

mArgabandhustotram by Appayya Dixita

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मार्गबन्धुस्तोत्रम् अप्पय्यदीक्षितेन्द्रैः विरचितम्

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मार्गबन्धुस्तोत्रम् अप्पय्यदीक्षितेन्द्रैः विरचितम्



श्रीमार्गबन्धुपञ्चरत्नमाला अथवा पञ्चरत्नस्तवं

मार्गबन्धुस्तोत्रम् ।

शम्भो मडादेव देव, शम्भो मडादेव देवेश शम्भो ॥

भालावनम्रस्त्रिरीटं भालनेत्रार्थिषा दग्धपञ्चेषुकीटम् ।

(भालप्रदीप्यास्त्रिरीटं भालनेत्रार्थिषा दग्धपुष्पेषुकीटम्)

शूलाडतारातिकूटं शुद्धमर्घेन्दुयूडं भजे मार्गबन्धुम् ।

शम्भो मडादेव देव, शम्भो मडादेव देवेश शम्भो ॥ १ ॥

अङ्गे विराजद्भुजङ्गं अलगङ्गातरङ्गाभिरामोत्तमाङ्गम् ।

ओंकारवाटीकुरङ्गं सिद्धसंसेविताङ्घ्रिं भजे मार्गबन्धुम् । (ह्रींकारवाटीकुरङ्गं शुद्ध)

शम्भो मडादेव देव, शम्भो मडादेव देवेश शम्भो ॥ २ ॥

नित्यम् यिदानन्दरूपं निह्नुताशेषलोडेशवैरिप्रतापम् ।

कार्तस्वरागेन्द्रयापं कृत्तिवासं भजे दिव्यसन्मार्गबन्धुम् ।

शम्भो मडादेव देव, शम्भो मडादेव देवेश शम्भो ॥ ३ ॥

कन्दर्पद्वर्णमीशं कालकण्ठं मडेशं मडाव्योमडेशम् ।

कुन्दाभदन्तं सुरेशं कोटिसूर्यप्रकाशं भजे मार्गबन्धुम् ।

शम्भो मडादेव देव, शम्भो मडादेव देवेश शम्भो ॥ ४ ॥

मन्दारभूतेरुदारं मन्दरागेन्द्रसारं मडागौर्यदूरम् ।

सिन्दूरदूरप्रचारं सिन्धुराजातिधीरं भजे मार्गबन्धुम् । (सिन्दूरगौरप्रचारं)

शम्भो मडादेव देव, शम्भो मडादेव देवेश शम्भो ॥ ५ ॥

अप्पय्ययज्ज्येन्द्र गीतं स्तोत्रराजं पठेद्यस्तु भक्त्या प्रयाणे ।

तस्यार्थसिद्धिं विधत्ते मार्गमध्येऽभयं याशुतोषो मडेशः ।

(अप्पय्ययमभिवर्यरचितं पञ्चरत्नस्तवं मार्गबन्धोरुदारम् ।

नित्यं पठेद्यस्तु भक्त्या तस्य मुक्तिः करस्यैव सायुज्यरूपम् ।)

शम्भो मडादेव देव, शम्भो मडादेव देवेश शम्भो ॥ ६ ॥

ॐति श्रीअप्पय्यदीक्षितेन्द्रैः विरचितं मार्गबन्धुस्तोत्रं सम्पूर्णम् ।

The sequence of the verses has variation; also with verse number 6.

Introduction and translation by N. Balasubramanian

A short life sketch of Shri Appayya DikShita (1520-1593 AD)

Shrimad Appayya DikShita was born at Adayapalam village, very near Arni, North Arcot District, Tamil Nadu, in the year 1520 AD. His father Shri Rangarajadhari was the son of Shri Acharya DikShita - also known as VakShasthalacharya who was in the court of Shri Krishnadevaraya. “Appayya” was an endearing form of his real name, Vinayaka Subramaniam. “The 16th century AD, in South India was an age of confusion when begotry and vigorous proselytism were rampant. Persecution of one sect by another with the help of the ruling dynasties was quite common. In such an age, the need was felt for a rare scholar with comprehensive vision and imagination, whose mission in life would be the reconciliation of the various creeds, cults and philosophies. Shri Appayya DikShita filled this essential need. He was a peace maker who pleade for harmony, tolerance and mutual goodwill and understanding at a time when people were quarrelling among themselves as to who was superior Vishnu or Shiva. (Dr. N. Ramesan IAS. Shri Appayya DikShita Page 3) “DikShitar’s culture was at once profound, libeal and wide. His characteristic impartiality never failed him even in his out and out militant works.” (A. V. Gopalachariar. Introduction to Varadarajastava 1927. P vI) DikShitar’s learning, says Y. Mahalinga Shastri, was in the truest sense of the word encyclopaedic.

अप्पय्यदीक्षितेन्द्रा-नशेषविद्यागुरुनन्दं वन्दे ।

यत्कृतिबोधोधाबोधौ विद्मदविद्मद्विभाजकोपाधी ॥ (भट्टोजीदीक्षितः)

Shri DikShita is the author of not less than 104 works and had enjoyed the patronage of King Chinna Bomma of Vellore. He was offered “kanakAbhiSheka” by this king in 1582AD. He was patronised by Chinna Thimma and Venkatapati also. He lived upto the ripe age of 73 years and spent his last days in Chidambaram. Some of his most famous works are Shivarka maNidIpike, NyAya rakShAmaNI, siddhAnta lesha sa.ngraha, parimala, chAturmata sArasa.ngraha, yAdavabhyudaya vyAkhyA, varadarAjustava and

kuvalayAnanda. His stotras are simple, popular and effective, for example, mArgabandhu stotram, durgAchandrakalA stuti, ApitakuchambA stava, hariharabheda stuti.

Margabandhu stotram: This small hymn is about Lord Marga sahaya or Margabandhu of Virinchipuram, near Vellore, NA Dt., the family deity of DikShita. It is very effective when recited before and during journey to ward off accidents and ensure success. (The above life sketch is taken from the book Shrimad Appayya DikShita, published by Shrimad Appayya DikShitendrar Grantha Prakasana Samiti, Hyderabad.)

The following abbreviations are used in the commentary: (1) VS: Shri Vishnu Sahasranama stotram with Shri Shankara's bashyam. (2) SS: Shiva Sahasranama stotram (called Vedasara sahasram) from Padmapuranam with the commentary (published by Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library) of HH Shri Paramasivendra Saraswati - 57th pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam and the guru of the well known saint composer Shri Sadasiva Brahmendra Saraswati. (3) BG: Bhagavat Gita (4) BH: Shrimad Bhagavatam (5) KU: Kathopanishad. (6) MU: mundakopanishad (7)SVU: Svetasvatara upanishad. (8)TU: Taittiriyanopanishad. (9) SA: Shri Shivanama Ashtottara shata stotram from Skandam with the commentary (called Shivatattva Rahasyam) of Shri Neelakanta DikShita (grandson of Shri Appayya DikShita's younger brother), a great scholar and poet in his own right.

मार्गः = a way, road, path; बन्धुः = relative or any one associated, well wisher. So the word मार्गबन्धुः means one who comes along with you giving company and protection स्तोत्रम् Stotram is a hymn praising the Lord गुणसंकीर्तनात्मकं स्तोत्रम् (VS681) It talks about His qualities.

मार्गबन्धुस्तोत्रम्

Stotram: At this point it is relevant to say a few words about stotram. Our scriptures are explicit in saying that the Supreme Being is one. It is without name, form and any other attributes. It is called brahman in our scriptures. This is not its name but one of its many attributes बृहत्तमत्वात् That which is big is brahman. Since the adjective 'big' is used simply without a noun to be qualified it implies that the bigness is unlimited. It is infinite and beyond time, space etc., unlike the objects and beings we see in the universe. The scriptures also aver that it is beyond our senses. The famous mantra from the Taittiriyanopanishad (Anu IV)

says that the brahman is beyond the reach of our mind and words यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह If so, how does a seeker think of it or pray to it? This is where our scriptures come to our help. They also describe the same God (who indeed is without a form or name) as having many forms and names. This helps a seeker to worship Him through prayers, puja, pilgrimages to holy places etc.. So we have gods like Rama, Shiva, Durga etc.. The worship of the Lord with form and name is called (सगुण उपासना) saguna (sa = with; guna = attributes; upAsana = worship). The names and forms conceal the esoteric truths mentioned in the upanishads. Thus they, like a map, give us some idea of something which is very vast and cannot be grasped by our senses. The Lord graciously accepts the worship offered to Him in any form one may choose. Krishna says

यो यो यां यां तन्मु भक्तः श्रद्धयाऽर्चितुमिच्छति ।

तस्य तस्यायत्नां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥ BG.7-21

He says that in whatever form a devotee seeks to worship Him with faith He upholds that faith and makes it steady.

स तथा श्रद्धया युक्तः तस्याराधनमीडते ।

लभते च ततः कामान् भयैव विदितान्दितान् ॥ BG.7-22 .

He adds that the devotee engages himself with faith in the worship (as said above) and from that he obtains his desires which are really conferred by Me alone. These statements of the Lord lend validity and sanctity to the worship of God with name and form who indeed is without any name, form or attributes. Later on the Lord says

तेषां सततयुक्तानां भजतां प्रीतिपूर्वकम् ।

ददामि बुद्धिसंयोगं येन मामुपयान्ति ते । BG.10-10 .

He assures that to such devotees who worship Him with love He will give the clear wisdom by which they will reach Him. In this manner the saguna upAsana acts as a stepping stone to nirguna upAsana and through that the realisation of God.

Prahlada, the gem among the devotees, mentions nine kinds of devotion (BH .7-5-23). The first two amongst these (viz.) श्रवणम् listening to the Lord's names and stories which bring out His glories and कीर्तनम् chanting them are the simplest and easiest to practise. These can be done by anyone irrespective of age, caste or gender. They are suitable for the young and energetic as well as the old and decrepit, a pundit and also the ignoramus. Thus they are suitable for all. It is possible that their very simplicity deceives one to imagine that they are

less potent than the other kinds of devotion. This is not so. Our scriptures repeatedly assert that they can confer the highest benefits on the devotee. The vedas contain stotras like the Rudram, Shri suktam etc.. Our puranas contain many. In addition our acharyas like Shri Shankara and other saints have composed soul-stirring compositions in many languages. All these are ideally suited for recitation.

One remarkable common feature to be found in these stotras is that each one may be in praise of a differently named god like Rama or Shiva. It will praise the attributes of that deity (in saguna form). It will also refer to incidents to be found in the puranas. The Bhagvat Gita says that the Lord incarnates Himself from time to time to subdue the evil and protect the righteous people. The puranas contain details of the incarnations and the deeds performed by Him to fulfill His mission. Behind all the glorification they will refer to His nirguna (without attributes) aspect also. The composition may be in praise of Shri Rama or Devi but it will also talk of the God as the Supreme Being. This clearly shows that the composer of the stotra was in fact praising the formless reality using the form of Shri Rama or Devi as a front. We can see this being done in this stotram also.

There is one more point to note regarding stotras. Poets have sung praises of nobles and kings for pecuniary gains. But these men and kings, howsoever great or rich they may be, are only human. They have their limitations and weaknesses. In view of this a poem in praise of a person has necessarily to overlook the subject's foibles, exaggerate whatever virtues are to be found and if necessary innovate virtues! Exactly opposite is the case with God. He is pure and without limitations. As said earlier He is beyond the reach of the mind and words. So those who have composed stotrams in praise of the Lord have invariably felt severely handicapped because of their own limitations. We find such verses confessing the feelings of inadequacy even in the compositions of great acharyas like Shri Shankara and Shri Vedanta Desika .

Now let us go to the Margabhandhu Stotram proper .

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शम्भो मडादेव देव शिव शम्भो मडादेव देवेश शम्भो -
शम्भो मडादेव देव ॥

The stotram begins with the recitation of the holy names of the Lord. The recitation of the Lord's names purifies the mind, makes it calm and fit for any serious undertaking. So they are normally repeated before commencing any work like pooja, religious discourse etc.. Here one may recall the familiar verses recited at the time of commencing puja or any religious ceremony .

अपवित्रः पवित्रो वा सर्वावस्थां गतोऽपि वा ।

यः स्मरेत् पुण्डरीकाक्षं सः बाह्याभ्यन्तरः शुचिः ॥

मानसं वायिकं पापं कर्मणा समुपार्जितम् ।

श्रीरामस्मरणेनैव व्यपोडति न संशयः ॥

श्री राम राम राम ॥

These verses say “Anyone - may be impure or pure or whatever may be his condition - if just thinks of the lotus-eyed Lord is certainly pure inside and out. Sins committed by mind, speech or action go away by thinking of Shri Rama. This is certain.” Thus the chanting of the Lord's names flushes out the impurities in the mind and invigorates it. The author can then look to the successful completion of the work taken on hand - in this case the composing of the hymn. Happily these names may be taken to apply to both to Shiva and Vishnu. They may be seen in the sahasranamams of both Shiva and Vishnu.

SHAMBHU शम्भुः । शं सुभ्रं ं भावयतीति शम्भुः

(SS-74: VS-38) He blesses his devotees with happiness and prosperity शं = happiness, prosperity. All beings go through the repeated cycle of birth and death. They experience varieties of sufferings during each life. During the dissolution of the universe He withdraws all beings within Himself - out of mercy - and after some time He releases them again at the beginning of the next kalpa so that they get relief and respite.

यतः सर्वाणि भूतानि भवन्त्यादियुगागमे ।

यस्मिंश्च प्रलयं यान्ति पुनरेव युगक्षये ॥ VS-11

“From whom all beings come at the beginning of the kalpa and into whom they again merge at the end of the kalpa.” This implies that they are also sustained by Him during the period in between. This is mentioned in the TU (3-1).

यतो वा ऽमानि भूतानि जायन्ते येन जातानि ञ्जवन्ति यत्

प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति

“From whom all these beings emanate, by whom they stay alive and into whom they merge after death.”

MAHADEVA महादेवः - महांश्चासौ देवश्च महादेवः ।

महत्त्वं च सकलपूज्यत्वाद्वा विभुत्वेन प्रमाणातो महत्त्वाद्वा He is worshipped by everyone. Also He is great because He pervades every thing.(SS22) सर्वान् भावन् परित्यज्य आत्मज्ञानयोगैश्वर्यं महति महीयते तस्माद्गुह्यते महादेवः (VS492)He is called Mahadeva because of His superior knowledge and His greatness as the greatest of the yogis. Shivarahasya says that the sound “Mahadeva Maha-deva” is a divine medicine for those bitten by the serpent called samsara महादेव महादेव महादेवेत्ययं ध्वनिः संसारसर्प-दृष्टानां दिव्यौषधमनुत्तमम् ।

DEVA देवः - स्वामिपर्यायो देवशब्दः, नरदेव इतिवत् । अकुञ्चितस्वामित्वं च शिवस्यैव The word deva indicates lordship. His lordship is unrestricted दिव्यतेर्देवः (SA93) He is effulgent. Krishna says ” I am the splendour of those who possess splendour,” तेजस्तेजस्विनामहम् BG(10-36) Accordingly, तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति KU(2-2-15). All these (the sun, the moon, the stars, the lightning and fire) shine only after Him. It is with the infinitesimal part of His luminosity that all these shine.

तेजोमूर्तिः SS413 and अभिततेजः SS34 are His names. In the course of teaching of Gita at KurukShetra, Arjuna requests Krishna to show him His cosmic form as Iswara. The gracious Lord obliges and reveals His universal form. Arjuna is overwhelmed by the splendour of the form he sees. He feels as though a thousand suns had risen at once in the sky दिवि सूर्यसदस्य भवेद्युगपदुत्थिता । यदि भाः सदृशी सा स्याद्भासस्तस्य महात्मनः । (BG 9-12). Here, as is usual with the scriptures, thousand is only indicative and stands for many or infinite. This is a popular verse and is said to have been quoted by the scientist Oppenheimer to describe the explosion of the first atom bomb which he witnessed.

Effulgence does not stand only for light. It also means wisdom. Shiva stands for infinite knowledge चः सर्वज्ञः सर्ववित् MU(1-9) One who is omniscient and knower of all धृतिधरः धृतिं ज्ञानलक्षणां दीप्तिं धारयतीति धृतिधरः VS(275)He bears the shine of knowledge दीप्तमूर्तिः दीप्ता ज्ञानमयी मूर्तिर्यस्येति दीप्तमूर्तिः VS(719) He is of the form of shining knowledge प्रकाशात्मा । प्रकाशस्वरूप आत्मा यस्य सः प्रकाशात्मा VS(276) His form is effulgent knowledge.

SIVA शिवः - शिवः मङ्गलस्वरूपः ॥ निर्भृष्ट निभिलङ्घ्यानुषङ्गापरमानन्दरूप इत्यर्थः । Shiva is the personification of auspiciousness. He is completely free from sorrows that characterise

all created beings including plants, animals, birds, humans and devas like Indra and even Brahma the creator. He is the embodiment of supreme bliss. (SS18) Also निश्चैगुणतया शुद्धत्वात् शिवः (VS27)He is devoid of the three qualities i.e. sattva(serenity), rajas(activity) and tamas(inertia). These qualities constitute ignorance (of Brahman or reality) and characterise all creation. So Shiva being free from these is pure. Patanjali sums up all this in his Yogadarsana (1-23) as क्लेशकर्मविपाकाशचैरपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेषः ईश्वरः । क्लेशाः, अविद्या, अस्मिता, राग, द्वेष, अभिनिवेशा, कर्म धर्माधर्मो, विपाकाः कर्मकृत्वानि - जन्मायुर्भोगाः, आशयो ज्ञानादि-वाशनाः, अतैः कालत्रयेऽपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेषः ईश्वरः इत्यर्थः ॥

स्मृतिमात्रेणैव पापयन् शिवः He removes the sins of those who just think of His name. DakShayani says this to her father DakSha यद्यक्षरं नाम गिरेरितं नृणां सङ्घत् प्रसंगादधमाशु भन्ति. The celebrated two syllables SIVA uttered with the tongue even once and that too casually, immediately wipes off the sins of those (who utter them).(BH 4.4.13) Shivarahasya says this about the sanctity of Lord Shiva's names:

सर्वाणि शिवनामानि मोक्षदान्येव सर्वदा ।
तेष्वप्यत्युत्तमं नाम शिवेति ब्रह्मसंज्ञित ॥

All the names of Shiva give moksha no doubt. But amongst them the name Shiva is the best and denominates brahman. The name Shiva is considered as the best among the Lord's names .

विद्यासु श्रुतिरुत्कृष्टा रुद्रैकादशनी श्रुतौ ।
तत्र पञ्चाक्षरी तस्यां शिव इत्यक्षरद्वयम् ॥

Of all the knowledge the vedas are superior. Among the vedas Shri Rudram that consists of sixteen chapters is superior. In that the PanchakShari is superior. In that also the two letters SIVA are the best. The glory of the Lord's names is dealt with in great detail in Puranas and hymns of the saints.

DEVESHA देवेशः - प्राधान्येन देवानामीशः देवेशः He is the foremost among the gods like Indra, Agni etc.. VS(492) सुरेशः - सुराणां देवानामीशः सुरेशः He is the lord of the devas. VS(85). He rules with a firm hand. None can dare to transgress His commandments without facing serious consequences .

भीषास्मात् वातः पवते । भीषोदेति सूर्यः ।
भीषास्मादग्निश्चेन्द्रश्च । मृत्युर्धावति पञ्चमः

TU(VII-1) It is for fear of Him that the wind blows; the sun rises; the fire and Indra perform their duties. It is for fear of Him that death the fifth runs about doing his work with diligence. The same is said by none other than Yama, the lord of death:

भयादस्याग्निस्तपति भयात् तपति सूर्यः ।

भयादिन्द्रश्च वायुश्च मृत्युर्धावति पञ्चमः । KU(3-3).

Now let us go to the stotram proper. It consists of five verses and a sixth one - called इलश्रुतिः that gives the benefit of reciting the hymn. In this hymn Lord Margabandhu is described as the God with form as Shiva bearing weapons, as the consort of Parvati. It refers to various incidents to be found in puranas that reveal His unrivalled power and glory. He is also praised in His aspect as the supreme reality, the attributeless brahman whose nature is existence, wisdom and bliss .

1

१. भालावनम्रकिरीटं भालनेत्रार्शिषा दग्धपञ्चेषुकीटम् ।

शूलाडतारातिकूटं, शुद्धमर्धेन्दुयूयं भजे मार्गबन्धुम् ।

शम्भो ...

भालः - forehead; bhAla is preferred to (wrongly used) phAla; अवनम्र - descended or come down; किरीटं - crown: indicates that Lord Shiva wears a crown on the head किरीटी - किरीटमस्यास्तीति किरीटी (SS782). The crown implies that Shiva wears other ornaments also डिण्डिः (SS273) and डिण्डिबाहुः (SS387) सुवर्णवर्णः -सुवर्णस्थेव वर्णोऽस्येति सुवर्णवर्णः VS(737). One who is golden-hued and डेमाङ्गः - डेमेवाङ्गं वपुरसेति डेमाङ्गः VS(738) One with body like gold are also His names. Shri Rudram salutes Him saying नमो डिण्डिबाहवे। पादावनम्रकिरीटं is another reading found in some books पादः = foot; implies that when gods like Indra bow down to salute Him their crowns touch His feet. The crown indicates lordship. Please see the comments on DEVESHA above. He demands respect and in fact He is the only one to be respected पूज्यः ॥ पूज्योऽयः पूज्यः सर्ववन्द्यः इत्यर्थः SS(70) He deserves to be worshipped by all. There is none equal to or greater than Him says Shri Suka while saluting Him before he begins to narrate Bhagavatam to King Parikshit निरस्तसाभ्यातिशयेन राधसा स्वधामनि ब्रह्मणि रंस्थते नमः BH(2-4-14)अतुलः - तुलोपमानमस्य न विद्यते इति अतुलः He has none equal to Him. VS(355) अनुत्तमः - अविद्यमान उत्तमो यस्मात् सः अनुत्तमः There is none greater than Him. VS

(80). Further there is none superior to Him. VS(626) अनीशः - न विद्यतेऽस्येश इति अनीशः All other devas including Brahma the creator are limited by time and are subject to sorrows प्रथमः - देवानां प्रधानभूत आद्यो वा प्रथमः He is the first and foremost among the devas. SS(111). Shri Rudram says He is the foremost and is the inner self of the devas प्रथमो दैव्यः Such is His glory भालनेत्रार्थिषा दग्धपञ्चेषुकीटं - नेत्रं = eye: अर्यिस् = fire: दग्ध = burnt: षुः = arrow: कीटः = a worm, insect पञ्चेषुः is the name Manmatha, the god of love, because he has five arrows: they are अरविन्दं, अशोकं, यूतं, नवमल्लिका and नीलोत्पलम् (lotus, ashoka, mango, jasmine and blue lotus). The five arrows are also said to be संमोहनः, उन्मादनः, शोषणः, तापनः and स्तम्भनः They are fascination, intoxication or extravagance of love, emaciation, suffering pain and numbing or stupifying respectively. Kalidasa vividly narrates the story connected with Shiva destroying the god of love in his masterpiece Kumarasambhavam. Manmatha shot his arrow संमोहनं at Shiva who was deep in meditation. He wanted to seduce Shiva's mind and make Him fall in love with Parvati who was attending on Him, but failed in his attempt. Shiva could sense that something was amiss and looked about. He saw Manmatha cowering at a distance. He just knit his brows in annoyance. In that moment fire shot out of His third eye and reduced the wretched Manmatha into a handful of ashes. Manmatha is contemptuously termed a worm or insect as he was foolish enough to try his tricks on none other than the great Shiva. So Shiva is known as कामारिः - कामस्य मन्मथस्य अरिः कामारिः SA(25)

Leaving the story apart, the implication is that there is no place for carnal desires in the presence of the Lord; just like there is no place for darkness in the presence of the sun. By the same logic, there will be no place for evil tendencies in the heart of a devotee who establishes the Lord therein.

Shiva's third eye is situated in His forehead. So Shiva is known as भालनेत्रः SS(159) and ललाटाक्षः SA(28) It is to be noted that the third eye is unique. None of the human beings and gods including Indra and the creator Brahma possess such an eye. So Shiva is also known as विरुपाक्षः । विरुपाक्षि विरुद्धस्वरुपाक्षि लोकविरुद्धत्रित्वविशिष्टानि अक्षीणि यस्य सः विरुपाक्षः । SS(129). He has an abnormal third eye. The third eye situated in a high position (viz) forehead and stands for supreme knowledge उन्नतस्थानवर्तिलोचनशालित्वकीर्तनेन विश्वोत्तरज्ञानशालित्वं सूचितम् SA(28). With such an eye He could easily look into the inmost recesses of anyone's heart and see the thoughts lurking there. So He could detect by a mere glance that the god of love has come to His presence with an evil thought and meted out severe punishment.

The Shiva-Mahimna stotram (15) says that for his foolishness Manmatha paid a heavy price with his life and became an object of memory स्मरः स्मर्तव्यात्मा न हि वशिषु पथ्यः परिभवः । स्मर Smara is another name of Manmatha. His arrows have not failed anywhere in the world of gods, demons and men. So he became conceited. Smara became (स्मर्तव्यात्मा) an object of memory. The moral of the story, says the poem, is that an insult to the great will produce serious consequences वह्निनेत्रः - वह्निनेत्रं ललाटे यस्य सः वह्निनेत्रः (SS131) is also one of Shiva's names. Bhartrihari in his Vairagya Satakam refers to this incident thus: लीलादग्ध-विलूलकाम शलभः (i.e.) who effortlessly burnt up the flippant god of love as a moth. A big fire instantly reduces a moth into ashes.

शूलः = the Trident of Shiva; आहत = struck; अरातिः = enemy; कूटं = mass, heap: Shiva has destroyed His enemies with His Trident. But Shiva has no enemies समोऽहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेषोऽस्ति न प्रियः (BG9-29) "I am the same to all beings. There is none hateful or dear to me" says the Lord in Gita. So we have to take "enemies" to mean the enemies of His devotees. We find that during the Mahabharata war Lord involved Himself to help His devotee Arjuna. During the KurukShetra war Arjuna was struck with wonder to see a figure radiant like the sun going ahead of him. The figure destroyed his enemies very easily with His trident. Arjuna tells this to sage Vyasa and asks who that radiant figure was. He adds that people think he has killed his enemies so valiantly though all the work was done by that figure. Vyasa says "You have seen Lord Shiva." ईशानमीश्वरं देवं दृष्टवानसि शङ्करम् Krishna confirms this and says "Your enemies have already been killed by Me. Be a mere instrument." BG(11-33) भयैवैते निहितः पूर्वमेव निमित्तमात्रं भव सव्यसाधिन्

The more dangerous "enemies" a devotee has to face are internal such as desire, anger etc.. In reply to Arjuna's question as to what impels a person to commit sins even though he may be unwilling, Krishna says काम ओष क्रोध ओष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः । मडाशनो मडापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिड वैरिणाम् । BG(3-37) "It is desire. It is anger. They are born out of rajo guna. It has huge appetite and makes one to commit sins. Recognise it as your enemy." And later on BG(16-21) He describes these as open gateways to hell that will destroy the self. He cautions Arjuna to be careful and avoid them. So a devotee in order to avoid these internal enemies installs Him in his heart and feels safe. Krishna tells Uddhava that once He is established in the heart evil tendencies like desires get destroyed कामा दुदय्या नश्यन्ति सर्वे मधि दुदृि स्थिते BH(11-21-26). They cannot live together like light and darkness. He is called कामडा -

कामान् उन्ति मुमुक्षूणां भक्तानां छिंसकानां चेति कामडा He destroys the desires of His devotees who seek liberation and the intentions of those who trouble them. VS(294). Also कामनाशः ॥ मुमुक्षूणां कामं नाशयतीति कामनाशः SS(126). Lord Shiva is the आदि गुरुः the earliest or the first guru. He teaches by demonstration. He shows He has destroyed His desires and wants His devotee to do likewise. He is only too willing to help him provided he makes his heart His temple. In view of this Bhartruhari describes a sadhu whose heart is pure as having devotion to Shiva with trident भक्तिः शूलिनि

Unfortunately a devotee has to contend with one more “enemy” - more pernicious than the enemies mentioned in the preceding para. It is attachment. Desire is a longing to possess something which we do not have and we feel that thing can give us satisfaction or pleasure or security. We try to get that thing and when someone or something thwarts the desire the desire turns into anger. Thus desire precedes anger or anger is the result of frustrated desire. Once the object of desire is got and is in our possession we tend to hold on to it. This inclination to bind ourselves to objects or people around us is known as attachment. We look to those objects or people to give us pleasure or security. Vedanta warns us to avoid getting attached to things or people; because firstly the objects of attachment are perishable as anything in the world is. If we develop strong attachment to something, then parting with it can be a very painful experience and we may sink under the load of the resultant grief. That was the case with Dasaratha who was excessively attached to his son Rama. He could not bear the pangs of separation from Rama who had to leave for the forest for fourteen years. He died in agony.

Secondly it is wrong to look to such objects or people for security as they are perishable and so are themselves insecure. Hence they cannot confer security on us. We will be left in the lurch. Attachment is called (ईषण्) Ishana. Three types of attachments are mentioned in our scriptures. They are attachment to (1) the money (2) wife/husband and (3) children. Further it is said that attachment, once developed to something, is very difficult to get rid of. It is like a blob of coal tar that has somehow got stuck to our body. It will take a long time and repeated washing to get rid of it. So we are warned to be wary of developing attachment to anything or any person. This does not prevent us from showing love to others.

Prahlada gives a description of these attachments (BH .7-6) in his advice to his friends. Talking about the attachment to money he says को -वर्धतृषण्। विसृजेत् प्राणोभ्योऽपि य इप्सितः ॥

यं कीर्णात्यसुभिः प्रेष्ठैस्तस्करः सेवको वशिष्ठः। (BH 97-8-10) He says that money is valued higher than life itself and so who can give up attachment to it? The thief, the soldier and the merchant trade their dear life for money. In view of this he warns all to stay away from the objects of attachment and seek the Lord. The boy Nachiketa said न वित्तेन तर्पणीयो मनुष्यः He said man can never get satiated with the wealth when Yama offered him immense wealth in exchange for the teaching about self.

Kunti, the mother of Pandavas, in her prayer to Krishna before He leaves for Dwaraka says स्नेहपाशमिमं छिन्धि दृढं पाण्डुषु वृषिष्णु। She prays to the Lord to cut her attachment to her relatives so that her mind can think of Him without distractions. BH(1-8-41)

The foregoing introduction is to explain the other implication of shula or the trident of Shiva. The three sharp points of the trident can destroy the three kinds of attachment that can assail a devotee and hinder his progress.

The devotee shakes off his attachments to the worldly objects first. This was what Vibhishana did before surrendering to Rama. As the brother of Ravana and his minister he was very powerful. He was immensely rich. He had palaces, loving wives and children. But he gave up every thing and rushed to Rama without even taking leave of his wife and children. He said त्यक्त्वा पुत्रांश्च दारांश्च राघवं शरणं गतः Renouncing my wives and children I have surrendered to Raghava and again परिक्रत्यक्ता मया लङ्का मित्राणि च धनानि च Lanka, friends and all wealth had been left behind by me. (Ramayana-Yuddhakanda-17-16 and 19-6). Then he transfers his attachment to the Lord and enshrines Him in his heart. Then the devotee ties His feet firmly with the cord of love and so He becomes immobilised प्रणयरशनया धृथाङ्घ्रिपद्मः BH(11-2-55). Thus firmly stationed in the devotee's heart He destroys the evil tendencies therein वृधन्तस्थो ह्यभद्राणि विधुनोति सुहृन्सताम् BH(1-2-17) शूलहस्तः - शूलं हस्ते यस्य सः (SS114): जितशत्रुः - जिताः शत्रवः येन सः जितशत्रुः (SS211) and रिपुघ्नः - सुररिपून् हन्तीति रिपुघ्नः (SS370) are Shiva's names.

Further it is said त्रैगुण्यं शूलमेतस्य - एवं भूतस्य शूलस्य करस्थत्वोक्त्या त्रिगुणात्मिकाया मायाया स्वाधीनत्वमुक्तं भवति SA(11) The trident represents the three gunas (traits). Shiva holding it in His hand shows He is in control of maya of which they are the constituents.

शुद्धं = कालत्रयेऽपि परमार्थतः मायाऽविधाटि सम्बन्धरहितः शुद्धः । शुद्धमपापविद्धं धृति श्रुतिः (SS310) Forever He is free from maya (the illusion by which one considers the unreal universe

as really existent and as distinct from the Supreme Spirit) and spiritual ignorance. This is made explicit by what is said about the moon next.

अर्धेन्दुयूऽ - अर्ध = half ँन्दुः = the moon यूऽ = crest, Shiva has partial moon on the crest
सोमविभूषः - विशिष्टा भूषा विभूषा, सोमः विभूषा भूषणं यस्य सः सोमविभूषः चन्द्रधरः (SS32) and also
शशिमौलिः = शशी चन्द्रः मौलौ यस्य सः शशिमौलिः (SS929) The moon appears as a special ornament
to Shiva शशिशेखरः - अयं चन्द्रः परमेश्वरस्य ज्ञानरूपं एति शिवागमे दर्शितम् । यतोक्तं “ ज्ञानचन्द्रकलायूऽ । ”
SA(5). The moon represents His infinite wisdom. Please see notes under Deva above. It
is to be noted that the crown that Shiva wears does not cover the moon. This implies
that Shiva’s lordship over the universe - His omnipotence - does not veil His wisdom. The
shining moon announces to the world that one who yearns for knowledge should come to
Him. Shankaracharya says in his Prasnotara ratnamalika को ङि जगद्गुरुः क्तः? शम्भुः, ज्ञानं
कुतः? शिवादेव । Who is the universal teacher? Shambu. From where can one get wisdom?
From Shiva only. So we have the saying ज्ञानमिच्छेत् मधेश्वरात् ” One should pray to Maheswara
for wisdom.”

भजे = worship: मार्गबन्धु = the Lord Margabandu. I worship Lord Margabandu who wears a
crown, who destroyed the insect like god of love with the fire from His eye in His forehead,
who destroyed the enemies (of gods) with His Trident, who is pure(i.e.) beyond maya and
ignorance and who wears the moon on His head as an ornament.

2

२. अङ्गे विराजद्भुजङ्गं अलगङ्गातरङ्गाभिरामोत्तमाङ्गम् ।

ओंकारवाटीकुङ्कुरङ्गं सिद्धसंसेविताङ्घ्रिं भजे मार्गबन्धुम् ।

शम्भो ...

अङ्गे विराजद्भुजङ्गं - अङ्गं = limb; may mean hand, or leg; विराजत् = shining or appearing
prominently; भुजङ्गः = serpent, snake; Lord Shiva is decked with snakes सर्पभूषः - सर्पाः भुजङ्गाः
भूषाः भूषणानि यस्य सः सर्पभूषः (SS43) His other names are सर्पदारः सर्पाः नागाः, ते दाराः यस्य सः
(SS494) and नागयूऽ - नागो वासुकिः कोटीरबन्धनार्थं यूऽयां यस्य सः नागयूऽ (SS736). Shiva wears
a garland of snakes and has tied Vasuki -the king of snakes - around His head to keep His
locks of hair in place.

Snakes:-

We fear snakes because we identify them with death. And everyone is afraid of death कस्माद्भयमिड? मरणात् says Sankaracharya in his Prasottara ratnamalika. The symbolism is used in our scriptures frequently. For example: अस्नं कालादिनाऽऽत्मानं कोऽन्यस्त्रातुमधीश्वरः BH(11.8.41) meaning “who else, other than the Lord can save one seized by the serpent of Time ? When Gajendra, the lord of the elephants was seized by a crocodile and found that he could not extricate himself from its grip he called the Lord saying यः कश्चनेशो बलिनोऽन्तकोरगात् प्रयत्नवेगाद्बिधावतो भृशम् ॥ भीतं प्रपन्नं परिपाति यद्बयान्मृत्युः प्रधावत्यराणं तमीमहि । BH(8.2.33) He says “Whosoever be the almighty God, who protects one, who has surrendered to Him being very much afraid of the powerful snake in the form of Death - that is very fast and is after him - and from fear of whom Death himself runs hither and thither, let us seek Him as our refuge.”

Kala means the Supreme principle which devours everything and Yama the god of death who is also known by the names Antaka and Mrutyu. So at level one He is Yama मृत्युः सर्वहृश्याडम् Krishna says “I am Death who seizes all life.” BG(10.34) He is Antaka अन्तकः - अन्तं करोति भूतानामिति अन्तकः VS(520). He causes the end of all life. At the higher level He is the kala or Supreme principle which destroys everything including Yama, the god of death at the time of dissolution. Lord Kapila gives a description of Kala to His mother Devahuti. BH(3.29. 36-45). He says it is none other than Vishnu who draws everything into Himself कालः - कलयति सर्वमिति कालः, - कालः कलयतामडम् - गीता १०.३० इति भगवद्भयनात् VS(418) and SS(33). The Lord is not limited by time or space or by any material अनन्तात्मा । देशतः कालतो वस्तुतश्चापरिच्छिन्नत्वात् अनन्तात्मा VS(518). He is not subject to destruction or anything that causes destruction. अमृत्युः । मृत्युर्विनाशः तद्धेतुर्वास्थ न विद्यते इति अमृत्युः VS(198). In fact it is He - the seer and all knowing who had created the gods (including Yama) and assigned to them their duties says Isavasyopanishad. कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयम्भूः यथातथ्यतोऽर्थान्व्यधाश्चाश्रतीभ्यः समाभ्यः So the snakes, representing kala or death, cannot harm Him but He wears them implying He uses Death for His services. Yama himself says मृत्युर्यस्योपसेयनम् Death to Him is like pickles or achAr - a thing He uses in the process of consumig the creation. KU(1.3.25). Remember that one uses a small quantity of pickle only to push in a large amount of food - the main dish. Similarly the Lord uses the services of Yama in a small measure for His main work. कालहन्ता । कालस्य मृत्योर्हन्ता SS(83) and कालकालः ॥ कालः यमः, तस्यापि कालः, . SA(29) are His names. He destroyed even Yama, the god of death to protect

His devotee Markandeya. The name also indicates that He is the supreme Lord who withdraws everything , the entire creation, including the god of death into Himself at the time of dissolution and releases them again at the beginning of the next cycle of creation. His other names are मृत्युञ्जयः - मृत्युः मरणां स्वयं स्वयं मृत्युं जयति, स्वोपासनादिना परिहरति इति मृत्युञ्जयः SS(123), SA(71). He removes or avoids the death of His devotees. The sage Markandeya confidently sings यन्द्रशेभरमाश्रये मम किं करिष्यति वै यमः “I take refuge in Lord Shiva. What harm can Yama do to me?” This is also said symbolically in the story of Dhruva. Towards the end of the story it is said that a chariot came to take him to the place reserved for him in the skies. The Lord had told him that it was a special place because there will be no return to this world again meaning he had crossed death and will not be reborn. At that time Yama - the god of death - approached him and bowed down. Dhruva stepped on Yama’s head and climbed into the vehicle .. तद्योत्तानपादः पुत्रो दृष्टान्तिः कमागतम् ॥ मृत्यो-मूर्ध्नि पदं दत्त्वा आरुरोडाद्भुतं गृहम् । BH(4.12.30)

At this point let us take a small detour and see what our scriptures have to say on the subject of life and kala or death. This may sound a bit morbid : but since it is literally a matter of life and death we should know some details.

One who is born has to die and one who dies is reborn जतस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युः ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च BG(2.27). From this it appears that this is a never ending process. One can view it in either of the two ways as follows. 1 - One does not believe in the existence of the other world. There is no inclination to think about or enquire into the process. Such people are known as Nastikas. 2 - This one - known as Astika - believes in the shastras and the existence of the other world. He tries to find a way out of it.

The shastras say that the people coming under the first category are to be pitied. The human birth is superior to other forms of births. Only humans are endowed with free will and ability to discriminate between the right and the wrong: the good and the bad. Only they have the ability to work for their own and other’s uplift. The animals do not have free will. Their life is governed by instincts. Because of this they do not incur any sin for their actions. One obtains a human birth after going through the inferior births and as a result of some good deeds and blessings of the Lord. It is therefore incumbent on us to use this privileged position to our advantage and seek higher goals including liberation from death. But if one fails to seize the rare opportunity that has come his way but fritters his life on petty

sense pleasures and garnering pelf he falls from his status and is considered an ignoramus. BH(11.7.74) यः प्राप्य मानुषं लोकं मुक्तिद्वारमपावृतम् । गृहेषु भगवत्सक्तस्तमाद्बद्धयुतं विदुः ।

The question of escaping death has been discussed again and again in our scriptures. We will structure the discussion as answers to the following questions.

- 1 - What leads to rebirth?
- 2 - What is wrong with rebirth or why rebirth is to be avoided?
- 3 - What is the process called death? and
- 4 - Can death be avoided and if so how to avoid death?

1 - What leads to rebirth?

Everyone has to work, at least to keep the wolf from the door. In addition people work to improve their standard of living, to provide for the rainy day, old age etc.. All these activities - called karma - can be classified as good or bad. The good ones are those that are enjoined by our scriptures and those that can be called virtuous, selfless and such. The bad ones are those that are prohibited by our scriptures and those that are motivated by greed, anger, selfishness etc.. Both acts produce results which are to be “enjoyed” by the doer. स्वकर्मणोऽनुभूयंति क्लृप्तं भुञ्जति जन्तवः । शुभेन कर्मणा भूतिर्दुःखं स्यात्पातकेन तु ॥ Skanda Puranam. The good deeds produce happiness, prosperity etc.. and lead to higher births - life of better quality and happiness in this world or higher worlds. The bad deeds produce unhappiness, misery etc.. By neglecting to do the duties expected of him and also doing acts that are prohibited he falls and is thrown into inferior births.

विहितस्थाननुष्ठानात् निन्दितस्य च सेवनात् ।

अनित्राडाभ्येन्द्रियाणां नरः पतनमृच्छति ॥

(Yagnavalkya Smrithi) Then he climbs up the ladder slowly and gets the human birth again after a long time says Lord as Kapila to His mother Devahuti. अधस्तात्त्रलोकस्य यावतीर्यातनादयः । इमशः समनुकम्प्य पुनरत्राप्रजेच्छुचिः । BH(3.31.34) Yama - the god of death - tells the same to Nachiketa: “One who is infatuated with wealth; not having a thought for the other world; such an ignorant person believing there is no such thing as hell or heaven comes within my clutches again and again.” न साम्परायः प्रतिभाति बालं प्रमाद्यन्तं वित्तमोडेन मूढम् ॥ अयं लोको नास्ति परं इति मानी पुनः पुनर्वशमापद्यते मे । KU(1.2.6) So the doer of the deeds has to be prepared to enjoy or suffer the fruits. If the fruits cannot be exhausted in one lifetime one has to take another birth and try to exhaust them. The problem, according to our shastras is,

that everyone of us had taken countless number of births, done karmas in these births and accumulated vast amounts of the karmas. This accumulated store waiting to bear fruit is called संचितं कर्मा sanchitam karma. In addition we continue to do karma in this life also and add to the stock of sanchitam karma thus necessitating more and more births. Out of this vast stock a chunk begins to yield the results. This chunk is called प्रारब्धम् prarabdham. There is no escape from the results of the prarabdham. It determines the duration of life, the wealth, education and the mode of death even as one is born आयुः कर्म यद्वित्तं यद्विद्या निधनमेव च । पञ्चैतानि विविच्यन्ते ज्ञायमानस्य देहिनः । We have to infer the impressions of the past deeds only when we are confronted with the results. Kalidasa says this in Raghuvamsa (1.20) कृत्वा नृमेयाः प्रारम्भाः संस्काराः प्राक्तना एव

2 - What is wrong with rebirth or why rebirth is to be avoided?

If one asks what is wrong with being born, saints like Shri Shankara want us to think and find out if anything is right with it? किं संसारे सारं ? अद्भुतोऽपि विचिन्त्यमानमिदमेव (Prasnottara ratnamalika). If one were to think that Shankara was a sanyasi and so had such a dark view of life, so did Bhartruhari and Kulasheekhara who were kings and had access to all kinds of pleasures न संसारोत्पन्नं चरितमनुपश्यामि कुशलं (Bhartruhari Vairagya Shatakam).

The problems start right from the beginning. Sage Kapila points out that nothing can equal the pain one suffers while in the womb गर्भवाससमं दुःखं न भूतं न भविष्यति BH(3.31.9). Then look at the troubles one goes through as he grows up. As one runs around earning and looking after his family one is assailed by worries and sickness. He is all the time growing old imperceptibly. व्याधीव तिष्ठति जरा परितर्जयन्ती, रोगाश्च शत्रव एव प्रहरन्ति देहम् says Bartruhari in his Vairagya shatakam. He says that old age is crouching there like a tigress frightening us, and diseases attack our bodies like enemies. Then there is the fear of the inevitable death. In view of all these Krishna describes rebirth as the seat of pain and impermanent. पुनर्जन्म दुःखालयमशाश्वतम् BG(7.15) Later on He again says this world is impermanent and joyless अनित्यमसुखं लोकमिदं BG(9.33). We clearly see that everything in this world is impermanent. This includes our bodies, our relations, friends and possessions. The question then is how can one feel happy when thrown into such a situation? Time is constantly gnawing at our life quietly. Bhartruhari says life is oozing away like water leaking from a pot with a crack आयुः परिस्त्रवति भिन्नघटादिवाम्भः Death is imminent and can strike anyone at any time. This being the case, Krishna asks “how can one find pleasure in wealth or enjoyment? It cannot

please him, who like an animal, is being dragged to be slaughtered.” BH(11.10. 20)को-वर्तः सुभयत्येनं कामो वा मृत्युरन्तिके। आधातं नीयमानस्य वध्यसेव न तुष्टिः। Next, Krishna said this world is joyless. This is because the pleasures are transitory. They have a beginning and an end and so are fleeting by nature. Their departure may leave a void and a trail of sorrow. Or they may make one to hanker for more of it and leave him restless and unhappy. So He says that one endowed with discrimination will not enjoy them ये छि संस्पर्शजा भोगाः दृग्भयोऽन्ये अवे ते। आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः। BG(9.22) Such sensory pleasures are trivial and cannot be termed as pleasures in the true sense.

In view of what is stated here, rebirth is not desirable and one should, if possible, avoid it.

3 - What is the process called death?

This is mentioned briefly in clinical fashion in the Brihadaranyopanishad. It says that as the end approaches the individual’s breathing becomes hard and he starts gasping. His pranas, along with the sense organs, withdraw from their respective foci and gather around jivatma - the individual soul. As he (jiva) departs, the pranas and the sense organs follow him. He gets a body as in a dream and enters another body. The impressions of his karma and the knowledge about brahman that he had acquired in that birth also follow him. He gets a body suitable to his karma in this world or some other world .. अवेमेवात्मानमन्तकाले सर्वे प्राणाः अभिसमायान्ति यत्रैतदूर्ध्वोच्छ्वासी भवति। (4.3.38) तमुत्कामन्तं प्राणोऽनूत्कामति प्राणमनूत्कामन्तं सर्वे प्राणा अनूत्कामन्ति सविज्ञानो भवति सविज्ञा मेवान्ववकामति त विद्याकर्माणि समन्वारभते पूर्वप्राणा य। (4.4.2) अथमात्मेदं शरीरं निडत्याविद्यां गमयित्वाऽन्यत्रवतरं कल्याणतरं रुपं कुरुते(4.4.4) Krishna says that the knowledge he had acquired in the earlier birth carries him forward in his next birth and he progresses in the spiritual path. He does not have to start ab initio. पूर्वोक्त्यासेन तेनैव द्वियते ऽयवसोऽपि सः BG(6.44) Some puranas describe it in detail making it sound a bit scary. Sage Kapila gives a description in His talk to His mother. This is on the same lines as stated above in the upanishad. He says that the individual soul living in the gross body has, in addition, a subtle body called Linga Shariram or SukShma Sariram which is invisible. It is made up of seventeen components (viz.) the five sense organs of perception (called gnanendriyas), the five sense organs of action (called karmendriyas), the five pranas, the mind and the intellect. It requires the gross physical body for functioning. It does not perish when the gross body perishes in the process called death which takes place at the end of prarabdham karma. The Jiva just migrates to another body (called birth) with the Linga Shariram according to the

nature of past karmas and generates new karmas which add on to the sanchitam karma and becomes the seed for future births.

4 - Can death be avoided and if so how to avoid death?

Luckily there is a way to escape death and the birth that follows. Krishna says “on reaching Me there is no rebirth.” मामुपेत्य तु कौन्तेय पुनर्जन्म न विधत्ते BG(8.16) The question, now is: ” where is He? and how to reach Him?” The answer to these questions form the main topic of discussions in our scriptures like Gita, Upanishads and puranas like Shri Bhagavatam and is beyond the scope of this essay and so is not attempted. One has to learn it from a qualified teacher.

अलङ्गागतरेगाभिरामोत्तमाङ्गं - अलङ् = sky; गङ्गा = the river Ganges. So the word अलङ्गाङ्गा means the heavenly river Ganges; तरेगः = wave; अभिरामः = pleasing, charming; उत्तम = best; The word उत्तमाङ्गं indicates the best limb in the body viz. the head; This says that Shiva looks charming with the waves of the divine river Ganges on His head गङ्गाधरः - धरतीति धरः
 ॥ गङ्गायाः धरः एति गङ्गाधरः (SS146) and SA(27). Also धूर्जटिः - धूः गङ्गा जटासु यस्य सः धूर्जटिः
 । नमः कपर्दिने एति श्रुतिः (SS286)जटार्द्रः - जटसु कपर्दनामिकासु गङ्गाप्रयुक्तमार्द्रं यस्य सः (SS797).

The river Ganges was, according to our scriptures, originally flowing in the heavens. The story of Lord Vishnu’s incarnation and His seeking three feet of land from the king Bali is familiar to all. When He lifted up His foot to measure the heavens, Brahma the creator, seized the rare opportunity and washed the holy foot of the Lord that has come his way with water from his water pot. The waters became the holy river Ganga.

धातुः कर्मण्डलुजलं तद्गुरुकमस्य

पादावनेजन-पवित्रतया नरेन्द्र ।

स्वर्धुन्यभून्नभसि सा पतती निमार्ष्टि

लोकत्रयं भगवतो विशदेव कीर्तिः ॥ BH(8.21.4)

The story of the descent of Ganga to earth is also familiar. It is mentioned briefly in Bhagavata in skanda 4 - chapter 17 and skanda 9 - chapter 9. It is given in detail in the Balakanda of Ramayana. Sage Viswamitra narrated it to Rama and LakShmana as he was taking them to Mithila after he had successfully completed his sacrifice with protection offered by the brothers. King Bhagirata - a scion of the ikShvAku dynasty to which Rama belonged - was instrumental in bringing the river to earth by performing severe penance. At his request Shiva received the mighty flow of Ganga falling from the heavens and released

it as a stream on the earth. A large gathering comprising the residents of the higher worlds and great seers came to witness the wonderful event. They, along with the people of this world, praised the waters of the river Ganga as pure because of its contact with Lord Shiva (मवाङ्ग पतितं तोयं पवित्रमिति पश्युशुः (1.43.28). Hence the saying कश्चां तु मरणाभुक्तिः (ie.) death in Kasi, now known as Varanasi, brings about salvation. King Parikshit decided to spend the last seven days of his life at the banks of the river because of this reason कस्तं न सेवेत मरिच्यमाणः । BH(1.19.6) It asks “which dying man will not resort to such a holy river?”

Ganga:-

Now let us get behind the story of Ganga and see what it means. Brahma to whom Bhagirata prays blesses his efforts. But He cautions the king that he should pray to Lord Shiva and involve Him in this matter because the earth cannot withstand the fall of Ganga from the heavens. He adds that no one other than Lord Shiva is capable of receiving the torrent from the heaven. This is because Brahma knows that Shiva is firm and unshakeable. स्थाणुः । स्थिरत्वात् (VS 28). Also SA(72) स्थाणुः वृक्षः तत्साम्यात् स्थाणुः । वृक्ष एव स्तब्धो द्दिवि तिष्ठत्येकस्तेनेदं पूर्णं - पुरुषेण सर्वम्

The ग in the name Ganga stands for Gayatri which represents the eternal, supreme Brahman. In Gangashtakam, she is addressed as the very embodiment of Brahman, पूर्वाभ्रमस्वरूपे . She is eternal and formed by the fusion of the powers extracted from the three - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. So Gayatri is worshipped in their forms during the three times it is recited (viz.) morning, noon and the evening. In view of this Shiva has placed her on the head - in the chakra called Brahmarandram. The scriptures define six chakras or seats of power in one's body. The chakra on the head is above all these and is the seat of Brahman. This is also the seat where one visualises one's guru in the form of Brahman and meditates on him because one's guru is not different from Brahman गुरुस्साक्षात्परम्भ्रम . The fact that she is formed from the powers of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva is stated symbolically in the story of Ganga. आदावादिपितामहस्य नियमव्यापारपात्रे जलं, पश्चात् पत्रगशायिनो भगवतः पादोदकं पावनम् ॥ भूयः शम्भु जटा विभूषणमणिर्जहोर्महर्षेरियं, कन्या कल्पाशनिनी भगवती भागीरथी भूतले । This says that “you Ganga started as water in the water pot of Brahma, then came into contact with the foot of Vishnu and again became the crown jewel on the locks of Shiva etc.”

Placed on the head of Shiva who is Himself the embodiment of knowledge the stream of

Ganga is symbolic of knowledge. So Shankaracharya refers to it in his Kasi Panchakam as ज्ञानप्रवाहो विमलादि गङ्गा The stream of right knowledge is the pure original Ganga. Again later he says त्रिभुवनजननी व्यापिनी ज्ञानगङ्गा(ie.) the Ganga of knowledge is the mother of the three worlds. This Ganga who is Gayatri and Brahman and is kept in the chakra in the head by Shiva is same as Uma or Parvati can be deduced from the following references. These are taken from the well known Lalitasahasranamam (LS).

1 - She is of the form of the three gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra.

सृष्टिकर्त्री ब्रह्मरूपा LS(265) गोप्त्री

गोविन्दरूपिणी LS(267) संडारिणी रुद्ररूपा LS(269)

2 - She is Gayatri गायत्री LS(420)

3 - She is Bhavani भवानी LS(112). Durga दुर्गा

LS(190). Parvati पार्वती LS(246). Uma उमा LS(633)

4 - She is seated on the head in the Brahmarandhram.

शिरस्थिता LS(591)

So Ganga is Brahman, is Gayatri and is Uma or Parvati. She proclaims the Ardhanari (the inseparable combination of the male and female principles) concept (अर्धनारी स्वर्पम्) of Shiva which is not explicitly seen in His representations (where Uma is shown as a separate figure). Thus one who knows Ganga knows Shiva and vice versa. Krishna says ओतसामस्मि जह्वी Of the rivers I am the Ganges. So it is not an ordinary river that the Lord had placed on His head. No wonder, then, that the very utterance of the name Ganga washes away one's sins even when one is miles away from the river. This is said in this popular verse that is normally recited before taking bath. गङ्गे गङ्गेति यो भूयात् योजनानां शतैरपि । मुख्यते सर्वपापेभ्यो विष्णुलोकं स गच्छति । The avadhuta saint Sadasiva Brahman has composed a song in praise of Ganga (jaya tungatarange gange जय तुङ्गतरङ्गे गङ्गे) wherein he salutes Ganga as one who purifies the worlds and cuts asunder the manifold bonds of mankind (कमलभवाद्दङ्कमद्दपवित्रे, बहुविधबन्धच्छेदकवित्रे । लवित्रं = sickle; instrument for mowing). Shri Gangashtakam says that if one dies on the banks of Ganga he goes to higher lokas compared to which even the world of Indra looks very inferior .

त्वद्दुःसङ्गे गङ्गे पतति यदि कायस्तनुभृतां तदा

मातः शातकतव-पदल्लाभोऽप्यतिलघुः

We can make one observation on the story of Bhagirata bringing down Ganga. The Lord - being the father - always gives much more than what one seeks from Him though this fact is not appreciated. He is कामप्रदः । भक्तोभ्यः कामान् प्रकर्षेण ददातीति कामप्रदः VS(298). He knows what the devotee asks and why he asks for it. The Lord not only gives what is asked for but goes further and fulfills his mission though unasked. In the case of Bhagiratha, he could have asked Shiva for salvation for himself and his forefathers and got it. Instead, he just asked Him to bear the Ganga as she came down from the heaven. But Lord Shiva helped the king not only in bringing down the river but also gave salvation to his forefathers then and there itself. Please carefully look at what Shiva told the king when He appeared before him. He said “I am pleased with you. I will do what is dear to you.” Ramayana (1.43.3 and 4) उभापतिः पशुपतिः राजानमिदमब्रवीत् । प्रीतस्तेऽहं नरश्रेष्ठ करिष्यामि तव प्रियम् ।

We all know what was dear to the king and what was it that had been haunting his mind for years and made him do severe penance, once to Brahma (for thousand years eating once a month and so on) and again to Lord Shiva. The king's idea was to then lead the river to the place where the ashes of his forefathers were lying for ages and perform their final rites so that they will attain release. But this was what he got as bonus. In addition he got salvation for himself also though he did not ask for it. Ganga represents Brahman and Shiva is DakShinamurthi - the giver of knowledge about the Brahman. Thus the story of the king getting the Ganga with Shiva's help implies he got the knowledge of Brahman directly from the Lord which knowledge results in salvation.

This was what happened in the case of Arjuna also. He met Krishna at Dwaraka and asked His help during the KurukShetra war. Krishna agreed to help but He said He will not take up arms. But even at the time when Arjuna made his request Krishna knew what was the mission for which he was seeking His help. And He fulfilled it then and there. Later on when teaching Gita before the war had even started He told Arjuna: “These enemies of yours had been killed by me already. You just be the instrument and enjoy all the glory.” तस्मात्त्वमुत्तिष्ठ यशो लभस्व जित्वा शत्रून् भुङ्क्ष्व राज्यं समृद्धम् ।

भमैवैते निडिताः पूर्वमेव निमित्तमात्रं भव सव्यसायिन् । BG(11.33)

At the time, Arjuna was unaware of the greatness of Krishna whom, as he admits later on, he considered as his friend only. He laboured hard and “fought the war” but it was over even before it started. He “won” it and got all the glory. In the same way King Bhagirata

took the trouble to drive ahead of Ganga all the way to the seas and then to the nether world where he saw the ashes of his forefathers, performed the last rites with the holy waters from Ganga and “got them salvation.” which was already an accomplished fact. The Ganga was named after him as Bhagirathi. This was the case with Dhruva, who wanted to be a king but he got that and also a permanent place in the heavens.

ओंकारवादीकुरङ्गं - ओंकार = the holy syllable OM; (variation ब्र्ही bIjamastra; वादी = garden, park; कुरंगः = deer; Shiva is likened to a deer in the garden of the holy syllable - meaning He is represented by OM also known as pranava. ओंकाररूपः - ओंकारः रूपं स्वरूपं यस्य सः तथा(SS138) Shri Krishna says in His Gita (10-25) “I am OM among the words.” गिरामस्यैकमक्षरम् Manu, the famous law giver, says that the letter OM by itself represents the ultimate reality - the Brahman ऐकाक्षरं परं ब्रह्म He adds that the creator Brahma extracted the three letters from the three vedas and so the syllable Om is the essence of the vedas अकारं चाप्युकारं च मकारं च प्रजापतिः ॥ वेदत्रयान्निरदुष्टं लूर्भुवः स्वरित्तीति च A similar reference is seen in Chandogyopanishad (2.23.3) तान्यस्यतपत्तेभ्योऽभितमेभ्य उंकारः संप्रासवत्त्यथा Shri Bhagavatam says that sound OM was acquired spontaneously by Brahma - the first born when he was in deep meditation. BH(12.6.44 and 39) . It says that the origin of the sound consisting of three parts is unmanifest. It flashes by itself and it reveals the nature of the almighty and supreme spirit.

समाहितात्मनो ब्रह्मन् ब्रह्मणः परमेशिनः ।
 धृधाकाशाद्ब्रह्माद्यो वृत्तिरोधाद् विभाव्यते ॥

ततोऽभूत् त्रिवृद्दोकारो योऽव्यक्तप्रभवः स्वरार्त् ।
 यत् तद्विद्गं भगवतो ब्रह्मणः परमात्मनः ।

Manu says further that a student (during his gurukula days when he learns the vedas) should utter OM both when beginning and ending his studies. The reason, he says, is that without uttering OM in the beginning the learning perishes and if OM is not said in the end what is learnt will not be retained ब्रह्मणः प्रणवं कुर्यादादावन्ते च सर्वदा। सवत्यनोऽद्वैतं पूर्वं पुरस्ताच्च विशीर्यति। In view of this Kalidasa compares Manu -the first of kings in the solar dynasty to OM in a grand simile आसीन्मडीक्षितामाधः प्रणवश्चन्द्रसामिव

Pranava :-

We can see discussions about pranava in Mandukya, Shiva Atharvasikha, Prasna and

Nrisimha Uttaratapini upanishads. This is also mentioned in Vicharasagaram. Here we will see it in brief. प्रणवः - प्रणवो नाम परमात्मनो वाचक ओङ्कारः , तदभेदोपचारेणायं प्रणवः (VS-957). He is in the form of pranava represented by OM. He is not different from the creation. So pranava represents both brahman and the universe. Sage Patanjali also has said this in his Yoga Sutra (1.26)तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः । प्रकर्षेण नूयते अनेनेति प्रणवः God is greatly praised by this. Earlier we saw that a stotram mentions the attributes or the qualities of the subject of the stotram. Thus pranavam indicates the auspicious qualities of the Lord and obtains His blessings to one who chants it. Patanjali adds (1.27): तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम् The chanting of pranava with understanding and faith is meditation on the Iswara. Pranava is made of the three letters A,U and M. These three letters represent the consciousness presiding over the three states - waking, dream and deep sleep states which one passes through every day. The consciousness is same but it functions differently in these states. The Mandukya upanishad views pranava as being composed of two parts: one having sound and the other without sound. The OM as specified above made up of the three letters is pronounced and constitutes the “sound” part. The upanishad says that the brief interlude that precedes and succeeds this “sound” part forms the “silent” component - the fourth letter अमात्रश्रुत्यौ ऽव्यवहार्यः प्रपञ्चोपशमः शिवो ऽद्वैत अवेमोकार आत्मैव संविशत्यात्मानं, य अवे वेद, य अवे वेद(Mandukya 12) They represent the two aspects of God (viz.) with form and without form respectively. The “sound” part signifies the saguna Iswara and the “silent” part the nirguna Iswara. Thus one can worship OM as God with form. This is like invoking our favourite deity in an idol or saligrama stone. Here we invoke the God about whom we do not have firsthand knowledge but learnt from scriptures or from some other source in the idol or some other form of representation and worship. The representation is known as pratikam प्रतीकम्. Meditating on the fourth or the silent part as “I the Self” is known as Ahamgrahadhyanam अहंग्रहध्यानम् One who meditates like this is called a muni मननात् मुनिरुच्यते In this type of meditation there is no difference between the meditator and Iswara or the object of meditation. As a result of this meditation the muni is blessed with the knowledge of the Self and crosses over the samsara. Thus is explained Shiva's name ओङ्काररूपः । ओङ्कारं रूपं स्वरूपं यस्य सः तथा । ओङ्काररूपत्वं य तदभिधानत्वाद्वा, तत्प्रतीकत्वाद्वा । तदभिधानत्वं ओमित्यक्षरमित्यादिना प्रसिद्धम् । ओङ्कार प्रतीकत्वं तु यः पुनरेतं त्रिमात्रेणेत्यादिना प्रश्नोपनिषदादौ प्रसिद्धम् । परं यापरं य ब्रह्म यदोङ्कार इति श्रुतिः VS(138).

The question, now is, if He is Himself omkara or the pranava, why then say He is the

deer in the park called OM? The answer is that He is OM the park as Paramatma as well as the deer the individual Jivatma. They are one and the same but look different to the uninitiated. The deer, unaware of its status, roams around in the park feeding and enjoying itself. This is an echo of the famous Mundakopanisad mantra द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सभाया समानं वृक्षं पश्चिपश्चजते । तयोरेव्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्त्वनश्नन्त्यो अभियाकशीति । MU (3.1.1) This mantra talks of two friendly birds sitting side by side on a tree. One is eating and relishing the fruits and the other one is quietly watching it. Here one of the birds represents the Jivatma. Eating the fruits is enjoying the results of the past karma and the other bird which looks on is the Paramatma as He is not attached to the fruits of action. Similarly Devi is described as औंकारपञ्जरशुकी a female parrot in the cage called OM in the Devi Navaratnamala. The saint composer Thiagaraja of Tiruvaiyaru addresses Rama as औंकारपञ्जरकीर a parrot in the cage called OM in his famous song beginning Jagadanandakaraka. Similarly the saint composer SadasivaBrahmam talks of Krishna as प्रशवपथोरुडगर्भकपाली one who is hidden inside the lotus of pranava (in his song kridathi vanamali कीडति वनमाली)

सिद्धसंसेविताङ्घ्रि - सिद्धः = a superhuman being of great purity and holiness possessing eight supernatural powers called siddhis. Can also be taken to mean a great sage; variation is शुद्ध for pure; संसेवित = worshipped; अङ्घ्रि = foot He is worshipped by great sages and other semidivine beings endowed with supernatural powers मङ्घ्रिर्वन्दितः - मङ्घ्रिभिः वामदेवादितिः उरभक्तादितिश्च ज्ञानार्तं वन्दितः । उपलक्ष्यमेतत् स्तोत्र-जप-पूजा-तप आदीनाम्(SS536) सद्भिः सम्पूजितः । सद्भिः सात्त्विकैर्वर्ष्यादितिः सम्पूजितः ॥ भक्तिश्रद्धादिना गन्धपुष्पादितिः प्रदक्षिणमस्कारादितिश्च पूजितः सम्पूजितः SS(777) The word siddha सिद्ध means accomplished or perfected. Linking with the earlier word, the muni meditates on the pranava. औंकारं बिन्दुसंयुक्तं नित्यं ध्यायन्ति योगिनः Once he understands that he, the meditator, and the Isvara the object of meditation represented by pranava are not different, then he achieves his goal and becomes a siddha purusha. The Mandukya Upanishad sentence quoted earlier says this only (viz.) that one who realises the true meaning of the Omkara - that it stands for the non-dual, indescribable Shiva obtains his goal which is his own Self. Shri Shuka mentions this in his prayer before he begins to narrate Bhagavatam to King Parikshit. यद्दृश्यन्मिथ्यानसमाधिधौतया धियानुपश्यन्ति छि तत्त्वमात्मनः BH(2.4.21)

Such a realised sage abides in his Self. So it is said तद्विष्णोः परमं पदं सदा पश्यन्ति सूरयः Hanuman is such a siddha who has immersed himself in the sacred Ganga and drank deep

its water of knowledge. So he is known as बुद्धिमती वरिष्ठः = best among the knowledgeable people. He sees his Lord Rama within himself all the time. Whenever His name is mentioned the Ganga within him wells up and flows out as tears of joy and his hands go up over his head in salute यत्र यत्र रघुनात कीर्तनं तत्र तत्र कृतमस्तकाञ्जलिं बाष्पवारिपस्त्रिपूरितेक्षणं मारुतिं नमत राक्षसान्तकम् says a popular verse about Hanuman. So his being shown as seated at the feet of Rama brings out the idea that siddhas worship the feet of the Lord. Truly speaking a siddha has nothing to worship as he has no second to him. Whatever he does becomes an act of worship. Sankaracharya says this in his Shiva mAnasa puja

आत्मा त्वं गिरिजा मतिः सद्यराः प्राणाः शरीरं गुडं
पूजा ते विषयोपभोगरथना निद्रा समाधिस्थितिः ।
सञ्चारः पद्योः प्रदक्षिणविधिः स्तोत्राणि सर्वा गिरः
यद्यत्कर्म करोमि तत्तदङ्किलं शम्भो तवाराधनम् ॥

Since the siddha has identified with Ishwara he is detached from his body. He knows that he got his body because of prarabdham and it will continue to hang on as appendage as long as the the vestige of prarabdham remains. He is aware that prarab dam will take care of it. So he is not concerned about it just as drunkard does not overly bother about his dress. Krishna says this to Uddhava:

देलं य नश्चरमवस्थितमुत्थितं वा
सिद्धो न पश्यति यतोऽध्यगमत्स्वःपुम् ।
दैवाद्यपेतमुत दैववशाद्दुपेतं
वासो यथा परिहृतं मदिरामदान्धः । BH(11.13.36)

Once his prarabdham is exhausted the body drops off. There is not death in the usual sense. His soul does not go anywhere as in the case of death of ordinary people but just merges in the all pervading brahman. This is like a pot getting broken. The space within the pot is not disturbed but just becomes one with surrounding space. This is said clearly in Brihadaranyakopanishad (4.4.3) योऽकामो निष्काम आत्मकामो न तस्य प्राणा उल्कामन्ति ब्रह्मैव सन् ब्रह्माप्येति This was what is said to have happened in Bhishma's case . आत्मन्यात्मानमावेस्य सोऽन्तश्चास उपारमत् BH(1.9.43)

भजे = I worship मार्गबन्धुम् the Lord Margabandhu.

I worship Lord Margabandhuon whose limbs snakes appear prominently, whose head looks charming with the waves of the celestial river Ganga, who is like a deer in the garden of

Omkara and whose feet are served by siddhas (great seers).

3

3. नित्यम् विद्यानन्दरूपं निष्ठुताशेषलोकेशवैरिप्रतापम् ।
कार्तस्वरागेन्द्रयापं कृत्तिवासं भजे दिव्यसन्मार्गबन्धुम् ।
शम्भो

This verse is the third among the five verses that make up the stotram. Thus it forms the centre-piece and is loaded with precious vedantic truths. It was said earlier that a stotram will describe the Lord with form and will also refer to His formless aspect. We see the formless aspect of the Shiva being emphasised here नित्यं विद्यानन्दरूपं - नित्यं = eternal, ever lasting, imperishable चित् = pure intelligence आनन्द =supreme bliss रूपं = form.

These words are the repetition of the famous upanishadic mantra सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म TU(2.1.2) that says Brahman is satyam, jnanam and anantam. This is one of Shiva's names सच्चिदानन्दरूपः । सत्यदेन कालत्रयाबाध्यं स्वरूपमुच्यते। चित्पदेन प्रकाशान्तरनिरपेक्षतया प्रकाशमानम्। आनन्दपदेन निरतिशयप्रेमास्पदतया सुभरूपं अतत्रितियात्मकरूपं यस्य सः सच्चिदानन्दरूपः । SS(653). Rama's form is existence, knowledge and bliss सत्यज्ञानानन्दशरीरी says the saint Sadasiva Brahmendra in the song भवेति मम हृदये (kelati mama hrudaye). So is Shri Lalita's form: सच्चिदानन्दरूपिणी। सत्त्वं चित्त्वमानन्दश्च स्वरूपमत एव विद्यान्तरेषूपसंछार्यमस्या इति सच्चिदानन्दरूपिणी। LS(699)

नित्यं - Nityam implies eternal existence - that is - it never ceases to be. It is not limited by time. Terms like the past, present and future are not applicable with reference to it. Lalita is known as Nitya नित्या कालत्रयेऽध्यबाध्या। अविनाशी वा अरेऽयमात्मे ति श्रुतेः । LS(136).

शाश्वतः and सत्यम् are two other names that have the same meaning as Nityam शाश्वतः । सर्वेषु कालेषु ऐक्यरूपतया भवतीति शाश्वतः । “शाश्वतोयं पुराणः” इति श्रुतिः । SS(398).(ie.) He exists in all times in the same form or without any change शश्वत् सर्वेषु कालेषु भवतीति शाश्वतः, “शाश्वतं शिवमच्युतम्” इति श्रुतेः । VS(56).

satyam सत्यम्। कालत्रयाबाधं सत्यम् SS(432)अवितथरूपत्वात् परमात्मा सत्यः “सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म” इति श्रुतेः । VS(106) In the invocatory verse to Shri Bhagavatam Shri Vyasa salutes the Lord saying सत्यं परं धीमहि.(ie.) we meditate on the supreme Reality that is not affected by the three time periods - the past, present and the future. BH(1.1.1) . He also winds up with the same

words सत्यं परं धीमहि BH(12.13.19) implying what is discussed in between the beginning and the end or the subject matter of the purana is none other than Brahman which is Satyam.

Shri Lalita is known as सत्यज्ञानानन्दरुपा । सत्यं ज्ञानं आनन्दश्च रूपं यस्याः ॥ “सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म” “विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्मेति” श्रुतेः । LS(790).

Bhartrihari, in the invocatory verse to his Satakatrayam salutes the Lord saying दिक्कालाधनवच्छिन्ना अनन्तचिन्मात्रमूर्तये He says that God is of the form of eternal consciousness unlimited by spatial direction, time etc दिशः प्राच्यादिदिक्प्रदेशाः, काला भूतभवविष्यद्भूतमानरूपा, आदिशब्दसंगृहीतानि वस्तूनि तथा च दिक्काला आद्यो येषां तानि दिक्कालानि । तैरनवच्छिन्नापरिक्रमा । विभुत्वान्नित्यत्वादेकत्वाच्च देशतः कालतो वस्तुतश्चापरिच्छिन्नेत्यर्थः । अत एव अनन्तापरिमिता । द्विविधपरिच्छेदशून्यत्वा दभाऽऽदऽऽयमाने- त्यर्थः ॥ चित् - chit means pure intelligence and indicates brahman. So the Lord gets the following names चिदात्मा । चित् - चैतन्यं आत्मस्वरूपं यस्य सः चिदात्मा SS(456). Also चिन्मयः । चिन्मयश्चिद्रूपः ॥ SS(829). Devi is described as चिन्मयी ॥ चिदभेदाच्चिन्मयी LS(251). Now let us go back to the reference from Bartruhari: (ie.) अनन्तचिन्मात्रमूर्तये ॥ चिन्मात्रा ज्ञानधना च ॥ चिदेकरसेति यावत् । तादृशी मूर्तिर्यस्य तस्मै । अेतद्रूपायेत्यर्थः । No doubt brahman is without any limitations mentioned above. But it is not void or empty like space which also seems unlimited. It is not inert but shines in the form of consciousness. This is clarified here.

From where did He get His wisdom? In reply the invocatory verse in Shri Bhagavatam referred to earlier says: अभिज्ञः स्वराट् । स्वेनैव राजते यस्तम् । स्वतः सिद्धज्ञानमित्यर्थः । He is omniscient. His knowledge is inherent and not obtained from anyone else or any other source. It is knowledge itself without a trace of ignorance.

आनन्द Ananda : Brahamn is of the form of pure bliss आनन्दो ब्रह्मेति व्यजनात् TU(3.6.1). The Taittiriyanopanishad has a chapter exclusively devoted to the ananda aspect of brahman. This chapter is hence known as Brahmanandavalli or Anandavalli. This chapter is unique in that it talks of several grades of ananda experienced by different beings. It starts with the maximum happiness that is possible to be experienced by a human being as the unit of measure. The next higher grade of ananda is hundred times this unit. Thus several grades are mentioned (including that of Indra and Brihaspathi) and the top most one mentioned is that of Brahma the creator. But a wise person who has studied the shastras and got discrimination knows that even Brahma's happiness

is fragile and limited. The Brihadaranyopanishad says that any ananda experienced by any being is just a droplet derived from the bliss that is Brahman अेतस्यैवानन्दस्य अन्यानि भूतानि मात्रामुपज्जवन्ति(4.3.32) Incidentally this is one of the names of Shri Lalita. (LS365) स्वात्मानन्दलवीभूतं ब्रह्माधानन्दसंततिः । The commentator Bhaskararaya explains this name referring to these quotations only. He says स्वस्या आत्मरूपो य आनन्दस्य लवीभूता षट्श्रद्धानन्दबिन्दुपर्यालोचनया सागरायमाणत्वेनालवा अपि दैव्यानन्दसागरस्य लवाः संपद्यमानाः ब्रह्मादीनां सृष्टिकर्तृत्वादिधर्मविशिष्टानां ब्रह्मविषयगुरुद्राणामानन्दानां संततयः संयक्समूढा यस्याः सा । “ अेतस्यैवानन्दस्यान्यानिभूतानि मात्रामुपज्जवन्ती” ति श्रुतेः । तैत्तिरीये मानुषानन्दमारभ्य उत्तरोत्तराधिक्येनवर्ण्यमानानामानन्दानां मध्ये परिगणितानां प्रजापत्याधानान्दानामपि परिच्छिन्नत्वेन पुरुषार्थत्वायोगेनापरिच्छिन्नानन्दस्य निर्गुणस्य सिद्धत्वाच्च पुरुषार्थसाधनज्ञानोपकमादि तात्पर्यनिर्णयक प्रमाणाविरोधाय तत्पदस्य निर्धर्मकालक्षकत्वमेव युक्तमिहाशयः ।

One may wonder why should the upanishad take the trouble to describe the many grades of ananda starting from the bliss that can be enjoyed by a human being. The answer is that the detailed description is a carrot the upanishad is dangling before us. It wants to reveal the fact that even the highest degree of happiness that one could enjoy is just a particle of that limitless ocean of bliss. It wants us to get excited at this revelation. It wants to prod us to strive hard and reach the pinnacle of bliss that is brahmananda and not be content with merely scratching its surface. The following are the Lord's names in this context

नन्दी । परमानन्दविग्रहो नन्दी । “विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्मे”ति श्रुतिः । SS(189) and VS(618)आनन्दी । सुभस्वरूपत्वात् आनन्दी VS(560) . Also ब्रह्मानन्दः । ब्रह्मरूप आनन्दो ब्रह्मानन्दः । “आनन्दं ब्रह्म मां ज्ञात्वा न बिभेति कुतश्चने” ति पाद्रे । “ आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वानि” ति श्रुतिः । SS(560) and सदानन्दः ॥ कालत्रयाऽबाधितनिरतिशयसुभस्वरूपः सदानन्दः । “ विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्मे” ति श्रुतिः । SS(673)

निह्रुताशेषलोकेशवैरिप्रतापम् - निह्रुत = eliminated अशेष = without remainder लोकेशः = lord of the universe - here it refers to Indra वैरिन् = enemy प्रतापः =dignity, glory, valour.

Shiva is the destroyer of the valour and pride of Ravana who was the enemy of Indra. Once Ravana tried to lift Kailasa as he felt he was strong enough to carry even the abode of the Lord. He was inebriated with power because he could conquer even Indra and other gods. He forgot that all his might and glory were only due to the blessings of the Lord. He even said that Shiva has not known that a danger has come to Him! This incident is mentioned in Ramayana (Uttara Kanda - canto 16). विज्ञातव्यं न ज्ञानीते लयस्थानमुपस्थितम्(Uttara kanda -

16-24). Shiva wanted to teach him a lesson and curb his pride. So He playfully pressed His toe. The pressure applied by Him crushed Ravana under the mountain.

ततो राम मडादेवो देवानां प्रवरो डरः ।

पादाङ्गुष्ठेन तं शैलं पीडयामास वीलय् ॥

पीडितास्तु ततस्तस्य शैलस्तम्भोपमा भुजः । (UK. 16-27,28).

Ravana struggled hard but was not able to extricate himself from the tight spot. Finally he prayed to the Lord and got himself released. So Shiva gets the name

अङ्गुष्ठशिरसा लङ्गानाथदर्षडरः । अङ्गुष्ठशिरसा पादाङ्गुष्ठाग्रेण लङ्गानाथस्य रावणस्य दर्षं गर्वं डरतीति डरः । षडं य राभायणादौ प्रसिद्धम् । शिवरडस्ये - अमुष्य त्वत्सेवासमधिगतसारं भुजवनं बलाडैलासेडपि त्वदधिवसतौ विडमयतः । अलब्यापातालेडप्यलसयलितान्ङ्गुष्ठशिरसि प्रतिष्ठा त्वय्यासीदध्रुवमुपयितो मुड्यति भल षति । ॥ “नमः सडमानाय नव्याधिन” षति श्रुतिः । SS(623).

Ravana was the grandson of the great sage Pulastya and the son of an equally great sage Vivasva. He was born as an asura due to a curse. Krishna gives a description of asuric nature in the 16th chapter of Gita entitled दैवासुर सम्पद्धिभागयोगः and also in the 18th chapter. He says that people with asuric nature are given to ostentation, arrogance, lust, anger and insolence. They will nurture innumerable hopes. These tendencies will pave the way for their downfall. We see that Ravana’s character fits this description exatly. These qualities lead to his ruin. Ravana was vastly learned (as is indicated by ten heads): but was foolish enough to think he could shake the Lord who is नित्यः all pervading, firm and unshakeable सर्वगतः स्थाणुः अचलः । BG(2-24). In fact if He shakes the universe will shake and without His will one can not move even a blade of grass. This is graphically described in a story in Kenopanishad. Thus Ravana committed a great mistake but Shiva curbed his pride and let him off कर्तस्वरगोन्द्रयापम् - कर्तस्वरम् = gold: अगः = mountain: षन्द्रः = lord and in this context means best: थापः = bow: This refers to Shiva using Meru - the famed mountain of gold - as a bow in His fight against the three asuras. The three demons named KamalakShan, DarukakShan and Vidyunnali were very powerful because of the boons they obtained. They lived in three cities built by Maya the divine architect. They troubled the devas to no end. The devas entreated Shiva to save them from these asuras. When Shiva started to fight them the devas wanted to take part in the fight. The earth became the chariot, the sun and the moon became the wheels, Meru the bow, the snake Seshan the bow string, Vishnu the quiver and so on. But Shiva felt that all these elaborate paraphernalia was superfluous for

the task. So He discarded them and destroyed the three cities just with a smile. When the asuras repented Shiva forgave them and took them into His service. This deed of Shiva is often referred to in hymns

क्षोणी यस्य रथो रथाङ्गयुगलं चन्द्रार्क-बिम्बद्वयं
कोट्यः कनकायवो हरिरभूत् भाषो विधिः सारथिः ।
तूणीरो जलधि-र्षयाः श्रुतिययो मौर्वी भुजङ्गाधिपः
तस्मिन् मे हृदयं सुप्तेन रमतां शाभ्मे परब्रह्मणि ॥

So He gets the following names पुरन्दरः । सुरशत्रूणां पुराणां दारणात्पुरन्दरः । त्रिपुरडा । “स तिस्रः पुरो भित्त्वे” ति श्रुतिः । SS(45) and VS(335). One who shattered the cities of the enemies of the gods पुरत्रयविधाती । पुरत्रयं विहन्तीति पुरत्रयविधाती । आदित्यपुराणे द्विसप्ततितमाध्याये- “अथ रुद्रस्य देवस्य निर्मितो विश्वकर्मणा । सर्वलोकमयो दिव्यो रथो यत्नेन सादरम् ॥” इति प्रस्तुत्य सर्वलोकभूतदेवेदेमयश्चन्द्रसूर्यमयश्चन्द्रयेत्यादि- विशिष्टरथनिर्माणान्तरं रथाङ्गेषु परमेश्वरे, मेरौ चापे विष्ववाद्यौ भाषाङ्गेषु ब्रह्मणा प्रेरिते, अनन्तरं देवानां, अनादिसिद्धतया विद्यमानमेव पशुत्वं पण्डितोद्देन, द्रष्टृकृते तदनु देवैर्विनायके पूजिते, अनन्तरं चन्द्रसन्दादिभिश्च परिवृत्ते, तदनु पुरत्रयस्यैकत्र समागमने ऋष्यादिभिश्च सन्तोषपुरःसरं जयशब्दे कृते ब्रह्मणा “जय” इत्युक्ते अथ देवो मडादेवः सावज्ञं तद्वैक्षत । पुरत्रयं विजृम्भाक्षस्तक्षणात्तस्मैकृतम् इत्यादि प्रसिद्धम् । उक्तं य शिवरुद्रस्ये- रथः क्षोणी यन्ता शतधृतिरगोन्द्रो धनुश्चो रथाङ्गयन्त्रार्कौ रथयराणापाणिः शर इति । द्विधक्षोस्ते कोटयं त्रिपुरतृणामाडम्बरविधि-र्विधेयैः कीडन्तो न प्लव परतन्त्राः प्रभुधियः ॥ इति छंदमपि रचस्यान्तरम् - साङ्ग्रामिकेण वपुषा प्रविराजमानं द्रव्यत्पुरत्रयतृणाशनमन्डलासम् । दैत्यान्दिधक्षुमयलेश्वरयापपाणिं ध्यायेत्पुरारिभमरौधरथाधिउडम् ॥ इति श्रुतिस्तु “तेषामसुराणां तिस्र इत्यारभ्य स तिस्रः पुरो भित्त्वेत्येवमन्ता” इति ॥ SS(104). and पुरञ्जयः - पुरं त्रिपुरं जयतीति पुरञ्जयः । “तेषामसुराणामि”ति श्रुतिः । SS(939). One who conquered the three cities and गिरिधन्वा - गिरिः मेरुः धनुर्यस्येति वा धन्व यस्येति वा गिरिधन्वा । छंदं य अर्थतः श्रुतिप्रसिद्धं नाम; “ रुद्राय स्थिरधन्वने गिरः” इति ऋग्वेदानां, देवप्रते य “ नमः स्थिराय स्थिरधन्वने” इति । One whose bow is mount Meru. SA(65). Incidentally, this episode shows that the Lord is capable of using anything as a weapon. As Rama He used just a piece of straw to chase Kakasura who misbehaved with Sita. In the case of Tipura He chose to use a mountain as His bow. He can do without any weapon also. He discarded the bow and burnt down the three cities with a smile. He subdued Ravana with a little pressure from His toe. He destroyed Manmatha with a mere look. The Tripura episode conceals the essence of vedanta as do the stories in our puranas. Krishna mentions this fact to Uddhava in His final advice परोक्षवाद्य ऋषयः ” The words of the sages are indirect in their import.” BH(11-21-35). The reason is that these

great truths are meant only for those who have faith in the words of the shastras and the teachers who expound them, are sincere and are ready to put in the needed effort to learn them. They cannot be laid bare to those who are not qualified to receive them. In fact such people run the risk of misunderstanding the teachings and being misled by them . That is why Krishna, after concluding the teaching of Gita, warns Arjuna that the valuable lessons taught to him should not be imparted to one who is not devoted etc., as said above छंदे तेनातपस्काय नाभक्त्याय कदाचन। न याशुभ्रूषवे वायं न य मां योऽव्यसूयति। BG(18-67). Great truths, like precious diamonds are not meant to be hawked in the streets like cheap vegetables. A diamond merchant keeps the diamonds carefully locked in an iron safe in his shop. Only a handful of people out of several millions in the city will be fit to enter the shop and enquire about them. The merchant, will welcome the customer, engage him in small talk and enquire about his requirements. By then he would have assessed the customer's worth and seriousness to do business. Then only will he unlock the safe, bring out his wares and show them to the customer. Similarly vedantic truths are invaluable and are to be guarded carefully and given only to the deserving. Brief explanation of the Tripura episode follows.

It was said that our body is viewed as being made of three layers - the gross body, the subtle body and the causal body. These three bodies are the three puras or cities. The paramatma who is of the form of chaitanyam or consciousness is omnipresent and is present in the body also, and enlivens it. The body itself, being mere bundle of matter, is inert. Krishna says this छंदं शरीरं कौन्तेय क्षेत्रमित्यभिधीयते and in the next verse क्षेत्रज्ञं य मां विद्धि सर्व क्षेत्रेषु भारत। BG(13- 1 and 2). The consciousness present in the body is known as atma or jiva or jivatma. But it is not a part or product of the body that is liable to decay and destruction. Such modifications of the body do not affect the jivatma. Even on death it is the subtle body which travels to take another body (as stated earlier). The atma being all pervading does not travel anywhere. It is like a pot being made. We may call the space confined in the pot as pot-space (to distinguish it from the total space though really there is no such division) but it was not created when the pot was made. When the pot is broken, it is pot that is destroyed and not the "pot space." It has nowhere to go. The confines of the pot having gone it just merges with the total space that is out side the pot also. Thus the atma has nothing to do with the body. This is said in Tattvabodha clearly as आत्मा कः? What is the Self? स्थूल-सूक्ष्म-कारण- शरीराद् व्यतिरिक्तः पञ्चकोशातीतः सन् अवस्थात्रयसाक्षी सच्चिदानन्दस्वरूपः सन् यस्तिष्ठति स आत्मा। Self is other than

the gross, subtle and causal bodies. It is beyond the five sheaths and the witness to the three states of consciousness. It is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss.

Thus there is no birth or modifications or death for the jivatma as is the case with the body. Krishna says this: न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचि-न्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ॥ अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न उच्यते उच्यमाने शरीरे। BG(2-20).

The pot because of which the infinite space (that has nothing to do with the pot) gets the apparent limitation as “pot space” is called upadhi. In the same way the body mind complex is upadhi for the paramatma and it gets the name jivatma (though both are one and the same). Its glorious state gets covered by the veiling power of maya (called avidya or ignorance) and it gets bound. This leads the jiva to identify itself with the limitations of the three bodies. It imagines it is a finite creature, helpless and subject to sorrows like sickness, old age, death etc.. This is known as samsara. Truly speaking the jivatma being none other than the paramatma and of the form of pure wisdom does not act or undergo any change. Since it does not act it does not also reap the fruits of action called कर्मफलम् (ie.) joy or sorrow. That is, it is not a कर्ता or भोक्ता (i.e.) doer or enjoyer or in other words atma is said to be akarta and abhokta (अकर्ता and अभोक्ता). One who has shed his identity with the body and clearly established his oneness with the Self is, therefore, not bound by the results of actions . The mistaken identification with the body and imagining he or she is an individual who has to act etc., is called ego or ahamkara and is the cause of all the problems. प्रकृतेः कृयमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ॥ अहङ्कारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते। BG(3-

27). An example will illustrate this peculiar situation. A person goes to sleep in his cosy house after a sumptuous meal. After some time he enters the dream world. In his dream he travels to a distant land and is stranded. He has lost his belongings and is famished. But he has no money to buy anything. The person is not used to such a privation and so is feeling miserable. This goes on for some (dream) days. Ultimately the intensity of the suffering becomes too much to bear and he wakes up with a start . To his utter delight he realises all that had happened was only a dream and he has not left his comfortable bed. He feels sheepish to think of the suffering he had gone through.

In the case narrated above all the suffering and misery was unreal. But it appeared real because the person identified himself with the dream body that was not his. The dream body was merely a projection of his mind and so had no substance. When the dreamer woke up

he gave up the identification and was free from sorrow. In the same way vedanta says that the individual's bondage and ensuing samsara are imaginary and due to wrong identification with the body-mind complex. This mistake is the result of ajnanam or ignorance. It will go when the individual sheds his ignorance and realises that he is not the body-mind complex but the atma whose nature is नित्यं विद्यानन्दरूपम् as said in the first line of this verse. Krishna says this to his friend Uddhava: दैहस्थोऽपि न दैहस्थो विद्वान्स्वप्राधयोत्थितः ॥ अदैहस्थोऽपि दैहस्थः कुमतिः स्वप्नदृश्यथा। BH(11-11-8). A wise man, though he appears to be in the body, has no identification with the body like the one who had woken up from a dream. But a man without discrimination is like one having a dream. He has chosen to (dis-identify with his true body and) identify with his (dream) body (and suffers the consequences). The dream body is only thought in the mind but the thought is so powerful that it makes him identify himself with the dream body, undergo the vicarious suffering and forget his real body that is ensconced in the bed.

Thus there has to be a second waking up, as it were, from our so-called waking stage to the real awakened stage with the advent of knowledge or jnanam. Till then one is in the clutches of agnanam or ignorance which forces us into karma or action that brings in the fruits of action which in turn results in rebirth etc.. The grace of the Lord confers this wisdom and takes one beyond the three bodies that envelop the jiva. This is said in the DakShinamurthy Stotram as यः साक्षात्-कुरुते प्रबोधसमये स्वात्मान-मेवाद्वयं तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नमः एतं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये When the dreamer wakes up from the nightmare the dreamer merges with the waker (if we may so call the one who has woken up) and not “become” the waker. He alone remains. He does not see the waker but claims himself to be the waker. This claiming is साक्षात् कुरुते So also in the case of self-knowledge one does not experience or “become” the atma; but स्वात्मानं अद्वयमेव साक्षात्कुरुते owns up his true nature as atma. Shiva's names relating to Tripura are त्रिपुरान्तकः । त्रीणि पुराणि त्रिपुराणि, त्रिपुराणां अन्तकः त्रिपुरान्तकः । त्रीणि पुराणि शरीराणि, “पुरसंज्ञे शरीरेऽस्मिञ्शयनात्पुरोषो ऽरिः” इति विष्णुपुराणवचनात्। तानि च स्थूल-सूक्ष्म-कारणात्मकानि- स्थूलं भौतिकमेव, सूक्ष्मं लिङ्गशरीरं, कारणं त्वविद्यारूपमिति। अेषां त्रिपुराणां अन्तकः त्रिपुरान्तकः; शिवज्ञानस्य च विदेहकैवल्यहेतुत्वं मन्त्रोपनिषदि श्रुतम्। एतं च श्रुतिप्रसिद्धं नाम, “त्र्यम्बकाय त्रिपुरान्तकाय त्रिकात्रिकावाय कावात्रिरुद्राय नमः” इति SA(38)पुरारातिः । पुराणां शरीराणां स्थूल-सूक्ष्म-कारणात्मनां अरातिः शत्रुरिति पुरारातिः । तदरातित्वं च शिवस्य स्वज्ञानस्य विदेहकैवल्यहेतुत्वात्; तस्य मन्त्रोपनिषदि प्रसिद्धम् SA(68). Krishna tells Uddhava that He is Himself Shiva who destroyed

the three cities त्रिपुरघ्नो धनुष्मताम् BH(11-11-20). Meru mountain. The Meru mountain is mentioned in our puranas, Mahabharata and Ramayana etc.. It is said to be rich in gold and other precious jewels and is said to be in the center of the earth. The Himalayas are in the southern part of the Jambudwipa in whose center is the Meru. The Bharathavarsha (India) is in the south of the Himalayas. One of the mountains surrounding the Meru is the Mandhara which was used by the gods to churn the ocean of milk. Shri Suka mentions this when he gives a description of the creation अेषं मध्ये ध्रुवावृत्तं नामाभ्यन्तस्वर्षं यस्य नाभ्यामवस्थितः सर्वतः सौवर्णः कुवगिरिराजो मेरुर्द्धीपायामसमुद्रादः कर्णिकामृतः कुवलयकमलस्य मूर्धनि द्वात्रिंशत्सहस्रयोजनविततो मूले षोडशसहस्रं तावतान्तर्भूम्यां प्रविष्टः । BH(5-16-6). The abodes of the gods like Brahma are situated on the peaks of the mountain. Lalita is said to reside on one of the peaks of Meru and so gets the name सुमेरुशृङ्गमध्यस्था । सुमेरोर्ध्वमद्रेर्मध्यशृङ्गे तिष्ठतीति तत्स्था ॥ शोभने मेरुमध्यशृङ्गे धृति वा LS(55). The sun and the moon are said to go round the mountain. Our poets mention this fact often. Kalidasa refers to the sun going round Meru in his Raghuvamsa (7-24). He says that Aja and Indumati going round the sacred fire during their wedding was like the day and the night revolving round Meru

प्रदक्षिणप्रक्रमणात्कृशानोरुदृष्टिषस्तन्मिथुनं यकासे ।

मेरोरुपान्तेष्विव वर्तमानं अन्धोन्धसंसक्तमडस्त्रियामम् ॥

Krishna says that He is Meru among the mountains मेरुः शिषिरिणामडं BG (10-23) and धिषण्यानामस्म्यदं मेरुः । BH(11-11-21). All these show that meru is considered a very holy mountain

कृत्तिवासि- कृत्तिः = bark of a tree , skin, hide वासः = dress. Shiva is reputed to be dressed in the bark of trees and skins of tiger and elephant. Once some rishis of Daruka forest performed a sacrifice. It seems they were very proud of their spiritual accomplishments. Shiva wanted to test their mind-set and teach them a lesson. So He passed by in the form of a shabbily dressed mendicant. The sages were furious to see the mendicant. From the sacrificial fire they created a ferocious elephant and a tiger and set them to attack the mendicant. But Shiva killed the animals, and wrapped Himself in their skins. The sages were humbled. They realised their mistake and surrendered to Shiva. So He gets the following names. व्याघ्रयर्माम्बरः । व्याघ्रयर्मं अम्बरं यस्य सः; “तथा पिनाकडस्तः कृत्तिवासा” धृति श्रुतिः । SS(108). गजयर्माम्बरः । गजसुरस्य यर्मं कृत्तिरम्बरं वासो यस्य सः गजयर्माम्बरः । श्रुतिरुक्ता । SS(158). कृत्तिवासः । कृत्ति दारुकावनस्थ-मुनिःकृतःऽऽभियारोत्पन्नव्याघ्रस्य यर्मं वासो यस्य स तथा । अथवा

काश्यां शिवभक्तजिघांसायागतस्य गजसुरस्य कृत्तिरत्र विवक्षिता । “ प्राणेश्वरः कृत्तिवासाः पिनाडी” श्रुतिः । SS(909) कृत्तिवासाः । कृत्तिः दारुकावनस्थमुनिद्विताभियारोत्पन्नव्याघ्रस्य यर्म वासः वस्त्रं यस्य स तथा । यथोक्तं स्कान्दे “ ततो व्याघ्रो मडाञ्छुद् आजगाम नभायुधः । तेषामृषीणां मर्मस्थः कोपोऽयं निर्गतो यथा । तं यादाय त्वयं भित्वा तदा यर्माभरोऽभवत् । शुशुभे यर्मणा तेन नानावर्णायुतेन य” इति ॥ अथवा काश्यां शिवभक्तजिघांसायागतस्य गजसुरस्य कृत्तिरत्र विवक्षिता ॥ यथोक्तं स्कान्दे अत्र - “वाराणस्यां पुरायातो गजरूपो मडासुरः । तापसांश्चिवभक्तांश्च निडन्तुं कोपदीपितः” इत्युपक्रम्य “ उत्वा तं कुञ्जरं भीममधुष्यं दिग्गजैरपि । पादस्तयुतं यर्म विशस्याच्छिद्य तेन वै । प्रावृत्त्यात्मानमात्मेशः स्तूयमानोऽभिलैः सुरैः ” इति SA(67). दुर्वासः । दुर्नरीक्षं वासो गजसिडव्याघ्रयर्मादिरूपं यस्य सः तथा । SS(566). Kalidasa wonders at Shiva, dressing Himself in the bark and skins of animals though He is the supreme lord, and profusely showers blessings on His devotees अडैश्वर्ये स्थितेऽपि प्रणतबहुकृले यः स्वयं कृत्तिवासाः । Malavikagnimitra (1.1).

These incidents show that the Lord is capable of vanquishing his enemies with ease. They are meant to warn one like Ravana who takes Him lightly that they will have to face dire consequences. But His nature is to subdue pride wherever it shows up - be it in an asura like Ravana or god like Manmatha or even great rishis who should have known better. This is because pride is an obstacle to the spiritual progress. Once they realise their mistake and give up their pride Shiva blesses them.

Now a few words about Shiva wearing the bark or skins of animals: First this kind of dress, His matted locks etc., proclaim that Shiva is beyond all varnas or grades of society - like brahmin, kShatriya etc., - and ashramas or stages of life - like student, householder etc.. In other words He is an अतिवर्णश्रमी Such a one is not bound by any rules or regulations applicable to any varna or ashrama. He only gave out the scriptures to enable us to become mature spiritually and realise Him. So He is known as bhandhu or well wisher बन्धुः । बन्धुकृत्यं छिताछितोपदेसं श्रुतिस्मृतिलक्षणं कृतवानिति । “स नो बन्धुर्जनिते”ति श्रुतिः । SS(581). So these very same rules cannot bind Him. The description of Shri Suka in Shri Bhagavatam matches the above description of a paramahansa. It says तत्राभवद् भगवान् व्यासपुत्रो यदृच्छया गामटमानोऽनपेक्षः । अलक्ष्यलिङ्गो निजलाभतृषः वृत्तश्च बालैरवधूतवेषः । BH(1-19-25).

Secondly, the bark of the tree and the skins that Shiva wears represent the cessation of birth. Birth and rebirth have been discussed earlier. We saw earlier while discussing the implications of Tripura that one’s mistaken identity with the body is the cause of all problems starting with karma resulting in fruits of karma and then birth(s) to “enjoy” the

results of karma. The dawn of wisdom will dispel the ignorance about the reality and reveal one's true status. This will end the cycle of birth and death. Lord's grace can give us the wisdom. So Shiva is called Hara ॐ: । स्व विषय ज्ञानेनाविधादेर्दरणाद्धरः । SS(392). The late Paramacharya of Kanchipuram had explained the incident of Shiva burning the three cities with a smile thus. "The All-pervasive, All-knowing Supreme alone can liberate us from the cycle of birth and death by vouchsafing us the jnana to throw off the fetters of this restricting human body and to find bliss supreme in the merger of the jivatma with the paramatma. Shri Parameswara destroyed Tripura by the smile that appeared on His face on a contemplation of the humour of the situation. In relation to ourselves, the Tripura is the physical body in the three states of sthoola, sookShma and karana. The consciousness of these three states of our body can be overcome only when we realise the supreme bliss that radiates from Iswara." (Acharya's Call-Part1- P251).

The body is the result of prarabdham and another one is just waiting around the corner when this drops. So one should not get attached to it but be ready to leave it without regret when the prescribed hour comes. Instead, one should use one's lifetime to gain discrimination and not chase the shadows. The avadhuta sage tells this to king Yadu लब्ध्वा सुदुर्लभमिदं बहुसम्भ्रान्ते मानुष्यमर्थदमनित्यमपीडधीरः ॥ तूर्णं यतेत न पतेदनुमृत्यु यावन्निःश्रेयसाय विषयः जलु सर्वतः स्यात् । BH(11-9-290). The human body is invaluable as it is got after innumerable births. No doubt it is frail and impermanent. But it is with this human body alone one can work to attain the life's goal. Plants and animals come lower in the rung of evolution. They face many limitations. So our shastras say that if one fails to properly use the rare human birth but lives to eat and leads a hedonistic life-style without a thought about the hereafter he is most unwise and incurs incalculable loss. In fact they say that such a one is no better than a brute or a tree. Harsh words indeed but they are born out of anguish and meant to rub in the point तस्यः किं न ज्वन्ति भस्त्राः किं न श्वसन्त्युत । न भादन्ति न मेढन्ति किं ग्रामपशवोऽपरे ॥ श्वविद्धराडोष्ट्रभरैः संस्तुतः पुरुषः पशुः । न यत्कर्णपथोपेतो जतु नाम गदाग्रजः । BH(2-3-18 and 19). "Do not trees live? Do not bellows breathe? And do not the domestic animals (other than the human beast) take their food and indulge in sex? The human beast who has never heard of the story of the Lord has been declared to be as good as a dog, swine, a camel and a donkey." But the Lord who is an ocean of mercy is ready to save such a person also if he wants to turn a new leaf and worships Him with single minded devotion. Krishna says he will be considered a righteous

person. BG(IX-30,31)अपि येत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाङ् । साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो ङि
सः ॥ क्षिप्रं भवति धर्मात्मा शश्वच्छान्तिं निगच्छति । कौन्तेय प्रेतिजानीङि न मे भक्तः प्रलशयति । The bark
and animal skins that Shiva wears proclaim this fact symbolically. They convey the above
assurance that those who turn to Him with devotion will be saved from repeated births
irrespective of the kind of life they might have lived. So Shiva has the following names
भेषजम्- संसाररोगस्थौषधं भेषजम् VS(578)भवडेति:- भवः संसारः, तस्य डेतिसायुधं संसारश्चेत्ता । “भवस्य
डेत्यै जगतां पतय” षति श्रुतिः । SS(272) तारकः । तारयति सम्सारदिति तारकः । SA(07) तारणः
। संसारसागरात्तारयतीति तारणः । VS(337) तारः । गर्भजन्मजरामृत्युलक्षण्ण्डं भयात्तारयतीति तारः ।
VS(338)तारः । गर्भजन्मजरामरणसंसारमडालभयात्तारयतीति तारः । “नमस्ताराय नमः शम्भवे ये”ति श्रुतिः
। SS(76) भजे दिव्यसन्मार्गबन्धुम् । दिव्य = divine सन्मार्गबन्धुम् = a companion to one who treads
the righteous path भजे = I worship; means I worship the lord who is a companion to one who
takes to the righteous path. This line provides more than one interpretation. सन्मार्गः । संश्रासौ
मर्गश्च सन्मार्गः । means the virtuous path: the path trodden by the saints and noble people and
that is in keeping with the shastric injunctions मडालभो येन गतः स पन्थाः । says Mahabharata.
It being very difficult to understand and interpret the scriptures it is safe to follow the path
trodden by the great men as they have followed the path and realised the results. The guru,
in Vivekachudamani, tells the disciple who had approached him for instruction that he will
show the path which ascetics took for crossing samsara संसारसिन्धोस्तरणोडस्त्युपायः । येनैव
याताः यतयोडस्य पारे तमेव मार्गं तव निर्दिशामि ।

Krishna says that if one chooses to neglect the path laid out by the scriptures it will lead
to his downfall. So He urges Arjuna to follow them यः शास्त्रविधिमुन्सृज्य वर्तते कामकारतः । न स
सिद्धिमवाप्नोति न सुषुं न परां गतिम् । । तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते कार्याकार्यव्यवस्थितौ । ज्ञात्वा शास्त्रविधानोक्तं
कर्म कर्तुमिडालसि । BG.(16-23,24.) For those who follow the virtuous path He becomes a
friend and guide. But for those like Ravana, who out of vanity or arrogance choose the
prohibited path He is not a friend but metes out severe punishment by casting them
into inferior births. तानडं द्विषतः क्रूरानसंसारेषु नराधमान् । क्षिपायजस्रमशुभानासुरीष्वेव योनिषु ।
BG(16.19) Sankaracharya explains “inferior births” as cruel beings such as tigers, lions
and the like अजस्रं सन्ततं अशुभान् अशुभकर्मकारिणः आसुरीष्वेव क्रूरकर्मप्रायासु व्याघ्रसिडालिषु योनिषु
क्षिपामि . Kalidasa prays in the invocatory verse in Malavikagnimitra सन्मार्गालोकनाय व्यपनयतु
स वस्तामसीं वृत्तिभीशः । He prays to lord to remove the ignorance born out of lethargy to
enable us to perceive the right path or the virtuous path. सत् Sat also means that which really

exists or existence and means brahman अवितथं परं ब्रह्म सत्, “सदेव सोम्येदम्” (छा.उ. ६।१।४।) एति श्रुतेः । VS(478). Thus Margabandhu is brahman only सत्त्वासौ मार्गबन्धुश्च सन्मार्गबन्धुः । Being brahman He is the best guide and companion one can get on the way to liberation. The path of self knowledge, says Yama, is very difficult to tread upon. It is just like walking over the sharp edge of a razor क्षुरस्य धार निशिता दुरत्याया दुर्गं पथस्तत्त्वयो वदन्ति KU(3-14). The knowledge about the Lord is most profound. The means to get it is difficult for the unprepared mind. When one gets struck on the path He (being with us all the time and very much within us), like a sign post, points the way to the next stage. He is a guide and companion as long as a seeker looks for Him. Like the rain bearing clouds He showers His grace on His devotees without expecting anything in return. Mundane bandhus (relatives) are the cause of bondage and ensuing misery. In fact they are called bandhus only because they bind themselves with us अग्राति मनः स्नेहादिना एति But lord Margabandhu is a unique bandhu who causes all bondage to drop off (as He is Sat) सत्सङ्गत्वे निस्सङ्गत्वम् says Shri Sankara in Bhajagovindam. So every one prays to Him for getting free from bondage अम्बुडं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् । उर्वारुडमिव बन्धनान्मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् । Ignorance is like a thick layer of scum covering our wisdom. When the scum is removed the underlying wisdom shines. Wisdom shows the seeker that he is himself Margabandhu. The seeker realises there is no where to go and the seeking ends. So He is known as मार्गः । मुमुक्षवस्तं मार्गयन्ति एति मार्गः; परमानन्दो येन प्राप्यते स मार्ग एति वा VS(365). He is sought by people who want liberation. He is the path through which one can get infinite bliss. Only by knowing Him liberation is attained यं विदित्वा अमृतत्वाय कल्पन्ते योगिनो मुमुक्षवः स एव पन्थाः मार्गः । “नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय” एति श्रुतेः । VS(397). The poet says दिव्य सन्मार्गबन्धुम् Why say दिव्य divya? The scriptures talk of the paths the jiva can take after the fall of the physical body. They are the dark path (कृष्ण गतिः) and the bright path (शुक्ल गतिः). The former path is available to those who perform duties and sacrifices prescribed in the vedas. Karmas may be performed with desires also (known as sakama karma). One may, for example, perform a sacrifice for achieving wealth or property or even swarga loka. The karmas done properly produce results without fail. One who does the prescribed karmas go to world of manes or pitruloka पितृलोकः after death through the dark path. One can also do the karmas without any desire (known as nishkamakarma). They are done as offering to the Lord and the results are accepted as gifts from Him. Such karmas naturally do not have a binding effect but result in (चित्तशुद्धिः) purity of the mind. So, now one with a purified mind can add meditation or upAsana (उपासना) on the Lord

in any chosen form, that is saguna Iswara, like Krishna, Rama, Shiva etc.. This becomes a powerful combination and gives better results(i.e.) they go to devaloka through the bright path .These are said to be superior worlds as the pleasures enjoyed are superior. अतेषु यश्चरते भ्राजमानेषु यथाकालं यादुतयो ज्याददायन् ॥ तं नयन्त्येताः सूर्यस्य रश्मयो यत्र देवानां पतिरेकोधिवासः । MU(1-2-5). We saw earlier that even the worlds of gods are finite and so one who attains such a place has to come down and be reborn after his merits are exhausted. So it is not considered wise to keep on doing karmas. Those who take to a combination of karma and upasana can practise austerities and develop mental maturity and detachment. They go to Brahmhaloka through the bright path तपःश्रद्धे ये ज्युपवसन्त्यरण्ये शान्ता विद्वांसो भैक्ष्यथर्था चरन्तः ॥ सूर्यद्वारेण ते विरजाः प्रयान्ति यत्रामृतः स पुरुषो ज्यव्ययात्मा । MU(1-2-11). Note the use of the word विद्वांसः , that is they are not yet jnAnis but on the way to become a jnAni. A jnani is liberated while alive in this world itself. He is known as a jivanmukta (जिवन्मुक्तः). But those who go to the Brahmhaloka study vedanta at the feet of Brahma. They get realisation. At the time of pralaya they, along with Brahma merge with brahman. They do not return to this world. This is what is known as gradual emancipation or kramamukti (क्रममुक्तिः). The lord is a companion and guide to those who take to the bright path that leads to Him.

Meaning of the verse. I worship Lord Margabandhu who is eternal, of the form of consciousness and bliss, who curbed the pride of Ravana, who used Meru the golden mountain as a bow, who wears the bark of a tree and skins and who is a companion to those who choose to tread the spiritual path leading to liberation.

4

४. कन्दर्पदर्पघ्नमीशं कालकण्ठं मलेशं मलाय्योमकेशम् ।
कुन्दाभटन्तं सुरेशं कोटिसूर्यप्रकाशं भजे मार्गबन्धुम् ।
शम्भो . . .

कन्दर्पदर्पघ्नम् - कन्दर्पः = Manmatha, the god of love दर्पः = arrogance, pride, vanity घ्न = used at the end of a word means destroying, removing or curing. So दर्पघ्न means one who removed or cured the pride. Shiva cured or removed the pride of Manmatha, the god of love.

This statement lends itself for more than one interpretation. 1 - Though formless and without attributes Lord assumes various forms such as Shiva, Krishna, Rama, Uma, LakShmi etc., to gladden the hearts of His devotees. Words can not adequately describe

the beauty of these forms. Manmatha is said to be the paragon of beauty. But even his famed beauty appears drab and insignificant when one thinks of the lord's bewitching form. Shri Suka describes Krishna as साक्षात् मन्मथमन्मथः । जगन्मोहनस्य कामस्यापि मनस्युद्भूतः कामः साक्षात्तस्यापि मोहक इत्यर्थः । BH(10-32-2), that is His beauty will cast a spell on Manmatha himself. So where is the question of his feeling proud in the Lord's presence? In view of this He is known as सुन्दरः । द्वात्रिंशलक्षणीयेतः सुन्दरः । “कामाय कामरूपिणः” इति श्रुतिः । SS(416). Also सुन्दरः । विश्वातिशायिसौभाग्यशालित्वात् सुन्दरः । VS(791). One who is more beautiful than anyone else सुदृढः । शोभनो देहो यस्य स सुदृढः । “मङ्गलायतनं देवं युवानमतिसुन्दरम् । ध्यायेत्कल्पतरोर्मुले सुभासीनं सखीमया.” इति । “शिवायै” इति श्रुतिः । SS(249) शुभाङ्गः - सुन्दरां तनुं धारयन् शुभाङ्गः । VS(586). Also शुभाङ्गः - शोभनैरङ्गैर्ध्वयत्वात् शुभाङ्गः । VS(782). Saints and devotees have lost themselves in singing about the beauty of the lord. Let us savour some samples. This description of Shiva is from Navaratnamala by the saint Shri Sadasivabrahmendra कंठर्पकोटिशतगुणसुन्दरदिव्याकृतिं शिवं वन्दे Shiva's divine form is millions of times more beautiful than that of Manmatha. Likewise the saint Shri Narayana Tirta in his Krishna Leelatarangini repeatedly calls Krishna as कामकोटिसम, मनसिजशतकोटिमञ्जुलवेष, मीनाङ्गकोटिमोहन, कोटिमदनसुन्दर, जगन्मोहन, that is Krishna is millions of times more beautiful than Manmatha. Such being the case his beauty is completely eclipsed in the presence of the Lord: just like the feeble light of the stars is lost in the blazing light of the sun. Let us look at another example. This one is from Shri Krishnakarnamrutam by Lilasukha. He is amazed at the sweet form of Krishna and could only exclaim “Oh! He is sweet,sweet, the very embodiment of sweetness.”

मधुरं मधुरं वपुरस्य विभो-र्मधुरं मधुरं वदनं मधुरम् ।
मधुगन्धि मृदुस्मित-मेतदहो मधुरं मधुरं मधुरं मधुरम् ।

Shri Vedanta Desika should have had the same sentiment as Shri Dikshita and addresses the lord at Tirupathy as कन्दर्पदर्पणर सुन्दर दिव्यमूर्ते! “the One whose beautiful form destroys the pride of Manmatha” (in Venkatesa suprabatam). The use of the word कन्दर्पः for Manmatha is significant. The name means that he was proud right from birth. Even the pride of such a being vanishes in the presence of the Lord.

2 - We are in the habit of describing things that have no defined form or have no form as beautiful if they please our senses. Thus we say the weather is beautiful or a smell is beautiful when it is pleasing to our senses. Similarly we describe the nature, for example

the sun rise, as beautiful because it is colourful and it is also cool at that time. We do not call the scene beautiful after a couple of hours when the sun is sizzling! In the same way we describe the formless Lord as beautiful as He confers bliss on us. Further weather etc., can give happiness in a very limited manner, that is for a limited time or in a limited quantity only. Soon they tend to pall or they will turn sour. So we may not call them really pleasing. Considering this Krishna says

ये हि संस्पर्सजा भोगा दुःखयोनय एव ते ।

आधन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः । BG(5-22) .

In sharp contrast the Lord is of the form of unlimited bliss and so infinitely beautiful. And it never gets stale. One never gets sated with looking at the form. Lilasukha is charmed by Krishna's form and describes it in his Shri Krishnakarnamrutam thus: प्रतिपदलविताभ्यां, प्रत्यङ् नूतनाभ्यां, प्रतिमुदुरधिकार्याम् It appears beautiful every time one looks at it. It seems ever fresh and more lovely than it appeared last time when one saw it. So He is known as सुधारुः - सुतरां दर्शनीयश्चारुः, निरतिशय-परमानन्दरूपत्वात्। “विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्मे”ति श्रुतिः । SS(818). and रम्यः - सुभरूपत्वाद्गम्यः । “यो वै भूमा तत्सुभमि”ति श्रुतिः । SS(924). Devi Lalita is known as सर्वाङ्गसुन्दरी - सर्वाङ्गि य तानि अङ्गानि य अवयवाः शिरःपाण्यादयः; तेष्वन्यूनानतिरिक्ताभाववत्त्वात् यथासामुद्रिका-लक्षणां तद्भवेन सर्वाङ्गसुन्दरी। अथवा सर्वेषामङ्गेषु शरीरेषु ब्रह्मस्वरूपतया अत्यन्तप्रेमविषयत्वेन सुन्दरपदार्थवद्विनाभाववाञ्छाविषयत्वात् तथा। (Lalitatrishati No. 130, Shankara's commentary).

3 - At a different level we may say that Manmatha was not destroyed really as it is said. He came on a mission but failed miserably. But Shiva was in total control of Himself and so could not be shaken. He has many names that attest this fact. Some of them are: शान्तः - विषयसुभेष्वसङ्गतया शान्तः, “निष्ठलं निष्ठियं शान्तम्” (श्र. उ. ६।१८) इति श्रुतेः । VS(582) and SS(9)विरागः - विरतो रागो यस्य विरागः । “कथमनेनेदृशेन निश्चिनोती”ति श्रुतिः । SS(89). विरतः - विगतं रतमस्य विषयसेवायामिति विरतः । VS(396)दमः - दमोऽस्यास्तीति दमः । निगृहीतेन्द्रियग्राम इत्यर्थः । आत्मारामत्वात्। “न हि स्वात्मारामं विषयमृगतृषणां ब्रमयति” इति शिवरहस्ये । “नीलकण्ठं प्रशान्तमि” ति श्रुतिः । SS(578). Thus Manmatha was no match to Shiva. He totally lost himself in the presence of Shiva. This is said to be the destruction of Manmatha. Shiva's anger was a flash and disappeared soon after as is wont with noble souls सधूनां क्षणिको कोपः । The punishment was a token. Shiva yielded to Rati's pleadings and brought Manmatha back to life as he has a role to play in the creation

ईश - The lord or master, one who is in complete control. Relating to the preceding episode of Manmatha this epithet fits Shiva perfectly as He conquered him who was famed to be invincible in all the three worlds. He made Manmatha feel small and acknowledge Shiva's overwhelming superiority

कालकण्ठम् - काल = black or dark-blue colour कण्ठः = throat. This means one whose throat has a dark colour. It refers to Shiva whose throat has a bluish hue. This is said to have happened after he swallowed the poison that was given out by the serpent Vasuki when the ocean was churned by the devas and asuras. Like Manmatha in the episode narrated above, the poison also lost its virulence and became impotent in Shiva's presence. So Shiva has the following names

नीलकण्ठः - नीलः कण्ठे यस्य सः नीलकण्ठः । शिवस्य कण्ठे नैत्यं विष्ववादि-सकलप्राण्यार्तिकर-डलाडल-विषधारणप्रयुक्तम्। —“नीलकण्ठं प्रशान्तमि”ति श्रुतिः । SS(5). The name नीलकण्ठः for Shiva appears in several places in Shri Rudram. Also: श्रीकण्ठः - श्रीः कालकूटजनिता शोभा। तद्भाङ्कण्ठो यस्य सः । तथा कालकूट-जनित-मालिन्यमपि शोभायै परमेश्वरस्य। “विकारोऽपि श्लाघ्यो भुवन-भयभङ्ग-व्यसनिन” इति न्यायात्। अथवा श्रीः विषमेव, “श्रीर्विषरयना शोभा सम्पत्सरलशाधिषु।वाणीलक्ष्मीलवङ्गेषु विषे भिव्वेऽपी”ति नानार्तरत्नमाला। तद्भाङ्कण्ठो यस्येति। SS(118) and SA(16). This says that even the dark patch generated by the poison added to the beauty of Shiva's throat. This is said in the following verse in the Shivamahimna Stotram also

अकाण्डब्रह्माण्डक्षययडितदेवासुरकृपा-
विधेयस्याऽऽसीद् यस्त्रिनयन विषं संकुतवतः ।
स कल्माषः कण्ठे तव न कुरुते न श्रियमडो
विकारोऽपि श्लाघ्यो भुवनभयभङ्गव्यसनिनः ॥ १४ ।

The following names of Shiva are based on this incident. कालकूटविषादी - डालाडल-विषपानकर्ता कालकूटविषादी । स्कान्दे सनत्कुमारसंछितायां काशिकावनमालात्ये विष्ववादिना समुद्रमथनं, तदानीं वासुकिमुष्मात्कालविषोत्पादनं, तेन ग्लानिः, तदनु तैर्विषनिग्रहार्तं शिवं प्रति प्रार्थना, तदनु शिवप्रेरीतेन—नाम्ना डस्तेन विषमाहृत्य य शिवडस्ते जम्बूकलवत्समर्षणं, तदनु- “गृहीत्वा भुक्तवाञ्छम्भुः कण्ठे नीलोऽभवत्तदा। तदाप्रभृति तत्स्थानं डालाशनमिति स्मृतम्। शिवोऽभूत्कालभुङ्गनाम्ना कालकण्ठ्याप्यकोऽभवदिति”ति। SS(203). The story of churning of the ocean is mentioned in the puranas. It appears in 8th book of Shrimad Bhagavatam. Some verses from this are given for reference

निर्मथ्यमानादुदधेरभूद् विषं मडोल्बणं डालाडलाहमग्रतः ।

सम्भ्रान्तमीनोन्मकराडिकच्छपात् तिमिद्धिपत्राडतिमिङ्गिलाकुवात् ॥

तमुग्रवेगं द्विशि द्विशुपर्यधो विसर्पदुत्सर्पदसड्यमप्रति ।

भीताः प्रजा द्रुद्रुवुरङ्ग सेश्वरा अरक्ष्यमाणाः शरणां सदाशिवम् ॥

“Seeing that effervescent, unbearable and irresistible poison possessing tremendous force and spreading in all quarters, as well as above and below, and finding no protection (anywhere), living beings along with their leaders got much frightened and flew for protection to Lord Sadasiva (the ever-auspicious one).” They prayed to Shiva to protect them. They said

देव देव मडादेव भूतात्मन् भूतभावन ।

त्राडि नः शरणापत्रांस्त्रैलोक्यदलनात् विधात् ॥

“O god of gods! O supreme deity! the protector, nay, the very self of all created beings! save us who have sought refuge in You, from this poison that is burning all the three worlds.” Shiva saw their plight तद् वीक्ष्य व्यसनं तासां कृपया भृशपीडितः । सर्वभूतसुदुद्देव एवमाड सती प्रियाम् । Shiva who was the embodiment of mercy was very much affected by their plight and told His consort Sati this

अडो भत भवान्येतत् प्रजानां पश्य वैशसम् ।

क्षीरोदमथनोद्भूतात् कालकूटादुपस्थितम् ॥

“How distressing it is, O Bhavani, this calamity that has come up on these people from the poison Kalakuta that had appeared during the churning of the ocean of milk.”

आसां प्राणपरीप्सूनां विधेयमभयं डि मे । अतावान् डि

प्रभोरर्थो यद् दीनपरिपालनम् ।

“Protection must be given by me to these people who are concerned about their lives. To protect the afflicted is the main concern of the great (who is endowed with power).” Saying this Shiva swallowed the poison He had gathered in His hand

निशम्य कर्म तच्छम्भोः देवदेवस्य मीढुषः ।

प्रजा दक्षायणी ब्रह्मा वैकुण्ठश्च शशंसिरे ।

Observing the benevolent act of Lord Shiva those who approached Him, Sati, Brahma and Lord Vishnu praised it.

Referring to this episode of Shiva swallowing the poison and the wearing Ganga on His head, the author Shri DikShita says that the Lord performed these acts not because the poison

was tasty or Ganga has purifying power : but only to save the world and because of extreme compassion. And these two acts could not have been performed by anyone else

गङ्गा धृता न भवता शिव पावनीति नास्वादितो मधुर इत्यपि कालकूटः । संरक्षणाय जगतां करुणातिरेका-
 ङ्कर्मद्वयं कलित-मेतद-नन्यसाध्यम् । (Brahmatarkastavam) मडेशम् - मडा is a substitute for मडत्
 meaning big or great इशः is synonymous with ईश्वरः and means lord or master मडेशः is
 the name of Shiva मडांश्चासावीशश्च मडेशः । “यः परः स मडेश्वरः” इति श्रुतिः । SS(26)मडेश्वरः -
 स्वर्गादियत्किञ्चिदीशितृत्वयोगादीश्वरत्वं छि ईन्द्रादीनमप्यस्ति; यदादाय षड्दिशाभ्राज्मणो उत्पातशान्ति प्रकरणे
 ईन्द्रयमादिषु “ईश्वराय स्वाहा” इति मन्त्रः प्रवृत्तः; शिवस्तु मडेश्वरः तेषामपीश्वरत्वात्, “ध्येयः सर्वेश्वर्यसंपन्नः
 सर्वेश्वरः शम्भुराकाशमध्ये” इति श्रुतेः; “सेन्द्रादिषु य देवेषु तस्य त्वैश्वर्यमुच्यते” इति भारतवचनाय ।
 अतदभिप्रायमेव य “मडेश्वरश्च भूतानां मडतामीश्वरश्च सः” इति भारतवचनम् । मडतः प्रणिन ईन्द्रादीन्त्यपि
 यदस्येशितृत्वं वर्तते, इदमेव अतदीयेशितृत्वस्य मडत्वमिति Indra and other gods like Yama may be
 lords of their respective quarters and have powers but the Shiva is their Lord also. Their
 lordships and powers were given by Him only. And it is to Him only they all rush for
 protection when they see a danger to all, as happened in the story just narrated. Later on
 it is said अतः एतदेवतासाध्यकार्यप्रवर्तकतया सर्वत्राप्रतिष्ठतत्वात् मडदीशितृत्वमस्येति मडेश्वर इति स्मृतः
 इति । इदं य श्रुतिप्रसिद्धं नाम, “मायिनं तु मडेश्वरम्”, “तमीश्वराणां परमं मडेश्वरम्”, “यः परः स मडेश्वरः”
 इत्यादि श्रुतेः । SA(2)

मडाल्योमडेशम् - मडत् = great or big व्योमन् = sky, atmosphere व्योमडेशः is an epithet of Shiva
 व्योमडेशः गङ्गाधारणसमये व्योमवद्विशालजटावलयरूपः डेशः अस्येति व्योमडेशः । SS(96) and SA(75).
 While receiving the Ganga when she was coming down from the heavens, Shiva spread out
 His hair which appeared to cover the sky. Hence the name. It is also one of Lalita’s name
 व्योमडेशी - व्योमैव डेशा यस्या विराडूपतयाः । व्योमडेशस्य शिवस्य स्त्री वा । व्योमैवात्वं सद् व्योमकम् ।
 अल्पार्थे कप्रत्ययः । तस्येशी ततोऽपि व्यापिका वा LS(941). Her (universal form) is larger than the
 sky. This is an additional meaning given for the name and is applicable to Shiva also.
 Because the sky was first created and came from Him only. Then other things were created
 from the sky. Thus Ganga came from the same source from which the entire creation started
 and so the river occupies a lofty position in our esteem. Besides it has an unique sacredness
 attached to it that is not attached to any other river or even to the rain water that falls from
 the sky. In fact the rain water is considered to be ordinary. It stays for a short time and is lost:
 but Ganga’s flow is perennial and is symbolic of His grace. Ganga came from the heaven.
 Her waters came in a big torrent. Because the water fell from a great height the stream got

scattered into fine spray and came down as an immense cloud. Shiva spread out His hair to cover the sky so that the cloud of spray got in and was trapped. Ganga lost her way and could not come out. This was done to curb her pride. She was released again when Bagiratha prayed to Shiva. The use of the adjective मडल in the word मडलप्योमकेशम् meaning great or big is significant मडलप्योम meaning “the big or the great sky” is said to distinguish it from the “small sky” that is mentioned in the Upanishads. अथ यद्विद-मस्मिन् ब्रह्मपुरे दडरं पुण्डरीकं वेश्म दडरोऽस्मिन्नन्तराकाश-स्तस्मिन् यदन्त-स्तदन्वेष्टव्यं तद्वत् विजिज्ञासितव्यमिति। Chandogyopanishad.(8-1-1). What is mentioned here is known as Dahara Vidya. Ordinarily people may find it to visualise brahman that is described to be without a form, name or any other attributes. It may appear to be something like a vacUm. It is the intention of Dahara Vidya to provide them something gross on which they can meditate upon. Daharam means small (दडरं अल्पं) and ब्रह्मपुरं is our body. Briefly stated this says that there is a small space within the heart in the body in which one can visualise brahman and get all his desires fulfilled. The upanishad says that this is because the space that is inside the heart encompasses all that is there outside.

कुन्दाभदनन्तम् - कुंदम् = jasmine flower आभः = likeness, resemblance दन्तः tooth. Shiva's teeth are white and have the luster or the soft glow like the jasmine flower. They are uniform and packed closely like the petals of a jasmine flower. They are specifically mentioned as they are in the mouth of the Lord that is the birthplace of all sounds, grammar and the vedas. It is said that the vedas are the very breath of the Lord. Shiva has several names based on this fact. Some are given here

वाञ्चिशुद्धः - वाचो वाच्यो विशुद्धा ऋग्वेदाद्यो यस्य सः वाञ्चिशुद्धः । “अस्य मडतो भूतस्य निश्चसितमेतद्वेदोयजुर्वेद” इत्यादि श्रुतिः ॥ उक्तं च सूत्रकारेण- शास्त्रयोनिर्त्वादिति। विवृतं च भाष्यकारेण मडतः ऋग्वेदाद्यैः शास्त्रस्य योनिः कारणमिति। SS(318)

कृतागमः - कृता रयिता मुष्पञ्चकाद्धिर्निर्गता आगमाः प्रणवादिमडामन्त्राः, ऋगादि सर्ववेदाः, प्रोद्गीतादि अष्टाविंशतिसङ्ख्याका आगमाश्च यस्य सः कृतागमः । “अस्य मडतो भूतस्य निश्चसितमेतद्वेदः इत्यादि” श्रुतिः । SS(444)

वेदनिश्चसितः - वेदा ऋग्वेदाद्यः निश्चसितमिव यथाप्रयत्नेन पुरुषनिःश्वासी भवति अयं यस्य स वेदनिश्चसितः । “अस्य मडतो भूतस्य निश्चसितमेवैतद्वेद” इत्यादि श्रुतिः । SS(733)

वेदकारः - विद्यैते धर्मब्रह्मणी अभिरिति वेदाः आम्नायाः तान् करोति निश्चसितरूपतया उच्यारयति इति

वेदकारः । “अस्य मडतो भूतस्येत्या”दि श्रुतिः । SS(887). Thus the sacred vedas in the form of His breath are always wafting in His mouth and are in constant touch with His teeth making them very pure and endowing them with unique sacredness. For these reasons the comparison of the teeth with the jasmine flower is to be found often in the compositions of the saints and devotees. Some examples are given here. Shri Narayana Theertha addresses Krishna as कुन्दरदन and कुन्दसुन्दररदन in his Krishna Leela Tarangini. (रदः = tooth.) This description of Devi’s teeth is in Shyamala Dandakam. कुन्दपुष्पधुतिस्निग्धन्तावलीनिर्मलालोवकल्लोवसंमेलनस्मेरशोणधरे!

सुरेशं - सुरः = god or deity. Shiva is the lord of gods like Indra, Brahma. He could ward off Yama also. Thus all the gods could not assess and understand His greatness and glory. That is why they were naive enough to plan and send Manmatha on that infamous mission. He was also worshipped by asuras like Ravana who subjugated the devas. He could crush Ravana and make him realise his helplessness and finally surrender to Him. There is none equal to Him or greater than Him. So Shri Suka salutes Him saying this निरस्तसाभ्यातिशयेन राघसा स्वधामनि ब्रह्मणि रंश्यते नमः । BH(2-4-14)निरस्तं सांयमतिशयश्च यस्य यदपेक्षया अन्यस्य साम्यमतिशयश्च नास्ति, तेन राघसा औश्वर्येण स्वधामनि स्वस्वरूपे ब्रह्मणि रममाणाय (Shridhara’s commentary). Shri Sadasiva Brahmendra bows to Him saying (in Navaratnamala- 12) निस्तुलमडिमानमानतोऽस्मि शिवम् । तुलनं = comparison. So he says “I salute Shiva of incomparable glory.”

कोटिसूर्यप्रकाशम् - कोटि = 10 millions प्रकाश brilliant, bright, shining. The Lord shines like a million (infinite) suns. There are so many suns and stars in the universe. The Lord gives them their brightness and He also shines because of His own glory without depending on anyone else. So He has these names सूर्यकोटिप्रतीकाशः - सूर्यकोटीनं प्रकाशं एव प्रकाशो यस्य सः तथा । एवं च अभूतोपमा । अधिकदीप्तिमानित्यर्थः । “नमो दीमाय दीप्तिरूपिणः” इति श्रुतिः । SS(502) सुदीप्तः - सर्वप्रकाशकत्वेन प्रमाणां विना सर्वदा दीप्त इति सुदीप्तः । “दीमाय दीप्तिरूपिणः” इति श्रुतिः । SS(633) मडाधुतिः - मडती धुतिर्बाह्याभ्यन्तरा च अस्येति मडाधुतिः; “स्वयंज्योतिः” (भृ-उ-४-३-८), “ज्योतिषां ज्योतिः” (भृ-उ-४-४-१६) इत्यादि श्रुतेः । VS (176) मरीचिः - तेजस्विनामपि तेजस्वात् मरीचिः; “तेजस्तेजस्विनामडम्”, (गीता १०-३६) इति भगवद्भयनात् VS(189) ज्योतिः - स्वत एव द्योतयत इति ज्योतिः; “नश्यत्परो ज्योतिरत्मा”, (ना-उ-१३-१) इति मन्त्रवर्णात् VS(877). Thus the Lord who is brighter than a million suns, who is eternal and never failing is the most dependable one to light our way. Let us pray to Him and seek His grace. So भजे = I worship मर्गबन्धुम् = the Lord Margabandhu. I

worship Lord Margabandhu who removed Manmatha's pride, who has kept poison in His neck, the great Lord who is more extensive than the space, whose teeth have the sheen of the jasmine flower, who is the Lord of the gods and who shines like millions of suns.

5

प. मन्दारभूतेरुदारं मन्दारगेन्द्रसारं मङ्गागौर्यदूरम् ।
सिन्दूरदूरप्रचारं सिन्दुराजातिधीरं भजे मार्गबन्धुम् ।
शम्भो ..

This is the fifth and the last verse in the stotram to be followed by the कृलश्रुतिः , a verse that states the benefit of reciting the stotram. The preceding verses referred to some incidents to be found in the puranas. These incidents were used to highlight some qualities of Shiva. They also mentioned some aspects of His form, like the moon and Ganga on His head. Of course the references are to His सगुण aspect or aspect with name and form as Shiva. In His निर्गुण aspect He is without name, form and qualities. These references brought out the greatness of the Lord like His compassion, readiness to come to the help of the distressed etc.. Thus, He destroyed Manmatha because he committed a serious offence. But when entreated by Rati (Manmatha's wife) He readily granted his life back. This shows His infinite compassion. Whatever be the name or form by which we choose to address Him, be it Shiva or Rama or Hari, we find that His qualities are endearing and draw one to Him. Shri Kulasekara states this in this popular verse in his Mukundamala (No:18) as follows

वात्सल्या-दाम्यप्रदानसमया-दार्ताति-निर्वापिणात्
औदार्या-दधशोषणा-दगणित-श्रेयःपदप्रापिणात् ।
सेव्यः श्रीपतिरेक एव सततं सन्त्यत्र षट् साक्षिणः
प्रह्लादश्च विभीषणश्च करिराट् पाञ्चाल्युडल्या ध्रुवः ॥

मन्दारभूतेरुदारं - मन्दारः = It is the name of one of the five trees in Indira's paradise. It is said to be capable of granting one's desires like the famed Kalpa tree, also of the paradise भूतिः = grandeur, dignity, riches उदारम् = generous, liberal. So the word मन्दारभूतेरुदारं means that Lord Shiva is more generous in granting one's wishes than the Mandara tree. So He is known as कामप्रदः - ભક્તેભ્યઃ કામાન્ પ્રકર્ષેણ દદાતીતિ કામપ્રદઃ । VS(298). He gives all that His devotees may need in abundance. Shri Vedanta Desika cites the case of Kuchela as an example and says धानामुष्टिमुये कुयेलमुनये दत्ते य वित्तेशताम् । meaning that He made His devotee Kuchela rich

as Kubera in return for a handful of pounded rice he offered Him. He is also known as वरदः - अभिमतान् वरान् ददातीति वरदः । VS(330). He grants boons desired from Him. Also वरदः भक्तानामिष्टप्रदः । “वरदं देवमीज्य” मिति श्रुतिः । SS(107). And उदारः - भक्ताऽभीष्टदः सर्वोत्कृष्ट उदारः । “आमतममुत्कृष्टतम” मिति श्रुतिः । SS(315). Saint Sadasiva Brahmendra calls Him as नतमन्दार - “the wishing tree of heaven” in his song भज रे गोपालम् - Bhaja re Gopalam. Again he calls Him as सेवकजनमन्दिरमन्दार - “the Mandara tree planted in the residential quarters of His devotees” in the song मानस संचर रे - Manasa sanchara re. We find the mantra नमो वृक्षेभ्यो हरिकेशेभ्यः in the eighth anuvaka of Shri Rudram. The explanation states that Rudra, who can take any form, has assumed the form of trees to help the world. He stands in the form of Palasa, Bilwa, Peepal and other holy trees which can be used in sacrifices for gaining heaven and the form of heavenly trees like Kalpaka, Mandara, Parijata etc., which grant all wishes. So He gets the following names पारिजातः - पारमस्थास्तीति पारि, समुद्रः, तस्माज्जातः पारिजातः देववृक्षः, तद्रूपत्वाद्देवोऽपि पारिजातः, भक्तजनेष्टदं धर्त्यतः । SS(264) and वृक्षाणां पतिः - वृक्षा अश्रत्थाद्यः, तेषां पतिः स्वामी । “वृक्षाणां पतये नमो धृति श्रुतिः । SS(692). The tree is one of the creations. May be it is in the heaven and so has some special features unlike those found here in this world. But places like the heaven are only finite. Gods like Indra who rule there are also finite though they may be known as अमरः . The tree Mandara also has a limited life. Since it has only a limited life, whatever it can give will also have limited life and perish eventually giving cause for unhappiness or sorrow. In view of this Krishna names those who seek petty favours (which are finite only) from Mandara and even gods like Indra, Brahma etc., as men of small intellect. He says अन्तवत्तु क्वं तेषां तद्भवत्यल्पमेधसाम् । BG(7-23). Sankaracharya, in his commentary, points out that अथैवं समाने अपि आयासे मामेव न प्रतिपद्यन्ते अनन्तकृत्वाय, अहो भवु कञ्चतरे वर्तते, धृत्यनुकोशं दर्शयति भगवान् । “though there is the same amount of exertion (in the two kinds of worship), people do not resort to Me so that they may attain infinite results. Alas! it is very miserable” -thus the Lord expresses His anguish. This is the reason for calling them as “men of small intellect.” But, unlike the tree, the Lord is नित्यः eternal as said in verse No. 3. He is not subject to decay etc., as the tree. So He is capable of granting finite material benefits like good health, wealth etc.. besides liberation or mokSha (i.e.) that is ever lasting or infinite. In fact He is willing to give Himself to His devotee. स्मरतः पादकमल-मात्मानमपि यच्छति । BH(10-80-11). This idea is repeated by Shri Kulasekara in his Mukundamala (31)सेव्ये स्वस्थ पदस्थ द्यौरि सुरे नारायणे तिष्ठति । The infinite thing obviously includes the finite things. The true devotees know this

and so do not seek benefits that are finite from Him. The Lord is very dear to them and they are very dear to Him प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स य मम प्रियः । BG(7-17). So He naturally takes care of them. Has not He said तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वडाम्यहम् ? “To them who are ever devout, I secure them gain and safety.” BG(9-22). Here योगः and क्षेमः “gain and safety” is explained by Shri Sankara as योगः अप्राप्तस्य प्रापणं, क्षेमः तद्रक्षणं, तदुभयं प्रापयामि अहम् । . (i.e.) Gain implies securing what is not already possessed; and safety means preservation of what is already possessed. Shri Sankara adds that while the lesser devotees work themselves for their gain and safety the true devotees do not. The Lord alone is their refuge. Wherefore the Lord Himself secures to them gain and safety केवलं अथैव भगवच्छरणाः ते; अतः भगवान् अथैव तेषां योगक्षेमं वडतीति । . Thus the true devotees do not lack anything. If there be any lack, it is taken care of by the Lord. The safety of their possessions is also taken care of by the Lord. What more can one desire? They are carefree and therefore relaxed. The Tamil saint Manikkavachakar said that the Lord was more concerned about him than the mother of her new born child. He said that He anticipated his needs and fulfilled them. The brahmin Kuchela was another such devotee. Outwardly he appeared to be very poor but inwardly he was very rich: he was totally contented and never felt any want यदृच्छ्योपपन्नेन वर्तमानो गृहश्रमी । BH(10-80-7).

मन्दरागोन्द्रसारम् - मन्दरः = is the name of a mythical mountain अगः = mountain. गोन्द्रः = the first or the best (of any class of objects). So the word मन्दरागोन्द्र means Mandara, the best among the mountains. सारं = strength. Mandara was used by the gods and demons to churn the ocean to get the nectar. It is said to be situated adjacent to the mountain Meru. मन्दरो मेरुमन्दरः सुपार्श्वः कुमुद एति अयुतयोजन विस्तारोन्नाडा मेरोश्चतुर्दिशमवष्टम्भ गिरय उपकूसाः । Of the four sides of Mount Meru stand the Mandara, Merumandara, Suparswa and Kumuda mountains forming its buttresses (as it were) and having a length and height of 10,000 yojanas. BH(5-16-10). Shiva is said to be as strong as Mandara, the best among the mountains. He is unmovable, like a mountain सर्वगतः स्थाणुः अचलः - सर्वगतत्वात् स्थाणुः एव स्थिरः एत्येतत् । स्थिरत्वात् अचलः अयं आत्मा । Because He is all pervading, He is stable like a pillar. Because He is stable He is firm. BG(2-24). The proof is that the mighty Ravana tried to lift His abode Kailasa and was crushed. But His unlimited strength is not demoniac but it is mellowed with kindness: so when Ravana realised his mistake and pleaded, He pardoned him and let him go. So He is known as मडाबलः- बलिनामपि बलवत्त्वात् मडाबलः । He is stronger than those who are said

to possess great strength. VS(172)

मडाबलपरः- मड्डलं शारीरं सामर्थ्यं सैन्यरूपं वा येषां ते मडाबलाः, धन्द्रोपेन्द्रप्रभृतयः तेषां परः श्रेष्ठः परमेश्वरः । “तमीश्वराणां परमं मडेश्वर”मिति श्रुतिः । SS(604). In fact He is known as अद्रिः- अद्रिवदप्रकम्भ्यः, परैरयल एति यावत् । “तं शान्तमयल”मिति श्रुतिः । यद्वा श्रीशैलारुणायलाटिपर्वतरूपत्वाद्दद्रिः । श्रीशैलशिखरं दृष्ट्वा पुनर्जन्म न विधते एति, काश्यां तु मरणांमुक्तिः, स्मरणाद्दरुणायलमिति य स्मरणात् ॥ “वनानि शम्भुर्गिरयश्च शम्भु”रिति स्कान्दे । “सर्वां ल्येष रुद्र” एति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(856).

मडीधरः- मडीं गिरिदुपेण धरतीति मडीधरः, “वनानि विष्णुर्गिरयो द्रिशश्च” (विष्णु-२-१२-३८) एति पराशरोक्तेः । VS(369). He held up Mandara during the churning of the ocean and lifted the Govardana mountain as Krishna. So He gets the name मडाद्रिधृक्- मडान्तमद्रिं गिरिं मन्दरं गोवर्दनं च अमृतमथने गोरक्षाणे च धृतवानिति मडाद्रिधृक् ॥ VS(180). The fact that He is mightier than the mightiest and has compassion makes Him the ideal protector. Shri Vedanta Desika has expressed this idea beautifully in his works अलीति डेतोरनुवर्तनीयं नाथ त्वदन्यं न विभावयामि । लयं कुतः स्यात् त्वयि सानुकुंपे रक्षा कुतः स्यात् त्वयि जातरुषे ॥ (Ashtabhujashtakam - 5) त्वयि रक्षति रक्षकैः किमन्यैः त्वयि चारक्षति रक्षकैः किमन्यैः । एति निश्चित धीः श्रयामि नित्यं नृडरे वेगवती तटाश्रयं त्वाम् ॥ (Shri Kamasikashtakam - 8). He asks: “When one is protected by You what use is there of other protectors? Again, when You are angry and decide to punish someone, what use is there of other protectors?” This reminds us of the famous incident of Kakasura in Ramayana. The asura misbehaved with Sita when she was in the forest with Rama. Rama was furious at his conduct and sent an arrow that chased him wherever he went. He ran to Indra, Brahma etc., for protection. But they hurriedly turned him away when they learnt that he had incurred Rama’s wrath and is being hunted by Rama’s arrow. Finally, feeling helpless, he surrendered to Rama Himself who forgave him readily. This incident was mentioned by Sita to Hanuman. She said

त्रीन् लोकांन् संपरिडम्भ्य तमेव शरणां गतः ।
स तं निपतितं लूमौ शरण्यः शरणागतम् ।
वधार्धमपि ङाकुत्स्थः कृपयापर्यपालयत् ॥

(Ramayana. Sundara Kanda. 38-32,3).

Great asuras like Ravana obtained wonderful boons from Brahma and other gods. With those powers they could subdue the three worlds. They were very proud of their powers and were convinced they were invincible and safe. But in the end they found themselves helpless when their time was up. Ravana bemoans this fact when he sees his army being

decimated in the fight with Rama

अडो सुबलवान् रामो मडदस्त्रबलं च वै ।

यस्य विक्रममासाद्य राक्षसा निधनं गताः ।

तं मन्ये राघवं वीरं नारायणमनामयम् ॥ (Yuddha kanda 72-10,11).

In contrast young devotees like Prahlada were under His protection. They faced trials and tribulations with the assurance that the Lord will protect them. So no harm could befall them. We also referred to the episode of Markandeya being saved by Shiva from the jaws of death and mentioned that one of His names is मृत्युञ्जयः SS(123) and SA(71). Shri Ramana Maharshi explains how the Lord Mrityunjaya saves His devotees from death. He puts it in a unique way in his work Sat-darsanam. He says

मृत्युञ्जयं मृत्युभियाश्चिताना-

मडमतिर्मृत्युमुपैति पूर्वम् ।

अथ स्वभावाद्मृतेषु तेषु

कथं पुनर्मृत्युधियोऽवकाशः ॥

The Maharshi says that when a devotee seeks the protection of the Lord from fear of death He protects him by destroying the individual! This sounds alarming and confusing. But what the Maharshi means is that normally one identifies himself with the body-mind complex and not the Self that is one's true nature. Thus the individual feels separate from the Self which is immortal and not subject to destruction. This separative idea is formed in the individual's mind. As long as one cherishes this mistaken notion one is in the grip of the viscious samsara. He is subject to repeated birth and death. This wrong notion that makes one to identify himself with the body is known as ahamkara or ego. When one surrenders himself to Lord Mrityunjaya who is very much in everyones heart the ahamkara loses itself. It is only a chimera that thrives as long as one's ignorance of his true nature persists. The Lord's grace confers the wisdom that destroys the ignorance. Consequently the ego gets stripped of all its coverings and ceases to be the ego. Rid of the ego the Self shines in its pristine glory. The individual finds his original nature and thus he goes beyond birth and death. He becomes immortal.

मडागौर्यदूरम्- मडा = great गौरी = is the name of Parvati मडागौरी means great or glorious Gauri अदूरम् = close by, not far away दूर = distant or far off. Gauri or Parvati is the consort of Shiva and is said to take up half of His body. In view of this it is said here that She is

not far off from Him. So Shiva is known as अर्धनारीश्वरः- नार्या अर्ध अर्धनारी, अर्धनारीमिवित
 ष्वरः अर्धनारीश्वरः । नार्यशोऽर्धमीश्वरांशश्चार्धमित्यर्तः । तदुक्तमाचार्यैः- “प्रवालप्रवालप्रभाशोभमर्ध
 मरुत्वन्मणिश्रीमडश्याममर्धम् । गुणस्युत्तमेकं वपुःशैवमन्तः स्मरामि स्मरापत्तिसम्पत्तिडेतुः” इति ॥ “पुरुषं
 कृष्णपिङ्गलमि”ति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(437) देवार्धकान्तः- देवस्य अर्धं वामभागः, कान्तात्मकः यस्य सः देवार्धकान्तः
 । भविष्योत्तरपुराणे- “अर्धं प्रवालरुचिरे ङरिनीलमर्धं नागाजिनाम्बरमतो वरवस्त्रमर्धम् । कान्ताऽणकार्धमथ
 दीमजटालुमर्धं दिव्यं मडः सततमधे तवाश्रयेऽडम्” इति ॥ “दरिद्रनीलवोडोत” इति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(568).

Krishna has said पिताऽऽत्मस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः । BG(9-17). “I am the father of this
 world, the mother, the dispenser of the fruits of action and the grandsire.” That He is both
 the father and the mother is symbolised by the Ardhanari form. Kalidasa says this in the
 invocatory verse to his great poem Raghuvamsam

वागर्धाविव संपुक्तौ वागर्थप्रतिपत्तये ।

जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेश्वरौ ॥

“I salute Parvati and Parameswara who are the parents of the universe and who are
 inseparably united like the speech and the sense, for obtaining the correct knowledge of
 the words and their meaning.” Thus Krishna says that He is both the intelligent cause and
 the material cause of the creation. He is कत्रा - क्खित इति कर्म जगत्तस्य कर्ता, “यो वै बालाक अतेषां
 पुरुषाणं कर्ता यस्य वै तत् कर्म स वेदितव्यः ।” कौ-७-४-१४ इति श्रुतेः । VS(316). करणं - जगदुत्पत्तौ साधकं
 करणम् । VS(378) कारणं - उपादानं निमित्तं च कारणम् । VS(379) विकर्ता - विविधं भुवनं क्खियते इति
 विकर्ता स अवे भगवान् विष्णुः । VS(381). The material cause is also known as prakriti which
 Krishna called as His inferior aspect in BG Chapter 7. Prakriti is also called maya that
 deluding power of Iswara मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यान्मायिनं तु भुवेश्वरम् । SVU(4-10). Prakriti is maya
 and the Lord Maheswara is in control of it. Krishna says that His maya is very powerful
 and very hard to overcome दैवी ङ्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया । BG(7-14). “This divine
 illusion of Mine, made up of gunas, is hard to surmount.” So He is known as मडामायः -
 मायाविनामपि मायाकारित्वात् मडामायः, “मम माया दुरत्यया” इति भगवद्व्ययनात् । VS(170). Krishna
 says that in fact He is both: the intelligent cause and the material cause called prakriti.
 Thus मूलप्रकृतिः is one of His names मूलभूता प्रकृतिः मूलप्रकृतिः, जगदादिकारणं, तन्निमित्तोपादानत्मकं
 ब्रह्मेत्यर्तः । “तदैक्षत, बहुस्यां प्रजायेति” इति श्रुतिः ॥ अैक्षतेति षक्षणकर्तृत्वान्निमित्तकारणत्वं, बहुस्यामिति
 बहुभवनडेतुत्वाद्युपादानत्वम् ॥ SS(411). Also प्रकृतिः - जगदुपादानभूतः परमेश्वरः प्रकृतिः । अयमर्तः
 सूत्रकारेण निश्चितः । प्रकृतिश्च प्रतिज्ञा, दृष्टान्तानुपरोधादित्यादिसूत्रपञ्चकेन । विवृतं येदं भाष्यकारेण
 संशयपूर्वपक्षप्रदर्शनपूर्वकम् ॥ SS(570) मायाबीजः - मायाया बीजं कारणमधिष्ठानमिति यावत् । अवे च

मायाया अर्धस्तत्वेन वास्तवताऽभावात् शक्तित्वेन स्वातन्त्र्याभावाच्च जगत ईश्वरैक्यबीजत्वमुपपद्यते । “देवात्मशक्तिं स्वगुणैर्निगूढामि” ति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(557). The prakriti mentioned as the mother is symbolised as the Lord’s consort and is variously called as Parvati, Ambika, Gauri, Bhavani, LakShmi etc.. प्रकृति, विष्णुपत्नी, नारायणसमाश्रिता are names of LakShmi to be seen in LakShmi Ashtottarashatanama stotram. Thus the Lord as brahman is one but, as Iswara and Devi appears as two. This is stated beautifully in the उमामहेश्वरस्तोत्रम् (Umamaheswara stotram) as follows नमः शिवाभ्यां नवयौवनाभ्यां परस्परश्लिष्टवपुर्धराभ्याम् । I salute the two Shivas who are eternally young and whose bodies are entwined with each other. Krishna also adds that we the created beings are in the clutches of prakriti and go through the cycle of birth and death till wisdom dawns on us but He is beyond it and maya, however powerful it may be has no influence on Him. So He is known as मायातीतः - मायाया अतीतः - मायया वा अतीतः । सत्वादि-गुण-सामान्यरूप-प्रकृतिविवर्जित इत्यर्थः । “अतमस्कममायमि”ति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(41). and निर्मायः - मायाया निर्गतः निर्मायः । यद्यपि “मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यान्मायिनं तु भूयैश्चरं” इति मायासम्बन्धः श्रुतिषु दृश्यते, तथापि मायायाः कल्पितत्वेन वास्तवसम्बन्धाभावात् कल्पितसम्बन्धपरेयं श्रुतिः । अत एव, व्यक्तात्पुरुषः परः, अक्षरात्परतरः, अविद्याकार्यहीनः । “अतमस्कममायमि”ति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(693). Bartruhari states the fact that the Lord is not in the clutches of maya in his own way in his Vairagyasatakam.(17)

એકો રાગિષુ રાજતે પ્રિયતમાદેહાર્ધહારી હરો
નીરાગેષુ જનો વિમુક્તલલનાસઙ્ગો ન ચસ્માત્ પરઃ ।

He says that among sensual persons Shiva is unique sharing half His body with His beloved. It appears from this that as though He cannot bear separation from her even for a second. But, he adds, that again among the dispassionate there is none superior to Him, unattached to the company of women.

The prakriti is subservient to Him. This is depicted in our puranas by showing Parvati and LakShmi as serving the Lord with great dedication. For example, Devahuti, the daughter of Manu, is said to have served her husband, sage Kardama, with the same delight as Goddess Parvati looks after Her consort, Lord Shiva નિત્યં પર્યચરત્ પ્રીત્યા ભવાનીવ ભવં પ્રભુમ્ । BH(2-23-1). The following names are thus derived from the facts stated above

પાર્વતીપતિઃ - પર્વતઃ હિમવાન્ તસ્ય પુત્રી પાર્વતી । તસ્યાઃ પતિઃ । તદ્દુક્તં સૂતસંહિતાયં- “ સા શિવા કરુણામૂર્તિર્જગન્માતા ત્રયીમયી । શિવાભિન્ના પરાનન્દા શકુરસ્યાપિ શકુરી” સ્વેચ્છયા હિમત્યુત્રી સ્વભક્તજનવત્સલા, તસ્યાઃ પતિઃ પ્રિયઃ પરમેશ્વરઃ ॥ “અમ્બિકાપતય ઉમાપતયે નમો નમઃ” ઇતિ શ્રુતિઃ ॥

SS(24) and अम्बिकापतिः - पार्वत्याः प्रियः अम्बिकापतिः । “छिरण्यपतयेऽम्बिकपतय” इति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(429). Also SA(15) गौरीशः - गौरीशोऽम्बिकापतिः ॥ SS(121) श्रीपतिः - अमृतमथने सर्वान् सुरासुरादीन् विधाय श्रीदेनं पतित्वेन वरयाभासेति श्रीपतिः । श्रीः पर शक्तिः, तस्याः पतिरिति वा, “परास्य शक्तिर्विविधैव श्रूयते” (श्वे-७-८) इति श्रुतिः । VS(603). श्रीशः - श्रिय ईशः श्रीशः । VS(606) जगत्पिता - जगन्निर्माता- “एदं सर्वमसृजते” ति श्रुतिः । SS(36) विश्वमाता - विश्वस्य माता व्यापी ज्ञाता वा । SS(85) जगद्धाता - जगतां धाता कर्ता । SS(86) मातामहः - मातुः पिता मातामहः, यतुर्विधभूतग्रामस्य पार्थिवस्य मात पृथिवी, तस्याः पिता मातामहः । “स भूमिमसृजते” ति श्रुतिः । पृथिव्या मातृत्वे “एयं वै माते” ति श्रुतिः । SS(615). Devi Gauri is called महल or great or glorious because of Her greatness. But one has to remember that She is dependant on Him for Her greatness. Shiva’s greatness is revealed by the fact that He married Her though She was only the daughter of the mountain Himavan. This marriage conferred greatness on Parvati and Himavan also. Similarly as Vishnu He married LakShmi, the daughter of the ocean, and conferred honour on LakShmi and the ocean also. This is stated symbolically in our puranas. For example, DakShayani wanted to attend and participate in the sacrifice organised by Her father DakSha. Shiva told Her not to go and warned that if She disregarded His advice and went to the function She will meet with humiliation. But She went to the function overriding His advice only to be met with a barrage of insults in the assembly. Unable to bear the insult, She sacrificed Her body and was reborn as Parvati. She had to perform severe penance to please Shiva and married Him again. A similar incidence is narrated in Ramayana also. Sita spent happy days with Rama in the forest till She saw the the golden deer and became infatuated with it. She sent Him away from Her to capture it. This invited trouble for Her. The moment Rama turned His back on Her, Ravana appeared on the scene and carried Her away to Lanka. She was incarcerated for a long time and suffered greatly सिन्दूरदूरप्रथारम् - सिन्दूरम् = red lead दूर = distant, far off प्रथारम् = going away. That is, Shiva’s complexion is very red and it outshines the colour of the red lead. Shri Rudram says असौ यस्ताम्रो अरुण उत भङ्गुः सुमङ्गलः । This says that Rudra is ताम्रः = copper coloured, अरुणः = rosy, भङ्गुः = golden yellow, सुमङ्गलः = highly auspicious and beneficent. Only a few can understand and worship the avyakta or impersonal God. A larger number can contemplate Rudra as residing on Kailasa. For the benefit of the others, who form the majority of mankind, He stands in the form of the sun. The sandhya vandana mantra says सूर्य आत्मा जगतः तस्थुषश्च = the sun is the self of the world, movable and immovable. The sun is the most acclaimed and worshipped power of nature. It is said that असौ यस्ताम्रो इत्यनेन आदित्यमुपतिष्ठते । The votary

should praise and worship the sun by means of the rik असौ यस्ताम्रो in the Rudram. So ताम्रः - अत्यन्त-रक्तस्ताम्रः । “नमस्ताम्राय ये” ति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(572) is one of His names. Also He is compassionate. The quality is represented by the red colour. So His form is suffused with that colour. He is known as दयाणुः - दयाशीलो दयाणुः । अनेन परमेश्वरस्य या शान्ता तनू सर्वह्लादरूपिणी सा प्रदक्षिता । “या ते रुद्र शिवा तनू” रिति श्रुतिः SS(155) सिन्धुराजातिधीरं- सिन्धुः = the sea, ocean राजन् = a king or chief. It is used to qualify something very great or glorious. For example Kalidasa describes the Himalaya as नगाधिराजः in his Kumarasambhava. अति = a prefix used to mean very, too, exceedingly etc धीरं = strong minded, wise, resolute. सिन्धुराजा meaning the chief of the oceans : indicates a mighty ocean. The Lord is very resolute, wise and strong minded like a mighty ocean. Kalidasa defines धीरः as one who is endowed with a mind that does not waver even when assailed by deleterious forces that are capable of perverting it विकारहेतौ सति विक्रियन्ते येषां न चेतांसे त एव धीराः ॥ (Kumarasambhava-1-59). Gita and the upanishads use the word to mean a person of wisdom or discrimination.

देहि नोऽस्मिन्मया देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।

तथा देहान्तरप्रसिर्धीरस्तत्र न भुङ्ग्यति ॥ BG(2-13).

Just as in this body the Self passes into childhood and youth and old age, so does He pass into another body. The wise man has no delusions in this regard and so is not troubled in the mind. Arjuna had delusion in this regard. He admitted in the end that his delusion had been destroyed as a result of Krishna’s teaching. He said नष्टो भोऽहः स्मृतिर्लब्धा त्वत्प्रसादान्मयाऽय्युत । BG(18-73). Again

यं हि न व्यतयन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ।

समदुःखसुखं धीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते ॥ BG(2-15).

Here Krishna says a wise man who is not afflicted by pleasure and pain is fit for immortality. Such a man of wisdom is called as धीरः and also as स्थितप्रज्ञः, स्थितधीः etc.. The upanishads use the word धीरः to indicate a man of wisdom and realisation. This example is from Kathopanishad अको वशी सर्वभूतान्तरात्म अकं रूपं बहुधा यः करोति । तमात्मस्थं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीराः तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं नेतरेषाम् ॥ KU(2-2-12). “The indwelling Lord of all beings; who is one without the second and has everybody under His control; transforms His one and single entity into multifarious; those wise persons who always observe (meditate upon) that Lord abiding in self; (it is they who) enjoy that eternal bliss; not the others.” One other interpretation of the word is धीरः - धियं ईरयति, धियं प्रेरयति । ईर = to urge, elevate, bring to life. Thus the word धीरः means the Lord who is behind the intellect and gives life to it. We worship Him

through the Gayatri mantra as धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् । Shiva is known as गायत्रीवल्लभः - गायत्र्या वल्लभो गायत्रीवल्लभः । गायत्रीप्रतिपाद्य इत्यर्थः । SS(179). The avaduta sage lists the similarities between a realised man and the ocean in his conversation with the king Yadhu. The story is seen in Shri Bhagavata. He says:

मुनिः प्रसन्नगम्भीरो दृर्विगाड्यो दुरत्ययः ।
अनन्तपारो ऽयक्षोभ्यः स्तिमितोऽ धवार्णवः ॥

समृद्धकामो ढीनो वा नारायणपरो मुनिः ।
नोत्सर्पेत न शुष्येत सरिद्भिस्त्रिव सागरः ॥ BH(11-8-5 and 6).

The conversation is narrated by Krishna in His advice to Uddhava. The avaduta says: The sage should be placid and profound, difficult to fathom and to cross over, illimitable and immovable, like the ocean with its mass of waters at rest. And whether he has an abundance of enjoyable things or he has none, the sage, who has set his heart upon the Lord, neither overflows nor shrinks, like the ocean on account of the waters of the rivers. These verses say that a jnani's mind is clear. He is mature and गम्भीरः deep or profound. Describing the qualities of Rama, Narada tells the sage Valmiki that Rama was profound like the ocean समुद्रं धव गम्भीर्ये । (Balakanda-1-17). The sage will appear to be simple, but his depth of knowledge and maturity cannot be measured: दृर्विगाड्यः . Because of his immense wisdom he cannot be overcome or overpowered. He is firm. He is beyond time and space as he has found he is अनन्तः and अपारः । . अपारः means shoreless. A jnani is limitless and all pervading as he has found his true nature स्वरूपम् . He is unshakeable; this refers to his emotional strength. On this point Krishna says

दुःष्यन्नुद्विग्नमनाः सुषुषुषु विगतस्पृहः ।
वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥ BG(2-56).

His heart is not distressed in calamities. It does not long for pleasures. He is free from attachment, fear and anger. He is called a sage, a man of steady knowledge.

The sage is not disturbed by his experiences, be they favourable or unfavourable. King Parikshit was such a person. He was born in the royal family and brought up in the lap of luxury. He was said to be calm and serene like Lord Shiva प्रसादे गिरिशोपमः । BH(1-12-23). But adversity hit him hard in the form of a curse. He had only seven days left to live. But though he was initially upset, he gathered his wits and immediately started thinking of what he should do next. He renounced his kingdom, went to the banks of Ganga and sought the

advice of sages about what one in his condition should do. The jnani has realised his fullness पूर्णत्वम् . So he has no wants. His sensory experiences are like the rivers: they may bring in flood waters or may dry up. But the ocean does not swell or shrink in size. It retains its fullness. This is with reference to material possessions also. So whether he owns all desirable possessions समृद्धकामः or has none, he treats both situations like नारायणपरः gifts from God. Ramayana gives a fine example in Rama for this. He was to be made the king but this was not to be. He was asked to go to the forest instead. But this sudden change of fortune did not upset Him in the least. Valmiki says: न वनं गन्तुकामस्य त्यजतश्च वसुधराम् । सर्वलोकान्तिगस्येव लक्ष्यते चित्तविडम्बिता ॥ (Ayodhya Kanda -19-33). No change of mood was perceived in him,- any more than in a (master) yogi who surpasses all (common) men (because of his having risen above all pairs of opposites),- even though he was ready to retire to woods and was renouncing the sovereignty to the globe. The man of wisdom does not become arrogant or depressed. Rama was said to be like this सर्वदाभिगतः सद्भिः समुद्रं यव सिन्धुभिः । Bala (1-16). He was always sought by the righteous even as the ocean by the rivers. The commentators explain that just as the ocean maintains its level even when rivers flow into it, Rama was level-headed even though sadhus were regularly calling on Him. He did not become proud. It emerges then, that in the case of a man of wisdom real possessions are not material possessions and adversity is not poverty. Prosperity for him is remembrance of the Lord and calamity is forgetting Him संपदो नैव संपदः विपदो नैव विपदः । विपद् विस्मरणं विष्णोः संपद् संस्मरणं उरेः ॥ It is possible that in adversity one's weakness shows up and all thoughts of Lord recede into the background. But this does not happen in the case of a true devotee. He is not daunted by reverses. In fact Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas found from experience that calamities made her think of Him and so she prayed that she should be regularly visited by them!

विपदः सन्तु नः शश्वत्तत्र तत्र जगद्गुरो ।

भवतो दर्शनं यत्स्याद्यपुनर्भवदर्शनम् ॥ BH(1-8-25).

A jnani has realised his oneness with God. So there is no question of his forgetting Him. So, let us pray to the great Lord Margabandhu to show us the way. भजे मार्गबन्धुम् :- भजे = I worship भर्गबन्धुम् = the Lord Margabandhu. In this verse the poet uses four similies to glorify Shiva's generous nature, His strength, His complexion and His wisdom. Talking about figures of speech one has to note that they are used by poets to highlight some quality or emphasise some thing. This works all right with the things in the universe (i.e.) with

finite things. But when one tries to use similies while talking about God who is not finite but infinite they fail. The desired effect cannot be produced. One cannot find something equal to or greater than Him. Shri DikShita says this in his poem Varadarajastavam

यस्मिञ्जलात्पतिशयोक्तिरलंङ्कितित्वं
 न्यूनोपमात्वमुपमा समुपैति सर्वा
 सूक्ष्मस्वभावकलनापि य न प्रतर्क्या
 तद्दर्शयामि भवतः कथमाभिदृश्यम् ॥

He says that one cannot describe His beauty directly, or by comparing it with a like object or by exaggeration. Describing it directly is not possible because His form is very subtle and cannot be grasped by words. There being none equal to it, one cannot use a simile and offer a comparison. Also one cannot use exaggeration to highlight His form. For example Kalidasa says that King Dilipa was tall like a tree शल प्रंसुः : Raghuvamsa (1-13). This makes nice reading and sounds definitely better than saying that Raghu was exceptionally tall. But exaggeration will not work when talking about His qualities as nothing can excel them. Still poets resort to the use of the figures of speech as with the worldly objects while praising Him. This is done in their enthusiasm to sing His glory and we accept it in the right spirit.

Meaning of the verse. I worship Lord Margabandhu who is more generous than the divine Mandara tree, who is stronger than the Mandara mountain, who is close to the great Gauri, who is of crimson colour and who is more profound than the mighty ocean.

6

६. अप्पय्ययज्जवेन्द्र गीतं स्तोत्रराजं पठेद्यस्तु भक्त्या प्रयाणे ।

तस्यार्थसिद्धिं विधत्ते मार्गमध्येऽभयं आशुतोषो भडेशः ।

शम्भो ...

अप्पय्य = the name of the author यज्जन् = performer of sacrifices गीतं = sung स्तोत्रराजं great poem पठेत् = reads यः = whoever भक्त्या = with devotion प्रयाणे = during a journey तस्य = for him. अर्थ = wish, desire सिद्धिः = fulfilment, complete attainment विधत्ते = arranges. मध्यः = middle or central part मार्गमध्ये on the way अभयं = freedom from fear, security आशु = fast, quick तोषः = satisfaction, pleasure, delight. आशुतोषः means one who is easily pleased भडेशः

= name of Shiva. This verse gives the benefit or the fruit of reciting the poem and is known as ફલશ્રુતિ: । ફલં means the fruit, the result or the reward. The author says that one who reads the poem with devotion during a journey will be successful and attain his goal or wishes. In addition he will feel secure and be protected by the Lord on the way. What is the nature of the Lord? He is મહેશ: the Lord of the lords like Indra and Brahma. It is to Him that they all rush when they are confronted by fear or serious danger. This name was explained in verse No. 4 where it occurs. But though He is the supreme Lord a devotee can easily please Him by offering items that can be obtained without difficulty. He is known by following names: સુલભ: - પત્રપુષ્પફલાદિભિ-ભક્તિમાત્રસમર્પિતૈ: સુખેન લભ્યત ઇતિ સુલભ: । “પત્રેષુ પુષ્પેષુ તોયેષુ અક્રીતલભ્યેષુ સદૈવ સત્સુ । ભક્ત્યેક-લભ્યે પુરુષે પુરાણે મુક્ત્યૈ કથં ન ક્વિયતે પ્રયત્ન: ॥” ઇતિ મહાભારતે ॥ VS(817). He is easily pleased by offering some leaves, flowers or fruits. The lowly woman Sabari could please Lord Rama by offering Him some fruits she had gathered in the forest. Krishna accepted with great delight some pounded rice which the poor brahmin Kuchela brought Him. Shri Krishna says that His devotees can attain the highest results by just offering a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water પત્રં પુષ્પં ફલં તોયં યો મે ભક્ત્યા પ્રયચ્છતિ । તદહં ભક્ત્યુપહૃત- મશ્નામિ પ્રયતાત્મન: ॥ BG(9-26) Shiva is known as: કરવીરપ્રિય: - કરવીરપ્રિયત્વં શિવસ્ય પુરાણાદિષુ પ્રસિદ્ધમ્ । “એકેન કરવીરેણ સિતેનાપ્યસિતેન વા । હરિં હરં વા સંપૂજ્ય બ્રહ્માભૂયાય કલપતે” ઇતિ । અનેન શિવપૂજસ્યાં સૌલભ્યમુક્તમ્ । શિવ: પૂજનીય ઇતિ ચ ॥ SS(326).

ભક્તાનાં સુલભ: - શિવપૂજાદિપરાણાં સુલભ: , શીઘ્રમનુગ્રાહક: । તદર્તમેવ શિવમૂર્તિગ્રહણમ્ ॥ SS(484). One of Shri Lalita's names also states this fact સુખારાધ્યા - સુખેન ઉપવાસાદિરૂપકાયકલેશં ધ્યેયસ્વરૂપ- નિયમનનિર્બંધાદિકં ચાન્તરેણાપ્યારાધ્યા ॥ LS(680). Prahlada says that it does not need much effort to please Him. One need not strain himself and go on pilgrimages etc., in search of Him ન હ્યચ્યુતં પ્રીણયતઓ બહ્વાયાસોડસુરાત્મજા: । આત્મત્વાત્ સર્વભૂતાનાં સિદ્ધત્વાદિહં સર્વત: ॥ BH(6-6-19). He is the very Self of every being and He is available everywhere. There is an apocryphal story that once the author Shri DikShita was preparing to go to a nearby village on some work when he received information that some people who were ill disposed to him were hatching a diabolical plot to attack and kill him on the way. The poet composed this stotram and prayed to the Lord to ensure his safety during the journey. As a result the enemies could not carry out their plan and Shri DikShita could complete his travel in complete safety. We too can recite this stotram and be protected by the Lord in our travels. It is our tradition to mention the ફલશ્રુતિ: or the fruits of reciting or listening to stotras or

puranas or other holy texts. This is usually said in the end of the text but sometimes is mentioned in the beginning of the text or in both places. The purpose of the कृत्वश्रुतिः is to interest one in reading or listening to the composition. The author in this case had lead a religious life. He had built two temples in his native village. He had performed several sacrifices as is expected of a brahmin. So he gets the appellation dikshita appended to his name. He also states this fact by calling himself as यजन् . The Manusmriti states that performing sacrifices is one of the duties of a brahmin अध्यापनमध्ययनं यजनं याजनं तथा । दानं प्रतिग्रहं चैव ब्राह्मणानामकल्पयत् ॥ Kalidasa says that the kings of the solar dynasty tended the sacrificial fires by means of offerings and honoured the guests also. यथाविधि हुताग्नीनां यथाकामार्थितार्थिनाम् । (Raghuvamsa-1-6). Manu further says that the noble ones should eat only the remains of this yagna as only it is worth eating. One who cooks for himself eats sin

अद्यं स देवलं सुदुक्ते यः पयत्यात्मकारणात् ।

यज्ञशिष्टाशनं ह्येतत्सतामन्नं विधीयते ॥

Krishna talks at length about various kinds of sacrifices in Gita (in chapter IV). He eulogises the performance of sacrifices by saying

यज्ञशिष्टामृतभूजो यान्ति ब्रह्म सनातनम् ।

नायं लोकोऽस्ययज्ञस्य कुतोऽन्यः कुरुसत्तम ॥

Eating the ambrosia, the remnant of the sacrifice, they go to the eternal brahman. Even this world, which is common to all beings is not for one who does not perform the sacrifices mentioned. How can there be to him another world which can be secured only by superior means? (BG 4-31). The Lord Himself is called yagna यज्ञः- सर्वयज्ञस्वयं पत्वाद् यज्ञः; “यज्ञो वै विष्णुः” (तै-सं-१-७-४) ऽति श्रुतेः । VS(445). Also यज्ञः- सर्वयज्ञस्वयं पत्वाद् यज्ञः । “त्वं यज्ञस्त्वं विष्णुः” रिति श्रुतिः ॥ SS(160). The performance of prescribed duties or what is known as karmas is necessary to get purification of the mind. This is the necessary first step in the path of spiritual progress चित्तस्य शुद्धये कर्म says Shri Sankaracharya in his Vivekachudamani. He defines such a person who has been regularly performing the sacrifices as noble minded महात्मानः अक्षुद्रचित्तः in his commentary (BG-19-13). Anandagiri elaborates the definition as मदान् प्रकृष्टो यज्ञादितिः शोधित आत्मा सत्त्वं येषां - those whose minds have been purified by sacrifice etc.. Such a person who is sincere, performs the duties expected of him and is broad minded is known as आसः - आसः यथार्थवक्ता । - a credible, trustworthy person. Such persons speak from experience. So we need not question their sincerity but accept what they

say as the truth with complete faith. Thus our tradition says आत्मवाक्यं प्रमाणम् । Great men act and speak for the good of the world only. They have no axes to grind. King Parikshit mentions this point when he greets the great sages who had come to see him in his last days समागताः सर्वत एव सर्वे वेदा यथा मूर्तिधरास्त्रिपृष्ठे । नेडाथवामुत्र य ऊश्चनार्थं ऋते परानुग्रहमात्मशीलम् ॥ The king said “shining like the vedas you have all come together from every quarter. You have no purpose of your own in this world (to achieve) in this world or in the next, except doing good to others , which is your innate disposition.” BH(1-19-23). Shri Sankaracharya also talks about this trait of great men:

शान्ता मछान्तो निवसन्ति सन्तो वसन्तवल्लोडडितं यरन्तः ।

तीर्णाः स्वयं भीमभवार्षवं जनान्छेतुनान्यानपि तारयन्तः ॥ (Vivekachudamani).

There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever गीतं = sung, chanted. The poet says that he had sung the poem. Does it mean he had not composed it? For example, one of the definitions of the word भगवद्गीता is that it was sung or chanted by Krishna: श्रीमत्तु भगवत्तु गीत्तु . This implies that He was not the author of the work (न कृतु) but was merely repeating what had been said by someone else earlier. Krishna Himself told Arjuna that He had imparted the same teaching long back to the Sun (Vivasvat) at the commencement of evolution by Him. This was then handed down in regular succession among the royal sages (men who were at once kings and sages). Thus it was an ancient teaching. The text may be different but the contents are essentially the same. They can be found in the upanishads also. One of the Gita Dhyana states this:

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो, दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः । पार्थो वत्सः,

सुधीर्भोक्ता, दुग्धं गीतामृतं मडत् ॥

The upanishads are like the cows. Gopala is the one who milks them. Partha (Arjuna) forms the calf. The pure minded one is the partaker and the supreme nectar Gita is the milk. In the same manner, in this case also the poet had glorified the Lord by stringing together some of His attributes. These attributes are to be found in the puranas etc., and so were known long back. Also the fact that singing the glories of the Lord will confer great benefits is also known from time immemorial. In the introduction to the Vishnu Sahasranama Bhishma tells Yudhishtira: I will tell you some of the renowned names of the Lord culled from various sources (such as the vedas and puranas) by great sages. These names will confer

all merits यानि नामानि गौणानि विभ्यातानि मडात्मनः । ऋषिभिः परिगीतानि तानि वक्ष्यामि भूतये ॥ Thus, the use of the word “sung” (गीतम्) seems appropriate. Why this piece is called स्तोत्र रत्न a great or splendid piece of work? In the beginning of Chapter 9 of Gita, Krishna talks of the knowledge of brahman and to glorify the subject He calls it राजविद्या राजगुह्यम् । “the sovereign science, the sovereign secret.” It is called sovereign because it talks of brahman and not of any lowly subject. It shows the way to wash off one’s sins and attain brahman. Similarly this stotra glorifies the Lord who is brahman, who is limitless and thus supreme. It does not talk of some thing that is inferior or perishable like a monarch or gods like Indra and Brahma who are all in the clutches of time. It says then पठेद्यस्तु भक्त्या प्रयाज्ञे तस्य अर्थसिद्धिं विधत्ते । (i.e.) whoever reads this with devotion during a journey, the mission will be completed successfully. The emphasis is on the word भक्त्या - with devotion. This implies that such great hymns should not be read or chanted mechanically, by rote but with devotion. One should put his heart and mind in it. Bhishma says so in the introduction to Vishnu Sahasranama : “Among the dharmas prescribed the one I am going to say namely, worshipping the Lord by singing His glories with devotion is, I consider the best.” अथ मे सर्वधर्माणां धर्मोऽधिकतमो मतः । यद्भक्त्या पुण्डरीकाक्षं स्तवैर्यज्ञैः सदा ॥ This is in reply to King Yudishtira’s question to him “which among the dharmas or duties you have mentioned is , according to you the best?”

को धर्मः सर्वधर्माणां भवतः परमो मतः?

Bhakti (devotion) while chanting the names of the Lord is mentioned more than once in the end after the stotram also. For example it is said:

भक्तिमान् यः सद्योत्थाय शुचिस्तद्गतमानसः । सडञ्जं

वासुदेवस्य नाम्नामेतत् प्रकीर्तयेत् ॥ १२५ ॥

धर्मं स्तवमधीयानः श्रद्धाभक्तिसमन्वितः ।

युज्येतात्मसुभक्षान्ति-श्रीधृतिस्मृतिकीर्तिभिः ॥ १३२ ॥

Shri Sankaracharya , in his commentary, says: भक्तिमानित्यादिना भक्तिमतः शुभेः सततमुद्युक्तस्यैकाग्रचित्तस्य श्रद्धालोर्विशिष्टाधिकांशैः कृत्वविशेषं दर्शयति । Thus a great deal of emphasis is laid on devotion and faith. The Lord is अनिमिषः । always awake VS(215) and on the look-out for people who have devotion. He has innumerable number of ears, eyes, mouths etc.. सर्वतः पाणिपादं तत् सर्वतोऽक्षिशिरोरुडम् । सर्वतः श्रुतिमात्लोडे सर्वमावृत्य तिष्ठति ॥ SU(3-6). His (as Ganesa) ears are big and very sensitive. With them He can hear even

prayers muttered softly. With His long proboscis He can detect even the faintest aroma of piety. He loves sincere prayers offered by His devotees and blesses them. He has the name: स्तवप्रियः VS(680). This does not mean that He loves adulation. He has no need for it. It is we who benefit by singing His glories. It was said पठेद्यस्तु ब्रह्म्या प्रयाणो तस्य अर्थसिद्धिं विधत्ते मार्गमध्येऽभवय आशुतोषो भडेशः । (i.e.) whoever reads this with devotion during a journey, the Lord will ensure that the mission is completed successfully. In addition he will feel secure as he will be protected by the Lord on the way. We noted that the word प्रयाणम् means departure, or journey. But if we scratch a bit deeper we find that the word also means death or departure from this world. This latter meaning puts the statement in a different perspective and introduces a very important topic viz., the last moments of one's life and how it is to be managed. Both प्रयाणकालः and अन्तकालः mean the same thing. The Bhagavatha Purana is very relevant in this context as it deals with this subject elaborately. It presents case histories of the last moments of many people to illustrate the theories that are stated in it. This subject is introduced by Krishna at the end of chapter 7 of Gita and dealt with in detail in the next chapter. He says

अन्तकाले य मामेव स्मरन्मुक्त्वा कलेवरम् ।

यः प्रयाति स मद्भावं याति नास्त्यत्र संशयः ॥

Who at the time of death, thinking of me alone, leaves the body and goes forth, he reaches My being; there is no doubt in this. BG(8-5). And;

यं यं वापि स्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम् ।

तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावात्भावितः । BG(8-6).

Thinking of whatever Being at the end a man leaves the body, Him alone, O son of Kunti, he reaches by whom the thought of that Being has been constantly dwelt upon. The word Being may mean any personal God (एष्ट देवता) (like Shiva or Devi) other than Krishna or any friend or relative or anything else (may be his house or bank balance or even his pet) that had been occupying the person's thought. This is mentioned in the upanishad also.

कामान्यः कामयते मन्यमानः स कामभिर्जयते तत्र तत्र ।

पर्याप्तकामस्य कृतात्मनस्त्विडेव सर्वे प्रविलीयन्ते कामाः ॥ MU(3-2-2).

An example is to be found in the story of the sage Bharatha that is familiar to all. This is told in the fifth book of Bhagavatham. The great king ruled over the entire country. It is because of him that the country has come to be known as Bharatam अजनाभं नामैतद्दर्शं भारतमिति यत आरभ्य व्यपदिशन्ति BH(5-7-3). The king was - मडाभागवतः a great devotee of

the Lord. After ruling the country for a long time he handed over the kingdom to his sons and retired to the forest. There, in the forest, he devoted his time in the worship of the Lord and derived great satisfaction. But he developed an infatuation for a fawn. His mind got diverted from the worship of the Lord. He was engrossed in protecting and caressing the young deer. Even as he was spending his time playing and protecting the deer the hour of death approached him. He died looking on the deer intently.

तदानीमपि-पार्श्ववर्तिनं आत्मजमिवानुशोचन्तं अस्मिन्दीक्षमाणे

मृगं येवास्मिन्निवेशितमना विसृज्य लोकमिमं सद्य मृगोऽ

कलेवरं मृतमनु न मृतजन्मानुस्मृतिः

धृतरवन्-मृगशरीरमवाप ।

As a consequence he was reborn as a deer. BH(5-8-27). Shri Suka says in anguish that Bharatha, a great devotee, instead of attaining the supreme goal, died like other common people and was reborn. A person with unfulfilled desires at the time of death gets the birth suitable to the fulfilment of the desires. So to one who wants to avoid rebirth Krishna says:

तस्मात्सर्वेषु कालेषु मामनुस्मर युध्य च ।

मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिमिवैष्यस्यसंशयः ॥ BG(8-7)

Therefore at all times you meditate on Me and fight; with mind and reason fixed on Me you shall doubtless come to Me alone. . Here “fight” means doing one’s allotted duty. This means that if one thinks of Him in his last moment he will attain Him. “Attaining” means realising Him by knowing His true nature. Krishna says this a bit later in clarification. He says – पुरुषः स परः पार्थ भक्त्यालस्य-स्त्वनन्यथा । BG(8-22). That Purusha, O Arjuna! within Whom all beings dwell, by Whom all this is pervaded, may be won by means of exclusive devotion. Shri Sankaracharya in his explanation says that “exclusive devotion” means exclusive devotion, characterised by jnana or knowledge of the self. स भक्त्या लस्यस्तु ज्ञानलक्षणया अनन्यथा आत्मविषयथा । is to be noted. Why should “devotion” should be characterised by jnana? In answer he refers to what was said earlier (in verse 7-17). The jnani is the best devotee as he is exclusively devoted to Him तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त ऐकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते Of them (the four types of devotees mentioned in verse No.16) all, the knower, ever steadfast and exclusively devoted excels. Shri Sankaracharya says that the wise man knows the truth and so is steadfast. He is exclusively devoted; for none else is seen deserving of devotion. Attaining Him means liberation from the repeated cycle of birth and death. Bhishma mentions this fact as he lay dying on the bed of arrows. Krishna was

present by his side . He prepared to shed his body at the auspicious time since he had the power to do so. He praised Krishna for His kindness to be present by his side at the crucial moments. He says:

भक्त्याऽऽवेश्य मनो यस्मिन् वाया यत्राम कीर्तयन् ।

त्यजन् क्लेशं योगी मुख्यते कामकर्मभिः ॥ BH(1-9-23).

A yogi who casts off his body with his thought fixed on Him through devotion and chanting His name with his tongue is rid of all hankerings and released from the bondage of actions. Then Bhishma stopped the wanderings of his senses and praised the Lord निवृत्सर्वेन्द्रियवृत्तिविभ्रमस्तुष्टाव जन्मं विसृजन्जनार्दनम् । BH(1-9-31). The first verse he said in praise of the Lord shows that he had shed his attachments and he was surrendering his pure mind to Him

एति मतिरुपकल्पिता वितृष्णा भगवति सात्वतपुङ्गवे विभूम्नि ।

स्वसुभमुपगते क्वचिद् विडर्तुं प्रकृतिमुपेयुषि यद् भवप्रवादः ॥ BH(1-9-32).

He said that on the eve of his departure from this world he offers his mind which is free from all thirst for worldly enjoyment to the Supreme Lord. He begins by saying एति - “thus or in this manner.” “In this manner” means “in the manner as advised by You.” Has not Krishna promised earlier that: ” with mind and reason fixed on Me you shall doubtless come to Me alone?” मथ्यर्पितमनोबुद्धि-मर्भिवैष्यस्थंशयः ॥ Thus Bhishma said that he was offering his mind that was free from all hankerings to Him and was thus qualified for liberation. Now, because such attainment of the Lord is the ultimate goal one can desire, saints pray to Him to bless them with His thoughts in their last moments. Thus Lilasuka prayed:

व्यत्यस्तपाद-मवतंसित-बर्द्धिर्बर्द्ध,

साथीकृतानन-निवेशित-वेशुर-भ्रम् ।

तेजः परं परमकारुणिकं पुरस्तात्,

प्राणप्रयाण-समये मम सन्निधत्ताम् ॥

He prays that he should be blessed with the vision of his favourite God Krishna that is at once bewitching and radiant, and a picture of kindness, standing with His legs crossed, decorated with a peacock feather tucked in His hair, playing the flute with His slightly inclined head, in his dying moments. Now, Krishna says that by thinking of Him in one’s last moments one can escape death and get relief. So can one be “smart” and think of Him only in his last moments but after leading a wayward or a “busy” life that had left him no time to think of the world to come? “No,” say our scriptures and saints. The reason is that the

last moments can be very traumatic for a variety of reasons. As one grows old and infirm his will power becomes steadily weaker. His subconscious is saturated with numerous thoughts. These thoughts will take over and his free will will not be able to function. If a person had laboured hard chasing “success” in life, accumulating wealth and all the appurtenances that go with it then he would have developed strong bonds with all of them. The thought of having to leave all those hard earned possessions behind will be hovering in his mind and be very painful. Thus he will die thinking of his money and perhaps worrying how all that is going to be managed in his absence. Or one may be very attached to his family members. The thought that he will soon be whisked away from them can be very excruciating and occupy his mind at that critical moment. Or it is possible that one may live long but may be overcome by debility and sickness in the old age. The suffering can be so intense that any other thought is rendered impossible. Further no one can predict precisely when the end will come. So it is not possible to plan and work on thinking of the Lord in the last moments. Thus, there can be many reasons for not being able to think of Him. So one should practise thinking of Him right from young age and at all the time possible. In this way the mind, slowly but steadily, gets saturated with the thought of God. Then there is a good chance of the thought surfacing at the right time. The words अन्तर्काले च literally mean “in the final moments also.” The “also” means, not only the final moments, but also the time preceding the crucial moments - “all through the life” as then only one can expect to be blessed with the thought of the Lord. The devotee Kulasekara prays

कृष्ण त्वदीय-पद-पङ्कजपञ्जरान्तः, अद्यैव मे विशतु

मानस-राजकुसुमः ।

प्राणप्रयाणसमये कङ्क-वात-पित्तैः, कण्ठावरोधनविधौ

स्मरणं कुतस्ते ॥

He prays to Krishna that his mind should now itself surrender to Him. He asks how it will be possible to think of Him in the final moments when the throat will be choked with phlegm etc.. and consequently there will be acute suffering. The celebrated vaishnavite saint Periazhwar makes a similar request. He says that the last moments will be painful. His physical strength will be depleted. His faculties will not be functioning properly. In such a situation he will not be able to think of Him. Because of these reasons he says that he is surrendering to the Lord now itself when the body has strength and mind is functioning properly. Then what happens to the atheist who keeps himself busy earning for himself,

his family with no thought of the hereafter and perhaps leads a sybaritic life? It is a sad situation, say our scriptures. Lord Kapila in His advice to His mother Devahuti gives a graphical, albeit terrifying picture of the last moments of such a person. He says:

वायुनोत्स्रमतोत्तारः ककुसंरुद्धनाडिकः ।

कासश्चासकृतायासः कण्ठे घुर्घुरायते ॥

(At the approach of death) his eye-balls are shot out by the action of the life-breath trying to find an exit: his wind-pipe gets choked with phlegm, coughing and breathing cause him exertion and death-rattle is heard from his throat.

शयानः परिशोचद्भिः परिवीतः स्वबन्धुभिः ।

वाच्यमानोऽपि न भ्रूते कालपाशवशं गतः ॥

Lying (in his bed) surrounded by his sorrowing relations and caught in the noose of Death, he cannot utter a word even when addressed.

अेवं कुटुम्बभरणे व्यापृतत्माजितेन्द्रियः ।

म्रियते रुदतां स्वनामुरुवेदनयास्तधीः ॥

Thus a man of uncontrolled senses, who is absorbed exclusively in worldly concerns, dies with a mind afflicted and stupified, and with his relatives standing by, crying with grief.

Further it is said that in the case of such person the memory of the present life slowly fades. The प्रारब्धम् pertaining to the next birth is ready to take over and the person gets a vision of the next birth to come. In addition, Sage Kapila says that, the person will also have a vision of the messengers of Death who have come to lead him away from this world.

यमदूतौ तदा प्राप्तौ भीमौ सरभसेक्षणी ।

स दृष्ट्वा त्रस्तदृष्टयः शङ्कभूत्रं विमुञ्चति ॥

He then sees before him two emissaries of Yama, huge in size and menacing with their terrific eyes. The sight makes him shudder and evacuate in fear. BH(3-30. 16 to 19). Kapila says further:

अेवं कुटुम्बं भिक्षाण उदरम्बर अेव वा ।

विसृज्येडोभयं प्रेत्य भुङ्क्ते तद्दुलमीदृशम् ॥

Thus a man who lives his life entirely for the pleasure of his body and for the support of his family is wrenched away from both and subjected to the sufferings of purgatory. BH(3-30-30).

अेकः प्रपद्यते ध्वान्तं छित्वेदं स्वकलेवरम् ।

कुशलेतरपाथेयो भूतद्रोडेण यद् भृतम् ॥

The body which a man has nourished by exploiting and inflicting cruelty on other creatures, he will have to abandon here and go alone to hell with the wages of his sins as his sole asset. BH(3-30-31).

डेवलेन ङ्यधर्मेषु कुटुम्बभरशोत्सुकः ।

याति शुवोऽन्धतामिश्रं यरभं पदम् ॥

A man who lives in this world merely for supporting himself and his family by thoroughly unrighteous means will certainly reach Andhatamisra, the hell of utter darkness. BH(3-30-33).

अधस्तान्नरलोकस्य यावतीर्यातनाधयः ।

ऋमशः समनुकम्य पुनरत्राप्रजेषुचिः ॥

Then attaining again to this world, he passes through various animal bodies one after another as part of his punishment until, having paid for his sins, he is purified. He is then born again as a man. BH(3-30-34). Now, let us hear the same thing from the horse's mouth. Yama the god of death told the boy Nachiketa:

न साम्परायः प्रतिभाति बालं, प्रमाद्यन्तं वित्तमोडेन मूढम् ।

अयं लोको नास्ति परं एति मानी, पुनः पुनर्वशमापद्यते मे ॥ KU(1-2-6).

Hypnotised by the attraction of wealth he fails to take notice of the other world. For him the visible world is everything, and there is nothing like the other world (heaven or hell). Such a person comes within my clutches again and again. Having gone through the above material about the "last moments" let us seek the answers to the following questions:

- 1- why does one fear death?
- 2- when do the "last moments" begin?
- 3- how should one prepare himself for the "last moments?" and
- 4- how much time the preparations will require?

We will try to answer the questions here.

1- why does one fear death?

One can be expected to fear or abhor or shun some experience if he had had previously tasted it and found it unpleasant or painful. But death can not be such an event. One could not have experienced death earlier in this very life and carry on the experience of it in the same life. We find that even insects try to avoid death. Because of this reason our scriptures

say that this fear is inherited from previous births. The sage Patanjali mentions this in his Yogasutras and calls the fear अभिनिवेशः । He says that the fear affects the wise people also.

स्वरसवाडी विदुषोऽपि तथाऽदोऽभिनिवेशः । साधनपादः-८।

स्वस्थ रसेन संस्कारैर्लौक्य वडतीति स्वरसवाडी ।

अपिशब्दसमुच्चितमविद्वांसं तथेति तच्छब्दः

पराभुशति ।

रुढः प्रसिद्धः । तथाय यथाऽविदुषः तथा विदुषोऽपि

स्वरसवाडित्वत्वेतुना यज्जतीयः यत्त्वेशो भयाभ्यः

प्रसिद्धोऽस्ति सोऽभिनिवेश इत्यर्थः । विदुषामपि

मरणत्रासकृतं भयमस्तीति भाष्यकृतोक्तम् ।

पूर्वपूर्वजन्मसु

मरणकाले यत्रासो जातो “मा न भूवं भूयासम्”

इत्युक्तं तत्रासो भयनामा तज्जन्त-संस्करमात्रा-

दविदुषामिवा- त्मविद्यामपि स जायते, न तत्राविद्यादिकं

कारणमिति ।

2- When do the “last moments” begin?

Suppose a person plans to go on a long trip, say, to Kasi and he had never been there earlier. One can easily imagine the excitement that wells up in his mind. He will start running around, gathering all the information about the place. He will start looking for people who can provide the information, the train fare and numerous other details. All these activities will be occupying his mind constantly as there will be some associated tension also. He may be physically present in his home town but his mind has already gone to the other place. So we may say that the journey begins the moment it is conceived of. The actual travel is also there and will follow. Similarly our journey begins the moment we start thinking of the other world. The pilgrimage to Kasi may come through or not: but this journey we are talking about has to be undertaken by everyone. The details are plunged in mystery. So it is incumbent on everyone to start knowing the complete details about the travel and making the preparations. All these are to be done now and without delaying it any further. It is said that death takes birth along with our birth. BH(10-1-38). Vasudeva points this out to Kamsa. मृत्युः जन्मवतां वीर देवेन सड जायते । अद्य वा अब्यशतान्ते वा मृत्युर्वै प्राणिनां ध्रुवम् ॥ From that moment it never leaves us even for a moment. Rama says this to Bharata when the latter meets him in Chitrakoota. Bharata is inconsolable at all the tragic events that had

happened in his absence. His father had died leaving his three mothers widowed, Ayodhya was plunged in grief and to cap it all his dear brother Rama had been expelled from the kingdom. Rama consoles him and points out that death is inevitable. There is no use in grieving over the dead as every one is inexorably moving towards his own end. So Rama advises him to stop crying over the king who is gone and instead to grieve for himself. अडे रात्राणि गच्छन्ति सर्वेषां प्राणिनामिड । आरूषि क्षपयन्त्याशु ग्रीष्मे जलमिवांशवः ॥ Passing days and nights quickly end the life-span of all living beings in this world, (even) as sunbeams suck up the water in summer.

आत्मानमनुशोच्य त्वं डिमन्यमनुशोचसि ।
आयुस्तु डीयते यस्य स्थितस्यास्य गतस्य च ॥

Grieve for yourself (alone), why do you grieve for another? In fact, the life-span of each and every creature, whether staying (at home) or departed (for another place), gets shortened (every moment).

सडैव मृत्युर्गजति सड मृत्युर्निषीदति ।
गत्वा सुदीर्घमध्वानं सड मृत्युर्निवर्तते ॥

Death ever walks with us (when we are walking) and remains seated with us (while we are sitting). (Nay,) having travelled a very long distance (with us) death returns with us (on our return). (Ayodhya Kanda -105-20, 21 and 22). Thus, one has to be alive to the fact that death is shadowing us. Because of this reason there has to be a sense of urgency and every moment has to be considered as the last moment. This is where the glory of Shrimad Bhagavatham becomes evident. If Ramayana teaches us the art of living then Shrimad Bhagavatham becomes an excellent treatise on the art of dying. This is because this purana gives in detail the answer to the third question: 3- How should one prepare himself for the “last moments?” This is one of the two questions asked by the king Parikshit to the sage Suka as the king is left with just a week to live. He asks:

अतः पृच्छामि संसिद्धिं योगिनां परमं गुरुम् ।
पुरुषस्येड यत् कार्यं म्रियमाणस्य सर्वथा ॥

“I enquire of you, the greatest preceptor of the Yogis, the character and the means of the highest realisation. What should be done under all circumstances by a man who is on the verge of death?” BH(1-12-37). The answer to the questions is given in the Book II of Bhagavatam and has been elaborated in the further Books also. This is similar to what is

said in chapter 8 of Gita. We have seen that those who are soaked in samsara and lead a Bohemian life get inferior births. Those who perform their duties and rituals with desires सकाम कर्मा get births suitable for the fulfilment of the desires. Those who perform desireless karmas निष्काम कर्मा and also upasana (which includes offering prayers, worship of the Lord in any particular form etc.) form the next higher category. Krishna advises that such people should, at the time of departure, cut off all attachments. Then they should concentrate on the Lord in His cosmic form as Virat Purusha or Viswarupa Iswara and leave the body. They attain liberation in stages called इममुक्तिः ।

प्रयाण काले मनसाऽथलेन भक्त्या युक्तो योगबलेन चैव ।

भ्रुवोर्मध्ये प्राणमावेश्य सम्यक् स तं परं पुरुषामुपैति दिव्यम् ॥ BG(8-10) .

But a person of wisdom - jnani- who has realised his true nature does not worry about death as it is meaningless to him. He is free and liberated - मुक्तः । He is totally detached from the body. The celebrated Tamil saint Pattinaththar presents this matter in his own unique rather blunt way. The body by itself is inert only. It is the presence of the consciousness in it that keeps it alive. Thus the only difference between a living body and the dead one is the presence of the animating life in the living body. And sooner or later the living body will also become dead or a corpse. So the saint, who was the personification of detachment, calls it as the “will-soon-be-dead” corpse! Or to put it in his language one is a dead corpse and the other a “will-soon-be-dead corpse” only. If one accepts this truth then one need not grieve over death. This is a well known fact only, but comes as a rude revelation. He is amused at the sight of a group of people surrounding a dead body and crying over it. He asks Lord Shiva at the famous Kanchipuram temple “O Lord! whence is this confusion; some will-soon-be -dead corpses falling and crying over a dead-corpse?” A pregnant, though a very disturbing one, statement that leaves us much to ponder.

4- How much time the preparations will require?

The “preparation” is for escaping death and it is meaningful only for one for whom “death” has meaning. As pointed out earlier “death” is irrelevant for a person who has gained wisdom. “One can escape death only by knowing Him. There is no other way to escape death.” So assert the shahtras. तमेव विदित्वातिमृत्युमेति नाभ्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय ॥ SU(3-8). Thus the one who has gained wisdom is clear that death can destroy only the body and not him. So he has no fear of death. Yama-the Lord of death says this to the boy Nachiketa

who sought wisdom from him:

अशरीरं शरीरेषु अनवस्थेष्ववस्थितम् ।

महान्तं विभुमात्मानं मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥

The wise person does not grieve. He knows that the all-pervading, the greatest Supreme Self is present without body among all the perishable bodies. KU(1-2-22). Thus the preparation is relevant only to others who are in various stages of spiritual progress. They have to gain wisdom first to be able to reject death. This is illustrated by the story of Markandeya. He was a devout worshipper of Lord Shiva. He knew death was imminent. When the hour of death approached he embraced Shiva (who is the very embodiment of knowledge) implying he got wisdom and with the wisdom rejected death and as a result he became immortal.

The question now becomes how long does it take to gain wisdom about ourselves. Unfortunately Krishna says it is a very long process and may involve many births अङ्गनां जन्मना-मन्ते ज्ञानवान् मां प्रपद्यते । वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥ BG(7-19). At the end of many births, the man of wisdom comes to Me, (realising) that Vasudeva is the all: he is the noble-souled, very hard to find. Shri Sankaracharya explains in his commentary that these many births are required to gain the mental maturity to make him fit enough to acquire and assimilate the supreme wisdom that liberates him. अङ्गनां जन्मनां ज्ञानार्थसंस्काराभ्याणां अन्ते समामौ ज्ञानवान् प्राप्नोति पादज्ञानः मां वासुदेवं प्रत्यात्मानं प्रत्यक्षतः प्रपद्यते । He then realises the goal to be reached is Vasudeva who is the inner self of all. Why such a person is extremely rare to find? Krishna had said earlier: मनुष्याणां सङ्घेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये । यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥ BG(7-3). Just one man among thousands strives to win the knowledge: among those who know and strive, only one comes to know Me in truth. What is the reason for this unfortunate situation? Why are people not interested in the path of knowledge that assures them liberation? The reasons can be many. One is that we have tenanted the body in innumerable births and have become attached to it. The attachment is so great that we have come to take the body to be ourselves. It sounds preposterous to hear that we are not the body, but something occupying it. It is naturally difficult, almost impossible to shake off the attachment that we have so assiduously nourished over such a long time. Secondly all the talk about the other world and liberation etc., sounds very theoretical. Things like heaven and God appear nebulous and remote. What they are said to offer is not certain. So one tends to prefer the bird in the hand and not the promised land. We do not come across

any who had been there and could narrate their experiences. All that we hear about is only culled from various books. Thus it is very difficult to get a lively interest in the subject. Then there are enough discussions on other mundane topics that can veer us away from the subject. The influences of the media, the alien religions, the many incidents that happen around us and some of our own experiences add to the scepticism and help to slacken what little interest one might have developed in the subject. Then the preparatory steps that one is expected to go through to become a qualified student for taking up the study of vedanta can be daunting. They too can put off one from taking serious interest in the subject. Because the steps known as साधन यत्तुष्टयसंपत्तिः or the four fold qualifications include things such as control of the mind to curb its wandering tendencies so that it becomes focussed on a subject, control of the sense organs so that they become disciplined, detachment to the pleasures of the world. Thus the reasons why people are not interested in the topic of liberation can be many. One is busy during the active part of the life. The general tendency is to put off religion for the post retirement period. But then it may be too late! Old age will bring with it its own problems. So Shri Sankaracharya wails: बालस्तावत् कीडासक्तः तरुणास्तावत् तरुणीसक्तः । वृद्धस्तावच्छिन्तासक्तः परेभ्रमणो कोऽपि न सक्तः ॥ So our scriptures advise one to start the practices early in life before one gets sucked into the whirlpool of life. Prahlada tenders this considered advice to his friends: कौमार आचरेत्प्राज्ञो धर्मान् भागवतानि । BH(7-6-1). When young the mind is fresh, receptive to advices and is not yet polluted by the pulls and pushes of the world. Kalidasa mentions that the kings of the solar dynasty, about whom he writes in his great work Raghuvamsam, acquainted with this subject even when young. He says शैशवेऽव्यस्तविधानि (1-7). Our tradition says that only that learning that leads to liberation can be called education. सा विद्या या विमुक्तये । Shri Sankaracharya also defines education as आत्मनो बोधः while commenting on the popular verse beginning विद्या विनयसंपन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि । BG(5-18). It is knowing about Self. Thus Devi (Lakshmi, Lalita) is called Vidya विद्या । The commentator's explanation is: भोक्षप्रदज्ञानस्वरूपत्वाद्धिद्या । (Lalita Sahasranamam. No 549). Other subjects are learnt only to eke out a living. They will not be useful beyond a point of time. Thus they are inferior. So a wise person will not fail to give utmost importance to this subject. This is said in our upanishads

द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये षति ७ स्म यद्ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति परा शैवापरा च ।
तत्रापरा ऋग्वेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदोऽथर्ववेदः शिक्षा कल्पो व्याकरणं

निरुक्तं छन्दो ज्योतिषमिति । अथ परा यथा तदक्षरमधिगम्यते ॥

MU(1-4 and 5).

These mantras say that there are two Vidyas worth knowing to men - Para and Aparā. Out of these two; the vedas, and all their branches through which one can gain the worldly and otherworldly enjoyments is the inferior one and is called Aparā Vidya. Para or the superior one is that through which the imperishable brahman is known. Yama also tells this to his student Nachiketa: श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतस्तौ संपरीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः । KU(1-2-2). He says that two paths present themselves before every one. One is called sreyas i.e., the one that offers release from all miseries for ever and the other is called preyas i.e., the means of obtaining the pleasures of this world. The wise person prefers the former viz., sreyas in comparison to preyas. The Tamil saint Tiruvalluvar also points this out in his great work Tirukkural. He asks what profit have those derived from learning if it does not lead to the worship of the Lord who is possessed of pure knowledge? But generally all these warnings and advices fall on deaf ears. Consequently we have to take the long path for salvation. The story of Gajendra, the elephant narrated in the eighth book of Bhagavata illustrates this point. The elephant symbolises one covered with ignorance. The elephant has a large family comprising of she elephants and baby elephants - a typical samsari. He was “enjoying” the life. He was afflicted with the heat and entered a lake full of fragrant waters. The fragrant waters represent the vAsanAs or the latent tendencies accumulated in previous births. He enjoyed a refreshing bath, sprayed the cool waters on the female elephants as well as their young ones and made them also drink. This he did out of attachment to his own herd. Shri Suka adds - like a householder यथागृही । Such a one steeped in samsara normally does not imagine there can be trouble around the corner. Thus the elephant could not foresee the imminent problem - नायष्ट कुच्छं कुपणोऽजमायथा । . A crocodile - representing kala - caught hold of the elephant. The elephant struggled hard to free himself but did not succeed. The gods looked on the struggle without coming forward to help. The struggle went on for thousands of years. This long time represents the numerous births one wrapped in ignorance has to take. The elephant found that his family members left him one by one . He was left alone, drained of energy and helpless. At this point the distraught animal cried to the Lord for help. Indra, Brahma and similar gods did not respond as they too are in the grip of time. The appearance of the Lord shows the dawn of wisdom. He killed

the crocodile and released the elephant meaning that with the gaining of wisdom one is released from samsara or the cycle of birth and death.

Shri Suka gives another example of the king Khatwanga of the solar dynasty. He was very powerful and on several occasions had helped the gods in their fights against the asuras. Once, after such a fight the devas wanted to offer a favour in return for the help they have received from the king. The only favour the king wanted was to know the duration of life remaining. Much against their will the devas had to inform him that he had only about an hour to left to live. The king at once rushed back to earth, renounced every thing, meditated on the Lord in that brief period of time and got liberation

भङ्गाङ्गो नाम राजर्षिः ज्ञात्वेयत्तामिडायुषाः ।

भुङ्कतात् सर्वमुत्सृज्य गतवान्भयं हरिम् ॥ BH(2-1-13).

Most appropriately Shri Suka calls the king राजर्षिः or royal sage, a saint like king. How can this be possible when Krishna had said that one can get liberated only after repeated births? The answer lies in the fact that one has to take several births before coming to the path of devotion: but having stepped into the right path he will get births suitable for his spiritual progress

तत्र तं बुद्धि-संयोगं लभते पौर्वदेहिङ्कम् ।

यतते य ततो भूयः संसिद्धौ कुरुनन्दन ॥ BG(6-43).

Krishna says that in his new birth he gains touch with the knowledge that was acquired in the former body. He strives with greater vigour than that with which he strove before for perfection. Thus the progress continues and does not stop till one gains wisdom mentioned in our shastras. At that stage one's preparations are over. Thus the king too was making progress. He got birth in the right environment i.e., the solar dynasty. He got the right education even as a child just like Kalidasa said of the kings of the solar dynasty शैशवेऽस्यस्तविद्यानाम् । The story of Khatwanga is told in book nine of Bhagavatha. The king, on being informed of the short span of life left did not panic or get agitated: but was smart enough to take appropriate steps without delay. He said that even as a child he knew what was reality and was not attached to sense pleasures offered by his vast kingdom. Thus, thanks to the right education he had received in his early days he had wisdom. He could renounce his kingdom etc., without hesitation and sit in meditation. These characteristics were also typical of the kings of solar dynasty i.e., यथाकालप्रभोधिनि they were alert at all

times when vigilance was called for and then at the end (of their lives) they abandoned their bodies by means of meditation योगेना-ते तनुव्यजम् . This is mentioned by Kalidasa in his Raghuvamsam. No wonder, then the king got the result he wanted in a short time. Shri Suka gives the example

of a great monarch to king Parikshit: not that of an ordinary person or a sanyasi so that Parikshit will get confidence that even a king like himself who had lived in the lap of luxury could work and get liberated in a short time. But in his case Parikshit had one full week to get freedom. So Shri Suka advises him to shed fear first as there was ample time. Then it was said that the one who reads the stotram with devotion will feel secure as he will be protected by the Lord on the way. मार्गमध्येऽभयं आशुतोषो भडेशः । It was stated earlier that our journey has already started and so we are on the way. The question, now, is how can reading the stotram with devotion confer security on the way? This becomes more relevant as the upanishads say आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वान् । न बिभेति कदाचनेति । the person having experienced the bliss of brahman ever fears not. (TU-II-4-1) that only by realising the Self one can shed his fears. We are long way from realising brahman. We very much seek security. We have the constant fear that the things that we consider as contributing to our security may get damaged or destroyed or leave us. Thus we worry about sickness, loss of money, friends or relatives etc.. The remedy for this feeling of insecurity is to realise that all these listed above can not last for ever. Either they will leave us or we will have to leave them some day. Everyone knows this but wants them to last for ever. Thus we want the body to be youthful and last for ever. One is unwilling to grow old and end one's days. Being insecure themselves nothing on the earth can confer security. This is a fact and has to be accepted howsoever bitter this may be. But strangely no one is prepared to accept this. Acceptance requires wisdom and it is not got in a day. It is a difficult process. The recital of the stotrams and other texts like the puranas pave the way for gaining the knowledge. They describe the endearing qualities of the Lord in a manner that will make our heart turn to Him. Once He gains entry into our heart He clears the accumulated sins and brings in the wisdom. Krishna has given this assurance in Gita (10-10) तेषां सतत-युक्तानां भजतां प्रीति-पूर्वकम् । ददामि बुद्धि-योगं तं येन मामुपयान्ति ते ॥ “To these, ever devout, worshipping Me with love, I give that devotion of knowledge by which they come to Me.” Thus devotion develops where even the seed of it was absent earlier. This is the power of listening to His glories

यस्यां वै श्रूयमाण्यां कृषणे परमपूरुषे ।

भक्तिरुत्पद्यते पुंसः शोकमोहभयापहा ॥ BH(1-7-7).

Such devotion dispels grief, infatuation and fear. Shri Suka lays stress on the fact that this happens even one decides to listen to the Lord's stories (श्रूयमाण्याम्) leaving us to imagine what benefits it can confer when one actually takes to listening to them. Shri Vedanta Desika states this clearly in his poem Abhitistavam (5).

He says:

भवन्तमिह यः स्वधीनियतयेतनायेतनं

पनायति नमस्यति स्मरति वक्ति पर्येति वा ।

गुणं कमपि वेत्ति वा तव गुणेश गोपायितुः

कदाचन कुतश्चन क्वचन तस्य न स्याद्भयम् ॥

He says that one who praises the Lord or salutes Him or remembers Him or recites hymns about Him or circumambulates Him or knows about at least one of His attributes does not encounter fear of any kind at any time from anyone at any place. This is repeatedly stated towards the end of Vishnu Sahasranama stotram in the कुलश्रुतिः . It is said न भयं क्वचिदाप्नोति वीर्यं तेजश्च विन्दति and भयान्मुष्येत भीतस्तु मुष्येतापन्न आपदः । and जन्ममृत्युजराव्याधिभयं नैवोपजायते । . This was what happened to the king Parikshit when he listened to Shri Bhagavatham. The experience totally transformed him. He shed the fear of death, gained wisdom and got release. God grants us the wisdom that removes the fear. So he is called भयापहः - भयं संसारञ्च पुंसामपहन् भयापहः । VS(935). But there may be fear from foes and elements etc.. God removes them also. Shiva is known as सहायः - ब्रह्मादीनामग्यापत्काले रक्षक इत्यर्थाः । SS(762). He protects even gods like Brahma in times of danger. Lalita is called भयापहा - भयानि जलस्थलादिप्रयुक्तादीनि सर्वाण्यपहन्तीति भयापहा । “आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्मन्न भिलेति कुतश्चेति” श्रुतेः । तथा य वायुपुराणे “अरण्ये प्रान्तरे वापि जले वापि स्थलेऽपि वा । व्याघ्रकुम्भीरयोरेभ्यो भयस्थाने विशेषतः । आधिष्वपि य सर्वेषु देवीनामानि कीर्तये”दिति । We do not realise the fact that He is never away from us even for a moment. We are used to looking out for security and not within. The devout Pandavas knew that they could get His help readily whenever it was needed. Kunti, the mother of Pandavas, acknowledged this fact gratefully. She said:

विषान्महाघ्नेः पुरुषाददसादसत्समाया वनवासकृच्छ्रतः ।

मृधे मृधेऽनेकमदारथास्त्रतो द्रौण्यस्त्रतश्चास्म हरेऽभिरक्षिताः ॥ BH(1-8-24).

She said that Krishna protected them from poison, from a conflagration, from the look of

man-eating demons, from the assembly of evil people (Duryodhana and his associates), from the many perils met during their stay in the forest, from the missiles of many great warriors (like Bhishma, Drona etc..) in every battle and lastly from the missile discharged by Aswatthama (the son of Dronacharya). The gopis also stated that Krishna saved them time and again from death from poisonous water, demons in various disguises, showers, storm and lightning and other perils

विषजलाप्याद् व्यालराक्षसाद् वर्षमारुताद् वैद्युतानवात् ।

वृषभयात्मजाद् विश्वतोभयादृषभ ते वयं रक्षिता भुङुः ॥ BH(10-31-3).

Thus the truly devout people never miss Him and are , therefore do not feel insecure on the way. The “way” or मार्गः may be viewed allegorically also. Our scriptures talk of many ways to worship Him. These are meant for people with differing tastes based on their temperaments. The Shiva-Mahimna Stotram says this:

त्रयी सांख्यं योगः पशुपतिमतं वैष्णवमिति

प्रभिन्ने प्रस्थाने परमिदमदः पथ्यमिति च ।

रुथीनां वैश्वानरादृष्टु-कुटिल-नानापथशुचिं

नृणामेको गम्यस्त्वमसि पयसामर्णवमिव ॥ (7).

There are different paths (of realisation) as enjoined by the three vedas, Samkhya, Yoga, Pasupatha doctrine and Vaishnava shastras. People follow different paths and each considers some particular path to be the proper one. This is because of the difference in their temperaments. But ultimately they all reach You only just as the rivers enter the ocean. Krishna says that all paths of worship lead to Him only and It is He who rewards them, just in the way they seek Him

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव लज्जाम्यहम् । मम

वर्त्मनूवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थस्सर्वशः ॥ BG(4-11).

Shri Rudram salutes Lord Shiva who is in the form of various paths. It says - पथीनां पतये नमः । पथीनां = शास्त्रोक्त दक्षिणोत्तर- तृतीय-मार्गाणां पतिः । This says that Rudra is the protector of the three paths described in the sastras. Later It again says: नमः सुत्याय च पथ्याय च । salutation to Him who is in the narrow foot paths and in the broad highways सुतिः स्वल्पो देवलोडमार्गः, प-था ब्रह्मलोडमार्गः । The narrow path indicates tortuous religious beliefs and practices. Krishna talks about this

मूढाग्राडेणात्मनो यत्पीड्य छियते तपः ।


परस्थोत्सादनार्तं वा तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ BG(17-19).

The penance which is performed obstinately, with self-torture, or for the purpose of ruining another is declared to be Tamasic. The broad and firm ways represent the beliefs and practices inculcated by the great teachers. They are the safe ways and are intended to be trodden by the common people मडाजनानि येनगतः स पन्थाः says Mahabharatha. Saint Thiagaraja talks about this in his famous song “Sakkani raja margamu undaga.” He asks “when there is the well-laid king’s highway of devotion to God, why do foolish people stray into hard, tortuous and thorny footpaths and suffer?” Saint Manickavachagar has stated the same idea in his Tiruvachagam. He says “I was straying in the company of fools who did not know the path to liberation. The Lord pointed out to me the path of devotion and how to shake myself free from my past acts. He flushed out the impurities in my mind. He made me Shivam or the auspicious one and ruled me with grace. Oh! who had received in full measure the bounty God has showered on me? I mistook the wrong paths to be the right ones. He prevented me from following the small pathways and showed me the broad ones for obtaining His divine grace.” Again Shri Rudra says नम षरिष्याय य प्रपथ्याय य । Salutation to Him who abides in saline tracts and in trodden pathways.


षरिष्याय Irinyaya: signifies arid tracts and has a refernce to samsara. प्रपथ्यः बहुभिडि सेवितो मार्गः प्रपथः, तत्र भवः प्रपथ्यः । “नम षरिष्याय यप्रपथ्याय ये”ति श्रुतिः SS(346). Prapathyaya: pathway trodden or resorted to by many. The Lord helps all who seek Him by following various paths. He says: मच्चित्तः सर्वदुर्गाणि मत्प्रसादात्तरिष्यसि । Fix your heart in Me. You shall, by My grace, cross over all difficulties. So let us latch on to Him and win His grace.

Thus we have come to the end of this gem of a poem. Quotations from various sources have been given to stress the point that the Lord is one but known by various names and forms. We can find that though this is a small piece of work it condenses in itself the gist of vedantic truth and is very suitable for regular recitation. I submit this commentary of mine at the feet of my preceptor Shri Vedanta Desikachariar Swami. He litererally flodded me with ideas on this poem But my bird brain could retain only an iota of what he communicated to me. I trust this work will receive the approval of the readers. Namaste. Om Tat Sat.

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mArgabandhustotram by Appayya Dixita

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Please send corrections to sanskrit@cheerful.com

