

Vishnu Purana

Sagara

There were many powerful kings among Mandhata's descendants. One of these was Purukutsa. Many years ago, the underworld was occupied by the gandharvas. They upset the rule of the snakes (nagas) and stole their jewels. The besieged nagas prayed to Vishnu for deliverance. Vishnu told them that he would enter Purukutsa's body and thus destroy the gandharvas. The nagas sent the river Narmada to bring Purukutsa down to the underworld and Purukutsa destroyed all the gandharvas. The happy sankes grated Narmada a boon. Whoever says, "I pray to Narmada morning and evening; Narmada, protect me from snake poison, " will never be bitten by snakes.

In the same dynasty was born King Vahu. Vahu lost a war with some other kings and went to the forest with his wife. There Vahu's wife was about to give birth to a baby. But Vahu had another wife as well. And out of jealousy, the second wife gave the first wife some poison. The result was that the baby did not come out but stayed inside the mother for seven years. King Vahu died in the hermitage of the sage Ourva. And Vahn's wife also wished to die on the funeral pyre.

But Ourva told her, "Queen, what are you doing? You are carrying a son who will be the bravest of the brave. He will conquer many lands and perform many sacrifices. Don't die on the funeral pyre."

The son was born and Ourva named the child Sagara. He taught the boy the Vedas, the shastras and the art of fighting. When he grew up, Sagara wished to win back his father's lost kingdom. He defeated the enemy kings and ruled over the entire world.

Sagara had two wives, Sumati and Keshini. These two prayed to Ourva that they might have sons. Ourva granted them the boon that one of them would have a single son, while the other would have sixty thousand sons. This is what happened and Keshini's son was called Asamanjas. But all these sons turned out to be quite evil. The gods went to the sage Kapila and asked him to rescue the world from the bad deeds of Sagara's sons.

At the time, King Sagara was performing an ashvamedha yajna (horse sacrifice) and his sons were the protectors of the sacrificial horse. Someone stole this horse and took it down to the underworld. The sons of Sagara looked for the horse and followed its trail down to the underworld. They found the horse wandering around in the underworld and not far from the house, they saw the sage Kapila. They concluded that Kapila must have stolen the horse and attacked the sage with their weapons. But a terrible fire issued out of Kapila's eyes and reduced Sagara's sons into ashes.

Asamanjas had a son known as Amshumana. On learning that this sons had been burnt into ashes, Sagara sent Amshumana to fetch the horse. Amshumana went to Kapila and began to pray to him. Pleased at this, Kapila offered to grant Amshumana a boon and Amshumana desired that his uncles might go to heaven.

Kapila said, "Your grandson will bring down the river Ganga from heaven. When the water of the Ganga touches the bones of your uncles, they will ascend to heaven."

Amshumana's son was Dilipa and Dilipa's son was Bhagiratha. It was Bhagiratha who brought Ganga down from heaven. That is why Ganga is also known as Bhagirathi.

Soudasa

In Bhagiratha's line there was a king called Soudasa or Mitrasaha. One day the king went out hunting in the forest and saw two tigers there. He killed one of these with his arrow and before dying, it adopted the form of a fierce rakshasa. The other tiger said, "I will have my revenge" and disappeared.

Some days later, King Soudasa began a yajna. The priest for this yajna was the

sage Vashishtha. Vashishtha finished his rituals and left. But the rakshasa adopted Vashishtha's form and sat down in Vashishtha's place. "At the end of the ceremony get me some rice and meat to eat," he said. "I am returning in a short while." Having said this, the rakshasa went away. But it adopted the form of a cook and cooked some human meat. Unknowingly, King Soudasa placed this meat in a golden vessel and waited for Vashishtha's return.

When Vashishtha sat down to eat, he was served this meat. In a trice he realized that this was human meat, and he cursed that Soudasa would become a rakshasa. But through his mental powers Vashishtha also learnt that much of the trouble had been caused not by Soudasa, but by the rakshasa. So he reduced the duration of the curse such that Soudasa would have to be a rakshasa only for twelve years.

But Soudasa still thought that he had been unfairly cursed. So he took some water in his hand and prepared to curse Vashishtha. At this, Soudasa's wife Madayanti said, "What are you doing? Don't curse Vashishtha. He is our guru."

Soudasa refrained from uttering the curse. But what was to be done with the water that he had taken in his hand? Since it was water meant for a curse, if it were to be thrown onto the ground or up into the sky, the grain and the clouds would be destroyed. So Soudasa poured the water onto his own feet and his feet became diseased and black. He came to be known as kalmashapada.

As a rakshasa, Kalmashapada lived in the forest and ate people. In the forest he once met a brahmana and his wife. He proceeded to eat the brahmana, although his wife begged him for mercy. At this, the brahmana's wife cursed him that he would die as soon as he met his own wife.

After twelve years the king was freed of Vashishtha's curse. But he refrained from going near his wife because of the other curse.

In this line was born Rama, who destroyed Ravana. Rama's brothers were Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna. Bharata destroyed three crores of gandharvas. Shatrughna defeated a rakshasa named Lavana and built the city of Mathura. Rama's sons were Kusha and Lava, Lakshmana's son were Taksha and Pushkara and Shatrughna's sons were Suvahu and Sharasena.

Nimi

Ikshvaku had a son named Nimi. Nimi once started a yajna that went on for a thousand years. He wanted Vashishtha to be the main priest. But Vashishtha said that he was already busy with the yajna that Indra planned to conduct for five hundred years. He asked Nimi to wait. He promised to come to Nimi's yajna as soon as Indra's was over.

Nimi returned without saying anything and Vashishtha assumed that Nimi had agreed to wait. But Nimi began his ceremony with Goutama and other sages. After finishing Indra's yajna, Vashishtha came to Nimi's yajna expecting to be the chief priest there. But he found that the sacrifice had already been begun with Goutama as the chief priest. Since he felt insulted, Vashishtha cursed Nimi that he would henceforth be without a body. Nimi felt this curse to be unfair. So he too cursed that Vashishtha would be without a body. Vashishtha however, received another body. Thanks to the gods Mitra and Varuna.

Meanwhile, King Nimi's body lay there, oiled and perfumed. When the yajna was over, the assembled gods wished to give the host of the yajna a boon. They wished to give Nimi a new body but Nimi said that he would have none of it. He desired instead that he might be allowed to live on the eyelids of people. This boon was granted. Nimi lives on the eyelids of all people and that is why the blinking of the eyelids is known as nimesha.

But Nimi had no son and the kingdom would have gone to ruins in the absence of a son. So the sages pounded the dead body with wood and a son emerged. Since he came out in this fashion from his father's body he came to be known as Janaka (father). And since his father had no body, Janaka was also called Vaidha (bodyless). When Janaka was ploughing the earth to obtain a son, a daughter came

out of the earth. She was named Sita.

Chandra

Having heard accounts of the kings of the solar dynasty, Maitreya wished to hear of the kings of the lunar dynasty, Parashara obliged.

Brahma's son was Atri and Atri's son was Chandra. Brahma made Chandra the ruler of stars and herbs. Chandra performed a rajasuya yajna (royal sacrifice). But because he successfully completed a rajasuya yajna, Chandra became arrogant. The guru of all the devas was Brihaspati and Brihaspati's wife was Tara. Chandra kidnapped Tara. Despite Brihaspati's repeatedly requesting him to return Tara, Chandra refused. A war began between the two sides. Since Shukra did not like Brihaspati, Shukra took Chandra's side. Also on Chandra's side were the danavas. Rudra and Indra sided with Brihaspati.

Since the war took place over Tara, it came to be known as the tarakamaya war. It was a terrible war and it seemed as if the whole world might be destroyed. The entire world asked Brahma to mediate and stop the war. Brahma stopped the war and returned Tara to Brihaspati.

But Chandra and Tara had a son and this son was called Budha. Budha married Ila and their son was called Pururava. Mitra and Varuna once cursed the apsara Urvashi that she would have to spend some time on earth. Urvashi to be his wife and Urvashi accepted, subject to a condition. Two sheep were to stay forever near her bed and if the sheep were to be ever stolen, Urvashi would return to heaven. Pururava readily agreed. They lived quite happily for sixty thousand years.

Urvashi had no desire to return to heaven. But in Urvashi's absence the gandharvas of heaven felt very lonely; they plotted ways of taking Urvashi back to heaven. One night they stole the two sheep. And since the condition was broken, Urvashi went back to heaven. Pururava and Urvashi however, had six sons, the eldest being Ayu.

But to remind Pururava of Urvashi, the gandharvas taught him the secret of fire and the king was instructed to divide this fire into three types. Earlier there used to be only one sort of fire. But Pururava introduced the three types of fire known as Garhapatya, Ahavaniya and Dakshina.

In Pururava's line was born Jahnu. Jahnu once saw that the bowl he used for his yajna was flooded with the water of the Ganga. He thereupon drank up the entire Ganga and restored the river only when the devarshis so requested. That is why Ganga is also called Jahnvi.

Satyavati and Richika

Gadhi was descended from Jahnu. Gadhi had a daughter called Satyavati. The sage Richika wanted to marry Satyavati. But Gadhi had no desire to marry off his daughter to an old brahmana who was also very hot-tempered. So he demanded one thousand horses were to be fleet of foot and white in colour with black ears. But Richika managed to get such horses from Varuna and thus married Satyavati.

Satyavati wanted a son. So Richika performed a yajna and obtained some rice pudding as a result. But Satyavati wished that her mother might also have a son. Richika, therefore, prepared a second bowl of rice pudding. He gave the two bowls to Satyavati and said, "This is for you and this for your mother." He then went off to the forest.

But Satyavati's mother said to her daughter, "Usually people want good sons for themselves, they are not keen about obtaining a good brother-in-law. I therefore suspect that your rice pudding is better than mine. Let us exchange bowls. I am a queen and my son will rule the world. He has to be strong. Your son will be a brahmana. He does not have to be that powerful." They exchanged the bowls.

Richika came back from the forest and heard what had happened. He was very angry. Into Satyavati's mother's bowl he had put the ingredients for a son who would be brave and violent as a kshatriya should be. And into Satyavati's bowl he

had put the ingredients for a son who would be peaceful and non-violent as a brahmana should be. As it was, everything had now been reversed.

On hearing this, Satyavati begged forgiveness and requested that her grandson, rather than her son, should be brave and violent. This request Richika granted. Satyavati's mother gave birth to Vishvamitra. And Satyavati gave birth to Jamadagni. Jamadagni married Renuka. Their son Parashurama killed many kshatriyas.

Raji

Pururava's son Ayu had five sons. Their names were Nahusha, Kshatravridha, Rambha, Raji and Anenah. Raji had five hundred brave sons. Many years ago, the devas and the asuras fought a war. Both the devas and the asuras went to Brahma and asked, "Who will win this war?" Brahma replied that the side for which King Raji fought would win.

The asuras came to Raji and asked him to fight on their side. "I will," said Raji, "provided that you make me Indra after the devas have been defeated.

"This we cannot do," replied the asuras. "We cannot promise you one thing and do another. Prahlada will be our Indra."

The gods too came to Raji and asked him to fight on their side. And faced with the same condition, they replied. "Yes indeed, you will be our Indra."

Raji fought on the side of the gods and killed the demons. After the enemy had been defeated, Indra touched Raji's feet and said, "You have protected us, so you are like my father. And since I am Indra, my father is obviously the supreme ruler of the world." Although Raji saw through the flattery, he permitted Indra to continue as the king of the gods and returned to his capital.

But after Raji died, Raji's sons demanded that Indra should hand over that which had been promised to them. This Indra refused to do. So Raji's sons defeated Indra and themselves assumed the title of Indra. After many years had passed, Indra went to Brihaspati and prayed that his kingdom might be returned to him. Brihaspati performed sacrifices so that Indra's powers might increase and slowly weaned Raji's sons away from the path of righteousness. He made them do evil deeds and turned their minds against the Vedas and the brahmanas. Indra could now easily defeat and kill the sons of Raji. Indra could now easily defeat and kill the sons of Raji. He assumed the title of Indra.

Nahusha and Yayati

Nahusha had six sons. Their names were Yati, Yayati, Samyati, Ayati, Viviyati and Kriti. Yati had no desire to be king, so Yayati became king after Nahusha. Yayati had two wives. The first was Shukra's daughter Devayani and the second was Vrishaparva's daughter Sharmishtha. Devayani's sons were Yadu and Turnvasu. And Sharmishtha's sons were Druhya, Anu and Puru.

Because of a curse imposed on him by Shukra, Yayati became old much before he should have been. He called his eldest son Yadu to him and said, "I have become old much before my time. I still want to enjoy material things. Please take my old age for a thousand years." Yadu refused and Yayati cursed him that no son worthy of being a king would ever be born in the line of Yadu. Yayati asked Turvasu, Druhya and Anu. But they too refused and were given the same curse by their father. Yayati asked Puru and Puru immediately agreed to his father's request. He took upon himself his father's old age and gave his father his own youth.

Yayati immersed himself in material pursuits. But after having spent many such years in enjoying life, he got tired of it all. He got back his old age from Puru and returned Puru's youth to him. Yayati made Puru the king and went off to do tapasya in the forest. Turvasu, Druhya and Anu merely received very small kingdoms that surrounded Puru's kingdom.

In Yadu's line was born Arjuna. This Arjuna prayed to Dattatreya and obtained

several boons from him. The first boon was that Arjuna would have a thousand arms. The second was that he would fight adharma and serve the cause of dharma, fight the evil and serve the good. The third was that enemies would not be able to defeat him. And the fourth and final boon was that Arjuna would be killed by someone who would be famous throughout the world. This Arjuna came to be known as Kartaviryarjuna. He performed ten thousand yajnas and ruled for eight-five thousand years. The name of his capital was Mahishmati. Once Ravana invaded this city and was defeated and imprisoned by Arjuna. Eventually Arjuna was killed by Parashurama. All who were descended from Yadu, were known as Yadavas.

The Jewel Syamantaka

Krishna's wife was Satyabhama and Satyabhama's father was Satrajit.

Satrajit sat down on the shores of the ocean and began to pray to Surya. Surya was pleased with his prayers and appeared before Satrajit.

Satrajit could not see Surya very well and said, "Lord, the sky you appear like a burning ball of fire. Yet you have appeared before me and I am not able to see much."

Surya was wearing a jewel known as a syamantaka on his throat. On hearing what Satrajit had said, Surya took off this jewel and laid it aside. Satrajit could now see Surya properly. Surya's eyes were brownish yellow and his body was bright, short and of a copper colour. Satrajit bowed down before Surya and Surya offered to grant him a boon. As a boon, Satrajit wanted the jewel and Surya granted this wish.

Satrajit put it round his neck and entered the city of Dvaraka. But because he was wearing the jewel, his body was radiant and energy seemed to flow out of him. The citizens of Dvaraka at first thought that it was Surya himself who was entering the city.

Satrajit kept the jewel in his house. Every day it produced gold. And thanks to its influence, disease, drought, wild animals, fire and theft disappeared from the kingdom. Krishna thought that the syamantaka jewel should really belong to the king, Ugrasena. Satrajit was aware of this desire of Krishna's. Scared that he might be compelled to part with the jewel, he gave it to his brother Prasena for safe keeping. The jewel had the property that if someone pure held it, it would produce gold. But if someone impure held it, it would kill the holder.

One day Prasena wore the jewel around his neck and went off on a hunt. In the forest he was killed by a lion. The lion was about to go off with the jewel, when Jambavan, the king of the bears, arrived on the scene. Jambavan killed the lion and took the jewel. He returned to his home land gave it to his young son to play with.

Meanwhile, the citizens of Dvaraka noticed that Prasena was not returning from the hunt. There was a general impression that Krishna had had his eyes on the jewel. So a rumour went around that it was Krishna who had killed Prasena and stolen the syamantaka. To put an end to such rumours, Krishna followed Prasena's trail into the forest. There he discovered Prasena's trail into the forest. There he discovered two dead bodies, Prasena's and the lion's. He guessed what must have happened. He followed the trail right up to Jambavan's hole and discovered Jambavan's son playing with the jewel. The child's nursemaid raised an alarm on seeing Krishna and Jambavan quickly arrived. A terrible fight raged between Krishna and Jambavan. This fight went on for twenty-one days. Several Yadava soldiers had also followed Krishna up to Jambavan's hole. When seven or eight days had passed and still there was no sign of Krishna, they concluded that Krishna must have been killed. They, therefore, spread the news of Krishna's death.

Krishna's friends arranged a shradha ceremony and the offerings made at this funeral ceremony served to increase Krishna's strength. Krishna finally defeated Jambavan and Jambavan bowed down before him, The two became friends and Jambavan married off his daughter Jambavati to Krishna. He also returned the syamantaka jewel.

The citizens of Dvaraka were delighted to see Krishna and Jambavati. Krishna told

them what had happened and returned the jewel to Satrajit. Satrajit was ashamed that he had ever doubted Krishna. He therefore gave his daughter Satyabhama in marriage to Krishna.

But there were other Yadavas like Akrura, Kritavarma and Shatadhanva who had also wanted to marry Satyabhama and they were not at all happy at this turn of events. They thought that they had been insulted. Hearing that the Pandavas had been burnt to death in the house of lac, Krishna went on a trip to Varanavata. Taking advantage of Krishna's absence, Shatadhanva killed Satrajit while the latter was sleeping and stole the jewel.

Satyabhama was furious that her father had been killed. She got up on her chariot and drove it to Varanavata to tell Krishna what had happened. Krishna came back to Dvaraka and told Baladeva that the two of them should get together and kill Shatadhanva. Shatadhanva ran for help to Kritavarma, but Kritavarma refused to oppose Krishna and Baladeva. Shatadhanva then, ran to Akrura, only to be met with another refusal. Shatadhanva then asked Akrura to at least keep the jewel for him. This Akrura agreed to do, provided that Shatadhanva did not tell anyone where the jewel was.

Shatadhanva got up on a fast horse and fled. But Krishna and Baladeva followed him on a chariot. After travelling for a long distance, Shatadhanva came to the forests on the outskirts of Mithila. His horse died. He started to flee on foot. At this, Krishna said that he would follow Shatadhanva on foot. He asked Baladeva to wait for him in the chariot.

Krishna caught up with Shatadhanva and sliced off his head. But despite searching all Shatadhanva's belongings, he could not find the jewel. He came and reported this to Baladeva. But unfortunately, Baladeva did not believe this. He said, "Krishna, you are not a brother I would like to associate with. Go your own way and I will go mine. We do not belong together." Baladeva went off to the kingdom of Videha and lived there as a guest of King Janaka's. It was then that Duryodhana learnt from Baladeva how to fight with the mace (gada). Krishna returned to Dvaraka. After three years had passed. Vabhru., Ugrasena and the other Yadavas managed to convince Baladeva that Krishna had indeed not stolen the jewel. Baladeva then returned to Dvaraka.

Meanwhile, Akrura started to perform many yajnas. It is a crime to kill someone who is performing a yajna. Akrura reasoned that even if Krishna got to know that he possessed the jewel, Krishna would not kill him as long as he was performing a sacrifice. The sacrifices went on for sixty-two years. And because the jewel was in Dvaraka, disease and other evil things disappeared from the city.

But some relatives of Akrura's killed some other yadavas and fled the city. Akrura also fled with them. And the moment this happened, wild beasts, drought and disease returned to Dvaraka. At first people thought that this was happening because a holy man like Akrura had left the city. Akrura was therefore brought back and immediately the wild beasts, drought and disease disappeared.

Krishna, however, reasoned that all this could not be happening simply because Akrura was a holy man. There must be more to it than that. How was it that Akrura performed one yajna after another? Where did he get the money? He was not a rich man. He must therefore have the jewel.

Krishna called an assembly of the Yadavas in his house. And there he told Akrura. "We all know that Shatadhanva had left the syamantaka jewel with you. Let the jewel remain with you, there is no harm in that. We are all gaining from its presence here in the city. But Baladeva suspects that I have stolen it. Will you please show it to him once to set his suspicions at rest?"

Akrura reasoned that if he lied, they might search his clothes and discover the jewel. So he took out the jewel from a golden box that he kept hidden inside his clothes. He offered it to the Yadava who was most worthy of it.

The jewel was so attractive that Baladeva also began to covet it. So did Satyabhama, since she thought that if the jewel had belonged to her father it was

now rightfully hers. Krishna felt that a quarrel was imminent and intervened. He said, "this jewel brings happiness to the kingdom only if someone pure wears it. If someone impure wears it, the wearer is destroyed. I should not wear it, I am not really pure, I have sixteen thousand wives. For the same reason, let not Satyahama possess it. Nor should Baladeva have it, he drinks all the time. Let the jewel stay with Akrura." And this was agreed to.

Shishupala

In an earlier life, Shishupala had been Hiranayakashipu. He was subsequently born as Shishupala, the son of Dama Ghosha, the King of Chedi. His mother was Shrutashrava, the sister of Vasudeva, Krishna's father. Just as Hiranayakashipu was killed by Vishnu, Shishupala was killed by Krishna. Shishupala had also been born as Ravana and had been killed by Rama.

Shantanu and Devapi

In the line of Kuru there used to be a king known as Pratipa. Pratipa had three sons, Devapi, Shantanu and Vahlika. Devapi left for the forest when he was very young and Shantanu became king.

For twelve years there was no rain in Shantanu's kingdom. To find out why, King Shantanu called all the brahmanas. The brahmanas explained that this was happening because Devapi should rightfully have been the king. An elder son is the person who should rule, unless of course the elder son happens to be an outright sinner. To make the rains come, it was thus imperative that Devapi should be brought back as king.

Shantanu had a minister named Ashmasari. This minister sent a preacher to Devapi in the forest. The preacher preached against the Vedas. Slowly the preacher turned Devapi's mind away from the holy texts. When the brahmanas and Shantanu went to the forest to offer the kingdom to Devapi, they found that Devapi was saying various things that were against the Vedas. Devapi had thus become a sinner and the kingdom was not offered to him. Shantanu continued to be the king and now it rained.

Shantanu and Ganga married and they had a son called Bhishma. Shantanu also married Satyawati and had two sons called Vichitravirya and Chitrangada. Dhritarashtra and Pandu were descended from Vichitravirya. The five sons of Pandu, the Pandavas, married Draupadi and Draupadi's sons were Prativindhya, Sutasoma, Shrutakirti, Shantanika and Shrutakarma. The Pandavas had other sons as well. Yudhishtira married Draupadi and had a son called Dvaka. Bhima married Hidimba and had a son called Ghatotkacha. He also married Kashi and had a son called Sarvatraga. Nakula married Karenumati and had a son called Nirmitra. Sahadeva married Vijaya and had a son called Suhotra. Arjuna had many wives. From Ulupi he had a son called Iravan, from Chitrangada he had a son called Babhravahana and from Subhadra he had a son called Abhimanyu.

Kali

The Vishnu Purana says that in future there will be a king called Mahapadmanada. Like a second Parashurama, he will destroy all the kshatriyas. The shudras will then become kings. Mahapadma will have eight sons and he and his sons will rule the earth for a hundred years. But a brahmana named Koutilya will kill all of them, and the shudra kings known as the Mouryas will rule. Koutilya will make Chandragupta king.

The Maura kings will rule for a hundred and thirty-seven years. Then the Shunga kings will rule for a hundred and twelve years. After that the Kanva kings will rule for forty-five years. Then the Andhra kings will rule for four hundred and fifty-six years. Then there will be various dynasties known as the Abhiras, Gardhabhilas, Shakas, Yavanas, Tukharas, Mundas, Mounas, Pouras, Kailakilas, Vahlikas, Nishadas, Nagas, Magadhas and Guptas.

The kali era will be a terrible period. Subjects will flee to the mountains because they will not be able to bear the taxes levied by the kings. They will not have food to eat

and clothes to wear. Dharma will be destroyed. Vishnu will be born again as Kalki to destroy all the evil-doers. It is after this that dharma will be established. Kali yuga will last for three lakh and sixty thousand years.

This is the end of the fourth section of the Vishnu Purana.

Vasudeva and Devaki

Vasudeva married Devaka's daughter Devaki. Kamsa drove the chariot of the couple on the occasion of the marriage. At that time, divine words were heard from the sky. A voice said, "Stupid Kamsa, whom are you driving in the chariot? The eighth child of this woman is going to kill you."

When he heard this, Kamsa took up his sword and wanted to kill Devaki. But Vasudeva said, "Brave warrior, do not kill Devaki. Rest assured that I will hand over to you all the children who are born." Kamsa agreed to this arrangement.

At that time, Prithivi (the earth) went to the gods on Mount Sumeru and complained. She said that the daityas who had been born on earth were creating havoc there. Many years ago, a daitya known as Kalanemi had been destroyed by Vishnu. This Kalanemi had now been born as Kamsa, the son of Ugrasena. He had got together with other evil and powerful kings like Arishta, Dhenuka, Keshi, Pralamba, Naraka, Sunda and Vanasura. All this oppression was proving to be too much for the earth.

Brahman corroborated what the earth had said. He said, "Let us all go to the northern shores of the great ocean and pray to Vishnu there. Whenever something like this happens, Vishnu is born on earth to protect the cause of dharma."

On hearing these prayers, Vishnu appeared before Brahma and the other gods. He heard what the gods had to say and tore off two hairs from his head. "These two hairs of mine will be born on earth to destroy the asuras," he said. "And all these other gods will also be born on earth to fight with the asuras." Before disappearing, he also added, "I shall be born as the eighth child of Devaki."

Kamsa heard all this from the sage Narada. He was furious and imprisoned Vasudeva and Devaki. One by one, six sons were born to Kevaki and Kamsa killed each of these sons. Vasudeva had another wife known as Rohini who lived in Gokula. The seventh son was magically transferred from Devaki to Rohini so that Kamsa never got a chance to kill it. This son grew up to be Sankarshana.

When Vishnu entered Devaki's body, Devaki looked so bright that no one could bear to glance at her. Krishna was finally born during the monsoon in the month of Shravana. (The accounts in different Puranas do not always agree. In some other accounts, it is stated that Krishna was born in the month of Bhadra.) The actual date was the eighth day of Krishnapaksha. He was born right at the stroke of midnight. All the sages were happy at this birth, the winds and the rivers became peaceful. The gandharvas sang and the apsaras danced. The gods showered down flowers from the sky.

Since there was the danger that Kamsa might kill the baby, Vasudeva, proposed to leave the child somewhere else. The guards slept, the prison door opened and the chains fell away by the grace of Vishnu. It was raining furiously that night. But a great snake held up its hood to protect Vasudeva and the baby. Vasudeva had to cross the river Yamuna which was very deep. But thanks to Vishnu, the water never rose above his thighs. Vasudeva crossed the river and met Nanda and other cowherds. Yashoda had given birth to a daughter known as Yogamaya. Vasudeva placed Krishna on Yashoda's bed and removed Yogamaya. He then returned to the prison with Yogamaya.

The guards woke up and reported to Kamsa that Devaki had given birth to a child. Kamsa rushed to the prison, picked up the baby and threw it down on the stones so as to kill it. But Yogamaya was really a goddess who had been sent by Vishnu. When Kamsa threw her down, the baby rose up into the air and adopted the eight-armed form of the goddess. "Stupid Kamsa." She said, "the person who will kill has already been born. It was the who had killed you in your last birth." So saying, Yogamaya disappeared into the sky.

Kamsa called all his evil friends together and said."My friends, the mischievous devas are trying to get me killed, but because I am brave, I am not going to pay any attention to this. Have you not seen how Indra fled like a coward before my arrows? In this whole world I am not sacred of anyone other than my guru Jarasandha. These attempts of the devas made me laugh. Nevertheless, one has to be careful as I have been told that Devaki's son will kill me. We have to kill any male child who seems to be unduly strong."

He was no further point in detaining Vasudeva and Deaki. He released them and said, "I have unnecessarily killed your children but that must have been their fate. The person who is to kill me must have been born somewhere else."

The Death of Putana and Other Incidents

Nanda and the other cowherds had come to Mathura to pay taxes to the king. Upon his release, Vasudeva congratulated Nanda for the birth of Nanda's son. He did not tell Nanda that the son was really his. He told Nanda to quickly return to Gokula and take care of Nanda's own son as well as Vasudeva's other son who was with Rohini.

The cowherds returned to Gokula. One night in Gokula, Putana came to feed the young Krishna. Putana was evil. The limbs of any child she fed at night got destroyed. But Krishna grasped Putana and began to drink her life out of her. With a thunderous noise Putana fell down and died.

Another time, the baby Krishna was lying down under a cart. He felt very hungry and was crying and kicking his legs up in the air. As a result of his kicking, the cart got overturned and all the pots and vats that were on the cart got broken. Everyone came running to see what had happened. They were very surprised to find there such a small baby had overturned a huge cart. Yoshada worshipped the cart with curds, flowers and fruit.

The sage Garga came to Gokula and named the two sons. Rohini's son was named Rama and Yoshada's son was named Krishna. Soon the babies learnt to crawl, and smeared with cowdung, roamed around everywhere. They went into the cowsheds and pulled the tails of calves.

On one particular day Yoshada got tired of all this. She got hold of some ropes and tied up Krishna to a thresher. Then she went away to do her housework. Krishna pulled and tugged at the thresher. There were two big arjuna trees that grew not very far away. Krishna dragged the thresher to these trees and tried to pass through the space between them. But the thresher got stuck in the space between the two arjuna trees. And as Krishna pulled and tugged, the huge trees were uprooted trees on the ground. And Krishna sat there amongst the wreckage, smiling. The rope that Yoshada had tied around his stomach was still there. Because a rope is called dama, Krishna came to be known as Damodara.

But the cowherds of Gokula were worried at what they thought were bad omens. First there was the death of Putana, next there was the overturning of the huge cart and finally there was the uprooting of the trees. They were not aware that Krishna was responsible for all this. They thought that some terrible danger was about to befall Gokula. So with their carts and their cattle, they left for Vrindavana.

Rama and Krishna grew up there. They looked after the calves, they played in the fields, they wore peacock feathers on their heads and they played the flute. Amongst their close friends were Shakha and Vishakha.

Kaliya Humbled

Part of the Yamuna river was known as the spot of Kaliya. Kaliya was huge snake that lived in the water. Because the snake lived at that spot, all the trees along the banks were scorched. And if any birds flew over the area and the spray of the water struck them, the birds immediately died. Krishna realized that his snake was none other than the snake which had been defeated by Garuda in the ocean. It had now fled from the ocean and had made a home in the Yamuna. The result was that no

one could drink the water of the Yamuna at the spot.

Krishna resolved to kill the snake. He tied his clothes firmly around his body and jumped into the water from a kadamba tree. As Krishna jumped into the river, the spray struck the trees along the bank and because the spray was poisoned by the poison of the snake, the trees began to burn.

Krishna began to swim in the water. On hearing the sound, Kaliya quickly arrived there. His eyes were red with anger and flames issued out of his mouth. He was surrounded on all sides by poisonous snakes and the wives of those snakes also accompanied them. All the snakes coiled round Krishna's body and began to bite and inject venom into him.

Some cowherds saw Krishna in the water, surrounded by snakes. They rushed back to Vrindavana and told everyone what they had seen. Nanda, Yoshada, Rama and the others all came running to the banks of the river. "Where is Krishna, where is Krishna?", screamed Yoshada.

They all saw Krishna in the water in the midst of the snakes. The women began to cry. Some of them proposed that they should also kill themselves if Krishna had indeed died. Hearing all this commotion, Balarama indicated to Krishna that it was high time that he killed the snake.

Krishna then shook off the coils of the snake. He lowered Kaliya's hood and climbed up on the top of the hood. There he began to dance. At this the hood began to bleed. Whenever the snake tried to raise his hood, Krishna stamped down with his feet. The snake became unconscious and began to vomit blood. The head and the neck broke and blood began to issue out of these parts as well.

Kaliya's wives then prayed to Krishna. They begged for mercy. They asked him to spare Kaliya's life. Kaliya also started to pray to Krishna. At this, Krishna spared the snake. But the condition was that Kaliya and his servants and relatives would have to leave the waters of the Yamuna and go back to the ocean. Henceforth, the mark of Krishna's feet would stay on Kaliya's hood. And seeing this mark Garuda would not pester Kaliya any more.

The waters of the Yamuna were purified.

The Killing of Dhenukasura

One day, Balarama and Krishna were wandering around in the forest and came to a grove where there were a lot of tala trees. A daitya who looked like a donkey lived there and survived on deer meat. His name was Dhenuka.

The tala trees were full of rich fruit and the other cowherds wished to help themselves to the fruit. The problem, however, was Dhenukasura, who guarded the tala trees. The cowherds, therefore, requested Balarama and Krishna to pluck some fruit for them. This the two brothers proceeded to do. But as the fruit fell on the ground, the sound attracted the angry Dhenuka who arrived on the scene. With its hind legs the donkey kicked Balarama in the chest. But Balarama caught hold of those legs and began to twirl the donkey round and round. At this, the donkey died and Balarama flung the dead body on the tala trees.

Many other daityas in the form of donkeys also arrived. But Krishna and Balarama killed all of them.

The tala grove became safe and cattle began to graze there once again.

The Killing of Pralamba

After killing Dhenukasura, Krishna and Balarama reached a banyan tree. They played and plucked flowers. They wore garlands. Ropes for tying cattle were round their shoulders. Their clothes were in golden and black hues.

Sometimes they rode on swings, sometimes they wrestled, sometimes they flung stones.

An asura known as Pralamba adopted the form of a cowherd and joined the games. Pralamba thought that Krishna might be too strong to kill, so he decided to kill Balarama. The boys were playing at a special sort of race then. Two boys would race upto a point and whoever was the loser would have to run again with the winner on his shoulders. Krishna defeated Shridama at this race. And when Balarama and Pralamba raced, Balarama defeated Pralamba. This meant that Pralamba would have to carry Balarama upon his shoulders. But as soon as Balarama got up on Pralamba's shoulders, Pralamba began to run away. He adopted the size of a huge mountain and his eyes were as large as cart-wheels.

Balarama cried out, "Krishna, I am being kidnapped. What will I do?"

"Why ask me," Krishna replied. "You are strong enough. Kill the asura."

Balarama's eyes became red with anger. He beat down on the asura's head with his fists and the asura died. Blood flowed out of his mouth.

Govardhana

This happened one autumn.

The cowherds decided to have a yajna to honour Indra. Indra was the ruler of the waters and it was he who sent the clouds. Without the clouds there would be no rain and without rain there would be no grain. What would the cattle eat in that case? This was the reason why the cowherds wanted to worship Indra.

But Krishna told Nanda, "Father, we are not farmers or traders. We live through animal husbandry, we live in the forests. Our gods should be cattle and the mountains. Let us stop this worship of Indra and let us instead worship the mountain Govardhana."

Nanda and the other cowherds agreed to this and that was how giri yajna (mountain ceremony) started. Curds, rice pudding and meat were offered to the mountain. Hundreds and thousands of brahmanas and guests were fed.

But Indra was very angry because his yajna had been stopped and he called the clouds to him. "Listen to what I say," he instructed them. "Destroy the cattle with rain and wind. I will come on Airavata and pour down rain as well."

Wind and rain started. The clouds were everywhere. There was lightning. And thunder and heavy rain. The world became dark and there was water everywhere. Cows and calves began to die.

Krishna had to do something to protect these unfortunate beings. So he uprooted Govardhana mountain and held it aloft like an umbrella. The entire mountain was thus balanced on only one of Krishna's hands. The cowherds and the cattle took refuge under the mountain and in the holes that were there. For seven nights Indra showered down rain. But after that he gave up and Krishna returned the mountain to original place.

Having been defeated in his purpose, Indra appeared before Krishna. "You have saved the cattle," he said. "You are like their Indra. Therefore, from now on, you will be known as Govinda."

Indra took down a bell from Airavata's neck. He filled it with holy water and anointed Krishna. And he said, "My son Arjuna has been born on earth. Please look after him and take care of him."

Krishna assured Indra that he would do so. The two embraced and parted ways.

Various Exploits

By then the cowherds had realized that Krishna was no ordinary man. They were slightly scared, but Krishna comforted them and told them that he was their friend.

One day, an asura known as Arishta arrived there. This asura had the form of a bull. The bull was dark as the clouds. The horns were sharp and pointed and his eyes were bright as the sun. He tore up the ground with his hooves. He was so tall that it was impossible to climb over him. This bull used to kill the calves and the sages.

Everyone was frightened at Arishta's arrival. But Krishna clapped his hands. On hearing the sound of the clap, Arishta charged at Krishna with horns lowered. Krishna grasped the horns and stopped the bull. Then he hit Arishta with his thighs. Finally, he tore off one of the horns and attacked Arishta with it. The daitya vomited blood and died.

Narada related all of Krishna's exploits to Kamsa and Kamsa was enraged. He decided that Balarama and Krishna would have to be killed before they became adults. Kamsa had two strong wrestlers known as Chanura and Mushtika. He plotted to have a wrestling match between Balarama and Krishna and these two wrestlers, and thereby kill the two brothers off. The occasion for this wrestling match would be a yajna that Kamsa would arrange. He would therefore send Akrura to Gokula to bring Balarama and Krishna to Mathura. In addition, he would send an asura known as Keshi to try and kill the two brothers in Gokula itself. A strong elephant called Kubalayapida would also be let loose on the brothers.

Keshi adopted the form of a horse and went to Vrindavana. He tore up the earth with his hooves, he shook the clouds with his mane and he attacked the sun and the moon on his way to Vrindavana. The cowherds were naturally frightened.

But Krishna was there to protect them. He inserted his hands into the horse's mouth and broke off the horse's teeth. Like white clouds, one by one the teeth fell down on the ground. After that, Krishna tore off the asura's lips and the asura began to vomit blood. His eyes fell off. Krishna then tore Keshi into two with his hands. Because Krishna killed Keshi, he came to be known as Keshava.

Meanwhile, Akrura arrived in Gokula and told Balarama and Krishna of Kamsa's invitation. The two brothers accepted the invitation and resolved to go to Mathura. The cowherds were naturally sorry to see Krishna go. They thought that he would never return to Gokula again. In a chariot, Akrura, Balarama and Krishna set out for Mathura.

Mathura and Kamsa

They reached Mathura in the evening. Akrura went ahead to the palace in the chariot, while Balarama and Krishna entered the city on foot. On the street they met a washerman. They asked the washerman for some nice clothes. But the washerman was Kamsa's servant. Not only did he refuse them the clothes, he also abused that two brothers. So Krishna hit the evil washerman with his palm and split his head in two. Balarama and Krishna then took away whatever clothes they wanted. Balarama dressed in blue and Krishna dressed in yellow. They then went to the house of a garland-seller. The garland-seller thought that these two were gods. And when Balarama and Krishna asked for flowers, not only did he give them many flowers, he also worshipped them. Krishna blessed the garland-seller.

On the streets they also met a young woman. The woman was pretty, but had a hump on her back. Her name was Kubja. She carried a salver of sandalwood paste in her hands.

"For whom is the paste?", asked Krishna.

"This is for Kamsa," was the reply. "He has appointed me to make fragrant paste for him."

"Please give us the paste," said Krishna. "This paste is fit for our bodies."

Kubja complied and Balarama and Krishna rubbed the paste on their bodies. Then Krishna grasped Kubja's chin with his index and middle fingers. He pressed down her feet with his own so that they did not move. As he exerted pressure upwards, Kubja's body straightened and the hump disappeared. Kubja became a beautiful woman.

At the yajna that Kamsa had arranged, a bow was to be worshipped. Krishna and Balarama asked various guards where this bow was being kept. They arrived at that room and Krishna proceeded to tie a string to the bow. But the bow snapped and the sound of the bow snapping was heard throughout the palace. The guards came and attacked Krishna and Balarama, but the two brothers killed all the guards.

By then, Kamsa had got to know that Krishna and Balarama had come to Mathura. So he called Chanura and Mushtika and told them to go and wrestle with the two brothers and kill them. He also called the servant who was in charge of his elephant known as Kubalayapida at the main gate to the palace. It was night. After issuing these instructions, Kamsa waited for morning.

When it was morning, arrangements were made for the wrestling match. There were ordinary seats for ordinary citizens around the arena where the match was to take place. Kings and special guests had special seats reserved for them. Kamsa sat on the highest seat of all. The women sat behind a partition. Amongst the spectators were Nanda and the cowherds, Vasudeva, Akrura and Devaki.

Marital music started to be played. Chanura and Mushtika stood in the middle of the arena, exhibiting their strength. Krishna and Balarama entered the arena. At the main gate they had killed the elephant Kubalayuapida and they carried the bloody tusks in their hands.

The schedule was that Krishna would fight with Chanura and Balarama would fight with Mushtika. The first wrestling match between Krishna and Chanura began. It was a terrible bout to behold. Both were strong fighters. But eventually, Krishna raised Chanura's body aloft and whirled it around a hundred times before throwing Chandura down on the ground. Chanura died. Meanwhile Balarama had started to fight with Mushtika. He hit Mushtika's head and chest with his fists and thighs. And he grasped Mushtika so hard that the breath of life went out of Mushtika's body. Krishna also killed another wrestler whose name was Toshalaka.

Kamsa was very angry. He instructed his guards to capture Krishna and Balarama and tie them up in iron chains. The guards were also to chain up Vasudeva and the cowherds.

But Krishna merely laughed. He jumped up on the stage where Kamsa was sitting and caught hold of Kamsa's hair. He threw Kamsa down on the ground and Kamsa, the son of Ugrasena, died. Krishna pulled the dead body down to the arena. Kamsa's body was so heavy that a huge pit was created where the dead body was placed.

Kamsa had a brother called Sumali and Sumali attacked Krishna and Balarama. But Balarama killed Sumali very easily. Krishna and Balarama then went and met Vasudeva and Devaki.

Kamsa had imprisoned his own father Ugrasena. Krishna released Ugrasena from the prison and made him king. Krishna also obtained a beautiful assembly hall named Sudharma from Indra. This he presented to King Ugrasena.

Since Kamsa was now dead, it was time for Krishna and Balarama to go to their guru's house for studying. Their guru was a sage named Sandipani, who lived in Kashi. There Krishna and Balarama went to learn amongst other things, the art of fighting. It took them only sixty-four days to learn all this. After the shishya's studies are completed he has to give a dakshina to his guru. Sandipani's son had died and as a guru dakshina, Sandipani desired that his dead son might be brought back to life.

After death, the sage Sandipani's son had gone to the great ocean. Krishna and Balarama took up their weapons and went to the ocean to demand the son. The ocean told them that the son was actually with a daitya named Panchajana who had the form of a conch-shell. Krishna entered the ocean and killed it. From the skeleton of the daitya was made the conch-shell Panchajanya that Krishna blows. To get back the dead son, Krishna and Balarama also had to go to Yama's world and defeat Yama. They did that and returned the son to the sage Sandipani.

They then returned to Mathura.

Jarasandha

Kamsa had married two of Jarasandh's daughters. These daughters were known as Asti and Prapti. On hearing that Krishna had killed his son-in-law, Jarasandha raised a huge army and attacked the Yadavas. The city of Mathura was under seize by the king of Magadha.

Krishna and Balarama had only a few soldiers, as compared to Jarasandha's gigantic army. But still they came out to fight. From the sky a bow called Sharnga, two quivers that never ran out of arrows, and a mace named Koumodaki fell into Krishna's hands. For Balarama the weapons were a plough and a club named Sounanda. Jarasandha was defeated by the two brothers and he fled.

After a few days Jarasandha attacked once more and was defeated yet again. This continued. There were eighteen occasions on which Jarasandha attacked and was defeated by the Yadavas.

Kalayavana

There was a brahmana named Gargya who had been insulted and ridiculed by the Yadavas. This brahmana went to the shores of the southern ocean and began to perform tapasya. His desire was a son who would be the scourge of the Yadavas. As part of the tapasya, he ate only iron dust for food. The tapasya went on for twelve years and at the end of it, Mahadeva was pleased. The brahmana obtained the desired boon.

The son who was born was black of hue. The king of the Yavanas had no son and the brahmana's son was adopted by the Yavana king. Eventually, this son became the king of the Yavanas and came to be known as Kalayavana.

Kalayavana wanted to know the names of all the powerful on the earth from Narada. He was told the names of the Yadava kings. So he decided to attack the Yadavas. He collected thousands and thousands of chariots, horses, elephants and infantry. Then he came to Mathura to wage war.

Krishna was worried. He realized that the Yadavas would become weakened from their war with Kalayavana. And if Jarasandha's attack came after that, the Yadavas might even lose at the hands of Jarasandha. On the other hand, if the Yadavas became weak from a war with Jarasandha, they might lose the war with Kalayavana. There was danger from both sides. It was, therefore, necessary to build a strong fort from where the Yadavas could wage a long drawn out war, even in the absence of Krishna. On the shores of the ocean Krishna, therefore, built the city of Dvaraka. There were many gardens and lakes in Dvaraka. But more importantly, it was surrounded by walls and moats on all sides and there were several forts inside the city. All the citizens of Mathura were brought to Dvaraka.

Krishna then appeared before Kalayavana. At the sight of Krishna, Kalayavana began to follow him, desirous of a fight. Krishna had a plan. He went inside the cave where a powerful king known as Muchukunda was sleeping. Kalayavana followed Krishna inside the cave. It was dark inside so that Kayavana could not make out that the person who was sleeping was Muchukunda and not Krishna. So, thinking that it was Krishna, Kalayavana kicked the body. When the king woke up, the anger in him came out as fire through his eyes and this fire burnt up Kalayavana into ashes.

Many years ago, King Muchukunda had taken part in a fight between the devas and the asuras. After killing many asuras Muchukunda was tired. He craved a boon from the gods that he might sleep for a long period of time. The devas granted the boon and also said that whoever woke up Muchukunda would be burnt into ashes by the flames that would come out of the king's body.

Having burnt up Kalayavana King Muchukunda came out of the cave and found that people were now much shorter than they used to be. He realized that the kali era must have arrived and went off to do tapasya on Mount Gandhamadana.

Kalayavana's soldiers were defeated by Krishna.

Balarama and The River Yamuna

Now that there was peace, Balarama went on a trip to Gokula. There he met all his old friends and throughly enjoyed himself.

One day he found that there was wine issuing out of a kadamba tree. Balarama drank a lot of the wine and became drunk. Since he was drunk he had lost control of his senses. He, therefore, told the river Yamuna, "River Yamuna, I feel like having a bath. Change your course and come here so that I may fulfil my desire."

Yamuna ignored this instruction. At this, Balarama was enraged and took up his plough. With his plough he grasped the river and pulled her towards himself, "You won't come, will you?", he said. "Let me see how you can flow where you wish."

The course of the river was changed.

Yamuna appeared before Balarama and begged for forgiveness.

This was granted.

When Balarama's bath was over, Lakshmi appeared before him and gave a garland of lotuses which never fade. She also gave him two pieces of blue clothing.

Balarama returned to Dvaraka after having spent two months in Gokula. He married King Raiyata's daughter Revati and had two sons named Nishatha and Ulmuka.

Rukmini and Rukmi

There was a king named Bhishmaka who ruled in the kingdom of Kundina. The king had a son named Rukmi and a daughter named Rukmimi. Krishna and Rukmini wished to marry each other. But Rukmi did not like Krishna, so he refused to get his sister married off to Krishna.

Bhishmaka was also an ally of Jarasandha's. So he agreed with Rukmi and decided to marry his daughter to Shishupala. All these allies of Jarasandha's went to Kundina to witness the marriage and Krishna and the Yadavas also went there. But one day before the marriage was due to take place, Krishna abducted Rukmini.

Thereupon several kings like Poundraka, Dantavakra, Viduratha, Shishupala, Jarasandha and Shalva attacked the Yadavas so as to kill Krishna. But they were defeated by Balarama and the other Yadavas.

Rukmi resolved, "I will not return to Kundina without killing Krishna." He followed Krishna with many soldiers, horses, elephants, and chariots. But Krishna easily defeated Rukmi.

When Krishna was about to kill Rukmi, Rukmini said, "I have only one brother. Please spare his life."

Krishna spared Rukmi's life. But Rukmi had resolved that he would not return to Kundina without killing Krishna. So he had to build a new city known as Bhojakata where he began to live.

Krishna married Rukmini according to the rakshasa form of marriage. They had a son called Pradyumna who was kidnapped by Shambarasura as soon as he was born. But later, Pradyumna was to kill Shambarasura.

"Tell me this story," asked Maitreya of Parashara.

Shambarasura knew that Pradyumna was destined to kill him. So six days after Pradyumna's birth, he kidnapped the newly born baby and threw it into the ocean. The ocean was full of sharks and crocodiles. The baby might have died, but a fish swallowed it up and the baby was saved. Later on, some fishermen caught the fish

and brought it to Shambarasura's kitchen.

Shambarasura had a housekeeper named Mayavati. When the fish was cut, Mayavati found the baby inside. She was very surprised. "Who is this boy and how did he come to be here?", she wondered. She went to Narada to find out who the boy was and Narada told her the entire story. He also told her to ensure that the boy was brought up properly.

This Mayavati proceeded to do. She was well versed in the techniques of maya or illusions and these she taught to Pradyumna. When Pradyumna grew up, she told him the entire story of his birth and kidnapping. Hearing this, Pradyumna challenged Shambarasura to a duel. Shambarasura used a lot of maya, but thanks to Mayavati, Pradyumna had also learnt the use of maya. So he did manage to kill Shambarasura.

After this, Pradyumna and Mayavati returned to Krishna and Rukmini. Everyone was happy and Pradyumna married Mayavati.

Apart from Pradyumna, Krishna and Rukmini had eight other sons and a daughter. And apart from Rukmini, Krishna had seven other major wives. Their names were Kalindi, Mitravinda, Satya, Jambavati or Rohini, Sushila, Satyabhama, and Lakshmana. The total number of Krishna's wives was sixteen thousand.

Pradyumna married King Rukmi's daughter and had a son named Aniruddha. Aniruddha married Rukmi's grand-daughter. On the occasion of this marriage, Krishna, Balarama and the other Yadavas arrived at Rukmi's capital Bhojakata.

After the marriage was over, some kings told Rukmi, "Balarama is addicted to playing dice, although he cannot play it at all well. Why not arrange match of dice in which we can defeat Balarama?"

Rukmi agreed to this proposition and a match was arranged in which Rukmi played with Balarama. In the first round, Rukmi won four thousand gold pieces off Balarama. This happened a second time and a third time as well. At this, the king of Kalinga and Rukmi began to laugh at Balarama.

Balarama got angry and placed four crores of gold pieces as a bet. Rukmi threw the dice, but this time Balarama won.

"I have won," said Balarama.

"No, you haven't", replied Rukmi. "You did place the bet, but I did not accept it. So you have not really won."

Words were then heard from heaven which said that it was Balarama who was in the right. Although Rukmi had not verbally accepted the bet, his throwing of the dice meant that the bet was acceptable to him.

This roused Balarama's anger and he picked up a dice and killed Rukmi with it. He also caught hold of the king of Kalinga and broke off the king's teeth. It was with these teeth that the king of Kalinga had laughed at Balarama. Many were the other kings whom Balarama killed on this occasion.

The Killing of Narakasura

Once Indra came to Davaraka on the elephant Airavata. He met Krishna and complained about the behaviour of a daitya named Narakasura.

This Narakasura was the son of Prithivi and the king of Pragjyotishapura. He was oppressing all living beings. He was kidnapping the daughters of devas, asuras and kings and imprisoning them in his house. Naraka had also stolen Varuna's umbrella from which the rains came, and the peak of Mount Mandara. In addition he had robbed Indra's mother Aditi of her earrings and was now threatening to steal Airavata.

Krishna decided to do something about Naraksura. He thought of Garuda and

immediately, Garuda appeared before him. Krishna and Satyabhama got onto Garuda and flew towards Pragjyotishapura. There was an asura named Muru who had installed many sharp stakes around Naraka's city. But Krishna sliced off these stakes with his sudarshana chakra. And when Muru attacked him, Krishna killed Muru and his seven thousand sons with the chakra. He also killed two others. Hayagriva and Panchajana, and arrived at Pragjyotishapura.

A terrible war raged between the armies of Narakasura and Krishna. Krishna killed thousands and thousands of asuras and sliced Narakasura in two with his chakra.

Inside Narakasura's palace Krishna found sixteen thousand and one hundred women whom Narakasura had imprisoned. There were also several horses and six thousand elephants with four tusks each. All of these Krishna sent to Dvaraka. Krishan put the other things that Naraka had stolen on Garuda and proceeded towards heaven to return them to their rightful owners.

The Taking of Parijata

Krishna arrived at the gates of heaven and blew upon his conch shell. The gods came out to worship Krishna. Krishna first went to Aditi's house and returned her earrings. Aditi blessed Satyabhama and gave her the boon that Satyabhama would never grow old or ugly, she would be in a state of perpetual youth.

Aditi also told Indra to worship Krishna. But Indra's wife Shachi thought that Satyabhama was a mere human, so she did not give Satyabhama any parijata flowers, although she wore them herself.

Krishna and Satyabhama went for a stroll in the gardens and there they saw the parijata tree. The leaves of the tree were of copper colour and the bark was of gold. Satyabhama said, "Why don't you take this tree to Dvaraka?" And she persisted, "If you really love me, please take this tree to our house. I will wear the flowers on my hair."

Krishna laughed. He uprooted the tree and placed it on Garuda's back. The guards said, "Please don't take this tree. It belongs to Shachi, the wife of Indra." They also pointed out that the taking of the tree would arouse the wrath of the gods.

At this, Satyabhama grew angry. "Who is Indra and who is Shachi?", she said. "This tree came out of the churning of the ocean, so it belongs to everyone. Why should Indra alone enjoy it? My husband is taking away this tree, go and tell Shachi this. Let me see if her husband can prevent it from happening. Go and tell Shachi that a mere human is taking the tree away."

The guards went and told Shachi what was happening. Incited by Shachi, Indra attacked Krishna with all the soldiers that the gods could muster. Indra had his vajra for a weapon, the other devas had clubs, swords, maces and spears. On seeing Indra on Airavata, Krishna blew on his conch shell and let loose thousands and thousands arrows. The gods flung many weapons at him, but Krishna repelled all these weapons. Garuda also helped in the fight. With a mace Krishna destroyed Yama's weapon. With his chakra he destroyed Kubera's palanquin. With a glance he robbed the sun of all energy. Agni was defeated with Krishna's arrows. The vasus, the rudras, the maruts and the gandharvas had to flee.

Indra and Krishna fought with each other while Garuda fought with Airavata. Indra finally took up his vajra and Krishna took up his chakra. Everyone in the worlds was frightened because the worlds might be annihilated. But when Indra hurled his vajra, Krishna simply caught the weapon in his hand. He did not fling the chakra. Indra started to run away.

Satyabhama taunted him. "Indra, king of the gods, why are you running away?", she said. "Aren't you Shachi's husband? Fleeing does not become you! Don't run away. Here, take the parijata tree. Let the minds of the gods be at rest."

Indra then apologised for all that had happened. He also said that there was no shame in losing to Krishna. For Krishna was, after all, nothing but Vishnu.

Krishna smiled and returned the parijata tree, as well as Indra's vajra. But Indra refused to take the tree back. He requested Krishna to take the tree to Dvaraka. Once Krishna died, the tree would return on its own to heaven. This Krishna agreed to do and the tree got the pride of place in Krishna's garden in Dvaraka. All the Yadavas came to see it.

Narakasura's elephants, horses and other wealth had also been brought to Dvaraka. The sixteen thousand and one hundred women that Narakasura had imprisoned had come to Dvaraka. Krishna married all of them.

Usha and Vanasura

Krishna had more than one lakh and eighty thousand sons. But the best of them was Pradyumna and Pradyumna's son was Aniruddha.

Vali's son was Vanasura and Vanasura's daughter was Usha. Usha once met Parvati and Shiva. She asked Parvati who her husband would be. Parvati replied that in the month of Vaishakha a person would appear in Usha's dreams. And this person would be her husband.

As promised by Parvati, Usha did see a person in her dreams. But she did not know how this person was. She told her friend Chitrlekha about this. Chitrlekha thought that the only way to find out was to show Usha the portraits of various important personages amongst the devas, gandharvas and asuras. But the required person could not be identified from these portraits. Usha was then shown the portraits of humans and immediately she identified Aniruddha."

Many years ago, Vanasura had prayed to Mahadeva," he had said, "please grant me fights. I have ten thousand arms. What will I do with all these arms if I don't get a chance to fight?"

"Be patient," replied Mahadeva. "One day you will find your flag lying broken. When that happens, you will get the opportunity to fight as much as you wish."

At this Vanasura was happy.

Meanwhile, once Aniruddha's identity had been established, Chitrlekha wondered what could be done. She went to Dvaraka and secretly brought Aniruddha to meet Usha. That was the very day on which Vanasura found his flag lying broken. The guards also came and informed him that Aniruddha was with Usha. Vanasura sent his soldiers to fight with Aniruddha, but Aniruddha killed them all with a club.

Then Vanasura himself entered the fray. Initially, he was beaten by Aniruddha. But he used maya to tie Aniruddha up.

Narada went to Dvaraka and told the Yadavas this. So Krishna, Balarama and Pradyumna came to rescue Aniruddha. Many were the soldiers that Krishna killed before entering the city. Also at the gate was a demon known as Jvara, a demon with a huge body, three arms and three legs. This demon had been born out of Mahadeva's body. The demon was so powerful that it even caused Balarama some discomfort. But Krishna created a demon from his own body which killed the demon Jvara.

Krishna killed many asura soldiers. Vanasura himself came out to fight. Mahadeva and Kartikeya fought on Vana's side and Vanasura's chariot was driven by Nandi. Terrible was the war between Krishna and Mahadeva and everyone thought that the world would come to an end. But Krishna tired out Mahadeva. Pradyumna defeated Kartikeya, and Balarama killed many of Vanasura's soldiers. Krishna and Vanasura shot arrows at each other. Then Krishna took up this sudharshana chakra and sliced off all Vanasura's arms. But when he was about to kill Vanasura, Mahadeva intervened and begged for Vana's life. This boon Krishna granted.

At the end of the war, Aniruddha and Usha too returned to Dvaraka with the other Yadavas.

The Slaying of Pundraka

There was a king named Poundraka who suffered from the illusion that he was Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu on earth. He adopted the name of Vasudeva and sent a messenger to Krishna saying, "Stop pretending that you are Vishnu. It is I who am Vasudeva. Come to me and beg for your life."

Poundraka was a friend of the king of Kashi. Krishna told the messenger that he would leave for Kashi the very next day.

Hearing the message, Poundraka got ready with his army. Krishna arrived in Kashi on Garuda. Krishna killed the enemy soldiers with his arrows, mace and chakra. He sliced Poundraka's body with his chakra and eventually killed him with a mace. He also killed Poundraka's friend, the king of Kashi. He cut off the king's head with his arrows and flung it into the city of Kashi. After that, Krishna returned to Dvaraka.

When the head of the king of Kashi fell inside the city, the inhabitants were surprised at this strange phenomenon. But the king's son found out that Krishna was responsible for this and prayed to Mahadeva. When as a result of the yajna Mahadeva appeared before him, the son begged, "Please create a demon that will kill Krishna, my father's murderer."

Mahadeva agreed and created such a demon from the fire of the yajna. This demon arrived in Dvaraka wishing to kill Krishna. Flames issued out of its mouth and its hair was also like fire. Krishna flung his sudarshana chakra at the demon. The demon turned and ran, but wherever the demon went, the chakra followed. Finally, the demon arrived in Kashi. But the chakra followed it there and burnt up the entire city. All the kings, servants, horses, elephants and cattle there were burnt.

Having achieved its purpose, the chakra returned to Krishna.

Shamba's Wedding

Krishna's son Shamba wanted to marry Duryodhana's daughter. He kidnapped her. But Karna, Duryodhana, Bhishma, Drona and other warriors fought with Shamba and managed to imprison him. On learning the news, the Yadavas got ready to fight with the Kauravas.

But Balarama restrained the Yadavas. "Leave it to me," he said. "Let me go alone. The Kauravas will listen to me and will let Shamba go." Balarama went to Hastinapura but did not enter the city. Duryodhana and the others learnt of this and came to pay their respects. Balarama then told them that King Ugrasena had requested that Shamba might be released.

But this request made the Kauravas angry. "Balarama, what are you saying?" they asked. "How dare the Yadavas order the Kauravas?" This is a bit like a servant ordering a master.

Refusing to release Shamba, the Kauravas returned to Hastinapura. This angered Balarama. He grasped the foundations of Hastinapura city with his plough and prepared to hurl the city into the Bhagirathi river. This brought the Kauravas to their senses and they begged for forgiveness.

Shamba and his wife were brought to Balarama and he forgave the

Kauravas. Ever since that day, Hastinapura leans towards the river on one side.

The Death of Dvidiva

The asura known as Naraka was opposed to the devas. And Naraka had a monkey friend named Dvidiva. Dvidiva fought with the devas and became particularly belligerent after Naraka was killed by Krishna. He destroyed all the yajnas and persecuted the sages. He also destroyed cities, villages and forests. He even tore up mountains and flung them into the ocean. The ocean overflowed and flooded cities and villages.

One day, Balarama was busy drinking in a garden. Dvidiva arrived there and began

to make a general nuisance of himself. He picked up Balarama's plough and club. And despite Balarama's warning him, he continued to laugh at him. Greatly angered, Balarama picked up his club and the monkey also picked up a huge boulder. Balarama broke up the monkey's boulder with his club. The monkey then began to hit Balarama on the chest. But Balarama brought down his fists on the monkey's head and the monkey died.

The End of the Yadavas

There was a place of pilgrimage known as Pindaraka. Some Yadava youths once met the sages Kanva, Vishvamitra and Narada there. The Yadava youths dressed Shamba up as a woman and brought him to the sages. "Sages," they asked, "tell us whether this woman will have a son or a daughter."

The sages saw through the game and were angered at the insult. "This person will give birth to a club," they said. "And that club will destroy your clan."

In due course a club came out of Shamba's body. But learning of the curse, King Ugrasena pulverised the club and had the dust scattered in the ocean. But the dust got changed into sharp reeds that grew on the shores of the ocean.

A small part of the club could not be crushed. This was thrown into the ocean as it was, and a fish swallowed this piece. When the fish was caught, this piece of the club came out of the fish's stomach and a hunter named Jara acquired the piece.

There was a place of pilgrimage known as Prabhasa and eventually the Yadavas went there. Only one Yadava named Uddhava went off to do tapasya on Mount Gandhamadana. In Prabhasa, the Yadavas began to drink and soon lost all control of their senses. They started to fight and picked up the reeds that were growing on the shores as weapons. Krishna did try to restrain them, but the Yadavas were in no mood to listen. Soon, Krishna and Daruka were the only Yadavas who were left alive.

Krishna and Daruka were wandering around and found Balarama seated under the tree. A huge snake came out of Balarama's mouth and disappeared into the sea. This meant that Balarama died.

Krishna told Daruka, "Go and tell King Ugrasena all this. Soon I too will die. And soon the sea will swallow up the city of Dvaraka. Go and tell the Yadavas who are left in Dvaraka that they should wait for Arjuna's arrival and that they should leave the city with Arjuna. And go and tell Arjuna to protect my people as best as he can. Vajra is to be made the king the Yadavas."

Daruka paid his respects to Krishna and left.

Krishna sat down to meditate. The hunter named Jara arrived there. He had fashioned an arrow-head out of the piece of the club. Seeing Krishna's feet, he thought that it was part of a deer and let loose an arrow. When he came up to see what happened, he found that his arrow had pierced the body of a man. He begged for forgiveness and Krishna assured him that Jara would go to heaven. In fact, a chariot immediately arrive to take Jara to heaven.

Krishna died. He was a hundred years old.

Arjuna found the dead bodies of Krishna, Balarama and other important Yadavas and performed their shraddha ceremonies. Krishna's eight major wives died on Krishna's funeral pyre. Revati did the same on Balarama's . Ugrasena, Rohini, Devaki and Vasudeva also entered a fire. The others left Dvaraka with Arjuna.

As soon as Krishna died, the parijata tree and the assembly hall named Sudharma returned to heaven. The kali era began. And the city of Dvaraka was swallowed up by the sea, with the exception of Krishna's own dwelling.

Arjuna settled some of the Yadavas in the Punjab. But when he was taking the Yadava women with him, the party was set upon by a band of dacoits. Arjuna tried to repel the dacoits but found that he had lost all his powers. His strength had left

him with Krishna's death.

This is the end of the fifth section of the Vishnu Purana.

The Kali Era

Maitreya wanted to know more about the kali era.

In the kali era, the norms of varna and ashrama will not be followed as is laid down in the Vedas. No one will pray to the gods . Relations between guru and shishya will cease. Might will be right. Women will all the time take care of their hair. Wealth will mean everything. Instead of spending money on dharma , people will spend money on building houses. Money will be spent for oneself and not for guests. Men will be selfish. Money will be earned through evil means. There will be drought.

Men will not bathe before their meals. Both men and women will become shorter. Women will not obey their husbands. The kings will not take care of the subjects, but will only impose taxes. People will become old when they reach the age of twelve and no one will live for more than twenty years. Evil will flourish. No one will worship Vishnu. All the classes will become like shudras.

There is only one good thing about kali yuga. In satya yuga one had to do a lot of tapasya to earn some punya. In kali yuga the same punya can be acquired through a little tapasya. The equivalence is like this. Ten years of tapasya in satya yuga are equal to one year of tapasya in treta yuga, one month of tapasya in dvapara yuga and one day of tapasya in kali yuga.

Vyasadeva said that shudras and women are fortunate. The other varnas have to do many things to enter that dharma is being followed. But for the shudras the path of dharma is simple. They only have to serve the other varnas to acquire punya. Similarly men have to do many things to achieve punya. For women, the attainment of punya is easy; they only have to serve their husbands.

Destruction

There are three types of pralaya or destruction, the first being brahma or naimittika. Naimittika pralaya takes place after a kalpa, that is after one of Brahma's days and after fourteen Manus have passed. Before this pralaya, the earth becomes weak and there are no rains for a hundred years. Vishnu adopts the form of Rudra and drinks up all the water that there is in the rivers, the oceans, the seas and the mountains. The seven rays of the sun manifest themselves as seven different suns. These suns burn up the three worlds. Not only is bhuloka burnt up, but bhuvarka and svarloka are also destroyed. There are dark and thick clouds everywhere. For a hundred years it continues to rain. All is darkness. For a hundred years the winds blow. And Vishnu sleeps on the waters that are everywhere till the worlds are created again.

The second type of destruction is known as prakrita pralaya. The three basic gunas are, as you know, sattva, rajas and tamas. Their perfect balance is known as prakriti. At the time of destruction when prakriti becomes assimilated into the paramatman, that is known as prakrita pralaya. The third type of pralaya is known as atyantika pralaya. This refers to the disappearance of three types of distress, adhyatmika, adhidaivika and adhibhoutika. Adhyatmika distress consists of physical and mental ailments like fever and sadness. Adhidaivika distress is that due to the elements, such as coldness and heat. Adhibhoutika distress is that which humans face from other living beings, such as ghosts and snakes. At the time of atyantika destruction, these distresses also disappear.

Keshidhvaja and Khandikya

Many years ago there was a king named Dharmadhvaja. He had two sons, Mitadhvaja and Kritadhvaja. Kritadhvaja was interested in acquiring knowledge and his son Keshidhvaja also became interested in acquiring spiritual knowledge. Mitadhvaja's son Khandikya was a king, interested in karma yoga, that is, union with God through action.

Both Khandikya and Keshidhvaja tried to outdo each other. Khandikya eventually lost his kingdom to Keshidhvaja and went off to the forest with his priests and ministers. Although he became a king, Keshidhvaja used to perform yajnas. Once the cow intended for the yajna was eaten up by a tiger. This was a sin and Keshidhvaja had to atone for it. He asked several sages what the form of penance (prayashchitta) should be, but none of the sages knew. They all said that the right person to ask was Khandikya, who was now living in the forest.

Keshidhvaja dressed himself up in deerskin and went to meet Khandikya. Thinking that Keshidhvaja might have come to kill him, Khandikya took up his bow and arrow. But Keshidhvaja told him that he had merely come to ask Khandikya a question. Khandikya told him what the right penance was and Keshidhvaja successfully completed the yajna.

But he then realized that he had not given Khandikya the dakshina or fee that was due to a guru. As dakshina, Khandikya desired that Keshidhvaja instruct him on the path to spiritual knowledge.

Keshidhvaja told Khandikya about the true nature of the atman, which was different from the mere physical body. True knowledge was that which taught that the atman was part of the paramatman and that one should therefore not get attached to material possessions. This realization came about through the practise of yoga.

How The Puranas Came Down to us

At the end, the Vishnu Purana narrates how the Puranas came to be handed down to us through generations of disciples.

The Puranas tell men of the ways to attain moksha (salvation). Ages ago, Brahma himself had told the sage Ribhu the story of the Puranas. From Ribhu the knowledge had passed to Priyavrata and from Priyavrata to Bhaguri. Bhaguri gave the knowledge to Stavamitra and Stavamitra to Dadhichi. From Dadhichi it passed to Sarasvata, from Sarasvata to "Bhrigu, from Bhrigu to Purukutsa, from Purukutsa to Narmada, from Narmada to Dhritarashtra and Purana. Dhritarashtra and Purana gave the knowledge to Vasuki, Vasuki to Vatsa and Vatsa to Ashvatara. Ashvatara passed it on to Kambala and Kambala to Elapatra.

The sage Vedashira acquired the knowledge of the Puranas from the underworld and gave it to Pramati, Pramati gave it to Jatukarna and Jatukarna passed it on to many sages.

Parashara had learnt of the Puranas from Vashishtha and he had now passed on the knowledge to Maitreya. Maitreya would eventually teach it to Shamika.

So ends the sixth and final section of the Vishnu Purana