mArgabandhustotram by Appayya Dixita

मागबन्धुस्तोत्रम् अप्पय्यदीक्षितेन्द्रेः विरचितम्

Document Information

Text title : Margabandhu stotra
File name : maargabandhu.itx
Category : shiva, appayya-dIkShita, panchaka
Location : doc_shiva
Author : Appayya Dixit
Translated by : (Copyright) N.Balasubramanian bbalu@satyam.net.in
Latest update : February 9, 2023
Send corrections to : sanskrit at cheerful dot com

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February 2, 2024

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श्रीमार्गबन्धुस्तोत्रम् अप्प्यदीक्षितेन्द्रेः विरचितम्

मार्गबन्धुस्तोत्रम्

शाम्भो महादेव देव, शाम्भो महादेव देवेश शाम्भो ॥

भालवनमङ्गलिकीर्ति भालनेत्रार्चिष्या दुर्धरकुषुकीतम् ॥

(भालप्रदीयमङ्गलिकीर्ति भालनेत्रार्चिष्या दुर्धरकुषुकीतम्)

शुलाहतारातिकृत्तु शुद्धस्मरणल्लिते भजे मार्गबन्धुम्

शाम्भो महादेव देव, शाम्भो महादेव देवेश शाम्भो ॥ १॥

अः रविज्ञानरुणेः अः औरवार्तीकृतु भजे मार्गबन्धुम्

(हींकारवार्तीकृतु शुद्ध)

शाम्भो महादेव देव, शाम्भो महादेव देवेश शाम्भो ॥ २॥

नित्यम् चिदानन्दरूपं निन्दुताशोक्तोकेशवप्रितापम्

कार्तवर्मोऽन्नन्दारापुरुषकर्पितापम्

शाम्भो महादेव देव, शाम्भो महादेव देवेश शाम्भो ॥ ३॥

कन्दुपरंदरसन्ती नारककृपेः महेशं महायोगेशकमेशाः

कुलसमान्तं सुरे शं कोदिसूष्क्षकाः भजे मार्गबन्धुम्

शाम्भो महादेव देव, शाम्भो महादेव देवेश शाम्भो ॥ ४॥

मन्दारुमूलेन्द्रां मन्दारण्डसरां महागोर्ष्यहरुम्

सित्तुरुप्रवचारं सित्तुरागातिसतीयं भजे मार्गबन्धुम्

(सित्तुरुप्रवचारं)

शाम्भो महादेव देव, शाम्भो महादेव देवेश शाम्भो ॥ ५॥

अप्प्यवर्ज्ञेन्द्रं गीतं स्तोत्रारं पठेदासु मया प्रवासं

तस्यार्थसिद्धं विधेः मार्गमाहोबध्वं चारुतोषो महेशः

(अप्प्यमाहोमावर्ज्ञेन्द्रां पठेदासु मया प्रवासं

नित्यं पठेदासु मया तस्य मुक्तिः कर्मे व तायुतरूपम् ॥)
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.

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 maNidIpikA, NyAya rakShAmaNI, siddhAnta lesha sa.ngraham, parimala, chAturmata sArasa.ngraham, yAdavabhyudaya vyAkhya, varadarAjamastava and...
 kuvalayAnanda. His stotras are simple, popular and effective, for example, mArgabandhu stotram, durgAchandrakalA stuti, ApitakuchambA stava, hariharabhedha 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 Braharendra Saraswati. (3) BG: Bhagavat Gita (4) BH: Shrimad Bhagavatam (5) KU: Kathopanishad. (6) MU: Mundakopanishad (7) SVU: Svetasvatara upanishad. (8) TU: Taittiriyopanishad. (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.

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

मागवन्धुस्तोत्रम्

Stotram: At this point it is relevant to say a few words about stotram. Our scriptures are explicit in saying that the Supreme Being is one. It is without name, form and any other attributes. It is called brahman in our scriptures. This is not its name but one of its many attributes बृहत्तमत्वात् That which is big is brahman. Since the adjective ‘big’ is used simply without a noun to be qualified it implies that the bigness is unlimited. It is infinite and beyond time, space etc., unlike the objects and beings we see in the universe. The scriptures also aver that it is beyond our senses. The famous mantra from the Taittiriyopanishad (Anu IV)
says that the brahman is beyond the reach of our mind and words यतो वाचो निर्विरल्ल्य अग्राण्य मनसा सह। If so, how does a seeker think of it or pray to it? This is where our scriptures come to our help. They also describe the same God (who indeed is without a form or name) as having many forms and names. This helps a seeker to worship Him through prayers, puja, pilgrimages to holy places etc.. So we have gods like Rama, Shiva, Durga etc.. The worship of the Lord with form and name is called (सगुण उपासना) saguna (sa = with; guna = attributes; upAsanA = worship). The names and forms conceal the esoteric truths mentioned in the upanishads. Thus they, like a map, give us some idea of something which is very vast and cannot be grasped by our senses. The Lord graciously accepts the worship offered to Him in any form one may choose. Krishna says

यो यो यां यां ततुः भक्तः श्रद्धायां चित्तमिच्छति।
तत्स्य तत्स्याच्छल्ला श्रद्धा तामेव विद्याम्यहम॥ 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.

सत्यं श्रद्धया युक्तं तस्याराधनमीहते।
लभते च तत: कामान् मथैव विहितान्वितान्॥ 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

तेषा सततायुक्तानां भजतां प्रीतिशूषकम्।
ददामि बुद्धिसंयोगं येन मामुपयान्ति ते। BG.10-10.

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

Prahlada, the gem among the devotees, mentions nine kinds of devotion (BH .7-5-23). The first two amongst these (viz.) श्रवणम्, listening to the Lord’s names and stories which bring out His glories and कीर्तनम्, chanting them are the simplest and easiest to practise. These can be done by anyone irrespective of age, caste or gender. They are suitable for the young and energetic as well as the old and decrepit, a pundit and also the ignoramus. Thus they are suitable for all. It is possible that their very simplicity deceives one to imagine that they are
less potent than the other kinds of devotion. This is not so. Our scriptures repeatedly assert that they can confer the highest benefits on the devotee. The vedas contain stotras like the Rudram, Shri suktam etc. Our puranas contain many. In addition our acharyas like Shri Shankara and other saints have composed soul-stirring compositions in many languages. All these are ideally suited for recitation.

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

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

Now let us go to the Margabhandhu Stotram proper.

\[
\text{शम्भो महादेव देव शिव शम्भो महादेव देवेश शम्भो -} \\
\text{शम्भो महादेव देव ॥}
\]

maargabandhu.pdf
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.

अपिवऽः पिवऽो वा सवाच्छव गतोऽधि वा ।
य: स्मरेतु पुप्परीकाः स: वाह्याम्यन्तर: शुचिः: ॥

मानसं वाचकं पापं कर्मणा समुपांजितम् ।
श्रीरामस्मारणेन व्यपत्ति न संशयः: ॥

श्री राम राम राम ॥

These verses say “Anyone - may be impure or pure or whatever may be his condition - if just thinks of th lotus -eyed Lord is certainly pure inside and out. Sins commited 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 शम्भु: । शं सुखं भावयतीित शम्भु: ।
(SS-74: VS-38) He blesses his devotees with happiness and prosperity शं = happiness, prosperity. All being go through the repeated cycle of birth and death. They experience varities 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.

यत: सर्वाणि भूतानि भवत्त्वादिद्युगागमे ।
यष्टिमंश्च प्रचर वान्ति पुनर्व गुमाश्चे: ॥ VS-11

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

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते येन जातानि जीवन्ति यत्
प्रयत्न्यभिःशविषान्ति ॥
“From whom all these beings emanate, by whom they stay alive and into whom they merge after death.”

MAHADEVA महादेवः - महांसौदेवः महादेवः।

He is worshipped by everyone. Also He is great because He pervades every thing.(SS22) सर्वानं भावनं परिस्थित्य आत्मज्ञानयोगेश्वरं महति महीयते तस्यादुत्त्यते महादेवः: (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 महादेव महादेव महादेवे नमः संसारसपः - देवा देवं नरदेव इतवत्॥ अकुंचितस्वाभिमत्वं च शिवस्येव The word deva indicates lordship. His lordship is unrestricted दिव्येवेदैव: (SA93) He is effulgent. Krishna says ”I am the splendour of those who possess splendour,” तेजः तेजं भावनं भवे भासा सवः सवां महादेवे महादेवे नरदेव इतवत्॥ Accordingly, तेजः तेजः भावुकः सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वत्रिभिः विभासितुः 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.

Accordingly, तेजः तेजं भावुकः सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वत्रिभिः विभासितुः KU(2-2-15). The gracious Lord obliges and reveals His universal form. Arjuna is overwhelmed by the splendour of the form he sees. He feels as though a thousand suns had risen at once in the sky दिवि सूर्यसहस्रस्य भवेवहुंगपदुःस्थिता। यदि भः सद्यशी सा श्यामास्तस्य महात्मनः॥ (BG 9-12). Here, as is usual with the scriptures, thousand is only indicative and stands for many or infinite. This is a popular verse and is said to have been quoted by the scientist Oppenheimer to describe the explosion of the first atom bomb which he witnessed.

Effulgence does not stand only for light. It also means wisdom. Shiva stands for infinite knowledge यः सर्वात्मा दीशायानां दीशं धारयती चुमितिः दीशायानां दीशं धारयती चुमितिः। VS(275) He bears the shine of knowledge VS(719) He is of the form of shining knowledge प्रकाशशस्त्रः आत्मा यत्सद्य स: प्रकाशशस्त्रा। प्रकाशशस्त्रवर्षितः आत्मा यत्सद्य स: प्रकाशशस्त्रा VS(276) His form is effulgent knowledge.
SIVA शिवः - शिवः मक्खलस्वरूपः ॥ निम्नेष्ट निर्विद्वः खानुषध्वप्ररमानन्दरूप इत्यर्थः ॥

Shiva is the personification of auspiciousness. He is completely free from sorrows that characterise all created beings including plants, animals, birds, humans and devas like Indra and even Brahma the creator. He is the embodiment of supreme bliss. (SS18) Also निश्चेष्टगुणत्वा शुद्धत्वात् शिवः (VS27) He is devoid of the three qualities i.e. sattva(serenity), rajas(activity) and tamas(inertia). These qualities constitute ignorance (of Brahman or reality) and characterise all creation. So Shiva being free from these is pure. Patanjali sums up all this in his Yogadarsana (1-23) as क्षगकर्मविपकाशयेरपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेषः ईश्वरः ॥ क्षुशा:, अविद्या, अस्मिता, राग, त्रयो, अभिविद्या, कर्म धर्मार्थमी, विपाका: कर्मफलानि - जन्मायुभागाः, अशायो झानादिव वाशानाः, एतेः काल्यायेरपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेषः ईश्वरः इत्यर्थः ॥

स्मृतिमात्रेण पावयन् शिवः: He removes the sins of those who just think of His name.

DakShayani says this to her father DakSha क्षणं नाम निरेरितं नृणं सकृ त् प्रसंगादधमाशु हन्ति 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:

सवा शिवनामानि मोक्षदान्वेव सर्वं ।
तेज्ञप्यतुत्तमं नाम शिवेति बहससंज्ञित ॥

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.

विचारसु श्रृतिरुत्कः सद्यकादशानी श्रुतोः ।
तत्र पवित्राय तस्यां शिव इत्यक्षरदयम् ॥

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

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

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:

Now let us go to the stotram proper. It consists of five verses and a sixth one - called फलौुितः 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. भालः - forehead; bhAla is preferred to (wrongly used) phAla; अवनॆ - descended or come down; किरीट - crown: indicates that Lord Shiva wears a crown on the head किरीट - किरीटम्यास्त्वत्ती - किरीटी (SS782). The crown implies that Shiva wears other ornaments also हिरण्यः (SS273) and हिरण्यवाङ्गः (SS387) सुवणवर्णः -सुवण्वस्वेव वर्णाःस्येति सुवणवर्णः: VS(737). One who is golden-hued and हेमाः - हेमाः वपुरसेवति हेमाः: VS(738) One with body like gold are also His names. Shri Rudram salutes Him saying नमो हिरण्यवाङ्गेः।

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 पूजः:॥ पूजायोऽह्यः: पूजः: सर्ववन्यः: इत्यथः:
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 निरस्तसाम्यातिशयेन राघसा स्वधामनिब्रह्मणिरस्यते नमः: BH(2-4-14)अतुः - तुक्तोपमानमस्य न वियहेर इति अतुः: He has none equal to Him. VS(355) अनुतमः: - अविद्यामानुजामो यस्मात् स: अनुतमः: There is none greater than Him. VS (80). Further there is none superior to Him. VS(626) अनीशः: - न वियहेरस्येषा इति अनीशः: All other devas including Brahma the creator are limited by time and are subject to sorrows प्रथमः: - देवानां प्रथानभूत आचो वा प्रथमः: He is the first and foremost among the devas. SS(111). Shri Rudram says He is the foremost and is the inner self of the devas प्रथमो दैवः: Such is His glory भालनेत्रारिछित्या दुर्धप्रेयकुछीतैः - नेंत्रै = eye: अर्थिसं = fire: दृष्टू = burnt: इषुः = arrow: कीटः = a worm, insect पशुः = is the name Manmatha, the god of love, because he has five arrows: they are अरविन्दः, अशोकेः, चूतं, नवमल्लिका and नीलोऽलम(lotus, ashoka, mango, jasmine and blue lotus). The five arrows are also said to be संमोहनः: , उन्मादनः: , शोषणः: , तापनः: and स्तम्भनः: They are fascination, intoxication or extravagance of love, emaciation, suffering pain and benumbing or stupifying respectively. Kalidasa vividly narrates the story connected with Shiva destroying the god of love in his masterpiece Kumarasambhavam. Manmatha shot his arrow संमोहनं at Shiva who was deep in meditation. He wanted to seduce Shiva’s mind and make Him fall in love with Parvati who was attending on Him, but failed in his attempt. Shiva could sense that something was amiss and looked about. He saw Manmatha cowering at a distance. He just knit his brows in annoyance. In that moment fire shot out of His third eye and reduced the wretched Manmatha into a handful of ashes. Manmatha is contemptuously termed a worm or insect as he was foolish enough to try his tricks on none other than the great Shiva. So Shiva is known as कामारि: - कामस्य मन्नमयस्य अरिः: कामारि: 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 भालनेत्र: SS(159) and लक्ष्मात्कः: 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 \textit{विरूपक्ष:} \textit{विरूपणी विरूद्धस्वरूपणी लोकविरूद्धतत्वविशिष्टानि अक्षीरणि यस्य स:} \textit{विरूपक्ष:} \textit{SS(129).} He has an abnormal third eye. The third eye situated in a high position (viz) forehead and stands for supreme knowledge उच्चतःस्थानर्तीलोचनशालित्वकीर्तिनेन विश्वोत्तरश्चालित्वै सूचितम् \textit{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 स्मर: स्मरं. Smara is another name of Manmatha. His arrows have not failed anywher in the world of gods, demons and men. So he became conceited. Smara became (स्मरं) an object of memory. The moral of the story, says the poem, is that an insult to the great will produce serious consequences वधिनेत्र: - वधिनेत्रं ठठोट्टं यस्य स: वधिनेत्र: (SS131) is also one of Shiva’s names. Bhartrihari in his Vairagya Satakam refers to this incident thus: लीलादर्शिवलूककाम शतम्: (i.e.) who effortlessly burnt up the flippant god of love as a moth. A big fire instantly reduces a moth into ashes.

\textbf{शूरठं} = the Trident of Shiva; \textbf{आहत} = struck; \textbf{अराति} = enemy; \textbf{कृत} = mass, heap: Shiva has destroyed His enemies with His Trident. But Shiva has no enemies समोऽहं सवैभूतेः \textit{में द्वेयोपरिति न पिय:} (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.” ईशानमीश्वरे देवं तपतानवतिश श्राकरम् Krishna confirms this and says “Your enemies have already been killed by Me. Be a mere instrument.” BG(11-33) \textbf{मणिमैते मिष्टिता:} \textbf{पूर्वमेव निमित्तमात्रं भव सवयसाचिन्}.

The more dangerous “enemies” a devotee has to face are internal such as desire, anger etc.. In reply to Arjuna’s question as to what impels a person to commit sins even though he may be unwilling, Krishna says काम एष कोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्रः \textit{काम एष कोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्रः} \textit{1 महाशानो महापापमा}
विच्छेदनिमित्व वैरिणाम। BG(3-37) “It is desire. It is anger. They are born out of rajo guna. It has huge appetite and makes one to commit sins. Recognise it as your enemy.” And later on BG(16-21) He describes these as open gateways to hell that will destroy the self. He cautions Arjuna to be careful and avoid them. So a devotee in order to avoid these internal enemies installs Him in his heart and feels safe. Krishna tells Uddhava that once He is established in the heart evil tendencies like desires get destroyed कामा ह्रदयः नशयन्ति स्वं मन्य हृदि स्थितेः BH(11-21-26). They cannot live together like light and darkness. He is called कामेण - कामान हन्ति मुमुक्षुणां भक्तानां हिंसकानां चेति कामेण He destroys the desires of His devotees who seek liberation and the intentions of those who trouble them. VS(294). Also कामनाशः।। मुमुक्षुणां काम नाशपत्तीति कामनाशः: SS(126). Lord Shiva is the आदि गुरुः the earliest or the first guru. He teaches by demonstration. He shows He has destroyed His desires and wants His devotee to do likewise. He is only too willing to help him provided he makes his heart His temple. In view of this Bhartruhari describes a sadhu whose heart is pure as having devotion to Shiva with trident भक्ति: शूलिनि

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

Secondly it is wrong to look to such objects or people for security as they are perishable and so are themselves insecure. Hence they cannot confer security on us. We will be left in the lurch. Attachment is called (ईषणा) 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 को न्यायत्तृणां विस्तृजेत प्राणेयोदयख य ईयिप्त: II यं कीणात्मुखं: प्रेपस्थम्यकरः सेवको वणिकः। (BH 97-8-10) He says that money is valued higher than life itself and so who can give up attachment to it? The thief, the soldier and the merchant trade their dear life for money. In view of this he warns all to stay away from the objects of attachment and seek the Lord. The boy Nachiketa said न वित्तेन तर्पणीयो मनुष्यः He said man can never get satiated with the wealth when Yama offered him immense wealth in exchange for the teaching about self.

Kunti, the mother of Pandavas, in her prayer to Krishna before He leaves for Dwaraka says स्मे पाशवसमिं निनिध्य टढ़े पाणिदु कृपणिः। 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 त्यत्त्र पुत्राध्य दारांश्च राजवं शरणं गतः Renouncing my wives and children I have surrendered to Raghava and again परित्यज्य मया तः ग्रिः मित्राणिः च धनानि च Lanka, friends and all wealth had been left behind by me. (Ramayana-Yuddhakanda-17-16 and 19-6). Then he transfers his attachment to the Lord and enshrines Him in his heart. Then the devotee ties His feet firmly with the cord of love and so He becomes immobilised प्रणयर्दशनया धृताधिपय: BH(11-2-55). Thus firmly stationed in the devotee’s heart He destroys the evil tendencies therein ह्यथृत्स्त्र्यो हम्मद्राणि विपुनोति सुहृत्सताम् BH(1-2-17)
Shiva’s names are 

- Shaktamayatva and Bhut Shoolyakya (SS114)
- Jyotiswarupam (SS211)
- Suparipukha (SS370)

Further it is said शूलाई सः (SS114) 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.

This is made explicit by what is said about the moon next.

अधूः - अधः = half इन्द्रः = the moon चूडः = crest, Shiva has partial moon on the crest 

- शिविष्ण भूषा भूषणं यः = the moon on the crest 
- अयः चन्द्रः मातृः वर्ष सः = Shiva’s moon 

The moon appears as a special ornament to Shiva शिविष्णेवः = Shiva’s moon 

- अर्थः चन्द्रः परमेश्वरस्य यानन्द इति शिवागमे दर्शितम् = the moon represents His infinite wisdom.

Please see notes under Deiva 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 Prasnottaratnamalika को हि जगद्युरुरूरकः = the universal teacher? Shambu. From where can one get wisdom? From Shiva only. So we have the saying ज्ञानमिच्छेत महेश्वरात् = One should pray to Maheswara for wisdom.”

मंत्रे = worship: मार्गवल्लः = 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. अजे विराजुः अभिग्राहन्तरामिरामोत्स्माः।
    ओकालवाटीकुरस्तिः सिद्धसंस्वेविताहि भजे मार्गवन्युः।
    शम्भो ...
Snakes:-

We fear snakes because we identify them with death. And everyone is afraid of death कस्मवेचिहिंद्र, मरणात, says Sankaracharya in his Prasnottarat ratnamalika. The symbolism is used in our scriptures frequently. For example: यथः कालाहिनाः कालात्मकोऽण अङ्क्षण्णातुमथी. BH(11.8.41) meaning “who else, other than the Lord can save one seized by the serpent of Time ? When Gajendra, the lord of the elephants was seized by a crocodile and found that he could not extricate himself from its grip he called the Lord saying यः कश्चनेशो बलिनो भुजंगकोरागत प्रचण्डवेगामदभिंदा भृगवाः. भीत प्रप्त िनेिपिति यद्यायनातृस्तु: प्राप्तचत्यरण तमीमि. 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 मृतयुः सबैंहरश्चाः Krishna says “I am Death who seizes all life.” BG(10.34) He is Antaka अन्तकः अङ्क्षण्णातित्रित अन्तकः: VS(520). He causes the end of all life. At the higher level He is the kala or Supreme principle which destroys everything including Yama, the god of death at the time of dissolution. Lord Kapila gives a description of Kala to His mother Devahuti. BH(3.29. 36-45). He says it is none other than Vishnu who draws everything into Himself कालः: कालयति सर्वामिति कालः कालः: कल्यातमहम्: गीता १०.३० इति भगवद्धचनात। VS(418) and SS(33). The Lord is not limited by time or space or by any material अन्ततात्मा। देशाः कालतो वस्तःतः त्रिक्षण्णतात् अन्ततात्मा। भगवद्धचनात। VS(518). He is not subject to destruction or anything that causes destruction. अमृत्युः: मृत्युंविनाशः तदेवेतौ न विधते इति अमृत्युः: VS(198). In fact it is He - the seer and all knowing who had created the gods (including Yama) and assigned to them their duties says Isavasyopanishad.
Karmaṇīśī pariṁbhās tvaṁbhās yathātṛtyaśaṁbhāvīdāchuśāsthiṁṣī samābhās: So the snakes, representing kala or death, cannot harm Him but He wears them implying He uses Death for His services. Yama himself says mṛtuḥkṛtyaṁsyaṁsyaṁsyaṁ. Death to Him is like pickles or achar - a thing He uses in the process of consuming 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. Kaṭhadātā. Kaṭasya mṛtyoḥṁnaṁ SS(83) and kaṭakhāḷ: II kaḷḥ: yam:, tatyāpi kaḷḥ:, 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 mṛtuḥkṛtyo: - mṛtuḥ: marnān svabhāтанāṁ mṛtuḥ jñayati, svāpaśanānaṁ dhṛtarātraṁ iti mṛtuḥkṛtyo: SS(123), SA(71). He removes or avoids the death of His devotees. The sage Markandeya confidently sings chaṅḍrāḷorāmaṁśaṁy evaṁ kṣaṁ kaṁṣaṁrāṭi tvaṁ yam: “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 .. tataḥtacchāpāyā: puṇḍro dārsanāṁñātikmaṁgaṁtaṁ II mṛtuḥ: mṛtuḥkṛtyo yamādantā upadhaṁ gṛham. 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 jātasya hi śruvo mṛtuḥ: śruvo jñam mṛtuḥ ca 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.

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 adddition 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. 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.
(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. अपस्तानलोकस्य यावतीर्यात्तनादयः। क्रमशः समनुक्रम्य पुनरत्राब्रजस्वल्चुरि:। BH(3.31.34) Yama - the god of death - tells the same to Nachiketa: “One who is infatuated with wealth; not having a thought for the other world; such an ignorant person believing there is no such thing as hell or heaven comes within my clutches again and again.” न साम्प्रायः प्रतिभाति वाल्तू प्रमाथन्तः विच्छोधेन मूढः॥ अर्थ ढोको नरित्त पर इति मानी पुनः पुनर्वासापद्यते में। 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 सचित्त कर्मोऽण्यं सचित्तम कर्म। In addition we continue to do karma in this life also and add to the stock of sanchitam karma thus necessi tating more and more births. Out of this vast stock a chunk begins to yield the results. This chunk is called प्रारम्भ: प्रारम्भार्थ्यम् प्रारम्भ परापद्यम। There is no escape from the results of the prarabdham. It determines the duration of life, the wealth, education and the mode of death even as one is born आयुः कर्म च विविध्य च विद्या निधनमेव च। पश्चेतानि विविधतेऽजायस्य प्रभुऽदितम। 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) फलानुमेयाः प्रारम्भाः संस्काराः प्रात्तना इव। 2 - What is wrong with rebirth or why rebirth is to be avoided?

If one asks what is wrong with being born, saints like Shri Shankara want us to think and find out if anything is right with it?किं संसारे सारे भव्योऽधिष्ठित्विचित्र्यमानमानिंत्यः (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 Kulashekhara who were kings and had access to all kinds of pleasures न संसारोत्तत्रे चरितमनुस्थायिम कुशाले (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 गर्भवाससाम दुःख न भूतं न भविष्यति BH(3.31.9). Then look at the troubles one goes through as he grows up. As one runs around earning and looking after his family one is assailed by worries and sickness. He is all the time growing old imperceptibly.
देहम् says Bartruhari in his Vairagya shatakam. He says that old age is crouching there like a tigress frightening us, and diseases attack our bodies like enemies. Then there is the fear of the inevitable death. In view of all these Krishna describes rebirth as the seat of pain and impermanent. पुनर्जनम् दूःखालयमशाख्ततम् BG(7.15) Later on He again says this world is impermanent and joyless अनित्यमसुख तोक्कमिम् BG(9.33). We clearly see that everything in this world is impermanent. This includes our bodies, our relations, friends and possessions. The question then is how can one feel happy when thrown into such a situation? Time is constantly gnawing at our life quietly. Bhartruhari says life is oozing away like water leaking from a pot with a crack आयुः परिरवति भिन्नघटादिवाम्भः. Death is imminent and can strike anyone at any time. This being the case, Krishna asks “how can one find pleasure in wealth or enjoyment? It cannot please him, who like an animal, is being dragged to be slaughtered.” BH(11.10. 20) कौन्तेयः सुखवशेषेन कामो वा मृत्युरत्तिके। आधारतं नीयमानस्य वध्येषेन न तुषिदः। Next, Krishna said this world is joyless. This is because the pleasures are transitory. They have a beginning and an end and so are fleeting by nature. Their departure may leave a void and a trail of sorrow. Or they may make one to hanker for more of it and leave him restless and unhappy. So He says that one endowed with discrimination will not enjoy them ये हि संस्यर्शेष भोगा: दूःखयोनय एव ते। आधारतवत्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमस्ते बुधः। BG(9.22) Such sensory pleasures are trivial and cannot be termed as pleasures in the true sense.

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

3 - What is the process called death?

This is mentioned briefly in clinical fashion in the Brihadaranyopanishad. It says that as the end approaches the individual’s breathing becomes hard and he starts gasping. His pranas, along with the sense organs, withdraw from their respective foci and gather around jivatma - the individual soul. As he (jiva) departs, the pranas and the sense organs follow him. He gets a body as in a dream and enters another body. The impressions of his karma and the knowledge about brahman that he had acquired in that birth also follow him. He gets a body suitable to his karma in this world or some other world..  एवमेवात्मानमर्ययादेह्यात् सर्वेदप्रणायं अभिसमायन्ति यत्रैतृज्ञज्ञानश्वसगी भवति।  (4.3.38) तथुत्तकामस्ते प्राणोद्वृक्कामस्ते प्राणांकनकामस्ते सर्वेदप्रणायं अनूपामान्ति सबिज्ञानो भवति सविज्ञा मेवान्वयकामस्ते विवाहकर्मणि समन्वयभेदः पूर्वव्रजा च। (4.4.2) अयमात्मेदेह्
अश्रुरं निन्हत्याविः गमपित्वान्यज्ञवतरं कल्याणतरं रूपम् कुरुते(4.4.4) Krishna says that the knowledge he had acquired in the earlier birth carries him forward in his next birth and he progresses in the spiritual path. He does not have to start ab initio. पूर्वभ्यासेन तेनेव हियते द्यवसोऽपि स: BG(6.44) Some puranas describe it in detail making it sound a bit scary. Sage Kapila gives a description in His talk to His mother. This is on the same lines as stated above in the upanishad. He says that the individual soul living in the gross body has, in addition, a subtle body called Linga Shariram or SukShma Sariram which is invisible. It is made up of seventeen components (viz.) the five sense organs of perception (called gnanendriyas), the five sense organs of action (called karmendriyas), the five pranas, the mind and the intellect. It requires the gross physical body for functioning. It does not perish when the gross body perishes in the process called death which takes place at the end of prarabdham karma. The Jiva just migrates to another body (called birth) with the Linga Shariram according to the nature of past karmas and generates new karmas which add on to the sanchitam karma and becomes the seed for future births.

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

Luckily there is a way to escape death and the birth that follows. Krishna says “on reaching Me there is no rebirth.” मामुपेत्यु तू कौन्तेय पुनर्जन्म न वियते 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 Bhagavatham and is beyond the scope of this essay and so is not attempted. One has to learn it from a qualified teacher.

अभ्रगंगातरंगाभिरमोत्तमाः - अभ्र = sky; गंगा = the river Ganges. So the word अभ्रगंगा means the heavenly river Ganges; तरंग: = wave; अभिराम: = pleasing, charming; उत्तम = best; The word उत्तमांगा 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 गंगाधर: - धरतीति घर: || गंगावा: घर: इति गंगाधर: (SS146) and SA(27). Also धूर्जित: - घू: गंगा जातासु यस्य स: धूर्जित: । नम: कपदिने इति श्रुति: (SS286)जाताद्रे: - जातसु कपदनामिकासु गंगाधरयुक्तमाः यस्य स: (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.

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 Viswamittra 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. Hence the saying काश्यों तु मरणायुक्तः: (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 कस्तोंन सेवेत मर्याम्यमाणः: 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.

The ग in the name Ganga stands for Gayatri which represents the eternal, supreme Brahman. In Gangashtakam, she is addressed as the very embodiment of Brahman,
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 Brahmaramandram. 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 Brahma. This is also the seat where one visualises one’s guru in the form of Brahma and meditates on him because one’s guru is not different from Brahma.

Placed on the head of Shiva who is Himself the embodiment of knowledge the stream of Ganga is symbolic of knowledge. So Shankaracharya refers to it in his Kasi Panchakam as ज्ञानप्रवाहो विमलादि गंगा. The stream of right knowledge is the pure original Ganga. Again later he says विभुवनजननी व्यापिनी ज्ञानगंगा(ie.) the Ganga of knowledge is the mother of the three worlds. This Ganga who is Gayatri and Brahma 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.

2 - She is Gayatri गायत्री LS(420)

3 - She is Bhavani भवानी LS(112), Durga दुर्गा LS(190), Parvati पार्वती LS(246), Uma उमा LS(633)

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

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 of Shiva which is not explicitly seen in His representations (where Uma is shown as a separate
Thus one who knows Ganga knows Shiva and vice versa. Krishna says खोतसामसिम जाह्वे 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. गंगा गंगाति तो बृहात योजनानां शतोरिपृ। मुच्यते सर्वपापेऽविश्वास: क स गच्छति। The avadhuta saint Sadasiva Brahram has composed a song in praise of Ganga (jaya tungatarange gange जय तुङ्गतरः गंगे ) wherein he salutes Ganga as one who purifies the worlds and cuts asunder the manifold bonds of mankind (कमलभवाण्डकमण्डपपतिचे, बहुविधवन्यच्छेदलिविचे। तविच्रः = 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.

We can make one observation on the story of Bhagiratha bringing down Ganga. The Lord - being the father - always gives much more than what one seeks from Him though this fact is not appreciated. He is कामप्रदः। भक्तेऽथः कामान प्रकरणं ददातिति कामप्रदः: VS(298). He knows what the devotee asks and why he asks for it. The Lord not only gives what is asked for but goes further and fulfills his mission though unasked. In the case of Bhagiratha, he could have asked Shiva for salvation for himself and his forefathers and got it. Instead, he just asked Him to bear the Ganga as she came down from the heaven. But Lord Shiva helped the king not only in bringing down the river but also gave salvation to his forefathers then and there itself. Please carefully look at what Shiva told the king when He appeared before him. He said “I am pleased with you. I will do what is dear to you.” Ramayana (1.43.3 and 4) उमापति: पशुपति: राजामिदन्धमबवीत। प्रीतस्तस्तेऽहं नरः इति करिष्यामि त्व प्रियम्। We all know what was dear to the king and what was it that had been haunting his mind for years and made him do severe penance, once to Brahma (for thousand years eating once a month and so on) and again to Lord Shiva. The king’s idea was to then lead the river to the place where the ashes of his forefathers were lying for ages and perform their final rites so that they will attain release. But this was what he got as bonus. In addition he got salvation for himself also though he did not ask for it. Ganga represents Brahman and Shiva.
is DakShinamurthi - the giver of knowledge about the Brahman. Thus the story of the king getting the Ganga with Shiva’s help implies he got the knowledge of Brahman directly from the Lord which knowledge results in salvation.

This was what happened in the case of Arjuna also. He met Krisna 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.”

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 Bhagiratha 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.

ॐकारां क्रुः - अंकार = the holy syllable OM; (variation ही bIjamantra; वांटी = garden, park; कुरंगः = deer; Shiva is likened to a deer in the garden of the holy syllable - meaning He is represented by OM also known as pranava. अंकाररूपः - अंकारः - रूपं स्वरूपं यस्य सः = तथा(SS138) Shri Krishna says in His Gita (10-25) “I am OM among the words.” गिरामस्येकमक्षरम् Manu, the famous law giver, says that the letter OM by itself represents the ultimate reality - the Brahman एकाकारः परं ब्रह्म He adds that the creator Brahma extracted the three letters from the three vedas and so the syllable OM is the essence of the vedas अकारं चापुकारं च मकारं च प्रजापतिः।। वेदायात्मित्वं दुहस्त्वं भूत्वा स्वरूपितं च A similar reference is seen in Chandogyopanishad (2.23.3) तात्त्विक्यतपत्तेऽथ् ओऽभितत्तेथ्य अकारः संप्रासवत्त्वथा 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.

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. In view of this Kalidasa compares Manu - the first of kings in the solar dynasty to OM in a grand simile.

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. 

In 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 preceeds and succeeds this “sound” part forms the “silent” component - the fourth letter.

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 states - waking, dream and deep sleep states which one passes through every day. The consciousness is the same but it functions differently in these states.
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 favour deity in an idol or saligrama stone. Here we invoke the God about whom we do not have firsthand knowledge but learnt from scriptures or from some other source in the idol or some other form of representation and worship. The representation is known as pratikam प्रतीकम् Meditating on the fourth or the silent part as “I the Self” is known as Ahamgrahadhyānam अहंग्रहध्यानम One who meditates like this is called a muni मननात मुनिरुच्यते In this type of meditation there is no difference between the meditator and Iswara or the object of meditation. As a result of this meditation the muni is blessed with the knowledge of the Self and crosses over the samsara. Thus is explained Shiva’s name ओऽकातरूपः । ओऽकार रूपं स्वरूपं यस्य सः तथा। ओऽकारपरत्वं च तदभिधानत्वाः, तत्मतीक्ष्याऽा. तदभिधानत्वं ओऽकारप्रतीकत्वेऽ तः पुनरेति चिमाज्ञेयत्यादिन प्रश्रोपनिपिपदाः प्रियसिद्धम्। परि चापरं च ब्रह्म यदोऽकार । इति श्रुति: 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 “एक त्रयों तयों तदिभधानां तस्य तत्त्वमाः।” 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 ओऽकारपंजरसचुकी a female parrot in the cage called OM in the Devi Navaratanamala. The saint composer Thiagaraja of Tiruvaiyaru addresses Rama as ओऽकारपंजरकीर a parrot in the cage called OM in his famous song beginning Jagadanandakaraka. Similarly the saint composer SadasivaBrahmam talks of Krishna as प्रणवपंजयोहरमंकपाली one who is hidden inside the lotus of pranava (in his song kridathi vanamali कीड़ति वनमाली)

सिद्धसंसेविताळिन्यो = सिद्धः = a superhuman being of great purity and holiness possessing eight supernatural powers called siddhis. Can also be taken to mean a great sage; variation is शुद्धः = pure; संसेवित = worshipped; अंग्रि = foot He is worshipped by
great sages and other semidivine beings endowed with supernatural powers महार्षिवन्दनः:
- महार्षि: वामदेवादिभिः: हरभक्तादिभिः: ज्ञानर्त: बन्दिः: । उपलक्षणमेतत: स्तोत्र-जप-
पूजा-तप आदीनामः(SS536) सदिः: सम्पूजितः: । सदिः: साविकर्दवर्ण्यादिभिः: सम्पूजितः: ॥
भक्तिभक्तादिनः गन्धपुष्पादिभिः: प्रदक्षिणमस्तकारादिभिः पूजितः: सम्पूजितः: SS(777) The
word siddha सिद्ध means accomplished or perfected. Linking with the earlier word, the
muni meditates on the pranava. उपलब्ध्यानेता-सिद्धार्थादिभः सम्पूजितः ॥

Such a realised sage abides in his Self. So it is said तद्भवन: परमें पदं सदा पश्यन्ति सूर्यः: 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 बुद्धिमतां वरिष्ठ: = best among
the knowledgeable people. He sees his Lord Rama within himself all the time. Whenever
His name is mentioned the Ganga within him wells up and flows out as tears of joy and
his hands go up over his head in salute यत्र यत्र रघुनाथ कीर्तन्त तत्र तत्र कृतमस्तकालः व
वाप्वारिपारिपिरितेर्क्षाण मारूक्ति नमत राक्षसांत्ककम् 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

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:

देहं च न धर्मवर्षितां सिद्धोऽन पश्चयति वतोध्यगमत्वरूपम्।
दैवादपेतमुव वासो यथा परिकृतं मदिरामदाः। Bh(11.13.36)

Once his prarabdham is exhausted the body drops off. There is not death in the usual sense. His soul does not go anywhere as in the case of death of ordinary people but just merges in the all pervading brahman. This is like a pot getting broken. The space within the pot is not disturbed but just becomes one with surrounding space. This is said clearly in Brihadaranyakopanishad (4.4.3) योऽकामो निकाम आसकाम आत्मकामो न स्तय प्राणा उत्कामन्ति वर्तव स्न महाभायेति This was what is said to have happened in Bhishma’s case. आत्मन्यात्मानमावेस्त्र सोसन्तथास्व उपारमः Bh(1.9.43)

भजे = I worship मागृबंदुम् the Lord Margabandhu.

I worship Lord Margabandhuon whose limbs snakes appear prominently, whose head looks charming with the waves of the celestial river Ganga, who is like a deer in the garden of Omkara and whose feet are served by siddhas (great seers).

3

3. नित्यम् चिदानन्दरूपं निहुताशोपशोभोःयित्रित्यापम्। कार्त्तिकरागेन्द्रचारं कृतिवासे भजे दिव्यसमार्गबन्धुम्।

शाम्भोः

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 नित्यम् चिदानन्दरूपं - नित्य = eternal, ever lasting, imperishable चिद = pure intelligence आनन्द =supreme bliss रूपं = form.

These words are the repetition of the famous upanishadic mantra सत्यम् ज्ञानमन्त्य विद्या TU(2.1.2) that says Brahman is satyam, jnanam and anantam. This is one of Shiva’s names सचिदानन्दरूपं: सत्यदेव कालाप्रायायाय स्वरूपमुच्यते। चिदानन्देव प्रकाशान्तरितिर्यक्ष्यतया
सत्यम् । काठज्ञावाच्य सत्यम् SS(432)अवितथरुपलवात् परमात्मा सत्यः \textit{“सत्येषः ज्ञाननन्द्वत ब्रह्म है”} इति श्रुते: । VS(106) In the invocatory verse to Shri Bhagavatam Shri Vyasa salutes the Lord saying सत्य परं धीमहि (ie.) we meditate on the supreme Reality that is not affected by the three time periods - the past, present and the future. BH(1.1.1) . He also winds up with the same words सत्य परं धीमहि BH(12.13.19) implying what is discussed in between the beginning and the end or the subject matter of the purana is none other than Brahman which is Satyam.

Shri Lalita is known as सत्यज्ञाननन्दरूपा । सत्यं ज्ञानं आनन्दः रूपं ययः: ॥ “सत्यं ज्ञाननन्दरूपम् ब्रह्मेऽर्थति” श्रुते: । LS(790).

Bhartrihari, in the invocatory verse to his Satakatrayam salutes the Lord saying \textit{“तत्त्वज्ञानवच्छिन्नाः अनन्तचिन्मात्रमुत्ये”} He says that God is of the form of eternal consciousness unlimited by spatial direction, time etc \textit{दिसः प्राच्यावरिष्यदेशः, कालं भूमिभविष्यद्वित्तमन्दरुपं, आदिशवर्गसंग्रहीताति वस्तूनि तथा च दिकाला आदयो येषां तानि दिकाभिनि। तर्कसत्त्वापरिकुञ्जन। चिन्तुवाचिन्त्यवादेक्यवाच देशतः कालंव वस्तुदापरिच्छिन्नत्वः। । अत एव अनन्तार्विनिमित। टिथिपरिच्छेदशून्यत्वा दृढ़ान्तः नामान्। त्वर्थ: ॥ चित् - chit means pure intelligence and indicates brahman. So the Lord gets the following names चिदात्मा। चित् - चेतन्यं आत्मस्वरूपं ययः: चिदात्मा SS(456). Also चिन्मय: । चिन्मयश्रिःपू: ॥ SS(829). Devi is described as चिन्मयी ।

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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: अभिः स्वराट। स्वेनेव राजते यस्म। स्वत: सिद्धानन्मित्वयः। 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.

Ananda: Brahm is of the form of pure bliss आनन्दो बभोतिव्यजनात्।

The Taittiriyanpanishad 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 Brihadaranyapanishad says that any ananda experienced by any being is just a droplet derived from the bliss that is Brahma एतस्येवनन्दसस्य अन्यानि भूनानि मात्रामुख्जीवनिः।

Incidentally this is one of the names of Shri Lalita. (LS365) स्वात्माननन्दससंबोहत बह्मायानन्दसंततिः। The commentator Bhaskararaya explains this name referring to these quotations only. He says स्वस्या आक्षणो य आनन्दस लवीभूता इत्रायानन्दसविन्दुपालोलोकमाण्डलवा यापि देवानन्दसागरस्य लवः संपथाना: ब्रह्मालीनो सृष्टिकृत्तवर्द्धिन्मविशिष्टाना: ब्रह्मविषुध्ग्राणामान्यानां संस्कृतमूहा यस्या: सा। “एतस्येवनन्दसविन्दायुक्तानि मात्रामुख्जीवनिः” ति श्रुते:। तेऽतिरीयेनामुनानन्दसरस्य उत्तरोत्तरमधुस्फिक्तिस्वर्णामान्यामान्यानां मध्ये परिगणितानि प्रजापत्यायानमाणामापि परिच्छेदतेन पुरुषार्थविभूतियोणायापरिच्छेदानन्दसस्य निर्णायस्य सिद्धवच पुरुषार्थसाधनज्ञानोपकामदि तत्त्वयनिर्णयक प्रमाणविशेषाय तत्त्वद्य सिद्धान्तार्थस्त्रव्यक्त्वत्वेभु युक्तिमिताशयः।

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

नन्दी। परमानन्दविश्राहो नन्दी। “विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्मोऽति श्रुति: । SS(189) and
VS(618)आनन्दी। सुसुखस्वरूपता आनन्दी VS(560)। Also ब्रह्मानन्दः । ब्रह्मरूप आनन्दो
ब्रह्मानन्दः । “आनन्दं ब्रह्म मां ज्ञातव न विभेदित कुतथने” ति पायो॥“आनन्दं ब्रह्मानो विद्वानि”
ति श्रुति: । SS(560) and सदानन्दः ॥ कालज्यादाबाबिनततिशयसुखस्वरूपः सदानन्दः । “
विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्मो” ति श्रुति: । SS(673)

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

Shiva is the destroyer of the valour and pride of Ravana who was the enemy of Indra. Once
Ravana tried to lift Kailasa as he felt he was strong enough to carry even the abode of the
Lord. He was inebriated with power because he could conquer even Indra and other gods.
He forgot that all his might and glory were only due to the blessings of the Lord. He even
said that Shiva has not known that a danger has come to Him! This incident is mentioned
in Ramayana (Uttara Kanda - canto 16). विज्ञातव्यं न जानीते भयस्थानमुपस्थिततम्(Uttara
kanda - 16-24). Shiva wanted to teach him a lesson and curb his pride. So He playfully
pressed His toe. The pressure applied by Him crushed Ravana under the mountain.

ततो राम महादेवो देवानां प्रवरो हरः ।
पादाक्षेन तं शैलं पीडकामास लीलयः ॥

पीडितास्तु तत्सत्स्व शैलस्वम्भोपमा भूजा: । (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
अनुशिषितसा लक्षणानाथदर्शरः । अनुशिषितसा पादाक्षेण लक्षणानाथस्य रावणस्य दर्श गर्वः
हरसतीति हरः । इदं च रामायणादृः प्रसिद्धम् । शिवरहस्ये - अमुक्त्वत्सेवासमिधितसारं
भुजवनं वलत्के गािसेपि त्वददिवसतो विकमयतः । अत्भ्यापातात्तेःप्यवाचिलातुधिशिरसि
प्रतिषंता त्वयासीद्वमुभिमचितो मुख्यं खळ इति। ॥ “नमः सहमान्य निव्याधिन” इति श्रुति: ।
Ravana was the grandson of the great sage Pulastya and the son of an equally great sage Vivasva. He was born as an asura due to a curse. Krishna gives a description of asuric nature in the 16th chapter of Gita entitled दैवासुर सम्पद्विभाग्योऽः: 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 सवः गतः आणुः अचलः: BG(2-24). In fact if He shakes the universe will shake and without His will one can not move even a blade of grass. This is graphically described in a story in Kenopanishad. Thus Ravana committed a great mistake but Shiva curbed his pride and let him off कातः रागे चापम्: कातः: = gold: अगः: = mountain: इः: = lord and in this context means best: चापः: = 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 Vidyumnali were very powerful because of the boons they obtained. They lived in three cities built by Maya the divine architect. They troubled the devas to no end. The devas entreated Shiva to save them from these asuras. When Shiva started to fight them the devas wanted to take part in the fight. The earth became the chariot, the sun and the moon became the wheels, Meru the bow, the snake Seshan the bow string, Vishnu the quiver and so on. But Shiva felt that all these elaborate paraphernalia was superfluous for the task. So He discarded them and destroyed the three cities just with a smile. When the asuras repented Shiva forgave them and took them into His service. This deed of Shiva is often referred to in hymns क्षोणी यस्य रथो रथाङ्गुगाठः चन्द्राकृर्त्विम्बद्वयं कोदंदः: कनकाचलो हिररभूत कशं शा: सुखेन परृणु भुज्याधिपयुखितमि: तस्मिन्मे हृदयं सुखेन रमतां शाम्भे परब्रह्मणि:॥

So He gets the following names पुरन्दर: सुराश्रावणां पुराणां दारणातपुरन्दर: त्रिपुराह: “स तित्त्र: छुरो मिलवे” ति स्मृति: SS(45) and VS(335). One who shattered the cities of the enemies of the gods पुराणयविघाती। पुराणय विहत्तिति पुराणयविघाती।

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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 परोक्षबादः ऋषयः “The words of the sages are indirect in their import.” BH(11-21-35). The reason is that these great truths are meant only for those who have faith in the words of the shastras and the teachers who expound them, are sincere and are ready to put in the needed effort to learn them. They cannot be laid bare to those who are not qualified to receive them. In fact such people run the risk of misunderstanding the teachings and being mislead 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 हृदं ते नातपकाय नामकाय कदाचन। न चाशुःश्वेवा वाच्यः न च मां योद्धायसेयति। 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 इदुः शरीरं कौन्तेय क्षेत्रमित्यमिश्रीयते and in the next verse क्षेत्रं च मां विद्य सर्वं क्षेत्रेषु भारत। BG(13- 1 and 2). The consciousness present in the body is known as atma or jiva or jivatma. But it is not a part or product of the body that is liable to decay and destruction. Such modifications of the body do not affect the jivatma. Even on death it is the subtle body which travels to take another body (as stated earlier). The atma being all pervading does not travel anywhere. It is like a pot being made. We may call the space confined in the pot as pot-space (to distinguish it from the total space though really there is no such division) but it was not created when the pot was made. When the pot is broken, it is pot that is destroyed and not the “pot space.” It has nowhere to go. The confines of the pot having gone it just merges with the total space that is out side the pot also. Thus the atma has nothing to do with the body. This is said in Tattvabodha clearly as आत्मा कः। What is the Self? स्थूलः-सूक्ष्मः-कारणः शरीराद्वैतिरिक्तः पञ्चकोशातीति। सन् अवस्थात्रयसाधी सब्दिकानान्दवर्ध्यः सन् यस्तिष्ठति स आत्मा। Self is other than the gross, subtle and causal bodies. It is beyond the five sheaths and the witness to the three states of consciousness. It is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss.

Thus there is no birth or modifications or death for the jivatma as is the case with the body. Krishna says this: न जातवे स्थिरतेः वा क्षणच्च न ज्ञवाभिव भूतवा भविष्य वा न भूषः।। अजो नित्यं शास्त्रतोऽर्धं पुराणो न हन्त्यते हन्त्याणाच शरीरे। BG(2-20).

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

Prakriti: कृष्णमाणानि गुणे: कर्माणि स्ववंश: || अहंकारविमूढःत्मा कर्ताहर्मिति मन्यते। BG(3-27). An example will illustrate this peculiar situation. A person goes to sleep in his cosy house after a sumptuous meal. After some time he enters the dream world. In his dream he travels to a distant land and is stranded. He has lost his belongings and is famished. But he has no money to buy anything. The person is not used to such a privation and so is feeling miserable. This goes on for some (dream) days.Ultimately the intensity of the suffering becomes too much to bear and he wakes up with a start . To his utter delight he realises all that had happened was only a dream and he has not left his comfortable bed. He feels sheepish to think of the suffering he had gone through.

In the case narrated above all the suffering and misery was unreal. But it appeared real because the person identified himself with the dream body that was not his. The dream body was merely a projection of his mind and so had no substance. When the dreamer woke up he gave up the identification and was free from sorrow. In the same way vedanta says that the individual’s bondage and ensuing samsara are imaginary and due to wrong identification with the body-mind complex. This mistake is the result of ajnanam or ignorance. It will go when the individual sheds his ignorance and realises that he is not the body-mind complex but the atma whose nature is नित्यं चिदानन्दरूपम् as said in the first line of this verse. Krishna says this to his friend Uddhava: देहस्योपिने देहस्यो चिदानन्द्रायायोक्तिः || अदेहस्योपिने देहस्य: कुमालि: स्वाप्तर्गयथा। 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 enconced in the bed.

Thus there has to be a second waking up, as it were, from our so-called waking stage to the real awakened stage with the advent of knowledge or jnanam. Till then one is in the clutches of agnanam or ignorance which forces us into karma or action that brings in the fruits of action which in turn results in rebirth etc.. The grace of the Lord confers this wisdom and takes one beyond the three bodies that envelop the jiva.

This is said in the DakShinamurthy Stotram as यः साश्वतः कुर्ले प्रत्योक्तमायेये स्वात्मान-मेवाद्य तस्मां श्रीगृहमूर्तिये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तिये 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 साश्वतः कुर्ले So also in the case of self-knowledge one does not experience or “become” the atma; but स्वात्मानं अद्यमेव साश्वतः कुर्ले owns up his true nature as atma. Shiva’s names relating to Tripura are त्रिपुरान्तकः । त्रीणि पुराणि त्रिपुराणि, त्रिपुराणां अन्तकः त्रिपुरान्तकः । त्रीणि पुराणि शरीराणि, “पुः स्सः शरीरेऽिकायनात्मातुरो शरीरं हरि:” इति विषुपुराणवचनात्। तानि च स्सः-सुंक-कारणात्मानि-स्सः भौतिकमेव, सुः स्सः विज्ञानारें, कारण त्यवधारूपूमतिः। एता त्रिपुराणां अन्तकः त्रिपुरान्तकः; शीवधानस्य च विदेशकेवल्येतुत्तवं मत्रोपिनिपदि शून्यम्। इदं च श्रुतिप्रसिद्धमू नामः। “च्यम्बकाय त्रिपुरान्तकाय त्रिकामिकाय कालासिरुद्धाय नमः” इति SA(38) पुराराति: । पुराणां शरीराणां स्सः-सुंक-कारणात्मानं अराति: शासुः शासति पुराराति: । तदरातितवं च शीवधानस्य विदेशकेवल्येतुत्तवात; तच मंत्रोपिनिपदि प्रसिद्धम् SA(68).

Krishna tells Uddhava that He is Himself Shiva who destroyed the three cities त्रिपुराणो धनुषपताखम् 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 एवं मध्ये इतिाः नामाभ्यान्तरवर्ष्यः यस्य माभ्यामवस्थितः सर्वत्रः सौर्यः: कुर्मगिरिराजो मेंदुरूपायासमुद्राः: कर्णिकाभूतः: कुर्मलखमलख यथानि द्वार्तिशतसंयोजननिवितात् मृदुः भोडसहस्रं तावतान्तर्भूमिः प्रविष्टः। BH(5-16-6). The abodes of the gods like Brahma are situated on the peaks of the mountain. Lalita is said to reside on one of the peaks of Meru and so gets the name सुमेरुक्षेत्रमित्रः। सुमेरुनेये मित्रे स्नेहिता। शोभने मेरुमणिये मित्रे इितवा 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। प्रदशीक्रणस्त्रात्काशानोरुद्धर्ष्यासमिद्रुतां चकासे। मेरोपान्तिष्विढ वर्तत्सम्यानुसंसब्धिस्य्याम्।।

Krishna says that He is Meru among the mountains मेरः दिशांतिरामः BG (10-23) and विभावानस्यान्तः मेरः। BH(11-11-21). All these show that meru is considered a very holy mountain। कृतिः कृतिः = bark of a tree, skin, hide वासः = dress. Shiva is reputed to be dressed in the bark of trees and skins of tiger and elephant. Once some rishis of Daruka forest performed a sacrifice. It seems they were very proud of their spiritual accomplishments. Shiva wanted to test their mind-set and teach them a lesson. So He passed by in the form of a shabbily dressed mendicant. The sages were furious to see the mendicant. From the sacrificial fire they created a ferocious elephant and a tiger and set them to attack the mendicant. But Shiva killed the animals, and wrapped Himself in their skins. The sages were humbled. They realised their mistake and surrendered to Shiva. So He gets the following names। वायुरध्रमामः। वायुध्रम अम्बरः यस्य सः। तथा धनिकहस्तः कृतिवासा। वासः। SS(108)। गच्छमामः। गच्छसुरस्य चर्मः कृतिरमः। वासः। वायुरध्रमामः। श्रुतिः। SS(158)। कृतिवासः। कृति दारुकावनस्थः मुनिकृतस्रविष्कारस्य वायुम्यासः। चर्मः। वासः। तथा। अथवा काश्यां शिवभक्तिज्ञानस्य। गच्छसुरस्य कृतिरः। विवेकिता।। प्राणेन्द्रः कृतिवासः। पिनाकी। चर्मः। SS(909)। कृतिवासः। कृति। दारुकावनस्थः मुनिकृतस्रविष्कारस्य वायुम्यासः। चर्मः। वासः। वस्त्रं यस्य सः। तथा। यथोऽसः। सकान्दे। “ततो वायो महानुक्षूङ्ग आजगाम नवायुः।।
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 अतिवर्गाधिकारी Such a one is not bound by any rules or regulations applicable to any varna or ashrama. He only gave out the scriptures to enable us to become mature spiritually and realise Him. So He is known as bhandhu or well wisher बन्धुः। वन्यकुल्य क्षतिग्रस्त विपदाद्रि प्रतिभायते। दूसरी तापसार्थार्थ वै। तस्माद वरस्मिद्वा माग्नायास्मिन्। खालिद ॥ 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 एकः धर्मस्य स्थितेद्विपि प्रणतवहुः य: स्वयं कृतिवासा।। इति SA(67). दुर्वासा:। दुर्वासी वासो गजसंहव्याध्रचं दिरुष्य वस: तथा।

So these very same rules cannot bind Him. The description of Shri Suka in Shri Bhagavatam matches the above description of a paramahamsa. It says तन्मभवदं भगवान् व्यासपुत्रो यद्यं गामतमानोऽनपे वृत्तेषं। अनुश्यिष्ठो निजारभुतुः। वृत्तेषस्वतीस्वत:। 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 हर: । स्व विषय ज्ञानेनाविद्यादेहरणादः । 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 लुभ्या सुदुःसम्मानं बहुसम्म्वान्ते मानुष्यमर्थंदस्मानित्यमीर्घ्यं धीरं । तूर्णं यतेत न पंदनस्मृत्यं यावल्क्षःअब्यस्य विषयः सङ्कुरू सर्वतः स्यात। 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 तरं: कि न जीवन्ति महां: कि न श्रसन्त्युत। न खाद्यंति न मे ह्विति कि ग्रामपशवोपपरे॥ श्रविभुधःराधाग्रव्रेव: संस्तुत: पुनरूः: पशु: । न यक्रणशोभेऽपि: जातु नाम गदाग्रजः। BH(2-3-18 and 19). “Do not trees live? Do not bellows breathe? And do not the domestic animals (other than the human beast) take their food and indulge in sex? The human beast who has never heard of the story of the Lord has been declared to be as good as a dog, swine, a camel and a donkey.” But the Lord who is an ocean of mercy is ready to save such a person also if he wants to turn a new leaf and worships Him with single minded devotion. Krishna says he will
be considered a righteous person. BG(IX-30,31) अपि चेतुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभान। 
सापुरुष स मन्तव्यः सम्मयवसितो हि सः।। ।। वधिर्भवति धर्मात्मा शर्क्ष्चत्तिन्तिन गांगन्ति। 
कौन्ते नेत्रीनाहि न में भक्तः प्राणस्यति। The bark and animal skins that Shiva wears 
proclaim this fact symbolically. They convey the above assurance that those who turn 
to Him with devotion will be saved from repeated births irrespective of the kind of 
life they might have lived. So Shiva has the following names भेषजम्। संसाररोगनयिका 
भेषजम्। VS(578)। भवः। संसारः। तथा हेतिसपूर्ण संसाराभ्यटिता। "भवस्य हेतौ जगतां 
पत्य" इति श्रुति:।। SS(272)। तारकः। तारयित संसारादित।

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 शा। शाख्रिविधिमुन्यज्ञ वर्तते 
कामकारत:। न स सिद्धिवादाति न सुरूः न पराः गतिम।। तस्माच्छाध्यं प्रमाणवे 
कार्याकार्यवस्थितो। ज्ञाता शाख्रिविधानोन्ते कर्म कर्तुमिहाःसि। 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। तानहं द्विषतः। कुरान्सारारेषु नराधमान। 
क्षिपायल्ल्लमुद्युधानासुरीवेश्योनिष्ठ। BG(16.19) Sankaracharya explains “inferior births” 
as cruel beings such as tigers, lions and the like अनसुर्वेशु कृकर्मम्प्रायायसु व्याप्रसिद्धादिद्यो। कौन्तेयम्। Kalidas prays in the invocatory
verse in Malavikagnimitra सन्मार्गंलोकनाय व्यपनयतु स वस्तामसी वृत्तिमेवः: । He prays to lord to remove the ignorance born out of lethargy to enable us to perceive the right path or the virtuous path. सत्, Sat also means that which really exists or existence and means brahman अवितथ परं ब्रह्म सत्, “सदेव सोम्मेदम्” (छ.उ. ६११४१) इति श्रुते: । VS(478). Thus Margabandhu is brahman only सद्याभासः मार्गबन्धु वस्त्रान्त्रिकम्:। 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 शृङ्गस्य धार निशिता दुर्तत्या दुः पथस्तत्तवयो वदन्ति KU(314).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 चाभालाति मनः श्रीहदिना इति But lord Margabandhu is a unique bandhu who causes all bondage to drop off (as He is Sat) सत्सम्पत्ये निमसङ्कल्पम says Shri Sankara in Bhajagovindam. So every one prays to Him for getting free from bondage व्यमके यजामहे सुगमिभु पुष्टिवर्धनम्। उर्वरकौमिव बन्धनानान्त्यथयो मृत्युशीय मामृतात्। Ignorance is like a thick layer of scum covering our wisdom. When the scum is removed the underlying wisdom shines. Wisdom shows the seeker that he is himself Margabandhu. The seeker realises there is no where to go and the seeking ends. So He is known as मार्गः। ममुक्षवस्तः मार्गायन्ति इति मार्गः। परमानन्दः चन प्रायत्ते स मार्गः इति वा VS(365). He is sought by people who want liberation. He is the path through which one can get infinite bliss. Only by knowing Him liberation is attained यं विदिताय अमृतताय कल्यात्ये योगिनो ममुक्षवः स एव पथः मार्गः। “नान्यं: पथं विचयतेऽध्यायं” इति श्रुते: । VS(397). The poet says दिव्य सन्मार्गन्त्युथम् Why say दिव्य divya? The scriptures talk of the paths the jiva can take after the fall of the physical body. They are the dark path (क्रृष्ण गतिः:) and the bright path (शुक्कगति: ). 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 pituloka पितुलोक: 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 (चित्तवृद्धि:) purity of the mind. So, now one with a purified mind can add meditation or upAsana (उपासना) on the Lord in any chosen form, that is saguna Iswara, like Krishna, Rama, Shiva etc.. This becomes a powerful combination and 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. एतेषु यशरते भ्राजमानेषु यथाकालं चाहितयो खाद्यदायनं ॥ तेन नयन्त्येता: सूर्यस्य रथमयो यत्र देवानां पतिरिकोपिवास: । 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 austenities and develop mental maturity and detachment. They go to Brahma-loka through the bright path तपःऽदे ये द्वारकसत्यरण्ये शान्ता विद्वानो मे क्षणयों चर्तत: ॥ सूर्यदेवरो ते विरजा: प्रायण्ति यत्रामूत् स पुरुषो द्वाब्यायत्मा। MU(1-2-11). Note the use of the word विद्वान: , 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 (जीवमुक्त: ). But those who go to the Brahma-loka 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 (क्रममुक्त: ). 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.
used at the end of a word means destroying, removing or curing. So ददपक 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 साश्चात् मन्मथमन्मथः: । जग्नमोहनस्य कामरत्यापि मनस्युदूतः: काम: साश्चात्तव्यापि मोहक इत्यः: । BH(10-32-2), that is His beauty will cast a spell on Manmatha himself. So where is the question of his feeling proud in the Lord's presence? In view of this He is known as सुन्दरः । द्वात्रिशाखाक्षणोपेत: सुन्दरः: । “कामाय कामरूपिण” इति श्रुति: । SS(416). Also सुन्दरः । विश्वातिनिमीतीमायशालित्वात् सुन्दरः: । VS(791). One who is more beautiful than anyone else सुदेहः । शोभनो देहो यस सुदेहः: । “मझलायतनं देवं युवानमितसुदरम्। ध्यायेक्षणातुपुरूषो खुलासीन सहोमया.” इति। “विवात्येव श्रुतिः । SS(249) शुभाजः: - सुन्दरो तथा धारणय शुभाजः: । VS(586). Also शुभाजः: - शोभनेरूप्यमेयत्वात् शुभाजः: । 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 कंदपकोटिशतगुणसुदरिदेवियाकृति शिवव वन्दे: Shiva’s divine form is millions of times more beautiful than that of Manmatha.

Likewise the saint Shri Narayana Tirta in his Krishna Leelatarangini repeatedly calls Krishna as कामकोटिसम, मनसिज्ञतकोटिमुखवेष, मीनाक्षिकोटिमोहन, कोटिमदनसुन्दर, जगन्मोहन , that is Krishna is millions of times more beautiful than Manmatha. Such being the case his beauty is completely eclipsed in the prescence of the Lord: just like the feeble light of the stars is lost in the blazing light of the sun. Let us look at another example. This one is from Shri Krishnakarnamrutam by Lilasukha. He is amazed at the sweet form of Krishna and could only exclaim “Oh! He is sweet,sweet, the very embodiment of sweetness.”

मधुरं मधुरं वपुरं मधुरं मधुरं वदनं मधुरम।
मधुगि मृत मृतमेतदहो मधुरं मधुरं मधुरम।

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

2 - We are in the habit of describing things that have no defined form or have no form as beautiful if they please our senses. Thus we say the weather is beautiful or a smell is beautiful when it is pleasing to our senses. Similarly we describe the nature, for example the sun rise, as beautiful because it is colourful and it is also cool at that time. We do not call the scene beautiful after a couple of hours when the sun is sizzling! In the same way we describe the formless Lord as beautiful as He confers bliss on us. Further weather etc., can give happiness in a very limited manner, that is for a limited time or in a limited quantity only. Soon they tend to pall or they will turn sour. So we may not call them really pleasing. Considering this Krishna says

ये हि संपर्स्वेः भोग हुः खयोत्तय एव ते ।

आयन्तवन्तः कौन्तेर न तेषु रमते बुधः । BG(5-22).

In sharp contrast the Lord is of the form of unlimited bliss and so infinitely beautiful. And it never gets stale. One never gets sated with looking at the form. Lilasukha is charmed by Krishna’s form and describes it in his Shri Krishnakarnamrutam thus: प्रतिपदलिलतायां, प्रतिमुद्रारिपकामां। 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 सुचारः - सुतारं दर्शनीयत्वाः: निरविश्वसनऽपरमाणुनसुरपुत्र:। “विज्ञानमाणुनं ब्रह्मेति श्रुति: । SS(818). and राम्यः: - सुकुसवपुत्रामयः । “यो वै भूमा तत्सुविमूर्तिः श्रुति: । SS(924).

Devi Lalita is known as सर्वाःपुसुनिधरी - सर्वा च तानि अनेकानां च अविभव्याभवः । शिरः पाण्यादयः:।

tेष्तन्नूतान्निरलिपिक्ष्यति समस्मायुनात्वन्ति काऽत् तस्मानावशमिषितं तद्वदन्ते सर्वाःपुसुनिधरी। अथवा सर्वाःपुसुनिधरी शुरुरिषु प्रवस्वपुत्रत्वाः अत्यन्त्रव्रेक्षमिषितं सुन्दरपदर्पंत्वन्ता विविजितनमाणुनायाश्च विविजितत्वात् तथाः। (Lalitatrishati No. 130, Shankara’s commentary).

3 - At a different level we may say that Manmatha was not destroyed really as it is said. He came on a mission but failed miserably. But Shiva was in total control of Himself and so could not be shaken. He has many names that attest this fact. Some of them are: शान्तः: - विश्वास्यसुकृताःशंकाः शान्तः। “निन्दकानितिकं शान्तम्” (ष्ठे. उ. ६।१९) इति श्रुतेः। VS(582) and SS(9) विरागः: - विरोध रागाः विरागः। “कथमरुपद्योतीतेष्व निन्दितात्तीति श्रुति: । SS(89).
Thus Manmatha was no match to Shiva. He totally lost himself in the presence of Shiva. This is said to be the destruction of Manmatha. Shiva’s anger was a flash and disappeared soon after as is wont with noble souls. 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.

Edward - 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.

नीलक्षण - काल = black or dark-blue colour. कण्ठ = 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

नीलक्षण: - नील: कण्ठे यस्य सः नीलक्षण: | शिवस्य कण्ठे नैत्यं विष्णुवादिकालक्षणायातिकर-हलाहल-विष्णुधारणप्रयुक्तम्। —“नीलक्षणं प्रशान्तमैंति श्रुति: | SS(5).

The name नीलभीव: for Shiva appears in several places in Shri Rudram. Also: श्रीकण्ठः - श्री: कालकूटजनिता श्रोभा। तद्धानकण्ठो यस्य सः। तथा कालकूट-जनित-मालिन्यमपि शोभैव परमश्रीर्यस्य। “विकारोपितं श्राह्यं भुवन-भयभङ्ग्य-व्यसनिनं” इति न्यायात्। अथवा श्री: विषमेव, “श्रीविष्णुचन्द्रा श्रोभा सम्प्रत्सर्वशाशिविश्वाणीलक्ष्मीव्रक्षो विषे विवेदंपीति नानात्तलमाला। तद्धानकण्ठो यस्येती। 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

अकाण्डक्राह्स्यवान्नविश्वामकतेदेवसुरकृपा- विकारोपितं सरसीदु यक्षिक्षपं विषें संहत्वत:।
स कल्माण: कण्ठे तव न कुरुते न श्रीयमहो
विकारोपितं श्राह्यं भुवनभयभङ्ग्य-व्यसनिन:। ॥ १४।
The following names of Shiva are based on this incident. कालकूटविषादी - हालाहल-विषपानकता कालकूटविषादी। स्कान्द सनकुमारसंहितायां कशिकावनमाहात्म्ये विष्वादिना समुद्रमथनं, तदानी वासुकिमुखाकालविषोत्पादनं, तेन गद्यनि्, तदनु तैरिनिग्रहां शिवं प्रति पार्थना, तदनु शिवप्रेतिनेनां नाश्ना हवस्तं विषमाहा च शिवहरस्तं जम्मूफलवस्तथमश्च, तदनु-
“गृहीम निवषमा च इव इविद्ना
शिवोत्पानके कालकूटाक्षुष्णं
कालकूटविषादी। 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

निम्ध्यमानालोकसमुद्रगुणकालविषमाहात्म्ये।
सम्मातंस्मिन्तप्राचारकरित्वमाहात्म्यमिश्रितं
तमुयपें दिशिनि दिस्युपयथो विसर्वदुमदारममुहाद।
भीताः धज्जाशुरुवाः अस्रावार्ज्जनाः शशाणं सदाशिवम।

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

देव देव महादेव भूतात्मन भूतभावन।
हृिि न: शरणाप्राप्तितः शिवानन्दसंिवात्।

“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 तदु बीूष्य व्यसन्तं तासा कुप्या भूषितं:। सर्वभूतसुहुदु देव इदमाह सती प्रियाम। Shiva who was the embodiment of mercy was very much affected by their plight and told His consort Sati this

अहो बत भवानयेतत् प्रजाना पदय वैूशसम्।
श्रीमोदमथोदुलतः कालकूटात्परिधाति।

“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.”

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

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

Refering 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.

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 that all the gods and demons were there to witness the act of Shiva.

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is also one of Lalita’s name व्योमकेश्वर - व्योमेव केशा यत्या विरुप्तया: । व्योमकेश्वरस्य शिवस्य स्वी वा। व्योमेवात्यं सन्योमकम। अत्यायं कप्रत्यय: । तत्वेयश ततोपयो व्यापिका वा LS(941). Her (universal form) is larger than the sky. This is an additional meaning given for the name and is applicable to Shiva also. Because the sky was first created and came from Him only. Then other things were created from the sky. Thus Ganga came from the same source from which the entire creation started and so the river occupies a lofty position in our esteem. Besides it has an unique sacredness attached to it that is not attached to any other river or even to the rain water that falls from the sky. In fact the rain water is considered to be ordinary. It stays for a short time and is lost: but Ganga’s flow is perennial and is symbolic of His grace. Ganga came from the heaven. Her waters came in a big torrent. Because the water fell from a great height the stream got scattered into fine spray and came down as an immense cloud. Shiva spread out His hair to cover the sky so that the cloud of spray got in and was trapped. Ganga lost her way and could not come out. This was done to curb her pride. She was released again when Bagiratha prayed to Shiva. The use of the adjective महा in the word महाव्योमकेश्वर meaning great or big is significant महाव्योम meaning “the big or the great sky” is said to distinguish it from the “small sky” that is mentioned in the Upanishads. अथ चदद- मरिस्व ब्रह्मपुरे दहरं पुण्डरीकं वेशम दहरंस्मिर्मित्रराकाश-स्तरिन्य यदन्त-स्तदन्वेष्यं तद्व विज्ञामित्वएति। Chandogyopanishad.(8-1-1). What is mentioned here is known as Dahara Vidya. Ordinarily people may find it to visualise brahman that is described to be without a form, name or any other attributes. It may appear to be something like a vacUm. It is the intention of Dahara Vidya to provide them something gross on which they can meditate upon. Daharam means small (दहरं अल्य ) and ब्रह्मपुरं is our body. Briefly stated this says that there is a small space within the heart in the body in which one can visualise brahman and get all his desires fulfilled. The upanishad says that this is because the space that is inside the heart encompasses all that is there outside.

कुंदाभदन्तम् - कुंदम = jasmine flower आभः = likeness, resemblance दांतः = 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
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 कुरदन and कुसुररदन in his Krishna Leela Tarangini. (रदः = tooth.) This description of Devi’s teeth is in Shyamala Dandakam.

Shri Sadasiva Braharendra bows to Him saying (in Navaratnamala- 12) निसुतुमहिमानमानतोऽसिम शिमम् tūtun = comparison. So he says “I salute Shiva of incomparable glory.”

कोटिसूर्यपकाशष्ण - कोटि = 10 millions प्रकाश brilliant, bright, shining. The Lord shines like a million (infinite) suns. There are so many suns and stars in the universe. The Lord gives
them their brightness and He also shines because of His own glory without depending on anyone else. So He has these names सूर्यकोटिप्रतीकाशः - सूर्यकोटीन प्रकाश इव प्रकाशो यस्य सः तथा। इत्य क अभूतपूर्वमा। अधिकदीसमानित्यथः। “नमो दीसाय दीसरुपिण” इति श्रुतिः। 1 SS(502) सुदीसः - सर्वप्रकाशाक्षत्र सर्वाणि विना सर्वदा दीस इति सुदीसः। 1 “दीसाय दीसरुपिण” इति श्रुतिः। 1 SS(633) महाचुरुः - महती चुरिवाद्यान्तरा च अस्येति महाचुरुः। “स्वच्छयोति” (बु.उ.४.३-९), “ज्योतिषा ज्योति” (बु.उ.४.४-१६) इत्यादि श्रुतेः। 1 VS (176) मरीचि: - तेजस्रिवानामि तेजस्त्वात मरीचि:, “तेजस्रिवानामम” (गीता १०.३६) इति भगवद्वचनात् VS(189) ज्योति: - स्वतं एव सोधतयत इति ज्योति:। “नरणपरो ज्योतिरत्मा”, (नाः-उ.१३-१) इति मन्थवर्णात् VS(877). Thus the Lord who is brighter than a million suns, who is eternal and never failing is the most dependable one to light our way. Let us pray to Him and seek His grace. So भजे = I worship मंगवन्युम् = 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

5. मन्दारमुतृतृदारं मन्दारगेत्रसारं महागौर्द्वृम्।
सिन्दुरारुप्प्रचारं सिन्दुरासारमािििः भजे मंगवन्युम्।
शाम्भो ..

This is the fifth and the last verse in the stotram to be followed by the फलश्रुतिः, 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 सम्पूण aspect or aspect with name and form as Shiva. In His निर्गुण aspect He is without name, form and qualities. These references brought out the greatness of the Lord like His compassion, readiness to come to the help of the distressed etc.. Thus, He destroyed Manmatha because he committed a serious offence. But when entreated by Rati (Manmatha’s wife) He readily granted his life back. This shows His infinite compassion. Whatever be the name or form by which we choose to address Him, be it Shiva or Rama or Hari, we find that His qualities are endearing and draw one to Him. Shri Kulasekara states this in this popular verse in his Mukundamala (No:18) as follows
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 means that Lord Shiva is more generous in granting one’s wishes than the Mandara tree. So He is known as - the wishing tree of heaven” in his song - Bhaja Gopalam. Again he calls Him as - “the Mandara tree planted in the residential quarters of His devotees” in the song - Manasa Sanchara re. We find the mantra 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 - ‘Vrisheekshaya’ in the eighth anuvaka of Shri Rudram. 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 . 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 अनन्तवच्छ फलेषां तद्वरत्वत्यमेवः समाप्ति अनन्तवच्छ फलेषां तद्वरत्वत्यमेवः समाप्ति अनन्तवच्छ फलेषां तद्वरत्वत्यमेवः समाप्ति अनन्तवच्छ फलेषां तद्वरत्वत्यमेवः समाप्ति। BG(7-23). Sankaracharya, in his commentary, points out that एवं समाने अपि आयामे अपि आयामे अपि आयामे मामेव न प्रतिपदने अनन्तफलाया अपि आयामे अपि आयामे मामेव न प्रतिपदने अनन्तफलाया अपि आयामे अपि आयामे मामेव न प्रतिपदने अनन्तफलाया।
“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 भूत्त्व्य: 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. स्मरत: पादकमल-मात्मानमपि वच्छति स्मरत: पादकमल-मात्मानमपि वच्छति। BH(10-80-11). This idea is repeated by Shri Kulasekara in his Mukundamala (31).स्मरत: स्मरत: पादकमल-मात्मानमपि वच्छति। BH(10-80-11). This idea is repeated by Shri Kulasekara in his Mukundamala (31).स्मरत: स्मरत: पादकमल-मात्मानमपि वच्छति।
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 योगः वहतीत तित्तमं तित्तमं तित्तमं तित्तमं। BG(7-17). So He naturally takes care of them. Has not He said तेषां नित्याभिनिपुनानां योगक्षेमं वहत्तमम् ? “To them who are ever devout, I secure them gain and safety.” BG(9-22). Here योगः and क्षेमः “gain and safety” is explained by Shri Sankara as योगः अप्राप्तस्य वहत्तमम् अहम् अहम् | क्षेमः अप्राप्तस्य वहत्तमम् अहम् अहम् | . (i.e.) Gain implies securing what is not already possessed; and safety means preservation of what is alreadly 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 केवलः एवं भगवच्छरण: ते अत भगवान् एवं तेषां योगक्षेमं वहत्तीति। BH(10-80-7). योगः = is the name of a mythical mountain अगः = mountain. इन्द्रः =
the first or the best (of any class of objects). So the word मन्दरागेत्र means Mandara, the best among the mountains. सारं = strength. Mandara was used by the gods and demons to churn the ocean to get the nectar. It is said to be situated adjacent to the mountain Meru. मन्दरे मेघमन्दरः सुपार्श्वः कुमुद इति अयुत्त्योजन विस्तारोत्ख्राह अर्णोत्तरुद्धारः बलात्मकम् गिरय उपकृतः। 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 सर्वं गत्य: स्थान: अचल: - सर्वं गत्य: अचल:। इव स्थित: इत्यत:। स्थिरत्वात् अचल: अर्थ: आत्माः। 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 महाबल: - बलनामपि बलवत्तचाल असवान:। He is stronger than those who are said to possess great strength. VS(172)

महाबलपरः महाबलपरः महाबलपरः महाबलपरः इति गर्भादन्त्राभ्यं वा येन: ते महाबलः। इत्येकः परमेकः। “तमिश्रिताम वर्यमन: महेश्वरः” श्रुतिः। SS(604). In fact He is known as अद्वो: अद्वो: अद्वो: अद्वो:। अद्वो: अद्वो: अद्वो: अद्वो:। ते शान्तमधरः शान्तमधरः शान्तमधरः। ते शान्तमधरः शान्तमधरः शान्तमधरः। ते शान्तमधरः शान्तमधरः शान्तमधरः। “वनानि शामुरगिरयश्च शामुरगिरयश्च” श्रुतिः। SS(856).

महीधरः महीधरः महीधरः महीधरः। “वनानि विष्णुरिगिरयो दिष्टाथ” (विष्णु-२-१२-१८)। इति परापरीक:। VS(369). He held up Mandara during the churning of the ocean and lifted the Govardana mountain as Krishna. So He gets the name महाश्रोवका अधिमदिवका। गिरि मन्दर: गोवर्दन: अमृतमयो गोर्क्षण:। 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 अमीठी हैतरदातन्वर्त्तनीयं नाथ वदन्त्ये न विभाववायमि। भर्य कूत्: स्थात् तिथि सानुक्रपे रक्षा कूत्: स्थात् तिथि जातरोषे। (Ashtabhujashtakam - 5)। तिथि रक्षति रक्षके: किमन्ये: तिथि चारङ्गति रक्षके: किमन्ये:। इति निषेधयति धी:। श्रीयमनि नित्यं नूत्रेण वेगवती ततावधवय:। VS(369).

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

अहो सुबलवान रामो महद्युग्म च वै ।
यस्य विक्रमसाद्य राक्षसा निधनं गता: ।
तं मन्ये राघवं वीरं नारायणमनामयम् ॥

(Yuddha kanda 72-10,11).

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

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

मृत्युञ्जयं मृत्युमियायाश्रिताना-
महमत्मर्मृतुमुषाति पूर्वमित ।
अथ स्वभावादमृतेऽथ तेषु
कर्थे पुनर्मृत्युदिनियोऽवकाशः ॥

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 viscous 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 everyone’s heart the ahamkara loses itself.

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. The individual finds his original nature and thus he goes beyond birth and death. He becomes immortal.

महागौरी - महा = great गौरी = is the name of Parvati महागौरी means great or glorious
Gauri अदूर = close by, not far away दूर = distant or far off. Gauri or Parvati is the consort of Shiva and is said to take up half of His body. In view of this it is said here that She is not far off from Him. So Shiva is known as अधनारी - नाया अर्धनारी, अधनारीसमिलित ईश्वर : अधनारीश्वर : नायाश्रोधमीश्वरांशाश्रमित्थले : तुदल्माराच्यां:-
“प्रवालप्रवालश्रोधमीश्वरांशाश्रमित्थले मरुवालमणिश्रीमहेश्वरमधमध्यमपुराणे।
गुणस्वस्तम्येन वाल्य: शीतमन्त: स्मरामि स्मरापतिसमपतितेऽः।” इति।। “पुरुष कृष्णपित्तलमिति श्रुतिः।। SS(437)
देवधर्मकान्ते। देशस्य अर्थ वामम्य: कान्तात्त्वः वर्त्त्य स: देवधर्मकान्ते:। भविष्योत्तरपुराणे।
“अर्थ प्रवालप्रवालश्रोधमीश्वरांशाश्रमित्थले मरुवालमणिश्रीमहेश्वरमधमध्यमपुराणे।
कान्तास्थलाधर्मध्य दीनजनादलमध्य दिव्य मह: सतमच मध्यास्येश्यहम:।” इति।। “दिनिद्रीलाल्योहोत” इति श्रुतिः।। SS(568).

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

वागर्धीविव संपृतको वागर्धीप्रतिपत्तये।
जगतः पितरै वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेश्वरी।।

“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 क्रूर - कियत इति कर्म जगतस्य कर्ता, “यो वै बालाक एतों गुरुमास्त्रं कर्ता यस्य वै तत्त्व कर्म स वेदितव्यः”। को-उ-१४ इति श्रुतेत्। VS(316). कर्ण - जगद्युपाली पादक कर्मम्। VS(378) कारण - उपदान निरूपितं च कारणम्। VS(379) विकर्ता - विविधं भुवनं कियते इति विकर्ता स च भगवान् विष्णुः। VS(381). The material cause is also known as prakriti which Krishna called as His inferior aspect in BG Chapter 7. Prakriti is also called maya that deluding power of Iswara मायाः तु प्रकृति विचारमात्यतिन्तु महेश्वरम्। SVU(4-10). Prakriti is maya and the Lord Maheswara is in control of it. Krishna says that His maya is very powerful and very hard to overcome दैवी होषा गुणमयी मम माया दृष्टया। BG(7-14). “This divine illusion of Mine, made up of gunas, is hard to surmount.” So He is known as महामायः - मायाविनामापि मायाकारितात् महामायः, “मम माया दृष्टया” इति भगवद्धुरनात। VS(170). Krishna says that in fact He is both: the intelligent cause and the material cause called prakriti. Thus मूलप्रकृतं is one of His names मूलभूता प्रकृति: मूलप्रकृतं:। जगदान्तरण, तस्मिन्तोपादानत्वं बहुतधर्मं। “तद्नेत्र, बहुत्यं प्रजायत:” इति श्रुतेः। ऐन्नेतों इत्यादित्वात्यातिविद्विविधति। बहुस्यांमिति बहुव्यापनं तत्वादानत्वम्। SS(411). Also प्रकृति: - जगद्युपालनभूतं: परस्येश: प्रकृति:। अयमर्त: सूत्कारण निरिक्त:। प्रकृतिस्य प्रतिष्ठाः। इत्यादित्वादिकारणात्यथायथ। विवृत्तं चेद्य भाष्यकरण संशयपूर्वकप्रणरस्तिर्पर्नर्कम्। SS(570) मायाविन: - मायाय बीजं कारणाविश्वानांमिति यावः। एवं च मायाय अवभ्यर्पते वा भावावात । कश्चित्वेन स्वातन्त्र्याभावाच जगत: इत्यार्थक्षेत्रनित्यमुपययते। “देवताशण्ति स्वगुणशरीरम” इति श्रुतिः।

SS(557). The prakriti mentioned as the mother is symbolised as the Lord’s consort and is variously called as Parvati, Ambika, Gauri, Bhavani, LakShmi etc... प्रकृति, विष्णुपली, नारायणसमाधिना are names of LakShmi to be seen in LakShmi Ashtottarashatanama stotram. Thus the Lord as brahman is one but, as Iswara and Devi appears as two. This is stated beautifully in the उमामहेश्वरस्तोत्रम् (Umamaheswara stotram) as follows नमः शिवाय नवयौवनायम् परस्परान्तिविविधपुरुषराम्यामृ।। 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 मायातीत: - मायाय अतीत:। मायाय वा अतीत:। सत्वादि-गुण-सामान्यरूप-प्रकृतिविविधित्वस्य इत्यतः। “अतमस्यमायायमिति श्रुतिः। SS(41). and निर्मायः - मायाय निर्माय:। निर्मायः।। यथपञचाय त्रिपि। मायाः तु प्रकृति विचारमायायिन्तु महेश्वरं। इति मायासम्बन्धः।
Bartruhari states the fact that the Lord is not in the clutches of maya in his own way in his Vairagyasatakam.(17)

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.

The following names are thus derived from the facts stated above

सा शिवा कहणामूर्तिजगन्माता त्रयीमयी । शिवाभिज्ञा पारान्द्रा श्रद्धरस्पायि श्रद्धरी

वेच्छ्या हिममुखी स्वभक्तजनवत्सला, तस्य: पति: प्रिय: परमेश्वर: ॥ "अम्बिकापतय

उमापत्ये नमः नमः" इति श्रुति: ॥ SS(24) and अम्बिकापति: - पर्वत्या: प्रिय: अम्बिकापति: - "हिरण्यपत्येवम्बिकपतय" इति श्रुति: ॥ SS(429). Also SA(15) गौरीशः

Gauri is called महा or great or glorious because of Her greatness. But one has to remember that She is dependant on Him for Her greatness. Shiva’s greatness is revealed by the fact that He married Her though She was only the daughter of the mountain Himavan. This marriage conferred greatness on Parvati and Himavan also. Similarly as Vishnu He married LakShmi, the
daughter of the ocean, and conferred honour on LakShmi and the ocean also. This is stated symbolically in our puranas. For example, DakShayani wanted to attend and participate in the sacrifice organised by Her father DakSha. Shiva told Her not to go and warned that if She disregarded His advice and went to the function She will meet with humiliation. But She went to the function overriding His advice only to be met with a barrage of insults in the assembly. Unable to bear the insult, She sacrificed Her body and was reborn as Parvati. She had to perform severe penance to please Shiva and married Him again. A similar incidence is narrated in Ramayana also. Sita spent happy days with Rama in the forest till She saw the the golden deer and became infatuated with it. She sent Him away from Her to capture it. This invited trouble for Her. The moment Rama turned His back on Her, Ravana appeared on the scene and carried Her away to Lanka. She was incarcerated for a long time and suffered greatly इस्ंट्रूरूर्पणारम् - इस्ंट्रूरम् = red lead दूर = distant, far off प्रचारम् = going away. That is, Shiva’s complexion is very red and it outshines the colour of the red lead. Shri Rudram says असौ यज्ञाः अरुण उत बन्धुः सुमङ्गलः। This says that Rudra is ताण्धः = copper coloured, अरुणः = rosy, बन्धुः = golden yellow, सुमङ्गलः = highly auspicious and beneficient. Only a few can understand and worship the avyakta or impersonal God. A larger number can contemplate Rudra as residing on Kailasa. For the benefit of the others, who form the majority of mankind, He stands in the form of the sun. The sandhya vandana mantra says सूर्य आत्मा जगतः: तस्युषुध्धः = the sun is the self of the world, movable and immovable. The sun is the most acclaimed and worshipped power of nature. It is said that असौ यज्ञाः इत्यने आदित्यमुपतिते। The votary should praise and worship the sun by means of the rik असौ यज्ञाः in the Rudram. So ताण्धः - अत्यन्तं रक्तस्ताण्धः। “नमस्तान्नाय चे” तिरे श्रुति:।। 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 द्यातुः: - द्याशीलो द्यातुः। अनेन परमेश्वरस्य या शान्ता तनू सर्वंहादरुपिणी सा प्रदर्शिता। “या ते रुद्र शिवा तनू” रिति श्रुति:। SS(155) सिन्धुराजांतिधीरुः सिंधुः = the sea, ocean राजन = a king or chief. It is used to qualify something very great or glorious. For example Kalidasa describes the Himalaya as नगाधिराजः: in his Kumarasambhava. अति = a prefix used to mean very, too, exceedingly etc धीरेः = strong minded, wise, resolute. सिन्धुराजः 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 धीरेः: as one who is endowed with a mind that does not waver
even when assailed by deleterious forces that are capable of perverting it (Kumarasambhava-1-59). Gita and the upanishads use the word to mean a person of wisdom or discrimination.

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 नषो मोहः स्मृतिरेखा त्वतसादान्यायांच्छुत। BG(18-73). Again यं हि न व्यतयते पुरुषं पुरुषं। समदु: ससुरं पीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते। BG(2-15).

Here Krishna says a wise man who is not afflicted by pleasure and pain is fit for immortality. Such a man of wisdom is called as धीरः and also as स्थितप्रजः, स्थितप्री: etc.. The upanishads use the word धीरः to indicate a man of wisdom and realisation. This example is from Kathopanishad एको वशी सर्वभूतान्तर्त्र एकेऽर रूपं बहुधा यः करोऽि तमाल्यस्थः येऽनुप्ति। धीरा: तेषां सुखं स्वातं नेतरेषाम ॥ KU(2-2-12). “The indwelling Lord of all beings; who is one without the second and has everybody under His control; transforms His one and single entity into multifarious; those wise persons who always observe (meditate upon) that Lord abiding in self; (it is they who) enjoy that eternal bliss; not the others.”

One other interpretation of the word is धीरः - धिरं ईरयति, धिरं प्रेरयति। ईर = to urge, elevate, bring to life. Thus the word धीरः means the Lord who is behind the intellect and gives life to it. We worship Him through the Gayatri mantra as धियो यो न: प्रजोदयतूः। Shiva is known as गायत्रीवद्भः: गायत्र्या वहूऽगायत्रीवद्भः। गायत्रीप्रतिपाद इत्यथः। SS(179). The avaduta sage lists the similarities between a realised man and the ocean in his conversation with the king Yadhu. The story is seen in Shri Bhagavata. He says:

मुनिः प्रस्त्रमण्मीरो वर्ष्यारो दुर्विचारो दुर्दयः। अनन्तपारो द्वाशोभम: स्तितिमिदु इवार्ष्णivol:।

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


dुःखेचनुवैदिकमः। सुकृष्ट हितस्मृहः। वीतरागभयबोधः। सिरस्थिरस्मृमनिवदते॥ BG(2-56).

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

The sage is not disturbed by his experiences, be they favourable or unfavourable. King ParikShit was such a person. He was born in the royal family and brought up in the lap of luxury. He was said to be calm and serene like Lord Shiva प्रसादे गिरिशोपमः। BH(1-12-23). But adversity hit him hard in the form of a curse. He had only seven days left to live. But though he was initially upset, he gathered his wits and immediately started thinking of what he should do next. He renounced his kingdom, went to the banks of Ganga and sought the advice of sages about what one in his condition should do. The jnani has realised his fulness पूर्णत्वः। So he has no wants. His sensory experiences are like the rivers: they may bring in flood waters or may dry up. But the ocean does not swell or shrink in size. It retains its fullness. This is with reference to material possessions also. So whether he owns all desirable possessions समृद्धकामः: or has none, he treats both situations like नारायणपरः: gifts from God. Ramayana gives a fine example in Rama for this. He was to be made the king but this was not to be. He was asked to go to the forest instead. But this sudden change of fortune did not upset Him in the least. Valmiki says: न वनं गन्तुकामस्य त्यजन्तश्च कसुधरामः। सर्वोकातिगस्येव लक्ष्यते चित्तविक्रिया॥ (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 in 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.

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. 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.

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 साल प्रस्तुः: 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.
It is our tradition to mention the फलश्रुति: 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 फलश्रुति: 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 यज्ञन्. The Manusmrithi states that performing sacrifices is one of the duties of a brahmin अध्यापनमध्यवर्त्यन्यजनं यज्ञनं यज्ञनं तथा.
Kalidasa says that the kings of the solar dynasty tended the sacrificial fires by means of offerings and honoured the guests also. Anandagiri elaborates the definition as महान प्रकृत्यायनयं कुरुस्तम्: कुरुस्तम। (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 अर्थ स केवलं भुज्व: यः पचत्वात्मकारणान्। यज्ञमिथारान्म हेततसतमान्म: विरीयते॥

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

Eating the ambrosia, the remnant of the sacrifice, they go to the eternal brahman. Even this world, which is common to all beings is not for one who does not perform the sacrifices mentioned. How can there be to him another world which can be secured only by superior means? (BG 4-31). The Lord Himself is called yagna यज्ञः- सर्वब्रह्मस्वरूपत्वाद् यज्ञः:“यज्ञो वी विषणु:” (४-३.७४) इति श्रुते:। VS(445). Also यज्ञः- सर्वज्ञस्वरूपत्वाद्यज्ञः:। “तव यज्ञस्त्वविषणु’रिति श्रुति:॥ 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 चितस्य श्रेयः कर्म says Shri Sankaracharya in his Vivekachudamani. He defines such a person who has been regularly performing the sacrifices as noble minded महात्मान: अश्लूदतिवा: in his commentary (BG-19-13). Anandagirir elaborates the definition as महान प्रकृत्यायनयं कुरुस्तम: शोधित आत्मा सत्वे वेयां - 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 आत: आस्त: यथार्थवक्ता। - a credible, trustworthy person. Such persons speak from experience. So we need not question their sincerity but accept what they say as the truth with complete faith. Thus our tradition says आत्माक्षे प्रमाणम। 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 समागता: सर्वेऽव सर्वेऽव वेदायं मूतिधाराकृतिपूर्द:। नेतीयवामुन्तु च कस्तनार्थ ओते प्रानुमहन्तमात्मशीलम्॥ The king said “shining like the vedas you have all come together from every quarter. You have no purpose of your own in this world (to achieve) in this world or in the next, except doing
good to others, which is your innate disposition.” BH(1-19-23). Shri Sankaracharya also talks about this trait of great men:

शान्ता महान्तो निवसनति सन्तो वसन्तवद्वृक्षहिं चरन्तः।
तीर्थाः स्वयं भीमभवार्षां जननेतुनानन्यानि तारण्तः॥ (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 गीत = sung, chanted. The poet says that he had sung the poem. Does it mean he had not composed it? For example, one of the definitions of the word भगवद्गीता is that it was sung or chanted by Krishna: श्रीमत भगवत गीता. This implies that He was not the author of the work (न कृता) 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:

स्वर्दपिनिषदो गाय, दोग्या गोपातनन्दनः। पाथें बत्सः, सुधीभोक्ता, दुर्धें गीतामुख महत॥

The upanishads are like the cows. Gopala is the one who milks them. Partha (Arjuna) forms the calf. The pure minded one is the partaker and the supreme nectar Gita is the milk. In the same manner, in this case also the poet had glorified the Lord by stringing together some of His attributes. These attributes are to be found in the puranas etc., and so were known long back. Also the fact that singing the glories of the Lord will confer great benefits is also known from time immemorial. In the introduction to the Vishnu Sahasranama Bhishma tells Yudhishtira: I will tell you some of the renowned names of the Lord culled from various sources (such as the vedas and puranas) by great sages. These names will confer all merits यानि नामांि गीतानि विस्वातानि महात्मसः। अल्पिभि: परिवीतानि तानि वक्ष्यामि भूतेः॥ Thus, the use of the word “sung” (गीतम) seems appropriate. Why this piece is called स्तोत्र राजा a great or splendid piece of work? In the beginning of Chapter 9 of Gita, Krishna talks of the knowledge of brahman and to glorify the subject He calls it राजविद्या राजगुह्म् “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 पठेयस्तु भक्त्वा प्रयाणे तस्य अर्थसिद्धि विघ्न्ते । (i.e.) whoever reads this with devotion during a journey, the mission will be completed successfully. The emphasis is on the word भक्त्वा - 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 Sahasranamam: “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.” एस में सर्वधर्माणां धर्मोधिकतमः मतः । यद्वक्त्वा शुन्धरीकाछि स्तववैरच्छिरः सदा ॥ This is in reply to King Yudishtira’s question to him “which among the dharmas or duties you have mentioned is , according to you the best?” को धर्मः सर्वधर्माणां भवतः परमो मतः? Bhakti (devotion) while chanting the names of the Lord is mentioned more than once in the end after the stotram also. For example it is said: भक्तिमान्यः सदोद्वत्यां शुचिस्तुदत्तमानसः । सहस्रं वासुदेवस्य नानामेतत्व प्रकीर्तितः ॥ १२५॥ इमं स्तवमधिवाचः श्रद्धाभक्तिसमन्वितः । युज्येतात्मसुवक्ष्यान्ति-श्रीधृत्स्मृतिकीर्तिभिः ॥ १३२॥ Shri Sankaracharya, in his commentary, says: भक्तिमानित्यादिना भक्तिमतः शुचे: सततमुयुक्तस्यक्रियतात्त्व श्रद्धाभोविशिष्टाविविधाकारिणः फलविशिष्ट दर्शितः । Thus a great deal of emphasis is laid on devotion and faith. The Lord is अनिमिषः । always awake VS(215) and on the look-out for people who have devotion. He has innumerable number of ears, eyes, mouths etc.. सर्वतः पाणिपादं ततः सर्वतोशिषिष्ठिरोहृदम् । सर्वतः श्रुतिमार्गाके सर्वावृत्य तिष्ठति ॥ SU(3-6). His (as Ganesa) ears are big and very sensitive. With them He can hear even prayers muttered softly. With His long proboscis He can detect even the faintest aroma of piety. He loves sincere prayers offered by His devotees and blesses them. He has the name: स्तववियः 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 पठेयस्तु भक्त्वा प्रयाणे तस्य अर्थसिद्धि विघ्न्ते मार्गमय्येतभयंच आशुतोषो महेशः । (i.e.) whoever reads this with devotion during a journey, the Lord will ensure that the mission is completed successfully.
In addition he will feel secure as he will be protected by the Lord on the way. We noted that the word प्रयाणम् means departure, or journey. But if we scratch a bit deeper we find that the word also means death or departure from this world. This latter meaning puts the statement in a different perspective and introduces a very important topic viz., the last moments of one’s life and how it is to be managed. Both प्रयाणकालः and अन्तकालः mean the same thing. The Bhagavatha Purana is very relevant in this context as it deals with this subject elaborately. It presents case histories of the last moments of many people to illustrate the theories that are stated in it. This subject is introduced by Krishna at the end of chapter 7 of Gita and dealt with in detail in the next chapter. He says अन्तकाले च मामेव स्मरन्युक्त्रा कर्तेवरम्।
यः प्रयाति स मद्दावयाति नास्त्यत्र संशय:॥
Who at the time of death, thinking of me alone, leaves the body and goes forth, he reaches My being; there is no doubt in this. BG(8-5). And; यं द्य वापि स्मरन्यावयात्ति त्यजत्त्वत्ति कर्तेवरम्।
तं तमेवैत कोन्तेय सदा तद्वावभावितः। 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 (इष्ट देवता) (like Shiva or Devi) other than Krishna or any friend or relative or anything else (may be his house or bank balance or even his pet) that had been occupying the person’s thought. This is mentioned in the upanishad also.
कामान्तः कामयते मन्ययान: स कामभिज्ञायते तत्र तत्।
पर्याप्तकामस्य कृतात्मनस्तिस्तिहैव सर्वं प्रविश्यतन्ते कामा:॥ MU(3-2-2).
An example is to be found in the story of the sage Bharatha that is familiar to all. This is told in the fifth book of Bhagavatham. The great king ruled over the entire country. It is because of him that the country has come to be known as Bharatam अजनाभं नामैत्त्वम् भारतमिति यत्व आर्यवर्योऽथिरिष्टि BH(5-7-3). The king was - महाभागवतः: 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.
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:

॥ 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 alloted 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 –

॥ 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. र भक्त्या लब्ध्यस्तु ज्ञानसन्ध्या अनन्यया आत्मविषयया ज ितय स भक्त्या लब्ध्यस्तु ज्ञानसन्ध्या अनन्यया आत्मविषयया is to be noted. Why should “devotion” should be characterised by jnana? In answer he refers to what was said earlier (in verse 7-17). The jnani is the best devotee as he is exclusively devoted to Him तेषां ज्ञानी नित्यमुक्त एकभक्तिर्विभाष्यतेः 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:

॥ 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

निव्वच्छयां तिथिपरिवर्तितविभ्रमस्तूलाय स च जन्यं विसुजननार्द्धनम। 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

इति मलिनशक्तिपता वित्तर्यस्य भगवति सात्ततपुः च विभूस्वः। स्वसुखमुपभगते कचिद् विहरत प्रकृतिमुपेययुषिष्य यद् भव्यवहः। II 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 इति - “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?” मयायंपत्तमोदुः मममौमेवययः यथावनेियशयः। II Thus Bhishma said that he was offering his mind that was free from all hankerings to Him and was thus qualified for liberation. Now, because such attainment of the Lord is the ultimate goal one can desire, saints pray to Him to bless them with His thoughts in their last moments. Thus Lilasuka prayed:

व्यत्यस्तपादम् मूर्तिसितं वर्धिबहः। सत्तृत्र्तानननिवेषितं वेणुरन्यः। तेजः परं परमकारुणेर् षुरस्तात् प्राणप्रायाणं समये मम सतत्रिधत्ताम्। II

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 अन्तकार्ते च literally mean “in the final moments also.” The “also” means, not only the final moments, but also the time preceding the crucial moments - “all through the life” as then only one can expect to be blessed with the thought of the Lord. The devotee Kulasekara prays

कृष्ण तपदीय-पद्-पञ्च-जप-प्रारम्भः; अध्यात्म में विशालः
मानस-राजसः।
प्राणप्रयाणसमये कफ-वात-पिताते; कण्ठावरोधनविभी
स्मरण कुमारः॥

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:

वायुनोत्कक्तमतोत्तरः कफसर्व-इन्द्राणिकः।
कास्त्रासकृतायासः कण्ठे पुद्धरायते॥

(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.

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

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 प्रारंभम, 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.

He then sees before him two emissories 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:

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).

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).
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).

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:

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 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 अभिनवेशः. He says that the fear affects the wise people also.

स्वरसवाही विदंपनीतः तथारुऽदोभिनवेशः । साधनपादः ९।
स्वस्वय रसेन संस्कारिणेऽव वहतीति स्वरसवाही ।
अपिशब्दसमुचितमविद्वांसं तथेति तत्चछन्दः:

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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. 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. अहो राज्वाणि गच्छन्ति सर्वाणां प्राणिनामिष्टः आयूषि क्षययन्त्याशु श्रीष्ये जलमिवावः।
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.

आत्मानमनुशोच तव किमन्त्यमनुशोचिसि।
आयुं विरोधाशु मीये॥
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).

सहेब मृत्युंर्वर्जति सह मृत्युंरिनिदति।
गत्वा सुदीर्घमध्यानं सह मृत्युंनिनवति॥
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:

अत: पृथ्यांमि ससिसिद्धं योगिनां परम् गुरुम्।
पुरुषस्वयं यत् कार्यं प्रियमाणांस्य सर्वं॥
“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 Bhagavatham and has been elaborated in the further Books also. This is similar to what is said in chapter 8 of Gita. We have seen that those who are soaked in samsara and lead a Bohemian life get inferior births. Those who perform their duties and rituals with desires सकाम कर्मा get births suitable for the fulfilment of the desires. Those who perform desireless karmas निष्काम कर्मा and also upasana (which includes offering prayers, worship of the Lord in any particular form etc.) form the next higher category. Krishna advises
that such people should, at the time of departure, cut off all attachments. Then they should concentrate on the Lord in His cosmic form as Virat Purusha or Viswarupa Iswara and leave the body. They attain liberation in stages called क्रममुक्ति:।
प्रयाण काले मनसादचलने भक्तया युक्तो योगवलने चैव।
भ्रुवोर्मेव्या प्राणमावेशय सम्यक सं परं पुष्पामुपैति दिव्यम॥ 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 - मुक्त:। He is totally detached from the body. The celebrated Tamil saint Pattinaththar presents this matter in his own unique rather blunt way. The body by itself is inert only. It is the presence of the consciousness in it that keeps it alive. Thus the only difference between a living body and the dead one is the presence of the animating life in the living body. And sooner or later the living body will also become dead or a corpse. So the saint, who was the personification of detachment, calls it as the “will-soon-be-dead” corpse! Or to put it in his language one is a dead corpse and the other a “will-soon-be-dead corpse” only. If one accepts this truth then one need not grieve over death. This is a well known fact only, but comes as a rude revelation. He is amused at the sight of a group of people surrounding a dead body and crying over it. He asks Lord Shiva at the famous Kanchipuram temple “O Lord! whence is this confusion; some will-soon-be -dead corpses falling and crying over a dead-corpse?” A pregnant, though a very disturbing one, statement that leaves us much to ponder.

4- How much time the preparations will require?
The “preparation” is for escaping death and it is meaningful only for one for whom “death” has meaning. As pointed out earlier “death” is irrelevant for a person who has gained wisdom. “One can escape death only by knowing Him. There is no other way to escape death.” So assert the shahtras. तमेव विदितवातितमृत्युमेति नान्य: पत्थर विचंत्यदयनाय॥
SU(3-8). Thus the one who has gained wisdom is clear that death can destroy only the body and not him. So he has no fear of death. Yama-the Lord of death says this to the boy Nachiketa who sought wisdom from him:

अशरीरं शरीरिषु अनवस्थेष्यवस्थितम्।
महात्मविश्वासमानं मत्वा पीरो न शोचि॥
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 बहुनां जन्मना-मन्ते ज्ञानवान् मां प्रपाधते। वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः।। BG(7-19).

At the end of many births, the man of wisdom comes to Me, (realising) that Vasudeva is the all: he is the noble-souled, very hard to find. Shri Sankaracharya explains in his commentary that these many births are required to gain the mental maturity to make him fit enough to acquire and assimilate the supreme wisdom that liberates him. बहुनां जन्मनां ज्ञानंसंस्काराध्यायानं अन्ते समातो ज्ञानवान् प्रात्याविद्याक्षान: मां वासुदेवं प्रत्यगात्मानं प्रत्यक्षत: प्रपाधते। 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: मनुष्यानां सहस्रेष्ठ कष्टिधार्यन्ति सिद्धे। यत्ततामपि सिद्धानां कष्टिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वत:।। BG(7-3). Just one man among thousands strives to win the knowledge: among those who know and strive, only one comes to know Me in truth. What is the reason for this unfortunate situation? Why are people not interested in the path of knowledge that assures them liberation? The reasons can be many. One is that we have tenanted the body in innumerable births and have become attached to it. The attachment is so great that we have come to take the body to be ourselves. It sounds preposterous to hear that we are not the body, but something occupying it. It is naturally difficult, almost impossible to shake off the attachment that we have so assiduously nourished over such a long time. Secondly all the talk about the other world and liberation etc., sounds very theoretical. Things like heaven and God appear nebulous and remote. What they are said to offer is not certain. So one tends to prefer the bird in the hand and not the promised land. We do not come across any who had been there and could narrate their experiences. All that we hear about is only culled from various books. Thus it is very difficult to get a lively interest in the subject. Then there are enough discussions on other mundane topics that can veer us away from the subject. The influences of the media, the alien religions, the many incidents that happen around
us and some of our own experiences add to the scepticism and help to slacken what little interest one might have developed in the subject. Then the preparatory steps that one is expected to go through to become a qualified student for taking up the study of Vedanta can be daunting. They too can put off one from taking serious interest in the subject. Because the steps known as साधन चतुष्पादिपति: 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: बाट्स्तावतः कीडासकः तरुणस्तावतः तर्कास्तः। वृद्धस्वाभिचिन्तासकः परेब्रह्मणो कोणपि न सकः॥ So our scriptures advise one to start the practices early in life before one gets sucked into the whirlpool of life. Prahlada tenders this considered advice to his friends: कौमार आचारेत्ताइः धर्मान्भागवतानि। 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 शैशवेऽffectवसीवानां निःस्रावसंपि। BG(5-18). It is knowing about Self. Thus Devi (LakShmi, Lalita) is called Vidya विद्या। The commentator’s explanation is: मोक्षप्रदानस्वरूपवाचियः। (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

इति ह स्य यह यहहरीदो वदन्ति परा चैवाप्रा च।
तत्त्रापरा ऋग्वेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदोऽथवेदः शिश्ना कत्यो व्याकरणं
निरुक्तं छन्दों ज्योतिष्मिति। अथ परा यया तद्वक्षरमिधिगम्यते॥

MU(1-4 and 5).

These mantras say that there are two Vidyas worth knowing to men - Para and Apara. 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 Apara Vidya. Para or the superior one is that through which the imperishable brahman is known. Yama also tells this to his student Nachiketa: श्रीवश्य त्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतत्स्तो संपरीत्वा विविधत्क पूर्वः। 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 चतुराङ्गिः। 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 - नायन्त्र कृष्णप्रसाद जमाणाय। 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

शैशवेऽ नाम् राजर्षि: ज्ञात्वयत्तामिहायुषया: ।
मुख्तोत्त सर्वसत्युज्य गतवानमयं हरिम् ॥ BH(2-1-13).

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

तत्र ते बुधि संयोगं लभते पौर्वदेहिकम् ।
यत्ते च तत्तो भूयं संसारं कुरुन्नदन ॥ 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 शैशवेस्यस्यत्वाध्यायानम्। 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., ज्ञात्वकाड़प्रवोधिनां 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 योगेनान्ते तनुत्याज्याम्। This is mentioned by Kalidasa in his Raghuuvamsam. 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.  

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 आनन्दः ब्रह्माणो विद्वानः। न विभेदः कदाचिनेति। the person having experienced the bliss of brahman ever fears not. (TU-II-4-1) that only by realising the Self one can shed his fears. We are long way from realising brahman. We very much seek security. We have the constant fear that the things that we consider as contributing to our security may get damaged or destroyed or leave us. Thus we worry about sickness, loss of money, friends or relatives etc.. The remedy for this feeling of insecurity is to realise that all these listed above can not last for ever. Either they will leave us or we will have to leave them some day. Everyone knows this but wants them to last for ever. Thus we want the body to be youthful and last for ever. One is unwilling to grow old and end one’s days. Being insecure themselves nothing on the earth can confer security. This is a fact and has to be accepted howsoever bitter this may be. But strangely no one is prepared to accept this. Acceptance requires wisdom and it is not got in a day. It is a difficult process. The recital of the stotrams and other texts like the puranas pave the way for gaining the knowledge. They describe the endearing qualities of the Lord in a manner that will make our heart turn to Him. Once He gains entry into our heart He clears the accumulated sins and brings in the wisdom. Krishna has given this assurance in Gita (10-10) तेषां सततःचुकाना भजतां प्रीति-पूर्वकम्। ददामि बुद्धि-योगं ते चेन मामुपवानि ते॥ “To these, ever devout, worshipping Me with love, I give that devotion of knowledge by which they come to Me.” Thus devotion develops where even the seed of it was absent earlier. This is the power of listening to His glories यस्यां वै श्रृः यमाणायां कुः परमपूर्वे। भक्तिरुत्पच्चा पुंशः शोकमोहभयपहा॥ 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 (श्रृः यमाणायाम्) 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:

भवत्तामहं च स्वप्निनियतं चेतनाचेतनं
पनायति नमस्तयि स्मरति वचि यथि वा ।
गुणं कमति वेञ्वि ता तव गुणेण गोपावितुः
कदाचन कुलश्रण कचन तस्य न स्वाध्वरयम् ॥

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 फलौतः. It is said न भवं कचिदामोति वीरं तेजश्वी विन्दुति and भवान्युक्तेन भीतस्तु मुच्येताप्त आपदः | and जनममुत्युजजाताय गृहस्थम नैवोपजायते ।। This was what happened to the king ParikShit when he listened to Shri Bhagavatham. The experience totally transformed him. He shed the fear of death, gained wisdom and got release. God grants us the wisdom that removes the fear. So he is called भयापहः - भयं संसारजं पुंसामपायन भयापहः | VS(935). But there may be fear from foes and elements etc.. God removes them also. Shiva is known as सहायः - ब्रह्मादीनामायपायक्तः रक्षक इत्यायः | SS(762). He protects even gods like Brahma in times of danger. Lalita is called भयापहा - भयापहा जनमस्त्थलादियुक्तानाचीन सर्वायपहन्ताति भयापहा | “आनन्दः ब्रह्मणो विद्वान विनेति कुलश्रणति” श्रुतेः | तथा च वायुपुराणो “अरण्येचार्यरेण्यो भयस्ताने विशेषतः | आधिशिवपि च सर्वेणु देवीनामानि कीर्तियंदिति । 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:

विषण्वहाः: पुरुषादर्श न कस्य समाभाया वनवाससुहुच्छ: ।
मृथे मृथे नेकमहारथामराहुतो द्रौण्यः तत्तथास्म हरेषभिरंकिता: ॥ 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

Thus the truly devout people never miss Him and are, therefore do not feel insecure on the way. The “way” or मागः 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:

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

Shri Rudram salutes Lord Shiva who is in the form of various paths. It says - पत्नीः पत्ये नमः | पत्नीः = शास्त्रोक्त दक्षिणोत्तर- तृतीय-मार्गाण्यं पति: | This says that Rudra is the protector of the three paths described in the sastras. Later It again says: नमः खुल्याय च पथः च | salutation to Him who is in the narrow foot paths and in the broad highways खुल्यायः। The narrow path indicates tortuous religious beliefs and practices. Krishna talks about this

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 महाजनानां येनगतः स पन्था: says Mahabharatha. Saint Thiagaraja talks about this in his famous song “Sakkani raja margamu undaga.” He asks “when there is the well-laid king’s highway of devotion to God, why do foolish people stray into hard, tortuous and thorny footpaths and suffer?” Saint Manickavachagar has stated the same idea in his Tiruvachagam. He says “I was straying in the company of fools who did not know the path to liberation. The Lord pointed out to me the path of devotion and how to shake myself free from my past acts. He flushed out the impurities in my mind. He made me Shivam or the auspicious one and ruled me with grace. Oh! who had received in full measure the bounty God has showered on me? I mistook the wrong paths to be the right ones. He prevented me from following the small pathways and showed me the broad ones for obtaining His divine grace.” Again Shri Rudra says नम इरिण्याय च प्रपथ्याय च। Salutation to Him who abides in saline tracts and in trodden pathways.

इरिण्याय Irinyaya: signifies arid tracts and has a reference to samsara. प्रपथ्य: वहुभिह सेवितो मार्ग: प्रपथ्य:, तत्र भव: प्रपथ्य:। “नम इरिण्याय चप्रपथ्याय चेति सृधि: SS(346).

Prapathyaya: pathway trodden or resorted to by many. The Lord helps all who seek Him by following various paths. He says: मचित: सर्वदुर्गाणि मात्रसादात्सरिष्यसि। 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 literally flooded 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)
pdf was typeset on February 2, 2024

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