मार्गवन्युस्तोत्रम् अप्रव्यदीक्षितेन्द्रः विरचितम्

mArgabandhustotram by Appaya Dixita

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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 les ha sa.ngraha, parimala, chAturmata sArasa.ngraha, yAdavabhyudaya vyAkhyA, varadarAjastava and kuvalayAnanda. His stotras are simple, popular and effective, for example, mArgabandhu stotram, durgAchandrakalA stuti, ApitakuchambA stava, hariharabheda stuti.

Margabandhu stotram: This small hymn is about Lord Marga sahaya or Margabandhu of Virinchipuram, near Vellore, NA Dt., the family deity of DikShita. It is very effective when recited before and during journy to ward off accidents and ensure success.

(The above life sketch is taken from the book Shrimad Appayya DikShita, published by Shrimad Appayya DikShitendrar Grantha Prakasana Samiti, Hyderabad.)

The following abbreviations are used in the commentary:
(1) VS: Shri Vishnu Sahasranama stotram with Shri Shankara’s bashyam. (2) SS: Shiva Sahasranama stotram (called Vedasara sahasram) from Padmapuranam with the commentary (published by Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library) of HH Shri Paramasivendra Saraswati - 57th pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam and the guru of the well known saint composer Shri Sadasiva Brahmendra Saraswati. (3) BG: Bhagavat Gita (4) BH: Shrimad Bhagavatam (5) KU: Kathopanishad. (6) MU: mundakopanishad (7)SVU: Svetasvatara upanishad. (8)TU:
Taittriyopanishad. (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 मागबन्धुः means one who comes along with you giving company and protection

स्तोत्रम् Stotram: is a hymn praising the Lord गुणसंकीर्तनात्मकः Stotram (VS681) It talks about His qualities.

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 निवर्तन्ते अप्राय 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 तनुं भक्तं श्रद्धायाचितुमिच्छति।
तस्य तत्स्याचलं श्रद्धां तामेव विद्याम्यहम्। BG.7-21

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

स तया श्रद्धा युक्तं तत्स्याराधनामीहते।
लम्बते च ततं: कामान् मन्त्रेव विहितान्निहितान। BG.7-22.

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

तेषां सततयुक्तानां भजतां प्रीतिपूर्वकम्।
ददामि बुद्धिसंयोगं येन मामुपयान्ति ते। BG.10-10.

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

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

One remarkable common feature to be found in these stotras is that each one may be in praise of a differently named god like Rama or Shiva. It will praise the attributes of that deity (in saguna form). It will also refer to incidents to be found in the puranas. The Bhagvat Gita says that the Lord incarnates Himself from time to time to subdue the evil and protect the righteous people. The puranas contain details of the incarnations and the deeds performed by Him to fulfill His mission. Behind all the glorification they will refer to His nirguna (without attributes) aspect also.

The composition may be in praise of Shri Rama or Devi but it will also talk of the God as the Supreme Being. This clearly shows that the composer of the stotra was in fact praising the formless reality using the form of Shri Rama or Devi as a front. We can see this being done in this stotram also.

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

Now let us go to the Margabhandhu Stotram proper.

शंभो महादेव देव शिव
शंभो महादेव देवीश शंभो -
शंभो महादेव देव

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

अपिवऽः पिवऽो वा सवा वां गतोऽिप वा
यः स्मरेतु पुण्डरीकाश्र स: बाह्याम्यन्तर: शुचि: ।
मानसं वाचिकं पाप कर्मणा सधुपारितम्।
श्रीरामस्मरणेन व्यपोहति न संशयः ।
श्री राम राम राम

These verses say “Anyone - may be impure or pure or whatever may be his condition - if just thinks of the lotus -eyed Lord is certainly pure inside and out. Sins 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 शाम्भु: । दं सुखं भावयतीति शाम्भु: (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.

“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).

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

He is worshipped by everyone. Also He is great because He pervades everything. He is called Mahadeva because of His superior knowledge and His greatness as the greatest of the yogis. Shivarahasya says that the sound “Mahadeva” is a divine medicine for those bitten by the serpent called samsara.

The word deva indicates lordship. His lordship is unrestricted. He is effulgent. Krishna says ”I am the splendour of those who possess splendour,” BG(10-36)

Accordingly,
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.

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.

Effulgence does not stand only for light. It also means wisdom. Shiva stands for infinite knowledge.

One who is omniscient and knower of all the shine of knowledge He bears the shine of knowledge He is of the form of shining knowledge.

Siva 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 Shiva 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 क्रृष्णकर्मिविपाकशये परामृशः:

पुरुषविशेषः ईश्वरः। क्रुद्धाः, अविद्या, अस्मिता, राग,
द्वेष, अभिविवेषा, कर्मः धर्मायर्माः, विपाकः:

कर्मफलाः - जन्मायुरे क्रुद्धाः, आशयो ज्ञानादि- वाशनाः,
एते: कालव्रेडपरामृशः पुरुषविशेषः ईश्वरः इत्यथः।

स्मृतिमन्त्रण पाववन् दिवः: He removes the sins of those who
just think of His name. DakShayani says this to her father

DakSha यद्यकर्मिनाम गिरिरितं नृणां सकृत।

प्रसंगाद्धमात्रिक 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:

सवाणि शिवानामानि मोक्षदान्येव सवेददः।

तेवरणूष्युतमं नाम गिरिरितं ब्रह्मसंहितामी। 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.

वेयसु श्रुतिरुपक्ष्या रुद्धे दादवाचानी श्रद्धाः।

तत्र पद्धक्षरी तस्यां शिव इत्यक्षरद्विम।

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 - प्राध्यान्येन 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.

भीषासमात्रबान: पवते। भीषेवाृति सूर्यः।
भीषासमादिश्रेष्ठः। मृउर्ज्जाविति पद्धमः।

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:

भयादस्याभिस्थपति भयात्‌ तपित सूर्यः।
भयादिन्द्रथ वायुः मृत्युर्भाविति पद्धमः। KU(3-3).

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

१. फालावनन्न्रिकरीटं फालनेऽािचिरा दशभष्येकुकीटम्।
शूलाहताराविरूढं, शुद्भर्वचंजुरूडं भजे मागभुमम॥

श्रीमो ...

फालः - forehead; अवनत्र - descended or come down;
किरीटं - crown: indicates that Lord Shiva wears a crown on the
head किरीटी - किरीटमयास्ततीतिकिरीटी (SS782). The crown implies
that Shiva wears other ornaments also हिरणय: (SS273) and
हिरणयवाक: (SS387) सुवर्णवर्णाः -सुवर्णस्वयं वर्णोपरस्वेति
सुवर्णवर्ण: VS(737). One who is golden-hued and हेमाङ्गः -
हेमेवाङ्गं वपुस्वेति हेमाङ्ग: VS(738) One with body like gold
are also His names. Shri Rudram salutes Him saying नमो
पादावनम् अनाधिकारिः is another reading found in some books पादः = foot; implies that when gods like Indra bow down to salute Him their crowns touch His feet. The crown indicates lordship. Please see the comments on DEVESHA above. He demands respect and in fact He is the only one to be respected पूजः। पूजायोः 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 राधसा स्वाधानित ब्रह्मणे रंग्यते नमः BH(2-4-14)अतुलः - तुलोपमानमस्य न विद्यते इति अतुलः He has none equal to Him. VS(355) अनुतमः - अनिच्छन्तिं उत्तमेऽ यस्मात् सः अन्तःतमः There is none greater than Him. VS (80). Further there is none superior to Him. VS(626) अनीशः - न विद्यतेऽस्येश इति अनीशः: All other devas including Brahma the creator are limited by time and are subject to sorrows प्रथमः - देवानां प्रथानभूत आयो 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 फालनेऽािच्छा दृष्यपश्चिमुकीिः - नेत्रेऽ = eye: अरिस्तोऽ = fire: दुःधः = burnt: इषुः = arrow: कीटः = a worm, insect पश्चिमुः is the name Manmatha, the god of love, because he has five arrows: they are अविन्दः, अशोकः, चूतः, नमस्तिकः and नीलोलम(lotus, ashoka, mango, jasmine and blue lotus). The five arrows are also said to be संमोहनः, उन्मादनः, शोषणः, तापः 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 मन्त्यस्य अरि:
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 फालनेऽः SS(159) and उल्टांकः 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 विरुपक्षः । विरुपाणि विरूपस्रुवपाणि लोकविरूद्धत्रित्वविशिष्ठानि अक्षीण्य यस्य सः:
विरुपाक्षः । SS(129). He has an abnormal third eye. The third eye situated in a high position (viz) forehead and stands for supreme knowledge उपनिषांतः स्थानर्वतिर्योक्तचाशालित्ववीर्योतिन्नेन बिश्वोत्सर्गाशालित्वं सूचितम् SA(28). With such an eye He could easily look into the inmost recesses of anyone’s heart and see the thoughts lurking there. So He could detect by a mere glance that the god of love has come to His presence with an evil thought and meted out severe punishment.
The Shiva-Mahimna stotram (15) says that for his foolishness Manmatha paid a heavy price with his life and became an object of memory र्मः स्मर्तव्यात्मा न हि वश्यु पथ्यः:  परिभवः। स्मर Smara is another name of Manmatha. His arrows have not failed anywhere in the world of gods, demons and men. So he became conceited. Smara became (स्मर्तव्यात्मा) an object of memory. The moral of the story, says the poem, is that an insult to the great will produce serious consequences वज्हनेत्रः - वज्हनेत्रं लघाते। वस्य सः वज्हनेत्रः: (SS131) is also one of Shiva’s names.

Bhartrihari in his Vairagya Satakam refers to this incident thus:

लीलादर्थ-विद्वूलकाम शलभः: (i.e.) who effortlessly burnt up the flippant god of love as a moth. A big fire instantly reduces a moth into ashes.

शूलः = the Trident of Shiva; आहत = struck; अराितः = enemy; 
कू टं = mass, heap: Shiva has destroyed His enemies with His Trident. But Shiva has no enemies समोहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे 
वैश्वोदिति न प्रयः: (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.” ईशानमीरं देवं देव द्वापवानसि।

Shardham Krishna confirms this and says “Your enemies have already been killed by Me. Be a mere instrument.” BG(11-33)
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 रजोगुणसमुद्भवः। महाशानो महापाप्मा विच्छेदनमिह वैरणम्। 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 ह्रदय्या नद्यन्ति सर्वं मयि हृदि स्थितेष्वे BH(11-21-26). They cannot live together like light and darkness. He is called कामहा - कामान हत्ति मुमुश्लूणां भक्तानां हिस्कानां चेति कामहा He destroys the desires of His devotees who seek liberation and the intentions of those who trouble them. VS(294). Also कामनाशः। मुमुश्लूणां कार्त्त्तिक पाप्मा नाशयतीित कामनाशः SS(126). Lord Shiva is the आदि गुरु: 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 भक्त: शूलिन। Unfortunately a devotee has to contend with one more “enemy” - more pernicious than the enemies mentioned in the
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 न्यर्थन्त्रमां विसृज्यत् प्राणेक्जोद्विश: य ईप्सित:।
यं कर्मात्मसमम: प्रेतेस्तस्तः: सेवको वाणिः। (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 स्तेषपाशामिं छिन्नि नदृढ़
पाण्डुः वृणिलयः। 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 त्वत्वा पुनः दाराःश्च राघवः शरणं गतः: Renouncing my wives and children I have surrendered to Raghava and again परित्वरथम मया श्रद्धा मित्राणि च धनानि च Lanka, friends and all wealth had been left behind by me.
(Ramayana-Yuddhakanda-17-16 and 19-6).

Then he transfers his attachment to the Lord and enshrines Him in
his heart. Then the devotee ties His feet firmly with the cord of love and so He becomes immobilised. प्रणयरश्यानया
धृथािरबः: BH(11-2-55). Thus firmly stationed in the devotee’s heart He destroys the evil tendencies therein हयनास्तो ह्यनास्तो विवुनोति सुहस्ताम् BH(1-2-17)
शुभः - शूभः हर्ते यस्य स: (SS114): जितशातु: -
जिता: शध्रव: चेन स: जितशातु: (SS211) and रिपुः -
सुरिपूः हन्तीतिर रिपुः: (SS370) are Shiva’s names.

Further it is said वैमुर्यं शूलमेत् एवं भूतम्य
शूलम् कर्त्तवत्वोत्स्य त्रिगुणात्मिकः मायाया
स्वाधीनत्वम् भवित SA(11) The trident represents the three gunas (traits). Shiva holding it in His hand shows He is in control of maya of which they are the constituents.

शुङ्क = कालःचेपसभ्यस्य परमार्थात्: मायाविवादि
संक्यमहित: शुङ्क: । शुङ्कमपापविव्वद्य इति
श्रुतिः (SS310) Forever He is free from maya (the illusion by which one considers the unreal universe as really existent and as distinct from the Supreme Spirit) and spiritual ignorance. This is made explicit by what is said about the moon next.

अर्थन्द्रुङ्क - अर्थ = half इन्द्रुङ्क = the moon चूङ्क = crest,
Shiva has partial moon on the crest सोङ्गमिवभूषः -
विषेषतः भूषा विभूषा, सोङ्ग: विभूषा भूषण यस्य स:
सोङ्गमिवभूषः चन्द्रधर: (SS32) and also शाशिमोहिः =
शाशी चन्द्रः मोङ्गलयस्य सः शाशिमोहिः: (SS929)The moon appears as a special ornament to Shiva शाशिमोहिः - अर्थे
चन्द्रः परमेश्वरस्य झानरूप इति शिवागमे
दर्शितम्। यतोकं “ झानचन्द्रकांचुङ्क।” SA(5).

The moon represents His infinite wisdom. Please see notes under Deva above. It is to be noted that the crown that Shiva wears does not cover the moon. This implies that Shiva’s lordship over the universe - His omnipotence - does not veil His wisdom. The
shining moon announces to the world that one who
yearns for knowledge should come to Him. Shankaracharya says in his
Prasnottara ratnamalika को हि जगदुरुकः ? शंभुः,
श्लान कुः ? शिवदेव। Who is the universal teacher? Shambu.
From where can one get wisdom? From Shiva only. So we have the saying
श्लानिम्भेत महेश्वरात् ।” One should pray to Maheswara
for wisdom.”
भजे = worship: मार्गवन्यः = 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. अङ्गे विराज-िरुजङ्गं
अम्रगान्तरज्ञाकामोक्तमाङ्गं
ांकवारीकुर्जं सिद्धसंस्मेविताङ्गं
भजे मार्गवन्यः। शंभो ...
अङ्गे विराज-िरुजङ्गं -
अङ्गं = limb; may mean hand, or leg; विराजत् = shining or
appearing prominently; भुजः = serpent, snake;
Lord Shiva is decked with snakes सपंभूषः: - सपं: भुजः:
भृषा: भृषणानि यस्य सः सपंभूषः: (SS43) His other names
are सपंहारः: सपं: नागः: ते हारा: यस्य सः: (SS494)
and नागचूडः: - नागो वासुकः: कोणिरक्षणार्थ चूडः
यस्य सः नागचूडः: (SS736). Shiva wears a garland of snakes and
has tied Vasuki -the king of snakes - around His head to keep His
locks of hair in place.

Snakes:-
We fear snakes because we identify them with death. And everyone is
afraid of death कर्माच्यमिह्? मरणात says
Sankaracharya in his Prasnottara ratnamalika. The symbolism is used
in our scriptures frequently. For example: 

कालाहिनास्तमानं कोंथन्यात्मात भृशम्: 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 बलिमोदकोरगात्पच्छण्डेवेगादभिधावतो भृशम्।
भीतं प्रपन्नं परिपावाय यद्यायनमृत्युः प्रधावत्ययतय तपीमहिः। BH(8.2.33)

He says “Whosoever be the almighty God, who protects one, who has surrendered to Him being very much afraid of the powerful snake in the form of Death - that is very fast and is after him - and from fear of whom Death himself runs hither and thither, let us seek Him as our refuge.”

Kala means the Supreme principle which devours everything and Yama the god of death who is also known by the names

Antaka and Mrutyu. So at level one He is Yama मृत्युः
सर्वहरश्चाहम् Krishna says “I am Death who seizes all life.” BG(10.34) He is Antaka अन्तकः
- अन्तं करोति
भूतानामिति अन्तकः: VS(520). He causes the end of all life.

At the higher level He is the kala or Supreme principle which destroys everything including Yama, the god of death at the time of dissolution. Lord Kapila gives a description of Kala to His mother Devahuti. BH(3.29. 36-45). He says it is none other than Vishnu who draws everything into Himself कालः
- कल्यात्ति
सर्वमिति कालः: - कालः
- कल्यात्मामहम् - गीता १०.३० इति
भगवद्गुप्तमाय भगवान वस्तुत्वापरिच्छिन्नतामाय अनन्तात्मा VS(418) and SS(33). The Lord is not limited by time or space or by any material अनन्तात्मा। देशात: कालतो वस्तुत्वापरिच्छिन्नतात्वात्वात्व अनन्तात्मा VS(518). He is not subject to destruction or anything that causes destruction.

अमृत्युः: । मृत्युर्विनाशः तद्देतत्वास्य न विद्वन्ते इति
अमृत्यु: 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.

So the snakes, representing kala or death, cannot harm Him but He wears them implying He uses Death for His services.

Yama himself says मृत्युर्वैयोपासेचनम Death to Him is like pickles or achAr - a thing He uses in the process of consumig the creation. KU(1.3.25). Remember that one uses a small quantity of pickle only to push in a large amount of food - the main dish. Similarly the Lord uses the services of Yama in a small measure for His main work.

कालः कालकालः SS(83) and कालकालः ।
कालः: यमः: तस्यापि कालः:., SA(29) are His names. He destroyed even Yama, the god of death to protect His devotee Markandeya. The name also indicates that He is the supreme Lord who withdraws everything, the entire creation, including the god of death into Himself at the time of dissoluton and releases them again at the beginning of the next cycle of creation. His other names are मृत्युंजयः - मृत्युः मरणं स्वभक्तान्म मृत्युं जयति, स्वोपासानादिना परिहरति इति मृत्युंजयः SS(123), SA(71). He removes or avoids the death of His devotees. The sage Markandeya confidently sings चन्द्रःशेखरमाश्रये मम कि करिष्यति वै यमः: “I take refuge in Lord Shiva. What harm can Yama do to me?” This is also said symbolically in the story of Dhruva. Towards the end of the story it is said that a chariot came to take him to the place reserved for him in the skies. The Lord had told him that it was a special place because there will be no return to this world again meaning he had crossed death and will not be reborn. At that time Yama - the god of death - approached him and bowed down. Dhruva
stepped on Yama’s head and climbed into the vehicle.

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 जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्यु: धृवं जन्म मृतस्य च BG(2.27).

From this it appears that this is a never ending process. One can view it in either of the two ways as follows.

1 - One does not believe in the existence of the other world. There is no inclination to think about or enquire into the process. Such people are known as Nastikas.

2 - This one - known as Astika - believes in the shastras and the existence of the other world. He tries to find a way out of it.

The shastras say that the people coming under the first category are to be pitied. The human birth is superior to other forms of births. Only humans are endowed with free will and ability to discriminate between the right and the wrong: the good and the bad. Only they have the ability to work for their own and other’s uplift. The animals do not have free will. Their life is governed by instincts. Because of this they do not incur any sin for their actions. One obtains a human birth after going through the inferior births and as a result of some good deeds and blessings of the Lord. It is therefore incumbent on us to use this privileged position to our advantage and seek higher goals including liberation from death. But if one fails to seize the rare opportunity that has come his way but fritters his life on petty sense pleasures and garnering pelf he falls from his status and is considered an ignoramus. BH(11.7.74)
The question of escaping death has been discussed again and again in our scriptures. We will structure the discussion as answers to the following questions.

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

1 - What leads to rebirth?
Everyone has to work, at least to keep the wolf from the door. In addition people work to improve their standard of living, to provide for the rainy day, old age etc. All these activities - called karma - can be classified as good or bad. The good ones are those that are enjoined by our scriptures and those that can be called virtuous, selfless and such. The bad ones are those that are prohibited by our scriptures and those that are motivated by greed, anger, selfishness etc. Both acts produce results which are to be “enjoyed” by the doer.

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.

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.
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.”

So the doer of the deeds has to be prepared to enjoy or suffer the fruits. If the fruits cannot be exhausted in one lifetime one has to take another birth and try to exhaust them.

The problem, according to our shastras is, that everyone of us had taken countless number of births, done karmas in these births and accumulated vast amounts of the karmas. This accumulated store waiting to bear fruit is called संचितं karmo sanchitam karma.

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 प्रारंभम prarabdham.

There is no escape from the results of the prarabdham. It determines the duration of life, the wealth, education and the mode of death even as one is born.

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 प्रारंभाः संस्कारः प्राणन्म: तथार्थमः: चिन्दः: । 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 प्रारंभाः संस्कारः प्राणन्म: तथार्थमः: चिन्दः:।

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?क्रि
If one were to think that Shankara was a sanyasi and so had such a dark view of life, so did Bhartruhari and Kulasheakhara who were kings and had access to all kinds of pleasures न संसारोऽचिरतमनुपँयािम कुशलं (Bhartruhari Vairagya Shatakam).

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.

व्याघ्रीव तिद्दति जरा परितर्जयन्ती, रोगाश्च शत्रव
इव प्रहरति देहम 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.

पुनजनम तु:खळत्यमशाष्ठतम् BG(7.15) Later on He again says this world is impermanent and joyless अनित्यमसुखं लोकमिमं 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 पिरोऽवित आयुः पिरोऽवित

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)कोन्वर्ते: सुखयत्येन कामो वा मृत्युरत्निके।
आधारत नीयमान्य वायसेव न तुषिद:।

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 संस्कन्तज्ञ भोगः:

तृःख्योनय एव ते। आधान्तवत्त। कौन्तेर न तेषु रमते वधः। 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.

एवमेवात्रानमन्तरकृते सर्वेऽप्राणः अभिसमायान्ति

यत्रेतृःख्योनयायाम्य स्वभवति। (4.3.38)

त्र्यूक्तान्तं प्राणोऽदनूक्ताम्नि प्राणमनूक्तामन्तं

सर्वेऽप्राणं अनूक्ताम्नि सविद्धानो भवति

सविद्धा मेवान्तवक्ता में विधाकर्मणि समन्ताबन्धे पूर्वप्रज्ञा च। (4.4.2)

अयमात्मेऽदुःशरीरं निन्द्याविदायां
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.

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.”

The question, now is: ” where is He? and how to reach Him?” The answer to these questions form the main topic of discussions in our scriptures like Gita, Upanishads and puranas like Shri Bhagavatam and is beyond the scope of this essay and so is not attempted. One has to learn it from a qualified teacher.

अंगंगातरंगाभिमकोत्तमाः - अं = sky; गंगा = the river Ganges. So the word
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 Viswamitra narrated it to Rama and LakShmana as he was taking them to Mithila after he had successfully completed his sacrifice with protection offered by the brothers. King Bhagirata - a scion of the ikShvAku dynasty to which Rama belonged - was instrumental in bringing the river to earth by performing severe penance. At his request Shiva received the mighty flow of Ganga falling from the heavens and released it as a stream on the earth. A large gathering comprising the residents of
the higher worlds and great seers came to witness the wonderful event. They, along with the people of this world, praised the waters of the river Ganga as pure because of its contact with Lord Shiva.

Hence the saying काँयां तु मरणान्मुक्ति: (ie.) death in Kasi, now known as Varanasi, brings about salvation.

King Parikšhit decided to spend the last seven days of his life at the banks of the river because of this reason न सेवेत मरणं। 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 Brahman. This is also the seat where one visualises one’s guru in the form of Brahman and meditates on him because one’s guru is not different from Brahman. The fact that she is formed from the powers of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva is stated symbolically in the story of Ganga.

This says that “you Ganga started as water in the water pot of Brahma, then came into contact with the foot of Vishnu and again became the crown jewel on the locks of Shiva etc.”

Placed on the head of Shiva who is Himself the embodiment of knowledge the stream of Ganga is symbolic of knowledge. So Shankaracharya refers to it in his Kasi Panchakam as ज्ञानप्रवाहो विमलाति गंगा

The stream of right knowledge is the pure original Ganga. Again later he says त्रिभुवनजननी व्यापिनी ज्ञानगंगा (ie.) the Ganga of knowledge is the mother of the three worlds.

This Ganga who is Gayatri and Brahman and is kept in the chakra in the head by Shiva is same as Uma or Parvati can be deduced from the following references. These are taken from the well known Lalitasahasranamam (LS).

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

2 - She is Gayatri 

3 - She is Bhavani 

4 - She is seated on the head in the Brahmarandhram.
So Ganga is Brahman, is Gayatri and is Uma or Parvati. She proclaims the Ardhanari (the inseparable combination of the male and female principles) concept (अर्धनारी स्वरूपम्) of Shiva which is not explicitly seen in His representations (where Uma is shown as a separate figure). Thus one who knows Ganga knows Shiva and vice versa.

Krishna says चोतसामासिं जाहवी 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.

The avadhuta saint Sadasiva Brahman has composed a song in praise of Ganga (jaya tungatarange gange जय तुंगतरङ्गे गंगे ) wherein he salutes Ganga as one who purifies the worlds and cuts asunder the manifold bonds of mankind (कमलभवा डकमलपिवऽे, बहुविधवन्धच्छेदलवित्रे। लिवऽं = 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 Bhagirata bringing down Ganga. The Lord - being the father - always gives much more than what one seeks from Him though this fact is not appreciated. He is कामप्रदः। भक्तेयः: कामानु प्रकर्षण ददातीिततलघुः: 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)

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.”

तस्मात्विद्यथा यशोऽलभ्यते जित्या शत्रूऽवधम भूतः राज्यं समुद्रम्।
ममेते निहिताः पूर्णेव निमित्तमातं भव सत्यमाचिन्द्र। BG(11.33)

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

In the same way King Bhagirata took the trouble to drive ahead of Ganga all the way to the seas and then to the nether world where he saw the ashes of his forefathers, performed the last rites with the holy waters from Ganga and “got them salvation.” which was already an accomplished fact.

The Ganga was named after him as Bhagirathi. This was the case with Dhruva, who wanted to be a king but he got that and also a permanent place in the heavens.

ओंकारवाटीकुरं -
ओंकार = the holy syllable OM; वाटी = garden, park;
कुरं: = deer; Shiva is likened to a deer in the garden of the holy syllable - meaning He is represented by OM also known as pranava.

ओंकाररूपः - ओंकार: रूपं स्वरूपं यस्य स: 
तथा(SS138) Shri Krishna says in His Gita (10-25) “I am OM among the words.” गिरामस्मयेकमक्षरम् Manu, the famous law giver, says that the letter OM by itself represents the ultimate reality - the Brahman एकाश्च 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

A similar reference is seen in Chandogyopanishad (2.23.3)
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 आसीन्महीशितामाचः:

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.

Pranava : - प्रणवो नाम परमात्मनो वाचक ओऽधारः ,

He is in the form of pranava represented by OM. He is not different from the creation. So pranava represents both brahman and the universe. Sage Patanjali also has said this in his Yoga Sutra (1.26)तत्स्य वाचकः प्रणवः । प्रकर्षण नूयते अनेनेति

Pranava: God is greatly praised by this. Earlier we saw that a
stotram mentions the attributes or the qualities of the subject of
the stotram. Thus pranavam indicates the auspicious qualities of the
Lord and obtains His blessings to one who
chants it. Patanjali adds (1.27): तज्जपस्तद्धर्मभावनम्॥

The chanting of pranava with understanding and faith is meditation
on the Iswara.

Pranava is made of the three letters A, U and M. These three letters
represent the consciousness presiding over the three states -
waking, dream and deep sleep states which one passes through every
day. The consciousness is same but it functions differently in these states. The Mandukya
upanishad views pranava as

being composed of two parts: one having sound and the
other without sound. The OM as specified above made up of the three
letters is pronounced and constitutes the “sound” part.

The upanishad says that the brief interlude that precedes and
succeeds this “sound” part forms the “silent” component - the fourth letter

They represent the two aspects of God (viz.) with form and without
form respectively. The “sound” part signifies the saguna
Iswara and the “silent” part the nirguna Iswara. Thus one
can worship OM as God with form. This is like invoking our favorite 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.

Meditating on the fourth or
the silent part as “I the Self” is known as
Ahamgrahadhyanam. One who meditates like
this is called a muni. 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 ओऽारूपः। ओऽारूपं
स्वरूपं यस्य सः तथा। ओऽारूपपत्वं च
tadābhāvāntaḥ, tatpratīktaḥ। tadābhāvāntaḥ
oṃmityakṣaramitvādina praśiddham। ओऽार प्रतीकत्वं तु यः
punarāṃ śriyāngetvādina pṛthvopanipitadāḥ prasiddham।
परं चापरं च ब्रह्म यदोऽार इति श्रुतिः: VS(138).

The question, now is, if He is Himself omkara or the pranava, why
then say He is the deer in the park called OM? The answer
is that He is OM the park as Paramatma as well as the deer the
individual Ji vatma. 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
द्वा सुपण्ग समयुजा स्वाया समानं चृतं
परिष्कर्जते। तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाभृत्यन्नन्यो
अभिभावकाद्रिति। MU (3.1.1)

This mantra talks of two friendly birds sitting side by side on a
tree. One is eating and relishing the fruits and the other one is
quietly watching it. Here one of the birds represents the Jivatma.
Eating the fruits is enjoying the results of the past karma and
the other bird which looks on is the Paramatma as He is not attached
to the fruits of action. Similarly Devi is described as
ओऽारप्रजनसुकी a female parrot in the cage called OM in
the Devi Navaratnamala. The saint composer Thiagaraja of Tiruvaiyaru
addresses Rama as ओऽारप्रजनकीर a parrot in the cage
called OM in his famous song beginning Jagadanandakaraka. Similarly
the saint composer SadasivaBrahmam talks of Krishna as
प्रणवप्रजाहरस्वंभक्षिणी one who is hidden inside the lotus of pranava (in his song kridathi
vanamali कृष्णि वनमाली
सिद्धसंसेविताद्विः
सिद्धः = a superhuman being of great purity and holiness
possessing eight supernatural powers called siddhis. Can also be
taken to mean a great sage संसेवित = worshipped; अंग्रि = foot
He is worshipped by great sages and other semidivine beings
endowed with supernatural powers महर्षिवन्दितः - महर्षिभः:
वामदेवावििभः: हरभन्दादिभिः ज्ञानार्थ वन्दितः।
उपलक्रणेष्ठेष्ठोत्र-जप-पूजा-तष्ठ आदीनाम(SS536) संधः:
सम्पूजितः। सदिः सात्विकेदेवयादिभः: सम्पूजितः।
भिष्ठाद्वादिना गन्धुपुण्यादिभः:
प्रदृष्िनमकारादिभिः पूजितः: सम्पूजितः: SS(777)
The word siddha सिद्ध means accomplished or perfected. Linking
with the earlier word, the muni meditates on the pranava.
ॐकारं विदिषयं नित्यं ध्यायन्ति योगिनः Once he
understands that he, the meditator, and the Iswara the
object of meditation represented by pranava are not different, then
he achieves his goal and becomes a siddha purusha. The Mandukya
Upanishad sentence quoted earlier says this only (viz.) that one who
realises the true meaning of the Omkara - that
it stands for the non-dual, indescribable Shiva obtains his goal which
is his own Self. Shri Shuka mentions this in his prayer before
he begins to narrate Bhagavatam to King ParikShit.
यद्विभिध्यानसमाधिघीतया ध्यायानुपशयन्ति हि
tतत्त्वमात्मनः: BH(2.4.21)
Such a realised sage abides in his Self. So it is said
तत्त्विष्णो: परम पदं सदा पशयन्ति सूरयः Hanuman is
such a siddha who has immersed himself in the sacred Ganga and drank
deep its water of knowledge. So he is known as बुद्धिमतां
बरिष्ठः = best among the knowledgeable people. He sees his Lord
Rama within himself all the time. Whenever His name is mentioned the
Ganga within him wells up and flows out as tears of joy and his hands go up over his head in salute. यत्र यत्र रघुनात कीर्तिनं तत्र तत्र कृतमस्तकाः जाति वायुवाचिपिरिपूर्विश्वेषणां मारुति नमत
राक्षसान्तकम् says a popular verse about Hanuman. So his being shown as seated at the feet of Rama brings out the idea that siddhas worship the feet of the Lord.

Truly speaking a siddha has nothing to worship as he has no second to him. Whatever he does becomes an act of worship. Sankaracharya says this in his Shiva mAnasa puja.

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 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:

Once his prarabdh 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)
This was what is said to have happened in Bhishma’s case.

This verse is the third among the five verses that make up the stotram. Thus it forms the centre-piece and is loaded with precious vedantic truths. It was said earlier that a stotram will describe the Lord with form and will also refer to His formless aspect. We see the formless aspect of the Shiva being emphasised here

नित्यं चिदानन्दरूपं - नित्यं = eternal, ever lasting, imperishable चित् = pure intelligence आनन्द = supreme bliss रूपं = form.

These words are the repetition of the famous upanishadic mantra सत्यं ज्ञानमन्नतं ब्रह्म TU(2.1.2) that says

Brahman is satyam, jnanam and anantam. This is one of Shiva’s names सचिदानन्दरूपं: । सत्यदेव काश्चावाच्य स्वरूपमुच्चाय। चित्यदेव प्रकाशान्तरिनिरपेक्षतया प्रकाशमानम। आनन्दपदेव निरतिशय्यप्रेमस्य वहुरूपं एतचित्तियात्मरूपं यस्य सः सचिदानन्दरूपं: । SS(653). Rama’s form is existence,
knowledge and bliss \textit{सत्यज्ञानानन्दशरीरी} says the saint Sadasiva Brahmendra in the song \textit{स्वरूपमते विवरिचतम्} (kelati mama hrudaye). So is Shri Lalita’s form: \textit{सचिदानन्दरूपिणी। सत्यं चित्मानन्दश्रुतम स्वरूपमतं एव विद्यान्तरेशपं संहार्यमस्य इति सचिदानन्दरूपिणी। LS(699)}

\textit{नित्यं} - Nityam implies eternal existence - that is - it never ceases to be. It is not limited by time. Terms like the present and future are not applicable with reference to it. Lalita is known as Nitya \textit{कार्तव्यवधानं। अविनाशी वा अरेरयमात्मे ति}\n
\textit{शाख्तः} and \textit{सत्यम्} are two other names that have the same meaning as Nityam

\textit{शाख्तः} । \textit{सत्यम्} \textit{कार्तव्यवधानं। सत्यं साध्वत्वोपपत्तं भवतीति}\n
\textit{शाख्तः} । " \textit{शाख्तोयं पुराणः इति श्रुतः। SS(398). (ie.) He exists in all times in the same form or without any change \textit{शाख्तं सर्वेऽकु लेऽश्वस्त्वं भवतीति शाख्तः}। शाख्तं \textit{शिवमन्यन्तं}। इति}\n
\textit{श्रुते:। VS(56).} satyam satyam \textit{कार्तव्यवधानं सत्यम्} SS(432) \textit{अविनाशी अविनाशी अरेरयमात्मे} सत्यं सत्यं \textit{श्रवणनन्तरं ब्रह्मं इति}\n
\textit{श्रुते:। VS(106)} In the invocatory verse to Shri Bhagavatam Shri Vyasa salutes the Lord saying \textit{satyam परं धीमहिः} (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 \textit{satyam 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 \textit{सत्यज्ञानानन्दरूपः। सत्यं ज्ञानं}
Bhartrihari, in the invocatory verse to his Satakatrayam salutes the Lord saying

अनन्तचित्रमात्रमूर्त्यः

He says that God is of the form of eternal consciousness unlimited by spatial direction, time etc:

चित्ता: कालाभ्यविनिर्देशसाः,  
यथा भूतभविष्यत्ते तत्तमानसाः,  
वस्तुतत्त्यतः च दिक्षता आदयो येषां तात्त्यतिः दिकालानां।  
तैरनविचित्रयापरिकरुणाः। विभुविशिश्चितिता देवक्याच वेशाः: कालाः  
वस्तुपरिचितानेन वेशाः। अत  
एव अनन्तार्मिताः। त्रिविक्षिप्तनविचित्रक्याः  
द्विक्षिप्तस्यायामाणे - त्वर:।

This chit means pure intelligence and indicates brahman. So the Lord gets the following names चिदात्मा। चित्त: -  
चैतन्य आत्मस्वरूपः यस: चिदात्मा SS(456). Also  
चिम्मय: | चिम्मयथित्तूः:।  
SS(829). Devi is described as  
चिन्मयी।  
चिदभेदानिम्मयी LS(251).

Now let us go back to the reference from Bartruhari:

(ie.) अनन्तचित्रमात्रमूर्त्यः।  
चिम्मत्रा ज्ञानधनाः  
च।  
चिद्वेकसेति यावत्। तात्रशी मूर्तिचच्चस्य तस्मै।  
पुत्रपायः। 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: स्वराटः। स्वेनेव राजते वस्तमः। स्वत: सिद्धान्मित्यथः। 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: Brahamn is of the form of pure bliss आनन्दो ब्रह्मेति व्यजनात्. The Taittiriyopanishad has a chapter exclusively devoted to the ananda aspect of brahman. This chapter is hence known as Brahmanandavalli or Anandavalli. This chapter is unique in that it talks of several grades of ananda experienced by different beings. It starts with the maximum happiness that is possible to be experienced by a human being as the unit of measure. The next higher grade of ananda is hundred times this unit. Thus several grades are mentioned (including that of Indra and Brihaspathi) and the top most one mentioned is that of Brahma the creator. But a wise person who has studied the shastras and got discrimination knows that even Brahma’s happiness is fragile and limited. The Brihadaranyopanishad says that any ananda experienced by any being is just a droplet derived from the bliss that is Brahman एतैवान्न भूतानं भूतानं मात्रामुपजीवनितः।

Incidentally this is one of the names of Shri Lalita. (LS365)

स्वात्मानन्दलीभूत ब्रह्मायानन्दसंतति:। The commentator Bhaskararaya explains this name referring to these quotations only. He says स्वस्या आत्मरूपो च आनन्दस्य तुर्वीभूता इन्द्रायानन्दविन्दुपर्यालोचनाय सागरायामाणतेनालयः अपि देव्यानन्दसागरस्य तवा: संपद्यमाना: ब्रह्मादीना: सृष्टिकूलातिदिगर्मविशिष्टानां ब्रह्मविष्णुरुद्राणामानन्दानां संततयः संवक्समूहा यथा: सा। " प्रस्यायानन्दस्यान्नानिभूतानि मात्रामुपजीवनितः। तिः श्रुतेः।। तैत्तिरिये मातृभाषाय उत्तररूपाधिकरणवर्यमाणामानन्दानां मध्ये परिगणितानां प्रजापत्यायानन्दानामपि परिचित्यलेवे

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

नन्दी। परमानन्दविग्रहो नन्दी। "विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्माति श्रुति: । SS(189) and VS(618) आनन्दी। सुखरूपत्वात् आनन्दी वस(560)। Also ब्रह्मानन्द: । ब्रह्मरूप आनन्दो ब्रह्मानन्द: । आनन्दं ब्रह्म मां ज्ञाता न विभेदति कुत्थनं ति पाप्यं। आनन्दः ब्रह्मणो विद्वानि ति श्रुति: । SS(560) and सदानन्द: । कालनन्दवाभिधिनिरंतिषयसुखरूप: सदानन्द: । " विज्ञानमानन्दं ब्रह्मो ति श्रुति: । SS(673)

निन्धताशोपलोकोक्षिरिप्रतापम् - निन्धत = eliminated अशेष = without remainder लोकोक्षा: = lord of the universe - here it refers to Indra चैरितं = enemy प्रताप: =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). 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.

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 अमुळशिरसा लक्ष्मीनाथदप्रेमरः। अमुळशिरसा पादाक्षरोङकरः। लक्ष्मीनाथरावणस्थितम् दर्पर्वभरहरः। इदं च रामायणादृश्यो शिवहरस्ये-अमुळशिरसा व्यापायपातात्स्थिन्तन्तरवद्धिशरसिस्वतं। त्वस्यसमधिगतसारं भुजवनं बलसिद्धवस्ती विकमयः। अमुळशिरसा पादाक्षरोङकरः। लक्ष्मीनाथरावणस्थितम् दर्पर्वभरहरः। इदं च रामायणादृश्यो शिवहरस्ये-अमुळशिरसा व्यापायपातात्स्थिन्तन्तरवद्धिशरसिस्वतं। त्वस्यसमधिगतसारं भुजवनं बलसिद्धवस्ती विकमयः।

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 सम्यक्ष्यविभागयोगः 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 नित्यः
all pervading, firm and unshakeable स्थाणः 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

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 श्रीणी च चस्य रथो रथाङ्कुमगलं

So He gets the following names पुरुषः। सुरश्रृणां पुराणां
दारणातपुरुषः। त्रिपुरा॥ स तित्रः पुरो
भिवं ति
श्रुति: ई SS(45) and VS(335). One who shattered the cities of the enemies of the gods पुरातत्त्विधाताः। पुरातन्त्रिति
पुरातत्त्विधाताः। आदित्यपुराणे
द्विगतितिमाध्यायेः
“अथ रुद्रस्य दंवस्य
निर्मितो विखकर्मणा। सर्वलोकमयो
dिव्यो रथो यबेन सादरम्।”
इति प्रस्तुत्य
सर्वलोकभूतेःवेदंवेदंसवर्धनसूर्यसूर्यवचंक्रपत्याधिविशेषधर्थनिर्माणान्तरः
रथारूढः परमेश्वरे, मेरो चापे विष्णुदां
बाणाः प्रभुः पुराणां
प्रेषिते, अनन्तरं देवानां,
अनादिसिद्धत्वा विचारकर्मः पशुत्वं
पणिनोदेन, प्रशिक्षिते तदनु देवः नायकं
शतधृतरश्वरे धनुरथो रथासनं
रथचरणपाणाः शरीरगते।
बाणाः प्रभुः पुराणां
प्रेषिते, अनन्तरं देवानां,
अनादिसिद्धत्वा विचारकर्मः पशुत्वं
पणिनोदेन, प्रशिक्षिते तदनु देवः नायकं
शतधृतरश्वरे धनुरथो रथासनं
रथचरणपाणाः शरीरगते।
इत्यादि प्रस्तुतम्।
उत्तरे शिवरथस्य: रथ: कोणी
यन्त्र शतधृतिर्गंद्रो धनुरथो
रथाचचाचारकों रथचरणपाणी: शर इति।
दिध्वंशात्ते कोठ्यं त्रिपुरत्तृणमांवरविधि
विख्येति: क्रीडन्तस्तो न खलु परतन्त्रा: प्रभुतिः।”
इति
इर्मपि रहस्यान्तरम्
सार्वभौमिकेन वपुषा
प्रविराजमानं दृव्यतप्रत्रृणानमन्द्वासम्।
One who conquered the three cities and

is mount Meru. SA(65). Incidentally, this episode shows that the Lord is capable of using anything as a weapon. As Rama He used just a piece of straw to chase Kakasura who misbehaved with Sita. In the case of Tipura He chose to use a mountain as His bow. He can do without any weapon also. He discarded the bow and burnt down the three cities with a smile. He subdued Ravana with a little pressure from His toe. He destroyed Manmatha with a mere look.

The Tripura episode conceals the essence of vedanta as do the stories in our puranas. Krishna mentions this fact to Uddhava in His final advice परोक्षवादादीश्चप्रत्ययः: ”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 इदं ते नातपमाय
नाभाूय कदाचन। न चाशुूषवे वाूं न च मां
योद्भ्यसूयति। 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 इदं
शरीरं कौौेय
क्षेत्रमित्यमिथीयते and in the next verse क्षेत्रहः च मां
विद्धि सर्व क्षेत्रेषु भारत। BG(13- 1 and 2). The consciousness present in the body is known as atma or jiva or jivatma. But it is not a part or product of the body that is liable to decay and destruction. Such modifications of the body do not affect the jivatma. Even on death it is the subtle body which travels to take another body (as stated earlier). The atma being all pervading does not travel anywhere. It is like a pot being made. We may call the space confined in the pot as
pot-space (to distinguish it from the total space though really there is no such division) but it was not created when the pot was made. When the pot is broken, it is pot that is destroyed and not the “pot space.” It has nowhere to go. The confines of the pot having gone it just merges with the total space that is outside the pot also. Thus the atma has nothing to do with the body. This is said in Tattvabodha clearly as आत्मा के वे चार चक्षी: सन् अवस्थात्रयसाः.

Thus there is no birth or modifications or death for the jivatma as is the case with the body. Krishna says this: न जायते भ्रूयते वा कदाचिव्यये भूत्वा भविता वा न भूवः.

अजो नित्यः
शाश्वतोऽव शरीरे न हन्यते हन्यमाने 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.

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:

देहस्थोऽपि न देहस्यो चिदानन्दम् चिदानन्दरूपायोत्थितः ।

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A wise man, though he appears to be in the body, has no identification with the body like the one who had woken up from a dream. But a man without discrimination is like one having a dream. He has chosen to (dis-identify with his true body and) identify with his (dream) body (and suffers the consequences). The dream body is only thought in the mind but the thought is so powerful that it makes him identify himself with the dream body, undergo the vicarious suffering and forget his real body that is ensconced in the bed.

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

When the dreamer wakes up from the nightmare the dreamer merges with the waker (if we may so call the one who has woken up) and not “become” the waker. He alone remains. He does not see the waker but claims himself to be the waker. This claiming is साक्षात् कृतेत So also in the case of self-knowledge one does not experience or “become” the atma; but अद्वयमेव साक्षात् कृतेत owns up his true nature as atma.

Shiva’s names relating to Tripura are त्रिपुरान्तः । त्रीणि पुराणि त्रिपुराणि, त्रिपुराणां अन्तः त्रिपुरान्तः । त्रीणि पुराणि शरीराणि, “पुरस्त्रे शरीरं दिस्मिन्द्रश्यायनात्पुरोशो हरि:”
SA(68). Krishna tells Uddhava that He is Himself Shiva who destroyed the three cities त्रिपुराणो धनुमतम 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 एषं मध्ये इत्यावृत्तः

नामाभ्‌यन्तरवर्षं

यस्य नाभ्यांविषिधि: सवर्ष: सौवर्ष: कुलसिमिराजो
मेंस्र्त्रीश्चायामसुमुश्राह: कर्णिकाभूत: कुवलसिकामलस्य
मूर्खिनि

श्रविशालस्यायोजनविति मूले षोडस्तःस्मां

तावतान्तरमूर्भ्यां

प्रविष्ट: । 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
सुमेरुमध्यमात्र योऽम ्
sुमेरुमध्यमात्र योऽम ् तिष्ठतीति
tतत्था ।

शोभने मेरुमध्यमात्र इति वा LS(55). The sun
and the moon are said to go round the mountain. Our poets mention this
fact often. Kalidasa refers to the sun going round Meru in his Raghuvamsa
(7-24). He says that Aja and Indumati going round the sacred fire during
their wedding was like the day and the night revolving round Meru
प्रदक्षिणप्रक्रियातः कृष्णोऽदिवरिचतम ्
िवरिचतम ् तिष्ठतीति।

Krishna says that He is Meru among the mountains मेरुः
शिरकिणामासं BG (10-23) and
धिष्मानामस्थमां मेरुः | BH(11-11-21). All these show that meru
is considered a very holy mountain
कृतिवासं. कृति: = 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. व्याघ्रचर्ममः | व्याघ्रचर्म
अम्बरं यस्य सः | तथा पिनाकहस्तः
कृतिवासा
इति श्रुतिः | SS(108). गजचर्ममः | गजासुरस्य
चर्मे कृतिरमः वासो यस्य सः
गजचर्ममः | श्रुतिरुक्तः SS(158). कृतिवासः | कृति
मागबङ्गबरोऽभवत। सुशुभे चमाणा तेन नानावणुतेन च इति ।
अथवा कालया शिवभक्षणिघाततस्य गजासुरस्य कृतित्रत्र विवक्षिता ।
यथोक्त स्कान्द पद ।
" वाराण्योः पुरायातो गजरूपो महासुरः । तापसाज्ञानवर्गात्र निहन्तः कोपदीपितः इत्युपक्रमः । तत्त्वात्र कुशरं भीममृष्यं दिग्गजजैपिः। पादहर्ष्यातः चर्म विद्याचित्रं तेन वै। प्रावृत्यात्मानावत्मेशः स्तूयमाचारितेः सुरेः । इति सव(67)।
दुरीसाः । दुर्निरीक्ष वासो गजसिंहव्याप्रत्यां दिरूपं यस्य स: तथा। SS(566)।
Kalidasa wonders at Shiva, dressing Himself in the bark and skins of animals though He is the supreme lord, and
profusely showers blessings on His devotees - एकैययः िवरिचतम् प्रणतवहुपते यः स्वयं कृतिवासा: I Malavikagnimitra (1.1).

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

Now a few words about Shiva wearing the bark or skins of animals: First this kind of dress, His matted locks etc., proclaim that Shiva is beyond all varnas or grades of society - like brahmin, kShatriya etc., - and ashramas or stages of life - like student, householder etc.. In other words He is an अतिवर्गाभमी 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 I बन्धुकृत्य हिताहितोपदेसं श्रुतिस्मृतिलक्षणं कृतवाणिति॥ स नो बन्धुकृत्यवाणिति श्रुतिः I SS(581). 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 तत्राभवद् भगवान् व्यासपुजो यष्टच्छया गामतमानोतपन्येत: I तत्राभवद् बहुभक्षो निजजागाभुधेष: वृत्तशवालेघृणुतवेषः I 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 हरः।

स्व विषय ज्ञानेनाविचारंहरं रणः। 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 prarabdam 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 लब्ध्या सुदूर्भमिदं बहुसभ्वान्ते मानुष्यमर्याद्मनित्यमपीपह धीरः।

तूर्ण यतेत न पतेदनुमत्यु यावनि:श्रेयसाय विषयः स्थलु सर्वत: 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

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)

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-संसाररोगस्योषधं भेषजम् VS(578)भवहेितः- भवः संसारः, तस्य हेतिरायुधं संसारच्छेत्रं।भवस्य हेत्यै। SS(272)

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मार्गवन्युपाध्यायम्: अस्तत्तत्त्त्तितेऽऽ: विविदितम्

तारः "नमस्तारायण
नमः शंभवे चैति श्रुति: । SS(76)
भजे दिव्यसन्मार्गवन्युम्। दिव्य = divine सन्मार्गवन्युम् = a companion to one who treads the righteous path भजे = I worship; means I worship the lord who is a companion to one who takes to the righteous path. This line provides more than one interpretation.

सन्मार्गः । संसारसो मर्गश्रुः सन्मार्गः: । means the virtuous path: the path trodden by the saints and noble people and that is in keeping with the shastric injunctions महाजनो येन गत: ।

प्रथा: । says Mahabharata. It being very difficult to understand and interpret the scriptures it is safe to follow the path trodden by the great men as they have followed the path and realised the results. The guru, in Vivekachudamani, tells the disciple who had approached him for instruction that he will show the path which ascetics took for crossing samsara संसारसीन्धोस्तरणेऽस्तुपायः । येनेव याता: यत्वोस्य पारं तमेव मार्गं तव निर्देशामि।

Krishna says that if one chooses to neglect the path laid out by the scriptures it will lead to his downfall. So He urges Arjuna to follow them यः: शाश्वतिविधानस्तृत्य वर्त्तेकामकारत: । न स सिद्धिविमापाति न सुखं न परं गतिम्।।

ततस्माचार्ह्व प्रमाणं तेन कार्याकार्यविधितान्। ज्ञातवा शाश्वतिविधानोक्तं कर्म कर्तुमिधाहि। संसारिः 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.

तानं द्वितेः कृत्तत्वसंसारेषु नराधमान्।
क्षिपायावत् श्रमशुभानासुरिष्वेव योनिषु। BG(16.19)

Sankaracharya explains “inferior births” as cruel beings such as tigers,
lions and the like: अजस्रं सन्ततं अशुभान्त् अशुभकर्मकारिणः
आसुरीवेच कृकर्मण्यायसु
व्याघ्रसिहादिपु योनिषु
क्षिप्यामि. Kalidasa prays in the invocatory verse in Malavikagnimitra

नमः सन्मार्गं लोकं

सत् अभिनवभूतं बूः रक्षणूः
रूक्षाईर्विश्वाशः
योंिनषु अनुपािमः.

Kalidasa prays in the invocatory verse in Malavikagnimitra
सतं सदेव सोऽेदम् (छा.उ. ६११४१) इति

सुरते: । VS(478). Thus Margabandhu is brahman only सदासी

मागबंधु सन्मार्गं सुभाच वतथं परं छािलोकनाय

सत् Sat also means that which really exists or existence and means brahman अविष्टथ

परं बहा सत, सदेव सोम्येदम् (छा.उ. ६११४१) इति

श्रुते: । 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.

शुरूस्त्रय धार निविषाता

दूरत्या दुर्गे पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति KU(3-14).
The knowledge

about the Lord is most profound. The means to get it is difficult for the
unprepared mind. When one gets struck on the path He (being with us
all the time and very much within us), like a sign post, points the way to
the next stage. He is a guide and companion as long as a seeker looks for
Him. Like the rain bearing clouds He showers His grace on His devotees
without expecting anything in return.

Mundane bandhus (relatives) are the cause of bondage and ensuing misery. In fact they are called

बंधुः तलांप निसाजं लयः

ब्यूहादिना इति But lord Margabandhu is a unique bandhu who causes

all bondage to drop off (as He is Sat) सत्यां तलांप निसाजं लयः
says Shri Sankara in Bhajagovindam. So every one prays to Him for getting

free from bondage व्ययं दयामहे सुगम्थं पुष्पिवर्धनम्।

उर्वरसूक्तमि वन्यनामृत्योमुश्वीय

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 मार्ग: आयुष्यवस्त: मार्गयन्ति
इति मार्गः; परमानन्दो चेन प्राप्ते स मार्ग
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 यथा विदित्वा
अमृत्युक्त: कल्याणे योगिनो मुमुक्षवः
स एव पन्था: मार्गः; "नान्य: पन्था
विचित्रदेशनाय
इति शुद्धे: वस VS(397). The poet says दिव्य सन्तानावन्याम
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 (कृपण गति: )
and the bright path (शुक्रगति: ). The former path is available to those who perform duties and sacrifices prescribed in the vedas. Karmas may be performed with desires also (known as sakama karma). One may, for example, perform a sacrifice for achieving wealth or property or even swarga loka. The karmas done properly produce results without fail. One who does the prescribed karmas go to world of manes or pitruloka पितृलोकः: after death through the dark path.
One can also do the karmas without any desire (known as nishkamakarma). They are done as offering to the Lord and the results are accepted as gifts from Him. Such karmas naturally do not have a binding effect but result in (चित्तशुद्धिः) purity of the mind. So, now one with a purified mind can add meditation or upAsana (उपासना ) on the Lord in any chosen form, that is saguna Iswara, like Krishna, Rama, Shiva etc. This becomes a powerful combination and 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 यशुः भ्राजमानेषु यथाकालं
चाहुतयो द्याद्भाय न।
We saw earlier that even the worlds of gods are finite and so one who attains such a place has to come down and be reborn after his merits are exhausted. So it is not considered wise to keep on doing karmas. Those who take to a combination of karma and upasana can practise austerities and develop mental maturity and detachment. They go to Brahmaloka through the bright path that leads to liberation or kramamukti.

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.
removing or curing. So दण्डभ्रम 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 साक्षात मन्मथयमन्मः। जगमोहनस्य कामस्यापि मनस्युद्दृष्ट: कामः साक्षात्तस्यापि मोहक इत्यर्थः। BH(10-32-2), that is His beauty will cast a spell on Manmatha himself. So where is the question of his feeling proud in the Lord's presence? In view of this He is known as सुन्दरः। द्वात्रिशाश्चक्षणोपेतः सुन्दरः। कामाय कामकृपिण इति श्रुति:। SS(416). Also सुन्दरः। विभाषातिशीलस्मृतामाभायशार्द्धात्वः सुन्दरः। VS(791). One who is more beautiful than anyone else सुदेहः। शोभनो देहो यस्य स सुदेहः। "मझलायतनं देवं युवानमतिसुन्दूरम्। ध्यायेत्वत्ततोरंतुमेते सुखसीतीं सहोमया।” इति। शिवान्यति श्रुति:। SS(249) शुभाङ्गः। - सुन्दरं ततुः धारयन् शुभाङ्गः। VS(586). Also शुभाङ्गः। - शोभनेत्रेत्यायत्वात् शुभाङ्गः। VS(782).

Saints and devotees have lost themselves in singing about the beauty of the lord. Let us savour some samples.

This description of Shiva is from Navaratnamala by the saint Shri Sadasivabrahmendra कंदर्पकोटिसतगुणसुन्दरदिव्याकृति शिवं बदन्। 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, मनसिजशतकोटिमल्लुक्तेष्म, मीनाङ्ककोटिमोहन, कोटिमदनसुन्द्रर, जगनमोहन, that is Krishna is millions of times more beautiful than Manmatha. Such being the case his beauty is completely eclipsed in the presence of the Lord: just like the feeble light of the stars is lost in the blazing light of the sun.

Let us look at another example. This one is from Shri Krishnakarnamrutam by Lilasukha. He is amazed at the sweet form of Krishna and could only exclaim “Oh! He is sweet, sweet, the very embodiment of sweetness.”

मधुरं मधुरं वपुरं िवभो - मेतदहो मधुरं मधुरं मधुरं।
मधुगन्धि मृदुस्मित-मेतदहो मधुरं मधुरं मधुरं मधुरं।

Shri Vedanta Desika should have had the same sentiment as Shri Dikshita and addresses the lord at Tirupathy as कन्दर्पदर्पंहर सुन्दर दिव्यमूर्ति! “the One whose beautiful form destroys the pride of Manmatha” (in Venkatesa suprabatam).

The use of the word कन्दर्प: 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 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 संस्पर्शजा भोगा हुःखयोनय पव ते ।
आद्यन्तवन्तः कृत्येन 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:
प्रतिपद्धमा, प्रत्यहे नूतनाय, प्रतिमुद्दरथकामाया।
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 सुचा्- सुतरां दशोऽन्यताः, नितिवय- परमानन्दुपत्वात्। विज्ञानमानि
ब्रह्मतु श्रुति: । SS(818). and रम्- सुवर्णपत्वाद्यः। यो वै भूतम तत्तःलिमिति
श्रुति: । SS(924).

Devi Lalita is known as सवाःसुचा्- सवाःणि च तानि
अमानं च अवयवः: शिर:पाप्यावः:, तेषुयूनानितिरित्वाभोवत्वात् यथासामुद्रिका:नुक्षण तदृत्वेन
सवाःसुन्दरी। अथवा सवाःमण्डुषु शरीरिषु
ब्रह्मस्वरूपतया अत्यन्तत्राधिकविस्तितवेन
सुदृढपदाधिकविनाभवावलःश्चविष्यत्वात्
तथा। (Lalitatrishati No. 130, Shankara’s commentary).

3 - At a different level we may say that Manmatha was not destroyed
really as it is said. He came on a mission but failed miserably. But
Shiva was in total control of Himself and so could not be shaken. He
has many names that attest this fact. Some of them are:
शान्त: - विषयसुवृज्ञसित्या शान्तः, "निषकर्तः
निक्षिप्य शान्तम्। (शै. उ. ६।१९) इति श्रुते: । VS(582)
and SS(9)विरागः। विरागो रागो वस्त्र विरागः।
कथमनेनेत्तेश्च निषिद्धोत्तरति श्रुति: । SS(89).
विरागः। विगतं रत्मस्य विषयेवायमिति विरागः।
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 सः्योऽ शः कः ऋिुपः। 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.

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.

कालकूठम् - 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.

नीलङ्कण्ठः - नीलः कण्ठे यस्य सः नीलङ्कण्ठः। शिवस्य कण्ठे नैतः विष्ण्वादिसकलप्राण्वाचरितकर्षलाहलविष्णवाराणप्रयुक्तम। नीलङ्कण्ठ प्रशान्तमिति श्रुतिः। SS(5). The name नीलाधिव for Shiva appears in several places in Shri Rudram. Also:

श्रीकण्ठः - श्रीः कालकूटजनिता शोभा। तद्वालक्षणो यस्य सः। तथा कालकूटजनितमालिन्यमपि शोभेव यमेव परवेदस्य। विकारोपायाष्ट्राध्यो भुवनभयभम्यसानिनः।
The following names of Shiva are based on this incident.

कार्कूटविषादी - हालाहल - विषपानकर्ता कार्कूटविषादी।
स्कन्दे सन्तकुमारसंहितायाः काशिकावनमाहातम्ये विष्णवादिना
समुद्रथरवनं, तदनां वाचुकिरिकासत्कारविषोत्तपादवनं, तेन
ग्लानिः, तदनु ते विर्भिषितग्रहातं शिवं प्रति पार्थना, तदनु शिवप्रेरीतेन—नाभा हस्तेन विषमाहत्य च
शिवहस्ते जैविनि जववत्समर्पणं, तदनु-गृहित्या
भुक्तवाच्छेनु: कण्ठे निहोशवत्तदा।
तदाप्रभृति तत्त्वान तत्त्वानमिति स्मृतम।
शिवोभूक्तकाशिलुाशा कालकुण्ठाव्यकोभवदिति।
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

निर्माण्यमानादुद्धेरस्रूपं विष्णु महोद्वच
हालाहलहंसनाम:।संभ्रान्तिनीन्द्रमकाराहितकुंगमत्
तिमिद्राङ्कांतिमिद्राङ्कांतिमिद्राङ्कांतिमिद्राङ्कांतिमिद्राङ्कांतिमिद्राङ्कांतिमिद्राङ्कां।
तमूखवेन दिशा दिशौधर्ममुहो विसपङ्कुस्तिस्वद्धमप्रति।
भृगु: प्रजा दुधरसं के धर्म अर्कस्माण: शरण
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

“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

“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.”

“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

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.

गङ्गा धृता न भवता शिव पावनीति नास्वादितो मधुर इत्यपि
kaśyapaḥ.

संरक्षणाय जगतां करुणातिरिक्तकमः
कलित-मेतद-नन्यसाध्यम्। (Brahmatarkastavam)

महेशः - महा is a substitute for महत् meaning big or great ईशः: is synonymous with ईश्वरः: and means lord or master महेशः: is the name of Shiva महारावीशाश्च महेशः। च: परः स महेशः: इति

śruti:। SS(26) महेशः -

स्वर्गादितिर्निर्दीशतुष्णयोगादीश्चरत्वं हि
इन्द्रादीनमप्यति: यदादाय शम्भशाबाह्यनु उत्पातान्ति
प्रकरणे इन्द्रयमादिदिपु ईशराय स्वाह | इति मनः

प्रवृत्तः; शिवस्तु महेशः: तेषामपीथरत्वात्,
"ध्वेयः सवेष्ठर्संपञ्चः सवेष्ठरः
शोभुराकाशमेवः इति श्रुते:। सेन्द्रादिपु च
deवेषु तस्य लेख्यमुच्यते इति भारतवचनाच।

एतदिविप्रायमेवः च
"महेशः: सर्वान् महतामीश्चरत्वस:। इति
भारतवचनम्। महतः: प्रणिन इन्द्रादीनप्रत्यपि यदस्येशितुष्णः
वर्त्ते:। इमेव एतदीशितृण्यस्य महत्यमिति 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 अत: इतरदेवतासाध्यकार्यवर्तकतया

सवेष्ठ्रतिहतत्वात् महदीशितृण्यस्येति महेश्वर इति
While receiving the Ganga when she was coming down from the heavens, Shiva spread out His hair which appeared to cover the sky. Hence the name. It is also one of Lalita’s name व्योमकेशी - व्योमेव केशा यस्या विराज्यपत्या: । व्योमकेशश्च शिववर्षी वी वा। व्योमेवाल्यं स्वयोमकम्। अत्यार्थं कप्रमयं: । तस्येश्वी ततोऽपि व्यापिका वा LS(941). Her (universal form) is larger than the sky. This is an additional meaning given for the name and is applicable to Shiva also. Because the sky was first created and came from Him only. Then other things were created from the sky. Thus Ganga came from the same source from which the entire creation started and so the river occupies a lofty position in our esteem. Besides it has an unique sacredness attached to it that is not attached to any other river or even to the rain water that falls from the sky. In fact the rain water is considered to be ordinary. It stays for a short time and is lost: but Ganga's flow is perennial and is symbolic of His grace.

Ganga came from the heaven. Her waters came in a big torrent. Because the water fell from a great height the stream got scattered into fine spray and came down as an immense cloud. Shiva spread out His hair to cover the sky so that the cloud of spray got in and was trapped.

Ganga lost her way and could not come out. This was done to curb her pride. She was released again when Bagiratha prayed to Shiva.

The use of the adjective महा in the word महाव्योमकेशाम् 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.

What is mentioned here is known as Dahara Vidya. Ordinarily people may 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) and ब्रह्मपुरेः 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.

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

वायविशुद्धः: - वाचो वाणो विशुद्धः ऋग्वेदवाद्यो यस्य स: क्रियाशुद्धः: "अस्य महतो भूमस्य निश्चितमेतत्रग्वेदोयजुवेद "इत्यादि श्रुति: ||

उर्क्ता च सुरकारणे: शाख्योपनिवादिते विवृत्ता: च भाष्यकारणेन महतः: ऋग्वेदादे: शाख्यस्य योनि: कारणिमिति। SS(318)

कृतागम: - कृता रचिता मुखपद्धकाद्विनिर्गता आगममा: प्रणवादिमहामच्छा: ॠगादि सर्वेदाः: प्रोदीतादि
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 कुँदरदन and कुँदसुँदरदन in his Krishna Leela Tarangini. (रदः = tooth.) This description of Devi’s teeth is in Shyamala Dandakam. कुँदपुप्पचुतिरमथनात्तवलीनिम्मात्तोलकह्योऽसैंमेतनमसेरशोणाधरे! सुरेशं - सुरः = god or deity. Shiva is the lord of gods like Indra, Brahma. He could ward off Yama also. Thus all the gods could not assess and understand His greatness and glory. That is why they were naive enough to plan and send Manmatha on that infamous mission. He was also worshipped by asuras like Ravana who subjugated the devas. He could crush Ravana and make him realise his helplessness and finally surrender to Him. There is none equal to Him or greater than Him. So Shri Suka salutes Him saying this बुधानिशवानात्तियांषे राधसा स्वधामनि वद्याणि रंस्यते नमः । BH(2-4-14)निरस्त सांवमातियाव्य यस्य यदपेश्या अन्यस्य सामय्यातियाय नासि, तेन राधसा ऐध्र्याण स्वधामनि स्वर्वरुपे बद्याणि रममाणाय (Shridhara’s
commentary). Shri Sadasiva Brahmendra bows to Him saying (in Navaratnamala- 12) निन्तुलमहिमानमानतोडिनिम शिवम्।
तुरुन्न = comparison. So he says “I salute Shiva of incomparable glory.”
कोटिसूर्यप्रकाशम - 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। इवं च अभूतोपमा। अधिकदीसिमानित्यर्थः। "नमो
दीपाय दीपितरुपिण इति श्रुति:। SS(502)
सुदीपि: - सर्वप्रकाशकलेन प्रमाणिण विना सर्वदा दीप इति
सुदीपि:। “दीपाय दीपितरुपिण इति श्रुति:। SS(633)
mahākūtāḥ: - महती ध्रुतिर्दान्त्यब्यन्तता च अस्त्येति महाध्रुतिः;
"स्वयंज्योतिः। (वृ-उ-४-३-९), ज्योतिषां
”ज्योतिः। (वृ-उ-४-६-२६) इत्यादि श्रुते:। VS (176)
मरीचि: - तेजस्विनामपि तेजस्विनात मरीचि:,
"तेजस्तेजस्विनामहम्, (गीता १०-३६) इति
भगवद्वचनात् VS(189)
”ज्योतिः। - र्वत एव ध्रुतयत्र इति ज्योतिः; नरचणपरो
”ज्योतितत्मा, (ना-उ-१३-१) इति मन्त्रवणात् 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 मार्गाबन्धु = 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.
This is the fifth and the last verse in the stotram to be followed by the फलौुितः, 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 समुण aspect or aspect with name and form as Shiva. In His निरुण 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:

वा्ना-दभयूदानसमया-दाता-िनवा-पणात ्
औदाया-दघशोषणा-दगिण-ौेयःपदूापणात ्।
से्वा: श्रीपति:के व सतत सन्त्यत्र षट साखिणः:
प्रहादद विभीषणश्र करिराट पादानाश्यहल्व्य धूवः:॥

मन्दारभूतेिदारं-
मन्दार: = 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 भूितिं: = grandeur, dignity, riches उदारम् = generous, liberal. So the word मन्दारभूतेिदारं means that Lord Shiva is more generous in
granting one’s wishes than the Mandara tree. So He is known as 
कामप्रदः - भक्तानि: कामान प्रकर्षण ददातीति कामप्रदः।

VS(298). He gives all that His devotees may need in abundance. Shri Vedanta Desika cites the case of Kuchela as an example and says धानामुचे कुचेलमुनये ददेचे वित्तेशताम्। meaning that He made His devotee Kuchela rich as Kubera in return for a handful of pounded rice he offered Him.

He is also known as वरदः - अभिमतान वरान ददातीति वरदः।

VS(330). He grants boons desired from Him. Also वरदः भक्तानमिष्टप्रदः। "वरदे देवमीठ् मिति श्रुतिः। SS(107). And उदारः - भक्तांभीण्डः सवैौकुः 
उदारः। आपतममुक्तिः मिति श्रुतिः।

SS(315). Saint Sadasiva Brahmendra calls Him as नतमन्दार - “the wishing tree of heaven” in his song भजे गोपालम् - Bhaja re Gopalam. Again he calls Him as सेवकजनमन्दिरमन्दार - “the Mandara tree planted in the residential quarters of His devotees” in the song मानस संचरे - Manasa sanchara re.

We find the mantra नमो वृक्षेयो हरिकेशेष्यः: in the eighth anuvaka of Shri Rudram. The explanation states that Rudra, who can take any form, has assumed the form of trees to help the world. He stands in the form of Palasa, Bilwa, Peepal and other holy trees which can be used in sacrifices for gaining heaven and the form of heavenly trees like Kalpaka, Mandara, Parijata etc., which grant all wishes. So He gets the following names पारिजातः - पारमस्यास्तीति पारि, समुद्रः, तस्माजातः पारिजातः: देववुष्ठः, तद्दूपत्वदेवोपि पारिजातः: भक्तजनेष्ठद इत्यर्थः। SS(264) and वृक्षाणां पति: - वृक्षा अत्यत्यादयः।
The tree is one of the creations. May be it is in the heaven and so has some special features unlike those found here in this world. But places like the heaven are only finite. Gods like Indra who rule there are also finite though they may be known as अमरः. The tree Mandara also has a limited life. Since it has only a limited life, whatever it can give will also have limited life and perish eventually giving cause for unhappiness or sorrow. In view of this Krishna names those who seek petty favours (which are finite only) from Mandara and even gods like Indra, Brahma etc., as men of small intellect. He says

अन्ततञु फर्ते तेषां तद्देशात्मनेयसाम्। BG(7-23).

Sankaracharya, in his commentary, points out that एवं समाने अपि आयासे मामेव न प्रतिपद्यन्ते अनत्तफलाय, अहों खलु कष्ठतरं वर्तते, इत्युक्तोष्म दर्शायति भगवान्। “though there is the same amount of exertion (in the two kinds of worship), people do not resort to Me so that they may attain infinite results. Alas! it is very miserable” -thus the Lord expresses His anguish. This is the reason for calling them as “men of small intellect.”

But, unlike the tree, the Lord is नित्य: eternal as said in verse No. 3. He is not subject to decay etc., as the tree. So He is capable of granting finite material benefits like good health, wealth etc.

besides liberation or mokSha (i.e.) that is ever lasting or infinite. In fact He is willing to give Himself to His devotee.

स्मरतः पादकमल-मात्मानमपि यच्चति। BH(10-80-11). This idea is repeated by Shri Kulasekara in his Mukundamala (31)सेवे स्वस्य पदस्य दातारि सुरे नारायणेन तिर्यति। 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. Príyo hí

BG(7-17). So He
naturally takes care of them. Has not He said têṣāṁ
nityābhinuktānaṁ yógaṁśeṁ vahámyahm? “To them who are
ever devout, I secure them gain and safety.” BG(9-22). Here
yóga: and kṣēma: “gain and safety” is explained by
Shri Sankara as yóga: apráasray práapam, kṣēma: tadrakṣeṁ,
tadrakṣeṁ práapyaṁ ahám. (i.e.) Gain implies securing what is
not already possessed; and safety means preservation of what is
alreaday 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 kēvālāṁ eva bhagavachcchāraṇa: tê; at
bhágavān eva têṣāṁ yógaṁśeṁ vahátiṁ. Thus the true devotees
do not lack anything. If their be any lack, it is taken care of by
the Lord. The safety of their possessions is also taken care of by
the Lord. What more can one desire? They are carefree and therefore
relaxed. The Tamil saint Manikkavachakar said that the Lord was more
cconcerned about him than the mother of her new born child. He said
that He anticipated his needs and fulfilled them. The brahmin Kuchela
was another such devotee. Outwardly he appeared to be very poor but
inwardly he was very rich: he was totally contented and never felt
any want yastucchhöopapañcaṁ vartamānaṁ gṛhāthrami.

BH(10-80-7).

mandragandrasāram

mandar: = is the name of a mythical mountain 

āga: = mountain.

indr: = the first or the best (of any class of objects). So the

word mandragendra means Mandara, the best among the mountains.

sār: = 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.

maargabandhu.pdf
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 सवगतः स्थाणुः अचलः - सवगतत्वात् स्थाणुः इव स्थिरः इत्येतत् | स्थिरत्वात् अचलः अर्थात् | 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 महाबलः - बलिनामिप बलवात् महाबलः | He is
stronger than those who are said to possess great strength.
VS(172)
महाबलपरः - महद्वरः शारीरः सामस्यं सेन्यस्यं वा येषां ते महावरः - इन्द्रोपेन्द्रप्रभृत्यं तेषां परः श्रेष्ठः परमेश्वरः | तमिश्चराणां परमं महेश्चर्मिति श्रुति: | SS(604). In fact He is known as
अद्रः - अद्रिवद्रत्वकम्य: - परेरचल इति यावत् | तं शान्तमचर्मिति श्रुति: | यद्वा श्रीशैलारुणाचतुर्विवर्तरुपवादिनः - श्रीशैलशिवस्यं द्वारा पुनर्जल्लम न विचारते इति, काव्यां तु मरणान्यत्र: ,
स्मरणाद्विता ज्ञातमिति च स्मरणात् || वनानि श्रेष्णिरश्रेष्ठ श्रेष्णिर्विहिति स्तनादे - सवों छोप रुद्र इति श्रुति: || SS(856).
महीधरः - महीधरं श्रृंगिरं धरतीति महीधरः - वनानि विष्णुगर्गिरयो दिशश्रेष्ठं (विष्णु-२-१२-३८) इति पराशरोऽके: || VS(369). He held up Mandara during the churning of
the ocean and lifted the Govardana mountain as Krishna. So He gets the name महादिधृक्षु - महान्तमद्रि गिरि मन्द्रं गोवर्द्धनेन अमृतमथने गोरणेन च धृतवानिति महादिधृक्षु। 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 अभिथि हेतौरुवर्नीनां नाथ तवदन्ते न विभावयमि। भवं कुत: स्यात् त्यव सानुकपे रक्षा कुत: स्यात् त्यचो जातरोश॥ (Ashtabhujashtakam - 5)

त्यव रक्षा रक्षके: किमन्ये: त्यव चारक्षा रक्षके: किमन्ये:॥ इति निश्चित भवी: श्रयामि नित्यं नूहे वेगवती ताठाथवं त्याम॥ (Shri Kamasikashtakam - 8).

He asks: “When one is protected by You what use is there of other protectors? Again, when You are angry and decide to punish someone, what use is there of other protectors?” This reminds us of the famous incident of Kakasura in Ramayana.

The asura misbehaved with Sita when she was in the forest with Rama. Rama was furious at his conduct and sent an arrow that chased him wherever he went. He ran to Indra, Brahma etc., for protection. But they hurriedly turned him away when they learnt that he had incurred Rama’s wrath and is being hunted by Rama’s arrow. Finally, feeling helpless, he surrendered to Rama Himself who forgave him readily. This incident was mentioned by Sita to Hanuman. She said जीन लोकान संपरिकम्य तमेव शरणं गत:। स ते निपतितं भूमौ शरणं शरणागतम॥ वधार्मिपि काकुत्थ: कृपयात्पालयत॥ (Ramayana. Sundara Kanda. 38-32,3).

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

अहो सुचतवन् रामो महदेश्वरः च वै।
यस्य विकम्मासाय राक्षसा निधनं गता:।
ते मन्ये राघवं वीरं नारायणमनामयम्॥ (Yuddha kanda 72-10,11).

In contrast young devotees like Prahlada were under His protection. They faced trials and tribulations with the assurance that the Lord will protect them. So no harm could befall them.

We also referred to the episode of Markandeya being saved by Shiva from the jaws of death and mentioned that one of His names is मृत्युजयः 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

मृत्युजयं मृत्युभियातिताना- महेंतर्मृत्युमुपेतित पूर्वम्।
अथ स्वभावाद्मृतेषु तेषु कथं पुनर्मृत्युभियोवकाशः॥

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

"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

Mahagauri means great or glorious Gauri. It is the name of Parvati. Mahagauri is close by, not far away. 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 Adinarsh. She is not far off from Him. So Shiva is known as Adinarsh. Krishna has said: “I am the father of this world, the mother, the dispenser of the fruits of action and the grandsire.” That He is both the father
and the mother is symbolised by the Ardhanari form. Kalidasa says this in the invocatory verse to his great poem Raghuvamsam.

“\(\text{मूलूकृतः} \) वा वार्त्ताविव वार्त्ताविविप्रतिप्रति ।
जगतः पितरो वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेवार ॥

“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

क्रण फ्रणत इति कर्म जगतस्य कर्ता "यो वेष वालक पतेषां पुरुषार्य कर्ता यस्य वेष तत्त कर्म स वेदितयः ।"
कौ-उ-४-१४ इति श्रुतेः । VS(316).

करण - जगद्वर्त्तो साधक करणम्। VS(378)
कारण - उपादान निमित्तं च कारणम्। VS(379)
विकर्ता - विविधं भुवनं कियते इति विकर्ता स एव भवान्
विष्णु: । VS(381).

The material cause is also known as prakriti which Krishna called as His inferior aspect in BG Chapter 7. Prakriti is also called maya that deluding power of Iswara.

मायां तु प्रकृति विधान्मार्यिनं तु 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 दुर्रत्ययः। BG(7-14).

“This divine illusion of Mine, made up of gunas, is hard to surmount.” So He is known as महामायः - मायाविनाममि
मायाकारित्वात महामायः, मम माया दुर्रत्ययः इति
भगवद्विवचनात। VS(170).

Krishna says that in fact He is both: the intelligent cause and the material cause called prakriti. Thus मूलप्रकृति: is one of His names मूलमूल्य गुणमयी मूलप्रकृति: जगददिकारणं
तत्तिथिन्तोपादानत्मकं ब्रह्मेत्यति: । तदैक्षतः, बहुस्याः
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, नारायणसामायिता का नामः देवात्माशंकिं स्वगुणोऽन्नगृहांमि ति" सुनिति। SS(557).

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
लोकः दिव्योः नवयोवनायाः परस्पराक्षरितव्युर्धराभ्याम्।

I salute the two Shivas who are eternally young and whose bodies are entwined with each other.

Krishna also adds that we the created beings are in the clutches of prakriti and go through the cycle of birth and death till wisdom dawns on us but He is beyond it and maya, however powerful it may be has no influence on Him. So He is known as
मायातीतः - मायाया अतीतः - मायाया वा अतीतः।

So He is the knower of maya and not the creator of the universe. He is the eternal, and not the creator. Thus maya is the ignorance of those who are trapped in the clutches of prakriti and go through the cycle of birth and death till wisdom dawns on us but He is beyond it and maya, however powerful it may be has no influence on Him. So He is known as
मायातीतः - मायाया अतीतः - मायाया वा अतीतः।

SS(41). and
निमयः - मायाया निमयः - निमयः। यच्छः मायाः तु
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 नित्यं पर्यंचरत प्रीत्य भवानीव भवं प्रभुम । BH(2-23-1).

The following names are thus derived from the facts stated above:  पावतीपितः - पवतः श्रवन्ति तस्य पुजी पावती । तस्या: पति: ।

तदुकं सूतसंहितायं - " सा शिवा करुणामूर्तिर्जनमन्मा त्रियमयिः । शिवाभिष्या परानन्दा शाङ्करस्वयापि शाङ्करी । स्वेच्छा हिमस्त्रुति स्वभक्तजनवत्सला, तस्या: पति: प्रिय: पुरसंधर: ॥ "अभिकापतय उमापतये नमो नमः । इति श्रुति: ॥ SS(24) and

अभिकापति: - पार्वत्या: प्रिय: अभिकापति: ।

हिरण्यपत्येप्रिमिकपतय । इति श्रुति: ॥ SS(429).
Also SA(15)
मागबन्धुः - गौरीशः - गौरीशोऽकापितः ॥ SS(121)
श्रीपति: - अमृतमथने सर्वान् सुरासुरादीन् विहाय श्रीरिनं
पतिवेन वरयामासेति श्रीपति: । श्री: पर शक्ति:, तस्या:
पतिरित वा, परास्य शक्तिरिविधियेव शूयते
(श्रेष्ठमहा-८) इति सृजति: । VS(603).
श्रीशः - श्रीय ईशा: श्रीशः । VS(606)
जगत्यता - जगश्शीमाता- इंद्र सर्वमसुजते ति
शृजति: । SS(36)
विश्वमाता - विश्वस्य माता व्यापी झाता वा । SS(85)
जगद्धाता - जगताः धाता करता । SS(86)
मातामहः - मातृ: पितामहः; चतुर्विधभूतयामस्य
पार्थिवस्य मातृ पृथिवी, तस्या: पितामहः; । स
भूमिमसुजते ति शृजति: । पृथिव्या मातृत्वे इति
वै माते ति शृजति: । SS(615).

Devi 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 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.

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This says that Rudra is तात्रः = copper coloured, अरुणः = rosy, ब्रेषः = golden yellow, सुमुखः = 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 सूयः आत्मा जगतः = 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 यस्तात्रो इत्यनेन आदित्यमुपनिषते । The votary should praise and worship the sun by means of the rik असौ यस्तात्रो in the Rudram. So तात्रः - अत्यन्त-रक्षस्तात्रः । नमस्तात्राय चे ति 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 दयाळुः - दयाशीलो दयाळुः। अनेन परमेश्वरस्य या शान्त्वा तनू सर्वंहादृशुप्रणिः सा प्रदोषिता । या ते रूद्र शिवा तनू रिति श्रुति: SS(155)

सिन्धुराजातियर्वं- सिन्धुः = 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 धीरं = strong minded, wise, resolute.

सिंधुराज 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 धीर: as one who is endowed with a mind that does not waver even when assailed by deleterious forces that are capable of perverting it विकारहेतौ सति विकिरयन्ते चेताः न चेतांसे त यथा धीर: ॥ (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 

नष्ठो मोहः स्मृतिःर्वन्तः तद्धर्माध्या धीरः ॥ 

BG(18-73).

Again यं हि न व्यतस्यन्ते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ॥ 

समस्तं: सुमुखं धीरं सोएमृतवत्वाय 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 धीर: and also as स्थितप्रगाः, स्थितभ: etc.

The upanishads use the word धीर: to indicate a man of wisdom and realisation. This example is from Kathopanishad
एको वशी सर्वभूतान्तरतम एकः सदृप वहुश्रृः करोति ।
तमात्मस्थः पूर्वपर्यन्त धीरा: तेषां सुखं शाश्वतं
नेतरेषाम् ॥ KU(2-2-12).

“The indwelling Lord of all beings; who is one without the
second and has everybody under His control; transforms His one and
single entity into multifarious; those wise persons who always
observe (meditate upon) that Lord abiding in self; (it is they who)
enjoy that eternal bliss; not the others.”

One other interpretation of the word is धीरः - धीयं
ईरयित, ईरयित। ईर = to urge, elevate, bring to
life. Thus the word धीरः means the Lord who is behind the
intellect and gives life to it. We worship Him through the Gayatri
mantra as धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्। शिव is known as
gायऽीवः - गायऽीवः
गायऽीवः।गायऽीप्रतिपाद 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:

मुनि: प्रसत्रगम्भीरो दुर्भिगादो दुर्तयः।
अनन्तपारो दृश्यायः, स्तितिमतोद इवार्णवः।
समुद्रकामो हीनो वा नारायणस्तो मुनि:।
नोत्सप्तन न श्रुष्येत सरिद्विरिव सागः। BH(11-8-5 and 6).

The conversation is narrated by Krishna in His advice to Uddhava.
The avaduta says: The sage should be placid and profound, difficult
to fathom and to cross over, illimitable and immovable, like the
ocean with its mass of waters at rest. And whether he has an
abundance of enjoyable things or he has none, the sage, who has set
his heart upon the Lord, neither overflows nor shrinks, like the
ocean on account of the waters of the rivers.

These verses say that a jnani’s mind is clear. He is mature and
gंभीरं: deep or profound. Describing the qualities of Rama,
Narada tells the sage Valmiki that Rama was profound like the
The sage will appear to be simple, but his depth of knowledge and maturity cannot be measured: तद्विविगास्यः. 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 तु:खेच्छनुद्विग्नमना: सुखेषु विगतःपचः।
वीतरागभयबोधः वीतधीमुिनिन्नरुच्यते॥ 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 पूणितत्वम्. 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:
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.

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.

It is possible that in adversity one’s weakness shows up and all thoughts of Lord recede into the background. But this does not happen in the case of a true devotee. He is not daunted by reverses. In fact Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas found from experience that calamities made her think of Him and so she prayed that she should be regularly visited by them!

A jnani has realised his oneness with God. So there is no question of his forgetting Him.

So, let us pray to the great Lord Margabandhu to show us the way.

भजे मागभुमः:- भजे = I worship मागभुमः = the Lord Margabandhu.
In this verse the poet uses four similies to glorify Shiva’s generous nature, His strength, His complexion and His wisdom. Talking about figures of speech one has to note that they are used by poets to highlight some quality or emphasise some thing. This works all right with the things in the universe (i.e.) with finite things. But when one tries to use similies while talking about God who is not finite but infinite they fail. The desired effect cannot be produced. One cannot find something equal to or greater than Him. Shri DikShita says this in his poem Varadarajastavam

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 Dilip was tall like a tree साल प्रसूः: 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.
This verse gives the benefit or the fruit of reciting the poem and is known as the fruit of recitation. The author says that one who reads the poem with devotion during a journey will be successful and attain his goal or wishes. In addition he will feel secure and be protected by the Lord on the way.

What is the nature of the Lord? He is the Lord of the lords like Indra and Brahma. It is to Him that they all rush when they are confronted by fear or serious danger. This name was explained in verse No. 4 where it occurs. But though He is the supreme Lord a devotee can easily please Him by offering items that can be obtained without difficulty. He is known by following names:

VS(817). He is easily pleased by offering some leaves, flowers or fruits. The lowly woman Sabari could please Lord Rama by offering Him some fruits she had gathered in the forest. Krishna accepted with great delight some pounded rice which the poor brahmin Kuchela brought Him.
Shri Krishna says that His devotees can attain the highest results by just offering a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water

पत्रं पुष्णं फलं तोयं यों मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति । तद्वर्तं
भक्त्युपहृतं श्रम्भविम् प्रयत्तिम् ॥ BG(9-26)

Shiva is known as:
करवीरिण: - करवीरिणस्य शिवस्य पुराणादिषु प्रसिद्धम्।
एकेन करवीरेण सितेनायस्यस्ते वा । हरिः हरं वा
संपूर्ण ब्रह्मभूताय कल्यते इति ।
अनेन शिवपूजस्यो सौतम्यमुक्तम् । शिवं फूजनियं इति च ॥
SS(326).

भक्तानां सुभम्: - शिवपूजादिपराणां सुभम्,
शैवम् ग्रन्थादिकं: । तदर्द्दमेव शिवमूर्तिग्रहणम् ॥ SS(484).

One of Shri Lalita’s names also states this fact सुखाराध्या -
सुवेन उपवासादिपराणां ध्रुपाध्यस्वरूपम:
नियमनिर्विश्वास्यादिकं चालत्तिरिणायाध्या ॥ LS(680).

Prahlada says that it does not need much effort to please Him. One need not strain himself and go on pilgrimages etc., in search of Him

न हिरं हरं वा ब्रह्मभूताय कल्यते: । आत्मत्वात्
सर्वभूतानां सिद्धादिदेश सर्वेऽ ॥ BH(6-6-19). He is the very Self of every being and He is available everywhere.

There is an apocryphal story that once the author Shri DikShita was preparing to go to a nearby village on some work when he received information that some people who were ill disposed to him were hatching a diabolical plot to attack and kill him on the way. The poet composed this stotram and prayed to the Lord to ensure his safety during the journey. As a result the enemies could not carry out their plan and Shri DikShita could complete his travel in complete safety. We too can recite this stotram and be protected by the Lord in our travels.

It is our tradition to mention the फलोतनिति: 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
प्रतिबद्धित: 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
apellation dikShita appended to his name. He also states this fact
by calling himself as यजनः. The Manusmrithi states that
performing sacrifices is one of the duties of a brahmin
अध्यापनम् व्ययनः यजनः याजनः तथा। दानं प्रतिग्रहेः
चैव ब्राह्मणानामकत्ययत्॥
Kalidasa says that the kings of the solar dynasty tended the
sacrificial fires by means of offerings and honoured the guests also.
यथाविध महापीणां यथाकामांचितार्थिनाम। (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
अर्थ स केवल भुज्जः यः पचत्यात्मकारणात्।
यज्ञशिराशानं द्वैतसतामः विधियते॥
Krishna talks at length about various kinds of sacrifices in Gita (in
chapter IV). He eulogises the performance of sacrifices by saying
यज्ञशिरामुत्तमदृो यान्ति ब्रह्म सनातनम्। नायं
लोकोस्मयज्ञस्य कुतोस्मयः कुरुसताम॥
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 यजः:- सर्वयज्ञस्वरूपत्वादः
यजः;यजः वीर विष्णु:। (तैंस० १-७-४)
इति
श्रुते:। VS(445). Also यजः:-सर्वयज्ञस्वरूपत्वादः।
"त्वं यज्ञस्तां विष्णुरिति श्रुति:। II 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. This says Shri Shankaracharya in his Vivekachudamani.

He defines such a person who has been regularly performing the sacrifices as noble minded in his commentary (BG-19-13). Anandagiri elaborates the definition as 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 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 a believable statement.

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

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 Shankaracharya also talks about this trait of great men:

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

गीतम् = 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: श्रीमता भगवता 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:

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो, दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः। पार्थो वत्सः, सुभीम्भोक्ता, दुर्ध्र गीतामृतं महत्॥

The upanishads are like the cows. Gopala is the one who milks them. Partha (Arjuna) forms the calf. The pure minded one is the partaker and the supreme nectar Gita is the milk.

In the same manner, in this case also the poet had glorified the Lord by stringing together some of His attributes. These attributes are to be found in the puranas etc., and so were known long back. Also the fact that singing the glories of the Lord will confer great benefits is also known from time immemorial. In the introduction to the Vishnu Sahasranama Bhishma tells Yudhishtira:

I will tell you some of the renowned names of the Lord culled from various sources (such as the vedas and puranas) by great sages.

These names will confer all merits

यानि नामानि गौणानि विश्वातानि महात्मनः। ऋषिषिमि परिगीतानि तानि बक्ष्यामि भूतये॥

Thus, the use of the word “sung” (गीतम्) 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 राजविच्छा 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 पठे भा भूयाणे तस्य अर्थिसिद्धि विघरते | (i.e.) whoever reads this with devotion during a journey, the mission will be completed successfully. The emphasis is on the word भत्त्वा - with devotion. This implies that such great hymns should not be read or chanted mechanically, by rote but with devotion. One should put his heart and mind in it. Bhishma says so in the introduction to Vishnu Sahasranama: “Among the dharmas prescribed the one I am going to say namely, worshipping the Lord by singing His glories with devotion is, I consider the best.”

एष मे सर्वधर्माणां धर्माभिधिकतमो मतः | य चतुर्वत्ता पुण्डरीकाक्षे स्तवबर्च्छारः 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 धर्मं सर्वधर्माणां भवत: परमो मत: ?

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: भक्तिमान: यः सदोत्स्वयं शुचिस्तद्वतत्मानसः | सहस्यं वायुदेवस्य नामार्मेत् प्रकीत्तिपूर्वस्तुम ॥ १२५ ||

इंम स्तवमधीयानां श्रुष्यभक्तिकिर्तिभिः ॥ १३२ ||
Shri Sankaracharya, in his commentary, says:

भक्तिमानित्यादिना भक्तिमत: श्रुचे:
सततमुद्योऽक्रमः चिततस्य अद्वलोकिर्विशिष्टिधिकारिणः
फलविशेषं दश्यित | Thus a great deal of emphasis is laid on devotion and faith. The Lord is अनिमिषः always awake
VS(215) and on the look-out for people who have devotion. He has
innumerable number of ears, eyes, mouths etc. सर्वतः:
पाणिपादं तत् सर्वतोऽक्रमश्रिरोऽहम् तीर्थः श्रुतिमाह्योके
sर्वमावृत्य तिष्ठति II SU(3-6). His (as Ganesa) ears are big
and very sensitive. With them He can hear even prayers muttered softly. With His long proboscis He can detect even the faintest aroma of piety. He loves sincere prayers offered by His devotees and blesses them. He has the name: स्तवप्रियः VS(680). This does not mean that He loves adulation. He has no need for it. It is we who benefit by singing His glories.

It was said पठे भक्तव्यावस्तु भक्त्याः प्रयाणेः
tतस्य अर्थसिद्धिः
विघ्नस्मार्थमथेक्षेत्रविचार आशुतोषोऽहम् | (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
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).

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 (इदेवता) (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.

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 नामैते भारतिमित्यत आराम्य व्यपदिशान्ति.

The king was - महाभागवते: 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 Bharata, 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:

**तस्मात्प्रेषेऽकाजेऽपावत्मानुवर्त्ये युध्यः च।**

**मन्येन्नित्यप्रितमनोद्धितमेवेष्यस्यसंशयः॥ BG(8-7)**

Therefore at all times you meditate on Me and fight; with mind and reason fixed on Me you shall doubtless come to Me alone. Here “fight” means doing one’s allotted duty.

This means that if one thinks of Him in his last moment he will attain Him. “Attaining” means realising Him by knowing His true nature. Krishna says this a bit later in clarification. He says –

**पुरुषः स परः पार्थ भक्त्वालम्ब्य-स्तवनन्ययः॥ BG(8-22).**

That Purusha, O Arjuna! within Whom all beings dwell, by Whom all this is pervaded, may be won by means of exclusive devotion. Shri Sankaracharya in his explanation says that “exclusive devotion” means exclusive devotion, characterised by jnana or knowledge of the self. **स भक्त्या सम्भयस्तु ज्ञानविशेषः। अनन्ययः आत्मविशेषः॥** 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 नित्यनृत्ती एकमत्थिविशिष्याते।** 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:

भक्तवाणीवेशय मनो यसिनू वाचा यथाम कीतयन्।
त्यन्त कलेवरं योगी मुच्यते कामक्रमेभ्॥

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

निवृत्तसंन्द्रयुष्टितिविभ्रमस्तुद्राव जन्यं
विसुज्जनार्धतम्॥ 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 मलिनःकलियता वितृषणा भगवति सावतपुज्ये विभूमिः।
स्वसुध्रमुपगते कथिदु विहितं प्रकृतिमुपेयुष्यि यदु
भवप्रवाहं॥ 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?" ममय्योत्तमनोबुद्धि-ममेवेत्यस्यस्याय:॥

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:

तेजः परं परमकाेणकं पुराात, प्राणप्रयाण-समये सम सज्ज्यताम् ॥

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 अन्तकाले 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 तद्विदीय-पद-पशु-जपक्षरान्तः, अधीवेन मे विशालु
मानस-राजसः।
प्राणप्रयाणसमये कफ-वात-पित्तेः, कण्ठावरोधनविधयो
स्मरणं कृतस्ते॥

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
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\textbf{Mārgaṇapuruṣotpattam}

\textbf{अप्यदक्षिणक्रियाका: कस्तोकालिक: कस्तोयाकालिक: कण्ठे घुघुरायते॥}

(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.

\textbf{शयानः परिशोचि: परिवीतः स्वबन्धुभः। वाच्यमानोऽिप न बृते कालपाशवशं गतः॥}

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

\textbf{एवं कुटुम्बभरणे व्यापृतमत्तमाजिनिर्द्वयः। घियते रूद्दं स्वामुरुवेदनप्यास्तधः॥}

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 \textit{पारव्यम्}, 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.

\textbf{यमदूतो तदा प्राणो भीमो सरभस्तेष्याणो। स दण्डः}

\textit{त्रस्तहदयः शकुन्मूृृच्छिन्य विमुद्भित।॥}

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:

\textbf{एवं कुटुम्बं विब्यथा उदमवर एवं वा। विसुज्ज्वेोहोभम्}

\textit{प्रेत्य भुज्जे तत्कस्तमीतज्ञम्॥}

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 had previously tasted it and found it unpleasant or painful. But death cannot 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.

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.

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).

Death ever walks with us (when we are walking) and remains seated with us (while we are sitting). (Nay,) having travelled a very long distance (with us) death returns with us (on our return). (Ayodhya Kanda -105-20, 21 and 22).

Thus, one has to be alive to the fact that death is shadowing us.

Because of this reason there has to be a sense of urgency and every moment has to be considered as the last moment. This is where the glory of Shrimad Bhagavatham becomes evident. If Ramayana teaches us the art of living then Shrimad Bhagavatham becomes an excellent treatise on the art of dying. This is because this purana gives in detail the answer to the third question:

3- How should one prepare himself for the “last moments?”

This is one of the two questions asked by the king ParikShit to the sage Suka as the king is left with just a week to live. He asks:

अतः पृच्छामि सर्विंद्रि योगिनां परमं गुरूम्। पुरुषस्येह यतौ कार्यं प्रश्नमाणार्थं संर्था॥

“I enquire of you, the greatest preceptor of the Yogis, the character and the means of the highest realisation. What should be done under all circumstances by a man who is on the verge of death?” BH(1-12-37). The answer to the questions is given in the Book II of Bhagavatam and has been elaborated in the further Books also. This is similar to what is said in chapter 8 of Gita.

We have seen that those who are soaked in samsara and lead a Bohemian life get inferior births. Those who perform their duties and rituals with desires सकाम कर्मां get births suitable for the fulfilment of the desires.

Those who perform desireless karmas निष्काम कर्मां 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 मनसांतिवेदने भक्ता युक्तो योगवेतने चैव ।
भृद्वीर्मध्ये प्राणमावेश्य सम्यक सत्तं परं पुरुषामुपैति दिव्यम् ॥ BG(8-10)।
But a person of wisdom - jnani- who has realised his true nature does not worry about death as it is meaningless to him. He is free and liberated - मुक्तः: । He is totally detached from the body.

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

4- How much time the preparations will require?
The “preparation” is for escaping death and it is meaningful only for one for whom “death” has meaning. As pointed out earlier “death” is irrelevant for a person who has gained wisdom. “One can escape death only by knowing Him.
There is no other way to escape death.” So assert the shastras.

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:

अशरीरः शरीरेषु अनवरे वि भवते । महात्मे विभुमानां मत्वा धीरो न शोचित ॥

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

बहूनं जन्मन्त्र-प्रगते ज्ञानवानुः मां प्रपन्धते । 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.

बहूनं जन्मन्त्र ज्ञानेपरिपक्षाणां अन्ते समासी ज्ञानवानुः प्राप्तिपरिपक्षाणुः मां वासुदेवं प्रत्यगत्वा प्रत्यक्षः प्रपन्धते । He then realises the goal
to be reached is Vasudeva who is the inner self of all. Why such a person is extremely rare to find? Krishna had said earlier:

मनुष्याणां सहह्येषु कथित्यतति सिद्धये। यत्तामपि सिद्धानां कथित्यम् वेष्टि तत्चतः॥ 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
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:

वाटस्तावः कौमारसः: तस्मांस्तावः तस्मानसःः ।
बृद्धस्तावःचिन्तनसःः पत्रेण्विवण कौमिनि सःः ॥

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 आचरेत्मां धर्मान्न भागवतानिहः । 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 शैशवेऽविवानां (1-7). Our tradition says that only that learning that leads to liberation can be called education.

शा विद्या या विमुत्त्ये । Shri Sankaracharya also defines education as आत्मनो बोधः while commenting on the popular verse beginning विद्या विनयसंपन्ने व्राह्यणे गवि हरिनिन । BG(5-18). It is knowing about Self. Thus Devi (LakShmi, Lalita) is called Vidya विद्या । The commentator's explanation is: मोक्षप्रद्धानान्वरस्पत्वाद्विया । (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
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: 

These two paths present themselves before every one. One is called sreyas i.e., the one that offers release from all miseries for ever and the other is called preyas i.e., the means of obtaining the pleasures of this world. The wise person prefers the former viz., sreyas in comparison to preyas.

The Tamil saint Tiruvalluvar also points this out in his great work Tirukkural. He asks what profit have those derived from learning if it does not lead to the worship of the Lord who is possessed of pure knowledge?

But generally all these warnings and advices fall on deaf ears.

Consequently we have to take the long path for salvation. The story of Gajendra, the elephant narrated in the eighth book of Bhagavata illustrates this point. The elephant symbolises one covered with ignorance. The elephant has a large family comprising of she elephants and baby elephants - a typical samsari. He was “enjoying” the life. He was afflicted with the heat and entered a lake full of fragrant waters. The fragrant waters represent the vAsanAs or the latent tendencies accumulated in previous births. He enjoyed a refreshing bath, sprayed the cool waters on the female elephants as well as their young ones and made them also drink. This he did out of attachment to his own herd. Shri
Suka adds - like a householder यथागृही। Such a one steeped in samsara normally does not imagine there can be trouble around the corner. Thus the elephant could not foresee the imminent problem - नाचकृपणोऽजमायया। 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 everything, meditated on the Lord in that brief period of time and got liberation

खत्वाङ्गो नाम राजार्थि: ज्ञातैवत्तमिदाधायोः। मुहृतात्तः
स्वर्गमुत्सुत्थ गतवानायं हरिम्॥ Bh(2-1-13). Most appropriately Shri Suka calls the king राजार्थि: or royal sage, a saint like king.

How can this be possible when Krishna had said that one can get liberated only after repeated births? The answer lies in the fact
that
one has to take several births before coming to the path of devotion:
but having stepped into the right path he will get births suitable
for his spiritual progress
तत्र तं बुिसंयोगं लभते पौवदेिहकम ्। यतते च ततो
भूयः संिसौकुःनकुनन ई। 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
शैशवेऽिवानाम ्। 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., यथाकालूबोिधनां वषाकालप्रवबोधिनां they were alert at all times
when vigilance was called for and then at the end (of their lives)
they abandoned their bodies by means of meditation
योगेनाे तनुःजाम ्। This is mentioned by Kalidasa in his
Raghuvaṃsām. 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 Parīkṣhit: not
that of an ordinary person or a sanyasi so that Parīkṣhit 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.

मागुपमभयंचा आशुतोषो महेशः।

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 storam with devotion confer security on the way? This becomes more relevant as the upanishads say आनंद विद्वान न विभेदति

कदाचनेति | the person having experienced the bliss of brahman ever fears not. (TU-II-4-1) that only by realising the Self one can shed his fears. We are long way from realising brahman. We very much seek security. We have the constant fear that the things that we consider as contributing to our security may get damaged or destroyed or leave us. Thus we worry about sickness, loss of money, friends or relatives etc.. The remedy for this feeling of insecurity is to realise that all these listed above can not last for ever. Either they will leave us or we will have to leave them some day. Everyone knows this but wants them to last for ever. Thus we want the body to be youthful and last for ever. One is unwilling to grow old and end one’s days. Being insecure themselves nothing on the earth can confer security. This is a fact and has to be accepted howsoever bitter this may be. But strangely no one is prepared to accept this. Acceptance requires wisdom and it is not got in a day. It is a difficult process. The recital of the stotrams and other texts like the puranas pave the way for gaining the knowledge. They describe the endearing qualities of the Lord in a manner that will make our heart turn to Him. Once He gains entry into our heart He clears the accumulated sins and brings in the wisdom. Krishna has given this assurance in Gita (10-10)

तेषां सतत-युक्तानां भजतां श्रीति-पूर्वकम्।

ददामि
"To these, ever devout, worshiping 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.

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 (श्रृष्टानां श्रीमाणायामः) 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:

भवांतपिः यः स्यद्विनियतचेतनाचेतनं
पनायति नमस्यत ब्रह्मरत वक्ति पर्यति वा।
गुणं कमि पंचवति वा तव गुणेश गोपाविधितुः:
कदाचन कुलश्रण कचन तस्य न स्यार्यः।

He says that one who praises the Lord or salutes 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 फलश्रुति: . It is said न भयं कवित्वा भवानुष्ठित भीतरस्तु मुच्छेतापन आयतः। and जनमष्ट्युतमुख्यर्वाचिष्य 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 संसारं पूर्णमपद्धनं भयापहः। VS(935). But there may be fear from foes and elements etc. God removes them also. Shiva is known as सहायः।
He protects even gods like Brahma in times of danger. Lalita is called भयापहा - भयानि जलस्थलातः दिप्युक्तादिनि सर्वाण्यपहन्तीति भयापहा। अनन्दे ब्रह्मणो विद्वान् बिभेति कुतर्शनेति शृः। तथा च वायुपुराणः अरपये प्रातः वायु जले वायु स्थेन्दरः वा। व्यााह्रुक्रुम्मीचोरे भयापहा भयापहा च सर्वं देवीनामानि कीर्त्यादिदिति।

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:

विषामहासे: फुरुष्यादद्वोरस्तस्तभाया वनवासकृत्स्नः। मृधे मृधे नकम्याः समवायाः। वृषमया नजाति द्रोणायत्ताः। हरेऽिभरि महारथा।

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.

विषजलायाः वातरक्षाणाः वर्षमारुताः वेद्युतानन्तराः। वृषमयात्मजाः विश्वतोभयाह्स्यम्भ ते वर्य रक्षिता।

BH(10-31-3).

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

ये यथा मां प्रययः तत्स्थायेव भजामय्यहम् । मम वपिमां प्रतयेत्ते मनुष्यः: पार्थ्यसर्वातः: ॥ BG(4-11).

There are different paths (of realization) as enjoined by the three vedas, Samkhya, Yoga, Pasupatha doctrine and Vaishnava shastras. People follow different paths and each considers some particular path to be the proper one. This is because of the difference in their temperaments. But ultimately they all reach You only just as the rivers enter the ocean.

Krishna says that all paths of worship lead to Him only and It is He who rewards them, just in the way they seek Him.

ये चशा मां प्रययः तत्स्थायेव भजामय्यहम् । मम वपिमां प्रतयेत्ते मनुष्यः: पार्थ्यसर्वातः: ॥ BG(4-11).

Shri Rudram salutes Lord Shiva who is in the form of various paths. It says - पथीनां पतये नमः । पथीनां = शाखोक्त दक्षिणात्तर- तृतीय-मार्गाण वतिः: । This says that Rudra is the protector of the three paths described in the sastras. Later It again says: नमः खुःयाय च पथ्याय च । salutation to Him who is in the narrow foot paths and in the broad highways खुःयितः: स्वतः देवलोकमार्गः, पत्था वहलोकमार्गः: । The narrow path indicates tortuous religious beliefs and practices. Krishna talks about this

मूढःहं खण्तनो यत्विध विचये तप: । परस्योत्सादानात्वा तत्तমसमुदाहरतम् ॥ BG(17-19).

The penance which is performed obstinately, with self-torture, or for the purpose of ruining another is declared to be Tamasic. The broad and firm ways represent the beliefs and practices inculcated by the great teachers. They are the safe ways and are intended to be trodden by the common people महाजनानो चेयणितः स पत्था: 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: वहुभिंडि सेवितो मार्गः प्रपथः, तत्र भव: ।
प्रपथ्य: । नम इरिण्याय च प्रपथ्याय चैति ।

श्रुति: SS(346). Prapathyaya: pathway trodden or resorted to by many.

The Lord helps all who seek Him by following various paths. He says:

मन्भित: सर्वंकर्णिगं मत्प्रसादातरिण्यसि ।

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.

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