

Mother Simhalika (Holika) and Son Acharya Swarbhanu (Rahu and Ketu) (Based on Sanatan Tales)

Author

Dr. Yatendra Sharma





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PUBLISHER



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SWARBHANU (RAHU EVAM KETU)
(BASED ON SANATAN TALES)
(ENGLISH)**

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	5
DISCLAIMER.....	6
MOTHER SIMHALIKA (HOLIKA)	7
Foreword.....	8
Birth and Parents	11
Childhood	18
Deeksha from Lord Fire (Agnidev)	26
Blessings of Mother Ganga.....	30
Marriage with Viprichitti	33
Return of Hiranyakashipu	42
Havoc of Hiranyakashipu.....	52
Holika	56
Worshipping Holika	65
ACHARYA SWARBHANU	68
(RAHU AND KETU)	68
Foreword.....	69
Birth	73
Guru Shukracharya	80
Acharya Title to Swarbhanu.....	96
Marriage	101
Severe Penance	114
Daughter Prabha	125
Jayanti	138
Devayani	142
Chakravarti Emperor Mahabali	153
Vaaman Incarnation	182
Crown Prince Baan	198
Churning of Ocean (Samudra Manthan)	219
Justice - Saturn, Rahu and Ketu.....	238
OBJECTIVES OF SHRI RAM KATHA	242
SANSTHAN PERTH (INC)	242
AUTHOR: DR YATENDRA SHARMA.....	244

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MOTHER SIMHALIKA (HOLIKA)



Foreword

Holi is widely regarded as one of India's most celebrated festivals, bringing people together from all over the world. Often referred to as the 'festival of colours and love', it is a day when people come together and put past resentments and ill feelings behind them. This vibrant celebration begins on the evening of Poornima (Full Moon Day) in the Hindu month of Phalgun with Holika Dahan, with the lighting of the Holi pyre. The following day, people celebrate with immense joy by applying colours to one another and exchanging warm embraces.

Vedic literature, legends and folklore offer different accounts of the origins of Holi. The most popular version tells of the tyrannical king Hiranyakashipu, who grew so powerful that he forced his subjects to worship him as a God. Much to his fury, his own son Prahalad refused to comply, remaining an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu instead. When all attempts to force or persuade Prahalad failed, the king tried to kill him.

Following several failed attempts, the enraged king conspired with his sister, Simhalika. She possessed a divine blanket, a gift from Agni Dev (the Lord of Fire), which made her immune to flames. She was instructed to sit on a blazing pyre with Prahalad on her lap. She was ultimately consumed by the fire, while Prahalad emerged entirely unharmed. Holi is, therefore, traditionally celebrated to mark the joyful deliverance of Prahalad, the devotee, from the flames.

When I was young, I often wondered: If Holika was truly evil, why was she worshipped as a Goddess right before the pyre was lit? My learned grandfather put me right, explaining that Holika was not a wicked being. Her real name was Simhalika.

She was the daughter of the great sage Kashyapa and his wife Diti, and the sister of the Daitya clan kings Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. The two brothers were the reincarnations of Jaya and Vijaya, the celestial gatekeepers of Lord Vishnu. They were cursed by the Rishis Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Sanat Kumara to be born as Rakshasas (demonic entities) on Earth.

Simhalika was a devoted follower of the Agni Dev (Lord of Fire), who gave her a fire immune blanket as blessings. Despite being married to king Viprichitti of the Daanava clan for many years, she was unable to conceive. Her brother Hiranyakashipu, out of generosity, gave her one of his sons, Ahlad, to adopt. Although she was deeply grateful to her brother, Simhalika found herself in a terrible dilemma when Hiranyakashipu demanded her help to kill Prahalad. He ordered her to sit in the pyre with fire immune blanket with Prahlad. While this blessed blanket will give her immunity from the fire, the fire will burn the boy alive.

Simhalika loved Prahalad as much as her own adopted son, Ahlad. When she hesitated to obey his command, the enraged Hiranyakashipu threatened to execute her husband and adopted son. Realising that her family's death would mean the end of her world anyway, she did choose the path of ultimate sacrifice. She reasoned that if her death could save her husband, her adopted son and her devout nephew Prahalad, she would embrace it with dignity.

As she sat on the pyre, she selflessly wrapped the protective blanket around Prahalad instead of herself. Prahalad survived, but she was consumed by the flames. In honour of her profound sacrifice, she is revered as 'Holika', the Goddess of the pyre, before the annual celebrations of Holi begin.

I realise that the story of Simhalika (Holika) is not widely known by general public. Many people think that she was the evil sister of the Daitya Vanshaj clan kings Hrayanaksh and Hiranyakashipu, based on some mythological stories. I, therefore, wrote this about Simhalika's (Holika's) life. I hope this would raise awareness that she was not an evil person (Rakshasi), but a great devotee of the Lord of Fire and a wonderful daughter of Maharishi Kashyap and Mother Diti.

A question may arise in one's mind. If Simhalika was not evil person, why were her brothers Hryanaksh and Hiryanakashipu? According to the Shruti, no one is born evil; it is a person's deeds (karma) that define them. When a person succumbs to the four negative tendencies (vikāras)—arrogance (ahānkar), lust (kāma), anger (krodha), and greed (lobha)—they turn towards darkness. While Simhalika remained pure, her brothers were consumed entirely by these flaws.

My sources of information to write this story are numerous legends (Poranik) and folk tales. I hope that readers will enjoy this short story.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.



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Birth and Parents

Maharishi Kashyap was visiting Soron (सोरों), where his wife Diti had been staying for some time in one of his Ashrams on the banks of the Ganges. He was always mesmerized by the beauty of the River Mother Ganga. Nowhere on Earth gave him such peace of mind as the banks of the River Mother Ganga.

The very name 'Ganga' conjures up an image of holiness, peace, joy, beauty, sweetness and all that uplifts the mind. The Ganges is not just a River. She symbolizes something much higher than anything else on Earth. While the Himalayas are a Yogi steeped in meditation, Mother Ganga, rising from his heart, is the culmination of that meditation. She blesses everyone, whether good or bad. She blesses everyone, providing both physical and spiritual nourishment. She is the life and soul of every living thing. She is the bridge between Heaven and Earth. She embodies civility in the form of water. Sinners may pollute her waters by bathing in them, but She remains as holy as ever, retaining Her sanctifying powers. Truth is her eternal message. To saints, God and truth are synonymous. The saints revere Mother Ganga because She is the 'Mother'. Not only does She protect and rein in the souls of the saints, She also teaches and guides them.

As he meditated on the beauty of Mother Ganga, a prayer arose from his heart.

देवि सुरेश्वरि भगवति गङ्गे त्रिभुवनतारिणि तरलतरङ्गे ।
शङ्करमौलिविहारिणि विमले मम मतिरास्तां तव पदकमले ॥

**Devi Sureshvari Bhagavati Gange Tribhuvana-
Taarinni Tarala-Tarangge |
Shangkara-Mauli-Vihaarinni Vimale Mama
Matir-Aastaam Tava Pada-Kamale ||**

O Goddess Bhagavati Ganga, Goddess of the Devas, You liberate the three worlds with the waves of Your merciful water. O Pure One, You reside in the head of Shankar. May my devotion remain firmly established on Your lotus feet.

Maharishi's meditation was interrupted by the voice of one of his female disciples, Kadambini, "O Gurudev Maharishi, congratulations! Mother Diti has been blessed with a girl."

A girl! She would be born through the blessings of Mother Prakriti (Nature). He remembered what his son, the Lord of Fire, had told him once: 'O father, aunt Diti will soon be blessed with a girl who will be my ardent devotee. She will be born with the blessings of Mother Nature. She will be blessed by Me as well as by Lord Vaman. One day, she will protect the great devotee of Lord Vishnu, and her name will become immortal.'

Hearing the voice of his female disciple, Kadambini, Maharishi Kashyap was thrilled with joy and rushed to the hermitage where his beloved wife, Diti, had just given birth to this divine girl. He took the girl from her lap and held her in his arms, shouting, 'O Simhalika (Friend of Lion/Lioness), welcome to my family!'

Maharishi Kashyap was no ordinary Rishi (Saint). He was the grandson of Lord Brahma and the son of Maharishi Maruchi, the Manas-Putra of Lord Brahma. He was one of the Saptarishis, the others being Maharishi Agastya, Maharishi Atri, Maharishi Bhardwaj, Maharishi Gautama, Maharishi Jamadagni and Maharishi Vashistha. He composed many hymns of the Vedas and authored

numerous books on Sanatan Dharma philosophy, Ayurvedic medicine and classical music. Some of the books he wrote are listed below.

The Kashyap Samhita (also known as the Vriddadjivakiya or Jivakiya Tantra) is a classical reference book on Ayurvedic paediatrics, gynaecology, and obstetrics. It was written in the form of a dialogue between Maharishi Kashyap and his disciple Vriddhajivaka. It covers topics such as caring for babies and diseases affecting children and women.

The Kashyapa Jnanakandah is a book of great wisdom that defines the Vaishnavism tradition.

The Kashyap Dharmasutra describes the principles of living a peaceful life for kings, pupils, and religious personalities (Dharma Gurus).

The Kashyap Samhita is a treatise on music. It explains the Viniyoga of each Rasa and Bhava in music.

Kashyapa's Alankar explains the theory of Alankar (musical note decorations).

The Kasyapasilpa (also known as the Amsumad Agama, the Kasyapiya or the Silpashastra) is a Sanskrit treatise on architecture, iconography, decorative arts and so on.

Several folk tales are also associated with Maharishi Kashyap as the founder of Kashmir. According to one story in the Neelmat Purana, the whole of Bharat was once submerged due to a terrible inundation. Over time, as the floodwaters receded, most of Bharat became habitable again. However, a vast region in the Himalayas in Northern India remained submerged. This stagnant water formed a large lake. A volcanic eruption occurred in the lake, causing

cracks in the mountain peaks on its banks and allowing the water to drain away. Thus, a beautiful place was formed. Once, when Maharishi Kashyap was passing through the area, he was mesmerised by its beauty. He decided to build his Ashram there. Using his divine powers, he cut the mountains and levelled the land. Although he successfully made this place habitable, there was a need for a canal to permanently drain the stagnant lake. Maharishi Kashyap sought the assistance of Lord Shiva. He meditated on Him. Lord Shiva appeared, and at Maharishi Kashyap's request, He struck his trident and a river flowed from the spot. This spot was called 'Vitasta'.

This river flowed smoothly, quenching the inhabitants' thirst and irrigating and making cultivable many areas before finally joining the Indus River. Once the area had been fully levelled and the banks of the Vitasta (Jhelum) had been completed, Maharishi Kashyap established his Ashram here. He entrusted his son Neel with the management of the Ashram. The Ashram's panoramic beauty and that of the surrounding area attracted many people from all over Bharat to this place. They migrated here to live in this beautiful region and the Ashram became like a country. This is how the state of Kashmir was founded.

The Puranas and Epics of the Indian tradition mention Maharishi Kashyap as the progenitor of humankind. At the behest of his father, Lord Brahma, Daksh Prajapati married his thirteen daughters to Maharishi Kashyap in order to increase the human population. The thirteen daughters of Daksh Prajapati were Aditi, Diti, Kadru, Danu, Arishta, Surasa, Surabhi, Vinata, Tamra, Krodhavasha, Ira, Vishva and Muni.

According to the Vishnu Purana and the Vayu Purana, Kashyapa is said to be the father of all the clans, including the Devas, the Daanavas, the Yakshas, the Daityas, and all

other living creatures through his thirteen wives. The children of his first wife, Aditi, were Indra, Varuna, Parjanya, Mitra, Anshu, Pushan, Dhriti, Agni, Aryaman, Surya, Bhaga and Vamana. They are known as the Adityas, or the Children of Aditi. The children from his second wife, Diti, were Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashipu, and Simhalika, known as the Daityas (children of Diti). The children from his third wife, Danu, were Puloman and Viprichitti, known as the Daanavas (children of Danu). The children of his fourth wife, Arishta, were the Gandharvas, who were skilled in dance and music. The children of his fifth wife, Surasa, were the Nagas (snakes). The children from his sixth wife Khasa were the Yakshas; the eldest son was Kubera. The children of his seventh wife, Surabhi, were the cows Kamdhenu and Nandini. The children from his eighth wife, Vinata, were Aruna and Garuda. The children of his ninth wife, Tamara, were the goddesses of the animal kingdom. His tenth wife, Krodhavasha, also gave birth to snakes. They joined the clan of Surasa and were also known as Nagas. The children of his eleventh wife, Ila, were the Goddesses of all vegetation (plants, trees, etc.). His twelfth wife, Kadru, gave birth to Ananta, Vasuki, Takshaka and Nahusha. They also joined the clan of Surasa and were known as Nagas. The children of his thirteenth wife, Muni, were the Apsaras. The most prominent of these were Orvashi, Menaka, Rambha and Thilothama.

Thus, Maharishi Kashyap was a great divine personality at the beginning of the era of progeny on Earth.

Diti, the mother of Simhalika, was one of Prajapati Daksh's 66 daughters. From childhood, Diti was very fond of her elder sister, Sati. As we know, Sati was an incarnation of Mother Prakriti (Nature).

When Lord Brahma decided to elevate his son Daksh to the status of 'Prajapati' (Lord of all inhabitants), he knew that

Daksh would be unable to fulfil the duties of this great responsibility without the blessings of 'Mother Nature (Prakriti)'. He instructed Daksh that, before he could be given the title of 'Prajapati', he must pray and meditate on Mother Nature (Prakriti). He should please Her through devotion and receive Her blessings so that She would be born into his family as his daughter. Accordingly, Daksh and his wife, Prasuti, went to the forest and meditated on Mother Nature (Prakriti). Mother Nature (Prakriti) was pleased with their prayers and devotion and blessed them, saying that She would soon be born as their daughter. However, She stipulated that She would leave them if they or any of their family members ever insulted Her. This was the reason why Sati immolated Herself when Prajapati Daksh insulted Her husband Lord Shiva and Herself during a Yajña ceremony.

After Mother Nature (Prakriti) made this promise to Daksh and Prasuti, Brahmishi Narad approached Her with another problem. Jay and Vijay, the security chiefs of Lord Vishnu, had been cursed by the Sanat Kumars (sons of Brahmadev) to be born on Earth as Daanavas. Jay and Vijay were divine and powerful personalities who were very dear to Lord Vishnu. It would not have been possible for an ordinary woman to carry them in her womb for nine months and give birth to them. Lord Vishnu sent Brahmishi Narad to Mother Nature (Prakriti) to find a solution to this problem. Lord Vishnu desired that Mother Nature (Prakriti) bless an appropriate woman with the strength to bear these two powerful beings in her womb. Mother Nature (Prakriti) obeyed Lord Vishnu's instructions and called Her friend Dharaa. She asked her to be born as Her sister into the family of Daksh, and to eventually marry Maharishi Kashyap and bear the powerful twins Jay and Vijay. Only Mother Dharaa had the ability and strength to do so. She accepted the instructions of

Mother Nature (Prakriti) and prepared to be born as Her sister in the family of Daksh.

The cow, the carrier of Mother Dharaa, was listening to the conversation between these two friends. She prayed to Mother Nature (Prakriti) and Mother Dharaa, requesting that she be allowed to accompany them, as she could not bear to be separated from them. The two mothers agreed and blessed her, saying that she would also be reborn as the daughter of Dharaa in the next life.

The cow, the carrier of Mother Dharaa, was a great friend of the lioness, the carrier of Mother Nature (Prakriti), and was often called Simhmitra (सिंह मित्र), meaning 'friend of the lioness'.

Mother Nature (Prakriti) blessed Daksh and Prasuti, and took birth as their daughter, Sati. Dharaa was also born to Daksh and another wife Panchajini, and was named Diti. When Diti married Maharishi Kashyap, she gave birth to the reincarnations of Jay and Vijay, who were named Hryanaaksha and Hirnyakashipu. She also gave birth to her carrier in previous life, cow named Simhmitra. In this new life, she was named Simhalika, another name for Simhmitra, meaning 'friend of the lioness'. As Maharishi Kashyap was omniscient, he knew the stories behind the incarnations of Diti and the cow. Thus, he gave his daughter the appropriate name of Simhalika (friend of the lioness).

Childhood

Soon after Simhalika was born, her father the sage Kashyap, left to provide spiritual guidance to his disciples at other Ashrams. It was said that he had gone to the direction of North-West towards the Himalayas. He worked hard to establish a new Ashram there and named it Kashmir. Meanwhile, one of his disciples, Rudra, looked after and managed Maharishi Kashyap's Ashram in Soron on the banks of the Mother Ganga. Simhalika grew up in this Ashram with her two older siblings, Hryanksha and Hirnyakashipu, under the care of their mother Diti.

Hirnyakashipu, the younger of the two brothers, was her beloved brother. The older brother, Hryanaaksha, was arrogant and rude. He used to tease her very often. She never liked him. Whenever he teased her, she would run to Hirnyakashipu and complain about him. Hirnyakashipu would pacify her saying that Hryanaaksha loved her from the bottom of his heart but was not the type of person to express his love and affection. He used to advise her to ignore him. She used to wonder how such a polite, kind and loving person as Hirnyakashipu could be friends with his older brother Hryanaaksha, who was the complete opposite!

Time passed. Simhalika became a four-year-old girl. One day when she woke up, she saw that there were lots of activities going on at the Ashram. The Ashram was being cleaned and decorated with flowers everywhere. Red carpets had been laid from the entrance to the guest room. The kitchen was busy preparing meals for the many guests. Simhalika was very curious to find out what was going on. She went to her brother, Hirnyakashipu, to ask him. He told her that their aunt Danu, the sister of their mother Diti, was visiting with her two sons, Puloman and Viprichitti, along with many servants and maids. Aunt

Danu and her entourage were visiting to convey a message to us. Simhalika had heard of her aunt Danu, but did not know much about her. “Who is this aunt Danu, Bhaiya?” she asked politely.

“Danu is our aunt, my lovely sister Simhalika. She and our mother Diti are real sisters, the daughters of our grandmother Panchajini and grandfather Prajapati Daksh. She is visiting us with her two sons, Puloman and Vipirichitti. I heard that there is animosity between the sons of our aunts Aditi and Danu. Our aunt Aditi is the half-sister of our mother Diti and aunt Danu. She was born to our grandfather Prajapati Daksh and another wife Prasuti. The sons of aunt Aditi are known as the Adityas (Devas), and her eldest son is Indra. The Adityas and the Daanavas, the sons of aunts Aditi and Danu respectively, are our half-brothers. I was told that Indra has threatened to kill Puloman', said Hirnyakashipu.

“How cruel is it for a brother to threaten to kill his own another brother?” exclaimed Simhalika.

“You are too young to understand this, Simhalika. When you grow up, you will understand the animosity between brothers. Now go and play. Aunt Danu’s son, Vipirichitti, is the same age as you. You will be very happy to meet him. Plan some good, happy days ahead with him. Play together and enjoy your time with him,” said Hirnyakashipu, and he left. He had to make preparations to welcome his aunt, Danu, and her entourage.

(Note: the sons of Aditi were known as the Adityas or Devas, the sons of Danu as the Daanavas, and the sons of Diti as the Daityas. Therefore, the Adityas or Devas, Daanavas and Daityas are clans, and their classification as gods or evils is not necessarily implied. However, the

behavior of the Daanavas and Daityas led to them becoming synonymous with the evils (Daanavas).

Aunt Danu, accompanied by her two sons and several servants, arrived as scheduled. They were welcomed by everyone in the Ashram led by Mother Diti. Mother Diti and Aunt Danu hugged each other. They were moved to see each other again after a long time and tears came to their eyes. Puloman and Viprichitti both touched the feet of Mother Diti. Similarly, Hryanaaksha, Hirnyakashipu and Simhalika also touched the feet of aunt Danu. Puloman and Viprichitti greeted Hirnyakashipu and Hryanaaksha with great love and affection, and hugged them. Simhalika also greeted them both.

She was very happy to meet Viprichitti. He was, of course, her age, very handsome and had a friendly, smiling face. His voice was sweet and polite.

'Thank goodness, Viprichitti is not like my older brother Hryanaaksha. He seems to be a kind and sweet young man, like my brother Hirnyakashipu. I am sure our friendship will be great,' thought Simhalika.

Mother Diti took aunt Danu to her private room. Meanwhile, Hryanaaksha and Hirnyakashipu took Puloman to their room. Hirnyakashipu asked Simhalika to take Viprichitti with her and show him the Ashram. Simhalika was very happy as she had acquired a great treasure to meet Viprichitti, a friend of her age. She had never had the company of someone her own age at the Ashram before. Her two brothers, Hryanaaksha and Hirnyakashipu, were much older than her and behaved more like her father than loving brothers or friends. Although Hirnyakashipu was kind, loving and polite to her, he still behaved more like an older brother than a friend. Hryanaaksha was very disciplined, rude and never spoke kindly to her. She had

always wished for a sibling or friend of a similar age. She found a friend in Viprichitti.

She showed Viprichitti everything she liked most around the Ashram. She showed him the beautiful gardens of the Ashram and then took him to the banks of the Mother Ganga. Simhalika was a very good singer with a sweet voice. She sang a few songs composed by her father, Maharishi Kashyap, and danced around. Viprichitti was mesmerized by her beauty, sweet voice and pure heart. They were both very happy and enjoyed their day thoroughly.

Aunt Danu and her sons stayed at the Ashram for a week. Each day of that week left a lasting impression on Simhalika. She would take Viprichitti to the Ashram gardens and the banks of the Mother Ganga every morning, where they would play, sing and dance. When she heard that aunt Diti and her sons, Puloman and Viprichitti, were leaving the Ashram to return home, she was very sad. After saying goodbye to Viprichitti, she went to the banks of the Mother Ganga and cried a lot.

She noticed that the atmosphere at the Ashram had changed a lot since aunt Danu left. Everyone seemed sad. Mother Danu and her brothers, Hryanaaksha and Hirnyakashipu, no longer smiled or seemed cheerful. She wondered what had gone wrong, and why everyone in the family was so sad after aunt Danu's visit. She wanted to ask her mother, her brothers and some senior Ashram members, but nobody would tell her anything. Then, one day, her brother Hirnyakashipu took her on his lap, filled with love and affection, and took her to the banks of the Mother Ganga.

'Simhalika, brother Hryanaaksha and I are leaving the Ashram early tomorrow morning to meditate on Lord Brahma in the forest. We must seek His protection and

blessings for our well-being. It is necessary for our survival. The sons of our aunt Aditi (the Adityas) led by their eldest brother Indra, have threatened to destroy us so that they can rule over us. Unfortunately, our father, the Sage Kashyapa, is silent and neutral on this issue. He has left this matter to be decided by us alone. Aunt Danu came to visit us and told us all these stories. Her son, Puloman, has already been threatened with death by Indra. I have been told that Indra will soon approach us with the intention of killing both of your brothers, Hryanaaksha, and me. Before that happens, we should seek divine blessings and boons, including weapons, from Lord Brahma to protect us. Lord Vishnu will not help us as He is siding with our aunt Aditi. One of her sons, Vaaman, is said to be an incarnation of His energies. Lord Shiva is in meditation after the self-immolation of His wife Sati, so He may not be approached. Mother Diti and Sati, wife of Lord Mahadev, were very good friends. In this time of difficulty, we miss Her dearly. If She were alive, She would stand by us and the sons of Aditi would not dare to harm us. But alas, she is no longer with us. Our only hope now is Lord Brahma. We are therefore leaving the Ashram to meditate on Him and receive His blessings. You must now look after Mother Diti and the Ashram," said Hirnyakashipu.

Simhalika was stunned. She was yet to recover from the sadness of Viprichitti's departure, and now his brothers, Hryanaaksha and Hirnyakashipu, wanted to leave her and the mother, Diti, too.

She started crying. "No, no, bhaiya, you will not go anywhere. I cannot survive without you. Why can't you send brother Hryaanaksha for this meditation instead? Why do you have to go?" screamed Simhalika. She didn't mind if her brother Hryaanaksha had to go to the forest to meditate.

“Try to understand, Simhalika. Hryaanaksha alone cannot do this. We have to do it together and ask Lord Brahma for protection. Imagine that when we return in a few years, we will all be living very good lives. Then I promise you I will never leave you,' said Hirnyakashipu.

Suddenly, Simhalika felt as though she had grown old. She never wanted anyone in her family to be killed. She thought that perhaps it was better to be separated from her beloved brothers for a few years than to be separated from them forever if they were killed. She decided to let them go to the forest to meditate and ask Lord Brahma for the boons they needed to protect them all.

"Alright, Bhaiyaa. If you think that is best for all of us, then so be it. Please go to the forest, meditate on Lord Brahma, and seek His protection and blessings. What should I do in your absence to keep mother happy?" asked Simhalika.

“Mother Diti understands all this, and we are leaving for the forest with her blessings. I am sure she will cope with all the difficulties and troubles until we return. However, if any trouble or difficulty arises that you and mother Diti cannot resolve, please feel free to contact Vaaman, the son of aunt Aditi. Vaaman is a very just person. He will not allow his other brothers to do us any wrong in our absence. If you cannot find him as He spends most of His time meditating and roaming into the forests, you can trust the Lord of Fire (Agni Dev), who is also the son of aunt Aditi. He is a good friend of mine and will do His best to stop His brothers from bothering our family while we are away. I have sent Him a message to visit our Ashram as soon as possible and to console you and mother Diti. I am sure that He will come soon. You can trust Him and approach Him at any time,” said Hirnyakashipu.

Little Simhalika put her head on her brother's shoulder and sobbed for a long time. Her brother, Hirnyakashipu, continued to show her love and affection, allowing her to sob. She did not realize that she had fallen asleep in his lap. When she woke up the next morning, she saw her mother Diti crying. Both the brothers, Hryanaaksha and Hirnyakashipu, had left for the forest to meditate.

Time passed. One day, when she woke up, she saw a young man talking to her mother. She had never seen this man in the Ashram before. She was curious to know who he was and why he was talking to her mother. She went to the room where the two of them were talking. When the man saw Simhalika, he stood up and took her on his lap.

“You may not know me, Simhalika, but I am your half-brother, the Lord of Fire (Agni Dev), and a friend of your brother, Hirnyakashipu. I apologize for not coming immediately when I received Hirnyakashipu's message to come and see you and aunt Diti as soon as possible,” said the young man.

"Lord of Fire, Bhaiyaa. Yes, brother Hirnyakashipu told me about you. I was waiting for You to come and console us. Look how empty the Ashram feels without brothers Hryanaaksha and Hirnyakashipu. Our father, Maharishi Kashyap has also not visited us for a long time either. We heard that he is building a new Ashram in the North-West and is very busy.” said Simhalika.

‘Now that I am here, I will do my best to assist you and aunt Diti. I know I can't replace Hryanaaksha and Hirnyakashipu, but I will certainly give my love and affection to my sister, Simhalika. I will stay here until you feel safe and are well educated. I will accept you as my disciple and teach you everything a Guru can teach”, said Lord of Fire (Agni Dev).

“My humble Pranams to my brother and now my Guru, Lord of Fire (Agni Dev). Please accept me as your disciple and forgive me for being a stupid young sister if I do not meet your expectations as your disciple,” said Simhalika.

Deeksha from Lord Fire (Agnidev)

The next day, during the Brahma Muhurta period before dawn, Simhalika was awoken by Agni Dev, the Lord of Fire, and taken to the banks of the Mother Ganga. When she finished her daily obligatory actions (nitya-karma), then a purification and initiation ceremony was performed by Guru Agni Dev.

गंगे च यमुने चैव गोदावरि सरस्वती ।
नर्मदे सिन्धु कावेरी जलेअस्मिन्सन्मिधिं कुरु ॥

Gange cha Yamune Chaiv Godavari Saraswati.
Narmade Sindhu Kaveri Jaleasminsandhi Kuru.

O Mothers of all Rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri, please purify me with your holy waters.

ॐ अपवित्रः पवित्रो वा सर्वावस्थां गतोऽपि वा ।
यः स्मरेत् पुण्डरीकाक्षं स बाह्यभ्यंतर शुचिः॥

Om Apvatrah Pavitro Va Sarvaavasthaam Gato Api Vaa.
Yah Smaret Pudreekaaksham S Baahybyntar Shuchih.

Those who remember the lotus-eyed Lord (Vishnu) gain inner and outer purity, regardless of whether places are permeated with purity or impurity.

यानि कानि पापानि जन्मान्तरकृतानि च ।
तानि तानि प्रणश्चन्ति प्रदक्षिणा पदे-पदे ॥

Yaani Kaani Paapaani Janmaantarkrataan i Cha.
Taani Taani Pranshchanti Pradakshina pade Pade.

O Lord, I have committed many sins throughout my life. I beg you to forgive me for each one as I go around God in my Pradakshina.

**मंत्र हीनं क्रियाहीनं भक्तिहीनं जनार्दन ।
यत्पूजितं मया देव परिपूर्णं तदस्तु मे ॥**

**Mantra Heenam, Kriya Heenam, Bhakti Heenam
Janaardana.
Yatpujitam Mayaa Deva Paripurnam tadasthu Me.**

O God, I worship You without the knowledge of Mantras, rituals or devotion. Please accept my worship despite these shortcomings.

**ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय । ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥**

**Om Asato Ma a Sad-Gamaya.
Tamaso Maa Jyotir-Gamaya.
Mrtyor-Maa Amrtam Gamay.
Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih.**

Om, O Lord, do not keep me in the phenomenal world of unreality, but lead me towards the reality of the eternal self. Do not keep me in ignorance, but lead me to spiritual knowledge. Do not keep me in the world of mortality, but lead me to the world of immortality of self-realisation. Om, peace, peace, peace.

Simhalika prayed:

**ॐ महाज्वालाय विद्महे अग्नि मध्याय धीमहि ।
तन्नोः अग्नि प्रचोदयात ॥**

**Om Mahajwalay Vidmahe Agni Madhyay Dhimahi.
Tanno Agnih Prachodayat.**

Om. Let me meditate on the great flame. O God of Fire, grant me a higher intellect. Let the radiant God of Fire illuminate my mind.

Simhalika was a very disciplined and obedient disciple. She would get up early in the morning during the Brahma Muhurta period, complete her daily obligatory actions (nitya-karma), sanctify herself by taking a dip in the Mother Ganga, and prepare to take lessons from her Guru, Agni Dev. She maintained a strict fruit-only diet throughout her entire period of education with Lord of Fire (Agni Dev).

She was curious to know why her cousin Indra (the son of her aunt Aditi) was hostile towards her cousin Puloman (the son of her aunt Danu). However, she found it difficult to muster the courage to ask her Guru such question. However, one day when the Lord of Fire was in a good mood, she asked Him this question.

Agni Dev said, “On your question about the animosity between Puloman (the son of your aunt Danu) and Indra (the son of your aunt Aditi), I can only say that it is due to their ambition to rule the Universe. Both Indra and Puloman want to be the Lord of the Universe. The Daanava Vritra, a giant cobra-type Daanava, was an obstacle to the world's prosperity and happiness. He prevented rain and sunshine from reaching the Earth. Indra fought and killed Vritra, annihilating his deceitful forces (Maya), thereby bringing rain and sunshine back to the Universe. Lord Brahma was very happy with his bravery and declared him a friend of humanity. He made him the king of Heaven and gave him the city of Amaravati as his capital. Vritra was a close friend of Puloman. Vritra and Puloman were planning to conquer the Universe and rule together. Indra's killing of Vritra upset Puloman's plans, and he became a bitter enemy of Lord Indra, vowing to take revenge for killing his best friend. Indra also fell in love with Puloman's daughter, Sachi, and wanted to marry her. Since Puloman refused this

alliance, Indra eloped with Sachi and married her. This also annoyed Puloman, who became an enemy of Indra with only one ambition: to kill him. You are too young to understand many of these issues, so you shouldn't worry about them. All your brothers are capable of looking after themselves and their welfare. For now, you should concentrate on your studies and look after your mother until Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu return from meditating with Lord Brahma,” said the Lord of Fire (Agni Dev).

The Lord of Fire, Agni Dev, stayed at the Ashram of his aunt, Diti, for a while, continuing to educate Simhalika in the Vedas, warfare, politics, and management. She was a very obedient, loyal and disciplined disciple who served her Guru, Agni Dev, with her heart and soul. The Lord of Fire was very pleased with her devotion. Once her education was complete, He decided to leave the Ashram and asked his aunt Diti for permission to do so. Before leaving, He blessed Simhalika and gave her a fireproof blanket as his blessings.

Simhalika was very happy in the company of her Guru and forgot all about her brothers, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. However, when He left, she became lonely again and would go to the banks of the Mother Ganga to chat with Mother Ganga for several hours.

Blessings of Mother Ganga

As stated above, Simhalika used to go to the banks of the Mother Ganga early in the morning. After taking a holy dip, she would sing Her praises.

तव चेन्मातः स्रोतःस्नातः पुनरपि जठरे सोऽपि न जातः ।
नरकनिवारिणि जाह्नुवि गङ्गेकलुषविनाशिनि महिमोत्तुङ्गे ॥

**Tav Chenmaatah Strotah Snaatah Punrapi Jathare
Soapi Na Jaatah.
Naragnivaarinin Jaahanavi Gange Kalushvinaashini
Mahimottunge.**

(Salutations to Devi Ganga) O Mother, whoever bathes in Your pure water will not be reborn. Jahnvi Ganga, You continue to save people from falling into Naraka (hell) and destroying their sins. O Mother Ganga, I pray to your greatness.

Mother Ganga was pleased with her devotion and appeared before her in person one day.

"O my pious daughter, I bless you so that you will not be reborn. Your sacrifice of one day of your life in service to Lord Vishnu will please Him greatly, and you will attain salvation," Mother Ganga blessed her.

Simhalika could not understand Mother Ganga's mystic words, but she fell at Her feet.

"Mother, I am very lonely. I miss my brothers, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. Please bless me so that they return soon," Simhalika requested of Mother Ganga.

"Sure, Simhalika. Your brother Hiranyakashipu will return soon after receiving his desired boons from Lord Brahma. Hiranyaaksha has chosen a different fate. You will find out

in due course of time. However, before your brother returns and you see him, you will receive good news. You will soon meet your childhood sweetheart, Viprichitti, and marry him. You will have a blessed marriage with him until you sacrifice your life in the service to Lord Vishnu. I cannot tell you anything more now. Go home and prepare to meet Viprichitti. You will soon marry him," replied Mother Ganga.

After blessing Simhalika, Mother Ganga disappeared into the holy water.

"My brother Hiranyaaksha has chosen a different fate," murmured Simhalika. She could not comprehend this. However, after learning from Mother Ganga that her brother, Hiranyakashipu, was returning soon, she became cheerful. Somehow, she felt in her heart that it really didn't matter if her brother Hiranyaaksha didn't return and had chosen a different path. She missed her loving brother Hiranyakashipu very much. The thought of meeting Viprichitti and marrying him made her even happier. She had been friends with Viprichitti when he visited her Ashram with her older brother Puloman and her aunt Danu. She often missed him.

With a smile on her face, Simhalika returned to her Ashram and went straight to her mother Diti's room. She was cheerful for the first time in a long while. Seeing the smile on her face, Mother Diti hugged her and asked why she was so happy.

"O mother, Mother Ganga appeared before me today and blessed me saying that my brother Hiranyakashipu will soon return after obtaining blessings from Lord Brahma. I am very happy to hear this good news. However, Mother Ganga told me that my brother Hiranyaaksha has chosen a different fate and will not be returning with my brother

Hiranyakashipu. I did not understand that, mother. She also said to get ready to marry Vipichitti, my childhood friend," Simhalika said hurriedly.

"Yes, I received a message from Puloman saying that he wants your hand in marriage for his younger brother, Vipichitti. I have agreed to this proposal in principle and have sent a message to your father Maharishi Kashyap in the North-West, asking for his consent. As soon as I receive his consent, I will reply to Puloman. Are you happy with this alliance?" Mother Diti asked.

"Hiranyaaksha has chosen a different fate. I don't understand either. I am sure the Lord will do what is best for him," Diti continued.

"Mother, do whatever you and father think is best for me," replied Simhalika.

One could clearly see her shyness when she heard the name of her childhood sweetheart, Viprichitti. In her heart, she was very happy about the proposal.

It was a wonderful day for Simhalika. She received two pieces of good news: the return of her loving brother, Hiranyakashipu, and a proposal to marry her childhood sweetheart, Viprichitti. She left her mother Diti's room and went to the gardens of the Ashram, where no one could see her. She sang and danced to her heart's content.

Marriage with Viprichitti

Time passed. Diti received Maharishi Kashyap's consent to marry their daughter Simhalika, to Viprichitti. She sent Puloman a message accepting the alliance between Simhalika and Viprichitti. A date was set for the wedding. However, an unfortunate incident occurred before the wedding could take place.

The animosity between Puloman and Indra grew day by day. Lord Brahma wanted to protect them both by keeping them apart. He gave Indra the kingdom of Swarga (Heaven) and gave Puloman the kingdom of Patal Lok (Netherworld), which were located on opposite sides of the Universe. But even this distance could not reduce their animosity.

Puloman had a beautiful daughter named Sachi. Because of her beauty and sensuality, every king of that era desired her. However, she fell in love with Indra, the son of her aunt Aditi, despite knowing about her father Puloman's animosity towards him. Indra approached Puloman through his Guru, Brihaspati, to propose this alliance. As expected, Puloman declined. Indra then planned to elope with Sachi and succeeded. When Puloman found out, he followed Indra to Swarga with his army to fight and desired to kill him and retrieve his daughter. A fierce battle ensued. Unfortunately for Puloman, he was defeated and killed by Indra.

When the sad news of Puloman's death arrived in Patal Lok, Danu was deeply saddened and declared a period of mourning. The news was also conveyed to Diti, and the wedding date of Viprichitti and Simhalika was postponed until the mourning period was over. Simhalika and her mother, Diti, also mourned Puloman's death.

Since the kingdom could not remain without a king, Danu declared Viprichitti the new king of Patal Lok.

After the mourning period ended, life in Patal Lok slowly returned to normal. Danu informed her sister Diti of the new wedding date. Diti began preparing for the wedding. Maharishi Kashyap was informed of the new wedding date. He had to be present to give away the bride (kanya daan).

Viprichitti's fame as a great warrior spread throughout the Universe. But what was he really like? The last time Simhalika saw him, they were children. Everyone said that he wielded unmatched power and strength. But was he still as loving as he was in childhood? Did he love her too? These were the questions popping into her mind.

Simhalika wanted to know more about Viprichitti in order to fully understand him before marriage. She wondered how she could achieve this goal and learn more personal details about him. Meanwhile, she learned that a messenger from Patal Lok had arrived to discuss the wedding with her mother, Diti. She decided to meet the messenger, who might shed light on Viprichitti. She asked her mother, Diti, if she could meet the messenger. Diti obliged and introduced the messenger to Simhalika.

The messenger greeted her with reverence. In confidence, Simhalika asked him to tell her about the personal life of king Viprichitti. She asked how many wives he already had and whom he loved more.

"Your Majesty, king Viprichitti is married only to one other princess, her majesty Suhashini. This alliance was arranged by queen mother Danu and king Puloman to strengthen the ties between the kingdom of Patal Lok and Bhoo Lok (Earth). As far as I know, the king never wanted to marry princess Suhashini because he had given his heart to you.

However, the late king Puloman promised him that the marriage to Suhashini would not interfere with the holy alliance between the two of you. Since this alliance with princess Suhashini was important for political reasons, prince Viprichitti had no choice but to accept it. King Viprichitti is a kind hearted person who gives all his respect and honor to queen Suhashini. However, his heart is with you. Please accept king Viprichitti as your husband and rule Patal Lok," the messenger politely replied.

"What does she (queen Suhashini) look like?" She asked the messenger.

"Your Majesty, the people of Patal Lok say she is one of the most beautiful women in the Universe," the messenger replied.

Simhalika felt her blood rise. Mother Diti could sense it. She dismissed the messenger and turned towards her.

"What has gotten into you, Simhalika? Beauty has no parameters, my darling daughter. I thought you were clever enough to understand that," said Mother Diti.

"So, you mean to say that I am not beautiful?" she asked her mother.

"Who says you are not beautiful, my darling daughter? Besides being beautiful, you are a disciple of Agni Dev. You are a very learned young lady. No woman in this Universe can match your wisdom, knowledge, or expertise in matters including warfare. Viprichitti loves you from the bottom of his heart. As you know, he never wanted to marry this princess. You will soon understand that political alliances are very important for a stable kingdom. Even if a king does not want to, he is sometimes forced to enter into such alliances for the benefit of the kingdom and his subjects.

So, give up your negative thoughts and accept this alliance wholeheartedly. You will find that Viprichitti is a worthy and loving husband," said mother Diti.

Mother Diti's words touched her heart, and she was now ready to become the queen of Patal Lok.

The wedding date was approaching quickly. A few days before the wedding, Maharishi Kashyap arrived at the Ashram in Soron where his wife Diti and his daughter, Simhalika had been living with several disciples. Simhalika was overjoyed to see her father again. She touched his feet and received his blessings.

"Simhalika, you have a great responsibility through this marriage. The animosity between the sons of Danu and Aditi has increased many times over since Indra killed Puloman. I know Viprichitti's heart burns with a desire to avenge his beloved older brother Puloman's death at the hands of Indra. Viprichitti is undoubtedly a great warrior, but he is no match for Indra who is supported by his brother Vaaman, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Also, do not forget that your Guru, Agni Dev is Indra's brother and will never go against him. You must always discourage Viprichitti from fighting Indra. You must protect him from the sons of Aditi. We are all born on this Earth for a purpose. You are born to serve the Lord. When the time comes, you will play your part, but until then, you should try to maintain peace and harmony among your brothers. You are a learned young lady with the ability to mesmerize any young man. Viprichitti is no exception," said her father, Maharishi Kashyap. He blessed her by placing his right hand on her head.

"I fully understand, father. I will do my best to follow your instructions. Please continue to bless us always. I expect

that you will not favor any of your sons," Simhalika said humbly.

"That is the very reason, Simhalika, that I do not interfere in the activities of any of my sons. Rest assured, I will always remain neutral," Maharishi Kashyap promised.

As the wedding date approached, preparations for the ceremony began in earnest.

At the appointed hour, the groom's party arrived with queen Danu and the warriors of Patal Lok. Maharishi Kashyap and all his disciples welcomed the groom's party.

Simhalika saw Viprichitti again after a long time. He had grown into a handsome man with the strength of an elephant. His golden hair was styled to perfection. His eyes were as clear as a mountain stream, and his features were perfectly proportioned. Radiating energy and vigor, he appeared lacquered and enameled. His cheekbones, like mountain peaks, appeared chiseled by a master craftsman. Their contours were so sharp that they looked as if they had been sculpted and pared to perfection. His eyes were as bright and spellbinding as a lodestar, bewitching all those present. He was soft-spoken and appeared to be a gentleman through and through. Viprichitti was also stunned by Simhalika's beauty. He could never have imagined that the innocent girl he had met several years ago had turned into a goddess. Her eyes were black and as large as lotus petals. Her complexion was slightly dark. Her hair was blue and curly. Her nails were convex and bright as burnished copper. Her eyebrows were fair, and her bosom was deep. She resembled a celestial maiden. Her body gave off a fragrance like that of a blue lotus, perceivable from a considerable distance. Her beauty was unmatched in the Universe.

Simhalika and Viprichitti instantly fell in love with each other. Simhalika thanked God for inspiring her to make the right decision to marry Viprichitti.

With the blessings of her parents, Maharishi Kashyap and Diti, and her aunt Danu, Simhalika married Viprichitti. However, her brothers Hiranyaaksha and Hiranyakashipu were absent from this occasion. Before departing for Patal Lok with her husband and her aunt and now mother-in-law, Danu, Simhalika went to the banks of the Mother Ganga. Seeking Her blessings, tears rolled down her face. "O Mother, I miss my brothers. Please keep them safe wherever they are. Mother Ganga, please tell my brothers that they are my divine brothers, my beloved friends and my most trusted elders. I miss their smiles, faces, and advice. I want to thank them for everything they have done for me. I also want to express my appreciation for the love they have always shown me. Please ask them to come back soon and visit me in Patal Lok," Simhalika requested Mother Ganga with tears in her eyes.

The next day, she left for Patal Lok with her husband and the entire wedding party.

Upon arriving at the palace in Patal Lok, she asked Viprichitti if she could go to meet her first wife, Suhashini, in her palace. Viprichitti was surprised. He could not deny her request. He wanted to accompany her to Suhashini's palace, but she asked him to let her go alone.

Simhalika knew in her heart that it would hurt Suhashini to accept her as a co-wife, especially one who is the daughter of her husband's aunt and very dear to her mother-in-law, Danu. At that moment, she felt pity for Suhashini as she realized that they both loved the same man, Viprichitti. To maintain peace and harmony, Simhalika decided to try to

appease Suhashini and assure her that she was not there to gain Viprichitti's love alone, but to share it with her.

She slowly moved into the room of the palace where Suhashini was still sleeping. Although Suhashini had already heard that Viprichitti had returned with his new wife, Simhalika, she was so depressed that she did not want to get up from her bed. Simhalika stood before her with her hands folded. Tears were flowing from the eyes of Suhashini. Suhashini failed to recognize Simhalika.

Simhalika slowly said, "O queen of Patal Lok, please accept my humble greetings."

Suhashini wiped her tears and asked, "Who are you, O beautiful young lady? Though you look like a 'Rishi Kanya' (daughter of a Sage), but you possess regal bearing. Where have you come from?"

Simhalika humbly replied, "O queen, I come from Soron, the land of Mother Ganga. I am the daughter of Maharishi Kashyap and his wife Diti. My name is Simhalika, and I am now married to Viprichitti. I have come to greet my older sister, Suhashini, the queen of Patal Lok, and to ask her permission to enter the palace of Patal Lok. Please bless your younger sister."

Simhalika's loving and kind words touched Suhashini's heart. She immediately got up from her bed, wiped her tears and hugged her. Simhalika touched Suhashini's feet.

Suhashini could not have imagined even in her wildest dreams that Simhalika would come to her palace in such a humble way to greet her and ask her permission to enter the palace of Patal Lok. She was deeply moved. Then, they spent hours talking about themselves and their lives. Suhashini was now convinced that Simhalika had come to

Patal Lok as her younger sister and not her husband's arrogant co-wife.

Suhashini said, "O my younger sister, Simhalika, I have thoroughly enjoyed your company. You have taken my pain away. I would love to have a sister like you. Let's go to mother-in-law Danu's palace where I will personally welcome you."

Then, both Suhashini and Simhalika left for the palace of queen Danu, where Simhalika was officially welcomed as part of the Daanav Vansh (Daanav clan).

Time passed. Suhashini and Simhalika became great friends and shared a husband. Together, they guided Viprichitti on the administrative matters of the kingdom for the welfare of their Subjects. The Patal Lok kingdom was very peaceful during that time. Neither they nor any other kingdom attacked each other. Life moved peacefully and joyfully along.

Then, one day, Suhashini suddenly fell seriously ill. The royal physician was unable to diagnose her illness. She grew weaker day by day, and unfortunately, she lost her battle with death in her husband Viprichitti's arms.

Everyone in the kingdom was sad to lose their beloved queen Suhashini. Simhalika found the courage to console her husband during this difficult time. She now had even greater responsibilities as queen of the kingdom and wife to Viprichitti.

One day, while she was in the royal court with her husband, a messenger arrived with news that her brother Hiranyakashipu had returned after obtaining the desired boons from Lord Brahma and would soon come to meet her in Patal Lok. Simhalika was thrilled to hear this news

and eagerly awaited her brother's arrival. She wanted to know about Hryanaaksha, too, but the messenger would not say anything.

Return of Hiranyakashipu

Simhalika heard that Lord Brahma was pleased with the penance of his brothers, Hryanaaksha and Hiranyakashipu, and gave them the gift of Earth to rule. Hryanaaksha, the elder brother, was crowned emperor of Earth. The sons of Aditi (the Devas) were unhappy with Lord Brahma's gift to Hryanaaksha and Hiranyakashipu, and wanted to reclaim the Earth. Fearing an imminent attack by Indra, Hryanaaksha sought help from his half-brothers in the Daanava clan of Patal Lok. The Devas challenged Hryanaaksha but were soon defeated. Mother Earth then prayed to Lord Brahma for rescue. Brahma and the sons of Diti prayed to Vishnu, the preserver of the Universe, to come to their rescue and redeem the earth.

Pleased with their prayers, Lord Vishnu appeared as a tiny creature from Lord Brahma's nostrils. This creature resembled a flea. It flew out with great speed and began to circumambulate Lord Brahma, gradually growing in size. It was no longer a flea, but a boar (Varaha). The boar grew until it was massive, larger than a full-grown elephant. Realizing that Lord Vishnu had appeared in this form to rescue Mother Earth, Lord Brahma worshiped the boar. They bowed their heads to Lord Vishnu in the form of the boar. Varaah roared and blessed them. His voice was like balm to their troubled minds.

The Varaah leaped into the sky. He cleared the sky of clouds with his tail. Now, the Sun's rays can be seen clearly, shining brightly and warmly.

He galloped across the Ocean in which Mother Earth lay submerged, waiting for Him to rescue Her.

Hiranyaksha was frightened by such a mighty creature. He turned to the Ocean for help. The Ocean knew that the

boar was Lord Vishnu and retorted, "O Hiranyaksha, I am old and unfit for battle. You are a mighty warrior blessed by Lord Brahma Himself. I am confident that you will defeat this creature. Go and challenge the boar Varaha to a duel."

Thus, the Ocean instigated the pride of Hiranyaksha. He roared and laughed, saying to the Ocean, "Do not worry, Ocean. I will kill Varaha in a duel soon. He is just a pig. Even the mighty sons of Aditi ran for their lives when they fought me. This creature is no match for my might."

However, the Ocean warned Hryanaaksha and said, "O Hryanaaksha, this is not an ordinary boar. Lord Vishnu has incarnated Himself in this form. Be cautious. He has taken this incarnation to rescue Mother Earth. Do not underestimate Him. All the divine powers given to you by Lord Brahma may not be match to His might."

Varaha (Lord Vishnu) located Mother Earth, who was waiting patiently to be rescued. He held Her between his large, magnificent tusks and lifted Her above the Ocean. When Hiranyaksha saw this, he screamed in fury. He hurled insults and expletives at Varaha, challenging Him to a duel. Varaha ignored the roaring and proceeded to return Mother Earth to her place in the Universe. Lord Brahma, then, solemnized His marriage with Earth.

Hiranyaaksha, stung by the insult, set out to kill him. He did not have to wait long before Varaha appeared before him and accepted his challenge.

By now, Varaha had assumed an anthropomorphic form with four arms carrying His deadly mace, Kaumodhaki (Gadaa). A garland of flowers adorned His neck, and He declared, "O Hiranyaaksha, I have wed the Earth. She is my wife now, and protecting Her is my duty as a husband. You

should respect tradition and the love between husband and wife and leave. I have no personal animosity against you and will spare your life. However, since I am now the wedded husband of the Earth, I am the ruler of the Earth. You are no longer king of the Earth."

Hiranyaaksha could not bear this insult. Roaring like a Daanava, he charged at Varah with all his might, wildly swinging his heavy mace at the husband of the Earth (Bhoo-Pati). Varah dodged the attack and struck back, knocking Hiranyaaksha off his feet. They fought in the skies, on land, and finally in the Ocean. They swam and attacked each other. This battle continued for a long time. At one point, it appeared that Hiranyaaksha would have the upper hand, and Varah was on the verge of defeat. Then, Varah crushed Hiranyaaksha's weapons. He soon overpowered Hiranyaaksha and struck him a fatal blow to the cheek.

Hiranyaaksha's massive body sank to the bottom of the sea, and Varaha roared in victory. He safely returned the Earth to Her rightful place and returned to His abode, Saket Dham.

Upon hearing of his older brother Hiranyaaksha's death, Hiranyakashipu was saddened and fearful for his own life. He developed a hatred for Lord Vishnu, blaming Him for killing his brother. He vowed to kill Vishnu one day. However, being intelligent and learned, he realized that if Lord Vishnu could kill his mighty brother, his own powers were no match to his older brother's. There was no way he could challenge Lord Vishnu with his current powers, including those given by Lord Brahma. He decided that, at an appropriate time, he would seek more power from Lord Brahma in order to kill Lord Vishnu. For now, he should be patient and wait for the right moment to challenge and attack Lord Vishnu.

Fearing for his life, Hiranyakashipu approached Lord Brahma and begged for his mercy. Lord Brahma assured him of his fearlessness and, with Lord Vishnu's permission, made him king of a small part of Mother Earth. Hiranyakashipu founded a new city in the present-day state of Rajasthan in India called Hiranyakashipu Ki Kher (Hindaun) and made it his capital. He married Kayadhu, the daughter of warrior of warrior Jambha from the Daanava clan.

After settling into his newly founded kingdom with Lord Brahma's blessings, Hiranyakashipu decided to visit his beloved sister, Simhalika, and her husband, Viprichitti, the ruler of Patal Lok. He was on his way to Patal Lok, when Simhalika heard that her brother, Hiranyakashipu, was coming to visit her. She was thrilled at the prospect of seeing him and her sister-in-law, Kayadhu, soon. Of course, she felt sad about the death of her older brother, Hryanaaksha, but she was never close to him, so it did not move her to tears.

Hiranyakashipu arrived in the capital of Patal Lok with his wife, Kayadhu, and his entourage. Simhalika and Viprichitti met them at the gate, touched their feet and took them to the palace of queen Danu with great respect. After touching the feet of queen Danu and receiving her blessings, Hiranyakashipu and his wife Kayadhu returned to Simhalika's private palace, where they were lodged.

The brother and sister met with great love and affection. Tears welled in Simhalika's eyes. They hugged each other for a long time and reminisced about old times. Kayadhu was from the Daanav clan and a distant relative of Viprichitti, so she also knew him very well. While Hiranyakashipu and Simhalika were having an emotional sibling reunion, Viprichitti and Kayadhu chatted about their past times together.

Several years had passed since Simhalika and Viprichitti's marriage, but unfortunately, Simhalika had not yet become a mother. Hiranyakashipu was curious about why an heir to Patal Lok and a child of Simhalika and Viprichitti had not yet been born. Viprichitti himself told him the unfortunate story of a curse from his aunt Tamara in his younger days that he would never become a father.

In a very sad voice, Viprichitti said to Hiranyakashipu, "When I was young, I loved collecting birds' eggs. I would go deep into the forest to find eggs from different birds and take them from their nests. The birds were disappointed with my behavior because I deprived them of their parenthood. They approached Tamara, the mother of Garuda, and complained to her. When she heard this, she became angry with me and said that because I had no respect for parenthood and did not understand the bond between parents and children, I had caused great distress and suffering by taking the eggs from the bird parents. She said that because of this, I would never be a parent."

"I am very sorry to hear that, Viprichitti, but do not worry. I promise to give you one of my children to adopt as your own," Hiranyakashipu said in a consoling voice. Thrilled, Viprichitti hugged his brother-in-law.

"Brother Hiranyakashipu, I can never repay this debt, but I promise to always be faithful to you. I will lay down my life at your command," Viprichitti promised.

"Yes, brother Viprichitti. One day, I may ask for your help to kill Vishnu and avenge the death of my older brother, Hryanaaksha. I plan to perform penance to please Lord Brahma and receive a boon of immortality from him. Once I receive it, I will challenge Vishnu and kill him. When I am ready, I will send you a message, and we will kill Vishnu and all the sons of Aditi together. We will capture the

kingdom of Heaven and rule the entire Universe together forever," said Hiranyakashipu in a loving but authoritative tone to Viprichitti.

"Sure, brother. Anytime," Viprichitti reassured Hiranyakashipu.

After staying in Patal Lok for a few days, Hiranyakashipu took leave of his aunt Danu, Simhalika, and Viprichitti to return to his kingdom. With a heavy heart, Hiranyakashipu, his wife, Kayadhu, and his entourage departed from Patal Lok.

Time passed. queen Kayadhu, the wife of king Hiranyakashipu, became pregnant with their first child. The desire for revenge against Lord Vishnu burned continuously in Hiranyakashipu's heart. He could not bear it anymore and decided to perform penance and worship Lord Brahma, asking for a boon of immortality before attacking and killing Lord Vishnu. He left his pregnant wife, Kayadhu, in the care of his generals.

Aditi's son Indra saw this as an opportunity to destroy Hiranyakashipu's kingdom and annihilate his greatest enemy forever. He also wanted to kill the Daanava child in Kayadhu's womb, as it could cause trouble for him and his brothers later. Indra attacked the kingdom, killing the generals and their army. He kidnapped Kayadhu.

Indra forcibly put Kayadhu on his chariot and headed to Heaven. In a highly pitiable voice, the chaste woman Kayadhu reprimanded Devraj Indra, saying, "O Devraj Indra, what purpose would it serve you to kidnap me? Do you not see the sin in kidnapping a helpless woman like me?"

Coincidentally, Brahmrishi Narad was passing through the same area at that time. He heard the queen's pitiable words and appeared before Devraj Indra. He stopped the chariot.

He said to Devraj Indra, "O Mahendra, you are the king of Heaven, the son of Maharishi Kashyap and Aditi, and the brother of the mighty Devas (Gods). It is not good for you to kidnap a helpless woman. Set this chaste woman free at once."

However, Devraj Indra replied, "Brahmrishi, this woman is nurturing the seed of the Daanava. I will destroy it before it germinates; then, I will set her free. I assure you she will not suffer."

Brahmrishi Narad said to Devraj Indra, "You do not know that you do not have the power to kill this unborn baby. You and your brothers should not fear this child. Rather, he will be the cause of your welfare. In the womb of queen Kayadhu is a supreme devotee of Lord Vishnu."

Upon learning of the presence of a supreme devotee of Lord Vishnu in the womb of queen Kayadhu, Devraj Indra respectfully approached her, offered his greetings, and sought her forgiveness. He respectfully helped her down from the chariot and handed her over to Brahmrishi Narad. Then, he went to his abode.

Narad told Kayadhu, "Your kingdom is in ruins now, O daughter. I will take you to the hermitage of my disciple, Maharishi Anand. You will be safe and comfortable there until your husband, Hiranyakashipu, returns from his penance."

Thus, queen Kayadhu came to stay at the hermitage of Maharishi Anand.

There, she served Maharishi Anand and the hermitage residents with great faith. She cleaned the hermitage, smearing it with cow dung, and fetched water from the river for the residents. She even began to worship Lord Vishnu, following the example of the other Rishis and Rishis's wives in the hermitage. She adopted a hermit's life: she wore bark clothes, slept on a khusha (a type of grass) bed, observed difficult fasts, and ate roots and tubers to satisfy her hunger. Thus, she was completely transformed into a great devotee of the Lord. Brahmishi Narad also visited her in the hermitage from time to time.

Maharishi Anand addressed her fetus, preaching Yoga, devotion, and the cryptic knowledge of Mantras. He taught that the world was meaningless and preached Vairagya, or abstaining.

This divine knowledge entered the mind of the unborn child. In due time, a handsome baby boy was born to queen Kayadhu. At the time of the baby boy's birth, Brahmishi Narad visited the hermitage of his disciple, Maharishi Anand, and named the baby Prahalad, meaning "extremely joyful."

As narrated in scripture, Hiranyakashipu pleased Lord Brahma with his penance. Lord Brahma appeared before Hiranyakashipu and offered him a boon of his choice. Hiranyakashipu asked for immortality. However, Lord Brahma declined, as it was beyond His powers. Hiranyakashipu then requested the following boon from Lord Brahma.

He asked, "O my Lord, O best of the givers of benedictions, kindly grant me this benediction. Please let me not meet death from any of the living entities You have created. May I not die within any residence or outside any residence, during the daytime or at night, nor on the ground

or in the sky. Also, please grant me a boon that my death not be brought about by any weapon, human, or animal. I also ask that I not die at the hands of any entity, living or nonliving. Furthermore, I ask that I not be killed by any Demigod, Daanava, or snake from the lower planets. Since no one can kill me on the battlefield, I should have no rivals. Therefore, grant me the benediction of having no rivals. Grant me the boon of sole lordship over all living entities and presiding deities, and grant me all the glories obtained by that position. Furthermore, grant me all the mystic powers attained through long austerities and Yoga practice, for these cannot be lost at any time.”

Lord Brahma blessed him by granting these boons and saying, “Tathastu (so it be).”

After obtaining these boons, which made him nearly immortal, Hiranyakashipu returned to his kingdom. He found that his kingdom had been completely ruined. Upon learning that Devraj Indra had attacked his kingdom in his absence, destroyed it, and kidnapped his beloved wife, queen Kayadhu, Hiranyakashipu became enraged and immediately attacked Devraj Indra. Fearing for their lives, Indra and his brothers fled heaven and hid in a safe place. Hiranyakashipu declared a merger of the heavenly kingdom into his own, becoming emperor of both worlds.

After gaining control of Heaven, he moved his chariot to the Ashram of Maharishi Anand. At that time, Maharishi Anand had left to preside over a Yajña organized by Maharishi Atri. He challenged the Ashram residents, threatening to kill them and burn the Ashram. Guru Mata confronted him. Unfortunately, he killed Guru Mata and several other residents. Despite pleading by his wife, Kayadhu, not to harm anyone in the Ashram, he burned and ruined it completely. Then, he took his wife, Kayadhu, and his son, Prahalad, to his palace.

Over time, Hiranyakashipu and Kayadhu were blessed with five more children. As mentioned above, their first born was Prahalad. Their other children were four sons—Sahlad, Ahlad, Shivi, and Vaashkal—and one daughter, Sinhika. As promised, Hiranyakashipu gave his son Ahlad to Simhalika and Viprichitti for adoption. For Simhalika, it was as if she had got the whole world. Her entire world revolved around Ahlad now.

After adopting Ahlad, Simhalika and Viprichitti went to visit aunt Tamara. Viprichitti placed Ahlad at her feet and asked for forgiveness for her actions as a child. Aunt Tamara's heart melted. She forgave Viprichitti and lifted her curse. With her blessing, Simhalika and Viprichitti returned to their capital in the Patal Lok (Netherworld).

A few years later, Simhalika was also blessed with a child. She gave birth to a son, and named him Swarbhanu. She credited Ahlad's arrival to her home as the reason for Swarbhanu's birth. Ahlad and Swarbhanu, both the princes were raised with great love and respect. Swarbhanu regarded Ahlad not only as his elder brother, but also as his guardian. Happy times continued. One day, by the command of Brahmurishi Narada, prince Swarbhanu was sent to the Ashram of Guru Shukracharya to attain knowledge and immortality.

Havoc of Hiranyakashipu

After receiving a boon from Lord Brahma, Hiranyakashipu considered himself immortal. He became the ruler of Earth and Heaven. He also had direct influence over Viprichitti, the king of Patal Lok. He decreed to all three kingdoms—Earth, Heaven, and Patal Lok—that he was God and must be worshiped. Anyone who did not obey his command, would be killed instantly.

Viprichitti, the king of Patal Lok, was a great follower of Hiranyakashipu. He was also indebted to Hiranyakashipu because he had given him his son Ahlad to adopt. Viprichitti supported Hiranyakashipu's decree in his kingdom and ordered all his citizens to worship Hiranyakashipu as God. Simhalika was the only one who opposed this idea. However, due to her love for her brother, Hiranyakashipu, and her fear that he might take Ahlad away from her if she did not support his dictate, she accepted the decree.

Upon hearing the decree from their master, the soldiers of Hiranyakashipu began tormenting the Saints and followers of Sanatan Dharma. They began destroying holy Yagnas and sacrificial rites conducted by holy persons. The Rakshasas killed any holy person who chanted the name of Lord Vishnu or refused to accept Hiranyakashipu as God.

However, in the palace of Hiranyakashipu, his firstborn son, Prahalad, rebelled against this decree. During his childhood at the Ashram of Maharishi Anand, he had learned that there is only one Supreme Personality of Godhead: either Lord Vishnu Himself or His incarnations. Prahalad tried to convey this message to his father, Hiranyakashipu, who became very angry with his son's behaviour.

Hiranyakashipu sent Prahalad to Sanskrit Acharyas (Professors) Shanda and Amarka. He instructed them to teach Prahalad that Hiranyakashipu was God, not Vishnu.

The Acharyas were followers of Hiranyakashipu and had already accepted him as God. They were stern disciplinarians who ordered Prahalad not to utter the name of Vishnu in their Gurukul. Instead of learning from their teachings, Prahalad continued to worship Lord Vishnu and taught the other disciples in the Gurukul to do the same. When the Acharyas found out, they feared the mighty king Hiranyakashipu. They tried their best to dissuade Prahalad. When he did not obey, they had no choice but to inform Hiranyakashipu.

Hiranyakashipu was furious when he heard this and summoned Prahalad to his court. He tried to dissuade Prahalad from worshipping Vishnu by gentle persuasion, teaching him that he was the only God who should be worshipped. All of Hiranyakashipu's instructions and orders went in vain. Prahalad continued to declare that the omnipresent Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe, was the Supreme Personality of Godhead and should be worshiped by everyone, including the king Hiranyakashipu. Hiranyakashipu's rage knew no bounds, so he ordered Prahalad be killed immediately. The Daityas struck him with pointed weapons. However, Prahalad's mind was so focused on Lord Vishnu that he did not feel any pain.

Seeing that torturing Prahalad in this way had no effect, Hiranyakashipu ordered him to be trampled by an elephant. The enraged elephant could not crush Prahalad either.

Hiranyakashipu made several attempts to kill Prahalad. He ordered Prahalad to be thrown over a precipice. Prahalad continued to chant the holy name of Lord Vishnu throughout the ordeal. Surprisingly, Prahalad came down

upon the Earth as gently as a flower drops onto grass. Hiranyakashipu tried every possible method to kill Prahalad, including poisoning him, starving him, and throwing him into a well, but Prahalad escaped death every time.

Then, Hiranyakashipu ordered that Prahalad be tied with highly poisonous serpents and cast into the Ocean. Prahalad continued to pray to his beloved Lord Vishnu: "Salutation to Thee, Lord of the Universe. Thou beautiful Lord Vishnu."

As he meditated on Lord Vishnu, he felt the Lord was near and everywhere. As soon as he realized this, the snake bonds snapped asunder. The mountains were pulverized. The Ocean was upheaved. He was gently lifted above the waves and carried safely to shore. Standing there, Prahalad forgot that he was a child of Daitya vansh with a mortal body. He felt that Lord Vishnu was the Universe, and that all of the Universe's powers emanated from Him. Nothing in Nature could injure him when the ruler of Nature, Lord Vishnu, was with him.

When Hiranyakashipu realized that all mortal means of getting rid of Prahalad, who was devoted to his enemy Vishnu, were powerless, he did not know what to do. He tried once more to persuade Prahalad to listen to his advice through gentle means. But Prahalad did not accept his advice. Hiranyakashipu thought that perhaps Prahalad's childish whims would be rectified with age and further training. He asked the Acharyas Shanda and Amarka to teach Prahalad the duties of a king once again. However, all of the Acharyas' efforts to convince Prahalad to accept Hiranyakashipu as God were unsuccessful. In fact, Prahalad began teaching the other disciples at the Gurukul to pray to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Vishnu.

His generals then advised that his sister Simhalika had a boon from Lord of Fire (Agni Dev) of immunity from fire in the form of a blanket. Prahalad could be burnt to death by her help. Knowing this, Hiranyakashipu immediately summoned his sister Simhalika to his royal court.

Holika

A message was sent to Viprichitti in Patal Lok (Netherworld) informing him that Hiranyakashipu wanted to see him and Simhalika in his capital as soon as possible. Upon hearing the message, Simhalika was thrilled at the possibility of seeing his loving older brother and his family after such a long time. She also thought that this might be a good opportunity to dissuade her brother from killing his son, Prahalad.

Simhalika loved Prahalad dearly. Prahalad was Ahlad's brother who was her adopted son. She dreamed that one day Prahalad would be king of the Daityas and Ahlad would be king of the Daanavas. She imagined that these two brothers would rule the Universe together in great harmony. Peace would prevail in the Universe. She knew her brother, Hiranyakashipu, did not like Prahalad but remained optimistic. Time heals all wounds. One day, she believed, Hiranyakashipu would forgive Prahalad and give him the title of "Crown Prince" (Yuvraj).

Viprichitti, Simhalika, and their royal entourage happily reached the capital of Hiranyakashipu. They were welcomed by Hiranyakashipu and queen Kayadhu at the palace gate. Simhalika went with queen Kayadhu to her palace, while Viprichitti accompanied king Hiranyakashipu to the royal court.

Simhalika wanted to see her loving nephew, Prahalad, and hug him. However, she could not find him in the palace of queen Kayadhu. Humbly, she asked her sister-in-law, "Where is Prahalad, Bhabhi? He didn't come to welcome me or pay his respects. This is not like my little, lovely nephew Prahalad, who is always polite, obedient, and respectful to his elders."

Queen Kayadhu was filled with emotions when she heard that none other than the sister of her husband Hiranyakashipu, spoke so kind words for Prahalad. She thought that, like her husband, Simhalika would speak ill of her loving, kind son, Prahalad. She started crying loudly, putting her head on Simhalika's shoulder.

"My dear sister, your brother tried every possible way to kill his own son, Prahalad. Prahalad's only fault is that he does not accept your brother as God. He continues to pray to Lord Vishnu and preach that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Now, your dear nephew is imprisoned. He is in prison, shackled from head to toe. You have been summoned by your brother to help him to kill Prahalad, my innocent, loving child. I beg you. I will be indebted to you forever if you will kindly forgive my son and not take part in killing Prahalad," begged queen Kayadhu, with tears in her eyes, continually sobbing and falling at the feet of Simhalika.

"Bhabhi, what are you talking about? How could I help my brother Hiranyakashipu to kill my loving nephew, the brother of my son Ahalad? It's impossible. I can't even think about it in my wildest dreams. You know how much I love Prahalad. He is like Ahalad to me. I have been thinking that one day these two brothers will rule the Universe together in harmony and peace."

Simhalika was stunned to hear this from her sister-in-law.

"Bhabhi, I also cannot understand how my brother Hiranyakashipu thinks I would help him to kill Prahalad. What plan does he have for that? Please describe it to me in detail so that I can prepare a befitting reply. Bhabhi, please be assured that I will protect Prahalad the same way I would protect Ahalad, even at the cost of my own life," Simhalika pleaded with her sister-in-law.

"Simhalika, my loving sister, you know your Guru Agni Dev gave you a boon in the form of a blanket that provides immunity from fire to you. Your brother wants you to sit on the funeral pyre with Prahalad, covering yourself with this divine blanket so that Prahalad is burned to death and you escape," queen Kayadhu told Simhalika.

"Hm, so that is the plan of my evil brother. Leave it to me now, Bhabhi," said Simhalika, not elaborating on her plans if her brother, Hiranyakashipu, asked her to do so.

The next day, early in the morning, Hiranyakashipu visited the palace of his queen, Kayadhu, where Simhalika was staying. His wife, queen Kayadhu, seated him with great honour. Not seeing Simhalika in the palace, he asked his wife where his dear sister was. Simhalika was busy worshipping her Guru, the Lord of Fire (Agni Dev). Interestingly, Hiranyakashipu did not get angry with his sister for worshipping Agni Dev. He smiled and thought, "My good sister has already understood me. She is preparing to take Prahalad into the pyre with her and seeking blessings from her Guru to burn Prahalad." He waited patiently until Simhalika finished her prayers.

When she finished prayers, a maid told her that her brother, king Hiranyakashipu, was waiting for her in the main hall of the palace. She rushed to the main hall. As she bowed to touch his feet, he immediately took her into his arms and hugged her.

"O Simhalika, how much I have missed you. I am so happy to see you and Viprichitti again. How is Ahalad doing? I hear he has grown into a handsome, obedient, and intelligent young man. I also heard that he helps his father, Viprichitti, with the administration of the kingdom. How lucky you are! Look at me. My firstborn son, Prahalad, is doing the opposite. I have so many dreams for this young

man's future. I defeated the sons of Aditi and captured Heaven for him. I always thought these two brothers, Prahalad and Ahalad, would rule the Universe. But he goes against me at every turn. I tried every possible way to change his behaviour: I persuaded him, made him crown prince (Yuvaraj), punished him, and exploited him (Saam, Daam, Dand, Bhed). He never listened to me, his Acharyas, or his senior court advisors. As a proud person with a high self-esteem, I could not take it anymore. I do not want to see his face anymore. I want him dead. My court has already sentenced him to death. However, I have tried every way to carry out the death sentence on him, but to no avail. I know you respect the pride, self-esteem, and honour of your loving older brother, who has always thought of your well-being. I even gave you my darling son, Ahalad, for adoption because you could not have children. What else could I have done? I beg you to help me implement the death penalty on Prahalad so that my words may be honoured.

Simhalika was surprised to see her arrogant brother talking to her in such a soft, loving voice. She had expected him to order her to carry out his wishes. No requests, no mercy. She gathered her courage and replied to her brother.

"Bhaiya, you know I am your loving, obedient sister. Viprichitti and I are so grateful to you for allowing us to adopt Ahlad. I will carry out any order of yours within my power," said Simhalika.

Hiranyakashipu was thrilled to hear these sweet words from his sister.

"My baby sister, I expect nothing less than your respect for your brother's court orders. I am very pleased. If you carry out my orders, I will also make Ahalad crown prince of my

kingdom, Earth. Ahalad will now rule the entire Universe," said Hiranyakashipu.

"What can I do for you, my brother, to make you happy?" asked Simhalika, as if she knew nothing of her brother's plans.

"It's very easy, Simhalika. You have a boon from your Guru, Agni Dev, in the form of a blanket that makes you immune to fire. Cover yourself with that blanket and sit on the funeral pyre with Prahalad. Nothing will happen to you, but Prahalad will be burned to death. In this way, the order of the royal court will be easily honoured, and your brother can hold his head high with pride," said Hiranyakashipu in a calm voice.

"What! You're asking me, his loving aunt, to kill my own nephew? You know, Bhaiyaa, Prahalad is as dear to me as Ahlad. How could I ever find the courage to carry out your order to kill Prahalad? Ahlad has deep regard, love, and affection for his older brother, Prahalad. When he heard that you were trying every possible way to kill his beloved brother, he got very angry. Viprichitti and I consoled him and tried to keep him calm. If he learns that I killed his beloved brother, he will hate me and never forgive me. I cannot live without Ahlad's love and affection. Bhaiyaa, please forgive me. I beg you not to ask me to do this. I would lay down my life for you, but not for this task," Simhalika said humbly to Hiranyakashipu.

"How dare you disobey my words? I gave you everything, including my son, to raise as your own. I could not have dreamed that you would ever disobey me in such a way. I tried to be humble and kind to you. You do not deserve my kindness. Carry out the death penalty of Prahalad as I said," ordered Hiranyakashipu angrily.

"No, Bhaiya, please listen to me. Don't ask me to do something that will take everything you gave me away. I humbly beg you not to force me to do this awful task," Simhalika pleaded again.

"I heard you say that Ahalad was angry with me for trying to kill his older brother, Prahalad. That is the training you gave my other son! You have turned him against me too, your older, loving brother. Shame on you! It seems that Ahalad is of no use to me either. If you do not carry out my orders, I will kill Viprichitti and Ahalad immediately. You are my sister, so I won't take your life. But I will leave you to live by taking away the two things you hold most precious: your husband and your son," said Hiranyakashipu angrily.

"No, no, brother, you cannot do that. I beg you. Please do not harm my loving husband, Viprichitti, or my son, Ahalad. I love them both more than my own life. I will carry out your orders," said Simhalika, fearing the death of her husband and son.

"Good. Now you understand and respect me. Get ready to obey my orders tomorrow," said Hiranyakashipu authoritatively as he left the palace of Kayadhu.

Kayadhu was shocked. Yesterday, she had talked to Simhalika and begged her to spare the life of her beloved son, Prahalad. Now, she had agreed to obey her brother's orders to kill her beloved son. She could not believe her ears. With tears in her eyes, she approached Simhalika and begged her once again to change her decision.

"Bhabhi, I will do whatever is best for Prahalad, Ahalad, you, and Viprichitti. I can only say this now. Please wait for the right time, and leave me alone now," Simhalika told her sister-in-law. She left the hall for her private room. She

closed the door and began meditating on her Guru, Lord of Fire (Agni Dev).

She went into a trance. The Lord of Fire appeared to her in a dream and blessed her: "My daughter, may the Almighty give you the strength to carry out your wishes."

She did not know when she fell asleep. She was awakened by a loud bang on her door. Someone was shouting that king Hiranyakashipu was waiting for her. A pyre had been prepared, and Prahalad was there too.

She woke up hurriedly. She told the person banging on the door to tell king Hiranyakashipu that she would be there soon.

After getting refreshed, she took her fire-immune blanket and hurried toward the pyre. After a long time, she saw Prahalad. The young boy stood before her with a mesmerizing smile. He looked just like Ahalad. For a moment, she forgot that she was in the palace of Hiranyakashipu, and that it was Prahalad standing before her. She thought Ahalad was standing there, smiling at her, inviting her to take him into her arms. Simhalika ran toward Prahalad and immediately embraced him. She began kissing him intensely on the cheeks and forehead. Then, she heard the hoarse voice of his brother, Hiranyakashipu.

"Enough of this display of affection, Simhalika. Now carry out my orders," Hiranyakashipu ordered.

"Yes, Bhaiyaa. I will certainly carry out your orders, but I have one request. I don't want the world to see my cruelty in taking my dear, young, smiling nephew to the pyre. So, no one should look at me, including you, when I move toward the pyre," Simhalika requested of her brother, Hiranyakashipu.

"Oh, that's all. No problem. I'm going to my palace anyway and will order all my soldiers to leave you two alone. I will wait for you in my private chamber. I hope to see you soon, alive and happy, with good news that Prahalad's death penalty has been carried out," said Hiranyakashipu as he left for his palace. Slowly, all the soldiers left the pyre, obeying their master's orders.

She took Prahalad in her lap and slowly moved towards the pyre. She looked around to see if anyone was seeing her and Prahalad jumping into the pyre. Once again, she looked Prahalad over closely.

"My loving nephew Prahalad, please look after my son and your brother Ahalad. He is a very nice, kind, and loving child who always loves you. Promise me that you will forgive him if he goes astray and instruct him to do the right thing," she said to Prahalad.

Simhalika then covered Prahalad with a fire-immune blanket and jumped into the pyre.

She was burned to death, sacrificing her life to save Prahalad. Brahmrishi Narad appeared and began singing the praises of Simhalika.

"O Simhalika, Lord Vishnu will never forget your sacrifice. You will not be reborn. Lord Vishnu is waiting for you in his Saket Dham. In memory of your great sacrifice, you will be called Holika from this day forward. Whoever prays and worships you on Phagun Shukla Poornima will be blessed by Lord Vishnu himself. They will enjoy peace, prosperity, fame, and success in this world. After death, they will attain Lord Vishnu's Saket Dham," Brahmrishi Narad blessed. He took the fire-immune blanket with him and left the pyre singing the praises of Holika.

Brahmrishi renamed Simhalika "Holika." In Sanskrit, "Holika" is made up of two words: "Hol" and "Ika." "Hol" means pyre, and "ika" means Goddess. Therefore, Holika means "Goddess of the Pyre."

Several hours passed and Simhalika did not return from the pyre. Hiranyakashipu became anxious and ran towards the pyre. He was surprised to see Prahalad standing before the pyre, alive and smiling. He saw his sister burning to death. There was no blanket in sight.

"Oh, this so-called God of Fire has proven that He is the son of Aditi after all. He took away the boon from my sister and burned her. What a wretched person! Why did I not realize this sooner? Why did I trust that the God of Fire would stick to his word? The sons of Aditi are not trustworthy anyway. My poor sister. I am very sorry. Please forgive me," lamented Hiranyakashipu upon her sister's death. He declared a one-month period of mourning in his kingdom for her loss. He ordered Prahalad to be taken to the Acharyas once again so they could try to mend his ways.

Queen Kayadhu now understood Simhalika's words. She thanked her in her heart for saving her son's life and prayed for her salvation.

Worshipping Holika

Brahmrishi Narad blessed Simhalika, calling her Holika (the Goddess of the Pyre), and granted health, happiness, prosperity, fame, and a good name to those who would worship her on Phalgun Poornima. Later, at Brahmrishi Narad's instruction, Lord Narsinhm Avatar, Lord Brahmdev, and Lord Agnidev established rituals for the worship of "Mother Holika."

Holika Installation (Sthapana)

The Scripture instructs that a proper place for the installation (sthapna) of Holika should be selected. The area where Holika is installed should be rinsed with cow dung and holy Mother Ganga's water. If these are unavailable, water with Tulsi leaves may be sprinkled instead. A wooden pole should be placed in the centre and surrounded by beads or garlands made of cow dung, popularly known as gulari, bharbholiye, or badkula. If cow dung is unavailable, these gulari may be made out of clay. Idols of Holika and Prahalad, typically made of cow dung or clay, should be placed on top of the heap. The Holika pile should be decorated with shields, swords, the Sun, the Moon, the stars, and other toys made of cow dung or clay.

During Holika Dahan, the Prahalad's idol should be removed from the pile. Also, four cow dung or clay beads should be kept safe on one side before the bonfire. One bead is kept in honour of the ancestors, one in honour of Hanuman, one in honour of the family, and one in honour of Holika.

Puja Process (Vidhi)

The following samagri (materials) may be used for Puja. If these materials are unavailable, a Sankalp(wish) in the heart is sufficient to please Holika.

These items include one bowl of water; beads made of cow dung or clay; roli; unbroken rice (akshat); fragrances, such as agarbatti and/or dhoop; flowers; raw cotton thread; turmeric pieces; unbroken moong dal; batasha, sugar, or gud; gulal powder; and coconut. If available, include fully grown grains of freshly cultivated crops, such as wheat or gram.

All the Puja ingredients may be kept on a plate. The Puja materials should also be accompanied by a small water pot and Puja thali. Then, sit on the Puja spot facing either East or North, if possible.

Before starting the Puja, sprinkle some water containing Tulsi leaves on the Puja thali, yourself, and everyone present.

The Puja begins with the worship of Lord Vishnu and the seeking of His blessings.

ॐ पुण्डरीकाक्षः पुनातु ।

ॐ नृसिंहाय नमः पंचोपचारार्थे गंधाक्षतपुष्पाणि समर्पयामि ।

Om Pundareekakshayah Punatu.

**Om Narsinmah Namah Panchopachaaraarthe
Gandhakshatpushpaani Samarpayaami.**

Then Bhakta Prahalad is worshiped and we seek his blessings

ॐ प्रह्लादाय नमः पंचोपचारार्थे गंधाक्षतपुष्पाणि समर्पयामि ।

**Om Prahaladaay Namah Panchopachaaraarthe
Gandhakshtpushpaani Samarpayaaami.**

And finally, Holika is worshipped.

असृक्पाभयसंत्रस्तैः कृता त्वं होलि बालिशैः ।

अतस्त्वां पूजयिष्यामि भूते भूतिप्रदा भवः॥

**Asrkpaabhaysantrstaih Krata Twam Holi Baalisheh.
Atstwaam Poojyishyammī Bhute Bhootiprada Bhavah.**

O Mother Holika, foolish and childish people created Holi to burn you, but you are a Goddess. We worship you and seek your blessings for power, wealth, and prosperity for ourselves and those present.

May Lord Narasimha, Bhakta Prahalad, and Mother Holika bless us all.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.

ACHARYA SWARBHANU (RAHU AND KETU)



Foreword

The author was born into a conservative Hindu family and was fortunate to have spent his childhood with a learned grandfather. He has always been inclined to learn about the great Sanatan Goddesses, Gods, Sages, Seers, Saints, and Sanatan Mothers of Hinduism. One childhood memory is etched in his mind as if it were yesterday. When he was about five-years-old, he saw his grandfather performing a Navgraha Shanti Puja. His young mind could not comprehend why Daanavas (evil personalities) such as Rahu and Ketu were among the nine planets being prayed to. He asked his grandfather about it.

His grandfather explained that Rahu and Ketu were not evil personalities, but rather devotees of Lord Mahadev and Lord Vishnu. The original name of Rahu and Ketu was Acharya Swarbhanu. Though born into the Daanava lineage, the grandson of Maharshi Kashyap Acharya Swabhanu was a foremost disciple of Guru Shukracharya. He sought immortality through severe penance to Mahadeva. During the Samudra Manthan, Acharya Swabhanu sat among the Sun and Moon Gods in line for the distribution of nectar (amrita) by Vishwamohini, an incarnation of Vishnu. This was part of a plan devised by Mahadeva. At the signal of the Sun and Moon Gods, Lord Vishnu severed Acharya Swabhanu's head from his body but did not dry up his Amrit (nectar). The Sudarshana Chakra contains an Agnivaan, which is capable of drying up even the Amrit (nectar). You may remember that Ravan's Amrit in his navel was dried up by the same Agnivaan. However, He did not order Agnivaan to dry up the Amrit of Rahu and Ketu because of His immense love for Acharya Swarbhanu. After severing Acharya Swarbhanu's head, Lord Vishnu invoked Lord Mahadev Himself.

Through surgery, Lord Mahadev attached Nagraj's head to Acharya Swarbhanu's torso and named the new being Rahu. Rahu is a Sanskrit word meaning "divine counsellor."

Mahadev joined Acharya Swarbhanu's body to Nagraj's head and named the new being Ketu. "Ketu" is also a Sanskrit word meaning "divine pennant."

He performed this surgery similarly to how He placed an elephant's head on Lord Ganesha's body and a goat's head on Prajapati Daksha's body after Mother Sati was consumed by the Yoga fire. Following Lord Vishnu's instructions, Lord Mahadev installed Rahu and Ketu among the Navgrahas with great respect. He ordered them to go to chief justice Shani Dev's Shani Lok and assist Him, which they did with full devotion.

The author wondered why Lord Mahadev did not perform surgery to attach Acharya Swarbhanu's head to his own torso. Why was it necessary to attach Nagraj's torso to Acharya Swarbhanu's head and Nagraj's head to his torso?

His grandfather smiled and replied, "Son, the teeth and radiance of the Sudarshan Chakra mangled and distorted Acharya Swarbhanu's head and torso so much when they were severed that it was impossible to reattach the head to the torso. Therefore, Mahadeva adopted this procedure."

The author asked his grandfather another question: "Grandfather, if Acharya Swarbhanu was a great scholar and devotee of Lord Mahadev and Lord Vishnu, why are ordinary people referring to him as an evil person, and Rahu and Ketu as evil planets?"

The grandfather answered the question patiently, "Son, humans are selfish creatures. Some so-called Pundits have deliberately started plundering innocent people by

declaring Rahu, Ketu, and some Navagrahas such as Shani and Mangal, to be malevolent planets. In the name of appeasing these planets, they deceive simple-minded people. Nanak Dukhiya Sab Sansar. Nanak says that everyone in this world suffers in some way. The cause of this suffering is our own misdeeds. Unfortunately, people refuse to accept this. Instead, they fall for the tricks of these selfish Pundits and blame the planets. Lord Shani, appointed by Lords Vishnu and Shiva, is the chief justice of the Universe. He was given this position because of His impartiality. Why would He cause anyone trouble without reason? The other Navagrahas (nine planets) act only according to His directions. So why would planets like Rahu, Ketu, and Mangal (Mars) punish someone without reason? The only remedy for alleviating suffering is to live righteously and ask for forgiveness for the sins one has committed, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Only worshipping or appeasing these Navagrahas is not the way to relieve suffering. Rather, one should continuously apologize for misdeeds committed knowingly or unknowingly. Apologizing to these nine planets (Navagrahas) may not eliminate suffering completely, but surely may diminish the evil effect. One must endure the consequences of one's actions, but these Navagrahas certainly have the power to lessen those hardships or grant the strength to bear them.”

The author's grandfather's words increased his curiosity to learn more about the lives of Rahu and Ketu. He (grandfather) then gave the author the Vamana Purana, Sri Vishnu Purana, Narada Purana, and other scriptures from countless Sages. He himself also introduced the life of Acharya Swarbhenu. This dispelled all of the author's misconceptions about Rahu and Ketu.

For the past 60 years, the author has been trying to make his fellow Hindus aware of this fact. A few years ago, some

friends requested that he should write and publish the life stories of Rahu and Ketu as a book. This book is part of that effort.

We humbly request that you take time out of your busy lives to study this book and benefit from it. According to Shruti, one way to appease the Navagrahas (Nine Planets) is to read and listen to their life stories. Reading this tale of Acharya Swarbhanu may grant you the grace of Lord Vishnu, Lord Mahadev, and Rahu and Ketu, who reside among the Navagrahas.

Dr. Yatendra Sharma
President
Shri Ram Katha Sansthan

Birth

There is an interesting story about Rahu and Ketu, born as Swarbhanu, the son of Simhalika, the daughter of Maharishi Kashyap and Diti. As detailed in the Simhalika (Holika) section of this book, Simhalika married Viprichitti, the son of Danu, another wife of Maharishi Kashyap. Unfortunately, they did not have any child for a long time after their marriage. Simhalika's brother, Hiranyakashipu, loved her deeply. Unable to bear her sorrow over being childless, he gave his son, Ahalada, up for adoption. Simhalika and Viprichitti were overjoyed to have Ahalad as their adopted son. Prince Ahalad was raised with great love in the palace of emperor Viprichitti and queen Simhalika in the Patal Lok (underworld). He proved to be extremely fortunate for his adoptive parents. King Viprichitti, king Hiranyakashipu's brother-in-law, was a powerful figure in the Patal Lok (netherworld), on Earth, and in Heaven. Only a few years after adopting Ahalad, Simhalika became pregnant with her own child. She attributed her pregnancy to the arrival of her fortunate adopted son, Ahalad, in her home. When the time came, she gave birth to a son. At birth, the newborn's face shone like the Sun. Moments after his birth, he bowed to his parents and his brother, Ahalad, his voice as authoritative as that of the Sun God. Simhalika, a disciple of Agni Dev, named her son Swarbhanu, meaning "voice like the Sun."

Princes Ahalad and Swarbhanu grew up together in queen Simhalika's palace. One day, when Swarbhanu was about five-years-old, Brahmurishi Narada suddenly arrived at queen Simhalika's palace. She welcomed him with due respect and seated him in a prominent place. Brahmurishi Narada is the brother of Maharishi Marichi, the father of Maharishi Kashyap. Therefore, Narada was the maternal granduncle of queen Simhalika and the paternal granduncle of emperor Viprichitti.

She placed her two sons, Ahalad and Swarbhanu, at the Sage's feet. He blessed Ahalad to become emperor of the Patal Lok (Netherworld) and seated him beside him. He took Swarbhanu in his lap. Playing with his hair, the Brahmrishi turned to queen Simhalika and said, "O dear Simhalika, this son of yours possesses all the qualities necessary to attain immortality. If he follows the path I show him, he may attain eternity and a place among the Gods. He will be as learned as Guru Shukracharya, and, in due time, he will lead the Daanava and Daitya clans alongside Shukracharya. But to achieve all this, he will have to endure a difficult struggle and austerity."

Upon hearing the words of Brahmrishi Narada, queen Simhalika was stunned. She knew her brother, Hiranyakashipu, had the same desire. To fulfill it, he had become an enemy of Lord Vishnu. She knew very well that enmity with Lord Vishnu was an invitation to death. Could this desire also bring her beloved son, Swarbhanu, to the doorstep of death?

Understanding her feelings, the omniscient Brahmrishi Narad held her hand lovingly and said, "Simhalika, Hiranyakashipu has certainly invited death by developing animosity with Lord Narayana. But remember my words, this son of yours will never do such a thing. Someone with intelligence equal to that of Acharya Shukracharya would never commit such an act. Now, do as I say. Hand over your son to me. I will take him to Acharya Shukracharya's Ashram and ask him to accept your son as his disciple. Shukracharya will never refuse my request. By becoming his disciple, your son will gain knowledge of the entire Universe. In due time, by the grace of Mahadev Shiva, he will attain immortality. I will spend some time in your palace, so think carefully about it and consult with your husband, Viprichitti, about my advice. If you like my advice, I will take him with me to the Ashram right now.

Saying this, Brahmarishi Narada left queen Simhalika's palace to troll in the adjoining garden for fresh air, chanting "Narayan, Narayan."

Simhalika took Ahalad's hand and carried her five-year-old son, Swarbhanu, in her lap as she headed for her bedroom. She was extremely hesitant to accept the Sage's advice to send Swarbhanu to Acharya Shukracharya's Ashram at such a young age. He was only five-year-old. She had conceived him after several years of marriage. While she was delighted by the prophecy that Ahalad would become emperor of the Daanava clan in the Patal Lok (Netherworld), the thought of being separated from her younger son, Swarbhanu, distressed her deeply. After reaching her bedroom, she sent a message to emperor Viprichitti through a maidservant, stating that she wished to see him as soon as possible.

The emperor was conferring with his ministers in the royal court when he received the message from queen Simhalika. He had also received news that his granduncle, Brahmrishi Narada, had arrived at queen Simhalika's palace. He was eager to meet Brahmrishi Narada as well. Therefore, he immediately dissolved the royal court gathering upon receiving queen Simhalika's message and departed for her palace.

Upon receiving news of emperor Viprichitti's arrival at her palace, queen Simhalika came to the door with an Arti plate to honour him. When emperor Viprichitti arrived at the door, she prayed and performed Arti for him. Then, she led him to her bedroom, where Ahalad and Swarbhanu were already present. Seeing their father, the two princes touched his feet, greeted him, and received his blessings for a long and prosperous life.

The emperor sensed a worried expression on the queen's face. For a moment, even emperor Viprichitti became

distraught. Had Brahmishi Narad brought any bad news about his kingdom? He knew that Brahmishi Narad, who frequently roams the Universe, is omniscient and knows the past, present, and future. He knows all the news of the Universe, as well as expected and unexpected events that might happen. He was a well-wisher of all the three clans: the Devas, the Daityas, and the Daanavas. Therefore, he used to inform them from time to time about conspiracies one clan hatched against another so they could prepare for any expected or unexpected emergency. He had learned that Brahmishi Narad was currently visiting Devalok. He was worried that the evil Indra might have hatched a conspiracy against him, so Brahmishi Narada came to Patal Lok to inform him. Queen Simhalika had probably been informed. This is why the queen is worried.

The emperor lovingly held the empress's hand and said in a sweet voice, "Is everything well, Empress? Did Brahmishi Narada bring any bad news that made your face pale? He is not here. Where is he now? I am eager to meet him. My heart is sinking. Please tell me why are you worried immediately."

The empress then smiled at the emperor and said, "My dear husband, Brahmishi Narada has not given me any bad news. Do not worry. Devraj Indra knows how brave you are. He won't dare to conspire against you so easily. Moreover, even the revered Guru Agni Dev will discourage him from doing so. Brahmishi has gone to the garden to breathe some fresh air. He will be back soon. His advice regarding Swarbhanu's well-being has disturbed me. He believes Swarbhanu has the potential to attain immortality, but he may have to undergo severe penance to do so. The words of Brahmishi cannot be untrue. According to Brahmishi, this can only be possible with the blessings of Gurudev Shukracharya. Therefore, he proposes taking Swarbhanu to Gurudev Shukracharya's Ashram

immediately. He is confident that Guru Shukracharya will accept his request and accept Swarbhanu as his disciple. Swarbhanu should perform penance under Guru Shukracharya's guidance to please God and obtain a boon. Brahmrishi Narad is confident that God will grant this boon. However, Swarbhanu is only five-year-old. He has experienced the comforts, luxuries, and affection of our royal palace. How will he be able to endure the extreme hardships of penance at such a young age? After so many years of Ahalad's presence in this palace, I have finally been blessed with the good fortune of bearing my own child. How will I be able to bear Swarbhanu's absence? This topic causes me great anguish. While I feel joy for Swarbhanu's attainment of immortality, I also feel immense sorrow for his separation. What should I do? I am at a loss. Please guide me."

Upon hearing this, emperor Viprichitti's face lit up with joy.

He spoke lovingly. "Listen carefully, my dear empress. The Daanava clan has always lived in constant fear of Devraj Indra. We never know when he will plot against us, defeat us, and force us to die a heroic death. If someone in our clan attains immortality, Devraj Indra will never dare to plot against us again. Our clan will become invincible. You should not worry about this small matter. You are the empress. If a small sacrifice is required to achieve a greater goal for the benefit of the kingdom, it should be made immediately. Please allow prince Swarbhanu to perform this invincible penance under the guidance of the revered Gurudev Shukracharya. Gurudev Shukracharya is a great well-wisher of our clan. He will assist our son in every way and provide protection. Prince Swarbhanu is fortunate to have the blessings of a godlike father in the absence of his own father. I know you are his mother. Your affection for your son is natural. But consider the immense benefits that

may be gained from this sacrifice. Please give up your sorrow.”

Until then, prince Swarbhanu had been sitting quietly. Then he addressed his mother and said, "O Mother, you are my life. Your command is absolute to me. I will certainly do as you command. My father's words and advice are worth considering. Mother, the power of penance is indescribable. Through penance, Lord Brahma created this, Universe. Lord Vishnu nurtures it through penance, and Lord Shiva destroys it through penance. The entire Universe is based on penance. Mother, if you allow me to practice penance as Gurudev Shukracharya instructs, I will gladly accept. Do not worry about the hardships penance will bring. I am capable of facing all hardships and obstacles. If you allow it, I am ready to accept these hardships for the sake of my clan.”

Upon hearing the words of her husband and son, empress Simhalika was momentarily overwhelmed with emotion. Then, regaining her composure, she resolved to hand her son, Swarbhanu, over to Brahmrishi Narada. He should bestow blessings that would be best for our clan.

While they were discussing this, empress Simhalika received word from a maid that the Sage had returned from the garden and was resting in the guest house. Upon hearing this news, emperor Viprichitti immediately ran to the guest room and prostrated himself before Brahmrishi Narada.

After receiving his blessings, the emperor sat at his feet. Empress Simhalika, Ahalad, and Swarbhanu then arrived at the guest house and sat close to Brahmrishi Narada.

Empress Simhalika then placed prince Swarbhanu at the feet of Brahmrishi Narada. With folded hands and tears in

her eyes, she said, "O granduncle Brahmrishi, you are the great well-wisher of our clan. Do as you deem fit. Prince Swarbhanu is dedicated to your service."

Brahmarishi Narada then lifted prince Swarbhanu into his lap. In a sweet voice, he said, "Listen to me, dear Simhalika, Viprichitti, and prince Ahalada. One day, all the Daanava and Daitya clans will thank you for this decision. When your son, Swarbhanu, attains immortality and sits among the Gods, the entire Universe will be proud of him. Why delay a noble cause? I must take prince Swarbhanu to Guru Shukracharya's Ashram as soon as possible. So bid farewell to your son."

Emperor Viprichitti, then, arranged for a magnificent chariot with great horses that ran faster than the wind. Empress Simhalika, emperor Viprichitti, and prince Ahalad then handed over prince Swarbhanu to Brahmrishi Narada and bade him farewell. Brahmrishi Narada, then, departed with Swarbhanu to Guru Shukracharya's Ashram.

Guru Shukracharya

Brahmarishi Narad learned through his divy drashti (divine vision) that Guru Shukracharya was staying at his hermitage in Kopargaon at that time, so he and Swarbhanu set out for Kopargaon.

The five-year-old then spoke to Brahmrshi Narad with boundless humility: "O Lord, I have heard bits and pieces about Acharya Shukracharya from my parents. I also know that he has taken on the responsibility of protecting the Daitya and Daanava lineages and assumed the position of Acharya for both clans. I wish to learn detailed knowledge about him from you."

Upon hearing Swarbhanu's loving and humble words, Brahmrishi Narad began to give him detailed information about Acharya Shukradeva.

He said, "O son, Acharya Shukracharya is the son of Maharshi Bhragu. Maharshi Bhragu is a mind-born son (Manas Putra) of Brahma and my brother. Maharishi Bhragu is the uncle of your grandfather, Maharishi Kashyapa. As you probably know, both Maharshi Kashyapa's father, Maharshi Marici, and Maharshi Bhragu are mind-born sons (Manas Putras) of Brahma. For this reason, Acharya Shukra is your granduncle."

"Impressed by the penance and wisdom of Maharishi Bhragu, a dear disciple of Lord Shiva, Brahmā, his father, honoured him with the title Prajāpati. Maharishi Bhragu is counted among the Saptarishis (Seven Sages). His daughter, Shri, married Lord Vishnu; therefore, he is also Lord Vishnu's father-in-law. He composed the extremely important text, the "Bhrigu Samhita."

Maharishi Bhragu wrote the Bhrigu Samhita at Lord Vishnu's command. Once, a fierce dispute arose among the Gods as to who was superior: Brahma, Vishnu, or Mahadeva. Deciding this matter was no easy task. Ultimately, all the Gods, led by Indra, went to Maharshi Bhrigu.

Upon hearing their question, Maharshi Bhragu said, "O Indra and all the Gods, no opinion on this matter is valid. The three deities—Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh—all belong to the category of the supremely great. They are one and the same. They are addressed by three different names only due to a division of labour. Brahma is responsible for the creation of the Universe, Vishnu for its preservation, and Mahesh for its destruction."

Indra and the other Gods were not satisfied with this statement. They insisted that Maharshi Bhragu should tell them exactly who the supreme deity was.

Seeing how insistent the Gods were, Maharshi Bhragu said, "O Gods, if this is your firm resolve, then I will certainly think on this matter. If I can reach a conclusion, I will reveal to you the superiority of one of them."

Maharishi Bhragu devised a plan. The God who had conquered anger should be the supreme God. He resolved to do something that would anger these three Gods.

Maharishi Bhragu first went to Brahmā in Brahmāloka. Despite being his son, Maharishi Bhragu did not greet, bow to, or pray to his father Brahmā. Seeing this, Brahmā became angry with Maharishi Bhragu. His anger grew so intense that his face turned red. Like fire, Brahma's anger turned into embers. Just as he thought of cursing Maharishi Bhragu, he reconsidered. After all, Maharishi Bhragu was his own son. It would not be right to curse him. Using his

discriminating wisdom, Brahma tried to suppress his anger. Maharshi Bhragu understood Brahma's inner state. He prayed to his father and sang his praises. Pleased by his prayer, Brahma blessed him. Having received the blessing from his father Brahma, Maharshi Bhragu proceeded to Mount Kailash to meet Lord Shiva. As soon as Lord Shiva saw Maharshi Bhragu approaching, he opened his arms to embrace him. However, Maharshi Bhragu refused the embrace and said, "O Mahadeva, you have always violated the boundaries of Dharma and the Vedas. The boons you grant to these wicked Rakshasas cause the creation to face many crises. Because of your these blunders, I will never accept your embrace."

Upon hearing these harsh words, Mahadeva became enraged. His anger grew so intense that He raised His trident to strike Maharshi Bhragu. Just then, Devi Sati stepped between them. She somehow pacified Mahadeva's wrath. Once His anger subsided, Maharshi Bhragu prayed to Mahadeva and sang His praises. Maharshi Bhragu apologized for his offense and asked for His forgiveness. Pleased by Maharshi Bhragu's prayer, Mahadeva blessed him.

After receiving blessings from Mahadeva, Maharshi Bhragu departed for Lord Vishnu's Vaikuntha Dham. Upon his arrival, Maharshi Bhragu found Lord Vishnu resting with His head in the lap of Goddess Lakshmi. As soon as he arrived, Maharshi Bhragu kicked Lord Vishnu in the chest.

Lord Vishnu immediately stood up and asked, "Great Sage, have you hurt your foot? I was unaware of your arrival. Please forgive my rudeness. Please rest here on My throne. I am blessed by the touch of your feet."

Seeing Lord Vishnu's affection, Rishi Bhṛagu's eyes filled with tears. He asked the Lord for forgiveness. He prayed to Him and received His blessings.

After receiving the blessings, he went to the celestial realm of the Gods. There, he recounted the entire story to Indra and the other Gods in detail. Upon hearing his tale, all the Gods were astonished, and their doubts were dispelled. After this incident, they concluded that Lord Vishnu is supreme among the Trimurtis.

There is another version of this incident in the scripture, too. When Maharshi Bhṛagu kicked Lord Vishnu in the chest, Lord Vishnu laughed and endured the blow. However, Mother Shri (Lakshmi) could not tolerate the insult to Her husband. An angry Mother Shri then cursed Her own father, Maharshi Bhṛagu: "O father, although you are a high-caste Brahmin, it seems to me that, out of arrogance, you have insulted my innocent, venerable husband. I curse you and all Brahmins to be deprived of wealth and prosperity from now on."

Shri's curse angered and agitated Maharshi Bhṛagu, who was about to curse his daughter. Then, Lord Vishnu laughed and said to Maharshi Bhṛagu, "O great Sage, do not be sad or angry. I grant you divine vision. Compile a Samhita scripture. It is my boon that its fruits will never be in vain."

As a result of Lord Vishnu's boon, Maharshi Bhṛagu composed the 'Bhṛagu Samhita'. This Bhṛagu Samhitā is an extraordinary text. It uses peculiar vocabulary. It provides equally authentic descriptions of the past, present, and future. The 'Bhṛagu Samhitā' is a rare text in the form of a dialogue between Maharishi Bhṛagu and his son, Shukracharya. Its language and style reflect the words of God.

Maharishi Bhragu had two wives. His first wife was Divya, the daughter of his maternal uncle, Hiranyakashipu. From her, he had two sons: Shukra and Vishvakarma. Shukra became the Guru of the Daitya and Daanava clans and was called Shukracharya. Divya's second son, Vishvakarma, became the chief architect for the Gods.

Maharishi Bhragu's second wife was named Pulomi. She was the daughter of Maharishi Puloma. Maharishi Bhragu also had two great sons with Pulomi: Chyavana and Richika. Maharishi Chyavana became a renowned inventor of Ayurvedic medicines. Maharishi Richika, a master of the Vedas, became a highly revered scholar of the Vedic scriptures and Upanishads. Richika married Satyavati, the daughter of king Gadhish. Maharishi Richika and princess Satyavati had a son named Jamadagni, whose son was Bhagwan Parshuram. Maharishi Bhragu sent his young son Shukra to his Guru, Maharishi Angira for education. My brother and another mind-born son (Manas Putra) of Brahmā, the Brahmrishi Angira was counted among those great Brahmrshis who assisted Brahmā in composing the Vedas. Maharishi Angira, was not Guru of only Maharishi Bhrigu, but also Guru of great Maharishi Atri.

Maharishi Angira also had a son named Brihaspati, who later became the priest and Guru of the Gods. Shukra was a far sharper intellect than Brihaspati, but due to his fatherly affection for Brihaspati, Brahmrishi Angira always scorned Shukra. He was determined to make Brihaspati the supreme scholar. This upset and disappointed Shukra. But he did not lose heart. One day, he left Brahmrishi Angira's Ashram. He went into the forest and began performing severe penance for Mahadeva. His penance pleased Mahadev, who appeared before him and asked him to ask for a boon.

Shukra fell at His feet with folded hands, and prayed humbly, "O Lord, if you are pleased with me, please accept me as Your disciple and grant me knowledge of the entire Universe."

Mahadeva was highly pleased with Shukra's devotion and love and said, "So be it."

He made Shukracharya His disciple. Then, Mahadev taught him the Vedic scriptures, dance, singing, weaponry, and other arts, and bestowed upon him the title of 'Acharya'. Mahadev then ordered him to establish his own Ashram.

With Mahadev's blessing, Shukracharya established his own Ashram in Kopargaon. When emperor Hiranyakashyapu, your maternal uncle, learned that Shukracharya had returned after pleasing Mahadev, he approached him and requested that he become the Guru of the Daitya lineage. Sukracharaya knew that Hiranyakshipu was a staunch opponent of Lord Vishnu, who was very dear to his Guru, Mahadeva. Therefore, he declined the position of Guru to emperor Hiranyakshipu, but agreed to become his advisor from time to time when requested.

Around that time, my other brother, who was another son of Brahma, Swayambhuva Manu, had a son named Priyavrat. One day, Priyavrat came to me and asked to become my disciple. Moved by his request and impressed by his talent, I accepted him. I imparted to him the great knowledge of God. Through the practice of 'Akhandā Samadhi Yoga', he surrendered all his senses and actions to Lord Vishnu. His father, Swayambhuva Manu, wanted him to take responsibility for ruling the Earth. However, he did not accept. Unpleased with his son's attitude, Swayambhuva Manu approached his father, Brahma.

He said, "O father, I am performing the duties of the world at your command. But my son has dedicated all his senses and actions to the feet of Lord Vishnu through the practice of 'Akhandā Samādhi Yoga.' When I asked him to accept the kingdom of the Earth, he refused and said that if he received the authority of the kingdom, his true self would be covered by the illusions of the kingdom, his wife, his children, and his other false attachments. He might become preoccupied with the concerns of the state and family and thus forget the ultimate truth. At the behest of his Guru, Narada, he has decided to renounce the world and devote himself to worshipping God. What should I do?"

When Brahma saw Priyavrat's inclination through his Yogic power, He assumed the form of the four Vedas. He went to Priyavrat with His son Marici and other attendants. At that time, I (Brahmrishi Narad) was teaching Priyavrat the knowledge of Brahm.

Seeing father Brahma approaching, Priyavrat and I immediately stood up with our hands folded and greeted Him. We worshiped Him in many ways. We described His virtues and the excellence of His incarnations with sweet words.

Then, looking at Priyavrat with a gentle, smiling, and compassionate gaze, Brahma said, "O son, I am telling you the true and authentic doctrine. Listen carefully. You are undoubtedly immeasurable, desireless, and a worshipper of the all-perfect Lord Vishnu. Not only you, but also, I, Mahadeva, your father, Swayambhuva Manu, and your Guru, Brahmrishi Narada, follow His command. No one in the Universe can disobey His decree through penance, learning, Yogic power, intellectual force, wealth, righteousness, his own help, or the help of another. The body given by the unmanifest and indestructible God experiences birth, death, grief, attachment, fear, pleasure,

and pain due to its actions. We should follow his instructions, just as a blind man follows someone who can guide him. Consider the harm that a householder's life can do to a wise man who has conquered his senses and is absorbed in his soul. One who desires to conquer the senses' enemies should first try to subdue them while living at home by exercising extreme restraint. Although you have already conquered these six enemies by taking refuge in the lotus feet of Lord Kamalnatha, I still advise you to enjoy the pleasures granted by the Lord first. Then, detach yourself and abide in your true self."

When Brahmā spoke these words, Priyavrata and I respectfully bowed our heads to Him. Priyavrata looked at me. I instructed him to obey father Brahmā's commands.

He replied to Lord Brahma, "I will follow your command, my Lord."

Having said this, he reverently accepted Brahmā's commands. Pleased with his son, Swayambhuva Manu entrusted him with the responsibility of protecting Mother Earth.

After that, emperor Priyavrata ruled the Earthly kingdom by the Lord's will. This splendid task reveals the vastness of his heart. By constantly meditating on the Lord's divine feet, king Priyavrat, who had freed himself from worldly attachments, accepted the imperial throne to honour his elders.

Later, he married Barhismati, the daughter of Prajāpati Vishvakarma. He became the father of ten sons: Agni-Dhyumna, Idhmajihva, Yajñabahu, Mahavīrya, Hiranyaretas, Ghrītapriṣṭha, Savana, Medhathithi, Viti-Hotra, and Kavi; and one daughter, Urjaswati.

When Urjaswati became a young woman, emperor Priyavart began searching for a suitable husband for her. None of the Devas, Daityas or Daanavas lineages were considered suitable matches for his energetic daughter. Then, he went to his father, Swayambhuva Manu, for advice on this matter. Fortunately, Brahma and Mahadeva were also present at that time. The emperor offered his Pranams (greetings) to these great Gods and requested that they suggest a suitable match for his daughter.

Mahadeva then spoke to emperor Priyavrat: "O son Priyavrat, my disciple Shukra runs an Ashram in Kopargaon on Earth. In due time, with my blessing, he will find his place among the nine planets (Navgrahas). You will not find a more suitable match for Urjaswati than him. Go to his Ashram and tell him that I want him to marry your daughter."

Upon hearing these kind words from the lotus mouth of Lord Shiva himself, Swayambhuva Manu and Lord Brahma ordered emperor Priyavarta to go to Shukracharya's Ashram with Urjaswati and follow his instructions.

The emperor went to the Ashram in Kopergaon, conveyed his Guru Mahadeva's message, and requested that Shukracharya accept Urjaswati as his wife. How could Shukracharya refuse a command from his Guru? He fell at the emperor's feet and said, "As you wish, my lord."

Thus, Shukracharya married princess Urjaswati. In due time, two sons were born to Shukracharya: Shanda and Tvastadhaara. You will also meet these two brothers, Shanda and Tvastadhaara, at the Ashram, along with Guru Shankaracharya and Urjaswati.

While they were talking, the chariot of Brahmarishi Narad and prince Swarbhanu arrived near the Ashram of Acharya Shukrudev.

Guru Shukracharya Ashram

When Guru Shukracharya awoke early in the morning during Brahma-muhurta, he immediately knew through divine vision that Brahmurishi Narada and Swarbhanu, Simhalikā's son, were coming to his Ashram, likely arriving by dusk. He ordered all his disciples to begin preparing for the arrival of the Sage.

At Guru Shukracharya's command, the entire Ashram was decorated with flowers, garlands and lamps. Guru Shukracharya's Kopargaon Ashram looked exceptionally divine this day. When hundreds of lamps were lit in the Ashram and on the Mother Godavari bank (ghat) at dusk, it seemed as if the Apsaras had descended to Earth. This supernatural, enchanting spectacle was simply breathtaking. As soon as the disciples received the news that the Brahmurishi Narad's chariot was now just a short distance away, the disciples began to recite Vedic hymns. Alongside the echoing Vedic mantras and hymns on the banks of the Godavari River, the disciples also began to chant the Godavari Aarti. The entire atmosphere became divine, filled with bhajans and the sound of conch shells and bells. The sight of countless lamps burning together made it seem as if a river of light was flowing. During this divine festival of lights, it was hard to tell whether Mother Godavari, adorned with garlands of lamps, was welcoming the special guests or whether the Apsaras, adorned with garlands of lights, were expressing their gratitude to Tripurari Shankar and Godavari.

As he approached the Ashram, Brahmurishi Narad sent Shukracharya a letter of greeting via the charioteer out of courtesy and asked for permission to enter. The coachman reached the Ashram, bowed to Gurudev Shukracharya, and handed him the letter. Upon receiving the letter,

Shukracharya immediately ran to meet his beloved Brahmrishi Narad, still in the same posture in which he had been sitting, accompanied by the coachman. The coachman then suggested that it would not be convenient for the Acharya to walk the long distance, and that he should wait at the Ashram gate to welcome Brahmrishi Narad. The Acharya paused at the entrance to the Ashram.

Brahmrishi Narad and Swarbhanu got out of the chariot a short distance before the gate and ran to meet him on foot. The scene of this meeting was a sight to behold. The Acharya welcomed the Brahmrishi by placing a garland of flowers around his neck, reciting Vedic mantras in his praise and touching his feet. The Brahmrishi Narada then embraced him warmly and bestowed a blessing of good fortune. He then introduced Swarbhanu to Acharya Shukradev. Swarbhanu immediately prostrated himself and clung to Guru Shukracharya's feet. Overcoming with emotions, Shukracharya lifted him into his lap. At that moment, Shukracharya's wife, Guri Maa Urjaswati, arrived on the scene and fell at the feet of Brahmrishi Narada to seek his blessing. The Brahmrishi embraced her, wishing her good fortune, and introduced her to Swarbhanu. Swarbhanu prostrated himself at the feet of Guru Maa (Guru Mother) Urjaswati, who was like a mother to him. Seeing this, tears welled up in everyone's eyes. Guru Mother Urjaswati embraced Swarbhanu, considering him as her own son. Then, Shukracharya requested that Brahmrishi Narada and Swarbhanu enter the Ashram's special guest room. When they arrived, Guru Mother Urjaswati said to Brahmrishi Narada with folded hands, "O Lord, if you permit, I will take son Swarbhanu to my cottage with me."

At the Guru Mother's request, Brahmrishi Narada laughed and said, 'Urjaswati, I have come only to leave him with you. Why not? Shanda and Tvastadhaara will be happy to

have a younger brother in Swarbhanu. You will surely fulfil his life's purpose with your maternal affection.”

The Guru Mother then took Swarbhanu with her to her hut. At that moment, her two sons, Shanda and Tvastaadhar, returned to the hut after evening prayers. They had already received word from their fellow disciples that Brahmishi Narad had arrived at the Ashram earlier that evening with a Daanava clan prince. Seeing a five-year-old child beside their mother in the hut, they guessed that this must be the Daanava prince. Approaching him lovingly, Shanda lifted him into his arms and asked, “Dear prince, what is your name?”

Before Swarbhanu could answer, his mother introduced him to her two sons herself.

she said, "Sons, this boy is Swarbhanu, the son of Viprichitti, the king of the Patal Lok (Netherworld) and queen Simhalika. Brahmishi Narad has brought him here to study under your father at the Gurukul. Consider him as your younger brother and do whatever you can to help him expand his knowledge. I entrust him to you.”

Upon hearing their mother's kind words, Shanda and Tvastadhara embraced the five-year-old boy Swarbhanu, and promised, "We will certainly protect you Swarbhanu, and help you grow in knowledge."

Meanwhile, at the guest house, Brahmishi Narada set out for the banks of the Godavari River to bathe. After bathing and meditating, he had a meal with Acharya Shukradeva and his family. He told them lots of news from across the Universe. Then, chanting “Narayana, Narayana”, he went to the guest house to rest.

The next morning, Swarbhanu completed his daily rituals, bathed in the sacred Mother Godavari and returned to the hut of Guru Mother Urjaswati and her sons, Shanda and Tvastadhara. He asked them for permission to tour the Ashram and meet the other disciples. Shanda and Tvastadhara then took Swarbhanu on a tour of the Ashram.

When he set foot on the grounds of Acharya Shukradeva's sacred Ashram, Swarbhanu was stunned by its beauty. He was so pleased by the Ashram's beauty that he forgot his own existence. The flowers in the Ashram's valley enhanced its beauty. Chanting could be heard from every corner. The fragrance of the havan offered to Agni Dev, the birdsong, the lush greenery and the pure, babbling waters of the Godavari River all won Swarbhanu's heart. For a few moments, he even forgot about his parents and his home. Then his Guru brothers, Shanda and Tvastadhara, introduced him to the other disciples of the Ashram. Swarbhanu's good looks, innocence, radiant face and brilliance drew everyone's attention. After touring the Ashram and meeting everyone, Swarbhanu and his Guru brothers, Shanda and Tvastadhara, made their way to the guest house where Brahmrishi Narada was staying.

After greeting Brahmrishi Narada, they sat down beside him. Shukracharya was also present. He was eager to hear about Swarbhanu's future plans from the mouth of the omniscient Brahmrishi Narada.

Perceiving his state of mind, the omniscient Brahmrishi Narada spoke to him in the most endearing words: 'O Acharya, I went to the kingdom of emperor Viprichitti and queen Simhalika. There, Viprichitti and Simhalika placed Swarbhanu at my feet. I was astonished to see his future. What divine play of the Lord is this, that He wants to grant this boy immortality? But for this, he needs guidance and

knowledge. You are the Guru of the Daitya and Daanava lineages, guiding the path and being the foremost sage in this Universe. If Maharshi Angira were not biased towards you because of his affection for his son Brihaspati, you would be the Guru of all three clans: the Devas, the Daityas and the Daanavas. I request that you accept this child as your disciple, impart knowledge to him, and encourage him to perform an extremely severe penance for Mahadeva, asking Him for a boon that will grant him immortality.

Upon hearing the words of the Brahmrishi Narada, the Acharya Shukradev spoke humbly: 'O most revered Brahmrishi, I shall obey every one of your words. I will certainly accept this boy as my disciple and impart the supreme knowledge to him. Not only will I encourage him to worship my Guru Mahadeva, I will also show him every way to please Him. It will be my own good fortune if my disciple attains immortality.'

Brahmrishi Narada then asked Shanda and Tvastadhar to come closer. When they did so, he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.

Then, addressing Swarbhanu, he said, "Dear Swarbhanu, Acharya Shukradev is your father and Guru. Guru Maa Urjaswati is your mother. Shanda and Tvastadhaara are your brothers from now on. It is your duty to honour and respect them, and obey every command they give you. Absorb all the teachings given by your Guru swiftly, and make a name for yourself as a scholar of the Daanava lineage. When your education is complete, follow the path that your revered Guru guides you to follow religiously and fulfil your life's purpose. May you find a way to please Mahadeva and attain immortality under Acharya's guidance. The time of my departure has come. May Narayan fulfil all your desires.'

With that, he placed his blessed hand on Swarbhanu's head. Before Swarbhanu, the Acharya or Urjaswati could respond, he rose from his seat, picked up his Veena and began to play, chanting, “Narayan, Narayan.”

Acharya Title to Swarbhanu

The next morning, Acharya Shukradeva ordered his disciples to start purifying Swarbhanu. He led it personally. Swarbhanu was bathed in the Godavari River, after which his purification ceremony commenced with the chanting of mantras.

गंगे च यमुने चैव गोदावरि सरस्वती ।
नर्मदे सिन्धु कावेरी जलेऽस्मिन्सन्निधिं कुरु ॥

Gange cha Yamune chaiva Godavari Saraswati.
Narmade Sindhu Kaveri jalesmin sannidhim kuru.

After this, Swarbhanu was purified by invoking Agni Deva on the Yagna altar through Mantra chanting and offering him Yagna havis.

ॐ अपवित्रः पवित्रो वा सर्वावस्थां गतोऽपि वा ।
यः स्मरेत् पुण्डरीकाक्षं स बाह्यभ्यंतर शुचिः ॥
यानि कानि पापानि जन्मान्तरकृतानि च ।
तानि तानि प्रणश्यन्ति प्रदक्षिणा पदे-पदे ॥
मंत्र हीनं क्रियाहीनं भक्तिहीनं जनार्दन ।
यत्पूजितं मया देव परिपूर्णं तदस्तु मे ॥

Om Apavitrah Pavitro Va
Sarvaavasthaam Gato Api Va.
Yah Smaret Pundarikaksham
Sa Baahyaabhyantarah Shuchih.
Yaani Kaani Cha Paapaani
Janmaantara-Krtaani Cha.
Taani Taani Pranashyanti
Pradakssinna-Pade Pade.
Mantra Heenam Kriya Heenam

**Bhakti Heenam Janaardana.
Yatpuujitam Mayaa Deva
Paripuurnnam Tadastu Me.**

Whether pure or impure, or having passed through all conditions of life, anyone who remembers the lotus-eyed Lord (Vishnu/Pundarikaksha) becomes pure, both outwardly and inwardly. All sins committed in this life or previous ones are destroyed with every step of the Pradakshina (circumambulation). O Lord Janardana (Vishnu), I have performed worship improperly, without the correct Mantras or rituals, and without devotion. Please, O Lord, make it complete as I have offered it to you.

Once the purification process was complete, the Acharya accepted him as his disciple. A ceremony was then held in which he swore an oath to observe the rules of the Brahmacharya Ashram and the Gurukul.

Swarbhanu was a boy of exceptional intellect and memory. As soon as a verse was spoken by his Guru, he would instantly memorise it. Acharya Shukradeva was greatly impressed by his keen intellect. His education advanced much faster than that of the other disciples. He soon mastered all the Vedas, the Vedanta and the Upanishads, as well as other such texts.

Shortly after Swarbhanu arrived at Guru Shukracharya's Ashram, both of Acharya Shukradeva's sons, Shanda and Tvastadhāra, accepted positions as priests to emperor Hiranyakashipu. More accurately, emperor Hiranyakashipu had ordered them to do so. To defy the emperor's orders was to invite the death penalty. Therefore, they departed for the emperor's capital, obeying his command. Their mother, Guru Maa Urjaswati, had also decided to accompany them to care for her sons. Consequently, Acharya Shukradeva was left completely alone. In these circumstances, Swrabhanu became his only support. While

residing at the Ashram of Shukracharya and serving him as his assistance, Swarbhānu received news that his maternal cousin, emperor Hiranyakashipu's son Prahlād, had turned against his father. Emperor Hiranyakashipu had declared him as traitor.

In the Varaha incarnation, Lord Vishnu killed his uncle, Hiranyaaksh, who was the brother of Hiranyakashipu. Hiranyakashipu then became an enemy of Lord Vishnu. Enraged by Vishnu, the Daanava emperor proclaimed himself 'God'. He forbade prayers to Lord Vishnu throughout his kingdom. However, his cousin Prahlād, the son of emperor Hiranyakashipu, refused to obey this order. Prahlād continuously prayed to Lord Vishnu. The emperor was extremely angry at his son's disobedience and sentenced him to death. He was subjected to many methods of execution. He was poisoned, thrown from a high mountain and into a pit of venomous snakes. He was also tied to a stone and thrown into the sea. Each time, however, Lord Vishnu protected him and kept him alive.

One day, Swarbhānu received a very sad news. His mother, empress Simhalika, had been ordered by emperor Hiranyakashipu to sit with Prahlād in a fire so that Prahlād would be burned to death while empress Simhalika would remain unharmed. Swarbhānu knew that his mother's Guru, Agni Dev, had given her a blanket as a boon so that fire could not harm her. However, empress Simhalika was burnt to death, but Prahlād was not. A thought was emerging in his mind that why was mother Simhalika consumed by the flames when she had immunity from her Guru Agni Dev in form of fire-immune blanket?

He cried a lot that day, remembering his mother, queen Simhalika. He was furious with Agni Dev, wondering why he had broken his promise. Just then, Acharya Shukradev sat closer to him. Stroking his hair, he explained that it was

actually queen Simhalikā who had decided to be consumed by the fire herself in order to save Prahlād. Guru Shukrācārya had a divine vision. He could see the past, the present, and the future. There was no question of not trusting the Acharya's words. Guru Shukracharya explained that your mother saw the image of your brother Ahlad in Prahlad. She placed the blanket given to her by the God of fire, Agni Dev, on Prahlad before entering the fire herself, and was burnt to ashes while Prahlad remained unharmed.

Hearing this, tears streamed down Swarbhanu's cheeks. In an astonished, choked voice, he asked Gurudev Shukracharya, "What! My mother gave up her life to save my cousin Prahlad! Mother, a thousand salutations to you. By saving my cousin Prahlad, you have illuminated the name of the entire Daanava lineage with your vast heart."

Sometime later, Swarbhanu received news that Lord Vishnu could no longer bear Prahalad's suffering and had taken the Narsimha incarnation. In this incarnation, he sent emperor Hiranyakashipu to his abode.

Upon hearing this, Swarbhanu asked his Guru, Shukracarya, "Gurudev, I heard that emperor Hiranyakshipu had received the boon of immortality from Brahma. How, then, did Lord Vishnu kill him?"

Then Guru Shukracharya explained, "My son, emperor Hiranyakashipu believed that he had been granted immortality by Brahma, but this was not complete. When Brahma showed that he was unable to grant him boon of immortality, Hiranyakashipu asked for a boon that he would not die by day, nor by night, nor at dawn or dusk, nor in the sky or on the earth, nor by any weapon or armament, nor by a man, a beast, a bird or a God. Brahma granted him this boon. When emperor Hiranyakashipu became enraged with Prahlad and raised his sword to slay

him, he cried out, 'O wicked boy! Summon your Lord Vishnu now! Where is He hiding? I will kill him along with you.'

Prahlad then said, 'O father, Lord Vishnu is present in every particle. He is all-pervading and omnipresent.'

Hiranyakashipu then pointed to a pillar in the palace and asked Prahlad if Vishnu was present in it as well. Prahlad replied that He certainly was. The emperor then struck the pillar with his sword. As soon as it split open, Lord Vishnu appeared in the form of Narsimha. Seeing this, the emperor trembled. This Narsimha form of Lord Narayana was neither fully human nor completely animal. He did not kill emperor Hiranyakashipu with weapons, but rather by forcing him to sit on his lap and tearing open his chest with his nails. At that time, it was neither morning nor night. In this way, Lord Vishnu fully honoured Brahma's words and killed the emperor. After this, He crowned Prahlad king.

Acharya Swarbhanu also had great love and respect for Lord Vishnu. Upon hearing this from his Guru, he began to chant 'Jai Jai Hari Vishnu'.

Swarbhanu's Guru, Shukracharya was a great devotee of Mahadeva. He knew that Mahadeva was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Therefore, Swarbhanu also held Lord Vishnu in the highest esteem.

Ten years had now passed for Swarbhanu at his Guru's Ashram. At just fifteen years of age, the Acharya appointed Swarbhanu as deputy head of the Gurukul.

Acharya Shukradeva then conferred upon him the title of 'Acharya'. From then on, he was addressed as 'Acharya Swarbhanu'.

Marriage

Several more years had passed since Acharya Swarbhanu settled into his Guru's Ashram. His responsibilities were growing day by day. Guru Shukradev, placing complete trust in him, had effectively handed over the entire burden of the Ashram to him.

However, Guru Shukracharya now had one concern: to settle him down in matrimony. He cast his gaze around, searching for a suitable bride for Acharya Swarbhanu. He found that Rishi Namoch's daughter Supratinamochi was befitting for Acharya Swarbhanu. Rishi Namoch was himself a disciple of Guru Shukracharya; therefore, he had no doubt that he would get his permission. Persuading Acharya Swarbhanu to agree to the marriage could prove challenging. He knew that Acharya Swarbhanu would never disobey his command if he ordered him to marry Rishi's daughter Supratinamochi. However, the Gurudev did not want this marriage to be forced. He wanted him to fall in love. Eventually, one day, he got this chance.

Rishi Namoch was planning to organise a grand Yagna. He came to the Ashram of Gurudev Shukracharya to seek his personal permission for the Yagna and requested that he should accept the position of chief priest. Shukracharya gave him a grand welcome and introduced him to his disciple, Swarbhanu. Rishi Namoch was deeply impressed by Acharya Swarbhanu's radiant countenance and personality. When the time was right, Gurudev Shukracharya suggested Acharya Swarbhanu's name for the position of chief priest in this grand Yagna instead of his own.

Rishi Namoch was already deeply impressed by Acharya Swarbhanu's personality, knowledge and humility. He accepted Guru Shukracharya's suggestion on the spot.

Meanwhile, seeing an opportunity, Guru Shukracharya also proposed that Rishi Namoch should marry his daughter, Supritinamoch, to Acharya Swarbhanu. He could not have found a better groom for his daughter than Acharya Swarbhanu. Rishi Namoch considered this to be his good fortune. He also realised that there could be no better match for his daughter than Acharya Swarbhanu. However, Shukracharya told Rishi Namoch that he did not want to force this marriage on Acharya Swarbhanu; rather, he wanted it to be based on love. Therefore, when Acharya Swarbhanu arrived at their Ashram as the chief priest of the Yagna, he suggested that his daughter Supritinamoch would be responsible for his hospitality. He was fully confident that Supritinamoch would win Acharya Swarbhanu's heart, and that he would then agree to the marriage.

The time for the grand Yagna arrived. At Guru Shukracharya's command, a beautiful chariot was prepared for Acharya Swarbhanu to travel to the site. At the appointed time, Acharya Swarbhanu arrived at the Yagna site. The Sage Namoch himself gave him a grand welcome. His daughter, Supritinamoch, was also present at the welcome ceremony. Rishi Namoch introduced his daughter to Acharya Swarbhanu. He urged her to personally oversee the Acharya's hospitality. The moment Supritinamoch saw him, she was captivated by Acharya Swarbhanu's brilliance and beauty. She began to pray to Mother Gauri: "If you are going to grant me a boon, make Acharya Swarbhanu my husband."

Rishi Namoch's daughter, Supritinamoch, served Acharya Swarbhanu with great devotion. As chief priest of the Yagna, Swarbhanu was extremely busy. He was so preoccupied that he did not pay attention to his food and drink. Supritinamoch insisted that he should eat his meals on time. She would also help him conduct the Yagna and,

to cool him down, fan him personally with her hand to reduce the heat from the fire. Acharya Swarbhanu was extremely pleased with her service. Once the Yagna was successfully concluded, he was ready to return to his own Ashram.

As he was leaving, he approached Supratinamoch and said, "O beautiful one, you have served me well. If there is anything I can do for you, please ask without hesitation."

Blushing and suppressing her inner desire for the Acharya to accept her as his wife, Supatinamocha said, "O great Acharya, if you are pleased with me, then please grant me the Mantra that will help me find my desirable husband."

Acharya Swarbhanu smiled and replied, "O daughter of the Sage, by worshipping my beloved divine Mother Gauri, you will find your desired husband. To please Mother Gauri, I am giving you a Mantra. Chant this Mantra regularly before Mother Gauri and Mahadev. My blessings are with you. Surely, in due time, you will find him."

Having said this, Acharya Swarbhanu whispered a mantra into Supratinaamoch's ear.

ॐ ह्रीं गौर्ये नमः।

हे गौरी शंकर अर्धांगिनी यथा त्वं शंकर प्रिया ।

तथा माम कुरु कल्याणी कान्त कान्ता सुदुर्लभम् ॥

**Om Hreem Gaurye Namah.
He Gauri Shankar Ardhangini
Yatha Twam Shankar Priya.
Tatha Maam Kuru Kalyaanee
Kaant Kaantaa Sudurlubham.**

O Gauri, consort of Shiva, just as you are beloved of Shiva, so make me beloved and rare to my beloved, O auspicious one.

After Acharya Swarbhanu left for his Ashram, Supratinamoch began regularly performing the proper worship of Mother Gauri with the Mantra, he had given her, having accepted him as her husband in her heart.

Meanwhile, upon arriving at his Ashram, Acharya Swarbhanu prostrated himself before Guru Shukracharya by touching his feet. He informed Gurudev of the success of the Yagna. He also told him that Sage Namoch's daughter, Supratinamoch, had served him very well. She desired to find a worthy groom. He advised her to chant the Mother Gauri Siddha Mantra regularly. She also asked me to ask you to bless her so that her wish may be fulfilled.

Acharya Shukradeva smiled and said, 'So be it.'

As her devotion to Mother Gauri grew, the Sage's daughter Supratinamoch developed a great love for Acharya Swarbhanu. Impressed by her devotion, Mother Gauri appeared to her in a dream one night, blessing her and saying that she would soon receive the husband of her heart's desire.

That same night, Mother Gauri also appeared in Acharya Swarbhanu's dream accompanied by Mahadev. She gave him explicit instructions to accept Supratinamoch as his wife. Mahadev smiled in support of Mother Gauri's command and also blessed him. Before Acharya Swarbhanu could respond, they both vanished.

The next morning, after performing his daily rituals of bathing and meditation, Acharya Swarbhanu went to Gurudev Shukracharya to convey Mother Gauri's and Mahadeva's message.

Guru Shukracharya simply smiled and said, "Dear son Swarbhānu, I know Supratināmoch has been in love with

you ever since you became the chief priest and conducted the Yajna of her father, Maharshi Namoch. Impressed by her service, you asked her for a favour. Out of shyness, she could not propose marriage to you directly, so she obtained the Mantra to please Mother Gauri in the hope of receiving a desirable boon from you. Her sole aim is to have you as her husband. She has performed an extremely austere penance with the Mantra, you gave her, holding you in her heart. Now, accept her as your wife. If you agree, I will send this marriage proposal to Rishi Namoch."

Acharya Swarbhanu's heart was filled with devotion and love for Supratinamoch. He touched the Guru's feet and said simply, 'Gurudev, you are my well-wisher. My life is dedicated to you. Do whatever you deem fit.'

Having received Acharya Swarbhanu's approval, Gurudev Shukracharya immediately sent one of his disciples to Rishi Namoch's Ashram with a marriage proposal for his daughter, Supratinamoch, to Acharya Swarbhanu.

Rishi Namoch had been waiting for this proposal. After receiving this message from Shukracharya, he went straight to his cottage to share the news with his daughter. He also asked for her consent. Supratinamoch, blushing, ran away, saying, "Father, you know what is best for me. Do as you and Acharya Guru Shukracharya wish."

Seeing that his daughter was happy with the proposal and had given her consent, Rishi Namoch accepted the proposal and sent a message to Acharya Shukradeva, asking him to select an auspicious date for the wedding. He invited the wedding party, along with all the guests, to his Ashram to enjoy their hospitality and preside over the ceremony.

When the disciple arrived at the Ashram of Guru Shukracharya with this auspicious news, the Guru and his

disciple, Acharya Swarbhanu, were discussing the commencement of a Yagna. Guru Shukracharya interrupted their conversation to read the letter written by Rishi Namoch, after which he congratulated Acharya Swarbhanu and offered his blessings.

Guru Shukradeva immediately sent this news to emperor Viprichitti in the Netherworld (Patala Lok) via one of his disciples. The emperor's delight knew no bounds to get this good news. In order to discuss the arrangements for the marriage, emperor Viprichitti promptly dispatched his royal treasurer, Anantacharya, to the Guru's Ashram, accompanied by prince Ahlaad.

Upon arriving at the Ashram, prince Ahlad greeted Guru Shukracharya by touching his feet. Acharya Swarbhanu then touched his brother's feet and accepted his blessings. The prince embraced his brother and congratulated him on accepting the marriage proposal for Supratinamoch, the daughter of Rishi Namoch.

He said to Shukracharya, "Gurudev, what are we waiting for? Please set an auspicious wedding date soon, so that we can prepare for the occasion. I humbly request your approval to send our royal treasurer, Anantacharya Ji, to the Ashram of Rishi Namoch. He will arrange all the wedding preparations and await our arrival there."

Upon hearing these words from prince Ahlad, Guru Shukracharya was overjoyed and replied, "Prince Ahlad, your command shall be obeyed at once. I support your proposal for Acharya Anant to go to the Ashram of Rishi Namoch. Also, please send a message to all the honoured councillors, friends and relatives to arrive here soon to attend the wedding.'

Afterwards, Guru Shukracharya announced the date of the wedding. He wrote down the date and details, and by prince Ahlad's orders, entrusted them to the royal treasurer, Anantacharya. Anantacharya was instructed to take a suitable sum of money from the royal treasury to make the necessary wedding preparations and await the arrival of the wedding party. Then prince Ahlad sent this auspicious news to his father, emperor Viprichitti, requesting that he should forward the invitation to all the council members, relatives, and friends. Upon receiving the news, emperor Viprichitti sent the message to everyone and began preparing to attend the wedding festivities.

He gave his courtiers the good news and invited them to accompany him as wedding guests. Joy reigned everywhere. The entire assembly resounded with cheers for Gurudev Shukracharya, Acharya Swarbhanu, emperor Viprichitti and prince Ahlad.

Armed with this good news, emperor Viprichitti went to his nephew emperor Prahlad's capital city. Emperor Prahlad welcomed him, along with mother queen Kayadhu and his wife queen Devi, with a heartfelt embrace. Upon hearing the good news, emperor Prahlad, mother queen Kayadhu, queen Devi, the Guru Maa Urjaswati, and the Guru brothers Shanda and Tvastadhaara all prepared to reach the Ashram of Acharya Shukradev as soon as possible. All of emperor Prahlad's honourable councillors were also invited. Led by Rajmata Kayadhu, the wedding party set out for Gurudev Shukracharya's Ashram in Kopargaon.

Meanwhile, the treasurer, Anantacharya, arrived at Rishi Namoch's Ashram with the details of the marriage. After touching the Sage's feet and bowing, he placed the letter in his hands. The news spread throughout the Ashram like wildfire immediately. When Supritanamooch heard it, she

went straight to Mother Gauri's temple and bowed to her in thanks. Words of devotion to Mother Gauri flowed from her lips.

श्वेत वृषे समारूढा श्वेताम्बर धरा शुचिः ।
महागौरी शुभं दद्यान्महादेव प्रमोददा ॥
सिद्धगन्धर्वयक्षाद्यैरसुरैरमरैरपि ।
सेव्यामाना सदा भूयात सिद्धिदा सिद्धिदायिनी ॥

Shvete Vrsse Samaaruuddhaa
Shvetambara Dharaa Shucih.
Mahaagaurii Shubham
Dadyaan Mahaadeva Pramodaa.
SiddhagandharvayakṣaadyairsurairamarairApi.
Sevyamānā Sadā Bhūyāt Siddhidā Siddhidāyinī.

O Devi Maha Gauri, the white-complexioned one riding a bull and wearing white clothes, who is pure and bright, please bestow Your auspicious blessings on me. You give delight to Mahadeva. May the one who is always served by siddhas (perfected beings), gandharvas (celestial musicians), yakshas (nature spirits), asuras (Daanavas) and devas (gods), the giver of accomplishments (siddhis), the bestower of perfection, always be with me.

Anantacharya conveyed prince Ahlad's message to Rishi Namocha and requested permission to begin the wedding preparations. Considering prince Ahlaad's request to be a blessing from the Lord, Rishi Namoch immediately granted Anantacharya permission to proceed. Anantacharya then set about organising the wedding. Excellent arrangements were made for the accommodation of the wedding guests and the bride's party. Countless vast tents equipped with every amenity were erected. Thousands of cooks prepared ample food for the groom's party and the bride's party. Anantacharya kept Gurudev Shukracharya and prince Ahlad informed of the preparations periodically. Gurudev Acharya Shukradev invited all the Gods. He also invited all

the honourable members of the Daitya and Daanava lineages, as well as all the Sages, Rishis, and dignitaries. As the wedding day drew near, Rishi Namoch's Ashram filled with guests.

As the wedding day drew closer, the Gods and venerable members of the Daitya and Daanava lineages, along with the Sages and council members, prepared their vehicles and set out for Rishi Namoch's Ashram. All kinds of auspicious omens began to appear. At the Ashram, the Sages's wives and daughters enchanted the atmosphere with their dancing and singing.

Meanwhile, Rajmata Kayadhu, queen Devi, emperor Viprichitti, emperor Prahlad, Guru Mother Urjaswati, and Guru Brothers Shanda and Tvastadhara, along with all the councillors, dignitaries, relatives, and friends arrived at Gurudev Shukracharya's Ashram.

Upon receiving news of their arrival, Gurudev Shukracharya accompanied by Swarbhanu welcomed Rajmata Kayadhu, queen Devi, emperor Viprichitti, emperor Prahlad, his wife Urjaswati, his sons Shanda and Tvastadhara, and all the councillors, dignitaries, relatives and friends at the gate of the Ashram.

The queen mother Kayadhu, queen Devi, emperor Viprichitti, emperor Prahlad, Guru Maa Urjaswati, Shanda, Tvastadhara and all the council members, friends and relatives prostrated themselves before Gurudev and received his blessings. Acharya Swarbhanu then touched the feet of queen mother Kayadhu, queen Devi, emperor Viprichitti, emperor Prahlad, Guru Mother Urjaswati, and his Guru brothers Shanda and Tvastadhara. They all gave him their blessings. Then, everyone proceeded to the Ashram with great joy. At Gurudev Shukracharya's

command, Acharya Swarbhanu had already arranged proper accommodation and food for everyone.

The day of the wedding drew near. Preparations for the wedding procession began. Acharya Swarbhanu was dressed as the groom by empress Devi and her maids. He then rode in a special chariot with Acharya Guru Shukradeva to the Ashram of the Sage Namoch. Following behind were emperor Viprichitti, emperor Prahlad, prince Ahlad, Shanda, Tvastadhaara and all the courtiers, friends and relatives in beautiful chariots.

Sometime later, the wedding procession arrived at the Ashram of Rishi Namoch. Anantacharya had decorated the Ashram so beautifully that Acharya Guru Shukradeva, emperor Viprichitti, and all the wedding guests were enchanted by its beauty. All the Ashram's groves, gardens, wells and ponds, as well as the rivers, were adorned with kalashas and lamps. Auspicious torans and dhwaja patakas adorned the entrance to every cottage in the Ashram. The wedding party (the baratis) were greeted with sweet dances and songs by the Rishi-patnis and Rishi-putris.

When news of the bridegroom's arrival reached the Ashram, the bride, Supritanamooch, went to the temple of Mother Gauri to receive Her blessings for a successful wedding. Mother Gauri appeared before her in person and blessed her, commanding all the Goddesses of prosperity and success to ensure the wedding was a success.

When the wedding party (baraat) arrived near the Ashram, there was great joy. All the Rishis came out to welcome the wedding party.

First, everyone prostrated themselves to Acharya Shukradev from a distance. Then emperor Viprichitti,

emperor Prahlad and prince Ahalad approached Rishi Nimoch, touched his feet and received his blessings.

The entire Ashram community welcomed the wedding party and requested that they rest in the tents erected by Anantaacharya.

The bridegroom, Acharya Swarbhanu, was taken to the wedding venue, where the bride's mother and other dignitaries performed an auspicious Aarti ceremony. In the mother's beautiful hands, a golden thali gleamed. According to the rites of Sanatan Dharma, the groom was purified and Aarti was performed. Afterwards, Acharya Swarbhanu returned to his tent. Everyone's hearts were filled with joy. Auspicious songs were sung throughout the Ashram. The cooks appointed by Anantacharya prepared a variety of dishes, which everyone greatly enjoyed.

When the time for the Panigrahan Sanskar (wedding ritual) approached, Guru Shukracharya summoned Sage Namoch and ordered that the bride be taken to the wedding pavilion. The Acharyas were also respectfully summoned and seated accordingly. The altar was decorated according to Vedic rites. A beautiful divine throne was set up on the dais, on which Acharya Swarbhanu took his seat. After bowing to Gurudev Shukracharya, his father Viprichitti and his brothers Ahlad and Prahlad, holding beloved Mahadeva in his heart, he took his seat. The priests then commanded Supratinamoch to come forward. Her friends, having adorned her, brought her forward at once. As a bride, Supratinamoch looked exceedingly beautiful.

First, Guru Shukracharya and all the other priests performed a Puja for Lord Ganesha. Afterwards, following the procedure prescribed in the Vedas, Guru Shukracharya conducted the wedding ceremony. Rishi Namoch gave his daughter away (Kanya Daan). After the ceremony, the bride

and groom returned to their respective homes in accordance with tradition.

The next day was the bride's farewell. Rishi Namoch and his wife stood before Acharya Swarbhanu with their hands folded and said, "O Acharya, you are very capable. We poor forest-dwelling Sages have nothing to offer you but our well-educated, cultured daughter. Please accept her.'

Acharya Swarbhanu assured them and said: "It is my great fortune to have Suparatinamoch as my wife. She will occupy a special place in my heart as my guiding wife.'

After taking leave of Sage Namoch and the others, the wedding procession set off for Acharya Shukradeva's Ashram. As soon as the procession entered the Ashram, the residents showered them with flowers. They welcomed them with dancing, singing and the beating of beautiful drums and cymbals.

Rajmata Kayadhu and queen Devi welcomed the bride and groom with an Arti. The groom, Acharya Swarbhanu, and the bride, Suparatinamoch, then touched the feet of Rajmata Kayadhu, emperor Viprichitti, queen Devi, brothers Prahlad and Ahlad, and other elders to receive their blessings.

Some time passed happily in this manner. Then emperor Viprichitti, emperor Prahlad and prince Ahlad asked their Guru, Shukracharya, for permission to return to their respective capitals. At the same time, emperor Viprichitti also requested that Acharya Swarbhanu and Suparatinamoch be given permission to accompany them to the Daanava clan's capital. The Guru granted their request, but Acharya Swarbhanu spoke humble and sweet words to the Guru and his father with folded hands: 'O Guru and father, you are both the pillars of my life and the masters

of this body. Disobeying your command would be a sin in itself. But I humbly beg you both to allow me to spend a little more time in the service of Gurudev. If you grant your permission, Supratinamoch and I will properly organise the Ashram, and we will be present to serve you when the time is appropriate. The Guru brothers Shanda, Tvastadhaara and Mother Urjaswati, are ever eager to enhance the splendour of emperor Prahlad's capital. Under these circumstances, it is absolutely essential for me to remain at the Ashram for a little longer.'

Having said this, Acharya Swarbhanu sat silently in a corner of the hut, his eyes filled with tears. Then emperor Viprichitti stood up, embraced him, and said, 'My son, as you wish.'

The next day, emperor Viprichitti, mother queen Kayaadhu, queen Devi, emperor Prahlad, prince Ahalad, The Guru Brothers Shanda and Tvastaadhara, and Guru Maa Urjaswati departed for their respective capitals.

Time passed slowly. The love between Acharya Swarbhanu and Supratinamoch grew day by day. After some time, they were blessed with a very beautiful daughter named Prabha.

Severe Penance

This routine continued until one day, when Brahmishi Narada arrived at Acharya Shukradeva's Ashram, playing the Veena and chanting 'Narayan, Narayan'. Upon hearing the news of the Brahmishi's arrival, Acharya Shukradeva and Acharya Swarbhanu ran barefoot to the gate of the Ashram to welcome him. After welcoming him with flower garlands, Supratinamoch performed Arti. Then, the Brahmarshi went to the banks of the Godavari River to bathe. After bathing and meditating, he returned to the Ashram to find that Supritinamoch had prepared food with her own hands. She then served a meal to the Brahmishi, the Acharyas and herself.

After the meal, Acharya Shukradeva urged them to rest in the guesthouse. Brahmishi Narada replied, "Acharya, I will certainly rest. But I have come to remind you of a promise you made to me. You may recall that when I came to you with the child Swarbhanu to request that you accept him as a disciple, I also said that he might attain immortality in the future. It is only through Swarbhanu's attainment of immortality that the future and welfare of the Daitya and Daanava lineages can be secured. You know that he needs your guidance and intense effort to achieve this. The time has now come for you to guide him towards this goal. He must please Mahadeva somehow and receive the boon of immortality from him, or find a way to immortality through him.

Having said this, and chanting 'Narayan, Narayan', Brahmishi Narad departed. Despite repeated requests from Acharya Shukradeva, he did not stay.

Following Brahmishi Narada's departure, Acharya Shukradeva, Acharya Swarbhanu and Supratinamoch began to discuss. As Mahadeva was the Guru of Acharya

Shukradeva, the latter knew him very well. Although pleasing Him and receiving a boon from Him was easier than with Brahma or Vishnu, obtaining the boon of immortality from Him was extremely difficult. Their attention then turned to the exact words of the Brahmishi: 'Find a way to attain immortality from Mahadeva.'

The Brahmishi might not have specified the boon of immortality from Mahadeva, but rather the path to obtaining it through Him. This would certainly not be easy, but it was more likely. Besides, the Brahmishi's words could not be untrue. If the Brahmishi said that it was possible to find a way to attain immortality by pleasing Mahadeva, then Mahadeva would surely show the way, if pleased. The key was to please him through severe penance.

Acharya Shukradeva spoke to Acharya Swarbhanu in kind words: "Dear son Swarbhanu, this path will be extremely difficult and arduous. To please Mahadeva, you will have to perform severe penance. It may even take several thousand years. Are you prepared for this, son?"

Acharya Swarbhanu bowed before his Guru. He took hold of Acharya Shukradeva's feet and said, 'Gurudeva, with your blessings, even the impossible becomes possible. Please guide my path. I will certainly undertake this severe penance, and with your grace I will also please Mahadeva.'

He continued, "Supratinamoch is not just my wife; she has always been my guide. I have taken a vow to live a married life with her and provide for her and our children. However, if she permits, I am willing to undertake this severe penance."

Supratinamoch grabbed her husband's feet and said, "Lord, to gain big, one must make small sacrifices. If you receive the blessings of Mahadev, what greater joy could

there be for me? Please do not worry about me or Prabha. With yours and Gurudev's blessings, we will be well. We will wait for you to return after obtaining the boon of immortality from Mahadev."

Hearing these pleasing words, Acharya Shukradev said to Acharya Swarbhanu, "That is great, son. It is late at night now. You should all rest now. We will start preparing to help you succeed in your penance from tomorrow morning. Remember, this will be a severe austerity, and as I said earlier, it may take thousands of years. Hunger, the Sun, the cold, the rain, the wind, fire, forest animals and so on may pose a great hindrance to performing this penance. It will be extremely important to protect your body from these. Only your family deity Agni Dev, the Guru of your mother Simhālīka, can grant you the protective armour to defend against these things. First, you must perform penance to please Him, make Him appear before you, and receive His blessing. Agni Dev only appears through Yajna when He is pleased. We will start performing the Yajña tomorrow morning to please Lord Agnidev."

At the command of Acharya Shukradeva, Acharya Swarbhanu then went to his cottage with his wife, Supratinamoch.

The next day, at dawn during the Brahma Muhurta period, Acharya Shukradeva performed his daily rituals and bathed in the Godavari River. He then invited all the Ashram residents and ordered them to prepare an Agnihotra Yagna with the correct offerings to appease Agni Dev. No sooner had the words left the Acharya's mouth than the Yagna and offerings were prepared and the Agnihotra Yagna commenced. The fire was lit in the Yagna (homa) pit using dry mango twigs. All the necessary oblation items, such as fruit, honey, ghee and other sacred materials, were provided in abundance. Acharya Shukradeva took his seat

as the Yajña priest, while Acharya Swarbhanu took his seat as the Yajña host (yajman). The chanting of Mantras and offerings burning in the fire pit filled the air with purity and fragrance.

Acharya Shukradeva conducted the Agnihotra Yagna with full Vedic ritual tradition. The Yajña continued for several months. Finally, Agni Dev appeared at the Yagna site, pleased, with prasad.

Acharya Shukradeva greeted him. Acharya Swarbhanu fell at His feet.

Agni Dev then spoke in a sweet voice: “O Swarbhanu, I know you wish to perform Mahadeva's great penance. As Acharya Shukradeva said, this could take several hundred years. To please Mahadeva for the boon of your desire may not be impossible, but it will certainly be rare. You will need to proceed with extreme courage and patience. With the grace of Acharya Shukradeva and my blessings, you will surely succeed. Accept this prasad. By consuming it, you will overcome hunger, sleep and the effects of the weather, such as cold and heat. You will conquer them all. With my blessings, you will become invisible during your penance, so no wild animals or other creatures will be able to see or harm you. Now, go and prepare to depart for the forest for your penance.”

Having said this and after giving him the vessel of the prasad, Agni Dev vanished.

After receiving the boon and Prasad from Agni Dev, Acharya Shukradeva taught Acharya Swarbhanu a special Yoga technique for harnessing solar energy, eliminating the body's need for food. With Agni Dev's blessing, the feeling of hunger would not arise, but the body would still require

energy to survive. After that, he initiated him into the Siddha Mantra.

ॐ नमः शिवाय ॥ ॐ नमो भगवते रुद्राय ॥
ॐ तत्पुरुषाय विद्महे महादेवाय धीमहि तन्नो रुद्रः प्रचोदयात ॥
ॐ त्रयम्बकं यजामहे सुगंधिम पुष्टि-वर्धनम उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनं
मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात॥

Om Namah Shivaya.
Om Namo Bhagavate Rudraya.
Om Tatpurushaya Vidmahe Mahadevaya
Dhimahi Tanno Rudrah Prachodayat.
Om Tryambakam Yajamahe
Sugandhim Pushtivardhanam.
Urvarukamiva Bandhanan
Mrityor Mukshiya Maamritat.

I bow to Shiva. I bow to Lord Rudra, the destroyer of obstacles and another name for Shiva. We meditate on the Supreme Being (referring to Shiva's highest divine form, Tatpurusha). We worship the three-eyed one, Lord Shiva, who is fragrant and nourishes all beings. Just as a ripe cucumber or melon is effortlessly freed from its vine, may He liberate us from the bondage of death and the cycle of mortality for the sake of immortality.

After receiving the blessings of Gurudev Acharya Shukradeva and good wishes from his pious wife, Supratinamoch, and bestowing his blessings upon his daughter, Prabha, Acharya Swarbhanu left for the forest. He built a hut on the banks of the Godavari River, a few miles away from Shukradeva's Ashram, and began his severe penance.

He placed his heart at the feet of Mahadeva, chanted the Siddha Mantras taught by his Guru, and began performing

austerities to please Mahadeva. His devotion to the Lord's feet grew ever stronger. He became so absorbed in his penance that he lost all awareness of his body and sustained himself with solar energy. Years passed, but he did not even notice. Yet, when he still had not received a vision of Mahadeva, he rose from his seat and stood on one leg. In this way, he performed austerities for countless years, standing on one leg.

Finally, a voice from the heavens proclaimed, "O son, I am extremely pleased with your penance. What boon do you seek through such severe austerities? Ask for any boon except immortality. I am eager to grant it to you."

Acharya Swarbhanu replied, "O Lord, if you are pleased with my devotion and love, first grant me a Darshan. I wish to see my Ishta with my own eyes."

Upon hearing Swarbhanu's loving words, Mahadeva appeared before him. Upon seeing Mahadeva, Swarbhanu first performed a prostrate bow, then said, "O Lord, I am your devotee. May your gracious gaze always rest upon me. Grant me my desired boon. You are the knower of all, and surely know that the Brahmrishi Narada inspired me to undertake this penance to learn from You how to attain immortality. I know, Lord, that You will not grant me immortality Yourself, but the Brahmarishi's words cannot be untrue. You will surely show me the path to attain immortality."

Having said this, Acharya Swarbhanu took hold of Mahadev's feet.

With a smile, Mahadev spoke in a sweet voice: "Dear son Swarbhanu, rise. Brahmrishi Narada is very dear to me. If he has said this, there must surely be some truth to it. Listen carefully to my words, and keep this discussion

secret. If you share any part of this discussion with anyone, your head will be cut into a thousand pieces. You may not know, but the Earth's empire currently belongs to emperor Mahabali, your maternal grandson and a great devotee of Lord Narayan. He is as mighty as his grandfather, Prahlad. He is undoubtedly an intelligent and righteous ruler. He has conquered the entire Universe with his power. He deposed Indra from the kingdom of Heaven and established his own dominion there. Indra and the other Gods have taken refuge with Narayan. They are engaged in His worship and have requested that He restores their kingdom and defeat emperor Mahabali. Emperor Mahabali is an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu. Lord Narayana does not wish to harm His devotee, emperor Mahabali. However, I know that He will soon take away emperor Mahabali's kingdom over the entire Universe and make him emperor of the Netherworld (Patal Lok). Since your father, emperor Viprichitti, went to the Lord's abode, the Netherworld has been without an emperor. Once emperor Mahabali becomes emperor of the Netherworld, Indra will regain his rule of Heaven. However, the fear of emperor Mahabali will remain in Indra's heart. He will pray to Lord Narayana earnestly, asking Him to make him and all the Gods invincible. Lord Narayana will inspire them to extract nectar from the Ocean. The Gods alone cannot accomplish the Ocean's churning. They will need the help of Daitya and Daanava warriors for this task. Then, Lord Vishnu will invite emperor Mahabali, through Brahmishi Narada, to join the Gods in churning the Ocean. In return, He will promise to give half of the nectar (Amrita) that emerges from the Ocean to the Daitya and Danawa races. Emperor Mahabali will agree to this, and thus, the churning of the Ocean will take place. During the churning, many precious gems and other items, including nectar (amrita), will emerge from the Ocean. A very beautiful woman named Vishwamohini, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, will distribute the nectar (Amrita). While the nectar is being distributed, you must

secretly take the form of a God and sit among them. The Sun and the Moon will sit side by side in this row, but the Moon will move away from the Sun because his heat will be unbearable. A small empty space will be left in the middle. You should sit there immediately. During the distribution of the nectar, you will receive it and attain immortality. The Sage's words will not be untrue."

Upon hearing Mahadev's words, astonishment spread across Swarbhanu's face. He replied in a trembling voice, "What, Lord! None of my mother, father, or brother are alive now. Emperor Mahabali, the great-grandson of the mighty Hiranyakashipu, is the emperor of all the three worlds now. O Lord, so many years have passed, and I was unaware. I know You have granted my Guru, Acharya Shukradeva, the boon of immortality, so he must be alive. Please tell me where he is now. I wish to go to him and hear the story of the past several years."

Then Mahadev spoke: "Yes, my son. Acharya Shukradeva is immortal and invincible. He is now the Guru of emperor Mahabali. You may depart now for emperor Mahabali's capital. Shukracharya is waiting for you. He wishes to come to Kailash to be with me now after entrusting his duties to you. I also grant you a new body of beauty and youth as a boon."

After granting boon and saying that, Mahadev vanished.

Having received a blessing from Mahadev, Acharya Swarbhanu set off for Kōpargaon to meet his Guru, Acharya Shukradev, at his Ashram. He was excited to see his Guru after such a long time. He quickened his pace and arrived near the Ashram. But there was nothing there other than a small temple. What had happened to the Ashram and his Guru?

Astonished, he approached the temple priest and asked, "O foremost of the righteous, there used to be Acharya Shukradev's Ashram here. Now, only this temple remains. Where did Acharya Shukradeva and his disciples go? Have they established a new Ashram?"

The temple priest looked at Acharya Swarbhanu in astonishment and said, "Your face shines with such brilliance that you must be a divinely enlightened being. It seems you have read some pages of history. Acharya Shukradeva's Ashram was on this site hundreds of years ago. He has been living in the capital of the Daityas for hundreds of years now, serving as their dynasty's Guru. He is now the guide and Guru of the great emperor Mahabali. Since emperor Mahabali made Thrikkakara his capital, Guru Acharya Shukradeva has resided there and built an Ashram. He no longer runs a Gurukul. It is said that one of his disciples, Acharya Swarbhanu, has gone to meditate upon Mahadeva and he is convinced that he will return one day. He says that he will establish the Gurukul only when Acharya Swarbhanu returns from his penance."

Upon hearing from the priest about the new residence of his Guru, Acharya Shukradeva, and his own name, Acharya Swarbhanu was utterly astonished. At that moment, he wished to keep his name a secret.

He told the priest, "Yes, brother, forgive my ignorance. I am confused. You are right. I am a student of history, and perhaps I have mistaken history for reality. Please do me a great favour. Show me the way to Thrikkakara. I have a strong desire to see Acharya Shukradeva, the source of life and guide of the Daitya and Daanava lineages.

The priest humbly replied, "All right, great man. If that is your wish, I will certainly try to arrange your journey to Thrikkakara. You are very fortunate that your arrival

coincides with a sacred time. Please rest here for a few days. In one week, a special Shiva puja will be held in this temple, organized and officiated by chief priest Prakash, who was appointed by emperor Mahabali himself. The devotee of Mahadeva and son of emperor Mahabali, prince Shri Baan, will be present at this sacred event. I will introduce you to Prince Baan. He will certainly arrange for your journey to Thrikkakara."

Acharya Swarbhanu spoke in a sweet and humble voice: "O foremost of the Kulshreshtha Acharya, I will never forget your kindness. As you instructed, I will accept your hospitality for a few days. When the time comes, please introduce me to the most venerable prince Baan."

Then, the priest took Acharya Swarbhanu to his home, giving him lodging with great honour and hospitality.

As the priest said, a grand ceremony for the worship of Mahadev was held at the temple one week later, which prince Baan himself attended. During the Mahadev's prayer, everyone was lost in the ecstasy of Acharya Swarbhanu's devotion as he chanted the Mantras alongside the priest. Prince Baan felt that this divine person must surely be very dear to Mahadev. The priest did not need to introduce Acharya Swarbhanu. Prince Baan approached him himself, clasped his hands, and began to ask, "O divine one, upon seeing you, I feel as if I am in the presence of either Mahadeva Himself or a part of Him. Please do me the honour of introducing yourself."

Then, deeming the time appropriate, Acharya Swarbhanu introduced himself to prince Baan.

He said, "O prince Baan, most venerable heir to the mighty emperor Mahabali, I am Acharya Swarbhanu, disciple of Acharya Shukradeva, son of emperor Viprichitti and

empress Simhālika. By my Guru's command, I have been engaged in the penance of Mahadeva until now. Having received Mahadeva's blessings, I have now returned. I have a strong desire to meet my Guru, Shukracharya. O prince, if you could arrange a meeting with him, I would be forever indebted to you."

Upon hearing the name Acharya Swarbhanu, prince Baan fell at his feet, prostrating himself, and said, "You are my most revered ancestor. Please accept the respects of your great grandson, and bless me. I am so fortunate to have had first Darshan of you. Our Guru, Acharya Shukradeva has mentioned your name many times and has been watching for your return. Let us not delay any further. Let us depart immediately for Thrikkakara. Please grant me your permission to leave."

Acharya Swarbhanu then embraced prince Baan and said, "My son, may Mahadev always be pleased with you. Why the delay now? Let us depart at once. My heart eagerly awaits meeting your father, the great emperor Mahabali, and my Gurudev Acharya Shukradeva."

"As you command, my revered ancestor," said prince Baan, immediately ordering the charioteer to prepare the chariot.

The priest was ecstatic. He was so fortunate that Acharya Swarbhanu, a devotee of Mahadev and disciple of the great Acharya Shukradeva, had accepted his hospitality for a few days. He ran and fell at his feet. Acharya Swarbhanu embraced him and gave him a fitting blessing.

By then, the charioteer had arrived with the chariot. He greeted prince Baan and said, "My lord, the chariot is ready."

Acharya Swarbhanu immediately mounted the chariot alongside prince Baan and set out for Thrikkakara.

Daughter Prabha

As soon as Acharya Swarbhanu and prince Baan sat in the chariot, the horses broke into a gallop and headed toward Thrikkakara. Once they were seated, Acharya Swarbhanu spoke to prince Baan in a sweet voice: "Dear son, since you know me, you must also know where my wife, Supratinamoch and my daughter Prabha are. My heart longs to meet them."

Upon hearing Acharya Swarbhanu's compassionate and loving words for his wife and daughter, prince Baan began to cry and said, "Lord, you have been granted a long life by Mahadeva's grace. But we mortals are not free from the cycle of birth and death. Many generations have passed since you left Gurudeva Shukracharya's Ashram and immersed yourself in Mahadeva's great penance. Daadi Shrimati Supratinamoch and Mahamaata Prabha are no longer in this world."

Upon hearing these words from prince Baan, Acharya Swarbhanu was stunned. He was overwhelmed by his love for his wife Supratinamoch, and his daughter Prabha. Every day he had spent with them began to flash before his eyes. Tears began to stream from his eyes.

Composing himself, he said, "Dear son, I understand that I can no longer meet them. However, if you remember anything that you deem appropriate, please briefly describe the events that took place at Gurudeva Shukracharya's Ashram after I left for severe penance to Mahadeva."

Prince Baan grabbed Acharya Swarbhanu's feet and said, "Great-grandfather, Gurudeva Acharya Shukradeva told me everything that has happened since you left for Mahadeva's great penance. He did so in the hope that, when I am reunited with you, you would ask me about it. Gurudeva is

a visionary. He must have had a premonition of our reunion."

Prince Baan continued, "After you left for Mahadeva's penance, the Gods, led by Indra, began to distress the Daitya and Daanava emperors. As you know, Lord Vishnu slew emperor Hiranyakshipu and seated Daadaa Shri Prahlad on the throne. At that time, Prahlad was only twelve years old. He began to rule under the guidance of his mother, Rajmata Kayadhu. Even at that young age, he was a just and peace-loving ruler. He governed the kingdom with a sole focus on caring for and providing for his Subjects. He was completely opposed to the idea of imperial expansion. He was perfectly content with his borders. He bore the mark of Lord Vishnu on his head. Lord Vishnu had granted him the boon of being unconquerable. Therefore, the Gods were afraid to interfere with his empire or cause insecurity. However, this complacency weighed heavily on the other Daanava kings. When the Gods attacked the Daanava monarchs, emperor Prahlad refused to side with them and kept preaching that they should protect themselves.

The Gods wanted to destroy the Daanava kings completely and establish their dominion. They repeatedly attacked the Daanavas, slaughtering their countless soldiers, and then vanished. Day by day, the Daanava kings' power waned. The Gods, under the guidance of Guru Brihaspati, played their game perfectly. Unfortunately, the Daanava kings could not find an appropriate guide. Your uncle, emperor Varshaparva, repeatedly visited Guru Shukracharya's Ashram. With clasped hands, he prayed that Shukracharya should accept the responsibility of being their Guru and guide them. However, Guru Shukracharya was not at all inclined to do so. One day, emperor Varshaparva came to the Ashram resolved to either convince Guru Shukracharya to accept his plea or lay down his life there. He began a fast

of only water. He declared that if the Guru did not agree to become their guide, he would not eat and would give up his life. He wouldn't even drink water. It was better to die at the hands of Guru Shukracharya than at the hands of Indra and the other Gods.

Day by day, his body grew thinner from the fast, and it seemed he would not be able to hold on to his life much longer. If emperor Varshaparva were to die, it would essentially spell the end of the Daanava lineage. This was unacceptable to Guru Shukracharya. On emperor Varshaparva's stubbornness, Guru Shukracharya bowed. He accepted the emperor's proposal to become the Guru of the Daanava clan. Guru Shukracharya wondered how he could save the Daanava clan. Perhaps the only way to protect the Daanavas was to appease Mahadeva through penance and obtain the power to revive the dead (Sanjivani Vidya) from Him. With that Vidya, whenever the Gods would slay a Daanava soldier, he could be instantly resurrected. Therefore, Guru Shukracharya immediately departed for the forest to perform penance and appease Mahadeva.

When Guru Shukracharya decided to perform great penance, there was no set time for his return. His return depended on Mahadeva's grace and when He would be pleased and grant him the boon of the power to revive the dead (Sanjivani Vidya). Therefore, Guru Shukracharya invited Rishi Namoch, your father-in-law, to the Ashram and explained the situation to him. He requested that Rishi Namoch look after his daughter, Supratinamoch, and his granddaughter, Prabha, during this time, and take them to his own Ashram. Rishi Namoch gladly accepted the proposal. Daadi Shri Supratinamoch and her daughter Prabha then arrived at Rishi Namoch's Ashram. After that, Gurudev Shukracharya went into the forest to propitiate Mahadeva and obtain the power to revive the dead.

Thus, Maha Mata Prabha was raised at Rishi Namoch's Ashram, where she spent her childhood. Time passed gradually. Maha Mata Prabha came of marriageable age. Her beauty was perhaps unmatched in the three worlds. She was more beautiful than even a celestial nymph. Therefore, Rishi Namoch set out to find a suitable husband for her.

But the Lord had planned something else. One evening, the residents of the Ashram saw an exceedingly handsome man approaching. That man was none other than emperor Ayu, son of emperor Pururavas. The emperor had gone hunting and, while chasing a deer, wandered far into the forest and lost his way. He came upon Rishi Namoch's Ashram at dusk searching for shelter. Starving and thirsty, emperor Ayu entered the Ashram and introduced himself to Rishi Namoch's disciples. News of emperor Ayu's arrival spread quickly. The Ashram's residents gave him due respect and hospitality. After eating, he stayed in the Ashram's guesthouse that night. The next morning, after completing his daily rituals, emperor Ayu went out for a stroll around the Ashram. There, he spotted Maha Mata Prabha and her friends in the garden. They had come to pick flowers for worship. While picking the flowers, a bee began to buzz around Prabha. She tried her best to shoo it away, but it would not leave her alone. She started running around, afraid of the bee. Her friends tried to chase the bee away too, but they were unsuccessful. Emperor Ayu witnessed the scene. He came forward immediately to help Prabha and chased the bee away. After the bee flew away, Prabha felt as if her life had returned to normal. However, emperor Ayu was captivated by Prabha's beauty after chasing the bee away. He expressed his desire to marry her. She then sent him to her mother's cottage, Supritinamoch.

By then, mother Supritinamoch had also heard that emperor Ayu was staying at their Ashram. When the emperor himself arrived and bowed to her, she was

impressed by his humility and personality. He then asked her for permission to marry Prabha. She immediately agreed to the proposal, but asked the emperor to wait for father Rishi Namoch. The marriage could only take place after obtaining his permission. The emperor gladly agreed.

A few days later, when Rishi Namoch returned to his Ashram, mother Supritinamoch informed him of the news.

Rishi Namoch murmured, "O Lord, I had been searching for the groom everywhere, and you have sent him right here to my Ashram. Your divine play is boundless."

He immediately granted permission for the marriage.

With great fanfare, Prabha married emperor Ayu. After receiving Rishi Namoch's and mother Supritinamoch's permission, emperor Ayu left for his capital, Prayag with his wife Prabha. Thus, your daughter, O revered one, became empress Prabha of the Chandra dynasty.

Acharya Swarbhanu then spoke to prince Baan in amazement: "O son, you said this emperor Ayu was the son of emperor Pururava. Was this Pururava the same one, the son of Buddha?"

Prince Baan replied humbly, "Yes, Acharya. Maharishi Atri and his wife Anusuya gave birth to Chandra Dev, the God Moon. Chandra Dev married Tara, the daughter of the Gods' Guru, Brihaspati. The great emperor Buddha was born to Chandra Dev and Tara. Buddha married Ela, the daughter of Vaivasvata Manu. The son of Buddha and Ela was Pururava. Pururava founded the lunar dynasty (Chandra Vansh), and Prayag was his capital.

Prince Baan continued, "O Lord, your daughter Maha Mata Prabha and emperor Ayu had five sons: Nahusha,

Kshatravrit, Rajabha, Raji, and Anena. Emperor Ayu and Maha Matashri crowned Nahusha, their eldest son when he had matured and embraced the Vanaprastha Ashrama. They built a hut in the forest and lived there. One day, a forest fire broke out all around them. In the forest fire, they offered their bodies as a sacrifice and attained the abode of Lord Vishnu. Emperor Nahusha was extremely talented, brave, just, and ambitious. He expanded the empire through his prowess and became known as a 'Chakravarti Emperor'. He married Ashokasundari, the daughter of Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati."

Then, Acharya Swarbhanu asked, "I know about Mahadeva's two sons, Kartikeya and Ganesha, but I did not know that He also has a daughter, Ashokasundari. When did Mahadeva and Mother Parvati have this daughter? Son, if you know anything, please tell me about her. My heart is filled with curiosity."

Prince Baan then began to tell the story of Ashokasundari's origin.

He said, "Lord, Mother Parvati once expressed Her desire to travel the Universe to Mahadev. To please Her, Mahadev agreed to accompany Her on the journey. As they wandered, they arrived at an exceedingly beautiful garden. Mahadev told Mother Parvati that O Devi, this is called Nandan Van."

Prince Baan continued, "Seeing the natural beauty there, Mother Parvati was spellbound. She especially liked one of the trees there. Out of curiosity, she approached it and asked Mahadev that what kind of tree is this that captivates Her with its beauty?"

Mahadev replied, "O Devi, this is no ordinary tree. It has the power to fulfill everyone's desires and wishes. It is called the Kalpa Vriksha."

Upon hearing this, Mother Parvati desired a beautiful daughter. The moment She made this wish, the Kalpa Vriksha placed a tiny, beautiful baby girl in Her lap. She named this baby girl child 'Ashoksundari'. As soon as she was born, Ashoksundari bowed to Mother Parvati and asked why she had wished for her.

Parvati replied, "O daughter, I am indeed the mother of two sons, but a life is not auspicious or complete without a daughter. Therefore, to make my life auspicious and complete, I asked the Kalpa Vriksha for a daughter, and you were My gift. I will raise you as My own daughter, and when the time comes, I will marry you off to prince Nahusha of the Chandra dynasty."

Thus, Ashokasundari became the daughter of Mother Parvati and Mahadev.

When Ashokasundari reached marriageable age, she did chose to perform penance. After receiving blessings from Mother Parvati and Mahadev, she went into the forest to meditate. While she was engrossed in her practice, the Daanava king Hunda was captivated by her beauty and proposed marriage. She told him that she was already betrothed to prince Nahusha of the Chandra vansha dynasty. She had pledged herself to prince Nahusha and considered him her husband. Enraged, Hunda captured her. Ashokasundari flew into a rage and cursed him: "O wretch, you shall meet your death at the hands of my husband, Nahusha."

After cursing him, she escaped his prison using her Yogic powers and returned home to Mount Kailash. At that time,

prince Nahusha was studying at Maharshi Vashishtha's gurukul. Maharshi Vashishtha taught prince Nahusha celestial knowledge about all types of weapons and divine powers. Upon completing his education, Maharshi Vashishtha told prince Nahusha about Ashokasundari, the daughter of Mahadev and Mother Parvati, and asked him to marry her. The Guru also instructed prince Nahusha to fight the Daanava king Hunda.

On orders of his Guru Maharshi Vashishtha, Nahusha fought and killed Hunda. Then, with the blessings of Mother Parvati and Mahadeva, he married Ashokasundari.

Then prince Baan further spoke: "O great-grandfather, during Nahusha's reign, Brahma himself crowned him king of Heaven."

Upon hearing this, the astonished Acharya Swarbhanu said, "As far as I know, after slaying emperor Hiranyakshipu, Lord Vishnu gave the earthly kingdom to my cousin Prahlad, the heavenly kingdom to Indra, and the netherworld kingdom to the Daanava emperors. Then how did Brahma snatch the kingdom of Heaven from Indra and give it to emperor Nahusha? Please dispel my curiosity."

Prince Baan then replied, "That is true, my lord. Lord Vishnu did just that. Emperor Prahlad was content with his boundaries, so he never thought about expanding his kingdom. But Indra was extremely ambitious. His goal was to become the emperor of all the three worlds. He would immediately eliminate anyone he considered a thorn in his path to achieving this goal."

Prince Baan continued, "Surely you may remember Prajāpati Tvastā. He had a pious, divine son named Viśvarūpa. Brahmā gave him three heads as a boon. Viśvarūpa took initiation from Brahmrishi Nārada.

Viśvarūpa was a great Sage endowed with great spiritual powers. Indra became fearful and insecure. Indra became deluded and thought that Viśvarūpa would surely depose him one day and take over the kingdom of heaven. In a fit of rage, Indra killed the virtuous and pious Vishvarupa. When Prajapati Tvasta learned about the murder of his son, he was enraged. He performed a Yajña to avenge his beloved son's murder. Vritrasura was born from this Yajna. When Vritrasura became an adult, Prajapati Tvashta ordered him to perform severe penance to please Brahma. The goal was to obtain a boon that would give him the power to destroy Indra and avenge Viśvarūpa's death. He performed severe austerities for Brahma. Brahma was pleased and granted him the boon he desired. Brahma granted him the boon that no weapon could kill him. He could not be killed by anything wet or dry. He could not be killed by wood or metal. During battle, he would also absorb half of his opponent's power. With this boon, his powers became invincible. He then waged war against Indra and the other Gods. He easily defeated Indra, the king of the Heaven. Indra fled the battlefield as a result. Vritrasura then established his dominion over Indraloka. Indra then fled to the refuge of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva took Indra to Brahma. Brahma also had no solution for Vritrasura's powers. Then, the three of them, Indra, Mahadev, and Brahmdev went to Lord Vishnu in His Saket Dham to seek His help. Lord Vishnu advised Indra that he must first become very friendly to Vritrasur and win his trust. It will be possible to kill him only when he is careless about his security and trust you fully. Lord Vishnu also advised Indra to pray to the Mother Goddess Kali so that She would use Her Yogmaaya to weaken Vritrasura's intellectual abilities. Devaraj Indra did exactly as Lord Vishnu had instructed, and as a result, received the blessing of the Mother Goddess Kali.

Then, in disguise, Indra befriended Vritrasura and gained his complete trust. One day, while Vritrasura slept on the seashore, Indra collected the sea foam. Sea foam is neither wet nor dry. It is not wood nor metal. During Vritrasura's sleep, not even half of Indra's power could enter him. Thus, Brahma's boon was not broken. Then, Mother Goddess Kali entered Vritrasura's mind, confusing his intellect completely. Indra wrapped the foam around his Vajra. The Vajra is Indra's favourite weapon, made from the bones of the Sage Dadhichi, and it is fearsome. Indra killed Vritrasura with the Vajra's might while it was wrapped in foam.

Since Indra killed Vritrasura in such a deceitful manner, his heart was filled with remorse. It was not fitting for a ruler like Indra to win someone's trust and then kill him in such a deceitful way. Secondly, Vritrasura was the son of a Brahmin, so the sin of Brahm-Hatya (killing Brahmin) also fell upon Indra. Overcome with remorse, Indra did not return to Heaven after killing Vritrasura. Instead, he went to the forest to perform penance. Thus, the throne of Heaven was left vacant. Without an emperor, the state administration deteriorated. Then, Brahma began searching for a suitable emperor for Heaven. His attention turned to Mahadeva's son-in-law, emperor Nahusha. He proposed this to Lord Vishnu and Mahadeva. They both agreed, and with their approval, Brahma crowned Nahusha emperor of Heaven. However, after becoming emperor of Heaven, a very high position, Nahusha became arrogant and unrestrained. Even his father-in-law, Mahadeva, was disappointed by his conduct. Mahadeva tried to reason with him many times, but Nahusha was intoxicated with the power of the Heaven and the Earth.

One day, he saw Sachi, Indra's wife, in the garden. He was captivated by her beauty. He didn't even consider that she was married. He proposed to her on the spot. Sachi

panicked. She immediately ran to her Guru, Brihaspati, and told him everything. It didn't take Guru Brihaspati long to realize that Nahusha was being arrogant. His arrogance needed to be curbed, as did the threat to Sachi's chastity. Guru Brihaspati took Sachi to Mahadeva and recounted what had happened. Mahadeva was enraged at Nahusha. Then, he thought of his daughter, Ashokasundari. It would not be appropriate to kill Nahusha because he is his son-in-law. However, he must be punished for this act. Mahadeva told Sachi to send Nahusha a message saying that she was willing to marry him on one condition. Nahusha must come to marry her in a palanquin pulled by the seven Rishis (Sapt-rishies), including his own Guru Maharishi Vashishtha and his elder brother Maharishi Agastya. Out of arrogance, the fool ordered the Sapt-rishies to pull his palanquin. His lust and arrogance had corrupted him so much that he did not realize his own Guru Maharishi Vashishtha and his elder brother Maharishi Agastya were among the Sapt-rishies.

The Sapt-rishis did not resist Nahusha's foolish order, perhaps because they understood Mahadev's intentions. They commenced pulling his palanquin. Nahusha's impatience grew. He had to reach Sachi as soon as possible to marry her. The seven sages were walking slowly. In his anger, Nahusha kicked Maharshi Agastya and said, "Snake, snake" (a Sanskrit word meaning "hurry up").

Maharshi Agastya could not bear the insult. He became enraged and immediately cursed him, saying, "Become a serpent."

No sooner had these words left his mouth than Nahusha's body transformed into that of a serpent. He took the form of a python.

Just then, Mahadev appeared. The seven Rishis greeted Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva then said that this wicked man had received the fruit of his actions. "Now, you may all go to your respective Ashrams."

Saying that, He vanished.

Ashokasundari then learned that her husband had been transformed into a python by Maharishi Agastya's curse. She approached Lord Shiva and prayed that He should revoke the curse. Mahadev explained that although Nahusha's sin was unforgivable, she could still appeal to Maharshi Agastya for mercy.

Ashokasundari then went to Maharshi Agastya's Ashram, took hold of his feet, and pleaded for mercy for her husband's sin. Maharishi Agastya's heart melted.

He said, "O daughter, a curse cannot be taken back. However, in the Dvapara Yuga when Lord Vishnu will incarnate as Lord Krishna, your descendants, the Pandavas, will redeem this curse."

After this, Lord Shiva freed Indra from the sin of Brahm-Hatya through a Yajña and sent him to his capital, Amaravati, where he once again became the lord of Heaven. Nahusha had six sons: Yati, Yayati, Sayati, Ayati, Viyati, and Krit. Since Yati had taken up renunciation, Yayati was crowned emperor of the lunar dynasty. Yayati married Devayani, the daughter of Guru Shukracharya, and Sharmishtha, the daughter of emperor Varshaparva.

Acharya Swarbhanu was surprised on hearing the name of Devayani as daughter of Guru Shukracharya.

Upon hearing this, the Acharya asked prince Baan, "My son, did Guru Maa Urjaswati give birth to a daughter after

I left for my great penance?" The prince laughed and replied, "No, great-grandfather. Gurudev married Indra's daughter, Jayanti. Devayani was Mother Jayanti's daughter."

Acharya Swarbhanu asked in a surprised voice, "Son, briefly tell me how and under what circumstances Guru Shukracharya married Indra's daughter Jayanti."

"Certainly, great-grandfather," said prince Baan in a sweet voice.

Jayanti

Prince Baan continued, "O Lord, after you left for great penance and then, at the request of emperor Vrishaparva, Guru Shukracharya also went into the forest to perform austerities. He did this to obtain the boon of the dead-reviving power (Sanjivani Vidya) from Mahadeva for the benefit of the Daitya and Danawa lineages. He performed severe penance. His austerities shook Indra's throne. Indra thought that Guru Shukracharya was performing such severe penances in order to take his throne. So, he sent his exceedingly beautiful daughter Jayanti to disrupt Gurudev's penance. She made many attempts to disrupt his penance with her seductive actions, but his samadhi remained unshaken. She was deeply impressed by his personality. When he awoke, she introduced herself and asked his hand in marriage. She promised that she would not disturb his penance. Gurudev accepted her proposal and married her. From this marriage, a daughter named Devayani was born, who was exceedingly beautiful.

Acharya Swarbhanu asked, "Will I be able to see Guru Maa Jayanti with Gurudev Shukracharya?"

Then, prince Baan bowed his head and said, "O revered great-grandfather, you will only be able to see the supreme, preeminent Guru Acharya Shukradeva in Thrikkakara. Guru Maa Jayanti returned to her father, Indra Dev, shortly after marrying him. After leaving to live with Indra Dev, she never returned to Gurudev. After some time passed and Guru Maa Jayanti still had not returned, Gurudev gave up on her and raised his daughter Devayani himself. I have heard that, after being persuaded by Indra Dev and Narayan Himself, Guru Maa Jayanti married emperor Rishabhdev. I do not know if Guru Acharya Shukradeva ever met her after her marriage to emperor Rishabhdev.

Upon hearing these new developments, Acharya Swarbhanu was astonished and spoke to prince Baan affectionately, "My dear son Baan, who is this emperor Rishabhdev whom Guru Maa Jayanti married? Tell me a little about him."

Prince Baan then began to tell Acharya Swarbhanu the story of emperor Rishabhdev.

He continued, "Great-grandfather, there is a powerful and famous kingdom on Earth called Ayodhya. At one time, emperor Nabhi was the monarch there. Emperor Nabhi was childless. In order to have a child, he and his queen Merudevi, went into the forest and performed severe penance to please Lord Vishnu. Impressed by their devotion, Lord Vishnu appeared before them and asked for a boon. The couple asked for a son who would be just like Him."

Lord Vishnu replied, "So be it, O emperor Nabhi. A form of myself will be born in your home from the womb of empress Merudevi. Now, return to your capital, Ayodhya, and wait for the right time."

When the time was right, empress Merudevi became pregnant and gave birth to a son. At the time of his birth, Nabhi's son had the marks of Lord Vishnu, including the Vajra-vatsa (thunderbolt mark). Seeing his son's exceedingly beautiful and well-built body, as well as his qualities of fame, radiance, strength, prosperity, valour, and bravery, king Nabhi named him 'Rishabh,' meaning 'the best.' When prince Rishabh became a young man, emperor Nabhi anointed him to the throne. The king then went into the forest to practice austerities with his righteous queen, empress Merudevi. It is said that king Rishabh's governance and administration were entirely praiseworthy. All of his subjects revered and honoured him as if he were Lord Vishnu himself.

Seeing emperor Rishabhdev's prestige, Indra became envious. Indra thought that though he was the lord of Heaven and he was the one who nourished all the inhabitants of the Earth with rain, thus giving them life, yet, the people of the Earth did not show him such reverence. Instead, they honour a mere mortal king so highly. Driven by jealousy and a desire for revenge, Indra withheld rain from Ayodhya for a year. Understanding Indra's envy, malice, and arrogance, emperor Rishabhdev created water and dense clouds with his Yogic powers. The entire sky was covered with dark clouds. The land flooded. The land of the entire country turned lush and green with crops.

Meanwhile, Indra met Brahmrishi Narad. Brahmrishi Narad told him that emperor Rishabhdev was none other than the energy of Lord Vishnu Himself. Indra's arrogance was humbled. He recognized emperor Rishabhdev's influence. He came to Earth and praised emperor Rishabhdev. Indra promised to marry his daughter Jayanti to Rishabhdev and then returned to Heaven.”

He told Jayanti about his promise to king Rishabhdev and requested her to marry him. However, Jayanti declined to marry king Rishabhdev. Then, Indra prayed to Lord Vishnu, requesting Him to persuade Jayanti to marry Rishabhdev. Lord Vishnu then told Jayanti that king Rishabhdev was His own energy, and she should marry him.

After being persuaded by Lord Vishnu, Guru Maa Jayanti agreed to marry emperor Rishabhdev. They had several sons, including prince Kavi, Hari, Antariksha, Prabuddha, Pippalayan, Avirhotra, Drumil, Chamas, and Karbhajaan, who took Sannyas.

Emperor Rishabhdev had many other sons, too. He gave them all Shastra Vidya (education according to scripture),

and when the eldest son became a young man, king Rishabhdev enthroned him and took Sannyas. After he took Sannyas, Guru Maa Jayanti remained in Ayodhya as Rajmata for some time. A few years later, however, she returned to Heaven to live with her father, Indra Dev. It is said that she now lives there in seclusion and does not meet with anyone.

Prince Baan continued, "After taking Sannyas, king Rishabhdev performed deep penance for Lord Narayan. He attained all the Siddhis, but renounced them. He became the Maha Siddha. You may know that my father, emperor Mahabali, is also a great devotee of Lord Narayana. He always said that king Rishabhdev set an example for seekers, devotees, and Yogis. When Rishabhdev wished to shed his physical body, a strong whirlwind suddenly caused the bamboo in the forest to catch fire from friction. The flames began to consume the entire forest. King Rishabhdev sat silently in the fire. His mortal body burned in the flames and was reduced to ashes, after which he merged with Lord Vishnu."

Then, Acharya Swarbhanu spoke: "Dear son, what happened to Devayani? Tell me that story as well."

Then prince Baan began to tell the story of Devayani.

Devayani

Then, prince Baan continued, "Great-grandfather, pleased by Guru Shukracharya's penance, Mahadeva granted him an audience and bestowed upon him the power of the 'Sanjeevani Vidya' as a boon. Having attained this knowledge, Guru Shukracharya returned to the capital of emperor Varshaparva with Devayani. There, he established his Ashram near an exceedingly beautiful and picturesque mountain site. The emperor granted him a high position and appointed him as the Guru of his lineage and the entire Daanava dynasty. Acharya Shukradeva was declared the most venerable and distinguished Sage in the Danawa empire. Anyone who disobeyed or insulted him was subject to the death penalty."

He continued, "The war between the Devas and the Daanavas continued relentlessly. However, the Daanava warriors were brought back to life by Guru Shukracharya with his resurrection knowledge. The God's Guru, Acharya Brihaspati, did not know this Sanjivini Vidya (knowledge of reviving the deads). In the war between the Devas and the Daanavas, the Daanavas were gradually gaining the upper hand. Troubled by this situation, the Deva's Guru, Brihaspati, devised a plan. He ordered his eldest son, Kacha, to become a disciple of the Daanava Guru Shukracharya, and learn the knowledge that could revive the dead from him by any means. Obeying his father's command, Kacha approached Guru Shukracharya and pleaded with him to accept him as his disciple. Guru Shukracharya immediately knew through his divine powers that Kacha was Guru Brihaspati's son and had come to learn the science of bringing the dead back to life."

Hiding his feelings, Guru Shukracharya asked Kacha, "O son, tell me who you are."

Then Kach grabbed Guru Shukracharya's feet and said, "O Lord, I am Kach, son of the Guru of the Gods Acharya Brihaspati and grandson of Prajapati Maharishi Angira. I, wish to take initiation from you by staying in your shelter."

Gurudev Shukracharya was impressed by Kacha's integrity. With his vast heart, he accepted Kacha as his disciple. He instructed Kacha to remain in the Ashram and receive his initiation by observing the vow of celibacy.

Now, Kacha became a disciple of Guru Acharya Shukra and began living in the Ashram. Devayani was deeply impressed by his sweet nature and great personality. Devayani fell in love with Kacha. Kacha was unaware of this love. He respected her as a Guru's daughter and like his sister.

Kacha's presence could not remain hidden from the Daanavs for long. When they learned that Kacha, the son of the Deva Guru Brihaspati was taking initiation from Guru Shukracharya and staying in his Ashram, they became enraged. They thought that he was there to learn the dead-reviving vidya from Gurudev. They immediately hatched a plan to kill him. One day, when Kach had gone to graze the Ashram's cows, the Daanavs saw him alone and killed him.

In the evening, when all the cows returned to the Ashram without Kacha, Guru Shukracharya grew suspicious and set out into the forest to search for him. In the jungle, he found Kacha's corpse. Taking the body back to his Ashram, he was arranging to send the body to Devaloka to Acharya Brihaspati, then Devayani came crying and begged him to bring him back to life. Gurudev could not see tears in Devayani's eyes. He accepted her request and using the dead revival vidya, he revived Kacha.

The Daanavas lacked the courage to speak out against Gurudev. They began plotting a second plan to kill Kacha.

They killed him while he was alone, cut his body into pieces, and fed them to a wolf. When Kacha did not return to the Ashram by nightfall, Gurudev immediately realized through his divine vision that the Daanavas had killed him again. This time, they cut his body into pieces and fed them to a wolf. Upon hearing this, Devayani broke down in tears. Driven by his love for her, the Acharya tracked down the wolf. By invoking the dead resurrection vidya, he revived Kacha. Kacha burst out of the wolf's stomach alive. Thus, Kacha was granted life once more.

When the Daanavas saw Kacha revived, they realized that Devayani's love would not let him die. They devised a peculiar plan. They thought that if they managed to kill Kacha again, burn his body, and give his ashes to Acharya Shukradeva to drink, the Acharya would be unable to use the dead resurrection vidya. If he did, he himself would die. With this idea in mind, the Daanavas killed Kacha for the third time while he was grazing the Ashram's cows in the forest. The Daanavas then burned Kacha's corpse.

They took his ashes and came to the Ashram of Guru Shukracharya. They cunningly mixed the ashes into the Varuni and offered it to Guru Shukracharya to drink.

Once again, when the cows returned in the evening and Kacha did not come back, Devayani became suspicious. She begged her father to go find him.

Then, using his divine vision, Acharya Shukradeva realized that Kacha was in his own stomach.

Guru Shukracharya said to Devayani, "My beloved daughter, I have revived Kacha many times, but the Daanavs kill him each time. How much longer can I keep bringing him back to life?"

With tears in her eyes, Devayani said to the Sage, "O my father, I cannot live without Kacha. Please do something. Give him life again."

Then, in a loving voice, Guru Shukracharya spoke to Devayani, "My dear daughter, this time the Daanavas killed Kacha. They burned his body and made me drink his ashes. If I bring him back to life, he will emerge from my stomach, and I will die."

Hearing this, Devayani was stunned. If she brought Kacha back to life, she would lose her father. She did not want to lose either of them. She grabbed her father's feet and said, "Father, there is no Sage in this Universe wiser than you. Even Brahma himself acknowledges this fact. Surely you can think of a way to save both Kach and yourself without harming either of you."

Seeing his daughter so distressed, Guru Shukracharya said, "Daughter, with my Yogic powers, I am imparting the dead reviving vidya to Kacha's ashes. When I bring him back to life, he will tear open my belly, and I will die. But then, with the dead reviving vidya that I will teach him, he will be able to bring me back to life."

Gurudeva Shukracharya did just that. He initiated Kacha's ashes into the dead reviving vidya. After Kacha obtained the knowledge, Gurudeva Shukracharya brought him back to life. Kacha rose from the dead as if nothing had happened. He saw Devayani weeping and the corpse of his Guru, Shukracharya. His memory returned at once. He comforted Devayani, then used the dead reviving vidya he had learned to revive Guru Shukracharya.

Thus, Kacha's purpose in learning the technique to revive the dead was also fulfilled. Just look at the twists of fate!

Kacha was able to learn this knowledge, thanks to the very Daanavs who had opposed it.

Kacha then asked Guru Shukracharya for permission to return to his home in Heaven to reunite with his father, a request that was gladly granted by Acharya Shukradev.

As soon as Devayani learned that Kacha wished to leave forever, she said to him, "O son of Sage Brihaspati, you have always been the ideal disciple. Now your education is complete, and your vow of celibacy has been fulfilled. I love you. Please marry me."

Hearing this, Kacha was stunned. He had never even dreamed of it. He had always regarded Devayani, the Guru's daughter, as his sister.

In a bewildered, trembling voice, he said to Devayani, "Devayani, you are my Guru's daughter and my sister. Besides, I came forth alive from your father's womb. In a sense, we were both born of the same mother and father. If I were to marry you, my sister, it would be a great sin. It is impossible."

Enraged by Kacha's words, the love blinded Devayani said, "O son of the Sage, you are insulting me. I curse you so that the art of reviving the dead, taught by my father, will never be useful to you."

Kacha thought Devayani's curse was very unfair. He became angry, too, and cursed her in return: "O Brahmin daughter, your marriage proposal was against Dharma. Yet you have cursed me out of lust. Now, I curse you that no Brahmin son will marry you."

Unfortunately, because of Devayani's curse, Kacha could never use the Vidya that could revive the dead.

After Kacha returned to Heaven, Devayani became sad. She was unaware of her own physical and mental state. The Daanava king Vrishaparva, had a beautiful daughter named Sharmishtha. She and Devayani were the same age. Princess Sharmishtha often came to Devayani at Gurudev Shukracharya's Ashram, and the two conversed like close friends. Since Sharmishtha was a beautiful princess, she was proud of her beauty and her high social status. She would talk with Devayani, but she considered herself a princess of high status and considered Devayani to be the daughter of her father's servant. One day, princess Sharmishtha played in the pond with Devayani and other friends. When Devayani came out of the water, she mistakenly took Sharmishtha's royal garments and wore them. She did not notice that the clothes she was wearing belonged to princess Sharmishtha. When princess Sharmishtha came out of the water, she saw Devayani wearing her royal garments. She became enraged and began insulting Devayani. She also insulted Devayani's father, Gurudev Shukracharya. She called Acharya Shukradev a mere servant of her father. In her anger, she pushed Devayani into a well and returned to her palace with her friends.

Devayani began crying out for help from inside the well, trying to save her life. Coincidentally, emperor Yayati, the son of emperor Nahusha and queen Ashokasundari, the daughter of Lord Shiva and Maa Parvati of the Chandra dynasty, was passing by at that very moment. When he heard Devayani's voice calling for help from inside, he stopped at the well and pulled her out.

Devayani said to emperor Yayati, "O emperor, I am Devayani, daughter of Guru Shukracharya. You saved my life by taking me in your arms. Now, please marry me."

The emperor replied, "O beautiful goddess, how can there be a union between you, the daughter of the supreme Brahmin Guru, and me, a Kshatriya?"

Then, Devayani recounted the curse that Kacha had placed on her, explaining that her destiny was to marry a Kshatriya, not a Brahmin. The emperor asked for time to consider this. Devayani invited emperor Yayati to visit her Ashram.

When he arrived, she told her father about princess Sharmishtha's insult of pushing her into a well. She also mentioned that the arrogant princess had called her father, Gurudev Shukracharya, a servant.

Shukracharya was greatly angered by this and told emperor Vrishaparva that he had decided to leave his kingdom. The Daanava king fell at Shukracharya's feet, joined his hands, and pleaded with him not to leave. After the Daanava king's repeated pleas, Shukracharya left the decision to his daughter, Devayani. Devayani said that Guru Shukracharya could stay with the Daanavas on one condition: Princess Sharmishtha would serve as her servant. By now, princess Sharmishtha had also come to her senses and was extremely ashamed of her actions. For the sake of her father and her clan, she accepted Devayani's condition and began living in Guru Shukracharya's Ashram as her servant.

Some time passed like this. One day, Devayani was strolling in the forest near the Ashram with her maids when she met emperor Yayati again by chance. Devayani pleaded with emperor Yayati again, "O emperor, you did hold my hand. I have chosen you as my husband from the bottom of my heart. Please accept me as your wife."

The emperor repeated the same words to Devayani: "Devi, you are the daughter of the great Brahmin Sage

Shukracharya, and I am a Kshatriya. Your father will not approve of this union."

Devayani replied, "O noble son of emperor Nahush and Ashokasundari, if my father agrees to this marriage, will you have no objections?"

Impressed by Devayani's beauty, emperor Yayati agreed. Saying this, emperor Yayati returned to his kingdom.

Devayani also returned to her Ashram and told her father, Guru Shukracharya, what was on her mind: "Father, on the day Sharmishtha pushed me into the well, emperor Yayati, the son of emperor Nahush, pulled me out and saved my life. He held my hand as he pulled me out. Since then, I have taken him into my heart. Emperor Yayati is willing to marry me if you permit it."

Knowing his daughter's wish and remembering Kacha's curse, Guru Shukracharya gave her daughter Devayani permission to marry emperor Yayati permission. He went to the kingdom of emperor Yayati himself with the proposal for Devayani's marriage.

The emperor gave Guru Shukracharya a grand welcome and offered him a high seat. Upon hearing the proposal, emperor Yayati immediately gave his consent. Afterward, emperor Yayati married Devayani. Sharmishtha came to emperor Yayati's palace as well, serving Devayani as her maid.

Over time, Devayani's anger and disrespect towards Sharmishtha healed. She began to love her as a friend. Devyani pleaded with emperor Yayati to build a separate palace for Sharmishtha. She began to live there.

The emperor Yayati knew that Sharmishtha was the daughter of the Daanava king Vrishaparva. Her beauty had won his heart. One day, he confessed his love to her. She accepted his confession, and the two performed a Gandharva wedding in secret to avoid Devayani.

Sometime later, Yayati had two sons with Devayani named Yadu and Turvasu. With Sharmishtha, Yayati had three sons: Druhyu, Anu, and Puru.

One day, Devayani went to Sharmishtha's palace to meet her. At that time, a few children were playing in the palace garden, and Sharmishtha was there too. Devayani was surprised to see them and asked the children, right in front of Sharmishtha, "You look like princes. From where are you, and who is your father?"

The children greeted empress Devayani and told her that their father was emperor Yayati of this kingdom.

Upon hearing this, Devayani became enraged. She said nothing to anyone but left her husband emperor Yayati, and went to her father's Ashram. Yayati and Sharmishtha tried to persuade her to return to the palace from Guru Shukracharya's Ashram, but she refused.

At that time, Guru Shukracharya had gone to Mount Kailash to see his beloved Guru, Mahadev. Upon returning from Mount Kailash, he was astonished to find Devayani at the Ashram. He asked her why she had left her husband, Yayati. Devayani then told him the entire story.

In a fit of anger, Acharya Shukradev cursed emperor Yayati: "Because of your lust, you cheated my beloved daughter. Your youth is the cause of this, so you shall immediately become an old man."

As soon as these words left his mouth, Yayati was transformed into an old man. He tried to find out why this had happened? He discovered that it was due to the curse of Acharya Shukradev. He immediately ran to the Ashram of Acharya Shukradeva and fell at his feet, begging for forgiveness.

Acharya Shukradeva turned to Devayani and said, "O emperor, only Devayani can forgive you."

As Yayati begged Devayani for forgiveness, tears streamed down his face. He deeply regretted what he had done. Devayani's heart melted as well, and she pleaded with her father to lift the curse.

In response to her plea, Acharya Shukradeva told emperor Yayati, "Just as an arrow released from a bow cannot be called back, a curse cannot be taken back once given. However, if one of your sons willingly accepts your old age, I can grant you the youth of that son. However, that son will have to accept your old age."

After bowing to the Sage, emperor Yayati returned to his palace with Devayani. He told his family about the curse and asked his five sons, one by one, to give up their youth. The emperor's youngest son, Puru, accepted the offer. Taking prince Puru with him, emperor Yayati went to Sage Shukradeva. The Sage took a vow of water from his Kamandalu and immediately transferred king Yayati's old age to prince Puru.

After taking his son Puru's youth, Yayati enjoyed the pleasures of worldly life for many years. Ultimately, king Yayati attained enlightenment. The longing for worldly pleasures never ends. True happiness does not lie in indulgence, but rather in renunciation. With this in mind, Yayati returned to the Sage and begged him to restore

Puru's youth. As emperor Yayati wished, the Sage returned the prince's youth. Yayati then declared Puru his successor and accepted the Vanprastha Ashram. He left for the forest to perform penance with Devayani and Sharmishtha.

Upon hearing stories about Rishabhdev, Guru, and Guru Mother Jayanti as recounted by prince Bān, Acharya Swarbhanu's eyes filled with tears. Controlling his emotions, he said to prince Baan, "Dear son, now tell me something about your father, the 'Chakravarti Emperor Mahabali'. You said that your father, Mahabali, is the grandson of my cousin Prahald who was a great Lord Vishnu's devotee and a 'Chakravarti Emperor' himself. Please tell me how he conquered all the three worlds."

Chakravarti Emperor Mahabali

Then, prince Baan spoke: 'Great-grandfather, when Gurudev Shukracharya returned from the forest after pleasing Lord Shiva and receiving the boon of 'Sanjeevani Vidaya', Gurudev informed emperor Prahlad through his one disciple of everything that had happened. He also informed the emperor Prahalad that he had agreed to become the Guru of the Daanava king, Vrishaparva.

Emperor Prahalad had a deep respect for Gurudev Shukracharya. He also wished to make him his own Guru. So, emperor Prahlad went to the capital of the Daanava king and requested him to be the Guru of both the Daitya and Daanava lineages. Acharya Shukradeva accepted his request. The emperor Prahalad then asked Acharya Shukradeva to reside in his capital and requested Daanava king to support his request. Vrishaparva held Prahlad in high regard and left the decision to Shukracharya. After Devayani's marriage, Acharya Shukradeva decided to establish Ashrams in both the places and thus continued to live in the capitals of both the emperors by dividing his time. He continued to be the revered Guru of both the Daitya and Daanava lineages.

Emperor Prahlad was undoubtedly a more powerful ruler than his father, emperor Hiranyakshipu. Yet he was also extremely kind and just, as well as being a devout follower of Lord Vishnu. The Daanavas, the Daityas and the human subjects all loved and respected him greatly. He was so powerful that he could easily have conquered the three worlds by simply raising his weapons. However, he was contented with his boundaries.

However, once he was very angry with Indra and declared war against him. Indra fled abandoning his heavenly kingdom.

Disappointed by the loss of his kingdom, Indra tricked emperor Prahlad into receiving a curse from a Brahmin. The emperor used to serve and give alms to thousands of Brahmins every day. One day, however, Indra prevented a Brahmin from entering the sacrificial hall on purpose, causing him to arrive late. The emperor did not notice him. Taking this as an insult, the ascetic Brahmin cursed emperor Prahlad: 'O emperor, by the grace of Lord Vishnu you have become emperor of the Universe and attained such splendour. You have insulted me. I curse you that you will forget to worship Lord Vishnu soon. As soon as His grace departs from you, you will lose your kingdom and all your splendour.'

Emperor Prahlad was stunned. Not a single word came out of his mouth. However, the other Brahmins began to request the visiting Brahmin to forgive emperor Prahlad, a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Upon hearing their kind words, the ascetic Brahmin's anger subsided and he spoke in a sweet, loving voice. "O emperor, in a fit of anger, I inadvertently gave you such a harsh curse. I sincerely apologise to you and to Lord Vishnu for this. I cannot retract the curse, but I bless you that during your darkest hours, Lord Vishnu Himself will come down to Earth to be with you. When you will see Him face to face, you will remember your devotion to Him. You will lay your head at His feet. Lord Vishnu will be pleased with you again, and you will regain your kingdom and glory.'

However, emperor Prahlad was deeply saddened on hearing the curse. He became disillusioned. He decided to go the forest to meditate on Lord Mahadev and ordered the Daanava general Andhaka to look after his kingdom while he was away to the forest to meditate on Lord Mahadev.

When Indra came to know that emperor Prahalad has left his kingdom to the forest for meditation on Lord Shiva, he declared war on Andhaka and emerged victorious.

After sometime, emperor Prahlad pleased Mahadev with his severe penance. Mahadev Himself appeared before him. He told Prahlad that his kingdom had been seized by Indra, who had defeated Andhaka. Indra had taken his wife queen Devi and his son prince Virochan, captive. Mahadev advised emperor Prahlad to wage war against Indra, achieve victory, take back his kingdom and get free his wife and son from Indra's prison.

Upon hearing this news, emperor Prahlad became extremely angry. He challenged Indra. Thanks to the boons of Mahadev, his strength was unmatched. Indra then approached Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu agreed and came to the battlefield to fight emperor Prahlad. Seeing Lord Vishnu before him ready to fight, emperor Prahlad remembered his devotion to the Lord and cried out, 'Save me, save me, O my Lord!'

Saying this, he fell at His feet. Lord Vishnu picked him up, embraced him, and returned his kingdom to him.

Meanwhile, having been defeated by Indra, General Andhaka went to the forest to perform penance and please Brahmadeva. By pleasing Brahmadeva, Andhaka was granted immense strength. Having obtained immense strength, he went to the Daanava's king and began to increase his power. He built a vast army and planned to challenge Indradeva. He then learned that emperor Prahlad had reclaimed his kingdom from Indradev. Greed took hold of his heart. He thought that, with this vast army, he should first defeat emperor Prahlad and become master of the Earth.

He declared war on emperor Prahlad. The emperor Prahalad learned that Andhaka had received a boon of boundless power from Brahmdev. Defeating him would be difficult, if not impossible. So, he took refuge in Lord Mahadeva. Mahadeva then challenged Andhaka Himself and killed him. After that, emperor Prahlad peacefully governed his kingdom under the leadership of Gurudeva Shukracharya.

At the appropriate time, emperor Prahlad declared his beloved son prince Virochan, to be the crown prince. Like his father, the crown prince was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu and possessed an extremely compassionate heart. He developed a desire to meditate on Lord Vishnu. Having received blessings from his father emperor Prahlad and Gurudev Shukracharya, he went into the forest to seek the Lord's blessings. He performed severe austerities in devotion to the Lord. Impressed by his devotion, Lord Vishnu appeared before him and granted him the gift of eternal victory. After receiving Darshan of the Lord and the boon of invincibility, he returned to the capital. His father emperor Prahlad, Gurudev Shukracharya and all the ministers, councillors and Subjects gave him a grand welcome. Once back in the capital, he began assisting his father emperor Prahlad with state affairs. He had a kind and generous heart, surpassing even that of his father emperor Prahlad. Every day at Brahma-muhurta, the time of day at dawn, he used to perform his daily rituals. He would bathe in the river and then pray to Lord Vishnu. Afterwards, he would open his treasury to Brahmins and the poor. Indra was very fearful of prince Virochan because he had received an invincibility boon from Lord Vishnu. Although emperor Prahlad did indeed restore governance of Heaven to Indra at the behest of Lord Vishnu, he had to accept subordination to emperor Prahlad. Indra believed that one day he would defeat emperor Prahlad and regain his independence. However, with prince Virochan's

invincible boon, this was impossible. Therefore, Indra devised a cunning plan. One morning, as prince Virochan was about to give alms to the Brahmins and the poor after praying to Lord Vishnu, Indra, disguised as a Brahmin, stood in line to receive alms. When it was his turn, prince Virochan asked him, "O distinguished Brahmin, what may I give you?"

Disguised as a Brahmin, Indra said to him, "O prince, I have come from a distant land having heard of your great fame. I have heard that you give beggars whatever they desire. Will you grant me what I desire?"

The prince laughed and replied, "O great Brahmin, you have heard correctly. Why do you have such doubts? Ask for whatever you wish. Whatever you ask for, if it is within my power, I promise I will surely give it."

Having bound prince Virochan to his word, the disguised coward Indra demanded his head. The great, generous prince Virochan immediately picked up the nearby sword and cut off his own head. With prince Virochan's head, the cowardly Indra fled the scene immediately. He feared that emperor Prahlad might challenge him and reclaim the head, and then Gurudev Acharya Shukradev might use his death revival vidya (Sanjivini Vidya) to revive him. He took prince Virochana's head to Heaven and offered it to Agni. It was soon consumed by flames.

Upon hearing this tale, Acharya Swarbhanu's eyes filled with tears and he said: 'Why should not my brother Prahlad's son be even greater than him? Blessed, blessed Virochana. By giving your head, you have raised the status of the entire Daitya lineage high. I am fully convinced that he will now be blissful with Lord Vishnu in Sāketa Dham.'

Prince Baan continued, 'O revered one, when emperor Prahlad learned of Indra's misdeed, he was enraged. He was ready to slay Indra. Just then, Brahmrishi Narada entered his assembly, playing his Vina and chanting 'Narayan, Narayan'. He calmed the emperor's anger by telling him the story of prince Virochana's previous birth."

Brahmrishi Narada said to emperor Prahlad, "O mighty king Prahalad, your son Virochana was the son of Vijay, the chief security officer of Lord Vishnu and protector of Sāket Dham. When the Sankadik Rishis cursed Jay and Vijay to be born on Earth into the Daitya lineage, Vijay's son became very angry with the Sankadik Rishis. He rushed to kill them with his sword. The Sankadik Rishis were angered by his audacity too. In turn, they cursed him, sentencing him to be born into a Daitya family on Earth. However, when he repented, Lord Vishnu granted him a boon: the curse of the Sankadik Rishis would come to an end when he would be reborn as the son of his beloved devotee, the Daitya emperor Prahlad. Lord Vishnu continued that after your birth, you would meet an untimely death and return to Saket Dham. O son Prahlad, Indra was merely an instrument. Virochana was destined to return to Sāketa Dham. Therefore, abandon your anger and appoint your grandson Bali as your crown prince. He, too, will become a devotee of Lord Vishnu and a powerful emperor, just like you. One day, he will receive the boon of immortality from Lord Vishnu.'

Upon hearing the words of Brahmrishi Narada, emperor Prahlad's anger subsided. He then appointed his five-year-old grandson prince Bali, as crown prince. The emperor entrusted the crown prince to Guru Acharya Shukradeva, who was to teach him politics and military strategy. Alongside Guru Shukracharya, emperor Prahlad also began teaching prince Bali how to become a great emperor. Prince Bali was dearer to emperor Prahlad than his own life. Time

passed. Prince Bali was a brilliant and sharp-minded student. He quickly mastered the teachings of Acharya Shukradeva and his grandfather emperor Prahlad. However, when prince Bali turned fifteen, he realised that this education alone was not enough to become a powerful ruler. Like his father prince Virochana, he must obtain the boon of invincibility from Brahma. This would require severe penance. He shared his thoughts with Gurudev and his grandfather. After receiving their permission and blessings, he went into the forest to perform austerities to please Brahma. For many thousands of years, prince Bali performed austerities to please Brahma. Eventually, Brahma appeared before him, pleased by his penance, and granted him the boon of invincibility.

With this boon, prince Bali returned to the capital of his grandfather emperor Prahlād. His grandfather emperor Prahlād, Gurudev Āchārya Śukradeva, all the councillors, and all the Subjects gave him a grand welcome. The emperor now wished to crown him as king and then go to Sāketa Dham, the abode of his beloved Lord Vishnu. Therefore, he discussed this with Gurudev and prince Bali. Out of great affection for his grandfather, prince Bali did not want emperor Prahlad to leave under any circumstances; however, he agreed to be crowned as king.

With great pomp and ceremony, prince Bali was crowned and named as emperor Mahabali. On the day of his coronation, all the emperors of the Universe, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Siddhas, the Daitya and Daanava warriors congratulated him. Unfortunately, Indradeva did not attend the coronation due to his jealousy. He felt a premonition of fear in his heart, fearing that, as he had caused the death of his father prince Virochan, he might be humiliated or even taken captive.

Emperor Mahabali took charge of the kingdom and began to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather emperor Prahlad and Gurudev Shukracharya. Time passed. Emperor Bali is a highly skilled ruler, establishing himself as a just, kind and beloved king.

Sometime later, his grandfather, emperor Prahlad expressed his desire to Gurudev Shukracharya to leave his body. Gurudev knew that he could not keep a devotee from his beloved deity for much longer; therefore, he granted emperor Prahlad permission to renounce his body by being consumed by the Yogic fire. Gurudev counselled emperor Mahabali at length. Eventually, Mahabali's attachment to his grandfather lessened somewhat. Under Mahabali's command and Shukracharya's leadership, a grand Yajña was organised, in which all the great Sages and Acharyas of that time participated. Brahmishi Narad himself arrived at the Yagna and gave his blessings. At the conclusion of the Yagna, emperor Prahlad consumed his body in the Yogic fire having received the blessings of Brahmishi Narad and Gurudev Shukracharya. Suddenly, a golden, jewel-studded Vimana (aerial vehicle) appeared, coming from Lord Vishnu's Vaikuntha Dham. Emperor Prahlad entered the Vimana and his subtle body departed for Vaikuntha Dham. Brahmishi Narad accompanied him.

News of Chakravarti Samrat Prahlad's departure for Vaikuntha spread throughout the Universe like wildfire. The other worldly emperors who had accepted his subordination regarded emperor Mahabali as inexperienced and declared their independence, rebelling against him. These emperors all became absolute dictators. In order to fill their treasuries and satisfy their desires, they began to oppress their poor and helpless Subjects. Emperor Mahabali could not tolerate this. With the permission and guidance of Gurudev Shukracharya, he and his army set out to bring these tyrants under control. Lord Brahma himself

had granted emperor Mahabali the boon of invincibility, so who could stop him? Gradually, the rebellious kings surrendered without a fight, accepting emperor Mahabali's supremacy and vowing to rule the land as he had established. Those who did not surrender were defeated, deposed from their thrones, and replaced with capable ruler. Having brought all the rebellious rulers under his control, emperor Mahabali returned to the capital and dedicated the conquered kingdoms to Gurudev Shukracharya.

Gurudev Shukracharya said, "O dear son Mahabali, I am a humble Sage, not a ruler. Therefore, keep all the kingdoms you have conquered under your own control. In return, grant me two boons."

Upon hearing this, emperor Mahabali fell at Gurudev's feet and said, 'Gurudev, why only two boons, I want to give you my very body. Command as you wish.'

Then, Acharya Shukradev asked for two things: that the practice of righteousness and charity be established among all the Danavaa and Daitya lineages, and that a Rajasuya Yagna be organised.

Emperor Mahabali gladly accepted, and the royal decree was announced to this effect.

The emperor instructed all his officials and subordinate monarchs to abandon unrighteousness and rule solely by righteousness. There was to be no place for injustice or unfairness in his kingdom. The primary objective of all administrative officers was to ensure the happiness of the people and alleviate their poverty. Anyone who failed to comply with this order would be punished. He also ordered his council of scholars, under the guidance of Guru

Shukracharya, to make all the arrangements to commence the Rajasuya Yagna.

As soon as Indradeva heard that emperor Mahabali was organising the Rajasuya Yagna, he became alarmed. If the Yagna succeeded, emperor Mahabali would become a Chakravarti Samrat and he might lose his rule over Heaven. Unlike emperor Prahlad, he sensed that emperor Mahabali was not bound by any vow to Lord Vishnu. Therefore, he would make every possible effort to subjugate the governance of Heaven completely. After careful consideration, and before emperor Mahabali could organise the Yagna, Indradeva hatched a plan to destroy his kingdom.

At Indra's command, the rains stopped in emperor Mahabali's kingdom, causing the crops to fail. A famine-like situation arose. Tormented by hunger and thirst, the people began to cry out for help. Indra then sent Kala Purusha and his assistants to Mahabali's kingdom to create disorder. Kala Purusha and his assistants incited the subjects against Emperor Mahabali, instigating a rebellion.

Upon seeing the people in such distress, emperor Mahabali opened his treasury and granaries. He discovered from Sage Shukracharya that it was Indra who had caused this situation. Upon hearing this, he became extremely angry with Indra and declared war on him.

Under the direction of Guru Shukracharya and led by emperor Mahabali, the Daitya army attacked Amaravati. Indradeva had not anticipated this happening so soon. He knew that emperor Mahabali had been granted invincibility by Brahmadeva. Defeating him in battle was impossible. Therefore, he went to Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu, accompanied by Brihaspati, the Guru of the Gods, to seek help. However, Lord Vishnu refused, saying that

this was the result of Indra's own misdeeds. Indra was responsible for this situation himself. If he had made such a decision, he must also be prepared to face the consequences. He should either fight Emperor Mahabali or flee.

Disheartened, Indra returned to Amaravati. Following Guru Brihaspati's advice that it would be impossible to win a war against emperor Mahabali without Lord Vishnu's help, he decided it was best to flee and departed from Heaven.

Emperor Mahabali then entered the Heaven unopposed. He welcomed all the celestial deities and gave the Apsaras and others a pledge of fearlessness. Then, at the request of Guru Shukracharya and the other commanders, emperor Mahabali was crowned the king of Heaven. Thus, he incorporated the governance of Heaven into his own realm. He appointed Surya and Chandra as his representatives to administer the heavenly kingdom, and his chief Daitya commander as commander-in-chief of the army. Then he returned to his capital.

The day after emperor Mahabali returned from Heaven, Guru Shukracharya said to him, "My son, you have certainly seized the kingdom of Heaven from Indra, who has fled. But I believe his exile will be short-lived. Wherever he has taken refuge, he must be plotting to dethrone you from the heavenly throne.' The only way to destroy his power completely is for you to perform 100 Rajasuya Yagnas. If you succeed in performing these 100 sacrifices, you will become invincible among the Daanava and Daitya races. Now, immediately command your spiritual leaders to prepare for these 100 sacrifices.'

Emperor Mahabali took hold of Guru Shukracharya's feet, bowed his head before him, and spoke in a humble tone

with his hands folded, saying, 'O Lord, you are the very foundation of our lives. Your instructions are an order to us. Please command as you see fit.'

Then, Gurudev Acharya Shukradev invited all the kingdom's Acharyas and ordered them to prepare for 100 Rajasuya Yagnas. They obeyed his command immediately.

Prince Baan continued, "Great-grandfather Acharya Swarbhanu, 99 Rajasuya Yagnas have now been successfully completed. Acharya Shukradev is now preparing for the hundredth. Your arrival coincides with a very auspicious occasion. With your guidance and blessings, as well as those of Acharya Shukradeva, the 100th Rajasuya Yagna will now be successfully completed."

As historical tales were being recounted, prince Baan's chariot, accompanied by Acharya Swarbhanu, reached the outskirts of emperor Mahabali's capital. As soon as the chariot crossed the boundary of the capital, prince Baan sent a soldier to request emperor Mahabali for permission to enter the city with his distinguished guest. The soldier sped off with prince Baan's message. Upon reaching the palace, he delivered the message to the palace gatekeeper. The gatekeeper immediately sent the message to the emperor. Emperor Mahabali granted permission at once.

Upon hearing that prince Baan was accompanied by a distinguished guest, emperor Mahabali went to Guru Shukracharya's cottage to deliver this auspicious news. However, he was curious to know who this distinguished guest might be.

When Acharya Shukradev awoke at dawn that morning, he began to experience some very auspicious omens. His right eye and arm were twitching, seemingly signalling that good news was about to arrive. Using his divine vision, he soon

realised that Acharya Swarbhanu was returning after pleasing Lord Mahadev and was on his way. Acharya Shukradev quickly completed his daily rituals, took his seat in his hut in the Ashram, and waited to receive this auspicious news.

Soon, Emperor Mahabali entered the Ashram, eager for an audience. Seeing the smile on the emperor's face, Acharya Shukradev realised that there must be some good news.

The emperor bowed at the feet of Guru Shukracharya and said, 'O Lord, prince Baan has arrived at the city gates and has asked permission to enter. He is accompanied by a distinguished guest. I do not know who he is, but the soldier reported that prince Baan is seated before him with folded hands, showing great reverence. He seems to be a person of extraordinary stature.'

Guru Shukracharya smiled and said, "My dear son, Swarbhanu is returning. This distinguished guest is none other than Swarbhānu himself, who pleased Mahadeva through great austerities and is now returning. Prince Baan is very fortunate to have had the opportunity to have Darshan and blessings of Āchārya Swarbhānu, even before you. Now go and prepare to welcome your granduncle Acharya Swarbhanu, along with prince Baan."

Hearing the pleasant and sweet words of Gurudev, emperor Mahabali was reminded of his grandfather, the emperor Prahlad. Thinking of Acharya Swarbhanu as equivalent to his grandfather emperor Prahlad, tears began to stream from his eyes. He thought that how fortunate he was that his grandfather emperor Prahlad's beloved brother Ahlad's brother Acharya Swarbhanu is coming to my capital. After bowing to Gurudev and dancing with joy, he left Guru's cottage and came straight to the palace. He ordered all the

councillors to give a grand welcome to prince Baan and the distinguished guest.

Every house in the capital of emperor Mahabali was decorated as though for a grand festival. After cleaning their homes, each citizen adorned their door with a toran. Rangoli adorned every courtyard. In the evening, chains of ghee lamps were hung up to provide light. Garlands of lamps made from earthenware vessels containing colourful glass shards were arranged to enhance the beauty and splendour of all the main places. The sight was simply breathtaking.

The decorations on king Mahabali's palace were exceedingly difficult to describe. The palace walls were adorned with exquisitely beautiful multi-coloured glass and mirrors. Beautiful ornamental paintings adorned the ceilings and the edges of the floors and walls. The entire palace was adorned with various fragrant flowers. Gold ornaments were used to decorate the palace.

The only thing left was for prince Baan and his distinguished guest to enter the palace.

Acharya Swarbhanu requested that prince Baan first take his chariot to the Ashram of Gurudev Acharya Shukradeva. He wanted to see his Guru before entering the capital. Prince Baan immediately ordered his charioteer to drive towards the Ashram of Gurudev Acharya Shukradeva at the request of Acharya Swarbhanu. Within moments, the chariot reached the Ashram. It was stopped just outside the Ashram's boundary. Acharya Swarbhanu and prince Baan then proceeded on foot towards Guru Shukracharya's cottage. A monastery servant recognised prince Baan and ran to inform the Guru that the prince had entered the Ashram with a distinguished guest. Guru Shukracharya

then immediately came out of his cottage and ran towards the gate to welcome Acharya Swarbhanu and prince Baan.

As soon as Acharya Swarbhānu and prince Baan saw Gurudev, they prostrated themselves before him. Acharya Swarbhanu immediately took hold of his feet. His hair bristled with joy. Gurudev Acharya Shukradev then lifted him up, embraced him and asked about his well-being.

Acharya Swarbhanu then humbly said, “O Lord, it is by your blessings alone that we exist. When your gracious hand is upon us, how could any harm come to us?”

The meeting of the Guru and disciple was a sight to behold. The tears streaming from Acharya Swarbhanu's eyes would not stop. After blessing Acharya Swarbhanu, Gurudeva also lifted prince Baan, holding him close and showering him with blessings.

Seeing this, tears filled the eyes of all the Ashram residents. Then Gurudev Acharya Shukradev spoke: 'O prince Baan, your father emperor Mahabali is waiting anxiously in the palace for you both. It would not be right to keep him waiting any longer. We should depart for emperor Mahabali's palace at once.’

Accepting the Guru's command, Gurudev Acharya Shukradev, Acharya Swarbhanu, and prince Baan then set off for emperor Mahabali's palace.

As they travelled, Subjects from all sides showered the chariot with flowers, chanting, “Jai! Jai!” in honour of Gurudev and prince Baan. Gurudev and prince Baan acknowledged their greetings as they moved forward. Acharya Swarbhanu, however, sat silently in a corner of the chariot. Despite the people's attempts to peer into the chariot to catch a glimpse of this distinguished guest,

Acharya Swarbhanu remained seated in silence in the corner. The scene was a delightful sight to behold. Soon, the chariot arrived at the gate of the emperor's palace. It was stopped at the gate, and the three of them, Gurudev, Shukracharya, prince Baan and Acharya Swarbhanu, walked towards the emperor's royal assembly hall.

As soon as emperor Mahabali received word that Gurudev Shukracharya, prince Ban and Acharya Swarbhanu had arrived at the palace gate, he ran out to greet them, barefoot. From a distance, he prostrated himself before Gurudev Acharya Shukradev and Acharya Swarbhanu. As he approached them, Gurudev lifted him up and held him to his chest. Then he fell at the feet of Acharya Swarbhanu. Tears began to stream from his eyes. Washing Acharya Swarbhanu's feet with his tears, he said, "I am so pleased to have the Darshan of my revered granduncle Acharya Swarbhanu, today, as if my grandfather emperor Prahlad were here."

Then, Acharya Swarbhanu embraced him and blessed him. Empress Sudeshna also arrived there carrying a Pooja thali. She first performed the Aarti for Gurudev Acharya Shukradev, touched his feet and received his blessings. Then, she performed the Arti for Dada Shri Acharya Swarbhanu, falling at his feet. Acharya Swarbhanu lifted her up, placing his blessed hands on her head and showering her with blessings. A shower of flowers and perfume filled the air. All the councillors and dignitaries of the kingdom prostrated themselves in line to receive the blessings of Gurudev Acharya Shukradev and Acharya Swarbhanu. As they bestowed blessings upon everyone, both Gurudev Shukracharya and Acharya Swarbhanu accepted everyone's greetings. Then, at emperor Mahabali's request, they proceeded to his private chamber.

Empress Sudeshna arranged the meal. The emperor and empress personally served the food to Gurudev, Acharya Shukradev, and Acharya Swarbhanu.

After the meal, Emperor Mahabali fell at the feet of Acharya Swarbhanu once again and said, 'My revered granduncle, this kingdom belongs to you. I humbly ask Gurudev to accept my plea, order the preparations for your coronation and instruct me to serve the kingdom as your servant.'

Hearing this, Acharya Swarbhanu lifted emperor Mahabali up, hugged him and said, "I have heard much about you, O great emperor Mahabali. Your justice, your love for your Subjects, your devotion to Dharma and your love for Lord Vishnu are spoken of throughout the entire Universe. If I were fond of the kingdom, O emperor, I would never have left my father emperor Viprichitti. This empire is yours, and it will always remain yours. I now wish to spend the rest of my life at the feet of Gurudev Shukracharya, obeying his commands.'

The emperor then said, 'Granduncle, your wish is our command. You must certainly live according to the Guru's orders, but please continue to guide me and this royal family always. Such is my humble request. I have already ordered the palace of emperor Prahlad to be prepared for your residence. I humbly beg you to accept my request.'

Acharya Swarbhanu said: 'My son, I am now a Yogi and I wish to live as one. If Gurudev deems it appropriate and grants me permission, I would like to live with him in his Ashram.'

Saying this, Acharya Swarbhanu looked towards Gurudev.

Smiling, Gurudev Shukracharya replied, 'Swarbhanu, ever since Devayānī has gone away, I have been staying in emperor Mahabali's capital for most of the time with only one hope that you would return. Otherwise, I would have gone to Mount Kailash to stay with my Guru Mahadeva, long ago. Of course, my Ashram is your Ashram.'

Gurudev Shukracharya said to emperor Mahabali, 'O emperor, Swarbhanu has travelled far and is tired. Now, please grant us permission to return to the Ashram.'

The emperor took hold of the Guru's feet and said, 'O Lord, you are the very foundation of our lives. Your wish is our command. Prince Baan will take you to the Ashram at once.'

Before emperor Mahabali had even finished speaking, prince Baan rose from his throne and ordered a soldier to instruct the charioteer to prepare the chariot immediately.

After leaving Acharya Swarbhānu and Gurudev Shukracharya at the Ashram and paying them his respects, prince Baan returned to the palace. Gurudev then ordered the Ashram residents to build a beautiful cottage for Acharya Swarbhānu, directing that he be accommodated in my cottage until the new one was completed.

That night, Gurudev Shukracharya asked Acharya Swarbhanu about his meeting with Mahadeva and the boon that had been granted to him. Acharya Swarbhanu simply replied, 'O Gurudev, thanks to your blessings, Lord Mahadeva has indeed shown me the path to immortality, but he ordered me to keep it a secret. However, keeping it from you would be a grave sin and an invitation to death. If you wish, I will explain everything in detail.'

Upon hearing these words, Guru Shukracharya's brow furrowed. There must be some profound secret that Lord Mahadeva had ordered to be kept hidden. Immediately, he cast his divine vision and saw everything that had transpired; he knew exactly what had happened. Patting Acharya Swarbhanu on the back, he said, 'Son, Mahadev is my Guru. His command is dearer to me than my life. Keep this secret.'

Some time passed in this way. Guru Shukracharya appointed Acharya Swarbhanu as the head of the Ashram. He also announced that, once emperor Mahabali's 100th Rajasuya Yagna had concluded, he would entrust the Daitya lineage to Acharya Swarbhanu, after which he would depart for Kailash to stay with his Guru Mahadev.

Soon, preparations for emperor Mahabali's 100th Rajasuya Yagna began at an auspicious moment, under the command of Acharya Shukradeva. Guru Shukracharya appointed Acharya Swarbhanu as chief priest of the Yagna. Prince Baan organised the Yagna administratively under the spiritual leadership of Guru Shukracharya. Guru Shukracharya, Acharya Swarbhanu, and emperor Mahabali invited the Sages from across the Universe. Maharishis, Acharyas and emperors were also invited to participate in the Yagna. Everyone accepted the invitation, arriving on the appointed day to grace emperor Mahabali's celebration. At the appointed time, the Yagna commenced.

Maharishi Narad informed Indra, who was living in disguise, about the Yagna. Indra panicked. If this 100th Rajasuya Yajña of emperor Mahabali is successful, it would be impossible to ever defeat him. Although he was in hiding after being defeated by king Mahabali, he was planning day and night to reclaim his heavenly kingdom. After the success of this Yagna, none of his plans could be put into action. Indra grabbed the feet of the Brahmrishi Narada

and said, "O Brahmrishi, son of Brahma, you are the most knowledgeable and wise person in this Universe. Only you can suggest a way to prevent the 100th Rajasuya Yagna from succeeding. Please guide me, my Lord."

Upon hearing Indradev, Brahmrishi Narad said, "O Indra, Shukracharya and Acharya Swarbhanu are performing this Yajña. No Rishi, Maharishi, Acharya, Deva, Daitya or Daanava in the three worlds has the power to disrupt it. Brahma himself protects emperor Mahabali. Shukracharya is Mahadeva's most beloved and foremost disciple. Acharya Swarbhanu has also pleased Mahadeva with his severe penance. Therefore, neither Brahma nor Mahadeva will help you disrupt emperor Mahabali's 100th Rajasuya Yagna. Although emperor Mahabali is also very dear to Narayana, He may remain impartial and rule in your favour. Even if He is not prepared to disrupt the Yagna, He can surely tell you how to get your kingdom back. Emperor Mahabali's deity is Narayana. He will not refuse Narayana's request under any circumstances. Only Narayana can help you to either disrupt the Yagna or restore your heavenly kingdom. Go to Him and seek refuge."

Having said this, Brahmrishi Narada departed, playing his Vina and chanting 'Narayan, Narayan'.

Indra had no choice but to take refuge in Narayana. Chanting "Save me, save me", he reached Lord Vishnu's Sāketa Dham. He recounted his plight to Lord Vishnu and waited for his guidance.

In a serious tone, Lord Vishnu spoke to Indra: 'Indra, Mahabali is my most beloved devotee. His father Virochana, and his grandfather Prahlad, were also very dear to me. I love them all more than my own life. You asked for Virochana's head as a gift, and through your wickedness and deceit, as a matter of fact, you murdered him. I was

extremely angry with you at the time. If Sachi had not prayed to me to calm down, I would have killed you there and then. You are not worthy of mercy at all. Yet you have come to my refuge. I never disappoint those who come to me for refuge, no matter how great a sinner that may be. I will not disrupt Mahabali's Yajña, but I will find a way to preserve Mahabali's honour and help you regain your kingdom. Now go and rest. Wait for the right time.”

Hearing these beloved words of Lord Vishnu, Indra was reassured. He prayed to Lord Narayan and left.

Under the spiritual guidance of Guru Shukracharya and Acharya Swarbhanu, emperor Mahabali successfully completed his 100th Rajasuya Yagna. All the Rishis, Maharishis and Acharyas blessed emperor Mahabali. Just then, a divine voice was heard from the sky.

'O emperor Mahabali, by successfully completing the 100th Rajasuya Yajna, you have become invincible. I, Narayana, grant you the boon of immortality. From this moment onwards, there will be only seven immortals in this Universe, and you will be one of them.”

**अश्वत्थामा बलिव्यासो हनुमांश्च बिभीषणः ॥
कृपः परशुरामश्चैव सप्तैते चिरंजीविनः ॥**

**Ashwatthama Balirvyaso
Hanumanscha Vibhishanah.
Krupah Parashuramascha
Saptaite Chiranjivinah.**

The seven immortals are Ashwatthama, Bali (Mahabali), Vyasa, Hanuman, Vibhishana, Kripacharya and Lord Parashurama.

Akashvaani (the voice from the sky) said again:

"Thanks to the efforts and blessings of Acharya Shukradeva and Acharya Swarbhanu, your 100th and final Rajasuya Yagna has certainly been completed successfully, but you will not reap its benefits until you have welcomed and honoured all the Brahmins who have come. Give them the alms they desire. Therefore, open your treasury and grant them their requested alms."

With these words, the divine voice vanished.

Gurudev Shukracharya furrowed his brow. He sensed that Lord Vishnu must be performing some divine play. He had certainly granted my disciple Mahabali the boon of immortality, yet he was about to deprive him of the kingdoms of the three worlds. Now, he had to wait and see how Narayan's divine play would unfold.

Emperor Mahabali's joy knew no bounds. He believed that his beloved Lord Vishnu had personally granted him the boon of immortality through Akashvani (voice from the sky). There could be no greater honour or joy for him. Unaware of Narayan's divine plan, he immediately opened his treasury. He began to give the Brahmins whatever alms they asked for. Once all the Brahmins had received their donations, a dwarf Brahmin suddenly appeared before emperor Mahabali and said, 'O king, may you prosper! You have successfully completed one hundred Rajasuya Yajnas and given all the Brahmins the alms they asked for. Will you also grant me my wish?"

Emperor Mahabali smiled and said, 'O Vamana (Brahmin), I welcome and honour you with all my heart. Why do you have any doubts? I have just given all the Brahmins present here the donations as they desired. Please, tell me what you need, and I will certainly grant it to you."

The dwarf Vamana said, "O immortal, great emperor, my Guru told me that accepting a gift incurs a debt, unless the giver frees you from it by making a vow. I am a poor Brahmin. How can I repay you? Therefore, only if you free me from this debt by taking water from my Kamandalu and make a vow, then only can I accept your gift."

The emperor laughed and said, "What problem could there be, Brahman Dev? Give me the water from your Kamandalu and I will make the vow right now, freeing you from any debt relating to this donation."

Upon hearing this strange condition for accepting the donation, Guru Shukracharya's brow furrowed. He had already sensed the divine play of Narayana, and now his doubt turned to certainty. Through his divine vision, he discovered that this dwarf, Vamana, was none other than the incarnation of Lord Narayana. This incarnation of Lord Vishnu had been born from Aditi's womb through a boon she had obtained after performing severe penance. Guru Shukracharya immediately went to emperor Mahabali. He tried to stop emperor Mahabali from performing a water vow. The emperor held Guru Shukracharya's feet and asked humbly for the reason.

Guru Shukracharya replied, "O king, this dwarf Brahmin is none other than Narayana Himself. He is Vamana, the son of Aditi, the grandmother of your grandfather Prahlad. I have come to know this through my divine vision. He has surely come to perform some divine play. I suspect that he wants to deprive you of the kingdom of the three worlds. Do not give him any donation after performing the water ritual. This is my order."

Once again, Emperor Mahabali took hold of Guru Shukracharya's feet and said, "Gurudev, even if you ask for my life, I would gladly give it. But if my beloved Lord

Vishnu asks me for something, how can I refuse? Therefore, command me to prove myself worthy of Lord Narayan. As you said, He is the son of my great-grandmother Aditi; he is my great-grandfather. He should have the highest place in my heart. This kingdom belongs to Him. He Himself granted me the boon of immortality, so He cannot ask for my life. If he asks for the kingdom, which belongs to Him anyway, then please let Him take it. Do not deprive me of His blessing.”

When Guru Shukracharya saw emperor Mahabali stubbornly insisting on doing things his own way, he became angry and said: 'Emperor Mahabali, I have successfully conducted your one hundred Rajasuya sacrifices through great effort. I have made you invincible. If you do not obey my command, I will strip you of your prosperity.'

Lying at his Guru's feet, emperor Mahabali said, 'Gurudev, even if I am rendered penniless, I will remain at your feet. Do whatever you think is appropriate for me. Make me penniless. Take away my kingdom. But please do not separate me from your feet. Grant me your permission so that I may keep my word.”

Gurudev Shukracharya realised that the foolish king would no longer listen to him. So, setting aside his anger, he said calmly, “My son, do as you wish.”

But he was his Guru, after all. How could he stand by and watch his disciple's complete downfall? He took the form of a frog and sat in the Kamandalu's hole, preventing any water from escaping for the ritual.

Emperor Mahabali went to the dwarf Vamana and fell at his feet.

Vamana lifted him up and asked, "O emperor, will you grant me bhiksha (alm) after completing the water ritual?"

'Certainly, Lord. My body, mind, wealth and kingdom are all yours. Just give the order," said emperor Mahabali.

The dwarf Vamana smiled at emperor Mahabali and tried to draw water from the Kamandalu. However, in the Kamandalu's spout was Lord Shukracharya in the form of a frog, so no water came out. The Lord immediately understood the reason. He took a splinter from a wooden plank in the Yajña hall and used it to open the Kamandalu's hole. Unfortunately, it went into one of Gurudev Shukracharya's eyes. Blood began to flow from the eye. Writhing in pain, he pulled out immediately. As a result, Gurudev Shukracharya lost an eye. The dwarf Vamana immediately wiped the blood flowing from Shukracharya's eye with his dhoti. This relieved the pain.

Then the dwarf Vamana drew water from the Kamandalu and placed it in emperor Mahabali's hand, asking him to make a vow.

The dwarf Brahmin then said, "O great-hearted emperor Mahabali, I only want three paces of land on which to build a hut. I, a poor Brahmin, will live in your kingdom by building my hut there."

The emperor said, "Lord, just three paces of land? How can a hut be built on that? Please ask for a larger piece of land. I will personally have your hut, Ashram and Gurukul built."

Smiling, the dwarf Vamana replied, 'O emperor, I am only a few fingers in size. I am neither a Sage nor a scholar who desires to build an Ashram or a Gurukul. I simply wish to live out the rest of my life in a small hut dedicated to the Lord's feet. Please grant me only three paces of land."

The emperor then bowed to the dwarf and said, "As you wish. I give you three paces of land in whichever part of my kingdom you choose."

No sooner had emperor Mahabali finished speaking than the dwarf Brahmin expanded into his Trivikram form. He took on a fearsome appearance. He was so terrifying that it was impossible to see His head or feet. He placed his foot on Earth, His thigh in the Netherworld, and His waist in Swargaloka. He positioned His stomach on Earth, His navel in the Netherworld, His chest in Swargaloka, His throat in Maharloka, His heart in Janaloka, His neck in Yamaloka, His head in Satyaloka, and His crown above them all. The Sun, the Moon and all the other planets, the Yogis, the Nakshatras, the Gods such as Indra and all the Nagas were seen offering prayers to Him, reciting Vedic Mantras.

Then Vamana took hold of king Mahabali's hand and said, "O king, I have placed one foot on the Earth and the other on the Heaven. Now, where shall I place My third foot?"

Hearing these words, emperor Mahabali bowed his head and said, "O Lord, please place your third foot on my head."

Vamana then placed his foot on the king's head and said, 'Now, emperor Mahabali, your entire kingdom and you yourself are mine. I am your Master, and I command you to accept the coronation of the Netherworld. I will give the kingdom of Heaven to the Gods with Indra as king, and the kingdom of the Earth among the Lunar and Solar dynasties of kings.'

The emperor smiled happily and said, 'O Lord, I have always been yours. I am forever your servant, and you are forever my master. I respect your command. Please grant me permission to go to the Netherworld.'

Just then, a great commotion broke out among the people of Thrikkakara. They all bowed down to the Lord and began crying, "Save us, save us!" and pleading, "O Lord, please command our benefactor, emperor Mahabali, to reside here in Thrikkakara."

Lord Vamana addressed them all, saying: "O councillors and Subjects, emperor Mahabali is also a very dear devotee of Mine. But everyone must abide by the decree of destiny. I am not exempt from it either. The decree of destiny is that emperor Mahabali should become king of the Netherworld. However, I grant him permission to come to his earthly capital, Thrikkakara, once a year. That day shall be celebrated as the festival of Onam."

Then Lord Vamana turned to Acharya Swarbhanu and said, "Swarbhanu, Gurudeva Shukracharya now wishes to go to Kailash and live with his Guru Mahadeva. He has long desired to go, but was waiting for you to return from your great penance and for emperor Mahabali's 100 Rajasuya Yagnas to be completed. Now both of these tasks have been accomplished. Please bid him farewell from the heart and accompany emperor Mahabali to the Netherworld to guide him as his Guru."

Acharya Swarbhanu fell at Lord Vamana's feet. Tears flowed continuously from his eyes. He said only a few words: 'As the Lord wish.'

Lord Vamana then turned to Shukracharya, blessed him, and said: 'O Shukracharya, you have guided the Daityas and Daanavas for many ages. Now, go to Kailash as you wish. Mahadeva is waiting for you there. He will perform surgery on your eye and restore your sight. You will be able to see with both eyes as before.'

Hearing these kind words from Lord Vamana, Guru Shukracharya was overwhelmed with emotion. Tears streamed from his eyes and praise escaped his lips.

शांतकारं भुजगशयनं पद्मनाभं सुरेशम् ।
विश्वाधारं गगनसदृशं मेघवर्णं शुभाङ्गम् ॥
लक्ष्मीकान्तं कमलनयनं योगिभिर्ध्यानगम्यम् ।
वन्दे विष्णुं भवभयहरं सर्वलोकैकनाथम् ॥

Shaanta-Aakaaram Bhujaga-Shayanam
Padma-Naabham Sura-Iisham.
Vishva-Aadhaaram Gagana-Sadrsham
Megha-Varnna Shubha-Anggam.
Lakssmii-Kaantam Kamala-Nayanam
Yogibhir-Dhyaana-Gamyam.
Vande Vissnnum Bhava-Bhaya-Haram
Sarva-Loka-Eka-Naatham.

We worship Lord Vishnu, who has a peaceful Nature and rests on a bed of serpents. From whose navel emerged the lotus (the seat of Brahma), he is the lord of the Gods. He is the foundation of the entire Universe and is omnipresent like the sky. He is dark in colour like a cloud and has limbs of great beauty. He is beloved by Goddess Lakshmi, has eyes like lotuses and is attained by Yogis through meditation. He is the sole master of all worlds, the remover of fear of birth and death.

After the prayer, everyone prostrated themselves before the Lord. Lord Vishnu blessed them all, and then He vanished.

Emperor Mahabali returned to his palace from the Yajnasala with empress Sudeshna, and began preparing to travel to the Netherworld. Meanwhile, Guru Shukracharya returned to his Ashram with Acharya Swarbhanu.

As soon as they arrived, Swarbhanu took hold of Shukracharya's feet and said, 'Before you depart for

Kailash, Gurudev, please tell me the complete story of the Vamana Avatar.'

You addressed Him as the son of my great-grandmother Aditi. Why did Lord Vishnu himself take birth from her womb? Please tell me the whole story.”

Hearing his disciple's sweet words and sensing his eagerness to learn about the Vamana incarnation, Shukracharya said, "Certainly, my son. Listen carefully to the complete story of the Vamana incarnation.”

Vaaman Incarnation

The great Sage Shukracharya began narrating the story of the Vaaman incarnation to his disciple, Acharya Swarbhahu.

he began, "O son, when emperor Mahabali conquered the three worlds and forced Indra to relinquish his heavenly throne and go into hiding, Indra began devising plans to defeat Mahabali. However, he could not think of a way to defeat emperor Mahabali, who was personally protected by Lord Vishnu. After much deliberation, he went to his mother Aditi who resided on Mount Meru. He recounted his plight to her and asked her to suggest a way to defeat the demon king Mahabali.

Mother Aditi replied, "O my best son, Indra, you and the Gods and the Maruts cannot surely defeat Mahabali. No one in this Universe can defeat him except Lord Vishnu. We should discuss this problem with your father Maharshi Kashyapa. He will surely find a solution. I know Mahabali is protected by Lord Vishnu Himself. However, there is no one more devoted to the welfare of the Gods than Lord Vishnu. So let us all go to Maharshi Kashyapa's Ashram and ask him for a solution to this problem."

Thus, Mother Aditi and Indra, along with all the Gods, went to Maharshi Kashyapa's Ashram in Kashmir. After hearing their plea, Maharshi Kashyapa suggested that they should request Brahma for help. So, Maharshi Kashyapa, Aditi, Indra, and the other Gods went to Brahma in Brahmaloka.

When Brahma saw them approaching, He provided them with appropriate seats. The omniscient Brahma then spoke: "O Maharshi Kashyapa, Aditi, Indra, and all the Gods, I fully understand the reason for your coming here, and I

myself have been pondering this matter for a long time. Defeating the powerful Daitya emperor Mahabali is possible only by the grace of Lord Vishnu. Currently, Lord Vishnu resides on the Northern shore of the Kshira Ocean at a place called 'Amrita.' I suggest that you, Maharshi Kashyapa, and Aditi should go there and try to please Him through penance and austerities. When the Lord appears before you both and is pleased, ask Him for a boon to solve this problem. I have full confidence that the Lord will provide a solution.”

Following Brahma's instructions, Maharishi Kashyapa and Aditi set out for a place called Amrita, located North of Kshirasagar.

After enduring great hardships and crossing many rivers and seas, the two great beings finally reached Amrita. There was neither any living creature nor Sunlight in this place called Amrita. Instead, there was dense darkness all around, and the boundaries of the forest were not visible. Maharshi Kashyapa then initiated Aditi into the Kamad Vrat to gain the favour of Amrita Deveshwar, the benevolent form of Narayana with a thousand eyes.

Thereafter, Maharshi Kashyapa and Aditi remained silent. They sat in Vir Asan position in the proper place and began to perform severe austerities. Maharshi Kashyapa performed the "Paramastava" as prescribed in the Vedas. They performed austerities for thousands of years, aiming to please Lord Vishnu with the Vedic chant.

Impressed by the devotion of Maharshi Kashyapa and Aditi, Lord Vishnu finally appeared before them and said, "O revered Sage Kashyapa and Aditi, you have both performed arduous penance. May you be blessed. Tell me your heart's desire, and I will surely fulfill it."

Maharshi Kashyapa and Aditi took hold of Lord Vishnu's feet. Seeing their beloved Lord Vishnu before them, tears streamed from their eyes. In a sweet, composed voice, Maharshi Kashyapa said, "O Lord, if you are pleased with us, please show our son Indradeva the way to defeat the Daitya king Mahabali."

Lord Vishnu then looked at Aditi. She immediately echoed the Sage's words, saying, "O Lord, what the Sage has asked is also very dear to me. This is my heart's desire as well."

Honouring Brahma's words and hearing their aspirations, the merciful Lord Vishnu said, "O revered Sage, My energy has incarnated from the womb of mother Aditi in the form of the dwarf Vaaman. With this form, I will protect the interests of all the Gods. Now, return to the earthly realm by the same path through which you came, and wait for the right time."

Upon returning to their Ashram, Maharshi Kashyapa and Aditi lost themselves in contemplation of Lord Vishnu, entering a state of samadhi. They remained in this state for a thousand years. When they emerged, the Ashram's residents praised them. From then on, the Ashram became famous as "Aditi Van". Through mother Aditi's penance, the forest attained a spiritual essence. Scriptures say that visiting this "Aditi Van" fulfills all desires and makes life prosperous.

When Maharshi Kashyap and his wife Aditi awoke from their samadhi, Lord Vishnu appeared before them once again. Seeing the Lord, Aditi began to cry and said, "O Lord of compassion, my son Indra has been defeated by the Daityas and forced into hiding. You know that the Daityas have seized his kingdom of Heaven. They have also deprived him of his share of the sacrifices. As you blessed us, Lord, please now protect Indra and destroy this tyrant

so that he may regain his kingdom and receive his due share from the sacrifices."

Seeing Aditi so sad, Lord Vishnu said, "O Devi, do not be sad. As you wish, I will soon find a solution through my incarnation, Vaaman, and show your enemy the right path. Leave your sorrow behind and be happy now."

Having said these pleasing words, Lord Vishnu vanished.

After He vanished, all the Gods, including Indra, gathered and prayed to Vaamana, the Lord's incarnation. Pleased by their prayers, Lord Vaaman appeared. Smiling, He spoke in a majestic voice: "O Gods, mother Aditi, be free of sorrow now. When the time comes, I will restore Indra to his heavenly throne. Now, return to your respective places and await that time."

Saying this, Lord Vaaman, the avatar of Lord Vishnu, took up an umbrella and a Kamandalu and went into the forest to practice Yoga. There, He performed extremely severe penance. Through this penance, He attained the divine powers of Lord Vishnu Himself. Thus, He taught the world the importance of penance. He taught that Brahma creates this world, Vishnu preserves it, and Mahadeva destroys it with the powers gained through penance. When a person is engrossed in penance, he or she receives supernatural powers. As the practice progresses, the effects of penance become clearer. Only by embracing penance can one experience inner satisfaction and joy. Penance instils faith in spirituality, which inspires one to perform good deeds selflessly. Selfless action enables a person to achieve goals and brings one into direct communion with God. Actions must be performed through the body, speech, and mind. Every action has a predetermined result. The result is inherent in the cause, just as a tree is inherent in a seed. Each action immediately affects us. The results of one's

actions leave an indelible mark on one's thought patterns, shaping the development of one's life. Good deeds lead to the attainment of goals and the finding of God, just as a seed becomes a tree. Every action has an immediate effect on us. Whether an individual goes towards good or evil depends on his actions. Only through penance can bad actions be curbed. Through penance and spiritual practice, a person can develop a great personality. The Vaaman incarnation taught that one can overcome weaknesses through penance. One can be freed from envy and malevolent tendencies, such as greed and attachment. One can learn to control one's mind. Through penance, a person can purify their inner self, which grants them pure resolve, enthusiasm, and energy. Penance halts the influence of useless and negative thoughts in a person's heart and enhances positive thoughts to provide inner strength. Then, resilience begins to emerge. Austerity improves not only this life, but the next as well.

While practicing penance, He travelled from one Ashram to another in the forest, teaching these principles to the Acharyas, Rishis, and their disciples.

After Mahabali completed his hundredth royal Yajña, Vaaman came to the Yajñashala to fulfill His promise to mother Aditi. Swarbhanu, you know what happened afterward very well.

Gurudev Shukracharya continued, "Swarbhanu, Lord Vishnu's love for Mahabali is unparalleled. If He had wanted to, He could have disrupted Mahabali's hundredth Rajasuya Yagna with the power of His penance. But He did not do so. Instead, He allowed the 100th Rajasuya Yagna to be completed successfully and blessed Mahabali with immortality. I can see with my divine vision that He deeply regrets this His action. He orchestrated this entire divine play only to fulfill the promise He made to mother Aditi.

Lord Vaaman will soon abandon his body and merge with Lord Vishnu. You must always honour and pray to Lord Vishnu from the heart. He will pave the way for you to attain immortality, as Mahadev told you. You should also now begin preparing to go to the capital of the Netherworld, Suttal, with emperor Mahabali, as ordered by the Lord. I also direct you to take responsibility for guiding emperor Mahabali and all the Daitya and Daanava lineages. As soon as you leave for Suttal, I will also set out for Kailash to live with my Guru Mahadeva. My blessings are always with you. Whenever you think of me or wish to consult me, simply remember me. I will come to you in a subtle form and guide you on the right path.

Meanwhile, in the palace, emperor Mahabali, empress Sudeshna, prince Baan, and the other courtiers began preparing to depart for Suttal, capital of the Netherworld. The Daanava governor of Suttal was informed that emperor Mahabali himself would assume the role of ruler of the Netherworld. Once the preparations for emperor Mahabali's journey were finished, he went to the Ashram of Guru Shukracharya and received his blessings. Standing before the Sages Shukracharya and Swarbhanu, he requested that Swarbhanu become the Guru of himself and all the Daitya and Daanava lineages. After receiving Acharya Swarbhanu's approval, emperor Mahabali spoke in a reverent tone: "Gurudev, please give me permission to leave for the Netherworld."

Acharya Swarbhanu, emperor Mahabali, empress Sudeshna, prince Baan, and the others prostrated themselves before Gurudev Shukracharya and received his blessings. They bid Guru Shukracharya farewell as he departed for Kailash to reside with his Guru Mahadev. At that moment, a golden, jewel-encrusted chariot, sent by Mahadev, appeared from the sky. Shukracharya ascended into the chariot and set off for Mount Kailash.

Immediately after Guru Shukracharya departed for Kailash, emperor Mahabali set off for Suttal with his family and courtiers after receiving orders from Acharya Swarbhanu.

When they arrived in Suttal, Acharya Swarbhanu, emperor Mahabali, his family, and his counsellors were given a grand welcome. At an auspicious moment, Acharya Swarbhanu performed emperor Mahabali's coronation. Mahabali was proclaimed emperor of all the Daitya and Daanava lineages. Acharya Swarbhanu assumed the duties of his Guru. Despite repeated pleas from emperor Mahabali, Acharya Swarbhanu refused to live in the palace. Therefore, emperor Mahabali ordered the construction of a beautiful Ashram for him some distance away from Suttal, the capital of emperor Mahabali. Acharya Swarbhanu then lived there with his disciples. Nevertheless, he arrived at court punctually, took his place of honour, and, as befitted him, guided the king.

One morning when Acharya Swarbhanu arrived at emperor Mahabali's assembly, he saw an exceptionally gifted, radiant, divine being dressed as a bodyguard at the gate. He was told that the emperor had appointed this person as his personal security guard. Acharya Swarbhanu had never seen this bodyguard before. He did not appear to be of the Daitya or Daanava lineage. Acharya Swarbhanu's brow furrowed. Who could this divine being be? Could the Gods have conspired to harm emperor Mahabali? Using the divine sight bestowed upon him by his Guru, Shukracharya, he was astonished to discover that it was none other than Lord Vishnu Himself. Lord Vishnu is emperor Mahabali's bodyguard! As he tried to make sense of it, the bodyguard smiled at him and signalled for him to keep the secret. Acharya Swarbhanu then bowed to Him and left the assembly. He could not concentrate on the assembly at all that day. He couldn't stop thinking about Lord Vishnu's presence as emperor Mahabali's bodyguard. He was

surprised by this and became curious to know the reason. When the assembly ended, he humbly spoke to emperor Mahabali: "O emperor, it seems you have appointed a new bodyguard. May I have permission to bring him to my Ashram so I can learn more about him?"

Guru Acharya Swarbhanu had not even finished speaking when emperor Mahabali rose from his throne, touched the Acharya's feet, and began apologizing for appointing this bodyguard without his permission. He had been so impressed by the bodyguard's radiance, valour, and talent that he could not refuse his request to become his bodyguard.

Acharya Swarbhanu rose, embraced the emperor, and said, "Sire, I know fully well that you would never make an improper decision. I have no doubt about your judgement. This person is without a doubt exceptionally gifted. I understand that. However, until a proper arrangement is made for his accommodation in the palace, he may reside with me at the Ashram, I request your permission to take him with me. It would allow me to learn as much as possible about him."

"Certainly, Gurudev. That is an excellent idea. I shall instruct the bodyguard at once," said emperor Mahabali.

He immediately called the bodyguard and ordered him to remain at the Ashram of Acharya Swarbhanu until suitable arrangements for his residence in the palace could be made.

Accompanied by the bodyguard, Acharya Swarbhanu then returned to his Ashram. First, he led the bodyguard to a special chamber where he touched His feet and prayed to Him. Impressed by the prayer, Lord Vishnu, who was disguised as the bodyguard, blessed Acharya Swarbhanu and said, "O Swarbhanu, I understand your curiosity. You

are as dear to me as Shukracharya. I conceal nothing from my beloved devotees. I will certainly tell you why I have appeared as Mahabali's bodyguard. Listen carefully."

Lord Vishnu continued, "Dear Swarbhanu, Mahabali is dearer to me than my own life. He is my great devotee, just like his grandfather Prahalad. Because of my promise to mother Aditi, I took the kingdoms of the three worlds away from Mahabali. I did award the kingdom of Heaven to Indra and divided the earthly kingdom between the Lunar and Solar dynasties. As you know, I awarded the kingdom of the Netherworld to Mahabali. Although it was an unjust decision for my devotee Mahabali, he did not utter a single word against My decision. He accepted My orders, bowed his head in obedience, and came to the Netherworld. I felt ashamed of this act Myself. First, I needed to atone for this deed, and second, I could not live being separated from My devotee. Therefore, I came to Mahabali's capital, Suttal, and became his bodyguard. This secret is known only to you and Brahmrishi Narada. I command you to keep it confidential. In due time, this secret will be revealed through My divine plan. By then, I will have finished my penance."

Astounded, Acharya Swarbhanu caught hold of Lord Vishnu's feet and said, "O Lord, who would dare to disobey Your orders? I only know a fraction of Your glory as told to me by my Guru Shukracharya. Is Mother Shri also not aware of this secret?"

Lord Vishnu laughed and said, "Had Shri been aware of this plan of Mine, She would have insisted on accompanying Me. In that case, it would have been exceedingly difficult for Me to perform My penance. For this reason, Shri is also unaware of this divine play."

With his hands clasped and his head bowed, Acharya Swarbhanu then spoke to the Lord again, "Lord, it is my great fortune that as long as You remain in Mahabali's palace, I shall have the benefit of Your daily Darshan. I have one request. I wish to begin each day with Your blessing by offering flowers in Your prayer and applying sandalwood paste to Your forehead. Please grant me this permission."

Lord Vishnu was deeply moved by Acharya Swarbhanu's devotion. He said, "O son, if you do this in Mahabali's palace, My secret will surely be revealed. I will come to your Ashram every day during Brahma-muhurt. Then you may worship Me as you may wish, offering flowers and applying sandalwood paste."

Seeing Lord Vishnu's love for his devotee, tears welled up in Acharya Swarbhanu's eyes. He repeatedly placed his head at the Lord's feet and sought His blessings. Thus, that morning passed. Then, Lord Vishnu and Acharya Swarbhanu performed their daily routines: bathing, meditating, etc. Acharya Swarbhanu prayed to Lord Vishnu, offered flowers, and applied sandalwood paste to His head. When it was time for court, they set off for Mahabali's palace.

By order of emperor Mahabali, accommodation was arranged for the new bodyguard adjoining the emperor's bedroom. Lord Vishnu then began to reside in the palace as a bodyguard. However, in accordance with His promise to Acharya Swarbhanu, He would arrive at the Acharya's Ashram every morning at Brahma-muhurta. Acharya Swarbhanu would then pray to Him, offer flowers, and apply sandalwood paste to His forehead. Then, Acharya Swarbhanu would commence his daily routine.

Meanwhile, in Sāketa Dhāma, Mother Shrī did not initially pay much attention to Lord Vishnu's absence. He used to go to meet His devotees and perform līlā. Usually, though, He would return quickly. This time, though, His absence was much longer. Mother Shri grew increasingly anxious. Using Her divine vision, She tried to find out where the Lord was, but due to the Lord's līlā, She was unsuccessful. Then she remembered Brahmrishi Narad. Nothing about the Lord's divine play is hidden from Brahmrishi Narad. Upon hearing Mother Shri's call, Brahmrishi Narad rushed to Saket Dham.

Mother Shri offered Brahmrishi Narad due respect and spoke humbly: "O Brahmrishi, Narayan dwells in your heart, and you dwell in Narayan's heart. None of His divine plays are hidden from you. Please tell me why the Lord has been away for so long and where He is currently residing."

Upon hearing Her humble words, Brahmrishi Narad said, "O Narayani, Lord Vishnu is currently in the Netherworld, serving as emperor Mahabali's bodyguard. Ever since Narayana took Mahabali's empire of the three worlds in three steps and returned the kingdom of Heaven to Indra, divided the earthly kingdom between the Chandra and Suryavanshi Kshatriyas, and gave Mahabali the Patala Loka kingdom, the Lord has been filled with remorse. He felt His decision was unjust to Mahabali, but He was bound by his promise to mother Aditi. He was also saddened that his beloved devotee Mahabali would be separated from Him. Therefore, to atone and remain close to His devotee, He took the form of a bodyguard to serve Mahabali. Not even Mahabali himself is aware of this. Apart from me and Acharya Swarbhanu, no one knows this secret. Now, you too have become part of this secret.

Upon hearing this truth from Brahmrishi Narad, Mother Shri was astonished and said, "O Brahmrishi, every moment

the Lord is absent feels like an age to me. Is there no way to summon the Lord back to Saket Dham?"

Brahmrishi Narad replied, "O Mother, the Lord never rejects the prayers of His devotees. If Mahabali himself pleads for the Lord to return to Saket Dham, then that will be possible. In my opinion, the full moon in the month of Shravan is the most auspicious time for this task. By then, the penance that the Lord imposed on Himself will also have been completed. On that day, You should assume the form of an ordinary woman, go to Mahabali's assembly, and tie the sacred thread of protection on his wrist to make him Your brother. Once he accepts You as his sister, the generous Mahabali will be compelled to give You a gift and beg You to ask for it. At that point, ask him for his bodyguard. He will surely respect his word and release the bodyguard to you. Of course, Mahabali will also learn this secret at that time. He will fall at the Lord's feet, begging for His forgiveness and insisting on returning to Sāketa Dham with You. Then, Lord Vishnu will not be able to refuse Mahabali's request and will bless him and return to Sāketa Dham with You"

Having said this, Brahmrishi Narada departed, chanting "Narayana, Narayana" and playing his Vina.

Mother Shri waited for the full moon of Shravan, then did exactly as Brahmrishi Narada instructed.

On that day, She assumed the form of an ordinary woman and entered Mahabali's assembly, asking to see him. Lord Vishnu was present as a bodyguard. She asked the bodyguard to inform emperor Mahabali that a woman wanted to see him. Lord Vishnu immediately recognized his wife, Shri, but He said nothing to Her in public. He approached king Mahabali and said, "O emperor, a woman who appears to be one of your Subjects wishes to see you.

She seems to be in great distress. I beg you to grant Her an audience."

Upon hearing the bodyguard's words, emperor Mahabali ordered a soldier to bring the woman before him at once. The soldier hurried off and brought the woman with him.

When she arrived, She respectfully greeted the emperor and said, "O emperor, an emperor is the protector of his people. All the women of the kingdom are like a mother, sister, or daughter to the emperor, according to their respective ages. I also consider you my brother. Today is the most auspicious occasion of the full moon in the month of Shravan. Please accept me as your sister and allow me to tie this thread around your wrist."

The delighted emperor Mahabali immediately descended from his throne. As he approached the woman, he said, "Dear sister, I am honoured that you consider me your brother. Here is my wrist. Please tie the thread to it to show your sisterly affection."

Mother Shri immediately tied the thread onto emperor Mahabali's wrist.

Then, emperor Mahabali said to the woman, "Sister, it is my duty to give you a gift in return. My bodyguard told me that you are in distress. Please do not hesitate to tell me what it is. There is no object in the three worlds that I could not give you to relieve your suffering."

Disguised as an ordinary woman, Mother Shri replied, "O great emperor, I have heard many tales of your generosity. Undoubtedly, nothing in the three worlds is impossible for you. I have only one very small request. This bodyguard of yours is My husband. Since He began serving you, He has renounced His home. I cannot live without Him. If you are

pleased with Me, pledge to release your bodyguard from His services and entrust Him to me.”

Hearing these simple words from his foster sister's mouth, emperor Mahabali laughed and said, “O sister, what a rare request is this. I hereby release this bodyguard from my services and command Him to return with You at once.”

Upon hearing emperor Mahabali's command, Goddess Lakshmi approached Narayana, who was disguised as a bodyguard, and then resumed Her own form as Goddess Shri. She humbly fell at Narayana's feet and said, "O Lord, please reveal Your true form and proceed to Saket Dham."

Upon hearing Devi Shri's words, Lord Narayana immediately returned to His true form.

Lord Vishnu, the God of Gods and the very support of the entire Universe, then, assumed His Chaturbhuj form. His complexion was like a blue cloud. All of His limbs were exceedingly beautiful and perfect. He appeared in his four-armed form, holding a conch shell, a discus, a mace, and a lotus flower. The entire assembly of emperor Mahabali was filled with His radiance.

Emperor Mahabali immediately fell at the Lord's feet. With tears in his eyes, he said, "O Lord, my beloved Narayan has been living as my bodyguard for a long time, and I was not even aware of it. Thinking You as my servant, I must have spoken improperly countless times. I am deeply ashamed. O Lord, save me! Protect me, O Lord, forgive my sins.”

Lord Hari Vishnu lifted emperor Mahabali, embraced him, and blessed him. Then, He said, "O my dear devotee Mahabali, you are dearer to Me than your father Virochana and your grandfather Prahlad. I did send you to the Netherworld, but I could not bear to be away from you.

Although you were treated unjustly, you never spoke ill of Me. I bless you to continue reigning over your kingdom without hindrance under the guidance of Acharya Swarbhanu. In due time, you will enter Sāketa Dham. You are immortal. You are free to abandon this empire and come to me whenever you wish. Now, grant me leave to depart."

Once again, emperor Mahabali fell at the Lord's feet. With tear-filled eyes, he bade farewell to Goddess Shri and Lord Vishnu. Acharya Swarbhanu also took hold of His feet and received His blessings. Then the Lord spoke to Acharya Swarbhanu: "O son, you have rendered me a great service. In due course, I shall repay this debt as well."

After blessing everyone, Narayana departed for Sāketa Dhāma with Narāyānī.

Since then, the Raksha Bandhan festival has been celebrated on the full moon in the month of Shravan.

Following Lord Vishnu's departure, emperor Mahabali became detached. He appointed prince Baan as crown prince. He left the administration of the kingdom to the crown prince and began to spend most of his time in devotion to the Lord at Acharya Swarbhanu's Ashram. Gradually, his connection with his Subjects began to fade. The crown prince began to rule the kingdom with an iron fist. Prince Baan was deeply distressed that Lord Vishnu's incarnation, Vaaman, had taken his father's kingdom of the three worlds. He considered Vaaman's actions unjust, biased, and demonic, and saw him as an enemy of the Daitya and Daanava lineage. His heart was filled with hatred for Lord Vishnu. The very name of Lord Vishnu irritated him. He began to think how to take revenge from Lord Vishnu every moment. He distanced himself from Acharya Swarbhanu. He began making decisions without

consulting Acharya Swarbhanu. Meanwhile, unaware of these events, emperor Mahabali remained devoted to God. Meanwhile, emperor Mahabali wanted to tour the Universe on a pilgrimage. He had complete faith in his crown prince Baan, who would govern the empire in his absence for the welfare of the people. Therefore, he entrusted the full reins of governance to crown prince Baan and set out on his pilgrimage with Acharya Swarbhanu.

Crown Prince Baan

After emperor Mahabali embarked on a pilgrimage, crown prince Baan was granted complete autonomy to govern the empire at will. He subjugated the other subordinate Daitya and Daanava emperors and incited their generals and warriors to wage war against the Gods. Battles broke out from time to time. These events began to disrupt the peace of the Universe. Countless warriors on both sides attained martyrdom. The Daityas and Daanavas did not have their Guru Shukracharya to revive their slain soldiers through his death-resurrection vidya (Sanjivini Vidya). Panic broke out everywhere. When emperor Mahabali received this news during his pilgrimage, he was deeply distressed. He cut his journey short and returned to the capital, Suttal, to reason with crown prince Baan and set him on the right path. Emperor Mahabali had also learned of prince Baan's anti-Vishnu mindset.

On the way, emperor Mahabali said to Acharya Swarbhvanu, "O foremost among teachers, the scriptures say that a father's mindset, whether conscious or not, inevitably passes on to his son. I am reminded today of my childhood. When I was young, I also spoke harshly of Lord Vishnu to my grandfather, the Vishnu devotee emperor Prahlad. My grandfather Prahlad was angered by my misdeed. But I appeased him by apologizing and showing my ignorance. The same kind of thoughts are gathering in the mind of crown prince Baan today. I must do everything I can to change his anti-Lord Vishnu mindset and encourage him to reconcile with the Gods. May Lord Vishnu helps me.

Upon hearing the words of emperor Mahabali, Acharya Swarbhvanu was astonished beyond measure. He could never have imagined emperor Mahabali turning away from Lord Vishnu. Therefore, he humbly asked the emperor, "O

emperor, please tell me why you developed such a strong aversion to Lord Vishnu during your childhood?"

The emperor replied, "O best of teachers, this was at the time when pleased by the penance of my great-grandmother Aditi, Lord Vishnu promised to protect her son Indradeva through His incarnation Vaaman. Lord Vaaman then went into the forest to perform severe penance. The entire Universe shook by the power of His penance. Vast mountains began to tremble. The oceans churned. The Daanavas and Daityas were deprived of their glory and vigour. To learn why the Daanavas and Daityas were in this condition, I asked my grandfather emperor Prahlad."

I asked, "O great emperor, my grandfather, all the beings of the Daitya and Daanava lineages have become pale and ashen as if scorched by fire. It seems as if they have been cursed by a great ascetic. Is some misfortune about to befall our lineage? Has Brahma awakened the Krita-shakti to destroy our lineage, causing us to lose our vigour? Please explain the reason to me."

Then, my grandfather emperor Prahlad saw through his divine vision given to him by Lord Vishnu and understood all the reasons.

After understanding the cause, he told me, "O son, I see that the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the dwarf Vaaman, is performing deep penance to protect Indra, as promised to his mother Aditi. Within Him, I see the Vasus, Rudras, Ashwinikumaras, Maruts, Sandhyas, Adityas, Gandharvas, Nagas, Daityas, and Daanavas. With these eyes, I have seen the Earth, the sky, the air, water, fire, oceans, mountains, rivers, islands, animals, lands, birds, the entire human race, and the Prajapatis, including Daksha, dwelling within Him. I have also seen Brahma, the creator of all worlds; Lord Shiva, the destroyer; the planets; the constellations; the

stars; and the Prajapatis, like Daksha, being absorbed. I have come to fully understand the reason for the condition of the Daitya and Daanava lineages. The Lord of Lords and source of the three worlds, Lord Vishnu in the form of Vaaman, is performing deep penance, bound by a vow to his mother Aditi to establish Dharma. He has deprived the Daitya and Daanava lineages of their physical strength”.

Seeing distressed grandfather, I said, "O best of Daitya emperors, we have a vast army of powerful warriors like you, as well as invincible commanders such as Shivi, Shanku, Ayashanku, Hayashira, Ashwashiara, Bhangkara, Mahahanu, Praghash, Shambhu, Kukkuraksha, and Durjay, among others. Why should we fear the son of our great-grandmother Aditi?"

Upon hearing my words, my grandfather emperor Prahlad became enraged. He said, "O Mahabali, because of this senseless thinking, you will surely destroy the entire lineage of Daityas and Daanavas one day. You do not know the power of the almighty God. The heroes and valiant warriors whose names you just mentioned, all the Daityas and Daanavas, all the Gods, including Brahma, and all the manifestations of the Universe, I, myself, you, all the mountains, trees, rivers, forests, and Oceans etc of the Universe, which were born from a fraction of the power of the supreme, omnipresent God, are not even a fraction of His might. By speaking such words, you have dishonoured your father Virochana and me. You have insulted my Ishta Lord Vishnu. The words you have spoken have caused me more pain than death. I regret that because of your thoughts, you will one day be exiled from the kingdom.”

Upon hearing these harsh and unpleasant words from my grandfather emperor Prahlad, I trembled. Bowing my head at his feet, I spoke in a humble voice: "O grandfather, please do not be angry with me. Forgive my foolishness.

Out of pride in my strength and lack of discernment, I spoke disrespectfully of Lord Vishnu. My intellect was destroyed by attachment. I am surely despicable. I have not followed righteousness. Your anger was only natural. Grandfather, the kingdom, wealth, and fame of the Universe mean nothing to me in this life compared to your blessings. I accept being dethroned, but I cannot turn away from your blessings and love, O grandfather. To turn away from you would be my certain destruction. Grandfather, I hold on to your feet. Please forgive this ignorant one and calm your anger. I am consumed by your wrath."

When my grandfather heard my sweet and pleasing words, his anger subsided. He embraced me and said, "My son, may you become a devotee of Lord Vishnu."

While they were still talking, the chariot of emperor Mahabali and Gurudev Acharya Swarbhanu arrived in Suttal. Crown prince Baan immediately ran to the city gate to welcome his father emperor Mahabali, and Gurudev Acharya Swarbhanu as soon as he received the message of their arrival. He bowed in reverence to Acharya Swarbhanu and emperor Mahabali. Emperor Mahabali then returned to his palace, while Acharya Swarbhanu departed for his Ashram.

The next morning, emperor Mahabali summoned crown prince Baan to his chambers. The crown prince immediately rushed to his father's chambers, touched his feet and sat down respectfully before him.

Gazing affectionately at his son, emperor Mahabali spoke in a gentle voice: "Son, I have learned that your ambition to expand your kingdom constantly drives you to wage war against the Gods. Countless heroes of ours have been killed in this war. Unfortunately, Gurudev Shukracharya is no longer with us and his ability to raise the dead has been

lost. Furthermore, you harbor ill will toward Lord Vishnu. You are spreading propaganda against Him. You know fully well that Lord Vishnu is my Ishta and Guru. Why are you doing this?"

Upon hearing his father's words, crown prince Baan became enraged. He stood up and said harshly, "Father, Lord Vishnu has committed a great injustice against us and shown favour to the Gods. He snatched our rule over the three worlds away and returned the kingdom of Heaven to Indra. He divided the kingdom of Earth between the Chandra and Suryavanshi emperors and banished us to the Netherworld. This same Lord Vishnu killed my two great-grandfathers, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu. Under his protection, Indra deceived my grandfather Virochan, and cut off his head. In short, he murdered him. Yet you still revere him as your Ishta. I am greatly surprised to learn this. I would not consider Lord Vishnu as my friend, let alone my deity. He is our greatest enemy. I have not yet received your orders, but I am ready to slay Him. It's true that I invaded the Heaven. The Heaven is our domain. I will not rest until I have reclaimed that kingdom. Give me your orders and witness your son's valour with your own eyes."

Seeing his son so enraged, emperor Mahabali affectionately called him over, patted him on the back, and said, "Son Baan, I have never doubted your prowess. Never entertain such a thought again. I know the prowess of Lord Vishnu. He is invincible. Once, in my youth, I too turned away from Lord Vishnu. Then, my grandfather emperor Prahlad taught me the right lesson and made me aware of Lord Vishnu's powers and glory. He has been my Ishta ever since. His love for me is unparalleled. You may recall that He stayed with me as my bodyguard out of His love for me. I urge you to abandon your hatred of Lord Vishnu. One day, you will badly burn yourself on this flame. I do not want to lose

my beloved son. Give up your stubbornness. Like me, accept Lord Vishnu as your Ishta and pray to Him."

Disregarding his father emperor Mahabali's humble words, the arrogant crown prince Baan then spoke: "Father, please forgive me for my harsh words. In my opinion, surrendering to an unjust man like this is cowardly. If you will not grant me permission to declare war against Lord Vishnu, then I will defeat Him on my own."

After all, emperor Mahabali was a father. It was only natural for him to be affectionate toward his son. Therefore, even after hearing his son's harsh words, he kept his anger in check. If anyone else had spoken such words to the emperor, he would have beheaded them immediately. Keeping his tone humble, emperor Mahabali spoke again: "O son, act with intellect, not passion. I will tell you some of Lord Vishnu's true qualities, against whom you are so enraged. Lord Vishnu is infinite and beyond birth, death, and old age. He is invincible and inexhaustible. He is unmanifest and infallible. He is the creator of the world and its teacher. He is the lord of creation, preservation, and destruction of all worlds, both moving and unmoving. In the form of Varaha, He lifted the Earth with the tip of a tusk. In His Narasimha incarnation, He tore open the chest of my great-grandfather the mighty emperor Hiranyakshipu, with His claws. You have seen how in His Vaamana form, He measured all three worlds with three steps. Why can you not perceive His prowess? Mahadeva and the other Gods, including Indra; the Sages, such as Sanaka; and all the Yogis bow their heads before Him. How can you, my dear son, claim equality with Him? Lord Vishnu is the Lord of the Universe and the supreme being. Son, focus your attention on worshipping Him."

The words of wisdom from king Mahabali had no effect on crown prince Baan. Despite emperor Mahabali's repeated

attempts to convince him of Lord Vishnu's superiority, prince Baan could not grasp his wise words. King Mahabali then became enraged. The basic nature of sandalwood is cool, but when it is rubbed repeatedly, even it emits rays of fire.

In his anger then, emperor Mahabali said, "O fool! You have already ensured your own destruction. A creature averse to Lord Vishnu cannot dwell with me. I order you to leave the Netherworld immediately. Since your thinking has sealed your own death at the hands of Lord Vishnu, what can I do? Never show your face to me again."

The father-son dispute reached the ears of empress Sudeshna, who immediately rushed to emperor Mahabali's chamber. When she saw emperor Mahabali angry with their beloved son, prince Baan, and heard him ordering prince Baan's exile from the Netherworld, she fell at emperor Mahabali's feet.

With folded hands, she requested, "O Master, his mind has become foolish. Do not be so angry with him, thinking him naive. I humbly beg you to order him to stay with Gurudev Acharya Swarbhanu at his Ashram for a few days. I am fully confident that Acharya Swarbhanu will explain the glory of Lord Vishnu to crown prince Baan and make him a devotee of the Lord."

Hearing the empress's words, emperor Mahabali told the crown prince, "Go and obey the empress's command now. I will pray to Lord Vishnu to grant you good sense through our Guru, Acharya Swarbhanu."

Upon hearing his parents' command, crown prince Baan touched their feet and left emperor Mahabali's chamber. He then went straight to Acharya Swarbhanu's Ashram.

When Acharya Swarbhanu saw crown prince Baan approaching his Ashram looking dejected, he quickly realized that there must have been a dispute between the father and son. He welcomed the crown prince with open arms. With tears in his eyes, the crown prince recounted everything that had transpired between him and his father, emperor Mahabali. Understanding the divine will of the Lord, Acharya Swarbhanu told the crown prince, "Dear son, your father has already explained the glory, valour, and splendour of Lord Vishnu to you very well. I cannot say more than that. As your Guru, I will support your mission in whatever way I can. Now, tell me clearly what your plans are."

The crown prince could not grasp the meaning of Acharya Swarbhanu's diplomatic words, but he was delighted nonetheless. He began outlining a plan to attack Lord Vishnu to him.

Then, Acharya Swarbhanu said, "My son, I wish for your plan to succeed. But consider this: Lord Vishnu has the power to slay your great-grandfather Hiranyakashipu and bind the three worlds with His three steps. How can you hope to defeat Him? Have you made the mistake of thinking your strength is greater than that of your great-grandfather Hiranyakashipu? If you attack Him, you will surely die. If you wish to match Him, first increase your own power."

Hearing Acharya Swarbhanu's words as pleasing, crown prince Baan seized his teacher's feet and said, "O Acharya, you are not only my Guru, but also my great-grandfather. Please guide me to the proper path so that I may acquire the strength necessary to defeat Lord Vishnu."

Acharya Swarbhanu thought that a person blinded in the month of Shravan sees nothing but green everywhere.

Prince Baan had defeated some Gods, but now he believed he could match Lord Vishnu's strength. Aloud, however, he said, "O son, the arms, weapons, etc., and the power to defeat Lord Vishnu can only be obtained through penance from one of the Trimurtis (Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh). Since you harbor hatred toward Lord Vishnu and wish to wage war against Him, such a boon could not possibly be obtained from Lord Vishnu. Mahadeva is a devotee of Lord Vishnu himself and would likely not grant you such a boon either. That said, Mahadeva is the merciful dispenser of boons. If you perform penance and please Him, He might show you the proper path. Therefore, in my view, if you perform penance for Mahadeva and please him, perhaps He could suggest a way."

Upon hearing these words from Gurudev Acharya Swarbhanu, crown prince Baan fell at his feet and asked him how to please Mahadeva.

Then, Acharya Swarbhanu advised him to go to the forest and perform penance for Mahadeva. He initiated him into a great Mantra that could please Mahadeva.

Acharya Swarbhanu said, "My son, chant the Siddhi Mantra of Mahadeva. I bless you, and I am sure that one day Mahadeva will be pleased with you and grant you a fitting boon. Now, receive the Mantra initiation."

ॐ नमः शिवाय ।
त्रिदलं त्रिगुणाकारं त्रिनेम् च त्रयायुधम् ।
त्रिजन्मपापसंहारमेक बिल्वं शिवार्पणम् ॥
ॐ मृत्युञ्जयाय रुद्राय त्राहिमाम् शरणागतं ।
जन्ममृत्यु जराव्याधि पीडितय् कर्मवन्धै ॥

Om Namah Shivaay.
Tridalam Trigunakaaram

**Trinetram Cha Triyaayudham.
Trijanma Paap a Samhaaram
Eka Bilvam Shivarpanam.
Om Mrityunjayaya Rudraya
Trahimam Sharanagatam.
Janmmratyu Jaravyaadhi
Peeditah Karmvanddahai.**

I offer one leaf of the Bilva tree to Lord Shiva. This leaf has three leaves (Tridalam) and embodies the three qualities, or Gunas (Trigunakaaram), which are Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. It is also like the three eyes of Shiva (Trinetram) and the triad of weapons, or Trident (Triyaayudham). This leaf destroys sins committed in three births (Trijanma-paapa-sambaaram). I seek refuge in Lord Shiva, the victor over death and the fiercest one, Rudra. Please protect me, O Lord. I surrender to You. Take away birth, death, old age, disease, suffering, and the bonds of karma.

After receiving the Mantra initiation and blessings from Acharya Swarbhanu, crown prince Baan left for the forest to perform penance for Mahadev.

He built his hut in a safe spot in the forest. Though certainly a frail structure, the hut had wooden walls and a thatched roof and was sufficient for his stay. There, he began chanting the Mahadeva Siddhi Mantra, practicing pranayama, and doing Yoga, all of which he had learned from his Guru Acharya Swarbhanu. In a short time, he became proficient in the most difficult Yoga poses. Following his Guru's example, he learned to cope with the weather and live with limited resources. He had complete control over his breath, and through continuous austerity practices, he could remain in a state of meditation for months. By entering his subconscious mind, his ability to probe its hidden recesses was growing, as was his awareness of external elements. He could feel divine consciousness pervading the sky around him and the life breath present in

every living being. Months and years passed, yet he was still unable to have Darshan of Mahadeva. Then, he intensified his penance. Standing on one leg and living off air and solar energy alone, he performed austerities for thousands of years. Finally, Mahadeva's heart melted, and he granted prince Baan a divine audience.

Seeing Mahadeva before him, Baan prostrated himself on the ground and prayed to Him. Then, Mahadev asked him to seek a boon.

Seeing that Mahadev was pleased, he stood before Him with his hands folded and said, "O Mahadev, if you are pleased with me, then grant me three wishes. O Lord, may I have a daughter as virtuous as Mother Parvati. Take me under your protection and grant me the opportunity to fight a warrior as valiant as You."

Mahadev then blessed him, saying, "So be it. O son, during your severe penance, you may not have kept track of time. When you began penance, it was the Satya Yuga era. Now, the Dvapara Yuga era is underway. Shortly after you began your penance, the Gods and Daityas churned the Ocean at Lord Vishnu's behest. Your father, the immortal emperor Mahabali, has already departed for Lord Vishnu's abode to live with Him after the churning of the Ocean (Samudra Manthan). Your Guru, Acharya Swarbhanu is now among the nine planets as Rahu and Ketu. There is nothing left in Suttal. I grant you the kingdom of Shonitpur on Earth. The people of Shonitpur are waiting for your arrival. As the king of this kingdom, you will marry one of my most devoted followers, Anoupamya. You will have a daughter named Usha with her. She will possess all the virtues my daughter with Parvati could have had. I will protect you in every way. When the time is right, you will have the opportunity to fight like a warrior equal to me. Now, depart for your capital, Sonitpur."

Upon hearing these sweet words from Mahadeva, prince Baan was astonished. Thousands of years had passed; even Yugas had come and gone. I was born in the Satyuga era. The Tretayuga era has also passed, and the Dwaparyuga era is underway. I did not even realize that. This must be the result of my Guru Acharya Swarbhanu's grace.

Prince Baan fell at Mahadeva's feet once again and began to plead, "O Mahadeva, now tell me how to meet my Guru Acharya Swarbhanu. You just said that he is now among the Navgrahas in the form of Rahu and Ketu."

Smiling, Mahadev then spoke: "Dear son Baan, in your kingdom of Shonitpur, there is a place called Paithani. Your Guru is waiting for you there. He will tell you the story of the Samudra Manthan (the churning of the Ocean). After he tells you this story, he will depart to take his place among the Navgrahas (nine auspicious planets). I have blessed Paithani so that anyone who goes there and prays to Rahu will also receive My grace."

Having said this, Mahadev vanished. Then, as instructed by Mahadev, prince Baan set off for his new capital, Sonitpur.

Following Mahadev's orders, prince Baan arrived at the border of Sonitpur. Right on the border stood a beautiful temple dedicated to Mahadev. The temple was being decorated for a special festival that day. Prince Baan prayed to Mahadev inside the temple, then asked the priest why the temple was specially decorated.

The priest replied, "O sire, you seem new to this city. Today is the Shivaratri festival. The acting emperor, prime minister Buddha will come to pray to Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati today. This temple has been specially decorated for the festival in honour of prime minister Buddha's arrival."

Prince Baan then spoke to the priest: "O Brahmin, I do not understand the meaning of your words. You said that the prime minister is the acting emperor of this empire. Has the emperor left the kingdom for a war or a pilgrimage? My curiosity has grown. Please tell me briefly."

The priest replied, "There is no emperor of Shonitpur currently. The last emperor was Sharay, who unfortunately had no heir. He was an ardent devotee of Mahadeva. Before his death, Mahadeva appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to entrust the responsibility of his empire to Mahamantri (the prime minister). Mahadeva told that a great person named Baan will appear in the land and take over the responsibility of the kingdom at the appropriate time. The emperor followed Mahadeva's instructions. After his death, the prime minister looked after the kingdom, waiting for king Baan to arrive.

Prince Baan then smiled and said to the priest, "All right, I understand now. Could you please introduce me to the prime minister when he arrives?"

The priest was deeply impressed by the visitors' personalities. He had a feeling that this person might be Mahadev Himself or a representative sent by Him. He replied in a mesmerized tone, "Certainly, sir. I will introduce you to the prime minister as soon as he enters the temple. Until then, you may stay in the guesthouse if you wish."

Prince Baan looked at the priest and said with a smile, "Thank you, esteemed Brahmin. I am experiencing great joy before the idol of Mahadev."

With that, prince Baan became engrossed in worshipping Mahadev.

Around midnight, the prime minister entered the temple with his assistants. As soon as they entered, the temple resounded with chants of "Har Har Mahadev, Jai Maa Parvati."

The visitor's meditation broke when he heard the shouts of "Har Har Mahadev, Jai Maa Parvati." Seeing an impressive man meditating near the idol of Mahadev, the prime minister was impressed. As if drawn by an unknown force, he approached the man. By then, the priest had also rushed to the prime minister's side and said, "Long live the prime minister. This visitor has been waiting for you in the temple since this afternoon."

Then, prince Baan rose and offered his proper salutations. In a gentle voice, he said, "O prime minister, my name is Baan." I have come to Sonitpur on Mahadev's orders. What command do you have for me now?"

Upon hearing the name Baan, the prime minister was astonished. He fell at prince Baan's feet and said, "Long live emperor Baan! I have ruled this empire as your representative since emperor Sharay's death. Now, you take charge of your own kingdom. First, on this sacred occasion of Shivaratri, please lead the prayers for Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati. Afterwards, please grant us permission to hold your coronation in their presence."

Prince Baan pulled the prime minister to his chest and said, "Until my coronation is complete, you will continue to act as acting emperor of the kingdom. Therefore, on this sacred occasion, you alone have the right to pray to Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati. We will all perform the Shivaratri Puja today under your leadership. I pray that Lord Shiva grants us an audience after the Puja so that He may instruct us on how to proceed with my coronation."

Then, as per prince Baan's request, the prime minister duly performed Pooja to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. At the conclusion of the Puja, Lord Shiva Himself appeared and hand over prince Baan to prime minister.

Lord Mahadev said, "O prime minister, I entrust your new emperor Baan to you." Having said this, He vanished.

After receiving the command and blessings of Mahadev, the prime minister, along with prince Baan and all his aides, set out for the capital, Sonitpur. Along the way, they heard chants of "Long live Mahadev! Long live Mother Parvati!" The entire route also echoed with chants of "Long live emperor Baan! Long live the prime minister!"

Hearing these cheers, the people of Sonitpur knew that they had finally found their emperor.

Upon reaching the capital, prince Baan was housed in the royal palace. The very next morning, the prime minister ordered the priests to perform prince Baan's coronation. The coronation was completed with great ceremony. Prince Baan became emperor Baan of the Sonitpur empire. He appointed the same person as his prime minister and granted him the freedom to select his cabinet.

Having managed the kingdom, emperor Baan was eager to meet his Guru Acharya Swarbhanu as soon as possible. The prime minister informed him of the exact location of Paithani. He decided to go to Paithani alone. After entrusting the prime minister with the task of managing the kingdom until his return, he set off alone to meet his Guru. Soon, emperor Baan's chariot arrived at Paithani. After ordering the charioteer to stop at the Paithani border, emperor Baan respectfully called out to his Guru Acharya Swarbhanu at the spot indicated by Mahadev. Just then, a familiar voice sounded from inside a cave.

"Come, son Baan inside the cave. I have been waiting for you here for many ages. Mahadev honoured me and gave me a place among the nineauspicious planets, but He commanded that I should wait here until I meet you."

Emperor Baan then entered the cave from where the voice was coming. He had barely gone a short distance when he saw Acharya Swarbhanu in a new form. He was astonished and in anger said, "Gurudev, your head is attached to the serpent's body. Who had the audacity to put my Guru Acharya Swarbhanu in this state? Tell me and I will send him to Yama's realm at once to punish him for this crime."

Acharya Swarbhanu then spoke in a sweet voice: "My son, do not lose your temper. Lord Vishnu Himself gave me the elixir (Amrit) to drink. Then, true to His word to the Gods that He would give the elixir only to them, He cut off my head. Since I had already drunk the elixir, I did not die. Then, at the request of Guru Shukracharya and Lord Vishnu, Mahadev appeared. At Lord Vishnu's request, Mahadev separated the head of his beloved Nagraj from its body. He surgically attached my head to the Nagraj's body, giving me a new name: Rahu. He then surgically attached the serpent king's head to my torso and named it Ketu. Thus, I became Rahu and Ketu."

Emperor Baan's anger just wouldn't subside. In a furious voice, he exclaimed, "Vishnu, Vishnu, Vishnu! This Vishnu has always harmed us. He killed our great-grandfathers, Hiranyaaksha and Hiranyakashipu. He had my grandfather, Virochana, killed by Indra. He tricked my father, emperor Mahabali, into relinquishing the rule of the three worlds in His three steps. Now I see that He has brought you to this state. Gurudeva, no matter what you say, I cannot control my anger. Give me your orders. I challenge Vishnu to battle right now! Lord Shiva himself has granted me his

protection. I am invincible. I am surely capable of slaying Vishnu.

Then, in the form of Rahu, Acharya Swarbhanu spoke in a calm voice: "Dear son Baan, calm your anger. I am alive only by the grace of Lord Vishnu. Mahadev did show me the path to immortality, but Lord Vishnu gave me the nectar of immortality. He could have killed me by using the Agnivaan, a fire arrow contained in His Sudarshana Chakra, to dry up the nectar after I drank it. But He did not do so. He did not use his Sudarshana Chakra to dry up the nectar; he only ordered that my head be severed from my torso. After that, He invoked Mahadeva and Gurudev Shukracharya. When Mahadeva appeared, Vishnu pleaded with Him to give me this body adorned with Nagraj's parts through surgery. The Nagraj body you see is no ordinary Nagraj. He is Mahadev's most beloved serpent. This is Mahadev's blessing upon me."

Hearing the calm, sweet words of his Guru Acharya Swarbhanu, emperor Baan's anger subsided somewhat. Falling at the feet of his Guru, he spoke: "Gurudev, pleased with my penance, Mahadev has granted me three boons. First, my daughter will have the same qualities as the daughter of Mahadev and Mother Parvati. Second, I will have eternal protection. And third, in any battle, I will be as strong as Himself. He also commanded me to come to you, to learn about my previous kingdom and the Netherworld, and about my father emperor Mahabali. He told me about this new abode of yours. I am eager to know what happened to my previous kingdom, my father and you."

Upon hearing the sweet words of emperor Baan, Acharya Swarbhanu, disguised as Rahu, began recounting the events that took place after prince Baan left for the forest to perform his great penance.

He said, "O son Baan, after you left for your penance, emperor Mahabali became lonely. You know he loved you more than his own life. He could not bear being separated from you. He effectively renounced the throne. Your younger brother, prince Agr, was made crown prince, entrusted with the reins of government, and he took up residence in my Ashram with empress Sudeshna. He devoted himself day and night to the worship of Lord Vishnu. When Indra learned that you had gone into the forest to perform penance, and that emperor Mahabali had renounced his kingdom and made his second son, Agr, crown prince, he began devising a cunning plan to assassinate the crown prince Agr. Indra knew that prince Agr possessed the same strength, talent, and foresight as emperor Mahabali and you, but lacked the experience and military prowess of emperor Mahabali and you. Therefore, it would be easy to eliminate him. Indra began attacking the Daitya kingdom day after day. The Daitya put up a strong fight against Indra and his army. Crown prince Agr did not want to distract emperor Mahabali from his spiritual practices. Therefore, he gave strict orders to his counsellors not to inform emperor Mahabali of these events. He would secretly meet with me, update me on the events, and beg me not to disturb his father. I was deeply impressed by prince Agr's personality, so I honoured his wishes and never informed emperor Mahabali of these events.

Indra probably never imagined that crown prince Agr would lead the Daitya's army with such military prowess against the Gods. In this war, the Gods were suffering more casualties than the Daityas. Indra became distraught. To find a solution to this problem, he went to Brahma. Brahma advised him that the only one who could provide solution to this problem was Lord Vishnu. Therefore, they should all go to Him. All the Gods supported this suggestion of Brahma. Brahma and Indra along with all the other Gods,

then went to Lord Vishnu's abode in Saket. Lord Vishnu honoured Brahma and all the Gods who had come with him and listened to their plea. Lord Vishnu Himself was also deeply saddened by this behaviour of Indra, but perhaps did not want to intervene. He could no longer bear to witness this daily slaughter. Lord Vishnu also knew that after emperor Mahabali, none among the Daitya lineages were well-wishers of the Tridevas. Emperor Mahabali had, in a sense, renounced his kingdom. Prince Agr also has no love for Lord Vishnu. Prince Agr is no doubt planning to invade the Heaven, defeat Indra, and seize the throne of Heaven. If prince Agr succeeds, then the Daitya will be ruling the Universe. These Daityas are not the devotees of Lord Vishnu, and like king Mahabali, they are not just, truthful, or followers of Vedic religion. A victory for prince Agr over Heaven would mean misrule throughout the Universe. Therefore, something must be done to stop him. Just then, an idea struck him.

Addressing Brahma and the other Gods, Lord Vishnu said, "O Brahmdev and the Gods, I will surely find a solution to this problem. If we grant the Gods immortality by having them drink the nectar, they will become invincible. With immortality, they will never die and Daitya will not dare to attack them. The only way to obtain the nectar is by churning the Ocean. However, the Gods alone do not have the power to churn the Ocean (Samudra Manthana). It must be done by the Gods in conjunction with the Daityas. This is only possible if we assure the Daityas that they will receive half of the Amrit (nectar). In their greed for immortality, the Daityas will agree to churn the Ocean with the Gods. However, this plan can only succeed with the help of emperor Mahabali. Although emperor Mahabali is not currently running the administration of his kingdom, he is still the emperor. He has not yet crowned prince Agr as king. I will send Brahmrishi Narada to emperor Mahabali with a message requesting his participation in the churning

of the Ocean. I am sure he will take my advice and instruct the Daityas to participate.

Then, Indra spoke to Lord Vishnu: "O Lord, if the Daityas get half of the Amrita, they will become immortal and invincible as well."

Lord Vishnu smiled and said to Indra, "First, think about obtaining the vessel of Amrit. Leave it to Me to decide what will happen next and how."

Reassured by Lord Vishnu, Brahma and the other Gods returned to their respective realms. Then, Lord Vishnu remembered Brahmishi Narad.

"The Lord has remembered me! Indeed, I am fortunate," Brahmishi Narad thought, chanting "Narayana, Narayana" while playing his Vina. Brahmishi Narada immediately arrived at Sāketa Dham. The Lord welcomed him whole heartedly and seated him beside Him.

In a gentle voice, Lord Vishnu said, "O Brahmin Sage, I request that you immediately proceed to the capital of emperor Mahabali, Suttal. Meet with emperor Mahabali and convey My message to him. These days, emperor Mahabali has entrusted the governance of his kingdom to his son, crown prince Agr, and he is residing at the Ashram of his Guru Acharya Swarbhanu. Go to the Ashram of Swarbhanu, where you will meet emperor Mahabali."

Upon hearing the Lord's humble words, Brahmishi Narada said with folded hands, "O Lord, not a single leaf moves without Your will. Your will is an order for us. Please command me. What must I do? I am fully prepared to carry out your will."

Lord Vishnu smiled and said, "Brahmrishi, I have only one message to deliver to emperor Mahabali. You are to return with his reply. That is your task for now."

The Brahmrishi Narad smiled and asked, "Lord, are you planning a new divine play? Please give your orders at once. I am ready to deliver your message swiftly."

The Lord said, "Brahmarishi, deliver my message to emperor Mahabali. I am greatly distressed by the daily war between the Daityas and the Devas. Every day, thousands of soldiers on both sides lose their lives. I am trying to find a permanent solution to this problem. I believe that if the Daityas and the Gods obtain the Amrit (nectar) and drink it, they will all become immortal. In such a situation, their insecurity will end. The Gods will believe that immortal Daityas cannot be defeated. Likewise, the Daityas will believe that it is impossible to defeat the Gods. Therefore, they will each strive to run their respective kingdoms smoothly for the benefit of their Subjects. Amrit can only be obtained by churning the Ocean. Neither the Daityas nor the Gods alone have the strength to perform the Ocean churning. Therefore, they must join forces to attempt it. I will persuade the Gods to participate in the process of churning the Ocean. If emperor Mahabali orders the Daityas to join the Gods, this task can be accomplished. Once the pot of nectar is obtained, it will be divided equally among the Daityas and the Gods."

Brahmrishi Narad wanted to ask some questions. Before he could speak, however, the Lord signalled him not to ask anything more for now.

After receiving the Lord's permission, Brahmrishi Narad departed for Suttal.

Churning of Ocean (Samudra Manthan)

Brahmrishi Narada arrived at Acharya Swarbhanu's Ashram, chanting "Narayana, Narayana. Upon hearing the familiar chant, Acharya Swarbhanu immediately realized that Brahmrishi Narada had arrived. At that time, Acharya Swarbhanu was absorbed in his spiritual practice, meditating on Lord Vishnu. He abandoned his practice midway through and rushed to the gate of the Ashram to welcome the Sage. He fell at Brahmrishi Narada's feet. He washed the Sage's feet with tears of love. Then, the Sage lifted him up, embraced him, and bestowed a fitting blessing upon him. Just then, an Ashram resident informed emperor Mahabali that Brahmrishi Narada had arrived at the Ashram. Upon hearing this, emperor Mahabali also ran to the Ashram's gate barefoot. Seeing the Brahmrishi from afar, emperor Mahabali bowed down to him and received his blessings. Then, accompanied by Acharya Swarbhanu, Brahmrishi Narada and emperor Mahabali arrived at emperor Mahabali's hut. Acharya Swarbhanu then requested that Brahmrishi Narada bathe in the river to refresh himself after the journey. After his bath, Brahmrishi Narada had a light meal with them.

After finishing their meal, Acharya Swarbhanu asked Brahmrishi Narada to rest in his guest house. Brahmrishi Narada smiled and said, "Acharya Swarbhanu and emperor Mahabali, I have come to you with a message from Lord Vishnu. Until I complete the Lord's task, how can I rest?"

Upon hearing these words "Lord's message and task", emperor Mahabali was astonished, but Acharya Swarbhanu began to smile. He had a feeling that perhaps the time had come to receive the boon of immortality from Mahadeva.

Outwardly, however, he said, "Brahmrishi, you know that Lord Vishnu is the Ishta of both the emperor and me. His

message is an order to us. We are eager to hear His orders. Please tell us quickly what the Lord's message is."

Brahmrishi Narad then conveyed Lord Vishnu's message: the Daityas and the Gods should unite to churn the Ocean, obtain the pot of nectar, drink it, and become immortal. This would permanently end the daily wars between the Daityas and the Gods.

Both Acharya Swarbhanu and emperor Mahabali listened attentively to the proposal. Acharya Swarbhanu immediately agreed, but emperor Mahabali became thoughtful and said, "Brahmrishi, I agree with Lord Vishnu's proposal. I am immediately sending a message to crown prince Agr to convene a meeting of the councillors and all the Daitya and Daanava warriors as soon as possible. I will make every effort to secure their consensus. You know that most of the counsellors and warriors of the Daitya and Daanava lineages do not consider Lord Vishnu their friend. Their own interests are surely at stake, and I will make every effort to convince them of this proposal. You will have to wait until this assembly is convened to respond to Lord Vishnu's proposal. If the Daitya clan's councillors and warriors reject this proposal, I will carry it out alone. I will churn the Ocean with the Gods. I still have enough strength to handle churning the Ocean on one side."

Then, in a sweet voice, Acharya Swarbhanu asked the emperor, "Which councillor or warrior of the Daitya and Daanava lineages has the courage to reject your proposal? If you consider it to be in their interest, send your consent to all the councillors and warriors. They will all churn the Ocean. Let them begin preparations for the churning of the Ocean."

Then emperor Mahabali said, "O Gurudev, no doubt no one has the courage to defy my command. Still, it would be proper for a noble deed to be undertaken with everyone's consent. Acharya, please send my message to crown prince Agr."

Acharya Swarbhanu immediately conveyed emperor Mahabali's message to crown prince Agr. The crown prince promptly obeyed the emperor's command, and a council meeting was immediately convened. All the councillors and warriors of the Daitya and Daanava lineages attended.

Emperor Mahabali presided over the assembly and said, "Councillors and warriors of the Daitya and Daanava lineages, I have received a proposal from Lord Vishnu through Brahmrishi Narada. Lord Vishnu is concerned about the daily war between us and the Gods. He wants to end it forever. He believes that if we churn the Ocean to obtain nectar (Amrit) and drink it, we may become invincible. This cannot be done by one side alone, either us or the Gods. He has sent a proposal to join forces with the Gods to churn the Ocean and obtain the nectar. Once obtained, the nectar will be divided equally among the Daityas, Daanavas, and Gods. This will ensure that the Daityas, Daanavas, and Gods all attain immortality. Feelings of insecurity will be eliminated, and everyone will be able to work for the welfare of their Subjects in their respective kingdoms. I fully support this proposal. If anyone wishes to speak against it, please feel free to present your views."

Before emperor Mahabali could finish speaking, the assembly echoed with chants of, "Well said, well said, Emperor!"

Everyone spoke in unison: "If emperor Mahabali agrees to this proposal, then we all agree. Emperor Mahabali, please tell us what we should do next."

After receiving the consent of all the Daitya and Daanava clans present, emperor Mahabali ordered them to wait for the next step. The assembly was then adjourned. Everyone's face was filled with joy at having attained immortality.

Emperor Mahabali then returned to Acharya Swarbhanu's Ashram. He informed Brahmrishi Narad of the consent of all the Daitya and Daanava councillors and warriors.

Upon receiving the news, Brahmrishi Narada came to Saket Dham and told the story to Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu was pleased that emperor Mahabali continued to have faith in Him and began to praise him. He then began planning the Ocean churning with Brahmrishi Narada.

He said to the great Sage, "O great Sage, please go to Mount Mandarachala and tell him that the Daityas, Daanavas, and Gods are ready to churn the Ocean. Plead with him to become the object with which to churn the ocean for this Yagna. Once you have his approval, go to Mount Kailash, the abode of Mahadev, and ask him to command Nagraj Vasuki to serve as the rope for the churning. After completing these tasks, instruct the Gods and prince Agr to search the forests for the medicinal herbs. Once they have found them, instruct them to add them to the Ocean."

Brahmrishi Narada immediately obeyed the Lord's command. Mount Mandarachal obeyed Lord Vishnu's instructions and prepared to serve as the object to be churned. At Mahadev's command, Nagraj Vasuki arrived at the designated site to serve as the noose for the Ocean churning. In the Ocean, the Daityas, Daanavas, and Gods

brought herbal medicines from the forests and added them to the Ocean. The Daitya and Daanava warriors stood on one side, and the Gods stood on the other, preparing for the Ocean churning. Lord Vishnu chose an auspicious moment to begin the churning of the Ocean.

The Daitya and Daanava team were led by prince Agr with Acharya Swarbhanu and emperor Mahabali as their advisors. The second team, composed of the Gods, was led by Devaraja Indra with Brahaspati as their advisor. Lord Vishnu appointed Shukracharya and Brahaspati to supervise both teams during the churning of the Ocean.

Lord Vishnu instructed the Daitya and Daanava warriors to hold Nagraj Vasuki's tail and the Gods to hold its head for the churning of the Ocean. The Daityas and Daanavas objected to this. They felt the Gods had deliberately humiliated them. Prince Agr, the Daitya and Daanava crown prince who was leading the warriors made it clear to Lord Vishnu that they would only cooperate if they are allowed to churn the Ocean from the side of the serpent Vasuki's head. That was what the Lord wanted. He was playing a psychological game. He wanted the Gods to churn from the tail. However, if He had given this order, the Daityas and Daanavs would not have allowed it. Therefore, He orchestrated this divine play, taking the Daityas' and Daanavas' psychological nature into account. Lord Vishnu knew that the friction generated during the churning of Ocean would cause Nagraj Vasuki to emit a fiery hiss from his mouth. This would scorch those churning the Ocean toward his face, distract and weaken them. Lord Vishnu immediately accepted prince Agr's proposal. He ordered the Gods to pull from the tail of the serpent and the Daitya and Daanava warriors to pull from the head of the snake.

Thus, the churning of the Ocean began. Due to the immense friction, Mount Mandarachal could not remain

stable. Sometimes it tilted toward the Gods, and sometimes toward the Daityas and Daanavas. Lord Vishnu quickly realized that a foundation was needed to keep the churning object steady. Lord Vishnu then assumed the form of a tortoise, becoming the base for Mount Mandarachala. This incarnation of the Lord became famous as the 'Kurma Avatar'.

As soon as Mount Mandarachala was stabilized, both groups began churning the Ocean with great force, driven by their desire to obtain the nectar.

Suddenly, a terrible poison named 'Kaalkut' emerged from the Ocean. The heat emanating from the poison began burning all ten directions. A great panic broke out among all living beings. The heat from the poison caused the Gods, Daityas, and Daanavas to burn. Their radiance turned smoky. Then, the supervisors of the churning of the Ocean, Shukracharya and Brihaspati, called upon the Daityas, Daanavas, and Gods to pray to Lord Shiva together. Pleased by their prayers, Mahadeva appeared. They all bowed down and asked Him to free them from the 'Kaalkut' poison.

Mahadeva smiled and addressed them: "O Daityas, Daanavas, and Gods, you need not fear the Kaalkut poison. For the sake of all of you and the entire Universe, I will bear this pain myself."

Then, Mahadeva assumed a fearsome form, placed the Kaalkut poison on his palm, and drank it. Using His Yogic powers, He prevented the poison from descending below His throat. Under the influence of the poison, Mahadeva's throat turned blue. From that time on, He came to be called Nilakantha. Some of the poison dripped from His palm onto the Earth. Snakes, scorpions, and other creatures absorbed it, thereby neutralizing its toxicity. Free from the

effects of the Kaalkut poison, both teams now joined the Ocean churning again with the same vigour.

The second jewel appeared from the churning of the Ocean. It was the Surabhi and Kamadhenu cows, personifications of divine fulfillment. They were surrounded by hundreds of black, white, yellow, green, and red cows. Then, Mahadeva instructed Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati to donate the Surabhi and Kamadhenu cows and their companions to Maharshi Vashishtha. Maharshi Vashishtha could keep them or distribute them among the other Sages as he might see fit. According to Mahadeva's orders, Maharshi Vashishtha appeared and accepted the donation of all the cows, including Surabhi and Kamadhenu. He kept the Kamadhenu cow for himself, gave the Surabhi cow to Maharshi Gautama, and distributed the other cows to the other Sages.

After entrusting Surabhi, Kamadhenu, and the other cow mothers to Maharshi Vashishtha, the two teams once again began churning the Ocean with renewed vigour.

The third jewel to emerge from the churning of the Ocean was the horse Uchchaiśrava. Uchchaiśrava was pure white horse. He had seven heads. He could run like the wind. Guru Shukracharya proposed presenting this horse to emperor Mahabali.

However, emperor Mahabali pleaded with him: "O my revered Guru, you know that I have renounced the royal life. I wish to spend the rest of my life at the feet of Lord Vishnu. What will I do with the horse, Uchchaiśrava? Please consult Guru Brihaspati and give the horse to whomever he deems appropriate."

Then, Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati began to deliberate. Guru Brihaspati advised giving it to the king of

the Gods Indra, which Guru Shukracharya accepted. Thus, the Uchchaiśrava horse was then presented as a gift to Indra.

The churning of the Ocean continued swiftly. The fourth jewel to emerge was the elephant, Airavata. When Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati saw elephant Airavata, they began to debate who was its rightful owner. Elephant Airavata had always belonged to Indra. The elephant had been submerged in the Ocean due to a curse from the Sage Durvasa. Therefore, the two Gurus decided to hand elephant Airavata over to its rightful owner, Lord Indra.

Emperor Baan was surprised to learn from Acharya Swarbhanu that elephant Airavata had to be submerged in the Ocean due to a curse from Rishi Durvasa. The emperor wanted to know the reason for the curse from Acharya Swarbhanu himself.

Acharya Swarbhanu explained to emperor Baan, "Once, the Sage Durvasa was wandering on Earth. While he was wandering, he saw a divine garland of Santanaka flowers in the hands of a Vidyadhari. The fragrance of the garland perfumed the entire place. The Sage asked the Vidyadhari to give him the garland. The Vidyadhari respectfully bowed to the Sage and gave him the garland. The Sage placed the garland on his neck and began to wander the Earth. Suddenly, he saw Lord Indra seated on his elephant, Airavata. Upon seeing him, the Sage removed the garland from his neck and offered it to Lord Indra. Indra took the garland and placed it on Airavata's head. The garland looked splendid, as if Mother Ganga were seated on the summit of Mount Kailash. The enraged elephant then removed the garland from his head and threw it to the ground with his trunk. Seeing this insult to the divine garland, Sage Durvasa became enraged and said to king Indra, "O Indra, your mind is corrupted by the intoxication

of wealth. You are very insolent. You did not honour the divine garland I gave you. Disrespecting the garland is the same as disrespecting me. I curse you that your splendour across the three worlds will be destroyed. This drunken elephant, your accomplice in disrespecting the garland, will soon be submerged in the Ocean."

Upon hearing this, Indra panicked. He immediately dismounted Airavata and fell at the feet of Sage Durvasa. He begged the Sage for forgiveness. However, the Sage's anger would not subside.

He said, "Indra, I am not a merciful person. There is no place for forgiveness in my heart. Why do you keep pretending to beg and plead? I cannot forgive."

Thus, having cursed them, the Sage Durvasa departed. A desperate Indra also returned to his capital Amaravati riding his mount, the elephant Airavata. Durvasa's curse could not be untrue. Trees, creepers, and other plants began to wither throughout Indra's kingdom. His divinity, splendour, and prosperity began to fade. Yagyas (sacrifices) stopped being performed. Ascetics stopped their penance. People lost interest in charity and religious observances. Thus, Indra's divine splendour began to diminish. One day, while riding his elephant Airavata on the seashore, a wave from the Ocean swallowed the elephant. Indra was left destitute. He somehow managed to escape the Ocean's embrace. He then went to the Vaikuntha, residence of Lord Vishnu and asked for a way to be freed from the curse of Sage Durvasa. The Lord told him that when the Ocean would be churned in the future, his elephant would emerge with nectar and other jewels, and his prosperity and sovereignty over the three worlds would be restored.

Continuing the story of the churning of the Ocean to emperor Baan, Acharya Swarbhanu, in the form of Rahu, said, "The Kaustubha gem emerged from the churning of the Ocean as fifth jewel. It is Lord Vishnu's favourite gem. He always wore it on his chest, but during his Varaha incarnation while fighting with Hiranyaaksha, it fell into the Ocean. Therefore, Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati reverently presented it to Lord Vishnu. This gem was exceedingly radiant. With this gem, the Lord destroys all divine calamities."

"The sixth jewel to emerge from the churning of the Ocean was a religious scripture called the Kalpa-Druma. Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati gave it to Brahma. The Kalpa-Druma then gave birth to the Kalpa-Vriksha, or wish-fulfilling tree."

"The churning of the Ocean continued. The seventh jewel to emerge was the Apsara Ramabha. She was an exceedingly beautiful Apsara in Indra's court who fell in love with Nakakuvera, the son of Kubera. The two even performed a Gandharva marriage. Indra uses Apsaras to destroy the Yagnas of Maharishis performing severe penance in order to claim his throne. Once, when Maharshi Vishwamitra was engrossed in severe austerities to attain the status of a Brahmrishi from Brahma, Indra first sent the Apsara Menaka to disrupt his practice. However, Menaka herself fell in love with Vishwamitra and marry him. After this, Indra sent Apsara Rambha to break Vishwamitra's penance. Rambha could not destroy Vishwamitra's penance either. Finally, exhausted, she fell at his feet and begged for forgiveness. When Vishwamitra realized that Rambha had come to break his penance at Indra's behest, he became furious and cursed her to turn to stone. Apsara Rambha then begged for forgiveness, pleading her innocence and saying that she was only following an order from her king, Indra.

Maharshi Vishwamitra's heart melted, and he said, "O beautiful one, I cannot take back the curse. You must indeed be transformed into a stone. After you are turned into stone, I will cast you into the Ocean. You will lie in the Ocean's embrace as a stone for a time. However, after some time, as directed by Lord Vishnu, the Daityas, Daanavas and the Gods will churn the Ocean. Then, the Ocean will reveal you in your true form, and you will regain your beautiful body."

With that said, he handed the stone-formed Apsara Rambha over to the Ocean. During the churning of the Ocean, she appeared in her true form as blessed by Sage Vishwamitra. Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati then freed her and ordered her to return to Heaven. After bowing to the two great Sages, Apsara Rambha departed for Heaven.

The eighth jewel that emerged from the churning of the Ocean was Mother Shri, who appeared in a new form as Mother Lakshmi. Mother Lakshmi was indeed the form of Mother Shri. Since Mother Shri was the wife of Lord Vishnu, Mother Lakshmi was handed over to Him, and He accepted Her immediately as his wife.

Upon hearing this, emperor Baan was utterly astonished by the new form of Mother Shri as Mother Lakshmi. With his hands folded, he asked Acharya Swarbhanu, "O revered Guru, as far as I know, Lord Vishnu married Shri, the daughter of Maharshi Bhragu. Then why did Mother Shri have to reappear as Mother Lakshmi? Please tell me this story."

Then, Acharya Swarbhanu replied, "You are correct, O son Baan. Lord Vishnu did marry Shri, the daughter of Maharshi Bhragu. Once, an argument arose between Shri and Lord Vishnu over some matter. The argument grew until Shri became angry with Her husband, Lord Vishnu. In

Her anger, She left Him and went to Her father's Ashram. Maharshi Bhragu tried to reason with Her, but She would not calm down. She refused to go back to live with Lord Vishnu in Sāketa Dham.

Then Maharshi Bhragu told her, "Daughter, if you come to my Ashram with son-in-law Lord Vishnu, I will welcome You with open arms. However, it is not good for You to be so upset by a small argument that You leave Your own home. Such arguments between husband and wife are bound to happen. Therefore, I command you to return to Sāketa Dham."

Mother Shri was deeply hurt by Her father Maharishi Bhragu's harsh words. She did not want to go to Sāketa Dham. She was so distressed that She decided to end Her life by surrendering to the Ocean. She submerged herself in the Ocean. But, as you know, the Ocean considers Maharishi Bhragu as his brother. A brother's daughter is considered equal to one's own daughter. Therefore, he welcomed Her as his own daughter and allowed Her to stay in his embrace until Her anger subsided. Her anger did subside, but She remained firm in Her resolve: She would not go to Sāketa Dham until Lord Vishnu would come to persuade Her. However, Lord Vishnu did not come to persuade Her. She took this as an insult. Although She did not return to Her husband Lord Vishnu in Sāketa Dham because of Her stubbornness, She loved Him dearly. She could not bear being separated from Him either. Therefore, She became very sad. Seeing Shri in this state, the Ocean grieved deeply and prayed to Lord Vishnu to accept Her. Impressed by the Ocean's prayer, Lord Vishnu appeared and promised to soon accept Shri as His wife in the form of Lakshmi. He instructed the Ocean that, when the Daityas, Daanavas, and the Gods would churn the Ocean, he should manifest Her as the eighth jewel in Her new form as Lakshmi. Then, He would embrace Her and accept Her

as His wife. In this new form, He will put an end to the dispute. Shri will not remember anything about the argument.

The Ocean presented Shri to Lord Vishnu in the form of Lakshmi because Lord Vishnu gave His word to the Ocean. Thus, Lord Vishnu immediately claimed this eighth jewel, Lakshmi. This day was the new Moon of the month of Kartik. From that day on, the worship of Mother Lakshmi began, and this celebration is now known as 'Diwali or Deepawali'.

Acharya Swarbhanu continued the story of the churning of the Ocean to emperor Baan. He continued, "O dear son Baan, from the churning of the Ocean, a very beautiful maiden named Varuni appeared carrying a pot of liquor as the ninth gem. Varuna Deva, who out of his love for emperor Mahabali was churning the Ocean from the side of the Daityas was enchanted by Varuni's beauty. Then, at emperor Mahabali's request, Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati performed Varuna's Gandharva wedding with Varuni. The Gurus ordered that Varuni's pot of wine be given to the Daitya and Daanava warriors. According to legend, the Daitya and Daanava warriors became addicted to alcohol because of this incident.

The Moon emerged as the tenth jewel from the churning of the ocean. As you know, son Baan, the Moon is the son of Maharshi Atri and Mata Sati Anusuya. His 27 wives were the daughters of Prajapati Daksha: the Ashwins; Bharani; Krittika; Rohini; Mrigashira; Ardra; Punarvasu; Pushya; Aslesha; Magha; Purva Phalguni; Uttara Phalguni; Hast; Chitra; Swati; Vishakha; Anuradha; Jyestha; Mula; Purva Ashadha; Uttara Ashadha; Shravana; Dhanishtha; Shatabhisha; Purva Bhadrapada; Uttara Bhadrapada; and Revati. These 27 wives are known as the Nakshatras. Tired of his wives' quarrels, he took refuge in the Ocean one day.

After the Moon submerged in the Ocean, his wives realized their mistake. Together, they prayed to Lord Vishnu to help them get their husband back. Impressed by their prayers, Lord Vishnu promised that they would be reunited with their husbands during the churning of the Ocean. Thus, the Moon appeared as the tenth jewel during the churning of the Ocean. Still afraid that their husband might leave them again, the wives prayed to Lord Mahadev, asking Him not to let their husbands go anywhere again. Impressed by the wives' prayers, Lord Mahadev granted Moon (Chandradev) a place to live on His head so he could not leave. Since then, Chandradeva has adorned Mahadev's head.

The Parijata tree was the eleventh jewel to appear from the churning of the Ocean. Mother Lakshmi cherished this tree and asked Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati for it. The two Gurus lovingly and respectfully handed the tree over to Mother Lakshmi. She then planted it in Saket Dham. The flowers, called 'Harsingar', were so dear to Her that She granted a boon to the Universe: any being who offers the Harsingar flower in prayer to Her and Lord Vishnu will receive wealth, prosperity, fame, and all worldly happiness. Later, Brahmrishi Narada planted one of its seeds on Earth. Thus, all creatures began to benefit from Mother Lakshmi's boon.

The Panchajanya Shankh was obtained as the twelfth jewel from the churning of the Ocean. The Ocean called the Panchajanya Shankh the brother of Mother Lakshmi. Therefore, Guru Shukracharya and Guru Brihaspati presented it to Lord Vishnu. This conch is also called the 'Sala Sankh'. Sala means brother-in-law's couch'. The conch is a symbol of victory. Its sound is considered very auspicious. Since the conch is the brother of the Goddess Lakshmi, it is believed that She resides in it.

During the churning of the Ocean, the thirteenth jewel was a pot held by the physician Dhanvantari. This pot is also called the 'Amrit Kalash' (pot of immortality). It was filled with Amrit (nectar), which became known as the fourteenth jewel.

As soon as the 'Amrit Kalash' was obtained, the Daityas, Daanavas, and Gods lost their patience. They began to fight each other for it. The Daitya prince Agr snatched it from the hands of the physician Dhanvantari. Then, Jayant, the son of Indra, challenged prince Agr. Jayant succeeded in snatching the pot from Agr. Jayant then fled towards the Heaven with the pot of Amrit. The Daityas and Daanavas pursued him. This struggle continued for twelve days. During this time, some drops of Amrit fell to Earth in four places: Haridwar, Prayag, Ujjain, and Nashik. Since then, the 'Kumbh Mela' has been held there.

The two Gurus, Shukracharya and Brihaspati, tried to reason with their respective sides, but to no avail. Offended by the Daityas' and Daanavas' disrespect, Guru Shukracharya returned to Mount Kailash to live with Mahadeva. Guru Brihaspati also went to his abode in the Heaven. In the war for possession of the pot of nectar, the Daityas and Daanavas were gaining the upper hand. It seemed that they would soon succeed in snatching the pot of nectar from the Gods. If they succeeded, they would distribute the nectar among themselves and become immortal. Lord Vishnu then devised a plan to give the Gods the nectar and make them immortal. He appeared on the battlefield in the form of Vishwamohini, an extremely beautiful woman, the world enchantress. As soon as the Daitya and Daanava warriors saw Her, they were utterly captivated. They were all enchanted by Her. A rivalry broke out among the Daityas and demons to possess Her.

They said, "O peerless beauty, lotus-eyed one, who are You, and what is Your purpose in coming here? It seems that Brahma must have sent You here for us. Now that You are here, beautiful one, help us settle our dispute. Distribute this nectar impartially among us, the Daityas, the Daanavas, and the Gods, according to justice."

When the warriors pleaded with Her, the female form of Lord Vishnu laughed mysteriously and took the pot of nectar in Her hands. Vishwamohini, then, told the Daityas, Daanavas, and Gods to observe a one-day fast and meditation. Then, they should sit in two separate lines: one for the Daityas and Daanavas, and one for the Gods. Vishwamohini captivated the minds of all the Daityas and Daanavas. She bewildered them with her enchanting gestures.

At that moment, I (Acharya Swarbhanu) remembered Mahadev's words. Looking toward the line of the Gods, I saw Surya and Chandra sitting close to each other. After a short while, unable to tolerate Surya's radiance, Chandra moved away from him and sat a short distance away. A gap was formed between them. I quietly sat in the space between them, holding Mahadev in my heart. Vishwamohini began distributing nectar to the Gods.

After Surya, I also had the opportunity to drink the nectar. Surya and Chandra recognized me and signalled to Lord Vishnu that I was from the Daanava lineage. He immediately cut my throat with his Sudarshana Chakra. My body split into two pieces. Since I had drunk the nectar, I did not die. I looked at Lord Vishnu and whispered, "O Lord, as per Mahadev's instructions, I am seated in the row of the Gods, between Surya and Chandra. You are also my Isht. Then why did you cut my body in half?"

Then, the Lord signalled me to be quiet. In no time, He had distributed nectar to all the Gods. There was nothing left for the Daityas and Daanavas. After distributing all the Amrit among the Gods, the Vishwamohini form of the Lord returned to His original form. The Daityas and Daanavas then realized that they had been cheated. They became enraged and determined to fight. Just then, emperor Mahabali arrived on the scene. He explained to the Daityas and Daanavas that it was pointless to fight now. The Gods had already achieved immortality. Defeat in the war is certain. Disappointed, the Daityas and Daanavas returned to Patala Loka.

Emperor Mahabali asked prince Agr to wait for him. Emperor Mahabali fell at Lord Vishnu's feet and said, "Lord, you have granted me the boon of immortality. Please have mercy on my son, crown prince Agr, and coronate him emperor of the Daanava and Daitya lineages. Command me to accompany you to Saket Dham."

Lord Vishnu then said, "So be it."

Thus, the crown prince Agr was crowned as emperor of the Netherworld by Lord Vishnu right then and there.

Then, Lord Vishnu remembered me (Acharya Swarbhanu). He collected my two severed bodies. Then, He remembered Mahadeva. Mahadeva appeared immediately before us. Lord Vishnu prayed to Mahadeva, "O Supreme Mahadeva, please attach the head of one of your sacred serpent kings to Swarbhanu's torso and join the two together through divine surgery."

Mahadeva immediately grabbed his beloved Nagraj from His neck. This was a sacred serpent he loved dearly. He severed its head from its body. He then performed the same surgical procedure which He had used to attach the head

of an elephant to Ganesha and the head of a goat to Prajapati Daksha. Mahadeva placed the Nagraj's body on my head and called me Rahu, meaning 'Divine Counsellor'. He placed the Nagraj's head on my body and called it Ketu, meaning Divine Banner'. Thus, I (Acharya Swarbhanu) was transformed into Rahu and Ketu.

Mahadeva then addressed me, saying, "O son Swarbhanu, your penance has been successful. According to Brahmurishi Narada, you have now been granted immortality. Your service to Lord Vishnu in Mahabali's kingdom, when he lived in Suttal as Mahabali's bodyguard, has also borne fruit. Remember that if Lord Vishnu had wished, he could have dried up your Amrit with the fire arrow (Agnivaan) contained in the Sudarshan Chakra. However, in honour of the promise He made to you in Suttal, He did not do so. Lord Vishnu and I are exceedingly pleased with your penance, devotion and love. By order of Lord Vishnu, I grant you great honour and install you in your new home. You receive this honour alongside the other auspicious planets: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. I have ordered Saturn to grant you a place in his realm. Brahma appointed Saturn as the chief justice of the Universe. In this Universe, under the authority of chief justice Saturn, you will continue to carry out the task of delivering the fruits of living being's deeds. You may remain on Earth a little while longer until Mahabali's son, prince Baan visits you. Your residence on Earth has been arranged in the village of Paithani. Prince Baan will come to meet you when he finishes his penance. He will be eager to hear about all these events. Please tell him the complete story, and then depart for Shani Lok."

Having told the entire story, Acharya Swarbhanu, in the form of Rahu, spoke to emperor Baan: "Dear son, now grant me permission to depart for Shani Lok. Enjoy the kingdom on Earth for many years (kalpas)." In the Dwapara

Yug, Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, will grant you a home in Saket Dham. By meeting your heroic death at the Lord's hands, you will attain liberation. There, you will meet your father Mahabali, your grandfather Virochana, and your great-grandfather Prahlād."

Upon hearing these affectionate words, emperor Baan fell at the feet of Acharya Swarbhanu in the form of Rahu and said, "O my beloved Guru, I do not wish to be separated from you, but you have already chosen your path. Please proceed to Shani Lok. I will build a grand temple for you here. Please grant your blessings so that whoever comes to Paithani to pray will be freed from the fruits of their deeds and guided on the path to union with God."

Then, Acharya Swarbhanu said, "Tathastu," bid farewell to emperor Baan, and departed for Shani Lok. Thanks to Acharya Swarbhanu's boon, anyone who visits Paithani with a pure heart today and praises him, is freed from all worldly suffering and granted liberation in the next life. After Acharya Swarbhanu departed for Shani Lok in the form of Rahu, emperor Baan returned to his capital, Sonitpur. Upon arriving, he ordered the construction of a grand temple for Rahudev in Paithani. A magnificent temple was then built there. Since then, thousands of people have come to Paithani to pray to Rahudev and seek his blessings.

Justice - Saturn, Rahu and Ketu

After bidding farewell to emperor Baan, Acharya Swarbhanu, in the form of Rahu, went to Shani Lok. Lord Shani welcomed him whole heartedly and built his palace on an extremely sacred and elevated site. At Lord Shani's instruction, Rahu and Ketu faithfully delivered the fruits of Karma to the inhabitants alongside Surya, Chandra, Mangal, Budh, Brihaspati, and Shukra.

Unfortunately, today, there is a notion in our society that Rahu and Ketu are malevolent planets. They are said to bring nothing but evil. This is completely untrue. Rahu and Ketu merely follow the orders of the chief justice Shanidev. There is no reason to fear them. If a person lives a righteous life, why would he/she suffer any hardship? Why would Shanidev, the chief justice, commit any injustice by afflicting harm without cause? Shanidev has never done anything unjust. Rahu and Ketu only follow his instructions. Therefore, no injustice is ever done by Rahu and Ketu. Rahu is the lord of the 'Kali Yuga'. He always renders pure, truthful, pious, and righteous justice to those who follow the path of dharma, who are just, and who love peace.

So why is there fear of Rahu and Ketu? What could cause this fear? Let us take a look at this.

The scriptures say that fear is caused by the mind. The mind is fickle and suspicious. Let us assume for a moment that a being will not receive any reward or punishment for whatever he or she does, good or bad. He or she will not suffer. He or she will not die. There will be no distress in his or her household. They will always live a happy, peaceful life full of wealth and prosperity. If that were the case, the being would do anything, good or bad, for his or her own selfish interests.

Is this the reality? No, we have to accept the ups and downs of life. Life is not just a bed of roses; it is also a bed of thorns. Why do thorns come into our lives? Why do we have to live in constant fear of death and old age? These are debt contracts (Rinuanubandh) from the Karma of our past and present lives. We reap what we sow. If you plant a Neem tree, you cannot expect to harvest mangoes. Lord Shani, the chief justice, dispenses the good and bad fruits of our actions according to our deeds. This is the truth, not an imaginary concept. We must accept what is eternal. Whatever has come will also go away. Similarly, it is also true that public administration does not run on rewards alone. If it always ran on rewards, there would be no punishment. There would be no courts, social panchayats, laws, prisons, or police.

We all know that the power of punishment is considered necessary for the government to control evil deeds. This is why punishment for misdeeds is administered by emperors, police, or the army. The identity of any military force or police force is defined by punishment. An emperor's identity is also defined by punishment. Power itself is also defined by punishment. A country's identity is defined by its social order and penal code. Every country has a penal code. Consider that the Universe's penal code lies with chief justice Shanidev and that the power to implement it lies with Rahu and Ketu, along with the other six Navgrahas (Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus). Then, how did these Navgrahas become cruel?

Once, Mother Lakshmi asked Shanidev a question in the presence of Rahu and Ketu.

She asked, "O Lord Shani, why do people call you and your associates, Rahu and Ketu, cruel? They say the three of you deities show no compassion. Why is that?"

Shani Dev replied, "Mother, the Lord has appointed me as the chief justice of the Universe. My associates, Rahu and Ketu, along with the other six Navgrahas, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus, carry out the Karmic results that I dispense. If we were to show compassion, how would the administration of the Universe function?"

Then Mother Lakshmi asked, "Shanideva, that's fine for mortals, but you don't show mercy to Gods either."

Shani Dev smiled and said, "O Mother, the Gods should be held to stricter standards than mortals on Earth. The creatures of the mortal world follow the Gods. If the Gods' conduct is not exemplary, how will order be maintained?"

Shanidev is a judge, not a cruel ruler. Rahu and Ketu follow his orders; they are not cruel, either. Unfortunately, some ignorant so-called Pundits nowadays promote them as cruel. A cruel judge typically never punishes tyrannical, immoral, or sinful people because he is at fault himself. He favours those who act unjustly. However, Shanidev, Rahu, Ketu, and the other six Navgrahas, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus, are not like that. They cannot tolerate injustice. They punish the immoral and sinful acts. These Gods are all very dear to Mahadev, yet even He could not escape their wrath on many occasions. The essence of all these Gods' characters is one: There is no greater virtue than selfless service."

They are pleased with those who serve others. They cannot tolerate the suffering of others. They protect Dharma. Through the protection of Dharma, the Gods establish the divine order of this Universe. These three deities, Shani, Rahu and Ketu are not meant to frighten anyone. The fear is within us which is all caused by our own misdeeds. Our inner self keeps warning us about what constitutes righteous action. Yet, ignoring the voice of our conscience,

we deceive other beings out of selfishness, continue to pursue our own interests. In such cases, these deities act as a check on these selfish, parasitic, hedonistic, cruel, and immoral beings. As the central deities of the economic, social, and political spheres, they are primarily the deities of Nature and inclination. These three deities, Shani, Rahu and Ketu along with the other six Navgrahas, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus maintain the balance in this Universe. These are the Gods who lead, mediate, dispense righteous justice and punish the wicked. We should respect them, not fear them.



OBJECTIVES OF SHRI RAM KATHA SANSTHAN PERTH (INC)

- Shri Ram Katha Sansthan Perth (Inc) is a Vaishnav non-profit religious organisation based on the principles established by Bhagwan Swami Shri Ramananda Ji Acharya (14th century).
- Shri Sansthan is non-discriminatory to any religion, caste, sex and social status of the devotees. Its main principle is, 'Hari Ko Bhaje, So Hari Ko Hoi', the one who worships the Lord, is dear to the Lord.
- Shri Sansthan believes that the worship of the Lord with pure heart and unselfish attitude is very dear to the Lord. All the devotees of the Lord are brothers and sisters.

Concept of Brahman (Supreme)

- Lord Ram, Mother Sita and their incarnations are the 'Supreme Brahman'. They are omnipresent and preserver of the Universe.

Concept of Jiva (Soul)

- The existence of Jiva (Soul) is dependent on Brahman. Lord Ram, Mother Sita and their incarnations (Brahman) are the means to achieve salvation (Moksha). Their eternal and omnipresence help Jiva to move forward towards the achievement of salvation (Moksha).

Concept of Maya (Illusion)

- Maya is the cause of Prakrati (Nature/ World). Prakrati is the combination of three Gunas (Qualities) - Sat, Raj and Tamas. By these three Guns, Prakrati creates the world. Maya is controlled by Brahman. Brahman (Lord Ram, Mother Sita and their incarnations) alone can provide salvation from Maya.

Concept of Moksha (Salvation)

- The abode of Lord Ram, Mother Sita and their incarnations is 'Saket-Dham'. By meditating on and praying Lord Ram, Mother Sita and their incarnations, the devotees get salvation (Moksh) and never come back into this world. The cycle of birth and death is eradicated forever.
- Shri Sansthan continues to publish religious books, booklets, magazines etc to fulfil these objectives. Time to time, Shri Sansthan also organises Shri Ram Katha and other religious Kathaen (stories) of the great Sanatan Rishies, Devs, Devis and great devotees.

AUTHOR: DR YATENDRA SHARMA



The author of this book, Dr Yatendra Shrama was born in a Sanatan Dharma Hindu family. Following his family traditions, he developed an interest in reading, listening, and narrating religious scriptures since his childhood. He learnt Sanskrit in his childhood from his grandfather Shri Bhagwan Das Ji and Shri Saligram Sharma Agnihotri Ji, the great scholar of Sanskrit and retired Principal of Naravar Sanskrit Mahavidyalay. He completed his PhD in chemical technology from the Technical University of Graz, Austria, and served the mining and mineral industry of Western Australia for more than three decades.

In 2016, with the help of some like-minded friends, he founded a religious organisation ‘Shri Ram Katha Sansthan Perth’, based on the teachings of Bhagwan Swami Ramanandacharya Maharaj, and following the traditions of ‘Shri Ramanandi Sampraday’. Shri Ram Katha Sansthan Perth is continually publishing books and booklets on the life stories of the great Sanatan Dharma Saints, Devs, Devis etc, to create awareness about the Sanatan Dharma culture to the followers of Sanatan Dharma.



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