

Linga Purana

Suta and Other Sages

We first pray to Brhama, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer. We also pray to the sages Nara and Narayana and Sarasvati, the goddess of learning. Our prayers are due to the sage Vedavyasa. It is only after these prayers that we can begin to read the sacred texts.

A tirtha is a place of pilgrimage. The sage Narada visited several such tirthas and eventually arrived at the forest known as naimisharanya. At that time, many other sages had assembled in naimisharanya. They greeted Narada warmly and offered him their respects. While all this was going on, who should arrive there but the suta Lomaharshana? (Sutas were a class of raconteurs. They were cross-breeds who were the offspring of kshatriya fathers and brahmana mothers. A kshatriya fathers and brahmana mothers . A brahmana belonged to the first of the four classes and a kshatriya to the second.)

The sages greeted Lomaharshana and said, "You had studied the Puranas under Vedavyasa himself. Please recite for us the Purana that describes the glory of Shiva's linga (image). It is our great good fortune that the sage Narada is also here. He has just returned after worshipping many tingas at many tirthas. What better occasion can there be?"

Lomaharshana agreed. He began with the account of the creation.

Creation

The divine essence is known as the brahman. In the beginning, the only object in the universe was the divine essence. There was nothing else. It was this brahman which divided itself into three different parts, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma became the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer.

There was only water in the universe then. In the water, a gigantic egg (anda) appeared. Brahma emerged from this egg. Inside the egg were also all the worlds that would be created.

During Brahma's day , creation flourishes. But during Brahma's night, there is destruction (pralaya). When Brahma merged out of the primordial egg, that constituted the original process of creation (sarga). But the following the process of destruction that takes place during Brahma's night, there is also a periodical process of re-creation (pratisarga).

Time is divided into four different eras - satya yuga, treta yuga, dvapara yuga and kali yuga. Satya yuga lasts for four thousand years of the gods, treta yuga for three thousand, dvapara yuga for two thousand and kali yuga for one thousand. A mahayuga is the period from the beginning of satya yuga to the end of kali yuga. It thus lasts for then thousand years of the gods. But in addition, there are intervening periods (sandhyamsha) between satya yuga and treta yuga is seven hundred years, that between treta yuga and dvapara yuga five hundred years, that between dvapara yuga and kali yuga three hundred years and that between kali yuga and the new satya yuga five hundred years. This adds another two thousand years. Thus a mahayuga really lasts for twelve thousands years of the gods.

How long is one year of the gods? To understand that, one needs to know a little bit about the measurement of time.

The smallest unit of time is a nimesha. That is the length of time it takes to blink one's eyes. Fifteen nimeshas constitute a kashtha, thirty kashthas are called a kala and thirty kalas make up one muhurta. There are fifteen muhurtas during the day and fifteen muhurtas during the night. Thirty muhurtas make up night and day, known as ahoratra. One year for humans is equivalent to one ahoratra for the gods. The six months during which the gods have their day is called uttarayana and the six months during which the gods have their night is called dakshinayana. Three hundred and sixty human years are equivalent to one divine year. Thus, twelve thousand divine years are equivalent to 4,320,000 human years and this is the length of a mahayuga.

Satya yuga lasts for 1,440,000 human years; treta yuga or 1,080,000; dvapara yuga for 720,000; and kali yuga for 360,000. This adds up to a total of 3,600,000 human years. Once one adds 720,000 years for the sandhyamshas, one obtains the figure of 4,320,000 human years in a mahayuga.

There are a little over seventy-one mahayugas in a manvantara. Seventy-one mahayugas would add up to 296,720,000 human years. There are actually 306,720,000 human years in a manvantara.

One thousand mahayugas make up one kalpa. There are thus 4,320,000,000 human years in a kalpa. Equivalently, fourteen manvantaras constitute one kalpa. A kalpa corresponds to Brahma's adhoratra.

One thousand kalpas are one year for Brahma and eight thousand such years are one yuga for Brahma. One thousand of Brahma's yugas are equivalent to one of Vishnu's days. Nine thousand of Vishnu's days are equivalent to merely one day for Shiva. (This is an attempt to establish Shiva's supremacy. In a Purana that glorifies Vishnu more, the relative rankings of Shiva and Vishnu would be reversed.)

At the end of one of Brahma's days, the entire universe and all the beings in it are destroyed. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are not however destroyed. There is darkness and water everywhere and Vishnu sleeps on this water. Since nara means water and ayana means resting -place, Vishnu is also known as Narayana.

When the day dawns, Brahma begins creation afresh.

Brahma first created three sons through his mental powers. Their names were Sananda, Sanaka and Sanatan. (In other Puranas, a fourth son named Sanatakumara is mentioned.) These sons became sages and performed intense meditation. Brahma also created another nine sons through his mental powers. Their names were Marichi, Bhrigu, Angira, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Daksha, Atri and Vashishtha.

To ensure that creation progressed further, Brahma next divided his body into two halves. The male half was known as Svayambhuva Manu and the female half was known as Shatarupa. These two married and had two sons and two daughters. The sons were Uttanapada and Priyavrata and the daughters were Akuti and Prasuti.

Daksha married Prasuti and they had twenty-four daughters. (The number of Daksha's daughters is sometimes given as twenty-four, sometimes as fifty and sometimes as sixty.) One of Daksha's daughters was named Sati and she was married to Shiva. When Sati died, she was reborn as Parvati, the daughter of the Himalayas, She was married again to Shiva as Parvati.

In fact, before starting to create, Brahma told Shiva, "Please help me out by creating some beings, I can not cope on my own."

Shiva gladly agreed and started to create beings who were just like him in appearance. These came to be known as the rudras.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed Brahma. "Don't create immortal beings who are like yourself. Create beings who are mortal."

"That I flatly refused to do," replied Shiva.

"Then please desist from creating," requested Brahma. "I shall take care of creation myself."

Shiva complied, but the rudras whom he had already created, remained.

Yoga

The sages told Lomaharshana, "Please tell us about yoga."

Lomaharshana complied.

(Yoga literally means union. It is a technique of meditation that enables one to realize the union between the divine soul (paramatman) and the individual human soul (atman or jivatman).)

Shiva is also known as Pashupati. The technique of yoga that Shiva taught is known as pashupata yoga. To teach this yoga, Shiva has an incarnation (avatara) in every kali yuga. In the present kalpa, there have been twenty-eight kali yugas and there have accordingly been twenty-eight incarnations of Shiva, all known as Yogeshvaras. Their names are as follows.

- (1) Shveta.
- (2) Sutara.
- (3) Madana.
- (4) Suhotra.
- (5) Kanchana.
- (6) Lokakshi.
- (7) Jaigishavya.
- (8) Dadhivahana.

- (9) Rishabha.
- (10) Muni.
- (11) Ugra.
- (12) Atri.
- (13) Vali.
- (14) Goutama.
- (15) Vedashirsha.
- (16) Gokarna.
- (17) Guhvasi.
- (18) Shikhandabhrit.
- (19) Jatamali.
- (20) Attahasa.
- (21) Daruka.
- (22) Langali.
- (23) Mahakaya.
- (24) Shuli.
- (25) Mundishvara.
- (26) Sahishnu.
- (27) Somasharma.
- (28) Jagadguru.

Every one of these Yogeshvarasas had four disciples each.

In fact, it is also Shiva whose incarnation is born as Vedavyasa in every dvapara yuga. Since there have been twenty-eight dvapra yugas, there have also been twenty-eight Vedavyasas upto now.

Their names are as follows.

- (1) Kratu.
- (2) Satya.

- (3) Bhargava.
- (4) Angira.
- (5) Mrityu.
- (6) Shatakratu.
- (7) Vashishtha.
- (8) Sarasvata.
- (9) Tridhama.
- (10) Trivrita.
- (11) Narayana.
- (12) Tarakshu.
- (13) Aruni.
- (14) Deva.
- (15) Kritanjaya.
- (16) Ritanjaya.
- (17) Bharadvaja.
- (18) Goutama.
- (19) Vachashrava.
- (20) Shushmayani.
- (21) Trinavindu.
- (22) Raksha.
- (23) Shaktri.
- (24) Dhimana.
- (25) Shatateja.
- (26) Parashara
- (27) Jatukarna.
- (28) Krishna Dvaipayana.

(The names given in these lists do not always agree wth the names given in similar

lists in the other Puranas.)

Yoga has eight components. These are known as yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Yama is preparatory to meditation, it has to be backed up by the practice of non-violence. Niyama means certain rules that have to be followed. These include truthfulness, celibacy and lack of jealousy. The rules also encompass cleanliness, the donation of alms and fasting at appointed times. Pranayama signifies the control of the breath of life. This must always be attempted in a proper asana (posture). Pratyahara implies the withdrawal of the mind from addiction to sensual and material pursuits. An image has to be decided on for purposes of meditation. When this image is fixed in one's mind, that is known as dharana, and the actual process of meditation is called dhyana. Samadhi is the final stage of meditation, when the union between the paramatman and the atman is realized.

Yoga must always be practiced in an appropriate place. One must not be close to a fire, nor must the place chosen be a cremation-ground or a location frequented by wild beasts. There must not be any noise or insects that are likely to distract one's attention. For example, a cave is a very good place to practise yoga in.

Do not imagine for a moment that yoga is easy. There are numerous distractions and disturbances that make one deviate from the right path. One has to fight laziness and sloth. As one progresses, there are illusions that one hallucinates from. Demons are seen. There are powers that one attains and these also cause distractions. But if somehow one manages to conquer these, true bliss can be attained.

The Linga

The sages said, "We know that a linga is Shiva's image. But why is Shiva worshipped in the form of a linga?"

Lomaharshana recounted the following story.

Many years ago, at the end of a destruction, there was water everywhere in the universe and the universe was shrouded in darkness. Vishnu slept on the water in his form of Narayana.

Brahma discovered Vishnu sleeping thus and woke him up. Failing to recognize Vishnu, he asked, "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

Vishnu woke up and noticed Brahma standing there. He smiled and said, "How are you, Brahma? Is everything well with my son?"

"How dare you call me your son?" demanded Brahma. "I am Brahma, the lord of everything. I am the creator of the universe. How dare anyone call me his son?"

"You seem to have forgotten everything," said Vishnu. "I am Vishnu and you were born from me. That is the reason why I addressed you as my son."

Brahma did not accept this and started to fight with Vishnu. While the two were thus grappling, a shining linga suddenly appeared. It was almost as if the linga had emerged to settle Brahma and Vishnu's dispute. The linga rose way up into the sky and it seemed to have no beginning or end.

"What on earth is this pillar of fire doing here?" Vishnu asked Brahma. "Let us investigate it. Why don't you go up and see where it ends? As for me, I shall proceed downwards. Let us meet after a while and compare notes."

Brahma agreed to do this. He adopted the form of a swan and flew up. Vishnu adopted the form of a boar and went down. No matter how further down Vishnu went, he could find no end to the linga. Nor could Brahma discover its upper extremity.

They returned and were amazed to find that neither had been able to find the end of the linga. They realized that they must be in the presence of a power that was greater than their own. They therefore began to pray to the linga and the sound of the mantra (incantation) om echoed all around the linga. Shiva appeared from within the linga in the form of a sage named Vedanama. He told them that it was the linga which was the origin of the universe. It was from the linga that the primordial egg (anda), the origin of the universe, had been created.

Shiva also taught Brahma and Vishnu the sacred gayatri mantra. He told Brahma and Vishnu, "We are all three part of the same supreme brahman. Brahma is the creator, Vishnu is the preserver and I am the destroyer. Don't fight amongst yourselves."

Ever since that day, Shiva has been worshipped in the form of a linga..

Brahma and Vishnu

"But why did Vishnu address Brahma as his son?" asked the sages. "Please explain that."

Lomaharshana told them the following story from the kalpa known as padma kalpa.

At the time of the destruction that came at the end of the earlier kalpa, there was water everywhere in the universe and Vishnu slept on this water. Vishnu felt slightly bored. So he made a gigantic lotus sprout out of his navel and started to play with it. The stalk of the lotus was made of diamonds and it shone with radiance like the sun.

While Vishnu was thus playing with the lotus , Brahma appeared.

"Who are you?" asked Brahma. "What are you doing here?"

"I am Vishnu," replied Vishnu. "I am the lord of everything. But who are you and where have you come from?"

"I am Brahma," responded Brahma. "I am the lord of everything in the universe. Every object that will be created in the universe is already present in embryonic form, inside my body. If you don't believe me, why don't you enter my stomach and see for yourself?"

Vishnu entered Brahma's body through the mouth. He marvelled to discover the fourteen regions (lokas) of the universe and the beings who would populate them all, inside Brahma's stomach. Vishnu wandered around for a thousand years, but could find no end to the vast expanse of Brahma's stomach. Finally, he emerged through

the mouth and told Brahma, "I am completely bowled over by what I have seen. But I can also show you wonders. There are many worlds inside my body as well. Enter for yourself and see."

Brahma agreed to this and entered Vishnu's body through the mouth. Inside Vishnu's stomach, he saw many worlds. He wandered around for a thousand years, but could not find the extremities of the stomach. Meanwhile, Vishnu had closed all the points of exit and Brahma could find no way of coming out. He eventually came out through the lotus that sprouted out of Vishnu's navel and seated himself on the lotus. Since padma means lotus and yoni means place of birth, Brahma thenceforth came to be known as Padmayoni. And since Brahma emerged out of Vishnu's body, he came to be regarded as Vishnu's son.

While Brahma was thus seated on the lotus, Shiva arrived. Such was the speed of Shiva's arrival that tidal waves were created in the water. The lotus started to tremble and Brahma was showered with drops of water.

"Stop shaking the lotus so," said Brahma. "You are scaring me."

"Who speaks from my navel?" asked Vishnu. "And why do you sound so angry?"

"I am Brahma," replied Brahma. "I have every right to be angry. Don't you remember? You had entered my body and had marveled at the worlds I had shown you there. You had then asked me to enter your body. But once I had done that, you had closed all the points of entry so that I had not been able to get out. I had to emerge through the lotus and now now seated on it. Apart from your earlier transgression, you have now started to shake the lotus. Why should I not be angry?"

"Please pardon me," replied Vishnu. "I had no desire to offend you by closing all the points of exit. I merely wished to play with you for a while. Please forgive me. And as a token of your friendship, please grant me the boon that you will henceforth be known as my son. But as for the lotus, I have no part in shaking it. Can't you see that Shiva is approaching? These tidal waves must have been caused by his arrival. Let us pray to him and pacify him."

"Who is Shiva?" asked Brahma. "I am Brahma the lord of everything. I refuse to pray to any upstart who approaches."

Vishnu quietened Brahma down and persuaded him that the two of them ought to pray to Shiva. Shiva was pleased at these prayers and offered grant Brahma and Vishnu boons. Vishnu wished the boon that he might always be devoted to Shiva. Brahma desired the boon that Shiva might be born as his son.

Subsequently, when Brahma began his task of creation, he was not happy with the beings he initially created. From this sorrow were born the eleven rudras, manifestations of Shiva. They cried as soon as they were born. Since the word ruda means to cry, they acquired the name of rudras. It was thus that Shiva was born as Brahma's son.

(This seemingly contradicts the earlier account of the Linga Purana that Shiva had created the eleven rudras himself. The story of the rudras being born from Brahma's sorrow is given in many Puranas in much greater detail. The Vishnu Purana and the

Padma Purana are examples.)

The Linga Purana next describes the rituals that have to be followed in worshipping Shiva's linga.

The Devadaru Forest

Deva means god and daru means tree (or wood). A devadaru is a special sort of tree (a sort of pine tree) that is loved by the gods.

Many years ago, there used to be a forest that was full of devadaru trees. In this devadaru forest there lived many sages and their wives. The sages were devoted to Shiva and performed very difficult tapasya (meditation) so as to please him.

Shiva was pleased at these prayers. But he decided to test the sages. He therefore adopted a very ugly appearance and came to the devadaru forest. He wore no clothes, his complexion was completely dark and his eyes were terrifying. The wives of the sages began to follow Shiva around. But the sages were disgusted that their wives should follow such an ugly and deformed creature. They used many harsh words to insult Shiva and Shiva promptly disappeared.

The sages then went and reported what had happened to Brahma.

"You stupid idiots," exclaimed Brahma. "Don't you realize what you have done? That ugly creature was Shiva himself. He was merely trying to test you and you have failed in the test. He was your guest and you have treated him badly. A guest is a guest regardless of whether he is handsome or ugly. He must be treated with the utmost respect and consideration. You have failed in this miserably. Don't you know the story of the sage Sudarshana?"

There used to be a sage named Sudarshana. He took great pains to instruct his wife that a guest must always be treated well and must never be refused. In fact, a guest is like Shiva himself. To refuse a guest is tantamount to refusing and insulting Shiva. On one particular occasion, the god of righteousness, Dharma, desired to test Sudarshana and his wife. He adopted the disguise of a brahmana and came to visit Sudarshana. Sudarshana was away at the time, but his wife treated the guest really well. Dharma then blessed Sudarshana and his wife that they would surely go to heaven.

The sages regretted what they had done and looked for a way so that they might please Shiva. They sought Brahma's advice and Brahma told them the story of Shveta.

Shveta

There was a sage named Shveta who was devoted to Shiva. He prayed to Shiva throughout his life. Eventually it was time for Shveta to die and Yama, the god of death, came to claim Shveta. Shveta was not at all disturbed at the sight of Yama. He thought that death would not be able to do him any harm if he prayed to Shiva. He went about making preparations for these prayers.

"Come, come," said Yama. "Is this the time to pray to Shiva? Your time on earth is over and you are under my powers now. What is the point of praying to Shiva now?"

Yama then tied up Shveta and prepared to take the sage to his abode. But Shiva, accompanied by Nandi, Parvati and several of his companions, arrived. At the mere sight of Shiva, Yama fell unconscious and died. The gods marvelled at this and showered down flowers from the sky.

Shveta was saved in this fashion. (The story of Yama's revival is not recounted.)

Brahma told the sages, "Now you know what can be gained by praying to Shiva. That is what you should do."

That is what the sages did. After they had prayed faithfully for an entire year, Shiva appeared before them. He was smeared with ashes and his visage was terrible. He wandered around the devadaru forest. But the sages had learnt their lesson. They were not repelled at Shiva's ugly appearance. They and their wives welcomed Shiva with flowers and incense.

Shiva was pleased. He gave the sages plenty of good advice. Amongst other things, he taught the sages the wonderful properties of bhasma (ashes).

Dadhicha

There was a sage named Dadhicha (alternatively Dadhichi). (The Mahabharata states that Dadhicha was the son of Shanti and the sage Atharva.)

Dadhicha had a friend named Kshupa. Kshupa was a king. Since Kshupa was a king, he belonged to the kshatriya class. Dadhicha was a brahmana.

The two friends once began to argue about the superiority of brahmanas vis-a-vis kshatriyas. Kshupa maintained that kshatriyas were superior, while Dadhicha held the opposite view.

Indra has a wonderful weapon named vajra. (This is sometimes identified with thunder, sometimes with a club.) Once upon a time, the demons (asuras) became very powerful and threatened to defeat the gods. The gods sought Kshupa's help and Indra gave Kshupa the vajra to fight with.

When Dadhicha and Kshupa had argued for a while, they came to blows. Dadhicha struck Kshupa a blow on the head with his fist. In retaliation, Kshupa struck Dadhicha with the vajra and sliced the sage in two. Dadhicha died. But before he died, he called upon Shukracharya, the preceptor of the demons, to come to his aid. Shukracharya knew the art of mrita sanjivani, that is, the technique of bringing dead people back to life. Shukracharya arrived and resurrected Dadhicha.

Shukracharya told Dadhicha, "Why don't you pray to Shiva? If you can please Shiva, by his grace you will become immortal. Where do you think I learnt the art of mrita sanjivani? From the great Shiva. Pray to him."

(The story of Shukracharya's obtaining this wonderful knowledge from Shiva is related in the Harivamsha.)

Dadhicha began very difficult tapasya so that he might please Shiva. When Shiva was pleased, Dadhicha obtained three boons from him. The first boon made

Dadhicha prosperous. The second boon made his bones as hard as the vajra itself. And the third boon was that Dadhicha could never be killed.

Thus armed, Dadhicha went to visit Kshupa and gave Kshupa a mighty kick on his head. Kshupa naturally picked up the vajra and hurled it at Dadhicha. The vajra struck Dadhicha a resounding whack on his chest. But such was the power of Shiva's boon that the vajra did the sage no harm.

Kshupa was amazed to see this. He resolved that he would pray to Vishnu to obtain still greater powers. Finally, Vishnu appeared before Kshupa and said, "I am pleased with your prayers. What boon do you desire?"

"Please grant me the boon that I may be able to defeat Dadhicha," replied Kshupa.

"Dadhicha has been fortified by Shiva's boons," said Vishnu. "I therefore fear that what you ask is quite impossible. Nevertheless, I will try."

Vishnu adopted the form of a brahmana and went to Dadhicha's hermitage.

"Welcome, great Vishnu," said Dadhicha. "But why are you in the disguise of a brahmana? Did you think that I would not be able to see through your disguise? Or did you think that I would not refuse what a brahmana asked for? Anyway, please give up this pretense. Adopt your own form and tell me what you want."

Vishnu adopted his own form and said, "I am going to bring Kshupa to your hermitage. All you have to do is to tell Kshupa that you are scared."

Vishnu brought Kshupa to Dadhicha's hermitage. But instead of saying what Vishnu had asked him to utter, Dadhicha said, "I am a devotee of Shiva's. How can I be scared of anything in the universe?"

These words angered Vishnu. Vishnu has a divine weapon known as the sudarshana chakra. He flung this at Dadhicha. But Dadhicha's powers were such that the chakra merely struck him on the chest and fell harmlessly to the ground.

"Oh dear, Oh dear," exclaimed Dadhicha. "Whatever has happened to the great Vishnu's chakra? Perhaps Vishnu would be better advised to use some other divine weapon. Like the brahmastra perhaps."

Vishnu hurled a brahmastra at Dadhicha, but nothing happened to the sage. Vishnu used several other divine weapons, but all in vain. The other gods arrived to help Vishnu in his fight with Dadhicha. But the numerous weapons that the gods used on Dadhicha were all rendered harmless by the sage. Dadhicha then picked up a handful of straw and flung this at the gods. As if magically, each of the straws became a flaming trident and threatened to burn up all the gods.

The gods fled in desperation. As for Vishnu, he created several beings who were just like him in appearance. But Dadhicha burnt all of these up. Vishnu next adopted a gigantic and wonderful form. This form was known as vishvarupa. The entire universe and all the beings in it could be seen in this vishvarupa.

But Dadhicha only laughed. "Who are you trying to impress?" he asked. "Look at me. You will find the entire universe and all the beings in it inside my body as well. I too

can play with illusions. Give up this tomfoolery. If you really wish to fight, let us do so by all means."

At this stage, Brahma decided to intervene. He advised Vishnu to pray to the sage instead of fighting with him. Vishnu did this and was forgiven by Dadhicha. As for Kshupa, he acknowledged the superiority of brahmanas and begged Dadhicha's forgiveness.

The place where these wonderful things happened is a tirtha named Sthaneshvara.

Nandi

There was a sage named Shilada. He performed very difficult tapasya so that he might have a son. After many years had passed, Indra appeared before Shilada and told him, "I am pleased with your meditation. Ask for the boon that you desire.

"Please grant me the boon that I may have a son who is not normally born and who will be immortal," answered Shilada.

"That is impossible," said Indra. "It is beyond my powers to grant you such a boon. I can at best give you a mortal son. An immortal son? I fear that not even Brahma can grant you such a boon. The only person who may be able to grant you such a boon is Shiva. Why don't you try to please him?"

Shilada started to pray to Shiva. For a thousand year of the gods he prayed ceaselessly. He was completely immobile, so that the termites built a nest on his body. His body could no longer be seen. The termites ate up all Shilada's flesh and drunk up all his blood. But Shilada continued to pray. When only bones were left in Shilada's body, Shiva appeared before him.

"Enough of this meditation," said Shiva. "I know what you desire and I will grant you the son you want. I myself will be born as your son and be known as Nandi."

Having said this, Shiva vanished. But not before he had revived Shilada with his touch.

Shilada now started a yajna (sacrifice) so that the son might be born. And Nandi emerged from the fire that had been lit on the occasion of the sacrifice. Nandi had three eyes and four arms. He held a trident and a mace in two of his hands. And his body was clad in armour made out of diamonds. The gandharvas (singers of heaven) sang songs to celebrate the occasion, the apsaras (dancers of heaven) danced. The gods showered down flowers from above.

The word ananda means joy. Since the boy's birth brought everyone joy, he was named Nandi.

But as soon as Nandi was taken home by Shilada. Nandi's divine appearance vanished and he assumed the form of an ordinary human child. Moreover, he forgot all about his divine origin. Shilada was greatly disappointed at this happening, but there was nothing that could be done. He devoted himself to his son's education. By the time Nandi was seven years old, he had become well-versed in the Vedas and other shastras (sacred texts).

One day, the two gods Mitra and Varuna came to visit Shilada. They took one look at Nandi and said, "Strange indeed are the ways of the world. Nandi bears all the auspicious signs on his body. And yet, he is not going to live for long. He is going to die before he is eight years old.

Shilada was mortified to hear this and started to weep. Nandi could not bear to see his father weep thus and started to pray to Shiva.

Shiva appeared and said, "What is all this talk of your dying? Stuff and nonsense. You are going to be immortal and you will always be by my side."

Shiva took off the necklace that he was wearing and hung it around Nandi's neck. Immediately, Nandi assumed a divine form with ten arms and three eyes. Nandi was adopted as a son by Parvati.

Shiva's companions are known as the ganas. And their leaders are known as ganeshvaras or ganapatis. It was resolved that Nandi should be made a ganapati. This was formally done at an august ceremony. The gods and the sages all came to attend this ceremony.

The Yugas

In satya yuga, people were always happy. There were no inferiors or superiors. All individuals were equal. The climate was neither hot nor cold. Hatred and jealousy were unknown. Hunger and thirst were not felt. The earth yielded an abundant supply of juices and mankind lived happily on this. There was no need to build houses. People lived on the shores of the oceans and in the mountains. There was no concept of sin (papa) and store of merit (punya), no need of heaven or hell. People were naturally righteous.

In treta yuga, things changed somewhat. Clouds formed in the sky and it started to rain heavily. The earth no longer yield a plentiful supply of juices. But because it rained so much, trees began to grow and people lived on the sap of these trees. But individuals slowly turned evil and started to fight over the possession of these trees. The trees no longer provided sap. But they did provide fruits that humans could live on. They used the barks of the trees for clothing. But when people continued to fight over the possession of the trees, the trees started to wither away and disappear. Heat and cold became manifest. Houses now had to be built so that one might protect oneself from the heat and the cold. Earlier, there had been no need to build houses. When all the trees completely disappeared, people learnt to practice agriculture so that they might live. The first practice of agriculture and animal husbandry goes back to treta yuga. But irrigation was not needed. The land irrigated itself. Artificial irrigation became required much later, when people grew even more evil.

Mankind really started to suffer from the time of dvapara yuga. Most evil traits like hatred, jealousy, quarrels and fraudulence can be traced back to that time. Famine and drought were first felt on earth in dvapara yuga.

Kali yuga is the worst period of all. This is a time when holy men are not revered. No one pays any attention to the shastras and it is evil that prevails. People are habitually liars. The shudras are the last of the four classes. As such, their duties are to serve the other three classes of brahmanas, kshatriyas and vaishyas. But in kali

yuga, the shudras lord over everything. Even the kings are shudras and oppress the brahmanas. Kings are thieves and thieves become kings.

Kali yuga is such an evil period that people will start to lend money so as to earn interest. The evil has its effects in terms of reducing the productivity of the land. Life expectancy is reduced to only sixteen years. The only redeeming feature of kali yuga is the fact that a minor righteous deed in kali yuga brings undying punya.

But kali yuga will not last for ever. When its duration is over, Pramiti (more usually referred to as Kali) will be born so to re-establish righteousness on earth. For twenty years he will travel around the world, killing the evil and protecting the good. He will destroy the shudra kings and bring back the religion prescribed by the Vedas.

Geography

The universe is divided into fourteen regions (lokas). Seven of these form the upper regions and seven others constitute the nether regions.

The seven lokas of the upper regions are named bhuloka (the earth), buvarloka, svarloka or svarga (heaven), maharloka, janaloka, tapoloka and satyaloka. The seven regions of the underworld are mahatala, hematala, rasatala, talatala, sutala, atala and patala, (The names of the seven regions of the underworld differ somewhat from Purana to Purana.) In the underworld live the demons and the nagas (snakes). That apart, there are many hells (naraka) in the universe. The sinners are punished in these hells.

The earth has many oceans and mountains. The land mass is divided into seven regions (dvipas) named Jambudvipa, Plakshadvipa, Shalmalidvipa, Kushadvipa, Krounchadvipa, Shakadvipa and Pushkaradvipa. The seven major oceans (samudra) that surround these land masses are Lavana, Ikshu, Sura, Ghrita, Dadhi and Jala. (The name of seven oceans differ from Purana to Purana. The missing name is that of the ocean known as Sarpi.)

You will remember that Svayambhuva Manu had two sons - Priyavrata and Uttanapada, Priyavrata had ten sons. Their names were Agnidhra, Agnivahu, Meda, Medhatithi, Vapushmana, Jyotishmana, Dyutimana, Havya, Savana and Putra. After Priyavrata died, the earth was divided up into seven regions and seven sons inherited a region each. Agnidhra received Jambudvipa, Medhatithi Plakshadvipa, Vapushmana Shalmalid-vipa, Jyotishmana Kushadvipa, Dyutimana Krounchadvipa, Havya Shakadvipa and Savana Pushkaradvipa. (The Linga Purana does not specify why Agnivahu, Medha and Putra did not obtain any shares to their father's kingdom. According to the Vishnu Prana, three of Priyavarata's sons were not interested in material pursuits and became hermits.)

The Linga Purana describes subsequent subdivisions of these dvipas. But since we are primarily interested in Jambudvipa, let us consider what happened to Jambudvipa alone.

Agnidhra, the ruler of Jambudvipa, was devoted to Shiva. He had nine sons and each of these sons was also devoted to Shiva. These sons were named Nabhi, Kimpurusha, Hari, Ilavrita, Ramya, Hiranmana, Kuru, Bhadrashva and Ketumala. After Agnidhra, Jambudvipa was divided into nine regions (varshas) and ruled over

by one of these sons. Nabhi ruled over Hemavarsha, Kimpurusha over Hemakutavarsha, Hari over Naishadhavarsha, Ilavrita over Meruvarsha, Ramya over Nilachalavarsha, Hiranmana over Shvetavarsha, Kuru over Shringavarsha, Bhadrashva over Malyavanvarsha and Ketumala over Gandhamadanavarsha.

(This is not the usual nomenclature of the Puranas. More usually, Nabhi ruled over the region that subsequently came to be known as Bharatavarsha after one of Nabhi's descendants. As for the other eight regions, they were named after the first kings who ruled after them. Thus, Hari ruled over Harivarsha, Kimpurusha over Kimpurushavarsha and so on and so forth. Each of these varshas had several mountains. The nomenclature of the Linga Purana names the varshas after the mountain ranges that were in them.)

To return to the account of the Linga Purana, Nabhi's wife was called Meru. Nabhi and Meru had a son named Ridhabha and Rishabha's son was Bharata. It was after Bharata that the region that Nabhi ruled over came to be known as Bharatavarsha. Bharatavarsha is bounded by the Himalaya mountains to the north and by the ocean to the south.

Right in the centre of Jambudvipa is Mount Sumeru or Meru and on all sides of Sumeru are many other peaks. Mount Sumeru is so high that it touches the solar circle. It is encrusted with snow and is full of gold and jewels.

Many are the gods who live on Mount Sumeru. Amaravati, the place where Indra lives, is on the eastern slopes of Sumeru. This city is full of beautiful places, bejewelled gates and golden pillars. There are crystal steps that lead down to limpid pools of clear water. The pools abound with lotuses of every hue that can be imagined.

At another corner of Sumeru is the fire-god Agni's abode. This city is known as Tejasvini. Yama's residence is named Vaivasvati and lies towards the south. There are many other cities designed to be the residences of other gods. There are special landing strips for the vimanas (space vehicles) of the gods.

Most remarkable of all is Brahma's residence, located right in the centre of Sumeru. A river named Jambu flows past the region. It is from this river that Jambudvipa acquires its name.

As mentioned before, there are mountain ranges on all sides of Sumeru. The Nilachala mountains are to the north, the Shveta mountains further north and the Shringi mountains still beyond. To the east of Sumeru lie the mountains Jathara and Devakuta. The Nishadha mountains are to the south, the Hemakuta mountains further south and the Himalaya mountains still further away towards the south. The mountains Malyavana and Gandhamadana are to the west of Sumeru.

There are four beautiful lakes (sarovara) around Sumeru. Arunodaya is to the east, Manasa to the south, Sitoda to the west and Mahabhadra to the north.

To the east of Bharatavarsha live the kiratas and to the west live the yavanas. Bharatavarsha proper is populated by brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras.

The hells are located below the underworld. There are twenty-eight of these. There the sinners are made to suffer for their evil deeds.

Astronomy

The sun's chariot was built by Brahma himself. It is made completely out of gold.

There are twelve months in a year. Their names are Madhu, Madhava, Shukra, Shuchi, Nabha, Nabhasya, Isha, Urjja, Saha, Sahasya, Tapa and Tapasya. (These names of the months are slightly unusual. More common is Vaishakha, Jyaishtha, etc.) Two months constitute a season (ritu) and there are therefore six seasons in every year. These are grishma (summer), varsha (monsoon), sharat (early autumn), hemanta (late autumn), shita (winter) and vasanta (spring). Madhu and Madhava are the months of grishma, Shukra and Shuchi are those of varsha, Nabha and Nabhasya those of sharat, Isha and Urjja those of hemanta, Saha and Sahasya those of shita and Tapa and Tapasya those of vasanta.

In every season, two adityas (gods), two sages, two gandharvas, two apsaras, two rakshasas (demons) and two nagas (snakes) ride on the sun's chariot to keep the sun company. Their names are as follows.

(i) Grishma - the adityas Dhata and Aryama; the sages Pulastya and Pulaha; the gandharvas Tumburu and Narada; the apsaras Kritasthala and Punjikasthala; the rakshasas Rakshoheti and Praheti; and the nagas Uruga and Vasuki.

(ii) Varsha - the adityas Mitra and Varuna; the sages Atri and Vashishtha; the gandharvas Haha and Huhu; the apsaras Menaka and Sahajanya; the rakshasas Poursheya and Vadha; and the naga Takshaka. (The name of the second naga is not given.)

(iii) Sharat - the adityas Indra and Vivasvana; the sages Angira and Bhrigu; the gandharvas Vishvvasu and Ugrasena; the apsaras Pramlocha and Anumlocha; the rakshasas Sarpa and Vyaghra; and the nagas Elapatra and Shankhapala.

(iv) Hemanta - the adityas Parjanya and Pusha; the sages Bharadvaja and Goutama; the gandharvas Suruchi and Parvasu; the apsaras Ghrithachi and Vishvachi; the rakshasas Apa and Vata; and the nagas Dhananjaya and Iravana.

(v) Shita - the adityas Amshu and Bhaga; the sages Kashyapa and Kratu; the gandharvas Chitrasena and Urnayu; the apsaras Urvashi and Purvachitti; the rakshasas Vidhut and Diva; and the nagas Mahapadma and Karkataka.

(vi) Vasanta - the adityas Tvashta and Vishnu; the sages Jamadagni and Vishvamitra; the gandharvas Dhritarashtra and Suryavarcha; the apsaras Tilottama and Rambha; the rakshasas Brahmopeta and Yakshopeta; and the nagas Kambana and Ashvatara.

The moon (Chandra) has a chariot that has three wheels and is drawn by three horses. The horses are completely white in colour. The sun drinks up the energy of the moon for a period of fifteen days. This period is known as krishnapaksha (the fortnight during which the moon wanes). The sun then replenishes the moon's energy over the next fifteen days. This period is known as shuklapaksha (the fortnight during which the moon waxes).

Budha (Mercury) is Chandra's son and rides a chariot that is drawn by eight horses.

The horses are yellow and the chariot is made of gold. Brihaspati (Jupiter) also has a chariot that is made of gold and is drawn by eight horses. But Shani's (Saturn) chariot is made of iron.

Just as Indra rules over the gods, the sun rules over the planets and the moon rules over the nakshatras (stars) and the herbs. But all of these revolve around Dhruva (the Pole Star).

Dhruva

Svayambhuva Manu had a son named Uttanapada. Uttanapada had two wives, Suniti and Suruchi. Dhruva was Suniti's son.

King Uttanapada was once seated on his throne. Dhruva happened to come there and clambered up onto his father's lap. He was a mere child then, being only seven years old.

But Dhruva's stepmother, Suruchi, objected to this.

"How dare you sit on the king's lap?" she demanded. "That is a place that is reserved for my son. Get down at once."

Although Uttanapada did love Dhruva, he dared not object. He loved Suruchi much more than he loved Suniti and he did not have the courage to go against Suruchi's wishes.

Dhruva began to cry and went running to his mother. Suniti did her best to console her son. "Don't cry, my son," she said. "The king loves Suruchi more than me and so loves her son more than you. There is nothing that can be done. We are unlucky. We must have committed many sins in our earlier lives and this is the punishment that is being meted out to us. There is nothing to be gained by crying. One must try to perform good deeds in this life so that, in the next life, we are more fortunate. Forget about the king's lap. Why don't you instead try to attain a place that would be impossible for Suruchi's son to achieve?"

Dhruva resolved that he would do this. He went away to the forest to meditate.

In the forest, he happened to come upon the sage Vishvamitra's hermitage. He told the sage the story of his misfortunes and about his mission. "Please tell me how I can attain the highest place of all," he said.

"The solution is to pray to Vishnu," replied Vishvamitra. The sage also taught Dhruva a powerful mantra (incantation) that he could use for praying to Vishnu.

Dhruva started to pray to Vishnu. He faced the east and began to chant the mantra. For an entire year he continued to do only this. He lived only on fruits and roots. Demons and wild animals roamed all around him, but he paid no attention to them. One particular ogre adopted the disguise of Dhruva's mother and came to Dhruva from his meditation. But Dhruva saw through this disguise and would not be distracted.

Finally, Vishnu appeared before Dhruva. "I am pleased with your prayers," said Vishnu. "What boon do you desire?"

"Please grant me the boon that I may attain the highest place of all," replied Dhruva.

Vishnu earmarked a place for Dhruva in the sky. Dhruva became the Pole Star. All the other stars revolve around Dhruva.

Daksha's Descendants

You probably remember Brahma's son, Daksha. Daksha married Prasuti. (In some Puranas, she is referred to as Asikli.)

Daksha and Prasuti had five thousand sons known as the Haryashvas. But the sage Narada came and told the Haryashvas that there was nothing to be gained by being addicted to material pursuits. They would be better off if they went away to meditate. Persuaded by Narada, the Haryashvas went off to meditate and have never been heard since. Daksha and Prasuti next had a thousand sons named the Shavalashvas. But Narada persuaded the Shavalashvas also to go away and meditate.

Daksha and Prasuti next had sixty daughters. Ten of these daughters were married to the god Dharma, thirteen to the sage Kashyapa and twenty-seven to Chandra.

The thirteen daughters who were married to Kashyapa were named Aditi, Diti, Arishta, Surasa, Muni, Surabhi, Vinata, Tamra, Krodhavasha, Ila, Kadru, Tvisha and Danu. (The names of the minor wives often vary from Purana to Purana.)

Aditi's sons were known as the adityas (gods). There were twelve of them, named Indra, Dhata, Bhaga, Tvashta, Mitra, Varuna, Aryama, Vivasvana, Savita, Pusha, Amshumana and Vishnu.

Diti had two sons, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. These two and their descendants were known as the daityas (demons). Danu had a hundred sons, chief amongst whom was Viprachitti. They and their descendants were known as the danavas (demons).

Tamra was the mother of all the birds. Vinata had two sons, Aruna and Garuda. Garuda became the king of the birds. Surasa was the mother of snakes (sarpa). (Most other Puranas state that Surasa was the mother of the rakshasas (demons). Kadru gave birth to snakes (nagas). Chief amongst them were Ananta, Vasuki and Takshaka. Krodhavasha was the mother of rakshasas and Surabhi gave birth of all cattle. Muni was the mother of the apsaras and Arishta was the mother of the gandharvas. From Ila were born the trees and the herbs. And from Tvisha were born the yakshas (demi-gods).

Parashara

There used to be a rakshasa named Rudhira and there used to be a king named Kalmashapada. The rakshasa entered the king's body, so that Kalmashapada became a demon.

The sage Vashishtha had a son named Shaktri. As a demon, Kalmashapada ate up Shaktri and his brothers.

(The story of how this happened is not given in the Linga Purana. But it is a story that is recounted in the Mahabharata and is as follows. King Kalmashapada belonged to the Ikshvaku line of kings. He had once gone to the forest and had become very thirsty. While looking for some water, the king met Shaktri. There was a very narrow path along which even two people could not walk abreast. Since he was very thirsty, Kalmashapada asked Shaktri to give him the right of way.

But Shaktri insisted that, as a brahmana, he possessed the right of way. Kalmashapada thereupon struck Shaktri with his whip and Shaktri in turn cursed the king that he would become a rakshasa. Kalmashapada's first act as a rakshasa was to eat up Shaktri and his hundred brothers.

To return to the Linga Purana, the sage Vashishtha could not bear the shock of his sons being killed. Vashishtha's wife was Arundhati. With Arundhati, the sage climbed a mountain and the couple flung themselves down from the peak so that they might die.

But the earth had no desire to permit the death of such great sage. She adopted the form of a woman and broke the couple's fall. "Please do not kill yourself," she told Vashishtha. "You are needed by the world."

Shaktri's wife was Adrishyanti and she too tried to dissuade her father-in-law from committing suicide. "I am expecting," she informed Vashishtha. "If the two of you kill yourselves, who will look after the son when he is born? He is, after all, Shaktri's son. Please stay alive for his sake."

While this conversation was going on, the baby who was in Adrishyanti's womb began to recite the Vedas. This was a miracle indeed and Vashishtha did not at first realize where the sound of the recitation was coming from. But Vishnu appeared and told the sage, "You will have a grandson who will bring glory to your line. He will be a great devotee of Shiva's. It is he who is reciting the Vedas. Please stay alive for his sake."

Vashishtha was dissuaded.

In due course, Adrishyanti gave birth to Parashara.

When Parashara grew up, he asked his mother, "Where is my father? Why do I not have a father like other children do?"

"Your father Shaktri was eaten up by a rakshasa," replied Adrishyanti.

"Eaten up by a rakshasa," exclaimed Parashara. "I will pray to the god Shiva. Through my tapasya. I will attain great powers. And with my powers I am going to burn up the entire universe. There is no point in retaining such an evil universe where one's father is eaten up by a rakshasa."

Vashishtha persuaded his grandson that such a general destruction of the universe would not be in anyone's interest. The universe had done no particular harm. If anyone had committed a crime, it was the rakshasa who had performed the dastardly deed. Parashara resolved that he would use his powers to destroy the rakshasas.

With this end in mind, Parashara started to pray to Shiva. Shiva was pleased at these prayers and granted Parashara some amazing powers. With these powers, Parashara got to see and talk to his dead father. And he used the powers to burn up all rakshasas.

"Please stop this destruction," Vashishtha told his grandson. "There has been enough of killing. If Shaktri died, that was written in his stars. The rakshasa was merely the instrument of what fate had decreed for my son. Do not kill any more rakshasas. Anger serves no purpose."

Parashara followed his grandfather's advice and was blessed by the sage that he would become well-versed in all the shastras. Vashishtha also blessed Parashara that he would compose the Purana samhita and the Vishnu Purana.

(Krishna Dvaipayana Vedavyasa was the sage Parashara's son.)

The Linga Purana now catalogues the kings of the solar and lunar dynasties. But these we will skip, as they are mostly a collection of names and are better described in other Puranas. It also gives Shiva's thousand names. These are repeated again later.

Tripura

There was a demon named Tarakasura who oppressed the gods. He was eventually killed by Skanda or Kartikeya, the son of Shiva and Parvati.

(Tarakasura's story is not given in the Linga Purana. It can be found in the Shiva Purana and in the Devi Bhagavata.)

Tarakasura had three sons named Vidyumali, Tarakaksha and Kamalaksha. These three resolved to avenge their father's death and started to perform very difficult tapasya so that they might obtain boons that would make them invincible. After a long period of mediation, they managed to please Brahma.

"You have pleased me," said Brahma. "What boon do you desire?"

"Please grant us the boon that no being in the universe may be able to kill us," requested the demons.

"That is a boon that cannot be granted to anybody," said Brahma. "If you so desire, set fairly difficult conditions for your death. But immortality is a boon that I cannot possibly grant you."

The three brothers consulted and arrived at the following condition which seemed to be fairly impossible to satisfy. Each of them would build a city (pura) and the three cities would normally be distinct. But once every thousand years, the cities would come together. (The cities were in the sky.) When the cities came together, if anyone could manage to shoot down the cities with a single arrow, that would be the appointed method of death for the three demons. This seemingly impossible condition Brahma agreed to.

A danava named Maya was the architect for all the demons and he built three cities

for Tarakasura's sons. Tarakaksha's city was made of gold. Kamalaksha's of silver and Vidyunmali's of iron. Inside each of the cities, Maya built several wonderful palaces. The three brothers lived in these cities happily, with their companions, the other demons. Incidentally, the demons were great devotees of Shiva.

But the gods were not at all happy. They were oppressed by the demons of Tripura. (The word tri means three and since there were three cities or puras, they were collectively referred to as Tripura.) The gods sought Vishnu's help so that Tripura might be destroyed.

"I understand your problem and you have my sympathies," said Vishnu. "But unfortunately, I can do nothing. The only person who can destroy Tripura is Shiva. But there is a problem. The demons are devoted to Shiva; they are not evil. Under the circumstances, Shiva will not take up arms against them. We will have to resort to some trickery. Why don't all of you go and start praying to Shiva? I will think of a way whereby the demons can be dislodged from the righteous path."

The gods went away to meditate. And Vishnu used his powers of illusion (maya) to lead the demons astray. He sent Shakyamuni (the Buddha) to preach to the demons. Shakyamuni was so glib of tongue that he made ready converts among the demons. They all became his disciples and gave up worshipping Shiva.

This was the moment that the gods had been waiting for. They prayed to Shiva that the evil demons might be destroyed and Shiva agreed.

Vishvakarma, the architect of the gods, built a chariot for Shiva to ride in. Brahma himself offered to be the charioteer. Shiva ascended the chariot and rode into battle. Nadi joined him with the ganas and the gods accompanied the army to aid in the fight. Numerous were the weapons that the gods took with them. They rode on elephants, horses, lions and buffaloes. Shiva graced this army of gods the way the moon graces a collection of stars.

The army advanced and came to where Tripura was. Shiva raised his bow and applied the divine pashupata weapon to his bow, waiting for the three cities to come together. As soon as this happened, Shiva let fly the arrow and the flaming arrow burnt up the three cities of the demons.

All the gods, including Brahma and Vishnu, worshipped Shiva.

The word art means enemy. Because Shiva destroyed Tripura, he is known as Tripurari.

The Linga Purana next describes the rites that must be followed in worshipping Shiva. In particular, a special rite named pashupata vrata is described in great detail.

Omens

There are some omens which are sure signs of impending death.

There is a nakshatra (star) named Arundhati. (This is in the constellation Ursa Majoris.) A person who cannot see Arundhati, the Pole Star or the Milky way (Chhayapatha) is sure to die within a year. A person to whom the radiance of the sun

seems to be diminished, will die within eleven months. One who dreams of vomiting gold or silver has but ten months to live. A dreamer who dreams of golden trees, cities of the gandharvas or ghosts or demons will die after nine months. If you suddenly lose or put on weight, you have but eight months to live. A person who leaves an incomplete footprint on dust or mud will not live for more than seven months.

A maximum lifespan of six months is indicated if a crow, vulture or dove alights on one's head. A person who is surrounded by crows when he walks or a person who is surrounded by dust does not live for more than four or five months. This is also the case if one's reflection happens to be distorted. A person who hears thunder when there are no clouds in the sky or a person who sees a rainbow in the water has but three months to live. If the reflection is incomplete, or if the reflection has a severed head, the person will die within a month.

An individual who reeks of the smell of dead bodies will die within fifteen days. Ten days of life is all that is left for someone who has smoke billowing out of his head. Death is nigh if one dreams of travelling southwards in a chariot drawn by bears or monkeys. This is all the more the case if one happens to be singing or dancing while thus travelling. The implications are the same if the dreamer dreams of being submerged in a cesspool of mud. One will die soon if one dreams of being set upon by warriors dressed in black. Death is also indicated if jackals greet one at the stroke of dawn. When a lamp is extinguished, a smell of burning lingers in the air. If you cannot smell this, you will die soon.

There are several more omens. The only salvation, if such omens are seen, lies in praying to Shiva.

The City of Varanasi

The city of Varanasi is very sacred. Shiva himself lived here with Parvati and Ganesha. Varanasi is one of the six greatest tirthas on earth. The other five are Kurukshetra, Shriparvata, Mahalaya, Tungeshvara and Kedara.

The sins of someone who worships Shiva in Varanasi are immediately forgiven. Any living being who dies in the city goes immediately to heaven. Several are the lingas and sacred ponds in Varanasi; some of them were set up by Vishnu and Brahma themselves.

The river Varuna winds through the city and unites with the holy river Ganga. At the confluence of the Varuna and the Ganga, Brahma established a linga known as Sangameshvara. Amongst other famous lingas in Varanasi are Shailesha, Svarnilesha, Madhyameshvara, Hiranyagarbhashvara, Goprekshaka, Vrishadhvaja, Upashantashiva, Shukreshvara, Vyaghreshvara and Jambukeshvara.

Andhaka

There was a demon named Hiranyaksha. Hiranyaksha was killed by Vishnu. But Hiranyaksha had a son named Andhaka.

Andhaka started to perform very difficult tapasya. He pleased Brahma through his prayers and obtained the boon that he could never be killed. Armed with his boon, Andhaka went about conquering the three worlds. He drove the gods out of heaven.

Indra and the other gods fled in desperation to Mount Mandara. They were joined in their flight by Visnu. But Andhaka pursued them there as well.

Shiva lived on Mount Mandara. The gods went to Shiva and said, "The king of the demons, Andhaka, is oppressing us. We do not know what to do, He has followed us here as well. Please save us from Andhaka's depredations."

Shiva ventured out to tackle Andhaka. Andhaka was not alone, he had millions of demon-soldiers with him. But Shiva burnt up all these soldiers. He then pierced Andhaka with a trident (trishula) and raised the trident up into the sky. The demon hung there, transfixed with the central prong of the trident.

The gods were delighted at this. They showered down flowers on Shiva and began to pray to him. All beings in the three worlds heaved sighs of relief.

As for Andhaka, the moment he was transfixed by Shiva's trident, all thought of evil vanished from his mind. He started to pray to Shiva.

Shiva was pleased at these prayers and said, "Son of Hiranyaksha, I am pleased with you. What boon do you desire?"

"If you are indeed pleased with me," replied Andhaka, "please grant me the boon that I may be always faithful to you. And please make me your constant companion."

Shiva agreed to this. He lowered Andhaka from his trident and made Andhaka a lord of the ganas. Andhaka is Shiva's constant companion. (According to some other Puranas, he was renamed Bhringi.)

(The Andhaka story, like most stories, is rather cursorily treated in the Linga Purana. Far greater details are given in other Puranas. According to some of these accounts, Hiranyaksha had no sons. Andhaka was the son of Shiva and Parvati and was adopted as a son by the childless Hiranyaksha. According to the Harivamsha, Andhaka was the son of Diti and the sage Kashyapa. Since all of Diti's sons were killed by the gods, Diti prayed to Kashyapa that she might have an immortal son. This son was Andhaka.)

Hiranyaksha and the Boar

The sages said, "You have mentioned Hiranyaksha and you also said that Hiranyaksha was killed by Vishnu. But we do not know the story. Please tell us about Hiranyaksha."

Lomaharshana recounted the following story.

Diti had two sons named Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakshipu.

Hiranyaksha was very powerful. He defeated all the gods and drove them out of heaven. As for the earth, he captured her and imprisoned her in the underworld. He then started to oppress anyone who still happened to be around.

"Let us go and visit Vishnu," said Brahma. "He should be able to deliver us from this

evil demon.

Vishnu heard the story of the woes of the gods and agreed to help. He adopted the form of the gigantic boar (varaha) and went down into the underworld. He discovered the demon Hiranyaksha there and slew him with his tusks. Vishnu then raised up the earth on the tusks of the boar and placed her in her rightful place on the top of the waters.

But when Vishnu gave up his form of the boar. The earth, which was transfixed to the tusks, started to float around. Shiva released the earth from the tusks so that she might stay in one place. What do you think happened to the tusks of the boar? Shiva wears them always around his neck.)

Hiranyakashipu and Narasimha

"What happened to Hiranyakashipu, Hiranyaksha's brother?" asked the sages.

Lomaharshana told them the following.

Hiranyakashipu had a son named Prahlada. From his birth, Prahlada was devoted to Vishnu. He prayed to Vishnu all the time.

But Hiranyakashipu could not stand this. He hated Vishnu. It was, after all, Vishnu who had killed his brother Hiranyaksha.

Hiranyakashipu told Prahlada, "I am ashamed of you. Does your behaviour become a son of the king of the demons? Who is this Vishnu? Is he superior to me? How dare you worship Vishnu? Stop this nonsense at once."

But Prahlada would not listen. He continued to pray to Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu could not bear to stand this any longer. He instructed his demon soldiers to kill Prahlada. The demons set upon Prahlada with all sorts of weapons. But by Vishnu's grace, nothing happened to Prahlada.

While this was doing on, Vishnu appeared. He adopted his narasimha incarnation, a being who was half-man and half-lion. (Nara means man and simha means lion.) Narasimha grabbed hold of Hiranyakashipu and slew the demon with his claws.

(So far the account is fairly usual, although it misses out on the interesting details given in texts like the Vishnu Purana. The Linga Purana now introduces a further twist, in an obvious attempt to glorify Shiva.)

After killing Hiranyakashipu, Vishnu did not give up his form of a lion. The lion raged everywhere in the universe, threatening to destroy everything.

The gods, led by Brahma, fled to Shiva on Mount Mandara. "Please save from the scourge of this lion," they pleaded

Shiva assured the gods that he would take care of narasimha.

Shiva created a being known as Virabhadra from his own body. Virabhadra was another manifestation of Shiva himself. Virabhadra had three eyes and he held several weapons in his hands. His teeth were as sharp as the crescent moon, his

eyebrows were like rainbows and his beard was as dark as the clouds.

"What would you like me to do?" asked Virabhadra.

"A being named narasimha is causing havoc," replied Shiva. "It is Vishnu who has adopted this form. The universe must be rid of narasimha. First, try to persuade him to give up this form. If that fails, kill him."

Virabhadra went to Vishnu and told him, "Vishnu, you are the preserver of the universe. There are several occasions when you have adopted incarnations so as to save the world. Why have you adopted this narasimha form? Please give it up at once. It is threatening the existence of the universe."

These words merely served to anger Vishnu. "I don't need any advice from you," he said. "Return to whence you came. I will destroy the universe; who are you to decree otherwise? I am the lord of everything. Brahma, the creator, was born from my body. Therefore, go away and leave me in peace."

"Haven't you forgotten Shiva?" asked Virabhadra. "It is Shiva who is supreme. He is the destroyer. And if you do not come to your senses, he is going to destroy you as well. Be forewarned. I am Virabhadra. Have you forgotten that I severed your head at the time of Daksha's yajna? Have you forgotten from where you obtained your sudarshana chakra (Vishnu's weapons, a bladed-discus)?"

These words angered Vishnu even more and he attacked Virabhadra. Virabhadra adopted a strange form that was half-deer and half-bird. It had a thousand arms and the crescent moon shone on its head. The wings were huge, sparks issued out of the eyes, and the claws were exceedingly sharp. Virabhadra grasped Vishnu and rose up into the sky. He flung Vishnu down repeatedly on the ground and picked him up again.

Vishnu came to his senses and started to pray to Shiva. He called upon Shiva by his one hundred and eight names.

But Virabhadra killed Vishnu. He sliced off narasimha's head and skinned the pelt. This did not mean that Vishnu died. It was narasimha who died. Vishnu merged into Shiva. Narasimha's pelt is worn by Shiva as clothing. And you will find narasimha's skull among the garland of skulls that Shiva wears around his neck.

Jalandhara

There was a demon named Jalandhara. He obtained tremendous powers through tapasya. Such were these powers that he managed to defeat the gods.

(The story of Jalandhara's origin is not given in the Linga Purana, but can be found in the Padma Purana. Indra once went on a visit to Mount Kailasa and met Shiva there. Failing to recognize Shiva, Indra hit him on the head with his vajra. A fire issued out of Shiva's head and threatened to burn Indra up. Indra pacified Shiva and contrived to avoid destruction. But Shiva flung the fire into the ocean and from his fire a boy was born. Since jala means water and since he emerged from the water, the boy came to be called Jalandhara. Alternatively Brahma discovered and adopted the boy. But the boy tugged so hard at Brahma's eyes. Brahma therefore named the boy Jalandhara and also granted him the boon that he

could be killed only by Shiva.)

To return to the Linga Purana, after having defeated all the other gods, Jalandhara challenged Vishnu to a duel. This duel lasted for sometime, but eventually, Vishnu too, met his match.

Jalandhara then told his companions, the other demons. "I seem to have defeated everyone that there is to fight with. The only one who is left is Shiva. Let us go and thrash Shiva, Nandi and the others."

The demon army trooped to Shiva's residence.

"What do you want?" asked Shiva. "Why have all of you come here?"

"We have come to fight with you," replied Jalandhara.

Shiva inserted his big toe into the ocean and started to churn the water. From this churning, the terrible weapon known as the sudarshana chakra was created.

"I shall certainly fight with you," said Shiva. "But first you must raise this chakra with your big toe. I will fight with you only if you succeed."

Jalandhara tried to do this. With a great deal of difficulty, he managed to raise the chakra and place it on his shoulders. But as soon as he did this, the weapon sliced off his head. Jalandhara's flesh and blood cluttered up the universe. Shiva had all of this sent to Yama, the god of death. Yama constructed a hell (naraka) named maharourava with this flesh and blood.

Thus it was that Jalandhara met his end. As for the demon's companions, they were burnt to ashes by Shiva's rage.

Shiva's Thousand Names

Many years ago, a fierce war raged between the gods and the demons. The gods received a sound thrashing and fled. While they were running away, they encountered Vishnu.

"Why are you running away?" asked Vishnu. "What on earth has happened?"

"The demons have defeated us," replied the gods. "They have acquired all sorts of divine weapons, largely thanks to the boons that you have granted them. These weapons have made them close to invincible. You are our only hope now. Do you remember the wonderful weapon that was known as the sudarshana chakra? It was created by Shiva to kill Jalandhara. That is what is required now. Nothing else will work."

"I will help you," promised Vishnu. "But we must first obtain the weapon, and to get it, we have to pray to Shiva."

Vishnu and the other gods started to pray to Shiva. They called upon Shiva by his thousand names. For convenience, we reproduce the names in groups of ten names each.

- (1) Bhava, Shiva, Hara, Rudra, Purusha, Padmalochana, Arthitavya, Sadachara, Sarva, Shambhu.
- (2) Maheshvara, Ishvara, Sthanu, Ishana, Sahasraksha, Sahasrapada, Variyana, Varada, Vandya, Shankara.
- (3) Parameshvara, Gangadhara, Shuladhara, Pararthaikaprayojana, Sarvajna, Saradevadi, Giridhanva, Jatadhara, Chandrapida, Chandramouli
- (4) Vidvana, Vishvamareshvara, Vedantasarasarvasva, Kapali, Nilalohita, Jnanadhara, Aparichedya, Gouribharta, Ganeshvara, Ashtamurti.
- (5) Vishvamurti, Trivarga, Svargasadhana, Jnanagamy, Dridaprajna, Devadeva, Trilochana, Vamadeva, Mahadeva, Pandu.
- (6) Paridrida, Vishvarupa, Virupaksha, Vagisha, Shuchi, Antara, Sarvapranayavadi, Vrishanka, Vrishavahana, Isha.
- (7) Pinaki, Khattangi, Chitravesha, Chirantana, Tomohara, Mahayogi. Brhamangahrita, Jati Kalakala, Krittivasa.
- (8) Subhaga, Pranavatmaka, Unmattavesha, Chakshushya, Durvasa, Smarashasana, Dridayudha, Parameshthiparayana, Anadimadhyanidhana, Girisha.
- (9) Girivandhava, Kubervandhu, Shrikantha, Lokavarnottamottama, Samanya, Deva, Kodandi, Nilakantha, Parashvadi, Vishalaksha.
- (10) Mrigavyadha. Suresha, Suryatapana, Dharmakarmakshama, Ksetra, Bhagavana, Bhaganetravida, Ugra, Pashupati, Tarkshya.
- (11) Priyabhakta, Priyasvada, Dantodayakara, Daksha, Karpadi, Kamashasana, Shmashanailaya, Suksha, Shmashanastha, Maheshvara.
- (12) Lokakarta, Bhutapati, Mahakarta, Mahoushadhi, Uttara, Gopati, Gupta, Jnanagamy, Puratana, Nita.
- (13) Sunita, Shuddhatma, Soma, Somavrita, Sukhi, Somapa, Amritapa, Mahaniti, Mahamati, Ajjatashatru.
- (14) Aloka, Sambhavya, Havyavahana, Lokakara, Vedakara, Sutrakara, Sanatana, Maharshi, Kapilacharya, Vishvadipti.
- (15) Trilochana, Pinakapani, Bhurdeva, Svastida, Sadasvastikrita, Tridhama, Soubhaga, Sarvasar-vajna, Sarvagochara, Brahmadhrika.
- (16) Vishvasrika, Svarga, Karnikara, Priya, Kavi, Sahakhavishakha, Goshakha, Shiva, Naikya, Kratu.
- (17) Gangaplavodaka, Bhava, Sakala, Supatisthira, Vijitatma, Vidheyatma, Bhutavahana, Sarathi, Sagana, Ganakarya.
- (18) Sukirti, Chhinnasamshaya, Kamadeva, Kamapala, Bhasmodvulitavigraha, Bhasmapriya, Bhasmashayi, Kami, Kanta, Kritagama,

(19) Samayukta, Nivrittatma, Dharmayukta, Sadshiva, Chaturmukha, Chaturvahu, Duravasa, Durasada, Durgama, Durlabha.

(20) Durga, Sarga, Sarvayudhavisharda, Sutantu, Adhyatmayoganilaya, Tantuvarddhana, Shubhanga, Lokasagara, Amritashana, Bhasmashuddhikara.

(21) Meru, Ojasvi, Shuddhavigraha, Hiranyareta, Bharani, Marichi, Mahimalaya, Mahahrada, Mahagarbha, Siddharvrindaravandita.

(22) Vyaghracharmadhara, Vyali, Mahabhuta, Mahanidhi, Amritanga, Amritavapu, Panchayajna, Prabhanjana, Panchavimshatitattvajna, Parijataparavara.

(23) Sulabha, Suvrata, Shura, Vangmayanidhi, Nidhi, Varnashramaguru, Varni, Shatrujita, Shatrutapana, Ashrama, Kshapana.

(24) Kshama, Jnanavana, Achalachala, Pramanabhuta, Durjneya, Suparna, Vayuvahana, Dhanurddhara, Dhanurveda, Gunarashi.

(25) Gunakara, Anantadrishti, Ananda, Danda, Damayita, Dama, Abhivadya, Mahacharya, Vishvakarma, Visharada.

(26) Vitaraga, Vinitatma, Tapasvi, Bhutabhavan, Unmattavesha, Pracchanna, Jitakama, Ajitapriya, Kalyana, Prakriti.

(27) Kalpa, Sarvaloka, Prajapati, Tapasvitaraka, Dhimana, Pradhana, Prabhu, Avyayaya, Lokapa, Antarhitatma.

(28) Kalpadi, Kamalekshana, Vedashastrarthatattvajna, Nityama, Niyamashraya, Chandra, Surya, Shani, Ketu, Virama.

(29) Vidruchhavi, Bhaktigamy, Parabrahma, Mrigavanarpana, Anagha, Adrirajalya, Kanta, Paramatma, Jagadguru, Sarvakarmachala.

(30) Tvashta, Mangalya, Mangalarata, Mahatapa, Dirghatapa, Sthavishtha, Sthavira, Dhruva, Ahaha, Samvatsara.

(31) Vyapti, Pramana, Tapah, Samvatsarakra, Mantra, Pratyaya, Sarvadarshana, Aja, Sarveshvara, Snigddha.

(32) Sarvadi, Agnida, Vasu, Vasumana, Satya, Sarvapapahara, Hara, Amritashashvata, Shanta, Vanahasta.

(33) Pratapavana, Kamandaludhara, Dhanvi, Vedanga, Vedavit, Muni, Bhrajishnu, Bhojana, Bhokta, Lokaneta.

(34) Duradhara, Atindriya, Mahashaya, Sarvavasa, Chatushpatha, Kalayogi, Mahanada, Mahotsaha, Mahavala,, Mahabuddhi, Mahavirya.

(35) Bhutachari, Purandara, Nishachara, Pretachari, Mahashakti, Mahadyuti, Anirdeshyavapu, Shrimana, Sarvaharyamitagati, Vahushruta.

(36) Vahumaya, Niyatatma, Bhavodhava, Narataka, Ojastejodyutikara,

Sarvakamaka, Nrityapriya, Nrityanritya, Prakashatmapratapa,
Buddhaspashtakshara.

(37) Mantra, Sammana, Sarasamplava, Yugadikrita, Yugavarta, Gambhira,
Vrishavahana, Ishta, Vishishta, Shishteshta.

(38) Sharabha, Sharabhadhanusha, Apangnidhi, Adhishtanavijaya, Jayakalavit,
Pratishthita, Pramanajna, Hiranyakavacha, Hari, Virochana.

(39) Suragana, Vidyasha, Vibudhashraya, Valarupa, Balonmathi, Vivarta,
Gahanagruru , Karana, Karta, Sarvavandhavimochana.

(40) Vidvattama, Vitabhaya, Vishvahbarta, Nishakara, Vyavasaya, Vyavasthana,
Sthananda, Jagadadija, Dundubha, Lalita.

(41) Vishva, Bhavatmatmasthita, Vireshvara, Virabhadra, Viraha, Virabhrida, Virata,
Virachudamani, Vetta, Tivrananda.

(42) Nadidhara, Ajnadhara, Trishuti, Shipivishita, Shivalaya, Valakhilya, Mahachapa,
Tigmamashu, Nidhi, Avyaya.

(43) Abhirama, Susharanya, Subrahmanya, Sudhapati, Maghavana, Koushika,
Gomana, Vishrama, Sarvashasana, Lalataksha.

(44) Vishvadeha, Sara, Samsarachakrabhita, Amoghadandi, Madhyastha, Hiranya,
Brahmavarchasi, Paramartha, Paramaya, Shambara.

(45) Vyaghraka, Anala, Ruchi, Vararuchi, Vandya, Ahaspati, Aharpati, Ravivirocha,
Skandha, Shasta.

(46) Vaivasvata, Ajana, Yukti, Unnatakirti, Shantaraga, Parajaya, Kailasapati,
Kamari, Savita, Ravilochana.

(47) Vidvattama, Vitabhaya, Vishvaharta, Nitya, Anivarita, Niyatakalyana,
Punyashravanadkirtana, Durashrava, Vishvasaha, Dhyeya.

(48) Duhsvapnanashana, Uttaraka, Dushkritiha, Durddharsha, Duhsaha, Abhaya,
Anadi, Bhu, Bhulakshmi, Kiriti,

(49) Tridashadhupa, Vishvagopta, Vishvabharta, Sudhira, Ruchirangada, Janana,
Janajanmadi, Pritimana, Nitimana, Naya.

(50) Vishishta, Kashyapa, Bhanu, Bhima, Bhimaparakrama, Pranava, Saptadhachara,
Mahakaya, Mahamadhanu, Janmadhipa.

(51) Mahadeva, Sakaalagamaparaga, Tattvatativivekatma, Vibhushnu,
Bhutibhushana, Rishi, Brahmanavida, Jishnu, Janmamrityujaratiga, Yajna.

(52) Yajnapati, Yajva, Yajnanta, Amogha, Vikrama, Mahendra, Durbhara, Seni,
Yajnanga, Yajnavahana.

(53) Panchabrahmasamutpatti, Vishvesha, Vimalodaya, Atmayoni, Anadyanta,
Shadavimsha, Saptalodhaka, Gayatrivallabha, pramshu, Vishvavasa.

- (54) Prabhakara, Shishu, Girirata, Samrata, Sushena, Surashatruha, Aristamathana, Mukunda, Vigatajvara, Svayamjoti.
- (55) Anujyoti, Atmajayoti, Achanchala, Kapila, Kapilashmashru, Shastranetra, Trayitanu, Jnanaskandha, Mahajnani, Nirutapatti.
- (56) Upaplava, Bhaga, Vivasvana, Aditya, Yogacharya, Brihaspati, Udarakirti, Udyogi, Sadyogi, Sadasanmaya.
- (57) Nakshatramali, Narakesha, Sadhishtana, Shadashraya, Pavitrapani, Papari, Manipura, Manogati, Hritpundarikasina, Shukla.
- (58) Shantavrishakapi, Vishnu, Grahapati, Krishna, Samartha, Arthanashana, Adharmashatru, Akshashya, Puruhuta, Purushtuta.
- (59) Brahmagarbha, Vrihadagarbha, Dharmadhenu, Dhanagama, Jagatahitaishi, Supata, Kumara, Kushalagama, Hiranyavarna, Jyotishmana.
- (60) Nanbhutadhara, Dhvani, Aroga, Niyamadhyaksha, Vishvamisra, Dvijottama, Vrihajyoti, Sudhama, Mahajyoti, Anuttama.
- (61) Matamaha, Matarishva, Nabhasvana, Nagaharadhrika, Pulastya, Pulaha, Agastya, Jatukarna, Parashara, Niravarana.
- (62) Dharmajna, Virincha, Vishtarashrava, Atmabhu, Aniruddha, Atrijnanamurti, Mahayasha, Lokachudamni, Vira, Chandasatya.
- (63) Parakrama, Vyalakalpa, Mahavriksha, Kanadhara, Alankarishnu, Achala, Rochishnu, Vikramottama, Vegi, Ashushabdapati.
- (64) Plavana, Shikhisarathi, Asamsrishta, Atithi, Shatrupramthi, Papanashana, Vasushrava, Kavyavaha, Pratapta, Vishvabhajana.
- (65) Jarya, Jaradhishamana, Lohita, Tananapata, Prishadashva, Nabhahyoni, Supratika, Tamisraha, Nidaghatapana, Megphapaksha.
- (66) Parapuranjaya, Mukhanila, Sunispanna, Surabhi, Shishiratmaka, Vasanta, Madhava, Grishma, Nabhasya, Vijavahana.
- (67) Angira, Muni, Atreya, Vimala, Vishvavahana, Pavana, Purujita, Shatru, Trividya, Naravahana.
- (68) Manovridhi, Ahamkara, Kshetrajna, Kshetrapalaka, Tejonidhi, Jnananidhi, Vipaka, Vighnakaraka, Adhara, Anuttara.
- (69) Jneya, Jyestha, Nishshreyasalaya, Shaila, Naga, Tanu, Deha, Danavari, Arindama, Charudhi.
- (70) Janaka, Charuvishalya, Lokashalyakrita, Chaturveda, Chaturbhava, Chatura, Chaturapriya, Amnaya, Samamaya, Tirthadevashivalaya.
- (71) Vahurupa, Maharupa, Sarvarupa, Charachara, Nyayanirvahaka, Nyaya,

Nyayagamyā, Niranjana, Sahasramurddha, Devendra.

(72) Sarvashastraprabhanjana, Munda, Virupa, Vikrita, Dandi, Gunottama, Pingalaksha, Haryaksha, Nilagriva, Niramaya.

(73) Sahasravahu, Sarvesha, Sharanya, Sarvalokbhrita, Padmasana, Paramjyoti, Paravara, Paramfala, Padmagarbha, Vishvagarbha.

(74) Vichakshana, Paravarajna, Vijesha, Sumukhasumahasana, Devasuragurudeva, Devasurananmaskrita, Devasuramahatra, Devadideva, Devarshidevasuravaraprada, Devasureshvara.

(75) Divya, Devasuramaheshvara, Sarvadevamaya, Achintya, Devatatma, Atmasambhava, Idya, Anisha, Devasimha, Divakara.

(76) Vibudhagravarashreshta, Sarvadevottamottama, Shivajnana, Shrimana, Shikhishriparvatapriya, Jayastambha, Vishishtambha, Narasimhanipatana, Brahmachari, Lokachari.

(77) Dharmachari, Dhanadhipa, Nandi, Nandishvara, Nagna, Nagnavratadhara, Shuchi, Lingadhyaksha, Suradhyaksha, Yugadhyaksha.

(78) Yugavaha, Svavasha, Savamsha, Svargasvara, Svaramayasvana, Vijadhyaksha, Vijakarta, Dhanakrita, Dharmavardhana, Dambha.

(79) Adambha, Mahadambha, Sarvabhutamaheshvara, Shmashananilaya, Tishya, Setu, Apratimakriti, Lokottara, Sfutaloka, Tryamabaka.

(80) Andhakari, Makhadveshi, Vishnukandharapatana, Vitadosha, Akshayaguna, Dakshari, Pushadantahrita, Dhurjati, Khandaparashu, Safala.

(81) Nishfala, Anagha, Adhara, Sakaladhara, Mrida, Pandurabha, Nata, Purna, Purayita, Punya.

(82) Sukumara, Sulochana, Samageya, Priyakara, Punyakirti, Anamaya, Manojava, Tirthavara, Jatila, Jiviteshvara.

(83) Jivitantakara, Nitya, Vasureta, Vasukiya, Sadgati, Satkriti, Sakta, Kalakantha, Kaladhara, Mani.

(84) Manya, Mahakala, Sadbhuti, Satyaparayana, Chandrasanjivana, Shasta, Lokaguda, Amaradhipa, Lokavandhu, Lokanatha.

(85) Kritajnakritibhushana, Anapayakshara, Kanta, Sarvashastrabhutasvara, Tejomayadyutidhara, Lokamaya, Agrani, Anu, Shuchismita, Prasannatma.

(86) Durjaya, Duratikrama, Jyotirmaya, Nirakara, Jagannatha, Jaleshvara, Tumbavini, Mahakaya, Vishoka, Shokanashana.

(87) Trilokatma, Triloksha, Shuddha, Shuddhi, Rathakshaja, Avyaktalakshana, Avyakta, Vishampati, Varashila, Varatula.

(88) Mana, Manadhanamaya, Brahma, Vishnu, Prajapalaka, Hamsa, Hamsagati,

Yama, Vedha, Dhata.

(89) Vidhata, Atta, Harta, Chaturmukha, Kailashashikharavasi, Sarvavasi, Satamgati, Hiranyagarbha, Harnia, Purusha.

(90) Purvajapita, Bhutalaya, Bhutapati, Bhutida, Bhuvaneshvara, Samyogi, Yogavida, Brahmanya, Brahmanapriya, Devapriya.

(91) Devanatha, Devajna, Devachintaka, Vishamaksha, Kaladhyaksha, Vrishanka, Vrishavardhana, Nirmada, Nirahamkara.

(92) Nirmoha, Nirupadrava, Darpaha, Darpita, Dripta, Sarvartuparivartaka, Saptajihva, Sahasrachi, Snigddha, Prakritidakshina.

(93) Bhutabhavyabhavanatha, Prabhava, Bhrantinashana, Artha, Anartha, Mahakosha, Parakavyaikapandita, Nishkantaka, Kritananda, Nirvyaja.

(94) Vyajamardana, Sattvavana, Sattvika, Satyakirti, Stambhakritagama, Akampita, Gunagrahi, Suprita, Sumukha, Naikatmanaikakarmakrita.

(95) Sukshma, Shukara, Dakshina, Skandhadhara, Dhurya, Prakata, Pritivardhana, Aparajita, Sarvasaha, Vidagddha.

(96) Sarvavahana, Adhrita, Svadhrita, Sadhya, Purtamurti, Yashodhara, Varahashringavrika, Vayu, Valavana, Ekanayaka.

(97) Shrutiprakasha, Shrutimana, Ekavandhu, Anekadhrika, Shrivallabha, Shivarambha, Shantabhadra, Samanjasa, Bhushaya, Bhutikrita,

(98) Bhuti, Bhushana, Bhutavahana, Akaya, Bhaktakayastha, Kalajnanai, Kalavapu, Satyavrata, Mahatyagi, Nishthashantiparayana.

(99) Pararthavritti, Varada, Vivittana, Shrutisagara, Anirvinna, Kalankanka, Kalankaha, Svabhavarudra.

(100) Madhyastha, Shatrughna, Madhyanashaka, Shikhandi, Kavachi, Shuli, Chandi, Mundi, Kundali, Khadgi.

(A few of the names are repeated more than once.)

Vishnu and the other gods prayed to Shiva by calling upon him by these thousand names and offering him lotus flowers. Shiva wished to test Vishnu. So he quietly removed a lotus from the ones that had been offered.

Vishnu realized the deception. He plucked out one of his own eyes and rendered it to Shiva as an offering in place of the flower. This pleased Shiva and he appeared. Such was his radiance that the gods, other than Vishnu, could not bear to look at him.

Shiva presented Vishnu with the divine sudarshana chakra. He also restored Vishnu's eye.

Daksha's Yajna

Daksha's daughter was Sati and Sati was married to Shiva. Daksha was thus Shiva's father-in-law.

Daksha once organized a yajna (sacrifice). To this, he invited all the other gods and the sages. But he did not invite Shiva. Sati went to the sacrifice and was insulted by her father. Thereupon, she immolated herself in the fire of the yajna.

Shiva was stricken with grief. He sent Virabhadra to destroy the yajna. The sacrifice was being held in the foothills of Himalayas, in a place named Kankha. Virabhadra completely destroyed the sacrifice. His companions killed many of gods and the sages, and flung their bodies into the water of the Ganga which flowed nearby. Virabhadra plucked out the eyes of the god Bhaga, smashed the teeth of the god Pusha and gave the moon-god a resounding kick. He sliced off Indra's head and the arms of the fire-god Agni. As for Vishnu, a mighty battle raged between Virabhadra and Vishnu. But Vishnu more than met his match and had his head cut for his pains. Daksha's head was also severed by Virabhadra. Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, lost her nose.

Brahma was thunderstruck at all this destruction and started to pray to Virabhadra and Shiva. Shiva was pacified and forgave the gods and the sages. Everything was restored to what it had been prior to Virabhadra beginning his process of destruction.

(The story of Daksha's yajna is one of the more interesting stories in the Puranas. But like most stories, the Linga Purana treats it cursorily. If you are interested in this story, you should read the Mahabharata or the Bhagavata Purana.)

Parvati

Sati was reborn as Parvati, the daughter of Mena (or Menaka) and the Himalayas. She had two sisters named Ekaparna and Ekapatala, although she was the eldest. Parvati was also known as Aparna.

When Parvati was twelve years old, she began to perform very difficult tapasya so that she might attain Shiva as a husband.

At that time, there was a terrible demon named Tarakasura. He was the son of the demon Tara. Tara himself was so powerful that he managed to defeat all the gods. For a thousand years Vishnu fought with Tara, but to no avail. Tara simply picked Vishnu up and flung him far away. Finally, Vishnu prayed to Brahma and obtained all sorts of wonderful powers. With these powers, he managed to kill Tara.

But Tarakasura was still around. He defeated the gods and drove them out of heaven. Vishnu fought with Tarakasura for twenty thousand years, but could do nothing to the demon. The gods fled in desperation to Brahma.

"Don't be so disconsolate," Brahma assured the gods. "Sati has been reborn as Parvati. She will marry Shiva, and she and Shiva will have a son named kartikeya. He will be your general and will defeat Tarakasura."

(According to the Shiva Purana, Tarakasura had obtained a boon from Brahma that only Shiva's son could kill him.)

Meanwhile, Parvati had been meditating so that she might marry Shiva, and Shiva was pleased at these prayers.

The marriage took place amidst a lot of fanfare. The first son to be born was Ganapati, the second was Skanda or Kartikeya.

(More commonly, Skanda is regarded as the elder. The story of how Skanda killed Tarakasura is recounted in the Shiva Purana.)

Upamanyu

There was a boy named Upamanyu who was once taken on a visit to his maternal uncle's house. Compared to his cousins, Upamanyu got inferior and diluted milk to drink.

He therefore told his mother, "Why can't I have better milk to drink?"

His mother started to weep. "My son," she said, "we are poor. We do not have the money to buy you good milk."

But so insistent was her son, that the mother ground some rice with water and gave it to her son to drink, pretending that it was milk. As soon as he tasted what his mother gave him. Upamanyu realized that it was not milk and began to cry even more profusely.

Finally the mother told the son, "Please do not cry. Unfortunately, we are poor. The only option left for those who suffer from misfortune is to pray to Shiva. Perhaps we are amiss in that we did not pray to Shiva in our earlier lives. Why don't you pray to Shiva now?"

Upamanyu started to meditate. He built a hermitage in the Himalyas.

Shiva decided to test Upamanyu. He appeared before the boy in the guise of Indra and said, "I am pleased with your tapasya and will grant you a boon. What boon do you wish for?"

"I am indeed fortunate that the king of the gods has come to visit me," replied Upamanyu. "Please grant me the boon that I may be devoted to Shiva."

"Who is this Shiva?" asked the fake Indra. "I am the king of the gods, I am much superior to that upstart. Worship me instead."

Upamanyu was not prepared to hear such insults hurled at Shiva. He thought that he had committed a great sin in allowing such insults to be uttered in his presence. He therefore prepared to kill himself. Shiva now appeared before Upamanyu in his own form and blessed the boy. Through Shiva's grace, Upamanyu never suffered from a lack of milk to drink.

Subsequently, Upamanyu taught the pashupata vrata to Krishna.

The Linga Purana now has some section on the virtues of being devoted to Vishnu. It also describes various rites that must be observed in praying to Shiva.

Epilogue

Lomaharshana completed his recital of the Linga Purana and the assembled sages were thrilled with what they had heard. They bowed down in obeisance before Shiva.

The Linga Purana is most sacred. Brahma himself has said that a person who reads it is forgiven all his sins. Reading this text is far superior to meditating, performing sacrifices, or donating alms. Brahma cannot possibly be wrong.

The sages thanked Lomaharshana for his pains and went their several ways.