene at the point of Brahma’s interruption, namely, when He rose from His meal to fetch the calves, while the other boys remained at theirs. The scene now starts with His returning with the animals which His companions thought to have been too quick, so unaware were they of the passage of one whole year. This extraordinary experience denotes the illusion of time, which cannot be measured, nor even noticed, in the absence of phenomena, which makes time itself a phenomenon, that is, the product of the mind.

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*Dhenukasura*

Sri Suka continues:

The boys have now grown big and have been entrusted with the grazing of cows in Brindavan proper, instead of being limited to its outskirts, as hitherto, with the calves. Brindavan was a vast tract of land rich in pasture grass, wild flowers and fruits, and perennial lakes with the broad Yamuna river meandering its silvery way across it. Driving their cows before them the brothers enjoyed its natural luxuriance. Krishna in particular was so entranced by its beauty that He behaved as if drunk. He played on His divine flute, danced before a dancing peacock, mimicked the cries of the swan, the goose, the skylark when He heard them, shook with pretended terror at the imagined roars of lions to frighten His animals, and when tired, He laid His head in the lap of a cow boy and His body on the soft grass, or put His elder brother's head on His lap and massaged his feet, while He listened to the songs of the cow boys. Krishna was the focus of the *gopas*' delight and love. They fanned Him, massaged His feet, sang and wrestled before Him to entertain Him, and served Him in every way, though without knowing His divine State, which He deliberately concealed, manifesting His powers only when the occasions compelled it.

At some distance from their usual haunts there was a big palmyra garden, of which the fruits were falling and rotting on the ground, with no one to eat them because of a herd of vicious asses headed by an asura, Dhenukasura by name, lived in it and forbade any human encroachment. The boys hankered after the fruits and pleaded to Krishna to help get them. When He and Balarama proceeded to the spot and the latter shook the trees with both his mighty hands, bringing down a great many bunches of fruits, the demon fiercely charged and struck him on the chest with his hind legs. As the asura turned to deal the second kick, Rama caught the legs which had risen to strike and, whirling the animal round, dashed him against a big tree and killed him. The stroke was so violent that it brought down the tree, whose crash shook its neighbour, which in its turn crashed and caused the fall of a third tree, whose fall brought down the fourth, and so on. Seeing the death of their leader and the devastation of their domain, all of the asses



assaulted the two brothers, but they were all seized and slain, leaving to the cow boys the free use of that garden forever after.

With a peacock feather fastened to His locks, a crown of wild flowers on His head and flute playing, Krishna, Whose eyes were as large as lotus petals, led the hosts of cows and cow boys back to Vraja every evening, covered all over with the dust raised by their march. At the sound of His flute the young *gopis* came out of their doors to look at the beauty of His face with amorous glances. Yasoda and Rohini welcomed their darlings with refreshments, bath water, change of clothes, etc.

Sometime after the above incident, the *gopa* boys once strayed to that part of the river Kalindi which was poisoned by a hundred-hooded dragon which lived in it. Unknowingly they drove their cattle into it to refresh them from the oppressive summer heat. No sooner did they and their cattle drink its water than they fell dead on the river side. Krishna fixed His gaze on them and revived them, but He determined to clear that water from its poison for all time.

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## XVI – XVII

### *The Dragon Kaliya*

Investigating the cause of Kalindi's contamination. Krishna found that in a part of it there was a large pool in which Kaliya, the dragon, had been living with its family for many *yugas*. The poisonous fumes which it emitted kept the water constantly at boiling point, killing all birds that flew over it and all life that came within its emanations. Krishna decided to drive away the dragon from there. He climbed a high tree nearby, tightened His loin cloth round His limbs, and leaped into the boiling water, which rose to about two hundred yards by the impact of His plunge. Kaliya, surprised at His daring, caught hold of Him in fierce anger and sank its venomous fangs into His vitals, winding itself round His tender body to cut it into slices. At the sight of their Beloved's apparent death, the cow boys fell down senseless, terror-stricken, and their kine lowed in great distress. Forebodings of an impending disaster likewise appeared in Vraja, which greatly alarmed Nanda and which the people connected with Krishna's fate, as usual, particularly as on that day Balarama had not accompanied Him like the other days. Men, women and children led by Nanda, Yasoda and Balarama came out in search of Him, following the hoof-marks of the cows, till they arrived at the spot and saw Him gripped by the monster, apparently lifeless, and the boys in a swoon on the river bank. The women fainted, the men and the children wept and screamed, Yasoda completely broke down and Nanda prepared to jump into the poisonous river, but Balarama, who alone was free from apprehensions, stopped him.

Krishna, who had by then remained in the dragon's grip for about an hour, saw the distress of the people, and started inflating Himself to such dimensions as the serpent could no longer hold him. He rose, and with one leap stood dancing on its hoods, breaking one hood after another. The animal furiously hissed, emitted fiery poison from its mouths and nostrils, and hectically whirled round and round in the vain attempt of shaking Him out of its body, or biting Him to death, until it was completely spent, when it vomited black blood and dropped down in a swoon. Having crushed all the hundred hoods with the weight of the whole universe in His body, Krishna listened to the dragon's chaste wives who prostrated to Him,

keeping their little ones before them, and prayed for forgiveness and for the restoration of their husband's life. They pleaded:

“Your descent to this world, O Lord, has the one purpose of punishing the evil-doers, and Your chastisement of this offender, we know, is fully merited. You, who treat all alike, do not punish except with the intention of rewarding. We consider Your anger against our husband as an act of Grace to wash away his sins, a Grace which he must have earned by some good deed in a past life. He who once touches Your feet no longer hankers after anything else, neither the world empire nor the highest heaven.

“Hail to You, infinite Lord, Who dwell in all hearts, the source and support of the elements, almighty, absolute *purusha*, Fount of Knowledge and Consciousness, Projector of *prakriti* and free from all taints! Be pleased, O Lord, to forgive the vicious creature, our husband, who has no knowledge of You. Have pity on our young ones and ourselves, Your maid-servants, and spare his life for our sake, who otherwise would remain helpless.”

Krishna spared Kaliya's life, and when it fully recovered from the swoon, it addressed Him thus:

“We, who are made of *tamo guna* are vicious by nature, a nature which we cannot overcome without Your Grace. Please show this Grace to us or administer any punishment You deem fit for the purpose.”

Krishna answered:

“You must no longer stay here, O Kaliya, but with your wives and children go quickly to the island of Ramanaka in the sea, leaving the river for the use of living beings. Garuda (the king of vultures and the mortal enemy of snakes), for fear of whom you sheltered yourselves here, will not trouble you, seeing the marks of my feet on you.”

So commanded, Kaliya and his whole family worshipped the Lord and withdrew to Ramanaka. Thereafter Yamuna's water became as sweet as nectar. When Krishna came out of the river, He was decked all over with precious gems and smeared with an unearthly sandal-wood paste, given to Him by the dragon family, as a mark of their homage. The *gopas* and *gopis*, who had swooned, recovered and rapturously hugged Him. Nanda, Rohini and Balarama tenderly embraced Him, and Yasoda took Him in her lap and

shed profuse tears of joy; even the cattle and their young ones were seen dancing with delight. The Brahmins demanded thanksgiving gifts of Nanda for His deliverance, and he generously responded with cows and gold without count.

The people of Vraja, who were excessively tired after the great strain of that day, did not return to their homes, but spent the night by the riverside. In the middle of the night a wild forest-fire broke out, on account of the great summer heat, which threatened to destroy the whole countryside and the inhabited places in it. Awakened by the scorching fire, the cowherds rushed to Krishna and appealed to Him to save them and their cattle. Krishna drew near and swallowed the flame and the destruction it had created, leaving no marks of the conflagration behind.

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## XVIII — XXI

### *Pralamba and Forest Fire*

Sri Suka turns to describe the summer season in Brindavan, where the general dryness and heat are not felt as they are elsewhere, and where the chirping of the crickets is drowned by the sound of the waterfalls, which keep the woodland green, the trees fresh, the ponds full, and the air delightfully cool. In these summer months the cowherds freely enjoy their sports while tending their cattle.

Pralamba was a vicious asura who disguised himself as a cow boy with the intention of kidnapping Krishna and Balarama and mixed with the others when they were playing in the forest. Krishna spotted him immediately, but told no one. To catch him, He suggested a game in which the boy who wins rides on the back of the one who loses. The boys divided themselves into two opposing parties, one led by Krishna and the other by Balarama. Thinking that Krishna might prove too heavy for him after what he had heard of Him, Pralamba chose to be in Krishna's party so that he might carry Balarama when his own party lost, for which he determined to work. When his party actually lost, Krishna carried His particular friend Sridhara, and Pralamba offered to carry Balarama. But whereas Krishna and the others stopped at the marked limit, Pralamba far exceeded it and started flying in his usual asuric form. Balarama was at first frightened, but soon he recovered his self consciousness and, lifting his mighty fist, struck the monster's head a blow which instantly killed him. Krishna and the boys rushed to Balarama and embraced him for having come out safely from the demon's trap.

When another forest-fire started and Krishna dealt with it as before, His and Balarama's fame spread far and wide in Vraja, among the young *gopis* in particular, as gods who had taken birth for their benefit.

The rainy season begins with its persistent clouds and heavy downpours which, though impede movements, do not deter our cow boys from going out, as usual, sheltering themselves now in caves, now under big trees in thick forests, or under jutting rocks and in hollow trees, freely plying their tongues with jokes, or their flutes with soul-stirring tunes to madden the Bhil women (forest dwellers) with love for them. They feed on roots, wild fruits, and rice mixed with curd and vegetable, which they carry

in their wallets from home. They skip, frolic and dance in their enjoyment of the rain, which falls like nectar for living creatures. Krishna knew the name of each and every cow and called to Him whichever He wanted to suck milk directly from its udder, the milk which flowed with abundant love at His touch, or the sound of His voice.

The autumn follows, reviving nature after four months of confinement, as it were: the clouds clear from the sky, lotuses float again on the ponds, water regains its transparency, fruit trees blossom, flowers carry the morning dew on their petals and spread their perfumes far and wide with the fresh breeze and the songs of the larks, the ascetics quit their cells and move about freely in the forest, the labourers plough their fields and Krishna intoxicates *gopis*, man and beast by the magic sound of His flute. Joy pervades Brindavan and love for Krishna fills the hearts of its damsels, who constantly think of Him and sing with flowing tears the songs which they have composed on His deeds in Gokula and Vraja.

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*Krishna Steals Damsels' Clothes*

Sri Suka continues:

Once in the coldest month of the year — *Margashirsa* (December-January) — the maidens of Vraja took a vow to worship the whole month the goddess Katyayani (Bhadrakali), who personifies the Lord's all-powerful *Maya*, to get Krishna as husband. It required daily bathing in the Yamuna, living on pure food fit to be offered as oblation, drawing the image of the goddess on the sand and worshipping it with flowers, incense, light and offerings of broken rice, fruit, etc., then praying:

“O Goddess Katyayani, Omnipotent Ruler of the universe, who possess infinite powers, grant that I get Krishna for consort; all hail to you!”

Fixing their hearts and minds on Krishna these maidens rose every day at daybreak, called one another, and marched to the river arm in arm, singing songs on Him, and praying to the Goddess to make the Darling of Nanda their husband.

On the last day of the month, which fell on a full-moon day, they came as usual shivering with cold to the river, undressed, and entered the water, leaving their clothes in a heap on the bank. To please them and satisfy their hunger for Himself, Krishna went there with His companions, picked up the bunch of clothes, climbed a *kadamba* tree close by with them and started exchanging jokes with His friends. Then from that height He called to the girls to come out and take their clothes from Him either one by one or all together, giving them to understand that He was very serious about it. But the *gopi* damsels took the matter lightly, tittered slyly and dipped still lower — up to their necks — in the icy water and cried out to Him:

“You should not wrong us, O Darling! We know You to be the beloved son of Nanda and praised all over Vraja. Be kind, O dear Krishna, to restore our clothes to us, frozen with cold as we are. As Your maid-servants, we are prepared to do Your bidding. You are a knower of *dharma* and must not do us wrong, or else we will report You to the King.”

Krishna replied:

“As you have promised to do My bidding, then come out and take your clothes here from Me with a smile.”

The girls obeyed and, pinched with cold, walked out of the river covering their parts with their hands. Krishna, pleased with their purity, placed the bundle of clothes on His shoulder and smilingly said:

“You know that you have transgressed against the river god by entering the water in the nude while you are on a vow, thus violating your vow. You have now to atone for it and demand forgiveness by the usual sign, namely, joining your palms over your heads and bowing low, after which I will return your clothes.”

Realising the truth of His statement, they did as He bade them and took back their clothes without feeling the least resentment at His behaviour. On the contrary, after dressing themselves they continued to gaze longingly at His face, as if to ask His permission to touch His feet. He permitted them to do so and added:

“Your desire to worship Me, O chaste<sup>[17]</sup> girls, has My approval. *The enjoyment of the world by those whose mind is devoted to Me cannot lead to more enjoyment, but becomes barren like fried seeds which cannot produce their kind. You have accomplished the purpose of your vow to the goddess. You will sport with Me in the coming nights to your hearts' content.*”

Summer visited Vraja once again and the cow boys one day found themselves far beyond their usual pasture. While sheltering themselves under the trees, Krishna grew pensive and spoke to them of the number of services which the trees render to living beings: “giving shelter from the heat of the sun and from rain, supplying fruits, flowers, roots, bark fibre, and finally, wood for cooking and warming houses, animals and men, whereas they themselves are exposed to all sorts of danger: rain, storms, lightning, snow, blazing heat of the sun, etc. Human beings should take lessons from them and spend their resources and labour for the welfare of all.”

[17] This praise of Krishna to the ladies for their unseemly naked attitudes is not understood by many, who are incapable of seeing through the eyes of Krishna. The Lord's obvious intention was to make them be absorbed in Him, as consciousness and forget their bodies, which the girls gradually did. After their shyness to emerge from the water and their appeal to Him not to shame them, their



views on the matter slowly changed to one of compliance, because of His mystic power working on them. By the time they approached Him and bowed naked to Him, the absorption was so complete that they ceased to have any body sense to feel ashamed, and continued in that state of trance even after dressing themselves and stood gazing at His face. We have the clue of this absorption in Krishna's remark "you have accomplished the purpose of your vow to the goddess," which consisted of a prayer for union with Him. It is quite obvious that the prayer has been conceded in merging their minds in Him.

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## XXIII

### *Liberation of the Brahmin Women*

Thus conversing and passing from the shade of one tree to another, Krishna and His companions reached the river. After refreshing themselves and their herds with a wash and a drink, the cow boys felt the pinch of hunger and asked their leaders Krishna and Balarama to find something for them to eat. Krishna remembered some Brahmin women who were devotees of Sri Hari, whose husbands were at that time performing a sacrifice not far from there. He asked some of the boys to go to the sacrificial hall and ask in His and His brother's names for some cooked food. The messengers prostrated themselves before the Brahmins and with joined palms delivered His message:

“O worshipful Brahmins, we are cowherd servants of Sri Krishna and Balarama who are grazing their cattle close by. They are feeling hungry and desire to have some cooked rice from you. Blessings be on you! If you have any rice to spare and have respect for the brothers, you will be good enough to give it to us, you who are foremost of the knowers of *dharma*.”

The Brahmins took no notice of them and of Sri Krishna's name, intent as they were, Sri Suka says, on petty hopes of ascending to heaven, from which they were any day likely to fall, and for which they were, in their blindness, making elaborate preparations. The disappointed *gopas* reported the matter to Krishna, who laughed and sent them back to the Brahmins' wives who, He said, “will surely give you what you want; for they live ever in Me in their mind.” As soon as the Brahmin ladies heard Krishna's name they rose and directly walked out to Him, carrying vessels full of their best preparations, ignoring their husbands, sons, brothers and relatives who tried to stop them. Surrounded by cow boys, Krishna was then sauntering in a grove with a golden silk cloth round His loins, a peacock feather stuck to a coronet of tender leaves on His head, a fresh water lily behind each ear, and a wreath of wild flowers round His neck. The Brahmin women feasted their eyes on His splendour and rushed to embrace Him to their heart's content. When He heard that they had come in defiance of their husbands and sons, Krishna addressed them gently:

“Welcome are you, highly blessed ladies! It is right that you should come to see Me, the Object of your longing, notwithstanding the obstacles. The wise who look to their interest should develop constant selfless devotion to Me, their own dear Self, dearer than which there is nothing, and on account of which life, mind, body, husband, sons and wealth appear dear. Now return to the sacrificial hall and help your husbands to lead the *yajna* to a successful end.”

The women answered:

“It is not becoming of you, O Lord, to say such cruel things to us. You have to vindicate the Vedic dictum that there is no return for him who attains to You. We have left our homes and families in order to live always near Your feet and, as You know, we will not be accepted back, even if we are ordered to return. Therefore grant that we remain with You, our sole Refuge.”

Sri Krishna answered:

“Your husbands and sons will find no fault with you, My favour being on you; even the gods will approve of your conduct. *Bodily contact alone does not always promote love and devotion: surrender your mind to Me, and you will attain to My State.*”

The Brahmin wives returned to the sacrificial hall and were surprised to find themselves well received by their relatives, as foretold by Krishna. Krishna collected His comrades and distributed among them the delicious food which the devout women had brought, and lastly He Himself ate.

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## XXIV – XXVII

### *Abashment of Indra*

The season for the worship of Indra is drawing nigh, and Krishna observed the bustle that was going on in Vraja in preparation for it. He very well knew what it meant, yet He respectfully inquired from Nanda as to the cause of that flutter. Nanda affectionately replied that it was for the worship of the lord of the clouds and rain by means of the materials which the rain helps to produce. He said:

“It is Indra, dear Son, who rewards men’s labour to gain the produce of the land, and it is but right that he should be thanked for it. Moreover, it is a custom which has descended to us from our forefathers, which we have to respect.”

Wanting to rouse Indra’s temper in order to curb it, Sri Krishna answered:

“What is all this talk about thanking Indra? We know that everything is pre-ordained — birth, death, enjoyment of pleasure and pain, danger, safety, wealth or poverty. If there is a god who dispenses karma (destiny) according to one’s past action, he must be powerless against the man who does not act at all, and also powerless in altering the course of karma. Karma alone is, therefore, worthy of worship as the principal or deity who confers happiness. Worshipping any god for that gives as little satisfaction as does the woman who has many lovers. Every being has to live according to what Karma disposes for him: a Brahmin lives by teaching the Veda, a Kshatriya by protecting the nation, a Vaishya by agriculture, trade, farming, cattle-rearing and money lending, and a Sudra by loyal service to the other three castes. The three *gunas* are responsible for the creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe. *Rajas* is mainly responsible for the propagation of the species through the union of sexes, as well as for the gathering of the clouds and rainfall, which is useful to life. What then, has Indra got to do with all this?

“For us cowherds the cow has been our only means of subsistence, and the pasture lands, forests and mountains our dwelling places. If we are to worship anything or anybody it should be these cows, for which we

should use the materials which we have collected (rice, milk, sugar, wheat flour, ghee, pulses, etc.). Let the Brahmins perform the sacrifice to the cows and Govardhana mountain and pour these as libations. We should afterwards feed not only the Brahmins and the people but also the pariah, the down-trodden and the dog. Let this cow-worship be instituted for all time to come, to please the cows, the Brahmins, the poor, the mountain and Me.”

Nanda immediately approved of this proposal and ordered the Brahmins to transfer the oblations to the worship of the cows and the mountain (Govardhana).

Indra got to know of what happened and, with his usual jealous propensities, determined to have his revenge. He summoned the most virulent clouds called Samvartaka, which are usually kept in reserve for doomsday, the eve of the universal dissolution (*Mahapralaya*), and lectured to them about the arrogance of Krishna, a quarrelsome, foolish and ignorant boy, an arrogance which deserved to be curbed by destroying its support, the cattle. He adjured them to do their worst by Vraja, promising to be by their side, riding on his elephant Airavata in the company of the wind god.

Released from their chains, Samvartaka sent out their lightning and thunders and poured water on Vraja with an unprecedented violence. The wind god lashed Vraja mercilessly with a most fierce storm and thick sheets of hailstones, which penetrated every house, every cottage, every cow-shed and flooded the whole countryside. The moisture and cold were so intense that man and beast, young and old, looked as if they were dying. The *gopis* brought their children to Krishna and appealed to Him to save them and their cattle from destruction. Seeing the parlous state of Vraja, Krishna lifted up Mount Govardhana with one hand and called upon the people to shelter themselves, their cattle and all their valuables underneath it. For one whole week He stood in that position without moving until Indra, feeling ashamed of the futility of his rage, withdrew the wind, the clouds and the rain and permitted the sun to shine. When the flood subsided, the land got dry, and the river began to flow with clear water, Krishna ordered the people to come out without fear and replaced the mountain on its old foundations, accepting the homage of all the people. The *gopis* pelted Him with unbroken rice and curd, and Yasoda, Rohini, Nanda and Balarama hugged Him and rained blessings and flowers on Him.

Now the news of Krishna's deeds spread to all parts of Vraja and its neighbouring kingdoms, and created a great sensation among the people. Their chiefs gathered in Nanda's house and reviewed all the superhuman achievements of his Son, from infancy down to the present, and Nanda repeated to them word for word the statement of the sage Garga who had identified Him with Lord Narayana, which made them unanimously agree that Krishna was actually Narayana Himself and they started worshipping Him as such.

Indra, cogitating over the extraordinary feat of Krishna in lifting a whole mountain and supporting it on His left palm for a whole week, could not get away from the feeling that He was Lord Vishnu Himself, which brought him to his senses. Shamefacedly he approached the Lord and prostrated full length on the ground before Him, touching His feet with his golden crown and begged forgiveness.

“Fools like me”, he said, “imagine themselves to be the unchallenged rulers of the universe, and grow exceedingly vindictive when a purpose of theirs is a little thwarted by a mortal, but become quickly disillusioned when they deal with You. It is to kill their arrogance and make them take to the path of virtue that You assume bodies, as if to sport in them. The office with which I am invested and the wealth and pomp which are attached to it have turned my head, which I now implore You to forgive and to grant that I may no longer take to evil-doings, but be inclined to devotion for You, my sole Refuge, Supreme Ruler and Preceptor.”

Lord Krishna smilingly answered that He had designedly stopped his worship to kill his pride, for, He said, “him whom I wish to reward with My favour, I take away his wealth.”

Surabhi, the celestial cow, pleased at Krishna's establishing cow-worship, came to thank Him for protecting her tribe on the earth, and offered Him the bovine crown, then she bathed Him with her milk, while Indra, at the suggestion of the celestial sages, who were present, bathed Him with the heavenly water of the Ganga carried in the trunk of his elephant and named Him “Govinda” — the God of the cows — to the rejoicing of the holy congregation, human and celestial.

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## XXIX

### *Infatuation of the Gopis*

In fulfilment of His promise to the bathing maidens, Krishna chose to hold His sports on a moonlit night in the autumn. The moon rose above the eastern horizon, flooding the woodland and meadows of Brindavan with its silvery beams and quenching the scorching heat of the day. Peace had descended upon the earth and a soft breeze, rising from the river, wafted the jasmin scent from the neighbouring groves. Krishna struck a melody on His flute and all the women of Vraja were caught in a frenzy of longing for its Player. They left husband, children, home, on the spot and flocked in large numbers to Him, tracking Him down by the sound of His wildly enchanting music. They walked so fast that they were unaware of one another and of the disorder in their attires. In their minds and hearts He was a lover, but actually they united with Him in His real State, which is that of the Liberated. Having renounced their all and taken refuge in Him, they were absolved from all their sins.

King Parikshit, interrupting Sri Suka, wondered how Emancipation could be obtained by women who were so steeped in ignorance as to take Krishna for a lover rather than for the infinite Brahman that He was. The Sage replied that he had already explained that point in connection with the Emancipation of Sisupala, who had constantly thought of Him with hatred, and that greater was the reason for these damsels to be emancipated for thinking of Him with intense love.

Sri Suka resumed his narrative. Seeing the *gopis* flocking round Him in the madness of their love, Krishna (conceivably with a twinkle in the eye) advised them to return home, before the night grew older and the dangers on the way greater, for, He said,

“Your babies may cry for their feed, and your relatives be anxious about your absence. The duty of a good woman is to serve her husband and tend her children. To a woman of good birth a paramour can do her great harm, and, certainly bars her way to heaven. Love for Me need not be satisfied by bodily contact but by meditation on Me, by listening to the stories of My deeds and the glory of My Divine Nature. Be pleased, dear *gopis*, to go back to your homes.”

The women, not expecting this rebuff, unleashed their tongues and accused Him of being cruel to them, He for whose sake they had left husband, home and everything, and Who was said to be the best knower of *dharma*, the greatest friend and the most beloved of beings.

“The wise,” they declared, “find delight only in You, their own eternal Self. None can compare with You, the Incomparable, Fount of infinite bliss! If we are ordered to return to Vraja our feet will be too paralysed to move, and our limbs will refuse to work in the home, where there remains nothing for us to do. Do quench with the nectar of your lips the fiery passion which You have kindled in our breasts, or else we will seek union with You, like yogis, by *tapas* and meditation, renouncing our domestic life altogether.”

Sri Krishna was greatly amused by their speech and firmness and resolved to give them some pleasure as a reward for their fidelity. He took them to the riverside and sported with them by singing, dancing, touching their hands, hair and garments, digging His nails in their flesh, casting bewitching glances on some and heart-melting smiles, which exposed His jasmin-bud teeth, on others. In their intense delight, the women began to exhibit a disastrous self-complacency and even pride, which led the omniscient Krishna to curb it by immediately vanishing from their midst.

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## XXX – XXXII

### *Gopis' Search for Krishna*

Missing Krishna, the *gopis* became distracted. They rushed in all directions in the forest, inquiring from each tree whether it had seen the Darling of Yasoda pass that way, and describing His appearance, complexion, dress and gestures, calling each tree by its species name and, receiving no answer, they behaved like mad.

As they went on and on praising, praying, wailing and deliriously rambling, as if life was ebbing from their bodies, all of a sudden Krishna appeared and flooded them again with light and life. They leaped to their feet and with wide-open eyes drank in the nectar of His blissful face. Some clasped His hands, some lay down on the ground and placed His feet on their breasts, some took His arms round their shoulders, others simply joined the palms of their hands, shut their eyes and sank their minds in Him like yogis. Going with Him to the riverside they spread their scarves on the ground and made a soft couch for Him, while His feet rested on their laps. Having satisfied themselves of His presence, they wanted Him to answer a question of grave concern to them on the vagaries of love relationships. Some people, they said, have their love reciprocated, others love without being loved, but there are some who do not and cannot love at all. What could be the reasons for these differences?

Krishna answered:

“Those who reciprocated love are actuated by self-interest, and not by goodwill or virtue. Those who love without being loved are by nature kind: their love is genuine and blameless, like parents' love. Those who do not love even those who love them, much less those who do not love them, are either yogis, whose sole enjoyment lies in the Self, or stupid, or still ungrateful. *As for Myself, I do not outwardly answer love for love, so that the devotee may think of Me in his mind. Therefore to establish in you, O fair ladies, a constant devotion to Me in your mind, I have made My body and My love invisible.* For my sake, I know, you broke all social norms, the precepts of the Veda, and even your domestic moorings, so that I cannot sufficiently repay all I owe you of love, which is absolutely faultless. Your goodness will be an adequate reward for your service to Me.”

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### XXXIII

#### *Rasa Dance*

The *gopis* now realised the nature of Krishna's love. which, they knew, would never forsake them, and felt supremely happy. In self-abandonment of joy, they proposed to dance the *Rasa* on the sandy bank of the Yamuna, which is a dance in which men and women form a circle, each man standing between two women encircling their necks with his arms and, as there were then no men other than Krishna, He multiplied Himself to the number of women and stood between them. The celestials, not wanting to miss this unique spectacle, came in their hundreds, with their musical instruments beating and their consorts decked with jewels and bursting with curiosity. The *Rasa* started in a medley of sounds, of celestial kettledrums, *gandharvas*' choral songs, and the jingling of the *gopis*' bangles, anklets and the thousands of bells which hung from their girdles. With their measured steps, their alternate clapping and interlocking of hands, billowing breasts, loosened girdles and hair, fluttering garments, and voices trembling with love, the *gopis* shimmered like lightning flashes in a thick cloud, charmingly unconscious of their attitudes. As the excitement of the dance grew hotter, the *gopis* behaved strangely in their love frenzy. One pitched her voice to a piercing treble, which her Krishna applauded with a "Bravo!" Another clasped the shoulders of the Krishna who was by her side, letting her bangles and jasmin crown slip off. A third held His arm, smelt its fresh-lily fragrance, and kissed it. A fourth *gopi* rubbed her cheek against His and received from His mouth the half-chewed betel. A fifth pressed His hand to her bosom, as if fatigued and needed a support.

The mad *Rasa* dance went on and on. The celestial women, smitten with jealousy for Krishna's amorous dalliance with mere mortals, fainted in their aerial cars and the moon-god along with his twenty-seven wives (stellar houses), struck with wonder, forgot his journey in the sky, stopping the night's movement towards its end. By multiplying Himself, Krishna enjoyed the cumulative love of all the *gopis* simultaneously, though He is ever in the enjoyment of the bliss of His own Self. With His own hands He wiped the drops of sweat from His companions' faces with the tenderness of a lover, which thrilled and maddened the damsels still more. Suffocated by their embraces and bedaubed with the saffron paint of their breasts,

Krishna finally entered the river Yamuna, where He was playfully pelted with a mass of water from all sides. Bath over, they all came out and started roaming with supreme ecstasy in the groves and woodlands of Brindavan in that endless night, which, in effect, consisted of many nights.

King Parikshit, interrupting Suka, asked:

“We are taught that Lord Krishna took birth among men with the supreme purpose of promoting *dharma* and suppressing *adharma*. How could He transgress His own laws by taking so much liberty with other men’s wives, He whose desires are all fulfilled? What could His intentions have been in perpetrating such repugnant acts?”

The Sage answered:

“Violating the principles of *dharma* by the Almighty carries no sin with it, Himself being the purifying agent, like the fire which cleanses all impurities. It is sinful and punishable in lesser beings. The poison, for example, which Shiva swallowed with impunity, would have been the death of any lesser person than Him. The intelligent man should shape his conduct according to the precepts enunciated and the rules laid down by the Great, and not according to their behaviour, which is not bound by any karmic law. The Lord appeared in a human body to shower His Grace on those who come in corporeal contact with Him, and create devotion in those who hear of the greatness of His deeds and life. As for the husbands of the *gopis*, you must know that they never missed their wives, having, by the power of the Lord, had them all along by their sides.”

When at long last shimmers of the dawn pierced the eastern sky, bringing the *Rasa* night to an end, the *gopis*, as commanded by Krishna, reluctantly tore themselves from Him and returned to their homes.

He who listens to this story with reverence, will be blessed with supreme devotion to the Lord and will acquire self-control and mastery<sup>[18]</sup> over lust.

<sup>[18]</sup> This should put an end to all doubts about Krishna’s unexceptionable behaviour with the *gopis*, which has been the subject of much controversy by some who are apt to judge Him by the normal behaviour of householders. These chapters have left no doubt in the seekers’ minds that this relationship was absolutely blameless, when even the *gopis* themselves acknowledged Krishna to be their “own eternal Self,” and Krishna again and again reminded them (and us, incidentally), that “I do

not outwardly answer love for love, so that the devotee may think of Me in his mind. Therefore, to establish in you constant devotion to Me in your mind I have made My body and My love invisible” (p. 248). The people who criticise this scene most are the ones who rightly hold fast to the sanctity of conjugal rights, but miss the fact that these rights were not denied to the *gopis* husbands, who, by the Lord’s own powers, never missed their wives, whom they found all along by their sides. We have, moreover, to remind them that the *gopis* and *gopas* were no ordinary mortals, but celestials who had taken special births for the Lord’s purpose, for which they were rewarded by His bodily presence and contact, a privilege which was denied to them in their heavenly spheres.

Finally, Sri Suka’s answer and this conclusion that the listener of this story will acquire “self-control and mastery over lust,” should dissipate the last vestige of doubt.

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## XXXIV – XXXV

### *Shankachuda*

Ambika forest was sacred to goddess Parvati, Shiva's Consort. Led by Nanda, the *gopas* once went on pilgrimage to her temple in the forest. After bathing and worshipping the Divine Couple, the pilgrims went to sleep that night on the bank of the Saraswati river. A mighty python, afflicted by hunger, crawled out of its forest hole to the side of Nanda and seized him. In the dread of death he cried aloud to Krishna to save him. The *gopas* rushed and struck the reptile with firebrands again and again, but could make no impression on it. Krishna approached and touched it with His feet, when lo! the serpent turned into a *vidyadhara* (a shining celestial), who stood before Krishna with bent head and joined palms in thankfulness for releasing him from the curse, which Rishi Angira had pronounced on him for railing at deformed sages contrasting them with his own beauty of countenance and figure.

After Krishna's return from pilgrimage a new *Rasa* opens, this time with the participation of Balarama, when the women, bejewelled and perfumed, went into another corybantic madness in moonlight in the fragrant forest. The two brothers sang with magical voices, which made the *gopis* fall into trance, in complete oblivion of their bodies and disordered attitudes. Suddenly a vile yaksha, an attendant of Kubera named Shankachuda, fell on the scene and drove the screaming women before him. Krishna and Balarama pursued him, each with a *sal* tree in hand, but on reaching him Krishna felled him with one blow of His fist and severed his head, which dropped to the earth with a precious stone pinned to the cap still sticking to it. Krishna picked up the gem and made a present of it to His beloved brother.

The days that followed that night were spent by the *gopis* in thinking of Krishna and singing His virtues and the greatness of His deeds, while He went on His usual rounds of grazing His father's cattle.

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## XXXVI – XXXVIII

### *Kamsa Summons Krishna to Mathura*

Sri Suka continues:

Now the wheels of Fate started moving to bring about Kamsa's destruction. Narada visited him and revealed to him the whole story of Krishna's birth: His being the eighth son of Devaki, His exchange for Yasoda's divine daughter by Vasudeva on the night of His birth, Balarama being His brother as the son of Rohini, the slaying by Krishna of the asuras sent by Kamsa, etc. Greatly disturbed by this news, Kamsa rushed out with a drawn sword to kill Vasudeva, but Narada stopped him and explained to him the innocence of Vasudeva, who had been chosen by Providence to be the instrument of his death, which did not prevent Kamsa from putting both Devaki and her husband in iron fetters at once. Calling his ministers, elephant keepers, and wrestlers, he gave them minute instructions on how they should manage things to destroy the two brothers, whom he had summoned to Mathura. He ordered a bow-sacrifice for the 14th day of the next lunar month — for the worship of Shiva, which, he believed, would secure him victory over his enemies. Then he called Akrura, a most respectable man among the Yadus who remained loyal to him, clasped his hands, and implored him in the name of their friendship to go to Vraja and bring the two youngsters.

“No one,” he coaxed him, “is more respected in the race of the Bhojas and Vrishnis than you, gentle Akrura. I depend on you to proceed to Nanda's Vraja and fetch the two sons of Vasudeva in this chariot without delay. I am told that my death has been ordained to be at the hands of the younger one. Let Nanda and other *gopa* chiefs come to me with their tributes. I shall have the youngsters quickly despatched by my elephant Kuvalayapida, who is like the angel of death himself or, if they escape the elephant, by my fierce wrestlers, who will descend on them like thunderbolts. Then I will turn my merciless hands against those who will mourn them in the Vrishnis, the Bhojas, and the Dasharhas, beginning with Vasudeva, my aged father Ugrasena, his brother Devaka, and all my other enemies. The earth will have then no more thorns for me. Destroying all who side with the gods by allying myself with their enemies, like Jarasandha, my father-in-law, Sambara,

Naraka and Bana the demons, I shall rule over the entire world. Please, therefore, start at once for Vraja and fetch the boys, as if inviting them to the bow festival and to see the splendour of Mathura. Of course you will not whisper a word about my intentions to anyone there.”

The wise Akrura replied:

“Your plans are well laid, O Prince. Yet one should keep one’s balance in success as in failure; for it is Providence Who allots to us the fruits of our actions. Even our best endeavours may be thwarted by Him, causing us as much grief as their success would cause us joy. Nevertheless I shall do your bidding.”

Kamsa then secretly summoned Kesi the asura and ordered him to proceed to Vraja and do his best to kill the two brothers by his demoniacal powers. At Vraja Kesi transformed himself into a formidable horse and moved in the countryside with the velocity of wind, ploughing the earth with his giant hoofs, and raising clouds of dust in tune with his world-shaking neighs.

Annoyed at the devastation caused to His beloved Vraja by the asuric horse, Krishna challenged it, which made it bristle with rage, whisk its tail and roar like a lion about to pounce. Then veering round, it dealt Krishna a deadly blow with its rear hoofs, which the latter by a swift movement of the hands caught, lifted above the ground, whirled round and flung the animal to a great distance, which stunned the asura but did not kill him. Recovering, the horse rushed at Krishna with an open mouth to bite Him to death, but as soon as its teeth caught His left hand, they shivered to pieces, as if they touched red-hot iron and the hand began to inflate till it blocked its throat and suffocated it.

Narada now appeared to Krishna and, taking Him aside, spoke in confidence to Him:

“O Krishna, Incomprehensible Magician, Master of Yoga, Ruler of the universe, Who dwell in beings like fire in the dry wood, Almighty Lord, Who stimulated the *gunas* and created the universe by Your own *Maya*, which is not other than Yourself! The day after tomorrow we will witness the death of Kamsa’s elephant, his wrestlers and of Kamsa himself by Your hands, and then by and by, of the demons Panchajana and Mura, also Kalayavana and Naraka.”



Unfolding to Him all His future victories, the princesses He will marry, and the deeds He will do in His whole life on earth, Narada worshipped Him and departed.

On the morrow of receiving Kamsa's order, the noble Akrura drove in a chariot to Vraja, all the way thinking of his good luck for having been chosen as the messenger to the Lord of the universe, like the Sudra who has been permitted to listen to the recitation of the Vedas. All his sins, he was convinced, would be destroyed on that day and his life be made to bear a meaning to him. In his great absorption in Krishna he rehearsed in his mind the scenes which he anticipated to take place on his arrival in Nanda's house: how he would fall at His feet, how He would raise him, embrace him and call him "Uncle Akrura", and so on. He thought to himself that although his mission was to bring the brothers to Kamsa for a dread purpose, Krishna, Who was omniscient and knew the hearts and minds of men, would not take it amiss from him.

As the sun stood over the Western hills, Akrura arrived at Vraja. Krishna and Balarama had just finished their bath and were moving about in the yard, where the cows were being milked. Seeing two lads with eyes as beautiful as full-blown lotuses and of dark and brown complexion (respectively), brimming with grace, Akrura recognised them (though he had not seen them before). They were wearing spotlessly clean yellow and blue clothes and emitting the fragrance of the sandal-wood paste with which they had been smeared. A necklace of precious gems encircled their necks and a garland of wild flowers descended to their breasts. Their effulgence illuminated the four quarters. Akrura quickly jumped down from the chariot and, overwhelmed with love, prostrated himself before them with eyes pouring tears of joy and hair standing on end. Choked with emotion, he could not introduce himself, but Krishna gently raised him to his feet and folded him in His arms, while Balarama bowed to him and embraced him also and, taking him by his joined palms, brought him in, seated him in a comfortable place and washed his feet. Krishna massaged his tired limbs and fed him with a sumptuous meal, after which Nanda and Akrura exchanged greetings and inquiries about one another's health and welfare, and touched upon Kamsa's tyranny, which caused Nanda to remark:

"The ruthless Kamsa, O Akrura, keeps you as the butcher keeps the sheep. What safety can there be for the subjects of him who has

killed[19] the newborn children of his sorrow-stricken cousin and who lives solely for the gratification of his desires?”

Passing the time in these talks, Akrura forgot the fatigue of the journey.

[19] This is the first time that Nanda speaks of the murder of Devaki’s sons by Kamsa, which shows that he no longer has illusions about Krishna as being his son. Further, in the beginning of the next chapter Krishna directly refers to Vasudeva and Devaki as His parents. Through what agency did the secret of Krishna’s birth leak out to Nanda – and, of course, to Yasoda – the *Bhagavata* does not say. We are led to presume that the revelation which Narada made to Kamsa had by that time become common property even before Akrura’s arrival, for the latter did not first divulge it to them, although Kamsa had intimated it to him.

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## XXXIX – XL

### *Krishna Departs to Mathura*

Sri Suka continues:

After dinner Krishna sat by Akrura's side and graciously inquired after his and his whole family's welfare, and recapitulated the outrages committed by Kamsa on His parents and elder brothers, whom he had killed at birth because of Himself. Then expressing delight at meeting a worthy kinsman in the person of Akrura, He asked him the purpose of his visit to them.

(In complete disregard of Kamsa's express order) Akrura explained everything: the tyrant's inveterate enmity towards the Yadus, his attempt to kill Vasudeva after the revelation of Narada of Krishna's birth, the purpose for which he sent him to Vraja, etc. The two brothers laughed heartily and Nanda immediately issued orders to keep the carts ready for next morning to carry his tributes to Mathura, where they would witness, he said, the great bow festival. This was proclaimed all over Vraja, which caused great distress to the *gopis*, who gathered in groups that night and discussed how they should bear their separation from their Beloved, blaming the "hard-hearted Akrura" for it.

No sooner did the sun appear in the eastern horizon next morning than Akrura offered his prayer to the sun-god, placed the boys in his chariot and drove ahead of the long line of bullock-carts carrying Nanda, his *gopas* and the large pitchers of milk, curds and butter which they were taking to Kamsa. The *gopis* accompanied Krishna on foot to a great distance, exchanging with Him endearments and sweet glances and extracting promises of return to them. After bidding Him farewell, they kept standing, following the flag of His chariot with their eyes until it completely disappeared behind the hills. From that time on the desolate *gopis* did nothing but speak of Him among themselves, sing His songs and think of Him when alone.

Noon found Akrura's fleet chariot on the bank of the sacred Kalindi, where it halted for refreshment. Krishna and Balarama had their drink and wash in the river and returned to the chariot, which they mounted with the help of Akrura, who returned to the river to perform his midday ablutions

with the reading of the sacred *Gayatri* mantra. As he bowed in prayer, he was astounded to see in the water the two boys, whom he had just left in the chariot, and stopped to think how they could have returned so quickly, pass by him and enter the river without his seeing them. To verify his experience, he rapidly walked back to the chariot, but he saw them there too, sitting and chatting as he had left them. Then without a word he rushed back and plunged into the river, when lo! before him the thousand-headed Sesa, white as the lotus fibre, dressed in blue silk and wearing His thousand crowns, was stretched on the water and over His coils laid Lord Vishnu of the complexion of the cloud, wrapped in yellow silk and extending His four arms. Behind Him were the four Kumaras and around Him stood siddhas, charanas, gandharvas, asuras — all with bent heads in salutation — also the nine prajapatis, the chief devotees like Prahlada, Narada, the Vasus and various gods and goddesses. Awed by this glorious vision, and overwhelmed by devotion, Akrura bowed deeply and sang the praise of the Lord.

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## XLI

### *At Mathura*

Having satisfied Akrura with this supreme Vision, Krishna withdrew it, and Akrura speedily returned to the chariot, transfigured. Krishna was greatly amused by the change in Akrura's countenance and asked him to share his secret with them:

“Tell us, Uncle Akrura, the wonders you have just seen in the water, in the sky, or in the earth which wrought this wondrous transformation in you.”

The good Akrura answered that whatever wonders the sky, the water, or the earth had, were only His (Krishna's), Who is their soul, so that to gaze at His face is to see all the wonders in existence.

Akrura drove his chariot fast and brought the youngsters to the outskirts of Mathura towards sunset. There they found Nanda waiting for them in a garden with his *gopas*, who, having not halted on the way, as Akrura had done, arrived earlier. Akrura pleaded with the boys to be his guests:

“You must not abandon Your devotee and servant like this, O Lord, but come with Balarama, grace my house and sanctify it with the dust of Your feet. To offer the water that has washed these feet of Yours to the gods and the manes as *tarpanam* (in worship) will highly please them. King Bali, the asura, attained incomparable prosperity and fame, as well as the Supreme Goal, which is reserved for Your devotees, simply because he had washed Your feet when You visited him as a dwarf. Hail to You the brightest gem of the Yadus! Hail to You Lord Narayana!”

Krishna answered that He and Balarama would certainly visit Akrura's house after disposing of Kamsa and bringing relief and delight to their relatives. With a heavy heart Akrura parted with them and appraised Kamsa of their arrival.

The following day Krishna, Balarama and their *gopas* fearlessly entered the city and were delighted to see the fortified city gates, the huge granaries, which were all round protected by an inaccessible moat, the big gardens and delightful parks, the public shelters at all crossroads, the

assembly hall of traders, business houses and market place, the big mansions and rest houses, the broad roads always sprinkled with water, and the artistic decorations in front of every house.

As for the women, the moment they heard of the brothers' entry into the city by the main road, they all rushed and occupied the windows and terraces of the mansions which lined the road. Their eagerness was so great that they did not wait till they finished the work in hand, but left it unfinished. And when Krishna passed and cast a glance here and a smile there, they were thrilled with joy and their minds enraptured. They showered baskets of flowers on Him and His brother. At every step the Brahmins came forward to worship them with fire, incense, rice, curd, flowers and fruits.

Passing by a washerman's shop, Krishna asked the man to give Him and Balarama the best clothes in his shop, promising great blessings in return. But the washerman, being too stupid to appreciate the favour, rudely answered:

“Are you always in the habit of wearing fine clothes on the mountains and forests where your profession takes you, that you dare ask for them here? Off with you quickly, foolish lads, or the King's officers will drag you to prison. Never again make such a demand if you hold your lives dear.”

While he was still threatening, Krishna touched his head with His finger-tips and severed it from the body. The servants, seeing the fate of their master, left the bundles of clothes as they were and ran away. From the bundles Krishna chose the finest pairs, one for each Balarama and Himself, and let the *gopas* choose what they wanted and left the rest.

They next passed to a weaver who took fancy to them and lovingly dressed them in bright colours, which matched their complexions and the festivities of the season. Krishna rewarded his love by conferring on him a form like His own, prosperity and God-consciousness. The brothers and the *gopas* now walked into the house of the florist Sudama and were received with due respect — with garlands, betel leaves, prostrations and sandalwood paste. Sudama welcomed Krishna (in a language which does honour to a Rishi):

“Your visit, O Lord, has made my birth meaningful and my race blessed. The gods, the Rishis and my ancestry must have been very

pleased with me to grace me by Your visit. O Supreme Cause! Although You love him who loves You, You never discriminate, You being the Self of all. Be pleased to command me to serve you both in any way You desire.”

Yet Sudama divined what they wanted and, without being told, chose the best and most scented garlands and presented them to Krishna and Balarama, not forgetting to give to the *gopas* also. The one boon he asked of Krishna was ceaseless devotion to Him and compassion for all living beings, which was granted, to which Krishna added prosperity and health for himself and his posterity.

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## XLII – XLIV

### *Death of Kamsa and His Wrestlers*

As they strolled on the main thoroughfare, the brothers met a hunchback damsel carrying a pot full of sandal-wood paste. They jokingly asked her to give them some of it, and promised to reward her for it. The maid answered pleasantly and gave her name as Trivakra — treble hunch — a maid-servant who prepared thick paste for Kamsa to his taste. Although she was deformed, her face was beautiful and shone with kindness. She was bewitched by the brothers' delicacy and comeliness, and willingly gave them some paste with which they smeared their chests and necks, heightening their charm. To reward her, Krishna drew near, placed His toes over hers, and raised her chin with His two first fingers. Thus stretched, the humps straightened themselves, giving her body a perfect symmetry with well rounded hips and breasts, which, added to the natural beauty of her face, resulted in a ravishing maiden, whose appeal was greatly enlivened by the spontaneous love which she conceived for the handsome young artist who had wrought the miraculous transformation. Love-lorn, the damsel, who was no longer Trivakra, but Kubja (her maiden name), pulled the end of Krishna's upper garment, inviting Him to the privacy of her house. Greatly amused, Krishna looked at her face and at the faces of His companions, and smilingly promised to call on her "after finishing the work in hand."

The distinguished visitors roved from place to place sight-seeing till they found themselves in their destination — the sacrificial hall — where the great bow, which glittered with gems, was exhibited and the people were heaping their presents by its side and worshipping it. It was guarded by a large number of attendants. Krishna seized it and, before these could stop Him, He pulled its string to its utmost length and broke it into two with a crash which reverberated in all the earth and reached the ears of Kamsa, filling him with dire dread. The sentries rushed at the audacious Youth with their bows and arrows, but our two heroes, each seizing one half of the broken bow, battered them to death with it. They likewise quickly despatched the party of soldiers which Kamsa sent against them, and leisurely walked out to complete their round of the capital. At nightfall they returned to their carts outside the city gates for a restful sleep.



Kamsa, on the contrary, fell to pieces at the destruction of the bow, the murderous assault on so many of his servants, and the evil omens which had been ceaselessly appearing in Mathura. The night was a long-drawn-out nightmare of torture, dishonour and death for him. Looking in the mirror, he saw his body without a head; each star turned double when he looked at the firmament; his shadow was full of holes; the usual hum he hears on closing the ears, was no longer there; sinking his foot in the mud left no mark in it; and when he snatched a little sleep now and then he dreamt he was embraced by a dead relative, or riding on a donkey, or having swallowed poison, or his body being smeared with oil and stark naked. All these bore ominous portents for him. With frayed nerves, he did not have a moment's rest, waking or sleeping, which brought him to the verge of madness.

The sun at last rose on the festival day, when a wrestling tournament was to take place by world-famed wrestlers — Chanura, Mustika, Kuta, Sala, Tosala and others — in the vast arena of the amphitheatre which was decorated with garlands, flags, arches, bunting, carpets, etc. From early morning spectators started filling the galleries: princes, chieftains, ministers, priests, traders and commoners. When Kamsa arrived last and sat on his throne, trumpets blared, the people applauded, and the national band struck its most joyful tune, which only slightly cheered his sorrow-laden heart. Nanda and his *gopas* were given special seats after they delivered their presents at the palace.

Krishna and Balarama took their morning bath, dressed and walked leisurely to the amphitheatre, but at the entrance of it they were stopped by the mighty elephant which blocked their passage. Krishna called on the mahout to make room for them to pass, but the latter, instead, goaded the elephant to attack Him, which the elephant quickly did by coiling its trunk round Him. Krishna slipped out of its coil and hid between its legs, and then jumped to its tail, which He caught with both hands and pulled back to a distance of twenty-five bow-lengths (about fifty yards), then whirled the mountainous animal round and round with its rider on its back. Leaping forward, He caught its trunk, pulled it and brought down the mammoth body in a heap to the ground, and leisurely extracted its tusks, with which He killed both the animal and the mahout.

Armed with the bleeding tusks and perspiring, the brothers with some of the *gopas* entered the arena. At the sight of them the heart of Kamsa,

who had lost his chief elephant with little struggle, trembled, though the spectators as a whole rejoiced in seeing Krishna, the reputed hero of so many battles, which they recounted to one another, from Putana-episode to Kesi's and now of Kuvalayapida. Most of them had heard of His Divine origin, His birth from Devaki and Vasudeva and His purpose in visiting Mathura.

The trumpets now gave the signal for the games to start. Chanura, the chief wrestler, approached Krishna and spoke to Him with arch courtesy:

“O Krishna, O Balarama, Your fame as skilful wrestlers has reached the King's ears and has tempted him to invite You to participate in this tournament, which he is attending in person. Subjects, as you well know, have to obey the commands of their Ruler, or else they meet with a bad fate. Usually cow boys take to wrestling to divert themselves, while their cattle graze, so that you have become past-masters in this art. We have now, O Youth, to do the bidding of our King and wrestle with You.”

Krishna, who was indeed very fond of this game, was not displeased with this speech, but answered:

“We who live in woodlands are, like your good selves, also the subjects of the Bhoja King, and like very much to please him, so that he may show his favour to us. Young though we may be, we will yet wrestle with our matches, so that there may be no sin resulting from inequality of strengths.”

Chanura replied:

“Neither You nor your brother are young in experience. You have just killed Kuvalayapida, which was stronger than one-thousand elephants, in mere play. You should, therefore, not hesitate to enter the list with veteran wrestlers, nor will there be any sin attached to our matching with You. Now You will please fight with me and Balarama will fight Mustika.”

Krishna accepted the challenge and the brothers' delicate limbs were at once seen interlocked with the massive ones of their adversaries. The ladies cried: “Fie on this unequal fight: it is a gross perversion of justice and fair-play to match youthful bodies with those of giant, expert wrestlers; a sinful

fall from righteousness will surely descend on this assembly, which should be shunned by the wise.”

By this time Krishna resolved to finish His opponent. He started by giving him hard hits with His feet, knees and hands, which made Chanura faint many times, as if he were hit by an iron mace, and when He permitted him for once to rise and strike Him with both fists on the chest, Krishna received the blow as an elephant receives a flower garland from an admirer. At last Krishna caught Chanura by the arms, whirled him round, and dashed him on the ground with such a force that He instantly turned him into an effete corpse, giving him no time to take another breath. Balarama, who had followed all the movements of Krishna, did likewise to Mustika, and killed him with blood pouring from his mouth. Then he killed Kuta with his fist, and Krishna knocked off the head of Sala by a mere kick with His foot. The remaining wrestlers fled the arena, leaving it to our heroes and their *gopas* to sport in, as they were wont to do in Brindavan. They joyfully danced and sounded their anklets to the tunes of the trumpets, which drew the spectators’ applause and the Brahmins’ shouts of “Bravo!”, “Well done!”. Kamsa was exasperated and ordered the trumpets to be silenced at once, the brothers to be driven out of the City, all the properties of the *gopas* to be confiscated, Nanda to be put in chains, and Vasudeva and Ugrasena (his own father) to be killed. But before these orders could be executed, Krishna leaped on Kamsa’s dais and held him in His firm grip eluding the drawn sword in his hand. Holding him by the hair from which the royal crown had tumbled down, He flung him dead into the arena. Then He dragged his corpse all over the amphitheatre for all the citizens to see. Nevertheless, the tyrant had the good fortune at the last moment of his life to see with open eyes Lord Vishnu with His four arms holding the mace, the discus, etc., and thus attained to Him — emancipated.

The eight brothers of Kamsa rushed at the two heroes to revenge their brother’s blood, but were quickly overpowered and despatched to Yama’s abode.

Krishna and His brother hastened to their parents, released them from bondage and worshipped them by touching their feet with their heads, but the parents, knowing the divinity of their sons, feared to embrace them lest they should be guilty of sacrilege.

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## XLV

### *Restoration*

Krishna, divining His parents' thoughts, and not wanting to deprive them of the felicity of normal parenthood, caused them to forget His and Balarama's real nature, and spoke to them as if He were an ordinary, dutiful son:

“You have, beloved mother and father, been suffering the pang of our separation from you, and have been denied the enjoyment of our childhood. Unlucky that we are, we too were deprived of the blessings of growing up by your side and receiving your loving attention, so that we consider the life we have so far lived as wasted.”

Having been taken in completely by Krishna's speech and by His deluding power, Devaki and Vasudeva took Him in their laps, embraced Him to their hearts' content and shed profuse tears of joy.

Krishna, likewise, released king Ugrasena from prison and replaced him on the throne of the Bhojas. All the Yadus, the Vrishnis, the Madhus, the Dasharhas and others, who had left Mathura because of Kamsa's tyranny, were recalled by Krishna and restored to their old homes and properties. The citizens of Mathura rejoiced in the protection of Krishna and Balarama and enjoyed prosperity.

Coming to Nanda, Sankarshana and Krishna embraced him and said:

“Dear father, yourself and mother Yasoda brought us up with the greatest care and love. You are our real parents, for when we were in great danger of losing our lives as infants, it was you two who looked after us and protected us. Be gracious to return to Vraja to bring comfort to our dear ones there with our happy news and we will follow you.”

Thus they consoled him and the *gopas* and honoured them with most valuable presents. Nanda folded them to his breast and returned to Vraja with brimming eyes.

Vasudeva thought it was high time to initiate his sons in the *brahmacharya ashrama* by investing them with the sacred thread and placing them in the hands of a Guru to teach them the Scriptures. He gave away to the Brahmins the cows he had vowed to gift them at the birth of

Krishna but had been seized by Kamsa. The studentship rules required the boys to live as celibates in the preceptor's house during the whole period of their studies. The teacher chosen for them was Sandipani, whom they approached with due ceremony and served as a god. He taught them the four Vedas and the auxiliary sciences: phonetics, prosody, grammar, astronomy, ritual, etymology, archery, the laws of Manu, logic, the various systems of philosophy, political and economic sciences, etc. They learned each lesson in one day, so that in sixty-four days they mastered all the sixty-four branches of knowledge and, as there remained nothing more for them to learn, they asked their preceptor to name his tuition fees, which were customarily paid in the end.

The unprecedented quickness of their superb intelligence immensely impressed Sandipani and confirmed to him the popular faith in their Divinity. After consulting his wife about his fees, he waived all monetary consideration, but demanded instead the restoration to life of their dead son, who had been drowned in the sea at Prabhasa. The brothers agreed, and forthwith rode to the seashore and demanded from the sea-god their preceptor's son, whom the waves had swallowed. After paying them due respect the sea-god denied any knowledge of the person concerned, and referred them to a demon who might have been responsible for his death. Finally they had to go to Yama's abode and fetch the preceptor's son to his parents, who greatly rejoiced and found this service to be more than adequate payment for their tuition. Sandipani bade them farewell in the following words:

“You have fully paid Your tuition fees, dear children, now go home. May your glory shine everywhere and purify the whole world. May the Vedas remain ever fresh in your memory in this world and the next.”

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## XLVI – XLVII

### *Krishna's Message to the Gopis*

Sri Suka continues:

Uddhava, a friend and adviser of Krishna, was the most distinguished of the Vrishnis, and a direct disciple of Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods. To assuage Yasoda's pang of a long separation from Him, Sri Krishna resolved to send him as His messenger of love. He called him one day, clasped his hands and said:

“Proceed to Vraja, gentle Uddhava, and bring good cheer to My dear parents and the *gopis*, who are particularly pining, greatly feeling My absence, and who have not only surrendered their minds to Me, but also everything that concerns their bodies, even their moral duties. By them I stand fast and, as I know that the only thing that is keeping them alive is the hope of My return, you should go with My message to them.”

Uddhava rode his fast chariot and reached Vraja at the time when the cattle had just returned from pasture and the din of their home-coming was great. Nanda, immensely delighted to meet Krishna's friend and messenger, welcomed him affectionately, and treated him with the kitchen's delicacies, speaking all the while of Krishna's heroism in fighting the most vicious demons, who had come to Vraja to kill Him, and the famous wrestlers of Kamsa, and with great feeling he ended:

“Our mind is constantly fixed on Him, as every wood, hill, river, playground, in which He has set His foot, reminds us of Him.”

Yasoda, hearing the stories of her Darling, overflowed with love and shed tears.

Uddhava listened in silence to all Nanda's stories and felt in his heart the supreme love which the couple bore for his adorable Lord.

Then he addressed them with great emotion:

“You two are, indeed, the most blessed of living beings that you conceived this peerless love for the Ruler of the universe. Krishna and Balarama are the material and spiritual Cause of all that exists. To think of Him for just one instant at the moment of death burns out all

one's karma and gains for one final Emancipation. What further merits need you two earn to reach Him, the Supreme Lord! Grieve not, Krishna will not tarry much longer to be by your side once again."

Thus the night slipped by happily in Nanda's house. At sunrise Uddhava went to the river for his morning ablutions. When the women of Vraja beheld a chariot plated with gold at Nanda's door they wondered in their love-pang if Krishna had returned to them. But when they saw Uddhava coming from the riverside with smiles and dress resembling those of Krishna, they guessed he was their Darling's messenger. They surrounded him, bowed respectfully to him and bashfully addressed him, as if in profound resentment of Krishna's desertion of them:

"We know you to be Krishna's friend, sent by Him to bring solace to His parents; otherwise there is nothing in Vraja, a pasture-land for cattle, for Him to remember. Blood ties cannot be easily broken even by hermits, but those of love which are made in self-interest, do not last long after that interest has been served," etc.

One of the *gopis*, feeling more than the rest, and musing over her past relation with her Beloved, beheld a bee close to her and, imagining it to be His messenger, addressed it with deep emotions:

"O honey-sucking messenger of the false Krishna, do not touch my feet with your tentacles, which bear the *kumkuma* (saffron) sucked from the flowers of Krishna's garlands on which it had been stamped by the breasts of His other women (in Mathura). After having allowed us guileless women to sip nectar from His lips, He suddenly deserted us; even as you, O bee, desert the rose after sucking its honey. Be off my foot, dear bee, I know from whom you have learned this ingratiating trick. For Krishna's sake we renounced everything in this world and the next, and see how He treats us, fickle-minded that He is! What is the use of getting reconciled to Him then! Believing His professions of love, even as a deer is lured by the sweet music of the hunter and then receives his fatal arrow, we ignorant sweethearts of Krishna have had again and again to suffer these torments when we see on our bodies the love-marks of His nails but Himself absent. Now, O bee, please change the subject."

The bee goes away but soon returns. The love-stricken *gopi* now changes her love-babble:

“O friend of our Beloved, has our Darling sent you again to us? Give us His message quickly and we shall honour you. How will you take us to Him? Is He still in Mathura? Does He ever mention us, His maid-servants? When is He going to put His fragrant arms round our necks again?”

Astonished at these effusions of extraordinarily love-distracted hearts, Uddhava decided to comfort them with Krishna’s message without further delay.

“You are the adored of all the worlds, O blessed ladies,” said he, “in that you allowed your minds and hearts to merge completely in Him, Lord Vasudeva. Devotion to Him is usually cultivated in various ways through charity, fast, penance, oblations, *Mantra japa* and prayers; through the study of the Vedas, self-control and the practice of virtues. But you have attained the very highest by pure love, which even sages are incapable of achieving. You forsook your nearest and dearest, your homes and very bodies for His sake: even now you are greatly suffering because of His absence. You have put me under your obligation by permitting me to see how profound is your devotion to Him. Now listen, O blessed ones, to the personal message with which your Darling has secretly entrusted me to bring joy to you all. He, the glorious Lord, said:

‘My being apart from you on account of the distance that separates us, even materially, is not possible, and is as impossible as the five elements which constitute the body can be separated from the body of a living being. *In order to make you focus your mind on Me, I am bodily staying away from you; FOR THE MIND DOES NOT GET ABSORBED IN THE BELOVED IF THE LATTER DWELLS IN CLOSE PROXIMITY AND IS ACCESSIBLE TO THE EYES AND EARS. It is only by a ceaseless thought of Me that My state is attained.* The women who, that night, were stopped by their families from joining Me in the *Rasa* dance, when you, dear *gopis*, enjoyed My company at Brindavan, have already attained to Me, because they kept thinking of Me and of My deeds in their minds’.”

The *gopis* were much comforted by this message and worshipped Uddhava, as if he were Krishna Himself. Uddhava found it necessary to stay in Vraja for some months in order to assuage their suffering by telling



and chanting the life-stories of Krishna, and to see with his own eyes the mountains, valleys, forests and woodlands, which bore His footprints. Having visited all the scenes of Krishna's youthful sports, and seen everything and everyone that was somehow connected with Him, Uddhava felt supremely happy and resolved to return to Mathura. In this last meeting with the *gopis* he bowed to them and said:

“You, blessed *gopis*, have fully justified your human life. Would that I were a bush or a blade of grass in Brindavan that I might catch some of the dust on which your feet had trodden, the feet which walked the path of devotion which is strenuously followed by the students of the Upanishads. I bow again and again to the dust of the feet of the blessed Vraja women, whose songs of Krishna purify all the three worlds.”

Then taking leave of them, Uddhava rode his chariot and arrived at Mathura, where he prostrated himself before Krishna and delivered to Him all the valuable presents he had carried from the people of Vraja for Himself, His parents, King Ugrasena and others.

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## XLVIII

### *Krishna Fulfils His Promises to Kubja and Akrura*

Krishna remembers His promise to the erstwhile hunchback and now beautiful maid Kubja and perceives in His mind her love-pang for Him. He called with Uddhava at her house, which was now furnished with costly furniture and decorated and perfumed in the best style. She received them with great delight and, after taking her bath and dressing herself in fine linen, she approached Krishna with smiles and folded Him in her arms in the bed, relieving her love torment. She solicited Him to stay a few days with her, but Krishna left, but promised to return, while giving her many valuable gifts.

With Balarama and Uddhava, Krishna visited Akrura's house, as had been promised by Him. Akrura received them with a great devotion, washed the brothers' feet in a basin and sprinkled his head with the water, as a mark of his adoration. He prayed to Krishna to dispel at once his attachment for wife, home, children, wealth, etc., to which Krishna replied:

“You are our guide, friend and uncle. We have need of your protection. Great souls like you are highly blessed and worthy of being worshipped. Even the gods are moved by self-interest, when they demand offerings from their worshippers, but not so are the men of piety who serve the world without expecting rewards and purify it by their very sight. Of these you are the foremost, Uncle Akrura. I wish you would do a good turn to our cousins the Pandavas by going to Hastinapura and finding out how they are faring. I understand that at the death of king Pandu, their father, they were brought to the capital by their blind uncle Dhritarashtra, who ascended the throne and that they and their mother, our aunt Kunti, are living there in misery. It seems that the feeble Dhritarashtra is under the thumb of his vile eldest son Duryodhana and does not treat the boys fairly. Do go and inquire, so that we may secure justice for them.”

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## XLIX

### *Akrura's Mission to Hastinapura*

In obedience to Krishna's command, Akrura proceeded to Hastinapura which had seen the glory of the royal dynasty of Puru, and met King Dhritarashtra who was surrounded by his relatives and counsellors: the great Bhishma, the saintly Vidura, Drona the famous teacher of archery, Aswatthama his son, Kripa, Karna, Duryodhana, the five sons of Pandu, their mother Kunti, and others. Greetings and inquiries about mutual welfare were exchanged on all sides.

To have a perfect grasp of the situation, Akrura found it necessary to stay longer than he had planned. Kunti (the sister of Vasudeva) and Vidura both met him privately and told him how the King was weak and partial to his own sons, who were exceedingly envious of the Pandava boys, who were very popular with the people for their virtues, moral superiority, military skill, intelligence and modesty and how the King's sons had tried to do away with them by poison or other treacherous means. With tears in her eyes Kunti inquired about her parents, her brothers and her old girl friends, and whether they remembered her, and whether Balarama and Krishna "care to send me a few words of comfort to assuage my grief, surrounded that we are — my fatherless boys and myself — by enemies." Akrura and Vidura both tried to console her and reminded her that the celestial fathers of her sons (p. 193) would never abandon them in times of difficulty.

When his time to return home drew nigh, Akrura approached Dhritarashtra and delivered to him the message of Krishna and Balarama, which exhorted him to rule impartially and be just to all the people, so that he might prosper and his fame, as a great king, might long remain in the memory of men. A contrary conduct, they said, would bring down on him curses in his lifetime and torture of hell after his death. They wanted him, in particular, Akrura continued:

"not to discriminate against your brother's sons in favour of your own. After all, one cannot be for all eternity with one's relatives, when one cannot be so with even one's body, which one has sooner or later to abandon and depart alone. Wife, children, wealth, whom one guards with unceasing anxiety, imagining them to last him forever, at the moment of death forsake the fool who places faith in them, leaving

him to carry alone his load of sins, which he grows to regret in the infernal regions.

“Therefore, O King, it will be to your advantage to rule with piety and justice and be impartial in the treatment of your orphan nephews.”

Dhritarashtra replied:

“Your sound advice, O Prince of charity, does not impress me, no more than the immortalising nectar impresses a mortal man; it does not stick to my restless mind, biased as it is in favour of my sons. Who can defeat the decrees of Providence, Who, I hear, has taken birth in the Yadu race! Hail to that Supreme Lord, Who, after creating the universe, entered it and apportioned to each man his duties and the rewards he reaps from them in ways, which are difficult to understand.”

Having known the King’s mind, Akrura returned to Mathura and reported everything to Krishna in detail.

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## L

### *The Rise of Dwaraka*

Sri Suka now switches his narrative on to the court of king Jarasandha, the father of the two wives of Kamsa, who, grief-stricken by their husband's death, returned to their parents. Jarasandha, king of Magadha, full of distress, anger and desire for revenge, mobilised a mighty army, which he imagined would be enough to rid the earth of the Yadus, and marched at their head along with his allies to lay siege to Mathura. Seeing this vast military force which consisted of twenty-three *akshauhinis* (about 2½ million men and a proportionate number of horses, elephants, chariots, weapons) collected against Him, Krishna thought that He would certainly destroy it with its chiefs, but would spare Jarasandha's life to enable him to gather forces again and again from all the dregs of the earth, to be annihilated again and again wholesale, which would make His task of purification easier than destroying him piecemeal.

As He was thus brooding, two celestial chariots, shining like the sun, alighted very near Him. They were driven by celestial charioteers and equipped with all the articles necessary for warfare. Following the chariots, weapons surcharged with indestructible mystical forces likewise landed. Krishna, turning to Sankarshana, said:

“You see, noble brother, the disaster that is facing our Yadu race. Here are your chariot and favourite weapons come down from Heaven. Now ride the chariot, O Lord, and save your people from this danger as well as the earth from this heavy weight of twenty-three *akshauhinis*.”

Krishna and His brother wore their armours, rode their chariots, and issued out of the city gates followed by a small detachment of soldiers. They blew their conches, challenging the enemy to begin his attack. Seeing them, Jarasandha addressed Krishna:

“O Krishna, vilest of men, I feel ashamed to fight a youngster like You, especially as You have come alone (without any army) to oppose me. Off with you, slayer of uncle. But you, Balarama, if you are keen to fight come and meet me. My arrows will pierce your body and will send you to heaven unless you will slay me first.”

Krishna replied:

“The truly valiant never boasts, but proves his manliness in action. Full of sorrow that you are over your son-in-law’s death, and yourself about to die, we will not take your words to heart, O King.”

Without further talk, Jarasandha covered them from all sides with his vast army, as a violent storm shrouds the brilliant sun with clouds and dust. The women of Mathura, who watched the battle from the roofs and windows of their houses, shook with fear at the disappearance of the brothers and their flags from their sight, and many of them even fainted. Sri Hari (Krishna), seeing His small force overwhelmed by millions of enemy shafts, twanged His Sharanga bow and discharged arrows in such numbers and with such speed that they appeared like a giant rotating wheel of fire, which scorched to death men, horses, and elephants who came within its radiation or contact by the ten-thousand, letting flow on the field hundreds of streams of blood, carrying off severed heads, hands, legs, pieces of shattered weapons and chariots. Balarama attacked with his celestial mace like a lion and completed the destruction of Jarasandha’s forces and, seizing Jarasandha himself, who now stood alone, bereft of followers, weapons and chariots, was about to bind him with ropes, when Krishna intervened and freed him. Put to shame, Jarasandha resolved to turn a recluse and perform penance, but was dissuaded by his allies Sisupala and others. Returning to Magadha, he collected another twenty-three *akshauhinis* and, as before, marched on Mathura only to be defeated again and again seventeen times, which was as Krishna desired him to do, the sooner to purify the earth from the human rabble which was weighing heavily on her.

When Jarasandha was expected for the eighteenth time, there appeared at the gates of Mathura a fighter of matchless heroism, Kalayavana by name, who goes round the earth to give battle to heroes of world fame.

With his thirty *akshauhinis* of *Mlechhas* (barbarians) the Yavana laid siege to Mathura and challenged its defenders. Seeing this colossal force, Krishna turned to Balarama and said:

“This is a great calamity for the Yadus. This Yavana has invaded us today, and in a day or two Jarasandha will come from the other side and will kill our relatives or take them prisoners while we are engaged in fighting the newcomer. The best thing for us to do is to build an inaccessible fortress in the sea and transfer all our people and their

cattle to it before Jarasandha arrives, when we will be free to fight first the Yavana and then Jarasandha.”

No sooner thought than done: Dwaraka rose immediately; an inaccessible fortress in the west sea, ninety-six miles long, containing a most skilfully laid-out city, with great mansions, gardens and groves of rare plants brought down directly from heaven. Celestial gems decorated the roofs, walls and floors of its palaces, houses and temples. All the four castes had scope to ply their trades and live in complete ease and comfort. Indra presented Krishna with the famous assembly hall (*Sudharma*) and the *Parijata* tree, whose protective shade gave immunity from hunger, thirst, diseases, grief, old age and death. Varuna, the water god, sent Him white horses with one black ear, fleet as thoughts. Kubera presented the eight varieties of wealth of which he was the deity. Using His yogic powers, Krishna transferred all the citizens of Mathura to this fortress-city; He and Balarama sallied out of the city gates to fight the Yavana.

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### *The Yavana Destroyed By Muchukunda*

At this juncture it suited Sri Krishna's plans to assume His Divine Form, that is: showing four arms, yellow silk dress, etc. Remembering Narada's description of Him, the Yavana recognised Him: and, as Krishna was unarmed and on foot, he dismounted to fight Him also on foot and without weapons. But as he approached to seize Him, all of a sudden Krishna turned His back and walked so fast that he could not overtake Him, although all along He appeared to be within an ace of his hands. Finally, reaching a mountain cave, Krishna entered it followed by His pursuer, who now completely lost sight of Him but presently saw a man fast asleep on the ground, whom he took for Krishna feigning unconsciousness, in order to escape fighting with him. In his impatience, he rudely kicked the sleeper with his foot till he wakened him. The man looking around for the cause of the disturbance and, seeing the culprit before him, he fixed his gaze of anger on him and instantly turned him into an ash heap.

Sri Suka describes the sleeping man as a descendant of Ikshwaku, named Muchukunda, a pious and truthful king. In his fear of the asuras, Indra once entrusted him with the safety of the gods and the Brahmins, whom Muchukunda greatly respected. After a very long time of his watching, Guha, the son of Shiva, took this duty upon himself, relieving this king from it. In recognition of his service, for which he had given up kingdom, family, all earthly enjoyments and rest for his body by his day and night vigil, the gods and the Brahmins asked him to name a boon other than Liberation, which none could grant but Lord Vishnu Himself. He demanded the blessing of an indefinitely long, undisturbed sleep, which was forthwith granted, but a curse was added by the celestials that any foolish man who would wake him up from his sleep would be burnt to death by a mere look of the awakened Muchukunda. Having secured this boon, the good king, who by then had lost all his relatives and throne, entered the aforesaid cave and went to sleep.

As the Yavana ceased to be a trouble, Sri Krishna appeared to the wise Muchukunda in His Divine Form with an entrancing smile and a dazzling youthful beauty, which so overwhelmed him with love and awe that he could not resist asking Him:



“Who may You be, Sir, Who roam about this thorn-strewn forest-cave with feet as tender as lotus petals? Are You the fire-god, the moon-god, or perhaps the royal Indra? I personally feel that You are none other than Lord Vishnu Himself, illumining this dark place by Your effulgence, which is more lustrous than the sun. Deign to tell me of Your lineage, name and designation. O Tiger among men. My name is Muchukunda, a descendant of the illustrious Ikshwaku, from the loins of Mandhata (p. 178), Kshatriya of race. I spent long, long ages in vigil protecting the gods from their enemies, and was overpowered by sleep in this lonely cave where I remained undisturbed until an intruder has just now wakened me and has paid the penalty of death for his transgression. And now I see Your glorious Self, Who dazzle my eyes when I look at You.”

Sri Krishna replied:

“My lineage and name, dear friend, are legion, more numerous than the particles of dust in this earth. No seer or sage has so far succeeded in counting them or knowing their end. I have taken the present birth at the prayer of Brahma to rid the world of the wicked who are burdening it with their presence. I now go by the name of Vasudeva, son of Vasudeva of the Yadu race. I killed the demon Kalanemi, in this birth known as Kamsa, as well as many demons, including the Yavana, whom I lured to this cave to be burnt to death by you. Having been repeatedly entreated by you, I have come to favour you, My devotee, with My Grace. Now name a boon and I shall grant it, for no one who takes refuge in Me will have cause to grieve.”

Muchukunda now remembered the prophecy of the sage Garga, ages ago, that Lord Vasudeva, in His birth in the house of Vasudeva, would appear in person to him. Full of joy at this most gracious favour, the King bowed low and said:

“Your *Maya*, O Lord, has so far blinded me to the absolute Reality and has, birth after birth, kept me bound to a family life and, therefore, to perpetual misery. In this last birth I tasted all the pleasures of the world but have derived no satisfaction from them, for the desires for them go on increasing, causing greater and greater misery. You have, O Lord, done me a great favour by depriving me of my kingship without any effort on my part.

“I have, therefore, no desire to ask for a boon other than that of eternal service to Your feet, which is the highest blessing. Long attached to the fruits of action, and tormented by the impressions left over my mind by that action and by my five enemies (the senses), I have now attained to Your sacred feet, where fear, grief, and anxiety cannot touch me, and where Supreme Truth is gained. Be gracious, O Supreme Self, to save me from distress.”

The glorious Lord replied:

“O King, your mind has already been purified and you will not to ask for worldly boons. Those who are not genuine devotees often succumb to temptations although they try hard to control themselves by the practice of *pranayama* and other means. Now go about the world fearlessly, for your devotion will increase, and your mind will remain fixed on Me. As a royal Kshatriya you hunted and killed many innocent animals. Go perform penance and rid yourself of that sin. You will be reborn as a Brahmin, a friend of all living beings, when O Muchukunda, you will attain to Me the Absolute.”

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*Krishna Marries Rukmini*

The blessed Muchukunda entered the forest of Mount Gandhamadana and reached Badarikashrama, the abode of Nara and Narayana, where he gave himself up to the practice of penance, and attained tranquillity.

Sri Krishna returned to Mathura, destroyed the hordes of the Yavana which were besieging it, and carried away the booty. But before reaching Dwaraka, He ran against the vast army of Jarasandha and, as He was too tired to confront it, He left the booty behind and both He and Balarama fled to Pravarsana Mountain, to the amusement of their enemy who, imagining them to be afraid, pursued them with his whole army. Failing to find them on the mountain even after the most thorough search, and thinking them to be concealed in its forests, he set fire to the whole mountain to scorch them to death. But the brothers had leapt from the top of the mountain to the plain and had escaped safely to Dwaraka. Taking them for dead, Jarasandha withdrew to Magadha.

Sri Suka continues.

Balarama married Revati, the daughter of the king of Anartas, and Krishna carried away Rukmini who was a part manifestation of Sree, the Consort of Vishnu, and married her after defeating Sisupala, king of Chedi, who had prepared to marry her himself.

Rukmini's father was Bhisma, king of Vidarbha, who had five sons, of whom the eldest was Rukmi, and only one daughter, the beautiful Rukmini. Rukmi hated Krishna and resolved to give his sister to Sisupala, a still greater hater of Krishna, although his parents and all his brothers preferred Krishna. This greatly troubled Rukmini who had set her heart on Krishna and, being brave, resourceful, and intelligent, she despatched to Him a trusted Brahmin — Sunanda — to bring Him to Vidarbha to carry her away.

Sri Krishna received the messenger with great courtesy and, after refreshing and comforting him, asked him his business. Sunanda related to Him in complete privacy all that had happened in the family in relation to Rukmini's marriage, and delivered to Him the following message from her in her very words:

“I have heard of Your many excellent qualities and of Your charming countenance, which blesses the eyes that see it, and have set my heart on You, O immortal Lord. What intelligent, high-born maiden will not choose You, the incomparable! Hence I have chosen You as the darling husband on whom to bestow my body. Please come and wed me here, and let not the jackal Sisupala defile by his touch the share of the royal lion, O Lord of beautiful eyes! May the Supreme Lord reward my fasting and penance by giving me Sri Krishna and none other for husband!

“Pray arrange to arrive incognito with Your generals at Kundinapura in Vidarbha on the eve of my proposed marriage and crush Sisupala’s and Jarasandha’s armies and force my marriage with You by the Rakshasa system (which bestows the maiden as a prize for valour). You will have no need to abduct me from the women’s chambers of the palace and kill any of my relatives, for on that day I shall be taken out in a big procession to the temple of the goddess Ambika for worship, and if I fail to see You there, I hereby vow to lay down my life by fasting, and await my marriage with You in some future birth, even if it be the hundredth.”

Sunanda ended by saying that it was now up to Krishna to consider what to do, and to do it without delay, for the time was pressing. Krishna laughed and, clasping the hand of the Brahmin, said:

“I too have set My heart on Rukmini and am getting no sleep at night thinking of her. I am aware that it is Rukmi who stands in the way of our marriage to spite Me. Yet I shall defeat him and the kings and shall carry the faultless Princess as easily as extracting fire from firewood.”

After ascertaining the date of Rukmini’s marriage from the positions of the constellations, Krishna rode His celestial chariot which was driven by the four celestial horses: Shaibya, Sugriva, Meghapushpa and Balahaka, and reined by Daruka, and in one night reached Kundinapura in the company of the Brahmin messenger.

The wedding preparations went on at top speed at Kundinapura. The city was cleanly swept, watered and decorated with arches, flags and flowers; the Brahmins recited the Sama, Yajur and Rigveda, calling blessings on the bride, while the family priests poured oblations over the fire and recited the Atharva Veda to propitiate the unfavourable planets.

The bridegroom's father, King Damaghosa of Chedi, likewise performed the customary rites and marched with his whole army — infantry and cavalry — to Kundinapura. His friends Salva, Jarasandha, Dantavakra, Viduratha, Paundranga and other kings, all enemies of Krishna, also arrived with their troops to support the bridegroom in the event Krishna would be so bold as to create trouble, and were accommodated in palatial mansions.

Coming to know that Sri Krishna had gone all alone to Vidarbha to stand against the combined forces of so many kings, Balarama raised a huge army and rode in all speed to Vidarbha. Rukmini on her part was every moment expecting the return of her messenger, and, as neither he nor Krishna arrived, she grew very apprehensive about Krishna's safety and about the fate of her suit to Him, which might have not found favour with Him and caused Sunanda to return on foot to her. Her agitation grew extreme as the eve of her wedding-day dawned and she received no sign of either of them. She made supreme efforts to restrain her tears, which were inauspicious to the momentous event which was soon to take place in her life. Yet she derived some consolation from the favourable omens she observed in her body: her left thigh, left arm and left eye throbbed, indicating happy news in the offing, which, indeed, did not tarry to prove their worth; for Sunanda's cheerful face at that very moment appeared in the distance. He reported his mission in detail, after having assured her of Krishna's presence in the city, and received a deep bow from her in return, which is worth, Sri Suka avers, more than all the wealth in the world, she being the goddess of prosperity herself.

Her good royal father having heard of the arrival of Krishna and Balarama to attend his daughter's wedding, went out to receive them with presents, refreshments and the flourish of trumpets, and accommodated them befittingly as honoured guests.

The bridal procession to the shrine of goddess Ambika started. Rukmini stepped out of her palace with a large number of her ladies-in-waiting and bridesmaids and rode her chariot protected by the King's bodyguards with drawn swords. At the outer precinct of the temple she alighted and entered the shrine barefoot with her mother and the elderly ladies of the palace to the sounds of the trumpets, drums, conches, drums, clarinets and the anklets of thousands of dancing girls. After worshipping in the innermost sanctum and praying to the goddess to make Krishna her

husband, the Princess walked back to her chariot on the arm of one of her maids. The kings who were waiting outside, seeing her splendid beauty, her shapely waist, the jeweled girdle falling carelessly on her hips, which were exhibiting a pre-puberty womanhood, her blooming face, profuse curly hair, jasmin-bud teeth, and red-rose lips, were smitten with love and dismounted from their vehicles to have a closer look at her.

As for the bride herself she was in trepidation, eagerly praying for the start of the scene which Krishna was expected to play at that juncture. She was impatient for His appearance. To gain time she walked very slowly and kept looking for Him from the corners of her eyes, shading her face with her hand on the pretence of pushing aside her hanging curls. As she was about to enter her chariot, she suddenly felt His hand round her waist, drawing her towards His chariot in the very presence of the stupefied Sisupala, Jarasandha and others. Seating her comfortably on cushions, Krishna drove slowly in the direction of Dwaraka accompanied by Balarama and his hosts.

When they came to their senses and realised what had happened, the assembled kings indulged in self-incriminations for having allowed themselves to be outwitted by a mere cow boy. In all haste they mounted their animals and pursued Krishna with all their armies; but Balarama's forces barred their passage and exchanged arrows like rain with them, which greatly frightened Rukmini, who for the first time lifted her eyes to the face of her Beloved, as if to express her anxiety to Him. Krishna reassured her with the words: "Do not fear, O fair One, the enemy will be soon annihilated by your own troops."

To end quickly the fight, the Yadavas (Balarama's men) started using their most potent arrows called *Narachas*, with which they mowed down enemies in considerable numbers. The few of those who remained turned their backs and fled. Rukmi, on the other hand, did not admit defeat, but boldly pursued Krishna and swore that he would not return to the capital without killing Him and bringing back his sister. Leaving his army to face Balarama's, he rushed after Krishna and discharged his arrows on Him. But Krishna returned his arrows in kind, seized him and drew His sword to cut off his head, when Rukmini fell at His feet and pleaded to Him to spare her brother's life, which Krishna did. But in order to humiliate him for his arrogance and hatred of Him, He tied him with his own scarf and shaved his

head and half of his moustache. When Balarama returned victorious from the battlefield and saw the deplorable state of Rukmi, he remonstrated with Krishna for shaming a Kshatriya by shaving him and apologised to Rukmini for the treatment meted out to her brother. Rukmi, upon his release, did not return to Kundinapura, as he had vowed he would not, but built a new city — Bhojakata — and lived in it for the rest of his life.

Sri Krishna brought His bride to Dwaraka and married her with due pomp and ceremony to the rejoicing of the whole nation.

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*Pradyumna*

Sri Suka now speaks of the birth of Pradyumna to Rukmini and Krishna, and his kidnapping by the demon Shambara, his enemy of the previous life. One day Shambara's cook Mayavati, opening the belly of a big fish found in it the baby who had been flung into the sea by the demon, and brought him up as her son, although by her great magic power she recognised him as her husband Kamadeva (the Lord of Love) in his last birth. Several years afterwards she taught him magic superior to that of Shambara, made him kill the demon, and restored him to his parents. Pradyumna and Mayavati, now a beautiful young woman, lived again as husband and wife.

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## LVI — LVII

### *The Syamantaka Gem*

Satrajit, a citizen of Dwaraka, was a great sun-worshipper. Greatly pleased with him, the sun-god rewarded him with a solar gem called Syamantaka, which shines on its wearer with the brilliance of the sun and yields more than one hundred kilograms of pure gold every day. One day Prasena, Satrajit's brother, wore it round his neck and went hunting in the forest. A lion killed him and his horse and took away the gem, but before it entered its lair, the celebrated Jambavan, the giant king of bears and a great devotee of the Lord in His incarnation as Rama, killed him and carried away the *syamantaka* to his cave for his children to play with.

Satrajit missed his brother and spread the rumour that Krishna had waylaid and killed him to rob him of the gem. To clear His name from this false imputation, Krishna took with Him the citizens and went in search of Prasena, whose corpse they found mangled in the forest by the side of a lion's spoors. They followed the spoors to the lion's den on the mountain and saw the marks of his fight with Jambavan, whose spoors they followed till they reached his cave which they feared to enter because of its great darkness. Krishna asked them to wait for Him outside the cave and entered it alone and fought with the bear a most fierce battle which lasted twenty-eight days until by a sudden flash of intuition Jambavan realised who He was when he cried:

“Ah! I now realise<sup>[20]</sup> that You are the almighty Lord Vishnu, the most ancient Person, the Supreme Lord of all created beings. You are the same Rama, my Lord and Master, at whose sight the ocean and its contents were agitated and allowed You to bridge it in Your passage to the island-fortress of Lanka.”

The Lord, seeing that His devotee had recognised Him, took him by the hand and with infinite love said: “It is this gem which brought Me here: I was accused of having killed its owner's brother and taken it, and it is incumbent upon Me to prove My innocence.”

Jambavan gave Him not only the *syamantaka* but also his daughter Jambavati for wife.

Krishna summoned Satrajit to the royal presence and handed him the gem. Stricken with remorse at his false charge against Krishna, Satrajit offered him the gem as well as his daughter the beautiful and gifted Satyabhama. Krishna accepted the daughter but returned the gem, saying that it was the gift to him of the sun-god and he should keep it, though the daily gold it yielded might go to the national treasury.

About this time news reached Krishna that the Pandavas had been burnt to death in a conspiracy laid by their cousins, who had lodged them all in a house of lac and set fire to it. He and Balarama hastened to Hastinapura to ascertain the matter.

In the absence of the two brothers things went bad in Dwaraka. Satrajit was killed in cold blood in his sleep for the possession of the *syamantaka*, and Satyabhama had to rush to Hastinapura and fetch Krishna to revenge her father's blood and retake the gem. Both the brothers pursued the murderer to the Videha territory and killed him, but did not find the precious stone on him. Krishna then returned to Dwaraka to search for it, and Balarama remained with his friend the noble Janaka, in whose court he found Duryodhana, the vile enemy of his cousins the Pandavas, made friends with him, and taught him the use of the mace.

At Dwaraka Krishna traced the *syamantaka* to Akrura who surrendered it to Him, but after showing it to Satyabhama and others He returned it to Akrura.

[20] It looks as if the Lord did not possess the power to overcome the king of the bears with a few cuffs or, as a matter of fact, a mere touch of the hand and that He needed four weeks to do it. It is to be remembered that Jambavan was His great devotee, and had rendered Him yeoman service in His Rama *avatara* when He marched on Lanka against Ravana. This is symbolical of the unique privilege of the devotee which redounds to his benefit; how, through his own efforts and persistent *sadhana*, he realises within a comparatively short time, the supreme Reality, for which he had been seeking through many lives. It is this privilege that has now been granted to Jambavan, when he at long last realised who his adversary was. It was the stupidity of this devotee which prevented him from divining the truth about his adversary from the first day or, in fact, the first hour, considering the tremendous resistance the latter – a mere man – offered to a lion-killer like himself, a stupidity which needed a stiff fight for twenty-eight days to be rubbed off.

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## LVIII

### *Krishna Marries More Wives*

Fresh news trickled to Dwaraka that the Pandavas, who had been given up for dead in the lac house, were actually seen somewhere in the district of Indraprastha. Krishna hastened there and found the place where they lodged. They all rose and embraced Him with unbounded love. Kunti praised Him as the Soul of the universe and inquired after His parents. Having been deprived of their share of the territory of Hastinapura, and, being now homeless, the Pandavas requested Krishna to build a capital city for them, which He quickly accomplished with the help of Vishwakarma, the architect of the gods, and called it Indraprastha. He also made Maya, the architect of the asuras, build for them a special assembly hall, which was capable of causing all sorts of optical illusions, in payment for the service which Krishna had rendered to him when He saved him from the fire which had consumed the whole Khandava forest where he (Maya) used to live. The fire had actually been caused by Krishna Himself in collaboration with Arjuna who wanted to please the fire-god so that he might be rewarded by the latter with the world-famous bow Gandiva, four white horses, a chariot, a pair of inexhaustible quivers, and an armour which nothing could pierce.

Sometime after this, one day Krishna and Arjuna who, being of the same age, had become great friends, went out hunting in the forest and had just finished their bath in the Yamuna river afterwards, when they saw a beautiful damsel strolling close by. Krishna sent Arjuna to inquire whether she wanted anything and who she was. She gave her name as Kalindi, daughter of the sun-god, who was performing penance there to Lord Vishnu to make her His wife, for she had vowed she would marry no one but Him. Arjuna reported her speech to Krishna, Who came forward, helped her to His chariot, and drove home with her and Arjuna.

When the rainy season came to an end Krishna returned to Dwaraka and immediately celebrated His marriage with Kalindi. He also married his own cousin Mitravinda, the daughter of His father's sister, a princess of Avanti, then Satya, a Kosala princess, after having subdued seven formidable bulls, which no prince had dared to approach, and received for dowry ten-thousand milch cows and their calves, nine-thousand elephants, chariots, horses and servants without count. His seventh marriage was with

Bhadra, another cousin of His, a princess of Kekaya, and His eighth was with Lakshmana, a princess of Madra, whom He carried away.

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## LIX

### *Narakasura Slain*

Sri Suka continues:

Naraka was one of the major demons born of Mother Earth from her contact with the Lord's body, when, as a Boar, He lifted her on His tusks from the bottom of the ocean. By his vast supernatural powers and vicious nature, Naraka was harassing men as well as gods. He once snatched from Varuna, the god of the seas, his unique umbrella, which was the emblem of his sovereignty, and the ear-rings of his mother Aditi. Next he dislodged Indra from the mountain of the immortals called Mandara, which caused Indra to raise his complaint to Lord Krishna.

To dispose of the terrible asura, Krishna mounted His mighty Garuda, the king of birds, along with Satyabhama, who was the incarnation of Mother Earth, and flew to Pragjyotisha, Naraka's capital, which was fortified on all sides by high walls and mountains and surrounded by wide rings of water, fire and wind. Its ramparts were mounted with sharp-shooting weapons and countless traps fashioned by Mura, the great asura architect, to baffle, capture and kill anyone who dared approach the city without previous notice. Krishna shattered the mountains with His mace, the weapons with His shafts, the triple ring of water, fire and wind with His discus, and Mura's traps with His sword. He blew His conch Panchajanya and the hearts of the defenders melted with fear. The blast which sounded like the thunder claps of doomsday brought from the depths of the water the five-headed monster Mura himself, who had been fast asleep, and who now in great wrath flung his fiery trident at Garuda and roared with his five mouths, filling the world with an earth-shaking sound. Krishna shattered the trident with two of His shafts, and with a few more tore open the demon's five mouths. Then throwing His discus, He lopped off all his five heads. He, likewise, disposed of the monster's seven sons and the number of generals who had tried to oppose Him, and of Narakasura himself, and entered the city in triumph. At the royal palace Krishna was met by Mother Earth with hymns of praise, prostrations, Varuna's umbrella, and Aditi's ear-rings. Going round the palace He found sixteen thousand maidens captured from the harems of kings, *siddhas*, demons and gods. As soon as they laid their eyes on the Lord, all the girls desired Him for husband. So Krishna put

them all in palanquins and sent them to Dwaraka with the treasures of Pragjyotisha; the chariots, horses, the sixty-four four-tusked rare elephants, descendants of Airavata, which Naraka had robbed from Indra, etc. On his way back Krishna passed by Indraloka and delivered the ear-rings and umbrella to Indra, who worshipped Him and Satyabhama, but when the latter desired a *parijata* tree from his garden and Krishna pulled out one for her, Indra and all the gods fought Him (forgetting His Supreme State and very recent kindness) . The Lord in less than no time routed them and once again humbled Indra's arrogance.

At Dwaraka Krishna celebrated His marriage with all the sixteen thousand maidens, making Himself as many as they were, and built for each a mansion in which He lived alone with her, so that each wife had her Krishna all to herself.

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*Krishna Tests Rukmini*

One night Krishna was on His splendid bed, reclining on cushions as white and soft as milk foam. Over His head was a silk canopy fringed with laces from which pearl strings mixed with precious stones of all colours and jasmin buds were hanging in profusion, giving the bed multicoloured shimmers and a sense-bewitching perfume. The gentle breeze of a moonlit night wafted in through the windows, the fragrance of the *parijata* flowers in the garden outside, mingling it with the perfumes of the jasmin and the scented aloe-wood which was burning inside. The divine Rukmini was standing near the bed fanning her Lord with a bejewelled fan with a hand adorned by rows of precious bangles which issued a tender music as it turned. With her big pearl necklace and diamond-studded girdle she looked the personification of grace and beauty in the eyes of Krishna, Who Himself with His hanging curls, gold necklace, ear-rings and captivating smiles did not look any less lustrous.

Brimming with happiness, Krishna was then in a bantering mood. With a soft, caressing voice He spoke to His beloved as follows:

“You, dear Princess, were keenly sought by kings who favourably compared with the lords of the spheres in wealth and distinguished qualities. Leaving one such who was love-mad for you, had called at your door, and had been affianced to you by your father and brother, in favour of one who is a mere nobody, was rather strange. Women who marry men whose ways of life are uncertain usually suffer, O lovely Lady. I am penniless and the friend of the penniless, which is the reason why men of wealth shun Me. Marriages are usually contracted between equals in wealth, birth, social status, prospects — never between high and a low. You, O Princess, unwisely ignored all these advantages when you preferred Me. Even now it is not too late: you may choose an eminent Kshatriya who is a match to you. For my part it was to curb the pride of Sisupala, Jarasandha, Salva and your brother Rukmi who hated Me, the destroyer of the wicked, that I decided to carry you away. I have, in fact, no desire for women, offspring, wealth, or any worldly enjoyment, being full of the bliss of the realisation of My own Self. I live like light, a detached witness to all these.”

These words struck terror and grief in Rukmini's heart, her tongue cleaved to her palate; tears of anguish rained down her cheeks and bathed her saffron-smeared breasts; her limbs went limp, causing her bracelets to slip out of her hands and her body to sag down dishevelled to the ground in a swoon, like a banana tree which has been struck down by a storm. Krishna realised that He had gone too far and that His beloved had missed the subtlety of His joke. He jumped down from the couch, folded her in His arms, wiped her tears, rearranged her beautiful locks and comforted her with His sweet address:

“Do not be angry with Me, Beloved! I know your single-minded devotion to Me, your husband: it was to hear your retort and see your resentful, quivering lips and the beauty of your darting glances that I spoke as I did — in sheer fun. There is no greater joy for a loving husband than to spend a little time in exchanging expressions of love with his beloved.”

Satisfied that Krishna was not serious in what He had first said, Rukmini slowly opened her eyes, gazed at her Darling's face with affectionate smiles and said:

“What You said, O lotus-eyed One, that there can be no comparison between You of infinite qualities, Who are established in Your own splendour, and me, who am constituted of the *gunas* and worshipped by the ignorant, is true. It is also true that those who are blinded by wealth and absorbed in the gratification of their desires do not know You, the stealer of every minute of their life. You Who are the personification of absolute joy, are the most desired by the wise who renounce everything — kingdom, throne, family — to have you alone. Kings like Anga, Prithu, Bharata, Yayati and many others retire to the forests and perform penance in search of You, O Lord, Who are the Source of all virtues and the touch of Whose feet grants eternal Salvation. Let the kings you have mentioned to have sought my hand be the lot of women who have not heard of your praises in the courts of the highest gods — Shiva, Brahma and others. Within their palaces these kings behave like brutes towards their ladies. When You ask me to choose another husband, I certainly take You seriously, for such women, who drag down the men who marry them in this world and the



next, do exist. All I ask, my Lord, is to continue to burn with love for Your sacred feet.”

Sri Krishna replied:

“It was to hear these very words that I, O virtuous Princess, started this joke. You already possess all these blessings you desire from Me, blessings which lead to the freedom from all desires. *Those who appeal to Me to grant them marital happiness have surrendered themselves to the enjoyments of the senses and, therefore, to delusion, for these can be obtained even by animals. Hell appears to be like a pleasant summer-resort to them.* But you are different: in all My house there is no one to compare with you in constancy and devotion, despite the humiliation I inflicted upon your brother and then his death at the hand of My brother (see next chapter). You were determined, you remember, to give up your beautiful body if I had tarried a little longer to carry you to My chariot on the eve of your proposed marriage to Sisupala. This love of yours, O Princess, is unique, and will stand to your credit eternity.”

Thus, Lord Krishna, following the ways of mortals, indulged in private amorous talks not only with Rukmini but with all His other wives.

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## LXI

### *Assassination of Rukmi*

Sri Suka speaks of Krishna's sons who numbered ten to each wife of His, and gives the names of the eighty born to the first eight wives, beginning with Pradyumna from Rukmini and ending with Satyaka from Bhadra. Of those born to the other sixteen thousand wives, he mentions the names of only three of the first one, Rohini. Of His daughters Sri Suka refers to only one — Charumati — from Rukmini, whom He married to Bali, Kritavarma's son. When all these sons and daughters married and begot children, the number of Krishna's grandchildren rose to scores of millions.

Although Rukmi continued to hate Krishna and His brother, he allowed his daughter Rukmavati to choose Pradyumna from other royal suitors because of his regard for his sister Rukmini who had saved his life from Krishna's hands. For the same reason he gave also a granddaughter of his — Rochana — to a grandson of hers, Aniruddha (son of Pradyumna). For the wedding of this last couple Krishna, Rukmini, Balarama, Pradyumna, Samba and others drove to Bhojakata, Rukmi's capital.

When the wedding ceremony was over, some of the royal guests present suggested to Rukmi to play dice with Balarama and win his money, knowing the latter's inadequate proficiency in the game. Rukmi acted on the suggestion and won time after time, starting with one hundred, then one-thousand, then ten-thousand gold coins gambled by Balarama, who admitted his loss, to the derisive remarks of his enemy the ruler of Kalinga. But when Rukmi placed a bet of one-hundred-thousand gold pieces and lost to Balarama, he resorted to a subterfuge and claimed the gain to be his. Excited and with bloodshot eyes Balarama staked one-million and again won. Rukmi wrongfully claimed the win to be his and appealed to the audience which, of course, was hostile to Balarama, to judge them. Divining that the judgement would be perverse, a voice sounded from heaven declaring the bet to have rightfully been won by Balarama, as everybody well knew. But this did not alter the loser's claim to it, as instigated by his wicked royal friends and, to crown his deceit, Rukmi mocked Balarama, who was already in a great fury, that he was but a cowherd, who had spent his life in the jungle and could not have possibly

mastered the rules of a game which was the prerogatives of kings to play. This was enough to make the injured man's blood boil, who, now in a towering rage, seized an iron bar and brought it down on Rukmi's head with such a force as to kill him on the spot. Then seizing the ruler of Kalinga, who attempted to flee, he broke the teeth which had been bared in mockery of him. The rod then fell indiscriminately on the heads, legs, thighs and arms of the other rulers, who had supported Rukmi's trickery and drew blood in abundance. Sri Krishna remained a silent spectator to this gory scene in deference to the feelings of His beloved wife on the one hand, and of His brother on the other. The victorious Balarama quickly put Aniruddha and his bride in a chariot and drove with them to Dwaraka.

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## LXII — LXIV

### *Nriga*

Sri Suka now describes the secret romance of Usha, the daughter of Bana, the asura king, with (the aforesaid) Aniruddha. Her pregnancy led to a fight between Bana and Shiva on one side, and Krishna on the other, Who had come to release His grandson from imprisonment for having been found ensconced in Usha's chamber. The former were badly defeated, and Shiva prayed to the Lord to spare the life of Banasura on account of his great-grandfather Prahlada. Krishna agreed because He had promised Prahlada not to kill any of his descendants, but He cut off his many arms, leaving only four for his day-to-day use. Banasura was happy at Krishna's magnanimity and gave Usha to Aniruddha as wife, putting them both in Krishna's chariot and bade them farewell, after bowing and prostrating many times to the Lord.

Some of Krishna's sons and His younger brother Gada were one day enjoying themselves in a garden and, getting thirsty, went to a well to draw some water to drink. Instead of water they found a huge chameleon as big as a boulder, which they tied to a rope and, for pity, tried to haul out of the well. But it defied all their efforts — it simply did not budge. They reported the matter to Krishna, Who went with them, stretched His left hand and lifted it up easily. Out of the well it turned into a celestial, fully decked with jewels and garlands and on his head a crown of shining gold. Bowing low to Krishna he told his story. He was Nriga, a most pious and generous king, son of Ikshwaku, famous for his munificence. Of the millions of cows he had gifted to the Brahmins, one cow strayed from its Brahmin owner and got mixed with the cattle of the King. The latter inadvertently presented it to another Brahmin. Its first owner one day saw it and demanded it back from the new Brahmin owner who refused to return it on the valid ground that it was the gift of the King to him. The King, grieved by this misadventure, offered to compensate either of them with a hundred-thousand cows for that one cow, but both of them declined the offer and went their ways. This was counted as a sin for the good King. It was ordained at his death that he should first suffer for his sin in a chameleon shape and then be rewarded for his fabulous generosity and piety by

entering the ranks of the celestials. Now by Krishna's grace he started reaping his reward.

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*Balarama Visits Gokula and Hastinapura*

The blessed Balarama now felt a great urge to go to Gokula to see his foster-parents, old friends and the dear *gopis* who still yearned for his and Krishna's company. On seeing him, Nanda and Yasoda embraced him and shed tears of love. The *gopis* were unceasing in their inquiries about their darling Krishna. Balarama masterfully soothed them and met them at night to sing and drink with them the sweet liquor *Varuni*, supplied by god Varuna from the hollow of a certain tree, and which filled the forest with its honey-like smell. One night when they were all under the strong influence of the liquor and felt too heavy to walk to the river Yamuna to have their usual bath and sports, Balarama commanded the river to come to them and, as the river hesitated to obey, he got enraged, pointed his plough at it, and dragged it to their side, as the magnet attracts a piece of iron. Bewitched by the company of the women of Vraja, Balarama lost all sense of time, so that the two winter months he spent with them passed like one day.

While he was here he killed the very vicious monkey called Dwivida, who had gone round the world polluting temples and sacrifices, demolishing hermitages and big villages by inundations or by crushing them under uprooted hills pelted at them, defiling high-born ladies, etc., to revenge the death of his friend Narakasura. As the dreadful beast tried to insult the *gopis* in the presence of Balarama, the latter fought with him and killed him. The gods, men, *siddhas* and Rishis who had suffered from his ravages, rejoiced and gave thanks to Balarama.

Sri Suka now shifts the scene to Hastinapura, the capital of Dhritarashtra, where Duryodhana held a *swayamvara* meeting of princes from whom his daughter Lakshmana was to choose a bridegroom, when Samba, Krishna's son from Jambavati, swooped on them and carried her away to the horror of the whole assembly. Six veteran heroes, of whom three were Karna, Sala and her father Duryodhana, pursued and brought him back bound to Hastinapura, after an engagement in which, though a mere boy, he fought like a lion. When the news reached Dwaraka through Narada, the Yadus made their preparations to march against the Kauravas under their king Ugrasena, but Balarama advised the path of peace and offered to be their messenger. On his arrival at the outskirts of the capital,

Balarama sent word of it to king Dhritarashtra with Uddhava, which brought the great Bhishma, Drona, and Duryodhana himself to receive him and affectionately embrace him as one of their best relatives and Duryodhana's teacher in mace fighting. After the exchange of greetings and courtesies, Balarama spoke of his business and demanded the release of Samba and the restoration to him of his bride Lakshmana, whom he had legitimately carried away and fought for. The Kurus at once bristled up with anger and gave a very indecorous answer which made them appear far superior to the Yadus, whose throne and exalted position entirely depended on themselves, the Kurus, an answer which was highly offensive, because, apart from its being unmannerly, it was utterly false.

Balarama could not swallow this, notwithstanding the eminence of the men who made it. He slowly rose to his feet, pointed his weapon at Hastinapura, lifted it from its place and began dragging it towards the broad river Ganga to drown it in it with its whole population, human and non-human, and its wealth. Seeing their capital rocking like a boat in a rough sea, the Kauravas were seized with a mortal panic and without loss of time they gathered their families, placed them before Balarama with Samba and Lakshmana in the fore and appealed for mercy.

“Do forgive our transgression, O Lord Sesha! Evil minded that we are we did not realise that you are the cause of the creation, depending on none but your own Self. Sages speak of the three worlds as the field of your play and of the earth as supported by only one of your thousand heads, Lord of infinite power! We know that your anger does not contain the slightest tinge of hatred, but is expressly meant to teach those who need teaching and maintain righteousness in the world. Be gracious to protect us.”

Balarama assured them of his protection. Duryodhana, who was very fond of Lakshmana, gave her to Samba in marriage with thousands of elephants, horses, chariots, etc. for dowry. Balarama collected all this wealth and returned with them and the bride and bridegroom in triumph to Dwaraka, where he told this story in open Court.

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## LXIX

### *Narada Dazzled by Krishna's Glory*

Sri Suka continues:

Narada, having known of the defeat of Naraka and the marriage of Krishna with all his sixteen thousand captive girls, was curious to see for himself how He managed to live in peace with so many wives about Him. He came to Dwaraka and was struck with wonder at its luxurious beauty: its numerous parks interspersed with ponds covered with full-blown lotuses and lilies of different colours; its nine-hundred-thousand mansions built of silver and cut glass inlaid with emeralds and furnished with furniture of gold and precious stones; its broad avenues and market places; its temples and assembly halls; its rows of splendid palaces inhabited by Krishna's immense family, one for each wife. He entered one of these at random and was dazzled: its columns were coral; its canopies strings of pearls; its seats and beds pure ivory studded with gems; its numerous servants of both the sexes wore gold necklaces and ear-rings and were smartly dressed. Peeping into a chamber from which perfume of aloe-wood was issuing, he saw Krishna seated near Rukmini, who was fanning Him with a gold-handled fan and who herself was served by many maid-servants.

Seeing the virtuous Narada, Lord Krishna rose to His feet, bowed His crowned head to him and placed him on His own couch, washed his feet and sprinkled His head with the water, to show him the respect due to an honoured guest. Extremely pleased, the Rishi praised the Lord and left.

Roaming about the extensive ground, Narada entered another palace, and great was his surprise to see Krishna there also, playing dice with His consort and Uddhava. Krishna also rose to meet him, offered him His seat, discharged the duties of a host to a dear guest and inquired about the date and time of his coming to Dwaraka (as if He had not talked to him a little while ago).

Completely bewildered, the Sage walked out and entered another and yet another mansion and found Krishna in all of them differently engaged; in one fondling His babies, in another preparing to go for His bath, in a third pouring oblations on the sacred fire and extremely happy to extend to him the same cordial welcome as in the first mansion (and as if He met him



for the first time that day). Pondering over all these wonders of the Lord of which he had no suspicion before, Narada laughed loudly and said to Krishna:

“We have known, O Master of Yoga, of Your mystic powers, but no one has yet fathomed their depths, not even the great gods Shiva and Brahma, who themselves use them. Today more of them have been revealed to my mind. Give me leave to go round the fourteen worlds and spread Your glory and the story of Your wonderful plays to purify them.”

The Lord answered:

“I do not only teach, O Sage, but also practise *dharma* to set an example to the world. Do not therefore be perplexed (by My actions), My son.”

Sri Suka remarks that that was how Narada saw the same Krishna in all the mansions of all His consorts, performing His household duties as if He were in serious pursuit of the three human objects *Kama* (conjugal enjoyment), *Artha* (earning of wealth for its maintenance), and *Dharma* (virtuous, pious living).

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## LXX – LXXIII

### *Death of Jarasandha*

Sri Suka proceeds to describe the routine of Krishna's daily life: the time He rises from bed, His ablutions, meditation on His own Self, bath, distribution of charity, distribution of betel leaves and flowers to the Brahmins, all the members of His household, friends, ministers and counsellors. Then riding His splendid chariot and bidding farewell to all His consorts, who stand out to see Him off, He goes to the famous Sudharma Council Hall, mounts His high throne, and sits among His courtiers like the bright moon amidst the stars in the firmament.

One day while He was thus seated a messenger entered, bowed low, and placed before Him a petition from more than twenty thousand kings who were imprisoned by Jarasandha in Girivraja, his capital, appealing for release by Krishna and the ending of their suffering.

Just then Narada entered and demanded Krishna's consent to the performance of the supreme *Rajasuya* sacrifice to Himself by king Yudhisthira, as well as His august presence at the celebration, to which, he said, all the kings of the earth would be also invited. This posed a dilemma to Krishna and the Council as to who should be first attended to — the messenger of the imprisoned kings, who were in great torment and who arrived first, or the invitation of His immediate relatives, which duty demanded He should first accept. But as He wanted to be impartial and decide dispassionately, He asked the wise Uddhava to give his advice.

Uddhava took the opinions of the counsellors one by one and then of Krishna Himself and arrived at the following conclusions. Krishna was certainly duty bound to attend the *Rajasuya* sacrifice of his cousin and also protect those who appealed to Him for protection. But as a rule this great sacrifice could not be performed without one being the owner of vast territories — of the whole earth if possible — which he could not obtain except by the defeat of Jarasandha, through which both duties would be discharged and both ends served simultaneously. As to the means of defeating Jarasandha, Uddhava offered his own personal suggestion. King Jarasandha, he said, had a giant's strength, equal only to that of Bhima (the second Pandava), and a vast army which it was not possible to defeat. It is best to make him accept a single fight with Bhima. As Jarasandha had a

great respect for the Brahmins and never failed to concede a favour demanded by them, Bhima should disguise himself as a Brahmin and demand of him the favour of fighting him, man to man, in the presence of Sri Krishna Himself. Bhima, Uddhava believed, would not fail to kill him.

When this advice was unanimously approved, Krishna turned to the messenger and asked him to return to the kings and tell them that their hour of deliverance was at hand. Then with the permission of King Ugrasena, Balarama and others, He ordered the preparations for His journey to Indraprastha to be made without the least delay — consorts, sons, servants, maid-servants, luggage, etc., all to go with Him along with the army and ministers.

Crossing the rivers, hills and lands of the kingdoms of Anarta, Sauvira, Panchala, Matsya and others, Krishna reached Indraprastha. King Yudhisthira and his whole family came out to receive Him with the sound of trumpets and recitation of the Vedas. Folding the Lord in his arms again and again, the King shed tears of joy. So did Bhima, Arjuna, Sahadeva and Nakula. The capital received the newcomers with great ovation — all the people turned out to acclaim them with songs, music, festal bells, flowers and flags. Krishna's consorts were received with equally great honour by the Pandavas' wife Draupadi, under the directions of Kunti, her mother-in-law, with gifts, garlands and refreshments. Elaborate arrangements were made for the accommodation and comforts of all the guests and the army.

At the urgent request of Yudhisthira, Krishna with all his retinue spent several months in Indraprastha, occasionally going on excursions with Arjuna.

When one day Yudhisthira was holding court, surrounded by his ministers, brothers, Brahmins, relatives, the elders and guests, he turned to Krishna and spoke as follows:

“I intend, O Lord Govinda, to worship You as well as the gods, who are but part manifestations of Yourself, by the supreme *Rajasuya* sacrifice. Kindly make that possible and demonstrate to the Kuru and Srinjaya chiefs the fates of those who worship You and those who do not. You are the Self of all, the Supreme Brahman, Who is of the nature of bliss, knowing naught but your own Self, in which the not-Self does not exist. You bestow Your grace on Your devotees without partiality or discrimination.”

The Supreme Lord answered:

“Your resolve, O King, is excellent: it will spread your fame in the three worlds and will please the celestials, the Rishis, the manes, your friends and Myself. You have first to defeat all the kings and conquer the whole earth by the help of your brothers who have been begotten by immortals who guard the world, and cannot be easily vanquished. You yourself are a man of great wisdom, self-control and virtues, by which you have conquered Me, and thus you cannot be defeated by even the gods, much less by mortals. After becoming the sovereign of the earth, collect materials for the *Rajasuya* sacrifice.”

Yudhishtira’s face bloomed with joy at the grand prospect which this statement of the Lord opened for him and, calling his four brothers, he sent them to the four cardinal points to subdue the kings of the earth, which they quickly did and brought untold wealth to his Treasury. Jarasandha alone remained unvanquished, which caused much misery to Yudhishtira. But Krishna placed before him Uddhava’s plan of sending Bhima, disguised as a Brahmin, to fight him in person, which was immediately approved by the Pandava King.

Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna accordingly proceeded to Girivraja and appeared as Brahmins before Jarasandha and flattered his vanity by speaking to him of the generosity of great monarchs, like him, who, sometimes even at the risk of their lives, promise boons to Brahmins and scrupulously grant them.

Looking intently at them and at their hands, which bore the marks of weapons, Jarasandha was convinced that they were Kshatriyas, particularly as he had a vague recollection of the face of one of them. Yet, having been flattered and enthused by their speech, he resolved to grant their request, even if they were disguised Kshatriyas, thinking to himself:

“Did not the Supreme Vishnu disguise Himself as a Brahmin dwarf and took from Bali the whole earth, despite the opposition of his preceptor, with the result that he became celebrated in all the three worlds! After all this body of mine will not live forever, but a Kshatriya’s fame must so live, or else his life is not worth anything.”

Then addressing the “Brahmins” he said: “Brahmins, ask whatever you desire and it will be granted even if it be my own head.”

Krishna answered:

“O great King, we are not Brahmins in quest of food, but we have come to request you to fight us singly, which you have been good enough to concede in advance. This is Bhima the son of Kunti, and that other is his younger brother Arjuna, and Myself am their cousin Krishna, an old acquaintance, if you remember.”

Jarasandha remembered, of course, laughed loudly and replied:

“I certainly agree to fight you, O fools! but Krishna, You are a coward and lose Your head in the battle and, so, I will not fight you. Out of fear of me You abandoned Mathura and took shelter in the sea (the island of Dwaraka). Arjuna, likewise, I will not fight, for he is not a skilful warrior and younger than myself in age. Bhima is the right man for me and I will fight him.”

Then picking up a huge mace, and giving another to Bhima, Jarasandha came out of the city with them and then no further sound was heard but “tap, tap, tap,” the sound of maces falling on bare flesh — shoulders, hips, thighs, feet, collarbones — a fight which was renewed every morning for twenty-seven days. On the twenty-eighth morning Bhimasena privately confessed to Krishna that it was impossible for him to defeat Jarasandha. But Krishna, Who knew the secret of the latter’s birth, at which his body came out in two halves, which his mother, the demoness Jara, joined into one and brought life to it by her magic power, encouraged him to go ahead and passed on to him some of His own power. He then gave him a hint as to how he should deal with his opponent. He plucked a tender twig from a tree and split it into two halves lengthways. Bhima quickly understood its meaning. As soon as the fight started on that day, the latter placed one foot on one of Jarasandha’s and lifted the other foot up with such violence that he tore his body into two, from the sacral region to the crown of the head, leaving in each half, one ear, one eye, one shoulder, half the back, one hip, one arm and one leg. Krishna and Arjuna affectionately embraced their hero and, putting, Jarasandha’s son Sahadeva on the throne of Magadha, they set at liberty the twenty-thousand imprisoned kings, fed them, bathed them and advised them not to pamper much the body, which is, after all, mortal and liable to corruption and disease. The kings prostrated to Krishna and left for their respective kingdoms in the chariots which He had made ready for them. Krishna,

Bhima and Arjuna returned to Indraprastha without further delay to bring supreme joy to Yudhishthira and all its people.

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*Yudhishtira's Rajasuya*

Having established his sovereignty over the earth, King Yudhishtira felt justified to glorify the Lord with the supreme *Rajasuya* sacrifice. With the permission of Krishna he sent invitations to all the celebrated Rishis — Vyasa, Vasishta, Bharadwaja, Gautama, Chyavana, Kanva, Maitreya, Vishwamitra, Jaimini, Parasara, Garga, Atharva, Kashyapa, Sukracharya and many others — also to Drona, Bhishma, Kripacharya, Dhritarashtra, all his sons and the noble Vidura, as well as all the kings, their ministers, Brahmins, businessmen, Kshatriyas and Sudras. Then he invited all the gods and their consorts, the yakshas, rakshasas, vidyadharas, kinnaras, etc.

When on the appointed day all the invitees arrived and confirmed Yudhishtira's competence to perform *Rajasuya*, the priests ploughed the sacrificial ground with a plough of gold and initiated him as the facilitator. Using utensils of gold according to the tradition set down by Varuna from ancient times, they conducted the ceremony on the lines laid down by the Scriptures. When the time came to choose from the assembled people the man who was most worthy of occupying the seat of honour, Sahadeva, the youngest Pandava, rose and proposed Krishna, for, he said:

“Krishna is the crest-jewel of the Yadu race, and is not only the Soul of all that exists but also its material manifestation — the sacrificer, the fire, the sacrifice, the oblations and the mantras. By doing Him honour we will do honour to our own selves and all beings. Therefore, I propose Him to the highest seat.”

Everyone approved of the proposal to the extreme satisfaction of the sacrificer, who rose, washed Krishna's feet and sprinkled the water over his own head and the heads of his consort Draupadi, brothers, ministers and all the members of his family and, with streaming eyes, presented Him with pieces of yellow silk and precious ornaments. The whole congregation stood up and with joined palms cried: “*Namo Namah!*” and “*Jaya Jaya!*” (Salutations and Victory).

Sisupala, who had sullenly endured the honour done to his enemy, now exploded: he rose to his feet, spread wide his arms and thundered in a voice which shook with rage:

“That Time is the omnipotent Lord, Whose decrees are inexorable and inviolate, as we have been taught by the sacred Vedas, we have proved it to ourselves by the proceedings of this day. We have seen how the balanced reason of even veteran Rishis and venerable elders could be misled by the prattling of a child (Sahadeva). Pray remember that you are capable of judging for yourselves as to who of the many revered men here present is worthy of occupying the highest seat in this sacrifice — men of great learning and wisdom, who, through great penance, have succeeded in expiating all their sins and establishing themselves in the absolute Brahman. How can this cowherd (Krishna), who has no *varna* nor *ashrama*, nor high birth, nor virtues, nor respect for *dharma* nor for our social and religious traditions, be paid these exalted honours? His clan is shunned by all respectable people for its indulgence in prohibited drinks and for its segregation in a fortified island which is destitute of Brahmins and the study of the Vedas, and if they issue from it, it is only to harass and plunder others.”

Though Krishna uttered not a word in self-defence, many guests plugged their ears and ran out of the hall. But the Pandavas, Matsyas, Kaikayas, and Srinjayas took their weapons and rushed to kill Sisupala, who bravely stood up to them with his sword and shield. Krishna exhorted His followers to keep calm and Himself took up His discus and released it at the enemy’s neck, slicing off his head. Sisupala’s friends lost heart and took to their heels. Now a miracle happened: from the dead body of the fallen Sisupala a column of light shot up and entered Krishna’s, thus merging him with the Lord after three lives in a human body in fulfilment of the Kumaras’ curse (p. 47). Thereafter the celebration went on peacefully to the complete satisfaction of the gods and the people assembled, save Duryodhana, whose smouldering jealousy was fanned to flame by the splendour of his cousins and his attachment to Draupadi, who had been snatched away from him by them and who, on that day, shone by the side of the sacrificer as his queen.

Making matters worse, he once suffered a public affront in the Council Hall due to a visual error on his part, the blame for which he also laid at the door of his cousins. It happened in the Hall of Illusions, which, it is to be remembered, the demon engineer Maya had built with a cunning craftsmanship. When Yudhishtira was seated on his throne of gold surrounded by his brothers, advisers, kinsmen, Krishna and the royal ladies



of whom one thousand were consorts of Krishna alone, Duryodhana (with his brothers), wearing his glittering diadem, pearl necklace and sword, entered. Walking over the burnished floor, he mistook it for water and pulled up a part of his garment to avoid wetting it, but when he actually came over a pool of water he thought it was again the shining floor, and took no precaution, so that he fell plump into it to the amusement of the ladies and of Bhima, who unadvisedly laughed loudly, to the annoyance of the good Yudhishtira, who rebuked him. A profound indignation filled Duryodhana's soul, who rose from the bog and, without a word, left the hall as well as Indraprastha in an unbounded fury, which greatly perturbed Yudhishtira but left Krishna cold, for He was slowly working out Duryodhana's destruction, beginning with these delusions which were actually of His own making.

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## LXXVI — LXXVII

### *Salva and Dantavakra Slain*

Sisupala's defeat in the marriage of Rukmini, and now his death, greatly rankled in the hearts of his most intimate friends, who swore vengeance on Krishna. Salva, in addition, took the rout inflicted on him on that memorable day in Vidarbha very much to heart. He performed penance to Lord Shankara (Shiva), lived on a handful of sand per day for a whole year and was awarded an invincible aerial car called Saubha constructed by (the aforesaid ingenious artist) Maya to destroy the strongest fortress with impunity and move in any medium: earth, water or air. Profiting by Krishna's absence, Salva laid siege to Dwaraka with his army, and with Saubha he unceasingly rained stones, trees, snakes, water and earth over the city, devastating its parks, razing down the upper storeys of its mansions and causing untold suffering to the people. Pradyumna, who was left in charge of the capital, showed a heroism equal to that of his father: he collected all his brothers, relations, friends and followers and harassed Salva in every possible way and fought pitched battles with his army.

When Krishna was nearing Dwaraka on His way back from Indraprastha with all his retinue, He saw signs of hostility in the capital. He ordered His brother to go look after it and Himself went in search of Salva, who tried his magical tricks to baffle and defeat Him. In one of these he showed Krishna's father as his prisoner and before His very eyes decapitated him, which greatly worried Krishna, but when He soon realised that it was an optical illusion, He destroyed Saubha with His mace and Salva with His discus.

Dantavakra then took up arms against Krishna to avenge the death of his two friends, Sisupala and Salva, but he too was disposed of along with his brother Viduratha. Dantavakra and Sisupala had no need to return to a human body, but reverted to their old office as the gatekeepers of *Vaikuntha*.

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## LXXVIII – LXXIX

### *Balarama's Pilgrimage*

News reached Dwaraka that the Kurus were making war preparations against the Pandavas. Balarama, who was attached to both sides, preferred to remain neutral and resolved to go on pilgrimage to use his time profitably. He proceeded to Prabhasa, bathed in the sea and worshipped the gods, the Rishis and the manes. Accompanied by Brahmins he skirted the valleys of the Sarasvati, Yamuna and Ganga, and finally reached Naimisharanya, where he found an assembly of sages holding religious discourses presided over by Romaharsana, a disciple of Rishi Vyasa, who was a Suta by caste (that is, born of a Brahmin mother and a Kshatriya father) and was seated on the elevated speaker's seat. When Balarama arrived and he was recognised as a part *avatara* of the Lord, the whole congregation rose to receive and honour him, except the Suta, which made Balarama not only rebuke him as unmannerly and of lower caste than his audience, but also strike him with a thin blade of *kusa* grass and kill him. The Brahmins, horror-stricken, spoke gently to Balarama that his was an unrighteous act, for the Suta had been given this place of honour by themselves for the duration of the religious session because of his great erudition and lucid expositions of the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*, so that he was a Brahmin in practice and that Balarama should consider himself a Brahmin murderer, for which he had to atone. They knew, they said, that he was a master of yoga, who stood beyond the ordinances of the Vedas, having descended in a human body to purify the world, yet he had to set a noble example to others by himself choosing the means of his atonement.

Bhagavan Balarama exhorted them to advise him on what he should do. He was prepared, he said, to restore life to the Suta, if they wished it. But the Sages insisted that it was for him to decide his own course of action without compromising (1) the infallibility of his divine weapon, (2) the inevitability of death, and (3) the privilege of occupying the seat of honour conferred on the deceased by themselves. This gave to Balarama a clear indication of the Sages' mind and made him let the death of the Suta stand, but granted health, long life, the ability to expound the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*, and the right to occupy the highest seat to his son Ugrasrava Suta, which was as if Romaharsana himself was so honoured. (This is the Suta

who is reciting this *Bhagavata* to the sages Saunaka and others with whom this book begins).

Then Balarama saved these Sages from the demon Balwala, who was polluting their sacrifices, and resumed his pilgrimage to the hermitage of Pulaha (Gaya) on the mouth of the Ganga, where he had a dip, and to the seven branches of the Godavari in the south. Moving further south, he visited the most holy Sriranga temple, where dwells Sri Vishnu, Southern Mathura (Madurai), and the part of the sea, where he saw the bridge which Sri Rama had built (in crossing to Lanka), and where a bath purges the greatest of sins. Hearing that Rishi Agastya lived on the Malaya Mountain (in Kerala), Balarama went to pay him his respects, and then he travelled to the shrine of the goddess Durga known by the name of Kanya (Kanyakumari in Cape Comorin) in the southern sea and various other temples in Kerala. Striking north-west, he bathed in the Tapti, the Narbada, Manutirtha and many other sacred rivers and tanks and returned to Prabhasa, where he heard from the Brahmins that the Pandavas and Kauravas had exterminated each other in the historic battle of Kurukshetra. He quickly set for the latter place, which he reached on the last day of the fight, when Bhima and Duryodhana, maces in hands, were facing each other in the last ditch. Sri Krishna, Yudhishtira and Arjuna silently bowed to him and waited for him to declare the purpose of his visit, when he turned to the two combatants and appealed to them to stop their fight. As neither heeded him, he turned his back and returned to Dwaraka, where he was received with affection by his relatives and Ugrasena. After a brief sojourn he returned to Naimisha forest to join the sages in performing sacrifices of which he was very fond, sacrifice being the very nature of Lord Sesha.

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*Sudama (or Kuchela)*

Sri Suka continues:

Sudama was a Brahmin classmate and friend of Krishna in the days of their studentship in the house of Sandipani and now a very poor householder having not enough to eat or cover himself and his wife with, so that the couple were greatly emaciated and in tattered clothes. Yet Sudama's perfect knowledge of the Absolute kept him supremely contented. His wife, who was very devoted to him, became so weak from starvation that she could no longer forbear broaching the subject to him. One day she mustered courage and, as gently as she could, said to him:

“Lord Krishna, O adorable husband of mine, Who is the Consort of the goddess of wealth herself, the fulfiller of His devotees' wishes, and the lover of Brahmins, is your personal friend. Why not approach Him and acquaint Him with our needs, so that He may relieve us of our suffering? He now lives in Dwaraka and is known to be so generous as to give even His own Self to those who appeal to Him.”

After many reminders of this kind, Sudama resolved to undertake the journey, which, he thought, would also make him see the Lord — a blessing by itself. The day he was starting he inquired if there was anything in the house which he could take as a fitting offering to Krishna, and, as there was nothing at all in it, his wife begged four handfuls of parched rice from a neighbour, tied them in a rag and gave it to him.

Thinking all the way of the Lord, Sudama arrived at Dwaraka, passed two fortifications, entered the palace in the centre of the city and found himself face to face with Krishna in Rukmini's mansion. As soon as He set eyes on him, Krishna rose from His seat, embraced him, made him sit on His own couch, washed his feet and did him all the honours due to a great and welcome guest. Even Rukmini was gracious to fan the beggarly Brahmin, which not a little puzzled her maids and the residents of the palace. Krishna then walked arm in arm with him, talking of the sweet days they had spent together in their teacher's house, particularly of the night they had once to spend alone in the forest, where they had gone to collect fuel for the preceptor's wife and were caught in a thunder-shower which

flooded the whole area and made it impossible for them to find their way home in the great darkness that followed it.

Becoming more intimate, Krishna said that He had heard of Sudama's marriage and of his total detachment from the world. Yet, He counselled, one should set an example to others by doing one's duty, as He Himself had been all along doing. The good Brahmin answered that there remained nothing more for him to achieve in this world, having had the blessings of living in the same house as the Lord of the Vedas and of the four objects of the human life, namely, Krishna. The Lord continued to be reminiscent, and, finally, as if in fun, asked His friend if he had brought any present for Him, for, He said, He appreciated even the smallest gift if given with real love, be it a fruit, a flower, a leaf from a tree, or mere water. And, knowing that Kuchela had come on the repeated entreaties of his wife because of their extreme penury, and yet had not said a word about it to Him, He decided to reward him. Then touching him affectionately all over, He put His hand under his upper cloth and pulled out the parcel (which the poor man was feeling shy to present), opened it, took a mouthful of it, and exclaimed, "What a delicious thing you have brought Me! I love beaten rice: this will please all the three worlds." As He was about to take another mouthful, Rukmini stopped Him and said, "One mouthful is enough to satisfy You, O Lord of the universe, and bring him untold wealth in this world and the next: another mouthful will make You part even with me."

That night Kuchela slept in Krishna's palace after a hearty dinner, and next morning he started for home. Krishna accompanied him some distance and bowed farewell to him, which made him supremely happy, although, he thought to himself, he had not fulfilled the purpose of his visit. He was satisfied with the reception he met, the tight hugs he received from the Lord — "he, a sinner, and Krishna the abode of Lakshmi." And if Krishna, he opined, did not think it fit to give him anything, He might have thought it was to his good to remain poor, so that his mind might not turn away from Him.

By now he reached the vicinity of his hovel, but lo! his house was not there. He stood transfixed with confusion, wondering whether he had come to the wrong place, but all the landmarks showed him to be in the right. Then whose is this seven-storeyed mansion, the gorgeous parks, the pellucid ponds covered with lotuses, the smart maid-servants moving up

and down them? As he was attempting to fathom this mystery, men and women servants rushed to welcome him home, and his wife, who looked like Lakshmi herself, came down from an upper floor with impatience to take him in. The house was a magician's dream: its columns were of multicoloured gems, its ivory beds were plated with gold, its chairs and couches were solid gold padded with soft cushions. He guessed all this was given to him by Krishna for that mouthful of parched rice without so much as a hint of what He was going to present him. "The Lord knows," he reflected, "*how wealth and power bring about one's downfall, and very often He refuses to answer a prayer made for them by some thoughtless devotee.* May my devotion to the glorious Krishna increase!" And so it did. Both Sudama and his wife enjoyed sparingly the pleasures of the world with a diminishing taste for them and a growing devotion to the Lord, until their contemplation became unceasing, their ignorance dispelled and they attained to His State.

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## LXXXII

### *Reunion*

Sri Suka continues:

Once upon a time (obviously before the battle of Kurukshetra) a forecast of a solar eclipse was widely spread, which made people of many lands gather for a big religious function in the sacred place called Samantapanchaka (p. 186) where once, Lord Parasurama collected five pools of Kshatriyas' blood, and where subsequently he performed penance to atone for it. There came the chiefs of the Yadus — Ugrasena, Vasudeva, Akrura, Balarama, Krishna and many of His sons and grandsons. There came Nanda, many *gopa* chiefs and *gopis* who were yearning to see the face of their Beloved. There came the kings of Matsya, Vidarbha, Kosala, Kuru, Kekaya, Madurai, Kerala and others — friends as well as enemies of Krishna. The joy of reunion was visible in the glowing faces of the people of Vraja, in their hair which stood on end, and in their voices which were choked with emotions. Men embraced men and women hugged women, and they all bowed to one another, inquiring about each other's health and welfare. When Kunti saw her brothers and sisters, their children and Krishna, she forgot her grief but accused her brother Vasudeva, whom she had not seen for a very long time, of indifference, when she was badly in need of help in the days of her great sorrow. Vasudeva answered that he too had his great sorrow, when he and his wife were persecuted by Kamsa, who had imprisoned them, put them in chains, and killed their newborn babies.

Bhishma, Drona, Vidura, Kripa, Draupada, Dhritarashtra, his wife and sons and many other kings met Ugrasena, Vasudeva and Krishna with great affection. When Nanda and Yasoda met their foster-sons Krishna and Balarama, they folded them in their arms and put them in their laps to relieve the agony of a long separation. Devaki and Rohini embraced Yasoda and expressed their great gratitude to her for all she had done for their darlings. Vasudeva also embraced Nanda and told him all that he and his wife Devaki had to endure from the wicked Kamsa.

When Krishna found time to give his attention to the *gopis* in private, He found their minds absorbed in Him, a state of oneness through love which even Yogis cannot easily achieve. He embraced them, inquired after their health, and said with a smile:



“Beloved Ones, I had to leave you and Vraja for the good of all. I hope you have not forgotten Me or accused Me of ingratitude. It is the Supreme Providence who brings people together and who separates them in His own inscrutable wisdom. You have to be congratulated, dear friends, for this love of yours, which will lead you directly to the realisation of My true nature and to immortality. I am the beginning and end of all things, their inner and outer being, their material elements as well as the Self which dwells in and enjoys them.”

Hearing this, the *gopis* discarded their body-sense and merged in the Supreme Self, praising the Lord for His infinite wisdom, which is also infinite love, which liberates from the bondage of worldly existence.

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## LXXXIII – LXXXIV

### *Krishna Meets Ancient Rishis*

After showering His grace on the *gopis* Krishna met Yudhishtira and other friends and enquired after their welfare. While the men were thus conversing, their ladies had their own separate talk. Draupadi asked the wives of Krishna to relate to her the circumstances of their marriages, and each recounted her own story and her happiness at being His consort, ending with Rohini representing the sixteen thousand princesses who had been released from Narakasura's capital and married by Him. Hearing the glowing terms in which they spoke of their Krishna, and the great amity which prevailed among all of them, Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi and even the *gopis* shed tears of joy.

At that moment a great concourse of ancient Rishis appeared on the scene — Vyasa, Narada, Vishwamitra, Chyavana, Bharadwaja, Vasishtha, Brihaspati, the four Kumara celibates and many others. All the kings along with Krishna rose to receive them, offered them seats, garlands and water to wash their feet. Then the Lord spoke:

“Your visit, O ancient Masters of yoga, has conferred on us great blessings. People of poor penance, who confine God to an image are not given the privilege of worshipping you. *Water does not purify nor images made of earth and stone represent deities till after a long recourse to them, whereas a single sight or touch of a holy man achieves instant purification. The worship of the gods not only does not wash away sins but, on the contrary, promotes the sense of duality (the worshipper and the worshipped), whereas the service of the wise, be it only for a short time, wipes out all sins. He who looks upon his body, which consists of bile, wind and phlegm as himself, and those who are connected with it as his own, and images of stone and wood as worthy of worship, and water rather than holy men as purifier of sins, is verily a donkey among cows.*”

Hearing this from the lips of the Lord, the Sages were confounded: they deliberated among themselves and came to the conclusion that He was pretending to be an ordinary mortal, speaking and behaving like one. They immediately answered:

“Even the prajapatis and the most ancient sages like ourselves are deluded by Your Maya. Almighty Lord! You conceal Your true nature behind a human veil. Though one without a second, in Your astounding sporting proclivities, you appear many in names and forms, just like Mother Earth, which, though one only, assumes the names and forms of the countless objects which She produces. Even the Yadus who live with You do not know You, veiled as You are by Your own *Maya*. Just as a dreamer takes the dream objects as real and his dream body as himself, so does the deluded one take waking objects as real and his body as himself, and thus fails to realise You — his own real Self — Who stand beyond the waking and dream states. We Your devotees deem ourselves most fortunate, O Lord, for having set our eyes today on those feet of Yours which grant Liberation from this illusion. Pray shower Your Grace upon us.”

As the Rishis were taking leave after the function to return to their respective hermitages, Vasudeva fell at their feet and requested them to show him the way to redemption from action (karma). Narada, astonished, turned to the Rishis and said:

“Is it not a wonder, O divine Rishis, that Vasudeva should take Krishna as a mere child of his and inquire of us the way to salvation! *It is the way of men to underrate those who are very close to them, like the people who live on the very banks of the Ganga seek other rivers to purify them.*”

Then addressing Vasudeva in the presence of his Divine Sons, the kings and the Rishis, he said:

“*To counteract past actions (Karma) and to cease to desire future action, action (ritual) is necessary to please the Lord. Sacrifice to Him, the Lord of Sacrifice, the Shastras proclaim, brings peace to the mind and joy to the heart. To spend with an open heart and humility in the sacrifice to the Supreme Person the wealth which has been earned by honest means destroys the desire for worldly enjoyments, for possessions and even for the enjoyments of the higher worlds (after death), which are, after all, also transitory — subject to the depredations of Time, the all-destroyer.*”

Acting on the advice of Narada, Vasudeva fell at the feet of the Rishis and earnestly begged of them to be gracious to officiate in the sacrifices

which he wished immediately to start. They agreed, and helped Vasudeva to perform a number of great *yajnas* in which he lavishly distributed presents to the Rishis, the Brahmins, the kings, all his friends and relatives, the musicians, the gods and everyone present.

When the people started leaving Kurukshetra for their respective homes, Vasudeva stopped Nanda and the people of Vraja and reiterated his sense of indebtedness to them.

“Brother Nanda,” he said, “the bonds of affection which the Lord forges in the hearts of men, cannot be easily broken even by yogis who work hard to break them. The friendship which you, highly virtuous couple, showed us is unparalleled and can never be repaid. Formerly we could not return it to any degree because we were helpless, as you well know, and later we did nothing for you because we were drunk with excessive wealth and power. Do not wish a king’s throne, O Brother, to the man who seeks blessedness: it blinds him to the love of even his own kinsmen.”

So saying, Vasudeva wept, remembering all Nanda’s and Yasoda’s love for Krishna and Balarama, and made them put off their departure by three months, during which he, Ugrasena, Uddhava and the two brothers showered on them all the love and the precious gifts they deserved. Then after giving a hearty send off to His foster-parents, His old friends and the dear *gopis*, Krishna returned to Dwaraka with His party.

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***Krishna Recalls His Baby-Brothers from the Dead***

Sri Suka continues:

Vasudeva kept the Rishis' remarks about the Divinity of his sons in mind and connected it with what he himself had seen and heard of their achievements. One day, at Dwaraka, as both of them came to pay him their usual respects, he stopped them and addressed them as the Incarnation of the Supreme Lord Himself, saying:

“I know you are none other than the Lord of *prakriti* as well as of all souls, and not my human sons. You, Lord Krishna, once said that You had taken birth to destroy the Kshatriyas, who had become too heavy a burden on the earth. I now take refuge in Your feet to rid me of the suffering of transmigration. I am fed up with the cravings of the senses which deluded me in the belief that You, the Supreme Being, were my child. At the time of Your birth You Yourself declared that, though unborn, You had been taking births to defend Your own laws from being infringed or abused by the wicked.”

Sri Krishna answered:

“What you have just said, O jewel of the Yadus, is the highest truth. You, Balarama, Myself, all the citizens of Dwaraka, as well as all mobile and immobile things are indeed the one absolute Self, which is self-luminous, eternal, unqualified, but projects the qualities out of itself and creates multiplicity.”

Vasudeva felt greatly elated at these words of Krishna and, driving all sense of duality from his mind, he remained silent. But the auspicious Devaki, who had heard that her sons had brought from the abode of Yama their preceptor's child, implored them with brimming eyes to use their divine powers and bring back also her dear little ones who had been killed by Kamsa, to delight her longing maternal heart. Krishna and Balarama immediately entered Sutala, whose ruler, Bali (p. 170), received them with the honour and worship due to them and awaited their command. Krishna spoke their mind:

“In the first *manvantara* Marichi, the prajapati, had six sons who were all celestials. When one day they saw Brahma attempting to consort

with his own daughter, they laughed, for which they had to be conceived as asuras in the womb of Hiranyakasipu's wife, and thence transferred to Devaki's womb by Yogamaya to be killed at birth by Kamsa. Our mother Devaki has been grieving for them, which is why we have now come to take them to assuage her grief and then restore to them their freedom to return to their celestial sphere.”

At the sight of her babies Devaki was transported with joy, and her milk flowed in abundance. She embraced them and put them to the breast, which gave out not the ordinary milk, but nectar, the remnant of the milk which Krishna had sucked. With the nectar inside them and the touch of Krishna on their bodies the children attained Self-realisation and, bowing to their parents and divine brothers, they ascended to Heaven before their very eyes, which astounded Devaki who took it as one of Krishna's pranks.

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## LXXXVI

### *Arjuna Carries Off Krishna's Sister*

Recalling that Krishna's sister was his own grandmother, Parikshit requests Suka to relate how his grandfather Arjuna had succeeded in marrying her, though Balarama had intended her for Duryodhana. The Sage answers that in his extensive travels Arjuna once found himself in Prabhasa, where he heard that Subhadra, Vasudeva's daughter, was going to be given in marriage to Duryodhana, and determined to marry her himself, for which he went to Dwaraka disguised as an ascetic carrying the *tridanda* (the triple staff) of his order and living on the food to which pious people invited him. Once he was likewise invited for meal by Balarama at the palace, where he saw the young Subhadra, who immediately kindled passion in his heart, which, he observed, she reciprocated. Then he revealed himself and his mission to Krishna and His parents, and received their approval. He bided his time, until one day when she was driving to a temple outside the Fort area for worship, he jumped in her chariot and drove to Indraprastha, fighting away the suitors who attempted to intercept them. Balarama was greatly agitated at this behaviour of Arjuna, but Krishna and other relatives fell at his feet and pacified him and, as a token of his reconciliation, he sent to the couple many valuable gifts — elephants, horses, chariots, household utensils and furniture.

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## *The Lord is Slave of His Devotees*

Sri Suka now digresses to give an example of how the Lord surrenders Himself to His devotees, becoming more a servant than a master to them.

In Mithila, the capital of Videha, lived the Brahmin Shrutadeva, who was a great devotee of Krishna, full of wisdom and free from passion. Although a house-holder, he performed all his duties and lived on whatever Providence placed at his disposal without efforts on his part, which was enough for his family's bare subsistence. Likewise the Ruler of Mithila, Bahulashwa, was greatly devoted to the Lord, Who loved them both equally. Without waiting for them to come to Him, Krishna Himself undertook the long journey to Videha to reward His devotees with the sight of His holy person, taking with Him a number of ancient Rishis: Narada, Vyasa, Suka (the narrator), Kanwa, Atri, Brihaspati, Chyavana and others. Passing through various territories and receiving the homage of their people who came to meet them, the party arrived at Mithila where the citizens headed by Bahulashwa came out in their thousands to welcome them and, as both Shrutadeva and the Ruler invited them to their houses with joined palms, Krishna went to both of them simultaneously, duplicating Himself as well as the Rishis without the knowledge of either host. Both the devotees went into ecstasy when the Lord entered their houses: Bahulashwa prostrated himself, and Shrutadeva danced round and round waving his upper-cloth over his head in wild rapture. They both praised Krishna as the self-effulgent Soul of all creation as well as its material sheaths, pervading and transcending the universe. Krishna stayed with them and instructed them in the path of righteousness till they attained oneness with Him.

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## LXXXVII

### *The Vedas Praise The Absolute Self*

King Parikshit asks how the Vedas, which deal only with the phenomenal *gunas*, are competent to describe the Brahman, which is undefinable and transcends the *gunas* in both their un-manifest and manifest states.

Sri Suka answers that the absolute Self (Brahman) assumes the senses, intellect, etc. *to enjoy both the diversity as well as the bliss of the final beatitude (which cannot be done except through the actions of the gunas)*. This indeed is the secret of the teaching of the Vedas relating to Brahman. *Whoever comprehends it will be freed from the false identification with the body and will enjoy the blessedness of its realisation.*

Sri Suka develops his point by telling the story of a meeting between the divine sages Narayana and Narada on one of the latter's visits to the former's hermitage in Kalpa (Badrinath) village, where he had been dwelling from the beginning of this *kalpa* for the good of humanity. Bowing to him in salutation, Narada put to him this very question when he was seated in the midst of other Rishis, who listened to their dialogue. Narayana in answer preferred to repeat the exposition which had once been given by the Kumara Sananda to an assembly of eternal celibate Rishis in a discussion on the nature of the absolute Brahman about which the Vedas are silent. Sananda said:

“At the end of the *pralaya* when the manifestation lies still dormant in Brahman, (to cause it to start moving) the deities in charge of the Vedas chant hymns praying that His mighty energies may set in motion a new life-cycle, whereby the *jivas* may resume their upward march towards Self-realisation:

“Manifest Your glory, reveal Your Supreme Nature, O exalted Lord, and root out the ignorance without beginning (*avidya*) of the *jivas* who assumed the *gunas*, which veiled their real nature. The Vedas can describe You only when You use Your power of illusion (*Maya*) in the act of creation. The wise know this universe to be Yourself, because it comes from You, appears in You and resolves into You, Who alone remain whether in its manifestation or in its dissolution, like the earth

in an earthen pot, which is always earth and nothing else. Having assumed various forms, You of Your own accord appear as the high and the low, like fire (which assumes the shapes of the various pieces of the firewood). Men of unclouded vision, who are purged of the desire for reward for their actions, realise Your true nature as the one changeless, indivisible, homogeneous Substance in all these unreal forms. The world need not be real simply because it emanates from You, the Real, for the effect need not be the same<sup>[21]</sup> as the cause. The world, being a mixture of both Brahman and *avidya*, cannot be real (like the serpent, which is the combination of the real rope and ignorance which causes the illusion), nor can it be real because of its serving a worldly purpose (performance of ritual), which is after all done in blind obedience to tradition. *Your utterances (Vedic texts), O Lord, on account of their being susceptible to many interpretations, delude the dull-witted who have excessive faith in ritual. As it has a beginning and an end, as there was a time when it was not, and there will be a time when it will not be, the world certainly cannot be said to have an existence in the middle, other than an appearance in You, Who are absolute Existence.* That is why the Vedas compare it to the various shapes given to a material substance, which are mere appearances in that substance (ornaments from the substance gold, and earthenware from clay). Only the unregenerate who come under the spell of Your potent *Maya* mistake this unreal world for real and their bodies for themselves and, thus, suffer transmigration.

*“He who realises You as You are, no longer feels the pain and pleasure determined by his past actions, nor recognises the binding injunctions of the Vedas. Even Brahma could not find Your limits; for in You abide, like particles of dust in the air, multitudes of cosmic eggs with all their sheaths driven about by the wheel of Time. That is where the Srutis become useful to describe You, the limitless, by simply negating the world, as not You.”*

Narayana Rishi continues to say that the assembled sages paid homage to Sananda for his foregoing exposition of the Self in the form of a hymn uttered by the Srutis and realised its true nature. Narada proceeded directly to the hermitage of Vedavyasa, after saluting the divine Narayana Rishi, and repeated to him this hymn as he heard it from the latter’s lips, *which demonstrates that though Brahman is undefinable and unaffected by the*

*gunas, it can be realised by the mind (which is rendered free from the gunas).*

[21] “The effect need not be the same as the cause,” etc., is another of those pregnant hints which the *Bhagavata* offers for meditation. The “effect” is the world which need not be real simply because its “cause”, Brahman, is real, like the non-existent serpent in the existent rope seen in the dark. To perceive a thing that does not exist, three elements must be present:

(1) a cause which is real, to be the ground of the appearance of the unreal — the rope in this illustration.

(2) ignorance, to cause the delusion of existence in the non-existent. This is the darkness in which the non-existent serpent is perceived. And, lastly,

(3) an intelligent entity to be the victim of delusion, otherwise how can there be delusion and for whom? This is the cogniser of the serpent.

In the case of the world’s illusion, the deluded entity is the *jiva*, which, in its real nature, is pure intelligence, cognition, under the influence of the senses (the “darkness” in the analogy) a non-existent world (the “serpent”) superimposed on itself as the substratum (the “rope”). Thus the world — the dream like superimposition is not real, although its ground — the Self of the *jiva* — is real. This hymn is the Vedanta in a nutshell.

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## LXXXVIII

### *Vishnu Extricates Shiva From Difficulty*

Another doubt arises in Parikshit's mind concerning the anomalous attitudes which distinguish the followers of Shiva, Who is the embodiment of penance and supreme Yoga, from those of Vishnu, Who is the Consort of the goddess of wealth and worldly enjoyments. The former, far from following the asceticism of their Master, are known to enjoy great wealth and sense-pleasure, whereas the latter possess self-control and dispassion.

Sri Suka replies that Lord Shiva is ever connected with the manifestation of the *gunas* through His divine energy (Shakti), from which He is never separate. Those who worship Him as the presiding deity of the cosmos, or of any of the principles of manifestation — ego, mind, intellect, senses — naturally attain prosperity in the cosmos; whereas the worshippers of Vishnu who stands beyond the *gunas* as the Supreme Purusha, must rid themselves of the *gunas* to reach His State. Lord Krishna, answering a very similar question put to Him by Yudhishtira at the end of the *Aswamedha* sacrifice, said:

*“I gradually take away the wealth of him on whom I wish to shower My Grace until he is reduced to penury and extreme misery. Forsaken equally by relatives and friends, he strives again and again to rise and again and again finds himself thwarted, till complete despair brings him to My devotees, when I reveal My Grace to him in the realisation of My infinite nature, which consists of pure Intelligence and eternal Existence. That is why many, finding Me difficult of attainment, worship other devatas who are easy to propitiate, and feel elated by the worldly prosperity, which these grant them and which eventually leads them so much astray as to make them forget even the gods who had conferred it on them.”*

Illustrating the last point, Sri Suka recounts the ancient legend of how the vicious demon Vrika, on the advice of Narada, performed *tapas* by daily cutting a piece of his own flesh and offering it, as oblation, to Lord Shiva for seven days, and when the latter finally appeared while Vrika was on the verge of cutting off his head to offer it as the last oblation, and asked him what he wanted, the wicked demon demanded that the person on whose head he placed his hand should die on the spot, which Shiva could not help

granting and which rebounded on Himself; for the demon, wanting to test the boon, attempted to put his hand on the head of its giver. It was a boon which Shiva grew to regret, when He trembled with fear and fled, hotly pursued by the asura. As He could find no place where He could hide from His pursuer, Shiva sought the protection of Lord Narayana in *Vaikuntha*. In order to save Him, the Lord assumed the form of a *Brahmachari* (student of religion) and held the asura in conversation, followed by some refreshment, when He inquired about the purpose of his visit, and insinuated that Shiva's boon was utterly useless on account of Daksha's curse, which Vrika could verify by putting his hand on his own head and come absolutely to no harm. Taken in by the Lord's sweet address and manners, and by the illusion which He had cast on Him, the asura acted on the suggestion and fell dead, as if struck by a lightning. Thus Lord Vishnu saved Shiva from the predicament which he had brought upon Himself by His too quick response to prayers.

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# BOOK ELEVEN

# I

## *The Curse On The Yadus*

The Lord's mission on earth is nearing its end. The celestials soliciting Him to return to His eternal abode, He resolves to complete the destruction of the wicked and the troublemakers so that He may be free to withdraw from the world. He has by now disposed of countless demons, daityas, and tyrant kings, and has provoked the great war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, which exterminated the Kuru race. There remains only His own race, which has become very wealthy, proud and mighty because of His unceasing guidance and support. He thought to Himself:

“The Yadu race has, under My protection, enjoyed an unparalleled prosperity and has become uncontrollable and too strong to be defeated. I alone can destroy it by causing dissension within it, which will entirely consume it, like a bamboo forest which gets consumed by the fire sparked by itself, after which I shall return to My transcendent *Vaikuntha*.”

By His Yogamaya Krishna caused the Yadava youths to tease the Rishis and invite upon themselves their inexorable curse, which was bound, He knew, to doom the whole race.

The ancient Rishis Narada, Vishwamitra, Kanwa, Durvasa, Vasishtha and others, who had spent some time in Dwaraka with Krishna, one day took leave of Him and went to stay at Pindaraka, not far away. The young nobles and princes, who were amusing themselves in the neighbourhood, took it into their heads to play a trick on them by dressing Samba, Krishna's son from Jambavati, like a girl and went to the Rishis, fell at their feet in mock humility and said:

“This young lady of black eyes, O great Brahmins, is with child, and is anxious to know from your unfailing vision whether the child she is bearing is a boy or girl. She feels shy to ask you herself.”

In their “unfailing vision” the Rishis guessed the trick, and replied in anger: “She is bearing a mace which will destroy your race, O fools!” which terrified the young men, who, on searching Samba actually found an iron mace wrapped in the cloth which covered his belly. In great alarm they rushed to Dwaraka and told the story to King Ugrasena before all the

people, showing the mace which had supernaturally appeared in Samba's clothes after the curse of the Rishis. The King ordered the mace to be reduced to powder and scattered on the sea water. But Fate caused the powdered iron to be driven back with the waves to the land, where it grew into a kind of grass called *eraka*, and the last iron piece, which could not be pounded, was swallowed by a fish and subsequently fixed to the arrow of a hunter — Jara by name — who found it in its maw.

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## II – V

### *Narada Instructs Vasudeva*

While the aforesaid Rishis stayed at Pindaraka, Sage Narada used frequently to come to Dwaraka to wait upon Krishna for some time. On one of these visits Vasudeva approached him with a prayer to teach him those actions which pleased the Lord most, for in the previous life, he said, he worshipped Him for the purpose of getting offspring, but now, with Narada's help, he aspired to rid himself of transmigration, which is replete with misery. The Sage answered:

“The virtues and duties (actions) you seek to know, O Vasudeva, indeed purify the mind. I will do well to repeat to you the conversations which took place on this subject in ancient times between the nine sons of the divine Rishabha (p. 92) and Nimi, king of the Videha. The wise declare that Rishabha was a ray of Lord Narayana in a human body, who came to teach Liberation by the path of Renunciation. Out of his one-hundred sons, eighty-one turned Brahmin authors of treatises on ritualistic worship, and nine were naked ascetics, dedicated to the knowledge of the Self, and roamed about to teach it to the world. Their names were: Kavi, Hari, Antariksha Prabuddha, Pippalayana, Avirhotra, Drumila, Chamasa and Karabhajana. When once Nimi was performing a big sacrifice conducted by the local Rishis, these nine ascetics came in and were received with great respect. At the right time in the course of the celebration the King bowed to them, praised them that it was very rare in life to meet such blessed souls as them, and solicited their favour to instruct the assembly in the virtues which end in the attainment of the supreme bliss. The Sages complimented the King for his piety and were pleased to answer one by one all his questions, which proved very comprehensive, beginning with Kavi who said:

‘For him whose mind is ever restless, the worship of the Lord, O King, is safest, inasmuch as complete reliance on Him does away with all fear. All actions whatever, whether of the body, the mind, or the senses should be surrendered entirely to Him, Lord Narayana, Who is one's own Self, which will annihilate the sense of duality. *Although duality has no existence, it, however, appears in the mind that dwells on it, like*

*a dream in the dreamer's mind. The seeker should train himself not to place faith in the thoughts that rise from it (the mind), but to take them like pictures or dreams. From this fearlessness results. An uninterrupted concentration on the Lord brings about a distaste for the pleasures of the senses and immediate knowledge of Him Who is supreme Peace.*"

Narada continues.

King Nimi now humbly inquires about the peculiar traits which distinguish the devotees. The sage Hari answers:

‘He is a great devotee of the Lord, who sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself — the Divine Self. He is a second rate devotee who is simply friendly to his fellow-devotees, compassionate towards the ignorant, and indifferent to enemies. The most ordinary devotee is he who worships the Lord with faith in an image and serves no one else. The highest devotee is he who sees the universe as the Lord’s illusion and, although he contacts objects of sense, he neither delights in them nor feels repulsion for them. By virtue of his constant remembrance of the Lord, he is never overwhelmed by the world phenomena — birth, death, hunger, thirst, fear, longing — which, strictly speaking, pertain to the body. *Cravings and impulsion to action, which sow the seeds of karma in a future birth, never take root in his heart.* Being different from his body, he never attributes to himself lineage, birth, death, social status, race, or designation in life, nor does he distinguish between his own property and that of others. Ever serene, he looks upon all beings with an equal eye.”

Nimi now inquires about the nature of *Maya* which bewilders even those who use it to deceive others. Antariksha answers:

“In order to enjoy the senses as well as the bliss of Liberation, the Prime Purusha created out of Himself the great elements from which He made all things, high and low. Then He became one mind and ten organs and entered the great elements as the many *jivas* with bodies, through which He enjoys the sense-objects and to which He grew attached by identifying Himself with them. *This identification with the gross body rather than with His own eternal Self is Maya, which causes Him much suffering as jiva, and from which He, however, escapes by seeking the realisation of His true nature, and after many*

many births attains it. This realisation is very blissful and is called Liberation.

The King of the Videhas again asks how can the man who mistakes his body for himself overcome this divine *Maya*, which is so difficult to conquer by those of uncontrolled mind. The sage Prabuddha replies:

“It is common knowledge that human couples who expect to derive happiness from their union reap only misery. What happiness can be gained from wealth which is gathered with so much hardship, or from children and relatives, who are but temporary acquisitions, *when even heavenly felicities do not last to eternity? Lasting happiness, O King, can be found nowhere but in the realisation of the absolute Truth through the guidance of a guru, who has mastered the meaning of the Vedas and has himself experienced it*, and through the practice of the well-known virtues namely, friendship, humility, benevolence, purity, performance of duty, endurance, study of the Scriptures, sincerity, non-violence, evenness of mind, control of speech, etc. The company of saints and the study of the Lord’s *avatars* also increase devotion (to Him), which eventually never fails to carry one safely across the bottomless ocean of *Maya*.”

The King said:

“You are, O Sages, the best knowers of Brahman, Who is also called *Paramatman* (Supreme Self) or Supreme Narayana. Pray explain to me His real Nature.”

Rishi Pippalayana answered:

“Know it, O Ruler of men, to be the absolute Reality, that which causes other things to exist, itself remaining causeless; that which prevails in the waking, dreaming and deep sleep states; that which animates the body, the breath, the senses and the mind, enabling them to perform their respective functions, and illuminates (knows) them without being illuminated (known) by them, even as the sparks cannot illuminate the fire which gives rise to them. Nor can the Scriptures (Vedas) give a positive delineation of it, though they are its authority: they affirm its existence by merely denying that of its opposite (world phenomena). It is thus the effect as well as the cause. This Brahman is unborn and deathless, neither grows nor changes but is the witness of all changeable things. *Just as the sunlight is visible to the healthy eye, so*

*is the Self (Brahman) perceivable by the heart which is devoted to the Lord and which has been purified from the changing gunas and from action.”*

Narada continues.

Speaking of action reminds King Nimi to inquire:

“Pray, O Sages, describe to me that Yoga of Action which rids one of the consequences of action (karma) and entitles one to the Supreme Knowledge which springs from inaction. On a former occasion in the presence of my father Ikshwaku I put this question to the celibate Rishis (the four Kumaras), but got no answer from them. *You may be aware of the cause of their reticence.”*

The Sage Avirhotra replies:

“In prescribing certain actions and prohibiting certain other actions, *the Vedas have the one ultimate purpose of ridding one of action and its fruits. The prescribed actions tempt the unregenerate with the joys of heaven, just as sweets tempt the child to swallow medicines.* The ignorant who has no control over his senses, however, must not fail to perform the prescribed actions, or he will incur the sin of neglecting his religious duties, which will keep him bound to the cycle of birth and death.

“Performance of the prescribed actions without attachment to their fruits, as dedication to the Lord, leads to its ultimate fulfilment, *which is the same as Supreme Knowledge, which results from inaction. The fruits promised by the Vedas to result from action are intended to create interest in action (which will gradually lead to their renunciation).* Therefore the seeker who is determined to cut the knot of ignorance from his heart and attain the Self, takes to worship Lord Keshava through the Vedic and Tantric rites, after having received initiation and detailed instructions from a qualified preceptor.”

Nimi asks the Sages to tell him of the different *avatars* of Sri Hari, of what He is doing now and will do in future. Drumila answers:

“To endeavour to recount the deeds of the Lord would be more difficult than to count the particles of dust in this earth. When He projects the five primary elements out of Himself as the physical universe and enters it, He assumes the name of *Purusha*, who is pure consciousness

by nature. By association with *Rajas* He becomes Brahma the creator, with *Sattva guna* He becomes Vishnu the preserver, and with *Tamas* Rudra the destroyer. In each cycle these three come into play.”

As for the Lord’s descents as special *avatars*, Drumila cites them one by one ending with Kalki, the twenty-second, which will take place at the end of Kali age, to destroy the Sudra rulers who will not be competent to administer justice and protect the people. He closes by saying that His manifestations are too many to be exhausted in the telling.

The King of the Videha again asks:

“What, O Jewel among the knowers of the Self, is the fate of those who do not worship Sri Hari, whose desires are strong, and whose minds and senses uncontrolled?”

The sage Chamasa replies:

“The four *Ashramas* and the four *Varnas* — Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra — are (like everything else) subject to the play of the *gunas*. Those who do not worship the Lord, though cognisant of Him as being the Ruler and Creator of the universe, fall from their castes and descend to the infernal regions. Most women and Sudras do not have the remotest chance of hearing of Him and His glory, and thus deserve your pity. The first three castes are nearer to His sacred feet by virtue of their birth and Vedic initiations and ceremonies. *Yet they miss the meaning of the Vedas by taking literally their reference to the material rewards bestowed by ritualistic actions, and become confounded. Though foolish, they consider themselves learned and swell with conceit, yielding to the fascinating descriptions of the fruits of action.* Dominated by *rajas*, their desires are insatiable, their deeds cruel, their anger is as dangerous as that of poisonous serpents, their love centres on ostentation. They mock at the humble devotees, revel in sexual delights, talk of pleasure only, and offer their devotion to women. *In their sacrifices they fail to observe the most essential parts, namely, distribution of charity in food and money, and kill animals for food rather than for the sacrifices alone, winking at the sin of destroying life unnecessarily. Blinded by the pride of birth and wealth, these wicked sinners despise not only the devotees of the Lord, but the Lord Himself (by killing Him in the form of animals for their consumption). They interpret the Vedas according to their own tastes*

*and ignore the portions which speak of the Lord as the aim and object of all human endeavour. Man is inclined by nature to the enjoyments of sex, flesh and wine, but the Vedas provide a check on the abuses of these tendencies by permitting sex relation only with one's wedded wife, the eating of flesh only at animal sacrifices, and the drinking of wine only at the sautramani sacrifice. By curbing these inclinations the mind will turn to the pursuit of dharma and true piety, which will develop insight and realisation of the supreme peace of Liberation. Those who use their wealth for their own and their families' comforts forget death, their formidable enemy, which may at any moment strike them down and deprive them of that very wealth and that very family. Those who kill animals remorselessly are fated to be devoured by those very animals in a future life, and those who hate their fellow-creatures hate the Lord Who dwells in them, for which they will be punished by a precipitous fall. Likewise those who run only after the three pursuits — kama, artha and dharma — taking no heed of the fourth (namely, moksha), invite ruin upon themselves by deliberately keeping themselves in ignorance. They kill their own selves and, as punishment for it, they will be compelled to leave behind everything that they had so painstakingly and unrighteously amassed, and enter abysmal darkness.”*

Nimi now asks his last question:

“We are told, O holy Sages, that the Lord assumes various shapes, names and complexions in various yugas and that men, likewise, worship Him differently.”

The Sage Karabhajana replies:

“No doubt Lord Narayana appears differently in the four different yugas. In Satya He assumes a white complexion and a form and dress peculiar to it, namely, four arms and matted locks, holding a staff and a kamandalu, like an ascetic, and is dressed in deer skin and barks of trees. His names are then Vaikuntha, Dharma, Suparna, Hamsa, Yogeswara, Amala, Ishvara, Purusha, Avyakta, Paramatman, etc. In that age people are serene in mind, friendly to all creatures, free from bias. Their worship consists of meditation and control of the mind and senses. In the Treta pious men teach the Vedas and worship the Lord as the embodiment of all the deities, following the Vedic rites. His names

are then *Vishnu*, *Yajna*, *Sarvadeva* (the Lord of all), *Jayanta*, etc., and His form is crimson in colour, having four arms, golden locks and a triple string round the loins. In the *Dwapara Yuga* seekers of truth worship Him through hymns, praising Him as the almighty Narayana, Vasudeva, Sankarshana, all-pervading, all-containing and dwelling in all hearts. (His appearance and dress as well as weapons have already been described again and again). In the *Kali Yuga*, He is worshipped by Vedic and Tantric rituals and by recitation of all His names. The wise who understand the merits of this age declare it to be the easiest for the attainment of Liberation, for, by merely repeating the Lord's names freedom from transmigration is achieved. In the Kali age, however, O great King, few are devoted to Lord Narayana, but in the land of the Dravidians, which is purified by many sacred rivers, the number is much larger. *Renunciation of all duties and seeking refuge only at the feet of the Lord, absolve one from all debts to the gods, the Rishis and the ancestors.*”

Narada continued.

When King Nimi heard the expositions of the nine sons of the Divine Rishabha, he, his priests and preceptors worshipped them and, acting upon their teaching, he attained the highest Goal:

“You too, O Vasudeva, will certainly attain it if, full of faith and detachment, you will likewise act upon it. Your fame and that of Devaki has already filled the universe for your being the parents of Lord Hari, Whose mere touch, let alone your love and service to Him as your son, has already purified you.”

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## VI

### *The Celestials Demand the Return of the Lord*

Sri Suka continues.

After Narada left Dwaraka, Brahma, Shiva and all the celestials, *Siddhas* and Rishis called on Krishna with garlands of celestial flowers in their hands and the singing of hymns. Brahma, who led them, spoke on their behalf as follows:

“One hundred and twenty five years ago, O Lord, You descended in the Yadu race in response to our prayer to lighten the burden of the earth. You have achieved that purpose in deeds which will be the talk of pious men of the whole *Kaliyuga*. You have firmly established righteousness, so that there remains nothing more for You to accomplish on earth, for even Your own race, which has grown arrogant and tyrannical, due to the wealth and support You have given to it, is as good as destroyed by the curse of the Rishis. Now we have come to pray You, O Supreme Vishnu, to return to Your transcendent *Vaikuntha* and bless us Your servants, the guardians of the spheres.”

The glorious Krishna answered:

“I have already decided on what you are now asking Me to do. Grown insolent by an unlimited prosperity and heroism, the Yadus feel inclined to dominate the whole world, and are only kept in leash by Me, as is the ocean by its shores. If I leave before destroying it, they will overwhelm and annihilate the human race by their overflowing energy. The sentence on them has already been passed by the Brahmins’ curse and I have only to see to its execution and then bid farewell to the earth, when I shall visit your spheres.”

Brahma and all the celestials fell prostrate before the Lord and departed. Calling the elders of the Yadus, Krishna spoke to them thus:

“You are well aware of the curse of the Brahmins on us and of the grave portents of its taking action. We must without loss of time betake ourselves to a safe place, which I suggest to be Prabhasa on the sacred Ganga, where once the moon god bathed and got rid of the phthisis which he had contracted by the curse of Daksha. By bathing there and propitiating the gods and the ancestors, and by giving gifts to the



Brahmins, we will wash away our sins and cross the ocean of ignorance, as people cross the sea with boats.”

Whilst the Yadavas were busy packing their chariots for the journey, Uddhava, who had observed the ominous signs, approached his Master in private, touched His feet with his head, and with joined palms said:

“I have strong forebodings, O Supreme Yogi, that after destroying the Yadu race You will leave the earth altogether; for, almighty though You are, You have taken no steps to countermand the Rishis’ curse. I cannot bear being away from Your feet for even a second. Grant that I am taken with You to Your divine abode. I have always waited on You as Your humble servant and devotee in Your bed, bath, kitchen, or in Your entertainments. I wore the garlands that had decked Your breasts and the clothes that had wrapped Your body, and ate the remnant of Your food: how can I now be separated from You?”

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***KRISHNA'S INSTRUCTIONS TO UDDHAVA***[\[22\]](#).

## VII – IX

### *The Avadhuta's Legend*

Sri Krishna answered:

“Your forebodings are well founded, O highly blessed Uddhava. Brahma, Lord Shiva, and all the guardians of the spheres have demanded My return to *Vaikuntha*. Besides, I have accomplished the task for which I descended to the earth with Balarama, except the extinction of the Yadu race, which is destined to perish by its own hand. On the seventh day from now Dwaraka will go under the sea. The world will be invaded by the spirit of Kali and will lose its auspiciousness as soon as I turn My back on it; for no sooner the Kali age moves in, righteousness will move out of it: people will develop a taste for unrighteous ways. You must not remain here, O good Uddhava, but shake off all attachment to your family and kinsmen and move about the world with a mind centred wholly on Me.

*“You must always remember that whatever is thought by the mind, perceived by the eye and the ear, and spoken by the tongue is the creation of the mind and, therefore, illusory.* The restless mind easily falls victim to the illusion of diversity, which leads to the conception of good and evil and the discrimination between prescribed action, inaction, and prohibited action. By controlling your mind and senses you will see the world in your own self, and your own self in Me, the Supreme Lord. Possessed of this knowledge, and immersed in the contentment of Self-realisation, you will experience no obstructions in life. *He who rises above both good and evil will not refrain from a prohibited action out of fear of evil consequences, nor will he perform a prescribed action out of hope for rewards, but will act like a child who takes no thought of consequences.* Being a friend to all, and possessing a serene mind which sees the world as Myself, you never again suffer the pangs of transmigration.

Uddhava said:

“It is for my highest good that You, the Embodiment the Soul and Goal of Yoga, are preaching the Yoga of Renunciation, which is extremely difficult to practise. I am very ignorant, O Lord, profoundly attached to

my body and children, who are, after all, the creation of Your *Maya*. I pray to You, O Master, to instruct me, Your servant, how to attain easily the sublime Renunciation of which You speak. There is no one other than Yourself either here on earth or among the gods who is qualified to teach the self-luminous *Atman*, the one and only Reality. Even Brahma is under the influence of Your *Maya*, for he looks upon the world as real. Afflicted as I am with grief for having to part with You, O Lord I seek Your guidance, You the friend of all, perfect, eternal and infinite, the omniscient Ruler of the universe Whose eternal abode is the transcendent *Vaikuntha*.”

The Lord answered:

*“Those who take to the investigation into the nature of the world raise themselves above their sensuous cravings. The Self itself is the surest guide to itself through direct observation and inference. Men of right judgement and of knowledge of the secrets of Sankhya and Yoga end by directly perceiving Me as their own Self, possessing all the faculties (whereby the phenomena are perceived). Of all the forms which emanate from Me, I cherish most the human body, because through it, keen and vigilant seekers can have a direct knowledge of Me, who am otherwise difficult to perceive. Let Me illustrate this by an ancient legend.”*

“The highly intelligent King Yadu, who was as great in piety as he was in heroism, once meeting a young Brahmin ascetic (*avadhuta*) of a high order (obviously Lord Dattatreya, p. 6) of unclean body, though full of wisdom, roaming about aimlessly, addressed him thus:

‘Men strive after wealth, power and religious merits with the purpose of acquiring fame, worldly enjoyments and long life; but you seem to desire nothing, to do nothing, and behave like a dunce, although you are in sturdy health and appear to be wise. It is a wonder that in the midst of people who are burning in the blazing fire of lust and envy you remain cool like the elephant who is half-immersed in the cold water of the Ganga. Pray tell me the secret of this abiding peace of yours.’

“The Avadhuta answered:

‘By wandering freely in the world my keen intellect has furnished me with many teachers from whom I have learnt much wisdom. They are the earth, the air, the tree, the dove, the bee, the wasp, the body, etc. —

twenty-four in number. By watching their behaviour and nature I have gathered many practical lessons. From the earth, for example, I have learnt its imperturbability under the great stress of having to bear all the created things. The tree, which is subject to depredation by every passer-by, human and non-human, has taught me to submit my will to that of others ungrudgingly. A seeker of Truth should be satisfied with bare subsistence, like the air in the breath (which is sustained by the life principle), and should not seek to tickle his palate by various delicious edibles. Like the air he should move about all things without attaching himself to any, and be unaffected by their merits and demerits. Although he has a body possessing many characteristics, shape, complexion, smell, etc., the ascetic whose mind is fixed on his own Self, knows himself to be devoid of them, like the odourless air which carries the smells of the objects which it pervades. From the dove I have learnt that the ascetic must conceive no fondness for any person or object, which will end in sorrow, like the family of doves which were excessively devoted to one another and which came to grief when they were caught by a fowler, who first trapped the two fledglings, and then one after another the parents who, out of love for their babies, had gone to witness their misfortune and cry with them. The infatuated householder parts completely with his peace of mind. *He who digresses from the quest of the final beatitude to a family life resembles the man who, having climbed to a great height, instead of soaring higher still, hurls himself down to the earth.* From the python I have learnt to feed on only what comes my way without exertion. *The ascetic should remain inactive and profound like the calm, deep sea, allowing himself to be under no one's control, nor be affected by likes and dislikes, elation and depression.* The uncontrolled mind comes under the Lord's deluding power as soon as it sees an alluring woman decked with jewels and a fine dress, and gets consumed by the fire of hell, as does a moth by the candlelight that lures it.

*'The acquisition of what one loves most is, indeed, the source of all afflictions. He attains unlimited happiness who, knowing this, does not attempt to acquire anything, not even companionship, for where many people live together discord is bound to arise.* With the cessation of desire the two lower *gunas* are transcended, and through the pure *Sattva guna* one passes to the bliss of *samadhi* (absorption in the Self)

by constant concentration on the Self. This is the lesson I have learnt from the wasp, which, in its original form, is a larva, but living in a wasp's hole and fixing its mind on the wasp is transformed into a wasp. From my body I learned that the process of birth and death is painful, yet it eventually induces thinking, discrimination and renunciation. The palate drags one in one direction, the generative organ in another, the eyes in a third, the nose, the stomach, the ear in a number of other directions, *like the wealthy husband of many wives who is incessantly tortured by their rivalries and their insatiable needs. Yet the reason with which the Lord endows him, enables him ultimately to realise the Supreme Reality.*

‘Having freed myself of all attachments, I roam about the world fully established in the knowledge and freedom of my own Self. It is therefore impossible to build a comprehensive and stable knowledge from only one teacher.’”

(This legend illustrates Krishna's statement that the human body can be made the best instrument for the attainment of the Supreme Goal.)

[22] Chapters 7 to 29 form what is known as the *Uddhava Gita*, which consists, as the name indicates, of the Lord's teachings to Uddhava. It is the heart of the *Bhagavata* and considered to be an amplification of the *Bhagavad Gita* by those who are in doubt about whether *Karma* or *Jnana* is the latter's message. Its crystal clear lucidity leaves no ground for any doubt on this subject.

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### *Fatuity of Celestial Enjoyment and of Action*

The Lord continued:

“My devotee should abstain from all desire and should conduct himself in conformity with the rules prescribed for his caste order and family status. With a purified mind he will be able to observe how the actions of the person who pursues pleasure produce diametrically opposite results, namely, misery. My devotee should therefore abstain from actions which are prompted by desire and should perform the prescribed duties as taught by Me. *He alone is exempt from duties whose mind is fully engaged on the inquiry of the Self.* My seeker should devoutly attend on his *guru, who must be of serene mind and has realised Me and whom he should regard as identical with Myself.*

“Just as fire assumes the shapes of the pieces of wood which it consumes, *so does the Self assume*[\[23\]](#)*, the qualities (gunas) of the bodies which it pervades, the bodies being in effect nothing but qualities, and the Self the Substance that supports them. Identifying the one with the other leads to transmigration, and separating the one from the other by investigation, to Supreme Knowledge. The perfect wisdom which is imparted by the perfect guru promptly destroys not only the illusion of the qualities but the qualities themselves.* (This is called transcendence of the *gunas* into the absolute Brahman.)

“As for the enjoyment of heaven, it is also subject to impermanence, frustration and failure. The sacrifices which propitiate the gods entitle the sacrificer to the same heavenly pleasures as the gods themselves enjoy, but only for so long as the fruits of his merits last: thereafter he takes birth in lower regions, according to his past actions and associations. So long as, propelled by the *gunas*, the senses are active, they perceive diversity in the *Atman* and impel action, the fruits of action and bondage for the *jiva*. *All actions result in misery and cause new actions in new bodies, so that in this world there is little peace for the jiva.*”

Uddhava asked:

“Do explain to me, O Lord, how does the *jiva* (which is said to be the unaffected Self) remain free from the actions of the body? Also how can the regenerate be distinguished from the unregenerate and how does he behave in eating, sleeping, walking, playing, etc.?”

[23] This, the Self, as *jiva*, does under the influence of *avidya*. Being pure consciousness occupying every point of the body, it naturally takes the shape of the body, as does the space in a pot. Hence it ascribes to itself all the characteristics of the body and thinks, I am thin or fat, tall or short, dark or fair, etc. It thus becomes an entity separate from other *jivas* with interests entirely different from, often even in conflict with, theirs, which causes it to be subjected to the laws of karma and transmigration.

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## XI

### *Transcendence of Action*

The Lord answered:

*“It is only with reference to the actions of the gunas, not to My essential nature, that I am said to be in bondage or Liberation. And as the gunas are rooted in illusion, there can be neither true bondage nor true Liberation for Me, but only a dream-like apprehension of them. Even transmigration is unreal.* You may compare the two entities, one in bondage and the other in Liberation, in one and the same individual to two birds alike in nature living in companionship in the same nest on a peepul tree. One of them plucks and eats the fruits of the tree, whilst the other, though remaining unfed, is superior to it in strength. The latter is aware of itself as well as of the other, and is free from desire, whereas the former is not aware of its companion and has always been bound by desire (on account of this unawareness).

*“The man of vidya (knower of Truth, i.e., the regenerate) though he has a body, is not conditioned by it, any more than a dreamer just awakened from the dream is conditioned by his dream body; and when he apprehends objects through the sensory organs, he knows that he is not doing so. The man of avidya (the unregenerate), on the contrary, remains in the illusion that he is the doer of his actions, which are actually done by the Indriyas (organs of actions and perceptions). He who comprehends this will lose interest in all perceived objects as well as in all actions, remaining free like the ether. He is really free and wise who remains unaffected though his senses feed on objects of sense. He is really free and wise whose mind, heart, senses and breath function without his thinking of them. He is really free and wise who does not show annoyance when he is subjected to afflictions and disrespect, nor pleasure when he is treated with respect. The sage who has transcended the diversity does not distinguish good from evil, merits from demerits, and, therefore, he neither praises nor condemns anything.*

*“He who is well versed in the Vedas, but has not realised the Supreme Brahman is like him who tends a dry cow. He who has cured himself from the disease of perceiving diversity in the souls and has*

concentrated his mind on Me, *should abstain completely from action. He who is unable to fix his mind on the Perfect Brahman will do well to do his prescribed duties with complete dispassion.* Occupying the mind with Myself, My births and deeds, and observing for My delight all the duties relating to *dharma, kama* and *artha*, and relying wholly on Me, he will develop unswerving devotion to Me, O Uddhava. By associating with saints he will surely attain to Me.”

Uddhava asked:

“Whom, O glorious Lord, do You consider pious?”

The Lord answered:

“He is considered pious who is compassionate towards all beings, forbearing, truthful, clean in mind, well-balanced, self-controlled, gentle, of unclouded judgement, effortless, sparing in eating, free from passion and excitement, loyal, depending wholly on Me, contemplative, alert, capable of imparting knowledge, does not seek respect for himself but bestows it on others. *He is the most pious of men who completely abandons all the prescribed duties, though he is fully aware of the sin of neglecting them, and directs his worship solely to Me.*”

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## XII

### *Supreme Efficacy of Satsanga*

The Lord continued:

“Neither Yoga, Sankhya, righteousness, austerities, study of the Vedas, sacrifices, nor philanthropic works, mantras, *yama*, *niyama* so easily win Me as does the association with saints — *satsanga* — which puts an end to all attachment. It is only through the company of the wise that many daityas, nagas, gandharvas, vaishyas, sudras, women and outcasts have attained to My State. All these were born with *rajasic* and *tamasic* dispositions in the several *yugas*, did not study the Vedas, nor sought learning, nor made *tapas*, but only through association with the righteous that they attained to Me. By loving Me, *gopis*, cows, deer, snakes, trees in hundreds of thousands (in Vraja) became accomplished and attained to Me, the Supreme Brahman. Therefore, O Uddhava, *turn your back on all actions, whether prescribed or not, as well as on all learning, past or future, and seek shelter with all your heart in Me, the Self of all, and you will be free from all fear. It is by this Self that the body is permeated, and in it that the universe is woven like the warp and woof of a cloth.*”

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## XIII

### *Extinction of the 'I'-sense*

“*Sattva, Rajas and Tamas* are the qualities of *prakriti* (phenomena), and not of the Self. By *Sattva* the other two are subdued, and *Sattva* by *Sattva* itself. From *Sattva* arises righteousness which inevitably leads to devotion and culminates in the realisation of the Self. Righteousness curbs unrighteousness which rises from *Rajas* and *Tamas*.”

Uddhava remarked that most men know that the sensuous pleasures are baneful in their results, inviting endless trouble, yet like dogs, donkeys and goats they heartily plunge into them, and asked why it is so. The Lord answered:

“It all begins with the perverse sense of ‘I’ rising in the heart, which causes the formidable, misery-ridden *rajas* to invade the mind and induce it to conceive notions of enjoyable objects and the means of enjoying them. Long brooding on the attractive features of a particular object creates an uncontrollable passion for it, which overwhelms the mind and impels irrevocable actions. Although the perception of the evil consequences of such actions is present, the impetuosity of the passion is too strong to arrest them. *But the man of discrimination exerts hard to control his infatuation, and, thus, spares himself future suffering. Such a man will turn his mind to Me, away from everything else, and will be finally established in Me.* This is the Yoga which I taught to Brahma in the presence of My disciples, the four Kumaras, Sanaka and his brothers.”

Uddhava wanted to know when and in what form did He teach Yoga to the four Kumaras.

Sri Krishna answered:

“The four mind-born sons of Brahma — Sanaka, Sanatkumara and others — once inquired of their father about the relation of the mind to the sense-objects. In view of the fact, they argued, that the former clings to the objects, and these impress themselves upon it, how can a seeker of Liberation disentangle them? The self-created Brahma, deeply thinking over this question, could not find an answer, his mind being occupied in his creative duties. So he concentrated it on Me, and

when I appeared in the shape of a swan they asked Me who I was. Listen to what I spoke in answer, O Uddhava.

‘If you admit of only one substance, the Self, how can your question have a meaning, O Brahmins? *If by “You”, you mean My body, then not only My body, but all bodies are made of the same five elements, and are, thus, identical in substance (and as there exists only one substance, all the bodies must be also [the Self] Myself). Whatever is known by the mind, expressed by the tongue, or perceived by the senses is but Myself: there is no other than Myself.* This is the conclusion to which all the investigations into the Truth lead. The sense-objects and the mind on which they leave their impress both form the body (qualities, adjuncts) of the *jiva*, which is I Myself (the substance), so that they can be transcended by the *jiva*’s contemplation on its own real nature. To be one with Me — its own essence — the *jiva* should give up the sense-objects and their impressions on the mind.

‘The three states of waking, dreaming and deep-sleep are the states of the mind resulting from the qualities, and distinct from the *jiva* which witnesses them. Bondage results when the mind, bearing the impress of the qualities (*gunas*) identifies itself with the *jiva*. Shaking itself from this false identification releases it from its bondage and establishes it in its essence, from which will follow the complete divorce of the mind from the sense objects, which will be seen as they are in themselves. He who realises the bondage to be unreal due to the actions of the *gunas* will develop renunciation and will take his stand on Me in *Turiya* (the Fourth state or *samadhi*), otherwise the belief in the reality of the objects will continue, and the foolish subject will continue to sleep though he imagines himself to be fully awake.

*‘The person who is awake is the same as the one who dreams as well as the one who is in dreamless sleep; he witnesses all the three states and connects them with his memory; he does not suffer any change.* Realising by investigation and by the guidance of the Srutis and sages that the states are mere superimpositions created by the qualities on himself, the wise seeker will cut at the root of the ‘I’-sense which has caused the false identification and ignorance. Therefore, O Sages, take to the contemplation of Me who am seated in your hearts. *The world is a mere display of the mind, having a seeming existence, like the circles*

*described by a firebrand.* The one consciousness appears as many due to the differences in the combinations of the qualities, which result from My power of illusion. Having withdrawn your sight from visible objects you will remain immersed in the bliss of the Self. *Thereafter your contact with the world will not mean that you will view the world as real, for what is once realised as unreal cannot again assume a reality, but it will mean that its impressions on your mind will continue till the body falls.* He who is established in the Self is no longer cognisant of the behaviour of the transient body, any more than the man who is blinded by intoxication is cognisant of the position of his cloth, whether it is off his body or on it: *the body which is under the control of Providence survives till the karma that has given birth to it is exhausted. Thereafter he will not return to new bodies, any more than he would to a dream body after having awakened from the dream.* This is the secret of the Yoga and Sankhya, O sages. I am, the Supreme Goal of both as well as of *dharm*a, power, and self-control.’

“Thus, O Uddhava, did I clear the doubt of Sanaka and his brothers.”

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## XIV

### *The Path of Devotion Easiest*

Uddhava asks:

“Teachers of the Vedas speak of many paths to Liberation, O Krishna. Does the importance of the path depend on the seeker’s choice, or is there actually only one path for all seekers? Yourself, O Master, have consistently recommended devotion for all, which, you aver, frees the mind from attachment and fixes it on You.”

Sri Krishna replies:

“The Word (the Veda) which I taught to Brahma was imparted by him to his eldest son Manu, who passed it on to the seven great seers, Bhrigu and others, who passed it on to their progeny from one generation to another, the gods, the *danavas*, the *guhyakas*, *siddhas*, *gandharvas*, *nagas*, *rakshasas*, men, and many others. *It is but natural that these should understand and interpret it each according to his natural tendencies, which depend on the proportions of the mixture of their gunas. This is the reason why perversion of it and heresy has taken place.* Take, for example, “blessedness”: some take it to be Wealth, some power, some *dharma*, others sexual enjoyment. Ascetics call it renunciation and mind control, pleasure-lovers call it sensuous delights, ritualists call it sacrifice, whereas it is the result of the highest human endeavour: *for no true blessedness is possible for those who set their hearts on worldly enjoyments: it is possible only for the minds that have completely surrendered to Me, expecting support from none but Me. Neither Brahma, Shiva, Lord Balarama, nor Sree, My Consort Herself, nor even My own Person is so dear to Me as (a devotee like) you, O Uddhava, I am ever present with him who is devoid of all expectations, who is given to the contemplation of Me, serene, free from hatred, and sees Me everywhere.*

“*Though attracted by objects of desire and he has not yet gained complete mind control, My devotee is not overpowered by them, being shielded by his strong devotion to Me. Just as fire steadily grows to a big flame and burns all fuel to ashes, so does devotion to Me, O Uddhava, blaze forth and consume all obstacles; it purifies even the*

outcasts who eat dogs' flesh. Piety, austerity and learning do not radically cleanse the mind if they are devoid of devotion. *The more the heart is purified by dwelling on My stories, the greater is the ability to discern the subtle essence of things* (in their outer gross coatings), like the eye that has been cleansed by unguents. *The mind which revels in objects gets entangled and falls with them, but that which contemplates Me merges in Me.* Therefore, give up thinking of the unreal and worthless things, which are no better than dream objects, and firmly fix your mind in devotion to Me. Eschew the company of women and their admirers, and go to a safe and convenient place and concentrate on Me, shaking off sloth. *He who follows these instructions will never suffer the afflictions that arise from bad associations."*

At the request of Uddhava to expound to him the process of contemplation on His form, Krishna describes first the *asanas* (bodily postures) and the breathing, and then the Lord's form on which the concentration should be made — symmetrical, gracious, with four long arms, graceful neck, beautiful cheeks and gentle smiles. The devotee should then gradually pass on to His real nature which is the all-pervading Brahman (formless consciousness), wherein there is neither thought nor thinker, and is the substance of all that exists. Krishna continues:

“Having withdrawn his mind from the senses and fixed it on My own Person (or Form), the devotee should now focus it on only one part of it, preferably the smiling face, to the exclusion of all the others. Then withdrawing it from even there, he should concentrate it on My all-pervading Self which is free like the sky. *Leaving that too, and becoming one with Me, he should cease to think of anything.* He will see Me, the *Antaryamin* (the inner Ruler), in himself, and himself in Me, like the light which is one with the fire. All doubt about Matter, Knowledge, and Action will then radically come to an end.”

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## XV – XVI

### *The Dangers of Siddhis*

Sri Krishna now minutely describes the supernatural powers that are apt to be gained by the perfect Yogi who practises the highest Yoga, but warns that these may seriously obstruct the union with the Lord. Then speaking of Himself as the living and non-living beings, as well as all the principles in the manifestation and of His *avatars*, He ends by saying:

*“I have indicated in brief all these manifestations of Mine, but you must know them to be nothing but fancy of the imagination — mere words, unreal. You will do well to control your speech, mind and senses, and you will never again suffer transmigration. He who fails to control his mind and tongue, will find all his spiritual attainments will leak out of him like water out of an unbaked pot.”*

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## XVII – XVIII

### *Sannyasa*

Uddhava requests the Master to depict those conducts which please Him most and which bring men true blessedness. Krishna reviews the history of the castes and orders in life (*Varnas* and *Ashramas*) and their evolution from the first *yuga* to their present state (in the third, *Dwapara yuga*), delineating the duties of each *Varna* and each *Ashrama*. Of the last and highest *Ashrama* (*Sannyasa* or Renunciation), He says:

“Having by close investigation realised the universe to be a superimposition on himself, the *Atman*, the sage who is established in himself, with a serene mind, *renounces all action*. Since everything that exists, including the body, all the thinking processes, and the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, has proved to be an illusion, he turns his back on it, *and is no longer bound by the scriptural precepts and the duties of the four Ashramas, though he may retain the appearance of a seeker after Truth*. The Self-realised man neither propounds the practice of rituals nor behaves in opposition to it, nor takes to intellectual discussions and fruitless arguments. He is neither afraid of anyone nor causes fear to anyone. He receives abuses with a controlled mind, but himself neither abuses nor shows disrespect to anyone, for the Self is one and the same in all beings, like the moon in several vessels of water. Possessed of fortitude, he neither desponds when he has no nourishment nor feels elated when he has it or when his other needs are satisfied; for all these are in the hands of Providence (Myself), *yet he has to make efforts to procure food to sustain his life in order that he may be able to pursue his quest for Truth*. The wise man who has realised Me will see no diversity, *though he may continue to have the body perception* until it falls in its own time, when he will attain to a perpetual state of equality with Me.

“He who has discovered and feels revulsion for the vanity of sense-pleasure *but has not yet received guidance to the realisation of Truth, should seek a guru* who is given to contemplation and respectfully serve him, regarding him as My own Self, till he attains Brahman. But he who continues to wallow in sense-pleasure, *lacks wisdom and dispassion, yet parades the external marks of sannyasa to make his*

*living, violates the duties of sannyasa and deceives himself, the gods (by abstaining from the religious performances of the householder), and Myself, Who dwell in his heart. He will be deprived of the joys of this world and the next.*

“He who loyally observes the duties of his *varna* and *ashrama* and possesses a knowledge of Me, eventually comes to Me, for he is the follower of *dharma* and, thus, My devotee.”

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## XIX

### *The World is illusion: Knowledge is True Perfection*

Krishna continues:

“The learned seeker whose intuition has led him to the realisation of the Self, does not indulge in theoretical dialectics about this world of diversity, knowing it to be a mere appearance in Me, a knowledge which he has also eventually to renounce (in *vidwat sannyasa*) exclusively to Me, his highest bliss and redemption, his goal and the way to it. *He whose mind has been thoroughly purified by knowledge and realisation alone can comprehend My Supreme State. Penance, pilgrimage, japa, charitable acts, are mere means of self-purification, and not of perfection, as knowledge is. Therefore work your self-knowledge up to the stage of realisation, O Uddhava, and reject everything else but your devotion to Me.* The threefold manifestation of *prakriti*, namely, body, mind and senses in you, is an illusion, having neither beginning nor end, but appears in the middle (like the snake which appears in the dark, but which has at no time been, nor will at any time be, other than a rope).”

Uddhava wanted to know the difference between *Jnana*, *Vijnana* and *Bhakti*, which are attempted by even the great Brahma. The Lord said that that very question had been asked by Yuddhishtira of Bhishma after the battle of Kurukshetra and that now He would give it in the very words of that apostle of *Dharma* (Bhishma). He quoted:

“*Jnana* consists in perceiving the nine principles, the eleven organs, the five elements, and the three *gunas* in all creatures, and the One Supreme Soul (*Purusha* or *Paramatman*) permeating them all. *Vijnana* (discursive knowledge) perceives neither plurality nor the pervading One, but investigates into the creation, preservation and dissolution of all things which are made of the *gunas* (to repudiate them all). *That alone is real which abides in the beginning and end and which appears to evolve in the middle.* Plurality has, therefore, no existence whatever (since the Reality alone exists but appears as the evolving diversity, having a beginning and an end): it is repudiated by the four principal *pramanas* (evidences or means of firm knowledge), namely, the authority of the Vedas, direct perception, the authority of the wise

(tradition), and inference. Ritualistic acts, likewise, being transient, are unreal. The wise look upon the pleasures of the invisible world (which are the result of action) as misery-laden and as perishable as those of this visible world.

As for the yoga of *Bhakti* I have already described it to you, O Uddhava, as mainly consisting of the preoccupation of the whole mind with Me in an all-absorbing love through studying, rehearsing, and chanting My stories; through contemplation, charitable acts, and worship; and, finally, through total surrender of the whole being to Me.”

Asked to describe *Yama*<sup>[24]</sup> and *Niyama* which are prescribed by the Scriptures for the attainment of the final Beatitude, the Lord mentioned them in detail and ended with:

*‘The desire to get over happiness and misery is happiness; the desire to enjoy worldly happiness is misery. He is learned who knows the distinction between bondage and freedom, and ignorant who looks upon his body as himself. The means by which I am attained is known as the right path, and the wrong path is that by which mundane activity is undertaken. Activity of the Sattva guna is heaven, that of tamas is hell.*

“I have thus answered all your questions, O Uddhava, but what avails you to go through all the characteristics of good and evil, which are always safe to avoid?”

[24] The qualities of *Yama* and *Niyama* have already been mentioned in different contexts here. Patanjali *Yoga-Sutras* separate them in two groups. The *Yamas* are those which the aspirant has to refrain from doing and are by order of importance: killing, uttering falsehood, thieving, incontinence, and greed. The *Niyamas* are those which he should strive to do or achieve and are: purity, contentment, austerity, study of the Scripture, and surrender to God.

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### *The Three Paths*

Uddhava submits that the Lord's Word (the Veda) is full of discrimination between merits and demerits; between good action and bad action; between a higher and a lower *varna*, a higher and lower *ashrama*; between what to do and what to refrain from doing by gods, ancestors and men in order to reach Emancipation, so that His forbidding him now from distinguishing between good and bad is a great puzzle, indeed, to him.

Krishna answers:

“In order to lead men to the highest good, three methods of self-discipline have been taught by Me. They are *Jnana Yoga*, the path of Knowledge (or investigations), *Karma Yoga*, the path of Action, and *Bhakti Yoga*, the path of Devotion. The first suits best him who has lost all taste for worldly action, considering it to be the source of all misery, whereas to him who thirsts after fulfilment of desires through action, *Karma Yoga* brings the desired end. The path of devotion is good for him who is neither disgusted with sense pleasures nor inordinately attached to them, and who, by some good fortune, loves to hear My stories and chant My name. *So long as one clings to worldly pleasure and has not developed devotion, he should perform his duties according to the injunctions of the Scriptures.* He who worships Me through sacrifice with desire for its fruits, O Uddhava, goes neither to heaven nor to the nether regions, but continues to take a human body and follow the straight course, abstaining from sins and purging himself from impurities till he attains *Jnana* (Supreme Knowledge) and devotion to Me. *It is for this very purpose that the denizens of heaven, like those of hell, aspire to take birth in this world, where alone Jnana is attained.* The wise should long neither for heaven nor for hell, nor should they seek to perpetuate this body, attachment to which is bound to lead them astray, but should strive for Liberation through it before it is cut down by death, like the intelligent bird who escapes to freedom betimes before the tree in which he has built his nest falls by the woodcutter's axe. He who is alert enough to notice his life getting shorter by every day and every night that passes, will lose no time in giving up his attachment to the body and all its activities. *He*

*truly commits suicide who does not endeavour to cross the dark sea of ignorance and transmigration whilst he possesses this sea-worthy boat, the body, which is most difficult to obtain, the guru being its pilot and I, the favourable wind, to take it safely to port.*

“Full of renunciation and repugnance for action and its fruits, the seeker should constantly practise concentration, and should be always alert to bring back the mind when it strays and breaks loose from his grasp by pleasing contrivances. He should intently watch its movements and, using his reason enforced by a *sattvic* (purified) intellect, he should bring it under subjection, as he would an unbroken horse by first conciliating it. *This way of taming the mind is considered to be the highest yoga.*

“In his meditation he should reflect on the ultimate principles and the process of creation as taught by the Sankhya, and dwell again and again on the teaching of the *guru* in order to claim the modification of the mind. He should also with a sharp intellect inquire into the identity of the *jiva* with the Supreme Self. *Should the yogi by mistake commit an undesirable act he must endeavour to counteract it by yoga alone (take to more intensive meditation and reflection), and by no other means; for adherence to one’s sadhana is highly virtuous. The distinction made between virtues and sins (merits and demerits) have the one purpose, first to dispose of impure actions and then of attachment to all actions, which, after all aim at sensuous enjoyments.*

“All the desires which are rooted in the heart of the sage who worships Me by the yoga of devotion gradually wilt away and, when he realises Me, the knot of ignorance which is lodged in his heart breaks, destroying all his doubts as well as the unexhausted stock of his karma. Thus by the yoga of devotion My devotee gains all that is gained by the other two yogas, by penance, by knowledge, by dispassion, by charitable acts, by pilgrimage. My devotee desires nothing, not even freedom from transmigration if offered to him by Me, for desirelessness is the most direct route to final Emancipation. The discrimination between virtue and sin, good and evil, does not exist for My pious devotee who sees everything with an equal eye, seeing Me, Who stand beyond thought and reason, in it. Those who follow the foregoing paths as delineated by Me will attain My State, which is free

from all fear, and which is known by the name of absolute Reality (Brahman).

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*Ritualistic Heaven Glamorous*

“But those who do not take to any of these three paths and seek the trifling pleasure for which their restless senses crave are bound to suffer transmigration. Virtue and sin, good and evil, purity and impurity, *varna*, *ashrama*, names and forms, are all invented by the Vedas to help men to attain their purpose in life, namely, *kama*, *artha*, *dharma* and *moksha*. From the wrong apprehension of the true nature of an object springs attachment for it, from attachment springs desire, from desire quarrels, from quarrels anger, which completely perverts the judgement. Judgement perverted, the purpose of life is defeated, making the sentient to resemble the insentient. The reward of heaven promised by the Vedas for the ritualistic worship is not blessedness in itself, but is calculated to create a taste for worship as an introduction to the subject of the final Liberation, even as the promise of sweets induces a child to take its dose of medicine.

*“Ignorant of this purpose of the ritualism as intended by the Vedas, the extrovert interpret this promise of its fruits literally. The knowing Rishis do not make this mistake. Clinging to the senses, the misguided mistake the pleasures of heaven as the highest reward and become excessively attached to the path of smoke (fire of sacrifice and ritual), which disqualifies them from the knowledge of the Self. To gratify their flesh they remain blind to the perception of Me in their hearts, like the eyes that are blinded by mist are incapable of seeing the things which are very close to them. They fancy heaven to be real and, so, they thirst after it, not knowing it to be as unreal as a dream that is pleasing to the eye and the ear. Abandoning Me, the Real, they spend all their earnings on sacrifices, like merchants who stake their fortunes in hopes of greater profits. Rooted in the gunas they worship Indra and the other gods who, like them, are sunk in the gunas, and not Me, Who stand beyond the gunas, entertaining the foolish notions that after staying in heaven and sport to their hearts’ content till the end of their celestial life, they will return to the earth as noble and wealthy householders. In their arrogant egotism they do not like to hear anything which refers to Me, contented as they are with the glamorous prospects held out to them by the Scriptures.*

“The three divisions of the Veda are really meant to convey the truth that Brahman, the Supreme Reality, is the Self of all. The Vedic texts say things which are not what they appear to be on the surface: they are thus most difficult to understand, being as vast and as unfathomable as the ocean. Presided over by Me, the infinite Brahman of infinite powers, the Veda is perceived by the wise as *Anahata* sound in all beings, like the fibre in a lotus stalk. The true meaning of what it reveals, explains, interrogates and refutes, is known to no one but Me. I am the sacrifice and the sacrificer in the rituals of *Karmakanda* (the ritualistic part of the Veda), the gods of the *Devatakanda* and the denied superimpositions of the *Jnanakanda* — I, the All, and the Cause of All. This is the import of all the Vedas, which affirms that the diversity is illusory, having no existence whatsoever.”

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## XXII – XXIII

### *Illusion of The Categories*

Uddhava submits that the enumeration of the categories (*tattvas* or principles) by various authorities are very confusing and do not tally with one another. “Yourself, O Lord of the universe,” he said, “have lately mentioned them to be twenty-eight (p. 384 including the three *gunas*). Others have placed them variously at twenty-six, twenty-five, sixteen, even only seven, four, eleven, etc. Be pleased, O eternal Master, to say which of these figures is the right one.”

The Lord answers:

“All the sages are right, for *each tattva includes all the others. What theory is not possible to maintain if it is based only on My Illusion?* The disputes of the Rishis arise from the modification of *My Maya* — the *gunas* — which is very difficult to overcome. From the disturbance of the *gunas* arise their disproportionate combinations which form the diversity of which the sages speak and which is the subject of their controversy. But when *Sama* (mind control) and *Dama* (sense control) are achieved, the diversity melts away, and so does the controversy. The number of categories that make up one or the other, differs according to which *tattva* the speaker takes for cause or effect, so that it is appropriate to accept everything that all the disputants say, each being right from his own angle of vision. One authority, for example, argues that in the *jiva*, which is invested with beginningless nescience, the realisation of the Self cannot arise by itself, so that there must be another person who is perfect in the knowledge of Truth to impart it. This is the *Guru* or God, whom this authority adds as the twenty-sixth principle. *But actually there is no difference between the individual and God (both being pure consciousness)*, so that the twenty-sixth principle is superfluous, realisation being the outcome of *sattva* which is *prakriti*, and not a quality of the *Purusha* (the *jiva*’s essential nature or God), and so on. Thus all the different enumeration of the categories are right, each having its own peculiar rational support.”

Uddhava remarks:

“If *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are different by nature, then why do they appear interdependent; *Purusha* manifesting only through *Prakriti* (the body), and the body always standing for *Purusha*, as one’s own self. Be pleased, O Omniscient One, to clear this confusion from my mind, since not only knowledge proceeds from You, but also the veiling of knowledge (doubt and confusion) by Your *Maya*.”

Sri Krishna answers:

“The distinction between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* is radical, O beloved. That which undergoes change owes its existence to the disproportionate combination of the three *gunas* among themselves, which are none other than My *Maya*, which creates the notion of differences. *Atman* being the cause of all this (the source of the *gunas*) is separate from them. *The doubt that the self-luminous Self exists apart from the body or not does not cease so long as realisation of it is not achieved*, and so long as men turn their minds away from Me, their real Self.”

Thinking about those who turn their faces from the Lord and who have to pass from one life to another according to their actions, Uddhava asks how they, as the Self, which is action-less, unborn and deathless, can act, be born and die.

The Lord answers:

“The trouble lies with the mind which perceives desirable objects through the senses, gathers impressions of them, and retains them as tendencies, forming the seeds for the next body and its destiny (karma). It travels from one body to another, dragging the soul with it. As the man who, getting impressed by the singing and dancing of others, tries to imitate them, so does the soul imitate the movements of the body on the prompting of the intellect, though in itself it is action-less. The activities of the body are reflected in the Self in the same way as the trees on the edge of a pool are reflected in the water. The intellect has the tendency to exalt the objects of sense by ascribing to them qualities which they do not actually possess but which emanate from its own self, like the rotation of the earth which is seen by a revolving eye. As our dream experiences are false so are our waking experiences and our identification of the body with the Self. Although pleasure and pain do not belong to the Self, they do not cease for him

who dwells on them, anymore than dream pleasure and pain cease for him who continues to dream.

“Therefore, O Uddhava, do not trust the deceiving senses. He who is bent upon the attainment of blessedness should lift himself by his own strength, whether scorned, spat upon, or harassed in every way, or deprived of his livelihood by the wicked.”

Uddhava said:

“Such outrages, O Lord of the universe, are more difficult to bear even by men of wisdom, *Prakriti* (nature) being too powerful to conquer.”

Krishna replied that there was indeed “no such perfect saint in the world as can keep himself unaffected by the hard words of the wicked. *The arrows that pierce the vitals are not so painful as the cruel words that pierce the soul: these rankle and torment.*”

Then He told the story of the miserly Brahmin who traded and amassed a vast wealth, yet deprived himself and his family of even the necessities of life, and who eventually was reduced to extreme penury, which induced him to turn a recluse and start an investigation into the nature of the body and the soul. But the people did not leave him in peace: they took to ridicule his past miserliness and subjected him to all sorts of indignities, which he bore with fortitude, having been awakened to the truth of the immortality of his soul and the illusoriness of the world. He thus managed to raise himself from the depressed state in which he had fallen, by his own spiritual strength and reasoning power.

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## XXIV

### *The Sankhya Doctrine*

Sri Krishna now turns to expound the Sankhya system as taught by the ancient seers, which rids one of the delusion of happiness and misery consequent upon the notion of diversity. He says:

“Before the *Satya yuga* there was a single, undifferentiated, infinite, absolute Substance — Brahman — which can be neither conceived nor described. Brahman then assumed a dual form, namely, *Maya* (illusory existence), and that in which it is reflected (the *jiva* or intelligence that perceives it). The former is the well-known *prakriti* (matter or *gunas*), which consists of cause and effect, and the latter is pure consciousness, or *Purusha* (Person or Self). When I disturbed the equilibrium of *prakriti* the three groups of qualities emerged (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), giving rise, by their disproportionate combination among themselves, to *Sutra* (cosmic activity) and *Mahat* (cosmic intelligence). From the modification of the latter rose the deceptive *ahankara* (the cosmic ego) which caused the *jivas* to identify themselves with the bodies made available to them by their past actions and tendencies. *Ahankara* was of three types — *sattvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic* — which together evolved all the gods who preside over them. Impelled by Me, the categories joined together and formed the Cosmic Ego, My playground, which I entered as Narayana, the Second Person, as it lay on the primeval waters.

“The universe then sprang up as a lotus from My navel, and on it appeared the four-faced Brahma who, with the help of the active *rajas* and penance, created the three spheres (*lokas*), namely, *Bhurloka*, (the earth and the seven subterranean regions — *Atala*, *Vitala*, *Sutala*, *Talatala*, *Mahatala*, *Rasatala*, and *Patala*), *Bhuwarloka* (the aerial region), and *Swarloka* (heaven, consisting of *Swarloka*, *Maharloka*, *Janaloka*, *Tapoloka*, and *Satyaloka*) with their presiding deities. In *Swarloka*, live the celestials, in *Bhurloka* humans and animals (in the earth), also asuras, nagas, etc., (in *Atala* and other subterranean regions), and in *Bhuwarloka*, *siddhas* (ancient great Rishis). All these three major spheres are the planes where the entities who are dominated by the *gunas* work out their destinies. The four higher sub-

spheres of *Swarloka*, namely, *Maharloka* and above, are the abode of those who practise spiritual disciplines, according to the degrees of their attainments. The highest of them, *Satyloka*, is the abode of Brahma, hence it is also called *Brahmaloka*. Beyond all these is My own sphere, *Vaikuntha*, which is exclusively reserved for My own devotees. *From the highest to the lowest this creation is nothing but the product of the gunas and moves by Karma of which I, as time, am the Dispenser. As prakriti, I am the matter of all, and, as Purusha (spirit), I pervade all.* As the beginning, the middle and the end of all, I alone am real. As at the time of creation, each category emerges from the preceding one (Myself — Brahman — being the primal substance), so at dissolution each merges back again into its predecessor until everything merges once again in the Un-manifest (*prakriti*), and then into Me. Investigations into these processes of involution and evolution bring the seeker indubitably to their Final Cause, Myself, Who will shine like the sun dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

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## XXV – XXVI

### *The Characteristics of the Gunas*

“Now, O precious Uddhava, I shall explain how each particular *guna* affects men’s moral nature, independently of the others. Mind and sense control, forbearance, sound judgement, truthfulness, benevolence, clear memory, contentment, abstemiousness, belief in God and in life eternal, modesty, liberality, abstinence from prohibited acts are the effects of *sattva*. Craving for sensuous pleasures, arrogance, passion, desire for action, obstinacy, discontent, hankering after blessings (from gods and men), discrimination between the interest of oneself and that of others, lust, garrulousness, love of praise, aggressiveness are the actions of *rajas*. The effects of *tamas* are: intolerance, miserliness, truthlessness, malevolence, ingratitude, hypocrisy, love for discord, grief, despondency, drowsiness, indolence, fear, anger, demanding favours, etc.

“These are the individual characteristics of the *gunas*, but in practice all the three go together in various proportions, one at one time dominates the others, and another at another time. From the behaviour of men one can easily distinguish the *guna* which at that moment happens to be prevalent in them. Those who take to *sattvic* actions go higher and higher, to *rajasic* actions go to the intermediate state, but those who take to *tamasic* actions go lower and lower even to the inanimate forms of existence. When at the moment of death *sattva* is predominant, the deceased ascends to heaven; if *tamas*, he descends to hell, and if *rajas* is then predominant, he returns to the human fold, *but if he has transcended the gunas, he attains to Me alone.*

“Worship done to Me without expectation of rewards is *sattvic*; that done with expectation is *rajasic*; whereas the one performed with the intention of harming another being is violent, and, thus, *tamasic*. Knowledge which concerns the absolute Self is *sattvic*, that which connects the Self with the body is *rajasic*, whereas the knowledge of irresponsible beings, or *that which concerns the natural actions of the body is tamasic*, but that which concerns Me transcends the *gunas*. Dwelling in the forest is *sattvic*, in the country *rajasic*, but in a gambling house it is *tamasic*; whereas living in My temple transcends the *gunas*.

“*Whatever is perceived by the senses and thought by the mind is made of the gunas, so are all the states through which the jiva passes. Rajas and*



*tamas can be overcome by sattva, and sattva by sattva itself to destroy even the subtle body of the jiva (see footnote p. 7), leaving the Atma alone dissociated from the gunas and full of Me, the blissful Brahman.*

“He who has liberated himself by the yoga of knowledge through a human body, will no longer be attracted by objects of sense, living though he may be in their very midst, knowing them to be illusory. Like the seeing man who refuses to be led by the blind, on no account will he consort with unholy people who are dedicated to the gratifications of their sexual instinct, thirst and hunger, which is bound to lead him to the darkness into which the sensualists themselves live.”

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## XXVII

### *Kriya Yoga*

Responding to Uddhava's request for general details of the *saguna* worship (through images or forms), Sri Krishna begins to say that since ritualism, as given in the Vedas, is of infinite variety to suit the tastes and circumstances of the worshippers and the nature of the fruits expected from them, He will give a brief account of its most salient features and the procedures which the worshipper should follow to make a success of his worship. This consists of three forms: Vedic, Tantric, and the combination of both. All these are performed by the "twice born" (that is, the man who has been initiated in the sacred thread ceremony and always wears this thread). The worshipper must be full of devotion to the Lord and must start with a bath and consecration of the materials — flowers, rice, etc. — which he intends to use in the worship, using the particular mantra of consecration. In certain worship the bath is repeated again and again, followed by purification of the body by smearing it with certain cleansing materials. He next describes the idol of worship: its form, the materials to be used in its making, its consecration, its daily ablution, the cloth and the jewels by which it is to be decorated, the mantras to be used in each of these processes, the materials to be offered to it, the vessels to be used, the form of prayers to be recited, etc. He ends by saying that the Lord can be worshipped in whatever image or medium for which the worshipper feels reverence and devotion, for, being the soul of the universe, He dwells in all things, and that after endowing the image with divine effulgence by invocation, the worshipper must draw the latter back into the lotus of his own heart, where the divine flame (of consciousness) perpetually shines.

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## XXVIII

### *Truth is One Only*

Recapitulating the teaching of the Absolute, Krishna affirms that considering the existence of only one substance — *Paramatman* or Supreme Self — manifesting as *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, the seeker must desist from praising or condemning the actions and dispositions of others, which will make him fall in the delusion of duality and thus defeat his own purpose of attaining the oneness of the Self. In the world of duality where everything is false, unreal like a mirage, an echo, a reflection, the discrimination between good and bad does not arise, although it somehow affects the *jivas*. The one substance is both the creator and the created, the protector and the protected, the destroyer and the destroyed. The *triputi* (triad of perceiver, perceived and perception) is the product of illusion, and thus does not exist. The knower of this truth as taught by the Lord, neither extols nor reviles anyone, but goes about unattached like the sun.

Uddhava declares that only two principles are involved in the person who suffers transmigration, soul and body, neither of which is capable of rebirth. The latter, he argues, disintegrates at death, and stands no chance of revival; the former is deathless, and, therefore, likewise cannot be reborn. Yet births and deaths are real. Who is it, he asks Krishna, who undergoes them (if neither the body nor the soul is reborn)?

The Lord answers:

*“Notwithstanding the fact that the phenomena do not at all exist, yet so long as the contact between the un-illuminated jiva and the senses continues, transmigration does not cease. So long as the dreamer continues to be deluded by the dream objects, he continues to suffer dream sorrow, although this does not exist (but as sensations in him), and ceases when he becomes enlightened on waking. Grief, fear, birth and death affect the deluded part of the dreamer, the ego, and not his being or Self. True knowledge consists in distinguishing the Self, which is real, from the not-Self, which is unreal. By the means spoken of before and by the Grace of a perfect Master, this distinction is clearly perceived, and the body is completely rejected as the non-Self. Just as space is not affected by the elements: fire, water, earth, etc., of which it is the container, so is the imperishable, all-containing Being not*

affected by the *gunas*. *Efforts must be made to shun the not-Self until supreme bhakti cuts down rajas*, the active qualities which are responsible for the illusion. Just as the disease that has not been radically cured is likely to recur again and again and afflicts its sufferer, so does the mind that teems with libidinous and *karmic* propensities bring about the fall of him who has not attained perfection in yoga (full *Jnana*). Imperfect yogis who fall from the path due to relationship with a family, disciples, etc., will in a future life, resume their yogic efforts at the point of interruption of their present endeavours, but will never take again to action. The unregenerate perform action till the last moment of their life, and are paid back in transient pleasure and pain, but the regenerate, though seated in a body remain action-less, their thirst for enjoyment having been slaked by the bliss of Self-realisation and being permanently established in the Self, they take no heed of the actions of the body, nor do they take for real the objects that fall within the ranges of their perception, no more than an awakened man concedes reality to the objects he has perceived in a dream.

The body which has so far been identified with one's own Self, dear Uddhava, and which is actually the product of the *gunas* and karma, now completely disappears in the light of Self-knowledge: not so the Self which can be neither perceived nor rejected (for the repudiator would still be the sentient Self itself, which remains as the absolute residuum). Just as the light of the sun dispels the darkness from the eye and reveals what has already been present but unseen, so does the realisation of Me dispel the darkness of the mind and reveal the Self, which has all along been invisibly present as the source of all experiences, the senses and speech, and which is self-luminous, beyond the reach of reason, words, births, time and space. The notion of differences in the absolute Self is entirely a delusion, for none exists other than itself. *The claim of an irrefutable duality made by some arrogant dualists is utterly senseless.*

“There are those who practise sense-control and manage to keep the body strong and youthful and take to the practice of yoga with the view of acquiring *siddhis*. The wise look askance at them and at *their futile endeavour to preserve a body which is as perishable as a fruit on a tree.*

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## XXIX

### *Farewell Message to Uddhava*

Uddhava submits that the yoga of concentration is extremely difficult to practise, so that many strivers feel disheartened and frustrated when they fail to curb their mental restlessness to attain peace. He asks if there is an alternative to it.

The Lord advises the surrender of the fruits of action to Him and the maintaining of a ceaseless thought of Him. Other aids are: dwelling in holy environments and in the company of saints, arranging processions and meetings to propound His glory, habituating oneself to see Him, the Perfect, within and without oneself and in all creatures, like the all-pervading ether. The person who treats all alike and honours and respects them all, as he does the Lord Himself, Krishna avers, is free from hatred, envy, malice, and self-conceit. Believing the Lord to be in all beings, he should prostrate before even a dog, a pariah, a cow, or a donkey until the conviction that all these are actually Himself takes a firm hold of him, taking no notice of the carping, and forgetting the body and the sense of shame and humiliation. This habit of looking upon all beings as the Lord Himself in thought, deed and word, is the best of all disciplines. *No effort, however small, made in His worship is wasted, for it is free from desire and unaffected by the gunas.* Any work surrendered to Him is righteous, even so insignificant an act as crying or running away in fear or grief.

The Lord concludes:

“The foregoing exposition covers the entire range of Vedantic thought, which I have again and again been propounding as clearly as has been possible. He who comprehends it fully will have all his doubts dispelled, and will be in a fair way close to the realisation of the transcendent Brahman. Of My own accord I will reveal Myself to the teacher who will widely preach it; and he who will daily recite it to purify others, will himself be purified. Likewise, he who will daily listen to it with reverence will be considered as practising supreme devotion to Me, and will not be bound to perform action.

“You should not, friend Uddhava, impart this teaching of Mine to a hypocrite, an unbeliever, a scamp, or one who is given to wicked ways, or is

not My devotee, but to one who is free from these faults, pious, and has a genuine devotion to Me, be he a Sudra or a woman. *Having known this, there remains nothing more for one to know, nothing more to enjoy. To him who has drunk the sweet nectar of immortality, no other drink satisfies.* I am to you, dear Uddhava, all the good that can be derived from knowledge, from the practice of *dharma*, from Yoga, from business undertakings and from regal powers. Relinquishing all duties in your dedication to Myself, you will enjoy My special favour and will attain immortality in Me.”

Sri Suka continues:

Having intently listened to the Lord’s expositions till the end, Uddhava, with a heart brimming with love, stood with joined palms before the Master, tears pouring from his eyes and throat so choked with emotion that for a long time he could not speak. Then prostrating himself before Him, he said:

“The thick darkness which had enveloped me has been dispelled by the splendour of Your teaching, O Master. The torch of wisdom which Your powerful *Maya* had snatched from me, has now been restored by You, O compassionate Krishna. Salutations to You, Great Yogin, pray so direct me, who am fallen at Your feet, that an unceasing love may continue to abide in my heart for You.”

The Lord answered:

“Proceed to My hermitage in Badari and shake off your impurities by bathing in the water of the Ganga which has been sanctified by the touch of My feet. Clothe yourself in bark of trees, live on the yields of the forests, control your mind and senses, and cease longing for worldly comforts. Dwell again and again on what you have heard from Me with a calm mind, occupying your time with what you know will please Me, and you will certainly attain to Me.”

In obedience to the Lord’s command, Uddhava prepared to bid Him farewell. He went round Him, fell at His feet, and bathed them with the tears which welled out of his sorrowful heart, and, bowing to Him again and again, departed, carrying on his head the wooden sandals which the compassionate Krishna had used on His feet and had gifted to him as a token of remembrance and love. Reaching Badarikashrama, Uddhava strictly followed the Master’s instructions and attained the State of Lord Hari Himself, as had been promised by Him.

He, who, with genuine faith, tastes ever so little of this wisdom which has been churned out of the ocean of nectar — the Upanishads — and taught to Uddhava by Lord Krishna in person, will attain Release himself, as well as those who seek his company.

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## XXX

### *Extinction of the Yadus*

Krishna returned to Dwaraka and saw frightful omens everywhere. He warned the assembled elders of the impending doom, saying:

“The grave signs which have appeared in the sky, in heaven, and on earth forebode an imminent disaster to Dwaraka. You do not have a minute to lose, but must immediately send all your womenfolk, children, and the aged to holy Shankoddara, while we men will proceed to Prabhasa, where the Saraswati turns westwards towards the sea. There we will perform ablutions, fast, and worship the gods to abort the evil and secure happiness.”

The elders arrived at the spot indicated by Krishna, and took to the practice of devotion under His lead. But Fate which was destined to blight them, impelled them to drink the sweet liquor *maireyakha* in large draughts, which vitiated their reason and involved them in bitter quarrels among themselves. The clash was tremendous. All sorts of weapons and animals — elephants, horses, camels, asses, mules — were used. Brothers, fathers, sons, cousins, friends, nephews hacked down one another mercilessly and indiscriminately. When all war-implements were broken, the survivors pulled out handfuls of *eraka* grass (p. 350), which in their hands turned into maces as hard as adamant and used them as weapons. Krishna tried to stop some of them from using it, but these struck Him Also. The fury of their hatred for one another caused by the intoxicant and by the Lord’s *Maya* was so great that it consumed them one and all, like the fire in a bamboo forest which leaves no tree alive.

Lord Krishna now thought that His mission on earth was over. On the seashore sat Balarama in yoga *asana* (posture) in contemplation of the Perfect Being as identical with his own self, and shed his human body. It was the turn of Krishna to follow suit. He sat under a peepul tree on the ground and assumed the form in which He appears in *Vaikuntha* — with four arms, *Srivatsa*, ear-rings, sacred thread, crown, bracelets, and His weapons attending on Him. Placing His left foot, which looked like a red lily, on His right thigh, He leaned against the tree. A hunter, Jara by name, who at that moment happened to be in the neighbourhood, struck this red foot, which looked like a deer’s mouth from a distance, with the arrow of

which not other than the piece of iron, remaining from the accursed mace of the Rishis, was the point. Discovering his error, Jara, full of remorse, fell at the Lord's feet and begged His forgiveness:

“O Lord Vishnu, most glorious Madhusudana, may it please You to pardon a sinner like me who has hurt You in ignorance. O Vaikuntha, do away soon with me, an animal killer, so that I may not live to injure innocent souls again.”

The Lord answered:

“Rise, O Jara, do not fear: you have, indeed, done My will. Go now by My permission to heaven which is the place of the righteous.”

Jara thrice went round Krishna, bowed to Him in salutation, and ascended to heaven (*swarga*) in an aerial car made ready for him. Daruka, Krishna's charioteer, searching for His Master, inhaled the breeze which carried the fragrance of *tulasi* (which always emanated from His body), and found Him under the tree. He jumped down from the chariot, fell prostrate at His feet shedding profuse tears of love, and said that the world was enveloped in darkness for him, as if he had lost his sight, and his mind knew no peace since his Master left him. As he was speaking, the chariot, which was carrying the Garuda flag of Vishnu, all of a sudden flew to the sky to his great amazement, followed by Krishna's celestial weapons. The Lord commanded Daruka:

“Go back to Dwaraka and convey to My kinsmen the news of the massacre of their relatives by each other's hands, the passing of Sankarshana, and My own predicament. Tell them to leave Dwaraka immediately with all their relatives and possessions, for the city will soon be covered by the sea, as I have abandoned it. They have to take our parents with them and proceed to Indraprastha under the protection of Arjuna. As for yourself, O Daruka, follow the discipline which you know to be so dear to Me, and establish yourself in Brahman who is identical with your own Self, cultivate indifference to all things which you know to be the product of My *Maya* and you will surely attain peace.”

Daruka went round the Lord and, bowing farewell again and again, turned away in very low spirits.

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*Ascension to Vaikuntha*

Knowing that the return of Krishna to His eternal *Vaikuntha* was at hand, Brahma, Shiva with His consort Uma, the Prajapatis, the Pitris, Siddhas, Gandharvas, the Gods led by Indra, Apsaras, Vidyadharas, and all the celestials gathered to witness the long-awaited occasion of His return to welcome Him back with hymns and songs of devotion. They rained flowers on Him from their aerial cars in great masses. After casting His glances on the assembly, Krishna closed His eyes, communed with His all-pervading essence, and passed on to *Vaikuntha* in that very form to the sounds of the celestial drums and music. With Him departed righteousness, truth, piety, fortitude, glory and prosperity from the earth. Brahma and the others could not perceive the Lord's passage into His realm, no more than the path of the lightning can be followed by mortals as it issues from the cloud. They were struck by the mysterious powers of the Lord and all together sang His praise and returned to their respective spheres.

Sri Suka, addressing Parikshit, continues:

“You should understand, O King, that the Lord's birth among mortals, all His deeds, and His withdrawal to His holy region, are a mere play on His part, like the various roles which an actor plays by his power of deception.”

Left alone, Daruka hastened back to Dwaraka and delivered his Master's message to Ugrasena and Vasudeva, bathing their feet with his tears. These and their womenfolk rushed to the place where the Vrishnis were lying dead and were overcome with grief. Devaki, Rohini and Vasudeva, not seeing Krishna and Balarama, lost consciousness and dropped dead on the spot. Their daughter-in-law and the other wives of Vasudeva ascended the funeral pyres hugging their husbands' bodies and perished. The wives of Krishna's sons and of all the heroes who died in the drunken scuffle were, likewise, consumed by fire with the corpses of their husbands in their arms. All the first eight wives of Krishna led by Rukmini fixed their minds on the Lord and entered the fire.

Extremely sad at parting with his Friend and Master, Arjuna found consolation in His utterances which he treasured in his memory. He rose to

the occasion and performed the funeral rites for the departed souls. The sea rose and flooded Dwaraka, leaving the mansions where the Lord had lived and continued to be present alone standing. Then taking the women, children and the old men who survived, Arjuna proceeded to Indraprastha, where he crowned Vajra, the great-grandson of Krishna — Aniruddha's son — King. The Pandavas, hearing of the disaster that had befallen the Vrishnis and of the two Divine Brothers' withdrawal from the world, grew despondent and retired to a mountain in the Himalayas to shed their bodies in it, keeping Parikshit on their throne at Hastinapura.

Thus ended the life story of Sri Krishna, ringing down the curtain on the most glorious *Avatara* of Lord Vishnu the Supreme Self, the Soul and Substance of the universe.

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# BOOK TWELVE

## EPILOGUE

## I — II

### *Kali Makes Its Bow*

King Parikshit asks[25] the Sage whose dynasty ruled the earth after Lord Krishna left it. Sri Suka answers that Puranjaya, King of Magadha, who is yet to come, will be assassinated by his minister, who will place his own son on the throne, and will thus start a new dynasty which will rule for one hundred and thirty years. Then a new line of ten kings — the Shishunagas — will succeed and will last three hundred and sixty years. The last king of the latter will marry a Sudra woman who will give birth to Nanda, who will destroy the Kshatriya race and will establish a new line of rulers, mostly consisting of unrighteous Sudra kings. After one hundred years of their rule Vatsyayana, a Brahmin, will found the Maurya dynasty by installing Chandragupta on the throne to reign for one hundred and thirty seven years.[26] Then one line of kings will follow another until Sudras and fallen Brahmins, who are no better than Mletchhas (barbarians), will seize power and will kill women, children, cows, and Brahmins. They will rape women and property, stop rituals and worship, and suck the blood of the people. Although some of them will be Kshatriyas, they will behave like outcasts. The people will adopt their ways and will completely degenerate.

The evil forces of the age will henceforth gather strength until the Kali spirit will be in its full stride, when righteousness, truthfulness, purity, benevolence, physical and mental vigour will reach their lowest water marks. Wealth alone will then count against lineage, morality and personal merits; and might will replace right. Marital ties will be formed solely on the expectation of the maximum sexual delight, in disregard of personal virtues. Cheating will be the mainspring of business, and the Brahmins' only qualification will be the wearing of the sacred thread. Justice will be perverted and administered according to the size of the bribe received. Poverty will be adjudged as the test of impiety, and hypocrisy of goodness. Good deeds will be done for the sake of publicity and the materially strongest among the castes will rule the others. This is the darkest age which will torment the people with endless worries and a short span of life; thirty years will be the maximum age men can reach: thirty years of thirst and hunger, of stunted growth in mind and body, of heresy, loss of caste and of memory. Men will worship their wives and their wives' relatives,

abandoning father, mother, sister and brother. Clouds will carry thunder and lightning but no rain. When the age will pass its nadir and its worst forces will have well-nigh spent themselves, the Lord will appear among the mortals in His *sattvic* form as Kalki in the house of Vishnuvasha, a noble Brahmin, in Shambala village. Riding His celestial horse Devadutta, He will exterminate robbers who bear royal names by the million, and will restore moral sense in the people till town and countryside will again enjoy peace and security. Then a new cycle of *yugas* will begin with *Satya* (the golden age) at its head, whose human generations will be imbued with great intellectual, moral and physical strength, possessing all *sattvic* qualities. When the moon, the sun and the mighty planet (Jupiter) will rise together in one house, and the constellation Pushya will be ascending, the wise will know that the golden age has commenced, whereas the age of Kali commenced when the seven major stars (the Great Bear) entered the zodiacal[27] sign Magha. Learned historians affirm that it started on the very day, nay, the very moment, Lord Krishna left the earth for *Vaikuntha*. As humanity as a whole passes through many ups and downs, the four castes, likewise, rise and fall, once one and once another gaining the upper hand.

All the great figures, Sri Suka continues, who have played a role in this history have passed away and left nothing but names behind them. Two little-known men of all the living beings of this period alone remained: Devapi, brother of Santanu, and Maru of Ikshwaku's line: they will continue to live in Kalapa village (Badrinath) till Lord Kalki appears when they will again spread virtues and resuscitate the *varnas* and *ashramas* in the following cycle of *yugas*.

All the kings, who in their days boasted of world ownership, had to leave everything behind and vanish like bubbles. *Those of them who were guilty of cruelty for the sake of their bodies, which had eventually to turn into worms, dirt, and ashes, were short-sighted and damned themselves, their violence having paved their way to hell. Even the sound of their names Time will be bound to obliterate.*

[25] This question on the part of Parikshit may appear rather strange, considering the fact that this narrative was purported to have been made to himself not long after the Ascension of Krishna, which

closed the *Dwapara* age and ushered in that of *Kali*, of which himself was the first king on the Pandavas' throne at Hastinapura. But as Sri Suka gives his answer in the future tense, we have to presume that the question was intended to elucidate a prophetic forecast. Therefore the enumeration of the kings who were to come after Parikshit and after Sahadeva king of Magadha, mentioned in the end of Book Nine and in this Book, refers only to the future. Here Suka picks up the thread of the Brihadratha line of Magadha kings from Puranjaya (Ripunjaya) with whom Book Nine closes.

The interest of these chapters lies in their brief description of the unfoldment of the Kali spirit in the world in this our own age far from its beginning. Historically speaking this chapter is taken to give an internal, though somewhat indefinite, evidence of the age of the *Bhagavata*.

[26] MAURYA DYNASTY: Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryas, did not rule for 137 years according to history. But the Mauryas rule did last 137/140 years.

Chandragupta ruled B.C. 323-299 (24 years). He drove away the last Greek from India in 323 B. C., ending Alexander's rule (From 327 to 323 when Alexander and Chandragupta Maurya, respectively, came to power).

Bindusaragupta's Son ruled 25 years.

Ashokagupta's Son ruled 40/90 years.

Ashoka's Grandsons (Dasaratha and Samprati and their offspring — 47/50 — who divided the country and began its decline — 137/140 years.

Then the Maurya's Dynasty was extinct by 185/83 B.C. Then the Dark Ages of India began, which ended in 300 AD., when the Great Imperial Gupta Dynasty was founded as the one and only Hindu Empire in history.

[27] Astronomically speaking, this stellar arrangement is wrong. The *saptarshis* are usually understood to be the seven major stars of Ursa Major, which stand always in the same position to the zodiacal signs, so that there can be no question of their entering the constellation *magha*.

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### III

#### *How to Escape the Kali Spirit*

The sage Suka stresses *the senseless lures of fame to which many kings succumb, and which they endeavour to gain through oppression, conquests, taxation and extortion*, and concludes with:

“I have narrated to you the stories of famous kings, O Parikshit, *to show you the futility of all worldly gains, so that you may develop a dislike for them. Moreover the stories themselves are mere sound, shedding no light on the highest truth*, unlike those of the Lord which purify the mind and bless it with peace and which should thus be heard every day.”

Parikshit wants to know how seekers can overcome the blighting influence of Kali, also the characteristic *dharma* of every one of the four *yugas*. Sri Suka answers that in *satyayuga dharma* is fully observed: “It then moves on all its four feet,” which are truthfulness, compassion, mutual help and asceticism. People then are friendly, contented, serene, forbearing, self-controlled, seek the Self, and treat all equally. In the *tretayuga* one of the four feet of *dharma* is rendered impotent by the beginning of *adharma* (unrighteousness): untruth, injury to others, discontent, and discord — its four feet. Yet the people continue to worship and perform penance. The majority of them are Brahmins by caste, not given to much violence and lust. In the *dwaparayuga* two feet of *dharma* are rendered inactive by the greater encroachment of *adharma*. This means that the four virtues of *dharma* (mentioned before) lose half of their force by the greater activation of their contraries. Then the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins predominate in number, take to the performance of very big sacrifices to obtain fame, learning, big wealth, large families and worldly happiness. In the kali age *dharma* shrinks to only one quarter of its original force, then fades away as *adharma* gains full supremacy at its darkest point. Then people grow greedy, immoral, cruel, quarrelsome and extremely envious. The Sudras, fishermen, and their tribe lead the other castes and *tamoguna* predominates over the other *gunas*. Men then are lustful and women profligate. The Brahmins look only to the gratification of their sexual desires and their palates. Hermits abandon the forests and live in towns to accumulate wealth. Students no longer observe purity. Sudras put on the hermit garb to make their living by false pretence. Heavy taxation, famine (droughts) and

fear take away all joy from the hearts of the people and keep them in mental and physical destitution. Afflicted by heretical teachings men do not generally worship Lord Vishnu.

As for attaining the Supreme in the Kali age, Sage Suka asserts that the method is easier than in the other three *yugas* because of the strong opposition offered to the efforts for it by the evil forces of the age. While in *Satyayuga*, Emancipation is attainable through intense concentration on Lord Vishnu, in *Treta* through sacrifice, in *Dwapara* through rituals, in *Kali* merely chanting His Name and singing His praise bring about detachment and Liberation.

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## IV

### *The Four Dissolutions*

Sri Suka now reiterates the divisions of time from the smallest *Paramanu* to the *Parardha* (p. 40) and cites four kinds of *pralayas* in all. They are:

1. *Naimittika* (occasional) *pralaya* which recurs after each day of Brahma's life (*kalpa*), when he goes to sleep and the world withdraws into Lord Narayana (just like the waking mind withdrawing into its source in sleep). It is also called the night of Brahma, and lasts as long as his day, which consists of one thousand cycles of four *yugas* each (p. 40).

2. *Mahapralaya* (major *pralaya*) which takes place at the end of Brahma's life of one hundred years (of 360 *kalpas*), when all the *gunas* return to their un-manifest state as primordial matter (*pradhana* or *prakriti*); hence it is also called *Prakriti pralaya* for a duration equal to Brahma's whole lifetime, after which an altogether new Brahma comes into existence.

3. *Atyantika* (final) *pralaya* or radical dissolution of the *ahankara* (ego) at the attainment of *Mukti*, the Supreme Liberation. And lastly,

4. *Nitya* (perennial) *pralaya* which ceaselessly alternates with the creative force every second in manifestation, causing changes in everything from Brahma downward, the dissolution of the old and its re-creation at every instant, as for example, the slow imperceptible changes in the human body, from the moment it is conceived in the mother's womb to the moment of its death and disintegration, after seventy, eighty or more years.

Sri Suka concludes:

“These are, in brief, the stories of the deeds of Lord Narayana, which must be taken as His mere sports. To him who is feeling the fierce fire of transmigration and is seeking to cross the ocean of the ignorance which causes it, there is no better boat to use than the constant recitation of these actions of Lord Purushottama (the Supreme Self). This *Bhagavata* was first taught by the Lord Himself to Narada (through Brahma), who taught it to my divine father, who taught it to me. It is equal to the Veda. The Suta, who is seated there, will recite it to the Rishis at Naimisharanya.”

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### *Suka's Valedictory*

About to bid farewell to the assembly, Sri Suka now delivers his final discourse (summarising the *Bhagavata's* message) to prepare Parikshit for his death. Addressing him he said:

“Let me again explain to you the true nature of Lord Hari, the soul of the universe. You should, O King, rid yourself of the notion which befits lower beings that you will die. Unlike the body which comes from non-existence and passes again into non-existence, you were before, are now, and will always be. You were not born from a father to be a son or grandson, like the tree from the seed. You are as different from the body as the fire is from the firewood. You are the Self which is deathless and unborn. Just as the space within a pot remains the same after the pot is broken, so you will remain the same when the body which you occupy perishes. It is the mind which creates the body and *the objects of perception* for the soul, and it is *Maya* which creates the mind and transmigration. As light results from the combination of fire, oil and wick, so is the body the result of the combination of *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva*, while transmigration is produced by the mistaken identification of the body with the soul.

“Do you, therefore, O King, save yourself from this identification by investigation into the truth of the Self which is present in the body, using your reason and meditation on Vasudeva. Urged as Takshaka (the serpent) may be by the Brahmin's curse, he will not be able to burn you, the Self, for all the things which cause death cannot harm the Supreme Lord, Who Himself is death to the agents of death. Realising yourself as ‘I am Brahman,’ the *Supreme Abode*, the Highest Goal and Unconditioned Self, you will see neither the body nor the universe, nor even Takshaka who will bite you, as different from your own Self.

“I have explained all this in response to your inquiries about Lord Hari. What more do you desire to know?”

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## VI

### *Parikshit Merges into the Supreme*

Suta continues:

The King, having attentively listened to all the instructions of the great sage Suka, who perceives the whole universe within himself, drew nearer to his feet, bowed low, and with joined palms said:

“I have been favoured by your gracious discourses on the Lord of the universe and on the means of attaining Him, and feel that my purpose has been accomplished. Lord, I fear neither Takshaka nor death, now that I have entered the fearless and blissful state of Brahman. Do now permit me to hold my tongue and establish my mind, which has been swept from passion, in Lord Vishnu, while casting my mortal body.”

After receiving the homage of the King, Sri Suka departed with the ascetics. Left to himself, Parikshit spread *kusa* grass on the bank of the Ganga and sat on it facing north. Stopping his breath, he sat motionless, and merged his mind in the Supreme Brahman, with which he completely united in identical oneness. Driven by the Brahmin’s anger, Takshaka proceeded to that spot in order to bite him, but on the way he met a Brahmin named Kasyapa, who had the power of curing snake bites, and dissuaded him from going to the King’s help by bribing him with money, intent as he was on killing him. As the serpent could assume any shape at will, he disguised himself as a Brahmin and bit the saintly King with such a fiery venom that it instantly turned him into a heap of ash. A great moan rose from the earth and from all the parts of the universe at Parikshit’s death. Celestial drums sounded, gandharvas sang his virtues, and the gods rained flowers over his remains.

Stricken with sorrow at the fatal attack on his father by Takshaka, Janamejaya resolved to destroy all the snakes in existence. His priests lighted a great sacrificial fire and summoned them by powerful mantras to offer themselves as oblations into it. Thousands of snakes responded to the call from all quarters and entered the blaze. As Takshaka did not appear, a special invocation commanded him to come without delay. Trembling with fear, the serpent rushed to Indraloka and invoked the protection of the chief of the gods. When the Brahmins came to know of this, they issued a

peremptory summons not only on Takshaka but also on Indra himself and all his retinue to come and enter the fire, which compelled them all to ride their aerial cars and descend in great agitation to offer themselves as oblations. But Brihaspati, their preceptor, went to King Janamejaya and explained to him the sin he was incurring by committing to the fire so many innocent beings. After all, he argued, when a person dies by accident or by the action of others, he receives only what he had prepared for himself, as decreed by Providence. Takshaka was a mere instrument of His will. Moreover, he continued, Takshaka had eaten nectar and could not be killed by the fire. He urged the royal sacrificer, in conclusion, to stop this senseless massacre, which was bound to react on himself, reminding him of the danger of performing sacrifices for evil purposes which were prohibited by the Scriptures.

The King submitted to Brihaspati's counsel and stopped the snake sacrifice.

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## ***The origin and Division of the Veda***

At the request of Saunaka, the spokesman of the assembled sages, Suta enumerates the Rishis, their disciples and the disciples of their disciples who were responsible for categorising the different branches of the Veda and imparting them to the future generations. He began by explaining the origin of the Sanskrit alphabet out of which the Veda was composed. It was a single syllable — AUM — which sounded from the heart of Brahma, while he was in profound meditation, and from which he evolved all the vowels and consonants. With these Brahma gave utterance to the four Vedas from his four mouths to his (mind-born) sons (Marichi and others) who taught them to their own sons, thus passing them on from one generation to another, one *yuga* to another. Later they were divided by great seers into *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, etc. and rearranged at the end of the Dwapara age. Then the Lord Himself, taking birth as Vedavyasa, son of Parasara, compiled them into four major parts and taught them to four of his disciples — one Veda, or class of mantras to each one of them.

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## VII

### *The Puranas*

The Suta now names the six sages who were the original propounders of the Puranas which they had learnt from their Guru Romaharshana Suta, the disciple of Vedavyasa. The Puranas deal with the creation, from Mahat downward, the subsistence of all created things, the *Avataras* of Lord Vishnu, the Manus, the Indras, the kings, the three divisions of time (past, present and future), the three states of consciousness (*jagrat*, *svapna* and *sushupti*), the *jiva* as the cause of the creation and its ultimate union with the Absolute, etc. The *Puranas* are eighteen in number, namely, *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Padma*, *Linga*, *Garuda*, *Narada*, *Bhagavata* (the present one), *Agni*, *Skanda*, *Bhavishya*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Markandeya*, *Vamana*, *Varaha*, *Matsya*, *Kurma* and *Brahmanda*.

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## VIII – X

### *The Vision of Markandeya*

Saunaka said:

“May you live long, O good Suta, gem of a speaker, who light the way of those who wander in abysmal darkness, do tell us of Markandeya, of whom we have heard that he was blessed with a long life, surviving even the *pralaya*, when the whole universe was under the floods of the night of Brahma, which is a great wonder, inasmuch as we know that Markandeya was a Rishi of this *kalpa*, and of our own race, which no *pralaya* has yet overtaken. It was said that when the world was a single sheet of water, he saw the Supreme Being as a baby floating alone on the water in crib made of a banyan leaf. Please, O great Yogi, who have mastered all the *Puranas*, dispel this doubt of ours.”

Suta replied:

“Markandeya received the sacred thread from the hands of his father and made a profound study of the Vedas. He took to a strict ascetic life, remained a lifelong celibate, and wore matted hair, *munja* grass girdle and bark of trees on the skin. For many million years covering six *manvantaras* he practised this penance and conquered death — a most unusual victory, which astonished all the gods and men. Greatly alarmed by this long penance, Indra in the seventh *manvantara* decided to seduce him out of it by sending his best *apsaras* and *gandharvas* to dance and sing before him. When these failed to make any impression on him, they returned to Indra looking like children who had roused a snake and had run for dear life from it.

“Sri Hari, immensely pleased with the Sage’s steadfast *tapas*, appeared to him as the divine Rishis Nara and Narayana, whom he immediately recognised as the *avatara* of Lord Hari and received with great honour and high praise. Rishi Narayana replied that his long strenuous austerities had pleased Him, and that having attained perfection, he could ask of Him any boon he desired. Markandeya begged to be shown in action the Lord’s *Maya* which deludes men and the guardians of the spheres to perceive diversity where none but the one indivisible Reality alone exists. Nara and Narayana agreed and returned to Their hermitage.

“One evening while Markandeya was performing his worship on the bank of Pushpabhadra the wind rose and quickly turned to a violent storm, carrying heavy clouds, thunders and lightning flashes. Torrential rain soon followed, which went on incessantly pouring till the water covered all the land, rose to the sky, and drowned even the stars. All life was extinguished from the universe save himself and the animals that lived in that vast, boundless ocean. Markandeya drifted on the stormy waves, afflicted by hunger, cold and darkness, not to speak of the crocodiles and other large man-eating animals which infested the water. Once he yielded to utter misery, and once he felt unaccountably exhilarated. Many million years, he reckoned, have thus passed.

“Tossing over the rollicking waves towards the end of this period, Markandeya saw the darkness lift from a point in the ocean and reveal a patch of raised land on which stood a banyan tree, and on a branch of it a baby laid on a leaf whose sides were turned up, giving it the shape of a basket. Light emanated from the child which drove away the ambient darkness. The baby’s complexion was of dark-green emerald, and his face resembled the petal of a full blown lotus. With his tiny hands he lifted one of his feet and placed its big toe in his mouth to suck it. At this sight the heavy load of sorrow lifted from the Sage’s heart and thrilled him with joy. Approaching the dazzling child, he suddenly found himself inside him, sucked in by his breath, and was surprised to see, also inside the child, his hermitage, his village and the river Pushpabhadra. Before he could solve this mystery, he found himself back again on the waves, flung out by the baby’s exhalation, and saw again the banyan tree and the little one gazing at him with a playful smile on his lips. He stretched his arms to hug the beautiful child to his heart, but the latter suddenly disappeared, taking with him the banyan tree and the flood, leaving the Sage standing on the bank of Pushpabhadra, near his hermitage, doing his worship as before. The several million years of the flood turned out to be but a vision of a few minutes cast by the Lord, Who appeared as the child, on Markandeya’s mind, in response to his prayer for it.

“This is the story, O Saunaka, of the *pralaya* which Rishi Markandeya has experienced. Later Lord Shiva appeared to him and granted him a long life (for the whole of this *kalpa*) to spend in intense devotion to Sri Hari.”

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## XI

### *Symbolism of the Lord's Form*

Saunaka asks why is the Lord, Who is Pure Consciousness, worshipped as a form, having limbs, servants and even weapons. Suta answers that these are meditated upon as mere symbols of virtues and principles in His manifestation. His feet, for example, represent the earth, His head heaven, His navel mid-air, and so on. Each of his ornaments and garments, again, has its own significance: the *jiva*, for instance, which is made of His own consciousness, is symbolised by the *kaustubha gem*; the light of intelligence which it radiates by the white curl of hair (*Srivatsa*) on his right chest; the *gunas* by the garland of wild flowers (*vanamala*), *Prakriti* (un-manifest *gunas*) by His seat Sesa. The sphere where He is imagined to reside is the sun, of which the worship is conceived to eradicate all sins, as if it were the Lord Himself. Likewise His weapons are the symbols of radical virtues and attributes. The initiated devotees who are made to meditate on all these know that the Lord is unlimited, formless consciousness which has no parts or distinguishing qualities, and is not other than their very Self.

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## XII — XIII

### *The Glory of the Bhagavata Purana*

The Suta gives a very brief synopsis of the foregoing eleven *skandhas* (books) and affirms that he who studies them with reverence and understanding will derive the same benefit as he would from the study of the Rigveda, Yajurveda and Samaveda, which are the three streams flowing with honey, ghee and milk, put together. This *Purana* which is the quintessence of the Upanishads and which consists of eighteen thousand slokas, was revealed by the gracious Lord to Brahma. It is profusely illuminated with legends illustrating the Lord's plays and the glory of dispassion. Its theme is the one, secondless Reality which is the essence of the Vedanta and identical with the individual soul, and has *Kaivalya* (the attainment of this lone Reality) for sole object. He who develops a taste for it will relish nothing else. It occupies among the *Puranas* the place which the Ganga occupies among the sacred rivers, or Vishnu among the gods, or Kashi among the holy places of pilgrimage. It is faultless in its exaltation of the One Immaculate Consciousness, which is the goal of the *Paramahamsas* (the highest ascetics), and in its exposition of the *cessation of all actions and self-dedication to dispassion, devotion, and spiritual enlightenment (vairagya, bhakti and jnana)*.

Let us contemplate the pure, perfect, eternal, absolute Reality which was graciously revealed by Lord Narayana in the beginning of creation to Brahma, and by Brahma to Narada, and by Narada to Vyasa, who imparted it to his son Suka, who imparted it to King Parikshit and redeemed him from the misery of transmigration.

Salutations to Sri Hari, the Dispeller of all fear, the chanting of Whose Name washes away all sins and puts an end to all suffering!

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## *List of Characters*

*Achyuta*: imperishable, permanent. A name of Krishna, Narayana, and Vishnu.

*Aditi*: daughter of Daksha and wife of Kashyapa. Mother of the Adityas, Vamana, and the gods.

*Adityas*: sons of Aditi, the eleven gods, of whom Sun god is chief.

*Adharma*: a son of Brahma, formed of his back.

*Agastya*: rishi, patron saint of the south, who worships the Lord Vishnu from Mt. Malaya, Kerala, S. India.

*Aghasura*: Agha; a demon disguised as a snake, killed by, and then absorbed into Krishna.

*Agnidhra*: Priyavrata's eldest son who married the celestial apsara Purvachitti.

*Airavata*: Indra's giant white elephant mount.

*Ajamila*: a fallen Brahmin, saved by Lord Narayana after calling out his name.

*Akrura*: one of the chiefs among the Yadus, an uncle and devotee of Krishna; also known as Danapati.

*Akuti*: daughter of Swayambhuva Manu, the first Sovereign of the earth, and Satarupa his queen. The whole of humanity descended from this line.

*Alarka*: king, disciple of Dattatreya.

*Ambalika*: princess of Kashi, wife of Vichitravirya, then of Vyasadeva; mother of Pandu.

*Ambika*: princess of Kashi, wife of Vichitravirya, then of Vyasadeva; mother of Dhritarashtra.

*Ananta*: a partial incarnation of Vishnu as the serpent Sesha, who dwells in Patala. Seventh (elder) brother of Krishna, transferred from Devaki's womb to Rohini's by Yogamaya.

*Anasuya*: Wife of Atri; Mother of Dattatreya and Durvasa.

*Anga*: king; married to Sunita, and a descendent of Vatsara. Issueless until Vishnu granted a boon for a son, who became the cruel king Vena.

*Angira*: one of the nine mind-born prajapatis (sons) of Brahma, formed from his mouth.

*Aniruddha*: son of Pradyumna, a grandson of Krishna.

*Antariksha*: a naked ascetic; one of nine ascetic sons of sage Rishabha, who had one hundred sons.

*Archis*: a lustrous girl extracted from the arm of Vena, being a ray of goddess Lakshmi. Prithu was extracted from the other arm. (See Prithu)

*Arjuna*: The third Pandava. Grandfather of Parikshit.

*Arjuna*: king; kidnapper of Kamadhenu, slain by Parasurama.

*Arundhati*: wife of the prajapati Vasishta, married to him by Kardama.

*Aswattama*: son of Drona, who tried to kill Parikshit (Arjuna's grandson) in the womb and thereby end the Pandava line. His son was Kripa.

*Aswinikumaras*: twin celestial physicians.

*Atri*: one of the seven mind-born sons of Brahma, formed from His eyes, married to Anasuya, and father of Soma the moon god.

*Avirhotra*: a naked ascetic, one of nine ascetic sons of sage Rishabha.

## **B**

*Badarayana*: sage Vedavyasa; father of Suka

*Baka*: asura disguised as a crane slain by Krishna; father of Aghasura.

*Balarama*: nineteenth (partial) avatar of Vishnu, born as Krishna's elder brother. Son of Vasudeva by Rohini.

*Bali*: asura, son of Kritavama and grandson of Prahlada, devotee of Vishnu.

*Bana*: asura king, son of Bali, a devotee of Shiva. Father of Usha. He married Charumati, a daughter of Krishna and Rukmini.

*Barishad*: a king addicted to the ritual of cutting kusa grass and the sacrifice of animals; Narada averted this addiction.

*Bharadwaja*: ancient Rishi.

*Bharata*: sage king; eldest son of Rishabha, known as Jada. Reborn as a deer after becoming attached to the form of this animal.

*Bhima*: Bhimasena; second of the Pandavas.

*Bhishmaka*: king of Vidarba; Rukmini's father.

*Brahma*: the creator within the trinity; Nirguna – the one reality, and Saguna – the personal godhead.

*Bhrigu*: a prajapati; one of the nine mind-born sons of Brahma, born from his thumb.

*Brihaspati*: ancient rishi, the preceptor of the gods.

*Buddha*: Sakyamuni, Magadhal; Founder of Buddhism, regarded as the twenty-first (partial) avatar of Vishnu.

## C

*Chakshusna*: Manu; the sixth. Lord Vishnu appeared in this manvantara as a tortoise, to immortalize the gods through their drinking of His nectar.

*Chamasa*: an ascetic; one of the nine naked ascetic sons of Rishabha

*Chandragupta*: a (then) future king prophesied by Suka in the Maurya dynasty.

*Chanura*: a world-famed wrestler hosted by Kamsa to fight and kill Krishna and Balarama.

*Charumati*: one of Krishna's daughters from Rukmini, whom He married to Bali, Kritavarma's son.

*Chitraketu*: king of the lands around Mathura, who relinquished his attachments to material things; later cursed by Parvati, and became the demon asura, Vritra. Married to queen Kritadyuti.

*Chyavana*: ancient rishi who took back his youth through the Aswins. He married princess Sukanya.

## D

*Daityas*: asuras, demons. Sons of Diti.

*Dadhichi*: the sage who cast off his body and gave Indra the bone of his arm from which was made the weapon which killed Vritra the demon.

*Daksha*: one of the nine mind-born prajapatis (sons) of Brahma, formed from his thumb.

Husband of Prasuti, father of Sati, one of Shiva's wives.

*Danava*: asura. Son of Danu.

*Danvantari*: the celebrated *amsa* of the Lord, who revealed the Ayurvedic medical science to the world.

*Dantavaktra*: Krishna's cousin. Slain by Krishna and restored to his status as gatekeeper in Vaikuntha.

*Danu*: wife of Kasyapa, mother of the Danavas (Asuras).

*Daruka*: Krishna's charioteer.

*Dasaratha*: king; from whom Sri Rama was born.

*Dattatreya*: avatara and son of Atri and Anasuya. Sixth (partial) incarnation of Vishnu. He listed twenty four gurus who had assisted him in attaining Self Realisation..

*Devadutta*: the celestial horse ridden by Kalki, the future incarnation of Vishnu.

*Devahuti*: second daughter of Swayambhuva Manu, the first Sovereign of the earth, and Satarupa his queen. The whole of humanity descended from this line. Wife of Kardama.

*Devaki*: Krishna's real mother; Yasoda became His fostermother.

*Devala*: Rishi who had previously cursed the alligator, Hutu.

*Devapi*: brother of Santanu; living being, along with Maru, alive since Krishna's time in Kalapa (Badrinath), who will re-establish virtue, the Ashramas and Varnas when Kalki appears, at the end of Kali yuga.

*Devi*: goddess Lakshmi.

*Devayani*: brahmin daughter of Sukracharya, who married Yayati, a Kshatriya. Mother of Yadu.

*Dhanvantari*: the twelfth avatara of Vishnu.

*Dharma*: a son of Brahma, formed from his Heart,

*Dhara*: previous incarnation of Yasoda.

*Dhenukasura*: head of a group of asuras, disguised as asses, who were slain by Balarama.

*Dhritarashtra*: blind son of Vysadava and Ambika. Father of Duryodhana, Pandu and Kauravas.

*Dhruva*: the son of Uttanapada and Suniti, devotional and ascetic, who, despite supreme tapas was destined to rule as king. Eventually through his



devotion he became *Dhruva-pada* (Polaris), the pole star.

*Diti*: the daughter of Daksha, wife of Kasyapa, mother of Hiranyakasipu and the Daityas, grand-mother of Prahlada.

*Drona*: father of Aswatthama, archery instructor to the Kurus and Pandavas and 2nd C in C of the former in the Mahabharata.

*Draupadi*: wife of the five Pandava brothers whose children were murdered by Aswatthama during the great Kurukshetra War.

*Drumila*: a naked ascetic, one of nine ascetic sons of sage Rishabha.

*Durga*: Kanya, Kanyakumari, the mother-goddess, a fearsome form of Shiva's consort.

*Durvasa*: ancient Rishi; a ray of Lord Shiva, known for his short temper. Descendent of Puru.

*Duryodhana*: eldest son of Dhritarashtra; a mace fighting teacher; slain by Bhima in the Mahabharata.

*Dushyanta*: Shakuntala's husband and father of Bharata; from whom descended the Pandavas and the Kauravas. A descendant of Puru.

*Dwivida*: a monkey chief slain by Balarama for his evil deeds; polluting temples, demolishing hermitages and general mayhem.

## **G**

*Gada*: Krishna's brother, son of Vasudeva and Rohini.

*Gajendra*: a huge elephant, formerly a Pandya king, rescued by Vishnu from the jaws of an alligator in the valley of Mt. Trikuta.

*Gandhini*: mother of Akrura.

*Gandhari*: wife of Dhritarashtra, mother of Kauravas and Duryodana.

*Ganga*: presiding goddess over the sacred river Ganga. Married to Santanu, Bhishma's mother.

*Gati*: wife of the prajapati Pulaha; married to him by Kardama.

*Garga*: Rishi; guru of the Yadus who was requested to perform Krishna's naming ceremony.

*Garuda*: eagle (or vulture) mount of Vishnu; son of Kasyapa. King of birds.

*Gautama*: warrior and guru of King Parikshit.

*Gopi(s)*: maiden who cares for cows: the chief devotees and lovers of Lord Krishna, who attained union through keeping their minds ceaselessly centered upon Him.

*Govinda*: god of cows, Krishna.

*Guha*: Skanda, Subramanya, Kumara; the second son of Shiva and Parvati.

*Guhyakas*: followers of Kubera.

## **H**

*Hanuman*: celebrated monkey chief who was immortalized in the Ramayana for his assistance to Sri Rama and Sri Lakshmana in tracking and returning Sita, after her capture by Ravana.

*Havirbhu*: wife of the prajapatis Pulastya; married by Kardama.

*Hara*: Shiva

*Hari*: Vishnu, also the name of one of nine ascetic sons of Rishabha.

*Haryashwas*: first group of one thousand sons of Daksha who became Self realised.

*Hayagriva*: a demon chief who stole the Vedas from the mouth of Brahma, slain by Lord Narayana for their recapture.

*Hiranyakasipu*: asura King; a son of Diti, elder brother of Hiranyaksha who was slain by Vishnu when incarnate as a boar. Father of Prahlada, Hiranyakasipu is slain by Lord Narasimha but returns to Vaikuntha as one of the two gatekeepers.

*Hiranyaksha*: brother of the above, also slain by Vishnu and returned to Vaikuntha.

*Hutu*: alligator who attacked Gajendra; cursed in a previous life by Rishi Devala

## **I**

*Ila*: one of two wives of Dhruva.

*Ikshwaku*: solar king, the eldest son of Manu, the seventh manvantara. An ancestor of Rama.

*Indra*: king of the gods and seventh incarnation of Vishnu, who possesses all the human foibles as well as all the divine powers. God of thunderbolt and rain and regent of the Eastern quarter.

*Ishvara*: one of the names of Lord Narayana in Satya yuga. Also the Supreme Lord, usually applied to Shiva or Paramesvara.

## **J**

*Jamadagni*: the murdered Rishi, who was revived by Rama and held to be the seventh star in the constellation of the Rishis, Ursa Minor.

*Jambavan*: the giant king of the bears who fought Krishna for twenty-eight days for the gem, Syamantaka and then realised him as his former master, Sri Rama.,

*Jambavati*: daughter of Jambavan, given to Krishna by her father as a bride.

*Janaka*: noble friend of Balarama.

*Janamejaya*: the eldest son of Parikshit, who incurred sin by destroying snakes, in revenge for his father's death at the bite of Takshaka.

*Janardana*: the Lord Vishnu.

*Jara*: demoness mother of Jarasandha, who put him together from two halves.

*Jara*: a hunter destined to kill Krishna with an arrow, heralding the advent of Kali yuga.

*Jarasandha*: King of Magadha and enemy of Krishna, killed by Bhima.

*Jaya*: one of the two shining gatekeepers of the seventh heaven, Vaikuntha; cursed by the four Kumaras and born as the twins Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu.

*Jada*: nick-name of king Bharata, the eldest son of Rishabha.

*Jayanti*: wife of Rishabha, gifted to him by Indra. Rishabha had one hundred sons, the eldest-Bharata became the sage King known as Jadabharata.

## **K**

*Kala*: wife of the prajapati Marichi; married to him by Kardama.

*Kalagnirudra*: a dreadful ferocious demon; the spirit of destruction, let loose upon doomsday by Lord Shiva.

*Kali*: spirit of the incoming age which commenced the moment that Krishna left the Earth. Parikshit ordained the areas of his domain: dicing,

wine, women, cruelty to living beings, and gold.

*Kaliya*: serpent contaminating a river, absolved by Krishna and sent to the island of Ramanaka.

*Kalindi*: daughter of the sun-god who became the fourth wife of Krishna.

*Kalki*: twenty second incarnation of Vishnu, yet to come, near the end of the Kali Yuga. Kalki will appear in the house of Brahmana Vishnuyasas, chief of the village of Shambala. His mount will be the swift horse, Devadatta, upon whom He will cleanse the Earth, Satya yuga will then commence.

*Kama*: one of the nine mind-born prajapatis (sons) of Brahma, formed from his heart.

*Kamadeva*: Lord of Love.

*Kamadhenu*: Celestial cow able to grant any wish.

*Kamsa*: tyrant ruler of Mathura, cousin of Devaki, slain by Krishna.

*Kanwa*: a great Rishi.

*Kapila*: Lord Kapila, the fifth incarnation of Vishnu, who founded the Sankhya system. Maintains his ashrama in NE direction.

*Karabhajama*: a naked ascetic; one of nine ascetic sons of sage Rishabha.

*Kardama*: one of the nine mind-born prajapatis (sons) of Brahma, formed from his shadow.

*Karna*: the eldest son of Kunti (born of the sun-god); abandoned by her, he joined the Kauravas; a great warrior and generous giver.

*Kasyapa*: son of the prajapati Marichi through Kala. Father of the gods and asuras. Daksha married his first thirteen daughters to him including Aditi and Diti. Father of Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu with Diti.

*Kauravas* tribe, chief enemies of the Pandavas.

*Kavi*: a naked ascetic; one of nine ascetic sons of sage Rishabha.

*Keshava*: Vishnu, also applied to Krishna.

*Kesi*: asura in the guise of a horse, killed by Krishna.

*Khyati*: wife of the prajapati Bhrigu; married to him by Kardama.

*Kratu*: one of the nine mind-born prajapatis (sons) of Brahma, formed from his hand.

*Kripa*: son of Aswattama; Drona's brother-in-law. Tutor at the court of Hastinapura.

*Krishna*: twentieth full Avatara of Lord Vishnu, hero of the Mahabharata and Srimad Bhagavatam.

*Krishnã*: Draupadi

*Kritadyuti*: eldest and foremost of thousands of queens of king Chitraketu, who bore him a child only after a puja was performed by Rishi Angira. The birth and subsequent death of this child led to the king's final emancipation.

*Kritavama*: father of Bali.

*Kriya*: wife of the prajapati Kratu, married to him by Kardama.

*Krodha*: one of the nine mind-born prajapatis (sons) of Brahma, formed from his brows.

*Kshemaka*: future king listed by Parikshit, fifteen generations into the Kali age.

*Kubera*: god of wealth.

*Kubja*: Trivakra; a hunchbacked maidservant of Kamsa, transformed into the beautiful maid Kubja by Krishna.

*Kuchela*: Sudama; Krishna's poor Brahmana classmate and devotee, whom he exalted.

*Kumaras*: original four sons of Brahma, who preferred Self-absorption to creation.

*Kunti*: sister of Vasudeva, wife of Pandu, mother of Bhima and Arjuna.

*Kurma*: tortoise, Vishnu's eleventh incarnation as a tortoise.

*Kuru*: founder of the Kuru dynasty..

*Kuta*: world-famed wrestler hosted by Kamsa to fight and kill Krishna and Balarama.

*Kuvalayapida*: Kamsa's elephant whom he boldly likened to the angel of death himself, who was set upon Krishna but was easily slain by Him.

*Khyati*: wife of a prajapatis, married by Kamada.

## L

*Lakshmana*: brother of Sri Rama

*Lakshmanā*: one of Krishna's wives; Duryodana's daughter who married Samba.

*Lakshmi*: goddess of prosperity, consort of Vishnu.

## M

*Madhava*: Krishna

*Madhu*: first asura, slain by Vishnu.

*Madhus*: Yadava tribe who ruled in Mathura.

*Madri*: wife of Pandu. Mother of Nakula and Sahadeva.

*Maitreya*: a celebrated Rishi; the co-disciple of Vedavyasa, who roams liberated and free in the World.

*Mandhata*: great emperor, son of king Yuvanasva, given birth by his father, and nectar to drink by Indra as a child.

*Manu*: primary man and father of the human race; married to Satarupa, who gave him two sons and three daughters. The fourteen successive Manus are mentioned in the Manusmriti, each of the Manvantaras being presided over by its own Manu. Currently it is said we are in the seventh..

*Marichi*: one of the nine mind-born prajapatis (sons) of Brahma, formed from his mind.

*Markandeya*: rishi and devotee who survived the last pralaya as a boon for his devotion to Vishnu from Shiva.

*Maru*: living being, along with Devapi, alive since Krishna's time in Kalapa (Badrinath), who will re-establish virtue, the Ashramas and Varnas when Kalki appears, at the end of Kali yuga.

*Marut*: seven or forty-nine gods of wind. Breeze, wind or air.

*Matsya*: tenth avatar, incarnation of Vishnu as a fish.

*Maya*: chief architect of the asuras, commanded by Krishna to construct an optical illusory assembly hall (Maya Sabha) for the Pandavas.

*Mayavati*: demon Shambara's cook who rescued Pradyumna, the son of Krishna and Rukmini from the belly of a big fish and who subsequently became a beautiful young woman and married Pradyumna.

*Mena*: wife of Hemavat who bore him no children.

*Menaka*: celestial apsara (nymph) whom Indra sent to the earth to spoil the severe tapas of Vishwamitra , which threatened to dethrone him from the ruler-ship of the three worlds.

*Mohini*: entrancing young woman, the thirteenth incarnation of Vishnu, who deluded the asuras and saved the nectar for the gods alone. Lord Shiva was also intoxicated by her.

*Mrityu*: god of death.

*Muchukunda*: a devotee who was granted the boon of undisturbed sleep by Brahmins for his service. Disturbed by the Yavana who was pursuing Krishna, he slew the pursuer with his glance.

*Mustika*: a world-famed wrestler hosted by Kamsa to fight and kill Krishna and Balarama.

## N

*Nabhi*: the eldest of nine sons of Priyavrata and Purvachitti, an apsara given as a wife by Brahma to Priyavrata. The father of Rishabha, the eighth avatara of Vishnu.

*Nahusha*: acting chief of the celestials while Indra went into hiding for the murder of Brahmins. Yayati was his son.

*Nakula*: fourth of the five Pandava brothers, son of Pandu and Madri. Half brother to Bhima and Arjuna.

*Nanda*: husband of Yasoda and step-father to Krishna. He was Drona in Brahmaloaka in a previous life.

*Nanda*: a (then) future king; the last in the line of ten Shishunagas; prophesied by Sri Suka to occur in the Kali yuga,; he will marry a Sudra and destroy the Kshatriya race..

*Nandishwara*: chief devotee of Shiva who cursed Daksha and the Brahmins.

*Nara*: a rishi who dwells in Badrinath with Narada. The fourth incarnation of Vishnu.

*Narada*: a rishi who dwells in Badrinath with Nara. A third incarnation of Vishnu, he appears throughout the Bhagavatam.

*Naraka*: an asura chief slain by Krishna; he was born from the Earth when she was in contact with the Lord as a boar.

*Narasimha*: the fourteenth avatara of Vishnu: a Man-lion who killed Hiranyakasipu.

*Narayana*: Vishnu, the Lord, ‘stretched upon the water’, the Self of the Universe and the seed of all divine incarnations. His abode is Vaikuntha, the highest region in creation.

*Neelakantha*: blue throat; name of Shiva after He swallowed poisonous emanations from the primeval ocean which were poisoning the creation, turning His throat blue.

*Nila*: companion of Hanuman who assisted the return of Sita to Sri Rama in Lanka.

*Nimi*: king of the Videha who asks many questions of the Rishis and has his doubts dispelled.

*Niritti*: god of sins and chief of the Rakshasas; a mind-born son of Brahma.

*Nisada*: a dwarf child extracted from a thigh of the dead body of Vena, the evil son of Sunita.

*Nisadas*: the dwarf race founded by Nisada.

*Nriga*: a pious and generous king; son of Ikshwaku, who “sinned” by accident and was reborn as a giant chameleon. Nriga was discovered in a well and exalted by Krishna.

## **P**

*Panchajana*: a prajapati, father of Askini, who married Daksha.

*Pandavas*: offspring of Pandu, with the Kauravas were the main protagonists of the great Kurukshetra war. Yudhishtira was their king, Indraprastha their capital.

*Pandu*: son of Vichitravirya and Ambalika, father of the Pandavas.

*Parasara*: a Rishi, the father of Vyasa, the seventeenth avatar of Vishnu. Guru of Maitreya who passed on the Bhagavatam scripture to him.

*Parasurama*: the sixteenth incarnation of Lord Vishnu who exterminated the arrogant Kshatriyas. Destined to propound the Vedas to the world in the next manvantara, the eighth.



*Parikshit:* Arjuna's grandson, Abhimanyu's son to whom Suka expounded the Bhagavatam. Krishna had previously extended great kindness to his forebears.

*Parvati:* Sati, beloved and consort. of Lord Shiva.

*Pasupati:* Lord of creatures, Shiva.

*Pippalayana:* A naked ascetic, one of the nine ascetic sons of sage Rishabha.

*Prabuddha:* A naked ascetic, one of nine ascetic sons of sage Rishabha.

*Prachinabarhi:* nickname of King Barishad, so called after the kusa grass used in the sacrifice of animals. King Barishad was addicted to this form of worship; sage Narada averted this addiction.

*Prachetas:*

*Prachetasa:* the son of the ten Prachetas and grandson of Prachinabarhi.

*Pradyumna:* the son of Krishna and Rukmini, who married Rukmavati, the daughter of Rukmi. Kidnapped by the demon Shambara.

*Prahlada:* devotee of Dattatreya; son of Hiranyakashipu, who refused his father's impious teachings.

*Pralamba:* a vicious asura disguised as a cowherd wanting to destroy Krishna and Balarama, who saw through his mask and slew him.

*Prasena:* sun worshipper, brother of Satrajit who was gifted the Syamantaka gem.

*Prasuti:* third daughter of Swayambhuva Manu and Satarupa, whose progeny filled the Earth.

*Prisnigarbha:* Prisni; mother of an incarnation Vishnu.

*Prithu:* ninth avatara of Vishnu, extracted from Vena's arm and who married Archis who was extracted from the other arm. He learned the way to Liberation directly from the Lord.

*Priyavrata:* son of Swayambhuva Manu, the first Sovereign of the earth, and his queen Satarupa. Uttanapada was his brother and Akuti, Devahuti and Prasuti were his sisters. Together their progeny filled the Earth.

*Pulaha*: Gaya; celestial sage, a son of Brahma formed from His navel; his ashram was on the Ganges delta.

*Pulastya*: celestial sage, a son of Brahma, formed from His ear. Grandfather of Ravana and Kubera.

*Puranjaya*: a (then) future King of Magadha in the Kali yuga in the Lunar lineage.

*Puru*: the youngest son of Yayati, ancestor of the Pauravas, who took upon himself his father's old age.

*Purusha*: the unborn Lord; Atman or First Person.

*Purvachitti*: beautiful apsara (nymph) of Brahmaloaka, given to Agnidhra, Priyavrata's eldest son, by Brahma as a wife.

*Putana*: a female demon, an infanticide sent by Kamsa who tried unsuccessfully to murder child Krishna, and who was slain.

## **R**

*Rahu*: planet and originally one of the Daityas; disguised himself as a celestial to obtain nectar through deceit and was slain by Vishnu. His severed head became immortalized as the planet.

*Rama*: (1) Parasurama, (2) Sri Rama, son of Dasartha, (3) Balarama, son of Vasudeva and Rohini, brother of Krishna; all incarnations of Vishnu.

*Rishabha*: eighth avatara of Vishnu, a lustrous sage who also became a king and preceptor.

*Ravana*: ten headed demon king of Lanka.

*Renuka*: mother of Parasurama.

*Revati*: wife of Balarama, daughter of the king of Anartas.

*Rochana*: granddaughter of Rukmi.

*Rohini*: wife of Vasudeva, mother of Balarama.

*Romaharsana*: Rishi, disciple of Vyasa, to whom Veda Vyasa taught the Puranas.

*Rudra*: Shiva, dark red; a being who broke out from between Brahma's eyebrows.

*Rukmavati*: a daughter of Rukmi allowed to marry Pradyumna despite her fathers hatred of Krishna.

*Rukmi*: elder brother of Rukmini, who opposed her marriage to Krishna.

*Rukmini*: a part manifestation of Sree, the consort of Vishnu, the first wife of Krishna.

## S

*Sahadeva*: son of Pandu by his second wife, Madri, begotten vicariously by the Aswin Twin physicians; a brother of Nakula.

*Sahadeva*: King Jarasandha's son in the Magadha lineage, enthroned by Krishna..

*Sachi*: the most beautiful wife of Indra, claimed by Nahusha in His absence.

*Sala*: world-famed wrestler, hosted by Kamsa to fight and kill Krishna and Balarama.

*Salva*: brother of Vidhurata opposed Krishna's marriage to Rukmini, along with her brother Rukmi.

*Samba*: son of Krishna, a brother of Pradyumna.

*Sambara*: demon enemy of the gods siding with Kamsa against Krishna's marriage.

*Samika*: Rishi who's son cursed Parikshit and who rebuked his son for judgment of the emperor.

*Sanaka*: Brahma's mind-born son, one of the four celibate Kumaras, who preferred to contemplate the Self rather than work in the Creation.

*Sananda*: see Sanandana

*Sanandana*: Brahma's mind-born son, one of the four celibate Kumaras, He expounded upon Brahman to an assembly of sages.

*Sanatana*: one of the four celibate Kumaras, who preferred to contemplate the Self rather than work in the Creation.

*Sanatkumara*: one of the four celibate Kumaras, who preferred to contemplate the Self rather than work in the Creation. He received the Bhagavatam from Sesha.

*Sandipani*: teacher of scripture to Krishna and Balarama. Krishna met Sudama in this class.

*Sankarshana*: Serpent Sesha, passed on Bhagavatam to Sanatkumara. Another name for Balarama.

*Santanu*: Bhishma's father, husband of Ganga (q.v.); brother of Devapi.

*Sarmistha*: virgin daughter of the Danava king Vrishaparva who pushed Devayani into the well.

*Sarva*: a name of Vishnu in Treta yuga.

*Satarupa*: queen of the primary Manu, mother of two sons: Piyavrata and Uttanapada, and three daughters: Akuti, Devahuti and Prasuti.

*Sati*: Shiva's wife, Parvati. She committed suicide at her husband-Lord Shiva's, slight by Daksha, and was reborn to Mena, the wife of Himavat, and remarried Rudra.

*Satrajit*: Sun worshipper, rewarded with the Syamantaka gem, who falsely charged Krishna with its theft.

*Satya*: a wife of Krishna, a Kosala princess.

*Satyabhama*: a wife of Krishna gifted to Him by Satrajit for the return of the Syamantaka gem. The incarnation of Mother Earth.

*Satyaka*: a son of Krishna with Bhadra; she was one of His first eight wives.

*Satyavati*: mother of Vyasa, an incarnation of Vishnu, and the author of this Bhagavata.

*Satyavrata*: Dravidian King, a great devotee of Narayana in a previous kalpa, who recognized the fish incarnation of Vishnu. In the present *kalpa* he was born as a son of Vivaswan, son of Kasyapa and Aditi, and his name was Shraddhadeva, who later became the Manu of the seventh manvantara (the current one) under the name of Vaivasvata.

*Saubhari*: an ascetic who lived half submerged in the Yamuna river; he transformed his body and married fifty princesses. After introspection he resumed tapas and realised the Supreme.

*Saunaka*: a sage to whom Suta recited the Bhagavatam.

*Savarni*: Manu of the next (eighth) Manvantara, now ruling Sataloka.

*Sesha*: Adishesha: serpent and divine bed of Lord Vishnu; with one thousand heads. (see Sankarshana)

*Shabalashwas*: second group of one thousand sons of Daksha, who also all became Self realised.

*Shakuntala*: lustrous daughter of the sage Viswamitra and the celestial nymph Menaka, with whom Dushyanta fell in love and married.

*Shambara*: a demon who kidnapped Pradyumna- who was Lord Krishna's first son.

*Shankachuda*: attendant of Kubera, a Yaksha slain by Krishna when he attacked a Rasa dance.

*Shankara*: Lord Shiva, third of the triune Hindu gods.

*Shanti*: married by Kardama to one of the nine Prajapatis: Atharva

*Sharyati*: a pious and learned king of the Solar lineage, who's daughter Sukanya offended Rishi Chyavana, and had to marry him.

*Shatrughna*: a partial manifestation of Lord Vishnu, and a brother of Sri Rama. The Ramayana is their full story. Lakshmana and Bharata are the other two of the four brothers.

*Shishunagas*: a future lineage of kings; correctly prophesied by Suka in the Srimad Bhagavatam in the Kali yuga.

*Shiva*: Lord, Shankara, Hara , Rudra. The third aspect of Supreme Consciousness, the destroyer.

*Shraddha*: wife of the prajapati Angira; married to him by Kardama.

*Shraddhadeva*: Satyavrata; In the present *kalpa* born as a son of Vivaswan, who later became the Manu of the seventh (current) Manvantar. Father of Ikshwaku, first of the solar kings.

*Shrutadeva*: Brahmin householder and devotee of Lord Krishna, whose house He visited. *Shurpanakha*: sister of Ravana and a rakshasi, encountered by Sri Rama.

*Sisupala*: an enemy of Lord Krishna, who was absorbed by Him.

*Sita*: Rama's wife who was kidnapped by Ravana to Lanka.

*Soma*: moon-god, the mind-born son of Atri.

*Sree*: Lakshmi, consort of Lord Narayana.

*Subhadra*: the sister of Lord Krishna, wife of Arjuna; grandmother of Parikshit.

*Sudama*: see Kuchela

*Sugriva*: companion of Hanuman who assisted in the return of Sita to Sri Rama in Lanka.

*Suka*: Sukadeva; son of Vedavyasa (Badarayana), who expounded the Bhagavatam to king Parikshit.

*Sukanya*: princess; daughter of king Sharyati who innocently offended Rishi Chyavana and became his diligent wife.

*Sukracharya*: Brahmin priest and preceptor of the asuras who married the daughter of Priyavrata. The teacher of Prahlada.

*Sunanda*: a trusted Brahmin messenger sent by Rukmini to find and bring Krishna to her.

*Sunita*: queen; wife of king Anga. (See Anga)

*Suniti*: the elder of the two wives of Uttanapada, the mother of Dhruva.

*Surabhi*: the celestial cow; wish-fulfilling cow or cow of plenty.

*Suruchi*: the younger of the two wives of Uttanapada, whom he favored.

*Suta*: Ugrasrava; present when Suka, the son of Vedavyasa (the author of this Bhagavatam) expounded the scripture to King Parikshit on the banks of the Ganges.

*Sutapi*: husband of Prisni in her previous life, a sinless prajapati.

*Suyajna*: king of Ushinara, unto whose wives Yama gave a discourse on jnana upon Suyajna's death.

*Swayambhuva*: see Manu

## T

*Takshaka*: great celestial serpent who bit and killed king Parikshit, due to an irreversible curse laid on the king by sage Samika's son.

*Tamasa*: manu of the fourth manvantara, son of Priyavrata.

*Tara*: the wife of Brihaspati, seduced by Soma. Their son thus began the Lunar regal dynasty.

*Tosala*: world-famed wrestler hosted by Kamsa to fight and kill Krishna and Balarama.

*Trinavarta*: a wind and storm raising asura (demon) sent by Kamsa to destroy Krishna.

*Trivakra*: Kubja; the hunchback whom Krishna straightened, and later visited as promised.

*Twasta*: Twastadeva; a Rishi; the father of Visvarupa who created a ferocious demon, Vritra to destroy Indra.

## U

*Uchchaishrava*: famed white horse, taken by Indra as his personal mount.

*Uddhava*: a great Yadava Vrishni statesman and devotee of Krishna, unto whom Krishna preached the Uddhava Gita, the core teaching of the Srimad Bhagavatam, before His return to Vaikuntha.

*Ugrasena*: King; the father of Kamsa.

*Ugrasrava Suta*: see Suta

*Uma*: consort of Shiva.

*Upendra Vamana*: the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu to Kasyapa and Aditi

*Usha*: the daughter of asura Bana, who had a secret romance with Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna.

*Utkala*: son of Dhruva and Ila.

*Uttanapada*: one of two sons and three daughters of Swayambhuva Manu and Satarupa.

*Uttara*: the mother of Parikshit, who was attacked by Aswathama while still in her womb.

## V

*Vaivasvata*: Manu; the name given to Satyavrata by Brahma, as Manu of the seventh (current) kalpa.

*Vajra*: son of Samba; sole survivor of the Yadava fratricide. The great-grandson of Krishna.

*Vak*: goddess of speech; one of the nine prajapatis, the mind-born sons of Brahma; formed from his mouth.

*Vamadeva*: a name of Rudra given by Brahma.

*Vamana*: the fifteenth avatar of Vishnu as a Brahmin dwarf, son of Aditi and Kashyapa.

*Varuna*: ruler of the seas; who alone stood up to Hiranyaksha.

*Vasishta*: great sage; a prajapati, a mind-born son of Brahma formed from his breath; great grand-father of Vyasa.

*Vasudeva*: Lord; Krishna;

*Vasudeva*: the father of Krishna and husband of Devaki, who had to give Him up to Nanda and Yasoda, so as to outwit Kamsa.

*Vasuki*: king of the serpents.

*Vatsasura*: a demon asura, disguised as a calf but recognized as such by Krishna, who slew him.

*Vatsara*: son of Dhruva and Brahmi, half-brother of Uttkala in whose place he was crowned king, married to Sunita, , and father of Vena.

*Vayu*: Lord of the winds.

*Vedagarbha*: Brahma; storehouse of the Vedas.

*Vena*: the cruel son of King Anga and queen Sunita, who prayed to Vishnu for a son. Killed by the Brahmins, he died issueless but from his dead body the dwarf race of Nisadas was created.

*Vibishana*: the youngest brother of Ravana, loyal to Rama – placed on the throne of Lanka after the rescue of Sita.

*Vidura*: Dritarashtra's half-brother who received teachings at Krishna's command from the Rishi Maitreya.

*Vijaya*: one of two shining gatekeepers of the seventh heaven; cursed by the four Kumaras and reborn as the twins Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu.

*Virabhadra*: monstrous colossus formed of one of Lord Shiva's matted locks to avenge Sati's death, caused by Daksha's slight against her husband.

*Vishnu*: the second member of the Hindu trinity who incarnates on Earth in many successive forms (avatars) to bring humanity back to the virtuous path. Krishna is the supreme avatar of Vishnu.

*Visvarupa*: the son of Twasta, murdered by Indra. Guru of the gods.

*Vishwamitra*: Kausika; the Kshatriya who became a Brahmarshi through his austerities; a Rishi.



*Viswakarma*: the celestial architect of Satalaloka.

*Vritra*: son of Twasta; a demon foe of Indra, who was previously king Chitraketu and thus a devotee of Vishnu, who attained Liberation immediately when freed from his demonic body.

*Vyasa*: Badarayana; the seventeenth avatara of Vishnu. Author of the Srimad Bhagavatam.

## Y

*Yadu*: the eldest son of Devayani who founded the Yadu race; the tribe of Lord Krishna

*Yajna*: name of Lord Vishnu in the treta yuga. The Lord of sacrifice. Son of Akuti.

*Yama*: the Lord of death.

*Yasoda*: wife of Nanda and foster mother of Krishna.

*Yavana*: a Greek warrior who besieged Mathura; destroyed by Muchukunda's glance while he was in pursuit of Krishna.

*Yayati*: the son of Nahusha who became prematurely old and exchanged his senility for his son Puru's youth.

*Yogamaya*: Lord Vishnu's creative power who transferred Ananta from Devaki's womb to Rohini's, and was born to Yasoda.

*Yudhishthira*: eldest son of Pandu and Kunti, vicariously via Dharma, the lord of piety.

*Yuvanasva*: a descendant of Ikshwaku, who propitiated Indra to give him a son; he gave birth to a male child whom Indra named Mandhata.

Note: the avataras of Vishnu are numbered by the same method as found in the text, which includes some of the partial avatars of the Lord. Various scriptures number the avatars alternatively, depending on whether the partial avatars are included.

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## *Glossary of Terms*

### **A**

*Achamana*: sipping water from the palm of the hand before or after a religious ceremony.

*Adharma*: corrupt; irreligious; unrighteous conduct or action which is contrary to dharma.

*Adityas*: a race, originally mothered by Aditi.

*Agama*: twenty-eight divinely revealed Hindu scriptures mainly dealing with temple worship, construction, and iconography, also containing advaitic teaching in Lord Shiva's words.

*Agni*: fire; the god of fire.

*Ahamkara*: ego; regarding oneself as the performer of action.

*Amsa*: a portion or spark of divinity.

*Ahimsa*: non-violence. One of the five Yamas (restraints) mentioned in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra.

*Akshauhinis*: a battalion in an army: 21,870 chariots, same number of elephants, 65,610 horses, and 109,350 foot soldiers.

*Amrita*: nectar of immortality; Ambrosia.

*Anahata*: internal unstruck sound associated with the chakras.

*Ananda*: bliss; the arising feeling when the Self is realized. Sat-Chit-Ananda.

*Anandamayakosha*: sheath of bliss; the body or kosha closest to the Self.

*Apsara*: a demi-goddess or nymph, expert in music and dance.

*Ardhajala*: lit. half net; a yogic posture.

*Arjuna tree*: *terminalia arjuna*; tall straight hardwood tree native to N. and S. India.

*Artha*: wealth; the second of the four ends of human existence.

*Ashoka tree*: *saraca indica*; low large leafed shade tree with red flowers, under which Sita stayed after being kidnapped by Ravana.

*Ashrama*: the four stages of life of a traditional Brahmin: Brahmacharya – student of the Vedas, Grihastha-householder, Vanaprastha-forest-dweller, Sannyasa-complete renunciation of the world. Also a hermitage or place of rest for spiritual inquiry and devotion.

*Asraya*: the Supreme; the Unborn source of all.

*Asura*: demon, demonic race; a generic name for the enemies of the gods;daityas, danavas etc.

*Aswamedha*: a horse sacrifice; traditionally made by kings.

*Atala*: atalaloka; one of the seven subterranean regions; place of demons and snakes.

*Atman*: the individualized Self; the soul.

*Avadhuta*: a naked ascetic; one with no worldly attachments or obligations.

*Atyantika pralaya*: final ego *pralaya* or radical dissolution of the *ahankara* at the attainment of *Mukti*, the supreme liberation.

*AUM*: OM; anahata; Pranava, the sacred syllable symbolizing Brahman, the Supreme Reality.

*Avatara*: descent; advent. Embodied manifestations of the Lord: Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Kalki etc.

*Avidya*: ajnana; spiritual ignorance; maya; deluding of the jiva into separation from Self or Brahman.

*Ayodhya*: U.P. Rama's birthplace and capital on river Sarayu, modern day Gogra, it was the capital of Kosala, and a capital for the Solar dynasty.

## **B**

*Badrinath*: one of the four main pilgrimage centres in the Himalayas, in Uttarakand at 3122 meters elevation.

*Banyan tree*: *ficus bengalensis*; a large Indian fruit tree having branches growing down into the ground forming additional trunks.

*Bhagavan*: god; deity. An epithet of Narayana.

*Bhagavata Dharma*: the law of Vaishnava dispensation of adoration and love.

*Bhakti*: devotion, reverence, worship

*Bhakti yoga*: the yoga of devotion; one of the four main branches of yoga.

*Bharatvarsha*: a primeval continent comprised of nine islands; a continental sub-classification.

*Bhiksha*: anything given as alms.

*Bhu*: one of the worlds created by Brahma when He split the lotus stalk into three pieces.

*Bhurloka*: collectively Earth and the seven subterranean regions created by Brahma, out of rajas. Rajoguna.

*Bhuwah*: the aerial region created by Brahma from the stalk of the lotus.

*Bhuwarloka*: the aerial regions; home of Rishis and Siddhas.

*Brahmachari*: student of the Vedas/religion; belonging to the first of the four stages (*ashramas*) in the religious life of a Brahmin

*Brahmacharya*: the first of the four ashramas. See *Brahmachari*

*Brahmakalpa*: the first cycle of Brahma's life.

*Brahman*: the One without a second, the Lord of Prakriti; the Supreme Reality.

*Brahmanas*: a section of each of the Vedas dealing with the meaning and the use of the Vedic hymns.

*Brahmin*: the first of the four main Varnas or castes of the Hindu social order; the caste of priests.

*Brahmavidya*: the supreme wisdom, liberating the knower from transmigration.

*Brindavan*: pastoral village where Krishna relocated from Vraja, in present day Mathura district, U.P.

*Buddhi*: intellect; understanding; mind as the organ of perception.

## C

*Chedi*: an ancient city on the banks of the Narmada river. Also an old race in M.P.

*Chitta*: mind-stuff; the first of the twenty-five categories within the Sankhya system.

## **D**

*Dakshina*: a monetary gift from a devotee to a guru.

*Dama*: sense control, along with *Sama*, mind control.

*Danavas*: a race of Asuras.

*Deva*: a divine being; a celestial.

*Devatakanda*: a division of the Veda describing the gods.

*Dharma*: one of the four ends of human existence; merit, right-action, righteousness, virtue.

*Dwapara*: the third yuga of the four yuga cycle: Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali.

*Dwaraka*: an inaccessible fortress island created by Krishna in the west sea to protect the Yadus from the siege laid by the Yavanas. Part of this island is still located, under the same name, off shore the north west coast of India on the coast of present day Gujarat.

## **G**

*Gayatri Mantra*: a sacred Vedic mantra recited daily.

*Gandharva*: celestial musicians; a class of demi-gods, who may grant sweet voices to young girls at their wish.

*Gokula*: the area where the child Krishna grew up.

*Goshala*: a barn or cowshed.

*Grihasta*: a householder. The second of the four ashramas in the religious life of a Brahmin.

*Guhyakas*: a division of the Yakshas, prominent at the court of Kubera and present at the marriage of Draupadi.

*Gunas*: the three overriding attributes, qualities, or properties of beings: sattva, rajas and tamas being the main group:

*Guru*: a teacher or Self-Realised being in the Hindu or Sikh religion. One who removes the darkness, ajnana, in the disciple.

## **H**

*Halahala*: a deadly poison produced during the churning of the ocean by devas and asuras in search of nectar.

Hastinapura: king Yudhisthira's capital, 56 miles NE of modern day Delhi.

## I

*Ishwara*: the supreme Lord or Being in his aspect of Lord of Creation

*Itihasa*: lit. 'So indeed it was'; heroic history, legends, and accounts of former events. Added to the Vedas as a fifth, along with the Puranas.

## J

*Jagrat*: the waking state. The first of the three states of consciousness.

Jambudwipa: ancient name of the Indian subcontinent including Nepal, Malaya, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

*Janaloka*: the fifth of the seven divisions of the Universe situated above Maharloka and below Tapoloka.

*Jiva*: the individualized soul with ego.

*Jnana*: supreme knowledge; one of the four main branches of yoga.

*Jnanakanda*: a division of the Vedas dealing with jnana (knowledge).

*Jnani*: one united with Brahman, the Self via the path of knowledge.

*Jnanendriyas*: the five internal organs of perception: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell.

## K

*Kadamba* tree: *anthocephalus cadamba*; tall wide canopied tree having fragrant orange flowers, said to burst into bloom at the sound of thunder. A genus of tree which may easily be climbed by a small child.

*Kaivalya*: the supreme or deathless state.

*Kala*: a measure and means of calculating time within the ancient Puranic system.

*Kali*: the name of the current age (yuga), and its ruler. Areas of Kali's influence: dicing (gambling), women, wine, cruelty to living beings and gold.

*Kali Yuga*: the fourth and dark age. It lasts 432,000 human years, and began on the departure of Lord Krishna in 3102 B.C.

Kalinga: kingdom in modern day Orissa area lying on the river Rishikulya, between the River Mahanadi in the north and the Godavari to

the south.

*Kalpa*: one is equal to 1000 cycles of four yugas, each kalpa being a day of Brahma measuring 4,320 million human years. Each kalpa is divided into fourteen Manvantaras. See text and footnote in Book III chapters X-XII.

*Kama*: desire, love; the god of love. Also lust: one of the six arch enemies of man's spiritual progress: the other five are *Krodha* (anger), *Lobha* (greed), *Moha* (delusion), *Mada* (pride) and *Matsarya* (envy).

*Kamandalu*: one of the eight traditional items required by a Brahmachari.

*Kappitha* tree: *feronia limonia*.

*Karma*: individual destiny; various types of experiences, which are the results of past actions by an individualized being; of various types: *prarabhda*, *nishkama* etc.

*Karmakanda*: the ritualistic section of the Veda.

*Karmendriyas*: the five organs of action: tongue, hands, feet, genitals and anus.

*Kaustubha*: a ruby-like gem arising from the churning of the ocean at the time of creation.

*Kavacha*: a potent prayer to Lord Narayana.

*Kosha*: a body or sheath, having attributes, surrounding and surrounded by the attribute-less Self.

*Krita*: Satya yuga, four times longer than the Kali yuga.

*Kshatriya*: the second of the four castes; warrior.

*Kshetrajna*: 'the owner of the field'; the Self or intelligent principle.

*Kumkum*: saffron; a dark yellow substance obtained from a flower and used as a spice to give colour and flavour to food.

*Kundinapura*: modern day Berar. Capital of Vidarbha, located between the Narmada and Krishna rivers. The city where Sisupala was to wed Rukmini.

*Kurukshetra*: battlefield of the Mahabharata. S.E. of Thaneshwar, U.P., said to be drained by the Saraswati River.

*Kusa* grass: also known as barhis; a bed or layer of this grass variety is strewn over a sacrificial area to serve as a sacred surface on which to pour the oblations and as a seat of the gods, as well as for the sacrificers. Sacred to Lord Ganesha.

## L

*Leela*: the cosmos looked upon as a divine play.

*Loka*: abode or place, usually used with an adjective for a heavenly or earthly region.

## M

*Mahat*: the cosmic mind

Magadha: king Jarasandha's kingdom.

*Mahabharata*: epic tale of the struggle between the Kauravas and Pandavas.

*Mahapralaya*: the great dissolution before the night of Brahma.

*Maharloka*: the fourth of the seven worlds, above Suvarloka, where those practicing spiritual disciplines abide.

*Mahat*: the cosmic mind or intellect.

*Mahatala*: a division of the seven subterranean regions.

*Maireyakha*: a sweet liquor, destined to cause infighting amongst the Yadus and bring about their downfall near the end of the Bhagavatam.

*Manas*: mind; one of the twenty-three categories of evolution of the Lord's body.

*Mantra*: a word or sound that is repeated, believed to possess a special spiritual power.

*Mantra japa*: the repetition of a mantra.

*Manu*: see Who's Who appendix.

Manutirtha: a sacred pond on the outskirts of Kurukshetra.

*Manvantara*: each kalpa is divided into fourteen manvantara, being one fourteenth of a day of Brahma or 306,720,000 years. Currently the Earth and humanity are said to be in the seventh of fourteen manvantaras.

*Margashirsa*: December-January, winter; the coldest part of the year.

Mathura: city in the modern state of U.P., situated on the Yamuna river.



*Maya*: illusion; the illusory appearance of the universe as extant, distinct from the Self.

*Mlechhas*: barbarians; non-Aryan; not conforming to Hindu or Aryan traditions.

*Moksha*: the final liberation of the jiva from transmigration in form.

*Mukti*: Liberation; Release from transmigration, Self Realisation.

Mountains:

Mt. Gandhamadana: the name of a mountain east of Mt. Meru renowned for its intoxicating perfume.

Mt. Govardhana: situated thirty kilometers from Brindavan in Mathura dist.U.P.

Mt. Kailas: abode of Lord Shiva. Sacred mountain in Tibet, west of Nepal.

Mt. Kulachala: collective name for seven sacred hills or ranges from Puranic times, spread across central and south India.

Mt. Mahendra: prominent geological feature of the Kalinga kingdom and identified with the E. Ghat ranges. This name has not changed since the Mahabharata was written.

Mt. Mandara: a heavenly mountain to the east of Mt. Meru.

Mt. Malaya: Kerala; the Bettigo of Ptolemy; Podigei or Padigei in Tamil. The southern part of the Western ghats, from the Nilgiris to Cape Cormorin.

Mt. Meru: (Sumeru) invisible golden mountain at the center of the universe. Also geographically placed in several places; Rudra Peak in the Gharwal Himalaya and on the Pamir plateau.

Mt. Trikuta: a heavenly mountain to the south of Mt. Meru.

**N**

Naimisharanya: Naimisha forest in U.P. near Lucknow, now an area of scrub desert.

*Naimittika pralaya*: the occasional pralaya or dissolution; the night of Brahma.

*Naga*: snake; dweller of Nagarloka. Also a hill tribe of North-East India

*Narachas*: the most potent arrows used by the Yadavas against king Rukmi's forces...

*Nirguna*: attributeless

*Nitya pralaya*: the alternating dissolution and creation of existence every second.

*Nivritti*: the path of return, leading to the cessation of all action.

*Niyamas*: prescribed action that the sadhaka should strive to do. See *Yamas*.

## O

*OM*: see AUM

## P

*Padma Kalpa*: an earlier cycle of Brahma of creation and dissolution.

*Pancharatra Agama*: Vaishnava gospel within the Vedas.

*Pandya*: ancient southernmost kingdom of India; noted for its pearls.

*Parabrahman*: the Supreme, unborn, formless.

*Paramahamsas*: lit. supreme swan, an epithet for the fourth or highest liberated men.

*Paramanu*: the smallest, sub-atomic particle of existence.

*Paramatman*: the Supreme Self.

*Parardha*: lit. the latter of two halves; The lifecycle of Brahma.

*Parijata tree*: *nyctanthes arbortristis*. Fragrant white and orange flowering shrub ten to twelve feet tall.

*Payovrata*: a vow to live on milk, singing devotional hymns and repeat certain mantras for twelve days.

*Pindaraka*: an ancient sacred place situated near Dwaraka in Gujarat.

*Pischacha*: Satan; head of all malevolent beings.

*Pitris*: manes; the departed ancestors who must be worshipped.

*Peepul tree*: *ficus religiosa*; a magnificent tall robust tree with wide spear shaped leaves. The Bo or Bodhi tree under which Lord Buddha Sakyamuni was enlightened.

*Prabhasa*: town in Gujarat close to Dwaraka.

*Pradhana*: un-manifest, radical or primordial matter. A Sankhya term for prakriti.

Pragjyotisha – Naraka's capital. Identified with the province of east Assam and the middle and north side of the Brahmaputra valley.

*Prakriti*: insentient form, un-manifest gunas. See pradhana.

*Pralaya*: of four types; the dissolution of creation; period of nescience following a kalpa. The night of Brahma, lasting as long as the previous kalpa or day. See page 418.

*Pranayama*: Yogic breath control used to quiet the thoughts.

*Puja*: ceremonial worship.

*Puranas*: eighteen in number: Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Padma, Linga, Garuda, Narada, Bhagavata (the present one), Agni, Skanda, Bhavishya, Brahmavaivarta, Markandeya, Vamana, Varaha, Matsya, Kurma and Brahmanda. The Puranas deal with creation, from Mahat downward, the subsistence of all created things, the *avatars* of Lord Vishnu, the Manus, the Indras, the kings, the three divisions of time (past, present and future), the three states of consciousness (*jagrat*, *svapna* and *sushupti*), the *jiva* as the cause of the creation union with the Absolute.

*Purna*: complete or whole; Purna avatar; a complete incarnation of the Lord.

*Purusha*: the Supreme Soul or Being; the Self.

## **R**

*Rahu*: an invisible planet, recently re-discovered.

*Rajas*: Rajoguna; one of the three gunas of humankind; activity

*Rakshasas*: ogres with whom Lord Vishnu co-operates when tamas guna prevails.

Ramanaka: an ancient island near Dwaraka, Gujarat, to which the serpent Kaliya was ordered by Lord Krishna, exiling him from the Yamuna river.

*Ramarajya*: the time of Rama's rule. A time of prosperity, peace and good government.

Ramayana: the legends of Rama's life.

*Rasa*: a dance, shoulder to shoulder of men and women.

*Rasatala*: one of the seven subterranean regions.

Rivers:

Gandaki: Narayani river of U.P. arising in Dhaulagiri.

Ganga: a goddess, and the sacred river of North India, arising at Gomukh at 3140 meters in the Himalayas and disgorging into the Bay of Bengal.

Kalindi: see Yamuna River.

Narmada: a sacred river, the daughter of Rudra. The Reva river of the Mahabharata, arising from the Amarakantaka mountain and flowing to the Arabian sea. Most of its course runs through M.P. and reaching the ocean in Gujarat.

Pushpabhadra: a river only mentioned in the Markandeya pralaya legend.

Saraswati: sacred river which has disappeared due to tilting of the Asiatic land mass; now said to now be subterranean, rising from a source above the Simla hills, it joined the Ganga and Yamuna at Allahabad at Triveni Sangam.

Tapti: a major river of western India and twin with the Narmada, rising in the Western Ghats from a sacred tank, Multai on the Satpura plateau.

Yamuna: Surya Putri; sacred river rising at Yamunotri, Kalindi peak at 3300 meters in Uttaranchal.

**S**

*Sadhana*: the discipline of spiritual practice..

*Saguna*: with attributes.

*Sal tree*: *shorea robusta*; cocoa butter is made using its seeds. Medium sized rough barked tree,

*Salokya*: dwelling in God's abode. One of the five forms of bliss experienced by the bhakta in the worship of Krishna.

*Sama*: mind control, along with dama, sense control.

*Samadhi*: unbroken effortless contemplation of the Self;

Samantapanchaka: place of five tanks; location where Parasurama collected the blood of the Kshatriyas five times, in Kurukshetra, made into a place of pilgrimage. It is near Delhi.

*Sambha Parva* of the *Adi Parva*: a textual subdivision within the Mahabharata; chapters 63-139.

*Samhitas*: an early division of the Vedas into two.

*Samipya*: residing ever in God's presence as a form. Being near God. One of the five forms of bliss experienced by the bhakta in the worship of Krishna;

*Samsara*: illusion; the life of transmigration.

*Sanjivinee*: a life-giving herb, and a mantra given by Shiva to Sukracharya giving back life to the asuras and Bali after the Deva – Asura war.

*Sannyas*: sannyasa; renunciation; the fourth (ashrama) stage in the life of a Brahmin.

*Saptarishis*: the seven ancient Rishis.

*Sarga*: the lowest element in creation, Mahat being the highest

*Sarshiti*: siddhis. One of the five forms of bliss experienced by the bhakta in the worship of Krishna.

*Sarupya*: assuming a god-like form. One of the five forms of bliss experienced by the bhakta in the worship of Krishna;

*Satsanga*: keeping the company of saints or saintly people.

*Sattva*: harmony – the mind in its natural state.

*Satya*: truth

*Satyaloka*: the abode of Brahma; the second highest world in creation, under Vaikuntha, Lord Vishnu's abode.

*Satya Yuga*: the age of truth; one of the four yugas, lasting four times as long as the last.

*Sayujya*: absorption into God. One of the five forms of bliss experienced by the bhakta in the worship of Krishna.

*Shakti*: the active principle of creation; Shiva is perceived as the axis.

*Sukta*: a hymn.

*Siddha*: a perfected Yogi, either incarnate or discarnate, possessing supernormal powers.

*Siddhapada*: the location where Devahuti attained final emancipation.

*Siddhi*: any of eight supernormal powers, cultivated through yoga or acquired naturally.

*Skandhas*: a volume within a book or scripture.

*Soma*: the plant and juice of the plant pressed and purified by the Brahmins, then mixed with flour and ghee etc. and fermented. Offered to the gods and imbibed by the priests. *Srivatsa*: a particular mole on the chest of Lord Vishnu or Krishna.

*Sudharma*: a great council hall presented to Krishna by Indra.

*Sudra*: the labouring and menial caste.

*Surabhi*: a sacrificial vessel.

*Sushumna*: the central nerve channel within the spine, said to connect the chakras and through which the divine force is said to climb in certain forms of Yoga.

*Sushupti*: profound dreamless sleep. The third of the four states of consciousness.

*Sutalaloka*: Sutala; one of the seven subterranean regions of the Earth, wherein lived Bali.

*Svapna*: dream state; see also jagrat and sushupti.

*Swah*: the third region of inhabited worlds, created by Brahma from the lotus stalk; see also Bhu, Bhuwah.

*Swarga*: Heaven, inclusive of all the various Hindu regions.

*Swarloka*: collective name for the heavenly regions, consisting of *Swarloka*, *Maharloka*, *Janaloka*, *Tapoloka* and *Satyaloka*.

*Syamantaka*: solar gem given to Satrajit by the Sun God as reward for his devotion; it is said to yield more than one hundred kilos of gold per day.

## T

*Tamas*: one of the three gunas; the quality of darkness; inertia; black.

*Tanmatras*: five subtle elements; the Indriyas – the intelligence behind them; the motivating power.

*Tantric worship*: worship performed by Tantrikas, a Hindu sect worshipping God as the Divine Mother.

*Tapas*: religious austerities, penance.

*Tapasvin*: one who undertakes penance.

*Tapoloka*: a sub-region of heaven. The world above Janaloka

*Tarpanam*: presenting libations of water to the Manes or the ancestors.

*Tattva*: categories of causes and effects.

*Tilak*: caste, beauty or sacred mark on the forehead.

*Treta*: second of the four yugas, three times longer than the Kali yuga.

*Triputi*: the triad of the perceiver, perceived and perception.

*Tulasi*: sacred basil. A sweet smelling herb sacred to Hindus.

*Turiya*: lit. the fourth; the state of super-consciousness beyond waking, dreaming and deep sleep states, encompassing and surpassing all three.

## U

*Uddhava Gita*: Lord Krishna's teaching to Uddhava. The heart of the Bhagavatam and main section of chapter eleven.

*Upanishads*: series of philosophical compositions concluding the exposition of the Vedas.

*Uthanika*: the standing ceremony; the time when an infant first stands up.

*Utkala*: the northern part of modern day Orissa.

## V

*Vaikuntha*: the highest heaven; the abode of Lord Narayana.

*Vairagya*: dispassion; indifference to the world; asceticism.

*Vaishya*: the agricultural and business caste.

*Vanamala*: a garland of wildflowers, usually alluding to Krishna as the wearer.

*Vanaprastha*: third of the four ashramas in the life of a Brahmin; forest dweller.

*Varnas*: the castes of ancient and recent Indian society; four main branches sub-dividing into a multiplicity of sub-divisions. Brahmin - priest, Kshatriya - warrior, Vaishya – business, Sudra – menial labourer,

*Varuni*: the goddess of intoxication.

*Vasanas*: latent tendencies or habits formed in previous births. The cause of birth and experience in general.

*Vedanta*: the Hindu philosophy based on the Upanishads esp. in its monistic form.

*Veda*: knowledge; four divine hymns uttered by Brahma: Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva, the Itihasas and Puranas of which the Bhagavatam is one, were added as a fifth.

*Videha*: bereft of the body. Also the kingdom ruled by king Janaka.

*Vidya*: knowledge or science.

*Vidyadhara*: a shining celestial; an garland wearing apsara or celestial maiden.

*Vijnana*: knowledge arrived at by discursive reasoning, opposite of Jnana.

*Viswajit yajna*: lit. a sacrifice to conquer the world.

*Vitala*: one of the seven subterranean regions of the Earth.

*Vraja*: district of Gokula where Lord Krishna lived as a young boy.

## Y

*Yajna*: sacrifice

*Yakshas*: demi-gods; followers of Kubera, the god of wealth, with whom Lord Vishnu co-operates when tamas guna prevails.

*Yamas*: the restraints which are to be observed by an aspirant: truth, non-violence, celibacy, non-stealing and non-attachment. See also Niyamas.

*Yoga*: Union; to unite or yoke. *Bhakti*: the path of devotion; *Hatha*: the path of bodily action and exercise; *Jnana*: the path of knowledge and *Karma*: the path of service, are the four main traditional branches. Other subsidiary branches such as Tantra shoot forth from these.

*Yogamaya*: the power of veiling or illusion used by Lord Vishnu to hide the Self making creation appear as if a separate reality.

*Yoganidra*: the sleep or nescience of Lord Narayana between dissolution and creation.

*Yogasamadhi*: beginningless and endless contemplation of the Self; Union.



*Yuga*: age or time span within a kalpa, each named for their attributes:  
Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali.

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