

SRI KRISHNAVENI MAHATMYAM

- P.R. Kannan

(Sri Krishnaveni Mahatmyam, a part of Skanda Purana, was available in a manuscript form in Telugu script with a scholar in Vijayawada. Through the efforts of Sri Sankaracharya Swamiji of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, who are camping at Vijayawada for Chaturmasyam now (July-Sep 2016), this manuscript came to light and was transcribed into Devanagari script by Dr.G.Sankaranarayanan of Sanskrit Department in Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi University in Enathur near Kanchipuram. This essay is a summary of Sri Krishnaveni Mahatmyam, obtained thus and is written as instructed by Sri Acharyas.)

Once upon a time, sage Narada was talking with Rishis on the terrible conditions in Kaliyuga and referred to the submission of Brahmadeva to Bhagavan Vishnu on this subject: O Lord, the horrifying Kaliyuga is approaching; people will commit very grave sins; what is it that will save them? Vishnu replied: It is only Tirthas (sacred waters) that can save people in the dreadful conditions of Kaliyuga. Like in every Kalpa, you create sacred rivers like Ganga and other Tirthas; I shall manifest river Krishnaa from my own body. (Kalpa is one day in the life of Brahma).

तस्याः संस्मरणस्पर्शपानस्नानस्तवादिभिः।

निष्पापा मनुजास्सर्वे लभन्ते गतिमीप्सिताम्।

कार्यद्वयं समुद्दिश्य कृष्णवेणी भवाम्यहम्॥

जगतां रक्षणार्थाय मद्भक्तानां च मुक्तये।

“People will get rid of all their sins and attain to lofty state by meditating on Krishnaa river, touching, drinking and bathing in its waters and singing its praise. I shall manifest as Krishnaveni river with two aims in view: to protect the world and to enable my devotees to attain Mukti (Liberation).” Vishnu added that the path of Yoga is too tough and that people will attain to high state by merely bathing, drinking etc. of the Krishnaa waters, as he had entered the waters himself.

Saying so, Vishnu created a divine damsel, who was blue-black complexioned, had four arms, with yellow silken garment (like Vishnu’s) draping her form, was wearing the insignia of Vishnu, and had the radiance of the moon and appeared as if brilliance incarnate. She was Krishnaa.

Brahma took her as her daughter and, by touching her, created many Tirthas. Krishnaa left Brahmaloaka and reached the earth in the form of a river. This Krishnaa river is like the Kalpaka tree and Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling divinities of Swarga and bestows all dharmas including Moksha.

Narada started to expound Sri Krishnaveni's glory at the request of the rishis. The mere listening of this Mahatmyam (account of glory) will rid one of the ill-effects of Kaliyuga and bestow even Moksha.

Once Sri Subrahmanya, accompanied by sages, came to Kailasa for having darshan of Siva. It appeared as if he was personification of Veda, with its six parts (Shadangas), surrounded by Puranas. He praised Parameswara and pleaded to him to teach him the greatness of river Krishnaa. Siva said: Ganga became capable of granting Moksha on mere thought of a human, just by contact only once with the feet of Sri Vishnu. Krishnaa is verily the body of Vishnu.

सर्वकर्षति चाघौघं तेन कृष्णा प्रकीर्तिता॥

“As she attracts all sins and destroys them, she is extolled as Krishnaa.” Siva added that as even the period of a Kalpa is inadequate for describing the greatness of Krishnaa, he would give a brief overview.

Glory of the birth of Krishnaa River

At the beginning of Kritayuga, all people had high religious merit and enjoyed pure happiness. With passage of time, sins increased and Kalpaka trees appeared on earth by Brahma's grace for bringing people on to righteous path. With sins growing further, these trees disappeared. Brahma then created special herbs on earth. They also vanished in the highly sinful atmosphere. Brahma then established on earth rainfall, dharma and adharma etc. The deity of Dharma himself incarnated on earth in four forms – Nara, Narayana, Hari and Krishna. Lamenting the preponderance of sins, they asked Krishna to proceed to Brahmaloaka and fetch Krishnaa river quickly and further, to prevail upon Brahma to create many sacred Tirthas on earth. Krishna did accordingly. When Devi Krishnaa started off from Brahmaloaka, she was accompanied by Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Devas and Rishis. As they contemplated on the site of origin of Krishnaa river on earth, a sage appeared. They asked him to spell out his wish. He said in response that he wished that Krishnaa should have her origin in the Sahyadri mountain

range and that he should attain to lofty state by bathing in her sacred waters. He also expressed his desire that Krishnaa should shine as the mother of all Tirthas on earth. Sahyadri mountain also submitted his prayer and Devi Krishnaa blessed that she would accordingly manifest at the mountain at the origin of the sacred river and that many holy rivers would also take birth in the Sahyadris, bestowing well being and merit on people. Vishnu, Nara, Narayana, Devas and all the fourteen worlds in their representation gathered in the Sahyadris. There was an atmosphere of glorious festivity. Everyone thought that it was Kamadhenu herself arrived from Swarga and desired to attain to high state by performing Homas, Poojas, Pitru Sraaddhas etc. on the banks of the sacred river. The Sahyadri Deity happily performed Mahapooja. Vishnu took the form of a white Asvatha (fig) tree; Krishnaa river originated at the foot of that tree. There was tremendous festivity with shower of flowers from the sky, the celestial music of the Gandharvas and the divine dance of Apsaras. Owing to the benign influence of Krishnaa river, dharma flourished; adharma waned. Reading of this account of the glory of the origin of Krishnaa river will itself confer great merit including comforts here and Moksha hereafter.

Other Tirthas

Narada now started to narrate the stories of many other Tirthas related to Krishnaa river, as recounted earlier by Bhagavan Skanda to Narada and other sages.

Vishnutirtham is located near the Asvatha tree, where Krishnaa river originates. Bathing there on Amavasya days and Thursdays confers Mukti itself. Brahmattirtham and Rudratirtham are also nearby. Bathing in these holy waters bestows the fruit of residing for a whole Kalpa at the feet of Rudra and Brahma. There is a mountain peak called Brahmagiri in the north of Sahyadri. Brahma performed penance here and attained the state of Vishnu. In Vedagiri to the south, Vedas reside with forms, together with Angas (parts of Vedas). There is an Amalaka tree in this area. A great river named Veni originates at the foot of that tree. The place of the sacred confluence of this river Veni with Krishnaa is also nearby. Bathing here and chanting Varuna japa or Gayatri mantra over 800 times bestows relief from all sins. Similarly in Vihanga Tirtha (Bird Waters), Garuda performed penance in the proximity of Siva and attained fulfilment of all desires. Sri Bhairava gives darshan in Sidhakshetra. Bathing in Krishnaa river there bestows Paramapada. Bathing in Malapahara Tirtha (Waters removing impurities) and having darshan of Nageswara confers all attainments. Similarly, Kumbheswara Tirtha and Poulastya Tirtha are also very significant.

To the east of these Tirthas, the Tirtha worshipped by Sri Markandeya is there. Markandeya sang the praise of Devi Krishnaa beautifully. He said that Vishnu's body took the form of the river for the welfare of the world and is blessing one and all; she is verily Gowri, Lakshmi, Saraswathi and Dakshina Ganga. Devi was pleased to give him darshan and told him to ask for the desired boon. Markandeya referred to the long life granted him by Bhagavan Vishnu and said that long life without devotion to the Lord is a waste, and hence he prayed for unflinching devotion to the Atmasvarupa, Siva, Vishnu and Devi, who has indeed taken the form of this world. Devi Krishnaa blessed him accordingly and added that whosoever takes bath in the river and prays to her will be blessed with long life and steady devotion. One can attain Mukti by taking bath in this Tirtha where Siva blesses as Markandeyeswara. Five rivers including Visalam came there and had darshan of Devi Krishnaa; Devas also assembled there; Siva grants Mukti there to everyone.

By taking bath in Kubjeswara Tirtha and worshipping Kubjeswara Siva, one can free himself of all sins and attain to Sivaloka. To the east of that Tirtha is Mahatirtha, where black til (gingelly) turns into white. Bathing there with devotion grants direct darshan of Devas. Taking bath for one month in the place of confluence of the rivers rids one of even the great sin of killing of brahmana. In the confluence called 'Aghahari' (Destroyer of Sins), taking bath twice and chanting Gayatri mantra a lakh of times bestows fulfilment of all desires and also Mukti. Saptasagarasanga Tirtha is the place where the seven seas had darshan of Devi Krishnaa; bath therein confers the fruit of bathing in the seven seas. The location of confluence of river Kousiki with Krishnaa is the place where sage Kousika (Visvamitra) did severe penance; bath therein grants Mukti. Bath in Saptakuloddhara Tirtha and darshan of Siva there will liberate the previous as well as future seven generations, as mentioned by Sri Skanda himself. There are the tirthas Kulatarakam and Bharatam on the east. When sages came there once upon a time, river Krishnaa vanished out of sight and the sages sang her praise with great devotion.

हंसा न केवलममी जलकांक्षिण-
स्त्वामायान्ति दूरगहनाद्भुवि तोयकामाः।
आयान्त्यहो परमहंस वराश्चदेवि
त्यक्तस्पृहा अपि सुखादिषु मोक्षकामाः॥

“It is not just Hamsas (swans), which come here from long distances for enjoying your waters, but great Paramahamsas, who have sacrificed all mundane comforts, also take shelter here with a desire to attain Moksha.” Devas, Asuras and humans have all come here, carrying a plethora of wishes. You are indeed the mother of one and all.

Devi was pleased with their devotion and gave them darshan from the midst of the waters. She was of enchanting form, carrying in her four arms, Sankha (conch), Chakra (discus), Gada (mace) and Padma (lotus). She accepted the Puja of the sages happily and divided her river into two sections; one was Madhuparam and the other, Devahradam; both were the paths of Mukti. Further on the east are the sacred Tirthas Gangatirtha, where sage Ganga had performed penance; Soorparakatirtha, Jambutirtha, Krounchatirtha where sage Krouncha had attained Mukti, and Yagnavatam.

In the holy Sarvasiddhitirtha, which removes all of one’s sins and grants Mukti, Siva, Parvati, Vinayaka and Shanmukha give darshan. Further on, there are the Tirthas called Adityahridayam, Ashtaka Sangamasthanam and Valmikatirtha. In the Tirtha called Siddhihradam, Janaka worshipped Lakshmi and obtained Sita as his daughter. As one moves further to the east, there are many more Tirthas, blessing the devotees. Crores of Tirthas like Mudgalam, Skandapuram etc. are there, proclaiming Devi’s grace loudly.

Thirteen Tirthas

Thirteen tirthas on the southern banks of river Krishna, spread over three yojanas (40 km.), are highly praised as effective. If one bathes in them in their normal order from west to east, all his wishes will be fulfilled. If one takes bath in the reverse order from east to west, he will attain Jivanmukti (Liberation while in body) itself. Devas and Pitrus will become happy. There is a story recounting the glory of these tirthas. There was a great brahmana named Sumathi. When a child was born to him, a Rakshasi woman kidnapped the baby and bolted away. On seeing an ascetic on the way, she developed cold feet and, dropping the baby on the spot, she ran away. A hunter named Durmukha found the baby, took him home and brought him up. When the child grew into an adult, he happened to see a brahmana about to be killed by robbers and saved him. That brahmana was none other than Kanva Maharishi. He became happy and, divining the true story of the hunter boy, he was surprised; he blessed him with memory of his

past. On realising his parentage, the boy felt extremely sad and prayed to the Maharishi to show him the right path. Kanva Maharishi advised him to travel to the southern part of the country, and take bath in the holy tirthas of river Krishnaa and perform Prayaschitta (expiatory ceremony) and reap good benefits. That brahmana- turned- hunter boy came down to the sacred tirthas accordingly and took bath in the normal as well as reverse order. He finally bathed in Sukla tirtha also and had all his sins removed. With the religious merit thus acquired, he travelled in a white Vimana to the celestial sphere, crossed Brahmaloaka and attained to Vishnuloka. Let us now look at some of these tirthas.

1. Gopadatirtha

This is the first tirtha on the western side. It carries the impressions of the feet of thousands of cows. Kamadhenu herself has spoken in praise of this tirtha and blessed. By bathing in this tirtha, worshipping Gopadeswara Linga and fasting for three days, one can get rid of even the sin of killing of cow. This is the tirtha for destroying all the sins relating to cows. The mantra to be chanted here is:

नमो गोभ्यः श्रीमतीभ्यस्सैरभेयीभ्य एव च
नमो ब्रह्मप्रसूताभ्यः पुत्रीभ्योपि नमो नमः॥

“Obeisance again and again to the glorious cows, the female offsprings of buffaloes and the female offsprings of Brahma.” Merely listening to this mantra from a distance will fetch the fruit of gift of cow and bestow plenty of milk, curd, ghee and honey.

2. Ananthatirtha

Anantha (Adisesha) performed penance here; Mahavishnu gave him darshan and blessed him with freedom from fear of Garuda, and also made him as his bed. He also invited Siva to sit on the bed. At this place, where Siva and Vishnu both blessed all people with darshan, Devas, Siddhas, Gandharvas and other celestials gathered and celebrated a grand festival. At the prayer of Anantha, Vishnu blessed that this tirtha would be known by his name as Ananthatirtha and that those who perform bath, gifts, japa etc. here would reap endless (anantha) benefits. Vishnu added:

अनन्तस्त्वमनन्तोऽहमनन्तोऽयं सदाशिवः।

तीर्थानि देवा वेदाश्च सर्वेऽनन्ताः स्थिता इह॥

“You are Anantha (person with no end); I am Anantha; this Sadasiva is also Anantha; All Tirthas, Devas and Vedas, which are Anantha, will abide here for long.”

Siva also blessed that those who bathe here and worship cows, would become heads of Ganas in Sivaloka. Other Devas also kept up their presence here. A Linga, which is Harihara (Vishnu and Siva), is seen here even now together with a hooded serpent. By performing Abhisheka of this Linga with milk during five Panchami days and worshipping the Lord, all wishes will be fulfilled and Moksha itself will be granted.

3. Suryatirtha

To the east of Anantatirtha is Suryatirtha, where Maharishi Naidruva did penance and had darshan of Bhagavan Surya. There is also Someswara Siva Linga here. Sage Naidruva's hymn on Surya is very beautiful. In that stotra, he says:

O Surya, you are indeed the Light of the entire Brahmanda. You absorb the essence from the earth, rain it back in the form of shower, making foodgrains grow and protect all the worlds. You nurture Chandra and provide nourishment to the foodgrains through Chandra's nectarine rays. You bless people with all comforts in response to the offering of water which they give you.

The Maharishi prayed to Surya, who gave him direct darshan, for Gnana and Bhakti, which would destroy the disease of Samsara (chain of birth and death). Surya blessed sage Naidruva accordingly and added that one, who chants the stotra of sage Naidruva, would also reap the same fruit. He further blessed that those, who take bath in the sacred Suryatirtha and worship Someswara and Surya, would have all their wishes fulfilled. In this tirtha, attainment of the full power of mantra through Purascharana (repeated chanting as prescribed), and worship of Pitrus are practised.

4. Saptakotitirtha

Bhagavan Vishnu gave darshan here and there is a rock here with the insignia of Sankha and Chakra. In this tirtha reside all the seven crores of sacred trirthas; this tirtha is hailed as Sangamatirtha (tirtha of confluence of many tirthas), capable of removing all impurities. Gifts, Sraadh, Japa etc. performed here will bestow benefits a crore of times of those in ordinary places.

5. Chakratirtha

Once Maharaja Ambarisha asked Mahavishnu as to which tirtha would confer Gnana quickly. Vishnu asked the king to follow the path shown by his Sudarsana Chakra and told him that the tirtha indicated by the Chakra would be the suitable one. The king spent a long time in the Chakratirtha. Devi Katyayani resides in this place. Bath in Chakratirtha will bestow the highest Gnana.

6. Sankhatirtha

This is the kshetra, which Sri Parameswara hailed as his own. One can worship five Lingas here and have darshan of the twin feet of Rudra. He will be blessed with removal of all sins and Mukti. This tirtha is noted for offerings of Pindas to Pitrus.

7. Runapakarana Tirtha

Once Sri Subrahmanya asked Sri Parameswara: Man enters the world with three debts right at birth- debts towards Devas, Rishis and Pitrus. Sastra says that he should repay the debt to Devas by performing yagas, the debt to Rishis through study of Vedas, and the debt to Pitrus by begetting sons, who would perform Sraadh. Man finds himself unable to repay the debts properly for various reasons. What is the remedy for such persons?

Siva said: At the place where river Malapaharini joins the river Krishnaveni, the tirtha for a distance of a yojana (13 km) is Runapakarana (Debt-removing) tirtha on both banks of the river. Bath in these sacred waters will remove all debts and grant even Mukti.

Bath in the sacred river Krishnaveni will confer the fruit of Vajapeya yagna. Bath when Surya is in Kanya Rasi (solar month of Proshtapada) will bestow the fruit of bathing in Ganga for 60000 years. Bath when Guru Bhagavan is in Kanya Rasi (this is celebrated as Pushkaram on a grand scale now) will destroy seven crores of sins. It will also not only complete the repayment of the three debts owed by himself, but also the debts of his parents. The place where the river merges with the ocean is the most purifying.

The Story of Rishi Dalbhya

Once sage Dalbhya borrowed some vegetables from a neighbour for feeding a guest, who had arrived at his home. With passage of time, he forgot to return the debt he had incurred. Owing to this sin, he was born as a jackal, a donkey and a jackal again in the following births. He retained his old memory well because of the power of his tapas (penance). When he met sage Goutama in the Vindhya mountains, he prayed to him for guidance on the path for removal of his sin. Goutama advised him to proceed southwards and take holy bath in Krishnaveni and get rid of his debt and sin. When Dalbhya asked Goutama on the exact spot in the course of the river Krishnaveni which would be most suitable, Goutama praised the place of confluence of Malapaharini river with Krishnaa and recommended the same. He added that by bathing there and worshipping Siva, he would get rid of his animal form and regain his earlier human form and further attain Moksha. He explained that there are many tirthas in the course of the river Krishnaveni; the gifts given there, though minute like til, would in fact bestow massive fruit like Meru mountain; sins committed elsewhere would be destroyed by bath in Sangama (place of confluence of river Malapaharini with Krishnaa) in a moment; but sin incurred in Sangama cannot be eliminated anywhere. There are many persons, who attained high state by taking holy bath in Sangama; Bharata, Dilipa, Yayati, Nahusha, Bhagiratha, Rama, Mandhata and many others took bath there and attained to unparalleled heights in Bhakti and Gnana.

Parasurama got Cleansed

After exterminating kshatriya race repeatedly 21 times, Sri Parasurama visited many tirthas for getting rid of his great sins. When he found that the sin could not be eliminated, Bhagavan Skanda showed him many tirthas on the banks of the river Malapaharini. At the end, when Parasurama took holy bath in the Sangama of Malapaharini with Krishnaa, Rishis could observe the sin of killing of kshatriyas taking a form and leaving his body. Parasurama praised river Malapaharini in glowing terms. He said that there was no tirtha equal to this Sangama in removal of sins and granting Moksha.