
mArgabandhustotram by Appayya Dixita

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మార్గబంధుస్తోత్రమ్ అప్పయ్యదీక్షితేనైః విరచితమ్

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మార్గబంధస్తోత్రమ్ అప్పయ్యదీక్షితేన్ద్రైః విరచితమ్



శ్రీమార్గబంధస్తోత్రమ్ పంచమాలా అథవా పంచరత్నస్తవం

మార్గబంధస్తోత్రమ్ ।

శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవ, శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవేశ శమోభ ॥

భాలావనవృత్తిరీటం భాలనేత్రార్చిషా దగ్ధపశ్చేషుకీటమ్ ।

(భాలప్రదీవ్యాత్కిరీటం భాలనేత్రార్చిషా దగ్ధపశ్చేషుకీటమ్)

శూలాహతారాతికూటం శుద్ధమర్ధేస్తుచూడం భజే మార్గబంధమ్ ।

శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవ, శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవేశ శమోభ ॥ ౧॥

అజ్ఞే విరాజద్భుజగ్గం అభ్రగ్గజ్జాతరజ్జాభిరామోత్తమాజమ్ ।

ఓంకారవాటికురగ్గం నిద్ధనంసేవితాజ్ఞీం భజే మార్గబంధమ్ । (హ్రీంకారవాటికురగ్గం

శుద్ధ)

శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవ, శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవేశ శమోభ ॥ ౨॥

నిత్యమ్ చిదానందరూపం నిహ్నుతాశేషలోకేశ్వైరిప్రతాపమ్ ।

కార్తస్వరాగేన్ద్రీవాపం కృత్తివాసం భజే దివ్యసన్మార్గబంధమ్ ।

శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవ, శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవేశ శమోభ ॥ ౩॥

కన్దర్పదర్పఘ్నమీశం కాలకణ్ఠం మహేశం మహావ్యోమకేశమ్ ।

కున్దాభదన్తం సురేశం కోటిసూర్యప్రకాశం భజే మార్గబంధమ్ ।

శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవ, శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవేశ శమోభ ॥ ౪॥

మన్దారభూతేరుదారం మన్దరాగేన్ద్రీసారం మహాగౌర్యదూరమ్ ।

సిన్ధూరదూరప్రచారం సిన్ధూరాజాతిధీరం భజే మార్గబంధమ్ । (సిన్ధూరగౌరప్రచారం)

శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవ, శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవేశ శమోభ ॥ ౫॥

అప్పయ్యయజ్ఞేన్ద్ర్య గీతం స్తోత్రరాజం పఠేద్యస్తు భక్త్యా ప్రయాణే ।

తస్యార్థసిద్ధిం విధత్తే మార్గమధ్యేభయం చాశుతోషో మహేశః ।

(అప్పయ్యయమఖివర్యరచితం పంచరత్నస్తవం మార్గబంధోరుదారమ్ ।

నిత్యం పఠేద్యస్తు భక్త్యా తస్య ముక్తిః కరస్యైవ సాయుజ్యరూపమ్ |
శమ్భో మహాదేవ దేవ, శమ్భో మహాదేవ దేవేశ శమ్భో || ౬ ||

ఇతి శ్రీఆపప్య్యదీక్షితేన్ద్రైః విరచితం మార్గబన్ధస్తోత్రం సమ్పూర్ణమ్ |

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.

ఆపప్య్యదీక్షితేన్ద్రైః-నశేషవిద్యాగురూనహం వన్దే |

యత్కృతిబోధాబోధో విద్యదవిద్యద్విభాజకోపాధీ || (భట్టోజీదీక్షితః)

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 maNidIpekA, NyAya rakShAmaNI, siddhAnta lesa sa.ngraha,

parimala, chAturmata sArasa.ngraha, yAdavabhyudaya vyAkhyA, varadarAjastava 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.

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

మార్గబంధుస్తోత్రమ్

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 బృహత్తమత్వాత్ 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 Taittiriyaopaniṣad (Anu IV) says that the brahman is beyond the reach of our mind and words యతో వాచో నివర్తన్తే అప్రాప్య మనసా సహ 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 (సగుణ ఉపాసనా) saguna (sa = with; guna = attributes; upAsana = worship). The names and forms conceal the esoteric truths mentioned in the upaniṣads. 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

యో యో యాం యాం తనుం భక్తః శ్రద్ధయాఽర్చితుమిచ్ఛతి ।

తస్య తస్యాచలాం శ్రద్ధాం తామేవ విదధామ్యహమ్ ॥ 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.

స తయా శ్రద్ధయా యుక్తః తస్యారాధనమిహతే ।

లభతే చ తతః కామాన్ మయైవ విహితాన్వితాన్ ॥ 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

తేషాం సతతయుక్తానాం భజతాం ప్రీతిపూర్వకమ్ ।

దదామి బుద్ధిసంయోగం యేన మాముపయాన్తి తే । 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.) శ్రవణమ్ listening to the Lord's names and stories which bring out His glories and కీర్తనమ్ 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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శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవ శివ శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవేశ శమోభ -
శమోభ మహాదేవ దేవ ॥

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 .

అపవిత్రః పవిత్రో వా సర్వావస్థాం గతోఽపి వా ।

యః స్మరేత్ పుణ్డరీకాక్షం సః బాహ్యోభ్యంతరః శుచిః ॥

మానసం వాచికం పాపం కర్మణా సముపార్జితమ్ ।

శ్రీరామస్మరణేనైవ వ్యపోహతి న సంశయః ॥

శ్రీ రామ రామ రామ ॥

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 శమ్భుః । శం సుఖం భావయతీతి శమ్భుః

(SS-74: VS-38) He blesses his devotees with happiness and prosperity శం = 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.

యతః సర్వాణి భూతాని భవన్త్యాదియుగాగమే ।

యస్మింశ్చ ప్రలయం యాన్తి పునరేవ యుగక్షయే ॥ 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).

యతో వా ఇమాని భూతాని జాయన్తే యేన జాతాని జీవన్తి యత్

ప్రయన్త్యభినంవిశన్తి

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

MAHADEVA మహాదేవః - మహాంశ్చాసౌ దేవశ్చ మహాదేవః ।

మహాత్వం చ సకలపూజ్యత్వాద్వా విభుత్వేన ప్రమాణతో మహత్వాద్వా He is worshipped by everyone. Also He is great because He pervades every thing.(SS22) సర్వాన్ భావన్ పరిత్యజ్య ఆత్మజ్ఞానయోగైశ్వర్యే మహతి మహీయతే తస్మాదుచ్యతే మహాదేవః (VS492)He is called Mahadeva because of His superior knowledge and His greatness as the gretest of the yogis. Shivarahasya says that the sound “Mahadeva Maha-deva” is a divine medicine for those bitten by the serpent called samsara మహాదేవ మహాదేవ మహాదేవేత్యయం ధ్వనిః సంసారసర్ప-దష్టానాం దివ్యోషధమనుత్తమమ్ ।

DEVA దేవః - స్వామిపర్యాయో దేవశబ్దః, నరదేవ ఇతివత్ । అకుంచితస్వామిత్వం చ శివస్యైవ The word deva indicates lordship. His lordship is unrestricted దివ్యతేర్దేవః (SA93) He is effulgent. Krishna says ” I am the splendour of those who possess splendour,” తేజస్తేజస్వినామహమ్ BG(10-36) Accordingly, తమేవ భాన్తమనుభాతి సర్వం తస్య భాసా సర్వమిదం విభాతి 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.

తేజోమూర్తిః SS413 and అమితతేజాః 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 దివి సూర్యసహస్రస్య భవేద్యుగపదుత్థితా । యది భాః సదృశీ సా స్యాద్భాసస్తస్య మహాత్మనః । (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 యః సర్వజ్ఞః సర్వవిత్ MU(1-9) One who is omniscient and knower of all ద్యుతిధరః ద్యుతిం జ్ఞానలక్షణాం దీప్తిం ధారయతీతి ద్యుతిధరః VS(275)He bears the shine of knowledge దీప్తమూర్తిః దీప్తా జ్ఞానమయా మూర్తిర్యస్యేతి దీప్తమూర్తిః VS(719)

He is of the form of shining knowledge ప్రకాశాత్మా | ప్రకాశస్వరూప ఆత్మా యస్య సః ప్రకాశాత్మా VS(276) His form is effulgent knowledge.

SIVA శివః - శివః మజ్గలస్వరూపః || నిర్మృష్ట నిఖిలదుఃఖానుషజ్గపరమానందరూప ఇత్యర్థః | 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 నిస్త్రైగుణతయా శుద్ధత్వాత్ శివః (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 క్లేశకర్మవిపాకాశయైరపరామృష్టః పురుషవిశేషః ఈశ్వరః | క్లేశాః, అవిద్యా, అస్మితా, రాగ, ద్వేష, అభినివేశా, కర్మ ధర్మాధర్మ, విపాకాః కర్మఫలాని - జన్మాయుర్భోగాః, ఆశయో జ్ఞానాది- వాశనాః, ఏతైః కాలత్రయేఽపరామృష్టః పురుషవిశేషః ఈశ్వరః ఇత్యర్థః ||

స్మృతిమాత్రేణ పావయన్ శివః He removes the sins of those who just think of His name. DakShayani says this to her father DakSha యద్వ్యక్షరం నామ గిరీరితం నృణాం సకృత్ ప్రసంగాదఘమాశు హన్తి 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:

సర్వాణి శివనామాని మోక్షదాన్యేవ సర్వదా |
తేషవప్యత్సుత్తమం నామ శివేతి బ్రహ్మసంజ్ఞిత ||

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 .

విద్యాసు శ్రుతిరుత్కృష్టా రుద్రైకాదశనీ శ్రుతౌ |
తత్ర పఞ్చాక్షరీ తస్యాం శివ ఇత్యక్షరద్వయమ్ ||

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 దేవేశః - ప్రాధాన్యేన దేవానామీశః దేవేశః He is the foremost among the gods like Indra, Agni etc.. VS(492) సురేశః - సురాణాం దేవానామీశః సురేశః 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 .

భీషాస్మాత్ వాతః పవతే| భీషోదేతి సూర్యః |
భీషాస్మాద్గ్నిశ్చేన్ద్రశ్చ | మృత్యుర్ధావతి పఞ్చమః

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:

భయాదస్యాగ్నిస్తపతి భయాత్ తపతి సూర్యః |
భయాదిన్ద్రశ్చ వాయుశ్చ మృత్యుర్ధావతి పఞ్చమః | KU(3-3).

Now let us go to the stotram proper. It consists of five verses and a sixth one - called ఫలశ్రుతిః 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

౧. భాలావనమృత్కిరీటం భాలనేత్రార్చిషా దగ్ధపఞ్చోషుకీటమ్ |
శూలాహతారాతికూటం, శుద్ధమర్ధేన్దుచూడం భజే మార్గబంధుమ్ |
శమ్భో ...

భాలః - forehead; bhAla is preferred to (wrongly used) phAla; అవనమృ - descended or come down; కిరీటం - crown: indicates that Lord Shiva wears a crown on the head కిరీటీ - కిరీటమస్యాస్తీతి కిరీటీ (SS782). The crown implies that Shiva wears other ornaments also హిరణ్యః (SS273) and హిరణ్యబాహుః (SS387) సువర్ణవర్ణః - సువర్ణస్యేవ వర్ణోఽస్యేతి సువర్ణవర్ణః VS(737). One who is golden-hued and హేమాఙ్గః - హేమేవాఙ్గం వపురనేతి హేమాఙ్గః VS(738) One with body like gold are also His names. Shri Rudram salutes Him saying నమో హిరణ్యబాహవే| పాదావనమృత్కిరీటం is another reading found in some books పాదః = 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 పూజ్యః || పూజాయోగ్యః పూజ్యః సర్వవంద్యః ఇత్యర్థః 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 నిరస్తసామ్యాతిశయేన రాధసాస్వధామని బ్రహ్మణి రంస్యతే నమః BH(2-4-14)అతులః - తులోపమానమస్య న విద్యతే ఇతి అతులః He has none equal to Him. VS(355) అనుత్తమః - అవిద్యమాన ఉత్తమాయస్మాత్ సః అనుత్తమః There is none greater than Him. VS (80). Further there is none superior to Him. VS(626) అనీశః - న విద్యతేఽస్యేష ఇతి అనీశః All other devas including Brahma the creator are limited by time and are subject to sorrows ప్రథమః - దేవానాం ప్రధానభూత ఆద్యో వా ప్రథమః 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 ప్రథమో దైవ్యః Such is His glory భాలనేత్రార్చిషా దగ్ధపఞ్చేషుకీటం - నేత్రం = eye: అర్చిన్ = fire: దగ్ధ = burnt: ఇషుః = arrow: కీటః = a worm, insect పఞ్చేషుః is the name Manmatha, the god of love, because he has five arrows: they are అరవిందం, అశోకం, చూతం, నవమల్లికా and నీలోత్పలమ్(lotus, ashoka, mango, jasmine and blue lotus). The five arrows are also said to be సంమోహనః , ఉన్మాదనః, శోషణః, తాపనః and స్తమ్భనః They are fascination, intoxication or extravagance of love, emaciation, suffering pain and benumbing or stupefying respectively. Kalidasa vividly narrates the story connected with Shiva destroying the god of love in his masterpiece Kumarasambhavam. Manmatha shot his arrow సంమోహనం 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 కామారిః - కామస్య మన్మథస్య అరిః కామారిః 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 భాలనేత్రః SS(159) and లలాటాక్షః 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 విరూపక్షః | విరూపాణి విరుద్ధస్వరూపాణి లోకవిరుద్ధత్రిత్వవిశిష్టాని అక్షీణి యస్య సః విరూపాక్షః | SS(129). He has an abnormal third eye. The third eye situated in a high position (viz) forehead and stands for supreme knowledge ఉన్నతస్థానవర్తిలోచనశాలిత్యకీర్తనేన విశ్వోత్తరజ్ఞానశాలిత్యం సూచితమ్ 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 స్మరః స్మర్తవ్యాత్మా న హి వశిషు పథ్యః పరిభవః | స్మర 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 (స్మర్తవ్యాత్మా) an object of memory. The moral of the story, says the poem, is that an insult to the great will produce serious consequences వహ్నినేత్రః - వహ్నినేత్రం లలాటే యస్య సః వహ్నినేత్రః (SS131) is also one of Shiva's names. Bhartrihari in his Vairagya Satakam refers to this incident thus: లీలాదగ్ధ-విలూలకామ శలభః (i.e.) who effortlessly burnt up the flippant god of love as a moth. A big fire instantly reduces a moth into ashes.

శూలః = the Trident of Shiva; ఆహత = struck; అరాతిః = enemy; కూటం = mass, heap: Shiva has destroyed His enemies with His Trident. But Shiva has no enemies సమోఽహం సర్వభూతేషు న మే ద్వేష్యోఽస్తి న ప్రీయః (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." ఈశానమీశ్వరం దేవం దృష్టవానసి శఙ్కరమ్ Krishna confirms this and says "Your enemies have already been killed by Me.

Be a mere instrument.” BG(11-33) మయైవైతే నిహితాః పూర్వమేవ నిమిత్తమాత్రం భవ
సవ్యసాచిన్

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 కామ ఏష క్రోధ ఏష రజోగుణసముద్భవః । మహాశనో మహాపాప్యా విద్వేషనమిహ వైరిణమ్। 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 కామా హృదయా నశ్యన్తి సర్వే మయి హృది స్థితే BH(11-21-26). They cannot live together like light and darkness. He is called కామహో - కామాన్ హన్తి ముముక్షూణాం భక్తానాం హింసకానాం చేతి కామహో He destroys the desires of His devotees who seek liberation and the intentions of those who trouble them. VS(294). Also కామనాశః ॥ ముముక్షూణాం కామం నాశయతీతి కామనాశః SS(126). Lord Shiva is the ఆది గురుః 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 భక్తిః శూలిని

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 (ఈషణా) 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 coaltar that has some how 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 కో న్వర్థతృష్ణాం విసృజేత్ ప్రాణేభ్యోఽపి య ఈప్సితః || యం క్రీణాత్యసుఖిః ప్రేష్టైస్తస్కరః సేవకో వణిక్ | (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 న విత్తేన తర్పణీయో మనుష్యః 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 స్నేహపాశమిమం ఛిద్ధి దృఢం పాణ్డవుషు వృష్టిషు | 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 త్వక్ష్వా పుత్రాంశ్చ దారాంశ్చ రాఘవం శరణం గతః Renouncing my wives and children I have surrendered to Raghava and again పరిక్ష్వక్తా మయా లక్ష్మీ మిత్రాణి చ ధనాని చ 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 ప్రణయరశనయా ధృఢాఙ్గీపద్యః BH(11-2-55). Thus firmly stationed in the devotee's heart He destroys the evil tendencies therein హృద్యన్తస్థో హ్యభద్రాణి విధునోతి సుహృత్పతామ్ BH(1-2-17) శూలహస్తః - శూలం హస్తే యస్య సః (SS114): జితశత్రుః - జితాః శత్రవః యేన సః జితశత్రుః (SS211) and రిపుఘ్నః - సురరీపూన్ హస్తీతి రిపుఘ్నః (SS370) are Shiva's names.

Further it is said త్రైగుణ్యం శూలమేతస్య - ఏవం భూతస్య శూలస్య కరస్థతోవక్ష్వా త్రిగుణాత్మికాయా మాయాయా స్వాధీనత్వముక్తం భవతి 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.

శుద్ధం = కాలత్రయేఽపి పరమార్థతః మాయాఽవిద్యాది సమన్తరహితః శుద్ధః । శుద్ధమపాపవిద్ధం ఇతి శ్రుతిః (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.

అర్ధేన్ద్రచూడం - అర్ధ = half ఇన్దుః = the moon చూడ = crest, Shiva has partial moon on the crest సోమవిభూషః - విశిష్టా భూషా విభూషా, సోమః విభూషా భూషణం యస్య సః సోమవిభూషః చన్ద్రధరః (SS32) and also శశిమౌలిః = శశీ చన్ద్రః మౌలౌ యస్య సః శశిమౌలిః (SS929)The moon appears as a special ornament to Shiva శశిశేఖరః - అయం చన్ద్రః పరమేశ్వరస్య జ్ఞానరూప ఇతి శివాగమే దర్శితమ్।యతోక్తం “ జ్ఞానచన్ద్రకలాచూడం।” 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 కో హి జగద్గురురుక్తః? శమ్భుః, జ్ఞానం కుతః? శివాదేవ! Who is the universal teacher? Shambu. From where can one get wisdom? From Shiva only. So we have the saying జ్ఞానమిచ్ఛేత్ మహేశ్వరాత్ ” One should pray to Maheswara for wisdom.”

భజే = worship: మార్గబంధుం = 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

౨. అజ్ఞే విరాజద్భుజం అభ్రగ్జాతరజ్జాభిరామోత్తమాఙ్గమ్ |
ఓంకారవాటికురంఘం సిద్ధసంసేవితాఙ్ఘ్రిం భజే మార్గబంధుమ్ |
శమ్భో ...

అజ్ఞే విరాజద్భుజం - అంగం = limb; may mean hand, or leg; విరాజత్ = shining or appearing prominently; భుజంగః = serpent, snake; Lord Shiva is decked with snakes సర్పభూషః - సర్పాః భుజంగాః భూషాః భూషణాని యస్య సః సర్పభూషః (SS43) His other names are సర్పహారః: సర్పాః నాగాః, తే హారాః యస్య సః (SS494) and నాగచూడః - నాగో వాసుకీః కోటీరబంధనార్థం చూడాయాం యస్య సః నాగచూడః (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 కస్మాద్భ్యమిహ? మరణాత్ says Sankaracharya in his Prasnotara ratnamalika. The symbolism is used in our scriptures frequently. For example: గ్రస్తం కాలాహినాఽఽత్మానం కోఽన్యస్త్రాతుమధీశ్వరః 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 యః కశ్చనేశో బలినోఽన్తకోరగాత్ ప్రచణ్డవేగాదభిధావతో భృశమ్ || భీతం ప్రసన్నం పరిపాతి యద్భయాన్మృత్యుః ప్రధావత్స్వరణం తమీమహి | 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 మృత్యుః సర్వహరశ్చాహమ్ Krishna says “I am Death who seizes all life.” BG(10.34) He is Antaka అన్తకః - అన్తం కరోతి భూతానామితి అన్తకః 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 కాలః - కలయతి సర్వమితి కాలః, - కాలః కలయతామహమ్ - గీతా ౧౦.౩౦ ఇతి భగవద్వచనాత్ VS(418) and SS(33). The Lord is not limited by time or space or by any material అనంతాత్మా దేశతః కాలతో వస్తుతశ్చాపరిచ్ఛిన్నత్వాత్ అనంతాత్మా VS(518). He is not subject to destruction or anything that causes destruction. అమృత్యుః | మృత్యుర్వినాశః తద్ధేతుర్వాస్య న విద్యతే ఇతి అమృత్యుః 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. కవిర్మనీషీ పరిభూః స్వయమ్భూః యథాతథ్యతోఽర్థాన్వ్యధధాచ్ఛాశ్వతీభ్యః సమాభ్యః So the snakes, representing kala or death, cannot harm Him but He wears them implying He uses Death for His services. Yama himself says మృత్యుర్వస్యోపనేచనమ్ 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. కాలహంతా కాలస్య మృతోర్స్థర్థాన్తా SS(83) and కాలకాలః || కాలః యమః, తస్యాపి కాలః, . 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 dissoluton and releases them again at the beginning of the next cycle of creation. His other names are మృత్యుంజయః - మృత్యుః మరణం స్వభక్తానాం మృత్యుం జయతి, స్వోపాసనాదినా పరిహరతి ఇతి మృత్యుంజయః SS(123), SA(71). He removes or avoids the death of His devotees. The sage Markandeya confidently sings చన్ద్రశేఖరమాశ్రయే మమ కిం కరిష్యతి వై యమః “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 .. తదోత్తానపాదః పుత్రో దదరాస్నైకమాగతమ్ || మృత్యో-రూర్ధ్ని పదం దత్వా ఆరురోహాద్భుతం గృహమ్ | 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 జాతస్య హి ధ్రువో మృత్యుః ధ్రువం జన్మ మృతస్య చ 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) యః ప్రాప్య మానుషం లోకం ముక్తిద్వారమపావృతమ్ | గృహేషు ఖగవత్సక్తస్తమారూఢమ్యతం విదుః |

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. స్వకర్మణోఽనురూపం హి ఫలం భుజ్జతి జన్తవః | శుభేన కర్మణా భూతిర్దుఃఖం స్యాత్పాతకేన తు || 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.

విహితస్యాననుష్ఠానాత్ నిన్దితస్య చ సేవనాత్ |
అనిర్విహాచ్ఛేన్ద్రియాణాం నరః పతనమృచ్ఛతి ||

(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. అధస్తాన్నరతోకస్య యావతీర్యాతనాదయః | క్రమశః సమనుక్రమ్య పునరత్రావ్రజేచ్ఛుచిః | 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.” న సాంప్రాయః ప్రతిభాతి బాలం ప్రమాద్యన్తం విత్తమోహేన మూఢమ్ || అయం లోకో నాస్తి పర ఇతి మానీ పునః పునర్వశమాపద్యతే మే | 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 సంచితం కర్మా 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 ప్రారబ్ధమ్ 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 ఆయుః కర్మ చ విత్తం చ విద్యా నిధనమేవ చ। పక్షైప్తాని వివిచ్యస్తే జాయమానస్య దేహినః । 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) ఫలానుమేయాః ప్రారమ్భాః సంస్కారాః ప్రాక్షనా ఇవ

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?కిం సంసారే సారం ? బహుశోఽపి విచిన్త్యమానమిదమేవ(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 న సంసారోత్పన్నం చరితమనుపశ్యామి కుశలం (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 గర్భవాసనమం దుఃఖం న భూతం న భవిష్యతి 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. వ్యాప్రీవ తిష్ఠతి జరా పరితర్జయన్తీ రోగాశ్చ శత్రవ ఇవ ప్రహరన్తి దేహమ్ 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. పునర్జన్మ దుఃఖాలయమశాశ్వతమ్ BG(7.15) Later on He again says this world is impermanent and joyless అనిత్యమనుఖం లోకమిమం 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 ఆయుః పరిస్రవతి భిన్నఘటాదివామ్భుః 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)కోన్వర్తః సుఖయత్యేనం కామో వా మృత్యురన్తికే! ఆఘాతం నీయమానస్య వధ్యసేవ న తుష్టిదః । 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 యే హి సంస్పర్శజ్ఞా భోగాః దుఃఖయోనయ ఏవ తే । ఆద్యస్తవన్తః కౌన్తేయ న తేషు రమతే బుధః । 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 Brihadaranyopaniṣad. 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 .. ఏవమేవాత్మానమన్తకాలే సర్వే ప్రణాః అభినమాయాన్తి యత్రైతదూర్ధోఽప్యచ్ఛాస్వసీ భవతి । (4.3.38) తముత్క్రామన్తం ప్రాణోఽనూత్క్రామతి ప్రాణమనూత్క్రామన్తం సర్వే ప్రాణా అనూత్క్రామన్తి సవిజ్ఞానో భవతి సవిజ్ఞా మేవాన్యవక్రామతి తం విద్యాకర్మాణి సమన్వారభేతే పూర్వప్రజ్ఞా చ । (4.4.2) అయమాత్మేదం శరీరం నిహత్యావిద్యాం గమయిత్వాన్యన్నవతరం కల్యాణతరం రూపం కురుతే(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. పూర్వాభ్యాసేన తేనైవ హ్రీయతే హ్యవసోఽపి సః 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 upaniṣad. 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.” మాముపేత్య తు కౌన్తేయ పునర్జన్మ న విద్యతే 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.

అభ్రగంగాతరంగాభిరామోత్తమాంజం - అభ్రం = sky; గంగా = the river Ganges. So the word అభ్రగంగా means the heavenly river Ganges; తరంగః = wave; అభిరామః = pleasing, charming; ఉత్తమ = best; The word ఉత్తమాంగం 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 గంగాధరః - ధరతీతి ధరః || గణ్గాయాః ధరః ఇతి గణ్గాధరః (SS146) and SA(27). Also ధూర్జటిః - ధూః గణ్గా జటాసు యస్య సః ధూర్జటిః | నమః కపర్దినే ఇతి శ్రుతిః (SS286) జటార్ద్రః - జటసు కపర్దనామికాసు గణ్గాప్రయుక్తమార్ద్రం యస్య సః (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.

ధాతుః కమండలుజలం తదురుక్రమస్య

పాదావనేజన-పవిత్రతయా నరేన్ద్ర |

స్వర్ధన్యభూన్నభసి సా పతతీ నిమార్జి

లోకత్రయం భగవతో విశదేవ కీర్తిః || 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 భవాఙ్గ పతితం తోయం పవిత్రమితి పస్పృశుః (1.43.28). Hence the saying కాశ్యాం తు మరణాన్ముక్తిః (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 కస్తాం న నేవేత మరీష్యమాణః | 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. స్థాణుః | స్థిరత్వాత్ (VS 28). Also SA(72) స్థాణుః వృక్షః తత్పామ్యాత్ స్థాణుః | వృక్ష ఇవ స్తబ్ధో దివి తిష్ఠత్యేకస్తేనేదం పూర్ణం - పురుషేణ సర్వమ్

The గ in the name Ganga stands for Gayatri which represents the eternal, supreme Brahman. In Gangashtakam, she is addressed as the very embodiment of Brahman, పూర్ణబ్రహ్మస్వరూపే . 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 Brahmrandram. 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 గురుస్సాక్షాత్పరమృహ్య . The fact that she is formed from the powers of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva is stated symbolically in the story of Ganga. ఆదావాదిపితామహస్య నియమవ్యాపారపాత్రే జలం, పశ్చాత్ పత్రగశాయినో భగవతః పాదోదకం పావనమ్ || భూయః శమ్భు జటా విభూషణమణిరహ్నోర్మహార్షేరియం, కన్యా కల్మషనాశినీ భగవతీ భాగీరథీ భూతలే| 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 జ్ఞానప్రవాహో విమలాదీ గఙ్గా The stream of right knowledge is the pure original Ganga. Again later he says త్రిభువనజననీ వ్యాపినీ జ్ఞానగఙ్గా(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.

సృష్టికర్త్రీ బ్రహ్మరూపా LS(265) గోష్ఠీ

గోవిందరూపిణీ LS(267) సంహారిణీ రుద్రరూపా LS(269)

2 - She is Gayatri గాయత్రీ LS(420)

3 - She is Bhavani భవానీ LS(112). Durga దుర్గా

LS(190). Parvati పార్వతీ LS(246). Uma ఉమా LS(633)

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

శిరస్థితా 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 (అర్ధనారీ స్వరూపమ్) 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 స్తోతసామస్మి జాహ్నవీ 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. గఙ్గే గఙ్గేతి యో బ్రూయాత్ యోజనానాం శతైరపి మువ్యతే సర్వపాపేభ్యో విష్ణుతోకం స గచ్ఛతి The avadhuta saint Sadasiva Brahmam has composed a song in praise of Ganga (jaya tungatarange gange జయ తుఙ్గతరఙ్గే గఙ్గే) wherein he salutes Ganga as one who purifies the worlds and cuts asunder the manifold bonds of mankind (కమలభవాణ్ణకమణ్ణపవిత్రే బహువిధబంధచ్ఛేదలవిత్రే లవిత్రం = 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 .

త్వదుత్సంజ్ఞే గంజ్ఞే పతతి యది కాయస్తనుభృతాం తదా
మాతః శాతక్రతవ-పదల్లాభోఽప్యతిలఘుః

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 కామప్రదః । భక్తేభ్యః కామాన్ ప్రకర్షేణ దదాతితి కామప్రదః 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) ఉమాపతిః పశుపతిః రాజానమిదమబ్రవీత్ । ప్రీతస్తేఽహం నరశ్రేష్ఠ కరిష్యామి తవ ప్రియమ్ ।

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.”

తస్మాత్స్వముత్తిష్ఠ యశో లభస్వ జిత్వా శత్రూన్ భుజ్ఞ్వి రాజ్యం సమృద్ధమ్ ।
మమైవైతే నిహితాః పూర్వమేవ నిమిత్తమాత్మం భవ సవ్యసాచిన్ । 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.

ఓంకారవాచీకురణ్ణం - ఓంకార = the holy syllable OM; (variation హ్రీం bIjamañtra; వాచీ = garden, park; కురంగః = deer; Shiva is likened to a deer in the garden of the holy syllable - meaning He is represented by OM also known as pranava. ఓంకారరూపః - ఓంకారః రూపం స్వరూపం యస్య సః తథా(SS138) Shri Krishna says in His Gita (10-25) “I am OM among the words.” గిరామస్యైకమక్షరమ్ Manu, the famous law giver, says that the letter OM by itself represents the ultimate reality - the Brahman ఏకాక్షరం పరం బ్రహ్మ 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 అకారం వాప్యకారం చ మకారం చ ప్రజాపతిః || వేదత్రయాన్నిరదుహద్ భూర్భువః స్వరితీతి చ A similar reference is seen in Chandogyopanishad (2.23.3) తాన్యభ్యతపత్రేభ్యోఽభితప్తేభ్య ఓంకారః సంప్రాస్తవత్స్యథా 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.

సమాహితాత్మనో బ్రహ్మన్ బ్రహ్మణః పరమేష్ఠినః |
హృద్యాకాశాదభూన్నాదో వృత్తిరోధాద్ విభావ్యతే ||

తతోఽభూత్ త్రివృదోంకారో యోఽవ్యక్తప్రభవః స్వరాట్ |
యత్ తల్లిజ్ఞం భగవతో బ్రహ్మణః పరమాత్మనః |

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 బ్రాహ్మణః ప్రణవం కుర్యాదాదావస్తే చ సర్వదా | స్వతస్యనోఽఙ్ఞుతం పూర్వం పురస్తావ్చ విశిర్యతి | In view of this Kalidasa compares Manu

-the first of kings in the solar dynasty to OM in a grand simile ఆసీన్మహీక్షితామాద్యః
ప్రణవశ్చన్దసామివ

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. ప్రణవః - ప్రణవో నామ పరమాత్మనో వాచక ఉఞ్కారః , తదభేదోపచారేణాయం ప్రణవః (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) తస్య వాచకః ప్రణవః । ప్రకర్షేణ నూయతే అనేనేతి ప్రణవః 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): తజ్జపస్తద్ధర్మభావనమ్ 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 అమాత్రశ్చతుర్థో ఽవ్యవహార్యః ప్రపఞ్చోపశమః శివో ఽద్వైత ఏవమోంకార ఆత్మైవ సంవిశత్యాత్మానం, య ఏవం వేద, య ఏవం వేద(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 ప్రతీకమ్. Meditating on the fourth or the silent part as “I the Self” is known as Ahamgrahadhyanam అహంగ్రహధ్యానమ్ One who meditates like this is called a muni మననాత్ మునిరుచ్యతే 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 ఓఙ్కారరూపః । ఓఙ్కారం రూపం స్వరూపం యస్య సః తథా। ఓఙ్కారరూపత్వం చ తదభిధానత్వాద్వా, తత్ప్రతీకత్వాద్వా తదభిధానత్వం ఓమిత్యక్షరమిత్యాదినా ప్రసిద్ధమ్। ఓఙ్కార ప్రతీకత్వం తు యః పునరేతం త్రిమాత్రేణేత్యాదినా ప్రశోపనిషదాదౌ ప్రసిద్ధమ్। పరం చాపరం చ బ్రహ్మ యదోఙ్కార ఇతి శ్రుతిః 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 Mundakopanishad mantra ద్వా సుపర్ణా సయుజ్ఞా సఖాయా సమానం వృక్షం పరిషస్వజాతే। తయోరన్యః పిప్పలం స్వాద్వత్స్యనశ్శనన్యో అభిచాకశీతి। 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 ఓంకారపఞ్జరశుకీ a female parrot in the cage called OM in the Devi Navaratnamala. The saint composer Thiagaraja of Tiruvaiyaru addresses Rama as ఓంకారపఞ్జరకీర a parrot in the cage called OM in his famous song beginning Jagadanandakaraka. Similarly the saint composer SadasivaBrahmam talks of Krishna as ప్రణవపయోరుహగర్భకపాలీ one who is hidden inside the lotus of pranava (in his song kridathi vanamali క్రీడతి వనమాలీ)

సిద్ధసంసేవితాఙ్గిం - సిద్ధః = 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 శుద్ధ for pure; సంసేవిత = worshipped; అంఘ్రి = foot He is worshipped by great sages and other semidivine beings endowed with supernatural powers మహర్షివన్దితః - మహర్షిభిః వామదేవాదిభిః హరభక్తాదిభిశ్చ జ్ఞానార్తం వన్దితః । ఉపలక్షణమేతత్ స్తోత్ర-జప-పూజా-తప ఆదీనామ్(SS536) సద్భిః సమ్పూజితః । సద్భిః సాత్వికైర్దేవర్ష్యాదిభిః సమ్పూజితః ॥ భక్తిశ్రద్ధాదినా గన్ధపుష్పాదిభిః ప్రదక్షిణసమస్కారాదిభిశ్చ పూజితః సమ్పూజితః SS(777) The word siddha సిద్ధ means accomplished or perfected. Linking with the earlier word, the

muni meditates on the pranava. ఓంకారం బింధుసంయుక్తం నిత్యం ధ్యామ్యన్తి యోగినః Once he understands that he, the meditator, and the Iswara 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. యదజ్ఞ్యభిధ్యానసమాధితయా ధియానుపశ్యన్తి హి తత్త్వమాత్మనః BH(2.4.21)

Such a realised sage abides in his Self. So it is said తద్విష్ణోః పరమం పదం సదా పశ్యన్తి సూరయః 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 బుద్ధిమతాం వరిష్ఠః = 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 యత్ర యత్ర రఘునాత కీర్తనం తత్ర తత్ర కృతమస్తకాఞ్జాలిం బొప్పవారిపరిపూరితేక్షణం మారుతిం నమత రాక్షసాన్తకమ్ 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

ఆత్మా త్వం గిరిజా మతిః సహచరాః ప్రాణాః శరీరం గృహం
పూజా తే విషయోపభోగరచనా నిద్రా సమాధిస్థితిః ।
సఞ్చారః పదయోః ప్రదక్షిణవిధిః స్తోత్రాణి సర్వా గిరః
యద్యత్కర్మ కరోమి తత్తదకిలం శమ్నో తవారాధనమ్ ॥

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:

దేహం చ నశ్వరమవస్థితముత్థితం వా
సిద్ధో న పశ్యతి యతోఽధ్యగమత్స్వరూపమ్ ।
దైవాదవేతముత దైవవశాదుపేతం

వాసో యథా పరికృతం మదిరామదాన్యః | 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) యోఽకామో నిష్కామ ఆప్తకామ ఆత్మకామో న తస్య ప్రాణా ఉత్క్రామన్తి బ్రహ్మైవ సన్ బ్రహ్మోపేయతి This was what is said to have happened in Bhishma's case . ఆత్మన్యాత్మానమావేస్య సోఽన్తశ్వాస ఉపారమత్ BH(1.9.43)

భజే = I worship మార్గబంధుమ్ 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. నిత్యమ్ చిదానందరూపం నిహ్నుతాశేషలోకేశవైరిప్రతాపమ్ |
కార్తస్వరాగేంద్రచాపం కృత్తివాసం భజే దివ్యసన్మార్గబంధుమ్ |
శమోభ

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 నిత్యం చిదానందరూపం - నిత్యం = eternal, ever lasting, imperishable చిత్ = pure intelligence ఆనంద =supreme bliss రూపం = form.

These words are the repetition of the famous upanishadic mantra సత్యం జ్ఞానమనంతం బ్రహ్మ TU(2.1.2) that says Brahman is satyam, jnanam and anantam. This is one of Shiva's names సచ్చిదానందరూపః | సత్పదేన కాలత్రయాబాధ్యం స్వరూపముచ్యతే| చిత్పదేన ప్రకాశాన్తరనిరవేక్షితయా ప్రకాశమానమ్| ఆనందపదేన నిరతిశయప్రేమాస్పదతయా సుఖరూపం ఏతత్త్రితీయాత్మకరూపం యస్య సః సచ్చిదానందరూపః | SS(653). Rama's form is existence, knowledge and bliss సత్యజ్ఞానానందశరీరీ says the saint Sadasiva Brahmendra in the song ఖేలతి మమ హృదయే (kelati mama hrudaye). So is

Shri Lalita's form: సచ్చిదానందరూపిణీ సత్యం చిత్వమానందశ్చ స్వరూపమత ఏవ
విద్యాన్తరేషూపసంహార్యమస్యా ఇతి సచ్చిదానందరూపిణీ LS(699)

నిత్యం - 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 నిత్యా కాలత్రయేఽప్యబాధ్యా| అవినాశీ వా అరేఽయమాత్మే తి శ్రుతేః
| LS(136).

శాశ్వతః and సత్యమ్ are two other names that have the same meaning as Nityam శాశ్వతః
| సర్వేషు కాలేషు ఏకరూపతయా భవతీతి శాశ్వతః | “శాశ్వతోయం పురాణః” ఇతి శ్రుతిః
| SS(398).(ie.) He exists in all times in the same form or without any change శశ్వత్ సర్వేషు
కాలేషు భవతీతి శాశ్వతః, “శాశ్వతం శివమమ్యతమ్” ఇతి శ్రుతేః | VS(56).

satyam సత్యమ్| కాలత్రయాబాధ్యం సత్యమ్ SS(432)అవితథరూపత్వాత్ పరమాత్మా
సత్యః “సత్యం జ్ఞానమనంతం బ్రహ్మ” ఇతి శ్రుతేః | VS(106) In the invocatory verse to Shri
Bhagavatam Shri Vyasa salutes the Lord saying సత్యం పరం ధీమహి(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 సత్యం పరం ధీమహి
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 సత్యజ్ఞానానందరూపా | సత్యం జ్ఞానం ఆనందశ్చ రూపం యస్యాః
|| “సత్యం జ్ఞానమనంతం బ్రహ్మ” “విజ్ఞానమానందం బ్రహ్మేతి” శ్రుతేః | LS(790).

Bhartrihari, in the invocatory verse to his Satakatrayam salutes the Lord saying
దిక్కాలాద్యనవచ్ఛిన్నా అనంతవిన్మాత్రమూర్తయే He says that God is of the
form of eternal consciousness unlimited by spatial direction, time etc దిశః
ప్రాచ్యాదిదిక్పృదేశాః, కాలా భూతభవిష్యద్వర్తమానరూపా, ఆదిశబ్దసంగృహీతాని వస్తుని
తథా చ దిక్కాలా ఆదయో యేషాం తాని దిక్కాలాని తైరనవచ్ఛిన్నాపరిక్లప్తా|
విభుత్వాన్నిత్యత్వాదేకత్వాచ్చ దేశతః కాలతో వస్తుతశ్చాపరిచ్ఛిన్నేత్యర్థః | అత ఏవ
అనంతాపరిమితా| ట్రివిధపరిచ్ఛేదశూన్యత్వా దఖణ్ణదణ్ణాయమానే- త్యర్థః || చిత్ -
chit means pure intelligence and indicates brahman. So the Lord gets the following
names చిదాత్మా| చిత్ - చైతన్యం ఆత్మస్వరూపం యస్య సః చిదాత్మా SS(456).
Also చిన్మయః | చిన్మయశ్చిద్రూపః || SS(829). Devi is described as చిన్మయా ||
చిదభేదాచ్ఛిన్మయా LS(251). Now let us go back to the reference from Bartruhari: (ie.)

అనన్తచిన్మాత్రమూర్తయే || చిన్మాత్రా జ్ఞానఘనా చ || చిదేకరసేతి యావత్ | తాదృశీ మూర్తిర్యస్య తస్మై | ఏతద్రూపాయేత్యర్థః | 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: అభిజ్ఞః స్వరాట్ | స్వేనైవ రాజతే యస్తమ్ | స్వతః సిద్ధజ్ఞానమిత్యర్థః | 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.

ఆనన్ద Ananda : Brahmam is of the form of pure bliss ఆనన్దో బ్రహ్మాతి వ్యజానాత్ TU(3.6.1). The Taittiriyaopaniṣhad 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 Brihadaranyopaniṣhad says that any ananda experienced by any being is just a droplet derived from the bliss that is Brahma ఏతస్యైవానన్దస్య అన్యాని భూతాని మాత్రాముపజీవన్తి(4.3.32) Incidentally this is one of the names of Shri Lalita. (LS365) స్వాత్మానన్దలవీభూత బ్రహ్మాద్యానన్దసంతతిః | The commentator Bhaskararaya explains this name referring to these quotations only. He says స్వస్యా ఆత్మరూపో య ఆనన్దస్య లవీభూతా ఇన్ద్రాద్యానన్దబిన్దుపర్యాలోచనయా సాగరాయమాణత్వేనాలవా అపి దేవ్యానన్దసాగరస్య లవాః సంపద్యమానాః బ్రహ్మాదీనాం సృష్టికర్తృత్వాదిధర్మవిశిష్టానాం బ్రహ్మవిష్ణురుద్రాణామాన్దానాం సంతతయః సంయక్సమూహో యస్యాః సా | “ ఏతస్యైవానన్దస్యాన్యానిభూతాని మాత్రాముపజీవన్తి” తి శ్రుతేః | తైత్తిరీయే మానుషానన్దమారభ్య ఉత్తరోత్తరాధిక్యేనవర్ణ్యమానానామాన్దానాం మధ్యే పరిగణితానాం ప్రజాపత్యాద్యాన్దానానామపి పరిచ్ఛిన్నత్యేన పురుషార్థత్వాయోగ్యేనాపరిచ్ఛిన్నానన్దస్య నిర్గుణస్య సిద్ధత్వాచ్చ పురుషార్థసాధనజ్ఞానోపక్రమాది తాత్పర్యనిర్ణయక ప్రమాణవిరోధాయ తత్పదస్య నిర్ధర్మకాత్మలక్షకత్వమేవ యుక్తమితాశయః |

One may wonder why should the upaniṣhad 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

నస్తీ పరమానందవిగ్రహో నస్తీ “విజ్ఞానమానందం బ్రహ్మ”తి శ్రుతిః | SS(189) and VS(618) ఆనస్తీ సుఖస్వరూపత్వాత్ ఆనస్తీ VS(560) . Also బ్రహ్మానందః | బ్రహ్మరూప ఆనందో బ్రహ్మానందః | “ఆనందం బ్రహ్మ మాం జ్ఞాత్వా న బిభేతి కుతశ్చనే” తి పాద్మే | “ ఆనందం బ్రహ్మణో విద్వాని” తి శ్రుతిః | SS(560) and సదానందః || కాలత్రయాఽబాధితనిరతిశయసుఖస్వరూపః సదానందః | “ విజ్ఞానమానందం బ్రహ్మ” తి శ్రుతిః | SS(673)

నిహ్నుతాశేషలోకేశవైరిప్రతాపమ్ - నిహ్నుత = eliminated అశేష = without remainder లోకేశః = lord of the universe - here it refers to Indra వైరిన్ = enemy ప్రతాపః =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). విజ్ఞాతవ్యం న జానీతే భయస్థానముపస్థితమ్(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.

తతో రామ మహాదేవో దేవానాం ప్రవరో హరః |

పాదాఙ్గుష్ఠేన తం శైలం పీడయామాస లీలయ్ ||

పీడితాస్తు తతస్తస్య శైలస్తమ్భాపమా భుజాః | (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

అఙ్గుష్ఠశిరసా లఙ్కానాథదర్పహరః | అఙ్గుష్ఠశిరసా పాదాఙ్గుష్ఠాగ్రేణ లఙ్కానాథస్య రావణస్య దర్పం గర్వం హరతీతి హరః | ఇదం చ రామాయణాదౌ ప్రసిద్ధమ్

। శివరహస్యే - అముష్య త్వత్సేవాసమధిగతసారం భుజవనం బలాత్కైలాసేఽపి త్వదధివసతో విక్రమయతః । అలభ్యాపాతాలేఽప్యలసచలితాఙ్గుష్ఠశిరసి ప్రతిష్ఠా త్వయాసీద్ధ్యువముపచితో ముహ్యతి ఖల ఇతి ॥ “నమః సహమానాయ నివ్యాధిన” ఇతి శ్రుతిః । 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 దైవాసుర సంప్రద్యభాగయోగః 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 exactly. 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 నిత్యః all pervading, firm and unshakeable సర్వగతః స్థాణుః అచలః । 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 కార్తస్వరాగేన్ద్రావాపమ్ - కార్తస్వరమ్ = gold: ఆగః = mountain: ఇన్ద్రః = lord and in this context means best: చాపః = 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 Vidyunmali 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

క్షోణీ యస్య రథో రథాఙ్గయుగళం చన్ద్రార్క-బిమ్బద్వయం
 కోదండః కనకాచతో హరిరభూత్ బాణో విధిః సారథిః ।
 తూణీరో జలధి-ర్థయాః శ్రుతిచయో మౌర్వీ భుజఙ్గాధిపః
 తస్మిన్ మే హృదయం సుఖేన రమతాం శామ్నే పరబ్రహ్మణి ॥

So He gets the following names పురందరః | సురశత్రూణాం పురాణాం దారణాత్పురందరః | త్రిపురహా | “స తిస్రః పురో భిత్వే” తి శ్రుతిః | SS(45) and VS(335). One who shattered the cities of the enemies of the gods పురత్రయవిఘాతీ పురత్రయం విహస్తీతి పురత్రయవిఘాతీ| ఆదిత్యపురాణే ద్విసప్తతితమాధ్యాయే- “అథ రుద్రస్య దేవస్య నిర్మితో విశ్వకర్మణా| సర్వలోకమయో దివ్యో రథో యత్సేన సాదరమ్ ||” ఇతి ప్రస్తుత్య సర్వలోకభూతదేవేదమయశ్చన్యూనూర్యమయచక్రద్వయేత్యాది- విశిష్టరథనిర్మాణాంతరం రథారూఢే పరమేశ్వరే, మేరౌ చాపే విష్ణ్వాదౌ బాణరూపే బ్రహ్మణా ప్రేరితే, అనన్తరం దేవానాం, అనాదిసిద్ధతయా విద్యమానమేవ పశుత్వం పణవినోదేన, ద్రఢీకృతే తదను దేవైర్వినాయకే పూజితే, అనన్తరం ఇన్యస్కన్దాదిభిశ్చ పరివృతతే, తదను పురత్రయస్యైకత్ర సమాగమనే ఋష్యాదిభిశ్చ సన్తోషపురఃసరం జయశబ్దే కృతే బ్రహ్మణా “జయ” ఇత్యుక్తే అథ దేవో మహాదేవః సావజ్ఞం తదైక్షత| పురుత్రయం విరూపాక్షస్త్రణాత్ఫస్మవైకృతమ్ ఇత్యాది ప్రసిద్ధమ్| ఉక్తం చ శివరహస్యే- రథః క్షోణీ యంతా శతధృతిరగేన్ద్రో ధనురథో రథాక్షేచన్ద్యార్కౌ రథచరణపాణిః శర ఇతి | దిగక్షోస్తే కోఽయం త్రిపురతృణమాడమ్బరవిధి- ర్విధేయైః క్రీడన్తో న ఖలు పరతన్త్రాః ప్రభుధియః || ఇతి ఇదమపి రహస్యాన్తరమ్ - సాక్ష్యామితేణ వపుషా ప్రవిరాజమానం ద్రవ్యత్పురత్రయతృణాశనమన్దహాసమ్ | దైత్యాన్విధక్షుమచలేశ్వరచాపపాణిం ధ్యాయేత్పురారిమమరౌఘరథాధిరూఢమ్ || ఇతి శ్రుతిస్తు “తేషామసురాణాం తిస్ర ఇత్యారభ్య స తిస్రః పురో భిత్వేత్వేవమన్తా” ఇతి || SS(104). and పురజ్ఞాయః - పురం త్రిపురం జయతీతి పురజ్ఞాయః | “తేషామసురాణామి”తి శ్రుతిః | SS(939). One who conquered the three cities and గిరిధన్వా - గిరిః మేరుః ధనుర్యస్యేతి వా ధన్వ యస్యేతి వా గిరిధన్వా| ఇదం చ అర్థతః శ్రుతిప్రసిద్ధం నామ;“ రుద్రాయ స్థిరధన్వనే గిరః” ఇతి చ్ఛన్దోగానాం, దేవవ్రతే చ “ నమః స్థిరాయ స్థిరధన్వనే” ఇతి| 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 పరోక్షవాదా ఋషయః ” 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 ఇదం తే నాతపస్కాయ నాభక్తాయ కదాచనా న చాశుష్రూషవే వాచ్యం న చ మాం యోఽభ్యసూయతి 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 ఇదం శరీరం కౌన్తేయ క్షేత్రమిత్యభిధీయతే and in the next verse క్షేత్రజ్ఞం చ మాం విద్ధి సర్వ క్షేత్రేషు భారతా 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 outside the pot also. Thus the atma has nothing to do with the body. This is said in Tattvabodha clearly as ఆత్మా కః?What is the Self? స్థూల-సూక్ష్మ-కారణ- శరీరాద్ వ్యతిరిక్తః పంచుకోశాతీతః

సన్ అవస్థాత్రయసాక్షీ సచ్చిదానందస్వరూపః సన్ యస్తిష్ఠతి స ఆత్మా | 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: న జాయతే మ్రియతే వా కదాచి-న్నాయం భూత్వా భవితా వా న భూయః || అజో నిత్యః శాశ్వతోఽయం పురాణో న హన్యతే హన్యమానే శరీరే | 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 కర్మఫలమ్ (ie.) joy or sorrow. That is, it is not a కర్తా or భోక్తా (i.e.) doer or enjoyer or in other words atma is said to be akarta and abhokta (అకర్తా and అభోక్తా). 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. ప్రకృతేః కృయమాణాని గుణైః కర్మాణి సర్వశః || అహంకారవిమూఢాత్మా కర్తాహమితి మన్యతే | 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 నిత్యం చిదానందరూపమ్ as said in the first line of this verse. Krishna says this to his friend Uddhava: దేహస్థోఽపి న దేహస్థో విద్వాన్స్వప్నాద్వ్యథోత్థితః || అదేహస్థోఽపి దేహస్థః కుమతిః స్వప్నదృగ్యథా | 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 యః సాక్షాత్-కురుతే ప్రబోధసమయే స్వాత్మాన-మేవాద్యయం తస్మై శ్రీగురుమూర్తయే నమ ఇదం శ్రీదక్షిణామూర్తయే 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 సాక్షాత్ కురుతే So also in the case of self-knowledge one does not experience or “become” the atma; but స్వాత్మానం అద్యయమేవ సాక్షాత్కురుతే owns up his true nature as atma. Shiva's names relating to Tripura are త్రిపురాన్తకః | త్రీణి పురాణి త్రిపురాణి, త్రిపురాణాం అన్తకః త్రిపురాన్తకః | త్రీణి పురాణి శరీరాణి, “పురసంజ్ఞే శరీరేఽస్మిఞ్శాయనాత్పురోషో హరిః” ఇతి విష్ణుపురాణవచనాత్ | తాని చ స్థూల-సూక్ష్మ-కారణాత్మకాని- స్థూలం భౌతికమేవ, సూక్ష్మం లిఙ్గశరీరం, కారణం త్వవిద్యారూపమితి ఏషాం త్రిపురాణాం అన్తకః త్రిపురాన్తకః; శివజ్ఞానస్య చ విదేహకైవల్యహేతుత్వం మన్త్రోపనిషది శ్రుతమ్ | ఇదం చ శ్రుతిప్రసిద్ధం

నామ, “త్ర్యమ్బకాయ త్రిపురాంతకాయ త్రికాగ్నికాలాయ కాలాగ్నిరుద్రాయ నమః” ఇతి SA(38)పురారాతిః । పురాణాం శరీరాణాం స్థూల-సూక్ష్మ-కారణాత్మనాం అరాతిః శత్రురితి పురారాతిః । తదరాతిత్వం చ శివస్య స్వజ్ఞానస్య విదేహకైవల్యహేతుత్వాత్; తచ్చ మన్తోపనిషది ప్రసిద్ధమ్ SA(68). Krishna tells Uddhava that He is Himself Shiva who destroyed the three cities త్రిపురఘ్నా ధనుష్మతామ్ 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 ఏషం మధ్యే ఇలావృతం నామాభ్యస్తరవర్షం యస్య నాభ్యామవస్థితః సర్వతః సౌవర్ణః కులగిరిరాజో మేరుర్ద్విపాయామసమున్నాహః కర్ణికాభూతః కువలయకమలస్య మూర్ధని ద్వాత్రింశత్సహస్రయోజనవితతో మూలే షోడశసహస్రం తావతాస్తర్భూమ్యాం ప్రవిష్టః । 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 సుమేరుశ్శృంగమధ్యస్థా । సుమేరోర్హేమద్రేర్మధ్యశ్శృంజ్ఞే తిష్ఠతీతి తత్త్వా ॥ శోభనే మేరుమధ్యశ్శృంజ్ఞే ఇతి వా 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

ప్రదక్షిణప్రక్రమణాత్కృశానోరుదర్చిషస్తన్మిథునం చకాన్ ।

మేరోరుపాస్తేషిషవ వర్తమానం అన్యోన్యసంసక్రమహస్త్రియామమ్ ॥

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

కృత్తివాసం- కృత్తిః = bark of a tree , skin, hide వాసః = 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. వ్యాఘ్రచర్మామృరః | వ్యాఘ్రచర్మ అమృరం యస్య సః; “తథా పినాకహస్తః కృత్తివాసా” ఇతి శ్రుతిః | SS(108). గజచర్మామృరః | గజాసురస్య చర్మ కృత్తిరమృరం వాసో యస్య సః గజచర్మామృరః | శ్రుతిరుక్తా | SS(158). కృత్తివాసః | కృత్తి దారుకావనస్థ-మునికృతః ౭ భిచారోత్పన్నవ్యాఘ్రస్య చర్మ వాసో యస్య స తథా | అథవా కాశ్యాం శివభక్తజిఘాంసయాగతస్య గజాసురస్య కృత్తిరత్ర వివక్షితా | “ ప్రాణేశ్వరః కృత్తివాసాః పినాకీ” శ్రుతిః | SS(909) కృత్తివాసః | కృత్తిః దారుకావనస్థమునికృతాభిచారోత్పన్నవ్యాఘ్రస్య చర్మ వాసః వస్త్రం యస్య స తథా | యథోక్తం స్కాన్దే “ తతో వ్యాఘ్రౌ మహాన్కుర్ధ ఆజగామ నఖాయుధః | తేషామృషీణాం మర్మస్థః కోపోఽయం నిర్గతో యథా | తం చాదాయ త్వచం భిత్వా తదా చర్మామృరోఽభవత్ | శుశుభే చర్మణా తేన నానావర్ణయుతేన చ” ఇతి || అథవా కాశ్యాం శివభక్తజిఘాంసయాగతస్య గజాసురస్య కృత్తిరత్ర వివక్షితా || యథోక్తం స్కాన్ద ఏవ - “వారాణస్యాం పురాయాతో గజరూపో మహాసురః | తాపసాశ్శ్చివభక్తాంశ్చ నిహస్తుం కోపదీపితః” ఇత్యుపక్రమ్య “ హత్వా తం కుఙ్జరం భీమమధృష్యం దిగ్గజైరపి | పాదహస్తయుతం చర్మ విశస్యాచ్ఛిద్య తేన వై | ప్రావృత్యాత్మానమాత్మేశః స్తూయమానోఽఖిలైః సురైః ” ఇతి SA(67). దుర్వాసః | దుర్నిరీక్షం వాసో గజసింహవ్యాఘ్రచర్మాదిరూపం యస్య సః తథా | 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 ఏకైశ్వర్యే స్థితేఽపి ప్రణతబహుఫలే యః స్వయం కృత్తివాసాః | 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 అతివర్ణాశ్రమీ 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 బన్ధుః | బన్ధుకృత్యం హితాహితోపదేశం శ్రుతిస్మృతిలక్షణం కృతవానితి | “స నో బన్ధుర్జనితే”తి శ్రుతిః | 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 తత్రాభవద్ భగవాన్ వ్యాసపుత్రో యదృచ్ఛయా గామటమానోఽనపేక్షః | అలక్ష్యలిక్ష్ణో నిజలాభతుష్టః వృతశ్చబాలైరవధూతవేషః | 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 హరః | స్వ విషయ జ్ఞానేనావిద్యాద్వారణాద్ధరః | 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 లభ్యా సుదుర్లభమిదం బహుసంభ్రావ్యన్తే మానుష్యమర్థదమనిత్యమపిహ ధీరః || తూర్ణం యతేత న పతేదనుమృత్యు యావన్నిశ్రేయసాయ విషయః ఖలు సర్వతః స్యాత్ | 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 తరవః కిం న జీవన్తి భస్మాః కిం న శ్వసన్యతా న ఖాదన్తి న మేహన్తి కిం గ్రామపశవోఽపరే॥ శ్వవిడ్వరాహోష్ఠ్యఖరైః సంస్తుతః పురుషః పశుః । న యత్కర్ణపథోపితో జాతు నామ గదాగ్రజః । 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) అపి చేత్సుదురాచారో భజతే మామనన్యభాక్ సాధురేవ స మన్తవ్యః సమ్యగ్వ్యవసితో హి సః ॥ ఉప్రం భవతి ధర్మాత్మా శశ్వచ్ఛాన్తిం నిగచ్ఛతి కౌన్తేయ ప్రేతిజాసీహి న మే భక్తః ప్రణశ్యతి। 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 భేషజమ్-సంసారరోగస్యాషధం భేషజమ్ VS(578)భవహేతి- భవః సంసారః, తస్య హేతిరాయుధం సంసారచ్ఛేతా। "భవస్య హేత్యై జగతాం పతయ" ఇతి శ్రుతిః । SS(272) తారకః । తారయతి సమ్సారాదితి తారకః । SA(07) తారణః । సంసారసాగరాత్తారయతీతి తారణః । VS(337) తారః । గర్భజన్మజరామృత్యులక్షణాద్ భయాత్తారయతీతి తారః । VS(338)తారః । గర్భజన్మజరామరణసంసారమహాభయాత్తారయతీతి తారః । "నమస్తారాయ నమః శమ్భవే చే"తి శ్రుతిః । SS(76) భజే దివ్యసన్మార్గబన్ధుమ్ । దివ్య = divine సన్మార్గబన్ధుమ్ = a companion to one who treads the righteous path భజే = 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. సన్మార్గః । సంస్పాసౌ మర్గశ్చ సన్మార్గః । means the virtuous path: the path trodden by the saints and noble people and that is in keeping with the shastric injunctions మహాజనో యే న గతః స పన్థాః । 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 సంసారసిన్ధోస్తరణేఽస్తు్యపాయః । యేనైవ యాతాః యతయోఽస్య పారం తమేవ మార్గం తవ నిర్దిశామి ।

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 యః శాస్త్రవిధిముత్స్పృజ్య వర్తతే కామకారతః । న స సిద్ధిమవాప్నోతి న సుఖం న పరాం గతిమ్ । తస్మాచ్ఛాస్త్రం ప్రమాణం తే కార్యకార్యవ్యవస్థితౌ జ్ఞాత్వా శాస్త్రవిధానోక్తం కర్మ కర్తుమిహోర్హసి । 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. తానహం ద్విషతః క్రూరాన్సంసారేషు నరాధమాన్ । క్షిపామ్యజన్మశుభానాసురీష్యేవ యోనిషు । BG(16.19) Sankaracharya explains “inferior births” as cruel beings such as tigers, lions and the like అజన్మం సన్వతం అశుభాన్ అశుభకర్మకారిణః ఆసురీష్యేవ క్రూరకర్మప్రాయాసు వ్యాఘ్రసంహోదిషు యోనిషు క్షిపామి . Kalidasa prays in the invocatory verse in Malavikagnimitra సన్మార్గాలోకనాయ వ్యపనయతు స వస్తామసీం వృత్తిమీశః । He prays to lord to remove the ignorance born out of lethargy to enable us to perceive the right path or the virtuous path. సత్ Sat also means that which really exists or existence and means brahman అవితథం పరం బ్రహ్మ సత్, “సదేవ సోమ్యేదమ్” (ఛా.ఉ. ౬.౧౧౪) ఇతి శ్రుతేః । VS(478). Thus Margabandhu is brahman only సజ్ఞాసౌ మార్గబంధుశ్చ సన్మార్గబంధుః । 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 క్షురస్య ధార నిశితా దురత్యయా దుర్గం పథస్తత్కవయో వదన్తి 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 బధ్నాతి మనః స్నేహోదినా ఇతి But lord Margabandhu is a unique bandhu who causes all bondage to drop off (as

He is Sat) సత్సంకల్పే నిస్సంకల్పే says Shri Sankara in Bhajagovindam. So every one prays to Him for getting free from bondage త్ర్యంబకం యజామహే సుగంధిం పుష్టివర్ధనమ్ | ఉర్వారుకమివ బంధనాన్మృత్యోర్ముక్షీయ మామృతాత్ | 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 మార్గః | ముముక్షవస్తం మార్గయన్తి ఇతి మార్గః; పరమాన్దో యేన ప్రాప్యతే స మార్గ ఇతి వా 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 యం విదిత్వా అమృతత్వాయ కల్పన్తే యోగినో ముముక్షవః స ఏవ పన్థాః మార్గః | “నాన్యః పన్థా విద్యతేఽయనాయ” ఇతి శ్రుతేః | VS(397). The poet says దివ్య సన్మార్గబంధుమ్ Why say దివ్య divya? The scriptures talk of the paths the jiva can take after the fall of the physical body. They are the dark path (కృష్ణ గతిః) and the bright path (శుక్లగతిః). 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 పితృలోకః 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 (చిత్తశుద్ధిః) purity of the mind. So, now one with a purified mind can add meditation or upAsana (ఉపాసనా) 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. ఏతేషు యశ్చరతే భ్రాజమానేషు యథాకాలం చాహుతయో హ్యోదదాయన్ || తం నయన్త్యేతాః సూర్యస్య రశ్మయో యత్ర దేవానాం పతిరేకోధివాసః | 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 detachmant. They go to Brahmaloaka through the bright path తపఃశ్రద్ధే యే హ్యుపవసన్స్వరణ్యే శాన్తా విద్వాంసో భైక్ష్యచర్యాం చరన్తః || సూర్యద్వారేణ తే విరజాః ప్రయాన్తి యత్రామృతః స పురుషో హ్యవ్యయాత్మా | MU(1-

2-11). Note the use of the word విద్వాంసః , 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 (జీవన్ముక్తిః). But those who go to the BrahmaloKa 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 (క్రమముక్తిః). 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

౪. కన్ధర్పదర్పఘ్నమీశం కాలకణ్ఠం మహేశం మహావ్యోమకేశమ్ |
కున్ధాభదన్తం సురేశం కోటిసూర్యప్రకాశం భజే మార్గబంధుమ్ |
శమోభి . . .

కన్ధర్పదర్పఘ్నమ్ - కందర్పః = Manmatha, the god of love దర్పః = arrogance, pride, vanity ఘ్న = used at the end of a word means destroying, removing or curing. So దర్పఘ్నం 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 సాక్షాత్ మన్మథమన్మథః | జగన్మోహనస్య కామస్యాపి మనస్యదూభతః కామః సాక్షాత్తస్యాపి మోహక ఇత్యర్థః | 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 సున్దరః | ద్వాత్రిశల్లక్షణోపేతః సున్దరః | “కామాయ కామరూపిణ” ఇతి శ్రుతిః | SS(416). Also సున్దరః | విశ్వాతిశాయిసౌభాగ్యశాలిత్వాత్ సున్దరః | VS(791). One who is

more beautiful than anyone else సుదేహః | శోభనో దేహో యస్య స సుదేహః | “మగ్గలాయతనం దేవం యువానమతిసుందరమ్ | ధ్యాయేత్కల్పతరోర్ములే సుఖాసీనం సహోమయా.” ఇతి | “శివాన్యే”తి శ్రుతిః | SS(249) శుభాఙ్గః - సుందరాం తనం ధారయన్ శుభాఙ్గః | VS(586). Also శుభాఙ్గః - శోభనైరక్షైర్ధ్యైయత్వాత్ శుభాఙ్గః | 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 కందర్పకోటిశతగుణసుందరదివ్యాకృతిం శివం వందే 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 కామకోటిసమ, మనసిజశతకోటిమణ్ణులవేష, మీనాఙ్కకోటిమోహన, కోటిమదనసుందర, జగన్మోహన , 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.”

మధురం మధురం వపురస్య విభో-ర్మధురం మధురం వదనం మధురమ్ |
మధుగన్ధి మృదుస్మిత-మేతదహో మధురం మధురం మధురం మధురమ్ |

Shri Vedanta Desika should have had the same sentiment as Shri Dikshita and addresses the lord at Tirupathy as కన్దర్పదర్పహర సుందర దివ్యమూర్తే! “the One whose beautiful form destroys the pride of Manmatha” (in Venkatesa suprabatam). The use of the word కన్దర్పః 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

యే హి సంస్పర్శజా భోగా దుఃఖయోనయ ఏవ తే ।
ఆద్యన్తవన్తః కౌన్తేయ న తేషు రమతే బుధః । 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: ప్రతిపదలలితాభ్యాం, ప్రత్యహం నూతనాభ్యాం, ప్రతిముహురధికాభ్యామ్ 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 సుచారుః - సుతరాం దర్శనీయశ్చారుః, నిరతిశయ-పరమానందరూపత్వాత్ । “విజ్ఞానమానందం బ్రహ్మే”తి శ్రుతిః । SS(818). and రమ్యః - సుఖరూపత్వాద్రమ్యః । “యో వై భూమా తత్సుఖమి”తి శ్రుతిః । SS(924). Devi Lalita is known as సర్వాజ్ఞసున్దరీ - సర్వాణి చ తాని అజ్ఞాని చ అవయవాః శిరఃపాణ్యాదయః; తేష్యన్యూనానతిరిక్తభావవత్త్వాత్ యథాసాముద్రికా-లక్షణం తద్వత్వేన సర్వాజ్ఞసున్దరీ । ఆధవా సర్వేషామజ్ఞేషు శరీరేషు బ్రహ్మస్వరూపతయా అత్యన్తప్రేమవిషయత్వేన సున్దరపదార్థవదవినాభావవాఙ్మూవిషయత్వాత్ తథా । (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: శాన్తః - విషయసుఖేష్యసజ్గతయా శాన్తః, “నిష్కలం నిష్క్రియం శాన్తమ్” (శ్వే. ఉ. ౬. ౧౯) ఇతి శ్రుతిః । VS(582) and SS(9)విరాగః - విరతో రాగో యస్య విరాగః । “కథమనేంద్రశేన నిశ్చినోతీ”తి శ్రుతిః । SS(89). విరతః - విగతం రతమస్య విషయసేవాయామితి విరతః । VS(396)దమః - దమోఽస్యాస్తీతి దమః । నిగ్రహితేన్ద్రియగ్రామ ఇత్యర్థః । ఆత్మారామత్వాత్ । “న హి స్వాత్మారామం విషయమృగత్పష్టా భ్రమయతి” ఇతి శివరహస్యే । “నీలకణ్ఠం ప్రశాన్తమి” తి శ్రుతిః । SS(578). Thus Manmatha was no match to Shiva. He totally lost himself in the prescence 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 సధూనాం క్షణికో కోపః । 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

ఈశం - 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

కాలకణ్ఠమ్ - కాల = black or dark-blue colour కణ్ఠః = 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

నీలకణ్ఠః - నీలః కణ్ఠో యస్య సః నీలకణ్ఠః | శివస్య కణ్ఠే నైల్యం విష్ణ్వాది-సకలప్రాణ్ణార్జికర-హాలాహల-విషధారణప్రయుక్తమ్—“నీలకణ్ఠం ప్రశాన్తమి”తి శ్రుతిః | SS(5). The name నీలగ్రీవః for Shiva appears in several places in Shri Rudram. Also: శ్రీకణ్ఠః - శ్రీః కాలకూటజనితా శోభా తద్వాన్కణ్ఠో యస్య సః | తథా కాలకూట-జనిత-మాలిన్యమపి శోభైవ పరమేశ్వరస్య | “వికారోఽపి శ్లాఘ్యై భువన-భయభక్తి-వ్యసనిన” ఇతి న్యాయాత్ | అథవా శ్రీః విషమేవ, “శ్రీర్వేషరచనా శోభా సమృత్సరలశాఖిషు| వాణీలక్ష్మీలవక్లేషు విషే బిల్వేఽపి”తి నానార్తరత్నమాలా తద్వాన్కణ్ఠో యస్యేతి 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

అకాణ్ఠబ్రహ్మాణ్ఠక్షయచకితదేవాసురకృపా-
విధేయస్యాఽఽనీద్ యస్త్రినయన విషం సంహృతవతః |
స కల్మాషః కణ్ఠే తవ న కురుతే న శ్రియమహో
వికారోఽపి శ్లాఘ్యై భువనభయభక్తివ్యసనినః || ౧౪ |

The following names of Shiva are based on this incident. కాలకూటవిషాదీ - హాలాహల- విషపానకర్తా కాలకూటవిషాదీ | స్కాన్దే సనత్కుమారసంహితాయాం కాశికావనమాహాత్యే విష్ణ్వాదినా సమద్రమథనం, తదాసీం వాసుకీముఖాత్కాలవిషోత్పాదనం, తేన గ్లానిః, తదను తైర్విషనిగ్రహార్తం శివం ప్రతి ప్రార్థనా, తదను శివప్రేరీతేన—నామ్నా హస్తేన విషమాహృత్య చ శివహస్తే జమ్బూఫలవత్సమర్పణం, తదను- “గృహీత్వా భుక్తవాఙ్చముఖః కణ్ఠే నీలోఽభవత్తదా| తదాప్రభృతి తత్థానం హాలాశనమితి స్మృతమ్ | శివోఽభూత్కాలభుజ్జ్వామ్నా కాలక్ష్మాఖ్యకోఽభవదీ”తి | 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

నిర్మథ్యమానాదుదధేరభూద్ విషం మహోల్బణం హాలాహలాహ్వామగ్రతః |

సమ్భ్రాన్తమీనోన్మకరాహికచ్చపాత్ తిమిద్విపగ్రాహతిమిజ్జీలాకులాత్ ॥

తముగ్రవేగం దిశి దిశ్యుపర్యథో విసర్పదుత్సర్పదసహ్యమప్రతి ।

భీతాః ప్రజా దుద్రువురణ్ణ సేశ్వరా అరక్ష్యమాణాః శరణం సదాశివమ్ ॥

“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

దేవ దేవ మహాదేవ భూతాత్మన్ భూతభావన ।

త్రాహి నః శరణాపన్నాన్స్త్రైలోక్యదహనాత్ విషాత్ ॥

“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 తద్ వీక్ష్య వ్యసనం తాసాం కృపయా భృశపీడితః । సర్వభూతసుహృద్ దేవ ఇదమాహ సతీం ప్రియామ్ । Shiva who was the embodiment of mercy was very much affected by their plight and told His consort Sati this

అహో బత భవాన్యేతత్ ప్రజానాం పశ్య వైశసమ్ ।

క్షీరోదమథనోద్భూతాత్ కాలకూటాదుపస్థితమ్ ॥

“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.”

ఆసాం ప్రాణపరీప్సానాం విధేయమభయం హి మే! ఏతావాన్ హి

ప్రభోరథో యద్ దీనపరిపాలనమ్ ।

“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

నిశమ్య కర్మ తచ్చమ్నోః దేవదేవస్య మీథుషః ।

ప్రజా దక్షాయణీ బ్రహ్మ వైకుణ్ఠశ్చ శశంసిరే ।

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

గణ్ణో ధృతా న భవతా శివ పావనీతి నాస్వాదితో మధుర ఇత్యపి కాలకూటః । సంరక్షణాయ జగతాం కరుణాతిరేకా-త్కర్మద్వయం కలిత-మేతద-నన్యనాధ్యమ్ । (Brahmatarkastavam) మహేశమ్ - మహో is a substitute for మహాత్ meaning big or great ఈశః is synonymous with ఈశ్వరః and means lord or master మహేశః is the name of Shiva మహోశ్చాసాపీశశ్చ మహేశః । “యః పరః స మహేశ్వరః” ఇతి శ్రుతిః । SS(26) మహేశ్వరః - స్వర్గాదియక్తి-చిదీశితృత్వయోగాదీశ్వరత్వం హి ఇన్ద్రాదీనమప్యస్తి: యదాదాయ షడ్వింశబ్రాహ్మణే ఉత్పాతశాన్తి ప్రకరణే ఇన్ద్రాయమాదిషు “ఈశ్వరాయ స్వాహా” ఇతి మన్తః ప్రవృత్తః; శివస్తు మహేశ్వరః తేషామపీశ్వరత్వాత్, “ధ్యేయః సర్వైశ్వర్యసంపన్నః సర్వైశ్వరః శమ్భురాకాశమధ్యే” ఇతి శ్రుతిః; “స్త్వాదిషు చ దేవేషు తస్య త్వైశ్వర్యముచ్యతే” ఇతి భారతవచనాచ్చ । ఏతదభిప్రాయమేవ చ “మహేశ్వరశ్చ భూతానాం మహతామీశ్వరశ్చ సః” ఇతి భారతవచనమ్ । మహతః ప్రణీన ఇన్ద్రాదీన్పుత్యపి యదస్యేశితృత్వం వర్తతే, ఇదమేవ ఏతదీయేశితృత్వస్య మహత్వమితి 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 అతః ఇతరదేవతాసాధ్యకార్యప్రవర్తకతయా సర్వత్రాప్రతిహతత్వాత్ మహదీశితృత్వమస్యేతి మహేశ్వర ఇతి స్మృఉతః ఇతి । ఇదం చ శ్రుతిప్రసిద్ధం నామ, “మాయినం తు మహేశ్వరమ్”, “తమీశ్వరాణాం పరమం మహేశ్వరమ్”, “యః పరః స మహేశ్వరః” ఇత్యాది శ్రుతిః । SA(2)

మహావ్యోమకేశమ్ - మహాత్ = great or big వ్యోమన్ = sky, atmosphere వ్యోమకేశః is an epithet of Shiva వ్యోమకేశః గణ్ణాధారణసమయే వ్యోమవద్యిశాలజుటావలయరూపః కేశః అస్యేతి వ్యోమకేశః । 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 వ్యోమకేశీ - వ్యోమైవ కేశా యస్యా విరాడ్రూపతయాః । వ్యోమకేశస్య శివస్య స్త్రీ వా । వ్యోమైవాల్పం సద్వ్యోమకమ్ । అల్పార్థే కప్రత్యయః । తస్యేశీ తతోఽపి వ్యాపికా వా 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 మహా in the word మహావ్యోమకేశమ్ meaning great or big is significant మహావ్యోమ meaning "the big or the great sky" is said to distinguish it from the "small sky" that is mentioned in the Upanishads. అథ యదిద-మస్మిన్ బ్రహ్మపురే దహారం పుణ్డరీకం వేశ్మ దహరోఽస్మిన్నస్తరాకాశ-స్తస్మిన్ యదస్త-స్తదన్వేష్టవ్యం తద్వవ విజిజ్ఞాసితవ్యమితి 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 vacuum. It is the intention of Dahara Vidya to provide them something gross on which they can meditate upon. Daharam means small (దహారం అల్పం) and బ్రహ్మపురం 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.

కున్దాభదన్తమ్ - కుందమ్ = jasmine flower ఆభః = likeness, resemblance దన్తః 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

వాగ్విశుద్ధః - వాచో వాణోఽఽ విశుద్ధా ఋగ్వేదాదయో యస్య సః వాగ్విశుద్ధః । "అస్య మహతో భూతస్య నిశ్వసితమేతద్వ్యద్యుగ్వేదోయజుర్వేద" ఇత్యాది శ్రుతిః ॥ ఉక్తం చ సూత్రకారేణ శాస్త్రయోనిత్వాదితి వివృతం చ భాష్యకారేణ మహతః ఋగ్వేదాదేః శాస్త్రస్య యోనిః కారణమితి SS(318)

కృతాగమః - కృతా రచితా ముఖపఞ్చకాద్వినిర్గతా ఆగమాః ప్రణవాదిమహామంత్రాః, ఋగాది సర్వవేదాః, ప్రోద్గీతాది అష్టావింశతినఙ్ఖ్యైకా ఆగమాశ్చ యస్య సః కృతాగమః | “అస్య మహతో భూతస్య నిఃశ్వసితమేతద్భగ్వదః ఇత్యాది” శ్రుతిః | SS(444)

వేదనిశ్వసితః - వేదా ఋగ్వేదాదయః నిశ్వసితమివ యథాప్రయత్నేన పురుషనిఃశ్వాసో భవతి ఏవం యస్య స వేదనిఃశ్వసితః | “అస్య మహతో భూతస్య నిఃశ్వసితమేవైతద్భగ్వదః” ఇత్యాది శ్రుతిః | SS(733)

వేదకారః - విద్యేతే ధర్మబ్రహ్మణీ ఏభిరితి వేదాః ఆమ్నాయాః తాన్ కరోతి నిఃశ్వసితరూపతయా ఉచ్చారయతి ఇతి వేదకారః | “అస్య మహతో భూతస్యేత్యా”ది శ్రుతిః | 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 కున్దరదన and కున్దసున్దరరదన in his Krishna Leela Tarangini. (రదః = tooth.) This description of Devi's teeth is in Shyamala Dandakam. కున్దపుష్పద్యుతిస్నిగ్ధదన్తావలీనిర్మలాలోలకల్లోలసంమేలనస్మేరశోణాధరే!

సురేశం - సురః = 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 నిరస్తసామ్యాతిశయేన రాధసా స్వధామని బ్రహ్మణి రంస్యతే నమః | BH(2-4-14) నిరస్తం సాంయమతిశయశ్చ యస్య యదపేక్షయా అన్యస్య సామ్యమతిశయశ్చ నాస్తి తేన రాధసా ఐశ్వర్యేణ స్వధామని స్వస్వరూపే బ్రహ్మణి రమమాణాయ (Shridhara's commentary). Shri Sadasiva Brahmendra bows to Him saying (in Navaratnamala- 12) నిస్తులమహిమానమానతోఽస్మి శివమ్ | తులనం = comparison. So he says “I salute Shiva of incomparable glory.”

కోటిసూర్యప్రకాశమ్ - కోటి = 10 millions ప్రకాశ 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 సూర్యకోటిప్రతికాశః - సూర్యకోటీనం ప్రకాశ ఇవ ప్రకాశో యస్య సః తథా| ఇయం చ అభూతోపమా| అధికదీప్తిమానిత్యర్థః | “నమో దీప్తాయ దీప్తిరూపిణ” ఇతి శ్రుతిః | SS(502) సుదీప్తః - సర్వప్రకాశకత్వేన ప్రమాణం వినా సర్వదా దీప్త ఇతి సుదీప్తః | “దీప్తాయ దీప్తిరూపిణ” ఇతి శ్రుతిః | SS(633) మహాద్యుతిః - మహతీ ద్యుతిర్బాహ్యోభ్యన్తరా చ అస్యేతి మహాద్యుతిః; “స్వయంజ్యోతిః” (బృ-ఉ-౪-౩-౯), “జ్యోతిషాం జ్యోతిః” (బృ- ఉ- ౪-౪-౧౬) ఇత్యాది శ్రుతేః | VS (176) మరీచిః - తేజస్వినామపి తేజస్త్యాత్ మరీచిః; “తేజస్తేజస్వినామహమ్”, (గీతా ౧౦-౩౬) ఇతి భగవద్వచనాత్ VS(189) జ్యోతిః - స్వత ఏవ ద్యోతయత ఇతి జ్యోతిః; “నరయణపరో జ్యోతిరత్మా”, (నా-ఉ-౧౩-౧) ఇతి మన్తవర్ణాత్ 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 భజే = I worship మర్గబంధుమ్ = 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

౫. మన్దారభూతేరుదారం మన్దరాగేన్ద్రసారం మహాగౌర్యదూరమ్ |
 సిన్ధూరదూరప్రచారం సిన్ధురాజాతిధీరం భజే మార్గబంధుమ్ |
 శమోభా ..

This is the fifth and the last verse in the stotram to be followed by the ఫలశ్రుతిః , 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 సగుణ aspect or aspect with name and form as Shiva. In His నిర్గుణ 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

వాత్సల్యా-దభయప్రదానసమయా-దార్తార్తి-నిర్వాపణాత్
 ఔదార్యా-దఘశోషణా-దగణిత-శ్రేయఃపదప్రాపణాత్ |
 సేవ్యః శ్రీపతిరేక ఏవ సతతం సన్వృత్ర షట్ సాక్షిణః
 ప్రహ్లాదశ్చ విభీషణశ్చ కరిరాట్ పాశ్చాల్యహాల్యా ధ్రువః ||

మన్దారభూతేరుదారం - మన్దారః = 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 భూతిః = grandeur, dignity, riches ఉదారమ్ = generous, liberal. So the word మన్దారభూతేరుదారం means that Lord Shiva is more generous in granting one's wishes than the Mandara tree. So He is known as కామప్రదః - క్రేతేభ్యః కామాన్ ప్రకర్ణేణ దదాతీతి కామప్రదః | 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 ధానాముష్టిముచే కుచేలమునయే దత్తే చ విత్తేశతామ్ | 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 వరదః - అభిమతాన్ వరాన్ దదాతీతి వరదః | VS(330). He grants boons desired from Him. Also వరదః భక్తానామిష్టప్రదః | “వరదం దేవమీడ్య” మితి శ్రుతిః | SS(107). And ఉదారః - భక్తాఃభీష్టదః సర్వోత్కృష్ట ఉదారః | “ఆప్తతమముత్కృష్టతమ” మితి శ్రుతిః | SS(315). Saint Sadasiva Brahmendra calls Him as నతమన్దార - “the wishing tree of heaven” in his song భజ రే గోపాలమ్ - Bhaja re Gopalam. Again he calls Him as నేవకజనమన్దిరమన్దార - “the Mandara tree planted in the residential quarters of His devotees” in the song మానస సంచర రే - Manasa sanchara re. We find the mantra నమో వృక్షేభ్యో హరికేశేభ్యః 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 పారిజాతః - పారమస్యాస్తీతి పారి, సముద్రః, తస్మాజ్జాతః పారిజాతః దేవవృక్షః, తద్రూపత్వాద్దేవోఽపి పారిజాతః, భక్తజనేష్టద ఇత్యర్తః | SS(264) and వృక్షాణాం పతిః - వృక్షా అశ్వత్థాదయః, తేషాం పతిః స్వామీ | “వృక్షాణాం పతయే నమ ఇతి శ్రుతిః | 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 అమరాః . 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 అన్తవత్తు ఫలం తేషాం తద్భవత్యల్పమేధసామ్ | BG(7-23). Sankaracharya, in his commentary, points out that ఏవం సమానే అపి ఆయానే మామేవ న ప్రతిపద్యన్తే అనన్తఫలాయ, అహో ఖలు కష్టతరం వర్తతే, ఇత్యనుక్రోశం దర్శయతి భగవాన్ | “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 నిత్యః 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. స్మరతః పాదకమల-మాత్మానమపి యచ్ఛతి | BH(10-80-11). This idea is repeated by Shri Kulasekara in his Mukundamala (31)నేవ్యే స్వస్య పదస్య దాతరి సురే నారాయణే తిష్ఠతి | 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 ప్రియో హి జ్ఞానినోఽత్యర్థమహం న చ మమ ప్రియః | BG(7-17). So He naturally takes care of them. Has not He said తేషాం నిత్యాభియుక్తానాం యోగక్షేమం వహామ్యహమ్ ? “To them who are ever devout, I secure them gain and safety.” BG(9-22). Here యోగః and క్షేమః “gain and safety” is explained by Shri Sankara as యోగః అప్రాప్తస్య ప్రాపణం, క్షేమః తద్రక్షణం, తదుభయం ప్రాపయామి అహమ్ | . (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 కేవలం ఏవ భగవచ్ఛరణాః తేః అత భగవాన్ ఏవ తేషాం యోగక్షేమం వహాతితి | . 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
యదృచ్ఛోపపన్నేన వర్తమానో గృహశ్రమి । BH(10-80-7).

మన్దరాగేన్ద్రసారమ్ - మన్దరః = is the name of a mythical mountain అగః = mountain.
ఇన్ద్రః = the first or the best (of any class of objects). So the word మన్దరాగేన్ద్ర means
Mandara, the best among the mountains. సారం = 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. మన్దరో మేరుమన్దరః సుపార్శ్వః కుముద ఇతి అయుతయోజన
విస్తారోన్నాహ మేరోశ్చతుర్దిశమవష్టమ్భ గిరయ ఉపకృప్తాః । 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 సర్వగతః స్థాణుః అచలః - సర్వగతత్వాత్ స్థాణుః ఇవ స్థిరః ఇత్యేతత్ ।
స్థిరత్వాత్ అచలః అయం ఆత్మా । 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 మహాబలః- బలినామపి బలవత్త్వాత్ మహాబలః ।
He is stronger than those who are said to possess great strength. VS(172)

మహాబలపరః- మహద్బలం శారీరం సామర్థ్యం నైన్యరూపం వా యేషాం తే
మహాబలాః, ఇన్ద్రోపేన్ద్రప్రభృతయః తేషాం పరః శ్రేష్ఠః పరమేశ్వరః । “తమీశ్వరాణాం
పరమం మహేశ్వర”మితి శ్రుతిః । SS(604). In fact He is known as అద్రిః-
అద్రివదప్రకమ్ప్యః, పరైరచల ఇతి యావత్ । “తం శాన్తమచల”మితి శ్రుతిః । యద్వా
శ్రీశైలారుణాచలాదిపర్వతరూపత్వాదద్రిః । శ్రీశైలశిఖరం దృష్ట్వా పునర్లస్మ న విద్యతే
ఇతి, కాశ్యాం తు మరణాన్ముక్తిః, స్మరణాదరుణాచలమితి చ స్మరణాత్ ॥ “వనాని
శమ్భుర్గిరయశ్చ శమ్భు”రితి స్కాన్దే । “సర్వో హ్యేష రుద్ర” ఇతి శ్రుతిః ॥ SS(856).

మహీధరః- మహీం గిరిరూపేణ ధరతితి మహీధరః, “వనాని విష్ణుర్గిరయో దిశశ్చ” (విష్ణు-
౨-౧౨-౩౮) ఇతి పరాశరోక్తిః । VS(369). He held up Mandara during the churning
of the ocean and lifted the Govardana mountain as Krishna. So He gets the name
మహాద్రిధృక్- మహాన్తమద్రిం గిరిం మన్దరం గోవర్దనం చ అమృతమథనే గోరక్షణే చ
ధృతవానితి మహాద్రిధృక్ ॥ 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 అభీతి హేతోరనువర్తనీయం నాథ త్వదన్యం న విభావయామి
 | భయం కుతః స్యాత్ త్వయి సానుకంపే రక్షా కుతః స్యాత్ త్వయి జాతరోషే ||
 (Ashtabhujashtakam - 5) త్వయి రక్షతి రక్షకైః కిమన్యైః త్వయి చారక్షతి రక్షకైః కిమన్యైః
 | ఇతి నిశ్చిత ధీః శ్రయామి నిత్యం నృహరే వేగవతీ తటాశ్రయం త్వామ్ || (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

శ్రీన్ లోకాన్ సంపరిక్రమ్య తమేవ శరణం గతః |
 స తం నిపతితం భూమౌ శరణ్యః శరణాగతమ్ |
 వధార్హమపి కాకుత్స్థః కృపయాపర్యపాలయత్ ||
 (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

అహో సుబలవాన్ రామో మహాదస్త్రబలం చ వై |
 యస్య విక్రమమాసాద్య రాక్షసా నిధనం గతాః |
 తం మన్యే రాఘవం వీరం నారాయణమనామయమ్ || (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 మృత్యుంజ్ఞాయః 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

మృత్యుఙ్గాయం మృత్యుభియాశ్రితానా-
 మహంమతిర్మృత్యుముపైతి పూర్వమ్ ।
 అథ స్వభావాదమృతేషు తేషు
 కథం పునర్మృత్యుధియోఽవకాశః ॥

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 vicious 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.

మహాగౌర్యదూరమ్- మహా = great గౌరీ = is the name of Parvati మహాగౌరీ means great or glorious Gauri అదూరమ్ = close by, not far away దూర = 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 అర్ధనారీశ్వరః- నార్యా అర్ధం అర్ధనారీ, అర్ధనారీమిలిత ఈశ్వరః అర్ధనారీశ్వరః । నార్యంశోఽర్ధమీశ్వరాంశశ్చార్ధమిత్యర్తః । తదుక్తమాచార్యైః- “ప్రవాలప్రవాహప్రభాశోభమర్ధం మరుత్వన్మణిశ్రీమహాశ్శ్యామమర్ధమ్ । గుణసూతమేకం వపుశైవమన్తః స్మరామి స్మరాపత్నిసమ్ప్రతిహేతుః” ఇతి ॥ “పురుషం కృష్ణపింగలమి”తి శ్రుతిః ॥ SS(437) దేహార్ధకాన్తః దేహస్య అర్ధం వామభాగః, కాన్తాత్మకః యస్య సః దేహార్ధకాన్తః । భవిష్యోత్తరపురాణే- “అర్ధం ప్రవాలరుచిరం హరిసీలమర్ధం నాగాజనామ్బరమతో వరవస్త్రమర్ధమ్ । కాన్తాఽశకార్ధమథ దీప్తజటాలుమర్ధం దివ్యం మహాః సతతమద్య తవాశ్రయేఽహమ్” ఇతి ॥ “దరిద్రస్నీలవోహోత” ఇతి శ్రుతిః ॥ SS(568).

Krishna has said పితాఽహమస్య జగతో మాతా ధాతా పితామహాః । BG(9-17). “I am

tha 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

వాగర్థావివ సంపుక్తౌ వాగర్థప్రతిపత్తయే ।

జగతః పితరౌ వనే పార్వతీపరమేశ్వరౌ ॥

“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 కత్రా - క్రియత ఇతి కర్మ జగత్తస్య కర్తా, “యో వై బాలాక ఏతేషాం పురుషాణం కర్తా యస్య వై తత్ కర్మ స వేదితవ్యః ।” కౌ-ఉ-౪-౧౪ ఇతి శ్రుతేః । VS(316). కరణం - జగదుత్పత్తౌ సాధకం కరణమ్ । VS(378) కారణం - ఉపాదానం నిమిత్తం చ కారణమ్ । VS(379) వికర్తా - వివిధం భువనం క్రియతే ఇతి వికర్తా స ఏవ భగవాన్ విష్ణుః । 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 మాయాం తు ప్రకృతిం విద్యాన్మాయినం తు మహేశ్వరమ్ । 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 దైవీ హ్యేషా గుణమయీ మమ మాయా దురత్యయా । BG(7-14). “This divine illusion of Mine, made up of gunas, is hard to surmount.” So He is known as మహామాయః - మాయావినామపి మాయాకారిత్యాత్ మహామాయః, “మమ మాయా దురత్యయా” ఇతి భగవద్వచనాత్ । VS(170). Krishna says that in fact He is both: the intelligent cause and the material cause called prakriti. Thus మూలప్రకృతిః is one of His names మూలభూతా ప్రకృతిః మూలప్రకృతిః, జగదాదికారణం, తన్నిమిత్రోపాదానత్వకం బ్రహ్మోత్పర్తః । “తదైక్షత, బహుస్యాం ప్రజాయేతి” ఇతి శ్రుతిః ॥ ఐక్షతేతి ఈక్షణకర్పత్వాన్నిమిత్తకారణత్వం, బహుస్యామితి బహుభవనహేతుత్వాదుపాదానత్వమ్ ॥ SS(411). Also ప్రకృతిః - జగదుపాదానభూతః పరమేశ్వరః ప్రకృతిః । అయమర్తః సూత్రకారేణ నిశ్చితః । ప్రకృతిశ్చ ప్రతిజ్ఞా, దృష్టాంతానుపరోధాదిత్యాదినూత్రపశ్చుకేన । వివృతం చేదం భాష్యకారేణ సంశయపూర్వపక్షప్రదర్శనపూర్వకమ్ ॥ SS(570) మాయాబీజః - మాయాయా బీజం కారణమధిష్ఠానమితి యావత్ । ఏవం చ మాయాయా అధ్యస్తత్వేన వాస్తవతాఽభావాత్ శక్తిత్వేన స్వాతన్త్ర్యాభావాచ్చ జగత ఈశ్వరైక్యబీజత్వముపపద్యతే । “దేవత్యశక్తిం స్వగుణైర్నిగూఢామి” తి శ్రుతిః ॥ 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.. ప్రకృతి, విష్ణుపత్నీ, నారాయణసమాశ్రితా 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 ఉమామహేశ్వరస్తోత్రమ్ (Umamaheswara stotram) as follows నమః శివాభ్యాం నవయానవాభ్యాం పరస్పరాశ్లిష్టవపుర్ధరాభ్యామ్ | 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 మాయాతీతః - మాయాయా అతీతః - మాయయా వా అతీతః | సత్వాది-గుణ-సామాన్యరూప-ప్రకృతివివర్జిత ఇత్యర్థః | “అతమస్కమమాయమి”తి శ్రుతిః || SS(41). and నిర్మాయః - మాయాయా నిర్గతః నిర్మాయః | యద్యపి “మాయాం తు ప్రకృతిం విద్యాన్మాయినం తు మహేశ్వరం” ఇతి మాయాసమ్భవః శ్రుతిషు దృశ్యతే, తథాపి మాయాయాః కల్పితత్వేన వాస్తవసమ్బంధాభావాత్ కల్పితసమ్బంధసరేయం శ్రుతిః | అత ఏవ, వ్యక్తాత్పురుషః పరః, అక్షరాత్పరతరః, అవిద్యాకార్యహీనః | “అతమస్కమాయమి”తి శ్రుతిః || SS(693). Bartruhari states the fact that the Lord is not in the clutches of maya in his own way in his Vairagyasatakam.(17)

ఏకో రాగిషు రాజతే ప్రియతమాదేహార్ధహారీ హరో
నిరాగేషు జనో విముక్తలలనాసజ్జో న యస్మాత్ పరః |

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 నిత్యం పర్యచరత్ ప్రీత్యా భవానీవ భవం ప్రభుమ్ | BH(2-23-1). The following names are thus derived from the facts stated above

పార్వతీపతిః - పర్వతః హిమవాన్ తస్య పుత్రీ పార్వతీ | తస్యాః పతిః | తదుక్తం సూతసంహితాయం- “ సా శివా కరుణామూర్తిర్జగన్మాతా త్రయీమయీ | శివాభిన్నా పరానన్దా శక్కురన్యాపి శక్కురీ”న్వేచ్ఛయా హిమత్పుత్రీ స్వభక్తజనవత్సలా, తస్యాః పతిః

ప్రియః పరమేశ్వరః ॥ “అమ్మికాపతయ ఉమాపతయే నమో నమః” ఇతి శ్రుతిః ॥ SS(24) and అమ్మికాపతిః - పార్వత్యాః ప్రియః అమ్మికాపతిః । “హిరణ్యపతయేఽమ్మికపతయ” ఇతి శ్రుతిః ॥ SS(429). Also SA(15) గౌరీశః - గౌరీశోఽమ్మికాపతిః ॥ SS(121) శ్రీపతిః - అమృతమథనే సర్వాన్ సురాసురాదీన్ విహాయ శ్రీరేనం పతిత్వేన వరయామాసేతి శ్రీపతిః । శ్రీః పర శక్తిః, తస్యాః పతిరితి వా, “పరాస్య శక్తిర్వివిధైవ శ్రూయతే” (శ్వే-ఉ-౮) ఇతి శ్రుతిః । VS(603). శ్రీశః - శ్రియ ఈశః శ్రీశః । VS(606) జగత్పితా - జగన్నిర్మాతా- “ఇదం సర్వమస్సృజతే” తి శ్రుతిః । SS(36) విశ్వమాతా - విశ్వస్య మాతా వ్యాపీ జ్ఞాతా వా । SS(85) జగద్ధాతా - జగతాం ధాతా కర్తా । SS(86) మాతామహః - మాతుః పితా మాతామహః, చతుర్విధభూతగ్రామస్య పార్థివస్య మాత పృథివీ, తస్యాః పితా మాతామహః । “స భూమిమస్సృజతే” తి శ్రుతిః । పృథివ్యా మాతృత్వే “ఇయం వై మాతే” తి శ్రుతిః । SS(615). Devi Gauri is called మహా 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, DakShyani 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 సిన్ధారదూరప్రచారమ్ - సిన్ధారమ్ = red lead దూర = distant, far off ప్రచారమ్ = going away. That is, Shiva’s complexion is very red and it outshines the colour of the red lead. Shri Rudram says అసౌ యస్తామ్రో అరుణ ఉత బభ్రుః సుమగ్గలః । This says that Rudra is తామ్రః = copper coloured, అరుణః = rosy, బభ్రుః = golden yellow, సుమగ్గలః = 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 సూర్య ఆత్మా జగతః తస్యషశ్చ = 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 అసౌ యస్తామ్రో ఇత్యనేన ఆదిత్యముపతిష్ఠతే | The votary should praise and worship the sun by means of the rik అసౌ యస్తామ్రో in the Rudram. So తామ్రః - అత్యంత-రక్తస్వామ్రః | “నమస్తామ్రాయ చే” తి శ్రుతిః || 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 దయాళుః - దయాశీలో దయాళుః | అనేన పరమేశ్వరస్య యా శాంతా తనూ సర్వప్లూదరూపిణీ సా ప్రదర్శితా | “యా తే రుద్ర శివా తనూ” రితి శ్రుతిః SS(155) సిన్ధురాజాతిధీరం- సిన్ధుః = the sea, ocean రాజన్ = a king or chief. It is used to qualify something very great or glorious. For example Kalidasa describes the Himalaya as నగాధిరాజః in his Kumarasambhava. అతి = a prefix used to mean very, too, exceedingly etc ధీరం = strong minded, wise, resolute. సిన్ధురాజా 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 ధీరః as one who is endowed with a mind that does not waver even when assailed by deleterious forces that are capable of perverting it వికారహేతో సతి ఏక్రియన్తే యేషాం న చేతానే త ఏవ ధీరాః || (Kumarasambhava-1-59). Gita and the upanishads use the word to mean a person of wisdom or discrimination.

దేహినోఽస్మిన్యతా దేహ కౌమారం యౌవనం జరా |
తథా దేహాంతరస్థాప్తిర్ధీరస్తత్ర న ముహ్యతి || 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 నష్టో మోహః స్మృతిర్లబ్ధా త్వత్ప్రసాదాన్మయాఽచ్యుత | BG(18-73). Again
యం హి న వ్యతయన్త్యేతే పురుషం పురుషర్షభ |
సమదుఃఖసుఖం ధీరం సోఽమృతత్వాయ కల్పతే || 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 ధీరః and also as స్థితప్రజ్ఞః, స్థితధీః etc.. The upanishads use the word ధీరః to indicate a man of wisdom and realisation. This example is from Kathopanishad ఏకో వశీ సర్వభూతాన్తరాత్మ ఏకం రూపం బహుధా యః కరోతి |

తమాత్మస్థం యేఽనుపశ్యన్తి ధీరాః తేషాం సుఖం శాశ్వతం నేతరేషామ్ || 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 ధీరః - ధీయం ఈరయతి, ధీయం ప్రేరయతి | ఈర = to urge, elevate, bring to life. Thus the word ధీరః means the Lord who is behind the intellect and gives life to it. We worship Him through the Gayatri mantra as ధీయో యో నః ప్రచోదయాత్ | Shiva is known as గాయత్రీవల్లభః - గాయత్ర్యా వల్లభో గాయత్రీవల్లభః | గాయత్రీప్రతిపాద్య ఇత్యర్థః | 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:

మునిః ప్రసన్నగమ్భిరో దుర్విగాహ్యో దురత్యయః |
 అనన్తపారో హ్యక్షోభ్యః స్తిమితోద ఇవార్ణవః ||

సమృద్ధకామో హీనో వా నారాయణపరో మునిః |
 నోత్సర్వేత న శుష్యేత సరిద్భిరివ సాగరః || 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 గమ్భిరః deep or profound. Describing the qualities of Rama, Narada tells the sage Valmiki that Rama was profound like the ocean సముద్ర ఇవ గామ్భిర్యే | (Balakanda-1-17). The sage will appear to be simple, but his depth of knowledge and maturity cannot be measured: దుర్విగాహ్యః . 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 అనన్తః and అపారః | . అపారః means shoreless. A jnani is limitless and all pervading as he has found his true nature స్వరూపమ్ . He is unshakeable; this refers to his emotional strength. On this point Krishna says

దుఃఖేష్వనుద్విగ్నమనాః సుఖేషు విగతస్పృహాః |
 వీతరాగభయక్రోధః స్థితధీర్మునిరుచ్యతే || 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 ప్రసాదే గిరిశోపమః | 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 పూర్ణత్వమ్ . 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 సమృద్ధికామః or has none, he treats both situations like నారాయణపరః 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: న వనం గన్తుకామస్య త్యజతశ్చ వసున్ధరామ్ | సర్వతోకాతిగన్యేవ లక్ష్మ్యతే చిత్తవిక్రియా || (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 సర్వదాభిగతః సద్భిః సముద్ర ఇవ సిన్ధుభిః | 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 సంపదో వైవ సంపదః విపదో వైవ విపదః | విపద్ విస్మరణం విష్ణోః సంపద్ సంస్మరణం హరేః || 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!

విపదః సస్తు నః శశ్వత్తత్ర తత్ర జగద్గురో ।

భవతో దర్శనం యత్స్వాదపునర్భవదర్శనమ్ ॥ 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. భజే మార్గబంధుమ్ :- భజే = I worship మర్గబంధుమ్ = 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

యస్మిజ్ఞాహాత్యతిశయోక్తిరలంక్రితిత్వం

న్యూనోపమాత్వముపమా సముపైతి సర్వా

సూక్ష్మస్వభావకలనాపి చ న ప్రతర్క్యా

తద్వర్ణయామి భవతః కథమాభిరూప్యమ్ ॥

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 సాల ప్రాంసుః : 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.

౬. అప్పయ్యయజ్ఞేన్ద్ర గీతం స్తోత్రరాజం పఠేద్యస్తు భక్త్యా ప్రయాణే |

తస్యార్థసిద్ధిం విధత్తే మార్గమధ్యేభయం చాశుతోషో మహేశః |

శమ్భో ...

అప్పయ్య = the name of the author యజ్ఞున్ = performer of sacrifices గీతం = sung
 స్తోత్రరాజం great poem పఠేత్ = reads యః = whoever భక్త్యా = with devotion ప్రయాణే
 = during a journey తస్య = for him. అర్థ = wish, desire సిద్ధిః = fulfilment, complete
 attainment విధత్తే = arranges. మధ్యః = middle or central part మార్గమధ్యే on the way
 అభయం = freedom from fear, security ఆశు = fast, quick తోషః = satisfaction, pleasure,
 delight. ఆశుతోషః means one who is easily pleased మహేశః = name of Shiva. This
 verse gives the benefit or the fruit of reciting the poem and is known as ఫలశ్రుతిః | ఫలం
 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 మహేశః 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:
 సులభః - పత్రపుష్పఫలాదిభి-ర్భక్తిమాత్రసమర్పితైః సుఖేన లభ్యత ఇతి సులభః | “పత్రేషు
 పుష్పేషు తోయేషు అక్రీతలభ్యేషు సదైవ సత్సు | భక్త్యైక-లభ్యే పురుషే పురాణే ముక్త్యై
 కథం న క్రియతే ప్రయత్నః ||” ఇతి మహాభారతే || 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 పత్రం పుష్పం ఫలం తోయం యో మే భక్త్యా ప్రయచ్ఛతి | తదహం భక్తుఃపహృత-
 మన్నామి ప్రయతాత్మనః || BG(9-26) Shiva is known as: కరవీరప్రియః - కరవీరప్రియత్వం
 శివస్య పురాణాదిషు ప్రసిద్ధమ్ | “ఏకేన కరవీరేణ సితేనాప్యసితేన వా | హరిం హరం వా
 సంపూజ్య బ్రహ్మభూయాయ కల్పతే” ఇతి | అనేన శివపూజస్యాం సౌలభ్యముక్తమ్ |
 శివః పూజనీయ ఇతి చ || SS(326).

భక్తానాం సులభః - శివపూజాదిపరాణాం సులభః, శీఘ్రమనుగ్రాహకః | తదర్తమేవ

శివమూర్తిగ్రహణమ్ || SS(484). One of Shri Lalita's names also states this fact సుఖారాధ్యా - సుఖేన ఉపవాసాదిరూపకాయక్లేశం ధ్యేయస్వరూప- నియమననిర్బన్ధాదికం చాన్తరేణాప్యారాధ్యా || 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 న హ్యమ్యతం ప్రీణయతః బహ్వయాసోఽనురాత్మజాః | ఆత్మత్వాత్ సర్వభూతానాం సిద్ధత్వాదిహ సర్వతః || 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 ఫలశ్రుతిః 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 ఫలశ్రుతిః 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 యజ్ఞస్వన్ . The Manusmrithi states that performing sacrifices is one of the duties of a brahmin అధ్యాపనమధ్యయనం యజనం యాజనం తథా | దానం ప్రతిగ్రహం వైవ బ్రాహ్మణానామకల్పయత్ || Kalidasa says that the kings of the solar dynasty tended the sacrificial fires by means of offerings and honoured the guests also. యథావిధి హుతాగ్నినాం యథాకామార్చితార్థినామ్ | (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 అఘం స కేవలం భుక్త్యై యః పవత్యాత్మకారణాత్ | యజ్ఞశిష్టాశనం హ్యేతత్సతామన్నం విధీయతే ||

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

నాయం లోకోఽస్యయజ్ఞస్య కుతోఽస్యః కురుసత్తమ్ ||

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 యజ్ఞః-సర్వయజ్ఞస్వరూపత్వాద్ యజ్ఞః, “యజ్ఞో వౌ విష్ణుః” (తై-సం-౧-౭-౪) ఇతి శ్రుతేః | VS(445). Also యజ్ఞః-సర్వయజ్ఞస్వరూపత్వాద్యజ్ఞః | “త్వం యజ్ఞస్త్వం విష్ణు” రితి శ్రుతిః || 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 చిత్తస్య శుద్ధయే కర్మ says Shri Sankaracharya in his Vivekachudamani. He defines such a person who has been regularly performing the sacrifices as noble minded మహాత్మానః అక్షుద్రచిత్తాః in his commentary (BG-19-13). Anandagiri elaborates the definition as మహాన్ ప్రకృష్టో యజ్ఞాదిభిః శోధిత ఆత్మా సత్త్వం యేషాం - 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 ఆప్తః - ఆప్తః యథార్థవక్తా | - 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 ఆప్తవాక్యం ప్రమాణమ్ | 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 సమాగతాః సర్వత ఏవ సర్వే వేదా యథా మూర్తిధరాస్త్రీప్యష్టే | నేహాథవాముత్ర చ కశ్చనార్థ ఋతే పరానుగ్రహమాత్మశీలమ్ || 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:

శాంతా మహాన్తో నివసన్తి సన్తో వసన్తవల్లోకహితం చరన్తః |

తీర్థాః స్వయం భీమభవార్ణవం జనానహేతునాన్యానపి తారయన్తః || (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 గీతం = 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 భగవద్గీతా is that it was sung or chanted by Krishna: శ్రీమతా భగవతా గీతా . This

implies that He was not the author of the work (న కృతా) 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:

సర్వోపనిషదో గావో, దోగ్ధా గోపాలనన్దనః । పార్థో వత్సః,
సుధీరోభక్తైః దుగ్ధం గీతామృతం మహత్ ॥

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 యాని నామాని గౌణాని విఖ్యాతాని మహాత్మనః । ఋషిభిః పరిగీతాని తాని వక్ష్యామి భూతయే ॥ Thus, the use of the word “sung” (గీతమ్) seems appropriate. Why this piece is called స్తోత్ర రాజా 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 రాజవిద్యా రాజగుహ్యమ్ । “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 పఠేద్యస్తు భక్త్యా ప్రయాణే తస్య అర్థసిద్ధిం విధత్తే । (i.e.) whoever reads this with devotion during a journey, the mission will be completed successfully. The emphasis is on the word భక్త్యా - 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.” ఏష మే సర్వధర్మాణాం ధర్మోఽధికతమో మతః | యద్భక్త్యా పుణ్డరీకాక్షం స్తవైరర్చేన్నరః సదా || 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?”

కో ధర్మః సర్వధర్మాణాం భవతః పరమో మతః?

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:

భక్తిమాన్ యః సదోత్థాయ శుచిస్తద్గతమానసః | సహస్రం
వాసుదేవస్య నామ్నామేతత్ ప్రకీర్తయేత్ || ౧౨౫|
ఇమం స్తవమధీయానః శ్రద్ధాభక్తీసమన్వితః |
యుజ్యేతాత్మసుఖణ్డైశ్చీధృతిస్మృతికీర్తిభిః || ౧౩౨||

Shri Sankaracharya , in his commentary, says: భక్తిమానిత్యాదినా భక్తిమతః శుచేః సతతముద్యుక్తస్యైకాగ్రచిత్తస్య శ్రద్ధాలోర్విశిష్టాధికారిణః ఫలవిశేషం దర్శయతి | Thus a great deal of emphasis is laid on devotion and faith. The Lord is అనిమిషః | always awake VS(215) and on the look-out for people who have devotion. He has innumerable number of ears, eyes, mouths etc.. సర్వతః పాణిపాదం తత్ సర్వతోఽక్షిశిరోరుహమ్ | సర్వతః శ్రుతిమాల్లోకే సర్వమావృత్య తిష్ఠతి || 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: స్తవప్రియః 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 పరేద్యస్తు భక్త్యా ప్రయాణే తస్య అర్థసిద్ధిం విధత్తే మార్గమధ్యేఽభయంచ ఆశుతోషో మహేశః | (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 ప్రయాణమ్ 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 ప్రయాణకాలః and అస్తకాలః 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

అన్తకాలే చ మామేవ స్మరన్ముక్త్యా కలేవరమ్ |
యః ప్రయాతి స మద్భావం యాతి నాస్త్వత్త సంశయః ||

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;

యం యం వాపి స్మరన్భావం త్యజత్యన్తే కలేవరమ్ |
తం తమేవైతి కౌన్తేయ సదా తద్భావభావితః | 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 (ఇష్ట దేవతా) (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.

కామాన్యః కామయతే మన్యమానః స కామభిర్జాయతే తత్ర తత్ర |
పర్యాప్తకామస్య కృతాత్మనస్త్విహైవ సర్వే ప్రవిలీయన్తే కామాః || 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 అజనాభం నామైతద్వర్షం భారతమితి యత ఆరభ్య వ్యపదిశన్తి BH(5-7-3). The king was - మహాభాగవతః 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.

తదానీమపి-పార్శ్వవర్తినం ఆత్మజమివానుశోచన్తం అభివీక్షమాణో
మృగ ఏవాభినివేశితమనా విస్మయ్య లోకమిమం సహ మృగేణ
కలేవరం మృతమను న మృతజన్మానుస్మృతిః
ఇతరవన్-మృగశరీరమవాప |

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:

తస్మాత్సర్వేషు కాలేషు మామనుస్మర యుధ్య చ |
మయ్యర్చితమనోబుద్ధిర్మామేవైష్యస్యసంశయః || 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 – పురుషః స పరః పార్థ భక్త్యా లభ్యస్త్యన్త్యయా | 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. స భక్త్యా లభ్యస్తు జ్ఞానలక్షణయా అన్త్యయా ఆత్మవిషయయా | 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 తేషాం జ్ఞానీ నిత్యయుక్త ఏకభక్తిర్విశిష్యతే 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:

భక్త్యాఽఽవేశ్య మనో యస్మిన్ వాచా యన్నామ కీర్తయన్ |
త్యజన్ కలేవరం యోగీ ముచ్యతే కామకర్మభిః || 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 నివృత్సర్వేష్టియవృత్తివిభ్రమస్తుష్టావ జన్యం విస్సృజన్జనార్దనమ్ | 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

ఇతి మతిరుపకల్పితా విత్పష్టా భగవతి సాత్వతపుణ్యవే విభూమ్ని |

స్వసుఖముపగతే క్వచిద్ విహర్తుం ప్రకృతిముపేయుషి యద్ భవప్రవాహః || 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 ఇతి - “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?” మయ్యర్పితమనోబుద్ధి-రామేవైష్యస్యంశయః || Thus Bhishma said that he was offering his mind that was free from all hankering 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:

వ్యత్యస్తపాద-మవతంసిత-బర్హిర్హం,
సాచీకృతానన-నివేశిత-వేణురస్యమ్ ।
తేజః పరం పరమకారుణికం పురస్తాత్,
ప్రాణప్రయాణ-సమయే మమ సన్నిధత్వామ్ ||

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 అన్తకాలే చ 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

కృష్ణ త్వదీయ-పద-పఙ్క-జపఙ్క-రాన్తః, అద్యైవ మే విశతు
మానస-రాజహంసః ।
ప్రాణప్రయాణసమయే కఫ-వాత-పిత్తైః, కణ్ఠావరోధనవిధౌ
స్మరణం కుతస్నే ॥

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:

వాయునోక్త్రమతోత్తారః కఫసంరుద్ధనాడికః ।
కాశశ్వాసకృతాయాసః కణ్ఠే ఘ్నుర్ఘురాయతే ॥

(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.

శయానః పరిశోచద్భిః పరివీతః స్వబంధుభిః ।
వాయుమానోఽపి న బ్రూతే కాలపాశవశం గతః ॥

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

ఏవం కుటుమ్బభరణే వ్యాపృతత్మాజితేన్ద్రియః ।
మ్రుయతే రుదతాం స్వనామురువేదనయాస్తధీః ॥

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 ప్రారబ్ధమ్ 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.

యమదూతౌ తదా ప్రాప్తౌ భీమా సరభసేక్షణౌ ।
స దృష్ట్వా తస్తహృదయః శకృన్మాత్రం విముఞ్చతి ॥

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:

ఏవం కుటుమ్బం బిభ్రాణ ఉదరమ్బర ఏవ వా ।
విస్మయ్యేహోభయం ప్రేత్య భుజ్కై తత్ఫలమీదృశమ్ ॥

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).

ఏకః ప్రపద్యతే ధాన్తం హిత్యేదం స్వకలేవరమ్ ।
కుశలేతరపాథేయో భూతద్రోహేణ యద్ భృతమ్ ॥

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).

కేవలేన హ్యధర్మేణ కుటుమ్బభరణోత్సుకః ।
యాతి జీవోన్మతామిశ్రం చరమం పదమ్ ॥

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).

అధస్తాన్నరతోకస్య యావతీర్యాతనాధయః ।
క్రమశః సమనుక్రమ్య పునరత్రావజేచ్ఛుచిః ॥

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:

న సామ్రాయః ప్రతిభాతి బాలం, ప్రమాద్యంతం విత్తమోహేన మూఢమ్ ।

అయం లోకో నాస్తి పర ఇతి మానీ, పునః పునర్వశమాపద్యతే మే ॥ 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 అభినివేశః । He says that the fear affects the wise people also.

స్వరసవాహీ విదుషోఽపి తథారూఢోఽభినివేశః । సాధనపాదః-౯ ।

స్వస్య రసేన సంస్కారేణైవ వహతీతి స్వరసవాహీ ।

అపిశబ్దసముచ్చితమవిద్వాంసం తథేతి తచ్ఛబ్దః

పరామృశతి ।

రూఢః ప్రసిద్ధః । తథాచ యథాఽవిదుషః తథా విదుషోఽపి

స్వరసవాహిత్వహేతునా యజ్ఞతీయః యత్క్లేశో భయాఖ్యః

ప్రసిద్ధోఽస్తి సోఽభినివేశ ఇత్యర్థః । విదుషామపి

మరణత్రాసకృతం భయమస్తీతి భాష్యకృతోక్తమ్ ।

పూర్వపూర్వజన్మసు

మరణకాలే యత్రాసో జాతో “మా న భూవం భూయాసమ్”
 ఇత్యుత్కణ్ఠారూపో భయనామా తజ్జనిత-సంస్కరమాత్రా-
 దవిషామివా- త్మవిదామపి స జాయతే, న తత్రావిద్యాదికం
 కారణమితి ।

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. మృత్యుః జన్మవతాం వీర దేహేన సహ జాయతే । అద్య వా అభ్యతాన్తే వా మృత్యుర్వై ప్రాణీనాం ధ్రువమ్ ॥ 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. అహో రాత్రాణి గచ్ఛన్తి సర్వేషాం ప్రాణీనామిహ । ఆయాంషి క్షపయన్త్యాశు గ్రీష్మే జలమివాంశవః ॥ 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.

ఆత్మానమనుశోచ త్వం కిమన్యమనుశోచసి ।
 ఆయుస్తు హీయతే యస్య స్థితస్యాస్య గతస్య చ ॥

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).

సహేవ మృత్యుర్వృజతి సహ మృత్యుర్నిషీదతి |
గత్వా సుదీర్ఘమధ్వానం సహ మృత్యుర్నివర్తతే ||

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:

అతః పుచ్చామి సంసిద్ధిం యోగినాం పరమం గురుమ్ |
పురుషస్యేహ యత్ కార్యం మ్రియమాణస్య సర్వథా ||

“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 సకామ కర్మా get births suitable for the fulfilment of the desires. Those who perform desireless karmas నిష్కామ కర్మా 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 క్రమముక్తిః |

ప్రయాణ కాలే మనసాఽచలేన భక్త్యా యుక్తో యోగబలేన చైవ |

భ్రువోర్మధ్యే ప్రాణమావేశ్య సమ్యక్ స తం పరం పురుషాముపైతి దివ్యమ్ || 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 - ముక్తః । 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. తమేవ విదిత్వాతిమృత్యుమేతి నాన్యః పథా విద్యతేఽయనాయ ॥ 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:

అశరీరః శరీరేషు అనవస్థస్వవస్థితమ్ ।

మహాన్తం విభుమాత్మానం మత్వా ధీరో న శోచతి ॥

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 బహూనాం జన్మనా-మన్తే జ్ఞానవాన్ మాం ప్రపద్యతే । వాసుదేవః సర్వమితి స మహాత్మా సుదుర్లభః ॥ 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. బహూనాం జన్మనాం జ్ఞానర్థసంస్కారాశ్రయాణాం అన్తే సమాప్తౌ జ్ఞానవాన్ ప్రాప్తపరిపాకజ్ఞానః మాం వాసుదేవం ప్రత్యగత్మానం ప్రత్యక్షతః ప్రపద్యతే । 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: మనుష్యాణాం సహస్రేషు కశ్చిద్యతతి సిద్ధయే । యతతామపి సిద్ధానాం కశ్చిన్మాం వేత్తి తత్త్వతః ॥ 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 సాధన చతుష్టయసంపత్తిః 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: బాలస్తావత్ శ్రీడాసక్తః తరుణస్తావత్ తరుణీసక్తః | వృద్ధస్తావచ్ఛిన్తాసక్తః పరేబ్రహ్మణి కోఽపి న సక్తః || 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: కౌమార ఆచరేత్ప్రాజ్ఞో ధర్మాన్ భాగవతానిహ | 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 శైశవేఽభ్యస్తవిద్యానాం (1-7). Our tradition says that only that learning that leads to liberation can be called education. సా విద్యా యా విముక్తయే | Shri Sankaracharya also defines education as ఆత్మనో బోధః while commenting on the popular verse beginning విద్యా వినయసంపన్నే బ్రాహ్మణే గవి హస్త్రిని | BG(5-18). It is knowing about Self. Thus Devi (LakShmi, Lalita) is called Vidya విద్యా | The commentator's explanation is: మోక్షప్రదజ్ఞానస్వరూపత్వాద్విద్యా | (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

ద్వే విద్యే వేదితవ్యే ఇతి హ స్మ యద్భ్రుహ్మవిదో వదన్తి పరా చైవాపరా చ |
తత్రాపరా ఋగ్వేదో యజుర్వేదః సామవేదోఽధర్వవేదః శిషా కల్పో వ్యాకరణం
నిరుక్తం ఛందో జ్యోతిషమితి | అథ పరా యయా తదక్షరమధిగమ్యతే ||

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: శ్రేయశ్చ ప్రేయశ్చ మనుష్యమేతస్మా సంపరీత్య వివినక్తి ధీరః | 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 యథాగృహీ । 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 - నాచప్త కృచ్ఛం కృపణోఽజమాయయా । . 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

ఖడ్వాన్గో నామ రాజ్ఘ్రిః జ్ఞాత్వేయత్తామిహాయుషాః ।

ముహూర్తాత్ సర్వముత్పృజ్య గతవానభ్యం హరిమ్ ॥ BH(2-1-13).

Most appropriately Shri Suka calls the king రాజ్ఘ్రిః 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

తత్ర తం బుద్ధి-సంయోగం లభతే పౌర్వదేహికమ్ ।

యతతే చ తతో భూయః సంసిద్ధౌ కురునన్దన ॥ 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 కైశవేఽభ్యస్తవిద్వానామ్ । 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., యథాకాలప్రబోధినాం 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 యోగేనాస్తే తనుత్యజామ్ . 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. మార్గమధ్యేభయంచ ఆశుతోషో మహేశః । 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 ఆనందం బ్రహ్మణో విద్వాన్ । న బిభేతి కదాచనేతి । 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) తేషాం సతత-యుక్తానాం భజతాం ప్రీతి-పూర్వకమ్ । దదామి బుద్ధి-యోగం తం యేన మామపయాన్తి తే ॥ “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

యస్యాం వై శ్రూయమాణాయాం కృష్ణే పరమపూరుషే ।

భక్తిరుత్పద్యతే పుంసః శోకమోహభయాపహా ॥ 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 (శ్రూయమాణాయామ్) 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:

భవన్తమిహ యః స్వధీనియతచేతనాచేతనం
 పనాయతి నమస్యతి స్మరతి వక్తి పర్యేతి వా ।
 గుణం కమపి వేత్తి వా తవ గుణేశ గోపాయతుః
 కదాచన కుతశ్చన క్వచన తస్య న స్యాద్భయమ్ ॥

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 ఫలశ్రుతిః . It is said న భయం క్వచిదాప్నోతి వీర్యం తేజశ్చ విద్ధతి and భయాన్ముచ్యేత భీతస్తు ముచ్యేతాపన్న ఆపదః । and జన్మమృత్యుజరావ్యాధిభయం నైవోపజాయతే । . 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 భయాపహః - భయం సంసారజం పుంసామపఘ్నన్ భయాపహః । VS(935). But there may be fear from foes and elements etc.. God removes them also. Shiva is known as సహాయః - బ్రహ్మాదీనామప్యాపత్కాలే రక్షక ఇత్యర్థాః । SS(762). He protects even gods like Brahma in times of danger. Lalita is called భయాపహా - భయాని జలస్థలాదిప్రయుక్తాదీని సర్వాణ్యపహస్తితి భయాపహా । “ఆనన్దం బ్రహ్మణో విద్వాన్న బిభేతి కుతశ్చనేతి” శ్రుతేః । తథా చ వాయుపురాణే “అరణ్యే ప్రాన్తరే వాపి జలే వాపి స్థలేఽపి వా । వ్యాఘ్రకుమ్భిరచోరేభ్యో భయస్థానే విశేషతః । ఆధిష్టవి చ సర్వేషు దేవీనామాని కీర్తయే” దితి । 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:

విషాన్మహోగ్నైః పురుషాదదరాదసత్సభాయా వనవాసకృచ్ఛృతః ।
 మృధే మృధేఽనేకమహారథాస్త్రతో ద్రోణ్యస్త్రతశ్చాస్మ హరేఽభిరక్షితాః ॥ 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

విషజలాప్యయాద్ వ్యాలరాక్షసాద్ వర్షమారుతాద్ వైద్యుతానలాత్ |

వృషమయాత్మజాద్ విశ్వతోభయాద్వృషభ తే వయం రక్షితా ముచుః || 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 మార్గః 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:

త్రయీ సాంఖ్యం యోగః పశుపతిమతం వైష్ణవమితి

ప్రభిన్నే ప్రస్థానే పరమిదమదః పథ్యమితి చ |

రుచీనాం వైచిత్ర్యాదృజు-కుటిల-నానాపథజషాం

న్యణామేకో గమ్యస్తవమసి పయసామర్ణవమివ || (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

యే యథా మాం ప్రపద్యంతే తాంస్తథైవ భజామ్యహమ్ | మమ

వర్తానువర్తంతే మనుష్యాః పార్థస్సర్వశః || BG(4-11).

Shri Rudram salutes Lord Shiva who is in the form of various paths. It says - పథీనాం పతయే నమః | పథీనాం = శాస్త్రోక్త దక్షిణోత్తర- తృతీయ-మార్గాణాం పతిః | This says that Rudra is the protector of the three paths described in the sastras. Later It again says: నమః స్రుత్యాయ చ పథ్యాయ చ | salutation to Him who is in the narrow foot paths and in the broad highways స్రుతిః స్వల్పో దేవలోకమార్గః, పథ్యా బ్రహ్మలోకమార్గః | The narrow path indicates tortuous religious beliefs and practices. Krishna talks about this

మూఢగ్రాహణాత్మనో యత్పిడ్య క్రియతే తపః |

పరస్యోత్పాదనార్తం వా తత్తామసముదాహృతమ్ || 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 మహాజనానాం యేనగతః స పథాః 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 నమ ఇరిణ్యాయ చ ప్రపథ్యాయ చ । Salutation to Him who abides in saline tracts and in trodden pathways.

ఇరిణ్యాయ Irinyaya: signifies arid tracts and has a refernce to samsara. ప్రపథ్యః బహుభిహి నేవితో మార్గః ప్రపథః, తత్ర భవః ప్రపథ్యః । “నమ ఇరిణ్యాయ చప్రపథ్యాయ చే”తి శ్రుతిః SS(346). Prapathyaya: pathway trodden or resorted to by many. The Lord helps all who seek Him by following various paths. He says: మచ్చితః సర్వదుర్గాణి మత్ప్రసాదాత్తరిష్యసి । 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.

Translation and commentary is written by N. Balasubramanian (Copyright)

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mArgabandhustotram by Appayya Dixita

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Please send corrections to sanskrit@cheerful.com

